

LAHORE (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has established the Election Monitoring and Control Centers to register public complaints for general election. The ECP local chapter sources told APP that the centers had been established at provincial, divisional and district levels, extending beyond Islamabad, for swift resolution.

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Pakistan Army as National Army to leave no stone unturned for national security, development: COAS

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir on Sunday New Year's Eve vowed that Pakistan Army as a National Army will leave no stone unturned to contribute to the cause of national security and development. The Army Chief's message on the occasion of New Year shared by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) reiterated the Armed Force's resolve of national service and protection despite all odds.

The Army Chief said, "Pakistan Army as a National Army will leave no stone unturned to contribute to the cause of national security and development. We take pride in our unwavering commitment to the people of Pakistan. (Pakistan Army and the nation are one). No one can defeat the spirit of Pakistan". The Military's media wing said a challenging yet momentous year of 2023

was over. Pakistan Armed Forces wish a happy new year to the proud and honourable people of Pakistan. The year 2024 is of immense significance for Pakistan both internally and externally.

Pakistan Armed Forces reinforce the patriotic spirit of serving the motherland, a land of immeasurable bounties and countless opportunities.

Undoubtedly, our great nation will rise, in line with the dreams of our

forefathers and aspirations of the people of Pakistan. Surely a bright future for the coming generations awaits us, Insha Allah (God Willing).

In line with the directive of the prime minister of Pakistan, it said, "We stand with and pray for the resilient people of Palestine and Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir and hope that the New Year will bring relief in their sufferings from Tyrannical regimes."

Firing near vehicles part of JUI-F chief's convoy in DI Khan

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (Monitoring Desk): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police on Sunday said firing occurred near vehicles part of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman's convoy in Dera Ismail Khan but the politician was not present when the incident occurred.

"Vehicles part of Maulana Fazlur Rehman's convoy went to Yarak area for refuelling when the incident occurred," District Police Officer (DPO) Rauf Kesrani told Dawn.com.

"Maulana Fazlur Rehman was not present," he said without providing any further details.

The development comes days after the interior ministry warned that

there were serious threats to the lives of the Maulana and Awami National Party provincial president Aimal Wali Khan.

In a statement, JUI-F spokesperson Aslam Ghauri termed today's incident a "cowardly act".

"They have repeatedly warned that the situation is not favorable for our leadership. The administration writes letters about the threats every day, but does not take any action," he said. He said the incident should be immediately investigated, questioning why security institutions were not fulfilling their responsibility.

"The law and order situation in KP and Balochistan is getting worse day by day,"

Ghauri said.

Meanwhile, Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani phoned the Maulana's son and condemned the attack. He also prayed for the JUI-F chief's well-being.

In a letter to the chief secretaries and inspector general of police of all provinces and circulated by the ANP, the interior ministry had said it had received reports from reliable sources revealing serious threats to the lives of the Maulana and Aimal.

"It is requested that extreme caution and vigilance is exercised and necessary security arrangements are made at their [Mr Fazl and Mr Aimal's] residences and during movement and

public gatherings to avert any untoward incident," it said in a letter.

At the time, JUI-F spokesperson Ghauri told Dawn that though he had not seen the interior ministry's Dec 29 letter, such threats were a routine for his party leaders.

He said that "security threats" had stopped Fazl from participating in his election campaign in the native area of Dera Ismail Khan. "Our party is facing many problems due to threats to its election campaign," he said. Ghauri said that the Election Commission of Pakistan and law-enforcement agencies should think about providing security to his party's leaders to ensure fair and free polls in the country.



GAZA: Displaced Palestinians, who fled their homes due to Israeli strikes, shelter in a tent camp, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, on the eve of the new year of 2024, in Rafah.

‘Three terrorists killed while infiltrating Pak-Afghan border’

RAWALPINDI (APP): Three terrorists were killed by the security forces on Sunday who were trying to infiltrate the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, in the general area Batwar of Bajaur District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) in a news release said that their movement was picked up by the security forces in the general area Batwar in the ensuing exchange of fire all three terrorists were killed.

Weapons, ammunition and explosives were also recovered from them.

Meanwhile, a soldier of the Pakistan Army embraced martyrdom while valiantly thwarting terrorists' firing attempt on the border post in the general

area of Spinwam, North Waziristan District, KP. The martyred soldier was identified as Naik Abdul Rauf (age: 31 years, resident of: District Rahim Yar Khan). It added that on the night of December 30 and 31, terrorists from inside Afghanistan, opened fire on a Pakistani Border Post in the general area of Spinwam, North Waziristan District, KP. The Army troops responded in a befitting manner causing considerable losses to the terrorists.

"Pakistan has consistently been asking the Interim Afghan Government to ensure effective border management on their side of the border. Interim Afghan Government is expected to fulfill its obligations and

deny the use of Afghan soil by terrorists for perpetuating acts of terrorism against Pakistan," the ISPR said.

Meanwhile, At least five terrorists were killed in an intense exchange of fire during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) conducted by the security forces on December 30-31 in general area Mashkai, Awaran District of Balochistan province. "During the conduct of the operation, after intense fire exchange between own troops and the terrorists, 'Five Terrorists' were sent to hell. Terrorists' hideout was also busted and a cache of arms, ammunition and explosives was recovered," an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release on Sunday said.

N. Korea's Kim orders military to prepare for possible 'war'

SEOUL (AFP/APP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un wrapped the year with fresh threats of a nuclear attack on Seoul and orders for a military arsenal build-up to prepare for a war that can "break out at any time" on the peninsula, state media reported Sunday. Kim lambasted the United States during a lengthy speech at the end of five days of year-end party meetings that set his country's military, political, and economic policy decisions for 2024.

The meeting announced plans for further military development in the coming year, including launching three more spy satellites, building unmanned drones and developing electronic warfare capabilities, as well as strengthening nuclear and missile forces, according to the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). Pyongyang this year successfully launched a reconnaissance satellite, enshrined its status as a nuclear power in its constitution, and test-fired the most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) in its arsenal.

At the meeting that ended Saturday, Kim accused the United States of posing "various types of military threat" and ordered his armed forces to maintain "overwhelming war response capability", according to KCNA.

It is a "fait accompli that a war can break out at any time on the Korean peninsula due to reckless moves by the enemies to invade us", Kim said.

In an effort to deter Pyongyang,

Washington earlier this month deployed a nuclear-powered submarine in the South Korean port city of Busan, and flew its long-range bombers in drills with Seoul and Tokyo. The North has previously described the deployment of Washington's strategic weapons -- such as B-52 bombers -- in joint drills on the Korean peninsula as the "intentional nuclear war provocative moves".

"We must respond quickly to a possible nuclear crisis and continue to accelerate preparations to pacify the entire territory of South Korea by mobilising all physical means and forces, including nuclear force, in case of emergency," Kim said.

N. Korea to launch three more spy satellites in 2024: North Korea plans to launch three more spy satellites in 2024 as part of efforts to ramp up its military, state media reported Sunday. Pyongyang successfully put a spy satellite into orbit last month and has since claimed it was providing images of major US and South Korean military sites.

This year it also conducted a record-breaking number of weapons tests, including the launch this month of its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), blaming growing threats from the United States. "The task of launching three additional reconnaissance satellites in 2024 was declared" as one of the key policy decisions for next year at a year-end party meeting, the official Korean Central News Agency

(KCNA) said.

The five-day meeting, which ended Saturday, was attended by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

"The United States, which has long caused and worsened political instability on the Korean peninsula, continues to pose various types of military threat to our country even as the year is coming to an end," Kim said.

Seoul, Tokyo and Washington have ramped up defence cooperation in the face of growing missile and nuclear threats from Pyongyang this year and recently activated a system to share real-time data on North Korean missile launches.

Earlier this month, a US nuclear-powered submarine arrived in the South Korean port city of Busan, and Washington flew its long-range bombers in drills with Seoul and Tokyo. The North has previously described the deployment of Washington's strategic weapons -- such as B-52 bombers -- in joint drills on the Korean peninsula as the "intentional nuclear war provocative moves".

Kim ordered his country's Korean People's Army to closely monitor the security situation on the peninsula and to "always respond with an overwhelming attitude".

"We must respond quickly to a possible nuclear crisis and continue to accelerate preparations to pacify the entire territory of South Korea by mobilising all physical means and forces, including nuclear force, in case of emergency," he said.

South Africa files case at UN's top court accusing Israel of ‘genocidal acts’ in Gaza; court confirms

UNITED NATIONS (APP): South Africa has filed a case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing Israel of engaging in "genocidal acts" in Gaza, and asking the court to order the Israeli government to halt its attacks.

In a press release, the Hague-based ICJ, which is UN's highest court, confirmed the application concerning alleged violations of Israel's obligations under the Genocide Convention.

Meanwhile, Israel has strongly rejected the allegation, calling it "baseless". Since a cross-border attack by Hamas on October 7, Israel's deadly bombardments of Gaza have left at least 21,000 people dead, three-quarters of them women and children, while thousands more are feared trapped under rubble, according to the enclave's health ministry. The application was filed "con-

cerning alleged violations by Israel of its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in relation to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip," the ICJ said in the press release.

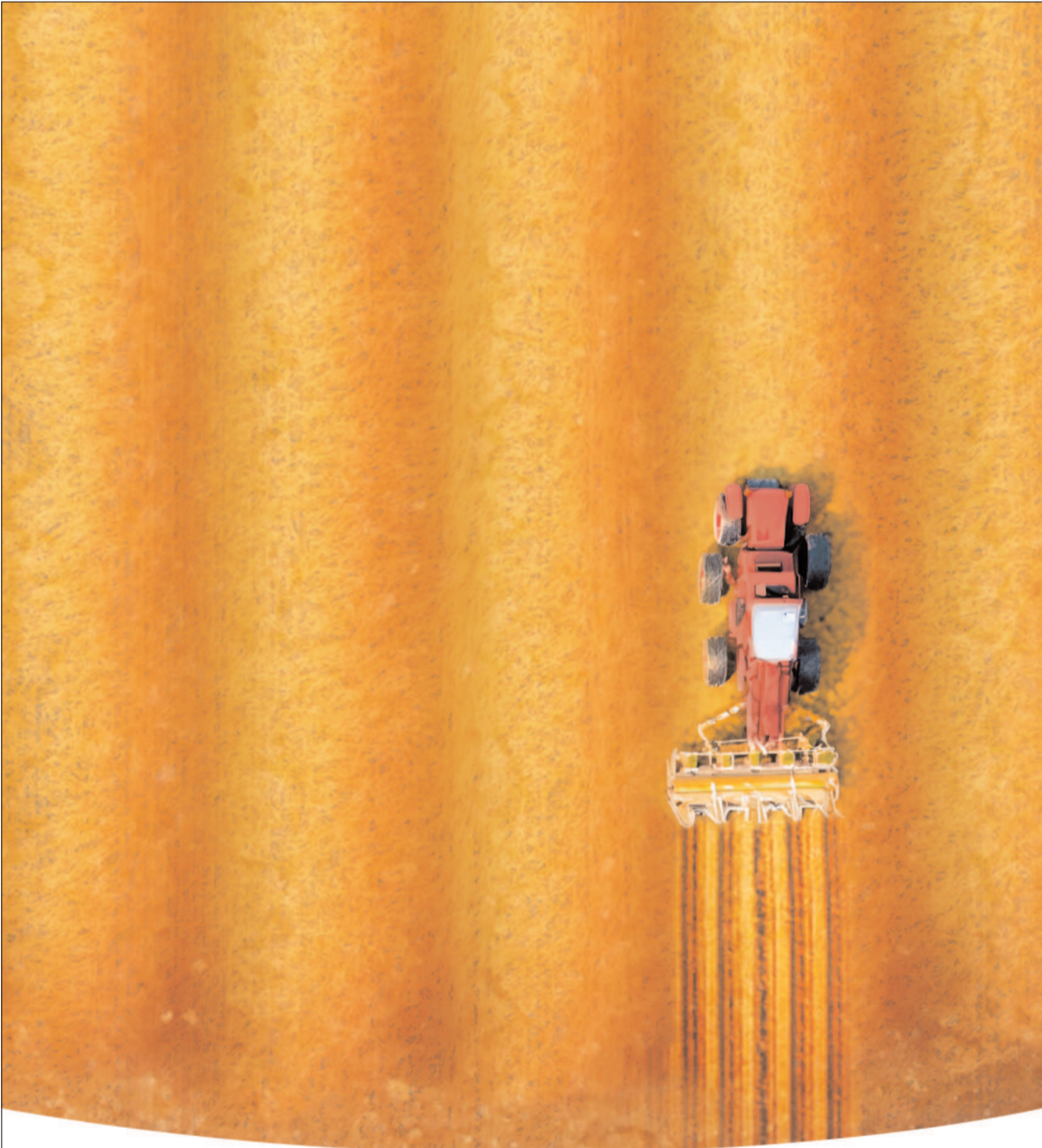
"Acts and omissions by Israel ... are genocidal in character, as they are committed with the requisite specific intent ... to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as a part of the broader Palestinian national, racial and ethnic group," read the statement.

It added: "The conduct of Israel -- through its State organs, State agents, and other persons and entities acting on its instructions or under its direction, control or influence -- in relation to Palestinians in Gaza, is in violation of its obligations under the Genocide Convention," the statement added, citing the application.

South Africa also accused Israel of

"failing to prevent genocide" and "prosecuting the direct and public incitement to genocide" in the application. "Israel has engaged in, is engaging in and risks further engaging in genocidal acts against the Palestinian people in Gaza," it added.

South Africa also requested the ICJ to "indicate provisional measures in order to protect against further, severe and irreparable harm to the rights of the Palestinian people under the Genocide Convention and to ensure Israel's compliance with its obligations under the Genocide Convention not to engage in genocide, and to prevent and to punish genocide." The Israeli onslaught has left Gaza in ruins, with 60% of the enclave's infrastructure damaged or destroyed, and nearly 2 million residents displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicines.



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Dengue cases decline as temperature dips in Punjab

LAHORE (APP): In a positive turn of events, a recent drop in the temperature across Punjab has led to a significant decrease in dengue cases with just three cases on Sunday.

Health Department data released today indicates a total of 15,185 confirmed cases reported across 36 districts in Punjab throughout the year 2023. The city-wise breakdown reveals that Lahore remains the most affected, with 7,029 cases, followed by Rawalpindi with 2,654, Gujranwala with 1,591, Multan with 1,464, and Faisalabad with 918 cases. However, in the last 24 hours, Lahore reported only two cases, while Faisalabad reported one.

Ali Jaan Khan, Secretary of Health Punjab, issued a heartfelt plea to citizens, emphasizing the importance of maintaining clean and dry surroundings as a preventive measure against dengue. He urged cooperation with health department teams actively working to combat the outbreak.

For those seeking dengue treatment, information, or wanting to lodge complaints, a free helpline is available through the health department at 1033.

Minister warns of carrying weapons, ariel firing on the eve of new year

KARACHI (APP): The Caretaker Sindh Minister for Home and Prison, Haris Nawaz on Sunday said that the citizens would not be cramped to celebrate New Year celebrations if they act like civilised, law-abiding and well-behaved citizens.

He said, 'Nobody will be allowed to carry a weapon, use narcotics and resort to aerial firing on the eve of New Year'. He ordered to ensure strict action against those found involved in aerial firing on New Year's night. "It is evident that celebratory aerial firing, besides loss of precious lives, disturbs the peace and causes a feeling of fear and danger among the citizens, so consequently the Police must cease it, using all the legal mechanisms available, including the preempt preventive action", he maintained.

The Caretaker Home Minister issued the directives to the IGP Sindh that the police must remain proactively vigilant to maintain law and order ensuring on-ground security measures at all the markets, public parks, food outlets, shopping malls and other places specially by deploying police at strategic points for quick response to protect the lives and property of the citizens.

Mayor felicitates newly elected body of KPC

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab and Deputy Mayor Karachi Salman Abdullah Murad congratulated President Saeed Sarbazi and General Secretary Shoaib Ahmed and other elected officials on the success of The Democrats Panel in the annual elections of Karachi Press Club. In a message, they said that the democratic and journalistic traditions of the Karachi Press Club are commendable.

SRB exceeds 6.3bn target by collecting Rs7.56bn

KARACHI (APP):The Sindh Revenue Board (SRB) in Sindh Workers Welfare Fund (SWWF) and Sindh Workers Profit Participation Fund (WPPF) has obtained 527 payments as compared to last year's 296 payments, registering a growth of 78 per cent despite a slowdown in the economy in general, the chairman of the board disclosed. In a follow-up meeting between Caretaker Chief Minister Sindh Justice (ret'd) Maqbool Baqar and Chairman SRB Wasif Memon on Sunday, the latter informed the CM after a question regarding the collection of funds that an increase in the collection of payments was also made despite the reduction of sales in the auto sector due to price hike and pharmaceutical sector due to issues in raw material import in particular, a communique said.

Chairman SRB apprised that consequent to the directions of the CM, the SWWF team of SRB has taken prompt actions and issued more than 5,200 notices to the various industrial establishments and recovered an amount of Rs 7.562 Bn

in the current financial year as compared to 5.4 Bn recovered last year registering a growth of 35 per cent.

During the meeting, the CM was told: "267 show-cause notices amounting to Rs 40 billion have been issued to the fund payers against which an amount of Rs 6.1 billion had been deposited with Nazir of the Sindh High Court (SHC) by banks and other fund payers".

It should be noted that the banking sector had deposited bank guarantees worth Rs 5.1 billion with the Nazir of the Court for the first time against 61 show-cause notices. At this, the CM directed the Advocate General (AG) Sindh for early release of the total amount of Rs 31 billion lying with the Nazir of the Sindh High Court as that amount relates to the banking industry and other Sindh-based industrial establishments. Baqar was further told that in addition to the show-cause notices of Rs. 40 billion, the SRB has issued 303 short payment notices of Rs.27 billion to various fund-payers in compliance with his directives.

FBR collects more than 1 Trillion gross revenue

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Board of Revenue creates history by collecting Rs.1021 Billion in December, 2023 and after adjusting refunds of Rs.38 billion issued during the month, reached net collection of Rs.984 billion. Targets for the month as well as for the first six months of the current financial year were also surpassed. Target for the first six months was Rs.4425 billion (as agreed with IMF), which was surpassed by 43 billion and recorded collection of Rs.4468 billion.

FBR in the corresponding six months of the previous year collected Rs.3428, thus registering an increase of more than 1 Trillion. This is despite the fact that refunds of Rs.230 billion have been issued against Rs.177 billion issued during correspon-

ding period of the previous year and continuous import compression.

Contraction in imports continues to impede revenues collected at the import stage. In the past the revenue mix at the import stage and domestic taxes used to be 50:50. This has now changed to 36:64 and FBR has absorbed the entire impact of import compression through raising more revenues domestically. Ratio of direct and indirect taxes has also altered and the share of Direct Taxes has increased to 49% for the first 6 months.

However, in December alone the share of Direct taxes was recorded at 59%. This share also registered an increase of 41% in the first 6 months as compared to the corresponding period of previous year. Again, within Direct Taxes, FBR during the past two years, has reduced the share of

withholding taxes from 70% to 55-58%. However, during December 2023, share of withholding taxes has been recorded as low as 40%.

It would not be out of place to mention, that, FBR collected 1 trillion as annual collection back in 2007-08. It took 50 years to achieve this milestone. Whereas, in a span of only 15 years, this feat has been accomplished in a single month; through untiring efforts, sheer dedication and hardwork of field formations and top brass of FBR.

Chairman FBR congratulates Member (Customs Operations), Member (IR-Operations) and their teams for achieving this unsurmountable task. He also thanks the taxpayers, without whose continuous support and correct declarations, this target could not have been accomplished.

23,928 accused arrested; cash, valuables worth Rs 2.49b recovered

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police arrested 23,928 persons during 2023 and recovered stolen valuables worth Rs. 2.49 billion, including 568 cars and 1,106 motorcycles from them.

Islamabad Capital Police took various measures to enhance the effectiveness of the operational division, streamline crime control, increase police station capabilities, ensure effective patrols, and prioritize public issue resolutions, a public relations officer said.

He said that, steps included increasing the capacity of station police officers, establishing a Court Compliance Unit, and initiating an Anti-Robbery and Dacoity Unit. Before 2022, there was no separate investigation system in Islamabad Capital Police.

However, significant reforms were made in 2023 to improve the investigation system, notably establishing the Police Bureau of Investigation, which separated investigation and operational matters at the station level.

Moreover, units for investigating crimes against women and children, combating robbery and dacoity, implementing court orders, and ensuring electronic attendance of suspects in courts were part of the investigation unit reforms.

A patrolling system is crucial for crime prevention, leading to the establishment of the new Dolphin Emergency Response Unit in Islamabad. This unit brought police response times down to 8 to 4 minutes. To address public issues, five new police stations and a division were also established during the year 2023.

In accordance with the government's directives, Islamabad Capital Police con-

ducted multiple operations against illegal resident foreigners, repatriating over 10,000 illegal residents to their home countries.

During 2023, the Islamabad Capital Police arrested 23,928 suspects involved in various crimes, apprehended 6,614 members of criminal gangs in financial cases, recovering stolen valuables worth Rs. 2.49 billion, including 568 cars and 1,106 motorcycles. Over a year, 2,061 individuals involved in robbery and theft were arrested, recovering more than Rs. 295 million worth of cash and valuables, including 31 cars and 163 motorcycles.

Additionally, 1,947 individuals were arrested for illegal possession of weapons, confiscating 111 Kalashnikovs and rifles, 33 shotguns and carbines, 1,672 pistols, 128 knives, and 8,541 rounds of ammunition. Furthermore, 2,675 absconders and proclaimed offenders were brought under legal scrutiny.

The establishment of specialized investigation units greatly assisted in effectively investigating serious crimes. Courts made rulings on 35 murder cases in 2023, sentencing offenders to death in 20 cases and life imprisonment in 15 cases. This number of judgments in such serious cases was unprecedented before. Around 24,326 cases were registered in police stations across Islamabad in 2023, with the investigation department completing investigations on 20,148 cases, while 4,178 cases are still under proceedings. Transparency in case investigations, maintaining merit, ensuring justice for criminals, and delivering justice to citizens are the primary goals of all these measures.



LAHORE: People selecting and purchasing used warm clothes at Empress Road as demand increase during winter season in the Provincial Capital.

CM inspects Lahore Zoo construction activity

LAHORE (APP): Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi paid a detailed visit to the Lahore Zoo, reviewed upgradation work and inspected ongoing construction activities.

Mohsin Naqvi expressed his indignation for not demolishing old constructions and ordered to demolish them and accelerate the up-gradation work. He asked about delay in carrying out the assigned task with regard to timely demolition of old constructions.

