

ISLAMABAD (APP): After negotiations with the protestors from Balochistan, the members of the committee formed by Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar, Federal Ministers Murtaza Solangi, Fawad Hasan Fawad and Jamal Shah, established on Sunday a Police Special Help Center for the release of the arrested persons. According to the statement, the process of releasing the arrested persons will be according to the law.

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Govt to investigate complaints about hurdles in electoral process: PM

ISLAMABAD (INP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar has assured that the government would thoroughly investigate the complaints regarding hurdles to stop some people from taking part in the electoral process. While speaking during an interview with a private TV channel, he rule out the policy of ousting anyone from political process and said that voters were free to elect candidates of their choice.

Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar said in his opinion those who showed disruptive behavior and were involved in the incidents of May 9 should not be allowed to hold public office. However, the Election Commission will decide about qualification and disqualification of candidates, he added.

The Prime Minister said state was a guarantor of the social order and when anyone challenges this order he was an anarchist. Regarding arrival of protestors from Balochistan to Islamabad, he said everyone had the right to protest with lawful behavior. However, if a situation of law and order would be created then law enforcement agencies would come into action. Referring to situation in Palestine, PM Kakar said Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was a war criminal and war crimes of Israel should be investigated as 7000 civilians were martyred.

PM stresses upon forging of unity under Quaid's guiding principles: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar has stressed the need to forge unity for the continuity of democracy, peaceful coexis-

tence and rule of law and the elimination of extremist forces. In a message on the observance of the 147th birthday of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of the nation, on Monday, the prime minister said that on this day, they should reaffirm their commitment to national unity and prosperous and progressive Pakistan.

Quaid's principles of 'unity, faith and discipline' should be the guiding principles for all as a nation to realize the democratic state as conceived by their founder," he emphasized. Extending facilitation to the nation on Quaid's birthday, the caretaker prime minister said that the entire nation was celebrating the occasion with zeal, fervour and reverence. He said that they were blessed with a great leader who had led the

Muslims of the sub-continent and at last achieved a separate homeland. Quaid-e-Azam had gathered the Muslims under one banner to wage a struggle for the realization of a separate new Muslim state on the global map. Prime Minister Kakar said that the personality of Q u a i d - e - A z a m Muhammad Ali Jinnah was still a beacon of guidance owing to his unmatched character and extraordinary leadership qualities.

His resolve and undeterred will had infused the Muslims with firm determination and courage to face all the ordeals in the continuation of their struggle and in way of achievement of their great goal, Prime Minister Office Media Wing, in a press release, quoted the prime minister as saying.

Deadline for filing of nomination papers for 2024 elections concludes

ISLAMABAD (INP): December 24 (Sunday) was the last day for submitting the nomination papers for the National Assembly and four Provincial Assemblies.

As per the schedule, scrutiny of the nomination papers will be carried out from tomorrow to the 30th of this month.

Appeals against the acceptance or rejection of

nomination papers can be submitted until the 3rd of January and decisions on these appeals will be made by the 10th of January.

The list of candidates will be displayed on the 11th of January, and candidates would have the option to withdraw until the 12th of January.

The electoral symbols

will be allotted on the 13th of January, and polling for the general elections will be held the 8th of February.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission of Pakistan 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.

Pakistan condemns custodial killing of three Kashmiri civilians in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan on Sunday strongly condemned the barbaric custodial killing of three Kashmiri civilians in Baffliaz, Poonch district of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

The Foreign Office spokesperson in a statement said the slain civilians were tortured to death at a camp of the Indian occupation Army.

A purported video clip of the Indian personnel stripping three men and sprinkling chilli powder on them is viral on social media. She said the incident, once again, exposes India's relentless state of terrorism in IIOJK. The perpetrators of these custodial killings must be held accountable. India's brutal occupation is the root cause of all major issues in IIOJK. The Kashmiri people must realize their inalienable right to self-determination, as enshrined in the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, she added.

Nine of a family dies as house catches fire in Abbottabad

PESHAWAR (APP): At least nine members of a family died after their house caught fire and then collapsed in Abbottabad district on Sunday.

Police said the unfortunate incident occurred at

Tarhairi village Abbottabad in the wee hours of Sunday when the family of Zakir Abbasi was fast asleep.

The deceased included a woman, her four sons and four daughters. The official of Mangal police

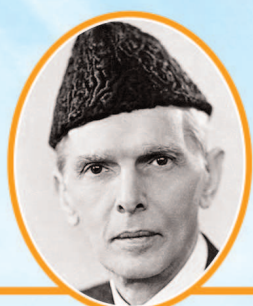
station, Rescue 1122 and local volunteers rushed to the spot and retrieved the bodies. Police said the house, which was made out of wood, caught fire after a short circuit and then collapsed, killing nine on the spot.

Chief Minister discusses financial problems of public universities

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice Retired Syed Arshad Hussain Shah Sunday chaired a high-level meeting wherein a detailed review of the financial problems of public universities and other matters were discussed.

The meeting was also attended by the concerned provincial ministers and administrative secretaries; the chairman of the Higher Education Commission and other officials were also present. The decision was also taken to complete the process for the appointment of vice-chancellors in the government universities of the province as soon as possible. The government has agreed to make grants given to universities subject to the better financial discipline of these universities. The meeting also agreed to merge university campuses with low enrollment with each other. The meeting also agreed to replace the traditional courses of colleges and universities with courses in line with modern market requirements. The financial crisis facing universities is a serious matter, the Chief Minister told the meeting.

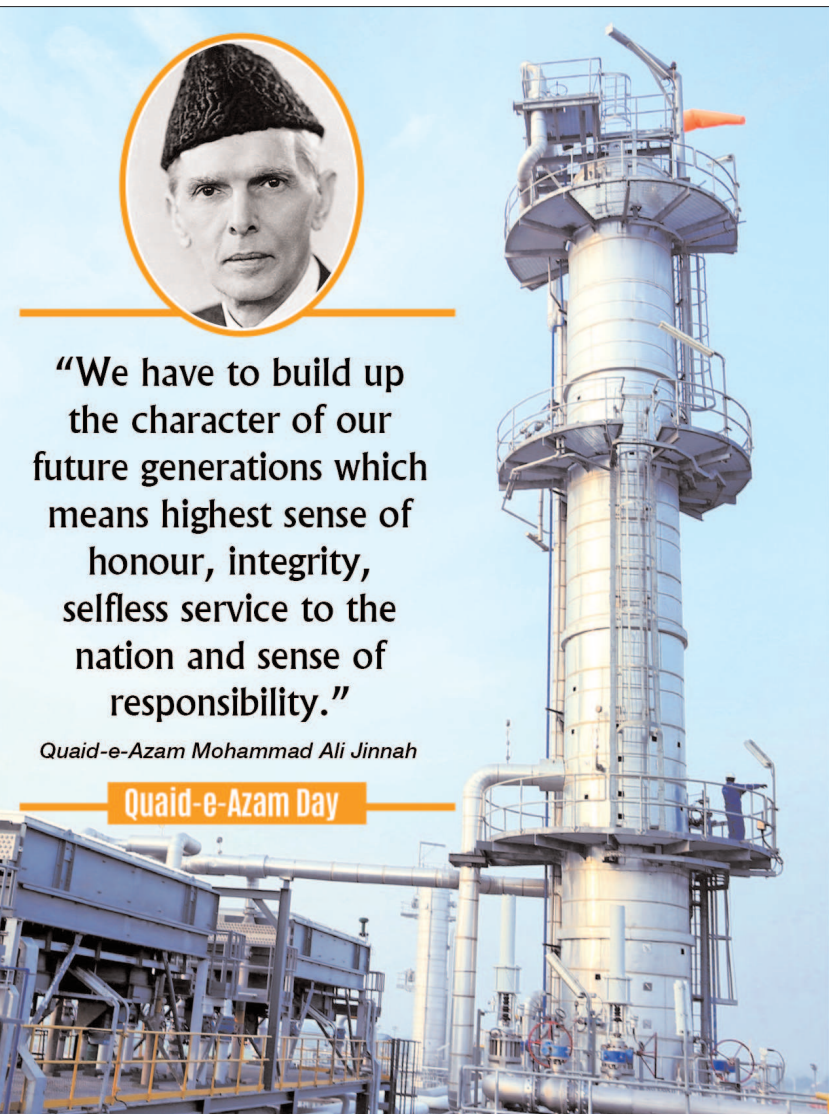
Universities need a comprehensive and full-time strategy to pull them out of this crisis, Arshad Hussain Shah said. The provincial government is moving forward in this regard in consultation with all stakeholders, the caretaker chief minister said. He said workable financial plans should be prepared to make universities financially stable and self-reliant.



"We have to build up the character of our future generations which means highest sense of honour, integrity, selfless service to the nation and sense of responsibility."

Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah

Quaid-e-Azam Day



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ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi calls on caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar.

Bilawal demands judicial investigation of cipher case

LARKANA (INP): Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has demanded judicial investigation of cipher case. Speaking to media in Larkana on Sunday, Bilawal said the cipher case is a serious matter and a judicial investigation must be carried out in this matter.

He said that relief has been given in the cipher case however the Bhutto family went through political victimization that why "we want proper investigation of the cipher case".


The former foreign minister stated that the Ex-president of US Donald Trump was tried in court and classified documents were recovered from his residence

hereby the cipher case also requires investigation and the people of Pakistan should know the truth behind cipher case as it was security breach.


Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto files nomination papers for NA-196: Former Foreign Minister and Chairman of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, has formally submitted his nomination papers for NA-196 (Kamber-Shahdadkot-I), on Sunday. Chairman PPP personally delivered his nomination documents to the Returning Officer in Shahdadkot. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari filed his nomination papers to Returning Officer/Assistant Commissioner Shahdadkot Mohsin Ali Sheikh for NA-196. Earlier, the arrival

of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari at Shahdadkot was met with an enthusiastic reception, as thousands of supporters gathered outside the RO office, expressing their support with fervent slogans, "Wazeer e Azam Bilawal", and a shower of flowers. Party leaders and office-bearers were also in attendance to mark this significant development.

President PPP Sindh Senator Nisar Ahmed Khuro, Mir Nadir Ali Khan Magsi, District President PPP Kamber-Shahdadkot Qammaruddin Gopang, Khurshid Ahmed Junejo, Chairman District Council Larkana Aijaz Ahmed Leghari, Suhail Ahmed Siyal, Ghulam Mustafa Leghari, PPP leaders and others were also accompanied with him.







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We solemnly pay homage to the indomitable spirit and visionary leadership that shaped the destiny of this nation. This Quaid-e-Azam Day, we reflect upon the enduring legacy of a man whose dedication and foresight guided Pakistan through its formative years. His unwavering commitment to justice, equality and the pursuit of a prosperous future for all remains a beacon of inspiration.

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ARGUS



PU holds session with Urdu scholar, signs MoU with KIU Book Club

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab University Library held a session with Urdu scholar and professor at Government Islamia College Civil Lines Lahore, Dr Aurangzeb Niazi. The session explored the intricate nexus between literary criticism and environmental studies, focusing on his latest work. Dr Niazi's exploration extends beyond the human realm to encompass all living beings, promoting a society where humans, animals, trees, birds and other manifestations coexist as equal citizens.

He eloquently points out that the yardstick for environmental studies in literature is fundamentally Western and sheds light on the self-directed deviation from Western literary norms within Urdu texts.

PU Chief Librarian Dr Muhammad Haroon Usmani, Dr Mir Waheed Akhlaq from the Karakoram International University (KIU), Gilgit-Baltistan, and students from that university were also present.

At the event, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was also signed between the PU Library Book Club and KIU Book Club. PU Chief Librarian Dr Muhammad Haroon Usmani, Dr Mir Waheed Akhlaq from the KIU formalised collaboration, symbolising a commitment to exchange of literary ideas and fostering a cultural bridge between the two institutions. Dr Mir Waheed Akhlaq expressed gratitude for the support and cooperation from the PU Library, expressing optimism for future collaborations. Dr Muhammad Haroon Usmani conveyed appreciation for the partnership and highlighted the enriching value of collaboration in the literary landscape.

SMIU VC presents tribute to Quaid-e-Azam

KARACHI (APP): The Vice Chancellor of Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Alma Mater of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Dr Mujeeb Sahrai has presented a great tribute to the founder of Pakistan on his 147th birthday anniversary.

He said that Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was unique in his thinking, character, struggle and actions. He said the Quaid was a popular personality and political leader of the subcontinent during the period when influential figures among Hindus, Sikhs and even Muslims were present, but Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah proved himself to be the beloved leader of the Muslims due to his intelligence, truthfulness, honesty and unparalleled leadership skills and the Muslims of undivided India unanimously accepted him as their leader.

Dr Sahrai has further said that while Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah had a modern concept of the development and efficiency of other sectors for the development of his country and people, he also had a different view and outline about education. Apart from this, he gave great importance to education.

CM orders foolproof security for Christmas

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has ordered foolproof security for Christmas day across the province, and issued directions to Inspector General of Police IGP Dr. Usman Anwar, additional chief secretary (ACS) and additional IG Special Branch in this regard.

The CM ordered to pay special attention to security of churches along with deployment of additional police force. He directed the police and law-enforcement agencies to remain alert and keep a vigil on the miscreant elements. Officers should themselves remain in the field and undertake monitoring of standard operating procedures (SOPs) implementation, said the CM.

Naqvi acknowledged that the Christian community had played a pivotal role in progress and prosperity of Pakistan. "We equally participate in the rejoice of Christian community on the eve of Christmas day," he said and promised that the Christian community would be provided peaceful environment to celebrate the festivities of Christmas day.

CM grieved over loss of lives: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Naqvi has expressed sorrow over the death of nine members of a family in a fire in Abbottabad. The chief minister expressed his heartfelt sympathies with the bereaved family. "We share heartfelt sympathies with the family in this hour of grief," the CM added.

CM condoles death of journalist's father: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has expressed grief over the death of the father of senior journalist Nauman Sheikh. In a condolence

message, he expressed his heartfelt sympathies and grief with the bereaved family. Mohsin Naqvi prayed for peace to the departed soul and fortitude to the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss with equanimity.

CM appoints minister to oversee projects in Rawalpindi: In a strategic move to expedite developmental projects in Punjab, Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has appointed Dr. Jamal Nasir, the Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare and Population Welfare, to monitor initiatives in Rawalpindi.

The decision, outlined in a press release on Sunday, aims to ensure timely completion of key projects, including the construction and upgrade of Holy Family Hospital and maintenance of 36 roads. Dr. Jamal Nasir is set to employ a transparent approach, regularly updating the Chief Minister on project progress through visual reports on WhatsApp.

The minister underscored his commitment to implementing the Chief Minister's vision, vowing that Rawalpindi will experience the benefits of the 'Mohsin Speed.' He listed top priorities, emphasizing a strict no-compromise stance on quality, with immediate action against any lapses or substandard work. Furthermore, Dr. Jamal Nasir assured relief measures for Rawalpindi residents, aligning with the Punjab government's initiatives.

He highlighted the bureaucracy's dedication to zero tolerance for corruption in project implementation, overseen by the chief secretary, and clarified that all ministers were entrusted with ensuring project completion according to deadlines across the province.

Bilawal-pays tributes to Quaid on birthday

KARACHI (APP): Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, has paid rich tributes to Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah on his 147th birthday anniversary, to be celebrated on Monday.

In a message on the eve of his birthday, Bilawal said that as we celebrate the birthday of our Quaid, let us reflect on his steadfast commitment to justice, equality, and the principles that define the essence of Pakistan.

He further said that Quaid-e-Azam was a democratic visionary leader whose unwavering dedication paved the way for the creation of our beloved country, Pakistan. "Our Quaid's indomitable spirit and unparalleled leadership continue to inspire generations, reminding us of the ideals upon which our great nation stands," he added.

The PPP Chairman said that the PPP steadfastly upholds the visionary ideals and objectives of the nation's founder, working towards the realization of an inclusive, democratic, and progressive Pakistan. He pointed out that Quaid-e-Azam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto fulfilled Quaid-e-Azam's vision by presenting the historic unanimous Constitution in

1973—a democratic structure grounded in the principles of equal rights for all and laying the groundwork for a robust defence—and added that in the face of the heartbreaking loss of her father, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto fearlessly took up the mantle, dedicating her life to the noble causes of democracy and uplifting the marginalized, ultimately making the ultimate sacrifice in the pursuit of these lofty ideals.

Former "President Asif Ali Zardari, during his presidency, diligently worked to bolster the ideals and objectives set forth by Quaid-i-Azam, achieving a significant milestone through the restoration of the 1973 constitution to its authentic form via the 18th constitutional amendment," he added. He said that Quaid-e-Azam envisioned a Pakistan that stands as a beacon of democracy, progress, and inclusivity, where every citizen, irrespective of colour, caste, or creed, enjoys equal opportunities, adding that in the present moment, the call to uphold this philosophy has never been more pressing. "In unity, we stand resolutely against ideologies seeking change through coercion instead of the ballot, all while unwaveringly adhering to the principles of democracy," he concluded.

WAPDA chairman visits K-IV project to review construction progress

LAHORE (APP): WAPDA Chairman Lt-Gen (retd) Engineer Sajjad Ghani visited Greater Karachi Bulk Water Supply Scheme (K-IV Project) to review progress on the project.

According to WAPDA spokesman here on Sunday, the K-IV project envisages to provide 650 million gallon per day (MGD) to Karachi from Keenjhar lake. The project will be completed in two phases. At present, WAPDA is constructing Phase-I, which is scheduled for completion in October 2024. Phase-I of K-IV Project will supply 260 MGD to Karachi. PC-I cost of the project is Rs 126 billion, expenditure till date is Rs 40 billion and accumulative progress of 40 per cent has been

achieved. General Manager (Projects) South, Chief Engineer/Project Director K-IV and representatives of the Consultants and the Contractors were also present during the chairman's visit.

The chairman visited in detail several sites of the project and witnessed construction work going on there. The project team briefed the chairman about the progress achieved so far. It was briefed that construction activities are continuing on all eight sites of the project. These sites include intake structure, pumping stations, water conveyance system consisting of pressurized pipes, reservoirs and filtration plants, project offices, colony and the approach road.



ISLAMABAD: Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali calls on Governor of Balochistan Abdul Wali Kakar at Balochistan House Islamabad.

Youths urged to follow in Quaid-i-Azam's footsteps

LAHORE (APP): Experts on Sunday urged students and youths to follow Quaid-i-Azam's principles, who always advised them to pay special attention to their studies and develop a strong academic foundation for the motherland to succeed.

Talking to APP in connection with the 147th birth anniversary of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, experts said he was a great thinker and politician, who believed in serving people and discipline. He was a sagacious and visionary leader and under his able leadership, workers of the Pakistan Movement sacrificed their lives for establishment of an independent Islamic state, they opined.

They maintained, "Our great leader stressed a sound sense of discipline, character-building and a solid academic background. To achieve all that, youths' first obligation should be serving themselves, their parents and the State."

Idara Nazriya-e-Pakistan Senior Vice Chairman Mian Farooq Altaf told APP that Pakistan has been blessed by Allah Almighty and we should be proud to be a free Pakistani. Jinnah was a great leader who defeated all conspiracies of the Britishers and Hindus and created Pakistan. We were the fourth largest economy in Asia.

God willing, the period of despair will end soon and we would once again be on the road to growth," he asserted.

He said that the epoch struggle and leadership of Quaid-i-Azam had become the means of creation of Pakistan and "today we are breathing in a free atmosphere

because of his struggle. Quaid-i-Azam was a great human being, from whose life we can learn a lot. His opponents also testified to the fact. He was a courageous and a fair man, who always believed in the rule of law." Idara Nazriya-e-Pakistan Secretary Naheed Imran Gul told APP that the organisation was educating the new generation about the vision, life and services of Quaid-i-Azam and his colleagues, adding Quaid-i-Azam used to urge students to value time, pay attention to education and lead a disciplined life.

He 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 Jammu and 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 stay away from elements which spread hatred and despair. MA Jinnah believed in objective and constructive politics."

He urged youths to follow in his footsteps, urging students to make the saying of Quaid-i-Azam "work, work and work" as their motto, adding adopt the habit of studying. Quaid-i-Azam always gave a message to students to pay full attention to the acquisition of knowledge, he added.

Pakistan Movement Secretary Mohammad Saifullah Chaudhry said that two days before the declaration of March 23, 1940, the

founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah hoisted the flag in Manto Park. "Despite reports of attacks during the journey from Delhi to Lahore, Quaid-e-Azam did not give up his journey. Quaid advised students to pay special attention to their studies and develop a strong academic foundation to succeed."

