

Ex-foreign secy passes away
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Former foreign secretary Riaz Khokhar passes away on Tuesday after prolonged illness. The deceased served as Pakistan's ambassador to China, India and the United States and was undergoing treatment since long due to health issues. The PPP leader Sherry Rehman has expressed deep grief and sorrow over the demise of Riaz Khokhar.

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Stripping PTI's 'Bat' symbol PHC suspends ECP order

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) has granted status quo against Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) verdict for withdrawal of 'Bat' symbol from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf after declaring intra-party null and void while adjourned further hearing till 9th January, on Tuesday.

PTI had approached PHC for party's symbol 'Bat' which was withdrawn by ECP by declaring intra-party elections null & void while the chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan along Barrister Ali Zafar appeared before court to argue the plea. ECP isn't court of law as declared by Supreme Court of Pakistan (SC) in several verdicts as well as dispute among political workers would be settle in the civil court as per law, Barrister Ali Zafar argued.

Barrister Ali Zafar stated that no activist from eight lac registered PTI workers had complaint against the intra-party elections as well as added that political party is neither a public sector department an organization of civil society.

However, Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhel inquired about complainant which quoted in ECP's verdict, while the counsel informed that the applicant isn't a PTI worker and argued that election commission became party int the plea against intra-party elections. In the meantime, PHC's single member bench observed that ECP neither declared intra-party election as illegal but objected that how can Umar Ayub has appointed Chief Election Commissioner for party's polls, as he isn't the general secretary. Barrister Ali Zafar argued that this is not a sufficient ground for declaring intra-party elections null and void.

The subject matter is clear by verdicts in Asma Jilani and Sindh High Court Bar Association pleas as well as argued that next ECP may declare elected office holders in 1997 null and void, Barrister Ali Zafar adds. The interference by executive in intra-party elections wouldn't be beneficial for democracy in Pakistan, the counsel argued. He added that withdrawal of symbol conveying that PTI has been stopping from electoral process.

PTI's counsel informed that the party chairman and general secretary be elected by means of secret ballot paper as inquired about party's rules in this regard. He added that the party is electing its workers rather than to import outsiders.

Meanwhile, Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhel enquired regarding last polling of PTI's intra-party elections while Barrister Ali Zafar informed that it was conducted in 2017 under old constitution and last time in June 2023 after amendments in 2019. Latterly, ECP declared intra-party election null and void as well as ordered for re-elections within 20 days which was conducted but now withdrew the symbol (Bat) after submission of nom-

ination papers for general elections.

The counsel requested for restoration of party's symbol because it will put fate of PTI's candidates in doldrum especially nomination on reserved seats. He further argued for suspension of ECP decision that PTI can grant tickets to the workers.

PHC will decide the plea by today (on Tuesday/ in first hearing/ as a petition placed in motion) as divisional bench has jurisdiction rather than single member, Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhel. He inquired regarding availability of Asad Umar resign in written from PTI general secretary. Barrister Ali Zafar argued that Asad Umar had announced resign after his return from imprisonment which was covered by all mediums of media.

Moreover, Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhel inquired from complainant's lawyers regarding jurisdiction of ECP for declaring intra-party elections. The counsel argued that PHC had stopped ECP from final decision in this regard as PTI approached the court against issuance of notice by election commission.

Justice Kamran Miankhel observed that PTI had obeyed ECP orders by holding re-election within 20 days and inquired about the jurisdiction of election commission for declaring intra-party election. He remarked that the lawyers must contend to address the court's observation rather arguing ifs and buts. Meanwhile, Additional Attorney General argued that ECP has jurisdiction to withdraw party's symbol over deficiency in the documents. ECP can grants symbol after holding of intra-party election and following submission of certificate before the commission.

However, Justice Kamran Miankhel observed ECP can't stop party's symbol after announcement of election schedule and remarked that {ECP} can may stop {PTI} from next election neither from upcoming. In the meantime, Additional Attorney General opposed status quo against ECP judgement as interim relief as it will decide the fate of whole plea. But Justice Kamran Miankhel observed that its looks like that ECP is outing one party from electoral process and remarked that the divisional bench will hear the plea after vacation.

Justice Kamran Miankhel enquired regarding total registered political parties while Additional Attorney General informed that the number stands 175. Is notice is issued to any other party? Justice Miankhel inquired. PHC's justice Kamran Miankhel remarked that withdrawal of symbol is like paralyzing political party as well as compared the situation with Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, Pakistan People's Party and Jammiat Ulema Islam Fazal while adjourned further hearing till 9th January, 2024. It is worthy to mention, Additional Attorney General Sana Ullah angered over laughing of PTI's affiliated female lawyer during hearing and observed that they are busy in argumentation rather than chuckling before the court.

Qureshi detained under 3-MPO despite bail

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Days after Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Vice-Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi secured his much sought-after bail in the cipher case, the former foreign minister was detained on Tuesday after a detention order was issued instead of letting him walk free.

The order, issued by Rawalpindi deputy commissioner under the Maintenance of Public Order (3-MPO), alleges that the PTI leader was involved in instigating violence in the May 9 riots — which saw military installations being vandalised across the country — and that his release might endanger public safety. "It is probable that after his release from jail, he will again continue his above activities which may lead to a law and order situation, harmful to the life and property of the general public," read the order.

The development comes as the senior politician was "likely" to be released today after a three-member Supreme Court (SC) approved his and PTI founder Imran Khan's bail in the cipher case on December 22. The apex court ruled that the discretion exercised by the Islamabad High Court (IHC) in declining bail to the petitioners was exercised per-

versely. Qureshi's 15-day detention is to come into effect from Qureshi's "entrance in Centra/District jail to avoid any likelihood of breach of peace/unlawful assembly in the district." The decision to detain the senior politician comes after Rawalpindi's District Intelligence Committee endorsed the central CPO's recommendation

Imran knocks at SC's door F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan has approached the Supreme Court (SC) seeking nullification of his conviction in the Toshakhana case and the trial court's verdict.

Lawyers of the PTI's top leader submitted the appeal against his Toshakhana conviction after rectifying the objections raised by the Supreme Court Registrar's Office earlier. The SC Registrar's Office returned Khan's appeal on December 23, saying the documents attached to the appeal were incomplete and directing the petitioner to refile it with all the relevant papers on January 6. The appeal was filed by Sardar Latif Khosa under Article 185 of the Constitution.

The former prime minister was sentenced to three years in prison and imposed a fine of Rs100,000 by Additional District and Sessions Judge (ADSJ) Humayun Dilawar on August 5, 2023, after the judge found Khan guilty of graft in the case. Khan's conviction in the case resulted in his disqualification from holding any public office for five years.

On Saturday, the ousted premier had petitioned the apex court against the Islamabad High Court's (IHC) order in the Toshakhana case as part of his efforts to overturn the conviction in the case to contest the general elections scheduled for February 8, 2024.

However, the IHC had dismissed the PTI supreme's plea seeking suspension of the trial court's verdict. In his plea filed in the IHC — the same court that had suspended his sentence — Khan had sought to nullify the conviction. In the fresh petition, Khan appealed the IHC's verdict to be stayed, stating that his sentence in the Toshakhana case had already been suspended.

seeking the prevention of the PTI leader's "unlawful activities and [him] acting in a prejudicial manner to public safety".

The detention order comes as a major blow to the PTI which was looking forward to Qureshi's release as it could've given a major boost to the party ahead of the upcoming elections slate for February 8, 2024 — in light of Khan's incarceration and a host of leaders parting ways with the party.

Taking to social media, Meher Bano, Qureshi's daughter, confirmed that her father has been detained

under the 3-MPO order. However, the PTI's vice-chairman is not the only one to be "detained" under the 3-MPO as hundreds of such detention orders have been issued against PTI leaders and members across the country for alleged involvement in the May 9 violence — triggered after the arrest of former party chief Khan in a graft case — which saw military installations including the Rawalpindi's General Headquarters (GHQ) and Lahore's Corps Commander's House being vandalised across the country.

Blast near Israeli embassy in New Delhi

NEW DELHI (Reuters): A blast occurred near the Israeli embassy in New Delhi on Tuesday evening and all staff were unharmed following the explosion, authorities said.

"We can confirm that around 5:20 p.m. (local time, 1150 GMT) there was a blast at close proximity to the embassy," Israeli Embassy spokesperson Guy Nir told Reuters, adding that local police and security teams were investigating the incident. Israel's foreign ministry said all staff were unharmed following the blast and Israeli authorities were cooperating with their Indian counterparts to look into the cause of the explosion.

The city's fire service had not found anything so far in their search operation, senior fire department official Atul Garg told Indian news agency ANI, in which Reuters has a minority stake. In January 2021, a small bomb went off near the Israeli embassy in New Delhi, without harming anyone. An Israeli official said at the time that Israel was treating the blast as a terrorist incident.

Nawaz's papers accepted F.P. Report

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif's nomination papers for the upcoming general elections have been accepted after facing no objections in Lahore.

Returning Officer Asghar Joya accepted Sharif's papers for constituency NA 130 following scrutiny, paving the way for the former Prime Minister's re-election bid. Notably, no challenge was filed against his candidature, clearing the hurdles for his participation in the February 8th polls.

Buoyed by the development, PML-N leader Bilal Yasin expressed confidence in Sharif's victory, predicting not only his success in NA 130 but also his ascension to the Prime Minister's office for a fourth term. Adding weight to Sharif's legal team's assertion that his case meets all legal requirements, lawyer Amjad Pervez pointed to the Election Commission's portal which confirmed completion of all necessary formalities by the veteran politician.

The process of scrutiny of nomination papers for general elections 2024 continued for the second successive day on Tuesday. According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), scrutiny of the candidates of the Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the People's Party (PPP) on the reserved seats for women will be held today.

Scrutiny of candidates of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) on reserved seats will be held tomorrow, while those of the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) is scheduled for December 28.

Earlier, nomination papers of former president and PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari were accepted from National Assembly constituency NA-207 Nawabshah. Talking to media after approval of his papers, Zardari took a dig at the PTI and said it had come in power [in 2018] without any effort. Now they have to sweat for re-election, he added. Resting rumours at rest, the ex-president said the "elections would be held as environment is conducive."

Regarding the former ruling alliance the PDM, he said it has split. He sounded upbeat when he claimed that the PPP would win the elections and form the government. Masses have pinned their hopes on the PPP and future of the party is bright. Meanwhile, the ECP accepted nomination papers of Awami Muslim League chief Sheikh Rashid and his nephew Raashid Shafiq, PPP's Nisar Khohro, Rubina Qaim Khani, Saeed Ghani, Tanzila Qambrani and Jamil Soomro, Sarwat Fatima of the TLP, and Afshan of the MQM.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar chairing a meeting regarding Khyber Pakhtunkhwa financial problems. KP Chief Minister Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah also present.

Govt to extend all-out support for uplift of merged districts: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Tuesday said that despite the availability of limited resources, the government would extend all possible support to the provincial government for uplift and welfare of the merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

The prime minister, chairing a meeting to discuss the matters about the KP, said that being cognizant of their problems, the Federal Government stood with the government and the people of the province.

He also instructed the authorities concerned to resolve the issues confronting the KP province that had rendered immense sacrifices against terrorism. The prime minister instructed to form a secretarial committee to resolve the KP's financial matters and formulate recommendations regarding the payment of net hydel profits, and the royalty of oil and gas.

To be headed by the federal finance secretary, the committee would consist of federal secretaries of planning, water resources and petroleum. Prime Minister Kakar also called for expediting the process of granting the university status to Khyber Medical College of Peshawar and Ayub Medical College of Abbottabad.

He said that during the last four months, the caretaker government had introduced reforms in every sector for the benefit of the country and nation as well as for facilitating the next elected government. Caretaker federal ministers Dr Shamsad Akhtar, Muhammad Ali and Ahmed Irfan Aslam, Caretaker KP Chief Minister Justice (Retd) Arshad Hussain Shah and Minister Amir Abdullah, chairmen of Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), and senior officers attended the meeting.

PM for according significance to climate resilience, finance aspects in Balochistan hydro projects: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar stressed upon focusing the climate resilience and climate finance aspects in all the water projects of Balochistan and reiterated that progress and prosperity of the people of province were among the top priorities of the government.

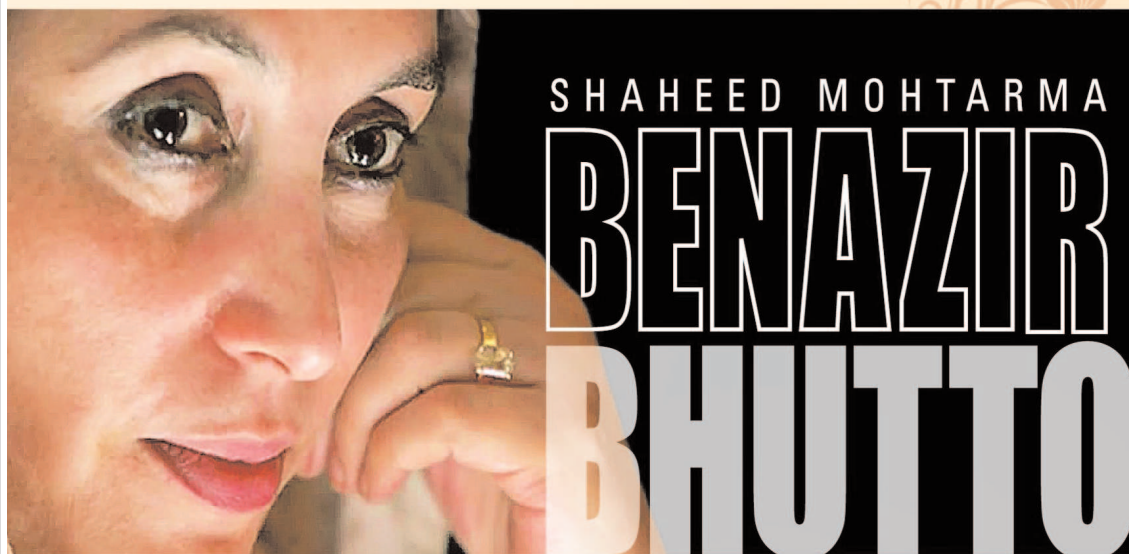
The caretaker prime minister chaired a review meeting on the important matters pertaining to the Balochistan province. The meeting was attended by Caretaker Balochistan Chief Minister Ali Mardan Domki, Education Minister Dr Qadir Baloch and Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir, Caretaker Federal

Minister for Planning Sami Saeed, Caretaker Federal Minister for Law and Water Resources Irfan Aslam, and relevant senior officials, the PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The chief secretary gave a briefing over different projects of the province. The prime minister further directed for expediting the matters related to the construction of a two-lane highway from Khuzdar to Karachi and observed that with its construction, the different parts of the country would get an alternate leeway, besides strengthening of the linkages.

He also asked for an immediate resolution of the financial issues faced by the universities in the province. The caretaker prime minister directed for the constitution of an inter-provincial committee with regard to the matters of Kachhi Canal project and the inclusion of caretaker minister for planning and caretaker chief ministers of Punjab and Balochistan provinces as its members. The committee would be tasked to finalize proposals about the restoration and expansion of the canal. A directive was also issued for the construction of check dams to utilize water from the hilly rivulets and streams, and for the protection of Kachhi canal and Pet Feeder from the hilly torrents.

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PSCA reunites missing child with parents

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Safe City Authority (PSCA) on Tuesday reunited a missing child with his parents. According to a spokesperson for the authority, a five-year-old child had lost his way home from the area of Shafiqabad police station. The parents filed a report at the Shafiqabad police station.

The investigation officer visited Safe City with the parents and checked details of the missing children available in the " Mera Payra App" and Safe City's Lost and Found Centre got the details of the missing child from the Lower Mall police station.

The Lower Mall police station had handed over the found child to the Child Protection Bureau.

The investigation officer obtained the child through the magistrate from the Child Protection Bureau. The spokesperson said after verification, the police handed over the child to the parents. Safe City's Lost and Found Centre has so far reunited more than 5,000 children with their families. Citizens should immediately inform 15 in case of any missing incident.

Anti-encroachment operation continues

LAHORE (APP): In an effort to clear Lahore from encroachments, the district administration's anti-encroachment operations are underway at various hotspots areas of the provincial capital on the seventh consecutive day, on Tuesday.

During the operation conducted at Baghbanpura to Jallo Mor, Arainya stop to Bajiya, Qainchi stop to Islampura, 75 encroachers were arrested, 31 FIRs were got registered, 177 shops were sealed, 141 signboards, 394 sheds were removed, and eight truck-load of confiscated items were shifted to junkyard.

In the seven days of the operation, a total of 808 arrests have been made, 85 FIRs were got registered, 1721 structures, including signboards and sheds have been demolished. Moreover, 827 shops and restaurants have been sealed, 20 trucks of belongings, including 4 handcarts, have been seized.

Lahore Deputy Commissioner Rafia Haider told media that currently anti encroachment operations were carried out at various points of the city. Metropolitan Corporation Lahore (MCL), police and other departments were also taking part in the anti-encroachment operation.

Rafia Haider said that as per instructions given by the CM Punjab, the operation against encroachment will continue. The operation will persist to ensure smooth traffic flow on busy roads. No leniency will be shown towards those involved in encroachments, she warned.

The DC appealed to the public to report encroachment if reoccur in any area after the operation. She urged citizens and traders to cooperate with the authorities in this regard.

CM inspects revamped Bibi Pakdaman shrine

LAHORE (APP): With the completion of 97 percent of renovation and expansion works, the historical Bibi Pakdaman shrine is set to reopen its doors to pilgrims before December 31. Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the site on Tuesday to review the progress firsthand.

Accompanied by provincial ministers, officials, Chief Minister Naqvi closely inspected the ongoing finishing touches on the main shrine structure and iconic domes. He emphasized the importance of high-quality craftsmanship and directed the officials to prioritize the completion of the widened pathway surrounding the shrine to ensure smooth movement for pilgrims. Furthermore, Chief Minister Naqvi stressed the need for a dedicated space for lamp-lighting rituals and instructed the installation of aesthetically pleasing lighting arrangements within the central chamber. He expressed his hope that the rejuvenated shrine would serve as a beacon of faith and tranquility, fostering peace and prosperity within the community.

Beyond the physical restoration, Chief Minister Naqvi offered prayers for Pakistan's continued development, stability, and security, extending his wishes to Palestinian Muslims as well.

CM reviews progress on Lahore Ring Road Southern Loop-3 project: The Lahore Ring Road Southern Loop 3 project marks a significant stride towards completion, reaching the 60 percent milestone.

Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Tuesday conducted a comprehensive review of the ongoing progress at Adda Plot Raiwind, personally inspecting the Lahore Ring Road Southern Loop 3 project.

The chief minister examined the ongoing construction activities spanning 8 km from Adda Plot Raiwind to Maraka Multan Road. He closely observed the works on the entire route, including the construction of bridges. In response, the CM issued directives for the expeditious

completion of the project.

During a meeting at the FWO (Frontier Works Organisation) camp office chaired by Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Colonel Jamal and Colonel Ahmed provided a detailed briefing on the project's progress. The meeting addressed various issues related to the project.

Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi emphasized that the completion of Ring Road Southern Loop 3 would enhance transportation facilities for the public. He highlighted the adherence to high standards in executing the project and expressed confidence in achieving its timely completion.

Speaking to the media after the visit, he underscored the significance of SL 3, Gujranwala Expressway, and Band Road projects. He assured relentless efforts to complete these projects with the highest quality, overcoming challenges and working around the clock.

The SL3 project, valued at over 17 billion rupees, spans 8 km and consists of three lanes. Chief Minister Naqvi said that the project, initially planned for two years, was on track to completion in the coming months. Responding to a question, the CM acknowledged weather-related challenges, particularly fog affecting motorway operations and causing traffic congestion. He assured the resolution of issues without allowing an increase in project costs.

CM Naqvi stated that SL3 and other projects are under continuous monitoring, with ministers overseeing critical locations even during the night. He affirmed full support for the dedicated teams working on project completion.

Regarding elections, the CM stated that in accordance with the court order, individuals accused cannot submit their nomination papers. He assured that transparent and free elections would be conducted. Furthermore, he mentioned that if any issue arose concerning the election, the government would take action before the Election Commission for resolution.

Commissioners, DCs offices' to become paperless

LAHORE (APP): After the successful implementation of e-Filing and Office Automation System (e-FOAS) in the departments, Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman has issued instructions to make paperless the offices of divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners across the province.

He issued these instructions during a meeting held at Civil Secretariat on Tuesday.

The Senior Member Board of Revenue, Additional Chief Secretary and administrative secretaries of all departments attended the meeting, while all divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners participated through video link.

The Chief Secretary directed the

Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) to complete the scanning of archive files as soon as possible. He said that the departments of the Civil Secretariat have been asked to ensure all departmental correspondence online, while integrating them through e-FOAS. He said that ending the conventional file system would save billions of rupees annually.

The Chief Secretary also issued instructions regarding early disposal of departmental inquiries and pension cases. He said that due to pending inquiries, employees were deprived of their right to departmental promotion. He also distributed shields among the Chairman PITB and his team for successful implementation of e-FOAS in departments.

Drive against polluting vehicles across Sindh

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) on the directives of Minister of Environment, Climate Change, and Coastal Development Department, i.e., Mr. Arshad Wali Muhammad has conducted a campaign across Sindh against vehicles emitting more than the prescribed amount of smoke.

According to the details of 5 days campaign, a total of Rs 196,000 fines were imposed across the province on 94 vehicles, emitting more than the normal amount of smoke during the said campaign. A total of 33 per cent of the vehicles were found to emit smoke, exceeding the prescribed limits.

The five-day campaign was conducted simultaneously in Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur divisions. In Karachi, SEPA officials checked vehicles at Boat Basin,

Brooks Chowrangi, Mazal Pump, Mazare Quaid, Stadium Road, Singar Chowrangi and Baldia, while in Hyderabad, Fateh Chowk and Qasim Chowk, and in Sukkur, vehicles were checked at Sabzi Mandi and Arain Phatak.

Apart from this, vehicles were also checked at Tehri Mor Khairpur and National Highway Ghotki.

With the support of traffic police, the officials of Sepa carried out technical checks of around 300 vehicles. While those vehicles whose smoke emission was normal, they were also advised to do regular tuning. In addition to different gases, there are fine particles in the smoke coming out of the vehicles, which go into the human lungs through breathing and cause severe damage to them.

According to the Sindh Environment Protection Act 2014, all types of pollution are strictly prohibited. Vehicles emitting smoke can be fined on the spot.



LAHORE: Skilled worker busy making gift baskets at his roadside setup.

Sindh Health Dept all set to launch Universal Health Insurance Policy

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Health Department completed all arrangements for rolling out the Universal Health Insurance Policy to ensure the provision of cost-effective, quality healthcare facilities across the province. Consultation with all the stakeholders has also been carried out for the launch of the Universal Health Insurance Policy, while the Sindh Health and Law departments have agreed to work together to fulfill all the legal requirements, according to a statement issued here on Tuesday.

The agreement was reached in a meeting between the Caretaker Minister of Health, Social Welfare, Public Health Engineering, and Rural Development Sindh Dr Saad Khalid Niaz and Caretaker Law Minister Umar Soomro.

The Health Minister, Dr Saad

Khalid Niaz, said that Universal Health Insurance is a revolutionary project that will provide affordable and quality treatment to the people of Sindh, while free treatment will be given to people living below the poverty line. He said that health insurance will not only provide quality healthcare facilities to people, but it will also help improve the condition of hospitals and benefit medical staff. The preparation of the Sindh Health Department concerning the policy was complete, while some legal complications would also be done away with with the assistance of the Law Department, he informed, and hoped that with the final approval of the cabinet, Universal Health Insurance would be rolled out across the province soon.

The law minister, Umar Soomro,

said that health cards had already been issued to people from the other three provinces of the country; therefore, the people of Sindh should also get health cards.

Through the eighteenth constitutional amendment, the subject of health was handed over to provinces, and there was immense potential for taking revolutionary measures at the provincial level, he said, adding that the caretaker government intended to work efficiently for the welfare of the people of the province. The two ministers discussed various aspects of the Universal Health Insurance Policy in detail and agreed to clear up legal complications related to the policy. The Law Minister, Umar Soomro, assured his possible cooperation on behalf of the Law Department.

Mayor Karachi for need to focus on basic health issues in Sindh

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab has said that the PPP-led Sindh government has worked on improving the National Institute of Cardiology (NIC) and Jinnah Sindh Medical University (JSMU) during the last 12 years and there was a need to focus on basic health issues in the province.

He said this while speaking as chief guest on the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the NIC, JSMU and the Association of Pakistani Descent Cardiologists of North America and at the opening ceremony of the JSMU's

Landhi campus for prevention and treatment of heart diseases, blood pressure and diabetes.

The Mayor said that the establishment of a health center for the treatment of heart diseases and diabetes in Landhi area was a good omen for Karachi, which would help the citizens for free medical tests like blood pressure, ECG, laboratory tests, echocardiography, doppler, peripheral vascular, ultrasound, medical consultation from senior cardiologists besides getting medicines free of charge. Vice Chancellor JSMU Professor Amjad Siraj Memon, Executive Director of National Institute of

Cardiology Professor Tahir Sagheer and Chairman of Almanai Association Javed Sulaiman and others were also present on the occasion.

Barrister Murtaza Wahab said our behavior regarding treatment has become such that we believe in more careful treatment and reaction and when doctors are treating in hospitals and pharma industries are running the state is considered successful while the need is to create awareness among the people regarding the timely diagnosis and preventive measures of the disease.

