

**Tremors felt in Islamabad**  
**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: A 3.2 magnitude earthquake rocked parts of Islamabad and surrounding cities, media reported late on Wednesday, just days after a 5.8 magnitude quake hit the federal capital and its suburbs. The tremors were also felt in Rawalpindi, Attock and Chakwal, around 9:50pm. According to seismological centre, the depth of the earthquake was 25 kilometres.



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# PM upgrades KMC, AMC to medical universities

## — calls brain drain as part of talent hunt, foresees strength for Pakistan

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR / SWABI: Caretaker Prime Minister, Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar here on Wednesday announced upgradation of Khyber Medical College (KMC) Peshawar and Ayub Medical College (AMC), Abbottabad as public sector medical universities.

The prime minister made the important announcement while addressing the 46th annual meeting of Association of Physicians of Pakistan Descent of North America (APPNA) organized by the alumni of Khyber Medical College Peshawar at Governor House. On the request of members of APPNA and its President Dr Arshad Rehman, Prime Minister Kakar said that practical work on upgradation of KMC and AMC as public sector medical universities should be initiated within 35 hours by the respective authorities.

Commending APPNA's rich services for ailing humanity and continued long connection with people of their home country, the prime minister directed the Governor and Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to give practical shape to upgradation of KMC and AMC to a full fledged medical universities keeping in view of people and APPNA demands.

While lauding services of students of both these medical colleges in healthcare services in the country as well as abroad, the prime minister said that Pakistani doctors serving in United States and others foreign countries were like an ambassador of Pakistan and their medical and surgical services besides philanthropy contribution during earthquake,

floods and other natural calamities in Pakistan was highly praised worthy.

Prime Minister Kakar said that he was very pleased that Pakistani doctors, settled in America have established strong roots and bonds with their countrymen and helped Pakistan in every difficult situation.

He said that Pakistani doctors have proved their abilities and professionalism all over the world including USA and played a role of a bridge between Pakistani communities and American citizens while dedication towards duties and treating patients with friendly attitude and warmth was their hallmark. "Pakistani doctors are the best in the world and graduates of KMC doctors were known internationally for their hard work, professionalism and devotion in healthcare services," he said.

On the request of APPNA President, the prime minister announced to recommend name of Dr Umar Taimur Atique, for Nishan-e-Imtiaz, the first non-American President of the College of Physician of America for his great services for Pakistan. Dr Umar Atique was the graduate of KMC Peshawar. The prime minister recalled his memories of spending time with friends at CEENA Hall hostel of KMC at Peshawar, saying that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's unique culture and civilization has impressed him the most. He also shared his views of the cancer pains through which his sister had passed through.

He said Peshawar was like his second home and regional languages including Pashto and Hindko in which great poets like Khushal Khan

Khattak, Ghani Khan and Rehman Baba, besides others presented their inspiring poetry.

Dr Arshad Rehman, President APPNA said that the association was established in 1978 about 4,500 members from Pakistan mostly settled in USA and Canada today. He said the today's meeting was the major event at Peshawar held after 18 years, adding APPNA is a non-political organization that constructed about 1,000 houses for last year's flood victims of Pakistan and awarded 100 scholarships to KMC students per year besides donation of 5,000 cornea for poor eye patients of Pakistan.

Dr Arshad claimed that APPNA had provided about one million dollars assistance for COVID patients of Pakistan. The function was also addressed by dean KMC, Dr Mehmood Aurangzeb and others. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor, Haji Ghulam Ali, Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (Retd) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah, Information Minister KP Feroz Jamal Kakakhel, Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry and IGP KP Akhtar Hayat Gandapur besides doctors and members of APPNA attended in large number. Earlier, the prime minister was received by KP Governor. Both the leaders discussed matters of mutual interest with special focus on well being of people of the province.

Meanwhile, Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq, calling the brain drain, a part of talent hunt, said those leaving Pakistan for better

(Continued on Back Page)



SWABI: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar interacting with students of Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering Sciences and Technology.

## Kirby denies leaving stash of weapons in Afghanistan

**Jalil Afridi**

WASHINGTON DC: White House National Security spokesperson, John Kirby, while replying to the question by *The Frontier Post* stated that the US had provided weapons to the Afghan Army for their defense and that this is a myth that the U.S. left some stash of weapons there.

John Kirby further stated that the US did not expect the Afghan Army under President Ashraf Ghani to surrender the way they did to the Taliban. John Kirby also stated that he was not aware of the reports that 21 Pakistani soldiers being killed by the Taliban in a recent attack where they the Taliban were using US weapons left behind in Afghanistan with the Afghan Army.

To another question asked by The Frontier Post about the recent visit of Pakistani Army Chief, John Kirby stated that the US Defense Department should be contacted in this regard and he has no specific information but he is aware that Pakistan is facing terrorism from across the border from Afghanistan. He Further stated that Pakistan is a strategic ally.

## Submission of papers in ECP starts

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The process of taking and submission of nomination papers for the national and provincial assemblies' constituencies for February 8, 2024 election began in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Wednesday.

The candidates and their authorized persons have started obtaining and submission of nomination papers at offices of their respective returning officers upto 4:30p.m. The nomination papers could be submitted in ROs offices till December 22. The candidates of different political parties at Nowshera, Charsadda, Swabi, Peshawar, Buner, Karak, Heshpur, Chitral, Shangla, and Kohat districts also get and submitted their nominations papers.

The RO offices at DI Khan, Mardan, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Malakand, Dir, Abbottabad, Mansehra besides others districts witnessed rush of candidates as well as their supporters who obtained and submitted their nominations papers. The preliminary list of candidates will be released on December 23 while scrutiny of nomination papers will be held from 24th to 30th December.

As per the schedule, electoral symbols will be allotted to the candidates on January 13 and polling for the general elections will be held on February 8. The Election Commission of Pakistan has issued guidelines for candidates to submit nomination papers.

# Kashmir settlement vital for peace: COAS

**F.P. Report**

RAWALPINDI: General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), COAS engaged in a candid discourse with members of prominent US think tanks and media.

COAS, during the interaction, put across Pakistan's perspective on regional security, transnational terrorism and importance of maintaining strategic stability in South Asia.

COAS said that Pakistan is a country of consequence both from geopolitical and socioeconomic perspective and wishes to develop itself as a hub of connectivity and a gateway to Central Asia and beyond, however, eschews Bloc Politics and believes in maintaining balanced relationships with all friendly

countries.

COAS highlighted that Pakistan desires to broaden bilateral engagement with the US through long term multi domain partnership. He highlighted that his interactions during the visit to the US with Political and Military leadership have been very positive and forward looking for further strengthening the relationship.

COAS also highlighted that Pakistan has stood as a bulwark against transnational terrorism for decades for ensuring regional stability and global peace and security. It has made unparalleled contributions and sacrifices in its enduring fight against terrorism and will continue to fight till logical end, in line with the

aspirations of people Pakistan.

COAS also stressed upon the need for resolution of Kashmir Issue as per the aspirations of the people of Kashmir and the UNSC Resolutions. He said, "Kashmir is an internationally accepted dispute and no unilateral action can alter the nature of this dispute against the wishes of millions of people of the area." COAS also emphatically highlighted the immediate need for ending the sufferings in Ghaza, provision of humanitarian assistance and implementation of two state solution for enduring peace in the region. Earlier on arrival, COAS was received by the Ambassador of Pakistan to United States.

# IHC fixes Imran's plea against in-camera trial today

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday fixed Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan's petition challenging the orders for an in-camera trial in the cipher case against him today (Thursday).

A special court established under the Official Secrets Act 2023 on December 14 approved the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) plea to conduct an in-camera hearing of former PTI chief and Vice-Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi in the cipher case, both of whom are incarcerated at Adiala jail in Rawalpindi.

The ex-prime minister has contested the special court's verdict, which also imposed a restriction on reporting the proceedings, moving the court to nullify the December 14 orders

and restrict the trial court from holding further proceedings till a decision on this petition. The petition stated that an open trial in the presence of the media and public is important to fulfil the requirements of justice.

Special court Judge Abul Hasnat Zulqarnain announced the verdict on December 14, stating that family members would be given access to the courtroom during the hearing. A bench, headed by Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb will hear the petition tomorrow, as per a cause list issued by the IHC registrar.

Imran Khan has also challenged the trial court proceedings in a separate plea submitted to the IHC. It may be noted that both the ex-PTI chairman and vice-chairman have been indicted by the same court for the second time on

December 13. Earlier, the charges were framed against the two politicians on October 23, and pleaded not guilty to their involvement in the offence related to the alleged misuse of diplomatic cable for political purposes. Following Khan and Qureshi's indictment, the regular trial of the cipher case on the charges of leaking state secrets was being held in Adiala jail in Rawalpindi. Last month, both leaders also challenged their indictment in the case, the IHC declared their jail trial "null and void" while allowing their intra-court appeals in the case. However, the federal cabinet yet again approved the summary of holding the jail trial of both politicians following which the trial continued, leading to the indictment of both Khan and Qureshi for the second time.

# Imran will contest polls from 3 constituencies: PTI

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founding chairman Imran Khan will contest elections from at least three constituencies in the general elections scheduled for February 8 next year, his party announced on Wednesday.

Speaking to media outside the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi, PTI Senator Ali Zafar said the Islamabad High Court (IHC) would announce its Toshakhana reserved verdict soon as the election schedule has already been announced.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) disqualified former premier Imran for five years from holding any public office following the Toshakhana case verdict on August 8 after he was found guilty of "corrupt practices under Section 167

of the Elections Act, 2017". "We want to inform you that Imran Khan will contest elections from at least three constituencies and we hope that the IHC will announce its judgment soon in the Toshakhana case, as the election schedule has been issued," he added.

He said the IHC would also rule on PTI's appeal that sought suspension of the former PM's conviction in the Toshakhana case. The PTI senator also called upon workers to submit their nomination papers for the upcoming polls, saying the party would prioritise the jailed members for tickets to contest the elections. "Those [workers] who rendered sacrifices for the party, facing cases and braving difficulties will be allotted [party] tickets 100%," the PTI senator said.

Speaking on the occasion, PTI chief Barrister Gohar said Imran will con-

test polls from the Lahore, Islamabad and Mianwali constituencies. He also opposed the top lawyers' bodies' demand seeking the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikander Sultan Raja, saying his party did not make any such demand. The PTI chairman said the final decision regarding ticket allocation will be made by the incarcerated party founder.

He also alleged that hurdles were being created for their candidates to contest the elections. "The nomination papers were snatched from Shah Mahmood Qureshi's secretary in Adiala jail," he claimed, warning that barring their candidates from contesting polls could disturb the law and order situation. He also urged the election commission and Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa to ensure free and fair polls in the country.

## BNA leader among 70 rebels lay down arms

**F.P. Report**

QUETTA: Balochistan Caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai Wednesday said that a commander of Balochistan Nationalist Army (BNA) along with 70 other fighters of the nationalist separatist group have given up arms, in a major positive development for the Pakistani security forces fighting against militancy.

"The BNA is spilling the blood of their brothers at the behest of India," the interim minister said while addressing a press conference flanked by Balochistan caretaker Home Minister Mir Zubair Jamali in Quetta. "Balochistan has been the biggest target of India's anti-Pakistan efforts as the enemy is aware of the fact that Pakistan's way to progress passes through Balochistan," the minister said.

This is the reason India has been trying to mislead the situation in the province for decades, he added. Achakzai said that Bangalzai had taken Gulzar Imam Shanbay's place after the latter's arrest. "Sarfaraz Bangalzai also realised the enemy's conspiracy," he said, adding that the sons of this soil retracted after knowing about India's nefarious intentions. On the occasion, Bangalzai said that he has been away from his land and people and coming back feels good.

"Weapon is not the solution to a problem. The parents should educate their children and keep them away from a negative environment," he said. The ex-BNA leader said that the banned militant outfits are also using women in their evil plans. He revealed that the funding of the militant outfits is being done from India, while drug peddling and kidnapping are also part of the conspiracy.

Bangalzai told the media that the 70 BNA fighters have accompanied him there, while many others are also willing to give up. He called on the state of Pakistan to make a policy for those who are willing to give up their separatist efforts and welcome them back.



AMMAN : Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Sahir Shamshad Mirza called by King of Jordan King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussain at Jordan.

# CPEC to boost Pak's economy: Solangi

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Wednesday said the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), formally launched in 2013, had substantially transformed the socio-economic scenario of Pakistan by addressing the dire energy crisis and crumbling infrastructure.

"The CPEC has infused hope, trust and confidence in Pakistani people", Solangi said while delivering a keynote address at the 8th China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Media Forum. Prior to the CPEC, Pakistan had been facing daunting challenges in 2013, that included 10-hour blackouts, a 2500 MW electricity deficit, and a \$250 billion economic loss, he said, and added later the CPEC projects had profound positive effects on the lives of local people with provision employment opportunities.

He said the CPEC eventually expedited Pakistan's economic development process and so far multiple projects had been completed in the energy sector alone. "CPEC significantly boosted Pakistan's economic growth," he noted. Solangi said: "The CPEC is not just an infrastructure project; it has generated 2,36,000 jobs since 2013 and is set to create 1.2 million direct jobs, contributing to local workforce development and reducing

regional disparities."

The minister said the CPEC had significantly enhanced Pakistan's economic growth, contributing a projected annual increase of 2 to 2.5 percentage points. "A 2018 World Bank report suggested a potential 3.5 per cent overall economic growth boost," he added. Going beyond the urban centres, he said the CPEC had addressed regional development gaps, fostering growth through various projects in the Western Alignment.

In the energy sector, he said CPEC's diverse 17,045 MW capacity, encompassing hydro, wind, solar, and coal-based power generation, had ensured a sustainable and reliable supply chain. He said the CPEC Media Forum was launched in 2104 to create awareness among the people about the ongoing propaganda against China and Pakistan.

Highlighting the critical role of media, he said: "In a world where information bombards us constantly, shaping our thoughts and opinions, it's crucial to sift through the facts", he added. The CPEC Media Forum, the minister said, had significant importance for him as he had the privilege of participating in the fourth edition of the CPEC Media Forum in 2018 in Beijing, alongside Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed.

During that period, he said the positive impacts of CPEC did not fully reach local communities at the initial stage, so there was

widespread propaganda against CPEC and China in Western and Indian media. He said that media's role in shaping public perceptions of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) required objective and accurate reporting to highlight its multiple aspects.

"Propaganda really shapes how people see such projects by carefully sharing information to influence their beliefs and feelings. It uses selective facts, emotions, and sometimes misleading stories to create a specific viewpoint." He said that as the custodian of information, media should disseminate accurate and unbiased narratives in a responsible manner.

"In today's information age, your role as guardians of truth is more vital than ever," he said, and urged the media to verify, cross-check, and prioritize authenticity over sensationalism to counter the corrosive effects of fake news. It should contribute to a constructive dialogue, conveying the true impact and potential of CPEC to the public for a prosperous future," the minister said.

"Let's stand united in recognizing CPEC as a transformative force that has not only reshaped our nation but has also become a beacon of hope for a brighter, more prosperous Pakistan" he said, adding "Together, let us debunk myths, celebrate achievements, and work towards a future where the promise of CPEC is fully realized".



## Police find 4.8m traffic violators in 2023

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Traffic Police found 4.8 million people violators of traffic rules and 2.2 million motorists were issued tickets for not keeping helmets during current year 2023 in the provincial capital.

According to Lahore Traffic Police's statistics for 2023, a total of 2,264 million motorcyclists were issued tickets for not wearing helmets while 52 were fined for driving without license. City Traffic Officer, Ammara Athar, stated that 2,023,000 vehicles were penalized for violations such as lane cutting, stop-line infringement, and zebra crossing violations. Additionally, 1,200,000 violators were caught for improper parking. During the current year, Lahore residents committed 85,000 instances of one-way violations, leading to enforcement actions against 63,000 vehicles disrupting traffic flow.

Ammara Athar highlighted that 39,000 vehicles faced consequences for disregarding red signals, 31,000 for not wearing seat belts, 48,000 for mobile phone use while driving, 49,000 for dangerous driving, 4,000 for tinted windows, and 136,000 for other violations. The CTO Lahore emphasized that the purpose of these actions was not just to generate revenue but to instill discipline in the citizens and ensure effective implementation of traffic laws. The focus is on enhancing urban behavior rather than merely collecting fines.

## Gas theft crackdown 167 connections disconnected in Punjab, KP and Islamabad

F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 167 connections; Rs 2.34 million fine imposed.

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 27 connections on illegal use of gas while another 13 on use of compressor and also imposed fine of Rs 0.12 million against gas theft cases. The team also lodged one FIR against gas pilferers. In Rawalpindi the team disconnected 1 connection on illegal use of gas while another one on use of compressor. During the operation in Islamabad team disconnected ten connections on illegal use of gas. In Multan 6 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 9 on use of compressor.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 65 connections on account of direct use of gas and illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 2.04 million against gas theft cases. In Mardan the team disconnected ten connections on illegal use of gas and also imposed fine of Rs0.11 million against gas theft cases. The team of Abbottabad disconnected one connection on illegal use of gas. In Sahiwal, one connection was disconnected on illegal use of gas and one on compressor use. In Faisalabad 2 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas. In Sialkot the team disconnected one connection on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs0.06 million have been booked against gas theft cases.

## CM orders land allocation for smart police stations

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has issued directives for the allocation of land dedicated to Smart Police Stations.

During a specially convened meeting presided over by Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi here on Wednesday, it was disclosed that the construction of 40 smart police stations is slated to be completed within the stipulated time frame. The initial phase will witness the establishment of 23 smart police stations in Lahore, while an additional 17 will be strategically located in other districts.

Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, in setting a stringent deadline for the Smart Police Station project, emphasized the phased conversion of conventional police stations into smart ones throughout the province.

The meeting scrutinized the construction, repair, and rehabilitation initiatives encompassing a total of 737 police stations. A comprehensive review of the progress on the Smart Police Station project and an evaluation of the facilities integrated into these stations took place during the briefing.

Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi directed the expeditious allocation of land to every landless police station across the province, stressing the swift completion of the land transfer process.

The meeting also addressed the project involving the construction of 313 houses for police officers and employees.

In attendance were Inspector General Police, Senior Member Board of

Revenue, Additional IG, Secretary Home, Secretary Communication and Works, CCPO, CTO, SSP Admin, and other key police officials.

**CM's initiative propels drug rehab center at Data Darbar Hospital:** Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi chaired a special meeting to assess progress on proposed enhancements for Data Darbar Hospital.

During the meeting, deliberations took place regarding the proposition to establish a treatment center for individuals grappling with drug addiction within Data Darbar Hospital.

Additionally, the prospect of entrusting the management of Data Darbar Hospital to the Anti-Narcotics Force was under consideration. The management reported that an initial allocation of 50 beds for the drug addiction treatment center in Data Darbar Hospital is underway.

Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi emphasized the commitment to delivering optimal medical facilities at Data Darbar Hospital, stating that the objective is to enhance healthcare services for the public. To ensure improved management, Data Darbar Hospital is slated to be handed over to the Primary and Secondary Healthcare department.

In attendance were Provincial Minister Azfar Ali Nasir, Chairman Planning and Development, Senior Member Board of Revenue, Secretary Auqaf, Secretary Health, Special Secretary Health, Commissioner Lahore, and other key officials.

## Officers and officials should perform duties punctually and responsibly: Salim Khan

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Director General Public Relations (DGPR Sindh) Muhammad Salim Khan visited various Directorates of Information Department on Wednesday.

DGPR Sindh gave instructions to the officers and staff on this occasion and asked them to perform their official duties in a timely and responsible manner. He said that it is the first task of the information department to inform the public about all the projects of the Sindh government through the media and for this purpose the officers of all the departments are using print, electronic and social media to

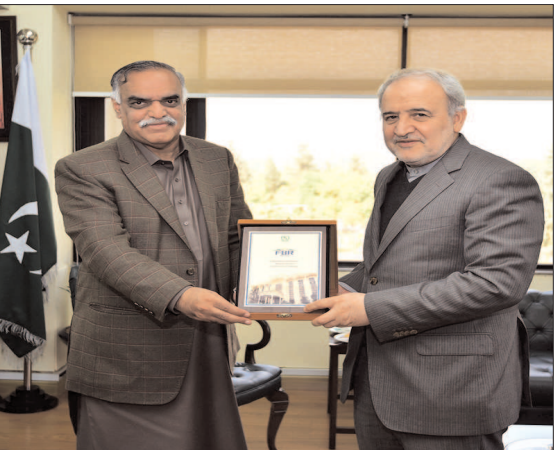


inform the public about the ongoing development projects in the province.

In his visit, DGPR Sindh Muhammad Salim Khan also visited the offices of Directorate of Admin and Accounts, Directorate of Advertisement,

Directorate of Press Information, Directorate of Publication, Directorate of Films, Directorate of R&R and office of Section Officer. He inquired about the office affairs from the officers and staff and issued necessary instructions on the spot.

## Ambassador of Iran to Pakistan Calls on Chairman FBR



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Iran to Pakistan H.E. Dr. Reza Amir Moghaddam called on Chairman Federal Board of Revenue Malik Amjed Zubair Tiwana here at FBR HQs. Member Customs (Ops) was also present on the occasion.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed matters pertaining to customs, cross border trade and management for smooth flow of bilateral trade between the two countries. They agreed to remove the irritants in the barter trade for increased economic activities between the two neighbors. The two sides also

agreed on early operationalisation of gate at Rimdan-Gabd crossing point for facilitation of traders and enhanced cross border trade. The Iranian ambassador said that expansion of parking area on Taftan side would facilitate Iranian trucks. He also requested to allow free movement of Iranian trucks atleast up till Quetta. Chairman FBR apprised him of the legal hurdles in this regard, however, he assured to look into the matter. It was also agreed that both sides will work on sharing trade related data digitally through Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) system.

The Iranian ambassador also invited a delegation comprising of officers of Pakistan Customs and other relevant Departments of Pakistan to Iran for a meeting to resolve all border related issues between the two brotherly countries.

## District admin starts anti-encroachment operation

LAHORE (APP): The district administration has started a comprehensive anti-encroachment operation in the provincial capital following the directions of Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab. On the first day of the operation, 282 encroachers were arrested, 565 sheds and makeshift structures were demolished, 190

restaurants and shops were sealed and six truck-load of confiscated items were shifted to MCL junkyard.

Lahore Deputy Commissioner Rafia Haider told media on Wednesday that the operation was carried out at Yateem Khana Road, Multan Road, Ferozpur Road, Thokar Niaz Bagh, Allama Iqbal Town, Dharampura, Canal Road, Ravi zone and other areas. Municipal Corporation Lahore (MCL), police and other departments were also taking part in the anti-encroachment operation. Rafia Haider said that as per instructions given by the CM Punjab, the operation against encroachment will continue. The operation will

persist to ensure smooth traffic flow on busy roads. No leniency will be shown towards those involved in encroachments, she warned. She appealed to the public to report encroachment if reoccur in any area after the operation. She urged citizens and traders to cooperate with the authorities in this regard.

## ‘Govt trying its best to improve Children’s Hospital’

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Punjab Health Minister Prof Dr. Javed Akram has said that the government is trying its best to improve Children's Hospital Lahore.

He was chairing the 9th syndicate meeting of the University of Child Health Sciences (UCHS) here on Wednesday. He said that basic steps are being taken to make the UCHS a paperless university.

Earlier the minister approved all the minutes of the 8th Syndicate meeting. Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Masood Sadiq also presented a report on the implementation of the decisions of the 7th Syndicate meeting. During the Syndicate meeting, 100 per cent implementation on the Lahore High Court's orders about quality and performance SOPs was emphasized. It was decided to approve the statutes of the UCHS and send them to the chancellor for final approval through the department. All the decisions of the finance and planning committee of the 8th syndicate meeting were approved. During the meeting, the ongoing progress on the complex under construction of the UCHS was also reviewed in detail. The officials of Infrastructure Development Authority Punjab gave a briefing in this regard during the syndicate

meeting. Approval has been given for the upgradation and repair of the lifts of the Children's Hospital Emergency and OPD and apart from this, equipment for the new department has also been

approved. The revised estimate for revamping Children's Hospital Lahore has also been approved.

