

Earthquake hits Islamabad
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A magnitude 5.8 earthquake jolted Islamabad and its suburbs on Monday, according to the seismological centre. The depth of the earthquake was 140 kilometres, while its epicentre was the Doda district of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). The tremors that spread panic among the residents were felt at 3.19pm.

@thefrontierpost

First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIX

No. 331

Regd. No. 241

JAMADI-US-SANNI 06 1445 -- TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19 2023

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30

Pakistan can't comprise national security: PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has said that as Pakistan stood at the crossroads of history, it could no longer continue to compromise its national security by accommodating huge number of undocumented immigrants.

"Our ultimate aim is to build a safer, more peaceful and prosperous Pakistan - with associated benefits for our own people, for the region, and the wider world," the prime minister wrote in an article published in The Telegraph on Sunday. He said that the governments across the world were adapting to a new era of mass migration linked to conflict, climate change, and economic opportunism.

He said the UK Government's plan to deport illegal immigrants to Rwanda was a sign of that pressure. The heated debate surrounding the proposal and the many efforts to derail the scheme illustrated the huge challenges for policymakers as they sought to balance human rights with hard realities. Similarly, he said, France was also struggling, while Italy had expressed fears that it might become "Europe's refugee camp". After opening its arms to several million refugees in recent years, Germany was also feeling the strain, prompting the announcement of tough new deportation measures.

The situation in the United States was no easier, he remarked. "Pakistan's problem is of a different magnitude altogether. Over the last three to four decades, between four and five million migrants (roughly the population of Ireland) have arrived. Many have no right to remain. Despite being a non-signatory to 1951 Convention on Refugees (and its 1967 Protocol), we have generously accommodated the single largest caseload of refugees," the prime minister wrote. He said the hospitality was in Pakistan's DNA and that was why the country had fulfilled its legal, moral and humanitarian obligations, and would continue to do so. "We have worked very hard, over a very long period of time, to accommodate as many as we can while giving those with no right to

remain ample opportunity to leave voluntarily."

Unfortunately, Prime Minister Kakar said that despite frequent opportunities to repatriate voluntarily, and multiple government attempts to register those who remained undocumented, a significant number had persistently refused to formalise their status, choosing instead to stay in the shadows. He said that while Pakistan had benefited from many hardworking and law-abiding migrants, the overall socio-economic and security cost of the huge influx had been staggering.

"Many work on the black market, paying no tax, depressing wages for legitimate workers. They are also susceptible to exploitation by the criminal underworld, with all its disturbing links to terrorist organisations operating in the region," he remarked. He said that since August 2021, at least 16 Afghan nationals had carried out suicide attacks inside Pakistan, while 65 terrorists killed in encounters with security forces, mainly in the bordering region, were identified as Afghans.

"No responsible government can ignore such concerns. Whenever we raised this with the interim Afghan government, they advised us to 'look inwards'. We have finally decided to heed to their advice to put our house in order," the prime minister commented. He said that Pakistan's painstaking repatriation programme had attracted predictable criticism from those who did not understand the complex history of the problem - or the extraordinary efforts that had been made to avoid forcible deportations.

He said in order to ensure the welfare of those being repatriated, the government had strictly directed all the officials involved in the programme to treat deportees with due respect and care. "Furthermore, our emphasis is on voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of individuals (along with their legally acquired assets), and not on deportation. Some 93 per cent of those who have returned to Afghanistan have done so voluntarily. Importantly, none of the

PM leaves for Kuwait F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Monday left for Kuwait to pay condolences over the death of the country's Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah.

During his visit, PM Kakar will convey sympathies to the Royal Family on behalf of the government and the people of Pakistan.

1.46 million Afghans who applied for proof of registration cards have been returned; nor have 800,000 or so individuals who hold Afghan citizen cards."

He said that some 79 transit centres had been set up, providing free meals, shelter and medical facilities while additional crossing points had been opened on the Pakistan-Afghan Border to facilitate the processes. Moreover, the security personnel were escorting the immigrants to border crossings, taking particular care of women and children. Emergency helplines were available to report any abuses, he added.

Prime Minister Kakar recalled that the abrupt withdrawal of Western allies from Afghanistan in August 2021 prompted a whole new influx of refugees to Pakistan. Hundreds of thousands of Afghan nationals crossed the border, claiming their lives were in danger. "Again, we take their welfare very seriously, recognising that some do require special protection. We will not deport at-risk groups, such as musicians, journalists, and human rights activists."

We do however need help from other countries," he said. He said only 59,033 of the new arrivals had been resettled outside Pakistan, while 42,068 awaited evacuation to the West. The rest had failed to put forward a convincing case to anyone for asylum, and continue to stay in Pakistan illegally, he maintained.



PESHAWAR: KP Caretaker Chief Minister, Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah called on by Chairman NAB, Lt. Gen. Nazir Ahmad Butt.

Foreigners can not stay without visa: Solangi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Monday said that foreigners including Afghan citizens could not stay in Pakistan indefinitely without a visa.

Talking to "Hum News" the minister said that some foreign countries had criticized Pakistan for sending illegal immigrants back to their countries. "There are about 20,000 Afghans in Pakistan who worked with the US coalition forces," Murtaza Solangi said. The minister said that the Taliban government was established in Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, but the US and its allies were not yet able to shift these 20 thousand Afghans to their own countries.

He said that everyone knew the treatment of illegal immigrants across the world. When illegal immigrants were drowning in Greece, no one came to save them. Murtaza Solangi recalled. Pakistan's record about illegal residents was very good as compared to other countries of the world, Murtaza Solangi opined.

The minister said that millions of Afghan citizens legally present in Pakistan had access to all facilities including health, education and business activities. About the foreigners who do not have documents or visas, he said "we only asked them to go back to their countries". The minister said that Pakistan will have to decide how long foreigners could stay inside Pakistan.

ECP reserves verdict on plea against PTI's polls F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Monday reserved the verdict on Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founding member Akbar S Babar's plea challenging the party's "fraudulent" intra-party polls.

The PTI recently held intra-party polls after which Babar, along with other party members, filed a petition, against "rigged/fraudulent PTI intra-party elections" requesting the country's top electoral authority to order the party to conduct fresh polls. On December 2, Barrister Gohar Khan was elected as the party's chairman replacing Imran Khan for the first time as PTI chief.

Babar, however, refused to accept the polls and move the electoral authority against the irregularities. The senior politician added that he and other founding leaders are part of the party following the high court's decision. The politician approached the ECP seeking its intervention in the matter as a member of PTI whose membership was validated by the electoral body.

A five-member commission, led by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, conducted the hearing on the petition filed by 14 PTI members against the intra-party polls. At the outset of the hearing, PTI's counsel Barrister Ali Zafar presented his arguments, saying that the ECP had ordered to conduct polls within 20 days.

Polls under judicial supervision

PHC reserves verdict on PTI plea

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) here Monday reserved verdict on the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) petition seeking holding of the upcoming general elections under the supervision of judiciary.

The division bench headed by Chief Justice of PHC, Justice Mohammad Ibrahim Khan and Justice Shakeel Ahmed after hearing arguments has reserved the judgment. Advocate Muazzam Butt of PTI had moved the application before PHC seeking the holding of February 8, 2024 election under the judiciary's supervision.

The petitioner has challenged the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) notification for the appointment of returning officers (ROs) and district returning officers (DROs). During the hearing, the PTI's Advocate Butt contended that the polling staff is to be posted two months prior to the election and questioned that how will the ECP hold transparent polls if they have not made timely arrangements in this regard.

Meanwhile, responding to the PTI's plea against ECP's notification, PHC Chief Justice Ibrahim said that we are bound by the

SC decision and cannot go against it. The chief justice was referring to the Supreme Court's December 15 verdict wherein the apex court had suspended the Lahore High Court's (LHC) ruling in response to a similar petition filed by the PTI against the ECP's decision to appoint ROs and DROs from bureaucracy.

On Saturday, a three-member top court bench, led by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa directed the ECP to issue the poll schedule and ensure timely elections on the said date. Following this, the electoral body issued the election schedule on the same day.

Focus on to up develop Balochistan: Zardari

F.P. Report

TURBAT: President of Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians and former President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari has said that the incoming PPP government after the upcoming general elections will start development projects in the fields of education, health and communication to speed up the development process in Balochistan, as well as will ensure supply of irrigation water to promote agriculture in the province. He said that in terms of development projects, "Balochistan will be the first" now, and "there is a lot of scope for Balochistan to move forward".

According to the press release issued by media cell Bilawal House Karachi, the former president, while addressing the party workers' convention here on Monday, said that Balochistan is the heart of Pakistan. He urged that conflict does not bring prosperity, and added: "We will beautify Balochistan, Balochistan has many resources. I will make Balochistan 10 times ahead." He said that during the party's previous govern-

ment in the province, he provided funds but did not monitor the development projects. "Now I will supervise the development projects myself," he vowed.

Former President pointed out that previous PPP governments in Sindh had build lining canals, as a result of which sugarcane is being cultivated in many uninhabited areas of the province. "Gold can also grow here in Balochistan," he added.

President Asif Ali Zardari said that development in Balochistan will be done in cooperation with China, saying: "China will be our partner, we will work together with China." He pointed out that Gwadar was already there, but no one except the PPP government paid attention to the expansion of that port. "We have to improve the economic conditions, we have to give employment to the youth of Balochistan," he said, adding that Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) will be expanded and educated unemployed youth will be given stipend till they get employment.

The former president said that individuals sitting in Islamabad do not understand Balochistan, they do

not understand Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa either, adding that the PPP government formed after the upcoming general elections will build a university in every division of Balochistan, a college in every district and medical colleges and hospitals keeping in mind the population.

The former president said that he had endured 14 years of imprisonment, during which he trained himself. Whenever PPP comes to power, it comes to serve the people, he said and added: "I gave identity to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province by giving its name. It's not our fault, it's our pride." He said that no nation can bear the burden of another, and added: "We gave hospitality to Afghans for 40 years, but today they are reluctant to be our brothers."

He urged that he want everyone to return to their homeland, stay in their own homes. No other country can take care of them. We will take care of our own," he concluded. Meanwhile, former Caretaker Federal Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti formally announced his joining PPP at the workers convention.

Karachi's voting choices disappoint Nawaz despite achievements

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Expressing disappointment over the electoral choices of the people of Karachi, former prime minister and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Nawaz Sharif on Monday stated that peace in the country's financial capital was restored during the tenure of his government but the votes went to other parties.

He expressed these remarks while addressing a parliamentary board meeting in Karachi. He urged the people of Karachi to introspect, stating, "Look within yourselves; it's not a good thing when the work is ours, but the vote goes elsewhere. We worked [for Karachi] with sincerity."

Sharif highlighted his commitment to development projects for Karachi and Sindh, asserting, "In my mind, there is a project. The Karachi-Hyderabad motorway has been built, but in my view, it's not a motorway. We will build a Karachi-Hyderabad motorway that

surpasses the standard of Lahore-Islamabad motorway."

The former premier questioned the lack of progress in Karachi and demanded answers from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which emerged as the leading party in the city following the 2018 general elections. "We initiated development, including the Green Line in Karachi, Orange Line in Lahore, and metro buses in Punjab. Why has there been no progress in Karachi since our tenure? We established a nuclear power plant with a capacity of 22,000 megawatts. Karachi acknowledges that I brought peace, but when it comes to voting, it goes elsewhere," he lamented.

Expressing the same sentiments for Chitral, Sharif noted, "Chitral residents accept that I built the [Lowari] tunnel worth Rs50 billion. However, in elections, the vote went to Jamaat-e-Islami. I ask Chitral residents if it's fair that we build tunnels for you,

and you vote for someone else."

Denying allegations of wrongdoing, Sharif defended his record, saying, "Despite spending more time in prison than in government, facing false cases that ended in acquittals, we did not lose courage. Today, we are here." Reflecting on his past terms as premier in 1999 and 2017, the PML-N supreme leader said he was surprised when he was ousted from the prime minister's office. "In 2017, the country was prosperous, CPEC was underway, petrol prices were low, and the rupee was strong. However, a selected person was brought in to replace me."

He said that the Indian prime minister came to Pakistan during his tenure and the world was saying that soon Pakistan would become a regional power and would be part of G-20 nations. However, he added that all the progress was reversed. "We had said goodbye to the IMF but the selected once again approached it.

Three dead as building collapses F.P. Report

KARACHI: At least three people were killed and 17 others wounded on Monday as a two-storey building collapsed due to a gas cylinder blast in Machar Colony on Mauripur Road in Karachi.

The blast took place in a gas cylinder shop in the building. One adjacent building was partially affected and a nearby vehicle was damaged. Police said a rescue operation was launched by rescue teams at the incident site. The Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi administration said they had received two bodies and eight injured at the hospital.

Police and rangers launched baton charge to disperse the crowd as it was creating hindrance in the rescue operation because of congested streets. Talking to media, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Keamari Arif Rao Aslam said police, rangers and rescue teams were working at the incident's site. He said a gas cylinder shop was situated in the building that collapsed because of the blast.

He said the explosion happened during transfer of gas in the shop as a vehicle loaded with gas cylinders came to supply gas. The police officer said three people were killed and 17 injured in the incident. The injured included two children and four women, he said. "A fire erupted immediately after the explosion and six of the wounded people received burn injuries. Three buildings around the building that collapsed are also affected," he said adding that the said buildings were also vacated for inspection. The SSP Keamari said debris would be removed with the help of heavy machinery. On October 11, an under-construction building collapsed in Karachi's Shah Faisal Colony area, leaving at least three people dead and several others injured, according to police.



KARACHI: Volunteers and security personnel busy in relief activities after gas cylinder blast at Machar Colony.

Supreme Court shuts all doors to election delay

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Monday ruled that no objections can be raised on the delimitations after the announcement of the schedule for the upcoming general elections.

A three-member bench of the top court, headed by interim chief justice Sardar Tariq, took up an appeal filed by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) against the Balochistan High Court's (BHC) decision to change the delimitations carried out by the polls organising body.

The decision was announced on ECP's appeal against the delimitation of two provincial seats in Quetta. The SC also nullified the BHC's decision on delimitation. The top court's order has virtually closed all doors to election delay as courts across the country would not be able to entertain any petition challenging delimitation carried out by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) any more.

If the petitions against the delimitations were admitted, the lengthy litigation process could lead to delays

in the elections. The development comes days after the apex court nullified the Lahore High Court (LHC) order that halted the training of returning officers, raising prospects of polls delay in the country and paved way for the elections to take place on its scheduled time.

Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa-led bench directed the electoral body to announce the election schedule, ending uncertainty surrounding the polls. In its order on the ECP's petition, the three-member SC bench ruled that the LHC would not hold further hearings on the petitions related to the appointment of polling officers and that any matter pertaining to the issue should be referred to the top court.

The LHC's decision, which came on a plea filed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawyer Umair Niazi, suspended ECP's decision to appoint the ROs and DROs from the executive branch. Following the top court's decision, the electoral body issued the much-awaited schedule for the general polls.

A day earlier, the ECP also resumed the training for

the ROs and DROs in line with the top court's verdict. Upon the advice of then-prime minister Shehbaz Sharif, President Alvi dissolved the 15th National Assembly three days before the completion of its five-year term. The former government prematurely dissolved the lower house to ensure that the polls were scheduled 90 days later — in line with the Constitution. However, that did not seem to happen, as the commission had said that it could not follow up on the 90-day deadline as it had to work on fresh delimitation of constituencies after the Council of Common Interests (CCI) approved the results of the 2023 digital census.

The ECP did that because Section 17(2) of the Elections Act states that "the commission shall delimit constituencies after every census is officially published" — which is in contrast with the constitutional deadline. In October, the Raja-led ECP announced that the polls would be staged in January next year, but did not announce the exact date, and in return, received flak.

Interfaith Harmony being promoted

PESHAWAR (APP): The Prime Minister's Special Representatives on Religious Harmony, Maulana Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi here Monday said that Hajj was one of the most important five pillars of Islam and reiterated that the government was committed to ensuring maximum facilities to all Pakistani pilgrims next year.

Addressing Tazeemul Al-Harmain Al-Shareefeen Conference here as chief guest, Maulana Tahir Ashrafi said that a significant decrease in the expenses of Hajj has been recorded this year after decreasing prices of Dollar due to Govt's effective economic and financial policies.

He said Hajjaj were like ambassadors of Pakistan and urged them to strictly abide by the rules, regulations and laws of Saudi Arabia. He said Pakistan highly valued its time-tested and all-weather friendship with Saudia Arabia having strong bonds of religion, history, culture, and enormous respect for the custodians of the two holy mosques.

While appreciating the overall Hajj arrangements, he directed the Hajj Organization Association of Pakistan to concentrate on the training of intending pilgrims so that they could achieve maximum blessing while staying in the holy land during Hajj.

He said Pakistan was our country and its problems could be addressed through hard work, commitment, and self-accountability.

Maulana Ashrafi who is Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council said that Inter-faith harmony and mutual co-existence in society are vital for the progress and prosperity of Pakistan. He said all minorities enjoy complete religious freedom in Pakistan.

He said Pakistan has all the resources to become an economic giant. He said Pakistan can earn huge revenue worth millions of dollars by promoting religious tourism.

Besides the scenic beauty of northern Gilgit Baltistan, KP, and Azad Kashmir, he said Pakistan was home to centuries-old Indus and Gandhara civilizations besides several other religious tourism sites if properly showcased on digital media could bring economic turnaround for the country.

Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi said that Pakistan wanted cordial and brotherly relations with all its neighbors and peace in Afghanistan was in the interest of Pakistan.

He said anti-Pakistan and Afghanistan elements wanted to create a rift among both the countries but they would never succeed in their nefarious designs.

He said Pakistan's stance on the Palestine issue was very clear. He said atrocities in Gaza should be immediately stopped. He said the sacrifices of the people of Palestine would not go to waste. He said an independent and sovereign Palestine state with Al-Qudus Al-Sharif as its capital would help in enduring lasting peace in the middle East.

Maulana Ashraf appreciated the association's efforts and expressed the hope that they would provide maximum facilities to the pilgrims during the upcoming Hajj.

Earlier, Jamal Khan Tarkai, Chairman of the association thanked the Prime Minister's special representative Maulana Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, and appraised him about the association's endeavours for the upcoming Hajj.

He said that approximately 904 companies of the association were registered with the Ministry of Religious Affairs for Hajji Operations and about 50 percent quota in Hajj was reserved for it. He also presented traditional Choga and Qula (turban) to the chief guest.



PESHAWAR: Chairman NAB Lt. Gen. (R) Nazir Ahmad Bhut addressing civil bureaucracy. Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and IGP also present on occasion.

Maulana Ashrafi meets Governor

PESHAWAR (INP): Special Representative to the Prime Minister of Pakistan for middle East and Interfaith Harmony, Maulana Tahir Ashrafi here on Monday met with Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali at Governor's House. At the meeting, both discussed the security conditions and interfaith harmony in KP.

The governor and Maulana Ashrafi also strongly denounced the atrocities of Israeli army in Gaza and the genocide of Palestinians.

Ashrafi apprised the governor regarding steps taken for the interfaith harmony and welfare of Pakistanis residing in the Middle East.

Governor Haji Ghulam Ali said world powers should play their pivotal role in preventing the innocent Palestinians from Israeli atrocities.

CM approves appointment of BoGs of 9 MTI hospitals

PESHAWAR (INP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister has acceded to the appointment of new chairmen and members of board of governors (BoGs) of nine MTI hospitals of the province after an approval of the Election Commission of Pakistan.

According to the notification of KP Establishment department, the appointment of the BoGs would be for a period of three years, adding that Ghulam Qadir Khan has been appointed as chairman of BoGs Hayatabad Medical Complex Peshawar, while Professor Mahfooz Hussain, Akhtar Naveed, Dil Roz and Dr Muhammad Ali Chohan nominated are the members.

Similarly, Malik Mushtaq Ahmad Dar has been appointed as chairman BoGs MTI-MMM DI Khan while Dr Muhammad Iqbal, Khalid Mahmood, Samin ullah Khan, Musa Khan and Esa Khan were appointed as the members. Prof Dr Ejaz Hassan Khan was appointed as chairman of BoGs MTI-Bacha Khan Medical College, Swabi while Prof Mohammad Ishaq Khattak, Sher Bahadur Khan, Prof Noor Jehan, Muhammad Irfan and Prof Sajjad Muhammad Khan were appointed as members.

Dr Damsaz Khan was appointed as chairman BoGs of MTI Khalifa Gul Nawaz Hospital, Bannu while the members included Malik Niamat Ullah Khan, Abid Ullah Khan, Dr Umar Ayub has been appointed as chairman MTI-KTH Peshawar while Prof Dr Tahir Ali, Mir Yaqoob Khan, Gohar Zaman and Qari Abdur Rauf Madni have been appointed as the members.

Prof Dr Khalid Anwar Khan Khanzada and Asad Ullah Chamkani were appointed as members of MTI-LRH, Peshawar, it said. Prof Muhammad Hafiz Ullah was appointed as chairman of BoGs Peshawar Instituted of Cardiology (PIC) while the members included Muhammad Anees, Justice (R) Sahibzada Khursheed Ahmad, Asad Akbar and Abdus Siddique. Dr Muhammad Arshad was appointed as chairman of MTI Mardan Medical Complex, Mardan while Misal Khan, S A Shakeel, Prof Dr Zia Muhammad, Pir Waheed and Arif Khan were appointed as the members of BoGs.

Provincial Health Security Action Plan 2024-2028: DG Health Services leads technical group consultations

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Director General Health Services Dr. Shaukat Ali on Monday presided over a three-day consultative session of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Technical Group to determine the Provincial Action Plan for Health Security 2024-2028.

The Technical Group, comprising Chief Center for Disease Control National Institute of Health Pakistan, Dr Mumtaz, representatives from all sub-directorates of the Health Department, project directors, and delegates from the World Health Organization participated in the sessions.

Dr. Shaukat Ali expressed his gratitude to all participants for their active engagement in the consultative meeting, stating that the collective efforts aim to develop an action plan aligned with the National Action Plan for Health Security. He highlighted that the province is currently formulating an action plan in compliance with the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005 for the diagnosis, containment, and control of diseases.

The consultative workshop, organized under the leadership of former Director Public Health Dr. Nek Dad Afridi, is expected to play a vital role in shaping the Provincial Action Plan for Health Security 2024-2028.

The technical team from the World Health Organization's EMRO office is providing specialised assistance in the formulation of the Provincial Action Plan for Health Security.

Dr. Shaukat Ali further explained that the workshop would facilitate the development of the Provincial Action Plan for Health Security 2024-2028.

