



RAWALPINDI: PTI's Shah Mahmood Qureshi being forcibly arrested outside Adiala Jail.

ECP ensures smooth operations for elections

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Wednesday assured smooth operations for upcoming general elections 2024, saying that all its operations and IT systems were working "satisfactorily".

In a statement issued here, the electoral watchdog said that it wasn't facing any difficulty in conducting the upcoming general election. The ECP further said that it has developed an automated and modern Election Management System (EMS) that will be used to "transform and compile election results from Presiding to Returning officers".

It added that the system has been tested several times for the mentioned purpose. 'Besides, some additional functions and features have been included to the EMS to facilitate the Returning Officers (ROs) so that the data can be used in future even during the initial phases of the polling process,' it noted.

The ECP mentioned that the main purpose of the EMS system was to transmit and tabulate election results and this system will only be used on the polling day. Rejecting all kind of apprehensions, the commission made it clear that the transmission and tabulation of poll results involve no risk.

It added that there would be no need of Internet during tabulation of election results. However, it said that provision of fiber optic facility is being ensured to the Returning Officers, along with Wi-Fi device as an alternate arrangement. It is pertinent to mention here that the election process entered its second phase on Monday with the returning officers embarking upon the weeklong task of scrutinising the thousands of nomination papers filed during December 22-24 period for the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies.

The process of scrutiny of the nomination papers would continue until December 30 after which the candidates could challenge the decisions of the returning officers, if any, in appellate tribunals until January 3, 2024, which would be decided by January 10, according to the election schedule. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) released the data of papers, which showed that the number of candidates in this election is the highest ever in the country.

Overall 28,626 candidates for both national and provincial assemblies submitted their nomination papers – 7,913 for the 266 general seats of the National Assembly and 18,546 for the 593 general seats of the four provincial assemblies. The numbers are way more than the nomination papers filed in the 2018 general elections. In the previous election five year ago a total of 21,482 nomination papers were submitted, including 5,473 for the general seats of the National Assembly.

Govt measures to boost foreign investment: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday said the government was taking steps to boost foreign investment in the Information Technology sector. "In this regard, positive progress has already been made," the prime minister said while chairing the 5th meeting of Board of Governors of Special Technology Zones Authority.

In a bid to promote and develop IT sector in the country, he directed the authorities concerned to chalk out necessary policies to attract international IT experts in Pakistan. PM Kakar highlighted that the Information Technology sector could play a vital

role in strengthening the country's economy as Pakistan had huge potential in this sector.

During the meeting, various matters linked to the Special Technology Zones Authority, came under discussion. The meeting endorsed the decisions, concluded during the 4th meeting of the Board of Governors of Special Technology Authority. It approved the re-structuring of the finance, audit and technical committees of the Board of Governors of the Authority.

Furthermore, the meeting also approved the presentation of drafts of the Authority's licensing framework, procedures and regulations before the technical committee. Federal

Secretaries of Cabinet, Finance, Information Technology, Science and Technology, Chief Secretaries of all the provinces and other Board members, attended the meeting.

'Resilient Pakistan' author Haya Fatima calls on PM: Haya Fatima Sehgal, the author of the book titled "Resilient Pakistan", Wednesday called on Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar. Her book is a compilation of her articles and features with a dedicated section on people who devoted their lives for the service to the country. The book covers topics such as cultural is-sues, fighting extremism and climate change.

Bilawal kickstarts election campaign with agenda

F.P. Report

GARHI KHUDDA BAKHS: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari Wednesday kickstarted his party's campaign for the February 8 elections, unveiling a 10-point agenda with an emphasis on welfare schemes.

Addressing a party's gathering in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh on the 16th death anniversary of his mother Benazir Bhutto, Bilawal presented the party's election agenda ahead of the upcoming polls slated for February 8, 2024.

Pledging to introduce policies that prioritise people's welfare, Bilawal announced a 10-point agenda, which his party is to enforce if they are voted into power by the people in the upcoming polls. Apart from promising major policy reforms, the PPP chief, without taking any names, fired a fresh salvo against political opponent Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz

(PML-N).

Bilawal said that there are those who are relying on "others" for the upcoming polls, in the same manner they had done so in the past. Reiterating his resolve to contest the elections regardless of the challenges, the PPP chairman said that he would face his political opponents in Lahore.

"I had told my team that I wanted to contest from Lahore. I'll take the battle to Lahore. Let's see what happens," he said. "Is it Lahore's destiny that the same person will be installed for the fourth time?" Bilawal said while taking a jibe at the PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif, who is eying a record-fourth term as the country's prime minister.

"Our paths are different with that of those we were in government for 16 months," Bilawal said while referring to the PML-N-led Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government of which the PPP was

a key part. The PPP chief assured of giving "a befitting response" to their opponents in Lahore in the polls.

On the issue of the party's candidacy for the prime ministership, Bilawal said that he would seek the support of PPP and Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) — headed by his father Asif Ali Zardari — for contesting the polls as the party's candidate for the prime ministership. His remarks come as last month, Zardari — during an interview on private TV channel — had termed his son as "inexperienced" saying that as the head of the PPPP, he had the authority to issue party tickets to candidates, including Bilawal — comments which fuelled rumours of a rift between the father-son duo.

Later, PPP Central Secretary Information Faisal Karim Kundi reassured that Bilawal remains the party's candidate for the top executive post.

Parliament went beyond its power in providing right to appeal: Justice Yahya

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Hours after the Supreme Court's detailed verdict in the case pertaining to the law clipping the chief justice of Pakistan's (CJP) powers, Justice Yahya Afridi on Wednesday evening issued an additional note, stating that providing the right to appeal is possible via constitutional amendment.

"With utmost respect for Parliament, I declare that Section 5 of the Act has been enacted by Parliament beyond its ordinary legislative power conferred on it under the Constitution; section 5 of the Act is, therefore, ultra vires the Constitution, and thus of no legal effect," the justice said in a 24-page note.

The said section grants a right of appeal retrospectively against an order passed by a top court bench exercising jurisdiction under clause (3) of Article 184 of the Constitution, while its sub-section (2) vests a right of appeal to any aggrieved person against whom an order has been passed under clause

(3) of Article 184 of the Constitution prior to the commencement of the Act, providing retrospective effect to such exercise of right. However, Justice Yahya is of the view that the Parliament must adopt the "right course", which he said is to "amend the Constitution" to provide a right of appeal against orders passed by the top court.

"I may mention here that providing a right of appeal against an order passed by this Court in its original jurisdiction is, no doubt, a positive thought to better ensure the requirements of fair trial and due process; but in pursuit of a positive outcome, the law not less than the fundamental and supreme law of the land - the Constitution — cannot be disregarded," the note read.

The apex court's full court bench — comprising all 15 judges of the apex court — had on October 11 declared the SC (Practice and Procedure) Act 2023, as "constitutional" with a 10-5 majority. The apex court had struck down a section dealing

with retrospective effect of the law, in its decision.

Five members of the bench — Justice Ijazul Ahsan, Justice Muneeb Akhtar, Justice Sayyed Mazahir Ali Akbar Naqvi, and Justice Ayesha A Malik, and Justice Shahid Waheed — had opposed the law in their judgments on the pleas challenging the law.

By a majority of 8-7 — CJP Justice Qazi Faez Isa, Justice Sardar Tariq Masood, Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Athar Minallah, and Justice Musarrat Hilali dissenting — sub-section (2) of section 5 of the Act (granting a right of appeal retrospectively) was declared to be ultra vires the Constitution. By a majority of 9-6 (Justice Ahsan, Justice Akhtar, Justice Afridi, Justice Naqvi, Justice Malik, and Justice Waheed dissenting) sub-section (1) of section 5 of the Act (granting a right of appeal prospectively) was declared to be in accordance with the Constitution.

Pakistan conducts successful test flight of Fatah-II

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan conducted a successful test flight of the multi-launch rocket Fatah-II on Wednesday, equipped with state-of-the-art avionics, a sophisticated navigation system, and a unique flight trajectory. The Fatah-II weapon system is capable of engaging targets with high precision up to a range of 400 kilometres, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement.

The test was witnessed by senior officers from tri-services and dedicated scientists and engineers. President Arif Alvi, Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJSC) General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir congratulated participating troops and scientists on the successful conduct of flight test.

The flight test of the indigenously developed Fatah-I guided multi-launch rocket system was conducted on August 24, 2021, making Pakistan capable of delivering a conventional warhead. The multi-launch rocket system gave the Pakistan Army capability of precision target engagement deep in enemy territory, according to the ISPR.

Faisal Saleh Hayat joins PML-N

F.P. Report

JHANG: In a blow to the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), their senior leader Faisal Saleh Hayat Wednesday joined the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) ranks in the wake of the upcoming polls slated for February 8, 2024.

Speaking to the media in Jhang, PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif termed Hayat's inclusion, along with his associates, as a major boost for the party in the city, media reported. The development comes as rumours had been circulating pertaining to the now-former PPP leader's prospects of bidding farewell to the Bilawal Bhutto-led party.

The rumours further gained strength after no PPP flags were raised as the former federal minister filed his nomination papers for NA-108 and PP-125 for upcoming elections on Friday. Hayat has previously been elected to the National Assembly in 1988, 1990, and 1993, on the PPP ticket. Whereas, he contested the 2008 elections on the Pakistan Muslim League-Qaid's (PML-Q) ticket.

He has also served in the executive in multiple capacities including Federal Minister for Commerce (1988-1990), Federal Minister for Interior (2002-2004), Kashmir Affairs (2004-2007), and Federal Minister Housing & Works (2011-12). The veteran politician is also the founding member of the PPP-Patriot group — and was elected to the upper house of the parliament on its ticket in 2002.

Political parties have ramped up their electioneering efforts ever since the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) announced the poll date earlier this month. The top electoral body has received a total of 28,626 nomination papers from prospective candidates across the country aiming to contest upcoming polls.

The scrutinisation process of the nomination papers will culminate on December 30 (Saturday) which will be followed by the issuance of the list of candidates on January 11, with candidates having the option to withdraw until January 12 i.e., before the ECP allots electoral symbol on January 13. The PML-N, ever since the return of their supremo Nawaz Sharif, has successfully wooed dozens of electables from various parts of the country to solidify its position ahead of the polls.

Qureshi re-arrested from outside Adiala jail

ECP moved against 'unlawful abduction'

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A petition was filed in the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) against the "unlawful abduction" of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi, who was re-arrested just minutes after coming out on bail.

The senior politician was taken into custody earlier in the day by Rawalpindi police from Adiala jail in connection with a case related to May 9 violent protests, a day after being detained under Section 3 of the Maintenance of Public Order (3-MPO) following approval of his bail in the cipher case last week.

In response to the former foreign minister's arrest, his daughter demanded the electoral body to fulfil its constitutional responsibilities and ensure the safety and release of Qureshi, who is a candidate standing the upcoming elections from multiple constituencies of the National Assembly and provincial assemblies of Punjab and Sindh.

Meherbano stated in the petition that Qureshi had been granted bail by the Supreme Court, and referred to the remark of Justice Athar Minallah, who stated: "The incarceration of the petitioners will not serve any useful purpose. Moreover, their release on bail during the

period of elections would ensure 'genuine elections and thus enable the people to exercise the right to express their will effectively and meaningfully.'"

Meherbano stated that the 3-MPO detention order had been withdrawn on the same day it was issued. "It is not known to us that if the MPO Order was withdrawn soon after its issuance yesterday then under what pretext was Mr Qureshi unlawfully detained at Adyala Jail till around 10.30/11am this morning," the petition read.

Meherbano mentioned that her father was previously detained under the 3-MPO order issued on May 23, but the Lahore High Court later quashed the order, stating that "it is further expected that after his release, Shah Mahmood Qureshi will not be detained under the provisions of the Punjab Maintenance of Public Order (Amendment) Ordinance 2017, for any delinquency having been committed in the past".

She called on the election commission and the chief election commissioner to take action against the "unlawful detention" of the PTI vice-chairman at the Adiala jail, which is "tantamount to denying the largest political party of the country, to quote the Supreme Court of Pakistan's above-men-

tioned order, a 'level playing field'". Meanwhile, President Arif Alvi also reacted to Qureshi's arrest, calling on the authorities to take notice of the "indecent treatment" of the two-time foreign minister, who served in the top office during two different governments.

"We must not become a state where human rights and dignity are violated without fear. Authorities must pay attention to the confiscation of documents, the brutal action against the protesters and now the indecent treatment of the former foreign minister by two governments," Alvi wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter. He said that "such incidents have happened before" but are not appropriate as Pakistan must undergo change.

Qureshi was implicated in cases related to the May 9 riots that broke out following the arrest of PTI founder Imran Khan in a corruption case from the premises of Islamabad High Court (IHC) earlier this year. According to sources, Qureshi was arrested in a GHQ attack case and will be produced in an anti-terrorism court (ATC).

They said Qureshi was arrested by Rawalpindi police in the case after deputy commissioner Rawalpindi revoked the 3-MPO detention order issued a day earlier.



NAJAF: Clerics and mourners pray over the coffin of Razi Mousavi during his funeral procession at Imam Ali shrine in Iraq.

‘Master of Roster’ concept alien to Constitution: SC

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued a detailed verdict in the case pertaining to the law clipping the chief justice of Pakistan (CJP), stating that the "Master of Roster concept is alien to the Constitution" and cannot be considered above the charter even if it is a conventional notion.

The top court issued a detailed verdict in the SC (Practice and Procedure) Act 2023 case, which was decided in October, with a full court bench — comprising all 15 judges of the apex court — sustaining the law as "constitutional" with a 10-5 majority. The apex court had struck down a section dealing with retrospective effect of the law, in its decision.

Five members of the bench — Justice Ijazul Ahsan, Justice Muneeb Akhtar, Justice Sayyed Mazahir Ali Akbar Naqvi., and Justice Ayesha A Malik, and Justice Shahid Waheed — had opposed the law in their judgments on the pleas challenging the law. By a majority of 8-7 — CJP Isa, Justice Sardar Tariq Masood, Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Athar Minallah, and Justice Musarrat Hilali dissenting — sub-section (2) of section 5 of the Act (granting a right of appeal retrospectively) was declared to be ultra vires the Constitution.

By a majority of 9-6 (Justice Ahsan, Justice Akhtar, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Naqvi, Justice Malik, and Justice Waheed dissenting) sub-section (1) of section 5 of the Act (granting a right of appeal prospectively) was declared to be in accordance with the Constitution. Penned down by CJP Isa, the 22-page detailed verdict stated that the term "Master of the Roster" is not mentioned in the Constitution, any law, or even in the rules and that the Constitution doesn't empower the top judge to act completely in his discretion.

"The Master of the Roster concept is alien to the Constitution, and if it is considered to be a convention it cannot prevail over the text of the Constitution." It stated that the term "Master" also connotes servitude, the extreme form of which is slavery, which is prohibited by the Constitution. The verdict stated that servitude also negates consultation, in reference to specific Quranic verses that command consultation as an obligatory practice.

The verdict further stated that when power is concentrated in an individual, it invariably brings disastrous consequences. "Irreparable damage is caused to the Judiciary and to the people of Pakistan when the legitimacy, integrity and credibility of the Judiciary is undermined. If the people lose their trust in the Judiciary, it will render decisions made by it mere words on paper,

without credibility and moral authority. The surest way for this to happen is when cases are not decided in accordance with the Constitution."

The verdict termed the Act to be fully compliant with the Constitution, stating that it was reviewed in detail and it was observed that the Act has "facilitated access to justice, instilled transparency, made the realization of Fundamental Rights more effective, and the Supreme Court more independent." The law gives the power of taking suo motu notice to a three-member committee comprising senior judges including the chief justice. It further aimed to have transparent proceedings in the apex court and includes the right to appeal.

Regarding the constitution of benches, the Act stated that every cause, matter, or appeal before the apex court would be heard and disposed of by a bench constituted by a committee comprising the CJP and the two senior-most judges. It added that the decisions of the committee would be taken by a majority.

Regarding exercising the apex court's original jurisdiction, the Act said that any matter invoking the use of Article 184(3) would first be placed before the committee. On matters where the interpretation of the Constitution is required, the Act said the committee would compose a bench comprising no less than five apex court judges.

Intense fog disrupts PIA flights operation

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) flights operating from Lahore, Multan, and Sialkot had been affected due to dense fog while some local flights faced cancellation as well.

A spokesperson for the PIA warns of operational challenges in air operations due to low visibility and intense fog and flights to and from Lahore, Multan, and Sialkot may face cancellations, changes, or delays due to challenging conditions.

During this season, fog disrupts air operations in these cities, posing difficulties for aviation activities, stated by the spokesperson and added that passengers were urged to obtain information about their flights from the PIA Call Center before heading to the airport, considering potential disruptions due to fog.

All set to take action against one-wheelie doers

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Traffic Police completed its preparation to launch a major crackdown against doers of one-wheelie in the provincial capital before new year night.

Chief Traffic Officer Ammara Athar has issued a directive to register cases against violators.

According to a spokesperson for the department, strict action would also be taken against facilitators of one-wheelie doers during the crackdown. Ammara Athar said that special checkpoints had been established on 90 locations to curb one-wheelie and other violations. SP Sohail Fazil, SP Shahzad Khan and SP Akramullah will supervise the crackdown while additional personnel would be deployed and assigned to monitor motercyclists on Main Boulevard Gulberg and Allama Iqbal Road, Main Boulevard DHA, The Mall, Jail Road, Ferozepur Road, Canal Road, and GT Road. Ammara Athar also warned parents to be vigilant about their children as no leniency would be given at any cost.

PU alumnus gives scholarship to Zoology students

LAHORE (APP): Punjab University (PU) Vice Chancellor (VC) Prof. Dr. Khalid Mahmood has appreciated the scholarship provided by the alumnus of the Institute of Zoology.

He expressed his views during a ceremony held at the VC office. Prof. Dr. Khalid Mahmood said offering a merit scholarship to two students of the Institute of Zoology would contribute to fostering a positive academic environment among students.

The vice-chancellor highlighted the significance of Tahirah Hyder Motara Memorial Merit Scholarship, noting that it represented the largest amount ever awarded by the university. The generous scholarship not only reflected the commitment of the alumnus to the institute but also stood as a testament to their dedication in supporting the academic endeavours of current students.

KU VC offers internships to Turbat University students

KARACHI (APP): A delegation of the Department of Chemistry of the University of Turbat, Balochistan, visited the International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS), and Dr A.Q. Khan Institute of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering (KIBGE) of the University of Karachi on Tuesday.

Three faculty members, 17 male and 15 female students all from the final year of the BS and MSc programs were part of the three-day study tour to Karachi. They also met the KU Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi at KIBGE and shared their experiences regarding the visit to two centers of excellence institutes of the University of Karachi.

On this occasion, the KU VC Professor Dr Khalid Iraqi offered on-hand training programs and internships to the students of the University of Turbat.

CM Naqvi inspects low-cost housing project in Raiwind

LAHORE (APP):The caretaker Punjab government has successfully revitalised another stalled welfare project, completing the construction of 245 houses under the low-cost housing scheme in Raiwind.

These affordable homes are slated to be handed over to deserving government employees on January 15, following special directives of Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

CM Naqvi inspected the newly constructed houses in Rakhpaji, Raiwind, thoroughly assessing the provided facilities. He ordered for taking immediate steps so that the government employees could reside in these houses. He also emphasised timely completion of sewerage and drainage facilities along with the redress of any outstanding issues related to house allotment. The FWO (Frontier Works Organisation) officials briefed the CM about the scheme. Chief Secretary, ACS, secretaries of housing, C&W, local government, commissioner Lahore, and representatives of the Bank of Punjab were also present.

CM felicitates nation on missile successful test: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi congratulated the nation on successful test of the Fateh-2 missile. In his message, the CM said that the Pak Army, scientists and engineers deserve praise for successful experiment, adding that Pakistan had achieved another milestone in its defense capabilities. Fateh-2 missile incorporates the latest technology and it would further strengthen Pakistan's defence capabilities, he added.

Murtaza Solengi meets CM: Caretaker Federal Information Minister Murtaza Solengi met Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi at his office, here on Wednesday.

Provincial Information Minister Amir Mir was also present, said a handout issued here. The meeting discussed matters of mutual interest, addressing challenges within the media industry, and formulating measures for the welfare of the journalist community.

Operation against encroachments continues

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

During the operation conducted at Bedian Road, Jallo Mor, Daroghawala, Manga Mandi, Mugulpura, 27 encroachers were arrested, four FIRs were registered, 76 shops were sealed, 117 signboards, 300 sheds were removed, and seven truck-load of confiscated items were shifted to junkyard.

In the seven days of the operation, a total of 835 arrests have been made, 89 FIRs were registered, 2,138 structures, including signboards and sheds have been demolished. Moreover, 903 shops and restaurants have been sealed, 30 trucks of belongings, including 4

CM reviews upgradation work at Services Hospital: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi conducted a comprehensive inspection of the ongoing construction activities at Services Hospital and reviewed progress made in enhancing hospital's infrastructure.

The CM directed the managing director WASA to lay a new drainage line, adding that the hospital's drainage system would be changed by laying new pipes along with the construction of a pumping station for efficient water drainage. He also inspected the construction work in various sections, underscoring the importance of maintaining high-quality standards in the upgradation process. He engaged with the labourers, encouraging them to exert extra effort. The CM commended another labourer who replied that their shift ends at 2 a.m. Provincial ministers Amir Mir, Azfar Ali Nasir, Advisor Wahab Riaz, secretary housing, secretary health, secretary C&W and others were also present.

CM visits Ganga Ram Hospital, expresses dismay: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi made a surprise visit to Ganga Ram Hospital on Wednesday where he found cleanliness arrangements inadequate. There were piles of filth and dirt in the washrooms. Patients and their attendants complained about being charged for surgeries in the hospital. A female patient also complained about having to procure medicines from outside. Expressing his strong dismay, CM Naqvi issued a final warning to the MS [medical superintendent], stating that hospital affairs should be rectified without further delay.

He said, "I am giving you a final warning: I will visit again soon. If the situation does not improve, you will be held responsible." He ordered an inquiry into an incident of charging money for surgery by the Chief Minister's Inspection Team and directed the CMIT to immediately reach the hospital to probe the matter and submit the inquiry report to him by evening.

handcarts, have been seized. Lahore Deputy Commissioner Rafia Haider told the 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.

SMBR reviews establishment of smart police stations

LAHORE (APP): A review meeting on the establishment of smart police stations was held here under the chairmanship of Senior Member Board of Revenue (SMBR) Nabil Javed.

Member Colonies Mohammad Khan Ranjha, Deputy Commissioner Lahore, Secretary Labour, LDA, Police officials and representatives of other institutions participated in the meeting. On the instructions of Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, the process of shifting police stations to permanent land was reviewed. Member Colonies Muhammad Khan Ranjha

briefed the SMBR on the progress. It was informed in the briefing that 22 smart police stations will be constructed in Lahore.

The process of giving land for the establishment of 18 smart police stations has been completed. Nabil Javed instructed DC Lahore and LDA to complete the processes soon.

Nabil Javed also reviewed progress of land transfer to police stations in other districts of Punjab.

GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA
COMMUNICATION & WORKS DIVISION MALAKAND
NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING
(Single stage single Envelope E-Bidding System)

C&W Department, C&W Division Malakand, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa invites electronic Bids from eligible registered firms/contractors with PEC (Relevant Category), C&W Department and KPRA in accordance with KPRA Procurement rules 2014 amended on 10/05/2022 on single stage single envelope procedure for the following works.

S. No	Name of Project	Required Category of PEC	Bid Security i/c Stamp Duty	Tender Fee @ 0.03%	Period of Completion	Last date & Time of submission of E-Bids	Date of Opening & Time
1	Construction of Deputy Commissioner Office I/C Hall in District Malakand ADP No. 107/160613	C-5 & Above) with Relevant Code for Civil Work & I/Elect.)	780700/-	11115/-	As per Work Order	12/01/2024 at 12:00 P.M	On Same day at 12:30 P.M
Construction of Technically & Economically Feasible 294-KMS Roads in Malakand Division ADP No.1591/200245 (2022-23).							
2	Construction / Black Topping of Pirkhushhal Baba Road Batkhela (0.65-KM)	C-6	324200/-	4270/-	-do-	-do-	-do-
3	Rehabilitation of Road at Safara U/C Palai (1-KM)	C-6	240000/-	3000/-	-do-	-do-	-do-
4	Construction/ Improvement & Black Topping of Muhammad Pattay Road Tehsil Dargai District Malakand	C-6	446200/-	6100/-	-do-	-do-	-do-
5	Construction / Improvement & Black Topping of Kharkai Dherai Palai Road Tehsil Dargai, District Malakand.	C-6	140500/-	1975/-	-do-	-do-	-do-

1. Bid Solicitation Documents and Instructions to Bidders can be obtained from the Office on any Working Day or downloaded from C&W Website (www.cwd.gkp.pk) on day before the submission date / time.

2. The Bidders should submit their E-Bids as per KPRA Notification NO SOR(14)/Vol. 1-24/2021-22, Dated 10/05/2022.

3. Complete Detail of Bid Security in Shape of CDR i.e Bank Name, CDR Numbers and Dates must be submitted electronically along with E-Bid on the E-Bidding System.

4. All Bidders are required to be registered with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority under Finance Act No. XXI of 2013.