He quoted the saying of the great leader that "without education it is complete darkness and with education it is light. Education is a matter of life and death to our nation. The world is moving so fast that if you do not educate yourselves, you will be not only completely left behind but will be finished up. The Holy Prophet (S.A.W) had enjoined his followers to go even to China in the pursuit of knowledge. If that was the commandment in those days when communications were difficult, then truly Muslims as the true followers of the glorious heritage of Islam should surely utilize all available opportunities.

No sacrifice of time or personal comfort should be regarded too great for the advancement of the cause of education." December 25 will dawn with gun salutes in the federal and provincial capitals, after which a graceful changing of the guard's ceremony will be held at the mausoleum of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah in Karachi.

Officials will lay wreaths at Quaid's Mazar and offer Fatiha. Moreover, official ceremonies and events have been scheduled throughout the country to pay tribute to Quaid's life, political struggles, and role in the creation of Pakistan.

Promoting e-vehicles to reduce pollution, oil import bill

LAHORE (APP): In view of the global energy problems and the fluctuating oil prices, often costing much to consumers, many countries are shifting their vehicles to electric power to reduce oil import expenditures. Economic giants like United States and China are already leading in race to manufacturing or altering existing vehicles to electric power for saving foreign exchange and ensuring cleaner environment.

However, the developing countries that are already overburdened due to oil import bill are yet to embark on this journey commonly due to lack of technology and awareness among masses. Pakistan also entered the race two years back by manufacturing and assembling electric bikes with number of companies still struggling for a potential market for e-bikes.

Despite being a potential sector of our economy, this sector could not click generally due to consumers' aptitude and market acceptance to complete replacement of the conventional motor bikes. Therefore, efforts were required to boost this sector to cut down oil import bill and address issues like trade deficit and balance of payments.

"Jolta Electric had launched indigenously developed e-bike at very affordable price two years back but it could not penetrate the local market," said Rehan Zaffar, Electrical Engineer at an e-bike company.

"This bike could not get desired acceptance commonly due to lack of awareness," he said. "Same happened with a locally manufactured three-wheeler auto rickshaw due to price variation."

Rehan Zaffar mentioned that promotion of e-vehicles was directly linked to manufacturing of batteries especially the lithium ion type. "Lithium batteries assembling or manufacturing in our country is insufficient to cater the needs of switching over vehicles to electricity," he commented. "Therefore, we need to increase number of companies manufacturing lithium ion type batteries as battery is a major component of e-bike/EVs (electric

vehicles).

The public response to e-vehicles previously gauged through pricing, aftermarket sales and maintenance is now changing due to another important component – the oil prices.

As most of cities in Punjab are badly hit by smog every year, shifting to e-vehicles would also help tackle this nuisance by reducing vehicular emission across the country despite that some people have concerns about safety, infrastructure, aftermarket support, price, durability and design of these vehicles.

However, the e-bike is gradually attracting people as they desire to cut down their expenditures on fuel. But, by the time majority among them cannot afford the e-bikes prices being offered by local assemblers, manufacturers, importers and dealers.

People with low budget prefer to modify their conventional motorbikes by installing some electric parts and batteries from vendors available in local market.

Although Chinese e-bikes and parts presently dominate the auto market amidst a perception of their being inexpensive, even then a large number of motorbike users are unable to shift to e-bikes.

"An e-bike generally needs an overnight charging of 1.5 units at home that is sufficient for 80km ride," informed Yasir Mushtaq, an e-bike importer and dealer. "Such a bike only costs consumers Rs 1,500 per month as compared to Rs 8,000-10,000 expenditure for petrol-driven 70cc bike."

"Promotion of EVs would surely and substantially cut down country's oil import bill and reduce pollution and environmental losses," he said. The Punjab government and Engineering Development Board (EDB) are diligently working on promotion of e-bikes and many local and foreign companies have expressed willingness to carry out local assembly of e-bikes.

"The government is all set to promote cost-effective e-bikes to control smog and cut down oil import bill," remarked Caretaker

Provincial Transport Minister Ibrahim Hasan Murad.

"As first step, we shall provide e-bikes on lease to government employees while students of universities and colleges would also be supported financially to get e-bikes," he said. "Prime objective of this initiative is to protect environment of urban areas and minimize use of expensive oil fuels," the minister said. "The e-bikes with zero-emission would emerge as a cost-effective and eco-friendly alternative to motorbikes." Hasan Murad also emphasized on Electric Vehicles Policy to ensure healthy environment and cost effective travelling.

Caretaker Provincial Minister for Planning and Development, Bilal Afzal also at a recent meeting of the committee constituted for provision of e-bikes to students of colleges and universities, decided to extend them financial assistance to buy electric bikes on easy installments with the collaboration of Bank of Punjab (BoP). "Let us formulate a rational model and submit a report to Punjab Cabinet for approval on this matter," he remarked during a briefing by Provincial Transport Secretary Ahmed Javed Qazi on manufacturing, pricing, market analysis of electric bikes, conditions for applicants, details of computerized draw, online application process by PITB and the BoP's "Post-Purchase Reimbursement Model" for supply of e-bikes. The scheme is expected to be launched soon.

"The e-bike would sway the local auto markets due to anticipated entry of a number of e-bike assemblers and manufacturers next year," said Tayyab Elahi, Marketing Manager of a local e-bike company. "E-bikes are expected to revolutionize local market with vast majority of people – male and female showing interest in buying them."

What needed is to be aware and financially facilitate people in buying e-bikes besides ensuring that ample electricity is available for them to recharge batteries of their vehicles.



LAHORE: Punjab Governor Balighur Rahman is addressing the Christmas celebrations event at Governor House.



‘Youth to be equipped with different skills’

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa caretaker minister for sports, youth affairs, science and technology Dr Najeeb Ullah Sunday said that provision of different skills to youth is need of the hour, saying skill development program is not only strengthening country but will also help to get rid of unemployment giant.

Appreciating the Caretaker Chief Minister initiative of “Skilling

Youth” program, he added that through the said program 0.5 million youth will be trained for getting skills in various sectors. He said these while chairing a meeting regarding skilling youth programs. Director General Science and Information Technology KP Sajid Hussain Shah, Director China Study Center University of Peshawar, Dr Kausar Takreem and other officers attended the meeting.

Dr Kausar gave a

detailed presentation on courses and programs offered by the Zhenghe College of China. She said that the educational concept of Zhenghe College is production, study and industry, adding she said college is more focused on the practice knowledge of students and more focus on the employment of the talents.

“Students of the last educational semester of Zhenghe college system will be sent to China through student exchange

while jobs will be offered in all the countries who have joined Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on completion of their training,” Dr Kausar said.

The caretaker minister Dr Najeeb Ullah said that the youth will be trained in skilling youth programs in different sectors including education, agriculture, science and information technology, paramedics, sports, youth affairs, vocational and technical training industry department and others.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah chairing a meeting regarding technical and vocational training programme for youth.

Minister greets nation on Jinnah Day

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Caretaker Minister for Information, Culture and Tourism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel on Sunday extends warm congratulations to the nation on the auspicious occasion of Jinnah Day, celebrating the birth anniversary of Quad-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah (25th December).

In commemorating the legacy of the founding father, Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel acknowledges the significance of this day in Pakistan’s history.

He emphasizes the values of unity, faith, and discipline advocated by Jinnah, which continue to guide the nation.

The caretaker minister urges citizens to reflect on the principles upheld by Quad-e-Azam and work collectively towards a prosperous and harmonious future.

He expresses confidence that by embracing Jinnah’s vision, Pakistan can overcome challenges and achieve new milestones. Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel encourages citizens to engage in activities that promote national unity and uphold the ideals of Jinnah. As the nation unites to celebrate Jinnah Day, he calls for a renewed commitment to building a strong, inclusive, and progressive Pakistan through hard work.

Security plan formulated

PESHAWAR (APP): In preparation for the Christmas festivities in the city, Peshawar Police on Sunday implemented comprehensive security arrangements, unveiling a full-fledged security plan to deploy over 2000 police personnel and officers who will execute security duties.

Expert marksmen are assigned to strategic positions around all churches, while thorough security measures are in place at prominent buildings near worship sites.

Checkpoints, including bomb disposal and sniffer dogs teams, will be deployed in the vicinity of all churches.

To enhance security effectiveness during Christmas, responsibilities have been specifically delegated to Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), Bomb Disposal Unit (BDU), Ababel Squad, City Patrolling, and Sniffer Dogs, along with Lady Police. Local police will also play a crucial role, with special responsibilities assigned to ensure surveillance via CCTV and control rooms.

Murderer sentenced for death penalty

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Additional District and Session Judge (AD&SJ) Peshawar convicted murdered named Imran for death penalty twice in killing/slaughtering of two relative women during robbery on 25th September 2014.

It is worthy to mention that the case was remanded back by Federal Shariat Court for fresh trial as the culprit was previously convicted for two times life-time imprisonment. Moreover, another alleged culprit named Bilal is still absconder from the court of law.

The counsel Ishfaq Ahmad Afridi advocate argued that belonging of deceased in the shape of Jewellery and watch was recovered at the time of arrest. He added that accused Imran led the local police to Sialkot and recovered further incriminating articles in shape of jewellery were recovered.

As well as the accused Imran confess his guilt

before Learned Judicial Magistrate and narrated the plan and preparation of this tragic and callous incident along with his absconding accused Bilal, as the story of prosecution and confessional statement of accused Imran were in line, the counsel argued.

According to details, police registered First Information Report on the complaint of Jameel Anwar against unknown accused on 25/9/2014 Under Section 17(4) Haraba, 411, 412 PPC and 15AA at Police Station Faqeer Abad for murder of his mother and wife of his brother as two innocent ladies were slaughtered brutally and gruesome manner and Jewellery and cash were stole.

The local police were investigating on different aspect in such like crimes it was a difficult and challenging task for police to arrest the main culprit/culprits finally on 13/10/2014 accused Imran resident of Shabqadar was arrested along with belonging of deceased (Jewellery) and

some stolen incriminating articles in the shape of jewellery hidden in the District Sialkot (Punjab) where accused Imran led the police to Sialkot further jewelry was recovered on the pointing of the accused at under construction Green marriage Hall.

Wherein husband of Imran’s sister was a security guard namely Ibrahim was also made a witness of incriminating Articles in shape of Jewellery. Ibrahim was also appeared in court and testify against his brother in law (accused Imran).

Accused Imran made confession before Learned Judicial Magistrate and confess the brutal murder (slaughter)of both the innocent ladies and stealing Jewellery and cash amount he also named his co accused Bilal (still absconding). Thereafter, on 21/10/2014 complainant charged the maternal relative accused Imran and Bilal for the murder of his mother and wife of his brother.

AD&SJ orders CCPO for FIR against SHO

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Additional District and Session Judge Peshawar Nadeem Muhammad ordered Chief Capital City Police for registration of First Information Report (FIR) against Station House Officer (SHO) Faqirabad in abduction of citizen as well as obtaining ransom.

The judge ordered further order for investigation to be assign to senior officer of crime branch not below the Rank Senior Superintendent of Police.

The counsel Syed Naeem Bukhari advocate informed that 24/11/2023 SHO

Faqirabad along with SHO Parhupura raided petitioner’s residence at Daman Hinki suburb of Peshawar without lady police. He added that had violated right to privacy and social dignity.

Earlier, judicial magistrate had discharged petitioner’s brother Asim from fake case of rakehell after five to six days of illegally apprehended by police, the counsel argued. He further added that police didn’t charged his brother nor Akhtar Ali who was present as guest after one month and argued that obtained Rs1 lac 20 thousand as ransom through a middle man named Hilal.

The counsel argued that SHO is still threatening petitioner while demanding more ransom by mobile phone. He argued that it is unconstitutional and violation of fundamental rights.

The counsel contended that evidences and witnesses are available against concerned SHO for abduction of citizens and obtaining ransom which is illegal as well as a non-bailable offense.

The court ordered Capital City Police Officer for registration FIR against concerned SHO and to assign investigation to senior officer alike SSP of Crime Branch.



PESHAWAR: Secretary Auqaf, Minority Affairs Bishop Ernest Jacob with others participating during Christmas cake cutting ceremony organised by CSF.

Mayor says education guarantee of development for any nation

PESHAWAR (APP): Mayor Peshawar Zubair Ali has said that education is the basic need of every human being which is also a guarantee of development for any nation or society.

Mayor of Peshawar Haji Zubair Ali was the chief guest at the annual day ceremony of the University Model School. Professor Dr. Saleem, former Provincial Minister Amanullah Haqqani, Principal and other members of various faculties were also present with him.

Addressing the ceremony, Mayor Peshawar Haji Zubair Ali said that the need for education is very important in today’s era. No matter how much time has progressed, the importance of education has its own destiny, he added.

A good society can be formed due to moral education, teachers are indispensable for the achievement of education, who help children to achieve higher education, he said, adding, there are lively teachers in the educational environment, without whom education cannot be imagined.

On this occasion, Mayor Peshawar said: “I received

my intermediate education from Municipal Inter School and College Wazir Bagh and Master from Peshawar University. “What I am today because of the teacher’s guidance,” he said, adding, “I am trying to fulfill the needs of every educational institution.” He said all facilities would be provided to the students in their schools and colleges for which a

plan has already been chalked out.

He said an ambulance for the first aid treatment for the students would be provided besides distribution of sports equipment and cash incentives for the position holders’ students. Under the supervision of the University Model School, Rs. 01 million will be given to those who got positions.

Mayor Peshawar also announced construction of new hostel rooms and its renovation and more guidance for sports activities.

The teachers, he said, have an excellent role in shaping the students to the right path.

On this occasion, Mayor Peshawar also inaugurated the Annual Sports Gala of the University Public School.



PESHAWAR: Shazia Naz Mujahida submitting nomination papers for PK-79 for General Election at Provincial Election Commissioner Office.

Submission of nomination papers in KP continued

PESHAWAR (APP): Submission of nomination papers continues Sunday as well in KP in connection with general elections.

Candidates are submitting papers for 13 provincial and five national assembly seats with more than 250 papers were received for five National Assembly seats in KP, an official of the Election Commission said here. He said, 58 candidates from KP have submitted papers for five seats of National Assembly and more than 700 papers will be received for thirteen seats in KP.

The official of the Prov-

incial Election Commission also confirmed that more than 170 papers have been collected so far for the seats of KP and 70 candidates have submitted their papers for the seats reserved for women in the National Assembly from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

So far 229 candidates have submitted their papers for reserved seats for women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the official of the Election Commission said.

Bikour, Sher Afzal file nomination papers for NA 32: Veteran politician and former Federal Minister, Ghulam Ahmed Bilour

and leader of Pakistan Tahrir e Insaaf Sher Afzal Marwat has filed nomination papers for the national assembly (NA 32) constituency Peshawar.

According Election Commission KP Office, over 10 candidates filed nomination papers for the above constituency for February 8 General Election 2024.

Similarly, former Chief Minister KP Mahmood Khan has filed nomination papers for NA2, NA3 and NA 4 Swat. He also submitted nomination papers for PK-4 Swat.

Similarly, 53 nomination papers were filed for women reserved seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Today is the last day of filing of nomination papers.

INP adds, Tiktoker Sandal Khattak files nomination papers on women’s reserved seat: TikTok sensation Sandal Khattak also jumped into politics and submitted nomination papers for reserved seats for women from KP.

Sandal did not reveal her political affiliation with the political party. Tiktoker said she stepped forward into politics to solve problems in her native area.

“Empowering women will be my goal,” Sandal said.

A transgender Sobia Khan has approached the Peshawar High Court (PHC), highlighting the issue of the non-allocation of seats for transgender individuals in elections.

Sobia Khan is running for PK-81. Sobia Khan, KP’s first transgender radio jockey, runs as an independent candidate, stressing her dedication to advocating for women’s and children’s rights. While another transgender Nayab Ali has been contesting NA-47 Islamabad.

It is pertinent to note that in the 2018 elections, Maria—transgender candidate—ran independently in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, securing 536 votes and surpassing the vote counts of female candidates. Sobia Khan, advocating for the rights of transgender, has submitted candidacy papers as an independent candidate from constituency PK-81.

The petition argued that since transgender have the right to vote, it is imperative that they also have the right to contest elections.

Household pollution posing serious threats to public health, environment

PESHAWAR (APP): The increasing level of household pollution both in the shape of biomass and solid waste generation is posing serious threats to public health and the environment of the city.

The air quality index in Peshawar in the current winter season has belled the alarm by recording a dangerous stage of more than 236 pollution levels; raising the status of the city to the most polluted in the country. According to environmental experts, the major source of air pollution is vehicular emission followed by household pollution in shape of the burning of fossil fuel, wood and waste for cooking at home.

A recent study by Peshawar Clean Air Alliance (PCAA), a volunteer association of civil society individuals, found that transport is contributing 58.46 percent in air pol-

lution and is followed by household pollution making a contribution of 11.66 percent while waste burning 4.1 percent and dust 17.67 burning.

It showed that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has one of the highest proportions of wood fuel usage, particularly in rural households and about half of Peshawar population lives in rural area. According to 2017 census, about 138000 households in Peshawar used wood as fuel for heating.

The study titled ‘Status of Air Pollution in Peshawar’ finds that the annual Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5) in Peshawar has ranged between 61.40 ug/m3 and 80.09 ug/mg3, exceeding the current national and provincial standards by 4 to 5 times and WHO air quality guidelines by 12-16 times.

High level of PM 2.5 have a considerable

impacts on the population of Peshawar as the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) estimates that citizen of Peshawar can add up to 2.3 years to their life expectancy if air quality level meets the WHO’s guidelines.

“Peshawar has been declared as the third most polluted city in Pakistan and the 9th most polluted in the world in the 2021 World Air Quality report,” says Dr. Adil Zareef, a public health expert and convener of PCAA.

Talking to APP, Dr. Adil said while evaluating the current year data of Peshawar air quality, the city has jumped from third most polluted city in Pakistan to number one. In November and December 2023, sometimes the air quality index of Peshawar crossed the pollution level of Lahore, the most polluted city of Pakistan.

He said according to

Health Department Report, around 93,000 cases of pneumonia have been reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the current year, an indication of an increase in chest and respiratory problems mainly due to toxic air.

“It’s time for chalking out a multi-sectorial policy to air pollution and safe public from different health-related ailments connected with poor air quality,” Dr. Adil stressed.

“Introduction of ‘Environmental Green Police’ can be given a regulatory authority under Environment Protection Agency (EPA) KP to impose environmental penalties on the offenders as is practiced in many countries,” he suggested.

Green policing can also help in implementation by the regulatory authorities, as the visibly emitting vehicle should be considered a

public crime and banned from plying on streets through strict administrative measures.

“Improving air quality is a long-term effort and requires a shared vision that’s longer than the political cycle and a multi-sectoral approach,” opined Dr. Asif Khan, a consultant on Climate Change and Water for Asian Development Bank (ADB).

An interactive partnership among the civil society, academia, and public health experts and government can realize the vision for a healthy Peshawar, Asif added.

“Apart from air pollution, accumulation of solid waste is also a big issue regarding household pollution,” observed Fawad Prizada, a young environmental activist from Peshawar.

Fawad has developed a mobile app for lifting

garbage from homes and its proper disposal to keep the city’s environment clean.

Holding BS degree in Computer Science (CS), Fawad Pirzada, a city dweller, obtained training from the National Incubation Center (NIC) and developed the app to continue with his passion of protecting the environment and also make some earning through it.

Titled as ‘The Kabari’ (Garbage collector), the app provides a facility to people at their doorstep for removal of garbage gathered in their homes causing a nuisance for inmates.

Fawad said the app is launched around two months earlier and is restricted to a specific area of Peshawar. He said Peshawar is generating around 1000 tonnes of solid waste on daily basis and proper disposal of such a huge quantity waste not

only requires resources but also scientific approach.

Fawad stressed spreading awareness about income generation from solid waste through its segregation. He said he is also earning from Kabari App and such initiatives needed to be taken by a large number of people in other parts of the city.

Fawad said the charges he made for scarp collection and for payment of used items is very reasonable and up to the satisfaction of customers.

“The population of Peshawar is more than four million and at the same time, the city’s solid waste generation almost doubled in the last few years from 580 tonnes per day in 2014 to more than 1,000 tonnes,” shared Sajid Ali, an official of Water and Sanitation Services Peshawar.

The Peshawar Cantonment Board, an

independent municipality on military-controlled land, produces an additional 60 tonnes of waste on a daily basis.

Under this growing burden, the city has struggled to find a suitable site to dump its waste. However, the scientific way of disposal of solid waste requires a lot of financial resources, he added.

Sajid also urged Peshawar dwellers to take part and cooperate with public sector entities in the resolution of these problems posing severe threats to public health.