He emphasised that the Health Department is committed to enhancing its future strategy in light of the insights gained from this workshop.

Acknowledging the significance of Pakistan becoming a signatory to the International Health Regulations, Dr. Shaukat Ali commended Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for taking the lead in implementing these regulations. He thanked all stakeholders for their technical support.

Chief Executive Center for Disease Control NIH Pakistan, Dr. Mumtaz, noted that Pakistan has organised the National Action Plan for Health Security at the national level, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has taken the lead in formulating the action plan.

The technical team from the World Health Organization emphasised that the implementation of International Health Regulations requires strengthening capabilities in 19 different areas, including biohazards, biochemical events, natural disasters, disease control such as COVID-19, border management, and air pollution.

The plan will be developed under the One Health Agenda and an All Hazards Approach, encompassing elements of veterinary, Climate change, health, and food security.

It is essential to note that the One Health Agenda includes veterinary, Climate change, health, and food security, while the All Hazards Approach incorporates health, chemical, radiological, environmental, natural or human-induced hazards, and climatic changes.

WSSP officers get training in 'Asset Management, Energy Optimization'

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Water and Sanitation Services Peshawar (WSSP) completed a three-month online training programme on Monday in 'Asset Management and Energy Optimization' for 19 officers and staff members.

The training was conducted in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and German experts provided online instruction to the officers.

During the training course, participants were educated on various aspects of solid waste management, tube wells, and efficient energy utilization through 12 modules. After each module, participants were tested, followed by a comprehensive examination. Those who passed the exam received certificates.

The primary objective of this training programme is to enhance operational efficiency and ensure the effective utilization of resources to reduce costs.

Zameer-ul-Hasan, General Manager of HR and PMER, distributed certificates to the officers who completed the training.

Among the officials present on the occasion were Turab Shah, GM Operations; Zonal Mangers Tariq Aziz, Aamir Gul Khattak, Basit Khattak, Anwar-ul-Haq, and Chief Internal Auditor, Mian Asif Shah.

On the occasion, Zameer-ul-Hasan praised JICA for their financial support for the training and emphasized that by using resources efficiently and according to the best practices and energy needs, not only will services improve but also costs will decrease. He encouraged the trained officers to utilize their skills for the benefit of the organization and the public, and also to transfer their expertise to their colleagues.

He further stressed the importance of ongoing training to enhance the capabilities of the workforce and indicated that such training programs will continue in the future.



ECP to conduct training for DROs and ROs

PESHAWAR (APP): The one-day training session for District Returning Officers (DROs) will take place on Tuesday in Peshawar.

The Provincial Election Commission Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will visit the session, where DROs will take their oaths of office and address the gathering.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a total of 160 Returning Officers and 36 District Returning Officers are undergoing training at the divisional level. Senior officers from the EC are serving as trainers for the sessions.



PESHAWAR: An artisan busy making wooden decoration items at his workplace.



PESHAWAR: A delegation of medical students meeting with Mayor Haji Zubair Ali.

PHC grants transit bail to three PTI's leaders

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Justice Sahibzada Asadullah of Peshawar High Court (PHC) granted transit bail to three Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders including provincial general Ali Asghar Khan till 30th December, on Monday.

PHC ordered PTI provincial general secretary along former parliamentarians named Ali Jadoon and Nazeer Abbasi while ordered for appearance before Session Court Abbottabad.

The counsel Ali Zaman and Shahab Ullah advocates argued that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)'s leaders were nominated in First Information Report registered at Bakot area of Abbottabad district for holding workers convention without permission.

The counsel further argued that the petitioners are law abiding citizens but nominated in FIR to create hurdles in election campaign for PTI.

The petitioners are appearing before concerned court but there is fear that police will arrest them earlier than their appearance, the counsel added.

The counsel requested for provision of transit bail to petitioners to contest their case before concerned session court. Ali Zaman Advocate argued that PTI activists are targets of political victimization of executive while added that other parties are holding conventions freely.

PHC's Justice Sahibzada Asadullah granted transit bail to three PTI's leaders including provincial general secretary Ali Asghar Khan on Rs1 lac and two personal sureties for each and ordered them to appear before Session Court Abbottabad on 30th December 2023.



PESHAWAR: President Secondary School Teachers Association KP Zulfiqar Ahmad addressing a press conference. — F.P. photo by Ghulam Murtaza

Power suspension on Peshawar, DIK, Abbottabad grids notified

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) on Monday notified that due to maintenance work power supply will remain suspended from Jamrud grid station on 20th, 23rd and 28th December from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Consequently, it said that consumers of Hayatabad 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, New Hayatabad, Health Care Center Hospital, Health Excellence, North West Hospital, Kidney Center, RMI, Kacha Garhi, Karkhano, Gul Abad, PIC, Hayatabad Surgical, Peshawar General, Foundation Hospital, Cell Wood, Northern Bottling, PCB, Alhaj, BSF, Olympia, Omrok, Industrial Estate, Mohmand Steel, Al Hafiz, Frontier Teak Wood, PPI, Mika Steel, Express 1, 2, 3 and PHA feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from Band Kurai-D.I. Khan Transmission Line on 21st December from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. resultantly, consumers of 66 KV Band Kurai grid connected feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will also remain suspended from AMC Abbottabad Grid Station on 20th and 27th December from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. resultantly, consumers of Garhi Habibullah, Jahangai, Tanawal, APS, Jannah Abad, Mandian, SID, Comsats University, INOR, AMC and PMA 2 feeders will face inconvenience.

Cold, dry weather to prevail in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The Provincial Meteorological Center Peshawar on Monday predicted that mainly cold and dry weather is expected in most districts of the province.

It further said that moderate foggy conditions are expected over Charsadda, Nowshera, Mardan, Peshawar, Swabi and D.I. Khan districts as well as over Motorway (M1) / Highways at night and early in the morning.

During the last 24 hours cold and dry weather prevailed over most districts of the province. Rainfall recorded (in mm) during the last 24 hours at different stations of KPK was nil.

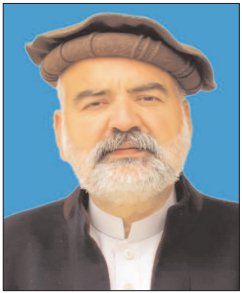
The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in centigrade at different stations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were Peshawar 20/03, Chitral 12/-02, Timergara 17/01, Dir 17/-03, Mirkhani 15/-01, Kalam NA/-05, Drosh 15/00, Saidu Sharif 17/00, Pattan 18/08, Malam Jabba 05/-02, Takht Bhai 19/03, Kakul 14/01, Balakot 18/02, Parachinar NA/00, Bannu 21/05, Cherat 14/04, DI Khan City 21/05.

The lowest temperatures recorded in the province was -06°C in Tirah valley of Khyber district and -05°C in Kalam.



In brief

Senior journalist passes away



Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Senior journalist and editor-in-chief of Daily Shumal Ghulam Farooq passed away at the age of 56. The deceased was a senior journalist and the owner of Daily Shumal Swat. He did his Master in journalism from University of Peshawar in 1992. He had prolonged illnesses and was undergoing treatment in Islamabad for the last two months. Late Ghulam Farooq has left Four Sons and a widow.

'Nawaz tasks to end difference' F.P. Report

RUSTAM: The central leader of Pakistan Muslim League-N (PMLN) and former Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Iqbal Zafar Jagra has said that Mian Nawaz Sharif has given the task of ending the internal disputes between the party leadership in KP by December 22nd, on Monday. All disputes will be resolved in the entire province; (PML-N) by public mandate will formed governments in the center including Pakhtunkhwa. He expressed these views while talking to the media representatives at the residence of Colonel. (R) Sher Afgan Khan on the occasion of an emergency visit to Tehsil Rustam. Provincial leaders of the party Sher Afgan Khan, Haji Akhtamawaz Khan, Syed Waris, Gul Shad Khan and other officials were also present on this occasion. Iqbal Zafar Jagra said that the workers are being activated by eliminating groupings in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the party is active in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the provincial leadership is united. In response to a question, he said that KP along with JUI and there will be seat adjustment in Punjab. At this time, the eyes of the entire nation are on Mian Nawaz Sharif workers should take the message of Mian Nawaz Sharif and start full preparations for the elections. Nawaz Sharif will once again be the prime minister of the country and lead the country on the path of development.

Court confirms BBA of PTI men F.P. Report

BUNER: Additional District and Session Judge (AD&SJ) Abdusalam Sakamikhel cancelled Bail before Arrest (BBA) of 8 PTI leaders while another AD&SJ Qaisar Khan Afridi confirmed BBA arrest of 8 activists, on Monday. Those BBA was cancelled including Afzar Khan, Abdul Kabir Khan, Iqbal Khan Panjtar, Sajjad Ali, Fazal Akbar, Mubarak Husain and Javed Iqbal while issued arrest warrant against Mohammad Shahid who was absent from the court. The Nawagai police formally arrested the accused and transported to police station for legal process. Those BBA confirmed included Kamran Khan, Bakhrad Khan, Syed Fakhar Jehan, Syed Salar Jihan, Haji Sharif Khan, Irshad Alam Khan, Amir Zeb and Waqar-ul-Mulk Khan. It's pertinent to mention here that the PTI leaders hailing from three constituencies PK 25 PK 26 and PK 27 were charged under sections 188, 280, 290, 3/4 in the police stations Pir Baba Gagra and Nawagai respectively for convening party workers conventions on 1st of December this year.

High time for joint efforts to protect Mardan rights: Mayar

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Mayor Mardan Hamayatullah Mayar on Monday claimed that under the previous ANP government, the first Khyber Institute of Neuro Research (KINR), supported not only by funds allocated for the Mardan and surrounding districts but also designed as a significant project for the entire Pakistan.

However, due to the recent decision of the caretaker government, Mardan

sions of the provincial government are causing mardan to be deprived of a much-needed advance cancer hospital.

Additionally, previous projects like the District Headquarters Hospital (DHQ), Pakistan's third-largest Benazir Bhutto Children Hospital, and other significant initiatives are also being neglected, he also blamed. He criticized the provincial government for allocating funds every year for the loss-making

cial government's decision to reclaim the allocated land. They collectively presented a protest memorandum to the Commissioner Mardan.

Voters awareness stressed for strengthening democracy: It is to raise awareness among people and especially women about the importance of voting and to make people aware of this important democratic and national responsibility so that they ensure their full participation in this democratic process of using the right to vote and the country and the nation.

Play your individual and collective role in the selection of the right leadership for. These views were expressed by women of various union councils organized by Saiban Development Organization in Mardan with the support of non-governmental organization IRSP. On Monday, District Social Welfare Officer Mardan Jamal Shah and Nusrat Ara, a female social worker in Tehsil Takhtbhai, addressed the women of the Hindu community, Harinder Devi, a minority female social worker, Neghat Seema and Muhammad Arif of Saiban Development Organization also addressed the program. The speakers said that in the strength of the democratic system.

The vote is of fundamental importance, the importance of the electorate in the strength of the democratic system is an indisputable fact and by using the power of the vote, the people decide the future of themselves and the country. Every citizen of Pakistan has the right to exercise their right to vote, the Constitution of Pakistan empowers the people to strengthen democratic institutions through the exercise of voting rights. He said that the role of youth and women is the most important in the electoral process in the country and they can ensure the protection of their rights through voting.

Jamal Shah has urged the public, especially women, to actively participate in the upcoming elections, exercise their right to vote and encourage others to do the same. The speakers said that vote registration and exercising the right to vote is a national duty. Unfortunately, due to lack of knowledge, the rate of women's vote registration is very low. Promote awareness campaigns.



and surrounding areas are being deprived of this excellent project. Mayor Mardan expressed these views during a special meeting of the City Local Government for Mardan, attended by council members, leaders of various political parties, business union, representatives of student organizations, government officials, and journalists.

Mayor highlighted that during the tenure of the Awami National Party's government, 5,000 acres of land were purchased for various projects. These included 2000 acres for Abdul Wali Khan University, 2000 acres for Agricultural and Engineering University, and 1,000 acres for Bacha Khan Medical College.

After the approval in cabinet meeting funds were being allocated. Unfortunately, People of Mardan & surrounding districts are now being deprived of the benefits of these projects due to the decisions of the current government, he alleged. He pointed out that the lands were acquired to be returned to the owners, a decision made during the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's previous government.

The caretaker government further execute this decision due to non-availability of funds. He added that despite the survey and project planning for a new advance cancer hospital in Mardan, the recent deci-

project BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) but not allocating 3.5 billion rupees for the owners of the land allocated for different projects to provide the bright future to the youth of Mardan and surrounding districts. He emphasized that this was injustice and unfair.

He appealed to all political leaders, student union, lawyers' associations, traders' union, doctor association, and the people of Mardan to come together and raise their voices for the bright future & right of Mardan. He urged collective efforts not only through protests but also through legal means to fight for their rights.

City Mayor Mardan Hamayatullah Mayar concluded by stating that Mardan is the second-largest district in the province, contributing significantly to taxes on tobacco, marble, sugar, and other items. Despite this, Mardan are facing injustice and oppression.

The leaders and representatives at the meeting strongly condemned the decisions of the provincial government and pledged to fight collectively on all forums for the rights of Mardan and the bright future of the youth. Under the leadership of Mayor Mardan Hamayatullah Mayar, all political leaders, business community, students, and council members protested vigorously to the office of the Commissioner Mardan against the provin-

Philonthropists urged to support orphan children

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The administrators of an orphanage, the Aghosh Al-Khidmat center Gulabad Saeedullah has said the center needs financial assistance for the purchase of a students' bus and land for a playground for reducing the concurrent expenses of the center.

He appealed to organizations working for children's rights and philanthropists to provide financial support to the Al-Khidmat Foundation (AKF) for the sponsorship of orphans residing at his center. He was talking to members of the district press club Timergara who were invited to the Gulabad center in Lower Dir here the other day.

The journalists led by their president Ismail Anjum visited the Aghosh Al-Khidmat center Gulabad in the Lower Dir district. The AKF central assistant general secretary Fazal Mahmood, district president Hafeezullah Khaksar and in-charge Saeedullah briefed the visiting journalists regarding the overall facilities available to the orphan children.

They said that a total of 84 orphan children from the Lower Dir, Upper Dir, Bajaur, Chitral and Malakand were being provided with free residence, education, healthcare and sporting facilities. They said the deserving children were selected under strict merit criteria irrespective of their families' political and social background. The



speakers said that well off people should come forward to support orphans so that they became useful citizens of the country in future. They hoped the graduate successful Aghoshians would serve others in their practical life.

The local journalists spent some time with the orphans and participated in their routine activities. They also checked their residential accommodation, education and training, food, medicine, washroom, IT lab, conference hall and study room of the children and expressed satisfaction on the facilities provided to the orphans.

Later a joint function of local journalists and orphans of the children was held which was addressed by the AKF leaders Fazal Mahmood, Hafeezullah Khaksar, Saeedullah, president of the district press club Timergara Ismail Anjum, president of the Chakdara press club Shah Faisal, senior journalist Haleem Asad and others.

Fazal Mahmood and Hafizullah Khaksar said

that a total of eighty-four orphans had been sponsored by local and outside male and female donors. They said that all of the orphans were being provided with free education at local standard private educational institutions. They said that each child was given Rs 30 daily as pocket money. They said the AKF arranged a donors' conference each year during which the children got sponsorship.

They were of the view that due to lack of residential facility there was no room for more children in the center if another floor was built then more children could get admission. The local journalists were impressed by the facilities given to the orphans living at the center and they promised that both the Timergara and Chakdara press clubs would extend their possible support to the AKF and its Aghosh center Gulabad for the best care of the orphan children. Gifts and appreciation certificates among the journalists were distributed on the occasion.



HYDERABAD: Medical students holding a protest in favour of their demands.

130 girl's schools functionalized F.P. Report

WANA: At least 130 out of 290 nonfunctional government-run girl's schools have been made functional in the South Waziristan districts to provide the local girls in getting education near their homes, claimed Ghulam Fatima, district education officer of South Waziristan on Monday.

Talking to this scribe, she said that the schools had been non-functional for a long time and after assuming charge in the merged tribal district she took it as a challenge and with support of tribal elders made all such schools operational for quality education. She said that more than 8000 students were enrolled in state run schools during enrollment drives launched in the ongoing year.

DEO expressed her strong resolve and commitment to curb absenteeism and ensure teaching and learning activities in public sector schools by ensuring cent percent attendance of teaching and non-teaching staff. "The schools' bosses involved in keeping the campuses closed on one pretext or the other will face stern departmental action", she warned.

She said that though she faced management and monitoring issues due to dearth of relevant officials and unavailability of basic facilities including office's building and furniture, drastic steps were taken to control truancy and improve attendance of both teachers and students.

DEO Fatima said that the number of closed schools had been reduced to 40 from 170 out of 292 while a huge amount of over Rs 21 million had been deducted from the salaries of truant employees. "Along with penalizing 30 employees with removal and compulsory retirement from government service, we have downgraded two officials and stopped annual increments of 246 staffers on disciplinary grounds in order to control absenteeism", she claimed.

DEO said that the separation of female and male education offices and establishment of female sub divisional education offices would help to promote female education in the tribal district. She said that she had expedited the process on ADP (Annual Developmental Programme) projects and a comprehensive report about fully and partially damaged schools had been sent to provincial authorities for want of funds.

Admn prepared for upcoming elections

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Commissioner Dera Zafarul Islam Khattak has said that the divisional administration has completed all preparations regarding upcoming general elections. While talking to journalists at his office, the commissioner said the provincial government held a joint meeting with representatives of Election Commission, Divisional and District administrations, police and law and forces agencies to restart the polio campaign as soon as possible. He said numerous lands related and other disputes were going on between different local communities for the last decades. The district administrations had been directed to take all possible steps for resolving that issues through Jirgas and courts.

Moreover, the commissioner informed that the drive against power theft

the commissioner said the eradication of polio virus from the country was a national cause.

The anti-polio campaign was postponed in Dera Ismail Khan after some unfortunate incidents and due to ongoing operations being conducted to establish law and order in the area. However, he mentioned, the efforts were being made by the divisional and district administration, police and law and forces agencies to restart the polio campaign as soon as possible. He said numerous lands related and other disputes were going on between different local communities for the last decades. The district administrations had been directed to take all possible steps for resolving that issues through Jirgas and courts.

Moreover, the commissioner informed that the drive against power theft

and recovery of PESCO arrears was successfully underway following the instructions of the federal government. He informed that about 1073 electricity thieves were arrested after registration of 1097 cases so far. An amount of over Rs 780 million has been recovered in terms of arrears in Dera Ismail Khan. He said that 24 feeders with over 80 percent losses have been closed from the grid station.

Four feeders including Town Hall, City-I, Topanwala and Saddar have been cleared which would be made load-shedding free after checking and clearance by the teams coming from out of city. About fertilizer crisis, the commissioner said the administration was aware of the issue and strict action would be taken against such fertilizer dealers who found involved in creating artificial crisis.

Archaeologists visits Moen Jo Daro

F.P. Report

LARKANA: A delegation of archaeologists from America and Turkey headed by famous Pakistani archaeologist Dr. Uzmi Rizvi arrived at the archaeological site of Sindh, Mon Jo Daro. The delegation visited various archaeological including stupa, DK areas and various ancient parts of the museum, on Monday.

On this occasion, the foreign expert archaeologists were briefed about the archaeological site of Moen Jo by Javed Ahmed Shaikh, the guide appointed at Moen Jo Daro. On the occasion of which Director Syed Shakir Hussain Shah informed the delegation of foreign archaeologists about the export of coins in the laboratory, on this occasion, Dr. Uzmi Rizvi, a famous archaeologist of Pakistan, while talking to the media, said that the workshop at Khairpur University/

A program has been organized in which archaeologists from Turkey and America have participated, who have been visited the archaeological site of Sindh, Moen Jo Run. A delegation of tourists, students of Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, visited Moen Jo

Daro, accompanied by foreign archaeologists, and the security of the foreign archaeologists was tightened on this occasion.

DIG suspends 4 officers for alleged involved in smuggling: Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Larkana Division Nasir Aftab took action and dismissed 4 police officers involved in smuggling. After suspending Shah Manzoor Ahmed Soomro and ASI Zahid Awan from their posts, they were summoned to the office while issuing show-cause notices.

The serious charges of smuggling have been made against the said police officers while talking to the media, DIG Police Larkana Division Nasir Aftab said that there is no space for any police personnel and officers involved in smuggling and they will not be given any kind of concession. He added that actions against the black sheep in the department have been accelerated so that the department is free from it.

Police held 10 alleged culprits: As many as 10 suspects involved in various crimes and incidents were arrested after the police took action in different areas on the growing unrest in Larkana district.

While conducting an operation in the area of Corruption Road, the accused Tawfiq Ahmed Barro and Majid Hussain Junjo were arrested and an unlicensed pistol and a gun were recovered from them, while the Mahota police conducted an operation in the area of the bridge and arrested the criminal Rizwan Zangijjo.

On the other hand, on receiving information, the staff of Waleed Police Station, Shikarpur District Police, arrested the wanted suspect involved in various incidents, while the police of Haidari Tehana Police Station arrested Aqil Road. Altaf Hussain Jatoti, the accused involved in various incidents, was arrested while taking action in the area.

In Chhape, among the four suspects, Mansoor, Abid, Parvez and Ghulam Rasool were arrested and cash was recovered from their possession, while Anis Raja, who was allegedly abducted from Ratodero, was recovered by Hydari police, while various areas In the course of the proceedings, the cases have been registered after the arrested accused wanted in various cases of serious nature were locked up in the border jails.

Hafizabad secures 2nd position in students enrolment across Punjab

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: District Hafizabad has got second position in students enrolment campaign 2023 in the Punjab. Provincial Minister Education Punjab Mansoor Qadir and Secretary School Education Punjab Ahsan Waheed bestowed commendation shield to Chief Executive Officer Education Hafizabad Sohail Azhar Khan to acknowledge good performance of school education department Hafizabad.

Sohail Azhar Khan said that the school education department has achieved target of students enrolment during 2023 under supervision of Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad Sundas Irshad and efforts of officers and teachers of the school education department Hafizabad.

Crackdown on irrigation pilferages continued: Crackdown on irrigation water pilferages is in full swings

while 103 cases have been registered against water pilferages in the district Hafizabad so far.

