

Senate election likely in March

ISLAMABAD (NNI): The Senate elections are anticipated to take place in the first week of March. Following the announcement of the general election, the relevant authorities initiated the preparations for the senate election as well. It is highly anticipated that the schedule for the Senate election may be released immediately after the general elections.

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Nawaz to visit Murree

LAHORE (NNI): Former prime minister and PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif, who returned home after spending four years in London in self-imposed exile, will again go to Murree tomorrow. During his stay in Murree, Nawaz would hold consultations with his legal team over his cases. The very next day, on Tuesday, they informed, he would head to Islamabad where he would attend hearings of the appeals he had filed against his conviction.

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# Babies evacuated from Gaza hospital

## UN agency dubs ‘death zone’

GAZA STRIP, Palestinian Territories (AFP/APP): More than 30 premature babies were evacuated Sunday from Gaza's largest hospital, said a health official in the Hamas-run territory, as Israel's army struck more targets in its war on the Palestinian militant group.

The World Health Organization (WHO) scrambled to evacuate the last remaining patients and staff from Al-Shifa hospital, describing it as a "death zone" after UN officials visited the facility raided earlier this week by Israeli troops.

Mohammed Zaqt, director general of Gaza's hospitals, told AFP that "all 31 premature babies in Al-Shifa hospital... have been evacuated" along with three doctors and two nurses. "Preparations are under way" for them to enter Egypt via the Rafah crossing, Zaqt said. Elsewhere in northern Gaza, a Hamas health official said more than 80 people were killed on Saturday in twin strikes on Jabalia refugee camp, the territory's largest, including on a UN school sheltering displaced people.

Israel has vowed to destroy Gaza's rulers Hamas over the October 7 attacks that it says killed 1,200 people and saw 240 hostages taken, in the worst-ever onslaught on the country.

In Gaza, the Hamas government says 12,300 have been killed in Israel's relentless aerial bombardment and ground operations. Most of the casualties on both sides are civilians.

Israel said Saturday its military was "expanding its operational activities in additional neighbourhoods... of the Gaza Strip" where the UN says some 1.6 million people have been internally displaced by more than six weeks of fighting.

The narrow Palestinian enclave, under a crippling

blockade since Hamas took power in 2007, has been under an Israeli siege since the war erupted, leaving food, water, medicine and fuel in short supply. The fighting has rendered more than half of Gaza's 36 hospitals non-functioning by shortages, combat or damage, the UN has said.

On Sunday, the WHO described dire conditions at Gaza City's Al-Shifa hospital, with a mass grave at the entrance and nearly 300 patients left inside with 25 health workers. It said it was planning "the immediate evacuation of the remaining patients, staff and their families".

But it warned that nearby facilities were already overstretched and urged an immediate ceasefire given the "extreme suffering of the people of Gaza". The Israeli army said three soldiers were killed Saturday in fighting in northern Gaza, raising the number of troop deaths there to 62 since the war began.

Israel this week showed AK-47 assault rifles and other military equipment it said had been found at Al-Shifa to support its claim -- rejected by Hamas -- that militants had been there.

On Saturday, hundreds fled the hospital on foot as loud explosions were heard around the complex. Columns of sick and injured were seen leaving with displaced people, doctors and nurses.

At least 15 bodies, some in advanced stages of decomposition, were strewn along the route, an AFP journalist said.

Medical charity Doctors without Borders (MSF) said one person was killed when its convoy came under attack Saturday while evacuating staff and family members from near Al-Shifa.

The WHO said 29 patients at

the hospital with serious spinal injuries cannot move without medical assistance. Israel has told Palestinians to move south for their safety, but deadly strikes continued there too.

At least 26 people were killed in a strike that hit a residential building on Saturday, according to the director of the Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis.

The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA, Philippe Lazzarini, said he had seen "horrifying images" of Saturday's strike on the UN school in Jabalia, which Egypt called a "war crime".

The Israeli army said "an incident in the Jabalia region" was under review without elaborating. With just a trickle of aid allowed in from Egypt, Israel permitted a first consignment of fuel to enter Gaza late Friday under US pressure, allowing telecommunications to resume after a two-day blackout.

Some 120,000 litres (31,700 gallons) of fuel arrived on Saturday, according to the UN.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose government had vowed to keep aid out of Hamas's hands, said the fuel would power basic necessities like water pumps and sewage systems to prevent disease outbreak.

"The humanitarian assistance is also vital to ensure continued international support," he told a news conference.

A US official has said more fuel deliveries and a "significant pause" in fighting would come "when hostages are released". The White House denied a Washington Post report of a tentative agreement.

But Qatar's Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said on Sunday a deal to free hostages hinges on "very minor" practical issues, without

## Pro-Palestinian demonstrators rally across Europe

PARIS/LONDON (AFP/APP): Thousands of protesters rallied across France and Britain on Saturday calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, while hundreds of others turned out again in cities across Europe.

Protests have been held across Europe since the unprecedented October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel unleashed the latest Gaza war. Several thousand people marched through central Paris in torrential rain behind a banner saying "Halt the massacre in Gaza and West Bank, immediate ceasefire". "France must immediately call for a ceasefire so that the guns go silent," said CGT union secretary general Sophie Binet, one of several union leaders to speak at the rally. The CGT estimated that 60,000 people rallied in the capital and a further 40,000 gathered in dozens of other towns across the country.

The interior ministry however said 7,000 people marched in Paris and 45,000 nationwide for the third straight Saturday.

In Marseille, AFP saw several hundred people stage a minute's silence for Palestinian victims of the war, while in Toulouse more than 1,200 people took part in a march, according to police.

Israel says Hamas militants killed more than 1,200 people, mainly civilians, and took 239 hostage when they stormed across the border on October 7.

The Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza says around 12,300 people have died in the

Palestinian territory in Israel's relentless military response, more than 5,000 of them children. Elsewhere in Europe, organisers said around 4,000 people marched in Geneva, lighting candles displayed as a map of Gaza in front of the United Nations' European headquarters.

One large banner read "Stop Genocide in Gaza" and many shouted "Free, free Palestine!" in English.

Two rallies were held in Amsterdam, one urging a ceasefire for Gaza, another demanding the release of the Hamas-held hostages, though police said the protests were calm and no arrests were made.

Several thousands marched in Lisbon, many also shouting in English "Palestine will be free". "I think the injustice toward Palestine, for the past 75 years, is incredibly severe," said Maria Joao Ralha, 64.

A few hundred people marched through Warsaw, with the protest culminating in a rally in front of Israel's embassy in Poland.

In Istanbul, which has seen massive protests called by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urging an end to Israel's campaign, about 100 people lit flares and held up anti-war banners under heavy rain outside the Israeli consulate.

The rally was called by football supporter groups, which often play an important role in Turkish protests.

All Israeli diplomatic staff left Turkey last month as a security precaution.

In Britain, the protest numbers were smaller after more than 300,000 people staged a pro-Palestinian march in London last Saturday. One targeted an office where the leader of the main opposition Labour party, Keir Starmer, holds meetings, with protesters waving Palestinian flags and chanting "Ceasefire now".

Some held placards reading "Stop the war in Gaza" and "Starmer -- blood on your hands" amid a heavy police presence in the Camden area of north London.

Starmer, a former human rights lawyer whose party is predicted to win an election expected next year, has refused to call for a permanent ceasefire, sparking a string of resignations from his top team.

Instead, he has called for a humanitarian pause to Israel's bombardment to allow aid in for the 2.4 million people in Gaza.

One protester at the London event, Nicoleta, 36, held a placard reading "Bombing hospitals is a crime".

"Because I'm a health care provider I'm here to defend the hospitals, the innocent civilians, the children in incubators," she said. The rally was one of many smaller protests organised nationwide by the Stop The War Coalition. London police said on Saturday they had now made 386 arrests since the October 7 attacks. Showing support for Hamas is an offence in Britain, as the organisation is considered a terrorist group.

elaborating. Relatives of some of the hostages on Saturday marched to Netanyahu's Jerusalem office, demanding action to free them.

"It's not normal to have children kidnapped for 43 days. We don't know what the government is doing, we don't have any information," said marcher Ari Levi.

The bodies of two female hostages were recovered in

Gaza this week, the Israeli military said, while four abductees have so far been released by Hamas and a fifth rescued by troops. Gaza's fate after the conflict remains unclear, and US President Joe Biden argued that the coastal territory and the Israeli-occupied West Bank should come under a single "revitalised" administration.

"As we strive for peace,

Gaza and the West Bank should be reunited under a single governance structure, ultimately under a revitalised Palestinian Authority," he wrote in the Washington Post. Netanyahu maintains that the Palestinian Authority "in its current form is not capable of receiving responsibility for Gaza".

Biden also threatened sanctions against Israeli settlers who

have ramped up attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank in recent weeks.

Since the Israel-Hamas war began, Israeli troops and settlers have killed more than 200 Palestinians in the West Bank, according to Ramallah-based health ministry. The Palestinian Red Crescent reported Sunday two deaths in overnight army raids in Jenin and the Bethlehem area.

## Zardari confident ECP will hold transparent elections

KARACHI (NNI): Co-Chairman of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and former president Asif Ali Zardari has said that the general elections in the country should be held on time. In his statement, former president Asif Ali Zardari said that the country is moving towards transparent elections and the People's Party is fully prepared for it.

He was of the view as the conditions in the country are conducive, elections should be held on time. He said that we have confidence in the Election Commission that it would conduct a transparent election. The former president said that the People's Party is the only party which is capable of contesting elections in any environment and will emerge as the majority party of the country on February 8.

A day earlier, UK High Commissioner Jane

Marriott called on PPP leader Asif Ali Zardari at Bilawal House in Karachi.

A party post uploaded on social media website X, formerly twitter, the former president was upbeat about the prospects of the PPP in the February 8 general elections. However, he expressed his party's concerns about level playing field in the run-up to elections. They said Mr Zardari told Ms Marriott that one party [PML-N] was being given priority treatment which belied claims of the caretaker government of giving level playing field in the elections.

The British envoy asked the PPP leader about the party's strategy and the prospects of polls on Feb 8, the insiders added. The PPP post on X mentioned that the former president stressed the British government's role in bringing an end to the Israeli aggression in Gaza. Mr Zardari wished

well King Charles on his birthday and congratulated former prime minister David Cameron on becoming foreign minister.

Sources informed that the British diplomat was eager to understand the PPP's confidence regarding the prospects of elections on February 8. She also wanted to know the party's strategy for the upcoming national elections.

PPP bigwigs have launched a series of remarks against the PMLN's performance in the 16-month stint of the PDM government. After ruling 16 months in the coalition government, former allies of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), now become political 'rivals' as the political temperature has been brewing to its peak level with each passing day since ECP announced general elections to be held on February 8.

## Bilawal accuses PML-N of lying on PIA's privatization

KARACHI (NNI): Completely throwing his weight behind the Pakistan International Airlines' (PIA) employees protest against proposed privatization of the airline, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said on Sunday what he had discussed with the PML-N was not the airline's privatization, but its restructuring.

Sources in the Bilawal House stated that while talking to a delegation of the PIA employees, Bilawal Bhutto alleged, "Just like the PML-N lies to the nation in political matters, it is not stating the facts about the discussions we had on the subject." "We will not allow a single worker of the airline to get unemployed," he said categorically. A strategy was also finalized at the meeting as to how to foil the privatization of the national flag carrier.

## Shehbaz felicitates Sister Zeph

LAHORE (APP): Sister Zeph met former prime minister and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Shehbaz Sharif here on Sunday, who congratulated her over winning the 2023 Global Teacher Award.

Shehbaz told Sister Zeph that she had brought good name to Pakistan, and the whole nation was proud of a daughter like her. He said Pakistan could not be developed without equipping the youth with education and skills. The former prime minister had invited Sister Zeph to pay tribute to her over her outstanding achievement. Issues regarding out-of-school children, promotion of education and improvement of the teaching sector were discussed in the meeting. Sister Zeph appreciated Shehbaz Sharif's services for education and development, and said he rendered valuable services for promotion of education through Punjab Endowment Fund, Daanish Schools, educational scholarships, e-books, IT and laptop schemes.



GAZA STRIP: Palestinian medics care for premature babies evacuated from Al Shifa hospital to the Emirates hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — Reuters

## KP CM directs completion of digital record of patwar system

PESHAWAR (APP): As an important step to ensure public services delivery in a more efficient and transparent manner in various service delivery outlets of the provincial government, the Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah has directed the concerned authorities for taking necessary steps on urgent basis to install live Internet Protocol Cameras (IPCs) at patwar kahanas, police stations and offices of DCs, ACs, DPOs, DSPs and Tehsiladars across the province.

He further directed to complete installation of IPCs at all aforementioned public service outlets/offices by the end of this month.

He also directed the concerned high ups to set up a Centralized Monitoring Cell for the surveillance of those cameras and to put in place a mechanism for direct access of the Chief Minister, Chief Secretary and Inspector General of Police offices to those cameras via IP network.

He underlined the need to initiate implementation of this project without any delay and directed the quarter concerned to immediately issue proper directives in written regarding installation of IPCs at all aforementioned offices.

He was presiding over a meeting of the Board of Revenue held here at Chief Minister's House.

Provincial caretaker Minister for

Information Technology Dr Najeeb Ullah, caretaker Minister for Finance and Revenue Ahmed Rasool Bakhsh, Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry, Additional Chief Secretary Syed Imtiaz Hussain Shah and other relevant officials of the Board of Revenue attended the meeting.

The participants of the meeting reviewed the progress made so far on the digitization of land records project and discussed various matters related to patwar kahanas and other offices of public service delivery.

The chief minister directed the quarters concerned to ensure supply of electricity and to install fire extinguishers at Muhafizkhanas across the province. He further directed them to make the complaint redressal mechanism functional in order to timely address the public grievances regarding revenue affairs.

The chief minister expressed great concerns over unnecessary delay in the completion of land records digitization project and directed for taking practical steps to complete this important project in all respects by the end of this year.

"No further delay would be tolerable to this effect" he warned and added that strict action would be taken against the elements found responsible for delaying in this important project.

The chief minister said that the

poor people were suffering at the hands of the traditional patwar system and this abuse of people will not be tolerated anymore.

"The officials of the Board of Revenue should themselves reviewed the process of providing services to public by visiting the field on regular basis", he directed and added that all the Deputy Commissioners would also have to visit at least one Patwarkhana in their respective districts on daily basis.

Similarly, he directed the District Police Officers to ensure visit of at least one police station on daily basis in order to have check and balance on the affairs related to public services.

"It is our collective responsibility to serve the citizens as per their aspirations, for which all the concerned higher officials should spare the time for field visit in order to address the public grievances", he remarked.

It was decided in the meeting to form a task force headed by the provincial minister for Information Technology for the timely completion of the land records digitization project. The task force will hold progress review meetings on daily basis and will submit report of the same to the chief minister. It was also decided to hold a weekly review meeting to be chaired by the chief minister with the purpose to take a stock of progress on the project.

## Head hundred seals Australia's sixth World Cup triumph

A H M E D A B A D (AFP/APP): Travis Head's impressive hundred sealed Australia's sixth World Cup title as they dashed the dreams of billions of fans with a six-wicket win over previously unbeaten hosts India on Sunday. Opening batsman Head scored 137 off just 120 balls, including 15 fours and four sixes, before being dismissed with Australia just two runs shy of victory. His innings was just the seventh hundred in a World Cup final and the third by an Australian batsman.

Head also shared a fourth-wicket stand of 192 with Marnus Labuschagne (58 not out) as Australia chased down a modest target of 241 with seven overs to spare.

Earlier, Australia restricted previously unbeaten tournament hosts India to 240 all out as they silenced a crowd of over 92,000 fans at the Narendra Modi Stadium -- a ground named after the Indian Prime Minister. Left-arm quick Mitchell Starc took



3-55 and Australia captain Pat Cummins, who won the toss, a miserly 2-34 in his maximum 10 overs. KL Rahul scored for India with 66 but hit only one boundary in 107 balls. Star batsman Virat Kohli made 54 after India captain Rohit Sharma struck a fluent 47 off just 31 balls opening the innings.

PM Kakar congratulates team Australia on winning ODI Cricket World Cup: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar congratulat-

ed Team Australia on their victory in the One Day International Cricket World Cup final against India on Sunday. "I congratulate Australia for winning the Cricket World Cup 2023 (CWC23)," he said in a post on X, formerly twitter. He also praised phenomenal inning played by Travis Head who scored 137 runs off 120 balls. The prime minister also commended team India for their spirited performance.





## Tourists to use precautionary measures due to dense fog

ISLAMABAD (APP): Tourists thronging from various parts of the country to Punjab's historical and religious sites should use safety and precautionary measures to avoid untoward incidents due to dense fog. Speaking to APP, the Pakistan Tourism Development Authority (PTDC) official said that an advisory had been issued by the National Highways and Motorways Police as dense fog had gripped all parts of the province.

He said the provincial government had launched an emergency to save the lives of the people and announced a holiday in educational institutions while markets remained closed in Punjab on Saturday. He further said the government advised the tourists to stay indoors and refrain from unnecessary travel from one place to another, adding that tourists might face various diseases due to smog waves.

Officials said that the purpose of closing the motorways in foggy hours during the night is to prevent mishaps and protect the lives of tourists.

He said the tourists were requested to complete their journey and reach their destinations before the onset of fog, adding that they should use fog lights in vehicles to avoid untoward incidents. It is pertinent to mention here that Pakistan, a land of unparalleled beauty and diverse landscapes, has long been a hidden treasure in the world of tourism. Its majestic mountains, serene valleys, arid deserts, and lush green plains offer a wealth of experiences for adventure seekers and nature enthusiasts.

## 4,465 FIRs, Rs 12,821,804 fine imposed

RAWALPINDI (APP): As many as 4,465 FIRs had been registered on violations of anti-dengue SOPs from January 1 to date in various areas of the Rawalpindi district, said District Coordinator Epidemics Prevention and Control Dr Sajjad Mehmood here Sunday. Giving details of the penalty actions, the health officer said that the district administration, in collaboration with allied departments, had sealed 643 premises, issued tickets to 1,395 and a fine of Rs 12,821,804 was imposed on violations of dengue SOPs in 2023. Dr Sajjad informed that around 2,611 confirmed cases had been reported in the district this year, while the number was 2,332 in 2021, and 4,700 in 2022 during the period.

The health officer further stated that presently 52 patients were admitted to the district's hospitals, including 42 to the Holy Family Hospital, six to Wah General Hospital, three to Kalar Syeda and one to the Taxila Hospital. Dr Sajjad informed that 2,580 patients were discharged after treatment while presently three patients were in critical condition. During the last 24 hours, six patients were reported in the district including two of each from Municipal Corporation and Potohar Urban area and one each from Kallar Syeda and Rawalpindi Cantonment area.

# CM condemns killing of children in Palestine on World Children's Day, leads walk

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (Retd.) Maqbool Baqar has said we are commemorating World Children's Day all over the world but simultaneously Israel is killing innocent children in Palestine, which needs to be condemned in strong words.

This he said while talking to the media persons just after leading the Walk organized by the Sindh Child Protection Authority (SCPA) of the Social Welfare Department at Seaview to commemorate World Children's Day here Sunday. The walk was attended by Minister Health Dr Saad Niaz, Secretary of Social Welfare Department Sajid Jamal Abro, Secretaries and senior officers of different departments. The event brought together children, parents, community leaders, NGOs, and government officials. The Caretaker Chief Minister emphasized the significance of children's rights, their promising future, and the government's commitment towards Child Protection. "We must remember the children being killed by Israel in Palestine," he said and prayed for their protection and care.

The CM said that World Children Day observed globally each year was dedicated to promoting and advocating for the rights and well-being of children. He added that the walk was initiated to raise awareness about

the rights and needs of children, emphasizing collective responsibility in ensuring children's secure and promising future. Baqar appreciated the social welfare department that has reunified 2275 missing children with their families, prevented and addressed around 200 child marriages, rescued 235 kidnapped children with invaluable assistance from the police, diligently addressed 883 cases of child abuse and violence, provided essential support and care to the affected children. Notably, rescued 1472 children from child beggary, ensuring them the chance to lead lives full of promise and opportunities.

He said that "World Children's Day was a powerful reminder of our responsibility to protect and nurture the future leaders of our nation. "The Sindh Child Protection Authority under the Social Welfare Department is steadfast in its commitment to implementing policies that prioritize the well-being and rights of every child in Sindh," he said. Baqar said that the Social Welfare Department remained devoted to implementing initiatives that safeguard the rights and promote the welfare of our children. He added that it has achieved remarkable milestones by managing 5497 cases, establishing an efficient 24/7 Sindh Child Helpline 1121, which has handled 129,750 calls over the past five years.

## Muhammad Yousif Kabooro visited Dadu Press Club

F.P. Report

DADU: Director Information (Admin and Accounts) Karachi, Muhammad Yousif kabooro visited Dadu Press Club, President Sabir Bhand, senior journalists Gulam Bhand, Nizam Sheikh, Liaquat Ali Malik, AD Kabooro, Sardar Charan, and Raja Altaf Abbasi were present.

The President Press Club Dadu, Mr. Sabir Bhand gave a detailed briefing about the fire incident in Dadu Press Club and the damage caused by this fire. He added that the Sindh Information Department has always provided financial support to



the press clubs. On the occasion, the director of information also expressed his regret for the damage caused by the sudden fire in the press club. While the director of information along with the president of the press club and senior

journalists visited the club. He assured the journalists that the Secretary Information will also be informed about the damage caused to the club, and all possible efforts will be made for the financial assistance to the Press club.

## Dr. Aamer Abdullah visits Waziristan

F.P. Report

SOUTH WAZIRISTAN LOWER: During a three days long visit of the Newly Merged Districts, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Newly Merged Districts Affairs, Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Dr. Aamer Abdullah, apart from participating in tribal jirga and other important meetings, in District South Waziristan Lower, on the second busy day, visited various government and educational institutions of the district.

Besides the Deputy Commissioner and District Police Officer, other relevant officials were also accompanied with the minister.

The provincial minister visited Government Polytechnic Institute South Waziristan Lower and reviewed the technical training activities there.

The minister expressed his great concern over the poor cleanliness situation in the institute and directed the concerned authorities of the institute to make proper arrangements for the cleanliness within a week time.

During the visit, he also met with IG

FC while on this occasion he received a detailed briefing regarding law and order situation in the district and other related issues. Similarly, DPO and police officers also briefed him about the activities of police department in the district.

During his two-day visit to the district, the caretaker minister also visited Shaulam Hospital and inspected the medical facilities there.

Taking notice of the non-availability of proper facilities and poor cleanliness in the hospital, the caretaker minister directed to provide better medical facilities to the patients and assured that the required funds will be provided to the said hospital soon.

While visiting Jamia Darul Uloom Waziristan, a well-known religious educational institution in the region, he reviewed the educational activities of religious and general education in seminary.

In this occasion the minister also met with Mohtamim of the institution, eminent tribal and religious leader Maulana Naik Mohammad wherein he informed the minister about the religious, traditional and professional education being provided in the institution.

## PPC Fighters stun PPC Markhor to lift trophy

Ali Sheikh

PESHAWAR: PPC Fighters outclass PPC Markhors by 44runs in a one-sided final to lift the trophy of RMI Media Cricket League. Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ghulam Ali was the chief guest on the occasion.

After winning the all important toss, Fighters captain Bilal Afridi elected to bat first and his team responded well by scoring 136 for the loss of two wickets in the allotted 12 overs. Shah Faisal once again showed his batting class by scoring 48 runs off just 25 balls with three sixes and three fours. Kamran 30 and Waqar 24 helped Fighters to post a target of 136 runs. In reply, Markhor, who had won the trophy for a record four times, never looked in control as Fighters bowlers gave no chance to Markhor batsmen to free their arms. Shahid Afridi who ended the tournament with joint top wicket taker along with Markhor's Irshad, was once again outstanding taking four wickets including two in one over. Markhor could manage to score only 96 runs for the loss of 9 wickets.



President Peshawar Press Club Arshad Aziz Malik, Pakistan Sports Writers Federation President Amjad Aziz Malik, Former President of PPC M Riaz, Khyber Union of Journalists President Nasir Hussain, Peshawar Press Club Sports Committee Chairman Zafar Iqbal, Sports Writers Association President Asim Shiraz, RMI Director Operations Dr. Gulzar, HOD Marketing Faizan Qureshi, Manager

Media RMI Syed Shabir Shah and other senior journalists were present.

