

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has issued notification of PTI Chairman Imran Khan's win on seven National Assembly seats during by-elections on vacant seats. On October 16, 2022, the PTI chief had secured win on seven NA seats and the PTI had swept by-elections while securing six NA seats and two Punjab Assembly seats.

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PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

Price. 20

US has no plan to bail out Pakistan



Jalil Afridi

WASHINGTON DC: US State Department Spokesperson, Ned Price while replying to a question by The Frontier Post stated that US is aware of the grim economic situation in Pakistan.

When asked if the US is aware that Pakistan has less than five billion dollars in forex reserves and if the US plans to give some economic support to Pakistan, Ned Price stated that he is aware that different economic institutions are in contact with Pakistan but he did not reply whether US plans to give some sort of economic bail out package to Pakistan.

When asked if the US government has given some suggestions to Pakistan in this regard, Ned Price said that US treasury officials are in constant contact with Pakistan.

KP CM, Opp completes consultation on caretaker setup

PESHAWAR (INP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Mahmood Khan and opposition have completed their consultation to nominate their candidates for the caretaker CM position. A day earlier, KP Governor Haji Ghulam Ali signed a summary to dissolve the provincial assembly on the advice of the chief minister. He also asked the KP chief minister and opposition to select a name for the caretaker CM slot. Sources said Mahmood Khan had finalized three names for the position after consultation with PTI Chairman Imran Khan. Meanwhile, leader of opposition in KP Assembly Akram Khan Durrani has also completed consultation with JUI-F chief Fazlur Rehman.

Pakistan, Belgium vow to boost ties

DAVOS (APP): Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari met his Belgian counterpart Hadja Lahbib on the sidelines of World Economic Forum meeting in Davos on Thursday and discussed bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari appreciated the support extended by Belgium for the flood-affected people of Pakistan. Both sides expressed the resolve to further strengthen economic, trade, investment and cultural cooperation. The Foreign Minister also held a meeting with Dutch Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Wopke Hoekstra on Thursday.

Earthquake jolts country

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An earthquake jolted parts of northern Pakistan, including Peshawar, Nowshera, Shabqadar, and Mardan on Thursday at around 4:30 pm, according to the National Seismic Monitoring Centre (NSMC) — the third one in at least less than a month. The NSMC reported that the epicentre of the earthquake was 237 kilometres west of Chitral.

Tremors were also felt in Charsada, Islamabad, and its surrounding areas, and were measured at 5.6 on the Richter scale, while the depth of the earthquake was 190 kilometres, it said. The Pakistan Meteorological Department also shared the details of the earthquake via Twitter saying, "An earthquake originated on 19-01-2023 at 16:30 PST. Mag: 5.6. Depth: 190km. Lat: 35.89 N. Long: 71.39 E. Epicentre: 37 km west of Chitral."

Pak's economy in shattered condition

Govt to meet IMF conditions without overburdening common man: Ahsan Iqbal

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal Thursday said that the government would meet the conditions set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to complete the programme, but common man would not be affected by the decisions.

He said the IMF agreement was hanging over the government which it had to negotiate with the Fund. The previous government, he said had recklessly agreed upon the programme, therefore the current government has no option but to continue the programme. "We have to do lot of adjustments, but we will take decisions in the larger interests of the state," he said and hastened to add that "we will try to put minimum burden on the poor and common people". He was addressing at an event here at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE).

The minister said Pakistan's economy was in shattered condition when the current government took over and keeping in view the short available time, it decided to take short term measures to turnaround the economy. Ahsan Iqbal stressed the need for mobilizing all available resources to increase productivity and exports of the country so as to get rid of foreign loans on permanent basis.

"Pakistan's productivity capacity is very low as compared to the standard average", he said adding that in agriculture sector alone, the country could earn billions of dollars by taking measures to increase the

crops' yield per acre. For instance, he said the per acre wheat production in Pakistan can be increased by up to 80 percent by improving on-farm management. Similarly, he said, "our industrial production possess numerous inefficiencies due to which we are not competitive with the world".

The biggest challenge in 75 years, he said is that Pakistan's productivity capacity could not be integrated with the global markets. Ahsan Iqbal pointed out that export-led growth is important to resolve the balance of payment issues, therefore he stressed the need to do all measures to earn maximum foreign exchange reserves. "We have to do resource mobilization and also have to increase tax to GDP ratio up to the global average of over 18 percent which is only at 09 percent in Pakistan".

He said in previous four years, the debt servicing burden had increased to Rs 4500 billion, so if the resources are not mobilized, the country's all collected tax would be spent on the debt repayment. Furthermore, he said increasing investment was another important factor to ensure sustainable economic development. "If the Pakistani investors only bring out their money and invest in the country, we will not need to go to the IMF or any other lender", he said adding that foreign direct investment would also have to be increased up to \$25-30 billion per year. He also asked the Ministry of Commerce to take urgent measures to increase the country's exports from current \$32 billion to over \$100 billion in shortest possible time.

Iran asked to ensure probe into cross border attack

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has called upon the Iranian authorities to ensure a thorough investigation into the cross border terrorist attack that took place in Panjur district of Balochistan and bring the perpetrators to task.

At her weekly news briefing here in Islamabad on Thursday, Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said the terrorists used the Iranian soil to target a convoy of security forces patrolling along Pakistan-Iran border. She said we expect Iran to ensure its territory is not used for cross border attacks in Pakistan. The spokesperson said Pakistan condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

She said we strongly commit that our territory will not be used for undertaking cross border attacks in Iran and we expect the same from Iran. The spokesperson said Pakistan and Iran are neighbors and our channel of communications are active. We are sharing with the Iranian side our concerns regarding the incident.

Responding to a question, the spokesperson said

Pakistan has always desired cooperative relationship with all its neighbors including India. She said we have consistently advocated for constructive engagement to resolve all outstanding issues including the core dispute of Jammu and Kashmir. However, India's unabated hostility and retrogressive actions have vitiated the environment and impeded the process of peace and cooperation, she added.

She said onus remains on India to create an enabling environment for meaningful and result oriented dialogue. She said the reversal of India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5th August 2019 in the illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir is of critical importance. The spokesperson said Pakistan will also appreciate if international community especially friendly countries would convince India to take such steps.

To a question, the spokesperson said Pakistan is in close contact with Saudi Arabia on matters pertaining to their investment in Pakistan. She said Pakistan and the United States are in the process of robust engagement and dialogue. She said Pakistan

expects to further deepen its cooperation with the US. The spokesperson said Pakistan and China have agreed to temporarily reopen Khunjerab border in two phases. In the first phase, the Khunjerab border will open today for two days and again from end January to early February after the Chinese Spring Festival. She said the Khunjerab border remains closed during the winter months.

However, she said, the Chinese side has agreed to Pakistani request for temporary reopening of the border to facilitate local traders. We appreciate the special efforts of border officials on both sides to ensure smooth border operations despite inclement weather conditions, she added. Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will undertake an official visit to Tashkent, Uzbekistan on January 25 to attend the 26th meeting of the Council of Ministers of Economic Cooperation Organization. She said the Foreign Minister will address the moot and hold bilateral meetings with participating ministers and other dignitaries on the sidelines of the event.

Toshakhana gifts: 'Info can't be shared: LHC told

LAHORE (Agencies): The Lahore High Court (LHC) has directed the government to submit an affidavit declaring the details of the Toshakhana gifts as "classified". During the hearing, the cabinet secretary submitted his reply to the court on a petition seeking details of the gifts withdrawn from the Toshakhana since 1947.

In his reply, the secretary told the court that the information is "classified" and can't be shared. Justice Asim Hafeez, upon hearing this, asked the government lawyer about his stance on the documents being labelled as classified. At this, Additional Attorney General Nasar Ahmed told the court that Toshakhana was transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Cabinet Division in 1973.

However, Justice Hafeez inquired that since the gifts are purchased how can they be considered as classified?

"If an affidavit comes that these items are classified then the court will not disclose those items. Maybe the court can draw a line on what information can be provided and what can be withheld," observed Justice Hafeez.

He also directed the government lawyer to submit the affidavit of the head of the Toshakhana within two weeks. New Toshakhana policy being developed, court told The cabinet secretary, in his reply to the court, urged it to adjourn the hearing of the case till the federal cabinet approves the new Toshakhana policy. The secretary also explained that as per a circular issued by the Prime Minister's Office circular on November 26, 2015 details of Toshakhana gifts are classified. He also added that the disclosure of such information may lead to unnecessary media publicity and harm Pakistan's ties

with other countries.

"We are developing a new Toshakhana policy as per international practice. The prime minister has formed an inter-ministerial committee which submitted its suggestions on the policy," he added. The secretary also told the court that after approval from the Prime Minister's Office, the new Toshakhana bill was presented before the federal cabinet. He added that the bill is pending approval.

Power tariff may go down

ISLAMABAD (INP): The electricity price is likely to be dropped by Rs2.20 per unit on Thursday. A petition seeking the decrease in the electricity price on account of fuel cost adjustment for the month of December 2022 has been submitted to the Nepra.

Oil, gas supply from Russia to Pakistan discussed

F.P. Report

LAHORE: A delegation led by Russian Energy Minister Nikolay Shulginov on Thursday called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif here wherein the two sides discussed the supply of oil and gas from Russia to Pakistan on a long term basis.

During the meeting, both the sides agreed on the importance of energy sector for the development of bilateral economic and trade relations. The two sides also reviewed the matters related to gas pipelines, a PM Office statement said.

Welcoming the delegation the prime minister highlighted the importance Pakistan attached to its relations with the Russian Federation. He recalled his meeting with President Vladimir Putin in Samarkand in September 2022 and said that the meeting had reached important decisions to further strengthen Pakistan-Russia relations.

He also noted with satisfaction the keen desire on both the sides to upgrade the bilateral cooperation in trade, investment and economic matters. The Russian energy minister reciprocated the prime minister's sentiments and delivered a special message of Russian President Vladimir Putin to the prime minister.

In his message, President Putin referring to Pakistan as Russia's important partner in South Asia and the Islamic World reiterated Russia's strong interest to deepen the bilateral relationship. The prime minister provided guidance for the work of 8th Round of Pakistan-Russia Intergovernmental Commission meeting scheduled to be held in Islamabad on January 20, 2023. Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Federal Minister for Commerce Syed Naveed Qamar, Minister for State for Petroleum Musadik Malik and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Tariq Fatimi were also present in the meeting.

PPP assures JI of addressing concerns

F.P. Report

KARACHI: A delegation of the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) led by provincial minister Saeed Ghani on Thursday met Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Karachi chief Hafiz Naemur Rehman and assured him of addressing reservations after the later expressed grievances over alleged rigging in recently held second phase of local government elections.

The PPP delegation include Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani and Najmi Shah. During the meeting, matters pertaining to second phase of LG elections in Karachi and Hyderabad and other issues came under discussion. Talking to media after the meeting, JI Karachi chief Hafiz Naemur-Rehman said that all matters were discussed with the PPP. He said they have serious concerns about the local body elections and the concerns have been shared with the friends from the PPP. "We will again hold talks if things improve," he said.

He further said that legal and matters are involved in the election and the government provides staff to the Election Commission, adding that most of the problems are related to ROS and DROs and we think this problem should be solved in a good way. On the occasion, provincial minister Saeed Ghani while praising Hafiz Naemur of his hospitality congratulated the winning candidates of JI and also assured him addressing the party concerns.

He said that the staff works under the supervision of the ECP during the elections, adding that they want the PPP and JI to work together. "Maintaining law and order in the city is everyone's responsibility and we have to try not to increase the tension among the political workers."



LAHORE: Russian Energy Minister Nikolay Shulginov shaking hands with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, ahead of their meeting.

Two cops martyred in Jamrud suicide attack

Amjad Ali Afridi

JAMRUD: As many as two policemen embraced martyrdom while three other personnel were injured in suicide, grenade attacks and exchange of firing with terrorist at Takhta Baig checkpoint area of Jamrud, Thursday night. The martyred police officials were Manzoor Shah and Younas Khan, while Rafique Khan was injured in the attacks.

In this regard, District Police Officer Khyber issued statement while added that police personnel has neutralized suicide bomber due to alert. DPO

added that police has cordoned the area and deployed further force to neutralize the terrorists to avoid further damages. He added that operation is underway while complete information should be provided after completion of operation.

Immediately after the attack, the traffic on the Pak-Afghan Highway was shut down and a heavy contingent of police was dispatched to the check-post. Talking to journalists, Jamrud SHO Shah Khalid termed the storm on the police check-post a suicide attack. "The suicide

bomber entered the check-post and blew himself up." The SHO added that the police opened fire on the target upon seeing the suicide bomber.

Taking notice of the attack, KP Chief Minister Mehmood Khan's has asked the IG Police for a report on the incident. "The incident is very sad, the sacrifices of the martyrs will not go in vain," the CM said.

Meanwhile, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) armed group, also known as the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for Thursday's attacks.

Geographies of vulnerability 'caught in recovery trap': Sherry

DAVOS (APP): Federal Minister for Climate Change, Senator Sherry Rehman on Thursday said, "The geographies of vulnerability, those of us who live in warmer climates, are caught in a recovery trap. We are at the ground zero of climate stress as we live in an era of accelerated climate change which leads to extraordinary human suffering."

My worry is that despite excellent progress made at a climate resilient recovery conference, we may not be able to rebuild one-third of the country before the next disaster hits us." The minister was speaking at the annual Pakistan Breakfast at Davos as the Chief Guest, organised by the Pathfinder Group. She thanked the organizers for arranging the event annually on the sidelines of the Annual Meeting in Davos, allowing Pakistani policymakers to share their insights with participants from all over the world in Davos, a news release here received said.

The minister praised the efforts of the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister for their leadership on the multi-lateral stage and exceeding the targets in Geneva during the Climate Resilient Pakistan conference, despite donor fatigue and other crises in the world. "It gave us a sense of how success can be achieved in times of extreme adversity, and what was a climate emergency."

However, make no mistake because it is still a climate emergency in Pakistan, and we still have a lot of work ahead of us to bring the country back to its feet. The cameras have moved away, but the crisis prolongs. There are still 20 million people who need humanitarian assistance, and 8 million people are exposed to flood waters," she said.

The minister highlighted,

"These disasters are not just acts of God, instead are the outcomes of prolonged anthropogenic activities — as these are man-made disasters and we shouldn't deflect the responsibility by calling it an act of God alone." The minister also spoke at a panel discussion titled 'Investing in Nature' organised by the Maryam Forum Foundation where she was joined by the Minister for International Cooperation of the Government of Egypt, Rania Mashat, President, Center for Global Development, Sir Masood Ahmed, Chief Economist, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Erik Bergl6f, and Chief Sustainability Officer, Mastercard, USA, Ellen Jackowski.

The session was moderated by journalist Nik Gowing, founder of Thinking the Unthinkable and former BBC World News presenter. The Minister said that climate change and biodiversity are critical issues that require a scientific approach to guide our decisions, but current efforts have fallen short. "There is an element of denialism still amongst corporate leaders and networks which shows our collective failure as we have not been able to take the public conversations to the required level. Every little island of rationality works, and every meeting today should be a call to action."

Our models of business and government need to change for that critical mass that is needed to shift the needle on biodiversity loss and climate action because we are way off the mark," she remarked. Minister Rehman urged that coalitions are needed to meet the climate action targets. "We must build coalitions for climate action."

So far, we have mostly been talking and working in silos due to the boundaries

we have set on ourselves. Everyone is speaking about the individual actions they are taking but we need to move beyond that to a surface with achievable collective action targets and then pledge to actually meet them," she stated. The Minister also highlighted that the climate financing needs of today are not being addressed by the 20th century international financial architecture as it was created for different challenges, but it is outdated for the crises of the 21st century.

"We need a redesign of the entire Bretton Woods financial architecture and make climate financing agile and easily available for countries that are at the forefront of climate stress. If we don't take collective and radical actions within this decade, what is happening in Pakistan will come to Davos someday, but after 1/3 of the globe is living in the 19th century again that has bred from our lack of collective action," she said.

In an interview with Axios, the Minister said that countries on the climate frontline face a recovery trap. "We did well in Geneva in securing recovery funds that will help us in providing humanitarian assistance with our development partners because the humanitarian crisis is not over, and for also creating bankable projects for reconstruction."

However, it is a race against time for us as we are caught in a recovery trap — the scale of reconstruction itself will take 3 years or more, and what happens if we face another natural disaster before the rebuilding even begins? We are in a clear arc of vulnerability, and we are working very hard to make sure that there is better preparedness and adaptation on the ground to avoid such a catastrophe in the future," she remarked.

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday rejected the request of PTI's leader Shehbaz Gill seeking to stop the special prosecutor from working in sedition case. Chief Justice Aamir Farooq, hearing the case, remarked that the trial in sedition case was yet to start, adding that the court would try to conclude Shehbaz Gill's plea as early.



11 dead, 1011 injured in 977 accidents

LAHORE (APP): At least 11 people were killed and 1,011 injured in 977 accidents in Punjab during the last 24 hours.

According to the Rescue 1122, 507 drivers, 32 underage drivers, 134 pedestrians and 381 passengers were among the victims of the road traffic crashes. The statistics showed that 221 accidents were reported in Lahore which affected 211 people placing the provincial capital top of the list followed by 82 in Multan with 88 victims and third Faisalabad with 65 accidents and 72 victims.

According to data, 857 motorcycles, 58 rickshaws, 112 cars, 16 vans, six passenger buses, 22 trucks and 99 other vehicles besides slow-moving carts were involved in the accidents.

2,130 arrested, weapons narcotics recovered

LAHORE (APP): Police arrested 2,130 criminals under the National Action Plan (NAP) during the last two weeks in different violations. During an action against illegal weapons, police arrested 518 accused and registered cases against them in different police stations of the city. Police recovered six kalashnikovs, 34 rifles, 29 guns, 444 pistols and revolvers besides 3,000 rounds.

As many as 217 accused were arrested in violation of Security of V u l n e r a b l e E s t a b l i s h m e n t s Ordinance, 296 in violation of Sound System Regulation Ordinance while 1,096 accused were arrested in violation of Information of Temporary Residents Ordinance whereas three accused were arrested in violation of hate material cases. CCPO Ghulam Mahmood Dogar reiterated his resolve to make the provincial capital drug free city as police had started a crackdown on narcotics sellers and arrested 616 drug peddlers.

Police also recovered 2-kg heroin, 222-kg hashish, 361-gram ICE and 8,697 liters of liquor.

206 railways employees regularized

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Railways Lahore Division has regularized 206 employees working under Prime Minister package. PR Divisional Superintendent Lahore M Hanef Gull distributed regularization letters among the employees in a ceremony here on Thursday.

Several assistant station masters, lower divisional clerks, ticket collectors, junior assistants train of grade-III and points men, gate men, electric assistants, diesel assistants, fitter assistants, signal assistants, carriage and wagon assistants pump assistants, telecom assistants, TL assistant, box porters, security guards, office boys, sweepers, lab attendants, waiting room assistants and gardeners of grade 4 have been regularized. The employees were appointed during the period of 2006 to 2015 under Prime Minister package. The DS congratulated the employees on their regularization.

‘Departmental promotion part of service career’

LAHORE (APP): Inspector General Police Punjab Aamir Zulfikar Khan said on Thursday that departmental promotion was an important part of the service career of every police officer which reflected the increase in their responsibilities. He expressed these views while talking to the officers who were promoted to the SP rank in the Central Police Office here.

The IG Punjab said that it was the responsibility of the supervisory officers to get excellent performance from the subordinate staff, so the promoted officers should play

Chairman PBIT calls on CM

LAHORE (APP): Chairman Punjab Board of Investment and Trade (PBIT) Qaiser Iqbal Baryar, Saleem Baryar and Ahsan Saleem Baryar called on Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi at his office. They discussed matters of mutual interest and exploitation of investment opportunities in the province.

The CM said that Punjab was taking the lead in all sectors, including investment, and pointed out that for the first time, all facilities for investors have been consolidated under one roof. He emphasized that increasing investment would create new employment opportunities. He said that Punjab was the safest and best province for investors and highlighted the one-window operation facility that has been established for investors' ease.

CM launches vaccination campaign against lumpy skin disease: Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi has launched a province-wide vaccination campaign to prevent the second possible wave of lumpy skin disease and inspected the vaccination used in this drive.

More than six million doses will be provided to livestock farmers free of cost at their doorstep as the government has provided Rs 1.5 billion for the purpose.

Punjab has procured the vaccine at a more economical cost compared to other provinces, he noted. With over 25 million cattle and 28.4 million buffaloes in the province, the chief minister highlighted the vital role livestock plays in the economy, contributing 14.1% to the national GDP and 63% to the agriculture sector, with 37% of village incomes generated from livestock.

He said that village farmers needed to be aware of the benefits of vaccination as viruses, including lumpy skin, cause illness in cattle. The Livestock and Dairy Development Department is providing 200 million doses of vaccines for various diseases free of cost across Punjab, he added. It has done the best planning along with introducing the mobile app ADS info for effective control of the disease. Vaccination has been started with the available resources, he said and appreciated the Livestock and Dairy Development Department for its efforts. He asked the field teams to use their capabilities to overcome this disease. Sardar Shahabuddin, Sardar Asif Nikai, Hafiz Ammar Yasir, secretary livestock, secretary information and others were present.

Inam for expediting work on BRT Red Line project

KARACHI (APP): The Sindh Minister for Information, Transport and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon here on Thursday directed to expedite work on BRT Red Line project to do away with the difficulties being faced by the citizens due to construction work at the earliest.

The minister was presiding over a meeting of Board of Directors of Trans Karachi to review the progress on BRT Red Line project. The meeting was attended by Secretary Transport Abdul Haleem Sheikh, Justice (R) Shaqi Usmani, Rukhsana Rahoja, Shumail Sikandar, Iqbal Lalani and Administrator Karachi Dr. Saifur Rehman while Vice Chancellor NED University Professor Sarosh Hashmat Lodhi participated through video link.

Speaking at the occasion, Sharjeel Memon said that Karachi Metropolitan Corporation had handed over the land to

Trans Karachi for setting up bus depot at Alladin Park while construction of the bus depot and bio-gas plant for the project would also start soon.

The citizens are facing severe difficulties due to construction work on the project and the government wants to complete it within the stipulated time frame, the minister said and warned that any delay or lethargy in this regard would not be tolerated at all.

Sharjeel said that Pakistan's first electric bus service has been started in Karachi while BRT Red Line is Pakistan's first bio-gas project.

He said that improving public transport system in the province was the vision of PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and the Transport Department was working day and night on transport projects across Sindh including Karachi to fulfill the vision of PPP Chairman.

Infrastructure development on Education City Karachi project

KARACHI (APP): Special Assistant to Chief Minister (SACM) Sindh for Investment and Public Private Partnership Projects Syed Qasim Naveed Qamar on Thursday said that Education City was one of the major projects of the Sindh government and infrastructure development work on the project would start in July 2023.

The SACM while addressing inauguration ceremony of police station in Education City here said that the project would not only enable more than 150 thousand students to get high quality education but it would also create

enormous direct and indirect employment opportunities. The Education City project is spanned over nine thousand acres of land and the best educational institutions would establish their campuses in the city that was being developed with objective of providing the best education opportunities to the people of Sindh.

Syed Qasim Naveed Qamar said that the work on infrastructure of the project would start in July 2023 and completion of the project would fetch significant and long lasting impacts on economic and education sectors of

the country. He expressed the hope that the Education City project would be a milestone in the history of Sindh and such successful projects were the result of the vision of Chairman People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah. Secretary Investment Department Mansoor Abbas Zaidi, Member Sindh Assembly Sajid Jochio, AIG Karachi Javed Ahmed Odhu, Project Director Abrar Sheikh and other officers were also present on the occasion.

PDMA issues rain, snowfall alert

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Punjab has issued alert in the wake of possible rain in different areas while snowfall in Murree during the next couple of days.

DG, PDMA Faisal Farid has said that rain with strong winds is expected in Lahore, Sargodha, Mianwali, Khushab, Bhakkar, Faisalabad, Jhang, Toba Tek Singh from January 21 to 24. He said that

Gujranwala, Gujrat, Kasur, Hafizabad, Kasur, Sialkot, Narowal, Sheikhupura and Nankana Sahib are also likely to experience intermittent rain with strong winds. He said that at the same time hailstorm is also expected at some places.

Meanwhile, there is a chance of snowfall in Murree which may cause road closure and vehicular traffic disruption. He said that tourists and travelers should be careful and avoid unnecessary travel. Significant drop in temperature is expected due to rain however he added the rain will be beneficial for the crops.

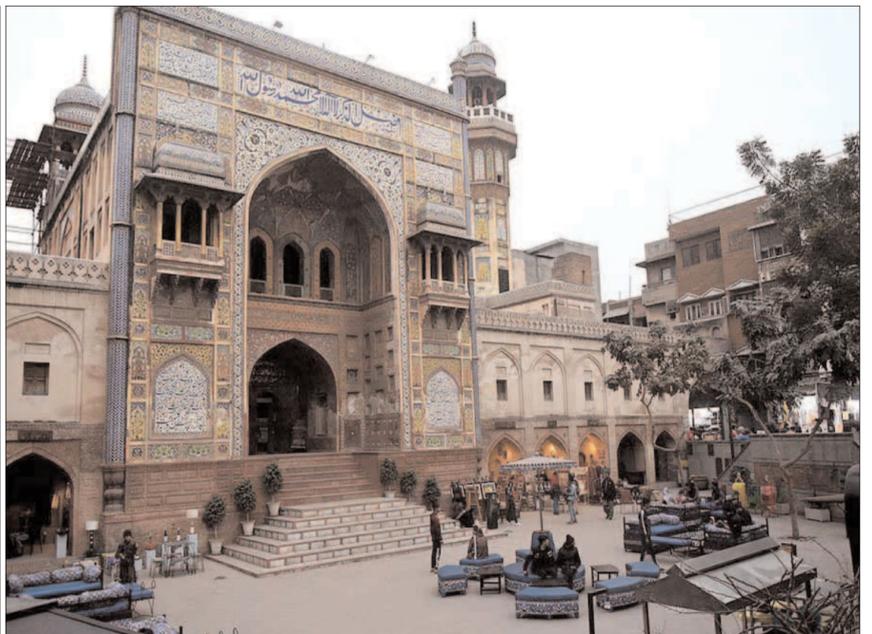
He said that PDMA has issued instructions to all concerned agencies to be on alert and advised the citizens to call PDMA's helpline line 1129 for help in emergency situation.

