

LAHORE (PPI) The two former MNAs from Sarai Alamgir who deserted the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz have rejoined it. Haneef Awan and Jameel Awan held a meeting with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif under the leadership of Abid Raza Kotla. During the meeting, the duo announced to join the PML-N. Reportedly, Kotla played a vital role in bringing the estranged politicians back to the PML-N fold.

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Hurting 1.5b Muslims’ religious emotions unacceptable: PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday strongly condemned the despicable act of desecration of the Holy Quran by a right-wing extremist in Sweden the other day.

On his Twitter handle, the prime minister said that no words were enough to adequately condemn the abhorable act of desecration of the Holy Quran by a right-wing extremist in Sweden.

"The garb of the freedom of expression cannot be used to hurt the religious emotions of 1.5 billion Muslims across the world. This is unacceptable," he added.

Imran Niazi part of grand design to victimize Nawaz Sharif, PMLN: PM: Prime Minister

Shehbaz Sharif Sunday said Imran Niazi had been part of a grand design to oust Nawaz Sharif and victimize Pakistan Muslim League (N) in the name of accountability.

In a tweet on social media platform Twitter, he said, "From 2013 onward, he has been an agent of anarchy and chaos in the country. His poisonous rants have debased politics, polarized society and undermined state institutions."

PM greets President Xi, Chinese people on new year: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday felicitated President Xi Jinping and the Chinese people on the arrival of the Chinese New Year.

On his Twitter handle, the prime minister extended his congratula-

tions to the Chinese leadership and the people of China at the start of the new year on January 22.

"May the Year of the Rabbit be filled with love, peace & prosperity for our Chinese friends," he further expressed his good wishes.

The Chinese New Year 2023, heralded as 'the year of Rabbit' falls on Sunday, January 22 and celebrations will culminate into a Lantern festival on February 5th.

MNA calls on PM: Abid Raza, a Member of the National Assembly (MNA), on Sunday called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif at his residence.

Special Assistant to the PM Atta ullah Tarar was also present on the occasion, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.



LAHORE: Member National Assembly Abid Raza calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif at his residence. Special Assistant to the PM Atta ullah Tarar is also present on the occasion.

‘Sadiq, Amin’ confesses to investing \$3 mln charity funds in housing society: Marriyum

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb said on Sunday that so-called "Sadiq and Amin" had admitted to investing Shaukat Khanam Cancer Hospital's \$3 million charity fund in a housing society.

While taking a jibe at Imran Khan, in a statement she said that "Saqib Nisar's 'Sadiq aur Amin' admits to investing Shaukat Khanum's \$3 million charity fund in a housing society". The minister said that the people of Pakistan had given Zakat funds for Shaukat Khanum Hospital, not for the private housing society.

Referring to double standards of Imran, she said he accused others of theft but now himself confessed to stealing and misuse of charity money.

Marriyum Aurangzeb said that Imran did not even get approval from the board of directors of the hospital while investing millions of dollars of charity money.

She termed Imran a swindler and fraud who had stolen Toshakhana gifts and misappropriated Zakat funds.

She said that Imran did not consider the plunder of Toshakhana gifts and misappropriation of £ 190 million any issue.

For him 5-carat diamond or getting foreign funding against the national interests was not a crime, she maintained.

She said that 458 Kanal land was taken as a bribe in the name of Al-Qadir Trust, and Bushra Bibi sold every job and every appointment in Punjab.

On the contrary, she said against his political opponents whom he called thieves he could not prove false accusations in any court in Pakistan or in Britain. She opined that this was the reason Imran Khan did not appear in courts because he would have to confess to all the crimes he had committed.

FM to visit Uzbekistan for ECO ministers meeting

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of Foreign Affairs Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will pay an official visit to Tashkent, Uzbekistan on 23-24 January, 2023 to attend the 26th meeting of Council of Ministers (COM) of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). The theme of the conference is "Year of Strengthening Connectivity".

According to Foreign Office, the minister will address the Council and will separately hold bilateral meetings with participating ministers of member states and other dignitaries on the sidelines of the event. Council of Ministers (COM) is the policy making forum of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) that approves the decisions and annual work plan of the organization. The 25th COM was held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan in November, 2021.

As a founding member, Pakistan remains strongly committed to ECO which aims at promotion of effective regional cooperation, with special focus on communications, trade, culture and connectivity.

Police vehicle narrowly escapes bomb blast

PESHAWAR (Monitroing Desk): A patrol van of the Badaber police station in Peshawar narrowly escaped a bomb blast on Sunday, the police said.

According to a statement issued by the Peshawar Capital City Police, Nasir Khan — in charge of the Badaber's Shaikhana checkpoint — was patrolling in Gula Khan Zangal, an area bordering Khyber Agency, when an improvised explosive device (IED) exploded near his vehicle.

"Khan's vehicle was slightly damaged in the blast. Fortunately, no injuries or casualties were reported," it said.

Police teams have arrived at the crime site to collect evidence and the area has been cordoned off. "The incident is being investigated closely," the statement added.

Meanwhile, the bomb disposal squad (BDS) said that approximately one kilogram of explosives was used in the blast.

Since the talks with the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) broke down in November, the militant group has intensified its attacks, particularly targeting the police in KP and areas bordering Afghanistan. Last night, a policeman was martyred and two others were injured when unidentified assailants attacked a police post in Dheri Zardad locality of Charsadda.

Last week, a deputy superintendent of police and two constables were martyred when militants, armed with automatic assault weapons, targeted the Sarband police station on the outskirts of the province's capital, Peshawar late at night.

Officials said the militants, equipped with advanced weapons, including thermal weapon sights, carried out a 'coordinated' attack.

ECP appoints Mohsin Naqvi as Punjab Caretaker CM

ISLAMABAD (PPI) :Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Sunday gave final approval to the name of the opposition's nominated Syed Mohsin Naqvi as Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister.

As the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led Punjab government and the opposition failed to cobble together an interim set-up in the country's largest province, the decision was made by the ECP in a meeting presided over by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja as the deadline to pick a caretaker chief minister for Punjab drew closer.

After the no consensus between the government and the opposition, the matter was sent to the electoral body under Clause 3 of Article 224-A of the Constitution. The ECP has to pick the CM from four nominees including Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi, Ahad Khan Cheema, Sardar Ahmad Nawaz Sukhera, and Naveed Akram Cheema.

ECP also issued a notification that says: "Pursuant to the proviso of Clause(3) of Article 224-A of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and as a result of detailed deliberations made on January 22, the ECP has unanimously decided to appoint Syed Mohsin Rana Naqvi as the caretaker chief minister, Punjab with immediate effect."

The ECP said a letter had been dis-

patched to Punjab Governor Balighur Rehman for administering the oath to Naqvi.

Since Saturday, the ECP worked on preparing the profiles of four candidates nominated by the treasury and opposition leaders of the dissolved Punjab Assembly for the selection of the caretaker chief minister of the province.

The detailed profiles of the nominees explained their qualifications and performance in their respective fields. The ECP secretary presented profiles of the nominees in today's meeting after which the ECP announced the final name of the CM.

The matter to pick the Punjab caretaker CM came to the Election Commission when a parliamentary committee constituted by the Punjab Assembly speaker failed to build a consensus on a candidate for the slot.

The parliamentary committee of the government and opposition members met on Friday last, however, they failed to reach a consensus on a single name.

The government had proposed the names of Sardar Ahmad Nawaz Sukhera and Naveed Akram Cheema while the opposition had nominated Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi and Ahad Khan Cheema for the slot of the caretaker chief minister of Punjab.

Profile of Syed Mohsin Naqvi

Syed Mohsin Naqvi is a reputable name in journalism. He is born in

Lahore on October 28, 1978, and did his primary education at Crescent Model School.

He graduated from Government College University (GCU) Lahore and got a degree in Journalism from the USA. During his stay in Miami, USA, he joined the international television channel, CNN as a reporter and also has the honour of being the youngest Regional Head of South Asia after returning to Pakistan.

During the war on terror during Musharraf's reign, Mohsin Naqvi, as the regional head, demonstrated his skills throughout the world through his lively reporting. He also interviewed martyred former premier Benazir Bhutto who reportedly made her last call to him before martyrdom in 2007.

In 2009, at the age of 30, he founded the local media, the City News Network, and is now the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of six news channels including City42, City41, UK44, Channel 24 News, and Rohi TV. He is also the Chief Editor of Daily42 Lahore.

In his life, Naqvi has always taken up difficult jobs and turned them into easy ones and continued to achieve success. He has close relationships with the country's top political figures. Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Mian Nawaz Sharif has also called his name as the best for the caretaker setup in Punjab.

Imran urges PTI stalwarts to speed up election campaign

LAHORE (NNI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan urged on Sunday his party members to speed up the electoral campaign, which he regard as "Election karao, mulk bachao" campaign.

The deposed premier prepared a strategy to react to the acceptance of the PTI lawmakers' resignation in the National Assembly. Mr Khan said once the PTI will complete the process of resignations, he will "pour onto the streets" himself to give tough time to the coalition government.

Mr Khan also directed his stalwarts to prepare a

schedule for the public gatherings. The sources privy to the development said the PTI will underscore the issues of "regime change and the government's economic policies" in its election campaign. To take the country out of the quagmire and economic woes, Mr Khan will give his supporters, roadmap.

After the NA speaker accepted the resignations of 70 PTI lawmakers, Mr Khan handed over the task to the party leaders of getting the resignations of the rest of the PTI lawmakers accepted, under the supervision of former NA speaker Asad Qaiser.

Imran condemns desecration of Holy Quran in Sweden: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman and former prime minister Imran Khan had criticized the desecration of the Holy Quran in Sweden.

Taking to Twitter, PTI said he denounced in strictest terms the recent incident, while saying the United Nations accepted the resolution regarding countering Islamophobia last year with the support of Organization of Islamic Cooperation. He added the UN's resolution made it clear that the hate speech against Islam and its leaders did not fall under the ambit of freedom of speech.

Six more classified docs found in Justice Dept search of Biden home: Biden lawyer

WASHINGTON (BBC): US Department of Justice (DoJ) investigators have found six more classified documents during a 13-hour search of President Joe Biden's home in Delaware, a lawyer for Mr Biden says.

Some documents seized at the Wilmington property on Friday were from his time as a senator and others from his tenure as vice-president under Barack Obama. Lawyer Bob Bauer said "personally handwritten notes" and "surrounding materials" were also taken away. Mr Biden and his wife were not present.

The president offered access "to his home to allow DoJ to conduct a search of the entire premises for potential vice-presidential records and potential classified material", Mr Bauer said in a statement on Saturday. Former President Donald Trump is facing a criminal investigation for allegedly mishandling classified files.

Earlier this month Mr Biden's lawyers said a first batch of classified documents had been found on 2 November at the Penn Biden Center, a think-tank the president founded in Washington DC.

A second batch of records was found on 20 December in the garage at his Wilmington home, while another document was found in a storage space at the house on 12 January, his lawyers said.

After finding the documents, the president said his team immediately turned them over to the National Archives and Justice Department. It is not clear why Mr Biden had kept them. Under the Presidential Records Act, White House records are supposed to go to the National Archives once an administration ends, where they can be stored securely.

A special counsel, Robert Hur, has been appointed to lead the investigation into how the sensitive documents were handled. The lengthy search and subsequent discovery of more documents is a political headache for the president, as he prepares to declare whether he will run for a second term in 2024.

Mr Biden and his wife, Jill, are spending the weekend in the coastal town of Rehoboth Beach in Delaware, where they own another house. It was searched earlier this month

and no documents were found, his lawyers said, according to the New York Times. The two-month gap between the first Biden discovery - days before the midterm elections - and the news being made public in January raises awkward questions for the president about transparency, BBC North America correspondent Anthony Zurcher says.

Mr Biden's team insists the president has co-operated fully with the DoJ inquiry. Mr Biden has played down the affair as an oversight, saying he has "no regrets" about not publicly disclosing the discovery of some classified files before the November midterm elections.

The discovery comes as former US President Donald Trump also faces a probe over his alleged mishandling of hundreds of classified documents at his Florida Mar-a-Lago residence and his alleged failure to comply with a subpoena. Mr Trump and his lawyers resisted handing over the documents until the FBI raided his Florida holiday home last August. He alleges that President Biden is being treated more favourably by the FBI.

OIC UNA strongly condemns desecration of Holy Quran in Sweden

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Union of Organization of Islamic Cooperation News Agencies (UNA-OIC) Sunday strongly condemned the vile act of desecration of the Holy Quran by far-right activists in front of the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm, Sweden.

"UNA warns that this provocative action, which is considered a hate crime and has been committed repeatedly by far-right extremists, targets Muslims, insults their sacred values, and serves as a further example of the alarming level reached by Islamophobia, hate, intolerance, and xenophobia," a press release said.

The UNA further urged the Swedish authorities to take necessary measures against the perpetrators of this hate crime and called for increased international efforts to prevent the re-occurrence of such acts and for solidarity to fight Islamophobia.

UN Alliance of Civilizations condemns desecration of Holy Quran in Sweden as 'insulting' to Muslims: The top official for the U.N. Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), Miguel Moratinos, has "unequivocally" condemned the "vile" act of burning the holy Quran in Sweden on Saturday by leader of the far-right party Hard Line, saying it was an affront to Muslims.

"It is disrespectful and insulting to the adherents of Islam and should not be conflated with freedom of expression," Moratinos, the High Representative of UNAOC, an initiative aimed at galvanizing international

action against extremism, said in a statement issued at UN Headquarters in New York on Sunday.

"While the High Representative stresses the importance of upholding the freedom of expression as a fundamental human right, he also emphasizes that the act of Quran-burning, amounts to an expression of hatred towards Muslims," the statement said. Recalling the UN General Assembly resolution of 26 January 2021 that reaffirms that the exercise of freedom of expression carries with it duties and responsibilities, the High Representative expressed his "deep concern" at the overall rise in instances of discrimination, intolerance and violence, regardless of the actors, directed against members of many religious and other communities in various parts of the world, including cases motivated by Islamophobia, anti-semitism and Christianophobia and prejudices against persons of other religions or beliefs.

"The High Representative further stresses that mutual respect is essential for building and promoting just, inclusive and peaceful societies rooted in human rights and dignity for all," the statement said.

"In this context," it added, "the High-Representative recalls the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites led by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, which provides an overarching framework and a set of recommendations including strength-

ening religious pluralism and promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue , mutual respect and understanding."

Meanwhile, asked for reaction, Farhan Aziz Haq, the UN deputy spokesperson, told APP, "We believe all religions and cultures must be treated with respect." UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is traveling abroad. He is currently in Cape Verde, the westernmost point of continental Africa.

NA speaker denounces desecration of Holy Quran in Sweden: National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and Deputy Speaker Zahid Akram Durrani on Sunday denounced the desecration and burning of a copy of the Holy Quran during a protest in Stockholm, Sweden, describing it as the biggest threat to world's peace. In a statement, the speaker and deputy speaker said the heinous act of desecration of the Holy Quran has hurt the religious sentiments of Muslims all over the world.

They said that Islam is a peaceful religion and respects the teachings and beliefs of all religions.

The speaker said that no one can be allowed to desecrate the holy books belonging to other religions under the guise of freedom of expression. He said that these kinds of heinous incidents create hatred for each other. They emphasized the need to take immediate action against the elements involved in this heinous act.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Chairman Maulana Syed Muhammad Abdul Khabir Azad here on Sunday announced that the moon of Rajab 1444 AH was not sighted at any nook and cranny of the country. Chairing the meeting of Zonal Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Islamabad at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, he said that the first of Rajab-ul-Murajab would fall on Tuesday, January 24.

Man commits suicide after killing wife, daughter

LAHORE (APP): A man committed suicide after allegedly killing his wife and minor daughter and injuring another at Dhalla flats, Liaquatabad, here on Sunday. Police said that Mohsin Masih took his wife and daughter to meet a pastor. In the presence of pastor, the husband and wife quarreled over some issue. After exchange of harsh words with his wife, the accused opened fire on her and his minor daughter. As a result, his wife Maria (30) and daughter Hania (3), received severe bullet injuries and died on-the-spot. The pastor, Azhar Khokhar, was also injured during firing, and shifted to a hospital in critical condition.

Later on, the accused committed suicide by shooting himself in his head. On receiving information, Rescue-1122 personnel reached the spot and shifted three bodies to Lahore General Hospital for post-mortem. Police started investigation after collecting evidence from the crime scene.

German, French CGs celebrate ‘Élysée Treaty’

KARACHI (APP): Consul General of France to Karachi Alexis Chahtahtinsky and Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany Dr. Rüdiger Lotz on Sunday celebrated the signing of ‘Élysée Treaty’ 60 years ago.

They termed it as a historic treaty of friendship.

The treaty on Franco-German cooperation was ratified at the Élysée Palace in Paris on January 22, 1963, ‘After World War II, France reached out to its former enemy and treated Germany as a partner.’ They said 60 years have been the happiest in our two countries history.

They said Germany and France have shown how two nations, formerly hostile to each other, can achieve unprecedented friendship and cooperation. This was neither easy nor natural. ‘It requires a great deal of leadership and political wisdom on both sides’, they added.

Today as Germany and France celebrate the 60th anniversary of the 1963 Élysée Treaty in a place where symbolically, the Alliance Française and the Goethe-Institut have come together, under the same roof, to bring French and German language and culture closer to the people of Karachi. France and Germany do believe that this friendship can serve as an example.

4 dead, 1,030 injured in Punjab road accidents

LAHORE (APP): At least four persons were killed and 1,030 others were injured in 974 road traffic crashes in Punjab during the last 24 hours.

As many as 542 seriously injured people were shifted to different hospitals while 488 with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by the rescue medical teams.

The data analysis showed that 502 drivers, 26 under-age drivers, 144 pedestrians, and 388 passengers were among the victims of the road traffic crashes. The statistics show that 254 accidents were reported in Lahore, which affected 248 persons, placing the provincial capital at top of the list, followed by 65 in Multan with 63 victims, and at third Faisalabad with 61 victims. According to the data, 791 motorbikes, 72 auto-rickshaws, 132 motorcars, 31 vans, eight passenger buses, 15 trucks and 81 other types of vehicles and slow-moving carts were involved in the road accidents.

Dolphin Squad, PRU arrest 40

LAHORE (APP): The Dolphin Squad and Police Response Unit arrested 40 suspected criminals during the last week and recovered six motorcycles, eight mobile phones and thousands of rupees in cash from them.

The both police squads responded to 2015 calls, received on the helpline during the same period.

American businessman meets CM Punjab

LAHORE (APP): Pakistani origin American businessman and leader of the Democratic Party Tahir Javed met Chief Minister Punjab Chaudhry Parvez Elahi at the CM Office on Sunday.

The guest appreciated the exemplary steps taken by the Punjab chief minister for well-being of the people of Punjab in a short span of time. He said that under the able leadership of CM Parvez Elahi, the Punjab government undertook five years work in just five months.

Tahir Javed acknowledged that Parvez Elahi had set a new example of rendering public service likewise his previous tenure. He said that declaring Punjab and American State California a ‘Sister State’ was a milestone step of CM Parvez Elahi and congratulated him on the initiative.

The CM said that the agreement to declare Punjab and California a ‘Sister State’ would promote trade, economic and business relations between Punjab and California. The CM highlighted that bilateral trade would enhance between Punjab and American State California, adding that relations in education, health, information technology, environment and culture sectors would also be promoted.

He said that the agreement would further augment bilateral relations between Punjab and California.

The CM lauded the Pakistani people residing in America for vigorously helping the flood-affecteds and praised the philanthropists for generously giving their dona-

tions in the CM Flood Relief Fund.

He said that the Punjab government utilised the donated amount for rehabilitation and settlement of the flood-affecteds in a transparent manner.

Parvez Elahi condemns Holy Quran desecration in Sweden: Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi strongly condemned desecration of Holy Quran in Sweden. According to official sources here on Sunday, the chief minister said that desecration of Holy Quran was heartrending action. He said that no society could ever imagine of desecrating holy books and there was no room for such heinous action in any religion as well. He said that such an action in the garb of freedom of expression was not tolerable. Parvez Elahi said that the heinous action of Sweden had actually hurt the sentiments of Muslims living all over the world.” Respect of Holy Quran was an integral part of the faith of Muslims, he added.

CM condoles death of PA Secretary’s elder brother: Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi visited the residence of Secretary Punjab Assembly Inayatullah Lak at GOR2 on Sunday.

He expressed his deep sense of sorrow with the secretary over the sad demise of his elder brother. He expressed his heartfelt sympathies and condolences with Inayatullah Lak and the bereaved family. He offered Fateha for the departed soul and prayed for grant of fortitude to the bereaved family.

Pakistan Post issues 11 commemorative postage stamps during 2022

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Post issued a total of 11 postage stamps here Sunday to commemorate different important occasions and honoring the great personalities and their achievements through the year 2022.

Among these 11 stamps issued last year, the first stamp of this year was issued on January, 01, 2022 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the diplomatic relation between Pakistan and Japan. The diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Japan were established on 28th April 1952. Pakistan was among the first in few countries that ratified the Japan Peace Treaty. The second commemorative stamp of Rs. 20 denomination was issued on January, 14, 2022 to mark the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Spain. Its images of Plaza de Cibeles, Spain and Islamia College Peshawar aimed to celebrate the friendly relations between our two countries, Pakistan-Spain ties are marked by cordiality, underpinned by commonality of views and shared interests of democracy, pluralism, peace and security.

Pakistan Post issued third stamp on March 23, 2022 on the occasion of 48th Session of OIC Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), held on March 22 and 23, 2022 in Islamabad, under the theme of ‘Partnering for Unity, Justice and Development’.

The meeting holds special significance as it will coincide with the 75th anniversary celebrations of Pakistan’s independence. To celebrate the 100 glorious years

of one of the most influential institutions for the women education in Pakistan, Lahore College for Women University Lahore (1922-2022), Pakistan Post issued 4th commemorative postage stamp of the year on May, 25, 2022 portraying the images of the University on it.

Pakistan Post issued 5th stamp of the year on July, 25, 2022 on the occasion of centennial celebration of Attock Refinery Limited (ARL). The ARL is a pioneer of crude oil refining in the country with its operations dating back to 1922.

On the occasion of the diamond Jubilee of Pakistan (1947-2022), the Pakistan Post issued a commemorative stamp on August 14, 2022, portraying the monuments of Pakistan on it. The stamp also comprises the words of “75 years of Independence and service” and “The true spirit of independence, Unity, Faith and discipline” along with the logo of the Diamond Jubilee celebration The 7th stamp of the year was also issued on August 14, 2022, on the occasion of 11th Edition of the International Defense Exhibition and Seminar (IDEAS) 2022. IDEAS is a continuous success story since year 2000 and now an established rendezvous of international defense exhibitors, high level delegations, security analysts and top-ranking policy planners.

To mark 75th founding anniversary of the universally recognized outstanding performance and achievements of “Pakistan Institute of International Affairs”, Pakistan Post issued 8th stamp of the year on 14th November, 2022.

34 shops,restaurants sealed over violating business hours

LAHORE (APP): In an operation under the anti-smog campaign, the district administration sealed 34 shops and restaurants in the provincial capital during the last 24 hours.

Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Ali, talking to the media on Sunday, said nine restaurants and bakeries were sealed in tehsil city while seven in Model Town, eight in Shalimar, six in tehsil Raiwind and four marriage hall and marquee were sealed on Beddian Road.

He said the outlets were running after 10:00pm which was a violation of the

rules, adding that shops could be operated till 10:00pm from Monday to Thursday and 11:00pm from Friday to Sunday as per rules. The DC urged the business operators to observe official timings for business activities, otherwise, action would be taken as the anti-smog campaign was effectively underway.

Meanwhile, the DC directed assistant commissioners to ensue monitoring and inspections of prices of commodities.

He ordered that DC counters should be maintained in stores and price list should be displayed at prominent places in shops.

Speakers stress special initiatives for promotion of art, craft in country

LAHORE (APP): Speakers at the third Unique Art & Craft Exhibition have stressed special measures for promotion of art and craft in the country, which will help open up new vistas of the art and culture sector.

