

**Explosive defused**  
KARACHI (INP): Karachi Bomb Disposal Unit has issued a report on finding a bomb from a train at Cantonment Station in Karachi on Saturday. The BDU report said that the bomb was found near seat number 71 in bogie number 5 of Awami Express as the explosive was kept in a black and red colored school bag. The weight of the bag was around 5 kg, two and a half kg of explosives were found after the bomb was defused.

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Vol. XXXIX No. 336 Regd. No. 241 JAMADI-US-SANNI 11 1445 -- SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24 2023 PESHAWAR EDITION 12 PAGES PRICE. 30



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar awarding certificate of appreciation to young artist for their artistic depictions of peace for Palestine cause.

## Bid to regain ‘bat’ electoral symbol PTI set to move court Tuesday

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) now-former chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan Saturday announced that the party would approach the Peshawar High Court (PHC) or the Supreme Court against the Election Commission of Pakistan’s (ECP) decision stripping of the former ruling party’s iconic election symbol — ‘bat’.

The PTI will likely be playing its election innings without the symbol as the ECP had a day earlier termed its intra-party polls “unconstitutional” and revoked its claim on the electoral symbol. Talking to journalists outside Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi, Barrister Gohar said that PTI’s petition for regaining the ‘bat’ electoral symbol would be filed on Tuesday morning, adding that consultation in this regard had almost been completed. Without naming the ECP, the PTI leader said that all of their efforts were aimed at depriving his party of the 227 reserved seats. The PTI leader saw a conspiracy behind the ECP’s recent order.

A day earlier, he had said: “Currently, there are 70 reserved seats in the National Assembly. The total number of reserved seats in Pakistan is 227. The seats are divided among those parties who have election symbols [as per their parties’ strength in the assemblies].” The lawmakers elected on reserved seats play a crucial role during the elections for the slots of president, prime minister, chief minister, and Senate chairman.

Responding to a question today, Gohar: “ECP’s order is not sustainable. It is contradictory.” He was confident that PTI would get relief when they challenged the order in the court. “[PTI’s] electoral symbol will be restored,” hoped Gohar, who is also a lawyer by profession. The PTI leader said that his party was waiting for the certified copy of the ECP.

## Elahi’s lawyer taken into custody

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Former Punjab chief minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi’s lawyer Amir Saeed Raan was taken into custody by unidentified people in Gujranwala.

Amir Saeed Raan’s brother Adam Saeed claimed Raan had to file nomination papers of Chaudhry Parvez Elahi for general elections 2024. He was taken into custody by unidentified people. Adam Saeed demanded of authorities for recovery of his brother as early as possible.

It may be recalled that about 10 months ago, Raan was taken away by some people and later he was recovered from Islamabad by the inspector general of Islamabad police on orders of the court. Former Federal Minister’s brother Faraz Chaudhary was arrested in Jhelum. The arrest unfolded as Faraz attempted to submit nomination papers on behalf of Fawad Chaudhary for NA-60.

The Jhelum police cited multiple pending cases against Faraz Chaudhary, the former general secretary of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the region. It’s noteworthy that Fawad Chaudhary, just two days ago, declared his intent to contest the election while detained.

## No scope of laxity in dissimulating truth: Solangi

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi has said that in the age of propaganda, narratives and counter narratives, the importance of the job of the officers of Information group had increased manifold.

Delivering his keynote address at “Graduation Ceremony of Training Programmes Domain Specific 38th MCMC and 40th Specialised Training Programme”, here the other day, he said the responsibility of officers of this group was countering propaganda of inimical forces and promote and project Pakistan’s soft and positive image.

He said unlike many other groups of civil service, the information group officers had to work hard to improve their skills by continuous study. “You have to love your job to improve your knowledge. You have to learn not only about media, media laws but politics, history, geography, art, culture, music and languages of the country,” he added. He said that the focus of the officers of the information group should be to adopt to rapidly changing media landscape. The minister said that when internet and social media were introduced, it was thought that new window of knowledge had been opened and the dependency of mainstream media would end.

But unfortunately, now a new “political economy” has been invented at the social media and affluent persons could hire services of a few dozen people to spread fake news and create bogus trends. He urged the officers to learn languages of Pakistan which had diverse culture as conveying a message to someone in his own language was always easy.

He said that in this age of advanced technology, there was no scope of laxity as any

delay in dissimulating truth would give others to fill the vacuum with fake news and propaganda.

Speaking on the occasion, Secretary Information and Broadcasting Shahera Shahid said that efforts were afoot for restructuring of the information group as per requirements of the modern times. She opined that restructuring of the information group was imperative to meet the challenges of modern times. Shahera Shahid urged the officers and probationers of the group to work hard to improve the standing of their group.

Executive Director General of Information Service Academy Dr Tariq Mehmood in his welcome address, threw the light on the aims and objectives of the two courses. Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi distributed the certificates among the participants of the two courses. Senior officers from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting including Additional Secretary Information and Broadcasting Syed Mubashar Tauqir Shah and MD Associated Press of Pakistan were also present on the occasion.

Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Murtaza Solangi, explicitly stated that the election date has not been altered, there should be no uncertainty about it and the future of the country is aligned with the constitution and democracy. Speaking to the media following his participation in the “Second National Training of Journalists on China-Pakistan Relationship in the New Era; An Assessment of Ten Years of CPEC, and How is this relationship report in Pakistani media,” he emphasized that, in accordance with the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the country will be governed by elected representatives.

## Deadline to submit papers to expire today

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Deadline to submit nomination papers for contest the upcoming general elections for the National and Provincial Assembly will expire tomorrow (Sunday).

Earlier, December 22, was set deadline for submission of nomination papers but the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) acceded to the appeals of various political parties extended it by two days. According to updated schedule of the Commission, scrutiny of the nomination papers is slated to occur from Monday through the 30th of this month.

Appeals against the acceptance or rejection of nomination papers can be submitted until the 3rd of January, with decisions expected by the 10th of January. The Election Commission is set to release the updated list of candidates on the 11th of January, and candidates have until the 12th of January to withdraw their papers. The allocation of electoral symbols will take place on the 13th of January, and the general elections are scheduled for the 8th of February.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has given more time to foreign observers who want to monitor the general elections. Now, they can submit their applications from December 31 to January 20. An official from the ECP informed APP that, up to this point, they have received responses from 103 representatives of foreign media living in Pakistan. The ECP has printed over 200,000 accreditation cards and appointed District Monitoring Officers and teams to oversee compliance with the code of conduct.

He recounted that a Christian King was the first one to lend support to the Muslims in their early days. He said it was obligatory for Muslims to have faith in all prophets from Prophet Adam to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). All Prophets were a guiding light for humanity, he said adding spirituality was a cure for the ills of humanity despite all the technological progress that humans had made.

He recalled the first speech of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah in the constituent assembly in which he outlined the basic principles of the state of

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“Who leaked the audio, who is account holder,” the bench questioned. “The intelligence bureau (IB) should investigate and submit a detailed report,” Justice Babar Sattar said in written order. “A secret agency submitted its report on audio leaks via the ministry of defence,” court said. “The court was told that the secret agency not having capacity to determine the source that released the information on social media,” according to the order.

“The IB shall determine the social media accounts that illegally leaked the audio,” “IB should submit its report within three weeks after inquiry. DG IB shall inform in next hearing, who could conduct surveillance of citizens and if the state of Pakistan has ability to stop illegal surveillance,” the judge asked. According to the order, the Attorney General told the court that the federal government didn’t allow any agency to record calls. He said that protection of privacy and rights of all citizens necessary.

“The FIA sought time to submit its reply. It shall submit report with details of the accounts leaked audios on social media. Director General FIA should also appear in court and brief, how surveillance and recording can be conducted,” the bench said in its order. In an earlier hearing of the case, Justice Babar Sattar questioned “If the electronic surveillance is allowed? Who could do it?”

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court on Saturday in an order in audio leaks case summoned DGs of IB and the FIA in personal capacity on February 19.

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The demands were issued as the protesters claimed in a statement to the press that over 100 previously detained members were not presented in courts and thus “missing” while they continued their rally outside Islamabad’s National Press Club (NPC) amid the presence of the police.

The long march led by Baloch women — which started in Turbat on December 6 after the alleged “extrajudicial killing” of a Baloch youth by the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) officials — had reached the federal capital on Wednesday. However, the police had blocked entry points of the city along with major arteries to prevent the protesters

## Citizens of all faiths enjoying equal rights: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Saturday reiterated that citizens of all faiths including Hindus, Sikhs and Christians were enjoying equal rights in Pakistan with dignity and the government would ensure protection of their places of worship.

Speaking at an event organized to celebrate Christmas here, he felicitated the Christian community on behalf of the government and the people of Pakistan. He said Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) signed the treaty of Najran that assured protection to the places of worship of Christians. In view of that treaty, it was obligatory for the Muslims for all times to come to protect the religious places of Christians, he said adding, “We need to promote harmony, peace and love.”

He recounted that a Christian King was the first one to lend support to the Muslims in their early days. He said it was obligatory for Muslims to have faith in all prophets from Prophet Adam to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). All Prophets were a guiding light for humanity, he said adding spirituality was a cure for the ills of humanity despite all the technological progress that humans had made.

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Pakistan. He quoted the Quaid as saying that “in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State.” In this way, Quaid-e-Azam made it clear that all Pakistani citizens had the same political rights, he stressed.

The prime minister said Quaid-e-Azam foresaw that Muslims, Christians and other communities would be denied their religious freedoms in India as Hindutva was raising its head at that time. “We will resist all kinds of fascism. Pakistan is the flag carrier of inclusiveness and harmony.” “We are free to choose our faith, God, Prophets and their companions did not force anybody to choose their faith. The free will is awarded by the divine. God respects my dignity then how can it be flouted by any government or ideology,” he continued.

He said Pakistan had its challenges and it was a victim of terrorism and thousands of its martyrs performed their national duty and defended every inch of the territory of the great nation of Pakistan. “Our valiant armed forces which included members of all religious communities were defending and protecting our shores, land, sea, and air and we take great pride in their valour,” he added. He lauded the role of minorities especially the

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## Repatriation continues

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Repatriation of illegal foreign nationals including Afghan nationals to their homeland was underway in a dignified and safe manner. Besides other measures for the dignified return of Afghans to their country, transit camps equipped with all facilities have been established in various districts for their temporary accommodation.

Christian community in the progress of Pakistan in the fields of business, education and health.

Christian teachers and missionary schools contributed immensely in shaping societies in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, he noted. PM Kakar said when blasphemy was committed in the West against

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) it was painful for Muslims. Blasphemy should not be allowed in the name of freedom of expression, he added.

Talking about the plight of Palestinians, he called for immediate peace in Palestine and the opening of a humanitarian corridor so that vital relief could reach the oppressed Palestinians. “Everyone deserved peace and Pakistan wanted peace for everyone in the land of prophets.” Minister for Human Rights Khalil George appreciated the prime minister for taking significant steps for the betterment of Pakistan.

He said people of different faiths were living in the country in harmony, adding the Christian community was very patriotic and contributed to the peace and prosperity of Pakistan. Special Representative to Prime Minister for Inter-Religious Harmony Maulana Tahir Ashrafi and leaders from different faiths were present at the event. The prime minister along with the guests cut a cake to celebrate the occasion of Christmas.

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LAHORE: Punjab Governor Balighur Rahman is addressing the speech competition ceremony in connection with Quaid-i-Azam Day at Nazaria-i-Pakistan Trust. —APP Photo

## Baligh: Quaid-i-Azam believed in serving people

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rahman said on Saturday that Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a great thinker and politician, who believed in serving people. He was a sagacious and visionary leader, and under his able leadership, the workers Pakistan Movement sacrificed their lives for establishment of an independent Islamic state, he added.

The governor was addressing a prize-distribution ceremony, organised for the students, who had won the speech contests, held in connection with the Quaid-i-Azam Day observance here at Aiwan Karkunan Tehreek-e-Pakistan. A large number of students participated in the speech competitions, organized by Idara-e-Nazriya Pakistan and Idara Tehreek-e-Pakistan, in collaboration with Directorate of Electronic Media and Publications, Ministry of Information and

Broadcasting.

The governor said that the leadership of Quaid-i-Azam had become the means of creation of Pakistan and "today we are breathing in free atmosphere". He said, "Quaid-i-Azam was a great human being, from whose life we can learn a lot. He was a true human being and his opponents also testified to the fact. He was a fair and courageous man, who always believed in the rule of law."

Balighur Rahman said that establishment of a separate state for Muslims on the basis of the Two-Nation Theory was a right decision of our elders. Seeing the treatment of Muslims in Indian illegally occupied Kashmir and other parts of India today, we should thank Allah Almighty that we are free and residents of an independent country. Quaid-i-Azam wanted to make Pakistan a cradle of Islam, he said and advised students, "We should stay

away from elements which spread hatred and despair. MA Jinnah believed in constructive politics and we should follow in his footsteps."

Idara Nazriya-e-Pakistan Senior Vice Chairman Mian Farooq Altaf said Pakistan had been blessed by Allah Almighty, and we should be proud to be Pakistanis. Jinnah was a great leader who defeated all conspiracies of the British and Hindus and brought us to Pakistan. "We were the fourth largest economy in Asia. God willing, the period of despair would end soon and we would once again be on the road to growth," he asserted.

Directorate of Electronic Media and Publications, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Director General Arshad Munir said that holding such events was welcome and an effective means of spreading the vision of Quaid-i-Azam. He advised students to

make the saying of Quaid-i-Azam "work, work and work" their motto and adopt the habit of studying. Quaid-i-Azam gave a message to students to pay full attention to the acquisition of knowledge.

Idara Nazriya-e-Pakistan Secretary Naheed Imran Gul said, "Our organisation is educating the new generation about the life and services of Quaid-i-Azam and his colleagues. Quaid-i-Azam used to urge students to value time, pay attention to education and lead a disciplined life."

Pakistan Movement Secretary Mohammad Saifullah Chaudhry called for keeping with such events throughout the year, from these events such rare gems come out which are in front of you today. During the ceremony, shields were distributed among the successful students and judges, and certificates were also distributed to students participating in the competitions.

## Mayor hails establishment of Karachi Metropolitan University

KARACHI (PPI): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab has said that the establishment of Karachi Metropolitan University in the central district is a good omen.

"After the university bill was passed by the Sindh Assembly, its gazette notification has been issued. Business and public administration classes will also be offered in the university, and admissions will be made next year," he expressed these views while inaugurating the renovated medicine department at a cost of one and a half crore rupees in Abbasi Shaheed Hospital on Saturday.

Municipal Commissioner Syed Afzal Zaidi, Professor Dr. Ijaz Wohra, Professor Dr. Qaiser Jamal, Senior Director Medical Services Dr. Nadir, General Secretary of People's Party Central District Dil

Muhammad, Medical Superintendent Abbasi Shaheed Hospital Naseem Ahmed, heads of various departments, doctors and a large number of paramedical staff were also present on this occasion.

Mayor Karachi said that KMC should adopt the mechanism of public-private partnership in KMDC and other hospitals to improve these medical institutions and provide quality treatment facilities to the citizens. He said that there is a need to increase the medical facilities in terms of the population of Karachi and the People's Party government is trying hard to provide better services to the citizens in this regard. If you have good intent it becomes easy to make it and Allah also helps.

A few days ago, with the efforts

of Dr. Sultan Mustafa, the renovation of the children's ward was done on a self help basis.

In the middle of January, the renovation of the 180-bed gynecological ward was also completed. With this citizens will get the Gynecology facilities in Abbasi Shaheed Hospital.

He said that a solution should be found to stabilize the institutions. Mayor Karachi said that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had established this hospital in 1974.

Today we are making efforts to improve the same hospital. He asked the heads of various medical departments and doctors to give suggestions for the improvement of the hospital, adding that he is ready to support you all in the light of these suggestions and the legislation required for this will also be done.

## CM visits five hospitals, reviews upgradation work

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Saturday visited various hospitals of the provincial capital to review ongoing construction and upgradation work.

He visited the Services Hospital, the PIC, Mayo Hospital, Lady Willingdon Hospital and Punjab Dental Hospital in five hours.

The CM reached Services Hospital and reviewed its upgradation work. He by assigning a deadline to complete the upgradation project of Services Hospital by January 31 ordered to undertake remaining work in three shifts. He directed to deploy 500 each labour force in every shift.

The CM monitored ongoing construction activities in the hospital and went to various floors, inspected the basement and monitored development work. Mohsin Naqvi ordered to speed up construction activities along with completing the upgradation project of the Services Hospital within stipulated time.

The CM also visited the Punjab Institute of Cardiology (PIC) and monitored ongoing work on the emergency and other floors of the upgradation project.

He ordered to open ground floor of the PIC emergency block by December 31 and assigned a deadline to complete upgradation work of the hospital by January 15. He directed to complete biogas work by tonight under any circumstance. He ordered to hand over third floor to the C&W department 100 per cent today and directed to establish a lab collection centre at the main gate.

After visiting the PIC, the CM reached Mayo Hospital and reviewed upgradation project of the emergency block. The project had entered into its last phases of completion. Mohsin Naqvi ordered to open the emergency block by January 7 and directed to complete the remaining work soon.

The CM monitored ongoing finishing work in the emergency block. He also visited Children Block at the Mayo Hospital and monitored upgradation work. The CM went to the 5th floor and reviewed construction activities. Mohsin Naqvi directed to complete the project speedily. He stated that no compromise would be made on the quality during construction activities. He directed to improve condition of the

lawn of Mayo Hospital forthwith and issued directions to PHA in this regard.

Later, the CM visited the Lady Willingdon Hospital and reviewed construction and restoration activities of the hospital. He was given a detailed briefing about progress being made on the project. The CM also reached Punjab Dental Hospital and reviewed ongoing construction activities of its upgradation. The CM directed to complete upgradation work by January 15. The CM issued directions to establish state-of-the-art sterilisation room for keeping the surgical tools. He directed MD WASA to ensure excellent drainage system in the Dental Hospital along with demolishing old water tank system and build a new one in its place. The CM directed early completion of the ongoing upgradation work at the Dental Hospital.

Secretary Communication and Secretary Health gave a briefing about the upgradation project. Talking to the media at the Lady Willingdon Hospital, the CM stated that the lender of the Services Hospital building was in a deplorable condition as any accident could

occur any time. "We are not only undertaking revamping but improving its condition as well". He said the upgradation of the PIC would be completed by December 31. The third floor of PIC will be completed by 15th of January and work on other floors is ongoing. "We have decided to establish a collection centre at the main gate of PIC so that revenue can be generated" he said. The gas installation work would be completed by tonight at PIC.

The CM revealed that the biggest emergency of Punjab comprising 230 beds was being constructed at Mayo Hospital on which work was ongoing day and night. "We would complete Mayo Hospital emergency by the 7th of January and the Children Hospital emergency by 15th January. We are handing over a park attached with the Children Hospital to PHA" he stated.

The CM said: "It is our utmost strive to encourage patients to visit government hospitals for their treatment and should feel satisfied after undergoing treatment. The emergency of government hospitals is excellent and have excellent doctors."

## First lady for steps to empower disabled persons

F.P. Report

KARACHI : The first lady Samina Arif Alvi, on Saturday, stressed collaborative measures for ensuring the provision of inclusive opportunities to disabled persons in all sectors of life, particularly education, health and employment.

She was addressing a seminar titled "Harmony of Gifts, Special Children, Special Possibilities" jointly organized by the Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi and The Circle in connection with the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Samina Arif Alvi pointed out the scarcity of facilities for special persons in the country and urged the government and private sector to work vigorously to enable disabled persons to play active and productive roles in society. She said that there were several obstructions for special people in our society and those needed to be removed for the creation of an inclusive society.

To bring a positive change in behaviour towards persons with disabilities we have to transform the public mindset and attitude through the inclusion of special children, she stated adding that amalgamation of disabled children in general institutions would help others to understand the special children and their special needs. Begum Samina Arif Alvi said that specialized teachers and trainers were required to educate and train disabled children. Concerned government departments had taken steps in this regard but those were not

sufficient concerning the number of such children and more efforts were required, she maintained.

Besides promulgation of laws for the assistance of special people, the government has reserved special quotas for differently-abled persons in public sector jobs and NADRA has made the process of issuance of Special CNIC easier while banks were also facilitating the differently disabled, noted and urged the private sector to contribute in efforts for empowerment of special persons and provide them employment opportunities.

Referring to the mass awareness campaign on breast cancer and its positive outcomes, she observed that the stigma attached with breast cancer was breaking and the situation was ameliorating as now more women in the first and second stages of the disease were coming to doctors for treatment. The same social stigma was attached to the mental health issues which also needed to be addressed so that public perceptions towards mental health could change and remedial efforts could be started well in time, she added.

The number of psychologists and psychiatrists in the country is also far less than then requirement, she noted and informed that overseas Pakistanis having expertise in the field were ready to provide their services in the sector. Government also started a project, Hamraz helpline, for providing consultation and guidance about mental health issues while another helpline was operational under Zainab Alert aimed at child protec-

tion, she said and added that there should be a single helpline so that any citizen could contact it in time of need without any difficulty.

The first lady appreciated Sindh government for establishing a centre for Autism in Karachi and also lauded The Circle, NOWPDP and other organizations working for the welfare and empowerment of disabled persons in the country. Sindh caretaker minister Muhammad Ahmed Shah, who is also president of the Arts Council Of Pakistan Karachi, speaking at the occasion said that the Sindh government has worked extensively for persons with disabilities and different projects worth billions of Rupees were completed in Karachi and other cities of the province.

He said that the social class system was affecting special people because they were more sensitive. "We have to eliminate that system from our society so that the weak can be empowered and for this purpose, we have to change our mindset first," he said. Group Managing Director Jang Group Sharukh Hasan said that media being a catalyst was capable of building or breaking a perception or a myth as it changes the mindset by creating awareness, building bridges and removing stigmas.

Later, Begum Samina Arif Alvi also presented mementoes to the CEO of NOWPDP Omair Ahmed, CEO of The Circle Sadaf Mateen and child and adolescent psychiatrist Dr Rabeeka Aftab and others in recognition of their services for differently abled persons.

### Excise& Taxation arrests two alleged smugglers

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Excise and Taxation Department arrested two alleged smugglers while recovered 10 kilograms hashish in the premises of South region, on Saturday. Director General Excise and Taxation Aurangzeb Panhor ordered concerned officers for crackdown against drug dealers and smugglers across Sindh province including Karachi capital city. Excise and Taxation South Deputy Director Kaleem Ullah Wasan along with Inspector Anwar Abbasi and Nasir Baloch raid Mirza Adam Khan at Layari expressway. The alleged culprits identified as Amjad Khan and Waqas Khan while confessed their involved in drug s business before investigation team.

### CM lays foundation of underpass

KARACHI (APP): The Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (Retd), Magbool Baqar performed the ground-breaking ceremony for the underpass being constructed at Karimabad. The Karimabad underpass is being constructed for Rs1.35 million, its length is 1080 meters and its width is 6.1 meters. The project would be completed within 24 months. The underpass project has been launched by KDA. The CM directed DG KDA to keep monitoring its quality and progress so that the project could be completed on time. The chief minister said that the project would help to reduce traffic congestion in the area.

### PU food festival concludes

LAHORE (APP): Punjab University (PU) organized cycling, football, cricket and tug-of-war competitions for children on the second day of the Family Food Festival at Club's Lawn here on Saturday. According to a spokesperson for the university, stalls of various items of food, drinks and garments were set up in the festival. On the second day, Dean Faculty of Economics, Business and Administrative Sciences Prof Dr Mumtaz Anwar Chaudhry, Chairman Club Committee Dr Munawar Iqbal, teachers' families and children were present.

## Security arrangements for Quaid Day, Charismas ordered

KARACHI (APP): The Caretaker Sindh Minister for Home and Prisons, Brig. (R) Haris Nawaz, issued a set of directives to the police and other LEAs on Saturday to ensure foolproof security arrangements for the celebrations planned in connection with the birth anniversary of the father of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and the festival of Christmas.

While issuing a directive to IGP Sindh, he said that

the police should remain fully vigilant to thwart any nefarious design of miscreant elements. He directed that foolproof security should be ensured around Mazar-e-Quaid, churches, worship places, shopping areas, markets, hotels, restaurants, parks, and other recreational sites in all districts of the province by exploiting all available resources.

"All district SSPs are to personally visit the security places and brief the

deputed personnel about the necessary measures by keeping high-alert security intact. SSPs should also make an audit of on-duty security personnel, especially around churches and Christian-populated areas," he added.