The CM also summoned a team of Infrastructure Development Authority Punjab (IDAP) at the Lahore Zoo. Naqvi underlined that the Lahore Zoo should give entirely new and unique look after completion of construction work. He ordered to speed up the process of bringing new animals at the Lahore Zoo for entertainment of citizens, especially children.

The CM inspected the under-construction bridge at the Lahore Zoo. Mohsin Naqvi monitored the snake house, giraffe house, lion house, elephant house and fish house. He ordered to make the cages of animals spacious according to international standard. He ordered to pay a special attention to the diet of lions and other animals.

The CM asserted that no compromise would be made on the quality of construction work with regard to upgrading the Lahore Zoo. He was given a briefing by Secretary Wildlife and DG Wildlife about progress being made on up-gradation plan of the Lahore Zoo. Secretary C&W, DG PHA, Deputy Commissioner and officials were also present.

CM felicitates nation on start of Year 2024: Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi, while congratulating

the nation on the start of year 2024, said that "our resolve is much higher than the challenges". Hopefully, the year 2024 would bring a ray of hope for the Pakistani nation, he said and added "Every achievement is possible with determination, resolve and hard work".

The CM underscored that it was utmost strive of the government to bring betterment in lives of people in the year 2024. "Pakistan has commenced its journey of progress and it is not going to halt now. The future of Pakistan is bright and prosperous."

Mohsin Naqvi underlined that "we should say good bye to the year 2023 and welcome the new year 2024. We will have to take into account over achievements and failures. We reiterate our pledge to utilise all our abilities in order to make Pakistan a prosperous country."

PML-N to put country on right track: Atta Ullah Tarar

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz leader Atta Ullah Tarar said on Sunday that Nawaz Sharif had always steered the country out of crisis in the past.

Addressing a workers' convention here on Sunday he said that Lahorites love Nawaz Sharif and always supported the PML-N through thick and thin. He said the PML-N Quaid had started the journey of serving people in 1980.

"Bilawal is contesting from Lahore's constituency NA-127," he said and questioned what work the PPP had done in Karachi for the welfare of people.

Speaking on the occasion, PML-N leader Khawaja Saad Rafique said, "February 8 is a day when there will be a competition between those who believe in country's development and who put the country's progress in the

reverse gear."

He said that Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif believed in doing practical work instead of making hollow slogans.

Khawaja Saad said he had recently visited Karachi, adding that it had been badly neglected. "The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government remained in power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for ten years but did nothing for the bet-

terment of the people there," he claimed.

PML-N Lahore General Secretary Khawaja Imran Nazir said that the PTI did nothing except weakening the country's economy and telling lies. He said, "On February 8, one voice will be heard from Khyber to Karachi and that is of Nawaz Sharif."

PML-N candidate from NA 128 Hafiz Nauman and others also spoke.

IRSA releases 27,700 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP):Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 27,700 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 37,400 cusecs.

According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1476.87 feet and was 76.87 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 17,200 cusecs and 8,600 cusecs respectively.

The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1156.35 feet, which was 106.35 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded at 6,100 cusecs and 5,000 cusecs respectively.

The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 11,500, 16,300, 19,600 and zero cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 7,300 cusecs of water were released at Nowshera and 6,800 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.

IESCO resorts to 6-8 power load-management

ISLAMABAD (APP):Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) has resorted to six to eight hours of power load-management in all operation circles of the company due to a gap in demand and supply.

According to IESCO spokesperson, load management would be ended after the restoration of normal supply to the company from the national grid system. The company regretted the inconvenience to the valued consumers, he said.

Lahore's first Bonsai garden showcasing miniature trees

LAHORE (APP): The Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) has opened Lahore's first government-owned Bonsai garden featuring dwarfed trees at the Jilani Park.

The PHA spokesperson told media here Sunday that translated from Japanese, "bonsai" means "tray planting" that involves cultivating dwarfed trees, shrubs, or vines in small pots. He explained that Bonsai can vary in size from just a few inches tall to towering imperial trees exceeding six feet. The dwarfed trees are hundreds of years old, and have been in training for five to 14 years.

While the Western world often associates Bonsai with Japan, dating its origins to the third century A.D., the ancient prac-

tice actually originated over 2,000 years ago in China, the spokesperson mentioned.

The idea of Director General Muhammad Tahir Wattoo, the display centre introduces enthusiasts to hardy trees and shrubs like pines, junipers, and maples that typically thrive outdoors. The center spans over 10,890 square feet (two kanals). Among the plants being put on display are Ficus, Fukien Tea, and Cedar.

Speaking following a visit to the centre, Wattoo remarked that the centuries-old craft of Bonsai is thriving as both a hobby and an art form. He noted that the craft has its roots in Taxila in the Gandhara civilisation and emphasised that the center is a gift to Lahore and its residents from the PHA.

Mayor announces to open Karachi Metropolitan Museum to citizens on March 23

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab has announced to opening of the Karachi Metropolitan Museum to the citizens on March 23, 2024 located at the historic Denso Hall building.

He said this while addressing a press conference held at Denso Hall on Sunday. Besides this KMC will launch the award of the Karachi Medal on August 14 every year for the heroes who have rendered precious and exceptional services to the city of Karachi, he said.

Cash prizes and medals will also be given to those who make useful and informative documentaries on Karachi. All the money earned by improving the tax recovery system in KMC will be spent on the welfare of the citizens as per the decision of the elected representatives of the city council.

Parking fees between KMC and the town administration, Anti-encroach-

ment and land issues will be resolved under the Sindh Local Government Act.

To solve the traffic problems, a project is being worked on to build parking plazas at different places in the city.

On this occasion, Municipal Commissioner Syed Afzal Zaidi, Mayor Karachi's Representative for Political Affairs Karamullah Waqasi, Deputy Parliamentary Leader in the City Council Dil Muhammad, Senior Director Media Management Ali Hassan Sajid, Director Culture and Sports Saif Abbas Husni and other officers were also present.

Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab said that Karachi is a historical city so KMC is working on the restoration and improvement of the historical heritage of the city. Denso Hall, Frere Hall, Maryweather Tower, KPT Building and KMC building. All are great his-

torical buildings, this is the historical heritage of the city which unfortunately got hidden. We will tell our future generations what has been the historical background of this city for which the establishment of the first Metropolitan Museum of Pakistan in the historical building of Denso Hall built in 1886 was approved in the recent meeting of the City Council.

On this occasion, he showed the historical records and documents regarding Karachi and said that in what era the land registry system was introduced, this city has everything, when the first birth certificate in Karachi was issued. The details of this are also available, we have also taken out the register of death certificates and the statues inside the Frere Garden were also installed in someone's house.



LAHORE: People busy in selecting and purchasing old books in the Provincial Capital.



Process of filling appeals against RO decision started

PESHAWAR (APP): The process of filing of appeals against the decision of returning officers (RO) for general election 2024 was started in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Sunday.

According to Election Commission of Pakistan, the process of filing of appeals against RO decisions would continue till January 3, 2024.

The process of submission of nomination papers and acceptance or rejection

of nomination papers by the returning officers have been completed.

The appellate tribunal would dispose of these appeals by January 10, 2024.

According to PTI, the nomination papers of former Speaker National Assembly, Asad Qaiser from NA-19 and PK-50, ex provincial minister Shahram Tarkai from NA-20 and PK-53 Swabi and Ali Ameen Gandapur NA- 44

DI Khan were rejected.

The nomination papers of former Federal Minister Murad Saeed from Swat, Sher Afzal Marwat, Shahryar Afridi from Kohat and Sher Ali Arbab from Peshawar, Muhammad Azam, Sabagatullah of Dir, Atif Khan of Mardan and Shandana Gulzar were also rejected.

The nomination papers of PTI stalwarts were rejected on various grounds. Meanwhile, the nomina-

tion papers of PTI Parliamentarians Chairman Pervez Khattak and his son in law, Dr Imran Khan Khattak from Nowshera, Jumat e Islami Ameer Sirajul Haq from Dir, former Federal Minister Khawaja Muhammad Khan Hoti from Mardan, Ikhtair Wali Khan of PMLN from Nowshera, Mian Iftikhar from Pabbi Nowshera and Haji Ghulam Ahmed Bilour of ANP from Peshawar were accepted.

SCCI chief unveils new variants of MG electric vehicles



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR : President, Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fuad Ishaq unveiled new electric vehicles introduced by MG Khyber Motors here during a ceremony held at chamber house.

The vehicles' launching ceremony was attended by the chamber vice president Ijaz Khan Afridi, MG Khyber Motors Chief Executive Officer, Naeem Afridi, CEO AA Gems and

Jewelry Abdullah Afridi, executive member Monawar Khurshid, Muhammad Ismail, former senior vice president Imran Khan Mohmand, and Ihsanullah, Nisar Ahmad, Waqar Ahmad, Mazar ul Haq, Fazal e Wahid, Ishiaq Muhammad and members of the business community, said in a press release here on Sunday.

On the occasion, MG Khyber Motors CEO Naeem Afridi and technical staff enlightened partici-

pants of the event about new variants of MG Electric vehicles, its significance, benefits and various features.

Fuad Ishaq congratulated MG Khyber Motors for launching new electric vehicles of different variants, stating that environment pollution would be reduced by introduction of new electric vehicles.

He added that environmentally friendly vehicles will be available to the business community and

people, which is economically and best as compared to vehicles, plying on petrol.

Administration of the MG Khyber Motors on the occasion while briefing the participants that MG electric vehicles were not only very economical as compared to cars, plying on petrol and diesel but they also environment friendly.

Ijaz Afridi, vice president of the chamber also addressed the participants, terming the launching of electric vehicles by MG Khyber Motors highly welcoming and hoped that it would assist to control over the rising environmental pollution in the province.

Speaker during the event emphasised the need for launching new electric vehicles to overcome the growing environmental issues in KP and rest parts of the country.

CEO of the MG Khyber Motors, Naeem Afridi during the event responded to various queries of the participants and gave a detailed briefing to the chambers' president Fuad Ishaq, vice president Ijaz Khan Afridi and others about new electric vehicles of various variants, features and its importance and features.

Returning of illegally staying foreigners from KP continued

PESHAWAR (APP): Returning of illegally staying foreigners from Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa continued and 513 people were sent to Afghanistan via Peshawar, Torkham border, an official of the Home and Tribal Affairs Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa said here Sunday.

According to details, given to the media men, he said, a total of 6,600 migrants were sent to Afghanistan and a total 5287 migrants from Pakhtunkhwa, 129 from Islamabad, 1150 from Punjab, 34 from Azad Kashmir were sent to

Afghanistan.

A total of 268,552 people have been deported from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Afghanistan through Peshawar, Torkham border, the official said. He disclosed that efforts are being made to send migrants to Afghanistan from Peshawar, other borders, Angoor Adda and Kharlachi.

A total of 3703 people were sent to Afghanistan through Angoor Adda border while 698 people were sent to Afghanistan from Kharlachi border, the official said. He said 2,72, 954 people have been sent to Afghanistan from the three borders of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

However, according to

the latest survey by the district administration and local police, details of illegal foreigners have been compiled. There are 676 illegal aliens in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including 172 men, 141 women and 354 children.

He said 38 families in which 68 men, 60 women, 272 people including 144 children are living in Kurram District, and 35 families in Khyber district, including 35 men, 32 women, 144 people with 77 children, are residing at Bara, Jamardud and Landi Kotal.

In Haripur district, 16 families in which 27 men, 22 women, 38 children including 87 people are residing at Ghazi, Haripur

and Khanpur. In District Malakand, 7 families including 7 men, 6 women, 47 people including 34 children are residing at Dargai.

In District Peshawar 4 families in which 8 men, 8 women, 36 people including 18 children are living at Shah Alam place and 10 families including 35 people are residing illegally in Lower Chitral and 19 people are residing illegally in Nowshera district, 14 people in Dir Upper and 6 people in Mardan district, the official confirmed. He said the district administration and local police are committed to ensure safe return of all illegally staying foreigners across the province to their home land.

Dr. Noreen obtains Ph.D



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Noreen Naz, Deputy Controller of Examinations Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar has been conferred with Doctorate Degree for her first-ever of its kind research on the establishment of a Model Research University in Pakistan.

The scholar of Education Department of Qurtuba University Peshawar, under supervision of Dr. Ifiat Ara has defended her research thesis.

On the eve of public defence besides external examiners, Dr. Arshad Ali Director Advance Studies Research Board University of Peshawar, Dr. Ihsan of Sarhad University, Dr. Rahim of Qurtuba University, teachers and large number of students were present.

If the government gets benefit from the research, Pakistan would get a front-line position in the global Higher Education field leading the prosperous economic status in the world.

Rs50,000 fine imposed

PESHAWAR (APP): The District and Session Judge Peshawar Ashfaq Taj imposed a fine of Rs.50,000/- on Kalsoom Maternity Hospital for maltreatment of a patient and her relatives.

Irshad Ali through his lawyer Anwar Ali Khan Advocate had filed a complaint before the Healthcare Commission Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stating that the staff of the said Hospital had maltreated him or his patient Zahida Begum and had taken

Rs.50000/- from him in the name of greetings.

The Health Care Commission had rejected the complaint arrived against which the complainant had filed an appeal before the District and Sessions Judge Peshawar through his Lawyer Anwar Ali Khan Advocate, the other day.

During the course of proceedings, the respondent had admitted receiving the said amount having been demanded in the name of greetings from the com-

plainant. Therefore, the Judge imposed a fine of Rs.50,000/- on Kalsoom Maternity Hospital directing that the Health Care Commission operating under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Care Commission Act 2015 must recover and pay this amount to the complainant.

In case of default, the Court further directed to recover it under this Act as land revenue under the West Pakistan Land Revenue Act 1967 and pay the same to the complainant.



PESHAWAR: Mayor Haji Zubair Ali with newly elected cabinet of Peshawar Press Club.



PESHAWAR: Secretary E&P Nisar Ahmad Khan and CEO PEDO Engr. Naeem Khan taking oath from newly elected cabinet of PEDO's Officers Association.

Governor, CM felicitate newly elected PPC cabinet

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Haji Ghulam Ali and Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice Retired Arshad Hussain Shah on Sunday felicitated the newly elected office bearers of The Unity Democratic Alliance Panel of Peshawar Press Club (PPC) for the year 2024.

In their separate messages, the Governor and Chief Minister congratulated President Arshad Aziz Malik and his cabinet.

The Governor Ghulam Ali and Chief Minister Arshad Hussain Shah expressed hope that the newly elected cabinet would utilize their leadership and professional skills for the prosperity and advancement of the journalistic community in the province.

They emphasized their responsibility in fostering a positive journalistic environment and promoting excellence in the field of journalism.

PMLNLF congratulated PPC cabinet

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial President of Pakistan Muslim League-N Lawyers Forum (PMLNLF) Kifayatullah Khan, Senior Vice President Farhad Ali, General Secretary Akbar Yusuf Khalil, Secretary Information Saleem Shah Hoti and Advisor Muhammad Atif Nazir have felicitated the newly elected President of Peshawar Press Club Arshad Aziz Malik and his cabinet.

In a joint statement, they said that the success of the journalist community for the second stint in office with a huge majority is an expression of full confidence in their leadership by journalist fraternity. They said that journalism is the fourth pillar of the state which plays a key role in the development of the country.

PMLN Lawyer Forum said that journalists are the ears and eyes of the nation who have to play a major responsibility for national identity and promotion. PML-N stalwarts expressed the hope that the new cabinet of Peshawar Press Club would play an active role for freedom of media, public rights and welfare of journalists.

Weather to be cold, dry in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The weather is likely to be cold and dry in most of the districts of KP, an official of the Department of Meteorology said here Sunday.

There is a possibility of fog in the morning and evening in the districts of Nowshera, Mardan, Swabi, Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan and Bannu, the Met office official said.

He said in Kalam, the mercury fell due to freezing and the temperature in Kalam is minus 3 degrees centigrade recorded while in Peshawar, the minimum temperature is expected to be 5 degrees Celsius and the maximum temperature is expected to be 21 degrees Celsius. Similarly, Dir minus 2, Chitral minus 1, Parachinar 1, Malam Jabba 2 and Takht Bhai recorded 5 degrees Celsius, MD officials said.

Health Department launches campaign

— to combat illegal narcotic drug activities

PESHAWAR (APP): The Health Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, under the guidance of Secretary Health Mahmood Aslam Wazir, on Sunday commenced a targeted campaign in response to the escalating illegal sale, storage, and distribution of narcotic drugs in the province.

According to Secretary Health Mahmood Aslam Wazir the Department of Health has received numerous complaints regarding the illicit trade of narcotic medicines in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. These substances, falling under Schedule B & G of The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Drug Rules 1982 (amended 2017), require a separate license (Form-11) for authorized sale.

Executed by Drug Inspectors, a focused effort unfolded on December 26th and 27th, 2023, across multiple districts.

The campaign's findings

were promptly reported to Secretary Health by the Director General of Drug Control and Pharmacy Services, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

An extensive report reveals inspections of medical stores in various districts, resulting in actions taken against violators of drug laws. In Abbottabad, 43 medical stores were inspected, leading to actions against 9 establishments. Similar interventions occurred in Bannu, Buner, Chitral, DI Khan, Mardan, Haripur, Mansehra, Lakki Marwat, Nowshera, Orakzai, Dir Lower, Swabi, Kohat, Malakand, North Waziristan, Swat, Charsadda, and Tank, with multiple stores facing consequences for drug law violations.

Secretary Health emphasized the continuity of this campaign until the complete eradication of illegal drug activities in the province.

Cases initiated against

offenders will undergo preliminary investigation by Drug Inspectors, and upon permission from the Provincial Quality Control Board (PQCB), they will be forwarded to The Drug Court for judicial proceedings, as outlined in section 11(6) of The Drug Act 1976.

Offenders have been charged under sections 231 C, 231 (i), 231 a (X) of The Drug Act 1976, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Drug Rules 1982 (amended 2017). Additionally, suspected sampling has been conducted for test analysis, accompanied by the sealing of premises.

Secretary Health Mahmood Aslam Wazir asserted a zero-tolerance policy towards such offenses, declaring his mission to eliminate illegal narcotic drug activities in the province. The cases will be pursued with rigor to ensure a drug-free and healthy future for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Cabinet of PEDO's Officers Association takes oath

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The newly elected cabinet of PEDO's Officers Association (Registered), a subsidiary of the Energy and Power Department KP on Sunday took the oath.

Secretary E&P Nisar Ahmad Khan and CEO PEDO Engr. Naeem Khan took oath from the newly elected Chairman of the Cabinet Haji Mohammad Ibrar, President Engineer Rabbib Ullah Shah, Vice President Engineer Moqem Uddin, Finance Secretary Imran Khan and others.

Speaking at the event

organized in this regard, Secretary Power Nisar Ahmad Khan said that PEDO is a profitable entity of the province, which brings more than Rs 4 billion to the province annually.

Several energy projects have entered in final stages of completion, the completion of which is expected to generate an additional income of more than Rs 10 billion for the province. He stressed that all officers devote all their energies to making the institution number one.

Chief Executive Naeem Khan reiterated that he has taken measures to solve all

the problems of employees and will continue to work for the welfare of the organization in the future.

Later on, newly elected President, Habib Ullah Shah and Chairman Muhammad Ibrar presented the charter of demand, in which the association included the gratuity of employees, health facilities for employees and residential colonies etc.

In the future agenda and expressed hope that they will devote all their energies in the best interest of the organization.

They will do their best to solve the problems of the employees.



PESHAWAR: Leishmaniasis is a parasitic disease caused by a Leishmania parasite and exists in three forms including Cutaneous Leishmaniasis (CL), Visceral Leishmaniasis (VL) and Mucocutaneous Leishmaniasis (ML). According to WHO, an estimated 700,000 to one million new CL cases occur annually around the globe while the disease affects some of the world's poorest people and is associated with malnutrition, displacement, poor housing, weak immune system, climate change and lack of financial resources. Match a photo with APP feature Slugged "Leishmaniasis: a disfiguring skin infection surging in KP."

PIC releases annual report

PESHAWAR (APP): In 2023, more than 61,000 heart patients, including 9,000 children, were examined in the OPD of Peshawar Institute of Cardiology, spokesman Rifat Anjum told media men during a briefing here on Sunday.

During 2023, more than 1400 patients underwent cardiac surgeries in PIC, spokesperson Miss Rifat Anjum said. She said that more than 11,000 angiogra-

phy and angioplasty procedures including 450 children were performed during one year.

She said 13,000 heart patients were brought to the emergency hospital and more than 15,600 patients underwent angiography, angioplasty, heart operations and other treatments free of charge on health cards.

She disclosed that 21 Tavi surgeries of interna-

tional standards were performed without chest surgery and not only the patients of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other provinces but also the neighboring country of Afghanistan have been given the best facilities in the PIC.

In Peshawar Institute of Cardiology, about 4 thousand Afghan patients were given treatment facilities in OPD. Spokesperson Rifat Anjum said.



In brief

'Fully prepared to hold polls'

QUETTA (INP): Provincial Election Commissioner Balochistan Ijaz Anwar Chohan has said that the commission was fully prepared to hold peaceful and transparent elections. In a statement issued on Sunday, he said that all necessary arrangements for general elections to be held on February 8, 2024 have been finalized. Ijaz Anwar Chohan further stated that a monitoring cell has been established to look into the issues. He said that all security arrangements have also been finalized.

Sardar papers accepted F.P. Report

MINGORA: Commissioner Pakistan Boys Scouts Association Sardar Waqar Shahzad Advocate nomination papers are accepted from NA 9 as well as for provincial assembly from Swat. PBSA Commissioner Waqar Ahmad Shahzad said that he will prioritize public welfare by challenging status quo of success in general election scheduled on 8th February 2024. It is worthy to mention that Sardar Waqar Shahzad is dynamic civil society member for change in Pakistan especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Gas leakage claims life

ABBOTTABAD (APP): In a tragic incident in Abbottabad, a fatal house fire broke out due to a gas heater, claiming a precious life. A Rescue-1122 fire vehicle, accompanied by firefighters and an ambulance with a medical technician, swiftly responded to the scene to control the flames and provide emergency assistance. Despite the issuance of guidelines for the use of gas heaters during the winter season by Rescue-1122, the district administration, and Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL), it is disheartening that people continue to neglect these guidelines, leading to the loss of precious human lives. Authorities are urging the public to adhere to safety guidelines to prevent further tragedies during the winter season.