He said without the cooperation and support of people, WSSP alone cannot remove all the dirt and waste left by people.

Citizens have to show responsibility regarding proper disposal of waste by avoiding litter and making their environment clean and green, he added.



In brief

Mother, daughter killed

MULTAN (APP): A woman and her daughter were killed while son sustained injuries as a truck crushed them near Raawan bypass at Tataypur road. According to Rescue officials, 22 years old youngster named Shoban s/o Rafiq resident of Basti Allahabad was going along with his mother Hasina Mai and sister Shumaila Bibi riding on motorcycle. Suddenly the motorcycle collided with a truck and ran over them. As a result, both women died on the spot while youngster sustained injuries. Rescue 1122 teams shifted the bodies and injured to Nishtar hospital in presence of police.

6 of same family submit papers

KHARIAN (INP): The process of submitting nomination papers for February 8 election is continuing in Kharian as six members of the same family including a woman have filed their nomination papers from the NA-62 and PP-28 constituencies. Five brothers, Abid Raza, Naem Raza, Shahid Raza, Shabbir Ahmad and Muhammad Ali Tanveer, and one sister-in-law filed the nomination papers and they will contest elections against each other from the NA-62 constituency. The woman, Saadia Shahid is the wife of Shahid Raza. Abid Raza is former MNA, Naem Raza is ex-Advisor to Punjab CM while Shabbir Ahmad is former MPA. Muhammad Ali Tanveer is former district chairman while Shahid Raza is former UC Nazim.

9 bootleggers arrested

MULTAN (APP): Police said on Sunday that they have arrested nine bootleggers and recovered 227 litres of wine during separate raids in the last 24 hours. According to a spokesperson for police, Jalalpur police arrested outlaw Bilal and recovered 30 litres of wine. Cantt police seized 10 litres of wine by arresting Fiaz Hussain, 15 litres from Muhammad Riaz and others. Separate cases have been registered against the arrested accused.

12 gamblers arrested

MULTAN (APP): Police claimed to have arrested 12 gamblers and recovered stake money from their possession during the crackdown. According to details, SHO Seetal Marri police station Khalid Hussain along with his team raided and arrested 12 gamblers. The police have also recovered Rs 20,000 stake money from their possession. Police have registered cases against the gamblers.

Police officials to perform duty

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): District police on Sunday have issued security plan regarding Christmas as 400 police officials and personnel would perform duty. Foolproof security arrangements have been made as workshops would be held at 23 churches while three churches declared sensitive. Monitoring through CCTV cameras and strict checking at entrance and exit points of churches would also be ensured. DPO Syed Hussain Haider has directed all police officials to ensure foolproof security arrangements during Christmas. All the officials have been directed to visit churches and review CCTV and other arrangements along with church administration.

Papers submission for polls continued

SWABI (APP): The process of submitting nomination papers for the elections of two national and five provincial constituencies of the Swabi district continued.

The process of submitting nomination papers have been continued to National Assembly Constituency NA-19 Swabi-I wherein Maulana Khalil Ahmad Mukhalis, former MNA of JUI ideology, Miraj Humayun, Dr.

Shireen, Dr. Fazal Elahi of PTI submitted their nomination papers.

From NA 20 Swabi-II Maulana Mufti Naveed Haqqani of JUI, Irfan Sher of PTI, Maulana Hussain Ahmed Haqqani of JUI from Constituency 50 Swabi 2 of Provincial Assembly. Imtiaz Zeb from PK 51 Swabi-III to JUI Sardar Ali Former MPA, Mustajab Khan Advocate, Maulana Shahabuddin,

Maulana Habib Rahman, Qari Sher Ali, Dr. Asif Ali, Ijaz Ali Advocate of Jamaat-e-Islami, Haji Zibar Azad, Syed Manwar Shah of PTI, PTI's Irfan Sher and Dr. Fazal Elahi from PK 52 Swabi 4, Haji Burhanullah of Qaumi Watan Party, Maulana Mufti Naveed Haqqani from JUI, Engineer Mohammad Sulaiman Khan and PTI's Salman Wali from PK 53 Swabi 5 submitted their nomination papers.

One killed, 3 injured over marriage disputes

FAISALABAD (APP): A man was shot dead while three people were injured over marriage disputes in Faisalabad on Sunday.

A Rescue 1122 spokesman said that Khalid Mehmood, 35, of Chak No.429-GB exchanged harsh words with his relative over a marriage dispute which infuriated the later and he opened fire and killed Khalid on the spot.

In another incident, Anwar opened fire and injured his aunts, Musarrat Ashfaq, 40, Aasia Nisar, 35, and her 10-year-old daughter Aleena Nisar over a marriage dispute at Chak No.216-GB.

Rescue 1122 provided first aid and shifted the injured to hospital for treatment while the Samundri police was investigating the incident, he added.

All set to celebrate Quaid's anniversary
The 147th birth anniversary of Father of the Nation Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad

Ali Jinnah to be observed today (Monday 25th December) with full national enthusiasm and zeal.

Special prayers will be offered after Fajr prayers for the departed soul of the founder of Pakistan.

Religious, political and social organizations have also arranged a number of functions, meetings and seminars to celebrate the day and pay tributes to Quaid's services for the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent.

Speech and essay-writing competitions will also be held at different educational institutions to mark the day.

Christians flock to markets ahead of Christmas

Preparations have been completed by the Christian community to celebrate Christmas here on Monday.

Activities regarding Christmas in the city have gained momentum to celebrate the most important

religious festival of the Christian community in a most befitting manner on December 25.

Christian families including elders, boys and girls were seen in a large number at city's shopping centers in Katchry Bazaar, Anarkali, main bazaars of Madina Chowk, Mansoorabad, Jhal Khannoana on Sitiana Road, D-Type Colony, D-ground, Jameelabad, Ghulistan Colony and other spots of readymade garments etc.

Churches in the city have been decorated with colorful lights, posters and traditional Christmas trees besides beautifying the areas where Christians live in a large number.

The police have made tight security arrangements by deputing more than 4,000 security personnel near Christian localities, churches in addition to setting up 214 pickets at entry and exit points of the district, a spokesman said.

Minorities fully safe, secure in Narowal: DC

NAROWAL (APP): The Deputy Commissioner Narowal Syed Hasan Raza said in a message on Christmas here on Sunday that Narowal district is a peaceful city where all minorities are fully safe and secure and celebrating their religious festivals with full enthusiasm.

All segments of society are playing their positive role for promotion of peace and security in the district, which is welcome, he added.

The DC said people of all religions live together with complete religious freedom in the country and participate fully in each others happy and sad moments. He said the Christian community had always given practical proof of being a patriotic

and peaceful citizen. The district administration, like every year, equally participate in the Christmas joy of the Christian community and wishes them Merry Christmas.

Members of the Christian community thanked the deputy commissioner and said the steps taken by the district administration regarding Christmas were satisfactory.

Meeting discusses anti-polio, benefits of iodized salt

Under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Narowal Syed Hasan Raza, a joint meeting of District Emergency Response Committee (DERC) was held here on Sunday to review anti-polio campaign and benefits of use of

iodized salt.

The meeting was attended by Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Health Dr. Naveed Haider, District Health Officer (DHO) Dr. Muhammad Tariq, District Coordinator for National Programme Dr. Zahid Randhawa, Dr. Rahat Ali and all officers of the relevant departments.

Dr. Naveed and Dr. Tariq briefed the deputy commissioner Narowal about dengue surveillance and anti-polio campaign, starting from the first week of January.

Dr. Zahid Randhawa stressed use of iodized salt, as iodine is an important nutrient for complete mental and physical development and health of children.

Arrangements for anti-polio campaign discussed

SARGODHA (APP): Additional Deputy Commissioner General Sargodha Umar Farooq said that no child should remain without vaccination during the five-day anti-polio campaign starting from January 8 in the district, in which more than 0.6 million children up to five years old age would be vaccinated.

While presiding over a review meeting at his office on Sunday, he said the polio team members should perform their duties efficiently.

He advised that anti-polio teams should also be

available at bus stands. In this regard, the Regional Transport Authority must play an active role, he added.

The ADCG directed that children should be informed about benefits of polio vaccination at educational institutions.

He said polio drops should also be given to children living in remote areas of the district.

He said members of polio teams should be trained to perform their duties in a better way, committees should be formed at

the tehsil level for monitoring of teams.

The meeting was informed that the door-to-door campaign would continue from January 8 to January 10. The left-out children would be vaccinated under the catch-up activity on January 11-12.

A total of 3,331 teams would work in the field during the polio campaign in the district.

The meeting was attended by Health Chief Executive Officer Dr Aslam Asad and other officers concerned.



QUETTA: National Party leaders Kalsum Niaz Baloch and Sadia Badani submitting nomination papers for General Election.

DC visits Churches in D.I.Khan

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): Deputy Commissioner Mansoor Arshad has visited different 'Churches' here in Dera Ismail Khan in connection with Christmas and met with elders of the Christian community.

According to the district administration, the deputy commissioner was accompanied by ADC Finance Syed Gulfam Abbas Shah during the visit.

The visiting officers also cut Christmas cake along with the Christian community elders and greeted the minority community at their religious festival. Speaking on this occasion, the deputy commissioner said that the administration shares the joys with the Christian community on this occasion.

Trader killed over resistance

MULTAN (APP): Armed dacoits opened fire and killed a trader over resistance during dacoity bid in Rewari town near Rasheedabad on early Sunday morning.

According to details, the armed outlaws entered into the Saeed Rewari sweets shop in Rewari town. The dacoits opened fires on the nephew of the shopkeeper named Muhammad Kamran and killed him over putting resistance. The dacoits fled away from there.

The people gathered there and staged demonstration protest for early arrest of the accused. The police concerned was busy in investigating the incident.

Brohi Ittehad felicitates PC's body

HYDERABAD (APP): Sindh Brohi Ittehad Hyderabad Division has felicitated the newly elected body of Press Club Hyderabad.

President Sindh Brohi Ittehad Haji Abdullah Brohi, General Secretary Irshad Brohi, Press Secretary Muhammad Qasim Brohi and other office bearers have felicitated the newly elected body of Press Club including Sajid Khanzada as president, Ashok Sharma vice President and Zafar Hakro as General Secretary, Pir Nizam Jan Sarhandi as joint secretary and Haroon Arain as treasurer who contested election on a joint panel of democratic journalist group and Aqeel Ibrahim Group and elected unopposed.

Ramos festival of Kalasha concluded

CHITRAL (APP): The religious festival of Kalash Valley, Chit Ramos (Chowmos), has come to an end with males and females from the three valleys of Kailash, Rambur, and 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 constables performed duty at the festival,

spokesman Mohammad Saad said.

The local tourism police provided all kinds of facilities to tourists during the festival, Mohammad Saad said, adding, "Various rituals were also performed in the festival."

The 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 various rituals are performed in the Chaimos 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.

District Police Officer orders tight security

SARGODHA (APP): District Police Officer Muhammad Faisal Kamran directed the police on Sunday to ensure foolproof security arrangements for celebrations for the birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Christmas in the district.

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 churches, worship places, shopping areas, markets, hotels,

and other recreational sites in the city by exploiting all available resources.

"All district DSPs and SHO's should personally visit places and monitor the measures," he said.

He also directed officials at check-posts to beef up checking and monitoring.

Four held with liquor, drugs

Police arrested four accused and recovered narcotics from them.

According to a press release issued by the DPO office here on Sunday, a team of Sillanwali police

station nabbed four accused with 140 liters of liquor, liquor distillation material and 1.85 kg hashish from them.

The accused were identified as Khan, Ramzan, Khalid and Naem.

The arrested suspects used to sell drugs at different places and they were planning to sell drugs on Christmas and New Year's Eve, the police spokesman said.

Sargodha police's crackdown against drug dealers will continue without discrimination, DPO Muhammad Faisal Kamran said.

NGO delegation visits GCWUS

SIALKOT (APP): A delegation of UGood, a non-governmental organization (NGO), collaborative partners of Sight Savers, visited Government College Women University Sialkot (GCWUS) and met with Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zarrin Fatima Rizvi and other officials.

According to GCWUS, as the follow-up of the previous meeting, areas of mutual cooperation and future course of action were discussed and it was decided that an MoU would soon be signed among the collaborative partners.

Ms. Shabina Gillani and Ejaz Ghouri shared the possible options of Sight Savers potential support for the disabled students and employees of GCWUS.

Leaders of the Mazboot Waseela organization were also present and ensured their possible support as well.

The Vice Chancellor welcomed their support and appreciated the considera-

tion of the disabled employees for the due support for boosting their confidence and contribution towards the institution.

Teenager injured

A teenager was injured seriously in a collision between a motorcycle and auto-rickshaw at Pasrur Road, tehsil Pasrur, here on Sunday.

According to Rescue spokesperson, 18-year-old Ali Raza was seriously injured in road accident near Kotli Haji Pura. Rescue-1122 provided the first aid and shifted him to THQ hospital Pasrur.

Distillery unearthed, liquor seized

The district police have unearthed a distillery, seized 40-litre liquor, and arrested a man with weapon.

According to police spokesperson, Ugoki police conducted a raid at a distillery, arrested Usman Ali, who was preparing liquor and recovered liquor with illicit weapon.

Police have registered a case against him and started investigations.

Christmas function at DPO office

Deputy Commissioner Sialkot Captain (ret'd) Shah Mir Iqbal and District Police Officer (DPO) Muhammad Hasan Iqbal organised a special Christmas function for Christian community employees at the DPO office here.

According to a spokesperson, a special function was organised with reference to the Christmas celebrations.

Addressing the participants, the DPO said "we are with the Christian community in their happy and sad moments and would continue to move forward while maintaining an atmosphere of brotherhood".

Later, District Police Officer Hasan Iqbal cut the Christmas cake and distributed cash and gifts among the Christian employees.

Seminar held on public participation in budgeting process

CHITRAL (APP): Young Star Development Organization (YSDO) held awareness seminar in Drosh Lower Chitral in collaboration with CPDI and CNBA here on Sunday.

Councilor Zahir Khan was chief guest on this occasion. Program Manager Abdul Qadir, highlighting the aims and objectives of this seminar, he said that it is very important to involve the public and take their opinions in the budgeting process. He said that the main purpose of this seminar is to create awareness among the people and to urge the government institutions to ensure the participation of the people in the budgeting process because the budget is preparing for the people, therefore the

participation of the people and their involvement is must in it.

Project Manager Inamullah said that it is very important to take the opinions of the people and involve them in the budget making. He said that salaries of government officials and for all development and non-development works, the budget is made from the fund obtained from the taxes of the people, but unfortunately, the opinions of the people are not taking in it.

He said that money is allocated in the budget for many purposes which are not for the benefit of the people or the people have no interest in it but it is forced on public without their willing.

He said that the main purpose of this seminar and awareness workshop is to put pressure on the relevant institutions of the government to include public opinion in the budgeting process.

Chairman of Young Star Development Organization (YSDO) Asfandiar Khan said that the situation of budget transparency in Pakistan is a very burning issue, he said that Center for Peace and Development Initiative (CPDI) and Citizen Network for Budget in collaboration with YSDO arranging such types of seminar, workshops and sessions to create public awareness. YSDO with the support of National Accountability (CNBA) has started a series of awareness programs and

seminars in Upper and Lower Chitral districts with the main objective of creating awareness among the people to exercise their right i.e. budgeting process.

He said that unless public opinion is not included in the budgeting process, the finger will be raised on its transparency and people will never be satisfied with the budgeting process.

He said that the government and non-government organizations are working for the welfare of the people and they try to create a pressure group for the government so that it includes the opinion of the people in the budgeting process or other development projects. Talking about the transparency of the budget, Asfandiar said that the process

of transparency in budgeting is very important.

UN official Kamal Abdul Jameel also spoke about the budgeting process in this seminar. He said that the purpose and goal of the United Nations is also to raise voice for the rights of people around the world and provide them with facilities. Farooq Ali Shah Nazim Village Council Drosh also spoke on this occasion.

He said that transparency in the budgeting process is very important because often a large part of the budget in our country is spent on unnecessary heads but wasted if this fund is invested for the welfare of the people, it will improve their lives. There can be a lot of positive change.

Ejaz Ahmad, who is con-

tributed to Lower and Upper Chitral for a long time.

It plays a key role in providing free treatment to indigent and poor patients, providing free blood to needy patients and burying abandoned dead bodies. He said that it is very important to involve the public and include their opinion in the budgeting process. Allocations are made in the interest of the public and include the welfare of the people whose tax money is spent on various projects approved by the budget.

He said that this seminar will benefit the people of the entire region and the entire country and pressure will also increase on the authorities to include the opinion of the people in the budgeting process.



Orthodox priests in Moldova rebel against Moscow rule

CIMISENI (AFP/APP): Long torn between loyalty to the Russian or Romanian Orthodox Church, the Moldovan village of Cimiseni has made its choice, triggered by Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The parish in the village near the capital Chisinau, whose 2,850 inhabitants mostly speak Romanian, is one of a growing number that have switched allegiance from Moscow to Bucharest.

The divorce mirrors the former Soviet Republic's bigger struggle as it seeks to leave behind Russia's influence and join the European Union.

"This fight between Orthodox brothers has outraged people," priest Ioan Solonaru told AFP, referring to the war in Ukraine.

Parishioners "started to tell me that they no longer wanted to come to Kirill's church to receive communion", said Solonaru, referring to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, the leader of Russia's Orthodox Church and a staunch supporter of the invasion.

The reception of Ukrainian refugees pouring over the border has also raised awareness in Moldova.

Since the invasion, more than 50 parishes have switched allegiance from Moscow to Bucharest, according to Moldova's Romania-linked Metropolis of Bessarabia.

"Nothing unites us with Moscow

any more," said the 55-year-old Solonaru, incredulous at "the nostalgia of some people for the USSR".

In a recent letter, Metropolitan Vladimir, head of the Russia-linked Metropolitanate of Moldova, expressed concern about the departure of priests. He wrote to patriarch Kirill of the "marginalisation" of his church "because of its membership in the Moscow Patriarchate, perceived in Moldovan society as an outpost of the Kremlin". The Moldovan people aspire to get closer to Romania, he suggested, asking for a solution to "end the crisis". A meeting of the highest dignitaries -- held following the letter -- decided to maintain their allegiance to Moscow. Around 1,350 parishes in Moldova are Moscow-linked, far more than some 200 with allegiance to Romania.

"We do not feel in danger," Ioan of Soroca, vicar of the Metropolitanate of Moldova, told AFP.

The Metropolitanate of Moldova has condemned the war in Ukraine -- though not Kirill -- with Bishop Ioan describing those who left as "lost sons (who) must come to their senses". Metropolitan Vladimir said this week that their actions were "reckless". Russia's invasion of its neighbour in February 2022 has accelerated the pro-European drive in the country of 2.6 million people,

situated between Ukraine and EU member Romania. The Metropolis of Bessarabia is receiving newcomers "with open arms", according to spokesman Constantin Olariu, just as Moldova is preparing to open accession negotiations with the EU.

"It's a pro-European signal," he said, adding that his church had to resume its activities "from scratch" in 1992 following Moldova's independence. President Maia Sandu sent a similar message, calling in a recent radio interview on "all of society, including the Church" to unite for "peace" on the path to European integration. The war has also sowed division among Orthodox Christians in neighbouring Ukraine.

In October, Ukrainian lawmakers advanced legislation to ban the Moscow-linked Ukrainian Orthodox Church -- which says it has severed ties with Russia since May 2022.

Ukraine also passed legislation to move its official Christmas holiday to December 25, in a break with the Russian Orthodox Church that celebrates it on January 7. Ukraine had been under Moscow's spiritual leadership since the 17th century at the latest, but part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church broke with Moscow in 2019 over Russia's annexation of Crimea and its support for separatists in the east of Ukraine.

Yemen warring parties agree to ceasefire, UN-led peace process

DUBAI (AFP/APP): Yemen's warring parties have committed to a new ceasefire and agreed to engage in a UN-led peace process to end the war, the UN envoy for Yemen said Saturday.

The announcement by UN special envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, marks the latest step to end the nine-year war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and triggered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

It follows recent meetings by Grundberg in Saudi Arabia and Oman with Rashad Al-Alimi, head of Yemen's Saudi-backed presidential council and Mohammed Abdul Salam, the chief negotiator of the Iran-backed Huthi rebels.

Grundberg said he "welcomes the parties' commitment to a set of measures to implement a nation-wide ceasefire... and (to) engage in preparations for the resumption of an inclusive political process", according to a statement by his office.

The envoy "will now engage with the parties to establish a road map under UN auspices that includes these commit-

ments and supports their implementation", the statement added.