This was stated in a meeting held at district complex and Deputy Commissioner Sundas Irshad presided over the meeting. ADCR Intiaz Ali Baig, AC Hafizabad Munawar Hussain, AC Pindi Bhattian Rashid Iqbal, police and irrigation officers attended the meeting. DC directed the irrigation and police officers to expedite action against water thieves and irrigation department submit desilting plan for removing silt from water channels to ensure smoothly flow of water as well as reach of the water at tail ends of water channels. She directed the irrigation officers to get registered cases against landlords involved in water theft indiscriminately to eliminate menace of water pilferage.

Fares reduced by 5%: District administration Hafizabad have announced to cut five percent trans-

port fare of all routes after reduction of petroleum products by the government.

This announcement was made by the Deputy Commissioner Sundas Irshad after presiding over a meeting held in this regards. Secretary District Road Transport Authority Ismaif Rasul, Motor Vehicle Examiner Muhammad Kashif and Managers Bus and wagon Stands attended the meeting. The reduction in transport fare was announced with the consultation of transporters to pass out benefits of reeducation in petroleum products to people.

DC directed all the transporters to past new fare list at their vehicles at prominent places and to ensure implementation on new fare list immediately. She also warned that strict and punitive action would be taken against those transporters who refrain from obeying the directions in this regards.



Thousands flee as war reaches Sudan's second-largest city

KHARTOUM (AFP): Thousands of displaced people have fled the formerly safe city of Wad Madani in Sudan, as the war between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) reaches the city. Paramilitary forces established a base in the east of Sudan's second-largest city and the capital of al-Jazirah state, the AFP news agency reported, forcing thousands of already displaced people to escape. The RSF attack has opened a new front in the eight-month-old war, in what had previously been "one of Sudan's few remaining sanctuaries", according to the Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) Sudan director William Carter. Crowds of people - many of whom had taken refuge in the city from violence in the capital Khartoum - were seen packing up belongings and leaving on foot in videos posted on social media. "The war has followed us to Madani so I am looking for a bus so me and my family can flee," 45-year-old Ahmed Salih told the Reuters news agency by phone. "We are living in hell and there is no one to help us," he said, adding that he planned to head south to Sennar. Sudan's army, which has held the city since the start of the conflict, launched air strikes on RSF forces as it tried to push back the assault that started, witnesses told Reuters. The RSF responded with artillery and RSF reinforcements were seen moving in

the direction of the fighting, the witnesses added. RSF soldiers have also been seen in villages to the north and west of the city in recent days and weeks, residents said. Sudan spiralled into war after soaring tensions between army chief General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and RSF commander General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo exploded into open fighting in mid-April. The war broke out due to disagreements over plans for a political transition and the integration of the RSF into the army, four years after former ruler Omar al-Bashir was deposed in an uprising. More than 12,000 people have been killed, according to a conservative estimate by the Armed Conflict and Event Data Project, while the United Nations says nearly 6.8 million have been forced to flee their homes. The UN said 14,000 people have fled Wad Madani so far, and a few thousand had already reached other cities. Half a million people have sought refuge in al-Jazirah, mainly from Khartoum. Wad Madani alone houses more than 86,000 displaced people, according to the UN, which has suspended all humanitarian field missions in al-Jazirah state. More than 270,000 of the city's 700,000 residents had been dependent on humanitarian aid, the UN said. The United States Ambassador John Godfrey urged the RSF to "cease their advance" on al-Jazirah state. "A continued RSF advance

risks mass civilian casualties and significant disruption of humanitarian assistance efforts," Godfrey said in a statement. Families scrambled to once again flee to safety but found bus tickets had quadrupled to \$60 a head, and many had nowhere to go. "A continuous flow of people, many of them who already ran for their lives just a few months ago, are now rushing towards already heavily burdened and resource-depleted cities in neighbouring states," the NRC's Carter said. "We are also extremely worried for highly vulnerable families in Wad Madani who have been crammed into displacement sites in schools for months and have nowhere to hide from violence, no means to escape and nowhere else to flee," Carter added. Sudan's doctors' union said the situation in the city has become "catastrophic" after pharmacies were forced shut. The army and RSF last week cast doubt on an East African mediation initiative aimed at ending a war that has triggered the largest internal displacement in the world and warnings of famine-like conditions. In Khartoum and cities in Darfur that the RSF has already taken, residents have reported rapes, looting and arbitrary killing and detention. The group is also accused of ethnic killings in West Darfur. The RSF has denied those accusations and said anyone in its forces found to be involved in such crimes would be held accountable. — Aljazeera

Kenya disassociates from DR Congo rebels alliance

NIAROB: Kenya has "strongly disassociated" itself from a Congolese opposition figure who forged an alliance with rebels in Nairobi, spurring a diplomatic row with Kinshasa. The Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it would investigate the political-military alliance after the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) recalled its ambassador in protest. The so-called Congo River Alliance, launched, includes DRC politicians and groups such as the M23 rebels, who have seized territory in eastern DRC, and Corneille Nangaa, a former DRC election commission chief. In response to the development, DRC recalled its ambassadors to Kenya and Tanzania for consultations. The envoy to Tanzania was recalled because Tanzania hosts the headquarters of the East African Community bloc, to which DRC also belongs. In a statement, Kenya's foreign minister, Musalia Mudavadi, said Kenya was aware some DRC nationals had addressed the press in

Kenya and made statements that were "inimical to the constitutional order of the Democratic Republic of the Congo". "Kenya strongly disassociates itself from any utterances or activities likely to injure the peace and security of the friendly nation of DRC and has commenced an investigation," he said. The probe, the minister said, would try "to determine the identities of the makers of the statement and the extent to which their utterances fall outside constitutionally protected speech". The new alliance, which Nangaa said aimed to string together various Congolese armed groups, militias, and social and political organisations, is an additional concern in a region where insecurity has persisted for decades, fuelled by ethnic rivalries and a tussle over resources. The diplomatic row comes amid growing security tensions ahead of the December 20 presidential elections in the DRC, which has been engulfed in civil strife for decades. After several years of dormancy, M23 rebels took up arms again in late 2021 and

seized large parts of the eastern province of North Kivu. The conflict has displaced some seven million Congolese within their own country. According to the Human Rights Watch, more than 1.5 million Congolese will be unable to vote in zones affected by the conflict and millions more internally displaced people will face the same challenge. Nangaa, justifying the formation of the new alliance, said the state is too "weak" to ensure order in the impoverished and war-battered country, and that a new movement needs to fill the void. DRC government's spokesman Patrick Muyaya accused Nangaa of being "unpatriotic" and launching "subversive activities". The head of the UN's peacekeeping mission in the DRC, Bintou Keita, said she was "extremely concerned" by the newly announced alliance. "I call on all political actors to operate within the framework of the Constitution and to respect human rights and the rule of law," she wrote on X, formerly Twitter. — Aljazeera

British teen to be repatriated from France

LONDON: A British teenager who went missing six years ago and was found this week in France is set to be reunited with his family in the United Kingdom. Alex Batty, who was "abducted" by his mother at the age of 11, will be repatriated, a prosecutor in Toulouse told the AFP news agency. He will take off for London from the southern French city "accompanied by several British police officers", said magistrate Antoine Leroy. Batty will be returned to his maternal grandmother, with whom the British justice system entrusted his custody before he disappeared in 2017 during a holiday with his mother and grandfather in Malaga, Spain. Toulouse deputy prosecutor Antoine Leroy said the youth had spent the past two years in different areas of southern France, living in "spiritual communities" with his mother, never staying more than several months in the same place. The grandfather died about six months ago, said Leroy, adding that the

boy's mother might currently be in Finland. The teen was found in the middle of the night by a delivery driver after he had escaped and had been along a road for four days, Leroy said at a news conference. Greater Manchester Police GMP earlier said they were working with French authorities to bring Batty home to his grandmother. France's BFM TV has reported a search operation was under way to find Batty's mother. Six years ago, Batty's mother and grandfather took him on what was meant to be a two-week family holiday in Spain. Instead, it turned out to be a six-year odyssey through Morocco, Spain and south-west France, living an off-the-grid life. Now 17 years old, Batty told French investigators that he, his mother and her father had moved from house to house, carrying their own solar panels, growing their own food, living with other families, meditating and contemplating reincarnation and other esoteric

subjects. "It was a nomadic life," police officer Lea Chambonnière said at the news conference in Toulouse. "The only constants, the only things they carried with them, were the solar panels and their vegetable plants." Batty reappeared, when a delivery driver found him walking alone on a remote French road and delivered him to the French police. "When his mother indicated that she intended to leave for Finland with him, this young man understood that this journey had to stop," Leroy, the prosecutor, said. "He was never locked up," he added. "But he was always obliged to live in these conditions." I cannot begin to express my relief and happiness that Alex has been found safe and well," the teen's grandmother, Susan Caruana, said in a statement released by British police. She said they spoke by video call and "it was so good to hear his voice and see his face again". "I can't wait to see him." — Aljazeera

Hundreds evacuated as floods ravage Australia

SYDNEY: Hundreds of people have been evacuated in northeastern Australia after extreme floods cut off towns and forced residents to flee to rooftops to escape rising waters. More than 300 people were rescued in the state of Queensland overnight, with military helicopters deployed to assist areas cut off by the floods, officials said on Monday. Cairns, a popular tourist destination that serves as a gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, has been almost completely cut off by floodwaters amid fears the town's 160,000 residents will soon not have access to clean drinking water. Local officials said the town had received about 600mm of rain over 40 hours through early Monday morning, more than three times the December average. All flights into and out of Cairns Airport, where plans have been partially submerged by floodwaters, were cancelled or postponed on Monday. More than 14,000 properties across the region are without power, according to authorities. In Wujal Wujal, a rural community in the Cape York region, nine people, including a seven-year-old boy, sought shelter on the roof of a hospital. Crocodiles have been spotted swimming in floodwaters in several rural areas, including Wujal Wujal and Ingham. The flooding follows heavy rains and strong winds brought on by Tropical Cyclone Jasper, which made landfall in Australia last week. Queensland state Premier Steven Miles said the flooding was the worst natural disaster he had ever seen in the state. "The problem is rain won't stop and until it eases up, we can't get aerial support into remote places," Miles told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Queensland Treasurer Cameron Dick has warned that the disaster will have a "billion-dollar impact" on the state. Weather officials have forecast more rain on Monday as Jasper is expected to linger over the region. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said that the Australian military had been put on standby for rescue and relief efforts. — Aljazeera

Serbia's ruling SNS ahead in snap election

BELGRADE: Exit polls say the ruling right-wing Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) of President Aleksandar Vucic is in the lead in a snap parliamentary election widely regarded as a referendum on his government. According to projections by the pollsters Ipsos and CeSID, the SNS won 47 percent of the vote and is expected to hold about 130 seats in the 250-member assembly. The main opposition Serbia Against Violence (SPN) alliance, a centrist coalition vying to unseat the populists who have ruled the Balkan state since 2012, won about 23 percent of votes, said the projections. The projections are based on a partial count of a representative sample of polling stations. Official results are set to be announced late on Monday. The election did not include the presidency but governing authorities backed by the dominant pro-government media have run the campaign as a referendum on Vucic. Two mass shootings in May, resulting in 18 deaths, including nine elementary school students, led to protests that shook Vucic and the SNS's decade-long grip on power. The discontent was made worse by rising inflation, which hit 8 percent in November. Opposition parties and rights watchdogs also accuse Vucic and the SNS of bribing voters, stifling media freedom, violence against opponents, corruption and ties with organised crime. Vucic and his allies deny the allegations. "My job was to do everything in my power to secure an absolute majority in the parliament," Vucic told reporters as he celebrated what he said was the SNS's victory. — Aljazeera

Starving Palestinians loot aid trucks in Rafah

GAZA: The humanitarian crisis in Gaza continues to worsen after more than two months of Israeli bombing and forced displacement of people to the enclave's south. Hungry and desperate Palestinians were seen jumping onto aid trucks in order to get food and other supplies in Gaza's Rafah area near the border with Egypt. Dozens of Palestinians surrounded the aid trucks after they drove in through the Rafah crossing with Egypt, forcing some to stop before climbing aboard, pulling food and water boxes down, and carrying them off or passing them off to crowds below. Some trucks appeared to be guarded by masked people carrying sticks. "The humanitarian situation has become very desperate, not only for the residents of Rafah city but also for the one million displaced Palestinians here who are becoming hungry, thirsty and traumatised as the war pounds on," said Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Rafah. Mahmoud said the amount of aid being allowed inside the strip is not enough and has forced the Palestinians into a "survival mode". "People are without anything - without a home, without access to food, without water and without medical supplies," he said. "So, the scenes at Rafah crossing are a natural response: When people starve to death, when they are hungry, this is what we will see happening." The United Nations this week warned that people in Gaza are so "desperate for food" that they are stopping aid trucks and immediately eating what they find. Philippe Lazzarini, the head of UNRWA who visited the strip recently, said the residents, despite their long and difficult history of suffering under Israeli



siege, have "never, ever experienced" hunger of this kind. "I saw it with my eyes that people in Rafah have started to decide to help themselves directly from the truck out of total despair and eat what they have taken out of the truck on the spot," Lazzarini said. On the same day, Carl Skau, the deputy head of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), confirmed that nearly half of the people in Gaza are starving, with no idea where their next meal is coming from. The WFP said half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million is starving as the Israeli military's assault on the southern part of the enclave expands and people are cut off from supplies. Drone footage from southern Gaza showed volunteers from the Gaza Emergency Relief prepare a giant stew. Aid deliveries crossing into Gaza via Rafah, the sole entry point on the Egyptian border, are only a fraction of pre-conflict levels, despite the surge in needs. Aid coming through the border crossing has been

slow to deliver what the Gaza Strip population needs because of delays from truck inspections. Rafah is sheltering more than 12,000 people per square kilometre, housing an estimated 85 percent of people displaced across Gaza since the attacks began on October 7. That day, Hamas launched a surprise incursion on Israeli territory, killing some 1,140 people and taking another 240 captives. Israel's bombardment has since killed 18,787 people and injured another 50,897, while thousands are believed to be buried under the rubble. Despite thousands sheltering at the crossing, Rafah continues to be the target of Israeli air strikes. A massive explosion took place overnight in the Geneina district of Rafah, with two people killed and residential homes targeted and destroyed, said Al Jazeera's Mahmoud. "A large number of injured have been brought to the Kuwaiti hospital here," he said. "We are talking about more than 50 people injured." — Aljazeera

Jimmy Lai's security trial opens in Hong Kong, UK urges release

HONG KONG: Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai has gone on trial for alleged national security offences, hours after the United Kingdom joined calls for his immediate release. Lai, who has been imprisoned since December 2020, arrived in court at 10am (02:00 GMT) where he is charged with conspiring to collude with foreign powers under the national security law imposed on the territory by China in June 2020. Journalists inside the court said the 76-year-old, who was dressed in a blue shirt and carrying a book, looked like he had lost weight, but appeared in good spirits. The publisher of the now-defunct Apple Daily is one of China's most vocal critics and was arrested initially in August 2020 as police raided the newspaper's offices. The trial was supposed to have started a year ago, but was delayed after the government challenged his choice of defence counsel, Timothy Owen, a UK-based lawyer, and sought Beijing's intervention. Lai and the Apple Daily also face charges under a sedition law dating from the British colonial era. He has pleaded not guilty to all charges. In a statement, UK Foreign

Secretary David Cameron said he was "gravely concerned" about the trial and joined the United States and European Union in calling for Lai's immediate release. Lai is a British citizen. "As a prominent and outspoken journalist and publisher, Jimmy Lai has been targeted in a clear attempt to stop the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association," Cameron said, noting that the security law was in breach of the commitments made to Hong Kong when it resumed sovereignty over the territory in 1997. "I urge the Chinese authorities to repeal the National Security Law and end the prosecution of all individuals charged under it. I call on the Hong Kong authorities to end their prosecution and release Jimmy Lai." Hong Kong's pro-democracy politicians, once vibrant civil society and media came under pressure in the wake of mass demonstrations in 2019, which began over concerns about a planned extradition bill with mainland China and evolved into calls for greater democracy. A year after it was imposed, Amnesty International said the security law had "decimated" Hong Kong's rights and freedoms.

The US also called for Lai's immediate release and condemned the prosecution. "Lai has been held in pre-trial detention for more than 1,000 days, and Hong Kong and Beijing authorities have denied him his choice of legal representation," US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement. "We call on Hong Kong authorities to immediately release Jimmy Lai and all others imprisoned for defending their rights." Security on Monday was tight after Secretary for Security Chris Tang warned it would be enhanced because previously, "these kinds of cases" had attracted people wanting to disrupt proceedings and harass prosecutors. People began queueing early for tickets with just 70 seats in the main venue at the West Kowloon court building open to the public. Some police were in riot gear, while others had dogs. A bomb disposal vehicle was parked nearby. "Jimmy Lai's case is a case of weaponising the legal system in Hong Kong," Finn Lau, a UK-based activist and founder of Hong Kong Liberty, told Al Jazeera. "There is no rule of law in Hong Kong anymore. It is just rule by law."

Lai has already been found guilty and jailed over separate cases related to the management of Apple Daily and his involvement in a vigil to mark the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. The final edition of the Apple Daily rolled off the presses in June 2021. Other publications critical of the administration have also folded, while elections have been overhauled to ensure only so-called "patriots" are able to hold public office in the territory. Last week's elections for district councils saw a record-low turnout of just 27.5 percent. The number of directly elected seats was cut to just 88, compared with 462 previously, and all candidates had to secure official approval before they could stand. "Actions that stifle press freedom and restrict the free flow of information - as well as Beijing and local authorities' changes to Hong Kong's electoral system that reduce direct voting and preclude independent and pro-democracy party candidates from participating - have undermined Hong Kong's democratic institutions and harmed Hong Kong's reputation as an international business and financial hub," Miller said in his statement. — Aljazeera

Why Israel will continue its deadly push into Gaza city centres

GAZA: Dramatic news reports, claims and videos have emerged from both sides involved in the Gaza fighting throughout the past week. The week started with the Israeli army releasing several videos of Palestinians stripped to their underwear being marched through urban ruins. Israel's PR machine disregarded the Palestinian outcry that followed. Israel staunchly asserted that the men were Hamas fighters and that their alleged mass surrenders signified that the end of the Palestinian group was close, even as many Palestinians and independent observers insisted that the men were civilians who had been treated against the laws of war by being publicly humiliated. For its part, Hamas stuck to its usual practice of pushing its cause through video releases - skillfully edited to enhance the desired effects - purporting to confirm its constant and numerous successes against Israeli invaders, mostly showing hits scored against armoured vehicles. Then came the news that stunned Israel and put a big question mark on its official line of Hamas being on the verge of collapse. First, nine soldiers were killed in

a single operation in the Shujaiya neighbourhood of Gaza City. That shock was followed by another one, with the Israeli army admitting that it killed three Israeli captives, having mistaken them for enemies - even though they held white flags. So what is really happening on the ground in Gaza? Nothing we did not predict weeks ago: The war has entered a difficult, unpredictable and bloody phase of full-scale urban warfare where gains are small and slow, and losses can be huge. Combat in narrow and cramped streets of old cities is known to be one of the most difficult ways to fight a war. Classic military theory calls for defended cities to be surrounded and blockaded by units just strong enough to prevent the defenders from breaking out, while the main force continues advancing and taking territory. But the fight in Gaza is not about conquering fields and beaches - Israel's proclaimed goal is to destroy Hamas. To do that, the first step is to control the ground where the enemy operates: the cities. Many aspects of warfare are as ancient as the human urge to fight wars: attack

and conquer versus defend and remain free. But the ways of achieving those goals have changed with technology and, at certain times, the means available to soldiers favour one aspect over another. In the old days, cities needed strong walls to defend themselves, but in the last 100 years, weapons have advanced at a rapid rate, causing a change in tactics. Successful resistance against enemy attacks no longer depends on huge, expensive static bastions. Nowadays, small but potent man-portable weapons whose destructive power is hugely disproportionate to their size, such as anti-tank rocket launchers, grenade throwers, small mortars, assault rifles and many others, allow the defenders to turn each house and every street into a formidable defensive position. From the 1940s to this day, almost all attempts to conquer cities held by determined defenders have ended in failure. The few victories attackers achieved were so costly that they often ended the offensive capabilities of those armies pushing into cities. In their own ways, Stalingrad, Warsaw, Berlin, Dien Bien Phu, Vukovar, Sarajevo,

Grozny and Fallujah - some successfully defended, others eventually succumbing to attacks - all confirmed the military wisdom that urban warfare should be avoided whenever possible. Israel could not avoid urban warfare in Gaza. To have a chance of destroying Hamas, it has to deny it its operating ground, the three biggest urban agglomerations in the strip: Gaza City, Khan Younis and Rafah. In the first phase of its ground operation, the Israeli army advanced across open ground, through farmland and villages that do not lend themselves to mounting a major defence, only harassing attacks to slow down and dent the invaders. Hamas acted in classic guerrilla fashion, launching some hit-and-run attacks without wasting any effort to stop the Israelis then and there. The second phase started with Israeli forces reaching the suburbs, first of Gaza City and then, after the temporary ceasefire expired, of Khan Younis. Treading slowly and carefully in expectation of a concentrated Hamas response, the Israeli military completed the encirclement of those two urban areas. — Aljazeera

The Frontier Post

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Leaders’ exploitation of public needs

As the election season commenced, the election campaigns of the contesting political groups are currently in full swing. The contesting parties and leaders are in a race to attract the public and grab votes by using all plausible guises, emotional slogans convincing phrases, and publicity strategies to secure their victory in the crucial polls. Recently, the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) President Abdul Aleem Khan announced that following a victorious election outcome, his government would take on the responsibility of covering electricity bills for up to 300 units. He also reiterated the party's commitment to serving the people, transcending political boundaries, and providing employment and recreational opportunities for the youth at the constituency level. Meanwhile, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has crafted a comprehensive 9-point agenda to steer its election campaign, that encompasses strategic measures to reduce government and administrative expenditures, increase income, enhance productivity, and introduce reforms to the tax system. The PML-N's agenda includes initiatives to address the rising costs of energy, electricity, and gas, and the inclusion of reforms for government institutions incurring losses including agriculture, judiciary, and the justice system in the country. Weeks ago, the PPP Chairman announced an increase in the salaries of government employees, upgradation in minimum wage, and a provision of assistance under the BISP program. Earlier, the PTI leadership conceived the idea of 5 million jobs, several hundred thousand homes for low-income households, and the creation of a better Pakistan on the model of Riaseat-e-Madina but failed to implement its manifesto after coming to power.