Driver losses life in Battagram

BATTAGRAM (APP): At least one person on Sunday died and 21 others injured when a passenger jeep deviated off the road and fell into a gorge. After the incident Rescue 1122 Battagram sent two medical ambulances to the scene. According to the local police sources, the driver of the passenger jeep lost his control over the vehicle and fell into the deep gorge, the accident resulted in the loss of the driver and 20 injuries including 11 women.

Three rustlers arrested

SARGODHA (APP): Police claimed on Sunday to have arrested three members of a cattle thief gang including its ringleader and recovered cattle from their possession. On the direction of DPO Muhammad Faisal Kamran, a team of Bhagtanwala police station arrested ringleader Safdar and his two accomplices, identified as Siyam Safdar and Zubair, and recovered six stolen cows and two buffaloes worth Rs 2.4 million.

500KV line catches fire

GUDDU (INP): The 500KV high transmission line of Guddu Power Plant caught fire due to a technical fault, reported on Sunday. After the incident, three lines of 500KV tripped. According to the NTDC officials, the technical fault occurred due to fog.

Construction, development of country: Christian community key player: Mayor

F.P. Report

MARDAN: City Mayor Mardan Himayatullah Mayar Advocate has said that Pakistan is a peaceful country where people belonging to all faiths and religions are living in harmony and all rights are fully available to them.

The local government is serious about the immediate solution of problems faced by the minorities at their door steps.

He expressed these views while addressing the

Christmas cake cutting ceremony with the Christian community in the local church organized by the non-governmental organization SDO.

Pastor Samuel Joseph, Organization President Muhammad Arif, Minority Tehsil Councilor Zubair Yaqoob, Ashok Kapur and Cantt Member Michael Andreas also addressed the ceremony while Nighat Seema, Maulana Inayat-ur-Rehman, Namdar Khan, from the civil society also addressed the ceremony.

While Atiqur Rehman, Sajjad Saleem, Atif Khan and others also participated. Gifts were also given to the children during the ceremony.

Mayor said that generally in Pakistan, followers of all faiths including Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs are living together peacefully.

On the occasion of Christmas, the Christian community also offered special prayers for the country's development, prosperity and security.

Strict security arrangements for churches

SARGODHA (INP): The district police made strict security arrangements at churches in Sargodha and other parts of the district here on Sunday.

A spokesman for district police said here that District Police Officer Muhammad Faisal Kamran had ordered foolproof security for churches and all other religious places of the Christian community.

An adequate number of police officers and personnel were deployed in and around churches. Personnel of Elite Force, Traffic Police and other law enforcement agencies were also deployed at important

points on Sunday.

Khushab development schemes reviewed

Commissioner Muhammad Ajmal Bhatti on Sunday made a surprise visit to Khushab to review the ongoing schemes of the Highways Department.

He inspected the under-construction road from Qaidabad to Shahpur in connection with the construction of Sargodha-Mianwali Road.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Revenue Khushab Amir Taimur, Deputy Director Development Sohail Sikandar, XEN Highways Intiaz Alam and Deputy

Director Technical Rana Shahid Imran were also present.

The commissioner checked the quality of the construction material and made it clear to the contractor that there would be no compromise on the material. He directed him to speed up the work and asked officers to review the work on a daily basis.

The commissioner was briefed about the details of the funds released so far.

He said that the construction of the road should be completed within the stipulated time so that the problems of the people could be mitigated.

Van driver dies, seven hurt in road mishap

MULTAN (APP): A van driver was crushed to death while seven others sustained injuries due to a collision between a minivan and a bus near Qasba Maral chowk Larr here on Sunday. According to Rescue officials, a minivan carrying chemicals was on its way when suddenly a passenger bus collided with it near Larr.

As a result, van driver died on the spot while seven others sustained injuries.

Upon receiving the information, Rescue teams rushed to the spot and shifted the body and four injured to Nishtar hospital. Three injured were shifted to Tehsil headquarters hospital Shujabad. The deceased driver was identified as 33 years old Abdul Latif s/o Abdul Majeed resident of Khokhran.

PHIP issues security plan for new year night

Punjab Highway Patrol

(PHP) police Multan region have issued a security plan for New Year night.

SP Patrolling police Huma Naseeb said that the cases would be registered against those involved in one-wheeling, aerial firing and fireworks.

She further said that the action would also be taken against mechanics who manufacture motorcycles for one-wheeling.

All forces and officials would perform security duty on highways in their beat area while Reserves would remain alert to avoid untoward incidents. The mobiles of the patrolling posts will also patrol on highways.

The crackdown against drug peddlers was underway and anti-social elements to be dealt with iron hands on New Year night.

SP said that one-wheeling and aerial firing could cause human loss and urged

the parents to keep an eye on their children.

Motorcycle lifter gang busted, stolen goods recovered

Police claimed to have busted motorcycle lifter gang and recovered stolen goods worth Rs eight hundred thousand including nine motorcycles from their possession.

According to a spokesperson for police, SHO Gulgasht Rao Zia-ur-Rehman along with his team raided and arrested three members of motorcycle lifter Hassan Tariq's gang including Zohaib, Amir and Habib.

Police have also recovered nine stolen motorcycles and Rs one lac cash from their possession while 10 cases of motorcycle theft were traced against the arrested accused.

Further legal action against the criminals was also launched.

Sargodha leads in cleanliness programme

SARGODHA (APP): Sargodha district has come first in the "Ab Gaon Chamkein Gay" programme across Punjab.

According to a handout issued here on Sunday, under the "Now Villages Will Shine" programme, 356,650 activities had been completed in all 186 union councils of Sargodha by the end of this year. These were the most activities recorded in any district across the province.

Deputy Commissioner Capt (ret'd) Shoaib Ali congratulated all members who performed services. He also thanked rural people for their cooperation and interest, saying that without them, the 100 percent target of the programme could not be achieved.

He said that the villages of Sargodha would also

look neat and clean like cities. The DC said that the process of cleaning and repairing of streets, roads and sewer lines was underway in all villages of Sargodha without discrimination. He urged rural people to pay their taxes on time so that the programme could be expanded.

He stressed the need for local government officials and field staff to continue working with the same spirit and dedication.

Seven held with drugs, weapons

Police arrested seven accused including two proclaimed offenders on Sunday and recovered narcotics and weapons from them.

Police said that during an ongoing drive against drug peddlers and criminals, teams of different

police stations conducted raids in their jurisdiction and arrested alleged criminals and recovered 520-gram hashish, 50 liters of liquor, two pistols and a gun.

The accused were identified as Ahsan, Imran, Irfan, Ashraf, Nasir, Bilal and Badar. Cases have been registered against them.

Dense fog engulfs Sargodha city

District city and its adjoining areas have faced dense fog on Sunday day which decreased visibility level by seven to ten meters.

According to a spokesperson, the fog started at late hours of Saturday night and continued till Sunday morning, decreasing visibility level and increasing coldness in the weather.

Security provided to churches in Bahawalpur

BAHAWALPUR (APP): The district police have provided foolproof security to faithful at churches in Bahawalpur City and other parts of the district on Sunday.

A spokesman for Bahawalpur police said here that District Police Officer, Bahawalpur, Syed Muhammad Abbas directed to provide foolproof security to churches and all other religious places of the

Christian community. "An adequate number of police officers and personnel were deployed in and around churches where faithful came to perform prayers on Sunday.

He added that the personnel of Elite Force, Dolphin Force and Traffic Police also deployed at important points on Sunday.

Bahawalpur faces very cold weather

Bahawalpur city and adjoining areas have been facing extremely cold weather as the mercury dropped to five centigrade at night between Saturday and Sunday.

The dense fog/smog has gripped the entire region which used to start in the evening and remained continuous for the next day.

The sun was seen for a while and the whole day passed with fog/smog.



ABBOTTABAD: A delegation of Abbottabad Press Club and Union of Journalists meeting with Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah.

13 injured as bus overturns in Arifwala

BAHAWALNAGAR (INP): Thirteen passengers sustained injuries when their bus overturned near a bridge of Sutlej River on Arifwala Road, police said Sunday.

Rescue 1122 reached the spot and launched a rescue operation by sending off the injured to a nearby hospital.

The accident occurred due to dense fog as the bus driver could not see the river bridge while crossing it.

As a result, the bus overturned, inuring 13 passengers, who were rushed to hospital by rescue 1122.

With foggy weather, many fog-related accidents have been reported in many parts of the country.

Motorists have been advised to follow precautionary measures to avoid accidents.

A few days ago, dense fog on the Grand Trunk (GT) Road led to a massive accident near Chungi No 5 in Jhelum in the wee hours of Thursday, leaving 30 persons wounded.

According to details, around 10 vehicles collided with each other as the visibility turned almost zero due to fog.

Police and rescue teams reached the spot after being informed and shifted the injured to hospital. According to rescue sources, five of the injured were in critical condition.

Six injured as 2 buses collide

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): At least six persons sustained injuries as two buses collided due to dense fog near Loharwala Stop on Khangarh Alipur Road early Sunday morning.

Upon receiving information about the accident, Rescue 1122 personnel rushed to the spot and provided first aid to the injured.

The victims were identified as Muhammad Ali, Sumaira Bibi, Abrar, Muhammad Idrees, Muhammad Afzal and Rabia Bibi.

Rs10.2b state land reclaimed

FAISALABAD (APP): The revenue department reclaimed 1679 Kanals of state land from land grabbers on the order of the Punjab ombudsman.

A spokesman for the local administration said here on Sunday that citizens had filed complaints before the Punjab ombudsman for the retrieval of state land from the Qabza mafia.

After hearing the complaints, Punjab Ombudsman Major (Retired) Azam Suleman Khan issued orders for immediate retrieval of the state land. Revenue officers with the help of local police retrieved 1679 Kanals of land which has the market value of Rs10.2743 billion, he added.

Adulterated milk wasted, fine imposed

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): The Food Safety and Halal Food Authority (FS&HFA) has wasted about 500 liters of adulterated milk and imposed fines of Rs 150,000 over violations in Dera Ismail Khan during the three-day special campaign against milk adulteration.

The campaign was launched following the directions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Food and FS&HFA Deputy Director Sajjad Ahmad had formed a special team at the district level.

The team comprised representatives from FS&HFA, Dairy Development and livestock department and district administration.

The team conducted operations at different places at different times across the district and collected over 150 samples which were tested for both water and chemical adulteration with the help of a state-of-the-art mobile food testing laboratory.

The chemical adulteration was not found in any

of the collected milk samples, however, water adulteration was found in several samples. The fines amounting up to Rs 150,000 were imposed on adulteration of water while 500 liters of milk was destroyed.

On this occasion, the Deputy Director said that the corrupt mafia would be dealt with iron hands.

12 injure in Trolley-Coach collision in D.I.Khan

At least 12 people were wounded when a coach collided with a tractor trolley here on Chashma road on Sunday.

According to police, the coach collided with the tractor-trolley loaded with sugarcane near Al-Moiz Sugar Mills on Chashma Road. The accident happened due to intense fog in the area.

All the injured were shifted to the hospital where some of them including Driver Kamran were told in a critical position.

SP reviews security at Chowkis in Tank

Superintendent of Police (SP) Investigation Tank

Haji Nasir Khan has visited different 'police Chowkis' and routes of the city to review the overall security situation keeping in view the prevailing threats.

According to a police spokesman, the SP Investigation was accompanied by SDPO Headquarters Abdul Rasheed Khan, SDPO City Circle Sharif Ullah Kundi and SDPO Jandola Syed Marjan paid this visit following the instructions of District Police Officer Tank Ifthikhar Ali Shah.

The visiting officers checked security on Bannu road, Wana road, DI Khan Road and Bypass Road besides at Luqman Chowki, Sami Ullah Chowki, Hasan Khan Chowki, Latif Chowki and under-construction Qayyum Shaheed Chowki. The visiting officers also checked the weapons and ammunition of on-duty personnel and directed them to remain alert all the time.

The SP informed the on-duty officers and personnel at Chowkis about the prevailing security threats.

Rs.2.78m fine imposed on shopkeepers

CHINIOT (INP): District authorities Chiniot imposed fine of Rs. 2.78m approximately USD 13,500 on shopkeepers on overcharging for essential commodities throughout 2023.

DC Muhammad Asif Raza announced the figures during a recent media briefing, outlining the district administration's efforts to ensure price stability for basic goods.

Price control magistrates conducted a staggering 2 lakh 34 thousand 975 inspections across markets and bazaars throughout the year, meticulously monitoring adherence to set prices. These inspections yielded 10,879 cases of overcharging, prompting fines against the offending shop-

keepers. The collected fines were deposited directly into the government treasury.

In addition to financial penalties, 32 shops were sealed for persistent violations. Deputy Commissioner Raza emphasized the district's zero-tolerance policy for price gouging, stating that access to essential commodities at fixed rates is a basic right for consumers.

Price control magistrates played a crucial role in achieving this price stability. Daily inspections were conducted to verify displayed price lists and ensure compliance with official rates. Violators faced swift and strict action, deterring further attempts at overcharging.

DC commended the magistrates' efforts, highlighting their dedication to protecting consumer rights and maintaining a fair marketplace within the district.

64 police pickets to set up

DG KHAN (APP): Dera Ghazi Khan (division) decided to set up 64 temporary police pickets to beef up security arrangements during New Year Night.

A total of 907 police officials along with 10 DSPs and 128 other officers were deputed at different locations to monitor the security. The security arrangements were extended across all four districts of the region including DG Khan, Layyah, Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur. Special attention has been given to key locations such as important venues, entertainment spots, public parks, bustling markets.

To maintain a vigilant presence, 46 police mobiles and 47 motorcycle squad teams will be continuously patrolling the area, complemented by constant monitoring through CCTV cameras. Additionally, extra traffic police personnel have been deployed on major highways to ensure smooth traffic flow.

The respective District Police Officers have received directives to swiftly bring to justice any elements that might disrupt the peace of society.

5 factories fined for ecocide

FAISALABAD (APP): The Environment Protection Department has imposed a fine of Rs.1.5 million on five factories on the charges of violating the law and polluting the environment in different parts of Faisalabad.

Deputy Director Johar Abbas Randhawa said here on Sunday that environment teams checked various factories and mills and found five of them on

Satiana Road, Jaranala-Khurarianwala Road, Jaranwala Road and Nishatabad-Jhumra Road involved in burning prohibited materials and polluting the environment.

Therefore, the teams imposed a fine of Rs.300,000 each on four factories situated at Jaranwala Road and Jaranwala-Khurarianwala Road whereas the owner of a textile unit situated at Nishatabad-Jhumra Road was fined Rs.200,000 and the textile unit situated at Satiana Road Rs100,000, he added.

Traffic plan for Murree devised

MURREE (INP): The traffic police have devised a comprehensive plan for Murree during the snowfall season.

As per plan, entry of heavy vehicles in the city will be banned and several points have been reserved for car parking. Besides, an emergency Help Line 051-9269200 has also been introduced for facilitating the tourists.

Different main roads including Kashmir Point, Mall Road, Guldana Road and other roads have been closed for two-way traffic.

Two traffic control rooms at Jinnah Hall Murree and Suni Bank Traffic picket, have been established to facilitate the tourists while 12 facilitation centers have also been set up.

NAROWAL (APP): In the light of the instructions of Chief Minister Punjab Syed Mohsin Naqvi, the provision of food items at cheap prices is being ensured to citizens throughout the district. In this regard, the performance of price control magistrates is being reviewed on a daily basis.

These views were expressed by the deputy commissioner at an important meeting. DC Syed Hassan Raza said that price control magistrates should play an active role in maintaining stability in the prices of food items and inspect shops on a daily basis. They should not only

impose heavy fines on violators but also seal shops and lodge an FIR against shopkeepers, he added.

According to the District Officer (DO) Industries, 25,612 inspections were made throughout the district from 1st December to 31st December as part of an ongoing campaign against hoarding and overcharging, in which 883 shopkeepers were found guilty of violations and a total fine of Rs.1,662,700 was imposed.

During the campaign, 4 cases were registered, 26 people were arrested and a shop was also sealed, he added.



China’s Xi says ‘reunification’ with Taiwan is inevitable

BEIJING (Reuters): China's "reunification" with Taiwan is inevitable, President Xi Jinping said in his New Year's address on Sunday, striking a stronger tone than he did last year with less than two weeks to go before the Chinese-claimed island elects a new leader.

The Jan. 13 presidential and parliamentary elections are happening at a time of fraught relations between Beijing and Taipei. China has been ramping up military pressure to assert its sovereignty claims over democratically governed Taiwan.

China considers Taiwan to be its "sacred territory" and has never renounced the use of force to bring it under Chinese control, though Xi made no mention of military threats in his speech carried on state television. "The reunification of the motherland is a historical inevitability," Xi said, though the official English translation of his remarks published by the Xinhua news agency used a more simple phrase: "China will surely be reunified".

"Compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait should be bound by a common sense of purpose and share in the glory of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," he

added. The official English translation wrote "all Chinese" rather than "compatriots".

Last year, Xi said only that people on either side of the strait are "members of one and the same family" and that he hoped people on both sides will work together to "jointly foster lasting prosperity of the Chinese nation". China has taken particular exception to current Vice President Lai Ching-te, the presidential candidate for Taiwan's ruling Democratic Party (DPP) and leading in opinion polls by varying margins, saying he is a dangerous separatist.

Responding late on Saturday to Lai's comments at a live televised presidential debate earlier in the day, China's Taiwan Affairs Office said Lai had "exposed his true face as a stubborn 'worker for Taiwan independence' and destroyer of peace across the Taiwan Strait".

"His words were full of confrontational thinking," spokesperson Chen Binhua said in a statement.

Since 2016 - when President Tsai Ing-wen took office - the DPP-led government has promoted separatism and is the "criminal mastermind" in obstructing exchanges

across the strait and damaging the interests of Taiwan's people, Chen said.

"As the leading figure of the DPP authorities and current DPP chairman, Lai Ching-te cannot escape his responsibility for this," he added.

Tsai and Lai have repeatedly offered talks with China, but have been rebuffed.

The DPP says only Taiwan's people can decide their future, as does Lai's main opponent in the election, Hou Yu-ih from Taiwan's largest opposition party the Kuomintang (KMT). The KMT traditionally favours close ties with China but strongly denies being pro-Beijing. Hou has also denounced Lai as an independence supporter.

The defeated Republic of China government fled to Taiwan in 1949 after losing a civil war with Mao Zedong's communists who founded the People's Republic of China. The Republic of China remains Taiwan's formal name.

Lai said on Saturday that the Republic of China and People's Republic of China "are not subordinate to each other", wording he and Tsai have used previously which has also riled Beijing.

Israeli indicted for impersonating soldier, stealing weapons

JERUSALEM (Reuters): Israeli prosecutors filed criminal charges on Sunday against a man accused of impersonating a soldier to join the Gaza war, of stealing munitions and, according to media, of posing for a frontline picture with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israel was blindsided by an Oct. 7 cross-border rampage by Hamas militants, with security forces often organising themselves spontaneously in the field to repel the infiltrators and mount a counter-offensive.

According to the indictment brought in Tel Aviv District Court, defendant Roi Yifrah never served in the Israeli military but nonetheless managed to make his way into

the war zones by pretending to be a member of an elite Shin Bet combat unit.

Shin Bet is Israel's domestic intelligence agency.

The top-rated Channel 12 TV aired a photograph of what it said was the 35-year-old, in full battle gear, posing with other soldiers alongside Netanyahu at a helicopter landing site. An Israeli official confirmed that Yifrah had posed with Netanyahu, but said the prime minister was never at risk due to "several layers of security at the site".

The Prime Minister's Office did not immediately reply to a request for comment. The ruse "facilitated (Yifrah's) access to firearms, ammu-

nition and military and police equipment," the indictment said, adding that a purloined haul found in Yifrah's home included an assault rifle, various kinds of bullets, smoke grenades and holsters.

The five counts against him, including aggravated fraud and larceny, could amount to a maximum prison sentence of 36 years. But Yifrah's lawyer argued that the defendant should be lauded.

"My client is a medic who ... saved lives under fire, while risking his life and eliminating terrorists," the lawyer, Eitan Sabag, told Channel 12, adding that "the defendant, under the circumstances, is the State of Israel - not Roi Yifrah".

Congo President Tshisekedi re-elected after contested poll

KINSHASA (Reuters): Democratic Republic of Congo President Felix Tshisekedi has been re-elected for a second term after getting more than 73% of the vote in a Dec. 20 poll, the country's election commission CENI said on Sunday.

The declaration of the result follows days of opposition complaints about the way the election was conducted. Logistical setbacks, an election day over-run, and an opaque vote count have fuelled a dispute that threatens to further destabilise a country roughly the size of Western Europe which is the world's top producer of cobalt and other prized industrial commodities.

Announcing the results in the capital Kinshasa, Denis Kadima, head of CENI, said Tshisekedi had obtained more than 13 million out of over 18 million valid votes, adding that turnout was more than 43%. Cheers erupted from

Tshisekedi's supporters present at the declaration after Kadima announced that Tshisekedi was provisionally elected.

Speaking to hundreds who gathered at his campaign headquarters after the announcement, Tshisekedi, flanked by his wife and mother, thanked supporters and promised to speed up programmes during his second term to tackle inequalities. "You believed in my commitment not to spare any effort so that our country will retake its rightful place, and so that the Congolese people will recover their pride and dignity in belonging to this country," he said.

"You believed in my fight against inequalities that have for a long time characterized our society." Rival political parties, candidates and those mandated by them have two days to challenge the outcome of the election at the Constitutional Court. The court then has seven days to

rule on the case and proclaim the final result.

Opposition frontrunner Moise Katumbi, who came second with 18%, has already ruled out mounting a legal challenge to the results, citing an alleged lack of independence of state institutions.

Other opposition candidates have not clarified whether they will challenge the results.

Earlier on Sunday a group of nine opposition presidential candidates, including Katumbi, and six leaders of political parties asked supporters to take to the streets to protest after the release of the provisional results. "We categorically reject the sham election ... and its results," the main opposition candidates said in a joint declaration. They demanded fresh elections be held with a new electoral body on a date to be agreed by all. "We call on our people to take to the streets en masse after the proclama-

tion of the electoral fraud," they said. While Tshisekedi's supporters celebrated his win in the streets of the capital, there was calm in other cities with little signs of protest on New Year's Eve. The government of Congo had previously rejected calls for a rerun of the elections. Since election day, some of Tshisekedi's main challengers, including former oil executive Martin Fayulu, have been calling for a re-run of the contest and of legislative elections, accusing CENI of allowing the vote to be tipped in the president's favour. CENI and the government have dismissed these allegations and also warnings from independent observer groups that the unscheduled extension of voting and other incidents on election day, and during the tabulation of votes, may have compromised the credibility and legal footing of the poll.