Yemen has been gripped by conflict since the Iran-backed Huthi rebels took control of the capital Sanaa in 2014, triggering a Saudi-led military intervention in support of the beleaguered government the following year.

A UN-brokered ceasefire that took effect in April 2022 brought a sharp reduction in hostilities. The truce expired in October last year, though fighting largely remains on hold.

Grundberg will now "engage with the parties to establish a roadmap under UN auspices" to end the war.

The road map also includes commitments to pay civil servants' salaries, open routes into the rebel-blockaded city of Ta'ez and other parts of Yemen and resume oil exports, according to the statement.

"Yemenis are watching and waiting for this new opportunity to provide for tangible results and progress towards lasting peace," Grundberg said.

"The parties have taken a significant step. Their

commitments are, first and foremost, an obligation to the Yemeni people."

The agreement comes amid a flurry of attacks by the Huthi rebels on key shipping lanes in the Red Sea in solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, where Israel is fighting Hamas militants.

The Huthis have pledged to attack Israel-linked vessels or ships heading to Israeli ports unless an end is brought to the Israel-Hamas war that started on October 7.

They have launched more than 100 drone and missile attacks, targeting 10 merchant vessels involving more than 35 different countries, according to the Pentagon.

The attacks by the rebels are imperilling a transit route that carries up to 12 percent of global trade, prompting the United States to set up a multinational naval task force to protect Red Sea shipping.

The Huthi "military actions hinder progress towards a peaceful resolution", Mohammed Albasha, a senior Middle East analyst for the US-based Navanti Group, told

AFP.

"The Huthis have transitioned... to becoming aggressors targeting civilian assets," he said.

The latest agreement also coincides with a push by Saudi Arabia to extricate itself from the conflict, despite slim hopes of a lasting peace.

The oil-rich monarchy gave a signal this year by resuming ties with Iran, which backs the Huthis against the Saudi-supported government in a proxy war.

The Saudi-led intervention's stated aim was to protect civilians from Huthi attacks, restore the government and stop Yemen becoming a safe haven for Iranian-backed forces.

Eight years in, the rebels control swathes of the country and command an impressive arsenal of weapons that they have used to attack Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, another coalition member.

Many analysts are pessimistic that Riyadh's plans for a downsized military role will bring peace to Yemen, which remains deeply fractured along religious, regional and political lines.

Syrians cancel Christmas festivities in solidarity with Gaza

DAMASCUS (AFP/APP): Christmas cheer has deserted the streets of Syria's cities, where the main churches have limited celebrations to prayers in solidarity with Palestinians suffering war in Gaza.

"In Palestine, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, people are suffering," the Syriac Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, Mor Dionysius Antoine Shahda, told AFP.

The northern Syrian city's central district of Azizia is usually home to a bustling festive market and a huge Christmas tree, while its streets are adorned with lights and trinkets.

But this year, the main square is almost empty and there are no Christmas decorations in sight.

"In Syria we cancelled all official celebrations and receptions in our churches in solidarity with the victims of the bombing on Gaza" by Israeli forces, Shahda said.

The Syriac Catholic Church was not alone, with the leaders of three of Syria's major churches -- the Greek Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox and Melkite Greek Catholic patriarchs -- announcing they were cancelling Christmas festivities and limiting celebrations to religious ceremonies.

"Given the current circumstances,

especially in Gaza, the patriarchs apologise for not receiving Christmas and New Year greetings," the trio said in a joint statement, adding they were limiting ceremonies to "prayers".

The health ministry in the Hamas-ruled Palestinian territory says more than 20,000 people have been killed in the Gaza Strip since Israel launched its massive air and ground offensive, in response to a deadly attack on southern Israel on October 7. Most of the dead in Gaza are women and children, officials say.

The Hamas attack killed about 1,140 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

Many Gazans have been displaced by the violence and forced into crowded shelters or tents, often struggling to find food, fuel, water and medical care. The UN agency for Palestinian refugees has said the ongoing Israeli military campaign left no safe place anywhere across the narrow territory.

Before Syria's civil war erupted in 2011, it was home to more than 1.2 million Christians, though huge numbers have fled since.

The conflict had dampened Christmas celebrations, but festivities

picked up in recent years as the main front lines froze and government forces retook control of large swathes of the country.

Still, gloom now prevails in the streets of the capital Damascus.

Festivities are limited to a lone market, while the Greek Orthodox Mariamite Cathedral in Damascus has put up modest decorations and a small tree in its courtyard.

Damascus resident Rachel Haddad, 66, said she had been glued to her phone for more than two months, reading news of the devastation in Gaza, and did not have the heart to put up a Christmas tree.

"This year was very sad. It began with the earthquake and ended with the Gaza war," Haddad said, referring to the February 6 tremor that ripped through southern Turkey and Syria, killing at least 55,000 people.

"There was no opportunity for joy," she said, also blaming Syria's economic woes.

The country's economy has been battered by war, with recurrent fuel shortages and long, daily power cuts a fact of life.

"If there is no electricity, how will you see the decorations and lights anyway?" Haddad asked.

In Gaza, displaced women recount lives upended by war

GAZA STRIP (AFP/APP): A relentless Israeli military campaign, has upset the lives of most, if not all, residents of the Gaza Strip.

Israeli forces have launched a bombardment campaign and ground invasion of Gaza ever since Hamas militants launched their shock attack -- the deadliest in Israel's 75-year history.

It killed about 1,140 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 20,258 people in the besieged Palestinian territory, according to the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. The United Nations estimates the fighting has displaced 1.9 million of Gaza's 2.4 million population. AFP spoke to three Palestinian women who shared how the conflict has upended their lives.

Wearing a stethoscope around her neck, Wahidi recalled spending 38 consecutive days treating patients in terrible conditions at Gaza City's Al-Shifa hospital, which has been raided by Israeli forces. "I worked through moments of escalation these past two years, but everything about this war is different: the length, the death toll, the severity of injuries, the displacement," she said.

For a month now Wahidi

has been sharing an apartment with 20 members of her extended family, having been displaced twice since the war broke out.

The medical intern is working in the emergency ward of the Kuwaiti hospital in Rafah, in the besieged territory's south.

"Every day, I come across suffering that I never thought I would see," she said. Some of her relatives took shelter at a school run by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, while others remained in Gaza.

Wahidi has lost all contact with those who stayed behind in Gaza City because the grid is often down and communications frequently cut.

"Before, I was home with everything I needed. Now I'm in this strange place, without water or food," she said.

"The situation is catastrophic." She also warned that "there's been a rapid spread of disease".

Still, she tries to make do by telling herself that others have it even worse. "After work, I can go home, I can cook and light a fire. I wash my hands when there's water," she said, counting her blessings. "We've had to consider water and food supplies, and how to charge our phones -- things we never thought about before," she added. "No one deserves to live like this."

Bayed hails from Gaza City but is now living in a tent outside the Kuwaiti hospital in Rafah.

She shares the space with her journalist husband and three children.

"Our life has been turned upside down. It's been a total 180," she said.

Her family has been forced to move multiple times since leaving Gaza City. They first fled south towards the central city of Deir al-Balah. However, the homeowners who took them in soon asked them to leave. It was "out of fear that journalists would be targeted" by Israeli strikes, Bayed told AFP.

"I cried so much... I didn't know what to do," she said. They set off again for Khan Yunis, in the south, but their plans were thwarted once again. The Israeli army issued an evacuation order for those in the area, sending them further south near the border with Egypt.

With what little food she can find, Bayed prepares meals for her children but they refuse to eat: "The food's bad and expired."

Life has become "hard, like being separated from family, as are the memories", Bayed said.

"We were happy before and had a stable life. We dreamt of building a bigger house. I want (that life) back." Ruk lives in a makeshift camp in Rafah along with her parents, brother, four sisters and

niece. "My life used to be so boring, I'd complain. The war changed everything," she said.

Her family left their home in Khan Yunis the day after the war erupted.

"We took a photo of the house, in tears," Ruk said.

They briefly stayed with one of her sisters. When it became too dangerous there, they left for the city's Nasser hospital, before winding up in Rafah.

"I thought we'd go home after a week. It's been more than 70 days now and we're still not back," she said.

The teenager said she has lost seven kilos (15 pounds) since the war began. She has fallen sick several times and was even taken to the emergency room after fainting.

Today, her meals mainly consist of canned food, with only the occasional piece of bread.

"I never thought my life would look like this... Before the war, I showered every day," she said.

"Now, if I'm lucky, I'll wash at the mosque once a week, at sinks reserved for performing one's ablutions -- if there's any water," she added. Ruk is afraid for the lives of her friends, and her own. She aspires to be a journalist and hopes to be able to travel abroad to make her dream come true. "I wish I could go back to the life I had before, the one I didn't like," she said.

At least 19 die in Nicaragua bus accident

MANAGUA (AFP/APP): At least 10 children were among 19 fatalities Saturday when an overcrowded bus overturned on a bridge in a town north of Nicaragua's capital Managua, a government website said.

The 10 children who died in the crash were between the ages of four

and 16, the el19digital.com official website said, citing Health Ministry officials.

Some 40 passengers were injured in the accident, it added.

Vice President Rosario Murillo, wife of President Daniel Ortega, said on state-run Channel 4 that around 70 people were crowded on the bus

at the time. She said the accident occurred in Rancho Grande, apparently when the bus driver lost control on a bridge and the vehicle overturned. "We are deeply moved by this misfortune," she said. Authorities said the bus was speeding, the website said, and police

arrested the driver as he tried to flee the scene afterward. Nine of the victims have been identified so far, Murillo said, without giving their names. Images in the local press showed the yellow bus impaled by the bridge's metal railing, while several apparent victims lay on the road nearby.

Calls for restraint in DR Congo after tense vote

KINSHASA (AFP/APP): Western embassies in Democratic Republic of Congo urged restraint on Saturday after leading opposition members called for re-election against 18 opposition candidates.

The sheer scale of the DR Congo -- roughly the size of continental western Europe -- and its dire infrastructure make elections a stark logistical challenge.

Massive delays and bureaucratic chaos marred the vote on Wednesday, with election authorities struggling to transport voting materials to polling stations on time. Some stations were unable to open at all. Officially, the country's electoral commission, Ceni, extended the vote only until Thursday for stations that had been unable to open on polling day.

But ballots were still being cast on Saturday in remote areas, according to

million were registered to vote, with more than 100,000 candidates running for various positions.

President Felix Tshisekedi, 60, is running for re-election against 18 opposition candidates.

The vote on Wednesday, with election authorities struggling to transport voting materials to polling stations on time. Some stations were unable to open at all. Officially, the country's electoral commission, Ceni, extended the vote only until Thursday for stations that had been unable to open on polling day.

But ballots were still being cast on Saturday in remote areas, according to

some officials, in a sign of continuing difficulties.

And Macaire Kambaru Sivikunula, an election official in the North Kivu region in the east of the country, told AFP that Ceni had granted special permission for five voting stations to open on Sunday for voting. Failure to get voting up and running on schedule had led to him and his family and other election officials receiving death threats, he added.

Five opposition leaders said in a statement Saturday that they were organising a protest march for next Wednesday.

They included gynaecologist Denis Mukwege, the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize laureate; and former oil executive Martin Fayulu.

"We will protest against the irregularities noted during the voting operations," they wrote in a letter to the governor of Kinshasa,

where they plan to hold the march.

Five other opposition candidates, including business magnate and former provincial governor Moise Katumbi, released a separate statement calling for the vote to be annulled, saying it had been marred by "massive fraud".

The poor but mineral-rich central African nation held four concurrent polls on Wednesday to elect the president, lawmakers for national and provincial assemblies, and local councillors. Ceni on Friday evening released presidential results from the Congolese diaspora, which represents a minuscule proportion of the electorate, indicating a provisional lead for Tshisekedi.

The release of other results expected on Saturday was however postponed until Sunday.

Libya's theatre stages comeback after country's years of turmoil

TRIPOLI (AFP/APP): Dressed all in white, a man pretends to aim a slingshot towards another who, running away, tries to dodge the imaginary rock flung towards him.

"Hassituha" (You Felt It), a mostly silent play from eastern Libya, symbolises both the country's divisions between west and east, and the rebirth of Libya's National Theatre Festival, which staged a comeback this week in Tripoli after a 15-year hiatus.

When it last took place in 2008, the festival was to be held again in four years.

Before that could happen, a NATO-backed uprising led to the overthrow and killing of long-time dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011. Subsequent vying for power, more than a decade of stop-start conflict followed before a period of relative stability.

Taking to stages in the capital Tripoli and Misrata, about 190 kilometres (120 miles) to the east, performers came from 11 cities around Libya -- a country split between a United Nations-supported government in the west and a rival administration

backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar in the east.

"Hassituha", performed at Tripoli's Scouts Theatre by a group who travelled from Marj in eastern Libya, was well received by an audience of more than 1,000 people.

"Some of them burst into tears" over the actors' performances, Muhammad al-Khaitouni, a spectator, said after seeing the play. He said the actors "mostly used gestures and other non-verbal expressions, but they quickly conveyed the meaning to us".

Accompanying his father and two brothers, Khaled al-Muwadhaf, 14, said the actors demonstrated the suffering brought by the chaos, poverty, and political corruption that has gripped the North African nation despite its oil wealth.

Ali al-Qadiri, who directed the play, said he believed the show was a success because it touched on the circumstances of ordinary Libyans, including a "lack of opportunities, and the economic stagnation that most cities in Libya suffer from".

Anwar Alteer, director of this year's festival, told AFP, "we want to rekindle

the flame and celebrate great artistic figures that the public must not be deprived of".

More than 60 playwrights and performers took part in the festival, alongside dozens of directors and authors.

Like "Hassituha", other performances touched on the painful aftermath of Kadhafi's fall and the chaos that ensued.

Salwa al-Maqsabi, a Libyan actress who came from the eastern city of Benghazi to perform in Tripoli, said arts and theatre were a means of overcoming divisions among Libyans.

"I am happy to be present in this sweet gathering," she said. "Theatre unites and does not divide, and it will succeed where politicians have failed."

"Ajyal" (Generations), a theatrical group from Derna, said they were optimistic about reviving the country's theatre despite the many challenges Libyans face.

On September 10-11 a flash flood in Derna swept entire neighbourhoods into the sea, leaving thousands dead or missing and more than 40,000 displaced.

On top of the country's other challenges Derna

still faces the task of rebuilding after the disaster. But Milad al-Hasadi, head of Derna's National Theatre, expressed hope for Libya's future.

"Today we are here burdened, it is true, with wounds, pain and loss, but we are optimistic for our country and its artists who succeeded in reviving the national theatre", said Hasadi.

"The conflict in Libya has isolated theatre from artists, and today we need to encourage and support every Libyan theatre, because their role is great in rejecting division, uniting Libyans, and sowing smiles and hope in our lives," Hasadi added.

The Tripoli-based government funded the festival's return, and members attended the opening.

Abdel Basset Buganda, undersecretary of the Libyan culture ministry, told AFP that Libya's theatre had gained lasting momentum.

"The Libyan artist has always sought to communicate with the public, but the interruption was caused by the neglect and political strife that harmed the arts, especially theatre," said Buganda.

"Today, we are united with all Libyan artists to overcome this strife."

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Al-Sudani's effective leadership in the face of these myriad challenges demonstrates his political acumen. It offers the international community an opportunity to complement his leadership by facilitating Baghdad's overarching ambitions, while remaining cautious and careful not to inadvertently stifle his efforts through excessive intervention.

Monitoring and mitigating potential systemic threats are crucial for economic stability. Now and in the coming years, the actions we take — both globally and locally — will determine whether we rise to the pressing international challenges or fall victim to them. Multilateral cooperation is too important to let fall by the wayside.

What’s being conveyed through ‘Leave the World Behind’

In my career as a writer, I have rarely ventured into the realm of film criticism. However, as an ardent admirer of disaster movies and apocalyptic thrillers, I find myself compelled to break my customary silence.

Often, films within this genre struggle to encompass essential elements such as exceptional acting, masterful direction, impeccable cinematography, and immersive visual effects, not to mention the necessary budget to bring their ambitious concepts to life. Yet, amid the crowded cinematic landscape, “Leave the World Behind” emerges as a striking anomaly. In telling the story of a world confronted with an unparalleled crisis, this cinematic masterpiece delivers a riveting and thought-provoking exploration of human nature and society.

Adapted from Rumaan Alam’s novel of the same name, “Leave the World Behind” invites viewers on a captivating journey into the depths of human experience. Set against the serene backdrop of a remote vacation rental home on Long Island, the narrative unfolds as two families, the Clays and the Washingtons, seek refuge from the relentless chaos of their everyday lives. Little do they suspect that their tranquil getaway will swiftly metamorphose into a profound meditation on trust, fear and the gradual erosion of societal norms.

The plot takes an unforeseen turn when a mysterious and unexplained blackout descends upon the secluded haven, severing the families’ ties to the outside world. Deprived of access to information and communication, the fragile cocoon of comfort and security that had surrounded them begins to unravel. It is within these walls,

amid the enveloping shroud of uncertainty, that the authentic essence of the characters is revealed.

Perhaps one of the most resonant themes explored in “Leave the World Behind” is the poignant examination of trust among people confronted with the unknown. As the families grapple with the enigma of the blackout and the potential perils lurking beyond, they are faced with a momentous choice — whether to place their trust

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“Leave the World Behind” presents us with characters left to their own devices in the absence of a functioning society, and in doing so it lays bare the primal instincts simmering beneath the facade of seemingly structured lives. The dissolution of societal norms and the relentless struggle for survival expose the raw, unvarnished facets of human nature — the instinct to protect oneself, the quest for dominance, and the pervasive fear of the unknown.

.....
In one another or succumb to the all-encompassing grip of paranoia.

This serves as a microcosm for the broader societal challenges relating to trust and cooperation, mirroring the struggles that pervade our increasingly fragmented world.

Moreover, the film boldly explores the intricate tapestry of race, class, and generational disparities. The characters are compelled to confront their own deeply ingrained biases and preconceptions as they navigate the crisis together. These divisions, again reflective of broader societal issues, underscore the elusive nature of true understanding among diverse groups.

“Leave the World Behind” presents us with characters left to their own devices in the absence of a functioning society, and in doing so it lays bare the primal instincts simmering beneath the facade of seemingly structured lives. The

Dalia Al-Aqidi

dissolution of societal norms and the relentless struggle for survival expose the raw, unvarnished facets of human nature — the instinct to protect oneself, the quest for dominance, and the pervasive fear of the unknown.

As viewers become engrossed in the film’s compelling narrative, the artistry of the actors is entrancing, as is the precision of the camera move-

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ments and the unrelenting atmosphere of suspense. Yet, beneath the surface, a series of essential and potentially hazardous messages begins to make their presence felt. These messages are skillfully woven into the fabric of the storytelling, leaving little space for the audience to pause and critically analyze them. Instead, they are presented in a manner that encourages immediate acceptance as undeniable realities.

This subtle approach to message delivery profoundly affects the viewer’s experience. The artful blending of these messages into the narrative creates an atmosphere in which they are seamlessly integrated into the plot, characters, and dialogue. As a result, the audience is less likely to perceive them as distinct elements to be scrutinized but rather as integral components of the story’s overarching themes and messages.

As the story unfolds, a

series of events point toward a coalition of rogue nations uniting with the sinister intent of orchestrating a cyberterrorist assault on the US, resulting in widespread disruption and chaos. These evil actions are vividly portrayed through scenes of bombings in New York City.

The overarching objective of this clandestine electronic group is to destabilize society to the extent that it ignites a civil war for survival. This ominous

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message is conveyed to the public through one of the characters. People are made aware of the impending threat when drones drop pamphlets, printed in various languages, bearing the menacing message, “Death to America.”

After watching the film, my curiosity led me to delve deeper into its production and I discovered that Barack and Michelle Obama, the former US president and his first lady, served as executive producers through their production company, Higher Ground. Notably, the 44th president had significant involvement in shaping the intricacies of the film’s plot. As revealed by Sam Esmail, who directed the film and adapted the screenplay, the former president provided extensive script notes, underscoring his active contribution to the development of the movie.

“He had a lot of notes about the characters and the

empathy we would have for them,” Esmail told Vanity Fair. “I have to say he is a big movie lover and he wasn’t just giving notes about things that were from his background. He was giving notes as a fan of the book and he wanted to see a really good film.

Obama thought the completed script was pretty close to how such a crisis would actually play out in the real world, Esmail added.

A three-pronged attack strategy characterizes the unfolding sequence of events depicted in the film. The initial phase is marked by a deliberate attempt to isolate people. This is followed by a meticulously orchestrated period of synchroized chaos. The narrative culminates in the third stage, which shows the start of a civil war.