He also directed that inter-districts and inter-provincial check posts beef up their checking and monitoring procedures and leave no stone unturned to implement the special security plan.

## Mir visits Sundas Foundation, distributes gifts among children

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Punjab Minister for Information and Culture Amir Mir visited the Sundas Foundation here on Saturday and inquired after the thalassaemia and other blood disorder patients.

On arrival, he was welcomed by foundation's president Muhammad Yasin and briefed about blood transfusion facilities and operational mechanisms.

The minister engaged with the children and distributed meals and gifts among children, affected by thalassaemia. He also took part in a Christmas cake-cutting ceremony and distributed gifts among patients. He commended the Sundas Foundation for its remarkable 26-year dedication to providing free blood donations for individuals grappling with blood disorders.

The foundation extends its services to thalassaemia patients across a broad spectrum, from infancy to 45 years, ensuring a consistent and timely blood supply while garnering crucial support from the government.

Minister Amir Mir emphasised the importance of raising awareness about thalassaemia, advocating for premarital thalassaemia tests and discouraging cousin marriages to effectively mitigate the prevalence of the disease. He also expressed appreciation for the foundation's pivotal role in fostering interfaith harmony during the

Christmas season, underscoring its expansive reach across more than 10 cities.

Notably, the Sundas Foundation's impact on healthcare is substantial, having provided assistance to over 7,000 thalassaemia patients. This underscores the foundation's enduring commitment and significant contribution to enhancing healthcare outcomes for those affected by thalassaemia.

Sundas Foundation President Muhammad Yasin informed the minister that Sundas Foundation is providing services in more than 10 cities, including Lahore, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Sialkot, Faisalabad, and Islamabad. Over 7,000 Thalassaemia patients are benefiting from the foundation, he added.

## Customs seize drugs at Torkham terminal

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Customs team led by Deputy Collector, Hammad Ahmed recovered the following contraband F/o Narcotic i.e Ice (Crystal Methamphetamine) = 1500 grams net concealed in a plastic box of 250 grams

230 Nos of Cartridges filled in 08 Nos Magazines for Kalashnikovs, which were concealed in the Battery Tool Box of Mercedes Trailer (22 wheeler) No.KBL-34472, loaded with soap stone. Further

Appraisalment at Import Terminal, Torkham led by Deputy Collector, Hammad Ahmed recovered the following contraband F/o Narcotic i.e Ice (Crystal Methamphetamine) = 1500 grams net concealed in a plastic box of 250 grams

230 Nos of Cartridges filled in 08 Nos Magazines for Kalashnikovs, which were concealed in the Battery Tool Box of Mercedes Trailer (22 wheeler) No.KBL-34472, loaded with soap stone. Further

search of the vehicle also led to the recovery of F/o Instant Yeast= total 20 packets each packet of 500 grams.

Approximate value of the seized, Narcotics i.e Ice ( Crystal Methamphetamine) is Rs.2,250,000/-, Magazine = Rs.40,000/-, ?Cartridges=Rs.57,500/-, ?Instant yeast = Rs.4,000/-, Seized vehicle is Rs.5,000,000/-, ? Soap stone is Rs.1,135,000/-, total value: Rs. 8,486,500.

## Noor Jehan's death anniversary observed

KARACHI (PPI): The 23rd death anniversary of Malika-e-Tarannum Noor Jehan was observed today [Saturday] with respect. Her real name was Allah Wasai. Born in Kasur, Punjab in 1926 in a family of musicians, Noor Jehan started her musical career from Calcutta at the age of nine as a singer child star. She was renowned as one of the

greatest and most influential singers of her time in South Asia and was given the honorific title of Malika-e-Tarannum. Noor Jehan ruled the film industry for more than 35 years and recorded about 10,000 songs in various languages including Urdu, Punjabi and Sindhi.

Noor Jehan was the voice that injected spirit in the Pakistan Army and the

public during the 1965 war with India. In 1957, Noor Jehan was awarded with the President's Award for her acting and singing capabilities.

She also earned Special Nigar Award, Pride of Performance, Life Time Achievement Award, Sitara-e-Imtiaz, PTV Life Time Achievement Award, and Millennium Award.



# PHC stops disposal of mining wastage in leased property

**Humayun Khan**

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Khurshed Iqbal stopped disposing mining wastage in the leased land of Malak Mining Company. PHC ordered Yousaf Mining Company for provision of pathway to the petitioner to access his property and emerald's mine as well as stopped from disposing mining wastage in private and leased property. The counsel Nauman Mohib Kakakhel advocate argued that petitioner possessing lease of 50 acres of mountain for emerald mining while Yousaf Mining Co; obtained only five acres of land. Earlier, Yousaf Mining Company creating hurdles for petitioner in emerald mining but it was stopped on intervention of the High Court but now disposing mining wastage in leased land of Malak Mining Company, the counsel stated. The counsel added that disposing of mining wastage is the liability of every mining company. He added that Mining Laws compelling companies to ensure 400 meters distance between explosive for mining and private properties and requested to stop Yousaf Mining Co; from disposing of mining wastage in petitioner's property. PHC's divisional bench comprised of Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Dr. Khurshed Iqbal stopped Yousaf Mining Company from disposing of mining wastage in leased and private land of Malak Mining Company while ordered for submission of reply.

# Dr. Brekhna Jameel honored with women in science award

PESHAWAR (APP): Associate Professor and Director IHPE Khyber Medical University Peshawar Dr. Brekhna Jameel on Saturday achieved an exceptional milestone in her scientific career by being awarded the prestigious "Women in Science" Award from the Institute for Global Health and Development at Aga Khan University. Amongst a competitive pool of applicants from South Central Asia and Sub-Saharan African countries, Dr. Brekhna Jameel emerged as the sole recipient from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, showcasing Pakistan's prominent position in the field. This distinguished award not only recognizes her dedication but also includes a \$20,000 research grant, providing an avenue for further groundbreaking research. Moreover, it presents the esteemed opportunity for Dr. Brekhna Jameel to collaborate with the renowned professor, Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutta, a commendable honor amplifying her exceptional journey. Dr. Jameel's remarkable accomplishment extends beyond a personal triumph; it stands as a source of immense pride for the women of Pakistan, particularly those hailing from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This accolade not only highlights her individual success but also reflects the extraordinary talent, perseverance, and resilience exhibited by women in the scientific domain. Her achievement signifies a beacon of inspiration, emphasizing the invaluable contributions and capabilities of women in science. Dr. Brekhna Jameel's success resonates as a testament to the unwavering spirit and remarkable potential that women in KP and across Pakistan hold within the realm of scientific excellence.

# Funds of Rs90 mln released for 74 TMAs

PESHAWAR (INP): The Finance Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Saturday released funds of Rs90 million for 74 TMAs across the province. As per details issued by the finance department, TMA Haripur received an order from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for up to Rs 8 million. Tehsil Ghazi in Haripur has the second-highest order, at Rs 5 million, with Rs 4.50 million going to Dera Ismail Khan TMA. According to the announcement, Bannu TMA has received Rs 2 million, Ghazni Khel Lacky Marwat has received Rs 1 million, and district Tank has received Rs 3.90 million.

# Seat adjustment to be settle down soon, says Samar Haroon Bilour

PESHAWAR (APP): The leader of the Awami National Party Samar Haroon Bilour on Saturday said that there should be a level playing field for all political parties and her party would not accept the treatment given to a single party in the last election. She said this while talking to media men here. She said the bat sign has been withdrawn from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf as the PTI intra-party election was held in two hours and the posts will also be divided, Samar Harun Bilour alleged. Awami National Party also does not accept the PTI intra-party election, Samar Haroon Bilour said. All political parties should be seen as equal in the election, Samar Haroon Bilour added. ANP does not want to be with any other party as happened with Awami National Party in the last elections, Samar Haroon Bilour said. Samar Haroon Bilour said that the matters related to the seat allocation of all political parties except PTI are being settled, adding, "Our judiciary has also become Political." The position of our judiciary which has come out in the Transparency International report is shameful for the nation, Samar Haroon Bilour said.

# Awareness session on intellectual property rights organized

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: An awareness session on the theme: "Protection and Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights jointly organized by Industrialists Association Peshawar and Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan at IAP office. The session was chaired by the Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan president Ayub Zakori while chairperson of Intellectual Property Organisation of Pakistan Furrugh Amil participated as chief guest on the occasion, said in a press release here on Saturday. A huge number of industrial owners from among small and large industries including their team attended the session along with concerned staff officers from Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), KPEZDMC and Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan. Chairperson Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan Furrugh Amil informed participants about main objectives of the organisation and highlighted the importance of the awareness session. In his open remarks, IAP president Ayub Zakori said the session would enable participants to get aware about intellectual property; Trademark Registry; Copyrights protection; Efficient and Integrated management of intellectual property; Enforcement of intellectual property rights; Patent and design registration. Ayub Zakori hailed active participants of members of the business community in the session. He also praised the Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan for organising such an important session. He concluded the session with a message of having complete knowledge of IP law; utilizing representative offices; highlighting issues and participating in healthy discussion; showing unity and strength of representative forums.



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

# Submission of nomination papers in KP continued

PESHAWAR (APP): Submission of nomination papers for specific seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa continues and so far 358 papers have been issued on the reserved seats for women and minorities, an official of the Election Commission said here Saturday. The official of the election commission said that so far 271 candidates have submitted papers for specific seats and 54 papers have been submitted for the seats reserved for women in the National Assembly. The official of the Election Commission said that 171 candidates have submitted their papers for the seats reserved for women in the provincial assembly and 46 other candidates have submitted their papers for the seats reserved for minorities.

# Census to help improving policy planning

PESHAWAR (APP): The first-ever digital census of Pakistan completed in 2023 is not only a remarkable feat in the technological world but is also a big source for proper development planning and evidence-based decision-making through the provision of reliable data. "The new census has touched almost all the sectors and provides comprehensive data which can help policymakers in proper planning based on data-supported evidence," observed Chief Statistician, Dr Naeem ul Zafar. Talking to APP at a Data Users and Producers Dialogue workshop organized by UNFPA and PBS in Peshawar, Dr Naeem ul Zafar said for the first time in the history of the country, data for the development of frame for the economic census was also integrated with the housing and population census. The exercise of integrating the economic census with the housing and population census has saved around Rs. Seven billion, Naeem disclosed. He said the gigantic exercise is the first ever in the South Asia region and will be followed by neighbouring countries in coming years. About the details of the 2023 census, Dr Naeem said that would be uploaded online in January of 2024 after which people can benefit from it by getting a lot of information on the required sector. The digital census completed in a timeline of around 18 months also holds the distinction of first-ever uncontroversial census, he claimed. Member PBS, Muhammad Sarwar Gondal said the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics is committed to providing accurate, reliable and accurate data for informed decision-making.

# CJ distributes Christmas gifts

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: A graceful ceremony was arranged at the Conference Room of Peshawar High Court (PHC) on the eve of Christmas, on Saturday. The Chief Justice PHC Justice Mohammad Ibrahim Khan and Senior Puisne Judge, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim besides, the worthy Registrar and principal officer of Peshawar High Court were in attendance. PHC chief justice Mohammad Ibrahim Khan ensured to guarantee the constitutional rights provided to the minorities. He assured his unconditional love for the community his lordship advised the audience to perform their duties wholeheartedly and excel in each walk of life. Similarly, the Senior Puisne Judge Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim reminisced the magnificent role played by Justice Cornelius, Justice Dorab Patel and Justice Rana Bhagwandas. His lordship too assured his unwavering support to the community. The representatives of Christians community hailed the efforts of Hon'ble the Chief Justice and Senior Puisne Judge. They also conveyed their utmost gratitude. Later, the Chief Justice along with the Senior Puisne Judge and worthy Registrar distributed Christmas gifts amongst the Christian staff of Peshawar High Court.

# 850 degrees and medals awarded among students

PESHAWAR (APP): The 8th convocation ceremony of Islamia College University took place in the lush green campus, where a substantial number of 850 students from various disciplines were awarded degrees and gold medals. The ceremony included 500 girls and 350 boys students. Distinguished guests at the event included the Provincial Minister for Higher Education, Dr. Qasim Jan, who was the special guest, and the Vice Chancellor of Islamia College University, Professor Dr. Gul Muhammad Khan. Former Vice Chancellor Dr. Noshad, Dr. Ali Muhammad, Professor Dr. Inayat Ali Shah, Professor Abbas, Professor Dr. Hifzullah, Registrar Dr. Haroon, Senior Alumnus President Muhammad Zaman Muhammad Zai, Deputy Director Admission Aamir Zahoor, Provost Dr. Syed Kamal, and Director Sports Ali were also present from various departments. Former Inspector General of Police, Ehtesham Ali Shah, and former Chancellor of the Engineering University, Iqtidar Ali Shah, also participated in the convocation. A total of 850 students received degrees during the convocation. This included 40 students awarded Ph.D. degrees, 115 students honored with gold medals, 80 students receiving MPhil degrees, and 40 students obtaining MS degrees. This year's convocation at Islamia College witnessed the conferral of degrees to 500 female and 350 male students across various disciplines. Special guest Dr. Qasim Jan, the Provincial Minister for Higher Education, expressed his delight, saying that revisiting Islamia College brought back fond memories, as he himself had been a student at this historic institution. Dr. Qasim Jan emphasized the pivotal role Islamia College plays in the progress of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the entire country, serving as a key player in nurturing diverse talents. Addressing the students, he encouraged them to utilize their skills for the nation's advancement, considering themselves architects of the nation. He extended congratulations to the parents and teachers, praying that Allah guides the graduates at every turn in life.

# Food Safety & Halal Food Authority conduct raid

PESHAWAR (APP): The teams of FS&HFA, KP raided kebab shops on Charsadda Road Peshawar, 600 kg of non-standard kebabs were exported and destroyed with heavy fines imposed, spokesman the FS&HFA said. He said 2000 kg of hazardous pickles were also seized from a warehouse after receiving a tip-off wherein warehouse sale, further action initiated as per Food Safety Act. The schools canteens and kebab shops located on Kohat Road were also checked, spokesperson of the Food Authority said.



PESHAWAR: Candidate of PPP Malik Tamash Khan submitting nomination papers. — F.P. photo by Ghulam Murtaza

# New Islamia Public High School hold a Annual Day Sports Gala



PESHAWAR (APP): New Islamia Public High School and College held a colourful Annual Sports Gala with more than 400 male and female students enthusiastically participating in different events enjoyed by the parents, invited guests and former Member Provincial Assembly Samar Haroon Bilour. The grand Annual Sports Gala of the New Islamia High School and College Peshawar started with a grand and colorful ceremony at Tahamas Khan Football Stadium here in which more than 400 male and female students participated in six different games. Ex-Member Provincial Assembly Samar Haroon Bilour formally inaugurated the Annual Sports Gala by lighting the torch. It was a very thrilling event in which students one after another carried

the torch and handed it over to the chief guest of the event Samar Haroon Bilour who lit the Games Torch. The CEO of the New Islamia School and College Iftikhar Liaquat Ali, Administrator Muhammad Amjad and Academic In-charge Waheed, District Sports Officer Peshawar Miss Gul Rukh, and a large number of parents, officials, teachers and students spectators were also present. The Annual Sports Gala started with the recitation of the Holy Quran by a Class-6 student Anum, followed by the National Anthem, which was nicely presented by a contingent of students wearing national flag-like dresses. All the participating contingent present a smart March Past wherein great enthusiasm witnessed among all the participating athletes in different Games. Soon after the March Past the children presented a wonderful performance on Chitralli dance and tableaux prepared on a national song "Me Bhi Pakistan Hoon Tu Be Pakistan, Tu To Meri Jaan Hai, Tu Mera Imman Ha" and "Meri Jan Pakistan". Looking after the performance of their kids, their parents present in the ceremony responded well with thundering applause. Speaking on this occasion Ex-MPA Samar Haroon Bilour said that it is a welcome thing to take children away from mobile phones and bring them to the field for sports because nowadays it has become a big challenge to attract the new generation towards positive activities. She said that sports activities are very important for physical and mental development and keeping in mind its usefulness, it has become necessary for teachers and parents to play their full role in bringing their kids to the playing fields. She urged and advised the students at the same time that they should utilize their energies in positive activities like sports. It is a good trend that our new generation is attracted towards healthy activities. She also appreciated the school management for involving the students in healthy sports activities. She said through this way it would help in providing a platform to the younger generation to come and show their hidden talent. Administrator Muhammad Amjad said that New Islamia High School and College is organizing its Annual Sports Gala on a regular basis in which hundreds of Children participate in various competitions.

He said this year too, more than 450 children are participating in six different games in the sports gala including football, athletics, badminton, table tennis, cricket, and tug of war. He said that six teams of school children are Tiger, Black Wolf, Warriors, Champion, Markhor and Lions. There will be competition between Markhor and Champion. Iftikhar Liaquat Ali, CEO of New Islamia School, while talking to the media, said that the purpose of organizing the sports gala is to provide an opportunity for mental and physical entertainment to the students. "I want to bring each other closer and promote a healthy and friendly environment in the school, which inculcates self-confidence in the students, which prepares the students for future provincial and national level competitions.





## In brief

### Conference held in Bannu F.P. Report

BANNU: Aqeeda khatma e Naboot message to be spread at every doorstep. This is said by Maulana Abdul Sattar Shah Bukhari while addressing a conference held in this regard. According to details, the conference was arranged under the leadership of Sheikh-ul-Hadees Maulana Hamid ur Rehman, in which different religiously scholars nationwide were present. Maulana Muhammad Tayyab Shah Bukhari stated that belief of last of Prophethood on Muhammad (SAW) is the backbone of our faith and it is inherited to each and every Muslim. One cannot be complete its religion without having the Aqeeda Khatama e Naboot. For this noble cause every Muslim is ready to sacrifice itself. Important decisions were made at the conference that is firstly Cabinet to be formed at tehsil level in Bannu. Secondly, District cabinet to be increased.

### Tenants kill son of shop owner

MANSEHRA (INP): Afghan national tenants shot dead son of shop owner over rent dispute near Koh-e-Noor Academy at Balakot road in Mansehra. Police arrested the accused. According to details, Muhammad Azeem Qureshi s/o Ali Bahadur visited the shop owned by his father to receive the rent from Afghan nationals identified as Qudrat Ali s/o Badam Gul and Israr Sharifullah s/o Sharif Afghani. However, the tenants refused to pay the rent which led to exchange of harsh words. After verbal clash, the culprits shot at Muhammad Azeem Qureshi leaving him critically injured. The injured was shifted to local hospital in Mansehra city where he succumbed to his wounds. The police arrested the culprits along with murder weapon and after registering a case against them started an investigation.

### Minority female to contest polls F.P. Report

BUNER: A member of minority community Dr. Sawera Parkash daughter of Dr. Oam Parkash filed her nomination papers for PK25 on general seat as well as applied for both reserved seats of Provincial and National Assembly, on Saturday. The lady doctor Swera Parkash age 25 has completed her MBBS from a college in Abbottabad also completed her house job and aspirant to become CSP officer for which she joined a coaching academy in Lahore where she is under study. The dr. Swera Parkash father Dr. Oam Parkash confirmed that his daughter had filed the nomination papers for PK 25 general seat from Buner district and KPK and NA minorities reserved seats on the directives of the PPPP top rank leadership. He claimed being a former president of People's Doctors Forum Buner and active political leader the party had asked him to file nomination papers for him or his son or daughter. He elaborated due to his retired life at home and his son barrister Ajay Kumar under age for the slot, his daughter dr. Swera filed the nomination papers to respect the party high ups. The candidate's father said that he is so glad while sharing information about his daughter and her photo with this scribe, commented being a committed and loyal Jeala of PPPP he will always respect party directions because the great leaders served the country and masses even sacrificing precious lives by Z.A Bhutto, Murtaza Bhutto, Shah Nawaz Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto.



KOHAT: KP Governor Haji Ghulam Ali and Brig. Malik Nasir Ali addressing the 28th Annual Parents Day of Garrison Cadet College.

## Submission of papers continues in Dir

### F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The submission of nomination papers by party candidates continued in the Lower Dir district here on Saturday. A total of 10 candidates affiliated with the Pakistan Tahreek Insaf submitted their nomination papers for PK 17 including prominent businessman Malik Umar Badshah with the returning officer Numan Pervaz.

Talking to local journalists at Samarbagh, Malik Umar Badshah demanded the PTI leadership to prefer ideological workers in the award of party tickets. He expressed his confidence in the party's present leadership. He said that he would accept the decision of party leadership regarding the award of a ticket for PK 17. The PTI youth wing leader Rahat Farooqi submitted his nomination papers for NA 7, Dr Shah Khalid for PK 14 and Zakirullah for PK 16.

Meanwhile the Jamiat Ulema Islam Fazl activist

Maulana Nabi Shah also submitted his nomination papers for PK 16 and party district chief Sirajud Din submitted nomination papers for NA 7. The PML-N leader Fazal Wahid submitted his nomination papers for PK 14 and Qari Fazal Rahim for NA 7. The PPP district secretary information advocate Alam Zeb submitted his nomination papers for NA 7.

**Inclusive budget to be ensured by public participation:** Speakers at a seminar held at Timergara demanded the government to ensure citizens' participation in the budget making process and consult all the stakeholders in decision making. The Charter of Demands Budget making and Implementation (CPDI), an organization working on budget issues, arranged the seminar at a local hotel here on Saturday. The local government representatives, journalists, members from the civil society and government officials attended the event.

The CPDI provincial coordinator Shamsul Hadi, district monitoring officer Munir Ahmad and others spoke on the occasion. They shed light on the budget making at federal and provincial level and identified its shortcomings.

The speakers said that the government should consult with citizens' groups, government departments and other stakeholders. They said that meetings and workshops should be arranged for public participation at town halls before finalizing the budget at each tier of the government. They said that separate statements should be prepared for women, children and persons with disabilities so that they could understand the budget proposals easily.

The speakers said that participation of citizens, monitoring of legislation and lawmakers' debate on budget proposals were the need of the hour without which a justified budget was not possible.

## Residents demand recovery of abductee Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: The residents threatened that if Shah Mahmood didn't recover within 24 hours, they would be compelled to block Indus Highway for traffic in protest.

This was claimed that by the brother of abductee named Mufti Shah Muhammad Khan along with former Nazim Iqbal while addressing a press conference at Kohat press club. During the press talk local elders including Malaks and elected members were present demanded recovery of abductee disappeared from premises of Shahpur check-post.

The speakers claimed that Shah Mehmood was abducted by force from his vehicle which left the car on the spot. They argued district administration and police for recovery of Shah Mehmood by today (Sunday) otherwise they will be compel to arrange protest on larger scale.

## 24 candidates to for NA, 77 candidates for PA in Shangla F.P. Report

SHANGLA: As many as 24 candidates for one seat of national assembly and 77 political workers submitted nomination papers for three constituencies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly from Shangla, on Saturday.

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz Khyber Pakhtunkhwa president Engineer Amir Muqam submitted nomination papers for NA11 and PK30 while Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf leader Shaukat Yousafzai submitted candidature from PK-28&29 from Shangla district.

Moreover, Baba-e-Shangla Al-Haj Syed Fareen will contest election for National Assembly while his sons Hanif-ur-Rehman and Gulzar will contest from PK-28&29 respectively as well as his nephew named Habib-ur-Rehman will contest from PK30.

## 13 politicians submitted nomination papers F.P. Report

TAKHTBHAI: As many as 13 activists from different political parties including independent candidates had submitted papers for general election with Returning Officer (RO) Takhtbhai scheduled on 8th February 2024.

According to details, Awami National Party (ANP) nominated Ahmad Bahadur Khan, Asad Bahadur Khan, Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) Jamsheed Mohmand submitted nomination forms from PK-61, Pakistan People's Party Shoaib Alam, Jammata-e-Islami Aqib Ismail, Pakistan Tahreek Insaf Shoaib Khan, former State's Minister Ali Muhammad Khan submitted nomination forms.

Moreover, PPP nominated Irfan Mohmand, ANP Nawabzada Sher Afghan Khan along with two independent candidates named Mumtaz Khan and Haji Maaz Ullah Khan submitted nomination forms from PK-60. For PK61 PMLN nominated Jamsheed Mohmand, ANP Jamal Nasir Khan, PTI Adil Nawaz Khan and JI Abdul Wasagh Khan submitted candidature with RO for general election.

# Youngsters to play key role in country's uplift: KP Governor

### F.P. Report

KOHAT: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali on Saturday underscored the significance of younger generation for the country and said that their capabilities are needed to lead nation on a course of development and progress.

He was addressing the Parents Day ceremony of Garrison Cadet College Kohat. The ceremony was also attended by General Officer Commanding 9th Division, Major General Zulfikar Bhatti, Principal, Malik Nasir Ali, members

Board of Governors, teachers and parents of cadets.