Historically, the Party's manifesto, leaders' legacy, and emotional slogans play a crucial role in election campaigns as those concise, memorable phrases encapsulate a candidate's message, party's vision, or promises with its voters and the general public. The party's electoral signs and slogans aim to resonate with voters, create an emotional connection, and leave a lasting impression. Thus, manifestos together with slogans complement broader campaign themes, reinforcing key talking points and serving as a rallying cry for supporters.

Although slogans are powerful tools, they ideally reflect the candidate's authentic vision and party's pro-public legacy if they are supported by substantive policies or actions of the leaders' which absolutely disappeared in the case of Pakistani political groups and their high-ups. Over the decades, Pakistani leaders used unreal and imaginative themes to exploit public needs and play with the public psyche paving their way to the Parliament and power. This is the reason that the PPP could not provide the public with Roti, Kapra, and Makan in the past five decades, and other political groups also traded the basic needs of the poor during the election season and often used to forget the masses until the next polls.

Exploitation of public needs in politics often occurs when politicians prioritize their agendas, interests, or those of specific groups over the genuine needs of the public they serve. This might involve promising solutions or policies to address pressing issues without genuine intent or action, using public needs as a tool for political gain, or neglecting certain crucial needs and ground realities altogether. Often politicians use public money to boost their politics and attract voters through the distribution of development funds, and provision of undue subsidies, etc., as IPP President Aleem Khan announced regarding the provision of free of cost electricity up to 300 units, the same offered by the Hamza Shehbaz government in Punjab last year before provincial polls and the PTI extended massive subsidies on fuel and electricity during the last year of its government in the country. All those measures were dual-edge weapons and sweet poison for the national economy, the country, and the public who paid a heavy price for those politically motivated policies of the past rulers.

Addressing the exploitation of public needs in politics requires transparency, accountability, and genuine commitment from public leaders to prioritize and address the concerns and well-being of the public. It also involves civic engagement, holding representatives accountable, and advocating for policies that genuinely serve the public's interests. Meanwhile, political groups and leaders must weigh their policies vis-a-vis their promises to the public vis-a-vis the ground realities and their intent to service delivery to the masses so, that poor hearts do not scratch if their leaders betray them in the future.

Illegal migration, a human tragedy

A boat loaded with scores of migrants sank off Libya's coast on Saturday resulting in 61 deaths and several missing those believed to be dead because of ruthless waves of seawater. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the unfortunate boat left Libya's Zuwara port to reach Italy's eastern coast but met an accident in the beginning of its dangerous journey within Libyan territorial waters in the Mediterranean sea.

Presently, a mass exodus of people from across Asia, Africa and Latin America is currently underway toward wealthy nations in Europe, North America and Australia. Millions of migrants move through the dangerous sea and land routes, across mountainous terrains in Eastern Europe, Brazil, and Mexico, while dozens of refugees ships/boats illegally land on Italian and Spanish shores or used English Channel to drop/off load illegal migrants on coastal regions of European nations who are very frustrated of these uncalled guests from poor countries. Although, multiple carnages of mass killings, border shootings, and ship swamps occur every year that cost thousands of lives of innocent migrants in the Adriatic/ Mediterranean seas and mountainous jungles in Brazil and Mexico. Meanwhile, a majority of western nations are rapidly adopting anti-migration legislation and protective measures to prevent this mass influx of people into their nations, yet this illegal mass movement of the people is not coming to an end.

In fact, poverty, unceasing armed conflict, ethnic and religious rivalries, and violence immensely contribute to legal and illegal migration from least developed nations, where people leave their native countries in search of economic opportunities and peaceful life in developed western nations. Hence, the majority of the masses living in underdeveloped and disadvantaged regions risk their life in reaching prosperous destinations because their leaders fail in providing those amenities which are easily available to third rate citizens in western nations. It is a bitter fact, awful reality and a matter of shame for the leaders who enjoy all privileges attached with high offices but do not serve the public who elect them to rule the nation.

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The balancing act...



When it comes to Israeli-led ‘war on terror’, follow the money

Antony Loewenstein

IT is easy to get distracted by US officials pledging to rally support for a "humanitarian pause" and reducing the number of civilian casualties in Israel's bombardment of Gaza. But what matters is the actions of the Biden administration, not empty platitudes. In early November, the US State Department approved a \$320m sale of guided bomb kits, reportedly assisting Israel to more precisely hit targets in Gaza. According to The New York Times, "Modern militaries generally add the guidance systems on their bombs with the goal of minimizing civilian casualties, although the damage can still be devastating, especially in urban areas."

The United Nations and every major human rights group in the world have routinely condemned Israeli actions in Gaza, along with the Hamas barbarism on October 7, and accused the Israeli army of potentially committing war crimes. Human Rights Watch has rightly called for a suspension of all weapons transfers to Israel and Hamas. The spectre of 9/11 and the catastrophic response by the US after that fateful September day 22 years ago hangs over Israeli actions in the last month.

US President Joe Biden, in remarks in Israel on October 18, said, "After 9/11, we were enraged in the United States. And while we sought justice and got justice, we also made mistakes." Calling some US actions after 9/11 "mistakes" is the height of imperial arrogance. During the Bush administration and beyond, invariably the most destructive US presidency in the 21st century, there was a worldwide torture campaign, the creation and expansion of the detention centre in Guantanamo Bay, the illegal invasion of Iraq, the use of black sites for extraordinary rendition and the death of nearly five million people, according to Brown University's Cost of War Project. Today, Israel is also filled with anger and vengeance and does not care one iota about the death of Palestinian civilians. Many in the

N Netanyahu-led government have expressed genocidal intent towards the entire Palestinian population. Most in the Israeli military and public are celebrating the physical abuse of Palestinians. Amid an atmosphere that is remarkably similar to the US after 9/11, the Israeli "war on terror" is taking shape.

With resounding approval from the general public, the Israeli army has undertaken systematic carpet bombing of the Gaza Strip, dropping in a month more than 25,000 tonnes of explosives, the equivalent of two nuclear bombs. The

has handed out thousands of weapons to settlers, with more potentially on the way, leaving Palestinians even more exposed than before to deadly violence, with no legitimate authority able to protect them. In the months and years ahead, Israel will likely launch a global assassination drive to track, target and kill Hamas leaders and key backers, reminiscent of the US's own campaign of so-called targeted killings after 9/11. Israel's former intelligence head, Amos Yadlin, has confirmed this inevitable plan of worldwide vengeance.

Many allege serious physical abuse and arbitrary detention. Palestinians from Gaza, who had worked in Israel, were also arrested and tortured before being released back to Gaza. Violence by Israeli settlers and soldiers has also surged in the occupied West Bank. More than 200 Palestinians have been murdered, many by live ammunition, as far-right Israeli settlers are taking the opportunity to terrorise the Palestinian population while the world's attention is fixed on Gaza.

bombardment of the small enclave mirrors the US air campaigns that used an extraordinary amount of ordnance on Iraq and Afghanistan over two decades, leaving behind immense devastation.

There are already reports that Israel is also stepping up the use of torture against detainees. Since October 7, its forces have rounded up thousands of Palestinians, including children, in the occupied West Bank. Many allege serious physical abuse and arbitrary detention. Palestinians from Gaza, who had worked in Israel, were also arrested and tortured before being released back to Gaza. Violence by Israeli settlers and soldiers has also surged in the occupied West Bank. More than 200 Palestinians have been murdered, many by live ammunition, as far-right Israeli settlers are taking the opportunity to terrorise the Palestinian population while the world's attention is fixed on Gaza.

The Israeli government

But Israel's "war on terror" will not be only about revenge, just as the US's was not. The Israeli arms industry has been thriving in recent years, with a record \$12.5bn in sales in 2022, double the figure from one decade ago. In the last year, 24 percent of arms went to Arab states, including Bahrain, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates. According to the Israeli Defence Ministry's own figures, the number of countries buying Israeli drones has jumped 40 percent in the last three years, munitions have grown by 45 percent and spyware and related cyber-equipment soared from 67 to 83 countries in 2022.

As I write in my book, The Palestine Laboratory, Israel has used both the endless occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, along with the siege on Gaza, to "battle-test" ever-evolving new forms of repression and surveillance. These offensive tools are then marketed

and sold to the majority of nations on the planet. In this context, the current war on Gaza will certainly be good for business. The Israeli army's social media team is already proudly promoting the first time in battle use of the Elbit-made Iron Sling, a mortar designed to hit Hamas rocket launching sites. This is a war for a local and global public audience as well as potential foreign buyers looking to build up their arsenal.

Israel is also likely hoping to expand the sale of its high-tech military and intelligence tools. Even Israeli spyware company, NSO Group, mired in scandals for years, is looking to get in on the action, pitching themselves to Washington as an essential part of this new "war on terror". In its assault on Gaza, the Israeli army has boasted about using artificial intelligence (AI) in combat to "produce reliable targets quickly and accurately". For years, Israel has claimed that it is a pioneer in AI-enabled warfare but there is no evidence that it has reduced civilian casualties while using it. The current death toll of more than 12,000 people in Gaza - the vast majority of them civilians - certainly does not lend credence to this claim.

In the occupied West Bank, AI is used to deepen the complete monitoring and control of Palestinians. It is not a liberating technology in Palestine. It is the complete opposite. Israel's pursuit of an ethno-nationalist agenda endangers both Palestinians and critical Jews within the country and across the world. Israel remains an inspiration for huge swathes of the global right and far right, from India to Hungary, in building a lose global coalition of nations opposed to immigration, multiculturalism and abiding by human rights norms.

With Israel claiming that it is fighting a war between so-called Western values and "barbarism", the decimation of Palestinians' lives and livelihoods in Gaza is a sign of an increasingly erratic and wild Israeli state. And yet, as it embarks on a dark and bloody "war on terror", the Western world is supporting it every step of the way.

Britain is paying deadly price for telling public to ‘protect NHS’

Fraser Nelson

ONE of the most controversial slogans during the lockdowns was telling people to stay home to "protect the NHS". This was deeply resented by actual NHS chiefs, who saw this as a hideous inversion of their duty. "The NHS is there to protect people, not the other way around," one told me at the time.

He had another fear: that asking people to "protect" the NHS by not using it was the exact opposite of the message they should be giving. In pandemics, the risk is that people avoid everyday healthcare - and that kills people as surely as the virus. So it was to prove. We know, now, that there were 8 million fewer GP appointments in the years after the first lockdown. So what happened to these people? The trajectory of the NHS waiting list was always going to depend on the answer. If they all returned over the next two years, the waiting list would peak at about 12 million. If only half did, then 8.5 million. Now, it seems to have peaked at about 7.7 million - suggesting just a third of those missing patients came to seek help.

Rishi Sunak may now fulfil his promise to cut waiting lists, but only because the system never managed to find so many of those who need and deserve care. This may help explain why the weekly death figure is, even now, still far higher than the pre-pandemic trend. This year so far, an astonishing 32,000 more have died in the UK than would be expected from the five-year average. Yvonne Doyle, a former medical director of Public Health England, blames "an underlying pandemic of ill health", driven by "highly-preventable conditions" like heart disease, diabetes and liver disease.

She didn't mention the other problem: cancer diagnoses. There were always concerns that Covid would take priority over cancer care, but these were literally laughed off by Chris Whitty. "This is sometimes said by people who have no understanding of health at all," he breezily informed a parliamentary committee. "Usually because they want to make a political point." So even he, a professor of public health, had come to see basic questions as being politically motivated - rather than a genuine concern about what was going on. And what was going on? We now know. NHS cancer screening programmes were being postponed and diagnostic tests reduced. Diagnosis and starting treatment were hit by long delays. This, in turn, hit prognosis rates and mortality rates. The victims tend to be younger. Most Covid deaths were among the over-80s. But those hit by the cancer issue now are mainly women in their 60s and 70s (for breast and colon cancer) and men in their 40s and 50s (for prostate cancer).

In the summer, an Oxford University study estimated there have been 62,000 fewer cancer diagnoses than would be expected in the pre-pandemic trend. It called for urgent action, including targeted screening programmes to find the missing patients and reduce the backlog. The NHS says this is happening, but signs of progress are scant. In any ordinary situation, there would be an all-out campaign to try to identify them, given how many

thousands of lives are still waiting to be saved. The NHS can still work very quickly: I had a cancer scare a while ago and was lying under a brand-new CT scanner within 10 days.

Three-quarters of patients are seen within two weeks of an urgent referral which, while far from the target, still shows a system that's waiting to serve lost patients. While the NHS insists it is catching up, like the "ghost" school pupils, reaching many of them seems to be beyond the capabilities of government. There's a similar story around the world. Australia and New Zealand had minimal Covid casualties but imposed strict lockdowns and they can now see the consequences. Their cumulative "excess death" figures are creeping up as high as Britain's, from similar issues: more people dying of preventable causes. And lockdown-free Sweden? So far, it seems to have recorded fewer cumulative "excess deaths" than any other country in the developed world.

Sweden, too, had a significant cancer hit - which shows how pointless it is to blame lockdown for all such problems. When a pandemic strikes, people panic and stay at home anyway. They avoid A&E departments and GP clinics through fear of infection: this, of course, raises obvious health risks. This is why, rather than amplifying fear, Swedish health officials tried to counteract it by asking people to keep using the health service and keep going out. "Physical activity is good for public health," ran the official message when the virus was at its peak. "Sports and exercise should, therefore, continue."

This is what Britain's message should have been, from the very start. Instead we amplified fears of NHS collapse which were, at first, bogey men conjured up by badly-wrong models and then used to enforce lockdown compliance. The full consequences of this fear messaging were never considered. I knew an official who worked on the campaign at the time who was appalled at how they only ever assessed the impact of reducing Covid contacts - and never tried to work out the side-effects, such as putting people off going to the doctor. The fact that the NHS coped so well during Covid is, even now, kept a secret. On peak Covid, April 12, 42 per cent of ventilator beds were lying unused. This figure should have been shouted out at the time to shore up confidence in the system. "Covid is on the way down," Matt Hancock could have said. "And even at its peak, the NHS had four times as many empty beds as normal. Our health service is not in danger of collapse and doesn't need protecting. It's here to protect you and it's vital that you keep using it."

Dr Doyle is quite right to say that the Covid inquiry should look at "excess deaths" and consider it a pandemic in its own right. But we have all seen enough of the inquiry's trivia-obsessed questioning to know this will never happen. Another public health agency should pick this up, though, for a simple reason. Far too many Brits are still dying, every single week, from preventable causes. The surest way to avoid repeating the old mistakes is for someone, somewhere to ask why.

The Telegraph

Telling countries not to be poor is bad climate advice

Mark Gongloff

IF you hired a financial adviser and the first nugget of wisdom for you was "Stop being poor," then you could probably fire that adviser. Oh, and meanwhile, the adviser's family owes you a fortune. That's a bit how developing nations should feel about the IMF at the moment.

The International Monetary Fund and World Bank held their annual meetings in Marrakesh, Morocco, recently. Ahead of those, the IMF released a paper arguing countries should balance fighting climate change - a pricey endeavor, at least at the front end - with avoiding debt. It may not seem like terrible advice, but it ignores some real-world complications.

For one thing, a key ingredient in the IMF's secret formula for beating both climate change and debt is raising taxes, basically. The IMF suggests

governments put a high price on carbon emissions to raise the revenue they need to address climate change without breaking the bank. Expensive carbon, along with other regulatory goads and incentives, will lure private financing and inspire companies to invest in reducing their emissions, the IMF says, sparing governments most of the cost of going green.

A big, obvious problem with this trick is that jacking up carbon prices, while absolutely the right thing to do, is often politically toxic. This is especially true in the US, which left \$754 billion in potential fossil-fuel tax revenue on the table last year, the IMF estimated recently. That's a huge subsidy for the industry, amounting to more than 10% of the world's \$7 trillion in total fossil-fuel subsidies.

Eliminating those lavish, unnecessary perks would indeed recoup a lot of revenue that could go a long way toward fighting climate change and avoiding debt.

But if the world's leading economy refuses to do it, then how eager should poor economies be to fall on that grenade? And how much revenue could they actually raise if they did? Speaking of debt, developing countries already have far too much of it, often at exorbitant interest rates. The debt-service payments of the world's poorest countries alone rose to \$70 billion last year, according to a recent Brookings Institution estimate. To put that number in perspective, consider that developed countries have promised to give \$100 billion a year to these nations to fight climate change. Developing countries are spending 70% of that amount on interest payments alone. Maybe that vigorish trickles down to the climate-change fight

eventually, but there's got to be a better way.

In fact, there is: Advanced economies and China - which continues to declare itself a developing nation and therefore exempt from developed-nation responsibilities - can help by forgiving or restructuring these debts. If creditors balk at wiping debts clean, then they should at least try alternatives such as debt-for-nature swaps, in which loans are forgiven if the benefits go toward environmental efforts. And if debt abolition is out of the question, then advanced economies could at least finally deliver on their promises to help the developing world mitigate and adapt to climate change. So far, they have never met that \$100 billion annual aid promise, made in Paris in 2015. At a climate in meeting in Bonn, Germany, last week, developed nations

managed to raise just \$9 billion to top up the United Nations' Green Climate Fund. The US didn't contribute a penny. It's galling to hear the gatekeepers of the global economy sniff about fiscal responsibility when the elite nations that bankroll them won't live up to their own responsibilities.

Meanwhile, the private financiers the IMF says are so critical to developed nations have been even more disappointing. Governments and development banks have consistently failed to lure private money at anywhere near the rate they once hoped. Private lenders tend to cling to "middle-income countries with relatively conducive enabling environments and low-risk profiles," said a recent report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. While advanced nations are responsible for the bulk of

planet-heating carbon emissions so far, developing ones bear the brunt of the catastrophes that result. Climate change accounted for \$143 billion in weather-related damages around the world every year, a recent study in Nature Communications estimated. The costs of such disasters average roughly 1% of gross domestic product per year for poor countries, compared with 0.2% for wealthy countries.

People in developing countries have the same right to safety and rising living standards as people in developed ones. Wealthy nations claim they want clean energy to drive that development. But that means they'll have to accept more of the financial burden of cleaning up the mess they have made. However expensive this might seem in the short term, the long-term costs of doing nothing will only keep rising.

The Japan Times

The ICC prosecutor needs to break his silence on Israel-Palestine

Mark Kersten

THE world is once again witnessing mass atrocities committed against civilians in Palestine and Israel. The scenes are heartbreaking and horrific. They demand a response based not on furthering more violence and suffering but on fostering justice and accountability. There is only one independent, international institution that could investigate and prosecute these international crimes: the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The ICC has jurisdiction over the territory of Gaza and international crimes committed by Palestinian factions, including Hamas. In 2021, ICC's Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) opened an official investigation into the situation in Palestine. This came in the wake of the OTP's determination that "war crimes have been or are being committed by Palestinian and Israeli actors in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip".

Among those ongoing crimes that the ICC can and should investigate are the deliberate targeting of civilians, taking them captives, as well as indiscriminate bombing campaigns. In addition, there is a clear and obvious risk that some of Israel's planned conduct may amount to collective punishment - punishing the broader Palestinian population for Hamas's atrocities - which is a war crime under the Geneva Conventions. A United Nations inquiry commission continues to collect evidence of atrocities committed in Israel and Palestine and has recently stated that "there is already clear evi-

dence that war crimes may have been committed in the latest explosion of violence in Israel and Gaza". Human Rights Watch has also described war crimes committed on both sides and noted that such atrocities would continue "so long as human rights and accountability are disregarded".

In response to this most recent spate of atrocities, the OTP issued a statement replying to journalist Alice Spier. It said the prosecutor's investigation is ongoing, that the current conflict falls under the ICC's jurisdiction, and invited those with "relevant information" to send it to the court. That is good, but not good enough. Why is ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan silent in the face of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Israel and Palestine? No matter what the prosecutor says or does, the ICC alone cannot stop the violence in Palestine and Israel. But he and the court have a role. Beyond investigating ongoing international crimes and issuing arrest warrants for those most responsible for atrocities in the situation in Palestine, the prosecutor should clearly and unequivocally condemn the violence and promise to address it with all of the powers available to him.

In office since 2021, Prosecutor Khan appears convinced that symbolic actions are not worth it. As a result, statements by him deploring violence or warning parties that they could be investigated and prosecuted by the ICC are rare. But they have been issued in the past, including in February

2022, when Khan announced that he was closely watching events in Ukraine. Did his words stop the violence and Russian aggression? No. Did it matter? Absolutely. Even if pronouncements condemning atrocities and warning perpetrators are symbolic, such gestures matter. Being the victim or survivor of an atrocity can be extremely isolating. Strong statements from the ICC prosecutor can demonstrate solidarity and indicate that the court is on the side of those whose basic human rights are being violated. They remind the world that the court is watching and that it has a role to play. It signals that the ICC is relevant and that the lives of those being murdered, starved, raped, bombed, and kidnapped matter. It might not deter such atrocities, but it is always worth trying.

What may also explain Prosecutor Khan's reluctance to speak out on atrocities committed in Israel and Palestine is his view that he prefers to focus on situations and investigations where there is a high probability that accountability can be delivered. Indeed, this was the reason why he "deprioritised" his investigation into alleged war crimes committed by US forces in Afghanistan. But then Khan issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin, a sitting head of state who is unlikely to be arrested or held accountable any time soon. Going after the Russian president was the right thing to do, but it went against the purported strategy of focusing on investiga-

tions in situations where the likelihood of arrest and therefore accountability was high. Given the extent of Western opposition to the ICC's investigation into Palestine, Khan might therefore believe that it is not worth it to act. He would be wrong. As in Ukraine, evidence of mass atrocities committed in Palestine and Israel is ample. No matter their political postures on the conflict, no one denies this basic fact. Victims and survivors of war crimes and crimes against humanity everywhere deserve justice and accountability. They deserve to know whether the ICC is on their side. That cannot happen if the prosecutor remains silent and inactive in the face of mounting evidence of international crimes being committed.

Speaking up and acting is also in the ICC's interest - even if it won't secure arrests or prosecutions in the near term. Whether rightly or wrongly, there are many who hold suspicions that the ICC prosecutor would prefer to focus on Ukraine, where Western support is greater than the situation in Palestine. It is in Khan's interests - and the interest of the court - to dispel them of that notion. Unlike many other international organisations, the court matters in the context of the situation in Palestine. If the prosecutor does not speak up or act in the face of such grievous crimes as are currently being committed, he risks irrelevancy in precisely the kind of situation of mass atrocity that it was created to respond to. So, to you, Mr Khan: Your voice matters. Please use it. Your office matters. Please act.

