

Pakistan condemns attack in Iran

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Foreign Office (FO) on Sunday strongly condemned an attack on an Iranian police station that killed 11 policemen and said it stood in "full solidarity" with the country's people and government in "this hour of unspeakable tragedy". On Friday, at least 11 Iranian police officers were killed in an overnight attack on a police station in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan.

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Hamid Kazmi joins PPP

ISLAMABAD (APP): Former Federal Minister Hamid Saeed Kazmi on Sunday announced to join the Pakistan Peoples Party after meeting with President Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) Asif Ali Zardari. A well-known religious scholar Ahmed Saeed Kazmi also joined the PPP, said a press release issued here by the party secretariat.

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Israel strikes Gaza as pressure grows to free more hostages

GAZA STRIP (AFP/APP): Israel carried out fresh strikes on Gaza Sunday as its leaders came under growing pressure to secure the release of hostages still held in the Hamas-run territory more than two months after the October 7 attacks.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faced protests on Saturday by relatives of hostages who called for an urgent deal to secure their freedom after the army admitted mistakenly killing three captives in Gaza. The trio were among an estimated 250 people taken hostage during Hamas's October 7 raids into Israel, which also killed about 1,140 people, according to the Israeli authorities' latest figures.

According to Hamas, Israel's retaliatory offensive in Gaza has killed 18,800 people, mostly women and children. At a protest in Tel Aviv on Saturday, relatives of hostages gathered to plead with the government for a deal. "Take us into consideration and come up with a plan now (for negotiation)," said Noam Perry, daughter of hostage Haim Perry, at the protest.

More than 100 of the Israelis and foreigners seized by Hamas and other militants on October 7 were released in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners during a week-long truce last month, mediated by Qatar.

Netanyahu doubled down on his war effort on Saturday, telling reporters of the three hostages' deaths: "It broke my heart. It broke the whole nation's heart."

"With all the deep sorrow, I want to clarify: the military pressure is necessary both for the return of the kidnapped and for achieving victory over our enemies," he added.

On Sunday, according to the Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza, at least 12 people were killed in Israeli strikes on the central city of Deir al-Balah. Witnesses

also reported Israeli air and artillery strikes on the southern municipality of Bani Suhaila east of Khan Yunis, the Gaza Strip's second city. On Saturday, Netanyahu appeared to address Qatari efforts towards a new truce. "We have serious criticisms of Qatar, about which I suppose you will hear in due course, but right now we are trying to complete the recovery of our hostages," he said.

In a statement, Qatar reaffirmed on Saturday its "ongoing diplomatic efforts to renew the humanitarian pause". But Hamas said on Telegram it was "against any negotiations for the exchange of prisoners until the aggression against our people ceases completely".

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said late Saturday he was travelling to Israel, Bahrain and Qatar to highlight Washington's "commitments to strengthening regional security and stability".

News platform Axios said Israeli spy chief David Barnea met Friday in an unspecified European location with Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, who helped negotiate the earlier truce. Israel's bombardment of Gaza has left much of the territory in ruins, with the UN estimating 1.9 million Gazans have been displaced by the war. The UN said this week that hunger and desperation were driving people to seize humanitarian aid being delivered to Gaza, warning of a "breakdown of civil order".

International aid organisations have struggled to get supplies to desperate Gazans.

"I would not be surprised if people start dying of hunger, or a combination of hunger, disease, weak immunity," said Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees.

PPP's Latif Khosa joins PTI

LAHORE (NNI): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) disgruntled leader Sardar Latif Khosa on Sunday officially announced to join the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), stating that he took the step "on the wish" of incarcerated PTI founder Imran Khan.

In a press conference held in Lahore, Khosa emphasized that his move was driven by the "interest of the country and democracy," expressing his commitment to raising his voice for the truth.

"I have decided this only in the interest of the country and democracy," he said. Khosa underscored the importance of adhering to the constitution, describing it as a "civil agreement" with the characteristics of welfare states.

He added: "The motherland can become prosperous if we follow the Constitution. The Constitution has a solution for everything if implemented in its true spirit."

Addressing the role of the armed forces, Khosa contended that their duty extends beyond protecting borders to assisting the state in emergencies such as floods and providing security during elections.

Notably, Latif Khosa, also a member of Imran Khan's legal team, had received an invitation to join the PTI on December 4. The decision comes after the PPP suspended Khosa's party membership on September 22 for defending the PTI head without approval and criticizing the state policy during a lawyers' function.

'Global powers made Pakistan slaves through int'l treatie'

MARDAN (NNI): Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam -Fazal chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman has lamented that international treaties have effectively made Pakistan subservient and subject to the policies of global institutions. Addressing a worker's convention in Mardan on Sunday, he voiced concerns over what he perceives as a weakened foreign policy under the influence of global powers.

Highlighting the impact of global institutions on Pakistan's internal affairs, Rehman asserted that decisions made by these entities often render the country's constitution and laws ineffective, particularly in less developed and smaller nations. He further emphasizes that international organizations wield control over Pakistan's economy, defense, and even its nuclear assets.



GAZA: Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a house, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

PM Kakar to visit Kuwait today

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakar will visit Kuwait on Monday to condole the sad demise of Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah. The prime minister, on X, posted that prayed for the high ranks of the departed soul, said that Pakistan stood in solidarity with the Kuwaiti Royal Family and the people of Kuwait at this moment of grief. He further said that the late Amir would always be remembered for his sterling contribution to strengthening Pak-Kuwait

relations. According to foreign media, the Kuwaiti Royal Court said that Sheikh Nawaf died at the age of 86 after a long illness. The State of Kuwait has declared an official mourning over the death of Amir. Sheikh Nawaf was sworn in as Amir following the death of his predecessor, the late Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah in 2020. He was born in 1937 and was the fifth son of Kuwait's late ruler from 1921 to 1950 Sheikh Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah.

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Zardari wants prompt resolution of internal party differences

PESHAWAR (NNI): Former President Asif Ali Zardari, during a meeting with Governor Ghulam Ali and party leaders at the Governor House, urged a prompt resolution of internal party differences. The discussion also touched upon matters concerning the allocation of election tickets. As per sources, the PPP co-chairman Zardari particularly urged party leaders not to form an alliance with Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the upcoming elections.

Sixty-one migrants drown in shipwreck off Libya

CAIRO(Reuters): Sixty-one migrants, including women and children, drowned following a shipwreck off Libya, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Libya said.

IOM, in a post on social media platform X, quoted survivors as saying the boat, carrying around 86 people, departed the Libyan city of Zwara, about 110 km (68 miles) from the capital, Tripoli. "The central Mediterranean continues to be one of the world's most dangerous migration routes," IOM said.

Deadly incidents this year included one in June, when a fishing boat packed with hundreds of migrants sank off Greece after departing from Tobruk, Libya. The voyage, which was supposed to end in Italy, resulted in 78 recorded deaths with the fate of 518 others

unknown, according to an IOM report. Drowning was the main cause of death on migration routes globally in the first half of 2023, with 2,200 recorded fatalities in the period, according to the IOM report.

The central Mediterranean route was the deadliest, accounting for a total of 1,727 deaths and disappearances along its shores in the period, the IOM report said. The majority of the deaths were recorded in Tunisia, followed by Libya, it said.

The figures remain an undercount, IOM said in its report. Sea migrant arrivals to Italy have almost doubled in 2023 compared with the same period last year, with around 140,000 people coming ashore so far. Some 91% came from Tunisia, with the tiny Italian island of Lampedusa bearing the

brunt of landings.

The European Union and Tunisia signed a "strategic partnership" deal in July that includes combating human traffickers and tightening sea borders during a sharp increase in boats leaving the North African nation for Europe.

Britain and Italy announced plans on Saturday to jointly finance the journey home for migrants stranded in Tunisia, according to statements from both countries, but did not say how much would money was being provided.

In Libya, more than a decade of violence since the overthrow and killing of dictator Moamer Kadhafi in a NATO-backed uprising helped turn the country into a fertile ground for human traffickers who have been accused of abuses ranging from extortion to slavery.

Caretaker Chief Minister KP declares anti-corruption "Jihad"

ABBOTTABAD (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Sunday has called for a collective effort to combat corruption, emphasizing a zero-tolerance policy for negligence in duty across all institutions. He expressed these views while talking to various delegations at KP House Abbottabad.

The Caretaker CM said that Abbottabad has been officially declared a sister city with Azerbaijan, marking the commencement of various developmental projects. The government is determined to ensure transparent and fair elections in Abbottabad,

prioritizing the resolution of local issues.

Following meetings with various delegations. Delegations from Azerbaijan, along with key officials such as Health Minister Dr Riaz Khan and Mineral and Planning Minister Dr Sarfraz Ali Shah, were present at the occasion.

During the discussions, the Chief Minister acknowledged the existing issues in the district, particularly concerning water, electricity, and cleanliness.

The Commissioner informed about devised solutions for these problems. Chief Minister Arshad Hussain outlined a

comprehensive strategy to tackle unemployment, aiming to train half a million youth within a year. Task forces have been formed in various institutions, offering courses ranging from four months to four years. The goal is to provide employment opportunities, both domestically and internationally, based on demand.

Additionally, Chief Minister Arshad Hussain announced the Quantum Valley declaration for Haripur and Abbottabad, ensuring that youth will no longer face employment issues. The empowerment of the youth is highlighted through plans such as conferring univer-

sity status to medical colleges, training doctors and physiotherapists, establishing nursing directorates, and constructing nursing institutes.

He emphasized the importance of resolving issues related to mosques and employees under the Auqaf Department. District Khateeb Mufti Abdul Wajid highlighted these concerns, and their resolution has been assured by the government. Overall, the government's commitment to combating corruption and addressing local issues reflects a proactive approach towards the development of Abbottabad.

PPP KP Parliamentary Board holds hybrid session under Chairman Bilawal

KARACHI (NNI): The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) on Sunday held a hybrid session of its parliamentary board for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), with PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari leading the proceedings.

Prominent figures present at the parliamentary board meeting included Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani, Faisal

Karim Kundi, Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha, and Rubina Khalid. The meeting also saw the participation of the central president of PPP's Women's Wing Faryal Talpur.

The gathering aimed to streamline the party's strategy for the upcoming elections and foster a transparent and inclusive process for candidate selection. During the

session, the PPP's parliamentary board discussed the qualifications and eligibility criteria of candidates aspiring to contest elections on the party's ticket in KP.

The exchange of ideas focused on evaluating the capabilities and potential of the candidates to ensure the selection of competent representatives.

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Salam Kissan. Sarsabz Pakistan.



CM hopes upcoming UMC to serve as milestone in fulfilling burgeoning healthcare needs of Karachiites

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister, Justice (retired) Maqbool Baqar, has expressed firm optimism that the upcoming charitable tertiary care hospital, University Medical Complex (UMC), to be built in Gulistan-e-Jauhar area after completion will serve as a milestone in fulfilling burgeoning healthcare needs of the residents of Karachi.

The interim Sindh CM was addressing as the chief guest at the fundraiser organised here at a hotel on Sunday for the speedy construction of the UMC. The Medics International (MI) has been building the UMC jointly with the Baqir Health and Educational Welfare Trust and Zaidi Abid Foundation, USA.

Speaking on the occasion, the interim CM noted that the healthcare needs of the residents of the city had been continuously increasing. He said the upcoming charitable healthcare facility would go a long way in phenomenally decreasing the burden of patients on the existing public hospitals in the city.

He expressed gratitude to the concerned healthcare professionals, philanthropists, and charity leaders who had conceived the idea of building a charitable tertiary care hospital in the city's heart in the shortest

possible time.

Justice (retired) Baqar said the construction of the UMC was the embodiment of the collective efforts on the part of the concerned philanthropists and charitable institutions to improve the public healthcare standards in Karachi.

He hoped that UMC after completion would also serve the deserving patients belonging to many underprivileged areas in rural Sindh and adjoining parts of Balochistan.

He said that a new tertiary care health facility was not merely a brick-and-mortar structure as it would emerge as a symbol of hope, compassion, and state-of-the-art treatment for patients from underprivileged communities.

He noted that UMC would also emerge as a centre of excellence in the field of medical education as in this regard it would establish linkages with leading medical universities in the world.

He eulogized the resolve of the MI and its partner charitable organisations to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of ailing populations in the country that didn't have the means to get the latest treatment facilities from the elite private hospitals in the city.

The interim CM praised the charitable efforts of the MI continuing for the past 30 years to provide essen-

tial healthcare facilities to the patients in backward and rural areas of the country and provision of emergency medical aid to the victims of natural disasters.

He urged the concerned philanthropists and donors to come forward and fully support the construction of the UMC as a state-of-the-art healthcare facility for needy patients in Karachi and adjoining areas.

Justice (retired) Baqar said the Caretaker Sindh government would provide whatever assistance would be required to build the construction of the UMC whether in the form of provision of land or grant-in-aid for the upcoming hospital. MI Pakistan CEO, Dr Dilbar Saeed, said in his welcome remarks that his non-profit and partner charities had the aim to build the upcoming charitable hospital and make it operational in the next five to seven years.

He said the UMC after becoming operational would generate employment opportunities for over 1,000 senior healthcare professionals who would provide specialised medical care to needy patients.

He said the UMC wouldn't decline the provision of essential treatment facilities to any patients on the grounds of his financial inability or lack thereof as the upcoming healthcare project wouldn't stand for

earning profits.

Dr Saeed informed the audience at the fundraiser that dedicated sections of the UMC would take care of the specialised medical needs of cancer and women patients. He said the UMC would work as a centre of excellence for healthcare professionals who had the aim to enhance their academic qualifications as per the international standards of medical education.

Dr Husain Mehdi, representing the Zaidi Abid Foundation, informed the audience that the UMC would serve the needy patients without any discrimination as the beneficiaries of the upcoming tertiary care hospital would belong to all ethnicities, religions, and sects in the country. He informed the audience that the construction phase of the UMC would begin in January 2024. Chairman of Sindh Higher Education Commission, Prof Dr SM Tariq Rafi, hoped that concerned philanthropists and donors of Karachi would ensure the construction of the UMC in the shortest possible time. Renowned TV artist, Khalid Anum, who conducted the fundraiser, also announced the donation of an ambulance on behalf of his family for the upcoming hospital. Noted philanthropist, Nadra Panjwani, announced a Rs five million donation for the UMC.



ABBOTTABAD: Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (Retd) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah addressing a ceremony at Comsats University.

Sindh Minister inaugurates digitalization of Revenue land

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Caretaker Minister for Revenue, Industry and Commerce, Muhammad Yunus Dagha inaugurated the digitalization of Revenue land and Online Facilitation Center at the office of Association of Builders and Developers Pakistan (ABAD), here Sunday. On the occasion, Yunus Dagha said, "Caretaker Sindh Government has established a facilitation center in the office of ABAD for digitization of revenue land and provision of online services. Under which ABAD members can now submit their applications at ease and can also get information about their applications online," said a statement.

He said, "Facilities of e-service have been provided in all the revenue offices of Sindh including Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners and Mukhtarkars offices as now the people of the province can submit their applications online in these offices and get results while documents can be received at home by courier."

Muhammad Yunus Dagha said, "Through digitization, the work will be completed with transparency in revenue and the difficulties of the customers will be reduced."

He said, "Through the digitalization of land, we are also computerizing the land records of the entire Sindh, with this process, no one's land ownership record can be changed through manipulation and now no one will be deprived of his right." He said, "Through this application, we are providing 10 different services, one of which is the provision of domicile."

He said, "E-services launched in the Department of Industry and Commerce and Board of Revenue Sindh can also be replicated to more provincial departments."

He said, "Now the lands of Sindh Board of Revenue will be sold through auction so that the money of the people of Sindh remains with the people of Sindh."

Muhammad Yunus Dagha said, "Sindh Board of Revenue is devising

the Allotment policy and very soon this policy will be tabled before the caretaker cabinet."

Caretaker Minister Mohammad Yunus Dagha said, "Construction sector can stabilize our GDP a lot and all it needs is attention."

Patron Chief of ABAD Mohsin Shaikhani and Chairman ABAD Asif Sumsum also spoke on the occasion.

She said, "Sindh government has taken a historic step by establishing a facilitation center in the office of ABAD, the representative body of the construction sector."

Mohsin Shaikhani, Asif Sumsum, other officials of ABAD and Senior Member Board of Revenue Sindh Zahid Ali Abbasi, Member RS&EP Abbas Baloch, Deputy Commissioners of various districts of Karachi and other officers were also present in the ceremony. While officers from Hyderabad, Sukkur and other districts of Sindh also participated online. On the occasion, the officers of Sindh Board of Revenue also answered the questions of the audience.

Dengue on the wane in Punjab

LAHORE (APP): The number of dengue cases is decreasing in Punjab as only 18 new cases were reported on Sunday.

The latest Health Department data reveals a total of 15,047 confirmed dengue cases across 36 districts in Punjab this year.

However, the battle against the fever persists with Lahore leading the unfortunate tally at 6,948 cases, followed by Rawalpindi with 2,654, Gujranwala with 1,584, Multan with 1,444 and Faisalabad with 912 cases. Lahore, with an additional 10 cases, continues to grapple with the fever, Gujranwala with 2, Multan with 1 and Faisalabad with 9 new cases. Meanwhile, Sheikhupura, Okara and Narowal each reported 1 case each of dengue within 24 hours.

Currently, 32 patients are undergoing treatment in various hospitals across Punjab, with 16 of them in Lahore district hospitals. Punjab Health Secretary Ali Jaan Khan urged people to maintain clean and dry surroundings as a preventive measure against dengue.

He also called for cooperation with health department teams that are working tirelessly to combat it.

For those in need of dengue treatment, information, or wishing to register complaints, a free helpline is available through the health department at 1033.

LESCO detects 278 power pilferers on 99th day of anti-theft campaign

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has detected a total of 278 connections from where the customers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts (Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara) on the 99th day of grand anti-power theft campaign.

The LESCO spokesman told media here Sunday that the company has also submitted FIR applications against 278 electricity thieves, out of which 144 FIRs have been registered in respective police stations, while 13 accused have been arrested. Grand anti-power theft operations against electricity thieves are being conducted on the directives of the Federal Power Division and the LESCO Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Engineer Shahid Haider is supervising these operations. The LESCO chief vowed that the operations would continue without discrimination until the complete end of electricity theft. The electricity pilferers as well as the LESCO officers and employees who facilitate them are also being brought to justice. On the 99th consecutive day of the anti-power theft campaign, the spokesman added, large commercial consumers were

also found involved in electricity theft and all of them were also disconnected. Among the seized connections were 05 commercial, 03 agricultural, 01 commercial and 270 domestic. All the power pilferers were charged with a total of 291,345 units as detection bill amounting to Rs 9,538 million.

Apprising the media about some major power pilferers, he explained that LESCO charged detection units worth Rs 300,000 to an electricity pilferer in Badami Bagh area of Lahore; Rs 120,000 to another customer stealing electricity in Saddar area of Shahdara Town; Rs 120,000 to a power thief in Factory Area; and Rs 110,000 detection bill to a power thief in Ferozwalla area. During the 99 days of grand anti-theft campaign, the spokesman mentioned, the LESCO detected pilferage on 36,087 power connections and submitted 36,367 FIR applications against electricity thieves in the relevant police stations out of which 35,976 FIRs have been registered, while 16,005 accused have so far been arrested by the police. The LESCO has so far charged a total of 57,497,837 detection units worth Rs 2,241,588,768 to all the power pilferers.

NCA teachers, students visit CTI

LAHORE (NNI): A delegation of teachers and students of National College of Arts (NCA) visited the Carpet Training Institute (CTI) and enquired about the various stages of manual carpet manufacturing and its export. Chairperson CTI Ijaz-ur-Rehman welcomed the students and gave them a detailed briefing about the handmade carpet industry.

Ijaz-ur-Rehman said that strong linkages between educational institutions such as the National College of Arts and various

industries, especially the handmade carpet industry, have strategic significance and through which key support can be provided in increasing production and availability of skills required by the said industry.

"Promoting cooperation between the two institutions can also be effective for entrepreneurship," he added. He said that in the presence of many problems, working together can get the best results and especially those who are doing their business can get the best support.

SFA inspects Paradise Bakery, fines over Rs0.2m

KARACHI (APP): A Sindh Food Authority (SFA) team Sunday conducted a surprise visit of the Paradise Bakery

Gulzar Hijri and imposed a fine of Rs0.25m on the Paradise Bakery located in Gulzar Hijri for violating SFA guidelines and laws. The team acted upon on the instructions of the Caretaker CM Sindh Justice (Retd.) Maqbool Baqar and Director General of SFA Agha Fakhar Hussain, a commune said. During the inspection the sanitation situation was found very poor. The medical records of the staff working at the bakery were also not available.

The production unit of the bakery was also temporarily closed due to the presence of rats and cockroaches in the production unit. The Paradise Bakery had also been issued a notice to improve the situation within 15 days.

KU shows answer sheets to students, parents

KARACHI (NNI): The University of Karachi on Sunday allowed the students and their parents to check the answer scripts of the entry test held for admissions in the morning session for the academic year 2024.

On this occasion, the in-charge Directorate of Admissions Dr Saima Akhtar, Professor Dr Anila Amber Malik, Dr Salman Zubair, and others were present for students' and parents' guidance. Dr Saima Akhtar mentioned that on the special directives of the KU Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi correct answers and candidate's examination copies were shown to parents.

Govt need to show a spirit of nationalism in Dr Aafia Siddiqui case: Altaf Shakoor

KARACHI (NNI): Pasban Democratic Party PDP Chairman Altaf Shakoor has said that if compared the Indians show more nationalism and patriotism than Pakistanis when their citizens are arrested abroad. Drawing parallels between the cases of Pakistani woman scientist Dr Aafia Siddiqui and Indian woman diplomat Devyani Khobragade, he said the Indian people and government showed an excellent example of national honor when their woman citizen was arrested abroad and forced the US government to bow down.

Devyani Khobragade, a 1999-batch IFS officer was arrested on December 12, 2013, in the US when she was India's Deputy Consul-General in New York on visa fraud charges and for allegedly providing false declarations in a visa application for her maid. She later was released on a USD 250,000 bond.

This happened only because the Indian people and government showed an unwavering solidarity for their arrested woman and compelled the mighty US government to accept their demands just within a very short time. Comparatively, Pakistan woman

scientist Dr Aafia Siddiqui has been languishing in a US jail for 20 years, even without committing a crime, because the government of Pakistan has shown a cowardice and Pakistani people failed to lend the required support for their daughter. Altaf Shakoor said this shows the proud national psyche and patriotism which help shaping great nations. He said Pakistan trapped into debt slavery is dancing to the tunes of the IMF and World Bank that take care of the US capitalism interests.