Moreover, an agreement has been signed between UCHS and Al-Rafa Foundation during the syndi-

cate meeting to further improve the treatment of patients. Under the agreement, a satellite clinic of the Children's Hospital will be established where the consultants will provide free medical facilities to the children.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Asif Ullah with regards to moveable & immoveable assets of deceased Ms. Asia Khan citizen number 1730144772592 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1.Sajid Ullah (Brother)2.Farman Ullah (Brother)3.Safi Ullah (Brother)4.Parveen (Mother) 5.Fozia (Sister)6.Asif Ullah (Sister)7.Nadia (Sister) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA RING ROAD-DSFU


PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Ms. Jamila with regards to moveable & immoveable assets of deceased Mr. Rostam citizen number 1570225037999 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1.Begum Bibi (Daughter)2.Niaz Begum (Daughter)3.Jamila (Spouse)4.Said Riaz (Son) 5.Sher Amin (Son)6.Riaz Khan (Son) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA DIR UPPER-SFU

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Muhammad Zubair Asghar Qureshi with regards to moveable & immoveable assets of deceased Mr. Muhammad Asghar Qureshi citizen number 1730123594363 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1.Sadia Asghar (Daughter) 2.Noman Asghar Qureshi (Son) 3.Muhammad Zubair Asghar Qureshi (Son)4.Taimur Asghar (Son) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA MEGA CENTER PESHAWAR-SFU

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Ms. Gul Chehra with regards to moveable & immoveable assets of deceased Mr. Ashiq Saleem citizen number 1730112969157 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1.Bakhtiar Alam Khan (Brother) 2.Gul Chehra (Spouse) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA MARDAN-SFU

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Taifoor Khan with regards to moveable & immoveable assets of deceased Mr. Abdul Ghafoor Khan citizen number 3740502509825 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1.Maimoona Bangash (Daughter)2.Waheeda Begum (Spouse)3.Taifoor Khan (Son) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA KOHAT-SFU

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Khan Momin with regards to moveable & immoveable assets of deceased Mr. Aslam Khan citizen number 2150910890891 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1.Roz Noma (Spouse)2.Khan Momin (Son) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA DI KHAN-SFU



### OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER HYDROLOGY

### IRRIGATION DIVISION PESHAWAR

Ph#: 091-9212114 Email: hydrology1234@gmail.com

#### NOTICE FOR INVITING E-BIDDING

(SINGLE STAGE SINGLE ENVELOPE PROCEDURE)

Hydrology Irrigation Division Peshawar Irrigation Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, invites electronic bid from the eligible firms/contractors in accordance with KPRA procurements rules 2014 on single stage single envelope procedure for the following works.

#.	Name of Work/ Sub Work	E/Cost in (Rs.)	2% E/Money+ P Tax+ Stamp Duty in (Rs)	PEC Relevant Code
A	Annual Maintenance & Repair (AM&R), Calibration & Repair of different types of Gauges in Hydrology Irrigation Division Peshawar Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during (2023-2024)			
1	Calibration and repair to 06 Nos. Gauge stations in District Peshawar.	298000	12210	C-6 & above CE-04
2	Calibration and repair to 07 Nos. Gauge stations in District Charsadda.	370000	13650	C-6 & above CE-04
3	Calibration and repair to 5 Nos. Gauge stations in District Nowshera.	219585	10642	C-6 & above CE-04
4	Calibration and repair to 4 Nos. Gauge stations in District Swabi.	230000	10850	C-6 & above CE-04
5	Calibration and repair to 5 Nos. Gauge stations in District Mardan.	200000	10250	C-6 & above CE-04
6	Calibration and repair to 4 Nos. Gauge stations in District Swat.	209613	10442	C-6 & above CE-04
7	Calibration and repair to 04 Nos. Gauge stations in District Peshawar.	220000	10650	C-6 & above CE-04
8	Calibration and repair to 5 Nos. Gauge stations in District Chitral, Malakand and Dir	309476	12440	C-6 & above CE-04
9	Provision/repair of telemetry system (Rain Gauge) various item i.e. battery etc in District Swat, Malakand, Peshawar, shangla and Swabi.	330000	12850	C-6 & above CE-04
10	Establishment of Flood Warr ng Cell i. Hydrology Division Peshawar i.e. batteries, electrification, solar system, Distemper, Painting of Door etc unforeseen items.	350000	13250	C-6 & above CE-04
11	Provision/repair of telemetry system (huts) various item i.e. battery etc in District Peshawar and Charsadda.	280000	11850	C-6 & above CE-04
12	Provision/repair of telemetry system (huts) various items i.e. battery etc in District Dir.	180000	9850	C-6 & above CE-04
13	Provision/repair of telemetry system (huts) various item i.e. battery etc in District Swat and Mardan.	180000	9850	C-6 & above CE-04
14	Repair/Installation Surface Valocity Radar (SVR) i/c cables, replacement of defective parts Kabul River at Adezai.	120000	8650	C-6 & above CE-04
15	Shifting of Telemetry System Swat River at Khawazakhela Right Bank to Left Band of Swat River.	350000	13250	C-6 & above CE-04
16	Shifting of Telemetry System Kalpani Nullah Said Abad to Kalpani Nullah Chowki Risalpur.	300000	12250	C-6 & above CE-04
17	Restoration of water supply for hut of telemetry system i.e. bore etc. at Adezai Bridge District Charsadda.	170109	9652	C-6 & above CE-04
18	Restoration of water supply for hut of telemetry system i.e. bore etc. at Adezai Bridge District Charsadda.	170109	9652	C-6 & above CE-04
19	Restoration of water supply for hut of telemetry system i/c bore etc Kabul River at Motorway Bridge District Charsadda.	170109	9652	C-6 & above CE-04
20	Calibration and repair to 06 Nos. Gauge stations i.e Siran River, Kunhar River Ghari Habibullah, Ichar Nullah Ghari road, Ichar nullah Ogi, KunharRiver at Kaghan, Nandiyar Khawar Batagram in District Mansehra and Batagram.	310000	12450	C-6 & above CE-04
21	Calibration and repair to 04 Nos. Gauge stations i.e Srrori Kassi, Ichar, Nandiar Batagram, Bedadi Kassi, Jura Nullah, and Batkass Nullah in Jurisdiction of Abbottabad Sub Division.	200000	10250	C-6 & above CE-04
22	Calibration and repair to 05 Nos. Gauge stations i.e. Haro River Jabri, Dour River Makitan, Haro River Khanpur, Bakka Nullah Pannian, and Bakka Nullah Bakka Village in District Haripur.	260000	11450	C-6 & above CE-04

TERMS AND CONDITIONS:

- Bid Solicitation Documents containing all the terms and conditions and other relevant instructions for the work to bidders can be downloaded from the Irrigation Website ([www.irrigation.gkp.pk](http://www.irrigation.gkp.pk)) as well as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Regulatory Authority Website ([www.kpra.gov.pk](http://www.kpra.gov.pk)). For the mentioned work separate Bids solicitation documents are to be submitted by the interested bidders.
- Electronic bidding shall be done on "Above/Below system" on BOQ/Engineer's estimate.
- As per clause 37-(A) KPRA Rules, all bidder are required to have registration with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority.
- The bidder shall submit 2% id security of the estimated cost as mentioned above, in the shape of deposit at call (Original) enclosed along with their bid before closing date and time which must reach to this office through courier service and the authenticity of the envelop will be confirmed from the courier services.
- Notifications issued by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (KPRA) pertaining to procurement process issued from time to time shall be applicable.
- If the evaluated electronic bid costs of two or more bidders are equal, then the successful bidder will be declared through draw/toss among them as deem fit by the procuring entity.
- The last date & time for Submission of the Bid along with relevant documents is 16-01-2024 up to 12:00 Noon, which will be opened on the same day at 12:30 PM in the office of the undersigned in presence of Contractors and their representatives who wishes to attend.
- Bid security of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest bidders will be retained till the approval of bids by the competent authority.
- Term and condition as per KPRA Act 2014 Prevailing Notification or subsequent changes if made their in and whereas matters pertaining to Add: bids security as per KPRA SRO No.14Col-1-24/2021-22, dated 10/05/2022 will be applicable.
- All bidders are required to have valid registration with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority established under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Act 2018 (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Act XXI of 2013)
- The Competent authority reserve the right to accept/reject any or all bids at any time prior to acceptance of bid as per Para 47 (i) of KPRA rules 2014 by assigning cogent reason.
- The interested firms/contractors may obtain clarification regarding bids solicitation documents during office hour or any working day from the office of the Executive Engineer Hydrology Irrigation Division Peshawar.
- The contractor must prepared their CDR's i.e. 2% Earnest money and additional security (If any) in shape of call deposit only for all the above mentioned work in the name of Executive Engineer Hydrology Irrigation Division Peshawar and should sure its submission with their bids. In case of failure their bids would be rejected and punitive action should be initiated against the defaulter as per KPRA Act/Rules

Executive Engineer Hydrology Irrigation Division Peshawar

INF(P): 3047/2023



# CS holds meeting with trainee officers

PESHAWAR (APP): The Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry on Wednesday held a meeting with the under-training officers of Pakistan Administrative Service here at Chief Secretary Conference Room.

At the meeting Secretary Establishment, Secretary P&D and member Board of Revenue were also present.

Addressing the trainee officers, the chief secretary

said the role of service of civil officers was to provide best possible services to the people. He stressed upon the officers to utilize their abilities and professional training for serving the people in the best manner.

The civil service, he said, plays the role of backbone in the state machinery and besides an honor, it was also a big responsibility for which, he added they were provided with the best training to service the

masses.

The chief secretary further said that conduct of free, fair and transparent elections was our responsibility for which all available resources will be utilized.

At the end of the meeting, the trainee officers thanked the chief secretary for providing them with valuable guidance and pledged that they will utilize all their energies for the welfare of people and country.



PESHAWAR: Chairman of Board of Governors MTI Hayatabad Medical Complex Ghulam Qadir Khan chairing inaugural meeting of new BoG.

# Free, fair and timely polls panacea to all ills: Faiq

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Muhammad Faiq Shah, founder and chairman of the Amun Taraqqi Party on Wednesday said free, transparent and prompt elections were the only way to steer the country and nation out of the prevailing crisis.

Faiq said election isn't the name of bestowing cronies, this is the right of people, urging the election commission to make it easier to contest elections for ordinary people, voting and transparent results as its constitutional responsibility.

If the objective is only selection, we don't need to waste massive public money on elections, he asserted.

The ATP chief slammed the statement of former secretary election commission Kavar Muhammad Dilshad that he stated the election

will plunge the country into bankruptcy, which is highly disappointing.

He asked to immediately remove uncertainty and make decisions for national interests unitedly.

"Economy cannot be stabilised in the political polarization," he said while speaking to the different delegations including lawyers, political and social activists here.

The party leader vowed to hold strict accountability, stating that textile industry, trade and small-scale businesses have ruined.

Our party has come into the political arena by carrying a sole manifesto, roadmap and ideology, through which the destiny of the whole nation and country will be altered, Shah said.

He added education, health and employment would gain fundamental

importance in our party's manifesto, asked to enforce emergency in these sectors and provide authority and justice to people.

Those who rule Sindh and Balochistan should assess the current state of education, agriculture, health and employment: what they have delivered to people in the last four decades?

Shah questioned: What they (rulers) do, except supplying dirty drinking water, destruction of education, health and other key sectors, polluted environment, china cutting and erecting castles and palaces, properties abroad.

The party leader said clean drinking water was unavailable till date whereas employment resources and opportunities have been snatched.

He said big fishes must be answered to public's questions.

# UNOPS in collaboration with UET organized one-day seminar

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) in collaboration with the Department of Civil Engineering, University of Engineering and Technology (UET) Peshawar organized a one-day seminar on "GHAR: Green Housing, Affordable, Resilient; Challenges and Opportunities the other day at UET Peshawar, drawing a diverse audience of practicing engineers, architects, town planners, policymakers, and stakeholders from the construction industry.

The primary objective of the seminar was to raise awareness among stakeholders about the critical need for climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable practices in construction.

The event aimed to inspire and empower professionals in the field to

adopt practices that are not only environmentally friendly but also economically viable.

Mr. Brian Fawcett, Country Manager UNOPS Pakistan, graced the occasion as the chief guest. In his address, Mr. Fawcett highlighted the role of UNOPS in enhancing the technical capacity of the Government of Pakistan in designing, constructing, and managing climate-resilient housing.

He emphasized the importance of research and development, training, and communication on passive techniques to improve building performance.

Fawcett commended the Department of Civil Engineering and Earthquake Engineering Centre, UET Peshawar for their efforts in developing a Seismic Building Code and other research relevant to the project.

Prof. Dr. Sahar Noor, Dean Faculty of

Mechanical, Chemical, and Industrial Engineering, welcomed participants on behalf of the Vice Chancellor of UET Peshawar.

He stressed the collective mission of the seminar to gain insights into sustainable housing, fortify structures against unpredictable disasters, and integrate green initiatives for energy conservation and carbon footprint reduction. Prof. Dr. Irshad Ahmad gave a memento.

Prof. Dr. Bashir Alam, Chairman, Department of Civil Engineering, emphasized the need to reconsider housing approaches in the face of unprecedented climate challenges.

He highlighted the importance of green housing as a crucial step towards creating affordable and resilient structures that address environmental concerns and promote community well-being. Prof. Dr.

## Inaugural meeting of BoGs held

PESHAWAR (APP): The inaugural meeting of new Board of Governors (BoGs) members of Hayatabad Medical Complex was held here on Wednesday.

The meeting was chaired by Ghulam Qadir Khan, the Chairman of the newly appointed Board of Governors, which was attended by Dr. Muhammad Ali Chohan, Professor Mahfooz Hussain, Advocate Akhtar Naveed, Delroz Khan, Retired Major General Taj-ul-Haq, and Advocate Haziq Ali Shah.

Chairman Ghulam Qadir Khan acknowledged the previous board's performance and emphasized the need to address patient care, treatment provisions, and swiftly resolve financial and administrative issues within the hospital.

The Chairman also provided insights into the accomplishments of the previous board, focusing on patient welfare and the efficient management of financial and administrative matters.

The Board pledged its commitment to providing quality healthcare services and promptly addressing challenges for the betterment of the community.

## Cold and dry weather to prevail in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The Provincial Meteorological Center Peshawar on Wednesday predicted that mainly cold and dry weather is expected in most districts of the province, while very cold in upper districts and hilly areas.

It 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.

The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in centigrade at different stations of KP were Peshawar 23/06, Chitral 17/-01, Timergara 20/00, Dir 19/-02, Mirkhani 17/-02, Kalam 14/-05, Drosh 14/01, Saidu Sharif 21/01, Pattan 21/14, Malam Jabba 10/-02, Takht Bhai 23/02, Kakul 18/01, Balakot 20/02, Parachinar 16/01, Bannu 25/06, Cherat 16/05, DI Khan City 27/07.



PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry meeting with under-training officers of Pakistan Administrative Service.

# Minister inaugurates newly constructed business centre

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce, Technical Education and Merged Districts' Affairs, Dr. Aamer Abdullah inaugurated the newly constructed Business Centre at Small Industries Estate here on Wednesday.

The construction of the centre has cost about Rs.45 million. The commercial operation of the facility could earn millions of rupees for the Small Industries Development Board (SIDB) on monthly basis.

The newly constructed Business Centre at Kohat Road, Small Industrial

Estate is comprised of display halls and showrooms for the exhibition of the products manufactured by the manufacturers of the estate.

Besides, the Managing Director (MD) SIDB, Ghazanfar Ali, Deputy Managing Directors Sahibzada Zulfiqar and Noman Fayyaz and other officers, officials and employees were also present on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, the caretaker minister termed the project as of high importance and directed amendments to the business model of the board for its financial stability, uplift

and to bring improvement as per requirements of the modern era.

He said that starting a new project used to be a hard task for any organization. However, he said that with the passage of this phase, the board has made a remarkable achievement.

He said that now for sustainable development the management of the board should take more such useful measures.

He directed the management of the board to take forward the concept of a profitable and business approach and adoption of a result-oriented short-term

# KP Health Security Action Plan 2024-2028 finalized

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Technical Group in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, under the leadership of Director General Health Services, concluded a three-day consultative session here on Wednesday to determine the Health Security Action Plan for 2024-2028.

The meeting, attended by Chief Center for Disease Control NIH Pakistan, Dr. Mumtaz, as well as all deputy directors and project directors from the Department of Health, representatives from the National Health Institute, and technical teams from the World Health Organization, was convened through mutual cooperation between the United States Agency for International Development-JSI the WHO and the Ministry of Health.

The workshop marked the culmination of collaborative efforts to address health security challenges in the region.

In his closing remarks, Director General Health Services, Dr. Shaukat Ali, expressed gratitude to all participants for their active engagement in the consultative meeting.

He informed the audience that the province has almost finalized an action plan in light of the International Health Regulations 2005 for the diagnosis, control, and treatment of diseases.

The consultative session also witnessed the determination of a Provincial Action Plan under the National Action Plan for Health Security.

Dr. Shaukat Ali highlighted that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is leading in the implementation of International Health Regulations in the

Pakistan EMRO region, making it the first province to do so. He thanked all stakeholders for their technical assistance.

Chief Executive Center for Disease Control NIH Pakistan, Dr. Mumtaz, in his address, mentioned that at the national level, a National Action Plan for Health Security has been established, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa consistently taking the lead in formulating action plans for the provinces. He commended the province for its proactive approach. The technical team from the World Health Organization emphasized that Pakistan, being a signatory to the International Health Regulations, needs to enhance its capacity at 19 thematic areas in the health sector.

The team conducted two days of intensive discussions and consultations on thematic areas.

The resulting reports will contribute to the preparation of a provincial plan, which will be presented by the Department of Health experts for implementation.

## Seminar to tackle health challenges organized

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Addressing the growing impact of climate change on public health, Evidence for Health in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa organized a comprehensive one-day seminar for health managers here on Wednesday.

This event brought together key stakeholders, including Director General of Health Services, Dr. Shaukat Ali, and Director of Public Health, Dr. Arshad Roghani, along

with participation from district health offices and regulatory bodies across the province.

Dr. Shaukat Ali underscored the vulnerability of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to climatic variations, emphasizing the adverse effects on public health. The seminar shed light on the surge in influenza-like diseases, waterborne infections, and pneumonia, all attributed to the changing climate.

Dr. Shaukat Ali commended the successful control of dengue this year,

highlighting Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as the pioneer in developing a robust health security action plan, marking a significant stride toward building a climate-resilient healthcare system.

During his address, Dr. Shaukat Ali stressed the need for the establishment and activation of primary health centers, including rural and basic health units. Despite economic constraints, he assured that no district would face shortages of essential medications and funds.



PESHAWAR: Deputy Director Regulation Directorate East Zone Zil Haja Ilyas supervising grand operation against illegal encroachments.

## PESCO notifies power suspension

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) on Wednesday notified that due to maintenance work power supply will remain suspended from Peshawar Cantt grid station on 21st December from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Consequently, it said consumers of University Town, PAF Base and Palosi feeders will face inconvenience. The power supply will also remain suspended from Wah-Haripur Transmission Line on 21st December from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. resultantly, consumers of 66 KV Haripur and Hevellian grid connected feeders will face inconvenience.

# Inauguration ceremony of 1st KMC-Con took place at KMC

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The event



witnessed the participation of all faculty members, students, and national and international KMC alumni, making it a moment of great pride for the entire

KMC family.

The organizing committee comprises accomplished professionals of Patron in chief Dean KMC Prof. Dr. Mahmud Aurangzeb, and President APPNA Dr. Arshad Rehan. Convenor Prof. Dr. Amber Ashraf from KMC and Dr. Muhammad Taimur from APPNA while Prof. Dr. Mushtaq Ahmad, Prof. Dr. Amer Azhar, Prof. Dr. Saadia Ashraf, and Prof. Dr. Muhammad Zarin are the Co-Convenors. from KMC and Prof. Dr. Aamir Ghaffoor Khan, Dr. Rashid Hanif, Dr. Humaira Haleem from APPNA. The conference is bound to be a great success with such a team of dedicated individuals leading the way.

The Health Advisor to

the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Prof. Dr. Riaz Anwar, was the chief guest at the event. He was accompanied by distinguished personalities Chairman BOG (Board of Governors) of KTH/KMC/KCD, Dr. Umar Ayub Khan, Dr. Arshad Rehan - President of APPNA, Prof. Dr. Amber Ashraf - Head of Cardiology at KTH, and MTI-KP Policy Board Member, Dr. Zia-ul-Islam.

The audience and alumni were warmly welcomed by Dean KMC Prof. Dr. Mahmud Aurangzeb who expressed his pride in the KMC alumni's achievements in prestigious positions across the globe at renowned organizations. He highlighted KMC-Con

as a game changer in the field of medicine, unlocking new doors for healthcare innovations and expertise.

This is truly a moment of great pride for the entire KMC family.

Dean KMC expressed his gratitude towards APPNA and the entire audience for their support. He also shared his vision for the future of Khyber Medical College, which involves transforming it into a fully-fledged university. To achieve this significant milestone, he appealed for the support of everyone present.

During the speech, Prof. Riaz Anwar highlighted the unwavering commitment of Dr. Amjad Zaidi to academic research and

clinical practice, expressing his pleasure in witnessing the remarkable success of KMC after four decades.

The primary objective of KMC-Con is to reinforce the relationship between medical education and research to further enhance patient care.

This conference serves as a platform where medical professionals from the American healthcare system, including distinguished Pakistani cardiologists, neurosurgeons, neurologists, and transplant surgeons, can share their expertise in healthcare technology advancements.

Experience a remarkable 3-day event from 20th till 22nd December 2023

that will be filled with groundbreaking scientific research, innovative healthcare advancements, and engaging symposiums hosted by reputable medical professionals who will share their expertise in the field of Healthcare technology advancements. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to immerse yourself in the natural beauty and traditions of Peshawar, which define our rich cultural heritage.

Relive the excitement and joy from the unforgettable memories with the Grant Alumni Reunion and Gala Musical Night. Get ready to immerse yourself in the amazing moments that will make this event truly unforgettable.





## In brief

### Youth killed in Mansehra F.P. Report

MANSEHRA: Robbers shot dead a youth over resistance during a robbery in village Shahelia of district Mansehra, police said on Wednesday. According to details, robbers barged into a house whose residents were on visit to house of a relative in Abbottabad. Over suspicion, Shoaib 30, entered house of his uncle to check after which robber started firing leaving him critically injured and fled the scene. The injured was shifted to King Abdullah Hospital where he succumbed to his wounds. The body was handed over to heirs and police after registering a case into the incident started efforts to arrest the culprits.

### FC distributes winter kits F.P. Report

CHITRAL: In a joint initiative, Frontier Corps North, in partnership with the Muslim Aid International, successfully distributed Winter Kits to the residents of Mastuj, Parkosap, and Chuinj, on Wednesday. The distribution aimed to fulfill the essential needs of those residing in the remote areas of Chitral during the winter season. A total of 275 Winter Kits were disbursed, reaching out to families in need. The collaborative effort received appreciation from the local community, acknowledging Frontier Corps North's timely support in providing winter essentials. This initiative reflects the commitment of both organizations to address the challenges faced by vulnerable communities, especially during challenging weather conditions. Frontier Corps North continues its mission to contribute positively to the welfare of the community, and partnerships with NGOs like Muslim Aid International play a crucial role in achieving these objectives.

### Two robbers injured

VEHARI (INP): Two robbers were injured, held with arms and looted valuables after exchange of fire here on Wednesday. According to details, on a tip-off, the police approached a two-member gang of robbers fleeing after committing robbery in Jhal Sial police station jurisdiction. Upon sight of police, the robbers started heavy firing and attempted to flee from the scene. In retaliatory firing of police, both robbers identified as Adnan and Mazhar were injured and arrested with arms and looted valuables. The injured robbers were wanted by police in various criminal cases and they were shifted to hospital.

### Customs foil smuggling bid

QUETTA (PPI): Collector of Customs Balochistan claimed to have foiled a bid to smuggle 826 grams gold and foreign currency in an operation conducted in collaboration with FC Balochistan along Pak-Afghan border in Chaman area on Wednesday. According to a statement issued by the spokesman for Collector of Customs Balochistan, the Collectorate team seized 826 grams gold and foreign currency in an operation at FC Gate in Chaman. The raiding team also arrested five alleged accused during the operation. The value of seized goods was reported to be Rs30 million. The operation was conducted under the supervision of Deputy Collector, Waqar Ahmed and Inspector Saad Faisal in compliance with the directives of Collector Customs (Enforcement), Balochistan, Muhammad Ismail, the statement added.

# AWKUM employees halts transportation facility in protest

F.P. Report

MARDAN: The ongoing strike at Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan (AWKUM) has entered its seventh week with an additional disruption as transportation services are now suspended.

The latest setback comes as a result of a delay in the convening of the Executive and Academic Council meetings due to a notification issued by the HEC Secretary. This delay has sparked intense frustration among university employees.

Adnan Saeed, President of the All Employees Association, has called upon political, social, and religious figures in Mardan to intervene, urging them to play a role in saving the university and addressing the injustices faced by university staff. Addressing the gathering, Adnan Saeed, along with Chairman Muzamil Khan, Senior Vice President Jawad Sanger, General Secretary Inam Afridi, Focal Person Umer Ali Shah, Media Incharge Ali Khan, Vice President Abid

Ali, Asfak Habib, and Popo Khan, emphasized the need to end the victimization of university employees and the economic oppression they face.

The key demands put forth by the protesters include the cessation of retrenchments and economic killings, payment of arrears and increments in salaries, and the immediate withdrawal of the illogical and unlawful decision to transfer 350 employees to remote campuses. The absence of a service structure has deprived employees of their rights for fifteen years, as the service structure neglects several key points related to the rights of the employees and falls under the category of exploitation and victimization.