The battle of ideologies and a changing world order

Ramzy Baroud

CLEARLY, we live in an era of global conflict. The challenge is knowing where we are heading. There are the ideologues who see the world only in the language of black and white, thus approaching conflict through a zero-sum game mindset. It is that kind of thinking that often leads to a bipolar world order. There are also the realists who understand the world essentially as a battleground between competing global powers. This is how multipolar worlds are often formed.

And a third approach, which, for now, persists within the realm of intellect, envisions a just world that does not cater to the interests of the powerful at the expense of humanity. Once, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) served as a model for this kind of thinking. Starting in February 2022, however, the Russia-Ukraine war abruptly forced a rethink, especially among nations in the Global South that have justifiably felt wrongfully treated in the years of US-Western global supremacy. Countries like Venezuela, Cuba and Algeria rushed to welcome the return of the great Russian ally. For them, an old world order was being restored.

Countries like Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger seemed ready to ditch their Western allies, namely France, with the hope of joining the Russian camp. For them, the prospect of a better world order was at hand. And a third group remains undecided, undergoing political struggles within their own national borders or regions, for example, Sudan.

From a strict geopolitical analysis, it is only 'natural' for the United States and its European allies to try to maintain their political dominance over the world. Sharing global resources might seem like a noble

idea, but global competition is really predicated on egalitarian principles. Equally, China and Russia did and will continue to expand their economic, military and strategic domains. No economic expansion is possible without such a pursuit. The conflict arises because, while new powers are expanding, old powers are fighting to block their strategic enlargement. Washington continues to resort to the same zero-sum strategy of yesteryears. A quick read of statements made recently by US President Joe Biden indicates that the US is not yet prepared to coexist with the global shifts. In a speech at the Oval Office on October 20, Biden spoke a language that perhaps only Americans can fully comprehend:

"We have to remember one thing: We're the United States of America, for God's sake. Think about it. We're the United States." For the rest of the world, this could only mean one thing: the US' claim to world dominance is based on the sheer virtue of the very existence of the US as a country. For many nations, this logic is implausible. But Biden's words are a reshuffle of similar statements made by past US presidents, secretaries of state and numerous top US officials throughout the years. "We are (...) the essential nation. We are the essential nation," Biden repeated in his address to the nation, this time citing a previous statement made by former Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright. The 'essentiality' here is hard to fathom, let alone analyse. For the powerful, the world is run through sheer interests. For the weak, solidarity is a critical factor. Oddly enough, it was former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger who is often quoted as saying that

"America has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests." In other words, American allies - or French, or British allies for that matter - will simply cease to be so if they realise that such an alliance is no longer essential to their national interests, or to the well-being of their peoples. Compare recent statements made by Biden to those made by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

First, Biden. The US President wants to maintain the old world order, based on the following logic: "American leadership is what holds the world together. (...) American alliances are what keep us, America, safe. American values are what make us a partner that other nations want to work with." Second, Putin. The Russian President understands what countries like Niger, Brazil and Iraq are looking. Hence, in his speech at the 2022 Moscow Conference on International Security, he said that the new "multipolar world" must be "built on international law, on fairer relations, that opens up new opportunities to combat common threats." Xi, as well, knows that this is not a battle of 'values', but of interests that are based on the respect for the sovereignty of nations and their collective quest for economic prosperity. "Ideological confrontation, geopolitical rivalry and bloc politics are not a choice for us," Xi said on Oct. 18, in a speech at the opening of the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing. The Global South understands precisely what these words mean. While some nations have already made up their mind regarding where they belong in this new world order, others are still watching and listening, hedging their bets, in anticipation of radical changes that will surely occur.

Gulf News

America back to playing regional cop in Middle East

Marwan Bishara

AS Israel wages genocidal war against the Palestinian people in Gaza, the United States is back to playing regional cop in the Middle East. The Biden administration has warned regional players against attacking its foremost ally and deployed not one but two aircraft carriers to back up its words. Washington also dispatched Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin to reinforce the message to state and non-state actors alike.

The US envoys doubled down on equating Hamas to ISIL (ISIS) to emphasise the brutality of the October 7 attack and make clear that there is no diplomatic solution to pursue, only a military one. The analogy with ISIL goes a long way to providing Israel with carte blanche to wage a "long and painful war" against Gaza. The Biden administration has rejected Arab calls for de-escalation or a ceasefire, rendering the US complicit in present and future Israeli war crimes.

It has also demanded from Arab governments and the Palestinian Authority to unequivocally condemn Hamas. Most have refused, with the exception of Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. US pressure, however, managed to get the Arab League foreign ministers to release a watered-down statement after an emergency meeting in Cairo, equating Palestinian and Israeli actions for the first time by condemning the targeting of civilians on "both sides". Meanwhile, not a single one of the six Arab governments "at peace" with Israel even bothered to recall its ambassador or freeze its normalisation, let alone close its embassy.

But the sentiments of the Arab public could not be more different from their governments' official statements. Wherever protests have been allowed, crowds have filled squares in solidarity with Palestine. For years, poll after poll has highlighted the overwhelming Arab support for Palestine as the foremost Arab cause, and the growing hostility towards America, which is seen as a destabilising hegemonic force in the region.

In fact, there is clear synergy between the Palestinian and the broader Arab struggle for justice and freedom. As the New York Times has finally concluded in a recent article, "supporting the Palestinians in their struggle against Israeli occupation is associated by many Arabs and Muslims with a broader struggle against injustice and oppression". But the Biden administration continues to be blind to this reality. This was reflected in Blinken's insistence that Arab partners with contacts to Hamas use their leverage for the release of all the Israeli captives held in Gaza. A tall order, considering both Israel and the United States have shown no concern for the safety of Palestinian civilians as they publicly commit to crushing Hamas, once and for all.

There has been hardly any American mention of the Palestinians' plight during a week of vicious Israeli bombardment of Gaza, except in the context of them being used as "human shield" by Hamas. Only after meeting Arab leaders, did Blinken speak in vague terms about potential humanitarian assistance. As Israel warned of an imminent ground invasion, and gave 1.1 million Palestinians 24 hours to relocate from the northern to the southern part of the Gaza Strip, the Biden administration echoed Israeli calls to evacuate Palestinians to "safety" in the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula through the establishment of a "humanitarian corridor".

But for the Palestinians who have long suffered from the trauma of displacement, the "humanitarian corridor" is an Orwellian term that stands for another round of ethnic cleansing by way of resettling Palestinian refugees in tent cities in the Egyptian Sinai. As the devilous plan failed to gain traction in Arab capitals, Blinken began to push for displacing the Palestinians within the Gaza Strip. He suggested dispatching them into special "safe zones", another Orwellian invention to enable their expulsion from their homes. Soon enough, the immense suffering Israel's full blockade has caused may well send hundreds of thousands to the

border, looking for food and shelter, leaving Egypt no option but to take them in.

Obviously worried, Egyptian President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi lectured the US Secretary of State during their meeting in Cairo about the realities of the Middle East in front of the media, telling him that Israel's military response has gone beyond the right to self-defence, and warning that the liquidation of the Palestinian issue at the expense of neighbouring states will have repercussions across the Middle East. Bizarrely, as the US is offering Israel unconditional support, there is no sign that it is privy to its specific war plans, or its endgame. Hence, President Joe Biden advised the Israelis in a pre-recorded interview on Sunday against "a new occupation of Gaza", warning it would be "a big mistake".

But, instead of calling for de-escalation and a ceasefire, the Biden administration has recklessly paved the way for a second Palestinian "Nakba" - or catastrophe - in the name of crushing Hamas, all of which is destined to lead to greater regional instability, violence and hostility towards the US as the enabler of Israel's war crimes. As Blinken toured the Middle East, the Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian also visited a number of Arab capitals. Undeterred by US threats, he called on Israel to stop its attacks on Gaza and warned that the war could expand to other parts of the Middle East if Hezbollah joined the battle, and that would make Israel suffer "a huge earthquake". Hezbollah and Israel are already clashing around the Lebanese border.

After decades of costly US failures in the Middle East, both on the strategic and diplomatic levels, losing wars and failing to mediate peace, the US seems addicted to Middle East chaos.

The US naval buildup is risking another regional conflict and drawing America into another Middle East war, despite Biden's commitment to end forever wars. If the US must interfere directly in regional affairs, let it be for the cause of peace and justice, not war and genocide, starting in Gaza, Palestine.

Armenia, surrounded by enemies, must be brought out of Russia's shadow

Arshak Makichyan

WE always underestimate the power of propaganda and dictators. No one believed that Putin would start a full-scale war in Ukraine, but he did. Before that, Russia waged war in Georgia, Syria and Donbass. Now, weeks after seizing control over the breakaway Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan could be readying an invasion of southern Armenia proper, according to US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken.

It may happen as soon as in the coming weeks. It is rather difficult to react to news like this. I thought perhaps Azerbaijan is trying to distract us from the ethnic cleansing in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian name) that took place just a few weeks ago. These statements were later refuted, and it turned out that they were apparently only discussing theoretical possibilities. But as experience shows, dictators usually do not stop until they are resisted. And unfortunately, the threats are more than theoretical. They are real. On one side are Presidents Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Ilham Aliyev of Turkey and Azerbaijan, who demand the opening of a corridor linking Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhchivan and Turkey through the Syunik region in southern Armenia. On the other side stands President Vladimir Putin, who does not want Russia to lose influence in the region.

After the Armenian Genocide and the wars that followed, the independent First Republic of Armenia, which had an area twice the size of Armenia's current territory, was divided between Turkey and the Soviet "Union" (actually occupation). Now, unfortunately, the inheritors of these same empires are moving to solve the Armenian Question once and for all. And now Russian propaganda has started discussing war in Armenia as a way to compensate for the failures in Ukraine. It is simple street gang logic. Always strike first. If rebuffed, you always can attack someone else.

It is difficult to predict how this will play out. Perhaps Azerbaijan will

attack and Russia will again put itself forward as a peacekeeping force. But we already know the price of Putin's promises. Moscow and Baku violated the 2020 ceasefire by starting the blockade and military operation. As a result, 100,000 people were forced to leave everything and flee the lands where they had lived for 3,000 years to Armenia, a poor country with closed borders with most of its neighbors. This reminded many people of the first genocide, when Armenians were massacred and no one helped. Almost all Armenians say now that Russia betrayed Artsakh and Armenia, and the government has started to distance itself from Moscow. But this will not be the end of Armenia's troubles. Russian propaganda is trying to lay the groundwork for instability. One of Russian television's most influential propagandists, Vladimir Solovoyov, said a military operation in Georgia and Armenia would be good for Russia, as it would give Moscow a land connection with its wartime ally Iran.

Few people paid attention, but these are not empty threats. Russia still has a military base in Armenia, posing a threat to Armenian statehood. Armenians understand this. But they also understand their economic dependence on Russia as the largest economy in the region. Russia also uses soft power. Moscow had close ties with Armenia's former corrupt presidents, who maintain their platforms and managed to grow rich at the country's expense. But, unfortunately, perhaps because of Russia's influence, some of these corrupt officials like former President Robert Kocharyan have escaped jail. And there is, for example, Mika "Burger" Badalyan, a pro-Russian blogger who calls for a revolution in Armenia. His message is boosted by Solovoyov and the editor-in-chief of RT, Margarita Simonyan, who have promoted fundraisers for his activities. When he violates Armenian laws, the Russian Foreign Ministry intervenes for him, even though he is an Armenian citizen.

After Baku launched airstrikes against Stepanakert, these propagandists promoted protests against the Armenian government based on false claims. But the government in Yerevan did not fall, as Badalyan and his supporters failed to appreciate that activism needs organization to succeed. I am an activist myself, and have been to many protests in Russia. If it were not for the fact Moscow would exploit any power vacuum, I, as a soon to be Armenian citizen, would support the protests calling for change in Armenia. The government has made many mistakes in recent years, adopting populist tactics and saying Armenia was ready to recognize Baku's claims over Artsakh. But at least Pashinyan has started to take steps away from Russia, such as ratifying the Rome Treaty to bring Armenia under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. Escaping the influence of Russia may still prove difficult. There are currently more than 100,000 Russians living in Armenia, many of whom fled repression and mobilization in their home country. Armenia is one of the few democratic countries where Russians are allowed without a visa. They do not extradite people at the behest of Russia. Nor do they stop people entering for unspecified reasons, as Georgia does. But attitudes toward Russia will worsen every year, especially as the new arrivals drive up the cost of living. It is in the interest of all people who oppose Russian imperialism to build a civil society that can resist Putin's fascism.

As important as helping refugees from Artsakh is, that is only the first step. We have to fight for Armenia against Russian colonialism, which extends far beyond the borders of the Russian pseudo-federation. Now the Russian colonial movement is awakening across Russia's republics. And they are the key to mobilizing millions of people much less privileged than Alexei Navalny, who is of course a hero, Ilya Yashin and many

other good Russian politicians who have been thrown in prison. Do you know why the Russian opposition failed to stop the war? Because they never became a real civil movement that fought for equal rights for all parts of society. Instead, they behaved as if they were any other political party. Many Russians still struggle to understand what colonialism means to their neighbors. Before the war in Ukraine, I traveled to Georgia and visited the wonderful Museum of Soviet Occupation in Tbilisi. After I wrote that I dreamed about such a museum in Armenia, many "good" Russians came to my comments section to explain that nobody occupied Georgia and that Stalin was a Georgian. Moreover they, the "good Russians" that they are, tried to help their Soviet brother Armenia during the catastrophic Spitak earthquake.

It's a pity they didn't do something as simple as open Wikipedia to read the history of the Turkish and Soviet war against Armenia. History is repeating itself yet again. But I hope we can still prevent the worst from happening. To do so Armenia would need military support from the West and sanctions against Azerbaijan. The Armenian diaspora, including in Russia, will be essential for this. Armenia may be an independent state, but it will be very difficult to wrench itself free from Russia's zone of influence. Putin still has a lot of instruments of pressure on Armenia. And rest assured, he and his dictator friends will continue to threaten Armenian democracy. That democracy, our mountains (though Mount Ararat, our national symbol, has long been controlled by Turkey), our lives and our history are the only things we have left. Armenia needs allies now who can be trusted. I dream that the country will finally gain true independence and that the world will not let the empires of Russia and Turkey occupy Armenia again. I hope that a miracle will happen. But even if the war does not start tomorrow, we have a huge job ahead of us to save Armenia from the threats it faces on multiple sides.

Gulf News

A nation in crisis: Examining America's deepening faultlines

What is going on in the USA? Those were the exact words penned to me on a recent WhatsApp message by my cousin Abdulaziz. Now Abdulaziz is no ignoramus when it comes to America, having spent a considerable number of years there and graduated from the prestigious Stanford University in California.

He displayed concern over recent trends in American politics citing the indictment of Hunter Biden, President Joe Biden's son, the drive towards impeachment of the President by members of the US Congress, the never-ending saga of an ex-President, and the multitude of legal cases against him, and finally the overthrow of Kevin McCarthy, an elected Speaker of the House of Congress by a small group of members of his own party. Indeed, just perusing these headlines would prompt most of us who have spent some time in the US for studies to wonder if there are indications that America is indeed on the decline and that the biggest challenge to their supremacy is being demonstrated by a great power to the east, China.

While I do have my own views on the subject, and I do qualify to put forth a credible argument, I did not want to sway Abdulaziz with

the opinion of an outsider looking in. And so, I turned to several contacts, born and raised Americans, who could shed some light and offer an explanation to the question of what is happening to their country. The first individual, and I chose to use first names only as requested, is a political analyst in a think tank based outside Washington DC.

Charles, as he is known to his friends was very direct. "I honestly believe we are seeing the decline of the American empire as we know it." "This has been in the offing for several years, and events nowadays are leading to just that. There is a systematic breakdown in all principles that once made this country great, a land of the free and the home of the brave. But honestly today, those are just hollow words." When I asked him if some changes could reverse the flow of his thinking, he was pessimistic. "Much as I would want it, I'm afraid that the damage done is too deep to get the proper healing."

Jeremiah, a farmer in a Midwestern state blamed it all on the politicians. "My father and mother were Democrats and we grew up with strong democratic values. But what does the party stand for today?

They have gone so far to the left that I am finding it extremely distasteful. Our children are being exposed to a curriculum that is offensive by nature, our police are being neutered and I mean neutered, and as a result, crime has risen exponentially while all we keep reading is how our politicians are busy sending money to other countries to fight their wars."

"We need those dollars here in America, dollars that can go a long way to fund law enforcement and provide decent health care to the needy. We cannot continue being the world's bread basket when we cannot afford to feed our own. Look around. There are hundreds of thousands of homeless Americans and more are on the rise. And guess what? Crime will shoot up beyond the capability of law enforcers." Nancy, a business owner who recently moved from California to Arkansas teasingly asked me what the business prospects were here in Saudi Arabia, as she was considering closing lock, stock and barrel a business that she had built over eighteen years but could not function in the atmosphere of the Los Angeles metropolis. "My store is just a few steps from the famed

Tariq A. Al Maena



PSX witnesses bearish trend, loses 925 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Monday, losing 925.35 more points, a negative change of 1.40 percent, closing at 65,204.68 points against 66,130.02 points the previous trading day.

A total of 1,890,424,261 shares valuing Rs.24.595 billion were traded during the day as compared to 1,741,361,884 shares valuing Rs. 29.976 billion the last day.

Some 381 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 107 of them recorded gains and 264 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 10 remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 444,141,868 shares at Rs.1.90 per share, K-Electric with 392,747,456 shares at

Rs.5.83 per share and Cnergyico PK with 205,409,424 shares at Rs.5.90 per share.

Hoechst Pakistan witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.49.00 per share price, closing at Rs.1,249.00, whereas the runner-up was Mehmood Textile Mills with a Rs.25.00 rise in its per share price to Rs.525.00.

Rafhan Maize witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.250.00 per share closing at Rs9,750.00, followed by Sapphire Fibres with Rs.142.50 decline to close at Rs.1,175.50.

Rupee on recovery path: gains 05 paisa against Dollar

Pakistani Rupee on Monday witnessed the 5th consecutive recovery session as it gained 05 paisa against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs283.20 against

the previous day's closing of Rs283.25.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market stood at Rs 283.2 and Rs286 respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by Rs2.03 to close at Rs 309.35 against the last day's closing of Rs311.38, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen came down by 01 paisa and closed at Rs1.98; whereas a decrease of Rs2.02 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs359.53 compared to the last closing of Rs361.55.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 01 paisa each to close at Rs77.11 and Rs75.49

respectively.

Gold rates up by Rs.400 to Rs.217,200 per tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs400 and was sold at Rs 217,200 on Monday compared to its sale at Rs 216,800 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs 1,543 to Rs 186,214 from Rs 185,871 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs 170,696 from Rs 170,382, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram Silver remained stagnant at Rs 2,670 and 2,289.09 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$3 to \$2,043 from \$2,040, the Association reported.

PPL holds eye camps for underprivileged communities



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) has recently organized 25 free-of-cost eye camps which have benefitted nearly 27,000 underprivileged

locals residing around the company-operated Sui, Mazarani, Gambat South and Adhi fields in Balochistan, Sindh and Punjab. The camps were held between November 18 and December 13 in part-

nership with Al Shifa Trust Eye Hospital.

Together, more than 16,000 locals were screened and treated at various healthcare facilities and Basic Health Units in relevant districts around

PPL-operated fields. Around 9,000 were given glasses for vision correction and more than 1,500 patients underwent cataract surgeries.

The highest number of patients, around 10,000, were witnessed during the eye camps in Balochistan, at Public Welfare Hospital, Sui and District Headquarter Hospital, Dera Bugti. Besides, four camps were held in the vicinity of Adhi Field and 16 at government schools in Punjab benefitting 3000 students.

Further, eye camps are planned around Kandhkot in Sindh and in Dhok Sultan, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The annual PPL eye camps have reached out to marginalized communities in remote areas of the country and provided quality consultation, latest onsite surgical technology, and medicines.

Asian markets mostly down as Fed rate-cut rally fades

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian markets fell Monday as traders took a step back following last week's rally, with Federal Reserve officials looking to temper expectations the US central bank will cut interest rates several times next year.

Investors are also keeping tabs on the Bank of Japan's meeting this week, though recent speculation that it will shift away from its ultra-loose monetary policy has faded, with observers tipping a move in the new year.

Equities look set to end the year on a high after the Fed suggested it will begin loosening monetary policy after a string of data showed inflation coming down and the economy on course for a soft landing.

The Dow and Nasdaq hit record highs on Wall Street as tech firms surged, but the buying frenzy slowed Friday as investors took a step back, which analysts said was to be expected after the latest advances.

Asia struggled at the start of this week, with Hong Kong down more than one percent, while Tokyo, Shanghai, Sydney, Singapore, Mumbai, Bangkok, Taipei, Manila

and Jakarta were also in the red. Wellington and Singapore eked out small gains, however.

A number of Fed officials lined up last week to douse expectations they will slash rates next year. Some observers have predicted as many as six, but the bank's "dot plot" forecast saw three.

New York Fed chief John Williams told CNBC that "we aren't really talking about rate cuts", adding it was "just premature to be even thinking about" a March cut, which some experts have suggested.

"If we get the progress I'm hoping to see... of course it would be kind of natural... (to) move monetary policy over a period of years back to more normal levels".

Atlanta Fed boss Raphael Bostic said he foresaw two reductions from the third quarter, while his Chicago counterpart Austan Goolsbee warned that policymakers would be unlikely to move until they were convinced inflation was brought to heel.

The Bank of Japan's own decision is due Tuesday, and while there has been talk that it is about

to shift away from years of ultra-loose policy, analysts do not expect it to do so for a few months.

Officials have kept rates in negative territory and stuck to a policy of controlling bond prices in a bid to boost the economy, but with inflation rising and the yen struggling, they are now said to be shifting.

"The BoJ has little need to rush into making policy changes," said economists at Societe Generale. "But markets will be watching for any sign the board is willing to end negative rates or yield curve control."

China's benchmark interbank gold prices

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Shipping activity reported at the Port where three ships namely, MSC Prelude V, Stamina SW and Serengeti scheduled to load/offload Container, Rice and Gas oil, berthed at Container Terminal, Multi-Purpose Terminal and Oil Terminal respectively on Sunday.

Meanwhile two more ships, Clean Sanctuary and

mixed Monday

China's benchmark prices for spot interbank gold transactions were mixed Monday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System.

The benchmark price for gold that is 99.95 percent pure or above stood at 474.34 yuan (about 66.87 US dollars) per gram, up 0.03 yuan from the previous trading day, while the price for gold that is 99.99 percent pure or above stood 1.03 yuan to 474 yuan. Spot transaction prices on the interbank price inquiry market are allowed to rise or fall within 15 percent from the benchmark prices each trading day.