He said during last two decades both political and military governments have shown lack of interest in the case of Dr Aafia Siddiqui as they don't want to irk the US. He said in fact, Pakistan has become a colony of America. He said after the East India Company now we are slaves of the IMF. Altaf Shakoor said that political parties of Pakistan also failed to show the required solidarity with Aafia Siddiqui. Her name was used as a politician slogan during election to befool voters, but the winning parties after coming into power just forgot their promises for seeking release of Dr Aafia.

PTDC organizes one-day photo exhibition at PNCA

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) organized a one-day photo exhibition at the Pakistan National Council of Arts here on Sunday.

Renowned mountaineer Nazir Sabir and PTDC's Managing Director Aftab ur Rehman Rana graced the inauguration ceremony.

Focused on mountainous tourist places, the exhibition featured 57 captivating photographs from the successful Salam Pakistan photography competition said a news release.

The tourist places in mountain areas were the

special focus of this photography competition. The exhibition showcased captivating photographs depicting various tourist sites, capturing the attention of a diverse and enthusiastic audience.

After the successful Salam Pakistan photography competition, 57 photographs were displayed at the exhibition.

The competition was organized on the eve of International Mountain Day where people submitted their photographs online in two categories, Professional and Amateur while a four member jury

decided the winner.

A total number of 378 entries were received in professional category while 110 entries were received for the amateur category.

Muhammad Asmar Hussain secured the first position in professional category while Mushahid Hussain secured first position in the amateur category. The winners were awarded with certificates and cash prizes. The exhibition exemplifies the commitment of PTDC towards promoting the scenic wonders of Pakistan, fostering tourism, and celebrating the nation's rich cultural and natural heritage.



KARACHI: Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (R) Maqbool Baqar speaks at Fund Raising Event of University Medical Complex at a local hotel.

Returning of illegally staying foreigners continued

PESHAWAR. (APP): Returning of illegally staying foreigners from Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa continued with 1014 people being sent to Afghanistan via Peshawar, Torkham border, an official of the Home and Tribal Affairs said here Sunday.

He said another 92 people were deported from Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 82 more illegal foreigners from Peshawar, Punjab will be deported through the Torkham border, the official of the Home Department said.

He said a total of 6452 migrants were sent to Afghanistan and a total 5249 migrants from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 125 from Islamabad, 1045 from Punjab, 34 from Azad Kashmir were sent to Afghanistan.

Likewise, a total of 260, 909 people have been deported from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Afghanistan through Peshawar, Torkham border. He said, efforts are being made to send migrants to Afghanistan from Peshawar, other borders, Angoor Adda and Kharlachi and similarly a total of 3648 people were sent to Afghanistan through Angoor Adda border while 698 people were sent to Afghanistan from Kharlachi border.

The official of the Home and Tribals Affairs said that 2, 65, 256 people have been sent to Afghanistan from the three borders of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and according to the latest survey by Deputy Commissioners, Peshawar, 871 illegal foreigners are still living in various districts.

According to Peshawar, government policy, no illegal foreigner can live and do business in any part of Pakistan with all relevant agencies committed to ensure safe return of illegal aliens.

Food Safety teams conducts raids

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority conducted operations in Peshawar and Mardan, unearthing irregularities in various food businesses. Hundreds of liters of sub-standard milk and kilograms of expired chickens were seized and disposed of, last day.

In this line spokesperson of the authority provided details that in a crackdown against the food adulteration, teams performed inspections on food-related businesses in Peshawar and Mardan. Food Safety team in Peshawar, led by Director Operations Akhtar Nawaz, established checkpoints on Kohat Road, examining vehicles carrying different food items. During the operation, samples were collected from milk tankers, and after testing through mobile food testing laboratory, approximately 450 liters milk were confirmed substandard and subsequently discarded. Heavy fines were imposed on the owners, and improvement notices were served to food-carrying vehicles.

According to details, the Food Safety team in Mardan inspected businesses in Skandaray bazar and adjoining areas. Spokesperson added that sample were collected from milk shops and examined by Mobile food testing laboratory and on resulting sub-standard, over 270 liters of milk were disposed of on the occasion. Following a tip-off, Food safety team also raided on a chicken shop in Sakandary Bazaar and recovered over 900 kilograms of expired chickens which were discarded, leading to legal action against the owner.

Director General of the FS&HFA, Shafiqullah Khan, lauded the successful operations and urged an intensified crackdown on the food adulteration mafia across the province.

He also emphasized the need for heightened scrutiny of milk vendors, hospital and educational institution canteens.

Sale of all types of fertilizers allowed

PESHAWAR (APP): As per the instructions of government of KP Home and Tribal Affairs Department Peshawar and Directorate General of Agriculture Extension KP Peshawar all small and large scale fertilizer dealers are informed that ammonium nitrate in KP including newly merged districts.

The Calcium Ammonium Nitrate has been completely banned, if any dealer is found with Ammonium Nitrate or Calcium Ammonium Nitrate Fertilizer in his shop or warehouse, he will be prosecuted and fined as well.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Minister for Technical Education, Industries, Commerce and Tribal Affairs Dr. Aamer Abdullah presiding over a meeting.

KP to include skills as subject in contemporary education

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Caretaker Minister for Technical Education, Industries, Commerce and Tribal Affairs, Dr. Aamer Abdullah has agreed with the proposal to equip the students with various technical schools and courses during their academic period as feasible, said a press release issued here on Sunday.

He has further directed the furnishing of a feasible proposal of pilot project, with possible partnership between higher education and technical education with clear possibilities of the success and usefulness of the project.

In this regard, a meeting was held here at Civil Secretariat Peshawar with the Caretaker Minister for Technical Education, Industries, Commerce and

Tribal Affairs, Dr. Aamer Abdullah, in the chair. Besides, Secretary Higher Education Arshad Khan and Secretary Industries and Commerce, Syed Zulfikar Ali Shah and Director (Finance), Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA), Munir Gul, Chief Economist Department of Industry Basit Khalil also attended the meeting.

Keeping in view the importance of technical skills and skilled education and training in the modern era, the meeting also discussed the inclusion of vocational training courses along with contemporary education and possibilities of the departments of Technical Education and Higher Education in this regard.

The participants of the meeting agreed with the

proposal and gave their useful feed.

In the meeting, Secretary Higher Education Arshad Khan said that with the success of this proposed plan, graduates of contemporary studies and secondary and higher secondary certificates as well as students with skills will not be remained unemployed, saying such educated youth will be able to find their jobs in the market and will also be able to find decent employment.

The provincial caretaker minister for technical education termed the proposal useful and directed that the department of higher education and industries and technical Education to jointly present a feasible and better plan along with the identification of the responsibilities of both departments.

In this connection, he

further directed the formation of a cluster of allocated colleges to implement it as a pilot project.

Dr. Sonia successfully defended her PhD thesis

PESHAWAR (APP): Ph.D scholar, Dr. Sonia Sumreen completed her Ph.D degree from the Department of Soil and Environmental Sciences, the University of Agriculture Peshawar.

She completed her Ph.D thesis titled "Isolation, Characterization and Evaluation of Rhizobacteria for Enhancing Growth and Nutrients Uptake of Maize (Zea Mays L.)."

Her Ph.D thesis was endorsed by Professors from Japan and Turkey. Dr. Sonia Sumreen successfully defended her Ph.D's dissertation by answering all the questions from participants and was declared eligible for Ph.D degree.

Dean Faculty of Crop Production Sciences Prof. Dr. Iftikhar Hussain Khalil, Director Advance Studies and Research Prof. Dr. Muhammad Sajid, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Tariq, Prof. Dr. Dost Muhammad, Dr. Maria Musarat, Dr. Ishaque Ahmad Mian and Dr. Muhammad Naveed were also present on this occasion and congratulated supervisor Dr. Muhammad Sharif and Scholar Dr. Sonia Sumreen. They hoped that the research of Dr. Sonia Sumreen will be beneficial for agriculture.

KP weather likely to be cold and dry

PESHAWAR (APP): The weather is likely to be cold and dry in most 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 official of the Meteorological Department added.

The mercury in Kalam has dropped below freezing and the temperature in Kalam is minus 4 degrees centigrade, the official of the Met Office said. The minimum temperature in Peshawar is 3 degrees Celsius while the maximum temperature is expected to be 19 degrees Celsius, the official said.

Energy & Power Dept hold an online E-Khuli Kachahri

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: On the directions of caretaker provincial government KP in order to bring transparency and administrative affairs good governance for prompt resolution of public problems policy, the Energy and Department KP organized an online (live) E-Khuli Kachehri. The public actively participated and explained certain problems for which immediate instructions had been issued on the spot.

In this context, under the chairmanship of Secretary Energy and Power Nisar Ahmad Khan, an online E-

Khuli Kachehri was held in Energy Department, wherein all the officers of the department, besides the heads of the subsidiaries PEDO, KPOGCL, Electric Inspectorate and KP Transmission and Grid Company participated.

The public issues were heard lively in Kachehri and orders were issued for redressal of grievances on spot. The initiative of Power department was appreciated by the public for holding E-Kachehri.

Speaking on the occasion, the Secretary Energy and Power Nisar Ahmad Khan said that holding an online E-Kachehri for the

immediate solution of public problems in government institutions is a good initiative of the present caretaker provincial government, which will end the distance between the institutions and the people, while the problems faced by the people will be solved on merit. He further added that for the first time E-Khuli Kachehri has been organized in the Energy Department and this process will be started every month.

He emphasized on officers to follow the merit based working in order to make good name of the department amongst public at large.

ATP announces to fully participate in elections

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Muhammad Faiq Shah, founder and chairman of the Amun Tar-aqqi Party Shah announced that his party will fully take part in upcoming general election and hundreds of tickets have been issued in the initial phase across the country.

Speaking at an emergent meeting of the party's executive committee and with members of provincial council on Sunday said they have already given a concrete roadmap and manifesto to steer the country out from present economic chaos.

He hoped if the plan could be implemented with true spirit then there will be visible improvement in export, efficient utilization

of natural resources and industrial sector.

Our ticket holders will contest by carrying a manifesto of public authority and justice against those people who deceived people and looted the country with both hands in the last several decades, Shah said, adding that his party will represent the all provinces.

The party leader said political pandits and dictators deceived the nation with fake promises and programs and left them a depressing and awkward situation and snatched the future for young people and undermined the institutions and state.

He said justice has defamed by framing two different laws for rich and poor.

Shah noted tug of war and politics-based on personality and personal interests have also dismantled the power.

We have brought leadership of the ordinary citizen and revolutionary manifesto and program.

The ATP leader said our goal isn't gaining power but to give authority to people and want to strengthen institutions and make them a source of public service.

Shah instructed the ticket holders to bring up locals, competent and well-knowledgeable people from Union Council to centre level.

He said decision making rights should be given to farmers, traders, lawyers, social segments, Ulema and think tanks and bring forward young leadership.

Sanitation challenges of rapid urbanization demands proactive approach

PESHAWAR (APP): Sanitation problems are regarded as worst nightmare associated with rapid and exponential growth of population that has affected every segment of life including water, environment, health and education sectors enormously.

Rapid population growth is considered as rootcause of sanitation problems around the globe putting service delivery system under permanent stress and making lives of millions of people miserable in slums towns and poor suburban areas of almost all major cities including Pakistan.

Besides others, urbanization is causing several governance challenges in big cities including housing, employment, sanitation and sewerage system that demands proactive approach realizing seriousness of problems, which are growing difficult with each passing day making the lives of mega city dwellers including Peshawar very

difficult.

A visitor might have been unerved after inhaling the bad water and garbage smell of drainage channels while moving in Peshawar's interior areas including Kohati, Gunj, Khalasa, Hazarkhwani, Lateefabad and Faqirabad.

"The sanitation services in these areas are very poor with bad smell emanating from uncovered drainage channels since long that has exposed residents to different health ailments and need to be addressed on priority basis," said Haseeb Khan, a social worker and resident of Kohati Peshawar while talking to APP.

He said Peshawarites of these localities were further exposed to unhealthy drinking water due to leakage of rusted water pipes besides waterborne diseases.

He said although the governments are spending huge funds to address sanitation and related issues posed by rapid urbanization and population growth, but

a lot of work was still required to provide safe drinking water and immediate replacement of leakage water pipes to avert health hazards.

He said the situation is still grim due to persistent growth of population ratio and movement of people from rural areas towards major cities that are already facing countless problems due to overpopulation including sanitation.

"Our problems and working has become hard due to increased urbanization in provincial metropolis as people are continuously migrating to various localities of the city for better economic and social services," said Waka Masih, a sanitation worker while talking to APP. He added that various other challenges including shortage of sanitary workers, vehicles, equipment and waste dumping sites have also aggravated the issue.

"The excessive population has not only increased

workload on sanitation workers but also increased their problems due to low wages," he said, adding unplanned infrastructure in major cities including Peshawar, Mardan and Abbottabad was incompatible to the mass urbanization leading to further overburdening the task of sanitation staff.

Professor Dr Naeemur Rehman Khattak, former Chairman Economics Department, University of Peshawar said that sanitation services of most of our cities including Peshawar were unfit to absorb the increasing load of migrants.

During 1951 to 2017, he said that urban share of the country's population has increased by about 33 million which means that 14.5 million people migrated from villages to cities with nearly 750,000 per year increase, thus exerted extra pressure on education, healthcare and sanitation services in Peshawar, Lahore,

Islamabad, Quetta and other cities of Pakistan.

Dr Naeem Khattak said that rural-urban migration was recorded highest in Punjab (6pc) followed by KP (4pc), Sindh (3pc) and Balochistan (2pc) during the said period.

Islamabad has witnessed highest proportion of migrants ie 36 percent followed by Lahore (15pc) and Karachi, Quetta and Peshawar are registered about 12pc respectively.

He said that urban sanitation has a pivotal role to achieve sustainable development goals relating to sanitation facilities in urban areas but it requires radical shift in mindsets and practices towards an urban sanitation approach including political priorities, funding, planning, design, management and good governance governance.

Dr Liaqat Ali, a medical professional while talking to APP said that poor sanitation increases risks of fatal diseases including

cholera, diarrhea, typhoid and polio. He said in next fifteen years about 55 percent of population would shift to urban areas, and the lack of inadequate sanitation conditions can have significant impacts on healthcare services.

He underscored the need of proper planning and diversion of financial resources to sanitation services in the wake of population explosion.

He opined that capacity building of sanitary staff at local or municipality level would help operate and maintain sewerage systems viz a viz installation of wastewater treatment plants can also be helpful to combat sanitation challenges. The organizations relating to sanitation system may be restructured and improved.

'Sanitation services mostly in informal settlements are affected due to construction of unplanned large buildings and other infrastructure overbur-

dened by unchecked urbanization thanks to overpopulation, said Hassan Khan, spokesperson for Water and Sanitation Services Company (WSSP).

He said the phenomenon is not new in Peshawar as each and every mega city is almost confronted with sanitation challenges.

The WSSP spokesman said work on 12-year Municipal Services Program of USD 44.6 million with assistance of USAID were recently completed under which nearly 20 lakh residents of Peshawar were provided access to clean drinking water, waste management, and improved sanitation services.

Under the project, he said that 140 clean drinking water facilities serving 448,000 people, replacement of 25,700 meters of old and rusted water mains, ensuring clean, reliable water supply in 21 union councils, rehabilitated sewerage and drainage lines, which improve sanitation

for 1.7 million people, more efficient solid waste collection and disposal besides improved municipal waste management services, including 575 vehicles and the establishment of a repair and maintenance workshop for waste management equipment were achieved benefiting nearly two million residents of Peshawar.

The spokesman said that monster problem cannot be addressed unless awareness was created among people about ill effects of poor sanitation and urging them to play collective role to avoid littering and habits that exacerbate sanitation issues. He added that sanitation conditions can also be improved by changing mindset of people and make them realize their civic responsibilities as member of society.

For this purpose, he reiterated proactive role of media, civil society and religious scholars to make the planet worth living.



In brief

DC Swabi visit Mehman Khana F.P. Report

SWABI: The Deputy Commissioner Swabi Dr. Tariqullah visited Government Mehman Khana at Shah Mansoor being run by Social Welfare Department. He checked the guest house record here and reviewed the facilities provided to the guests. District Officer Social Welfare Swabi Zafar Ali Khan was also present on the occasion. Dr. Tariqullah directed to provide the best services to the passengers staying in the government guest house.

Ali condole death of Nawaf

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan Caretaker Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki has expressed his deep sorrow and grief over the death of Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah. The Caretaker Chief Minister prayed for the high ranks of the departed soul and courage for the bereaved family. "People of Pakistan are equally grieved and share their grief with the Kuwaiti Royal Family and the people of Kuwait at this moment of sorrow," the CM said. The Amir of Kuwait, late Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah would always be remembered for playing his pivotal role in strengthening Pak-Kuwait relations and helping people of Pakistan at crucial times.

4 of a family injured

SIALKOT (INP): As many as four people of family including a child suffered burns in gas stove explosion here at mohallah Islampur, Sialkot. According to Rescue 1122, the blast occurred due to gas leakage as the stove was placed in room. Nazeer, owner, (55) Musarrat (55), Atiq (28) and a year-old Mishal suffered injuries. Rescue 1122 provided first aid to the injured and shifted them to AIMH. Rescue said that the blaze caused a loss of Rs.500,000 worth of goods, while due to timely rescue operations goods worth Rs.1 million and the house were saved.

Six passengers injured

MUZAFFARGARH (INP): Six people, including two women, sustained injuries after a speeding bus collided with a truck amid fog near Taunsa Morr in the district of Kot Addu on Sunday. According to Rescue 1122, three injured persons were given first aid on the spot; however, the other three were shifted to hospitals. Two women are also among the injured. The local police are investigating the incident.

Police conducts flag march

DG KHAN (APP): The district police under the direction of DPO Ahmad Mohyuddin, here on Sunday conducted a flag march keeping in view the country's current situation. The flag march started from police lines and culminated at the same place after passing through the city bazaar. The squads of Dolphin Force, Elite Force, traffic police and district police participated.

Youth killed

BUREWALA (APP): A youngster was shot dead by an alleged outlaw in a matter about honor killing, in the limits of Gaggu Police Station, Burewala. The youngster Saqlain had an alleged illicit relationship with the sister of the alleged killer named Waheed. In a fit of rage, the alleged outlaw shot at and killed Saqlain. DSP Zafar Dogar rushed to the site and started an investigation. The body was shifted to THQ hospital.

Govt completed Badini Link Road

QUETTA (APP): The Balochistan Caretaker Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki Sunday said the interim provincial government had completed the expansion of Badini Link Road project initiated under Quetta Development Package in a period of four months, which had been pending for last seven years.

Caretaker Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki, inaugurated the expansion and dualization of Link Badini Road and also laid the foundation stone of Link Road from Sabzal to Samungli cross via Shahbo road to Airport Road Quetta on Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, Ali Mardan said that the caretaker provincial government after assuming charge, observed many challenges including the unnecessary delay on Quetta development pack-

age.

He said, "Caretaker government has ensured prompt provision of funds for ongoing development projects and removed all obstacles in the daily life of citizens by providing full administrative support."

Ali Madan added, "All available resources have been utilized to facilitate the masses due to which these projects have reached completion."

He said, "We are trying our best to ensure the immediate completion of public projects of collective nature. The welfare of the public is among the top priorities of the caretaker government."

Mir Ali Mardan said, "The completion of the communication projects will significantly improve the flow of traffic in Quetta city and the public will also have the facilities of alternative roads instead of overcrowded roads."

He said, "In the short tenure of the caretaker government, other ongoing projects under the Quetta Development Package including Sariab Road, Sabzal Road and Anscorb Road will also be completed soon."

Ali Mardan said, "The caretaker provincial government will continue its efforts to provide full support for the completion of every important project of a public welfare."

The Project Director of Quetta Development Package, Rafiq Baloch, while giving a briefing on the progress of all the ongoing projects of Quetta Development Package, said, "Due to the constant visits and supervision and special interest of the caretaker Chief Minister of Balochistan, work on all the projects has been expedited which is in progress and will be inaugurated within two weeks."

Kalash Festival Chitromos started

CHITRAL (APP): The religious festival of Kalash Valley, Chitramos (Chowmos) has started with Kalash people residing in three valleys of Kalash, Rambur, Berar and Bomburit enthusiastically participated despite cold waves.

DG Tourism Authority Barkatullah Marwat on behalf of the Tourism Department, deployed tourism Police on the festival in order to provide fool-proof security.

He said the Tourism Police will provide all kinds of facilities to tourists during the festival. Tourism Police is also performing duty on the routes leading to Lowari Tunnel and Kalash, Barkatullah Marwat said.

Before going, tourists can get all kinds of information from Tourism Helpline 1422 in order to avoid untoward incidents, DG Tourism Authority said. This festival is celebrated

as a symbol of happiness and peace for winter.

A bonfire festival was also celebrated in the historical and cultural Chaumos festival of the Kalash tribe. Boys and girls compete by setting fire to the branches of pine trees to create a tall smoke. In the festival, boys and girls carry their small leaves and sing songs and perform various rituals.

Various rituals are performed in the Chaumos festival including Shishau, Savi Lek Har, Choi Nari, Mandahek and Shara Berayak. Fruits, vegetables and dry fruits were distributed to share love, peace and unity.

American citizen hunts Kashmiri Markhor in Chitral: A 9-year-old Kashmiri Markhor Kashkar of Toshi Shashamin, an American citizen of Chitral area, hunted after winning a bid of giving one hundred

and five thousand US dollars to the Wildlife Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The American citizen Daron James Millman bid one hundred and five thousand US dollars to hunt the Markhor, an official of the Wildlife Department told media men. Markhor's horn measured 45 inches, while 53 inches is the highest record in the history of trophy hunting in the conservative areas of Chitral, said the Wildlife Department official.

He said 70% of the money received from trophy hunting will be collected locally and 30% will be collected in the government treasury, said the Department of Wildlife official. He said 73,500 US dollars, Rs. 2.874 million will be distributed to the local community, the official of the Department of Wildlife, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa said.



SWABI: Deputy Commissioner Swabi Dr. Tariqullah checking record during his visit to Govt Mehman Khana at Shah Mansoor.