5. Venue of Bid Opening is **Office of the Executive Engineer C&W Division Malakand.**

6. All Bids will be accepted through Pakistan Post or Courier Service Representative positively

7. Separate CDR of 2% E/Money & Separate CDR for Tender Form Fee @ 0.03% One Original and Second Photo Copy will be shown to the undersigned at the time of tendering.

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER C&W DIVISION MALAKAND

Email:-cwmkd2013@gmail.com, PH#0932-412486, Fax-0932-411905

INF(P): 3100-2023



KARACHI: Begum Samina Arif Alvi chairing a meeting with the delegation of Dawoodi Bohra Education trust at Governor House.

Karachi police chief vows to strictly deal with criminal elements

KARACHI (APP): Additional Inspector General of Police Karachi, Khadim Hussain Rind, Wednesday, vowed to strictly deal with all the criminal elements so that a safe and secure environment could be provided to the business community as well as citizens of the metropolis.

The Karachi police chief speaking at a meeting with traders and industrialists during his visit to the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) said that the police was determined to strictly deal with the situation particularly rise in extortionist activities and the incidents of kidnapping for ransom. He added that a committee has already been established to aggressively deal with all such issues and its positive results would be visible soon, said a statement issued here. "A total of 438

encounters took place and 1963 criminals had been arrested since I assumed charge as Additional IG", he said.

An individual involved in street crimes could be jailed for a period of seven years but unfortunately, there were cases wherein only three individuals have been sentenced for one year only while around 40 to 45 such criminals were jailed for three months and even less than that, he said and vowed "we are determined to maintain peace in Karachi despite challenges." On the traffic issues, he said that it was mostly due to a lot of excavation done in various localities for development projects which upon completion would provide some relief to commuters. Referring to his discussions with the traffic engineering department, he informed that out of 93 traffic signals in various areas

of the city, only 30 were operational which was also a major reason for traffic jams. Speaking on the occasion, Chairman BMG Zubair Motiwala expressed concerns about the overall situation of law and order and urged that law and order be improved at any cost to provide relief to citizens.

Vice Chairman BMG Jawed Bilwani and President KCCI Iftikhar Ahmed Sheikh stressed law enforcement agencies to thwart all criminal activities to restore peace in Karachi. Iftikhar Ahmed also requested the Additional IG for setting up a police picket at New Sabzi Mandi where the criminal activities were widely being reported particularly at late night when the export consignments of fruits and vegetables were being packed.

PSCA issues alert regarding intense foggy condition in city

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) has issued an alert regarding the intense foggy conditions in the city, emphasizing the implementation of precautionary measures for driving in urban areas.

Visibility has been reduced to a few meters in various parts of Lahore, including Mall Road, Canal Road, Ferozepur Road, Jail Road,

Thokar Niaz Baig, Qaid-e-Azam Interchange, and Gajumata.

The Safe City Spokesperson instructed the citizens to adhere to precautionary measures while driving, including keeping headlights on low beam and ensuring the use of fog lights and both indicators. Drivers have been advised to maintain a reduced speed and a reason-

able distance from other vehicles. The use of reflectors on the front and rear bumpers of vehicles was recommended, and avoiding frequent lane changes was emphasized. Due to the severe fog, all motorways connected to Lahore were closed. It was further stressed that, in case of any emergency, residents should immediately dial 15.

Tehrik-e-Jawanan rally pays homage to security forces martyrs

KARACHI (APP): Tehrik-e-Jawanan Pakistan and Kashmir (TJPK) Sindh Chapter on Wednesday took out the "Security Forces and Shuhada-e-Pakistan Zindabad" rally to pay homage to the brave sons of the soil who sacrificed their lives for the defence of the motherland.


The rally, led by TJPK Chairman Muhammad Abdullah Hameed Gul, started from the PC Hotel and culminated at Ibrahim

Hyderi after marching through Shahrah-e-Faisal, Qayumabad Korangi and other areas of the metropolis.


At the culmination point, the rally participants were warmly welcomed by the people. Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah Gul paid glowing tribute to the martyrs of the Armed Forces of

Pakistan who had laid their lives for the security and integrity of Pakistan. He urged the people to forge unity and discipline among their ranks and file to take the country forward on the path of progress and prosperity. He said that Allah had bestowed the Pakistan with unique geographic land-

scape and precious natural resources, and "now it is our collective responsibility to work with honesty and dedication for its development". Abdullah Gul also appreciated the working class for their tireless efforts not only to feed their families but also contribute to the national economic growth.



Government of Pakistan
Ministry of Interior
NADRA Regional Head Office Peshawar



PROCUREMENT THROUGH OPEN FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT
PREQUALIFICATION NOTICE
File# PRQ-Vehicle-Tyers/Vehicle-Tyers/2023-24/ 11

PRE-QUALIFICATION FOR SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION OF VEHICLE TYRES
WITH TRADE IN OF OLD TYERS FOR FY 2023-24

1. Sealed bids are invited under PPRA Rule-15 & 16 from firms / contractors / dealers registered with Sales Tax / Income Tax /Professional Tax Departments and having their own automobile workshops in Peshawar District. The Workshops are being Pre-qualified against this Notice for undertaking Repair and Maintenance of Official Vehicles of NADRA RHO Peshawar during the FY-2023-24. The Details are as under:-

Detail of Work	For Supply and Installation of Vehicle Tyers with Trade-In of Old Tyers For FY 2023-24 as per prevailing NADRA Mechanical Transport SOP (June 2023)
Contact Officer	Assistant Director (Procurement) Ph: 091-9217840
Closing Time, Date & Place of receiving of qualification documents	Up to 11:00 AM, 11 th January 2023, NADRA RHO Peshawar.
Time & Place of opening of qualification documents	11:30 AM, 11 th January 2023, NADRA RHO Peshawar.

2. Prequalification Documents, containing application and detailed terms & conditions can be purchased by the interested parties from 28th December, 2023 to 11th January 2023 upon a written request on official letter head addressed to the Procurement Section, NADRA Regional Head Office, Peshawar at given address from 8:00 AM to 15:00 PM (Monday to Friday) & upon payment of a non-refundable fee of Rs.2000/-. Request for the same must reach at least 07 working days before closing date; else any delay liability cannot be claimed.

3. The proposals, prepared in accordance with the instructions in the prequalification documents must reach at below mentioned address on or before 11:00 hours on 11th January 2023. Proposals will be opened on the same day at 11:30 hours.

4. This advertisement is also available on PPRA website at www.ppra.gov.pk.

5. NADRA reserves the right to reject all the bids as per Rule 33 of PPRA 2004.

(Tariq Masood)
Deputy Director (Procurement)
Regional Head Office, NADRA
Plot # 31-B, EOBI Building Phase V,
Hayatabad, Peshawar.
Phone: 091-9217840

PID(I) 3909/23

Preservation of hindko language: Governor assures support to HTF

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali on Thursday assured cooperation to delegation of Hindkowan Tahafuz (Preservation) Foundation (HTF) is resolution of problems and appreciated their efforts for preservation and promotion of hindko language.

The delegation that was led by Chairman of the foundation, Haji Amin Hassan included Malik Shan Elahi, Ghulam Bilal Javaid, Nasir Jamal, Ehsan Arif, Rizwan Saraf and other members. Mayor Peshawar, Haji Zubair Ali was also present on the occasion.

The delegation discussed with governor matters relating to promotion of hindko language urging him to take steps for inclusion of language in curriculum of schools. They also urged governor to play role for preservation and preservation of historic language.

Talking to delegation members, Haji Ghulam Ali assured his cooperation and said that he would extend full support to foundation as a citizen of provincial metropolis.

He also lauded efforts of foundation for promotion of hindko language and associated culture.

Later, he met with a delegation of high court lawyers that was led by Bilal Khalil Advocate.

The delegation informed governor about their problems and concerns. Governor listened to their problems and assured the delegation his support.

Progress on 2% admission quota for minorities held



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: All the public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should proactively disclose implementation of 2% quota in admission for ethnic minorities on the websites of their respective universities. The said information falls in the Section 5 of the KP RTI Act, 2013 i.e. publication and availability of record. It is pertinent to mention that the KP government had approved 2% admissions quota for minority candidates in all the public

sector universities of KP back in May 2021.

It was stated by Syed Saadat Jahan, Deputy Director Communication, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission (KPIC) while sharing his insights in a provincial consultation 'Progress on 2% Admission Quota for Minorities in Education' collaboratively arranged by National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and a non-governmental organization Blue Veins on Wednesday here at a local hotel in Peshawar.

Vice Chancellors and representatives of all the public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and members of minority communities participated in the said consultation.

Syed Saadat Jahan said that KPIC believes and promoting equal citizenship through ensuring their access to information held by public entities. He also quoted that KPIC has already trained Public Information Officers (PIOs) of all the public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on the disclosure of public information.



PESHAWAR: Members of Contractor Association hold placards during a protest. — F.P. photo

Substandard chips, rotten edible items discarded

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority on Wednesday recovered and discarded 700 kg substandard chips and over 100 kg rotten food items in Peshawar and Nowshera.

The Food Authority while taking notice of public complaints received in an online public hearing conducted operations in Peshawar and Nowshera, said the spokesperson of Food Authority.

A team of the authority conducted raiders on Chips factories located on Charsadda Road here and found use of non-food grade colour and in the preparation of chips.

The team confiscated and discarded more than 700 kg of substandard chips.

Similarly, during operations in different markets of Tehsil Pabbi, district Nowshera the teams inspected pop and chips wholesalers, chicken and kebab shops, and chips and spices factories.

800 grams of non-food grade color, 5 kg of mislabeled packing material and 50 kg of substandard garlic were seized from a spices factory.

Some 40 kg of substandard chicken meat was seized from three chicken shops and discarded, said the spokesman adding that heavy fines were imposed for violation of hygiene rules, while notices for improvement were issued to several businesses.

DG Food Authority Shafiullah Khan warned that strict disciplinary action would be taken against the elements involved in adulteration.

He urged the general public to inform the Food Authority officials about the food factories established in their surroundings so that action could be taken.



PESHAWAR: Provincial presiding of PPP Syed Zahir Ali Shah addressing a public gathering. — F.P. photo

'PTI facing consequences of making wrong entry'

PESHAWAR (INP): Central President of Awami National Party (ANP), Amir Haider Khan Hoti has said that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders were being expelled of same track from which they made an entry into country's politics.

In a statement issued here on Wednesday, he said that PTI was facing the consequences of making a 'wrong entry'.

Amir Haider Hoti said that three categories of people including sincere PTI activists standing with party founder, those who expect betterment in coming days and the people identity was questionable for sincere activists remain with PTI at present.

The ANP leader said, "We will have to see on whose directives the third type of people joined PTI and for whose directives they are waiting for."

PMLNLF condoles departure of ex-MNA F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) Lawyers Forum (PMLNLF) expressed their heartfelt condolences on the death of former member of National Assembly Ibrahim Paracha, on Wednesday.

In a joint statement by PMLN Lawyers Forum president Kifayatullah Khan GS Akbar Yousaf Khalil, Senior Vice President Farhad Ali and Secretary Information Saleem Shah Hoti Advocates stated that the late Ibrahim Paracha, who had been bed-ridden for a long time.

He was a dynamic and intelligent political leader who rendered great services to the party and the people. They said that Ibrahim Paracha remained active for the political and human rights of the people despite his severe illness.

PMLN Lawyers Forum added that the deceased was not a personality but the name of a movement who fought bravely and courageously on every front but never deviated from hid stand.

His struggle and services are a beacon for political workers and people. PMLN stalwarts said that it is not easy to fill the void left by his death.

They expressed heartfelt sympathy with the family members of the deceased and prayed that Allah may bless the deceased and give courage to bear this loss with fortitude.

KPCTA announces art competition

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) has announced to organize art competition for students of merged districts studying in universities of the province.

The students of newly merged districts would participate in the competition that comprises three categories including stage drama, culture and art exhibition and traditional attan.

Interested students should apply for the competition by 10th January with proper documents including domicile or national identity cards of their respective area.

The 39 universities of merged districts have been send invitation of the competition that was aimed to provide students of these areas to promote their culture and traditions.

Cold, dry weather likely in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The Meteorological Department on Wednesday forecast cold and dry during next 24 to 48 hours for most of the districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

However there were chances of drizzling, light snowfall in Chitral and surrounding areas and rain with strong cold winds in Swat, Battagram, Mansehra and Haripur, and hills in the upper areas.



PESHAWAR: DIG Counter Terrorism Department Imran Shahid addressing a press conference at Central Police Headquarters.

98 terrorism suspects rejected by courts: DIG

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: In a crucial press conference held at the Central Police Headquarters in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the DIG Counter Terrorism Department (CTD), Imran Shahid, revealed that 98 suspects involved in terrorism-related incidents have been rejected by the courts in the province. During the conference, the DIG CTD said the improved investigation procedures, extending custody periods from 7 to 40 days, to ensure the thorough examination of cases. Highlighting the surge in

terrorism incidents in southern districts, DIG Imran noted the rising challenges and the demand for extortion in various business sectors, particularly in the Bajaur region, where businesses are facing demands totaling in the millions. This year alone, 1093 FIRs were registered for terrorism-related incidents.

While acknowledging a shortage of officers in the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD), DIG Imran Shahid assured that FIRs and investigative processes are being handled meticulously. The southern districts, being border regions, face heightened incidents of terrorism, requiring a robust response.

Imran Shahid attributed a decline in terrorism and crime rates to the expulsion of illegal Afghan immigrants, stating that since their evacuation, instances of terrorism and crime have significantly decreased.

He revealed that in the past year, 2095 cases against terrorists were filed, resulting in the arrest of 726 individuals.

Security forces also neutralized 255 terrorists in confrontations, while specialized teams equipped with modern weaponry have been established in each region.

In the ongoing fight against terrorism, the province witnessed the sacrifice of 184 officers and personnel, with 408 sustaining injuries.

The government, in its commitment to combat terrorism, has provided law enforcement agencies with advanced equipment for tracking suspects.

The DIG CTD expressed optimism, stating that in the coming years, with the aid of new tools and strategies, the province will witness a substantial reduction in terrorism incidents.

Certificates awarded to IT team for best performance

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Traffic Officer Dr. Zahidullah awarded certificates of appreciation to the IT team for their excellent performance.

Chief Traffic Officer Dr. Zahidullah said that the IT team is the backbone of City Traffic Police Peshawar and the system can be further improved only by using modern technology.

He further said the activation of trackers, e-challan, Google map, radio and social media in the vehicles has clearly reduced the problems faced by the citizens, while transparency has also been ensured, for which the IT team gave special praise.

He said that our effort is to bring more revolutionary changes in City Traffic Police Peshawar so that City Traffic Police Peshawar can be presented as a model for the entire province.

He further added that other departments of City Traffic Police Peshawar should also improve their performance by imitating IT so that its fruits can be shared with the people.

He directed the IT team to bring more reforms in City Traffic Police Peshawar and to create convenience for the citizens.

He said that the available



resources are being utilized to ensure public and no negligence will be tolerated in this regard.

Qudratullah completes Ph.D degree F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Professor Qudratullah Khan Khattak has completed his Ph.D degree from Qurtaba University, Peshawar. He has successfully defended his thesis entitled "Research and Critical Review of Psychological Dimensions in 21st Century Urdu Fiction 2001-2018". Dr. Sattar Khan Khattak and Dr. Syed Zubair Shah were supervisor and Co-supervisor while external examiner was Dr. Sohail Ahmed of his thesis. Prof. Qudratullah Khattak satisfactorily answered all the questions in his Ph.D. Public



Minister inspects cleanliness drive

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Local Government Amir Durrani on Thursday visited provincial metropolis and inspected ongoing cleanliness campaign.

He was accompanied by Chief Executive Officer Water and Sanitation Services Peshawar, Hassan Nasir, Chief Municipal Officer, Haji Irshad, General Manager Operations, Tariq Aziz and concerned staff.

Caretaker Minister visited Haji Camp Adda, Gulbahar, Gunj, Kohati, Ameen Colony, Civil Quarters and Kotla Mohsin Khan and inspected ongoing cleanliness campaign.

Later, he chaired a meeting that was also attended



by representatives of WSSP union. Addressing the meeting, he said that finance department has been directed to release funds for salaries of employees.

He also directed WSSP

Scrutiny of nominations papers continued in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PESHAWAR (APP): The scrutiny of nomination papers for the upcoming general elections continued in the province wherein scrutiny of 58 papers for the National Assembly and provincial assembly was completed.

According to the spokesman of the provincial election commission so far, scrutiny of 32 papers has been completed on the specific seats of women in the Provincial Assembly.

Similarly, scrutiny of 26 candidates for the National Assembly and minority

reserved seats has been completed.

He said that 40 candidates were summoned for the seats of the Provincial Assembly and, 30 for the national and minority seats on Wednesday.

He said those candidates who want to change the date of scrutiny would be accommodated adding that due to Christmas the candidates for minority seats were given relaxation in scrutiny on 25th and 26th December.

Nomination papers of former MPA Javed Nasim

for NA 32 Peshawar accepted:

The nomination papers of former Member Provincial Assembly (MPA), Javed Nasim Khan for national assembly (NA-32) constituency Peshawar was accepted by the respective returning officer here on Wednesday.

Talking to media persons, he said resolution of unemployment, poverty, illiteracy and pollution would be top priority if voted to power.

He said Pakistan was our country and it has all

resources if properly utilized can change destiny of people.

Javed Nasim said nomination paper of his son Wahab Javed for PK-83 were also accepted.

Besides Javed Nasim, former Federal Minister and ANP leader Ghulam Ahmed Bilour and PTI Sher Afzal Khan have also filed nomination papers for NA-32 Peshawar.

Javed Nasim served as MPA during 2013-18 and raised strong voice for rights of people of Peshawar.



In brief

Dr. Saveera launches drive F.P. Report

BUNER: The PPPP district chapter president observed Shaheed Benazir Bhutto 16th death anniversary at the residence of PDF President Dr.Imran Shah in Amnawar on Wednesday. The Dr.Savera Parkash candidate for PK 25 Buner general seat launched her elections campaign addressing the gathering. The speakers district president Saifullah Khan Sher Zaman Khan Inam Khan Bakhti Mohamad Dr.Imran Shah Akbar Ali Bacha candidates PK 25 Dr.Savera PK 26 Yousaf Ali Khan PK 27 Shamsheer Bacha NA 10 Sherzaman Khan addressed. The speakers praised Bhutto family for rendering life sacrifices for the mother land Islam and masses as they were the brain behind the atomic status Islamic conference unanimous constitution empowerment masses democracy in the country CNIC Passport foreign jobs and world wide respect Pakistan. They were united to contest elections from the party platform and to enter into alliance and seat adjustment as per the decisions of the party high ups at provincial level for which they had already constitute a committee to negotiate. They repeated the party leadership candidates and workers would accept any decisions come from party top bosses.

DMO oath taking ceremony held F.P. Report

MARDAN: In the context of holding General Elections 2024 in a transparent manner, the oath taking ceremony of the District Monitoring Officer and Monitoring officers was held at the DC office here today. Deputy Commissioner who was District Returning Officer who was District Returning Officer Muhammad Fayyaz Khan Sherpao administered the oath to the District Monitoring Officer who is Additional Commissioner Naem Akhtar and all Monitoring officers. Speaking on the occasion Deputy Commissioner District Returning Officer said that Transparent Conduct of General Elections 2024 is our national responsibility, which must be carried out honestly within the constitutional framework. He urged the monitoring officers to perform their duty with dedication and make it sure that the codes of conduct issued by ECP and Home Department is implemented in letter and spirit.

Cut in power outage demanded F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Jamaat-i-Islami candidate for PK 14 and former MNA Sahibzada Yaqub Khan along with party activists, on Wednesday met the Pesco executive engineer at his office and informed him about the consumers' grievances regarding the unscheduled and prolonged power outage. The former lawmaker said that the duration of power outages in the Lajbok Dara area had increased to over 16 hours daily. He said Pesco should take actions against the defaulters but should not punish the whole community. The XEN informed the delegation that the company had over Rs 20 million arrears on the basis of which the power supply was suspended. He said the area elders should cooperate with the Pesco in its recovery, so that the duration of power outage could be decreased. Meanwhile, the IJT, a students' wing of the Jamaat-i-Islami on Wednesday set up a protest camp against a school administration for stopping it to start a free tuition class at the government high school Balambhat during winter vacations.



ABBOTTABAD: KP Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah inaugurating Ayub College of Dentistry.

Benazir Bhutto: Legacy of courage and grace

Sumeta Afzal Syed

FEW names have managed to evoke the unique blend of admiration and sorrow in history as Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. Woven with struggles, monumental accomplishments, and an unwavering commitment to democracy and women's empowerment, her entire narrative transcends the boundaries of time and emotion.

Benazir Bhutto's journey began against the backdrop of a politically charged Pakistan. As the daughter of former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, she had inherited a legacy intertwined with triumphs and trials. May it be the thrills of her formative years to the riveting days of early political activism, her charisma and determination set her on a path that would redefine the role of women in Pakistani politics.

Benazir's title, "Daughter of the East," was not merely a phrase coined for the sake of optics. It encapsulated her transformative impact on the political landscape. She shattered gender norms; ascending to become the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1988. Her leadership heralded a new era, inspiring women across the nation to believe in their ability to effect

change.

Champion of democracy: Amidst the tumultuous political climate, Benazir Bhutto remained a staunch advocate for democracy. Bhutto slogan, "Roti, Kapra, aur Makan" symbolized her commitment to addressing the basic needs of the common citizen. She navigated the challenges of governance with a resolve that resonated beyond borders, earning her international acclaim as a champion of democratic values. Benazir understood the transformative power of empowering women.

Her initiatives aimed at dismantling discriminatory laws, coupled with her rallying cry, "Women's rights are human rights," showcased a leader unafraid to challenge societal norms. She envisioned a Pakistan where women played pivotal roles in shaping the nation's destiny. Beyond the confines of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto emerged as a global stateswoman. Her nuanced understanding of international dynamics and commitment to peace earned her the title, "The Iron Lady of Pakistan." In diplomatic circles, she was respected for her ability to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes and advocate for regional stability.

Tragedy strikes: December 27, 2007, marked the cataclysmic moment when a cowardly

act of terrorism claimed Benazir Bhutto's life. The nation plunged into an abyss of grief, and the world mourned the loss of a leader whose presence transcended politics. The day Benazir Bhutto was assassinated remains etched as the saddest in Pakistan's history. The outpouring of sorrow echoed the profound impact she had on the collective heart of the nation. It was a loss not only of a political leader but of a beacon of hope, a voice for the voiceless, and a symbol of resilience.

Legacy of hope and inspiration: Benazir Bhutto's legacy endures, a testament to the resilience of the human spirit. Her life, her struggles, and her accomplishments serve as a source of inspiration for those who continue the fight for democracy and women's empowerment. In the echoes of her slogans and the silent tears shed on that fateful day, there lies a call to uphold the ideals she championed.

As we remember Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, let us not merely mourn her tragic end but celebrate the enduring spirit of courage, grace, and unwavering commitment she embodied. May her legacy continue to guide us towards a future where the principles she stood for become the cornerstone of a progressive and compassionate Pakistan.

‘Digital Connect’ project inaugurated in Bajaur

F.P. Report

KHAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Newly Merged Districts Affairs, Industries, Commerce and Technical Education Dr. Aamer Abdullah on Wednesday, paid a day long visit to District Bajaur wherein, he formally inaugurated the IT skills training center at Qadafi, Tehsil Utmankhel, established under the mega IT project of "Digital Connect", started by the provincial government, for the youth of merged districts.

During his visit, the caretaker minister also took briefings at district headquarter Khar, from the administration, police and line departments on the overall situation of administrative affairs, law and order and development process in the district. On this occasion, he also interacted with local journalist community and the president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Deputy Commissioner Bajaur Anwar Haq, District Police Officer Kashif Zulfiqar, Additional Deputy Commissioner Hamza Zahoor and other officers

were also present on the occasion.

During inaugurating the IT training center established under the KP Information Technology Board, the caretaker minister in his address to the ceremony comprised by training participant students and local elders, said that the youth in the merged districts will be given IT skills training and an opportunity for them to work in the relevant sector avenues. He added that such centers are being set up in seven districts as these districts remained behind other regions in digital literacy.

He further said that this initiative has been started from Bajaur while such training center is also ready in Orakzai and this project will be spread in other merged districts in which IT training will be given according to the needs of the market. Similarly separate arrangements have been made for women in these IT hubs, the minister told.

He said that in the project, not only the facility of the training center has been provided, but facilitation for the youth under training to work together or create a project

and an ICT community center to fulfill the ICT needs of these youth free of charge will also be available here. Similarly, monthly stipend will also be given to these trainees.

The caretaker minister expressed that this center will be the main source for the youth of Bajaur to start their own online and IT businesses and transfer their skills to others. Earlier, on his way to Bajaur, the caretaker minister inspected the under-construction road from Dhand Sar to Pir Qila in Mohmand district and directed that special care should be taken in quality of the construction of the road as it is the main highway of this area.

While getting briefings regarding district administration, police and other sectoral departments the minister gave ten days deadline to the district administration for completion the all steps and codal formalities, required for the establishment of small industrial estate in Bajaur. He said that the issue of release of funds for the staff of outsourced hospitals in the merged districts is being resolved.