Court Notice

IN the Court of Qaiser Khan Afridi Additional District Judge II/Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Daggar, Appeal No.147/13, Institution 30/8/2021 Date of hearing: 28/1/2023. Amer Nawab etc VS Parvez Khan etc. Notice to no 31/1. Khider Zaman s/o Shahid Zaman. 31/2. Rifaqat d/o Shahid Zaman. 71/4. Habibur Rehman s/o Shad Migammad (late). 72/1. Kishwar S/o Dilawar Khan (late). 76/1. Aurang Zeb. 76/2. Sikandar Zaman. 76/3. Uzer sons of Shamroz Khan (late) resident of Panjtar tehsel Khadukhel district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 6/2/2023 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

IN the Court of Abdul Halem Civil Judge V /Alaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar, Suit No 525 /1, Institution 14/6/2022 Date of hearing: 6/2/2023. Baren Khan VS Royddat Khan. Declaration Suit. Notice to no 3/1. Nor Zaman. 3/2. Qarenuallah. 3/3. Saleemullah sons of Bakht Meena resident of Bulandai tehsel Chaghorzi district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 6/2/2023 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.



LAHORE: A beautiful view of outside the entrance gate of Masjid Wazir Khan at walled city.

Maritime sector is financial, techno intensive: Murad

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that the maritime sector is both financially and techno intensive and needed significant capital for building, operating, and making it economically profitable. He said this while speaking at the 3rd Steering Committee Meeting of the Pakistan International Maritime Exhibition and Conference (PIMEC) 2023 here at the CM House, said a statement.

The conference was attended by provincial Ministers, Syed Sardar Shah, Jam Ikram, Dr. Azra Fazal Pechuho, Sharjeel Memon, Chief Secretary Sohail Rajput, Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (operation Rear Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi, COMCOAST Rear Admiral Raja Rab Nawaz, COMKAR Rear Admiral Mian Zakir Ullah Jan, provincial secretaries, IG Police Ghulam Nabi Memon, senior officers of Pak Navy and provincial bureaucracy.

The term blue economy relates to traditional ocean-related economic activities such as fisheries, tourism, and maritime transport as well as new emerging opportunities like off-shore renewable energy, aquaculture, and sea-bed extraction activities. It further aims at developing sea-bed natural resources for sustainable use as well as socio-economic uplift.

Syed Murad Ali Shah said that the maritime sector was both financially and techno intensive and needed significant capital for building, operating and making it economically profitable. "Once that investment has been made and setup is in place, it also requires highly skilled manpower, which regrettably we just do not have in sufficient numbers at this point in

time," he said and added it would not be out of context to say that Pakistan was suffering from "sea blindness" and that's why the motto of PIMEC has been very aptly kept as 'Sea the Future'.

Syed Murad Ali Shah said that PIMEC should provide a foundation to bring together stakeholders from diverse maritime industries such as Aquaculture was just like farming in water and it was an environmentally responsible source of food and commercial products. He added that a large chunk of the coastal population was associated with fisheries; however, this sector has a lot of export potential yet to be exploited.

Syed Murad Ali Shah said that Pakistani fishing boats lacked modern equipment and techniques for fishing and storage. "PIMEC can be a platform for boat construction and associated industries to modernize fishing boats," he said and added that Pakistan was blessed with a large ship-breaking yard called GADANI and if utilized to its full potential, it has the capacity to generate millions of dollars each year. The CM Sindh said that coastal tourism was almost a neglected field and was required to be tapped because tourists were attracted by the climate, biodiversity as well as long sandy beaches of South Asia.

Shipping is the cheapest mode of transport, which carries 80 percent of global merchandised trade in volume, the CM said and added that considering the landlocked geography of many regional countries, Gwadar has the potential to be developed into a full-fledged regional hub and a trans-shipment port in the future.

Syed Murad Ali Shah said that

although Gwadar port's development was in progress but same was required to be coupled with the maritime industries to accrue maximum benefits and these gaps could be bridged through an effective platform like PIMEC.

Syed Murad Ali Shah said that we should not forget that there is economics at play behind the optimism that supports the development of the maritime economy in Pakistan. "Being a developing country with untapped marine economic resources, Pakistan has a huge economic edge," he said and added that this was because there would not be any diminishing marginal returns here till the capital accumulation reached its optimum point, therefore an initiative of the Pakistan Navy like PIMEC was highly praiseworthy.

Thus, by coming together as researchers, politicians, stakeholders, and business owners, Pakistan's maritime economy can be made to stand firmly on its feet in a matter of years, the chief minister said and hoped academic sessions of the International Maritime Conference (IMC) would encompass discussions on these issues and much more; particularly, in what way could the Blue Economy help reinforce the revival of our national economy.

The CM Sindh said that keeping in view the prime importance of the maritime sector, he would personally oversee all administrative arrangements for the successful conduct of PIMEC. The CM Sindh directed the Karachi police and concerned deputy commissioners and civic agencies to ensure necessary arrangements for the exhibition and conference scheduled to be held from February 10 to 12, 2023.

GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN

PAKISTAN PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

No.CCDB/Tender/AB/256

Dated: 16/01/2023

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders on percentage rate basis (not on individual items) are hereby invited for the works mentioned below from the approved PEC registered Contractors and Pak PWD enlisted contractors duly renewed for the current financial year 2022-23.

Tender documents can be received from the office of the undersigned during office hours on any working day on payment of tender cost (Non-Refundable) up to 06/02/2023 with written request on letter pad accompanied with attested copy of CNIC, Income tax Registration Certificate as active taxpayer (filer). Tenders will be issued to the proprietor of the Firm/Company or their legally authorized representatives having registered power of attorney (duly attested). The tenders in sealed cover should be received in the tender box kept in the office of undersigned on 07/02/2023 up to 12:00 PM and the respective tenders will be opened on the same day at 12:30 PM in the presence of contractors or their authorized representatives, having registered power of attorney.

The following instructions may be read and understood carefully in true letter and spirit, as in case of violation of any of these, the tender forms will not be issued. The documents under mentioned must be accompanied with the application, failing which no tender forms will be issued.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

- No tender will be sold / issued on the date of opening of tenders.
- No tender will be issued / received through post, telegraph or E-Mail.
- According to PPR Rule-25, Bid Security, as stated below against each work in the shape of CDR/Call deposit shall be furnished from any scheduled Bank in the name of the Executive Engineer, Central Civil Division, Pak PWD, Bannu. No tender will be entertained without bid security as stated below against each work or less amount.
- Tenders can be purchased on the prescribed cost (Non-refundable) in Cash mentioned against the below noted works from the office of the undersigned during office hours upto 06/02/2023.
- All CDRs once received may be credited into the Government Account and will be refunded through Government Cheque.
- 1st, 2nd, 3rd, lowest bidders CDR will be retained till acceptance of tender.
- The documents provided by the bidders if found ambiguous will be verified and in case of fake one, the firm will face immediate / appropriate penal action as per rules and law.
- Tender Notice is also available at PPR Website (www.ppra.org.pk)
- Under Rule 33(1) of public Procurement Rules, 2004, the competent authority reserves the right to reject all bids or proposals at any time prior to the acceptance of bid or proposal.
- The submission of tenders by the contractor implies that he is fully conversant with the site of work, scope of work and terms and conditions as laid down in the tender documents.

Note:-In case of any public holiday or surprise engagement of the undersigned the schedule of closing & opening will be on 08/02/2023 or 09/02/2023.

S.No	Name of Work	N.I.T Amount	Earnest Money/Bid Security 2% of Bid Amount	Period of Completion	Cost of Tender
1	Establishment of MCH Centre at Hazrat Ali Kot Distt. Lakkki	3013862/-	2% of Bid Amount	03 Months	2000/-
2	Establishment of Civil Dispensary (CD) at Azum Kot Distt. Lakkki	2794375/-	2% of Bid Amount	03 Months	2000/-
3	Establishment of Civil Dispensary (CD) at Javid Khan Kot Distt. Lakkki	2794375/-	2% of Bid Amount	03 Months	2000/-

Executive Engineer

Central Civil Division Pak. PWD, Bannu

PID(P) 019/23



PTI government worst flop in history of KP: JI

PESHAWAR (APP): Naib Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Inayatullah Khan has termed the provincial government of PTI as the worst flopped government in the history of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Addressing a press conference at JI KP Headquarters, Markaz-e-Islami here on Thursday, the former provincial minister said that corruption and bad governance were reigning the province during last year's rule of PTI.

Besides, JI MNA

Maulana Abdul Akbar Chitrali, Provincial Secretary Information, Syed Jamaat Ali Shah, Anas Hussain Awan and Mohammad Iqbal also flanked him on the occasion.

He said that the bad governance of the PTI government has played havoc with the economy of the province and the burden of the debts by the end of the current financial year will cross over the figure of over Rs.1000 billion.

During the period of over four years, 187 administrative secretaries and

four each Chief Secretaries and Provincial Police Chiefs were replaced and the province became unsecured even for the leaders of PTI also wherein members of the provincial assembly were paid extortion.

Inayatullah Khan said that the PTI government during the last four and half years neither began nor completed any mega development project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the throw-forward of the scheme has reached to Rs.1.3 trillion. He said that whichever projects initiated

were also under inquiries of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

He further alleged that during the period of last five years, federal government paid a huge amount of Rs.357 billion, but not a single mega project was initiated in the newly merged districts of the erstwhile FATA.

He said that record loans were obtained for non-productive sectors and none of the hydropower projects was completed, saying the province has technically become a defaulter.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mahmood Khan with a delegation of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf from District Dir.

Lateef Afridi's murder: Lawyers strike continued on third day

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The strike from court proceedings continued on third day consecutively against murder of former president Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) and senior Lateef Afridi, on Thursday.

Court's proceedings were adjourned due to unavailability of lawyers due to strike while senior

lawyer claimed that the murder was happened due to security lapses.

Peshawar High Court Bar Association Rahman Ullah, general secretary Farooq Afridi, district bar president Ali Zaman, senior lawyers Ishaq Ali Qazi, Amin-u-Rehman, Ayaz Khan, Yasir Khattak, Qazi Jawad along with KP Bar Council members including Syed Mubashir Shah,

Nauman Kakakhel, Babar Khan Yousafzai, Danyal Chamkani, Amjad Hassan Tanoli and Syed Abdul Fayyaz other lawyers praised Lateef Afridi for his struggle for supremacy of constitution.

The legal fraternity argued federal government to complete legislation for Lawyers Protection Bill to curtail such incidents in future and demanded iden-

tification of responsible authorities for security lapses in PHC security.

The lawyers observed strike on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council (KPBC) announcement of mourning for three consecutive days against murder of Lateef Afridi in Peshawar High court bar room. They praised Lateef Afridi commitment for constitutional and human rights in Pakistan.



PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali presiding over a meeting at University of Technology Nowshera at Governor's House.

Doctors congratulate people for dissolution of PTI govt

PESHAWAR (APP): President, People's Doctor Forum (PDF), Professor Dr Nisar has congratulated the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for dissolution of PTI government, which due to incompetency and nepotism had paralyzed the governance and administration system in the province.

In a statement issued here on Thursday, the president of PPP affiliated doctors said that PTI during its

government posted their blue-eyed near dears on lucrative posts in all institutions and were looting national exchequer for the promotion of their party cause.

He further alleged that the PTI government in the name of Medical Teaching Institutes had selected unrelated and inexperienced heads of major hospitals. He has demanded the immediate dissolution of the Board of Governors of

all MTI hospitals.

Dr Nisar has further accused the PTI government of massive corruption, nepotism and irregularities in the name of health cards in the health sector of the province.

He called for the immediate abolition of health cards and other similar schemes by the upcoming caretaker set up with immediate effect and provision of relief to the general public.

Restaurant manager held for unhygienic workplace

PESHAWAR (APP): The Assistant Commissioner, Zainab Naqvi on Thursday while showing great resentment over the poor hygiene situation at Shahbaz Canteen and Restaurant, arrested its manager.

According to the district administration, the action was taken on the directives of Deputy Commissioner Peshawar Shafiqullah Khan who received complaints that Shehbaz Restaurant has poor hygiene conditions at its workplace.

In a prompt action, AC Zainab Naqvi raided the restaurant and arrested its manager for doing business in unhygienic conditions. She said no one would be allowed to play with the lives of innocent people. She warned the hoteliers to keep their environment clean otherwise strict legal action would be initiated against them.

RTO directs for action against sales tax evaders

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Chief Commissioner Inland Revenue, Regional Tax Office, Peshawar, Aqeel Ahmad Siddiqui has directed the mobile squads to pace up operations against sales tax evaders.

For this purpose, check posts are also being established at different points in Peshawar and adjacent districts under the section AOD of the Sales Tax Act, 1990.

The mobile squads successfully seized goods and vehicles carrying these

goods, said in a press release issued here on Thursday.

The seized goods include 88,000 kg of steel valuing Rs12,591,850/-, 55,399 kgs of ghee valuing Rs21,397,604/-, 13000-meter cloth valuing 112,500, and 55 cartons of shoes valuing Rs50,940/.

The goods were being supplied from the manufacturing undertakings established in the erstwhile FATA/PATA areas and sales tax liability was not paid off.

The total revenue involved is Rs5,702,154;

this includes sales tax and penalty on the goods amounting to Rs2,021,920/- on steel, Rs3,580,234/- on ghee, and Rs50,000/- on shoes and cloth each.

Furthermore, 24 vehicles were seized in the process of which 19 were released after payment of due tax and penalty.

The Chief Commissioner Aqeel Ahmad Siddiqui warned the manufacturing units located in the newly merged areas to collect sales tax and pay the same thereof according to the law, otherwise, strict action will be taken against the evaders.

Tahir Ullah appointed as Deputy Controller

PESHAWAR (APP): The Elementary and Secondary Education department on Thursday notified appointment of Tahir ullah Jan (BS-18) officer as Deputy Controller Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) DI Khan on deputation basis for a period of three years.

A notification issued here said that the appointment of the deputy controller was made on the order of Chief Minister KP BISE under section-12 (8) (ii) of the KP BISE Act, 1990 (KP Act No V of 1990) as amended in 2005.

The terms and conditions of deputation of Dr Tahir ullah Jan, Deputy Controller (BS-18) of Examination BISE DI Khan as Controller of Examination in BISE, DI Khan in his own pay scale would be settled in due course of time.

Livestock & Poultry Congress: Meeting reviews arrangements

PESHAWAR (APP): A meeting held here with Secretary to KP government on Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives, Mukhtiar Ahmad in the chair reviewed arrangements for the

upcoming International Livestock & Poultry Congress, said a press release issued here on Thursday.

Besides, Dr Alam Zeb Mohmand Director General (Extension) Livestock KP,

Dr Ijaz Ali DG Res Livestock KP, Dr Muhammad Iqbal Director Research, Dr Khisrao Kaleem DG Fisheries KP, Dr Habib Ur Rahman and representatives of Pakistan Veterinary Medical Association (PVMA) including Dr Sajjad Khan Wazir, Dr Aaqil Muhammad attended the meeting.

The meeting decided that the event will be held from March on 2-3, 2023 at Peshawar. The participants of the meeting discussed and finalized names for the organizing committee of the event.

City Police seize 6 kg of heroin

PESHAWAR (APP): The Capital City Police foiled the smuggling of 6 kilograms heroin and arrested an alleged inter-provincial narcotics smuggler, said a press release issued here on Thursday.

The narcotics were recovered during the body search of a suspect on Sheikhano Road in the jurisdiction of Badhber Police Station.

The alleged smuggler identified as Bakhtiar son of Sardar Khan, resident of Inayat Kalley, tribal district Bajaur has confessed involvement in drugs smuggling during initial investigation.

A formal FIR against the accused has been registered and further investigations were in progress.



PESHAWAR: Director General KP Culture & Tourism Authority Muhammad Bakhtiar Khan giving shields to participants in conference.

ICS to announces girl's admission

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Islamia Collegiate School (ICS) Principal Dur-e-Zaiba said that inauguration of Girls section is final stage and should be announced admission soon following success of Islamia Girls College.

The principal ICS Dur-e-Zaiba requested parents

talking to media personnel and added that the initiative is taken to provide quality education to girl's folk. She added that in first step from Kinder Garten (KG) to 5th class for girls while further upgradation should be done from time to time.

The admission forms 23rd will be available at ICS main branch while interested parents are requested to provisionally register their girls' children with the school.

to confirm their provisional admission in current month along with their credential with school's administration.

The admission forms 23rd will be available at ICS main branch while interested parents are requested to provisionally register their girls' children with the school.

Dangerous inverters installed

PESHAWAR (APP): In the wake of closure of CNG stations, the taxi drivers have started installing inverters in their vehicles to save petrol, however according to the experts these inverters could prove fatal for the people onboard the vehicle in case of any mishap.

According to a taxi driver, after installation of the inverter, the vehicle uses less petrol and covers long distances. However the technical experts said these inverters could prove much more dangerous and fatal in case of any mishap or mis-handling.

Installation of the inverter in a car costs Rs 14000 and requires a plastic bottle, filled with petrol inside the car. The taxi drivers said due to closure of CNG stations they were unable to earn sufficient money for their household which compelled them to install the inverters. In KP the government had ordered closure of CNG stations for one month from 1st January to provide gas to the domestic consumers during the winter season.

Dr. Shoaib elected as central president POA



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Prof. Dr. Muhammad Shoaib Khan Chairman Orthopaedic Department & Associate Dean (postgraduate) Khyber Teaching Hospital Peshawar elected as central President Pakistan Orthopaedic Association with overwhelming majority for tenure of 3 years.

Pakistan Orthopaedic Association (POA) election was held at Islamabad.

Voting was done for electing central and provincial candidates in the three provinces Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

while from Baluchistan the candidates were elected unopposed.

Prof Dr. Muhammad Shoaib Khan Chairman Orthopaedic Department & Associate Dean (postgraduate) MTI Khyber teaching hospital Peshawar was elected as central President Pakistan Orthopaedics Association for next 3 years.

Dr. Shoaib thanked the entire orthopedic community and added that, God willing, I will take the entire community in loop to make POA an academic body at PAR with Regional & international authorities

and associations. My vision is establishment of Orthopedic centres of excellence in different cities, recognition of more orthopaedic sub-speciality centres across the country. Providing opportunities of fellowship programs for young fellows in different orthopaedic sub specialities and super specialities. Enhancement of slots for paid fellowships.

Development of Orthopedic sub specialities in collaboration with CPSP and PMC, uplifting of POA Research journal and amendment in POA constitution as per need.

Bacha Khan week starts tomorrow

PESHAWAR (APP): Awami National Party (ANP) would celebrate Bacha Khan week from January 20 where inaugural ceremony would be held at Bacha Khan Markaz here.

ANP provincial president Aimal Wali would address the inaugural ceremony while the central and provincial leadership and council members and workers would participate in the ceremony.

On the occasion books, cultural and dress stalls would be displayed at Bacha Khan markaz for the attraction of guests. The week-long celebrations would continue till January 29.

Gomal varsity clears all pension cases

PESHAWAR (APP): Director Finance Gomal University Irum Gul has said that the varsity has cleared and paid all the pension dues of its employees from BS-17 to 21.

Talking to APP she said as per the directives of Pro Vice Chancellor Gomal Professor Dr Shakib ullah all the pension cases have been resolved and under his leadership the varsity would soon come out of financial crises.

Condolence reference held at AG KP office

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Auditor General of Pakistan Muhammad Ajmal Gondal, Controller General of Accounts Maqbool Ahmed Gondal and Accountant General KP Murtaza Khan express heartfelt condolences and share grief with the bereaved family on sad demise of Muhammad

Younis Khan, ex-Auditor General of Pakistan.

In this regard condolence reference was held at Accountant General KP Office and also floral wreath was placed on the grave by officers of the Department of Auditor General of Pakistan. May Allah rest his soul in eternal peace and bless him with highest place in Jannah.



Scattered light rain predicted

PESHAWAR (APP): The Provincial Meteorological Center Peshawar on Thursday predicted that scattered light rain with light snowfall over the hills is likely to occur in most districts of the province.

These weather conditions may prevail in Chitral, Lower & Upper Dir, Malakand, Buner, Swat, Shangla, Kohistan, Battagram, Torghar, Mans-ehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, Swabi, Mardan, Nowshera, Charsadda, Peshawar, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Hangu, Orakzai, Kurram, Kohat, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Tank, Dera Ismail Khan, North and South Waziristan districts.



In brief

JI to hold protest
F.P. Report

KATLANG: Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) will protest against rampant inflation and vote theft in Karachi today, Friday, in Katlang Bazar. This was announced by Zonal Emir Haji Azim-U-Din Khan, JI Youth District Mardan President Imtiaz Ali Shah Nangyal, Noor Islam, Sajid Bacha and Syed Asghar Ali Shah Bacha while addressing a press conference at Katlang Press Club said that breaking up the assemblies. The problem will not be solved. PTI and PDM will not leave behind. Because the economy of this country, moral values and the ship of civilization that has been sunk will demand an answer. It will be taken into account. He invited the people of the area to participate in a massive demonstration at Katlang Bazar on Friday and express their determination to hold the present rulers and the former Fitna accountable. JI added that there is no room for PPP in Karachi. And trying to hijack the local elections because of the government in the province. But we will bring those who killed the night of democracy to a culpable role. And those rulers will be drowned in the storm of inflation due to corruption and mismanagement.

Police arrest
23 suspects

BAHAWALPUR (INP): The district police of Bahawalpur have taken 23 suspects into custody and recovered hashish, liquor and cash from their possession. A spokesman for Bahawalpur police said that acting on a tip-off, a police team of PS Hasilpur arrested a suspect and recovered 520 grams hashish from his possession. Two separate teams of PS Bahawalpur (Sadar) and PS Hasilpur conducted raids at dens lying within their jurisdiction and apprehended two drug pushers besides recovering 110 liters locally made liquor from their possession. Two men were arrested and booked in case of driving vehicles with very high speed while violating limits on highways passing through the jurisdiction of PS Dera Nawab Sahb and PS Hasilpur. The police of PS Kotwali and PS Chani Goth have taken 13 gamblers into custody and recovered gambling money from their possession. Five persons were arrested for violating Punjab Sound Act in areas lying within jurisdiction of PS Ahmadpur and PS Chani Goth. The police have lodged separate cases against the accused. Further probe was in process.

MWMC conducts
cleaning drive

MULTAN (INP): Multan Waste Management Company (MWMC) conducted a special cleaning operation at MA Jinnah Road on Thursday. According to MWMC, the highway stretching from Chowk Kumharanwala to Kasuri Chowk was cleaned thoroughly. All garbage and filth were removed from both sides of the road while the Chowk Kumharanwala flyover was given special attention for early-morning cleanup before traffic flow increased. Moreover, scraping of the lane of Bosan Road was also underway. Similarly, a cleaning operation was started to remove sand and soil from the roadsides of Eidgah, Chowk Rashidabad and Shamsabad. The MWMC Chairman said the metro route from Chongi No. 14 to BCG Chowk had been washed with sprinkling water to remove dirt and dust from the streets up to the desired level.

Seized drugs
destroyed in presence
of judicial magistrates

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Adenzai police in the presence of a judicial magistrate on Thursday set ablaze at the Chakdara Fishing hut. Briefing local journalists on the occasion the judicial magistrate Ilyas Khalil said that a total of 41 cases of drugs' seizure were registered by the Ouch police station, 3 by Asban and 39



by the Chakdara police station. He said that a total of 23353 grams of charas, 1485 grams of heroin, 88 grams of ice and 9.5 liters of liquor were destroyed.

The narcotics' destruction

process was supervised by judicial magistrates Ilyas Khalil and Tariq Khan while station house officers Ouch and Chakdara Muhibullah Khan and Shah Faisal were also present. The magistrate said that drugs were destroying the young generation, especially the ice that was used by the students. He said the accused of these cases had been convicted in the courts

Pakhtunkhwa has met its logical end and now the JUI-F workers should expedite their door to door campaign.

He stated this while addressing a welcome party hosted in the honour of the JUI-F elected local government representatives and newcomers at the Timergara rest house here on Thursday. The function was also addressed by the Timergara tehsil chairman Mufti Irfanud Din, district naib emir Khurshid Khan, Maulana Huzaifa and others.

Sirajud Din said the JUI-F would form the next government in the province for which the workers should speed up their election campaign.

He said the PTI government in the province had so far released no funds to the local governments. He said the opposition lawmakers too were deprived of development funds during the last four months that showed the PTI undemocratic and immoral attitude. He said that so far no mega development project was initiated in Dir despite the fact that the PTI had five MPAs and two MNAs from Lower Dir. He said the dark period had ended and the issues faced by the people would be solved soon.

Transporter directed
to ensure govt fares

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: The district administration has decided to implement the transport fare list issued by the regional transport authority in letter and spirit to provide maximum relief to citizens after reduction in prices of oil commodities by the government.

The decision to this effect was taken in a meeting held here at tehsil building in Lakki Marwat city on Thursday with assistant commissioner Tariq Mehmood in the chair. The meeting of all stakeholders had been convened on the special directives of local deputy commissioner Fazal

Akbar who has already issued instructions to all concerned to initiate action against public transporters involved in fleecing commuters.

Officials of municipal administration and RTA and office bearers of the transport union were in attendance. On the occasion, Tariq asked the members of the transporter community to implement the fares notified by regional transport authority or otherwise the administration would take stern legal action against them.