In the end, the chief guest Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Gulam Ail distributed prizes among the winning players. Shah Faisal was named as best batsman of the tournament while Irshad Ali was declared as best bowler of the tournament, while Shahid Afridi was adjudged Man of the Match for his brilliant bowling.



LAHORE: Youngsters playing cricket on Mall Road as Punjab government has ordered markets to remain closed over the weekend in the hope that the long weekend will help cut toxic levels of smog.

## Parliamentary Caucus on child rights to ensure well-being of children: Raja

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly Raja Perviz Ashraf stressed on the significance of child rights and stated that the Parliament has always vigorously worked for the welfare and well-being of children.

He stated that the Parliament, especially the 15th National Assembly, has achieved many milestones as regards to effective legislation for child welfare and child safety. He further said, "There is a positive correlation between the socio-economic progress of a country and the state of well-being of its children". NA Speaker expressed these views on World Children's Day which is commemorated on November 20 (tomorrow) of each year. Speaker National Assembly Raja Perviz Ashraf expressed dismay over the poor state of welfare and well-being of children worldwide and the growing socio-economic problems. The

Speaker further elaborated on the effectiveness of the child-friendly and child welfare initiatives taken by the 15th National Assembly, namely the 1st ever Summer Democracy School, under 18 Internship Program, children's speech competition held on the floor of the National Assembly along with 1st ever Children's Parliament and the formation of 1st ever Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights. He reiterated that the Parliament is completely committed to the mission of welfare and betterment of children.

Speaker NA expressed deep resentment over the shameful violation of child rights and war crimes being committed against Palestinian and Kashmiri children and stated that instead of launching collective and universal initiatives for the betterment of children the world is still silently witnessing such heinous and gruesome acts of

violence against children. The Speaker stressed the ignorance and negligence of the International Community over the continuous & blatant violation of child rights and war crimes being committed by fascist Israeli Occupation Forces and the State of India against children of Palestine and Kashmir, respectively.

He further stated that in addition to the prevalent socio-economic hurdles towards the achievement of child welfare and well-being, war crimes and genocide have made things far worse than one can imagine.

Furthermore, the NA Speaker expressed profound grief over the destruction of hospitals in Palestine, the loss of precious lives of innocent Palestinian children and the unimaginable misery being faced by children of Palestine due to the immoral, inhumane, and illegal Israeli bombardment.

## Another 95 connections disconnected in Punjab, KP and Islamabad

F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 95 connections while 274 under billing cases processed ; Rs 4.59 million fine imposed.

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 7 connections on illegal use of gas and another 10 on use of compressor and 151 under billing cases have been processed. The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.25 million against under billing cases. In

Bahawalpur the company disconnected one connections on the use of compressor .The regional team in Multan disconnected 3 connections on illegal use of gas and 3 connections on compressor use .73 Under billing cases have been processed. The team imposed fine of Rs 0.14 million against gas pilferers.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 42 connections on account of direct use of gas and illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 1.07 million against gas theft and under billing cases and lodged 5 FIRs against gas thief. The regional team in

Islamabad disconnected 9 connections on illegal use of gas.

In Sahiwal, the team imposed fine of Rs 0.01 million against gas theft . In Faisalabad 10 under billing cases have been processed. The team booked an amount of Rs 0.18 million against gas theft and under billing cases in Sialkot. In Sardodha the team imposed fine of Rs 0.03 million against gas pilferers. The team of Sheikhupura disconnected 16 connections on illegal use of gas and 29 under billing cases have been processed and amount of Rs 2.74 against Under billing and gas theft cases.

## Career counseling helps students to acquire employment as per their potential, aptitude

PESHAWAR (APP): Most of the students at school, college, and even at the university level are unaware of their true potential and aptitude in the selection of subjects, hunting for jobs, and in seeking professional careers that could match their inner abilities.

Filing an online application in a net café for a government job, Ehtisham Qasier (26) is hopeful to achieve his dream this time after repeating this painstaking exercise for nearly three years despite his higher education qualification. Graduated from Government Postgraduate College Peshawar, Ehtisham was unable to secure a government job either through recruitment testing agencies or the public service commission, apparently due to his low grades and repeated changes in education line in his 16-year education career.

"I am applying for government and NGOs jobs for the last three years soon after obtaining a BS four-year degree in urdu literature from the Government Postgraduate College Peshawar, but could not succeed due to inappropriate selection of subjects and repeated changing of education line," the Nowshera-born graduate told APP before leaving for home on a motorbike at Hastnagri bazaar, Peshawar.

Ehtisham is rushed to the net cafe to apply for jobs after seeing vacancies advertised in newspapers by different government departments, companies, and NGOs from time to time, and his struggle culminates in extreme disappointment owing to his low educational grades and

changing of subjects in secondary, higher secondary, and graduation.

"During my entire educational career, there was hardly anyone in our educational institutes who guided us in the selection of subjects as per our potential and aptitude. As a result, many of my colleagues had either found it difficult to get a dignified job in the public or private sector or left study incomplete, thus putting an extra burden on parents who pinned high expectations on them," he said.

"There was hardly any other suitable option left for me now but to join a private educational institute in Peshawar as a part-time Urdu teacher to meet my pocket expenses," he said. Like Ehtisham Qaiser, many students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were finding it difficult to get a dignified job due to low grades in their education career owing to the change of subjects from Metric to MA and MSc due to a lack of professional career counselors in schools and colleges in the province.

Dr. Khalid Mufi, former principal of Khyber Medical College, Peshawar, and senior psychiatrist, told the news agency that career counseling is very important in shaping the lives of students at a young age, besides helping them to make informed decisions about their career path.

He said the country's job market was competitive, requiring skilled hands, while the education system was outdated and non-market-oriented. "Most of our students at Primary and even at college level were unaware of their true potential and chose subjects in

metric, FA/FSc, graduation, and later MA/MS without consulting career counselors, which later leads to unhappiness, depression, and frustration in society after they fail to get jobs."

"The selection of the right career is one of the most life-changing decisions in a student's life, and if it is not taken seriously, it may result in lifetime regret, frustration, anxiety, and demotivation.

In a country like Pakistan, where the population bulge had crossed the psychological barrier of 240 million this year and where there were an estimated 22.8 million out-of-school children, including 4.7 million in KP, the role of career counselors carried significant importance, especially in schools and colleges, to provide much-needed advice on the basis of an assessment of students' aptitude, personal interests, and desired path.

Besides doctors and engineers and competitive exams, he said there are many education disciplines like artificial intelligence, mechatronics, telecommunication, architecture, textiles, banking, transport, forestry, mining, IT, and petroleum engineering for students to excel in. Dr. Khalid Mufi suggested the appointment of professional career counselors in elementary and secondary education for the assistance of students, besides ensuring personal and educational growth in life.

"Poor selection of career path and repeated changing of curriculum subjects often lead to poverty and unemployment in the country, where the jobs market is already overburdened," said Professor Dr. Naeemur

Rehman, former Chairman, Economics Department, University of Peshawar, while talking to APP.

Dr. Naeem, while citing a report from the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), which uses employment data from 2001-02 to 2020-21, said that the unemployment rate for graduates in 2020-21 had increased to 16.1% as compared to 14.9% in 2018-19, while the unemployment rate for engineers had doubled from 11% to 23.5% in two years.

Similarly, the unemployment rate for computer science graduates has jumped from 14.2% to 22.6% in just two years, while the unemployment rate of agriculture science graduates grew from 11.4% to 29.4% during the said period.

He said the gap between the rate of overall unemployment (6.3 percent) and that of graduates (16.1 percent) is almost 10-percentage-point wide, and the misalignment between demand and supply of graduates largely contributed to the higher unemployment rate among graduates in Pakistan. Ikhtlaq Ahmed, Chief Education, Government of KP, said that a special center was setup for offering career counseling and job placement services to students and youth in the field of vocational and professional education. He said the center was established by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (KP-TEVTA) at the Government Advanced Technical Training Center at Industrial Estate Peshawar, where necessary professional training was being provided to job seekers wishing to go abroad.



# KP takes swift action to address VC vacancy issue

PESHAWAR (INP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has taken swift action to address the ongoing vice-chancellor vacancy issue in public universities by activating the search committee on an emergency basis.

A meeting chaired by the caretaker Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Syed Arshad Hussain Shah, focused on reforms in the higher education sector and resulted in the decision to expedite the appointment process. The Chief Minister directed the relevant authorities to complete the membership of the search committee within a week. He emphasized that the selection of vice-chancellors should prioritize administrative capabilities, merit, and other essential qualifications. He also stressed the importance of long-term solutions to address the challenges faced by universities, including improving governance and financial self-reliance.

To align research priorities with modern market demands, the Chief Minister instructed the establishment of a dedicated committee headed by the caretaker minister for higher education. This committee will be tasked with finalizing the decisions and suggestions made during the meeting. The Chief Minister also set a one-week deadline for finalizing the action plan.

The government's prompt action to fill the vice-chancellor positions and implement reforms signals a commitment to strengthening the higher education sector in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. By prioritizing administrative competence, merit, and financial independence, the government aims to ensure the long-term success of public universities.

# Business community donated Rs7.8 million for orphan children

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Under the platform of the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), the business community of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa donated funds over Rs7.8 million for orphan children of the renowned institute, SOS Children Village Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

According to details, SOS Children Village Pakistan Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chairman Justice (retired) Qalandar Ali Khan and founder of Aziz Jan Institute of Learning and leading industrialist of the KP, Senator Mohsin Aziz arranged an awareness session in the Sarhad chamber for the 'Kafalat' of orphan children, which presided over the SCCI president Fuad Ishaq, said in a press release issued here on Sunday.

On the occasion, the chamber senior vice president Sanaullah Khan, vice president Ijaz Khan Afridi, former presidents Riaz Arshad, Haji Muhammad Asif, Malik Niaz Ahmad, former vice president Abidullah Yousafzai, executive member Qurtul Ain, and Ihsanullah, Ghulam Bilal Javed, Javed Ahmad, Saddam Gul, Fazl e Wahid, Ishfaq Muhammad along with people belonging to industries and trade were present.

Fuad Ishaq while speaking during the awareness session expressed satisfaction and happiness over the Kafalat to orphan children along with education, health and other facilities provided by SOS Children Village Pakistan KP.

He said the business community has highly appreciated the work of the SOS Children Village Pakistan KP, as it is doing the wellbeing of orphan children, is very commendable.

Members of the business community during the awareness session generously and wholeheartedly donated funds and took 'Kafalat' of orphan children.

On the occasion, Fuad Ishaq handed over a cheque over Rs1.2 million for Kafalat of seven orphan children while businessmen forum leader and noted industrialist former senator Ilyas Ahmad Bilour, Sabir Sethi, former president SCCI Malik Niaz Ahmad, senior vice president Sanaullah Khan, Hazrat Umar announced Kafalat of one and one orphan whereas former president Riaz Arshad, Asim Rehman and Shakirul Haq guardianship for 10 orphan children.

Earlier, the SOS Children Village Pakistan KP Director Kaukab Batool and AD Zahir Shah gave a detailed presentation regarding facilities, providing to orphan children in the institute and its performance in an elaborate manner.

session, the announcement was made for a technical training program for orphan children on behalf of Senator Nauman Wazir, while Senator Mohsin Aziz announced to provide all required machinery and equipment in this regard.

Sensor Mohsin Aziz, who is founder of Aziz Jan Institute of Learning and leading businessman/industrialist and SOS children village Pakistan KP, Chairman Qalandar Ali Khan praised and thanked the SCCI president Fuad Ishaq and businessmen for making generous pledges for orphan children.

During the awareness

# All possible measures to be taken for development, prosperity

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Finance, Excise Taxation and Narcotics Control Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ahmed Rasul Bangash has said that every possible effort will be made for the development and prosperity of the merged tribal districts. He has expressed these views during a call on meeting with Muhammad Haseeb Khan Salarzai, a social worker and prominent personality from tribal district Bajaur in his office. During the meeting, Muhammad Haseeb Khan Salarzai has congratulated the caretaker minister on taking charge of the ministries. On this occasion, The caretaker minister has said that all possible measures will be taken for the long-term development and prosperity of the merged tribal districts, including the tribal district Bajaur. He said that possible efforts will be initiated to resolve issues confronting tribal districts people in development and prosperity. He said that resources will be utilized to provide higher education opportunities to the people of tribal districts. Providing better education and health facilities to the people of tribal districts is the need of the hour. Providing better education and health facilities the people of tribal districts will be able to progress on the path of development.

He furthered that, as the tribal districts are now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and these areas want special focus to include in the race of development and progression. He has said that all possible steps will be initiated for the completion of ongoing schemes and schemes which are near to completion, the completion of the bridge in Naraza village of tribal district Bajaur, Salarzai Degree College, pashat to lawang road and Girls Degree College Khar should be made possible and all possible steps would be taken for the provision of funds to such public interest schemes in all NMDs. He has further said that the development of the whole province, especially of the marginalized districts is our wish and priorities so that the people of such districts also join this race of development and prosperity.

**Weather to remain dry**

PESHAWAR (APP): The weather is likely to remain dry and cold in most of the districts of the province with a possibility of fog in the morning and evening in the districts of Nowshera, Mardan, Swabi, Peshawar, DI Khan and Bannu.

The temperature in Kalam dropped below freezing. The temperature in Kalam is minus two centigrade, Meteorological Department officials said here Sunday. In Peshawar, the minimum temperature is expected to be 8 degrees Celsius while the maximum temperature is expected to be 22 degrees Celsius, Meteorological Department said.

In Parachinar 1, 2 in Chitral and Dir, 5 in Malam Jabba and 8 in Takhtbhai, the official of Meteorological Department said.



**PESHAWAR: Social activist from Bajaur Muhammad Haseeb Khan Salarzai meeting with Caretaker Minister for Finance, Excise Taxation and Narcotics Control Ahmed Rasul Bangash.**

# Encouraging job-oriented business imperative for poverty alleviation and economic prosperity

PESHAWAR (APP): The career options vary from person to person as per their choice as some would opt only for government jobs, others try their luck to get settled abroad and some would go only for entrepreneurship – to become job creators instead of job hunters.

Initially, it does not seem easy to launch a business as it carries the possibility of financial risks but it is also possible to generate handsome revenue as was true for Akhsaar Ali (38) who lived a satisfied life after entering the solar panels business in Peshawar where he employed six laborers for assistance.

Known as Akhsaar Lala in the solar panel market at Dalazak Road, the motivated youth wakes up early in the morning and comes to his shop after performing fajar prayer and breakfast along with his two younger brothers: Tariq Ali and Younas Khan before going for installation.

"I entered the solar panel business in 2010 after my several applications were rejected by the public and private organizations owing to lack of professional experience, and rented a shop on Rs 1000 per month at Pabbi, Nowshera after seeing the people's positive response towards the installation of solar panels in the wake of long hours load-shedding in the peripheries of Peshawar and Nowshera districts," he told APP.

"Following the early death of my father Noorzada Khan, I left my education incomplete at graduation and knocked on the doors of different government organizations and NGOs for jobs but my applications were not considered due to lack of professional experience.

Keeping in view the financial constraints of my family, I immediately started sale and purchasing solar panels at a small shop in the main bazaar of Pabbi tehsil of Nowshera district to support my widowed mother and meet education expenses of my two younger brothers who were under the heavy loans burden due to expansive treatment of my ailing father," said Akhsaar, while loading solar panels in a pickup brought by his brothers, Tariq and Younas from Karkhano market, a hub of solar and electronics goods in Peshawar.

"In recent years, the demands for solar panels have increased manifolds due to the widening of the demand-supply gap of electricity as 650-watt panel was being sold at Rs 50,000, 610 watts on Rs 47,000, 550watt on Rs 40,000 and 450 watt on Rs32,000 in Karkhano market," he said, adding that earning in every business was primarily depended on timely actions and initiatives besides required surplus money.

In summer, he said solar panel business shines while in winter's profit is comparatively low due to its lesser demands.

Akhsaar is planning to expand its business to Punjab, Dubai and Afghanistan due to its huge market demands' there.

"Pakistan's industrial future is linked with solar and wind energy and the time has come to divert financial resources to bolster these renewable energy resources to create jobs for youth," said Zilakat Khan Malik, former Chairman of the Economics Department, University of Peshawar while talking to the news agency.

He said that Pakistan has several well-known wind corridors with average wind speeds of 7.87 m/s in about 10 per cent of its windiest areas most suitable for energy generation.

He said one of the reasons for the high rate of unemployment and lack of businesses growth was the shortage of energy in Pakistan, adding by utilizing just 0.071 percent of the country's area for solar photovoltaic (SP) power generation besides Karachi and Balochistan coastal areas, wind could meet the country's growing electricity demand easily.

"The significance of solar and wind energies has increased in Pakistan after its energy shortfall touched a record 8500 MW this year, necessitating urgent expansion of solar and wind power to at least 30 percent of the country's total electricity generation capacity by 2024, which is equivalent to around 24,000megawatts."

Dr Zilakat Malik said that the expansion of renewable energy resources would not only make electricity cheaper but also achieve greater energy security, and reduce carbon emissions helping Pakistan to save up to USD 5 billion over the next 20 years.

Dr Malik said that the Alternative and Renewable Energy Policy 2019 report of the National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC) has confirmed that Pakistan's target to increase Variable Renewable Energy (VRE) to 30 per cent of its electricity by 2030, magnifying higher penetrations of solar and wind energies would be economically beneficial in terms of job creation and overall production of industrial units.

He said that work on all ongoing energy projects should be expedited after the World Bank commitment of about \$425 million in financing to the National Transmission Modernization Project aimed at increasing the capacity and reliability of selected segments of the national transmission system in Pakistan and modernizing key business processes of the NTDC.

He said the National Solar Energy Initiative was approved in September 2022 by the then government to produce 10,000 megawatts of electricity through solar energy projects that would help reduce the import bill of costly diesel and furnace oil besides meeting the country's utility and business sector requirements.

The SMEDA spokesman said that over 400 pre-feasibility studies were prepared to bolster self-employment and bolster SME sector in the country including KP. Besides preparation of National SME Policy 2021, he said that about Rs 89.24 million were allocated for pre-feasibility studies of air conditioner and generator rental service centres, Rs7.94 million for bread and biscuit manufacturing units, Rs51.75 million for dairy farms beneficiaries having 25 cows helping them establishing environmentally controlled shelters and Rs166.64 million for sitting up of shelters of dairy farms with 100 cows to bolster milk and dairy business in the country including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The first phase of the Rashakai Special Economic Zone (RSEZ) has been completed under CPEC before six months of the scheduled time aimed at promoting business and employment besides turning KP into a hub of trade and investment.

Phase I of RSEZ encompassed 247 acres of modern facilities designed to attract domestic and foreign investors besides spurring economic growth and job creation for a skilled workforce. Phase I housed 18 zone enterprises with seven being under construction mobilising an estimated investment of Rs85 billion.

Different projects were launched in the second phase of RSEZ that would generate approximately 250,000 jobs for the youth of KP.



**PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah chairing a meeting regarding public sector universities.**

## Crackdown on drug smugglers

PESHAWAR (APP): Secretary Excise Taxation and Narcotics Control Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ihsanullah Khan on Sunday said that operations are underway to eliminate drugs from the society, strict action is continued on drugs smugglers and arrested four international smugglers.

On the direction of Secretary excise Aftab-ud-Din Director Narcotics Control, Zahid Iqbal Khan Excise and Taxation Officer Narcotics Control and Syed Naveed Jamal Circle Officer Mardan Regio, Akif Nawaz Khan SHO Police Station Excise Mardan Region along with Ali Jan Khan Additional SHO and Sahibzada Saad and Gulzeb Khan Assistant Sub-Inspector and others have arrested four important members of international and inter-provincial smugglers group in a successful operation near Motorway Mardan.

The accused are operating an international and inter-provincial drugs network.

Important evidence of international and inter-provincial drug trafficking and dealing was obtained from the mobile phones of the arrested smugglers, more revelations are expected.

Case has been registered in the police station Excise Mardan region for further investigation and legal action in the case.

## Conference on Cardiac Thoracic Surgery held

PESHAWAR (APP): The Peshawar Institute of Cardiology (PIC-MTI) hosted a three-day international conference on Sunday on Cardiac Thoracic Surgery, concluding with remarkable participation from cardiac surgeons and cardiologists globally, including experts from Pakistan.

The conference featured presentations on cutting-edge and novel cases related to heart diseases, providing a platform for knowledge exchange.

Riffat Anjum Spokesperson PIC said that under the auspices of the Pakistan Cardiac Society, the PIC organized a three-day conference where renowned thoracic surgeons conducted live surgeries, including Minimally Invasive Surgery, Med Cape, TAVR, Thoracic Esophagectomy, Surgical TEE Workshop, and presentations by experts on various topics.

According to the Spokesperson, the theme of the conference, was "Empowering Quality through Collaboration for a Bright Future in Cardiac Surgery," emphasized the importance of such gatherings in fostering networking, collaboration, and establishing professional relationships. Participants highlighted how conferences of this nature promote networking and collaboration, fostering opportunities for future cooperation, research projects, and leadership roles.

The conference, jointly organized by the Pakistan Association of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgeons (PACVTS) and Peshawar Institute of Cardiology.

Professor Dr. Hasanat, President of the Pakistan Association of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery, expressed his satisfaction with the successful international conference held in Peshawar.

He acknowledged the efforts of the Peshawar Institute of Cardiology in bringing together experts and professionals from various institutions and organizations, promoting the exchange of knowledge and advancements in cardiac surgery.

## Repatriation of foreigners continued

PESHAWAR (APP): The repatriation of the illegally staying foreigners from different parts of the country, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, continues, the home and tribal affairs department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa officials said here Sunday.

Last day, 472 more foreign families were sent to Afghanistan, including 901 men, 541 women and 925 children, the official said. According to the data of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Home Department, 2,21441 people have gone to Afghanistan via Torkham border.

Likewise, 3289 foreigners have been sent back home from Angor Ada, the official of the Home Department said here while another 419 foreign nationals have been transferred to their homeland from the Khar Lachi border. Since September 17, a total of 2,25,149 people have gone to their homeland, the official informed.

Similarly, 592 illegal foreigners were also deported through the Torkham border, a total of 3,855 illegally residing Afghans have been repatriated so far, said the official. As many as 3009 illegal Afghans were repatriated from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

**Grand operations against foreigners residing illegally continue in Peshawar**

A series of grand operations against foreigners residing illegally in Peshawar is ongoing, SSP Operations Kashif Abbasi during his visits to different camps in Nasir Bagh area told media men. SP Security, Additional Deputy Commissioner Imran Khan were also present on the occasion of the visit.

SSP Operations checked the security arrangements in the camp as well as other arrangements and facilities during his visit. In the camp established on Nasir Bagh Road, the documents of the illegal residents will be completed and they will be sent to their homeland, SSP operations said.

In the first phase, illegally staying foreigners are being sent back to their homeland and in the second phase, the action plan will be decided after the policy, SSP operations added. He said all steps have been taken to ensure due facilities to those inside the camps.

**Police arrested 24 illegal Afghans**

Peshawar Police made more arrests in the operation against foreigners living in urban and suburban areas and as many as 24 illegal Afghans were arrested, police said.

According to detail, the Police said that 4 Afghans were caught within the limits of Bhan Mari Police Station while 13 families voluntarily left the area and Yeka Tut Police detained three people while one illegal family was identified. Likewise, 17 people were transferred to Peshawar transit point from Kabli police station, Police said.





## In brief

### 7 gamblers held in Tank

TANK (APP): In a crackdown against anti-social elements, the Tank police have rounded up seven alleged gamblers and recovered two partridges and stake money amounting to Rs 115,000 from their possession here in the jurisdiction of Gul Imam police station on Sunday. A spokesman for the district police informed that acting on a tip-off, a police team under the supervision of DSP Rural Syed Marjan Khan and Gul Imam police station SHO Raffi Ullah Khan conducted a raid at Khali Dagar area near Khyber Village and apprehended seven alleged gamblers identified as Riffat Ullah, son of Sami Ullah; Shams Uzaman, son of Ali Bagh; Mudassir, son of Mustafa; Sami Ullah, son of Maza Din; Mehtab, son of Jameel; Sana Ullah, son of Ajmal; and Anwar Kamal, son of Ahmad Jan, who were busy gambling on partridges. The police team also recovered betting money amounting to Rs 115,300 and two partridges from them. The cases have also been registered against the arrested accused.