He said that there were 14 health centers of KMC in 25 towns of Karachi, four or

five primary health centers in each town were built by the government, some of which are inactive which should also be activated. If the local government, JSMU and NICVD should work together, we can make a comprehensive and efficient system for this, he added.

He said that the age for National Identity Card was 18 years and the citizens would soon be directed to undergo some tests if they renewed their identity cards in NADRA at the age of 20. The office of the Mayor of Karachi will surely provide necessary help in this regard, he said. Murtaza Wahab said that there was a good facility in any institution.


Bangladesh High Commissioner calls on Governor

LAHORE (APP): High Commissioner of People's Republic of Bangladesh to Pakistan Ruhul Alam Siddique called on Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman and discussed promotion of bilateral cooperation in the fields of trade and education during a meeting at the Governor's House, here on Tuesday.


The Honorary Consul General of Bangladesh Qazi Humayun Fareed was also present on the occasion, says a handout issued here by the Governor's media team. Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman and Bangladesh High Commissioner expressed concern over the Israeli bombardment and atrocities on the Palestinian people.

Muhammad Balighur Rehman said the circumstances under which Bangladesh was separated reminded of a painful past. He said Pakistan and Bangladesh have once been a nation and country, and both of them share common faith, history, and culture. The Governor Punjab said both countries can move forward as good neighbours, adding that goodwill existing between both countries needs to be translated into even stronger economic, trade, investment, educational, and cultural linkages to the benefit of both nations. He said it is heartening to know that Pakistani medical and dental students are studying in Bangladesh on scholarships.

He said that there should be maximum exchange of student delegations in the educational institutions of the two countries.



GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN
NATIONAL DATABASE AND REGISTRATION AUTHORITY
(Regional Head Office Peshawar - Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)



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- Office Accommodation should be in the below mentioned locations: -

S#	NADRA Registration Center	Required Covered Area
1.	Kalam (UC Kalam, District Swat)	2500-4000 sq ft
2.	Balakot (Tehsil Balakot, District Mansehra)	2500-4000 sq ft
3.	Shinkhari (Tehsil Shinkhari, District Mansehra)	2500-4000 sq ft

- Space measuring of total covered area mentioned against each with public and staff washrooms.
- Prominent, having independent entrance and proposed building should not be in residential area.
- Security wise viable location and easily accessible by public transport.
- Dedicated 3 Phase Electrical Meter / Connection
- Preference will be given to the building in which dedicated transformer is installed.
- Tap Water facility along with overhead tank.
- Ramp for wheel chair for disable citizens.
- Space, NOC for installation of direction board, sign board and heavy generator.
- Roof top for satellite dish antenna installation.
- Sufficient space for maintaining the public queue & parking area.
- Tenancy for a longer period (Preferably 10 years).

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Technical Bid (Separate Envelope):

- Photocopy of property ownership documents [Fard-e-Jaidad/Allotment letter/Relevant Certificate by concerned authority (where settled revenue record is not available)].
- Photocopy of valid CNIC.
- Completion and Fitness Certificate of the building
- Undertaking on Non-judicial stamp paper of Rs. 100/- certifying that owner / building is not temporary / permanently debarred from any Government agency / authority / department (without bearing any responsibility on NADRA whatsoever in this regard).
- Pictures of the building offered for lease.
- Valid Site Plan / Map of the building duly approved from concerned authority.
- In case of absence of owner, authority letter for representative duly signed by property owner, permitting him to attend tender process.

Financial Bid (Separate Envelope):

- Owner's consent showing monthly rent & offered area of the building.
- Quoted price shall be inclusive of all taxes.
- No brokerage / service charges will be paid in case of real estate agent.
- Opening date / time of **Financial Proposal** will be informed to all successful bidders of General Proposal Evaluation.

➤ Bidding documents received after submission of due date / time mentioned above, will not be entertained.

➤ NADRA reserves the right to reject all bids / proposals under PPRA Rule 33 and can cancel the bidding process before acceptance of bid or proposal.

➤ Bid can also be rejected if owner of selected building fail to produce acceptable required / property documents.

➤ This advertisement is also available on PPRA website at www.ppra.org.pk

For any query contact on following address:

PID(I) 3882/23

Director (Admin)

NADRA Regional Head Office, Peshawar - Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
EOBI Building, Plot No. 31 Sector B-1, Phase-V Hayatabad Peshawar | Telephone: 091-9217840

Caretaker CM warns civic agencies to work for betterment of Karachi

KARACHI (APP): Chief Minister Sindh Chief Minister Justice (Retd) Maqbool Baqar on Tuesday directed the transport department to pursue the federal government to construct the Green Line Corridor from Numasih to Radio Pakistan.

The contract of the firm working on the corridor has been cancelled, therefore it must be re-tendered so that the important project of Green Line could be extended to the Old Radio Pakistan building on M.A Jinnah Road.

He issued these directives while presiding over a meeting to review the civic issues here at CM House. The meeting was attended by Minister of Local Government Mubin Jumani, Mayor Karachi Murtaza Wahab, Chairman P&D Shakil Mangnejo,

Secretary Finance, Secretary Local Government, DGs of development authorities, MD SSWMB, all DCs, and all municipal commissioners of all the towns.

The CM said the Civic Centre was a unique and beautiful building but these days it was looking being neglected. Its washrooms are so dirty and dilapidated that nobody would bother to use them, the CM said. When a development authority could not keep its own offices how it would undertake the development of the city, he questioned.

The CM directed DG KDA to improve the over-look and interior of the civic centre. The CM was told that the officers of provincial and federal government housed in the Civic Centre were not paying rent. At this, the CM

directed the Secretary of Local Government to start at source rent deduction from the provincial government offices housed in the Civic Centre and take strict against the federal government offices working there.

The chief minister directed the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) DG to conduct an audit of all the dangerous buildings and report the actions taken to prevent the loss of lives in such buildings.

He also directed the DG to SBCA to report him about the action taken by him against the illegal constructions. "I want a comprehensive report of the builders whose buildings were seeping and were not interested in improving them," he said and directed the DG to cancel their construction licenses if they failed to improve their buildings. Discussing

the condition of JPMC and Civil Hospital buildings, the CM directed Secretary Works to visit there and ensure their repair. He added that these two hospitals were most important and needed the proper attention of all the concerned agencies.

He also directed Mayor Karachi to visit Abbasi Shaheed Hospital and prepare a detailed plan for its improvement and share the same with him. The CM said that during the transition period, various ghost employees have been put on the payroll of local bodies such as Towns, Union Councils/ Committees. He directed all the municipal commissioners, local government, and the finance department to check their employment records and remove the ghost employees and share the report with him.

New Secretary Excise takes charge

— pledges enhanced performance, integrity in Excise Dept

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: In a significant development, the newly appointed Secretary of the Excise Taxation, and Narcotics Control Department for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Fayaz Ali Shah assumed office, bringing a wealth of experience and a commitment to advancing the department's performance.

The distinguished officer, a senior member of the (PMS), has a commendable track record, having served in pivotal roles such as Director General of Excise

Taxation and Narcotics Control, Director-General of Peshawar Development Authority (PDA), and Director-General of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA).

His extensive experience, particularly in leading the Excise Department, positions him well to understand the intricacies of the department and adeptly manage its affairs. Speaking to the media after assuming charge, the new Secretary emphasized the vital role of the Excise Department as a tax collection entity.

He expressed his commitment to enhancing the department's overall performance, outlining measures to tackle issues such as smuggling and the illegal trade of narcotics. The Secretary assured the public of stringent surveillance to counter drug-related activities in the province, affirming a resolute stance against the drug mafia.

Furthermore, he underscored the importance of fairness in the administration, assuring that under his leadership, no individual would be subjected to unfair treatment or unwarranted inconvenience.

The Secretary's pledge reflects a dedication to transparency, efficiency, and integrity within the Excise, Taxation, and Narcotics Control Department.

As the department welcomes its new leader, expectations are high for positive reforms and strengthened governance under his experienced stewardship. The public eagerly anticipates the positive impact of the Secretary's tenure on the operations and effectiveness of the Excise Department in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Minister Amir Durani presiding over a meeting regarding salaries of WSSP's employees. Secretary Dawood Khan also present on occasion.

Minister directs for completion of project

PESHAWAR (APP): Provincial Caretaker Minister for Science and Information Technology, Dr. Najeeb Ullah Marwat has directed to resolve issues hindering completion of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa E-Governance Project.

He was chairing a meeting that was convened to discuss progress on KP E-Governance Project. The meeting among others was attended by Director General Information Technology, Sajid Hussain, Project Director, Faisal Shahzad and other concerned officials.

Addressing the meeting, caretaker minister directed to complete the project at the earliest and added that digitization would improve performance of public sector department besides ensuring transparency in the whole system.

He said that concerned departments work in liaison and devise a comprehensive plan to complete e-governance.

The meeting also discussed progress on e-governance project and invited suggestion of all stakeholders.

80m commuters utilizes BRT

PESHAWAR (APP): Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) has achieved an impressive ridership of approximately 80 million people during the outgoing calendar year 2023, contributing to a total commuter of 215 million since its inception in August 2020, said annual report shared by the TransPeshawar operator of the urban transport system here on Tuesday.

It said that a noteworthy shift was observed in the gender dynamics of ridership, with women constituting 30% of the total commuters—a significant surge compared to the meager 2% estimated before the implementation of the BRT system.

Due to the increasing popularity and demand, the system is constantly expanding. "Zu Peshawar is unwavering in its commitment to fostering inclusivity and embracing technological advancements. Our ongoing efforts to make the system more welcoming for specially-abled individuals reflect our dedication to ensuring that everyone can access and benefit from our services seamlessly," said the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) TransPeshawar, Dr. Tariq Usman Saeed.

The transformative upgrades to the Zu app enhance user experience, offering features like recharging through Omni Shop, comprehensive travel histories, and NFC-supported balance uploads, he added.

KP reports lowest number of dengue cases

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Secretary Health Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mahmood Aslam, stated that in the year 2023, there were 20,566 suspected cases of dengue reported across the province and no death has occurred owing to dengue in the current year.

After screening 19,013 cases, dengue was confirmed in 747 individuals. Notably, no fatalities have been recorded due to dengue this year. Compared to the 22,960 cases reported last year, the current figure of 747 cases indicates a significant 97% reduction. These details were released

in a statement from his office on Tuesday.

Mr Mahmood Aslam highlighted that despite limited resources and funding, Civil defense and other line departments have demonstrated improved efficiency in tackling dengue.

He emphasized that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reports the lowest number of dengue cases in the entire country.

Furthermore, he shared that over 10 million homes were checked as part of the dengue prevention campaign. Dengue larvicides were used in more than 9,000 homes where the presence of dengue larvae

was confirmed. Additionally, the examination of over three million potential larval habitats took place.

Regarding awareness initiatives, Secretary stated that Lady Health Visitors delivered over 200,000 awareness messages as part of the Dengue Awareness Campaign. A total of 4,462 awareness sessions including Dengue Awareness Walks and lectures were conducted.

He also commended the religious leaders, divisional and districts administrations and the health department employees for successfully limiting dengue cases to 747.



PESHAWAR: Mayor Peshawar Haji Zubair Ali listening people's problems at his office.

PMLN possess potential to overcome national crisis

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) will steer out the country out of political and economic crisis under the dynamic leadership of Party supreme Nawaz Sharif.

This was stated by speakers at a function in connection with birthday celebration of founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam and PMLN Quaid Nawaz Sharif held at Peshawar High Court.

PMLN lawyers Forum President Kifayatullah Khan, Peshawar High Court Bar Association Tariq Afridi, Senior Vice President Farhad Ali, General Secretary Akbar Yousaf Khalil, provincial Senior Vice President PMLN Lawyers Pakistan Syed Sardar Hussain, Provincial Secretary Information, Salim Shah Hoti, PMLNLF leaders Atif Nazir, Taimur Afridi, Manzoor Khalil, Asif Nazeer, Muhammad Shabir, Gul Nazeer Azam, Saima Jafree, Safdar Khan, Shah Nawaz Khan and Hidayatullah were present.

Earlier a cake was cut to mark birthday celebration of Quaid-e-Azam and Nawaz Sharif. Speakers



eulogized the services of PMLN.Chief Nawaz Sharif for the uplift and welfare of the people. They said that PMLN government had put the path on development through megaprojects which changed the lot of the masses.

However, they regretted that the PML N government was destabilized through conspiracy. They said that Nawaz Sharif and other party leaders were trapped in fake cases and

thus they had been victimized. Speakers said that PMLN leaders had been acquitted in all cases.

The speakers said that the acquittal of party leadership vindicated our stance. They said that PMLN would sweep the general election and it would form next government. They exhorted people to vote PMLN in general election. They said that PMLN was capable to provide relief to masses.

Dr. Umar Ayub Khan chaired clinical executive board meeting



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Teaching Hospital, Khyber Medical College and Khyber College of Dentistry, Chairman Board of Governors Dr. Umar Ayub Khan presided over the first executive meeting with the patron of all medical departments. Dean KMC, Prof. Dr. Mahmud Aurangzeb, Medical Director Professor Dr. Muhammad Ayaz Khan and chairpersons of all departments participated.

In his address to the participants,

Dr. Umar Ayub Khan congratulated Khyber Medical College for organizing first Khyber Medical College Conference.

He stated that all possible support will be given to all the employees, because the tall buildings of any hospital are baseless until the employees are happy, but the impact of all possible support to the employees is on the patients, so that patients are provided with international standard medical facilities, which should be the first duty of all of us on a priority basis.

His first point in the meeting was about the biometric attendance of doctors. He said that only installing a biometric system is not enough to ensure attendance, so everyone should have a clinical audit because our main goal should be quality time, which surgeon how many surgeries were performed in a day and how many patients were seen in OPD by other senior doctors.

Chairman Dr. Umar Ayub Khan also discussed other issues in the college and hospital in the meeting, in which he urged to consider the institutional based practice and also issued

instructions to ensure attendance of senior doctors with all facilities. He further said that we never want any of our employees to approach the courts for their rights, but we board members, Dean Khyber Medical College, Medical Director, Hospital Director are there for the convenience and support of all.

He further said that for the promotion on various posts of the faculty, we will speed up the links with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Policy Board as soon as possible and all the faculty were urged to be promoted according to the rules and regulations of the PMDC and the Policy Board.

All the faculty chairpersons were urged to send the details of vacant posts in their respective departments to the Board through the Dean's office as soon as possible so that all these vacancies can be filled up by the Election Commission. He also issued instructions to activate the Cath lab and to conclude an agreement with the cardiology department of Hayatabad Medical Complex as soon as possible.

Dr. Sheema Khan, Clinical head Gastroenterology,

has been instructed to push for the introduction of modern technology in invasive Gastroenterology department as we want to equip our students with modern education as well as provide patients with international standard treatments.

He added in order to make cancer treatment more stable, He has issued instructions to the medical director to allocate a separate ward for cancer so that the separate budget for cancer treatment can be discussed and approved it by the Govt. of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He also considered setting up a new stroke unit in the Khyber Teaching Hospital, taking more staff for the MRI machine so that the people can be provided day and night facilities.

In the meeting, Dean Khyber Medical College said in his address to the participants that Khyber Teaching Hospital has a model status as including the establishment of a complex of 20 model operation theaters which is not available anywhere else in Pakistan, new OPD building with high level of modern requirements under the supervision of expert doctors. Precise patient care is provided, and fortunately, every medical field is here. Recently, we have introduced cancer, endocrinology, nephrology, interventional cardiology, rheumatology and other fields, which are not only for patients care even our students are also being introduced to the modern departments and latest technologies. There is a highly qualified faculty of Khyber Medical College, due to which Khyber Medical College has the high rank in the region.

Power shutdown notified

PESHAWAR (APP): Pesco authorities have notified power shutdown in areas of Dangari and Shuba Bazar due to maintenance work.

According to Pesco, power supply will remain suspended from 132 KV Peshawar Fort Grid Station on 27, 28 and 30 December from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM, resultantly consumers of 11 KV Dabgari and Shuba feeders will face inconvenience. Power supply will also remain suspended from Peshawar Industrial Grid Station on 28 December from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM, resultantly consumers of 11 KV Abasen feeder will face inconvenience.

Cold, dry weather to prevail in KP

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

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

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

The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in centigrade at different stations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were Peshawar 26/05, Chitral 18/-01, Timergara 22/02, Dir 22/-01, Mirkhani 21/01, Kalam 18/-05, Drosht 17/04, Saidu Sharif 22/01, Pattan 24/15, Malam Jabba 12/02, Takht Bhai 23/04, Kakul 20/03, Balakot 23/04, Parachinar 17/01, Bannu 25/08, Cherat 16/05, DI Khan City 28/09.

The lowest temperature recorded in the province was -05°c in Kalam and Tirah valley of Khyber district.



PESHAWAR: Youngster busy in repairing vehicle headlight at Shoba Bazaar.

Election 2024: Candidates blow horns to attract voters

PESHAWAR (APP): The candidates of all mainstream polito-religious parties and independents have expedited election campaigns and corner meetings to inform masses about their election manifestos after submitting nomination papers for different constituencies for general election 2024.

The scrutiny of nomination papers continued in the respective offices of returning officers in all 37 districts of KP where the process would be completed by December 30, 2023. Eying on national and provincial assemblies, the stalwarts of Pakistan Peoples Party, Pakistan Muslim League-N, Awami National Party, Jamiatul Islam-F, Jumat e Islami Pakistan and Pakistan

Tahrik e Insaf have mostly fielded political heavyweights to clinch maximum seats from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and form government for next five years.

On NA-28 Peshawar-I, a total of 33 candidates filed papers including former member national assembly, Noor Alam Khan of JUIF, former minister KP, Taimur Salim Jhagra of PTI and ex-speaker KP assembly, Kirmatulla Khan Chagarmatti of PPP.

Similarly, on NA-29 Peshawar-II, as many as 22 candidates submitted their nomination papers including former MNA Amir Ayub Khan, former MPA Sobia Shahid and Tahir Nadeem while 27 candidates would try their luck on NA-30 Peshawar-III including former MNA

Shah G Gul Afridi of PMLN, ex MNA Nasir Khan Musazai of JUIF and ex MPA Khalid Waqar Chamkani.

On NA 31-Peshawar-IV, a total of 30 candidates filed nomination papers including former MNA Arab Sher Ali, Arab Zarak Khan, Arab Alamigr Khan. Tough electoral battle is expected on NA-32 Peshawar's constituency mostly comprised on city areas among ANP's leader and former federal minister, Ghulam Ahmed Bilour, PTI's Sher Afzal Marwat and Shah Jee Gul Afridi of PMLN.

"The literacy rate in Peshawar was high compare to other districts where most people were associated with trade and business and the role of young voters

would play a crucial role in deciding fate of the candidates," said Muhammad Rauf Khan, Chairman Political Science Department, University of Peshawar while talking to APP.

Similarly, former Chief Minister and vice Chairman of PTI-P, Mahmood Khan, PMLN Engr Amir Muqam, and PTI's Murad Saeed have submitted nomination for different seats of national assembly in Swat where tough electoral battle is expected among mainstream political parties.

Besides political parties, transgender community and minorities' women were also flexing their muscles in different constituencies in KP. Dr Saveera Parkah, who is representing Hindu community, also filed nomination paper for the general

seat of PK-25 Buner district. Her father Om Parkash was associated with PPP for the last three decades and hoped to get a PPP ticket for her daughter.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan, 5,278 candidates filed nomination papers for national assembly and KP Assembly seats in KP.

As many as 1283 male and 39 female candidates filed papers for general seats of national assembly and 3,349 male and 115 female candidates for general seats of provincial assembly.

Similarly, 97 females filed nomination papers for women reserved seats of the national assembly and 321 women for reserved seats of KP assembly while 68 male and six female sub-

mitted papers for non-Muslim seats.

Meanwhile, a one day training of district monitoring officers and monitoring officers was concluded here where 36 district returning officers and 230 monitoring officers were imparted training on different matters related to electoral process and election laws besides code of conduct for general election.

"The manifestos of political parties would play a crucial role in deciding the future of these candidates during the general election 2024," said Muhammad Rauf, chairman of the political science department, university of Peshawar while talking to APP.

The turnout of voters, strong baradari system and past track record of candi-

dates and their political parties performance in Govt would decide which party would rule Pakistan for next five year," he said.

Rauf said today was an era of digital media and advised political leaders to avoid blame games, accusation, mudslinging and concentrate on constructive workable programs and issues based speeches that would help political parties' leaders to persuade voters especially young electorates toward them.

He urged all political parties and people to unite for general election 2024 and exercise their right of franchise wisely so that competent representatives may be elected to take the country forward besides resolving masses problems.



In brief

Student killed, 23 injured

SHEIKHUPURA (INP): A student was killed and 23 passengers injured in separate road accidents in different localities of Sheikhupura, police and rescue sources said on Tuesday. According to details, near Baway Di Kutya stop, a 16-year-old student identified as Shehram slipped while riding a bus slipped and fell down and was crushed to death by the vehicle. An over speeding passenger coaster and a Mazda collided at Lahore road near Kota Abdul Malik resulting in injuries to 18 people. Due to poor visibility caused by a dense fog, a passenger van rammed into a tractor trolley outside a petrol pump at Sharqpur road. Five people including Iqbal Bahu, Nazim Ali, Waseem, Yaseen and Nazim s/o Muhammad Hussain were injured in the accident. The body and injured were shifted to different hospitals of respective areas.

Three held for killing youth

F.P. Report

MANSEHRA: The police on Tuesday arrested three Afghan tenants for killing a youth over financial dispute in jurisdiction of Mansehra City. According to details, some three days earlier, accused killed Hassan Qureshi 27, s/o of shop owner at Balakot Road after exchange of fire over non-payment of monthly rent. The police arrested all three culprits including Qudrat Ali s/o Badam Gul, two brothers Sharifullah and Israr. The detainees were being investigated under the case registered against them at City police station.

Crive against crimes in Tank

F.P. Report

TANK: Tank police have tightened a noose around anti-social elements, arresting seven accused during ongoing operations at various parts of the district. According to a spokesman of the district police, the police have launched a crackdown against criminal elements in line with directives of District Police Officer (DPO) Iftikhar Ali Shah to ensure rule of law. As part of efforts, Station House Officer (SHO) Shaheed Murid Police Station, Noor Aslam-led party arrested an accused and recovered one pistol and five cartridges. The police also arrested two more accused and recovered over 500 grams hashish. In another action, SHO of Gul Imam Rafi Ullah Khan acting on tip off raided a compound and arrested four persons involved in aerial firing. SHO of City police station Rehmat Khan-leading a police party also recovered hashish and registered cases against the accused and started further investigation.

PTI ex-MPA taken into custody

MULTAN (INP): As the general elections, scheduled to be held on February 8, 2024, are approaching so, is the crackdown on the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders, especially those who have filed their nomination papers, is intensifying. In a latest instance, the party's ex-MPA from Arifwala Chaudhry Na'eem Ibrahim was taken into custody by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) when he arrived at the Multan International Airport on Tuesday morning. Quoting his spokesman, sources told media that the former MPA was arrested despite the fact that a court had granted him bail until December 27.

Caretaker minister orders facilitation of patients at hospitals

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Caretaker Minister for Industries, Technical Education and Newly Merged Districts (NDMs) affairs Amir Abdullah visited Mardan Medical Complex (MTI). Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Saeedullah Jan was accompanying him.

On the arrival of the caretaker minister, Dr. Azam Manan, DMS of Mardan Medical Complex, welcomed him. The provincial minister visited various wards of Mardan Medical Complex including OPD, Accident and Emergency Ward, Neurosurgery Ward, Orthopedic Ward, Medical A Ward and CCU (Cardiology Ward).

The caretaker minister inquired about the health of the patients and the availability of medicines and doctors. He said that the provincial government has launched Khushal Khyber Pakhtunkhwa program to improve the provision of various services, under which the ministers are going to various districts to review the facilities provided to the people in order to improve it further. He urged the medical staff to provide the best health services to the patients as well as to treat them politely. He also assured to fulfill various needs of the hospital.

Commissioner directs fair distribution of electricity: A meeting was held under the chairmanship of Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai regarding public complaints in the context of day-to-day power outages and hide and

seek of electricity. Chief PESCO Qazi Tahir, Deputy Commissioner Mardan Muhammad Fayaz Khan Sherpao, SE Pesco Mardan and related engineers participated in the meeting.

Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai informed Chief Pesco and other officials about the increasing load shedding of electricity in Mardan Division and the anxiety among the people in this regard. He said that administrative officers and police in Mardan conducted a day and night campaign against power theft and kunda culture as a result of which Mardan was given the status of load shedding free city with record recovery.

But with the onset of power outages in Mardan city for some time now, the duration of load shedding has been extended in other areas, which has created anxiety among the people. Chief Pesco Qazi Muhammad Tahir said the cooperation of Mardan division administration and police in the campaign against electricity theft and kunda culture was matchless. He said that due to the recent severe cold and fog, tripping in grid stations is a technical problem that causes frequent power outages.

This problem will be solved after the change of weather. Commissioner Mardan emphasized on Pesco officials that in this regard continuous supply of electricity should be ensured by controlling the technical problems as soon as possible and along with this, necessary steps should be taken to inform the public about the situation.