Court Notice

In the Court of Senior Civil Judge /Guardian Judge/Aala Allaga Qazi Buner at Daggar. Application No. 61/2 Institution. 15/12/2023. Date of hearing. 21/12/2023. Mst. Samelzsy Bibi VS General Public. Notice to General Public. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants (General Public) cannot be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore anyone concerned will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 21/12/2023 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Cargo volume of 51,084 tonnes, comprising 23,682 tonnes imports cargo and 27,402 tonnes export cargo carried in 1,114 Containers (151 TEUs Imports and 963 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 07 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them Edible oil carrier 'Sakizaya Star' & five more ships, MSC Pamela, Maersk Brooklyn, Al-Bida, Limra and Indigo Cefiro carrying Canola Seed, Container, LNG, LPG and Coal are expected to take berths at FAP, QICT, EETL, SSGC and PIBT respectively on today, while two more Container ships, Maersk Kinloss and Northern Javelin are due to arrive at Port Qasim on 19th December, 2023.



ISLAMABAD: Representatives of RIM and Mall of Murree signing an MOU.

CAD declines to \$1.6b in 5 months: SBP

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Current Account Deficit (CAD) has significantly slid down to \$1.16 billion during the first five months of the current fiscal year as compared to the deficit of \$3.26 billion during the same period of last year, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported Monday.

"Current Account Deficit improved significantly to \$1.16 billion in July-November FY24, from \$3.26 billion in July-November FY23," SBP posted on the social media website X (formerly Twitter).

On year-on-year basis, the CAD witnessed a surplus of \$9 million in November 2022 compared to a deficit of \$157 million in November 2023.

According to the latest SBP figures, the merchandise trade deficit during July-November (2023-24) was recorded at \$8770 million as compared to the deficit of \$13,427 million in July-November (2022-23).

Likewise, the services' trade deficit was recorded at \$1,124 million during FY2023-24 compared to the deficit of \$317 million during the corresponding period of last year.

The overall trade deficit in goods and services was recorded at \$9,894 million during the current fiscal year compared to the deficit of \$13,744 million during last year.

Meanwhile, the balance on primary income stood at negative 2,957 million against \$1,951 million last year, according to the SBP data.

BoR moving towards digitization: SMBR

LAHORE (APP): Chairing a review meeting on IT reforms, Senior Member Board of Revenue (SMBR) Nabil Javed has said that Board of Revenue (BoR) is moving towards digitization. BoR Member Colonies Muhammad Khan Ranjha, Member Tax Tariq Qureshi, Member IT (Information Technology), BoR Secretary Shafiqullah Mushtaq and Chief Settlement Commissioner, PLRA (Punjab Land Record Authority) Director General Saira Umar also attended the meeting on Monday.

SMBR Nabil Javed reviewed improvement in the land management system, settlement management system and land acquisition system, progress in land acquisition, e-library, IT-based land management registration system, and digitization of agricultural income tax.

He also issued instructions for timely completion of all projects and said there should be no delay in providing facilities to citizens, arguing that public confidence can be restored only through transparency. He warned that unnecessary delay in departmental affairs would not be tolerated.

Nabil Javed assured that the problems faced by the member IT would be resolved soon. The SMBR vowed to develop the Board of Revenue on modern lines, adding that digitization is very crucial in the modern era.

273 connections disconnected

F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 273 connections; Rs2.9 million fine imposed.

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 22 connections on illegal use of gas while another 15 on use of compressor and fine of Rs0.22 million have been booked against gas theft cases. The team of Rawalpindi disconnected 3 connections on illegal use of gas. During the operation in Islamabad team disconnected 5 connections on illegal use of gas. In Multan

the team disconnected 14 connections on use of compressor and 0.25 million booked against gas theft cases.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 50 connections on account of direct and illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 1.67 million have been booked against gas theft cases. The team also lodged one FIR against gas pilferers. The team of Abbottabad disconnected 2 connections on illegal use of gas.

In Sahiwal, the team disconnected three connections on use of compressor. In Sheikhupura 52 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 3 on compressor

use and amount of Rs 0.13 million booked against gas theft cases. The team of Bahawalpur disconnected 86 connections on illegal and direct use of gas and also imposed fine of Rs 0.376 million against gas theft cases. In Faisalabad the team disconnected 5 connections on illegal use of gas while another 2 on use of compressor.

The team disconnected 10 connections on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 0.11 million have been booked against Gas theft cases in Mardan. In Sialkot the team disconnected 1 connection on illegal use of gas and also imposed fine of Rs0.19 million against gas pilferers.

LSMI output declines by 0.44 per cent

ISLAMABAD (APP): Large Scale Manufacturing Industries (LSMI) in the country witnessed a negative growth of 0.44 percent during the first four months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period of year 2021-22, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

The provisional quantum indices of Large Scale Manufacturing Industries (LSMI) for October 2023 with the base year 2015-16 have been developed based on the latest data supplied by the source agencies.

On a year-on-year basis, PBS posted a decrease of 4.08% in the LSMI sector compared to the industrial output of October 2022, according to PBS data.

The main contributors towards overall negative growth of 0.44% are Food (0.61), Tobacco (-0.71), Textile (-3.12) Garments (3.98), Petroleum Products (0.49), Chemicals (0.22), Pharmaceuticals (1.66), Cement (0.42), Iron & Steel Products (-0.10), Electrical Equipment (-0.50) and Automobiles (-1.51) and Furniture (-1.84).

The production in July-October 2023-24 as compared to July-October 2022-23 has increased in Food, Beverages, Wearing apparel, Coke & Petroleum Products, Chemicals, Fertilizers, Pharmaceuticals, Non-Metallic Mineral Products, Machinery and Equipment, and Other Manufacturing (Football) sectors, while it decreased in Tobacco, Textile, Iron & Steel Products, Electrical Equipment, Automobiles, other transport equipment and furniture areas.

AKU-EB celebrates high achievers from region



F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Aga Khan University Examination Board (AKU-EB) hosted its High Achievers Ceremony to honour the outstanding academic accomplishments of students from the Sindh region. The event was hosted by Dr Sulaiman Shahabuddin, President, Aga Khan University, who welcomed students, parents and esteemed guests. The ceremony was graced by the esteemed presence of Mr. Amir S. Fancy, Chairman of Fancy Group, as the Chief Guest.

AKU-EB High Achievers recognised a total of 145 students from Sindh of whom 103 were female, and 42 male. This impressive achievement contributes to the overall tally [KS1] of 185 High Achievers in Pakistan, reflecting the dedication and commitment of students across the nation. With 132 female High Achievers compared to 53 males on a national level, the AKU-EB continues to witness a commendable

display of academic prowess among young women.

The event also highlighted the 10th Anniversary of the AKU-EB Bridge Scholarship, which is seen as a beacon of hope and opportunity for students to access quality education under the AKU-EB system. Rejoicing in the celebration, Mr. Amir S. Fancy invited students to dream big, emphasizing the role of service and giving back. Acknowledging the remarkable efforts of the high-achieving students, he invited them to embrace the journey of lifelong learning.

This year's results are also noteworthy in that AKU-EB is seeing an increasing number of High Achievers coming from outside of Karachi, including Hyderabad, Naushahro Feroze, Dadu, Larkana, Ubauro, Khairpur, and Sukkur. This is a testament of the impact of AKU-EB's efforts to improve access for talented youth across Sindh and Pakistan to achieve their potential. Embracing students'

efforts under the AKU-EB system, Dr Sulaiman Shahabuddin invited students to remember that no one succeeds on their own and that students should always remember those who stood by their side including their parents, teachers, peers, and the AKU-EB system. He asked High Achievers to, "Never stop having faith in your own abilities. Don't lose that powerful curiosity about the world and how it works that keeps you excited about learning; that keeps you reading outside of class; that keeps you asking: 'Why?' Why are things like that? And why can't they be different? Never stop working hard."

The AKU-EB High Achievers Ceremony not only celebrated academic success but also served as a platform to recognise the hard work, resilience, and intellectual growth of students in Sindh. The event brought together educators, parents, and students to applaud these exceptional individuals and inspire future generations to strive for excellence.

Court Notice

In the Court of Qaisar Khan Afridi Additional District Judge II/Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Daggar. Appeal. No. 6/6, Institution 22/7/2023. Date of hearing. 18/1/2024. Gohar Ali etc VS Adalat Khan etc. Notice to No. 4/1. Sartaj Ali Shah son of Sakhi Dad Shah resident of Amnawar tehsel Gagra district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendant can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendant will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 18/1/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

In the Court of Samina Sehah Afridi Judge XIII Bannu. Suit No.184/FC Institution No. 11.11.2023 Next date of hearing 14-01-2024 case title: Mst. Muskan VS Azeem Ullah. Notice to Azeem Ullah son Rabbani R/o Hinjal Nawab Tehsil & District Bannu. Presently U.A.E. Whereas in the above case titled the service of above defendant (s) is not possible through ordinary means, therefore, you defendant (s) is/are informed through this publication that on 14-01-2024 at 8.00 AM. You have to appear before this court either personally or through attorney or through counsel to pursue the suit noted above, otherwise, Ex-parte proceedings will be initiated against you.



In brief

Nadal will cope with Grand Slam

MELBOURNE (Reuters): Rafa Nadal has shown good progress in training since recovering from a hip injury but his coach Carlos Moya still worries about how the former world number one's body will hold up against the rigours of Grand Slam tennis. The 37-year-old suffered a muscle issue at Melbourne Park in January that wiped out his season but will return at Brisbane this month before playing in the Jan. 14-28 Australian Open where he won two of his 22 Grand Slam titles. The Spaniard, who had surgery in June, has said 2024 could be his final year on tour and has stepped up training in recent months in order to make a comeback and ensure he finishes his career on court. "Rafa's going to go from training, which he's doing very well, to competing. It's impossible to have the same conditions in training as in a match," Moya said in an interview with the ATP Tour. "Playing the best of five sets, win, rest, return to court two days later ... That's the doubt I have right now, especially for a Grand Slam. But we have time. If the Australian Open started tomorrow, it would be a real fear. "There's still a month left, a tournament before in Brisbane, demanding training ... I think all of this will put him in a position to be able to endure it. But now that's my fear." Nadal dropped out of the top 100 for the first time in 20 years earlier this season and has slipped to number 668 but is eligible for a protected ranking having been injured and not competing for at least six months.

ILT20 bans Naveen-ul-Haq

DUBAI (Agencies): Naveen-ul-Haq has been banned by the UAE's ILT20 for 20 months for breaching his player agreement with Sharjah Warriors when he "refused to sign the retention notice" for the second season of the tournament, to be played in January-February next year. The decision effectively bars Naveen from playing in the ILT20 in 2024 and 2025, but he has signed with Durban's Super Giants - owned by the group that owns IPL team Lucknow Super Giants, of which he is a part - in the South African SA20 league, which will be played almost concurrently with the ILT20. Warriors, who had signed Naveen on for the inaugural edition of the league in 2023, had "earlier this year sent him a retention notice on the same terms and conditions," an ILT20 statement said. "Sharjah Warriors approached the ILT20 to intervene in this dispute. The ILT20 first initiated a mediation process through an independent third-party mediator, however the mediation failed." The league's disciplinary committee, comprising ILT20 chief executive David White, head of security and anti-corruption Col Azam, and Zayed Abbas, member of the Emirates Cricket Board, heard the points of view of both Warriors and Naveen and examined the evidence before them before communicating their verdict. "We do not take pride in making this announcement but all parties are expected to comply with their contractual commitments and recognize that non-compliance can cause damage to the other party," White said. "Unfortunately, Naveen-ul-Haq failed to honour his contractual obligations with the Sharjah Warriors and as such the league had no option but to impose this 20-month ban on him."

Pakistan women create history, beat New Zealand in Super Over



ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan women's team created history in New Zealand once again when they defeated the hosts by three runs in the Super Over of the third ODI at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch late Monday.

This was Pakistan women's team's first win over White Ferns in their own backyard and only their second win in 17 matches. After Monday's win, Pakistan have jumped to the second position in ICC Women's

Championship with 16 points from 18 matches. Chasing 252 to win, Pakistan levelled the score on 251 for nine in their allotted 50 overs, according to information made available here by Pakistan Cricket Board.

Bismah Maroof, also declared player of the match, scored her 20th ODI half-century. She scored a 86-ball 68, which included five fours.

She knitted a 101-run partnership for the third wicket with Aliya Riaz (44, 84b, 4x4s) and 35-run partnership with captain Fatima Sana (36, 33b, 3x4s). Natalia Parvaiz (26, 23b, 1x4, 1x6) and an unbeaten knock from wicketkeeper-batter Najiha Alvi (23 not out, 26b, 1x4) helped the side reach 251.

In the Super Over, Pakistan scored 11 runs, courtesy of the first ball four hit by Aliya Riaz. In reply, despite being hit for a six by Sophie Devine, Sadia Iqbal kept her cool and clinched two wickets to lift Pakistan women's team to win by three runs.

Earlier, after opting to bat first, White Ferns scored 251 for eight in their allotted 50 overs. The opening pair of Suzie Bates and Isabella Gaze were back in the pavilion in the 15th over with 43 runs on the board. Captain Sophie Devine and Amelia Kerr got together and knitted a 56-run

partnership for the third wicket. Both Devine (29, 32b, 4x4s) and Kerr (77, 87b, 5x4s) were bowled by leg-spinner Ghulam Fatima, who ended-up with match figures of two for 59 in 10 overs.

She has now 18 wickets in the ICC Women's Championship 2022-25 from 10 outings. Nashra Sundhu, the left-arm spinner bagged two wickets too, giving away 59 overs and taking her tally of wickets to 19 from 13 matches.

Scores in brief:

Match Tied - Pakistan women beat New Zealand women in the Super Over

New Zealand 251-8, 50 overs (Amelia Kerr 77, Maddy Green 65 not out; Ghulam Fatima 2-59, Nashra Sundhu 2-59)

Pakistan 251-9, 50 overs (Bismah Maroof 68, Aliya Riaz 44, Fatima Sana 36, Natalia Parvaiz 26, Sidra Amin 24, Najiha Alvi 23 not out; Lea Tahuhu 2-30, Amelia Kerr 2-54)

Player of the match - Bismah Maroof (Pakistan)

Player of the series - Amelia Kerr (New Zealand).

Australia announce Test squad

PERTH (Agencies): Australia are on track to play an unchanged XI in the second Test against Pakistan in Melbourne, announcing a trimmed-down squad Monday with back-up fast bowler Lance Morris omitted.

The home side crushed the visitors by 360 runs inside four days at Perth on Sunday, with off-spinner Nathan Lyon taking his 500th wicket. Opener David Warner hit a battling 164 to ensure he retained his place for the Boxing Day Test in what is expected to be his farewell series.

The 37-year-old has indicated that the third Test in Sydney will be his last and had been under pressure after a lean run and with former fast bowler Mitchell Johnson saying he did not deserve a hero's farewell. Morris was released to play in the Big Bash League with pace spearheads Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood injury free and Scott Boland the first choice should a replacement be needed.

"Lance has been released for the Melbourne match but will stay prepared for Test cricket as he remains firmly in our plans for the summer, should an opportunity arise," said chief selector George Bailey. "Otherwise, the squad remains unchanged following the strong performance in Perth."

Australia squad: David Warner, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Mitchell Marsh, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins (capt), Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, Josh Hazlewood, Scott Boland, Cameron Green.

Kane hits 20th Bundesliga goal in record 14th game

LONDON (Agencies): Harry Kane scored twice to become the quickest player to ever reach 20 goals in his Bundesliga career as Bayern Munich beat fourth-placed Stuttgart.

England's Kane, in his 14th Bundesliga game, slotted Leroy Sane's pass into an empty net within 90 seconds. After Thomas Muller and Kim Min-jae had goals disallowed for offside, striker Kane headed in Bayern's second from close range. Kim netted the third with a header, his first goal for the German champions.

Kane has reached 20 league goals in his opening 14 Bundesliga games, demolishing the old record set by Hamburg legend Uwe Seeler, who took 21 games to reach that mark in the league's first season back in 1963-64.

Manchester City striker Erling Haaland, then of Borussia Dortmund, was next with 22 games in 2020. In a separate statistic, Kane is the second player ever to score 20 goals this quickly in a Bundesliga season, after Bayern and Germany legend Gerd Muller in 1968-69.

He moves four goals clear of the Bundesliga's second top scorer, Stuttgart's Serhou Guirassy, who barely had a chance at the Allianz Arena.

Bayern remain four points behind surprise leaders Bayer Leverkusen, who beat Eintracht Frankfurt 3-0 earlier on Sunday.

Xabi Alonso's side have not lost any of their 24 competitive games this season, a joint record for any German side from the start of a season - after Hamburg, who went on to win the title and European Cup in the 1982-83 campaign.



Shadab Khan ruled out of Pakistan T20 series against New Zealand

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan cricket team suffered a major blow ahead of the five-match T20I series against New Zealand as all-rounder and vice-captain Shadab Khan is unlikely to join the Men in Green due to an injury.

Shadab Khan, 25, sustained a foot injury in the recently-held National T20 Cup and has been sidelined since then. His participation in the upcoming five-match T20I series is highly unlikely and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) will look for the 25-year-old's replacement soon.

The PCB aims to announce the squad for

the New Zealand tour on December 25. PCB's selection committee consisting of Wahab Riaz, Kamran Akmal, Asad Shafiq, and Iftikhar Anjum will meet in the coming days and the top performers of the National T20 Cup will also be considered.

The Pakistan cricket team is currently in Australia to play a three-match Test series in the ongoing World Test Championship (WTC) 2023-25 cycle which will conclude on January 7. After the Test series, Pakistan is scheduled to play their first T20I match against New Zealand on January 12.

After Babar Azam stepped down as captain in all formats, Shaheen Shah Afridi was named the skipper of the shorter format by the PCB.

Tour schedule
First match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 12 January, Auckland
Second match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 14 January, Hamilton
Third match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 17 January, Dunedin
Fourth match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 19 January, Christchurch
Fifth match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 21 January, Christchurch.

Tiger Woods still believes he can win on PGA Tour

ORLANDO (Agencies): Tiger Woods believes he can still win on the PGA Tour but will only play one event per month in 2024 as he continues his recovery from ankle surgery.

The 15-time major champion has had a limited schedule since suffering a leg injury in a car crash in 2021. He carded a final-round 61 alongside his 14-year-old son Charlie at the PNC Championship in Orlando on Sunday. "If I'm able to practise and do the things I know I can do, and prepare, I know I can still do it," Woods said.

"I can still hit the golf ball. It's just a matter of prepping and get enough reps in and get enough work in and being right physically, and the

endurance capability of it.

"I haven't had the leg good enough where I've been able to compete and play a lot of rounds. "I can still hit the golf ball. I can still putt.

"Granted it's also putting it all together for 72 holes. That's the challenging part of it." Woods' last win on the PGA Tour was at the 2019 Zozo Championship in Japan, which saw him equal Sam Snead's record of 82 Tour victories.

He made his latest injury comeback at the Hero World Challenge in the Bahamas earlier this month, having withdrawn during the Masters in April before having ankle fusion surgery. The American says his ankle continues to hold up well, though he was able to use a golf cart

at the PNC Championship, something he is not allowed to do on the PGA Tour.

"A lot of things are aching a lot more than my ankle, which is the way it goes," said Woods, who turns 48 on 30 December.

"We've been working out hard, been able to recover. We've been training every day, which is great. "It's been nice to knock off a lot of the rust and some of the doubt that I've had because, quite frankly, I haven't hit a shot that counted in a long time." As well as playing alongside son Charlie, Woods' 16-year-old daughter Sam was caddy at the Ritz Carlton Golf Club as Team Woods finished tied for fifth at the 36-hole event formerly known as the Father/Son Challenge.

Man City to play Copenhagen in Champions League last 16 short on glamour ties

PARIS (AFP): Holders Manchester City were handed a tie against FC Copenhagen in Monday's draw for the Champions League last 16, from which the meeting of last season's runners-up Inter Milan and Atletico Madrid appears the standout tie.

Pep Guardiola's City, who are looking to retain the title they won in Istanbul last June, will be expected to comfortably get the better of the Danish side, who qualified from their group at the expense of Manchester United after beating the Red Devils 4-3 at home.

The clubs met in the group stage of last season's Champions League, with City winning 5-0 at home before being held to a 0-0 draw away at the Parken Stadium. Inter, the Serie A leaders, were one of the teams to avoid after finishing second in their group and their meeting with Atletico will see Diego Simeone, the coach of the Spanish club, come up against a team with whom he spent two years as a player in the late 1990s.

French champions Paris Saint-Germain, who have gone out in the last 16 in each of the last two seasons and in five of the last seven campaigns, were also braced for a tough draw having come second in their group behind



Borussia Dortmund.

They will therefore be relieved at being handed a tie against Real Sociedad, who topped their section above Inter but are appearing in the Champions League last 16 for the first time since 2003/04, when they were knocked out by Lyon. Barcelona's meeting with Italian champions Napoli is another standout tie, while Premier League leaders Arsenal will be expected to get the better of Porto and reach the quarter-finals for the first time since 2010.

"We want to try and go as far as possible, but we are very much concentrating on playing well, performing well and playing the best football we can, and then we'll see how far we go," Arsenal's sporting director, Edu, told the club's website. Sergio Conceicao's Porto finished level on points with Barcelona in their group but were ranked in second

place after losing both meetings with the Catalans.

Real Madrid will be heavily fancied against RB Leipzig, and Bayern Munich will be strong favourites against Lazio, a team they beat 6-2 on aggregate at the same stage of the competition in 2020/21. "We've had positive experiences with Lazio before," said Bayern captain Manuel Neuer.

"We'll go into the games as favourite but we won't allow ourselves to underestimate them." The other tie sees Dortmund come up against PSV Eindhoven, who are coached by former Borussia manager Peter Bosz and are through to the last 16 for the first time in eight years.

The first legs will take place in mid-February with the return matches in March. This season's Champions League final will be staged at Wembley in London on June 1.

Cummins leads stars up for grabs in big-money IPL auction

NEW DELHI (Agencies): Some of the world's top cricketers will go under the hammer in Dubai on Tuesday in the next auction for the lucrative Indian Premier League.

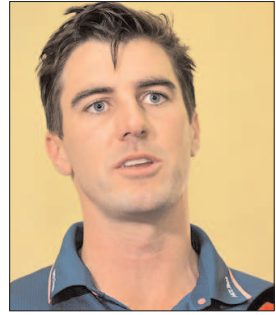
Players can start the bidding for their services at up to \$240,000 but the best will be snapped up for many times that.