### Annual Urs to kick off today

NAWABSHAH (INP): The celebrations of the 752nd Annual Urs of Saint Syed Ali Asghar Shah, famed as Sakhi Jam Datar, will officially start on November 20 at Jamsahib. The district administration has announced Monday, November 20, as a public holiday in the district. The CHADAR on Dargah would be laid by Commissioner Syed Sajjad Haider Shah, Deputy Commissioner Zahid Hussain Rind, and Dargah Sajjadah Nasheedin Faqeer Nveed Hussain Vistro to open the celebrations of the Annual Urs.

### Notorious robber held

DADU (INP): A notorious robber was injured and arrested with arms after exchange of fire with police at Link road near Mehar in district Dadu on Sunday. According to details, a gang of robbers engaged in planning robbery started firing a patrolling police. In retaliatory firing of police, notorious robber Minthar Janwari was injured and held while his accomplices managed to escape. Police recovered a Kalashnikov and bullets from possession of the wounded robber who was shifted to hospital for treatment.

### Body of abducted found

WAZIRABAD (INP): Body of an abducted person of Bharoke Cheema was found from Rajbaha canal in Wazirabad on Sunday, police said. According to details, Jibrin 35, a tailor by profession was abducted a couple of days earlier. After spotted by passersby, police took the body into custody and shifted it to hospital. A case was registered into the incident at Saddar police station and investigations were underway.

### Two marriage halls sealed

DG KHAN (APP): The raids were underway on Sunday against violations of marriage act and one dish. The authorities sealed two marriage halls, registered two cases and imposed a fine of over Rs 3.1 million on halls owners across the division. On the directions of caretaker chief minister Punjab, the operation has been accelerated for the implementation of marriage act and the teams have inspected 1354 marriage halls during crackdown continued from November 4 in DG Khan division.

# Uplift projects reviewed in meeting

## F.P. Report

MARDAN: Under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai in his office the other day. Besides Deputy Commissioner Mardan Captain Retired Abdul Rehman, WSSCM General Manager and Project Chief Engineer Mohammad Khalil Akbar, Executive Engineer C&W Naqib Khattak, Xen Irrigation Ahmed, SNGPL and Public Health were present in the meeting. attended.

During the briefing on this occasion, it was said that the completion of this project will improve the quality of life of the citizens. The construction work on the sewage treatment plant and solid waste landfill site at a cost of 8.5

billion rupees in the city is going on rapidly, which will make the city of Mardan more prosperous.

The waste water coming out can be cleaned and used for irrigation and other purposes. The meeting was informed that the sewage treatment plant for the six union councils of Mardan city is going on in full swing, in which the waste water of the six union councils Guli Bagh, Roria, Muslimabad, Hoti, Bari Cham and Bukit ganj will be made reusable.

Six million gallons of sewage water will be treated on a daily basis from the six union councils of the city.

Commissioner Mardan Shaukat Ali Yousafzai termed the project as very important and said that the completion of these projects will bring innovation and improvement in the

provision of sanitation services to the citizens of Mardan.

Under the KPCIP project, waste will be collected from house to house to make it reusable and non-usable waste will be disposed of safely.

Commissioner said that all possible support will be given to Asian Development Bank and WSSCM in the completion of this important project.

He directed to continue consultation and coordination with all the stakeholders of Mardan for the completion of the projects and clarified that there will be no compromise on the quality of the work as a lot of money from national exchequer was being spent on this project.

He directed the WSSCM to further improve the sanitation system in Mardan city.

# Peace Cycle Gala celebrates Peace and Unity



## F.P. Report

MOHMAND: Mohmand district witnessed a vibrant conclusion to the Mohmand, Bajaur Peace Cycle Gala. Organized in collaboration with the Pakistan Army, Pakistan Cycling Federation and Frontier Corps North, the event showcased the positive impact of peace in the tribal areas of KPK. Attended by security forces, district officials, local elders, students, and a large youth contingent, the gala featured a three-day Peace Cycle race, attracting 134 cyclists from across Pakistan.

The 80 km race spanned districts Mohmand and

Bajaur, promoting both professional and amateur cycling. Inspector General Frontier Corps North, Major General Noor Wali Khan, graced the closing ceremony as the chief guest. In a captivating display of talent, the Band of Frontier Corps North delivered a mesmerizing performance. Simultaneously, the students of Cadet College Mohmand showcased outstanding athleticism, adding an energetic and vibrant dimension to the event.

The event celebrated winners in various categories, with Najeebullah of WAPDA securing the first position in the professional category and Haris Ali from

Bajaur district claiming victory in the amateur category. A special acknowledgment was extended to 75-year-old Khawaja Zaheruddin from Islamabad, who excelled in the Peace Cycle Gala. Nisar Ahmed, the youngest player from Quetta, also received a special award, highlighting the event's inclusivity.

The people of the area expressed gratitude to the Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps North, recognizing the event as a testament to the complete restoration of peace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's tribal areas. The successful gala underscores the community's embrace of such festivities, affirming their commitment to peace.

# Director General PHA inaugurates food outlet

SARGODHA (APP): Parks and Horticulture Authority Sargodha Director General Syed Tauqeer Haider Kazmi along with APP Station Manager Makhdoom Shah Latif Qureshi inaugurated the food point 'Foodies' located at Quenchi Moor in Hassan Plaza here on Sunday.

PHA Director General Syed Tauqeer Haider Kazmi said that 'Foodies' was a good food point addition to Sargodha city where citizens would get quality fast food. He also invited the Foodie owner to set up his point in the 7-day Lok

Mela which would be organized by the PHA soon.

APP Station Manager Makhdoom Shah Latif said that the citizens of Sargodha were fond of good food and if 'Foodie' maintained its quality, it would get a good response from them.

The owner of the food outlet, Bilal Ashraf Warriach, said that providing quality and fresh food to people was his first priority.

**Sewage-grown vegetables destroyed**

The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) on Sunday

destroyed vegetables grown with waste water spread over a 20 kanal area of land in Bhakar district.

According to a press release, a PFA team equipped with a tractor inspected vegetables grown in the Lal Darwaesh area of Bhakar and destroyed the cabbage crop, which was being irrigated with sewage.

The Spokesman of Punjab Food Authority said that there was a ban on the cultivation of sewage-grown vegetables and strict action was being taken against farmers on the violation.

# HWA holds seminar on Universal Children's Day

NAWABSHAH (APP): Children from different child rights clubs have urged the district and provincial governments to invest funds and take extraordinary steps to protect the right to life, survival, health and education in the district. They revealed alarming statistics on education and child welfare in the district.

During a seminar organized by Hari Welfare Association (HWA) on the occasion of the Universal Children's Day in Benazirabad here Sunday, the child leaders said that 32 percent of the children were out of school, with 53 percent being girls, primarily due to poverty, lack of government investment, awareness, and high rates of corporal punishment. Additionally, 48 percent of the district's population had never attended schools, including 26 percent of females, perpetuating a cycle of illiteracy rooted in a feudal structure, they told. The child leaders who

spoke on the occasion including Areeba, Fiza Fatima, Yushfa, Farwa and Yusra who emphasized the prevalence of corporal punishment in nearly all schools, hindering students from reporting due to fear.

They highlighted the scarcity of basic facilities and nonexistent schools in some areas, further obstructing education provision. Malnutrition emerged as a critical issue, with 55 children experiencing stunting due to poor nutrition.

Lack of immunization was evident, as around 40% of the district's population, particularly in rural areas, lacked immunization. Child clubs reported 885 cases of violence against children in 2021, including sexual abuse, abductions, missing cases, and child marriages.

Akram Ali Khaskheli urged the government to address child labour and bonded labour, prevalent issues in all districts of Sindh. He remarked that in

the tribal districts of Sindh, the lives of peasants and workers' children were miserable, devoid of fundamental rights, particularly the right to education. Owing to persistent tribal feuds, these children face significant obstacles in accessing basic education. Instead, they frequently find themselves involved in agricultural activities or aligning with their fathers in the kacha areas, thereby perpetuating the legacy of tribal conflicts.

The child leaders demanded increased funding for schools, female teacher appointments and rigorous monitoring.

They also urged the expansion of immunization programs to rural areas and initiating special services for malnourished children. There were reported 6.4 million out-of-school children in Sindh, deprived of their right to education due to poverty, lack of nearby schools, government disinterest, awareness, and corporal punishment.



CHINIOT: A farmer busy in thrashing rice in traditional way in his field.

## Sher Alam emphasizes significance of election

KOHAT (APP): Leader of Awami National Party Village Council Nakband Sher Alam Khan on Sunday said that the forthcoming election was critical and significant for Pakistanis to find their destiny.

He was addressing a ceremony organized under the banner of ANP at the constituency PK 90 in Village Council Nakband.

The event was attended by village dignitaries, community leaders, entrepreneur Farooq Khan and a sizable number of local youth. ANP Constituency PK 90 Candidate Yakub Khan, ANP District Kohat Leader Rahab Noor Afridi and the event organizer Sher Alam Khan also addressed the gathering.

In his address, Sher Alam Khan underscored the critical nature of the upcoming election, portraying it as a momentous opportunity for the people of Pakistan. He urged the fellow citizens to choose leaders wisely, emphasizing the importance of candidates dedicated to address the fundamental issues of the country.

## 2 burnt alive as truck catches fire

THARPARKAR (INP): Two individuals were reportedly burnt to death after a truck overturned and caught fire on Diplo Nokot Road near Sindh's Tharparkar village on Sunday.

According to the details, a loader truck of a private contractor company – working in Thar – was transporting the roller which was overturned while taking a turn on Diplo Nokot Road near Sindh's Tharparkar village.

The two individuals – identified as Rajab and Shakeel Pathan, residents of Hyderabad – who were in the truck also caught fire and died on the spot as the local residence failed to extinguish the fire.

Sources within the company stated that the roller was transported from one site to another site during which the accident occurred.

According to the local SHO, initially, it was suspected that three persons were trapped in the vehicle as the bodies were completely burned while the company confirmed that there were only two persons in the vehicle.

## 2 brothers reunite

KARTARPUR (INP): While the creation of two states India and Pakistan in 1947 marked the fulfillment of a longstanding demand of the Muslims of the sub-continent for a separate homeland, at the same time, it resulted in the separation of hundreds of families, especially Muslims, who either shifted to Pakistan or preferred to stay back in India, reported on Sunday.

In one such instance, two brothers, who had got separated at the time of partition of the sub-continent in 1947, finally reunited with each other along with their families at Kartarpur, Narowal after a gap of 76 years. After the partition, Bashir Masih had come to Faisalabad while his brother Sabah Masih stayed back in India.

# Four LPG shops sealed in DI Khan

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): The district administration has tightened a noose around illegal supply of liquefied natural gas (LPG) and sealed four shops over a charge of illegally supplying LPG to public and private vehicles.

According to DC office officials, a team led by Assistant Commissioner Dera Farhan Ahmad, following the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Mansoor Arshad, launched a crackdown on illegal supply of LPG. The action was taken after multiple public complaints received about illegal supply of gas into vehicles by the LPG dealers, which was not only illegal but also dangerous for people's life.

On this occasion, Tehsildar Dera Sajid Saleem, Field Staff of Revenue department and local police were also accompanying the assistant commissioner. The team visited a number of LPG refilling shops on Diyal road and its adjoining areas and sealed four of them for supplying LPG to vehicles illegally.

Speaking on this occasion, the assistant commissioner said the district administration has formally started a crackdown against

LPG dealers.

Filling of LPG in vehicles and auto-rickshaws was illegal and dangerous for human lives which could lead to any tragedy anytime, he added.

He warned that the district administration would take strict action against all such dealers who were found guilty of this act.

The crackdown on such illegal shops would be continued for the sake of ensuring safety of the people, he said.

**Dera police trace dacoity case; recovered stolen bike**

The district police on Sunday claimed to have traced a dacoity case and arrested an accused, recovering a stolen motorcycle and weapon from him here in the limits of Saddar police station.

According to a police spokesman, a team of Saddar police station traced a dacoity case in which accused Ali snatched a motorcycle from a citizen.

The police, adopting modern scientific techniques, arrested accused Ali, son of Hameed Ullah, a resident of Sheikh Yousaf Adda, and recovered a stolen motorcycle, one pistol, and four cartridges from his possession.

Further investigation by the accused was underway.

**Driver died, assistant injured as spirit tanker catches fire in DI Khan**

An oil tanker driver was died and his assistant got injured after the vehicle caught fire here on Sarobai inclined area in Darazinda last night.

According to Rescue 1122 spokesman, a tanker full of spirit liquid was heading towards Peshawar from Quetta when it overturned at inclined area of Sarobai on inter-provincial road in Sub-Division Darazinda. The vehicle, after it overturned, caught fire. As a result, the driver of the vehicle was died and his assistant got injured.

After receiving information, the medical and fire fighter teams of Rescue 1122, under the supervision of District Emergency Officer Owais Babar rushed to the site and started operation.

The rescue teams controlled the fire and shifted the body and injured to Type-D hospital Darazinda and later to DHQ Hospital Dera Ismail Khan. The deceased and injured were identified as Tasleem Marwat (45) and Mustafa Lakki Marwat.

# DEC for encouraging women for casting votes

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): District Election Commissioner (DEC) Abdul Rauf Khan has said the youth should support the efforts of the election commission to encourage women to take part in the electoral process for a bright future for the country.

In this regard, he encouraged the young girls to not only get engaged in the voting process themselves but also involve their mothers, sisters and other women

from their communities in the electoral process as it plays a key role in shaping the future of a democratic country. He expressed these views during a voter awareness session conducted here at Government Girls Higher Secondary School Paroa, where the students were briefed on the voting process.

The awareness session was also attended by ADO establishment Secondary, ADO establishment

Primary, District Education Officer (Female), School Principal, teachers and a number of female students. Highlighting the importance of the vote, he said it was the right of all citizens of Pakistan aged over 18 to cast their votes.

He said there was a significant number of registered young voters in the country, adding, they should actively participate in ensuring transparent polling.

# WASA recovers Rs2 million

FAISALABAD (APP): The Water & Sanitation Agency (WASA) has recovered Rs.2 million from 183 defaulters besides cutting off connections of 83 chronic defaulters in November.

WASA Managing Director Amir Aziz, in a statement here on Sunday, said that the agency had launched a vigorous campaign against defaulters. Teams under supervision of Director Revenue East Javaid Ghani are active in the field and the teams not only recovered Rs.2 million from 132 defaulters during November but also cut off sewerage connections of 83 defaulters.

The action was taken in Allama Iqbal Colony, Raja Ghulam Rasool Nagar, Maghool Road, Samundri Road, Amin Abad, College Road Samanabad, Chak No.204 Road and their peripheral localities, he added. He appealed to WASA consumers to pay their bills timely so that the agency could ensure quality and trouble-free services.

**Three robbers arrested; motorcycle, cash, weapons seized**

Jaranwala Sadar police arrested three dacoits including their ringleader and seized a motorcycle,

cash, illegal weapons and other items.

A police spokesman said here on Sunday that the police, on a tip-off, raided and arrested three outlaws including their ringleader, Farooq alias Faruqi, and his two accomplices who were wanted to the police of Khurarianwala, Jaranwala and Sadar circles in a number of robbery and other cases.

**15 fertiliser dealers arrested for profiteering:** An Agriculture Department team nabbed 15 fertiliser dealers for profiteering.

Agriculture Extension Director Chaudhary Abdul Hameed said here on Sunday that agriculture teams checked 71 fertiliser outlets and found 15 dealers involved in selling DAP and urea fertilizer at high rates. The dealers were handed over to police, he added.

**One dies, two injured in road accident**

A motorcycle died and two others were injured in a road accident in the area of Millat Town police station.

Spokesman Rescue 1122 said here on Sunday that two speeding motorcycles collided with each other near Faisal Garden on Sheikhupura Road.

## Rescue 1122 conducts walk

MULTAN (APP): Rescue 1122 conducted an awareness walk and seminar on "World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims" in order to sensitize citizens about precautionary measures to reduce road incidents on Sunday.

District Emergency Officer (DEO) Rescue 1122 Dr Kaleemullah led the awareness walk.

While addressing the seminar, Dr. Kaleemullah said that as per the World Health Organization report, in view of the current data of road traffic accidents in Pakistan, every house in Pakistan will be affected by road traffic accidents in next few years which is a matter of concern.

He maintained that the ratio of road traffic accidents in the developed countries of the world was five percent while it was alarming in our country.

The official said that they were running an awareness campaign under the 'Community Safety Program' which is helpful to create awareness among the people and added that it was the responsibility of all of us to follow traffic rules and aware the students in schools, and colleges about the implementation of road traffic rules and safety measures.





# India considering new shaft to free trapped tunnel workers

**D E H R A D U N** (AFP/APP): Indian rescuers are considering opening a vertical shaft to free 41 men trapped in a collapsed tunnel after drilling at the site was paused over fears of further cave-ins and as efforts stretched into a second week.

Excavators have been removing earth, concrete and rubble from the under-construction tunnel in the northern Himalayan state of Uttarakhand since last Sunday after a portion of the tunnel the workers were in collapsed.

Rescue efforts have been slowed by continued falling debris as well as repeated breakdowns of the crucial heavy drilling machines, with the air force having to twice airlift in new kit.

Drilling through the tonnes of debris was paused late Friday, after a cracking sound created a "panic situation", officials said. Operations were then halted due to the possibility of "further collapse", said the government's highways and infrastructure company, NHIDCL.

Relatives of those trapped, who spoke to the men via radio, said conditions were grim and morale low.

"They are in tears... they have started asking us whether we are lying about the rescue efforts



being made to save them," one relative told reporters late Saturday, without giving their name. Engineers had been trying to horizontally drive a steel pipe about 90 centimetres (nearly three feet) wide through the debris -- wide enough for the increasingly desperate trapped men to squeeze through.

Bhaskar Khulbe, a senior government official involved in the rescue operations, said teams were now considering digging an entirely new shaft, including from above. "We are exploring all options to save the workers," Khulbe said late Saturday. "We have no shortage of resources, options and methods".

Khulbe said rescuers were looking at a time frame of "a maximum of four to five days" to free the men, without giving further details.

The Press Trust of India news agency reported "preparations to drill a vertical hole from the top of the hill" had begun, as an alternative route out.

Indian media carried a photograph showing an excavator starting to clear soil on the forested hilltop high above the tunnel.

Rescuers have been communicating with the trapped workers by radio, and food, water, oxygen and medicine have also been sent to them via a 15-centimeter-wide (six-inch) pipe.

Tunnel expert Arnold

Dix, an independent disaster investigator and president of the International Tunnelling and Underground Space Association, said he was on his way to India after being asked to help.

"We are discussing right now our options for the safe rescue of these men," Dix told India Today.

Experts have warned about the impact of extensive construction in Uttarakhand, where large parts of the state are prone to landslides.

Dix said the tunnel was in "one of the most difficult areas", but said he was confident they would be rescued. "We are going to bring those 41 men home", he said.

# The Ukrainian train attendant chaperoning Western VIPs

**KYIV, UKRAINE** (AFP/APP): She may be from a remote Ukrainian village, but Tetyana Kogut has rubbed shoulders with some of the world's most powerful Western leaders.

The 36-year-old train hostess never thought she would meet celebrities or heads of state when she started working as a "providnytsa" -- a sleeping car attendant -- 19 years ago. But since Russia's invasion of her country she has taken on an unlikely role, welcoming and catering countless VIPs travelling to show their support for Kyiv.

"I've accompanied dozens of passengers -- presidents, prime ministers, princes..." she told AFP.

In Ukraine, where all commercial flights have been grounded since the start of the war, night trains remain an integral part of the nation's transport system and one of the only ways to get in and out the country.

They have been impressively punctual despite the war, and fares are relatively cheap.

For Ukraine's Western supporters, they have no choice: transport by train, usually from Poland, is the quickest way in. Each carriage is manned by one or two hosts who check tickets, serve tea and coffee, and keep things quiet and clean.

Tetyana is from Golovetsko, a village two hours from the western city of Lviv, where she still lives with her husband and teenage son.

At the start of the invasion, she

worked for weeks, sometimes under bombardment, on civilian evacuation routes. After Russian forces were forced to retreat from the outskirts of Kyiv in spring 2022, Western politicians began pouring into the capital.

Dozens of hosts and hostesses were given the task of accompanying these delegations.

The first such delegation was that of European Parliament President Roberta Metsola at the beginning of April 2022. The train crew realised there were going to be VIPs when they saw security guards at the station in Poland.

Over a year and a half later, Tetyana has stopped counting her VIP guests, but she has learned enough English to offer tea or coffee and understand the questions of her passengers.

"They thank us for our work and say: You've stayed in the country, aren't you scared?" she said, sitting in a compartment on train 091/92 between Kyiv and Lviv.

In total, Ukrainian railways have carried more than 500 official delegations during the 21 months of war.

For security reasons, information about the journeys are often kept under wraps.

But details are sometimes released later, like when German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and then Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi teased French President Emmanuel Macron about his supposedly posh compartment

during a visit to Kyiv in June 2022.

The passenger Tetyana has accompanied the most is former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, with whom she travelled four times while he was head of government and after he left office.

He gave her his hat with the London Underground emblem.

Johnson, Tetyana said, also comforted her during her "worst journey" on August 24, 2022, when a Russian strike on a railway station killed at least 25 civilians, including two of her colleagues.

Some politicians are just happy to arrive on time.

A team led by German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock was "very impressed" with the punctuality of her train, which arrived in Kyiv exactly on schedule, Tetyana said.

"They said that in Germany, that doesn't happen," Tetyana said.

Her train has been late only once, by a quarter of an hour, Tetyana said, after a tree fell on the tracks.

"We had to explain (to the delegation) that it wasn't bombardment but simply the rain," she joked.

She has since built up "a little museum" of souvenirs offered by her passengers, including badges, thank-you notes, pens and notebooks. "I never imagined that I would be able to meet presidents of other countries and talk to them", Tetyana said. "but I would have preferred peace at home and to see them only on television."

# Heavy rain in Kenya affects tens of thousands, disrupts cargo

**NAIROBI** (AFP/APP): Kenya on Sunday said tens of thousands of people across the country had been impacted by heavy rainfall, flooding and landslides that had also interrupted cargo services at Mombasa port.

The Horn of Africa has experienced intense rainfall linked to the El Nino weather phenomenon in recent weeks that has claimed dozens of lives, including at least 46 in various parts of Kenya.

Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua said at least 80,000 households in Kenya had been affected "with numbers rising every day".

He said the government was responding to "save our people" including with helicopters and other emergency services to deliver aid and rescue marooned families.

"This situation has continued to threaten lives," he said in a statement issued Sunday, urging the public to avoid floodwaters and evacuate homes in low-lying areas.

The prolonged rainfall was expected to extend into the first quarter of next year, he added.

Officials said nine people have died in the coastal region since last week including two passengers in a car belonging to the

Kenya Revenue Authority that was swept off a flooded bridge in Kwale County on Friday morning.

"A multi-agency team led by the Kenya Coast Guard Service is on scene trying to retrieve the bodies," the interior ministry said Sunday.

Kenya Railways said floods and landslides had caused an "unexpected delay" in deliveries to Mombasa port and along the cargo rail line to Nairobi.

"Consequently, this has affected normal train operations, including cargo transfers, loading as well as offloading activities at the Port of Mombasa," the state-owned railway said in a statement on Saturday posted on X, formerly Twitter.

A landslide in one section of the line between Mombasa and Nairobi had resulted in "the closure of that section for all freight trains" but limited passenger services were still moving, it added.

Mombasa, the country's second-largest city, and its port and railway cargo line serve not just Kenya but also landlocked neighbours including Uganda, South Sudan and Rwanda.

British charity Save the Children on Thursday said more than 100 people, including 16 children, had died and over 700,000 been forced out of their homes in Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia due to flash flooding.