Speaking during the protest, the organizers expressed that university employees play a fundamental role in the progress of Abdul Wali Khan University. Unfortunately, the employees find themselves grappling with numerous issues as the university administration remains oblivious to their

plight. They highlighted that during the era of inflation, the wages of the employees are meager, and despite promises, there has been no increase in their salaries.

In a plea to the authorities, the organizers stated that the university employees have been deprived of salary increments so far, and their demands for salary increases have fallen on deaf ears. The university administration is urged to adhere to the laws governing employees' rights and consider their demands for fair compensation.

As the strike prolongs and transportation services remain halted, the impact on the daily lives of students and employees intensifies. The uncertainty surrounding the resolution of these issues raises concerns about the future of Abdul Wali Khan University and the well-being of its dedicated workforce. The plea from the protesters echoes the sentiment that immediate action is required to address the grievances and restore normalcy to the university's operations.

# JUI protests against law and order, arranged sit-in

F.P. Report

LARKANA: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) unit of Taluk Baqrani staged a protest against the growing unrest in Larkana last day. A sit-in was held after a protest was held by Baqrani, in which JUI leaders Abdul Sami Sharo, Hafiz Muhammad Azam, Muhammad Juman Bhatti and others protested and said that unrest is starting to touch the sky in Baqrani taluka of Larkana district.

Roads and paths have become a no-go area for the public. It is a clear proof that a few days ago, two unknown armed men stole cash and a motorcycle from JUI activist Abdul Samad Sohro at the Gaji Wah police picket, but the Baqrani police are still avoiding it.

While giving a warning,

he said that if the police do not try to recover the looted goods within five days, we will stage a dharna on December 27 on the Larkana-Moin Jo Daro road. On the other hand, DSP Baqrani Ghulam Mustafa Abro assured the protesters and the sit-in was dispersed.

**Youth killed over old rivalry:** A young man was killed by unknown armed men near Larkana. According to details, 26-year-old Sajid Ali Woldit Tajal was shot dead by armed men in the village of Gul Muhammad Sheikh of Taharu Dero police station in Taluk Larkana. Sheikh was killed while the passer-by Shaman Ali Woldit Ahmed Nawaz Sheikh was seriously injured in the firing.

After receiving the information about the incident,

the border police arrived and ascertained the details while the police shifted the injured to Chandka Hospital for further treatment and the deceased. The body of the young man was handed over to the heirs after conducting the post-mortem, while when the body reached the house, there was a scene of mourning in the house.

While talking to the media, the Taluk Police said that this incident happened due to old enmity where unknown armed men attacked the young man. He was killed and one was injured, we are trying to arrest those involved in the firing in any case, while on the other hand, Deputy Inspector General of Police Larkana Nasir Aftab took strict notice of the incident from SSP Larkana.



BAHAWALPUR: Prof. Dr. Tanvir Hussain Turabi, Dean Faculty of Agriculture and Environment Sciences and other cutting the ribbon at the opening ceremony of Agrarians Fun Sports Fest 2023.

# As many as 240 people obtains winter package

F.P. Report

TIMERGARA: Al-Khidmat Foundation Lower Dir with the support of Zakat Foundation distributed winter relief packages to 240 deserving and needy people, on Wednesday.

The dignitaries participated in the ceremony, vice President of Al-Khidmat Foundation Lower Dir, Haji Majidullah Khan, General Secretary Sultan Zeib, President of Timergara City, Haji Fahimuddin, Ishfaq Khan,

Muhammad Ali Ghori, Rahimul Haq and other responsible persons, 240 deserving, deserving and winter e package among poor people, which included wicks, jackets, warm blankets and each package was worth 11 thousand rupees, was distributed among the poor and indigent people on this occasion.

President of Al-Khidmat Foundation Lower Dir, Haji Majidullah Khan and General Secretary Sultan Zeib. He said that Al-

Khidmat Foundation is serving the poor humanity without any political or religious affiliation. In view of the severe cold, they distributed winter packages among the poor and needy people of Lower Dir in a transparent manner with the support of Zakat Foundation America. appealed to the philanthropists to take special care of the poor and deserving people around them and to support them in all possible ways keeping in mind their needs.

# KSO arranges session for politicians

F.P. Report

BUNER: The Karwan Social Organization was organized a session for the politician here at Buner Press Club on Wednesday.

The JUI the ADP the QWP the PTI the PML leaders attended. The KSO chairman Sarzamin Khan briefed them about the elections act

2017. He shared all of politicians and the candidates must know about the rules and regulations framed in the elections act 2017 so as to follow them for making sure holding the election fair free and transparent.

The speaker shared all about the pre campaigning during campaigning post campaigning voting day

agents and complaints about voters etc. The politicians Maulana Saeedur Rehman Mufakir Qari Arifullah Mohamad Jan Husean Zaid and Adiaquillah raised questions and suggested that these recommendations to be submitted before the elections commission so as to make easy voting process in rural belt especially in the hilly areas.



KHYBER: Deputy Commissioner administering oath to Returning Officers, appointed for general elections. — F.P. photo

## ROs take oath for elections

F.P. Report

KHYBER: The oath-taking ceremony of the returning officers appointed for national and provincial assemblies' seats election for conducting of upcoming general election in Deputy Commissioner (DC) Khyber office last day. DC, Khyber Sanaullah and District Election Commissioner Shahid Ali administered oath from the officials.

As per the press release Additional DC (finance) Hasseb-ur-rehman was posted as returning officer for national assembly seat NA-27 while Assistant Commissioners (AC) Landi Kotal Irshad Mohmand, AC Bara Shahab-u-Din, AC Jamrud Dr Amir Zeb besides education and other administration departments officers were assigned duties of returning officers for provincial assemblies seats PK -69,70 and 71.

Later on, returning officers for NA-27 and PK -69, 70 and 71 publicized notices last evening, quoting the Election Commission of Pakistan stating that candidates can submit their nomination papers from 20 December 2023 to 22 December. From 24 December to 30 December scrutiny of the documents will be held. On 12 January 2024 a candidate can get back his candidature while on 13 January election signs will be allotted and general election will be held on 08 February 2024.

## Kisan board flays black marketing

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Vice President Kissan Board Pakistan Aman Ullah Chatha and District President Hafizabad Shoukat Ali Phularwan said that all tall claims of district administration proved falls to provide fertilizer on control price while black marketing of fertilizer is continued in the district. Fertilizer mafia is engaged in selling fertilizer on arbitrary prices. They expressed these views while addressing a meeting of farmers at Hafizabad.

They said that due to slackness and negligence of concerned officers, farmers are compel to purchase fertilizer at price of Rs. 4900/= per bag instead of Rs. 3750/= per bag in black for growing wheat crop. They said that Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad was given good news of reaching goods train loading with twenty thousand bags but shortage of fertilizer has not been overcome so far and government has failed to provide any relief to farmers of the district. They said that not only hallow slogans of government to provide relief to farmers exposed but per acre yield of wheat also be affected.

## Bid to smuggle diesel foiled, five held

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: The police foiled on Wednesday an attempt to huge quantity of diesel and arrested five accused during operation in Daraban police station jurisdiction.

In line with directions of District Police Officer (DPO) Dera, Abdul Rauf Babar Qaisrani, police station Daraban, led by SDPO Daraban Circle Malik Anees ul Hasan along with SHO Abdul Ghaffar Khan conducted operation against non-custom paid diesel.

# Teachers true leaders of nation

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Speakers at a function have said that devoted and honest teachers are the real leaders, heroes and builders of a nation and they occupy an elevated position in each society. The government high school Banda Talash arranged the function on the retirement of its headmaster Gul Rehman after serving for more than 35 years.

The function was attended by schools' heads, teachers, students, social and political activists, area elders and colleagues of the retiring teacher. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa former 'khatieb' and Jamaat-i-Islami nominated candidate for NA 7 Maulana Muhammad Ismail was chief guest on the occasion. The function was addressed by Maulana Ismail, district education officer Lower dir

Mahboob Ilahi, former chairman All Government Employees Grand Alliance Syed Muhammad Shah, retiring school head Gul Rehman, president All Primary Teachers' Association Qazi Ubaidullah, retired schools' officer Aftab Alam, Humayun Khan, retired DDEO Haji Ali Haidar,

president school officers' association Principal Salahud Din, SOA former president Mushtaqur Rehman and others. The retiring school head was gifted by his friends, students, teachers and colleagues on the occasion.

Maulana Ismail demanded the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and high ups of the education department to take practical steps for rehabilitation of those schools which had been demolished for reconstruction in the district. DEO Mahboob Ilahi said the government had improved the standard of schools and provided qualified and trained teachers as compared to the old age. He asked teachers to focus on students' character building.

The speakers appreciated the retiring headmaster Gul Rehman for his role, contribution and devotion to the sacred profession of teaching. They said the education department was deprived of a model teacher and the best manager. They said that teachers were respected across the globe as they produced leaders of various fields. They said that a true teacher did not retire but he lived in the hearts of his students forever.

The retiring school head thanked his colleagues, principals, students, area elders and officers for giving him respect and honour on his retirement for services.

**As many as 8 thousand NCP vehicles:** The excise and taxation department official in Lower Dir Fazal Ghafoor has said that so far more than 8000 non-custom paid (NCP) vehicles have been registered with the excise department in the Lower Dir district.

The in-charge profiling center Timergara inspector Muhammad Wakil was also present on the occasion. The official said that the profiling of NCP vehicles had been sped up as Dec 31st had been declared as the last date for the process which was drawing near. He said the profiling of these NCP vehicles was fruitful as it would reduce the risks of security, car lifting and misuse of NCP vehicles in the region.

The official said that profiling of the NCP vehicles was free and the department charged nothing on it. He said that legal actions would be taken against the owners of NCP vehicles if they failed to get their cars registered by Dec 31st.

# Workshop for teachers held in Lakki Marwat

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: A three-day training workshop organised by the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Bannu for male and female teachers in the auditorium hall of Public Library in Lakki city concluded here with the certificate distribution ceremony.

During the training workshop the attendees were imparted with basic techniques and skills on SLO based examinations, efficient learning, reliable assessments and on-screen marking. Dr Muhammad Asif, a resource person delivered lectures on the development of SLO based test items and effective learning. He also acquainted the participants about on-screen marking and credible assessment.

During the workshop the participants conducted exercises and group work to excel their skills and benefit students.

Dr Asif said that the participation of female teachers in the training workshop was encouraging and it would help in providing quality education to the students in the backward area. He said that the teachers in remote southern districts needed more attention and capacity building than their colleagues in other parts of the province, especially in big cities.

"Such training workshops will enable them to deliver in a better way", he added. The educational board's chairman Arshad Ali Khalil, DEO Muhammad Ilyas Khattak and Controller of Examinations Dr Faiq Jan

distributed certificates among the participants and appreciated them for taking interest in the training session. Khalil said that the main purpose of organising the workshop was to enhance the capacity of teachers so that they could prepare students for SLO based examinations. He said that the training would also enable the teachers to improve their on-screen marking skills.

He said that the department would utilise the services of trained teachers to train more teachers on development of SLO based test items, effective learning, credible assessment and on-screen marking. BISE Bannu deputy director IT Hakeem Khan, assistant director IT Rafiullah Khan and ADEO Dr Ihsanullah were also present.

# Commissioner orders sharing of canals' closure schedule

HYDERABAD (PPI): Commissioner Hyderabad Syed Khalid Hyder Shah has directed the officers of Irrigation Department to share their schedule with the concerned Deputy Commissioners regarding the annual closure of canals so that drinking water can be stored for public.

To meet the requirement of water during the closure canals, WASA should ensure storage of water to deal with the shortage of drinking water during the annual closure for repair and de-silting work. He was presiding over a meeting to review the arrangements of water supply during the closure of canals at his office today.

Deputy Commissioner Hyderabad Tariq Qureshi, Deputy Commissioner Matari Lal Dino Mangi, Chief Engineer Kotri Barrage Haji Khan Jamali said that the Irrigation Department is working for the improvement of Irrigation System so that the farmers can be benefited for cultivation and the shortage of clean drinking water can also be ended. In this regard, the Karo Ghunghro drain is being restored to stop the sewage flowing into the fresh water canals as after its completion the sewage water would be drained out directly into the sea.

He informed that after removal of encroachments from both sides of Wadhu Wah, road would be constructed under ADP scheme which has been approved by Government of Sindh adding that after completion of this scheme the fresh water would be supplied to Rani Bagh, Niaz Stadium and public school

Hyderabad. He assured that in the annual closure of canals from December 25 to January 10, 2024, close coordination with WASA would be ensured for supply of drinking water to the people during the closure.

On this occasion, concerned WASA officer said that water has been stored in the filter plants as per the requirement, while a plan is being worked out to stop the flow of sewage in Wadhu wah and after completion of development scheme of Wadhu wah the problem of sewage in fresh water will be solved permanently and fresh water in Wadhu wah will benefit the people. In the meeting all DCs briefed the commissioner about the water storage in their concerned districts during closure.

Later, the Divisional Commissioner Hyderabad Syed Khalid Hyder Shah presiding over a meeting in his office about the Divisional Task Force for Polio has said that after positive environmental sample in Hyderabad the health department and the polio teams need to take more effective measures.





# Ukraine’s citizen army struggles with a hidden enemy

DONETSK REGION, Ukraine (Reuters): Psychotherapist Oleh Hukovskiy stands beside a white board in a makeshift classroom in eastern Ukraine and addresses a group of soldiers attending a session on how to cope with the stress of war.

The former psychiatrist joined the armed forces about six months after Russia launched a full-scale invasion in February 2022, and now runs a psychological support group attached to the 67th Separate Mechanised Brigade in the direction of the ruined town of Lyman. The classes cover basic psychological theory and coping techniques including breathing exercises. While the dozen soldiers attending are responsive to questions and suggestions, Hukovskiy is aware he can only do so much in the time provided.

"They have obligations and have to return to the frontline," he said of the troops, some of whom are being treated for light wounds and battle stress at a medical aid centre whose location the Ukrainian military requested not be disclosed. "Any intervention we are making is to stabilize them to some degree and that's all," the 41-year-old told Reuters. "So it's not for full recovery from any kind of symptoms. It's not possible in the conditions we work under."

While many soldiers who seek psychological support return to battle after short breaks, some more serious cases are sent for further treatment at rehabilitation points away from the front. Hukovskiy is one of hundreds of professionals and volunteers across Ukraine treating soldiers for mental health problems, a growing challenge for an army experiencing exhaustion as it seeks to hold a much larger enemy at bay. Many of those fighting joined as volunteers, meaning they had little, if any, preparation for sometimes fierce combat under artillery, mortar and drone fire.

"Ukraine has an army of mobilised citizens who just yesterday were teachers, artists, poets, IT specialists, or workers," said Dana Vynohradova, deputy brigade commander for moral and psychological support. "We don't have the capacity to conduct comprehensive psychological training for military specialists." The Ukrainian military has tried to recruit more people for the "first line" of response - psychological support.

Ukraine's armed forces declined to answer questions on the scale of the recruitment drive and how many soldiers had been treated for psychological conditions since the start of the invasion. Such details are often treated as military secrets. Reuters interviewed 13 people involved in

supporting troops and four soldiers undergoing treatment, from short-term care over a few days to weeks-long rehabilitation for more serious cases of trauma as well as amputees learning to live with their injuries. They spoke of exhaustion, stress, anxiety, fear and guilt, but also of camaraderie, a sense of obligation to hurry back to units in which they served and strong motivation to repel the enemy.

Hukovskiy said Ukrainian soldiers were not rotated often enough. As the war drags on and Russian defences hold, pressure is growing on Kyiv to find more people to join up while not hollowing out the struggling economy. "Forty-five days is a critical period when soldiers can stay and ... have a chance to stay mentally healthy," he said. "We have a situation where they can be (deployed for) much longer, and they are getting a lot of concussions, a lot of bad combat fatigue."

Attending Hukovskiy's class last month was "DJ", a former factory worker from central Ukraine who, like most other troops, goes by his call sign. "I have nightmares and they exhaust me. When I get some time to rest, I don't sleep at all," he told the session. Later, sitting on the edge of his bed in a dormitory and flicking through photographs on his phone, DJ explained how he had not been prepared for the ferocity of combat.

"When I first went into the war and to the front line, then it dawned on me," said the shaven-headed 50-year-old, wearing Ukraine's "trident" coat of arms as a pendant and an earring. "At first I didn't understand what mortar shelling, tank shelling, artillery shelling was ... It turned out my psyche could not endure forever." He said his position in the Lyman direction of the front came under Russian fire "24/7". Like some others, DJ added that he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and concussion.

On a rainy November day in a nearby village - its damaged houses a reminder of fighting when the area was temporarily held by Russians in 2022 - Dmytro, a soldier in the 21st Separate Mechanised Brigade, walked along chatting to Serhii Rostikov, the unit's stress control group leader. According to Rostikov, soldiers decide for themselves whether to seek psychological support, although other specialists said unit commanders could make recommendations if they saw signs for concern. "After the artillery shelling, I developed a fear of going back to (combat) positions," said Dmytro, 24, wearing combat fatigues and a hoodie over his head.

# France passes tough immigration bill

PARIS: The French parliament has passed by a wide margin an immigration bill backed by President Emmanuel Macron after a rebellion within his party over the toughened-up legislation that had secured the endorsement of the far right.

The bill had been significantly toughened since it was first introduced, with some on the left of Macron's ruling Renaissance party accusing his government of caving in to Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) in an attempt to secure support. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, an ambitious 41-year-old who has spearheaded the legislation, expressed relief that the votes of his coalition and conservatives were enough to get the bill through parliament.

Some 349 members voted in favour with 186 against. The upper house had passed the legislation already. "Today, strict measures are necessary," Darmanin said afterwards. "It's not by holding your nose in central Paris that you can fix the problems of the French in the rest of the

country."

An earlier version of the bill was voted down without even being debated in the National Assembly, in a major blow to Macron. Pressure from the right saw the government agree to water down regulations on residency permits while delaying migrants' access to welfare benefits - including for children and housing - by several years. The amendments also introduced migration quotas, make it harder for migrants' children to become French, and say that dual nationals sentenced for serious crimes against the police could be stripped of their French nationality.

Le Pen had said the RN would endorse the amended legislation - prompting embarrassment among more left-wing members of Macron's party who find it unpalatable to vote in unison with the far right. In the end, 20 members of Renaissance voted against the bill, 17 abstained and 131 voted in favour. After the vote, Le Pen claimed an "ideological victory".

The French have long

prided themselves on having one of the most generous welfare systems in the world, granting payments even to foreign residents, helping them pay rent or care for their children with means-tested monthly contributions of up to a few hundred euros. The far right and, more recently, conservatives, have argued these should be reserved for French people only. Macron had made the migration bill a key plank of his second mandate and might have had to shelve it without the compromise.

Dozens of NGOs condemned the legislation ahead of the vote. It is "the most regressive bill of the past 40 years for the rights and living conditions of foreigners, including those who have long been in France", about 50 groups, including the French Human Rights League, said in a joint statement. "With this text directly inspired by RN pamphlets against immigration, we are facing a shift in the history of the republic and its fundamental values," said French Communist Party leader Fabien Roussel.

— Aljazeera

# Malaysia bans Israel-flagged ships

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia has banned all Israeli-flagged cargo ships from docking at its ports in what it said was a response to the war in Gaza, accusing Israel of violating international law through the "massacre and brutality against Palestinians".

On Wednesday, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced the decision to impose the maritime ban on Israel-affiliated vessels - singling out ZIM, Israel's largest shipping firm - amid growing alarm over disruptions to global shipping as a result of attacks on cargo ships in the Red Sea. Ships on their way to Israel will also be barred from loading cargo at any port in the Southeast Asian nation with immediate effect, Anwar said in a statement.

Malaysia, where about 60 percent of the popula-

tion is Muslim, does not maintain diplomatic relations with Israel and advocates for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. "The Malaysian government decided to block and disallow the Israeli-based shipping company ZIM from docking at any Malaysian port," Anwar said. The restrictions are a response "to Israel's actions that ignore basic humanitarian principles and violate international law through the ongoing massacre and brutality against Palestinians".

Malaysia "also decided to no longer accept ships using the Israeli flag to dock in the country" and ban "any ship on its way to Israel from loading cargo in Malaysian ports". "Both of these restrictions are effective immediately," the prime minister said. Malaysia has donated mil-

lions of dollars in aid to Gaza and Anwar has vocally supported the Palestinian cause and condemned Israel's bombardment of Gaza since October 7.

At least 19,667 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks since the war started in October. The death toll from Hamas's attack on Israel, which triggered the current conflict, stands at nearly 1,140. Kuala Lumpur has a longstanding relationship with Hamas. Malaysia's ban comes at a time of major disruptions to shipping routes as the Red Sea passage is jeopardised due to attacks by Yemen's Houthis rebels in the world's main East-West trade route. The Red Sea is linked to the Mediterranean by the Suez Canal, which creates the shortest shipping route between Europe and Asia.

— Aljazeera

# South Korea reports eight outbreaks of H5N6 bird flu on farms

PARIS (Reuters): South Korea has reported eight cases of H5N6 bird flu on farms, prompting the culling of more than 500,000 poultry, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) reported. The outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza, commonly called bird flu, were detected between Dec. 5 and Dec. 11, in villages in the western part of the country, the WOAH said in a report posted on its website citing information from South Korean authorities.

The virus killed 47 birds, while the rest of the flocks totalling 513,810 were culled, the Paris-based WOAH said. Earlier this month South Korea reported an outbreak of the H5N1 strain which has been spreading around the globe, including in Japan and Cambodia in Asia, but it had not reported any outbreaks of H5N6. The H5N6 strain over the past four years has only been detected in Asia, the WOAH database showed, with the latest outbreak on a poultry farm in the Philippines in January.

The strain has infected a large number of people in China in the past years, raising concern among some experts. Between 2014 and Dec. 16 of this year, there were 88 human cases of avian influenza A(H5N6) reported globally with 87 of those occurring in mainland China, Hong Kong's Centre for Health Protection (CHP) said in a report released. The latest human case was reported on Sept. 27, it said.

# Sudan army chief faces calls to go after RSF gains

KHARTOUM: The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has captured Sudan's second-largest city, just a day after the army and its supporters prematurely celebrated repelling an attack. As army soldiers retreated from Wad Madani - once a hub for hundreds of thousands of displaced people - they left civilians behind. The army has released a rare statement acknowledging that its troops withdrew too quickly and promising an investigation, yet their supporters are calling for accountability.

"On Sunday we actually celebrated with the rest of Wad Madani," said Noon Arbab\*, a young woman now searching for a way out of the city with her family. "Now I think it was all a big lie." "I think we should throw the army's entire leadership away," she added. Countless civilians like Arbab are calling for army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan to step down in the hope that a new leader can thwart the RSF's advances.

Al-Burhan's subordinates are also furious with the way he is fighting the war, according to sources close to security forces. But experts warn that a change of guard could lead to a power struggle - or vacuum - fracturing the Sudanese army. "Despite the position that al-Burhan finds himself in, I think if he leaves - however that happens - it will leave an indelible mark on the Sudanese army," said Kholood Khair, an expert on Sudan and founding director of the think tank Confluence Advisory. Since the RSF captured Wad Madani, many of the army's supporters have taken to social media to call on generals to replace al-Burhan. The sentiment is widely shared among civilians who are terrified that the RSF could attack their towns and cities next.

The RSF tends to loot homes, markets and banks in every city it conquers, as well as subject women to sexual violence. "All of the citizens want the removal of al-Burhan. He is the reason for all of the cities and provinces falling to the RSF," said Yousif Ibrahim\*. "I still don't understand why the army just left Wad Madani. Wad Madani is where so many displaced people from Khartoum sought refuge."

— Aljazeera

# UN warns water shortages a deadly risk for Gaza children

GAZA: Limited access to clean water and sanitation amid Israel's relentless bombardment pose a grave risk to children in Gaza, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has warned. Huge masses of displaced people herded into the southern Gaza Strip by the war are accessing only 1.5 to 2 litres of water per day, well below the recommended requirement for survival, the UN agency stated on Wednesday. The crisis, antagonised by limited aid deliveries and the destruction of infrastructure, puts huge numbers of vulnerable children at risk of disease, it added.

Pushed by Israel's continued onslaught across the enclave, hundreds of thousands of people, around half of them estimated to be children, have been pushed into the city of Rafah since early December, and are in desperate need of food, water, shelter, medicines and protection, UNICEF said. As demand continues to rise, water and sanitation systems in the city are in an extremely critical state. UNICEF says that 3 litres are required daily for survival. The amount rises to 15 litres if water required for washing and cooking is also counted.

"Access to sufficient amounts of clean water is a matter of life and death, and children in Gaza have barely a drop to drink," said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell. "Children and their families are having to use water from unsafe sources that are highly salinated or polluted. Without safe water, many more children will die from deprivation and disease in the coming days."