WSSCA and TMA cleans Abbottabad city

ABBOTTABAD (APP): Ahead of the Chief Minister's visit to Abbottabad city, the Water and Sanitation Services Company Abbottabad (WSSCA) initiated a comprehensive cleanup campaign to enhance cleanliness and hygiene standards in various key locations.

It is noteworthy that more than two weeks ago, in response to a ban on dumping garbage at the Salhad dumping point by the Peshawar High Court (PHC) Abbottabad bench, the entire city had transformed into a substantial accumulation of waste. The recent cleanup operation by

WSSCA has effectively addressed this issue, focusing on major areas within the city to clear accumulated garbage.

The district administration in Abbottabad successfully negotiated with the residents near the new dumping site in Dhamtoor and commenced the cleaning operation before the Chief Minister's arrival.

The cleanup initiative covered significant areas, including Shimla Hill Turn, Malikpur, Sarban Chowk, Kehal near Comprehensive School, Bandkoha, Urban City opposite Cantt Police Station, Kunj High School, District Headquarters Hos-

pital, Fawara Chowk near Bar Club, Traffic Police Office, Food godown, and MC Bazar Chowk.

In a demonstration of their commitment to maintaining a clean and healthy environment, WSSCA workers diligently gathered and properly disposed of trash and waste materials. This undertaking significantly contributed to the overall beautification and sanitation of crucial public spaces.

However, in the Cantonment areas of Abbottabad, substantial piles of garbage still mar residential and commercial areas, presenting a challenge to ongoing cleanliness efforts.

Kid kidnapped for ransom recovered

MULTAN (APP): Police claimed to have recovered a minor kid safely who was kidnapped for ransom in the limits of Mumtazabad police station here on Sunday.

The police registered the case and launched immediate action and recovered four years old kid namely Abdul Wahab who was kidnapped for ransom from Mumtazabad police station

area.

Regional Police Officer (RPO) Muhammad Sohail Chaudhary said that the help was taken from modern technology for the safe recovery of the child and the arrest of the accused as the special teams of IT, CIA and CRO participated.

The main accused of the incident Fayyaz Sanjrani was also arrested from Taunsa Dera Ghazi Khan.

Three bootleggers held with wine

Makhdoom Rasheed Police have arrested three bootleggers and recovered 1600 litres wine from their possession during an operation conducted here on Sunday.

Taking action on the directives of the City Police Officer (CPO) Sadiq Ali, Makhdoom Rasheed police under the supervision of



QUETTA: Central President of National Party and former Chief Minister Balochistan Dr. Abdul Malik addressing occasion of inclusion Changiz Hayee Balch Advocate.

TMO visits fire brigade branch

KOHAT (APP): Tehsil Municipal Officer (TMO) Kohat Muhammad Shoaib on the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Kohat Dr. Azmatullah Wazir, visited the fire brigade branch on Sunday and inspected the attendance of the staff as well as inspected the fire brigade vehicles.

During the visit, TMO instructed to the fire brigade staff to be vigilant at all times to deal with all kinds of emergencies.

On this occasion, officers expressed deep concerns over the installation of poles on the roadside by the PTCL department. TMO said that the necessary actions will be taken to provide facilities to people.

MCCI hails PVTC endeavor

MULTAN (APP): Punjab Vocational Training Council is making all possible efforts to equip skills amongst youth to enable them to earn a livelihood.

This was stated by Manager PR Marketing and Industrial Linkage Bushra Naaz, who was talking to President Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mian Rashid Iqbal at the MCCI Office.

PVTC is committed to annihilating unemployment, she stated. She also added that the youth were being provided skills as per the standards and requirements of the industry.

She informed that PVTC always introduced such programs, which could ensure maximum job opportunities.

President MCCI Mian Rashid Iqbal hailed the services of PVTC and stated that the Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry would continue to support and sponsor youth under its Child Sponsor Scheme. On this occasion,

officials Insar Mehmood, Farasat Hussain, Tanvir Ahmed, and some others were also present.

Artist Pashi passes away

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Renowned artist, drama actor, wrestler, and journalist Sohail Ahmad Pashi has passed away at Bahawalpur Victoria Hospital (BVH).

He suffered cardiac arrest and was admitted to the ICU ward of BVH. Earlier, he was suffering from hypertension and kidney diseases. He was all-rounder in several fields of life. He performed as an artist, drama actor, local wrestler, civil society leader, and journalist.

He remained a member of the administrative body of the Bahawalpur Press Club. Journalists, civil society leaders, and a large number of people expressed their deep sorrow over the demise of Pashi.

Station House Officer Muhammad Amin Jhandir arrested three bootleggers including Allah Wasaya, Barkat and Allah Bachaya. Police have recovered 1600 litres wine and also unearthed a distillery.

The recovered wine was to be supplied on Christmas and New Year's night. Police launched legal action after lodging cases against the accused.

SP inspects security of police stations

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): The Superintendent Police (SP) City Muhammad Ishaq Khan has visited different police stations and inspected the security arrangements.

According to police spokesman, the SP paid visit to Dera Town, Saddar and Yarik police stations following the directions of Regional Police Officer (RPO) Dera Nasir Mehmood Satti.

During the visit, SHOs Atta Ullah Khan, Malik Sajid and Khubab Wali Baloch briefed the SP about the security arrangements made at their respective police stations.

The SP directed them to further enhance the security of police stations. He also checked the weapons and alertness of the on-duty personnel.

He directed the on-duty personnel to ensure the use of bullet-proof jackets and helmets while performing their duties.

Traffic police carry out fog awareness campaign

The district traffic police

have carried out a fog awareness campaign in different areas of the city here Sunday.

According to police spokesman, the awareness campaign was carried out following the instructions of District Police Officer Abudl Rauf Babar Qaisrani under the supervision of DSP Traffic Muhammad Adnan.

Under the campaign, the traffic police officials led by Traffic Incharge Izzat Khan Gandapur educated the drivers on different roads about driving rules during fog.

Izzat Khan Gandapur asked the drivers to keep the speed of their vehicles slow during the fog to avoid any accident.

He told the commuters to switch on fog lights, fasten seat belts, maintain a safe distance from other vehicles and reduce the speed in order to ensure the safety of the lives and property of the passengers.

He advised the drivers of tractor trolleys and loaders to use reflective tapes on

their vehicles.

Advocate injured while resisting robbery

The unknown dacoits shot and injured an advocate during a robbery incident here in the limits of Cantt police station.

According to police, 31-year-old Asad ur Rehman Munir son of Malik Munir Ahmad, a resident of the Muryali area, reported to the Cantt Police that he along with his brother Saqib Munir were returning from their land on motorcycles when two unknown accused stopped them near Malik Abdul Ghaffar's house in Muryali area.

He informed the police that the accused snatched his wallet, carrying around Rs 6000 cash, CNIC, and other important documents, at gunpoint. Upon resisting, the accused opened fire on them and fled the scene.

As a result, Asad ur Rehman Munir got injured while his brother remained safe. The police registered a case and started an investigation.

Seminar on 'youth role in nation building' conducted

SARGODHA (APP): National Commission for Human development (NCHD) in collaboration with University of Sargodha media studies department

conducted a seminar titled 'Importance of Youth in Nation building' at Community development Center here on Sunday.

Founder Director Pakistan Human Development Fund Parvaiz lodhi was the chief guest of the seminar.

Sajid Ali, Director Operations Punjab (NCHD), Syed Hassan Raza Sherazi, Chairman, Media studies University of Sargodha,

Mehr Umar Daraz Jhawri, Deputy Director NCHD, Ghulam Abbass Gondal, Dean faculty of social sciences said that 70 percent of Pakistan's population was youth and he was trying to provide them best educational facilities.

Arrangements at Lok Mela lauded: Commis-

sioner Muhammad Ajmal Bhatti on Sunday hailed exemplary arrangements at the "Lok Mela" organized by the Parks and Horticulture Authority Sargodha (PHA), which was held from 7th to 13th December.

Ajmal Bhatti congratulated PHA DG Syed Touq-

country on the way of prosperity and "we could not go away from the importance of youngsters role in national building".

Mahr Umer while addressing the audience said that NCHD was striving hard to enhance youth after utilizing all possible resources and contributing a lot in this regard.

Ghulam Abbass Gondal, Dean faculty of social sciences said that 70 percent of Pakistan's population was youth and he was trying to provide them best educational facilities.

Arrangements at Lok Mela lauded: Commissioner Muhammad Ajmal Bhatti on Sunday hailed exemplary arrangements at the "Lok Mela" organized by the Parks and Horticulture Authority Sargodha (PHA), which was held from 7th to 13th December.

Ajmal Bhatti congratulated PHA DG Syed Touq-

eer Haider Kazmi and media consultant and focal person Shafqat Awan after building exemplary coordination along with other institutions.

Ajmal Bhatti said the Lok Mela presented Sargodha at the national level and hoped the PHA would continue such recreational activities in future.

Illegal medicines, drugs recovered in Shah Purr: Deputy Drug Controller Fahim Zia on Sunday launched a massive crackdown against illegal medicine seller medical stores and pharmacies.

He checked several medical stores at Moza Safdar Shah and Jhawrian at several medical stores and recovered huge stock of illegal medicines from them.

He sealed three stores including Khawaja medical store, Safdar medical store and Ahmed medical store over violation.

Fund for employees of C&W office established

BAHAWALPUR (APP): A contributory fund for the welfare of employees of the office of Secretary Communication and Works, South Punjab, has been established. According to an official press release issued here, the Communication

and Works Department, Government of Punjab has established a contributory fund for welfare of office of Secretary Communication and Works for South Punjab.

In this regard, a ceremony was held here where the Additional Secretary, Communication and Works, Ghulam Yaseen, Additional Secretary

(Technical), Rao Dilshad, Deputy Secretary (Admin), Syed Waseem Hasan, and other officials distributed warm clothes among the employees of the office.

Under this contributory fund, an employee of BS-4 was given away a sum of Rs 20,000 on head of financial assistance for the marriage of his son.

6 passengers injured in road mishap

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): Six people, including two women, sustained injuries after a speeding bus collided with a truck amid fog near Taunsa Morr in the district of Kot Addu on Sunday.

According to Rescue 1122, three injured persons were given first aid on the spot; however, the other three were shifted to hospitals. Two women are also among the injured.

The local police are investigating the incident.

Customs seizes foreign diesel

KHUZZAR (PPI): The Collectorate of Customs, Balochistan on Sunday claimed to have seized foreign diesel worth Rs60 million in an operation conducted at Customs check post Wango in Khuzdar.

According to a statement issued by the spokesman for Collectorate of Customs, 39000 litre foreign diesel was recovered from three passenger buses

during checking at Customs Check Post Wango in district Khuzdar of Balochistan province. The seized foreign diesel valued at Rs. 60 million.

The operation was conducted by staff of Customs check post Wango in compliance with the directives of Chief Collector Collectorate of Customs Abdul Qadir and Collector Customs, Khuzdar, Saleem Memon.



Hostage families demand Israel present plan for negotiation ‘now’

TEL AVIV (AFP/APP): The families of hostages held in Gaza called on the Israeli government Saturday to make an urgent deal to secure their release after the army admitted "mistakenly" killing three captives.

The Israeli army has said the three hostages killed by troops in Gaza on Friday were carrying a white flag and had cried for help in Hebrew.

The news of their killing has sparked protests in Israel, and the relatives of the remaining hostages have expressed concern their loved ones could be next. "All we get again and again are dead hostages," Noam Perry, daughter of hostage Haim Perry, said at an event in Tel Aviv

organized by the Hostages and Missing Families Forum.

"Our demand is not a fight (with the government) it's a call that anyone would have made if it had been their father. Take us into consideration and come up with a plan now (for negotiation)." Ruby Chen, father of 19-year-old soldier Itai, who is among the captives, said: "We feel like we're in a Russian roulette game (finding out) who will be next in line to be told the death of their loved one."

"They explained to us first that the ground operation would bring back the abductees," he said.

"It doesn't work. Because since

then, abductees have been seen returning, but not so much alive. It's time to change this assumption," he said. Around 250 people were taken hostage during Palestinian militant group Hamas's October 7 attacks on Israel, which killed around 1,140 people, mostly civilians, according to Israeli figures. Vowing to destroy Hamas and bring back the hostages, Israel launched a massive offensive against the Palestinian Islamist movement that has left much of the Gaza Strip in ruins. The territory's Hamas government says the war has killed at least 18,800 people, mostly women and children.

Tensions run high as DR Congo approaches election

KINSHASA (AFP/APP): The Democratic Republic of Congo gears up for elections on Wednesday that could consolidate its democracy or unleash fresh violence as political tensions threaten to boil over.

Some 44 million registered voters are set to cast ballots in the vast central African nation of about 100 million people on December 20 in presidential, parliamentary, provincial and municipal polls.

About 100,000 people are standing in the four votes, with President Felix Tshisekedi seeking another term after winning a disputed election in 2018.

The sheer size of the DRC, which is roughly the size of continental western Europe, means staging elections is a logistical nightmare.

The country is also one of the world's poorest and has little high-quality infrastructure, with the CENI electoral commission still struggling to distribute voting material to more than 175,000 polling booths.

Political scientist Gaucher Kizito Mbusa told AFP that voting should go

smoothly in the more densely populated zones but would be difficult in rural areas due to insecurity and poor roads.

The UN Security Council on Friday approved a government request that the outgoing peacekeeping mission in the country, MONUSCO, provide logistical support beyond the three violence-wracked eastern provinces where it is deployed.

A diplomat told AFP that not all voting stations will open on December 20 due to a lack of equipment, saying some may operate a day or two after or even later.

In a report published on Saturday, Human Rights Watch (HRW) warned of electoral violence that "risks compromising the holding of the vote".

The NGO says it has documented clashes between supporters of rival parties since early October that have led to "assaults, sexual violence and at least one death".

Given the DRC's turbulent political history, the fiercely contested 2018 elections passed off calmly and marked the country's

first peaceful handover of power. But the political scientist said "intolerance" had crept into the debate, while the diplomat said "hate speech" was prevailing over ideas and programmes. The announcement of the results, expected several days after polls close, may be when the danger is greatest. Fraud remains a key concern and all the major opposition presidential candidates have urged vigilance. The opposition has long accused the government of stacking the electoral commission and the Constitutional Court, the final arbiter of electoral disputes. Analysts say unrest will be muted if the official results match with those of observers, notably from various churches, but not if they diverge.

Raging conflict in the east, plagued by armed groups for more than three decades, has also poisoned the campaign trail.

The M23 rebel group has advanced over swathes of North Kivu province since its re-emergence from dormancy in late 2021.

HRW said more than 1.5

Serbian voters head to polls to shape nation's future

BELGRADE (AA/APP): Serbians are heading to the polls on Sunday to choose new members of the country's 250-seat parliament, 120-member Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and municipal councils. Polling stations opened at 7 a.m. local time and will close at 8 p.m. for around 6.5 million eligible voters.

Voting will be cast in 8,273 election centers in Serbia and 81 election centers in 35 countries.

A total of 2,817 candidates are competing on 18 lists and 126 seats are needed for a majority in the Assembly.

The newly-elected president and the new government will need to deal with major issues that Serbia is facing. One is in the breakaway region of Kosovo, which declared independence in February 2008. But Belgrade claims it is a breakaway province.

Serbia has also refused to impose sanctions on Russia for the Ukraine war.

The government is facing pressure from the European Union and the US to recognize Kosovo's independence and impose sanctions on Russia.

Serbs living in Kosovo will not be able to vote in the Serbian general elections, according to the Election Committee.

Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti said earlier that they need a special agreement with Serbia so that members of the Serbian community in Kosovo who have dual citizenship can vote in Serbian parliamentary elections on the territory of Kosovo.

But Anadolu reported earlier that Serbs in Kosovo will not be able to vote, according to Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic.

Vucic's remarks came when Anadolu asked if NATO would take additional security measures for

Serbs in Kosovo for the Dec.17 snap general elections.

He claimed that Serbs are going to be barred from their basic right due to Kurti's involvement in the electoral process.

Serbs living in Kosovo were not allowed by Kosovar authorities to participate in the last Serbian elections in 2020 when the alliance led by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) that was headed by Vucic came to power.

Following these developments, Kosovo Serbs will be taken to Serbia by bus to vote, as in the 2022 elections.

Emergency flood alerts issued for parts of Australia's Queensland

SYDNEY (Xinhua/APP): Emergency flood alerts were issued for parts of Australia's northeastern state of Queensland on Sunday as a result of torrential rainfall in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Jasper.

Major flood warnings were issued for the

Barron River, the Daintree River, the Herbert River, the Johnstone River Catchment, the Mulgrave River, and the Tully and Murray Rivers, according to the Bureau of Meteorology.

The Barron River at Lake Placid was currently

sitting at 13.34 meters, which was 1.34 meters above the major flood height, the local Courier Mail newspaper reported.

More water was pouring down towards the coast from the Atherton Tablelands, and the river was expected to rise further, the report said.

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services urged residents to move to higher ground if it was safe to do so, or to the upper floors of their buildings.

Tropical Cyclone Jasper made landfall in Far North Queensland late on Wednesday.

S.Africa's 'staggering' visa quagmire bogs down economy

JOHANNESBURG (AFP/APP): Tens of thousands of foreign executives, engineers and other key workers have endured a year-long wait for South African visas that business groups say is costing investment and threatening the country's position as a continental hub.

Already suffering from lacklustre growth and high unemployment, the government has acknowledged that a skill shortage is throttling development.

And a huge backlog in visa processing has worsened the problem. Long visa waits are common in much of the world but South Africa has some of the biggest jams, business groups say. "We have various cases of people who have been waiting for

more than a year," said Pamina Bohrer, secretary general of the Italian-South African Chamber of Trade and Industries. Besides the "psychological stress" caused to families whose lives are put on hold, firms are suspending or scrapping expansion plans in the country, she said.

"The backlog is staggering," Busisiwe Mavuso, head of Business Leadership South Africa, which groups dozens of international companies including BP, Nestle and Unilever, wrote in a newsletter in November.

"The fact that companies can't fill the positions means they can't invest and expand." Home Affairs Minister Aaron Motaoleli told a parliamentary committee in September

that severe understaffing meant 74,000 applications for all types of visas were awaiting processing. The ministry did not reply to a request for comment on latest figures. Concerns have surged since the coronavirus pandemic, however.

In 2021, only 3,047 critical skills visas were processed, down 45 percent on 2019, according to official figures. About two-thirds were rejected. At a time when South Africa badly needs skilled workers, its vetting is cumbersome and erratic, experts say. Applicants have to provide medical reports, criminal records and travel plans. Business groups complain about inconsistent decision making. Some applications are processed in weeks

while others languish, they said. In some cases applicants get a permit but their spouses do not.

Some are refused for minor issues like a missing phone number. A team tasked by President Cyril Ramaphosa to investigate visa delays said South Africa needs engineers, information technology experts and managers.

But getting a work visa can take 48 weeks or longer, it said. Waiting times in Nigeria and Kenya were more than four times shorter. An entrepreneur replying to an anonymous survey by the EU Chamber of Commerce in South Africa last year said the visa quagmire pushed his firm to choose Ghana for a new Africa market office.

DIJON, France (AFP/APP): The woman elected Miss France 2024 has framed her victory as a win for "diversity", drawing praise for her short hair as well as predictable criticism from viewers of the beauty pageant which has faced accusations of sexism.

"No one should dictate who you are," declared 20-year-old Eve Gilles, who was the only contestant in this year's competition whose hair was cropped short. "We're used to seeing beautiful Misses with long hair, but I chose an androgynous look with short hair," she said after her victory Saturday night, adding that every "woman is different, we're all unique."

The woman from a vil-

lage near Dunkirk in northern France was elected in the city of Dijon in front of 5,000 pageant fans.

Half the score was determined by viewers, the other half by a jury of seven women. On social media, many viewers reacted with delight, battling down criticism that portrayed her selection as politicised.

"Maybe the new #MissFrance isn't gorgeous in your eyes, but seeing wokeism in her because she has short hair... It's just ridiculous," said one admirer of the new Miss France on X. "Eve Gilles is the new Miss France 2024, your malicious and useless criticisms won't change that, she's sublime," said another X user.

Gilles's victory comes less than a week after a court ordered a French broadcaster and television production house to compensate two previous Miss France finalists for secretly filming them and showing their bare breasts on air.

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Alexia Laroche-Joubert, chief executive of Banijay France which owns the Miss France brand, defended the pageant as a symbol of "success" and a "social elevator" for contestants who have later become "businesswomen, doctors or film directors".

The contest's criteria have been "modernised", she said, in that there is no

Dollar restrictions weigh on Iraq daily life

BASRA (AFP/APP): In Iraq's southern city of Basra, Al-Harith Hassan has been struggling to withdraw his salary in dollars for months as the government tries to curb the country's addiction to US currency.

"When we go to withdraw our salary, they only give us a fraction of it, in instalments," said Hassan, who is paid in dollars for his oil field logistics job. Oil-rich Iraq is hardly short of dollars -- it has foreign currency reserves of more than \$100 billion (93 billion euros).

But in its fight against a booming currency black market, Baghdad has imposed ever-tighter restrictions on the use of American bucks.

For people like Hassan, this can mean a severe cut in his earnings.

He used to withdraw his money and change it at semi-tolerated exchange shops for rates up to 1,600 dinars per dollar.

But increasingly, he says he can only withdraw his cash in dinars at the official rate of 1,320 dinars per dollar. The banks and central bank have traded blame for who is imposing the new restrictions.

"This is a problem. It means that our salary is losing 20 percent of its value," said Hassan.

More restrictions are coming as the government tries to stop dollars

dominating the economy.

From January, Iraq's central bank will require every commercial transaction to be made in dinars. Existing US currency deposits will still be accessible in dollars, but new money wired from abroad will only be available in dinars, at the official rate.

One of the main factors feeding the demand for foreign currencies in Iraq is "the smuggling of US dollars to countries and entities facing US sanctions, including Iran and Syria", said Hayder al-Shakeri, a researcher at the Chatham House think-tank.

Shakeri also noted the "illicit trade" of certain highly taxed goods, such as cigarettes.

Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani acknowledged in September that sanctions preventing dollar transfers to Iranian banks had driven Iraqi traders to the black market.

Iraq and Iran's central banks were working on a mechanism to regulate such trading, he said.

In late November, the government announced steps to encourage importers of goods like cigarettes, cars, gold and mobile phones to use official channels to obtain dollars.

And, at least officially, the Hawala over-the-counter money transfer system, no longer transfers money in dollars. A year ago, Iraq adopted the

international electronic transfer system known as SWIFT in order to monitor dollar usage, help tackle money laundering and ensure the respect of international sanctions.