Oscar-tipped 'Society of the Snow' gives voice to Andes plane crash dead

LOS ANGELES (AFP/APP): Roberto Canessa has spent most of his life recounting the astonishing tale of how he survived a plane crash, two avalanches and a diet of human flesh before trekking across freezing mountains to save himself and his friends.

Now the infamous tragedy -- or miracle -- in the Andes that hit Canessa, just 19 at the time, and the other members of his Uruguayan rugby team is the subject of a major new Netflix movie, out January 4 and expected to contend for awards including Oscars.

And Canessa, 70, is only too happy to see it told again, convinced that one of the most incredible survival stories of all time still contains important messages for future generations.

"We all have our own personal mountain range," Canessa told AFP. "And there are many people who are climbing the mountain right now. We must tell them not to be discouraged, to keep going."

"Society of the Snow," from Spanish director J.A. Bayona (also behind "Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom"), focuses on the odyssey that the young, amateur team went through when their plane to Chile crashed in the frozen, high Andes in 1972.

The film's title and story are taken from a book of the same name by Uruguayan writer Pablo Vierci, who collected the testimonies from various members of the "society." For Canessa, the name represents the pact that was born when the survivors realized that "civilized society had left us aside."

"When you're in a rugby team on a plane to Chile to play a match, and suddenly you crash... of course, as human beings, you assume that people will come to rescue you," he recalled.

"But the days begin to pass... you have to make your own water, you have to eat the dead because otherwise you will die. The dead are there, next to you. You begin to see the death of another person not with sadness for him, but sadness for you, because it is like you are on a waiting list." On October 13, 1972, a plane with 45 people on board - members of the Old Christians rugby team, plus some family members and crew -- crashed on the Argentine side of the Andes.

The dramatic impact tore the plane apart, and killed several people including the pilot immediately.

Survivors took shelter in the plane's fuselage, but freezing temperatures -- particularly at night -- thwarted any attempts to trek down the mountain to safety. Others died during the 72 days they remained trapped in the Valley of Tears, from avalanches, infected wounds and dire conditions. "What happened to us

in the Andes is absurd," said Canessa, ultimately one of just 16 who lived to tell the tale. Eventually, Canessa and another survivor endured a remarkable 10-day trek over a mountain peak and into Chile to find rescue, using improvised equipment.

The accident and their feat have been addressed previously on the big screen, with the 1993 film "Alive," starring Ethan Hawke.

But Bayona wanted to tell the story in his native language, with local actors, and felt there was still "something that was missing to tell."

"It was giving those who had not returned the chance to express themselves. Finding that twist gave meaning to our film," he said.

Numa Turcatti, who survived the initial plane crash and helped marshal his increasingly desperate friends throughout their ordeal in the Andes, is the main hero of "Society of the Snow."

For 30-year-old Uruguayan actor Enzo Vogrinic, it was the role of a lifetime, but an intensely difficult challenge. To portray the impact of the hostile mountain environment, the actors gained and shed considerable weight, and spent hours immersed in the snow. "There's no way to tell this story unless you go through suffering," he told AFP. Hungry and constantly cold on set, Vogrinic -- who even shot scenes

while feverish -- described filming the scenes of the two avalanches that struck the survivors as "torture."

"It was almost a scientific film, an experiment to make the poor actors go through the same hardships as us... with the advantage that they got to leave at the end of each day," joked Canessa.

"It is a super-light version of what happened on the mountain. We had it much worse.

If I had a movie of how we had it, audiences would leave the theater," he added.

The movie was selected as the closing film at the Venice film festival, and has earned nominations for January's Golden Globes and Critics Choice Awards.

It is also Spain's official entry for the Oscars, and has made the final shortlists of possible nominees for best international film, best visual effects, best score, and best makeup and hairstyling. Academy Award nominations will be unveiled in January.

Canessa says the rescue trek through the Andes taught him to take life step by step, and he believes the film serves as a useful metaphor for people watching to think about how they can react to their own challenges.

"Sit in the cinema and let yourself be carried away by thinking about what you would do if the plane in your life crashed," he said.

Denmark’s Queen Margrethe II announces surprise abdication

COPENHAGEN (Reuters) : Denmark's Queen Margrethe II, Europe's longest-serving monarch, will abdicate on Jan. 14 after 52 years on the throne and will be succeeded by her eldest son Crown Prince Frederik, she announced on Sunday.

The 83-year-old queen, who ascended the throne in 1972, made the surprise announcement on live TV during her traditional New Year's Eve speech, which is viewed by many in the country of 5.9 million people. Referring to a successful back operation she underwent in February, she said, "The surgery naturally gave rise to thinking about the future - whether the time had come to leave the responsibility to

the next generation".

"I have decided that now is the right time. On 14 January 2024 - 52 years after I succeeded my beloved father - I will step down as queen of Denmark," she said.

"I leave the throne to my son, Crown Prince Frederik," she said.

The queen became the longest-serving monarch in Europe following the death of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022. In July, she became the longest-sitting monarch in Denmark's history.

In Denmark, formal power resides with the elected parliament and its government. The monarch is expected to stay above partisan politics, representing the nation with traditional

duties ranging from state visits to national day celebrations.

Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen thanked the queen for her life-long dedication to duty.

"It is still difficult to understand that the time has now come for a change of throne," Frederiksen said in a statement, adding that many Danes had never known another monarch.

"Queen Margrethe is the epitome of Denmark and throughout the years has put words and feelings into who we are as a people and as a nation," she said.

Born in 1940 to Denmark's former monarch King Frederik IX and Queen Ingrid,

Margrethe has throughout her life enjoyed broad support from Danes, who are fond of her tactful and yet creative personality. She is also known for her love of archaeology and has taken part in several excavations.

She became heir to her father in 1953 at the age of 31, after a constitutional amendment allowed women to inherit the throne. In 1967, she married French diplomat Henri de Laborde de Monpezat, who served as her royal consort until his death in 2018.

The couple's two sons are Crown Prince Frederik, who will become King Frederik X, and Prince Joachim. Frederik married Mary Elizabeth Donaldson, an Australian, in 2004.

6.4-magnitude earthquake hits off eastern Indonesia

JAKARTA (Xinhua/APP): A 6.4-magnitude earthquake struck off Indonesia's eastern province of Papua earlier Sunday, with no potential to cause a tsunami, the country's meteorology, climatology and geophysics agency said.

The weather agency previously

said the magnitude of the quake was recorded at 6.5.

The earthquake jolted at 00:16 a.m. Jakarta time Sunday (1716 GMT Saturday) with the epicenter located at 1 km south of Sarmi regency of Papua province and a depth of 50 km, it said.

The agency did not issue a tsunami warning because the tremors of the quake would not trigger giant waves. Indonesia has been frequently stricken by earthquakes because of its position on a vulnerable quake-hit zone called "the Pacific Ring of Fire."

Nicaraguan priests targeted in latest wave of arrests

SAN JOSÉ (AFP/APP): Nicaraguan authorities have arrested at least 12 priests since December 20, opposition figures and news reports said Saturday.

Eleven of those arrested appear on a list given to AFP by lawyer Martha Molina, an expert on Nicaraguan Church affairs, exiled in the United States.

The newspaper La Prensa also said Jader Hernandez, pastor of a church in Managua, was

detained.

Nicaragua is led by President Daniel Ortega, a former guerrilla leader who toppled a US-backed right-wing regime in the 1970s and ruled for more than a decade.

But since returning to power in 2007, Ortega has turned authoritarian as he exiled and jailed dissidents and rivals, quashed presidential term limits and seized control of all branches of the state.

He has also locked

horns with the Catholic Church.

The Central American nation has shuttered more than 3,000 associations, NGOs and unions in the wake of 2018 protests against Ortega's government.

Hundreds of critics have been detained, including several people who sought to challenge Ortega ahead of presidential elections in 2021.

In October, the authorities shuttered the local office of the Franciscans, a Catholic order.

Relations between the Vatican and the Managua government deteriorated amid the 2018 protests, during which more than 300 people were killed in clashes between the opposition and government supporters, according to the United Nations.

Ortega's government was angry that churches sheltered protesters during a crackdown on those massive anti-government demonstrations.

Myanmar to introduce registration fees for online sales businesses

YANGON (Xinhua/APP) -:Myanmar's Ministry of Commerce has launched a new registration system for online sales businesses in November and will introduce registration fees for online services, effective on Jan. 1, 2024.

The registration and renewal fees were stipulated at 70,000 kyats (about 33.33 U.S. dollars) for companies, 50,000 kyats (about 23.8 dollars) for small and medium enterprises, and 30,000 kyats (about 14.28 dollars) for individuals, the ministry said in a state-

ment on Thursday. Non-compliance with registration will result in legal action.

The commerce ministry said that it has granted an exemption for registration fees until Dec. 31 starting from Nov. 2, when the online sales business registration system was first initiated.

According to the ministry, each registration will be valid for up to two years, starting from Jan. 1, 2024. On Sept. 5, the commerce ministry issued e-commerce guidelines aiming at bolstering the

country's e-commerce sector, it said.

Myanmar exports over 900,000 tons of corn in over 8 months: Myanmar exported 918,606 tons of corn in eight months of the 2023-24 fiscal year starting from April 1, according to the Ministry of Commerce on Sunday.

The Southeast Asian country earned more than 275 million U.S. dollars from corn exports during the period between April 1 and Dec. 15 this year, the ministry's figures showed.

According to the data,

the country exported over 44,000 tons of corn in November. During the period, Myanmar exported the corn to countries like the Philippines, Singapore and China, via both sea routes and land borders, official data showed.

The country's overall export earnings during the period reached 10.13 billion dollars, according to the ministry's data.

Myanmar mainly exports agricultural products, animal products, marine products, minerals, forest products and manufacturing goods.

Armed drone shot down near US base in northern Iraq

BAGHDAD (Reuters): Defence systems shot down an armed drone on Sunday over Erbil airport in northern Iraq where U.S. and other international forces are stationed, Iraqi Kurdistan's counter-terrorism service said in a statement. A group called "Islamic Resistance in Iraq" said

it had launched the drone to attack what it called an "occupation base". There were no casualties or damage to infrastructure, security sources said.

U.S. and international forces based in Iraq and across the border in Syria have been on high alert amid dozens of attacks on their bases since the Israel-Hamas war broke out. Sunday's attack came less than 24 hours after two drones were shot down on Saturday evening near a northern Iraqi military base used by the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces, and al-Harir airbase that also hosts U.S. forces, according to the Kurdish

Regional Government. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed al-Sudani has ordered an investigation in coordination with the Kurdish regional security forces and pledged to pursue those responsible for Saturday's attack, a military spokesman for the prime minister said on Sunday

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Saga of nomination papers

Nomination papers of several PTI contesters for upcoming elections have been rejected on one ground or another including those of Imran Khan who continues to languish in jail on charges that many believe are fake and concocted. On the other hand nomination papers of Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari have been cleared to contest the upcoming elections in February.

Everyone across the board in Pakistan believes that these elections are being held just to path the way of Nawaz Sharif and Bilawal Bhutto to come into power and run the affairs of Pakistan. Everyone across the board also believes that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari himself has no charges of corruption against him but no body denies that Nawaz Sharif and his daughter, Maryam Nawaz has tons of corruption charges against them. And that's where the problem lies. It is not only the putting of Imran Khan in jail and rejecting his elections papers which is causing Pakistani people to react in a peculiar manner but it is the same corrupt faces of the Sharif's family which is causing the hopelessness in the future of Pakistan.

Agreeing with the fact that the establishment supported Imran Khan in the elections held in 2018 does not pacify the hundreds of corruption cases in which the Sharif family is involved. Imran's hate should not become the cause of love for Nawaz Sharif. The future of Pakistan and its almost 200 million inhabitants should not be left in such confusion and chaos.

The other day Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff stated that anti Pakistan rumor mill is in full gear on social media. We completely agree the Chief but such moves by the Election Commission to reject so many nomination papers of one political party only adds more fuel to the social media influencers around the world. Has the Chief of Army Staff ever made a report to see how much money Pakistan spends on its own branding on social media around the world. Every intelligent country around the world, in every important capital, since last several decades has been spending thousands and millions of dollars through their respective embassies on branding their own country on social media. Every political party of Pakistan nationally and internationally spends thousands of dollars to promote their own political party but they do not promote Pakistan. Then who is going to promote Pakistan? Who is going to promote the good things of Pakistan and who is going to promote the challenges of Pakistan?

We believe that Imran Khan and his political party PTI along with all the other political parties have learnt a common lesson of not messing with the establishment. They have learnt that their politics should not reach the defence corridors of Pakistan. The piousness, the charitable work, the cricket World Cup trophy or the Oxford degree does not give Imran Khan the right or liberty to accuse serving military general of plotting to assassinate him. We still fail to understand who gave this idea to Imran Khan to accuse an army general of assassinating him. Pakistani military is known around the world for countering some of the most lethal terrorist organizations in the world and in some the most difficult terrains including the suburbs. If they wanted to eliminate Imran Khan, it was a piece of cake for them. We personally believe they protected him from several attempts to kill.

Having said all this, the conclusion is that if Pakistan wants to be on the right path and direction, it must give the opportunity to deserving candidates to come forth and participate in the due process of elections. Bygone should be bygones and new chapter in the history of Pakistan needs to be turned where free and fair elections decide the destiny of Pakistan. Enough of these old faces and their old corruption cases. Pakistan is full of new and talented faces in every field of life. These talents should be explored and polished. Pakistan deserves better so let's make it better.

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GCC poised to meet 2024's challenges

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg

The Gulf Cooperation Council played an outsized role in global affairs during 2023. Its economy has grown considerably to \$2.3 trillion, more than a 12-fold increase in four decades, thus growing the revenues of its member states, firms and households to enable them to grow and engage more effectively with the global economy.

The GCC also expanded its reach during the year and diversified its strategic partnership portfolio to include major countries and organizations, especially from the Global South. For a long time after its founding in 1981, the organization was inward-looking, focusing on the internal integration between its member states. In 2008, during the global financial crisis, it decided to expand its external relations, starting from traditional relations with Europe and the US. From early 2020 to late 2022, COVID-19 and other factors made it difficult to continue outward expansion at the same pace.

As soon as the pandemic restrictions were relaxed, the GCC and China revived a proposal dating back to 2019. In December 2022, the GCC-China Summit, the first ever, was held in Riyadh. The summit sought to upgrade their mostly economic engagement, which goes back about two decades, to a “strategic partnership,” meaning that its scope will expand to include all areas of mutual interest, including closer security and political coordination. The leaders agreed on an ambitious five-year joint action plan and China, for the first time, took a public stand against some of Iran's destabilizing behavior in the region.

Their economic partnership strengthened during 2023, with China maintaining its position as the GCC's top trading partner. Two-way merchandise trade exceeded \$230 billion, accounting for more than 20 percent of total GCC trade. Thirty percent of China's oil imports came from the GCC, as well as 10 percent of its gas. China was the destination of more than 25 percent of the GCC's chemical and petrochemical exports.

During the year, free trade negotiations came tantalizingly close to conclusion and two-way investments picked up following a slowdown during COVID-19.

In March, the decisions made at last December's summit were put into action, as Beijing witnessed the signing of a deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran to restore diplomatic relations after a seven-year rupture. China subsequently hosted follow-up meetings between the two countries to cement the new deal, generating a hopeful new spirit in the region.

In addition, during 2023, China and the GCC launched discussions about nuclear cooperation, focusing on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, nuclear security and the

safety of nuclear installations. China offered unlimited support for training and capacity-building in these areas.

Strengthening ties with China was an important part of a larger drive toward strategic diversification. In July, the GCC held its first ever summit with the countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) in Jeddah. In October, it held a similar summit in Riyadh with the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations. In each summit, the heads of state and government agreed on a joint program to guide their engagement, including political and security dialogue, trade and investment, and people-to-people engagement, for the next several years.

In late September, the GCC foreign ministers met for the first time as a group with their counterparts in the 25-member Association of Caribbean States and agreed to a joint program that includes political dialogue, investment and tourism. The ministerial meeting was a prelude to a summit at the level of heads of state and government contemplated for 2024.

In November, Saudi Arabia hosted a summit in Riyadh with the Caribbean Community, another Caribbean-based organization, also a first.

At the same time as they were exploring these new partnerships, Saudi Arabia and its GCC sisters sought to shore up their traditional alliances. In May, Jeddah hosted the Arab Summit, where new grounds were broken in an attempt to resolve the 12-year-old conflict in Syria. After months of negotiations, Syrian President Assad was invited to return to the Arab League. This followed the striking of a deal in Amman on a step-for-a-step roadmap toward de-escalation, leading to a UN-mediated political solution according to UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

The GCC and the US continued to meet in different formats to discuss specific elements of their strategic partnership, which was announced in 2015 during Barack Obama's presidency. GCC foreign ministers met with the US secretary of state in Riyadh and New York to coordinate political views on regional and international issues. They agreed, for example, on the need to resume peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, and also that the outcome of those talks should be two states along the 1967 borders and according to UN resolutions.

In addition to these ministerial meetings, GCC-US specialized working groups also met and were reenergized, dealing with issues such as Iran, maritime security, missile and air defenses, counterterrorism and trade and investment.

In September, Saudi Arabia, the EU and the Arab League, supported by Egypt, Jordan and other GCC countries, launched a

new initiative in New York to reenergize Middle East peace negotiations. This launch was followed in October by a GCC-EU meeting in Oman, where foreign ministers from member states of the two blocs reviewed progress on their strategic partnership, which had been announced in February 2022 in Brussels. The EU and GCC have maintained close contacts since the founding of the latter in 1981, as the EU has served as the most successful model for regional integration.

As the GCC-EU meeting in Muscat took place on Oct. 9, two days after the Hamas attack on Israel, that conflict dominated much of the talks. After heated and sustained discussions, the two groups agreed on a consensus that was cobbled together, miraculously considering the diversity of views on the issue within the EU. It was most likely a reflection of the newly established strategic partnership.

The new elements in the GCC-EU partnership include security cooperation, climate change mitigation and a deeper political engagement. The EU's partnership in reviving the Middle East peace process is part of the new dynamic, as are advanced discussions on maritime security, cybersecurity, counterterrorism and fighting organized crime.

The war in Gaza has made it even more imperative for the GCC and EU to cooperate on several fronts — ceasefire, humanitarian issues and to pick up the pace on what they agreed upon in Muscat and New York, i.e., to find ways to reach a political solution for the war and the wider Palestine question.

During the Muscat meeting, the ministers endorsed recommendations regarding aid coordination, which was very timely considering the growing needs in Gaza and the obstacles imposed by Israel on aid accessibility. To deal with the repercussions of the war on Gaza, the GCC foreign ministers held an emergency meeting in Oman on Oct. 17, when they laid out a common position on the war and on humanitarian assistance, pledging sizable amounts of new aid.

In November, Saudi Arabia convened an emergency joint meeting of the Arab League and Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Riyadh, which was attended by the leaders of Arab and Islamic countries and which presented a unified voice on the war. The summit also laid down a comprehensive set of practical measures for Gaza, including additional aid and the documentation of breaches of international humanitarian law to present to the International Criminal Court.

Perhaps the most important measure adopted by the Arab-Islamic Summit was the formation of a ministerial committee — led by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan and which also

included ministers from Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Qatar, Palestine and Türkiye — to follow up the decisions of the summit on Gaza and the Palestine question. This committee has so far met all five UNSC permanent members and others, urging a ceasefire and improved humanitarian access.

The GCC states have also played an important role in mediating conflicts outside their immediate regions. Saudi Arabia, for example, has led the intra-Sudanese talks in Jeddah, together with the US, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the African Union. While this platform has yet to produce a peace deal, it has contributed to de-escalation and helped prevent the conflict from spilling over to other countries.

The economic role of the GCC states is not only a function of their growing economies and thriving markets, but also of their role in stabilizing energy markets at a time of global turmoil and energy insecurity. The fact that Dubai hosted Expo 2020, Qatar is currently hosting the International Horticultural Expo and Saudi Arabia is going to host Expo 2030 in Riyadh is a sign of the international recognition of the growing economic and strategic roles these countries play.

In a greatly polarized world, the GCC states have managed to keep working with all sides. On the Russia-Ukraine war, GCC foreign ministers met, individually and collectively, with their Russian and Ukrainian counterparts in Riyadh, Moscow, Kyiv, New York and elsewhere. The GCC side offered its help in mediating the conflict and succeeded in freeing some of the hostages and detainees held by the parties to the war. The GCC also argued repeatedly and strongly for continuing grain exports and preventing food shortages in developing countries that depend on those exports.

Similarly, when the US proposed the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, GCC members Saudi Arabia and the UAE joined the new venture, as they had earlier joined China's Belt and Road Initiative. Healthy competition between superpowers could benefit the region and the cohabitation of the two initiatives could contribute to thwarting conflict.

The coming year is likely to present formidable political and security challenges for our region and beyond, but the GCC as an organization and its member states are poised to deal with those challenges effectively. By their actions, they present a model of the fruits of peace and stability that some of their neighbors could learn from, whether that is Israel or Iran, two countries that have chosen to live by the sword but have failed to achieve either peace or stability. By their readiness to engage and mediate with all parties, GCC states are able to lend a hand to these troubled lands.

Netanyahu will use his ‘poison machine’ to cling to power

Yossi Mekeberg

For a glossary of the characteristics of Benjamin Netanyahu, here is a list of nouns that few associate with the Israeli prime minister, not only across the world, but also in Israel: integrity, humility, honor, honesty, decency, morality, altruism — you get the picture. If anyone thought that his unmitigated failure to defend his people on Oct. 7 would bring to the fore an inner self that was more reflective, uncontentious and self-effacing, they could not have been more mistaken. On that day, for a brief moment, Netanyahu and his political allies were stunned by the colossal failure to provide their people with the most basic of public goods they were tasked with supplying — namely, protecting their lives. But when it became apparent that the public had lost trust in him and wanted him gone, he and his cronies reverted to their default mode of cranking up their “poison machine” to full power in order to deflect any blame for what has become the worst crisis in Israel's history.

By any acceptable standard of conduct in public life, Netanyahu's time as prime minister should have long ago been confined to the pages of history.

First, a prime minister who is a defendant in three corruption cases of bribery, fraud and breach of trust should have at least stepped down for the duration of the trial, while fighting to prove his innocence like any other ordinary citizen. Instead, with the help of his close aides, he devised what became known as the “poison machine,” which in essence is a network of people and bots that disseminates a host of toxic, violent and inciting messages across social media against political rivals, their ideas and their activities.