The inaugural ceremony of the exhibition was held at Alhamra Art Council, The Mall, by the Unique Group of Institutions (UGIs) and the Lahore Arts Council, said a press release issued here on Sunday.

The speakers said that educational institutions and teachers could play a crucial role in promotion of art and craft among the young generation, especially students of institutions of higher learning. Addressing the ceremony, Lahore Arts Council Board

of Governors Chairman Raziuddin Ahmad said that the current exhibition was reflective of new generation’s aspirations and their creative faculties.

He said seeing enthusiasm and organised efforts of the Unique Group, the Lahore Arts Council decided to join hands with it for organising a festival to promote art and craft in the country.

Well-known artist and poet Shah Nawaz Zaidi told the audience that art stirs hidden capabilities of human being and helps people become successful professionals. He said today’s students have more opportunities available to them and they could play a proactive role in promotion of art and craft in society.

Known cartoonist Javed Iqbal said that our educational institutions mostly ignore co-curricular and extracurricular activities, though these are a must for their educational growth on sound footing. He said Unique Group of Institutions was playing a unique role in promotion of art and craft in society. He said art was a complete discipline like medical and engineering, and it should be given equal importance. UGI Chairman Prof Abdul Mannan Khurram said that every individual has hidden creative abilities, and teachers and enabling environment of educational institutions bring out and polish that talent among students.



LAHORE: Federal Minister Mian Javed Latif addressing a press conference.

Abhorrent act of Holy Quran’s desecration hurt religious sentiments of Muslims globally: Ashrafi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister’s Special Representative for Interfaith Harmony and Middle East Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi on Sunday said the abhorrent act of the Holy Quran’s desecration in Sweden badly hurt the religious sentiments of 1.5 billion Muslims on the globe.

Condemning the incident in the strongest terms while talking to APP, Ashrafi who is also the Chairman of Pakistan Ulama Council said it could be a plot to fuel the

anti-Muslim violence under the pretext of advocating freedom of speech in the world.

He urged the Swedish government to adopt the measures to prevent recurrence of such disgraceful incidents in the future and should not allow extremists and radical elements to spread hatred against Islamic sanctities and values. He said such actions had nothing to do with freedom of expression and under the international human rights law, nobody was allowed to carry out hate speech and incite peo-

ple to violence.

He also urged the United Nations, Organization of Islamic Cooperation and United States Commission on International Religious Freedom to take punitive action against the far-right politician in Sweden for desecrating the divine command.

Ashrafi said that Islam was a religion of peace and Muslims, including in Pakistan, believed in respecting all the religions, adding that this code of conduct must be followed by all to create religious pluralism in the world.

8 shopkeepers arrested

KARACHI (APP): A campaign to implement official rates of wheat flour in Karachi Division is underway, and around eight shopkeepers have been arrested and a fine of over Rs 0.4 million has been imposed in violation of official rates.

The arrests have been made on the directives of Commissioner Karachi Mohammed Iqbal Memon to implement the official price, said a communique here on Sunday.

Following the directives, the Deputy Commissioners (DCs) imposed fines on 85 shopkeepers and collected over Rs 0.4 million.

The DCs had also submitted a report on the matter to the Commissioner.

According to the report, 24 shopkeepers were violated in district South, 30 in district East, 11 in West and 10 each in districts Central and Malir.

Forest Department working on converting fog into water: chief conservator

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Forest Department is going to start work on a project to convert fog into water in hilly, desert and other potential areas, in an effort to promote horticulture and get drinking water in water-scarce areas.

Department’s Chief Conservator Saqib Mahmood told APP here on Sunday that the method of obtaining water from fog is called ‘fog collector’. For the last 30 years, many countries had been working on it, and this experiment has been successful in various countries including Malaysia, Chile, South America, Peru, Ghana,

South Africa, Eritrea, California, Morocco and Middle East. They are not only watering the plants but also getting drinking water from fog collectors, he explained.

Though a number of counties are obtaining water for drinking as well as for plants through this method, it was still being done on an experimental basis in the world, he said. He continued that many countries were getting huge benefits from this method; but this would be the first of its kind in Pakistan, to be started as a pilot project and around 100 saplings

would be planted under this project.

Saqib Mahmood said that the department had given green signal to start work on this pilot project, adding that some areas of Rawalpindi were considered to be most suitable for the purpose. The chief conservator explained, “This method is very successful in areas where the amount of water in fog is high, particularly in hilly areas. The vapors in the air take the form of liquid water droplets and this phenomenon is most observable on thin, flat, exposed objects, including plant leaves and grass blades.

Empowering women – a key to societal transformation

LAHORE (APP): Women’s economic empowerment in any society is central to realizing their rights and enabling them to equally participate in businesses, setting up entrepreneur, control over productive resources and economic decision-making.

As the world changes from conventional to digital mode, imparting them training on the latest techniques can also have a trickle-down effect on our younger generation making it healthier, more sensible and more productive for a secure future.

Acknowledged internationally this priority is at the heart of the policies of all important institutions including the World Bank as mentioned in its report “Women, Business and the Law 2022.” Presenting an index covering the potential of around 190 economies and structured around the life cycle of working women, the World Bank, in the overall count, has awarded Pakistan a 55.6 score out of 100. However, in terms of laws affecting women’s decisions to work, Pakistan secures a perfect score of 100.

Therefore, respective provincial governments in the country are now focusing other areas to improve on the international score card with Punjab already taking number of steps for women empowerment.

“Punjab government took number of initiatives for legal and economic empowerment of women,” said former spokesperson for Punjab Government, Mussarat JamshaidCheema. “Punjab Women Development Department had embarked on initiatives like women employment, entrepreneurship, decision-making, property ownership, education and vocational training.”

Since implementation of decision relates to government departments, therefore despite dissolution, the Women Development Department (WDD) is carrying forward the agenda of enhanced women participation in different arena of life.

“Women participation is imperative for nation building and prosperity of our country. Therefore, keeping aloof half of country’s population from this process would be no service

to nation,” she stated.

Women Development Department (WDD) of the Punjab government in recent years took number of initiatives to ensure adequate and considerable representation of women in the government service.

“Presently, 14 percent women are working in provincial government departments,” said an official at WDD. “The government has also made it mandatory to ensure presence of at least one woman in selection committees in all departments.”

The Punjab Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) has also acknowledged that the provincial government was ensuring women empowerment and protection of their rights through capacity building of all local government incumbents regarding new laws about women.

With a cost of Rs. 87.937 million, PCSW had initiated training sessions for Nikah Registrars to train them on legal drafts, amendments, policies, registration, rights and proper filling of Nikah Nama. These Master Trainers have imparted training to Nikah Registrars and Local Government Officials in respective districts also providing them copies of 28,000 manuals during training sessions. The training session also covered topics about important amendments in laws related to Birth Registration, Muslim Family Laws, Inheritance and Marriage Restraint Act, Child Marriage Act and Women Protection Act.

“This activity would ensure protection of women rights and their safety against exploitation and discrimination at the time of Nikah and in case of divorce,” said Mufti Zubair Ahmad from Jamia Ashrafia. The provincial administration has also envisioned a residency program across the province named “Transitional Housing” (Second-Stage Housing) - for women who are victims of violence. This project would provide support services to victims or affected women and is designed as a bridge to self-sufficiency.

Despite all these initiatives, some of the human rights activists have

strongly advocated to protect rights of female agriculture workers.

“Agricultural sector bears pivotal importance in our economy and employs millions of female workers. Therefore, it may be given the status of an industry to ensure better wages to female workers,” said Bushra Khaliq, Executive Director at an NGO ‘Women in Struggle for Empowerment (WISE)’.

“Since women are key contributors in the progress of agricultural economy, food security and overall economic growth, therefore rights of female agrarian workers must be protected on priority,” she said. “Household workers and agrarian workwomen are the most vulnerable segments and deserve immediate attention.” Although different projects are underway, the experts still believe that educating women to certain level can be the best service for protecting their rights.

“Education is a key to empowerment. Educated women and girls can better contribute in national development as well as effectively protect their rights,” said noted educationist Professor Dr. Fakhar-ul-Haq Noori.

“No nation can progress by confining its half of the population at home,” she said. “Women must be equipped with modern education, ensured equal rights and provided unbiased opportunities to excel in all walks of life,” Noori said.

She also underlined the need for creating an encouraging environment especially for rural women to participate in decision-making, trade unions, public speaking, cooperatives and related associations.

Since a lot Hinduism era practices still reflect in our societal behaviors, therefore it is shared responsibility of clerics and religious scholars to promote Islamic concepts especially those related to women rights as no other religion gives more rights to women than Islam. As a second step, concerned authorities must diligently pursue women empowerment agenda ensuring that all laws framed in this regard are fully implemented to generate desired results.



Work on gas projects to be start soon

PESHAWAR (APP): Engr Amir Muqam, Adviser to the Prime Minister for Political and Public Affairs, National Heritage and Culture here Sunday said that work on gas projects approved by our government in 2013 would be soon started and directives for its speedy launching has been issued to the concerned authorities.

He said PMLN preparations for the upcoming election has been completed and his party would contest it in KP and Punjab under an inclusive strategy as all eyes of people are on PML-N after a poor performance of PTI.

He expressed these views while addressing a jirga of the party leaders and workers here at Sangota Swat. He said that billions of rupees gas projects were approved for different areas of Swat by PMLN Government in 2013.

These projects were also approved for gas deprived areas of Kanju- Matta, Matta-Khwazakhela and adjoining areas.

However, he claimed that the PTI Government has stopped work on these gas projects after it was

imposed on the province in 2018 and unfortunately work could not be started on it since that time.

He said that former Chief Minister Mahmood Khan had played no role in approval of these gas projects and has taken back the provided fund under this head, and its proof and evidence was available.

Muqam said he was not levelling allegations against former Chief Minister Mahmood Khan but it was a fact that these people have created obstacles in way of execution of these gas projects in Swat.

Amir Muqam said that a meeting with sui gas authorities were held for revival of all these projects and it was decided that our gas projects approved in 2013 would be restored and survey work would be completed in two to three days. He said formal work on these projects would be started in seven to 10 days.

The PM aide said that he would now talk with the concerned authorities for lifting ban on gas connections, and that people rights would be protected.

He said that exemption of Malakand division from

more taxes has been discussed with the prime minister and efforts would be made to exempt it from taxes in line with wishes and sentiments of its people.

He said that demands of people were also brought into the notice of the Prime Minister.

He said that Prime Minister's attention was also diverted to floods, corona and law and order situation in Malakand division, adding in such situations enforcement of taxes would be an injustice with the people of Malakand division.

He said that efforts would be made to grant more extension in tax free zone's status to Malakand division.

He said that PML-N senior vice president Maryam Nawaz Sharif would soon come to Pakistan to lead the party election campaign.

He said that people would reject all those elements in election, who made politics for personal gains instead to address people problems.

He said that PML-N would achieve landslide victory during election in KP and Punjab.

Police mobile targeted in Peshawar IED explosion

PESHAWAR (INP): A police mobile van targeted with an IED attack in Badhber area of Peshawar, but no losses of life happened.

An improvised explosive device (IED) was detonated at the boundary of Khyber district when a patrolling van of Badhber police station passing by. The vehicle had minor damage with the explosion but the policemen including Shekhan police post in-charge Nasir Khan remained unscathed in the incident, police said.

According to the bomb disposal unit, around one KG explosives were used in the bomb attack.

Police has launched a search operation in the area and evidence being collected from the crime scene, officials said.

AAC inspects drainage systems

PESHAWAR (APP): Additional Assistant Commissioner (AAC) Revenue Dir Lower Tariq Khan, on the directives of the Deputy Commissioner Dir Lower Captain (Retd) Muhammad Zubair Khan Niazi, on Sunday paid a surprise visit to check the water flow and cleanliness of the main drainage system developed for draining out the rain water from roads.

The AAC visited Shekolai Road, Talash and Shamshi Khan road and directed for the construction and rehabilitation of the damaged bridges to ensure smooth flow of traffic and avoid unnecessary traffic jam besides checking the cleanliness of the drainage system as well. He said that due to poor sanitation, the rain waters was accumulating on the roads causing difficulties for the citizens.

He, along with NHA staff, supervised the cleaning of drains along Shekolai Road. The AAC, along with consulting contractors, visited approved sites for bridges at Talash and Shamshi Khan to make alternative routes for traffic flow during the construction of the bridges.

Measures afoot to ensure facilities at schools

PESHAWAR (APP): The district administration is taking solid measures to ensure all required facilities in educational institutions.

As part of such efforts, Assistant Commissioner Pharpur Tehsil Aneeq Anwar paid a visit to various schools where he inspected facilities including clean drinking water and academic activities there.

The AC also inspected cleanliness conditions and instructed the relevant staff to carry out cleanliness on the premises on a daily basis in order to ensure an enabling environment for students for learning.

Later, he also checked the attendance register and instructed the staff to ensure their regular presence in order to contribute their services towards building a prosperous society through promotion of education.

As result of illiteracy and political intolerance, he said that assemblies did complete its five years constitutional term and huge financial resources were being wasted on holdings of re-elections in the country.

According to Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) 2021 survey, about 22.8 million children were out-of-schools (OSC) in the country including 4.7 million children aged between 5 to 16 years in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The OSC included 2.9 million girls and one million belonged to merged tribal districts.

As many as 74.4 percent of girls and 38.5 percent boys are out of school in the province. Besides 77 percent reported OSC in Palas Kolai, 70 percent in Upper Kohistan and 69 percent in Upper Kohistan, there are reports of about



PESHAWAR: Residents of Chitral hold protest in favour of their rights. — F.P. photo by Ghulam Murtaza

Shaukat Ali visits different police stations

PESHAWAR (APP): District Police Officer Bajaur Shaukat Ali along with Circle DSP Nimatullah Khan and SHO of Khar Police Station Saeedur Rahman visited different police stations and check-post and held an important meeting regarding security with its in-charges in view of the current security situation across the district.

During the visit to Khar Police Station, they dis-

cussed various steps in detail to deal with any untoward situation.

The DSP and SHO issued strict instructions to all the in-charges of outposts to ensure the presence of police officers around their out-post in view of the current situation.

They also directed the officials and Jawans of the Police force to strictly monitor the environment, miscreants and criminal ele-

ments and other aliens. They said that police force should use bulletproof jackets, helmets and keep night vision equipments by avoiding the use of mobile phones while performing their duties.

Strict action will be taken against the in-charges and official who were found absent from duty or without bulletproof jacket, helmet or using mobile phone during duty hours, the warned.

Sewing Training Center for orphans, widows opened

PESHAWAR (APP): District Social Welfare Officer Mardan Jamal Shah Mohmand, Additional Assistant Commissioner Headquarters Junaid Khalid and CEO of Concept Corporation Muhammad Arif Atuzai visited Majidabad Power Plant Mardan and inaugurated Bin Rayan Sewing Training Centre for orphan girls and widows.

Speaking on the occasion, Social Welfare Officers Jamal Shah Mohmand, Junaid Khalid and Mohammad Arif Atuzai appreciated the establishment of the sewing

centre and congratulated the management.

"Today's women are not only taking care of children and fulfilling household responsibilities, but they are also generating resources to meet the household expenses," Jamal Shah said.

He said the government is very serious about women's rights and their protection. Along with this, work is ongoing on various projects to make women financially independent, he added.

Chairman of Zamung Ezwa Welfare Society

Mardan Muhammad Parvez said that women are more than half of the country's population, and we cannot develop without empowering them. Zamung Ezwa Welfare Society is doing a great job in this regard,, he added.

Empowering unemployed women to start dignified employment by making them skilled through technical education, he said.

He said that women should master new skills and train other women in their area so that they could be able to earn on their own.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Muhammad Azam Khan and Chief Secretary Dr. Shahzad Bangash meeting with Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali at Governor's House.

FPCCI calls for simplification of tax system

PESHAWAR (APP): Regional Coordinator, Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI), Sartaj Ahmad Khan has called for the simplification of the tax system to enable the business community and others to file their taxes through online procedure.

He said that the reformation and simplification of the tax system will not only enhance the national tax net rather will also promote

business activities in the country.

Addressing a joint meeting of the FPCCI and Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, he urged the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority to take the business community into confidence regarding taxation and hold awareness sessions like seminars and workshops regarding benefits of tax depositing.

He further urged KPRA

to introduce a one-window operation and make online payment of taxes highly simple, so the business community could not face any hardships in depositing their taxes.

Speaking on the occasion, Chairman, All Pakistan Commercial Exporters Association (APCEA), Minhajuddin said that all businessmen are keen on depositing of their taxes, but due to lack of facilitation they are facing hard-

ships in this regard.

He urged the management of KPRA to make its online portal simplified and easily accessible for trading community.

On this occasion, the representatives of Pakistan Academy for Rural Development assured the trading community for redressal of their tax related issues and said that the state machinery is working through trade and business activities.

Bus Rapid Transit service launching super express route

PESHAWAR (APP): Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Peshawar is launching a Super Express Route from tomorrow (Monday) January 23, 2022.

According to a spokesperson of TransPeshawar, the Super Express service Route (XER-15

would be operated from Chamkani to Mall of Hayatabad and take only 30 minutes.

After the passage of every 12-minute, a bus will leave from platform No.1 at Chamkani station and will stop at Sardar Ghari, Malik Saad Shaheed, University of Peshawar and Mall of

Peshawar stations.

The service will operate from Chamkani at 7:30 A.M till 3:20 P.M while from the Mall of Hayatabad it will operate from 8:10 A.M till 4:00 P.M. The service is introduced while keeping in view the crowd of commuters at peak hours. The service will

remain active for days a week from Monday till Friday.

The spokesperson said that the operation of the service will save the precious time of commuters and minimize crowed in the service.

Shopkeepers warned

PESHAWAR (APP): The district administration is committed to providing quality edible items to citizens at affordable prices.

In this regard, Additional Assistant Commissioner Naurang Gohar Ali paid a visit to the bazaar and checked the designated government flour distribution points to ensure the

availability of stock for distribution.

Later, he also visited shops to check the price, quantity and expiry of essential food commodities in Naurang Bazaar.

During inspection, different shops were checked and heavy fines were imposed on violators on the spot.

He said that shopkeepers

should display price list at prominent places at their shops and sell items at officially prescribed rates.

He said that the administration was committed to extending relief to citizens and warned that action would be taken against those shopkeepers who were found to be overcharging people.

Anti-narcotics operation in progress

PESHAWAR (APP): On the directives of the District Police Officer (DPO) North Waziristan, grand operation against narcotics sellers is full swing as three accused have been arrested and collectively 19,740 kilograms of hashish were arrested during an intelligence-based operation, said a press release issued here on Sunday.

The operation has been launched as per vision of the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Muazzam Jah Ansari and Regional Police Officer (RPO) Bannu, Syed Ashfaq Anwar to cleanse the region of the menace of narcotics.

The alleged narcotics sellers arrested by North Waziristan Police have been identified as Rahim son of Bakht Daraz, resident of Zarmoom (Mir Ali), Raheedullah son of Sakhi Rehman, resident of Zaker Khel (Mir Ali) AND Said Rehman son of Noor Rehman, resident of Harmz (Mir Ali), Usman resident of Miami Kabul Khel.

Narcotics cases have been registered against the accused and further investigations were in progress.



PESHAWAR: An artist making handmade decoration item at his workplace.

Illiteracy poses challenge to country's democratic, economic stability

PESHAWAR (APP): Besides socioeconomic imbalances and political intolerance, illiteracy has also damaged political and economic stability in most of developing countries including Pakistan where about 22 million children were still out-of-schools (OSC) due to poverty.

Political experts observed that illiteracy was detrimental to democratic and economic growth apparently due to its potential of creating such an environment, which not only endangers the very existence of the democratic system but also deprives electorates of all fruits promised by a democratic dispensation.

"Democracy mainly suffer due to unawareness of electorates about importance of politics, their role in a political government

and making accountability of political parties through votes due to lack education," said Professor Dr AH Hilali, former Chairman Political Science Department, University of Peshawar while talking to APP.

He said this lack of education unawareness leads to unwise and imprudent decisions at the time of elections and resultantly, the state, despite having a democratic form of government, remains deprived of the most suitable persons to runs its affairs.

Besides wrong decisions and attitudes, he said that illiteracy can also affect democracy by causing a large gap of non-participation in politics by the populace, which may leads to anarchy and derailment of a democratic government as evident in our country's history.

As result of illiteracy and political intolerance, he said that assemblies did complete its five years constitutional term and huge financial resources were being wasted on holdings of re-elections in the country.

According to Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) 2021 survey, about 22.8 million children were out-of-schools (OSC) in the country including 4.7 million children aged between 5 to 16 years in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The OSC included 2.9 million girls and one million belonged to merged tribal districts.

As many as 74.4 percent of girls and 38.5 percent boys are out of school in the province. Besides 77 percent reported OSC in Palas Kolai, 70 percent in Upper Kohistan and 69 percent in Upper Kohistan, there are reports of about

61 percent of such children in Torghar, 55pc in Shangla, 53 percent in Lakki Marwat and 51 percent each in Tank and Batagram districts.

In merged areas, 66 percent of children are out-of-school in North Waziristan, 63 percent in Bajaur, 61 percent in South Waziristan, 51 percent each in Mohmand and Khyber, and 47 percent each in Kurram and Orakzai and bringing them under school net was necessary to reap all fruits of democracy.

Wajid Ali Khan, ANP leader and former Minister said that the highest number of OSC in KP as revealed by BISP has exposed the tall claims of former PTI government regarding decrease of illiteracy, an increase in children's enrolment in schools and implementation of a

uniform education policy.

He said the education sector was devolved to provinces under the 18th constitutional amendment and under article 25-A of the constitution, and that it was the responsibility of the former PTI government that ruled the province for nearly 10 years to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to metric level but completely failed to do so.

He said neither the promises of uninformed education were fulfilled nor the dual education system was abolished in the province while the private schools continued sucking the blood of millions of people with a roaring increase in tuition fee every year while PTI leadership paid a deaf ear to it.

To eradicate illiteracy

and bring OSC under schools net, the Federal Government under BISP has started Education Scholarship Program to motivate parents to enroll their children and discourage students dropout rate.

Under the BISP, Rs1500 per three months were being provided to each boy student and Rs2000 to girl at primary level, Rs2500 for boy and Rs3000 for girl at the secondary level and Rs3500 for boy and Rs4000 per girl at higher secondary school level.

Since the inception of the BISP, over 9.4 million children were enrolled to date and over Rs40 billion were disbursed under BISP's Education Scholarship program, said Ikhtiar Wali, PMLN KP spokesman.

Talking to APP, he said the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has recently

launched five key initiatives include 200,000 Internships for young engineers, uplifting of the 20-poor districts of Pakistan including erstwhile Fata and Balochistan, establishment of 250 mini sport complexes, establishment of Pakistan Innovation Fund, and 75 national top talent scholarships programme for education and socioeconomic empowerment of youth.

The spokesman of Elementary and Secondary Education Department KP said that over 850,000 students were enrolled last year in KP.

He said that about 50,000 students were also enrolled in 1,443 second shift schools.

He maintained that COVID-19 was the main reason behind the increase of drop-out of students.

He said Stars of KP, Rehamatul Alamin and ETEA merit scholarships were launched to increase the student's enrollment in the province.

As many as 200 alternate learning pathways centers would be opened for children aged 9-16 for OSC while Rs3 billion would be spent on converting two rooms schools to six rooms besides converting mosques schools into schools.

The construction of 100 new primary schools was proposed for the upcoming fiscal year while 150 middle schools to secondary schools in settled districts would be achieved.

He said a rupees one billion projects was proposed for the establishment of early childhood education program to be executed in next fiscal year.



In brief

Two killed in road mishap

PAKPATTAN (INP): Two people including a woman were killed in a dreadful road accident here on Sunday. Rescue sources said that a tractor trolley ran over a motorcycle carrying two people in Pakpattan city resultantly two including a woman were killed on the spot. The bodies were shifted to District Headquarter Hospital for post-mortem and police after registering a case against the driver of tractor trolley started an investigation.