In February, the prime minister said the new regulations had cut foreign currency trades from around \$200-300 million per day to \$30-50 million. "We are consolidating our monetary sovereignty," Mudher Salih, financial policy adviser to the prime minister said.

"We cannot accept dealing with two currencies within the national economy", he told AFP.

Seeking to stave off inflation, the government allows importers to obtain dollars at the official rate in key sectors like food, medicine, and construction. And it is encouraging banks and importers to favour alternative currencies like the euro, Emirati dirham, and Chinese yuan, to reduce dollar demand.

For now, the gap between the official and unofficial dollar rates is still causing headaches for authorities.

Police recently caught several people at Baghdad airport as they were planning to travel with dozens of debit cards and use them abroad to withdraw thousands of dollars at the official rate, which they could sell for a profit on the Iraqi parallel market.

Chad votes on new constitution ahead of promised end of military rule

N'DJAMENA (AFP/APP): Chad voters go to the polls on Sunday for a referendum on a new constitution, in a key step towards elections and the return of civilian rule promised, but postponed, by the ruling military junta.

A large section of the opposition and civil society in the central African country are calling for a boycott.

They argue the plebiscite is designed to pave the way for the election of the current transitional president, General Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, and the continuation of a "dynasty" begun by his late father 33 years ago following a coup.

The "yes" camp seems assured of victory after a well-financed campaign by the ruling junta against a divided opposition, which has faced arrest, intimidation and threats for more than a year.

The capital N'Djamena has been plastered with posters championing a "yes" vote to bring in a constitution for a "unitary and decentralised state".

It is not very different from the constitution that the military repealed in 2021, enshrining a regime in which most of the power is concentrated in the head of state.

The opposition, which

advocates federalism, backs the "no" vote.

The "yes" camp retorts that a unitary state is the only way to preserve unity, while federalism would encourage "separatism" and "chaos".

Provisional results are scheduled to be published in late December, with the Supreme Court due to validate them four days later.

The two main platforms of parties and civil society organisations hostile to the junta have called for a boycott, hoping a low turnout will delegitimise a leader whom they accuse of perpetuating a 33-year "Deby dynasty".

Where they can find space, they have put up posters with the words "Stop the referendum" and a big red cross.

They are hoping a low turnout will undermine the credibility of the referendum, which is "purely and simply legitimising the dynasty that they want to impose on us", said Max Loalngar, coordinator of one of the groups, Wakit Tamma.

He was speaking to AFP by telephone from a country of exile that he declined to name.

Some advocates of a boycott were dismissive of both sides.

"They're all the same, whether they're campaign-

ing for 'yes' or 'no'. They've shared the money out between themselves," Badono Daigou for the GCAP opposition platform told a rally.

"The result is a foregone conclusion. The 'yes' vote will win."

Mahamat Deby, 37, was proclaimed transitional president by the army in April 2021, following the death of his father Idriss Deby Itno, who was killed by rebels on his way to the front line of the fighting.

Deby senior had ruled Chad, the second least developed country in the world according to the United Nations, with an iron fist for more than 30 years.

When he took power, his son promised elections after a transition period of 18 months and made a commitment to the African Union not to stand in them.

But 18 months later, his regime extended the transition by two years and authorised him to run in the presidential election, now scheduled for the end of 2024. On the anniversary of the 18-month transition -- October 20, 2022 -- between 100 and 300 young men and teenagers were shot dead in N'Djamena by police and military, according to the opposition and national

UK teen found in France arrives back in Britain: police

LONDON (AFP/APP): Alex Batty, a British teen who went missing six years ago and was found this week in southwest France, has arrived back in the UK, police said Saturday.

"It gives me great pleasure to say Alex has now made his safe return back to the UK after six years," Matt Boyle of Greater Manchester Police told reporters at the force's headquarters in northwest England.

The 17-year-old earlier Saturday boarded a KLM

flight at Toulouse, headed to London via Amsterdam.

He was accompanied by British police officers and a family member, said Boyle.

"This moment was undoubtedly huge for him and his loved ones, and we are glad that they have been able to see each other again after all this time," he added.

Batty will be returned to his maternal grandmother, with whom the British justice system entrusted his custody before his mother abduct-

ed him, aged 11, in 2017 while on holiday in Spain.

For six years, including two in France, he lived a "nomadic" life in a "spiritual 'community'", never staying more than several months in the same place.

The teen was found in the middle of Wednesday night by a delivery driver after he had escaped and was walking along a road for four days, a deputy prosecutor told a news conference on Friday evening.

He is in good health and does not appear to have

Miss France winner says her short hair a victory for 'diversity'

DIJON, France (AFP/APP): The woman elected Miss France 2024 has framed her victory as a win for "diversity", drawing praise for her short hair as well as predictable criticism from viewers of the beauty pageant which has faced accusations of sexism.

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APS tragedy and need of hour

The nation observed the 9th anniversary of the Army Public School (APS) massacre with a broken heart, watery eyes, utter disappointment, and gloominess. The government leaders, political activists, and civil society paid rich tribute to the students and teachers of the APS Peshawar who suffered ruthless terrorism and laid their lives with honour and dignity. The cowardly terrorist attack grieved the entire nation and strengthened the national resolve, leading to decisive action against the menace of terrorism in the country.

December 16 is a dark day in the history of Pakistan because the perpetrators of terrorism and the enemies of the country weighed a massacre of innocent students in APS School Peshawar about nine years ago but the same enemy earlier broke apart Pakistan into two pieces in 1971. Historically, the APS tragedy was the turning point in the one-and-a-half-decade history of homegrown terrorism in Pakistan that brought the entire nation on a single-point agenda to defeat the evil of terrorism on Pakistani soil. Soon after the APS tragedy all political parties and military leadership set together at one table and devised a National Action Plan (NAP) to fight the terrorists and eradicate terrorism and extremism from the country. Although, our brave security forces fought gallantly and defeated the menace of terrorism from our soil but the political leadership failed to fully implement the sweeping reforms and strategies including Counter Violent Extremism (CVEs) policy, and necessary legislative, administrative, and social reforms to streamline the religious seminaries, educational syllabi, to counter extremism and promote tolerance, pluralism and enlightened moderation in the society.

Apparently, Pakistani leaders failed in tackling the issue of terrorism and extremism in their nation, rather successive political governments fell prey to their politically motivated slackness and delay in the implementation of the National Action Plan in certain areas. Previously, the Shehbaz-led PML-N government in Punjab eluded such reforms in the Southern parts of the province to appease its electoral allies and strengthen its stronghold in that region. Later, the same mistake was repeated by the PTI government in the KP by striking an agreement with the terrorist outfits and importing the menace of terrorism once again. Unfortunately, the Pakistani nation confronts the same circumstances and the same challenge that it faced in the aftermath of the APS carnage almost 9 years back and dealt with during early 2015 and 2016. However, this time there is no chance for repetition of mistakes and tolerance for terrorism as our leaders did in the past.

Introspection and an admission of mistakes on such a day is no shame. As a nation, we must admit our mistakes that led to the reoccurrence of tragedies on 16 December 1971, on the same date in 2014 and the one we are embattled with these days. Currently, our people, cities, markets, Bazars, and sensitive installations are unsafe, while the Pakistani LEAs and brave sons of the soil are chasing the terror deep inside in its caches and hideouts in DI Khan, North Waziristan, South Waziristan, and hilly areas in Kutch and other parts of Balochistan. The APS tragedy and the recent resurgence of terror in the country is a reminder that the state's security and foreign policies have failed as the non-state actors are active once again on a rampage with impunity. Those who sought to placate the militants and negotiate peace with them last year have done incalculable damage to the nation and must be held accountable for their misconduct and negligence. On this day, we must unite ourselves against our enemies and set a nationwide course to overcome the challenge of terrorism, extremism, and intolerance for the sole purpose of building a heaven that enshrines peace, love, and tranquillity and moves toward progress and prosperity in the days ahead.

Timber Mafia and illegal logging

According to the report, the KP's forest department has initiated a province-wide campaign against the timber Mafia that is massively involved in illegal logging and smuggling of timber rendering thick vegetation into barren hills. Meanwhile, the KP's Forest Department has claimed that it has ceased 11 trucks involved in the smuggling of timber and investigations are underway to assess the magnitude of the problem.

Illegal cutting of forests and smuggling of precious wood has now shaped into a lucrative business in the country. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, being a major timber market and forest zone, has become a haven for the timber mafia and smugglers. Over the years, that cruel business has eaten up forests spread over thousands of acres of land in Hazara, Malakand, and Khyber District into naked mountains and still this illicit business flourishes across the province.

Historically, forests have a tremendous impact on human life as they host a wide variety of plant and animal species, contributing significantly to global biodiversity. The forest also plays an important role in Oxygen production and helps mitigate the worst effects of climate change by preventing soil erosion, regulating the water cycle, and helping to maintain rainfall patterns. Forests also provide various resources like timber, medicinal plants, fruits, and nuts, contributing to local economies and livelihoods along with providing recreational activities and tourism.

Historically, timber smuggling in Pakistan has been a persistent problem causing serious loss to the national economy along with environmental damage from deforestation, biodiversity, and disturbance in the ecosystem, and social life as well. Preserving and sustainably managing forests is crucial to overcoming these losses and ensuring a healthy environment for future generations. Although, the government has implemented various measures, including increased law enforcement, stricter regulations, and the promotion of sustainable forest management practices. Yet, there is a dire need for collaborative efforts involving government agencies, law enforcement bodies, local communities, and international organizations to help combat this illicit trade, social evil, and serious crime that is ruthlessly swallowing up previous forests in the country. Furthermore, raising awareness about the environmental and socio-economic impacts of timber smuggling can play an important role in garnering public support for forest conservation and combating illegal logging activities in the country.

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Busy and momentous year ahead for the Middle East and North Africa

Hafed Al-Ghwel

As we close one year and look ahead to the next, a whirlwind of convulsions threatens to push the Middle East and North Africa region over the edge.

For the optimists, this year's series of seemingly bizarre developments are only part of a broader, profound transformation and overdue sociocultural change. Others, however, believe the Arab world is adrift in uncharted waters, rocked by the crosscurrents of geopolitical rifts and shifting interregional dynamics, a defining hallmark of 2023, that have made a casualty of the overarching trend of de-escalation.

It is abundantly clear that the contours and narratives of the region are being molded and remolded almost in real time, with remarkably resilient societies hobbling along in a disordered world, impelled by conflicts, competition and fragmentation.

That resilience is set to face its most challenging test yet against headwinds that are likely to intensify in the coming years. Next year will be a very consequential one because almost half of the world's population will head to the polls in 40 countries. As historic as that will be, there are grave concerns that the clash of wills at the ballot boxes — affecting about 3.2 billion people and more than \$44 trillion in combined gross domestic product — will increase the turbulence in our poly-crisis era of brutal wars, record debt, high inflation and a warming planet.

Arab countries will have to attempt to maintain a high level of adaptability in navigating a series of ever-more capricious tides in global geopolitics, as new governments settle in and implement policy shifts consistent with the demands of their electorates.

Recent experiences in efforts to pursue the power of dialogue over the force of arms, dissolve long-term rivalries, and seek strategic diversification — to hedge against changeable international partners, most notably in response to the perceived inconsistency of US policies — is a testament to this capacity for “adaptation” in a fast-changing world.

A chaotic 2023 and the prospect of a highly consequential 2024 have made such adaptation even more necessary. After all, the region will remain at the epicenter of an intensifying global hegemonic rivalry.

As the US continues its strategic retreat, its presence in the region is being subtly replaced by a more covert approach. This move symbolizes a shift from overt military dominance to a more nuanced engagement.

The recalibration of America's regional strategy contrasts sharply with China's steady encroachment, evidenced by its

pivotal role in brokering the normalization agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March this year.

The shadow of Russia looms large, too, with its actions in Ukraine and its burgeoning partnership with Iran affecting region-

Arab countries, making them vulnerable to turbulent course corrections influenced by a pressing need for comprehensive and inclusive governance reforms.

Without such measures, the regional terrain risks a return to a state of greater

strategic alliances. The UAE's embrace of “foreign policy proactivism” has broadened its strategic footprints in Libya and Sudan, areas traditionally within Egypt's sphere of influence.

This jockeying for regional preeminence might also give nontraditional actors, such as Algeria and even Ethiopia, a chance to capitalize on a growing power vacuum. While Ethiopia's involvement hinges predominantly on the dispute over Nile water, its budding alliances and regional posturing cannot be discounted. On the other hand, after years of political and economic struggles Algeria is undergoing a diplomatic rejuvenation.

Elsewhere, the long shadows of 2011 continue to manifest themselves. The long-term effects of the unresolved crises in Syria and Libya loom ominously over the coming year, casting doubt on the sustainability of the regional equilibrium.

The dire situation in Syria highlights the necessity of renewed multilateral diplomatic dialogue. Arab participants will have to step up their diplomatic efforts to help unfreeze the lines of conflict, break down the political walls that divide Syria's rival territorial zones and, ultimately, reintegrate the country into the global community.

Managing Libya's instability calls for successful reconciliation. Ongoing squabbles and an unending power struggle between political elites, hybrid actors and external meddlers continue to deter progress toward achieving a stable future for the country. The most likely path forward continues to lie in empowering the UN to broker a more inclusive settlement. Counteractive measures from the international community, primarily the US, can help contain disruptive influences and prevent additional conflict.

The more recent conflicts in Sudan and Gaza add another layer of complexity. The challenge here is to prevent these crises from becoming tinderboxes that ignite broader regional conflict. Robust peace efforts involving global and regional players will be crucial if these conflicts are to be deescalated and further polarization prevented.

In the year ahead, Arab countries will continue to carefully navigate this complex landscape, balancing their partnerships with global powers, responding to internal and regional challenges, and striving for stability and growth. Past experiences will undoubtedly shape their strategies but the ever-evolving geopolitical dynamics will necessitate constant reassessment and recalibration of these approaches.

Next year promises to be a busy one for the MENA region, filled with opportunities, challenges and critical decisions that will shape its future.

Gaza: What are the scenarios for ‘the day after’?

Faisal J. Abbas

As the atrocities continue to unfold in Gaza, we hear so much talk now about “the day after” scenarios. This is paired with interesting statements recently made by the likes of US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan indicating the start of a deviation from the hard-line earlier position of his administration, when President Joe Biden said there were no red lines for Israel.

Clearly, such a position by President Biden was not surprising ahead of an election year. However, that, accompanied by the much-criticized veto of a resolution calling for a ceasefire in the UN Security Council, has now resulted in more than 18,500 killed by Israel, including babies, women, the elderly and at least 56 journalists.

So, what do Sullivan's statements mean? Firstly, that despite the carefully selected public phrases, it is clear that the global outrage of what is happening in Gaza has caused serious concerns behind closed doors in the US and Israel. This is why it is somewhat reassuring to hear someone as senior and experienced as Sullivan say that his recent talks with Israeli officials were about transitioning to a new phase of the war targeting Hamas in particular. He reiterated that Hamas is not the Palestinian people and that more needs to be done to ensure Israel's declared intention not to target civilians reflects the reality on the ground.

More significantly, he said that Israel cannot occupy Gaza in the long run. This brings us back to the ongoing debate about “the day after” scenarios.

First, it is important to remember what Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said a few days ago about the matter: Any future discussions cannot occur while the bombing continues. So, the attention has to remain on obtaining an immediate ceasefire. And what should be clear is that the — again highly condemnable — US veto should not be seen as the end of the road, but a reminder that more efforts should be made to convince the administration and the international community to put more pressure on Israel. This includes a reworded draft resolution if that is what it takes to resolve the matter.

The bottom line is that the aim should remain focused on an immediate ceasefire and a permanent solution to the conflict by finally reestablishing a Palestinian state living side by side and in peace with Israel.

This is why the obsession with talking about “the day after” must be paired with an equal obsession with talking about “the day before,” and that means the fact that Israel has been occupying Palestinian lands since 1967, as defined by the UN. A matter that must be resolved to ensure what happened on Oct. 7, and before, does not happen again.

Despite the gloomy outlook, there are still glimmers of hope. To start with, the Hamas leadership has signaled its willingness to accept a two-state solution — as suggested by senior Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzouk in a recent interview with Al-Monitor. Of course it is fair for one to argue — or rather wish — that it had done so 16 years ago and supported the Palestinian Authority's efforts to reach a peace deal instead of undermining it and calling for the eradication of the state of Israel. After all, history shows that more Arab land has been liberated and reclaimed via negotiations as opposed to warfare. Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon are clear and recent examples. Another sign of hope is the recent successful release of the first group of hostages.

This was a reassuring sign that regional diplomacy can work, and it goes without saying that more goodwill gestures like that will go a long way.

However, the question remains: What does “the

day after” look like? We must examine all possibilities on the ground. It is clear nobody will accept another Israeli occupation of Gaza when the efforts are on convincing them to dismantle settlements in the West Bank to enable a two-state solution. What is also clear is the Arab/Muslim/Palestinian position — an absolute rejection of any Israeli plan to displace or transfer the people of Gaza elsewhere. Palestinians must and will remain in their land and another Nakba must be avoided.

Similarly, the PA would never accept riding back into Gaza on the backs of Israeli tanks. A transition period with international peace-keeping troops — like the situation in Lebanon — might be possible, but that would require an acceptable formation, most probably with the involvement of neutral international armies and Arab states that have signed peace treaties with Israel.

It is also likely there will be a situation whereby the West Bank and Gaza are reunited under one authority, which essentially goes against the creed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has adopted for the past 16 years of widening intra-Palestinian divisions.

The last but probably unlikely possibility is a referendum, which includes all Palestinians, to see whether they want to live in one country alongside Israel. This is likely to be rejected by both sides, particularly as, while it would tick the box of Israel being a democracy, it would end its *raison d'être* as a “Jewish state.”

And given that a one-state solution is unlikely, what really does not help at this stage are the statements by Israeli officials, most recently and notably the

Of course it is fair for one to argue — or rather wish — that it had done so 16 years ago and supported the Palestinian Authority's efforts to reach a peace deal instead of undermining it and calling for the eradication of the state of Israel. After all, history shows that more Arab land has been liberated and reclaimed via negotiations as opposed to warfare. Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon are clear and recent examples. Another sign of hope is the recent successful release of the first group of hostages. This was a reassuring sign that regional diplomacy can work, and it goes without saying that more goodwill gestures like that will go a long way.

ones by Israeli ambassador to London, Tzipi Hotovely, categorically rejecting in a televised interview the concept of two states.

What also does not help is the Muslim community shooting the messenger and calling for the boycott of an influential television show like “Piers Morgan Uncensored.”

In fact, what is needed is more appearances by rational guests who can present convincing arguments for justice. Just look at the results achieved by a fair and balanced reporter like CNN's Clarissa Ward when she was given access, via an Emirati field hospital, to report from Gaza. The truth is very powerful, so I cannot see how anything can be achieved by boycotting the debate, as opposed to owning it.

The ‘Brussels effect’ is key tool for EU in its global ambitions

Mark Eyskens, the former Belgian prime minister, famously said in 1991 that the EU is “an economic giant, a political dwarf and a military worm.” Fast forward more than three decades and a significant number of people still agree with his rather undiplomatic characterization.

To be sure, the EU has achieved some significant progress toward its goal, under European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, to become a genuinely global geopolitical player on the world stage. This is especially so in regard to Ukraine, following Russia’s invasion last year.

However, the limits to its ambitions have been exposed more recently in the Middle East, following the Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel. While the EU, and some individual member states such as Germany and France, have tried to influence events in that arena, so far only the US has been shown to have any substantive influence there.

For many traditional observers of global affairs, this shows that the EU’s claims to be a world power are hollow. The argument often goes that the continent will continue to lack critical influence given its weak economic growth and political challenges, set in the context of the growing influence of revisionist powers such as Russia and China.

Yet, for all the real problems the EU unquestionably faces, one area in which it does have disproportionate influence is that of being a regulatory superpower. This is what scholars such as Professor Anu Bradford, who is based in the US, call the “Brussels effect.”

By developing far-reaching regulations that have a significant bearing outside of Europe on the entire global business environment, the Brussels-based club helps ensure that European values play a role in shaping a wide spectrum

of policy areas — including sustainability and the environment, antitrust issues, data privacy, consumer health and safety — as a growing number of global firms adopt EU standards as global standards.

One of the standout examples of this, in practice, is environmental legislation. The EU’s Green Deal is a far-reaching compendium of sustainability measures in which Brussels has gone further and faster than almost any other international power.

“The EU becomes the very first continent to set clear rules for the use of AI,” he said. “The AI Act is a rule book but it’s also a launchpad for EU startups and researchers to lead the global AI race.” Certainly, many other powers might not copy every single provision of the EU legislation. However, a significant number will try to follow its broad framework. Moreover, AI companies will have to follow the EU’s rules and are likely to extend at least some of those obligations to markets beyond the continent. After all, it is simply not efficient to retrain separate AI models for different markets. Part of the huge significance of all this lies in the fact, as von der Leyen has said, that “the AI Act transposes European values to a new era.” The foundation for the new EU rules on AI is a risk-based, tiered system in which the highest level of regulation applies to application of the technology that pose the greatest risk to health, safety and human rights. However, even the lower tiers of regulation place major new obligations on AI services.

national power.

Most recently, however, the EU hit the headlines for being a “first mover” in another key policy area, through the development of the world’s first comprehensive AI legislation following a breakthrough deal this month. It represents the strictest regulations agreed anywhere for governing this emerging technology.

There will be a transitional period before the legislation kicks in but when it does, companies that fail to

Andrew Hammond

comply with the rules will face fines of €35 million (\$38 million) or 7 percent of their global revenue. The next steps, procedurally, will be for the European Parliament to ratify the AI Act proposals early next year, with the far-reaching legislation coming into force as soon as 2025.

The agreement is only the latest example of the EU becoming a potential

powers might not copy every single provision of the EU legislation. However, a significant number will try to follow its broad framework.

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There will be strict

world leader in terms of setting the regulatory rules for the global economy, a fact that European Commissioner for Internal Market Thierry Breton highlighted when the legislation was agreed.

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There will be strict

Ukraine can help the Global South beat hunger

The large-scale war that Russia unleashed against Ukraine in February 2022 has extensively gone beyond the borders of our country and Europe.

Russian aggression has not only caused enormous human suffering and thousands of deaths, but it has also had a significant negative impact on global food security. It affects every country. It endangers everyone.