PPP fears pre-poll rigging through police transfers

HYDERABAD (INP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has expressed its concern over the transfers of senior police officials in Sindh. In his letter to the chief election commissioner (CEC), the party's Central Election Monitoring Cell In-charge Senator Taj Haider, while referring to the transfers of eight police officials made by the Sindh government in the ongoing month of December has said that this step by the provincial government is a violation of section 230 of the Election Act, 2017.

The senator writes that a

few days ago seven, of eight officers, of the rank of superintendent police (SP) and senior superintendent of police (SSP), had been directed to report to the CPO. It is further written in the letter that eight police officials have been posted in district Kashmir after transferring the SSP to the station.

"There is no emergency which has necessitated the transfers of these officials on such a large scale," the senator writes, adding, "It appears that the Sindh government has made all such postings to exert pressure on voters and to pave the

way for the rigging of elections through the involvement of police."

The letter further reads that another matter of concern for the PPP is that a retired FIA DG is now PML-N Sindh president, who can use his connections and wield influence to rig elections. "The recent posting of SP District Matyari is especially noteworthy," writes the senator. He further states that keeping in view the above-mentioned facts, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is requested to declare all such postings cancelled.



ABBOTTABAD: DIG Hazara giving away shield to Coordinating Officer National Institute of Management Muhammad Imran.

Seven killed in two different road mishaps

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: As many as 7 people died in two different road accidents in Hafizabad while 4 children were seriously injured. Two women and a child were also among the dead. The deceased women were coming to Hafizabad from Gujranwala to attend a wedding. Rescue 1122 rescue teams shifted the injured to the hospital.

According to Rescue-

1122 sources, a family resident of Gujranwala was coming to Hafizabad to attend a wedding. When they reached near Sadar police station, the car went out of control due to high speed and after hitting the divider, it collided with the dumper, as a result of which four people including two women and a child were died and four children in the car were also injured. They were shifted to the hospital by rescue teams of

1122. The car was being driven by a woman.

The second accident took place on Vinike-Qadirabad road, where a high-speed motorcycle collided with the car coming in front while crossing the rickshaw, as a result of which the three youths on the motorcycle died on the spot. The deceased include Irfan resident of Pindi Bhattian and Saim resident of Khanqah Dogran and a one identified.

Annual matric exams to start from March 1

FAISALABAD (INP): The annual matriculation examinations 2024 will start under the aegis of the Board of Intermediate & Secondary Education (BISE) Faisalabad from March 1, 2024 followed by the commencement of annual intermediate examinations 2024 from April 15, 2024.

A spokesman for the Education Board said here on Tuesday that the candidates could submit their admission forms for matric exams 2024 with double fee up to January 5 and with triple fee up to January

13, 2024, as deadline for submission of admission forms for matric exams had expired.

Similarly, students could apply for inter exams 2024 up to January 20, 2024 with single fee while the admission forms would be received with double fee up to February 2, 2024 and with triple fee up to February 9, he added.

What growers urged to water crop timely: Agriculture experts on Tuesday urged the wheat growers to water their crops on time to get healthy and bumper production.

According to Agriculture (Extension) Department spokesman, wheat grows in most areas do not care about watering their crop in time which affects the quality as well as quantity of the production.

He advised the growers to water their crop first time after 20-25 days of its cultivation whereas the second watering should be made after 70-80 days. The third watering should be made after 110-115 days of sowing, so that the grains could become fully developed, he added.



ABBOTTABAD: KP Governor Haji Ghulam Ali addressing during the first convocation of Government College of Women for Commerce and Management Sciences.

109 candidates submit papers in Larkana

F.P. Report

LARKANA: As many as 31 nomination forms have been submitted for 2 seats of the National Assembly, while 109 nomination forms have been submitted for 4 seats of the Provincial Assembly, in this regard, 17 candidates for NA-6-1-194, and for NA-195 14 candidates have submitted their nomination forms to the attached returning officers while in 4 provincial seats of Larkana 33, 11 PS-33, 11 PS-35 candidates, 24 PS-12 and 17 PS-13 candidates.

People's Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and former MPA Faryal Talpar are participating in the elections while Jamiat Ulema Islam Sindh Secretary General Maulana Rashid Mahmood Soomro, former MPA Moazzam Abbasi.

Sardar Adil Und, Political Secretary of PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari Jameel Ahmed Soomro, former provincial minister Sohail Anwar Sial including PPP, Jamiat Ulema Islam, GDA and leaders of all political parties and independent candidates intensified their election campaign, has been done.

DRC resolves land issue in Buner

F.P. Report

BUNER: Dispute Resolution Council (DRC) Gadezai Salarzai circle on Tuesday peacefully resolved land dispute between two parties.

DRC Chairman Wali Rehman Shehzad Amir Rehman Abdur Rashid told media the parties were developed serious misunderstanding over a piece of land but the timely intervention by summoning both the parties and listening them with keen patience the parties were convinced during third hearing to in writing agreed upon mutual understanding and the issue peacefully resolved forever.

6 passengers injured in Hangu firing

F.P. Report

HANGU: At least six people were injured when unknown assailants fired at a passenger van near Saddar police station in Hangu district on Tuesday.

Police said six people including the driver of the passenger vehicle were injured in the firing incident. Soon after the incident, DPO Hangu, Nisar Ahmad Khan and his team reached the site of the incident and collected evidence from the crime scene. The injured were shifted to District Headquarters Hospital Hangu.

Secy health visits Mastung hospital

MASTUNG (PPI): Secretary Health Department Abdullah Khan, Divisional Director Health Dr Tahira, DHO Dr Rasheed DHO, and other officers visited SNGRTH Mastung on Tuesday.

The visiting team inspected wards and other sections of the hospital and found them functional. During the visit it was observed that the IPC protocols are not being implemented in letter and spirit, upon which the secretary showed his grave concern and directed the CEO and the administration to immediately implement the IPC protocols to prevent the infection spread.

Moreover, the secretary health directed that proper hospital waste management system should be developed and implemented, its suggestions be presented in the board meeting.

Rs20,000 each as stipend will be provided to youth

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Caretaker Minister for Information Jan Achakzai has said that on the directives of Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki, the Balochistan had announced a special package to extend pecuniary assistance to the unemployed youth of the Chaman.

Addressing a press conference at Quetta Press here on Tuesday, he said that Rs20,000 each would be paid to the unemployed youth of Chaman, a city bordering Afghanistan, as a stipend, adding that step had been taken to reduce the problems of the people of Chaman. He said that the services of Bolan Mail

3 had been restored after Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar took notice of the closure of train services.

Welcoming the message of Chief of Army Staff General Asim Muneer issued on the eve of Christmas that division of the country would not be let on the basis of ethnicity, provincialism, sectarianism and nationalism, he said that the whole nation welcomed the emotions of Chief of Army Staff. He said that the people of Balochistan would foil the nefarious designs of the enemies.

Voice raised by Cricketer Ahmed Shahzad for the cricketers of Balochistan and providing opportunities for the crick-

eters of Balochistan in Quetta Gladiator was welcoming, said he, adding that people of Balochistan were having talent, but sporting opportunities were not being provided to them.

Condemning the biased attitude of Pakistan Cricket Board, Achakzai said that it was the responsibilities of all federal departments and institutions to provide opportunities to the youth of Balochistan. Soon national cricketer Ahmed Shahzad would pay a visit to Balochistan to provide counselling to the young cricketers of the province, he remarked. He said that government of Balochistan was committed to providing opportunities to the youth of the province.

IGP directs cops to prioritize public safety

F.P. Report

BARA: Inspector General Police (IGP) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Akhtar Hayat Khan Gandapur has said that police are responsible for provision of safety to the masses and they are equipped to face the challenges, on Tuesday.

This he expressed while talking to the tribal elders during his visit to tehsil Bara, district Khyber, flanked by Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Peshawar Ijaz Khan, District Police Officer (DPO) Saleem Abbas Kulachvi. He said that there was no place for the anti-social elements and with joint efforts of people and police; they would curtail all kind of crimes.

Valued sacrifices of the tribesmen, the IGP said that they would leave no stone unturned to work for the interest of their motherland.



The tribal elders should play their due role to settle pithy disputes being faced by the locals; they added and urged them to assist them to restore durable peace in the area. He went on with support of locals; the police could wipe out the anti-social disease of the tribal society. The tribal elders assured him that they would extend every possible help to the police to curtail crimes in the area. IGP, KP Aakhtar Hayat Khan

Gandapur inaugurated a new police station in Bara and inspected various sections of it.

Directing the local police personnel, IGP urged them to stay alert on their duty hours, keeping in view unfavorable situations in the district. He stressed to adopt all safety measures while conducting patrolling to avoid any untoward incident. He also planted a sibling inside the police station and offered prayers.

Retired public servant commits to serve public in politics

F.P. Report

KARAK: Former candidate and public servant Javed Khattak has announced to contest the elections as an independent from PK 97.

Talking to the press conference, he said that Ali Khel, while the entire district is mine, the purpose of starting the election campaign from Madrasa Siraj Uloom Ali Khel was to do it from this holy place.

Mehmood Khan spent 9 and a half years while Ikram Khan Durrani used the royalty of Karak in his native areas for five years, due to which Kirk has turned into a Khundrat. Had there been a leader, Karak today would not have been in such a bad mood and such a disappointment.

In the previous election, all political circles were united against me and there

was a lot of rigging and they have to take revenge because they knew that if I had won the election, if I were among your people, you are the love of the people, the politics of these people is just abuse. Taking contracts or selling, God willing, my manifesto will be shared with you very soon. My not joining Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam is asking for a link road from CPEC for my district.

Two killed, two injured as jeep falls into gorge

F.P. Report

BALAKOT: Two people were killed and two others injured when a jeep skidded off road and plunged into a ravine here, police said on Tuesday.

According to details, the accident took place in UC Ghanool of tehsil

Balakot district Mansehra where a jeep carrying four people got out of control of driver and fell into a gorge.

As a result of accident, two people including member village council Ghanool Ali Zaman alias Munshi and employee of Wildlife Department Sajjad were killed while

Asif s/o Ali Zaman and Muhammad Shafique s/o Aziz ur Rehman were critically injured. The rescue personnel pulled out the bodies and injured from ravine and shifted them to hospital where the wounded people were referred to King Abdullah Hospital Mansehra due to critical condition.



HYDERABAD: Doctors and health workers holding a protest rally in favour of their demands.



Navalny tracked down to ‘Polar Wolf’ prison in Arctic

MOSCOW (Reuters): Jailed Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny has been tracked down to a penal colony north of the Arctic Circle, his spokeswoman said, after supporters lost touch with him for more than two weeks. Navalny, 47, was tracked down to the IK-3 penal colony in Kharp in the Yamal-Nenets region, about 1,900 km (1200 miles) north east of Moscow, spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said. Navalny's lawyer managed to see him, Yarmysh said. "This prison will be much worse than the one that was before," Yarmysh told Reuters TV in Vilnius via video call. "They are trying to make his life as unbearable as it possibly can be." "They definitely try to isolate Alexei and to make it more difficult to access him," said Yarmysh, who refused to disclose her location due to security concerns. Navalny's allies, who had been preparing for his expected transfer to a "special regime" colony, the harshest grade in Russia's prison system, said he had not been seen by his lawyers since Dec. 6 and raised the alarm about his fate. Navalny's new home, known as "the Polar Wolf" colony, is considered to be one of the toughest prisons in Russia. Most prisoners there have been convicted of grave crimes. Winters

are harsh - and temperatures are due to drop to around minus 28 Celsius (minus 18.4 Fahrenheit) there over the next week. About 60 km (40 miles) north of the Arctic Circle, the prison was founded in the 1960s as part of what was once the GULAG system of forced Soviet labour camps, according to the Moskovsky Komsomolets newspaper. "The conditions there are harsh, with a special regime in the permafrost," said Leonid Volkov, an aide to Navalny. He said it was difficult to communicate with prisoners held at the remote site. The United States welcomed reports that Navalny had been located but remained "deeply concerned" about his well-being, the US State Department said, calling for his immediate release and describing his detention as "unjust." Navalny's lawyer, Ivan Zhdanov, said his supporters had sent 618 requests for information about his location and suggested that the Russian authorities wanted to isolate Navalny ahead of the March presidential election. Navalny, who had been held at a penal colony 235 km (145 miles) east of Moscow, says he has been imprisoned because he is viewed as a threat by the Russian political elite. As a prisoner, he is unable to run in the election.

He denies all the charges he has been convicted of and casts Russia's judicial system as deeply corrupt. Russia says he is a convicted criminal. Navalny earned admiration from Russia's disparate opposition for voluntarily returning to Russia in 2021 from Germany, where he had been treated for what Western laboratory tests showed was an attempt to poison him with a nerve agent. Navalny says he was poisoned in Siberia in August 2020. The Kremlin denied trying to kill him and said there was no evidence he was poisoned with a nerve agent. His supporters cast him as a future leader of Russia who will one day walk free from jail to lead his country, though it is unclear how much popular support Navalny has inside Russia. The authorities view him and his supporters as extremists with links to the CIA intelligence agency who they say is seeking to destabilise Russia. They have outlawed his movement, forcing many of his followers to flee abroad. Last month Navalny lamented the terrible state of inmates' teeth in Russian prison. "Poor nutrition, a lack of solid food, lots of sweet stuff (the most affordable food), a lot of strong tea, smoking, and a complete absence of dental care do them in," he said at the time.

China looks for diplomatic ‘sweet spot’

BEIJING: With comments such as, "It's possible that the US military brought the [COVID-19] virus to Wuhan" and, "Racism against ethnic minorities in the US is a chronic disease of American society", former Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian was one of the most ardent of China's so-called wolf warrior diplomats. Although criticised by Western diplomats, Zhao's combative rhetoric drew a huge audience on social media platform X, where he built up a following of more than 1.9 million, and other Chinese diplomats rushed to adopt his forthright approach. But then at the beginning of January, Zhao was abruptly reassigned to a much less public role the Chinese Foreign Ministry that manages land and sea borders. Since then, little has been heard from him, and he has not posted on X since. Before Zhao's transfer, the Chinese government had made few attempts to rein in its wolf warrior diplomats. But when Beijing's ambassador to France, Lu Shaye, questioned the sovereignty of post-Soviet states in a French interview in April, prompting outrage among several European countries, Beijing quickly distanced itself from Lu and his remarks. The wolf warriors have been pushed aside, according to associate professor Chong Ja Ian, who teaches China's foreign pol-

icy at the National University of Singapore. So too has another animal that has long symbolised the softer side of Chinese diplomacy. Chinese pandas in zoos across the West have returned to China this year with no immediate plans for the animals to be replaced. According to Rutgers University's Shaoyu Yuan, who is a scholar of Chinese diplomacy, the departure of wolf warriors and pandas suggests a shift in Beijing's diplomatic approach. "They are currently trying to find the sweet spot between hard and soft diplomacy," he said. Wolf warrior diplomacy draws its name from the 2017 Chinese movie Wolf Warrior 2 - about a former Chinese soldier who volunteers to go to an unnamed war-torn African country to rescue Chinese citizens trapped by fighting between rebels and government forces. According to NUS's Chong, wolf warrior diplomacy had its roots in growing tensions in the South China Sea amid a 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague that China's expansive maritime claims in the disputed waters were without legal basis. In that context, wolf warrior diplomacy was a way to demonstrate resolve to both external and domestic audiences and convey that the People's Republic of China (PRC) was serious about defending its interests,

Chong told Al Jazeera. "It also dovetailed with increasing Chinese Communist Party (CCP) promotion of a more strident sense of Chinese nationalism that included strong ethnic and cultural elements," he added. While Chinese diplomats of previous decades were known for a more cautious and bureaucratic diplomatic tone, rarely engaging with foreign media or posting on social media, wolf warrior diplomats have brazenly defended Beijing from foreign criticism and proactively launched rhetorical attacks of their own across media landscapes against perceived hostile forces. Although wolf warrior diplomacy is a relatively recent phenomenon, panda diplomacy is far more established. In its modern format, it goes back to the 1950s but picked up in the 1970s with United States President Richard Nixon's landmark visit to China and the end of Beijing's international isolation. Following the visit, then-Chinese leader Mao Zedong gave two pandas to the US as a gift. Two years later, the United Kingdom was also given two of the animals. "The pandas provided a friendly and cuddly perspective on the PRC at a time when negative impressions of the PRC stemming from the Korean War and the Cultural Revolution were still relatively fresh," Chong explained. — Aljazeera

Ukraine carries out air assault on Crimea'

KYIV (Reuters): Ukraine carried out an air attack on Feodosia in Crimea, Ukraine's air force commander said on Tuesday, after the Russian-installed governor of the Crimea said that the assault sparked a fire in the town's port area. The commander of Ukraine's air force, Mykola Oleschchuk, said on the Telegram messaging app, without providing evidence, that the attack destroyed a major Russian Navy vessel, the landing Novocherkassk ship. "And the fleet in Russia is getting smaller and smaller! Thanks to the Air Force pilots and everyone involved for the filigree work!" said Oleschchuk. The report could not be independently verified and there was no immediate comment from Russia. Both Russia and Ukraine have often exaggerated the losses they claim to have inflicted upon each other in the 22-month long war, while underestimated their own casualty and equipment losses. Earlier on Tuesday, Sergei Aksyonov, the Russian-installed governor of Crimea, said only that the Ukrainian attack resulted in a fire in the town's port area that was promptly contained. "All relevant emergency services are on site," Aksyonov said on the Telegram. "Residents of several houses will be evacuated." Footage posted on several Russian news outlets on Telegram showed powerful explosions and fires over a port area.

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Many affected by floods in Thailand

NARATHIWAT: Tens of thousands of people in southern Thailand have been affected by severe flooding that has submerged roads and railways, forced schools to close and left some residents trapped in their homes. The province of Narathiwat in the country's far south near the border with Malaysia was most seriously affected, with some districts submerged for days, according to broadcaster Thai PBS. It said that "scores of people" had requested assistance and some were sitting on the roofs of their flooded homes. At least a dozen schools in the provinces of Narathiwat and neighbouring Yala have been forced to close, while footage from the region showed homes and shops inundated with water. Days of torrential rain have also caused problems at sea, with at least seven boats sunk in the Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea. The kingdom's state railway company said track subsidence meant that trains heading south to Malaysia were stopping at Yala, 100km (62 miles) away from the border. Authorities have warned residents in the provinces to be ready to evacuate if the floods get worse. Serious floods in the region in December last year killed at least three people. — Aljazeera



GAZA: Debris from the destroyed Khalifa house in Nuseirat camp, after it was hit by an Israeli missile.

Sudan’s civilians pick up arms, as RSF gains and army stumbles

KHARTOUM: When the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) called on young men to enlist last June, Zakariya Issa* went to the nearest recruitment centre. He was one of thousands of young people who trained for 10 weeks in Wad Madani, a city just south of the capital Khartoum. In September, he was deployed with 500 people to fight the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a group stronger than the army and backed by the United Arab Emirates. Many of his friends and peers were killed or wounded within a couple of weeks. "I lost five of my friends," Issa, 20, told Al Jazeera from Saudi Arabia, where he now lives. "They were more than friends. They were my brothers." The Sudanese army and allied groups are relying on young men with little or no military training to fight as foot soldiers against the RSF. Over the past week, recruitment has picked up across River Nile State since the RSF captured Wad Madani, Sudan's second-largest city. River Nile state is a traditionally privileged region that has produced many of the political and military elites in Sudan's modern history. But now, army officers and figures from Sudan's political Islamic movement, which ruled for 30 years under former autocratic president Omar al-Bashir, are calling on young men from this region to thwart the RSF. New recruits told Al Jazeera that they are motivated to pick up weapons due to the risk that the RSF could attack their cities, loot their belongings and subject women to sexual violence. Most view the RSF - which is primarily made up of tribal nomadic fighters from Sudan's neglected province of Darfur - as

invaders and occupiers. While the group has evicted thousands of people from their homes, army supporters are also exploiting ethnic undertones to recruit young men. "I picked up a gun to defend myself, my ethnic group and my homeland," said Yaser, 21, from Shendi, a city in River Nile State where thousands of people have reportedly picked up weapons in recent days. "The RSF are not just at war with the army. They are at war with civilians," he told Al Jazeera. After Wad Madani fell to the RSF, civilians across eastern and northern Sudan were devastated. The city was a haven for internally displaced people who fled Khartoum and surrounding towns earlier in the war. They are now on the move again. "People mostly think that the army can't protect them now," said Suleiman al-Sadig,* a lawyer from Atbara, a city in River Nile State. Recent RSF advances have compounded the panic. Photos and videos surfacing across social media show what appear to be children and young men arming themselves in River Nile State. According to residents and journalists, some of those recruits have gone to Wad Madani to fight the RSF, while others are staying behind in case of an attack. "The calls to get armed are not coming from the army. They're mostly coming from civilians themselves," al-Sadig, told Al Jazeera. Suleiman Baldo, the founder of the Sudan Transparency and Policy Tracker think tank, believes arming young men is irresponsible. "For me, these young recruits are really cannon fodder for ideological reasons," he told Al Jazeera. "Sudan's [political] Islamic movement is push-

ing for this kind of mobilisation in areas that are beyond the RSF's control." In one photo on social media, which Al Jazeera could not independently verify, one of the young recruits is seen captured by the RSF and tied to the windshield of a car. A former soldier, who is in close contact with officers in the army, added that new recruits are often the first people to die in battle. "They have no combat or military background and they just carry weapons. They die quickly," he told Al Jazeera. Over the last two decades, River Nile State has attracted many young men from Arab and non-Arab tribes in search of work and stability. Many were uprooted by the state-backed Arab tribal militias - later repackaged as the RSF - which crushed a mostly non-Arab rebellion in Darfur in 2003. These young men are now being accused of spying on behalf of the RSF based on their ethnicity and tribal affiliations. According to local monitors, many have been arrested, tortured and even killed by military intelligence and by civilians carrying arms in northeastern cities. On December 19, Zeinab Noon* spoke with her male cousins who are all between the ages of 16 and 20. They told her that they captured RSF spies in Shendi. "[They said] they're torturing them, so there is a sense of paranoia," Noon, who lives outside of Sudan, told Al Jazeera. "I don't think they know [for sure if they're really spies]." [The Darfur Network for Human Rights (DNHR), a local monitoring group, said in a statement that these attacks are "linked to incitement to ethnic violence" in River Nile cities. — Aljazeera

MM2H visa changes draw cautious welcome, questions from ex-pats

PENANG: For foreigners hoping to relocate to Malaysia or extend their stay, the announcement of new terms for one of the most coveted residential and retirement visas prompted mixed emotions. Many ex-pats drawn to the Southeast Asian country, which offers a sunny climate, famed cuisine and a mix of Malay, Chinese, Indian and Indigenous influences, breathed a sigh of relief at the rollout of "relaxed" requirements for Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H). But after nearly a year of anxious waiting for clarity about changes to the scheme, some prospective applicants were disappointed to see key details left unmentioned in the announcement earlier this

month - including whether certain income and asset thresholds will need to be met, and whether applicants aged 50 and above are included. "The new rules open up the visa programme to a lot more people although a few things are still to be clarified," Andy Davison, the CEO of expat-focused publisher TEG Media, told Al Jazeera. "High on the list is the required monthly income which is the biggest single obstacle for most people wanting to apply for the existing MM2H visa." The MM2H programme, which originally offered foreigners the chance to live in Malaysia for up to 10 years subject to certain wealth and investment requirements, approved some

57,000 applications in the first 16 years after its launch in 2002. But since 2018, the scheme has been under a constant state of "evaluation", only to be suspended altogether in 2020 during the COVID-19 crisis and ensuing border closures. The programme was revived in 2021 with tightened regulations that required applicants to have a monthly income of at least 40,000 Malaysian ringgit (\$8,662) - up from 10,000 ringgit (\$2,165) previously - pricing most applicants, especially retirees, out of consideration. In the two years following the change, the programme saw applications decline by 90 percent. The changes announced by Tourism Minister Tiong King Sing on December 13

appear to make MM2H a more realistic option for the average expat. Under the revised programme, the visa will be open to applicants aged at least 30, compared with 35 previously. Whereas MM2H eligibility was previously based on a fixed deposit of 1 million ringgit (\$216,567), applicants will now have the choice of opting for a fixed deposit of 500,000 ringgit (\$108,283), 2 million ringgit (\$433,135) or 5 million ringgit (\$1,082,837) based on three tiers - Silver, Gold and Platinum. The Silver and Gold tiers offers 5-year and 15-year residency, while the Platinum tier touts eligibility for permanent residency - a difficult status to achieve in Malaysia. — Aljazeera

Staying warm in Gaza: A battle for survival

GAZA: Esraa Kamal al-Jamalan was nearly eight months pregnant when she, her husband and their five-year-old son were forced to flee their northern Gaza neighbourhood of Sheikh Radwan after it was bombed by Israel in late October. They walked more than three kilometres (1.86 miles) to al-Shifa Hospital, where many people were sheltering, taking with them only a few lightweight T-shirts and trousers as they expected to soon return home. Two months later, 28-year-old Esraa and her family are living in one of the hundreds of makeshift tents in Deir el-Balah in central Gaza with no means of protecting her newborn from the harsh winter - cold temperatures combined with rains. "When it first started raining here, I hadn't given birth yet. Me and my husband were trying to find shelter from the rain, as the water kept seeping through here and there in the tent," Esraa said, sitting with her daughter in her lap, her skin pale and yellow. "We've been through rough days. We have never seen something like this before."