7 injured after blast triggered

ATTOCK (PPI): Seven people were injured after the roof of a house collapsed due to a blast caused by gas leakage on Sunday, rescue officials said. The incident took place at a house in Haroon village of Tehsil Hazro. The injured included husband and wife with their five children. Rescue team reached the spot and shifted the victims to a hospital. The injured are said to be in a critical condition.

Minor girl recovered safely

FAISALABAD (APP): Tandlianwala police recovered a minor girl safely within a week of her abduction. A spokesman said here on Sunday that three-year-old Amina was kidnapped while playing outside her house in Chak No 414-GB on Jan 14, 2023. Her parents tried their best to search for her but in vain. They reported the incident to the area police. The police started investigation on scientific lines. Footage for the accused riding on a motorcycle was obtained from nearby CCTV cameras and circulated on the social media. 'Wanted' leaflets were displayed at important public places in the area for their identification. When the police tightened investigation circle around the accused, they dropped the kidnapped girl near her house and escaped from the scene. The police handed over the girl to her parents while the raids were still continuing for arrest of the culprits, he added.

Two accused arrested

BAHAWALPUR (INP): Sama Satta police have taken two drivers into custody for over-speeding who were violating traffic rules while passing through the area lying within the jurisdiction of the police station. A spokesman for Bahawalpur police said that a patrolling team of PS Sama Satta took notice that two drivers had been driving their vehicles at extra speed besides violating traffic rules. They were signaled to stop and later were taken into custody. The Sama Satta police have registered cases against the accused.

Mpeco issues new meters

MULTAN (APP): Mpeco has provided 31,536 new single-phase static meters and 351,360 meter PVC wires to all eight circles of the division to provide new connections to consumers. Director Material Management Mpeco, Engineer Malik Muhammad Arif Wains said on Sunday that new meters and PVC wires had been provided for the consumers who paid demand notices for new connections till December. He said that the single-phase meters have been provided for domestic and commercial connections. He said that Superintendent Engineers had been directed to receive material from all regional stores for early installation of new connections. He said that the concerned officers had been directed to submit the report regarding the installation of new connections with the headquarters.

Abbasi calls upon judiciary to right the wrongs done to Nawaz Sharif

QUETTA (INP): Former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Sunday said the judiciary should review its past decisions, urging it rectify the injustices done to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, whose return to Pakistan is expected soon.

Responding to a reporter's question during a joint press conference, Abbasi said: "The injustices done to Mian Nawaz

Sharif sahab we talk about Mian Nawaz Sharif returning to the country but we should also rectify those injustices and those injustices are very evident."

The PML-N leader has been holding a series of non-partisan talks along with other renowned political 'mavericks' such as former finance minister Miftah Ismail and former senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar on the current

economic and political issues in the country.

The speakers blamed all stakeholders including political parties, the military establishment and the judiciary for the problems the masses were facing and urged them to find a way out of the prevalent political and economic impasse in light of the Constitution instead of focusing on a power struggle.

BCDA to make master plan of coastal line

QUETTA (APP): The Balochistan Coastal Development Authority (BCDA) is working on the master planning of the coastal line of the province in order to determine the future feasibility of compressive development and preservation of natural ecosystem.

The Balochistan government was making serious efforts to frame the master plan of the coastal belt soon as the province possessed a plethora of tourist attractions along the 750-kilometre-long coastal belt, sources in the Balochistan government told APP on Sunday.

The construction work on the eco-tourism resorts, beach parks, floating jetties and rest area was in full swing with allied facilities in the coastal areas of Balochistan to cater for the

needs of local and foreign tourists visiting its beautiful coastal lines.

The construction work on the establishment of tourist resorts in Kund Malir, Gadani, Aurmara, Jiwhani, Gwadar and Kalamat was in the final stages as 90 per cent of development work had been done.

The government is working to develop its coastal areas to facilitate tourists and travellers in order to boost the blue economy, the source said.

In a bid to unlock the potential of the tourism sectors of Balochistan, the government had decided to preserve marine resources and the coastal ecosystem to combat coastal erosion with the plantation of coastal plants.

They said the government was striving to provide

basic and residential facilities at the sites, sound infrastructure, the best transport system and a safe environment to the visitors of the area. The Balochistan government has spent Rs 250 million on the establishment of five beach parks at the coastal belt, they added.

The provincial government has formulated Balochistan Coastal Development Authority to regulate commercial activities and ensure modern facilities in the area. The government has posted 215 lifeguards to facilitate the tourists and provide protection to them, the sources said and added that the provincial government was taking concrete measures to promote domestic tourism that could contribute huge revenue to the national exchequer.

Differences simmer among PTI leadership

JEHLUM (INP): Differences simmer among the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf leadership in Jhelum following Fawad Chaudhry's decision to contest for the provincial assembly seat from another constituency instead of the constituency in his own electric fiefdom, it surfaced on Sunday.

Reportedly, Fawad Chaudhry wants to contest the Punjab Assembly election not from his own constituency but from another constituency.

The decision of the former information minister was met with opposition by party's own leader, former MPA Raja Yawar Kamal.

The ex-MPA objected to the idea saying why Fawad wanted to contest from PP 25 and why he was shunning his own constituency PP 27?

Mr Kamal also accused his party of showing favouritism during the appointments of deputy commissioners.

He also alleged that recruitments were made in the education department and municipal committee in violation of merit.

The former MPA lashed out at the city deputy commissioner alleging that he was working on some 'unknown mission' and he was harming the PTI's reputation.

Extra force deputed on snow hit areas, says SP



F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: SP Hazara Motorway Syed Saqib Shah said that after receiving the fresh spell of snow last night, additional personnel has been deployed in Battal and Chinarkot for assistance and convenience of passengers. He expressed these views while talking to the media here Sunday.

He further said that an awareness campaign was also launched in these areas since the onset of winter, while officials were deputed

for awareness/information at Chinarkot and Kuzabanda toll plazas.

Saqib Shah said that snow-clearing machines have also been mobilized to clear the carriageway for all kinds of traffic. He said that before traveling in the snow-hit areas of the Hazara motorway, make sure that the vehicle is fully fit and the driver is experienced in driving on snow.

Moreover, the road can be slippery at night and early in the morning due to black ice which is a post

snow phenomenon, so avoid unnecessary travel during these times, adding SP Hazara motorway said.

He said that negligence and careless driving can cause severe losses, in case of any emergency, for any help or information contact the Motorway Police helpline number 130.

Besides other hilly areas of the Hazara division, the intermittent snowfall continued in the Battal and Chinarkot areas of Hazara Motorway for the third consecutive day on Sunday.

Hills station receives snowfall

DADU (INP): The Gorakh Hills Station, popularly called the Murree of Sindh, received the season's first snowfall after a gap of two years.

The resort is located at 5,800 feet above sea level in the Kirthar range, 90 kilometres from Dadu town.

According to Gorakh

Development Authority chairman Rafiq Ahmed Jamali, the minimum temperature in the region was recorded at -8 degrees Celsius, the lowest ever, during the last 24 hours.

The Gorakh Hill Station has been a majestic mountain site in Dadu district of Sindh, which is being

developed for several years to provide the people of Sindh with a hill station in their backyard. Gorakh is located in the Kirthar mountain range at an elevation of 1734m, along the border of Sindh and Balochistan.

Gorakh is still an underdeveloped hill station project. It is situated on



SWAT: Adviser to Prime Minister Engr. Amir Muqam listening people problems.

Flood victims in desperate need of assistance

QUETTA (APP): Secretary General of Balochistan National Party (Awami) and Provincial Minister for Agriculture, Balochistan Mir Asadullah Baloch said the flood-affected people were in desperate need of support but the province was always left alone in such natural disasters.

Talking to APP, he said the official matters were badly paralyzed because of the prevailing financial crisis in the province.

"Balochistan wants to get a suitable share of assistance for the rehabilitation of flood affectees pledged by global partners in donors conference held in Geneva," he added.

Baloch said the federal government has not provided Rs 40 billion in finances for the current financial year of Balochistan and Rs 11 billion were outstanding for the last financial year.

According to the constitution, Balochistan's share in the national finance commission (NFC) award was protected, but the province received Rs 11 billion less during the last financial year, while the payment for this quarter of the current financial year, which is close to Rs 40 billion was not provided.

"We demand our due share in the NFC award and not any relief package from the federation," he added.

Balochistan, he said was facing a severe financial crisis at present and did not even have money to pay the salaries of the employees.

He claimed that the federal government had not given funds to the province for the rehabilitation of the flood victims.

He called on the political leadership to make collective efforts for the signing of a new charter of democracy and economy for a stronger and prosperous Pakistan. He wanted all the parties to think of saving the country while keeping their interests at bay.

He said the system could be run better only by holding transparent elections in the country. However, he added, economic stability was necessary for conducting elections as they would cost the national exchequer over Rs 75 billion.

He said, "Balochistan's resources, including CPEC, Reko diq, Saindak, and minerals are discussed all over the world. Despite being a rich region, we are still suffering from poverty. The centre is not fulfilling its responsibility towards the province in a good way."

Asad Baloch said the development process in Balochistan has come to a standstill as the PSDP runs the system of the province, which was currently frozen. The provincial government had also cut PSDP, non-deployment expenditure, and on-going schemes, he added.

He added, "We asked for 10,000 tractors, and 200 bulldozers from the federal government, but nothing has been given. The provincial government has distributed seeds worth Rs 4 billion to farmers from its own resources."

Also, City, Quadrat Abad, Saeed Abad, Rasheed Abad and Taj Colony feeders originating from 132-KV University grid station, 7-JB, Ghausia Abad and Ramdewali feeders linked

‘Kachhi Canal to fulfill long standing demand of locals’

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan Minister for Irrigation, Muhammad Khan Lehri said the completion of Kachhi Canal project would fulfil the long-standing demand of the people of Balochistan and exert a positive impact on the economy of the entire region.

Talking to APP, he said the canal was a vital project to alleviate poverty and eradicate extremism in remote areas of the province by developing an agro-based economy.

"It is a good sign for the province that the land being cultivated in Sui and adjacent areas of the Dera Bugti district through the existing Kachhi Canal has brought a phenomenal change in the livelihood of the locals," Lehri said.

With the completion of Phase 2, a new era of development and prosperity would dawn in Naseerabad, Jhal Magsi and Kachhi Districts, he added.

Lehri said the survey work of phase three was in progress and the construction work of the second phase of the project would also be formally initiated.

He said the agriculture sector in Naseerabad district would be further developed and at the time of the closure of the canal system, it would be possible to supply water for irrigation and other needs from the Kachhi canal.

He said that WAPDA had played a very important role in the completion of the canal.

Lehri said that he himself was monitoring the quality of the construction work of the project.

He said that PC-1 of the second phase of the Kachhi Canal Project would be approved soon to extend the project by another 58 kilometres.

Phase 1 of the Kachhi canal project would be completed next month as

the development work of the project was near its completion, the minister said.

Phase-1 of the canal consisted of 363 kilometres in length and would be irrigated 103,000 acres of barren land in the Dera Bugti and adjoining areas, he added.

Under the expansion works, the existing main canal would be further extended by another 40 kilometres in the third phase of the project, he pointed out.

He said the project would irrigate a total area of 175,000 acres in Dera Bugti, Naseerabad, Jhal Magsi, Kachhi districts and other areas.

The 500 kilometres long canal, with a discharge capacity of 6,000 cusecs water, which takes off from Taunsa Barrage in Muzaffargarh district of Punjab enters Balochistan via Dera Bugti district.

Balochistan faces acute shortage of drinking water

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan is facing an acute shortage of clean drinking water as most of the water filtration plants installed at various locations in the province were out of order.

Due to faulty water filtration plants, a large part of the population in Balochistan has no access to potable water, civil societies said. "Only 25% of Balochistan's dwellers have access to clean drinking water", they added.

The local people urged the government to restore the closed water plants to ensure the provision of clean drinking water.

Talking to APP, an official of the Balochistan government said the government had decided to rehabilitate and restore water filtration plants in the province on an emergency basis to ensure quality drinking water to the masses.

Chief Minister Balochistan Abdul Quddus Bizenjo has directed the officials concerned to rehabilitate out-of-order filtration plants within a month, he added.

He said resolving the water issue was a top priority of the government as it had established water filtration plants in every district of the province to provide clean drinking water but they went out of order due to poor maintenance. Moreover, the government had also increased the salaries of operators of the water filtration plants, he added.

The official said through the restoration of water treatment plants, clean water would be available to all.

All available resources would be utilized for the early completion of clean water projects, he added.

Utilizing all resources, proper measures had been taken to keep all tube wells in the province operational so that the citizens would get water at scheduled times, he added.

He said the public health department had initiated many water supply schemes in each district of the province, however, it would take some time to get the facilities operational.

He said the government had been working on laying new water supply lines in the province to ensure potable water facilities everywhere.

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38 criminals arrested

MULTAN (APP): Police claimed on Sunday to have arrested 38 criminals besides recovering drugs and illegal weapons from their possession during a crackdown launched across the district in last 24 hours.

In line with special directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Shakir Hussain Dawar, the police launched a crackdown against criminals and arrested three notorious proclaimed offenders wanted to police in different cases of dacoity, robbery, theft and other crimes. The police have also apprehended a court absconder during the crackdown.

Meanwhile, six drug peddlers were arrested with 95 litre liquor and Hashish while three illegal weapon holders were arrested with three pistols and rounds, police sources added.

Police have also apprehended four gamblers and recovered stake money and gambling material from them while three drivers were held for over speeding, four arrested for illegally refilling LPG and two other outlaws held over tenant act violations.

During the crackdown, eight professional beggars were arrested by the police while four other criminals were also apprehended.

FESCO issues shutdown programme

FAISALABAD (APP): FESCO issued shutdown programme for Monday for necessary repair, maintenance and expansion of electricity lines. Power supply from Nawab Sher and Riaz Nagar feeders linked with 132-KV Chak No.582-GB grid station, Rodala, Arkana and new dana Abad feeders connected with 132-KV Jaranwala grid station and Raja Road feeder attached with 132-KV Tariq Abad grid station will remain suspended from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Also, City, Quadrat Abad, Saeed Abad, Rasheed Abad and Taj Colony feeders originating from 132-KV University grid station, 7-JB, Ghausia Abad and Ramdewali feeders linked

with 132-KV Chiniot Road grid station, Ashraf Abad feeder connected with 132-KV Nishatabad grid station, Barnala feeder attached with 132-KV Chak Jhumra grid station, new Beeranwala feeder originating from 132-KV Kamal Pur grid station, Ali Housing, new Jinnah Colony, Afghan Abad and Jinnah feeders linked with 132-KV Jhang Road grid station, GM Abad and Madina Abad feeders connected with 132-KV Narwala Road grid station, Data Street feeder attached with 132-KV GIS grid station, Dijkot City feeder originating from 220-KV Samundri Road grid station, 466 Road and Khiddarwala feeders linked with 132-KV Samundri

grid station, Soondh, Noor Mehal and Aslam Shaheed feeders connected with 132-KV Mureedwala grid station, Lal Shah, Maqbool Pur, Mureedwala, Mochiwala and Eidgah feeders attached with 132-KV Gojra grid station, Raza Abad and Bahlak feeders originating from 132-KV Tandlianwala grid station, Kot Fazil feeder linked with 132-KV Garh Fateh Shah grid station, Kallarwala feeder connected with 132-KV Manjhalah Bagh grid station and Saeed Abad-1 feeder attached with 132-KV Nia Lahore grid station, Imam Bargah Road and Momin Abad feeders originating from 132-KV Factory Area grid station will observe shutdown from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Monday.



Peru closes Machu Picchu as protesters arrested in Lima

LIMA (AFP/APP): Peru closed the Inca citadel of Machu Picchu Saturday and authorities expelled protesters from a Lima university where they have been holed up as they wage relentless anti-government demonstrations in the capital.

Protests demanding the resignation of Peruvian President Dina Boluarte have been ongoing since early December, leaving 46 people dead and prompting the government to impose a state of emergency in violence-hit areas. This crisis triggered by the ouster of leftist Indigenous president Pedro Castillo last month stems largely from a gaping inequity between Peru's urban elite and poor rural Indigenous people in the Andean region who saw him as one of their own and working to make their lives better.

Authorities announced Saturday yet another protester had died following demonstrations in that Andean region in the south, with the victim arriving already deceased at a local hospital in the Puno region.

And video footage from the town of Ilave that went viral on social media shows police shooting right at Indigenous demonstrators in the town square. Enraged protesters responded by setting fire to a police station, local media reported.

Clashes between police and the crowd in that town near Lake Titicaca and the border with Bolivia left 10

people injured, hospital officials said.

Prior to the closing of Machu Picchu, rail services to the site had already been suspended due to damage to the track by demonstrators. The only way to get up to the popular tourist site is by train.

At least 400 people, including 300 foreigners, are stranded at the foot of the site, in the town of Aguas Calientes, and pleading to be evacuated. "The closure of the Inca trails network and the Machu Picchu citadel has been ordered due to the social situation and to preserve the safety of visitors," the Ministry of Culture said in a Saturday statement. "We don't know if a train will pick us up. All the tourists here are queuing to register" for evacuation, Chilean tourist Alem Lopez told AFP Friday.

Tourists "cannot leave because the railway has been damaged in different places," Tourism Minister Luis Fernando Helguero said.

"Some tourists have chosen to walk to Piscacucho, but that takes six hours or more and very few people can do it," he said.

Piscacucho is the closest village to Machu Picchu connected to the roads.

In December, several hundred stranded tourists were evacuated from near the site. Tourism is vital for Peru's economy, representing between three to four percent of the country's GDP. In Lima, where two

days of mass mobilization by demonstrators from the country's poor Andean region have just concluded, the situation Saturday remained tense. Security forces used an armored vehicle to breach the gate of the University of San Marcos in the city's downtown, in an attempt to expel protesters who have been sleeping there. A large contingent of police searched occupants, sometimes forcing them to lie on the ground, AFP journalists observed.

Interior Minister Vicente Romero Canal N television that police intervened after university authorities said some of the squatters were committing crimes. He did not specify what these were.

Around 200 people were arrested, said Alfonso Barrenechea, a spokesman for the prosecutor's office.

Protesters are trying to keep up pressure on the Peruvian government, defying a state of emergency that now covers almost one-third of the country. The European Union on Saturday condemned the chaos and the "very large number of casualties," calling for a peaceful political solution in Peru. The protests were sparked when former president Castillo, a rural schoolteacher, was removed from office and arrested on December 7 after attempting to dissolve the country's legislature and rule by decree, amid multiple corruption investigations.

Next New Zealand PM slams 'abhorrent' treatment of Ardern

WELLINGTON (AFP/APP): New Zealand's incoming prime minister Chris Hipkins criticised the "abhorrent" treatment endured by Jacinda Ardern and vowed on Sunday to shield his own family, three days after her shock resignation.

Hours after being unanimously endorsed by Labour Party MPs as the party's leader and the nation's next prime minister, Hipkins attacked the personal abuse suffered by Ardern during her more than five years in the top job.

Ardern sparked a national debate about the pressures she faced when she revealed Thursday that she was stepping down just nine months before October 14 general elections, saying she no longer had "enough in the tank". Politicians and other public figures have lined up to criticise the "vitriol" Ardern was subjected to as prime minister, notably on social media, although she did not mention it herself. "The way Jacinda has been treated, particularly by some segments of our society -- and they are a small minority -- has been utterly abhorrent," Hipkins said.

"It does not represent who we are as a country," said the 44-year-old education and police minister. Men have a responsibility to call out such treatment and say "it's not ok," he said.

The future prime minister, best known for leading a national crack-down on Covid-19 for nearly two years, said he understood that putting himself forward as leader meant he was "public property".

"But my family aren't," he told reporters. Hipkins said he wanted his six-year-old son and four-year-old daughter to grow up with a "typical Kiwi kid life", adding that his amicable separation from his wife was his own business.

"I have seen the enormous scrutiny and pressure placed on Jacinda and her family and so my response will be to keep my family completely out of the spotlight," he said.

- 'Humbling' - Ardern said she had been exhausted after leading New Zealand through the Covid-19 pandemic, its deadliest terror attack and a volcanic eruption. "I am human. We give as much as we can for as long as we can and then it's time," the 42-year-old leader said.

Hipkins said he would be sworn in as the nation's 41st prime minister by the governor general on Wednesday after Ardern formally steps down.

New Zealand under his leadership will switch its focus from Covid-19 to bolstering the economy, Hipkins said. The cost of living, rising inflation and workforce shortages have been blamed in part for Labour's decline in the polls since 2020, now

surpassed by the centre-right National Party opposition.

"Covid-19 and the global pandemic created a health crisis. Now it's created an economic one and that's where my government's focus will be," Hipkins said. The incoming New Zealand leader promised to tackle rising crime levels, too.

"We know we've got more work to do when it comes to re-engaging young people, to tackle the underlying causes of criminal offending."

Hipkins also announced the country will have its first deputy prime minister of Pacific island descent, Carmel Sepuloni. The 46-year-old Sepuloni entered parliament in 2008 and has been the minister for social development since 2017.

Sepuloni said her father, of Samoan and Tongan heritage, arrived in New Zealand in 1964 to work on the railways.

That his daughter would become deputy prime minister of New Zealand "is very hard to comprehend", she said.

"I want to acknowledge the significance of this for our Pacific community." About eight percent of New Zealand's 5.1 million population identifies as Pasifika -- a New Zealander of Pacific island descent.

Grant Robertson, deputy prime minister under Ardern, is expected to remain as finance minister.

Burkina Faso wants French troops out: state news agency

OUAGADOUGOU (AFP/APP): Burkina Faso's military regime told France it wants its troops stationed in the country to leave within a month, the state news agency AIB reported on Saturday.

"The Burkinabe government last Wednesday denounced the accord which has governed, since 2018, the presence of French armed forces on its territory," said AIB, adding that it had given France a month to complete its pull-out.

A source close to the government said the authorities had called for "the departure of French soldiers in a short time". France has 400 special forces soldiers stationed in junta-ruled Burkina to battle an Islamist insurgency -- but relations have deteriorated in recent months.

The country is ruled by a military junta, led by Captain Ibrahim Traore,

which seized power last September.

French troops withdrew from Mali last year, after a 2020 coup in the former French colony saw its rulers inch closer to Russia.

Burkina Faso, also once under French rule, saw officers seize power in September in the second coup in eight months.

Rekindling ties with Russia has been on the agenda in Burkina since the coup.

Eritrea troops seen leaving Tigray as US hails 'withdrawal'

ADDIS ABABA (AFP/APP): Eritrean forces have been leaving towns in the war-torn region of Tigray, locals told AFP, as the United States hailed a pullout seen as key to a landmark peace deal.

Fighting between federal troops and Tigray rebels erupted in northern Ethiopia in November 2020 and raged for two years before the two sides signed a peace deal in South Africa's capital Pretoria on November 2, 2022. Under the agreement, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) agreed to disarm and re-establish the authority of the federal government in return for the Ethiopian government reopening access to the war-torn region in dire need of food and aid.

But the Pretoria agreement made no provision for the withdrawal of Eritrean troops, who fought on the side of the federal government and who were accused by the United States and human rights groups of some of the worst abuses in the bloody conflict.

The United States, along with the European Union, had sought to put pressure on Eritrea to remove its troops. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke on Saturday of their "ongoing withdrawal" in a telephone call with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

Blinken called the withdrawal "significant progress" in the peace agreement.

"The Secretary welcomed this development, noting that it was key to securing a sustainable peace in northern Ethiopia, and urged access for international human rights monitors," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

- Convoys leaving - On the ground in Tigray, locals told AFP that convoys of Eritrean troops have been leaving the towns of Shire and Adwa, although some soldiers remained.

"I saw some Eritrean forces leaving Shire towards the northeast. I don't know if they're making a full retreat," said one resident, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Another local confirmed having seen a convoy of trucks, buses, tanks and artillery pieces rolling out of town. However, he said some Eritrean soldiers were still "walking the streets and around the markets" on Saturday.

"People are waiting to find out if the Eritrean forces are really withdrawing," one resident in Adwa told AFP on Saturday.