This time the 10 IPL franchises will have a combined \$31.5 million to spend. The Twenty20 tournament, the richest in cricket, is expected to begin in March. With the players pocketing most of the fee, AFP looks at five stars who could hit the jackpot.

Cummins skipped this year's IPL because of a packed calendar but will make a triumphant return after taking Australia to World Cup glory in India.

The fast bowler silenced a crowd of 100,000 in the final in Ahmedabad when he bowled out Indian hero Virat Kohli and was widely lauded for his captaincy in leading Australia to the title. Cummins, 30, who previously made an auction record of \$2.17 million when he signed with the Kolkata Knight Riders in 2019, will enter with a top base price of \$240,000.

Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Mitchell Starc, Steve Smith and Sean Abbott will be among the other Australian World Cup winners in the hunt



for a payday.

The up-and-coming batting all-rounder of Indian origin made three centuries in his 578 runs at the World Cup for a strike rate of 106, along with five tournament wickets.

The 24-year-old's first name reflects his father's love of India's cricket greats — "Ra" from Rahul Dravid and 'chin' from Sachin Tendulkar.

Ravindra, a left-handed batter and spinner, had his name chanted by Indian fans during the World Cup and can expect the same enthusiasm from franchises when his name comes up for grabs at a base price of \$60,000. Exciting England batsman Brook has plundered runs in all three international formats and has a strike rate of 141.54 in the T20 version.

He was snapped up by Sunrisers Hyderabad for \$1.6 million in the previous auction but failed to make much of an impact, barring a century early in this year's IPL.

The 24-year-old then managed just 169 runs in six World Cup matches, but recently hit a match-winning 43 in a West Indies ODI and has kept his base price at \$240,000.

One of the breakout stars of the World Cup, Coetzee finished inside the top five bowlers in the competition with 20 wickets.

The South African quick made his debut early this year in a Test against West Indies at Centurion and has since played every format to add to the Proteas' pace riches. Coetzee, 23, is looking to boost his career in the money-spinning IPL and has kept himself in the top bracket with a base price of \$240,000.

Hasaranga has built a reputation of taking wickets at crucial junctures with his leg-spin and has been Sri Lanka's go-to bowler in white-ball formats.

The all-rounder earned a \$1.43 million contract at Royal Challengers Bangalore in 2022 but was released by the team ahead of this year's auction.

He has claimed 158 wickets in limited-overs formats and has a T20 strike rate of more than 124 as an attacking middle-order batsman.

The 26-year-old missed the World Cup with injury but should expect another lucrative IPL contract with a base price of \$180,000.

Algerian footballer on trial in France over Gaza post

NICE (Agencies): Algerian international footballer Youcef Atal goes on trial in France Monday accused of inciting hatred after posting a video in which a Palestinian preacher purportedly threatens Israel with a "black day."



Atal, who plays for Ligue 1 side Nice, shared the video on his Instagram account, which has 3.2 million followers, shortly after the attack by Hamas militants on Israel on October 7 in which 1,139 people were killed.

In an extract of the footage seen by AFP, the preacher, Mahmoud Al Hasanat, at first talked about the plight of children in Gaza. Prosecutors said they also identified another extract in which he called on God to "send the Jews a black day," and "steady the hands" of Gaza inhabitants if they should "throw stones."

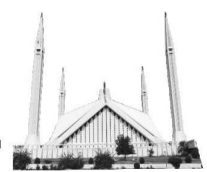
The 27-year-old defender, who quickly deleted the post and issued an apology, was suspended by his club while prosecutors probed the incident for suspected "justification of terrorism."

But they dropped that line of investigation after watching the video and questioning the player, instead charging him with "incitement to religious hatred." Two associations, the International League against Racism and anti-Semitism (Licra) and the Jewish Observatory of France, have brought civil actions against the player.

If found guilty, Atal could be sentenced to up to one year in prison and fined 45,000 euros (\$49,000). He has been under judicial supervision with a ban on traveling abroad except to play professional football.

His club quickly suspended him "until further notice" after the post, while the professional football league banned him for seven matches. Some of Atal's Algerian team mates argued for leniency, saying he had apologized and not actually watched the video until the end before posting it.

The deadliest ever Gaza war began with unprecedented attacks by Hamas against Israel on October 7, when the group killed 1,139 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250, according to updated Israeli figures.



In brief

IRSA releases 85,900 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Monday released 85,900 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 39,300 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1477.64 feet and was 77.64 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 19,600 cusecs and 45,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1160.50 feet, which was 110.50 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 56,300, 32,900, 26,000 and 1,700 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 7,400 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 2,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Eight held during search operation

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a collaborative effort with various law enforcement agencies, the Capital Police of Islamabad carried out a comprehensive search operation in different areas under the jurisdiction of the Aabpara police station. As part of the operation, a thorough examination was conducted, resulting in the inspection of 70 individuals, 15 cars, 23 motorcycles, seven shops and many hotels. The intensified scrutiny is part of the police's ongoing efforts to bolster security measures in the region. Eight individuals who failed to provide proper identification documents during the search operation were promptly transferred to the police station for further investigation. The primary objective of the search operation is to fortify the security infrastructure in the designated areas and ensure the safety of residents and businesses. In line with the commitment to combat crime, Islamabad Police has heightened its actions against criminal elements. The recent operation reflects a proactive approach in addressing potential threats and maintaining law and order, a police spokesperson said. Citizens are encouraged to play an active role in ensuring community safety. Authorities urge residents to report any suspicious activities promptly. The public can contact the police at the emergency helpline number 15 or utilize 'ICT 15 App' for convenient and swift reporting. This collaborative effort aims to create a safer and more secure environment for everyone in the capital city.

158 cases against underage drivers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police have registered 158 cases against underage drivers during last 24 hours, said a police spokesman here on Monday. Total 3603 FIRs were registered under the campaign launched against underage drivers while 158 cases were registered during last 24 hours. All possible steps were being taken to improve the traffic situation on the city roads and facilitate the citizens, he added. The spokesman informed that police, on the directives of City Police Officer, Rawalpindi were taking action in accordance with the law against underage drivers. The CPO had directed the officers concerned to take solid steps to control traffic rules violations and underage driving, he said.

Senate delegation visits Kuwait Embassy to extend condolences

ISLAMABAD (NNI): A delegation led by Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani Monday paid a visit to the Kuwait Embassy in Islamabad to convey heartfelt condolences on the passing of the esteemed Emir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The delegation, comprising Senators Naseebullah Bazai, Mohammad Abdul Qadir, and Danesh Kumar, led by Chairman Senate expressed deep sorrow and solidarity with the Kuwaiti Ambassador, over the great loss of the Emir of Kuwait.

As a gesture of respect, Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani penned poignant condolence remarks in the memorial book dedicated to guests, underscoring the significant loss felt not only by Kuwait's royal family but also resonating

profoundly with the people of Pakistan.

"In the demise of Emir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, we have lost a true friend and a dynamic leader," Chairman Senate remarked. "His personal commitment to regional stability, global development, and his role in fostering international harmony shall be remembered and cherished for generations to come". Sanjrani further conveyed his heartfelt condolences, sharing in the grief of Kuwait and its people during this difficult time. "May Allah grant forgiveness and exalt the late Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah," he added. The Chairman's visit stands as a testament to the enduring bond between Pakistan and Kuwait, showcasing solidarity and sympathy during this period of mourning.

Work on 36 city roads to be started soon: Dr Jamal

RAWALPINDI (APP): Caretaker Provincial Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare and Population Welfare Dr Jamal Nasir on Monday said that the repair and carpeting work of 36 roads including Asghar Mall Road would be started soon. He said this while meeting a delegation of Anjuman Tajran Asghar Mall Road led by General Secretary of Markazi Anjuman Tajran Tahir Taj Bhatti. He said that work on these projects would be completed at the earliest with 'Mohsin Speed'.

Dr Jamal said that a Business Facilitation Center would be set up soon in Rawalpindi to facilitate the business community of the district, adding representatives of 20 federal and provincial departments would be present in the facilitation centre, and all necessary NOCs for investment would be provided within two weeks. He said that Caretaker Chief Minister, Punjab Mohsin Naqvi inaugurated the first business facilitation centre in Lahore a few days ago, and such centres would also be established in Rawalpindi, Multan, Gujranwala and other big cities.

AIOU faculty board approves different programmes of Social Sciences

ISLAMABAD (APP): Faculty Board meeting of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, of Allama Iqbal Open University during its meeting held yesterday, approved different programmes of Social Sciences.

Dean, Prof. Dr. Abdul Aziz Sahir presided over the meeting, while different schemes of studies of post-graduates, BS, MPhil and PhD programs and other academic-related matters were discussed.

The meeting emphasized on aligning the quality of courses and the number of credit hours of all the programmes with the policy of the Higher Education Commission and the University.

All the teachers of the faculty participated in the meeting while the external members included Dr. Salman Basit, Dr. Naheed Qamar and Dr. Fauzia Aslam.

Prof. Dr. Abdul Aziz Sahir said that in the light of the instructions of the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, special attention will be laid on quality educa-

tion and all the programs will be aligned with the contemporary requirements as per the instructions of HEC.

He said that in the light of the directives of the Government of Pakistan, Fajm ul-Quran and Seerat-i-Taiba and Civic and Community Engagement will be included as compulsory in all teaching programs.

He said that the approval of BS Accounting and Finance by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants is a good news. Now Pakistani students will not have to face educational problems abroad.

Dr. Abdul Aziz Sahir added that as per the special direction of the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, Department of Pakistani Languages prepared four new courses for the promotion of Pashto, Punjabi, Sindhi and Balochi language and literature, which will be an integral part of all the BS programs of the university. All the decisions of the Faculty Board will be approved by the next meeting of the Academic Council.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani recording his condolence on the demise of AMIR of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in the visitor's book at Embassy of Kuwait.

ANF recovers 81 kg drugs in six operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting six operations across the country managed to recover 81 kg drugs and arrested 11 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Monday.

He informed that 44 grams weed was recovered from two parcels sent from the UK at the courier office in Rawalpindi.

30 kg hashish was recovered from a vehicle near M-1 Motorway Islamabad while four suspects were arrested. 20.4 kg hashish was recovered from a vehicle near Kakpul Islamabad while an accused was arrested. 17 kg hashish was recovered from Tera Zakhakhel Khyber while 8.4 kg hashish was recovered from a vehicle in Chishtiabad, Islamabad and four accused including a woman were rounded up. 4.8 kg hashish was recovered from a vehicle near GT Road Peshawar and two suspects were arrested.

Cases under Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered and further investigations are under process.

Minister urges to promote Arabic language

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training, Madad Ali Sindhi on Monday said that the Arabic language is a great asset of Muslims and stressed the need to further promote it.

Addressing a conference, "Role of Institutions and Individuals in the Reviving the Arabic Language" organized by the Faculty of Arabic, International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) he said that Arabic is an eloquent language, it is a flowing river whose flow is increasing day by day.

He said that the role of the International Islamic University in the promotion of Arabic is exemplary where teachers from many

other countries including Egypt, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia are playing an excellent role.

He said that institutions like the International Islamic University should be promoted in society and the other universities should also adopt the IIUI's style of education.

Talking about the importance of education, he said the only solution to development lies in prioritizing education. Speaking at the conference, Muhammad Mutaah Al-Ashbi, the Ambassador of the Republic of Yemen said that Arabic is the language of the Qur'an, and steps should be taken to promote Arabic. Expressing his views, Acting President of IIUI Dr. Abdul Rahman said that the role of the

Arabic language is important in economic and academic development.

He also mentioned that IIUI is already serving the cause of the promotion of the Arabic language with great efforts.

He apprised that at IIUI, courses of Quran comprehension and functional Arabic language are compulsory. On the occasion, the Dean of the Faculty of Arabic, Dr. Fazal Ullah suggested that Arabic must be included as a compulsory subject at the Primary level, as well as it may also be included at a higher level in the curriculum. He also briefed about the aims and objectives of the conference. The conference was also addressed by Dr. Habib-ur-Rahman Asim, and other researchers and experts in Arabic language.

Jamal Shah inaugurates exhibition of photographs & books on Quaid-i-Azam

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture Jamal Shah on Monday inaugurated ten-day long exhibition of photographs and books on Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah here at Heritage Museum, Lok Virsa.

National Heritage and Culture Division, Lok Virsa organized the exhibition in collaboration with National Library of Pakistan (NLP) and National Archives of Pakistan.

Executive Director Lok Virsa Muhammad Uzair Khan, Director General NLP Asif Khan Niazi and large number of students were also present on the occasion.

Addressing the ceremony, the minister said that National Heritage and

Culture Division attached departments have planned a series of events from December 17th to December 28th to pay rich tribute to Father of Nation and Founder of Pakistan, adding that these events include lectures, live performances, exhibitions, seminars, tableaux etc.

Jamal Shah said that these events are being organized with collaboration our cultural departments, community and local artists.

He said that these events are aimed at highlighting the heroic struggle of our Quaid and his associates in achieving a separate homeland for the Muslims of subcontinent.

"Our youth have tremendous potential and I advise

them to make the country prosperous by adopting the teachings of the Quaid-i-Azam and Allama Muhammad Iqbal in letter and spirit", he said.

Jamal Shah said that our younger generation needs to work hard by following the footsteps of Quaid-i-Azam. He said that every photograph on display tells a story not only about Quaid's life but also the great struggle of our leaders to feel separate homeland for Muslim of subcontinent. He said that it is a great opportunity for youth especially the students to feel real moments captured in photographs, these are the windows to the past which shows how our great leaders went through the freedom struggle.

Minister commends F/6-3 School's community-led upgradation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister of Education and Professional Training, Madad Ali Sindhi on Monday paid a visit to F/6-3 School to witness the remarkable efforts undertaken by the local community to enhance the school's facilities and educational standards. Expressing admiration for the collective commitment of the community, the minister acknowledged the substantial improvements made at F/6-3 School and applauded the

spirit of collaboration that has propelled this initiative.

In a pivotal announcement, the minister directed the immediate upgradation of 20 government primary schools in Islamabad, aligning them with the transformative model set by F/6-3 School. This ambitious directive aims to enhance the educational infrastructure and quality of learning across these institutions within the next six weeks.

The dedicated team from the Education Department

of the Federal Ministry has enthusiastically embraced this challenge.

With a steadfast commitment to meeting the expectations of the minister and the citizens of Islamabad, the Education team pledges to implement comprehensive upgrades across the designated schools.

This initiative reflects the government's unwavering commitment to fostering quality education, empowering communities, and creating an environment.

Railways to restore Bolan Mail, Akbar Bugti Express

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways has decided to restore two more passenger trains from Quetta to Karachi and Quetta to Lahore to facilitate the passengers of the routes. "The decision to restore trains including Bolan Mail and Akbar Bugti Express has been taken on the directions of the caretaker government," an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP.

The official said that the Bolan Mail would resume its operations by the end of December this year, while Akbar Bugti Express would be restored in March next year. He said the two trains would facilitate the people of Sindh and Punjab provinces to travel to Balochistan and

vice versa. Currently, the Jaffer Express is the only operational passenger train in Balochistan being run between Quetta - Peshawar, besides local Chaman and Hurnai trains.

About the Bolan Mail, the official said the train would consist of 12 coaches with the facility of a dining car and bedding. The passengers would also be provided clean blankets, pillows and standard food, he added. It is pertinent to mention here that, in October last, the department had restored train services at Sibi-Harnai section which was suspended 18 years ago after the miscreants destroyed main bridges and railway tracks in the year 2006.



ISLAMABAD: A street vendor displaying different kinds of balloons to attract children at Tramri Chowk.

Customs seize tons of goods

NIMRUZ (Ariana News): The Ministry of Finance said on Monday that officers from the mobile customs unit have seized tons of goods being smuggled into the country illegally at different points in the province. The ministry has said that the seized goods include more than 9 tons of cacao, lavashak (Persian fruit roll) and honey; over one ton of spices; two tons of tomato paste; 240 kgs of beans and close to 700 kgs of clothes.

People's welfare top priority

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs, stated that officials ought to take into account the needs of the public in their professional affairs. Mawlawi Abdul Kabir made these remarks during a meeting with IE leaders at Sepidar Palace. It has been said that these officials, who visited with the Deputy PM to inquire after his state of health, stated that positive changes are happening in all government departments.

IE calls UN Chief's report 'optimistic'



KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate's spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, called the quarterly report of the UN Secretary-General regarding Afghanistan "optimistic."

UN's Chief Antonio Guterres in his report to the United Nations Security Council highlighted the security, political, economic and social developments in Afghanistan.

However, Mujahid told TOLONews that Guterres has no precise definition about the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan.

"The government is inclusive. We have shared it with the UN. Any definition that they have for an inclusive government, we

can share with them now that our government is inclusive... but unfortunately they do not have yet any general definition," Mujahid said.

According to Guterres's report, "security incidents linked to the armed opposition and attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) continued." However, he said that the country continues to face unprecedented levels of humanitarian need with over two-thirds of its population requiring assistance amid significant shortfalls of funding.

It stated in the report that available data indicates that "armed clashes decreased by 41 percent, from 104 to 61 incidents" in 2023, the

report said, adding, "the armed opposition posed no challenge to the Taliban for territorial control during the reporting period."

Mujahid meanwhile stressed that the activities of the Islamic Emirate's opposition are not a challenge for them.

The political analysts gave various opinions regarding the report.

"We call on the government to respect the wishes of the people. Every Afghan should see themselves, and the universities should be reopened for our sisters, and our sisters should be appointed in the posts where they are needed," said Hasham Alokozai, a political analyst.

"These reports are in the interest of the people of Afghanistan... and for the presence of the international community, as well as the contribution of the international community to find a solution for Afghanistan," said Wais Naseri, political analyst.

It was mentioned in the report that "actual attacks on the de facto authorities were fewer in number, despite an increase in the number of claimed attacks by groups on social media."

IEA works to create conditions for trade

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs, stated that the Islamic Emirate is working to create practical trade and investment conditions in the country.

According to a statement released by the Deputy Prime Minister's office, Hanafi stated in a meeting with some Shia leaders that the Islamic Emirate strives to create favorable conditions for trade and investment in Afghanistan, which will contribute to the people's and country's prosperity and development.

He also said that Afghanistan is the common home of all Afghans and urged all citizens of the country living abroad to return home and contribute to the development of their country.

Abdul Hafiz Jalili, a national trader, and Abdul Ghani Kazemi, who represented others at the meeting, stated that the Islamic Emirate has undertaken a variety of initiatives throughout the country to encourage traders and investors to return and engage in trade and investment.

They also noted that the Islamic Emirate has concentrated on expanding economic and business prospects in the country by providing required facilities for traders and investors.

3 ex-Afghan Air Force members die

KABUL (Khaama Press): American authorities have announced that three former members of the Afghan Air Force were killed in a training aircraft crash in Oregon, USA.

According to a KOIN News report, citing Oregon state police, the aircraft collided with power lines.

According to Oregon officials, the plane flew from McMinnville Airport in Oregon to Independence State Airport.

In a statement from the American police, the identities of the three individuals were revealed as 35-year-old Mohammad Hossein Mousavi, pilot, 35-year-old Mohammad Bashir Safdari, passenger, and 29-year-old Ali Jan Firdousi, passenger.

Reports indicate that the aircraft's occupants were Afghan citizens who worked with the support barrel for Afghans in Beaverton.

It's noteworthy that following the rise to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan, thousands of former security forces left the country and sought refuge in European and American countries.

Many former security forces of Afghanistan have fled the country, finding themselves in neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan. These individuals face dire circumstances, lacking adequate support in their new environments.

They report being left without support and continue to wait, hoping to seek refuge in Western countries. Their situation remains precarious as they navigate life in these neighbouring states.

Muttaqi calls for Mes Aynak project to start



KABUL (Ariana News): Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Amir Khan Muttaqi said in a meeting with China's special representative for Afghanistan that practical work of Mes Aynak copper mine should begin.

He also said that the country's authorities were ready for copper extraction to start.

According to a statement

issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Monday, Muttaqi also said the acceptance of the ambassador of the Islamic Emirate in Beijing was an important development and appreciated China's "positive position" in international forums.

He added that the two countries should work on ways to increase Afghanistan's exports to China.

According to the statement, China's special representative for Afghanistan, Yue Xiaoyong, said in the meeting that his country respects Afghanistan's sovereignty and will never interfere in its internal affairs.

He noted that China has significantly reduced the customs tariffs on imports from Afghanistan in order to expand trade between the

two countries.

The Chinese diplomat emphasized that the relevant institutions of the two countries will work for the start of the Mes Aynak copper project.

In the meeting, the two sides emphasized on expanding bilateral relations and increasing the level of trade and cooperation in the political field.

Japan provides nearly \$7 million in health aid to Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): Japan has announced its commitment to continue aiding Afghanistan in collaboration with the World Health Organization, providing \$6.9 million to strengthen Afghanistan's capacity to respond to infectious diseases. The World Health Organization welcomed this assistance and stated that the budget would be used to support health facilities in Afghanistan through coordination with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

According to a statement released by the organization, the initiative aims to

provide secondary and tertiary healthcare services to patients with infectious diseases, support laboratories for accurate diagnosis of various diseases, and ensure the full functionality of the Japan-Afghanistan Leprosy Hospital and the National Tuberculosis Hospital in Kabul.

Over 76,000 individuals across Afghanistan are expected to benefit from this project. Takyoshi Kuramaya, Japan's Ambassador to Afghanistan, expressed his country's commitment to further reducing the negative impacts of certain diseases through these

advancements.

He added, "I sincerely hope that by reducing the burden of leprosy and preventing such diseases, Afghanistan will become a country where all children, women, and men can live in peace."

Lao Da Peng, the World Health Organization's representative in Afghanistan, stated that the organization appreciates Japan's unwavering support and its continuous involvement in efforts to prepare and respond to infectious disease outbreaks in Afghanistan.

Earlier, the World Health Organization had warned of

a serious vulnerability in Afghanistan's healthcare system in a report. The report highlighted that the lives of millions of people in Afghanistan are at risk due to food insecurity, the spread of infectious diseases, and ongoing droughts.

Specialized infectious disease hospitals in Afghanistan require support to strengthen their capabilities for effective response. This support will enable these hospitals to mitigate the future impacts of infectious disease outbreaks and reinforce the overall healthcare system in the country.

TAPI Project to begin soon, says Muttaqi

KABUL (TOLONews): The acting Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, said that work on the TAPI Pipeline Project will begin soon.