People are burning for warmth as the smoke gives her breathing difficulties. "The other day, she kept coughing [from wood smoke] until she turned blue. We were terrified she could have died," Esraa explained, her voice shaking. "I am worried the most about my daughter. She hasn't even gotten vaccinated yet." As Israel's assault on Gaza enters its 12th week, Al Jazeera spoke to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip about the challenges brought on by the arrival of winter for the nearly two million people internally displaced in the enclave. Winters in Gaza typically last from December to March, with average low temperatures dropping to eight degrees Celsius (46 degrees Fahrenheit) in January. Heavy rains and chilly winds can make winters even harder to survive for people in tents or those stranded outdoors without a roof over their heads. In mid-December, heavy rains accompanied by strong winds tore flimsy tents apart and drenched the clothes and blankets of people sheltering under temporary covers. Many people from northern Gaza were forced out of their homes after Israel launched a war following an attack by Hamas in early October. The weather was then still warm so people

fled wearing lightweight summer clothing. With at least 60 percent of residential units now destroyed or damaged, people barred from returning to their neighbourhoods in the north, and humanitarian aid barely trickling into the Gaza Strip, displaced Palestinians have virtually no means of obtaining warmer clothing. Saleem al-Jamalan, Esraa's husband who is also 28, said the cold prevents them from moving around. "As you know, we weren't able to take any clothes with us, not even our personal documents," he explained. "It is freezing cold at night. We cuddle tightly at night because there is no source of warmth." Esraa gave birth to their baby girl at a nearby hospital on November 24, and received stitches without any painkillers. "I begged her [the doctor] to give me a little painkiller," she said, adding that it hurt a lot. When Saleem held the baby, he removed his only jacket to wrap around their newborn. A man at the hospital, noticing what Saleem had done, gave them an item of baby clothing. "She has been wearing it since birth. Even when she throws up, I just wipe it off because I cannot take it off to wash it since the weather is cold," Esraa said in a low voice. "I didn't

expect my daughter would be born in a situation like this," Saleem said with frustration. "Back at our house, we had a baby bag ready for her. We were so happy and prepared for her birth. I don't know what happened to us, to everybody. May God help us all." For an average person, risk factors for several health conditions increase when malnourished and/or exposed to the cold for long periods of time. For children in Gaza, who make up nearly half of the population, these risks are exacerbated. Mental health and effectiveness of the heart, lungs, and digestive system are particularly affected by hypothermia and malnutrition. Shadia Araqaq was displaced from the Shujayea neighbourhood east of Gaza City. Her family was among the many who fled south on foot under the Israeli army's watch. "My husband had his ID in one hand and a white flag in the other. I also had my ID in my hand. My children had their backpacks. We kept walking until we reached the so-called safe path," the 42-year-old mother of four recounted. "We passed by the Israeli tanks, and as soon as we passed, the shooting started right at feet's length. I started to pray to God to save my family." She was terrified. Then a tank fired. The fragments from the round almost hit them, she recalls.

Shadia says her family escaped with just one day's worth of food, water and money. They now live in a plastic tent which "is freezing," she said. She has also since been able to buy some used clothing for her children. "I bought them some second-hand winter clothes and we lit some wood fires to warm up," Shadia explained. "Unfortunately, I only managed to buy one piece of clothing for each one of them." Amid the continuing siege and war, prices for basic necessities like winter clothing and food have skyrocketed in Gaza, making it very difficult for displaced and now unemployed people to afford these items. With fuel rarely available and little access to electric or gas heaters, people in Gaza are resorting to cutting down trees for firewood for warmth and to heat water for cooking and bathing. They have been forced to cut down olive trees, which take a long time to grow and are a major source of food and oil in the Palestinian territories. Displaced Palestinians have also struggled to find adequate food, and hunger makes it harder for the human body to stay warm. Esraa's husband Saleem worked as a construction worker and bicycle mechanic, but has not been able to find jobs since the war started.

"My husband is not working now. He doesn't have a single shekel. We've been living on the distributions [from aid organisations]. Sometimes they give us rice or a coupon," Esraa said. When Al Jazeera met Esraa and Saleem, they hadn't eaten all day as food assistance is not regular. Saleem was cooking eggplant that he said he got from his mother, but had not been able to find bread to eat it with. "My wife is malnourished and she cannot breastfeed our daughter," Saleem said. "Even if we want to prepare a bottle of milk, there's no healthy way to warm the milk. If we want to boil some water for the baby, we have to light plastic and paper which is not safe." The nearly two million people internally displaced in Gaza are mostly sheltering in overcrowded spaces with very limited access to clean water and sanitation, resulting in a sharp increase in the spread of diseases. "Seasonal diseases like flu and common cold are more common than usual, because of the crowding. Even the [hospital] staff have more frequent infection of the common cold or seasonal viruses," said Dr Mohammed S Ziara, 36, a doctor working at the European Hospital in Khan Younis in southern Gaza. — Aljazeera

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Begging business

RECENTLY, the Police authorities claimed that a robust campaign against the rising trend of professional begging in twin cities had been launched in December. This resulted in the registration of 42 cases and the initiation of legal actions against 67 beggars. According to authorities, the move was aimed not only to decrease the prevalence of begging but encourage alternative means of earning a livelihood.

Begging or requesting something, usually money or goods, as a charity is considered to be an immoral act that is often done out of necessity or desperation when someone lacks basic resources or means to support himself or his family. Although, poverty has increased significantly due to prevailing socio-economic conditions and rising inflation in the country, yet the genuine cases in which an individual asks for assistance are significantly low, whereas our bazaars, markets and streets are filled with professional beggars, who often employ deceptive tactics such as crocodile tears and fake disabilities, highlight the extent to which begging has become a pervasive business. The phenomenon is not limited to a specific age or gender, as women carrying infants and young men/children resort to begging to elicit sympathy from the public. These statistics underscore the need for comprehensive measures to address the root causes of professional begging.

The curse of begging has become so gigantic issue and these figures are not in the dozens or hundreds but they are in the thousands in each city, where no market, no street, Chowk, Religious Shrine, Mosque, park or any other public place is currently immune from the prevalence of begging. The scope of the problem is so high, that the Saudi government informed the Pakistani authorities about professional beggars, who depart Pakistan to perform Humra and instead beg in Saudi Arabia during their stay in the country. Recently, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has offloaded nearly three dozen beggars from a PIA flight heading to Saudi Arabia and registered cases against them. The investigation revealed that some travel agents and recruiting firms were also involved in this hateful business.

Presently, the menace of begging is growing unhindered, as this evil has shaped into a lucrative business and certain communal groups and individuals adopted it as a profession without feeling any remorse or insult. The government of Pakistan has taken various initiatives to support the poor segment of society, to provide shelter to the homeless which includes disbursement of cash through the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and Bait-ul-Maal, while shelter homes for orphans and homeless are also available at district level. Meanwhile, several NGOs are also providing boarding and lodging facilities to poor and homeless people in the country. Besides these endeavours, the government also started vocational training and rehabilitation programs to help address this issue by providing equal employment opportunities for all segments of society.

Begging is a complex issue influenced by socioeconomic factors, personal circumstances, and societal attitudes. Although, state-run and privately owned social support mechanisms are available in society, but certain people escape from handy work and habitual beggars. Such figures are not ready to give up this menace and continuously spoil the social environment and earn a bad name for the country. At the same time, the state institutions make false claims and do not fulfil their official responsibility in true letter and spirit. The crowds of beggars roam freely in each nook and corner of the twin cities without any fear of censure or legal prosecution.

Apparently, the task of eradicating professional begging is undoubtedly challenging, but continued determination, comprehensive strategies, and stringent measures against professional beggars could help curb this tendency in our society. The goal should be to create an environment where citizens can earn their livelihood through legitimate means, reducing dependency on begging as a source of income, so our society moves toward self-sufficiency and affluence.

China-Philippines row

CHINESE state media accused the Philippines of repeatedly infringing on China's territory in the South China Sea, spreading false information and colluding with extra-territorial forces to cause trouble. The newspapers further accused Manila of relying on US support to continuously provoke China, with extremely dangerous behaviour which could seriously undermine regional peace and stability.

Tensions between China and Philippines witnessed a sharp spike in recent months as there had been multiple clashes between their militaries and accusations have been traded from both sides over a spate of run-ins in the South China Sea. Historically, China claims most of the South China Sea, parts of which are also claimed by the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan, Vietnam and Indonesia. An international tribunal in 2016 invalidated China's claim in a ruling on a case brought by the Philippines, which Beijing rejected vehemently.

The bilateral relations between Beijing and Manila souring rapidly because of a decade-old territorial dispute between the two countries. That deeply coincides with Manila's bolstering diplomatic and military ties with the United States, and Japan, which Beijing perceives as containment by its adversaries. Interestingly, the resolute Chinese are not ready to give in to the Western pressure and West's military tactics that often emerge in the shape of aerial patrol or sea voyages of Western aircraft or warships in the Taiwan Strait or disputed waters in the South China Sea.

In fact, Washington has forged a series of bilateral and multilateral treaties, partnerships and alliances with a number of countries in South and South East Asia including India, Taiwan, Philippines, Vietnam, South Korea, and Japan. The US and NATO warplanes sail through the regional waters throughout the year and often give courtesy calls at neighbouring ports. All those activities directly or indirectly have some consequences for Beijing at present or in the future, which is of great concern for Chinese government and its security institutions.

The lone China is proud of its unforeseeable economic progress and unrestricted military might, yet it fears from being encircled by it's enemies either politically or militarily. On the other side, the United States and NATO avoid direct clashes with Beijing and intend to use neighbouring Taiwan, the Philippines or Vietnam as frontline states against ruthless adversary to kick start a conflict that disrupt Chinese growth and trash Beijing's plan for global supremacy. Hence, the world must wait, for either of the trio-East Asian nations to put it's sovereignty at risk to fulfil the Western agenda at any time in the future.

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Palestinian resistance

Ramzy Baroud

THE dramatic, earth-shattering events in Oct. 7 have taken many people by surprise. But not attentive observers. Few expected that Palestinian fighters would be parachuting into southern Israel on Oct. 7 or that, instead of capturing a single Israeli soldier - as in 2006 - hundreds of Israelis, including many soldiers and civilians, would find themselves captive in besieged Gaza.

The reason behind the "surprise" is the same reason that Israel is still reeling in collective shock, which is the tendency to pay close attention to political discourses and intelligence analyses of Israel and its supporters, while largely neglecting the Palestinian discourse. For better comprehension, let us go back to the start. We entered 2023 with some depressing data and dark predictions about what was awaiting Palestinians. Soon before the new year commenced, UN Mideast envoy Tor Wennesland said that 2022 was the most violent year for Palestinians in the West Bank since 2005. "Too many people, overwhelmingly Palestinian, have been killed and injured," Wennesland told the UN Security Council.

This figure - 171 killed and hundreds wounded in the West Bank alone - did not receive much coverage in the Western media. The mounting number of Palestinian victims did, however, register among Palestinians and their resistance movements. As anger and calls for revenge grew among ordinary Palestinians, their leadership continued to play its traditional role - that of pacifying Palestinian calls for resistance while continuing with its "security coordination" with Israel. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, 88, carried on rehearsing the old language about a two-state solution and the so-called peace process, but simultaneously cracked down on Palestinians who dared protest his ineffectual leadership. Defenseless in the face of a far-right Israeli government with an open agenda to crush Palestinians, expand illegal settlements and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, Palestinians were forced to develop their own defensive strategies. The Lions' Den - a multifactional resistance group that first appeared in the city of Nablus in August 2022 - grew in power and appeal. Other groups, old and new, emerged on the scene throughout the northern West Bank, with the single objective of uniting Palestinians around a nonfactional agenda and, ultimately, producing a new Palestinian leadership in the West Bank. These developments sounded alarm bells in Israel. The Israeli occupation army moved quickly to crush the new armed rebellion, raiding Palestinian

towns and refugee camps one after the other with the hope of turning this nascent revolution into another failed attempt to challenge the status quo in the Occupied Territories.

The bloodiest of the Israeli incursions occurred in Nablus on Feb. 23, Jericho on Aug. 15 and, most importantly, in the Jenin refugee camp. The July 3 Israeli invasion of Jenin was reminiscent, in terms of casualties and degree of destruction, to the Israeli invasion of that very camp in April 2002. The outcome, however, was not the same. Back then, Israel, having invaded Jenin and other Palestinian towns and refugee camps, succeeded in crushing armed resistance for years to come. This time around, the Israeli invasion merely ignited a wider rebellion in the Occupied Territories, creating a further schism in the already deteriorating relationship between Hamas and Palestinians on the one hand and Abbas and his PA on the other. Indeed, just days after Israel concluded its attack on the camp, Abbas emerged with thousands of his soldiers to warn the bereaved refugees that "the hand that will break the unity of the people ... will be cut off from its arm." Yet, as the popular rebellion continued to build momentum in the West Bank, Israeli intelligence reports started talking about a plan composed by the deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, Saleh Al-Aroui, to ignite an armed intifada. The response, according to Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth, citing official Israeli sources, was to kill Al-Aroui. Israel's attention and counterstrategy was focused intently on the West Bank, as Hamas in Gaza, in Israel's viewpoint, seemed disinterested in an all-out confrontation. But how did Tel Aviv reach such a conclusion?

Several major events - the kind that would usually have pushed Hamas to retaliate - had taken place without any serious armed response by the resistance in Gaza. Last December, for example, Israel had sworn in the most right-wing government in its history. Far-right ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich arrived on the political scene with the declared objectives of annexing the West Bank, imposing military control over Al-Aqsa Mosque and other Palestinian Muslim and Christian holy sites and, in the case of Smotrich, denying the very existence of the Palestinian people. Their pledges were quickly translated into action under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Ben-Gvir was keen on sending a message to his constituency that the seizure of Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israel had become imminent. He repeatedly raided or ordered raids on Al-Aqsa at an unprecedented frequency. The most violent and humili-

ating of these raids occurred on April 4, when worshippers were beaten up by soldiers while praying inside the mosque during the holy month of Ramadan. Resistance groups in Gaza threatened retaliation. In fact, several rockets were fired from the Strip toward Israel, merely serving as a symbolic reminder that Palestinians are united, regardless of where they are in the geographic map of historic Palestine. Israel, however, ignored the message and instead used Palestinian threats of retaliation, along with occasional so-called lone-wolf attacks - like that of Muhanad Al-Mazaraa at the illegal Ma'ale Adumim settlement - as political capital to ignite the fervor of Israeli society. Not even the death of Palestinian political prisoner Khader Adnan on May 2 seemed to shift Hamas' position. Some even suggested there was a rift between Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad following Adnan's death as a result of his hunger strike in Ramleh Prison. On the same day, Palestinian Islamic Jihad fired rockets into Israel, as Adnan was one of its most prominent members. Israel answered by attacking hundreds of targets inside Gaza, mostly civilian homes and infrastructure, which resulted in the deaths of 33 Palestinians and the wounding of 147 more.

A truce was declared on May 13, again with no direct Hamas participation, giving further reassurance to Israel that its bloody onslaught on the Strip had achieved not just a military purpose - often referred to as "mowing the lawn" - but a political one too. However, Israel's strategic estimation proved to be wrong, as attested by Hamas' well-coordinated Oct. 7 attacks in southern Israel, which targeted numerous military bases, settlements and other strategic positions. But was Hamas being deceptive? Hiding its actual strategic objectives in anticipation of that major event? A quick examination of Hamas' recent statements and political discourse demonstrate that the Palestinian group was hardly secretive about its future action. Two weeks before 2023 commenced, Hamas' leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar had a message for Israel: "We will come to you in a roaring flood. We will come to you with endless rockets; we will come to you in a limitless flood of soldiers ... like the repeating tide." The immediate response to the Hamas attack was the predictable US-Western solidarity with Israel, calls for revenge and the complete destruction and annihilation of Gaza, and revitalized plans for displacing Palestinians out of Gaza into Egypt and out of the West Bank into Jordan. The Israeli war on the Strip, also starting on Oct. 7, has resulted in unprecedented casualties compared to all

previous Israeli wars on Gaza and, in fact, on Palestinians during any time in modern history. The word "genocide" was soon used, initially by intellectuals and activists, but eventually by international law experts too. Despite this, the UN could do nothing. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Nov. 8 that the UN had "neither money nor power" to prevent a potential genocide in Gaza. This effectively meant the disabling of the international legal and political systems, as every attempt by the UN Security Council to demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire has been blocked by the US. As the death toll mounted among a starving population in Gaza, Palestinians resisted throughout the Gaza Strip. Their resistance was not confined to attacking or ambushing invading Israeli soldiers, but was predicated on the legendary steadfastness of a population that refuses to be weakened or displaced. This "sumud" continued, even when Israel began to systematically attack hospitals, schools and every place that, in times of war, should be seen as "safe" for a beleaguered civilian population.

On Dec. 3, UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk said "there is no safe place in Gaza." This was repeated by other UN officials, along with other phrases such as "Gaza has become a graveyard for children," which was first noted by UNICEF spokesperson James Elder on Oct. 31. This left Guterres with no other option but to invoke Article 99 of the UN Charter, which allows the secretary-general to "bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security." Israeli violence and Palestinian sumud also extended to the West Bank. Aware of the potential for armed resistance in the West Bank, the Israeli army quickly launched major, deadly raids on countless Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps, killing hundreds, injuring thousands and arresting thousands more. But Gaza remained the epicenter of the Israeli genocide. Aside from a brief humanitarian truce, coupled with a few prisoner exchanges, the battle for Gaza - in fact, for the future of Palestine and the Palestinian people - continues and at an unparalleled price of death and destruction. Palestinians know full well that the current fight will either mean a new Nakba, like the ethnic cleansing of 1948, or the beginning of the reversal of that same Nakba - as in the process of liberating the Palestinian people from the yoke of Israeli colonialism. While Israel is determined to end Palestinian resistance once and for all, it is obvious that the Palestinian people's determination to win their freedom in the coming years is far greater.

The US is no country for old men

Belén Fernández

SHORTLY prior to his death from prostate cancer in August of this year at the age of 72, my father emerged from a state of muteness to recite, with a burst of energy, the 1927 poem, *Sailing to Byzantium*, by William Butler Yeats, which begins: "That is no country for old men."

My mother, my uncle, and I were present for the impromptu performance, which took place in my father's bed in Washington, DC, where he had commenced in-home hospice care after the chemotherapy treatments that had been forced upon him by profit-oriented doctors had accelerated his demise. This was but one of many poems my father had memorised as a young man intent on honing his intellectual credentials; my mother and uncle - who in their youth had also fallen under the influence of my dad's cerebral pursuits - joined in on the lines they remembered. Having completed his vehement recitation, my father resumed his generally mute state, which was thereafter punctuated only by intermittent outbursts about wanting to die.

I have no way of knowing what was going through my dad's mind during that final poetic eruption, but the first line of the Yeats poem did seem to be a fitting commentary on the country in which we found ourselves - the one where we had all been born and the one my parents and I had spent years avoiding. My mom and dad had only relatively recently returned to reside in the homeland after nearly eight years in Barcelona; I had flown into Washington in August from Turkey, which was one of my regular stops in a 20-year self-imposed exile. Indeed, my father's final months had merely confirmed that the US is "no country for old men". Counterproductive chemotherapy treatments were but one of the ways he had been milked for all he was worth, before being turned over as prey to the lucrative realm of funeral and cremation services.

For example, for a one-month prescription of the prostate cancer drug Xtandi, a medication developed with none other than US taxpayer money, my father had been charged \$14,579.01 - ie, more than many people in the United States earn in several months. For folks lacking the means to pursue healthcare and other basic needs, US capitalism can be deadly, too. And while US society specialises in oppressing a wide range of demographics - minus, of course, the elite minority that thrives on acute inequality - the treatment of the elderly is particularly cynical. Having outlived their labour-based exploitability as cogs in the capitalist machine, older people become decaying objects from which profit must continue to be extracted until the very last minute.

According to the results of a West Health-Gallup survey published in 2022, approximately one in four Americans aged 65 and

older and three in 10 Americans between the ages of 50 and 64 said they had sacrificed basic needs, such as food, to pay for healthcare. The study found that older women and Black Americans were disproportionately affected and that punitive health care costs constituted a significant source of stress in the daily lives of older Americans, with stress naturally only exacerbating existing medical issues.

Add vampire-like insurance companies to the mix, and the panorama becomes ever more morbid. The prohibitive fees associated with many programmes - coupled with insurance outfits' frequent refusal to cover lifesaving treatments - means that life itself continues to be a privilege and not a right in the United States. Then there's the \$34bn assisted-living industry, which a recent Washington Post investigation revealed to be plagued by wanton neglect despite charging an average of \$6,000 a month per resident. Since 2018, the Post reported, more than 2,000 residents have wandered off unnoticed from such facilities, and nearly 100 of them have died after doing so.

So much for "assisted living". To be sure, the loneliness and isolation that so often attends old age in the US does nothing to increase life expectancy; nor does the unique stigma that US "culture" attaches to ageing. As the American Psychological Association (APA) has noted, institutionalised ageism in the United States entails a "host of negative effects, for people's physical and mental wellbeing and society as a whole".

Granted, loneliness and isolation are often lifelong afflictions for inhabitants of the so-called "land of the free", where the collective mental wellbeing is hardly helped by a dog-eat-dog insistence on individual success at the expense of communal and family bonds and the conversion of human beings into consumerist automatons. And the cutthroat, transactional nature of existence in the US culminates, appropriately, with elderly bodies being put up for grabs by pharmaceutical companies, nursing homes, and the corporate racket known as the US healthcare system.

That said, the US is, in fact, a fine country for some old men - such as former warring diplomat Henry Kissinger, who perished at home in Connecticut in November at the ripe old age of 100 after spending a good part of his life causing the deaths of countless people worldwide. Not long after my father's death in August, I fell into conversation with a Bolivian man in his 50s who had resided in Washington for more than two decades and who expanded on the "no country" theme. He planned to stick it out for another 10 to 15 years before returning to his home city of Cochabamba, he told me, because he couldn't afford to be old in the US. And while the US may be "no country for old men", it's not much of a country for anyone else, either.

Chinese migration up at border

Aline Barros

between Colombia and Panama that tens of thousands of migrants used in 2022 on their way to the US "We had to climb four hills on the first day," he said. His wife was carrying her 14-month-old son on her back. His mother, who was in poor health, couldn't walk after climbing the first hill, but a fellow migrant helped along the way.

Those without the means to obtain a visa sometimes choose this dangerous route. Wang said he originally planned to apply for a tourist visa to come to the United States, but at that time the waiting list for a tourist visa interview to the United States was more than six months. While he said he objected to China's COVID-19 lockdown policies and human rights record, he had also protested against the Chinese government after he arrived in the US, which prompted

local law enforcement to visit his uncle's home in China. "We must not stop [protesting the Chinese government] overseas, despite their threats to intimidate my family, my uncle, and the others. So, when we are overseas, we cannot keep a low profile. If we don't speak out when [our families] are threatened, they [the Chinese government] know this method is effective and they will threaten others again," he said.

The Chinese Exclusion Act, which passed in 1882, was the only law in US history that singled out a specific ethnic group. President Franklin D. Roosevelt officially ended the act on Dec. 17, 1943, and granted Chinese Americans equal citizenship rights for the first time. Renata Castro, a Florida-based immigration lawyer, says today's Chinese migrants, if they

are unable to come to the US with an existing visa, are finding other ways to flee the world's second-most populous nation, including showing up at the US-Mexico border to seek asylum.

"Mainly because these are individuals that are escaping the oppressions of the Chinese government. ... But most importantly, they are fleeing the lack of economic expectations they have in China right now," she said.

When people come to the US seeking protection because they have suffered persecution or are afraid that they will suffer persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular group, they are permitted to file for asylum regardless of their immigration status. But to apply for asylum, a person must be present in the US Chinese migrants who cross into the US without authorization

usually wait for agents from US Border Patrol to pick them up. Once the agents process these migrants, many are assigned court dates and released in cities close to their final destination, adding to an immigration court system that is taking about five years to decide cases. According to October data from Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, Chinese migrants were granted asylum nearly 67% of the time in immigration courts over the past two decades - one of the highest rates by nationality. The reasons, per the Christian non-profit ChinaAid, is the continuing decline in human rights conditions, higher accessibility to information on social media about crossing the US Mexico border, and restrictions on religious freedom. Out of 108,273 Chinese migrant applications, 77,711 were granted asylum. Asylum was denied to 29,635 and 927 applications received another type of immigration relief.

VOA

Why the West misinterprets Middle East power shifts

Rami G Khouri

‘In Yemen, there is wisdom,’ goes the medieval Arab saying. Remember that, if you’re trying to sort out how the Israel-Palestine confrontation in Gaza rattles the Middle East - because ongoing Yemeni attacks against Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea clarify one of the region’s most important political dynamics of recent times.

The rocket and drone attacks on Israeli-owned or -bound ships in recent weeks are a show of support for besieged Palestinians in Gaza by Ansar Allah (Houthis), who control most of northern Yemen. Ansar Allah say they would stop these attacks only when Israel ends its genocidal siege and bombardment of the Palestinian enclave. These attacks are part of a coordinated military reaction by the three core Arab members of the Iran-led anti-Israel (and anti-West) “Axis of Resistance”. Hezbollah, Hamas and Ansar Allah, to Israel’s latest assault on the Palestinians.