The governor said that country expects a lot from youngsters and they should work in a dedicated way for country's progress and development. He said that youngsters must develop in themselves virtues of self-discipline, determination and truthfulness to achieve the objective abiding by golden principles of merit and justice.

He praised the efforts of college administration for maintaining higher standard of education in the institution and said that students of the college

have earned respect by serving meritoriously in different fields.

Governor urged cadets to come up to expectations of their parents and utilize energies to explore new opportunities and meet the challenges of contemporary world. He also distributed certificates and commendation certificates among outstanding cadets. On the occasion, students showed their skills in gymnastics show, march past and taekwondo events. Principal of the college also presented annual performance report of the college.

# ANP leader Nazia Shah submits nomination papers

### F.P. Report

MARDAN: Syeda Nazia Shah, a prominent social activist and former President of the Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries, submitted her nomination papers for the Provincial Reserved Seat for Women (MPA) to the Election Commission, on Saturday.

Accompanied by party members and supporters, Syeda Nazia Shah visited the Election Commission office in Pakistan Peshawar to complete the formalities for her candidacy. Speaking to the media after submitting her nomination papers, she expressed her commitment to women's empowerment and active participation in legislative processes.

Syeda Nazia Shah, a leader of the Awami National Party (ANP), emphasized the importance of women's representation in decision-making bodies. She stated, "I believe in the power of women to bring about positive change in our society. By contesting for this reserved seat, I aim to contribute to legislative initiatives that promote women's rights, education, and economic empowerment."

Highlighting the need for inclusivity, Shah added, "Our democracy thrives when diverse voices are heard. Women's perspectives are crucial in shaping policies that address the challenges faced by our communities. I intend to

advocate for issues that matter most to women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa."

Syeda Nazia Shah's political journey has been marked by her advocacy for social causes, and her decision to contest for the women's reserved seat aligns with her longstanding commitment to championing women's rights and socio-economic development.

While talking to media, she said that i see this election as an opportunity to elevate the voices of women in our region. It's not just about securing a seat; it's about creating a platform for women to actively participate in decision-making. We need policies that address the specific challenges faced by women, from education to healthcare to economic opportunities. "I believe in the principles of democracy, and a diverse representation ensures that the concerns of all segments of society are taken into account. If elected, I will work tirelessly to bridge gaps and advocate for policies that foster equality and progress" said Nazia.

As Syeda Nazia Shah enters the electoral arena, her campaign focuses on promoting a more inclusive political landscape, where women's perspectives are integral to shaping the future of Mardan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well.

Around 131 candidates on Saturday submitted their

nomination papers so far to contest polls on total three national and eight provincial assemblies seats of the district. As per the data provided by returning offices, 29 candidates belonging to different political parties as well as independent individuals had submitted their nomination papers for three NA seats including NA-21, NA-22 and NA-23.

Similarly, they said that 102 aspirants of different political parties and independent candidates had submitted their nomination papers for eight provincial assemblies seats including PK-54, PK-55, PK-56, PK-57, PK-58, PK-59, PK-60, PK-61.

Former chief minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ameer Haider Khan Hoti had submitted his nomination papers for two seats including NA-22 and PK-58. Likewise, ex-senior provincial minister of PTI Muhammad Atif Khan had also submitted his nomination papers for NA-22 and PK-59 seats.

It values to mention here that the political activities and election campaign of different political parties had got high momentum soon after the polls announcement by election commission of Pakistan. The election commission of Pakistan had made two days extension in the date for nomination papers that was why it was expected that a large number of aspirants for polls to get and submit their nomination papers.



SHANGLA: Provincial president of PML-N Amir Muqam submitting his nomination papers for general elections. — F.P. photo

# Several candidates file papers in D I Khan

D I KHAN (INP): With a two-day extension by the Election Commission of Pakistan in the deadline to submit nomination papers, more candidates submitted their nomination papers for two National Assembly and five Provisional Assembly constituencies of Dera Ismail Khan district on Saturday.

Many candidates went to the offices of their respective Returning Officers (ROs), appointed by ECP, to submit their nomination papers along with their

jubilant supporters and other party leaders. During the last four days, several candidates submitted their nomination papers.

For NA-44 D.I Khan-I, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Central Information Secretary Faisal Karim Kundi, TLP Divisional Ameer Haji Shafiq Qasuria, Jamat-e-Islami leader Muhammad Yousaf and independent candidate Makhdoom Jawad Asghar

submitted their nomination papers. Maulana Obaidur Rehman also submitted his nomination papers as a covering candidate to his party chief.

For NA-45, DI Khan-II, JUI-F leader Maulana Obaidur Rehman, former MNA Sheikh Yaqoob, PPP candidate Sardar Fateh Ullah Khan Miankhel, TLP leader Haider Khan Miankhel and JI leader Muhammad Ejaz Awan, Sardar Shoaib Nasir Khan Miankhel submitted their nomination papers.

# Youth's blind murder case solved

FAISALABAD (INP): The police solve a blind murder case of a 26-year-old youth and arrested the assassin. According to details, a youth hailing from 48-B Colony was shot dead near Momanabad graveyard

three weeks earlier.

Soon taking over the charge, Incharge Investigation Factory area police station, Adil Gulfam took over the case and arrested the murderer. The accused in the preliminary

investigations revealed that father, step-mother and step-brother of the deceased paid him Rs80,000 to kill the youth to grasp his property. The police have started to arrest other culprits nominated in the killing.



SHANGLA: Former provincial minister Shaukat Yousafzai submitting his nomination papers for general elections. — F.P. photo

# Chit Ramos festival of Kalasha ends

### F.P. Report

CHITRAL: The religious festival of Kalash Valley, Chit Ramos (Chowmos), has come to an end with male and female from the three valleys of Kailash, Rambur, Brir, participating in the festival.

A large number of domestic and foreign tourists participated in the Chaimos Festival, said Tourism Authority Spokesman Muhammad Saad. Tourism Police con-

stables performed duty at the festival, spokesman Mohammad Saad said.

Tourism police men provided all kinds of facilities to tourists during the festival, Mohammad Saad said, adding, "Various rituals were also performed in the festival." The Tourism Police continued to perform duty on the routes leading to Lowari Tunnel and Kalash valley, he informed. The Chaimos festival is celebrated as a symbol of joy and peace for the winter

season, spokesman Mohammad Saad said.

In the festival, children and girls compete by setting fire to the branches of pine trees and making a loud smoke and various rituals are performed in the Chaumos festival including Shishau, Savi Lek Har, Choi Nari, Mandahek, Bonfire and Shara Berayak, he added. He said, fruits, vegetables and dry fruits were distributed to share love, peace and unity.





# Mass drone attack hits several Kyiv districts



KYIV (Reuters): More than two dozen Russian drones targeted Ukraine's capital, officials said, injuring two people and damaging residential buildings in Moscow's latest overnight drone strike against Ukraine. It was the sixth such attack on Kyiv this month and part of a larger drone swarm aimed at parts of central, southern and western Ukraine, the country's air force said.

Ukrainian air defences shot down 24 out of 28 attack drones, it said. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said on Telegram that a drone had hit a block of flats in the Solomyanskyi district, south of the city centre, triggering a fire on

the upper floors that was quickly brought under control. Emergency services also said several apartments were damaged on the 24th, 25th and 26th storeys of the building. Two people were injured, including one being treated in hospital.

The incident occurred a few hundred metres from a maternity hospital. A video posted on social media showed a giant orange flame going skyward in the night. Klitschko also said drone fragments had set fire to a house under construction in Darnytskyi district on the eastern bank of the Dniipro River that runs through the city.

Pictures posted online

showed construction materials strewn about the site. Serhiy Popko, head of Kyiv's military administration, said fragments from a downed drone had struck an apartment building in a third area, also south of the city centre. He posted pictures showing smashed windows and heavy damage to apartments.

Ukraine's southern command said an unspecified infrastructure facility in the Mykolaiv region had been struck and that fragments from a downed drone had damaged a grain storage facility in the Odesa region. No injuries were reported and the resulting fires were extinguished, authorities said.

## US paramedics found guilty in 2019 death of Black man

WASHINGTON: Two paramedics in the western US state of Colorado have been found guilty of criminally negligent homicide for their role in the 2019 death of Elijah McClain, a young Black man who died after police roughly detained him, put him in a chokehold, before the medics injected him with a powerful sedative.

A jury handed down its verdicts against Jeremy Cooper, 49, and Peter Cichuniec, 51, and also found the latter guilty of assault in the second degree for the administration of a high dose of the sedative ketamine. The death of 23-year-old McClain was the first among several recent criminal prosecutions against medical first responders to reach trial, potentially setting the bar for prosecutors for future cases.

It was also the last of three trials against police and paramedics charged in the death of McClain, whom officers stopped after a suspicious person complaint. The first trial ended with one police officer being found guilty of criminally negligent homicide and another acquitted. The second ended with a third officer being acquitted. McClain's mother, Sheneen McClain, wept outside the court as a supporter of the McClain family, MiDian Holmes, spoke with reporters on her behalf.

"We do not know justice until we see sentencing," Holmes said. "We are still seeking justice." Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser said accountability would not end with the convictions, and that much more work needs to be done to prevent the deaths of innocents at the hands of police and other first responders. "Elijah did nothing wrong. His life mattered. He should be with us here today," Weiser said.

During their trial, Cooper and Cichuniec told the jury they believed the ketamine was required to calm McClain, and police officers who were roughly detaining him interfered with their ability to quickly treat him. But prosecutors argued throughout the trial that the paramedics violated their training protocols by failing to examine McClain before injecting him with the maximum allowed dose of ketamine. "These defendants didn't even try. When Elijah McClain pleaded 'Please help me', they left him there, they overdosed him on ketamine ... they killed him," prosecutor Jason Slothouber said during closing arguments on Wednesday.

Police confronted McClain on the night of August 24, 2019, after a bystander called 911 to report that the man was dressed in a winter coat and ski mask on a warm night, and was acting suspiciously as he walked home from a convenience store. Police laid hands on McClain within seconds of stopping him and put him in a carotid chokehold at least twice. He vomited into his ski mask and repeatedly told officers he could not breathe. The original autopsy conducted on McClain in 2019 found the cause of death to be "undetermined". — Aljazeera

# How bad is Gaza's hunger crisis under Israeli attacks?

GAZA: Weeks of restricted access to food in the Gaza Strip have culminated in severe hunger and growing risks of famine in the besieged enclave. Since early October, Israeli attacks across Gaza have damaged local bakeries and food warehouses, along with roads that are used to transport humanitarian aid. Israel's total blockade on the enclave has also restricted food, water and fuel from entering in the first place. How bad is starvation in Gaza and what is the food supply like since the war? Here is what we know.

More than 90 percent of Gaza's 2.3 million population is facing high levels of acute food insecurity, according to an Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report on Monday. The IPC, which measures hunger risks, also reported that 2.08 million people in Gaza are facing "acute food insecurity" that can be classified in the organisation's phase three of risk or above.

The IPC has five phases of acute food insecurity, ranging from none (phase one) to catastrophe or famine (phase five). Phase three and five are considered crisis and emergency. "Acute" food insecurity is a short-term phenomenon and tends to stem from unusual or man-made shocks, compared with "chronic" food insecurity, which is long term and a result of insufficient means for living. Between December and February, Gaza's entire population is projected to fall under phase three or above, according to the United Nations-backed report.

If current hostilities and limited aid continue, Gaza is also at risk of experiencing a famine by early February. The IPC definition of famine is when at least 20 percent of the population in an area falls under phase five of acute food insecurity. Families in Gaza have had to cope with deteriorating quality and declining quantities of food, along with an inability to cook meals due to fuel

shortages. Spending a day without eating any food has become usual. In early December, the World Food Programme (WFP) reported that nine out of 10 people across the enclave skip meals for long periods. Nutritionally vulnerable groups such as pregnant women are at heightened risk, while baby formula and milk have been in severely short supply for toddlers who rely on it.

Even preparing meals requires finding alternatives to cooking gas, and aside from using firewood or cardboard, at least 13 percent of displaced people have been forced to burn solid waste, says the WFP. Hunger has also quickly escalated since a brief truce ended in early December. Just 12 days after it ended, the WFP found that at least half of internally displaced people surveyed knew someone who had resorted to consuming raw meat. Access to water is also scarce, with less than two litres (0.5 gallons) available for each person per day – far short of the 15 litres needed to survive, according to the WFP.

Since October 7, the number of trucks carrying food that entered Gaza in a month fell by more than half, compared with at least 10,000 trucks before the war. Over two months of war, only 1,249 trucks carrying food assistance reached Gaza, the WFP reported on December 6. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs also reported that over the first 70 days of the war, only 10 percent of the food needed for Gaza's entire population entered the enclave. The WFP has recommended that at least 100 trucks carrying just food and water enter Gaza a day, but on most days since the war even the total amount of trucks entering has been less than that. The agency also noted that damaged roads near Rafah at the border with Egypt – where most aid is now dispersed from – cannot accommodate this increase.

At the height of aid supply during

the truce lasting from November 24 to December 1, some 200 trucks entered daily, while the WFP was only able to reach about 10 percent of Gaza's population with in-kind and cash-based food assistance. Even once food aid is supplied, access to a sufficient share has not been possible. A report from the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) and Al Mezan, a human rights organisation based in Gaza's Jabalia refugee camp, on December 14 found that people near Rafah's food distribution centres would often have to wait in line for 10 hours, and sometimes still returned home empty-handed.

"I have to walk three kilometres to get one gallon [of water]," Marwan, a 30-year-old Palestinian, who fled south with his pregnant wife and two children on November 9, told Human Rights Watch. "And there is no food. If we are able to find food, it is canned food. Not all of us are eating well." Still, Gaza's population primarily relies on humanitarian assistance for food, followed by local markets and assistance from friends or relatives. With rising shortages across all of these, support from relatives is also dwindling, according to the WFP.

As more of Gaza's population is pushed into shelters in southern governorates, which are also under intense bombardment, competition for food is expected to increase, said the IPC. Fighting across the Gaza Strip, and especially in the northern governorates, has particularly made it difficult to access food and aid. Local farmlands, flour mills, bakeries and warehouses have also been directly damaged by Israeli bombardments. Only a month after fighting broke out, all of northern Gaza's bakeries closed due to lack of supplies such as flour and fuel, the UN reported on November 8. Risks of being hit by Israeli strikes also resulted in movement restrictions for those seeking to leave their homes for food. — Aljazeera

# Sudan war: 'When a bomb fell I told my son it was an action movie'

KHARTOUM (BBC): Rasha Amin's five-year-old son now wets the bed at night after a neighbour's house in the capital, Khartoum, was struck by a missile in October. "He wakes up at night crying because he had a nightmare or he's scared," explains the mother of two.

A golf ball-sized piece of shrapnel had smashed a hole through her wall and air conditioning unit and narrowly missed Rasha's other child, her 20-month-old toddler, who was asleep in his crib. A paramilitary unit that had set up next door was the intended target and Rasha's explanation to her older child that people were filming an action movie did not convince him for long. The 31-year-old schoolteacher and her family had a narrow escape in the eight-month civil war that has killed at least 10,000 people. Nearly seven million others have fled from their homes but many, like Rasha and her family, remain trapped and traumatised amid the fighting.

Her house is still badly damaged. She shows the BBC around virtually with her smartphone, pointing to cracks in the wall and windows and doors that are missing. "We're still scared. We have to put our mattresses on the floor away from the windows," she says of her efforts to keep her family safe. "We also stay close to closets and the fridge in case the roof comes down." Fighting between Sudan's army and its former ally, the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), broke out in April after a row between the generals leading the two groups.

Since then the army has struggled to control large parts of the country, losing much of the capital and the western Darfur region as the fighting escalates. It is now on the backfoot in central Sudan after the RSF recently took over the city of Wad Madani, the capital of Gezira state, which had been seen as a safe haven from the fighting. People who had sought safety from Khartoum are now having to run for a second time. Already at least 250,000

people have fled from Gezira, according to the UN. The region is considered to be a bread basket for Sudan, producing 70% of its wheat, raising fears that the crisis could lead to serious food shortages and a "hunger catastrophe", in the words of a World Food Programme (WFP) spokesperson.

Rasha and her family did try to flee when the war broke out but were unsuccessful. Both her husband and children are British citizens, and she hoped the whole family would be eligible for evacuation. The family paid "a lot of money" to be driven miles to a military base where Western evacuees were to be picked up. On the way they witnessed the horrors of war - dead bodies lying by the road, factories burning, people looting abandoned shops.

But their hopes of getting out were dashed when they arrived. Officials told her that her London-born husband and their children could be evacuated, but not Rasha. "We were trying to say you can't separate a breastfeeding baby from his mother and we could pay for visa on arrival," she says, sobbing. The family had no choice but to return home, says her husband Mohammed Said who believes it was "the sensible thing to do".

Since then he has pleaded for help from the British government to ensure his and other mixed-nationality families can be moved to safety in the UK. Asked about the predicament of families like Rasha's, UK Minister for Africa Andrew Mitchell told the BBC: "We did relax some rules in some cases to try and help families that were caught in that position", and advised that the family "keeps in touch with the British Foreign Office".

Rasha and her husband have written emails to the Foreign Office and an MP they opted not to name, but say all they received were automated responses. "Of course we feel abandoned," says Mohammed, while acknowledging the difficulty of reach-

ing anyone trapped in the warzone.

In the meantime the family remains stuck in Khartoum, surrounded by armed men roaming the streets and faced with daily power cuts and a lack of basic services. Efforts to try and broker a political solution to the conflict led by Sudan's neighbours - represented by the regional bloc the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (Igad) - and Saudi Arabia have so far been unsuccessful. The warring generals - army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo of the RSF - have yet to agree to meet face-to-face. The prospect of getting them to the negotiating table became even more distant in recent weeks after Gen Burhan disputed an Igad announcement of a breakthrough and vowed to fight "to victory or martyrdom".

The US and British governments have said both sides have committed war crimes. The RSF has further been accused of conducting ethnic cleansing in the western region of Darfur. In recent months, non-Arab communities in Sudan, particularly the Masalit, have been targeted, their villages burned and there have been reports of widespread rape. "We will do everything we can along with our allies and like-minded people to bring those who perpetrate any form of human rights abuse and breaches of international humanitarian laws to account," Mr Mitchell, the UK minister, told the BBC.

Sudan's food situation was already dire before the war but the situation is getting worse as charities struggle to distribute aid. "We've only been able to reach Khartoum with food assistance once in the last three-four months," said Leni Kinzli, the WFP spokesperson for Sudan. The country's ability to feed its population will be seriously tested "Nobody feels safe anywhere in the country any more because the situation is devolving so rapidly... Come May, we are looking at a hunger catastrophe," Ms Kinzli told the BBC. — Aljazeera

# France completes mily withdrawal from Niger

ABUJA (AP): France completed the withdrawal of its troops after they were asked to leave Niger by the country's new junta, ending years of on-the-ground military support and raising concerns from analysts about a gap in the fight against jihadi violence across the Sahel region of Africa.

The last French military aircraft and troops departed Niger by the Dec. 22 deadline set by the junta which severed ties with Paris after the coup in July, the French Army General Staff told The Associated Press by email. France already announced this week that it would close its diplomatic mission in Niger for "an indefinite period." However, the country would continue to be involved in the Sahel — the vast expanse south of the Sahara Desert which has been a hot spot for violent extremism — although differently.

President Emmanuel Macron said during a visit to a base in Jordan. "I decided on some important reconfigurations," Macron said. "We will continue to protect our interests over there but our armies won't be as present permanently, will be less stationary and also less exposed," he said. Niger's junta described the end of the military cooperation with France as the start of "a new era" for Nigeriens.

"Niger stands tall, and the security of our homeland will no longer depend on a foreign presence," it said via X, formerly known as Twitter. "We are determined

to meet the challenges before us, by consolidating our national military and strategic capabilities." But analysts say a vacuum will be created by the troops' departure. It will "leave Niger and the entire Sahel worse off" in terms of overall counterterrorism efforts as Niger was seen as the last remaining Western partner in the decade-long fight against jihadi groups in the region, said Ryan Cummings, director of Africa-focused security consulting company Signal Risk.

Some 1,500 French troops were training and supporting the local military in Niger, which had been envisioned as the base for counterterrorism operations in the region after anti-French sentiment grew in Mali and Burkina Faso, both run by juntas that have also forced French troops out. But after deposing Niger's democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum, the nation's junta led by Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani severed military relations with France and other European countries. Instead, he sought defense cooperation with Russia, whose private mercenary Wagner Group is already active in parts of Africa but faces an uncertain future there following the death of its leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin.

The withdrawal of foreign military missions is already affecting security in Niger, where the number of attacks has surged, according to Oluwale Ojewale with the Dakar-based Institute for

Security Studies. "The country has not demonstrated sufficient military capabilities to fill the vacuum created by the withdrawal. Strategic attacks are being launched by the various armed groups who now roam freely in the ungoverned spaces in the country and incidents have remained on the rise," said Ojewale.

## Kenyan ex-minister arrested

NAIROBI (BBC): A former Kenyan tourism minister has been arrested and taken to court over corruption allegations. Najib Balala, and other ex-officials, are accused of inflating the cost of a project to build a tourism college. In court, he denied the charge of abuse of office relating to an irregular payment worth \$21m (£17m), the Nation newspaper reports.

He is the first former minister to be arrested since William Ruto was elected president last year. Mr Ruto came to office vowing to fight corruption, which has long been seen as a problem in the country. Mr Balala served as tourism minister for 12 years in three successive governments, stepping down in 2022 as President Uhuru Kenyatta left office. He appeared in court in the coastal town of Malindi alongside a former permanent secretary at the ministry of tourism, Leah Gwiyio.

# Indonesian leader's son brushes off 'nepo baby' tag in feted debate showing

MEDAN: As the vice presidential candidates took to the stage for Indonesia's second televised presidential debate, all eyes were on Gibran Rakabuming Raka – perhaps the most controversial vice presidential candidate in Indonesia's history.

Batting away charges of inexperience and nepotism, Gibran, the 36-year-old son of current Indonesian president Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, dominated the stage despite being up against more experienced candidates. The verdict among observers generally was that Gibran's performance far exceeded expectations.

"My overall impression was that any doubters who thought Gibran was a clueless lightweight have been proven completely wrong," Alexander Arifianto, a research fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore (RSIS), told Al Jazeera. "He was well-prepped for the debate and showed he has an excellent grasp on economic issues. Much better than his two opponents."

Since he announced his candidacy in October, Gibran has faced a storm of controversy, including accusations of being a "nepo baby" and a continuation of the dynastic politics that

have long plagued Indonesia's politics. With no political experience apart from a two-year stint as the mayor of the city of Surakarta in Central Java, Gibran has been accused of riding on his father's coat-tails – Widodo also served as mayor of Surakarta – and lacking the bona fides of rival candidates Abdul Muhaimin Iskandar, the deputy speaker of parliament, and Mahfud MD, a minister responsible for coordinating political, legal and security affairs.

Gibran's candidacy was facilitated by a controversial ruling by the Constitutional Court of Indonesia in October that loosened the minimum age requirement for presidential and vice presidential candidates. While the court upheld the minimum age threshold of 40 in principle, the judges carved out an exception allowing officials who are at least 35 to run if they have been previously elected to office – allowing Gibran to become Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto's running mate ahead of the February 14 election.

The ruling was particularly contentious as the then-head of the Constitutional Court, Anwar Usman, was Widodo's brother-in-law. Usman

was removed from his position after the Constitutional Court ethics committee found him at fault for not recusing himself from the decision, although the ruling on the age requirement was allowed to stand. With questions swirling about the legitimacy of Gibran's candidacy and his suitability for office, his debut on the debate stage had been hotly anticipated.

"Straight away: This debate was won by Gibran. So far, expectations for Gibran have been very low. Basically, Gibran has never been tested. In the first presidential debate, he looked like an oddity: a high school student surrounded by seasoned politicians and governors," Yohanes Sulaiman, a lecturer at Universitas Jenderal Achmad Yani in West Java, told Al Jazeera. "In this debate, his performance was much better than the two people I had expected to eat him for lunch, namely Mahfud MD and Muhaimin. It was clear that he was prepared, confident, and had mastered the material, perhaps having been thoroughly trained by his debate preparation team." The second of five televised debates, and the first to feature the vice presidential candidates, was focused on the economy, includ-

ing issues such as taxes, trade, management of the state budget, infrastructure and urban planning.