His targets are mainly on the left, but may include some of the right should this suit his political and personal interests. These messages are all laced with the most appalling terms and accusations, character assassinations spiced up with half-truths, to say nothing of sheer lies.

One of the leading dubious characters in this destructive and shameless practice is none other than the prime minister's son, Yair, who has become a frequent visitor to the courts in the course of being sued for defamation, and has already lost such cases on more than one occasion.

Anyone questioning Netanyahu's suitability to run a country can expect to bear the brunt of vicious and often personal attacks and innuendo.

On the balance of probability, at the last general election these underhand tactics enabled Netanyahu's Likud party to legitimize the racist-xenophobic, religious-fundamentalist and belligerent parties of the far-right, which consequently did well and allowed him to form the most extreme right-wing government ever seen in Israel.

This coalition harbors strong anti-democratic and anti-Arab sentiments aimed at destroying the democratic system at home, while putting an end to any chance of peace with the Palestinians based on the two-state solution.

For Netanyahu this is a price worth paying in order to save his neck by ensuring that his corruption trial will never reach a conclusion, or at least one that is not to his liking.

Worse, Netanyahu also agreed to his coalition partners' plan for an assault on the democratic system, and has already set this in motion, knowing full well that it will divide the country, as it has done most visibly. Months of mass protests have not changed his

mind, as the political system became an instrument to serve the leader and not the country, while his poison machine has been turned against the leaders of these democratic protests.

Netanyahu did not stop there, and it must be said, while fully acknowledging the criminal responsibility of Hamas for the atrocities of its Oct. 7 attacks, that he contributed to the disaster through his failed strategy regarding the Palestinian issue which saw him become an enabler of the militant group while weakening any Palestinian partner for peace.

Yet, instead of immediately taking personal responsibility, apologizing to the nation, resigning his post and disappearing into the sunset in the immediate aftermath of the killing and hostage taking of so many of the very people he was elected to protect, in his typical manner, without compunction or conscience, he still clings obstinately to power and shows no sign of relinquishing it.

In the face of grieving families and those worried sick for loved ones taken hostage, he has spurned any responsibility, while embarking on a conflict whose objectives are unattainable, compromising the reputation of his country due to the way Israel is conducting that war by killing thousands upon thousands of innocent Palestinians.

Meanwhile, he uses the poison machine to blame everyone but himself for the worst security fiasco in the country's history, while threatening to turn Gaza into a military and political quagmire.

The chiefs of the Israeli Defense Forces and Shin Beit have also been on the receiving end of Netanyahu's poison machine since Oct. 7, although they have already accepted responsibility, while continuing to lead their troops in the war.

The machine is also being aimed at the leaders of the pro-democracy protests, although they were the ones who warned him that harming Israel's democracy would compromise its military's preparedness to face future threats.

And, of course, there is also Netanyahu's habit of blaming those behind the Oslo Accords, or the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza despite his support for it, while he counts on people's short memories and his well-known dexterity in deception and deflection.

Disgustingly, the poison machine has not spared the victims of the Hamas attack, as many have been characterized and vilified as leftist due to their social-economic profile, or are the families of the hostages whose only crime is demanding the government ensure the release of their loved ones, which seems less of a priority for this leadership with each passing day.

Let us not delude ourselves: At no point is there going to be a dignified Netanyahu resignation speech, before or after a ceasefire is declared, one that takes responsibility for the dire situation in which Israel has found itself under his premiership.

As far as Israel's prime minister is concerned, there is now only one option, and it is the Netanyahu option, which suggests that he might have an interest in prolonging the conflict for as long as possible in the belief — not always supported by history — that a country is unlikely to change its leader during a war.

And when this war eventually does end, we will not be surprised to see him continue to spread unprecedented discord and division throughout the country, as he employs his poison machine in the most reckless manner. Because for him, Israel without Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister simply does not exist.

Why Israel should choose peace — before time runs out

Eliahu Cohen, Israel's foreign minister, recently boasted that Papua New Guinea is planning to open a consulate in a West Bank settlement, a suggestion that arrogantly defies the international community and claims Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that he wants to encourage the migration of Palestinians from Gaza, another way of saying he wants to promote expulsions. The Israeli government is doing everything it can to avoid talks about a political solution and peace agreement with the Palestinians. However, Israelis fail to realize that time is not on their side, and that the sooner they clinch a deal with the Palestinians, the better.

Israel's attitude stems from the fact that it thinks it has the upper hand and can impose on Palestinians any solution that suits it. The problem is, as described by the veteran journalist Gideon Levy, Israelis live in a bubble, unaware of the brutality they inflict on Palestinians. Living in a world of their own, they do not realize they are at a disadvantage. Three factors are working against them:

the change globally in the perception of Israel, the growing capability of their enemies, and internal divisions in Israeli society.

Ten years ago, no one could have imagined they would witness mass protests in support of Palestine. The Palestinian issue is no longer viewed as a conflict between two parties, but now is seen through a "social justice" lens. People across the world who have no connection with Palestine or to Palestinians are taking a stand against what they see as injustice. Israel has lost international sympathy. The perception that Israel is a refuge for Jews fleeing the Holocaust has been replaced by the view that it is a colonial power subjugating indigenous people.

Craig Mokhiber, the UN human rights official who resigned in protest over the Gaza war, said the Israeli slaughter of Palestinians is driven by an ethno-nationalist, colonial-settler ideology. This view is likely to grow stronger as more Palestinian civilians are killed. Political elites in the West are sympathetic to Israel, but the grassroots, especially younger generations, do not share the same outlook. The bad news for

Dr. Dania Koleilat Khatib

Israel is that political change follows social change. Therefore, even in the US, where Israel holds the core of its international support, the situation is likely to change, especially among members of the Democratic Party. Joe Biden might be the last US president to back Israel. What will Israel do when it no longer has US or European support? Joseph Borrell, the EU foreign policy chief, bluntly accused Israel of breaching international law.

The second reason is the increasing capability of Israel's enemies and potential challengers. The Oct. 7 attack showed Israelis what Hamas is capable of. That was a big shock, but also a wake-up call to a new reality. The reality is that Israel's enemies are becoming stronger. A Hamas official vowed that Oct. 7 will happen again. Chances are that if it does reoccur, it will be even more brutal. Hamas is seen as the weaker enemy. They are confined to Gaza and have been under siege for 17 years. This is very different to Hezbollah, which has much more developed capabilities and a direct connection with Iran, while operating freely in

Lebanon. The militant group has an arsenal of 150,000 missiles, many precision guided.

Iran is also improving its defense capabilities. As for Türkiye, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has vowed to make Israel pay for its crimes. During a pro-Palestine protest, Erdogan supporters chanted demands to send Turkish soldiers to Gaza. What would Israelis think about that?

Israel has to come to terms with a new reality — it does not hold a competitive technological edge over its neighbors. Turkish-made drones were able to change the tide of the war in Libya. Countries in the region are producing weapons that one day can threaten Israel. Israelis can no longer rely on the fact they are stronger and more advanced than anyone in the region and, hence, can impose their terms. Israel does not have the deterrent capability it had previously, and needs a peace agreement to guarantee its security.

The third reason is the internal division in Israeli society. Though now we see the effect of "rallying around the flag," divisions are likely to reemerge and

grow wider once the war is over. For all those reasons, time is not on Israel's side. It is better off making peace with the Palestinians according to UN resolutions and generally accepted norms. This will allow Israel to be accepted and have good relations with neighboring countries, even Iran. If Israel reaches a fair settlement with the Palestinians, Tehran will have to accept it.

Peace will allow Israel to mend its internal divisions and work on national cohesion. Israelis should think of South Africa. White citizens got a very good deal. There was little or no wealth distribution. This is mainly because they realized two things early on: The international community would no longer support them, and the Black population could no longer be pacified. They sealed a deal while they were in a position of power and could have favorable terms.

Israelis should be aware that time is not on their side. The longer they wait and continue to subjugate Palestinians, the weaker their position. A deal today while they still have the support of the US is definitely better than a deal in 10 years when they will likely have little or no support.

Key trends in 2023 that shaped Türkiye's foreign policy

Sinem Cengiz

As 2023 comes to an end, it is crucial to analyze the major trends that have influenced Türkiye's foreign policy this year. Unlike any other year, 2023 holds special significance as it commemorates the centennial of the Republic of Türkiye, and because it was marked by several significant challenges and opportunities.

The year started with a tumultuous and tragic incident which not only affected the country's foreign policy, but also its political and social landscape. In February, devastating earthquakes struck the southeast of Türkiye and the north of Syria. The international community's solidarity and response was very important, with some countries initiating "earthquake diplomacy" with Türkiye, including Armenia. Amid this tragedy, a border crossing between Türkiye and Armenia opened for the first time in 35 years to allow humanitarian aid through. This was symbolically important because the two nations do not have diplomatic relations.

A few days after this tragedy, there was further cause for optimism in the region as Saudi Arabia and Iran restored diplomatic relations, facilitated by China, seven years after severing ties. The event was welcomed by Türkiye's policymakers in Ankara. It reinforced the perspective in Ankara that the deal could encourage Türkiye to cooperate with both Saudi Arabia and Iran on different regional issues without feeling the pressure of picking a side.

Against the backdrop of significant de-escalation in the region — with Ankara starting to normalize relations with several regional actors including Egypt, Israel and the Gulf states — Türkiye held one of the most important elections in its history. The outcome of the May polls was particularly important for the future trajectory of Turkish foreign policy, and saw Hakan Fidan becoming the new foreign minister. With the appointment of Fidan, who had led the National Intelligence Organization for 13 years, the country entered a new phase in its foreign policy. Fidan is not only internationally known for his back-channel talks to improve Türkiye's diplomatic relations with the Gulf states but is also the leading actor in the country's normalization initiatives with Egypt and Israel.

In the post-election era, Türkiye's policymakers drafted a new approach titled the "Century of Türkiye." In doing so, and to reflect the importance of the Gulf states, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan embarked on a tour in July encompassing Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE. Erdogan's tour was

both symbolically and strategically significant, as several agreements were signed between Türkiye and the Gulf states that sought to diversify their economies, counter security threats and enhance their roles in the region. This year also saw Türkiye and Egypt, after a decade of frosty ties, engage in efforts to mend relations. With the conclusion of Türkiye's general elections, the rapprochement process gained speed in summer, leading to the mutual upgrade of diplomatic missions to embassies.

However, while there was relative calm in the region, from Egypt to Türkiye and from Syria to the Gulf, the conflict between Israel and Hamas in October intensified geopolitical tensions. Just like the rest of the world, Türkiye was caught off guard. The Gaza crisis has seemingly marked a turning point for the Middle East,

of the Supreme Council of the GCC was held, which Erdogan attended. The inclusion of Erdogan reflected Türkiye's commitment to fostering stronger ties within the region, but also to structure and institutionalize its foreign relations, to encompass economic partnerships and security concerns.

In the last days of the year, the foreign affairs commission of Türkiye's parliament approved Sweden's NATO membership bid. Türkiye had already ratified Finland's bid to join NATO in April but kept Sweden waiting until the latter took more steps to cooperate on terrorism-related issues. Türkiye's move was welcomed by the West, which seeks to strengthen the alliance with regard to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It was Moscow's actions in Ukraine that pushed Sweden and Finland to join NATO. Throughout the year, Ankara has cast itself

Türkiye's top diplomat has engaged in shuttle diplomacy, visiting regional countries and international stakeholders, and proposing a new mechanism of guarantors to resolve the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian issue — with the suggestion that Türkiye become one of the guarantors for peace and reconciliation. In December, amid the Gaza war, the 44th Session of the Supreme Council of the GCC was held, which Erdogan attended. The inclusion of Erdogan reflected Türkiye's commitment to fostering stronger ties within the region, but also to structure and institutionalize its foreign relations, to encompass economic partnerships and security concerns. In the last days of the year, the foreign affairs commission of Türkiye's parliament approved Sweden's NATO membership bid. Türkiye had already ratified Finland's bid to join NATO in April but kept Sweden waiting until the latter took more steps to cooperate on terrorism-related issues.

altering the dynamics of Türkiye's foreign policy as well as delicate regional power balances. It has become a significant focus of Türkiye's foreign policy agenda, especially as there appears to be no light at the end of the tunnel for a resolution.

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as a mediator in the Russia-Ukraine war, and attempted to strike a balance between its nominally pro-Kiev policy, and cordial relations with Moscow.

This past year has seen escalating regional and international power rivalries that have resulted in growing uncertainty, and a changing geopolitical landscape marked by security challenges. Amid these concerns, Türkiye has entered its second century with a new foreign policy vision. Ankara's two objectives within this changing landscape were nuanced diplomatic relationships with all actors, and the vigilant and pragmatic assessment of global and regional shifts.

It is in the interest of NATO and Arab states to deepen relations

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg recently made an important visit to Saudi Arabia. This was the first such visit by a sitting secretary-general and will hopefully serve as the starting point for closer NATO-Arab relations in the coming years.

During his stop, Stoltenberg met with Saudi Arabia's Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman and GCC Secretary-General Jassem Mohamed Albuadiwi, in addition to other senior officials. He also delivered remarks at the Saudi Armed Forces Command and Staff College.

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, which started in 2004, currently forms the basis of NATO's relations with Arab states. Although all six members of the GCC were invited to join, only Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE have done so. In 2017, Kuwait became home to the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Regional Center. The focus of the regional center is to increase the shared understanding of security challenges between NATO and its partners in the region through high-level meetings and educational courses. Saudi Arabia, while not a member of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, has shown interest in improv-

ing relations with NATO in recent years. This makes Stoltenberg's choice of Saudi Arabia for his recent visit to the Middle East particularly significant.

However, little has been done to advance relations between NATO and the countries of the Middle East in recent years. After much enthusiasm in the early days of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, no new member has joined the grouping in years. The Middle East in general, and the Gulf region specifically, is often an afterthought in NATO's official strategy documents. This is short-sighted. Although NATO's remit is the transatlantic region, there is plenty of security overlap with the Middle East that requires attention.

Last October, Stoltenberg announced the formation of a team of experts to advise him on the best ways to improve relations between NATO and the countries of the Middle East. They are expected to report their findings and recommendations at the NATO foreign ministerial meeting this coming April. As they undergo their review, there are several things that the group should be considering to advance relations.

Firstly, NATO must focus on practical areas of cooperation with the countries in the Middle East.

Luke Coffey

This includes cooperation on regional maritime security — especially as shipping in the Red Sea becomes more problematic. Also, there should be increased cooperation on improving air defense capabilities.

With the proliferation of ballistic missiles across the Middle East and the increasing numbers of drones being used, the topic of air defense should be at the top of the agenda for NATO cooperation in the region. Finally, there is an ongoing and shared concern about counterterrorism. This should be another area of cooperation for NATO and the countries of the Middle East.

Secondly, NATO should advocate expanding the membership of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. The leaders of NATO and Saudi Arabia should build on the success of the secretary-general's recent visit to Riyadh to formalize a closer relationship between the two sides. Since Saudi Arabia is a leader in the region, NATO cannot have effective engagement in the Middle East without close relations with Riyadh. As the secretary-general told an audience at the Saudi Armed Forces Command and Staff College: "I believe there is huge potential for NATO to do more

with Saudi Arabia because we have mutual challenges."

Thirdly, NATO should use 2024 as an opportunity to highlight the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative by marking the 20th anniversary of its founding. The alliance can do so by holding a special meeting of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative at the heads of state and government level. This is rarely done as they normally meet only at the foreign ministerial level.

Fourthly, as NATO marks this anniversary, it would be a good idea for the alliance to issue a strategy document outlining what NATO's goals and aspirations are in the region.

When NATO published its most recent Strategic Concept, the document meant to prepare the alliance for future threats and challenges, there was barely any attention given to the Middle East.

In fact, in a document that is just over 4,200 words, only one paragraph of about 80 words was devoted to the region. Furthermore, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative was not mentioned at all.

Finally, NATO should appoint a special representative for the Middle East and North Africa region, where personal relationships are paramount. It should appoint a highly

respected diplomat with knowledge of the region to be an enduring point of contact between the alliance and the region.

NATO has its hands full right now. Russia's invasion of Ukraine will soon enter its second year. The defense and security of eastern Europe is a constant concern for the alliance. The uncertainty of the upcoming presidential election in the US is making many European members of NATO anxious.

The alliance is also undergoing a debate about what role, if any, it should have in Asia with the rise of China.

Even so, NATO cannot ignore the Middle East. Recent history has shown that when it comes to geopolitics and security challenges, the transatlantic region and the Middle East are closely linked.

There has also been a good track record of security cooperation to build on. For example, a number of Arab states such as the UAE, Jordan, Qatar and Bahrain have served as part of NATO-led missions in Libya, the Balkans and Afghanistan over the years.

The first 20 years of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative have delivered only modest results. It would be in the interest of NATO and Arab states to deepen relations over the next 20 years.

Is Russia-Ukraine war set for a big freeze?

On the battlefield in the Russia-Ukraine war, the first half of 2023 was a period of buildup toward Ukraine's Kherson and Kharkiv counteroffensives. But there were no swift resolutions. The summer counteroffensive did not produce the desired results, partly because Kyiv did not receive the necessary weapons from its allies, President Volodymyr Zelensky has admitted to the Associated Press. Nonetheless, Ukraine continued with its counteroffensive.

On Dec. 1, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu claimed that the Ukrainian army had lost more than 125,000 people and 16,000 large-scale weapons since the start of the counteroffensive. "Total mobilization in Ukraine, supplies of Western weapons and the introduction of strategic reserves into battle by the Ukrainian command did not change the situation on the battlefield," he said.

Given these developments on the ground, how will the 2023 phase of the war be assessed? What were its main challenges and developments? And, looking ahead, what can we expect in 2024?

Zelensky last month stated that Ukraine needs "three victories" — for the

US Congress to approve further military assistance, for the EU to continue its support, and for "open dialogue" on Ukraine's EU accession.

Through NATO, Ukraine's Western allies have promised 500 million (\$539 million) to deal with Kyiv's critical needs. They are also committed to a multiyear assistance program, in addition to billions of euros of financial aid. NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg last month linked these commitments to "our security interests" and urged members of the security alliance to continue backing Ukraine.

At the 2023 Vilnius summit, NATO allies also reasserted that Ukraine would become a member of the alliance once specific conditions are met. This involves a careful balance of declaring unconditional ongoing support, including prioritizing Ukraine's security as part of "our" security, while still setting conditions before the country can be fully welcomed into the bloc.

Individual NATO members have also shown additional commitments to the Ukrainian cause, but there are already signs of looming challenges in 2024.

The US has provided more than \$40 billion in security aid to Ukraine. Germany and the Netherlands also recently

increased their aid pledges for Ukraine. However, the future of these commitments risks becoming mired in domestic politics, as a proposed \$61 billion US aid package has been held up by Congress. Moreover, the war between Israel and Hamas, which broke out on Oct. 7 is having an effect. The US has reduced its supply of 155mm ammunition by "more than 30 percent," a senior Ukrainian source told ABC News in November, despite Washington's assurances that the conflict in the Middle East would not have an impact.

With regards to European partners, a proposed 50 billion package from the EU is being opposed by Hungary, delaying its approval. It may also face disruption due to the financial crisis in Germany and the strengthening of the far right in several European countries, such as in the recent Dutch elections.

Along with this financial angle, the diplomatic aspect remains an obstacle. Not least is the fact that Ukraine's membership bid has already divided the union. "Ukraine is in no way ready to negotiate on its ambitions to join the European Union," Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said last month. In a Foreign Policy

Dr. Diana Galeeva

article in 2022, Amanda Coakley had called Orban "Putin's Trojan horse inside the European Union."

Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto, commenting on the European Commission's recommendation that

Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu warned that NATO allies need to stand firm in supporting Ukraine or risk right-wing and populist forces in the EU becoming even stronger.

The possibility of peace negotiations taking place is

The future course of the war is particularly closely connected with the US position. Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder noted in an October interview with Berliner Zeitung that Washington prevented the conflict from being resolved in March 2022. The US, in his opinion, is the only one that can resolve the issue of a settlement. Therefore, the 2024 US presidential election, in addition to the European Parliament elections, might contribute to evolving approaches toward the war and the role of Western countries in it. This would have a direct impact on the possibility of peace negotiations.

accession negotiations with Kyiv should begin, suggested that Ukraine should not be admitted to the EU until the armed conflict there ends, otherwise it risks spreading throughout Europe. Meanwhile,

crucial to any analysis of how things will play out, but it is not at all clear that such a stage will be reached in 2024. Firstly, the disagreement between the two conflicting sides remains profound. Ukraine "cannot

afford any stalemate," according to Zelensky. The country previously lived under such conditions from 2014 to 2022 and cannot abide by it again in the future. According to the Ukrainian president, the conflict could end if Russia fulfills the conditions of the "peace formula" he presented. However, Moscow has ruled out negotiations based on the Ukrainian plan and called it unacceptable.

There have also been indications from both sides that they expect further conflict. Putin this month ordered an increase in the number of Russian troops of nearly 170,000, bringing the size of the army to 2.2 million, including 1.32 million troops. As for Ukraine, according to the latest polls, almost half of Ukrainians (44 percent) declared their readiness for compromises in peace negotiations with Russia, but about the same number (48 percent) were in favor of continuing hostilities. The survey was conducted by the one of the biggest nongovernmental and independent research organizations in Ukraine, the Rating group.

At the same time, there are other crucial partners in the war to consider. In November, Stoltenberg said that NATO members are not putting pressure on Ukraine regarding negotiations with Russia.

According to him, strengthening Kyiv's position in future negotiations requires continuing to provide it with military assistance.

However, a minority of EU members oppose this view. Hungary's Szijjarto said: "The propaganda saying that more fighting will create better conditions for signing a peace agreement is false. Today, the conditions for peace talks are far better than any that there will be tomorrow."

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Finally, elections are also expected in Ukraine in the spring of 2024. However, they cannot legally be held during a time of martial law, which continues to apply in the

country. Zelensky himself has said that it is "not the right time" for elections. Meanwhile, he is acutely concerned about the "Churchill phenomenon," referring to the electoral defeat of successful British wartime leader Winston Churchill in 1945. Despite uniting his people for this "national struggle," Zelensky has faced criticism, which might add a domestic challenger to his external struggles.

To sum up, it is clear that Ukraine remains dedicated to its current course, along with its allies. Meanwhile, Russia continues to build its important role among what it terms the "world majority," i.e., countries in the Global South and the East, which will help it to sustain its economy and war effort. Amid such dynamics, the situation is unlikely to change in 2024, prompting a pessimistic assessment of the possibility of peace. However, the new year will witness fundamental developments, with planned elections in the US, Europe and Ukraine.