KHAR: KP Caretaker Minister for merged districts, Dr. Amir Abdullah inaugurating 'digital connect' projects in Bajaur.

Police arrests court's bailiff for alleged kidnapping

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Police recovered abducted child and handed over to the heirs. The accused kidnapper was arrested along with the weapons, the items used in the importation were also recovered. The arrested accused was demanding a ransom of 50 crores from the parents of the abducted child for the recovery of the abducted child.

According to the details, a report of the abduction of Fahad Ali, son of Fawad Ali, age 9 years, resident of Garoshah, from their area a week ago for ransom, was reported. After receiving the information against the unknown accused, which the Police officers of RPO Mardan Region Muhammad Sulaiman and DPO Najib ur Rahman took strict notice, SP Investigation Muhammad Suleman, SP Sadar Khalid Khan, under DSP TakhtBhai Ashiq Hussain, SHO Noor Muhammad. A special team consisting of other investigating officers was formed and given the task of safely recovering the kidnapped child and arresting the accused.

The police recovered the kidnapped child and got access to the accused Sangen Shaha resident of Miraj Colony. The weapon M-16 was recovered from the accused and the accused also gave the name of his co-accused Shahryar, the name of his partner, who will be arrested soon. The arrested accused Sangen Shah is a civil servant bailiff in the local court who is also a close relative of the kidnapped child.

Meanwhile, as a result of public complaints regarding low gas pressure to domestic consumers, SNGPL officials Mardan were called to explain and resolve the problem of low gas pressure.

Under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Fayaz Khan, an important meeting regarding low pressure of gas to domestic consumers was held in Mardan district. The Deputy Commissioner inquired from SNGPL officials about the reasons for low gas pressure to domestic consumers Akif Noor, Regional Manager and Rehan Khan, Deputy Chief Engineer SNGPL Mardan gave a detailed briefing to the Deputy Commissioner that new gas pipeline has been laid at several places where there were complaints of low gas pressure.

Four members of Saifullah family to contest for elections

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Saifullah brothers have expedited their efforts to muster support of political heavyweights and influential elders for the Feb 8 polls. Former federal ministers Salim Saifullah Khan and Anwar Saifullah Khan, former Senator Osman Saifullah Khan and former provincial minister Dr Hisham Inamullah Khan are in the electoral race for the sole national assembly and three provincial assembly constituencies in Lakki Marwat district.

After submission of nominations, the scrutiny process is underway and the Saifullah brothers have succeeded in gathering the support of several political elite and notables of the district. In a recent development, two heavyweights including Dr Sarfraz Meenakhel and Barrister Abid Nawaz met Salim Saifullah Khan at his residence and discussed with him the prevailing political and electoral scenario of the district.

A source privy to the meeting told media that the Meenakhels joined Marwat Qaumi Ittehad, a group formed by influential Saifullah to bring various clans' elders and political elite on a single platform to win coming general elections. Dr Sarfraz, a former tehsil naib nazim and son of

former city nazim Dr Khalid Latif is the divisional general secretary of Pakistan People's Party. His cousin Barrister Abid Nawaz also remained active in politics in the past. Both belong to an influential Meenakhel tribe and are popular among youths. Their family has a strong influence in Lakki city and parts of the district.

The source said that the elders of the Meenakhel tribe assured the Saifullahs that their family and supporters would support them in the upcoming general elections. Former minister Salim Saifullah Khan visited Dr Khalid Latif and his son Dr Sarfraz at their residence in Lakki city. On the occasion, he told journalists that his family had united the elders and clans' chiefs on a single platform under the banner of Marwat Qaumi Ittehad. He said that a decision regarding contesting candidates for national and provincial assembly seats would be made soon with consultation of allies and MQI leaders.

Saifullah asked the people, especially women and youths to come out of their houses on Feb 8 to cast votes and play a role in transforming the backwardness of the district into development. He said that the support of the Sikandarhel clan would pave the way for their win

in coming elections.

Meanwhile, former federal minister and PPP leader Anwar Saifullah Khan addressed a gathering at the hujra of PPP district president Iqbal Hussain Advocate in Mamakhel area of Naurang town. He also met Haji Abdul Qadus Khan Wazir, a noted social figure in the Nar Khaisore area and discussed with him the forthcoming Feb 8 polls.

His son and former Senator Osman Saifullah Khan and area elders accompanied him. Saifullah requested Wazir to support candidates affiliated with Marwat Qaumi Ittehad in the coming elections. Addressing a gathering at the hujra of the PPP leader, the former minister said that to cast a vote was the national duty and the constituents should visit the polling stations on polling day to use their right of franchise. He asked the people to bring a change of prosperity and a bright future with the power of vote.

"People must elect honest and talented representatives if they want to transform backwardness of the district into sustainable development", he added. He said that his family was fully capable of bringing the area on track to progress and end deprivations of local residents.

JI threatens to protest against load shedding

F.P. Report

TIMERGARA: Jamaat-e-Islami has threatened to protest against unannounced and cruel load-shedding of electricity in Union Council Lajbok of Tehsil Balambhat led by ex-MNA and candidate of Jamaat-e-Islami from PK-14 Sahibzada Muhammad Yaqub from Axin WAPDA.

In this regard, a representative delegation, former member of the National Assembly and nominated candidate from PK-14, Sahibzada Muhammad Yaqub Khan, former Tehsil Nazim Balambhat, Imranuddin Advocate and other leaders, Exeive Wapda Muhammad Jibraeel visited his office. He also said that there is 19

hours of electricity load shedding in Lajbok, which has thousands of people, due to which the people are facing severe problems and the patience of the people has run out.

Former MNA said that due to illegal and cruel load-shedding of electricity, the business life is also very affected and the region is like Karbala. On this occasion, Axin Muhammad Jibraeel told the delegation that there are more than two crore arrears in the Union Council Lajbok, on the basis of which electricity load-shedding is being done, support so that the duration of electricity load-shedding can be reduced.

Meanwhile, in the light of the orders of the provincial government, under the

supervision of "Kushal Program" and on the special instructions of District Food Controller Lower Dir Kashif Ehsan, Riyaz Ahmed (Assistant Food Controller) and Shabir Ahmed (Food Inspector) visited the shopkeepers located at Main Timergara base. While taking action against, fishmongers, bakers and various hotels were checked.

Notices under the Food Act were issued against several shopkeepers for not displaying the official price list, selling bread at low weight and high rate and not taking care of cleanliness. The concerned accused will be produced in the court of the Special Price Control Magistrate, District Dir Lower.



NEWSHERA: KP Caretaker Minister for Information Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kaka Khel offering dua at the Mausoleum of Hazrat Kaka Sahib.

150 scholarships granted to students on eve of convocation

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Numania School has made history by hosting the first-ever annual convocation of the Numania Country Day School System in Swat. The event witnessed the participation of professors from the United States and Canada, on Wednesday.

During the convention, 150 scholarships were announced for students and staff of the Kanju and Charbagh campuses, and the launch of a campus in Canada was also announced. The convocation, held at the main city of Mingora, featured Chief Guest Dr. Ihsan Ali Khan, former Vice-Chancellor and renowned education expert, Mumtaz Ahmed Sadiq, Chief Editor of Azadi Group of Newspapers, Syed Abdullah Shah, Director of Tippu Shaheed School and College, ADEO Fazal Khaliq, Dr. Kausar Ali Shah, Chief Security Officer of the Chief Minister, Amjad Khan, and other guests

from Swat.

During the ceremony, awards, certificates, and cash prizes were presented to position holders among students. Parents also actively participated in the grand event. Students presented speeches, songs, and other performances on the tableaux, receiving applause and appreciation from the audience.

Dr. Ihsan Ali Khan emphasized the importance of promoting higher education for the country's development and prosperity. He encouraged the audience to initiate actions themselves rather than waiting for others. The Chief Guest expressed satisfaction over the talent and quality education provided by Numania School. Chief guest Mumtaz Ahmed Sadiq highlighted the need for purposeful education to foster the country's progress and appreciated the step taken by Dr. Kausar Ali Shah.

Amjad Khan, the Chief Security Officer to CM shared his experiences and efforts in constructing 11 mosques,

nine universities, and eleven wonder homes during his tenure. He stressed the importance of education in Swat and lauded Numania School for contributing to the bright future of the region. The event also featured a speech by Syed Abdullah Shah, who mentioned the partnership with Dr. Kausar Ali Shah. He commended the talent of students and their potential to contribute to society's development and the establishment of an ideal society.

Dr. Kausar Ali Shah shared a poignant personal story of overcoming challenges due to being an orphan. He acknowledged the support from Syed Abdullah Shah, Dr. Ihsan Ali Khan, Allama Raza Khan, and others in his educational journey. In conclusion, the convention successfully celebrated the achievements and hard work of the students at Numania School and highlighted the importance of purposeful education in building a prosperous future for Swat and the nation.



Will rebuild Gaza: Death, displacement and a mother’s 2024 hope

GAZA: Rania Sakallah is holding onto happy memories. Shortly before the war started, she and her family enjoyed a day out together at Sheikh Ijlin beach in the south of Gaza City. They stopped at the Tropical Restaurant to eat chicken pizza. Her twin son and daughter were about to embark on their final year of studies at Al-Azhar University. There was a lot to look forward to.

Now they face the bleakest of starts to 2024. Huddled in a freezing room in the southern border town of Rafah with other family members - 11 people in total - the future resembles a gaping void and the Gaza City home Rania and her husband Hazem had built together possibly reduced to rubble. "I don't sleep all night," says Rania. "I lie awake all night thinking: What are we going to do? Where are we going to go?"

Rania and Hazem, an accountant with the Palestinian Authority, decided to flee Gaza City on October 13, leaving behind their four-bedroom home. "Because we were so scared, we didn't take much," says Rania. Carrying a few bags with clothes and tinned food, they walked the 33km (20 miles) to Khan Younis, taking turns to push Rania's 75-year-old mother, who had recently suffered a stroke, in her wheelchair. For about 50 days, they stayed in Khan Younis, sleeping on the floor of Rania's brother's shop as Israel launched some of the most intense air attacks of the entire war on the Israeli-declared "safe zone" in early



December. Chased by bombs, they hit the road again, joined by the families of Rania's brother and sister, scrambling for accommodation in Rafah, just as the heavy winter rains began.

Rania and her family are far from alone. According to the United Nations, half of Gaza's population of 2.2 million is now crammed into schools, public buildings and makeshift camps in Rafah and near-by al-Mawasi. The most desperate are in the streets. Although southern Gaza is supposed to be the enclave's last refuge, Israel continues to pound the area. With aid trucks only able to bring in scant supplies, disease and extreme deprivation are rife, says Rania. Talking on the phone to Al Jazeera, Rania described the battle for survival in Rafah. "Life has tired us out. It has become impossible," she says. "It's not just me. It's like a million Palestinians just like me. And

some of them are in an even worse situation." More than half a million people in Gaza have run out of food and are now at immediate risk of starvation, UN agencies said last week. Deliveries of food, water and medicine were stopped at the start of the war, with November's pause in fighting allowing more aid to enter via Rafah - still, only 10 percent of food needs are being met right now.

In Rafah, life revolves around getting enough food and water to survive another day. "When we want to make bread, the first challenge is finding the flour," says Rania. Even that basic ingredient has become scarce, with family members queuing for hours at a school run by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency), which is sheltering thousands and distributing some food aid. Sometimes people leave empty-handed. It is still possible to buy food, she says. But with supplies run-

ning low, prices of basics like fava beans, chickpeas and cheese have skyrocketed, rendering them inaccessible for most people. Once food has been secured, members of the family have to search for firewood outside, as fuel and gas are now impossible to get hold of. Rania uses an old oil drum as a stove to cook. Water only comes on tap once a week, but is sometimes too dirty even to shower, let alone drink. The mixture of poor nutrition and dirty water is making people ill, sparking outbreaks of diarrhoea, gastroenteritis and skin infections. Rania does not leave the house without a face mask. As the weather gets colder, catching flu or respiratory infections can mean death. Many of those sheltering at the UNRWA school where she queues for food are ill, she says. There is a room in the school offering medical assistance but it is unable to provide any treatment beyond paracetamol. "You're not going to get help if you go there," she says. But going to the hospital is not an option either. Right now, Rafah's Abu Yusef al-Najjar Hospital and the Kuwaiti Hospital are operating beyond capacity on barely any medical supplies. Fuel supplies needed for generators, cut off at the beginning of the war, are still heavily restricted.

Overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions have spawned a whole new set of health hazards. On average, 160 people sheltering in UNRWA schools share a single toilet and there is one shower unit for

every 700 people, according to UN figures. Doctors report that many are infected with parasites. Infectious dysentery, causing vomiting and diarrhoea, is now widespread. Cases of contagious illnesses like chickenpox, measles and viral meningitis are also rising fast. "I'm trying for there not to be illness in my family," says Rania. "We're thinking we could be losing one of our loved ones at any moment and we are scared." With no electricity, Rania's phone call with Al Jazeera required careful preparation, involving a one-hour walk to the nearest UNRWA school to charge her phone. Once a connection was established, it repeatedly threatened to drop. This is nothing unusual these days - sometimes it takes Rania dozens of attempts to reach her ailing mother and father, who joined the family in Deir el-Balah when she left for Rafah, Rania tells Al Jazeera.

Right now, the internet is usually only available for 10 minutes at a time. Rania's children, Rana and Mohammed, both 22 years old, feel like their dreams have been shattered, their world now reduced to a single room in a war zone, with no means of communicating properly with the outside world. Rana was about to qualify as a dentist, while Mohammed was studying software engineering. "I tell them to find other places where they can finish outside Gaza but they ask how they can do this. There's not even any internet for them to look for universities," Rania says. In any case, she wonders if they

would be accepted anywhere without a certificate. Gaza has endured repeated phone and internet blackouts due to strikes on telecommunications infrastructure, deliberate shutdowns and power cuts since the war started on October 7. Under blockade for the past 16 years, the enclave has often been compared with an open-air prison, even before the war.

On the cusp of the New Year, Rania, Hazem and the twins are praying for peace. Right now, the only certainty Rania has is that she will not leave Gaza - at a time many Israeli politicians have suggested that the people of Gaza move into Egypt's Sinai desert. Egypt has rejected the proposal. Rania's sister, Aya, also sharing the room in Rafah, stuck it out for as long as she could in Gaza City, eventually forced to leave with her husband and their son, all holding white flags and their identity papers aloft so they would not be shot as they walked south. One uncle who stayed behind was killed by the bombs.

Rania does not even know if the family home, with her beloved garden full of lemon, mango and guava trees, is still standing. But, she says, she is prepared to live in a tent amid the rubble of the destroyed city. "Every day my kids ask me when we are going to go back to Gaza City," she says. "Why would we go to Sinai? Sinai is a desert." "If Gaza too is a desert, I'd rather return there and rebuild it." — Aljazeera

Sudan war: Heavy hearts for artists painting pain of conflict

KHARTOUM (BBC): Artist Galal Yousif managed to flee Sudan when conflict erupted earlier this year with only a few belongings stuffed into a small backpack. The turmoil and bag, in which he had crammed his passport, two pairs of jeans, five shirts and a car key, is depicted in his painting Man With a Heavy Heart.

He first created the work as a mural in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, which he reached after a harrowing journey in June. Having now found temporary refuge in Kenya, he has recreated it on canvas - a striking image of a man with a hand over his heart, surrounded by large circular red dots resembling gunshot wounds. A moon shines behind his head and lying on the ground is the backpack - symbolising all that Sudanese people have lost in the eight-month conflict. He had initially packed his car key thinking he would be back home soon.

"I paint my pain," he tells me in his home-cum-studio in Kenya's capital, Nairobi. As an artist, he says his mission is to turn his personal experience into a collective visual narrative, offering a powerful glimpse into the "many people lost" in Sudan and the heavy toil of a "useless war". The conflict began in April when two generals in the ruling junta fell out - pitting the army against the formidable paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The fighting has since forced around seven million people from their homes, the

UN says.

Yousif heard the first signs of war while working late towards the end of Ramadan in his studio near the presidential palace in Sudan's capital. In the early hours of 15 April, he noticed troops massing nearby. Sensing something was about to happen, he decided to drive back to his family's home in the north of Khartoum - reaching there just before dawn after which the fighting started. "Chaotic days" followed, he says, as there was no water, electricity and little food - and he struggled to care for his elderly aunt and uncle and other relatives. Every night he heard the sounds of planes and gunfire and could see large plumes of smoke descending over the city - prompting him to take the decision to leave. He hoped it was a temporary move - managing to get bus tickets for all the family to head to their ancestral home in the city of Rufa'ah - around 150km (93 miles) south-east of Khartoum.

As the situation deteriorated and with his relatives too frail to travel further, Yousif realised that as a well-established artist he could do more to support them if he headed to Nairobi. So he set off with his backpack on public transport to Metemma, a town on the border with Ethiopia where thousands of people were heading. A month later he managed to get a flight from Addis Ababa to Nairobi where he has found a community of other Sudanese artists who had also fled the once-thriving art scene in

Khartoum. According to Khartoum art curator Rahiem Shadad, around 35 of these artists are now in the Kenyan capital, including other big names like Bakri Moaz, Yasir Algari and Hani Khalil Jawdat. Others have settled in Cairo. Mr Shadad, who owns Khartoum's Downtown Gallery, representing many esteemed contemporary artists, tells the BBC his art space now lies in ruins. A vast amount of artwork, including at least 165 framed paintings and 300 other pieces belonging to 60 artists, has also been lost, he says. In recent months, the curator, who is also in Nairobi, has spearheaded numerous exhibitions of Sudanese art in the city.

He recently set up The Rest, a space for those in exile to live and work, with support from Nairobi's GoDown Arts Centre. Despite this warm welcome by Kenya's art community, life is difficult for the Sudanese artists because of issues around asylum, lack of documents and their lack of substantial incomes. "Some of these artists came with just \$100 [€80] in their pockets," Mr Shadad says. Many of them are also deeply traumatised by their experience and losing their entire catalogue. "Emotionally and spiritually, I am not OK," artist Tibian Bahari tells me about not being able to return to Sudan where her father and sister still live. Her aim is to keep Sudan - a "sacred and magical land" - alive through her work, which currently centres around depicting the coun-

try's topography. This determination comes down to her clothing. "I always wear my jalabiya every morning," she says, referring to the ankle-length, loose-fitting robe with wide long sleeves worn by both men and women in Sudan. She feels a deep sense of "responsibility" to share "truthfully" her journey and map out the art of displacement and especially keep a space for Sudan's women artists. Many artists were part of the civilian protest movement that prompted the overthrow of Sudan's long-time leader Omar al-Bashir in 2019. Afterwards, the army initially entered into a power-sharing arrangement with civilian groups, before seizing power and the decent into war.

These artists feel their dreams have been crushed by the conflict - and that the world has forgotten them in the wake of the conflict in Gaza. In the last week, fighting has escalated. Yousif's family has been under attack by the RSF in Rufa'ah. Before the phone lines went down, he heard that his family, including his aunt, uncle and some of his siblings, had been forced out of their home by the RSF. They had managed to seek shelter at his grandmother's house in city centre. "For the second time, my family has lost our home, first in Khartoum and now in Rufa'ah," he says, describing a city under siege. "Nobody can go out," he says, adding that they are virtually prisoners unable to move around or flee. Like his painting, Yousif feels his heart continues to bleed.

Houthi say they carried out drone attack on Israeli port

SANAA: Yemen's Houthi rebel group has said that it carried out drone attacks targeting the Israeli port city of Eilat, as well as a commercial vessel in the Red Sea, as the Iran-backed group steps up attacks that it says are a means of pressuring Israel to end its war in Gaza.

Speaking, Houthi military spokesman Yahya Sarea said the group conducted drone attacks on Eilat and "other areas in occupied Palestine". Sarea said the group also launched missiles at an MSC United vessel in the Red Sea after it rejected three warning calls.

MSC Mediterranean confirmed that MSC United VIII, which was en route from King Abdullah port in Saudi Arabia to Karachi, Pakistan, came under attack but that the crew was safe. The shipping company says it is conducting an assessment and reported the incident to the US-led naval coalition in the Red Sea. The statement comes several hours after a British maritime group said it received reports of an incident involving a vessel off the coast of Yemen, saying that drones were sighted and an explosion was heard. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) said the incident took place about 60 nautical miles (111km) outside of Yemen's Hodeidah port.

"A commercial shipping vessel came under attack by two suicide drones," Al Jazeera correspondent Resul Serdar reported from Djibouti, located in east Africa across the sea from Yemen. "It [UKMTO] says the drones didn't cause any damage on the ship. The ship is now safe, continuing its voyage, and they are in constant communication with the naval coalition formed by the United States."

The incidents come amid high tensions in the Red Sea, where the Houthis have been targeting commercial vessels in solidarity with the Palestinians for weeks. The UKMTO report followed two other explosions that struck a vessel off of Hodeidah. The US has said the Houthis, who control wide swaths of northern Yemen, have launched more than 100 drone and missile attacks, targeting 10 commercial shipping vessels with links to dozens of countries. The group has also launched missiles and drones at Israel, which has unleashed a devastating assault on the besieged enclave of Gaza where it is battling the Palestinian armed group Hamas following a deadly assault on southern Israel on October 7. Israel's assault on Gaza has killed more than 20,000 Palestinians and sparked concerns about the possibility of a wider regional escalation. The Houthi raids in the Red Sea have caused significant disruptions along the vital shipping route, causing some companies to reroute their vessels at considerable expense. — Aljazeera

Will US election save TikTok from near-death?

WASHINGTON: TikTok is a lot like the young people on its platform - difficult to control. Earlier this year, the fate of the short-form video app in the United States hung by a thread as several states looked to imposed restrictions on its use, and one state, Montana, legislated on a ban. And yet, TikTok seems set to enter 2024 on solid footing. After all, which political party would want to start an election year banning a platform on which 150 million mostly-young Americans spend their lives?

The app survived a year in which its CEO was subjected to a five-hour US Congressional grilling in March, the app was banned on federal government devices, and lawmakers called for a broader ban on the app, calling it "spyware" and "digital fentanyl". While the obstacles in its path since then may not have vanished, they seem to have diminished in size. A federal judge blocked a ban on TikTok in Montana at the end of November, a PEW survey released earlier this month showed that fewer Americans supported a federal TikTok ban than they did earlier in the year, and Congress won't take up legislation addressing foreign-owned apps like TikTok this year.

While no astrologers were consulted for this piece, it's fair to say the stars seem to have aligned in favour of TikTok as it enters 2024. The new year is unprecedented, with elections in over 70 coun-

tries, including the US.

"This is the first time TikTok will be front and centre as an app for political news and views in an election year, a particularly tricky path for TikTok to walk down," said Katie Harbath, founder and CEO of technology policy firm Anchor Change. "The platform will have to make decisions that companies like Meta and Google have had to do in the past. Candidates will want to reach voters on the platform, the way the Biden campaign is working with TikTok influencers," she added. Harbath was previously public policy director for global elections at Facebook, now Meta. Harbath said Democrats won't be the only ones forced to use TikTok to reach young voters. Republicans, including the likes of Nikki Haley, who have called for a TikTok ban, will have to do a mea culpa and use the app for their campaigns, she said. "Eventually, the place where the voters are will win," Harbath pointed out.

While TikTok may not be going away anytime soon, it will have to navigate tricky regulatory waters, something Harbath believes the company is adept at, given that it has hired veterans from other tech platforms and has worked at winning over the broader public. While conversations around TikTok being forced to divest from its Chinese parent company, ByteDance, seem to have died down for now, the proposition is not dead in the waters, she said.

Irrespective of which party wins elections next year, ByteDance will be pushed to sell TikTok's US operations to an American company, she said. "A sale would depend on whether investors see a real challenge for TikTok to continue being associated with ByteDance. This could depend on broader geopolitical issues, like China's actions in Taiwan," Harbath said.

The controversy over TikTok stems from fears that it could spy on US citizens on behalf of China. FBI director Chris Wray called the app a national security risk, adding that Chinese companies were forced to do whatever the Chinese government wanted - in terms of sharing information or serving as a tool of the Chinese government". He feared China could harness the app to influence users. TikTok's CEO Shou Zi Chew, in his testimony before the House Energy and Commerce Committee in March, said, "TikTok has never shared, or received a request to share, US user data with the Chinese government. Nor would TikTok honour such a request if one were ever made." He has said repeatedly that ByteDance was not owned by the Chinese government, and that 60 percent of the company was owned by global institutional investors. At the heart of the TikTok debate lies the question of whom to believe. "We don't have enough information to make that call yet," Harbath said. — Aljazeera

Ukraine's allies fall short of Russia's on arms help, raising 2024 risks

KYIV: In March of this year, Ukraine asked its European allies for a quarter of a million shells a month. Its full battle plan, then-Defence minister Oleksiy Reznikov said, required at least 350,000. Ukraine was then rationing itself to just 110,000 a month and needed Europe to help make up the difference.

The European Union pledged a million shells within a year - a third of what Ukraine had requested. By the end of November, it had delivered 300,000 from the stockpiles of European armies. It has four months to make up the difference, but further deliveries have to come from new production, said Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy chief. Astonishingly, after almost two years of war on European soil, the EU has not taken stock of continental production capacity. "We would like to know today where we are and what can be the rhythm of production for this second track," said Borrell on November 14 at a gathering of EU defence ministers.