Ukraine has historically been recognized as a key player in terms of global food security. Our fertile soil, hardworking farmers, investments and technologies allowed us to become one of the world’s leading exporters of grain, sunflower oil, corn and other agricultural products.

We have forged fruitful and mutually beneficial relationships with many countries in the Global South. About 400 million people around the world, including many on the African continent, depend on our food exports.

Between 2016 and the start of the Russian aggression in 2022, Ukraine exported 92 percent of its wheat to Asia and Africa.

Nowadays, Russia tries

destroying our agricultural potential and our ports, thus jeopardizing the world’s food security.

Over the past 100 years, Ukraine has experienced more than one famine. At least 4 million Ukrainians perished during the Holodomor of 1932-33. This was an artificial famine orchestrated by the policies of the Kremlin. The communist totalitarian regime forcibly confiscated food from Ukrainian farmers. This is a deep wound in the history of our country that continues to hurt each of us.

These days, Russia is again playing “hunger games,” but this time with all countries of the world.

Russia has arranged a blockade of Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea, through which Ukraine has traditionally exported more than 90 percent of its agricultural products. Russia attacks Ukraine’s port infrastructure with missiles and kamikaze drones, leading to huge damage. Russia destroys grain warehouses containing Ukrainian harvests that our farmers produced from the fields, some of which are mined by the Russian army.

This summer, Russia

Denys Shmyhal

broke off the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which had allowed the export of nearly 33 million tons of agricultural products to 45 countries, 60 percent of which was delivered to Africa and Asia. In particular, the goods went to Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, China, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen.

Thanks to Ukrainian agricultural exports, food prices have dropped by 25 percent compared to the spike in prices caused by Russia’s war against Ukraine.

Now, the Kremlin is deliberately jeopardizing the entire world. Russians clearly understand the role and importance of Ukraine in the global food security chain. But this does not stop them.

The latest report by UN agencies says there are 18 “hot spots” of hunger in 22 countries or territories in the world. Russia wants to take advantage of this. The Kremlin’s strategy consists of the following: The more crises it can create, the faster — it believes — it

can destroy us.

Ukraine seeks peace. But it is about a just and lasting peace. This is only possible on the basis of the “Peace Formula” presented by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Food security is one of the 10 elements of the Peace Formula. It states: “The issue of food security must be de-weaponized. Any actions that negatively impact food production and supply generate global risks.”

It calls for free, full and safe navigation in the Black Sea and Azov Sea to be safeguarded.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative and the Ukrainian humanitarian initiative known as “Grain from Ukraine” must work. They should not be threatened with attacks by missiles and kamikaze drones.

We tell the countries of Africa, the Middle East and Asia: Let us not build alliances against anyone — let us build alliances for a better cause. For the sake of overcoming hunger. To make the world more secure. So that everyone in the world can provide food for their families.

More than 30 countries and international organiza-

restrictions, for example, on the use of facial-recognition technology, except for narrowly defined law enforcement exceptions. The legislation bans the use of AI for “social scoring” — using metrics to establish how virtuous a person is — and in systems that “manipulate human behavior to circumvent their free will.”

The use of AI to exploit people who are vulnerable because of their age, disability or economic status is also banned. Moreover, consumers will have the right to file complaints if they fall victim to illegal use of AI and fines can be imposed for any violations.

Until the legislation is fully in force in 2025, or later, the EU will support businesses and developers in their efforts to prepare for the new rules. About 100 companies have already expressed an interest in joining a transitional AI Pact through which they will commit, on a voluntary basis, to implementing key obligations contained in the legislation ahead of the legal deadline.

Therefore, these developments potentially give the EU “first-mover advantage” in efforts to regulate this new technology in a fast-moving global landscape.

US President Joe Biden also recently signed an executive order on AI. At the multilateral level, too, in October the G7, chaired this year by Japan, agreed on a set of principles for a code of conduct for firms developing advanced AI systems.

Taking all of this together, the development and implementation of AI legislation will reinforce the EU’s regulatory superpower credentials. While much uncertainty remains about the overall fortunes of the bloc in the years ahead, this “Brussels effect” might sustain the EU’s influence internationally for some time to come, even if it never fully manages to deliver on its ambition to become a geopolitical giant.

Washington visit teaches Zelensky a hard lesson about US domestic policy

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was in Washington this week, almost a year after his last visit, when he received a hero’s welcome in the White House and in Congress. This week, during his third visit since the war started in 2022, he discovered what a difference a year can make.

Despite the warm White House welcome, the Ukrainian president found a different Washington on Ukraine. He found that money is drying up, with the Ukraine aid package being held hostage in Congress and tied to the immigration and US border policy, with a strong right-wing Republican group in Congress that sees its national interest on the southern US border more than on a European border. He undoubtedly felt that support for Ukraine was falling after the failure of the counteroffensive to deliver what was promised to Washington, and a pessimistic assessment that the war has stalled. He also saw an election campaign that made everything, including Ukraine aid, a political tool in the tug-of-war between the Republicans and Democrats over who will occupy the White House next year.

But, most importantly, Zelensky must have noticed the change in the language of support even from his staunchest supporter President Joe Biden. Last year, the president welcomed Zelensky with a promise that the “American people will stay with you as long as it takes.” This week, the US leader vowed to “continue to supply Ukraine with critical weapons and equipment “as long as we can.”

The White House and the Ukrainian president were sensitive and concerned about the message that a dearth of US assistance sends to Russia and the world. Zelensky said that much at the white House when he warned that “the world is watching us,” and that if the aid does not come, Russian President Vladimir Putin could win.

Biden tied the aid to the credibility of the US, and urged Congress to approve the funding for Ukraine before the Christmas break, saying that otherwise they will give “Putin the greatest Christmas gift they could possibly give him.”

The White House invited Zelensky to help lobby Congress, which is blocking any additional aid to Ukraine, and tying it to the immigration policy and the southern border with Mexico following a record influx of illegal immigrants. Republicans in Congress question the policy of sending billions in aid to Ukraine in what they regard as a stalemate and a “war of attrition,” according to US media reports.

Last week, Republicans in the Senate blocked the White House’s request of its emergency spending bill requesting \$111 billion that includes aid for Ukraine. The Senate vote was an indication of the dwindling support for Ukraine in the US. Polls show that most Americans oppose additional funding for the war with Russia, with 55 percent of respondents in a CNN poll saying Congress should not authorize more money for Ukraine.

The Republicans in Congress tied any authorization of aid for Ukraine to concessions from the White House on the immigration policy and the border with

Dr. Amal Mudallali

Mexico. Republican Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, when asked if Congress would approve aid for Ukraine, replied: “If they give us the border.” It is classic political horse trading, with Ukraine dragged into the fight. The border policy is an important issue for voters in this election year. Even governors of Democratic states are worried about the situation on the border, where a record 12,000 illegal immigrants entered the US in one day this month.

Zelensky made his case to Congress — telling them he needed aid “urgently,” and that a win for Putin “could be very dangerous” — but does not seem to have changed many minds in the entrenched Republican position. The House Speaker, who supports Ukraine, was skeptical, saying after meeting the Ukrainian leader: “We need a clear articulation of a strategy to allow Ukraine to win. And thus far, their responses have been insufficient.”

The White House is under immense pressure from all sides on this issue. Pressure from the Republicans who find this a golden opportunity to squeeze the White House for concessions on the border issue; pressure from progressives in the Democratic party who reject the Republicans’ strict approach to immigration and urge the president to resist; but, most importantly, pressure from the voters, with 64 percent disapproving of his border policy, according to a Wall Street Journal poll. In the face of all of this pressure, Biden is struggling to keep his Ukraine policy focused, funded and credible at a time when the situation on the ground is failing to inspire confidence that any of the war aims will be met soon.

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Sen. James Lankford, the lead Republican negotiator on the aid, reminded people after Zelensky’s visit that the US has its own national security issues as well. He said: “When we’re dealing with Ukraine, we’re dealing with Israel, we’re dealing with what is happening in the Indo-Pacific; we’re also dealing with what’s happening on our own border. We’ve got to be able to resolve that.” He is saying the US is overstretched.

Negotiations are continuing between Democrats and Republicans on the Hill, with Biden personally in regular contact with the Congressional leadership to push for a solution, according to the White House.

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the ground is failing to inspire confidence that any of the war aims will be met soon.

Senate Majority leader Charles Schumer (D-NY) asked the Senate to return to Washington next week despite the Christmas holiday to try to reach an agreement on the border in order to free the aid for Ukraine. The Republican-controlled House adjourned, with the Speaker saying he was not going to ask people to stay in Washington “twiddling their thumbs,” when “they’ve not sent me anything,” meaning proposals.

Sen. Mitch McConnell said it is “impossible to pass the supplemental before Christmas.” But on Thursday night, two positive news items offered hope that an agreement might not be as elusive as it had seemed. Schumer’s request that the Senate come back next week to give negotiators time to reach an agreement coincided with the White House spokeswoman saying they are optimistic about a deal, and that the negotiations

“are going in the right direction.” All indications were that the president is ready for a compromise. The question is, what will satisfy the Republicans? Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, an Independent and one of the leading negotiators, said: “I can see the deal. We have a lot to do to get there, but I can see it.” However, Republican leaders poured cold water on the optimism of their colleagues, with Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) saying: “At the moment, a deal by the end of the year is just not remotely possible.” Graham said that he has not seen language to look at and that he is not going to “take the bait.” A deal could be reached on the border and the aid, but the question is the timing. Time is a scarce commodity when you are fighting a war, as Zelensky impressed on Washington. The Ukrainian leader is learning the lesson of American domestic policy the hard way. But if he thinks things are so difficult for him now, he should not look forward to next year when the election campaign will overwhelm Washington completely.

Maybe the lesson for Ukraine, its president, and all involved is that when you are running out of money and time, it is best to change course. This conflict has gone on for too long, and a peaceful solution is overdue.

the shaping of the war’s trajectory remains to be seen. Türkiye and Saudi Arabia can act as two heavyweights in overcoming these differences. Member states’ future actions will not only influence the conflict’s resolution but also define the broader Middle Eastern order.

As key OIC members, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia are deeply concerned about the potential for regional destabilization, if not a Middle East war. The cooperation that Ankara and Riyadh are pursuing during the Gaza war — even at just the level of a diplomatic front — is likely to consolidate and deepen the normalization of relations between these two states and strengthen the future role and status of the OIC.

Along with their counterparts from other OIC states, have undertaken a globe-trotting mission seeking international action to stop the war in Gaza and to push for humanitarian aid to be allowed into the Strip. The delegation has held meetings in Beijing, Moscow, London, Paris, Barcelona, the US and Canada. In a photo taken on the last leg of their trip, the Saudi, Turkish and Palestinian foreign ministers were all present.

For decades, the question of Palestine has maintained a prominent place in the official Saudi and Turkish positions. In particular, Gaza has remained central due to the unjust blockade imposed by Israel. Palestinian self-determination still holds

Turkiye, Saudi Arabia on diplomatic blitz for Gaza

Turkiye and Saudi Arabia, both active members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, have been working on the diplomatic front for Gaza. Their strategy involves internationalizing the war as much as possible, while seeking the deeper involvement of non-Western powers such as China and Russia.

As OIC member states, they cooperate on a number of issues, ranging from Palestine to Kashmir and from Myanmar to the plight of the Uighurs. The Palestine issue was not only instrumental in their cooperation, but it was also an important issue in Türkiye’s membership of the OIC, which came in response to a 1969 arson attack on Al-

Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The process that resulted in Türkiye joining the OIC, which is based in Saudi Arabia, was very controversial. Türkiye began as a preliminary member, as it did not approve the OIC Charter because it was found to be incompatible with the secularist principle of the Turkish constitution. The leftist Republican People’s Party opposed Türkiye’s participation in Islamic forums and organizations.

However, the Turkish government under the leadership of Suleyman Demirel, who had a conservative worldview, tried to use the country’s participation in the OIC to erase the misunderstandings of the past between Türkiye and the Middle Eastern states.

Both domestic and external political developments pushed Demirel to send Türkiye’s foreign minister to the first meeting of the OIC in Rabat in 1969. However, while keen to approach the Arab world, Türkiye was also trying to keep its relations with Israel on track.

Turkiye had remained neutral during the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. After its conclusion, Ankara became one of the first countries to recognize Israel. From 1949 until the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, Türkiye remained the only Muslim-majority country to have diplomatic ties with Israel.

However, this approach was not welcomed by the OIC’s member states. At the second summit held in

1974, Türkiye was asked to break its ties with Israel. Although Ankara approved some of the decisions taken at the summit, it did not agree to sever its relations with Tel Aviv and so was denied funding from the Islamic Development Bank. Türkiye reacted to this move by increasing its level of representation at the organization.

Ankara also asked Rauf Denktas, the president of northern Cyprus, to make a speech at the summit and for a representative from the community to attend all OIC meetings. Türkiye’s requests were accepted and it was also allowed to host an OIC meeting in Istanbul. Denktas delivered his speech at the seventh

Sinem Cengiz

Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in the Atatürk Cultural Center in Istanbul in May 1976. It was agreed that representatives of the Turkish Muslim community of Cyprus be invited to attend future meetings of the OIC.

It was at this conference that Türkiye agreed to allow the Palestine Liberation Organization to open an office in Ankara without any conditions. Thus, the Palestinian cause played a key role in Türkiye’s membership of the OIC and in mending its ties with Middle Eastern states. This is also the case at present.

Over the last three weeks, the Turkish and Saudi foreign ministers,

along with their counterparts from other OIC states, have undertaken a globe-trotting mission seeking international action to stop the war in Gaza and to push for humanitarian aid to be allowed into the Strip. The delegation has held meetings in Beijing, Moscow, London, Paris, Barcelona, the US and Canada. In a photo taken on the last leg of their trip, the Saudi, Turkish and Palestinian foreign ministers were all present.

For decades, the question of Palestine has maintained a prominent place in the official Saudi and Turkish positions. In particular, Gaza has remained central due to the unjust blockade imposed by Israel. Palestinian self-determination still holds

importance in the minds of their populations.

The OIC serves as a significant platform for these states to showcase their involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although the OIC has the potential to play a pivotal role in advocating for peace and justice in the conflict, it is imperative that its members should take more steps to get involved in the process to ensure that the suffering of the Palestinian people comes to an end.

The divisions among the OIC’s members on forging a cohesive and robust response to the Gaza crisis showcase the complex geopolitical realities of the region. Whether they can overcome their differences and play an effective role in



Vehicles physical verification desk set up

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fuad Ishaq and Director Excise and Taxation department Islamabad Bilal Azam inaugurated vehicles physical verification desk at the chamber house.

The move aims at easing difficulties of the business community and people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regarding vehicles physical verification.

In this regard, a formal inauguration ceremony was held at the chamber house here on Sunday.

The event was attended by the SCCI vice president Ijaz Khan Afridi, former presidents Faiz Muhammad Faizi, Zulfikar Ali Khan, Zahidullah Shinwari, Riaz Arshad, members of the executive committee Monawar Khurshid, Kashif Amin, Minhajuddin, Chairman of Sarhad

Chamber of Commerce and Industry Cars Dealer Standing Committee on Ghulam Bilal Javed, vice chairman Bakht Mir Jan Durrani, traders leader Haji Amin Hussain Babar, Saddar Gul, Fazl e Wahid, Excise and Taxation Officers Peshawar region, members of business community in a large number.

Fuad Ishaq while speaking on the occasion lauded the Excise and Taxation Department Islamabad for setting up of a vehicles physical verification desk at the chamber house, stating that this initiative will remove difficulties of the business community and people of KP.

The SCCI said the business community was the backbone of the country's economy.

Therefore, he urged the government and relevant authorities to take pragmatic steps for provision of facilities to business com-

munity under one window operation.

He said owing to being far away from seaport, vice KP business community has faced enormous difficulties that have brought negative impacts on businesses, the country's trade and export.

Fuad Ishaq on the occasion suggested broadening the existing tax-base for bringing new people under the tax-net.

He urged the government and departments concerned to avoid burdening existing taxpayers with new taxes.

The SCCI chief said the country's economy would stabilize by readdressing business community issues.

He also gave a number of proposals for simplifying the current tax-filing system.

Praising the efforts of Excise and Taxation Department Islamabad for establishment of the desk at chamber house, Mr Ishaq

said the department will take measures for provision vehicle registration and token renewal facility through this desk.

Bilal Azam while speaking on the occasion said the Excise and Taxation department is fully committed to facilitate the business community and hoped the desk will play a role to mitigate suffering of the community.

He also explained the department's special initiatives and other facilities that have been extended to the business community and the main objective of the vehicle's physical verification desk.

Ghulam Bilal Javed also spoke on the occasion and praised the excise and taxation department Islamabad for this important step.

He also apprised the meeting regarding initiatives that had been taken under leadership of Faud Ishaq for resolution of the business community.



PESHAWAR: President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce & Industry Fuad Ishaq and Director Excise & Taxation Department Islamabad Bilal Azam inaugurating vehicles physical verification desk at Chamber House.

Teachers, students visit CTI

LAHORE (APP): A delegation of teachers and students of National College of Arts (NCA) here Sunday visited the Carpet Training Institute (CTI) and they were briefed on various stages of manual carpet manufacturing and its export.

Chairperson CTI Ijaz-ur-Rehman welcomed the delegation and gave them a detailed briefing about the handmade carpet industry.

Ijaz-ur-Rehman said that strong linkages between educational institutions such as the National College of Arts and various industries, especially the handmade carpet industry, have strategic significance and through which key support can be provided in increasing production and availability of skills required by the industry. "Promoting cooperation between the two institutions can also be effective for entrepreneurship," he added.

He said that working together would yield best results and especially those who are doing their business can get best support. He suggested that all relevant institutions such as universities, Higher Education Commission and the industry associated with the industry after recognizing challenges and opportunities should meet and hold dialogue in the context of bridging the gap between academia and the industry. "Linkages between the industry and academia are indispensable for a strong and bright future of Pakistan," he concluded.

China, Pakistan sign MOU

— to boost textile cooperation

SUZHOU (INP): China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Textiles (CCCT) and All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) signed an MOU, at the "China Pakistan Textile & Apparel Executive Summit" to boost textile cooperation between the two countries.

Pakistan's Federal Minister for Commerce & Industries, Dr Gohar Ejaz participated in the summit and said this MOU will pave the way for deeper collaboration, knowledge sharing, and joint ventures. "This MOU signifies Pakistan's unwavering commitment to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and reinforces the strategic economic partnership."

This collaboration will unlock significant potential for our textile industries, propelling them to even greater heights," he said, according to a report carried by Gwadar Pro.

He stated that "attending this esteemed gathering presents a unique opportunity to explore avenues for enhanced private-sector cooperation, solidifying the textile industry as a cornerstone of our bilateral economic partnership."

"Through insightful discussions and dedicated business meetings, we aim to unlock new frontiers in trade, innovation, and sustainability, paving the way for a mutually prosperous future. Together, the two nations work for a stronger, more resilient textile landscape that benefits our economies and communities alike," he added.

Addressing on the occasion, Zhang Xinmin, Vice Chairman, China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Textiles (CCCT) expressed appreciation for cooperation between the two countries and hoped to enhance cooperation in the field of textile. He noted that through this cooperation both parties will work together to assist in the exchange of delegations and organise events for business representatives from both sides.

"The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to promote and strengthen the development of economic and trade relations and cooperation between member companies of APTMA and CCCT on the basis of equality and mutual benefits," he added.

LCCI hails increase in FDI, emphasizes more efforts

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry (LCCI) Sunday welcomed rise in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and called for more aggressive efforts to maintain the good momentum.

LCCI President Kashif Anwar, Senior Vice President Zafar Mahmood Chaudhry and Vice President Adnan Khalid Butt said in a media statement here that rise in Foreign Direct Investment is an encouraging sign for the economy.

They said that the net Foreign Direct Investment in the first four months of the current financial year (July-October 2023-24) stood at USD 524.7 million, exhibiting an increase of 7 percent as compared to USD 488.9 million in the same period of FY 2022-23. There is a need for concrete efforts to enhance the level of FDI in the country.

The LCCI office-bearers said that Special Investment Facilitation

Council (SIFC) can play an instrumental role in materializing the signed agreements with UAE and Saudi Arabia for bringing investment in diverse sectors of the economy. Going forward, stability in macro-economic policies, and focus on competitive business regulatory environment, particularly related to taxation and cost of doing business can play a pivotal role in enhancing foreign direct investment in the country.

The LCCI office-bearers said that Pakistan has the potential to attract FDI worth billions of dollars in various sectors of economy like energy, agriculture, tourism, health, mines and minerals, precious stones, information technology and various others.

LCCI President Kashif Anwar suggested that the government should persuade the investors for taking over the those state-owned enterprises which are not performing well and turned these into profitable.

At the one hand, it would reduce the burden from national exchequer while give revenue and generate employment opportunities at the other.

The LCCI office-bearers suggested that Pakistan's foreign missions abroad would have to play a key role to attract foreign investors. Foreign investors should be informed that Pakistan has lucrative opportunities for investment in various sectors of economy.

They said that the countries, which have signed Bilateral Investment Agreements with Pakistan, have meager share in total foreign direct investment in Pakistan. They said that the government has to target these countries for marketing the investment potential of Pakistan.

They said that there are almost same countries which are investing in Pakistan since long. They said that the new countries must be targeted to attract FDI in Pakistan.

PIAF for overhauling power sector as anti-theft drive fails to give results

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) has stressed the need for overhauling the power sector through some drastic measures as the total cost of inefficiencies in the power sector is continued to rise, crossing Rs2.6 trillion by Oct 31, 2023, showing 13 percent or Rs 75.25 billion per month growth in its flow, indicating that anti-theft drive failed to give results.

PIAF Chairman Fahemur Rehman Saigol, referring to the latest data, observed that circular debt stock touched Rs2.310 trillion at the end of FY 2022-23, which has now reached Rs2.611 trillion during July-October 2023-24 with a growth of Rs301 billion against growth of Rs249 billion in same period of 2022-23.

Fahem Saigol said that the Discos' losses, inefficiency stood at Rs77 billion during July-October 2023-24 as compared to Rs 65 billion in the same period of 2022-23, showing addition of Rs 16 billion in total circular debt stock.

He said that in present scenario the energy effi-

ciency and conservation are key measures used by countries across the globe to mitigate associated risks. However, in the case of Pakistan, both energy efficiency and conservation were generally treated as alien concepts.