It may be that, with many new politicians in power, there will be some shifts in the war. But if the geopolitical situation remains fairly static, there is a possibility that the Ukraine war will become a largely frozen conflict in 2024.



Pak Rupee falls 24% against Dollar in 2023

KARACHI (INP): Pakistan experienced a significant economic downturn, marked by a staggering 24.47% decrease in the value of the rupee against the dollar in the interbank market in 2023. The country grappled with financial woes, an uncertain economic and political landscape, leading to a 20.05% drop in the value of the rupee in the open market.

Notably, the pound and euro gained momentum against the rupee, while the local currency remained relatively stable for the majority of the year. Throughout the calendar year, the value of the dollar in the interbank market saw a total increase of 55.43 rupees, closing at 281.86 rupees by year-end. In the

open currency market, the dollar closed at 282.72 rupees, reflecting an increase of 47.22 rupees.

Despite economic challenges, the Pakistan Stock Exchange witnessed a prosperous year for investors in the first eight months of 2023.

The market soared to historic highs in the last four months (September to December), attributed to stringent measures taken by the caretaker government. Key initiatives included reinstating the IMF program in August, law enforcement actions, and robust anti-trafficking campaigns across various sectors.

In a remarkable turn of events, the Hundred Index set records, reaching

51,482 points on October 30, followed by new highs of 60,502 points on November 29, and an unprecedented 66,426 points on December 12.

The value of the dollar, however, faced resistance against a backdrop of external payment pressures. The rupee struggled to ease its decline, with the government implementing strategies to match import needs with remittances and export income, ultimately proving effective in stabilizing the exchange rate.

A reduction in the current account deficit positively impacted the rupee, with the interbank rate of the dollar falling below 282 rupees in weekly business. The open market rate dropped to below 283-284

rupees, narrowing the difference between the interbank and open rates to 86 paise.

In the midst of economic fluctuations, the Pakistan Stock Exchange remained resilient. Despite facing volatility and an initial decline due to uncertain political conditions, the exchange witnessed a historic one-day trading low of 2,534 points – an unprecedented event in the country's history. However, as the calendar year drew to a close, certain sectors opted to withdraw capital.

The stock market's overall performance led to a substantial increase in the value of shares, totaling a staggering one trillion 15 billion 69 crore 99 lakh 44 thousand 069 rupees.

Economy stuck in low growth trap due to poor performance in 2023

LAHORE (INP): Senior Vice Chairman Ferozeur Road Industrial Association (FRIA), Shahbaz Aslam has said that the economy throughout the 2023 continued to stuck in low growth trap, as economic conditions leave Pakistan highly vulnerable to climate shocks with insufficient public resources to finance development.

While referring to the data of concluding year 2023 and media reports, he suggested the domestic debt re-profiling did not always work unless associated with sharp and sustained structural reforms.

Shahbaz Aslam advised the government to look at the bigger picture while cautioning domestic stakeholders that creation of a new institution that envisages billions of dollars of investment inflows backed by pledges may not provide a quick fix of the economy. This is not to undermine the

concerted ongoing efforts to make Pakistan an attractive destination for foreign investment but to emphasize the fact that basic economic theory dictates that foreign investment would flow into those countries where the economy is strong, growth is projected to rise and key macroeconomic fundamentals, including foreign exchange reserves, are more than sufficient to forestall the possibility of inability to meet the import bill, which includes basic inputs/essentials for industry as well as the householder.

The member PIAF executive committee further stated that structural reforms are therefore the way forward and until and unless the administration supplements its crackdown with these reforms that are minutely identified in reports but continue gathering dust in all relevant ministries, the situation is

unlikely to lead to sustainable long-term improvement.

He said that the government is forced to borrow from the domestic and external resources to finance the fiscal deficit as the country's tax revenue collection is insufficient to meet the expenditures. While, in absence of external financing the government is completely dependent on domestic borrowing, of which domestic debt stocks are sharply increasing.

Multilaterals as well as bilaterals have long been urging the government of Pakistan to reform the power sector, since decades ago when circular debt was in millions of rupees which today is a whopping 2.5 trillion rupees, to reform the tax structure that continues to rely heavily on indirect taxes whose incidence on the poor is greater than on the rich, a major contributory factor in

poverty levels reaching a high of 40 percent today, to continuing the policy of steadily raising the budgeted current expenditure, thereby shrinking the available fiscal space annually and, last but not least, warning Pakistan of an impending water scarcity decades ago that went unheeded resulting in the country's current status of a water-stressed country.

Shahbaz Aslam noted some home truths about the steady regression of key macroeconomic indicators due to resistance and reluctance to implement the necessary reforms by civilian and military dispensations that, in his words, accounts for the worst ever economic crisis in the country today. He referred to the stop and go cycles of half-hearted reforms that are just enough for the country to muddle through but that offer no long term perspective of improvement.

MCCI for technology in food industry to boost economic returns

MULTAN (APP): Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) stressed the importance of addressing technological gaps in the food industry, specifically in precision engineering for vegetables and the need for the establishment of a food lab in the region.

In a meeting between Saadia Masood, Director of Technology Upgradation and Skill Development Company Lahore, and Mian Rashid Iqbal, President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Multan, held on Sunday here, various technological advancements were discussed. Mian Rashid Iqbal

stated that the region had immense potential to excel in various fields, especially agriculture.

President Mian Rashid Iqbal and Vice President Sheikh Muhammad Asim Saeed expressed concern over the technological deficit affecting various sectors, stressing the need for awareness sessions.

They suggested organizing an awareness session at the Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry to enlighten the business and industrial community about the services provided by Technology Upgradation and Skill Development Company.

They also observed that about 50 percent of vegetables perished due to a lack of facilities and they termed it a huge loss to local farmers as well as the country.

They also highlighted the necessity of modernizing the cotton ginning industry and importing new machinery, suggesting the establishment of a research institute for ginning to boost cotton products as well.

Saadia Masood briefed on ongoing projects and initiatives across the country, describing the essential role of technology in bridging the gap between business communities and the

government.

Saadia Masood maintained the significance of Technology Upgradation and Skill Development Company in facilitating collaboration between the business community and the government. She hinted the potential benefits of leveraging modern technology to enhance economic development.

Overall, the meeting underscored the pivotal role of technology in boosting economic sectors, with a call for collaborative efforts between business communities, government, and technological development entities.

Industry be prioritized in power, gas supply in winter: PFC

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Furniture Council (FC) has demanded the government to accord top priority to the industrial sector regarding uninterrupted power and gas supplies during the winter season.

PFC Chief Executive Officer Mian Kashif Ashfaq made this demand while talking to a delegation of industrialists led by

Chaudhary Arai Arain here on Sunday.

He argued that the industrial sector plays a pivotal role in the economic growth and uninterrupted gas and power supplies are essential for its smooth functioning. It will not only sustain production but also safeguard jobs and contribute to overall economic stability besides help

achieve export targets.

Kashif Ashfaq said that timely availability of power is also crucial for agricultural activities, especially during winter, to support processes such as crop drying and irrigation. Ensuring a reliable power supply to this sector will directly impact food production and the livelihood of farmers, he added.

The PFC chief hoped that government would take necessary measures to coordinate with relevant authorities and stakeholders to implement this prioritization effectively. He was of the view that government attention to this matter will undoubtedly contribute to the economic prosperity and well-being of the people.



MULTAN: A fish seller cleaning fish to attract customers at their setup in wholesale fish market.

Call for enhancing women's access to finance

LAHORE (APP): The Coordinator to Minister of State and Federal Tax Ombudsman Meher Kashif Younis Sunday stressed the need of enhancing women's access to finance and providing credit to women-led small and medium-sized enterprises for strengthening the economy besides creating ample job opportunities in Pakistan.

Speaking as a keynote speaker at a seminar on "Better Access of Women to Micro Credit" organised under the aegis of Gold Ring Economic Forum, a strategic think-tank, he added that inclusive, resilient and sustainable development cannot be achieved if women do not have equal economic opportunities and benefits.

Meher Kashif said it's the need of the hour that Pakistan's current financing ecosystem must improve women's access to much-needed finance and empower them to boost their livelihoods while contributing significantly to the economy. There are many women entrepreneurs in Pakistan, but they remain unrecognized, being small and informal in nature and lacking the incentives to register their businesses formally or to grow, he observed.

"Our policies must recognise the importance of women entrepreneurship and create an enabling environment that increases women's participation in the formal economy and gives them more opportunities to grow their businesses, he remarked.

Meher Kashif Younis, who is also Chairman Kyrgyzstan Trade House in Pakistan and Vice President Gold Ring Economic Forum, said policy-based loans should support reforms that incorporate women's needs into national policies, such as the State Bank of Pakistan's Banking on Equality Policy that, among a range of measures, requires banks to establish departments dedicated to providing services to women.

The coordinator said the financial intermediation loan, meanwhile, is expected to benefit around two million women entrepreneurs, including about 510,000 who previously had no access to finance, through lending via participating financial institutions.

SNGPL cuts off 485 connections for theft

F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 485 connections; Rs4.14 million fine imposed.

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 25 connections on illegal use of gas while another 24 on use of compressor and also imposed fine of Rs 0.08 million against gas theft cases.

In Rawalpindi the team disconnected 183 connection on illegal use of gas while another 4 on use of compressor and amount of Rs 0.11 million against gas theft cases.

During the operation in Islamabad team disconnected three connections on

illegal use of gas.

In Multan 4 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 36 on use of compressor. The team also booked an amount of Rs 0.45 million have been booked against gas cases and also lodged one FIR against gas pilfers.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 66 connections on account of direct use of gas and illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 2.33 million against gas theft cases. The team also lodged 2FIRs against gas pilfers.

The team of Mardan disconnected 20 connections on illegal use of gas and also imposed fine of Rs0.92 million against gas theft cases.

In Sahiwal, one connection was disconnected on

illegal use of gas while another 3 on use of compressor and the team also imposed fine 0.21 million against gas pilfers.

In Sheikhpura 18 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 6 on use of compressor and amount of Rs 0.01million booked against gas theft cases. The regional team of Sargodha disconnected 1 connection on illegal use of gas.

The regional team of Bahawalpur disconnected 63 connections on illegal use of gas and another four on use of compressor.

In Faisalabad the team disconnected one connection on illegal use of gas while another one on use of compressor and also imposed fine of Rs0.03 million against gas theft cases.

CTI demands hike in students' stipend

LAHORE (APP): Carpet Training Institute (CTI) Chairperson Ejaz-ur-Rehman Sunday urged the government to provide students with scholarships in proportion to the inflation ratio to attract the youth to learn skills.

Talking to the youth receiving training at Carpet Training Institute (CTI) here, he said, "Young people can secure their economic future by focusing on innovative ideas and the government should focus on the slogan of 'Talent Nation for Development'."

Ejaz-ur-Rehman said that research should be focused on bringing innovation in the designs of carpet products and for this the internet can be fully utilized.

He said that every year hundreds of thousand of youths are entering the market for whom it is impossible to provide employment in the public sector.

The government should prepare a plan of action considering the mental trend of the youth, full support of skill teaching institutions, increase in

stipends in proportion of inflation to promote technical education and skill learning after matriculation, a joint venture should be done with the private sector to provide employment to the youth who receive scholarship and training to teach them modern skills abroad," he added.

He said that keeping in mind the demand of the world, the youth must be equipped with modern skills and after that they should be provided with support and assistance for employment.

Prices of dry fruits soar as cold approaches

MULTAN (APP): The prices of dry fruits gone up with the increase in cold weather as 25 to 30 percent rates high this year.

Talking to APP here on Sunday, a shopkeeper named Kashif said that the prices of dry fruits were high as compared to last year.

He used to sell dry fruits worth Rs 30,000 to Rs 50,000 daily whereas his sale is barely Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000 now.

He said that many shopkeepers have left dry fruits business due to reduced sales.

According to the shopkeepers, the rates of pista-

chio Rs 3200 to 4000, cashew 3400 to 4400, pine nuts (chilghoza) 8000 to 12000, fig 2200 to 3000. Dry apricots 1000 to 1400, normal dry dates 550 to 800, solid walnuts 800 to 1400, walnuts 3000 to 3500, reedy 500 to 800, roasted chickpeas 800 to 1000, almonds 2600 to 3200, paper almonds 1600 to 2000 and groundnuts selling Rs 800 to 1000 per kg in the market.

A citizen named Anwar Shah said that among the long list of dry fruits, groundnuts and roasted gram which the common man could buy to some extent are now becoming

out of reach.

Azhar Hayat said that the shopkeepers have arbitrarily increased the prices, each shopkeeper has set own prices in the same market.

Everyone wants to eat dry fruits, but went out of the shops without purchasing due to high rates.

The daily wage class didn't have the power to buy dry fruits.

Citizens have demanded regular check and balance system on the prices of dry fruits so that profiteers could be discouraged and fruits be made available to the people at fair prices.

New policies, reforms required for ease of doing business in 2024: APBF

ISLAMABAD (INP): President All Pakistan Business Forum (APBF), Syed Maaz Mahmood has stressed the need for new policies and widespread structural reforms in the upcoming year of 2024 to help investors launch their ventures with ease and comfort, as the country has been lagging behind in the ease of doing business index over the years and especially in the concluding year of 2023.

In his new year message issued on Sunday, he observed that a policy should be finalized after incorporating inputs from real stakeholders of the business community, including the APBF, with the sole aim of facilitating foreign and domestic

investment by removing the unnecessary bureaucratic and administrative hurdles that slow down the process of starting new business ventures and hinder economic growth.

Quoting the figures, Maaz Mahmood stated that in the recent Ease of Doing Business Index, Pakistan is considerably behind peer economies, ranking 108 out of 190.

In the regulatory area of Starting a Business, Pakistan ranked 72 out of 190 countries.

The scope of the new policy intervention in 2024 should be limited to NOCs required by federal regulatory agencies for incorporation and starting operations of a business activity. This policy should cover busi-

ness registration and authorization required for business operations. The policy should be applicable on all public sector entities of the federal and provincial governments that regulate businesses.

The business leader said that World Bank Group's Doing Business project provides a measure of the "Ease of Doing Business" through a set of objective indicators that focus on the impacts of laws, regulations and their enforcement across 190 economies.

The government claimed that it has consistently been making efforts to improve business environment in the country.

In previous years, almost 300 reforms have been implemented to improve

investment climate in the country, it added.

But the growing political uncertainty and institutional imbalances are adversely affecting the country's perception.

The World Bank in a publication has reported the country's current economic model is not working since it has fallen behind its peers, significant progress in poverty reduction has now started to reverse, and the benefits of growth have accrued to a narrow elite.

Improving the efficiency of power distribution companies to encourage exports through increased private participation, and address the very high costs of electricity generation through increased renewable generation.

He underlined that fiscal management must be drastically improved, and debt servicing costs and domestic revenue mobilisation are at unsustainable levels, leaving adequate resources to invest in human development and infrastructure, address economic challenges.

Cutting red tape as well as opportunities for costly discretion in the government's dealing with businesses is paramount. Structural macroeconomic imbalances, particularly on the fiscal side, will remain a prerequisite to ensure a more stable economic environment to attract investors.

The country is at a losing end insofar as poverty alleviation is concerned.

Pakistan also has the lowest per capita income in South Asia and highest out-of-school kids in the world. In comparison with the region, Pakistan's per capita income, as of 2023, is \$1660 as compared to \$3,700 of Vietnam, \$2700 of Bangladesh \$2380 of India. In the 80s, Pakistan's per capita income was far ahead of these countries". Furthermore, as of 2023, India's GDP at \$7 trillion is 11 times higher than Pakistan's GDP of \$341 billion.

The APBF leader Maaz Mahmood said the policy should simplify the process of registering a business venture and minimize delays, as one of the significant regulatory barriers to investment and doing busi-

ness in Pakistan is compliance with no-objection certificates, which are commonly considered regulatory barriers in obtaining regulatory approvals to investments and doing business.

Through this policy, the government must plan to replace NOCs requirement for business regulation with a system of compliance verification through an effective mechanism that should operate in federal regulatory agencies adopting this policy and cover related procedures.

He said that the use of NOCs should be replaced progressively at the federal as well as provincial level by a risk-based and inter-agency compliance verification mechanism to facilitate investments and doing

business in Pakistan.

The business leader said that the low levels of investment can be attributed to a complex, multi-layered, and opaque regulatory regime that involves enforcement by federal, provincial, and municipal government agencies. Regulatory instruments used under this regime consist of various registrations, licenses, permits, and certificates, including NOCs. These regulatory requirements significantly increase the cost of doing business.

He argued that the Ease of Doing Business could help promote entrepreneurship, innovation and job creation, besides stimulating economic growth, removing unnecessary delays and procedures.



In brief

Nadal loses comeback match

BRISBANE (Agencies): Spanish superstar Rafael Nadal's first match back after a 12-month injury layoff ended in defeat when he and doubles partner Marc Lopez went down to Australian pair Jordan Thompson and Max Purcell on Sunday. The Australian duo were too consistent, winning their Brisbane International first-round match 6-4, 6-4 on Pat Rafter Arena. Nadal looked sharp on the court and appeared to have no issues with his movement after the long lay-off for a hip problem. He takes to the singles court on Tuesday against former US Open champion Dominic Thiem of Austria.

Nasser Hussain's prediction

LONDON (Web Desk): Former England captain, Nasser Hussain believes Babar Azam is poised for an outstanding 2024. In a video released by the International Cricket Committee (ICC), the former England captain shared his predictions for Babar Azam and Virat Kohli, the former captains of Pakistan and India, respectively. Nasser Hussain expressed his belief that relinquishing the captaincy could relieve Babar Azam of some pressure, allowing him to focus more on his batting skills. I think it's a big year for him Babar and Pakistan. He has given up the captaincy, and that might be the weight off his shoulders, said Nasser. Hussain emphasized the significance of Babar Azam's role in the team, stating that Pakistan relies on him to score crucial runs. The most significant thing he can do for Pakistan cricket is score a heap of runs. They need him to score runs. There's a T20 World Cup in the Caribbean, and they reached the finals last time. They will require their former captain to deliver a strong performance, he added. In addition to Babar, Hussain also predicted a fantastic year for Indian batting maestro Virat Kohli. Nasser mentioned that Kohli was technically sound in 2023 and recalled his knock against Sri Lanka in the World Cup. The former England skipper added that the cricketer seemed to be in a good mental space, which will only elevate his game in the coming year.

Dennis charged

ADELAIDE (Agencies): World champion cyclist Rohan Dennis has reportedly been charged by police with causing the death of his wife after she was hit by a car on Saturday. South Australia Police said a 32-year-old woman suffered serious injuries and died in hospital in Adelaide overnight. A statement added that a man, 33, had been arrested and charged with causing death by dangerous driving, driving without due care and endangering life. The driver was known to the woman and has been released on bail until March. It has been widely reported in Australian media that the man and woman are Dennis and his wife Melissa Hoskins. Hoskins was a world champion in the team pursuit in 2015 and raced at the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympics. She and Dennis married in 2018 and have two children. In February, Dennis announced he would retire at the end of the 2023 season after a career in which he won stages at the Tour de France, Giro d'Italia and Vuelta a Espana. A multiple world champion on both road and track, he won road time trial bronze at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, having won team pursuit silver at London 2012.

Andy Murray reveals 2024 could be his last on Tour

BRISBANE (AFP): Two-time Wimbledon champion Andy Murray said 2024 could be his final year before retirement after illness and injury hampered his preparation for the new season.

Murray's year will begin at the Brisbane International as he builds up for the Australian Open later in January. The 36-year-old is ranked 42nd in the world after a frustrating end to 2023, when he won just one match in his last four tournaments.

Murray has previously battled back from what seemed impending retirement after undergoing hip surgery in 2018.

But he conceded that he will bring down the curtain on his career if the next 12 months follow the same pattern as 2023.

"If I was in a situation like I was at the end of last year, then I probably

wouldn't go again," Murray told the BBC.

"But then if physically I'm doing well and my results are good and I'm playing well, then that's enjoyable and I could see myself still playing.

"We'll see how the year goes, see how the body holds up. If things are going well, I'd love to keep going. But if they're not, and I'm not enjoying it, it could be the last year, yes."

Murray, who won Wimbledon in 2013 and 2016 and also took the US Open title in 2012, is part of a golden generation coming towards the end of trophy-laden careers.

Roger Federer retired in 2022 and Rafael Nadal had an injury-blighted 2023, although the Spaniard has suggested he might try to play on beyond 2024.

At 36 Novak Djokovic is still hoping to add to his record 24 Grand Slam titles

before hanging up his racket. Murray revealed the psychological struggle with falling down the rankings after so many years at the top was taking its toll.

"When you have played right at the highest level, it's not that easy when you are going through periods where you are losing in first rounds, and maybe losing matches that you probably should have won," he added.

"At the same time, a couple of years ago if someone had offered me that I'd been playing at top-40 level in the world when I had been struggling with my hip, I would have been happy with that.

"But it is hard, mentally, so I need to do a better job of putting things in perspective this year and be a little bit easier on myself."

Murray faces second seed Grigor Dimitrov in the first round in Brisbane on Monday.

Tariq Rafi beat Hamadan Noman in 1st Ocean Tennis championship

KARACHI (APP): Tariq Rafi beat Hamadan Noman in a three set long match in under 13 Singles match of 1st Ocean - Siddiqsons Tennis Championships being played at DA Creek Club Karachi with 5-4, 2-4, 5-4 score.

According to a communique here, as per the second day results of the championship.

Men's Singles 1st Round Uzair Katchi beat M. Imran Abid 8-0

Muhammad Asif beat Humza Jawed 8-0

Rayan Ahmed beat M. Salman Ajmal 8-1

Men's Singles 2nd Round

Saqib Zia beat Bilal Khalid 8-0

Uzair Katchi beat Bilal Khalid 8-5

Vinod Das beat Basit Hussain 8-0

Ladies Singles 1st Round

Mariyam Zeeshan beat Zunaira Zahid 8-3

Versha Das beat Zeenia Jaffrani 8-0

Juniors Under 17 Singles 2nd Round

Rayan Ahmed beat Asif K. 6-1, 6-1

Under 15 Singles 1st Round

Yahya Haleem beat Hamza Essa Jee 4-0, 4-0

Under 13 Singles 1st Round

Arman Ali beat Hassan Farhan 4-0, 4-0

Yahya Haleem beat Eschelle Asif 4-2, 5-3

Under 13 Singles 2nd Round

Tariq Rafi beat Hamadan Noman 5-4, 2-4, 5-4

Meer Abbas Bhagat beat Syed Abdullah 4-2, 4-1

Arham Shehzad beat Aman Sheikh 4-1, 4-1

Rohan Das beat Raahim Faisal 4-0, 4-1

Aidh Imran beat Syed Sufyan 4-1, 4-1

Under 11 Singles 1st Round

Mir Abbas Bhagat beat Ariz Ayaz 4-0, 4-0

Under 11 Singles 2nd Round

Nayyal Sohaib beat Mariyam Zeeshan 4-1, 4-0.