Using unsafe water and lack of hygiene is a "dramatic" risk factor for children, who are more vulnerable to waterborne disease, dehydration and



malnutrition, according to UNICEF. Humanitarian aid deliveries simply do not meet the needs of the population for basic survival. This causes a shortage in water and hygiene products that is further compounded by the fact that a large percentage of sanitation facilities have been either destroyed or simply cannot accommodate the large number of displaced Palestinians congregating in specific locations.

"We are doing everything we can to meet the needs of the people in Gaza, but the equipment and supplies we've managed to provide are far from enough," said Russell. "The constant bombing, along with the restrictions on materials and fuel allowed into the territory, are preventing critical progress. We urgently need these supplies to repair damaged water systems." Doctors and aid

workers have been warning of the spread of disease and epidemics, since the start of Israel's "indiscriminate" bombing campaign after Hamas's October 7 Hamas attacks.

According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), from November 29 to December 10, cases of diarrhoea in children under five jumped 66 percent to 59,895, and increased by 55 percent for the rest of the population. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said last week that the WHO has reported cases of meningitis, chicken-pox, jaundice and upper respiratory tract infections as well. The UN health agency cautioned that the figures likely did not provide the full picture because of a lack of complete information with the health system and other services in Gaza near collapse. — Aljazeera

# Greece approves new law granting migrants residence rights

ATHENS (AP): Greece's parliament overwhelmingly approved new legislation that will grant tens of thousands of undocumented migrants residence and work permits amid a shortage of unskilled labor. The law drafted by the center-right government links the right to residence with proof of employment. According to the labor ministry, it will affect some 30,000 people, many of them agricultural laborers.

The United Nations migration and refugee agencies praised the new law, which applies to migrants who have been living in Greece without residence permits for at least three years up to the end of November. It will not cover later arrivals. Lawmakers in the 300-member parliament voted 262 in favor of the law - despite grumbling from the

governing New Democracy's right wing and with the backing of leftwing opposition parties.

New Democracy had threatened to expel any of its lawmakers who didn't back the measures - making a single exception for a former prime minister who had strongly criticized the bill. Speaking after the vote, Migration Minister Dimitris Kairidis praised the cross-party consensus, saying it would help address market demand for less skilled workers. He said the government seeks to blend "strict border controls and fighting (migrant trafficking) with facilitating legal migration" according to Greece's needs. He said the new law would not allow for illegal gain of Greek citizenship or family reunification rights, and the permits would be contingent on migrants' continued

employment.

In a joint statement, the International Organization for Migration and the UNHCR described the bill as "a positive example of political will to lift the barriers that render people invisible and marginalized." The statement said it would benefit Greece's economy while protecting migrants from exploitation by legalizing their employment. The two agencies also hailed the provision that reduces the wait from six to two months for asylum-seekers who want to enter the Greek labor market. Located in the European Union's southeastern corner on the Mediterranean Sea, Greece remains a key entry point for people seeking a better life in the EU. Most cross in small boats from neighboring Turkey to Greece's eastern Aegean islands.

Despite a drastic drop in arrivals from the peak of nearly 1 million in 2015, some 45,000 people reached Greece so far this year, the highest number in four years. While many are granted legal residence as refugees, others remain illegally in the country for years, blending into the gray economy. In June, hundreds of people are believed to have died after a battered trawler carrying up to 750 people from Libya to Italy foundered off southwestern Greece.

The Mediterranean's deadliest shipwreck in living memory occurred on April 18, 2015, when an overcrowded fishing boat collided off Libya with a freighter trying to come to its rescue. Only 28 people survived. Forensic experts concluded that there were originally 1,100 people on board.

# DR Congo elections: Voting marred by lengthy delays

DR CONGO (BBC): Voting in the Democratic Republic of Congo's high-stakes presidential election has been marred by lengthy delays at polling stations. Voters waited in long queues at many polling stations in the capital, Kinshasa, and other cities as they opened about two hours late. Ballot papers were delivered at the last minute in an election that has proved to be a logistical nightmare.

President Félix Tshisekedi is pitted against 18 candidates. DR Congo is roughly four times the size of France, but lacks basic infrastructure - even some of its main cities are not linked by road. The UN, Egypt and neighbouring Congo-Brazzaville helped fly election material to remote areas. Some 44 million people are registered to vote, following a campaign dominated by worsening insecurity in the mineral-rich east.

A polling station at a school has been ransacked

in the eastern town of Bunia, but it is unclear who was behind it. DR Congo sits on vast reserves of cobalt, currently a vital part of many lithium batteries, seen as essential to a future free of fossil fuels. Among those challenging President Tshisekedi are wealthy mining magnate Moïse Katumbi and former oil executive Martin Fayulu, who believes that he won the last election in 2018, the result of which was questioned by several international observers.

But the peaceful transfer of power, the first in the country's history, following that poll became a source of optimism that the country had turned a corner. For the first time, Congolese nationals living in five other countries - including South Africa and former colonial power Belgium - will be able to cast their ballots. As before, the winner will be the candidate with the most votes. The large number of challengers to Mr Tshisekedi could

work to his advantage, as it may divide opposition support.

Voters are also choosing parliamentary, provincial and municipal representatives - with about 100,000 candidates in total - in this huge country, which stretches some 2,000km (1,400 miles) west to east. There are more than 175,000 polling booths. The electoral commission, with the help of UN peacekeepers, began delivering voting material in far-flung areas about two months ago because of the poor transport network. In the east, insecurity has dominated the run-up to the polls.

Dozens of armed groups have been competing to control parts of the region, home to much of the country's vast mineral wealth. The presence of a UN peacekeeping force, an East African regional force and Congolese soldiers has not quelled the violence, which has resulted in about seven million people being forced from their homes. Many of

those have not been able to register to vote, in what some criticised as a chaotic registration process. There are some places where voting will not take place at all because of rebel activity.

The perennial insecurity in the eastern provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu has been a major campaign issue, with presidential candidates making lofty promises to end it. Political violence in the run-up to the polls has also been a source of concern. On the eve of the vote, the European Union said it was worried about "the hate speech, violence and incidents that have marked the last few days". There have been some deadly incidents, causing Mr Katumbi to briefly suspend his campaign. Polls opened at 06:00 local time (04:00 GMT in Kinshasa) and voting is due to continue for 11 hours. The electoral commission is expected to announce provisional results on 31 December.

# Firefighters are battling a wildfire on slopes of a mountain

CAPE TOWN (AP): More than 300 firefighters were battling a blaze on the slopes of a mountain near Cape Town in South Africa for a second day on Wednesday and residents were evacuated from at least one neighborhood overnight, emergency services said.

Five firefighters were injured and two were taken to the hospital, the city's Emergency Services spokesperson Jermaine

Carelse said. The wildfire on the mountain slopes near the seaside town of Simon's Town, around 40 kilometers (25 miles) south of Cape Town, had threatened houses in the pre-dawn hours after it started. That threat was narrowly averted, Carelse said. He said only one derelict building on the grounds of a nearby South African navy base had been damaged.

Residents were evacuated from the neighborhood

most at threat just before 1 a.m. as a precaution, he said. Three helicopters continued to scoop up water from the ocean and drop it on the fire. Firefighters had worked to put out the fire through, but it was still burning, Carelse said. The fire lit up the mountain that overlooks Simon's Town, a small resort town that hosts South Africa's flagship naval base.

Wildfires are a regular threat on the mountain slopes around Cape Town in

the hot, dry months from November to April. They become dangerous and unpredictable when they are fanned by strong coastal winds, which city authorities said happened with the Simon's Town fire. A huge wildfire burned across the slopes of Cape Town's world-famous Table Mountain for days in 2021, destroying nearly a dozen buildings, including some historic structures at the University of Cape Town.



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# The role of lawyers forum

**T**OP lawyers' bodies of the country, the Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) and the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) have recently held a protest rally and expressed distrust in the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) for holding free and transparent elections slated for February 8 next year. In their official press releases, both lawyers forums expressed their concerns over the conduct of the CEC, regarding election procedures, delimitations, and seat allocations, stressing the need for the provision of a level playing field and equal opportunities, for all political parties and independent candidates to ensure transparency and fairness in the electoral process.

Civil society, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), and Lawyers' associations play an important role in countries around the globe by advocating for sane legislation, upholding the rule of law, and promoting access to justice for laymen and disadvantaged segments of society. These professional forums provide support and resources to the lawyers' community, offer professional excellence and growth through education, and set ethical standards for the profession in civilized nations across the world. These associations also engage in lobbying for legal reforms, protect the rights of lawyers, and sometimes offer pro bono services to ensure justice for all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic status, religion, and ethnicity. Historically, Pakistan's Lawyers' Movement was a landmark civil movement that emerged in response to the dismissal of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry by a powerful military ruler General Pervez Musharraf dating back in 2007. This movement was primarily led by lawyers and legal professionals protesting against blatant aggression against the independence of the judiciary and writ of the constitution. Succeeding its sole mission by reinstating the deposed judges to their positions, was a magnificent achievement of the Pakistani lawyers community and civil society over a decade ago.

Unfortunately, like all other state institutions, governing bodies, and labour unions, the lawyers' community is utterly divided and polarized across the spectrum, and each faction resolutely toying its party's manifesto and the agenda of its party leaders. So far, the idea of civil reforms, national building, and political grooming of the public/ professionals is no longer a priority of any political leader, advocate, or union leader in the country. Meanwhile, after grabbing unimaginable respect in society in the aftermath of the successful lawyers' movement, a few young advocates and some sections of the lawyers' community have been lured into an unethical and unprofessional attitude by being involved in illegal practices. The intimidation of government institutions, the LEAs, the threat and coercion to Judges and juries has become customary in today's Pakistan. Historically, Senior advocates failed in character building and professional grooming of their junior colleagues and students, while the unreal sense of professional superiority has translated the young advocates into villains and desperados instead of docile persons and law abiders.

At this moment, Pakistan is coming out of a months-long political haphazard and anarchy and the nation hopes for socioeconomic stability after a smooth election and transition of power early next year. Lawyers associations are important elements of Pakistani society and they must play a constructive role by highlighting the irregularities and shortcomings of government institutions so those important issues can be resolved timely. However, personal attacks on government executives and manipulating an already fragile political environment could not have any constructive part in nation-building and political cohesion. The lawyers' forums have a proud history of their magnificent achievements in legislation, and parliamentary, and constitutional affairs in the country throughout the past. Hopefully, the lawyers' community will desist from internal division, political polarization, and gangsterism, while continuing their rightful role in nation-building through constructive criticism, constitutional advice, and active philanthropy in the future.

## Erdogan-Orban teamwork

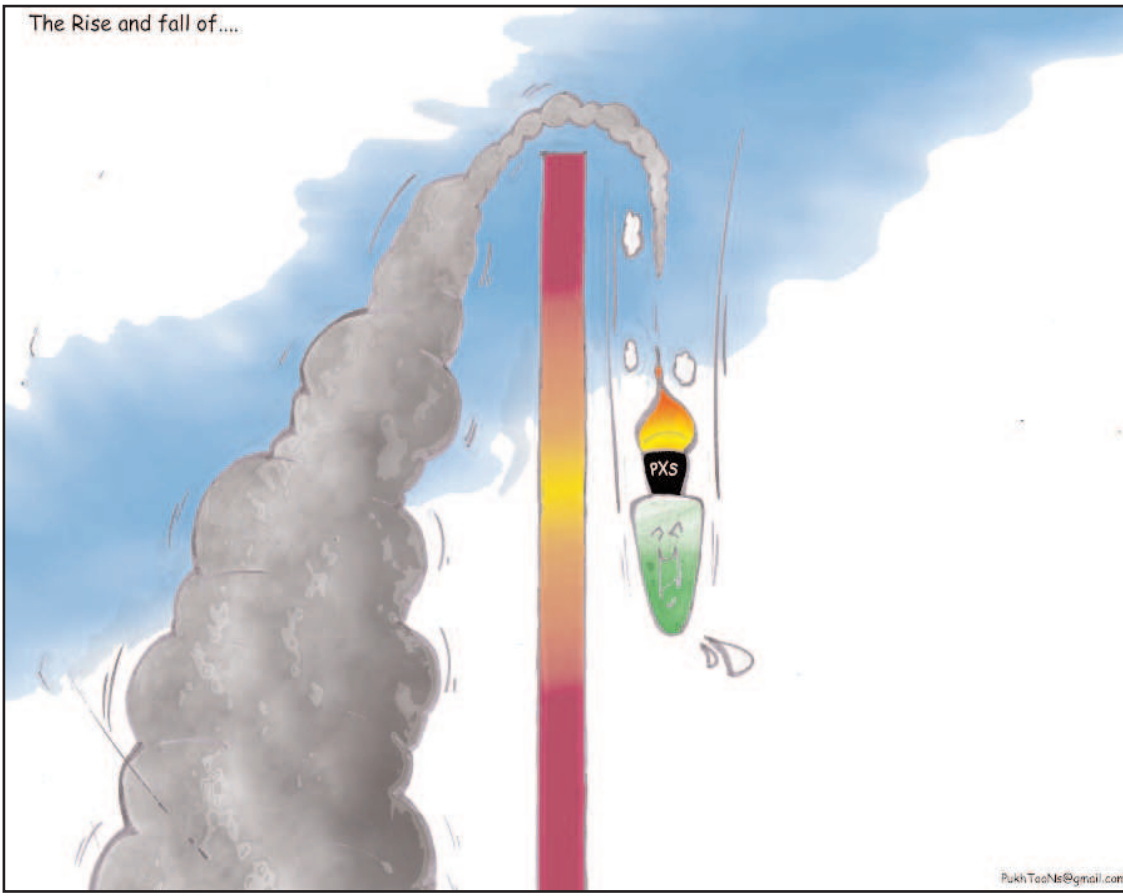
**T**URKISH President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has recently paid an official trip to Budapest, in a bid to forge deeper trade and economic ties with the Central European state and create bonds with Hungary's far-right leader and European evangelist Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Erdogan's visit coincides with the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between modern day Turkey and the Republic of Hungary. It is also a crucial period due to worsening hostility within the European Community on the issue of war in Ukraine and ties with Moscow under Vladimir Putin. The two leaders signed a joint political declaration moving their relations to an advanced strategic partnership level, which manifests the closest, friendly, fraternal, and political cooperation between their nations. Both leaders toasted their adversaries and jointly announced that Turks and Hungarians will be victorious together in the 21st century.

In the prevailing scenario, Europe is embattled with itself and internal cartels, monopoly of major nations, unimaginable US influence on foreign policy and political matters of the EU Community together with NATO's expenditures on foreign military campaigns had caused conflict of interests among the member states. Several EU states are currently mulling over the prospects of their departure from the bloc. Turkey, the sole Muslim European country, EU and NATO member state, feels itself unfit in the alliance because of diverging security and economic interests, whereas western bloc is also uncomfortable with President Erdogan, whose policies are more aligned with the Russian Federation than NATO and the US. The same situation exists with Hungary's far-right leader Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who, although sits in the EU council but speaks on behalf of Kremlin and authoritarian Putin regime.

Interestingly, the like minded Erdogan and Orban have plunged the European Union into a unique quandary, as both are resolutely resisting Poland's bid for NATO membership and do not comply with anti-Russia sanctions imposed by the United States and allies, instead both Countries are vigorously consolidating their ties with Russia and China. Hungary has still not voted to approve Sweden's entry into NATO, and Turkey linked its vote with US's provision of F-16 fighter jets to Ankara. The Erdogan-Orban alliance has vowed to be victorious in this century, however, their teamwork would be more visible in the days ahead.

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# The questions raised by the recent Gaza escalation

Chris Doyle

**H**ERE we go again. The sixth Israeli military operation on Gaza since 2005 is in full swing following Hamas' extraordinary attacks inside Israel. It is not a surprise to see this again; it was inevitable as nothing had changed in Gaza. The shock was that Hamas tried and pulled off such a dramatic and bloody operation. Initial assessments of a crisis in progress and with few confirmed details are a risky proposition. The Hamas attack from Gaza in the early hours of Saturday raises so many questions and, as ever, there are few clear answers.

What led Hamas to launch this surprise attack, which is of a scale never seen before? Why such an incredibly bold, reckless move? What does it hope to achieve? Does killing civilians help its cause? Targeting civilians is a war crime. It seems Hamas even took Israeli children into Gaza. It says that it is about stopping the Israeli threat to Al-Aqsa and to get prisoners released. Is that the case or are there other issues at play? Who made this decision and which parts of the Hamas leadership knew and approved what was a secret operation? Is there an Iranian or other foreign hand pushing Hamas on this? Did anyone in Hamas think for one moment about the horrors that Palestinian civilians will now have to endure? How will Israel act? Will we witness another protracted bombardment of Gaza and a ground invasion? Will this, the most extreme government in Israel's history, be even more brutal in conducting that campaign? Might it have as its ambition the full and direct military reoccupation of the Gaza Strip? Israel has remained the occupying power, but for the most part controlled Gaza from the armistice lines, the sea and the air.

This would mean the return of the Israeli military inside the Strip, a scenario few should welcome. At the end of whatever operation ensues, heads will roll and this could include the demise of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Can or will the Palestinian Authority do anything? Does it have many options? If anything, all this has done is further expose the weakness of President

Mahmoud Abbas, who has no solution or strategy to help his people. Many Palestinians will see Hamas as trying to do something, even if some will see this as ill-judged.

What can we expect? This is unlikely to be a short-term escalation. Israel may well opt for a dangerous ground invasion, as it did in 2014 after three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped in the West Bank. Hamas will continue to fire rockets into Israel as long as it can. The violence will probably not be restricted to Gaza, with reports of

least until Israeli forces have dealt massive damage to Hamas' capabilities and, in their view, taught it a lesson. Yet the biggest question in the long term will be how the international community responds. If it follows the traditional script adopted after every other Israeli-Hamas conflagration, it will fail both peoples. Soundbites and slogans are not a substitute for a strategy. Yes, Israel has a right to self-defense, but will we hear that Palestinians have that same right? Will the international community remind Israel

***This is very doubtful, at least until Israeli forces have dealt massive damage to Hamas' capabilities and, in their view, taught it a lesson. Yet the biggest question in the long term will be how the international community responds. If it follows the traditional script adopted after every other Israeli-Hamas conflagration, it will fail both peoples. Soundbites and slogans are not a substitute for a strategy. Yes, Israel has a right to self-defense, but will we hear that Palestinians have that same right? Will the international community remind Israel that there are limits to self-defense and that aggressive attacks on civilians do not qualify? And will we hear that golden oldie of the need to restore calm? Living under occupation is an aggression and never calm.***

clashes inside Shuafat camp in East Jerusalem already surfacing. Palestinians in the West Bank have to survive with checkpoints locking them in, while settlers will seek to further their own long-term strategic goals of seizing more land and water, while creating a coercive environment where more Palestinians will be forced to flee their villages and ancestral lands. Could there be a short-term deal between Hamas and Israel to go back to the situation of last week? This is extremely unlikely. Inside Israel, Netanyahu knows he has to be seen to react to what was the biggest Israeli intelligence and security failure since 1973. This will have shaken the entire security establishment.

Some in Hamas may believe that having Israeli prisoners will be a card they can play; an insurance policy. This is very doubtful, at

least until Israeli forces have dealt massive damage to Hamas' capabilities and, in their view, taught it a lesson. Yet the biggest question in the long term will be how the international community responds. If it follows the traditional script adopted after every other Israeli-Hamas conflagration, it will fail both peoples. Soundbites and slogans are not a substitute for a strategy. Yes, Israel has a right to self-defense, but will we hear that Palestinians have that same right? Will the international community remind Israel that there are limits to self-defense and that aggressive attacks on civilians do not qualify? And will we hear that golden oldie of the need to restore calm? Living under occupation is an aggression and never calm.

The international community needs to speak out clearly and act decisively. Hamas is already sanctioned and isolated. What about a drive to end the 16-year-old Israeli-Egyptian blockade of more than 2 million people in Gaza? This is collective punishment of an entire people, a war crime. Keeping these Palestinians locked up in an open-air prison, unable to trade, travel and have a normal life, is a recipe for conflict.

Palestinians exist in what is an overcrowded slum with water so bad even animals should not drink it. It is time to see Gazans as humans. We need to ask what impact the

blockade has on children, what it means to 800,000 children who have never left this hellhole, who have no concept of what the outside world is like? Ignoring the illegal Israeli actions in the West Bank has had consequences too. Should the international community do nothing, then what we will see is a massive loss of life and destruction of people's lives. Already, the fatality counts for both peoples are in three figures and the Palestinian number will be shooting up every hour that the Israeli military operation continues. It may also risk widening the confrontation to the northern front, though for now Hezbollah has stayed out of it. What would be refreshing would be to see leaders ditching the blame game in favor of finding long-term solutions. These solutions should be win-win for all peoples. It would mean a Gaza that is free to breathe, allowing its people to dream of a new life free from oppression and occupation. It would mean allowing proper and legitimate economic life to flourish. It would mean ending a blockade that denies Palestinians in Gaza the ability to engage with those in the West Bank.

It would also mean that Israeli civilians living in communities around Gaza can live in safety, free from rocket and mortar attacks or, as in this case, free from being attacked by armed fighters who invade their communities. None of this will come about without a clear, viable political process. The US administration has spoken out more forcefully against many Israeli actions this year, as it should, but it has not advanced any political project that addresses the plight of the Palestinians. Saudi Arabia has been under pressure to abandon any genuine solution to the Palestinian question in the American push for an Israel-Saudi normalization deal. It has been right to hold out against this.

What these events show us once again is that it is the future of the Palestinians that lies at the heart of this conflict. As one Israel commentator remarked: "Israel will never be paradise if life in Gaza is hell." Without resolving that issue in a fair and reasonable fashion, all the normalization deals in the world will not bring peace and security to Israelis and Palestinians.

# Centre for disabled asylum seekers

Frances Ryan

**U**NDER the grey sky of an Essex seaside town sits a broken wheelchair, its blue front wheel shattered. Inside an office, a frame for a hoist languishes. A sign on a lift reads "Out of order". Scraps of cardboard have been stuck on to the glass of broken windows and doors, blocking outside light from entering darkened rooms. Welcome to a Home Office centre for disabled asylum seekers - otherwise known as Britain's hidden shame.

Shipped in from Manston - the overcrowded Kent asylum centre - last November, the 55 residents housed in this processing centre run by a private company have severe or life-limiting disabilities. Some have lost limbs, others are deaf or blind. Half a dozen are paraplegic. Some have been disabled since birth; others were maimed in the war zones they're now fleeing from. Ask an official, and they'll likely describe the site as a "former care home", but you'd be hard-pressed to find much care. There are no grab rails in the property. No changing beds for incontinent residents or commodore for those who can't make it to the toilet. Bathrooms don't have shower chairs to enable people to wash.

The centre has security guards but no trained care workers. Instead, disabled residents are left to fend for themselves. One young man from Pakistan with cerebral palsy is paralysed and unable to speak, but has not been given a carer. His mum is with him in the centre and does all she can, but she needs knee surgery herself. Buckled by the strain, she's started to use her son's walking frame. "His mum sobs and cries all the time," says Maria Wilby, from the local charity, Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Migrant Action. "A few weeks back, she begged for help on the floor." The charity typically provides advocacy but has become a kind of NHS cum Boots, sourcing anything from white canes to incontinence pads. Like many in the centre, the young man only has a wheelchair because he's using a donated one - but it doesn't fit. He must be suffering but can't communicate it, says Maria.

Only a few months ago an Iranian man living in the centre died. Doctors had repeatedly said he needed a wheelchair, but he never received one. It's thought he suffered a fatal stroke. "We're essentially waiting for the next [death]," Maria says. "And it will be because of a lack of care." This is Britain's so-called soft touch asylum seeker system, where disabled people cross the sea to ask for aid and we leave them without support to eat, wash or move.

As Rishi Sunak boasts he'll "stop the boats", recent months have seen asylum seekers placed in increasingly dire conditions: from a barge and cruise ships to camps on former military sites. Last week, the first public inquiry into abuses at an immigration centre found "credible evidence" of breaches of human rights law relating to torture and inhuman or degrading treatment. It would be natural to be shocked by this, to lament how such a thing could happen on our soil. And yet it is, right now - and not by accident. The revelation that the home secretary, Suella Braverman, stopped some safety checks for vulnerable people in asylum centres is a stark sign of what has become a deliberate and far-reaching culture of harm.

Housing asylum seekers in unsafe and undignified

accommodation is less a policy and more performative brutality: a live-action party political broadcast that says, under this government, "the invasion" won't be permitted to get comfy. In this context, disabled asylum seekers being left to rot in an old care home is not some horrible aberration - it is the system working exactly as intended. The cruelty, as they say, is the point. Try the food in the Essex accommodation and it's tellingly prison-like: a falafel squashed in a slice of white bread, or a pile of beans in a polystyrene box. I'm told, three residents have become diabetic since arriving at the centre - one has lost two toes.