# Iran rapper jailed over backing protests freed on bail: media

**TEHRAN** (AFP/APP): Iranian authorities have released on bail a popular rapper jailed for more than a year over supporting nationwide protests sparked by Mahsa Amini's death in custody, local media have reported.

Toomaj Salehi, 32, was arrested in October 2022 after publicly backing the wave of demonstrations which erupted a month earlier, triggered by the death of 22-year-old Amini, an Iranian Kurd, who had been taken into custody over an alleged breach of strict dress rules for women. In July, Salehi was sentenced to six years in prison on charges of "corruption on earth" -- one of Iran's most serious

offences which carries a maximum penalty of death.

The musician's lawyer, Amir Raisian, told Iran's reformist newspaper Shargh late Saturday that upon appeal, the Supreme Court had found "flaws in the initial sentence" and ordered that Salehi be "released from prison today on bail".

An image posted overnight on Salehi's official Instagram account shows him out of jail, holding a bouquet of white flowers.

The accusations against Salehi included spreading "lies on the internet" and "propaganda against the state" as well as inciting people to violence and

"having formed and managed illegal groups with the aim of disrupting security in cooperation with a government hostile" to Iran.

Iranian officials have labelled last year's protests "riots" and accused Tehran's foreign foes of fomenting unrest.

Meanwhile, prominent actor Hanieh Tavassoli -- one of a dozen actors recently banned from work for failing to observe Iran's dress code for women -- has been handed time in jail, her lawyer said Sunday.

An Iranian court gave Tavassoli, 44, a six-month prison term and a fine of 150 million rials (\$300) for "publishing false con-

tent with the intention of disturbing the public", lawyer Maryam Kianersi said without elaborating, according to Shargh.

Months of unrest following Amini's death on September 16, 2022 saw hundreds of people killed including dozens of security personnel, and thousands more arrested.

Seven men have been executed in protest-related cases involving killing and other violence against security forces. On Monday, Iran's Supreme Court upheld a death sentence over the killing a Revolutionary Guards officer during the protests, according to the judiciary which did not identify the condemned man.

# DR Congo election campaign starts with fireworks, bullets

**KINSHASA** (AFP/APP): Democratic Republic of the Congo kicks off a month-long election campaign Monday with 26 candidates running for president amid a tense political climate and fighting in the east of the country.

Some 44 million registered voters, out of a population of almost 100 million, will elect a president on December 20.

They will also choose between tens of thousands of candidates for legislative and local bodies in the country with vast resources but endemic conflict and corruption. A "pre-campaign" has been underway for a while, with President Felix Tshisekedi, who is seeking a second term, attending numerous public events while his allies vaunt his record.

With the launch of the official campaign, big rallies, media interviews, giant posters and handing

out flyers will be allowed.

On opening day, Tshisekedi will hold a rally at the Martyrs Stadium in Kinshasa while one of his main challengers, Martin Fayulu, is addressing a rally in a nearby province.

In total there are a record 25,832 candidates for the legislative elections, 44,110 for provincial bodies and 31,234 for municipal councils, according to the Electoral Commission (Ceni), which faces the struggle of organising voting across the country's 2.3 million square kilometres and limited infrastructure.

"There is a political will to stick to the electoral calendar, but there are doubts about the technical feasibility," said Tresor Kibangula, a political analyst at the Ebuteli research institute.

The east of the country has been racked by fighting for three decades, and violence is surging again after

the M23 group, supported by Rwanda, recently occupied much of Nord Kivu province. The fighting will prevent normal voting in two territories in the province, but the whole process would be threatened if rebels take the provincial capital Goma.

"M23 will not take Goma," insisted Tshisekedi, who says a return to calm is his priority, along with improving services and the economy, building roads and respecting freedom of speech and of the press.

His record is mixed, according to analysts, and disastrous according to the opposition, which is already warning of massive fraud.

In addition to Fayulu, who claims he was robbed of victory in 2018, the main opposition candidates are Moise Katumbi, former governor of the Katanga mining region; Doctor

Denis Mukwege, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 for his work with victims of sexual violence; and two former prime ministers.

The incumbent president is favoured to win, particularly since there is only one round of voting, but representatives of five leading opposition groups met this week in South Africa to study the possibility of proposing a single candidate.

A coalition has been formed and a common platform adopted, but Fayulu has yet to adhere.

Voters are mixed about the value of voting.

Eunice, a 20-year-old geography student, says she is "happy" to be voting for the first time.

Ezechiel, a 24-year-old studying management IT, is discouraged. "There will be fraud, like in 2018," he said. "I am not going to waste my time."

# Austrian property tycoon's troubles rattle investors

**VIENNA** (AFP/APP): The Austrian property group that co-owns New York's iconic Chrysler building has warned of an imminent "restructuring" that has cast a spotlight on several precarious projects -- and the wealthy tycoon behind the company.

Rene Benko, one of Austria's richest people, with a net worth of \$6 billion according to Forbes, has grown his Signa group into a real estate giant since founding it in 2000.

But as the sector is hit by higher borrowing costs and surging material prices, a growing number of developers are filing for bankruptcy. Several Signa projects, including the construction of a landmark high-rise in Germany, have ground to a halt, making investors jittery about their money. Confirming its troubles, Signa announced last week that Benko was stepping down from its advisory board as the group prepares a "plan for essential restructuring steps" by the end of November.

"Signa symbolises the real estate boom of recent years, in which cheap money was readily distributed for every project, no matter how daring," the Austrian daily Die Presse wrote in an editorial this month. "A perfect environment for Benko, who

took out dizzying amounts of loans without shame. Sustainability didn't play a role," it said. Born in 1977 to a middle-class family in Innsbruck, Benko worked with a friend restoring attics as a teenager before dropping out of school and founding Signa.

Among its first purchases was a department store in Innsbruck, which Benko transformed into a modern shopping centre.

Since then, Benko has added the Chrysler building and the Berlin shopping gallery KaDeWe to the company's portfolio, while branching out into media and other sectors.

At one point, the company reportedly tried to attract investors with slogans like "It was never so boring to get rich". "When you have success, you become interesting. And if you give the impression that you have remained a man of your words, you build trust and expand your circle of friends," Benko told Die Presse in 2008. With offices in Austria, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and Switzerland, Signa has holdings worth 27 billion euros (\$29 billion) and projects worth 25 billion euros in development, according to its website.

But Signa looks to be in trouble.

Thailand's Central

Group said this month that it had taken control of the historic British department store Selfridges, which Signa used to own.

And Signa-led work on the prestigious Elbtower in the heart of Hamburg -- expected to be one of Germany's tallest buildings -- was halted at the end of last month.

Karen Pein, the Hamburg senator in charge of urban development, has threatened to demolish the half-built tower if the group is not able to continue work on schedule.

The future of another Signa project, the renovation of the Alte Akademie in Munich, a former Jesuit college to be transformed into an office and residential complex, is also uncertain. Fitch, the credit rating agency, has already downgraded the Signa Development subsidiary after it said it was "facing challenges including with respect to its liquidity position".

And the online e-commerce unit Signa Sports United has initiated insolvency proceedings for several of its entities and has decided to drop its stock listing on the New York Stock Exchange to reduce costs.

Signa did not respond to AFP requests for comment.

Signa's undertakings have drawn criticism in the past.

The leading German department store chain Galeria Karstadt Kaufhof, which Signa purchased in 2019, filed for bankruptcy in 2020 amid the coronavirus pandemic, and the chain decided to close 52 stores at the start of the year.

In 2020, Benko testified before an Austrian parliamentary committee probing wide-ranging corruption allegations after the so-called Ibizaagate scandal shook the country's politics.

He was asked about his links to several high-ranking conservative and far-right political figures, though Benko has not been charged in connection with the case.

The scandal erupted in 2019 when a video showed Austria's former far-right leader offering public contracts to a woman posing as a Russian oligarch's niece in exchange for campaign help. In a separate matter, Benko received in 2012 a 12-month suspended jail sentence over an Italian tax case, after a court found him guilty of bribing Croatia's former prime minister Ivo Sanader with 150,000 euros to intervene with the Italian tax authorities.



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## Pakistan’s Response to Climate Change

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revealed in its recent report that Pakistan is among the most vulnerable countries to climate change which has been causing a \$ 2 billion loss annually to the South Asian nation since 2000. As said, climate change affects four million people every year, while last year's superfloods impacted 30 million people and perished 1,700 lives causing the bulk of economic losses, and displacement. The report highlighted that Pakistan's economy may be affected by natural disasters by up to 9% by the year 2050. The IMF has also raised concerns about the affordability of Pakistan's Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP), urging a reassessment of the initiative concerning budget allocation and the volume of the impending risk to basic infrastructure in the country. The report emphasized the importance of climate-resilient infrastructure, given Pakistan's exposure to climate risks. The IMF emphasized the incomplete implementation of measures outlined in the Public Financial Management Act 2019 and the 2021 Manual for Development Projects.

Pakistan is highly vulnerable to global warming and natural disasters because of its geographical location, topography, acute weather conditions, irregular growth and untidy governance. Historically, Climate change has had significant impacts on Pakistan, particularly in the form of extreme weather events, water scarcity, glacial melt, and periodic heatwaves in the country. The Country faces severe challenges such as agricultural productivity, increased flooding, droughts, and water and food insecurity that merit urgent attention from the leaders to avert the bulk of economic, monetary, and administrative challenges until they physically threaten the nation in the future. Historically, our nation has been facing climate-induced weather events regularly including earthquakes, floods, landslides, cyclones, etc. that caused significant damage to the country's infrastructure, economy, and population. Presently, global warming has caused serious survival risks for the South Asian nation, as last year's superfloods caused nearly \$30 billion in economic losses, while monsoon floods have become a recurrent phenomenon on an annual basis.

The primary purpose of the Pakistan Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) is to plan, finance, and execute development projects aimed at improving infrastructure, education, healthcare, energy, transportation, and other sectors essential for the nation's progress. The PSDP is crucial for implementing the government's development agenda, allocating budgets, and monitoring the progress of projects across different ministries and departments. Its role involves prioritizing projects, allocating funds, ensuring transparency and efficiency in project execution, and facilitating socio-economic growth and progress in the country. The IMF report has categorically mentioned the flaws and anomalies in PSDP's projects planning, funds allocation as well and time for execution and completion of the projects which often lead to delays, an increase in cost, reevaluation of the projects that mostly end up in additional financial burden/ incompleteness or downsizing of the projects.

Historically, global think tanks, international financial institutions, and scholarly circles have always provided constructive input to Pakistan regarding its policies relating to governance, financial management, monitoring, and regulation to curb corruption, misuse of resources and enhance transparency in government spending yet Pakistani strategists often reject those suggestions terming them inapplicable in Asian or Pakistan's peculiar environment. After all, politically motivated policies and projects often prove to be counterproductive and disastrous for our nation. It is high time that the planning commission and provinces revisit their PSDP projects and remove their flaws to build and protect their nation from the worst effects of global warming, which is a need of the hour and demand of nationalism.

## Public Service of KP Rulers

The KP newly throned interim Chief Minister has issued stern instructions to provincial authorities to ensure efficient and transparent public service delivery to the masses. In the first go, the Chief Minister has ordered necessary steps on an urgent basis to install live cameras (Internet Protocol Cameras) at patwar kahanas, police stations, and offices of DCs, ACs, DPOs, DSPs and Tehsildars across the province further directing them to complete installation of IP cameras at all aforementioned public service outlets/ offices by the end of this month.

The resolution of public issues and service delivery to the masses had been the top priority of the nation's saviours throughout history. Great leaders had always cared more for the common man and always endeavoured to bring peace, comfort, and prosperity to the masses. The newly appointed judge turned administrator has carried forward his legacy of public service and rightly busted provincial administration for its incompetence and slackness in public work. Historically, Patwar Khanas, Police Stations, Courts, Hospitals, Union Councils, and offices of local administration had become hubs of corruption, where government servants demand huge money to deliver fundamental rights and common utilities to the public. Putwaris, Police, and Kutchery (Courts) are most notorious for corruption and exploitation of the common public and this important social evil has come to the notice of the Chief Minister shortly after souring in his office. Unfortunately, the former Judge failed to diagnose the existential snags of the judiciary during his three decades of service in that department, otherwise, he also enlists all courts and bar rooms for immediate installation of IP Cameras.

In fact, it is a human error that they cannot evaluate themselves like a barber who never takes his head shaved on his own. The TFP's news hawk successfully pinpointed the lapse of the administrators that missed an important avenue. Hopefully, after sensation over these pages, the KP government will also include provincial Courts, bar rooms and local government offices in the newly initiated camera surveillance project, so all departments can be dealt with on equal footing and the standard for public service delivery could be raised to optimum level.

### Important Notice

The Frontier Post will not be responsible for the comments in the articles and letters. The Frontier Post requests the writers of articles and letters to please make sure that they write their email addresses and mention the names of the cities, towns, districts or tehsil of their residences at the bottom of their articles and letters.



## Sacking of UK Home Secretary Suella Braverman was only a question of when, not if

Yossi Mekelberg

Suella Braverman's days in the UK government were numbered the moment she wrote an ill-fated newspaper article in which, clearly for ideological reasons, she inappropriately and inaccurately criticized the Metropolitan Police, Britain's largest police force, for allegedly favoring one group of protesters (pro-Palestinians) over another (right-wing groups).

She was sacked from her job as home secretary by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Monday, several days after her op-ed was published. Her demise was as much about the way in which she phrased her unprecedented criticism of the police as it was about the actual content of the article.

Her choice of words might have been the result of sheer ignorance of police policies and procedures, or perhaps a deliberate attempt to stoke the fires of division among the public and by doing so curry favor with her supporters. Probably it was both.

For a minister in charge of a department that is crucial to the maintenance of law and order to publicly make the inaccurate generalization that there is "only one way to describe those (pro-Palestinian) marches: they are hate marches," and to claim that the police were "playing favorites" by using stronger control tactics against some while tolerating others, was an act of sabotage of her own ministerial responsibilities by inflaming an already potentially explosive situation.

Instead of highlighting in a considered manner her concerns about some manifestations of hate speech among a minority of the protesters, and the need for it to stop, she instead opted to incite violence against hundreds of thousands of people exercising their legitimate democratic rights, while at the same time stirring up the far right against both protesters and police.

It might be that Braverman deliberately plotted her own downfall so that she could have complete freedom to pursue her agenda. Sunak was already keen to remove Braverman from the Cabinet but, until the events of the past week, was too frightened of upsetting the right of his party.

After all, throughout her political career Braverman has been a loose cannon who has failed to grasp the responsibilities she bears and the effects of what she does and says, first as an MP and then as a senior member of the Cabinet.

Over the past year she was running one of the most complex ministries in the country, a job that requires great sensitivity and a delicate touch, not a sledgehammer approach bent on inflaming the existing tensions surrounding some of the most divisive issues in British society, including immigration and the multicultural nature of the nation.

Pro-Palestinian marches began in the UK soon after the start of the current war in Gaza. They have taken place across the nation, though mainly in London.

Protesting is a basic freedom enshrined in domestic and international laws. This right is closely linked to freedom of expression, which is exercised during protests, marches and demonstrations, and also counterdemonstrations. Without it, no society is truly free.

These protesters have been expressing their legitimate concerns about the killing of thousands of

cusable, they should be condemned, and they should be dealt with by the police when the law is broken — but not under government duress.

Sadly, protests can attract extremists. One can only wish that the conversations and general discourse surrounding the conflict could have been somewhat more considerate, nuanced and conducted with a vision of peace and

**Some slogans, such as “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” are controversial and open to interpretation, and I wish the protesters could have instead demanded simply that that all Palestinians be free and equal in all their rights. But what**

**Braverman did was to release two genies from the bottle with one stroke of her pen. Firstly she insulted and incited against all those who would like to see an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, to halt the killing of civilians there. Secondly, by undermining the police and describing right-wing protesters as the victims of police discrimination, she sought to legitimize the violence officers faced while battling far-right hooligans in central London.**

**Throughout her political career, Braverman has not paused in her pandering to the far right and its entourage of thugs, and she egged them on with even more relish after becoming home secretary. On this most recent occasion, the results were instant, especially given the fact that her newspaper op-ed was published just days before Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday. For some, these occasions are a somber reminder of the horror of wars and why they should be prevented, but for others they are an occasion for their nationalistic impulses to spiral out of control.**

**For the first time ever, the Cenotaph — which has been a landmark in Whitehall since the end of the First World War and is the central focus for was remembrance and commemoration events in the UK — this year became the focus of violent behavior by brutes and bully boys who claimed to be “defending” this British shrine from what Braverman described as “hate marchers” and “Islamists.”**

Palestinian civilians in Gaza by the Israeli military, and demanding an immediate ceasefire. It is an entirely legitimate attempt to influence the British government to call for a ceasefire, and the vast majority of the marchers are doing so peacefully and within the law.

Admittedly, among the protesters there have been some, and they are a tiny minority, who carried the flag of Hamas, an organization outlawed in the UK, expressing support for the group and, by extension, for the massacre of Israelis on Oct. 7. We have also seen vile antisemitic chants and placards.

These incidents are inexcusable, they should be condemned, and they should be dealt with by the police when the law is broken — but not under government duress.

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It is impossible not to draw a connection between the former home secretary's reckless statements and this out-of-control violence by far-right thugs.

Sunak hardly emerges from this sorry saga with his reputation enhanced. Braverman's article was a deliberate and obvious attempt not only to stir up tensions within British society, and by doing so position herself as the torchbearer of the extreme right of both the Conservative Party and British society, but to undermine Sunak's authority.

He should have sacked Braverman before the ink had dried on her hate piece. That would have shown him to be a strong and principled leader. By delaying the decision for several days and then being forced to sack her under mounting pressure, he once again showed himself to be neither strong nor principled but someone who responds only to pressure.

Braverman has gone but what she represents remains present in British society and ready to be exploited by cynical and opportunistic politicians, as she demonstrated with her vitriolic anti-migration and anti-multiculturalism stances.

While she might aspire to lead the Conservative Party and one day become prime minister, the divisive and explosive way she is going about this is more likely to result in her following in the footsteps of a former Conservative prime minister, Boris Johnson, and ending up as a presenter on GB News, rather the leader of a nation with a proud history of tolerance for others and their views.

## EU’s toolbox for ‘de-risking’ China grows with addition of anti-coercion measures

Andrew Hammond

EU politicians, in particular European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, are increasingly framing their policy on China as one of “de-risking.” However, the block and its 27 member states currently lack the toolbox required to deliver on this, imperfectly defined, ambition.

This leaves Brussels facing a huge political challenge, to say the least. Little wonder, then, that von der Leyen and others gave such a warm welcome to the EU's recent decision to grant final approval for a new, so-called European anti-coercion tool.

The measure, intended as a deterrent, will enable the EU to impose countermeasures on any third-party country, including China, that attempts to exercise economic coercion over member states. Available countermeasures include increased customs duties, intellectual property restrictions, or export controls.

One key trigger for development of the anti-coercion tool was the alarm in several member states about China's blockade of EU member Lithuania, over the Baltic nation's deepening ties with Taiwan. After allowing Taiwan to open a representative office in its capital, Vilnius, in 2021, Lithuania was subjected to a Chinese ban on exports.

The new EU regulations, which are due to be signed on Nov. 22 and come into force 20 days later, represent a potentially major milestone in the bloc's new economic-security strategy, which proposes to carry out a thorough assessment of possible threats in four areas: risks to the resilience of supply chains, including energy security; risks to the physical security and cybersecurity of critical infrastructure; risks related to the security and leakage of technology; and risks of the weaponization of economic dependencies or economic coercion.

At the forefront of this economic-security debate in Brussels is the “de-risking” of China. This was highlighted recently by EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell when he cited the huge trade imbalance between the bloc and China, which stands at about 400 billion (\$435 billion) in China's favor.

On Nov. 16, von der Leyen said that this huge deficit is “the calculated and declared result of China's trade and security policy. China's declared strategy is to reduce its dependence on the world and at the same time increase the world's dependence on China.” She therefore urged the EU to speed up the process of de-risking Beijing.

Borrell highlighted the importance of addressing this issue in his own comments few weeks ago, when he said “it is ... in our mutual interest to find common ground, to redress the imbalance in our economic and trade relations. Otherwise, de-risking may indeed accelerate far more than is good, as the public opinion will increase its pressure on political leaders to disengage more from China.”

However, the lack of clarity over exactly what “de-risking” actually means increases the possibility of EU policy failure rather than success. Part of the challenge is that opinions within the EU 27 significantly diverge on these issues so, despite the significant tensions with China, it will not be a straightforward matter to secure an ongoing policy consensus.

For example, de-risking looks different to many policymakers in Germany, given the nation's deep economic ties with China, than it does to their counterparts not only in Lithuania but other key, hawkish Eastern European nations. Germany is, by far, China's biggest trading partner within the EU, and the nation's firms also hold sizable investments in the country.

Within this large arena of European policy on Beijing there are some other signals, beyond the

anti-coercion tool, about what de-risking might look like, based on what von der Leyen described as a need for “a clear-eyed picture of what the risks are.”

A growing number of EU decision-makers, for instance, want to make better use of existing export controls, foreign direct investment screening, and foreign subsidy instruments. Take the example of investment screening: Not all EU countries had screening in place as recently as 2021, and even where it existed, Brussels had no formal legal power to block investments.

Building on this, the new framework is likely to include efforts to reduce dependency and diversify supply chains away from Beijing, especially in areas where the EU needs to enhance its green and digital economies.

We can therefore anticipate greater European interest in African and Latin American countries with great mineral resources, and higher prominence for initiatives such as the EU's Global Gateway strategy for investment in infrastructure projects and economic partnerships based on certain key principles.

Key elements of the new EU framework are also likely to include measures

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von der Leyen said are needed for the “bolder and faster use” of new economic tools against China. These include the roll-out of regulations on foreign subsidies that would give the EU extra muscle to fight the distortion of subsidies businesses can receive. The aim is to give Brussels greater powers to prevent state-subsidized companies in China, or other non-member nations, producing goods in Europe.

Another tool that the EU looks set to develop is what von der Leyen calls “a targeted instrument on outbound investment,” especially in relation to sensitive technologies that can lead to development of military capabilities that pose national security risks.

In her own words: “We need to ensure that our companies' capital, expertise and knowledge are not used to enhance the military and intelligence capabilities of those who are also systemic rivals.”

Even with these new anti-coercion rules and other measures, however, a key question is to what extent this emerging toolkit will be able to deliver on the de-risking goal set by von der Leyen and others.

Seeking to differentiate the EU stance from what she described as the US-style “decoupling” from China might be clever rhetorical positioning, but the implementation of this might turn out to be very difficult, politically and economically.



# India’s ill-advised shifting stance on Palestine

India abstained from a recent vote at the UN General Assembly on a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. In doing so, the country indirectly aligned itself with a number of Western nations that voted against the motion.

By abstaining or voting against the resolution, countries revealed that they had acquiesced to Israel’s incessant and indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza, which has led to thousands of casualties, including many among children and even patients in hospitals.

While Western nations, most notably the US and those in Europe, have traditionally been pro-Israel on the issue of the Israel-Palestine conflict, India’s abstention from the UN vote marked a very significant shift in the country’s stance on an issue in which it had steadfastly remained neutral, and on humanitarian issues even pro-Palestinian.

The Indian Foreign Ministry said it did not vote in favor of the resolution because the text failed to explicitly condemn the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas on Israel. This explanation was received with skepticism and cynicism in India, where many critics pointed out that the country could easily have voted for the resolution while also stating its concerns about the lack of a clear condemnation of the attack on Israel.

Many critics saw the close relationship that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi enjoys with his Israeli counterpart,

Benjamin Netanyahu, as influencing the decision.

The popular perception is that the Indian stance on the vote represents a huge shift in its position on the protracted dispute between Israelis and Palestinians, and the decision to abstain attracted sharp criticism across the country. Many major political parties criticized Modi’s government for sacrificing India’s decades-old stance on the Palestinian issue.