"Along with impounding public transport vehicles, the violators will face both fines and imprisonment", he made clear, saying that the administration will ensure provision of maximum relief to commuters.

Assistant Commissioner also chaired a meeting of the district vigilance committee to discuss matters pertaining to control human trafficking and underage labour.

The progress regarding implementation of the decisions of the previous meeting were also discussed with detail. Additional AC Sultan Nooruddin Ahmer, ASP Waqas Rafiq, social welfare officer Insaf-U-Rehman Khattak and officials of labour and other departments were in attendance.

Two dialysis machines
donated to DHQ hospital

Hafiz Aziz-ur-Rehman

HAFIZABAD: A local social welfare organisation has donated two more dialysis machines to District Headquarter Hospital for providing free of cost dialysis facilities to kidney patients.

Deputy Commissioner Touqeer Ilyas Cheema inaugurated the newly installed machines. President Anjum Falah-o-Behood Insaniat Hafizabad Haji Falak Sher Chatha, Finance Secretary Sheikh Faisal Islam, Joint Secretary Zafar Iqbal Rattu, CEO Health Dr. Nayyar Imran Haider, Incharge Dialysis Unit Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Usman, Technician Tahir Mehmood, ex-president Press club Hafizabad Ch. Imtiaz Ahmad Taj and other prominent personalities attended the ceremony.

DC thanked the Founder of Noor Foundation Muhammad Shafiq for providing two new dialysis Machines to the hospital and lauded serving the ailing humanity. He said that serving the humanity was a great work and almighty Allah affectionate such people because it is a big worship. He urged upon philanthropists to come forward to serve the poor and helpless people of society for success of this world and hereafter. He announced that three more dialysis machines would be provided in the hospital to provide dialysis facility to maximum kidney patients. Dialysis facilities is being provided to more than three thousand patients monthly, he added and also visited dialysis ward to review treatment facilities being provided to patients.

DCJCC hopeful for rule of law: Chairman District Criminal Justice Coordination Committee and District and Session

Judge Hafizabad Malik Mushtaq Elahi Bingi said that all stakeholders perform their responsibilities for providing free and timely justice to masses while no one society could prosper without providing justice.

While addressing a meeting of committee, he called upon officers of government departments to focus on justice in all government affairs and without justice, distraction was prevailed in the society. He urged the judges and officers disposed off their daily work on same day instead of put on next days and no any hurdle be tolerated.

Almighty Allah have bestowed to you this position and to ensure justice with this position to work day by day for promoting justice in their concerned departments which is prerequisite of this position, he added.

DPO Rai Mazhar, ADCGR Abdul Rauf, Additional District and Session Judge Umer bin Akbar, Senior Civil Judge Shabina Hameed Mughal, Senior Civil Judge Muhammad Usman Ghani, Superintendent Jail Muhammad Abu Bakar Abdullah, District Public Prosecutor Irfan Ahmad Khan, Probationer Officer Faiqa Zulfiqar, MS DHQ hospital Dr. Asad Ikram, Superintendent District and Session Judge Mirza Muhammad Bashir Jarral attended the meeting. Monthly performance of the committee was reviewed in the meeting.

Commissioner inspects construction works: Commissioner Gujrat Division Ahmad Kamal Maan visited Hafizabad and reviewed pace of construction work on establishment of new building of DHQ hospital, University of Hafizabad, construction of road from Kot Sarwar Motorway Interchange to

Gujranwala, Hafizabad to Head Khanki Road and other development projects being completed with the cost of Rs. 35 billion in the district.

Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad Touqeer Ilyas Cheema, ADCR Abdul Rauf, AC Rab Nawaz Chadhar, Deputy Director Development Hafiz Mubashar-ul-Hassan and other concerned officers were also accompanied by the Commissioner. DC along with other officers of different departments gave briefing to the Commissioner regarding ongoing development projects of their concerned departments, provision of wheat flour to people and polio vaccination campaign underway in the district.

The Commissioner directed the officers of different departments and consultants to ensure use of quality material in execution development projects and timely completion of public welfare projects so that people could get benefits of expenditures billion of rupees on the projects by the government. He said that Rs. 10 billion were being spent of establishment of DHQ hospital for providing better healthcare to people at local level, Rs. 6 billion on establishment of University of Hafizabad to ensure giving higher educational facilities to the students of the area, Rs. 10 billion on construction of road from Kot Sarwar Motorway Interchange to Gujranwala for providing the best communicational facilities to thousands commuters belongs to Hafizabad, Gujranwala and other districts of the Punjab whereas Rs. 8.25 billion also being spent to complete road from Hafizabad to Head Khanki for providing shortest link to district Hafizabad with divisional headquarter Gujrat.



KOHAT: Activists of WAPDA Hydro Union holding a protest rally for acceptance of their demands.

Rain, snowfall
expected in
Balochistan

QUETTA (PPI): Pakistan

Meteorological Department, Regional Center, Quetta on Thursday forecast that normal to moderate rain may occur in coastal areas, Awaran, Panjgur, Surab, Kalat, Khuzdar, Bolan, Loralai, Harnai, Zhob and surroundings while normal rain with snowfall is expected in Quetta, Kalat, Mastung, Ziarat, Killa Abdullah, Pishin, Killa Saifullah and adjoining areas, however, cloudy weather would remain in rest parts of the province during the next 24 hours.

Weather forecast for next 48 hours: mainly partly cloudy to cloudy weather is expected in most parts of the province with cold to very cold conditions. However, light snowfall / rain may occur in Quetta, Ziarat, Killa Saifullah and Killa Abdullah areas with its surrounding areas during the next 48 hours.

Weather prevailed during the last 24:ain recorded in Quetta, Dalbandin, Gwadar, Jiwhani, Kalat, Khuzdar, Nokundi, Panjgur, Turbat, Zhob, Usta Muhammad, Loralai, Mastung, Chaman, Muslim Bagh, Pishin and Ziarat.

Snow occurred in Ziarat and Quetta during the last 24 hours. Maximum temperature recorded on Thursday: Barkhan 14, Dalbandin 11.5, Gwadar 25, Jiwhani 25, Kalat 10, Khuzdar 16.5, Lasbela 25.5, Nokkundi 12.5, Panjgur 20.5, Pasni 26, Quetta 5.5, Samungli 7.5, Sibi 17, Turbat 25, Ormara 24, Zhob 11, Uthal 26.7 and Usta Muhammad 18.

School
inaugurated
in Bajaur

F.P. Report

KHAR: Deputy Commissioner Bajaur on Thursday inaugurated Girls Primary School in tehsil Khar that was established under Alternate Learning Pathways Program. On the occasion, Deputy Commissioner was briefed about working of educational institutions being established under ALP Program.

He was told that 79 ALP centers have been established in district Bajaur among which 26 are for male students and 15 for female students. It was told that 21 feeder schools have also been set up in which 3200 students are getting education. Deputy Commissioner appreciated initiatives being taken under ALP programs and hoped that it would change the entire scenario of education in Bajaur tribal district.

22 criminals
nabbed

SARGODHA (INP): Sargodha Police on Thursday launched a comprehensive crackdown against criminals and claimed to have arrested 22 criminals across the district.

Police also claimed to have recovered 344 litres of wine, 234 empty bottles of liquor, 12 pistols, 8 rifles, 1.2 kg of hashish and many other valuables worth millions of rupees. The arrested criminals were identified as Naem, Naseem, Waqas, Waleed, Munawar, Nadeem, Mansab, Muneer, Akram, Akhtar, Akhlaq, Shamus, Shahid, Shakeel, Nouman, Anwar, Ansar, Adnan, Aqeel and others.

Availability of flour
in Buner assured

F.P. Report

BUNER: The grand jirga argued deputy commissioner and district police officer to ensure availability of flour and demanded stern actions against drug-dealers as well as cutting supply on priority basis.

This was demanded by Gadezai Loya Jirga during 'Kuli Katcheri' in deputy commissioner Shahid Ali Khan, DPO Salah-U-Din Kundi, ADC Akhtar Nawaz, AC Gadezai Fazal Wahid, DHO Dr. Qazi Afsar, TMO Ekhtyar Hussain Bacha, Tehsildar Imtiaz, Naib Nasebzay, heads of C&W, PESCO, Forest, Population Welfare and others line department were present before the public.

The jirga comprised of Mian Syed Laiq Bacha, Haji Saifiqullah, Afsar Khan, Shah Jehan, Mutabar Khan, Riaz Khan Yousafzi, Asif Khan, Gul Mohammad, Khaliqdad, Ashtar Khan, Abbas Shaheen, Sher Nabi, Sardar Ali Said Wahid and Aman Ullah along with large

number public from every walk of life. The elders were poured heap of problems top among them the crisis of flour which they branded a question of life and death for them. They added that flour unavailability, high price, political distribution were issues and demanded strict monitoring of the local flour mills, distribution on merit otherwise threatened protest.

The jirga demanded to cut supply line of narcotics and bleak future of young generation well explained and demanded action. They pointed out THQ Hospital problems besides over loading on newly constructed roads.

They lamented butchers for own fixed rate and demanded intervention. The elders raised core issue of power supply disruption for hours long and wished to improve the situation before summer. They demanded cleanliness in the Pacha Bazar and streets in villages too.

The elders were quite harsh on faulty names in

the computerization record of the revenue while the staff mistakes were badly affected land owners and they have to hire lawyers for correction names in land revenue record which they branded unjust and demanded its correction by revenue staff at tehsil.

The elders concluded with hoping these issues would be resolved till feedback open forum at the same venue so as the Gadezaiwal satisfied and let continue supporting district administration for the noble causes of prosperity development and peace in the area.

The DC and DPO assured them all out support to live with peace adding most of the issues were during the open forums discussed with concerned dept head and solved while rest of them would be resolved and freed back would be shared with them during feedback open forum which they promised to be convened soon at the same venue, they concluded with hope and best wishes to see soon.

Increasing literacy rate,
poverty eradication priority

MULTAN (APP): Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) South Punjab, Capt.(R) Saqib Zafar on Thursday said that increasing literacy rate and eradication of poverty in the region was top priority of the government. He said that work was underway on hundreds of development projects to raise the living standard of the people.

ACS South Punjab Saqib Zafar was addressing to a group of under-training ASPs in South Punjab Secretariat here. Secretary School education Dr. Ehtesham Anwar, Secretary Primary and Secondary Health Muhammad Iqbal, Secretary P&D Aftab Pirzada and SSP Umar Riaz were also present on the occasion.

He said that South

Punjab was an important region of the country and land of unique civilization and culture. He said that the aim of establishing South Punjab Secretariat was to resolve problems of people of the area at their doorsteps. South Punjab Secretariat has crossed many milestones of its success.

ACS further informed that the provincial cabinet has fixed 32 percent job quota for South Punjab while 68 percent for other districts of the province and 10 percent for candidates on open merit. He said that the budget allocated for the development projects of South Punjab couldn't be spent in any other district. He said that service delivery has greatly improved at DHQs, THQs and BHUs

located in remote areas due to monitoring of South Punjab Secretariat.

Saqib said the School Olympics Games and the establishment of the first transgender school were the proud initiatives of the South Punjab Secretariat. He said Green Book pertaining to climate change was being taught in the school and Miwaki forests are being grown in more than 200 schools which will have far reaching results. Students' councils have been established in schools to create leadership qualities among students. ACS South Punjab also gave souvenir to SSP Umar Riaz while SSP Umar Riaz presented a commemorative shield to Additional Chief Secretary South Punjab.

More distribution points
setup for subsidized flour

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Under the direction of Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Tahir Vatto, trucking points have been established at central locations for the uninterrupted supply of cheap flour across the district.

According to details, action was also taken against 5 flour mills. Deputy Director Food Asif Raza conducted a surprise inspection at the flour sale points and arrested Muhammad Bilal, who supplies flour to hotels, in Shah Rukn Alam police station.

Deputy Director Food also imposed fines of Million rupees on Pakiza Flour Mills, Shamshad and Mahmood Flour Mills. Earlier, District Food Controller Umair Sagheer also conducted a surprise raid late at night.

On this occasion 100 bags of official flour to be supplied to hotels were also seized. Asif Raza said that the quota of Hamzai Flour has been suspended

on the supply of government flour, while the artificial crisis situation of flour is reducing due to uninterrupted supply to the citizens. The Deputy Director of Food said that the private market also has complete control over the quality and supply of flour.

Meanwhile, Assistant Commissioner Shujaabad Abdul Basit Siddiqui, Chief Officer Amir Rauf along with Municipal Officer visited different places of the city. Inspected the four doors of Muzaffar Mahal and Fasseel. Checked the attendance of the polio team at the polio point established at Chandni Chowk.

After that, checked the flour point established in the Municipal Committee. After listening to the problems of the people, the Assistant Commissioner sought an explanation from the Food Inspector.

AC said that why there is so much rush here one bag should be given to each person so that everyone can benefit from this facility to

which the food inspector assured that the orders will be processed immediately. On this occasion, Assistant Commissioner Abdul Basit Siddiqui said that the timely supply of cheap flour is our first priority so that the people can benefit from this facility. They are doing it. It is necessary to end encroachments for the beauty of the city.

Dad Muhammad
appointed as
SDPO

F.P. Report

KOHAT: After the transfer of SDPO Dara Adam Khel Fazal Wahid to Central Police Office Peshawar, SDPO Headquarters Circle Kohat Dad Muhammad has been posted as SDPO Dara Adam Khel.

A notification issued here said that awaiting posting at Regional Police Office Kohat DSP Shahid Adnan has been posted to SDPO Headquarters Circle Kohat to replace Dad Muhammad.



Marcos says Philippines to resist 'recessionary forces'

DAVOS, Switzerland/MANILA (Reuters): Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said his country would resist global recessionary headwinds, but warned that increasing tensions in the South China Sea were harming trade. Marcos was bullish about the country's economic prospects in a speech at the World Economic Forum's (WEF) annual meeting, which has been dominated by talk of an impending global recession brought on by the cost of living and energy crises. "My belief is that as long as the unemployment rate stays low, we will be able to resist the recessionary forces," he said.

He said the upskilling of his country's labour force was powering economic growth, including remittances from overseas workers. But increasing tensions in the South China Sea were affecting trade on all of the exchanges in the region, he said. "The future of the region has to be decided by the region, not outside powers," he said.

Earlier, Marcos said he expects the domestic economy to grow around 7% this year, saying strong fundamentals, prudent fiscal management and reforms in key sectors will cushion against risks from a potential global recession. The Southeast Asian country, which will announce its 2022 economic performance on Jan. 26, also expects last year's gross

domestic product growth to be faster than the 6.5%-7.5% target. "Our strong macroeconomic fundamentals, fiscal discipline, structural reforms and liberalisation of key sectors instituted over the years have enabled us to withstand the negative shocks caused by the pandemic and succeeding economic downturns and map a route toward a strong recovery," Marcos was quoted as saying in a statement his office issued.

Marcos was in Davos, Switzerland this week for the World Economic Forum, accompanied by his economic team and several Philippine business executives. There he met with potential investors to seek support for his infrastructure development programme. Pent-up domestic demand following the removal of pandemic restrictions propped up economic growth last year and will continue supporting consumer spending this year, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Felipe Medalla said on Jan. 10. "Our actual projection is 6.5 (percent for 2023) but there are signs that we might be able to surpass that," Marcos said in Davos, where he also presented his proposed sovereign wealth fund to potential investors.

He said they were mainly introducing the idea. "We want people to be aware that this is in the pipeline. This is something that we can look

forward to, and that we will be able to utilize for the continuing development in the Philippines," he said. Critics have raised concerns over the transparency and governance of the wealth fund, which has been approved by the House of Representatives, and is pending deliberation in the Senate. Under the bill, state lenders Development Bank of the Philippines and Land Bank of the Philippines would provide a total 75 billion pesos (\$1.37 billion) for initial capital, while the central bank will contribute subsequently through dividends. The Philippines is also grappling with soaring prices of onions, widely used in many local dishes, and prompting the government to approve emergency onion imports.

Marcos said prices had already started to come down thanks to the imports, but in the long term there was no getting around the need to increase production. Asked about criticism that poor planning by the government, such as delayed decisions on imports, was to blame for the situation, he said the government had great difficulty in determining how much they had and also blamed illegal imports. "We have a better handle on it now and I think we can see it in terms of our scheduling of our buying," he said. "But the long term solution is productivity."

HK to scrap isolation requirement for people with COVID

HONG KONG (Reuters): Hong Kong said it will no longer require people infected with COVID-19 to quarantine from Jan. 30, removing one of the last major coronavirus restrictions in place in the Asian financial hub. The scrapping of the isolation requirements is part of a decision to downgrade COVID-19's status to an endemic disease from a severe respiratory disease and follows a similar move by China on Jan. 8.

"I have decided to scrap the quarantine order for COVID-infected patients. This is one of the important steps towards normalcy," city leader John Lee told a legislative meeting on Thursday. People in Hong Kong are, however, still required to wear masks unless exercising. Last week, high-speed rail services between Hong Kong and mainland China resumed for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic. The re-opening comes amidst a massive wave of infections on the mainland following China's abrupt U-turn on its "zero-COVID" policy.

US Senator calls for investigation

WASHINGTON (Agencies): United States Senator Ron Wyden called for the Justice Department's inspector general to investigate federal, state and local law enforcement access to a database of more than 150 million money transfers, citing concerns it disproportionately affects minorities and low-income people. Law enforcement agencies have routinely accessed the vast trove of money transfer records without court oversight, Wyden said.

The Democratic senator's office has been investigating the mass surveillance programme for a year and has found that hundreds of law enforcement agencies have access to the money transfer database, which is housed inside an Arizona nonprofit known as the Transaction Record Analysis Center (TRAC). The TRAC database was created as part of a 2014 money laundering settlement between the Arizona attorney-general's office and Western Union, a US-based financial services company.

Wyden's letter to Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz also alleged that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and one of its sub-units, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), hid key elements of the surveillance programme from him during a February 2022 briefing. A Department of Homeland Security spokesperson did not immediately reply to a request for comment. TRAC could not be immediately reached for comment. The US Drug Enforcement Administration, DHS and the Arizona attorney-general's office have all asked for data from money transfer companies and directed them to send data to TRAC, Wyden said.

Western Union, MoneyGram International, Viamerica Corp and Euronet Worldwide are among the companies that have shared customer data with TRAC in bulk, he added. "This unorthodox arrangement between state law enforcement, DHS and DOJ agencies to collect bulk money-transfer data raises a number of concerns about surveillance disproportionately affecting low-income, minority and immigrant communities," Wyden's letter said. Wyden announced in March that HSI issued custom subpoenas - a type of subpoena - for millions of money transfer records between Mexican residents and people living in four US states. Announcement regarding the surveillance was broader than previously known. It listed 22 countries and one US territory involved in the relevant transfers, including Columbia, Bolivia, Ukraine, Hong Kong, Costa Rica and Venezuela.

First migrants cross into US from Mexico using mobile app



CIUDAD JUAREZ/MEXICO CITY (Reuters): Migrants on Mexico's northern border began entering the United States using a mobile app designed to facilitate the process of applying for asylum, although several quickly reported difficulties in using the system. This month, the Biden administration said it would broaden use of the so-called CBP One app to allow asylum seekers to enter their personal information as a pre-screening step for a US appointment to request asylum.

"I'm really excited, I can't wait to see my family," said Alejandra, a Venezuelan migrant who entered El Paso, Texas from the border city of Ciudad Juarez, headed for Florida. Giovanni Castellanos, another Venezuelan who

has been waiting on the Mexican border for months to enter the United States, said he got an appointment quickly. Castellanos, who spoke as he was lining up to enter Laredo, Texas, from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, recommended migrants avoid taking risks to cross and to use the app instead.

Since it was activated for pre-screening last week, the app has been in such demand that it is telling applicants it has run out of appointments, according to Mexican officials and a dozen migrants, some of whom shared phone screenshots with Reuters. To receive a US appointment, migrants first must go to a border entry point in Mexico determined by the app. Some migrants told Reuters the app only had appointments far from where they currently are.

Jose Huerta, a Venezuelan migrant in the border city of Ciudad Juarez, told Reuters the app said he could cross for his appointment from Tijuana, a city some 1,200 kilometers (746 miles) to the west opposite San Diego. "I don't have money, now I have to walk," he said. Traveling between border cities could expose more people to danger, and some migrant advocacy groups want the United States to provide more appointments to asylum-seekers to reduce risks. "They need to increase the number of appointments per day, we're confident this will be the case," said Enrique Lucero, director of migration affairs in Tijuana. US Customs and Border Protection did not immediately reply to requests for comment from Reuters about the app.

China accuses 'some Western media' of COVID-19 coverage bias

BEIJING (AP): China on Thursday accused "some Western media" of bias, smears and political manipulation in their coverage of China's abrupt ending of its strict "zero-COVID" policy, as it issued a vigorous defense of actions taken to prepare for the change of strategy. The move in December to end mass testing and quarantines led to a sharp rise in cases, with some hospitals and crematoriums overwhelmed with victims.

An editorial in the ruling Communist Party mouthpiece People's Daily outlined what it called China's "optimization and control measures" and blasted reports by media outlets they didn't identify as "completely biased hype, smear and political manipulation with ulterior motives." Since the initial wave of new cases, life in much of China has largely returned to normal, although officials have expressed concern about a further spread of the virus into the countryside during the Lunar New Year travel rush now underway.

Despite that, the editorial said many localities

have "passed the peak of the epidemic, and production and life are speeding up to return to normal." "Zero-COVID," as the strategy came to be known, sought to track and isolate every case of infection, along with those who had contact with them and even third-hand contacts. It confined millions of people in cities such as Shanghai to their homes for two months or longer, with many suffering from food shortages and lack of access to health care.

China strongly defended the policy but began dismantling it under economic pressure and after highly rare street protests broke out in Beijing and other major cities denouncing the ruling party and its leader, Xi Jinping. On Jan. 8, it took the further step of eliminating the requirement that those arriving from abroad undergo lengthy and expensive quarantines. China rejected both foreign and domestic criticism of the policy's excesses, denouncing earlier calls from the World Health Organization for it to adjust to changes in the

nature of the virus, calling them "irresponsible." That made the abrupt mid-winter shift to a policy of merely seeking to prevent the most serious cases all the more jarring for the population, many of whom have defied censors to express anger online. Virtually overnight, testing stations where people had stood in long lines disappeared, while field hospitals used to quarantine millions simply ceased to exist.

China also capped publishing figures on new cases and deaths, which it had long been suspected of underreporting, leading to further complaints from the WHO and foreign nations about a lack of transparency. Unconfirmed estimates now put numbers of new cases at tens of thousands a day, with up to 85% of the population in some provinces having become infected. China has also rejected calls to release more data and provide more information about the origin of the virus, first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, accusing those making the requests of "politicizing"

the issue.

The government has also lashed out at countries that require travelers coming from China to show a negative virus test, calling the demand "discriminatory" even though it requires the same of anyone entering China. That defensive attitude was reflected in the People's Daily editorial, which said: "Thanks to meticulous medical preparations, sufficient production capacity reserves, and strong organizational planning and equipment, China has smoothly passed the adaptation period after the 'transition' and 'shift' of the epidemic prevention policy."

"In the face of China's prevention and control achievements, any political manipulation is pale and powerless," it added, citing endorsements from academics in Nigeria, Kenya and Russia, all close Chinese diplomatic partners. "All parties should focus on fighting the epidemic itself, avoid any words or deeds that politicize the epidemic, strengthen solidarity and cooperation, and work together to defeat the epidemic," the editorial said.

Norway archaeologists find 'world's oldest runestone'

COPENHAGEN (AP): Archaeologists in Norway said that have found a runestone which they claim is the world's oldest, saying the inscriptions are up to 2,000 years old and date back to the earliest days of the enigmatic history of runic writing. The flat, square block of brownish sandstone has carved scribbles, which may be the earliest example of words recorded in writing in Scandinavia, the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo said. It said it was "among the oldest runic inscriptions ever found" and "the oldest datable runestone in the world."

"This find will give us a lot of knowledge about the use of runes in the early

Iron Age. This may be one of the first attempts to use runes in Norway and Scandinavia on stone," Kristel Zilmer, a professor at University of Oslo, of which the museum is part, told The Associated Press. Older runes have been found on other items, but not on stone. The earliest runic find is on a bone comb found in Denmark. Zilmer said that maybe the tip of knife or a needle was used to carve the runes.

The runestone was discovered in the fall of 2021 during an excavation of a grave near Tyrifjord, west of Oslo, in a region known for several monumental archaeological finds. Items in the cremation pit burnt

bones and charcoal — indicate that the runes likely were inscribed between A.D. 1 and 250. "We needed time to analyze and date the runestone," she said to explain why the finding was first announced.

Measuring 31 centimeters by 32 centimeters (12.2 inches by 12.6 inches), the stone has several types of inscriptions and not all make linguistic sense. Eight runes on the front of the stone read "idiberug" which could be the name of a woman, a man or a family. Zilmer called the discovery "the most sensational thing that I, as an academic, have had."

There is still a lot of research to be done on the

rock, dubbed the Svingerud stone after the site where it was found. "Without doubt, we will obtain valuable knowledge about the early history of runic writing," Zilmer said. The runestone will be exhibited for a month, starting on Jan. 21, at the Museum of Cultural History, which has Norway's largest collection of historical artifacts, from the Stone Age to modern times.

Runes are the characters in several Germanic alphabets that were used in northern Europe from ancient times until the adoption of the Latin alphabet. They have been found on stones and different household objects.