Fahem Saigol noted that there was an urgent need for up-gradation of energy efficiency and conservation standards and strict enforcement, besides replacement of inefficient appliances and consumer awareness for responsible use of energy were other key areas which should be identified for action as a national priority. He estimated that a dollar outflow of around \$ 1.25 billion could be potentially saved annually through implementation of efficiency and conservation measures.

The PIAF Chairman pointed out that the line losses ran as high as 9 percent over and above the percentage allowed by NEPRA. He informed that theft and line losses should be addressed through advanced metering and cabling.

Payables to power producers have reached Rs1.750 trillion during four months of CFY from Rs 1.434 trillion at the end

of FY 2022-23, showing an addition of Rs316 billion. The stock of payables to IPPs was Rs 1.750 trillion during July-October 2023-24.

However, Gencos' payables to fuel suppliers have declined to Rs96 billion from Rs 111 billion in FY 2022-23 and posted Rs 5 billion growth during July-October 2023-24 from Rs 91 billion in the comparable period of 2022-23. No change was witnessed in Rs 765 billion parked in Power Holding Limited (PHL). PHL parked amount was Rs 793 billion during the same period of 2022-23.

Key reasons for the substantial growth in flow of circular debt are issues of K-Electric (KE), AJ&K, release of subsidies, delay in implementation of QTA adjustments, higher interest payments, rupee dollar parity etc.

The sources said, Rs 389 billion is receivable from KE as on October 2023 - pending due to subsidy dispute between the power utility company and the federal government.

He said that the amount of budgeted but unreleased subsidies was recorded at Rs 8 billion during the first four months of current financial year against Rs54 billion in the comparable period of 2022-23.

IPPs interest charges on delayed payments of PHL and IPPs recorded at Rs 45 billion in four months of current fiscal year against Rs 54 billion in the same period of 2022-23. The amount of IPPs interest charges on delayed payments was Rs 143 billion during the entire fiscal year 2022-23.

Pending generation cost (QTAs + FCAs) stood at Rs 110 billion against Rs 103 billion during the same period of 2022-23 and Rs 250 billion in FY 2022-23. Non-payment by K-Electric reached Rs 43 billion in July-October 2023-24 against Rs65 billion during the same period of FY 2022-23.

Discos' under recoveries reached Rs 165 billion during first four months of 2023-24 as compared to Rs 61 billion during corresponding period of 2022-23; however, their cumulative under recoveries stood at Rs 236 billion as of June 30, 2023. Other adjustments (prior year recovery, etc.) were Rs147 billion during July-October, 2023-24 against Rs 254 billion in July-October 2022-23.

FTO Coordinator warns taxpayers of scams and fraudulent schemes

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Coordinator Meher Kashif Younis on Sunday urged taxpayers to remain vigilant against scammers, fake websites, non-existent charities, fictitious emails and dummy tax notices.

Addressing the business community at an awareness session on the directives of FTO Dr Asif Mahmood Jah, Sitara-I-Imtiaz and Hilal-I-Imtiaz, he said that it was his duty as coordinator to bring their knowledge to a pressing matter that requires immediate attention, the escalating prevalence of scams and fraudulent activities targeting taxpayers across Pakistan, said a news release issued here.

He said, "FTO has

noticed a disturbing surge in deceptive practices, including fraudulent emails, fabricated notices, sham websites and the creation of non-existent charities, all designed to exploit unsuspecting taxpayers, adding, these malicious tactics excel at mimicking official communication channels, posing a significant threat."

He said that tax payers received calls or messages promising hefty tax refunds in exchange for a fee from impersonating tax authorities. In 2022, he said Pakistan's computer emergency response team reported a 300 percent increase in tax-related phishing incidents, and scammers pose as charity, which is nonexistent."

He said, "Fraudsters steal taxpayers' personal information to file fake tax

returns, claiming refunds and leaving the victim with a tax liability. FBR has reported over 1500 cases of identity theft in 2021.

He said tax scams pose a considerable challenge in Pakistan, but through the partnership of vigilant taxpayers and the FTO, significant progress can be made in protecting taxpayers from falling prey to fraudulent tactics.

He said that by staying informed, vigilant, and proactive, taxpayers can ensure their financial security and maintain the integrity of the tax system. He stressed the need for the implementation of a comprehensive public advisory campaign.

This campaign should underscore the imperative for taxpayers to exercise heightened caution and dili-

gence when encountering any communication purportedly from tax authorities.

Underscoring the importance of independently verifying the legitimacy of such communications, cross-referencing official contact details, and refraining from divulging sensitive personal or financial information without robust verification measures is crucial, he concluded.

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Despite the significant importance, over 5 million SMEs has been facing a huge credit gap, receiving only 7% of private sector credit, far below neighboring countries like Bangladesh (25%) and India (18%), with the State Bank committing to increase SME credit share

to 17% by 2023. To achieve this, we must advocate for targeted and fixed SME allocations in concessional financing schemes, particularly those aimed at the export-oriented sector.

These views were expressed by the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industries' Businessmen Panel (BMP) Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar. He proposed the SBP to allocate at least 25 percent of concessional financing, including the Export Finance Scheme, exclusively to SMEs in the export sector. This strategic allocation will not only boost SME sector's growth but also promote a more inclusive and resilient economy.

Mian Anjum Nisar, who is also SAARC Chamber vice president and the FPCCI former president, suggested the central bank to review its credit policies by fixing a special quota to finance the small and medium enterprises, as only the large industries have been availing government's all major concessional export loaning facilities, with very limited financing is left for the SMEs which are the

backbone of the economy, contributing around 40 percent to the national gross domestic product (GDP).

Mian Anjum Nisar said that the State Bank of Pakistan has launched various policies for the promotion of SME finance, but the required results were still awaited. It was unfortunate that banks were always reluctant to provide financing to SMEs as their financing continued to show negative growth.

The FPCCI's Businessmen Panel Chairman said that the government with a view to help grow the businesses will have to take solid measures to strengthen the industry, especially the SMEs, saving the livelihood of millions of workers associated with the small industries. The government will have to make a visible reduction in markup rate to help grow the businesses, particularly the SME sector, as Pakistan needs millions of jobs annually.

We need to highlight the critical role of Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in driving sustainable economic development in Pakistan. With an

estimated 5.2 million businesses, the SME sector is a cornerstone of our economy, fostering employment, growth, and export diversification.

In its endeavor to provide concessional financing to the export-oriented sector, the SBP has introduced the Export Finance Scheme, offering financing as low as 3%, in stark contrast to the earlier Export Refinance Schemes' (ERF) markup rates that reached 21%. However, it is a matter of great concern that a substantial portion of this financing has been availed by large corporate industries, leaving no room for SMEs. The current economic challenges demand a targeted approach to support the SMEs, as they are among the hardest-hit and in desperate need of assistance.

The FPCCI former president said that a small section of public sector and Islamic banks and few DFIs were active in financing SMEs sector. Despite significantly contributing to the GDP, exports and employment generation, the financing percentage of

SMEs remained pathetic in general. He urged the government that SME policy should focus on addressing specific issues faced by the SME sector and help check reluctance of financial institutions to provide financing to SMEs.

He said that the FPCCI and the BMP fully supported the proposed measures for promotion of SME finance including the establishment of credit guarantee company for offering risk sharing facility for SMEs. He urged all the stakeholders to collaborate to meet the objectives of the SME policy and support the priority sectors.

Mian Anjum Nisar emphasized the importance of SMEs for the growth and development of the economy.

He called for early and speedy access to finance for SMEs, including creation of enabling regulatory framework, market development, awareness creation and capacity building programs for banks and SMEs and introduction of SME financing targets for banks and DFIs.

He stressed that a sepa-

rate and comprehensive policy for the SME sector was the need of the day to promote contribution of SME sector for inclusive growth.

There are over five million SMEs across the country. These represent about 90 percent of Pakistan's businesses, and contribute 35 percent to GDP with over 30 percent to export earnings. In fact, it is a key pillar of national economy, employing about 40 percent of the workforce for different abilities---skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled. These diversified enterprises are engaged in a variety of industrial, commercial and services activities. The long list of businesses include textiles, leather, plastic, sports goods, handicraft, IT, construction, materials, consumer goods, horticulture, fisheries, gems, healthcare, agricultural produce, and energy.

The SMEs are vulnerable to financial strains, increased cost of production, supply chain disruption, and drastic decrease in demand, due to limited financial resources and weaker access to financing and management.

Court Notice

In the Court of Faseeh-ur-Rehman civil judge III/ Illaqa Qazi Kadal district Swat. Case # 21/1. Institution 10/2/2023. Next hearing date 12/01/2024. Adalat Khan s/o Muhammad Zaman etc Vs. Fiveoon Khan etc. Notice to defendant # 3 Bakht Alam Khan 7) Gran Khan 8) javid Khan sons of Habib Khan 2/3. Akram Khan 1/4 Murad Khan sons of Fiveoon Khan (late) r/o Totano Bandai (presently abroad). In above mentioned case the respondent can't be served in the ordinary way, it is therefore proclaimed that if said respondents will not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8:30 am dated 12/01/2024 ex-parte proceeding will be held against the mentioned respondents under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

In the Court of Qaisar Khan Afridi Additional District Judge II/Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Dagar. Appeal No. 83/13. Institution 24/7/2023. Date of hearing. 15/1/2024. Sahib Gul Vs. Akbar Khan etc. Notice to No. 8, Mohamadi Gul son. 9. Mst. Farasat d/o Mohamadi Gul residents of Soor Kamar Mera Kalpani Tehsil Gagra District Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants cannot be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the Court at 9 a.m. dated 15/1/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

In the Court of Kiran Noor Judge Family Court Tehsil Matta Swat. Case # 188/FC institution Year 2023. Next hearing date 03/01/2024. Mst.- Asiya Vs. Anwar Alam. Notice to: Anwar Alam s/o Aqlemoon r/o Sakhra Tehsil Matta District Swat. In above mentioned case the respondent can't be served in the ordinary way, it is therefore proclaimed that if said respondents will not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8:30 am dated 03/01/2024 ex-parte proceeding will be held against the mentioned respondents under my hand and seal of this Court.



In brief

Bangladesh bag maiden U19 Asia Cup title

DUBAI (Agencies): Bangladesh on Sunday thrashed UAE by 195 runs at Dubai International Cricket Stadium to claim their first ACC U19 Asia Cup title. Batting first, Bangladesh set a target of 283 runs for UAE, on the back of a brilliant 129-run innings from Ashiqur Rahman Shibli. Chowdhury Md Rizwan (60) and Ariful Islam (50) also gave important contributions with the bat. For UAE, Ayman Ahamed (4 for 52) was the top wicket-taker. In response, UAE were bundled out for just 87. Bangladesh's Rohanat Doullah Borson and Maruf Mridha were the pick of the bowlers with 3 wickets apiece. Ashiqur Rahman Shibli was picked as Player of the Match for his match-winning innings. He was also given the Player of the Series award for scoring the highest number of runs (378) in the tournament.

Female umpires induction course

LAHORE (PPI): The PCB has announced that it will conduct a female umpires induction course at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore in January-February 2024. The candidates who will successfully complete the course will be inducted into the PCB Female Panel of Umpires for the forthcoming domestic cricket season, allowing them to officiate region/district and club level matches. In the opening three days of the course, the participants will be provided basic knowledge of the umpiring laws, regulations and rules of the game. On the fourth and final day of the four-day long course, the participants will undergo a written test, a fitness test and an interview. Those willing to apply can submit the online registration form available at PCB.com.pk/UR till 31 December, 2023. Former women's cricketers will be given preference for course registration. Candidates (female only) aged between 28 and 40 can register for the course, and the shortlisted registrants will need to submit a fee of PKR 15,000.

Abdul-Jabbar breaks hip in fall

Los Angeles (Agencies): NBA legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar has been taken to hospital after breaking his hip in a fall at a concert on Friday. The 76-year-old, who is the only six-time Most Valuable Player in league history, is set to have surgery in a Los Angeles hospital. Abdul-Jabbar played in the NBA from 1969-89, winning six championships - five with the Los Angeles Lakers. He held the NBA career regular-season scoring record of 38,387 points until LeBron James broke it in February. The 19-time All-Star, who stands at 7ft 2in, still holds the records for regular-season field goals (15,837) and career minutes played (57,446). He has also had a successful acting career, appearing in films including Airplane! and Glass Onion, as well as featuring in The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, The Simpsons and The Big Bang Theory. "We are all deeply appreciative of all the support for Kareem, especially from the Los Angeles Fire Department, who assisted Kareem on site, and the amazing medical team and doctors at UCLA Hospital, who are taking great care of Kareem now," said his business partner Deborah Morales.



PERTH: The Australians celebrate with Nathan Lyon after his 500th Test, Australia vs Pakistan.

India thrash South Africa by eight wickets in first ODI

JOHANNESBURG (AP): Left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh picked up his maiden five-wicket haul as India beat South Africa by eight wickets in the first ODI on Sunday.

Singh recorded 5-37 in 10 overs, and shared nine wickets with Avesh Khan, who took 4-27 in eight overs, as the Proteas were bowled out for a paltry 116 in 27.3 overs. In replay, India coasted to 117-2 in 16.4 overs with debutant opener Sai Sudharsan scoring an unbeaten maiden half-century.

The victory gives India a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. Gqeberha will host the second ODI on Tuesday, while the third will be played in Paarl on Thursday. Opting to bat first, South Africa's batting line-up duly collapsed. Singh bowled Reeza Hendricks for an eight-ball duck, and then trapped Rassie van der Dussen lbw for a golden duck.

From 3-2 in the second over, opener Tony de Zorzi resisted and attacked the bowling. He scored 28 off 22 balls, with two fours and

two sixes, before a mishit pull was caught behind.

It was one-way traffic after that, with Singh and Khan finding a lot of movement. Skipper Aiden Markram played on off Avesh Khan for 12 runs. Heinrich Klaasen was out similarly off Singh for six.

Khan ran through the middle order, with David Miller caught behind for two. He then trapped Wiaan Mulder lbw for a golden duck. There was no escape for South Africa as it went from 42-2 to 58-7 in the space of 32 deliveries.

Both pacers searched for their fifth wickets, but only Singh managed to get to the landmark. He picked up Andile Phehlukwayo lbw, after he top scored with 33 off 49 balls. His runs allowed South Africa to cross the 100-run mark and avoid complete embarrassment. Wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav bowled Nandre Burger for seven, thus denying Khan a chance at his milestone.

In reply, India started poorly as Mulder trapped Ruturaj Gaikwad lbw for

five runs. While there was movement on offer, it wasn't as exaggerated as it had been in the first innings and allowed the Indian batters to settle down. Shreyas Iyer, playing his first game on tour, counter-attacked and scored 52 off 45 balls. He hit six fours and a six.

In doing so, he put on 88 off 73 balls with Sudharsan holding anchor at one end. He hit nine fours and reached his maiden half-century off 41 balls.

Sudharsan became the fourth Indian opener - and the 17th batter overall - to score 50-plus on his ODI debut. It was India's fourth biggest win in terms of balls remaining with 200.

South Africa had won the toss and opted to bat, with its primary pacers rested. Markram is again in charge of South Africa with Temba Bavuma in reply returning for the two-test series beginning on Dec. 26. Lokesh Rahul is leading India in the absence of skipper Rohit Sharma. Star India batter Virat Kohli is also unavailable for this series.

Young hits century as New Zealand see off Bangladesh in first ODI

DUNEDIN (AFP): Opener Will Young cracked a rapid century as New Zealand recovered from a dreadful start to beat Bangladesh by 44 runs on Sunday in the rain-affected first one-day international.

The match was shortened to 30 overs each after three rain delays to New Zealand's innings in Dunedin. The home side burst into life in the final stages to post an imposing 239-7. Needing an adjusted target of 245 to win the first ODI of the three-match series, Bangladesh were restricted to 200-9 in a chase that lost momentum.

New Zealand bounced back after losing two wickets in the game's opening over when seamer Shoriful Islam had Rachin Ravindra and Henry Nicholls both caught without scoring.

A brilliant 171-run stand for the third wicket between Young, who hit 105 off 84 balls, and captain Tom Latham, who finished with 92 runs, handed the advantage back to the hosts in a match played in overcast conditions throughout. Their stand straddled two stoppages, which reduced the innings from 46 overs to 40 and then to 30.

The pair hit out in brutal fashion over the last 10.4 overs, when the hosts chalked up a remarkable 131 runs. Latham fell short of his eighth ODI century, bowled by off-spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz, but Young forged on to reach three figures for the third time in the 50-over format before being run out in the final over.

Young said his first priority was to steady the innings after its disastrous start. "Tommy and I set up a nice partnership although it was on and off with the rain," Young said. "We came back on with 10 overs to go and we thought why not have a crack? And it came off today. It was nice to get a few out of the middle at the end and it's the icing on the cake to finish with a win." Shoriful was comfortably Bangladesh's best bowler, taking 2-28 off six overs.

The chase began brightly, with opener Anamul Haque reaching 43, supported by Towhid Hridoy (33) and Liton Das (22), who all scored at better than a run a ball.

However, the pursuit tailed off when Afif Hossain fell for a hard-hit 38 in the 24th over, with his team still needing 80 runs. Visiting captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said the result was "very disappointing" after Islam's early fireworks.

Lyon reaches 500 as Australia crush Pakistan in 1st Test

PERTH (Agencies): Nathan Lyon took his 500th Test wicket Sunday as Australia dismissed a rattled Pakistan for just 89 to post a thumping 360-run win in the opening Test at Perth.

Pakistan's unlikely bid to win their first Test in Australia since 1995 was left in tatters by the spin king and the home side's formidable pace attack, who wrapped up the game inside four days.

Chasing 450 for victory, the visitors succumbed meekly with Lyon taking 2-18. Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood both grabbed three wickets each.

After being left stranded on 499 after Pakistan's first innings, Lyon finally reached the milestone when he trapped Faheem Ashraf lbw but there was an agonizing wait as it went to review. He then bowled Aamer Jamal in the same over, joining an elite club of just seven other players, including fellow spinners Muttiah Muralitharan of Sri Lanka and Australia's Shane Warne.

Australia declared on day four at 235-5 after Pakistan were dismissed for 271 in their first innings, in reply to the hosts' 487. Skipper Pat Cummins made the call after opener Usman Khawaja was out for a gutsy 90 on a deteriorating pitch after a 126-run partnership

with Mitchell Marsh.

Marsh remained unbeaten on 63 after Pakistan had removed Steve Smith and Travis Head early in the day to give themselves hope, which quickly evaporated. Facing a daunting chase, they got off to a horror start with Abdullah Shafique out for two in the first over, nicking an unplayable Starc ball to Alex Carey behind the stumps.

Captain Shan Masood, in his first Test in charge, did not last much longer, edging to Carey off Hazlewood to leave his team in dire straits at 17-2. Starc also accounted for Imam-ul-Haq, trapping him lbw for 10, before Babar Azam and Saud Shakeel put up some resistance. But that crumbled when Azam got an edge to Cummins on 14, with Carey again collecting. When they returned from tea, Sarfaraz Ahmed lasted just six balls before he was caught by Marsh at gully off Starc, and Agha Salman was needlessly run out.

Lyon then worked his magic before Hazlewood cleaned up the tail. Australia had resumed at 84-2, with Khawaja on 34 and Smith 43. It was hard going at the start with cracks appearing on the pitch, with Pakistan's pace bowlers beating the bat and causing problems. Impressive debutant Khurram Shahzad got a

breakthrough in the fourth over of the day, trapping Smith lbw for 45 with a ball that nipped back.

Enter the aggressive Travis Head, who stroked a straight drive boundary off the second ball he faced to signal his intent. But he lived dangerously and a misjudged drive off Aamer Jamal went straight to Haq at cover, out for 14.

Both Marsh and Khawaja survived reviews in the same eventful Jamal over as Pakistan ratcheted up the pressure. Marsh hit sixes off Jamal then spinner Salman to keep the scoreboard moving, before a huge escape on 23 when Masood dropped a sitter at mid-off. At the other end, Khawaja kept grinding away to make a 25th Test half-century off 151 balls, accelerating after he reached the mark.

Marsh cracked a thunderous drive off Shaheen Shah Afridi to bring up his second 50 of the match as both men attacked the bowling after lunch. Khawaja raced to 90 with some audacious boundaries before his luck ran out going for another big shot, caught by Azam off Afridi, which brought about the declaration. They now head to Melbourne for the Boxing Day Test before the series wraps up in Sydney.

Opening Ceremony of 7th CNS Open Shooting C'ship held at Karachi



F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Opening Ceremony of 7th CNS Open Shooting Championship 2023 held at Pakistan Navy Shooting Range, Karachi. Commander Karachi Rear Admiral Muhammad Saleem graced the event as chief guest.

"About 400 shooters from Pakistan Navy, Pakistan Air Force, FRA,

SRA, PRA, BRA, HEC, WAPDA, Pakistan Police, SSU, RSS Club, KGSSR Club, and PNSR Members Club are participating in the competition," a Pakistan Navy news release said.

During the Championship, 24 events will be contested in Pistol, Rifle and Shotgun categories. Event matches are being contested under the umbrella of National Rifle Association of Pakistan

(NAP) as per International Sports Shooting Federation (ISSF) latest rules and regulations.

Four events of Big Bore Pistol, 50M and 0.22 Open Sight Categories are included in schedule of events as festival matches. Furthermore, apart from 10 events in men category, 05 events for women and 04 for youth in Pistol and Rifle categories are also part of Championship.

World Squash Team Championship Egypt defeat England to retain men's title

TAURANGA (Agencies): Egypt claimed their third consecutive men's World Squash Team Championship title with a 2-0 win over England in Tauranga, New Zealand.

World number four Mostafa Asal and world number one Ali Farag claimed victories over brothers Marwan and Mohamed ElShorbagy.

The siblings previously represented Egypt before

switching nationalities.

Asal beat Marwan 11-9 11-9 before Farag defeated Mohamed 8-11 11-2 7-11 11-8 11-7 to clinch the tie.

It was the fifth final in a row to feature the two nations.

"It's absolutely amazing," said Egypt coach Hesham El Attar. "There was a lot of tension. I know it was slightly expected that we had to deliver, but

we wanted it badly.

"That expectation creates extra pressure. We had to distract ourselves with daily routine and not think too far ahead. One hour at a time.

"As everyone knows, anything can happen and as we saw in the matches it was very tense and rallies were very close.

"It's a wonderful feeling and it hasn't quite sunk in yet."