Dandy Rafitrandi, an economist with the think tank the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, said the questions set by a panel of experts were quite specific and required each candidate to understand economic topics. The candidates' weak grasp of economics was noticeable at times, Rafitrandi said, including when the questions turned to funding government projects and programmes. "Gibran explained several programmes, for example, a free lunch programme [for civil servants] worth 400 trillion Indonesian Rupiah [\$25.8bn], but did not explain the source of the funding," Rafitrandi told Al Jazeera.

At another point during the debate, Muhaimin said that he and presidential candidate Anies Baswedan, the former governor of Jakarta, wanted to build 40 new cities across Indonesia to rival Jakarta – without explaining how these would be paid for. The main flashpoint of the evening came when the candidates sparred over Nusantara, Indonesia's new capital city, which is currently being built in the jungles of Kalimantan.

The plan, which was spearheaded by Widodo, involves moving Jakarta, which is crowded, choked with smog and sinking due to illegal groundwater extraction, at a projected cost of \$1.3bn. The project has struggled to secure foreign investment, which was envisaged to cover the majority of its hefty price tag, and has only attracted local investors, something which Mahfud questioned Gibran about given his support for the plan.

Gibran replied that Mahfud could "Google" who was investing in the project and attacked Muhaimin for being "inconsistent" after previously backing the scheme. Mahfud also previously supported Nusantara, and only Anies and Muhaimin have said that they would cancel the project if elected, arguing the money could be better spent elsewhere in Kalimantan and other parts of the country.

Nusantara is not expected to be a deciding factor in the election, with some recent polls showing that Prabowo and Gibran have a 20-point lead over Ganjar Pranowo, the former governor of Central Java, and Mahfud MD. "Gibran was the clear winner of tonight's debate. It has set the bar high and it will be tougher for both Anies's and Ganjar's teams to

catch up with them, especially when it comes to economy and investment issues," RSIS's Arifianto said.

"Sadly, both Mahfud and Muhaimin are single-issue candidates who are good only for their issues [law and religious issues respectively] but not so good in others." However, not everyone was impressed with Gibran's dynamic performance, saying that it placed style above substance. "He was better rehearsed compared to the other two candidates, which will likely impress some voters. However, his responses lacked policy substance, relying on a combination of slogans and factoids," Ian Wilson, a lecturer in politics and security studies at Murdoch University in Perth, Australia, told Al Jazeera.

But while Gibran may want to get away from the "nepo baby" tag, it may be difficult to shake off his family's image altogether, Wilson added. "Gibran showed that he is, despite attempts to brand himself as a fresh thinking millennial, very much still his father's son, doubling down on a commitment to continuing signature Jokowi policies such as the Nusantara capital city project," he said. — Aljazeera



## The Frontier Post

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Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at  
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# Deerly needed educational reforms

**R**ECENTLY, the Inter Board Coordination Commission (IBCC) convened a high-level conference of the top educationists that was attended by Vice-Chancellors of Universities, Chairman of different Boards of Education from across the country, high-ups from the education ministry, academicians, teaching faculty and students. The theme and purpose of the conference was the evaluation of Examination and Assessment Practices in Pakistan. While addressing the gathering of top brand educationists, the Caretaker Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training stressed the need for a paradigm shift in educational examinations and assessment systems to align them with the requirements of the modern era.

Education is the most important element in the overall national life of any nation. A modern and competitive education system is of utmost importance to provide state-of-the-art education to school and university students so they can compete with the current day challenges effectively. Meanwhile, examinations and assessments are the major pillars of the educational system that not only set standards but gauge the talent of the students and teach them practicability and implementation of their knowledge in real life. Unfortunately, education and literacy had neither been a priority for the past governments nor it was important for the civic groups who considered education as a tool to boost their political legacy and garner votes from the public.

Pakistan's education system faces various challenges including inadequate funding, a lack of qualified teachers, outdated curricula, socio-economic disparities and access to education, and inadequate infrastructure, while gender inequality also massively contributes to low literacy rates and educational depletion. Meanwhile, a lack of leaders' vision and no attention from the government resulted in educational degradation in the country. The private education industry was groomed rapidly because public schools were using century-old teaching practices that emphasized memorization of the lesson instead of concept-based study, formative assessment and practical implementation of knowledge gained by the students. That's why our educational system is nonproductive and Pakistan is behind in current day Research and Development (R&D), modern technologies, and the latest innovations.

Several past governments undertook numerous steps to transform the education system by introducing major reforms, uniform curricula, teachers' training and nationwide standardised examination and testing systems, but no pivotal change could so far be implemented due to recurrent disruption and unsustainability in government policies. Historically extensive research and the advent of modern technologies and educational scenarios around the globe have transformed rapidly and it has become essential for Pakistan to bring necessary changes in its examination and assessment systems accordingly. The use of digital technology and modern techniques in the examination and testing process could help improve the educational system in the country. There is a need for curriculum planning, continuous monitoring, data analytics and assessment, digitization of curriculum, setting up question banks, and data integration. The Inter Board Coordination Commission (IBCC) is the most suitable platform with representation of all the educational boards that review proposals and offer recommendations. The Universities and the private sector must also be taken on board to make unanimous decisions to ensure uniformity in the educational system. The Federal Board has recently introduced a concept-based study and assessment system, hopefully, more comprehensive and broad-based reforms will be grasped into the country's education system that sufficiently competes with the world standards and satisfactorily fulfils the needs of our future generations.

## The PTI's dilemma

**T**HE Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has recently declared the PTI's party election unlawful while stripping the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) of its iconic election symbol, the bat, that depicts its founder's cricket legacy, longheld achievements, and worldwide fame. A five-member ECP bench comprising of the Chief Election Commissioner and his four aides announced a reserved verdict saying that the PTI has not complied with the ECP's directions and failed to hold the intra-party election by the PTI prevailing Constitution, 2019, and Election Act, 2017, and Election Rules, 2017. Historically, the recent verdict has served as a major blow to the party which currently gearing up for the February 8 polls and eyeing victory in two federating units along with playing the opposition role in the centre.

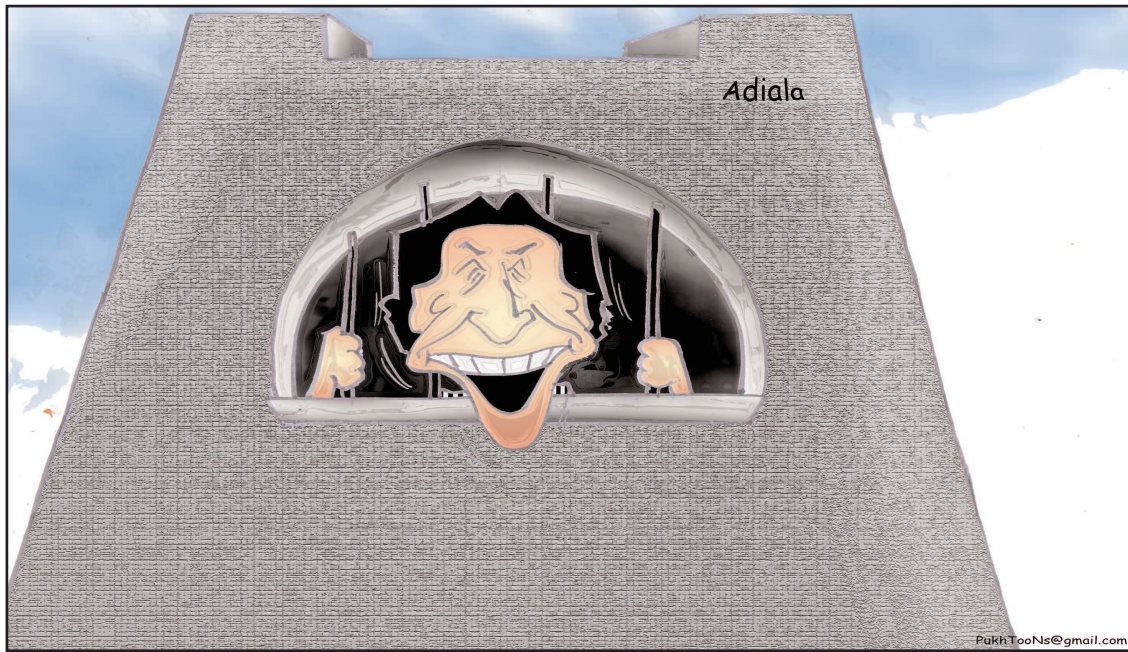
Historically, the PTI was under the sonars of the Election Commission of Pakistan due to multiple reasons ranging from misdeclaration of the PTI's Chairman, foreign funding cases, Toshkhana cases, intra-party elections and many more together with intimidation and harassment of ECP's high-ups by the PTI senior leaders when the party was in power from mid-2018 to April 2021. Previously, the PTI leadership has been accusing the ECP of prejudice and partiality along with levelling allegations of not providing a level playing field in the ongoing election campaign, that charges might be real or a pre-emptive narrative to avert/manage the situation which has emerged at this time.

The PTI leadership has rejected the ECP's verdict and termed it a politically motivated decision aimed at barring the group from parliamentary politics at least during the next five-year term, because, the scores of reserved seats in the National and Provincial assemblies are allocated to different political groups in accordance with their presence in the relevant houses. Those reserved seats play a crucial role in the Party's powerplay during the elections for the slots of president, prime minister, chief minister, and Senate chairman.

Historically, the PTI nose downed due to the unethical and unmeasured policies of its leadership, who plays foul and hopes for courtesy and relaxation from others, all that happened in all cases from Toshkhana to intra-party elections. On these pages, the Frontier Post categorically highlighted the nomination and uncontested victory of Barrister Gohar Khan, which led the party to this day. There is a need for self-accountability, collective decision making and democracy within the party to make its prospective clear, narrative real and future glaring in the days to come.

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# Biden's foreign policy woes

Kerry Boyd Anderson

**A**T the start of 2023, US President Joe Biden was halfway through his presidential term. Many foreign policy experts felt that Biden had made good progress in repairing the damage to traditional alliances from Donald Trump's presidency. The Biden team had reason to feel good about Washington's approach toward the war in Ukraine. The widely criticized 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan was in the rearview mirror.

There were challenges and disappointments, such as the lack of progress toward renewing a nuclear deal with Iran. Yet, overall, the Biden foreign policy team had reason for optimism at the start of the year. However, at the end of 2023, the outlook is less positive.

All US presidents enter office with foreign policy priorities and all of them must cope with international events that threaten to derail their plans. The war in Ukraine demanded some shifts in policy and resources, but the White House was prepared for the war, which neatly fitted into Biden's approach toward foreign policy. The war in Gaza, however, does not fit the president's preconceived worldview or his administration's approach to foreign relations. Furthermore, domestic political divides increasingly threaten to undermine foreign policy.

At the same time, the Biden administration must continue trying to address other priorities, including China and climate change. Looking ahead, 2024 already appears challenging for foreign policy - even before considering the potential for new surprises in foreign affairs and the effects of a US presidential election.

When Russia attempted a full invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, the US was ready. Forearmed with accurate intelligence, Washington was prepared for the Russian attack. Moscow's efforts to subjugate a sovereign, democratic country fitted very well into Biden's framework of a world shaped by competition between democracies and autocracies, with Russia and China as the most problematic of the latter. It also helped that Biden had already invested in strengthening relations with European allies. Washington's policy toward Ukraine initially went well. The president and his officials were able to quickly rally European and, to some extent, international support for Ukraine. The US provided significant economic and military aid to Kyiv. Ukrainians

impressed the world with their ability to derail Russian plans to control their country.

The US tends to be very good at the first six months or so of warfare. Whether engaged directly in a military conflict or supporting an ally such as Ukraine, Washington tends to be decisive and capable of quickly drawing on massive military and economic resources. For example, so far, the US has provided more than \$44 billion in military assistance to Ukraine since February 2022, according to the State Department, plus billions of dollars in other forms of assistance. However, most wars do not end quickly and cleanly. In recent decades, Washington has struggled as a war gets messy. In a context of less decisive victories, frozen lines and asymmetric warfare, US leaders struggle to clearly delineate crucial political and military objectives.

The last year of war in Ukraine has demonstrated the complexity of warfare. After impressive initial efforts to push back Russian forces, the war has stalled and could last a long time. Enemies of the US are well aware that Americans seem to have relatively short attention spans, or at least that American unity behind a cause tends to fray over time. Russian disinformation has exacerbated fractures within American politics. Democrats are largely in favor of helping Ukraine, but Republican leaders are divided over the issue. A recent Gallup poll found that 62 percent of Republicans said that the US is doing too much to help Ukraine, compared to only 14 percent of Democrats who agreed.

Moscow and Kyiv know that Republican wins in Congress or the White House in next year's election would undermine aid to Ukraine. This presents a huge threat to Biden's policies; while the White House will continue supporting Ukraine for now, the mere reality that such support might be short-lived puts those efforts at risk. Unlike Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Hamas attack on Oct. 7 took Washington by surprise and US leaders struggled to adjust.

Understandably, the immediate response of Biden and many American leaders to the Hamas attack was horror and fury at its brutal nature. Biden offered full support to Israel and he prides himself on being "the first US president to visit Israel in time of war." Biden has a long-standing personal commitment to

Israel and comes from a generation of leaders who have long provided unquestioning support to the country. Biden and many senior officials appear to have failed to fully anticipate what would happen next, although many younger foreign policy practitioners could have easily predicted it. The massive death toll and humanitarian disaster that came with Israel's military and economic response to the Hamas raid seems to have taken Biden and his senior team by surprise.

US support for Israel has long made it vulnerable to accusations of hypocrisy, complicating its diplomacy in the Middle East. For years, US leaders felt that the cost was worth it. However, the far-right shift in Israeli politics and the incredible suffering in Gaza since Oct. 7 threatens to seriously damage US diplomatic goals in the region and globally. One of the Biden administration's main goals in the region was expanding normalization deals between Israel and Arab states, but the war in Gaza complicates those efforts. Furthermore, there are concerns about the risk of a broader regional conflict. More generally, strong US support for Israel under the current circumstances intensifies the feeling throughout much of the world that Washington is not serious about supporting democracy, human rights, stability and prosperity. This puts many diplomatic goals at risk.

Domestically, Biden is facing a backlash among younger Democrats, who object to providing billions of dollars in military and other aid when the Israeli government kills thousands of civilians in Gaza and often ignores advice from US leaders - and when those funds could be used to benefit Americans at home. Biden has repeatedly tried to convince Americans that combating Russian aggression in Ukraine and Hamas terror in Israel are closely linked. In an Oct. 20 speech, he said: "Hamas and (Vladimir) Putin represent different threats, but they share this in common: They both want to completely annihilate a neighboring democracy." He has argued that allowing terrorists to get away with terror and dictators to get away with aggression leads to more "death and destruction." His administration has presented both Putin's regime and Hamas as threats to global order.

Biden's efforts at linking the two wars in order to gain support for US aid to both Israel and Ukraine does not appear to be con-

vincing many Americans. The Republican Party is divided about continuing support to Ukraine, while Democrats are increasingly willing to question unconditional support to Israel. The two wars do have something in common in foreign policy terms, however: no clear endgame. The Biden administration has not been clear, at least publicly, on what it hopes to achieve through ongoing aid to Ukraine, besides generally supporting Ukraine and halting Russian aggression. Similarly, Israel's lack of a viable endgame in Gaza is already creating cracks in the Israeli government's relationship with the White House.

For the foreseeable future, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza will continue to be top issues for US foreign policy. At the same time, as a global power, America will continue to try to pursue objectives in other areas. China remains a top priority. In November, Biden met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in an effort to stabilize relations that had become increasingly hostile. Washington sees Beijing as a competitor and wants to limit China's global influence, while continuing to partner with the country on economic and other issues where the two countries have shared concerns.

Addressing the climate crisis is another priority. Biden has had some notable successes in addressing climate change through domestic policy; however, in foreign policy, success is less clear. For example, at COP28, Vice President Kamala Harris pledged \$3 billion to the Green Climate Fund, but it is unclear if Congress will approve those funds. Other top issues include security at the southern border, managing threats from Iran and expanding the US presence in the Indo-Pacific.

With an election in November 2024, domestic politics will have significant impacts on foreign policy. Biden will have to contend with Republicans' growing objections to support for Ukraine, Democrats' increasing concern about Palestinian civilian deaths, ongoing pressure from Democrats to address climate change, and so forth. Foreign policy was often considered an area of strength for Biden, but a Gallup poll from November found that only 32 percent of Americans approve of his foreign policy. If Trump is the Republican nominee, which is likely, then a second contest between Biden and Trump will highlight two extremely different approaches to the US' role in the world.

Arab News

# Nuclear disarmament

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

**A**S the number of nuclear weapons held by major powers is on the rise, the international community ought to put more effort into preventing the proliferation of these weapons and work toward their elimination. It is estimated there are currently about 12,500 nuclear warheads around the world. The Guardian newspaper reported in June: "At a time of both deteriorating international relations and the escalation of nuclear saber-rattling, there are now said to be an estimated 12,512 warheads globally, of which 9,576 are in military stockpiles ready for potential use, up 86 on a year ago."

Nuclear proliferation - the spread or acquisition of nuclear weapons and technology by additional countries or entities, as well as those that initially developed and tested such weapons - is becoming a greater concern for global security due to the potential consequences of the use of these weapons. The proliferation of nuclear weapons can also undermine international norms and agreements aimed at preventing their spread. The erosion of these norms could lead to a more uncertain and dangerous global security environment. Although some scholars, policy analysts and politicians may argue that nuclear weapons can be seen as a means of deterring potential adversaries from attacking, one of the threats associated with their proliferation is that the existence and rising number of nuclear weapons creates a constant risk of accidental use, unauthorized access or escalations during times of conflict.

The risk of miscalculation also increases. False alarms, the misinterpretation of signals and technical malfunctions could all lead to unintended nuclear conflicts. It goes without saying that the use of nuclear weapons would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences, causing immense loss of life, severe injuries and other health effects, as well as displacement. Long-term environmental damage should also not be underestimated. The detonation of a nuclear weapon causes long-lasting damage, including radiation contamination and nuclear fallout. In other words, a large-scale nuclear conflict would have severe and far-reaching environmental consequences, affecting ecosystems and the climate alike.

In addition, the spread of nuclear weapons to more countries increases the likelihood of their use and heightens geopolitical tensions. As a result, nuclear weapons can be a destabilizing factor in the world, meaning reducing their numbers would be a step forward in terms of enhancing global security.

Furthermore, the rising number of nuclear weapons in neighboring countries or regions can trigger arms races, with non-nuclear-armed nations feeling compelled to develop their own nuclear capabilities in response to perceived threats from others. Regional rivalries may contribute to a cycle of proliferation in this case. Some regions are of particular concern regarding nuclear proliferation due to geopolitical tensions. The Korean Peninsula and the Middle

East, for example, ought to be the focal points of international efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

The international community must also consider the potential for nonstate actors to acquire nuclear weapons as proliferation increases. The potential for nuclear weapons or material to fall into the hands of a proxy group or terrorist organization should be a grave concern. Nonstate actors acquiring and using nuclear weapons could result in devastating consequences, posing a significant threat to global security. Finally, nations with nuclear capabilities may use their arsenals as a form of political leverage, engaging in nuclear blackmail or coercion to achieve strategic goals. This could lead to an increase in international crises and heighten the risk of conflict.

Therefore, the potential consequences of the use of nuclear weapons raise ethical questions about states' continued possession of them and the moral responsibility to work toward their elimination. Achieving complete global nuclear disarmament should be a critical and long-term goal for the international community.

The world can take several steps and adopt efficient strategies in order to progress in this direction. These include increasing public awareness of the risks associated with nuclear weapons and advocating for disarmament. Grassroots movements, civil society organizations and advocacy efforts play a vital role in raising awareness and pushing for policy changes. Fostering a global culture of peace and conflict resolution is vital in order to encourage nations to prioritize diplomatic solutions to disputes, invest in conflict prevention and build international cooperation to address the root causes of conflicts. Other strategies include encouraging the ratification and implementation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which prohibits all nuclear explosions for both civilian and military purposes; renewing and negotiating new arms reduction treaties between nuclear-armed states, whether bilateral or multilateral; reinforcing and strengthening existing arms control agreements such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in order to ensure compliance; enhancing verification mechanisms; and strengthening the role of international organizations in monitoring and verifying compliance with arms control agreements.

It is incumbent on the nuclear-armed states to take the lead by demonstrating their commitment to disarmament through unilateral or negotiated reductions in their arsenals. This can set a positive example for other nations and build momentum for broader disarmament efforts. In summary, as nuclear proliferation rises, it is more important than ever to focus on disarmament, which requires sustained international political will, dialogue, cooperative efforts, diplomatic initiatives and a shared commitment to the principles of peace and security. Achieving this objective will contribute to a safer and more secure world, free from the threat of nuclear catastrophe.

# Lebanon dodges a bullet as army chief stays on

Dr. Dania Koleilat Khatib

**T**HE Lebanese parliament last week extended the tenure of army commander Gen. Joseph Aoun, delaying his retirement for a year. With this decision, one can safely say that Lebanon dodged a bullet.

Aoun's retirement, which was due in mid-January, would have been disastrous for Lebanon. The country has no president and no prime minister. Key positions in state institutions, such as the governorship of the central bank and the directorship of the General Security, are also vacant. Today, the only institution holding the country together is the Lebanese Armed Forces. It is the only institution that still has the respect of the international community. This is mainly due to the persona of the commander, who has been able to keep the army together and maintain a certain level of security against all odds.

The extension was sug-

gested by Environment Minister Nasser Yassin, who is currently in charge of putting together an emergency plan. He pushed for the extension as an urgent step to prevent the breakdown of the country, as its southern front is in direct confrontation with Israel. Unfortunately, in Lebanon, everything is politicized and the different actors look for personal gain.

The extension was opposed by Free Patriotic Movement head Gebran Bassil, who did not want Aoun to stay in the game. By remaining in his position, Aoun will keep his eligibility for the presidency. Hence, Bassil tried to block the renewal and to pressure Hezbollah into toeing the line. However, this time the group did not abide by the whim of its Christian ally. The stakes were too high. With the various state institutions floating about with no guidance, no one could afford for the army com-

mander's post to be left vacant. Hezbollah knows that the disintegration of the army would mean internal unrest. At this moment, this is the last thing it wants. Because Lebanon could face an attack from Israel, domestic security and cohesion is of paramount importance.

Domestic cohesion is essential. Hezbollah did not directly confront its ally, the Free Patriotic Movement, as it did not vote for the extension. Instead, its parliamentarians left the assembly when the article was put to the floor. Hezbollah walks a fine line in terms of catering to its Christian ally's demands. The group knows that it cannot afford additional popular discontent. People are blaming Hezbollah for the presidential void. It is being accused of holding the country hostage in order to serve Iran's interests. If it had fol-

lowed Bassil and blocked the extension of Aoun's mandate, this would have cost them dearly and would have been skillfully used by their opponents. However, the significance of the extension goes beyond these issues - it is also a test of trust in Aoun. The general emerged from the parliamentary session as the strongest contender for any future presidential election.

The extension was a big loss for Bassil but a big win for Lebanon. It actually saved the country from disintegration. Given that Lebanon is bankrupt, the army's expenditure, including salaries, were last year paid for entirely by Qatar. According to sources, the Qataris made it clear that they would not pay again unless they had a credible and trustworthy counterpart. They are right. Gulf states have for years endowed Lebanon with

donations that have found their way into the pockets of corrupt politicians. Not anymore. Despite the fact that the political class hates Aoun, they do not want the country to collapse. They would not want to manage the mess that would result from the breakdown of the armed forces.

The international community also could not take the risk of seeing the leadership of the army left vacant. Everyone needs a credible interlocutor. And there is a consensus not to let Lebanon collapse. Does Europe want to see a wave of refugees leaving Lebanese shores? Does anyone want to see Lebanon become a launchpad for terrorist attacks? However, the extension of the commander's remit will not really save the country; it will only prevent it from totally collapsing. But given the miserable situation the country is witnessing, the Lebanese have set the bar so

low that even something as tactical as the one-year extension of the tenure of the commander of the army is seen as an achievement.

Despite the fact that the Americans want to keep the conflict in Gaza contained, nothing can guarantee that this will be the case. It is in the interest of the political class to have a credible leadership that the US can trust and for which Washington is willing to use its leverage to pressure Israel into restraining itself.

This is why the international community should capitalize on the "achievement" of last week's session and push for the election of a president and a government. This might be the right moment to do so. It might be the moment to explain to the political class that, at this difficult time, no one is willing to talk to Lebanon unless it has a credible president, prime minister and government.