“Whoever started this wants us to finish it,” one of the characters astutely observes, emphasizing the relentless pursuit of a hidden agenda that propels the story forward.

While there might be various reasons why the Obamas’ production company chose this particular story for one of its early film projects, the film undeniably has evoked a profound sense of fear and apprehension among many. It has prompted reflection on the unsettling possibility that a future exists in which adversaries could try to undermine the US not through the traditional means of military force, but through cyberterror and societal destabilization.

This has sparked a sense of pessimism and questions about the resilience of American society in the face of such challenges. In the face of these questions, and by choosing to produce this film, the Obamas have exposed a nation tinged with a palpable sense of concern and apprehension.

Turkish-Kuwaiti ties can continue uptick under Sheikh Mishal

Sinem Cengiz

Kuwait has experienced two changes in leadership in just over three years. Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who took the reins in 2020 after the death of his half-brother, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, passed away last Saturday. The Gulf country’s new emir, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, took the oath of office on Wednesday.

Kuwait’s distinctive foreign policy has been closely associated with the years-long leadership of Sheikh Sabah. Sheikh Nawaf inherited that legacy and, during his brief reign, made his own unique contributions to the country’s domestic and foreign policies. The policies of the past two emirs have significantly influenced Kuwait’s foreign relations, providing a solid foundation for the new leadership’s vision.

Before discussing the future prospects of Kuwait’s relations with Turkiye, it is essential to reflect on the Turkish-Kuwaiti relationship during Sheikh Nawaf’s three-year reign.

Historically, Turkey’s ties with Kuwait have been the most enduring among the Gulf Cooperation Council states, maintaining stability without major fluctuations. Despite facing regional structural challenges, the two countries have entered a new phase in their relationship over the past decade, demonstrating resilience and consistency. This situation became noticeable when several agreements were signed between the two countries in the fields of energy, defense and culture. This positive trajectory has intensified over the past five years, with Sheikh Sabah visiting Turkiye on several occasions, while Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan prioritized Kuwait in his Gulf tours.

The foundation laid during Sheikh Sabah’s leadership bore fruit during his successor’s era. Sheikh Nawaf took the reins at a time when the regional climate was changing. After just a few months in office, the AIUla Declaration, which ended the years-long Gulf dispute, was signed. This situation was a relief for Kuwait, which was concerned about the growing tensions in the region and the future of the GCC as a subregional bloc. It was also a relief for Turkiye, which subsequently opened a new page in its relations with the GCC states. In this context, the reconciliation climate gave Kuwait the space to foster its relations with Ankara without the pressure it faced from the Turkiye-Gulf tensions of the past decade.

In 2021, Sheikh Nawaf sent a letter to the Turkish president reaffirming his country’s desire to bolster ties with Ankara in various spheres, as well as pointing to the issues of common concern. This was echoed by Sheikh Mishal, who was crown prince at the time. He said: “We are talking about the strength of relations between Kuwait and Turkiye and we refer to all aspects of political, economic, commercial and security cooperation.” As he stated, the relationship between the two countries had started to develop beyond the diplomatic realm.

In the same year, the sec-

ond meeting of the Turkiye-Kuwait Joint Committee for Cooperation was held after a hiatus of almost eight years. This meeting, at the foreign ministerial level, was viewed as highly significant. Kuwait’s then-Ambassador to Turkiye Ghassan Zawawi was instrumental in making sure the meeting took place.

This diplomatic blitz was followed by a crucial development in the defense realm in June this year. Kuwait concluded a contract worth \$367 million with Turkish defense firm Baykar to buy its Bayraktar TB2 drones. Kuwait became the 28th country to buy these drones. Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez has been key in fostering these defense ties.

In the economic realm, mutual trade volume has reached \$680 million and Turkish companies want to get their share from Kuwait’s 2040 master plan.

Zawawi, who served as

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In 2021, Sheikh Nawaf sent a letter to the Turkish president reaffirming his country’s desire to bolster ties with Ankara in various spheres, as well as pointing to the issues of common concern. This was echoed by Sheikh Mishal, who was crown prince at the time. He said: “We are talking about the strength of relations between Kuwait and Turkiye and we refer to all aspects of political, economic, commercial and security cooperation.” As he stated, the relationship between the two countries had started to develop beyond the diplomatic realm. In the same year, the second meeting of the Turkiye-Kuwait Joint Committee for Cooperation was held after a hiatus of almost eight years. This meeting, at the foreign ministerial level, was viewed as highly significant. Kuwait’s then-Ambassador to Turkiye Ghassan Zawawi was instrumental in making sure the meeting took place. This diplomatic blitz was followed by a crucial development in the defense realm in June this year. Kuwait concluded a contract worth \$367 million with Turkish defense firm Baykar to buy its Bayraktar TB2 drones. Kuwait became the 28th country to buy these drones. Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez has been key in fostering these defense ties. In the economic realm, mutual trade volume has reached \$680 million and Turkish companies want to get their share from Kuwait’s 2040 master plan.

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In exclusive remarks to Arab News, Sonmez described Turkish-Kuwaiti relations during the Sheikh Nawaf era as “exceptional.” He added that Sheikh Nawaf “was an extraordinary and benevolent individual, esteemed as a true friend of Turkiye. Throughout his highness’ reign, Kuwait and Turkiye forged even stronger bonds, fostering positive relations across multiple spheres encompassing trade, investment and diplomacy. Emir Nawaf was notably recognized for nurturing diplomatic ties with Turkiye, a relationship historically valued and cherished by both nations.”

Kuwait was among the first countries to deliver humanitarian assistance to the victims of the earth-

quake that hit Turkiye in February. Humanitarianism is an important sphere in Kuwait’s cooperation with Turkiye. Turkiye hosts millions of Syrians and carries out extensive humanitarian assistance in its refugee camps. Kuwait is among the largest donors to Syrians and has carried out several aid campaigns at Turkiye’s southeastern border with Syria.

After the major leap in the relationship between Kuwait and Turkiye over the past decade, there is a consensus on regional and global issues between the two countries. Despite recent moves toward regional de-escalation, there are still several regional and global issues that remain a factor in their security calculus. Thus, there are five motivating factors in Turkish-Kuwaiti ties: historical/political, economic, security/defense, regional vision, and humanitarian assistance.

The real AI revolution should be in humanity’s attitude toward it

Refik Anadol and Karel Komarek

Although our age is defined by humanity’s disproportionate influence on the planet, we ourselves are undergoing profound changes. Tasks that could previously only be accomplished through human labor are increasingly being performed by machines, including many tasks that rely on creativity. Far from a distant theoretical possibility, artificial intelligence has arrived — and it is here to stay.

In considering AI’s potential, it can be tempting to channel the techno-optimism of the 1990s, when IBM’s Deep Blue triumphed over the world chess champion Garry Kasparov, unleashing a wave of interdisciplinary interest in how AI might be deployed and commercialized in other domains. But it can also be tempting to adopt the opposing view and insist that AI will become an intolerable threat to most people’s livelihoods and perhaps even to human existence itself.

Both reactions are not new: They have often accompanied the emergence of major innovations. They also make similar mistakes, because both treat technological progress as if it were something sep-

arate from us. Nowadays, the optimists fixate on what AI might do for us, while the pessimists worry about what it will do to us. But the question we should be asking is: what will AI do with us?

This question is as pertinent to fine art as it is to finance, despite the apparent differences between these domains of quintessentially human activity. New media art is best understood as a dialogue between experimentation and tradition. The human longing for novelty and tradition are mutually dependent: Only by appreciating what came before an artwork can we comprehend what makes it new. No work is fully independent of cultural heritage, just as light cannot be understood in the absence of darkness.

Investing, too, is a hybrid enterprise. Success lies in recognizing genuine forms of innovation, which in turn requires an appreciation of what has already been done.

This interplay between past and present also describes generative AI itself. By drawing on vast stores of previous human expression — data — AI can achieve near-universal applicability and facilitate

innovation across many areas of culture and industry.

It was this understanding of AI that led us to pursue our collaborative project, which is known as Dvorak Dreams. By harnessing the power of machine learning, we transformed the 19th-century Czech composer Antonin Dvorak’s compositions, visual archives and legacy into a 100-square-meter installation that was exhibited throughout the annual Dvorak Prague Festival in September in front of the UNESCO-listed Rudolfinum. As the inaugural project of the 0xCollection, a new cultural initiative dedicated to digital art, the piece exemplified AI’s potential as a tool for both transforming human creativity and enriching cultural heritage.

Artists working with AI can map out a path for the technology’s role across society more broadly. Today’s algorithmic models rely on massive quantities of training data, most of it created by and for human consumption, and this makes them immensely powerful tools for pursuits like research and development. From hundreds of hours of classical music to more quantitative types of

data, it is human input that makes AI’s output meaningful and intelligible. Only by maintaining this symbiotic connection between us and our rapidly evolving technologies can we ensure that AI’s development brings more benefit than harm.

Make no mistake: The benefits of machine learning could be profound. As novel and alien as it may seem to us now, AI is uniquely capable of serving human ends — from optimizing technological efficiency to aiding in the creation of artwork that can be appreciated by audiences around the world. The human response to AI’s output is what will determine its utility, including as an instrument of meaning-making. There is no denying that AI will play an expanding role in our increasingly digitalized world. What we need is a strategy of coexistence that respects, elevates and optimizes both human and machine.

To that end, we see Dvorak Dreams as a proof of concept. Rooted firmly in human sources and imaginative expressions, it leveraged AI to retrieve, synthesize and extend the legacy of an earlier cultural pioneer. The resulting presentation was not simply a

machine-generated “hallucination;” it was a display of co-evolution. An “artificial” intelligence, guided by human intervention, made a past cultural production real to us in the present. It both revived history and created it anew. Finding value lies in uniting tradition with novelty. Without both elements, the final product would not move us.

Dvorak Dreams required us to put aside debates about humans versus humans and humans versus machines. The result was beneficial both for the development of technology and for the progress of contemporary art. Now, we find ourselves calling for a revolution — not of the technology, but of humanity’s attitude toward it. AI is admittedly extraordinarily powerful, but it is hardly the first technology to alter the human condition.

We need not assume the position of either a true believer or an unbending critic. Human progress emerges from collaboration between us and, beyond that, between us and our machines. In this sense, the role of artists, investors and innovators in the AI revolution is the same: to combine openness toward the future with informed appreciation of the past.

Luke Coffey

EU must prove it is serious about enlargement

This has been a historic month for the EU. After months of deliberation, the Council of the EU last week voted to grant candidate status to Georgia and to begin membership talks with Ukraine and Moldova. This decision marks a turning point regarding the enlargement of the bloc.

When the EU’s predecessor, the European Coal and Steel Community, was created in 1951, there were only six members: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Over the course of the next 53 years, only nine new members were added to what became the European Economic Community and then later the EU, bringing the total to 15. This changed in 2004.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact

in the early 1990s, the EU focused on the enlargement prospects in Central and Eastern Europe. This initiative came to fruition in 2004, when the EU’s single largest enlargement occurred. At this time, 10 new countries joined, including seven that were once either part of the Warsaw Pact or Soviet Union. However, since this so-called big bang enlargement in 2004, only three new countries have joined: Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 and Croatia in 2013. Of course, the UK formally left the EU in January 2020 after the Brexit vote. Today, the number of members stands at 27.

Because of Russia’s large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there is a newfound geopolitical impetus for EU enlargement for countries in Central and Eastern Europe. In the summer of

2022, just months after the invasion, Ukraine and Moldova were granted EU candidate status. This month, both began accession talks to formally join the bloc. Meanwhile, Georgia, which has long remained committed to Euro-Atlantic integration but has experienced democratic backsliding in recent years that raised concerns in Brussels, was given candidate status.

However, before popping the Champagne, getting Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia across the finish line and into the EU will be no easy task. This is not because Kyiv, Chisinau and Tbilisi will be unable or too slow at making the required reforms to join. Instead, the biggest obstacles will likely be found in Brussels and among certain EU members in Western Europe as they grapple with the institutional reforms needed to bring

in new members. There are four particular issues of concern.

Firstly, since voting in the Council of the EU is, at least in part, based on a formula that includes the population of each member state, some countries in Western Europe stand to lose influence if bigger countries join. For example, upon joining, Ukraine would become the fifth-most-populous member, followed by Poland and Romania. This would make Central and Eastern Europe more influential in the decision-making of the EU in a way that will likely make Paris and Berlin uncomfortable.

Secondly, there is also the matter of reallocating seats in the European Parliament if new members are added. Currently, there are 705 seats. These are distributed based on popula-

tion, with the maximum number of seats for any EU member being 96 and a minimum being six. If a new member joins, the seats have to be redistributed. This means current members will lose seats, especially considering Ukraine’s relatively bigger population. For the EU’s smaller states, this will not make too much difference. However, the bigger states in Western Europe will lose out.

Thirdly, the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy will need to be reformed before Ukraine can join. This will be no easy task. The CAP was introduced in 1962 to facilitate a complex system of agricultural subsidies and to set agricultural policies across the EU. The CAP is hugely expensive as it is and today takes up about a third of the EU’s entire

budget. The number of agricultural subsidies received by member states under CAP is linked to farm size. Considering Ukraine has an estimated quarter of Europe’s total farmland, billions of euros in subsidies will be shifted eastward and away from Western European countries like France and Spain. Reforming CAP is already one of the most contentious issues inside the EU. A major farming country like Ukraine joining the EU would make CAP even more difficult to reform.

Finally, there is an important geopolitical matter that will need to be resolved before Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia join the EU. All three countries have Russian troops on their territory that are uninvited. It is also not well known that the EU contains a mutual defense clause (Article 42.7 of the Treaty

on European Union) that is similar to NATO’s Article 5 security guarantee. NATO’s defense clause is the No. 1 roadblock when it comes to countries like Ukraine and Georgia joining the alliance. With Russian troops already occupying territory in these countries, NATO members are concerned that their entry into the alliance would trigger an automatic war with Moscow. In theory, the same thing could be true regarding the EU’s Article 42.7, but there has been no public debate about how to address this matter. However, as these three countries get closer to the EU finish line, you can bet that this will become a contentious issue.

Right now, there is an understandable amount of euphoria in the EU over the prospect of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia joining. However, as Kyiv,

Chisinau and Tbilisi make progress on the difficult but necessary reforms to join the EU, Brussels also has an obligation to make the necessary institutional reforms.

It would be tragic if Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia successfully underwent the political and economic reforms needed to join the EU, only to then have the process stalled because of Western European concerns over the allocation of European Parliament seats, voting weight in the European Council or farming subsidies. Even the challenges surrounding the EU’s Article 42.7 are not insurmountable with the right leadership and creativity in Brussels.

If the EU is serious about bringing in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia as members, it must start the necessary reforms now before it is too late.



Setup of SIFC renovates Pak economic landscape

LAHORE (INP): Coordinator for Minister of State and Federal Tax Ombudsman Meher Kashif Younis said on Sunday that establishment of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) has renovated the Pakistan's economic landscape by successfully attracting foreign direct investment.

The initiative holds immense significance, particularly in the realm of FDI as the SIFC effectively engages with various countries and was fully committed to ensuring investment flows into country, he said while speaking as the keynote speaker at a seminar on "The Impact of SIFC on Pakistan Economy" held under the aegis of Gold

Ring Economic Forum, a strategic think tank.

Meher Kashif Younis said its manifesto included foreign investment with a long-term goal of touching \$60bn in five years and eventually achieving the target of \$100bn.

"We need consistency in economic, fiscal, trade policies and close collaboration with local and foreign stakeholders for attracting investments," he added.

The Coordinator said it was good omen that Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar had signed multi-billion dollar agreements for the foreign direct investment (FDI), depicting tremendous response to the SIFC which was likely to increase substantially from

January next.

He said these agreements encompass investment cooperation across diverse sectors such as energy, port operations, waste water treatment, food security, logistics, mining and aviation sectors.

Meher said the International Finance Corporation (IFC), in collaboration with the Board of Investment (BoI), had also introduced an ambitious investment plan to inject more than \$1.5bn in Pakistan's economy through both short- and long-term planning.

He said economic partnership between China and Pakistan had also been reinforced by inking 20 agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoUs)

under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cooperation.

He hinted that countries like France, Germany and Korea had expressed their interest in signing agreements related to administrative control of power distribution companies of Pakistan.

The Coordinator said strategically located Pakistan possessed tremendous potential, laced with plenty of natural resources and studded with minerals in abundance. He said what the country needed the most was political stability, a long lasting good governance, transparency, and streamlining cumbersome procedures for strengthening national economy.

PIAF stresses need for solid steps to boost remittances

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) on Sunday 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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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 government heavily relies on remittances, which are much higher than the country's total export proceeds.

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 con-

tribute about 55 percent 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 an MoU with the AMF is expected to be helpful for the country in receiving maximum remittances through official channels. Linking RAAST with Bana will facilitate Pakistanis to remit money in real time. The SBP said the integration of RAAST with Bana 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.



ISLAMABAD: An elderly labourer cutting wood into pieces for selling purpose at his workplace.

PFC team to attend London expo: CEO

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) Chief Executive Officer Mian Kashif Ashfaq Sunday announced that a delegation would join a 3-day London Expo starting from March 25 for exploring new markets and promotion of bilateral trade.

Talking to a visiting delegation of the UK-based Pak origin business community led by Muhammad Arbab Khan, President Pak-British Friendship Council North West Chapter UK here, he said the primary purpose of the visit was to explore and enhance the possibilities of expanding trade relations, fostering joint collaboration, and identifying potential investment avenues between the two countries.

During the visit, the delegation aims to engage in meaningful discussions with key stakeholders, government officials, and business leaders in the UK, he added.

Shaharyar Khan, ourism Ambassador and Investment Consular of Pakistan to Milan, Italy, was also present on the occasion.

He said, "We are enthusiastic about the prospect of building lasting partnerships that will not only boost the furniture industry but also contribute to the overall economic development of both countries."

Mian Kashif Ashfaq, who is also Chairman UK-Pakistan Joint Business Council, said the PFC was fully committed to promoting economic ties and strengthening partnerships.

He said, "I believe by fostering collaboration, we can create mutually beneficial opportunities that contribute to the growth of both economies. We look forward to the opportunity to exchange ideas, share expertise, and establish connections that will pave the way for a successful and fruitful collaboration between two countries," he added.

China's weekly coastal bulk freight index edges up

SHANGHAI (APP): China's coastal bulk freight index increased during the week ending on Dec. 22, according to the Shanghai Shipping Exchange (SSE).

The composite index for coastal bulk freight rose 2.2 percent week on week to 1,187.71, the SSE said.

The coal sub-index increased 2.7 percent to 1,230.87, SSE data showed.

The SSE initiated the index in 2001, under the guidance of the Ministry of Transport, to reflect fluctuations in the Chinese coastal transport market.

Inflation keeps rising, says APBF

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The All Pakistan Business Forum (APBF) has observed that the inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) continued to rise in the wake of higher prices of food and energy despite recent cut in the prices of petroleum products, as essential commodities have still not seen a decline in prices, leaving trade and industry frustrated.

APBF President Syed Maaz Mahmood, quoting the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), observed that the index spiked 38.28 percent when compared with the corresponding week of last year, as out of the 51 essential commodities covered by SPI, prices of 17 (33.33 percent) items increased, rates of another 17 decreased and prices of the remaining 17 items remained unchanged compared to the previous week.

On a weekly basis, the price of tomato rose 6.28 percent, egg 3.48 percent, powdered salt 2.75 percent, cooked beef 1.06 percent, garlic 1.04 percent, tea (prepared) 0.73 percent, beef 0.39 percent and potato 0.35 percent.

Among non-food commodities, the electricity charges for Q1 rose 8.59 percent, energy savers 0.55 percent, shirting 0.47 percent and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) 0.31 percent, according to the PBS.

The year-on-year trend depicted price increases in the range of 58-137 percent among different items.

Maaz Mahmood said that Pakistan has been facing a high inflation for the past couple of years partly due to massive depreciation of the rupee against

the US dollar and partly due to a surge in global commodity prices like energy cost. The country largely meets its energy demand through expensive imports.

The monthly inflation reading, measured by the Consumer Price Index, hit a four-month high at 31.4 percent in September 2023 after reaching a six-decade high at 38 percent in May.

Inflationary pressures are expected to slow down from January 2024 onwards.

The latest rupee appreciation of 10.62 percent in the past 27 working days to over three-month high at Rs287.62/\$ is expected to encourage the government to make a deep cut in petroleum product prices in the upcoming fortnightly review for the second half of Dec.

However, the likely surge in gas prices under a condition of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan program may keep inflation elevated and not allow it to fall significantly in the near future.