In the past, India has

**By abstaining from the UN resolution on Gaza, India lost a unique opportunity not only to reassert its position on Palestine, with which it has historically enjoyed a very close relationship, it also rubbed up many Islamic countries the wrong way, potentially undoing decades of work by numerous Indian governments to foster a closer relationship with the Islamic world, including Gulf Cooperation Council nations. In fact, one of the biggest foreign policy successes of Modi’s government has been its balanced relationship with GCC nations and Israel, thanks to which trade and strategic ties with both the Arab world and Israel have prospered over the past 10 years or so. Instead of abstaining from the vote, therefore, India should have opted for sharp criticism of the excessive violence unleashed by Israel in Gaza, which has gone on for over a month.**

consistently called for ceasefires not only in conflicts between Israel and Palestine but also in others in the Middle East. Even in the war between Ukraine and Russia, India has consistently refrained from criticizing either side and repeatedly called for a ceasefire and a return to diplomacy in an effort to find a peaceful resolution to

Ranvir S. Nayar

the conflict, which has now dragged on for more than a year and a half.

Even though Russia has traditionally been a much stronger ally of India than any other country, including Western nations and Israel, Indian authorities did not hesitate to call for an immediate end to violence in the war with Ukraine.

Voting for the resolution on Gaza would therefore

have been very much in line not only with India’s own stance on numerous international issues, but also with the sentiments of almost every other developing nation, a grouping of 120 countries that India aspires to lead, with some justification. Almost every other member of that 120-strong group supported the call for

a ceasefire and India ought not only to have taken the lead in consolidating the bloc’s vote, but also tabled any tangible amendments to the resolution, such as clear criticism of the Oct. 7 attacks on Israel that caused hundreds of civilian deaths.

This ill-timed and unreasoned abstention came just weeks after India hosted a rather successful summit of G20 nations in New Delhi, during which, despite all the doubts about whether a joint communique would be

issued, the host nation did indeed manage to get all parties, despite the polarization between Russia and NATO members, to sign off on the communique.

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India seemed to undertake a certain degree of course correction in a subsequent vote in the General Assembly, last Sunday, in which it joined 144 other nations in delivering a sharp rebuke of the Israeli policy on settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

India should not rest, content with this condemnation, however. It could indeed take the lead by trying to convince the Israeli leadership that the objective of total destruction in Gaza is hardly likely to bring peace to the region. It can only fuel anti-Israeli sentiment in Palestine and other Arab nations, with dire consequences for Israel.

# How Russian troops are threatening EU expansion

Luke Coffey

The European Commission, the executive branch of the EU, has recommended that accession talks for EU membership should start for Ukraine and Moldova, and that Georgia should receive its long awaited EU candidate status. The European Council is expected to vote to approve this next month, the beginning of what will be a long but important process.

All three states bring an added complication to EU enlargement: the presence of Russian troops on their territory.

Russia’s illegal military presence in Ukraine began in 2014. In November 2013, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, under pressure from the Kremlin, failed to sign an association agreement and free trade deal with the EU despite promising to do so. Instead, he agreed to join the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union. The Ukrainian people felt betrayed and took to the streets. Months of street demonstrations led to his removal in early 2014.

Russia responded by sending in unmarked troops to occupy Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula under the pretext of “protecting the Russian people.” This was followed by military meddling in eastern Ukraine. After eight years of low intensity conflict, Russia carried out the large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Last summer, the EU offered candidacy status to Ukraine. This month, accession talks started — exactly a decade after Yanukovich reneged on his promise.

Russia’s military presence in Moldova is a legacy of the Soviet Union. When the USSR was disintegrating, Moldova, at the time part of the Soviet Union, declared independence. At the same time, the region of Transnistria, which is considered by the international community to be a part of Moldova, tried declaring independence. A war broke out between Moldova and the separatists in the early 1990s, with Russia backing the latter. In 1999, Russia agreed to remove all its troops and weaponry from Moldova by the end of 2002 but never followed through. Today, 2,000 Russian troops are still based in the breakaway region.

Since the 1990s, Moldova has swayed between pro-Russian and pro-European governments. However, in recent years, elections have returned decisively pro-European governments to office. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was a wakeup call for Moldova, and the government has since pursued closer relations with Europe. Moldova was finally granted EU candidate status last year and will soon begin accession talks with Brussels.

After its Rose Revolution 20 years ago this month, Georgia has pursued a policy of EU and NATO memberships. In 2008, after NATO declared that Georgia would join the alliance at some point without committing to a firm timeline, Russia sensed indecision and invaded. After a brutal five-day war in August 2008, Russia

continues to occupy about 20 percent of Georgia’s territory.

Since the reemergence of nation states in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union, the enlargement process for the EU has become a topic of debate across Europe. Some believe the EU enlarged too quickly in the years after the Cold War, and without the proper institutional reforms needed to accommodate so many new members.

For example, some policy issues, such as those relating to foreign affairs, defense, and economic sanctions require unanimity among members before a decision can be made. This means that just one country out of the 27 can block major initiatives in foreign

**There is also a major challenge related to security that is not discussed when it comes to Ukraine, Moldova or Georgia joining the EU. One of the main reasons they have not joined NATO is that each country has Russian troops occupying part of their territory. Because of NATO’s Article 5 mutual defense clause, which states that an attack on one is an attack on all, there is a concern that a country joining NATO, while in a state of war or “frozen conflict” with Russia would automatically drag the alliance into a war. The EU also has a mutual defense clause in Article 42.7 of the Treaty of the European Union. The same concerns about NATO’s Article 5 apply to that. So far there has been no discussion on how to resolve this issue.**

**Russia has developed and perfected a formula to keep its neighbors out of the EU and NATO: invasion and partial occupation. Russia’s actions toward Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in recent years is a great example of this. Without any creative or bold solution, it is unlikely that any of the three will join the EU while Russian troops remain on their territory. Of course, Russia knows this. In the case of Ukraine, the fastest and most direct way to get into the EU (and NATO) will be a military victory expelling the Russian invaders. The US and Europe should be arming Ukraine with this goal in mind. If this happens, it is likely Russia would have little choice but to leave Moldova and Georgia too.**

and defense policy. Some EU members have called on this to be changed before new members are brought into the union.

In part, this is why the enlargement process has stalled and a new member has not been added since Croatia joined in 2013. This is the longest period without new members since the first round of enlargement in 1973.

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# Cameron’s return is a bold move by UK’s prime minister

Occasionally domestic politics pulls a surprise that no smart commentator expects, and the UK has just experienced one with global implications: the country has a new foreign secretary. Confounding Westminster watchers and alarming even some in his own party, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has appointed former Prime Minister David Cameron, who has been out of the political mainstream since 2016.

The appointment is no disrespect to the man Cameron succeeds, James Cleverly, who by all accounts is popular with his counterparts around the diplomatic world and steadied the foreign office after a run of rather shaky predecessors.

But it is a bold and good move. It recognizes the unique character of the position in UK politics. The foreign secretary is rarely seen as overtly partisan, recognizing that British interests outlive governments, with decisions and positions largely to be inherited by successive administrations. It suits a consensual approach to decision making, the sort demonstrated by a party leader who built and led a rare coalition government in British politics from 2010-15. In addition, a foreign secretary of the UK — which is a UN Security Council member, a NATO pillar and G7 player — meets with the very top level of world leaders. To have the background of six years as a head of govern-

ment will score well in what is a rather hierarchical environment: an elite group will know that he has succeeded to a level beyond themselves.

The choice of Cameron is a good one, with such a style and background. But it is also bold in the context of UK politics, and shows a determination in both men to put the country’s interests above those of party. Cameron is not popular with a noisy section of

**The choice of Cameron is a good one, with such a style and background. But it is also bold in the context of UK politics, and shows a determination in both men to put the country’s interests above those of party. Cameron is not popular with a noisy section of Conservatives at present, as a man positioned more to the political center than many current MPs, and who led the campaign against leaving the EU. Paradoxically, however, now that decision is made, his appointment should signal to Brussels that the knee-jerk confrontations to suit elements of the British media might now be over, and the grown-up job of working together with Brussels in a difficult world, from migration to war in Ukraine, is in the hands of those who mean it. His record will be scrutinized keenly. No one who has led his country for over half a decade is without controversy and debate over decisions.**

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His record will be scrutinized keenly. No one who has led his country for over half a decade is without controversy and debate over decisions. I worked as

Cameron’s minister for the Middle East and North Africa between 2010-13, through the upheavals of the Arab uprisings. He faced particular criticism over his Libya and Syria positions. I think the criticisms were unfair, and his thinking behind key decisions tells a better story. In

Libya we pored over the intelligence suggesting that a proven killer of opponents was on his way to Benghazi to dispose of them “alley by alley,” and in Syria the use of chemical weapons on children appalled him. Memory of a world standing by, as in the horrors of Rwanda in which he had taken a keen interest, waskey to his deciding that the UK should not do so. One should wonder if the death and exile toll in

evidence, he will take decisions without agonizing endlessly over them — a necessary skill at his level. They will be stress tested. The UK’s National Security Council, bringing together in a formal structure security, intelligence and foreign policy elements, dates only from 2010 — created by Cameron himself as a first act in power after seeing the aftershocks of the Iraq war laid at the door of the informal “sofa government” decision-making style of its predecessor, an administrative reform for which he is given too little credit.

Cameron will not be short of places to exercise his grasp of world affairs and advise his prime minister. China will test him, as it sits in a different place from when he was in office, and he will have followed the recent Biden-Xi summit closely. It is telling that he has made his first personal visit as foreign secretary to Ukraine. But perhaps his most urgent task is in the Middle East, with the explosion of extraordinary and distressing violence in southern Israel and Gaza. He knows and values the importance of the Arab world. He built a strong relationship with Israel, but in 2010 famously referred to Gaza as “an open-air prison.”

Playing a leading part in a conclusion that will inevitably involve not just Gaza but also the West Bank and East Jerusalem to provide both justice and security for all would be a fine legacy in due course.

While he will scrutinize

# Where is the world conscious?

The world was surprised on Nov. 7 by the statement of former US president Barack Obama in an interview with the “Pod Save America” program about the war in Gaza, where he said: “We have to admit that no one’s hands are clean from what is happening (between Hamas and Israel), and that we are all complicit to some extent.”

This coincided with another surprise; where a group of US Congress members addressed a letter to US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken — despite their support to the right of Israel in “self-defense” — stressing the importance of delivering humanitarian aid to Gaza, and the commitment of the Israeli government to follow international laws in its military operations to prevent further violence, and to pave the way for intensive diplomatic

efforts to reach a sustainable peace.

Good positions reflecting hope, but when we consider what is happening on the ground, they remain just talk unaccompanied by action.

The American saying “talk is cheap” is suitable for a temporary title for the unconventional crisis of violence we are living in.

In reality, “actions speak louder than words.” The positions of the West and the US are resounding, and their absolute bias toward Israel is unashamed and unhesitating.

One week following the Al-Aqsa Flood of Hamas on Oct. 7, the US sent two of the largest and most powerful aircraft carriers in the world, USS Gerald R. Ford and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, to provide assistance to its first ally, as Associated Press agency described it. They

were joined on Nov. 6 by a nuclear-powered Ohio-class submarine capable of carrying nuclear warheads, as announced by US Central Command on social media.

These steps were followed by unprecedented support from the West to Israel. Images from the video of UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak arriving in Israel on a military plane carrying weapons and supporting equipment are still fresh in our mind.

Forty days after the start of the Israeli-led genocide against the Palestinians, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz confirmed, during his recent visit to Tel Aviv on Tuesday, that his country “has only one place, during the hard times in which the Jewish state finds itself, and that is alongside Israel.”

We have this war of duality, that we have never

Khalaf Ahmad Al-Habtoor

seen the likes of before. It even indicates the extent of the hidden fanaticism of some Westerners against Arabs and Muslims. It has become a traditional model for winning votes, and even an optional strategy in America that is employed by Donald Trump, Republican candidate Ron DeSantis and others. They threaten to prevent Arabs and Muslims from entering universities and banning them from entering the US.

As for Europeans, they are no less obstinate, as a number of Europeans football players of Arab origin face waves of persecution for their sympathy with the Palestinian people. The German team Mainz terminated the contract of its player Anwar El-Ghazi because of his support for the people of Gaza. Politicians in France

called for Karim Benzema’s Ballon d’Or award and French citizenship to be stripped. Where is the freedom of expression that Europeans and Americans both call for? Does the West, which sanctifies this right, not believe that the actions of its governments are now disgusting double standards?

The humanitarian catastrophe that we witness daily in Palestine adds more pain to these positions in the West. Moreover, many cities and capitals are witnessing distinguished electoral protests over the policies of their governments and their absolute support for the actions of the Israeli government. Does the “self-defense” argument that parties in the international community use to support Israel also apply here?

The speech by Israeli Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu, in which he said that a nuclear strike on Gaza was a “possibility,” was widely condemned by the world. However, Eliyahu would not have expressed these extremist and brutal statements if he lacked confidence in gigantic Western support for his country until this moment.

What is the secret of Europe and the US’ “absolute support” for Israel? Have they become affected by historical guilt? The decades-long campaign that Israel is leading against the Palestinian people is as brutal as the Holocaust genocide against the Jews during World War II, under the gaze and strange silence of the West. Chancellor Scholz explained his country’s position by saying that “Germany’s history and the responsibility it had

for the Holocaust requires us to help maintain the security and existence of Israel.” But should the Palestinians continue to pay the price for these sins?

We realize that Israel is the first ally of the US and the West and the protector of its interests in the region, and we witness daily how the world rises to action against anything that threatens Israel’s security. But no one denies the existence of the Israeli state. Efforts are intensified daily to live with Israel’s existence in peace. As the biggest losers in this region, are the Palestinians forbidden from living in safety and stability in a state with an independent entity?

In the UN, 139 out of 193 member states have recognized the Palestinian territories as a Palestinian state, while the US, France and UK have refused to

recognize a peaceful state of Palestine until the conflict with Israel is resolved. Can we deal peacefully between the two entities with this huge difference in power?

The security situation in Palestine will fail to stabilize as long as its people cannot live in dignity, independence and security, and while their decision-making power is taken away from them, and they are practically fighting a giant they cannot even force to listen to their requests.

In the face of this imbalance between the parties, the US and the West are required to stop this bloodshed, which has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths.

They must supervise Palestinian elections that will result in a government of honest, patriotic men capable of negotiating with Israel and reaching sustainable peace.



# PIDE to host 37th AGM and Conference of PSDE

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) is hosting the 37th Annual General Meeting and Conference of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE), addressing the critical theme of “Breaking the Aid-Debt Chains.”

This distinguished event, in collaboration with Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU), Multan, is scheduled to take place from November 20 to 23, 2023, according to a press release issued here on Sunday.

In the face of chronic fiscal challenges, persistent political uncertainty, and ongoing inflationary trends, Pakistan finds itself grappling with domestic and international financial obligations. PIDE’s 37th PSDE Conference serves as a platform to address the pressing need to evaluate Pakistan’s financing constraints and fiscal challenges, exacerbated by

excessive government spending without sustainable feasibility assessments.

While Pakistan has historically sought foreign aid to finance trade gaps and domestic development, decades of policy failures necessitate practical reforms and policy prioritization.

The 37th PSDE Conference aims to deliberate on how international financing aligns with domestic growth agendas and seeks sustainable solutions to economic challenges, especially in the context of recent environmental catastrophes like devastating floods.

A crucial aspect to be explored during the conference is the assessment of government spending at various tiers and revenue realization against potential over the last decade. This evaluation, encompassing federal, provincial, and local levels, is vital for achieving consolidated fiscal balances and efficient governance.

The role of local governments, a fundamental pillar of governance, will be scrutinized for its continuity and efficiency, especially in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fostering social inclusion.

The 37th PSDE Conference will bring together economists, social scientists, policymakers, businesspersons, and various stakeholders on a single platform to deliberate on these pressing issues facing Pakistan’s economy. It also provides an opportunity for young scholars to engage in the debate and learn about Pakistan’s economy.

Through keynote lectures, panel discussions, debates, and research papers, the conference aims to generate immediate, medium, and long-term policy steps to break the cycle of fiscal despair. The objective is to foster sustainable growth for Pakistan without resorting to quick fixes in the form of debt or aid.

The highlights of this

year’s conference include the Quaid-i-Azam Lecture by Prof. Jeffery Sachs of Columbia University, a special invited lecture on “Social Equity and Economic Reforms” by Luis Felipe Calva of the World Bank, a special invited lecture by Prof. Abid Aman Burki of LUMS on “Aid Effectiveness Revisited in the Context of Pakistan”, a special invited lecture on “Fiscal Management for the Revival of the Economy” by Faisal Rasheed of the Oxford Policy Management, 6 panel discussions on various themes pertinent to the revival of Pakistan’s economy, and technical papers on various topics.

The cohosts of PSDE’s 37th Annual Conference, organized by PIDE, include the World Bank Group, UNICEF, RASTA, the Bank of Punjab, Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, Saudi Pak Agricultural and Industrial Investment Company, and BZU School of Economics.

# Donors financing can’t bring large impact on fragile economy without reforms

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: As the country has won early IMF approval for another \$700 million payout last week and is seeking more loans to help fragile economy the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry’s Businessmen Panel (BMP) has termed the IMF new deal with Pakistan as a positive development for the economy but warned that this bailout alone can’t speed up the economic growth without fundamental reforms.

FPCCI former president and Businessmen Panel (BMP) Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar said that the multilateral donors financing might not bring any significant impact on struggling economy, as the sustainable solution to Pakistan’s economic issues lies in the structural reforms and consistent policies.

He said the decision to take more loans will keep complicating the problems in longer term, as the government needs \$23 billion in foreign debt repayments

for this fiscal year, which is the direct result of such decisions of taking loans from foreign nations.

He said that the obvious reason is that foreign exchange reserves are simply not enough to meet the imports. Besides decline in exports, home remittances by the Pakistanis abroad, the other desired form of foreign exchange earnings, also continued to fall. He said that the rupee will strengthen which will reduce inflation, so, the IMF agreement is overall a good development.

Anjum Nisar expressed his opinion on the agreement with the International Monetary Fund and said that there is positive news and now the rupee will strengthen, which will reduce inflation.

He said that agreement is very positive, however, the IMF conditions have increased the cost of production. He said that government will make payments to exporters when fiscal space is created. The upcoming government would need to adhere to measures agreed with the

IMF to secure another program next year.

The government is in the middle of a deep economic crisis amid steep currency devaluation and interest rates hikes with its major debt sustainability indicators witnessing marked deterioration during the second half of this fiscal year. Amid the crippling economic crisis, the government will have to return \$77.5 billion as external debt in the next three years, that is by 2026.

A report noted that a major portion of the \$77.5 billion is owed to China, and has to be paid in June next year when a \$1 billion Chinese SAFE deposit and a roughly \$1.4 billion Chinese commercial loan would mature.

The report showed that Pakistan’s share of external debt in the total public debt rose from 37% in June to 37.2% by December, heightening the currency risks simultaneously with the rupee sinking and foreign countries shying away from extending loans.

This is synchronous with interest rates at historic

highs and the currency devaluing by 56 per cent since the incumbent government came into power a year ago, reported The Express Tribune.

According to the debt bulletin, in dollar terms, Pakistan’s total public debt stood at USD 233 billion by December, including USD 86.6 billion in external public debt.

The country needs to service 28 per cent of its debt in just one year, which is quite a big chunk and will expose the nation to all types of debt-related risks.

The floating rate domestic debt is now \$22.5 trillion or 68 per cent of domestic debt, which is poisonous due to interest rates at a record 20 per cent.

Even though the country evaded defaulting in 2023, the year 2024 will be even tougher for the country. This is because the debt servicing will rise to nearly \$25 billion.

This includes \$15 billion of short-term loans and \$7 billion in long-term debt, including a vital \$1 billion repayment on a Eurobond in the fourth quarter.



ISLAMABAD: Women purchasing dry fruit from vendor at weekly Sunday Bazaar.

## Need urged for broadening tax base

ISLAMABAD (APP): Coordinator to Minister of State and Federal Tax Ombudsman Meher Kashif Younis Sunday emphasized the critical need for broadening the tax base by targeting tax evasion in Pakistan.

Speaking at a round table conference themed “Impact of broadening tax base on the economy by checking tax avoidance”, organized under the aegis of Gold Ring Economic Forum, a strategic think tank, he said our economic stability and growth are contingent on a robust and equitable taxation system, and it is imperative that we must take decisive action to identify and net those evading their tax obligations.

The current state of our tax base is cause for concern, with a significant portion of potential revenue slipping through the cracks due to evasion, he said adding that this not only hampers the government’s ability to fund essential services but also places an unfair burden on law-abiding citizens who fulfill their tax responsibilities.

He said leveraging technology for data analytics and employing sophisticated tracking mechanisms can significantly enhance our ability to pinpoint individuals or entities engaging in tax evasion. Meher who is also Chairman Kyrgyzstan Trade House in Pakistan said moreover, it is crucial to strengthen legal frameworks and penalties to deter potential tax evaders.

# Align oil prices globally: PIAF

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial & Traders Associations Front (PIAF) has called for passing on the full relief of cut in petroleum products in the international market to the local consumers, as global oil prices have dropped around 6% to their lowest in four months. Brent futures settled down \$3.76, or 4.6%, to \$77.42 a barrel. US West Texas Intermediate crude (WTI) shed \$3.76, or 4.9%, to \$72.90. Both Brent and WTI earlier traded at their lowest since July 7, at \$76.60 and \$72.16, respectively.

PIAF Chairman Faheem Rehman Saigol, in a statement issued here, asked the government to bring down price of petrol in line with fluctuations in global oil prices and appreciation of the rupee against the US dollar. According to reports, the demand worries triggered by fears of a slowdown in economic growth in China and expectations of further interest rate hikes in the US underpinned the decline in oil prices. While markets await more signals from the US Federal Reserve’s (Fed) monetary policy, investors fear that higher US rates could potentially hurt oil demand in the world’s largest oil consumer.

Meanwhile, the American Petroleum Institute’s expectations of crude oil

inventories showed a fall of about 2.42 million barrels last week, signaling a rise in demand in the world’s largest oil consumer.

He said that instead of hiking the power tariffs, the government should focus on controlling the transmission and distribution losses and power theft besides improving the performance of power companies to save the consumers from further burden. The PIAF Chairman was of the view that the government could mobilize the required resources through increasing the number of taxpayers, reducing line losses and power theft, and ending exemptions to narrow the fiscal deficit instead of increasing the power tariff. He said the last increase in power tariff left the industrial sector, particularly the export industry like textile, uncompetitive in comparison to regional competitors. This may lead to the loss of more export orders and render many more people jobless.

Despite the tariff surge, he said, power companies would not be able to recover the targeted revenue loss of around 28-30%. At the same time, it will force many consumers to stop paying their bills, which have become unbearable.

Faheem Rehman asked the government to undertake fundamental reforms in the power sector to make electricity affordable. Besides, the govern-

ment should launch a crackdown on the habitual power bill defaulters like putting them behind bars.

At present, the levy on petrol is already at the maximum level of Rs60 per litre. He said that the prices of petroleum products on the Platts index have dropped drastically and also the rupee has strengthened versus the dollar. Average gains for the rupee are calculated at Rs7.50 for the past several days.

He said that petrol is mainly used in motorbikes and cars and is an alternative to CNG, especially in Punjab, where locally produced gas is not available at CNG filling stations. He said that liquefied natural gas was being used in CNG retail outlets but that has also gone scarce for the past couple of years as PLL could not strike import contracts.

He said that the private sector has been struggling to import LNG since 2015 but all their efforts have come to nothing because the public gas utilities want to maintain their monopoly over gas supplies. HSD is primarily used in agriculture and transport sectors and any reduction in its price may have a positive impact on inflation. Kerosene oil is used for cooking purpose in remote areas like northern parts of the country. Pakistan Army is a major consumer of kerosene oil.

# Sultanate of Oman celebrates 53rd National Day — II

## Zegham Hussain

In this context, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over the inauguration of Sultan Haitham City. The city, which occupies an area of 14,800,000 square metres, has been planned to reflect sound and sustainable urban planning based on the utilization of green spaces on an area of 2,900,000 square metres. It is designed to house 100,000 people and it will have 20,000 housing units ranging between separate villas, semi-attached villas, townhouses and flats.