"There have already been announcements of Eritrean soldiers leaving, only for them to come back later from other directions."

With access to Tigray limited, it is impossible to independently verify the situation on the ground.

The withdrawal has not yet been confirmed by peace deal signatories or the agreement's observation mission. The war broke out in November 2020 when the TPLF, which had held power in Ethiopia until the Abiy's rise, attacked Ethiopian federal military facilities in Tigray.

Abiy, who had won the Nobel Peace Prize in part for reconciling with Eritrea, unleashed a major offensive against the TPLF, which at one point had appeared close to advancing on the capital Addis Ababa.

Situated on the border with Tigray, Eritrea sent in troops at the start of the conflict to support Ethiopian forces.

Addis Ababa and Asmara denied for months any Eritrean involvement in the conflict but Abiy later admitted their presence in March 2021.

The departure of Eritrean troops has been announced several times before but never verified.

The exact toll of the war, which has largely come to an end, remains unknown. The International Crisis Group think tank and Amnesty International have called it "one of the deadliest in the world".

The conflict displaced more than two million people and left millions more in need of humanitarian aid.

UK wild camping campaigners rally in Dartmoor over court ruling

C O R N W O O D (AFP/APP): "Nature is a human right!" declares 21-year-old Anya Wilding as she dons hiking boots and prepares to join the fight to "get it back" on Dartmoor in southwest England.

The photography student and thousands of others spent Saturday afternoon demonstrating for the right to camp in the open on a common within Dartmoor National Park.

The protest was sparked by a recent UK court order that any such wild camping within parts of the park owned by wealthy local landowners requires their consent. The January 13 ruling has infuriated campaigners for better public access in rural areas. They say Dartmoor -- where over half of the land is private -- was the only remaining place in England where wild camping without landowner consent was permitted. Around 3,000 of them braved frigid temperatures to gather in the small village of Cornwood for a march to Stall Moor, a vast common owned by Alexander Darwall, who is now seeking to outlaw the pastime there.

"Everyone deserves the same access, it's a fundamental right and they're taking that away from us and I'm here today to get it back," explains Wilding.

"It was the only place it was legal so (the ruling) is like a kick in the teeth," she adds of wild camping on Dartmoor, which has also long been popular with walkers for its rugged beauty. "You wake up and there's this golden light that lights up all the hills and it's the most amazing feeling."

Across England, where half of the land is owned by less than 1 percent of its population, the ability of people to explore freely is severely limited.

The so-called "right to roam" -- an ancient custom that allows anyone to wander in open countryside, whether the land is privately or publicly owned -- has only legally guaranteed access to certain areas since 2000.

But venturing off the beaten track is still only possible on a tiny fraction of land: 8 percent of the countryside and 3 percent of the nation's waterways, according to official figures.

And that does not permit other activities such as wild

Israel PM removes top minister over court ruling

JERUSALEM (AFP/APP): Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu removed a top minister from office Sunday following a Supreme Court ruling against Aryeh Deri's appointment which has shaken the nascent cabinet.

"It is with a heavy heart, with great sorrow and with an extremely difficult feeling that I am forced to transfer you from your position as a minister in the government," Netanyahu told Deri during a cabinet meeting, according to a statement from the premier's office.

Leader of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish party Shas, Deri was appointed health and interior minister last month as part of a coalition deal following Israel's November 1 elections. On Wednesday, the Supreme Court ruled that Netanyahu "must remove Deri from his position" due to a tax evasion conviction last year. The veteran politician relinquished his parliamentary seat at the time. The judges said Deri made it appear as if he had intended to resign from politics to get a lighter sentence, but he ran for office again in the November polls.

13 killed in building collapse in Syria's second city

ALEPPO (AFP/APP): A building collapsed Sunday in Syria's second city of Aleppo, killing 13 people including children, authorities and media reported.

The state news agency SANA had initially given a death toll of 10 before quoting an interior ministry statement revising it upwards to 13 and projecting that it was likely to rise.

A Kurdish news agency meanwhile said five children were among the dead, and a war monitor said they were all Syrians displaced during more than a decade of fighting in the country.

Only one person had

been rescued from the rubble, the interior ministry said, adding that rescue and search efforts were ongoing. The five-storey building, which was inhabited by seven families, had collapsed in the early hours of the day, the ministry added.

Locals told AFP that about 35 people lived in the building. Video footage shared on state television showed dozens of rescue workers toiling to unearth people from the rubble while bulldozers worked to clear the debris.

SANA quoted a police source as saying earlier that the building, located in Aleppo's Sheikh

Maksoud neighbourhood, had collapsed "due to a water leak" in the foundations. Much of Aleppo was destroyed during Syria's nearly 12-year conflict, with many of the remaining buildings left in a decrepit state.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the victims were all displaced people from the northern district of Afrin.

The Sheikh Maksoud neighbourhood is predominantly inhabited by Syrian Kurds and governed by the People's Protection Units (YPG).

Many of its residents fled from Afrin after Turkey began an offensive there in 2018.

Nearly half a million people have been killed in Syria's conflict since it broke out in 2011, and about half of its pre-war population has been displaced. Many of those displaced have had to move into buildings that are structurally unsound, resulting in relatively frequent collapses.

Last September, a building collapse in the Ferdaws neighbourhood of Aleppo killed 10 people, including three children.

And in February 2019, another collapse in the city killed 11 people, including four children.

Processions, lunches and concert to crown King Charles III

LONDON (AFP/APP): The coronation weekend for King Charles III will feature a star-studded concert, nationwide "big lunch" and volunteering initiative as well as the traditional ceremony and royal processions, Buckingham Palace announced late Saturday.

The three days of ceremonial, celebratory and community events in early May will be a chance for "people to come together in celebration of the historic occasion", the palace said in an update on its much-anticipated plans.

The landmark long weekend looms with the monarchy still grappling with the fallout from the publication earlier this month of Prince Harry's scorching tell-all memoir "Spare", in which he made a series of incendiary claims against the family.

It is unclear whether US-based Harry -- Charles' younger son -- and his American wife Meghan will attend the coronation, with a recent Sunday Times report claiming a reconciliation could still take place prior. Charles, 74, immediately became king when Queen Elizabeth died aged 96 on September 8 last year, ending her record-breaking 70-year reign after a year of declining health.

He also took over as head of state of 14 Commonwealth countries, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

The coronation traditionally takes place some months after a new sovereign has ascended to the throne, following a period of national and royal mourning as well as intense preparation. The country's first coronation since 1953, set to be watched worldwide and feature various global dignitaries, will begin with Charles' formal crowning at London's Westminster Abbey on Saturday May 6, in a tradition dating back more than



900 years. Buckingham Palace has previously said the service, to be conducted by Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, will reflect the monarchy's historic traditions alongside its modern role. "The Coronation is a solemn religious service, as well as an occasion for celebration and pageantry," it noted.

Charles' wife, Queen Consort Camilla, 75, will also be crowned.

The pair will arrive from the palace without other royals in "The King's Procession", before returning in a larger ceremonial entourage known as "The Coronation Procession" featuring other family members. Once back at the palace, the opening day will conclude with the royals appearing on the balcony overlooking The Mall where thousands of people are expected to gather.

The next day will then see a "special coronation concert" staged at Windsor Castle, west of London, to be produced and broadcast live by the BBC and featuring "global music icons and contemporary stars".

Several thousand pairs of tickets will be made available through a public ballot, while volunteers from charities supported by

neighbour to a street party, a coronation big lunch brings the celebrations to your neighbourhood," said the palace, which expects events in streets, gardens, parks and community spaces. The scheme will be overseen and organised by a team from the Eden Project, the eco-friendly visitor attraction in Cornwall, southwest England.

Camilla has been patron of its annual "big lunch" initiative -- which aims to boost community spirit, reduce loneliness and support charities and good causes -- since 2013.

The final part of coronation weekend, dubbed "the big help out", will be held on Monday May 8 -- designated a public holiday in the UK this year. Organised by community forum The Together Coalition and partners including The Scouts, the Royal Voluntary Service and various faith groups, it will "highlight the positive impact volunteering has on communities across the nation". People will be encouraged to try volunteering for themselves and join initiatives in their local areas in a bid to create "a lasting volunteering legacy from the coronation weekend".

Also on May 7, neighbours and communities will be invited to host thousands of "coronation big lunches", billed as a "nationwide act of celebration and friendship".

"From a cup of tea with a

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Iran-EU new scrum

According to the media, the European Parliament's approval of a resolution calling on the bloc to consider a terrorist designation for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has received strong condemnation from senior Iranian leadership and military commanders. Meanwhile, the EU also condemned the Raisi government's response to the ongoing protests and the executions linked to those protests, and drone sales to Russia, while the bloc also recommended sanctions against Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, President Ebrahim Raisi and all business and entities linked to the IRGC.

Iran and the west are engaged in intensive verbal battles over the past months since the violent anti-regime protests engulfed the Asian nation in September last year. Tehran accused the western powers of supporting the anti-government protesters in its country while the EU was enraged by Tehran's forceful suppression of rights activists along with Iran's provision of military armed drones to Russia which caused a significant setback for Ukrainian security forces amid heightened hostility in Bukhmut and Soledar regions. This bilateral row reached its peak when the EU parliament adopted a resolution calling for the imposition of sanctions against Iranian individuals and entities responsible for human rights violations including senior political and military leaders together with the most powerful and influential Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its subsidiaries, like the paramilitary Basij and the Quds Forces.

In fact, the EU's latest step was the beginning of the long way toward listing Iranian individuals and entities as the 700 members EU Parliament proposed sanctions that need the approval of the EU Council followed by the 27 government consensus to become a policy of the bloc. The EU announcement has been welcomed by Iranian dissents across the world but it prompted a massive outcry from the Iranian ruling elite which termed it fatal not only for the EU-Iran bilateral relations but also called it the last nail in the coffin of the already dead 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal.

Historically, Iran and European Union have already downgraded diplomatic and trade relations, while two major EU nations, the UK and France had been engaged in shuttle diplomacy with Tehran to revive the scrapped JCPOA, but those efforts failed at the last movement after Iran linked the revival of deal with the IRGC's removal from the US's terror list. The current anti-Iran uproar in the western capitals is the outcome of Tehran's military collaboration with Moscow otherwise clerics' human rights violations usually received mere condemnation and media tumult in the west.

Presently, Iran's Foreign Ministry, the IRGC, and lawmakers are in consultation to give a coordinated and befitting response to European Union as the IRGC is not only a powerful military organ but an effective foreign policy instrument and a main pillar of Iran's revolutionary regime in the post-1979 era. The Raisi government is actively working to stall the EU's bid to designate its lethal arm by using all available tactics and tools, however, the United States and its all-weather allies are determined to hit Iran's most sensitive part to effectively respond to Putin-Raisi plan. In fact, all is customary in war, one must be ready to get a punch in reward for a slap.

Media liberties versus governance

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday said that the government attached high importance to the freedom of the press and media for transparency and accountability. During a meeting with a delegation of the German Press Federation, the Premier directed the authorities to speed up their joint work with the German government for training and capacity building of the reporters and media industry.

Press and media are generally considered to be the fourth pillar of the state and usually play the role of a watchdog to ensure accountability and transparency in governmental affairs. Interestingly, the perception of media among the entire political spectrum had always been different for the opposition and the treasury, as it deems fit to their politics. Journalists had been assigned by the nature to act as whistleblowers, work as auditors, and plays as referee and judge in society, which usually does not suit too many and mediamen always face threats from the government, as well as from the anti-social elements including criminals, terrorist organizations, feudals, and warlord cum politicians.

Historically, Pakistan has always been an unsafe place for journalists and scholars since its very existence as and when they opined contrary to the policies and interests of the rulers or tried to figure out the truth concealed behind the power corridors. While some times states institutions considered unbiased reporting against the core values and interests of the nation and imposed restrictions on freedom of the press. According to a recent report by the government, about 42 journalists were murdered by unknown assassins in the last four years across the country, whereas countless had been harassed, reprimanded, and prosecuted by the government and its institutions.

The successive governments have framed multiple pieces of legislation to support the freedom of the press, the safety of the journalist, and enhance media access to public information but no such law has ever been upheld by the public representatives, and news channels and reporters always received a backlash from the rulers, while every other leader intends to expand PECA and empower PEMRA to squeeze space for journalism. Political governments should promote civil liberties and media freedoms at all times while keeping asides their trivial differences and insignificant gains because political season never remains the same and benches reshuffle in no time, so sober diplomacy strengthens democracy and endures in long run, otherwise each belligerent finally comes to negotiation.

Quote of the day

Laws are like spider's webs: If some poor weak creature comes up against them, it is caught; but a big one can break through and get away.

— Solon, 630-560 BC, Ancient Greek lawmaker & philosopher.

The current campaign of the Western "International" to the East gives rise to quite obvious associations with 1941 and 1812. Invasion of Twelve Languages v.3.0. And if we also take into account the year 1918 with the campaign of fourteen powers, then even v.4.0. Everything is so familiar and familiar.

Even the High Representative of the EU, Borrell, not to say that the most distinguished historian, speaking the other day in Madrid,

The Brussels authorities are always in favor, but Josep Borrell and Charles Michel are not suitable even as company political officers. How they will rally such diverse forces - only they know. Thus, a united Europe is clearly inferior to its ancestors from the time of the Fuhrer-Emperor in terms of cohesion, as well as readiness to kill and especially die in the fields of Russia. If wars were waged by newspapermen and humanities professors, there would be no enemy more terrible and cruel. But the campaign mainly requires other military registration specialties, and where to get them is less clear. This is not a basis for harmful hatred, but also not a basis for all-out proping before the formidable invasion of twelve democracies.

said: "Russia is a big country, she is used to fighting to the end, she is used to almost losing, and then recovering everything. She did it with Napoleon, she did this to Hitler. It would be absurd to think that Russia lost the war, that its military is incompetent. Therefore, right now it is necessary to continue to arm Ukraine."

The final conclusion, however, is strange. Is it to be understood that the Brussels regional committee will be militarily more successful than the French Empire or the Third Reich? But at least it's good that the representative remembered historical analogies.

True, if Borrell's excursus into the past did not cause any complaints - as if it should be so - then the same excursus by S. V. Lavrov, who compared the current Western coalition of democracies with the Reich and its satellites, caused curses and gnashing of teeth. John Kirby, strategic communications coordinator at the US National Security Council, called Lavrov's speeches "offensive, absurd and undeserving of a response," and the president of the European

Jewish Congress, Ariel Muzikant, condemned the comparison of the US and its allies' policy towards Moscow with the actions of A. Hitler and called on the Russian Foreign Minister apologize. Borrell for some reason did not call.

Be that as it may, the composition of the former internationalists is impressive. In 1812, in addition to, of course, the French, the Grand Army included Italians, Croats, Spaniards, Portuguese, Dutch, Bavarians, Saxons, Westphalians, Hessians, Prussians, Swiss, Poles, etc. Together, representatives of non-titular nations made up about half of the invasion army. The Au-

strians also stood on the Russian border (present-day Ukraine), but did not invade.

A similar picture was in 1941. In addition to the Wehrmacht, regular armies of Italy, Romania, Finland, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia fought against the USSR. As well as volunteer formations from Spain, France, Holland, the Scandinavian and Baltic countries. The contribution of the Czechs (engineering) and the

Swedes (iron ore) to the military economy of the Reich is also difficult to overestimate. And although not all, but most of the German satellites made an active contribution to the final solution of the Jewish question. They themselves deported the Jews to the Reich for destruction.

So Borrell only repeated the basics of school history textbooks. Just like Lavrov.

But there were other similarities as well. Both the great emperor and the Fuhrer had more than enough formal allies. If we talk not about formal, but real participation in the military efforts of the hegemon, the picture was more

Maxim Sokolov

complex. Not only the Habsburgs, but also many others could rightly say:

"I serve all allies

Austrian, Austrian."

That is, as long as there is a victorious offensive, we will also advance (but preferably in auxiliary units, where there is less risk), but if military happiness turns away from the Fuhrer-Emperor, then we are not ready to stand for him to the last: our shirt is closer to the body. As a

force in the occupied territories, but first these territories must be captured. Poland is partly adjacent to the bold, but its determination is more about the seizure of Ukrainian lands, and the military costs must be paid by NATO allies. The British are always ready for various responsible wet deeds, but no, thank you for the heroic attack of light cavalry. There is nothing special to subsidize the allies (as happened in previous wars). There are rhetorical exercises.

Roughly the same with the French. Selling museum equipment to Ukraine, intriguing, puffing out your cheeks and dancing on a tightrope - that's always the case. The nature of the Parisian circus performers is unchanged. But to die in the Donetsk steppes is let someone else.

The Germans groan and huddle, huddle and groan, like the venerable Solomon from The Miserly Knight. What can be understood: the state of the Bundeswehr leaves much to be desired, and the method "We raised our army in battles" does not inspire the Germans.

Like the Czechs. Russophobia is welcome, and labelled him a drunkard.

There is also Walter Braga Netto, a retired army general, former minister of defence and vice-presidential candidate in Bolsonaro's 2022 presidential ticket. In June 2022, Braga Netto stated that if Bolsonaro's demand that the armed forces audited the election results was not accepted, the election could be cancelled. "Either we have clean elections, or we won't have elections." Reportedly, during the insurrection Braga Netto would have the task to deploy the armed forces in the streets.

Even though the idea of the army exerting tutelage over politics is appealing and popular among high officers, despite the persistent Bolsonaro and Bolsonaroista calls the bulk of the armed forces were not persuaded to stage a coup. Bolsonaro had become so toxic that even substantial sections of the world far right seems to be ready to dissociate themselves from him, despite the BBC/PSB strenuous PR efforts made with "Rise of the Bolsonaros."

On 9th January, Lula gave vent to his anger over the Bolsonaroista violent insurrection against Brazil's democracy announcing his government will not rest until finding and punishing all those responsible, including its financial backers. Brazil's General Attorney Office has obtained that 6.5 million Reais (over 1 million Euros) belonging to 52 individuals and 7 companies be frozen to be investigated as suspects of having financed the coup attempt.

Followed by governors and Supreme Court judges, to symbolise institutional unity in defense of democracy, Lula headed a walk (09/01/23) from the presidential palace to the Federal Supreme Court premises to verify the damage done to the vandalised

public buildings. Among those present were Brazil's 27 state governors, the presidents of both Congress and Senate, and the General Attorney. Lula strongly criticised the lack of action and the silence of the armed forces for two months camps outside military barracks demanding they stage a coup d'état. And for good measure, Lula has so far sacked over 50 military officers in charge of the presidency's security.

After the institutional walkabout, law and order was swiftly restored by police forces: the Bolsonaroista camp outside the army HQ in Brasilia was dismantled after an order from Alexandre de Moraes leading to the arrest of 1,500 protesters who were detained in over 300 detention centres. All such camps in other states of Brazil were also dismantled.

Torres Anderson is under arrest and the STF suspended Alexandre de Moraes governor Ibaneis Rocha from his position for 90 days pending an investigation. During the coup attempt, as Rocha was sitting on his hands, Lula issued a decree turning control of Brasilia's security over to the Federal Government until January 31. "Twenty minutes later, all government buildings had been completely cleared of rioters by the Brasilia Civil Police and the Federal Police." Brasilia's Military Police Commander in chief, Fabio Augusto Vieira, is also under arrest. Silvinei Vasques, director of the PRF, has 'been retired'.

Senator Renan Calheiros (former Senate president) stated that it would request STF minister Moraes to investigate Bolsonaro's responsibility in the coup attempt. STF doyen judge, Gilmar Mendes, pointed out that Bolsonaro carries political responsibility for not having dissuaded his supporters from executing acts of violence. Brazilian prosecutors have asked the courts to seize Bolsonaro's

assets as part of their investigation of the coup attempt.

Brazil's General Attorney Office has included Bolsonaro in its investigation because he may have "publicly incited the commissions of crimes". And STF judge Ricardo Lewandowski rejected a preventive habeas corpus request for Torres and Jair Bolsonaro.

Due to the perplexity surrounding the Bolsonaroista insurrection, little attention has been paid to the implementation of Lula's policies. On 2nd January, one day after being inaugurated, he cancelled the privatization of eight state-owned companies. He also reversed several reactionary Bolsonaro decrees: re-established financial support to fight against deforestation and repealed a measure on illegal mining, suspended the issuance of new gun permits and authorisation for new shooting clubs, guaranteed income support for the poor, and a tax exemption on fuel, among a raft of progressive measures.

To top it all up, he appointed Sonia Guajajara, a representative of indigenous peoples, in charge of the newly created Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, which he pledged to create during the electoral campaign.

Under Lula's progressive government, the significance of Brazilian democracy to rest of Latin America cannot be stressed enough. Nor can the threat represented by the Bolsonaroista militarisation of Brazil's state institutions. During the election campaign he promised the sack around 8,000 military officers appointed at all levels of the state throughout Brazil.

We will need to both remain vigilant – Bolsonaroismo has been defeated but it is not yet buried – and redouble our solidarity with the people of Brazil and the peoples of Latin America.

expressed "deep concern" at Israel's punitive measures against the Palestinian people, leadership and civil society following a U.N. request for an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice on the legality of Israeli policies in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem. More positive news: From Brazil to Chile, Palestinians have good reason to be excited for left-wing victories. But the new governments' many challenges may temper those hopes.

Some consolation, if this is deemed as such – "The Harvard Kennedy School reversed its decision and said it would offer a fellowship to a leading human rights advocate it had previously rejected, after news of the decision touched off a public outcry over academic freedom, donor influence and the boundaries of criticism of Israel." Only goes to show global advocacy works. Another success story: "More than 90 countries have

Bolsonarismo has been defeated but it is not yet buried

Francisco Dominguez

Moraes, president of Brazil's Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), led the PRF blockade to be lifted and his order to extend the polls closure time in 560 places, prevented this Bolsonaroista vote suppression effort from succeeding.

In a raid carried out by the Federal Police (12th January), a page with minutes for Jair Bolsonaro was found in the private residence of his (now ex) minister of justice, Anderson Torres, with a plan to issue a presidential decree declaring a state of emergency in the premises of the TSE aimed at changing (annulling) the 31st October election result and impose military rule.

Previously, Bolsonaro and some of the top brass, had proposed that the armed forces conducted their own, separate and parallel, vote audit to be contrasted with the TSE figures should Lula be declared the winner. On the 8th of January Torres was Brasilia's security secretary appointed in that position by the capital city governor, Ibaneis Rocha, a Bolsonaro's staunch ally.

With Torres in charge of Brasilia's security the scene was ready for the putsch. Its Military Police (MP) simply opened the gates for the violent invaders. There are scores of posted videos showing sympathetic MP officers smiling, hugging and taking selfies of themselves with the insurrectionists. Brasilia's Military Police Commander in chief, Fabio Augusto Vieira, is charged with openly conniving with them.

Another Bolsonaroista top brass is ex minister of Institutional Security, general Augusto Heleno, who throughout 2021 and 2022 kept making threats of military intervention. In November 2022, after Lula's victory in the second round, Heleno publicly tarnished the mental and physical health of the president

and labelled him a drunkard.

It never ever happened. Despite committing to new procedures to reduce the practice, the army is still using night arrests as a default against Palestinian children. It only gets worse. Read on. A study shows that 57 percent of Israelis opposed blocking the Supreme Court's authority in halting legislation from the Knesset, as proposed by Israel's new government, if the essence of those laws is

void arresting kids at night.

en Jewish supremacy and racial segregation as the underlying principles of the Israeli regime. Adalah proposes that Israel's initiatives and policies necessitate urgent intervention by international bodies, including by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the reconstitution of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid.

At the level of civil society, we read reports of tens of thousands of Israelis tak-

ing to the streets of Tel Aviv and other cities to protest what they see as an erosion of their country's democracy. But this huge protest and rally is not about ending apartheid and colonialism in Palestine. Israelis are not demonstrating for justice. Democracy in Israel would mean an end to apartheid. That is not what the Israeli protesters want.