BISE Mardan wins one silver, a bronze medal in Pakistan Board Women Games

PESHAWAR (APP): Like in the past, this year the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Mardan teams have given outstanding performances in the Pakistan Board Women Games by taking the runners-up trophy in girls volleyball and third position in basketball championships played at Lahore on Sunday.

Chairman BISE Farid Khattak, in a felicitation message, also lauded the performance of the girls players who gave outstanding performances in the ongoing Pakistan Board

Games by winning the runners-up trophy in the Girls Volleyball Championship and taking third place in the basketball event.

He said that, like in the past, this year the performances of the players were outstanding and expressed the hope that in other games, not only the female but also the male teams would give good results. He said with little support and encouragement, the girls players outshined many strong teams from other provinces like Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir,

and Islamabad.

Speaking to APP on the phone, former international player and Assistant Director of Sports (female) Asiya Noor said that the players enthusiastically participated in both volleyball and basketball, and despite poor umpiring, the teams of BISE Mardan have given outstanding performances.

She said they lost to Lahore Board in the final of the Girls Volleyball Championship in a thrilling 3-2 battle. She said the BISE Mardan team won the first two sets by 21-25 and 20-25 and lost the other

three sets by 25-22, 27-25, 25-23, and 15-13.

It was a do-or-die battle wherein Lahore Board is a strong team and also provides services to international players as well, but BISE Mardan girls, including Muqadas from Govt Girls Centennial Model School, Kanal Road Mardan, Fatima of Govt Higher Secondary School No. 1 Mardan, Sapna, Sundas, Sana, and Anila, GGHS No. 1 Mardan, Sadia, Husna, Govt Girls Higher Secondary,

Hatiyyan, Mardan, Laiba of Govt Girls Higher Secondary School Parkho, and Nazish, Nabila Shah, also from GGHSS Hatiyyan, Mardan, and Bibi Sakeena of Govt Girls Degree College Sheikh Maltoon played well.

In Basketball, BISE Mardan defeated the strong BISE Peshawar team in the pool match of the Basketball Championship, recorded victory against Bannu Board in the quarter-finals and lost to Faisalabad in the semi-final at 17-15. BISE Mardan in the third position defeated Peshawar by 16-8.

She said players of the BISE Mardan basketball team, including Aliveena,

Taniya, Marjan, Khatijah, and Gulalay of Girls Cadet College Mardan, along with some players from different schools, gave an outstanding performance in the championship by taking third place.

She said BISE Mardan would also participate in the forthcoming Pakistan Board Sports Gala to be held on December 20 at Jinnah Sports Complex, Islamabad, wherein the teams of BISE Mardan would participate in hockey and badminton only.

She said they have teams from most of the schools in

District Mardan where trials were conducted on merit, and that is why good performances are coming up from the girls' players.

She said Muqadas and Bibi Sakina have been selected in the Pakistan Board Girls Volleyball team for an international visit as well, which is a great achievement of the BISE Mardan. She said they have won 48 medals in the Pakistan Board Girls Competitions and more than 15 players got international colour while participating in different teams including hockey and visited abroad.



In brief

AC City swooped down on alms seekers

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a swift operation, the Assistant Commissioner City swooped down on professional beggars plaguing Islamabad's posh sectors F-6 and F-7 neighborhoods on Sunday. Sixteen individuals were apprehended and whisked away to Kohsar Police Station, leaving the swanky streets temporarily beggar-free, ICT spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabasum said. He said that this action wasn't just about cleaning up the cityscape from professional beggars. While adult beggars faced legal proceedings, any accompanying minors were compassionately sent to the Edhi Center, ensuring their well-being while dismantling the beggar networks that exploit them. "This is just the latest operation in an ongoing city-wide campaign, spearheaded by Assistant Commissioners, to tackle the issue of professional begging head-on," he added.

IRSA releases 85,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 85,300 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 37,700 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1478.85 feet and was 78.85 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 19,900 cusecs and 45,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1161.40 feet, which was 111.40 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 4,800 cusecs and 26,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 61,800, 32,900, 28,000 and 1,800 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 7,100 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 2,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Police beef up security

RAWALPINDI (APP): On the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani, Rawalpindi District Police have enhanced security at churches. According to a police spokesman, Divisional Superintendents of Police, SDPOs and SHOs on Sunday checked security at churches in their respective areas and briefed the police personnel deployed there. He informed that 432 police personnel were deployed to ensure security at churches. He said that Rawalpindi police had made strict measures to ensure the security of the Christian community. The CPO had ordered effective patrolling in different areas and directed the senior police officers to deploy plain cloth police officials and well-equipped policemen near the churches and public places. All available resources were being utilized to maintain law and order across the district, to protect the rights of the minorities and to ensure security at churches, he added.

AIOU announces schedule

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has announced a workshop schedule for postgraduate programs, BS and B.Ed. (ODL programs), offered in the autumn semester of 2023. According to details, the workshops for the first batch will be held from December 18 to January 1.



ISLAMABAD: A view of Christmas Tree installed at F-6, Agha Khan Road in connection with upcoming Christmas celebrations in Federal Capital.

Ombudsman Office receive 190,000 complaints during current year

ISLAMABAD (APP): Wafaqi Mohtasib (Federal Ombudsman), Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi has directed the investigation officers and the heads of federal agencies to ensure timely implementation of Wafaqi Mohtasib decisions since no slackness would be tolerated on this count.

He said that 178,000 complaints have so far been decided since January 2023 and the number of complaints may touch an all-time high figure of 190,000 by the year-end.

Wafaqi Mohtasib was presiding over a high-level meeting of WM Regional Officers from Lahore, Faisalabad, Sargodha, and Gujranwala on Wednesday. Ijaz Ahmad Qureshi, speaking to the media in Lahore, for the first time after having been elected as President of the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA) said that it was a great honor and recognition of Pakistan's valuable con-

tribution.

Commending the performance of the Regional Offices, he reiterated his firm commitment to resolving the issues faced by the poor masses. He said that the Wafaqi Mohtasib was a "poor man's court" and its main purpose was to redress the grievance of oppressed and marginalized members of the community. All out efforts would be undertaken by the government officials to resolve the complaints so that relief was provided to poor strata, he added. He said without the allocation of additional budget and manpower, the officers of Wafaqi Mohtasib had put in their best to reach out to the public to resolve their complaints through Khulli Katchehries and IRD. He said several complaints, filed with Wafaqi Mohtasib, were increasing every year and only in 2022 WM received 164,174 complaints out of which 154,770

complaints were resolved.

This year WMS has received 183,000 complaints till now and it is expected that this number may reach 190,000 by the end of the year, he added. He said his increase in the number of complaints showed the trust of the people, reposed in the Wafaqi Mohtasib institution. He commended the role of media in creating awareness about the institution of Wafaqi Mohtasib among the public, he added.

Wafaqi Mohtasib also highlighted steps being taken for the benefit of the pensioners, Overseas Pakistanis, Prisoners, and specially the Women and Child Prisoners. He emphasized that the media to cooperate in disseminating the message of Wafaqi Mohtasib to far-flung areas to ensure that poor segments of society receive the information about Wafaqi Mohtasib and enable them to get timely relief.

Rs 5.80m for electricity bill of Qasr-e-Naz lodge

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Housing and Works has allocated an amount of Rs 5.80 million in the current financial year 2023-2024 for electricity bills of Qasr-e-Naz Lodge, South Zone Karachi due to financial constraints.

"Out of the total Rs 5.80 million, only an amount of Rs 0.87 million have been released at the rate of 15 percent in this regard so far," an official source told APP. He said that the Karachi Electric Supply Company bill was Rs 7.26 million for the month of September, 2023 along with arrears and the electricity connection had been disconnected in June, 2023. As per the statement of K-Electric, the official said that the electricity connection would be restored after payment of complete amount along with arrears. To a question, the official source said that the FGEHA had opened registration to allot plots to general public in sectors G-12 and F-12, Islamabad in August 2023.

‘Special Kashmir advisory committee’ to be formed soon

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment, Mushaal Hussein Mullick Sunday announced that a special Kashmir advisory committee would be constituted soon on every district level to mobilize and for peaceful solution of Kashmir cause.

Talking to PTV news channel, she said that a multi-faceted board comprising top national and intentional diplomatic experts would play their active role for this advisory committee on Kashmir issue, adding, the committee would offer comprehensive recommendations to the Government in response to the Indian Supreme Court's decision. She also urged youth to tap modern tools of IT to help influence the world against war crimes and human right violation of Kashmiris, adding, youth should devote their time and energies for the promotion of Kashmir cause and raise their voice for the oppressed and subjugated people of Indian Illegally Occupied & Kashmir (IIOJK).

She said the innocent people of Kashmir had been made alien in their own homeland where occupation forces were killing, torturing and maiming the youth, while the women were being dishonored.

She asked students to intensify their political, diplomatic and moral support to their brothers and sisters in IIOJK, who were struggling for their inherent right to

self-determination, adding, overseas youth should sent online petitions against Indian government who are busy in demographic changes in Kashmir.

She also demanded international organization to pay attention and demilitarize Kashmir under UN's resolution, adding,

"Human rights violations and demographic changes will not disappear if a government blocks access to international observers and then invests in a public relations campaign to offset any unwanted publicity." She further said, "The present Secretary General of the UN is very active, therefore, he will play his due role in solving the Kashmir dispute."

"Jammu & Kashmir is the core dispute between Pakistan and India and to ensure peace and stability in South Asia the international community must play its due role in the peaceful resolution of the dispute in accordance with the UN resolutions," she urged. "The government of India only aim to change the demographic character of Muslim majority in IIOJK and disempower its residents," she said.

"Indian administration was only pursuing a policy by splitting the population of Kashmir to secure their political future," she added. She asked people not to lose hope but stay vigilant and alert, and safeguard the Kashmiri rights and write online e-mails to UN and highlight the sufferings of Kashmiris.

3rd Int'l Hydropower Conference to be held on Wednesday

ISLAMABAD (APP): The third International Hydropower Conference, themed "Hydropower: A Renewable Energy Source for a Sustainable Future," will be held here on Wednesday.

The global convergence of energy experts is going to be organized by The Energy Update in collaboration with the Private Power Infrastructure Board (PPIB) and the International Hydropower Association (IHA). "The conference is poised to unveil discussions

that can shape the trajectory of clean and sustainable power in the region," said Chairman of the Organization Committee Naeem Qureshi while taking to APP.

He said, "This conference is not just a gathering; rather, it is a dynamic exchange of ideas that aims at propelling the hydropower sector forward. It's a curate-raiser for the innovations that will drive our sustainable energy future."

The theme reflected a commitment to exploring

hydropower's potential as a key player in the global shift towards renewable energy, he said. He said topics on the agenda include 'Clean, Green, and Sustainable Power' and 'Finance and Investment in Hydropower,' promising insights into technological advancements and financial strategies that could shape the industry.

Qureshi said the conference would serve as a platform to showcase progress made in the hydropower sector, not just in Pakistan but in the broader region.

Net Metering – an impending source of relief for consumers

ISLAMABAD (APP): In an era of escalating power prices, selling power to national grid would definitely be a source of relief for consumers as alternate energy systems installed at houses would make them earn money instead of simply being the consumers.

Yes, the Net Metering system that now enables them to sell extra electricity to Power Distribution Companies (DISCOs) generated easily through their solar and wind systems for years, just after one time spending. Thousands have already converted to this system as power distribution companies are now providing them with this modern facility of selling extra electricity to concerned distribution company.

This novel facility of selling extra electricity has already started functioning with certain companies including K-Electric awarding net-metering connections to purchase surplus electricity.

"Instead of just keep paying as consumers, the clients of power distribution companies are now becoming sellers by selling their extra electricity," said Chief Executive Officer of Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) Dr. Muhammad Amjad. He said following successful models of several western and eastern countries, the government ultimately introduced this technology to facilitate power-producing customers.

"Net metering is also an innovative and immediate solution to current power shortage in the country," Dr Amjad stated and informed that IESCO was country's first power dis-

tribution company facilitating both commercial and domestic customers to generate electricity through solar panels and sell their surplus electricity to IESCO. Net-metering project was launched countrywide in 2016, allowing any domestic, commercial, industrial and other consumers to have at least a three-phase meter connection to avail this facility.

Under the arrangement, such a consumer could sell additional energy to respective power distribution companies and make stocktaking (calculations) with it at the end of a month. Since the system allows the consumers to generate electricity from one kilowatt to one megawatt, NEPRA issues license to applicants seeking generation above 25kW in the service area jurisdiction of all distribution companies.

"We got extremely encouraging response from public. The IESCO has installed 21,218 net metering connections with a total generation capacity of 229.09 megawatts (MW) in its jurisdiction from January 2016 to October 2023," informed Manager Public Relations IESCO Asim Nazir Raja. He said the company had received 22,174 applications for net metering connections worth 244.77 MW and so far licenses have been issued to 22,114 consumers with an accumulative capacity of 242.33 MW.

"The import and export of billing units had started from 18,310 net metering connections with a total capacity of 201.09 MW," he informed. "Total exports and imports from these connections stood at 254,454,591 units and 411,934,674

units respectively."

Asim said the company had paid an amount of Rs 2,995,823 to connections' holders till March 2023. "IESCO is mandated to issue licenses up to 25 kilowatts (KW) while beyond this capacity, NENPRA issues licenses for net metering connections." He informed that all customers having three phase connections can avail this facility through our one window system where customers can register their applications to get free net-metering connection in just three to four weeks. The federal government has issued 'Net Metering Regulations' to establish flexible regulatory regime where any consumer can install solar panels and sell excess electricity to concerned distribution company by following a short, simple and easy process.

"The system will help bridge power generation gap, also resulting in reduced load-shedding," remarked Chairman National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA), Waseem Mukhtar. "It promotes cleaner, renewable and environment friendly power generation and is also a priority of the government."

Any consumer who fulfills requirements can submit application to Distribution Company along with necessary documents and DISCO would acknowledge its receipt and inform whether the application is complete in all respects. If the Distribution Company is satisfied with consumer's qualification as Distributed Generator, it will enter into a standard Agreement as approved by the Authority.



ISLAMABAD: A view of dry leaves drops from tree during Autumn season in Federal Capital.

Railways ask officials to recover outstanding dues from federal, provincial depts

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways has asked its officials concerned to initiate the procedure to recover outstanding dues from the federal and provincial departments for using its land and services.

The Ministry of Railways has asked the federal and provincial departments to pay their outstanding dues worth billions of rupees on account of using its land and other services, within the least possible time as the department was facing economic issues, an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP.

About the amount payable against the different departments, the official said that over Rs 8.375 million (over 8 billion) are payable by different departments on account of using its land and various services. He said the federal departments had to pay an

amount of Rs 709.084 million, provincial departments Rs1980.217 million and autonomous and private bodies Rs 5685.736 million.

To a question, he said Pakistan Railways has upgraded as many as 181 vulnerable un-manned level crossings to manned level crossings, out of 550 which are identified by the department over the entire railway network. "The relevant provincial government provided the finances to Pakistan Railways for the upgradation of un-manned level crossings in the country," he added.

He said the department was taking several steps including the up-gradation of unmanned and vulnerable railway level crossings across the country in collaboration with respective provincial governments.

The official said there were two types of level crossings over the Pakistan

Railways network, un-manned and manned level crossings, adding that the un-manned level crossings were without gate leaves.

"There are a total of 1,565 unmanned level crossings over the entire railway network and as per railway policy in vogue, the up-gradation of any unmanned or manned level crossing is the responsibility of road owning authority," he added.

He said that a joint survey of Pakistan Railways and the Provincial Government was also conducted in 2013-14 to identify accident-prone/vulnerable un-manned level crossings across the country.

The official said that it also mentioned Section 12 of the Railway Act of 1890 that the district administration or road authority should bear the expenses for the upgrade of these unmanned level crossings.

Northern areas see winter tourism boom

ISLAMABAD (APP): Winter tourism got a high boom in Swat and other northern areas of the country, and snowfall in Malam Jabba and Kalam valleys drew a substantial number of tourists from across the country to enjoy snowball games and skiing. In winter, the scenic valleys transform into white wonderlands, offering tourists multiple opportunities for adventure coming from all across the country, according to a report aired by a private news channel.

Swat, Malam Jabba, Gabin Jabba, Miandam, Matiltan, Kalam, Utror, Gabral, Matiltan, Mahodand, and Loye Sar are some of the mountain resorts where tourists have been planning to spend their upcoming winter vacations, said a local in Swat. "Today my dream came true after seeing my first snowfall in my favorite tourists' destination of Swat, where the snow-covered valleys and mountain peaks attract visitors in droves these days," said a tourist with family.

A local of Swat Valley advises tourists that they should come fully equipped with proper shoes and jackets if they plan on visiting the valley during the winter.

"We had heard about the enchanting beauty of Malam Jabba from our friends. We find it to be different from other snow resorts," said a tourist who came from Punjab. "The Majestic Valley of Swat is my favorite winter destination due to its diverse features, easy accessibility, pollution-free cool weather, and trout fish amid snowfall," said a female tourist.

"It is very cold here at Kalam, but I cannot simply keep myself away from the falling snow, said a foreign tourist, adding, This is amazing."

"Swat is a hundred times better than what we had imagined; it is like we have come to heaven, and the people here are amazing; they are very cooperative also," a tourist group added.

"The winter school holidays have become a good window for tourist arrivals. The feedback we have gotten from our guests makes us hopeful for a better winter season, PTDC officials claimed. "Kalam is a perfect spot for adventure, and authorities must focus on tapping its potential in order to promote winter tourism," another foreign tourist commented.

IE expressed sympathy

KABUL (Agencies): The Islamic Emirate in a statement on behalf of government and Afghan nation expressed its sympathy with the Kuwaiti nation, over the demise of Sheikh Nawaf Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah the Emir of Kuwait. Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah has died at the age of 86, Kuwaiti state TV announced. The crown prince, 83-year-old Sheikh Mishal al-Ahmad al-Sabah, has been named as his successor.

The Frontier Post

Jamadi-us-Sanni 04, 1445 — Monday, December 18, 2023

Australia provides \$20m aid

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Australian government has recently announced a significant contribution of 20 million dollars to support the Afghan population. This donation marks a crucial step in providing humanitarian aid and reflects Australia's commitment to international welfare and solidarity. The Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated in a press release on Saturday, the 25th of December that the Australian government has allocated 20 million dollars for the Afghan people.

Khaf-Herat Railway to carry goods soon

HERAT (TOLOnews): Officials from the Afghanistan Railway Authority (ARA) said that commercial goods will soon be transported over the Khaf-Herat Railway. The spokesperson of ARA, Abdul Sami Durrani, told TOLOnews that the Khaf-Herat Railway from Mashhad in Iran to Roznak Ghorian station in Herat is ready for operation and there are no challenges left on this route. "We had meetings with the businessmen of the western region of the country. In meetings we talked with them regarding the necessary preparations and coordination. In a few weeks, we will witness the transfer of commercial property, exports and imports and transit through this route," Durrani said.

"Railways are one of the very cheap and fast routes, which helps our businessmen to import and export goods cheaply and in a short time. We are making attempts so that railways will be active in different parts of Afghanistan and will be further developed," the Islamic Emirate's spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid said. However, the Chamber of Industry and Mines, and the Chamber of Commerce and Investment consider the activation and development of Afghanistan's railway projects beneficial for the growth of commercial activities. "We hope to see the opening of the Herat-Khaf railway so that we can at least export our minerals easily, and the expenses of our imports will decrease

through this way. This road will be at least an alternative to the Karachi way," said Sakhi Ahmad Payman, first deputy of the Chamber of the Industry and Mines. "Khaf-Herat Railway is one of the important economic projects in order to transfer goods as soon as possible, and the private sector warmly welcomes it," said Mirwais Hotak, head of the Executive Board of the Chamber of Commerce and Investment. According to the information provided by the Afghanistan Railway Authority, the route of the Khaf-Herat Railway, which starts from Mashhad in Iran and reaches Roznak Ghorian station in Herat, is 62 kilometers long, and the work on the fourth section of this railway is still ongoing.

7,500 uplift projects incomplete: Minister

HERAT (TOLOnews): Muhammad Younus Akhnudzada, the acting minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, said 7,500 projects remain incomplete in the country due to the halt of foreign aid to Afghanistan.

During his visit to Nimroz province, Akhnudzada said that projects were ongoing in the previous Afghan government and were funded by foreign countries which stopped after the takeover by the Islamic Emirate.

"7,500 projects are related to our ministry which are incomplete across the country, we have no hope that the foreign countries will resume them. God willing, we will build our country with our own money," said Muhammad Younus Akhnudzada, the acting minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development.

The acting minister also said that all development projects in the country are funded from the internal budget of the Afghan government.

In Nimroz province, the acting minister inaugurated the work of two dams.

"We hope that such dams will increase in the country," said Abdul Qayum Rouhani, the provincial governor of Nimroz.



Owing to the recent drought and lack of rainfall in Nimroz, agriculture has declined in the province, and its residents ask for construction of more dams.

"This [building dam] is very little for us, not much has been done for us over the years," said Janan, a resident of Nimroz province.

"We urge the Islamic Emirate to increase the number of such dams in our province," said Abdul Khaliq, a resident of Nimroz province.

Thousands of people have become unemployed due to the halt of projects funded by foreign countries and international organizations in the country.

The Afghan people call on the Islamic Emirate to make efforts to resume the projects.

Afghan youth try to make it back to Iran

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): A number of youth in western Herat province try to make it back to Iran on a daily basis after being forcibly deported due to dire economic situation.

They name unemployment a challenge and the driving force behind their frustration to leave the country, but officials say efforts have been undertaken to create employment opportunities for young people.

While holding a bag of clothes in his hand, a resident of Adraskan district, Ghulam Farooq, told Pajhwok Afghan News he had been unable to find work since last two years and that was why he was leaving the country. He said it there were employment opportunities, he would prefer to stay in the country and work to support his family.

"There is no security problem in the country now, but I want to leave the country due to unemployment," another Herati youth told Pajhwok. He urged the government to create jobs for the youth.

A resident of Shindand district, Anas said he always travelled to Iran legally on visa and passport, but he did not feel safe in Iran. "The government should make efforts to strengthen our passport to be accepted in neighboring countries."

To prevent legal and illegal migration

of the youth to other countries, Anas asked the government to create employment opportunities.

Social affairs experts say in order to decrease the level of migration to other countries, employment opportunities must be created on all levels.

One expert Gullab Haidari told Pajhwok the youth was the national wealth and to prevent their migration to other countries, they must be provided employment opportunities inside the country.