One woman in her 70s has lost 4kg since she arrived. She's been boiling instant food in a kettle but with only £8.24 a week for expenses, she can only afford out of date produce. "She's now knocking on doors [in nearby houses] begging them to cook for her," Maria says. When I asked the Home Office about conditions, it said "the food provided meets NHS Eatwell standards" and it was "committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of those on asylum support." It added: "Accommodation providers are contractually obliged to ensure accommodation is accessible for disabled people and where concerns are raised, we work with providers to ensure they are addressed."

Essex county council says it's in "ongoing dialogue with the Home Office, local council and voluntary organisations regarding those living at this site", and "care packages have been put in place to meet eligible needs". Ask Maria, and it's a different picture: only a handful of residents have been offered social care. There's no way of knowing exact numbers - some people don't even know they've had an assessment. "The majority don't have a copy of the result, let alone a translated one," she says. The reports that are available are often plagued with errors. One man was a Paralympian back in Iran, but his assessment reported he was in prison. "He's terrified," she tells me. "He thinks the Home Office will think he's lying now."

After almost a year here, the residents are in effect trapped. Some have been given dispersal rights to leave the centre while they wait for their claim to be processed, but can't - because there is no accessible accommodation. As we finish talking, Maria asks me not to publish the location of the centre. She says that an elderly resident has recently been attacked in the street, and there are fears of further hate crimes. "He was speaking in a foreign language on his phone ... That was enough."

This hate has not come from the ether; it has been stoked by every baiting front page and minister. It is not as if Labour has challenged this. When Keir Starmer rightly committed this month to consider all asylum claims, he found time to lambast "wasteful spending on hotels" and "people who have no right to be here". At some point, we may consider thinking of the "small boats problem" as simply fellow human beings in need. In the meantime, asylum seekers will continue to suffer ill treatment at the hands of British authorities - and much of the political and media class will at best, justify it, or, at worst, applaud. In Essex, disabled people will remain hungry and in pain as they wait to know their fate. Out of sight, out of mind.

*The Guardian*

# Labor strikes capture widening fissures in US' social contract

Xu Ying

**S**EISMIC rumblings of labor strikes are shaking the foundations of the US economy. Tens of thousands of workers are walking out at health care giant such as Kaiser Permanente and auto manufacturers such as General Motors. These strikes represent tremors of a larger social earthquake as pandemic strains, inequality, and soaring costs of living push America's working class to a breaking point. This revolt encapsulates widening fissures in the social contract after decades of working families struggling with stagnant wages and shrinking benefits.

Workers in health care and manufacturing endured immense risks and challenges through the COVID-19 pandemic. Nurses and technicians worked grueling hours caring for criti-

cally ill patients while factories continued churning out products, often without adequate protection. These sectors absorbed the hardest blows but saw minimal relief after the crisis ebbed.

Now, patience has worn thin. Kaiser nurses accuse the giant HMO of worsening under-staffing, overwork, and burnout by denying wage and benefit improvements. Auto workers endured relentless schedules to keep assembly lines running despite supply snags and infection outbreaks. But auto firms such as GM initially offered raises of just 4 percent despite 2021 profits nearing \$10 billion. Employees believe they deserve a far greater share after risking their lives while executives enriched shareholders.

These flashpoints reflect simmering frustrations coming to a boil after the pandemic put essential

workers under intense strain. But instead of relief, employees face soaring living costs as inflation hits a 40-year high. For workers barely getting by after decades of flat pay, the yawning gap between their sacrifices and corporate windfalls has become a catalyst for revolt.

Today's strikes signify deep disillusionment with an American economic system that has failed working families. Globalization and financialization over the last 40 years enriched elites while workers faced eroding job security and bargaining power. Regular people watched major crises consistently impact their livelihoods disproportionately as elites prospered. Trust in institutions such as government, business, and media deteriorated as the social contract

frayed. Workers grew frustrated with an economy serving the few at the top at the expense of the many toiling below. Demands grew for structural changes to restore fairness, opportunity, and balance.

Labor advocates argue policy shifts must empower unions, elevate wages, strengthen social safety nets, and check corporate influence over government. Workers aim to recast an imbalanced capitalist system that has catered to enriching executives and shareholders above all else. The strikes embody demands for redistributing economic power and prosperity more equitably.

The strikes carry major reverberations since health care and auto manufacturing are linchpins of the economy. With a \$4 trillion health care sector and iconic American

brands such as GM and Ford, work stoppages in these immense industries send tremors through the whole economic system. Kaiser and the automakers now weigh the risks of operational paralysis against meeting worker demands. But historically, capitalists strongly resist concessions that empower unions and erode profit margins. The choice of confrontation versus compromise has high stakes for charting the country's course.

If met with obstinacy, today's strikes could escalate into a cycle of radicalism and grassroots mobilization like during the 1930s New Deal era. Failure to remedy foundational inequalities and power imbalances risks further fraying social cohesion as economic tumult builds. With the economy teetering and inequality reaching new extremes, America has arrived at a pivotal juncture.

The pandemic fueled simmering discontents among workers watching corporate profits soar as their wages stagnated and expenses skyrocketed. Now, labor aims to correct the imbalance through flexing its disruptive power.

The choices ahead weigh heavily with history. America today mirrors the Gilded Age's yawning divides and worker disaffection. Lessons from past crossroads reveal reforming a strained social contract before its total rupture is the wise path forward. The eruption of strikes in 2023 encapsulates widening fissures in the American social contract. Pandemic strains fused with decades of inequality have primed dramatic labor revolt aimed at securing an equitable stake in society. This uprising carries profound stakes for the nation's future trajectory.



# EU’s extractive trade policies in Tunisia contribute to migration

Sylvia Kay

**S**INCE the start of the year, the number of people fleeing North Africa by boat to the European Union has increased significantly. Even though some of them are people on the move from sub-Saharan Africa, using countries like Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya as transit points, many are locals who can no longer make a living in their own country.

The EU has scrambled to block more people from crossing the Mediterranean by intensifying its surveillance and militarisation of its southern sea borders. But it has also reached out to regional governments to get their help in stemming migration. In the case of Tunisia, the EU and Tunisian President Kais Saied signed a deal called the "Comprehensive Partnership Package". In return for stopping the flow of people attempting to cross the Mediterranean into Europe, Tunis is to get 255 million euros (\$269m) for equipment, training and financial support. It could also receive a further 900 million euros (\$953m) should it reach a deal with the International Monetary Fund for structural economic reforms, including controversial cuts to its food subsidy programme.

In terms of the trade component of the deal, the memorandum of understanding outlines, inter alia, plans for investments in agriculture, green energy and digital transition. While it remains to be seen how this memorandum will further take shape, it can be read as a continuation of the EU's trade policies towards its southern neighbour which have been criticised for systematically disadvantaging Tunisian small and medium enterprises. Against this backdrop, it appears unlikely that the migration deal will improve the situation for Tunisians, especially those from the rural areas who are trying to emigrate from the country en masse. In fact, the EU's past and present trade policies towards Tunisia are much to blame for the misery of small-scale farmers and agricultural workers.

While EU companies have flooded the Tunisian market with EU-made products, Tunisian farmers have struggled to compete with their EU counterparts, not least due to the ways in which the EU continues to protect its domestic agricultural sector. Sometimes EU protectionism takes the form of frustratingly simple things such as the fact that periods during which Tunisian products are granted privileged access to the EU market under a customs quota arrangement do not synch up with their

production cycle in Tunisia. For example, in the case of watermelons, the main growing season is between June and September, yet the EU only grants duty-free imports between November and May.

More traditional olive growing, in contrast to monoculture industrial olive groves, involves older trees that are spaced out and require less water; it is thus better suited to more arid climates. Such agricultural practices used by small farm-

*Sometimes EU protectionism takes the form of frustratingly simple things such as the fact that periods during which Tunisian products are granted privileged access to the EU market under a customs quota arrangement do not synch up with their production cycle in Tunisia. For example, in the case of watermelons, the main growing season is between June and September, yet the EU only grants duty-free imports between November and May. The unequal economic exchange in agricultural trade relations between Tunisia and the EU is also apparent in the trade in olive oil, one of Tunisia's top exports. Olives are grown on prime irrigated agricultural land as a large-scale monoculture. Some 80 percent of the olive oil produced from them is exported, mostly in crude form, principally to Spain and Italy where it is refined and sold to European consumers. In the process, Tunisia loses out on significant added value.*

The unequal economic exchange in agricultural trade relations between Tunisia and the EU is also apparent in the trade in olive oil, one of Tunisia's top exports. Olives are grown on prime irrigated agricultural land as a large-scale monoculture. Some 80 percent of the olive oil produced from them is exported, mostly in crude form, principally to Spain and Italy where it is refined and sold to European consumers. In the process, Tunisia loses out on significant added value.

Meanwhile, rising food prices in the country have meant that the consumption of olive oil is increasingly out of reach for ordinary Tunisians. Food remains the largest expense for Tunisian families, more costly than housing, electricity or water, representing on average 30 percent of annual household expenditure, and rising to nearly 40 percent for the lowest income groups.

ers for production for the domestic market are seen as unviable due to the lack of support they receive from the government. As farmer Abdul Karim explained to me during a trade and agriculture policies workshop organised by the Tunisian Platform for Alternatives and the Transnational Institute in July in Tunis: "Traditional olive trees can live for 150 years. Support for olive growing is 2 dinars per olive tree while our cost of production is about 15-20 dinars per tree. We need support for water and for tractors. But in the absence of this support, my olive trees will dry out and die."

Apart from olives, Tunisia is pressed to grow other agricultural products for export to the EU, including citrus fruits and vegetables. Some of them are also particularly water-intensive crops, which make little sense to grow in a country suffering from extreme water stress, droughts and wildfires.

Already in the fourth year of a prolonged drought and with temperatures reaching 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit) in July, the situation of Tunisian farmers will only get worse. Climate risk forecasts for Tunisia project that annual maximum temperatures are likely to increase by between 1.9C to 3.8C by 2050, while precipitation levels may fall by as much as 22 percent.

In response, the Tunisian government has instituted a series of measures to try to curb water use, including a limit on agricultural irrigation and a ban on groundwater pumping below 50 metres. While these measures may sound reasonable, they have left Tunisian farmers struggling. Reduced rainfall means farmers must resort to tapping groundwater sources to irrigate their crops and trees, and to provide drinking water for their animals. Yet declining groundwater levels mean that water cannot be found until 80 metres deep, Abdul Karim told me. Farmers have no other choice but to dig deeper or face economic ruin.

Farmers we spoke to complained that while they face the risk of being criminalised for using water to survive, the government turns a blind eye to wealthy investors who are buying up land for olive production and digging deepwater wells in an unregulated fashion. These wells can be up to 200-300 metres deep, according to Yasser, a Tunisian natural resource management engineer who also participated in the aforementioned workshop. All this means that small-scale farmers, who are in the majority in Tunisia, are caught between the crushing forces of an unfair external trade policy, and an internal government policy tailored to the needs of a few big market players. They cannot make a living out of farming any more, and many have no other option than to emigrate.

The EU agreement with Tunisia to boost trade relations and stem the flow of people trying to make it to European shores is a blatant refusal to deal with some of the underlying causes of migration. Trade policies favouring European markets will not improve the socioeconomic situation for Tunisians in rural areas. In the context of multiple and intersecting crises, agricultural and trade policy in Tunisia and the broader North Africa region must be reimaged. If the EU really wants to address what it calls a "migration crisis", it needs to rethink its extractive trade policies with the rest of the world, and not enter agreements that only lead to more precarity.

# MENA region needs to be proactive amid heat threat

Sara Al-Mula

**T**HE world experienced a blistering heat wave this summer, with July breaking records as the hottest month ever recorded, according to the World Meteorological Organization and the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service. To put into perspective the impact such extreme weather can have on societies, a summer 2022 heat wave claimed the lives of more than 60,000 people in Europe.

The Middle East and North Africa region, already recognized as the most water-stressed in the world, has grappled with extreme heat in recent times and is set to face significantly elevated temperatures by the close of this century. A study published by The Lancet Planetary Health in April predicted that the number of heat-related deaths in the MENA region will rise by 123 per 100,000 people, putting it about 60-fold above the current figure. In the event of sustained high global greenhouse gas emissions, air temperatures in the region may approach 50 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. Nonetheless, if global warming is capped at 2 C above pre-industrial levels, then 80 percent of the forecasted fatalities could be prevented.

Heat waves can have a detrimental effect on individuals and society at large. Primarily, they can have an immediate impact on human health, causing a number of severely uncomfortable illnesses like heat exhaustion, heatstroke, dehydration and fainting. Vulnerable segments of society - such as infants, the elderly, people with low incomes, people with disabilities and people with health conditions - are especially susceptible to heat-related illnesses and deaths. Moreover, prolonged exposure to extreme heat can exacerbate mental health issues, causing fatigue, sleep disruption, confusion and irritability. Workers who have to operate outdoors - such as delivery drivers, construction workers, farmers and fishermen - are also especially susceptible to the ravages of extreme heat, which can reduce overall labor productivity. Furthermore, hot seasons can put a strain on healthcare facilities, as they receive influxes of patients with heat-related illnesses.

On a larger scale, heat waves can harm local environments in the form of reduced or damaged agricultural yields, water shortages, wildfires and impacts on biodiversity. All of these factors can affect the well-being of communities as they face food and water shortages, price hikes, damage to homes, drought seasons and worsening air quality. Critical urban infrastructure is also impacted severely as extreme heat tends to damage roads, railway tracks, bridges, dams and power lines. Structural damage to buildings due to extreme heat can increase demand for energy consumption and cooling, which can overload power stations, surge energy bills and further increase greenhouse gas emissions.

Chiefly, it is critical that MENA policymakers are proactive in implementing measures to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of extreme heat, especially as heat waves in the region are becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change. Thus, regional governments need to adopt a multifaceted policy approach that ensures swift collaboration between key stakeholders to protect communities from the adverse effects of extreme heat and build resilience in the face of climate change. Heat action plans are a critical step in managing cities and their populations to navigate seasons of extreme heat with minimal disruption, damage and fatalities. Preparation is key, so it is critical that cities and populations are issued with early warnings regarding heat alerts through various communications channels. This can be achieved by establishing meteorological data systems that track temperature trends, provide timely heat wave alerts and assess the effectiveness of interventions.

Urban planners can mitigate the effects of extreme heat by launching mass tree-planting plans, offering urban tree canopies, building pockets of green space within neighborhoods in cities and incorporating heat-resistant public spaces such as cooling centers. For instance, Saudi Arabia has launched a large-scale afforestation project, with the aim of planting 10 billion trees across the Kingdom to help tackle cli-

mate change. When it comes to sustaining valuable natural resources, such as water and energy, policymakers need to implement stringent water conservation policies and encourage energy-efficient systems. Buildings need to incorporate heat-resistant materials and insulation, in addition to air conditioning, green roofs and green walls. The Singapore Green Building Masterplan, for example, aims to green 80 percent of buildings by 2030 via energy-efficient solutions and mandatory sustainable construction practices.

To mitigate food security concerns, it is important to invest in sustainable farming practices that reduce vulnerability to extreme heat. Investing in sustainable public transportation systems that are resilient to extreme heat is pivotal in providing people with practical modes of mobility during heat waves. It can also reduce reliance on heat-generating vehicles. Full-fledged health plans need to be devised and deployed effectively in the event of extreme heat waves. Health facilities need to be fully equipped with ample wards, medical equipment, cooling systems and backup power during hot seasons. In this vein, medical workers and emergency responders need to be trained to recognize and treat all heat-related emergencies.

Public health awareness campaigns can communicate crucial information to the public, especially vulnerable populations, about protecting themselves from the risks of extreme heat, the range of heat-related illnesses and common symptoms, the importance of hydration, cooling strategies, how to limit outdoor activities and emergency contacts in case of the need for medical assistance. At the same time, it is vital that vulnerable groups are protected during heat waves by offering social assistance programs targeting low-income individuals, such as paying for their energy bills. Legislators should also revise regulations regarding safeguarding people with outdoor work, such as mandatory breaks during peak hot hours and the provision of water, food and cooling areas. The myriad challenges posed by extreme heat necessitate proactive policies to protect the region's populations from its adverse effects.

# Labour’s war on Nimbys should terrify the Tories

Kate Andrews

**T**HE Tories should be afraid. There is a political party in town that finally seems to understand the magnitude of the UK's housing crisis and wants to do something about it. And it's not the Conservatives. Labour's conference was full of old policy ideas they need to retire: bans on zero-hours contracts, higher taxes and more borrowing. But those plans took a back seat once Keir Starmer took to the stage.

The Labour leader promised to reinstate the target, scrapped by the Tories last December, to build 300,000 new homes a year. But, even more importantly, he acknowledged what delivering this promise would require: building on the not-so-green parts of Britain's green belt.

It's the argument people serious about building have been making for years: the classification of green belt has lost its way, dragging in ruined pieces of land that no one is frolicking through, but also that no one can build on. At long last, those examples have made their way into a leader's speech, as Starmer rattled off the "clearly ridiculous uses" of green belt designation, including "dis-

used car parks [and] dreary wasteland". "Not a green belt," he said. "A grey belt." It was the perfect description of what's gone wrong: gloomy landscapes being "protected" at the expense of young people's prospects of one day owning a home.

But paying lip service to house-building will not be enough. While the Labour top team may subscribe to Starmer's "big build" agenda, getting the wider party on board will be a harder sell. It was only last month that Labour peers voted down an amendment to change nutrient neutrality rules, which would have paved the way for tens of thousands more homes to be built. Starmer may have mastered the language for building a brighter future, but when members of his party are asked to cast a vote, recent evidence would suggest Labour is stocked with more

Not-In-My-Back-Yard (Nimby) types than he might like to admit. Starmer may also struggle in the run-up to an election to balance his building ambitions with his green agenda, especially if the Green Party sees even a small uptick in the polls as they try to attract Left-wing voters who

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arguments around affordability, economic growth and the potential to enhance biodiversity, there were double digit percentage point gains for voters in favour of building on parts of the green belt.

Starmer is in a unique position to capitalise on housing - not only because 39 per cent of voters say they trust Labour to manage housing policy compared with 20 per cent for the Tories, according to the LPDF polling - but because Sunak ruled himself out of competing on the green belt during the leadership election. What seemed at the time to be an out-of-character promise to protect the green belt last summer has tied the Prime Minister's hands on housing policy. So we find ourselves in the strangest of circumstances, where Sunak's conference speech last week pledged policies for the young that no one was asking for, while Starmer's speech tapped into one of the biggest policy challenges the country is crying out to see fixed. What's more, the Labour leader does not need to overhaul the planning system. Just meeting the housing target for a few years in a row would be a huge upgrade from where we are now. That's how low the "party of homeownership" has set the bar.

# Russia has been politically embarrassed

Tom Sharpe

**W**AR is rarely clear-cut. Clearly defined 'front lines' that can be breached by heroic attacks don't really exist outside Hollywood, and the search for clear winners and losers can be so blurred by the super slow-mo scrutiny (with VAR levels of inaccuracy) of modern communications that people find them where they don't exist. The fog of war is very real, and gets worse as technology advances.

Nevertheless, what is happening in Crimea at the moment is huge: radars taken out by special forces in August; UK-supplied Storm Shadow strikes killing a Kilo-class submarine and a Ropucha-class landing ship; a well-timed follow-up strike destroying a headquarters full of retreating senior staff in September; a special forces jet-ski raid showing Cockleshell Hero levels of bravery and audacity in October. Sevastopol's viability as a base isn't dead yet - as of yesterday there are five warships alongside there - but to quote my American military friends, it's "taking one hell of a beat-down". And it might bounce back. History has plenty of examples of military locations defended well beyond practical worth out of pride or misplaced emotion. One thing is for sure: life in the naval base there can't be much fun at the moment.

The Armed Forces Minister James Heappey recently described the Black Sea Fleet as 'functionally defeated'. In warship terms, it is possible to achieve what's called a mission kill without sinking the enemy ship. Taking out a major weapon system, destroying the operations room or crippling the propulsion are examples of this. It can also be done by eroding their will to fight to the point of combat ineffectiveness. If that's what he meant by 'functionally defeated', then for Sevastopol, he is right. But

that is just Sevastopol. Jet-skis and flags are brilliant, but they don't retake Crimea. And what about the rest of the Black Sea Fleet now displaced but not out of the war? Their ability to disrupt and deter shipping, in particular grain exports from Ukraine, has been hampered but not stopped.

Russia's ability to operate warships in the North-western Black Sea to harass and interdict ships there is now almost zero, but that has more to do with Ukraine's superior weapons and surveillance coverage than events in Sevastopol. And it's not totally zero - the Kremlin has already shown ample willingness to take significant losses if they feel they have to. Right now in Novorossiysk there are seven Kalibr cruise missile shooters, three of which are Kilos that can also lay mines. The problem with these assets is it doesn't really matter where in the Black Sea they are based. Kalibr has the legs to strike from anywhere and a submarine laying mines will not be deterred by Ukrainian missiles. They also have some maritime air assets, although these are sparse and ageing. Mines are a critical part of this strategy. They provide a cheap and effective way to control sea lanes, driving risk and associated insurance premiums up in their wake. They are deniable and, worryingly, often unaccounted for, free-floating into harm's way. The Royal Navy's decision to sell two minehunters to Romania last week looks sound. Discussions about allowing Nato mine countermeasures groups into the Black Sea are probably premature, but at some point the mine clearance effort at sea will demand it.

Putin's argument for seizing Crimea was built on the premise that it was of vital strategic interest. But if its fleet is no longer safe there, then at what point does the whole peninsula become just another portion

of Ukrainian territory seized by Russia illegally, and which ought to be returned? Current talks of building a naval base on the Black Sea coast of the breakaway Georgian region of Abkhazia can't help this sense of political embarrassment in the Kremlin. Operationally, the Ukrainians have the upper hand in the Black Sea. Russia is being forced to react and is doing so in a disconnected way. Command and control appears fractured, missions are haphazard and poorly planned. The loss of Sevastopol can only make this worse. Tactically the Ukrainians are showing great levels of ingenuity and flexibility with coordinated multi-domain attacks using a blend of traditional and novel weapon systems. Navies and procurement departments around the world will be pouring over the lessons from this at a fundamental level - or at least should be.

Has the tide turned in the naval battle to the extent that Ukraine can now achieve its strategic objectives and Russia cannot? The FCDO announced only yesterday that the threat to British shipping remains "at the highest level". Sevastopol has been badly damaged, but has Ukraine got enough assets to hit Crimea at will, making it too dangerous for 800k Russians to live there? Not quite. There is a danger that the lack of a 'Hollywood-style breakthrough' in the land war means that people are now searching too hard for it elsewhere. Recent events in Crimea and in particular Sevastopol are seismic; Russia has been politically embarrassed, operationally dominated and tactically outthought. Fighting morale in the Black Sea Fleet must be at an all-time low. But unless this converts into the restoration of something akin to freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, I don't believe it can't truly be called a strategic turning point - at least, not yet.

The Telegraph

# Hamas has crossed the Rubicon. What now?

Faisal J. Abbas

**T**HE massive escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict sends so many messages at the same time. The first thing one has to note is that a Hamas attack on this scale could only have been possible after months of planning. In fact, this is exactly the kind of "explosion" warned of as a consequence of continued occupation and deprivation of Palestinian rights. Those claiming that the attack was unprovoked are wrong - this is precisely the reaction that deliberate and systematic intimidation by the current Israeli government garners when insult is added to injury.

Does this justify the killing and kidnapping of civilians? Absolutely not, and this is true regardless of who the villains or victims are. So, what happens now? Well, given recent history, the outcome is pretty predictable: Israel will say it has the right to defend itself, declare a full-scale war and inflict the maximum pain possible in retaliation. Hamas will declare the outcome - no matter what it is - a victory. Many Palestinians will celebrate the

unprecedented early success portrayed in images of Israelis fleeing and soldiers being detained. Shortly after, the same Palestinians will suffer the devastating consequences at the hands, tanks and aircraft of the Israeli army. After that, Arab countries - namely the GCC - will come to the rescue and help rebuild Gaza.

Will this escalation change anything in the balance of power? Well, given the number of captured soldiers, it does provide Hamas with a few more bargaining chips. It also boosts the morale of the group's followers since this is the first time such an operation has been so widely shared on social media. However, it is unlikely to change the reality on the ground, as Hamas simply does not have the means to sustain a standoff against the world's 18th-strongest army, which has just been pledged full support by the US. So, could this be a strategic move by Hamas aimed to tell the international community that "we alone decide for Palestine"? That is a possibility. At the end of the day, while it is true

that the Palestinian Authority is the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, the PA's influence has always been limited compared with that of Hamas.

It is the unfortunate reality that in the failed states of this part of the world, illegitimate, armed representatives, such as Hamas, Hezbollah in Lebanon or the Houthis in Yemen, will always have the upper hand. Meanwhile, the PA has no choice but to support Hamas in order to avoid further internal Palestinian friction. As a result, it will only be perceived as even weaker globally. However, here are the cons of Hamas's most recent adventure: It gives Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a way out of his internal political turmoil at a rare moment when even members of his own Israeli military were opposing him.