Russia, too, has been firing more shells than it can produce, and in September reached out for help to North Korea. Within a month, North Korea had

delivered 1,000 containers worth of ammunition, said White House spokesperson John Kirby. Estonian military intelligence chief Col Ants Kiviseld said that translated into 300,000-350,000 shells - the same amount as that delivered by the EU to Ukraine, but in one month instead of eight. A Washington Post analysis of satellite photography suggested the number was higher because ships had been plying the route between the North Korean free trade zone port of Rason to Russia's port of Dunaï since August. Russia may have received additional North Korean shells via rail. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) said satellite imagery showing that rail traffic between North Korea and Russia had "dramatically" increased since Russian President Vladimir Putin met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in September.

"To the West's great surprise, Russia proved more adept at securing what it wanted from the outside, including from China," Yiorgos Margaritis, professor emeritus of history at the Aristotelion University of Thessaloniki, who has been monitoring the balance of artillery, told Al

Jazeera. "The quantity of shells North Korea promised - 10 million - is monstrous. And they've already provided a 10th of that." "[Russia] is well supplied, it does not care for the amount of losses, and it has third-party support which is not in doubt. All of these three elements are not the same on the Ukrainian side," Jens Bastian, a fellow with the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, told Al Jazeera. The EU has been left fumbling for an answer. Borrell has suggested its defence industry default on contracts to overseas clients, who are currently buying 40 percent of its production.

The US response was quicker and more dynamic. In February it decided to increase artillery shell production sixfold - a level not seen since the Korean War - to replenish stocks sent to Ukraine, supply Ukraine with more, and build up stocks for future conflicts. According to a New York Times report, the US Army was buying 14,400 shells a month in September 2022, when it tripled that, and in January 2023 doubled it again, to 90,000. But it will still take US defence contractors until the end of next

year to reach that production capacity. What is the matter with Europe? The EU says it will match the US's orderbook of a roughly million rounds of artillery ammunition, including missiles, per year by spring. "I am responsible for the production capacity of ammunition, so I can confirm that the goal of producing more than a million ammunition rounds annually ... can be achieved," EU internal market commissioner Thierry Breton was reported to have said at an EU defence ministers' meeting on November 14. For that to happen, governments must place orders, he said.

"It is the member states who must place the order for this ammunition, who must produce it, and who must ensure that it is produced primarily for Ukraine. All this is in the hands of the member countries," said Breton. Yet, by December 6, EU members had placed orders for only 60,000 of the one million shells they promised Ukraine, Reuters news agency reported. Orders take a long time to fulfil, making it doubtful that the EU will come through by March on even the limited ones that have been placed. — Aljazeera

Nine killed after severe storms batter Australia

BRISBANE: At least nine people have been killed after severe storms battered Australia's eastern states over the Christmas holidays, bringing down trees and power lines and leaving tens of thousands of households without power.

Police and rescue services in the states of Victoria and Queensland confirmed the deaths of eight people, the youngest a nine-year-old girl who was reportedly swept away in a flooded storm drain on the outskirts of Brisbane, Queensland's capital. In Gympie, some 180km (111 miles) north of the city, three women were swept into a storm drain when floodwaters surged through the rural town. One of them survived, but the two others were found dead. "It's absolutely tragic news for families in this region at Christmas time," Gympie Mayor Glen Hartwig told ABC News. Severe thunderstorms hit the country's eastern coast on December 25 and December 26, bringing large hailstones, high winds and torrential rain. Rivers flooded and the winds ripped off roofs and brought down trees in some of the worst-affected areas.

Eleven people were thrown into the ocean when their boat capsized in the

sea at Moreton Bay in Queensland's south. Police said on Wednesday that three people had drowned, while eight were rescued from the water and rushed to hospital in a stable condition. "It has been a very tragic 24 hours due to the weather," Queensland Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll told reporters. The Bureau of Meteorology has warned that coastal regions in Queensland were still at risk of "dangerous" storms as well as "life-threatening" floods, "giant" hail and "damaging" winds.

Queensland's power company Energex said the storm brought down more than 1,000 power lines and about 86,000 households remained without electricity. It was expected to take days to restore power to some people, the company said. Meanwhile, in Victoria, a woman was found dead after flash floods swamped a regional campground in Buchan, 350km (217 miles) east of the state capital Melbourne. Two people were also killed by falling trees.

The wild weather also took a toll on the annual Sydney to Hobart yacht race. Less than 24 hours after the 95 boats left Sydney Harbour on

December 26 on their way south to the Tasmanian capital, eight entrants had pulled out. SHK Scallywag, a Hong Kong-owned ship that had been contesting for the lead, was damaged and crew member Geoff Copley said the sailors had endured "lightning and thunder for hours". They were now "hunkered down", he added, with the weather slowly beginning to improve.

First held in 1945, this year marks the 25th anniversary of a violent storm that tore into the 1998 race fleet, with wild winds whipping up mountainous seas in which six people died, five boats sank and 55 sailors were rescued. The east coast storms come after former Tropical Cyclone Jasper made landfall earlier this month, causing flooding and widespread damage in Queensland.

In the country's west, meanwhile, several regions are fighting fires. A volunteer firefighter was killed while responding to a bushfire, media reported. Australia is currently in an El Nino, which can cause extremes ranging from wildfires to tropical cyclones and prolonged droughts. — Aljazeera

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Iran’s nuclear quandary and regional dynamics

THE International Atomic Energy Agency has recently told the member states that Iran has increased its production of highly enriched uranium, reversing its previous output reduction from mid-2023. According to the IAEA, Iran is enriching to up to 60%, close to the roughly 90% that is weapons grade, at its Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEF) in its sprawling Natanz complex and at its Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP), which is dug into a mountain. The reports suggest that the country has enough enriched uranium to make three nuclear bombs.

The ongoing Hamas-Israel conflict in Gaza has altogether changed the geopolitical landscapes and geostrategic dimensions in the broader Middle East and North African (MENA) regions because it brought about two new theories relating to the future geopolitical environment and regional security. Hamas's surprised surgical strikes trashed Israel's artificial impression of an invincible state and exposed the fraghtness of Israeli security mechanisms. Secondly, Israel responded through unimaginable barbarism and cruelty, bombing Gaza's civilian population, shelter homes, and Hospitals resulting in mass casualties of Palestinians. Meanwhile, the Netanyahu regime has vowed to assume a permanent role in Gaza, to break Hamas's stronghold and prevent the reoccurrence of the October 7-like attacks in the future. At the same time, Washington's resolute support for Tel Aviv has cast serious security concerns among Gulf nations, particularly, Iran, which is a strong backer of Hamas and a staunch enemy of Israel and close ally.

Realistically, the current situation has caused significant security risk for Tehran because its armed proxies including Hamas, Hizbullah, and Shia militant groups, in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Algeria and Tunisia seriously endangering the US and Israeli interests. Currently, pro-Iran forces are under attack by the United States and allies as President Biden has ordered an operation against Iran-aligned groups in Iraq, while a senior IRGC general has been killed in an Israeli air strike in Libya in recent days.

Previously, the United States and Iran struck a landmark prisoner swap deal by releasing five detainees from each nation that also gave Tehran unrestricted access to its frozen oil funds of \$6 billion. The majority of foreign diplomats and political analysts perceive that the slowdown, which began in June this year, was the result of secret talks between the United States and Iran that led to the release of US citizens and a slowdown in nuclear activities. After Iran reversed its months-long slowdown by resuming uranium enrichment to up to 60% purity, close to weapons grade. The IAEA's experts fear that Iran can make 3-4 nuclear weapons, which can entirely change the geostrategic matrix in the region and beyond.

Currently, Competing regimes in Tehran and Washington are weighing their cards by tactful use of diplomatic, and military manoeuvres to protect their political and strategic interest. Iran has displayed utmost resilience in the face of collective diplomatic coercion and sanctimonious policies of the Western bloc, not only on the nuclear front but also in trade, economy, and global diplomacy throughout the past decades. The IAEA, a UN subsidiary that plays the role of West's vain Guard platoon, is currently much worried over the increased enrichment of uranium at Iranian nuclear plants but those guarantors of global peace are unashamedly feel no remorse over their failure in stopping an inhumane massacre of innocent Palestinians and blatant ruination of Palestinian land.

In fact, the powerful Jewish state fearlessly implements its nefarious agenda as the geo-strategic balance does not exist in the Middle East. If Tehran grasp nuclear status it will ensure strategic balance, resist Israel's nefarious agenda, and likely to promote peace and stability in the Middle East region.

Legacy of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto

THE sixteen death anniversary of former PPP leader and two-time Prime Minister Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was observed across the country with utmost sorrow and grief. Shaheed Benazir Bhutto was not only the first woman Prime Minister of the Muslim world but she was the real pioneer of political struggle and democratic values in Pakistan. She was a great leader, caring mother, kind-hearted woman and accomplished politician. She championed democracy and human rights against dictatorships and terrorism and laid her life during her mission for the revival of democracy and enlightenment in our society.

She always stood for the protection of the downtrodden and marginalized classes of society, the rights of minorities, and the development and independence of Pakistani women. Historically, Shaheed Benazir kicked start her political career amid challenges from conservative religious clerics, dictatorship and rigid politicians whom majority took birth and groomed in a military farm.

She faced the unethical and indecent politics of her adversaries without losing resilience and came back with new vigour and temperament. She was an advocate of civil liberties, pluralism, social harmony, and unity among federating units in the country. Benazir's mission was to establish a democratic system and a society based on equality and brotherhood. Shaheed Benazir Bhutto did not surrender in front of intimidation from the dictatorial regime and gallantly sacrificed her life for the restoration and strengthening of democracy in the country.

Shaheed Benazir carried forward the political legacy of her father through public service and working toward the betterment of the country. Despite serious risk to her life from her political rivals and terrorist outfits, she remained resolved to resist terrorism, extremism and intolerance in our society. In fact, she fought against terrorism and forces of evil for the development and prosperity of her countrymen. Her tragic assassination shortcut her political career but her philosophy, contribution to democracy, civil liberties, women's rights, and governance continue to influence and inspire their followers and the general public in Pakistan and beyond in the coming years and decades.

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Climate change: Time for Middle East to seize the day

Hafed Al-Ghwel

AS the clock ticks toward a climate tipping point, the Arab world finds itself at a crossroads. Climate change, once a distant, nebulous threat, has now emerged at the forefront of regional concerns, casting a long shadow on the future of its economies, societies and geopolitical stability. The region, already grappling with political instability, economic volatility and conflicts, now faces an escalating climate crisis that exacerbates existing challenges and presents new ones.

Statistics paint a grim picture. The UN warns that, if countries continue their current trajectories, the world could warm by about 2.5 degrees Celsius by the end of this century, far exceeding the 1.5 C limit set under the Paris Agreement. These temperature variations, while seemingly minor, will have devastating consequences and the Arab region is already on the front line of the gradually escalating impacts. Multiple countries have already been hit particularly hard, from sweltering heat waves, droughts and saline water intrusion to desertification and a sharp upswing in dust storms blighting the once-fertile cradle of civilization.

Even from a fiscal perspective alone, the costs are enormous and only continue to grow. While climate change is a planetary threat, the Middle East and adjacent regions face a harsh, sobering reality - temperatures are rising twice as fast as the global average and rainfall is becoming scarcer and less predictable. For the past three decades alone, dramatic shifts in temperature and rainfall patterns have had significant impacts on per capita incomes across the Arab region and the sectoral composition of national output and employment.

Meanwhile, climate-induced disasters have resulted in permanent gross domestic product losses of 1.1 percent in the Middle East and North Africa - a figure that is likely to rise as the economic burden of these adversities is amplified by existing societal issues, such as inflation and unemployment.

Furthermore, recent studies are increasingly linking climate change with the potential to further undermine public health, which has yet to recover from the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating poverty and widening inequality gaps. This can lead to strained sociopolitical landscapes, enduring instability and possibly conflict, making future failed states out of currently fragile ones.

September's Derna disaster in Libya is the most recent example of how the economic consequences of runaway climate change can

become particularly pronounced in states strained by conflict and governance failures. As a result, these states experience four times higher output losses following climate-related weather shocks, which are likely to worsen in frequency and intensity. Apart from natural disasters, there are warnings and a growing body of evidence showing how climate change could worsen the region's water security and food production, potentially leading to state failure and creating fertile ground for terrorism and violent extremism. In the world's most arid region, climate-related water scarcity is especially potent, with estimates that dwindling fresh water supplies could cost Arab nations between 6 and 14 percent of their GDP by 2050. In one particular year, the Arab region suffered a \$12 billion GDP loss due to water scarcity alone - a consequence of delayed responses that, if left unchecked, could endanger as many as 100 million North Africans.

Yet, amid these challenges, the region has also emerged as a global leader in climate diplomacy, hosting successive climate summits, including the pivotal COP28 in Dubai. For all the criticism targeting these gatherings, they remain the foremost platform for the region (and the world) to promote cross-border collaboration and demonstrate an unyielding commitment to climate action, underscoring the scale of the task at hand and its increasing urgency. At present, mitigation and adaptation efforts are falling far short, as action and support remain disjointed, gradual and focused on specific sectors, leaving some areas neglected. With the clock ticking, the planet's current trajectory still leads to a substantial increase in global temperatures. Meeting the existing commitments would result in about a 2.5 C temperature rise by the end of the century, while current policies are on track for an alarming 3 C increase. As evidence, the global average temperature briefly exceeded the critical 1.5 C threshold in both March and June 2023.

The main contributor to rising temperatures is the growth of greenhouse gas emissions, particularly from fossil fuels, which account for more than 75 percent of total emissions. In 2022, emissions exceeded pre-pandemic levels, but governments around the world are planning to produce double the amount of fossil fuels by 2030, far exceeding what is sustainable for limiting global warming to 1.5 C. To avoid surpassing the warming threshold set in Paris, global emissions must decrease by nearly half in

the next seven years, when compared to 2010 levels, and hit net-zero by 2050. To achieve that and reduce the mounting costs of climate change, the world needs to take comprehensive, collaborative and urgent action. Not only will the potential benefits be significant, the future of the Middle East and the resilience of its economies depends on it. At a global level, it is believed that the accumulated benefit of limiting warming to 1.5 C rather than 2 C could exceed \$20 trillion. To realize that, however, governments in the Middle East, for instance, may need to invest up to 4 percent of GDP annually to sufficiently boost climate resilience and meet their 2030 emissions reduction targets.

This seems daunting given the region's tense geopolitical dynamics, economic headwinds and untested capacity to foster collaboration between rival interests. This is against the backdrop of increasing fragmentation, owing to the rise of self-assured, self-interested middle powers. Regardless of which path Arab nations take to achieve their planned targets, attracting more private finance will be key to bridging financing gaps and reducing disparities between the region's economies. Governments could also ease the funding burdens by implementing measures such as accelerated fuel subsidy reforms and carbon taxes, alongside other interventions.

The UAE and Qatar, for instance, are investing heavily in renewable energy projects, while countries like Morocco, Jordan and Tunisia are improving water management practices. These initiative-taking steps not only help to mitigate the harmful impacts of climate change, but they also have significant economic benefits. However, these efforts must be scaled up. The region's current adaptation and mitigation policies must be expanded and reinforced. This will require a comprehensive strategy that addresses both immediate crises and the longer-term consequences of climate change.

Future climate policy in the Middle East must strike a balance between managing economic trade-offs and taking decisive action to mitigate the devastating impacts of climate change on the region's economies, sociopolitical fabric and development. While there is tangible progress today, climate interventions in the Middle East will need doses of realism far more than an emphasis on grand plans. Pragmatism and right-sized responses will be essential, otherwise the region risks putting the cart before the horse if it does not prioritize

and sequence its climate interventions effectively.

The convergence of initially disconnected threats, compounded by climate change-induced disasters, can lead to a complex web of challenges that will be next to impossible to unravel without risking the collapse of entire economies. Moreover, even if there was an abundance of climate financing readily available for the region's poorer countries, the focus will be less on mitigation or adaptation strategies. Rather, the more pressing needs will be reducing volatility by relieving pressure on tattered safety nets, closing inequality gaps, investing in infrastructure and tackling unemployment - especially among youths and women. Failing to align climate intervention priorities with these urgent socioeconomic needs could lead to mismatched priorities that only fuel civic antipathy, unrest and, ultimately, conflict.

To significantly reduce emissions and contribute to the global climate change fight, Arab countries must consider more ambitious mitigation strategies. Bright prospects lie in capitalizing on eco-friendly industrial initiatives, which not only help decrease emissions but also address other objectives such as poverty eradication and closing inequality gaps. Additionally, just and fair transitions, created by collective, participatory decision-making processes, will be crucial to reducing the disruptive impacts on jobs and communities as countries transition away from fossil fuels. This entails strengthening transparency in reporting on climate adaptation actions, particularly actions driven by the needs and situations of local communities.

Of course, these actions will need to run concurrently with a rapid scaling up of financing for climate adaptation, targeting developing countries. While the establishment of a fund for climate-related losses and damages is a promising development, funds pledged so far are only a tiny fraction of the \$400 billion in estimated losses incurred by developing countries annually.

For now, the Middle East needs to adopt a comprehensive, pragmatic and inclusive approach toward climate change mitigation and adaptation. With the right strategies and their successful implementation, the Arab region can bridge its current gaps and take decisive steps toward combating climate change, while ensuring prosperity for its own population. By aligning these actions with global efforts, the Middle East can chart a path toward a more sustainable and resilient future.

Gaza’s orphans: Pain without borders

Ghada Ageel

IN Jabalia refugee camp, north of Gaza, the cries of an 11-year-old boy named Ahmad pierce the air. "I want my Baba, my Baba, Baba," Ahmad sobs. His plea echoes through the camp, exposing the profound void left by the murder of his father at the hands of the Israeli occupation forces. "Where are you, Baba? Why did they murder you? What crime did he commit?"

People attempt to console the grief-stricken boy but he is beyond consolation: "He promised me to stay alive and not to go. I'm tired. Leave me alone." Meanwhile, a few thousand kilometres away in Belgium, another Palestinian boy, 15-year-old Zain, mourns the loss of his father, Al Jazeera cameraman Samer Abudaga. Zain recounts the tragedy that unfolded on December 15, revealing the cruelty of his father's murder by an Israeli drone.

After being struck by shrapnel, Samer bled to death for five hours on the grounds of Farhanah, the high school I went to in Khan Younis. Three members of an ambulance team, including my friend, Rami Budeir, who attempted to rescue Samer, were also targeted and killed. The enormity of the atrocity is etched into Zain's tearful eyes and face as he speaks about his father. He pledges to pray for him every day. His voice breaks as he sings a song he had written for his dad. "My heart is missing you. Separation tortures me. My heart, after you, is lost, and bitterness is the taste in my mouth."

Zain's words in Belgium, Ahmad's cries in Jabalia reach me here in Edmonton, Canada. I find myself sobbing, unable to shake the images of their pain or grapple with the questions they evoke. My heart has shattered a thousand times in the past 80 days and it breaks once more. I am unable to escape the thoughts of these children, enduring the lasting trauma of being intentionally made orphans by a genocidal army.

What makes the pain all the more unbearable is that Zain is the same age as my own son, Aziz, and strikingly resembles him in every aspect - facial features, height, body, voice, and even the choices of clothes and hairstyle. These uncanny similarities intensify the deep sorrow I feel towards Zain and the hundreds of thousands of children who have lost parents, relatives and friends in Gaza. As I think of Zain and his father who was targeted while wearing a press vest, my thoughts wander to another Palestinian orphan, 12-year-old Donia Abu Muhsein.

Donia was recovering in Nasser hospital in Khan Younis, when Samer's body was brought in and prepared for funeral. Israeli bombardment of a house where Donia and her family were taking shelter had killed her parents and two siblings and smashed her leg which necessitated an

amputation. When Donia looks at the camera in a video shot a few days before her death, there is a faint smile on her face. Her will to live and dream are strong. She says she wants to study and become a doctor. "We are alone now without [my family]. I was very much connected to [them]. But I must continue," she says.

But the Israeli occupation forces did not allow her to. Two days after they murdered Samer, they killed Donia's dream. They sheltered Nasser hospital, murdering the orphaned girl in her hospital bed. I wonder about other children who survive but their hearts and bodies are broken, with no one left of their extended families to take care of them. Another young orphan, perhaps Donia's age, shares her harrowing story in another video. She recounts the loss of 70 people, including her parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, while seeking refuge in a chalet on the beach after losing their home.

Only she and her five-year-old brother Kanan survived. Unable to walk and in urgent need of an operation, she prays for the opening of the Rafah crossing, hoping for a chance to leave. She is one of the 55,000 wounded people who are currently abandoned by the world scattered across Gaza where a man-made medical collapse is taking place. Tearfully, and in a voice and with a facial expression that could break the hardest rock, the girl says, "If the border doesn't open within 48 hours, I won't be able to walk again. I'm in great pain, and I miss walking and my parents deeply."

In the face of the horror and pain the children of Gaza are experiencing, the cry for justice is not a mere plea, it is a global call to humanity, to its collective conscience, if it still exists. This comes at a time, when the powers that be, led by America, openly endorse this genocide and stand in the way of putting an end to it. They are making sure that more children will be orphaned, starved, made homeless, bombarded day and night, and denied access to healthcare, education, and parental love and care.

Yet, there is also a growing chorus of voices of peace and hope as well. Russian-American activist Masha Gessen, upon receiving the Hannah Arendt Prize, highlighted the critical opportunity the world still possesses to intervene in Gaza. Gessen emphasised, "The biggest difference between Gaza and the Jewish ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe is that many Gazans, most Gazans are still alive, and the world still has an opportunity to do something about it."

Though we couldn't save Donia and the parents of Zain, Ahmad and the little orphaned girl, there remains a chance to save those who are still alive in Gaza. We need ceasefire now!

Aljazeera

Biden is too busy snubbing Britain to lead the West against China

Matthew Lynn

IT is close to losing its position as the world's largest economy. It is facing challenges in key industries from aerospace to technology and pharmaceuticals. And its grip on the global trading system is weakening.

The pressure is now on President Biden to strengthen America's economic might in order to counter an assertive China before it is too late. But here is a question he needs to answer. Why is he scuppering a trade deal with Britain? The major economies of the Western alliance will surely need to work together if they are to have any chance of counteracting China. This won't be possible without abandoning short-sighted protectionism and working together instead.

Entering his fourth, and perhaps final, year as US President, no one was really expecting Joe Biden to make signing a free trade deal with the UK a top priority. The Democratic left, his key supporters, have

developed a reflexive dislike of Britain, preferring to side with Ireland, or the EU, or anyone else who might be taking issue with us that week.

The President would be more likely to go for a relaxed round of golf at one of Donald Trump's courses than to invite Rishi Sunak to the White House for a grand ceremony celebrating free trade between the two old allies. It will be interesting to see whether Sir Keir Starmer, who is pitching for a summit with Biden ahead of the next general election, will have more luck. Regardless, the news that the US President has indefinitely shelved a trade deal between the two countries is a major blow. The chances of it happening this decade have narrowed significantly: it is far easier to pull something off the table than put it back on.

We will hear plenty from ardent Remainers about how the UK is an irrelevance to the US, and it was fanciful to expect special

treatment. We will be told that, now that we have left the EU bloc, we are a geopolitical irrelevance. But that ignores one fundamental issue. A strong US domestic economy is not enough, we need a strong Western one as well to counter the growing Chinese threat. It's a threat Biden certainly seems to be taking seriously. Largely thanks to fracking, it has restored its energy independence, and reclaimed leadership of the oil industry. Sanctions have been imposed on technology transfers with China, while tariffs have been imposed to protect crucial industries. It will take many more years to assess the full impact of all those policies, and whether they have succeeded or failed. But it is notable that Mexico has now overtaken China as America's main trading partner.

And there are signs the Chinese industrial machine is slowing down, even if

only modestly. The assumption that China would cruise effortlessly to global economic supremacy, that this would be the "Chinese century", has started to falter. That the US is adopting a strategy of "de-risking" from China is welcome. The current regime may prove to be perfectly benign, as its leaders insist, though recent moves towards upending the current rules-based international order suggest otherwise. The chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, Alicia Kearns, earlier this year warned that its accelerating aggression poses an "alarming threat", drawing some nations closer to a vision of "unruly autocracy".

But America is missing a crucial section of the strategic jigsaw. Its dominance will be weakened if Britain, Germany, Italy, France, Japan, South Korea, Australia and its other Western allies are economically stagnating. Clearly, it is

not the job of Joe Biden to fix the domestic policy errors made by politicians in Westminster. But it can encourage them to nurture their own industries. It can make sure dollars flow through the global economy, and hold their value. It can encourage American companies to invest globally, building expertise in countries friendly towards its values and interests. And the quickest way to achieve that is through free and open trade, for the simple reason that it makes everyone richer.