The new city translates 12 international criterions of luxury and welfare-ranging between affordable cost, integrated utilities and sustainable systems-all of which played a role in drawing out the city’s masterplan. The Sultanate of Oman continues to implement economic plans, financial and investment programmes within the framework of the tenth five-year plan (2021-2025), guided by the priorities of Oman Vision 2040. The outcomes of these plans have contributed to enhancing the GDP growth, raising financial and economic indicators, improving credit ratings, and achieving some financial surpluses that were directed to economic and social priorities.

The economy of the Sultanate of Oman witnessed a growth in fixed prices by 2.1 percent during the first half of 2023. Oman managed till the first half of 2023 to reduce public debt to RO 16.3 billion, thanks to rationalizing and raising the efficiency of spending, as well as the increase in public revenues as a result of the rise in oil prices. It was also attributed to the financial measures taken to increase non-oil revenues, in addition to managing the

lending portfolio by repurchasing some sovereign bonds at less than their issuance value, repaying high-cost loans and replacing them with lower loans, and issuing local bonds for trading on Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) at a relatively low cost.

Meanwhile, the contribution of the tourism sector to the GDP reached RO 1.070 billion in 2022. It is hoped that it will reach 2.75 percent during the next two years, compared to 2.4 percent at the end of last year (2022). Foreign direct investments (FDI) recorded a 23.3 percent increase at the end of the first quarter of 2023, to stand at RO 21.27 billion. Oman strives to attract investments for projects in various fields, including renewable energy and clean hydrogen, as many land plots were allocated for this purpose. In this framework, two agreements were inked last June 2023 with an investment value of approximately USD 10 billion, to develop two new projects for the production of green hydrogen in the Governorate of Al Wusta, as the total expected production will reach 250 metric kilotons of green hydrogen, equivalent to 6.5 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity.

Within the same context, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth met with some CEOs of global companies who participated in Duqm Economic Forum last month (October 2023). During the meeting, HH Sayyid Theyazin highlighted the investment opportunities available in the fields of renewable energy and clean energy, such as green hydrogen and green ammonia. These sectors come in line with Oman’s approach towards zero carbon neutrality by 2050. The meet-

ing also spotlighted the incentives offered to investors and the investment milieu in Oman.

At the behest of His Majesty the Sultan, a fund named “Oman Future Fund” was launched last May 2023 with a capital of RO 2 billion. The fund is aimed at enhancing economic activity and encouraging the private sector to enter into partnerships or finance feasible investment projects in the sectors of economic diversification targeted by Oman Vision 2040. The Sultanate of Oman accords a priority to digital economy to be a contributor to the national economy. To this end, His Majesty the Sultan gave instructions in this regard to design a national programme to implement and localize artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, and to accelerate the devising of legislation to position these technologies as basic enablers and catalysts for these sectors.

The National Digital Economy Programme works to build and develop a prosperous digital economy in the Sultanate of Oman based on several principles that include establishing national industries in the digital economy, enhancing in-country value (ICV), and generating sustainable opportunities. The Sultanate of Oman seeks to maximize the benefit of its geographical location through the special economic zones and free zones. It also strives to utilize the maritime transport routes to connect markets in the GCC, Europe, Asia and Africa. For this purpose, Oman has established Khazaen Economic City that includes two free zones in the Governorate of South Al Batinah. The city has managed to attract local and foreign investments worth RO 300 million.

Khazaen Economic City and the rest of economic zones and free zones in Sohar, Duqm, Salalah and Al Mazunah are regulated by legislations and systems that encourage investment and offer low taxes and advanced infrastructure. This economic mobility in the Sultanate of Oman and the subsequent positive results towards improving financial and economic indicators and reducing the state’s public debt made credit rating institutions raise and modify their credit outlook for Oman. Standard & Poor’s raised the credit rating for Oman to “BB+” with a stable future outlook, Fitch raised the credit rating of Oman to “BB+” with a stable outlook last September, and Moody’s raised the credit rating of Oman to the level of “Ba2” while maintaining a positive outlook.

Meanwhile, the Sultanate of Oman has made progress in several global indicators, as it ranked 56th globally and 5th in the Arab world in the Industrial Competitive Performance Report for 2023, issued by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Oman also advanced 10 places in the Global Innovation Index for 2023 to obtain the 69th rank globally, out of 132 countries. During giving audience to businesspersons and owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), His Majesty underscored the importance of building an effective partnership between the government and private sectors. This partnership will empower the private sector in setting up projects and investments to support targets of economic diversification, growth of gross domestic product (GDP) and generating job opportunities for citizens.

The aforementioned affirmation is consistent with the Royal orders to augment Oman Development Bank’s (ODB) maximum lending limit from RO 1 million to RO 5 million. The Royal directives allow an increase in this limit for development projects that contribute to augmenting added value. They also stipulate increasing the percentage of contribution towards financing the cost of projects, expanding the list of activities and fields funded by Oman Development Bank, while offering additional incentives for projects established outside Muscat Governorate within the framework of investment plans in the governorates and creating job opportunities there.

Meanwhile, the foreign policy of the Sultanate of Oman, under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, continues to provide a global role model, based on mutual respect, common interests and benefits, non-interference in the internal affairs of countries, respect for international conventions and laws, and upholding the principles of peace, humanity, dialogue and tolerance. In this context, His Majesty the Sultan said, “We reassert our firm political tenets, solidly anchored in the principles of good neighborliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of other sovereign nations. Our position is further rooted in a steadfast belief in the establishment of a just and equitable system for mutual benefit and exchange of interests, aimed at establishing solid foundations for stability and peace, and to make a positive contribution towards these noble objectives”.

Therefore, these principles and values pursued by

the Sultanate of Oman in its foreign policy have made it a source of trust and appreciation for international units and organizations to play active roles and achieve security, peace and stability in a number of regional and international issues. These principles and values stress that the approach of peace and cooperation is the only path and the safest ideal model for the region and the world at large.

In this regard, the Sultanate of Oman has pointed out that it follows a preventive media policy to protect society from sources of extremism and radicalism that lead to terrorism. This is achieved by consolidating values of tolerance, harmony, unity and rapprochement among its members, avoiding inciting sectarian strife in all local media means, and pursuing a policy of positive neutrality in dealing with news, especially those related to civil and sectarian conflicts in some countries of the region.

At the level of bilateral relations, His Majesty the Sultan held talks during the current year (2023) with leaders of Arab and foreign countries through mutual visits and phone calls, including with the presidents of America, Russia and Syria. Additionally, His Majesty visited a number of countries, including the United Arab Emirates, the Arab Republic of Egypt, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. These visits aimed at promoting areas of bilateral cooperation and exchanging views on a set of regional and international issues of common interest.

The Sultanate of Oman is currently chairing the 43rd session of the GCC Supreme Council. Oman perceives the achievements made by the GCC in various fields were attributed to

the success of benign endeavors, unification, interdependence and kinship among the countries of the region, united by a common history and destiny, as well as the GCC keenness to extend bridges of friendship with friendly countries and all regional and international bodies and organizations in support of joint cooperation in the political, economic and commercial fields. In this context, the Sultanate of Oman hosted Gulf meetings of various ministries, bodies and joint committees.

The Sultanate of Oman has reacted to a number of events in the region, including the Israeli aggression against Gaza and the violation of Palestinian rights. In this regard, the Monarch of the country affirmed the Sultanate of Oman’s solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people and backed all efforts calling for halting the escalation and attacks on children and innocent civilians and releasing prisoners in accordance with the principles of international humanitarian law. His Majesty the Sultan also urged the international community to fulfill its responsibilities to protect civilians, ensure their humanitarian needs, lift the illegal siege on Gaza and the rest of the Palestinian territories, and resume the peace process to enable the Palestinian people regain all their legitimate rights by establishing their independent state on the 1967 borders with (Al Quds A’Sharqiyah) East Jerusalem as its capital in accordance with the principles of the two-state solution, the Arab Peace Initiative and all relevant international resolutions.

During his audience with the GCC foreign ministers and the GCC Secretary-General, His Majesty also

stressed the need to intensify regional and international efforts to stop escalation and violence and provide protection for civilians. The Sultanate of Oman is rallying efforts with the GCC, Arab and Islamic countries to achieve ceasefire in Gaza and halt the unjustified and inhumane attack on Gaza Strip. During the GCC Ministerial Council’s meeting in Muscat, the GCC countries provided immediate support worth USD 100 million for humanitarian and relief aid, and stressed the need to urgently ensure the delivery of this aid to the Gaza Strip.

The Sultanate of Oman also contributes to resolving a number of contemporary regional and international issues, including the Yemeni crisis. It also works in cooperation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni parties to exert constructive efforts that contribute to forging a comprehensive and lasting solution, in a manner that meets aspirations of all Yemeni people.

In the humanitarian level, the Sultanate of Oman responded to the efforts made with the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Belgium, to facilitate the process of receiving two Austrian citizens and a Danish citizen and transporting them from Tehran to Muscat and then transporting them to their countries, in addition to Oman’s contribution with the State of Qatar for the mutual release of Iranian and American nationals. Oman’s renewed renaissance, under the leadership of His Majesty the Sultan and the efforts of its noble people, is pressing ahead to achieve development goals and realize aspirations, so that Oman and its people enjoy a more prosperous future.

(Concluded)





In brief

World champion Yafai retires

CALIFORNIA (Agencies): Former WBA super-flyweight champion Kal Yafai has retired after losing against Jonathan Rodriguez. Rodriguez put Yafai on the canvas twice before the referee stopped the contest in round one at YouTube Theater, Inglewood in California on Saturday. Briton Yafai, 34, was the WBA super-flyweight champion between 2016 and 2022. "This was the end before the fight anyway," Yafai told DAZN after his defeat. Pointing at the inner lining of his shorts, Yafai added: "I had it on here 'the last dance', I had it engraved in my shorts. I knew I was coming to the end anyway." After beating Luis Concepcion via unanimous decision to win the vacant WBA super-flyweight strap in 2016, Yafai made five successful defences of his belt before losing the title following a TKO defeat against Roman Gonzalez. Birmingham's Yafai represented Great Britain at the 2008 Olympics and he won a silver medal at the 2010 European Games in Moscow, Russia. After turning professional in 2012, Yafai went on to win super-flyweight titles at British, Commonwealth and Inter-Continental levels prior to claiming his world title. Yafai won 27 of his 29 professional bouts, picking up 15 of those victories inside the distance.

Djokovic beats Alcaraz

TURIN (Agencies): Novak Djokovic delivered a masterclass to beat Carlos Alcaraz in the latest instalment of their burgeoning rivalry to reach the ATP Finals showpiece. The Serb will aim for a record seventh title on Sunday after a 6-3 6-2 win put him through to face Italian Jannik Sinner in Turin. Sinner became the first Italian to make the season-ending final with a 6-3 6-7 (4-7) 6-1 win over Daniil Medvedev. In doubles, Britain's Joe Salisbury and American Rajeev Ram reached the final. The defending champions beat French-Mexican pair Edouard Roger-Vasselin and Santiago Gonzalez 7-6 (7-5) 3-6 10-7, and will face Argentina's Horacio Zeballos and Marcel Granollers of Spain for the title on Sunday. Djokovic at his best against Alcaraz In a blockbuster encounter between the two players who have dominated the tour this season, Djokovic, 36, was at his ruthless and relentless best against his 20-year-old opponent. He faced just two break points in the first set, in his opening service game, and delivered stunning back-to-back volleys at the net followed by a smash to hold a seven-minute game for 3-2 - but those were the only real times he faced pressure in the opener. A loose service game from Alcaraz handed Djokovic a break for 5-3 and the Serb served emphatically out to love. Djokovic broke early in the second set to tighten his grip on the match but was then in danger of losing the advantage when the Spaniard had two break points in an enthralling sixth game that featured the best tennis of the match. But the 24-time Grand Slam champion saved them both, including one by delivering a brilliant passing shot at the end of a 23-shot rally, and then went a double break up in the next game. He then raced to 40-0 when serving for the match before the rare blemish of a double fault, before sealing victory with a smash.

## Peshawar defeat Karachi Whites to win Pakistan Cup



RAWALPINDI (APP): Peshawar clinched their third one-day cup title after defeating Karachi Whites by five wickets in the AH Group Presents Trans Group Pakistan Cup 2023-24 final at Pindi Cricket Stadium Rawalpindi on Sunday. Nabi Gul hit the winning runs for Peshawar as the Sahibzada Farhan-led side pocketed a cash prize of PKR 5 million. Peshawar's last national one-day title win came in the 2016-17 season when they beat the same opponent at National Bank Stadium, Karachi in the final by 124 runs. Karachi Whites began their innings patiently after being put in to bat first by Peshawar on a surface that seemed to assist the fast

bowlers. The first blow arrived in the eighth over with Habibullah was dismissed by left-arm pacer Mohammad Imran. Saim Ayub, who starred with 95 in the semi-final triumph for Karachi Whites, was the second batter to exit the stage when Imran struck again to have him caught by Azam Khan. Wickets continued to tumble as none of the top five batters could register a score above 13. Karachi Whites skipper Sarfaraz Ahmed was dismissed, courtesy a sharp catch by Iftikhar Ahmed for just 22 off 25 balls. Azam Khan was the last man out for 30 off 46 deliveries as Karachi merely scrambled to 103 all out in 31.2 overs. Imran was the chief

destroyer with four wickets for 28 runs while Mohammad Abbas Afridi got three wickets. Peshawar did not face serious hiccups in their chase of the paltry target getting home with five wickets and 27.4 overs to spare. Mohammad Harris top-scored with a quick-fire 46 from 33 balls featuring seven fours and a six. Sahibzada was out in bizarre fashion as he inadvertently whipped the bails off with his bat resulting in a hit wicket off Ghulam Mudassar. The other four wickets to fall were taken by Noman Ali (two wickets), Danish Aziz and Saim (one each). Multan's Haseebullah took home the player of the tournament and best wick-

et-keeper awards for his tally of 326 runs including two centuries and 10 dismissals. Saim topped the batting chatting charts with 397 runs in eight innings and was duly named best batter of the tournament. Multan leg-spinner Zahid Mehmood and Peshawar fast bowler Abbas Afridi were the joint winners for the best bowler award with 15 wickets each. For his impactful figures of 4-28, Mohammad Imran was declared player of the final.

Scores in brief: Peshawar beat Karachi Whites by five wickets. Karachi Whites 103 all out, 31.2 overs (Azam Khan 30, Sarfaraz Ahmed 22; Mohammad Imran 4-28, Mohammad Abbas Afridi 3-20). Peshawar 108-5, 17.2 overs (Mohammad Harris 46; Noman Ali 2-19). Player of the tournament – Haseebullah (Multan Region) (326 runs and 10 dismissals). Best Batter – Saim Ayub (Karachi Region Whites) (397 runs). Best Bowler – Zahid Mehmood (Multan Region) and Mohammad Abbas Afridi (Peshawar Region) (15 wickets each). Best Wicket-keeper – Haseebullah (Multan Region) (326 runs and 10 dismissals). Player of the final – Mohammad Imran (Peshawar Region).

## Pro-Palestinian pitch invader disrupts cricket WC final



AHMEDABAD (AFP) : A pro-Palestinian protester in India broke through security cordons to invade the pitch at the cricket World Cup final on Sunday, stopping play briefly while he hugged superstar batsman Virat Kohli.

Wearing a face mask in the colors of the Palestinian flag, and a T-shirt with the slogan "Stop Bombing Palestine," the unnamed young protester ran onto the pitch in the 132,000-seat mega-stadium in India's western city

of Ahmedabad. He was escorted off the pitch by security officers, and play swiftly resumed. Unbeaten hosts India have won 10 games in a row at the tournament as they seek a third World Cup title and were facing Australia in the final. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was expected to attend the match along with Australian deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles. Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas in response

to their Oct. 7 attacks, which Israeli officials say killed about 1,200 people, and saw about 240 people taken hostage. The army's relentless air and ground campaign has since killed 12,300 people, more than 5,000 of them children, according to Hamas. India, which has a long-standing call for an independent Palestinian state, has condemned Hamas and airlifted aid to Egypt for Palestinian civilians from the besieged Gaza Strip.

## Osama of PU wins 3 gold as Faraz Khan creates new long jump record

PESHAWAR (APP): Osama of Punjab University Muhammad Osama bagged three gold medals in 800m, 1500m, and 3000m, while Faraz Khan of the University of Central Punjab created a new long jump record on the second day of the ongoing All Pakistan Inter-University Men Athletic Championship being played here at Hostel No. 2, inside the University of Peshawar Campus, on Sunday.

The Vice Chancellor (VC) of the University of Peshawar, Professor Dr. Muhammad Idrees, was the chief guest, along with Member Monitoring Cell HEC Khadam Ali Khan, Rana Amajd Iqbal, and Ahmad Khan Haral, who gave away medals and cash prizes.

Muhammad Osama, the promising athlete, won three gold medals with his stunning performances in the 800m, 1500m, and 3000m. "I will have another event as well and could try to get more medals,"

Osama told APP. "I have good training as a long runner, and I am confident to win the 5000-meter gold medal as well," he said. Another promising athlete, Faraz Khan, created a new HEC record for long jump by showing a distance of 7.50 meters, beating his old record of 7.31 meters he created during the 34th National Games held in Quetta this year.

Faraz Khan of the University of Central Punjab also won another gold medal in the tribal jump, followed by Muhammad Talha of the UCP and Hamza Zia of the UCP. In the 1500m, Muhammad Usama won the gold medal, followed by Sami Ullah of PU and Bahawal Khan of UCP.

In the shot put, Wasi Ullah of UCP won the gold medal, followed by Nouman Shehzad of Sargodha University who won the silver medal, and Muhammad Shoaib Yousaf of Lahore Garrison who won the bronze medal.

In the 400-meter hurdles, Ahmad Saeed of UCP won the gold medal, followed by Salman Ahmad of the University of Lahore and Hazarat Umar of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan. In the 800-meter hurdles, Muhammad Usama of PU won the gold medal, followed by Shahsawar of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan and Muhammad Raza of PU.

In the hammer throw, Zohaib Habib of SCU Lahore won the gold medal by recording a distance of 52.16 meters, followed by Daud Saleh of UCP with his throw record of 50.41 meters, and Rasees Younus of PU with a distance of 45.66 meters got the bronze medal.

The pole vault, 100m final, 110m hurdles, 400m, 200m, 10,000m, high jump, javelin throw, 4x100 relay, and 4x400m relay competitions would be held on the last day with a presentation ceremony. A total of 43 universities are taking part in the athletic meet.

## Iqra, Quaid-e-Azam University to clash in Inter-University Women Squash final

PESHAWAR (APP): Iqra University and Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad would clash in the final after recording victories against their respective rivals in the All-Pakistan Inter-University Women Squash C'ship being played under the aegis of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University here at Qamar Zaman Squash Complex on Sunday.

Legendary and former World No. 2 Mohib Ullah was the chief guest on this occasion who witnessed the two semi-finals matches of the Championship in which a total of 15 Universities are taking part. Deputy Director Sports Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Mariyyah Samin, national coach Tahir Iqbal, Chief

Referee Munawar Zaman, Referee Adil Faqir, Riaz Khan, officials and players were also present. In the first semi-finals Iqra University Zohra defeated Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan's Maira Hussain by 3-0, the score was 12-10, 11-3 and 11-9, Hira Aqeel of AWKUM defeated Aaima of Iqra University by 3-0, the score was 11-4, 11-2 and 11-3 and in the third singles of the Team event Umme Kulsom of Iqra beat Sapna Akbar of Abdul Wali Shah University Mardan by 11-5, 11-1 and 11-2.

In the second semi-final Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad defeated Lahore College for Women University by 3-0.

In the first singles Manahil Aqeel of QAU beat

Iqra Ameen of LCW by 3-0, the score was 11-1, 11-1 and 11-1, Nimra Aqeel of QAU beat Tania Younis of LCW by 11-0, 11-2 and 11-2 while in the third singles Hira Safdar beat Anzeela of LCW by 11-4, 11-5 and 11-7.

1ST SEMIFINAL RESULT  
IQRA (2-1) AWKUM  
Zohra Abdullah (Iqra) (3-0) Maira Hussain (awkum) (12-10 11-3 11-9)  
Hira Aqeel (awkum) (3-0) Aaima (Iqra) (11-4 11-2 11-3)  
Umme Kulsom (Iqra) (3-0) Sapna Akbar (awkum) (11-5 11-1 11-2)

2ND SEMIFINAL RESULT  
QAU (2-0) LCW  
Manahil Aqeel (QAU) (3-0) Iqra Ameen (Lcw) (11-1 11-1 11-1)  
Nimra Aqeel (QAU) (3-0)

## Verstappen battles through to win Las Vegas Grand Prix thriller



LAS VEGAS (AFP): World champion Max Verstappen claimed the 18th win of his record-breaking season, overcoming a five-second penalty to power to victory in a thrilling Las Vegas Grand Prix on Saturday.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc overtook Red Bull's Sergio Perez on the last lap to grab second place ahead of the Mexican with French driver Esteban Ocon of Alpine finishing fourth at the end of a race which saw multiple lead changes and plenty of overtaking. Verstappen had been highly critical of the return of Formula One to Vegas after a 41-year absence, saying the event was "99 percent show", but as he drove past the finish line he celebrated with a chorus of 'Viva Las Vegas' on the team radio. "He loves a race like that. Even though he was on the end of a penalty. When he came back...the way he fought. I think he changed his mind about

Vegas," said Red Bull team principal Christian Horner. The show was certainly evident with pre-race grid packed with a host of celebrities from the world of music, sport and entertainment as memories of the embarrassment of the opening practice session on Thursday being stopped early due to a loose water valve on the track, faded. When the race was under way, the low grip on the track made sure there was no shortage of incident, overtaking and lead changes, as the night race delivered the entertainment the American promoters had craved from the new event. The Dutchman won by 2.070 over Leclerc but had to work for his victory in what was the latest starting race in F1 history.

"It was a tough one. I tried to go for it at the start. We both braked quite late and I just ran out of grip, so we ended up a bit wide," said the triple

world champion. "A lot of fun" "The stewards gave me a penalty for that and it put us on the backfoot. I had to pass quite a few cars and there was the Safety Car, so at that point there was a lot going on," added Verstappen, summing up the race as "a lot of fun." The Dutchman, starting second on the grid, grabbed the lead in the first turn of the opening lap but was penalised five seconds for pushing Leclerc wide. The tricky surface was evident when McLaren's Lando Norris crashed out, spinning into the barrier on turn 14 of the fourth lap. The British driver was taken to hospital for precautionary tests. Ferrari's Monegasque driver Leclerc kept in close touch though and was able to get the lead back, overtaking Verstappen on lap 16. The Dutchman had to serve his penalty in the pit, leaving him plenty of work to do to regain his

lead and when Leclerc went into the pits on lap 22, Perez took over at the front.

Mercedes' George Russell made contact with Verstappen, clipping his front wing, an incident which resulted in a five second penalty for the British driver who crossed the line fourth but ended in eighth place.

Leclerc and Perez jostled for the lead but Verstappen was ominously gaining ground and after he passed Perez he then made his decisive move on lap 37.

From then on, Verstappen never looked back, Leclerc slipping into third spot after he outbraked himself and allowed Perez to fly by. But there was one more twist in the tale as Leclerc brilliantly moved past Perez to grab second place.

"What a race. I enjoyed it so much. I'm of course disappointed to only finish second, but that's the best we could do," said Leclerc. "And we needed it. The weekend didn't start the way we wanted it to start but I am so happy it ended that way. It's such an incredible sport. The energy around the city is incredible and I at least really enjoyed today," he said. Ferrari's Carlos Sainz, who had started in 12th place after being sanctioned with a harsh ten-place grid penalty, rose to finish sixth behind Aston Martin's Lance Stroll.

The Mercedes pair of Lewis Hamilton and Russell finished seventh and eighth with Aston Martin's veteran Spaniard Fernando Alonso ninth and McLaren's Australian Oscar Piastri tenth.

## Bangladesh's cricket captain Shakib bids to be lawmaker



DHAKA (Agencies): Bangladesh cricket superstar Shakib Al Hasan has formally entered politics, seeking a nomination from the ruling Bangladesh Awami League to run in the upcoming general election on January 7.

Awami League joint secretary general Bahauddin Nasim told AFP that Shakib took nomination forms on Saturday from the party to contest in three constituencies in the election. The polls are set to be boycotted by major opposition parties.