Salah leads Egypt as African Cup of Nations squad named

CAIRO (Reuters) : Mohamed Salah will lead Egypt at the African Cup of Nations in the Ivory Coast, skipping a 27-man squad named by coach Rui Vitoria.

The group includes all but two of the starting lineup for the last Cup of Nations final two years ago, when Egypt lost on penalties to Senegal in Yaounde.

But there is a first call-up for 22-year-old Ahmed Nabil Kouka, who in June helped Egypt's under-23 side qualify for the 2024 Paris Olympics and also played for Cairo giants Al Ahly at this month's Club World Cup in Saudi Arabia.

Egypt compete in Group B at the tournament in the Ivory Coast, starting their campaign in Abidjan against Mozambique on January 14th. They also meet Ghana and the Cape Verde Islands in their opening round group.

Squad: Goalkeepers: Mohamed Abou Gabal (National Bank), Ahmed El Shennawy (Pyramids), Mohamed El Shennawy (Al Ahly), Mohamed Sobhi (Zamalek)

Defenders: Mohamed Abdelmoneim (Al Ahly), Ahmed Fatouh (Zamalek), Ali Gabr, Osama Galal, Mohamed Hamdy (all Pyramids), Mohamed Hany (Al Ahly), Ahmed Hegazi (Al Ittihad), Omar Kamal (Future), Ahmed Samy (Pyramids)

Midfielders: Emam Ashour, Marwan Attia (both Al Ahly), Mohamed Elheny (Arsenal), Hamdi Fathi (Al Wakrah), Mahmoud Hamada (Al Masry), Ahmed Nabil Kouka (Al Ahly), Ahmed Zizo (Zamalek)

Forwards: Mostafa Fathi (Pyramids), Mahmoud Kahraba (Al Ahly), Ahmed Hassan Kouka (Pendikspor), Omar Marmoush (Eintracht Frankfurt), Mostafa Mohamed (Nantes), Mohamed Salah (Liverpool), Mahmoud Trezeguet (Trabzonspor).

Junaid Khan named as Pakistan U19 team's bowling coach

LAHORE (Monitroing Desk): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Sunday appointed the former left-arm pacer Junaid Khan as the Pakistan U19 team's bowling coach.

The decision came following the unavailability of bowling coach Rehan Riaz, who has opted out of the ICC U19 World Cup 2024 due to a family emergency.

Junaid Khan, who previously served as the head coach of Islamabad Region, led the team to victory in the Hanif Mohammad Trophy 2023-24 recently.

The 34-year-old Junaid Khan has represented Pakistan in 22 Test matches since his debut in 2011, picking 71 wickets at an average of 31.73.

He also picked 110 wickets in 76 ODI matches at 29.23 from 2011 to 2019, while in T20I cricket he picked eight wickets in nine games.

Junaid Khan was also part of the 2017 ICC Champions Trophy-winning squad where Pakistan triumphed over



India in the final.

The ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup 2024 will commence on January 19, 2024, in South Africa, while the final is scheduled to be played on February 11, 2024.

Five venues across South Africa will host a total of 41 ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup matches.

The 15th edition of the showcase event will feature 16 teams, divided into four groups.

Group A features defending champions India alongside Bangladesh, Ireland and the United States of America (USA), while Group B consists of England, South Africa,

West Indies, and Scotland.

Two-time champions Pakistan are placed in Group D alongside Afghanistan, New Zealand and Nepal while Australia, Sri Lanka, Namibia and Zimbabwe were placed in Group C.

The top three sides from each group progress to the Super Six phase of the event.

The top four teams at the conclusion of the Super Six stage will then advance to the semi-finals, scheduled on February 6 and 8.

Meanwhile, the final of the ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup will take place on February 11 in Benoni.

South Africa will host the U19 World Cup for the third time, having previously hosted the 1998 and 2020 editions.

Notably, the International Cricket Council (ICC) awarded the hosting rights of the mega event to South Africa as a consequence of the apex cricket body's provisional ban on Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC).

New Zealand win third T20 to square series with Bangladesh

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, (AFP/APP): New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner took four wickets as they beat Bangladesh by 17 runs in a rain-affected third and final Twenty20 international on Sunday to draw the series 1-1.

After dismissing the tourists for 110 in Mount Maunganui, New Zealand's top-order collapsed to 49-5 before Jimmy Neesham and Santner recovered to reach 95-5 off 14.4 overs.

When heavy rain halted play, the Black Caps were comfortably ahead of the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern target, thanks largely to an unbeaten 28 from all-rounder Neesham.

The result denied Bangladesh a first series victory on New Zealand soil in any format, having lost the preceding ODI series 2-1.

After asking Bangladesh to bat first on a lively Bay Oval pitch, Santner claimed 4-16 off his four overs, stifling an innings that was already struggling at 41-3 when he was introduced.

Seamers Tim Southee, Adam Milne and Ben Sears all took two wickets.

Milne (2-23) removed Bangladesh captain and top-scorer Najmul Hossain Shanto for 17 when he skied a full-pitched delivery to point.

Four other Bangladesh

batsmen reached double figures but failed to convert into a substantial score.

Four of New Zealand's top order were dismissed for one run and when Finn Allen followed after scoring 38, Neesham held the innings together as the storm clouds gathered, with solid support from Santner who was unbeaten on 18.

Seam bowler Shoriful Islam took 2-17 off 3.4 overs.

Bangladesh won the first game in Napier on Wednesday by five wickets, before Friday's second match was abandoned after 11 overs because of rain in Mount Maunganui.

Polarising Warner draws curtain on 12-year Test career with Pakistan series



of the Ashes.

"I'm extremely remorseful. I have let my teammates, Cricket Australia, the fans, myself and my family down," said Warner at the time.

Two months earlier, he was similarly contrite after an ugly Twitter spat with two Australian journalists.

But his trademark combative nature never dimmed.

In the opening Test in Durban ahead of the ball-tampering fiasco, he and Quinton de Kock squared up to each other, with Warner claiming the home wicket-keeper had made "vile and disgusting" remarks about his wife Candice.

Warner was fined 75 percent of his match fee and De Kock 25 percent.

Despite the controversies, he was welcomed back into the Australia fold when his ban ended, and made his Test comeback during the Ashes series against England in 2019.

It was a miserable return, scoring just 95 runs in 10 innings at a paltry average of 9.5 booed by repeatedly hostile English fans.

But selectors again kept faith and he bounced back later that year with an unbeaten 335 against Pakistan in Adelaide and has been ever present since.

Former Australia captain Greg Chappell said Warner would "never live down the sandpaper-gate incident," but he urged people to look past it to his overall contribution to the team spanning more than a decade.

"Whatever one thinks of him, David Warner has been fantastic for Australian cricket," he wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald this weekend.

"I know how hard it is to do what he has done through 111 Tests, so I hope that David's harshest critics acknowledge his talent and contribution and forgive his human frailties."

Khyber Tigers wins Season-3 of Kaliwal Zalmi Cricket League



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Tigers clinched the Season-3 of Kaliwal Zalmi Cricket League with a record 800 teams and over 12,000 Young Cricketers taking part in Pakistan's one of the biggest Tape Ball Cricket events.

Khyber Tigers won the season 3 of Kaliwal Zalmi Cricket League in the final played in Kabal Ground Swat. Khyber Tigers beat Bannu Bulls in the final in the presence of a large crowd. Arshad Khan Education Secretary KPK, Head of Marketing GTR Tyres, Asad Usmani, PCB Level 3 Coach, Jamal and

other local government officials grace the closing ceremony.

Record 800 teams and over 12,000 Cricketers were in action during GTR presents Kaiwal Zalmi League held in cities, villages, and fields of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Chairman of Peshawar Zalmi Javed Afridi said that he is thankful to the young cricketers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for the wonderful response of the Kalewal Zalmi League.

"We will continue to organize healthy activities for the youth in the future as well. CEO GTR Tyres Hussain Kuli Khan said that GTR believes in organizing sports and

healthy activities for the youth in Pakistan.

Kaliwal Zalmi League is close to my heart and Peshawar Zalmi and GTR will continue to organize such events together in Future for the youth of KP and Pakistan, he said. Peshawar Zalmi, Zalmi Foundation and Paigham e Pakistan combined collaboration event emerged as the popular cricket festival of the province.

The teams of Bannu Bulls, Khyber Tigers, Swat Hawks, Bara Titans, Kohat Knights, Hazara Panthers, Charsadda Eagles and DI Khan Stallions made it to the final stage of the League.

Pistons end 28-game losing streak to avoid another record

MIAMI (AFP): The Detroit Pistons avoided an unwanted record when they ended their 28-game losing streak with a 129-127 win over the Toronto Raptors on Saturday.

The Pistons had equalled the record losing streak of the Philadelphia 76ers with their loss to the Boston Celtics on Thursday.

The 76ers had a 28-game skid spanning the 2014-15 and 2015-16 seasons. Detroit's dismal run was the longest single-season losing streak in NBA history but a first win since October ensured the Pistons avoided another miserable milestone.

Cade Cunningham's 30 points and 12 assists helped Detroit recapture the winning feeling and although a three pointer from Gary Trent with a second remaining narrowed the deficit it was too late for a Raptors comeback.

Pistons head coach Monty Williams said the scenes in the locker-room after the win had been special. "Guys were screaming, I was almost in tears. I'm just so happy for our guys, I'm happy for everybody in the locker-room," he said.

"I've been in a ton of locker rooms my whole life and that's a first for me to have that kind of, it wasn't relief, it was just like, 'Thank God, finally'," added Williams. Williams, the 2022 NBA Coach of the Year, said he hoped the win

would prove to be a turning point for his team.

"Sometimes it just takes a win like that to get things started and I just have so much respect for our team."

"I think people may have thought that they were okay with losing. But they came in every day with a great spirit, and they wanted answers. They came in wanting to learn and try to get better. "So I just respect the heck out of our guys. Really happy that we finally got a win because it's so hard to win in this league," he said.

LeBron James suffered defeat on his 39th birthday as the Los Angeles Lakers were beaten 108-106 at the Minnesota Timberwolves.

James, who was on court for 39 minutes, put up 26 points on 10 of 21 shooting from the field with Anthony Davis top scoring for the Lakers with 33 points, 17 rebounds and eight assists.

With 3.1 seconds remaining, James thought he had tied the game at 107-107 with a three point throw right on the line of the arc but to his frustration the referee ruled it to be only a two point effort.

Anthony Edwards, who top scored for Minnesota with 31 points, added a point from the free throw line before James was off-target with an attempted buzzer beater.

-- Four-game winning streak --

The Miami Heat's four-game winning streak came to an end with a 117-109

defeat at the Utah Jazz with star Jimmy Butler suffering another injury setback.

Butler had missed all four of Miami's recent wins with a calf injury but on his return to action he was unable to complete the game, leaving with a foot injury in the third quarter after making eight points.

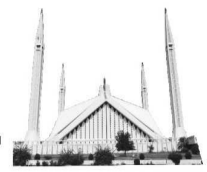
Collin Sexton top scored for the Jazz with 22 points and Keyonte George contributed 21 points as the Jazz (14-19) pulled off the win against the 19-13 Heat.

Although Utah pulled away late in the game, outscoring Miami 29-21 in the fourth quarter, it had been a close contest with 25 lead changes and 12 ties.

While Bam Adebayo delivered for the Heat, with 28 points and 16 rebounds, Miami's supporting cast failed to step up when Butler was forced out -- Miami made just one field goal in the last 5:57.

The Heat did reduce Utah's lead to two points with 2:41 remaining but the Jazz responded strongly to see out the game. "Second half, we were just never able to contain them off the bounce, regardless of what the action was," said Heat coach Erik Spoelstra.

With MVP Joel Embiid still missing with an ankle injury, Philadelphia, third in the East, suffered a 105-92 loss at the Chicago Bulls to slip to 22-10 on the season. DeMar DeRozan scored 24 points and Coby White 20 for the Bulls.



In brief

163 traffic wardens to regulate traffic

RAWALPINDI (APP): 163 traffic wardens and officers of traffic police have been deployed at all important points of Murree to regulate traffic and facilitate the tourists, said a City Traffic Police spokesman. Traffic police had devised a comprehensive plan for Murree for the snowfall season according to which entry of heavy vehicles in the city would be banned, he added. He said an emergency Help Line 051-9269200, had also been introduced for facilitating the tourists. The citizens, having complaints, could contact police round the clock, he added. He informed that Help Line center was also serving as control room from where all possible facilities were being provided to the tourists and all out efforts were being made to cope with any untoward situation. He said that several points had also been reserved for car parking. Different main roads including Kashmir Point, Mall Road, Guldana Road and other roads had been closed for two-way traffic, he said adding the tourists should cooperate with traffic police so that traffic mess particularly during snowfall season could be avoided.

5 days left for AIOU registration

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is organizing a convocation, and the last date for registration is January 5, 2024. According to the AIOU, the graduates who have secured at least 70% marks in their respective degree programmes from the semester of Autumn 2004 to the semester of Spring 2022 are eligible for registration. The students are directed to visit the convocation website 'convocation.aiou.edu.pk' to register or learn more about the convocation. The convocation will take place on January 31, 2024, at the Jinnah Convention Center in Islamabad. The President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi, will award degrees and gold medals to graduates. Many distinguished guests, including federal ministers, secretaries, senior officials of HEC, vice chancellors of various universities, rectors, renowned journalists, eminent social personalities, deans, professors, principal officers, faculty members, and students of AIOU will participate in the convocation. Vice Chancellor AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, emphasized that convocation is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for students, and he encourages all eligible students to register and be a part of this historic event in their lives.

ITP achieves milestones

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police (Traffic Unit) achieved remarkable milestones during the year 2023 which were particularly aimed to facilitate the public and ensure a safe road environment in the city. These achievements include the establishment of a new Traffic Headquarter at Faizabad, women driving centre, an increase in penalties for traffic law violations, implementation of an internationally recognized driving license in two languages, integration of the E-Challan system with criminal record as well as notification to concerned individuals before the expiration of new driving licenses. During the year 2023, the Islamabad Capital Police Traffic Unit took action against 8,86,698 vehicles and motorcycles for traffic violations while legal actions were also taken against 1,151 individuals for severe traffic violations.



ISLAMABAD: A beautiful view of the last sunset of the year 2023.

Economic zone of 5000 acres to be set up in Rawalpindi: Commissioner

RAWALPINDI (APP): The administration would set up an economic zone of 5000 acres in Rawalpindi to facilitate the business community, said Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta.

He informed that the master planning of Rawalpindi includes an economic zone of 5000 acres where the traders would set up the factories and provide economic opportunities to the local people. The Commissioner said that Rawalpindi is a division of six districts covering 22,993 square kilometers.

Rawalpindi division has 22 tehsils and a total population of the division is 11,406 million. Rawalpindi Division has a literacy rate of 72.25% and there are 12 universities and five specialized institutions in the division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta added.

The division has a total of 544 schemes worth Rs 179,576 million under the Annual Development Program (2023-24) and 33

percent funds had been utilized so far on the development schemes, the Commissioner added.

At present, work on various mega projects is underway in Rawalpindi. Phase-I of the Rawalpindi Ring Road, a mega project to reshape Rawalpindi, was swiftly being completed, he said. Economic Corridors would be created along the Rawalpindi Ring Road to provide maximum economic opportunities by promoting local industry in Rawalpindi.

An economic zone of 5000 acres would be created under the master planning of Rawalpindi on the proposal of the business community, he said. The construction work of Dadocha Dam was also swiftly being completed to provide Rawalpindi with 35 million gallons of clean drinking water per day.

Several other projects including Leh Expressway, Katchehari Chowk, Safe City Project, Water Supply Schemes and revamping of Holy Family hospital proj-

ect would be completed.

Construction of 150-bed Rehab Center at Wah General Hospital, up-gradation of Pirwadhai Bus Stand, Slaughter house, VICS Centre, Freelance IT center and Gymkhana in all the districts of the division were also included in the development schemes of the current year. Divisional Public Schools had also been started in other districts of the division.

Liaquat Bagh Library would also be developed. The divisional administration's current focus is on action against hoarders, environmental issues, tourist facilities in Murree, provision of better travel facilities for the public and upcoming elections, he said.

Due to lack of feeder bus service, full utilization of metro bus could not be achieved, he said adding, a feeder bus service would be started across the city to cover 80% of the city. These feeder buses would transport passengers from across the city to metro stations, he added.

Training civil servants' group from NIM visits Lahore, Sialkot

ISLAMABAD (APP): A group of 14 under-training civil servants from the National Institute of Management (NIM) Islamabad visited Sialkot and Lahore under the leadership of Muhammad Masood Ahmad who was heading the under training officers.

The visit is a part of a senior Management course which is currently in progress at NIM Academy here, a news release on Sunday said. The delegation visited the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce, Sialkot international airport, Forward Sports Sialkot, Sialkot surgical industry. In Lahore, the delegation visited Akhuwat College University Kasur and the Orange Line Train project.

Implementation of Khilafat-e-Rashida principles for judicial reforms: Ashrafi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi on Sunday called for the implementation of the Khilafat-e-Rashida system in Pakistan, with the foremost demand being an equitable and unbiased justice system.

Speaking at a seminar on Syedna Siddique Akbar, he highlighted that Pakistan, as an ideological state, is built on the principles of Khilafat-e-Rashida, with a focus on justice and fairness. Highlighting the need to emulate first caliph Siddique Akbar's adherence to Islamic beliefs and duties, he asserted that universal Zakat contributions could alleviate hunger across the nation. Ashrafi stressed the importance of a robust Zakat system, asserting that with proper implementation, hunger could be eradicated.

Expressing concern over the stagnant justice system after 76 years, he lamented the lack of accountability for those attacking state defense institutions and urged the judiciary to deliver fair decisions, especially regarding the events of May 9. He expressed concern, stating that if the culprits of May 9 go unpunished, then Allah safeguards the nation. He questioned the impediments preventing their punishment and raised the issue of the necessity of military courts, suggesting a potential challenge in the absence of such a system. Ashrafi emphasized the dete-

rioration of the justice system in the country and urged the Chief Justice of Pakistan to institute reforms in the lower-level courts.

Expressing condemnation for Israeli brutality in Palestine, he suggested that, rather than mere celebrations on the new year, Pakistanis should actively contribute financial aid to Palestinians and offer prayers for them. Highlighting international perspectives, he expressed that the stance of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab League is to foster a consensus on the two-state solution, adding that discussions are proposed with Egypt and Qatar to address the Palestinian issue in a bid to secure a lasting ceasefire.

Ashrafi said Commander-in-Chief of the Nation, General Syed Asim Munir, forthrightly conveyed to American leadership that persistent Israeli aggression could result in global repercussions affirming that Pakistan stands in solidarity with oppressed Palestine and pledges unwavering support. He, paying tribute to Syedna Siddique Akbar, stated that Hazrat Siddique Akbar holds the esteemed position of being the first Caliph of Muslims.

Emphasizing the fundamental tenet of the Khilafat system, he underscored the paramount role of justice adding that regardless of one's religious affiliation, the scales of justice must remain impartial.

05 illegal arm holders, liquor suppliers nabbed

RAWALPINDI (APP):

Police have arrested five illegal armholders and liquor suppliers and recovered arms, and ammunition from their possession during the crackdown here on Sunday.

According to a police spokesman, Chuntra police held Tayyab and recovered 01 pistol of 30

bore from his possession, and 01 pistol 30 bore was recovered from Anas.

Similarly, Saddar Wah police nabbed Wahi Sajid and recovered 01 pistol 30 bore from his custody.

While R.A Bazar police recovered 05 liters of liquor from Dawood, and the same quantity was recovered from Sihahl.

Police have registered separate cases against the accused and further investigation was in progress.

SSP Operations appreciated the performance of police teams adding that the crackdown will be continued against illegal arm holders and liquor suppliers without any discrimination.

Time to save maize farmers from market exploitation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Amidst impending food security issues, the maize farmers across the country are worried about sufficient return for their crop after facing serious pricing issues.

In absence of proper support price mechanism and strict implementation of policies like in case of wheat and cotton, whenever there is a bumper maize crop, the farmers fall prey to middlemen and hoarders.

As most of the farmers cannot sell their crop, they have to sell this - one of the most essential food crops - on throwaway prices suffering losses or hardly managing to meet their ends.

Maize is among the major crops that can play an important role in catering domestic food requirements and helping trim the import bill of edible oil. But, when its growers do not get proper price, they get disappointed and shift to other crops in next season.

"Maize is called 'Gold Crop' due to its diversified consumption. It is used as human food, animal feed and a vital product for industries. Many Asian and African countries use it as a vital food component to avert food insecurity," remarked Muhammad Ashiq Khan, a member of Farmers' Association Gojra. He said various companies like Rafhan Maize Products produce dozens of items from maize that are used in our industrial, pharmaceutical and food sectors.

"It is also used in confectionery, bakery, dairy, beverages, snacks and savory products and as feed for animals and poultry birds."

But, during the current season its farmers are in real trouble due to less price as presently the crop is sold at Rs.1,500 to Rs.2,000 per maund (40 kg), Ashiq Khan said. "This situation has disappointed farmers who are needed to be steered out of this situation."

Farmers believe that this price

does not make them meet their ends after they had purchased its seed on much higher price and spent money on other inputs. Heaps of maize could be seen all around the Punjab province with farmers in a fix to manage their crop at such lesser rate.

"Maize is an important food crop cultivated twice a year. But in absence of support price, its growers are forced to sell it at Rs.1,800 to Rs. 2,500 per maund," said Dr Fahad Rasul, Associate Professor of Agronomy, University of Agriculture Faisalabad. "This is disappointing for farmers. On this rate they cannot secure money to cultivate next crop and would surely switch to other crops."

He said at a time when the country was spending huge money on soybean import, maize could be utilized to feed fill this requirement of poultry feed industry. "Non-availability of hybrid maize seed is another issue for many growers as shopkeepers sell maize seed at much higher price than the original price printed on seed bag."

For example, Dr Fahad said retail price of one maize seed variety was Rs.15,000 per bag but it was being sold for Rs 20,000 in black market. "As it is an exhausting crop and farmers spend more on its cultivation and saving it from insect attack, so they need a proper return." He mentioned to a recent "fall-army-worm" attack on maize crop - a new insect that stops maize plant's growth by eating its leaves. Then there is 'earworm' insect that is equally damaging. "In such a situation, we sincerely need to support our farmers to get a reasonable rate for their crop."