California sees extensive storm damage as weather calms

LOS ANGELES (AP): Key roadways remained closed and officials estimated thousand of homes were seriously damaged in California as weeks of wild weather that flooded roadways, collapsed hillsides and toppled countless trees finally became calm. Tallying the damage will take time, but the number of houses and other structures that will be red-tagged as uninhabitable could be in the "low thousands," said Brian Ferguson, spokesperson for the Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

The damage is spread across 41 of California's 58 counties, Ferguson said. In unincorporated Santa Barbara County, after more than 60 inspections at properties that sustained damage from mudslides and downed trees, four homes were red-tagged and 32 were yellow-tagged as needing extensive repairs, said Kelsey Buttitta, the county's communications manager. "Also we're seeing a lot — a lot — of damage when it comes to roads," she said, esti-

imating that more than a dozen are fully closed. "Some roads are completely washed away." There is no estimated reopening date for State Route 154, a key north-south artery in the county that is inundated with mud and rocks, Buttitta said. Nine atmospheric rivers since late December caused power outages, flooding, levee breaks, washouts and landslides nearly statewide. At least 20 people were killed.

Light rain and snow showers lingered in some areas across California, but the skies were finally largely clear. A shot of precipitation from a quick system was predicted, followed by a dry period, the National Weather Service said. Forecasters cautioned that although the midweek rainfall will be light, it could be enough to cause problems because the state is so saturated. Flood warnings remained in effect for the Salinas River in Monterey County and parts of Mariposa and Merced counties in the Central Valley.

Officials in Ventura County said it could take up to three weeks to clear the only road into the remote canyon community of Matilija in the Los Padres National Forest near Ojai. Repairs could take six months. More than 70 residents were evacuated by helicopter, but a handful have refused to leave, according to the Ventura County Sheriff's Office. "Towering piles of rock and mud reach over 40 feet (12 meters) tall in some locations, blocking access to roadways and leaving residents isolated to the canyon," the sheriff's office said in a weekend statement. To the north in Berkeley, eight homes were red-tagged after a sodden hillside collapse, sending mud onto properties, including one belonging to Marjorie Cruz. No injuries were reported. "You can't describe what it's like to wake up in the morning and look outside your door and see this horror come through," Cruz told NBC Bay Area.

Greenland temperatures hottest in 1,000 years

BERLIN (Agencies): New data has revealed that temperatures in Greenland are the warmest they have been in 1,000 years, underscoring the growing impact of human-driven climate change on the natural world. A study published in the scientific journal Nature found that temperatures have risen 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above the 20th-century average since 1995. The data shows that Greenland's ice cores — samples taken from deep within ice sheets and glaciers — have warmed substantially.

"We keep on [seeing] rising temperatures between the 1990s and 2011," said the study's lead author Maria Hoerhold, a glaciologist at the Alfred Wegener Institute in Germany. "We have now a clear signature of global warming."

As fossil fuel consumption releases carbon into the atmosphere and warms the planet, scientists have warned that governments have yet to make the changes needed to avert the worst repercussions of global warming. In November, a United Nations report found that many of the world's most famous glaciers could disappear by 2050 as the planet warms. Of the more than 18,600 glaciers the organization monitors across 50 World Heritage Sites, about one-third are expected to vanish by mid-century.

Another study found that two-thirds of the world's glaciers are expected to disappear by 2100. Greenland's ice cores, which reveal information about long-term temperature changes, take time to analyse. Data from the cores had last been updated in 1995 and previously suggested that Greenland was not warming as quickly as the rest of the Arctic region. However, the newly analysed cores, taken in 2011, show a sharp rise over the last 15 years. "This is an important finding and corroborates the suspicion that the 'missing warming' in the ice cores is due to the fact that the cores end before the strong warming sets in," said climate scientist Martin Stenel of the Danish Meteorological Institute, who was not involved in the research.

Hoerhold said that natural weather variability and undulations caused by an occasional weather system called "Greenland blocking" had previously hidden the toll of human-caused climate change. But in the

1990s, that change became too large to ignore. Past data showed Greenland warming at a lower pace than the rest of the Arctic, which was warming four times faster than the global average. Now, Greenland appears to be catching up. The ice cores are used to create a chart approximating temperatures in Greenland over a more than 1,000-year timeframe, stretching from the years 1000 to 2011.

For the first 800 years, the temperatures slowly cooled, then edged up and down before a dramatic spike in the 1990s. Hoerhold said that there is "almost zero" chance that the post-1995 spike is attributable to a factor other than climate change. Another set of ice cores was taken in 2019, but Hoerhold said they are still being studied. The study also revealed that more water is being released as Greenland's ice melts, contributing to rising sea levels. "We should be very concerned about North Greenland warming," said Danish Meteorological Institute ice scientist Jason Box. "Because that region has a dozen sleeping giants in the form of wide tidewater glaciers and an ice stream."

UN expresses 'concern' over Guatemala probes

UNITED NATIONS (Agencies): The United Nations has issued a statement expressing "concern" after Guatemala announced it would investigate a former anti-corruption investigator assigned to the country. Iván Velásquez, a Colombian who led the UN's anti-corruption efforts in Guatemala from 2013 to 2019, is under investigation for "illegal, arbitrary and abusive acts", according to prosecutors in Guatemala.

But critics have warned the probe is the latest effort from Guatemala's government to backtrack on anti-corruption efforts. UN Secretary-General António Guterres "expresses his concern at the numerous reports suggesting that criminal prosecution is being exercised against those who sought to shed light on cases of corruption and worked to strengthen the justice system in Guatemala", a spokesperson said. The UN also underscored that "justice operators and officials" from its former anti-corruption campaign continue to "enjoy privileges and immunities" even after their

positions have come to a close.

The campaign started in 2006 when the UN and Guatemala agreed to launch the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). The aim of the commission was to root out "criminal groups believed to have infiltrated state institutions" in the wake of Guatemala's decades-long civil war. In 2007, at the time when the commission was ratified, Guatemala was in the grip of a police scandal, with reports of extrajudicial killings, and there were fears corruption could erode the country's democratic gains. Velásquez, a Colombian who formerly served as an auxiliary magistrate to his country's Supreme Court, was appointed to head the CICIG on August 31, 2013.

Under his leadership, the commission pursued investigations into some of Guatemala's highest authorities, including the administration of then-President Otto Pérez Molina. Both Molina and his vice president ultimately resigned

amid accusations they participated in a corruption scheme known as "La Linea", which allegedly used customs officials to solicit bribes in exchange for evading import duties. Molina was sentenced last month to 16 years on fraud and conspiracy charges. He has denied any wrongdoing.

The UN commission's investigations are estimated to have led to the sentencing of more than 400 people, as well as the disruption of at least 60 criminal networks. But the CICIG's work came to a sudden halt in 2019, when Guatemala announced it would withdraw from the 2006 agreement with the UN. The government had previously tried to declare Velásquez a "persona non grata" and deny him entry to the country. The move prompted fears that 12 years' worth of government reform would be reversed. "The old actors that have manipulated the judicial system are empowered and will look to debilitate the system again," a constitutional lawyer from Guatemala told Al Jazeera at the time.

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Urban planning and nation's plight

CHIEF Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mahmood Khan formally approved the first-ever Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Urban Policy 2030 during a meeting of the Land Use and Building Control Council on Wednesday. According to the details, in the first phase council has approved master plans for Mardan city, Wana as well as Miran Shah and Mir Ali Urban areas in North Waziristan. As said, 16 master plans for different cities are in the pipeline that would be ready in the next few weeks to implement modern techniques for land development and introduce the newest designs and modern architectural qualities in a standard format across the KP.

Town and Urban Planning is the essence of today's modern living that not only makes optimum and judicial use of available space but also enables governments, builders, architects, and administrators to provide maximum comforts and innovations to the community. Town Planning also helps us in the preservation of the natural environment coupled with social amenities along with economical use of available resources including drinking water, electricity, gas, and other communication and internet facilities through pooled resources and collective arrangements within a specific neighborhood. The idea of Urban planning is not a new concept, rather the ancient Rome and the Ghandara civilizations had comprehensive sanitation systems, road lanes, and lighting arrangements in their constructions.

Unfortunately, as a nation, we could not implement those same ideas in our everyday social life whereas our cities and towns had been shaped into wild growth and unplanned construction. Currently, all residential colonies and major cities face identical problems of sewerage, clean drinking water, ungoverned traffic, encroachment, poor construction, lack of parks and recreational places, greenery, community services, and finally the rule of the law. Meanwhile, illegal and unauthorized housing societies had grown across the country causing multiple administrative and legal issues for the governments along with turning useful cultivating land into grey structures and proposed commercial hubs. Ironically, those problems are multiplying regularly by the public while the regulators, administrators, and law enforcers have no sense of responsibility to stop this self-creation of the catastrophe by the masses.

There is no scarcity of rules and regulations, as well as government institutions to authorize and regulate construction and businesses in all major cities such as CDA, PDA, LDA, KDA and SBKA, RDA, and MTA, while numerous cantonment boards and Municipal administrations are functional in all cities and towns still illegal building, are continuously being constructed, unauthorized societies are being launched and unlawful encroachment still exists everywhere in all provinces as well as in the Federal Capital.

KP government introduced KP Land and Building Control Act in 2021 and established a new autonomous authority at the provincial level to regulate land use and implement building codes in the entire province. Previously, there are several development authorities at the district level to regulate the construction, and the Sindh Building Control and Development Authority (SBKA) was the only provincial-level institution, which has been overseeing construction in Karachi and Sindh since the 1950s. However, SBKA failed to prove its worth even in Karachi instead of the entire province. Now, the KP government has initiated a province-wide campaign to overcome the issue of bad governance. The problem lies in the no implementation of the law, no fulfillment of responsibility, and no accountability of the corrupt, criminals, and crooks. Until and unless government officials and the public do not uphold the constitution and merit, no change can be brought in this country through multiple institutions and volumes of legislation.

Climate change, poor versus privileged

FEDERAL Minister for Climate Change, Senator Sherry Rehman told the World Economic Forum (WEF) on Wednesday that the historic emitters responsible for the majority of global Green House Gases (GHG) emissions need to move resources to allow developing and emerging economies to make the energy transition to renewable without compromising development.

Global warming has become a grave risk to the survival of the universe because of the reckless, uncontrolled, and unplanned growth and industrialization of developed nations. However, this unilateral industrialization caused relatively more risk for the less developed world because developing nations could not build their infrastructure, economy, and living standards that compete with the worst effect of climate change. Thus, African, Asian, and Latin American nations are more prone to devastation due to floods, drought, hunger, and wildfires. The historic Paris Accord on Global Warming has chalked out a global strategy and commitment and asked the world nations to work towards net zero by 2050 and achieve the 1.5C target, by all means, if human intends to survive on the earth. Interestingly, only a few countries took it seriously while others chased their development goals and made the world an unlivable place.

There had been debate on the issue that climate change hurt nations more than the global GHG emitters including the United States, Europe, China, and India. After the recent superfoods in Pakistan, this issue was highlighted by the developing nations through the platform of G77 at the United Nations and COP27 gathering recently held in Sharm-Al- Shaikh Egypt. Surprisingly, G77 nations and Pakistan remained successful in constituting Loss and Damage Fund to finance the states suffered by the climate change induced floods, hurricanes and other natural disasters in the future.

During the recent meet-up of the World Economic Forum (WEF), the disadvantaged nations urged the privileged countries to help finance their endeavors for the renewable energy transition to mitigate the effects of climate change. In fact, the leaders of developing nations must work for the betterment of their nations instead of looking for aid and grants for wealthy nations, because they achieved this status through hard work and patience, which needs to be exercised by others too.

Quote of the day

Don't be distracted by criticism. Remember, the only taste of success some people have is when they take a bite out of you.
— Zig Ziglar, American writer.

How does this fit into a broader strategy to end Ukraine war?

WHEN top US and European defense officials meet at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Friday to discuss the war in Ukraine, the biggest issue on the agenda will be how the coalition can continue to supply Ukraine with more sophisticated weapon systems.

Specifically, the Ukraine Contact Group, a formal assembly of some 50 nations, will be discussing tanks. Pressure will be on Germany to yield to demands from Britain, Poland, and the Baltic States to send Leopard 2 main battle tanks to Ukraine, and allow other NATO countries that have

the tanks to do so too.

This would mark a significant advancement in Western military assistance to Ukraine. It could be seen as an escalation. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has opposed sending the Leopards, despite intense pressure, including from members of his own coalition. He told the Guardian on Wednesday that "we want to avoid this becoming a war between Russia and NATO." Later in the day, German officials told reporters it would not send Panthers unless the U.S. gave Ukraine American-made tanks, according to the Wall Street Journal.

So far, the United States

Anatol Lieven

has refrained from sending its own M-1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine, though like Germany, it has sent infantry fighting vehicles (often misleadingly called "tanks") and heavy artillery. The Biden administration has welcomed Britain's promise to send 12 Challenger tanks. This is purely symbolic. On the other hand, the transfer of Leopards (Ukraine has said that it needs 300 Western tanks) would be an altogether more serious affair, even though it would take time to train Ukrainian troops to use them.

Any additional dispatch

of additional Patriot anti-missile batteries is far less controversial, because they will be used to defend Ukrainian infrastructure from Russian missiles — a goal on which all NATO countries are agreed.

The discussion of how far the West should go in supplying advanced tanks is important but it raises critical, strategic questions about where the coalition truly wants from what could be interpreted as an escalation by Russia. The following are the key questions they should be asking themselves — but likely are not.

1. How do our plans for

military assistance to Ukraine fit into our broader strategy for ending the war?

2. Given the Biden administration's justified desire to avoid a direct military conflict with Russia, what should the allies be doing to prevent an incremental slide into ever deeper U.S. involvement, as happened in Vietnam?

3. What should the US and NATO be doing to plan for surprise Russian moves, such as disabling satellites vital to US/Ukrainian command and control of precision-guided munitions?

4. Are these partner governments prepared to back Ukraine to reconquer all the territory it has lost since

2014 — including Crimea and the eastern Donbas as suggested in this Wednesday New York Times article — even at the risk of Russia escalating towards war with NATO and the use of nuclear weapons?

5. If not, at what stage and along what lines do they want Ukraine to call a halt, and what pressure are they prepared to bring to bear in order to achieve this?

6. If neither side achieves a breakthrough and the war becomes a stalemate, at what stage will the destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure and the cost of supporting Ukraine necessitate the search for a ceasefire?

'You cannot sit on two chairs at the same time, especially if they are that far apart'

"You cannot sit on two chairs at the same time, especially if they are that far apart." Hoyt Brian Yee, then U.S. deputy assistant secretary for European and Eurasian affairs, had a stark message to Serbia back in 2017: Belgrade had to make a choice between the West and Russia. Five years down the line, Serbian foreign policy is still looking both ways. So far, even Russia's brutal war in Ukraine has not caused Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic to alter course.

On the one hand, Vucic professes a sincere commitment to bringing Serbia into the EU and promoting regional integration through initiatives such as Open Balkan, a platform Serbia shares with Albania and North Macedonia. On the other, Serbia resists pressure to join Western sanctions against Russia and sever its long-standing ties to the country. Flights from Moscow and Saint Petersburg land daily at Belgrade airport. The city brims with middle-class Russians taking advantage of Serbia's visa-free regime and lax residence rules to move their businesses closer to the EU and avoid being mobilized and sent to the front in Ukraine. The Serbian-Russian connection appears as strong as ever. Yet at the same time, Serbia is winning plaudits in Brussels. "Serbia is well advanced on its EU path," tweeted European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on a visit to Belgrade on October 28, 2022.

Serbia's Russian connection raises alarm across the region. The country's neighbors in the former Yugoslavia fear the wars of the 1990s could come back with a vengeance. In their eyes, the Russian aggression against Ukraine emboldens Serbian revanchism and endangers the Western-backed territorial status quo across the Western Balkans.

The Kosovar government, for one, paints Serbia as a mere extension of President Vladimir Putin's Russia. When nationalist Serbs set up barricades in northern Kosovo and fired shots at the police in July–August 2022, Kosovar Prime Minister Albin Kurti said that the risk of a new conflict between Kosovo and Serbia had increased. Before the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, he said, the chances of a new war were low, but then the situation changed. "The first episode, a consequence of the fascist idea of panslavism that the Kremlin has, was Ukraine. If we have a second episode, for example in Transnistria, then the probabilities that a third war will develop in the Western Balkans [are] very high." Kurti was hinting at Vucic's repeated warning that Serbia would act to prevent a "pogrom" against Serbs in Kosovo. Although tensions have abated lately, thanks to the resolute mediation efforts of the EU, fears have not fizzled out. A fresh escalation in northern Kosovo, similar to the one witnessed in late December 2022, cannot be ruled out.

The threat Russia poses in the Western Balkans should not be exaggerated. Virulent nationalist rhetoric aside, Serbia is not beholden to the Kremlin but rather is hedging its bets, as it has done for a long time. Moreover, the United States and the EU are running out of patience, ramping up pressure on Vucic to come off the fence. In Belgrade, von der Leyen stressed that Serbia's

progress toward EU accession was contingent on the country's alignment with the union's foreign policy. However belatedly, the war in Ukraine may mean that Yee's warning is finally heeded.

The Serbia-EU-Russia triangle

Serbia's Janus-faced policy has deep roots and is reminiscent of Yugoslavia's Cold War nonalignment stance. Serbia depends on the EU both economically and politically. The union is, by a long stretch, Belgrade's leading trading and investment partner. Serbs can travel visa-free to the EU, where a vast diaspora has been living for decades. Vucic is seen more often in the company of von der Leyen, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, or French President Emmanuel Macron than with Putin. Serbia is also an EU accession front-runner in the Western Balkans. Belgrade embarked on EU membership talks in 2014, with only Montenegro doing so earlier. As of October 2022, Serbia had opened twenty-two out of thirty-five policy chapters, including the crucial dossiers on judicial reforms and on justice and home affairs.

Yet Serbia's progress toward the EU is hardly a success. Accession negotiations are moving frustratingly slowly, and after eight years, just two chapters have been provisionally closed. By comparison, it took Croatia the same amount of time to complete full EU accession between 2005 and 2013. This lack of progress breeds frustration in Serbian society. A July 2022 survey by New Third Way, a research organization, found that 66 percent of Serbs felt closer to Moscow than to the West and that 40 percent favored an end to membership talks with the EU.

Along with the EU's perceived lack of commitment to enlargement, the Kosovo dispute is a key reason for these lukewarm public sentiments. Contrary to what the authorities in Belgrade say, it is clear that Serbia will not join the twenty-seven-strong bloc without recognizing Kosovo's sovereignty, as the EU is loath to import an unresolved conflict akin to the one in Cyprus. Serbia's membership negotiations kicked off only after a deal brokered in 2013 by then EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton committed Belgrade to normalize ties with Pristina in exchange for greater rights for Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo. Yet the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo has long been at an impasse. Talks have been undermined by recurrent crises in the Serb-populated north of Kosovo, clashing interpretations of the original agreement, a Serbian campaign to convince states worldwide to de-recognize Kosovo, and an attempt in 2019–2020 by the administration of then U.S. president Donald Trump to override the EU and push an alternative deal based on a land swap.

Currently, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell is scrambling to relaunch the talks, with former Slovak foreign minister Miroslav Lajcak acting as a go-between, but it is an open question whether either Vucic or Kurti is serious about reaching a political settlement. Despite a tentative agreement on the loaded subject of Belgrade-issued car registrations, which triggered tensions in July–August 2022, both leaders seem to distrust the

EU as much as they do one another.

This is where Russia enters the picture. Since Kosovo proclaimed independence in 2008, Moscow has stood by Belgrade's side in preventing the new state from gaining wider acceptance by the international community. Although Russia lost some diplomatic leverage when Belgrade turned to the EU as a mediator in 2010, Russia's permanent seat in the UN Security Council and ties to the Global South are of immense help to Serbia in isolating and pressuring Kosovo.

To be sure, the Russian approach has been unashamedly opportunistic, often at Serbia's expense. Moscow has selectively invoked a Kosovo precedent to justify its own actions, recognizing as independent states Georgia's breakaway territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in August 2008 and the so-called people's republics in Ukraine's Donbas region in February 2022. Yet Serbian public opinion appears unaffected by the contradictory messages coming from Moscow. As data from numerous polls suggest, a great majority of Serbs look at Russia as an ally and a desired partner, well ahead of the EU—not to mention the United States, which is faulted for taking Kosovo away from Serbia.

Serbia's flirtation with Russia—and with China—goes hand in hand with an authoritarian turn in domestic politics. Since becoming prime minister in 2014, Vucic has amassed an extraordinary degree of power thanks to his control over the media, the public sector, and the security apparatus. The opposition is fragmented and eviscerated, with Vucic and his party winning yet another presidential and parliamentary election in April 2022. Anti-Western nationalism is rampant and dominates the public sphere, as in the 1990s.

Serbia's democratic decline complicates relations with the EU, although the union's leaders prefer to engage with, rather than shun, Vucic. At the same time, he has nurtured links to other strongmen, such as Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Arguably, Orbán's Hungary presents an example for Serbia to emulate: a country that benefits mightily from EU membership, especially through lavish subsidies, while pursuing an illiberal political model at home and a multivector policy externally.

Serbia's response to the war

On October 7, 2022, Belgrade awoke to the sight of billboards showing a portrait of a smirking Putin. The conservative movement Our People, whose name is a nod to Russia's war in Ukraine and evokes Slavic brotherhood, was using the billboards to convey to Putin the well-wishes of his Serbian brethren on his seventieth birthday. Weeks earlier, on August 28, thousands of right-wing protesters had marched through Belgrade in protest against EuroPride, a pan-European LGBTQ event taking place in Serbia; they carried outside images of Putin and General Dragoljub "Dra a" Mihailovic, the controversial leader of the anticommunist Chetnik movement during World War II. Putin has been invited to join the

Serbian nationalist pantheon, and his appeal goes well beyond the far-right fringe.

That appeal is demonstrated by the popular response in Serbia to the war in Ukraine. The 2022 New Third Way poll found that 59 percent of Serbia's citizens blame the West for the bloodshed, compared with 23 percent who fault Russia and 18 percent who believe that Moscow and Western powers share responsibility. According to another survey, conducted in June 2022 by the Center for Research, Transparency, and Accountability, a human rights organization, 72 percent of Serbs believe that Russia was forced to start the war because of NATO's intentions to enlarge.

These attitudes do not exist in a vacuum. Russia benefits handsomely from favorable media coverage in Serbia. As a whole, popular TV stations and print outlets paint the war as a clash between Russia and the United States, rather than an act of aggression against a sovereign state. Their message is amplified by Kremlin-sponsored outlets, such as the Sputnik news agency's Serbian service, which is soon to be complemented by an online Serbian-language TV news channel as part of the RT franchise. Russia is commonly portrayed as a victim of the West, much as Serbia was during the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s. To Serbian nationalists, the war in Ukraine is therefore payback for the West's imperial arrogance and heavy-handedness. This view resonates strongly with the Kremlin elites' deeply held conviction that the 1999 bombing campaign against Serbia showed NATO's true colors as a vehicle of U.S. hegemony rather than a defensive alliance.

For his part, Vucic presents ties to Russia as a matter of necessity. In May 2022, Serbia concluded a new three-year supply contract with Russian energy giant Gazprom, securing deliveries through the winter of 2022–2023 at advantageous prices because of a formula linked to the price of crude oil rather than to the spot market: in early December 2022, Srbijagas charged just over 29 (\$31) per megawatt-hour (MWh), compared with about 94 (\$99) per MWh on the spot market.

Other Serbian officials have gone much further. In August 2022, Aleksandar Vulin, a longtime minister of the interior and defense, traveled to Moscow, where he met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and was decorated by the Russian Ministry of Defence. "Serbia led by President Aleksandar Vucic does not forget [the] centuries-old brotherhood [with Russia]," Vulin proudly announced. Then, on September 24, during the annual session of the UN General Assembly in New York, then Serbian foreign minister Nikola Selakovic signed a memorandum with Lavrov on coordinating their two countries' foreign policies.

Regional repercussions

Serbia's continued affair with Russia makes its neighbors fearful. This begins with Kosovo. Serbia's writ runs into northern Kosovo thanks to Belgrade's support for parallel institutions, a strong intelligence presence, and links to local organized crime and smuggling networks. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad

Dodik, who in November 2022 was elected president of Republika Srpska (RS), has been hollowing out Bosnian state-level institutions and threatening to pull the Serb-majority entity from the common state and declare its independence. Serbia also holds influence over parties in Montenegro and the Serbian Orthodox Church is the largest denomination in that country.

This web of formal and informal connections has given rise to talk of a Serbian world (Sprski svet)—by analogy with the Kremlin-backed Russian world (Russkii mir)—in which Serbia exerts influence beyond its borders. Many non-Serbs see this formula as a code word for irredentism and revanchism.

Belgrade's regional influence is not a matter of political rhetoric only. Serbia has been upgrading its armed forces and procuring armaments. Nominally, such efforts are in line with the country's professed policy of neutrality and simultaneous engagement with NATO, Russia, and China. In practice, Moscow appears to be the beneficiary. Russia and its ally Belarus have provided Serbia with advanced equipment, including MiG-29 fighter jets. Between 2014 and 2021, Serbia conducted joint exercises with Russia and other Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) members. Cooperation at the level of the security establishment is strong as well, given Serbian officials' regular exchanges with the likes of Nikolai Patrushev, the all-powerful chief of Russia's Security Council. So when Belgrade tabloids speculate that Serbia will regain Kosovo once the United States inevitably packs up and leaves, just as it left Afghanistan, their pronouncements are taken seriously elsewhere in the Western Balkans.

True to its habit of stirring up discord to undermine the West, Russian diplomacy has been hard at work to exploit anxieties caused by the Ukraine war. In March 2022, the Russian ambassador in Sarajevo, Igor Kalabukhov, stated that it was for Bosnia and Herzegovina to decide whether or not to join NATO but that if it did, Russia would be free to respond to this "threat." He warned that a putative entry into the Atlantic alliance would force Sarajevo to take a side in the West's military-political confrontation with Moscow.

Russia intervened in an escalation in northern Kosovo in July–August 2022 as well. As local Serbs built barricades in response to decisions by Pristina to force drivers with Serbian-issued license plates to change them for Kosovar ones and to issue Kosovar entry and exit documents for Serbian ID holders, the Russian ambassador to Serbia, Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko, blamed the EU and the United States for the crisis.