"He is a celebrity and has great popularity among the country's youth," Nasim said, welcoming the cricket all-rounder.

Shakib's candidature has to be confirmed by a ruling party parliamentary board headed by Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina. He hopes to contest a seat either in his southwestern home district of Magura, or in the capital Dhaka, Nasim said.

Hasina has led the South Asian country of around 170 million people for the past 15 years and has been accused of ruling with an iron fist.

She is seen as almost certain to return to power for a fourth time if the opposition boycott goes ahead.

Hasina has overseen impressive economic growth, but Western nations have sounded the alarm over democratic backsliding and she has been accused by the opposition of vote-rigging at the past two polls.

Turning to politics is nothing new for cricketers in South Asia, where the

sport is massively popular. Doing so during a playing career, however, is rare.

But former cricket captain Mashrafe Mortaza joined politics in 2018 and was elected as a lawmaker from the ruling party in the same year.

He led Bangladesh in the 2019 World Cup, before giving up the sport to focus on politics.

Shakib, Bangladesh's regular captain in all three formats, is currently nursing a finger injury, which has forced him to skip the forthcoming Test series against New Zealand.

He suffered the injury during a match in the World Cup against Sri Lanka, when he made headlines after an unusual appeal against Angelo Mathews, which resulted in international cricket's first ever timed out.





## In brief

### Int'l Traffic Day day today

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Int'l Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims 2023 is being observed today with the aim of traffic law enforcement in full force and spirit. Meanwhile, World Toilet Day is also being observed today, keeping in mind the focus on cleanliness and personal care. According to the United Nations, there are 3.5 billion people living without safe toilets worldwide. In this regard, this year's theme is 'Accelerating Change', using the hummingbird to inspire people to take personal action to help improve toilets and sanitation systems.

### AIOU closes admissions

ISLAMABAD (APP): Today (Monday, November 20) is the last day for admissions to the programs offered in second phase of Autumn 2023 semester at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU). According to Director Admissions, this is the final date and will not be extended further. Vice Chancellor AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, has expressed the hope that prospective students would take advantage of this opportunity to enroll. The last date for admission was originally set for November 7, but some students missed the deadline. They were given an extension until November 20 to apply. Dr. Nasir explained that the academic calendar prevents the date from being extended any further due to the semester system. Admission forms and prospectus of Associate degree in Arts (BA General), Associate degree in Commerce (B.Com), Associate degree in Education, B.S (ODL) programs, BBA, post-graduate diplomas and certificate courses are available on the university website.

### IRSA releases 89,100 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Indus River System Authority (IRSA) released 89,100 cusecs of water from various rim stations on Sunday, with an inflow of 46,100 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1507.67 feet and was 107.67 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded at 24,200 and 42,000 cusecs, respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1186.15 feet, which was 136.15 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded at 6,800 cusecs and 32,000 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu, and Sukkur was recorded at 53,700, 46,100, 45,600, and 11,200 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from the River Kabul, a total of 7,200 cusecs of water were released at Nowshera, and 2,000 cusecs were released from the River Chenab at Marala.

### Seven gamblers arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested seven gamblers and recovered cash amount Rs 24,000, 06 mobile phones from their possession during crackdown here on Sunday. According to police spokesman, Pirwadhai police carried out raid and held gamblers who were identified as Raheel, Javed, Adnan, Waseem, Zeeshan and Shahzad and recovered bet money Rs 12,500, 06 mobile phones from their custody. Similarly, Saddar Wah police nabbed Usman and recovered cash amount Rs 11,500 and slips of different numbers from his possession.



ISLAMABAD: A large number of people busy in selecting and purchasing second hand warm clothes at weekly Sunday Bazaar, Aahpara.

## ‘UN FAO’s 40 ambitious projects to revolutionize agriculture in Pakistan’

ISLAMABAD (APP): The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) on Sunday unveiled a dynamic portfolio of 40 diverse projects strategically dispersed across various regions of Pakistan. These initiatives, with varying scopes, financial parameters, and target audiences, underscore the FAO's commitment to fortifying the agriculture and food security sectors in the country.

In an exclusive panel interview with the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), Country Representative Florence Rolle and Assistant FAOR (Programs) Dr. Aamer Irshad highlighted the proactive role of the FAO in numerous initiatives and programs aimed at strengthening Pakistan's agriculture and food security sectors. These initiatives span a spectrum, including enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainability,

supporting livestock and fisheries development, and implementing food security programs to alleviate hunger and malnutrition.

The FAO's involvement extends beyond traditional agricultural support. The organization actively engages in sustainable natural resource management, providing humanitarian assistance during emergencies, and collaborating closely with the Pakistani government on policy development. Additionally, the FAO supports research and innovation while helping Pakistan adapt to the challenges posed by climate change.

Rolle outlined FAO's 2023–2027 priorities with Pakistan: enhancing food availability, strengthening climate-responsive planning, and improving agricultural value chains. The focus includes nutrition policy, climate frameworks, support for enter-

prises, disease control, and women's empowerment in agriculture. She explained that project selection is based on a thorough consultative process, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2023–2027. The FAO's Country Programming Framework (CPF) for 2023–2027 involves consultations with relevant ministries, departments, academia, UN agencies, and resource partners at both federal and provincial levels.

Highlighting the FAO's commitment to accountability, Rolle underscored the presence of a robust monitoring and evaluation system with units in Islamabad and across provinces. This system plays a pivotal role in shaping program effectiveness by providing guidance based on lessons learned.

## CDA initiates studies for recycling of capital's solid waste

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has initiated studies for recycling and disposal of the capital's solid waste intending to reduce environmental pollution which is posing a threat to the health of the general public.

"The detail of studies included waste characterization studies, waste generation studies, situational analysis report, municipal solid waste (MSW) collection, haulage, treatment and disposal, rapid assessment report of landfill sites Islamabad and communication and behaviour change strategy," an official told APP. The Urban Unit Lahore carried out studies during the period from January to March 2023 with a total cost of Rs. 21.926175 million. However, this is an unfortunate fact that CDA has been unable to develop an international system for solid waste disposal, in the capital owing to land availability and legal issues.

The authority is working

on developing a system whereby it will be initiating a mechanism of solid waste minimization, reuse, segregation at source and recycling of waste keeping in view the standards for optimum disposal using the method of landfilling. These activities will take an approximate time of one year. It is also pertinent to mention here that CDA launched a pilot project to segregate solid waste last year to reduce environmental pollution and use items for recycling on a commercial basis.

It is a critical requirement since it enables recycling, reuse, treatment, and scientific disposal of different components of waste.

Sorting out waste makes it easier to understand how to reduce general waste output, identify items that can be reused, and set aside others that should be recycled. Waste segregation practices and a workforce that understands the importance of sorting waste prevent items suitable for recycling from being thrown away with

general waste.

Approximately 700 tons of solid waste are collected and transported by the Sanitation Directorate and Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI) from the federal capital daily. The waste segregation also makes it easier to apply different processes-composting, recycling, and incineration.

**CDA completes 90 percent work of installation of new led lights, repair of old street lights:** The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has completed almost 90 percent work of the installation of new LED lights, and repair and maintenance of old street lights along the streets, service roads, and main avenues of the federal capital. "The authority has already allocated funds in this regard last month which will not only help to ensure proper lighting arrangement on these roads and streets but also control the criminal activities in the capital," a CDA official told APP.

## PTDC's remarkable achievements highlighted in promoting country's tourism

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) has made remarkable achievements in the tourism industry and its promotion by marketing country's natural landscape, history, culture and archaeological sites being providing facilities to tourists. Taking to APP, the PTDC official said that the corporation was working effectively according to the vision to develop the tourism sector as a national priority in a sustainable and acceptable manner, taking full advantage of regional and international trends and developments.

He said, "PTDC is projecting the country as a tourist friendly destination in bringing Pakistan amongst top five tourist destinations of Asia and marketing of tourist places at home and abroad through tourism show and exhibitions to generate revenue." "Tourism sector is contributing a lot to national exchequer as well," he added. The official said, "The tourism organization is to act as a catalyst in encouraging the private sector to play active role in tourism promotion

and development."

It was developing infrastructure and services within the country to facilitate the tourists. He said, "It has already established Tourist Information Centers (TIC) at various airports to provide accurate information to foreign and local tourists."

He said that Minister of State for Tourism, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Youth Affairs Wasi Shah had unveiled that TIC would set up at Gawdar International Airport to facilitate the tourists about their destination.

He said, "PTDC with collaboration of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) has kicked off an effective cleanliness campaign at various parks of the federal capital to ensure neat and clean environment to attract large number of tourists in a healthy ambience." Official said the campaign launched aimed at ensuring clean environment to urge the tourists to maintain cleanliness at tourist spots of the capital city as a number people from various parts of the country throng to the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi for recreation and tourism purposes.

## Railways Police arrest around 3,843 accused

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways Police claimed to have arrested a total of 3,843 accused due to their involvement in violations of rules and laws and also registered some 3,563 cases against them in eight Railways divisions over one year.

"Around 641 cases were registered in Peshawar Division, 561 in Rawalpindi, 1,037 in Lahore, 321 in Mughalpura workshops, 389 in Multan, 206 in Sukkur, 343 in Karachi, and 65 in Quetta Division," official sources in the Ministry told APP. They said the Railways Police Help Desks had been established at all the major railway stations across the country, and the performance of the Railways Police has been quite satisfactory during the last year.

## Late breast cancer diagnosis causes 44,000 deaths annually in Pakistan: Begum Alvi

ISLAMABAD (APP): First Lady Begum Samina Alvi said on Sunday that nearly 44,000 women die of breast cancer every year in Pakistan due to late diagnosis and stressed that thousands of women and their families could be saved if it was diagnosed at an earlier stage, with chances of survival up to 98 percent.

However, she regretted that there was a lack of awareness about the early symptoms of this disease in Pakistan. As a result, the disease kept spreading silently and proved fatal.

The first lady was addressing the Pakistan Foreign Office Women's Association's (PFOWA) annual charity bazaar. The spouses of Islamabad-based diplomats organized stalls on the occasion depicting the culture, cuisine, and artifacts of their respective countries. The proceeds of the charity bazaar will be used for the welfare of the low-income staffers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Begum Alvi said that they had started a comprehensive, inclusive, and nationwide breast cancer awareness campaign.

"One of the major challenges before us was to convey our message to women living in far-flung areas of the country. Most of the cancer cases in Pakistan were reported in the third or fourth stages, which not only made the treatment painful and expensive but also reduced the chances of survival. Apart from this, mammography, ultrasound, and screening facilities are either lacking in our country or these facilities are very expensive," she added. Referring to autism, children with disabilities, and the importance of early detection of breast cancer issues, she said that these initiatives hold immense importance, as they have the potential to save many lives. About progress on public awareness, Begum Alvi said that they had reached out to millions of mobile users across the country with the help of ring-back tone and messages, and in this year, over 140 million SMS on breast cancer had been sent to mobile users in Pakistan.

She said that now the number of cancer cases in the third and fourth stages has decreased in different hospitals in Pakistan, while the reporting of cancer cases in the first and second stages has increased. Now, mammography, ultrasound, and screening facilities are being provided at subsidized rates in different hospitals across the country, and the number of these facilities has also increased, she added. Similarly, the first lady said they had worked to shatter misconceptions, foster inclusivity, promote inclusive education and rehabilitative services, and ensure equal opportunities for persons with disabilities (PWDs). "One of our aims was to bring about behavioral change in society towards them, create sensitivity in our society towards their issues, and make them feel part of the mainstream," she added.

The first lady also urged the provision of skills, training, and jobs to persons with disabilities as per their aptitude and skillset. The first lady said that they had also asked international experts on disability to contribute their energies to train teachers to impart education to children with disabilities. She opined that children with different abilities should be given the opportunity to learn and grow with other children because, in this way, they would be socialized and society would also become more aware of their special needs.

About the issue of mental health and early counseling, she said that they were taking the initial steps towards building healthier communities and trying to educate the people that mental health was an important aspect of their overall health and well-being. "As per one estimate, almost 24 million people in Pakistan need mental health counseling and services," she shared. The first lady alluded to the acute shortage of mental health facilities and trained professionals in Pakistan and said that they were making efforts to connect with trained overseas Pakistani professionals and international experts, asking them to donate their time and expertise to train and advise people in Pakistan.

## Cutting educational expenses through novel methodologies

ISLAMABAD (APP): As continuously increasing education expenditures were reaching beyond parents capacity, experts believe that modern and novel teaching methodology could be one of panacea to address this issue. In a tug of war between the parents and owners of private educational institutions, either the students miss the opportunities of quality education or the lives of their parents become miserable.

The owners, despite earning significant profit, are often seen complaining of extra expenditures in running their institutions due to the price hike of essentials.

If, for a moment, their claims were accepted, there could have been no justification for them to continue with this business if there was no profit. But they go with it, and the easy way to recover their expenditures is to shift the burden to parents through an increase in fees.

Therefore, educational experts have come up with the notion of adopting proper planning, the use of the latest technologies, and a systematic approach to reducing education costs at schools.

For them, it might initially seem counterintuitive to invest in new technology. However, choosing the right software and tools can reduce the need for working capital and minimize the use of material resources.

"In many cases, private institutions are charging hefty amounts, and the government should actively engage with them to get fee structures rationalized," remarked former Vice Chancellor Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Dr. Shahid Siddiqui. "When they are earning millions of rupees, the chargeable amount is becoming unbearable even for middle-class parents, while kids of poor people cannot even think of studying at these institutions."

"The government and the owners of private institutions should sit together and think out a way forward to address this issue," he added.

He pleaded in favor of the idea of

distant learning through the latest online techniques and said, "It will make us technologically efficient and help save money."

Dr. Siddiqui said different schools use bulk paper to maintain records of teachers and students and prepare reports, timetables, syllabuses, and much more. "Imagine how much money is spent on maintaining this physical record. But, by going paperless and moving databases to the cloud, they can cut down on a sizeable amount of money."

He regretted that non-formal education had been a deprived area since 1974, as after AIOU, only Virtual University was established to provide distant education. "Virtual or distant learning is an easy source for students to access quality education on lesser fees than to physically approach the educational institutions."

"Then there is another dilemma of the number of books and notebooks," he mentioned and said, "it is unkindness to our babies, seen carrying kilos of books on their backs."

"Why do we overload our primary-level students with books and notebooks?" he stated. "Can't we reduce the number of books and shift them to the latest modes of learning in this era of the latest technologies?"

He said the formal universities are converting to an online system, which will surely reduce the cost of education.

Keeping in view the hardships of parents, Vice Chancellor Islamia University Bahawalpur, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ali, came up with the idea of amending the laws and creating a corporate cluster by using the physical assets of education departments to earn money and provide cheaper education to students.

"We can use science and technology parks as money-making hubs, and by cutting extra expenses, we can establish 'endowment funds' at colleges and universities to support needy students," he stated.

Recently, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) under the Higher

Education Development in Pakistan (HEDP) project conducted an extensive capacity-building session for public sector universities on financial autonomy and revenue generation.

This meeting was aimed at encouraging higher education institutions (HEIs) to develop projects for generating funds and revenue to meet their needs. 75 vice chancellors, treasurers, and registrars from public sector HEIs discussed the possibility of resource generation.

As, for decades, education has remained a neglected sector, the expert strongly pleads to enhance the budget for the education sector.

"First of all, the government should take education as a top priority and allocate at least 5% of the GDP for this sector," said Renowned educationist Murtaza Noor. "As per law, education is free from Grade I to 16, and the state should ensure facilities for such students, especially scholarships for those in dire need."

He suggested establishing students' alumni to support poor students, control the cost of education, and award scholarships to kids from marginalized segments through charity. "The private sector must also be bound to give fee concessions and scholarships to deserving students under corporate social responsibility (CSR)."

Fund allocation for the higher education sector in Pakistan was very low as compared to international standards, while the financial contribution by the provincial governments for HEIs had also been negligible, except in Sindh province.

As a key objective of its HEDP project, the HEC has encouraged public-sector HEIs to enhance revenues from non-traditional sources other than government grants and student fees. Since the costly education and paucity of funds for public sector universities persist as a chronic issue, it is the utmost responsibility of the upcoming government to take revolutionary measures for coping with this challenge.

## IRCRA distributes aid to Afghan refugees at Torkham Border

ISLAMABAD (APP): The International Research Council for Religious Affairs (IRCRA) on Sunday persistently carried out the distribution of aid and gifts to Afghan refugees at the Torkham border. Supported by a select-group of philanthropists, IRCRA initiated the assistance process for Afghan refugees from the very outset. Concurrently, various charitable organizations, including local tribal elders, actively participated in aiding and supporting the departing refugees. Participants among the

Afghan refugee community expressed gratitude towards IRCRA and the Pakistani community for this compassionate gesture.

Talking to media, IRCRA President Muhammad Israr Madani emphasized that a prosperous and stable Afghanistan was the shared aspiration of our nations and to achieve this goal, the organizations, institutions, and citizens of both countries must collaboratively contribute. President Madani underscored the need for

Pakistan and Afghanistan to formulate a unified strategy addressing common concerns, such as terrorism and extremism, to foster economic stability in both nations.

He stressed the importance of fostering strong working relations between the two fraternal nations to address these challenges effectively.

He expressed gratitude to the Afghan refugees for their continual contributions to the development of Pakistan. In return, the Afghan refugees

acknowledged the generosity of the Pakistani people in keeping their doors open during challenging times and providing them with ample opportunities. Meanwhile, IRCRA Director Tahmeed Jan Azhari emphasized the profound ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan, rooted in historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious foundations. He asserted that these connections should not be undermined by social media propaganda.



### Major dam to be built

NIMRUZ (Ariana News): IEA leadership, under the directive of the supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, has announced plans to build a major dam in the Khash Rod district, in Nimruz Province, in order to better manage water resources. Radio Television Afghanistan reported that this initiative, valued at two billion Afghanis, and the proposed dam wall will reach a height of 50 metres and will be capable of holding approximately 60 million cubic metres of water.

## The Frontier Post

Jamadi-ul-Awwal 04, 1445 — Monday, November 20, 2023

### Residents expressed concerns

KABUL (TOLONews): The residents of Kham Aab district expressed their concerns over the damages sustained as their residences are being damaged by water from the Amu River. They said that Amur Darya is also destroying agricultural lands annually at its peak season. "It has been since the past 20-years that construction on the side of Amu has been continuing and millions of dollars have been spent but it has not been very satisfactory," said Safar Qol, a resident of Kham Aab.

# More than 400,000 migrants returned



KABUL (Khaama Press): According to reports, so far, approximately 450,000 Afghan migrants have voluntarily returned to the country from Iran to address the issue of illegal immigration.

Tasnim news agency, citing Javad Khani, the official in charge of managing illegal migrants at the National Organization for Migration, has reported that there is a possibility of approximately four million illegal migrants being present in the country.

According to this Iranian official, 92% of illegal

Afghan migrants in Iran are located in eight major cities, including Tehran, Sistan and Baluchistan, Khorasan Razavi, Qom, Kermanshah, Yazd, Fars, and Alborz.

He emphasized that one million illegal migrants in the country have received identity cards to date.

This Iranian authority considers border closures as one of the main policies of the National Organization for Migration, and the process of expelling illegal migrants began initially in the parliament and has been further expanded through the Supreme National

Security Council.

Additionally, Javad Khani pointed out that the majority of migrants in Iran are Afghan citizens, and efforts to organize individuals without proper documentation have begun. Identity cards will soon be distributed to them. This comes as, according to reports, approximately five million Afghan migrants are living in Iran.

Previously, the expulsion of Afghan migrants from Iran and Pakistan has faced international reactions, with international organizations calling for the halt of their expulsion.

## Over 270,000 cases addressed

KABUL (TOLONews): The Supreme Court of the Islamic Emirate reported that after the reestablishment of the Islamic Emirate, it has addressed nearly 300,000 cases in the country.

The Supreme Court's head of foreign, public, and press relations, Abdul Rahim Rashid, added that the departments of this institution have issued nearly 300,000 official docs to citizens throughout the country during this period.

Rashid said that all of the nation's courts are working to promptly address the cases of residents.

"In total, the supreme court has addressed 272,463 cases, and during this period, it has also addressed 293,944 official docs," he noted.

Meanwhile, some citizens noted that justice should be considered in court decisions.

"I ask the Islamic Emirate that people's cases not be delayed, and should be addressed on time," Fazullah Qaderi, a resident of Nanagarhar told TOLONews.

"It will be acceptable to all the people if justice is implemented," Ali Hassan, a resident of Bamiyan told TOLONews.

According to some political analysts, professional people should be appointed in the courts so that people's cases can be addressed properly.

"These employees who were not corruption in the previous government, they should be hired in lower positions in courts so that the process of supreme court comes back to normal," said Moeen Gul Samkanai, a political analyst.

The officials of the Supreme Court pledged transparency in the courts of the country, saying they are trying to improve their work process.

# Efforts to prevent cervical cancer being made: Ministry

KABUL (TOLONews): The spokesperson of the Ministry of Public Health said one day after the International Cervical Cancer Elimination Day of Action that they are trying to establish cervical cancer treatment centers in the provinces of the country in order to prevent the increase of this disease.

Although the Ministry of Public Health has not conducted a new survey of people suffering from this disease, it says that in 2020, nearly 1,300 people were suffering from this disease.

One day after the International Cervical Cancer Elimination Day, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Public Health said that the Ministry is trying to prevent the increase of this disease in the country, raise the level of awareness among the people and establish treatment centers for this cancer in the provinces of the country.

"Through public awareness, we were able to convey to the people the guidelines that we can prevent cancers. Of course, more work is needed in this area. Afghan society is a society that in the past, even women were not given information about this. We have special centers for treatment and diagnosis in Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif," said Sharafat Zaman Amarkhil, a spokesman for the MoPH.

At the same time, the World Health Organization in a report expressed concern about the disease and said that women in poor countries and marginalized women in rich countries suffer from this disease.

"In the last three years, we have witnessed significant progress, but women in poorer countries and poor and marginalized women in richer countries still suffer disproportionately from cervical cancer,"



said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.

"It is the HPV virus itself, which is a viral infection that occurs in women, which ultimately causes cervical cancer," said Sonita, a doctor.

"In Afghanistan, HPV can be treated, if the virus itself is discovered, then it can be treated, or anyone who needs a vaccine, must be vaccinated," said Najmussama Shefajo, a

doctor.

"Back pain, leg pain, and also some weakness and lethargy, even physical and mental disability are found in women, which are symptoms and signs," said Tamkin Ayoubi, a doctor.

Although the Ministry of Public Health does not say anything about the number of new cases of cervical cancer, it emphasized that in 2020, nearly 1,300 people were diagnosed with this disease in the country.

# Afghanistan's economy once again nears precipice: USIP

KABUL (TOLONews): The US Institute of Peace (USIP), after reviewing the recent reports of the World Bank on the economic situation of Afghanistan, said that Afghanistan's economy once again is near "the precipice."

Senior economic experts of USIP noted that "more than two years into Taliban rule, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world with some of the highest humanitarian needs."

"Two recent World Bank reports — which were launched at a USIP event last week — lay out the landscape of the Afghan economy and the situation of Afghan households. Despite some signs of economic stability over the past year, the economy remains weak and unable to generate the jobs and livelihoods needed to accommodate the growing population — hence unemployment

and underemployment are widespread and increasing. Poverty remains very high, and large numbers of Afghans are still unable to meet their basic food and non-food needs," said William Byrd, Senior Expert, Afghanistan.

Economic experts emphasized that this need has become more serious with the expulsion of Afghan immigrants from Pakistan.

"There are no quick fixes to the Afghan economy, and the World Bank's recent reports show that demographic pressures from population growth and the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Pakistan will likely outpace economic growth in the short term. When it comes to maintaining — let alone increasing — Western donor assistance and removing the formal and informal sanctions that have been hindering the Afghan economy, the

Taliban would have to moderate their severe restrictions against female education and women working, which seems most unlikely to happen in the light of past experience," said Scott Worden, Director, Afghanistan and Central Asia Programs said. However, the Ministry of Economy rejected this report, saying that the Islamic Emirate is one of the successful governments in the region by undertaking large economic projects, controlling the inflation rate and maintaining the country's monetary stability against foreign currencies.