At one point last week, Israel and the United States simultaneously exchanged direct fire with Axis of Resistance forces in both Gaza and the West Bank in Palestine, in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and also Yemen - which can also be seen as a peculiar low-intensity, indirect military engagement with Iran. Any assessment of how the region has evolved since October 7, and what likely lies ahead, must acknowledge three critical points relating to the Axis of Resistance’s regional network, military capabilities and trajectory.

The mainstream US media and political elite tend to ignore all three points, which are: The widespread fear in the West that this latest Israel-Hamas confrontation would spark a full-fledged regional war between the US-Israel and half a dozen Arab-Iranian forces has not materialised. However, neither has the confronta-

tion remained confined to Gaza - it has sparked the first serious coordinated battlefield action by the Axis of Resistance across the region. This reflects Hezbollah’s talk all year of the “unity of fronts”, ie, Axis members now coordinate and assist one another in battle, or between battles, in times of preparation.

For decades, Hezbollah and Hamas were the only two Arab powers that faced down Israel militarily, and forced it into ceasefires, prisoner exchanges and other concessions. Ansar Allah’s ongoing drone and missile attacks on Red Sea shipping routes will likely similarly challenge Israel. These attacks may eventually provide the Yemeni group with important leverage against its Western adversaries, especially if, as expected, the US and Israel do not send ground troops into Yemen, but rely solely on air power in their efforts to protect trade routes. Hezbollah was the first Axis member to prove its military prowess against Israel. The impasse between the Lebanon-based group and Israel in the 2006 war led to an informal truce based on mutual deterrence. Both parties realised that a fully-fledged war would inflict severe damage to national assets and result in unacceptable numbers of civilian casualties on both sides; they have since confined their confrontations to limited tit-for-tat attacks that result in limited casualties. On October 7, by attacking Israel at an unprecedented scale and then managing to defend its assets to date, Hamas has also proved that it has built significant military prowess. Ansar Allah’s capabilities are also improving - after forcing Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates into ending their war on Yemen, in the past month it attacked at least 100 vessels in the Red Sea with high effi-

ciency. A senior US military official called this a “very significant breadth of attacks” not seen in at least “two generations.”

We cannot yet predict what this means for the future, but this much is clear: Hamas’s new prowess in attacking Israel and defending its own assets brings it close to Hezbollah’s qualitative capabilities; and Ansar Allah’s proven competence in drone and missile attacks against Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Red Sea shipping heightens its military proficiency. The emerging reality is that the Axis of Resistance that unites Iran with half a dozen big and small Arab non-state, armed actors is growing stronger, and will likely continue to do so if the issues that drive the partnership remain unresolved - especially the Palestine conflict, and Israeli-American aggression, threats or sanctions against Arab parties. Former American diplomat in Yemen Dr Nabeel Khouri, now a senior fellow at the Arab Center Washington, also explained to me in an interview that after the end of the war in Yemen, Ansar Allah now seem ready to act on a regional level.

Yet you would be ignorant of this if your knowledge about the region comes from the mainstream US media. For the American media largely follow the American political elite, and both tend to ignore Middle East realities that do not comply with Western preconceptions of “weak” Arabs who only respond to the use of force by “righteous” Israeli-American armies” - despite the recent events in Palestine, Lebanon, and Yemen that have shattered such racist visions for good. The increasing power, integration, and influence of the Axis of Resistance rank among the most significant geo-strategic developments in the Middle East in

the last half century.

The combination of state-anchored Arab militancy by Hezbollah (Lebanon), Hamas (Palestine) and Ansar Allah (Yemen) alongside Iran’s resistance to American and Israeli provocations are best understood through their common underlying values of “resistance” and “defiance”. The American media and political class, and most of the West, still refuse to see or acknowledge this, because Israel, the US and their Arab allies are the ones being resisted and defied. They prefer to assess developments in the region through their imagined prism of Islamist extremism that is blindly anti-American and anti-Israeli. And they assume they can handle any Middle Eastern challenge through Israeli-American military attacks, sanctions or threats. Not surprisingly, scholars routinely confirm, the US and Western media mostly report on Gaza through distorted frames, usually reflecting Israeli and US policies. So we should expect them also to report on Yemen and the expanding Axis of Resistance mainly through Western and Israeli fears of growing Iranian influence. This includes the recently taken steps of sending an American armada to the region and creating a 10-country task force to conduct joint patrols in the Red Sea, the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, and the Gulf of Aden, and to provide intelligence.

This aims to keep maritime traffic flowing, though top global shippers like Denmark’s AP Moller-Maersk and Germany’s Hapag-Lloyd already diverted their ships to other routes. Washington is also actively considering military strikes against Ansar Allah, though Axis of Resistance and Yemeni history - in line with their defiance attitude - suggest this would not deter future attacks against ships.

Kyiv’s path to victory runs through streets of Moscow

Matthew Schmidt

U K R A I N I A N P r e s i d e n t V o l o d y m y r Zelensky's trip to Washington last week underlined the new phase his country's war is in. With fighting stalemated on the battlefield, and with Western support for Kyiv wavering, the fight in the US Congress may be the most important in the conflict. It's clear that Ukraine can hold the line of contact with Russian forces. It's not clear Ukraine's president can advance the political front line far enough and fast enough, in Western capitals, to push Russia off Ukrainian soil.

As that diplomatic and political drama unfolds, it's becoming increasingly clear that there are only three ways the war in Ukraine might end. First, Russia could win outright, with a permanent settlement in which Ukraine cedes territory to Moscow. Second, Ukraine could win: In that scenario, Ukraine would need to take back Crimea, the center of gravity around which the war has pivoted since 2014 when it was occupied by Russia. Third - the most likely scenario - the fighting could be frozen and followed by a political resolution years from now.

Six-hundred-plus days since February 2022 - and almost 3,600 days since Ukrainians began in 2014 to fight and die to repel Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces - Kyiv's forces have managed to stop Russia's attempt to take over Ukraine wholesale. Now, Russian victory looks like Kyiv making conclusive concessions at a negotiating table: suing for peace amid stalled Western support and legally forfeiting its claims to the Donbas, Crimea and other territory Russia has seized. That certainly would be unpalatable to Ukrainians. A summer Gallup poll showed the Ukrainian public broadly committed to continuing the fight against Russia, with those who wanted to keep fighting nearly unanimous in saying that declaring victory would require regaining all the territory lost since 2014. For Zelensky, that public sentiment makes negotiation very difficult. It's not clear Western leaders really appreciate the staunchness of this opinion among ordinary Ukrainians, but at this point, Ukrainians do not seem to want their leaders to permanently cede territory so dearly fought for not just by soldiers, but by an entire population that has endured two years of missile barrages, the destruction of cities and worse at the hands of Russia's invading army.

Setting aside the complicated and depressing prospect of Ukraine giving away land and giving in to Russia, Kyiv is left with two ways to win. If Washington and Brussels manage to overcome political deadlock and deliver a new round of aid, and perhaps more advanced weaponry, Ukraine can seek to use it in a drastic bid to capture Crimea. Or, Kyiv can take the longer and more-likely route: pursue not a war-ending settlement that gives away territory, but a ceasefire that pauses the fighting while preserving Ukraine's legal claims to its territory - in the hope that it one day can regain them. Those are the only possibilities for a simple reason: No matter what, the way Kyiv ultimately wins this war - if it is, indeed, to win - is in the streets of Moscow.

That's because despite all the Ukrainian and Western efforts to oppose Putin's phantasmagoric nightmare of a greater "Russian world," and despite the fortunes spent on high- and low-tech weapons being used on the battlefield, the underlying nature of war hasn't changed. War remains a battle of lethal force whose purpose is to resolve what is in reality a political question. In the words of the great "Dead Carl" von Clausewitz, as my military students called him, war is about politics by "other means." What happens on the battlefield ultimately must reach the politics of the enemy's capital, if the fighting is to change the course of a war. Forgive this professorial moment, but it's worth it to understand that the nature of war has a deep effect on how military officers across the Western world think about when military force does and doesn't work. To get a sense of how these officers make sense of what's at stake in Ukraine today, and the ways it might play out in the key year of 2024, it's critical to know something about Dead Carl's take on war and politics.

To Clausewitz, a 19th century Prussian general and

philosopher of early modern warfare, military force was the only way to defend against a foe intent on Putin's kind of aim: imposition of political control on a target country. In this wrestling match of lethal force between two sides, professional skill and technology were required - but so were courage and determination. The critical components of victory, as Clausewitz saw them, were political will to prosecute the fight, even through losses; the will of the men (and, today, women) fighting; and the will of the population to support, or at least acquiesce to, the effort. This trinity of the political, the military and the population was the great insight of Clausewitz's work. Professional military education emphasizes that these variables constitute the true nature of all war, whether in ancient Rome or the bloodlands of Ukraine. To win, one side has to affect the political will of the enemy and change its decisions about how or whether to fight. Lethal force and economic sanctions have to push the enemy to a failure point that impacts the enemy's population or its political and military leadership to such an extent that those enemy leaders conclude surrender, ceasefire or a negotiated settlement are better courses of action than continuing to fight.

Revolutions, coups, elections - these are the ways by which the decision to wage war is changed. Each group in society can influence what gets decided about a war, or, in the extreme, who gets to make the decision. Combatants make similar efforts to change out the enemy's wartime decision-makers. Russia's reported attempts to assassinate Zelensky - and Allied plans to take out Hitler during World War II - reflect Clausewitz's observation about the relationship between war and politics. The nature of war is constant, even when the tools and strategies to wage it change. So what does a deceased 19th century Prussian philosopher's analysis of war say about the current state of affairs in Europe's biggest conflict since 1945?

So far, it shows how and why ultimate success has eluded Ukraine so far. For all of Ukraine's incredible battlefield performances, it's not clear there's been any significant effect on the politics in Moscow. Putin has sent to death or permanently maimed upwards of 190,000 soldiers, according to a late-October estimate by Britain's defense ministry - not including the Wagner group mercenaries, many drafted from prisons, who fought and died in Bakhmut - but the Russian population hasn't revolted yet. It's been so steeped in nationalist propaganda for so many years that a buffer sits between the reality of the war and its public perception. There are many reasons why. Recruiting troops in far-off provinces, in prisons and reportedly in other countries has insulated the Russian middle class most likely to threaten Putin's rule. When there have been protests, Russia's political leadership has used the security services to suffocate them. Battlefield performance has something to do with it, too: Though the military leadership has made mistakes after mistakes, they've been saved from battlefield defeat by their sheer size advantage and the quantity of artillery and missiles they've been able to throw into Ukraine. (Keeping the flow of shells going is a big reason Zelensky personally sought help from Washington this month. Quantity can win over quality, whether in men or artillery.)

Kyiv hasn't been able to kill the bear. It hasn't been able to affect the politics in the streets of Moscow, much less inside the Kremlin walls. The war hasn't yet altered the will of Putin, his generals or the public. If that is to change, Ukraine will need more, and the West must do three things to help. First, it has to give Ukraine what its top general, Valerie Zaluzhny, recently asked for in a widely read interview with The Economist. Zaluzhny asked for better military technology to overcome the quantity vs. quality problem that has bedeviled his forces from the start. That's what Biden is asking Congress to authorize and what Republicans have been delaying a vote on. Here, Clausewitz offers more insight on the challenge facing Ukraine's wartime president. Zelensky

needs to break the West's political logjam. Piling on top of Clausewitz's three main factors in the outcome of wars - the will of leaders, soldiers and populations - Kyiv faces the additional problem of keeping American voters and members of Congress in the fight. Zelensky doesn't control the American political landscape in a presidential election year, and that might be fatal to his hope of pushing Russia's army all the way out of his country in 2024. As for how Ukraine could win, using whatever Western support it manages to secure now and in the future, there is the short way and the long way.

There is only one path, difficult as it is, toward a speedy and decisive victory. Taking Clausewitz's observations into account, recapturing Crimea is the only Ukrainian battlefield objective that might affect Putin's standing in Russia - and that might quickly reverse the souring of US and European support. Seizing Crimea was Putin's original reason for the war, initiated by the Kremlin way back in 2014, and the Russian president has invested the peninsula with enormous symbolic value. A dramatic military defeat might tip the political scales in Moscow. Although other analysts and I think it remains within the realm of possibility, it's not likely given the exhaustion of Ukrainian troops and the risk that Kyiv won't receive the necessary weapons in time. The second option - one less dependent on immediate deliveries of high-tech weapons, followed by a quick and drastic battlefield success - is for Zelensky to freeze the fighting and play a long-term strategy to get his territory back over time. This is a back-up plan if the first fails to happen or fails to work. One might call it the "Berlin option." While Ukraine's detractors may want Kyiv to sue for peace, this option would involve a different kind of negotiation, the goal being to stall. In a way, it would also involve a tactic Russia itself employed after the initial phase of this war in 2014.

Such an economic rebuild is critical for Ukraine's long-term survival in the face of an aggressive Russia. Economic growth, jobs, better housing and educational options would draw back many of the 6.3 million Ukrainians who have fled their country since Russia's full-scale invasion early last year. Families that have been refugees for two years now will have put kids in schools, find jobs and housing and begin to integrate into their new communities. Showing them that returning home promises a quality of life that can soon compete with what they have now, abroad, is crucial to bringing back the human talent needed to rebuild the country. Finally, in the longer term, the same thing can happen to the populations under occupation in the Donbas and Crimea. In time, probably after Putin is gone from power, the lure of a better life just across the border may spark the political will to fight Moscow for the chance at a better life in a thriving, safe, European Ukraine.

That is a long-term theory of victory, one predicated on political and economic strength, not just battlefield gains. While it would be difficult to achieve, and while it would take many years, the broad trajectory is in keeping with Clausewitz's accurate observation of war as politics. The tremendous sacrifices made in the trenches of Ukraine are what won this possibility. Had the cunning and bravery of Ukrainians, and the political will of the West to support them, not stopped the column of invaders pointed at Kyiv in March 2022, the outcome would have been determined in the streets of Kyiv, not Moscow. On one hand, a more limited Ukrainian defeat remains possible: Kyiv could accede to Russia at the negotiating table, giving away occupied land forever.

On the other, the prospects of an economic rebuild, inclusion in the European Union and official or unofficial protection from NATO - in short, Ukrainians getting an upgraded country that can thrive in the Western fold - remains the likeliest way for Kyiv to win a long-term political face-off with Moscow. War is the realm of chaos and chance. But it also opens up the possibility of a better future in exchange for the sacrifices of so many. Dead Carl teaches us that it's the politics in Washington, Brussels and Kyiv that will secure or squander it.

CNN

Democracy is more robust than its enemies believe - and 2024 will prove it

TO say we are living through "historic" times is a cliché, but 2024 measurably will be. More citizens in human history will go to the polls than ever next year: over two billion across 50 countries.

Will it mark the high-water mark of democracy? The prevalence of increasingly authoritarian, imperialist states like Russia - democracies in name only - and the domestic volatility in countries like the United States, set to elect its president in November, conjures, for many, a sense of Gibbon-esque decline, of Western democratic hegemony eroded by its decadence and faint-heartedness. I believe this anxiety is overblown, and not merely when I sip a reassuring glass of mulled wine on Christmas Eve.

The idea of democracy is more resilient than its frequent crises and fragilities suggests: even in countries where despotism currently reigns, dictators are compelled to appeal to ideas of freedom which authoritarianism can never truly extinguish. One can murder a man, but ideas are bulletproof. It bears repeating that if, as many claim, countries like Russia were truly culturally predisposed towards autocracy, there would be no need for Putin to carry out his wave of terror against democratic opposition. Nor would he feel the need to sanction foreign journalists, as he did to me and several Telegraph colleagues this year for reporting on the war in Ukraine.

Freedom is cherished even in countries without longstanding democratic traditions. The clearest example in the European context is Ukraine, where soldiers are dying daily - even today and over the fes-

tive period - for freedoms taken for granted by many of its neighbours. Indeed, democracy is considered so valuable to the Ukrainians, they dare not risk it in wartime. Ukraine was scheduled to have a presidential election in March, but postponed it for fear of Russian interference in the form of shells and subterfuge; very real threats. I speak to many Ukrainians for the Telegraph's daily podcast on the war, and they are surprised that some in the wider West perceive this decision by President Zelensky as evidence of a shift towards oligarchy. "We do not need to prove our democracy to the world," one told me, "We are shedding our blood for it." Another country with a fledgling democracy - when measured by the standards of history - that covets its freedom is Taiwan, scheduled to hold a presidential election in mid-January. The result could set the tone for 2024.

Another win for their Democratic Progressive Party could see the brewing tensions between Taipei and Beijing erupt into far more overt hostility, perhaps even violence, as occurred between Kyiv and Moscow when it became clear to the latter that time was running out to keep Ukraine within its orbit. But it would also mark a considerable success in the battle of ideas between democracy and autocracy worldwide - for some time, Beijing sought to use political threats and manipulation to impose its will on Taiwan. A victory for the status quo here would expose the degree of Xi Jinping's failure. The greatest democratic miracle in 2024, when measured in numbers, will be India: a nation of 1.4 billion

people, speaking over 100 languages, will go to the polls in April-May, with Narendra Modi seemingly set to win a third consecutive victory. While there are anxieties about his attitude to political dissent - various opponents have been jailed - and New Delhi's willingness to continue cooperating with hostile nations like Russia, the post-imperial democratic test many believed was doomed to fail has long outlasted its critics.

Which brings us neatly to the United States - the greatest democratic experiment in modern history. Here the rhetoric of crisis and implosion is omnipresent, many speculating that a re-elected Donald Trump would mark the demise of American democracy and power, the end of the country's relative stability since the Civil War of the 1860s. Yet paradoxically, another vote for Trump, far from signalling the death of American democracy, could be said to mark its ultimate triumph - underlining what was proven but ignored by commentators in 2016: that millions of Americans believe that the democratic institutions of their country are strong enough to contain the instincts of whoever inhabits the Oval Office. Many Americans thirst for change, but there is no evidence that a majority want it to come at the expense of democracy. It bears repeating that, measured sociologically, the United States is no failing state: the precursor to tyranny over freedom.

Its economy is robust, and its demographic make-up - neither too young, nor too old - favours stability. Rather the prospect of a Trump victory would arguably be less signifi-

cant for American democracy than it would be for other democratic nations. If he were to follow through on his threats and pull out of Nato, or even withdraw substantial military support for Ukraine, that would have huge geopolitical ramifications.

Thankfully in Britain we have been spared military aid becoming a partisan issue: Keir Starmer has pledged to continue supporting Kyiv in the same manner as the Conservatives if he wins the UK general election, likely also taking place next year. In Washington, by contrast, this issue has become mired in domestic politics, just as it has in Poland, Slovakia, and elsewhere. When defence becomes a matter of debate over detail, everyone loses. One can say the same, indeed, for democracy itself: its survival is predicated on the sincerity of our belief in its not being up for debate. On those grounds alone there is room for optimism: in most Western countries now, democracy is irrefutable, unlike, say, in the 1930s. Yet freedoms can eke away, and beliefs can be eroded if people begin to perceive that their vote does not matter, because nothing ever truly changes - on immigration, for example. It is for that reason that politicians - in the West and the wider world - have a responsibility to act in this age of instability. If they do not, claiming their hands are tied by the mechanisms of government, then people will begin to question the institutions themselves. And therein lies unrest. But do not let that thought dampen your mood on Christmas Day. For now, the problem of whether to have that second mince pie is more than enough.

Francis Dearnley

Ranvir S. Nayyar

Time to get rid of the short-sighted politics of migration

EARLIER this month, developments took place in the parliaments of two European countries, with opposing results, but both incidents illustrate the same problem: that Europe continues to live in denial that it needs more immigrant workers for long-term economic prosperity.

In London, Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak surprised most by winning over rebels in his Conservative Party to push through a new law that allows the government to send some asylum seekers to Rwanda for resettlement. The bill was passed with a fairly comfortable margin of 43 votes in the House of Commons, despite a fairly united position adopted by opposition parties which voted against it.

Coincidentally, across the English Channel, France's parliament was also voting on an equally controversial immigration bill brought by the government of President Emmanuel Macron. But Macron was unable to stem the revolt in his party and the bill was defeated, narrowly, in the Assemblée Nationale, the lower house of parliament, with 270 MPs voting against and 265 in favor. Within minutes of having lost the vote, Macron promised to bring back the bill within days, which he did. And though he managed to get the bill passed in its second reading, with support from far-right MPs, it left Macron's party deeply divided, with several MPs voting against it, and calling it too harsh.

While France's legislation did not propose sending asylum seekers to a faraway land like Rwanda, it did call

for a crackdown on immigration, with several repressive measures aimed at preventing migrants from coming to the country, as well as provisions for expelling those who commit crimes. The far right in France, which has been on the ascendancy in the EU for over a decade, had dismissed the first bill as being too soft and not harsh enough to deter migrants. This position was stridently opposed by those on the left, who have maintained that these bills contravene international human rights laws. The matter in France is headed to the courts because opposition parties have approached the Constitutional Court for its intervention. But politics aside, there are extremely strong economic reasons for the EU to not only temper its anti-migrant policies, but actually reverse them and do so rather urgently.

For years, economists and businesspeople have been complaining of a shortage of workers in various sectors of the economy, starting with, but not limited to, areas where highly skilled people are needed. While most European governments have since woken up to these calls and are making it relatively easy for skilled foreign workers to enter the economy, the processes are far from smooth. And even now various studies point to a significant shortage of workers for the top-end of every EU nation's economy. While skilled people are needed for European economies to keep pace with the rest of the world, the shortage of workers is more pronounced as one moves

lower down on the skills ladder. Take construction, for instance. It is a sector where skilled, semi-skilled and relatively unskilled workers are all needed. But construction firms throughout the EU have long complained of not being able to recruit locally and are often forced to turn to undocumented workers already in the country, even at the risk of penalties. Certainly, for some unscrupulous company owners, employing irregular workers is attractive because they can exploit them by not adhering to laws and regulations on minimum wages and other benefits.

According to the European Trade Union Confederation, the construction sector faces a shortage of 1.5 million new workers between now and 2030, and needs a further 1.2 million to replace those who would have retired by then. A report by the European Commission also admits that a shortage of workers exists in all sectors and across all job profiles, from highly skilled to unskilled. It says that besides reskilling and involving more women in the workforce, the EU has to look at "targeted" migration in order to boost its workforce. The report points to a worsening situation before the end of this decade as the total working-age population of the EU will drop from the current 265 million to 258 million, leaving a shortfall of at least 7 million workers to fill those jobs.

Also, the COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on the shortfalls in the healthcare and personal-care sectors of Europe. This is turning out to

be the Achilles heel of a continent that has an ageing population, and no relief in sight from foreign replacements coming in, or citizens having more children. While Britain and France are still relatively better off than most European countries in terms of the working age of their people, they are still vulnerable to possible labor crises. Even with this being a looming possibility, the British government has already announced that it will tighten immigration laws for skilled migrants from 2024, including nearly doubling the minimum salary required for an immigrant worker to get residency visas for family members. Incidentally, these workers need to earn at least 15 percent more than the average British worker to be able to get their family members over. The British government will also tighten, or even possibly remove, the current rule that allows foreign students to stay on for two years after their studies without fulltime jobs. These restrictions fly in the face of moves being made by various European nations to get foreign students to study at their universities. Such muddled policies and seemingly knee-jerk responses to what are long-term and systemic challenges for European nations, can only lead to a further deterioration in their labor market, which in turn may cause a lasting and serious impact on their economies and society. European nations need to open up their borders for their own long-term health and wealth. It is time to get rid of short-sighted policies, and temper the politics surrounding migration.

Arab News



Dakar International Trade Fair in Senegal: Ten Pakistani companies showcase products

DAKAR, Senegal (APP): Ten (10) Pakistani companies are showcasing their products at the 31st Dakar International Trade Fair (FIDAK) being held in Senegal's capital till December 31.

The aim of the Pakistani exhibitors is to explore the Senegalese market for developing strong business partnerships and introducing high quality Pakistani products in Senegal and West Africa. The products include sports goods, surgical instruments, textiles (men, women and baby garments), cosmetics, leather goods, furniture, jewelry and handicrafts.

Pakistan Embassy in Senegal organized a number of activities on the sidelines of FIDAK 2023 to maximize the opportunities for Pakistani traders to develop business linkages. The activities include the inauguration of pavilion by the Ministers of Commerce of Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire, publicizing and promoting the products through social media campaigns and holding an Open House Journee du Pakistan (Pakistan Day) at the stalls.

The embassy also arranged for the Pakistani

exhibitors to attend a business networking gala dinner, "Textile Night" organized by Senegalese Textile Association.

Pakistan made its maiden official participation in 29th FIDAK as the Guest of Honour Country from 6-20 December, 2021. Since then, the mission has been encouraging companies with the support of Trade Development Authority (TDAP) to showcase their products in FIDAK 2023 from December 7-31, 2023.

The FIDAK was inaugurated on December 15, 2023 by the Minister for Commerce, Local Consumption and SMEs of Senegal, Abdul Karim Fofana and Minister of Commerce, Industry and SME Promotion, Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, Souleymane Diarrassouba. Both Ministers visited and inaugurated the Pakistan pavilion among others.

The ministers appreciated "Made in Pakistan" products, especially footballs, surgical instruments, cosmetics and fabric and enjoyed making few shots with the football at sports goods stand. They were also presented footballs and other souvenirs from the

Pakistani stalls.

The ceremony was inaugurated by Director General CICES (Centre International du Commerce Extérieur du Senegal), President of the Dakar Chamber of Commerce CCIAD and Ambassador of Pakistan Saima Sayed.