He stressing the need for putting the economy on a sustainable growth trajectory by providing incentives to the industry, lamented that the economy is facing multiple challenges of falling exports, high inflation, low growth and declining foreign reserves, with fiscal accounts under immense pressure on account of heavy interest payments.

The APBF President said that the drop shows the government would find it difficult to achieve the industrial growth and export target, leading to more pressure on foreign exchange reserves of the

country.

He asked the government to address the underlying structural vulnerabilities through smooth energy supply at competitive rates, as country's overall export proceeds continued to shrink for the fifth consecutive month in a row.

Quoting the data, he pointed out 1.7 billion dollars decline in remittances during the first half of the current year compared to the same period the year before (a decline of 11.1 percent), exports declined by 6.6 billion dollars (6.8 percent decline), foreign direct investment dipped by 654 million dollars (58 percent decline), portfolio investment plummeted from negative 45.5 to negative 1032 million dollars, Public Sector Development Program decreased by 122 billion rupees (48.4 percent) and credit to private sector from 1043.1 to 703.6 million rupees which contributed to a decline in Nov 2021 Large Scale Manufacturing Sector growth of 6 percent to negative 5.50 percent in the comparable period this year.

He observed that the drop in textile and clothing exports is gaining momentum over the past five months owing to multiple factors including high energy costs, stuck-up refunds and a slump in global demands despite the massive depreciation of the rupee.

He believes that one of the main reasons behind falling exports was the exchange rate instability.

The discontinuation of duty drawbacks on local taxes and levies by the government has also created liquidity issues for the export sector.

Iftikhar lauds FTO for addressing taxpayers issues

LAHORE (APP): SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry former President Iftikhar Ali Malik Sunday eulogised the meritorious services being rendered by Federal Tax Ombudsman Dr Asif Mahmood Jah for addressing tall genuine tax-related grievances of taxpayers, especially the business community across the country within a record shortest possible time of 34 days.

Talking to a delegation of industrialists, led by

Muslim Khan Buner here, he said since he assumed office on 29th September 2021, a public awareness campaign touched the whole country and as a result the first time in history, thousands of aggrieved taxpayers approached the regional offices sprawling nationwide through email, FTO portal, WhatsApp, Mobile APP, Fax and written complaints which were resolved in a record time of 34 days from the date of complaint.

Malik said Dr. Jah's commitment to resolving issues in such a timely manner reflects a proactive approach that fosters a business-friendly environment. He appreciated the principled and bold stance of Federal Tax Ombudsman's advocacy for timely payment of taxes and the expansion of the tax base. Recognizing the urgency of these measures, Dr. Jah's stance aligns with the broader goal of strengthening the national economy, he added.

Court Notice

In the Court of Jauhar Ali Safi Civil Judge-I/Alaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar, Suit No. 327/1, Institution 30/3/2023. Date of hearing 26/1/2024. Tariq Jalal vs. Sher Zaman Khan etc. Notice to No. 4. Sarfaraz Khan s/o Mumber resident of Tenowil Dgeray at Sura Tehsil Mandan district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendant cannot be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendant will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 a.m dated 26/1/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Expensive gas, power hitting industry as exports keep declining: BMP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The high gas and power prices have made the local as well as the export industry uncompetitive on the world market resulting in an 8 per cent monthly and 7 percent annual decline to \$1.3 billion in November.

The BMP Chairman and FPCCI former president Mian Anjum Nisar observed that the government would have to sustain its top focus on enhancing the share of renewable energy and hydropower projects to lower energy costs through an improved energy mix, although financing for such projects remained a key challenge. He said that enhancing the share of renewable energy (RE) and

hydropower in the energy mix was the government's priority and needed to be sustained over a longer horizon as it was the only way to provide affordable energy to the people.

Quoting the figures, he said that in rupee terms, the country's textile exports clocked in at Rs376bn, down by 7pc month-on-month but rose 19pc year-on-year owing to rupee depreciation against the dollar. Basic textiles witnessed a fall of 14pc MoM and a rise of 20pc YoY to \$243m in November. The YoY substantial increase resulted from the 12 times YoY increase in raw cotton exports due to the significant growth in cotton crop this year as compared to last year, which was greatly

affected by floods.

Value-added textile exports reached \$920m, up by 6pc MoM while it fell by 12pc YoY. Towels remained the major contributor to the segment with 21pc MoM and 20pc YoY drop in exports. Knitwear saw a 5pc MoM and a 12pc YoY decline.

Bedwear posted a 16pc MoM and 8pc YoY fall followed by 12pc YoY decline in readymade garments but a 5pc MoM rise.

In 5MFY24, textile exports shrank by 6pc to \$6.9bn from \$7.4bn in the same period last year due to an economic slowdown and a reduced demand for textile products worldwide.

The government has set a textile export target of \$25bn. However, textile

exports for FY24 will reach \$17bn, up 3pc YoY.

Pakistan's Information Technology (IT) exports rose nine per cent month-on-month to \$259 million in November, which was also higher than the 12-month average of \$222m.

The jump is due to a relaxation in the permissible retention limit by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), increasing it from 35pc to 50pc in the Exporters' Specialised Foreign Currency Accounts, and the stable rupee which encourages IT companies to repatriate their foreign income and deposit it in local accounts.

IT export number indicates the amount remitted back to Pakistan by technology companies.

FPCCI former president and Businessmen Panel (BMP) Chairman said that the drop shows the government would find it difficult to achieve the industrial growth and export target, leading to more pressure on foreign exchange reserves of the country. He asked the government to address the underlying structural vulnerabilities through smooth energy supply at competitive rates, as country's overall export proceeds continued to shrink for the fifth consecutive month in a row.

Quoting the data, he pointed out 1.7 billion dollars decline in remittances during the first half of the current year compared to the same period the year before (a decline of 11.1 percent), exports declined by 6.6 bil-

lion dollars (6.8 percent decline), foreign direct investment dipped by 654 million dollars (58 percent decline), portfolio investment plummeted from negative 45.5 to negative 1032 million dollars, Public Sector Development Program decreased by 122 billion rupees (48.4 percent) and credit to private sector from 1043.1 to 703.6 million rupees which contributed to a decline in Nov 2021 Large Scale Manufacturing Sector growth of 6 percent to negative 5.50 percent in the comparable period this year.

Rising prices of wheat are the key factors responsible for affecting the general price level. International commodity prices are showing downward trend on a

YoY basis and its impact will ultimately be transmitted to domestic prices with some lags after adjusting the currency devaluation. While the government kept the administered prices at their current level to stabilize the overall prices but post floods persistent shortfall of essential crops is preventing inflation to settle down.

He observed that the drop in textile and clothing exports is gaining momentum over the past five months owing to multiple factors including high energy costs, stuck-up refunds and a slump in global demands despite the massive depreciation of the rupee. He believes that one of the main reasons behind falling exports was the exchange rate instability.



In brief

Handball trials

begins in Abbottabad

PESHAWAR (APP): In connection with the Prime Minister's Talent Hunt Youth Sports League, Men Handball Trials have started at Kings Football Stadium, Abbottabad with fourteen best players and three reserves will be selected in the trials. On this occasion, Regional Sports Officer Abbottabad Ahmed Zaman was the chief guest along with DSO Mansehra Aqib, international player of Pakistan Handball and brand ambassador of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Handball League, Hazrat Hussain, Additional Registrar Peshawar University Dr. Noorzada and other important personalities were present. Trials were held under the auspices of Directorate of Sports Peshawar University, Director Sports and Organizer and Coordinator of Peshawar University Bahre Karam, President of Provincial Handball Association, is supervising the trials. The selection committee comprises international players including Naveedur Rahman and additional registrar Dr. Noorzada were also present. A large number of players participated in the trials. The trials would also be continued after which the selected players will be announced.

Quaid-e-Azam Day Cycle Race

PESHAWAR (APP): Sanaullah of Mardan clinched the trophy of the Quaid-e-Azam Day Cycle Race organized under the aegis of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cycling Association here at Northern Bypass on Sunday. Sanaullah of Mardan won the first position, Mohsin Khan of Baikistan Academy and Omar of Mardan took second and third position respectively. On the occasion of the closing ceremony, the special guest Malik Tariq Awan, a well-known social personality, distributed trophies, certificates and cash prizes among the athletes. President KP Cycling Association Syed Shayan Ali Shah, Secretary Muhammad Ali, Former President and Organizer Nisar Ahmed, International Cyclist Murad Ali, Technical Official Muhammad Bilal and Taffor Zareen and other officials and a large number of spectators were present. In the 28 kilometer race, in the professional category, Sanaullah of Mardan won the first place with 40.40sec, Mohsin Khan of Bayistan Academy and Umar Farooq of Mardan won the second and third positions respectively. The amateur category race consisted of fourteen kilometers. Adil Khan of Peshawar stood first with 22 minutes and 10 seconds, Abuzar of Swat and Muhammad Saad of Mardan took the second and third positions respectively. At the end, Malik Tariq Awan distributed trophies, certificates and cash prizes to the players.

England rope in Pollard

LONDON (Agencies): England have appointed former West Indies captain Kieron Pollard as an assistant coach for the Twenty20 World Cup next year, the country's cricket board (ECB) announced on Sunday. Pollard helped the West Indies win the World Cup in 2012 while the 36-year-old, who made a name for himself as a T20 specialist, won five Indian Premier League titles with the Mumbai Indians between 2013 and 2020. The 2024 World Cup will be held in the West Indies and the United States in June. "Pollard will join the England men's team specifically for the T20 World Cup as an assistant coach and to provide expertise of local conditions," the ECB said in a statement.



KARACHI: Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf giving away medal to a prize winner of 7th CNS Open Shooting Championship.

India beat Australia in women's Test for first time

MUMBAI (Agencies): India secured their first Test win over Australia with an eight-wicket victory in a one-off match in Mumbai.

Australia began the final day with five second innings wickets in hand and a lead of 46 but India ruthlessly dismissed the tourists for 261. India then chased down a modest target of 75 shortly after lunch thanks to Smriti Mandhana's unbeaten 38.

"It's the reward for all the hard work we have done for so many years," said India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur. "It's reward for the hard work and patience. We just wanted to play positive cricket."

India's win is their first in 11 women's Tests against Australia, who are ranked number one in the world in the format, since the sides

first played in 1977.

A first-innings lead of 187 had given India the upper hand in the contest after they posted a commanding 406 in response to Australia's 219. Richa Ghosh (52), Jemimah Rodrigues (73), Deepti Sharma (78) and Mandhana (74) all made patient half-centuries for India, while spinner Ash Gardner took 4-100.

Australia's batters struggled at the Wankhede Stadium with vice-captain Tahlia McGrath the only player to make a half-century in either innings for the tourists. India all-rounder Sneha Rana was named player of the match after her off-spin brought her match figures of 7-119 from 44.4 overs.

"A Test match in India is happening after a long time,

so this win is right at the top," Rana said. "For Indian fans also this win is huge. The players who are growing will see this win and want to play more Test cricket."

It was a disappointing start to Alyssa Healy's reign as captain having been named as Meg Lanning's permanent successor across all formats earlier this month. "Except for the first day, we showed a lot of fight," Healy said.

"Full credit to the Indian team, they just put too many runs on us. If we would have batted the first full day, we could have been in the game." India's victory was their second in Tests this month having thrashed England by 347 runs in Mumbai. Australia and India play each other in three ODIs and three T20s starting on 28 December.

Curran loses appeal against 4-match ban

SYDNEY (Agencies): Sydney Sixers all-rounder Tom Curran said he "deeply regrets" the incident which resulted in him receiving a four-match ban for intimidating an umpire.

Cricket Australia found that Curran was involved in a disagreement with an umpire during the warm-up before a Big Bash game against Hobart Hurricanes.

The 28-year-old England player lost an appeal against his punishment. "I have had a lot of time to reflect on my actions and the incident," said Curran. "My preparation for every fixture is deeply methodical and my focus is intense during the warm-up."

"Part of my preparation is to do a run through and gauge my run up on that particular surface. I've done this before every match and for me it's part of my routine for every match."

"The interaction with umpire Muhammad Qureshi took me by surprise at a time when I was very focused on my pre-match routine. I didn't expect the stand-off that resulted. "I deeply regret the way I reacted to it and the resultant impact for umpire Qureshi, the Sydney Sixers and myself personally." In the build-up to the match on 11 December, the fourth umpire - who is tasked with supervising the pitch - asked Curran not to run on the pitch.

But CA's code of conduct commissioner Adrian Anderson found that Curran then "attempted to perform a practice run-up and run at pace straight towards the umpire, who stood in the bowling crease facing Curran. The umpire stepped to his right to avoid the risk of collision".

The incident was deemed to be "intimidation or attempted intimidation of an umpire or match referee" under the CA code.

According to the BBL's rules, only the captain and team coach are permitted to walk on the pitch to assess its condition prior to the start of play, with spiked footwear also not allowed before the match. "My intention was always to veer off to umpire Qureshi's right, in a similar way to my run up at the other end," added Curran.

Pakistan Navy clinches Champions title of 7th CNS Open Shooting C'ship

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Closing ceremony of 7th Chief of the Naval Staff Open Shooting Championship was held at Pakistan Navy Shooting Range, PNS BAHADUR at Karachi. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf was the Chief Guest on occasion.

Pakistan Navy clinched the title of CNS Open Shooting Championship 2023 with 35 Gold, 17 Silver and 13 Bronze medals whereas Sindh team secured the Runners up position. Almost 400 shooters from all over Pakistan participated in the

week long Championship.

Chief of the Naval Staff awarded medals and trophies to the winners of the championship and appreciated the efforts of organizers and support of sponsors and sports shooters from all over Pakistan to make the championship a success.

During the championship, a total of 27 events including 11 men, 5 women and 4 in youth categories were contested. In order to promote the game of shooting among youth and for interest of local sports shooting lovers, 7 events of Big Bore Pistol & Big Bore Rifle categories were also held

which were non-scoring towards overall points of the championship.

Around 400 shooters from Pakistan Army, Pakistan Navy, Pakistan Air Force, ASF, Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan, FRA, HEC, Sindh Police and SSU Sindh Police teams and different shooting clubs from Karachi participated in the championship and displayed their skills in the sport of shooting. All matches were contested under the umbrella of National Rifle Association of Pakistan (NRAP) as per International Sports Shooting Federation latest rules and regulations.

Usman Khawaja denied permission to have peace symbol on bat

MELBOURNE (AFP): Australia's Usman Khawaja has been denied permission to place a peace symbol on his bat and shoes for the Boxing Day Test against Pakistan, reports said Sunday.

A sticker showing a black dove and the words 01:UDHR — a reference to Article One of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — was on his bat and shoes during training in Melbourne on Sunday.

The star batter had multiple meetings with Cricket Australia over recent days to find a message that would be appropriate for the second Test this week, local media said.

But his latest humanitarian gesture has been turned down by the International Cricket Committee, The Australian and Melbourne Age newspapers reported.

The ICC were not immediately available for comment.

Khawaja, a Muslim, was stopped from wearing shoes emblazoned with the handwritten slogans "Freedom is a human right" and "All lives are equal" during the first Test in Perth.

The 36-year-old had wanted to show his support for the people of Gaza.

But he was told they flouted ICC rules on messages that relate to politics, religion or race.

He wore a black arm-

band during the match and was reprimanded by the ICC, but insisted afterwards it was for a "personal bereavement" and vowed to contest the ruling.

Khawaja spoke on Friday about how the Israel-Hamas conflict had affected him, saying he despaired at seeing how many children had been killed.

"When I'm looking at my Instagram and seeing innocent kids, videos of them dying, passing away, that's what hit me the hardest," he said.

"I don't have any agendas other than trying to shine a light on what I feel really passionately, really strongly about."



RIYADH: Anthony Joshua punches Otto Wallin during the Heavyweight fight between Anthony Joshua and Otto Wallin.

Joshua wins in style but Wilder suffers shock loss

RIYADH (Agencies): Anthony Joshua put in a terrific performance to beat Otto Wallin inside the distance but Deontay Wilder's shock points loss to Joseph Parker on the same bill scuppered plans for the long-awaited heavyweight showdown.

Briton Joshua boxed magnificently in Saudi Arabia, dominating Wallin before the Swede's corner pulled him out of the fight at the end of the fifth.

Earlier in the night, American Wilder appeared a shadow of himself in Riyadh, and was hurt badly in the eighth as New Zealander Parker was awarded a unanimous decision.

"I heard that Deontay lost. So what? He'll be back. Deontay, everything that he said about me, I could rip him apart right now, but I'm going to take the higher ground," Joshua said.

"You can come back. If he wanted to, he can come back. I'm sure everyone still wants to see that fight."

Parker, also a former world champion, was awarded a unanimous decision with the judges' scoring it 118-111, 118-110 and 120-108.

Saudi organisers had already pencilled in the Joshua-Wilder bout for next year. While no contract had been signed, the pair were expected to enter the ring post-fight and announce a deal to fight at some point in early 2024.

Wilder admitted all the talk of a fight at least five

years in the making had been "a distraction", although Joshua more than did his part. After the fight, promoter Eddie Hearn said Joshua is most likely going to face Croatia's Filip Hrgovic for a vacant IBF world title, bidding to become a three-time world champion. But as the dust settles in Riyadh, many boxing fans will be cursing their luck, as Joshua v Wilder slips away once again.

Wilder a shadow of himself as Parker proves his worth

Wilder entered the ring wearing a crown, but it has been almost four years since he reigned over the heavyweight division.

The 38-year-old was introduced with his newly acclaimed nickname 'Dr Sleep'. After some cagey opening rounds he may have put the crowd to sleep rather than his opponent.

The inactive Wilder had boxed just three minutes in the past two years, signs of ring rust were expected. But losing rounds is nothing new to Wilder. Numerous times before he has looked out of his depth, only to unleash that ferocious right hand, Parker, 31, grew in confidence and traded with Wilder in the fourth, whipping a left hook into the body and hurting Wilder with an exchange on the inside.

Was the ghost of the Tyson Fury trilogy, when Wilder drew one and lost two, haunting him? His timing and

judgement of distance was off. Parker came forward with bursts. In between rounds Parker's trainer, Andy Lee, told his fighter to go after Wilder, that a knockout would come. "This is your moment," Lee said.

Wilder enjoyed his best moment in the sixth, landing a right but without the ferocity which has stopped 42 opponents in 43 wins.

Former WBO champion Parker was the busier, more accurate boxer, comfortably winning most rounds.

Wilder had no answer for what was to come in the eighth. Parker landed the most thunderous overhand right. Wilder, backed into the ropes, was in trouble as Parker continued the attack.

Saved by the bell, Wilder poked his tongue out as he stumbled back to his corner. All the while Joshua was getting his hands wrapped and going through warm-ups in the dressing room, unaware of what was unfolding in the ring.

Wilder was telegraphing his right hands as Parker continued to land more cleanly as the fight entered the championship rounds. New Zealand's Parker was on a run of three straight wins and two knockouts. He was demonstrating just why many pundits tipped him for the win. For all Parker's dominance, there was still a puncher's chance for Wilder. He threw the kitchen sink in the 12th, but missed by an absolute mile.



MUMBAI: Players of India celebrate their team's win over Australia during day four of the Women's Test Match between India and Australia at Wankhede Stadium.



In brief

Police bust dacoit gang

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have busted a dacoit gang by arresting three of its active members allegedly involved in dacoit and other crimes and seized weapons, cash, mobile phones, motorcycles, and other valuables from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Taxila police managed to bust a dacoit gang and arrest its three members, namely Amjad, Shehzad, and Tehzeb ul Hassan. He informed that police recovered four stolen motorcycles, five mobile phones, cash worth Rs 15000, weapons, and other items from their possession. He said police were trying to arrest other members of the gang. The Superintendent of Police, Potohar, directed police teams to accelerate operations against gangs and other lawbreakers, he added.

Christmas cake cutting ceremony

RAWALPINDI (APP): A Christmas cake-cutting ceremony was organized here on Sunday for the officers belonging to the Christian community of Rawalpindi Police, said a police spokesman. Senior Superintendent Police (SSP) Operations, Flight Lieutenant (R) Hafiz Kamran Asghar, DSP Admin, DSP Security Tahir Sikandar and Christian Police Officers of Rawalpindi Police and their families participated in the ceremony. SSP Operations cut the Christmas cake with policemen and their children. The SSP congratulated the policemen and their children on Christmas with gifts and wished them well. The purpose of the event is to share in your happiness, said SSP Operations. He further said that Rawalpindi Police join you in the joy of the Christmas festival. Foolproof security would be provided to churches, Christian localities and the community, Hafiz Kamran Asghar added.