A US-UK trade deal would deliver enormous benefits to the UK of course. The US is our largest single market. Our exporters are rewarded by its expansion. But we are also the seventh largest partner for the US, measured by the volume of imports and exports. The UK is the second largest corporate investor in the US after Japan. Collaboration with us will improve the US position when combatting challenges including repression in Hong Kong, geno-

cide in Xinjiang, coercion aimed at Taiwan, Chinese government subsidies, and the widespread theft of cutting-edge Western intellectual property. This same logic applies just as much to trade with Europe. Just as there is no trade deal between the US and the UK, there isn't one between the US and European Union either (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was scrapped in 2019 after years of negotiations). A trade deal with Japan was finally signed in 2020, which should have set a blueprint for a future agreement with Britain. A free trade agreement between the UK and the US, with similar legal and regulatory systems, should have been wrapped up in a year or two. The only obstacle was President Biden's petty protectionism. He is ceding economic leadership to China - at precisely the moment when the Western economies should be working together and fighting back.

For Palestinians in Gaza, the ‘day after’ means investigating Israeli war crimes

Osama Al-Sharif

SINCE Israel launched its assault on Gaza almost three months ago, the US, and some Israeli officials and media commentators have been talking about the day-after scenario, meaning what happens when the guns fall silent and the fog of war is dispelled. Most scenarios have assumed that Israel would be able to achieve its two declared objectives - uprooting Hamas from Gaza and freeing Israeli captives being held there.

But now, after more than 80 days of Israeli bombing and shelling, which even CNN admits is "indiscriminate," and with more than 60 percent of the Gaza Strip's buildings destroyed, Israel is far from achieving either goal. The bombing of Gaza has been described as the most vicious since the Vietnam War. More than 20,000 Gazans have been killed, 70 percent of them women and children. More than 50,000 have been injured. Aid convoys passing through the Rafah crossing every day are insufficient, according to the UN, which also says that Palestinians in Gaza now face disease and famine. Many thousands will die because of the cold, and lack of medicine, food, and clean water.

Still, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insists that Israel will continue to fight until victory is reached - now a goal that appears elusive, if not impossible. There are mounting calls in Israel for his dismissal, while support for the war among Israelis is dwindling by the day. Hamas and its allies continue to rain rockets on Israeli towns and cities, while inflicting a heavy toll on the invading army. Support for Gaza and Palestine has reached record levels around the world, aside from the obstinate position of the

US government, with most now supporting calls for a permanent ceasefire. Much has changed in recent weeks. Most Western mainstream media outlets are now critical of Israel's handling of the war, and an increasing number of observers believe Israel is fighting a losing battle, while also pointing to the possibility that it is committing war crimes. On social media, young people are lining up to condemn the war and voice solidarity with the Palestinians.

Despite all this, Netanyahu and his far-right coalition partners want the conflict to continue at any price. The Israeli leader is refusing to listen to relatives of the hostages, who want a deal that will end the war and secure the safe return of their loved ones. The Biden administration is losing public support at home, with almost half of the American people, if not more, wanting a lasting ceasefire. The US is becoming isolated even among its allies, most of whom disagree with giving Israel a green light to operate indiscriminately in Gaza. But regarding the "day after," Netanyahu and the US do not see eye-to-eye. The Israeli prime minister, now fighting for his political life, appears to want extended Israel security control of Gaza, which means open-ended occupation. However, Biden and even most Israelis disagree.

An Egyptian proposal to secure a long-term hiatus in return for freeing the captives, while opening the path for joint Hamas-Palestinian Authority control of Gaza, but without specifying details of an Israeli withdrawal, has reportedly been rejected by the Hamas military wing. It is no secret that a halt to the

conflict now would represent a resounding defeat for Israel, leading to a collapse of the war government, and a reckoning for Netanyahu. But most omit two factors from possible solutions and scenarios. The first is that Palestinians in Gaza want an immediate end to the war because every day means hell for those who are simply lucky to survive. Washington's blind support for Israel means that every minute, every hour and every day, more Palestinian civilians are killed. That cannot be tolerated by the international community any longer.

The second issue is not who will rule Gaza once the bombing stops, but how will the international community step in to save millions who are displaced and living in catastrophic conditions. Israel must not be allowed to decide how many aid trucks are allowed to pass through Rafah and other crossings when the lives of millions are at stake. The world must make recompense for its failure to uphold international humanitarian law and save many thousands of innocent lives because the US and Israel believed that so-called collateral damage was acceptable in this case.

But what is also important and urgent is that an independent investigation of what happened on Oct. 7 and afterward be carried out and pronouncements made. It was ironic that Karim Khan, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, accepted an invitation to meet the Israeli families who were targets of the Hamas attack, yet would not visit the Gaza Strip or make a strong statement on allegations of Israeli war crimes, crimes against humani-

ty, and ethnic cleansing leveled against Israel.

The ICC's credibility is now in question, as Khan and the court remain silent on what Israel is carrying out in Gaza. By last count, about 100 journalists and their families have been killed by Israel. Doctors, medics, university professors, activists, poets, artists, UN workers, and thousands of children have been killed. Hospitals, universities, schools, mosques, churches, civic centers, and residential buildings have been demolished. There are reports of mass executions of civilians. If Khan is unable to act, then he should resign. Otherwise, he is not fit to hold office, and is discrediting the ICC and its purpose. There have been dozens of cases filed at the ICC concerning the killing of journalists, children, and crimes by Israeli officers and the complicity of high-profile political figures in war crimes. Khan cannot ignore these cases, all of which name Israel as the main culprit.

The "day after" for Gaza is not only about who will rule the besieged and now leveled strip of land where 2.1 million Palestinians, 70 percent of whom were already displaced or refugees, used to live. Netanyahu, his lieutenants, and his generals are war criminals. They should be investigated and tried. Those who supported this war must also be named and charged. In a perfect world, this would be the right thing to do. But ours is not an ideal world, and the war on Gaza should set in motion a process to create a world order where warmongers and killers of babies become an example, so that no repeat of the carnage in Gaza can become possible ever again.

Arab News

Seize the moment, seize Russian assets for Ukraine

Nigel Gould-Davies

AS Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has dragged on, the West has regularly expanded its support for Ukraine. What was once unthinkable - arming Kyiv with advanced tanks and long-range missiles, and even cluster munitions and fighter jets - has repeatedly become doable.

But there is one giant exception: Western governments have refused to use the huge sums of Russian state assets that are frozen in their financial systems to help the victims of the Kremlin's war. And yet the moral, legal and strategic case for doing so is compelling. It is time to seize the moment and seize these assets. At the start of the war, G7 countries and their allies froze Russian Central Bank (CBR) reserves deposited in their jurisdictions. This well-coordinated and highly effective move deprived Russia of access to - but not ownership of - these assets. While we do not know their exact value, as most states refuse to disclose their holdings, they are believed to total over \$300 billion - twice Ukraine's current GDP.

Throughout the invasion, Russia has inflicted over \$400 billion of damage on Ukraine and committed thousands of alleged war crimes. Ukraine's national income has crashed by a third, leaving the country desperately needing continuous financial support. The West has generously provided over \$150 billion in financial and military aid. But its coffers are not bottomless. President Vladimir Putin remains confident that Russia will win the war by outlasting its adversaries in a contest of resolve, one that exhausts Ukraine and proves too costly for the West. The solution is obvious: use Russia's assets to compensate the victims of its aggression, while also easing the burden on Western taxpayers. The West took bold, creative risks when it provided military support for Ukraine and imposed an unprecedented flurry of sanctions on Moscow. Since then, Russia's CBR assets have laid dormant. When it comes to the question of whether these assets should be seized and used to help Ukraine, Western governments remain timid and avoidant.

Why have states been so reluctant to debate the issue openly? They would appear to have four concerns in mind. The first is legal: state assets enjoy sovereign immunity under international law and thus may not be seized. But international law also

offers a solution. Instead of a sanction, an asset seizure can be a proportionate countermeasure to a grave breach of international norms, and there is no doubt that Russia's invasion of Ukraine constitutes such a violation. As Professor Philip Zelickow of Stanford University and others have shown, there are well-established legal principles for developing a powerful case for Western states to take custody of Russian state assets. While Western governments are opaque about the legal advice on which they are basing their approach, they do not appear to have seriously explored their options. They should do so now. The remaining three concerns are related to policy, not law. They suppose that even if Western states are allowed to seize Russia's assets, they should not take this step because the costs of the precedent it would set would outweigh the benefits. This assertion is dubious.

First, policymakers assume that an asset seizure could undermine Western currencies as a store of value. But if the G7 and their partners coordinate taking over CBR assets as effectively as they froze them, all of the world's major reserve currencies would be involved. This would deprive Russian capital of any feasible safe havens to which it could flee. Instead of weakening the global financial system, such a move would be a formidable demonstration of the West's strength. The next concern is that seizing Russian state assets would set a bad precedent that hostile states could use against Western companies. This argument conflates state and private assets. Seizure of the former as a state countermeasure sets no legal precedent for the treatment of the latter. This is not something of concern to hostile states like Russia, as the Kremlin has already appropriated the Russia-based assets of four major European companies and handed them to its cronies. Finally, some have argued that seizure could deter other states from depositing their reserves in Western banking systems. But an asset seizure inflicts no harm beyond what has already been done. It simply means that assets Russia no longer controls will be repurposed to help Ukraine. Immobilizing these assets at the start of the war set a far more significant precedent by cutting Russia off from

its CBR assets. The West rightly had no qualms about taking that step.

So, what is the West's official policy? After more than a year of hesitation, the G7 declared in May that Russia's assets "will remain immobilized until Russia pays for the damage it has caused to Ukraine." This policy cannot succeed for three reasons. First, Russia will never compensate Ukraine, let alone acknowledge its legitimacy as a state, unless it undergoes radical and systemic domestic change. Deposing Putin - itself a tall order - would not be enough as it would require a transformation of Russia's regime and worldview. It is absurd to assume such a scenario as a precondition for success. Second, the G7's position gives Russia no incentive to help rebuild Ukraine. The scale of destruction that Russia has brought on Ukraine means that any compensation it would have to pay Kyiv far exceeds the sum of its assets frozen by the West. Why would Russia agree to be left worse off than before?

Third, the G7 envisages compensation to Ukraine only after the war is over. But Ukraine cannot wait since it urgently needs help now. Its resilience, and thus the outcome of the war, depends on support today, not tomorrow. The longer Western policymakers delay, the less likely it is that Ukraine will win - and thus Russia will feel uncompelled to pay anything at all. There is visible unease among Ukraine's allies with the unrealistic, illogical and contradictory position Western policymakers have taken on the issue of Russia's frozen assets. While its professed commitment to Ukraine remains strong, it is not marshaling the means to match it. The situation is now dire, with budget disputes in Washington and Brussels putting future funding for Kyiv in jeopardy. Seizing CBR assets would not only make huge financial resources available for Ukraine at Russia's expense but it would also send a powerful signal of Western resolve to the Kremlin.

As things stand, the West provides Ukraine weapons with which to kill Russian soldiers, but it refuses to give Kyiv Russian money. It is time to demonstrate the same boldness and creativity in the financial realm as it has in security. The war has become a war of attrition. Nobody can afford to hesitate any longer.

The Moscow Times

Why does the Christian West ignore Palestinian Christians' plight?

Daoud Kuttab

SINCE October 7, Israel and its allies have tried to put the war in Gaza within the "war on terror" framework, actively comparing Hamas to ISIS. Many who instinctively equate Palestinians with Muslims have indeed fallen for this false narrative. But the brutal war Israel has waged on Gaza has not targeted "only terrorists" as it has claimed. Instead, it has massacred Palestinian Muslims as well as Palestinian Christians in what legal scholars agree amounts to genocide.

The Christian community in Gaza has lost at least 21 members so far. This may sound like a small number, but given they were only 1,000 before the war, these massacres threaten to eliminate the Christian presence in the strip for the first time in almost 2,000 years. Proportionally speaking, the death rate of Palestinian Christians is double that of the entire Palestinian population in Gaza.

And yet, the leaders of Christian-majority countries in the West have remained shockingly silent on the plight of Palestinian Christians. United States President Joe Biden, a devout Catholic, has said and done nothing to protect fellow Catholics in Gaza, who have also been targeted by the Israeli army. This falls in line with decades of unwavering Western Christian support for the racist Israeli state, which has threatened the Christian presence in the holy lands for decades.

The Israeli onslaught against Palestinian Christians was taking place long before Hamas was even created. During the Nakba of 1948 when Jewish militias attacked Palestinian villages and towns,

Palestinian Christians were targeted just like Palestinian Muslims. Christian Palestinians were forced out from Lydda (what Israelis call today Lod). Many ended up taking refuge in Ramallah, walking dozens of kilometres on foot while trying to avoid the brutal Jewish militants.

In Jerusalem and other areas, Palestinians regardless of their faith were also expelled. Members of my own family - my dad, uncle and grandmother - had to flee for their lives. My aunt and her family who lived in the Musrara neighbourhood sought refuge near the Notre Dame Catholic Chapel, thinking they would be safe there, but a Jewish sniper shot and killed her husband, leaving her a widow with seven young children. The terror and dispossession did not stop even after the state of Israel was established. For example, residents of the two predominantly Palestinian Christian villages of Iqrit and Biram, which at the end of the Arab-Israeli War fell within northern Israel, were forced out in November 1948. They were told they could return "within two weeks", but the Israeli state never allowed them to.

In the following decades, the Palestinian Christians who remained within the territory Israel claimed faced the same apartheid regime that Palestinian Muslims did. They have been subjected to about 65 racist laws that deprive them of the same rights as Jewish citizens of Israel, according to research done by the Haifa-based Adalah NGO. One of the earliest of these laws was the 1950 Law of Return, which enshrined the right of Jews to come to Israel, settle

and automatically receive citizenship. It denied the same right to the expelled indigenous Palestinian population despite the fact that the United Nations had decreed in Resolution 194 that Palestinian should be allowed to return to their homeland and be compensated for the loss of their homes.

More recently, the Knesset approved the Nation State Bill in 2018, which formally declares Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, thus further solidifying the legal iteration of Jewish supremacy. This emboldened even more the extremist elements within Israeli society and encouraged even more anti-Palestinian violence. Incidents of Jewish extremists harassing and intimidating Palestinian Christians, spitting on them and attacking their processions have spiked. Christian properties, including churches and cemeteries, have been targeted.

Just days before Hamas's October 7 attacks in southern Israel, a group of Jewish men and boys harassed a Christian procession carrying a cross, viciously spitting on them. A video of the incident went viral and caused international outrage, but clearly not among Western leaders. Repeated appeals from Christian church leaders for action on Jewish Israeli violence have fallen on deaf ears for years. On October 17, just days after launching its brutal war on Gaza, Israel bombed the courtyard of the Christian-run Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza, killing hundreds of people who had sought shelter there from its bombardment. The Israeli propaganda machine tried to blame the attack

on the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, but subsequent investigations confirmed that the "evidence" it had produced was fabricated.

A Palestinian Catholic mother published an appeal to Biden, calling on him to base his policies on his moral beliefs. "We are not children of a lesser God, Mr. President, we are the Palestinian Christians of the holy land where the message of love peace, and justice started, and we call upon you to stop this Genocide." Leaders of the Palestinian Christian community also sent an open letter to Western church leaders and theologians in which they challenged "western theologians and church leaders who have voiced uncritical support for Israel and [called on] them to repent and change".

Biden and his administration have indeed treated us, Palestinian Christians, as the children of a lesser God. He and other Western leaders who have backed Israel are fully responsible for the genocide of the Palestinian people. What they have done will not be forgotten. Today we are not celebrating Christmas. Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, is also not celebrating. All festivities have been cancelled as Palestinian Christians mourn the victims of the Israeli genocide.

What gives many hope in this dark time is the fact that despite Israeli brutality and Western silence, Muslim and Christian Palestinians stand as a united front. Israel has long deployed the divide and rule tactic on us, but in the past two months and a half, we have demonstrated that our unity is stronger than ever in the face of Israeli colonial violence and racism.

Milei's government pays IMF

Natalie Liu

ARGENTINA's new government sent to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) its scheduled debt payment, thanks to a loan from the CAF - the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean. In doing so, the government of Argentina's new president, Javier Milei, avoided tapping into a currency swap line Beijing was preparing to make available, with strings attached.

Since Milei's victory on November 19, and his inauguration on December 10, intense maneuvers between Buenos Aires and Beijing appear to have taken place, largely under the radar. Among the dignitaries attending Milei's inauguration was a special envoy dispatched by Chinese communist leader Xi Jinping. Milei received Xi's envoy, Wu Weihua, accompanied by China's Ambassador to Argentina Wang Wei, on December 11.

The meeting was cordial, by all accounts, and prompted Milei to send a letter to Xi the next day. While the content of Milei's letter has not been made public, Argentine media indicated that it included language about the currency swap between the two countries Milei's predecessor had put in place. The Chinese RMB, or yuan currency, and Argentine peso, swap is an arrangement in which the two countries make a certain amount of their own currencies available to the other party and has, in effect, worked as a "non-automatic line of credit" made by Chinese authorities to the Argentine government, as Argentine media put it.

Prior to Milei's meeting with Wu Weihua, Chinese representatives have conveyed to Milei's team that for the line of credit to be activated,

including possibly tapping it to pay the IMF on December 21, Xi needs to know where Milei stood. According to Infobae, an influential Argentine newspaper that has closely followed developments between Buenos Aires and Beijing, Milei's appointee to head the country's Central Bank held a closed-door meeting with Wang Wei and discussed the currency swap, i.e., the credit line that had been sitting there but needed Beijing's approval before it could be tapped by Milei's government.

The Chinese diplomat listened to the Argentina official before giving a simple answer: Argentina must clarify what it will do with its Central Bank because the yuan will be transferred there, and Beijing needs to understand what Milei and his foreign affairs minister, Diana Mondino's diplomatic agenda is. On the campaign trail, both Milei and the political party he founded have staunchly said that they are not interested in advancing the communist country's agenda. Milei has also vowed to adopt the US dollar as the country's official currency and close its Central Bank, which he identified as playing an important role in the undisciplined approach toward fiscal and monetary policy that resulted in the country's unsustainable inflation.

Upon being briefed by his Central Bank chief, Santiago Bausili, Milei was motionless, according to a report about the meeting published in Infobae. Around the time Milei received Xi's envoy in Casa Rosada, Argentina's presidential palace, on December 11, Milei's finance minister, Luis Caputo, also was busy negotiating with the CAF, the Latin American and Caribbean regional

development bank. On December 14, Reuters and Infobae both reported that Milei's representatives had struck a deal with the CAF for a bridge loan of \$960 million to help the new Argentine government make its December 21 IMF payment. On December 15, the CAF made the deal public through an announcement on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Milei's office declared the deal with the CAF as the new government's "first major victory." "It looks like China has overplayed its hand," Christopher Ecclestone, a London-based strategist and longtime observer of Argentine political economy, told VOA.

On December 19, Argentine media reported that Beijing has frozen the currency swap that it had offered to Argentina during an October meeting in Beijing between Xi and Milei's predecessor, Alberto Fernandez. A day earlier, Beijing had summoned its ambassador to Buenos Aires back to its capital, Argentine media reported. It is unclear whether diplomat Wang Wei's return to China is Beijing's gesture of displeasure with Buenos Aires, or an occasion for authorities in Beijing to hear out its overseas representatives before making its next move. As Ecclestone sees it, "China needs all the friends it can get, even the non-friends they can get," given how unpopular the Chinese brand currently is in international circles.

"If Milei is not hostile, he's a friend, in the Beijing scheme of things," Ecclestone said in a phone interview from London. The best thing China can hope for, he added, is for countries to not be hostile. To that end, both Xi and his diplomats have

made progress, in the analyst's opinion. "Milei was sounding hostile [during his presidential campaign], now he's not hostile, [that] has to be a win for Xi," he added. In a sign that the new Argentine government is committed to continuing Argentina's diplomatic relations with Beijing, a new ambassador to China has been appointed in recent days. Earlier, Beijing reportedly had expressed unease over the fact that the previous administration's appointed ambassador had been called back, leaving the embassy with low-level diplomatic representation.

On Friday, Milei's government also proposed a bill to the Argentine legislature that Chinese companies investing in Argentina would be spared taxation if they already pay taxes in their home country, similar to treatments for companies from countries like Japan, the UAE, and Luxembourg, etc.

Milei's team has also confirmed that dollarization is still its objective since he was inaugurated but refrained from giving a timeline. Although experts say dollarization has much more to do with stabilizing the economy, it is also seen through the geostrategic lens as a potential move for Argentina to get closer to Washington and away from Beijing. "In principle, China, like Russia, is opposed to the dollar's hegemony - everywhere and at all times. Argentina is no exception," Steve H. Hanke, professor of applied economics at Johns Hopkins University and an ardent proponent of dollarization whose ideas have been shared by Milei on X, formerly Twitter, on multiple occasions, told VOA in a written interview.

VOA

WE are about to enter a general election year, and although it is conceivable that Rishi Sunak will wait until Jan 28, 2025, the very end of the term allowed, he would be mad to do so. Prime Ministers behind in the polls always hope that by waiting almost until the last possible moment - John Major in 1997, Gordon Brown in 2010 - something might turn up to change their fortunes. They are usually wrong.

James Callaghan should have gone to the country in the autumn of 1978 but dithered and was poleaxed by the winter of discontent, culminating in a lost confidence vote in parliament and an election defeat the following spring. In 1992, Major called the election on March 11, the day after the Budget and three months earlier than he needed to. He won a majority a few weeks later, confounding expectations of a Labour victory.

For Mr Sunak to go the full distance would mean campaigning over the Christmas period, which would not go down well with voters. With no fixed-term (as opposed to maximum term) parliament any more, October/November are the most likely dates. But will Sunak be Major 1992 or Major 1997 - an against-the-odds victor or a lamb to the slaughter, with Labour winning a landslide? Or might this election be more like 1964? This also took place at the very end of the maximum five-year period. The Tories had won a resounding victory in 1959 under Harold "you've never had it so good" Macmillan, only to be rocked by a succession of scandals like the Profumo affair and the Vassall spy scandal.

Macmillan resigned in 1963 and was succeeded by Alec Douglas-Home, an hereditary peer who had to

Philip Johnston

renounce his title in order to contest a seat and join the Commons as prime minister. Labour also had a new leader in the shape of Harold Wilson who had taken over the party following the untimely death of Hugh Gaitskell. Then, as now, the Tories had been in office for 13 years and looked clapped out and bereft of ideas. Yet they lost only narrowly, with Wilson securing a majority of just four. Wiser heads in the party today see 1964 as a more realistic parallel for the coming election than 1997 because they will start the campaign so far back.

Labour has to win an additional 123 seats just to have a majority of one in the House of Commons, the legacy of Jeremy Corbyn and the party's Leftward lurch. In 2019, they won just 202 seats which is 70 fewer than the base on which Tony Blair launched his campaign in 1997. Clearly, the melt-down of the SNP will help if Labour can win back 30 or 40 seats in Scotland; but an overall majority is still a tall order and talk of a landslide seems well wide of the mark. Even if Sir Keir does as well as Blair in 1997 he will only have a slender majority.

What will happen to the Tories? Even in defeat in 1964 they still won more than 300 seats with the Liberals the only other party, chipping in with nine. This time, however, the Conservatives risk losing scores of seats to the Lib Dems and the impact of a re-Faraged Reform Party is yet fully to be felt, though the signs are ominous. Two recent by-elections saw Reform take enough votes to deprive the Tories of a majority. If that is widely replicated in a general election then the Conservatives are in serious trouble and getting 200 seats will be a struggle.

Another parallel with 1964 is also taking shape, that of class. Does the background of a party leader matter any more? Sixty years ago it was a key feature of the campaign as Labour mercilessly lampooned their opponent's aristocratic connections. Like his predecessor, Douglas-Home was an Old Etonian whom Wilson referred to as the 14th Earl Home. The latter's riposte was "I suppose, when you come to think of it, he is the 14th Mr Wilson."

It was an exchange that exemplified a changing world. The Sixties were not only in full swing, ushering in the most profound social upheavals for a century, but meritocracy rather than hereditary entitlement was considered the only legitimate route to advancement. "I grew up working class," he has said (many times). "My dad was a toolmaker, my mum was a nurse....we had our fair share of cost-of-living crises." In fact, his father was apparently self-employed and owned their house, according to a recent biography, so the description of working class in the conventionally understood sense would be pushing it a bit.

Moreover, in an era where authenticity is valued, this prolier-than-thou appeal no longer works. Whereas in 1964, the class divide was still a potent political issue, today's party leaders are more likely to be judged on what they have done and what they have to offer rather than whether they owned a Scottish estate or their father worked down a mine. That is why we are entitled to look at Sir Keir's record as a human rights lawyer and subsequently as Director of Public Prosecutions when assessing his fitness for the highest office. By next Christmas, we should know whether he has achieved it.

The Telegraph



SCCI Chief visit Peshawar Expo Centre

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fuad Ishaq alongwith Secretary Industries, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Zulfiqar Ali Shah and Pakistan Expo Centre Private Limited Chief Executive Officer Mariam Khawar visited the under-construction Peshawar Expo Centre, situated in Tarnab Peshawar.

During the visit, a detailed briefing was given to SCCI chief Fuad Ishaq and apprised him that structure of Peshawar Expo Centre has been completed while renovation and other construction work on the Expo centre would be com-

pleted in next 18 months, with provision of timely funds, said in a press release here on Wednesday.

Fuad Ishaq during the visit told secretary industries government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Zulfiqar Ali Shah and Pakistan Expo Centre Chief Executive Officer Mariam Khawar that in his previous presidential tenure, the Expo Centre was approved when former federal minister for commerce Khurram Dastgir visited the chamber house.