President CCIAD in his remarks fondly recalled his visit to Pakistan for the 4th International Textile Expo in Karachi in May 2023 and appreciated the efforts of Pakistan Embassy for enhancing bilateral trade engagements.

Ambassador Saima Sayed mentioned in her remarks that Pakistan and Senegal had a lot to offer each other for a win-win partnership.

She invited the attendees to visit the Pakistani stalls in FIDAK that were showcasing high quality "Made in Pakistan" products like sports gear, surgical instruments, textiles and ready-to-wear women clothing, baby garments, cosmetics, furniture and handicrafts.

The embassy of Pakistan also celebrated Pakistan Day, "Journee du Pakistan" at the Pakistan Pavilion set up at the Dakar International Trade Fair FIDAK

2023.

The FIDAK echoed with Dil Dil Pakistan and Pakistani snacks were served to all those, visiting the Pakistan Pavilion.

The Senegalese visitors appreciated the Pakistani products and hospitality. Pakistanis in Dakar joined in the festivity as well. A large number of Pakistanis also travelled from The Gambia for this event.

The mehndi stall was extremely popular among the Senegalese girls. Pakistanis at the event heartily joined in the festivities and danced to the Pakistani tunes.

Director General CICES (Centre International du Commerce Extérieur du Senegal), Salihou Keita dueing his visit to the Pakistan Pavilion for the Journee du Pakistan lauded the high-quality products and the workmanship, especially of the wooden carved furniture and the brass handicrafts there.

Since its independence in 1960, Senegal enjoys cordial friendly relations with Pakistan. Senegal has a reasonable size of economy with the potential for Pakistani exports and household goods.



LAHORE: A vendor selling fishes to customers outside his shop at local market.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Five ships namely, Msc Singapore, Al-Jalaa, Leena, Saehan Kostar and Lila Fortniet scheduled to load/offload Container, Fuel oil, Cement, Palm oil and Chemicals, berthed at Container Terminal, Oil Terminal, General Cargo Terminal, Liquid Terminal and Engro Terminal respectively on Monday.

Meanwhile three more ships, MSC Jemima, Pacific Victory and Simaisma also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim during last 24 hours to load/unload Containers, Coal and LNG respectively.

A total of seven ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them a container ship 'MSC Singapore' left the Port on today morning on Tuesday.

Cargo volume of 51,350 tonnes, comprising 27,049 tonnes imports cargo and 24,301 tonnes export cargo carried in 1,293 Containers (420 TEUs Imports and 873 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 05 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them three ships, MSC Jemima, Pacific Victory and Simaisma carrying Container, Coal and LNG are expected to take berths at QICT, PIBT and EETL respectively on Tuesday.

PSX witnesses bearish trend — loses 2,534 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Tuesday, losing 2,534.12 points, a negative change of 4.11 percent, closing at 59,170.98 points against 61,705.09 points the previous trading day.

A total of 670,859,618 shares valuing Rs.17.129 billion were traded during the day as compared to 671,550,776 shares valuing Rs.13.709 billion the last day.

Some 369 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 43 of them recorded gains and 315 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 11 remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were K-Electric Ltd with 97,358,482 shares at Rs.4.44 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 72,516,907 shares at Rs.1.36 per share and Bank of Punjab with 41,014,387 shares at Rs.5.72 per share.

Sapphire Fibres Mills witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.109.12 per share price, closing at Rs.1,566.00, whereas the runner-up was Ibrahim Fibres Limited with a Rs.23.45 rise in its per share price to Rs.363.90. Unilever Pakistan Foods

witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.355.00 per share closing at Rs. 21,000.00, followed by Nestle Pakistan Limited with Rs.106.00 decline to close at Rs.7,800.00.

Steady recovery continues: Rupee gains 15 paise against Dollar

Pakistani Rupee on Tuesday witnessed the 10th consecutive recovery session as it gained 15 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs282.37 against the previous day's closing of Rs282.52.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market stood at Rs282.7 and Rs285.2 respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 47 paise to close at Rs311.27 against the last day's closing of Rs 310.80, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs1.98; whereas a decrease of Rs 17 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs358.48 compared to the last closing of Rs358.65.

The exchange rates of

the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 05 and 04 paise to close at Rs 76.88 and Rs75.27 respectively.

Gold rates up by Rs.300 to Rs. 219,600 per tola

The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs.300 and was sold at Rs. 219,600 on Tuesday compared to its sale at Rs.219,300 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs. 258 to Rs.188,272 from Rs. 188,014 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs. 172,582 from Rs.172,347, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

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

The price of gold in the international market remained unchanged at \$2,072, the Association reported.

Maersk preparing to resume shipping

LONDON (BBC News): Danish shipping giant Maersk has said it is preparing to resume shipping operations through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

The move follows the deployment of an international military operation to prevent attacks on commercial ships by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

Several firms have paused shipments via the Red Sea following the attacks. German shipping firm Hapag-Lloyd has said it will decide on Wednesday whether to resume using the route.

The Red Sea is one of the world's most important routes for oil and liquefied natural gas shipments, as well as for consumer goods.

It is bookended by the Bab al-Mandab Strait - also known as the Gate of Tears - in the south near the coast of Yemen and the Suez Canal in the north.

Houthis have declared their backing for Hamas in its war with the Israelis, and the rebels based in Yemen have said they are targeting vessels which they believe are heading for Israel. Some ships have come under attack from drones and rockets.

POL import bill shrinks by 16.19%

ISLAMABAD (APP): The imports of the overall petroleum group contracted by 16.19 per cent during the first five months of the current fiscal year (2023-24) compared to the corresponding period of the last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

The total imports of the petroleum group during July-November (2023-24) stood at \$ 6,453.914 million against the imports of

\$7,700.269 million during the same period of last year

Among petroleum commodities, the import of petroleum products declined by 25.08 per cent, from \$ 3,552.323 million last year to \$2,661.234 million during the period under review.

Likewise, the imports of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) declined by 7.47 per cent from \$ 1,584.800 million last year to \$ 1,466.418 million this year whereas

petroleum crude dipped by 9.71 per cent from \$ 2,273.328 million to \$ 2,052.542 million.

The import of Liquefied Petroleum Gas went down by 5.53 per cent in the first five months of the current fiscal year and stood at \$273.641 million compared to \$289.671 in the corresponding period in 2022.

Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, the petroleum group imports wit-

nessed a decrease of -13.44 per cent during November 2023 as compared to the same month of last year, from \$ 1,646.183 million to \$1,424.903 million.

On a month-on-month basis, the petroleum imports into the country also came down by 6.70 per cent during November 2023, compared to the imports of \$1,527.147 million in October 2023, according to the PBS data.

Annual home prices rise again

NEW YORK (Reuters): Annual home prices in October rose again, pointing toward continued recovery of the housing market, data on Tuesday showed.

A Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) report showed home prices grew 6.3% on a yearly basis, up from a revised 6.2% the month prior.

Annual price growth began to accelerate in June after declining steadily since February 2022. Prices increased moderately by 0.3% on a month-to-month basis after climbing by 0.7% the month before.

Rates on the most common home loan neared 8% in October, reaching a two-decade high on the back of the Federal Reserve's rate hike cycle.

The Fed left its policy benchmark interest rate unchanged for three consecutive meetings, bolstering expectations of a closing rate hike cycle and stoking a rally in the bond market.

The average rate on a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage fell below 7% in December, as yields on mortgage-backed securities headed down. Existing home sales have risen moderately since then, gaining 0.8% in November and indicating softening rates may draw sellers from the sidelines and open up inventory to prospective buyers, a National Association of Realtors report released in December showed.

OGDCL installs water filtration plant



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), Pakistan's premier Exploration and Production (E&P) company in the petroleum sector, inaugurated a Reverse Osmosis Plant in village Gorsian of Tehsil Gujjar Khan, Rawalpindi district to ensure the provision of clean drinking water for the local community.

As the major contributor to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Pakistan's corporate sector,

OGDCL remains committed to transforming the lives of communities residing in and around its operational areas.

With a strong emphasis on the well-being of the people, OGDCL's CSR initiatives continue to play a crucial role in addressing the diverse needs of the communities it serves.

The inauguration ceremony, organized by OGDCL's CSR department, was attended by local political figures and a large number of local residents. The local community appreciated

OGDCL's initiative, recognizing the company's commitment to social responsibility and its role in enhancing the quality of life in the area.

The newly installed Reverse Osmosis Plant is a testament to OGDCL's dedication to community development and ensuring access to essential resources. The facility will provide the local community of Gorsian with access to clean drinking water, thereby significantly improving public health and preventing the spread of water-borne diseases.

Custodians of a legacy

Bashir Riaz

The evening of 27th December, 2007 was filled with harrowing sorrow. I was lost in thought when a phone call pierced through the silence. Amir Mir informed me that Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was seriously wounded in a bomb blast while coming out of a jalsa in Rawalpindi and she was being taken to a hospital. It felt as if my whole world came crashing down around me.

In November, Shaheed Bibi had invited journalists to a dinner. After the dinner, she told Amir Mir that if anything were to happen to her then he could mention

General Musharraf.

After a while, Amir Mir broke the news to me that Bibi was martyred in the suicide attack. I was devastated and the earth felt like slipping away from under my feet. People were angry everywhere and started burning public property to express their distress.

In such volatile circumstances, going to Larkana was like inviting death. I couldn't decide whether to go to Islamabad or Larkana. Eventually, the next day, I decided to go to Larkana. Along the way, we saw torched vehicles and felt the country was in mourning. When we arrived in Garhi Khuda

Bux, the burial had taken place already and there was a sea of grief-stricken faces around us.

When we reached Nodairo, we found out that Asif Ali Zardari was not there. He called while we were traveling back and we tried to do condolence but I could not find any words as my mind felt numb due to a huge sense of loss. Her struggles and achievements flashed across my mind. She was the first woman Prime Minister of the Muslim World. She fought courageously against dictatorship. She was a leader recognised internationally for her political acumen. Programmes have been

introduced in universities to honour her legacy.

In 1999, a conference was organised for women and during that time, she invited me to join her in Portugal. At the conference there, she spoke about political and social role of women and everyone applauded her talk. She took out the time to answer all the questions and mingled with the participants who were all eager to meet her.

Apart from Europe, the Arab World also gave Shaheed Bibi immense respect, and she was known as the Daughter of Islam. Shaheed BB was a leader who represented a demo-

cratic and progressive Pakistan on the international level. She was the first woman Prime Minister of the Muslim World. She fought against the tyrannical rule of dictators who actively tried to oppress her and the workers of Pakistan People's Party. However, Shaheed BB always stood side-by-side along with her people not only during her life but also in death.

Shaheed Bibi simultaneously fought on several fronts. She was a mother as well as a father to her children. Despite personal engagements, she managed to take out time for party work and kept an eye on the global politics. She used to

work on her computer for 5 hours every day, writing articles and publishing her statements on various matters.

A beautiful aspect of Shaheed Bibi's personality was that she had a generous soul and cared for the poor. She used to feel the pain of others just like her own. When she became the Prime Minister, she helped numerous families. She always supported her party workers when in need as well. She had a special fund that she utilised to help people associated with journalism and literature.

Once, she gave a tip of Rs. 100,000 to the caretaker of Pak Tea House, bringing

joy to his household. She helped scores of people through me. She gave employment opportunities to several people. A lot of people benefited from her generosity. Even today, the less fortunate ones remember the kindness of Shaheed Bibi and keep her in their prayers.

After Shahadat, the entire World recognised Bibi as a great leader. Just like her parents, Shaheed BB had a lot of charisma. I witnessed all her traits and her personality first hand as I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to accompany her everywhere. For this reason, she referred to me as her shad-

ow. She was very kind to me, and the trust she bestowed upon me is invaluable and an asset for me.

In her life, she shone like a bright star in the hearts of the people, and in her death, the glow of the star continues to guide her people in the direction of democracy and peace. Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Bakhtawar, and Asifa are the custodians of her legacy. I am confident that they will follow in the footsteps of their mother and will carry forward her mission of serving the people.

(The writer is the former press-secretary to Benazir Bhutto)



In brief

Yasir Arafat appointed coach

LAHORE (APP): Former Test all-rounder Yasir Arafat has been appointed as the High-Performance Coach of the Pakistan Men's Cricket Team and will be part of the team management for the upcoming five T20Is against New Zealand scheduled from 12 to 21 January, 2024 in New Zealand. 41-year-old, Yasir, appeared in three Tests, 11 ODIs and 13 T20Is for Pakistan. He completed his ECB Level 4 coaching course from Loughborough University, becoming the first Pakistan Test cricketer to do so. He has also worked as bowling coach with county teams like Sussex and Surrey, as well as with Australia's Big Bash League franchise, Perth Scorchers. Recently, he worked as a bowling coach with the Hong Kong national team. Besides coaching, Yasir has featured for different T20 teams in league cricket around the globe, including appearances for Otago and Canterbury in New Zealand domestic T20 league cricket. Yasir will serve as the camp commandant for the five-day camp in Lahore from 29 December to 2 January for the preparation of the tour.

Handball trials concluded

PESHAWAR (APP): The handball trails under Prime Minister's Talent Hunt Programme has concluded at Kunj Football Stadium, Abbottabad in which 14 players have been selected for the forthcoming Provincial Handball League to be played under the aegis of the Directorate of Sports University of Peshawar. International handball player Naveedur Rehman and Director of Distance Education System Dr. Noorzada were there and monitored the performance of the players before selecting them for the team to represent Hazara Region in the Provincial Handball League to be played in Peshawar. Regional Sports Officer Ahmed Zaman was the chief guest on the occasion of the closing ceremony. In the Provincial Handball League teams from Hazara, Swat, Bannu, Peshawar and Mardan would take part and out of that two teams would be short-listed for the National Handball League, also to be played in Peshawar. The trials at Bannu will be held from December 28-29, 2023. Among the players selected in the trials are Owais Khan, Shahryar Khan, Zahoor Khan, Kamran Khan, Ikhtishamul Haque, Muhammad Abbas, Muhammad Aqib, Amar Khan, Abdul Haseeb, Inam Khan, Saddam Hakeem, Kashifullah, Muhammad Salman and Ghaffar Elahi are included.

Badminton Championship

PESHAWAR (APP): All Pakistan Inter-University Badminton Championship Zone B will start a joint collaboration of the Directorate of Sports University of Peshawar and Higher Education Commission Islamabad here at the indoor hall of the Campus today (Wednesday). These views were expressed by the Director General Sports University of Peshawar and former international athlete Bahre Karam while talking to the media here on Tuesday. He said that under the auspices of the Higher Education Commission and the University of Peshawar, the All Pakistan Inter-University Zone B competition will be played at Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum Indoor Hall inside the University Campus.



CENTURION: Kagiso Rabada bowled a beauty to have Virat Kohli caught behind.

Rabada takes five wickets but Rahul keeps Indian hopes alive

CENTURION (AFP): South African fast bowler Kagiso Rabada took five wickets but a fighting innings by KL Rahul kept Indian hopes alive on the first day of the first Test at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Tuesday.

India were 208 for eight when bad light followed by rain brought an early close. Rabada took five for 44 – his 14th five-wicket haul in Test cricket. Rahul, who made a century to set up an Indian win on the same ground two seasons ago, was unbeaten on 70.

Rabada was outstanding for the hosts after they sent India in to bat on a pitch which had been under cover because of rain for 40 hours leading up to the morning of the match.

But South Africa failed to take full advantage of helpful conditions. Left-arm fast bowler Nandre Burger was impressive in his first spell in Test cricket, taking two early wickets, but neither Marco Jansen nor Gerald Coetzee could find consistent control.

Rabada and Burger

reduced India to 24 for three and India could have been in deeper trouble if South Africa had not missed chances from Virat Kohli (38) and Shreyas Iyer (31) in the early stages of a partnership which yielded 68 runs for the fourth wicket.

Iyer was on four when he was dropped by Jansen at backward point off Rabada and Kohli was on the same score when he was put down by Tony de Zorzi at midwicket off Burger in the next over.

Rabada dismissed both set batsmen as well as Ravichandran Ashwin in a three-wicket spell immediately after lunch. Iyer was bowled by a ball which cut back off the pitch and Kohli was caught behind off a superb delivery which swung away late before Ashwin was caught at third slip off a steeply-lifting delivery.

Rahul and Shardul Thakur (24) put on 43 for the seventh wicket but Thakur twice needed treatment on the field after being hit on the helmet by Coetzee and his right arm when Rabada returned for his third spell.

Thakur played a loose drive to be caught at mid-off by stand-in captain Dean Elgar immediately after being treated for his second injury.

Rahul batted with composure and added 41 of the 44 runs scored for the loss of Jasprit Bumrah's wicket after Thakur's dismissal. When play was halted Rahul had faced 105 balls and hit ten fours and two sixes. Elgar, who has announced he will be retiring from international cricket after the second Test in Cape Town next week, took charge after Temba Bavuma left the field with a strained left hamstring injury before lunch.

A bulletin from the South African dressing room stated that there would be "daily medical evaluations to determine his participation in the match". Bavuma's decision to bowl first was not surprising given the conditions after prolonged rain in the days leading up to the match – but it is a ground on which batting has tended to become more difficult later in matches because of uneven bounce.

PCB announces player development programmes

LAHORE (PPI): The Pakistan Cricket Board has announced three development programmes across the country which involve the activation of sub-academies in seven cities, specialised training camps for national players and a project to financially support the U19 players to develop them into quality professionals.

Chairman PCB Management Committee, Mr Zaka Ashraf, after consultation with Director - Pakistan men's cricket team, Mohammad Hafeez endorsed this initiative for the betterment of Pakistan Cricket. The PCB will collaborate with Defence Housing Authority (DHA) as the latter will provide land for cricket grounds in Islamabad, Quetta, Bahawalpur, Lahore and Peshawar for sub-academies. The Hanif Mohammad High-Performance Centre in Karachi and the Inzamam-ul-Haq High-Performance Centre in Multan will also be activated as sub-academies with the appointment of relevant resources.

As part of the development programmes, specialised training camps will be arranged for national and upcoming players. The U19 players will be provided extensive financial support along with skills training and thorough grooming as professionals.

Director – Pakistan men's cricket team, Mohammad Hafeez, while announcing the development programmes said: "We are delighted to announce three development programmes with an aim to groom our young players, hone the skills of national players via specialised camps and activate the sub-academies for year-round training camps."

"This initiative will help our players get ready for the highly competitive cricket at the top level. It is the need of the hour to work on the skills of our players and provide them with world-class facilities. We will also target interior Sindh and erstwhile FATA for further development programmes so that the talent in far-fetched areas can also be turned into international product."

Boys 18& under Singles 1st Round: Asad Zaman bt Haziq Aasim 6-0,6-0; M. Hamza Aasim bt Rayan Khan 6-2,6-2; Shahswar Khan bt Talha Khan 6-2,6-2; Hamid Israr bt Kamran Khan 6-1,6-0; M. Salar bt Ruhaab Faisal 6-3,6-4; Mahatir Muhammad bt Inam Qadir 6-2,7-5; Amir Mazari bt Ali Zain 6-3,6-3

Boys 14& under Singles 1st Round: Saqib Ali bt Ehsanullah Kabir 4-5(1),4-0,5-4(4); Haziq Areejo bt Anis Khan 4-0,4-0; Junaid Meher bt M. Arsalan 5-4(1),4-2; M. Yahya bt Arsh imran 4-0,4-0.

Men's Singles 1st Round: Aqeel Khan bt Syed Nofil Kaleem 6-2,6-0; Yousaf Khalil bt M. Salar 6-1,6-3; Hamid Israr bt Uzair Khan 7-5,6-3; Saqib Hayat bt Ahtesham Humayun 6-1,6-4; M. Hamza Aasim bt Ahmed Babar 6-1,2-1(ret); Muhammad Shoaib bt Shehryar Anees 6-2,6-2; Hamza Roman bt Waqas Malik 6-4,6-1; Muzammil Murtaza bt Asad Zaman 6-3,6-2; Mudassir Murtaza bt Mahatir Muhammad 6-2,6-2; Barkatullah bt Veqar Rahim 6-3,6-1; Shahzad

wherein the former pulled off a stunning victory. Nael won the first set 6-3, but Sami staged a strong comeback to win the match 6-1, 6-4.

Following are the results of different categories on the day first: Men's Singles 1st Round: Aqeel Khan bt Syed Nofil Kaleem 6-2,6-0; Yousaf Khalil bt M. Salar 6-1,6-3; Hamid Israr bt Uzair Khan 7-5,6-3; Saqib Hayat bt Ahtesham Humayun 6-1,6-4; M. Hamza Aasim bt Ahmed Babar 6-1,2-1(ret); Muhammad Shoaib bt Shehryar Anees 6-2,6-2; Hamza Roman bt Waqas Malik 6-4,6-1; Muzammil Murtaza bt Asad Zaman 6-3,6-2; Mudassir Murtaza bt Mahatir Muhammad 6-2,6-2; Barkatullah bt Veqar Rahim 6-3,6-1; Shahzad

Serena Hotels Tennis C'ships 2023 kick off

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 8th Serena Hotels National Ranking Tennis Championships 2023 rolled into action at the PTF-SDA Tennis Complex, Islamabad on Tuesday.

International tennis star Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi is also participating in the event. Pakistan's all the top players including, Aqeel Khan, Muhammad Shoaib, Muzammil Murtaza, Muhammad Aqib, Barkatullah, Shahzad Khan, Yousaf Khalil, Sarah Mahboob Khan, Meheq Khokhar, Sheeza Sajid, Esha Jawad and Anna Ali Qayum are participating in the mega event.

The best match of men's singles 1st round was between Sami Zeb Khan and Ahmed Nael Qureshi

wherein the former pulled off a stunning victory. Nael won the first set 6-3, but Sami staged a strong comeback to win the match 6-1, 6-4.

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Hewick storms to King George VI glory after Shishkin mishap

London (AFP): Hewick stormed from last to first to win the King George VI Chase and the £142,000 (£180,000) winners' cheque on Tuesday in a dramatic climax in which Shishkin looked set to triumph but stumbled and unspun his jockey.

Hewick's rider Gavin Sheehan admitted that if it had not "been the King George I would have pulled him up" as his mount – purchased for just 850 euros (\$937) and trained in Ireland by John "Shark" Hanlon – trailed the other five runners for the majority of the race.

Shishkin ran anything like the "plonker" his venerable trainer Nicky Henderson had described him as last week due to his refusing to race on his seasonal debut. He took up the running from 2020 King George winner Frodon six fences out and looked in control when he jumped



the second last.

However, three paces on he stumbled and his jockey Nico de Boinville crashed to the ground. "I am very proud of the horse," said de Boinville. "These things happen. Racing can be cruel. I have never had a roar like that from a crowd after a fall, so fairly to them." His mishap appeared to leave the race in the hands of last year's winner Bravemangame and favourite Allaho. Allaho touched down in front after the last fence but out of nowhere Sheehan produced US Grand National winner Hewick, who brooked no argument as he

ceased past both of the horses in front of him.

"Biggest heart" Sheehan stood up in the saddle and saluted the crowd as he crossed the line with Bravemangame edging Allaho for second.

Sheehan -- who picked up the ride as regular jockey Gainford is injured -- said he had thought it was pointless as Hewick was all but tailed off going out on the second circuit.

"Put it this way if it had not been a King George I would have pulled up," said Sheehan. "He stays and stays but there are only a certain amount of questions you can ask him. "Shark" said to me when he asked me to ride him that he is probably the smallest horse in the race but he has the biggest heart. "This is massive. I am absolutely delighted, I am gobsmacked as a King George is not an easy one to win."

Pakistan strike thrice on rain-impacted opening day of MCG Test

MELBOURNE (Monitoring Desk): Rain interfered with the action at Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), where Pakistan and Australia face each other for the second Test of the three-match series. Pakistan bowlers struck thrice to avoid significant damage, countering the solid start by David Warner and Usman Khawaja.

After winning the toss, Pakistan opted to field first in the Boxing Day Test, banking on overcast conditions to favour their seam bowling attack. Shaheen Shah Afridi opened the bowling alongside fellow left-handed pacer Mir Hamza.

Left-handed batter David Warner was given a new life when Abdullah Shafique dropped him at first slip off Shaheen's bowling in just the third over of the game. The first-wicket stand between Warner and Usman Khawaja yielded 90 runs.

Salman Ali Agha provided the first breakthrough for Pakistan as Warner was caught at first slip by Babar Azam on the stroke of lunch. Warner, riding on the back of

a match-winning century at Perth, returned to the pavilion after scoring 38 from 83, including three fours.

Recalled to the Test side for the first time since January, right-arm fast bowler Hasan Ali quickly settled in and brought Pakistan the second wicket shortly after lunch. Australia were reduced to 108-2 in the 34th over after Khawaja (42, 101b, 5x4s), who had braved the new ball well for his team, edged the ball and was caught by Salman in the slips.

Marnus Labuschagne and Steven Smith replaced the opening duo on the crease. The two saw off the second session of the day, with the Pakistan pace attack looking to make the most of the increasingly bleak conditions as dark clouds loomed over the MCG. Hasan and Shaheen worked in tandem to mount pressure on the home side, bowling three maidens in a row at one point.

Soon after, rain enforced an early tea and play was suspended owing to weather conditions. Australia ended the session at 114-2

in 42.4 overs.