Now, it is a full-scale war to protect Israel and rescue kidnapped soldiers and civilians, so it is a case of "all hands on deck." It also further empowers his right-wing coalition at a time when the world has been trying to convince them to

back down and tempt them with peace proposals.

Will Hamas emerge stronger or weaker after this? Well, this time they have crossed the Rubicon, and Israel has already signaled that the gloves are off. Given the level of escalation, even opponents of Netanyahu's right-wing government in the US and Europe will be reluctant to call for restraint. In other words, Hamas must brace itself for tough times ahead, and, sadly, it is the average Palestinian who will eventually pay the price. What effect will the latest events have on prospects for a wider regional peace proposal? The short answer remains: Time will tell.

However, in my opinion, it is time for the world to double down. As the statement by the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs clearly indicated, the international community must act now to activate a credible peace plan that enables a two-state solution, which is the best means to protect civilians. Easier said than done? Perhaps, but at least Saudi Arabia can say it tried its best, and has been for decades.

Arab News





## PSX stayed bearish, loses 385 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bearish trend on Wednesday, losing 385.02 more points, a negative change of 0.61 percent, closing at 62,448.01 points against 62,833.03 points the previous trading day.

A total of 1,187,368,881 shares valuing Rs.26.038 billion were traded during the day as compared to 1,513,931,019 shares valuing Rs.29.099 billion the last day.

Some 362 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 107 of them recorded gains and 246 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of

9 remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were K-Electric Ltd with 280,811,788 shares at Rs.5.77 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 211,123,179 shares at Rs.1.55 per share and Cnergyico PK with 54,405,306 shares at Rs.4.89 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.249.00 per share price, closing at Rs.21,799.00, whereas the runner-up was Mari Petroleum Company with a Rs.52.11 rise in its per share price to Rs.2,106.79.

Rafhan Maize Products witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.100.00 per

share closing at Rs9,800.00, followed by Hoechst Pakistan Limited with Rs.93.00 decline to close at Rs.1,156.00.

**Rupee gains 11 paise against Dollar in 7th consecutive interbank trading session**

Pakistani Rupee on Wednesday witnessed the 7th consecutive recovery session as it gained 11 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs282.90 against the previous day's closing of Rs283.01.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market

stood at Rs283.6 and Rs286.3 respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 95 paise to close at Rs310.25 against the last day's closing of Rs309.30, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese Yen went up 01 paise and closed at Rs1.97; whereas a decrease of 29 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs358.20 compared to the last closing of Rs358.49.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 04 and 05 paise to close at Rs77.02 and Rs75.39 respectively.

## Report on 'State of Commerce in Pakistan Int'l, Domestic' launched



### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR, Dec20: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) launched its latest research report, "The State of Commerce in Pakistan - International and Domestic".

The report explores the challenges and opportunities shaping the landscape of Pakistan's commerce sector. It sheds light on the current state of commerce in the country. As a premier institution dedicated to fostering economic development, PIDE's report serves as an invaluable source of information and statistics on the state of commerce in Pakistan, said in a press release issued here on Wednesday.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Nadeem ul Haque, Vice Chancellor of the Pakistan Institute of PIDE, has developed this report for the Ministry of Commerce & Industries to fill the comprehensive report, and explore into all facets of internal and external trade

in Pakistan. The primary objective is to gain a profound understanding of markets, growth and international and domestic trade. He emphasised that despite the sector being vibrant it faces challenges stemming from the various governments' indifference, regulatory problems, and various other problems.

He highlighted the growth potential of several entities within sectors such as construction, retail, chain stores, food, franchises, and transport. Dr Haque said that PIDE's research shows that the government's footprint on the economy is at over 70% of the economy, with heavy-handed government involvement in trade and markets, stifling market development and growth. The cost of regulation, estimated at over 60% of the GDP, particularly affects segments larger than 50% of the GDP, turning regulatory agencies into a burgeoning industry in Pakistan. Our current

approach is to fragment out the markets and segment ourselves from the global value chain.

PIDE has presented proposals to the government for deregulation, specifically targeting markets such as real estate, and improvements in tax documentation to foster the creation of large multinational businesses. However, the government's preoccupation with borrowing and reliance on lenders to decide policy remains a significant challenge.

More specifically the report recommends a broader discussion on an immediate cessation of our absolute policies on import substitute and export promotion could be discontinued. Our Commerce and Industry must develop as part of the global value chain.

According to the report, there is a systemic failure to diversify across manufacturing, exports, and domestic markets. Notably, the import substitution policy, exemplified by the Mobile

Phone Manufacturing Policy 2020, has fallen short of its targets. Despite the significant contribution of domestic commerce to formal and informal employment and GDP, this sector has been historically overlooked in policymaking, with the first domestic commerce policy formulated only in 2021.

On the international trade front, the report highlights obstacles such as high tariff cascading, minimal progress in moving up the export product value chain, and limited destination diversification. Urban design, zoning regulations, and city planning negatively impact businesses in Pakistan, particularly in domestic commerce.

The chief guest on the occasion was Dr. Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Govt of Pakistan, while Ms Sarah Saeed, Special Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce attended the event as a special guest.

In his address, Dr. Khan underscored the paramount role undertaken by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics. He lauded PIDE for spearheading cutting-edge research crucial for the nation's immediate requirements.

In her remarks, Ms Sarah Saeed commended PIDE's efforts in highlighting the importance of domestic commerce in Pakistan.

## Minister to increase country's exports to China upto \$25 billion

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Commerce and Industries, Dr. Ejaz Gohar on Wednesday unveiled his vision to increase Pakistan's exports to China up to US \$25 billion to engage in trade between the two neighbours.

The newly appointed Economic Counsellor of China to Pakistan, Mr. Yang Guangyuan paid a courtesy call to the Commerce and Industries Minister Dr. Gohar Ejaz, said a press release issued here. The meeting followed two successful visits to China by Dr. Ejaz which are a part of the intensified interaction

between the two countries in the field of trade.

Guangyuan extended warm congratulations to Dr. Ejaz for his successful visit to China, emphasizing the positive initiatives taken to foster economic cooperation between the two nations. Minister Ejaz conveyed the warmth and hospitality extended by the Chinese officials during his visit to China.

Dr. Ejaz highlighted that the primary purpose of his recent visit to China was to witness first-hand the remarkable progress China has achieved on the one hand and to seek new market segments for Pakistani exports on the other hand. He unveiled an ambitious 5-year vision to boost trade between Pakistan and China, setting a target of \$ 25 billion for Pakistan's exports.

Guangyuan welcomed

the Minister's sentiments for increasing bilateral trade and economic cooperation and expressed China's commitment to stand with Pakistan, emphasizing the deep-rooted friendship between the two countries as "iron brothers." He conveyed China's goal to increase its trade volume from the current \$27 trillion to \$32 trillion in the coming years, affirming China's willingness to include Pakistan in this trade expansion.

Dr. Ejaz emphasized his vision for Pakistan's economic progress through "trade not aid," resonating with Mr. Guangyuan's sentiments. Potential collaboration between the countries in setting up export processing zones was also discussed.

The Chinese side expressed its interest in relocating industry from China and thus utilising Pakistan's export process-

ing zones and cost-effective labour for accessing African and Central Asian markets. The Commerce Minister offered access to Central Asian Republics through Pakistan, highlighting the strategic and economical route it provides to China Mr. Yang expressed his interest in exploring this opportunity for mutual benefit.

Guangyuan welcomed Minister's sentiments and invited him to visit China's Guangzhou and Shandong provinces next month to further enhance bilateral trade ties.

### Court Notice

In the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Case No. 262/1. Institution 7/9/2023 date of hearing 6/1/2024. Abdulb Salem etc. vs Mst. Qemata etc. Notice to No. 4/2. Ibrahim son. 4/8. Mst Zenab d/o Taj Gul. 10/1. Shahi Rawan. 10/2. Sher Jamal sons of Mst. Fatrni. 14. Nawab Husain s/o Qurasan. 18. Iftikhar Ahmed ex-Halqa Patwari Elai at present in Kowga. 21. Ehsan Gul. 22. Wahid Gul. 23. Salem Gul sons of Saeed Gul resident of Elai Tehsil Daggar district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants cannot be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 a.m dated 6/1/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

### Court Notice

In the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Case No. 235/1. Institution 31/7/2023 date of hearing 9/1/2024. Shehzad Gul vs Jihan Rasol. Notice to No. 1/6. Murad Ali. 1/8. Usman Ali sons of Jihan Rasol resident of Naro Ubo Daggar Kalay Tehsil Daggar district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants cannot be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 a.m dated 9/1/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

### Court Notice

In the court of Kiran Noor Judge Family Court Tehsil Matta Swat. Case # 195/FC institution year 2023. Next hearing date 16/01/2024. Mst: - Muneeba etc VS Asghar Ali. Notice to defendant. Asghar Ali s/o Gul Hakeem r/o Arkot Tehsil Matta district Swat (presently abroad). In above mentioned case the respondent can't be served in the ordinary way, it is therefore proclaimed that if said respondents will not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8:30 a.m dated 16/01/2024. Ex-parte proceeding will be held against the mentioned respondents under my hand and seal of this Court.

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) organized the visit of a six member delegation comprising of leading exporters of citrus fruits to Tashkent.

During their two days visit the delegation held meetings with local association of food sector, held B2B meetings with Uzbek counterparts an visited the local whole sale fruit market. The delegation also visited the office of Agency of Plant Protection and Quarantine Uzbekistan.

The visiting delegation held a meeting with the President of Uzbekistan Food Industry association (UFIA) at 1pm on 18-12-2023 at Crystal Ballroom, International Hotel Tashkent.

Leader of the delegation Mr. Shoaib Basra, ex-President of Sargodha



PESHAWAR: Chairman National Highway Authority Arshad Majeed Mohmand answering to questions in E-Kachehri arranged through NHA official Facebook page.

## Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Six ships namely, Maersk Kinloss, Clean Sanctuary, Chem-Road Polaris, Limra and Ejanan scheduled to load/offload Container, Fuel oil, Palm oil, Coal, LPG and LNG, berthed at Container Terminal, Oil Terminal, Liquid Terminal, Electric Power Terminal, Sui Southern Terminal and Gas Terminal respectively on Tuesday.

A total of twelve ships were engaged at POA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them six ships, Indigo Cefiro, Al-Bida, Limra, Stamina SW, Northern Javelin and Maersk Kinloss expected to sail on Wednesday.

Cargo volume of 260,533 tonnes, comprising 204,824 tonnes imports cargo and 55,709 tonnes export cargo carried in 4,780 Containers (3,080 TEUs Imports and 1,700 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

Five ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them a General Cargo ship 'Elgiznur Cebi' & two more ships, Celems Schulte and Sheng Ping Hai scheduled to load/offload Cement, Containers and Coal are expected to take berths at Mw-1, QICT and IBT respectively on Wednesday, while two more Container ships, Seaspan Ganges and Spil Kartini are due to arrive at Port Qasim on Thursday.

## Gold rates up by Rs900 to Rs218,500

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs 900 and was sold at Rs 218,500 on Wednesday against its sale at Rs 217,600 on the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs 771 to Rs 187,328 from Rs 186,557 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs 171,718 from Rs 171,011, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola silver decreased by Rs.20 to Rs.2,650 whereas that of ten gram silver reduced by Rs.17.15 to and 2,271.94 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$13 to \$2,060 from \$2,047, the Association reported.

## Chairman commits to complete projects

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD. Chairman National Highway Authority Arshad Majeed Mohmand has said that the Authority is trying its level best to complete country-wide ongoing motorways and national highways building schemes as per scheduled time frame with quality construction.

He was responding to the questions raised by people across the country in e-Katcheri held at National Highway Authority Headquarters here on Wednesday.

On Facebook, people from various parts of the country expressed interest

through their questions, opinions and complaints to further improve the performance of NHA. Most of the participants commended this step of public access to NHA authorities through social media.

NHA Members concerned were also present on this occasion, while Member PPP Naveed Iqbal Wahla and Member EC Naseem Khattak assisted Chairman NHA in answering the questions.

During e-Katcheri, Chairman NHA also issued on spot orders on public complaints for immediate maintenance of certain roads. Mr. Arshad Majeed Mohmand also threw light

on reasons which led to delay in timely completion of some projects.

Chairman NHA reiterated that NHA attaches top priority to keep its roads network open to traffic all the time, as motorways and national highways are only source of public movement, trade activity, transportation of agricultural produces and economic stability.

Arshad Majeed Mohmand assured the complainants that NHA officers will contact them on their given numbers and will inform about the actual situation of the projects for satisfaction of the complainants.

## Gas theft crackdown: Another 167 connections disconnected: SNGPL

### F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 167 connections and imposed fine amounting to Rs 2.34 million.

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 27 connections on illegal use of gas while another 13 on use of compressor and also imposed fine of Rs 0.12 million against gas theft cases. The team also lodged one FIR against gas pilferers.

In Rawalpindi the team disconnected 1 connection on illegal use of gas while another one on use of com-

pressor.

During the operation in Islamabad team disconnected ten connections on illegal use of gas.

In Multan 6 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 9 on use of compressor.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 65 connections on account of direct use of gas and illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 2.04 million against gas theft cases.

In Mardan the team disconnected ten connections on illegal use of gas and also imposed fine of Rs0.11 million against gas theft cases.

The team of Abbottabad disconnected one connec-

tion on illegal use of gas.

In Sahiwal, one connection was disconnected on illegal use of gas and one on compressor use.

In Faisalabad 2 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas.

In Sialkot the team disconnected one connection on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs0.06 million have been booked against gas theft cases.

In Sheikhupura 15 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 3 on use of compressor and amount of Rs 0.01 million booked against gas theft cases.

In Bahawalpur the team disconnected 1 connection on use of compressor.

## Tokyo stocks close higher

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo stocks closed higher on Wednesday helped by a relatively cheaper yen against the dollar after the Bank of Japan indicated it plans to keep its super-loose monetary policy in place.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index advanced 1.37 percent, or 456.55 points, to 33,675.94, while the broader Topix index ended up 0.67 percent, or 15.57 points, at 2,349.38.

The dollar fetched 143.64 yen in Asian trade, down from 143.89 yen in New York but still up from 142.36 yen in pre-Bol decision Asian hours on Tuesday.

"The trend of the yen's depreciation, in addition to

rallies in three US major indices, helped the Nikkei index rise sharply," Iwai Cosmo Securities said.

The yen declined against the dollar after Bank of Japan governor Kazuo Ueda said late Tuesday he plans to maintain monetary easing without addressing any plans to exit from the policy.

In Tokyo, Panasonic rallied 1.50 percent to 1,390.5 yen. Uniqlo operator Fast Retailing advanced 3.92 percent to 37,340 yen, and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries climbed 3.07 percent to 7,881 yen.

Kawasaki Kisen soared 5.58 percent to 6,115 yen, Mitsui O.S.K. Lines added 2.21 percent to 4,493 yen, and Nippon Yusen ended

up 3.17 percent at 4,333 yen, after saying their joint venture container business "will reroute its vessels away from the Suez Canal and the Red Sea."

Toyota gave up some of its earlier gains, ending up 0.13 percent at 2,644 yen, after its subsidiary Daihatsu said it will suspend shipments of all car models currently in production both in Japan and abroad, following new revelations about its safety tests being rigged.

Japan booked a trade deficit of 776.9 billion yen (\$5.4 billion) in November, according to data released by the finance ministry 10 minutes before the opening bell. The data did not prompt strong market reactions.

## TDAP arranged visit of delegation of exporters to Tashkent

### F.P. Report

Chamber of Commerce and Industry highlighted the importance of their visit. Mr. Bakhadur, President of the Uzbekistan Food Industry Association (UFIA) vowed to extend every support to the exporters of Pakistani Citrus.

The B2B sessions for the visiting delegation were organized on 18-12-2023 from 2pm to 6pm in the Crystal Ballroom International Hotel Tashkent. Members of UFIA and Chamber of Commerce & Industry Uzbekistan attended the session. 28 B2B sessions between Pakistani and different Uzbek businessmen took place.

Both sides discussed opportunities available for businessmen of both the countries in the food sector in general and citrus fruit in particular.

The delegation visited the office of Agency of



Plant Protection and Quarantine Uzbekistan on 19th December 2023 at 11:00 am. The Agency discussed in details the SPS and quarantine require-

ments of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the facilitation provided in this regard by the Agency.

Members of the delegation visited the Koiluk

Market Tashkent and observed the quality and other parameters of Pakistani citrus fruit vis-a-vis imported from other countries.





**In brief**

**Neymar to miss 2024 Copa América**

B R A S Í L I A (Agencies): Brazil forward Neymar will miss the 2024 Copa América in the United States because of a serious knee injury he suffered in October, Brazilian team doctor Rodrigo Lasmar said Tuesday. The Al Hilal star, 31, suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament and meniscus in his left knee during his country's World Cup qualifying loss to Uruguay on Oct. 17, before undergoing surgery two weeks later. The Copa América will begin on June 20 and run through the final on July 14. "It's too early," Lasmar told Brazil's Rede 98. "There's no point in skipping steps to recover sooner and taking unnecessary risks. Our expectation is that he will be prepared to return at the start of the 2024 season in Europe, which is August. "We need to be patient. Talking about a return before nine months is premature, this is a global concept for knee ligament surgeries recovery. It is very important to respect the biological time, the time the body takes to reconstruct that ligament. "If we follow those steps and after a long recovery, the expectation is that he can perform again at a high level." Neymar is Brazil's all-time leading scorer with 79 goals in 129 appearances. Brazil were drawn into Group D of next year's Copa América, alongside Colombia, Paraguay and the winner of a playoff between Costa Rica and Honduras. Earlier on Tuesday, it was announced that Brazil will face Mexico on June 8 in a pre-tournament friendly. It is the second time the Copa América will be hosted by the U.S., following the centenary edition in 2016, with six teams from Concacaf joining the 10 from South America.

**Houghton resigns**

HARARE (Agencies): Dave Houghton has resigned as Zimbabwe head coach three weeks after failing to reach the 2024 T20 World Cup. The Chevrons were the top-ranked side in the African qualification tournament last month, but missed out on the top two as Namibia and Uganda booked their spots in the United States and the West Indies instead. Houghton, who was appointed in June last year, said he had "lost the changeroom" and felt a "new voice" was needed to take the team forward. The 66-year-old's final matches in charge came in an ODI series at home against Ireland which the tourists won 2-0. However, Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) said Houghton, his country's first Test captain, would be reassigned to a new role in the organisation. "Dave will always be a legend of our game," ZC chairman Tavengwa Mukhlani said. "While the past few months have been disappointing as we failed to qualify for both the 50-over World Cup and the T20 World Cup, they should not obscure all the work he has done over the past year to rebuild the foundations for long-term success. "Dave leaves with our sincerest thanks for his tireless efforts and we are looking forward to working with him in a different role as we seek to change our on-field fortunes." Houghton lead Zimbabwe to last year's T20 World Cup in Australia, their first global tournament for six years, where the side reached the Super 12 stage after first-round victories over Ireland and Scotland.

# Adil Rashid and Babar Azam on top of ICC's T20I and ODI rankings

DUBAI (Agencies): England legspinner Adil Rashid has become the No. 1 ranked bowler in T20Is, while Pakistan batter Babar Azam has displaced India opener Shubman Gill at the top of the ICC men's ODI rankings. Rashid overtook two other legspinners - Afghanistan's Rashid Khan (No. 2) and India's Ravi Bishnoi (No. 3) - after taking seven wickets in the first four T20Is of England's ongoing series in the West Indies. He is only the second England player to become No. 1 in the ICC men's T20I rankings for bowlers,

after offspinner Graeme Swann more than a decade ago. Rashid's elevation to the top came a day after he went unsold during the IPL 2024 auction. India's Suryakumar Yadav remains the top ranked T20I batter after scoring a fifty and a hundred in the second and third T20Is in South Africa. His lead over Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan in second place is now a 100 ratings points. In ODIs, Babar has gone past Gill to become the No. 1 batter after Gill was rested from India's ongoing series in South Africa, though neither batter has

played an ODI since the 2023 World Cup ended. In the Test rankings, Kane Williamson remains No.1 while Usman Khawaja moves up three places to fourth following Australia's win against Pakistan in Perth, with another opportunity to close the gap during the Boxing Day Test match. Pat Cummins has moved up a spot to third in the Test bowling rankings, while Nathan Lyon has risen to fifth, Mitchell Starc to eighth, and Josh Hazlewood tenth. India offspinner R Ashwin remains the No. 1 ranked bowler in Tests.

## Pakistan Army Youth Talent Hunt Volleyball trials on Jan 3: DG Sports KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The Pakistan Army Youth Talent Volleyball trials will be held from January 3, 2024 under the aegis of the Directorate General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Director General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Abdul Nasir Mohmand said Wednesday. Talking to media, he said the trials were earlier scheduled in December but now would be organized from January 3, 2024. He said in collaboration with the Pakistan Army and the Directorate General of Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Inter-Regional Championship in connection with the talent hunt program 2023-24 will start from January 3

at the Peshawar Sports Complex, in which the Directorate of Sports including all regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will participate. He said players of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Volleyball academy will also participate. DG Sports Abdul Nasir Mohmand said that on the special instructions of Corps Commander Peshawar Lt. Gen Hasan Azhar Hayat, Talent Hunt Program 2023-24 is being organized in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in which volleyball players will be selected in various games including volleyball. In this regard, players were selected for the regional team under the supervision of the Regional Sports Officer in

all the regions who will represent the region at the provincial level. The hunt program has been changed from December 22 to January 3, which will continue until January 7, in which twenty players will be selected for the camp, who will be given Rs. 45,000 per month by the Pakistan Army for six months, while after the camp, the National Rs. 15,000 will be given per month until the Championship. The purpose of these efforts of Pakistan Army, he said, is to bring positive change in society and to restore the splendor of the sports field. He said, these steps would definitely prove to be important progress towards a healthy society.

## Shadab Khan becomes honorary DSP of Punjab Police



(Monitoring Desk): Star Pakistan all-rounder Shadab Khan on Wednesday, became an honorary Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) of Punjab Police. Punjab Police stated that the cricketer was awarded the coveted rank of Honorary District Superintendent of Police (DSP) by the provincial Inspector General (IG) Dr Usman Anwar and Additional IG Sultan Ahmed Chaudhry. Shadab Khan will serve as the brand ambassador of the force. The star cricketer was informed about his job responsibilities following his appointment. Shadab Khan said he was proud to serve in the Punjab

Police. He urged youth to join government sectors and play their role in the development of the country. "I am honoured to be allowed to serve in a different way," he said. "We talk about change, let's be the change we want to see. I encourage our next generation to join the government sector to serve the country if possible. Pakistan Zindabad." It is pertinent to mention that Shadab Khan is not the only current Pakistan cricketer to join a police force. Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah are also serving in the Punjab Police and Balochistan Police respectively. Shadab Khan has been sidelined from the team as

he is nursing an injury. He will not be part of the side that travels to New Zealand for a five-match T20I side. Shadab Khan opened up on his exclusion from the Pakistan team on the social media application X (formerly Twitter). He wished the best of luck to the selected players for the bilateral series. He added that he was recovering from his injury and would return to playing domestic cricket at short notice. He lamented about people liking players who are not selected and disliking those who are fulfilling national responsibility by playing for the country. He said Pakistan captain Shaheen Afridi and his team should be backed now.



**NELSON: Soumya Sarkar of Bangladesh celebrates scoring 150 runs during game two of the Men's ODI series between New Zealand and Bangladesh at Saxton Field.**

### Inter-Zonal Women Four Games begins

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inter-Zonal Women's Throwball, Tchoukball, Basketball Asian Style Kabaddi Championships formally inaugurated here at the Sports Complex of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Peshawar here on Wednesday under the aegis of Directorate of Sports Higher Education Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Additional Director Female Miss Shabana Marwat was the chief guest who formally inaugurated the four Games Championship wherein players from eight different zones including Peshawar, Swat, Mardan, Bannu, Hazara, Kohat, Malakand and Dera Ismail Khan are taking part. Deputy Director Sports Arshad Hussain, President Sports Committee Professor Tahira Dar, Principal of City Girls College Gulbahar Girls College, Organizing Secretary Miss Najma Qazi, Miss Neelam Babar, and a large number of officials, players and spectators were also present during the colourful opening ceremony. Players from all eight zones are taking part in the Tchoukball, Basketball, Asian Style Kabaddi and Throwball. The ceremony was started with the recitation from Holy Quran by Himna of Kohat, followed by the national anthem and March Past of the all participating teams. Speaking on this occasion, Additional Director Higher Education Department Shahbana Marwat said, "The Directorate is providing all out support to the players and that is why teams from across the province are taking part." She said, "The government of KP wants women to be provided with equal opportunities for sports. The Directorate of Sports Higher Education Department of KP will provide all sports facilities so that women players can also shine the name of the country and the nation at national and international levels."