Initially, a sum of Rs500 million has been sanctioned out of the total estimated cost of Rs2.5 billion, in which over Rs2.4 billion has so far been spent, the SCCI chief elaborated.

He, however, said owing to increasing cost of construction materials, an additional Rs4billion is required to complete this important project for which financial assistance would be needed through the Export Development Fund.

The SCCI president expressed satisfaction over the designing and structure of Peshawar Expo Centre, which was built at 200-kanals.

He, however, voiced concern over delay in timely completion of the project.

Fuad Ishaq urged the federal minister for commerce Dr Gohar Ejaz to ensure the required Rs4billion for Peshawar Expo Centre in the next meeting of the Export Development Fund.

It will not only provide facility to local industries to display their products at the Peshawar Expo centre but also export would be boosted from the province, he added.

The SCCI chief hoped the Peshawar Expo Centre will provide facility to the business community of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province for promotion of export.

Fuad Ishaq said that former federal minister for commerce Khurram Dastgir Khan and the ex-federal secretary commerce Muhammad Shehzad Arbab had provided assistance in establishment of Peshawar Expo Centre, for which the SCCI and business community of the KP is highly thankful.



RIYADH: Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Overseas Pakistanis Muhammad Jawad Sohrah Malik inaugurating Pakistan Pavilion at Human Resource and Labour Service Expo 2023.

Shipping activity at PQ

KARACHI (APP): Shipping activity remained active at the port where three ships, MSC Jemima, Pacific Victory and Simaisma carrying Containers, Coal and LNG, berthed at Container Terminal, Bulk Terminal and Elengy Terminal respectively on Tuesday.

Meanwhile three more ships Maersk Cabo Verde, Cap Andreas and Neutron Sound with Containers, and Mogas also arrived at outer anchorage of the port during the last 24 hours.

A total of eight ships were engaged at POA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them, a container vessel MSC Jemima left the port on Wednesday morning and two more ships, Al-Jalaa and Saehan Kostarareexpected to sail on today afternoon.

Cargo throughput during last 24 hours stood at 136,746 tonnes, comprising 90,610 tonnes imports cargo and 46,136 tonnes export cargo, including containerized cargo carried in 1,804 Containers (895 TEUs Imports and 909 TEUs export) was handled at the port. There are 05 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them three ships, Cap Andreas, Cabo Verde and Sparto & another ship Isabella carrying Containers, Mogas and LPG areexpected to take berthsat QICT, FOTCO and EVTL on Wednesday.

PSX turns around to bullish trend — gains 1,692 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Wednesday turned around to bullish trend, gaining 1,692.64 points, a positive change of 2.86 percent, closing at 60,863.62 points against 59,170.98 points the previous trading day.

A total of 669,356,605 shares valuing Rs.16.115 billion were traded during the day as compared to 670,859,618 shares valuing Rs.17.129 billion the last day.

Some 357 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 274 of them recorded gains and 63 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 20 remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were K-Electric Ltd with 102,249,598 shares at Rs.4.89 per share, Fauji Foods Ltd with 58,130,290 shares at Rs.11.25 per share and PTCL with 55,426,000 shares at Rs.12.25 per share.

Pakistan Tobacco Company witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.56.00 per share price, closing at Rs.1,100.00, whereas the runner-up was Mari

Petroleum Company with a Rs.43.55 rise in its per share price to Rs.363.90.

Mehmood Textile Mills witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.37.00 per share closing at Rs. 468.00, followed by Faisal Spinning Mills with Rs.29.25 decline to close at Rs.360.75.

Rupee gains 18 paise against Dollar

Pakistani Rupee on Wednesday witnessed the 11th consecutive recovery session as it gained 18 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs282.19 against the previous day's closing of Rs282.37.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market stood at Rs282 and Rs284.5 respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 33 paise to close at Rs311.60 against the last day's closing of Rs311.27, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen came down by 01 paise and closed at Rs1.97; whereas the decrease of 78 paise was

witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs359.26 compared to the last closing of Rs358.48.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 04 and 03 paise to close at Rs 76.84 and Rs75.24 respectively.

Gold rates up by Rs.1,000 to Rs. 220,600 per tola

The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs.1,000 and was sold at Rs. 220,600 on Wednesday compared to its sale at Rs. 219,600 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs. 857 to Rs.189,129 from Rs.188,272 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs. 173,368 from Rs. 172,582, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola silver increased by Rs.30 to Rs2,680 whereas that of ten gram Silver went up by Rs.25.72 to Rs.2,297.66.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$13 to \$2,085 from \$2,072, the Association reported.

Commerce minister to address status of SEZs in Karachi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Commerce and Industries, Dr. Gohar Ejaz here on Wednesday chaired high-level meeting to address the status of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Karachi for creating investment friendly environment the country and to assess the current status of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Karachi.

The meeting was attended by key officials including Sauleh Ahmed Farooqi, Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce,

Rashid Langrial, Secretary of the Ministry of Industries and Production and Sohail Rajput, Secretary Board of Investment.

The meeting focused on the operational status of the Port Qasim SEZ, which is now ready for prospective investors.

The Port Qasim SEZ boasts comprehensive utility services, creating an ideal environment for businesses to thrive.

During the discussions, the minister highlighted the importance of diversification and growth, specifical-

ly addressing the establishment of a SEZ dedicated to the Information Technology (IT) sector.

The IT SEZ is poised to play a crucial role in fostering innovation and technological advancement in Pakistan. A key agenda item centered on initiatives to enhance the skill set of the labor force in Pakistan.

The Ministry of Commerce, in collaboration with other relevant authorities, plans to implement programs to improve the overall skill level of the workforce, with a particular

emphasis on IT skills.

This strategic approach aligns with the goal of boosting IT exports and positioning Pakistan as a competitive player in the global IT industry.

The minister reiterated the need for proper incentivization of the public sector to ensure inclusive growth. He emphasized that sustained economic development requires a collaborative effort between the government and private sector, with appropriate incentives serving as a catalyst for progress.

Pakistan exports seafood worth \$161.8 million in five months

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan earned \$161.896 million by exporting 72,515 metric tonnes of fish and fish preparations during the first five months of the current fiscal year, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

AS compared to the exports of \$185.802 million during July-November (2022-23), the fish exports during the July-November (2023-23) witnessed decline of 12.87 percent, according to PBS data.

In terms of quantity, the exports of fish and fish preparations however increased by 1.54 percent during the first five months when compared to exports of 71,415 metric tonnes during last fiscal year.

On a year-on-year basis, the seafood exports decreased by 25.75 percent to \$38.035 million in November 2023 as compared to the exports of \$51.224 million in November 2022.

In terms of quantity, the exports witnessed a 12.07 percent decrease by going down from 20,542 metric tonnes last year to 18,064 metric tonnes this year.

On a month-on-month basis, the seafood exports declined by 6.77 percent when compared to the exports of \$40.797 million in October, according to the PBS data.

In terms of quantity, fish exports increased by 8.5 percent in November compared to the exports of

16,648 metric tonnes in October.

The overall food group exports from Pakistan increased by 37.12 percent during the first five months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period of last year.

Food exports during July-November (2023-24) were recorded at \$2,640.905 million as compared to the exports of \$1,925.969 million in July-November (2022-23), a surge of 37.12 percent, according to latest PBS data.

It is pertinent to mention here that country's merchandise trade deficit contracted by 33.59 per cent during the first five months of the current fiscal year

compared to the corresponding period of last year.

The Trade deficit from July-November (2023-24) was recorded at \$9.378 billion as against the deficit of \$14.122 billion in July-November (2022-23), showing negative growth of 33.59 per cent.

During the period under review, the exports increased by 1.93 per cent to \$12.172 billion compared to the exports of \$11.942 billion during the corresponding period of last year, according to the latest PBS data.

On the other hand, the imports narrowed by 17.32 per cent and were recorded at \$21.550 billion compared to \$26.064 billion last year.

Tokyo stocks end higher

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo stocks ended higher Wednesday, with investors building on gains on Wall Street overnight.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index added 1.13 percent, or 375.39 points, to end at 33,681.24, while the broader Topix index rose 1.13 percent, or 26.54 points, to 2,365.40.

The dollar fetched 142.61 yen, against 142.34 yen in New York.

Global markets were positively affected by the so-called "Santa Claus rally", which has historically seen stocks tick higher -- albeit at thinner volumes -- during the end-of-year holiday period.

Also at play were growing hopes that US rate cuts are a possibility for the coming year, analysts said.

"Aside from the customary Santa seasonality, any gains witnessed for the remainder of this week may be attributed to the notable increase in the probability of a soft landing," Stephen Innes from SPI Asset Management said.

The global mood extended to Tokyo as well, where high-priced shares linked to semiconductors in particular experienced rallies, according to IwaiCosmo Securities.

Another big mover was SoftBank Group, which jumped 4.23 percent to 6,357 yen after the high-tech investor said it was acquiring T-Mobile shares worth \$7.59 million.

Among other major stocks in Tokyo, Tokyo Electron rose 1.26 percent to 25,620 yen, Sony Group added 1.44 percent to 13,340 yen and Toyota advanced 1.65 percent to 2,583 yen.

Economic outlook stays optimistic despite challenges

ISLAMABAD (APP): Despite significant challenges, the overall economic outlook remained optimistic, marked by receding inflationary pressures, positive prospects in agriculture, signs of potential recovery in the industrial sector, imports, and a favorable external environment.

According to Monthly Economic Update and Outlook for December issued by the ministry of finance, the optimistic economic outlook is also evident by the 2.13 percent growth achieved in the first quarter of FY2024, largely contributed by agriculture and industry.

Further, the report says, the twin deficit is on a downward trajectory signifying better economic management to reduce the macroeconomic imbalances.

"This lays the foundation for progressing towards higher and sustainable economic growth. It is therefore expected that this positive momentum will further strengthen in the upcoming months," the report adds.

Meanwhile, the report says for the Rabi season 2023-24, wheat crop has been cultivated on an estimated area of 8,733 million hectares against the target of 8,998 million hectares to achieve the production target of 32.3 million tonnes.

Punjab has surpassed its sowing target (6,475 million hectares) by 2 percent to 6,592 million hectares, while in other provinces it is in progress.

The Large Scale

Manufacturing (LSM) declined by 0.4 percent during Jul-Oct FY 2024 against the contraction of 1.7 percent same period last year. In October 2023, LSM decreased by 4.1 percent on Year on Year (YoY) basis against -1.4 percent in the same month last year.

While on a monthly basis, it is declined by 2.0 percent in October against the decrease of 3.2 percent in September. During Jul-Oct FY2024, 12 out of 22 sectors witnessed positive growth. These includes, food, beverages, coke & petroleum products, wearing apparel, leather, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, non-metallic mineral products, rubber products, fabricated metals, machinery and equipment, and others (Football).

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation recorded at 29.2 percent on a YoY basis in November 2023 as compared to 23.8 percent in November 2022. During Jul-Nov FY 2024, CPI stood at 28.6 percent against 25.1 percent in the same period last year. On basis, it increased to 2.7 percent in November 2023 compared to an increase of 1.0 percent in the previous month.

The Sensitive Price Index (SPI) for the week ended on December 21, 2023, recorded a decline of 0.51 percent as compared to previous week. Prices of 9 items declined, 24 items remained stable and 18 items increased.

A substantial increase in revenues compared to expenditures brought down the fiscal deficit to

0.8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) (Rs.861.7 billion) in Jul-Oct FY2024 from 1.5 percent of GDP (Rs.1265.8 billion) last year.

The primary surplus continued to improve owing to contained growth in no markup spending and recorded Rs.1429.7 billion (1.4 percent of GDP) during Jul-Oct FY2024 from Rs.136.2 billion (0.2 percent of GDP) last year.

The net federal revenue receipts increased to Rs.2806.6 billion in Jul-Oct FY2024 from Rs.1316.8 billion last year. The sharp rise in revenues has been largely attributed to considerable improvement in non-tax revenues that grew by more than 300 percent during the period under review.

In absolute terms, it increased to Rs. 1586.5 billion against Rs. 346.4 billion last year. This growth in non-tax collection has been observed across all major heads, indicating a broad-based increase.

Similarly, receipts from Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) tax collections grew by 29 percent to Rs.2748.4 billion against Rs.2138.7 billion last year.

The net provisional FBR tax collection maintained its momentum with 29.6 percent growth to reach Rs.3484.7 billion during Jul-Nov FY2024 from Rs.2688.4 billion last year. Within total, domestic tax revenues grew by 32 percent driven primarily by a 62.8 percent surge in Federal Excise Duty (FED) and a 42.2 percent rise in direct taxes.

Asian stocks track US gains in 'Santa Claus rally'

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian markets were higher on Wednesday, tracking Christmas holiday gains on Wall Street, with investors betting on the US Federal Reserve cutting interest rates as early as March. Markets in Japan, Australia and Hong Kong all rose, with bourses in the latter two reopening after the Christmas trading break.

Market sentiment has been largely positive since the Fed's last meeting, when it indicated the rate-hike cycle could be nearing its end, with inflation beginning to slow.

Global markets were also positively affected by the so-called "Santa Claus rally", which has historically seen stocks tick higher -- albeit at thinner volumes -- during the end-of-year holiday period.

"Since '69, the S&P has averaged a 1.3 percent gain in the Santa Rally, and with the market up so much this year, punctuated with an 8-week winning streak, there are not many sellers willing to book taxable gains to avoid a weak possibility of a correction," said investor Louis Navellier in a note.

Still, the main focus for investors will remain the Fed, whose rate-hike cycle has driven market activity ever since it began last year.

"The bets for a March Fed cut continue to grow, helping to propel stocks higher," said Navellier.

"Interest rates are essentially flat, and the US dollar index continues to fall."

Tokyo stocks closed up more than one percent, with investors continuing to

react to signals from the Bank of Japan that it may reverse its ultra-loose monetary policy, and with the timing of the move remains unknown. Hong Kong, Shanghai, Sydney, Seoul, Taipei, Wellington, Mumbai, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur were all up.

On Tuesday, Wall Street stocks continued their positive momentum, with the Dow and broad-based S&P 500 both rising 0.4 percent, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index climbed 0.5 percent.

Bucking the rising trend, however, was Apple, whose share price dipped 0.3 percent after a US ban on some of its smartwatch models came into effect, a byproduct of a patent dispute.

The ban stems from a complaint made to the

International Trade Commission in mid-2021 accusing Apple of infringing on medical device maker company Masimo Corp's "light-based oximetry functionality".

Currency markets saw few changes on Wednesday, with the euro and British pound rising around a quarter of a percent against the dollar. The yen was also steady, standing at 142.61 to the dollar, compared with 142.34 yen in New York trading.

Oil markets reversed last week's gains, mainly due to fears regarding the possible regional spread of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, with explosions reported off the coasts of Egypt and Yemen, deady US military action in Iraq and strikes from Lebanon.



In brief

PHF to probe irregularities

K A R A C H I (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) Wednesday announced that it will conduct an inquiry into the financial affairs of its former officials from 2008 to 2022. The new president of the PHF, Tariq Hussain Bugti, said that he will expose the financial fraudsters who have damaged the national game. He said the former secretaries and presidents of the PHF, including Asif Bajwa, Shehbaz Senior, Rana Mujahid, Qasim Zia, Akhtar Rasool and Brigadier (ret'd) Khalid Sajjad Khokhar, will be investigated for their role in opening private bank accounts and misusing funds. He also said that he has requested the Ministry of Interior to put their names on the Exit Control List (ECL) until the inquiry is completed. He added that those who are cleared in the investigation will be removed from the ECL. The PHF president said that he is determined to take strict action against those who have harmed the interests of hockey in Pakistan.

Pistons set NBA record

NEW YORK (Agencies): The Detroit Pistons set a new record for the longest losing streak in an NBA season after the Brooklyn Nets inflicted their 27th straight defeat. Detroit, who won two of their first three games of this campaign, were beaten 118-112 at home on Tuesday. In the fourth quarter, the Pistons - led by Cade Cunningham who scored 41 points - held a 97-92 lead. But the Nets took control with 13 unanswered points and Cameron Johnson top-scored with 24 in their win. The Pistons face the Boston Celtics, who have the NBA's best record, in Detroit on Thursday. Another defeat would see them draw level with the Philadelphia 76ers, who lost 28 consecutive matches across the 2014-15 and 2015-16 seasons. Elsewhere, Andre Drummond scored 24 points and added 25 rebounds to help the Chicago Bulls beat the Atlanta Hawks 118-113. Drummond became just the sixth player to record 20-plus points and rebounds in the same NBA game this season as the Bulls claimed their fourth win in five matches. The Memphis Grizzlies secured a fourth successive win in eight days with a 116-115 overtime victory against the New Orleans Pelicans. Ja Morant, who returned to the Memphis squad last week following a 25-game ban for a social media post, finished with a game-high 31 points. Franz Wagner contributed 28 points and Paolo Banchero added 24 as Orlando sealed a second victory in three days. Eight Indiana Pacers players hit double figures as they overcame the Houston Rockets 123-117. Tyrese Haliburton scored 33 points and dished out 10 assists for the Pacers and Myles Turner added 18 points as Houston fell to a fourth loss in six games. Elsewhere, the San Antonio Spurs slumped to a 23rd defeat in 24 matches, losing 130-118 to the Utah Jazz, while the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 129-106.

Australia take control of second Test as Pakistan flounder

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon put Australia in the driving seat of the second Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Wednesday to leave Pakistan tottering at 194-6, still 124 runs behind on day two. At stumps, Mohammad Rizwan was on 29 and Aamer Jamal not out two after Cummins took the crucial wickets of Abdullah Shafique (62) and Babar Azam (one), then Agha Salman (five). Lyon chipped in by removing Imam-ul-Haq (10) and Shan Masood (54), while Josh Hazlewood bowled Saud Shakeel for nine as Pakistan's dream of a first Test win in Australia since 1995 faded. The visitors had claimed seven wickets in the morning session on a pitch offering seam and swing, restricting the hosts to 318. Aamer Jamal spearheaded Pakistan's charge with 3-64 after Australia resumed on 187-3 after being sent into bat, with Marnus Labuschagne top-scoring on 63. Openers Haq and Shafique made a positive start in reply, surviving a series of loud appeals.

But veteran spinner Lyon, fresh from taking his 500th wicket during the first Test in Perth, finally earned a reward when Haq edged to Labuschagne at slip. Undeterred, Pakistan upped the run rate after tea with Masood hitting Lyon for six and Shafique reaching his first Test 50 in Australia, and fifth overall, with a four off Mitchell Starc. But their 90-run partnership was broken by Cummins, who showed sharp reflexes to stick out his left hand for a catch off his own bowling to end Shafique's stay. Fired up, he then clean bowled danger man Azam before Lyon returned to claim his second wicket when Masood miscued and Mitchell Marsh did well to hold a catch with the sun in his eyes. Hazlewood took care of Shakeel before Cummins brought himself back and accounted for Salman, caught by wicketkeeper Alex Carey to leave Pakistan in trouble. Labuschagne had been a rock on day one, digging in for an overnight 44 off 120 balls. He padded up again alongside Travis Head on nine with the sun shining,

smacking a boundary off Shaheen Shah Afridi in the opening over to signal Australia's intent. The explosive Head drove Hasan Ali to the ropes off his first ball and followed it up with another in the same over to quickly get in the groove. But his flair cost him on 17, lashing at a wide Afridi delivery that took a thick edge and was well collected by Salman in the slips. At the other end, Labuschagne kept plugging away to bring up his 17th Test half-century. Marsh was given out twice in successive balls during a fiery Ali over while on seven by West Indian umpire Joel Wilson. He reviewed both decisions — for lbw and caught behind — and survived. But just as the match appeared to be slipping away from Pakistan, Jamal bagged the wicket of Labuschagne, who edged to Shafique at slip. Carey and Starc quickly followed as Pakistan cashed in with a new ball, before Marsh holed out to Jamal off Mir Hamza on 41 and the tail folded. Australia won the first Test of the three-match series in Perth by 360 runs.

Abdullah Zaman, Sehrish Ali win Mohibullah Khan Jr Squash C'ship titles

PESHAWAR (APP): Abdullah Zaman and Sehrish Ali claimed Mohibullah Khan Junior Squash Championship title after defeating their respective teams here at Qamar Zaman Squash Complex on Wednesday. Chairman Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Squash Association Qamar Zaman was the chief guest. Finance Secretary Wazir Gul Muhammad, Executive Member Fazal Khalil, Directorate Senior Coach and Chief Organizer Manoor Zaman, Senior Coach Tahir Iqbal, Muhammad Wasim, Chief Referee Adil Faqir and other officials were also present. There was a match between Muhammad Ryan Zaman and Atif Ali Naz of the Under-9 category in which Atif Ali Naz secured victory with 11-8, 3-11, 11-3 and 11-8. In the Under-11

category final Arbab Fahad and Ans Rafy gave each other a tough fight and at the end, Arbab Fahad secured victory at 11-4, 11-5, 6-11 and 11-8. In the Under-13 final both Danish Sikander and Abdul Hadi Gul played well and some good nick, drops and forceful smashes were also witnessed. The final was stretched to five sets and continued for almost 53 minutes, the score was 12-10, 11-13, 12-14, 12-10 and 11-9. The final was also enjoyed by the capacity crowd present on this occasion as Danish and Abdul Hadi Gul played well against each other. In the Under-17 Boys final Abdullah Zaman easily defeated Fawad Khan by 3-0, the score was 11-7, 11-7 and 11-5. Abdullah Zaman dominated the proceedings and did not allow Fawad Khan to strike back.

In the final of Girls U-15, the match between Sehrish Ali and Nimra Rehman also proved to be one-sided. In which Sehrish Ali won 11-9, 11-9 and 11-4. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Squash Association have almost completed 29 events in the last six months of the current year which includes International events as well for both male and female, said Muhammad Wazir Gul, Finance Secretary of the KP Squash Association. Muhammad Wazir Gul, who is also Director Blue Tone Squash Academy, said we have given more focus to the age groups competitions so as to strengthen squash at the grassroots level. He said a game calendar would be announced for the coming year-2024 wherein a total of 15 events would be organized in the first six months.

Gakpo backs Liverpool forwards to fill in for absent Salah



LONDON (AFP): Liverpool's Cody Gakpo believes his side have the forward firepower to cope without Mohamed Salah when the Egypt star departs for the upcoming Africa Cup of Nations. Darwin Nunez ended a run of 12 games without a goal, while Diogo Jota came off the bench to score after a month out injured in a 2-0 win over Burnley on Tuesday which took Liverpool to the top of the Premier League table. Salah has one more Liverpool game — at home to Newcastle on Sunday — before he departs for the African Nations Cup and the 16-goal winger is set to be away from Anfield on international duty for up to a month. That makes Nunez and Jota's goals against Burnley all the more timely, with Gakpo having scored seven himself so far this season. "For every attacking player who didn't score for a few games, it's always nice to get back on the scoresheet and Darwin did

it with a very good goal," said Gakpo. "For Diogo as well. When you are injured and you come back and score that's always nice and good for the confidence. So really happy. "Mo is gone after the Newcastle game so we need the goals. Of course, I think I can contribute even more." Liverpool captain Virgil Van Dijk added: "It's always important for the guys up front to score goals. I am delighted for Darwin. Diogo, it's the same story. It's good to see the boys back on the scoresheet. "I also want to say that Cody was outstanding, in the first half especially. It's good to see. Everyone has to keep pushing each other. That's the only way we can get better," the Netherlands defender explained. "Others have to step up anyway. We have to deal with losing Mo and we have the players up front who can make the difference. Let's see how we deal with it." Liverpool are now two points ahead of Arsenal,

although the Gunners will return to the summit with victory at home to London rivals West Ham on Thursday. "The table is not looking in a bad place but we have to take it one game at a time, don't let our heads go everywhere all over the place, just stay focused and keep doing what we are doing now and even improve more," said Gakpo. The 24-year-old Dutch attacker has never before experienced English football's packed Christmas and New Year schedule, with Gakpo enjoying himself as matches come thick and fast. "It's the first time I played with this intensity -- a lot of games in a few days - and it's nice as if you play a good game you can play again and if you play a not-so-good game, you can make it good in the next game as it's coming nice and quick," he said. "Everybody wants the three points -- also the opponents -- so you have to work really hard every game and you have to be able to win games different ways."

Bangladesh claim historic victory over New Zealand in first T20

NAPIER (AFP): Bangladesh claimed an historic five-wicket win over New Zealand on Wednesday after their bowlers ran riot in the opening game of their three-match Twenty20 series on Wednesday in Napier.

This was Bangladesh's first Twenty20 win on New Zealand soil, four days after also claiming a maiden away one-day international win over the Black Caps in Napier. "I'm really excited and very proud of how we played," said Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto. Asked to bat by Shanto, New Zealand made a disastrous start losing three wickets before reaching 134 for nine after their 20 overs. "Our bowlers learnt quickly in these conditions with the new ball," Shanto added. "We were really confident after we restricted them."

The Black Caps bowlers gave home fans hope with the early wickets of Bangladesh opener Rony Talukdar and Shanto. Veteran Litton Das partnered up with Soumya Sarkar, then Towhid Hridoy to steer Bangladesh to 96-4 after 13 overs. The visitors were wobbling at 97-5 as they lost wickets in quick succession after Afif Hossain was caught for one run off six balls.