# How Russian officials plan to recruit 400K new contract soldiers in 2024

Farida Rustamova & Maxim Tovkaylo

**THE Kremlin and the Defense Ministry plan to continue their campaign to recruit contract servicemen for the Russian army next year, our sources have said. Russia's regions have already received the 2024 contract soldier recruitment plan from Moscow, and its quota is approximately the same as in 2023, a high-ranking source familiar with the military leadership's plans said.**

Nationwide, authorities expect to find approximately 400,000 people to agree to go to the front next year, the source said. Another person taking part in Kremlin meetings confirmed that the regions will be responsible for finding and recruiting new contract servicemen next year.

He did not give an exact quota for the coming year, merely saying it "will be similar to what it was this year, or slightly less." "But definitely not more," he stressed. Since the spring of 2023, authorities have carried out a mass campaign to promote contract service in the army across Russia's regions. The main thing that lures people to war is money. While the average salary in Russia is about 70,000 rubles (\$760), the monthly salary of a contract serviceman starts at 204,000 rubles (\$2,200). Bonuses may also be awarded for taking part in offensive actions and capturing Ukrainian equipment, for example. In addition, one is entitled to a one-time payment from the federal budget in the amount of 195,000 when their contract is concluded. Wealthier regions such as Moscow and the Moscow regions pay contract soldiers significantly more. The Russian authorities' intention to recruit 400,000 contract servicemen in 2023 was first reported in March. Officials' statements suggest that this goal has already been exceeded. For example, at the Defense Ministry board meeting on Dec. 19, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said that 490,000 contract servicemen and volunteers have been enlisted since the beginning of the year. The latter do not formally have the status of servicemen and can leave the front at the end of their term of service, while contract soldiers are obliged

to fight until the formal end of the war. Shoigu did not disclose how many contract servicemen were recruited this year, but according to Deputy Security Council Chairman Dmitry Medvedev, volunteers account for about 21% of those enlisted. By that estimate, about 387,000 people have signed contracts with the Defense Ministry since the beginning of the year.

If we study the Defense Ministry's statements in recent years about the number of contractors in the Russian army and plans to recruit them, we can see that the official figures do not add up. In March 2020, Shoigu claimed that there were 405,000 contractors in the Russian army. Let's remember this number. A year ago, already in the midst of the war, Shoigu said the number of contractors should be increased to 521,000 by the end of 2023 and ultimately to 695,000. It is not known how many contractors were in the army at the time of this statement. But it is unlikely to be fewer than in March 2020, because increasing their number was one of the Defense Ministry's priorities before the war. If we rely on the official numbers mentioned above, the Defense Ministry needed to recruit 116,000 more people to fulfill the plan that Shoigu announced at the end of 2022. However, the target for contract soldiers for 2023 was 400,000 fighters. Moreover, this figure was recently confirmed by Putin himself.

The Russian authorities claim to have exceeded the plan this year. As we calculated above, about 387,000 people signed a contract with the Defense Ministry. Based on official statements, there should already be more than 750,000 contractors in the Russian army. That is, even the plan that Shoigu announced the day before for 2024 has been fulfilled: to increase the number of contractors to 745,000. Our sources in the government were unanimous in their belief that it will be much more difficult for the authorities to fulfill the plan to recruit contractors next year,

although the situation will differ from region to region. They voiced skepticism toward the Defense Ministry's latest reports on recruitment successes. "The people who went to war for patriotic reasons have run out," said a high-ranking source familiar with how the regions are recruiting contract soldiers. "At the same time, salaries at civilian and military enterprises have risen significantly. Plus in some regions, there are rotational workers, and their salaries are even higher. If you are paid 150,000 rubles at a civilian job, why do you need the 200,000 rubles that the Defense Ministry pays to a contract soldier?" According to the source who attends meetings in the Kremlin, the Defense Ministry has exhausted its pool of potential recruits. "Today, there are no longer the same number of people who drank beer and husked sunflower seeds (and went into contract service)," he said, adding that the prison population willing to sign contracts is also drying up. "Now there is a race between regions. They are trying, but it is unrealistic to find so many people," said a source close to the Kremlin. "These are concrete people. If you attract one of them to the army, this person drops out of somewhere. And nowadays, he tends to drop out of a particular occupation - an ambulance doctor, a bus driver. And where can you get a new bus driver?"

The 200,000-300,000 ruble salary for contract servicemen also disturbs the balance in the labor market, the source continued. "There is a specific story with Russian Railways, where there is a huge shortage of personnel at construction sites. And this deficit has become even stronger this year, as workers are finding less physically demanding jobs with salaries 1.5-2 times higher. For example, the same bus driver."

As of October, Russia's unemployment in Russia is at a record level of 2.9%. While President Vladimir Putin boasts of this figure, the financial and economic bloc is not happy about it, as the

shortage of workers is holding back economic development and accelerating rising prices. "There are practically no working hands left in the economy, the situation with workers is really very acute," Central Bank Chairwoman Elvira Nabiullina said recently. Economic Development Minister Maxim Reshetnikov called the labor shortage the main source of internal risk to the economy. Despite the labor shortage, the plan for contract servicemen will be fulfilled through more targeted campaigning, a source with knowledge of the regions' plans to find contract workers said.

He pointed to the example of citizens who do not pay alimony as a potential reserve. "There are tens of thousands of them, and they are not officially employed anywhere. We have not had time to mobilize them. It is clear what kind of moral character these citizens have. But this way they will be able to pay their debt to the country and pay alimony," he said. However, alimony payments from servicemen still need to be secured. Some defaulters took advantage of the authorities' relaxations for those who went to the front and avoided responsibility. According to the Federal Bailiff Service, as of Jan. 1, 2023, there were 771,000 enforcement proceedings for the recovery of alimony, and 153,800 cases of non-payers being wanted or fined. Next year, a law creating a registry of alimony debtors could be passed. The reliance on contract service allows the authorities not to mobilize citizens in large waves. However, according to sources in the regions, local authorities would prefer mobilization because it's an easier system for them.

And the work done since last fall to organize lists of military commissions and other information on citizens could help authorities mobilize men "without harming the economy." "But when one of the governors tries to convey upstairs: 'Let's maybe have another mobilization,' there is a firm refusal. Contracts only," a source in the leadership of one region complained.

The Moscow Times

## Keir Starmer is a disgrace for wearing military clothes

Ross Clark

**MRS Thatcher made a lot of right calls in her time, but none more so than in what she chose to wear when she drove a tank for the cameras on a visit to British forces in West Germany. She was dressed in a rather fetching long white mac and matching headscarf. "I'm the Prime Minister," she was saying, "not a squaddie. I'm not trying to pretend that I am doing their work."**

If only there had been someone around to give some advice to Keir Starmer before he popped on television in military fatigues - while, for goodness sake, calling for a "sustainable ceasefire" in Gaza. No, Mr Starmer, you are a Labour leader auditioning to be PM; you

are not leading a military junta. I can only hope there aren't a few old majors out there in the nation's retirement homes who saw the clip and have concluded that Starmer has just led a coup d'etat, and now won't get out from under their beds.

I can see the thinking behind it. Labour's strategists know that defence is traditionally one of Labour's weak points and they want to get the message across that their leader is pretty tough. Unlike some Labourites, he is not going to sit in his Downing Street bunker as nuclear missiles rain down on Britain and refuse to press the button on the grounds it is still worth

talking to the enemy. But even so, it is pretty laughable to see Starmer posing in military garb. For one thing, I thought Labour types were supposed to be touchy about cultural appropriation. He wouldn't dare wear a sombrero if he visited a Mexican restaurant, nor don a grass skirt while visiting Maoris in New Zealand. So why does he think he has to dress up in military fatigues just because he is visiting an army base?

We know who you are: you are a lawyer, not a lance corporal. Stop trying to pretend you know one end of a bazooka from another. By the way, there is no point in wearing camouflage indoors, either. It is

there to help make you blend into the grass and bushes, not concrete. To be fair to Starmer, he isn't the first senior politician to entertain fantasies of being a soldier. Liz Truss wore a flak jacket while taking her own drive in a tank. Boris Johnson, too, turned out in fatigues on a visit to our troops in Estonia. Michael Heseltine, unsurprisingly, also wore military gear.

I say to any politician thinking of dressing up in military gear: no, you are not going to impress us. You just make yourself look like Idi Amin. There are enough countries around the world whose leaders have been put there by military force. There are no votes to be had in seeming to emulate them.

The Telegraph

## New era opening-up

Huang Qifan

**AS China is accelerating the establishment of a new development paradigm with domestic circulation as the mainstay and domestic and international circulation reinforcing each other, China's opening-up has entered a new stage with several prominent new features.**

First, its trade policy has shifted from being predominantly export-oriented during the past few decades to encouraging both exports and imports. It is no longer pursuing a trade surplus but aims to promote balanced two-way trade. For example, the China International Import Expo, the world's only expo dedicated to promoting imports, reflects the policy shift. In addition, China's general tariff rate has dropped to around 7 percent and is anticipated to fall below 5 percent by 2025, reaching the World Trade Organization average.

Second, the opening-up policy has extended from the coastal and border areas to inland regions, forming a coordinated, holistic and parallel opening pattern. Before 2000, all national-level opening-up measures in China began in coastal cities. In the decade after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2012, new opening-up measures took an integrated approach to cover all regions across the country: new districts were built in central and western regions, bonded zones expanded from coastal to central and western regions, and free trade pilot zones were approved in batches nationwide. Currently, half of China's 150 bonded zones are located inland. Essentially, opening-up is an idea, a system and a way of working, rather than specific locations.

Third, promoting overseas investment is seen as equally important as attracting foreign investment. Despite severe disruptions in the global supply chains, foreign investment in China has actually increased. Over the past decade, China has attracted an

average of \$140 billion in foreign capital each year, with the actual use rising to nearly \$190 billion in 2022. China's outbound direct investment hit \$153.71 billion in 2020, ranking first in the world for the first time. The trend of two-way investment is evident. Fourth, while the trade in goods under the framework of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and World Trade Organization used to account for the lion's share of China's trade, policies now encourage trade in both goods and services.

For example, in the financial sector, restrictions on foreign ownership of securities companies, fund management companies, futures companies and life insurance companies have been lifted. In manufacturing, restrictions on foreign ownership of commercial vehicle manufacturers have been relaxed. In agriculture, the requirement for Chinese control of the breeding of new wheat varieties and seed production has been relaxed to a minimum Chinese ownership of 34 percent. The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October last year once again emphasized high-level opening-up and outlined five tasks.

First, expanding institutional opening-up to facilitate both domestic and international circulation. While China used to largely participate in international economic circulation by opening-up its production resources and outputs, it has now moved to a new stage where domestic circulation takes the lead, steadily opening-up its regulations, rules, management and standards. In order to turn China's massive single-market into a magnet for global resources through high-level opening-up, it is essential to create a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment, effectively connecting domestic and international circulations.

Second, building China into a trader of quality by prioritizing the

trade of services and digital trade. In recent years, the volume of China's trade in services has remained second in the world. However, compared to the high value-added services trade in developed economies and the tremendous growth of China's trade in goods over the past 40 years, China's trade in services is facing challenges such as a large deficit and low structural efficiency. The enormous volume of the goods trade has not played the expected role in driving the development of the service trade. The top leadership attaches great importance to this issue. The China International Fair for Trade in Services has been held for many years. President Xi Jinping has delivered important speeches on multiple occasions. Relevant departments have introduced a pilot program of deepening comprehensive innovation-driven development of the trade in services.

It is foreseeable that trade in services will take up a rising share in China's total trade volume and digital trade will grow its share in the trade in services. The service trade and digital trade will become additional pillars to support China's transformation into a trader of quality. Third, driving comprehensive opening-up through high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative. While the BRI reshuffles the world economy, it is also profoundly influencing and shaping China's opening-to the outside world.

The launch and operation of the China-Europe Railway Express is an outstanding example. The railway lines have fueled the rapid development of routes, ports and hubs, expanding new opportunities for the opening-up of inland cities. Moving forward, it is necessary to continue breaking through bottlenecks and barriers, accelerate the formation of an international economic and trade cooperation megacorridor supported by the railway, key hubs along the lines, and

deeply-integrated industry and supply chains. In particular, transport capacity should be optimized in order to make greater contributions to driving comprehensive opening-up.

Fourth, implementing the strategy of "free trade port + pilot free trade zone + network of high-standard free trade zones". As the highest-level platform for opening-up, the Hainan Free Trade Port has started construction and is expected to launch independent customs clearance in 2025, according to the master plan. In general, international economic and trade rules are evolving toward zero tariffs, zero barriers and zero subsidies, transitioning from border control to behind-the-border opening and underlining the convergence of business environments.

Efforts should focus on aligning with high-level economic and trade rules including pre-establishment national treatment, negative lists, intellectual property protection and environmental protection. It is also important to gain new experiences and set new examples for China to engage in international economic and trade rule negotiations and global economic governance. Fifth, participating in global cooperation by internationalizing the renminbi and implementing a high-quality going-global strategy. The report to the 20th Communist Party of China National Congress proposed the internationalization of the renminbi "in an orderly way", different from "a steady and prudent way" stated in earlier reports.

Over the next 15 years, with the gradual implementation of renminbi settlement in cross-border trade, bulk commodity imports and Chinese outbound investments, the internationalization of the renminbi is expected to see major progress. It has been forecast that the proportion of renminbi in payment settlements will increase by one percentage point each year, reaching around 17 percent by 2035.

The China Daily

# As Arctic ice melts, a new Russia-China threat looms

Frida Ghitis

**THERE'S something otherworldly about the Arctic. During the Polar Night, which can last for months, the sun does not rise above the horizon, leaving the region in continuous darkness broken by periods of almost mystical twilight.**

On cloudless nights, one can see the Aurora Borealis dance across the vast skies, its swirling greens and blues contrasting with the stark white of the endless expanses of snow. But then, at the Tromsø harbor in Norway's northernmost reaches, the natural landscape is broken by the metallic military grey of a Norwegian Navy frigate. It's a reminder that the Arctic is not immune from the tensions besetting the rest of the globe.

In fact, the temperatures here are rising nearly four times faster than in the rest of the planet - and that's just the thermometer's reading. When it comes to geopolitics, the coldest region in the world risks becoming its hottest. In a recent speech to the Arctic Council - the intergovernmental body that acts as the region's steward - Admiral Rob Bauer, the head of NATO's Military Committee, warned, "We cannot be naïve and ignore the potentially nefarious intentions of some actors in the region."

"Conflict," he said, "can present itself at any moment, in any domain, including the Arctic," he added, ominously. That was not hyperbole. The region's fast-growing militarization, fueled by increased international tensions, are compounding a push to benefit from the Arctic's strategic and economic potential. Melting ice is also creating new shipping lanes and opening natural resources to exploitation, making strategic control of the Arctic ever more enticing. A few hundred miles from Tromsø's port, the Kola Peninsula in Russia is home to the country's Northern Fleet, where multiple ballistic missile submarines, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, troop concentrations, airfields and other military assets are massed near NATO's border.

This past weekend, Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a thinly veiled threat to Finland, one of eight countries in the Arctic and NATO's newest member, warning that "there will be problems," between the two countries now that Helsinki joined the alliance.

Russia, he said, will soon concentrate military units near the northern part of the countries' shared frontier. Just weeks earlier, Finland closed its border crossings with Russia, accusing Moscow of launching a "hybrid operation" - weaponizing desperate

migrants by helping them reach the frigid European border in the Arctic in an effort to destabilize the European Union. In an interview with state media, Putin claimed that the two countries had no problems before Finland joined NATO, having resolved their territorial disputes in the 20th century. But Finland remembers how they were "resolved" - with a Russian invasion and a ferocious 1939-1940 Winter War that left Russia in possession of parts of Finland.

When Russia invaded Ukraine last year, Finland decided neutrality did not guarantee safety. It needed the protection of joining NATO. Tensions along the Arctic have grown exponentially since Russia's unprovoked 2022 invasion of Ukraine, but the troubles were growing long before. For decades, the region at the top of the globe seemed like a special place, where world powers could come together for the common good. The Arctic Council looked like a model of coexistence: A forum created in 1996, during that brief interlude of optimism in relations between post-Soviet Russia and the West. The group, made up of the eight countries with territory inside the Arctic and indigenous peoples - Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, the US - sought to promote peace, stability, and sustainable developments, safeguarding the region.

By the turn of the century, however, relations with Russia - and later with China, whose role in the region is now emerging - took a negative turn. In retrospect, some observers argue that Russia exploited that perception of Arctic "exceptionalism" the mantra of "High North, low tension," publicly proclaiming its commitment to peaceful cooperation, while simultaneously launching a gargantuan military buildup. In October 2021, Russia took over the rotating chairmanship of the Council. Speaking to the annual Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik, Iceland, Nicolay Korchunov, a top Russian Arctic official, outlined Moscow's plans. During Russia's chairmanship, he explained, "we will continue to foster constructive cooperation, maintain peace and stability..."

A few months later, Russia invaded Ukraine. The work of the Arctic Council froze. Its very future was put in doubt. Soon after, Russia accelerated its military and commercial activities in the region. In brazen disregard for environmental safety standards, Russia started

using thin-hulled - rather than ice-class oil tankers - to transport crude across the region. One shudders to imagine what a major oil spill would do to this unspoiled top of the world. During a summit between Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping in March, the two countries agreed to focus on the Arctic, appearing to open a new front against the West. By some estimates, China has invested \$90 billion in the region. Moscow and Beijing are working together to build a "Polar Silk Road," with economic, geopolitical, and military objectives. China is unsubtly crafting an argument to become a player in the region, declaring itself a "near-Arctic state."

NATO finds it all concerning, according to Admiral Bauer, "because while Russia's intentions in the Arctic have become clear in recent years," China's "remain opaque." Moscow meanwhile has decried NATO's eastward expansion. And now, the accession of Finland, and possibly Sweden into the alliance, would leave Russia as the only Arctic nation outside of NATO. If, as some argue, Russia managed to pull the wool over the eyes of its Arctic neighbors, its invasion of Ukraine ripped it off. "It might be hard to understand how deep the peace has been in Norway," said Norway's Deputy Defense Minister Anne Marie Aanerud. "We literally felt nothing could go wrong for generations." Now Norway's Arctic is not just the place to watch pods of whales go foraging for herring among soaring ice-bound fjords. NATO's military forces also make frequent visits, responding to provocative maneuvers by Russia's massive military presence. In September, Tromsø residents saw a French Navy's submarine emerge from its waters. Days later, a US submarine was also greeted here.

Aanerud recalled a Russian military exercise a few months ago, which appeared to practice cutting off the Scandinavian peninsula. In response, Scandinavia will soon host the enormous "Nordic Response" military exercise, with participation of some 20,000 troops from 14 countries. The Arctic - the extreme northern latitude - with its dramatic landscapes, exotic atmospheric phenomena and still-pristine nature, may seem like a safe refuge from a tempestuous planet. But the seemingly otherworldly oasis is very much of this world. The turbulence roiling the planet is making its way to the top of the globe, and the tensions in the High North are likely to increase even after some of today's headline-grabbing conflicts recede.

CNN

## China can open a new chapter for inbound tourism

Yang Jinsong

**IT has of late become easier for some foreigners to visit China. Under an experimental visa-free entry policy effective from Dec 1, 2023, to Nov 30, 2024, ordinary passport holders from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia are now entitled to visa-free travel to China for up to 15 days. The policy is widely expected to boost inbound tourism to China.**

Inbound tourism has played a significant role in China's modernization thanks to the country's reform and opening-up. It helped China earn foreign exchange, accelerated the formation of a modern tourism system, improved service quality, promoted continued opening-up of the tourism sector and enhanced people-to-people exchanges between China and the world. China's inbound tourism has also had a worldwide impact, and China registered more than 145 million inbound tourist trips in 2019.

The world now has greater expectations of China's inbound tourism. Foreign visitors don't only want to visit beautiful landscapes, but also to see from close quarters people's lives in both rural and urban areas. Their purpose of visiting China is to understand the country and hear its voice.

Because of the bright prospects China offers, foreign markets want to communicate closely with their Chinese counterparts, discover unique products and services and develop sus-

tainably with China's inbound tourism market.

Meanwhile, China expects inbound tourism to help advance the Global Civilization Initiative and shape the landscape of tourism cooperation across the globe.

For example, inbound tourism, which is part of cultural exchange, can enhance friendship between peoples from China and the world, bolster the high-quality development and advance high-level opening-up. China's inbound tourism should be and must be a global public product. Currently, China's inbound tourism and global tourism depend on each other. China needs to interact with the world to promote its inbound tourism with regard to the development environment, tourism convenience, marketing, unique tourism attraction and talent cultivation.

First, the tourism authorities should guide the development of an inbound tourism market, closely monitor tourism market change among China and major tourist destinations, adjust management policies of tourist groups and make efforts to attract tourists from countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.

Second, the relationship between inbound and domestic tourism should be handled properly. Inbound tourism needs to be integrated with the development of domestic tourism and social situations at the destinations. Tourists

should get easy access to local infrastructure, public services, transportation and the internet. Also, their requirements and expectations should be met by market entities in order to promote the sustainable development of inbound tourism.

Third, related departments should cooperate to establish mechanisms to improve the convenience of getting visa and integrate resources to address problems concerning tickets. What's more, tourism entities should create themes and models to connect foreign tourists with China, and create market products related to China's modernization to attract foreign tourists. For example, people's daily lives, enterprises' innovation and the products concerning the BRI are all sources of tourist attractions.

Efforts should be made to train tourism professionals, introduce talent, improve their abilities and provide incentives. Travel experts and enthusiasts can be included into the industry to adapt to the new business models.

All these moves can boost the high-quality development of inbound tourism. China's tourism market should develop to meet new demands for foreign visitors by promoting urban, culinary and health tourism. Besides, the integration between culture and tourism needs to be boosted to help tourists experience China's rich culture and history. The development of inbound tourism requires long-term efforts but it has a bright prospect.



# Economy now showing signs of revival: Tanveer

ISLAMABAD (APP): Punjab's Minister for Industries and Commerce, S.M. Tanveer, said on Saturday that the government is working hard and pursuing reforms in various sectors, due to which the economy is now showing some signs of revival, and vowed that all possible efforts would be made to put Pakistan on track for sustainable growth.

He said that a business facilitation centre has been established in the province as a one-window facility to automate the licenses and NOCs required for starting up or expanding businesses, which would help boost business activities, according to a press release issued here.

He said this while addressing a dinner reception hosted by Atif Ikram Sheikh, former President ICCI and presidential candi-

didate of UBG for FPCCI, at his residence.

S.M. Tanveer said that UBG has a clear vision to address the key issues of the business community, increase exports, strengthen foreign exchange reserves, and boost industrialization, and this vision would be implemented after winning the upcoming elections of FPCCI to revive the economy.

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), said that the role of FPCCI is very important in promoting the private sector in the country and assisting the government in boosting exports, encouraging foreign investment, and stimulating economic activity, and UBG will strengthen FPCCI to play this role effectively.

He said that ICCI is a

strong supporter of UBG and hoped that under the dynamic leadership of S.M. Tanveer, UBG would achieve a landslide victory in the upcoming elections of FPCCI to address the issues of the business community and promote the economy.

Khalid Iqbal Malik, Group Leader of ICCI, said that the current leadership of FPCCI has failed to deliver for the business community and stressed that all chambers of commerce and trade associations should support UBG in the upcoming elections of FPCCI so that this apex trade body could play an effective role in making Pakistan a hub of business and economic activities.

Zafar Bakhtawari, former President of the ICCI and Secretary General of UBG Pakistan, said that the private sector is the back-

bone of the economy, and there is a need to promote business leaders as role models in the country to attract youth towards entrepreneurship so that they could drive Pakistan towards progress and prosperity.

Atif Ikram Sheikh, presidential candidate of UBG for FPCCI, said that they have prepared a plan to address the key issues of the business community and steer the economy out of trouble. He said that they would realize the mission of the late SM Munir after winning the elections of the FPCCI to make Pakistan a hub of business activities in the region.

Abdul Rauf Alam, Sheikh Abdul Razak, Waqar Bakhtawari, Zahid Maqbool, and others also spoke on the occasion and expressed strong support for UBG.



ISLAMABAD: Customers inquiring about dry fruits at a stall in H-9 Weekly Bazaar.

## Pakistani delegation visits to China's AiMall Technology Center

BEIJING (APP): A delegation of Pakistan's Artificial Intelligence Technology Center (AITC) comprised of Director General Nadeem Ahmed, Technical Director Dr. Aminuddin Qureshi, Directors Dr. Syed Khurshheed Hasnain and Kamran Qureshi had a visit to Chinese AI company, Shenzhen AiMall Tech. Co., Ltd. to discuss bilateral cooperation.