Police register 129 cases

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police have registered 129 cases against underage drivers during the last 24 hours, said a police spokesman here on Sunday. A total of 4418 FIRs were registered under the campaign launched against underage drivers, while 129 cases were registered during the last 24 hours. Police, on the directive of City Police Officer Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani, were also conducting awareness campaigns in schools and colleges to educate. He told the students about the legal age requirements for obtaining a driving license. All possible steps were being taken to improve the traffic situation on the city roads and facilitate citizens, he added. He informed that police, on the directive of the City Police Officer, Rawalpindi, were taking action under the law against underage drivers.

AIOW organizes event for workers

ISLAMABAD (APP): A Christmas celebration function was organized at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOW) for Christian workers. Addressing the ceremony, Vice Chancellor AIOW, Prof Dr Nasir Mahmood said that all the prophets have taught love, tolerance, forgiveness and justice, while today in our society, instead of brotherhood and love, we are living with hatred and disgust with each other. Dr Nasir said, let's pledge that we will not do what our conscience forbids us to do. He said that most of us have to change ourselves for the establishment of a beautiful society.



ISLAMABAD: Youngsters from Christian community preparing Christmas Crib in connection with Christmas celebrations at G-7 area.

Nation to celebrate 147th birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam with zeal

RAWALPINDI (APP): Nation to celebrate 147th birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam with zeal and fervour on Dec 25, Monday as all arrangements have been finalized. All is set to celebrate the anniversary of the Father of the Nation, and founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah in the Rawalpindi division. Special programs have been arranged by various social, political, governmental and non-governmental organizations and forums to celebrate the birthday of the founder of Pakistan with great enthusiasm and devotion. Punjab Arts Council organized an exhibition of paintings titled 'Jinnah Say Quaid Tak' to pay tribute to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Over 50 works of art by students of universities and colleges were showcased in the exhibition. Former Director Rawalpindi Arts Council, Naheed Manzoor and Director of Arts Council Waqar Ahmed were the chief guests of the exhibition. Speaking at the opening ceremony, Naheed Manzoor said that Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was the last outstanding figure of the freedom struggle of the Nation, which reached its peak in his person. "The founder of Pakistan is an ideal leader for all of us," she added.

Waqar Ahmed said that

all aspects of his personality and attributes are a beacon of light for the nation. The journey from Jinnah to Quaid-e-Azam is also an important chapter in his life. It is an important national requirement to keep the new generation aware, he added.

The chief guest emphasized that understanding the journey of Mr Jinnah to Quaid-e-Azam could be helpful and useful in the journey of history for the stability and bright future of Pakistan. Special events, seminars, cake-cutting ceremonies, painting exhibitions, and sports festivals are being organized across the country to pay tribute to Quaid-e-Azam and shed light on his lifelong political struggle and guiding principles of unity, faith, and discipline.

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah who was born on December 25, 1876, in Karachi led the struggle for a separate homeland for the Muslims of the sub-continent. On the birthday of the Founder of Pakistan, the national flag will be hoisted on principal government buildings throughout the country. The day will dawn with special prayers for the security, progress and prosperity of the country.

Special events will be arranged on the day to highlight and promote the ideas and views of the Quaid-e-Azam. In these events,

speakers will highlight Quaid-e-Azam's lifelong political struggle and his guiding principles of unity, faith and discipline.

Quran Khawani would be held at the Mazar-e-Quaid in Karachi, while a change of guard ceremony would also take place.

A large number of people from all walks of life would visit the tomb to pay tribute to Quaid-e-Azam for the services he rendered for the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the sub-continent. Newspapers will bring out supplements while TV channels will present programs to highlight the messages and vision of Quaid-e-Azam. The City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi have issued a special traffic plan for Christmas Day and Quaid-e-Azam's birth anniversary. According to a CTP spokesman, as many as 281 officers and wardens would be deployed in the city to regulate the traffic rush and to facilitate the citizens on December midnight and on December 25.

The spokesman informed that special squads had been formed to control one-wheeling. The traffic officials including circle In-charges, Inspectors, Traffic Wardens and Traffic Assistants would be deployed to maintain the flow of traffic on city roads, he said.

Ministry renovates 2,377 houses, flats in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Works Department (PWD), Ministry of Housing and Works has upgraded and renovated as many as 2,385 houses and flats in various sectors of Islamabad during the last five and half years.

"The PWD has carried out EM works of as many as 1,365 flats and houses while around 1,012 civil work is executed of different categories, an official in the ministry told APP.

The official said the ministry has owned as many as 5,253 houses and flats of categories-I to categories-V located in various sectors in the federal capital. He said the

Capital Development Authority (CDA) was responsible for the maintenance and renovation of the Pak Secretariat, Islamabad, therefore, no fund has been spent on the ministry's renovation. The official said the PWD has started sending notices to the allottees of government accommodation in Sector I-9/4 about payment of electric meter bills for water motors installed at residential blocks. He said the Finance Division had allocated funds for payment of utilities in the relevant heads of accounts of the users while utility bills of the residential accommodation including hostels, rest houses and judicial residences should

be paid by the users.

To a question, he said the Ministry of Housing and Works has allocated an amount of Rs 5.80 million in the current financial year 2023-2024 for electricity bills of Qasr-e-Naz Lodge, South Zone Karachi due to financial constraints. "Out of the total Rs 5.80 million, only an amount of Rs 0.87 million has been released at the rate of 15 per cent in this regard so far," he added. He said that the Karachi Electric Supply Company bill was Rs 7.26 million for September 2023 along with arrears and the electricity connection had been disconnected in June 2023.

Railways increase ROW charges for five years

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways has significantly raised the Right of Way (ROW) charges for a single-track crossing to Rs. 3.8 million for five years which would help the department to generate more revenue.

Historically, Pakistan Railways charged Rs. 100,000 per track crossing for 10 years when telecom operators installed fibre broadband, sources in the Ministry told APP. In 2007, they said the charges were increased to Rs. 2.7 million for five years, as the use of fibre broadband expanded. However, in 2022, the PTI-led government reduced the crossing charges to Rs. 600,000 per crossing for a lifetime to promote fibre broadband.

They said that in contrast, cable TV operators continue to pay only Rs. 100 per year. It is pertinent to mention here that Pakistan Railways has offered to lay fibre optics cables along the railway tracks across the country, in a joint venture with private sector investors to generate revenue for the department.

Pakistan Railways has around 7,791 kilometres of railway network across

the country which will not only help the department to improve its financial condition but also attract investors to invest.

The matter also came under discussion during a meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC), in which the Ministry of Railways pointed out that the department was offering an excellent opportunity for laying fibre optics cables along its track for digital connectivity across the country.

During the meeting, Pakistan Railways informed that it has a network of 7,791 km, which passes through high-density population areas and connects major cities in the four provinces.

With the average assets and hefty pension bills, Pakistan Railways contended, but its financial health was deteriorating, and unless new revenue sources were identified, the reliance on government subsidies would keep on growing.

Pakistan Railways was of the view that right-of-way charges on fibre optics cables would offer the department a decent source of earnings.

Nine drug peddlers, bootleggers netted

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi police, in an action against suspected drug peddlers and bootleggers here on Sunday, arrested nine accused, besides recovering over seven kg of charras, 18 litres of liquor, a Kalashnikov, a 30-bar pistol, ammunition, and other items from their possession. A police spokesperson said that Saddar Wah, Rawat, Rattaamral, and Mandra police held Muhammad Taj, Abdul Bakar, Abdul Jalil, and Wajid and recovered over seven kg of charras from their possession. Waris Khan, Bani, Saddar Wah, and Rattaamral police conducted raids in their respective jurisdictions and rounded up five accused.

ISLAMABAD (APP): With the mounting traffic load in the federal capital, Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has tightened belts to penalize violators for streamlining smooth traffic flow and the safety of residents. Robust enforcement strategies are implemented with heightened fines and registration of FIRs for serious violations, particularly involving underage driving as this phenomenon has emerged as a serious issue in the recent past. Taking cognizance of the gravity of this issue the ITP embarked on rigorous enforcement of traffic rules penalizing thousands of violators by imposing fines and impounding their motorbikes.

These measures showed some positive results with statistics showing a decline in violations 38,000 fewer violation cases registered in October and November 2023 as compared to the same period last year.

But, it should not be a one-sided story but rather a shared responsibility of everybody. When the police are trying to do their bit, the parents and other family members must also ensure to stop their underage kids from driving freely on roads endangering their and other's lives.

"Under-age driving is a serious issue," remarked Chief Traffic Officer Islamabad, Muhammad Sarfraz Virk. "A significant portion (65 per cent) of traffic violations is attributed to amateur drivers. We recently witnessed some lethal encounters due to underage drivers."

"But, we are diligently focusing on this area," he stated revealing that during 2023, the authorities actively registered FIRs against underage drivers, impounding over 35,000 motorbikes and seizing 17,000 vehicles involved in various violations. "We also called their parents, asked them to submit affidavits to ensure that this practice is not repeated and sought their cooperation to impose

PM felicitates Christian community on Christmas

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar felicitated the Christian community on the occasion of Christmas and said the nation on this day should pledge to make Pakistan a model of religious tolerance and inter-faith harmony. In a message on the occasion of Christmas, he said, "The Christian community is celebrating Christmas in Pakistan and across the world and I and the whole nation felicitate the Christian brothers and sisters on the happy occasion of Christmas. Christmas is the name of love, brotherhood, patience and sacrifice."

These values were critical in putting a society on the path of development, he added. The PM said the Prophet of Allah, Hazrat Essa (AS) healed the pain of humanity and took the message of God to the whole humanity.

Hazrat Essa (AS) reformed humanity with teachings of peace, brotherhood, tolerance and forbearance which led to the success of humans.

The moral teachings and the guidance of the Prophet were a beacon for humanity for all times to come, he continued.

He said in the present age there was an acute need to follow Hazrat Essa's message of human compassion, affection, tolerance and fraternity.

In the last few years at the international level, human society had been facing an adverse situation due to a wave of religious intolerance, he observed.

"To reverse this negative trend we have to spread Hazrat Essa's message of brotherhood and religious tolerance and follow

his teachings to make the world a cradle of peace. In this way we can forever end hatred from the world," he remarked.

He said the white colour in Pakistan's green flag represented the minorities including the Christian community which played a vital role in the progress and development of the country, and in all fields including defence, judiciary, arts, sports and education made their countrymen proud. The prime minister said the Christian community laid down their lives for strengthening the foundation of the country and for its integrity and solidarity.

He said in the Quaid of Pakistan every person had complete religious freedom and the constitution of Pakistan provided special protection to minorities, adding every citizen was given equal rights and they had complete freedom of worship and had liberty to perform religious rituals and celebrate religious occasions.

"The State and every citizen have the responsibility to protect their places of worship," he asserted.

He said, "The issues faced by Pakistan can only be resolved when we rise above the distinctions of colour, ethnicity, and religion and work day and night as a united nation for the progress of the country."

"Pakistan is our home and on this occasion of Christmas we should pledge that together we will make Pakistan a model of religious tolerance and brotherhood and play our foremost role in taking our country out of all kinds of difficulties," he concluded.

Qateel Shifai remembered on birth anniversary

ISLAMABAD (APP): Qateel Shifai as his pen name in 1938. "Qateel" was his surname and "Shifai" was in honour of his Ustaad Hakim Mohammed 'Shifa' whom he considered his mentor. After the death of his father in 1935, he moved

to Rawalpindi to support his family. In 1946, he came to Lahore and joined the monthly 'Adab-e-Latif', as assistant editor. His first ghazal was published in the Lahore weekly 'Star', edited by Qamar Jalalabadi.

Curbing underage driving – a shared responsibility

ISLAMABAD (APP): With the mounting traffic load in the federal capital, Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has tightened belts to penalize violators for streamlining smooth traffic flow and the safety of residents. Robust enforcement strategies are implemented with heightened fines and registration of FIRs for serious violations, particularly involving underage driving as this phenomenon has emerged as a serious issue in the recent past. Taking cognizance of the gravity of this issue the ITP embarked on rigorous enforcement of traffic rules penalizing thousands of violators by imposing fines and impounding their motorbikes.

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"But, we are diligently focusing on this area," he stated revealing that during 2023, the authorities actively registered FIRs against underage drivers, impounding over 35,000 motorbikes and seizing 17,000 vehicles involved in various violations. "We also called their parents, asked them to submit affidavits to ensure that this practice is not repeated and sought their cooperation to impose

discipline at homes to discourage repetition of this practice," he informed.

"Although sense of responsibility is improving yet lot is needed to be done," he remarked. "I would especially advise parents not to be swayed by love for their children. It may land them and their children in serious trouble." The Ministry of Interior issued a notification in September this year, announcing an increase in traffic violation fines in Islamabad. The move is part of a broader initiative to ensure road safety and strict adherence to traffic regulations.

Since the general trend of violation had shown a decline in violations since the initiation of FIR registration, broader cooperation and additional resources to further fortify road safety in the city were direly needed. "Our efforts are on way but for complete success, we need parental involvement," he said. "They must be aware that amateur drivers would be facing problems like getting character certificates and other documents for usage within the country and travelling abroad." In the present scenario when the federal capital's population had increased to two million people just a few hundred police officials could not be able to manage the situation ideal. Therefore, we need to create a balance between the populace and the police. When asked to comment on this situation, Sarfraz Virk proposed a strategic plan to strengthen Islamabad Traffic Police, highlighting increased resources including additional personnel and divisions to curb violations. "This proposal aims to secure eight divisions, encompassing extra DSPs, vehicles, bikes and lifters. Once, approved, this proposal would significantly improve traffic police's capacity to manage Islamabad's traffic." He urged active public cooperation to make comprehensive road safety campaigns a success as king commuters to also mani-

fest a sense of responsibility for the common good.

"We are committed to our duties under the guidance of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCPPO) Dr Akbar Nasir Khan to raise awareness on traffic rules and ensure the safety of people," he reiterated.

"Our efforts include educating the road users, installing special signboards, and conducting awareness campaigns at the government, private and educational institutions," he stated. He also mentioned modernization initiatives adopted during ICCPO Dr Akbar Nasir Khan's tenure like a streamlined one-window operation for obtaining driving licenses, an efficient e-challan system and the use of social media and FM radio (92.4) for public awareness. "We appreciate the support by the Interior Ministry and the Prime Minister in our efforts to maintain order in our ranks also," Virk said. "We have a robust internal accountability system against police misconduct and the public can conveniently lodge complaints through the ICT15 app." He said after action against drivers without licenses, the trend of obtaining traffic licenses is on the rise. "We have streamlined its process and licenses now are issued efficiently. For this, I would appreciate the entire license staff for providing brisk facilities to applicants."

As abiding by the law is the responsibility of every citizen, therefore this goal should not be left to the police alone to achieve. Citizens especially parents of underage drivers, the police and other state departments must move hand in hand to root out such menaces from our society. Moreover, as the capital's population surpasses the two million mark just 685 traffic police personnel are quite insufficient to manage traffic, therefore it is direly needed to raise their number, equip them promptly and provide vehicles for quick response to any situation.



ISLAMABAD: Customer selecting and purchasing second hand warm clothes from the vendor at Lehtar Road.

EU donates 3 million euros

KABUL (Ariana News): The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid says that the European Union has contributed three million euros, (\$3.2 million) to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund. OCHA said this amount of aid will enable aid agencies to reach millions of people across the country in need of assistance and protection. The European Union has already provided several aid packages for Afghanistan during the course of the year.

Pine nuts exports increased

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Commerce and Industry said that compared to the previous year, the amount of pine nuts exports has increased slightly. The statistics of this ministry show that in the last eight months, \$14 million dollars worth of pine nuts have been exported to China, India, Pakistan, UAE and US. The spokesperson of this ministry said that they are trying to provide more facilities in the export sector of pine nuts through air corridors and land routes.

MoIC establishes joint stock company

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC) said that a committee has been established to regulate the work of businessmen and industrialists returning to the country.

The ministry emphasized that a joint-stock company will be established within the framework of this committee, which aims to attract investors with low capital.

Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, the Commerce and Industry spokesman, said: "The committee for setting up facilities for returning businessmen and craftsmen has been formed, and this committee is for the building of Afghanistan. For those who have small capital and do not have the ability to do big business, MoIC plans to create a joint-stock company for them." This company will be established under the supervision of this committee in the MoIC.

The spokesman of the Islamic Emirate Zabihullah Mujahid said: "A joint stock

company can create a general coordination among Afghan investors in Afghanistan and also give everyone an opportunity to have a share in the company."

The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI) called the establishment of joint-stock companies in the country an important step in creating investment opportunities in Afghanistan.

"Stock companies in other countries have given good results. In Afghanistan, we used to have various stock companies and those companies were partners with the former Soviet Union," said Khan Jan Alokozay, a member of the ACCI's Board of Directors.

Meanwhile, some economic experts called the establishment of a joint-stock company as a positive step in the integration, combination and prevention of the waste of small amounts of capital to foreign countries, and they emphasized the same treatment for all businessmen who share in this company.

"The establishment of the national investment Joint Stock company in Afghanistan is a good step and a better step in order to integrate and properly combine the small capital that comes from outside the country. In order to prevent their waste and their disappearance, this is a good step of protection for small capital owners," said Sayed Masoud, an economic expert.

"The establishment of joint stock companies leads to the accumulation of capital, and with the provision of sufficient capital, agricultural mechanism farms are built in industrial areas, which have effective experience with stock companies in the past," said Azerakhsh Hafezi, an economic expert.

The high-ranking officials of the Islamic Emirate has said that they are considering customs exemptions, distribution of land in industrial parks, and tax exemptions for Afghan businessmen who transfer their capital to the country.

Concerns over air pollution increased

KABUL (Ariana News): The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) says over the past month, the air quality in Kabul city has deteriorated and become more polluted.

NEPA officials said that the lack of electricity, extensive use of unrefined coal and burning of plastic are major factors of air pollution in the capital.

"Air pollution has various causes. Damaged roads, the wide spread of dust and the use of vehicles that have technical problems, pollute the air," said Sayed Qayyum Hashemi, an expert at NEPA.

Hashemi added that teams from this department are checking buildings and residential areas to make sure homes with burners have filters installed.

"Install filters and always keep filters active and where necessary and where possible, we encourage the commercial sector to use alternative fuels," he said.

The Ministry of Public Health's spokesman Sharaf Zaman also said that the number of people suffering from respiratory diseases due to air pollution is increasing in the country.

Kabul residents meanwhile say they are unable to breathe the air in the capital these days. "The air is polluted, nothing can be seen after five in the evening, people get sick," said a Kabul resident.

Kabul is one of the most polluted cities in the world. Even though billions of dollars poured into the country in the last two decades and huge sums of money was used to fight climate change, the air quality in Kabul continues to deteriorate.

160 schools sans buildings

KUNDUZ CITY (Pajhwok): There are a total of 512 schools in northern Kunduz province and 163 of them are without buildings where the students are taught under the open sky and they are faced with many problems.

Director of Education Maulvi Ismail Abu Ahmad told Pajhwok Afghan News currently 1,906 classrooms were needed in the province.

According to him, there are 512 schools in the province, but 163 of them lacked buildings. Around 231,000 boys and girls are studying in these schools.

He said they have shared this problem with charitable organizations to cooperate in construction of buildings for these schools.

"We have shared the issue with the government and institutions, they have promised to construct buildings for these schools," Ahmad added. In addition to lack of school buildings, he said about 1,400 teachers were also needed in this province.

Meanwhile, residents and students urged the government and adding agencies to construct buildings for these schools.

Samia, a student, said: "We want building for our school, proper classrooms because we face problems in winter."

Zia-ul-Haq, a resident, says: "We want government to construct building for schools, our children study under the open sky."

4-day polio vaccination campaign commenced

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan has announced that a four-day polio vaccination campaign has begun in various areas of the eastern zone and will continue until December 28th.

The ministry stated on Sunday, December 24th through a press release, that the campaign in 42 districts of the eastern zone, which are at serious risk of the polio virus, will continue from December 23rd to 29th, targeting children under the age of 10.

According to the Ministry of Public Health, more than 8.8 million children will receive the polio vaccine in collaboration with the ministry and international partners in different regions of the country.

Furthermore, Qalandar Abad, the acting Minister of Public Health, has described the positive cases



of polio as "worrying" and has emphasized the need to eradicate it in the country.

This comes at a time when the World Health Organization announced yesterday that the risk of children contracting the virus has increased after the

return of Afghan migrants from Pakistan.

According to the organization's report, no new positive cases of the polio virus have been registered in Afghanistan in the past four months.

However, there is now

an increased threat following the return of migrants.

It is noteworthy that Afghanistan and Pakistan are the two countries in the world where the polio virus continues to threaten the lives of children.

30 casualties recorded in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): Last week, a number of countries and global organisations announced more than \$200 million in aid to Afghanistan.