Shaheen returned with the ball once play resumed and trapped Smith LBW, but the decision was overturned after a successful review by the batter. Eventually, Aamir Jamal provided the much-needed breakthrough, cutting short the gritty 46-run stand between Smith and Labuschagne, as the former was caught behind after edging the ball. Smith walked back after scoring 26 from 75, including two boundaries.

Travis Head (nine not out, 19b, 1x4) replaced Smith on the crease. Batting alongside Labuschagne, he helped Australia get to 187-3 in 66 overs by stumps. Labuschagne (44 not out, 120b, 3x4s) will face the first ball on the second day.

Action will resume on day two at the Melbourne Cricket Ground at 0430 PKT.

Scores in brief: Australia overs 187-3, 66 overs (Marnus Labuschagne 44 not out, Usman Khawaja 42, David Warner 38; Salman Ali Agha 1-5, Hasan Ali 1-28, Aamir Jamal 1-47)

Wood hat-trick helps Forest to superb win at Newcastle



LONDON (Agencies): Chris Wood scored a hat-trick on his return to St James' Park as Nottingham Forest ended a seven-game winless run with a stunning Premier League victory at Newcastle.

The result moves Forest up to 16th in the table and five points clear of the bottom three prior to Tuesday's other fixtures. Alexander Isak had seemingly put Eddie Howe's side in control when he stroked home a penalty midway through the first half after going down under a challenge from Ola Aina.

But Newcastle only sporadically threatened in attack and always looked vulnerable to a rejigged Forest side set up to counter-attack at pace. Morgan Gibbs-White dragged an early effort wide for the visitors, while Anthony Elanga missed two excellent opportunities before combining with the former England Under-21 midfielder to allow Wood to tap in a deserved equaliser against his old employers before the break.

Wood, who was Howe's second signing on Tyneside, added to his tally shortly after the interval,

racing on to Elanga's pass and shimmying past home defender Dan Burn to lift the ball over goalkeeper Martin Dubravka.

He capped a fine display with another composed finish after Murillo's through ball sent him clear of an absent Newcastle defence.

Elanga and Gibbs-White both had chances to inflict further damage on the hosts, who remain seventh in the table after their fourth defeat in five Premier League games.

Wood and Gibbs-White star for revitalised Forest

Steve Cooper was sacked as Forest manager a week ago after presiding over a run of just one win in 13 top-flight games. On this evidence, replacement Nuno Espirito Santo appears to have already begun to implement his own ideas to deliver some Christmas cheer to the City Ground.

Having made six changes to the starting XI that lost against Bournemouth on Saturday, he was rewarded by a purposeful display that saw Forest repeatedly cut through the visiting defence with some incisive counter-attacks.

Wood's sharpness in front of goal belied the fact

he was only starting his fifth league game of the season, having largely been utilised as a substitute by Cooper.

While the New Zealand striker will rightly take the plaudits for his match-winning contribution, others in red also excelled.

Forest captain Gibbs-White, who got the better of Bruno Guimaraes in midfield, could also arguably lay claim to being the game's outstanding player and ought really to have capped a fine display with a couple of goals.

And aside from some wasteful finishing and a poor decision not to slide another first-half pass across to Wood, Elanga provided an excellent outlet for Forest on the right.

Newcastle's impressive home run ends

While Newcastle came into this contest amid a poor run of their own, there was still an expectation that they would stretch their impressive home record to eight consecutive top-flight victories.

When Aina's slight contact on the calf of Isak gave them a first-half penalty, which was duly dispatched, they were seemingly on their way.

CGC Gulbahar wins Inter-Zonal Women Basketball title

PESHAWAR (APP): City Girls College (CGC) Gulbahar Peshawar of the Peshawar Zone recorded victory against Government Girls Degree College Nowshera from the Mardan Zone in the Higher Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inter-Zonal Women Basketball Championship played at BISE Peshawar Sports Complex on Tuesday.

Director Sports Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Peshawar and former international athlete Manzar Khan, former Director Sports Miss Raham Bibi, former Director Sports (PSB) Din Muhammad, Deputy Director Sports Arshad Hussain, Miss Farhad, Miss Husma who graced the occasion as guests and witnessed the thrill-packed final.

Before the start of the final match played between City Girls College Gulbahar and Govt Girls College Nowshera teams the players were introduced to the guests. Secretary General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and former International Basketball player Raj Mir, officials Faisal and Romi were also present.

The match started at a fast tempo and Peshawar Zone and Mardan Zone

players gave each other a tough fight. Peshawar Zone skipper Asiya, Laiba, Sana, Mehaq, Irsa Wajahat, the granddaughter of former international basketball player Din Muhammad exhibited an excellent display.

The players of Govt Girls College Nowshera of Mardan Zone including Shaista, Irum, Moham, Bushra, Tahira, Jawairia and Fatima also played well and struggled hard for a single point. Irsa Wajahat and skipper Asiya Khan were so excellent in their basketball and made some good baskets from the three pointer area while for Girls College Nowshera Bushra, Moham, Jawairia, Shaista played well and got some key points.

Girls College Nowshera was leading in the first two quarters as they also played well against a strong Hazara team and defeated them in the semi-finals by reaching the final. Girls College Nowshera led the way in the first quarters of 10 minutes by 5-9 and similarly was leading the second quarters as well at 13-14 but in the last two quarters City Girls College Gulbahar played well specially national player Irsa Wajahat, skipper Asiya and mid attacker Laiba Khan, who one after the other made some key baskets and

guided their team to victory.

Government Girls College City Gulbahar got the lead in the third quarters and raced up to 19-16 and also maintained the same in the last and fourth quarters by winning the final at 31-29. At one time both were tied at 24-24 but thanks to Irsa Wajahat and Laiba who made some key baskets with a three pointer by reaching at 31. For Girls College Nowshera Bushra, Moham and Jawairia were the key point's contributors. City Girls College of Peshawar Zone won first position in Cricket, Netball and Basketball and third position in Throwball.

Speaking on the occasion, President Sports Committee and Principal CGC Professor Tahir Dar appreciated the performance of the girls players including Asiya, Sana, Irsa, Mehaq, Laiba, Laiba Mery, Wajaha, Mehkan, Kalsoom for their outstanding performances. Prof. Tahir Dar also appreciated all the teams for their active participation in the Inter-Zonal Girls events. She said, Football, Athletics and Kabaddi would also be organized in befitting manners under the Directorate of Higher Education Department.



In brief

ICT seals eight petrol pump nozzles

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Labour Department of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Administration on Tuesday continued regular inspections of petrol pumps across the Federal Capital. According to an ICT Administration spokesperson, the teams of Labour Department sealed eight nozzles of different petrol pumps on account of short measure. "The violations will be dealt with in accordance with the Weights & Measures Act 1976 and Rules," he added. Meanwhile, a Food Department team under the supervision of Assistant Commissioner Pothwar visited the area of Shams Colony and sealed four illegal factories.

Musical Show held at PAC

RAWALPINDI (APP): Punjab Arts Council organized a grand musical program on the occasion of the 147th birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Director Arts Council Waqar was the Chief Guest while Tahir Nayyar, Asma Lata, Ashraf Mirza, Hameed Babar and other artists performed in the musical show. The musical show gets huge applause from the audience. The chief guest Waqar Ahmed said that the historical struggle of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah for the establishment of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the sub-continent has been highlighted in various aspects so that the new generation can be enlightened about these principles. Through his visionary leadership, he played an important role in reshaping the map of the world. The new generation needs to adopt Quaid-i-Azam as a role model and follow his principles, he added. Assistant Director Muhammad Sulaiman said that Punjab is a rich province in terms of culture, in which colors of Punjabi, Saraiki, Pothohari cultures are prominent. Culture is the identity of any region. Nations that do not protect their culture lose their identity in the world. Punjab Arts Council and the Department of Information and Culture have rendered valuable services for the protection of culture. A large number of people from the twin cities participated in the grand musical program.

Riaz Khokhar passes away

ISLAMABAD (INP): Former foreign secretary Riaz Khokhar passes away on Tuesday after prolonged illness. The deceased served as Pakistan's ambassador to China, India and the United States and was undergoing treatment since long due to health issues. Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Sherry Rehman has expressed deep grief and sorrow over the demise of Riaz Khokhar. She said that late Riaz Khokhar always supported a developed Pakistan and remained ready to share his intellectual views in this connection. Sherry Rehman prayed for the departed soul in eternal peace and courage for the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss with fortitude.

3 adults killed while filming video

ISLAMABAD (APP): Three adults were reportedly killed on Tuesday while filming a video on a motorbike in the Sheikhpura district of Punjab. According to police, the motorcycle collided head-on with a car coming from the opposite direction due to distraction, resulting in the killing of three youngsters.



ISLAMABAD: A nursery worker covers baby plants with plastic sheet to protecting from frost and cold weather.

Shaheed BB's sacrifice for restoration of democracy to be remembered: Raja

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervez Ashraf on Tuesday said that the sacrifice rendered by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto for the restoration and strengthening of democracy in the country would ever be remembered in the political annals of history.

He said that Shaheed Benazir Bhutto sacrificed her life for the restoration and strengthening of democracy in the country.

He said that Shaheed Benazir Bhutto had the honour of being the first elected woman Prime Minister of the Islamic world. He expressed these views on the 16th martyrdom anniversary of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto.

He said that Shaheed Benazir Bhutto was conscious of threats and dangers posed by anti-national

elements but she remained resolved to resist terrorism and extremism.

"BB had fought against terrorism for the development and prosperity of the country and the strengthening of democracy," he said.

Raja Pervez Ashraf said that Shaheed Benazir Bhutto was the pioneer of democratic struggle in Pakistan and she always stood for the protection of the downtrodden classes of the society, the rights of minorities, and the development and independence of women. She was an advocate of civil liberties harmony and unity in the federal units.

The speaker further said that Benazir Bhutto's mission was to establish a democratic system and a society based on equality.

She carried forward the mission of the People's

Leader Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and said that Shaheed Benazir Bhutto remained committed to her mission with patience and courage till the last breath of her life. Raja Pervez Ashraf said that Shaheed Benazir Bhutto promoted the politics of tolerance and dialogue instead of imposing ideas. Her struggle to fight and eliminate the scourge of terrorism is of key importance. The speaker said that by adopting the mission of Ms. Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, we can take the country on the path of development.

After the martyrdom of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, the way Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto led the party and the country is admirable. He expressed his determination that the mission of Ms. Benazir Bhutto Shaheed will be completed.

CDA devises system to check misuse of vehicles, fuel theft

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) administration has decided to address complaints of misuse of government vehicles and theft of petrol and diesel with modern technology. According to CDA official, under the direction of CDA Chairman Captain (retd) Anwarul Haque, the Member IT and Technology has devised a foolproof mechanism. In the first phase, the system will be applied to commercial vehicles.

In the second phase, the vehicles used by officers will also be connected to the system. Under the new system, the supply of petrol and diesel to all vehicles will be stopped from CDA's own petrol pumps. PSO cards will be issued to each vehicle and it will get a fixed amount of petrol or diesel. All vehicles will be fitted with fuel sensors and vehicle trackers. Fuel monitoring will be done by fuel sensors while vehicle tracking will be done by vehicle trackers and an alarm will be set off as soon as a vehicle goes out of its route. Every vehicle will have a check on where it is going. The vehicle can also be locked for misuse.

The monitoring system will be established in the IT department of the CDA.

AIOU paying special attention to joint activities of students: VC

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is paying special attention to the 'joint activities of students' in collaboration with national and foreign universities and other educational institutions to provide Pakistani children with maximum learning opportunities so that they can be successful in every phase of life.

This was said by Vice Chancellor AIOU, Prof Dr Nasir Mahmood in his message on the inaugural session of a Winter Camp for Children. Director, of Yunus Emre Institute, Prof Dr Halil Tokar, remarked that Türkiye and Pakistan have enjoyed a long-standing relationship for centuries, with both countries supporting each other on every occasion.

acclaimed. Munir Niazi extended his literary talents to the world of cinema by composing melodies for numerous films. His exceptional contributions were duly recognized by the Government of Pakistan, which bestowed upon him the 'Presidential Pride of Performance' and 'Sitara-e-Imtiaz.' Additionally, the Pakistan Academy of Letters honored him with the 'Kamal-e-Fun Award.'

Munir Niazi bid farewell to this world on December 26, 2006, in Lahore. His final resting place is at the Model Town Cemetery in Lahore.

ANF recovers 1903 kg drugs in eight operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting eight operations across the country managed to recover 1903 kg drugs and arrested seven accused, said an ANF Headquarters here on Tuesday.

He informed that over 3 kg Ice was recovered from a passenger traveling to Jeddah by Flight No. PA-470 at Allama Iqbal Airport.

1 kg heroin recovered from two passengers traveling to Bangkok by Flight No. TG-342 at Jinnah Airport.

In third operation, 52 Ice drug filled capsules were recovered from the stomach of a passenger at Allama Iqbal Airport Lahore. The accused was leaving for Doha by flight number QR-629.

24 Ice-filled capsules were recovered

from the passenger's stomach at Bacha Khan International Airport. The accused was leaving for Sharjah by flight number ER-751. 1500 kg hashish and 200 kg heroin were recovered from a house in Pishin while 120 kg hashish and 9.6 kg opium were recovered from an abandoned vehicle near Fairazwala stop Lahore.

33.6 kg hashish and 26 kg opium were recovered from a vehicle near Ravi Motorway Toll Plaza Lahore while two accused were arrested.

In the eighth operation, 10 kg hashish was recovered from Zakhakhel area of Khyber. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and further investigations are under process.

'Citizens need to take 'seasonal influenza vaccine' to avoid virus'

ISLAMABAD (INP): Punjab Caretaker Health Minister Dr Javed Akram has said that the citizens need to take special care of their health during the recent days as Punjab was adversely affected by air pollution due to heavy smog and cases of the illness causing flu-like symptoms among people, especially among elderly citizens were increasing.

Speaking to a private news channel on Tuesday, he said hinted that the new virus could be "COVID", adding, that currently, various types of viruses are affecting the health of citizens, and children and elderly people are more affected by this virus.

Dr Javed Akram also asked citizens and residents to immediately take the seasonal influenza vaccine.

An alarming increase in the cases of respiratory infections including influenza A, B and others were being reported in hospitals, he added.

The minister advised citizens to use face masks, avoid close contact, and wash their hands to avoid the influenza virus as it is easily transmissible from an infected person to others. He also advised to adopt a healthy lifestyle as it played the main role in fighting against ailments.

Dr Javed Akram urged the authorities to take necessary measures to spread awareness about the flu while apprising the participants about the symptoms and precautions of influenza A and B.

Patients with chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes, cardiac and lung diseases, pregnant women, elderly people, and children under five years are at higher

risk of developing severe or complicated diseases, he warned.

Meanwhile, Caretaker Federal Minister for Health, Dr. Nadeem Jan on Tuesday presided over the review meeting for preparations of the Global Health Security Summit. The Global Health Security Summit is being held on January 10 and 11 in the federal capital of Pakistan.

During the meeting, Dr. Nadeem Jan was briefed on the preparations for the summit. The Global Health Security Summit will be attended by top health experts from around the world.

An integrated strategy to deal with epidemics will be formed at the global conference. The minister said that by holding the international conference, the positive image of Pakistan will be presented.

He said that holding the summit is proof that Pakistan can play a key role in the health sector.

He said that the purpose of the summit is to make Pakistan and the world safe from diseases.

Dr. Nadeem Jan said that at the summit, an action plan will be decided to strengthen the health systems of poor countries.

At the conference, work will be done to strengthen the health system before the sudden epidemic.

He said that effective measures are being taken to protect people from global epidemics. Federal Secretary Health Iftekhar Ali Shalwani and DG Health Dr. Muhammad Ahmed Qazi participated in the meeting besides other officials of the Ministry of National Health Services.

50% candidates pass NRE step-2 exam

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) has said that more than 50% of candidates passed the National Registration Examination (NRE) step 2.

According to the spokesperson of PMDC, a total of 367 candidates appeared for the test, which was successfully conducted by the council.

He said that these candidates were given the best possible facilities so that they were able to take the exam in a good environment. The exam was conducted by the National University of Medical Sciences, as per the schedule announced by the council, he added.

The exam was held at Combined Military Hospital (CMH) on the

10th of December 2023.

The whole purpose of the NRE was to test the competency, knowledge, and skills of a graduate to ensure they are a 'safe doctor' as they would be granted a license to treat patients independently.

The NRE skills and clinical exam represent the basic skills that are mandatory for patient handling and management in the absence of which patients would be at severe risk.

NRE step one exam was a theoretical MCQ-based basic and clinical sciences evaluation exam for foreign medical graduates to qualify. Candidates who successfully cleared the NRE step one became eligible for NRE step two which is clinical evaluation for the permanent

license.

The NRE refers to a standardized test administered by the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council. The PMDC conducted this examination for medical graduates who have acquired their degrees from foreign institutions and wish to practice medicine in Pakistan.

President PMDC stated that the National Registration Examination was likely to protect the rights of the patients and to encourage all able and learned students to assume practice in the mainstream field. He added that PMDC has not compromised on the standards of public safety and is working with a clear vision and dedication to facilitate and improve the healthcare system in Pakistan.

'Punjab shift from conventional transport to electric vehicles'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Provincial Minister for Transport, Livestock, and Mines & Minerals Ibrahim Hassan Murad Tuesday said that the Punjab government was making a big push for electric vehicles to provide a sustainable and eco-friendly mode of transportation to control air pollution.

"Punjab wants to become a 'global hub of manufacturing of electric vehicles'," he said while talking to a Private news channel. The government is also planning to offer incentives for manufacturing electric vehicles and batteries to boost economic growth and encourage local manufacturing, he said, adding, that other provinces should also focus on shifting their auto industry towards EV systems.

The minister stressed

that the use of electric rickshaws and bikes in Punjab will substantially decrease both air and noise pollution. With the provision of additional insights, these electric rickshaws boast an impressive range, capable of travelling up to 150 km on a single charge, he said.

The adoption of electric vehicles, including cars and bikes, has gained prominence worldwide due to their efficiency, fuel-saving benefits, and zero emissions, contributing to a healthier and more sustainable environment, he explained. Many charging stations have already been established, with commitments to construct even more. It is a clear indication that the industry is committed to enabling widespread EV adoption, he added.

Replying to a query, he

said that to meet the growing demand, the government of Punjab with the help of the private auto industry are spearheading efforts to add more charging points to EV charging networks. This includes offering software solutions that make daily charging accessible. The government is working with private players to boost the presence of charging stations, he added.

He also asked that private players must innovate to create batteries made of lightweight materials, with higher energy density, and that use renewable sources for charging.

With the collaboration of the transport department and a local private company, the government has launched these electric rickshaws and subsidized electric bikes, he mentioned.



ISLAMABAD: SNGL staffers busy welding gas pipeline during installation at G-7 area in the Federal Capital.

Increase of crime in Kabul

KABUL (TOLNews): Some Kabul residents are worried about the increase in crime. Milad resident of Kabul City, said that even though he has contacted the security agencies many times during the period, there is no news about his car. "I was working inside the house, it was around 6 to 6:30 in the evening, the car started, and the sound came inside the house. I went out and saw that someone was inside the car and the car moved, and robbers stole my car," said Milad.

The Frontier Post

Jamadi-us-Sanni 13, 1445 — Wednesday, December 27, 2023

WFP announces aid reduction

KABUL (Khaama Press): The World Food Program (WFP) recently announced that due to a budget shortage, it will reduce its aid in Afghanistan to 10 million people. The organization said in a video published on Monday, that while winter is harsh in Afghanistan, it has been forced to reduce food aid to around 10 million people due to a lack of funds. The WFP has also called on international bodies to help the people of Afghanistan during the current winter.

Decrease of water concerns residents

RODAT, Nangarhar (TOLNews): The drying up of springs and wells and the decrease in the level of underground water have worried the residents of Rodat district of Nangarhar. They said that, due to the drought, many of their agricultural lands have remained uncultivated. "Because of the drought, most of the people have not planted anything here, and now part of the farmland has been turned into a cricket field," said Abdul Wajid Sadat, a resident.

Some farmers called on the government to address their problems by building small canals and dams. "The water that was on our land in the past has now gone down 20 meters," said Tahsil Khan, a farmer. "There are some springs, and wells that due to the drought have dried up," said Saddam Hussain, a farmer. The officials of the Nangarhar river region said that they have started the process of activating small canals and drains in the districts where the under-

ground water level has decreased. "Currently, UNESCO is working on more than six springs, two of which are in Rodat, two of which are in Chapera, and the other two are in Khogyani. According to the information of the officials, there are 225 springs in different districts of Nangarhar, some of them have dried up due to drought, and deep wells are not being reconstructed on time, and they will start working to reactivate them.

Calls to end ban on women working continue

KABUL (Ariana News): One year after the ban was imposed on women working in some fields in Afghanistan, the special representative of the United States and the United Nations have emphasized that the ban has jeopardized the process of providing assistance.

They have demanded the cancellation of the ban. I'm December last year, the Ministry of Economy issued a decree prohibiting women and girls from working for non-governmental organizations. The UN special rapporteur on human rights and the representative of the United States of America on human rights and women's affairs for Afghanistan have once again called for the cancellation of the decree banning the work of women by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

Richard Bennett, the special rapporteur for human rights of the United Nations for Afghanistan, has once again called for the lifting of the ban on women's work in this country. Bennett emphasized that the role of women in the vital economic situation and their contribution to the prosperity and progress of the Afghan society is essential.

Bennett wrote in a message on X: "One year ago #Taliban [Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan] banned women from working in NGOs. Once again I urge the lifting of the ban. Education and work are vital to a full and dignified life, women are crucial for the economy and their contributions are essential for the well-being and progress of #Afghanistan society."

At the same time, Rina Amiri, the special representative of the United States of America for human rights and women's affairs for Afghanistan, also said on the anniversary of the ban on women's work by the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan that the ban on women's work in non-governmental organizations and international organizations to provide humanitarian aid faces a serious threat.

Amiri wrote on X that the request to cancel this order should be strengthened. A part of Amiri's message states: "The Taliban's suspension of Afghan female NGO and UN staff poses a serious threat to the delivery of critical humanitarian assistance. Even where women have negotiated the space to work, the ban leaves them vulnerable to intimidation & threats."

She emphasized: "You should cancel the slogan of bans, let's strengthen it among Afghans." This is while the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan announced a ban on women's work in non-governmental institutions and international organizations in December of last year. After this decree, a large number of Afghan women stayed at home. Many international organizations, whose aid process was more dependent on women's work, stopped or suspended their activities in Afghanistan.

Former UNAMA chief meets with Stanikzai



KABUL (Ariana News): Tadamichi Yamamoto, the former head of UNAMA in Afghanistan, and his accompanying delegation, met with Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, the Afghan Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Yamamoto said that Japan has a special love for the people of Afghanistan,

and for this purpose, wants to understand the current situation in Afghanistan and, in addition to providing humanitarian aid, Japan wants to build trust and relations between the existing government and the international community. Atsushi Tsunami, the president of Suskawa Peace

Foundation, was also at the meeting and presented information about the foundation and showed his readiness to work in Afghanistan. Stanikzai, in his turn, welcomed them and mentioned Japan's assistance and cooperation with Afghanistan. He also said Afghanistan

is a country that has just come out of wars and it is necessary to provide assistance in the fields of education, health, agriculture and environmental protection, and assured them of the IEA's full cooperation and facilitation. The delegation also pledged assistance in a number of areas.

Afghan schoolgirls finishing sixth grade in tears

KABUL (AP): Bahara Rustam, 13, took her last class at Bibi Razia School in Kabul on Dec. 11 knowing it was the end of her education. Under Taliban rule, she is unlikely to step foot in a classroom again. In September 2021, a month after US and NATO troops withdrew from Afghanistan following two decades of war, the Taliban announced that girls were barred from studying beyond sixth grade. They extended this education ban to universities in December 2022. The Taliban have defied global

condemnation and warnings that the restrictions will make it almost impossible for them to gain recognition as the country's legitimate rulers. Last week, U.N. special envoy Roza Otunbayeva expressed concern that a generation of Afghan girls is falling behind with each day that passes. Last week, an official in the Education Ministry said Afghan girls of all ages are allowed to study in religious schools known as madrassas, which have traditionally been boys-only. But Otunbayeva said it was

unclear if there was a standardized curriculum that allowed modern subjects. Bahara is holding onto her education and pores over textbooks at home. "Graduating (from sixth grade) means we are going to seventh grade," she said. "But all of our classmates cried and we were very disappointed." There was no graduation ceremony for the girls at Bibi Razia School. In another part of Kabul, 13-year old Setayesh Sahibzada wonders what the future holds for her. She is sad she can't go to school

anymore to achieve her dreams. "I can't stand on my own two feet," she said. "I wanted to be a teacher. But now I can't study, I can't go to school." Analyst Muhammad Saleem Paigir warned that excluding women and girls from education will be disastrous for Afghanistan. "We understand that illiterate people can never be free and prosperous," he said. The Taliban have barred women from many public spaces and most jobs, all but confining women to their homes.

IEA's acting transport, aviation minister leaves for Uzbekistan

KABUL (Ariana News): The ministry of transport and aviation said that Hamidullah Akhondzada and a delegation left for Uzbekistan on Tuesday. According to the ministry during this trip, the acting minister will discuss the development of transport affairs between the two countries with the Minister of Transport of Uzbekistan, and will also meet with aviation officials. This comes the Minister of Transport of Uzbekistan and related officials visited Afghanistan for discussions on bilateral cooperation related to land transport.