In yet other shocking conditions, we read how the Israeli army promised to a-

Israel ignores international law

Ranjan Solomon

Israel's pogrom to obliterate the Palestinians from the land is ongoing with a vigor and revenge that is picking political momentum. Whether that will work in its intent is another question.

Domination, suppression and control are the strategies that Israel is employing. In a new position paper, Adalah, an Israeli human rights organization, lays out how the guiding principles and coalition agreements of the new Israeli government intend to deep-

en Jewish supremacy and racial segregation as the underlying principles of the Israeli regime. Adalah proposes that Israel's initiatives and policies necessitate urgent intervention by international bodies, including by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the reconstitution of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid.

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anti-democratic.

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Lies and a complete lack of independence, gentlemen, leads to poverty

The situation in Europe continues to steadily worsen - in particular, it is already clear: you can definitely forget about the longed-for and advertised green transition. A story was released on the German TV channel NDR : in the frame, Robert Habek, the Minister of Economics of Germany, standing against the backdrop of huge piles of coal, states with a sad face that the government, in order to somehow get through even such a gentle winter, is forced to reactivate power plants using fuel oil and coal. Moreover, Germany will not be able to stop using non-environmentally friendly coal until at least 2030.

Try the first time to guess who is to blame. Congratulations, you are absolutely right.

We are witnessing with our own eyes an intermedi-

West and a terrible aggressive Russia, the entire existence of which is subordinated to one task only: to destroy European prosperity. Since all alternative sources of information in the West and overseas have been mercilessly purged, this propaganda works quite well for itself. Proven by Ukraine.

But let's go back to Germany and talk about who is really to blame for the fact that now you can forget about decarbonization and long hot showers there.

Robert Habek blames Russia for the growth of its own coal consumption, which allegedly cut off natural gas supplies to Germany. Yes, you heard right, before you is the very alternative reality in which it was not the European Union, at the behest of Washington, who initially fought in hysterics over the construction of Nord Stream 2 for years, it

Sergey Savchuk

total capacity of its facilities in Russia exceeded an impressive 34 gigawatts.

Naturally, the Uniper concern entered Russia not because of some lofty ideals and philanthropy, but solely because of a sober calculation. The enterprises of our energy sector needed fast and large investments, as well as some technical and technological developments from Western countries. In particular, the same Siemens supplied our power plants with high-capacity turbines, gas compressor units, locomotives and much more. Investors were interested in two factors: profit and energy at reduced prices. The same Uniper was excellent at selling electricity to Russian domestic consumers and providing export flows.

Another shareholder of SP-2, the German

refused to supply gas to Germany - it was German politicians, like obedient puppets, who did everything possible to destroy the existing supply schemes, although Moscow repeatedly, demonstrating truly biblical patience, urged not to do this.

Robert Habek was embarrassed to remind fellow citizens that since 2015, when the second Nord Stream project was being laid, Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose cabinet facilitated investment and the start of construction, cited a simple concrete fact as incentives: for forty years of natural gas supplies first from the USSR, and later from Russia, our side has never violated its contractual obligations. Never.

Speculating on the fundamental scrupulousness of our country in this matter, transit countries have repeatedly tried to disrupt

Angela Merkel's politics is over.

Both points are highly significant. Let's start with the fact that a whole minister shamelessly lies from a high rostrum, and not even about Russia, which is customary, but about the former chancellor, under which the German economy reached a historical peak. Lindner promotes the narrative that Berlin has been building relations with Russia for years, not because it was extremely profitable and his country received energy resources at moderate prices, but allegedly to achieve the democratization of Russia. Do not look for logic here - this is the same parallel reality.

As for the complete rejection of Russian gas, according to the most preliminary estimates, this has already cost Olaf Scholz's team an unplanned ten bil-

Europe as a whole and Germany as its main economic and industrial locomotive in particular, everything was fine as long as they cooperated with Russia, and did not flatter themselves with hopes that they could strangle her and live without her resources. For example, Uniper, one of the largest generating companies in the Old World, one of the key shareholders of Nord Stream 2, has been successfully and productively operating in our country for more than a decade. Even at the beginning of the 2000s, the E.ON corporation entered Russia, which acquired controlling stakes in five Russian power plants at once. Later, the aforementioned Uniper was spun off from its structure, which inherited Surgutskaya GRES-2, Berezovskaya GRES, Shaturuskaya GRES, Smolenskaya GRES and Yavinskaya GRES with a total capacity of 8.6 gigawatts. Already by 2016, the company's production fleet was replenished with a number of other hydro, gas and coal-fired power plants, and the total capacity of its facilities in Russia exceeded an impressive 34 gigawatts. Naturally, the Uniper concern entered Russia not because of some lofty ideals and philanthropy, but solely because of a sober calculation. The enterprises of our energy sector needed fast and large investments, as well as some technical and technological developments from Western countries. In particular, the same Siemens supplied our power plants with high-capacity turbines, gas compressor units, locomotives and much more. Investors were interested in two factors: profit and energy at reduced prices. The same Uniper was excellent at selling electricity to Russian domestic consumers and providing export flows.

ate historical stage of the next wave of the demonization of Russia. Now, when it is already completely clear that the Russian economy has withstood the pressure of sanctions, the ruble has not collapsed, inflation has slowed down and even went in the opposite direction, and the fall in GDP turned out to be much less than predicted, the European authorities need to drum the postulate of a monstrous Russia into the heads of fellow citizens again and again. This is also done because our country (no matter what they fantasize about in Washington and Zhytomyr) has not become a world pariah, that is, all bloody machinations like the "massacre in Bucha" turned out to be in vain. While American and European politicians, like mechanical parrots, repeat the invented mantra about isolation a thousand times, Moscow is increasing cooperation with India and China. Relations with the countries of South America have not deteriorated at all, Africa is experiencing a real boom in interest in everything Russian, at the same time the presence of former European colonialists is gradually decreasing, which, of course, cannot please Paris, Berlin and London.

Since our western neighbors and once even partners cannot influence this process, a favorite trick is used - lies, lies and again lies. Thus, a parallel black-and-white reality is formed, where there is a nice kind

did not impose an embargo on the purchase of Russian coal, oil and gas, not he abandoned long-term contracts with Gazprom, and he was not at all the one who imposed a price ceiling on Russian energy resources.

This is Russia's fault, it uses its hydrocarbons as a weapon and blackmail lever.

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Wintershall Dea, invested in the development of oil and gas fields near Urengoy with great benefit for itself and for Germany, back in the late nineties it invested heavily in the construction of the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline bypassing Ukraine, and later in gas pipelines along the bottom of the Baltic.

By the way, about Nord Streams.

Now, against the backdrop of the events in Donbass and the coronavirus pandemic that preceded this, it has been completely forgotten what the informational and political intensity of passions around the construction of the second gas pipeline was. For several years, this was the main information event and an occasion for speculation, intrigue and fraud. Recall at least the ban on insurance of ships involved in the project, or the sabotage withdrawal from the project of European pipelayers. When it became clear that the pipeline would still be completed, then President Donald Trump directly threatened that the United States would impose sanctions against any country that dared to buy gas from Ust-Luga. The refusal to certify NS-2 by Berlin and the imposition of direct sanctions by Washington against Nord Stream 2 AG fit perfectly into the same outline. Both events took place simultaneously - on February 22, 2022, that is, exactly two days before the start of the NWO.

It was not Russia that

exports. Only an alien, probably, did not hear that Ukraine for twenty years not only directly stole gas, but also put forward endless conditions, demanding incomprehensible compensations, revisions of conditions, price reductions, blackmailing Moscow by shutting off the valve. It is for this reason that back in 1999, that is, a year before Vladimir Putin became president, the first Yamal-Europe bypass route was launched. For the same reason, Nord Stream 1 was built and operated at the limit of its design capabilities until the very moment of the explosion, pumping Russian gas to the German coast.

At the end of November 2022, Uniper filed an arbitration lawsuit against Gazprom, demanding to pay \$11 billion for the fact that they received less gas and were forced to buy it on the side at inflated prices. The company's management is not at all embarrassed by the fact that the Russian side could not physically supply anything after the sabotage and explosion of three gas pipelines. However, this position fits into the general anti-Russian outline.

Last week, the World Economic Forum was held in Davos, Switzerland, where, among others, German Economy Minister Christian Lindner spoke. He proudly declared that at the moment Germany has completely defeated dependence on Russian gas and, to quote, "the era of

lion euros. That is how much they had to pay for leasing three regasification platforms" in Wilhelmshaven. Brunsbüttel and Lubmin. Along the way, we had to conclude contracts with Qatar and the United States for the supply of liquefied natural gas, which also turned out to be much more expensive than Russian pipeline gas. The icing on the cake was the ultimatum demand from American LNG producers to switch to long-term contracts - the very ones that Europe was so fiercely dissuaded from when it came to working with Russia.

Thanks to this long-term geopolitical clowning, Robert Habek stood near the mountains of coal and complained about the lack of gas.

In conclusion, let's say that the German Wintershall Dea, together with the parent company BASF, reported a record loss of more than three billion euros last week. Uniper, the lion's share of which belongs to the Finnish Fortum, has decided to sell all its assets in Russia, but cannot get permission from the Russian regulator. The latter is not in a hurry and does exactly the right thing. If the client no longer wants to eat heartily with a golden Russian spoon, he must sell it not at the market price, but at the price that Russian buyers are willing to pay.

Lies and a complete lack of independence, gentlemen, leads to poverty.



“Social Security is not negotiable”

Strategists and policy experts in both parties believe Democrats will have to come to the bargaining table soon to negotiate a debt ceiling deal that would avoid an economic catastrophe.

President Biden and Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) are so far refusing to negotiate with Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) on raising the nation's debt ceiling, but voices across the political spectrum argue the precedent for such talks has been set.

Former President Obama negotiated with the House Republican majority in 2011 to extend the nation's borrowing authority, while former President Trump agreed to big discretionary spending increases in 2019 to raise the debt ceiling.

Obama agreed to negotiate big spending cuts with Republicans before the

Alexander Bolton

they predict that Republicans won't win the same steep spending cuts they got from Obama a decade ago.

“Ultimately Schumer, McConnell and Biden will figure something out,” said Jim Kessler, a former Schumer aide who now serves as executive vice president for policy at Third Way, a centrist Democratic think tank.

“In the end, I think the likelihood is the agreement will come out of the Senate and the House will be forced to take it. McConnell's view is, ‘We're not going to default,’” he said.

McConnell predicted at an event at the University of Louisville on Thursday that Republicans would negotiate a deal with Biden.

“In the end, I think the important thing to remember is that America must never default on its debt. It

President Biden and Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) are so far refusing to negotiate with Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) on raising the nation's debt ceiling, but voices across the political spectrum argue the precedent for such talks has been set. Former President Obama negotiated with the House Republican majority in 2011 to extend the nation's borrowing authority, while former President Trump agreed to big discretionary spending increases in 2019 to raise the debt ceiling. Obama agreed to negotiate big spending cuts with Republicans before the 2012 presidential election because he knew he was ultimately responsible for the health of the U.S. economy, which would have taken a major hit if the federal government had defaulted on its debt obligations in 2011. Trump agreed to a \$320 billion increase in domestic and military spending as part of a two-year budget deal because he wanted to take the threat of default off the table before his reelection bid.

2012 presidential election because he knew he was ultimately responsible for the health of the U.S. economy, which would have taken a major hit if the federal government had defaulted on its debt obligations in 2011.

Trump agreed to a \$320 billion increase in domestic and military spending as part of a two-year budget deal because he wanted to take the threat of default off the table before his reelection bid.

Experts say Biden is now in a similar position as he readies his own reelection bid and won't be able to resist negotiations.

“A failure to deal with the debt limit would be catastrophic for the economy. Any serious person who has studied this knows the economic consequences would be deep, long-lasting and disastrous,” warned former Senate Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad (D-N.D.).

Conrad said he understands why Democrats refused to negotiate with Republicans on raising the debt limit during Obama's second four years in office, but he expects Biden to sit down with Republicans this year on the issue.

“You can see that there is the possibility at least of a negotiation,” he said. Conrad said a negotiation between Biden and Republicans in Congress would be an “opportunity to deal with some of the long-term challenges facing the country.”

“The hard reality is both Social Security and Medicare are headed for insolvency,” he said. “There's an opportunity to deal with some of these long-term challenges that are critically important to the country.” Other Democrats also think a bipartisan negotiation will take place, though

never has, and it never will,” he said. “We'll end up in some kind of negotiation with the administration over what the circumstances or conditions under which the debt ceiling be raised.”

Biden so far is not getting tremendous pressure from his party to enter negotiations, with the exception of Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), who represents a state that tends to be deep-red in presidential elections.

“We have to work together. It's bipartisan, it's always been bipartisan as far as the debt ceiling,” Manchin told Fox Business in an interview in Davos, Switzerland. “I think what we have to do is realize that we have a problem. We have a debt problem.”

Manchin, who is up for reelection in 2024, floated the idea of considering reforms to prolong the solvency of federal programs such as Medicare and Social Security in exchange for Republican support for raising the debt ceiling.

“We would put bipartisan, bicameral committees together to look at each one of the trusts and come up with solutions of how you fix it,” he said.

A Senate Republican aide said refusing to negotiate with Republicans “isn't sustainable especially with folks like Manchin floating ideas out there.”

Besides Manchin, who hasn't said whether he plans to run for reelection next year, vulnerable Senate Democrats include Sens. Jon Tester in Montana, Sherrod Brown in Ohio and Jacky Rosen in Nevada, as well as Independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (Ariz.) will be watching the debt ceiling maneuverings closely.

Schumer and then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-

Calif.) refused to negotiate spending cuts in exchange for raising the debt limit in the fall of 2021 and instead put pressure on McConnell to work out a deal to bring along at least 10 Senate GOP votes.

McConnell agreed to a procedural workaround that allowed debt-limit legislation to circumvent a filibuster in the Senate, allowing him to make the argument that Democrats alone raised the debt limit. But McConnell still came under withering criticism from former President Trump and some conservatives because GOP votes were needed to allow the debt limit bill to bypass a filibuster.

Republicans say Democrats can't expect McConnell to help pave the way for a clean debt limit increase this year.

“Mr. Schumer and others are talking about, ‘We can do what we did in '21 and that's just hold out and

Is the traffic light coalition more important to you than saving Ukraine?”

The US and NATO failed to convince Berlin to part with some of its Leopard 2s and become the first continental European power to send Western tanks to Ukraine during talks at Ramstein Air Base on Friday. German intransigence sparked howls of anger and derision in both Washington and Kiev.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's decision to hold off on the delivery of Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine sparked a fierce debate among senior lawmakers within Germany's coalition government, with Free Democratic Party lawmaker Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann leading the charge in attacking the chancellor.

“If you don't want to deliver Leopard 2s, you must explain why,” Strack-Zimmermann, chairwoman of the Bundestag's Defense Committee, told German media on Saturday. “We're always one step behind. We always wait for something to happen. Germany waits, the Federal Chancellery waits until pressure increases,” the lawmaker complained. She

added that since Berlin has already agreed to deliver Marder infantry fighting vehicles, it should send tanks too because the equipment “works together. And if you don't want all that, you have to explain it to the people.”

Rolf Mutzenich, leader of Chancellor Scholz's German Social Democratic Party's faction in the Bundestag, slammed Strack-Zimmermann's rhetoric, accusing her and others like her of “taking us into a military conflict,” and calling on Berlin to be guided by “common sense” when it comes to German-made combat vehicles.

“The same people who are calling for going it alone with heavy battle tanks today will be screaming for planes or troops tomorrow,” Mutzenich said, adding that there was no place for “outrage rituals” in today's shaky security situation in Europe.

Strack-Zimmermann struck back on Twitter, calling Mutzenich a “symbol of all the failures of German foreign policy,” and accusing him of holding “yesterday's views,” which will “lead to tomorrow's prob-

Ilya Tsukanov

lems. He is no longer able to adapt his worldview to reality.”

The Free Democratic Party lawmaker found support from Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Andriy Melnyk, who was recalled as ambassador to Ukraine last year after calling Chancellor Scholz a “liverwurst sausage.”

“Good point, dear lady Strack-Zimmermann! But why do you tolerate this coalition partner? Is the Traffic Light coalition more important to you than saving Ukraine?” Melnyk tweeted, referring to the coalition government formed in 2021, which includes the Social Democrats (red), the Free Democratic Party (yellow), and the Green Party (green).

The Ukrainian official slammed Berlin over its indecision on Leopards this week, calling Germany's position an “embarrassment,” “disgrace and huge disappointment,” and calling on the Scholz government to “put an end to this crazy Punch and Judy Show.”

Melnyk's sentiments

were echoed by hawks across the Atlantic in the US Senate, among them Lindsey Graham (R) of South Carolina, who vented that he was “tired of the s***show of who is going to send tanks and when they are going to send them.”

Fellow Republican and Georgia Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene blasted Graham over his position on Saturday, tweeting that US lawmakers are supposed to “serve the American people who pay for the tanks and our salaries, not [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky.”

Greene also asked Graham why he wasn't “calling for tanks at America's southern border while our country is invaded every day and Americans are being murdered in record numbers” by fentanyl, the opioid streaming into the country alongside migrants.

The proposal to send tanks to Ukraine sparked a fierce debate in the Bundestag earlier this week, with an Alternative for Germany lawmaker warning that the last time

Berlin sent tanks east, Soviet tanks ended up in the streets of Berlin.

Washington has put major pressure on its German allies to send some of the estimated 328 Leopard 2s left in the Bundeswehr's arsenal to Ukraine. German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius has promised to check the army's inventory. According to German media, Berlin might send Kiev its 19 oldest Leopard 2s, which were previously used to simulate enemy tanks in drills.

The UK announced plans to deliver 14 Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine earlier this month, making it the first NATO country to send Western-made main battle tanks to the conflict zone. Washington has held off on deploying its own jet-engine-powered gas-guzzling M1 Abrams tanks to the east, citing their weight and supposed unsuitability to the Ukrainian environment - a claim that stands at odds with the fact that the Cold War-era tank was designed specifically to fight Soviet tanks in a European battle space.

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Trade, industry announce protest in lead of BMP, PIAF against SBP to curb imports

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry's former president Mian Anjum Nisar has said that the business community across the country has decided to come to the streets against the anti-industry policies of the government on Monday, 23rd Jan 2023 (today), lodging a massive and strong protest demonstration, especially against the non-opening of LCs (Letter of Credits) to import industry raw material for the smooth running of business activities in the country.

Mian Anjum Nisar, who is the chairman of FPCCI's ruling group of Businessmen Panel (BMP) and also patron-in-chief of the PIAF, which is presently ruling at LCCI, threatened the government of continuing this protest across Pakistan until the clearance of their containers of imported goods, stuck up at ports for a long time, as the economy is presently in a standstill position owing to this unfortunate attitude of the authorities.

Mina Anjum Nisar urged the government for immediate restoration of the opening of letters of credit with the availability of foreign exchange for the import of raw materials putting industries into gear. He said that representatives of all trade bodies, industri-

al associations, markets and bazaars would participate in this protest, in the lead of BMP and PIAF, being held in front of Lahore Press Club today (Monday) to give a strong message to the government, telling them that every sector of trade and industry is severely affected due to stoppage of imported goods, as a result the economy is going towards a total closure and default.

He said what we need urgently is opening of LCs with availability of foreign exchange for meeting the requirements of industrial sector. He said that many industries are now facing shortage of raw material and are on the verge of cutting their production. He said that key products especially under HS code 84 and 85 include home appliances, air conditioners, IT products, generators, telecom, steel and automobiles. Importers are worried due to non-opening of LCs.

PIAF chairman Faheem ur Rehman Saigol observed that factories importing raw material for producing food, medicines and iron are now facing serious supply constraints. Due to non-release of our import documents and consequent non-availability of raw material, the manufacturing units are on the verge of closure, he said. He said that despite the lifting of the import ban by the government, delay in opening Letters of Credit

(LCs) for essential machinery, equipment and spare parts is a matter of grave concern for traders.

He said that the current economic situation is very disturbing; SMEs and large-scale industry (LSM) are suffering from slowness. Production has stopped due to non-availability of parts, bank payments are not being made, operational expenses are also becoming difficult to meet, which has increased the fear of unemployment, he added. He said that large firms in Pakistan rely on imported raw materials / parts, which run our industries. He appealed to the Finance Minister and Governor State Bank to take immediate notice of the situation and open LCs.

Faheem Saigol observed that the country has been reeling from economic distress amid fast-depleting foreign exchange reserves, weakening rupee, and worsening macroeconomic cues, as the gap between inter-bank and open-market US dollar rates has widened by over Rs24, highlighting the difference in how the greenback is being valued in two formal marketplaces in Pakistan.

Mian Anjum Nisar said that the current economic situation in Pakistan, marred by rapidly-depleting foreign exchange reserves, has also forced commercial banks to be selective in opening LCs

even for sectors such as healthcare, as it has been unable to open Letters of Credit (LCs) as per its usual banking cycle.

He lamented that the economists foresee an imminent humanitarian and healthcare crisis in Pakistan unless prompt actions are taken by the State Bank of Pakistan, Ministry of Finance and other institutions to avert the disaster.

The BMP Chairman and PIAF patron-in-chief said that at the same time, the country has failed to secure much-needed funding from friendly nations and struggled to restart its International Monetary Fund bailout program.

The struggle has left policymakers in Pakistan scrambling to arrange foreign exchange amid heightened worries over the country's economic health.

Moreover, market rumors of a possible default by Pakistan are also making rounds but the government remains optimistic that Saudi Arabia will offer crucial support for foreign exchange reserves.

The FPCCI former president said that the currency market continued to stay engulfed in a massive dollar shortage, as customers struggled to get their hands on the greenback. Dollars are not available in the market as the economic situation remains vulnerable, while foreign exchange reserves remain low.



ISLAMABAD: People purchasing seasonal fruit 'oranges' from vendor at Sunday Bazaar, Aabpara.

Women chamber to hold exhibition

SIALKOT (APP): Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Senior Vice President Gulzaib Waqas Awan has said that "We Exhibit 2023" mark the date March 11, 2023 at Family Park Sialkot Cantt.

In a statement, she said that women entrepreneurs from Sialkot and surrounding areas would be given an opportunity to participate as exhibitors. She said that the WCCI had been serving women entrepreneur with the mission of assisting them in commercial sector and creating a conducive environment for all working women at all levels.

The WCCI SVP said that "We-Exhibit 2023" which will be an excellent opportunity for women entrepreneurs to showcase and highlight their products and bring up their businesses to the next level.

She said that to ensure maximum participation, the exhibitors had been offered Premium, Gold and Silver packages. Gulzaib Waqas Awan said that application forms are also available at the WCCI office, and can be sent via email. "Exhibit and explore to grow, the way you deserve to grow because together we excel," the WCCI SVP said.

Growth in agri sector key to reduce poverty

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Pakistan Hi Tech Hybrid Seed Association (PHHSA) Shahzad Ali Malik Sunday said growth in the agriculture sector is two to four times more effective in raising incomes among the poorest compared to other sectors.

Talking to a delegation of progressive farmers led by Shoukat Ali Arain from Mamukanjan, district Toba Tek Singh, he said agriculture is considered as the backbone of the economy as it forms the basis for food and nutrition security and provides raw materials for industrialization. He said agriculture is also crucial to economic growth, accounting for 4% of global GDP and in some least developing countries, it can account for more than 25 percent.

He said agriculture can help reduce poverty, raise incomes and improve food security for 80% of the world's poor, who live in rural areas and work mainly in farming. He said value addition to the agricultural produce implies that more income is generated from agriculture which contributes to lower levels of poverty in rural areas. He said lower poverty rates in rural territories are also associated with more production and income diversification and with more market-oriented economies.

He said Pakistan's agriculture sector plays a central role in the economy as it contributes 18.9 percent to GDP and absorbs 42.3 percent of labour force. It is also an important source of foreign exchange earnings and stimulates growth in other sectors. He said in view of global impending hovering threats of food insecurity, the government must strengthen the agriculture sector on modern scientific lines for bumper production to meet ever-increasing demands of population exploitation grappling the country unchecked.