In the throw ball Mardan defeated Hazara by 25-20, 25-19, 25-21. Mardan played well and did not give much chance to Hazara to strike back. In the Basketball Hazara defeated Mardan by 31-27 in a thrilling match. For Hazara Alishaba, Marwah, Tahira, Maimuna and Sughra played the best game while Anila Khushbakh, Irum and Gul Sanga from Mardan played the best game while in another match of Tchoukball Frontier College Peshawar Zone played well and defeated Girls College Bacha Khan of the Peshawar Zone, the score was 11-10. There was tough competition between Peshawar-A and Peshawar-B teams as their players exhibited tough fights for the single point.

## Pakistan's top female climber sets her goal for next two years

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's top female mountaineer Naila Kiani on Wednesday revealed her future plan, stating that she would be attempting to complete her feat of summiting world's all the fourteen above 8000-metre peaks within next two years. "Initially, I wanted to accomplish my target as soon as possible, but after the Shishapangma incident I have changed my mind. Now I have decided to achieve the milestone a bit slower. Hopefully, I'll complete my mission in two years," Naila, who is the only Pakistani female to climb ten peaks above the height of 8000 meters told APP. Naila faced a critical ethical dilemma on Shishapangma Mountain in October 2023, making a life-saving decision to move back just 400 meters below the summit after two climbers were lost. She prioritized ethics over ascent, ultimately sparing her and her team's lives. "I believe human life should be prioritized over reaching the summit in the dangerous world of mountain climbing," she maintained. The year 2023 has been the most successful year for her as she became one of the only seven climbers in the world, who have

climbed multiple peaks in six months. Naila, a former aerospace engineer, banker and a boxer, who took a unique path of scaling world's highest peaks, was also honoured by the President of Pakistan in a conference held by Alpine Club of Pakistan. Naila's successful summits include Mount Everest (8,848 meters) in 2023, K2 (8,611 meters) in 2022, Lhotse (8,516 meters) in 2023, Nanga Parbat (8,126 meters) in 2023, Manaslu (8,163 meters) in 2023, Annapurna (8,091 meters) in 2023, Broad Peak (8,051 meters) in 2023, Gasherbrum II (8,035 meters) in 2021, Gasherbrum I (8,080 meters) in 2022, and Cho Oyu (8,188 meters) in 2023. Despite her remarkable success, Naila acknowledges the challenges female athletes face in Pakistan. She highlighted the difficulty female athletes encounter in securing brand endorsements. In a poignant reflection, she refuses to compromise her integrity by aligning with brands that view her as merely a social media figure. She underscores the struggles faced by athletes and mountaineers, emphasizing that she would not settle for inadequate com-

pensation. Looking ahead, she is seeking additional sponsors to join her on this unprecedented journey to climb the last four peaks. Despite her numerous achievements, she recognizes the importance of continued support to overcome the challenges that lie ahead. Naila's message to the youth echoes through her journey -- invest in personal development, seek mentors, and relentlessly pursue dreams. "Dream big, stay consistent, and work hard to turn aspirations into reality," she reckoned. Behind the scenes, Naila emphasizes the critical role of family support, particularly her husband's unwavering dedication in caring for their three and four-year-old daughters. In a world where she encountered robust foreign climbers, Naila became a trailblazer, standing tall as the first Pakistani female mountaineer to reach the world's highest summits. A crucial part of Naila's success has been the support from her main sponsor, the BARD Foundation. Naila expressed a deep connection with it, describing the foundation as a family that played a pivotal role in her journey. She said Fauji Foundation and Sensodyne also stood by her side as supporters.

## Inter-Zonal Women Four Games begins in a colourful ceremony

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cials, players and spectators were also present during the colourful opening ceremony. Players from all eight zones are taking part in the Tchoukball, Basketball, Asian Style Kabaddi and Throwball. The ceremony was started with the recitation from Holy Quran by Himna of Kohat, followed by the national anthem and March Past of the all participating teams. Speaking on this occasion, Additional Director Higher Education Department Shahbana Marwat said, "The Directorate is providing all out support to the players and that is why teams from across the province are taking part." She said, "The government of KP wants women to be provided with equal opportunities for sports. The Directorate of Sports Higher Education Department of KP will provide all sports facilities so that women players can also shine the name of the country and the nation at national and international

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# Chelsea edge past Newcastle on penalties

LONDON (Agencies): Chelsea booked their place in the semi-finals of the League Cup on Tuesday, defeating Newcastle United 4-2 in a penalty shootout at Stamford Bridge after substitute Mykhailo Mudryk kept the Blues alive with a 92nd-minute equaliser. Newcastle had appeared set to snatch a 1-0 win in west London until Kieran Trippier, on as a substitute, failed to cut out a Malo Gusto cross and allowed Mudryk, also on as a sub, to slot

home, levelling the tie at 1-1 and taking it to penalties. England defender Trippier turned a bad night into a disastrous one when he fired Newcastle's second penalty wide before Matt Ritchie saw his effort saved athletically by Chelsea's Djordje Petrovic, making only his second start in goal for the Blues. "Trips is an incredibly strong character," Newcastle manager Eddie Howe told reporters. "When he's given us so much,

now's our turn to support him and look after him the other way and that's what we'll do." Chelsea had gone behind in the 16th minute when Callum Wilson, surrounded by Chelsea defenders, pounced on an error by Benoit Badiashile who felt the ball caught in his feet allowing Wilson to flick his finish past Petrovic. The hosts dominated possession throughout the game but struggled to break down a well-drilled Newcastle defence.

They brought French forward Christopher Nkunku off the bench for his first competitive appearance for the Londoners having suffered a knee injury in pre-season shortly after his transfer from RB Leipzig. But the expensively assembled Blues, who have struggled for a second straight season in the Premier League, had seemed destined to throw away a precious chance of silverware until Mudryk's late strike. "Obviously it means a lot.

Sometimes things happen when you trust in each other and believe until the end," the Ukrainian, who has struggled to find his feet since signing for Chelsea nearly a year ago, told Sky Sports. "Sometimes when the game is tough you need to keep pushing and believe until the last second because it's football and everything can happen."

Mudryk was one of four Chelsea players to score in the shootout, along with Nkunku,

Cole Palmer and Conor Gallagher. Chelsea, in their first season under Mauricio Pochettino, are pinning their hopes on the domestic cups as they currently sit 10th in the Premier League and did not qualify for European competition. The defeat for Howe's Newcastle -- without a major trophy since the 1950s -- represents a second blow in the space of a week after they were eliminated from the Champions League last Wednesday.





## In brief

### ANF recovers 91 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting five operations across the country managed to recover 91 kg drugs and arrested two accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed that 1.796 kg Ice drug was recovered from passenger's shoes and bag at Allama Iqbal International Airport. The accused was leaving for Saudi Arabia by flight number PF-718. In a raid at a courier office in Rawalpindi, ANF recovered 76 grams weed from a parcel sent from the UK. 48 kg hashish was recovered from a truck near RCD Road Winder while an accused was arrested during the operation. In an operation, 25 kg heroin was recovered near Kuchlak Bypass Quetta while 17 kg hashish was recovered from Zakhakhel area of Khyber. Separate cases have been registered against the accused under the Anti-Narcotics Act and further investigations under process.

### Police arrest two bike lifters

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested two bike lifters and recovered eight stolen motorcycles from their possession, said a Police spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed that a team under the supervision of SHO, New Town Police Station managed to net two bike lifters namely Amir and Adeel and recovered eight stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation was underway. Superintendent of Police, Rawal Faisal Saleem said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind bars. He said that on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO), Rawalpindi, the operation against the bike and car lifters had been accelerated.

### Police register 135 cases

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police have registered 135 cases against underage drivers during the last 24 hours, said a police spokesman here on Wednesday. Total 3882 FIRs were registered under the campaign launched against underage drivers while 135 cases were registered during the last 24 hours. All possible steps were being taken to improve the traffic situation on the city roads and facilitate the citizens, he added. He 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 relevant officers to take solid steps to control traffic rules violations and underage driving. He urged the parents to keep a vigilant eye on their children to avert road accidents. Police were also conducting awareness campaigns in schools and colleges to educate the students about the legal age requirements for obtaining a driving license, he added.

### RWMC organizes awareness seminar

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) on Wednesday organized a seminar and walk to create awareness against corruption. Speaking at the seminar, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) RWMC Rana Sajid Safdar said that the golden principles of Islam including speedy justice and self-accountability were the guarantors of the eradication of corruption in the society.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Secretary for Interior Aftab Durrani in a meeting with the Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmad Al-Maliki.

## Saudi Ambassador discusses plan for Faisal Mosque renovation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmad Al Maliki on Wednesday held a meeting with Secretary Interior Aftab Akbar Durrani to discuss the plan for the renovation of Faisal Mosque.

Secretary Interior welcomed Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmed Al Maliki at his office and offered all support for renovation of the Faisal Mosque, built after the name of Shah Faisal with Saudi Arabia's cooperation. Interior Secretary Aftab

Akbar Durrani and Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmad Al Maliki agreed to further promote mutual relations between the two countries.

He said that the relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were exemplary.

He also lauded the recent visit of Imam Kaaba's visit to Pakistan while the Saudi ambassador expressed best wishes for the upcoming elections in Pakistan.

The Secretary Interior informed the ambassador that Road-to-Makkah was a

wonderful project and added Karachi would also be included in this project for the upcoming Hajj.

He informed the ambassador that Passport and Immigration department had launched E-passport process for the facilitation of public while new machines would be installed for smooth functioning. He said that Pakistan also has interests in the Jeddah Exhibition in which the Ministry of Interior would actively participate.

## PPP finalizes arrangements to observe Benazir's 16th death anniversary

RAWALPINDI (APP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Rawalpindi Chapter has finalized arrangements to celebrate the 16th death anniversary of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto Shaheed on December 27 in a befitting manner.

Talking to APP, former media advisor to ex-Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani, Mian Khurram Rasool, said that the city would be decorated with the portraits of former Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (ZAB), Benazir Bhutto and Bilawal Bhutto. He said ZAB and BB

devoted their lives to the people and democracy.

They both created awareness among the people about social, civil, economic, and political rights among the masses and stabilized the country by uniting the four provinces.

Meanwhile, President PPP, Rawalpindi Raja Kamran Hussain said that Quran Khawani would be held at 1:00 p.m. and 'Dua' would be offered at 5.05 p.m.

He informed that the central leadership of PPP including ticket holders of the national and provincial assemblies of the district

would attend the ceremony.

Raja Kamran said that local body members, the People's Federation, people youth organisation, women's wing, people lawyers forums, and people's unity of PIA would also participate in the event.

He said Benazir was a leader of International stature, and her services would be remembered forever.

Speakers will highlight the achievements of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, who struggled for democracy and sacrificed her life for the people of Pakistan.

## Intensive drive underway for registration of house servants and tenants in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 'Knock the Door' campaign led by Islamabad Capital Police is actively pursuing the registration of employees and tenants.

During this ongoing initiative, a police spokesman said that multiple teams from Islamabad Capital Police are conducting street-level and door-to-door operations to facilitate the registration of tenants and domestic workers. Simultaneously, these teams are addressing citizen concerns and inquiries.

The Counter Terrorism

Department (CTD) Islamabad has reported the registration of data about 207 house servants from 516 houses within the jurisdiction of the Secretariat Police Station during the last 24 hours.

The primary objective of this campaign is to prevent any potential untoward incidents by maintaining law and order in the federal capital. Registering tenants and domestic workers not only enables vigilant monitoring of potential miscreants but also serves as a deterrent against individuals involved

in suspicious activities.

Citizens are urged to cooperate with policemen who visit their homes for data collection purposes.

The campaign emphasizes that unregistered employees and tenants may pose a risk, potentially leading to serious incidents such as theft and robbery. By implementing comprehensive registration measures, Islamabad Capital Police aims to create a secure environment for the citizens of the federal capital, utilizing all available resources.

### Vehicles prohibited from entering safe city without valid driving license

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police have banned the entry of all private and government vehicles in Safe City Islamabad being driven by persons having no driving license. Notices have been dispatched to all educational institutions by the police department. The objective of this undertaking is to instill awareness among the citizens of Islamabad regarding adherence to traffic laws and to assure the concrete enforcement of traffic regulations.

Following the special direction of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCPPO), Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the CPO Safe City/Traffic Islamabad has prohibited the entry of vehicles of individuals coming to Safe City Islamabad or officers without a driving license. A police spokesperson said that all educational institutions and federal government departments have been formally intimated in this regard. The CPO Safe City/Traffic stated that the purpose of this action is to create awareness among the residents of the federal capital regarding compliance with traffic laws and to ensure the enforcement of traffic laws.

## PPP will come up to public expectations after coming to power: Kundi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) central information secretary Faisal Karim Kundi Wednesday stated that his party leadership would come up to the people's expectations after coming to power and change would be visible to everyone as PPP will fulfill all its promises to move country towards development.

Pakistan People's Party had been always striving for ensuring political stability and democracy in the country, he said while talking to a Private news channel. "PPP would contest elections under its manifesto of 'Roti, Kapra aur Makaan', PPP is the only political party who has opened its doors for other political parties for discussion," he said.

Kundi said that PPP did not believe in the politics of revenge as the Party's President, Asif Ali Zardari always believed democracy as the best revenge.

Whenever the PPP leadership came to power, they fought against the challenges and addressed the issues of common man, he added.

Opposite parties are focusing on the politics of hatred and division whereas we are doing the politics to serve the people, he mentioned.

Replying a query, he said that Pakistan had vast potentials and resources but the country would rise only when there would be rule of law and justice, adding, achieving a respectable position for the country in the world nations will be our priorities.

## NDMA convenes first National Dialogue on Anticipatory Actions to address climate vulnerability

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) on Wednesday organized the First National Dialogue Platform on Anticipatory Actions here to address climate vulnerability.

The dialogue was held in collaboration with key partners including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), German Red Cross and Pakistan Red Crescent Society, World Food Programme (WFP), Welthungerhilfe (WHH), Concern Worldwide (CWW), and UN OCHA, a news release said.

Over a 100 participants from the humanitarian sector, international financial institutions, hydrometeorologists, climate scientists, national governments, academia, community leaders, and decision-makers participated in the dialogue.

The participants discussed about how their experience in developing anticipatory action initiatives can support the building, strengthening, and scaling up of and forecast-based financing to reduce the impact of forecastable disasters; how to learn from each other to improve the design of existing projects;

and advance the use of weather and climate data.

The dialogue aims to promote a shared understanding of anticipatory action among stakeholders, facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences, understand the roles of international financial institutions in advancing the practice of including funding on disaster risk and pre-arranged financing, develop practical recommendations for the effective implementation of in Pakistan and identify opportunities for collaboration to develop and implement jointly.

Anticipatory action is a unique approach that involves taking timely and informed actions based on credible forecasts or collective risk analysis to mitigate the impacts of potential hazards. It encompasses various terms such as Forecast-based Financing (FbF), Early Warning Early Action (EWEA), Forecast-based Action (FbA), and Anticipatory Humanitarian Action (AHA). Harmonizing these terms will ensure a unified approach to anticipatory action in humani-

Break-out sessions on specific themes were conducted to identify pathways and the ways forward for developing a country roadmap and identify existing gaps, challenges, roadblocks, and milestones for a collective way forward.

The initial session concentrated on multi-hazard forecasting, triggers, and early warning systems. It delved into forecasting potential hazards in Pakistan, identifying multi-hazard triggers for, and elucidating the distinctions between and disaster risk reduction.

In the subsequent session, the spotlight shifted to Planning and financing. This segment underscored the integration of into Pakistan's DRM planning process, placing a strong emphasis on gender equality, disability inclusion, and social considerations in both Anticipatory Action planning and financing. The final session centered on knowledge generation and fostering partnerships. This portion highlighted a multidisciplinary approach to knowledge generation for, exploring the connections between and shock-responsive social protection.

## Decked Christmas tree always becomes centerpiece of festive joy

ISLAMABAD (APP): With only a few days left in the commencement of the celebrations of the grand festival of Christmas, the Christian community in the federal capital like other parts of the country has started decorating the Christmas tree which is the centerpiece of the festive joy.

The Christmas tree is the main symbol of the Christmas celebrations to welcome the arrival of Santa Claus and creates more attraction to the occasion of Christmas with its colourful decorative look.

The members of the Christian community have started decorating the evergreen coniferous tree, real or artificial, as a tradition associated with the celebration of Christmas.

The tree is usually decked with different ornaments including baubles, small bells painted gold or silver, stars of different shapes and sizes, pine cones, apples, candies, tinsel and balloons made from glass, metal, wood and ceramic. An angel and star are often placed at the top of the tree representing the host of angels.

"I have started the ornamentation of my Christmas tree before the time and I am excited because all my friends are visiting my home to see the colourful

tree", said Asiya Yusuf, a youngster. She said, "Decorating Christmas tree is the main hallmark of this festival, "our festival remains incomplete without bringing this tree".

Amir Masih, who is a father of four-kids, "My kids are always more enthusiastic towards decorating Christmas Tree before the start of the festival so that they have pictures of the decked tree on their social media platforms to get likes".

He said that Christmas is the time to share happiness with each other and pray for our country's progress and prosperity.

The festival of Christmas also brings good business to the sweet sellers, gift shops as well as the sellers of ornaments for Christmas tree.

Talking to APP, Ali Nawaz, a decorative items seller said that people mostly use colourful candles and electric lights (fairy lights) to decorate their small-sized trees as these are easily available here while many people also decorate outdoor trees with lights and some other ornaments.

He said the festival would also give us the opportunity to sell these ornaments and earn good business.

In various cultures, the Christmas

tree is traditionally brought into the home and decorated with Christmas lights (originally candles), ornaments, garlands, tinsel, and candy canes during the days around Christmas.

The earliest accounts of decorating an evergreen tree at Christmas were recorded in Livonia (roughly modern territory of Estonia and Latvia) in 15th century. The Christian community is finalizing its preparations for celebrating the Christmas festival with more enthusiasm and renewed spirit, feeling the echo of church bells that announce the birth of Jesus.

Christmas is the occasion when all young and old take a keen interest in decorating Christmas trees and buying Christmas gifts to show their love to their family and friends and celebrate the occasion by distributing gifts among children, singing hymns and prayers, and arranging family gatherings. The festival will be marked through different activities ranging from official gatherings to cake-cutting ceremonies in small communities.

The joyous occasion will fill the atmosphere with colours, symbols and traditions of Christmas that mainly include Christmas Tree, Santa Claus, Carols and Christmas gifts.



ISLAMABAD: A WAPDA worker busy installing new electric cables on a pylon at Tramri area.



Disabler’s issues to be solved

KABUL (BNA): Mullah Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs, stated in a meeting with several people with disabilities that resolving the challenges of handicapped individuals is vital. According to a statement released by the Deputy Prime Minister’s Office, Hanafi met with Mohammad, a disabled person from Nangarhar province who traveled to Kabul to express his concerns about the challenges that disabled people face in that region.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Jamadi-us-Sanni 07, 1445 — Thursday, December 21, 2023

Haqqani meet DG IOM

KABUL (BNA) Acting Refugee and Repatriation Minister, Khalil ur-Rahman Haqqani, in a meeting with appointed Director General of the International Organization for Migration, Mrs. Amy E. Pope, asked the organization to accelerate delivering for the displaced and returnees as the cold winter merging. Haqqani asked Ms. Pope to visit refugees camps in close to have a better understanding of their needs.

High price of electricity serious issue

BAMIYAN (TOLOnews): Residents of Bamiyan criticized the continuous shortage of electricity and its high price in the province and asked the authorities to resume the construction of the 220-kilowatt electricity transmission line between Bamiyan and Baghlan.

The construction of the first section of the Bamiyan - Baghlan power transmission line of 220 kilowatts started at the end of 2018 at the cost of 10 million US dollars with the financial assistance of the Asian Development Bank in the center of Bamiyan, and its work was stopped after the fall of the previous government.

“We buy one kilowatt of

electricity for 16 Afghanis, our consumption is about 30 to 40 kilowatts of electricity, which is around 600 to 700 Afghanis,” said Mohammad Ali, a Bamiyan resident.

“If the same electricity of Doshi that was going on in the past restarts, it will help the people,” said Sefatullah, a Bamiyan resident.

The head of Breshna Sherkat in Bamiyan said that the construction of the 220-kW power transmission line of Bamiyan-Baghlan, which was completed 65% before the return of the Islamic Emirate, will begin next solar year.

“Bamiyan - Doshi power plant, which is 65% completed, has been placed in

the five-year work plan, and is supposed to start its work in 1403,” said Ziauddin Jahadyar.

“The electrical equipment of the project was produced in China and was ready to be transferred, however, due to the non responsiveness of Breshna Sherkat and non-payment of the contract money, we couldn’t transfer the equipment to Afghanistan,” said Rahimullah Rahim, technical head of a contractor company.

According to the head of Bamiyan Breshna Sherkat, more than 4,000 families in the center of Bamiyan use solar and diesel electricity, and they pay 15 to 25 Afghanis per kilowatt of electricity.

EU donates 25m Euros to address poverty crisis

KABUL (Khaama Press): The World Food Programme (WFP) has announced that the European Union has contributed 25 million euros to support those in need in Afghanistan.

This organization announced on Tuesday, through its social media platform X, about the EU’s assistance for Afghanistan.

According to the World Food Programme, these aids will be used to support pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, hungry families, and the treatment of malnourished children across Afghanistan.

Also, Shaw Wali, the head of the World Food Programme in Afghanistan, has emphasized that ‘these humanitarian aids from the European Union are happening at a time when we still have a chance to access the most vulnerable families before the arrival of winter and snowfall.’

In the statement, citing Francois Gommès, the head of EU humanitarian operations, it is mentioned that one in every three Afghan citizens does not know where their next meal will come from.

He added, concerning the fact that the people of Afghanistan are facing a harsh winter that ‘the European Union stands with the people of Afghanistan for survival with life-saving aids.’

The World Food Programme has expressed concern about the severe drought and economic crisis in Afghanistan.

According to the statistics of this organization, the total aid of the European Union for Afghanistan in the year 2023 has reached 73.7 million euros.

This comes at a time when the increase in poverty, the migration crisis, and the arrival of the cold season have increased the people’s need for humanitarian assistance.

Norway announces \$6.7m aid to Afghanistan

KABUL (Ariana News): Norway increased its support for Afghanistan with \$3.8 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and \$2.9 million to the UN World Food Program (WFP), due to the large influx of Afghans repatriated from Pakistan, Norway’s government said in a statement on Tuesday.

“I am pleased that we can increase our support to UN agencies operating at the border and inside Afghanistan. As winter looms, needs will increase, making sufficient humanitarian assistance even more critical. Norway remains committed to supporting the humanitarian response in Afghanistan,” said Norway’s Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide.

This brings the Norwegian support for the humanitarian response in Afghanistan for 2023 to approximately \$30.6 million.

Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have returned from Pakistan in recent months amid a crackdown on illegal migrants.

“The Afghans arriving at the border are extremely vulnerable. Many are families with children. According to the UN, most returnees need critical aid, including shelter, water, food, sanitation, healthcare, and protection,” said Eide.

Norway encourages that the implementation of the repatriation plan respect the human rights and dignity of the individuals concerned. Norway shares UNHCR’s concerns about the adverse effects of the arrest, detention and forced return of Afghan nationals, including asylum seekers and individuals with valid documents, according to the statement.

“While the international society is deeply concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, we must not lose sight of other humanitarian crises. Norway has strong sympathy with the Afghan people,” said Eide.

Afghanistan-Russia relations strengthening daily

KABUL (Ariana News): Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Amir Khan Muttaqi said in a meeting with the special envoy of Russia for Afghanistan on Wednesday that relations between Kabul and Moscow are strengthening by the day and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) is grateful to Moscow for supporting Afghanistan in international forums.

According to a statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Muttaqi stressed that trade relations between Afghanistan and Russia should be expanded.

He said that Afghanistan is ready to play a positive role in the transit of Russian goods to South Asia after the reconstruction of Salang Highway.

According to the statement, Zamir Kabulov, Russia’s special envoy for Afghanistan, said that some



countries want to advance their own agenda in the region by creating new mechanisms.

Kabulov said that nothing should be done without the approval of the Afghan government.

He said, if any country has a problem with

Afghanistan, it can discuss it bilaterally with the government of Afghanistan.

The envoy said that some countries see that the regional countries are expanding cooperation with the Afghan government, and they want to intervene in the issues of

the region with new mechanisms and create hurdles for progress.

The Russian diplomat also emphasized that the United States should release the frozen assets of Afghanistan and allow these reserves to help Afghanistan’s economy.

Haqqani calls advice of visiting Turkish scholars in Kabul ‘valuable’

KABUL (Ariana News): Acting Minister of Interior Sirajuddin Haqqani met with a delegation of Turkish religious scholars in Kabul and considered their advice valuable for strengthening the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA).