He made the remarks one day after his meeting with Turkmenistan Foreign Minister Rasit Meredow.

"The talks were conducted about the major TAPI pipeline project which has entered Afghanistan, and how to begin this project," Muttaqi told a gathering in Herat.

According to officials, Muttaqi and Meredow discussed the extension of the

Torghondi-Herat railway, the import of energy to Herat, and the extension of trade between the countries.

Speaking to the same gathering, the acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, Shahabuddin Delawar, said that all preparation has been taken to implement the TAPI pipeline project.

"The implementation of the TAPI project goes from Torghondi until Spin Boldak," he said.

The acting Minister of Industry and Commerce, Nooruddin Azizi, said that

an industrial town will be constructed in Herat.

He said that the country's economy is improving and that all projects are being supported through the national budget.

"All the budget of the Islamic Emirate is being funded through Halal ways," Azizi said.

Delawar also added that the extraction process of oil and gas has been announced for bidding.

He said that the Herat cement factory will resume operation and that asphaltting of 350km Herat-Ghor highway will begin.

Ministry says newspapers must be supported



KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Information and Culture said that newspapers industry and archives should be supported.

In the meeting "Newspapers and National Languages - Background, Challenges and Solutions", the deputy minister said that the content and writing of newspapers should be simple, professional, and new.

"We should not belittle the newspapers, we should equalize the needs, writers, poets, technical staff, and paper, according to the

standards of the day," said Atiqullah Azizi, the deputy minister.

The deputy minister of Education said in the meeting that there are limits to freedom of speech in all countries and freedom of speech should not cause discord between people.

"In every society that we see, there is a limit to freedom of speech. The term free expression is limited," said Sebghat Ullah Waseel.

Meanwhile, the head of governmental newspapers said that the government should support the media in

the country.

"At this time, there is a need to pay serious attention to the press, both the officials and the government should increase the attention, and the media workers should be aware of the (government's) work," said Mohammad Ibrahim Nabil, head of the governmental newspaper.

"The media is not only for reflecting events, but also is a bridge between the nation and the government, which transmits the wishes, politics, and culture effectively. In a society where the media is active and does its work correctly and honestly, the fundamental rights of the people are preserved," said Zabiullah Sadat, head of TOLONews.

Based on the information provided by the Directorate of Governmental Newspapers, four newspapers, Anis, Hewad, Shariat, and Kabul Times, are currently operating in the capital, and 1,000 copies are distributed daily.

Increasing mental health issues among women due to restrictions in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): Women and girls in Afghanistan describe their lives under the rule of the Taliban administration as 'a gradual death.' According to human rights defenders, the current situation in Afghanistan is not desirable for any human being, and they ask the Taliban to modify its policies towards women. Still, after more than two years, no change has occurred in the Taliban's approach to women's freedoms.

The group has openly refused to accept women's freedoms and has increased its restrictions against them. The growing restric-

tions have led to an increase in suicides among women and girls, nearly doubled their mental and psychological problems, and severely limited their access to open environments and medical centres.

CNN recently reported the story of a 15-year-old girl who attempted suicide because she was deprived of schooling and is now undergoing treatment in Pakistan.

The report in this media outlet states, 'Arezzo, who was oppressed by the Taliban, swallowed acid. Now, her brother and sister are trying to save her life.' 15-year-old Arezzo, after

being deprived of schooling, attempted suicide. Her brother and sister took her to Pakistan for treatment; her older brother and sister, Ahmad and Mahsa, are now caring for her in a rented room in Karachi. While kissing Arezzo's hand, Ahmad whispered, 'Don't worry. You'll get better. Don't worry, we're always with you. I hope you get well soon.'

The report in this media outlet states that when schools in their village were closed to girls above sixth grade, Arezzo's parents sent their daughters to Kabul for language education. Still, soon, the educa-

tional centres were also closed to girls. There is no precise data showing the extent of suicide in Afghanistan, but human rights groups and doctors say that the rate of suicide among women and girls has increased under the rule of the Taliban regime.

Dr. Shakib Ahmadi works longer hours than usual six days a week, seeing patients at a mental health clinic in Herat province in western Afghanistan. He told CNN that 'since the Taliban took over two years ago, the number of female patients in his clinic has increased by 40 to 50 percent. He said

that about 10 percent of these patients kill themselves.'

He said that their lives are limited by the Taliban, and women and girls resort to cheap household items for suicide attempts. Rat poison, liquid chemicals, cleaning liquids, and agricultural fertilizers - anything they think will reduce their sorrow and grief.

The UN also wrote in its quarterly report on the human rights situation in Afghanistan that the mental health of Afghan women is very poor, to the extent that 76 per cent of them describe their mental health as 'very bad' or 'bad.'

Minister for MoHE urges unity among citizens

KABUL (TOLONews): The acting Minister of Higher Education (MoHE), Nida Mohammad Nadim, during his visit to Kunar province, stressed the importance of unity among the citizens across the country, saying that more efforts should be taken for it.

Nadim said that Daesh created mistrust among the Afghans and killed the people before the Islamic Emirate came to power.

He stated that Daesh has been suppressed and that there is no place for the group in Afghanistan.

He also referred to the religious sections in the country and said: "May Afghanistan succeed. There is only one religion section in Afghanistan, which is Imam Abu Hanifa. All Afghans are in one religious section."

The acting minister criticized the achievements of the past 20 years, including

democracy.

"They say we lost the achievements of the past 20 years. What were the achievements? They have brought women out of their houses," he said.

The political analysts gave various opinions.

"The republic government also had major achievements. One of them was the rights of women and girls," said Najib Rahman Shamal, a political analyst.

"I think the statements about the Taliban's fighting against the Daesh are true. And all the world countries



accept it," said Wahid Faqiri, a political analyst.

Nadim is traveling to Herat, Badghis, Farah,

Zabul, Kandahar and Kunar to meet with university instructors and tribal elders.

Maintenance of border signs with Iran 15% completed

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs said that the renovation work of border signs with Iran have been fifteen percent completed.

The ministry's spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat told TOLONews that the work on a plan to renew the border signs with Afghanistan's neighboring countries, including Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China, is still ongoing.

"The process of renewal of border marks with Iran has so far progressed by 15 percent. We also have some areas with Tajikistan as well, which need to be renewed. We are working in general to mark the border areas," Fitrat said.

The spokesman added that talks are now underway with Tajikistan to renew the border signs between Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Political analysts con-



sider the renewal of border signs between Afghanistan, China, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Iran and Tajikistan to be effective in solving some challenges.

"A delegation composed of the Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs, the intelligence and also the political deputy of the PM should follow up the issue and mark the areas, so there will be no problem in the future," said Moeen Gul Samkanai, a political

analyst.

"Putting marks in the crossings which have been recognized by Afghanistan, is a good step," said Tariq Farhadi, another political analyst.

According to the information provided by the Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs, Afghanistan and Iran have nearly two hundred border signs on the border, and work is underway to renew these signs.

KP CM reviews Task Force on Technical Edu & Skills Development

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A meeting of the recently constituted Task Force on Technical Education & Skills Development was held here on Monday with Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah in the chair to thrash out line of action to implement the Human Resource Export Strategy of the provincial government of exporting 0.5 million trained human resource to various countries for employment.

The meeting discussed threadbare various options and means, and made important decisions to this end. The meeting decided to start crash courses on emergency basis to impart technical and digital skills training to the youth as per the demand of international market. The meeting further decided to formally launch Digital Skill Development Program under the KP Information Technology Board next week. Under the Program more than 84,000 youth would be trained on various digital skills.

The Chief Minister directed the concerned high ups to immediately release the required funds to the KPIT Board for the purpose.

Caretaker Provincial Ministers Dr. Najeebullah, Dr. Amir Abdullah, Dr. Qasim Jan, Syed Sarfaraz Ali Shah, Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary, relevant administrative secretaries and other members of the Task Force attended the meeting. The meeting reviewed progress on the decisions made in the last meeting of the Task Force. It was also decided to enhance the allocated seats of nursing colleges of the province with the aim to produce trained nurses to be exported to foreign countries, and the concerned quarters were directed for necessary steps in this regard. The initiative is aimed at producing at least 50,000 trained nurses annually.

Talking on this occasion, the Chief Minister directed the authorities concerned to give priority to the youth of the Newly Merged Districts in Skill Development Trainings as these areas were affected by terrorism, and thus need of special attention. "Time is too short, and there is a lot to do", the Chief Minister remarked and added that if there is will to do, than much can be done even in short time.

He urged upon the authorities to make tangible progress on daily basis in this regard; and decided that meet-

ing of the Task Force would be held on daily basis to review progress. It was also decided in the meeting to revamp the existing system of Technical & Vocational Training to align it with the needs of modern era; and further decided to have a separate Task Force in this regard.

Chairman NAB calls on Caretaker CM KP: Chairman, National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Lt Gen (r) Nazir Ahmad called on caretaker Chief Minister Justice Retired Syed Arshad Hussain Shah at the Chief Minister House and discussed matters related to ensuring transparency in developing projects besides affairs of government departments and expressed the resolve of working together for achieving these objectives.

It was agreed to include high authorities of NAB in development projects to stop possible corruption at the beginning level. It was also decided to include a NAB representative in the Chief Minister Task Force. The Chairman NAB has praised the vision of the Chief Minister pertaining to transparency and eradication of corruption and assured every possible support to KP Government for ensuring transparency.



ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi addressing the event to celebrate Award Winning Project Green Presidency, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

NK test-fires most advanced ICBM with US in range

SEOUL (AFP): North Korea on Monday test-fired its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile that has the potential to reach the United States, extending a record-breaking number of weapons tests this year and triggering further international condemnation.

South Korea said the North fired an ICBM that used solid fuel, which makes missiles easier to transport and faster to fire than liquid-fuelled versions. Monday's launch was the third time the North had tested a solid-fuel ICBM, after launches in April and July, which analysts said signalled consistent efforts to improve the technology.

North Korea had said the previous two were "Hwasong-18" missiles but did not immediately comment on Monday's launch. The United States, South Korea and Japan all quickly condemned the missile test, stating it was in breach of United Nations Security Council resolutions and would make the Korean peninsula less secure. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol ordered an "immediate and overwhelming" countermeasure, and called for a joint response with the United States and Japan.

Japan's defence ministry said the ICBM had a potential range of more than 15,000 kilometres, which would cover all of the United States. It followed a short-range missile launch on Sunday night. "The launches are" not only a clear violation of UN Security Council resolutions but also a threat to peace and stability of the region and we strongly condemn," Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said. The United Nations Security Council has adopted many resolutions calling on North Korea to halt its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes since it first conducted a nuclear test in 2006.

However China, a close ally of North Korea, offered no direct response to the latest launches and instead released a statement highlighting the deep trust between the two nations. "In the face of the turbulent international situation, China and the DPRK have always firmly supported and trusted each other," Foreign Minister Wang Yi said after meeting an official from Pyongyang, using the official acronym for North Korea. South Korea's military initially said it had detected the launch of a long-range ballistic missile from the Pyongyang area on Monday morning that flew 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) before splashing down in the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan. The South reported the missile flew up rather than across, a method Pyongyang has previously said it employs in some weapons tests to avoid flying over neighbouring countries.

North Korea last year declared itself an "irreversible" nuclear power and has repeatedly said it will never give up its nuclear programme, which the regime views as essential for its survival. Park Won-gon, a professor of North Korean Studies at Ewha University, said the latest ICBM was likely the Hwasong-18, adding that it would be a huge asset for North Korea, if and when it becomes operational. "The Hwasong-18 uses solid fuel, so there will be no preparation time, and it can be fired immediately from a mobile launcher, and it can be seen as a weapon system with a practical ability to strike the US mainland," Park told AFP.

UNSC to vote on new Gaza ceasefire call

NEW YORK CITY: The United Nations Security Council will vote Monday on a new resolution calling for an "urgent and sustainable cessation of hostilities" in Gaza, as Washington exhibits growing impatience with key ally Israel.

The vote comes days after the United States blocked a previous Security Council resolution that would have called for a "humanitarian ceasefire" in the battered Palestinian territory, where Israel continues its deadly strikes in retaliation for Hamas's unprecedented attack on October 7.

But in the General Assembly, the UN's 193 members voted overwhelmingly for a ceasefire, with 153 in favor - exceeding the 140 or so countries that have routinely backed resolutions condemning Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. The upcoming Security Council resolution was introduced by Arab countries that had come away from last Tuesday's General Assembly vote bolstered by such broad international support, though the latest text's fate remains uncertain.

The new draft, drawn up by the United Arab Emirates and seen by AFP,

calls for an "urgent and sustainable cessation of hostilities" to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access in the Gaza Strip." It also affirms support for a two-state solution in the region and "stresses the importance of unifying the Gaza Strip with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority."

In a move criticized by Israel and the United States, the draft does not explicitly name Hamas, though it does call for the "immediate and unconditional release of all hostages" and condemns "all indiscriminate attacks against civilians." The Security Council has faced sharp international opprobrium as it has managed to pass only one resolution on Gaza since the start of the war, in which the 15-member body called for "humanitarian pauses" — after five other resolutions were rejected, including two thanks to American vetoes.

According to diplomatic sources, negotiations on the new text continued Sunday in an effort to avoid another impasse, days after US President Joe Biden warned that Israel was at risk of losing international support due to its "indiscriminate" bombing of Gaza. "The United States should now back those words by acting

at the United Nations Security Council to pressure Israel, as well as Palestinian armed groups, to comply with international humanitarian law and protect civilians," Louis Charbonneau, the UN director at Human Rights Watch said, telling Washington: "Don't use vetoes to block resolutions aimed at stopping mass atrocities."

Security Council resolutions are technically binding, but are often ignored by the countries involved. According to Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry, some 18,800 people, mostly civilians and children, have died since Israeli bombardment began in Gaza in retaliation for Hamas's October 7 attack, which Israel said left 1,139 people dead, also mostly civilians, and saw some 250 people kidnapped.

"In the face of such atrocities, there is only one moral position, one defensible position: Ceasefire now, ceasefire now, ceasefire now," Palestinian UN Ambassador Riyad Mansour said Friday. But his Israel counterpart Gilad Erdan countered: "Calling for a ceasefire now, while (hostages) are still being held, is the most immoral thing to do." — Arab News

Court grants bail to Fawad in graft case

RAWALPINDI (INP): The Special Court on Monday granted bail to the former federal minister Fawad Chaudhry in a corruption case.

According to the details, the former federal minister was presented before the special court where the judge after hearing the arguments from both sides approved the bail plea of Fawad Chaudhry in the corruption case. The court directed Fawad Chaudhry to submit a surety bond of Rs 200,000 against his bail plea.

It is pertinent to mention here that last week, the Anti-Corruption Court rejected the physical remand plea of Fawad Chaudhry and sent jail on judicial remand in a graft case. After completing the one-day physical remand of the former federal minister under the Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE), Fawad Chaudhry was produced before the court seeking further physical remand of the accused. After hearing the argument from both sides, the senior judge Ghulam Akbar rejected the further physical remand and sent Fawad Chaudhry to jail on judicial remand.

Attack on checkpoint thwarted

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: The security personnel thwarted attack of militants on security checkpoint here Sunday-Monday night. According to details, terrorists stormed Chanda security checkpoint in district Dera Ismail Khan of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The police instantly reacted to the attack and heavy exchange of fire took place forcing attackers to escape. However, no casualties or property damages were reported in attack and cross firing. Earlier on Dec 12, he security forces conducted operations in different areas of D.I Khan killing 27 terrorists. Daraban checkpoint was destroyed in suicide attack resulting in martyrdom of 25 security personnel.

Lance Naik Mahfuz remembered

ISLAMABAD (INP): Recipient of Nishan-e-Haider, Lance Naik Muhammad Mahfuz Shaheed was remembered on his 52nd martyrdom anniversary on Monday. Born on October 15, 1944, in Pind Malakan Rawalpindi, Lance Naik Muhammad Mehruz was enrolled in the Pakistan Army on October 25, 1962. After training, he joined the 15th Punjab Regiment.

During the 1971 war, Lance Naik Muhammad Mehruz was part of the Pul Kanjry operation in the Wahga-Attari sector. On the night of December 17, while capturing the objective, his company was halted at about 70 metres short of Indian positions.

PPP: People are in trouble because of high inflation

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on arrival at the residence of a senior party worker, Zubaida Shaheen to enquire about her health in Lahore spoke to the journalists. He said that he is delighted that he has come to Lahore as the PPP was founded in Lahore and we will work hard to bring the party at a stage where it was during the times of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

Bilawal said that the people of the country are in trouble because of high inflation. The government of the Party will be representative of the people and will resolve the issues faced by them. The PPP has always fought against poverty, inflation and unemployment. The PPP has always fought poverty

and there is no opponent of the Party but poverty, unemployment and price hike. He said that the traditional parties are doing the politics of hatred and division whereas we are doing the politics to serve the people. He promised to solve the problems of the people with their support.

Responding to the questions by the journalists, he said that we have to implement the slogan of "Roti, Kapra Aur Makaan". In the past we had introduced the revolutionary programme by the name of Benazir Income Support programme to provide financial relief to the poor women and to save them from acute poverty. On similar lines we will introduce the 'Youth Card'. We want to help those who are in need.

Responding to a question, Bilawal said that we will not only give a surprise

in Balochistan but also in the entire country including Punjab if we get a level playing field. He said that the door of dialogue is always open in politics. We are facing a situation in which the politics of division is at its peak in Pakistan. We would like to take every party along with us when we come to power. We are all patriotic Pakistanis and we will work together. We are passing through a historic economic crisis and to emerge from it, will have to introduce a new kind of politics. The workers of the party in Lahore are courageous and steadfast and have stood with us during even the most barbaric dictatorships. We are proud of the PPP workers who offered great sacrifices. The PPP gave rights to the growers and laborers. The PPP is a party of the downtrodden masses, Bilawal said.



ISLAMABAD: Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf exchanging views with Ambassador of UAE to Pakistan, Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Alzaabi at Naval Headquarters.

PPP, ANP, QWP discuss seat adjustment with JUI-F

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The delegations of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Awami National Party (ANP) and Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) visited Mufti Mahmood Markaz, the provincial secretariat of JUI-F and discussed seat adjustment in the forthcoming general elections with it, said Abdul Jalil Jan, the provincial spokesman of JUI-F here on Monday.

The delegation of PPP was consisted of former provincial president, Syed Zahir Ali Shah, former KP Assembly Speaker Kiramatullah Khan Chagarmati, Amjad Khan Afridi, Malik Tehmash Khan and Misbahuddin while the delegation of ANP

was consisted of the provincial president, Aimal Wali Khan, Senator Hidayatullah Khan, Khadim Hussain and Shakeel Umerzai.

Similarly, a delegation of QWP comprised of its provincial president Sikandar Hayat Khan Sherpao, Dr Farooq, Aad Afridi and Fayyaz Khan also visited the provincial headquarters of JUI-F and held detail negotiations regarding seat adjustment. During the negotiation team of JUI-F was represented by its provincial ameer, Senator Maulana Atta-ur-Rehman, Maulana Atta-ul-Haq Darwaish, Senator Dilwar Khan, Mufti Fazal Ghafoor, Abdul Jalil Jan, Maulana Amanullah Haqqani and Asif Iqbal Daudzai.

According to Abdul Jalil Jan, the provincial spokesman of JUI-F, the delegations of all these three political parties expressed their desire of joint participation in the February 8 polls.

The provincial ameer of JUI-F, Senator Maulana Atta-ur-Rehman while welcoming the visit of the leadership of the political parties to Mufti Mahmood Markaz stressed need for harmony among the political parties in the province and said that traditions and toleration have always been respected. He said that joint struggle waged in previous years had also promoted harmony and said that the process of negotiations among the political parties will continue.

ANP mulls seat adjustment with MQM-P, PML-N in Karachi

F.P. Report

KARACHI: ANP contacted Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) and PML-N on seat adjustment in Karachi for the upcoming general elections.

According to sources, the ANP leadership and MQM-P discussed matters related to electoral alliance on several seats in Karachi. Sources revealed that the ANP Karachi leadership is not in favor of forming an alliance with Pakistan People's Party

(PPP). Furthermore, several meetings have already held between ANP, PML-N and MQM-P in connection with seat adjustment for upcoming polls.

Earlier, MQM-P refused to adjust its traditional seats with with Pakistan PML-N. Sources told that MQM-P leaders have excused themselves from adjusting traditional seats with PML-N in Karachi. However, MQM-P showed agreement on seat adjustment in some constituencies of Lyari, Keamari

and Malir.

Both sides agreed on holding discussions for adjustment on a rural seat in Malir. Mustafa Kamal would be MQM-P's candidate for the Baldia Town seat, whereas, the political party insisted on naming its candidates on both NA seats in Hyderabad. On the other hand, PML-N urged MQM-P to support its candidates in those constituencies where candidates secured 20,000 to 25,000 votes in the previous elections held in 2013 and 2018.

Higher energy tariffs kept weekly inflation over 40%

ISLAMABAD (INP): Soaring food prices and higher energy tariffs not only kept the weekly inflation over 40 per cent for the fifth consecutive week but also pushed the same to a six-month high, as inflation continues hitting the people hard, whose shrinking purchasing power means they are neither able to fully meet their personal needs nor can help revitalise national economy by boosting domestic demand.

The latest figures released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistic come despite the official claims and the viewpoint shared by top international financial institutions, materialising the stance held by many that you can't arrest inflation by increasing the ener-

gy tariffs. Hence, the weekly inflation rate – measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) – remained at a six-month high of 43.16pc in the week ending December 14 thanks to the high prices of sugar, pulses, eggs, rice and food items. The alarming trend means the gains made during the last few months are being reversed as the SPI reached the highest level since the week ending on June 1, when it was recorded at 43.17pc.

Meanwhile, the higher and sustained inflation is also making the rate cuts a distant possibility given the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) is following monetary tightening – a policy advocated by institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as

well as US Federal Reserve, European Central Bank and other top central banks. The higher interest rates have paralysed the economy where the higher borrowing costs is skyrocketing the cost of doing business, which is already much higher in Pakistan than desired level around the globe.

In this environment, there is doubt that the confidence level among the businessmen and industrialists will be down, as they were hoping for interest rate cuts. One must remember that no expansion in existing businesses and establishment of new ones mean there are neither job creation opportunities nor wage hikes, further worsening the prevailing cost-of-living crisis.

Putin says Russia has no plan to attack NATO

MOSCOW (Reuters): Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin dismissed as complete nonsense remarks by US 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 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 US-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." A senior US State Department official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said last month that Putin would not make peace before he knows the results of the November election in the United States.