'If IMF demands met, inflation rate feared to touch 30% in 2023'

ISLAMABAD (INP): The President of Pakistan Business Forum (PBF), Mian Usman Zulfiqar has said that the government is likely to meet all IMF demands to revive loan programme and in result new taxes would impose on the industry and masses, depreciation of the currency which would further spike the inflation and annual inflation rate is also feared to touch 30 percent in 2023.

He said that despite that Pakistan should considering alternative options to tide over its economic crisis other than habitual option of IMF.

In a statement issued on Sunday, Mian Usman Zulfiqar said that unfortunately Pakistan's formula for economic growth is as flawed as it gets: borrow foreign currency-denominated loans, build some

large-scale infrastructure, get a minor growth spurt in the process, and wait until this growth spurt fades so we can repeat the process again.

Our economic failure is a symptom of our collective political choices. Once we can allocate political power more fairly, we can make better economic outcomes.

The PBF President said it's high time to lower Pakistan's debt, ensure a stable currency and promote business-friendly policies for foreign and domestic investors and that could be possible if we fix our currency for a period of few years at the rate of Rs 200, only borrowing from commercial banks for government expenditures, enhance our tax collections and ensure accountability with no bail out further to state owned enterprises and

surprisingly we have a vibrant agriculture sector who have a potential to contribute five percent GDP growth annually.

Through this we could come from this ongoing economic meltdown. Similarly we should understand FDI will only be flourish if you have a stable currency in order to determined the profitability for the foreign investors.

That could be possible if we signing charter of economy for at least 20 years including to revive our strategic relations with United States too.

The PBF President also stressed to attain a balanced development in establishing united and fair society; stresses on to the growth with fair distribution enabling every Pakistani to participate in any principal economic activity.

Body on Post Office, Telecommunication meets

SIALKOT (APP): A meeting of Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Departmental Committee on Post Office and Telecommunication was held at the SCCI.

The guests from Sialkot Post Office Department Chief Post Master Muhammad Mushtaq, Senior Post Master Nasir Javaid and Rizwan-ul-Haq and Manager Export Post Deputy Superintendent Customs Arshad Kamal were invited.

Chairman Department for Post Office and Telecommunication Saleem Akhtar Bhutta presided over the meeting.

The meeting was attended by the chairmen of different SCCI committees,

Fizan Akbar, Sh Zahid Hameed, Shabina SVC SME Awais Ahamad Butt, Shahbaz Siam, Ahmed Khan and SCCI Executive Committee Members.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and solve the issues facing exporters related to GPO and Customs.

SCCI Chairman Department for Post Office and Telecommunication Saleem Akhtar Bhutta, in his address, briefed participants about the issues. Chief Post Master Muhammad Mushtaq, in his reply to queries, promised solving the issues.

Chairman Departmental Committee for Post Office and Telecommunication

said that efforts were being made to establish better relations between Post Office and Sialkot industry. Saleem Bhutta said that steps were necessary to improve facilities of Post Office Sialkot for industrialists and reduce their difficulties.

Chief Post Master Muhammad Mushtaq in his reply to queries promised solution to the issues. He said that he was providing the latest techniques and methods to make the shipments process easy.

Senior Post Master Nasir Javaid said that he was working on development SME with GPO so that shipments be done on latest technique.

Govt failed at economic front: Chairman PEW

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chairman Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW) Brig. (retd) Aslam Khan has said that the government has failed completely on economic front and it adversely disappointed the people and business community.

In a statement issued on Sunday, he said that government was more concerned about politics instead of the country which was against national interests and open violation of obligations.

Brig. Retd. Aslam Khan said that the disappointing economic performance of the government was having a negative impact on 220 million people and national defence as well.

He was of the view that in the prevailing circumstances all the important circles of the country are frustrated over bad governance. At this critical juncture, the priority should be the economy, but the government's priorities are something else, due to which the economic crisis despair and anxiety are increasing, he added.

The chairman PEW said that the people hoped that the economic situation would improve by removing Miftah Ismail and appointing Ishaq Dar as the finance minister, but the

idea proved wrong.

Economic managers continue to stick to their wrong policies and important decisions are not being made according to the country's conditions and the requirements of the IMF, due to which the situation is rapidly deteriorating, he added.

Aslam Khan noted that apart from the economic field, the government is performing worst in the political pitch as well. Neither the investment environment has been improved, nor has the law and order situation improved.

He said that the government has not been able to defend its policies nor has there been any interest in

countering the misguided youth attacking institutions through social media.

PDM leaders unite only to get benefits and settle their cases, but there is no agreement among them to save the country due to which their popularity continues to decrease rapidly, he observed.

The partners of PML-N are not cooperating with it even after getting more than their due share and in this situation, PML-N is trying to gain cheap fame by targeting the establishment, he said.

Aslam Khan said that in the current situation, the champions of democracy have become a major threat to democracy.

Mobile phone imports decrease 66.73% to \$362m

ISLAMABAD (APP): The import of mobile phones into the country has witnessed a decrease of 66.73 percent during the six months of current fiscal year (2022-23) as compared to the corresponding period of last year.

Pakistan imported mobile phones worth US \$ 362.862 million during July-December (2022-23) as compared to the imports of US \$ 1090.647 million during July-December (2021-22), showing decline of 66.73 percent, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

Meanwhile, on year-to-year basis, the import of mobile phones also dipped by 69.10 percent during the month of December 2022 when compared to the same month of last year.

Canvas footwear exports increased

ISLAMABAD (APP): Canvas footwear exports during the first six months of the fiscal year of 2022-23 increased by 49.96 percent as compared to the exports of the commodity during the corresponding period of last year.

During the period from July 22-Dec 22, Canvas footwear worth US \$336,000 were exported as compared to the exports of US\$224,000 during the same period of last year.

According to the data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the exports of leather footwear increased by 27.05 percent, worth US\$75,314,000 as compared to exports of US\$ 59,280,000 during the same period of last year.

Meanwhile, Footwear exports also increased by 26.14% as the exports recorded during the current fiscal year were US \$91,775,000 as compared to the exports during the same period of last year which were US \$72,759,000.

During the period under review, other footwear exports increased by 21.65 percent, worth US \$16,125,000 in the current fiscal year, as compared to the exports of US \$13,255,000 during the same period of last year.

Football exports increased

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's Football exports during the first six months of the fiscal year of 2022-23 increased by 53.58 percent as compared to the exports of the commodity during the corresponding period of last year.

During the period from July 22 to December 22, footballs worth US\$120,893,000 were exported as compared to the exports of US\$63,671,000, during the same period of last year.

According to the data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the exports of Sports goods increased by 27.40 percent, worth US\$208,674,000 as compared to exports of US\$163,797,000 during the same period, last year.

Meanwhile, other exports also increased by 5.33 percent as the exports recorded during the current fiscal year were US \$50,077,000 as compared to the exports during the same period of last year which were US\$47,544,000.

During the period under review, gloves exports decreased by 0.45 percent.

Business community hails govt's decision to buy oil from Russia

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Kyrgyzstan Trade House Meher Kashif Younis Sunday hails the government's wise decision to buy crude oil from Russia in currencies of friendly countries as announced by Russia's Energy Minister Nikolay Shulginov on Friday.

Talking to a delegation of industrialists and traders led by Faran Shahid here today he said it's a good omen that Pakistan will pay in the currencies of friendly countries which he added will definitely ease dollars pressure on either side and help pave way for further strengthening of existing economic cooperation and bilateral relations.

Meher Kashif Younis who also attended some meetings with visiting Russian delegation said agreements between both sides will pay dividends in

the days to come. He appreciated that Islamabad wants to import 35% of its total crude oil requirement from Russia. He said historically the South Asian country has had no major commercial relations with Moscow, unlike neighbouring India. He said Pakistan depends on oil from Gulf countries, mainly due to close political and friendly ties, which often extend facilities like deferred payments, and that route is cheaper logistically given its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz.

Meher Kashif Younis said the earlier recent decision of the government was also a good one for direct settlement and clearing in RMB and Pakistan which will help balance greatly the possible trade fluctuations caused by changes in US dollars.

He said moreover, RMB clearing can be a fast track

for two countries to further deepen industrial cooperation in financing and purchasing. He said the trade volume of Belt and Road countries has reached 11.6 trillion Yuan last year.

If RMB clearing and settlement is fully encouraged, trade efficiency in countries along the Belt and Road will improve, as will more extensive financial cooperation, he added.

He said as inflation and the energy crisis in Europe and the United States have eroded market confidence and China's economy is the same size as the EU's, the RMB may become a future safe haven for investors. He said since 2006, annual trade between Pakistan and China has averaged 17.61 billion US dollars. He said the Bank of China and State Bank of Pakistan ink accord will support cross-border transactions.

TASI ends 42 points higher to close at 10,724

RIYADH (Agencies): Saudi Arabia's Tadawul All Share Index on Sunday gained 42.61 points — or 0.40 percent — to close at 10,724.62.

While MSCI Tadawul 30 Index edged up 4.61 points to close at 1,486.51, the parallel market Nomu slumped 243.64 points to 19,213.17.

TASI's total trading turnover of the benchmark index on Sunday was recorded at SR3.09 billion (\$820 million), with 140 stocks of the listed 223 advancing and 64 falling.

Hail Cement Co. was the topmost gainer of the day, which rose 6.51 percent to SR12.10. The other top gainers were Saudi Advanced Industries Co., Middle East Healthcare Co., Al Hammadi Holding and East Pipes Integrated Co. for Industry.

The worst performer on Sunday was Dur Hospitalia Co., which fell 2.69 percent to SR22.40. Other top decliners were Arabian Cement Co., Qassim Cement Co., Dallah Healthcare Co. and Almarai Co.

Incidentally, Almarai Co. declared its financial results and registered a 13 percent rise in its net profit after zakat and tax for 2022 to SR1.75 billion from SR1.56 billion in 2021. Its revenues during 2022 increased 18 percent to SR18.7 million from SR15.8. The dairy major's

share, however, fell 1.61 percent to SR55.10.

Among sectoral indices, 16 of the 21 listed on the stock exchange advanced while the rest declined. The Diversified Financial Index was the top performer as it rose 1.87 percent to 6,268.38. All constituent stocks, including Saudi Advanced Industries Co., Kingdom Holding Co., Saudi Tadawul Group Holding Co., Sinad Holding Co. and Nayifat Finance Co., ended positively.

Food and Beverages Index and Utilities Index dropped 0.62 percent to close at 4,904.33 and 7,456.54, respectively. While the worst-performing stock in the food and beverages sector was Almarai, the utility sector buckled under the weight of Saudi Electric Co, which fell 1.20 percent to close at SR23.06.

On the announcements front, Al Masane Al Kobra Mining Co. informed the stock exchange on Sunday that the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources issued on Jan. 18 issued it a new exploration license to prospect for gold.

The license is valid until Nov. 24, 2027, and covers an area of 34 square kilometers in the Asir region, according to a statement to Tadawul. The license is also in line with the new Mining Investment Law and its executive regula-

tions. AMAK's share price rose 0.9 percent to SR78.1.

Aldrees Petroleum and Transport Services Co. told Tadawul that its board of directors recommended on Jan. 22 a 20 percent cash dividend, or SR2 per share, for 2022, doling out a total dividend of SR150 million.

Aldrees' share price picked up 0.13 percent to SR79.6.

ACWA Power Co. also communicated to the stock exchange that Jazan Integrated Gasification and Power Co. completed the acquisition of the second group of assets for the Jazan Integrated Gasification Combined Cycle project.

The utility major said the project involves the acquisition of the \$12 billion IGCC plant from Saudi Arabian Oil Co. The first group of IGCC assets was acquired on Oct. 27, 2021.

ACWA Power's share price fell 0.49 percent to SR161. National Medical Care Co. also inked a share purchase agreement with SmartMed Co. to purchase 100 percent of Jivar Medical Services Co. for SR65 million.

The acquisition deal will be financed through the healthcare provider's internal sources and credit facilities, according to a statement to Tadawul. The company's share price surged 1.54 percent to SR79.20.



In brief

Five players injured

FAISALABAD (INP): Five players were injured when two teams clashed during a cricket match here on Sunday. Police said that cricket match was underway between two teams in Kaleem Shaheed Park of Faisalabad when the players after exchange of hot words attacked each other with cricket bats and bricks. Five players were injured in the fight who were shifted to hospital and police after registering a case into the incident started an investigation.

Sarfaraz, Afridi perform Umrah

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan cricket team wicketkeeper-batsman Sarfaraz Ahmed and fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi recently have the privilege to perform Umrah. Shaheen Afridi gave the news of performing Umrah to his fans by uploading a picture taken in Haram Sharif on social media. <https://www.geo.tv/latest/466524-pacer-shaheen-shah-afridi-performs-umrah> Shaheen also wrote "Alhamdulillah" in the caption of the picture. On the other hand, Sarfaraz Ahmed is also present in Haram Sharif these days to perform Umrah. The video of Sarfaraz Ahmed, reciting na'at while carrying his son on shoulders has gone viral.

U16 Memorial Tennis Open final

PESHAWAR (APP): In the first Haji Malik Umar Khattab Khalil Memorial Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Junior Tennis Championship held at the Synthetic Tennis Courts of the Peshawar sports Complex both Shah Sawar Khan and Hamza Rehmat took a berth into the Under-16 age group final. Yaqub Ahmed was the chief guest on this occasion, Zaeheeruddin, Assistant Directorate of Tragedy and Accounts Office, Provincial Tennis Association Secretary General Umar Ayaz Khalil, coaches Zakirullah, Roman Gul, Inam Gul, Wakeel Khan, Janan Khan, Farman Khan, Shaharyar Khan and Nouman were also present. The Tennis Championship under the auspices of the Provincial Tennis Association, Shah Sawar Khan defeated Uzair Khan by 6-2, 6-0 in the U-16 semi-final while in the second semi-final, Hamza Rehmat defeated Ryan Khalil 6-2 and 6-3 and qualified for the final. In the first quarter-final in the U13 category, Arsalan defeated Zain Roman by 6-2 and 6-2 while Muhammad Shayan Afridi defeated Ahmed Khan by 6-2 and 6-1, Junaid defeated Zohaib Amjad 6-2, and 6-3.

FIFA suspends Sri Lanka

COLUMBO (Agencies): Football's governing body FIFA has suspended Sri Lanka's national federation, it said Sunday, a month after issuing it with a "red notice" over governance issues. That warning came after the Ministry of Sports introduced a raft of regulations that reportedly compromised the autonomy and independence of national sports bodies, including the Football Federation of Sri Lanka (FFSL). This month the FFSL held an election, which reportedly fell short of standards agreed upon with FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), in which an ally of the sports minister became chair. In a letter Sunday, FIFA said the FFSL was suspended "until further notice".



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Erling Haaland, right, scores his side's second goal during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester City and Wolverhampton.

Haaland scores hat-trick as Man City tame Wolves

MANCHESTER (Agencies): Erling Haaland's fourth hat-trick in 19 Premier League appearances hauled Manchester City to within two points of leaders Arsenal with a 3-0 win over Wolves on Sunday. Pep Guardiola got the reaction he was hoping for from the English champions after questioning their hunger to retain the title after Thursday's 4-2 win over Tottenham. The hosts had to come from 2-0 down in a dramatic second half against Spurs, but there was little mystery over the destination of the three points once Haaland had broken Wolves' resistance five minutes before half-time.

Haaland's scoring rate has slowed marginally in recent weeks, but his header from Kevin De Bruyne's cross moved him level with the 23

league goals that saw Mohamed Salah and Son Heung-min share the Golden Boot with last season.

The 22-year-old took his tally to 30 goals in all competitions from the penalty spot early in the second half after Ilkay Gundogan had been upended by Ruben Neves.

Wolves then gifted Haaland his hat-trick just four minutes later as goalkeeper Jose Sa presented the ball to Riyad Mahrez, who unselfishly squared for his teammate to roll into an unguarded net. Guardiola quickly took the chance to give his star striker a rest as Haaland was replaced on the hour mark by Julian Alvarez to Wolves' relief.

City should still have inflicted further punishment on Julen Lopetegui's men. Mahrez just failed to

hold his run as he was flagged offside after dinking in De Bruyne's through ball before Gundogan headed a glorious chance over.

But three goals were more than enough for the three points to put pressure on Arsenal ahead of their clash at home to Manchester United later on Sunday. Just a second league defeat since Lopetegui took charge leaves Wolves still outside the relegation zone only on goal difference.

Leeds edged one point clear of the bottom three, but remain without a league win since November after a 0-0 draw at home to Brentford. David Raya denied the incoming Wilfried Gnonto with the best save of the game to salvage the Bees a point that moves them above Liverpool into eighth.

Shoaib Akhtar distances himself from biopic 'Rawalpindi Express'

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Former Pakistan fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar has announced that he is no longer part of the 'Rawalpindi Express' movie, which was meant to be his biopic.

The movie was announced in July last year, and Akhtar at the time had expressed his excitement over the project. However, on Saturday, the former cricketer said he had parted ways with the makers of the biopic due to "constant contractual violations".

In his tweet, Akhtar said he tried his best to keep things going but decided to disassociate himself from the "dream" project after failing to resolve disagreements.

"Very sadly, I would like to inform all of you that after careful consideration for months, I have decided to disassociate myself from the film 'Rawalpindi Express' and its makers by terminating the agreement through my management and legal team," Shoaib said.

The fastest bowler also warned that he would sue the filmmakers if his name were used in the movie now.

"Severe legal action will be taken if the makers continue to make biography film[s] and use my name or life story events in any way."

The development comes weeks after singer and actor Umair Jaswal, cast for the role of 'Shoaib Akhtar' in the biopic, stepped away from the project.

In his tweet on January 4, Umair said he left the movie for "creative and personal reasons."

"Due to creative and personal reasons, I have decided to step away from the Shoaib Akhtar biopic project RAWALPINDI EXPRESS. I will no longer be associated with any media or news related to this project. Wishing everyone involved all the best."

12th Rashid D. Habib Memorial National Professional Golf Tournament 2023

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Final Round of Bank AL Habib's 12th Rashid D. Habib Memorial National Professional Golf Tournament 2023 was played on Sunday, 22nd January at the Karachi Golf Club (KGC).

Last year's defending champion Waheed Baloch from KGC with gross of 277, 11 under par reclaimed the trophy. The runner-up this year is Muhammad Shehzad who scored 278, 10 under par. Pakistan's Ace golfer Muhammad Shabbir is holding third position with 279, 9 under par.

The two-day Junior and Senior Categories were played through Saturday and Sunday. On first day of junior category competition, 14 years old Ashass Amjad while teeing off at 13th hole of Blue Course achieved a hole-in-one. The leader in this category is Muhammad Sahil. Ashass Amjad stood runner-up in Junior category leaderboard. Bank AL Habib rewarded a brand new Toyota car to Ashass.

The Senior Professional Category trophy went to Muhammad Tariq with

Muhammad Akram as the runner up. As usual, with the aim to support and develop professional golf at KGC a two-day match for local KGC Professionals, Senior Professionals and KGC Caddies, the 22nd edition of Rashid D. Habib Memorial Golf Tournament, was played during 17th and 18th January.

Abdul Waheed, Latif Khaskheli and Saleem Inayat took top three positions in the KGC Senior Professionals category. They scored 78, 81 and 82 respectively. Nooruddin won trophy in the KGC Professionals category, with Iqbal Masih as runner-up. A trio of Abdullah, Jalil and Zubair is holding third position jointly in this category.

In the KGC Caddies category, Tariq Kamal carded 11 over par and became new title holder. The runner-up Sabir Akbar is three points behind him. Third position in this category is a three-way tie between M. Javed, Nabeel Khan and Zakir Ali with 15 over par.

The aggregate Prize Money of the tournament this year was PKR 10 million that was paid accord-

ing to Pakistan Golf Federation (PGF) regulations. Amount included PKR 7.95m for Best Performers in National Professional Category, PKR 1.4m for KGC Professionals, Caddies and Senior Pros, as well as Appearance Money of PKR 650,000. The Appearance Money was distributed amongst the top three Professionals: Muhammad Shabbir Iqbal, Muhammad Alam and Muhammad Munir and top three Senior Professionals: Muhammad Tariq, Tahir Naseem and Muhammad Akram as per PGF current ranking.

Chief Guest at the ceremony was Chief of Naval Staff, Pakistan Navy-Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi NI(M), HI(M), SI(M), SBT who presented trophies and award money to winners. PNS Chief appreciated the role of Abbas D. Habib family and Bank AL Habib in promotion of Golf in Pakistan. Admiral Niazi thanked Karachi Golf Club management and Bank AL Habib team on successfully conducting the 12th Rashid D. Habib Memorial National Professional Golf Tournament.

Shiffrin's chase of record 83rd win moves on to next resort

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO (AP): American skier Mikaela Shiffrin's pursuit of a record 83rd World Cup win will move on to the next stop on the circuit.

Shiffrin finished seventh in a super-G on Sunday, 0.62 seconds behind race winner Ragnhild Mowinckel, to mark the third straight event in Cortina this weekend that she missed out on the podium.

Her next chances to break a tie with former teammate Lindsey Vonn for the women's record will come in two giant slaloms at the Kronplatz resort in nearby San Vigilio di Marebbe on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Mowinckel finished 0.30 seconds ahead of Cornelia Huettner and 0.47 seconds ahead of Marta Bassino on the course that will be used for the 2026 Milan-Cortina Olympics.

Italian standout Sofia Goggia sat out the race following a fall a day earlier, due to soreness in her right knee.

Shiffrin was on pace to finish on the podium until she veered wide off the racing line toward the end of her run just before the



concluding jump into the finish area. She shook her head slightly upon seeing her time, which at that point was good for second place behind Bassino.

"I made a little error with my timing on the last turn on the course," Shiffrin said. "And of course it's quite flat down here so you lose some speed. But it was quite a strong run."

It was the third career victory for Mowinckel, who claimed silver medals in both downhill and giant slalom at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics before missing the entire 2019-20 season due to a serious knee injury.

"I was generally sur-

prised when I saw my time because I knew the race was close," Mowinckel said.

The race started directly into the Tofana Schuss, a chute between two walls of rock that is the steepest part of the course, rapidly ramping skiers' speeds up to 115 kph (70 mph) as they rushed zig-zag down the mountain.

If Shiffrin doesn't win in San Vigilio, her next races will be two slaloms — her best event, having accounted for 51 of her 82 wins — in Spindleruv Mlyn, Czech Republic, next weekend. That was where Shiffrin made her World Cup debut as a 15-year-old in March, 2011.

Australian Open 2023 : Iga Swiatek loses to Elena Rybakina, Coco Gauff out to Jelena Ostapenko



Victoria Azarenka of Belarus celebrates after defeating Zhu Lin of China during their fourth round match at the Australian Open tennis championship.

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Top seed Iga Swiatek is out of the Australian Open after losing to Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina in the fourth round.

Rybakina, seeded 22nd, had struggled to replicate the displays which saw her win at the All England Club in July. But against Swiatek the Kazakh showed again how she thrives on the big stage, playing confidently

and powerfully in a 6-4 6-4 win at Melbourne Park.

Less than half an hour later, Coco Gauff lost 7-5 6-3 to Jelena Ostapenko.

American seventh seed Gauff, 18, was among the favourites for the title but was overpowered by the 17th seed from Latvia.

Rybakina, 23, will play former French Open champion Ostapenko in the quarter-finals instead of the

match-up between Swiatek and Gauff that many predicted.

"I am nervous every time I am on court but I try to show calm. It is a big win and I'm happy to be in another round," Rybakina said.

Third seed Jessica Pegula, the highest-ranked player left in the women's draw, came through 7-5 6-2 against Czech Barbora

Krejcikova.

The American could face two-time Melbourne champion Victoria Azarenka in the quarter-finals should Azarenka beat Zhu Lin later on Sunday.

Swiatek 'wanted it too much'

Poland's Swiatek rose to the top of the world rankings last year following the retirement of Australia's Ashleigh Barty, going on to win the French Open and US Open titles as she dominated the WTA Tour.

She reached the Melbourne semi-finals last year and, after a remarkable 2022, returned aiming to be the first women since Serena Williams in 2015 to hold three of the four major titles.