However, extraction work at some mines has been started, creating jobs for many, Haidari said.

Labor and Social Affairs director Hafiz Mirza Mohammad Abu Mansoor said trade opportunities had improved in Herat and over 600 factories were functioning in the province.

He rejected widespread unemployment in the country and said those choosing to migrate to other countries had different mindset or they had no patience to search for jobs in the country. "That is why they choose migration to other countries".

He said there was unemployment in the country, but the government of Islamic Emirate (IE) was making efforts to address the problem.

UN calls for support of women's struggles

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Women's Division has called on the global community to listen to the voices of women and girls in Afghanistan and support their struggles.

The organization issued a message on social media platform X, asking countries around the world to 'invest' in the resistance of women and girls in Afghanistan.

The United Nations Women's Division, referring to the struggle of women and girls in Afghanistan as their global struggle, emphasized that they remain alongside Afghan women and girls.

The United Nations Women's Division is calling for support for the struggles of women while the struggles of women in Afghanistan have always been suppressed, and several protesting women, including Zhulia Parsi, Manizha Seddiqi, and Parisa Azada, are in the prisons of the Taliban administration.

Amnesty International has also criticized the global community's silence in the face of human rights violations, especially the violation of women's rights by the Taliban administration, and has called for the release of other women from prison.

In addition to these limitations, in the past two years, restrictions on education, work, participation, and access to basic rights have led to the exclusion of women from public life in Afghanistan.

Despite all reactions regarding the lifting of restrictions against women and girls in Afghanistan, the Taliban regime has labeled these demands of the global community as 'orders' and insisted that the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan are ensured within the framework of 'Islamic Sharia'.

Meanwhile, Global Partnership for Education has announced that it is allocating \$110 million to support children's education in Afghanistan. The network stated that this program is expected to benefit more than 7.66 million children.

UN Chief: Taliban's exiled opp becomes more active

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Secretary-General, in a report to the Security Council, stated that the political opposition in exile, despite being scattered, has become more active in challenging the Taliban on both domestic and international issues.

Antonio Guterres referred to meetings of Taliban opponents in Moscow, Dushanbe, and Vienna.

The UN Secretary-General presented his quarterly report on the "Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security" to the Security Council.

This report covers the period from September 18 to December 1 and addresses a variety of issues.

According to the report, while the political opposition in exile has become more active, the armed forces opposing the Taliban have not posed "any challenge" to the Taliban's control of the territory in the past three months.

The report states that despite claims by armed opponents of the Taliban on social media, the actual attacks by these forces were less frequent compared to the same period in 2022.

The report also mentions



that the Afghanistan Freedom Front was the most active military group opposing the Taliban during the reporting period, while the National Resistance Front was much less active than in 2022. According to the report, the National Resistance Front has not attacked Panjshir in the last three months.

According to a report by the UN Secretary-General, the Taliban have continued arbitrary arrests, enforced media shutdowns, and censorship to limit dissenting views. In September and October, the Taliban intelligence arrested three individuals, including members of the spontaneous Afghan

Women's Movement and their relatives, as well as three journalists in Daykundi. The UN Secretary-General expressed concern over the Taliban's arbitrary detentions, arrest of media workers and civil society activists, and suspension of media outlets. He stated that these actions are inconsistent with international human rights and contrary to Afghanistan's commitments.

Antonio Guterres expressed concern over the Taliban's public punishment of citizens, stating that this practice is contrary to the Convention Against Torture.

In regard to the contin-

ued educational deprivation of women, the UN Secretary-General highlighted the closure of girls' schools above the sixth grade and the prohibition of girls attending university, indicating the Taliban's ongoing imposition of restrictions against Afghan women and girls.

He also noted that Afghanistan continues to face unprecedented levels of humanitarian needs, with over two-thirds of its population needing assistance in 2023. The report added that Afghanistan's humanitarian program for 2023, aimed at aiding over 21 million people across the country, is severely underfunded.

Taliban jails women survivors of violence for 'Protection': UN Reprot

KABUL (Khaama Press): International media, citing the Office of the Deputy of the United Nations in Afghanistan, have reported that the Taliban administration sends women survivors of gender-based violence to prison for their protection.

The BBC news network reported on Friday, December 15, that there are now no shelters for the protection of violence victims in Afghanistan, and the Taliban claims that they are being properly protected in prison.

UNAMA has stated that gender-based violence against women and girls existed in Afghanistan even before the dominance of the

Taliban.

Still, with the advent of the new regime, the social life of women has been limited, and family violence against women, especially by their husbands, has increased.

The UNAMA office added that before the establishment of the Taliban, there were 23 shelters for the protection of women survivors of gender-based violence in the country, none of which are now active.

The de facto regime has deemed protective shelters for women or 'safe houses' as originating from Western culture and declared their existence unnecessary."

Officials of the Taliban administration have stated that they take commitments from caretakers of violence-affected women to not harm them.

The report states: 'In cases where women survivors of violence had no male relatives or there were safety concerns, they were sent to prisons; similar to addicts and the homeless.'

Meanwhile, the 'Purple Saturday Movement', managed by a number of protesting women, has expressed concern in a statement regarding the realities reflected in this report.

The statement of this movement states:

'Imprisoning women who are themselves victims of gender-based violence is not only against Islam and Sharia, but in reality, it is a horrific form of mental, emotional, and physical abuse of women that must be stopped immediately.'

UNAMA has said that since the Taliban came to power again on August 15, 2021, the handling of gender-based violence complaints has been unclear and inconsistent.

The Office of the Deputy of the United Nations has emphasized that women who have experienced violence are now afraid of seeking official justice for fear of arrest.

Global partnership announces \$110m for child education support in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): Global Partnership for Education (GPE) has announced that it is allocating \$110 million to support children's education in Afghanistan. The network stated, through a press release, that this program is expected to benefit more than 7.66 million children across Afghanistan through support provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children.

According to the network, GPE has earmarked this amount of assistance for the next two years to enhance the basic skills of schoolgirls and schoolboys. Laura Frigenti, CEO of the Global Partnership for Education, emphasized that

these contributions will help improve children's access to the education they need, stating, "We are very pleased to continue our support for education in Afghanistan."

The network's statement further mentions that \$59.5 million of this aid will be channeled through UNICEF. In comparison, \$50 million will go through Save the Children to ensure access to quality education, especially for marginalized children, including girls, in various areas.

Global Partnership for Education, noting its joint commitment to ending the learning crisis worldwide, added that it mobilizes partners and financial resources to support education in



nearly 90 low-income countries. This comes at a time when the state of education

in the country has been a cause for concern, particularly following the rise of

the Taliban administration and the ban on girls' education beyond the sixth grade.

18 casualties recorded in Afghanistan last week

KBAUL (Pajhwok): Last week, more than seven million dollars assistance was pledged to Afghanistan, a two-day conference held in Doha and the US slapped a ban on two officials of IEA — a decision slammed by the caretaker government in Kabul.

Casualties

At least seven people were killed and 11 others injured in separate incidents of violence across the country last week.

One armed robber was killed in the Yafatali-Payeen district of Badakhshan in a clash with security forces. Two other robbers were killed in a similar incident in Mazar-i-Sharif.

Meanwhile, local officials said a moneychanger had been killed and one suspect detained in Faryab. Three people lost their lives and eight others were

wounded as a result of an explosion of an old mortar shell and three others, including a woman, were injured due to fight between two families in the same province.

In the previous week, according to sources, four people had been killed and as many others injured in various incidents across the country.

Reaction to Hekmatyar's remarks

HIA leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, at an online meeting with his supporters, said: "It is said the US has changed its tone and stance on the Taliban and has asked IEA to form an inclusive government in line with the Doha Agreement. The US has even handed to the Taliban a list of conditions. If these conditions are not met, the US will support

Taliban's opponents."

Referring to Hekmatyar's remarks, the IEA spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid wrote on X: "The claim that IEA had been given a list by the US for the formation of an inclusive government is untrue. The IEA has never promised anybody the formation of such type of government. Hekmatyar Sahib's remarks in this regard are far from true..."

Subsequently, some people released on their social media a letter from an intelligence agency regarding the disarming of Hekmatyar. But both IEA and HIA called the letter fake.

Doha conference on girls' education

Last week, the Doha Forum 2023 discussed the state of education in Afghanistan and the need for providing infrastructure

and resources to strengthen the significant sector.

In a session entitled "Education for Her, Progress for All, participants underlined the imperative of reconstruction of education for women in Afghanistan.

Speakers stressed the role of relevant governmental and international organizations in that regard and the importance of providing global financial mechanisms for supporting education in Afghanistan.

In a related context, the speakers discussed the different types of education that could be followed in Afghanistan, including school, home, or remote education through the Internet.

They called for strengthening international support to invest in these spaces and sectors, pursue appro-

priate and safer opportunities to ensure girls' education, and develop the education sector in general in Afghanistan.

Despite improvements in the security situation as a result of a reduction in armed violence after August 2021, the human rights situation in Afghanistan remains dire, says UNAMA.

"I would like to remind the de facto authorities that Afghanistan as a state remains party to international human rights treaties that are an essential part of international law and in which Afghanistan has had an historic role," said Roza Otunbayeva, the secretary-general's special representative for Afghanistan and UNAMA head.

Afghan officials have said nothing about UNAMA's statement, but

earlier, the caretaker government denied the reports of human rights violations in Afghanistan and said that human rights were observed in the framework of Islamic Sharia in the country.

US ban on IEA officials, Mujahid's remarks

The US Department of Treasury slapped a ban on Sheikh Fariduddin Mahmood and Sheikh Mohammad Khalid Hanafi. Sheikh Fariduddin is currently serving as the director of the Academy of Sciences and Sheikh Mohammad Khalid Hanafi as the acting minister of vice and virtue.

Zabihullah Mujahid, chief spokesman for IEA, slammed the ban as a futile exercise. According to him, despite having a history of taking such unsuccessful measures, the US should not

repeat failed experiences.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Vice and Virtue says they are implementing Islamic orders for the sake of Allah, not IEA, and imposing any restrictions cannot move them from their goals.

Sheikh Mohamad Faqir Mohammadi, deputy minister of vice and virtue, told a gathering in Kabul last week that observing Islamic hijab and other orders were commands of Allah that must be implemented. Imposing restrictions could not move IEA from its path.

Continuation of humanitarian aid

The United Nations says Cyprus has contributed 98,000 to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF). Britain announced \$5.5m assistance for landmine clearance in Afghanistan. The UK Embassy wrote on

X: "Britain continues to support HALO's work in Afghanistan, where our £5.5m of funding has already supported the clearance of over 375 football pitches' worth of land for safe use by Afghan communities."

The UN Emergency Children Fund (UNICEF) appealed for \$1.4 billion to meet the humanitarian and basic needs of 19.4 million people in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, 23.3 million people, including 12.6 million children, are in need of humanitarian assistance in 2024, mainly due to the residual impacts of a protracted conflict, extreme climate shocks and the country's severe economic decline, which is characterised by high unemployment and a fragile recovery, the statement said.

Russia has no plan to attack NATO, dismisses Biden remark as ‘nonsense’: Putin

MOSCOW (Reuters): Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin dismissed as complete nonsense remarks by U.S. President Joe Biden that Russia would attack a NATO country if it won the war in Ukraine, adding that Russia had no interest in fighting the NATO military alliance.

The war in Ukraine has triggered the deepest crisis in Moscow's relations with the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and Biden warned last year that a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia would trigger World War Three.

In a plea to Republicans not to block further military aid earlier this month, Biden warned that if Putin was victorious over Ukraine then the Russian leader would not stop and would attack a NATO country.

"It is complete nonsense - and I think President Biden understands that," Putin said in an interview

published on Sunday by Rossiya state television, adding that Biden appeared to be trying to justify his own "mistaken policy" on Russia. "Russia has no reason, no interest - no geopolitical interest, neither economic, political nor military - to fight with NATO countries," Putin said.

The U.S.-led NATO alliance was founded in 1949 to provide Western security against the Soviet Union. After the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, it was enlarged to include some former Soviet and Warsaw Pact countries.

Putin has repeatedly cast the post-Cold War expansion of NATO as evidence of the West's arrogant way of dealing with Russia's security concerns.

Under Article 5 of the NATO treaty, "the Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them

in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all". Putin said that Finland's entry into NATO in April would force Russia to "concentrate certain military units" in northern Russia near their border.

The failure of Ukraine's counteroffensive this year has raised questions in the West and inside Ukraine about just how realistic the Ukrainian and Western aims of defeating Russian forces in Ukraine are.

Officials in Moscow and the West have repeatedly spoken of a "new Cold War", with Russia and China on one side and the West on the other.

Asked about how common ground could be found with the West given the rhetoric on both sides, Putin said: "They will have to find common ground because they will have to reckon with us."

JI announces opposition to alliance with PML-N, PPP

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Ameer Siraj ul Haq declared that his party will not form an alliance with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in the upcoming elections.

According to a private TV channel, emphasizing the commitment to fight on the manifesto of peace, progress, and prosperity, Siraj ul Haq outlined key priorities for the future on Sunday. He said his party aims to conclude the construction of Governor Houses and Commissioner Houses on 8,000 acres and optimize financial management and fund utilization. Additionally, the implementation of an emergency plan in the education and healthcare sectors has been pledged.

Siraj ul Haq expressed the intention to establish rehabilitation training centres for the unemployed and deliver a message of real change to the people.

The JI chief criticized the PML-N and PPP, accusing them of bringing destruction to the country. The announcement firmly states that there will be no alliance with these two major political parties in the upcoming elections.

He informed that his party has already issued tickets to more than 50 per cent of the hopeful candidates for the forthcoming elections. If transparent elections are not ensured, the election results will not be recognized, he said adding that if the same environment is not provided to all the political parties, the next government will not work.

He said currently, the environment is being created for a "Ladle" and a "Super Ladle" (favourites). He added that for transparent elections, the judiciary, establishment and election commission must be neutral.

ECP to resume Akbar S. Babar's plea on PTI's intra-party elections

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is scheduled to resume the hearing of the plea filed by PTI founding member Akbar S. Babar against intra-party elections on December 18 (Monday).

The Commission revealed the cause list for the PTI intra-party case, setting the hearing for December 18. A five-member ECP bench will examine objections and issues raised against PTI's intra-party elections with key applicants such as Akbar S. Babar, Raja Tahir Nawaz, and Naureen

Farooq. Barrister Ali Zafar, representing PTI, is expected to present the concluding arguments before the bench.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has summoned Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Gohar Ali Khan and several other party members, including Chief

Election Commissioner Niazullah Niazi, Umar Ayub, Haleem Adil Sheikh, Yasmin Rashid, Ali Amin Gandapur, and RO Central Secretariat Sardar Masroof, in the intra-party

election case.

The notice highlighted that the PTI intra-party elections did not seem to align with the party's constitution, Rules 2020, and the Election Act 2017. It emphasized that the ECP issues a certificate only when all the legal prerequisites for conducting intra-party elections under the Election Rules 2017 are met. On December 2, following the ECP's instructions, PTI conducted its intra-party elections, resulting in the election of Barrister Gohar Khan as the party's new chairman.

North Korea fires short-range missile, condemns U.S. for raising tensions

SEOUL/TOKYO (Reuters): North Korea fired a short-range ballistic missile on Sunday, as it condemned U.S.-led military shows of force including the arrival of a submarine in South Korea as tantamount to "a preview of a nuclear war".

The missile was launched towards the sea off North Korea's east coast and flew about 570 km (350 miles) before falling in the ocean, according to the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).

The launch came after warnings from officials in Seoul and Tokyo that nuclear-armed North Korea was preparing to test-fire a missile, including one of its longest-range intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) this month.

All of North Korea's ballistic missile activities are banned by United Nations Security Council resolutions, though Pyongyang defends them as its sovereign right to self defence.

"North Korea's recent ballistic

missile launch is a clear violation of the United Nations Security Council resolution, which prohibits the use of ballistic missile technology and scientific and technological cooperation," South Korea's JCS said in a statement.

Less than half an hour after the launch, North Korean state media carried a statement from the defence ministry criticizing "military gangsters" in the United States and South Korea for raising tensions with drills, displays of force, and nuclear war planning.

The statement by an unnamed ministry spokesman cited the arrival of the U.S. nuclear-powered submarine USS Missouri in the South Korean port city of Busan on Sunday.

"The armed forces of the DPRK will thoroughly neutralize the U.S. and its vassal forces' attempt to ignite a nuclear war and thus reliably ensure peace and security in the Korean peninsula," the statement said, using the initials of

North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The spokesman also criticized South Korea and the U.S. for holding their second Nuclear Consultative Group meeting in Washington on Friday, as part of efforts by the allies to streamline war planning and increase military shows of force as a warning to North Korea.

The launch was immediately detected, tracked and monitored, and information was closely shared between the United States and Japan, South Korea's military said.

The three countries had said that a real-time missile information sharing system would become operational this month.

About 20 minutes after initially reporting the launch, the Japanese coast guard said the missile had already fallen.

It appeared to have fallen outside Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), broadcaster NTV reported.

More shipping giants suspend passage via Red Sea after attacks

PARIS (AFP/APP): Two more major shipping firms, Mediterranean Shipping Company and CMA CGM, said Saturday they were suspending passage through a Red Sea strait vital for global trade after Yemeni rebel attacks in the area.

The announcement by Italian-Swiss giant MSC and France's CMA CGM follows a similar decision Friday by two of the world's largest shipping companies, Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd. The announcements were in response to a warning by the Iran-backed Huthi rebels, who control much of Yemen but are not recognised internationally.

The Huthis said they were targeting vessels near the strategic Bab al-Mandeb strait to pressure Israel over its devastating war with Palestinian Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

Thousands of ships every year transit through the strait, which runs between Yemen, on the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, and the African continent.

The tensions have added to fears that the Gaza conflict could spread.

Ships belonging to Israel or heading to its ports "will remain vulnerable to targeting until the aggression stops, the siege on Gaza is lifted, and humanitarian aid

continues to flow" to Gaza, Huthi spokesperson Mohammed Abdul Salam said on X, formerly Twitter.

Oman was sponsoring discussions "with a number of international parties" regarding operations in the Red and Arabian Seas, he added. An American destroyer on Saturday shot down more than a dozen drones in the Red Sea launched from Huthi-controlled areas of Yemen, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said. The UK government said one of its destroyers had also brought down a suspected attack drone in the area.

MSC, one of the world's largest freight shipping lines, said one of its container vessels had been targeted in the Red Sea on Friday and it was halting traffic through the strait until it was safe. No one on the MSC Palatium III was wounded but the ship suffered fire damage, the company said. CMA CGM said it had ordered all its vessels to leave the area and stay there until further notice. "The situation continues to deteriorate and there are increasing concerns about security," it said.

On Friday, the International Chamber of Shipping condemned the

Huthi attacks which "threaten the lives of innocent seafarers and the safety of merchant shipping".

The incidents breached international law and states in the region should work to de-escalate the situation, it said. Diverting Asia-bound shipping from the Red Sea to South Africa's Cape of Good Hope would increase costs and delays, the body noted. Consultancy S&P Global estimated that the detour would increase the distance between Rotterdam in the Netherlands and Singapore by 40 percent.

US says its destroyer downs 14 drones in Red Sea

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): An American destroyer on Saturday shot down more than a dozen drones in the Red Sea launched from Huthi-controlled areas of Yemen, the US military said, as the impact of the Israel-Hamas conflict spreads to global shipping lanes.

"The Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS CARNEY... operating in the Red Sea, successfully engaged 14 unmanned aerial systems launched as a drone wave from Huthi-controlled areas of Yemen," US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

The aerial vehicles were "assessed to be one-way attack drones and were shot down with no damage to ships in the area

or reported injuries," according to the statement. The operation took place as Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin headed to the Middle East, where he would meet with Bahrain on "US efforts to convene multi-lateral coalitions to respond to aggression at sea that threatens shipping and the global economy," a Department of Defense statement said.

In Israel, Austin would highlight America's steadfast support of its ally but also "discuss steps Israel is taking to mitigate civilian harm."

He is to meet with Israeli military leaders on "the next steps in the conflict after an eventual cessation of high-intensity ground operations and airstrikes," a senior defense official was quoted as saying.



KUWAIT CITY: The coffin of Kuwait's late Emir Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad Al-Sabah is carried out of the Bilal bin Rabah Mosque in Kuwait City ahead of burial during his funeral on Sunday.

Afghan interim govt is arming not only Taliban but also other terror groups

ISLAMABAD (NNI): The evidence of foreign weapons smuggled from Afghanistan and being used in terror attacks in Pakistan have emerged as the constant supply of these arms to a terrorist outfit like TTP has serious consequences for regional security.

The trend has emerged after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, the allied forces left a massive quantity of military hardware in the war-torn country at a time when Pakistani armed forces have been busy in fighting the TTP (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan) for the last two decades.

Meanwhile, it isn't just the TTP with the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) too used the US weapons in its attacks on Frontier Corps (FC) camps at Noshki and Panjgur.

Details show that the TTP members armed with US-made weapons had targeted the Zhob garrison, two border posts in Chitral.

Similarly, US weapons were

recovered from the terrorists carrying out attacks in Tank as well as targeting the Mianwali airbase.

Meanwhile, the attackers in the recent terror hit in the Daraban area of Dera Ismail Khan were not only equipped with the US weapons but also night-vision gear.

On the other hand, the Pakistani authorities seized Customs officials and security forces seized a large quantity of US-made weapons at Pakistan-Afghanistan border earlier this week on Dec 12.

A variety of weapons - including military-grade assault rifles like M4, night vision equipment, laser devices and thousands of rounds - were among the items recovered from a vehicle which was seemingly transporting weapons.

It is now clear that the haphazard US withdrawal resulted in enhancing the TTP's capabilities of carrying out cross-border attacks from Afghan soil. Meanwhile, it is not just Pakistan but also international media

which has highlighted this fact, as the EurAsian Times reported that the TTP was using US-made weapons in terror attacks across Pakistan.

The seriousness of this issue can be gauged by the figures shared by the Pentagon, which show the United States supplied a total of 427,300 weapons - \$18.6 billion in value - to the Afghan forces from 2005 to August 2021. And 300,000 were left behind after the US withdrawal, resulting in a sharp increase in terrorism in the region since then.

These developments a proof that the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has not only been arming the TTP but also providing an opportunity to other terrorist outfits. Hence, the claims made by the interim Afghan government about not allowing its territory to be used against Pakistan are meaningless as the cross-border arms trafficking means that the innocent citizens and the security forces remain a constant target of the heavily-armed TTP.



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