Both parties conducted in-depth discussions on various issues and future cooperation plans in the field of AI technology. Dr. Yang Heng, Chairman of AiMall, Chen Zai, Strategic Planning Director, and Ji Chuande, Technical Expert accompanied the visit.

Nadeem Ahmed analyzed the current development status of AI globally

and in Pakistan, and introduced in detail the scientific research progress made by AITeC in the field of AI through a video.

"So far, AITC has established multiple core artificial intelligence laboratories such as computer vision, natural language processing, machine learning and deep learning, and is committed to conducting high-quality AI technology research and development in various fields," Dr. Yang briefly introduced the overall development, technology application, industrial layout and strategic planning of AiMall. Subsequently, the two parties had specific discussions on topics such as AI large models, computer vision, embodied intelligence and other AI technology hotspots and industrial

application development, and exchanged views on future business cooperation as well as training courses, CEN reported.

The delegation also visited the AI product area of AiMall. Dr. Yang introduced the application of AI technology in different industries in China, "including the retail fast-moving consumer goods industry, such as helping brands achieve rapid collection of offline real marketing data to accurately grasp market dynamics, and provide chain stores, properties, etc. with comprehensive AI solutions covering people-goods-field from field experience to personnel environment management."

In addition, the delegation's experience also included international hot

technologies such as general + vertical industry AI language large model application Ask and Get, intelligent vision AI multi-person real-time face-changing.

"AITeC devote to providing high-quality AI solutions customized according to needs, which coincides with the philosophy of AiMall. We highly look forward to exploring and promoting win-win development of AI technology," said the delegation members, who highly appreciated for AiMall's exploration in the field of AI. Both parties totally agreed to contribute to promoting the high-quality development of AI technology under the framework of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Belt and Road Initiative.

## Inflation caused of energy rates hike a serious challenge: M. Ali

ISLAMABAD (INP): The presidential candidate of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI) for 2024 election, Muhammad Ali Sheikh has said that the uncontrolled inflation caused of constant hike in energy rates and depreciation of local currency was most serious challenge to the country's economy.

He said the high cost of doing business has been hurting the economic growth, as the inflation rate bounced back to 29.2% in concluding month, hurting the trade and industry the most, who faced the brunt of a staggering 520% increase in gas prices.

While quoting the PBS, Muhammad Ali said that the CPI surged to 29.2% last month compared to a year ago. The increase was more than market expectations and has lessened the prospects for a cut in the interest rates, which stand at the country's highest ever level of 22%.

This reading, the first announced by the PBS after the recently concluded International Monetary Fund (IMF) talks, in which the global lender also cut the inflation forecast for Pakistan to 22.8%, may

strengthen the IMF's view of keeping the policy rate unchanged until core inflation starts easing out when the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meets on December 12th.

The IMF has released its executive board meetings' calendar till December 11th, and Pakistan's case has not yet been listed for the approval of the second loan tranche of \$700 million. This may make it difficult for the central bank to cut the interest rate before the board meeting.

The BMP presidential nominee for FPCCI polls predicted that inflation would remain high and may even increase further due to market frictions caused by relative demand and supply gap of essential items, exchange rate depreciation and recent upward adjustment of administered prices of petrol and diesel.

He called for keeping check on government expenditure and high cost of debt servicing to contain budget deficit, as the Pakistan's federal budget deficit projection has been revised to history's highest to over Rs6 trillion, highlighting the unending fiscal woes that have pushed the country into a debt trap despite putting additional burden of billions of rupees on industry in the current

fiscal year.

Expressing serious concern over the high jump in country's budget deficit, Ali Sheikh said the revision has been made in light of agreement with the International Monetary Fund, which exposed the massive underreporting of expenditures at the time of budget presentation by the finance ministry.

This is a highly unsustainable level and has already pushed the country into a situation where debt restructuring seems to be the only viable option. He PIAF chairman maintained that the failure to reform the tax system and increase revenue collection is a major factor behind heavy domestic and foreign borrowings by the government.

In view of the low level of available FX reserves, the debt management strategy of Pakistan may have to be revisited, to ensure the stability of Pakistani rupee and restoration of international capital markets' confidence in the economy of Pakistan.

He expressed surprise at the impact of the gas price hike, stating that it has surpassed market expectations.

His analysis suggests that PBS included fixed costs, such as meter rent, in the weekly inflation calculation in addition to the gas tariff hike.

The pace of inflation increased in urban areas while there was deceleration in rural areas, reported the PBS.

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### Stock market to grow next year: experts

HANOI (APP): After a period of decline and stabilization in 2022-2023, Vietnam's stock market is expected to witness significant growth opportunities in 2024, Vietnam News cited experts as saying on Saturday.

According to the experts, lower interest rates and improved performance of listed enterprises are among the key factors driving this positive outlook.

Dinh Quang Hinh, head of the Macro and Market Strategy Department of VNDirect, said the country's production and export sectors are showing signs of recovery. Expansionary fiscal policies and wage reforms are expected to boost domestic consumption, contributing to improved business performance and driving stock market growth.

As of November 2023, Vietnam's benchmark VN-Index recorded an 8.6 percent increase compared to the end of 2022.

The capitalization of Vietnam's stock market has reached 5.75 quadrillion Vietnamese dong (236 billion US dollars), up 10.1 percent against the same period last year, according to the State Securities Commission of Vietnam.

### Court Notice

In the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Case No. 305/Institution. 10/10/2023 Date of hearing. 15/11/2024. Mohamad Fiaz VS Bakht Rawan. Notice to No. 1. Bakht Rawan s/o Kabal Khan of Budal Chaghorzai Buner. 2. Shahi Rawan s/o Bakht Rawan resident of House No. 1822 Karachi at present Palangay Riyal Tehsil Chaghorzai 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 am dated 15/11/2024 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. 240/1. Institution. 2/9/2023 Date of hearing. 11/1/2024. Dilkharom VS Yarmoz Khan. Notice to No. 1. Yarmoz Khan s/o Fatih Khan. 11. Shaista d/o Fatih Khan resident of Torwasak 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 am dated 11/1/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

### Economic growth discussed

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Labour and Human Resources Secretary Naeem Ghous, along with Director General Labour Syeda Kulsum Hai and Director Labour Welfare Muhammad Shahid, conducted a meeting with Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) Senior Vice President Zafar Mehmood Chaudhry here on Saturday.

Focus of the discussion was on fostering a collaborative environment to enhance the growth of the business community for overall development of Pakistan.

The secretary emphasised pivotal role of the business community in progress and prosperity of the nation. He affirmed that the Punjab Labour Department was dedicated to serving as a facilitator, ensuring maximum facilities for trade and industry. Ghous highlighted that the department has formulated policies with a vision to create a satisfied labour force capable of making optimal contributions to national growth.

## Vehicles' verification process launched

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Excise and Taxation Office Islamabad successfully launched vehicles' physical verification process here at chamber house on Saturday.

Today, a large number of members of the business community and citizens got their vehicles physically verified.

According to the details, the Excise and Taxation Office Islamabad formally initiated the process of vehicles' verification, said in a press release issued here on Saturday.

People thronged to the chamber house for physical verification of their vehicles and took benefit from the facility extended by SCCI for business community and people while they also highly appreciated this step of the chamber.

ETO Islamabad Inspectors Mian Naseer, Asif Jehangir and Imran Kahut carried out physical verification of over 250 vehicles throughout the day.

The business community and people praised the initiative of the chamber, stating that SCCI is fulfilling its responsibilities as a real institute of the business community.

After the initiative, now the business community and people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will not go to Islamabad for vehicles' physical verification.

Members of the business community and citizens said the desk would ease their difficulties which they had faced during vehicles' physical verification, which they highly commended.

## Pak-China textile summit strengthens economic ties

BEIJING (APP): The China-Pakistan Textile and Apparel Executive Summit and Business Meetings were held in Kunshan, East China's Jiangsu Province, last week. At least 100 representatives from the Chinese and Pakistani governments, trade associations and textile and apparel enterprises attended the event.

In his opening speech, Deputy Mayor of Kunshan Zhang Feng noted that the year 2023 marked the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the initiation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). As a flagship project of the Belt and Road, the CPEC has achieved significant cooperation results, particularly in the textile and apparel sector where there is substantial complementarity and potential for collaboration between the two countries, he said.

He expressed the hope that the summit would further deepen exchanges and cooperation in the textile and apparel industry, Global Times reported.

Gohar Ejaz, Federal Minister for Commerce and Industries of emphasized Pakistan's traditional strength in textiles, citing natural conditions conducive to cotton production, a large and competitive workforce, a complete industrial chain, and favorable conditions for international market access.

He highlighted the potential for joint ventures between Chinese and Pakistani enterprises to produce different products along the textile value chain. Pakistan will provide comprehensive support for Chinese businesses investing in the country.

During the summit, the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Textiles (CCCT) and the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

According to a post by the CCCT, the signing of the MOU will further promote and strengthen economic and trade cooperation between the textile and apparel industries of China and Pakistan.

This collaboration is expected to empower and facilitate the development of cooperation between Chinese and Pakistani businesses, pushing bilateral trade, investment, and supply chain cooperation in the textile and apparel sector to new heights.

### Gold rates decline by Rs500

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs. 500 and was sold at Rs. 219,300 on Saturday compared to its sale at Rs.219,800 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs. 429 to Rs.188,014 from Rs.188,443 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went down to Rs. 172,347 from Rs. 172,740, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram Silver remained stagnant at Rs. 2,650 and 2,271.94 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$2 to \$2,072 from \$2,074, the Association reported.

## PIAF stresses need for solid steps to boost remittances

LAHORE: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) has said that foreign remittances flows are crucial which can support the country's account balance amidst low volumes of foreign direct investment (FDI) and nominal growth of exports.

The PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol said that overseas Pakistanis living in Gulf should further be motivated to maintain an upward momentum in remittances, as they contributed more than 60 percent of the total inflows during last couple of months.

He said that remittances can help not only in financing the deficit in import payments but also in foreign debt repayments, suggesting the government to focus on structural reforms, which can revive Pakistan's economic growth with major focus on incentives for overseas Pakistanis workers.

The PIAF Chairman said that Pakistan has been witnessing a significant decline in workers' remittances on a year-on-year basis, however it surged by 5.34% on a month-on-month basis, reaching a total of \$2.21 billion, owing to several positive factors, including improved transparency and the implementation of stringent measures against dollar smuggling. These initiatives have helped create a more secure and regulated environment for remittance transactions.

Faheem Saigol said that remittances for Sept came in at \$2.21 billion, according to data shared by the State Bank of Pakistan. This figure, while an improvement from last month's \$2.09 billion, was significantly lower than market expectations of \$2.4-2.5 billion. On a month-on-month basis, remittances rose by 5.3%. However, they declined by 11.24% compared to last year, when remittances stood at \$2.49 billion.

In a statement issued here, the PIAF Chairman asked the government to announce attractive package for overseas Pakistanis to enhance the volume of foreign inflows because this is the only hope which can support the country's account balance, as the remittances have started declining, showing a huge fall during last month.

If government supports overseas Pakistanis and provides them incentives, they can play a vital role in boosting Pakistan's economy through their remittances and investments for high economic growth. If the falling trend persists in the remaining months of this fiscal year, it could pose serious problems for the economic managers as the govt heavily relies on remittances, which are much higher than the country's total export proceeds.

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The BMP chairman observed that the development comes at a crucial time for Pakistan, which has seen its foreign exchange reserves deplete due to external debt servicing and lower inflow of dollars.

Mian Anjum Nisar appreciated the SBP, which under its home remittances promotion measures, allowed exchange companies to maintain separate foreign currency accounts for each money transfer operator.

The State Bank of Pakistan and the Arab Monetary Fund have signed a memorandum of understanding to facilitate remittances from Arab countries with official channels.

The government and the SBP have been trying to stop remittances through illegal channels, which not only destabilises the exchange rate but also reduces inflows. He believes that the MoU with the AMF would help Pakistan bring most of the inflows through the banking channels. Arab countries contribute about 55% of the total remittances. In FY23, Pakistan received \$27.3 billion in remittances compared to \$31.2 billion in FY22, showing a shortfall of \$4.2 billion.

This shortfall was a cause for concern as the country faced a default-like situation at the beginning of the current fiscal year FY24. It is believed that this \$4.2 billion was either sold in Dubai at much higher rates or sent home through illegal channels. In the first week of September, the government initiated a crackdown against illegal currency businesses and dollar smuggling, which produced positive results, and the rupee started appreciating.

However, the latest move to sign a MoU with the AMF is expected to be helpful for the country in receiving maximum remittances through official channels. Linking RAAST with Buna will facilitate Pakistanis to remit money in real time.

The SBP said the integration of RAAST with Buna aims to facilitate cross-border remittances between the Arab region and Pakistan through formal channels. This initiative will benefit individuals as well as businesses not only through instant, safe and cost-effective cross-border payments, but also by strengthening economic, financial, and investment ties between the Arab countries and Pakistan.





In brief

Safeguarding wrestlers may be key to federation's return

NEW DELHI (Reuters): The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), battling a sexual harassment scandal, may need to safeguard women wrestlers to get its suspension lifted, the game's global governing body said on Saturday.

The Wrestling Federation of India was suspended by the United World Wrestling (UWW) in August after failing to hold its election on time. The UWW had asked for a fresh election after the WFI's then-president, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, a lawmaker from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, was charged with sexual harassment and criminal intimidation. Singh has denied wrongdoing and is out on bail, but the victory of a candidate he backed as his successor in Thursday's election has triggered fresh protest. Sakshi Malik, a top woman wrestler quit the game in protest, while male wrestler and fellow Olympic medalist Bajrang Punia returned one of India's highest civilian awards.

"Conditions to address the concerns about safeguarding could also be requested," a UWW spokesperson said, when asked about the possibility of lifting the suspension on the WFI.

"We are still gathering feedback from representatives onsite to determine if the conduct of the election was valid and well organised," the spokesperson said by email. "Before we can lift the suspension, we need to receive the official information from the national federation and the confirmation by the NOC (National Olympic Committee) and the Ministry of Sports."

Wrestlers staged a sit-in protest against Singh in New Delhi and had to be talked out of their plans to throw their medals into the River Ganges in May.

Abrar ruled out of second Test

MELBOURNE (Monitoring Desk): Abrar Ahmed's symptoms have significantly improved, and he has started bowling at 50 per cent intensity. Although he has worked really well since his diagnosis in Canberra, he still is not 100 per cent asymptomatic. Considering the nature of the injury and the workload required from a spinner in a Test match, Abrar is not yet ready and will therefore not be available for the second Test. He will undergo a preliminary fitness test on 25 December, which will determine his probable return-to-play date.

Moore cleared of doping

LONDON (Agencies): British tennis player Tara Moore is free to play again after a panel ruled that contaminated meat was the source of her failed doping test. Moore, 31, was ranked as Britain's leading women's doubles player when she was provisionally banned in May 2022. She maintained she had never "knowingly taken a banned substance" and intended to prove she was a "clean athlete". An independent tribunal found Moore "bore no fault or negligence" for her adverse analytical finding. Moore tested positive for nandrolone metabolites and Boldenone from a test when was competing in the Colombian capital Bogota in April 2022.

The International Tennis Integrity Agency said it "has issued, and will continue to issue, information concerning the risks of meat contamination in certain parts of the world to all players".

Bangladesh seamers rout New Zealand for 98 in consolation win

NAPIER (Agencies): Bangladesh's seamers skittled New Zealand for 98 in a thumping nine-wicket win in the third ODI in Napier to help the visitors avoid a series whitewash. This was New Zealand's lowest total against Bangladesh.

New Zealand head coach Gary Stead had warned about Bangladesh's improved pace attack in away conditions, and the visitors showed their worth on Saturday as Bangladesh produced their first ODI victory against New Zealand in their own backyard.

Only four New Zealand batters reached double-figures as Shoriful Islam, Tanzim Hasan Sakib and Soumya Sarkar picked three wickets each. Tanzim got the party started for Bangladesh, squaring Rachin Ravindra up to have

him nick behind in the fourth over. He then got the better of Henry Nicholls in the eighth with a short ball.

Will Young, who finished as the top-scorer in the series, then provided some resistance along with Tom Latham, as the two added 36 runs for the third wicket. But Shoriful bowled Latham through the gate with a nip-backer to spark a slide which saw New Zealand lose four wickets in the space of five overs and 12 runs. Shoriful had Young edging one to gully before casting Mark Chapman with another good delivery. Tanzim then had Tom Blundell caught at backward point to leave New Zealand 70 for 6.

Sarkar then took over, knocking Josh Clarkson and Adam Milne over and

getting Adithya Ashok to nick off. Mustafizur Rahman picked up the final wicket to complete the rout.

Bangladesh's openers started watchfully until Sarkar had to retire hurt after something went into his right eye. He tried applying water and even an eye drop, but could not carry on.

Anamul Haque hit Jacob Duffy for two boundaries in the next over as Bangladesh shifted gears. Clarkson and Will O'Rourke conceded three boundaries each in the 10th and 11th overs as Anamul and Najmul Hossain Shanto raced towards the paltry target. O'Rourke had Anamul edging behind for a 33-ball 37, but it was much too little and much too late as Shanto sealed the win two overs later, bringing up a 42-ball half-century in the process.



MELBOURNE: Steve Smith (R) and Alex Carey in action during an Australian Test squad nets session at Melbourne Cricket Ground.

West Ham leapfrog Man Utd with 2-0 win

LONDON (Agencies): Jarrod Bowen and Mohammed Kudus' second-half goals gave West Ham a 2-0 win over Manchester United in the Premier League's early game on Saturday, as the Hammers briefly moved into the top six.

Bowen bundled home from close range in the 72nd minute after a lovely one-two with Lucas Paqueta, who played in Kudus six minutes later to settle the game with a sharp finish.

West Ham, recovering from a bruising 5-1 defeat to Liverpool in the League Cup in mid-week, move up to sixth on 30 points and United drop to eighth on 28 points.

The first half was low on quality and its best chance fell to Alejandro Garnacho in the 35th minute, but the winger lost his balance and shot straight at Alphonse Areola.

Bowen broke the deadlock with his 11th league goal of the season, taking Paqueta's dinked ball in his stride before Onana's save rebounded off the forward and into the net.

Paqueta then capitalised on Kobbie Mainoo's mistake to set up Kudus, who fired home past Onana to secure all three points for the hosts.

Pakistan's two-day practice match against Victoria XI ends in a draw

MELBOURNE (Monitoring Desk): The two-day practice match between Pakistan and Victoria XI, played at Junction Oval in Melbourne, resulted in a draw. The previous day saw Pakistan declare their first innings at 323-8, helped by half-centuries by Saud Shakeel, Mohammad Rizwan and Salman Ali Agha. In reply, Victoria XI posted 272-4 before declaring.

Pakistan then posted 57-3 in their second innings, when stumps were called.

Victoria XI started the day trailing by 276 runs, with Marcus Harris and Blake Thomson on the crease. Thomson (30, 46b, 7x4s) was caught off Mir Hamza's bowling early in the day but Harris went on to register a century (126, 131b, 22x4s, 1x6).

Dylan Brasher was the other contributor with the bat. He scored an unbeaten half-century (79 not out, 105b, 12x4s), which helped the team reduce the first-innings deficit to 51 runs.

Hasan Ali, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Mir Hamza and Sajid Ali all returned with a wicket each.

Shan Masood and Abdullah Shafique opened the batting for Pakistan in

their second innings. Shan fell cheaply to Matthew Fofia. Sarfaraz Ahmed, who replaced Shan on the crease, was dismissed by Sam Elliott for 10.

Abdullah, who hit a 44-ball-39 including seven boundaries, was the top scorer for Pakistan for the day.

After Abdullah fell to Tyler Pearson in the 12th over of the innings, the two captains shook hands and the match was drawn.

Pakistan will play their second Test of the three-match series against Australia at the Melbourne Cricket Ground starting 26 December.

Scores in brief:

Match Drawn

Pakistan 323-8 (dec), 78.4 overs (Saud Shakeel 70 retired, Salman Ali Agha 51, Mohammad Rizwan 50 retired; Doug Warren 3-69, Matthew Fofia 2-44) and 57-3, 11.3 overs (Abdullah Shafique 39, Sarfaraz Ahmed 10; Sam Elliott 1-6, Tyler Pearson 1-8, Matthew Fofia 1-15)

Victoria XI 272-4 (dec), 59 overs (Marcus Harris 126, Dylan Brasher 79 not out, Blake Thomson 30; Shaheen Shah Afridi 1-37, Hasan Ali 1-53, Sajid Khan 1-53, Mir Hamza 1-69)

Mohammad Nawaz replaces Noman Ali

PESHAWAR (APP): The national selection committee, headed by Wahab Riaz, has approved Mohammad Nawaz as the replacement of Noman Ali for the ongoing Test series against Australia.

Left-arm spinner Noman was ruled out of the three-Test match series after being diagnosed with acute appendicitis. He underwent a surgery on Saturday.

29-year-old left-arm spinner Nawaz, who is already part of the 17-member T20I squad against New Zealand commencing from January 12 in New Zealand, will fly to Australia on the first available flight.

Wahab Riaz, chief selector of the men's cricket team, said: "It is really unfortunate that Noman Ali is not available for the Test matches. Due to logistical challenges, including visa issues for any new player, and considering the requirement for a left-arm spinner, Nawaz was the best available choice for the side."

On Abrar Ahmed's availability, the team management is hopeful that Abrar will be available to the side for the third Test match at the Sydney Cricket Ground, commencing from January 3, 2024.

PCB announces squad for ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup

LAHORE (APP): Saad Baig will lead the 15-member Pakistan U19 squad in the ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 in South Africa to be played from January 19 to February 11, 2024.

Among the squad are Ali Asfand and Mohammad Zeeshan, both of whom had represented Pakistan in the previous edition of U19 World Cup held in West Indies in January-February 2022.

Pakistan U19 squad – Saad Baig (captain and wicketkeeper), Ali Asfand (vice-captain), Ali Raza, Ahmad Hassan, Amir Hassan, Arfat Minhas, Azan Awaiz, Haroon

Arshad, Khubaib Khalil, Mohammad Zeeshan, Naveed Ahmed Khan, Shahzaib Khan, Shamil Hussain, Muhammad Riazullah and Ubaid Shah.

Chairman Junior Selection Committee Sohail Tanvir said: "I want to congratulate the 15 players who have made it into the squad for South Africa and I am confident that this well-balanced side has the capability and potential to perform well in the World Cup."

"While picking the team, we have considered the conditions in South Africa where the pitches are conducive to pace

bowling and have aimed to cover all bases."

Support staff – Shoaib Mohammad (Team Manager), Mohammad Yousaf (Head Coach), Rehan Riaz (Bowling Coach), Mansoor Amjad (Fielding Coach), Muhammad Masroor (Assistant Batting Coach), Umer Rashid Dar (Assistant Coach), Hafiz Naeem Ul Rasul (Team Physio), Usman Hashmi (Team Analyst) and Imran Ullah (Strength & Conditioning Coach).

The players named in the squad will assemble for a training camp, which will take place from 28 December 2023 to 6 January 2024 in Lahore.

Davis Cup Ties to unfold in Pakistan as India loses appeal before ITF

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The International Tennis Federation (ITF) has unequivocally turned down India's appeal, affirming that the Davis Cup Tie is set to unfold in Pakistan.

The ITF's independent tribunal, in its recent ruling, underlined the definitive decision that the Davis Cup event will be hosted in Pakistan.

This development highlights the second occasion within the last month where Pakistan's

stance has been upheld.

The independent tribunal, in its February decision, confirmed that India would indeed tour Pakistan for the upcoming Davis Cup Tie, slated to occur in early April next year.

Pakistan consistently submitted that the prevailing security situation in the country was conducive to hosting the event, highlighting that other international teams were actively engaging in matches within Pakistan.

The ITF's independent tribunal emphasized that no substantial grounds exist to alter the venue for the Davis Cup Tie. It declared the security conditions to be suitable for the match to proceed as scheduled.

India had previously attempted to relocate the Davis Cup Tie, citing concerns related to general elections and security in the region.

The ITF had already rejected India's position last month.

Man City make history with Club World Cup win



RIYADH (Agencies): Julian Alvarez scored twice as Manchester City won the FIFA Club World Cup for the first time by beating Brazilians Fluminense in Saudi Arabia.

Pep Guardiola's side, taking part in the tournament after winning last season's Champions League, made the ideal start as Alvarez struck after 40 seconds, chesting in from close range after Nathan Ake's long-range strike hit the post.