Das, who finished on 42 not out, survived two close calls as he battled cramp. The on-field umpire gave him out lbw on Tim Southee's bowling, but the Bangladesh opener stayed at the crease when the review showed the ball would have sailed over the stumps. Ish Sodhi then caught Das at the boundary, but stepped onto the boundary rope to give away six runs.

It fell to allrounder Mahedi Hasan, who finished 19 not out, to hit the winning runs in his partnership of 40 alongside Das with eight balls spare. "Credit to Bangladesh, they bowled well," said Mitchell Santner, who captained New Zealand with regular white ball skipper Kane Williamson rested.

"We fought hard with the ball to make it interesting, but the powerplay took it away from us with the bat," Santner added. The second and third Twenty20 in Internationals will both be played at Mount Maunganui on Friday, then Sunday.

Bangladesh, ranked ninth in Twenty20 international cricket, punched above their weight to floor third-ranked New Zealand. Having dismissed the Black Caps for 98 in Saturday's third one-day international in losing the series 2-1, the Bangladesh bowlers picked up where they left off.

Hasan bowled Tim Seifert in the opening over. Shoriful Islam was the pick of the Bangladesh bowlers with 3-26, including having Finn Allen caught and Glenn Phillips trapped lbw in consecutive balls.

Daryl Mitchell hit consecutive fours before falling for 14 to leave New Zealand 20-4. Mark Chapman hit 19 off as many balls before being caught with the score on 50-5.



MELBOURNE: Pat Cummins celebrates the dismissal of Salman Ali Agha during day two of the Second Test Match between Australia and Pakistan.

Elgar and Bedingham put South Africa ahead against India

CENTURION (AFP): Dean Elgar, on the eve of retirement, and new cap David Bedingham took South Africa into the lead on the second day of the first Test against India at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Wednesday. Elgar made a boundary-studded 140 not out and Bedingham an assured 56 as South Africa reached 256 for five — a lead of 11 runs — when bad light stopped play.

Two late wickets kept India in the game, especially as there was no sign that South African captain Temba Bavuma would bat after suffering a hamstring strain on the first day.

There was no update on his condition from the South African dressing room but he remained in his tracksuit while other batsmen took their turns to pad up.

KL Rahul scored 101 for India — his eighth Test cen-

tury and his second in successive matches in Centurion — and was last man out when India were dismissed for 245.

Elgar, 36, who has announced he will retire from international cricket after the second Test in Cape Town next week, had to survive a challenging start against Indian new ball bowlers Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj.

But the left-handed opening batsman blossomed with some of the most fluent stroke play of his career when India surprisingly did not use the two strike bowlers immediately after lunch.

Elgar reached his fifty off 79 balls with ten fours and his 14th Test century was made off 140 deliveries with nine more boundaries. His scoring rate slowed as he went on the defensive in increasingly

poor light before play was called off. He had faced 211 balls and hit 23 fours. Bedingham, 29, has played English county cricket for Durham since 2020 and there was speculation that he would attempt to qualify for England. But new South African Test coach Shukri Conrad called him up for the Test squad and he looked comfortable from the start of his innings. A tall right-hander, he went into his debut Test with a solid average of 49.51 compiled over 86 first-class matches, 44 of them for Durham. He hit seven fours and two sixes in an 87-ball innings while helping Elgar add 131 for the fourth wicket.

South Africa added 145 runs for the loss of two wickets in 33 overs in an afternoon session extended to make up for overs lost in a rain-hit first day.

Djokovic expects Nadal back for more Grand Slams not just to play

RIYADH (AFP): Novak Djokovic warned Wednesday he expects great rival Rafael Nadal is returning "to win a Grand Slam, not just to play" as the world number one prepares to defend his Australian Open title next month.

Nadal, a 22-time Grand Slam champion, makes his comeback after a near year-long injury absence at the Australian Open warm-up event in Brisbane starting Sunday.

The 37-year-old Nadal has said that 2024 could be his final season without being able to "guarantee it 100 percent". But Djokovic, 36, who won three Grand Slams in 2023 to overtake the Spaniard with a record 24,

expects his rival to be as competitive as ever.

"I always expect him (Nadal) to play at his best, to be honest. Many times they've signed him out, they've done that with me as well. But we've proved them wrong," Djokovic told journalists on the sidelines of an exhibition match against Carlos Alcaraz in Riyadh.

"He's not a kind of a player that will come back to the tour just to play — let's say -- on a medium level, play a few matches," continued Djokovic.

"He wants to win titles, he wants to be the best, that's why he is who he is: a legend of our sport. I'm sure that his training and preparation is done with an inten-

tion to win a Grand Slam." Nadal has not played since a second-round loss to American MacKenzie McDonald at the Australian Open a year ago.

He twice needed surgery after struggling with a hip injury and has slipped to 670th in the world rankings while sidelined.

Alcaraz added: "I think he's ready... I saw some videos of him practising, he's 100 percent."

"I hear from other players that they practised with Rafa in these past weeks and they said that he's going to return to his good level. His top level." "I think he's ready for great things this year as well," added the world number two of his compatriot.

HEC All-Pakistan Inter-University Men Badminton C'ship begins

PESHAWAR (APP): All Pakistan Inter-University Badminton Championship Zone B got under way in a joint collaboration of the Directorate of Sports University of Peshawar (UoP) and Higher Education Commission Islamabad here at the indoor hall of the Campus on Wednesday.

A Pakistani origin Dr. Atiq Samdani, Head of the Virginia Cancer Institute, USA, formally inaugurated the Championship in which a total of 14 Universities teams from all across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are taking part.

Dr. Atiq Samdani, who remained a student of the KMC, is well known Cancer specialists, is currently on a visit to Pakistan including KP. Dr. Atiq while recalling his memories, said that he being a basketball player, represented NWFP in the National Basketball Championship in 90s.

All Pakistan Inter-Varsity Badminton Zone B Championship started in the gymnasium of Directorate of Sports of UoP with more than 70 players from fourteen universities participating in the Championship organized by HEC and supervised by UoP.

The team comprising UoP, Abbasian University, Brains Institute Peshawar, CECOS University, Gandhara University, IM Sciences Peshawar, ICUP, Iqra University,

KMU, UET, Agri University Peshawar, Northern University, Nowshera, Shuhad-e-Army Public University Nowshera and SUIT.

VC UoP Prof. Dr. Muhammad Saleem Khan, Oncologist, Head of Virginia Cancer Institute Dr. Atiq Samdani and Squash Legend Qamar Zaman were the special guests at the colourful opening ceremony.

The competition was inaugurated by cutting the ribbon and was accompanied by DG Sports Bahre Karam, Director of Sports of various universities, Director of Sports of KMU Nasir Saleem, International Handball Players and Coach Asim Rashid, Naveedur Rahman and other officials were present. VC UoP Prof. Dr. Muhammad Salim Khan congratulated the Director of Sports and his team for organizing the best competitions and assured that they will continue to support the development of sports. He said that UoP has produced heroes in the field of sports. Dr. Atiq Samdani said that he himself has been a basketball player from school to university level and still plays basketball regularly.

He said that the spirit of serving the nation brings him to Pakistan. He also travels around the country to support the treatment of cancer patients and at the Virginia Cancer

Institute to serve cancer patients around the world.

He said that fitness is the real health, as long as you stay fit, diseases do not attack you, it is very important to participate in sports for fitness and there is no age limit for it. Legend Qamar Zaman said that Bahre Karam won gold medals for the country and nation in the Asian and Saif Games and till today he is engaged in the service of sports.

The team of UoP consists of Muhammad Tauseef, Farhan Ahmed, Zubair Khan, Taimur Khan, while the manager is Khalid Khan. Ziyad, Sajjad Khan, Imad Khan, Mehran Khan while Manager Qaiser Siddique, City University team includes Azeemullah, Rizwanullah, Muhammad Umar, Fahad Mustafa, Amir Hamza Hussain and Manager Sajid Iqbal. Muhammad Uzair, Bilal Khan, Muhammad Abrar, while Farid Usman is the manager, Muhammad Anzal Akbar, Ibrahim Durrani, Abbas Shah, Abdul Muqeud, Kashif Khan and Muhammad Nisar are team managers in the team of CECOS University, Muhammad Faizan Syed is in the team of Khyber Medical University including Muhammad Hasan, Syed Saqlain Haider while the manager of the is Dr. Abdul Salam.



In brief

NHA launches strict action

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Highway Authority (NHA) has issued a detailed advisory warning the truck drivers and loaders to avoid overloading their vehicles as it had initiated strict action against the vehicles violating the restrictions and burdening the national thoroughfares leading to accidents and damage to important connectivity infrastructure. The Authority with the cooperation of the National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) has initiated a stringent nationwide drive against overloaded vehicles that were jeopardizing public life, property and infrastructure. The minimum weight allowed for a two-axle Bedford truck or vehicle was 17.5 tonnes, 27.5 and 29.5 tonnes for a three-axle vehicle, 39.5 tonnes and 41.5 tonnes for a four-axle vehicle, 48.5 tonnes and 49.5 tonnes of vehicles for a five-axle vehicle, 51.5 tonnes for a five-axle vehicle, 58.5 and 61.5 tonnes for eight axle vehicle. The overloading of vehicles was leading to risk to life, tyre burst, damage to roads, excessive fuel usage, early damaging of tyres, heavy fines, axle breakage, expenditure of road repairs and wastage of time.

4791 FIRs launched

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police registered over 4791 FIRs against underage drivers during a special campaign so far, said a police spokesman. He informed that police on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi, Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani were taking action by the law against underage drivers. The CPO had directed the City Traffic Police officers to take solid steps to control traffic rules violations and underage driving, he said. The parents were also advised to discourage driving by underage drivers adding that fatal road accidents occur due to speeding and reckless driving of the drivers particularly underage. The ongoing operation against underage drivers and other traffic rules violators had been accelerated on the instructions of the CPO. The vehicles and motorcycles of the underage drivers were also being impounded in respective police stations, he said. In addition to issuing fines for underage driving, police were also conducting awareness campaigns in schools and colleges to educate young individuals about the legal age requirements for obtaining a driver's license, he added.

5 illegal arm holders arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested five illegal arm holders and recovered arms, ammunition from their possession during crackdown here on Wednesday. According to the police spokesman, Rawat police held Saleem and recovered an M-16 rifle from his possession and the same police recovered 12 bore rifle from Ansar. Similarly, Kahuta police recovered 12 bore rifle from Khalid while Mandra police recovered 01 pistol 30 bore from Abu Bakr. Following the operation, Saddar Barooni police nabbed Abid and recovered 01 pistols 30 bore from his custody. Police have registered separate cases against the accused and further investigation was in progress. SSP Operations appreciated the performance of police teams adding that strict action would be taken against those who were carrying illegal weapons.



ISLAMABAD: Special Representative to the Prime Minister for Religious Harmony & Islamic Countries and Chairman Pakistan Ulema Council Hafiz Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi addressing a press conference at his Office.

Interfaith unity celebrated on Christmas Ashrafi acknowledges collaborative efforts across religions

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Special Representative on Religious Harmony and Pakistani Diaspora in Middle East and Muslim Countries, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, on Wednesday, emphasized the spirit of unity and cooperation among all religious communities on the occasion of Christmas in the country.

Holding a press conference here, he expressed gratitude and acknowledged the leaders and representatives of various faiths across Pakistan, commending their collaborative efforts in fostering interfaith harmony. Ashrafi, who is also the Chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council specifically thanked the Christian community for actively participating in their religious ceremonies across the country, highlighting the unity displayed during these events.

He shed light on the nationwide manifestation of interfaith cohesion, exemplifying Pakistan as a country that embraces and respects all religions. He reiterated the commitment of Pakistan as a nation that upholds the principles of the Constitution, emphasizing that everyone is bound by the rule of law.

In a firm stance, Ashrafi stated, "Pakistan is a country that recognizes and respects all religions and sects. Our Constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens, regardless of their faith." He went on to express regret over the fact that some individuals wish to impose their ideologies

on the nation.

However, the Prime Minister's Special Representative highlighted that the entire nation, irrespective of religious affiliations, collaborated with the Christian community, setting a remarkable example of interfaith harmony. He reiterated the importance of unity, diversity, and mutual respect in the fabric of Pakistani society. Expressing disappointment over the dissemination of misinformation, Ashrafi highlighted the Ministry of Religious Affairs' efforts in managing Hajj applications that exceeded the designated quota. He asserted that the Ministry was actively working to address these issues and find practical solutions. In a broader context, he announced the establishment of Pakistan Peace Councils nationwide. These councils would foster interfaith harmony and collaboration, promoting unity and understanding among diverse religious communities, he added.

Additionally, the Prime Minister's Special Representative said the Ministry of Religious Affairs had launched the Pakistan Hajj Application, providing guidance and information for pilgrims. He said this digital initiative was designed to ensure that Hajj participants receive the necessary support and guidance throughout their sacred journey.

He also addressed several critical issues, including the positive economic trajectory in Pakistan, the polio issue, and the humanitarian situation in Palestine.

Ashrafi acknowledged the positive developments in Pakistan and the establishment of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) to facilitate foreign investment. He emphasized the significance of SIFC in providing essential facilities for external investments, highlighting its pivotal role in the country's economic growth. On the pressing issue of polio eradication, he mentioned a conference being held on Thursday under the supervision of Health Minister Nadeem Jan, involving scholars and religious leaders. He said special guest Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, was expected to address the conference, where a joint Fatwa (religious decree) and declaration would be issued to emphasize the legitimacy of polio vaccination globally.

Addressing concerns about delayed justice, Ashrafi, on behalf of the Pakistan Ulema Council, urged the immediate punishment of those involved in the May 9 incidents. Despite the available evidence against the culprits, he questioned the delay in taking action and called for swift justice against the perpetrators.

Turning to the distressing situation in Palestine, Ashrafi revealed that Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar was engaged with leaders from all Islamic countries regarding the peace and ceasefire situation in Gaza.

CDA to auction more plots in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has decided to conduct an auction of plots in January 2024, alleviating the budgetary constraints faced by civic body.

According to the CDA official, the plot auction is set to take place from the 10th to the 12th of January at the F9 Park in Gandhara Hall. Plots located on Blue Area, Centers, and Park Road will be included in the auction.

The auction list includes petrol pumps, Class Three shopping centres, agro farms, and apartment plots, along with fruit and vegetable shops, IT centres, and hostel plots.

A substantial 10 percent discount will be applicable for complete payments made within one month of bid acceptance. Furthermore, approval for construction plans will be granted upon the first instalment payment.

Iqbal's poetry, philosophy and thought were universal: Madad Ali

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training, Madad Ali Sindhi on Wednesday said that Iqbal's poetry, philosophy and thought were, undoubtedly, universal and his message was for the people of the whole world.

Iqbal's message is as fresh as ever and we still need it today, the minister said while addressing the opening session of a two-day international conference on "Iqbal's Thought in the Perspective of 21st Century and Two Great Poets of Islam: Iqbal and Akif" at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU). The conference was organized by the Department of Iqbal Studies AIOU in collaboration with Yunus Emre Institute.

Madad Ali Sindhi mentioned that Iqbal's thought provided a solution to the problems of today and served as a guiding light for all human beings. Iqbal's political philosophy is a source of strength for democracy in Pakistan, he said.

He expressed his delight over the presence of eminent intellectuals and Iqbal enthusiasts from all over Pakistan, Egypt, Iran, and Turkey at the conference.

The federal minister congratulated Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, Vice Chancellor AIOU and his entire team for organizing this international conference on Iqbal.

Vice Chancellor AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood mentioned that the University was one of the few universities which had established a Department of Iqbal Studies to promote Iqbal's thoughts and poetry. He

stated that through this department, we aimed to convey the message of Allama Iqbal to the youth. Dr. Nasir emphasized the need to elaborate and explain Iqbal's thoughts to train the new generation.

Turkish Ambassador Mehmet Pacici and Dr. Halil Tokar commented that Iqbal's poetry had profoundly impacted the Turkish nation. In Turkey, there have been many translations of Iqbal's poetry and research work on Iqbal is being conducted in Turkish universities, he said and added, however, in Pakistan, Muhammad Akif is not recognized, and in collaboration with AIOU, the Yunus Emre Institute will promote the poetry and thoughts of the Turkish poet Muhammad Akif in Pakistan. Other speakers including Director General, NLPD, Prof. Dr. Saleem Mazhar, Dr. Baseera Ambreen from Punjab University and Dr. Fatima Hasan from Karachi expressed their concern about the challenges that today's young generation is facing including academic, intellectual, cultural, and moral crises. They emphasized that Allama Muhammad Iqbal's thoughts, philosophy and poetry can inspire and guide the youth to overcome these problems.

Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Prof. Dr. Abdul Aziz Sahir expressed his gratitude to all the guests and participants.

Dr. Shiraz Zaidi explained the aims and objectives of the conference, while Dr. Arshad Mehmood Nashad hosted the inaugural ceremony.

Wafaqi Mohtasib launches revamped version of the official website

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Wafaqi Mohtasib, Mr. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi has said that the website of the Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat (WMS) plays a pivotal role in providing basic information to its users with regard to redressal of their complaints besides enabling them to lodge these complaints online, without having to travel to its Offices.

He was addressing an austere ceremony organized in connection with the launch of the revamped version of the official website of this Office here today. All Senior Officers were present on the occasion while the Heads of Regional Offices attended the event online. The representatives of the National Information Technology Board (NITB) who had helped in developing the website were also present.

He said by using the state-of-the-art technology, the website has been made more efficient, user-friendly, incorporating the necessary contents in Urdu, thereby facilitating those who were earlier facing difficulties in surfing and



utilizing the English version of the website. He added that the inclusion of all essential features in the Urdu language shall enhance awareness in the masses about the services being rendered by this institution.

He further observed that all the essential contents including the complaint redressal mechanism, its practices and procedures, special initiatives including the Informal Resolution of Disputes (IRD), Outreach Complaint Resolution (OCR), KhuliKatcheries and alike have been uploaded in the Urdu language. Similarly, the information pertaining to the working of the Grievance Commissioner for

Overseas Pakistanis and the Grievance Commissioner for Children operating under the aegis of the WM Office has been displayed in Urdu on its web pages.

The Wafaqi Mohtasib went on to say that the primary purpose of undertaking this exercise was to provide all necessary information to the website users and visitors, who were residing in the far-flung areas of the country and were unable to visit the Head Office or the Regional Offices. He expressed the confidence that with the launching of this website, all segments of the society would be able to benefit themselves from this facility and would be able to seek redressal of their grievances virtually at their doorstep.

IG NH&MP unveils initiative to reinforce road safety

ISLAMABAD (INP): Inspector General National Highways and Motorway Police (NH&MP), Sultan Ali Khawaja has unveiled a significant initiative approved by the Government of Pakistan and the Ministry of Communications to reinforce road safety and prioritize the well-being of commuters and their belongings. To ensure the effective enforcement of traffic laws on the extensive network of

National Highways, the NH&MP has taken proactive measures aimed to guarantee secure travel and safety of the commuters as well as their property.

This comprehensive plan unfolds in two phases, with the first phase commencing on October 1st, 2023, on Motorways, Hazara and Swat Expressway, where specific fines were increased for cars and jeeps. The escalation in fine rates across various traffic violations is in

line with the government's commitment to curb serious violations of traffic laws, guided by the amended twelfth schedule of the National Highway Safety Ordinance 2000. Moving forward to the second phase, scheduled for January 1st, 2024, the revised fine schedule will be implemented for all vehicle types on all National Highways and Motorways under the jurisdiction of the National Highways and Motorway Police.

Nutritionist urges public to slash sugar intake for optimal well-being

ISLAMABAD (APP): A health expert on Wednesday emphasized the need to reduce sugar intake to promote overall well-being and combat the rising health concerns associated with excessive sugar consumption. "Excessive sugar intake is a major contributor to various health issues, including obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases," Dr Babar Saleem, a prominent nutritionist told a private news channel. He highlighted the alarming rates of sugar consumption in the general population, stressing that individuals to take control of their health by making informed choices about what they consume.

Dr Saleem noted that many processed foods and beverages, often staples in modern diets, are laden with hidden sugars, contributing to the health crisis.

He underscored the need to launch awareness campaigns about the risks associated with high sugar intake and provide practical tips for reducing consumption.

"These efforts aim to empower individuals to make healthier food choices and adopt sustainable lifestyle changes," he maintained. "Reducing sugar intake doesn't mean sacrificing taste or enjoyment. It's about making smarter choices and being mindful of what we consume. Small changes can lead to significant improvements in our overall health," added Dr Saleem. He called upon the health authorities to encourage food manufacturers to reformulate products to lower sugar content. The goal is to create a supportive environment that facilitates healthier choices for consumers.

The nutritionist urged the masses to read food labels carefully, choose whole, unprocessed foods whenever possible, and limit the intake of sugary snacks and beverages. He believed that a collective effort to reduce sugar consumption would lead to a healthier population and a significant decrease in the prevalence of diet-related diseases.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for IT & Telecommunication, Dr. Umar Saif giving award to the winner team during Awards Ceremony of Digital Pakistan Cyber security Hackathon-2023.

Qalandar met Mahathir

KABUL (BNA): Dr. Qalandar Ebad, the Acting Minister of Public Health of Afghanistan, held a meeting with Malaysia's former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad. In discussions focused on the exchange of experiences in the health sector, Dr. Qalandar Ebad highlighted the importance of collaboration in this field. The meeting, which took place in Malaysia, also had the participation of Naghibullah Ahmadi, the charge de affairs of the Afghan Embassy in Malaysia.

The Frontier Post

Jamadi-us-Sanni 14, 1445 — Thursday, December 28, 2023

Ministry signs MoU

KABUL (Ariana News): Ministry of Industry and Commerce signed memoranda of understanding with ten organizations to support and develop small and medium enterprises. These projects include various consulting sections, supporting small and medium entrepreneurs, promoting marketing for entrepreneurs, empowering poor women, creating job opportunities, sewing training for girls and widows, developing handicrafts, and creating jobs for women without caretakers.

Lack of water affecting almond yield

DAIKUNDI (TOLONews): Some gardeners in Daikundi are worried about the decrease in almond products due to the drought in the province. According to them, the lack of water has caused hundreds of almond trees in Daikundi to dry up or remain fruitless.

"If an almond tree does not bear fruit, people will no longer be able to provide expenses for their families. In these three or four years, we had a good harvest," said Ewaz Ali, a gardener.

"Almond trees are des-

troyed and have no fruits, currently, I am destroying the trees that had fruits before because they have dried up and have no fruit due to the lack of water," said Zamin Ali, a gardener.

Almonds are one of the most important horticultural products in Daikundi and provide about 70 percent of the income of the residents of the province.

The head of agriculture and irrigation of Daikundi also said that compared to last year, 9 metric tons of almond products have

decreased in the province, but they are trying to support gardeners.

"Compared to last year, there has been a decrease of almost 9 thousand tons. Last year it was more than 29 thousand tons, but now more than 20 thousand tons of almonds have been harvested," said Sher Ahmad Rafi.

Almonds, apples, apricots, and berries are among the most important products of gardeners in Daikundi province, and most of its residents provide for their family's expenses.

One-third of children engaged in laborious work

KABUL (Khaama Press): The International Rescue Committee (IRC) in its latest report has highlighted that the needs of 40% of children in Afghanistan are unmet, emphasizing that one-third of children in the country are engaged in laborious work.

The agency reported on Wednesday, that many children have been forced into arduous labour by their families due to increased poverty following the rise of the Taliban regime.

The report, aimed at examining the situation of children in Palestine, states that the condition of children in the Gaza Strip and Sudan is "disastrous."

The International Rescue Committee has stressed that aid agencies in Afghanistan have failed to meet even the minimum needs of 40% of children.

Previously, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had stated that children in Afghanistan are forced to undertake hard and dangerous work to obtain their meals.

According to a report in 2022, in the northern areas of Afghanistan, 131,400 children, some as young as five years old, have been separated from their families and are exposed to violence and abuse.

The United Nations also reported that children's access to basic services has been disrupted due to prolonged conflicts, displacement, severe poverty, food insecurity, lack of livelihood opportunities, and lack of investment, and there has been an increase in recruitment, abuse, and sexual violence against them in Afghanistan.

It is worth mentioning that the Taliban administration has rejected this UN report and emphasized children's rights in the country.

Meanwhile, as poverty increases in Afghanistan, the number of working children on the country's roads has grown, becoming a concern for human rights and children's organizations.

DABS, Tajikistan sign electricity supply agreement for 2024

KABUL (Ariana news): Chief Executive Officer of Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), Alhaj Mullah Muhammad Hanif Hamza, has signed an electricity purchase agreement with Tajikistan for 2024.

Hamza signed the agreement at a meeting in Turkey with the Chairman of Tajikistan Electricity Company, Mohammad Omar Asazada.

During the meeting, both sides discussed the possibility of extending a new 500 KV transmission line from Tajikistan to Afghanistan, with Tajikistan expressing interest in pursuing this extension.

DABS' leadership also requested Tajikistan's cooperation in resuming, coordinating, and implementing the CASA-1000 project.



The Central Asia-South Asia power project, com-

monly known as CASA-1000, is a \$1.16 billion project that once complete will allow for the export of

surplus hydroelectricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Ministry, 15 institutions signed agreements



KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has signed agreements with 15 domestic and foreign institutions worth more than one billion Afghanis. The purpose of these agreements is to support children, technical and vocational training programs, orphanages, and poor families.