On September 26, the ambassador joined Serbian Defense Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic and Chief of Staff Milan Mojsilovic to inspect a Serbian army base in direct proximity to Kosovo's border. As ever, context matters: the visit came after weeks of media speculation about a possible Serbian military intervention in northern Kosovo to prevent what Vucic described as a concerted plan to cleanse Kosovo of Serbs. Naturally, the Serbian military and politi-

cal leadership had publicly ruled out an invasion. Yet troops at the border, including the unit inspected by the Russian ambassador, were put on high alert. In the longer term, Russia is in a position to throw a wrench into the works of the EU effort to restart talks between Belgrade and Pristina, too. Moscow is sure to oppose any agreement in the UN Security Council and bar Kosovo from joining the UN and has a lot of scope to continue playing a spoiler role.

The same applies to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dodik met Putin in Moscow on September 20, 2022, to secure the Russian leader's endorsement ahead of the October Bosnian general election. Having won the RS presidency, Dodik could revive plans to repatriate powers away from Sarajevo and set up a parallel judicial council. In early January 2023, RS awarded Putin (in absentia) a medal of honor. Even though Russia did not veto the extension of the EU-led peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR, at the UN Security Council in November, the Kremlin retains that option in the future. Either way, Moscow holds substantial diplomatic and political leverage over the fragmented country.

Moscow's political influence is checked by economic trends caused by the Ukraine conflict, however. While the region is not particularly vulnerable to a cut-off of natural gas supplies—the six Western Balkan countries consume a meager 4 billion cubic feet) of gas annually—it is exposed to the secondary effects of the conflict. High gas prices in Europe also drive up the cost of electricity, increasing the burden on households and cash-strapped governments under pressure to provide social safety nets. Recessions in Germany and the other core EU countries will have negative fallout throughout the Western Balkans, where growth depends on exports to or financial flows from Western Europe.

The World Bank expects a slowdown of growth in the Western Balkans from 2022 onward, putting an end to the post-coronavirus boom in 2021. At worst, there might be a repeat of the early 2010s, when the eurozone crisis spilled over into the region. Economic stagnation will have deeper and longer-lasting consequences than Russian propaganda or interference in day-to-day politics in the Western Balkans and will mean that these countries will look not only to the EU but also to others, including China, Turkey, and the Gulf states, for assistance.

No second front
Despite Russia's disruptive moves, it faces an uphill task to fulfill its geopolitical agenda in the Western Balkans. Three obstacles for the Kremlin stand out.

First, the scenario of a full-blown Russian military intervention in the Western Balkans remains far-fetched. As during the 1998–1999 Kosovo War, Russia lacks the military capacity to wage expeditionary warfare in the former Yugoslavia. Its forces left Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo as far back as 2003. At present, Ukraine is draining all Russian resources and keeping the Kremlin busy. For that reason, any putative operation in

(Continued on Page 7)

'Voting with their feet'

TWENTY-TWENTY-TWO was a tumultuous year in British politics that saw three prime ministers and the UK rival Australia as the "coup capital" of the West. Great Britain is in the midst of a winter of discontent, reminiscent of 1978 with widespread industrial action, energy shortages, and a cost-of-living crisis exacerbated by inflation, interest rates, and taxation reaching levels many of us have never experienced. With crumbling public services and declining living standards, there is dismay at the state of the country, with citizens feeling that they are paying more than ever for very little in return.

However, unlike in 1979 when public outrage catapulted Margaret Thatcher into office, the Conservatives have now been in government for 13 years and cannot distance themselves from their own record. With the opposition parties making the case for bold reforms and economic growth, the Conservative Party looks exhausted and out of ideas. After 5 prime ministers in 13 years, largely spent settling intra-party squabbles, it is difficult to point to any area of British life that has improved under their leadership. This period in government is likely to be remembered as a wasted opportunity, with important lessons for advocates of freedom on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Tories have long been ideologically flexible and thus willing to adjust the sails to stay in power. When they decline in the polls or are hindered by an unpopular leader, they ruthlessly change course. It is this agility that has earned them their reputation as the world's most successful political party, having held office for most of the last century. Despite this flexibility, one constant has been their image as the party of personal responsibility, enterprise, and low taxes. The present situation feels different, as though the party is fundamentally broken and in need of the

kind of renewal only possible following an election.

The Conservatives are having a crisis of confidence that has become existential. Despite having a significant majority in Parliament, the government has done little with it, and polls now predict a wipeout at the general election expected next year. They do not know who or what they should stand for, and therefore, are not doing anything conservative at all. Last year exposed the chasm between Conservative MPs and the 170,000 party members who volunteer on their behalf. There is a growing frustration that the party is too centralised and that constituency associations should have greater influence in selecting their candidates for Parliament. In last summer's leadership election, Rishi Sunak led the MP vote only for Liz Truss to secure a comfortable victory with the membership, having promised the low-tax agenda that MPs subsequently forced her to reverse. This divide leads members to conclude that many MPs are paying only lip service to traditional Conservative rhetoric on the virtues of low taxes, law and order, and personal responsibility.

In office, the Conservatives have pursued huge tax increases and a creeping encroachment of the state. British police welcome economic migrants arriving illegally in small boats on the south coast while 82% of burglaries go unsolved and London's knife crime epidemic worsens. Apparently unsure or unwilling to defend what it is to be a conservative, the Tories mimic their centre-left opponents on behalf of voters who would prefer the real thing.

Britain had three very different prime ministers last year, each with their own interpretation of conservatism and a determination to undo the work of their predecessor. The year 2022 began with Boris Johnson, to whom the party owes its landslide majority. He embraced a high-spending, high-borrowing state in

a bid to "level up" the country before falling poll numbers, and his personal conduct led colleagues to depose him. He was replaced by Liz Truss, the most freedom-oriented prime minister since Thatcher, and the closest we get to an American Republican. She went too far, too fast, before being forced out after 50 days. We are now led by Rishi Sunak, who nobody voted for and who, having managed the economy during the pandemic, is arguably responsible for many of the difficulties we now face.

Truss correctly diagnosed the root of Britain's problems—two decades of anaemic growth and a productivity crisis caused by structural issues crippling our economy. With a refreshing intellectual honesty and political conviction that has become rare in Britain, she entered office laser-focused on unlocking growth. She planned ambitious supply-side reforms to incentivise enterprise through the tax system, abandoning our national preoccupation with redistribution. She also intended to overhaul burdensome regulation in housing and childcare, areas she had explored for years as an advocate of freedom courted by think tanks in the UK and USA.

These were good ideas, yet she made monumental unforced errors, including her failure to "roll the pitch" to ensure that voters, the media, her party, and financial markets were sufficiently briefed on her policies. She did the right things in the wrong order, announcing tax cuts and spending increases before any of the reforms or budget cuts needed to fund them. Coinciding with rising interest rates globally, her policies and subsequent lack of leadership and poor communication made her position untenable.

Critics of Truss were gleeful in celebrating her downfall, claiming the "free-market libertarian experiment" has now been discredited for a generation and Americans and Brits alike should be careful not to learn the wrong lessons from the Truss premiership. Those who value freedom will reflect on its missed potential to prioritise economic growth, reduce the size of government, and promote choice and competition for citizens. The current situation was in no way inevitable and stems more from political naivety and incompetence than poor policy. Truss capitulated to

her own party as well as the media, despite most of her tax cuts being popular with the public and business. She performed her first U-turn within weeks of taking office and from then on, her backbenchers knew that with enough pressure they could dilute or reverse her attempts at reform. The same is true of her successor, Truss asked us to take risks but was unable to assure the public and markets. Britain is now doing the opposite of what Truss intended, with Sunak leading us to further decline.

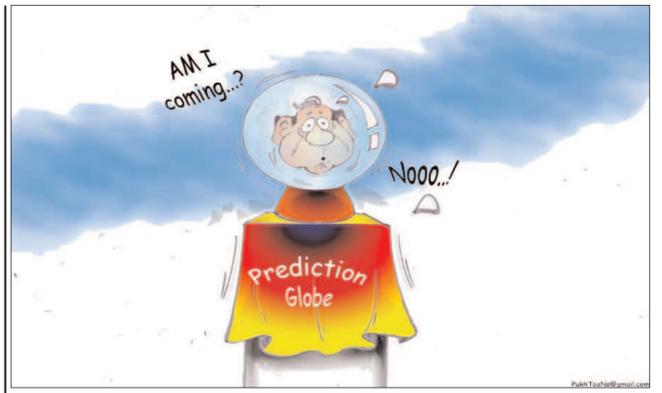
The Conservatives should not assume that there is no demand from voters for a pro-liberty, pro-enterprise agenda. We need only look to key American states, such as Florida and Virginia, to see that in these election battlegrounds where undecided voters determine the outcome, there is real appetite for change. At the same time, increasing numbers of parents are withdrawing their children from public schools, opting either for private tuition or homeschooling. Movements such as that to "fund students, not systems" are garnering support and achieving much greater choice and competition in education.

They are also "voting with their feet," with migration patterns showing an exodus of people deciding to move from states with higher taxes, costs, crime, and regulation to those without. It would be a huge mistake for Britain's Conservative Party to conclude that the lesson of 2022 is that people want less control over their lives, a larger state bureaucracy, and higher taxes. On both sides of the pond, there are real signs of progress for those who believe in freedom. In both countries, there is an appetite for secure borders, a leaner state, and smarter taxation. This requires strong leadership and communication, as well as conviction, rather than careerist politicians who are easily buffeted by the groupthink of the political and media class.

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Dangerous illusion?

AT the forum in Davos, they say that only the defeat of Russia will bring peace to Europe, and in order to achieve it, Ukraine needs to supply significantly more weapons. Moreover, the leaders of the EU and NATO in the interviews they give on the sidelines of the forum speak more frankly than from its rostrum. Thus, the head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, told CNN that "Ukraine needs all the military equipment it can handle, including advanced systems," and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in an interview with Reuters that "this is a turning point in the war and the need for significant increase support for Ukraine": "If we want to reach a peaceful negotiated solution tomorrow, we must provide more weapons today."

Olaf Scholz spoke about a turning point, or rather, a turning point, at the end of February, but then the chancellor spoke about Germany and Europe as a whole, promising to accept the challenge of the time and respond to "Russia's aggression." Now - after the decision to start deliveries of German infantry fighting vehicles and on the eve of the decision to transfer German tanks - Scholz was specific: "In order for the war to end, Russian aggression must be defeated. That is why we are constantly supplying Ukraine with a large number of weapons in close cooperation with our partners. This includes air defense systems such as IRIS-T or Patriot, artillery and armored infantry fighting vehicles which marks a profound turn in German foreign and security policy."

That is, the turn in 11 months of hostilities led Berlin to the supply of heavy weapons: no matter how the Germans resisted, the taboo was lifted, they were forced to participate in the war with Russia in all formats, except for the direct participation of German troops. At the same time, Scholz, Stoltenberg and von der Leyen say they do not want to fight with Russia and want to avoid a direct clash between NATO and the Russians. You just need to increase the supply of weapons to Kiev - and then Russia will inevitably lose. After all, as Scholz said, "Russia has already suffered a complete fiasco in achieving its imperialist goals": "Ukraine is successfully defending itself and demonstrating courage."

Of course, showing confidence that Russia's defeat is inevitable is part of the war with Russia. It would be strange if Western leaders simultaneously called for more arms supplies and doubted Ukraine's victory. One can only worry about insufficient support for Kiev and that there will not be enough shells and guns: it was not for nothing that the influential German expert, the founder of the Munich Security Conference, Wolfgang Ischinger called on the West for a war economy: "Sooner or later, we will have no choice but to supply more modern Western equipment if we do not want Ukraine to be defeated. <...> Ukraine is forced to spend such an amount of ammunition per day that we can produce in only six months. Obviously our stocks will run out. What does this mean? Who will provide the supplies? The war economy means that we in NATO and Europe must take the initiative in a coordinated manner and, in connection with the fighting, call on European defense companies to produce more weapons and ammunition."

Europe has already been mentally prepared for the need for a long war with Russia at the hands of

Ukrainians - now it remains to prepare it physically. And at the same time continue to assure everyone that everything is under control and there is no risk of the conflict escalating to a direct clash between Russia and NATO. That is, the West is sure that it will be able to defeat Russia, while it itself will not suffer, and will save Ukraine? Yes, most of the establishment is betting precisely on this, allowing (in the worst case for itself) only the loss of Ukraine. But not a threat to Europe itself. Although in words many of them constantly talk about this - about how Russian aggression in Ukraine threatens European security - in reality, almost none of the European leaders (with the exception of the Poles, but this is a special case) does not believe in this.

Of course, they do not want to lose Ukraine at the same time. But after all, even if the Russians return it to themselves, then at what cost! Huge - human, financial, reputational. Even taking Ukraine, Russia will be weakened and isolated, it will not have the strength to expand - and all thanks to our determination to support Kyiv, European leaders convince themselves. In any case, we win: either we keep Ukraine, or we exhaust Russia so that it either falls apart or will be restored for decades. And for us, Europe, it will cost practically nothing: well, economic problems, we will endure, besides, then it is quite likely that the Russians will still return to the supply of their energy resources - they have nowhere to go.

Dangerous illusion? Never mind. The main thing is that many of the decision-makers in the West believe in it. And the price that the West can actually pay is openly discussed only by counter-elite or truly opposition forces - and they directly talk about the risk of being drawn into a global war, and about the split of Europe, and about its falling into disenfranchised dependence on the Anglo-Saxons, and even about the threat of a sharp accelerating the process of dismantling the entire Atlantic world order. But they are not listened to, although in France, and in Germany, and in Italy there are plenty of such voices.

They are also heard in the USA: to a lesser extent among politicians, to a greater extent among serious scientists, experts in geopolitics. Back in the middle of last year, one of the realists was Henry Kissinger: the former secretary of state did not sympathize with Russia's interests at all, but at least acknowledged their existence and pointed out the danger of slipping into a global war.

In late spring last year, speaking at the previous Davos forum (which was postponed from the beginning of the year), he called for early negotiations, fearing that otherwise NATO would be drawn into a war with Russia. Then Kissinger was scolded in Kiev - not for the cause, but simply because he did not talk about the return of Crimea and Donbass. Although even then he declared that he was ready to abandon his idea of a neutral Ukraine, which would be a bridge between Russia and Europe, despite the fact that earlier, including after 2014, he recognized the danger of the West's attempts to drag Ukraine over to him - for supporters of a war with Russia to the bitter end, Kissinger was too "dove". And already in the fall, the former Secretary of State spoke directly about the fact that Ukraine should eventually be accepted in one form or another or tied to NATO.

And now he spoke again in Davos - and repeated this thought: "I used to be

against Ukraine's membership in NATO because I was afraid that everything that we are seeing today would start as a result. Now (since the process has reached this point anyway), the very idea of a neutral Ukraine has lost all meaning. With the completion of the NATO process, in whatever form it may develop in the future, it must guarantee Ukraine a place in its ranks. This will be an appropriate and justified step."

That is, after winning the war with Russia, Ukraine should be accepted into NATO? Yes, Kissinger believes so, while declaring that "even against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict" he believes "in dialogue with Russia", "in the cessation of hostilities, the restoration of the pre-February situation and the continuation of negotiations on further development with the participation of Europe, America and Russia."

Moreover, he is confident not only that it is possible to achieve the defeat of Russia (calling it a "cease-fire") by increasing the supply of weapons to Ukraine, but also that Russia will then change its attitude towards Europe in a way that is beneficial for the West: "The other goal is to prevent conflict against Russia as such by allowing it to rejoin the international system. Countries that have been under Russian pressure for almost the entire Cold War may find this inappropriate, but in the new circumstances, Russia may well re-evaluate their traditional view of things, which is based on a mixture of attraction to the culture of Europe and fear of its potential dominance."

That is, what happens? The West will defeat Russia, will finally take Ukraine for itself, and the Russians will realize that they were wrong and will be asked to return to the "world order based on rules", that is, they recognize the right of the West not only to lead the world, but also to take the territory of historical Russia? Yes, this is exactly what Kissinger means, and he also persuades those who call to go to the end, that is, until the collapse of Russia: "Giving the Russians a chance to rethink their dependence on the military is all the more important because the collapse of Russia as a state capable of pursuing its own policy will entail internal conflict throughout its vast territory in 11 time zones, as well as intervention from other countries. Wait a minute, there are over 15,000 nuclear warheads."

These are the "pigeons" in the Atlantic elite. Yes, they are smarter than "hawks", but there is absolutely nothing to talk about, let alone negotiate with them. The bet on the defeat of Russia becomes uncontested for the West - the Atlanticists discuss only the scale of this defeat. "Doves-realists" say that it is necessary to defeat Russia on the Ukrainian battlefield and stop there, because the complete defeat of Russia is dangerous both with a nuclear war and the collapse of a nuclear state. And the "hawks" suggest not to worry about the consequences: the more Russia loses, the better for the West.

Both of these positions are dangerous, not for Russia, but for the West itself. The impossibility of an objective assessment of reality makes it impossible to predict the development of the situation and weakens the one who still considers himself a hegemon. Both the wrong assessment of Russia and the underestimation of its capabilities have more than once led to catastrophic consequences for those who bet on its defeat.

'You cannot sit on two chairs at the same time, especially if they are that far apart'

(Continued from Page 6)

Southeastern Europe would have to involve Serbia not just in a supporting role but as a chief protagonist.

It is plain to everyone in Belgrade, apart from the most deranged propagandists, that such a gamble would generate enormous risks for both the country and Vucic personally, as he would be squandering his relationship with the West and would face harrowing economic sanctions. A gamble would not deliver much, either. NATO and the EU have reinforced their presence in the region to project stability and deter hostile actions. Since February 2022, both EUFOR and EULEX, the EU-run rule-of-law mission in Kosovo, have received reinforcements. KFOR, NATO's peacekeeping contingent in Kosovo, has declared its readiness to scale up its numbers, too. These deployments, backed by EU and NATO members as well as U.S. forces in Europe, create a major disincentive for Vucic to take undue risks.

Second, Serbia is not a full-fledged Russian ally. Rather than siding with Russia without any reservations, Belgrade is hedging its bets in international forums. Since March 2022, Serbian diplomacy has supported several UN General Assembly resolutions condemning the Russian aggression against Ukraine. On October 13, Serbia joined another 143 countries in condemning Russia's September annexation of the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia. Without voicing it publicly, the Serbian leadership has been wary of Russia's reference to a Kosovo precedent to justify the redrawing of borders, as that undermines Belgrade's own claim against what it considers a breakthrough province.

On a practical level, Vucic is courting other powerful states and leaders and not relying exclusively on Putin. Serbia is procuring Chinese surface-to-air missiles. Long-standing plans for the purchase of Turkey's Bayraktar TB2 unmanned aerial vehicle were on the agenda during Erdogan's September 2022

visit to Belgrade. Serbia has likewise signaled its interest in alternative gas supplies. Vucic attended the inauguration of works for a floating liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal off the Greek coast near the port city of Alexandroupolis on May 9, 2022, as well as the launch of the Greece-Bulgaria interconnector pipeline on October 1. Once its current three-year deal with Gazprom expires, Serbia will be negotiating imports with Azerbaijan and LNG producers, to be delivered through another interconnector across the border with Bulgaria. Moreover, the visa-free access that Russians have to Serbia means that the country also provides an escape route and, in some cases, a safe haven for political opponents of Putin.

Third, Serbia has come under considerable pressure to impose sanctions on Russia. U.S. Ambassador to Serbia Christopher Hill arrived in Belgrade in late March 2022 explicitly with a mission to talk Vucic into joining the Western coalition. Hill has been vocal in local media, stressing the fact that Serbia has no reasons to support an attack against a sovereign country. Speaking to the national broadcaster RTS on October 19, Hill said Serbia had to think hard about where its interests lie and recognize they lie with the West.

The EU is doing its share, too. In early October, the EU imposed a full embargo on seaborne Russian crude oil, starting in December. That move cut supplies to Serbia, which depends on the Adriatic pipeline, linked to terminals on Croatia's Adriatic coast. The same month, the European Commission's regular report on Serbia's progress toward EU membership highlighted non-alignment with sanctions as a chief obstacle to Belgrade's ambitions to make headway in the accession talks. At the same time, Serbia has faced criticism from the commission over the liberal visa regime it applies to citizens of third countries, which allows Serbia to be used as a conduit for illegal migration to the EU. The Serbian government has also reintroduced visas for Burundians

and Tunisians in order not to have its own nationals' visa-free access to the EU's passport-free Schengen zone removed. It is not inconceivable that the EU could use the same leverage to demand the termination of Serbia's visa-free regime with Russia, too.

Taken together, these factors narrow the wiggle room for Vucic. He was able to defer the decision on joining sanctions on Russia by delaying the formation of a new cabinet after the April 2022 elections. Constitutionally, it is the government, rather than the head of state, that has the power to impose sanctions. But with Prime Minister Ana Brnabic's new administration having been endorsed by the Serbian parliament and given the pressure from the EU and the United States, Serbia could be expected to accommodate at least some of the West's demands. The removal of Vulin and the Russia-connected technology minister Nenad Popovic from the cabinet and the return of pro-Western figures such as Tanja Miscevic, who is in charge of EU negotiations, are interpreted as signs of a potential shift.

Some off-the-cuff statements by senior Serbian officials hint that a change of course may be in the works. Former foreign minister Selakovic said that Russia would show understanding and would not carry out reprisals if Serbia were forced to adopt sanctions. In response, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko flew into Belgrade and publicly warned the government that any U-turn would be tantamount to "political suicide." If he decides to change tack, Vucic will probably outsource the decision to Brnabic and new Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic, the leader of the Serbian Socialist Party, who is considered to be closer to Moscow than the president is. Serbia has already taken some minor steps to align with the EU: it joined sanctions against Belarus and against Ukraine's former president Viktor Yanukovich, and it has not taken part in any military exercises with Russia or the CSTO since February 2022.

Dodik certainly depends on Russian support to a greater degree than Vucic does. But even he has not put all his eggs in Moscow's basket. One reason that Dodik has not come under EU sanctions for disrupting central-state institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the veto exercised by Orbán. Since the start of the war, Dodik has carefully avoided a head-on collision with the West. In March, he addressed the European Parliament, a move intended to allay fears in Brussels that he would move forward with his secessionist plans. The setbacks Russia has suffered in Ukraine since have probably made Dodik even more risk averse—not to mention the fact that Vucic is unlikely to swiftly recognize a breakaway RS and risk a clash with the West. Still, Bosnia and Herzegovina's dysfunctional politics will continue to present Russia with opportunities to rock the boat.

The war in Ukraine has shed light on unresolved political issues and lasting fissures in the Western Balkans. Yet the region is not at risk of a direct assault by Russia. Much more concerning is Moscow's capacity to exploit indigenous problems and fan the flames of conflict. The economic effects of the war should not be underestimated, either. Serbia remains the hub of Russian influence in the region, but the EU and the United States have not exhausted their leverage. While Vucic will not burn bridges with the Kremlin, Serbia and Russia may drift apart.

In response to this situation, the EU has some cards to play. First, it should ramp up its economic assistance to the Western Balkans. The 9 billion (\$10.6 billion) post-coronavirus recovery package promised to the region in October 2020 for the period 2021–2027 can buy Brussels influence at a time when growth is set to slow. But it has to be coupled with a smart strategic communications campaign targeted at societies that have grown cynical and are vulnerable to all manner of disinformation. The same goes for recent initiatives

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PSX trading continues with bullish trend

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Thursday, gaining 44.49 points, a positive change of 0.10 percent, closing at 38,831.58 against 38,791.09 points the previous day.

A total of 157,822,378 shares were traded during the day as compared to 153,090,751 shares the previous day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs6.406 billion against Rs5.010 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 335 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 153 of them recorded gains and 157 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 25 companies remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were Pak Petroleum with 13,642,897

shares at Rs74.08 per share, TRG PaK Ltd with 11,048,293 shares at Rs102.40 per share, and Oil and Gas Dev. with 10,995,702 shares at Rs79.44 per share.

Bhanero Textile witnessed a maximum increase of Rs75.69 per share price, closing at Rs1,095.00, whereas the runner-up was Colgate Palm with a Rs64.00 rise in its per share price to Rs1,865.00.

Rafhan Maize witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs504.16 per share closing at Rs7,895.84, followed by Nestle Pakistan with Rs48.00 decline to close at Rs5,260.00.

Rupee closes at Rs229.15 against USD

The exchange rate of the Pakistani rupee depreciated by 25 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading on Thursday and closed at Rs229.15 against the pre-

vious day's closing of Rs228.90.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs237.25 and Rs239.5 respectively.

The price of the euro decreased by 74 paise and closed at Rs247.87 against the previous day's closing of Rs248.61, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese yen gained one paise to close at Rs1.78, whereas a decrease of 02 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British pound, which was traded at Rs282.62 as compared to its last closing of Rs282.64.

The exchange rates of the Emirates dirham and Saudi riyal increased by 06 paise each to close at Rs62.38 and Rs61.00 respectively.

Gold prices decline by Rs1,200 to Rs185,300 per tola

The per tola price of 24 karat gold witnessed a decrease of Rs1,200 on Thursday and was traded at Rs185,300 against sale at Rs186,500 the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs1,029 to Rs158,865 against Rs159,894, whereas that of 10 grams of 22 karat decreased to Rs145,626 from Rs146,569, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The prices of one tola silver decreased by Rs20 to Rs2,080 whereas that of 10 gram silver went down by Rs17.15 to Rs1,783.26.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by US\$ 6 to US\$ 1,909, the association reported.

TSS sign MoU with Knowledge Platform

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Smart School (TSS), one of the largest school systems of Pakistan, signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Knowledge Platform, a blended learning solution providers, who will provide a customized digital platform for enhanced learning experiences of Matriculation students across TSS network.