"I felt like I took a step back in terms of how I approach these tournaments and I maybe wanted it a little bit too hard," she said.

"So I'm going to try to chill out a little bit more."

Rybakina's success has been more sporadic. Between claiming the most prestigious title in tennis and the start of this year's Australian Open, she won just 14 of her 24 matches and has spoken out about

the lack of recognition she feels she has been given.

She has also struggled with tough draws, with her world ranking lower than expected after receiving no points for her Wimbledon victory. But she made another impressive statement at Melbourne Park, reaching the last eight for the first time with a dominant win over Swiatek.

The pair exchanged breaks early in the opening set before a double fault from Swiatek at 3-3 gave Rybakina another chance, which she took with a whopping cross-court backhand winner. A confident hold to love sealed the one-set advantage, but Swiatek improved at the start of the second set and moved into a 3-0 lead.

Rybakina quickly fought back and levelled for 3-3 as Swiatek struggled to deal with her hefty serve. She dropped just six points on her first serve in the match and registered an impressive held to love to secure victory after breaking for 5-4. Rybakina says she is no longer "bothered" about not having earned ranking points at Wimbledon but improving her world status is a source

of motivation in Melbourne.

"For sure it's a motivation, but as I said before, every tournament I come I want to win and no matter points, no points," she said. "I love to compete, no matter where I play. For now I would say that I don't really look at these things."

Ostapenko has 'never doubted' she can win another major

Ostapenko became a teenage champion at French Open almost six years ago but a lack of deep runs since has seen many write her off as a one-hit wonder.

However, against Gauff she displayed the powerful-hitting and aggression that led her to the Roland Garros title in 2017. Ostapenko hit 30 winners as she broke Gauff's serve three times and also saved seven of eight break opportunities for the American.

Despite it being the first time since Wimbledon in 2018 that Ostapenko has reached a major quarter-final, the 25-year-old says she "honestly hasn't really doubted" she could win another.

"My life changed a lot, so I needed a few years to really get used to what happened because I was really

young," said Ostapenko, who had never previously gone beyond the third round at Melbourne Park.

"I always knew and believed in my game. If I play well, I can beat almost anyone. "I was trying to work more on my consistency, especially in the pre-season, just to step on the court and play my game."

Gauff had not dropped a set in her previous three matches, including a second-round win over British number one Emma Raducanu. The teenage prodigy, who lost to Swiatek in last year's French Open final, became emotional during her news conference as her wait to land a major continues.

"I think every loss is somewhat in my control because I do feel like I'm a good player, but today she just played better," said Gauff. "There were moments in the match where I was getting frustrated because I normally can problem-solve, but I feel like I didn't have much answers to what she was doing."

"There was a couple of things I could have improved on, but overall I think she deserved to win."



In brief

Country's witnesses drop in COVID-19

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan has witnessed a significant decrease in coronavirus cases across the country. According to details issued by National Institute of Health (NIH) on Sunday, 3,726 corona tests were conducted in 24 hours of which only nine were tested positive for COVID-19. The average of coronavirus cases remained 0.24 percent. No death occurred due to the disease during this time. However, condition of nine affectees of COVID-19 was stated to be critical.

Pakistan post to hold online open court

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Post would conduct an online Khuli Kachery (open court) in all postal circles on January 26 (Thursday) from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. to resolve the complaints of its customers. According to official sources, the initiative would be taken on the special directives of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the Ministry of Communications and Postal Services for addressing the complaints of the users and improving the services of the department. During the online interaction, the Director General of Pakistan Post would listen to the complaints of the postal clients through online zoom meetings. The Director General will issue orders to authorities concerned for resolving the grievances and providing all possible facilities to them. People can join through the meeting ID: 786 148 1947 Passcode: 111 111 117 and Zoom meeting link: <https://bit.ly/PakPostZoomMeeting>. The open court duration would be two hours.

38 archeological sites discovered

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Department of Archeology and Museums Islamabad has discovered 38 new archaeological sites in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) during the last five years. An official source told on Sunday that the Department had discovered these new archaeological sites with the help of its team of archaeologists. There were already six archaeological sites in the federal capital, including Ban Faqiran Stupa, Mai Qamru Mosque, Tomb of Sultan Makrab Khan, Farwala Fort, Rawat Fort and Shahullah Dutta Cave. After 18th Amendment in 2010, all archaeological sites and monuments were decommissioned and handed over to the respective provinces.

IRSA releases 43,100 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 43,100 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 40,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1497.50 feet and was 99.50 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 16,300 cusecs while outflow as 25,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1125.80 feet, which was 75.80 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 6,100 cusecs and 100 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded 43,600, 25,500, 12,600 and 6,300 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 10,800 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 7,200 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.



ISLAMABAD: People visiting famous picnic point Damn-e-Koh to spend their holiday.

Embassy of China organises series of activities to celebrate Chinese New Year 2023

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Cultural Office of the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan has launched a series of activities to grandly celebrate the '2023 Happy Chinese New Year' here on Sunday.

Chinese New Year also known as 'Spring Festival' is the most important festival of the year for the Chinese nation, said a news release of the Embassy.

"It is a time reserved for families. It is an important opportunity for families and friends to get together and celebrate the new year. Often, family members and relatives travel from all over the country to come together for the special event", it added.

The Chinese people strive to make this event as special as possible, often spending hours preparing food and decorations for the events of the festival.

In order to celebrate the '2023 Happy Chinese New Year', the China Cultural

Center in Pakistan worked with the Shanghai Municipality this year to promote the cultural and tourism resources of Shanghai in Pakistan. A wide range of exciting events, such as cultural performances, exhibits, tourism promotion documentaries, and more, were included. China Cultural Center in Pakistan launched the musical concert "Our Common Homeland" by the Shanghai Chinese Orchestra online, and in the coming days, "Happy Chinese New Year - Pujiang Arts Collection" Online Performances & Exhibitions by the Center for China Shanghai International Arts Festival and more similar activities will be launched on various social media platforms run by China Cultural Center in Pakistan as well as the Cultural Office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Pakistan. The Cultural Office of the Chinese

Embassy in Pakistan organized a cake-cutting to kick off the upcoming celebration. Zhang Heqing, Cultural Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan and concurrently Director of China Cultural Center in Pakistan said that Happy Chinese New Year, an annual brand activity held to celebrate Spring Festival under the guidance of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, has taken off in recent years and is increasingly becoming an important platform for China to share Chinese culture and concepts with shared future with people from all over the world.

Friends from Pakistan can visit our social media platforms including Facebook and Wechat to witness the festive celebration of 2023 Happy Chinese New Year. www.facebook.com/ccenterinpk

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Admin foils 12 bids to smuggle 6880 wheat, flour bags

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Food Department Rawalpindi and district police foiled 12 bids to smuggle 6880 wheat and flour bags during last seven days.

According to a district administration spokesman, the authorities of the food department along with Potohar Division police conducted raids in different areas and rounded up 12 drivers on recovery of 6880 wheat and flour bags.

He informed that the accused were trying to illegally ship wheat flour bags out of the Rawalpindi division. He said Rawalpindi District Food Department was ensuring the supply of nearly 37,000 wheat flour bags on daily basis in vari-

ous markets and bazaars across the district as 74 wheat flour sale points were set up in different areas of the district to facilitate the citizens and ensure regular supply of the flour on subsidized rates.

The spokesman said earlier, 60 wheat flour sale points were set up by the administration while on the directives of Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Saqib Manan the number of the sale points was enhanced to 74 in different areas of Rawalpindi including city, cantt, and saddar.

He informed that all the flour mills of the district were directed to supply 500 each subsidized wheat flour bags weighing 10 kg to the

citizens daily.

He said the district administration teams were also monitoring the supply of wheat flour and action in accordance with the law was being taken against the violators of the order.

In line with the directives of the district administration, the food department had launched a crackdown on flour mills for not providing the required quota, he added.

"The food department was taking action against hoarders and those involved in the cartelisation of wheat causing a price hike as we have a surplus of agricultural commodities in the Rawalpindi division," he added.

Globally renowned medical practitioner from UAE visits The Diabetes Centre (TDC)

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Globally renowned senior media practitioner Dr. Javed Ahmed Raza, Director Metabolic Surgical Unit, Cleveland Abudhabi visited The Diabetes Centre here on Sunday.

On arrival, he was a given a warm welcome by MS, Brig @ Dr Muhammad Ajmal Khan along with the team. Dr Javed Ahmed Raza who runs a charitable Institute in Muzafarabad as well, met Chair TDC, Dr Asjad Hameed and shared views of mutual interest.

Chairman briefed the guest about future plans of the Hospital and urged collaborations in this regard.

The guest was taken on a round of the hospital wherein he was shown various departments and their operations.

Dr Javed Raza lauded TDC's relentless efforts in creating awareness and simultaneously combating diabetes thus saving precious lives of innumerable patients. Management of TDC thanked Dr Javed Raza for coming down to the hospital and his resolve to work together for a diabetes free Pakistan.



PRCS provides medical treatment to 141,063 patients through 28 MHUs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) has provided medical treatment to 141,063 patients through 28 Mobile Health Units (MHUs) under the Monsoon Emergency Flood Response Operation 2022.

The PRCS has reached out 99,697 people through health and hygiene promotion activities and distributed 410,871 inclusive health and hygiene kits in the flood-hit areas, a release.

The health facilities included the provision of free-of-cost check-ups, tests, treatment and medicines while the society has also provided first aid services to 3124 people.

Besides health and hygiene facilities, the PRCS has provided 2.80 million liters of safe drinking water regularly (3.818 households are benefiting from 02 water treatment plants on daily basis).

The PRCS has distributed 31,269 family tents, 247,586 hot meal packs and prepaid cards to 1700 households for restoring family links.

Pakistan Red Crescent (PRC) is a humanitarian organization, dedicated to improving lives of vulnerable segments of society, since 1947.

PRC endeavours to strengthen humanitarian and social values by promoting the ideals of tolerance, non-violence, sympathy, love and respect for others in society.

PPP delegation from GB calls on Asif Zardari

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation of Pakistan Peoples Party Gilgit Baltistan, consisting of parliamentary and organising committee members led by the opposition leader in GB assembly and president PPP as well, called on Asif Ali Zardari at Zardari House.

The delegation included PPP GB General Secretary Engineer Muhammad Ismail, Senior Vice President Jamil Ahmed, provincial Secretary Information and member GB assembly Sadia Danish, Vice President Bashir Ahmed, Member assembly Ghulam Shahzad Agha, member GB Council Ayub Shah, and Deputy General Secretary Advocate Atiq ur Rehman, said a news release.

The delegation enquired about the health of Asif Zardari and appreciated his positive role in country's politics.

During the meeting, the political situation in the country and the GB were also

discussed. On the occasion, Asif Ali Zardari said that there is a close relationship of the party with Gilgit Baltistan and the PPP has always taken measures in the development of GB including resolving GB's constitutional and organisational issues. The PPP will continue to serve the people of GB in future as well. He said that there are a lot of health issues in GB specially an increase in heart patients in GB which is a great concern. Hence, a modern hospital of heart diseases will be established in GB.

Asif Zardari instructed the delegation to keep in contact with the people of GB and raise their issues.

He said that the party is deeply rooted in the province and will continue to fulfil the dreams of the people of GB.

The Secretary General of the PPP, Nayer Hussain Bukhari was also present during the meeting.

NHMP urged drivers to be careful on slippery roads

ISLAMABAD (APP): National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) have urged drivers to exercise caution while driving on slippery roads during and after periods of rain.

The warning comes as weather forecasters predicted that plain the region will experience heavy rainfall and northern areas will have snow-fall over the coming days till January 25, which could lead to dangerous driving conditions on the highways.

Talking to APP here on Sunday, an official of NHMP informed that slippery road conditions are

prevailing on various highways including Shah Maqsood to Thakot (E35), Dina Nath to Jinnah Terminal Thokar Bypass (N5), Islamabad Toll Palaza to Sawabi (M1), Thalian Interchange to Islamabad Toll Plaza (M2), Havelian to Achriya (E35), Shaheen CNG to Dina Nath(N5) and at Express Highway from Katlang to Chakdara.

He said that rain can cause roads to become slick and slippery, making it harder for drivers to maintain control of their vehicles. He said slippery conditions can lead to an increased risk of acci-

dents, particularly for those traveling at high speeds.

To stay safe on the roads during wet weather, he advised the drivers to slow down and increase the following distance behind other vehicles.

Additionally, he warned drivers to be aware of sudden changes in weather conditions, such as heavy rain, snow-fall, and fog that can reduce visibility on the roads. He recommended that drivers use their headlights and windshield wipers to help improve visibility, and also to be prepared for sudden stops or changes in traffic flow.

ANF teams fired upon in Rawalpindi and Peshawar

ISLAMABAD (APP): An officer was injured when two teams of Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) came under fire in Rawalpindi and Peshawar, a private TV channel reported on Sunday.

Drug smugglers opened fire on ANF teams during raids resulting in injuries to an officer who received a bullet in his arm in Dhok Munshiyar in Rawalpindi and on Nasir Bagh Road in Peshawar.

Police conducted a raid in Rawalpindi to arrest drug trafficker, known as Khan who supplied drugs to youth through Facebook.

During the raid, the accused opened fire on the ANF team in which one officer was injured. Lance Naik Moeen was rushed to the hospital for emergency treatment.

The ANF team, with the help of the local police, launched an investigation while taking steps for arrest of the accused. In another incident in Peshawar, ANF vehicle was sprayed with bullets on Nasir Bagh Road. Luckily, no ANF officer was injured in the firing.

After the officers' retaliation, the drug smugglers escaped from the scene leaving behind their vehicle.

The accused were proclaimed offenders and were wanted by the ANF in several cases.

During the search of their vehicle, the ANF personnel seized 10kg heroin and 10kg ice drug. An ANF spokesman said that further action was underway to arrest the culprits.

Waste disposal - an uphill task for garrison city managers

RAWALPINDI (APP): The garrison city, once reckoned among the cleanest cities in the country, is fast losing its beauty due to rising pollution and uncollected solid waste with majority of its population exposed to serious health hazards.

With more than half of daily generated solid waste remaining uncollected, the chunk lifted by the city managers is also dumped in open in city's vicinity since no proper waste segregation or treatment mechanism is in place. As the figure of waste generation varies between 3000 to 4000 tonne daily, the concerned departments can lift only 1000 tonne randomly with remaining waste either moving to sewage or lies at streets in small heaps. The existing workforce, machinery, vehicles and non-availability of modern dumping sites are the main reasons behind the city managers' inability to keep roads and residential areas clean.

Rapid urbanization due to massive population influx from other cities and adjoining rural areas resulting in mushroom growth of new housing societies in the outskirts of Rawalpindi, is another challenge for authorities. Although the officials of Rawalpindi Waste Management Corporation (RWMC) claim to collect and properly dispose of solid waste, the situation on ground is otherwise. "We are efficiently and effectively providing solid waste management services across the city," claimed RWMC's Chief Executive Officer Ahmed Nawaz Gondal. "Daily we collect around 1000 tonne solid waste by deploying 3800 sanitary workers and 243 different types of vehicles." He said presently the corporation is dispensing duties at five cities of Rawalpindi District. "The waste collected from different areas is gathered at Liaqat Bagh and then transported to a dumping site at Losar. Chak Beli road some 30 kilometres from Rawalpindi city."

He explained that RWMC provides services like placement of

waste containers, manual mechanical sweeping, mechanical washing, waste collection, waste transportation, disposal, de-silting of tertiary drains, plot clearance and resolution of complaints received through helpline 1139. "RWMC has a Vehicle Trip Counting System (VTCS) operated automatically without human involvement."

The CEO informed that RWMC also carries out solid waste management services at 24 Metro Bus Stations including mechanical washing of Metro Bus track, stairs and escalators, platform, pedestrian bridge, auxiliary areas and washrooms. He said improper dumping of waste by citizens was the biggest problem for RWMC and urged the residents to throw garbage in waste containers instead of drains, open plots and roads.

A recent study conducted by School of Social Sciences and Humanities, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) has revealed that waste collected across Rawalpindi is dumped in open without any gas collection or leachate management system for the safety of ground and surface water resources.

Environmentalists and health experts have described burning or dumping solid waste in open as hazardous for human health and environment calling upon authorities to put in place a proper mechanism of disposal. "A landfill site and state-of-the-art disposal plants were essential for solid waste management as per international standards to mitigate environmental pollution and avert hazards to human health," remarked Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Deputy Director Muhammad Rafique. He said the World Health Organization (WHO) has also termed open sewage channel of Nullah Leh in Rawalpindi a significant cause of pollution stating, "installation of waste disposal plant had become inevitable for Rawalpindi."

"We are already paying a heavy

price of environmental degradation in terms of resources damage and human ailment," Rafique said. "Therefore, we direly need to focus this issue for environmental protection and lessen healthcare burden on our economy." As all of daily generated waste is seldom collected by authorities due to insufficient infrastructure, its sizeable amount flow into Soan river or Nullah Lai, posing serious health hazards as both run through thickly populated areas.

There is also a behavioral tendency of the citizens not to throw their randomly in streets dispose of waste containers, least caring for their own and other's health. "Improper solid waste management and its dumping in open poses health hazards like cough, bronchitis, congestion, skin and liver diseases, asthma and even cancer," said District Health Officer Dr Waqar Ahmed.

"Households closer to dumpsites were more vulnerable to various risk factors like foul smelling, air pollution, water contamination, mosquitoes and rodents," Dr Waqar said. "The number of patients suffering from air and water pollution is rising with more people suffering from liver, lungs and stomach diseases."

He called for devising a comprehensive strategy involving concerned civic authorities, citizens, environmental and health experts. "If we continue to shy away from this challenge, more and more people will be falling ill." In this situation, the experts have also suggested public consultation and household involvement for promoting the method of 3 RS; reduction, reuse and recycling of solid waste. But by the time, even at major cities the waste is jumbled in a single container and this non-segregated openly dumped waste triggers highest volume of leachate especially during monsoon, polluting the vicinities.

Therefore, since the country lags far behind in mechanized waste collection, segregation and recycling, there is dire need for putting in place a proper mechanism to tackle this issue.

3 robbers arrested by police

KABUL (Agencies): Police arrested three on charges of robbing a house in Kabul. The th3 police district of Kabul personnel these three people while robbing a house, the Commander of police of Kabul said in a statement. The suspects were involved in the robbery of many houses in different sites of Kabul city, the statement added. According to the police of Kabul, the detainees will be introduced to judicial bodies after police investigations.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Jamadi-us-Sani 30, 1444 — Monday, January 23, 2023

Four drug dealers arrested

BAMYAN (Agencies): The local security officials of Bamyan province of Afghanistan said that police arrested four people on charges of drugs dealing in that province. The police spokesman of Bamyan Police, Mohammad Khawani Rasa said that police arrested two people while dealing alcohol and two others for dealing drugs from the center of Bamyan. An amount of drugs and two vehicles were recovered from the detainees.

Afghan, chinese FMs pledge to fight terror

KABUL (Khaama Press): Afghanistan's Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi held a telephone conversation with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang on Saturday, both sides stressed strengthening cooperation and combating terrorism.

The Chinese minister said that his country places great importance on the safety of Chinese nationals and entities serving in Afghanistan, and expects the Afghan caretaker government to take concrete measures to ensure the safety of Chineses citizens.

For his part, Muttaqi said that Afghan leadership will not allow any forces or militant groups to use Afghan soil to disrupt Afghanistan-China relations and undermine China's interests. Afghan security officials are decisive to take strong meas-

ures to ensure the safety of Chinese institutions and personnel, he added.

Qin is China places great importance on building long-lasting relations with Afghanistan and respects its independence and sovereignty.

"China does not interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs, nor does it seek self-interest or a sphere of influence in Afghanistan," Chinese Minister said.

Since the overthrow of the previous regime by the Taliban in August 2021, China is one of the few countries, which has maintained close ties with the Taliban authorities in Kabul.

Besides continuing the delivery of humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan during these difficult times, China has remained firm in initiating social development projects in order to improve the

living conditions of the ordinary people in Afghanistan.

In the recent past, China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC), a pioneer engineering contracting company in China contracted the extraction of the Amu oil field with the Afghan interim government worth millions of dollars. The project will create jobs for thousands of people in Afghanistan who are desperately searching for work during these tough economic times.

Meanwhile, the withdrawal of the United States from the country translates into a strategic geopolitical gain for China – paving the way to deepen its engagements in Afghanistan and achieve its national interests through its mega economic projects under the umbrella of the "Road and Belt Initiative".

IEA strongly condemns burning Holy Quran

KABUL (Agencies): The Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan strongly condemned the burning and defilement of the Holy Quran in Sweden and urged to be punished the perpetrators of such a provocative act.

A statement issued by the ministry of foreign affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan said Swedish authorities must "severely punish perpetrators of this act and urged to prevent such incidents that desecrate Islamic sanctities from occurring".

Iran on Saturday strongly condemned the burning of the Quran, Islam's holy book, by a Swedish-Danish right-wing extremist in Sweden, calling it an attempt to stoke hatred and violence against Muslims.

Saudi countries have condemned what it called the "deliberate abuse of the Holy Quran by some radicals in Sweden and provocation and incitement against Muslims".

The leader of the Danish far-right party Stram Kurs (Hard Line) on Saturday burnt a copy of the Holy Quran in the Swedish capital.

Under police protection, Rasmus Paludan burnt a copy of the Muslim holy book near the Turkish Embassy's building.

The Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu criticized Sweden for giving Paludan a permit for burning the Quran, adding that racism and hate crimes do not count as freedom of thought.

104 individuals and 70,000 animals die in cold wave, fires

KABUL (Pajhwok): Over a hundred people have died due to the cold wave, snow-fall and fire incidents in different parts of the country, an official of the Islamic Emirate says.

Over the past fortnight, central, northern and north-western parts of the country have been in the grip of biting cold, creating multiple problems for the people.

Pajhwok Afghan News recently quoted officials in some provinces as saying that 88 individuals had so far died because of the harsh winter.

On Sunday, the BBC quoted a spokesman for the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) as saying: "The recent unfortunate incidents of cold weather, floods, fires and gas inhalation have killed 104 people, partially or completely torched 50 houses and left about 70,000 livestock dead in Takhar, Badakhshan, Nimroz, Kandahar, Laghman, Ghazni, Uruzgan, Jawzjan, Sar-i-Pul, Faryab, Paktika, Balkh, Samangan, Bamyan and Herat provinces."

ANDMA had dispatched teams to the affected provinces to survey the losses ahead of aid distribution to victims, Rahimi said.

"Some governmental bodies and welfare organisations distributed aid packages to about 40,000 families in different parts of the country over the last month," the ANDMA spokesman added.

Afghanistan women's cricketers resettled

KABUL (Agencies): Afghanistan's contracted women cricketers have thanked Australia – the government and its people – for providing them with a future they never thought they would have after the Taliban took control of their country in August 2021.

That is when their payments stopped and the homes of suspected female athletes or their male supporters began being raided.

The women cricketers fled over the border into Pakistan, while seeking asylum elsewhere.

Uzbekistan urged to honor electricity supply contract



KABUL (Pajhwok): Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi has asked

Uzbekistan to provide electricity to Afghanistan in line with the agreement between the two nations.

Earlier, Da Afghanistan Breshna Shirkat said that electricity import contract with Uzbekistan extended for another one year.

Addressing the inauguration gathering of the Afghanistan's Agriculture Products Development Fund, Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said Afghanistan and Uzbekistan enjoyed good interaction through Hairatan Port and hoped that Tashkent will provide over 400MW electricity agreed between the two countries.

"Uzbekistan has cut off electricity supply and people are facing trouble, the demand of brotherhood

and neighborhood was to cooperate and help in dire situation."

He said Uzbek officials should honor their pledge and provide electricity according to the signed contract because the people of Afghanistan needed electricity in winter and summer.

Stability in Afghanistan

According to Muttaqi Afghanistan was moving towards stability and the future was bright that needed strong commitment and hard work.

"You can observe there is change of mindset at international level about Afghanistan. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan owned a strong and solid policy which is recognized by the world and finally Afghanistan will get its desire place in the international stage."