There is a common dilemma in our country that whenever there is a bumper crop of maize or cotton or sugarcane, the farmers are left on mercy of brokers, commission

agents, hoarders and mill owners.

They are forced to sell their commodity on lesser rate, suffer loss and then shift to other crops creating shortage of the same crop next season. This vicious circle must be seriously addressed ensuring consistency in crops cultivation, pricing and their proper disposal. "Maize is our third most important crop and validly contributes to averting food crises," said Ahsan Malhi, Principal Scientist, Maize Department, Ayub Research Institute, Faisalabad.

"It provides around 6.9 million calories food energy per hectare, much higher as compared to 3.7 million and 4.9 million calories food energy of wheat and rice respectively."

He said previously about 75% maize produce was consumed in villages as staple food and 25% by the milling sector. But, presently, its 60% is used in poultry and animal feed sector and 30% is consumed by wet milling sector. "People now consume only six percent maize as food and remaining four percent of this crop is used as seed."

Ahsan Malhi advised farmers to use 10 to 15 kilograms seed per acre and prefer to cultivate hybrid maize varieties including YH-1898, FH-1046, FH-1036, FH-949, MMRI Yellow, Pearl White, Malka-2016, Gohar-19, Simmyt-Pak, Sahiwal Gold that are resistant to harsh climate and disease attack and give maximum production.

Seeing the miserable condition of maize farmers this time again, the policy makers should seriously evolve a comprehensive strategy on seed production, support price, procurement and effective dissemination of the crop. This would not only keep the farmers going with diverse crops growing but also meeting the maize related food needs indigenously.

Health expert for using home remedies to treat colds

ISLAMABAD (APP): A health expert has urged people to take precautionary measures and use home remedies to avert seasonal colds during the winter season.

"Expensive medicines from doctors either bring relief for the patient or sometimes aggravate the disease. If it is not a major problem, seasonal colds can be treated better and more effectively with home remedies," Dr. Abdul Manan told a private news channel.

With the advent of winter, one can catch colds, flu, coughs, pneumonia, and breathing problems due to abrupt changes in weather and overlooking your health; however, little lifestyle changes can protect your body against such diseases.

The health expert recommended a 1000-mg dose of vitamin C per day, as it plays an important role in preventing the flu. He said oranges

and lemons are rich sources of vitamin C that can be consumed during this season.

In cold weather, Manan said people should expose their bodies to sunlight, which is a natural source of vitamin D3 and protects the human body from multiple viruses by increasing a person's immunity. Daily consumption of pure honey in small amounts is also beneficial, he said, warning parents to avoid giving it to kids under the age of one.

The health expert emphasized the need to strengthen the immune system to fight diseases by consuming warm fluids like chicken broth and soups that lubricate the nose and throat by reducing inflammation. Turmeric powder, ginger juice, and a pinch of ground black pepper in milk can give instant relief to a person suffering from a cough or cold. Gargling with salt water is good for a sore

throat. He maintained that lemon also has anti-viral properties that can cure the flu quickly.

For this, he said a mixture of ground ginger, a teaspoon of honey, ground black pepper, and a spoon of lemon juice can be consumed twice a day. "Black pepper relieves a cold, while honey relieves a cough. Add ground black pepper to a spoon of lukewarm honey and drink it," he remarked.

Sharing the key factors that invite the flu and cold, he said unhealthy foods, especially those high in sugar, dehydration, and high-stress levels, increase the risk of disease by weakening the immune system. Smoking is also a major cause of catching colds. Likewise, lack of sleep also affects immunity in the human body. Your body requires adequate rest so that it can fight against viruses and recover, he noted.

Admin sets up 13 centers in Murree to facilitate tourists

RAWALPINDI (APP): Murree district administration on the directives of the Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta has set up 13 centers at 13 different places in Murree at Satara Meel, Lower Topa, Jika Gali, GPO, Kashmir Point, Kuldana, Kali Matti, Masiyari, Sindhan, Sunny Bank, Bhorban, Thanda Jungle and Saharbagla to facilitate the tourists.

According to a Commissioner Office spokesman, the Commissioner Rawalpindi Division had directed the authorities concerned to provide all possible facilities to the tourists during snowfall season. Under the Murree Contingency Plan, an additional 140 traffic police personnel had been deployed in Murree, he added.

The Commissioner had instructed that there should be no delay in preparations at the local level for the implementation of the plan. The biggest problem of Murree is traffic jams, he said adding, that the role of police and traffic wardens is the most important. The concerned forum would be approached to ensure the early appointment of a separate DPO for Murree district, he added.

A large number of tourists are expected to arrive in Murree on the occasion of New Year's Night. The administration was

directed to complete all the arrangements within Murree city and public service messages were being displayed on the SMDs to inform the tourists, he added.

A 24/7 helpline had also been arranged by the Tourism Department for the guidance of the tourists and to update them about weather and traffic conditions.

The vehicles entering the city were being monitored through digital counting at the 17 Mile Toll Plaza. 26 CCTV cameras had also been installed on all the main roads to monitor the traffic situation, he informed. According to Deputy Commissioner Murree, Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi, all the departments were put on high alert in view of the forecast of snowfall in the coming days.

A consultant had also been hired for the parking plaza in Murree who would be visiting the site soon, he added. Traffic Police Murree had acquired the frequency of FM 88.6, the DC Murree said adding, a special website would also be activated soon for the convenience and awareness of the tourists.



ISLAMABAD: A shepherd guarding herd of sheep at greenbelt along Islamabad Expressway at Khanna Pul.

2 Afghan citizens executed

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Human Rights Organization of Iran has announced that two Afghan prisoners have been executed in the central prison of Karaj, Iran. According to reports, these Afghan citizens were executed for the crime of “intentional murder.” According to the organization, “These two Afghan citizens were transferred to solitary confinement on Thursday, along with Akbar Nehmati, who had previously been convicted of intentional murder to retribution.

IE urged to boost employment

KABUL (BNA): A group of elders and dignitaries from different ethnic groups in Balkh province met with Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, the Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs, and asked him to prioritize job creation in their province. The representatives of the group, Alam Khan Azadi and Mohammad Suroor, praised the Islamic Emirate for bringing freedom and independence to Afghanistan after four decades of war.

168 cases of violence recorded, says AJC

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Afghanistan Journalists Center expressed concern about media rights violations in Afghanistan and said that in 2023 it recorded 168 cases of violations of journalists’ rights in the country.

The report stated that one journalist died, 19 journalists were injured, there were 78 cases of threats and 61 cases of arrests of journalists recorded.

The Afghanistan Journalists Center stated

US reveals cause of flight crash

KABUL (Khaama Press): Two weeks following the tragic crash of an Airplane in Oregon, USA, which resulted in the death of three pilots, all former members of the Afghan forces, the government has disclosed the primary cause of the accident.

Foreign media, citing the US government, recently reported that a former Afghan Air Force pilot ignored the instructor’s advice not to return to the airport due to adverse weather conditions, leading to the crash during a training flight in Oregon.

The AP recently reported that the National Transportation Safety Board of America stated in its Friday report that an examination of the aircraft’s body and engine shows no technical violations.

Previously, US authorities announced that three individuals from the Afghan Air Force died following the crash of a small plane during a training flight in Oregon.

The Oregon state police have identified the deceased as 35-year-old Mohammad Hussain Mousavi (pilot), 35-year-old Mohammad Bashir Safdari (passenger), and 29-year-old Ali Jan Fardousi (passenger).

Notably, these individuals were conducting training flights over the past year to obtain their licenses.

The tragic incident highlights the ongoing risks and challenges faced by former Afghan forces who are continuing their aviation training in the US.

The government’s revelation of the cause of the crash underscores the importance of adherence to safety protocols and weather advisories during flight operations.

that “in 2023, the recorded cases of violation of the rights of journalists and the media show a significant decrease compared to the 260 events recorded in 2022, but there is no change in terms of quality and structure.”

This comes as journalists and media workers also urged the interim government to take solid steps to eliminate the existing challenges.

“All of the activities belonging to the media and journalists should be pursued through the commission of media violation and this commission should be incentivized and any media and journalist who commit a violation, should be investigated through this commission,” said Rasul Shahzad, a journalist.

“The government should increase access to information. The economy of the media organizations should be empowered and supported,” said Mustafa Sharyar,

a journalist.

The Islamic Emirate in reaction to the AJC’s report said that the detention of the journalists has not been due to their media related activities.

Islamic Emirate spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said that no media has come under pressure and that all media are “freely active”.

“Some of the cases that happened in 2023 were because of violations. Sometimes, the journalists have been arrested on criminal activities or legal cases for a temporary time. The detention has not been permanent,” he said.

Meanwhile, according to the reports of the media watchdogs, around 86 TV channels, 257 radio stations, 33 journalists and 46 printing media organizations are currently active in Afghanistan.

At least 220 media organizations were closed after the Islamic Emirate came to power.

Review of economic plans in 2023

KABUL (Ariana News): In 2023, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) was able to complete some huge projects from domestic revenues with little resources.

The completion of the first part of the Qosh Tepa canal and the reconstruction of part of the Salang highway are among the most important projects that were completed this year.

Attracting investment of 6.5 billion dollars on seven large mines, expanding trade relations with neighboring countries, maintaining the value of the Afghan currency against foreign currencies, preventing the smuggling of dollars out of the country, and also preventing the exchange of foreign currencies in daily transactions are considered to be among the other achievements of the IEA in 2023.

The start of the reconstruction of the Kabul-Kandahar highway, the extraction of oil from the Qashqari wells in Sar-e-Pul province, and the beginning of the extension of the 500 kV Jawzjan-Kabul line are also among the projects

of 2023.

In addition, Afghanistan’s exports to other countries also increased. Based on the statistics of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, exports have reached one billion and 717 million dollars.

Afghanistan’s export goods have been exported to Iran, Pakistan, India, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, China, Kazakhstan and America.

In 2023, the value of the Afghan currency was not only maintained against foreign currencies, but the value of the Afghan currency increased, the central bank stopped commercial transactions with foreign currencies and did not allow dollars to be smuggled out of Afghanistan.

This year, Afghanistan has had 21% of imports from Iran, 18% of imports from China, 18% of imports from Pakistan, and 14% of imports from the United Arab Emirates.

However, experts have said that Afghanistan needs more work and effort to get out of the current situation into a better status.

Capacity increased to 200,000 personnel

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Interior’s spokesman, Abdul Matin Qani, said that the capacity of the ministry has increased from 150,000 to more than 200,000 personnel and that all forces and personnel have been enrolled based on the needs in civilian and military departments.

Qani said that efforts are underway to attract fresh forces from various provinces.

“Around 75,000 vacancies have been distributed to the provinces. The delegation went and after the survey, the professional people have been appointed,” he said.

Veterans and analysts meanwhile urged the Islamic Emirate to focus on the professionalism of the forces in the country.

“The important principle is professionalism. If we even have hundreds of thousands of forces but they are not professional, they cannot provide security,” said Mohammad Zalmai Afghanyar, a military analyst.

“To provide security, the police and intelligence should be active. They should be trained professionally to thwart the attacks and terrorist incidents on time,” said Fazal Rahman Samkanai, political analyst.

The spokesman said that based on the decree of the Islamic Emirate’s leader, the interior ministry sent a list of around 75,000 military and civilian vacancies to various provinces.

Girls students continue studies secretly

KABUL (Al Jazeera): Al Jazeera has reported that female medical students in Afghanistan are continuing their education in secret.

The Al Jazeera report published on December 30th states that over 3,000 women who graduated before the education ban have been denied participation in the “exit exam.”

The prohibition of female doctors from entering exams has led to a severe shortage of female doctors in Afghanistan’s health sector.

Qalandar Abad, the acting Minister of Public Health, has also referred to this issue, stating that they are facing a shortage of female doctors.

Al Jazeera interviewed two girls who are interning in hospitals secretly. They have said that they have taken this action against imposed restrictions and to prevent forced marriages.

The girls told Al Jazeera reporter that “their constant fear is that the Taliban might see them during their internships.”

Roza Otunbayeva, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative in Afghanistan, reported in the last report to the UN Security Council that Afghanistan is the most repressive country in the field of women’s rights.

Al Jazeera has reported that in parts of Afghanistan, men do not allow their women to be treated by male doctors. While the Afghan health sector urgently needs female doctors, the ban on girls’ education has led to a “most destructive” situation.

Youth collect textbooks to distribute to students

KABUL (TOLOnews): A group of youth in the south-eastern province of Khost are collecting textbooks to distribute them to students.

They go home to home and ask for extra textbooks.

A member of this civil movement, Naqibullah Zaland, said that they have so far collected around 2,000 textbooks and handed them over to the provincial department of education.

“We have launched this campaign to address the needs of the students who lack access to textbooks so we can provide access to textbooks for the students,” he said.

The residents of Khost meanwhile praised the movement, saying that lack of sufficient textbooks is one of the main challenges of the school students.

“Their collecting of books is a positive step because they are providing education opportunities for others,” said Hazratullah, a



resident of Khost.

“This is a great process as they give books to those students who don’t have them,” said Zainullah, a resident of Khost.

Meanwhile, the provincial education officials said that the shortage of text-

books has been addressed at some level.

“Whoever helps the education department, we will come to them. But they should coordinate with us before launching any program. They should bring their books to us and we

welcome such steps,” said Mohammad Anwar Din Parwar, head of the provincial department of education.

A shortage of textbooks and teachers is a major problem in schools across the country.

A look at diplomacy of Islamic Emirate in 2023

KABUL (Ariana News): The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) spent 2023 also with the crisis of lack of international legitimacy and could not secure Afghanistan seat at the United Nations.

The international community also kept sanctions on the Islamic Emirate this year due to its restrictions on women and girls.

In 2023, however, the Islamic Emirate made progress in diplomacy with some countries, and China, became the first country to formally name a new ambassador to Afghanistan since the IEA takeover.

This year, the interaction of the Afghan embassies with the Islamic Emirate also continued, and in October, the Afghan

embassies in the Netherlands and Spain announced their engagement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul. At the end of this year, diplomats having contacts with the Islamic Emirate took control of the Afghan embassy in India.

Meanwhile, Iran, Afghanistan’s western neighbor, had tense relations with the Islamic Emirate over the issue of water rights from Helmand River.

Pakistan also had tense relations with the Islamic Emirate this year due to the alleged presence of Tehreek-e-Taliban in Afghanistan, a charge which Kabul denies.

The relations deteriorated to a level that Islamabad started the process of

forced repatriation of more than one million Afghan refugees from Pakistan.

Experts believe that the neighboring and regional countries have not yet been able to agree on a specific policy for engagement with the Islamic Emirate. According to them, this requires the implementation of the conditions of the international community, including the formation of an inclusive government and respect for the rights of women and girls and ethnic and religious minorities by the Islamic Emirate.

In 2023, the cabinet of the Islamic Emirate also remained as caretaker. The return of former government officials and politicians to the country continued, and hundreds returned

to the country through the relevant commission.

However, the Islamic Emirate calls 2023 a year full of achievements and emphasizes that this year progress has been made in all fields, especially in expanding relations with other countries.

The spokesman of the Islamic Emirate, however, considers the reason for the lack of international legitimacy to be the actions of certain countries, which he believes also have upper hand in the United Nations.

Although the Islamic Emirate has established diplomatic relations with about 20 countries, no country has officially recognized it as the government of Afghanistan.

Excessive coal consumption aids respiratory diseases in Bamyan

BAMYAN (Pajhwok): Some residents and experts in central Bamyan province have expressed their concerns over increase in respiratory diseases due to the excessive process, loading, unloading and burning of coal.

Qudratullah Raha, the founder of Bamika Higher Education Institute, in Bamyan said the process and loading of coal in residential areas was against the environmental and urban laws and this practice has dangerous consequences for the environment.

He said the increasing heavy vehicles traffic and use of coal besides negatively impacting agriculture had generated a number of respiratory diseases.

He warned if serious and practical measures are not taken to move coal transportation centers from inside the city and reduce pollution, the local residents will face serious health problems.

Ahmad Raza Rostae, one of the engineering faculty teachers of Bamyan University, said taking into

account environmental considerations towards sustainable development, the prevention of environmental pollution and health problems was necessary.

He believed one of the energy sources that will have the most negative environmental and health effects is the excessive use of coal.

He explained the dispersion of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere as a result of coal burning which created small carbon particles in the air and that enter into human body through respiration caused different types of diseases.

This comes that workers in the coal mines had complained against different respiratory diseases and termed working in the coalmine a difficult task.

Muharam Ali, one of the Bamyan City residents, said he worked in the coal loading factory from the past two years in order to earn livelihood and support his family.

He said: “During the two years that I have been working in the coal mining sector, I have now suffered

from serious heart and respiratory problems. I visited the hospital several times, but at first I could not sleep, and the harder I work, the more I face shortness of breath and chest pain.”

Dr. Faroghudin Amini, head of the Provincial Hospital’s Antani Department, talked about the surge in the number of patients visiting hospital and said patients suffering from heart, respiratory problems, allergy, flu, sore throat and others visited the hospital frequently.

He believed the first reason behind surge in respiratory problems was growing air pollution caused by vehicles and coal burning.

Dr. Amini explained that fact that coal is a completely chemical and carcinogenic substance, when a person breathed it from the air, it could affect the pulmonary system and the respiratory arteries of the lungs, taking the person close to lung cancer or even causes death.

He urged to bar children and elders from going outside early morning and late at night and use masks

when needed.

Environmental Protection Department (EPD) officials acknowledged growing environmental degradation and said efforts had been taken to control the situation.

Provincial EPD Head Mohammad Ibrahim Dadfar said increasing environmental pollution in this season is one of the grave issues adding that all residents and businesspeople are bound to adhere to urban and environmental laws.

He said in order to control environmental pollution most of the coal loading and unloading centres had been removed from residential areas and moved outside in the Qarghna Tou area.

He also stressed in order to reduce and control environmental pollution, besides preventing the burning of plastic and garbage, all owners of Hamams and heating centers advised to install filters on their heating facilities, in case of violation their licenses would be canceled.

‘Russia won’t remove Taliban from list’

KABUL (Khaama Press): Zamiir Kabulov, Russia’s special representative for Afghanistan, stated that while he respects Kazakhstan’s decision to remove the Taliban from the list of terrorist groups, Moscow has no intention of doing the same.

Russia’s special representative for Afghanistan recently made these remarks in an interview with Russian NCA radio.

Mr. Kabulov emphasized that the Taliban has not changed, and Russia is not negotiating the removal of the Taliban from the list of banned groups.

The special representative of the President of Russia for Afghanistan has articulated Russia’s stance on the Taliban administration at a time when Kazakhstan’s Foreign Ministry unexpectedly removed the Taliban from its list of banned terrorist groups.

The ministry’s announcement was published on Friday, stating that Kazakhstan’s decision to remove the Taliban from the terrorist groups’ list was in accordance with a United Nations Security Council resolution.

The Kazakh Foreign

Ministry stated, “The Republic of Kazakhstan periodically reviews its national list of banned terrorist organizations to update it. As part of this process, it was decided to remove the Taliban group in accordance with the practices of the United Nations.”

However, Zamiir Kabulov, Russia’s special envoy, commented, “This is the sovereign right of Kazakhstan. We understand and respect this decision. However, we continue to view the Taliban movement as it was, with no current changes.”

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5 killed in various incidents in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): Kazakhstan last week removed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) from its sanction list and the UN Security Council adopted a resolution on Afghanistan, but Russia and China abstained and \$27.8 million aid was announced for the country.

Casualties

Last week, five people, including a kidnapped child, were killed in various incidents across the country.

A kidnapped child named Ilyas Momand was killed in eastern Nangarhar province by his kidnappers after his family failed to pay the ransom money. One

of the child’s killers was killed during an operation by security forces.

A teacher and a doctor at the Kabul Medical University were killed in Kabul and a woman and her alleged lover were killed in Sari Pul province by the woman’s relatives over illicit relationship.

In the previous week, according to sources, nine people had been killed and 21 others injured in various incidents across the country.

Before the regime change in August 2021, hundreds of civilians, insurgents and security forces would get killed and maimed every week.

World’s Interaction with Islamic Emirate

Azerbaijan plans to open its embassy in Afghanistan next year, a media report said on Saturday, citing a statement from the foreign ministry in Baku.

Under a decree signed by President Ilham Aliyev on July 28, 2021, Ilham Mammadov was appointed as Azerbaijan’s ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to Afghanistan.

Also, the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan removed the Islamic Emirate from the list of banned groups banned from operating in their territory.

Acting Minister of

Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan Maulvi Amir Khan Muttaqi said relations between Afghanistan and Kazakhstan were on a positive trajectory and Kazakhstan’s decision would serve the interest of both countries.

Liu Jinsong, Deputy Director-General of the Department of International Economic Affairs in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, met new Afghan ambassador to the country, Bilal Karimi, and called positive relations between the two countries a new chapter and both sides vowed to expand interactions.

Reports said Tadamichi

Yamamoto, former UN representative for Afghanistan, said normalization of relations with the caretaker Afghan government was in the interest of both Afghanistan and the world, pledging Japan’s cooperation in this regard.

UNSC resolution

The UN Security Council (UNSC) yesterday adopted a resolution on an independent assessment on Afghanistan that provides recommendations on international engagement to address the challenges being faced by the country.

The UN News wrote on X that the resolution approved after 13 positive

votes about of 15.

The United Arab Emirates mission to the UN also said: “Today, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution co-penned by the UAE and Japan.”

The resolution advances the process outlined in the independent assessment on Afghanistan, including through creating a UN Special Envoy to promote implementation of the recommendations.

The mission added: “The resolution affirms that the objective of this process is an Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbours, fully reintegrated into the international com-

munity, with the safe, full, equal and meaningful participation of women.

However, Russia and China abstained from the voting.

Russia and China said they did not vote on the resolution on Afghanistan and were against the appointment of a special representative for Afghanistan without consultation with the Islamic Emirate.

The Islamic Emirate had said that Afghanistan has a strong central government and could manage its internal affairs and was fully capable of implementing its foreign policy.

It said parallel mecha-

nisms by the United Nations, such as the appointment of a special representative, were not acceptable.

Continuity of aid

To help needy Afghans, the European Union has pledged contributing three million euros (\$3.2 million) to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund and the Islamic Development Bank allocated 24.6 million dollars to help the Afghans.

Additionally, the Deputy Director of the United Nations Humanitarian Aid Coordination Office said 16 million people in Afghanistan will be distributed humanitarian aid this winter.

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