The MoU was signed by Mr. Abdus Sattar, Project Director TSS and Mr. Omar Iqbal, COO of Knowledge Platform in a graceful ceremony held at The Smart School Head Office in Lahore. Under the agreement, The Smart School



will be introducing "DigiSmart", an enhanced learning Platform for improved results of Matriculation stream in collaboration with Knowledge Platform.

DigiSmart, a customized digital learning solution that brings technology directly to the classrooms

and self-directed learning options through latest technology in the form of customized videos, activities, games, and assessments.

Through the effective use of DigiSmart by the teachers and students, data driven performance can be measured for both individual as well as class progression. It's easier for parents to check the learning curve of their child and work to improve their performance using DigiSmart at home. We believe that DigiSmart will prove to be engaging and result focused for improved board exam results which will greatly benefit TSS network and its students.

Govt firm to revive IMF programme: Ayesha Ghaus Pasha

ISLAMABAD (APP): State Minister for Finance and Revenue, Ayesha Ghaus Pasha here on Thursday highlighted that the government wants to continue programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in such a way that the common man should not bear the burden of tough decisions to be made as per the Fund's condition.

Speaking to the media here after attending the Senate Standing Committee on Finance, Mrs. Pasha said that the government's economic team is having meetings with the Prime Minister to focus on its program with the IMF.

She said the Prime Minister was not in favor of taking tax measures across the board that could put an extra burden on the poor and common people.

To a question, she did not give any date when to

start talks with the IMF team but she said that the government was firm to go with the program after having a detailed workout.

She said the government would try to convince the IMF about the worst situation in Pakistan after the disastrous floods last year. "The people are already suffering due to the disastrous flooding and they are not in a position to afford any further measures".

Earlier, briefing the Senate Committee on Finance she informed that Pakistan is going through an extraordinary situation.

Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue met under the chairmanship of Senator Saleem Mandviwala.

Mrs. Pasha requested to understand that normal economic conditions cannot be provided yet and that we have inherited the current account deficit.

She said that we have given instructions to the

banks to open necessary Letters of Credit (LC's).

If LCs are not open, it does not mean that the country is going bankrupt, she added.

LCs related to essential food items, energy, pharmaceuticals exports, and agricultural products will be opened, she added.

The State Minister said that we are trying our best to increase foreign exchange reserves but it takes time.

The Committee directed the State Bank to immediately open LCs in the pharmaceutical industry.

The committee also consider the matter of Exemption of FED/Sales Tax to Industrial Traders of Ex-FATA and instructed the special secretary of finance to arrange a meeting with the state minister of the chamber of representatives.

Labour calls for Transpennine Express rail contract removal

LONDON (BBC News): Labour is calling for train operator Transpennine Express to have its contract removed.

Transpennine, which operates across the North of England and into Scotland, has been cancelling trains on a daily basis for months. Labour's shadow transport secretary Louise Haigh said the service had "never been worse".

Rail Minister Huw Merriman said that if the service "can't be turned round then decisions will be made".

When rail franchises fail in England, they are taken over by a Department for Transport-owned company called the Operator of Last Resort (OLR).

Ms Haigh asked in the House of Commons on Thursday for this to happen to Transpennine.

The train company's contract is up for renewal in May. Mr Merriman responded that he was "keen to ensure the [OLR] has a manageable portfolio" but "decisions will be made" on Transpennine if it cannot turn itself around.

However, he added that

there had been criticism about the performance of another rail operator, Northern, which is currently run by the OLR.

London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) and Southeastern Trains are also run by the OLR.

Transpennine has blamed its cancellations on high sickness rates and a backlog of driver training caused by the pandemic.

The train operator also lacks a current agreement on rest day working with the drivers' union Aslef.

On Wednesday, Mick Whelan, Aslef's general secretary, was asked on the BBC's Today programme why members had not been given a vote on an offer of 1.5 times pay for working overtime.

He responded that pay had not gone up in several years, and the point of rest day working was not to cover services.

Asked if an agreement on rest day working would mean more trains running, he said: "I don't think my people would work those trains for a lower rate of pay even if we had an agreement."

Mr Whelan added: "We

have a company that's operating in totally bad faith and smashing every agreement we've got".

He said Transpennine has "poor performance, poor industrial relations and can't operate in the 21st Century".

Ministers have repeatedly said a reliance on rest day working needs to end.

A Transpennine Express spokesperson said the company was "committed to the communities we serve and want to assure our customers that we are doing all we can to deliver a train service they can rely on".

The firm had removed services from its timetable on a day-to-day basis due to "very high levels of sickness and a training backlog following the pandemic", said the spokesperson, adding that Transpennine "continues to work flat-out to deliver higher levels of service delivery and to tackle the issues that are being experienced by customers".

Mr Merriman had already said on Wednesday that Transpennine Express' contract was under consideration.

He told the Transport

Select Committee: "If a train operator is not performing and it appears clear that they can't perform and can't turn this around, then that contract would come to an end and we wouldn't hesitate to put it into the Operator of Last Resort."

"I am already looking at what needs to be done... with regards to that contract," he added.

Mr Merriman said he had weekly data on Transpennine and another troubled operator, Avanti West Coast, and what they were doing to improve performance.

Mr Merriman also told the Transport Select Committee on Wednesday he would meet the regulator about cancellations in advance.

This can happen up to 10pm the night before and are not included in on-the-day cancellation figures.

Mr Merriman said these currently outnumbered on-the-day cancellations on Transpennine Express.

On Thursday, he told the House of Commons the practice needed "a good look" and the current levels on Transpennine gave him concern.



KARACHI: MD PARCO Shahid Mahmood, CEO Mubadala Energy Mansoor Mohamed Al Hamed and Member of OMV Executive Board Martijn van Koten on occasion of MoU signing ceremony.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Three ships namely, Irenes Ray, Chola Treasure and Pao-vosa Wisdom with containers, chickpeas and rapeseeds, called at the port on Wednesday, berthed at Container Terminal, Multi-Purpose and Garin & Fertilizer Terminal respectively.

Meanwhile, two more container ships, CMA CGM Orfeo and MSC Patnaee-III, also arrived at the outer anchorage of the port during the last 24 hours.

A total of eight ships were engaged at POA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them, four ships, X-Press Bardsey, Irenes Ray, MSC Madhu-B and Victorious left the port on Thursday morning, while another ship, Chem Sinyoo is expected to sail on later today.

A cargo volume of 118,644 tonnes, comprising 57,881 tonnes of imports cargo and 60,763 tonnes of export cargo, including containerized cargo carried in 4,476 containers (984 TEUs Imports and 3,492 TEUs export) was handled at the port during the last 24 hours.

There are 18 ships at the outer anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them five ships namely, CMA CGM Orfeo, MSC Patnaee-III, Elpida, Zheng Hai and Neutron Sound scheduled to load/offload containers, rice, palm oil and gas oil are expected to take berths at QICT, MW-2, LCT and FOTCO later on Thursday.

Oil prices down amid recession fears

ANKARA (APP): Oil prices decreased on Thursday influenced by weak economic data from the US amid recession fears and a hefty rise in crude stockpiles.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$83.92 per barrel at 9.20 a.m. local time (0620GMT), down 1.25% from the closing price of \$84.98 a barrel in the previous trading session.

The American benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at \$78.63 per barrel at the same time, a 1.47% fall after the previous session closed at \$79.8 a barrel.

Oil prices retreated from their highest level in over a month after weak US data fueled recession worries.

US Producer Price Index recorded its biggest decline since April 2020 in December, with a 0.5% fall, according to data released Wednesday.

Retail sales in the US fell 1.1% in December, below expectations, while industrial production fell 0.7%, the biggest drop since September 2021. Additionally, the US Fed reported that American companies expect "low growth" in the economy in the coming months.

Meanwhile, US crude oil inventories rose by about 7.6 million barrels during the week ended Jan. 13, data from the American Petroleum Institute showed.

A more-than-expected stockpile increase signals a drop in crude demand, weighing prices down.

Official stock data from the US Energy Information Administration is scheduled to release later in the day, and if the estimated build-in stock levels is confirmed, prices are expected to fall further.

Mubadala Energy, OMV and PARCO sign MoU

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Mubadala Energy, the Abu Dhabi-based international energy company, has announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with OMV Downstream GmbH (OMV) and Pak-Arab Refinery Limited (PARCO) to explore opportunities in sustainable fuels and feedstock production in Pakistan.

Under this agreement the companies will explore the possibility of pursuing projects in circular economy initiatives, including plastics production and recycling, sustainable fuels and feedstock as well as the development of synthetic oil and chemical products. The collaboration builds on a well-established partnership between Mubadala Energy, OMV and PARCO and seeks to utilize cutting edge technologies while leveraging existing infrastructure and market access.

In line with Mubadala Energy's strategy to pursue opportunities in new energy sectors and low carbon solutions, the agreement also supports its recently launched sustainability strategy that pinpoints three key priorities: Creating a positive environmental

impact, supporting responsible operations, and being a partner of choice.

Through the MoU the partners also hope to further support efforts to ensure energy security within key customer centers.

Mansoor Mohamed Al Hamed, Mubadala Energy CEO, commented: "We have set out a clear strategy to pursue new energy sectors and low carbon solutions in support of the energy transition. This agreement brings together existing partners to combine leading technology, energy transition expertise and market infrastructure to realize the potential of circular economy solutions, at scale. With the UAE's commitment to net zero emissions, I am excited to see this collaboration contribute to these goals."

For OMV, the project supports the company's net zero emissions targets and is in line with a strategy to become a leading, innovative producer of sustainable fuels and feedstock. For PARCO, the agreement has the potential to position the company as an important player in the circular economy and deepen integration into the chemicals & materials industry, while proactively developing

sustainable, low-carbon solutions that help diversify its business.

Mr. Shahid Mahmood Khan, Managing Director, PARCO, commented: "As the energy lifeline of the nation, we resolve to secure a sustainable energy future for the Country. Pakistan has immense potential to move towards environmentally friendly fuels. We are glad to collaborate with Mubadala Energy and OMV to accelerate energy transition in Pakistan. Their technology and expertise will play an instrumental role in exploring avenues for circular economy and sustainable fuels."

Martijn van Koten, Member of the OMV Executive Board and Executive Officer Fuels & Feedstock, said: "We are delighted to participate in this joint activity, which supports our sustainable business strategy. The sourcing of sustainable raw feedstock and plastic waste is key to our intention to expand sustainable fuel production and our ReOil technology. I am convinced that OMV, with its extensive know how in key sustainable technologies, can make a significant contribution to the success of this cooperation."

US stocks retreat while BoJ decision weighs on yen

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Wall Street stocks tumbled on Wednesday as traders weighed the latest US data showing slowing economic activity, while the yen retreated after the Bank of Japan decided against further tweaking monetary policy.

Major indices in New York had opened higher following US data showing a surprisingly big drop in December retail sales and a decline in wholesale prices.

The reports added to expectations of an upcoming pivot by the Federal Reserve away from aggressive interest rate hikes, boosting sentiment.

But stocks went negative soon after the open, adding to losses in the afternoon. The S&P 500 finished down 1.6 percent. "It seems like we got a little over-bought," said Maris Ogg of Tower Bridge Advisors.

Sam Stovall, chief investment strategist at CFRA Research, said the US data had also "highlighted recession risks."

But hopes for China's recovery continued to provide much-needed support, with Vice Premier Liu He telling the World Economic Forum that growth would likely rebound this year as the country reopens after zero-Covid. His comments came after data showed the Chinese economy expanded last year at its slowest pace since 1976 -- excluding pandemic-hit 2020 -- but still beat forecasts.

The news added to hopes for a global recovery after last year's pain caused by rising prices, interest rate hikes, China's economic woes, war in Ukraine and a spike in energy costs that the conflict sparked.

In foreign exchange, the yen pulled back against the

dollar.

Traders had been keenly anticipating the Bank of Japan decision after its last month shocked markets by announcing a tweak that allowed its tightly controlled bond yields to move in a wider bracket.

The move in December sent the yen soaring, and while the bank held firm Wednesday, there is a growing expectation that officials will eventually move away from the policy of buying up bonds to keep yields in check.

"Speculation will remain that it will eventually review its policy," Takahide Kiuchi, executive economist at Nomura Research Institute and a former BoJ policy board member, told AFP.

Shares in tech giant Microsoft slumped 1.9 percent after it confirmed it would cut 10,000 jobs due to the poor economic outlook.

Simplification of regulations demanded

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said the prevailing complicated business regulations were a barrier to business and investment activities in Pakistan, and stressed that the Board of Investment (BoI) should speed up its process of regulations reforms to promote ease of doing business in the country.

He said this while talking to a BoI delegation that visited ICCI under the leadership of Director General (Reforms) Zulfikar Ali and briefed the business community about the Pakistan Regulatory Modernization Initiative (PRMI) to facilitate the business community, said a press release issued here.

ICCI President said the new environmental laws are creating more problems for the private sector as their compliance is not possible, especially for old businesses, and industries, and stressed that BoI should work in consultation with stakeholders to reform and simplify them.

The said BoI is establishing a Pakistan Business Portal to provide a one-stop shop facility to businesses for licensing, registration, and no-objection certificates through an online system linked to all relevant government departments. This project is likely to be completed by 2027.

They said that BoI has received over 230 proposals for reforms in regulations out of which 115 reforms have been completed while more are being processed.

They said that under PRMI activities, mapping of all business regulations is being done to analyze and eliminate unnecessary regulations and simplify and automate remaining regulations in order to facilitate the business community.



Australian Open 2023 results

Djokovic wins but Ruud loses to Jenson Brooksby



CENTURAGES
Djokovic cruised through the rest of the contest. The Serb left the court for treatment and returned with fresh, tighter dressing on his leg.

The 27-year-old Frenchman, making his Australian Open debut in 2023, took advantage and

forced the 21-time Grand Slam champion into a second-set tie-break as the crowd got behind his every shot, much to Djokovic's frustration. With play defying his ranking of 191, Coucaud

bounced back from 3-0 down in the tie-break to mark the first time Djokovic has lost a set to a qualifier or lucky loser in Melbourne since 2009.

But something switched in Djokovic's mind at that point, and his relentlessness returned. The fourth seed breezed through the third set in little over half an hour, although faced another challenge in the fourth set in the form of hecklers in the crowd who he said were "drunk out of their mind". After asking the umpire "what he was going to do about it", the hecklers were eventually removed and Djokovic regained his focus, knocking Coucaud out with a bagel he did not deserve. Djokovic will play his "Balkan brother" Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria in the third round, a player he has beaten on nine occasions but

not played since 2019. "A lot happened tonight in tonight's match," Djokovic said in his on-court interview.

"Enzo deserves credit for the fight, he played some great tennis, especially in the second set."

"We both had medical timeouts and struggled a little bit, but I managed to respond well in the third and especially the fourth."

The 24-year-old Norwegian was outplayed by world number 39 Brooksby, who took control early with two breaks of serve in the opening set and commanded play from the baseline in the second.

Nadal sidelined for six to eight weeks with injury

MELBOURNE (AFP/APP): Spanish world number two Rafael Nadal on Thursday said that he will be sidelined for up to eight weeks after suffering a left hip flexor injury during his shock exit from the Australian Open.

The 36-year-old wrote on Twitter that scans showed a moderate muscle tear.

"I have carried out medical tests after the defeat yesterday," the 22-time Grand Slam winner said, adding that they showed "a grade two lesion in the iliopsoas of the left leg".

"Normal recovery time six to eight weeks," he said, adding that he would now rest and undergo anti-inflammatory physiotherapy. The projected timeline puts his participation at the ATP 1000 Indian Wells and Miami events in March in doubt, which would see him plunge down the rankings.

Spanish world number two Rafael Nadal will more likely target being ready for the clay-court season in mid-April, leading into the French Open in May where he will be chasing a 15th title. The defending champion slumped out of the Australian Open on Wednesday to 65th-ranked American Mackenzie McDonald in the second round -- his worst Grand Slam result in seven years.

He took a medical timeout when a break down in the second set after hurting himself stretching for a forehead and grimacing in pain.

Peace School & College win Tug-of-War title

PESHAWAR (APP): Peace School and College Charsadda clinched the trophy after defeating Government Girls Degree College Dargai by 2-1 in the final of 'New Year Deputy Commissioner Charsadda Women Sports Festival' being played at Abdul Wali Khan Sports Complex here on Thursday.

More than 200 girls player are competing in six different events part of the New Year Women Sports Festival being organized by District Administration and District Sports Officer Charsadda. Peace Girls College Charsadda won the trophy by defeating Government Girls Degree College Dargai by 2-1, while City College won the title in the Kabaddi match final by defeating Government Girls College Nahaqi in a show Kabaddi match. City Gulbahar Girls College team defeated Girls College Nahaqi by 30-23 points. On the occasion, Administrator Peshawar Sports Complex Syed Jafar Shah was the chief guest along with District Sports Officer Charsadda Tahsin Ullah Khan.

Director Sports Bacha Khan University Charsadda and former intentional athlete Shabana Khattak, General Secretary of Provincial Kabaddi Association International referee Sultan Bari and other personalities were also present. Deputy Commissioner Charsadda Girls Sports Festival continued at Abdul Wali Khan Sports Complex in full swing.

PSL eighth edition PCB to hold deliberations today

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) will share the schedule of upcoming eighth season with PSL franchises and hold final deliberations over it. The schedule which has been finalised is likely to be announced on Friday (tomorrow). The latest reports suggested that the opening ceremony of HBL PSL 8 will take place in Multan International Stadium.

The league will start from

February 13 to March 19 and will be played at four different venues, including National Bank Cricket Arena (NBCA) Karachi, Multan International Stadium, Pindi Cricket Stadium and Gaddafi Stadium Lahore. The draft for HBL PSL 8 took place on December 15, where teams finalised their squads for the upcoming season. PCB is expected to hold an in-house

replacement draft in late January for players, who might be unavailable due to international commitments.

PCB was hoping to add Quetta as the fifth venue for the eighth edition of the PCB's annual marquee event, however, now the board is instead planning to host just an exhibition match between Peshawar Zalmi and Quetta Gladiators at the Bugti Stadium, Quetta on February 5.

20-K Cup 2023

MT Whites, City Gymkhana, Ali Garh triumphant

LAHORE (APP): Model Town Whites, City Gymkhana Cricket Club and Ali Garh Cricket Club emerged as triumphant

in the 20-K Cup 2023 T20 Cricket Tournament matches played here at different venues on Thursday.

All-rounder Naveed Malik excelled in Model Town Whites' thrashing 9-wicket victory over Yu Slim Club in the 34th match of the tournament. Naveed Malik not only smashed scintillating 59 runs but also clinched 3 wickets for 16 runs to emerge as player of the match. Yu Slim Club, batting first, could score 119-9 in 20 overs. Safer Azam struck 43 and Amir Jamil 22 runs.

Naveed Malik bagged 3-16, Aon Shahzad 2-20 and Shahab Khan 2-28. Model Town Whites easily chased the target in 10.2 overs, losing just 1 wicket. Naveed Malik hammered 59 and Aon Shahzad hit 40. Majid Majeed took the only

wicket. Brilliant batting performance by Rana Arslan steered City Gymkhana to a 20-run win over Lucky Star Club in the 35th match. Rana Arslan not only cracked classic 75 runs but also got one wicket that helped him become a player of the match.

City Gymkhana, batting first, posted a huge total of 186-10 in 20 overs. Rana Arslan was top scorer with 75 runs while Muhammad Bilal scored 47 and Rizwan Haider 30 runs. M Subhan bowled extremely well and clinched 6-10 while Daniyal Hanif took 2-25. Lucky Star could score 166-8 in 20 overs. Zainul Hassan slammed 61 while Junaid Ali hit 39 and Zeeshan Khadim 24 runs. Saad Athar grabbed 4-20 and Abdul Rehman took 3-29. Zeeshan Ashraf guided Ali Garh Club to a thumping 8-wicket triumph over Shah Faisal Club in the 36th match. Zeeshan Ashraf was in sublime form

and hammered 70 runs to emerge as man of the match. Shah Faisal Club, batting first, scored 128 runs for the loss of 7 wickets in 20 overs. M Ilyas scored 27 runs, Gohar Hafeez 19 and Naimat Ullah 17 runs. Faraz Ahmad claimed 3 wickets for 40. Ali Garh comfortably chased the target in 14.3 overs for the loss of just 2 wickets. Zeeshan Ashraf made superb 75 and Nouman Ali 41 runs.

On Friday (20th January 2023), three matches will be played. Cricket Center will play Shinning Club in the 37th match of the tournament at Model Town Greens ground, Prince Cricket Club will compete against City Gymkhana Cricket Club in the 38th match at Ittefaq Cricket Ground while in the 39th match of the tournament at Model Town Club, Shah Faisal Cricket Club will vie against Ludhiana Gymkhana Cricket Club.

Secretary Sports Punjab, DG SBP inspect different sports venues

LAHORE (APP): Secretary Sports and Youth Affairs Punjab Musarrat Jabeen and Director General Sports Punjab Muhammad Tariq Qureshi inspected different sports venues and facilities here at Nishtar Park Sports Complex on Thursday.

They were accompanied by Director Admin Syed Umair Hassan, Deputy Director Planning Rauf Bajwa and officials of Project Management Unit (PMU) during their inspection visit. Secretary Sports Punjab and DG, SBP inspected Punjab Tennis Stadium, tennis hostel, State of the Art Tennis Courts, Sports Board Punjab's cricket academy, NPSG Gymnasium Hall, Co-Working Space and Youth Helpline at SBP E-Library, under construction Squash Complex project and Sports Medicine Clinic during their detailed visit. Mohammad Tariq Qureshi gave a thorough briefing to Musarrat Jabeen about multiple features and details of under construction sports facilities.

In brief

Junior Tennis Championship

PESHAWAR (APP): The first Haji Malik Umar Khattab Khalil Memorial KP Junior Tennis Championship began on Thursday at the synthetic tennis courts of the Peshawar Sports Complex here. The championship was formally inaugurated by Dr Masood Javed along with Secretary of Provincial Tennis Association Umar Ayaz, tennis coaches Ruman Gul, Nauman Khan, Shehryar Khan, Inam Gul, Janan Khan and other personalities were present on the occasion. More than 200 hundred players are participating in the Championship in different categories. The Championship will continue till January 24. Umar Ayaz Khalil, son of late Malik Umar Khattab, and General Secretary of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tennis Association while talking to the media men said that in the Championship, there will be boys U9, U13 and U16 competitions. He said that tennis player Ejaz Khan is sponsoring the championship to pay homage to Kashan Umar Muqim and his grandfather late Malik Umar Khatib Khan Khalil who played tennis in Canada. He said that holding the championship is a good opportunity for the tennis players of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to perform brilliantly in both junior and senior categories.

Ice Sports Championship

ISLAMABAD (APP): The six-day National Ice Sports Championship commenced in Naltar, Gilgit-Baltistan on Thursday with a colorful opening ceremony, attended by a huge number of sports lovers welcoming and celebrating the scenic snow-clad mountains event. Talking to APP, an official of the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) said the championship was being attended by huge crowds including locals, foreign and domestic tourists, and adventure seekers. The six-day event will conclude on January 24. "The championship is a regular annual feature of the Winter Festival at Naltar, in which many teams are participating to entertain the people through healthy games. Locals also setup stalls of handicrafts, fruits, and foods during the event," he added. He said every year, the championship welcomes local and international tourists and provides them with a magnificent opportunity to gather refreshing memories.

FG/Din Polo victorious

LAHORE (APP): FG/Din Polo team outpaced BN Polo team by 9-4 in the only match on the third day of the Maj Gen Saeed-ul-Zaman Janjua Memorial Polo Cup 2023 here at the Jinnah Polo Fields on Thursday. From FG/Din Polo, both brothers Sheikh Muhammad Farhad and Sheikh Muhammad Raffay thrashed in three tremendous goals each while Shah Shamyul Alam and Raja Jalal Arsalan converted one goal each. Raja Samiullah did play well for the BN Polo team and hammered a hat-trick of goals while Haider Naseem scored one goal. FG/Din Polo dominated the match right from the word go as they converted one goal in the first chukker while fired in four fabulous goals in the second chukker to take a healthy 5-0 lead. BN Polo though made their presence felt in the third chukker by scoring one goal yet FG/Din Polo made a good come back and banged in two back-to-back goals to stretch their lead to 7-1.

MELBOURNE (BBC): Novak Djokovic battled through injury to reach the Australian Open third round on another day when more of his expected title rivals were knocked out.

The 35-year-old Serb, going for a record-extending 10th men's triumph in Melbourne, won 6-1 6-7 (5-7) 6-2 6-0 against French qualifier Enzo Coucaud. Djokovic had a medical timeout, seemingly hampered by an existing hamstring injury, but came through. A day after Rafael Nadal exited, second seed Casper Ruud was also beaten. The Norwegian, who reached two Grand Slam finals last year, lost 6-3 7-5 6-7 (4-7) 6-2 to American Jenson Brooksby. In the same quarter of the draw, eighth seed Taylor Fritz also lost 6-7 (4-7) 7-6 (7-2) 6-4 6-7 (6-8) 6-2 to

Australian wildcard Alexei Popyrin. Twelfth seed Alexander Zverev, still in the early days of his return from a serious ankle injury, was beaten 6-7 (1-7) 6-4 6-3 6-2 by lucky loser Michael Mmoh, who was a late call-up to the main draw after another player withdrew and said he had to change his flight because he had expected to already be out. Russian fifth seed Andrey Rublev suffered no such upset, beating Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori 6-2 6-4 6-7 (2-7) 6-3 to set up a third-round meeting with Britain's Dan Evans.

Djokovic entered the Rod Laver Arena with his left thigh heavily taped but it was his opponent Coucaud who struggled with injury early on, rolling his right ankle midway through the first set and requiring a medical time-

out. Djokovic cruised through the rest of the contest. The Serb left the court for treatment and returned with fresh, tighter dressing on his leg.