They added a second in the 27th minute when Nino turned Phil Foden's cross into the back of his own net. England's Foden then got on the scoresheet himself in the second half when he darted through the middle to prod in Alvarez's cross, before the Argentine forward got his second in the 88th minute with a clinical strike into the far corner.

Success meant City emulated Manchester United, Liverpool and Chelsea in lifting the Club World Cup, but became the first English side to win five trophies in a calendar year. The Treble of Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League last season was followed by the Uefa Super Cup in August.

"It was an incredible year," said Guardiola. "Today we closed the chapter. We won everything we could. Now time to try again." But some of the shine was taken off their victory by the sight of Rodri - so influential for the side - going off injured towards the end of the second half.

Meanwhile, Egyptian side Al Ahly claimed third place with a 4-2 win against Urawa Red Diamonds of Japan.

City seal another title to

round off memorable 2023

City's win in Jeddah completed a trophy-laden and unforgettable year for the club. Although winning the Club World Cup has often carried less importance for English sides, Guardiola had spoken of his determination to "close the circle" and lift the trophy he believed would complete City's collection.

While this was their first appearance in the tournament, Guardiola had won it before with Barcelona and Bayern Munich and underlined his desire to triumph again by naming a strong line-up. The outcome was a dominant display by the reigning Premier League champions, with goalkeeper Ederson largely untested aside from a Jhon Arias header just before half-time, and a late John Kennedy strike.

"We were a little lucky at the start, we got the ball and scored early and then they had an incredible 10-12 minutes that made you realise how tough it would be," added Guardiola.

"The second goal helped us, but maybe we didn't deserve it. We adjusted something in the second half and we were much, much better."

City will celebrate before switching focus back to domestic matters, with their next game an away trip to Everton on Wednesday, 27 December.

With one win in their last six Premier League games, they will hope to use the momentum of their confident victory, and accolades of being crowned world champions, to get their title defence back on track.

Rodri concern after midfielder limps off

While City fans will be pleased to see another piece of silverware added to their trophy cabinet, they will be concerned by midfielder Rodri going off in the 74th minute. The midfielder was hurt by a challenge from Aleksander and looked in pain as he received treatment. Rodri was able to get back on his feet and attempted to continue, but was substituted to avoid risking him further.

City have struggled when the Spaniard has been absent this season, with their three defeats in the Premier League coming without him in the side.

Joel Embiid helps 76ers win and moves closer to Jabbar's record

WASHINGTON (Agencies): Joel Embiid managed at least 30 points and 10 rebounds in a game for the 13th time in a row as his Philadelphia 76ers beat the Toronto Raptors 121-111.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's record is 16 games for the Milwaukee Bucks in 1972. Embiid registered 31 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists as the 76ers recorded an eighth win in nine games.

"I didn't force anything. I think I took two

shots in the first six or seven minutes, but I just let the game come to me," said the Cameroonian.

"It came to me and then in the third quarter, I just found opportunities and made a few shots."

Tyrese Maxey and Tobias Harris scored 33 points apiece for the 76ers, while Pascal Siakam top scored for the Raptors with 31 points.

Elsewhere, Stephen Curry made a season-high eight three-pointers as he scored 30 points to inspire

the Golden State Warriors to a 129-118 victory over the Washington Wizards.

The Denver Nuggets, who are the reigning champions, secured a 122-117 victory against the Brooklyn Nets, with Jamal Murray scoring 32 points and Nikola Jokic adding 31.

Domantas Sabonis recorded 28 points, 12 assists and 11 rebounds for his fourth triple-double of the season as he helped Sacramento Kings to a 120-105 win against the Phoenix Suns.







## In brief

## Poet, Naat Khawan Muzaffar Warsi remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prominent Urdu poet, critic, essayist, lyricist and scholar Muzaffar Warsi was remembered here on his birth anniversary. Born on December 23, 1933 in Meerut, his name was Mohammad Muzaffar ud din Siddiqui and he used his pen name 'Warsi' making Muzaffar Warsi. He started his poetry by writing lyrics for songs for Pakistani movies but gradually changed direction and his style of poetry became more oriented towards writing Hamd and Naats. Warsi was one of the few distinguished voices and one of the most prominent poets of Pakistan. Warsi experimented with every genre of poetry including ghazal, nazam, naat and hamd. The unique style and diversity of themes made him prominent among the poets of his era. Muzaffar Warsi enlightened 'Natia Poetry' with a new style and naats like "Ya Rahmatulil Alameen" and would always be remembered among people having a literary taste. He received the pride of performance award from the government of Pakistan in 1988. He died on January 28, 2011 in Lahore.

## Police bust dacoit gang; arrest five active members

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have busted a dacoit gang by arresting five of its active members allegedly involved in Gujar Khan dacoity and other crimes and seized weapons, US\$600, Rs 250,000 cash, gold ornaments, mobile phones and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Gujar Khan police managed to bust a dacoit gang and arrested its five members namely Anjum, Amjad, Adnan, Faizan and Waseem. Arrested dacoits have been sent to jail for an identification parade, he said. The spokesman said police were trying to arrest other members of the gang. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is under process. Meanwhile, Jatli police arrested two bike lifters namely Samar Zaman and Nasir Mehmood and recovered two stolen motorcycles from their possession. In other raids, Taxila, Saddar Wah, New Town, Bani and Saddar Baroni police rounded up eight accused namely Imran, Wajidhassan, Adeel, Sawal, Ashesh, Imran, Abdul and Majid and recovered seven kg charas from their possession. Cases have been registered against the accused while further investigations are under process.

## Famous actor Izhar Qazi remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): Renowned film actor and singer Izhar Qazi was remembered on the occasion of his death anniversary on Saturday. Born in Karachi, he began his professional career as an engineer at Pakistan Steel Mills. He was introduced to television drama writer Fatima Suraiyya Bajia, who was looking for a new face for the television serial Ana. He appeared as the romantic lead alongside Mehreen Ilahi, Shakeel and Ghazala Kaifee in the 1982 serial. He later appeared in the serials Daira and Gardish with Shakeel and Saqi. After achieving television success, Qazi transitioned into the Lollywood film industry in 1986. His film debut was as the lead role in Nazar Shabab's Ruby, alongside veteran co-stars Mustafa Qureshi, Shafi Mohammad, Sabeeta, and Rangeela. The film was met with critical acclaim. Director Jan Mohammad casts Qazi in his films. Qazi's collaborations with Jan Muhammad included popular films including Manila ki Bijliyan, Roop ki Rani, and Choron ka Baadshah.

# Mushaal reveals 100-day plan to uplift and empower women across Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment, Mushaal Hussein Mullick, has asserted that the principles of human rights and women's empowerment are deeply embedded in the fabric of our religious, cultural, social, and political values. She was delivering a keynote speech at the launching ceremony of "Hundred Day Plan – Execution and Achievements by the Caretaker Government" held in Governor House Lahore. The launching ceremony was graced by the esteemed presence of Governor Punjab, Muhammad Baligh Ur Rehman, said in a press release issued here on Saturday. The focal Person to SAPM, Sabien Hussein Mullick, one of the architects of the 100-day plan, delivered a detailed presentation on the Execution and Achievements of the 100-day plan.

The launching event was

organized in collaboration with Infocomm, an organization renowned for its work on Women Empowerment and Financial Inclusion. Other dignitaries from civil society and organizations dedicated to women's empowerment and human rights were among the attendees. Mushaal emphasized that the principles of human rights and women's empowerment are not only deeply embedded in the constitution of Pakistan but also find a robust foundation in our national heritage. She underscored the transformative capacity of Pakistani women and advocated for increased female engagement in social and digital arenas. She emphasized that the 100-day plan encapsulates innovative solutions poised to uplift and empower women across Pakistan. Mushaal underscored that despite its constrained mandate, the caretaker setup demonstrated a robust resolve to attain the objec-

tives outlined in the 100-Day Plan. She conveyed her hope that all stakeholders, driven by a shared commitment, would actively contribute to realizing the dream of advancing human rights and women's empowerment in Pakistan. Speaking on the occasion, Sam Ali Dada, Advisor to SAPM on Gender Inclusion, stressed the need for focused efforts on empowering women through financial inclusion. She emphasized that achieving women's financial independence stands as a pivotal pillar for advancing gender equality and unlocking the true potential of the nation.

The 100-day plan, developed by the Ministry of Human Rights under the leadership of SAPM, stands as a comprehensive package of visionary ideas and initiatives. The plan is aimed at enhancing the overall human rights landscape and promoting women's empowerment in Pakistan.

The plan encompasses a wide array of initiatives spanning critical areas such as Gender Equality, Education, Economic Empowerment, Healthcare, Violence against Women, Political Participation, Legal Rights, Reproductive Rights, Freedom from Discrimination, Child Marriage, Access to Justice, Media Representation, Access to Technology and Social and Economic Safety Nets.

In his address, the Governor of Punjab commended the dedicated efforts of those instrumental in shaping the 100-day plan. He acknowledged and extended appreciation to SAPM Mushaal Hussein Mullick for her personal endeavours in championing human rights in Pakistan and tirelessly working towards the empowerment of Pakistani women to deserving status. The Governor also declared Mushaal as a source of inspiration and an emblem of the Kashmir freedom movement.



ISLAMABAD: A family sitting around the fire to keep them warm as the temperature falls in the city. —APP Photo

## Elderly teachers appeal for exemption from polling duties

ISLAMABAD (APP): Elderly and medically vulnerable teaching and non-teaching staff of educational institutions have appealed for exemption from their duties at polling stations during general election 2024.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has recently announced a training schedule for polling staff, a national duty that is mandatory and cannot be refused.

The staff of educational institutions are predominantly called upon for polling duties. The lack of consideration for the health and well-being of many teachers is highlighted by the fact that even those suffering from chronic conditions like heart problems are being appointed for election duties.

The situation is exacerbated by the apparent absence of engagement of staff from other ministries and divisions by the Election Commission, limiting the pool of resources available for such critical roles.

This has raised concerns among the senior educators about the potential impact on their health. A senior women teacher, speaking to

APP, expressed the physical challenges associated with age, stating, "I am 59 years old and at the verge of retirement and facing multiple health issues.

The teachers like me should be exempted from the polling duty which is a hustle job because it involves a range of responsibilities that can be physically and mentally demanding."

As per medical experts, individuals aged beyond the fifth decade often experience a decline in muscle strength, aerobic capacity, and cognitive abilities. Factors such as slower reaction times and caution increase with age, presenting a trade-off between speed and accuracy. This is particularly concerning given the fast-paced and high-stress environment of election duties.

Emphasizing the need for younger, energetic teachers to take on these responsibilities, a young teacher said, "The young teachers who are energetic and enjoy performing such duties should be appointed as polling staff. Election duties typically require long hours, attention

to detail, and the ability to handle various logistical challenges.

Polling stations are busy, with a continuous flow of voters, and the responsibility of ensuring a smooth and fair electoral process falls on the shoulders of the individuals working during elections.

This includes tasks such as verifying voter identities, managing queues, handling potential issues, and maintaining the overall integrity of the electoral process. It is a difficult job for those senior teachers who are in their late fifties."

Adding to the plea, an Associate Professor of a local college, also choosing to remain anonymous, disclosed his struggle with diabetes and hypertension, conditions that make the physically demanding and stressful nature of polling duties even more challenging.

He stressed, "Teachers above the age of 55, especially those with chronic health conditions, should be exempted from polling duty because the pressure associated with election duties increases as the

responsibility for maintaining order and facilitating a transparent voting process rests on the staff involved.

This demanding nature of the job can be particularly challenging for those who may not have the physical stamina or cognitive agility required for such tasks."

Another teacher said, "Directors within the Federal Directorate of Education, who are in the same grades as the teachers, seem to be exempt from such duties, raising questions about the fairness and equity of the appointment process.

This has left many to wonder why teachers from the education department bear the brunt of election duties, impacting not only their well-being but also the education of students during their absence.

The teachers urged the authorities to consider their age and health conditions when assigning polling duties, suggesting that exemptions for those aged 55 and above or with specific health concerns would be a reasonable and compassionate approach.

# FIA apprehends Baig for issuing counterfeit degrees

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Investigation Authority (FIA) has apprehended Muhammad Amin Baig in Sector F-10 for allegedly distributing fraudulent degrees under the guise of The Open International University, Sri Lanka.

The FIA spokesperson stated here Saturday that Inspector Kashmif Riaz and Ehtasham Gondal, members of the FIA team, found printed degrees, cer-

tificates, fake university stamps and admission forms in the possession of the accused.

Investigations are going on with more revelations expected. Amin ran a fraudulent international council, providing MD degrees for \$1,000 and PhD degrees for \$1,500.

Amin's arrest was ordered by Deputy Director of Anti-Corruption Circle, Islamabad, Afzal Khan

Niazi. Baig was conducting his unlawful operations through different agents.

The detained former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Drap, Sheikh Akhtar Hussain, had acquired a degree from Baig's fraudulent operation. Amin's arrest was facilitated by information provided by the apprehended suspect.

Contact has been made with Sri Lankan authorities through Interpol.

## Christianity striving to promote inter-faith harmony: Dr Joseph

RAWALPINDI (INP): Spiritual leader of Christian, Archbishop Rawalpindi, Islamabad Dr. Joseph Arshad has said that Christianity is striving to promote love, affection and peace, promotion of inter-faith harmony is the need of the hour for which all sections of the society has to play its role.

He said, Christmas gives us a message of peace and brotherhood, the Christian community will continue to strive for the development and prosperity of the beloved country.

These views were expressed by him while addressing the dinner organized for the promotion of inter-faith harmony. Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Christian leaders along with Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment Mushaal Hussein Mullick, Station

Commander Rawalpindi Brigadier Ahmed Nawaz, Muslim League leaders Chaudhry Tanveer, Barrister Daniyal, Chaudhry Osama, Malik Abrar, Ziaullah Shah, Rasheed Khan, Sabatul Hasan Bukhari known as Sabti Shah of Pakistan Peoples Party, businessman leader Sheikh Muhammad Hafeez, Shoaib Sadal, member of peace committee Babu Sajid Amin Khokhar, Frayad Francis, Reverend father Sarfraz Simon, Napoleon Gomez, Sanobar Gill, various Ambassadors and scholars of the countries Izhar Bukhari, Hafiz Iqbal Rizvi, Pir Azmatullah and administrative officers participated.

Addressing the participants of event, Dr. Joseph Arshad urged the Christian community to remember their needy and deserving

brothers in the joy of Christmas and share them in their joy. Archbishop Rawalpindi Islamabad congratulated the Christian community on Christmas and said Christmas is a message of peace, reconciliation and love.

Christian community on this joyous occasion should pledge that it will continue its efforts to promote peace and love throughout the world including Pakistan, he added.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment Mushaal Hussein Mullick also congratulated the Christian community on Christmas and lit the candle of peace and cut the Christmas cake along with Archbishop Rawalpindi Islamabad Dr. Joseph Arshad and other distinguished guests.

## Minister visits Ethiopian pavilion At Karachi Feast

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Madad Ali Sindhi graced the Ethiopian Pavilion with his presence at the Karachi Festival on Saturday. On arrival, the minister was welcomed by Ethiopian Ambassador to Pakistan, Jemal Beker Abdula.

According to a press release issued by the Embassy, the Pavilion served as a captivating proof of the rich tapestry of Ethiopian tourism, rich culture and heritage.

The minister, on the occasion, witnessed mes-

merizing cultural performances at the pavilion and savoured Ethiopian coffee which had become the centre of attraction at the Karachi Feast.

Madad Ali Sindhi commended Ambassador Jemal Beker Abdula for the commendable initiative of introducing Ethiopian tourism and culture to Pakistan.

Recognizing the immense potential for tourism and the diverse cultural offerings of Ethiopia, the education minister expressed his gratitude to the Government of Ethiopia

for the commencement of Ethiopian Airlines in Karachi which was instrumental in fostering connections between Pakistan and Africa.

Ambassador Jemal Beker Abdula extended gratitude to the minister for gracing the Ethiopian tourism pavilion with his presence.

The ambassador highlighted the strong attachment of the people of Pakistan with Ethiopia which was a land of Bilal Habeshi and King Nejashi.

He expressed his resolve to strengthen bilateral relations between the two nations.

## HEC awards undergraduate scholarships to GB students

ISLAMABAD (APP): The scholarship committee of the undergraduate scholarship programme for Gilgit-Baltistan met at the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Secretariat to approve the selection of the third batch of students who will pursue their undergraduate studies in different public sector universities in Pakistan.

The meeting, chaired by Executive Director HEC Dr Zia Ul-Qayyum, was attended yesterday by the Vice Chancellor, Karakoram International University Gilgit, Dr Atta Ullah Shah, Vice

Chancellor, University of Baltistan Skardu, Dr Muhammad Naeem Khan, Director General (Scholarships) HEC, Ms Aayesha Ikram, Assistant Chief (S&T) Planning Commission, Mr Muhammad Zaheer, Director Education (Colleges), Mr Juma Gul, and Mr Javed Hassan Awan, Project Director (GB Scholarships) HEC.

For the intake of the third batch, HEC advertised the scholarship in August 2023.

The test was conducted in November. A total of 100 students have been

provisionally selected on merit, and among them, 37 are female students.

It is pertinent to mention here that the undergraduate scholarship programme for students at GB is part of the underdevelopment package for Gilgit Baltistan.

This programme is envisioned to provide financial assistance to GB's students aspiring for undergraduate studies at HEC-recognised public sector universities in Pakistan. The programme was started in 2021, and until now, 275 students have been awarded this scholarship.



ISLAMABAD: An eye-catching view of a Church at G-7 decorated with colorful lights during Christmas celebrations. —APP Photo

## CTP issues traffic plan for Christmas

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Traffic Police (CTP) here on Saturday prepared a special traffic plan to be enforced on Christmas Day and Quaid-e-Azam birth anniversary.

According to Chief Traffic Officer, Rawalpindi Taimoor Khan, special squads have been formed to control one-wheeling.

A total 281 Traffic offi-

cials including circle Incharges, Inspectors, Traffic Wardens and Traffic Assistants would be deployed to maintain the flow of Traffic on city roads.

The CTP teams would perform duties in the vicinity of churches and celebration sites on Christmas day.

Special squads would also be deployed to main-

tain the flow of traffic on the occasion.

The motorists would not be allowed to park their vehicles outside churches. As per the plan, parking sites have been established 200 yards away from all churches.

He urged the motorists to cooperate with the traffic wardens so that traffic problems could be averted.



Risk of poliovirus spread

KABUL (Ariana News): The influx of Afghan returnees from Pakistan significantly increases the risk of cross-border poliovirus spread as well as spread within the two countries, the WHO warned. In a statement issued following the meeting of the IHR Emergency Committee for Polio, WHO said that during the past four months, there have been no new WPV1 cases reported from Afghanistan, where the total number of cases remains six, all from Nangarhar province.

Two small dams built

FARAH (TOLONews): Two small water dams costing more than \$300,000 have been completed in Pusht-e-Rod district of Farah province. The cost of building these dams has been paid by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. "These dams are located in Pusht-e-Rod district, and it took six months to complete them. Up to \$310,000 dollars were spent," said Abdul Salam Fazli, deputy governor of the district.

Nadim criticizes foreign intervention in Afghanistan's Affairs

KABUL (TOLONews): The acting minister of higher education, Neda Mohammad Nadim, criticized what he called as the interference of countries in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

Speaking at a madrasa (religious school) graduation ceremony in Kabul, Nadim pointed out that foreign countries use excuses and unfounded criticism to try and paint a negative picture of Afghanistan for the world.

The acting minister of higher education noted that foreign countries want to prevent the implementation of Sharia principles in the country under the name of human rights.

"Sometimes they criticize the hijab, sometimes they criticize stoning, and sometimes they criticize the expression of Islamic rites, and it is the responsibility of the scholars to be careful, and you [the scholars]



confront all that is unjust, misguided," Neda Mohammad Nadim further stated.

Meanwhile, the chief of staff of the Islamic Emirate, Qari Fasihuddin Fitrat, said at the ceremony that US tried to destroy madrassas (religious schools) in the country during its twenty years of presence in Afghanistan.

"Their [America's] main and important goal was to fight against madrassas (reli-

gious schools), to destroy madrassas, and to insult and humiliate madrassas and students, under various titles," Fitrat noted.

However, some religious clerics criticized the misuse of the Islamic Emirate's name by some people and urged the current government to prevent this.

Nearly 140 students graduated from Imam Abu Hanifa Madrasa in the 29th graduating round.

IEA in full control of situation

KABUL (Pajhwok): IEA is in full control of the situation in the country, says a senior Russian diplomat.

"We are building equal relations with them in the interest of trade and economic cooperation," said the head of the Second Asian Department at the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Timofey Boikov as calling IEA a viable negotiating partner for Russia and underlining the need for breaking stereotypes around Afghanistan.

Boikov, taking part in a discussion on Afghanistan at the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the diplomat said Moscow was developing relations with Kabul.

He commented: "We believe the Taliban are capable of coming to agreements. We believe that they are in full control of the situation in the country..."

The diplomat added it was important having a frank discussion on the ground situation in Afghanistan with a focus on removing stigmas surrounding the country.

IE Attachés active in 16 countries: Spokesman

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate said that in addition to the current government's embassies' operations in sixteen nations, their attachés are also active in the political, cultural, commercial, and immigrant sectors.

The spokesman of the Islamic Emirate, Zabihullah Mujahid, said that some attachés are from the previous government and some have been introduced by the Islamic Emirate.

"In some countries, attachés of the previous government are employed, while in other countries, newly appointed attachés have been sent; the majority of them are cultural, economic, commercial, and immigrant attachés who take care of things well," Mujahid said.

In the meantime, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce said that they will soon introduce their new attachés to China and Kazakhstan.

"So far, we have been



able to introduce seven attachés to the countries of Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, and Turkey, and soon new attachés will be introduced to China and Kazakhstan," said Akhundzada Abdul Salam Javad, a spokesman of the ministry.

Some analysts said that Afghanistan will benefit

from the appointment of attachés in various sectors.

"Anyone who is introduced must be an expert and should be introduced based on his/her expertise," Ajmal Zurmati, a political analyst told TOLONews.

"In addition to being beneficial to our country, it

can be very effective in establishing relations between Afghan citizens who live in other countries," Mohammad Ferdous Behguzin, an economist said.

Earlier, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of the Islamic Emirate announced the appointment of trade attachés to Turkey.

200 ethnic conflicts resolved: Ministry

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Borders and Tribal Affairs (MoBTA) said that since the beginning of this year, nearly 200 ethnic conflicts have been handled and resolved in different provinces of the country.

The ministry's spokesman, Hamdullah Fitrat, talked about the efforts to resolve conflicts throughout the country and emphasized that more than 100 other ethnic conflicts are going to be resolved in the

near future as a result of their efforts in different parts of the country.

The ministry's spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat said: "Up to now, 197 ethnic conflicts have been resolved and more than 100 more are in the process of being resolved, and we are trying to resolve these ethnic conflicts as soon as possible."

The MoBTA spokesman reported that after the Islamic Emirate came into power, with the cooperation

of ethnic elders and religious scholars in the country, there were nearly 700 big and small conflicts that have been resolved and turned from enmity to friendship.

Fitrat added: "The biggest conflict among these was in Nuristan, where more than 400 people were killed and both sides lost billions of Afs. In total, 687 people were killed in these conflicts."

Meanwhile, a number of political experts emphasized

the resolution of ethnic conflicts and said that conflict resolution is effective for the unity of the people.

"In those areas where there is enmity between people or tribes, if it is dealt with in the framework of the government, then it is an achievement of the state and it is also in the interest of the people," said Gul Mohammadudin Mohammadi, a political expert.

"If the resolution of conflicts is continued on the basis of ethnic philanthro-

py, then the problems between the people will be solved and the unity will be more stable," said Moeen Gul Samkanai, a political expert.

According to the report of the MoBTA, a commission has been established to resolve ethnic conflicts in the capital of the country, and for each province committees have been established so that all ethnic conflicts can be handled and resolved by these commissions and committees.

Afghan Minister meets with Malaysian envoy

KABUL (Ariana News): Acting Minister of Public Health Qalandar Ibad, during his visit to Malaysia, met with the country's special envoy for Afghanistan in Kuala Lumpur.

The Ministry of Public Health said in a statement on Friday that in the meeting, Ibad said that Afghanistan holds significance as the heart of Asia, and it will not pose any threat to other countries



since it is an independent country.

He added that the doors

of Afghanistan will always be open for any kind of positive engagement.