Casualties Last week, nine people were killed and 21 others wounded in separate incidents of violence across the country. One person was killed and 20 others were injured in a clash between two tribes in southeastern Khost province.

Local officials said three armed robbers had been killed in a clash with security forces in Jawzjan province. One individual was killed in a clash over a violation of traffic rules in Ghazni. In Nangarhar, one individual was stabbed to death by three assailants.

In Takhar, a husband killed his wife and a father murdered his 19-year-old daughter. Unidentified gunmen stabbed an elderly man to death in the same province. In the previous week, according to sources, seven people had been killed and 11 others injured in various incidents across the country.

Before the regime change in August 2021, hundreds of civilians, insurgents and security forces would be killed and maimed every week.

Continuation of humanitarian aid Canada contributed 21 million US dollars to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to support vulnerable Afghan populations in Central Asia and Pakistan.

The Norwegian govern-

ment has pledged \$6.7 million in aid to the in need and refugees returning from Afghans Pakistan after being forcibly deported.

Australia allocated \$20 million assistance for Afghan refugees amid sustained humanitarian efforts.

In addition, Japan announced nearly 11 million dollars for the health sector in Afghanistan while the Global Education Partnership Networkpledged \$110 million to support Afghan students.

The European Union (EU) contributed 25 million euros in humanitarian aid to the World Food Programme (WFP) for delivering food to needy Afghans.

In the previous week, The United Nations said Cyprus had contributed 98,000 to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF).

Britain announced £5.5 million assistance for landmine clearance in Afghanistan, the UK Embassy wrote on X: "Britain continues to support HALO's work in Afghanistan, where our £5.5m funding has already supported the clearance of over 375 football pitches used by Afghan communities."

Global interaction with IEA In her briefing to the UN Security Council, UNAMA chief Roza Otunbayeva hailed improved security and counternarcotics in Afghanistan, insisting that interaction with the caretaker government did not mean legitimisation.

Chinese Special Envoy for Afghanistan Yue Xiaoyong, in a meeting

with Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, said his country respected Afghanistan's sovereignty and would never interfere in Kabul's internal affairs.

British Charge d'Affaires Robert Chatterton Dickson, in a meeting with Muttaqi, said the current situation provided a good opportunity for resolving Afghanistan's economic and political issues and attracting humanitarian assistance.

Girls' education Last week, one year of the ban on girls university education was completed.

Some female students called the continuation of restriction harmful for the future of the country, saying they had no problem with observing the Islamic hijab — a divine order. IEA should open the doors of universities to girls within the framework of Islamic law, they demanded.

Also last week, some Afghans launched the National Campaign for Girls' Education" and asked IEA to lift the curbs on female students before the start of the new academic year.

The interim government has repeatedly said the restrictions on girls' education are temporary. It says efforts are underway to reopen schools and universities for girls.

Don't use refugees for political purpose.

December 18, World Refugee Day

Pakistan has forcibly deported more than 500,000 Afghan refugees over the past two months. Iran and Turkey also expel

thousands of Afghan refugees daily.

Since IEA's takeover, more than 2.8 million Afghan refugees have returned from different countries. However, about seven million Afghans are still living abroad as refugees, according to the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation.

Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, in a meeting with International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Director-General Ay Pope, stressed the need for the international community's support to Afghan returnees.

Muttaqi said the issue of refugees should not be treated politically by host countries. He argued refugees were not a burden on host country, but contributed significantly to their development and economic growth.

Amy Pope, during her visit to Torkam crossing in eastern Nangarhar province, pledged IOM's continued support to returnees.

Zabihullah Mujahid, IEA's chief spokesman, said over 800,000 Afghan refugees had returned to their homeland since October.

Fazlur Rahman invited to visit Kabul

Afghan Ambassador to Pakistan Sardar Ahmad Jan Shakib delivered IEA's invitation to JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rahman at a meeting in Islamabad last week. The Islamic Emirate said the purpose of inviting Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam chief to Afghanistan was to resolve issues between Kabul and Islamabad.

Heratis struggle to make a living amid soaring fuel prices



HERAT (Pajhwok): Residents of western Herat province complain fuel prices have increased in the province while they are struggling with economic hardships.

The residents say the afghani has appreciated against the dollar and in contrast, fuel and food items' prices have increased. They ask the government to control prices in the market.

Omid, a rickshaw driver and the head of a family of five people, told Pajhwok Afghan News that it had

become hard for thousands of people to support their families. He said his income was insufficient to make ends meet and the price of one liter of petrol had increased to 75afs.

He said Herat residents bought low quality fuel with a high price for their vehicles and the rate of gas had increased in winter.

Omid asked the government to intervene and bring down the prices.

Sebghatullah, another resident, said the dollar's rate had decreased, but fuel prices jumped.

"The government should help people solve their problems by decreasing the prices of essential goods in winter", he demanded.

On the other hand, Petroleum Products Company director Sayed Hafizullah Asim rejected people's concerns about increased fuel prices. He told Pajhwok Afghan News that Afghanistan was a consumer country and prices in Herat province had not increased.

Asim said: "When demand for something increases, its price also increases in the market and fuel prices are high in global markets and we don't have a clear indicator the prices will fall with more imports".

Meanwhile, municipality spokesman Nasir Armal said prices control teams used to distribute daily and weekly price lists to people according to imports and economy situation.

Armal added municipality also made price list for fuel and no one was allowed to change the prices, otherwise legal action was taken.

Depression can lead to suicide if not treated: Physicians

KABUL (Pajhwok): Medical doctors have said the growth of depression was higher in women comparing to men and warned if depression is not treated in a reasonable time it could lead to suicide.

They recommend improved awareness on depression and urged people suffering from depression should be taken to the doctors at earliest.

This comes in November the Ministry of Public Health announced that around half of the Afghanistan's population suffered from severe depression.

A report from the WHO also announced that around 280 million people worldwide suffered from depression

and a large number of these people ewer women.

Depression leads to dangerous consequences: Physicians

Psychologist Dr. Diyana Sediqi, who works at the Exxon Mental and Neurological Hospital in capital Kabul, told Pajhwok Afghan News: "Depression means halt or a mental cold, this problem is one of the most severe mental disorders in the world, which causes negative feelings in a person and creates a sense of sadness and grief in a person, and impairs his ability at work, home, and outside."

She said depression could be hereditary or could be caused due to

social problems and economic difficulties.

He said feeling grief, disinterested, feeling guilty, away from society, feeling angry and reducing daily activities are some of the mental symptoms and changes in appetite more or less eating, changes in sleep, fatigue and low energy are some of the physical symptoms of depression.

Dr. Diyana said the closure of women and girls schools and universities contributed to the growing depression cases among women.

She said daily up to four patients suffering from depression visited the hospital in which girls deprived of education are

also included.

She said initially the depression symptoms are low but if continued and did not controlled the patient could commit suicide as well.

Dr. Dyana said depression could be treated and the best way was setting target and occupation.

She said that patient suffering from depression should refer to the physician and asked family members to encourage their family members suffering from depression to refer to the doctor.

Neurologist Abdul Wahid Rahnvord at Sardar Mental and Neurological Clinic, said depression could have negative impact

on public lives in all areas.

A depressed person, he said, his family, and the people of society, he suffered from problems in all areas of life, and he is hopeless about the future and cannot establish social relations.

He said the reasons that caused depression among men and women were the same but added the number of women suffering from depression was double worldwide. He said depression has different reasons such as social, economic, biological, and hereditary and others.

He said matters like looking after family, certain restrictions in the family and society, pregnancy and

child birth contributed more in growing depression among women.

Dr. Abdul Wahid said 50 percent of the total 100 to 150 patients referred to the neurology were depression patients. Most of the female depressed patients were girls who are deprived of education.

Referring to the growing number of depression patients, he said the lack of public awareness regarding depression, negligence from depression treatment, control, no government and international cooperation in the identification and treatment of this illness were the main causes in this regard.

He stressed over improved public awareness

are needed to bring awareness to the people to know about the domestic products of the country."

Sadudin Saeed, Deputy Minister of Finance for Information and Culture, said they are supporting domestic products.

"Such exhibitions display the domestic products

of factories, where people come to visit them and buy for themselves, their families and their offices," he said.

Meanwhile, a number of participants said that the active presence of women in exhibitions affects advertisements of their products.

She has been receiving treatment from the past one month and now felt better. Earlier she suffered from headache, kept herself isolated and lost her interest in the life.

Mohammad Asghar, the resident of Kabul City who suffered from depression after the death of his young brother, said: "When my brother died of cancer, life was not pleasant for me, I hated everything and I didn't even like my children, but I am better now Alhamdulillah since I have started treatment."

He refused to appear in front of the camera but asked people suffering from depression to refer to the doctor.

Govt striving to go towards solution of Balochistan protestors problem: Solangi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Sunday that it was an effort of the government to go towards the solution of the problem of protestors from Balochistan through negotiations. Talking in a programme on "GTV" the minister said that it was desire of the interim set-up that the protestors should go back to their homes with dignity, honour and safety.

"We want to solve the problems of the protestors and talks should be held in Balochistan or Quetta

instead of Islamabad," Solangi said. The minister for information said that most of the protestors from Balochistan were women and at this time, they were present in front of the National Press Club.

Security, ambulance and medical facilities were available for the protestors, Murtaza Solangi informed. The minister said that it was the preference of the protestors to sit in front of the NPC and register their protest peacefully.

"Everyone is allowed to protest peacefully and our effort is to ensure that the protestors do not face any kind of inconvenience", Murtaza Solangi remarked.

He said that yesterday also, the negotiation committee held talks with the protestors. The minister pointed out that the demands of the protestors were decades old.

When the protestors reached Islamabad, some people were already in the NPC, Murtaza Solangi added that protestors who came from Balochistan blocked the road near Chaungi No. 26 (Motorway Chowk).

He said that the local administration offered the protestors space for protest in F-9 Park and H-9 ground but they refused to go there.

Elaborating further, the minister said that late night

these protestors were joined by some locals.

"When the protestors in Islamabad started moving towards the red zone, the police tried to stop them," Murtaza Solangi said.

He said some protestors were arrested who were involved in stone pelting on the law enforcement agencies. The minister said that arrested women were released two days ago whereas releasing 163 arrested men was in progress. When the protestors left Balochistan, they were not stopped anywhere, Murtaza Solangi added that no ill-treatment was done to the protestors.



LARKANA: Chairman Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari submitted his nomination papers for NA 194 (Larkana-1) to returning officer for upcoming General Election 2024.

Bilateral naval exercise Thamar Al Tayyib 2023 culminates in North Arabian Sea

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy - Royal Navy of Oman Bilateral Exercise Thamar Al Tayyib 2023 (TAT-23) was conducted in Gulf of Oman. This was 11th edition of the series of Thamar Al Tayyib exercises being conducted between Pakistan Navy and Royal Navy of Oman since 2002.

PN Flotilla comprising of Pakistan Navy Ship ASLAT with embarked helicopter, Fast Attack Craft PNS QUWWAT and PN Maritime Patrol Aircraft along with Special Operations Forces participated in the exercise. The bilateral exercise was conducted in two phases. Harbour phase included operational and tactical level table top discussions and exercise planning conferences.

During the Sea Phase of the exercise, both the navies conducted range of advanced operational exer-



cises encompassing major facets of maritime operations related to Anti-Air, Anti-Surface Warfare and Counter Terrorism exercises. The exercise also involved Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) by ships of both Navies with an aim to curb illicit activities at sea. Ex TAT- 23 provided

an avenue to enhance mutual learning, improve interoperability and opportunity for both navies to further hone their professional skills.

Pakistan and Oman share a common maritime area and both the navies closely cooperate with each other to maintain

good order at sea. Regular conduct of bilateral Exercise Thamar Al Tayyib 2023 is a clear manifestation of strong fraternal and brotherly relations between Pakistan and Oman in general and Pakistan Navy and Royal Navy of Oman in particular.

Nawaz Sharif, Mariyam files nomination papers

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Muhammad Nawaz Sharif on Sunday filed nomination papers to contest general elections from Lahore's National Assembly constituency NA-130.

Nawaz Sharif's nomination papers were submitted to the returning officer concerned by former MPA and provincial minister Bilal Yasin. The returning officer had fixed December 26 for the scrutiny of the nomination papers. At least, 24 candidates have submitted their papers to contest elections from the constituency.

The other candidates include PTI's Dr Yasmin Rashid, PPP's Ahmad Khan, PML-N's Bilal Yasin and Waheed Alam Khan. It is pertinent to mention here that Nawaz Sharif will also contest elections from Mansehra's NA-15.

Meanwhile, Senior Vice President of Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) Mariyam Nawaz on Sunday filed nomination papers for two National Assembly and three Provincial Punjab (PP)

seats. The PML-N chief organiser has submitted her nomination papers for NA-119 and NA-120 constituencies. In the 2018 general elections, PTI's Rahat Aman Ullah Bhatti won the NA-119 (Sheikhupura I) constituency and PML-N's Rana Afzaal Hussain stood runner-up, whereas PML-N's Rana Tanveer Hussain won NA-120 (Sheikhupura 2) and PTI's Ali Asghar Chaudhry was runner-up.

Mariyam also submitted nomination papers from three constituencies of the Punjab Assembly — PP-159, PP-160 and PP-165. PTI won PP-159 and 160 seats of Lahore with a slim margin in the last general elections, while PML-N stood runner-up in both constituencies. On the other hand, PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif won PP-165 seat by a huge margin last time.

Bilawal challenges Sharif brothers in their stronghold

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has challenged the Sharif brothers in their stronghold of

Lahore in the February 8 polls. The PPP chief on December 22 filed nomination papers from the NA-128 constituency in Lahore which has been traditionally the stronghold of the PML-N with the party securing a majority of seats from the provincial capital in the last many elections.

Along with Bilawal, PPP's Hafiz Ghulam Mohiuddin also filed nomination papers from the NA-128 and PP-170 constituencies while the party's Misbah-ur-Rehman filed nomination papers for the PP-169 seat in the same constituency. PML-N's Mian Ahmed Subhan is expected to contest elections against the PPP chief in the NA-128 constituency. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan has also announced contesting polls from three constituencies including Lahore. The much-awaited general elections will take place on February 8, 2024, with the national poll organising authority finally issuing the schedule following the Supreme Court's order.

Iran navy receives new cruise missiles amid growing tension

DUBAI (Reuters): The Iranian navy has taken delivery of cruise missiles with a range of 1,000 km (621 miles) as well as reconnaissance helicopters, state media reported on Sunday, as the U.S. accused Iran of a drone attack on a chemical tanker in the Indian ocean.

"The Talaeiye cruise missile has a range of over 1,000 km and is a smart missile that can change targets mid-mission," state media cited the head of Iran's navy, Shahram Irani, as saying. Reconnaissance helicopters, drones and marine cruise missiles were among new weapons added to the navy's arsenal, Irani said, adding that "all of this equipment has been designed and produced by Iran's military industry". Although Western military analysts say Iran sometimes exaggerates its capabilities, Iranian-made missiles and drones are a key element in Tehran's military hardware. The U.S. Department of Defense said on Saturday that a drone sent from Iran struck a Liberian-flagged chemical tanker in the Indian ocean.

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Sunday released an updated roster of 175 officially registered political parties representing a diverse spectrum within Pakistan's political arena on Sunday.

The updated list no longer includes Imran Khan, the founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), as the head of the party, marking PTI as a leaderless political entity. Furthermore, the roster now incorporates the faction led by Pervez Khattak, known as Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Parliamentarians.

A noteworthy event occurred earlier as PTI lost its electoral symbol, the 'bat', following the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) announcement of the reserved verdict on the party's intra-party elections. After hearing arguments from all concerned parties, the ECP ini-

tially reserved its decision. Following this, Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, leading a five-member bench of the Election Commission, declared PTI's intra-party elections null and void. Following the ECP's verdict, Gohar Ali Khan, who took over as PTI chairman after Imran Khan, will no longer serve as the party's leader.

Significantly, the registered entities include the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP), led by President Abdul Aleem Khan. The registration of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is associated with its former Chairman, Pervez Khattak, while Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) are registered under the names of Shehbaz Sharif and Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, respectively.

The list includes several other

notable party affiliations. The Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), led by Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, is registered as the Peoples Party Parliamentarians under Asif Ali Zardari's name. Furthermore, the Balochistan Awami Party is registered under the leadership of President Abdul Quddus Bizenjo, and the Awami Muslim League Pakistan (AMLMP) is listed under the leadership of President Sheikh Rashid Ahmed. The roster also highlights other prominent political groups, including the Awami National Party (ANP) led by Asfandiyar Wali Khan, the Balochistan National Party (BNP) led by Akhtar Mengal, and the Jamaat-e-Islami led by Sirajul Haq.

Additionally, the Jamiat Ulema Islam, led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P), represented by Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, are listed.

Hamas says 200 killed in 24 hours of Israeli strikes on Gaza

GAZA STRIP (AFP/APP): Israeli strikes in Gaza killed more than 200 people in 24 hours, Hamas-controlled authorities said Saturday, as the United States again pressed its ally to do more to protect civilians.

Despite growing calls for restraint and for more aid to reach war-stricken Palestinians, Israel showed little sign of modulating its 11-week-old "Operation Swords of Iron" -- which aims to rout Hamas.

Fighting is now centred on Gaza City and the southern city of Khan Yunis, both considered strongholds of the Palestinian militant group that carried out bloody October 7 raids into Israel. After reports of heavy Israeli shelling, grey and black smoke rose over the north of the coastal territory and in Khan Yunis.

The refugee camp-turned-city is the birthplace of Yahya Sinwar, Hamas' leader in Gaza and the man Israel holds most responsible for the October attacks.

The Israeli Army chief of staff, Herzi Halevi, visited troops on the ground in Khan Yunis, telling them that the operation had been "very impressive, truly very impressive, both the attack here and carrying out the operation in a secure manner".

Outside a morgue at the city's Nasser Hospital, grieving relatives prayed, wept and stared vacantly as they tried to process incalculable loss.

Hamas authorities said the death toll from this war has now surged beyond 20,000. "This is a genocide," said resident Rafat Al Aydi.

Israel denies directly targeting civilians and says the war against Hamas is vital to ensure the October raids on farms, villages and kibbutzim that killed an estimated 1,140 people can never be repeated.

In Washington, President Joe Biden said he had another "long talk" with Israel's hawkish prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

The White House said the discussion focused on the "objectives and phasing" of Israel's military operation, as well as "the critical need to protect the civilian population including those supporting the humanitarian aid operations". Israeli officials gave a terse readout of the call, saying "the Prime Minister made it clear that Israel would continue the war until all of its goals have been achieved".

A total of 144 Israeli troops have been killed since the ground offensive began almost a month ago.

Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister, has had testy relations with a string of US presidents. But disagreements over how the Gaza war is being prosecuted, when it will end, and what happens the day after, have strained ties ever further.

On Friday, the United States allowed the passage of a UN Security Council resolution that effectively called on Israel to allow "immediate, safe and unhindered" deliveries of life-saving aid to Gaza "at scale".

World powers had wrangled for days over the wording, and at Washington's insistence toned down some provisions -- including removing a call for a ceasefire.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has accused Israel of "creating massive obstacles" for aid deliveries. For Palestinians in Gaza's southern city of Rafah, the prospect of aid alone was not enough.

"We don't want food, we want a ceasefire," said Mahmud al-Shaer.

Ahmad al-Burawi, who was displaced from Beit Lahia further

north, added: "We just want to return to our lands, that's all. We want a solution" to end the war. "People are dying," he said. The war has displaced about 80 percent of Gaza's 2.4 million population, according to UN estimates.

Israelis, including friends and relatives of the 129 captives still believed held in Gaza, demonstrated again on Saturday in Tel Aviv.

Hamas said it "lost contact" with militants tasked with guarding five of the hostages, including three elderly men who appeared in a hostage video the group released this week.

"We believe that those hostages have been killed" in Israeli strikes, said spokesman Abu Obeida.

Talks aimed at rescussating a truce and prisoner swap appeared to be stalled. An earlier truce allowed 80 Israeli hostages to be released in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners, but ended after one week.

Far from Gaza, a new attack on shipping Saturday showed the war is already spilling over into the broader region. Maritime agencies said a drone strike damaged a chemical tanker in waters off Veraval, India.

There was no claim of responsibility, but the Pentagon said it was a "one-way attack drone fired from Iran". Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels have repeatedly fired drones and missiles at ships in the Red Sea, saying they are targeting Israeli-linked vessels in solidarity with Gaza.

Iranian deputy foreign minister Ali Bagheri on Saturday said the Huthis act on their "own decisions and capabilities".

There also have been cross-border skirmishes between Israeli forces and Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah movement which, like Hamas, is backed by Iran.