Madande gives Zimbabwe dramatic ODI victory over Ireland

HARARE (INP): Clive Madande struck a four off the final ball of a rain-interrupted one-day international thriller in Harare on Wednesday to give Zimbabwe a three-wicket victory over Ireland. The home side needed 13 runs from their last over under the DLS system to win and, boosted by a six from Ryan Burl, reduced the target to four runs with one Graham Hume delivery left.

By scooping the ball over deep midwicket, wicketkeeper Madande joined Burl (59) and Sikandar Raza (43) as stars of a brave fightback by Zimbabwe after Ireland posted 288-4 in 50 overs. Zimbabwe scored 214-7 in reply as a three-match ODI series began, following a 2-1 win by the hosts in a three-match Twenty20 series.

Burl was run out seeking a second run off the second ball of the final over and Raza was caught earlier having miscued an attempted shot over long on.

"I am ecstatic about Clive," said Burl. "When batting with him, I kept telling him to be the guy that is going to be there until the end, and win it for your country. "As to my good form, there is no secret," he said of a knock that included two sixes and six fours. "I'm just concentrating on putting my head down and doing the right things."

Harare-born former England Test batsman Gary Ballance contributed 23 to the Zimbabwe total before being caught at short third man attempting a pull shot off a back-of-a-length ball. Ireland captain Andy Balbirnie

struck 121 before retiring hurt.

Zimbabwe won the toss, opted to field and, initially, the decision paid off as openers Paul Stirling (13) and Stephen Doherty (3) were dismissed with 25 runs on the board. The match then underwent a dramatic change as Balbirnie and Harry Tector (101 not out) put on 212 for the third wicket -- 16 runs short of the Irish record.

Balbirnie faced 137 balls and hit three sixes and 13 fours before being struck on the side of the head by a Brad Evans no-ball that did not pitch, and was forced to quit. Tector reached his century with two runs from a cover drive off the fourth ball of the final over. His total included one six and eight fours off 109 deliveries.

12th Rashid D. Habib Golf Young golf talent shines to joins leaders on day one

F.P. Report

KARACHI: First Round of Bank AL Habib's 12th Rashid D. Habib Memorial National Professional Golf Tournament 2023 was played on Thursday, 19th January at the Karachi Golf Club (KGC).

Defending Champion Waheed Baloch, Pakistan's Ace Golfer Shabbir Iqbal, Muhammad Zubair, Zahir Shah, Muhammad Shehzad and Assad Khan shared 69, three under par

and jointly leading on first day. Khalid Khan, Ashiq Hussain and Matloob Ahmed are following them with 70, two under par.

Pakistan's Ace Golfer Muhammad Shabbir Iqbal started an amazing round in Red Course and played four under par. Shabbir played one over in Blue side. Waheed Baloch started from Blue Course and played one under. His two under at the red helped his place with first day leaders. Zubair at the Red played 36 par but did

three under par after completing the blue side. Young Asad Khan also displayed good round of 32, four under par at Red Course but played one over par at Blue.

The game was tough for golfer during the early hours due to wind and chilly weather, however visibility was good. Greens are fast due to freshly trimmed grass and rolling by KGC. The Toyota Corolla and a Suzuki Alto for hole-in-one remained unclaimed on day one. Final Round will be played on Sunday 22nd January.

Sports festival kicks-off

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Assistant Commissioner Lachi Khola Tariq formally inaugurated the Kohat Sports Festival 2023 organized by the Kohat Sports Office in collaboration with the District Administration and Mol Company.

The Festival which would continue for six days, includes Football, Volleyball, Cricket, Tug of War, Athletics and

Badminton Games. The inaugural ceremony besides others was also attended by the District Sports Officer Kohat Sajid Afridi, President Football Association Mohibullah Shinwari and sports lovers in large number.

In first phase, competitions of the abovementioned games would be played at Tehsil level while its finals will be played at Kohat Sports Complex. The chief guest on the occasion also distributed

Sports Kits among the players. AC Lachi Khola Tariq stressed upon the locals to take full advantage of this golden chance and participate in the Festival games by approving themselves best players of their respective games. She added, the Festival was aimed to discover the untapped talent at grass roots level. She assured that the Provincial Government would fully support and encourage the talented players at all levels.





In brief

Police arrest eight kite sellers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police on the directives of City Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Shehzad Nadeem Bukhari are making efforts to control kite flying and managed to net eight kite sellers on recovery of 876 kites and 37 kite flying string rolls, said a police spokesman here on Thursday. He informed, Gungmandi, Rattaamral, City, Race Course, and Taxila police conducted raids in their respective jurisdiction and rounded up Ibrar, Toqeer, Hamza, Hanzala, Irfan, Haseeb and Attique and recovered 876 kites and 37 kite flying string rolls from their possession.

Divisional Superintendents of Police directed the police teams to accelerate operations against kite sellers and flyers. Senior Superintendent of Police, Operations Rawalpindi said that strict action in accordance with the law would be taken against the rules violators and they would be sent behind the bars.

'Securing life top priority'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Malik Jamil Zafar Thursday warned the officers that no laxity towards safety and security of the citizens would be tolerated and strict disciplinary action would be initiated against officials showing negligence towards official duty. Following the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, SSP Operations Malik Jamil Zafar chaired a crime meeting to review the crime situation in the capital, said a news release. All the Zonal DPOs, SP Plan and Patrolling, SDPOs and SHO's attended the meeting. The meeting reviewed the overall crime situation in the capital. He further directed all officers to arrest the offenders involved in heinous crimes, vehicle and motorbike lifters especially those involved in murder cases adding that the ratio of challan of the cases and recoveries should be increased.

ANF recovers over 161 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Pakistan while conducting three counter-narcotics operations seized over 161 kg narcotics, 2000 intoxicated tablets and arrested three accused including an Afghan National, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday. He informed ANF Balochistan conducted a raid near Gwadar and recovered 100 kg charras. In another raid, ANF recovered 44.4 kg charras and 16.8 kg opium from a car intercepted near Sheikhpura Toll Plaza. A drug smuggler resident of Lahore was also rounded up during the operation. In the third operation, ANF foiled a bid to smuggle drugs from Khyber to Peshawar and recovered 2,000 intoxicated tablets from the possession of two accused including an Afghan National, who was netted near Bus Terminal Peshawar.

'Imran destroys morals of nation'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader and member of the national assembly (MNA), Qadir Khan Mandokhail on Thursday said Imran Khan had destroyed the morals of the nation and spread hatred. Talking to a private media channel, Mandokhail, who is also the Chairman of the NA Special Committee on Affected Employees, said the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief had been slandering others but was himself corrupt morally and financially as instantiated in the Toshakhana case and the Billion Tree Tsunami projects.



ISLAMABAD: State Minister for Poverty Alleviation & Social Safety Pakistan, Faisal Karim Kundi addressing at "Mega Youth Gathering & Marathon" under the theme 'Run Far Life' at Jinnah Convention centre.

Pakistan's flood victims immediately need essential health services

ISLAMABAD (APP): United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has urged the international community to invest in building human capital and resiliency, particularly in rural Sindh and Balochistan where much of the devastation occurred due to recent floods.

"These vulnerable communities need reliable access to essential services such as healthcare, nutrition, education, protection, hygiene, and sanitation, especially those in remote and underserved communities," UNICEF Representative in Pakistan, Abdullah Fadil said at a press briefing at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

He said, "The rains have ended, and sadly yet 4 million children fight for survival near contaminat-

ed and stagnant flood waters." With homes destroyed, they are suffering a bitter winter, without decent shelter." He said, "Villages turned into islands, children turned into orphans, families still living under scraps of plastic in literally freezing conditions."

He said, "In the flood-affected districts, about 1.6 million children were already suffering from severe acute malnutrition, while another six million children suffer from stunting, a condition that can cause irreversible damage to children's brains, bodies and immune systems. UNICEF expects this situation to have worsened exponentially."

He said, "Twenty-seven thousand schools have been washed away. And despite the ongoing tragedy, despite all the young lives at stake, UNICEF's current appeal

of US\$173 million is less than half funded. This is notwithstanding our work across almost every sector, reaching millions of children." "Last week, international donors pledged over US\$9 billion to help Pakistan recover from the catastrophe. This is a very generous move. But children must be at the centre of recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts." He said, "Real economic recovery and sustained growth can only be achieved if we make the necessary investments to meet the immediate and longer-term needs of children."

He said, "Pakistan is a known climate hotspot, and it is only a matter of time before another large-scale climate disaster strikes the country's children. We need flexible funding to double our efforts today, and long-term investment."

Sibbi-Harnai railway track to be operational soon

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways has almost completed the reconstruction and renovation work on the strategic Sibbi-Harnai railway track with the assistance of the National Logistics Cell (NLC) and it would be operational very soon.

"The railway track was made dysfunctional after a series of bomb blasts which damaged as many as 22 steel bridges in the highly rugged and inaccessible area," sources in the Ministry of Railways told APP. They said the track was badly damaged in 2006 and so far about 97 percent of the reconstruction work of the project was completed and remaining work would be completed soon.

The sources said that Minister for Railways Khawaja Saad Rafique had also taken keen interest in the projects and directed the con-

cerned official to complete the project at the earliest. In March 2016, they said that a contract for rehabilitation and restoration of the Sibbi-Harnai railway track along with the up-gradation of railway stations was awarded to the NLC as no other construction firm agreed to undertake the project due to the prevalent security situation and enormity of the task.

During the initial survey of the track, they said it was found that 22 steel bridges of different sizes were completely destroyed and required replacement. They said in addition, massive river protection work was to be undertaken to save the infrastructure. The quantum of work, non-availability of road access, and requisite resources made the project a formidable challenge.

The sources said under-

taking the project with the sincerity of purpose and utmost sense of duty, NLC officers, engineers, and construction workers braved harsh weather conditions and a hostile security environment, and subsequently completed 97% of the rehabilitation works in record time.

The major task was the fabrication of steel bridges. The steel bridges were fabricated in Karachi and were transported all the way to the project site after being painstakingly assembled by NLC engineers in a befitting manner, they added. They said a total of nine railway stations along with tracks have been upgraded by NLC engineers including the reconstruction of Harnai Railway Station and a complete renovation of Sibbi Railways Station, which can be regarded as the finest railway station in Balochistan.

BISP disburses Rs. 30,601, 739,000 among 4,371,677 among Kafalat beneficiaries till today

ISLAMABAD (APP): Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has disbursed an amount of Rs. 30,601,739,000 among 4,371,677 beneficiaries across the country under the quarterly payments of the Benazir Kafalat programme.

Till January 19, around 55.43 percent quarterly payment amount has been paid to the beneficiaries through the designated banks and retailers, following a smooth and transparent procedure.

According to the BISP, those deserving women who still have not received their quarterly payment of Rs. 7000 may visit their nearest payment center to receive the amount.

Around 7.7 million families would receive over Rs. 55 billion in the first tranche of Benazir Kafalat payments.

The beneficiaries have been advised to receive their full installment of Rs 7,000 and get the payment receipt by the quarter concerned in any case.

To facilitate the beneficiaries, BISP has set up a special control room for the redressal of public complaints regarding the disbursement of Benazir Kafalat payments.

The control room has been set up on the special directives of the Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety,

Shazia Marri, to ensure transparency in the distribution of the first quarterly installment for the year 2023.

BISP has asked the beneficiaries to immediately report to BISP's toll-free helpline 080026477 and contact the nearest BISP Tehsil Office if a person demands any kind of deduction or fee for payment.

The message sent by BISP would come from 8171 only and no message from any other number or code should be trusted, as it is faked and fraudulent.

The beneficiaries facing problems regarding receiving the payments could register their complaint on Whatsapp numbers for Punjab: 03255365520, Sindh: 03449118336 and Balochistan: 03255365469 while the complainants from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan could contact at 03255365476.

The beneficiary women and trans-genders of Islamabad, Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan have started receiving this money from Payment Centers or Biometric ATMs designated by Habib Bank; while in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, the amount is being disbursed through Payment Centers or Biometric ATMs of Bank Al-Falah.

Adding of more water reserves inevitable for Pakistan: Khurram

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Power Division Khurram Dastgir on Thursday said that the flood in 2022 was a serious indication of climate change and it was inevitable to add more to water reserves in the country.

Addressing at a ceremony here that there was a dire need to prepare for such situations in the future. The flood caused severe damage to power supply infrastructure for which the government was making all-out efforts to restore it, he said.

He said in most of the power supply infrastructure has already been restored in the effected area. Flood brought havoc to areas of Sindh, Balochistan and South Punjab, he said.

The minister said the flood not only affected people but also destroyed agricultural land and crops. Drainage of water from the flood-affected areas was a difficult task but the government utilized all available resources in this regard, he said.

Dastgir said we have to decide in which direction we want to take the country. The new generation will have to contribute to the development of the country, he said.

Six more Tele Health facilities

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Federal Minister for Science and Technology Agha Hassan Baloch chaired a review meeting of different organizations of the ministry here on Thursday. Agha Hassan Baloch directed the chief operating officer of COM-SATS Internet Services (CIS) Jamal Nasir to set up six more Tele Health facilities in the underprivileged areas of Balochistan including BHU Khuzdar, BHU Waddh, BHU Kharan, BHU Qalat Pandran, BHU Jungle and BHU Chaghi.

The Minister said that Balochistan suffers from the highest incidence of preventable deaths among mothers, children and young infants and to improve the health care system, it was the top priority of Sardar Akhtar Jan Mengal and BNP to resolve the prevailing health problems in Balochistan.

Border violation by any is not acceptable: Ashrafi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Special Representative for Interfaith Harmony and Middle East Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi on Thursday said Pakistan was a sovereign and independent country with a strong army and wanted positive and stable relations with all Islamic and neighbouring countries. Commenting on the possibility and resumption of dialogues with India, he said the way of negotiation with India went through Kashmir.

"If India reverses August 5, 2019 status of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, there will be a possibility of negotiation on all issues including Kashmir," he added.

He said the invitation from Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to

negotiate with India is an attempt to bring stability to the region and it should not be taken as a weakness.

Prime Minister's Special Representative for Interfaith Harmony and Middle East Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi said the peaceful talks between India and Pakistan could improve things with a possibility to the solution of the Kashmir issue.

Condemning the attack on Pakistan's security forces at the Pakistan-Iran border, he said Pakistan had given its clear stance to the Iranian government on this incident. Ashrafi who is also the chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council said it was the responsibility of Iran to arrest and hand over the culprits involved in this heinous crime against Pakistan.

IGP visits Police Training College Sihala

RAWALPINDI (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab, Aamir Zulfiqar Khan here on Thursday visited Police Training College Sihala and reviewed training affairs including performance of several sections of the college.

Commandant Sihala College, DIG Ashfaq Ahmed Khan gave a briefing about the college's history and its professional affairs. The IGP was informed that more than 100,000 police officers and personnel of different institutions including from Sri Lanka, Africa, and Kenya have completed training

from Sihala College. IGP Punjab reviewed the performance of different branches of the college.

During the visit, the IGP also inaugurated the newly constructed park and walking track. He also laid the foundation stone for the construction of the buildings of the Punjab School of Investigation and Hostel No. 17 in Campus-II.

The IGP while addressing the under training officers and their trainers at the auditorium issued important instructions.

"Professional training of the force in line with the modern demands of policing is my top priority," he

added. He said that those who have completed their training should make all-out efforts in the field in serving and protecting the citizens. "To restore the honor and dignity of the police force, we will have to do our own accountability. We have to become servants of the public and their protectors in the true sense," he added. The government would be requested to approve Rs250 per head instead of Rs150 for the food of the under training officers, he said. He asked the authorities concerned to organize an IG Cup, a cricket tournament between all training colleges and units.

HEC announces LAW-GAT test to enroll with Bar Council as an advocate

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has announced Law Graduate Assessment Test (LAW-GAT) for eligibility to seek enrollment as an advocate with Bar Council.

According to official sources, as per eligibility criteria persons having passed Bachelor's degree in Law or equivalent from a university recognized by HEC/PBC are eligible to apply for the test.

The test will consist of Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQs), while revised curriculum of Law GAT Test can be downloaded from <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/services/students/etc/Documents/Curriculum-LAW-GAT-test.pdf>.

The Law-GAT Test will be tentatively held on February 12, 2023. Any change in test date, due to unavoidable circumstances, shall be communicated to candidates through www.hec.gov.pk and <http://etc.hec.gov.pk>.

Applicants who register through HEC online registration process will download their Roll Number Slip through <http://etc.hec.gov.pk> a week before the test date. Email/SMS will be sent to registered applicants for test date, time and venue. The candidates are required to provide valid email/mobile number while filling online application form. A print of Roll Number Slip, original CNIC and deposited fee challan will be required to enter in test centre. The examination will be conducted at the following test centres i.e Bahawalpur, Hyderabad, Lahore, Quetta, D.I. Khan, Islamabad, Multan, Sargodha, Faisalabad, Karachi, Peshawar, Sukkur and Gilgit. The applicants may select any test centre from the list available in the application form. HEC asked students to note that said test will be held on any of above centre if minimum 250 applicants will select that centre. Please also note that test centre once selected will not be changed after registration. Applicants are directed to visit the following link: <http://etc.hec.gov.pk> for online registration. In case of any difficulty during online registration, please visit

onlinehelp.hec.gov.pk.

It is pertinent to mention here that the Honourable Supreme Court vide its Order dated March 6, 2018 has directed restoration of the Law Graduate Assessment Test (LAW-GAT) by the Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) through the Higher Education Commission (HEC).

The objective of the Assessment Test is to ensure proper scrutiny and evaluation of a law graduate desirous to join the legal profession so that only competent individuals possessing necessary basic knowledge of law may enter the legal profession for practicing law. Therefore, a law graduate only becomes eligible to apply to a Bar Council for enrollment as an Advocate if he/she qualifies the Assessment Test to be conducted by HEC, Pakistan having been so authorised by PBC, pursuant to the aforementioned Order of the Honourable Supreme Court and read with Section 26 (cc) of Legal Practitioners and Bar Council's Act 1973 and rules of the PBC.

The students are asked to download bank Fee Challan while registering for the test at <http://etc.hec.gov.pk>. (Fee Challan is only available on ETC online registration portal). All candidates are required to upload paid and scanned Fee challan, duly stamped by an HBL branch, while completing the application form of ETC online registration portal to submit the application. The test fee is non-refundable and non-transferable.

It is mandatory to bring original applicant copy of paid fee challan on the test day along with your original CNIC/ original Passport; else candidate will not be allowed to sit in the examination.

The last date for online registration is January 30, 2023(4pm).

At least 50% score is required to pass the Law Graduate Assessment Test (LAW-GAT) for the students.

Applicants will have to meet other criteria, if any, as per Rules and Regulations of the Pakistan Bar Council. Applicants will have maximum of five chances to clear the test. HEC will conduct the test on a quarterly basis.



ISLAMABAD: Students are performing in comedy drama competition at Islamabad Model College for girls F6/2 held in connection with intercollegiate ceremony.

1 killed, 2 hurt in accident

BALKH (Agencies): In a road incident in Chaharbulak district of Balkh province of Afghanistan, one person was killed and two others were injured, local officials said on Thursday. The police spokesman of the Balkh, Mohammad Asif Waziri, said: 2 cars collided in the Chaharbolak district of Balkh province, killing one person and injuring two others. According to the officials, this accident was caused by the negligence of the drivers.

Mines reserves discussed

KABUL (Agencies): Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, Sheikh Shahabuddin Delawar, in a meeting with Mawlawi Qadratullah Abu Hamza, Governor of Zabul, discussed the mines reserves. The mineral sites that were formerly surveyed by the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, were reviewed. The Minister has instructed the relevant officials of this ministry to send a geological survey team to Zabul to survey the sites that have not been surveyed so far.

Asia is comparable to a living body composed of soil and water. The heart that beats inside the body is Afghanistan. The destruction of Afghanistan would be the destruction of Asia. And in its progress and prosperity lies the well-being of Asia. - Allama Iqbal

China viewed as a significant player

KABUL (Khaama Press): The recent investment by a Chinese company in Afghanistan has demonstrated that China is still in a position to play a significant role in the country. The recent oil extraction contract between the Chinese company- China Petroleum Economics and Information Research Center (CPEIC) and the interim government in Afghanistan strengthens the concept that China wants to boost its presence via economic investment. Both countries are neighbors, and the instability in Afghanistan can create new challenges to China's security. On the other hand, Afghanistan is part of the Belt and Road Initiative which can connect South Asia to Central Asian countries and prepare China to grow its stake in the region further. However, the recent move by the Chinese in Afghanistan has demonstrated that China is still in a position to play a significant role, even though it is still being determined whether the project will live up to its promise. From a Chinese perspective, China's presence in Afghanistan is just an extension of Beijing's principle of non-interference. In reality, the absence of regional and significant powers' presence made China step forward, quoted from Raffaello Pantucci by South China Morning Post. The recent attack on Chinese citizens in Kabul shows that the Chinese presence in the country will emerge with new challenges, such as the USA had encountered.

70 people died as cold sweeps Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLOnews): The State Ministry for Disasters Management said that at least 70 people have died from cold amidst a freezing winter across the country. More than 70,000 livestock have also died due to the extreme cold weather in the county, officials said.

"According to primary figures, due to the snowfall and cold weather in the provinces of Badghis, Ghazni, Nimruz, Ghor, Paktika, Herat, Kandahar and Faryab, 70 people have died and one person was wounded, and at least 70,000 livestock have perished in Badghis, Sar-e Pol, Jawzjan and Faryab," said Mawlawi Abdullah Mohammadi, head of the emergency operations center in the ministry.

People in different parts of the country said that the freezing weather this winter is unprecedented. They said that poverty and unemployment are the major causes of the rise in casualties during the cold season. "We ask the international community, the local administration and partner institutions to genuinely cooperate with the people in this area. The weather is quite cold and the people's economic status is very poor," said Mohammad Amin Khalili, a resident of Bamian.

"There is no job in this cold weather. Everyone has five to six children and people are unemployed," said Bibi Gul, a resident of Jawzjan.

"We need the aid distribution to needy families in Faryab province to resume immediately," said Rohullah Arman, a resident of Faryab.

According to representatives of the State Ministry for Disaster Management, that over the past 28 days, they have provided food and non-food relief packages to at least 5,000 families in different parts of the country who were affected by the cold wave.

66 prisoners freed from jail in Nangarhar

KABUL (Agencies): Based on the decree of supreme leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 66 people including women and children were released from Nangarhar jail. The head of the appeals court of Nangarhar, Mohammad Gulab Farooqi, said that based on the decree of the supreme leader, those prisoners who have lessened their crimes or pardoned the opposite party. 66 people, including 11 children and 5 women, were released he said. Mawlawi Bilal Shaheen, in charge of Nangarhar jail, said that currently there are 1,100 prisoners, including 65 children and 50 women, who have been provided with a suitable environment and education.

4,000 needy families received aid

JAWZJAN (Agencies): Cash aid was distributed to four thousand needy families in Jawzjan province of Afghanistan. These grants were distributed by the People's Action organization for Change, with the support of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Afghanistan and coordination with the Departments of Agriculture and Economy in Jawzjan, to needy families in the Aqecha district. Mawlawi Mohammad Zarif Favez, head of Jawzjan's Economy department says that in this round, 7,100 Afghans in cash was distributed to each family. Several families who have benefited from this assistance, while appreciating these contributions, want more support and assistance from partner organizations with the farmers of this province.

Protecting of women's rights: UN officials hold talks with Afghan authorities



KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous visited Kabul and met with the Taliban authorities to discuss Afghan women's rights and other issues. The senior UN delegation held meetings with UN staff, national and international NGOs, and Afghan women to get a good understanding of the situation and discuss ways to protect women's and girls' rights in Afghanistan, according to Farhan Haq, the UN Deputy Spokesperson.

In a meeting with Afghanistan's Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi on Wednesday, Amina Mohammed stressed the need to uphold human rights, especially for women and girls, and were encouraged by exemptions being introduced that have allowed the resumption of some humanitarian activities that had been hampered following the ban. Minister Muttaqi expressed his gratitude and hoped that the UN delegation would portray Afghanistan's true image to the international community. "Women are engaged in educational and health sectors in significant numbers whereas those who used to work in government offices are paid salaries at home. The number of female inmates has reduced considerably and broad facilities have been provided in the business sector," Muttaqi said. Muttaqi also reiterated that not recognizing the Afghan government, travel bans on the Islamic Emirate authorities and restrictions on the banking system have led to numerous problems. To overcome these challenges, the international community needs to take positive in this regard.

Since the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021, followed by the disruption of international financial assistance, the war-torn country has been left once more in dire economic, humanitarian, and human rights crises. Women and girls have been deprived of their rights, including the right to education, and disappeared from public life under the country's ruling regime. Thousands of women have since lost their jobs or were forced to resign from government institutions and the private sector.

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Iran, Turkey seek women's access to edu in Afghanistan



KABUL (TOLOnews): The Turkish foreign minister at a conference with his Iranian counterpart emphasized on the need to provide women and girls access to education and work. Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said on Tuesday that there is no religious justification for the ban on women's access to education. "We have confirmed our consistent view regarding restrictions on girls' children access to education and women's access to work in Afghanistan," the Turkish foreign minister said. "We will engage in this regard with the Taliban or if it was needed we will continue our activities under the umbrella of the Organization of the Islamic Countries Cooperation. Our religion, Islam has not banned education and on the contrary it stresses on education. Then these issues are in contradict with our religion and are inhumane," he added. According to UNESCO, more than 118 million girls across the globe are out of school. The UN Secretary-General said that nothing can "justify keeping girls out of the classroom." "The ruling side in Afghanistan should pay attention that as much as we witness the restrictions regarding women's rights and freedom, there will be further reactions," said Marriam Arseen, a women's rights activist. "I am one of the girls whose schools were closed for the past two years and we were able to continue our lessons amidst many problems," said Huma, a student. "The restrictions that were imposed on women should be canceled and schools and educational centers should be reopened," said Zahra, a student. The decrees of the Islamic Emirate to ban women and girls from having access to education and work at NGOs have faced widespread reactions at national and international levels. But the caretaker government says the decisions are not permanent and that they are temporary.