"We always said that

Afghanistan will not be a threat to anyone and recently US foreign secretary acknowledged this, earlier Pakistan warned against airstrike in Afghanistan but recently its foreign minister said that Pakistan had no such plan this showed that they recognized the fact that Afghanistan is not a threat to anyone. We had a fruitful meeting with Russian envoy recently who pledged bilateral cooperation, humanitarian aid and expressed views on the formal recognition of the IEA government," said Muttaqi.

He added UN also acknowledged that interaction should continue with Afghan government and assured more humanitarian aid.

Agriculture should be modernized

Muttaqi said it was an honor to see that Afghanistan was moving forward in several areas, adding that

all institutions were busy for the development of the country.

He said 80 people in Afghanistan were associated with agriculture and the qualities of Afghanistan's agriculture products were high in the world.

"Our agriculture crops are natural, agriculture should be modernised, there is need for the construction of cold stores in the country and exploration of market. Strategies and programmes should be launched for the development of agriculture and livestock in order to strengthen our economy, our people should find job in their villages and this is possible when agriculture is improved," he added.

He said last year Afghanistan's products reached international markets and similar efforts would be made to do so in the future.

UN warns Taliban for isolating Afghanistan



KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations delegation has warned the Islamic Emirate authorities that isolating women would lead to the isolation of Afghanistan as the country is already faced with a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, according to reports.

A high-level UN delegation traveled to Afghanistan this week and met with high-ranking de facto officials of the country aimed at ensuring the protection of women's rights and girls' rights amid the growing concern over the alienation of Afghan women from public life.

The UN legal experts

called on the Taliban authorities to prioritize protecting the rights of women and girls under any circumstances and urged the international community to support Afghan women during these critical times.

The UN delegation that visited Kabul included Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, the Executive Director of UN Women Sima Bahous, and the Assistant Secretary-General for UN political, peacebuilding, and peace operations Khaled Khiri.

The purpose of the four-day visit to Afghanistan was to observe the situa-

tion, engage with de facto authorities and highlight the UN solidarity with the Afghan people, the delegation in a statement said on Friday afternoon.

Meanwhile, the senior UN team will share their findings and recommendations with all member states, which may influence global policies towards Afghanistan in the short and long terms.

"The recent bans issued by the Taliban caretaker government restricting women and girls from educational institutions and workplaces is of great concern for the UN. Indeed, these restrictions are isolating Afghanistan itself in the midst of a terrible humanitarian crisis," Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said.

Ms. Bahous, the third executive director of UN Women, said, "what's happening in Afghanistan is a grave women's rights crisis and a wakeup call" for the international community.

The UN delegation's message is crystal clear to the Taliban authorities regarding the violation of the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, with serious ramifications if the situation does change for the better.

Afghanistan need more aid

KABUL (Agencies): The head of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Afghanistan, Eloi Fillion met with the Acting Foreign Minister, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi. Fillion highlighted the actions and projects of the Red Cross in various sectors in Afghanistan and thanked the Islamic Emirate for its cooperation in providing its services.

He said that Afghanistan is a country that has just been freed from war, adding that ICRC will focus to increase its services in Afghanistan more than any other region.

For his part, Foreign Minister, Muttaqi expressed his satisfaction with their operations, saying that the Islamic Emirate deeply appreciates the ICRC services in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is more peaceful than ever, as wars end, the number of casualties has decreased, transplantation of artificial limbs, and medical services promoted, Muttaqi added.

New model car designed in Kandahar displayed



KABUL (Agencies): Graduated students from the Directorate of Technical and Vocational Education in Kandahar have designed a new model car, which was shown off in Kandahar.

The provincial head of Technical and Vocational Education, Mawlawi Abdul Wadud Hotak, said that currently there are 300 educa-

tional institutions in 34 provinces of the country.

According to him, 300 departments are provided long and short-term education courses for youths in the country.

Hotak said that the administration has started serious work in gathering professional staff and making use of their abili-

ties with the arrival of the Islamic Emirate, adding that hundreds of professional cards have been registered with the department so far.

The designer of the car Jameel Ahmed Qureshi said that the team made Buick 1910 model car by hand without machinery for the first time in Kandahar.

Hospitals admitted at least 40,000 children last month: Ministry

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Public Health on Sunday said that at least 40,000 children under the age of five years old were admitted to hospitals across the country for various diseases over the past month.

According to the ministry, at least 10,000 children have been referred to medical centers across the country over the past week.

"In December, 40,000 children under the age of five years old were hospitalized across Afghanistan and it turned to be around 10,000 children a week," said Sharafat Zaman Amarkhil, a spokesman for the Ministry of Public Health.

TOLONews reporter visited the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in downtown Kabul, where dozens of children are hospitalized for various diseases, including respiratory illnesses.

"We could not afford to



pay for her treatment. We took her to Pul-e-Khumri city (in Baghlan). Doctors sent us to Kabul. Thank God, she is feeling better now," said Gul Afroz, the grandmother of Zarghona,

a one-and-a-half-year-old child who is suffering from a cardiac problem as well as pneumonia.

"It has been one week that he is in critical condition. We brought him to the

hospital," said Hamida, mother of a child.

Doctors at Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital said seasonal diseases have increased among children over the past two months.

China accused of providing modern weaponry to Taliban

KABUL (Khaama Press): Following the terror attack in the heart of Kabul in December, which housed mostly Chines nationals, China is allegedly accused of providing modern military equipment to the Taliban according to sources.

The Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISK) militants were behind the brutal terror attack, resulting in the injury of several Chinese citizens. China's weaponry support to the de facto regime in Kabul has reportedly begun following the terror incident and the rising instability which threatens the country's interests and the implementation of the "Road and Belt Initiative" (RBI) in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, Chinese sources have expressed

concerns about the volatile security situation and the rising militancy in Afghanistan which could turn the country into the hub of terrorists in the region.

"In response to the growing insecurity and militancy, China has sought to provide the de facto authorities of Afghanistan to fight all forms of terrorism and extremism," Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai, author of The Troubled Triangle: US-Pakistan Relations under the Taliban's Shadow in The Jamestown Foundation said.

After the withdrawal of the US and international forces in August 2021, China deepened its engagement with the Taliban-run government for several reasons. China was among the

few counties such as Iran, Pakistan, and Russia asking the international community to help the Taliban stabilize the country.

With no major international player on the ground, the opportunity seemed quite good for China to support the Taliban and achieve their national interests in war-torn Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the US presence in Afghanistan was a strategic threat to China. Now with the US gone, closing ties with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is a new geopolitical development for China, reported Jamestown Foundation.

China will give its utmost efforts to succeed in achieving its interests in Afghanistan through mega economic and development

projects, under the umbrella of its well-known Road and Built Initiative.

Qomi as new Iranina envoy appointed for Afghanistan

KABUL (Agencies): Hassan Kazemi Qomi, the special representative of the President of Iran, has been appointed as ambassador of that country for Afghanistan.

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Kabul in a statement informed introducing, Hassan Kazemi Qomi, as the new ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran for Afghanistan.

Iranian Navy visits Pakistan

KARACHI (APP): Iranian Navy ships and submarine on Sunday visited Karachi port and participated in a naval exercise with Pakistan Navy (PN).

Upon arrival at Karachi port, the PN officials along with the Iranian consulate Staff warmly welcomed the visiting flotilla and national anthems tunes of both countries were played as a mark of respect, a Pakistan Navy media release said.

The recent visit of the Iranian Navy to Pakistan reaffirms joint efforts to promote regional stability and maritime

security for the protection of Sea Lines of Communication and Seafarers in the region. During stay at port, both navies held mutually rewarding professional interactions, exchange visits, and table-top discussions on matters of mutual interest. Upon the culmination of the visit, a passage exercise between the two navies was conducted to enhance naval cooperation.

The visit of Iranian navy ships to Pakistan is a manifestation of strong bilateral ties between the two countries and a resolve toward regional peace.



Ten dead in mass shooting in Asian city in California

MONTEREY PARK (AFP/APP): Ten people have died and at least 10 others have been wounded in a mass shooting in a largely Asian city in southern California, police said Sunday, with the suspect still at large hours later.

The gunman opened fire at a dance venue in Monterey Park, as the local community were celebrating Lunar New Year, with witnesses saying he shot indiscriminately with a semiautomatic weapon.

Captain Andrew Meyers of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said officers had responded to emergency calls around 10:20pm on Saturday and found people pouring out of the premises.

"The officers made entry to the location and located additional victims," he said.

"The Monterey Park Fire Department responded to

the scene and treated the injured and pronounced 10 of the victims deceased at the scene. "There are at least 10 additional victims that were transported to numerous local hospitals and are listed in various conditions from stable to critical.

"The suspect fled the scene and remains outstanding." Police gave no description of the suspect, and did not say what kind of gun he used.

Monterey Park, about eight miles (13 kilometers) east of downtown Los Angeles, is home to around 61,000 people, the majority of them Asian or Asian American. Local resident Wong Wei told the Los Angeles Times his friend had been at the dance club, and had been in the bathroom when the shooting erupted. When she emerged, she saw a man carrying a long gun and fir-

ing indiscriminately, as well as the bodies of three people, two of them women and one person who he said was the boss of the club.

The paper reported that Seung Won Choi, who owns a seafood barbecue restaurant near the scene said three people had run into his restaurant and told him to lock the door.

The three said there was a man with a semiautomatic gun who had multiple rounds of ammunition on him, and would reload every time he ran out, Choi told the paper. The Times reported that tens of thousands of people had gathered earlier in the day for the two-day Lunar New Year festival, which is one of the largest in southern California. Meyer said detectives did not know whether the suspect knew his victims or whether it was a targeted attack.

44.2m children receive anti-polio drops

ISLAMABAD (APP): Over 44.2 million children under five years of age were administered polio drops during a five-day nationwide immunization drive. According to official sources, to provide maximum protection and boost a child's immunity, polio teams also provided a dose of Vitamin-A to children aged six to 59 months in addition to polio drops, during the drive.

They said that the government had fixed the target to vaccinate over 10 million children in Sindh, over 421,000 children in Islamabad, 2,599,000 children in Balochistan, over 7,458,000 children in Balochistan, and over 278,000 children in Gilgit Baltistan. They said that over 350,000 trained and dedicated 'Sehat muhafiz' members were engaged in the vaccination drive to inoculate the targeted children at their doorstep.

On this occasion, Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination Abdul Qadir Patel said, "If we can eliminate the poliovirus from southern KP, we will succeed in eliminating polio from Pakistan altogether."

He added, "We are actually quite close to the finish line, and we are determined to get there as soon as possible. Pakistan has made great strides in the fight against polio, with virus circulation, reduced to only one small part of the country." Dr Shahzad Baig, Coordinator of the National Emergency Operation Centre, emphasized that the anti-polio campaign required collective action at all levels to eradicate the poliovirus from the country.

"Our aim is to ensure timely and repeated vaccination of eligible children. High-risk districts are our top priority, and we are keen to eliminate the poliovirus from the challenging areas while protecting the rest of the region as well," he added.

PML-N attempts to bridge PPP and MQM-P chasms

KARACHI (NND): PML-N Sindh president Syed Shah Mohammad Shah on Sunday attempted to bridge the fissures between the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P).

Jamaat-i-Islami Karachi chief Hafiz Naem ur Rehman called on Mr Shah at his residence, during which the PML-N leader stressed the need for alliance between the PPP and MQM-P sooner.

Discussing the recent Sindh LG polls in the meeting, Mr Rehman said, "The LG polls in Karachi were held with difficulty as some of the people were resorted to the tactics of delaying the elections."

Underscoring the significance of the unity among the political leaders, Mr Rehman said there was a dire need for the politicians' unity for the sake of Karachi. Meanwhile, Mr Shah praised the JI's LG election campaign, saying, "JI had bagged an achievement in Karachi." Mr Shah acknowledged his party's contribution to Karachi, saying, "The PML-N had played a critical role in maintaining law and order in Sindh's capital province."



QUETTA: Former prime minister and PML-N leader Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Nawabzada Haji Lashkar Raisani, Miftah Ismail and Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar hold a joint press conference.

Minister laments some forces want Imran to remain politically popular

LAHORE (NND): Expressing his exasperation, Federal Minister Javed Latif has said that some forces want Imran Khan to remain politically popular. Mr Latif was addressing a presser in Lahore on Sunday. He said it is mindboggling why no decision has been made on the pending cases against PTI Chairman Imran Khan.

The federal minister further said patronage was openly continued till 2022. Did the chief of the establishment of that time not know that the letter was fake? Did Saqib Nisar, who gave the certificate of Sadiq and Amin, not know about this playboy?" he questioned.

"Imran is being made Sadiq (truthful) and Amin (trustworthy) in another form," the federal minister blasted wondering in whose interest it was to keep Imran politically popular.

"Will this joke be played over and over again," he said adding that once again the tug-of-war is being started.

He said PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif has rendered so many sacrifices for the sake of this nation and state. Nawaz's sacrifices are being wasted, he rued.

Those who defamed Nawaz Sharif should be taught a lesson. Nawaz Sharif should be apologized to and brought back.

Javed Latif said Nawaz Sharif will repeatedly sacrifice for the country? On whose wish was Nawaz Sharif removed in 2017? After the confessional of the accused, the matter was digested. "They were demanding to form a commission in 2017, today the matter has gone beyond the truth commission, money has to be taken out of the pockets of the accused of 2017," he added.

He said Nawaz Sharif did not take the guarantee and does not want it even today. "Nawaz Sharif will not sacrifice anymore as he made many sacrifices for the state. His sacrifices were wasted. 20 by-seats were also being facilitated," he added.

The federal minister further said five people have harmed the state in all economic and political aspects. It will not be enough as Nawaz Sharif should be declared innocent and brought back to Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif must be brought back as a sign of punishment to the punishers. The date of Nawaz Sharif's return will be announced after the election date for both provinces.

He said that due to the looting of the former government, there has been a wave of inflation in the country and Imran Khan is responsible for bringing Pakistan to this level.

Thirty-two UN peacekeepers, including seven Pakistani, killed in wanton attacks in 2022

UNITED NATIONS (APP): At least 32 UN peacekeeping personnel, including seven from Pakistan, were killed in deliberate attacks against them last year, according to the UN Staff Union.

For the ninth year in a row, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was the deadliest for peacekeepers with 14 fatalities, followed by 13 fatalities in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), four fatalities in the United Nations Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and one fatality in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Among the 32 fatalities were 28 military and 4 police personnel, including a woman police officer, the press release said.

"Peacekeepers and the civilian personnel who work side by side with them are on the front lines of the United Nations' work

in the world's most challenging environments," Staff Union President Aitor Arauz said in a statement. "Each malicious attack against UN personnel is a blow to peacekeeping, one of the pillars of the multilateral edifice," Arauz said. "It is a collective responsibility of the international community to put in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure accountability for these heinous acts, which may constitute war crimes under international law."

The UN Staff Union said that the 32 killed in 2022 bring to 494 UN and associated personnel killed in deliberate attacks in the past 13 years from improvised explosive devices, rocket-propelled grenades, artillery fire, mortar rounds, landmines, armed and successive ambushes, convoy attacks, suicide attacks and targeted assassinations.

It said the peacekeepers who died in 2022, by country, were 7 from Pakistan, 7 from Egypt, 4 from Chad, 3 from Bangladesh, 2 from India, 2 from Nigeria, 1 each from Guinea, Ireland, Jordan, Morocco, Nepal, Russia and Serbia.

Among the Pakistani peacekeepers, six --

Muhammad Ismail, Faizan Ali, Asif Ali Awan, Samiullah Khan, Muhammad Saad Nomani and Muhammad Jamil Khan -- serving MONUSCO, were killed in a helicopter crash in east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The MONUSCO helicopter crashed in the Tshanzu area, 20 kilometres south of Rutshuru, in North Kivu, was part of a surveillance and reconnaissance mission, carried out in an area where clashes had taken place between the M23 militia and the armed forces of the DRC.

Another Pakistani peacekeeper Babar Siddique, serving with MONUSCO, was killed in an attack on the Mission's operational base in Minembwe, South Kivu, by suspected members of the Twirwanaho armed group, the press release added.

Pakistan has been one of the largest contributors of uniformed personnel to U.N. peacekeeping operations. Since the 1960s, Pakistan has contributed over 200,000 troops to 43 missions. In its service to the cause of peace, Pakistan lost 157 of its bravest who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Election will not be allowed until arrest of Saqib Nisar: Safdar

ISLAMABAD (NND): Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) leader Captain (R) Safdar Awan Sunday said they will not allow elections until former Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Saqib Nisar and his five companions go to jail.

PML-N supremo Mian Nawaz Sharif's son-in-law Safdar Awan addressed a party workers' convention organized by Malik Raiz MNA at Shahdara on Sunday.

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) leader Captain (R) Safdar Awan strongly criticized the role of former CJP, General Pervez Musharraf, and General Qamar Javed Bajwa and said all these conspired against Mian Nawaz Sharif. Safdar said now is the time to respect the vote as Saqib Nisar and 5 judges gave a verdict against the integrity of the country. He said Saqib Nisar has tarnished the country's honor by arresting his wife Maryam Nawaz Sharif from the airport.

He said the whole nation will reach Lahore to welcome Maryam Nawaz Sharif when she will return to her homeland. He also said in the last 4 years, Imran Khan fell the country into a quagmire and now Shahbaz Sharif is trying to take this country out of this quagmire.

Lula sacks army commander after anti-government riots

BRASÍLIA (AFP/APP): President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva sacked the commander of Brazil's army Saturday, two weeks after an election-denying mob loyal to his far-right predecessor ransacked the halls of power in Brasilia.

The veteran leftist's dismissal of Julio Cesar de Arruda came a day before Lula was to make his first trip abroad -- to Argentina -- as he moves to put the South American powerhouse back on the international stage. Arruda had only taken up the post on December 30, two days before the end of outgoing president Jair Bolsonaro's term, and was confirmed by Lula's administration in early January.

On January 8, Bolsonaro supporters ransacked the presidential palace, Supreme Court and Congress in Brasilia, breaking windows and furniture, destroying priceless works of art, and

leaving graffiti messages calling for a military coup. Lula has said he suspects security forces may have been involved in the riots, in which more than 2,000 people were arrested. The leftist president announced a review of his immediate environment.

Defense Minister Jose Mucio said Saturday evening after meeting with the president that Arruda was out as head of the army because of "a break in the level of confidence." "We thought we needed to stop this in order to get over this episode," Mucio said, alluding to the attack in Brasilia. Mucio said Friday after a meeting with Lula and the chiefs of the three branches of the military that there was no direct armed forces involvement in the riots.

On Wednesday, the man named to be the new army chief, Tomas Ribeiro Paiva, until now the head of the southeastern army com-

mand, vowed that the military "will continue to guarantee democracy." And he suggested that the results of the October election in which Lula defeated Bolsonaro should be accepted.

On Sunday Lula will head to Argentina, the customary first stop for Brazilian presidents. Beyond tradition, however, the trip will also allow him to meet with a faithful ally, President Alberto Fernandez, as well as regional counterparts at the summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

"Everyone wants to talk to Brazil," Lula said this week in an interview with the Globo TV channel, promising to rebuild Brasilia's ties with the international community after Bolsonaro's four years in office were marked by international isolation for the country.

Sweden's NATO bid hit by repeated rows with Turkey

STOCKHOLM (AFP/APP): Sweden's bid for NATO membership is facing a dead end because Ankara's demands to Stockholm to hand over Kurdish activists and prevent rallies attacking Turkey's leadership have strained ties.

The chances of this changing after Turkey's parliamentary elections due in mid-May are uncertain, said Paul Levin, director of Stockholm University's Institute for Turkish Studies.

"We can now probably forget Turkish ratification before the elections, which seem to be scheduled for May 14," Levin told AFP.

"What happens after that depends in part on who wins."

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's objections to Sweden's NATO membership rest largely on Stockholm's refusal to extradite Turkish nationals Ankara wants to prosecute for "terrorism".

And Erdogan is running for re-election. In December, Sweden extradited a member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) to Turkey. He had been convicted in a

Turkish court and denied asylum in Sweden. Erdogan wants more action from Stockholm against the PKK, listed as a terror group by Turkey and its Western allies.

"On one hand, there is a Turkish president who has jailed thousands over alleged insults and who wants to divert attention from a poor economy in the months before an election," said Levin.

"On the other hand, there are groups in Sweden who are against NATO membership and PKK supporters worried about the government's pledges to go after" them, he said. Levin said these PKK supporters had realised they could provoke Erdogan "by insulting him and thereby stall the accession process". A protest by a far-right politician in front of the Turkish embassy in Stockholm on Saturday -- authorised by the police -- has further strained relations.

Rasmus Paludan is a Swedish-Danish activist who has already been convicted for racist abuse.

He provoked rioting in Sweden last year when he went on a tour of

the country and publicly burned copies of the Koran. On Saturday, he burned another copy of the Muslim holy book after a speech of almost an hour denouncing Islam.

Police based their decision to authorise the protest on the basis of Sweden's liberal constitution, which protects the right to demonstrate. Ankara summoned Sweden's ambassador to register its outrage, then cancelled a visit of Swedish Defence Minister Pal Jonson that had been scheduled for next Friday in Ankara -- a rare high-level meeting.

Earlier this month, Ankara called in Sweden's ambassador after pro-Kurdish activists hung an effigy of Erdogan from its feet, explicitly comparing him to Benito Mussolini. Italy's Fascist dictator was left hanging upside down after his execution in the closing days of World War II.

Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson denounced it as an attempt to sabotage the country's NATO membership bid -- but that sparked a backlash from some

inside Sweden defending the right to freedom of expression. Then last week, the leader of the far-right Sweden Democrats, Jimmie Akesson, whose party props up the Swedish government, denounced Erdogan as an "Islamist dictator". He urged Kristersson not to appease Turkey "because it is ultimately an anti-democratic system and a dictator we are dealing with". Akesson told Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter.

Turkey is seeking the extradition of more Kurdish "terrorists" based in Sweden. Erdogan recently said there were as many as 130 there. Stockholm has made it clear that the courts have the final say, but that does not appear to have satisfied Ankara.

Jens Stoltenberg, the secretary general of NATO, who last spring was talking of a fast-track membership process of just a few weeks, told AFP in January he still thought it would happen in 2023, even if he could not guarantee it. Both Turkey and Hungary were still to ratify the bid, he pointed out.

Russia pushing towards two towns in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region

MOSCOW (AFP/APP): Moscow's forces are pushing towards two towns in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region, where fighting intensified this week after several months of a stagnant front, Russian state media reported Sunday.

Russian-installed official in the region Vladimir Rogov said offensive actions were concentrated around two towns: Orikhiv, around 50 kilometres (30 miles) south of Ukrainian-controlled regional capital Zaporizhzhia, and Hulyaipole, further east.

"The front is mobile, especially in two directions: Orikhiv and Hulyaipole," Rogov was quoted as saying by the Ria Novosti news agency.

He said there was active fighting in those areas,

according to the agency. "The initiative is in our hands." The Russian army later claimed for a second day in a row that it had taken "more advantageous lines and positions" after "offensive operations" in Zaporizhzhia.

It claimed to have hit Ukrainian positions in the village of Lezhyno, outside the regional capital of Zaporizhzhia, which has not fallen to Ukrainian forces. AFP was not able to verify this information.

In its daily report on Sunday, the Ukrainian army said "more than 15 settlements were affected by artillery fire" in Zaporizhzhia.

Earlier this week, Rogov announced a "local offensive" around Orikhiv and said the Russian army had

taken control of the village of Lobkove, near the Dnipro river. He also said this week that fighting has "sharply increased" in the southern region.

The front in southern Ukraine has been considerably quieter recently than in the east, with Moscow withdrawing from the major city of Kherson in November.

Russia claims to have annexed the Zaporizhzhia region along with three other Ukrainian regions, but does not control it in its entirety.

While Moscow controls large swathes of the southern part of the region, its main city Zaporizhzhia and northern part did not fall to Russian forces. Russia has vowed to push Ukrainian forces out of them.