"The Islamic Emirate is considered one of the successful governments in the region for the growth and development of Afghanistan's economy, in the initiation of large-scale infrastructure projects, as well as in controlling the inflation rate and maintain-

ing the stability of the national currency against foreign currencies," said Abdul Latif Nazari, deputy of the Ministry of Economy.

According to some economists, more infrastructure projects should be undertaken to improve the economic situation in the country. "The only way to progress is that we should focus all our efforts on strengthening the infrastructure," Ahmad Firdous Behgzin, an economist told TOLONews.

Previously, some senior economists of the World Bank expressed their concerns about the deterioration of the economic situation in Afghanistan in a meeting held by the World Bank and the USIP.

Some economists have noted in the meeting that half of the population of Afghanistan is currently living below the poverty line.

# Employees of to comply with local law: Mujahid

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said that employees of international institutions who work in different sectors in Afghanistan are obliged to comply with the laws of the country.

Mujahid told TOLONews that the Islamic Emirate has the right to arrest people who do not follow the principles and laws of the country.

"If an employee of an

organization disobeys the laws of the country or acts contrary to the principles laid down for them, they will be arrested, and a government has the right to do this," the spokesman told TOLONews.

Some economist believe that the Islamic Emirate should facilitate the work of humanitarian institutions in the country and share specific procedures with them.

"If they [Islamic

Emirate] cooperate with them in ensuring their security, and cooperate with them regarding their plans and programs that they want to implement, and not interfere in their affairs, I think the interest of international institutions will increase," said Abdul Naseer Reshtia, an economist.

This comes as earlier some humanitarian organizations reported the arrest of some of their workers by the Islamic Emirate.

# Acting Minister calls for specialization in education



KABUL (TOLONews): The Acting Minister of Higher Education said that specialization is the basic principle in a society.

Neda Mohammad Nadim added that there is a need for experts and professionals in every sector in the country.

The acting Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication also emphasized the convergence of modern and religious sciences.

The Ministry of Higher Education announced the beginning of master's degree and PHD programs at Afghan International University. The head of this educational institution says that they have started their programs in eleven departments in three faculties of medicine, engineering and agriculture.

"Afghan International University has currently started eleven programs, four of which are doctoral programs and eight of which are master's programs. On this occasion, I welcome all the winners who have entered these programs," said Rafiullah Atta, head of Afghan International University.

The Acting Minister of Higher Education, who participated in this program, said that having expertise is an important principle in every society and believes that they need experts and professionals in every sector.

"Expertise is important and necessary in a society. Without expertise — life, a government and a country will not succeed," said Neda Mohammad Nadim, acting Minister of Higher Education. On the other hand, the acting Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunication emphasized the convergence of modern and religious sciences And asked people who are experts in religious and contemporary fields to respect each other's opinions.

"Those who have studied religious sciences and are skilled in the religious department, or those who have

been trained in the religious sciences and are skilled, both should live like brothers," said Najibullah Haqqani, the acting Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunication.

"Those who are on the path of education have high points and are respected by Allah, they are also respected by the people because they are respected because they have worked hard on this path," said Hamdullah Nomani, the acting minister of MUDH.

At the same time, some students asked the Islamic Emirate to reduce the fees for these programs.

"Our proposal is that the doctoral study fee for students, which is sixty-five thousand Afghanis, should be reduced," said Nawid Ahmad, a PHD student.

"We wish is that in the future they improve these kinds of programs and facilities for the students as well," said Jamal Naser, a PHD student.

The Acting Minister of Higher Education added that the challenges in the education sector of the country are over and there is no need for young people to travel abroad to continue their studies.

## Edu centers for girls shut down in Herat

HERAT (Khaama Press): Sources in Herat province report that the presence of girls in some educational centres has been prohibited due to the failure to comply with the directives of the local government of this province.

According to sources, officials from the Ministry of Education, the Department of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, and Taliban intelligence forces reportedly raided some schools that were teaching girls foreign languages on Tuesday and sealed the gates of these educational centres.

The director of one of the schools in the city of Herat, speaking with Khaama Press anonymously, stated that the authorities of the Taliban administration have blocked the gates of approximately ten schools. He further added, "Girls cannot attend courses, and schools that were teaching girls have had their gates sealed."

Another school administrator in Herat emphasized that the presence of girls has been prohibited due to male teachers instructing them.

However, Nisar Ahmad Elias, the spokesman for the Herat governor, claims to be unaware of the closure of school gates and adds that he needs more information.

It should be noted that girls who have survived the closure of schools and universities continue their foreign language studies in some of the country's educational institutions.

This comes as more than 600 days have passed since the closure of schools for girls above the sixth grade in Afghanistan. However, the Taliban administration has taken no action to reopen educational and academic institutions for girls.

# Women's expo in Kabul draws hundreds of visitors



KABUL (Ariana News): The Ministry of Commerce and Industry said Sunday that the Khadijah al-Kubra National and International Expo, which was launched in Kabul city to empower women entrepreneurs, is now in its sixth day and is being well supported.

According to the ministry, women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs from the provinces and Kabul have been showcasing their products and networking with local and foreign business owners.

"Hundreds of visitors are pleased with the launch of

this exhibition, and appreciated the handicrafts and other products of women entrepreneurs."

There are more than 800 booths at the expo, all showcasing products of women entrepreneurs.

The seven-day expo will wrap up on Monday.

# Trans-Afghan railway project estimated at \$7b

KABUL (Khaama Press): According to reports, authorities from Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and the Taliban administration have announced that the estimated cost of constructing the "Afghan Transit" railway line is approximately seven billion dollars.

According to BNA News, citing officials from Islamabad, Kabul, and Tashkent, it has been reported that this railway line will be constructed in collaboration with both the private sector and the government.

The "Afghan Transit" railway project was signed by officials from the Afghan delegates from Taliban, Uzbekistan, and Paki-

stan in Islamabad earlier.

According to reports, the transport capacity through this railway was estimated at around 20 million tons in 2018. Additionally, BNA has emphasized that the member countries involved in this project have expressed concerns about the security situation in Afghanistan.

Previously, the construction cost of this 573-kilometre railway line had exceeded four and a half billion dollars. It's worth noting that the "Afghan Transit" railway begins in Termez and, after passing through cities like Mazar-e-Sharif and Kabul, reaches Peshawar, Pakistan.

The "Afghan Transit" railway project, a collaborative effort among these three countries, has a strategic objective of creating a vital economic corridor. This corridor will serve as a crucial link, connecting the landlocked nations of Central Asia to the maritime trade routes of the Indian Ocean. The ambitious plan was initially proposed in the year 2018.

The envisioned railway line not only promises to enhance regional connectivity but also holds the potential to facilitate the movement of goods and people, boosting trade and economic growth across the participating nations.

# Elderly woman's wish comes true, clinic built on her land



AIBAK (Pajhwok): A health centre has been built on a piece of land donated by an elderly woman and inaugurated in Khurram Sarbagh district of northern Samangan province.

It was a great hope of Bibi Rabia, 90, to build a health centre in Tatar Chal village of Khurram Sarbagh district since long and finally her dream came true, her relatives said.

The relatives said local people hailed Bibi Rabia a heroine.

Raz Mohammad, Bibi Rabia's eldest son, said his mother distributed the family land among her children and she dedicated her own part for a mosque and a health clinic.

Raz Mohammad said: "My mother told me that there should be a health clinic in this village

because the people face different health problems, especially pregnant women during childbirth. As there was no health center in this village, pregnant women travel to Aibak city on the back of animals for childbirth."

Bibi Rabia, who talks with difficulty and also cannot hear well, told Pajhwok Afghan News: "I donated all my land to please God for a clinic and I signed the land documents so no one claims its ownership in the future."

BaBa Murad, a relative to Rabia, admired her as a woman of good reputation and generosity. He said it was her will for her children to build a clinic in the village.

Samangan public health director Malulvi Muhibullah Bahari confirmed

Bibi Rabia had dedicated her land for a health clinic.

He added: "This is her sacrifice and generosity. She dedicated the land for a clinic in this remote area, anyone who benefits from this health center owes to the generosity of this mother."

"We wouldn't have seen this clinic if she had not donated her land. She did not study in a school or seminary, but she taught the community a great lesson of humanity."

Mullah Abdul Wakeel Haqyar, Khurram Sarbagh district chief, said the clinic would respond to the needs of dozens of families.

Tatar Chal is a remote and impassable area of Khurram Sarbagh district and its residents had complained several times about lack of health facilities in the past.



# Thousands attend JI's Gaza Solidary March in Lahore

LAHORE (NNI): Thousands of citizens have attended Jamaat-e-Islami's (JI) Gaza March in Lahore to show solidarity with Palestinians in besieged densely populated strip and occupied West Bank suffering from the aggression of the Israeli occupation forces.

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) organised the Gaza Solidarity March at Lahore's Punjab University (PU) Campus Bridge today which was attended by thousands of citizens including women and children. The massive public event was addressed by JI Pakistan Ameer Sirajul Haq, politicians and clerics.

Protestors chanted pro-Palestinian slogans and demanded an end to Israeli aggression in Gaza.

While addressing the Gaza March, JI Pakistan Ameer Sirajul Haq said that the innocent children of Gaza were waiting for the help of Muslim countries amid Israeli bombardment. He slammed rulers of the Muslim countries for doing nothing for the relief of Palestinians except making tall claims. He also criticised that the rulers of the Muslim countries did nothing in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit except for consolation.

"A dead resolution was passed in the OIC summit, ineffective to provide any relief to the Palestinians and stop inhumane actions of the Israeli occupation

forces." He lauded the Western nationals including the United Kingdom (UK), France, Australia, Ireland, United States (US) and Canada for showing solidarity with the Palestinians. Haq said that the French people forced their government to change its narrative through a powerful campaign.

"The people of Australia and Canada have also exhibited solidarity with Palestinians. I also thank the people of Ireland, Washington and London for raising strong voices for Gaza."

The JI Pakistan Ameer said that the massive rally was a 'message of death' to the enemy. "Israel is an evil state created by the imperialist forces. Palestinians have never accepted Israel and they are standing firmly against the occupation forces."

He said that Israeli people are also protesting against Benjamin Netanyahu. Our public event gives a message to Gaza that they are not alone and we are standing side-by-side in this Jihad."

Sirajul Haq slammed the Pakistani rulers, saying, "I wanted to see the prime minister, chief minister, Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) politicians in this march but the political personalities are currently busy lobbying in Balochistan and Sindh [for the forthcoming general elections]."

## Grand operations against foreigners residing illegally continue in Peshawar

PESHAWAR (APP): A series of grand operations against foreigners residing illegally in Peshawar is ongoing, SSP Operations Kashif Abbasi during his visits to different camps in the Nasir Bagh area told media men. SP Security and Additional Deputy Commissioner Imran Khan were also present on the occasion of the visit.

SSP Operations checked the security arrangements in the camp as well as other arrangements and facilities during his visit.

In the camp established on Nasir Bagh Road, the documents of the illegal residents will be completed and they will be sent to their homeland, SSP operations said.

In the first phase, illegally staying foreigners are being sent back to their homeland, and in the second phase, the action plan will be decided after the policy, SSP operations added. He said all steps have been taken to ensure due facilities to those inside the camps.

**Police arrested 24 illegals** **Afghans:** The Peshawar Police made

more arrests in the operation against foreigners living in urban and suburban areas and as many as 24 illegal Afghans were arrested, police said.

According to detail, the Police said that four Afghans were caught within the limits of Bhan Mari Police Station while 13 families voluntarily left the area and Yeka Tut Police detained three people while one illegal family was identified. Likewise, 17 people were transferred to Peshawar transit point from Kabli police station, Police said.

## Ashrafi stresses Afghan cooperation in effort to restore order

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Religious Harmony and the Pakistani Diaspora in Middle East and Islamic Countries, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi on Sunday said Pakistan not only prioritizes peace in Afghanistan but also places equal importance on maintaining peace within its own borders.

He, in an exclusive talk with APP, highlighted the objective behind the removal of illegal Afghans to restore order to the homeland, expecting that registered Afghan refugees and the Afghan government would collaborate with the Pakistani government in this effort.

Ashrafi who is also the chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council mentioned that in a meeting with the Army Chief, the religious scholars of all schools of thought emphasized the

importance of complete cooperation on matters concerning Pakistan. They explicitly declared any armed struggle by groups other than state institutions as forbidden, reassuring the state of their unwavering support, he added.

He said Pakistan was actively engaging with friendly nations, including Saudi Arabia, to effectively manage the situation in Gaza adding that Pakistan had not only doubled its aid to Palestine but was also open to considering additional increases to provide further support.

Ashrafi emphatically refuted the propaganda, clarifying that there was not placement of security glass between both the Army Chief and the scholars.

He emphasized that such misleading information serves as an adversary to Pakistan, aiming to sow chaos within the nation. He made it clear that the Army Chief not only briefed all

the scholars on the current state of affairs but also personally visited each of them to inquire about their well-being. In recognition of the positive strides in the country's economy and decisive actions against wrongdoers, the scholars commended the Army Chief and unequivocally expressed their full support for the 'Paigham-e-Pakistan' doctrine, he added.

Ashrafi urged the Interior Ministry and Federal Investigation Agency officials to take decisive action against those who undermine state institutions and tarnish Pakistan's credibility on social media. Addressing the issue of Afghan refugees, he highlighted that a significant number of Afghan nationals were implicated in recent acts of terrorism in Pakistan. When questioned about this to the Afghan government, the response was that Pakistan should address the issue domestically, he maintained.

### Wearing face mask mandatory for a week in Punjab

LAHORE (APP): In view of the dangerous situation of smog, the Punjab government has declared it mandatory to wear face masks for a week in the province. A formal notification was also issued by the Primary & Secondary Healthcare Department secretary on Sunday on the direction of Punjab caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

According to the notification, the step has been taken keeping in view the increasing smog impact on public health. It added, "Hence, it is necessary to take all possible safety measures for prevention and control of airborne diseases. All citizens will wear masks during all kinds of outdoor activities."

It will be implemented across Lahore division, including Lahore, Nankana Sahib, Sheikhupura and Kasur districts; and Gujranwala division, including Gujranwala, Gujrat, Sialkot, Narowal, Hafizabad, and Mandi Bahauddin districts. These areas, according to the notification, have the highest deteriorating air quality index. The wearing of masks has been made mandatory for a week – from November 20 to 26. For months now, the above-mentioned cities of Punjab, specifically Lahore, have been reeling under toxic and hazardous levels of air quality due to the onset of smog, for the 'fifth season', as it is called, towards the end of the year.

It is worth mentioning here that provincial metropolis has been consistently retaining its top spot on the list of most polluted cities in the world.

### Ex-ministers quit PTI, join IPP

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and former federal minister Ali Nawaz Awan parted ways with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and announced joining Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP).

According to party sources, Ali Nawaz met IPP Patron-in-Chief Jahangir Khan Tareen and President Aleem Khan in Lahore and announced joining their party. Aoun Chaudhry and other IPP leaders were also president. Jahangir Tareen and Abdul Aleem welcomed Ali Nawaz in the party folds.

Separately, former provincial minister Sardar Asif Nakai also announced quitting the PTI and joining the IPP in a meeting with Jahangir Khan Tareen and Aleem Khan. Aoun Chaudhry, Samsam Bukhari, Nauman Langriyal and other leaders also participated in the meeting.

### 235,821 Afghans return to homeland

ISLAMABAD (APP): As many as 235,821 Afghans have so far been repatriated to their homeland, according to Radio Pakistan.

The repatriation of illegal foreign nationals, including Afghans, to their homeland is continuing. Thousands of Afghans are returning to their homeland on a daily basis through the Chaman and Torkham borders, thanking Pakistan for its generosity. Apart from other measures for the dignified return of Afghans to their country, transit camps equipped with all facilities have been established in various districts for their temporary accommodation.



ISLAMABAD: First Lady Begum Samina Alvi visiting the Palestinian stall and expressing her condolences for the martyrs of Gaza, at Pakistan Foreign Office Women's Association's Annual Charity Bazar.

## Ukrainian army says advancing at Dnipro river as drones target Kyiv

KYIV (AFP/APP): The Ukrainian army said Sunday that it has pushed Russian forces back "three to eight kilometres" from the banks of Dnipro river, which if confirmed would be the first meaningful advance by Kyiv's forces months into a disappointing counteroffensive.

Ukrainian and Russian forces have been entrenched on opposite sides of the vast waterway in the southern Kherson region for more than a year, after Russia withdrew its troops from the western bank last November.

Ukrainian forces have staged multiple attempts to cross and hold positions on the Russian-controlled side - with officials in Kyiv finally reporting a "successful" breakthrough last week. "Preliminary figures vary from three to eight kilometres, depending on the specifics, geography and landscape design of the left bank," army spokeswoman Natalia Gumenyuk told Ukrainian television Sunday, without specifying whether Ukraine's military had complete control of the area or if the Russians had retreated.

"The enemy still continues artillery fire on the right bank," she said, estimating that "several tens of thousands" of Russian troops are in the area. "We have a lot of work to do," she added.

It comes after Kyiv's much-awaited counteroffensive launched last June had largely fizzled, with Ukraine retaking just a handful of villages in the south and east.

The last significant success claimed by Kyiv was the retaking in August of the village of Robotyne in the southern region of Zaporizhzhia.

A bridgehead on the left bank of the Dnipro could allow a deeper offensive in the south, though it would require deploying more men and armour into the challenging marshy region.

Pushing Russian troops back would also offer protection to Ukrainian towns and villages on the river's western shores that have faced constant shelling over the past year, Ukrainian officials say.

A Russian artillery attack on the city of Kherson injured five people on Sunday, including a three-year-old child, Interior Minister Igor Klymenko said.

Russia's defence ministry said Friday it had thwarted an attempt by Ukrainian troops to land on unspecified islands in the river, days after a Russian-installed official in the occupied Kherson region conceded that Ukraine had managed to hold positions in the village of Krynyky on river's eastern shores.

Russia did not comment on the situation on the eastern bank in a daily military briefing on Sunday.

AFP has not able to independently confirm the claims made by officials.

Meanwhile, drone attacks, a defining characteristic of the war, have intensified this week.

Both of the capitals, Kyiv and Moscow, were targeted Saturday night, though both sides claimed to have intercepted most of the attacks and no victims were reported.

Ukrainian drone attacks on Moscow were particularly frequent in the spring, ahead of the launch of its counteroffensive in June, but they have been rare in recent weeks.

Kyiv was also targeted for a second night by a barrage of Iranian-made Shahed drones packed with explosives that were launched by Russian forces, local authorities said.

Russia's defence ministry said its drone attacks hit a fuel depot in Ukraine's central Kirovograd region and an ammunition warehouse near the capital Kyiv.

Ukraine said it shot down 15 of 20 Russian drones, while Russia claimed to have destroyed 31 Ukrainian drones. Oleksiy Kuleba, the deputy head of President Volodymyr Zelensky's office said Sunday Kyiv was boosting the number of "mobile groups" that could "combat" the wave of Russian drone attacks.

A day earlier, the Ukrainian air force said it had shot down 29 of 38 Shahed drones launched by Russian forces across the country -- the most drones launched by Moscow in an overnight attack since late September.

Saturday night, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he expected Russia to increase its attacks on Ukraine's energy system to paralyse the country's heat and power supply. "The closer we get to winter, the more Russian attempts will be made to make the strikes more powerful," he said in his daily address, calling on his army to be "100 percent effective, despite all the difficulties, despite all the fatigue". On the diplomatic front, Russia's Vesti TV announced that President Vladimir Putin will take part in a virtual G20 leaders' summit on Wednesday, after skipping the flagship in-person meeting in New Delhi in September.

## Politicians from Nawabshah, Dadu districts join PML-N as Memon remains in action

KARACHI (NNI): Amid the ongoing war of words between the PPP and the PML-N, more political personalities on Sunday announced their decision to join the ranks of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's party.

The latest addition to the PML-N's ranks came from Dadu and Shaheed Benazirabad [formerly known as Nawabshah] districts as the elders from the locally-influential families met Bashir Memon – the newly-appointed provincial president of the party. Ghulam Rasool Unar, who previously associated with the PTI and was elected as the Sindh Assembly member from the Sakrand area of Shaheed Benazirabad, joined the PML-N, as Memon said Unar would play an important role in the district's politics. Unar said he had made the decision because of having complete trust in the leadership of Nawaz and Memon, with a promise

that he would give tough time to the PPP.

From the Johi tehsil of Dadu, it is the Leghari family which announced their decision after Raees Khan Gaji Leghari and Raees Ahmed Khan Leghari held a meeting with Memon.

Mir Amanullah Talpur, Raees Shakeel Jalbani, Raees Shahjahan Leghari and Ajab Ali Leghari were also present on the occasion.

Earlier this week, Karim Bux Gabol, a former MPA elected on a PTI ticket from Karachi East, had also been inducted into the PML-N as Memon is trying his best to attract more and more influential politicians towards the party.

The main, if not the only, reason behind the mercurial rise of Memon in the PML-N is his strong conviction that the party should go for closer electoral understanding with other parties to enable it enter the provincial politics an effective

fashion. Soon after joining the party in September, he was the first PML-N leader to say in public that it would opt for election alliance with the MQM-P and the JUI-F in Sindh. At the same time, Nawaz is also eyeing Balochistan for a major breakthrough in the upcoming general elections scheduled to be held on February 8 next year, where a number of politicians became part of his party. But this approach and PPP's inability to make any inroads in Punjab – Pakistan's most populated province where the battle for the ultimate crown would be decided – have resulted in strong anti-Nawaz statements from Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

However, the elder Sharif as well as Shehbaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz haven't given any reaction so far with the likes of Rana Sanaullah, Khawaja Saad Rafique and Ahsan Iqbal responding to the PPP's assertions.



LAHORE: A view of closed shops at Mall Road as Punjab government has ordered markets to remain closed over the weekend in the hope that the long weekend will help cut toxic levels of smog.

## In Iran, Gaza war overshadows preparations for 2024 legislative vote

TEHRAN (AFP/APP): As the war in Gaza continues to hold public attention, Iran is gearing up for parliamentary elections next year where many conservatives are determined to tighten their grip on power.

The Islamic republic has since August opened registration for candidacy in the upcoming parliamentary elections slated for March 1, 2024.

Last week, officials announced that out of the 24,982 applicants, around 28 percent have been disqualified in an initial screening phase.

The decision can be appealed and a final list of candidates competing for the 290-seat parliament will be announced one month ahead of the March vote. With the preparations underway, many in Iran are preoccupied with mounting economic difficulties and the aftershocks of last year's mass protests triggered by the death of Mahsa Amini.

Political scientist Ahmad Zeidabadi says he expects voters to refrain from taking to the polls "if the system cannot offer them reasons for hope and change."

Another growing concern among Iranians is the potential impact of the

war in the Gaza Strip, which broke out on October 7 between Palestinian Hamas militants and Israel.

Zeidabadi says the repercussions of the Gaza conflict could also impact the election results especially if Hamas, which Iran supports, was defeated. It "would weaken the position of the government's supporters," he said. Next year's elections will be the first since nationwide protests rocked Iran following Amini's death in September 2022.

Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd, died in police custody following her arrest over an alleged breach of the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women. Iran's current parliament, which was formed in 2020, has been dominated by conservatives after many reformists and moderates were disqualified.

The country at the time saw a voter turnout of 42.57 percent -- the lowest since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

On Thursday, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called for "fervent" elections.

Ultra-conservative President Ebrahim Raisi, who took office in August 2021, said his government

has "no candidate" in the upcoming legislative elections.

"We are only looking to create the ground for wider and higher participation of all people and groups in the elections," he said.

Supporters of reformist candidates fear another 2020 scenario after multiple candidates were disqualified in the initial screening.

Reformist daily Ham Mihaan said last month that there was a common view that "even if the known and famous reformists register as candidates, it is unlikely that they will be approved."

Many have accordingly opted against competing including Ali Larijani, former parliament speaker who ran against Raisi during the 2021 presidential elections.

In May, Larijani accused some of leading a campaign to "purify" the political atmosphere by eliminating any adversaries.

Among the disqualified candidates include the reformist incumbent MP Massoud Pezeshkian, known for his criticism of the government and who described his disqualification as "ridiculous".