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Humanitarian partners reached out to 25.3m Afghans in 2022

KABUL (TOLOnews): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a report that the humanitarian partners have reached out to 25.3 million people in total in Afghanistan. According to OCHA, the response was enabled by a combination of new funding in 2022 of \$2.3 billion and the \$542 million funds carried over from 2021. However, OCHA said that \$2 billion (45 percent) of the \$4.4 billion required to deliver humanitarian assistance in 2022 remains unfunded. "Between January and November 2022, humanitarian partners reached at least 22 million people with food and livelihoods support; 12 million people with access to health care (consultations and treatment); 5.9 million children and pregnant and lactating women with support to prevent and address acute malnutrition; 10.4 million people with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance; 554,400 children with access to education and education materials; 1.8 million people with emergency shelter and household items; and 5.3 million people with protection assistance," the report said. Meanwhile, a number of vulnerable people said that the aid provided to them was not sufficient and that they need more support. Malik Gul Khan, a resident of Kabul, said that he is facing severe economic challenges amid cold winter. "There is no job over the past 14 months after the emergence of the new government," he said. "No one helped us. We don't have shelter," said Bibi Gul, a resident of Kabul. OCHA's report also pointed out that despite the historic scale of response so far in 2022, underfunding has meant that people's needs were not reduced and they have not been able to start the path towards stability and independence. "In fact, there are more people today in Afghanistan who rely on humanitarian assistance as the only source of survival," the report said. The concerns about Afghanistan's humanitarian situation comes as many organizations have halted their activities following the Islamic Emirate's decision to bar women from going to work at NGOs. However, three major organizations including International Rescue Committee (IRC), Save the Children and CARE have resumed some of their activities in Afghanistan. "The international humanitarian assistance aid to Afghanistan in 2022 has only prevented an increase in poverty," said Abdul Naser Rishnia, an economic affairs analyst. The Ministry of Economy said that the aid in sectors that can create job opportunities could be more effective. "We praise NGOs and international organizations that are cooperating for the improvement of livelihood and economic situation of our countrymen. Humanitarian activities through focusing on sectors that create jobs will be effective economically," said Abdul Rahman Habib, a spokesman for the Ministry of Economy.

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Smelting plant to be built in Logar

LOGAR (TOLOnews): A smelting plant with an initial investment of \$20 million will be built for the first time in Logar province's industrial park, officials said on Thursday. Local officials said that the plant will provide jobs for thousands of people. They called on investors to visit the industrial park, which has "every facility." "In this plant, \$20 million have been invested, and work on it is completed and we will start activity soon," said Mir Hashim Hizbullah, a local official. "Our investors can invest here with full confidence so that our country's economy will improve and poverty can decrease," said Mohammad Sarwar Haqqani, deputy head of the Industry and Commerce Department of Logar. The industrial park in Logar is located near Kabul in the Mohammad Agha district and is built on about 500 acres of land. Meanwhile, Logar residents welcomed the move and said they hope it will providemore jobs to the people. "Most of our countrymen are jobless. If we find work here that will be good," said Mohammad Ibrahim, a resident of Mohammad Agha district. "We want that this plant will start its activities soon and we can find work here," said Aminullah, a resident of Logar. "We ask the government to provide job opportunities for us and pay attention to these kinds of projects," said Asil Khan Ahmadzai, a Logar resident. The Industrial Park in Logar was established in 2015, and for security reasons, investors could not invest here so far.

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Professional education centers to be built in all districts of Kandahar

KANDAHAR (Agencies): The head of Technical and Vocational Institution's Vocational Program Reform Mawlawi Abdul Wadood Hotak met to discuss the opening of technical and professional centers in all districts of Kandahar with the Deputy governor of the province. Hotak called the aim of his visit to Kandahar to collect information about the work, achievements, and plans of the Directorate of Technical and Vocational Education in this province. The department has the plan to build technical education centers, attract institutions, and provide necessary materials to the Directorate of Technical and Professional Education of Kandahar. He urged cooperation from the deputy governor of Kandahar in this regard. Meanwhile, the Deputy Governor of Kandahar Mawlawi Hayatullah Mobarak praised the services of the aid department in the military and civil sectors and assured assistance in the construction of professional and technical education centers in all districts of the province.



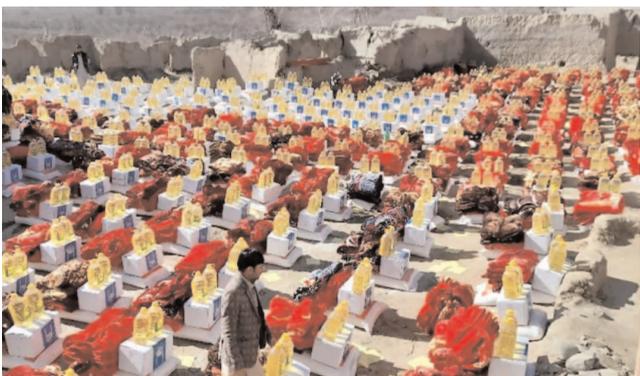
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KANDAHAR (Agencies): The head of Technical and Vocational Institution's Vocational Program Reform Mawlawi Abdul Wadood Hotak met to discuss the opening of technical and professional centers in all districts of Kandahar with the Deputy governor of the province. Hotak called the aim of his visit to Kandahar to collect information about the work, achievements, and plans of the Directorate of Technical and Vocational Education in this province. The department has the plan to build technical education centers, attract institutions, and provide necessary materials to the Directorate of Technical and Professional Education of Kandahar. He urged cooperation from the deputy governor of Kandahar in this regard. Meanwhile, the Deputy Governor of Kandahar Mawlawi Hayatullah Mobarak praised the services of the aid department in the military and civil sectors and assured assistance in the construction of professional and technical education centers in all districts of the province.

Hundreds of needy families received aid



KABUL (Agencies): Aid organizations in Paktika and Kandahar provided cash and food aid to 1,249 families. The provincial head of natural disasters Management department in Paktika, said that 449 families received cash aid by the Norwegian Committee in Barmal district, where each family received 274 US dollars. Meanwhile, food items were distributed to 800 families by the Islamic Relief Organization in Argbistan district of Kandahar. Each family receiver flour, rice, cooking oil, beans, salt and rice.

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FM stressed cooperation with Aga Khan Development Network

KABUL (Agencies): Acting Foreign Minister, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, in a meeting with the special representative of the Aga Khan Development Network, assured cooperation with that network. Foreign Minister, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, met with Akbar Ali Pasnani, the special representative of the Aga Khan Development Network. In this meeting, the special representative of the Aga Khan Development Network expressed his sorrow over the bloody incident in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gate. He thanked the Islamic Emirate for its cooperation in various sectors, especially in Khost and Paktika, to build houses for earthquake victims. He asked international charity organizations to enhance coordination and interaction with the Afghan government. For his part, Muttaqi, hailing the services of the Aga Khan Development Network, assured of any kind of cooperation in the future with the network and inspired them to provide more services in the relevant sectors.

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Medvedev warns of nuclear war if Russia defeated in Ukraine

MOSCOW (Agencies): Dmitry Medvedev, an outspoken former Russian president who is close to Vladimir Putin, has warned NATO that Moscow's defeat in Ukraine could trigger a nuclear war. "The defeat of a nuclear power in a conventional war may trigger a nuclear war," Medvedev, who serves as deputy chairman of Putin's powerful security council, said in a post on the Telegram messaging app.

"Nuclear powers have never lost major conflicts on which their fate depends," said Medvedev, who served as president from 2008 to 2012. He also said the military alliance and other Western defence leaders, due to meet at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Friday to discuss support for Ukraine, should consider the risks of their policy. The Kremlin was quick to endorse Medvedev's remarks, saying they were in full accordance with Moscow's principles.

Moscow's doctrine allows for a nuclear attack after "aggression against the Russian Federation with conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is threatened". Medvedev, 57, who once presented himself as a reformer who was ready to work with the United States to liberalise Russia, has recast himself as the most publicly hawkish member of Putin's circle. Since Russia invaded Ukraine almost a year ago on February 24, Medvedev has repeatedly raised the threat of nuclear chaos and used insults to describe the West.

Russia and the United States, by far the largest nuclear powers, hold about 90 percent of the world's nuclear warheads. Russia has 5,977 nuclear warheads while the United States has 5,428, China 350, France 290 and the United Kingdom 225, accord-

ing to the Federation of American Scientists. As president, Putin is Russia's ultimate decision-maker on the use of nuclear weapons.

Washington has not detailed what it would do if Putin ordered what would be the first use of nuclear weapons in war since the United States unleashed the first atomic bomb attacks on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. While NATO has conventional military superiority over Russia, when it comes to nuclear weapons, Russia has nuclear superiority over the alliance in Europe.

Putin casts Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine as an existential battle with an aggressive and arrogant West and has said that Moscow will use all available means to protect itself. Russia's February 24 invasion of Ukraine has triggered one of the deadliest European conflicts since World War II and the biggest confrontation between Moscow and the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. The United States and its allies have condemned the invasion of Ukraine as an imperial land grab, while Ukraine has vowed to fight until the last Russian soldier leaves its territory.

Since a grim New Year's Eve message describing the West as Russia's true enemy in the war on Ukraine, Putin has sent several signals that Moscow will not back down. He has dispatched hypersonic missiles to the Atlantic and appointed his top general to run Russia's war effort. Putin said on Wednesday that Russia's powerful military-industrial complex was ramping up production, and was one of the main reasons why his country would prevail in Ukraine.

Fahad appointed as SAPM



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has appointed Fahad Haroon as Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) with status of Minister for State with immediate effect, on Thursday.

In this regard a notification has issued from cabinet. The notification stated that the Fahad Haroon as appointed as Minister for State. It is worthy to mention that Fahad Haroon has already served as Special Assistant to Chief Minister Sindh on Media Affair.

4 terrorists killed in Balochistan

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: At least four terrorists were killed in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Balochistan's Hoshab, according to Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) report on Wednesday. According to the military's media wing, the security forces conducted an intelligence-based operation (IBO) on the hideouts of the terrorists in Hoshab.

During the exchange of fire, four terrorists were killed, the ISPR added. The statement noted that a huge quantity of weapons and ammunition were also recovered in the IBO. It is pertinent to mention here that the country's law and order situation has worsened over the past few months, with terrorist groups like the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan executing attacks on law enforcement agencies (LEAs) across the country.

Earlier on December 31, a Pakistan Army soldier embraced martyrdom while four terrorists were killed during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in general area of Jani Khel in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bannu district. "During the exchange of fire, four terrorists were killed while a 25-year-old Sepoy Muhammad Waseem embraced martyrdom," the ISPR said. Meanwhile, the security forces recovered a cache of arms and ammunition from the terrorists.

Shahzad, Imran discuss situation

LAHORE (INP): Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Imran Khan was called on by Leader of the Opposition in Senate, Senator Dr. Shahzad Waseem here on Thursday and key issue came under discussion.

During meeting of Senator Dr. Shahzad Waseem with Chairman PTI held at his Zaman Park Lahore residence, prevailing political situation of the country and the parliamentary affairs came under discussion. Leader of the Opposition briefed Imran Khan about issues relating Upper House of the Parliament and party chief gave important instructions to Senator Dr. Shahzad Waseem about the parliamentary affairs.



KARACHI: Leader of Jamaat-e-Islami Hafiz Naeem Ur Rehman addressing a press conference along with leader of Pakistan Peoples Party Saeed Ghani after the meeting.

Establishment of committee for uplift projects challenged in PHC

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The starring committee established by federal government for usage of developmental funds in merged districts of erstwhile Fata has challenged at Peshawar High Court (PHC).

Former Members Provincial Assembly (MPAs) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ghazan Jamal, Shafiq Afridi, Anwar Zeb Khan, Ajmal Khan, Syed Iqbal Mian and Nasrullah Khan in which federal government, planning commission, finance division and starring committee were made respondents in the writ petition. The writ stated that establishment of starring committee by planning commission 3rd January is unconstitutional and against the spirit of 25th constitutional amendment in which Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa became the subordinate of a bureaucrat.

The petition further added that Governor is a constitutional position while in the starring committee Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Governor

become a subordinate to bureaucrat. Federal Government has curtailed constitutional rights of erstwhile Fata's residents through a notification, the writ stated.

The establishment of starring committee has violated Constitution of Pakistan because development projects are the dominion of provincial government and also contradicting with provincial autonomy. Deputy Secretary will decide fate of developmental projects while the constitution of starring committee has also demoralized constitutional position of Governor, the petition argued. The petition requested PHC to declare null and void the notification regarding establishment of starring committee for developmental projects in merged districts of erstwhile Fata.

Moreover, the former MPAs has also filed another writ regarding release of 3% share for erstwhile Fata in National Finance Commission which also pending before honorable Peshawar High Court.

Although, writ stated that in 2010 NFC award 3% shares were granted

for erstwhile Fata while its stoppage has disturbed businesses of duty including salaries of employees. The petition further argued that awarding of NFC in every five years is constitutional obligation and requested PHC to ordered competent for holding NFC meeting while pleaded for provision of funds as per populace ratio of erstwhile Fata district.

At the time of filing writ at PHC, MPA Ghazan Jamal said that they had upheld at issue at the floor of assembly for several times but to no veil and now knocked the doors of honorable court for their constitutional rights. He added that in writ court is requested to ordered federation for release of erstwhile Fata's share.

MPA claimed that Sindh didn't willing for NFC award while added only Rs5 billion is released for erstwhile Fata and claimed that all representatives of merged districts stand with shoulder to shoulder for obtaining their constitutional rights. He added that they pressurize federation from every forum to release erstwhile Fata share in NFC award.

Centre seizes power of SC to appoint chairman of NIRC

ISLAMABAD (INP): The federal government has seized the power of the Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP), the authority to appoint the chairman of the National Industrial Relations Commission (NIRC) and transferred the power from the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to the federal government.

In this connection, the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis inaudibly amended the rules of the National Industrial Relations Commission. Sources told INP that withdrawing the authority of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to appoint a chairman of the NIRC is a violation of the decision of the Supreme Court which was given by the apex court in the case of Riyazul Haque against Federation of Pakistan.

However, the government transferred the power of appointing the chairman of the National Commission for Industrial Relations from the Chief Justice of Pakistan to the federal government. After the amendment, the federal government will be able to remove the chairman of the National Commission for Industrial Relations and members without giving a notice of one month to keep control. The Supreme Court had given a decision on January 13, 2013 in case of Riazul Haque vs Federation of Pakistan that the appointment of the chairman of such tribunals and commissions will be

carried out in consultation with the Chief Justices of the Supreme Court and High Courts.

Along with this, they should be economically and administratively independent so that the National Commission for Industrial Relations and such tribunals can make decisions independently. The provision to remove the chairman and members of the National Commission for Industrial Relations within 30 days without giving any reason was also included in the rules. Prior to this, according to the old rules, consultation with the Chief Justice was necessary to appoint a chairman and no chairman or member could be removed without giving reasons. According to the new amendment, the federal government itself will appoint the chairman of the National Commission for Industrial Relations, the new amendment.

After this, the Federal Government will be able to appoint former and current Judges of the Supreme Court or High Court as Chairman Commission. According to the new rules, the Chairman and members will be appointed for a period of three years, which will not be extended. The appointment of commission members will be for three years. The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and the Federal Minister did not give any kind of position despite repeatedly communicating with them. It should be clear that accord-

Maryam will return on 29th: Safdar

LAHORE (INP): PML-N vice president Maryam Nawaz will return Pakistan from London on January 29, her spouse Captain Safdar Awan confirmed on Thursday. Maryam will land at Lahore airport on 4:00pm on Sunday January 29, Safdar said.

"Intervention in politics has inflicted irreparable loss to the country," he said. "Ex- COAS's intervention caused flour shortage in country," Capt. Safdar said. "Pervez Musharraf's intervention inflicted irreparable loss to the country," he said. "We will expose those judges and generals, who pushed Pakistan to the existing situation," Safdar said. "Maryam Nawaz will return to Pakistan to expose those who had conspired against Pakistan," he added.

According to earlier reports, PML-N activists have started preparations for warm welcome of Maryam Nawaz on her returning back to the country. Captain Safdar Awan has started mobilization of the party workers and contacting other party leaders. Earlier, Punjab governor Balighur Rehman said in a statement that former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is returning to Pakistan next month while Maryam is also arriving soon. It is pertinent to mention here that Maryam Nawaz has left for London in October last year after getting her passport back from the Lahore High Court (LHC).

LG polls: IHC adjourns appeals till 26th

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has adjourned the hearing till January 26, in intra court appeals with regard to the local body elections in the federal capital.

A division bench of IHC headed by Chief Justice Aamer Farooq heard the appeal of Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) against the decision of single member bench. Additional Attorney General Aamir Rehman, Additional Attorney General Munawar Dogal, petitioner's counsel Ali Nawaz Awan and others appeared before the court.

The chief justice remarked that the court is hearing only urgent cases, adding that the main cause list had been cancelled as he was not feeling well. Justice Aamer Farooq asked the respondents to exchange the documents with themselves and the court would fix the case for next week.

ECP may release schedule for by-polls on 34 NA seats

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is likely to release the schedule for by-polls on 35 National Assembly (NA) vacated by PTI lawmakers next week.

According to sources, the ECP has decided to hold by-polls on 35 NA seats and schedule for by-elections will be released next week. The decision was taken in an ECP meeting held in Islamabad, say sources. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) recently denotified 35 Members of the

National Assembly (MNAs) of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) after the NA speaker accepted their resignations.

The denotified PTI lawmakers include Asad Umar, Asad Qaiser, Pervez Khattak, Murad Saeed, Imran Khattak, Shehryar Afridi, Ali Amin Gandapur, Noorul Haq Qadri, Raja Khurram Nawaz, Ali Nawaz Awan, Sadaqat Ali Khan, Ghulam Sarwar, Sheikh Rashid Shafiq, Mansoor Hayat Khan, Fawad Chaudhry, Sanaulah Khan, Hammad

Azhar, Shafiqat Mahmood, Malik Amir Dogar, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Zartaj Gul, Faheem Khan, Saifur Rehman, Alamgir Khan, Ali Zaidi, Aftab Siddiqui, Ataullah Khan, Aftab Jahangir, Muhammad Aslam Khan, Najeeb Haroon, Qasim Suri and others.

Moreover, PTI MNAs on reserved seats including Aliya Hamza Malik and Kanwal Shauzab were also denotified. In July last year, NA Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf had accepted the resignations of 11 PTI MNAs.

PTI popular party amongst general public: KP CM

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mahmood Khan has said that PTI has become the most popular party amongst general public as well as political classes adding that despite the end of its tenure in the province, people and political figures are joining PTI. This is evidence of their firm conviction and confidence in its dynamic and sincere leadership. Imported politicians have failed in denting the political stature of PTI, he added. The Chief Minister expressed these views while addressing the joining ceremony of prominent political figures from district Dir on Thursday. MNA Bashir Khan and ex Provincial Minister Mohibullah were also present on the occasion.

According to details, ex district councillor of PPP from Chakdara Haji Nawab, ex district councillor of PPP from Temergara Muhammad Israr, ex district councillor of PPP from Kotigram, Dir lower Haroon Rashid and president of PPP from Talash Dir lower Malik Mumtaz formally joined PTI by quitting their longstanding affiliation with Pakistan People's Party.

Similarly, president of

QWP from Temergara, Khizar Hayat also announced joining PTI. The Chief Minister welcomed the newcomers to the fold of PTI and paid rich tribute to them for choosing a political party which is representative of Pakistanis. The Chief Minister said that PTI has wiped out all the political parties at grassroot level due to their sincere leadership and development initiatives.

He made it clear that Imran Khan is the only leader who is fighting against corrupt political mafias single handedly. This is the reason why people have faith in his leadership, he said and added that only Imran Khan has the ability to steer the country out of the current economic crises.

The chief minister maintained that the conglomerate of corrupt political leaders has been exposed and these people cannot deceive people anymore. Talking about the development and welfare strategy of the provincial government, the Chief Minister said that his government has taken concrete steps in all the sectors; a number of reforms and development initiatives have been completed to align the health, education and other social services institutions with contemporary needs.

Our efforts have started yielding positive results in all the sectors, he remarked.

The Chief Minister said that PTI will form government with a huge majority and will achieve its targets regarding equal development of all areas of the province. He also announced the holding of a grand public gathering in district Dir soon. The Chief Minister said that his government has paid special attention to the development of Dir and other backward districts adding that a new district "Central Dir" and three new tehsils have been notified formally, which was a long-standing demand of the people.

On this occasion, the delegates expressed their firm commitment that they will fully support Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf in the upcoming general elections and will sweep the polls in district Dir. MNA Bashir Khan talking on the occasion has said that due to the development funds provided by the provincial government, several development projects have been completed in Dir district, including the establishment of a university, the completion of a medical college, the completion of the Koto Hydropower Project, grid stations and establishment of cadet college.

Kashmiri leadership passes 5-point resolution on J&K dispute

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Members of the Legislative Assembly of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and senior political leadership of AJK from across the aisle have unanimously passed a five-point resolution calling on India to reverse its illegal, unlawful and unjust annulment of Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution on 5th August 2019 and re-endorsed the principled stand taken by Pakistan to link any negotiation or dialogue with India with the reversal of these actions.

The statement was issued during a luncheon hosted by President Dr Arif Alvi for the Acting President of AJK, Anwar ul Haq, Prime Minister of AJK, Sardar Tanvir Ilyas, Former PM of AJK, Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan, members of the AJK Legislative Assembly, and senior political leadership of AJK. The 5-point resolution called upon India: (i) to retract its illegal move to change the demography of IIOJK by illegally issuing domiciles to over 4,200,000 non-Kashmiris and empowering them to buy Kashmiri land and conduct businesses; and (ii) to put an end to atroc-

ities, intimidation, harassment and humiliation inflicted upon the innocent Kashmiris perpetually by the Indian Occupation Forces of over 1 million.

(iii) The resolution urged the international community, the UN, and human rights organizations to play their role to implement several UN Security Council Resolutions on Kashmir and take meaningful and decisive steps towards the holding of an impartial plebiscite under the auspices of the UN to allow the Kashmiris to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination;

(iv) to take notice of the draconian restrictions and curbs imposed by India to usurp media freedoms and impose a media blackout in IIOJK, and take meaningful steps for allowing the journalists and media to perform their role of providing impartial and truthful information on the prevailing grave human rights situation in IIOJK.

(v) The resolution called upon the leadership of both Pakistan and India to allow cross-border hassle-free movement to allow the Kashmiris of

IIOJK and AJK to meet their relatives and do business.

While expressing his views during the meeting, the President said that the Government of Pakistan and the entire Pakistani leadership, irrespective of their political affiliations, were fully committed towards the Kashmir cause and would continue giving their moral, political, and diplomatic support for the inalienable right to self-determination of the Kashmiris.

He observed that there was a clear distinction between the freedom fighters and terrorists, and the Kashmiri brothers and sisters were waging a just freedom struggle by all means and angles and were sacrificing their lives for the attainment of their right to self-determination. He regretted that the Muslim freedom movements around the world were deliberately, wrongly and unjustifiably equated with the terrorist movement, whereas other such movements were termed as just and lawful.

The President proposed that the media, being the most effective tool to convey around the world any injustice committed anywhere in the world

against humanity, must also be used effectively to raise the voice and aspirations of the Kashmiris for their right to self-determination and to highlight the illegal, unlawful, and unjust Indian actions of 5th August 2019 which had unilaterally deprived the Kashmiris of their special status and protection which was provided to them under Article 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution and the human right violations committed by India with impunity.

He said that the international media should also be engaged to compare the political, economic, social, cultural and religious freedoms enjoyed by the Kashmiris in AJK and contrast it with the oppression, cruelty, humiliation and suppression of Kashmiris in IIOJK. The President further said that our Kashmiri brethren in IIOJK had rendered innumerable sacrifices and as per estimates over 500,000 Kashmiris had embraced martyrdom, 30,000 women had been widowed, 10,000 had been raped, many had been made "half-widows", and thousands of Kashmiris had been crippled and blinded for the rest of their lives. He

stated that their sacrifices for the just cause would not go to waste and Insha'Allah they would achieve their right to self-determination in a very near future.

The President said that the Jammu and Kashmir Dispute was raised by India in the UN and consequently many resolutions of the UN Security Council promised to hold a plebiscite but unfortunately the Kashmir Dispute had not been given its proper importance as compared to other conflicts and disputes in the world.

Earlier, the Acting President of AJK, Anwar ul Haq, Prime Minister of AJK, Sardar Tanvir Ilyas, Former PM of AJK, Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan, and members of the AJK Legislative Assembly in their addresses highlighted the atrocities being perpetually perpetrated by the brutal Indian Occupation Security Forces against the innocent Kashmiris to muffle their voice for the demand of self-determination and plebiscite.

They said that Kashmiris across the borders wanted to be a part of Pakistan to realize and pursue their dreams without fear of coercion,

intimidation and harassment in accordance with their social, cultural and religious traditions and norms. They said that Kashmiri leadership should be taken into confidence while making any discussion, negotiations, dialogue or strategy to strengthen our stand and voice on the issue of Kashmir around the world.

They stated that all Kashmiris of IIOJK and AJK dreamt and aspired to become a part of Pakistan and the entire Kashmiri leadership irrespective of their political affiliations supported the slogan of "Hum Pakistani Hain, aur Pakistan Hamara Hai".

They further informed that the OIC Secretary General's visit to AJK was a landmark step in the history of the Kashmir freedom movement and hoped that OIC would play its role in purporting the Kashmir cause and would play an effective role in its early resolution. Later, the participants of the meeting offered Fataha for the martyrs of the Kashmir Freedom Movement and prayed for the prosperity of Pakistan and the early resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir Dispute.