According to a statement released by the Ministry of Interior, Haqqani expressed his gratitude to Turkey, especially the Islamic scholars, for the construction of mosques, madrassas and schools in Afghanistan, as well as for helping Afghans in times of need.

Haqqani added that although it was difficult to perform the Islamic instructions and worship in some cases in the past, but at that time the scholars kept the candles of religion and invitation lit and gave the call to prayer.



He said that Afghanistan and Turkey are connected according to the Sharia, with the ropes of Islam and brotherhood.

Based on the statement, Sheikh Ibrahim Sardar, head of the Islamic delegation of Turkey, said that

Turkey has long historical relations with Afghanistan and many common values. He appreciated the sacrifices of Afghans in the struggle for freedom and praised the achievements of the Islamic Emirate.

According to the mem-

bers of the delegation, the creation of facilities after the hardships that the forces of the Islamic Emirate endured is a divine test and serving the country and the nation is a major responsibility during the governance period.

Qatar in support of Trans-Afghan railway project: Uzbekistan

KABUL (Ariana News): Uzbekistan announced that Qatar has expressed support for the Trans-Afghan Railway construction project.

The announcement was made following a meeting between Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and visiting Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Tashkent.

“Particular attention is paid to promoting new joint investment projects, in particular in the fields of green energy, industry, agriculture, infrastructure development, the banking and financial sector, education,

healthcare, and tourism,” said a statement by the Uzbek presidency.

It said that ways to further expand cooperation in the field of transport and logistics were considered during the meeting, adding that the Qatari side particularly expressed support for the Trans-Afghan Railway construction project.

Afghanistan Railway Authority says that the Trans-Afghan railway project is a regional project that needs international support. The first survey of the project was conducted following the establishment of the

Islamic Emirate and the route of the railway was determined.

Sami Durrani, the spokesperson of Afghanistan Railway Administration, said that a one-year plan has also been prepared between the countries involved.

According to experts, the completion of this project will lead to the expansion of Afghanistan’s commercial and political relations with South Asia and Central Asia, and the project can be effective in improving the economic situation and creating job opportunities in the country.

In 2021, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to implement the Trans-Afghan railway project, but it was delayed due to financial issues.

On the other hand, officials in the Ministry of Energy and Water say that the 500 KV power transmission project from Dasht Alwan of Pul-i-Khumri to Arghandi of Kabul will be inaugurated in the near future. According to the officials, this project can import more electricity to Afghanistan from Turkmenistan and solve the problems of the people to some extent.

Complaints mount in Kabul over high price of fuel

KABUL (TOLOnews): Some drivers in the capital complained about the high price of fuel and said that the price of one liter of oil in the capital has increased by ten afghani. They want the officials of the Islamic Emirate to reduce the price of oil in the capital.

“The price of oil is rising and not going down. Afghans are facing a challenge in the winter season. We ask the authorities to pay serious attention to the price of oil,” said Omar, a driver.

“A few days ago, the fuel price was 63 afghani, now it is 72 afghani, the problems of our drivers are many, if we raise the rate, no one will be able to pay,” said Mohammad Ehsan, a driver.

Meanwhile, the Chamber of Commerce and Investment considers the reason for the high price of fuel in the capital to be the blocking of the Salang highway and emphasizes that efforts are being made to reduce the price of fuel in the capital.

“We are trying to get serious attention in the sector. Salang will be opened soon,” said Mohammad Yonis Momand, deputy of the chamber. “The high price of oil is because of the Salang highway,” said Abdul Majeed Niazi, head of the chamber in Faryab.

Earlier, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce said that in the last 11 months of this year, about 710,000 tons of oil worth 302 million dollars entered Afghanistan from Russia.

200 refugees transferred



KABUL (Ariana News): The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has announced the transfer of 250 Afghan refugees from Pakistan to the United Kingdom.

The organization called for support of safe ways and sustainable solutions for Afghan refugees through a message on the social media platform X.

The International Organization for Migration emphasizes that these refugees represent a global effort to support Afghans displaced by war.

According to the organi-

zation’s report, since the Taliban administration’s resurgence in Afghanistan in August 2021, it has facilitated the resettlement of at least one thousand Afghan refugees in various countries. Previously, several Afghan refugees were transferred from Pakistan to countries including Canada and Britain.

It’s noteworthy that Britain has committed to relocating 20,000 eligible Afghan refugees to the country over the next four years.

Currently, thousands of Afghan refugees are residing in Pakistan, awaiting

relocation to Western countries, including Canada, France, and Britain.

This development is part of the broader international response to the Afghan refugee crisis following recent political changes in Afghanistan. Pakistani authorities have initiated a crackdown on Afghan refugees, commencing forced deportations since November 1st. This move has raised concerns about the treatment and rights of these refugees within Pakistan.

Despite facing widespread condemnation and calls to cease the forceful deportation of Afghan migrants, particularly in light of the severe humanitarian crisis and the harsh winter conditions, Pakistani officials have continued with their actions.

International organizations and human rights groups have urged Pakistan to reconsider its stance, emphasizing the critical situation of the Afghan refugees and the potential risks they face upon forced return to their homeland.



## Nawaz to contest from Mansehra's NA-15

F.P. Report

MANSEHRA: With political parties ramping up their electioneering efforts, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Captain (ret'd) Safdar has claimed that party supremo Nawaz Sharif will be contesting upcoming polls from Mansehra's NA-15.

Speaking to the media on Wednesday, Safdar — the husband of PML-N Chief Organiser Maryam Nawaz — said that the former prime minister would submit his nomination papers for the National Assembly seat "NA-15 Mansehra-cum-TorGhar" by December 21 (Thursday). The development comes as the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has begun receiving the nomination papers from potential candidates who are set to contest polls slated for February 8, 2024.

As per the documents, Nawaz's name is included in the list of nomination forms issued to the candidates of the said constituency. The PML-N supremo's decision to file nomination papers from NA-15 comes as the constituency is considered a stronghold of the party that won the seat in the 2013 and 2018 elections.

Nawaz, who returned to Pakistan in October after a four-year self-imposed exile, has been leading the party's election campaign with his eyes set on a fourth term as the country's chief executive. Since his return, the three-time prime minister has got his sentences in Avenfield and Al Azizia references quashed by the Islamabad High Court (IHC). However, following his disqualification — by the Supreme Court in the Panama Papers Case — Nawaz needs the lifelong ban on holding any public office to be removed if he is to qualify to contest the upcoming polls.

Earlier in the day, PML-N's staunch rival Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) announced that its incarcerated founder Imran Khan — disqualified by ECP in the Toshakhana case after being found guilty of corrupt practices — will contest the general elections from at least three constituencies. Speaking to media outside the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar said that Khan will contest polls from the Lahore, Islamabad and Mianwali constituencies.

Announcements from both parties come as the ECP, acting on the apex court's directions, announced the election schedule on December 15. The development categorically nullified the rumours regarding the polls being delayed after the top court suspended the Lahore High Court's ruling against the electoral body's notification regarding the appointment of returning officers (ROs) and district returning officers (DROs).

## Hearing of Toshakhana case adjourned

ISLAMABAD (INP): An accountability court of Islamabad deferred the hearing of the Toshakhana reference pertaining to luxury vehicles against PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif, President PPP-P President Asif Ali Zardari and Yousaf Raza Gilani till January 4.

Hearing of the Toshakhana case against Nawaz, Zardari and others was conducted by accountability court Judge Muhammad Bashir on Wednesday. Sharif's counsel Qazi Misbah and pleader Rana Irfan appeared before judge whereas NAB's special prosecutor Irfan Bhola and Sohail Arif were also present in the court.

The court was prayed to restore applications filed by general public. These applications were filed about auction of properties owned by Sharif and court orders issued over that. The defence counsel told the court that applicants had raised objections and after amendment in the law hearing over those objections were put off. There were six applications. He requested the court to issue orders over these applications. He added that there were five miscellaneous applications too. He said details of these applications will be provided to the court. The prosecutor told the court that investigation officer had been transferred so he needed more time for preparation.

# ISI can't trace source of audio leaks, IHC told

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday said the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in its report stated it can't trace the source of the audio leaks. Hearing the pleas of former chief justice of Pakistan Saqib Nisar's son and former prime minister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi regarding their audio conversation leaks, IHC's Justice Babar Sattar asked why the ISI filed the report through the Ministry of Defence.

At this, Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan replied the intelligence agency should have filed the report through the Prime Minister Office. According to the ISI report, the investigation could proceed only after taking assistance from social media platforms, the attorney general added. The report of the PMO regarding the audio leaks was submitted to the court by the attorney general.

The AGP said no intelligence agency was allowed to tap audio conversations by the federal government including the ISI, Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and Intelligence Bureau (IB). The FIA had to first see who recorded the call, the attorney general said adding that following the court orders, the FIA was writing to telecom companies as it required access to those IP addresses.

"If any government agency is doing this recording, it is doing so illegally," he maintained. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) lawyer said private audio leaks could not be broadcast by TV channels. At this, the court asked what action the PEMRA was taking on the matter.

To which, the counsel apprised the bench that TV channels would not air this kind of audio. "We have sent the matter to the Council of Complaints, they will decide," the PEMRA lawyer added. Justice Babar Sattar asked whether the

PEMRA was effectively functioning as a regulator. He further asked if the authority had issued urgent instructions to the TV channels. "So, you are saying that you cannot take immediate action, the matter will go to the Council of Complaints," the court remarked.

The audio conversation between Bushra Bibi and his counsel Latif Khosa that surfaced on November 30 on social media, suggested that there were differences in the incarcerated former prime minister's family. Latif Khosa said not once but for the entire day the TV channels continued to broadcast the audio. He said it was a derogatory treatment.

The court observed that on the one hand, there was freedom of information and on the other was the matter of privacy, and how it could be balanced. However, Justice Babar said, it was the responsibility of the state to ensure both. Counsel Aitzaz Ahsan said there should be self-regulation, but here even the Constitution was not implemented. He cited the delay in polls as an example.

The court, quoting a news report, asked the attorney general to check if IB was given the authority to record calls. The AGP replied he would look into it and apprise the court. The IHC directed the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to submit a detailed report at the next hearing. If the government didn't come up with the required information then the court would appoint national and international amici curiae for the purpose, it said.

Ordering the FIA and other institutions to submit their replies, the court adjourned the hearing. "Whoever comes, he says there is no permission to tap calls. Nobody is telling who is doing it and why," he said. The court also decided to appoint senior journalists as amici curiae on the matter related to the code of conduct of TV channels.

# Colorado Supreme Court kicks Trump off ballot

COLORADO (BBC): Colorado's Supreme Court has ruled that Donald Trump cannot run for president next year in the state, citing a constitutional insurrection clause. The court ruled 4-3 that Mr Trump was not an eligible candidate because he had engaged in an insurrection over the US Capitol riot nearly three years ago.

It does not stop Mr Trump running in the other states and his campaign says it will appeal to the US Supreme Court. The decision, they said, was "completely flawed". The ruling only mentions the state's primary election on 5 March, when Republican voters will choose their preferred candidate for president. But it could affect the general election in Colorado next November. It is the first ever use of Section 3 of the US Constitution's 14th Amendment to disqualify a presidential candidate.

Tuesday's decision — which has been placed on hold pending appeal until next month — only applies in Colorado. Similar attempts to kick Mr Trump off the ballot in New Hampshire, Minnesota and Michigan have failed. The justices wrote in their ruling: "We do not reach these conclusions lightly. We are mindful of the magnitude and weight of the questions now before us. "We are likewise mindful of our solemn duty to apply the law, without fear or favor, and without being swayed by public reaction to the decisions that the law mandates we reach."

The decision reverses an

earlier one from a Colorado judge, who ruled that the 14th Amendment's insurrection ban did not apply to presidents because the section did not explicitly mention them. That same lower court judge also found that Mr Trump had participated in an insurrection in the US Capitol riot. His supporters stormed Congress on 6 January 2021 while lawmakers were certifying President Joe Biden's election victory. The Colorado Supreme Court's decision does not go into effect until 4 January 2024. That is the eve of the deadline for the state to print its presidential primary ballots.

Steven Cheung, a spokesman for the Trump campaign, called the ruling "completely flawed" and lambasted the justices, who were all appointed by Democratic governors. "Democrat Party leaders are in a state of paranoia over the growing, dominant lead President Trump has amassed in the polls," Mr Cheung said in a statement. "They have lost faith in the failed Biden presidency and are now doing everything they can to stop the American voters from throwing them out of office next November."

Mr Cheung added that Mr Trump's legal team would "swiftly file an appeal" to the US Supreme Court, where conservatives hold a 6 to 3 majority. Representatives for Mr Biden's re-election bid declined to comment on the Colorado ruling. But a senior Democrat affiliated with the campaign told CBS News, the BBC's US partner, that the decision would

help Democrats by supporting their argument that the US Capitol riot was an attempted insurrection. The source said it would also aid Democrats in showcasing "the stark differences" between Mr Trump and Mr Biden.

Republican lawmakers condemned the decision, including House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson, who called it "a thinly veiled partisan attack". "Regardless of political affiliation, every citizen registered to vote should not be denied the right to support our former president and the individual who is the leader in every poll of the Republican primary," he said. On the campaign trail Mr Trump's Republican primary rivals also assailed the ruling, with Vivek Ramaswamy pledging to withdraw his name from the ballot if Mr Trump's candidacy is not reinstated.

Mr Trump, speaking at a campaign event in Iowa on Tuesday night, did not address the ruling. But a fundraising email sent by his campaign to supporters said "this is how dictatorships are born". The Colorado Republican Party also responded, saying it would withdraw from the state's primary process if the ruling was allowed to stand. Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (Crew), the group that brought the case, welcomed the ruling. "It is not only historic and justified, but is necessary to protect the future of democracy in our country," the group's president, Noah Bookbinder, said in a statement.

# PHC withdrew arrest warrant against BRT's contractor

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench comprising of Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan and Justice Shakeel Ahmad withdrew arrest's warrant of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) contractor as well as extended status quo 23rd January 2024 while ordered National Accountability Bureau (NAB) for submission of reply in this regard, on Wednesday.

The counsel Waseem Sajjad, Abdul Muneem Khan, Shumail Butt and Qazi Jawad advocates appeared on behalf of petitioner while Deputy Prosecutor General Azeem Dad along with Additional Prosecutor General Muhammad Ali present before court during the hearing of BRT's contractor plea.

PHC has been approached with three writ petitions contesting the re-investigation of BRT, despite the court being informed that NAB had not submitted a reply. However,

NAB's representative contended that a reply had indeed been submitted but was delayed due to technical issues with the High Court's system. The counsel Waseem Sajjad, contended that NAB lacks jurisdiction over the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project due to its civil nature and further argued for a declaration of nullity of the inquiry.

Deputy Prosecutor General Azeem Dad and Additional Prosecutor General Muhammad Ali asserted that Masood Ahmad another petitioner in the case, failed to appear before the court neither participating in the inquiry despite being granted interim bail. Furthermore, they argued for a withdrawal of status quo in this regard. The legal representative, Qazi Jawad Advocate, contended that Masood Ahmad Shah is currently involved in a distinct legal proceeding due to his inclusion on the Exit Control List (ECL) and is being re-

resented by his attorneys at an appropriate court of law.

Nonetheless, the legal representatives of NAB have petitioned for the removal of the status quo and put forth the argument that PHC lacks jurisdiction to grant pre-arrest bail in this matter as Accountability Court is vested with competent jurisdiction in this case. A divisional bench comprising of Chief Justice PHC Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan and Justice Shakeel Ahmad observed that NAB first submit reply then further argumentation to be held while adjourned hearing till 23rd January 2024.

**PHC grants transit bail to 10 PTI workers:** Justice Syed Arshad Ali of the PHC has granted transit bail to 10 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers who were nominated in six separate cases following a workers' convention held in Kohat and ordered for appearance before the Session Court till 26th December.



ISLAMABAD: Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Jiang Zaidong taking selfi Caretaker Information Minister Murtaza Solangi and others during 8th CPEC Media Forum at COMSTECH Auditorium.

## Asad Qaisar released from Mardan jail

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader and former speaker of the National Assembly Asad Qaisar has been released from the central jail in Mardan. As per details, Asad Qaisar was released after Deputy Commissioner of Swabi took back the 3 MPO order on the direction of Peshawar High Court.

The PTI leader was in jail under 3MPO from November 24 despite his bail in May 9 violence case. On December 9, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader and former speaker of the National Assembly Asad Qaisar was rearrested after securing bail from the district and sessions court in Mardan on.

Prior to this, the district and sessions court in Mardan granted him bail in the May 9 case against surety bonds of Rs90,000. However, following his release, Swabi police rearrested him under MPO. Qaisar, who is accused of corruption in the procurement of equipment for Gajju Khan Medical College, was arrested from Bani Gala, Islamabad, on Nov 3. The ACE booked Mr Qaisar over his alleged corruption in the purchase of medical equipment for Swabi's Gajju Khan Medical College.

## Bar councils cry foul over ECP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's legal eagles are ruffling feathers. In a rare joint move, the Pakistan Bar Council, Supreme Court Bar, and Sindh High Court Bar have taken aim at the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), raising serious concerns about its ability to conduct transparent and fair elections.

The chorus of discontent stems from the ECP's handling of constituencies and seat distribution, with accusations of gerrymandering and bias flying thick and fast. The Pakistan Bar Council, in a scathing statement, questioned the fairness of the electoral process and demanded equal opportunities for all political parties.

The Bar Council's statement throws a dark cloud over the ECP's credibility. It alleges a "growing perception" that the current Commission lacks the mettle to hold clean elections, and its actions are raising troubling doubts about the integrity of the entire process. The Bar Council doesn't hold back on the judiciary either. It calls upon the Supreme Court to stop blindly validating every ECP move and instead, scrutinize inconsistencies and take swift action. The message is clear: the Supreme Court must uphold its role as guardian of the Constitution and not be seen as rubber-stamping a compromised electoral process.

The Supreme Court Bar Association is taking matters a step further, announcing an All-Pakistan Representative Convention to discuss the crisis and demand a level playing field for all political parties. The message is loud and clear: Pakistan deserves general elections that are free, fair, and transparent, not a sham orchestrated by a biased election commission. Will the ECP listen? Will the Supreme Court rise to the occasion? Will Pakistan get the elections it deserves? Only time will tell, but one thing is certain: the legal fraternity is not backing down, and the pressure is mounting on the ECP to clean up its act.

# Hamas chief in Egypt for Gaza truce talks

CAIRO: Hamas's Qatar-based leader Ismail Haniyeh arrived in Cairo on Wednesday for talks on a ceasefire in the group's war with Israel in Gaza and a prisoner exchange. Haniyeh arrived "in the Egyptian capital Cairo to hold discussions with Egyptian officials over the developments of the Zionist (Israeli) aggression on the Gaza Strip and other matters," the group said in a statement.

Prior to his arrival in Cairo, Haniyeh had met in Doha with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, though details on the meeting were scant. A source close to the Palestinian militant group said on Tuesday that Haniyeh would head a "high-level" Hamas delegation to Egypt, where he is due to hold talks with Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel and others. The discussions will be "on stopping the aggression and the war to prepare an agreement for the release of prisoners (and) the end of the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip," the source said on condition of anonymity, as he was not authorized to talk about the visit.

A source close to the Islamic Jihad group, which fights alongside Hamas in Gaza, said the group's leader Ziad Nakhalah is also expected in Cairo early next week for talks. Both groups had posted videos earlier this week showing what they claimed were hostages still held in Gaza pleading for the Israeli government to secure their release. During a week-long truce late last month that Qatar brokered with help from Egypt and the United States, 80 Israeli hostages were freed in exchange for 240 Palestinians held in Israeli jails.

**Hamas government says Gaza war death toll hits 20,000:** The Hamas government's media office in the Gaza Strip said Wednesday at least 20,000 people have been killed in the Palestinian territory since the war with Israel began.

Some 8,000 children and 6,200 women were among the dead, it said, as the conflict continued to rage more than two months after it broke out on October 7.

**Egypt, US ministers discuss Gaza, maritime security concerns in Red Sea:** Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry recently held talks with

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to discuss the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and maritime security concerns in the southern Red Sea and Bab El-Mandeb, the strait that connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden.

Ahmed Abu Zeid, a spokesman for Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said Shoukry received a phone call from Blinken who spoke of America's keenness to work closely with Egypt on regional and global issues during the new term in office of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. Shoukry and Blinken agreed to use all means at their disposal to prevent the displacement of Palestinians outside of the Gaza Strip and their territories, and the Egyptian minister highlighted the importance of working to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

He also urged the US to support a draft resolution proposed by Arab and Islamic groups in the UN Security Council aimed at removing obstacles to aid getting into Palestine. The talks, Abu Zeid added, also covered security challenges in the southern Red Sea region and the Bab El-Mandeb and their impact on maritime transport.

Shoukry pointed out the need to provide safe navigation for commercial vessels in the Red Sea, a shipping lane vital to global trade. At the end of their discussions, Shoukry and Blinken pledged to stay in regular communication.

Meanwhile, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visited the Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier in the eastern Mediterranean Sea on Wednesday, and thanked its crew for their role in helping prevent a broader conflict in the Middle East during the Israel-Hamas war.

The nuclear-powered Ford, a small, floating city of over 4,000 people with eight squadrons of aircraft, became a powerful symbol of American resolve by rushing closer to Israel after it was attacked by the Palestinian militant group Hamas on Oct. 7. Austin has extended the Ford's deployment three times, hoping its presence would make Iran and Iran-aligned groups — particularly Lebanon's Hezbollah — think twice before joining the fight against Israel. — Arab News

# PM upgrades KMC

(Continued from Page 1)

opportunities would eventually become a strength for the country, which ought to be encouraged.

The prime minister, in an interactive session with the students of Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering, Science and Technology, exemplified the Indian nationals who had left their country and returned as an asset to contribute to their country. Responding to a question about the measures taken by the government to stop the brain drain, he said those leaving the country were not going to vanish, rather they would seize better economic opportunities and skills, which should be encouraged.

He said after improving their skills and qualifications, they would become a valuable asset and product as the world was in search of talent. "I consider their journey a part of the talent hunt," he added. He said there was no evidence of any dramatic surge in brain drain in the prevailing circumstances rather it was a continuous process of skilled, semi-skilled, and non-skilled people moving abroad for better economic opportunities.

He said the export of human resources was an important component of the country's GDP. To a question about the arrest of Imran Khan, he said the state had an inherent right to apprehend those who violated the laws. He was arrested under certain laws, not by the PML-N, PPP or JUI, he added. He urged the educated class to also debate their political attitudes besides asserting their right to agitate.

Prime Minister Kakar called for adopting the "all of us" approach, in addition to encouraging qualitative discussions for betterment

of the society. He said democracy should morph towards the performing democracy as the performance was the key indicator to judge the success of the democratic system. He said transitional democracies like Pakistan could not turn into settled democracies for not giving due focus on performance.

To another question, he said every individual was responsible for defending the ideological frontiers of the nation. He said Islam was not the name of a reactionary movement but a reformist movement that encouraged any type of dialogue that otherwise would impact society negatively. Responding to another query, he said no one, including the state, could suppress critical thinking, but being a critical thinker did not necessarily require being abusive in conversation.

"Unfortunately, critical thinkers are not being born. This is the tragedy. I am trying to find my Rousseau and Voltaire of my time," he remarked. Asked about the reasons behind the low ratio of girls' education, he said the situation would not change unless the people built influences voluntarily and started taking pride in the accomplishments of the girls as well, not merely the boys.

He said the change in the society's attitude was of paramount importance as the government's intervention alone would not suffice to overcome the situation. He assured that the State of Pakistan did not discriminate, on the basis of gender and the challenges of primary and higher education could only be tackled by the State through collaborations at the district and Tehsil levels. The prime minister said the academia-industry linkage was crucial for reaping the eco-

nomical dividends as well as establishing an ecosystem to create opportunities for the graduates and fulfill corporate requirements.

Meanwhile, the Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar inaugurated a girl hostel at Ghulam Ishaq Institute of Engineering and Science (GIK) at Topi.

The Prime Minister unveiled the plaque to formally inaugurate the girl hostel. Senior officials of the Institute were also present. He was informed that the hostel had 91 rooms for accommodations of 180 students. The Prime Minister also planted a tree at the lawn of the institute.

Meanwhile, addressing at Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering Sciences (GIKI) in Topi area of Swabi, Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday emphasized that focusing on science and technology was important to achieve goals of fast development in the country.

He said the institute was playing vital role in promotion of science and technology as it was preparing high quality graduates in a range of fields of engineering sciences. The prime minister recalled that when he visited GIKI for the first time in 1990s, he was much impressed by the not only the infrastructure of the institute but also the quality of education and energy of students.

He said Allah Almighty created human being for a noble cause. The ability to think, the ability to conceptualize things and seeking knowledge makes the human being different from the angels, he added. The prime minister said Pakistan was formed to have the prestigious educational institutions such as GIKI.