"We should pay attention to the problems in our society, the world should help us, and we have reduced corruption to zero. Security is also provided," said Aziz Rahman, an official of the ministry.

"There are contracts with 15 institutions, which include 21 projects, the total cost of the project is more than 1 billion 79 mil-

lion Afghanis," said Din Mohammad Haqbin, deputy of the ministry.

The spokesman of the IE considers it important to create agreements between the ministries with internal and external institutions in the field of providing work for the people and reducing the country's economic challenges.

"The capacities that the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has identified for them will provide the field of work and service for the people of Afghanistan...." said Zabiullah Mujahid, spokesman of the Islamic Emirate.

Some analysts said the activities of institutions that work in various sectors to provide social and econom-

ic services in the country to be effective.

"Agreements between some institutions and government institutions in the field of employment creation can be of great economic importance," said Shaker Yaqoobi, an economist. The cooperation agreement of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has been signed with 15 domestic and foreign institutions, while yesterday the Ministry of Industry and Commerce announced the signing of 10 agreements with some institutions providing social and economic services.

Based on the ministry's statement, these institutions work to support and develop small and medium enterprises in various sectors.

Three-day 'Afghanistan future thought forum' underway in Turkey

KABUL (Ariana News): The 8th Session of the Afghanistan Future Thought Forum (AFTF) got underway in Istanbul on Tuesday and aims to tackle a number of issues including the findings of the recent independent assessment commissioned by United Nations.

The three-day forum is being jointly hosted by Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and IHH Humanitarian Relief

Foundation.

According to Sultan Barakat, Director of Conflict and Humanitarian Studies at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, a number of key figures are attending including Oguzhan Ertugrul, Turkey's director general for South Asia and the UN's special coordinator for Afghanistan Feridun Sinirlioglu, among others.

Sinirlioglu presented the

findings of his recent independent assessment of Afghanistan at the meeting.

Barakat said in a post on X, that the participants were also expected to discuss three other key areas, including recent responses to natural disasters; the forced return of Afghans from Pakistan and Iran; and the impact the conditions of women are having on health issues in the country.

Sinirlioglu's independ-

ent assessment of the situation in Afghanistan was also presented to the Security Council by United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres in early November.

Sinirlioglu's report proposed ways for the IEA to come out of international isolation.

He recommended that a national dialogue should be held to form an inclusive government.

Cabinet meeting held to discuss projects

KABUL (BNA): The twelfth session of the Islamic Emirate's cabinet, led by Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund, the Prime Minister of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, was held.

According to a statement released by the Prime Minister's Office, one of the key agendas of the session was the initiation of the remaining work on the "Omar Kandahar" mosque. The Ministry of Urban Development and Housing was assigned the task of overseeing this project and establishing a qualified committee to ensure its progress.

Additionally, under the guidance of Mawlawi Hamdullah Naumani, the Acting Minister of the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, a comprehensive review was conducted on the Macrorayan Fifth residential project.

Representatives from various ministries, including Information and Culture, Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, Environmental Protection, Kabul Water Utility, and Kabul Municipality, participated in the discussion.

The aim was to assess the report provided by the obligated committee and find an effective solution to the matter.

During the twelfth session of the cabinet, the committee, supervised by the Office of Administrative Affairs delegation, presented their findings on the Ministry of Communications' real-time system.

The committee's opinions were approved, and it was decided to expedite the activation of this system, ensuring its efficient operation.



KABUL (Ariana News):

After returning home from Iran, the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs called on Maulavi Abdul Kabir, the third deputy prime minister for political affairs of Afghanistan, and reported that his trip to Tehran was "full of achievements".

According to a newsletter issued by the prime minister's office, Amir Khan Muttaqi told Kabir that during his trip to Iran he met with a number of Iranian officials as well as diplomats and Afghans living in

Tehran and Mashhad.

Muttaqi called Iran a "friend of Afghanistan" and said that he had a discussion with Iranian officials regarding the political, economic and trade development between the two countries.

Based on the provided statistics, nearly 7,000 illegal immigrants, 38 machine guns, 13 handguns, and 3,700 bullets have been discovered and confiscated by the country's forces so far.

Following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, many Afghans have sought refuge in neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Iran, with aspirations to reach European nations.

This exodus is driven by a multitude of factors impacting their homeland.

The runaway of Afghans is attributed to various rea-

ened in the future.

During his trip to Iran, Muttaqi also participated in the international meeting on Palestine and met with Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs; with Kazemi Qomi, the special representative of the President for Afghanistan affairs; and the Governor of Khorasan province.

During this trip, Muttaqi also visited the Afghan embassy in Tehran and the consulate in the city of Mashhad and talked with diplomats and representatives of immigrants.

Afghan citizen arrested in Serbia for human trafficking

KABUL (Khaama Press): Security officials in Serbia have announced the arrest of an Afghan citizen on charges of human trafficking and weapon possession.

Serbian media reported, citing the Ministry of the Interior that the arrest of the Afghan citizen occurred in the Subotica area.

According to the Serbian Interior Ministry, a sniper rifle, two Kalashnikovs, and over 550 bullets were recovered from the arrested individual.

Previously, Serbian police authorities had reported the arrest of two Afghan citizens on charges of "human trafficking" at the Croatian border.

It is noteworthy that the

operations of the Serbian security forces have increased in recent months aimed at arresting illegal immigrants and traffickers.

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sons including persecution, security threats, and a lack of job opportunities amid a deteriorating economy. Additionally, the stringent restrictions on women's and girls' education and employment have significantly contributed to the mass migration.

The dire situation in Afghanistan has prompted a large-scale humanitarian crisis, with neighboring countries and European destinations becoming primary refuges for those escaping the harsh realities of life under the Taliban regime. The international community continues to witness the movement of Afghans seeking safety and a more stable future.



KABUL (TOLONews): The Afghanistan Food and Drug Authority (AFDA) said that currently there are more than a hundred drug and medical product manufacturing factories in the country.

Jawid Hajir, the spokesperson of the authority, said that the active factories of the country have the capacity to produce more than 650

pills of medicine.

The spokesman said that the authority has prevented 80% of drug smuggling in the country.

"Currently, drugs may be smuggled in at about 20-30%, and to reduce this percentage to zero, the authority of Afghanistan is currently implementing anti smuggling procedures," said Jawid Hajir.

Meanwhile, the head of one of the drug production factories in the capital, which has invested more than \$25 million, emphasized the need to prevent drug smuggling in the country.

"The only obstacle to the progress and development of Afghanistan's pharmaceutical industry, which all factories are facing today, is

the issue of smuggling," said Nisar Ahmad Tarakai, head of the factory.

"The government has managed to ban the importation of domestically produced drugs so that we can have progress. It means that a product produced inside cannot be imported by importers," said Abdul Hadi Hedayat, head of a factory.

The National Union of Drugs said that to use domestically produced drugs, the price of these drugs should be reduced, and all necessary drug equipment should be produced inside the country.

"I request that if they want Afghan medicine to be used by the Afghan people, one should have good quality and secondly, adjust the prices because the Afghan people are all poor," said Asadullah Kakar, head of the union.

Earlier, the head of the Afghanistan Food and Drug Authority (AFDA) said that Afghanistan is ready to export some medical items to other countries.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar chairing the 5th meeting of Board of Governors of Special Technology Zones Authority.

Research vital for overcoming climatic disaster: Solangi

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Wednesday that climatic disaster was one of the biggest challenges the country was facing currently, and acquisition of research-oriented knowledge was vital to tackle it.

He expressed these views while addressing the 4th convocation of Information Technology University (ITU) Punjab here, Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman, ITU Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Adnan Noor Mian, vice chancellors (VCs) of various universities, ITU Dean Faculty of Sciences Prof. Dr. Arif Mehmood, Dean Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Dr. Yaqoob Bangash, Dean Faculty of Business and Management Sciences Dr. Sara Khawar, faculty members and a large number of students and their parents attended the event.

He said, "We observe the negative effects of global warming and other climatic changes every day; therefore, we have to play our due role to protect the natural environment." The federal minister said that Pakistan

was faced with challenges of economic depression, intolerance and violent behaviours also. Emphasising the important role of students to overcome these challenges, he said that only those nations attain the uphill tasks of development and prosperity which face the challenges firmly, asserting that education was the most important tool to overcome these challenges. Pakistan could also fast progress and develop only through the acquisition and promotion of knowledge, he added.

Murtaza Solangi said humanity had been the characteristic of all religions and that very objective was of the education that people become better persons. He also stressed the need for tackling the negative propaganda, citing that unfortunately some people were spreading false and baseless news on social media to secure high ratings, which the government and patriotic people would have to fight out. He said if research universities like the ITU maintain the very basis of their establishment, many of the problems would be solved automatically. In this regard, he referred to the well-known German dramatist's famous play "The Exception and the Rule". In the 4th convocation of the

ITU, 524 students were awarded degrees including five with Ph.Ds and 16 with gold medals.

Meanwhile, the Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said 16th martyrdom anniversary of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto was a stark reminder that violent extremism, in its all manifestations, shades, colours, shrouds and ideologies, remained an existential threat for Pakistan.

Using his X account, he said the war against terrorism and extremism, was the long one, "but we shall win it, Insha Allah."

Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi also met Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi, Provincial Information Minister Aamir Mir was also present on the occasion.

They discussed issues of mutual interest, solutions of media industry problems and initiatives for welfare of the journalist community. Murtaza Solangi appreciated the steps taken by Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi to execute and complete public projects at fast pace.

PHC names five judges for appellate tribunals

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court has constituted tribunals to hear appeals of election candidates against returning officers' decisions. The high court has nominated five judges for election tribunals. Additional Registrar (admin) Hidayatullah has forwarded the circular to the election commission.

According to the court order, Justice Shakeel Ahmed has been nominated election tribunal judge for Peshawar, while Justice Naeem Anwar has been named for the high court's Mingora branch. Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhal will hear appeals in Abbottabad, Justice Muhammad Faheem Wali in DI Khan bench tribunal and Justice Fazal Subhan at high court bench Bannu.

The election tribunal judges will hear objections and appeals against returning officers' decisions. After submission of nomination papers, returning officers conducting scrutiny of the nomination papers, which will remain continue till December 30. The polling will be held on February 08, 2024.

India FM visits Moscow

MOSCOW (AFP): Russia and India have made tangible progress in talks on plans to jointly produce military equipment, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday, after talks with his Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar in Moscow. Speaking at a news conference, Lavrov said such cooperation was of a strategic nature and was in both countries' interests and would help ensure security on the Eurasian continent.

He said Moscow respected India's desire to diversify its military hardware suppliers and was ready too to support New Delhi's desire to manufacture things needed by India in India. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russian President Vladimir Putin would meet Jaishankar later on Wednesday. Jaishankar said he expected Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to meet next year.

Jaishankar said he and Lavrov had discussed the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, as well as bilateral trade and investment. India has become one of Russia's core economic partners since the West in 2022 imposed sweeping sanctions on Moscow over the war in Ukraine.

Russia has diverted much of its oil exports to India and stepped up diplomacy within the BRICS group of nations, a grouping of which both countries are founding members. According to Jaishankar, Indian-Russian trade is expected to top \$50 billion this year. He said New Delhi was keen to sign a bilateral investment treaty with Russia as well as a free trade agreement with the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union.

Imran faces nomination challenge

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan's bid for a seat in the 2024 general elections from Lahore has hit a snag with an objection filed against his nomination papers.

Mian Naseer, a Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) candidate and former provincial assembly member, submitted the objection, citing Khan's recent conviction as grounds for disqualification. Mian Naseer argues that Khan's conviction in the Toshakhana reference renders him ineligible to contest in accordance with Pakistan's election laws. This latest challenge follows an objection raised against the nomination papers of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, also contesting from Lahore.

The objection against Bilawal Bhutto Zardari hinges on a technicality in his nomination papers. Citizen Muhammad Ayaz claims that Bilawal incorrectly identified himself as the chairman of both the PPP and its parliamentary wing, which are separate entities with distinct symbols.

Gaza war to last months, Israel says

GAZA (Reuters): Israeli forces pumelled central Gaza by land, sea and air on Wednesday and a telecommunications outage in much of the enclave hit efforts to reach Palestinian casualties, after Israel's military chief said the war on Hamas would grind on for months.

Reflecting Israeli resolve to wipe out Hamas despite growing global calls for a cease-fire, Israel's Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi said the 11-week-old war would last "many months" and there were no "magic solutions" or "shortcuts." In central Gaza's Al-Maghazi district, five Palestinians were killed in one air strike, medics said, while to the north in Gaza City health officials said the bodies of seven Palestinians killed overnight arrived at Al Shifa Hospital.

Residents also reported heavy fighting east and north of Al-Bureij district and in the nearby village of Juhr Ad-Deek, where they said Israeli tanks are stationed. Israel's military on Wednesday reported three more soldiers killed in action in Gaza, bringing total military losses in the enclave since ground operations began on Oct. 20 to 166. Nearly 21,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli strikes, according to Gaza's health ministry.

Israeli intensified its raids this week, particularly in a central area just south of the waterway that bisects the Gaza Strip. The Israeli army told civilians to leave the area, though many said there was no safe place left to go. The World Health Organization released footage taken mostly on Monday and Tuesday at several Gaza hospitals, with WHO emergency medical team coordinator Sean Casey saying Gaza's health capacity was 20 percent of what it was 80 days ago.

"There's blood everywhere in these hospitals at the moment," said Casey, adding that nowhere in Gaza was safe. "We're seeing almost only trauma cases come through the door and at a scale that's

quite difficult to believe, it's a bloodbath as we said before, it's carnage." The Israeli military said it was continuing to strike what it called terror targets in Gaza, at one point using its navy to hit suspects deemed to pose a threat to ground troops.

In the Shejaia district of Gaza City an Israeli attack on militant fighters on foot caused secondary explosions, indicating the area was rigged with explosives to attack soldiers, a military statement said. The Palestinian Red Crescent reported a complete loss of communication with its teams working in the Gaza Strip due to the disruption of telecommunications and Internet services.

It said in a statement that the VHF radio communication network, the sole means of communication during the blackout, sustained damage from artillery shelling that hit part of its headquarters in Khan Younis, posing a challenge for emergency medical teams trying to reach the wounded and injured. "We are gravely concerned about the continued bombardment of Middle Gaza by Israeli forces, which has claimed more than 100 Palestinian lives since Christmas Eve," UN Human Rights Office spokesperson Seif Magango said on Tuesday.

Since Hamas killed 1,200 people and captured 240 hostages on Oct. 7 in the deadliest day in Israeli history, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has responded with an assault that has laid much of Hamas-ruled Gaza to waste. As well as the reported 21,000 Palestinian dead, thousands more are feared to be buried under rubble. Nearly all the enclave's 2.3 million people have been driven from their homes, many several times.

Gaza authorities buried 80 unidentified Palestinians on Tuesday whose bodies were handed over by Israel through the Kerem Shalom border crossing, the health ministry said. According to the Islamic Waqf, or religious affairs ministry, the

bodies were collected from the northern part of the Gaza Strip.

Israel says it is doing what it can to protect civilians, and blames Hamas for putting them in harm's way by operating among them, which Hamas denies. But even Israel's closest ally the United States has said it should do more to reduce civilian deaths from what President Joe Biden has called "indiscriminate bombing."

Six people were killed in the West Bank city of Tulkarm in an Israeli raid, the Palestinian health ministry said. In Washington, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Israel's Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer discussed planning for what happens when the war ends, including governance and security in Gaza.

The two also discussed efforts to bring home the remaining hostages and a transition to a different phase of the war to focus on Hamas leaders when they met on Tuesday, a US official said. The United States has pressed Israel in recent weeks to scale down its war to a more targeted operation. But Washington is still seen in the region as a supporter of Israel and US forces have been attacked by Iran-backed militants in the Middle East.

In an interview with Egyptian TV, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said Israel intended to stay in Gaza after the war "but the whole world does not agree with it." He said the US could "order" Israel to agree that Gaza become part of a future Palestinian state. There are growing signs the conflict is spreading.

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi militia claimed responsibility for a missile attack on Tuesday on a container ship in the Red Sea and for an attempt to attack Israel with drones. The attacks are a response to Israel's assault on Gaza, the militia says. An Israeli airstrike killed a senior leader of Iran's Revolutionary Guards in Syria on Monday.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani called on President Dr. Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

PHC directs federal govt for issuance of passport to KP Speaker

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) ordered the Federal Government for issuance of passport to Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly and observed that the court can't entertain plea regarding transit bail due to absence of the petitioner, on Wednesday.

The counsel Ali Azeem advocate informed that the petitioner had applied for renewal of passport and submitted urgent fee but concerned authorities didn't issued despite as Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.

However, Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhal inquired about Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa whereabouts, while the counsel answered that Mushtaq Ghani is in London. The counsel added that the petitioner is enlisted in Exit Control List (ECL) as well as his passport is also expired and requested for issuance of passport. He also pleaded for granting transit bail to stop custody on his arrival.

In the meantime, Additional Advocate General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Danyal Asad Chamkani argued that Mushtaq Ghani had already obtained interim bail till 27th December. PHC declared that the petitioner obtain passport firstly then approach for transit bail while ordered Ministry of Interior, Federal Investigation Agency as well as Passport and Immigration for issuance of passport to Mushtaq Ghani, Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.

Meanwhile, PHC's Justice Fazal Subhan suspended appointment of new Returning Officer (RO) for PK-91 Kohat-II Irfan Marwat and ordered Usman Ashraf for continuation of responsibilities and directed Election Commission of

Pakistan (ECP) for submission of reply.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) two candidates including former Deputy Speaker and Minister for Law Imtiaz Qureshi as well as Dawood Shah challenged appointment Irfan Marwat as new RO PK-91 on 25th December by replacing Additional Assistant Commissioner Headquarter.

The petitioners pleaded that appointment of RO is self-contradictory as ECP had imposed ban on posting and transfers which shows discrimination by the commission. They argued that new RO had shifted all files to District Council against his jurisdiction and argued the appointment is unconstitutional as well as illegal. PHC's justice Fazal Subhan suspended appointment of new RO PK-91 and directed Usman Ashraf to continue his responsibilities while ordered ECP for submission of reply in this regard.

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Khawaja Asif slaps Rs1b defamation notice on Usman Dar, mother

F.P. Report

allegations to defame Asif. The defamation notice called on Dar and his mother, Rehana Dar, to pay Rs1 billion in damages within 14 days. Both politicians hail from Sialkot and they contested the 2018 elections from the National Assembly's NA-73 constituency — and Asif defeated Dar.

After a raid on Dar's house earlier in the month, Rehana accused Asif of orchestrating the police action and being manhandled by the raiding party. In a video statement, Dar's mother said that her house was broken into by people who manhandled her, pulled her hair, and tore her shirt.

Iranian Guards vow revenge against Israel

TEHRAN (AFP): Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) warned Israel on Wednesday that it or its allied groups would take "direct" action to avenge the killing of senior commander Razi Mousavi.

The general was killed on Monday in an Israeli missile strike near the Syrian capital, according to state media, at a time of heightened regional tensions around the Israel-Hamas fighting raging in Gaza. The Israeli army, which has launched hundreds of strikes on Iran-linked targets in war-torn Syria in recent years, said only that it does not comment on foreign media reports.

The body of Mousavi, a commander in the Guards' foreign operations arm the Quds Force, was taken to Iraq for funeral rites in holy sites a day ahead of his burial in Iran planned for Thursday.

IRGC spokesman Ramezan Sharif warned that "our response to Mousavi's assassination will be a combination of direct action as well as [from] others led by the Axis of Resistance," the local Mehr news agency reported. Sharif charged that the Israeli killing of the general near Damascus "was likely due to its failures after the 'Operation Al-Aqsa Flood'" — a reference to the October 7 surprise attack Hamas launched against Israel.

The Hamas attack resulted in the deaths of around 1,140 people in Israel, most of them civilians, according to an AFP tally based on the latest official Israeli figures, and saw around 250 people taken hostage. Israel retaliated with a relentless bombardment and ground invasion that have killed at least 21,110 people, according to Gaza's health ministry.

The Gaza crisis has reverberated across the Middle East, drawing in armed groups backed by Israel's arch foe Iran in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Iran, which supports Hamas financially and militarily, has hailed the attacks as a "success" but denied any direct involvement. President Ebrahim Raisi has said Iran sees it as "its duty to support the resistance groups" but insisted that they "are independent in their opinion, decision and action".

Sharif claimed Mousavi's killing was an Israeli attempt "to expand the war to other geographical areas". In Iraq, hundreds of mourners flocked today to attend memorial prayers for Mousavi, whose coffin was taken to the Imam Ali shrine in the city of Najaf.

CM KP distributes laptops among students

F.P. Report

MANSEHRA: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah, on Wednesday paid a day-long visit to Hazara Division, during which he distributed laptops amongst the students of Hazara University Mansehra, under the Prime Minister Laptop Scheme.

Besides, the Chief Minister inaugurated Khyber Medical University Hazara Campus and Ayub College of Dentistry during his visit to district Abbottabad. Arshad Hussain Shah also inaugurated Online Complaint Management & Patient Facilitation Center and Cornea Transplant Service at Ayub Teaching Hospital, Abbottabad.

Addressing the ceremonies held on this occasion, the Chief Minister said that Ayub Teaching Hospital was the largest teaching hospital of Hazara Division; all the issues impeding service delivery in the hospital would be resolved on priority basis.

Arshad Hussain Shah made it clear that after the caretaker prime minister's announcement, the provincial cabinet has accorded in-principle approval to

upgrading the Ayub Medical College Peshawar to the status of universities, adding that soon after getting NOC from Higher Education Commission and Election Commission, an ordinance would be promulgated for both the universities.

Earlier, addressing the laptop distribution ceremony at Hazara University Mansehra, the chief minister said that promoting quality education in the province was the top most priority of his government. He stressed upon the higher education Institutes to replace the conventional scheme of education and training with market-based courses aligning with the needs and requirements of contemporary world. He added that unfortunately, the graduates of the conventional education are often jobless which is one of the major causes of their disappointment and frustration as well.

"We have to impart them market-based skills and technical courses, thereby enabling them to have respectable job opportunities not only in the country but international market as well. That's why, he said

that the provincial government has devised Human Resource Export Strategy, under which at least five lac youth would be trained in various fields and to be sent abroad for employment. He said that this program would be launched officially within the next few days adding that demands are also being taken from different countries for this purpose.

Touching upon the issues of universities in the province, the chief minister said that sincere efforts were being made to steer the different universities out of financial crunches. "Although the caretaker government's mandate is relatively limited, but we are trying our best to do something better for the wellbeing of the people", he said. The Chief Minister said that Haripur and Abbottabad have been declared as Quantum valley and a quantum computing project has been launched aimed at providing advanced quantum computing education to the youth, aligning with international standards. The initiative will prove to be a revolutionary move towards introducing rapidly emerging computing technology in the province, he added.

SC refuses to hold immediate hearing on Imran's plea

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court Wednesday refused to conduct an immediate hearing of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan's plea in the Toshakhana case.

Among other petitions, PTI also filed one seeking suspension of his conviction in the Toshakhana case to ensure he partakes in the general polls scheduled to take place on February 8 next year. Meanwhile, sharing his remarks on the plea, Justice Athar Minallah observed that the suspension of the trial court verdict against Khan in the Toshakhana case cannot end his disqualification.

The PTI chief was disqualified for five years from holding any public office due to his conviction in the case. The apex court, however, refused to fix the petition for hearing as only two judges of the SC were available owing to winter vacation. On December 21, IHC's two-member bench rejected Khan's request seeking suspension of the trial court's verdict in the aforementioned case.

Addressing Khan's lawyer Shahbaz Khosa, Justice Minallah said the matter before the bench was that conviction should be over-

turned following suspension of sentence in the case. "There is no judicial precedent in the country's history that suspension of sentence led to the annulment of conviction," he remarked. Khosa responded by saying that there were judicial precedents when senior politician Javed Hashmi's sentence was abolished along with the verdict.

"The court should see how Judge Humayun Dilawar issued five sentences in a single day," the lawyer added. Acting Chief Justice Sardar Tariq Masood told Khosa that this petition could be dismissed by a two-member bench, asking him if they should do so. "A two-member bench cannot even give you interim relief because there is a division bench decision in the high court," he remarked.

Justice Masood said the disqualification petition in the Toshakhana case should be fixed before a three-member bench. "Only two judges are available in Islamabad. The Toshakhana case should be heard by at least a three-member bench," the judge remarked. The acting chief justice said hearing of the disqualification case is not possible this week.

"What if the case is on important points and should be heard by a five-member

bench," the acting CJP added. "Next week, Qazi sahib will also come," said Justice Masood referring to Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa, who is on winter vacation. Khosa said the court can still form a bench by summoning judges. "The judges are not available here, you tell me who should sit and hear?" the acting chief justice asked the lawyer, after which the judges left the courtroom.

Earlier, the SC indicated fixing another PTI's petition seeking contempt of court proceedings against the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) as the acting chief justice said he would decide about the matter in his chamber. In August, Khan was sentenced to three years in prison and 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 Toshakhana case.

He has been convicted of misusing his position as prime minister to sell state gifts worth more than Rs140 million (\$490,000) that he received from foreign dignitaries during visits abroad. Following his conviction in the case, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) disqualified the former PM for five years.