Lack of jobs a major challenge for Afghan migrant women in Iran

TEHRAN (Khaama Press): Millions of Afghan immigrants live in Iran under challenging economic conditions, and according to published statistics, about one-third of them are women, whose employment opportunities are limited. Asifa Stanekzai, a women's rights activist in Iran, spoke with Khaama Press and mentioned that undocumented immigrants in Iran are at risk of "forced" deportation, with the most significant restrictions being on education and employment. According to Stanekzai, migrant women in Iran are mostly engaged in home-based occupations such as sewing, which, in her view, is related to limitations in "employment generation" and "cultural" issues. Furthermore, the Iranian newspaper "Ham-Maihan" emphasized in a report titled "Migrant Women: Invisible Workers" that Afghan women migrants in Iran are employed in underground workshops for low wages. According to unofficial statistics, approximately 4 to 5 million migrants, of which 90% are Afghan migrants, live in Iran, with 41% of them being women. Stanekzai also attributes

one of the reasons for women's migration to Iran to the educational limitations in Afghanistan and the desire to go to European countries. She adds that there is no legal organization dedicated to addressing the problems of migrant women in Iran, and only the Immigration Department and people's councils collaborate in this area. However, it is worth noting that according to Iranian media reports, Afghan migrant women are actively involved in the

production sector in Iran, but broader acceptance of Afghan women in the public sphere is still lacking. Ms. Stanekzai mentions that human rights organizations in Iran have not been active in addressing the challenges faced by Afghan migrants. It should be noted that an Iranian newspaper mentioned the life of an Afghan migrant woman who has spent twenty years working in various professions, including carpet weaving, nursing, and house painting. However, due to not

having legal residency, she lost her job. Iran has hosted millions of Afghan migrants for decades, imposing various restrictions on Afghan migrant families, forcing them into low-paying and labour-intensive jobs for many years. At the same time, the trend of deporting Afghan migrant families from Iran is on the rise, with the Iranian Foreign Minister recently emphasizing that Iran, unlike in the past, cannot provide services to Afghan migrants.



Couples marry in mass ceremony to save money



KABUL (AFP): A mass ceremony bound fifty Afghan couples in wedlock in Afghanistan's capital Kabul. Such ceremonies are becoming a common practice in one of the world's poorest countries as couples seek to reduce cost of independent wedding ceremonies. AFP reported that Monday's event took place in a glitzy wedding hall in the city but the ceremony did not have fanfare as seen before since dancing and music have been banned by Taliban regime which deems them un-Islamic. The City Star wedding hall, in which the ceremony took place is near the airport. As per the report, cars decorated with green ribbons and plastic roses arranged in shape of hearts were seen at the venue. The couples were to leave in these cars after the cere-

mony. "A traditional wedding would have cost us at least 200,000 to 250,000 Afghanis (\$2,800 to \$3,600), but this time it will be between 10,000 and 15,000 Afghanis," said Roohullah Rezaei (18) as quoted by AFP. Rezaei barely earns 350 Afghanis per day. "We invited 35 people from our two families, otherwise it would have been 300 to 400," said Rezaei, who was wearing a plastic flower in the breast pocket of his waistcoat worn over a white tunic. A group named Selab Foundation organised the ceremony and helped each couple with amount equivalent to USD 1600. This is a huge amount for common Afghans. Couples who were to get married were to leave with a cake, carpet, blanket and

few household appliances which would help them set up their household. A kit containing toothpaste, shampoo and moisturiser was also to be given to the newlyweds. **Taliban presence** An official from the Taliban ministry for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice was present at the ceremony. He made a speech. Recitations from Quran took place. The news report said that although grooms were in the hall, brides were kept out of sight and media wasn't given access. They appeared only after lunch and were fully veiled. "I've been waiting for this day for three years," said Samiullah Zamani, a 23-year-old farmer from Kabul province. "I can't wait to see her," he said of his fiancée.

Kazakhstan donates over \$400m to Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): Kazakhstan's media have reported that since the beginning of this year, the country has provided \$472 million in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. The Kazinform news agency of Kazakhstan published a report saying that these humanitarian aids include both food and non-food assistance. According to the report, Kazakhstan has aided countries like Tajikistan and Afghanistan this year, with the majority of it going to Afghanistan. It is worth mentioning that Kazakhstan had previ-

ously provided emergency aid to the earthquake victims in Herat, consisting of various food and non-food items. Kazakhstan announced this news while international aid agencies and organizations have once again expressed concern over the threatening situation of hunger and poverty in Afghanistan after the end of 2023. This is while poverty and hunger continue to spread among the needy in the country, following international humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. The forceful deportation

of Afghan migrants from Pakistan during a harsh winter has intensified the already critical humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. The country faces increased hardships as these returnees add to the existing challenges of those in need. Simultaneously, the World Food Programme (WFP) recently reported a significant reduction in aid, dropping support for over 10 million needy individuals due to funding shortages. This cutback further strains the resources and capacity to address the widespread needs across Afghanistan.

52 Afghan citizens released from Iranian prisons



KABUL (Khaama Press): Local officials of Nimroz province have announced that Iran has released 52 Afghan citizens from Al-Ghadir prison in the city of Zahedan. Media outlets reported on Monday that Yar

Mohammad Hagyar, a representative of the Taliban's foreign relations in Nimroz, has announced the release of prisoners. He emphasized that these prisoners were released as a result of the efforts of officials from the

Taliban embassy in Tehran and the Afghan consulate in Zahedan. According to reports, these individuals had been arrested by Iranian police for "not having legal documents." The head of the foreign

ministry representation office in Nimroz added that 200 prisoners have been released in the tenth round of prisoner releases last week from prisons in Iran. It is worth mentioning that in the past months, 680 prisoners have been released in 10 phases and handed over to the authorities of the Taliban in Nimroz. Previously, nearly 200 Afghan citizens had been freed from Al-Ghadir prison in Zahedan, Iran. This is while in recent months, the trend of arresting and deporting illegal Afghan migrants in the countries of Iran and Pakistan has increased. Yesterday, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation of the Taliban also reported the release of 15 Afghan citizens from prisons in Pakistan.

Govt to follow Senate proposals on employees' salaries, says Solangi

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Tuesday assured the Senate that the government would follow House recommendations regarding the salaries and allowances of government employees, including Balochistan.

In response to questions during the question hour regarding the less representation of officers from Balochistan at the federal level, the minister asked the lawmakers to formulate a policy and make recommendations if there was any perceived injustice.

Responding to questions from Senators Fauzia Arshad, Mohsin Aziz, and Danesh Kumar, he welcomed the suggestions from Senate members regarding the use of zig-zag technology in rural areas for making bricks. He acknowledged that zigzag technology was effective in reducing emissions of pollutants and increasing efficiency, though it was still expensive.

Senator Irfan Siddiqui's question about the non-allotment of plots to retired employees, the minister assured that he would inform the House after obtaining information from the department. If the chair deemed it appropriate, the matter could be referred to the privilege committee, he added.

In response to Senator Mushtaq Ahmed's question, the caretaker federal minister said that the issue of F14, F15, and Bhara Kahu sectors should be sent to the relevant standing committee. Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani referred

the matter to the concerned committee for further investigation. The minister said that currently, no caretaker minister was using bulletproof vehicles. He said that all details regarding the use of bulletproof vehicles by ministers and advisors during the previous government had been shared with the House.

Murtaza Solangi said that Senators have the right to criticize the decisions and policies made by the previous government regarding the provision of bulletproof vehicles to ministers and advisors.

Caretaker Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Murtaza Solangi also said the government would explore maximum options to redress the problems of journalist fraternity, and seek legal action, in accordance with the Constitution, to restrict forced job layoffs of media persons.

Talking to the media after the walk-out of journalists during the 334th session of the Senate in the press gallery, he expressed full solidarity with the journalist community regarding the forced dismissal by some media houses. Solangi said the legal provisions would be explored to take punitive action and extend support to safeguard the rights of media workers.

"I stand with journalists and media workers; the issue of forced dismissals of journalists is not acceptable," he said. He said he had an earlier discussion with the Chairman of Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) regarding the forced dismissal of journalists and media workers. He said the meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting would be held on

Friday afternoon, adding : "This issue will also be discussed with Chairperson of the Standing Committee, Senator Fauzia Arshad."

Murtaza Solangi said the interim government would take all the steps under the law to effectively tackle issue. "Government's sympathies are with media workers. It is our responsibility to implement the legal protection that media workers and journalists have in the Constitution," he said. Workers' forced dismissals from media houses unacceptable: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Tuesday said that forced dismissals of workers from media houses were not acceptable.

It was the government's responsibility to implement the legal protection provided to media workers and journalists under the law, Murtaza Solangi maintained while talking to journalists who had staged a walkout from the Press Gallery during the Senate session against forced dismissals by their respective media organizations. He said that he stood with journalists and media workers on this issue.

The minister said the issue was discussed with the Chairman Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority and Senate's Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting is also scheduled to meet on Friday afternoon where it will also be discussed with the Chairperson of the panel. "We will take whatever steps are possible under the law," Murtaza Solangi assured the media persons. He said that the sympathies of the government were with media workers.



RAWALPINDI: PPP workers lighting candles in memorandum of former prime minister Shaheed Benazir Bhutto at Liaquat Bagh.

Naval Chief attends Indian Ocean Naval Symposium

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief of the Naval staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf visited Thailand to attend eighth Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Conclave of Chiefs at Bangkok. The event involved panel discussions on issues related to cooperation in maritime security of Indian Ocean and Blue Economy- ways forward for sustainable development of IONS members.

During IONS Conclave of Chiefs bilateral meetings between Chief of the Naval Staff and naval leadership of IONS member states were also held. CNS called on Commander of Qatar Emiri Naval Forces, C-in-C of Royal Thai Navy, Deputy C-in-C of Russian Navy, Commander of Royal Navy of Oman, CNS of French Navy, Commander of Iranian Navy, Fleet Commander of Royal Navy, UK and Vice Chief of Japan Maritime Self Defence Force and discussed matters of mutual interest. Admiral Naveed Ashraf focused on PN contributions to regional maritime security and emphasized on collaboration between the regional navies to enhance maritime security of the region. He also stressed upon greater collaboration between Indian Ocean countries to exploit potentials of blue economy.

Hike in electricity tariffs proposed

ISLAMABAD (INP): The consumers may face another blow to their budgets as the Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA) has proposed a Rs 4.66 per unit increase in electricity tariffs. This move, if approved by the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) today could translate to an additional burden of over Rs 36 billion on consumers.

The proposed hike stems from November's fuel price adjustments and arrears. CPPA's justification rests on the fuel mix used for electricity generation during the month. While hydropower remained the primary source at 36.5%, nuclear (over 20%) and imported coal (over 6%) also played a significant role. Local coal contributed 13%, domestic gas 9.2%, and LNG 10.6%. This potential price increase comes on the heels of previous hikes, further squeezing household budgets already strained by inflation and economic pressures. Consumers, businesses, and industries alike would bear the brunt of this additional cost, raising concerns about its impact on economic activity and affordability.

Zardari, Bilawal pay tribute to Shaheed BB

E.P. Report

KARACHI: Former President of Pakistan and President of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Asif Ali Zardari paying tribute to Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto on martyrdom anniversary and reiterated to continue her mission regarding struggle for a free and independent Pakistan, empowered Parliament and the rule of the Constitution

In his message on the eve of the martyrdom anniversary of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, he said that eliminating poverty, unemployment and economic misery from the country was the mission of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and the completion of this mission was top priority of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

Asif Zardari said that the martyred party chairperson was neither afraid of dictators nor did she fear the extremists. Her bravery was the legacy of the leadership and workers of Pakistan Peoples Party, he added. He said that the time was not far away when Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan will be the realization of a Pakistan free of political, social and economic exploitation. He said that Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's philosophy was that the prosperity of the workers and farmers of Pakistan would guarantee the country's progress. Asif Zardari said that the PPP guarantees the best future for the youth and will strive to provide them with opportunities to advance and develop.

Chairman Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari eloquently commemorates the indelible legacy of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, the first democratically elected woman prime minister of the Islamic world as well as esteemed leader of the world, saying that the "Daughter of the East" stands not only as a historical figure but as a living movement and a radiant torch, her nationalistic spirit, enduring struggle, and steadfast leadership destined to be ingrained in the hearts and minds of the Pakistani nation." According to the press release issued by Media Cell of the Bilawal House, the Chairman PPP shares a reflective message on the occasion of Shaheed Mohtarma

Benazir Bhutto's 16th martyrdom anniversary due on Wednesday, saying that her mother remained ardently dedicated to the noble cause of transforming the country into a genuine welfare state, guided by the visionary ideals of nation's founding fathers. He said that throughout her lifetime, Bibi Shaheed bound together Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan like a harmonious chain. "Her tragic assassination was a malevolent scheme, strategically targeting the momentum of advancement and the realization of Pakistan's vision for enlightened moderation and a democratic society," he added.

Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari pointed out that on the one hand, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, as the PPP chairperson, took the ideology of the Quaid-e-Awam and his party to new heights through her philosophy and unparalleled struggle, while as a political leader she always represented the real populace by becoming the voice of the common man and the downtrodden classes of the country. "On the other hand, as Prime Minister, where she strengthened the national defense by giving the gift of ballistic missile technology, there she protected the rights and took the far-reaching measures ensuring the welfare and development of country's salaried class, farmers, workers, minorities, women, children and the elderly," he added.

Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari assured the nation that the election manifesto to be presented by the PPP in the fast approaching general elections will resonate with the visionary aspirations and missions set forth by the Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

Expressing unwavering dedication, he affirmed that his party staunchly upholds the cherished philosophy of its martyred leadership, Saying: "PPP is determined to make the dream of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto a reality, that Pakistan should be the model of excellence for the world as an prosperous, progressive, egalitarian and strong democratic federal state."

Widespread casualties on day 80 of Lebanon conflict

BEIRUT: On Tuesday, the 80th day of the conflict in southern Lebanon, hostilities between Hezbollah and the Israeli army caused casualties among Lebanese civilians and the Israeli army, including serious injuries.

Israel also violated Beirut's airspace. An Israeli drone targeted a spot close to a supermarket on the road leading to the center of Touline village. Two civilians were injured by flying glass from the attack. Malek Awali, mayor of Touline, told Arab News that he was "surprised by this strike, as the village is 5 km north of the Litani Line, meaning that it is not located within the conflict area," adding that "the bombed road doesn't lead to the border region located south the line."

Awali said that

"Touline's residents didn't leave the village, which hosts 170 Syrian refugee families and 100 Lebanese families who fled the border region, considering it is a safe village." Before the attack on Touline, an Israeli drone carried out two strikes on an open area between the villages of Jibchit and Choukine. The explosions were heard in Nabatieh.

A security source told Arab News that "the Israeli bombing last week and early this week has targeted roads that lead to the border region and that are vital for Hezbollah, namely the Al-Khardali road." Following the death of the Iranian military commander Sayyed Reza Mousavi in an Israeli raid in Damascus, people in the southern region feared that Iran and its allies would respond to the inci-

dent from Lebanon. Hezbollah announced that it had targeted several Israeli military outposts, causing direct casualties, including "the Zebdine outpost, using Burkan missiles," adding that "Israeli enemy soldiers were deployed in the vicinity of the Ramyah outpost." The militant group added that it targeted "a monitoring room near the Shomera outpost using appropriate weapons, killing and injuring its members." Hezbollah also said that it targeted "a gathering of the enemy's soldiers in the Dovev outpost using appropriate weapons, killing and injuring them." Israeli media said that "an Israeli soldier died due to injuries he received from an anti-tank missile fired from Lebanon last week." — Aljazeera

PEMRA bans surrogate company ads

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The PEMRA on Tuesday prohibited "broadcast/distribution" of advertisement of surrogate companies in any manner whatsoever with immediate effect.

The Authority, in its prohibition order, warned all the licensees, including satellite television (TV) channels, radio stations, all landing rights permission holders and distribution network operators of legal proceedings under relevant provisions of PEMRA laws in case of non-compliance and/or on repeated violation.

It said that the order was issued in continuity of its earlier letters "wherein office memorandum/advisory issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Islamabad with regard to "Zero Tolerance for Surrogate Companies" were circulated among licensees for compliance".

"The Authority, while exercising powers vested under Section 27(a) of the PEMRA Ordinance 2002 as amended by PEMRA (Amendment) Act 2023, hereby prohibits broadcast/distribution of advertisement of surrogate companies (in any manner what so ever) with immediate effect which are promoting gambling/ betting in different sports events being telecast/ broadcast/ rebroadcast in the country and refers the matter to Council of Complaints (Islamabad) for appropriate recommendations to the Authority," it added.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has already vowed zero tolerance against the surrogate companies of the "betting houses". In an advisory, the Ministry urged all the ministries, departments and organizations not to engage in any kind of contract or cooperation with the surrogate companies illegally operating in Pakistan, especially on print, electronic and social media.

Indians sent back by France over trafficking concerns

MUMBAI: A plane carrying suspected victims of human trafficking was rerouted to India while on its way to Nicaragua after being detained in France. It has now landed in Mumbai.

While no evidence of trafficking was found, the inquiry gave way to concerns of undocumented immigration that are still being investigated by French authorities.

The plane was an Airbus A340 operated by Romania-based Legend Airlines. The aircraft, carrying 303 Indian passengers, departed from Fujairah International Airport in Dubai and was en route to Nicaragua in Central America.

On Thursday afternoon, it stopped to refuel at Vetry Airport, about 150km (95 miles) east of Paris. French police used the opportunity to intervene after an anonymous tip that some of its passengers may be victims of trafficking. The aircraft remained grounded in France for four days for legal deliberations. The reception hall at Vetry Airport was transformed into a waiting area. Passengers were given individual beds while they awaited a decision on where they would travel next, local officials in the eastern Marne region of France said on Friday.

A French court ruled that authorities did not have the legal authority to detain several of the passengers further, and the plane was cleared to leave by French prosecutors on Sunday. The Airbus A340 then departed with 276 of the Indian passengers on Monday and landed in Mumbai early on Tuesday. It is unclear why the plane diverted to Mumbai instead of resuming its journey to Nicaragua. The remaining 27 passengers on the original flight remained in

France. In a post on X, the Indian embassy expressed thanks to French officials for the "quick resolution of the situation enabling Indian passengers to return home".

A makeshift courtroom was set up at the airport where emergency judicial hearings were carried out for two days into the conditions and purposes of the trip by a unit specializing in organised crime. Consular officials from the Indian embassy in Paris were also on site. Twenty-five of the passengers, including five minors, requested asylum in the country while two passengers were detained based on suspicions of trafficking before being released. They have also reportedly requested asylum.

"We cannot keep foreigners in a waiting area for more than 96 hours. Beyond that, it is the liberty and custody judge who must rule on their fate," Francois Procureur, the head of the Chalons-en-Champagne Bar Association, told local television on Saturday. Once it received clearance, the plane left Vetry Airport.

No concrete evidence was found, but French authorities said they are continuing to investigate potential breaches of immigration laws. The passengers were likely Indian workers in the United Arab Emirates intending to use Nicaragua as a gateway to the United States or Canada, a source close to the inquiry told the Agence France-Presse (AFP) news agency.

Liliana Bakayoko, a lawyer for Legend Airlines, denied that the company had any role in human trafficking or "committed any infraction". An unnamed "partner" company was responsible for verifying the identification docu-

ments of each passenger, according to Bakayoko. The passengers were Indian and included many children, including 11 unaccompanied minors and a 21-month-old.

They were "frustrated" after spending several nights at the airport, said Patrick Jaloux, the head of civil protection in the Marne region. The 15 crew members of the Legend Airlines flight were also questioned and released. Procureur said the hearings were "unprecedented". "I'm surprised at how things unfolded in the waiting area," Procureur told BFM television. "People should have been informed of their rights, and clearly, that was not the case."

The US has designated Nicaragua as a country that has done the least to prevent human trafficking. It is both a source and a major transit route for undocumented people looking to enter the US. While no human trafficking has been confirmed yet among the passengers on the plane, Genevieve Colas, coordinator at the French nonprofit Secours Catholique-Caritas told AFP the release of the plane had "surprised" her.

"What if they really are victims of people trafficking?" she asked. "Then it wouldn't be right to just let them take off to another country." Secours Catholique-Caritas works with displaced people and migrants in multiple countries around the world. In Mumbai, Indian authorities are expected to question the returned passengers about their plans because several elements of the case are still unclear. From October 2022 to September, nearly 97,000 Indians were stopped while trying to enter the US illegally. That's a fivefold increase from 2019-2020. — Aljazeera

Shaheed BB legacy to symbolize love and bravery among public

Sharjeel Inam Memon

IT has been 16 years since Shaheed Ms. Benazir Bhutto left us, but the pain of her tragic death remains fresh. Reflecting on this great tragedy, the soul still trembles today, as terrorists attacked and brutally martyred her in Liaquat Bagh, Rawalpindi, on December 27, 2007. This tragic event not only shocked the people of Pakistan but also democratic forces worldwide, leaving a lasting legacy of grief, sorrow, and sadness transmitted from generation to generation.

Even today, people often ask the question: when the martyr Ms. Benazir Bhutto knew in advance that her life was in danger, why did she return to her homeland after ending her 8-year exile? The answer to this question is that Shaheed Ms. Benazir Bhutto was not only aware of the danger but also believed that some national and international forces had conspired and planned to kill her.

Not only had foreign governments informed him about this plan, but she

herself had also briefed some world leaders and media representatives about it. She had formally informed the then President General Pervez Musharraf about the project. Despite this, she returned home and personally answered this question.

In an interview, she expressed, "We are individuals who engage in discourse. We possess ideology and emotions. We know how to live and die. History is woven with the sacrifice of martyrs. The very fabric of history is crafted by the threads of revolution."

On October 18, 2007, as Shaheed Bibi was leaving Dubai, numerous individuals cautioned her against returning to her homeland due to the imminent threat to her life. However, she persistently reiterated, "I will not abandon my people. We live and die alongside them." When she landed at Karachi Airport on the same day, there was a cheering sea of people welcoming her. It was a historic day when the people of Pakistan decided they wanted a peaceful, developed, and democratic Pakistan under the

leadership of Mrs. Benazir Bhutto.

In October 2007, a revolution unfolded in Pakistan. Anti-democratic and anti-people forces utilized the power of gunpowder to suppress people's power. By targeting Ms. Benazir Bhutto through terrorists, they demonstrated their intent to physically sever Shaheed Bibi from the people at any cost and ruthlessly implement their plan. About 200 democrats were martyred, and hundreds were injured in this terrorist incident. Ms. Benazir Bhutto was spared in this incident, but the pages of her unpublished book, "Reconciliation," were stained with the blood of the martyrs.

In this book, a solution was provided to eradicate terrorism worldwide, including Pakistan, and to establish a peaceful global society. The aim is to foster democracy globally and eliminate the gap between the rich and the poor. This will only be possible when the path of reconciliation is embraced everywhere, replacing conflict.

This implies that Shaheed Ms. Benazir Bhutto arrived in Pakistan on

October 18, 2007, with a significant mission as a world leader. The fulfillment of this mission was only possible if she lived among the people of Pakistan and initiated the struggle.

The initial step of her mission was to reinstate democracy in Pakistan. Following that, terrorism was to be eradicated by uniting the democratic and peace-loving forces globally, and poverty should be eliminated by fostering a conducive environment for democratic and political processes worldwide. Completing this mission was not feasible by remaining distant from the people. Following the tragedy that occurred in Karachi on October 18, 2007, party leaders and other well-wishers advised the late Ms. Benazir Bhutto to leave Pakistan again and conduct her campaign from abroad. After the tragedy on October 19, 2007, when she conducted a press conference at Bilawal House in Karachi, a journalist asked her whether, despite the events of October 18, she would continue running a public relations campaign for the elections.

To this, she replied without any

pause, "Those people also want me not to run an election campaign and go back. They wish for real democracy not to be restored in Pakistan. However, if democracy is not restored, the dangers for Pakistan will increase. I will stay with my people." Then the world witnessed Shaheed Bibi initiating a public relations campaign once again. In every meeting, she used to declare, "I have risked my life for democracy in Pakistan."

After the October tragedy, he added more to his book "Reconciliation" and wrote in one place, "I suffered the punishment of my father's arrest, imprisonment, and murder, and I knew that such wounds of the soul never heal. I was ready to do anything to spare my children from the pain I endured at my father's death. However, this was the only thing I could not do."

From these words of Mrs. Benazir Bhutto, it is not difficult to infer that she loved her children dearly and did not want to subject them to the shock of her death. Yet, she consciously accepted her death. During the elec-

tion campaign, she once visited the shrine of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh and sat there alone for several hours, closing all the doors of the shrine.

On that very day, people realized that Shaheed Bibi was certain about her death. Despite this, she resumed the election campaign. Even during this period, people continued advising her not to attend meetings. But she used to respond that if I do that, the dangers for Pakistan will increase and hence, that happened. On December 27, 2007, she was martyred in public.

Today, if there is democracy in Pakistan, it is the result of the sacrifice of Shaheed Bibi. Shaheed Bibi is a metaphor of bravery and courage in history. Shaheed Bibi is a metaphor of love for her country and her people. The enduring bond she established with her land and people through her sacrifice will remain forever. We all owe it to the blood of Shaheed Bibi to continue her mission of restoring true democracy in Pakistan.