On the issue of drug addicts, Ibad said that the West and the previous government in Afghanistan could not address the problem in 20 years, but the Islamic Emirate treated the drug addicts in a short period of time.

He stated that currently thousands of men and women are working in the Ministry of Public Health and are receiving training in various fields.

He added that Malaysia is a friendly and brotherly Muslim country and they will continue their efforts for permanent cooperation in the field of health.

According to the statement, Dato Ahmad Azam, Special Representative of Malaysia for Afghanistan, assured that his country will cooperate with Afghanistan in other sectors besides health.

Karimi discusses economic relations with Beijing official



KABUL (TOLONews): The Ambassador of the Islamic Emirate to China, Bilal Karimi, in a meeting with China's Director-General of the Department of Asian

Affairs of the Foreign Ministry, Liu Jinsong, discussed a range of topics including the expansion of economic relations, and the creation of trade facilities.

During the meeting, Liu Jinsong said that they are trying to encourage Chinese investors to invest in Afghanistan. The Afghan Embassy in

Beijing in a statement quoted Jinsong as saying that there is no problem in bilateral relations between Afghanistan and China and joint work is ongoing to strengthen them.

According to the statement, Karimi said the Wakhan Corridor is an important transit and trade route between the two countries, saying that investment opportunities have been provided for Chinese companies in different parts of Afghanistan.

"Liu Jinsong said during the meeting that the Islamic Emirate embassy's activities in China have improved bilateral ties between the two nations. Jinsong said that he is working to encourage

Chinese businesspeople to make investments in Afghanistan. He also expressed hope that an opportunity would be provided for extraction from Mes Aynak. Bilal Karimi said that now with the establishment of security in Afghanistan, the investment opportunity for foreigners has been provided more than before," the Afghan Embassy in Beijing said on X.

"Many issues have been discussed, including security issues; there is security and stability in Afghanistan. Chinese investors and businessmen can come and visit Afghanistan with confidence. Business matters were also discussed, so that

Afghan traders who transfer goods from China to Afghanistan and also from Afghanistan to China will be provided with more facilities on the way," the Islamic Emirate spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said.

The ACCI asked the current government to provide investment opportunities, especially for Chinese investors, in the country. "The closest and cheapest and the most convenient way is the Wakhan Corridor and we welcome it. We ask the Islamic Emirate and China that investment be made here," said Khanjan Alkozi, a member of ACCI.

Some economists consider the expansion of relations between Beijing and Kabul, especially in the

economic sectors, beneficial to the country. "China is one of the influential countries in Afghanistan's economy, and in addition to having a good impact on Afghanistan's economy and playing a good role in trade, it can even play a good role in the region," Qutbuddin Yaqoobi, an economist told TOLONews.

Previously, the acting Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, Attaullah Omari, in a meeting with the head of MCC China Company, pledged that he will cooperate with the company in the acquisition of land around Mes Aynak Logar and Hajigak Mines in Bamiyan.

As Afghan economy struggles, Taliban increasingly looks to go it alone

KABUL: More than two years after the Taliban's takeover, its internationally isolated government is pushing ahead with a plan to make the Afghan economy more self-sustaining, if not outright self-sufficient.

Afghan officials are overseeing the construction of dams and canals to boost agriculture, and tunnels to connect remote provinces. Steel mills work through the night to churn out red-glowing, heavy beams for infrastructure projects.

The Taliban-run government's ambitions, at least in part, are driven by necessity. The Taliban's crackdown on women's rights has worsened its pariah status, stalling efforts to gain control over Afghan central bank reserves held abroad and to secure Western funding. While foreign aid funded three-fourths of the public expenditures before the takeover, the Taliban says it is largely relying on domestic revenue and customs to finance its projects.

Abdul Latif Nazari, a deputy minister of economy, acknowledged in an interview that these financial constraints limit the scope of government projects. "But we're on the right path," he said, "the path that will lead us to self-sufficiency."

For the Afghan population, however, economic conditions continue to deteriorate. The number of Afghans with humanitarian needs has surged by about 60 percent since 2021 and

now represents over two-thirds of the population, according to the United Nations.

And challenges are mounting. Afghanistan's trading partner, Pakistan, is increasingly frustrated with the government in Kabul and has been willing to disrupt economic ties for political purposes. Meanwhile, cash-strapped Afghan business owners and other taxpayers say they're running out of savings to pay for the Taliban-run government's plans.

"Self-sufficiency itself does not mean anything," said Omar Joya, an Afghan economist, unless the Taliban can achieve "economic growth, employment, lower poverty levels and an adequate life so that people can at least meet their basic needs."

Riches below the ground

Taliban officials say a priority is an expansion of oil extraction, drawing on reserves that could eventually cover domestic demand, according to assessments conducted before the Taliban takeover. With new wells, one of Afghanistan's biggest oil fields, located in the Amu Darya basin in the north of the country, could increase its output more than threefold in the coming months, officials projected.

They are also rushing to exploit the country's vast wealth of lithium ore and other minerals, which might be worth almost \$1

trillion, according to a US Defense Department estimate in 2010. Afghan authorities say they struck seven mining contracts earlier this year, worth \$6.5 billion in investment.

It could take years before mining can start on a large scale. Once it does, the Taliban says infrastructure projects now underway will be essential for exporting coal, minerals, as well as vegetables.

In the west of the landlocked country, a railway link with Iran that is being repaired has raised the prospect of Afghan freight trains heading to Iranian sea ports. Meanwhile, repairs at the Salang tunnel in northern Afghanistan were just completed, Taliban officials say, which could ease travel between central and northern Afghanistan and facilitate trade with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

During years of war, long-haul trucking in Afghanistan was obstructed by Taliban attacks and military checkpoints where extortion was common, but a more reliable road network could now help to revive this commerce.

"Afghanistan is standing on its own feet," said Shir Baz Kaminzada, a mining and industry representative and the chief executive of one of the country's largest printing companies, which until not long ago produced NATO leaflets.

But Kaminzada acknowledged that reminders of the

country's international isolation remain ever present. Western manufacturers that used to supply his plants with equipment and banks that facilitated his payments now shun his company, he complained.

He blamed Pakistan for much of the disruption. Afghanistan's industry is rising from the ashes, he said. "They're scared."

Tensions with Pakistan

The more Afghan officials seek autonomy, the more apparent it has become how dependent the country remains on neighboring countries. When trucks carrying agricultural produce headed toward Pakistan this fall, they were repeatedly halted at the border. As politicians traded accusations, pomegranates and onions rotted in the sun.

Pakistan's leadership blames the Afghan Taliban for harboring militants who have staged a mounting number of deadly attacks in Pakistan in recent months. Angered, Islamabad has expelled hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees, seized Afghan imports and imposed restrictions on cross-border trade.

The impact of the political tensions was palpable at the customs department in Kabul on a recent afternoon, where imports from and exports to Pakistan are processed.

As trucks carrying goods arrived at the gate, many of the warehouses were only half-full. Ahmad Khalid

Rahimi, a 45-year-old customs official, was quick to explain that the empty shelves were in no way a reflection of the economy, but rather of the department's efficiency. "Everything is being processed very quickly," assured Rahimi.

"Why are you lying?" whispered a frustrated worker who stood nearby. "We don't have enough supplies these days."

An hour away, at the Milat steel factory on the outskirts of Kabul, the gap between the government's ambitions and reality is evident every day at 4 p.m. when the electricity goes out for about six hours, and the cranes and observation towers lose power.

Hundreds of employees were hired when the factory, central to the Taliban's infrastructure plans, reopened last year. And yet, the factory has in recent months struggled with shortages of electricity.

The Taliban is hoping to use solar energy to make the country's power grid self-sufficient. But for years to come, the Milat steel factory will likely have to compete with the power demands of more than 5 million Kabul residents and the constraints of a grid that has for decades relied on imported electricity.

Despite high demand for the factory's output, Milat Steel recently had to lay off 150 of its 500 workers, said Nasir Ahmad Haqmal, 35,

who supervises production.

Uncertain times

Taliban officials primarily blame the West for many of the challenges. In an interview, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid singled out the United States for freezing \$7 billion in Afghan central bank assets after the Taliban takeover. "First, they occupied our country. And now they occupy our reserves," said Mujahid.

But Afghanistan's new partners could prove challenging, too. While some Chinese companies are positioning themselves to reap a windfall from lithium and other natural resources, the Chinese government's ties to the Taliban remain limited.

Afghanistan is focusing much of its outreach on Iran, but long-standing border tensions over scarce water supplies make political relations between the two countries unpredictable.

Meanwhile, taxes, fees and licenses have become such a burden for some Afghans that they say they're thinking about giving up their businesses.

Ismail Hotak, 25, founded a commercial real estate agency on the outskirts of Kabul last year. Even though business has been dismal, he keeps getting hit with taxes and unexpected fees that he said he didn't know existed.

"If the authorities ask me for any more money, I'll

just close," he said.

Many of these fees existed before the Taliban takeover but were less stringently enforced. Corrupt officials "reduced the cost if we paid them directly. Most of it went into their own pockets," recalled Sahib Khan Ansari, 48, a steel vendor in Kabul.

Ansari said he appreciates the decline in corruption and the increased investments in infrastructure under the Taliban.

But the one thing that would make the economy flourish by clearing the way for foreign aid and investment, he said, would be the reopening of schools for girls.

— Washington Post



KABUL: People shop at a market in central Kabul.





KARACHI: President Dr. Arif Alvi and Caretaker Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Dr. Aneeq Ahmed attending meeting with delegation of Darul Uloom.

## KP public sector varsities issues discussed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An important meeting regarding issues being faced by the public sector universities of the province was held here the other day with the caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice R Syed Arshad Hussain Shah in the chair. Concerned caretaker provincial ministers, administrative secretaries of the relevant provincial departments, Chairman Higher Education Commission and other high ups attended the meeting.

The participants discussed in details the financial issues and administrative matters of the public sector universities and reviewed the various proposals in order to steer the universities out of current financial crunches. Both the provincial government and Higher Education

Commission expressed their commitment to work jointly for addressing the financial and administrative issues being faced by the public sector universities across the province. It was agreed in the meeting, that government's grant to the universities would subject to their improved financial discipline.

The meeting also decided to complete the ongoing process for the appointment of vice chancellors in public sector universities as soon as possible. The participants agreed in principle with the proposal to merge the university campuses having lower enrollments. Similarly, it was agreed to introduce courses in line with the demand of modern market and to ensure implementation of improved educational process as an essential service in the higher educational institutions.

Talking to the participants, the caretaker Chief Minister urged the need to have a comprehensive and all time solution to address the financial issues of government universities in the province adding that his government is moving on to this effect in consultation with all the stakeholders. The Caretaker Chief Minister made it clear that we have to prepare and implement viable financial plans to make public sector universities financially stable and self-reliant.

Underlining the need to align higher education sector with the requirements of contemporary world, he said that it is imperative to introduce market-based courses instead of traditional education in the universities. The caretaker provincial government is very sincere and committed to take all possible steps for this purpose, he remarked.

## SHC restrains utility Cos from providing services

KARACHI (INP): The Sindh High Court (SHC) has restrained utility companies from providing utility services connections to illegal and unauthorized buildings and constructions in the metropolis.

The court said that gas, power and water connections should not be provided to any premises in the Karachi city unless the approved completion of the building plan was produced in original by the applicant. The SHC during a petition regarding utility connections lashed out that where were the CEOs of K-Electric, Sui Gas and Water Corporation.

The lawyer of K-Electric said that CEO Monas Alvi has left for Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah. He said that during temporary connection was provided to houses at time of connection which prevails for one year. The legal representative of the power company further stated that we the teams of K-Electric takes action but were attacked in areas like Lyari but services would not be provided to any building without approval of building plan.

CEO Water Corporation, Salahuddin Ahmed began pardon from SHC and said that no connection of unauthorized building would be provided in future. Lawyer SBGA was of the view that case of collapsing of nine-storey building in Agra Taj Colony has been registering.

Justice Nadeem Akhtar directing the CEOs of Sui Gas, Water Corporation to submitted writing statement said that building constructed without approved plan should not be provided services onwards. Giving six weeks respite to SBGA in Agra Taj Colony building collapse adjourned the hearing till first week of February besides directing complete implementation on court directives.

## Six judges named for election ATs

KARACHI (INP): Sindh High Court has constituted tribunals to hear appeals of election candidates against returning officers decisions on Saturday. The high court has nominated six judges for appellate tribunals.

The court announced that Justice Arshad Hussain, Justice Khadim Hussain Tunio and Justice Adnan Karim will hear appeals in Karachi and Hyderabad. Justice Irshad Ali and Justice Zulfiqar Sanghi will hear appeals in Sukkur, while Justice Saleem Jessar will preside over the tribunal in Larkana to hear appeals about the ROs decisions on nomination papers of election candidates.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) revised the nomination papers schedule for the general elections to be held on February 08, 2024. The election body extended the date of submission of nomination papers by two days and announced that the nomination papers can be submitted upto December 24. Following the nomination paper submission, the preliminary list of the candidates will be published on December 24.

The returning officers will scrutinize the candidates' nomination papers from December 25 till December 30. The polling will be held on February 08, 2024. It is pertinent to mention here that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) wrote a letter to the ECP requesting to extend the date of submitting nomination papers by two days. Earlier, MQM Pakistan and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam had also pleaded to the election commission to extend the date for submission of nomination papers.

National Assembly constituency NA-241 at the Assistant Commissioner office, here. Senior Deputy Convener Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan, Dr. Farooq Sattar submitted nomination papers for NA-240 Karachi. MQM leader Arshad Vohra also filed nomination papers for NA-240 Karachi. Talking to media, Dr. Farooq Sattar said that his party is going to field candidates in the election from all over Sindh province. MQM-P leader Mustafa Kamal filed nomi-

nation papers for NA-247 and NA-242 Karachi. MQM-P Leader Khawaja Izhar ul Hasan submitted nomination papers to contest the election for NA-247 while another MQM-P candidate Rehan Hashmi filed nomination papers for NA-250. Former member of the National Assembly, Shakoor Shad filed nomination papers for NA-239 Karachi. PPP candidate Abdul Hakeem Baloch filed nomination papers for NA-231 Malir Karachi.

# Gaza war's staggering toll reaches a grim milestone: 20,000 dead

RAFAH: Israel's war to destroy Hamas has killed more than 20,000 Palestinians, health officials in Gaza said, as Israel expanded its offensive and ordered tens of thousands more people to leave their homes. The deaths in Gaza amount to nearly 1 percent of the territory's prewar population — the latest indication of the 11-week-old conflict's staggering human toll.

Israel's aerial and ground offensive has been one of the most devastating military campaigns in recent history, displacing nearly 85 percent of Gaza's 2.3 million people and leveling wide swaths of the tiny coastal enclave. More than half a million people in Gaza — a quarter of the population — are starving, according to a report from the United Nations and other agencies. Israel declared war after Hamas militants stormed across the border on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people and taking some 240 hostages. Israel has vowed to keep up the fight until Hamas is destroyed and removed from power in Gaza and all the hostages are freed.

After many delays, the UN Security Council adopted a watered-down resolution calling for immediately speeding up aid deliveries to desperate civilians in Gaza. The United States won the removal of a tougher call for an "urgent suspension of hostilities" between Israel and Hamas. It abstained in the vote, as did Russia, which wanted the stronger language. The resolution was the first on the war to make it through the council after the US vetoed two earlier ones that called for humanitarian pauses and a full cease-fire.

The US also negotiated the removal of language that would have given the UN authority to inspect aid going into Gaza, something Israel says it must do to ensure material does not reach Hamas. Israel's Ambassador to the UN, Gilad Erdan, thanked the US for its support and sharply criticized the UN for its failure to condemn Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks. The US vetoed a resolution in October that would have included a underline because it didn't also underline Israel's right to self-defense.

Hamas said in a statement that the UN resolution should have demanded an immediate halt to Israel's offen-

sive, and it blamed the United States for pushing "to empty the resolution of its essence" before Security Council vote. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, meanwhile, reiterated his longstanding call for a humanitarian cease-fire.

Guterres said nothing can justify Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks, its taking of hostages, its rocket launches against Israel and what he called its use of civilians as human shields. "But at the same time, these violations of international humanitarian law can never justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people, and they do not free Israel from its own legal obligations under international law," the secretary-general said.

Israel, shielded by the United States, has resisted international pressure to scale back its offensive. The military has said that months of fighting lie ahead in southern Gaza, an area packed with the vast majority of the enclave's 2.3 million people, many of whom were ordered to flee combat in the north earlier in the war. Evacuation orders have pushed displaced civilians into ever-smaller areas of the south as troops focus on Khan Younis, Gaza's second-largest city.

The military said late Thursday that it is sending more ground forces, including combat engineers, to Khan Younis to target Hamas militants above ground and in tunnels. It ordered tens of thousands of residents to leave their homes in Burej, an urban refugee camp, and surrounding communities in central Gaza, suggesting a ground assault there could be next.

In the city of Rafah, on the border with Egypt, an airstrike on a house killed six people, according to Associated Press journalists who saw the bodies at a hospital. Among the dead were a married couple and their 4-month-old child, said the infant's grandfather, Anwar Dhair. Rafah is one of the few places in Gaza not under evacuation orders, but it has been targeted in Israeli strikes almost every day.

The air and ground campaign continued in the north, where Israel says it is in the final stages of clearing out Hamas militants. Mustafa Abu Taha, a Palestinian farm worker, said many areas of his hard-hit Gaza City neighborhood of Shijaiyah have become

inaccessible because of massive destruction from airstrikes. "They are hitting anything moving," he said of Israeli forces.

Gaza's Health Ministry said that it has documented 20,057 deaths in the fighting and more than 50,000 wounded. It does not differentiate between combatant and civilian deaths. It has previously said that roughly two-thirds of the dead were women or minors. Israel blames Hamas for the high civilian death toll, citing the group's use of crowded residential areas for military purposes and its tunnels under urban areas.

Israel's military says 139 of its soldiers have been killed in the ground offensive. It says it has killed thousands of Hamas militants, including about 2,000 in the past three weeks, but it has not presented any evidence to back up the claim. For most of the war, Israel also stopped entry of food, water, fuel and other supplies except for truck convoys of aid from Egypt, which cover only a fraction of the needs in Gaza.

Because of insufficient aid entering Gaza, the extent of starvation has eclipsed the near-famines of recent years in Afghanistan and Yemen, and the risk of famine increases each day, Thursday's UN report said. An Israeli military liaison officer said there is no food shortage in Gaza, saying sufficient aid is getting through. "The reserves in Gaza Strip are sufficient for the near-term," Col. Moshe Tetro said from the Kerem Shalom cargo crossing, without elaborating.

Israel opened the Kerem Shalom crossing several days ago amid international demands to increase the flow of aid. But the military struck the Palestinian side of the crossing, killing four staffers, and the UN said it was unable to pick up aid there for delivery. It was not immediately known if the UN resumed work there Friday. The Israeli military said it was targeting militants. The Israel-Hamas war has also pushed Gaza's health sector into collapse. Only nine of its 36 health facilities are still partially functioning, all located in the south, according to the World Health Organization. The agency reported soaring rates of diseases in Gaza, including a five-fold rise in diarrhea and increases in cases of meningitis, skin rashes and scabies. — Arab News

## I believe in character but not vote: Ch Nisar

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Former interior minister Chaudhry Nisar claimed Saturday that he does not want to win elections on behalf of any political party. While addressing an election rally, Chaudhry Nisar said that he wants to win elections solely on behalf of the people of the Sawan. He said that he had successfully served the people of the constituency after grabbing victory in the elections for the first time in 1985.

"In this scenario, Pakistan can only be saved through a miracle. I want to assure you to play a role for a miracle after reaching the assembly. I believe in character but not vote. Everyone knows my services and my symbols can be seen everywhere in the area." "My opponents had only constructed one road but in my tenure, several development projects were completed in this constituency."

Nisar hoped for his 'historical victory' in the February 8, 2024, general elections. He added that he has never disappointed his voters nor involved in any sort of corruption.

The former interior minister said that he is contesting the general elections on two National Assembly (NA) and one Provincial Assembly (PA) seats [as an independent candidate]. He announced to closely monitor the election results and asked his supporters to stay vigilant during the counting of votes and inform him after witnessing any kind of violation.

In March last year, former interior minister and ex-central leader of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) Chaudhry Nisar had hinted at returning to politics after breaking the four-year silence. He said that he has been offered major positions but he kept restricted himself from coming into power for the last four years.

Nisar said that he observed fasting from the power for four years.

"The people of my constituency will never face embarrassment for demanding votes for me. I had never sold my conscience nor anybody could call me corrupt," Chaudhry Nisar, after being elected as an MPA from a Rawalpindi constituency in 2018, took an oath as the provincial lawmaker in May 2021.

The former federal minister had been elected from the Punjab Assembly constituency PP-10 in the 2018 general elections as an independent candidate. He didn't take the oath in protest against alleged rigging which he claimed led to his defeat in the National Assembly's constituency NA-59, Rawalpindi-III. He had decided to take the oath after nearly three years to prevent his disqualification.

## 15 injured in three Quetta blasts

QUETTA (INP): In a tragic incident, a total of three explosions were reported in three different locations in Quetta city leaving 15 individuals injured. According to media reports, blast occurred due to the gas pipeline leakage in Eastern Bypass, Nawan Kali, and Kuchlak, resulting in 15 individuals mostly children.

The rescue sources further claimed that the injured individuals were shifted to Civil Hospital and are being treated in the burn ward. Last week, as many as three individuals were injured in an alleged gas pipeline explosion that was reported in Karachi's Gulshan-e-Iqbal area. According to the initial reports, the blast allegedly occurred in a gas pipeline under the Nipa Bridge near Gulshan-e-Iqbal area. The rescue officials reached the scene and initiated the shifting of the three injured individuals including a woman.

The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) officials confirmed that the explosion that occurred in the gas pipeline was caused by some drug addicts as they lit a fire to smoke drugs under the NIPA bridge. The KMC officer added that the wall of the KMC workshop also collapsed due to the explosion, while no individual was critically injured.

## Massive raid at airport

LAHORE (INP): An Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) has seized a total of more than 912 kilograms of drugs in 10 operations conducted across different locations led to the arrest of 10 individuals, including four women.

At Lahore Airport, a passenger bound for Saudi Arabia was arrested after 58 capsules filled with ice were discovered in his stomach. Similarly, at Multan Airport, another passenger heading to Sharjah was found to have swallowed 52 capsules filled with heroin. In Islamabad, near Chongli No. 26, four women were apprehended with a combined total of 6 kilograms of hashish and 1 kilogram of ice.

## Siraj hails Tehran's support for Palestinian Muslims

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Sirajul Haq has appreciated Tehran's support for Palestinian Muslims, hoping leaders in the Muslim world would adopt a similar strong stance in solidarity with the people of Gaza, who are resisting the atrocities of Israeli forces.

He was talking to Iranian Ambassador Reza Amiri Moghaddam who called on him on Saturday and discussed Pak-Iran relations, regional situation and matters of mutual interests. JI Foreign Affairs Director Asif Luqman Qazi was also present in the meeting.

Sirajul Haq emphasized that the positive relations between Pakistan and Iran

bring benefits to both nations, stressing the need for the two Muslim neighbors to enhance economic ties for regional prosperity and development.

He identified the presence of US forces in different regions as a primary cause of instability and security deterioration. He criticized Washington's unethical and illegal support for Israel, attributing it to the killing and genocide carried out by Tel Aviv forces in Gaza. Despite global demonstrations and calls for a ceasefire by the UN, Israeli forces continued their violent actions in Gaza, resulting in the deaths of thousands, including children and women. He lamented the world's inability to stop

these atrocities.

Connecting the US forces' occupation to instability in Afghanistan and the broader region, the JI chief asserted that the US did not seek positive relations among Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. He called for the three countries to come together and collaborate for the welfare of their people. He highlighted JI's consistent efforts towards harmony and unity within the Muslim Ummah. Moghaddam expressed that Pak-Iran relations are based on mutual respect and Muslim brotherhood. He commended JI's role in supporting Palestinians, viewing the party's efforts positively. He also appreciated Haq's role in promoting sectarian harmony.

## MQM-P, PPP, JI leaders filed nomination papers

KARACHI (INP): Leaders of various political parties filed their nomination papers to contest the general elections 2024 for different Constituencies of the National and provincial assemblies. Ameer Jamat-e-Islami Karachi, Hafiz Naeem-ur-Rehman filed nomination papers for NA-246, NA-250 and Sindh Assembly constituency PS-129 Karachi.

PPP leader Saleem Mandviwala filed his nomination paper to contest the general elections 2024 from

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