

ISLAMABAD (INP): Scrutiny of the nomination papers filed by candidates of various political parties and independent candidates for next general elections will conclude tomorrow (Saturday). According to details, appeals against the acceptance or rejection of nomination papers can be submitted until January 03, 2024 while decisions on these appeals will be made by the January 10, 2024.

Four killed in mishap

F.P. Report

UPPER DIR: At least four people including women were killed and four others injured when a vehicle wedding guest fell into here on Friday. According to details, the accident took place in Salamkot area of Upper Dir where a vehicle with wedding guests onboard skidded off road due to over speeding and plunged into a ravine.

@thefrontierpost

First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIX

No. 342

Regd. No. 241

JAMADI-US-SANNI 17 1445 -- SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30 2023

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister participating in National Farmer's Convention as chief guest.

Anti-Pakistan rumour mill in full gear on social media: COAS

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir has said that social media is rife with fabricated claims against the state of Pakistan as he came down hard on anti-national elements.

"Social media is being used to create an environment of chaos, despair, and panic. Through fake news, an impression is being created that the state is losing its [writ]," the army chief said in an address to the National Farmers Convention in Islamabad on Friday.

Like many countries, Pakistan is also grappling with the growing challenge of fake news on social media — masquerading as truths and spreading like wildfire. The reports, despite being unfounded, are fuelled by emotional appeals and designed to existing societal divisions. A detailed report issued earlier this year by EU DisinfoLab showed that Indian media outlets have also been part of a smear campaign against Pakistan by quoting non-existent organisations, journalists, and bloggers.

This is not restricted to other states being involved in smear campaigns against Pakistan and its institutions, but investigations have also revealed that a political party — the Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) — was also involved in using state resources for spreading false propaganda against state institutions. In his address to the farmers, the army chief further said that "rumours" and "negative impressions" were being spread about Pakistan.

"But you should know that only two states were established on the bases of the Kalima: the state of Madina and Pakistan," COAS Munir said, emphasising divine backing to the country. He added that Pakistan is rich in resources; it has glaciers, rivers, mountains, and fertile land that produces some of the world's best rice, fruits like kinnow and mangoes, and treasures like granite, gold, and copper.

In the 1960s, he said, Pakistan was one of the fastest-growing countries in Asia, but "we forgot the three golden principles of the Quaid-i-Azam —

faith, unity, and discipline — which is why we saw a decline". Moving on, Gen Munir said that agriculture and animal husbandry were professions of almost every prophet because they included discipline, hardship, growth, and patience, which resulted in countless rewards.

The army chief mentioned that the driving force behind the Green Pakistan Initiative was to boost agriculture. A major chunk of the initiative's income will go to the provinces, while the rest will be kept for farmers and agricultural research, he said, noting that the "role of the army in this is only to serve the people and farmers".

The army chief added that agriculture malls will be organised in districts, where all kinds of agriculture-related facilities will be available to the farmers. COAS Munir added that the provision of easy agricultural credit, cold storage chain, climate change-resistant seeds, and genetically engineered livestock will be ensured for the farmers. "All types of mafia will be crushed together with the nation," the army chief added.

Rs140b released for power plants

ISLAMABAD (INP): Following the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) condition, Pakistan has released Rs140 bln to the government-run power plants to address circular debt in the energy sector, an official document of the finance ministry said on Friday.

As per details, Pakistan has to slash the circular debt of the energy sector by Rs400 billion during FY2023-24 as per the International Monetary Fund's condition. The finance ministry document showed that Rs57 billion has been released to Karachi-Electric to address the circular debt issue. Pakistan is likely to release Rs260 bln to the power sector and Rs65 bln to the gas companies in 2023-24, the sources said.

Pakistan is currently in the IMF's SBA program and trying its best to meet the requirements of the next staff-level agreement. Earlier, the Pakistani government gave assurance to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on maintaining the power sector's circular debt at Rs2.31 trillion. The Power Division presented the details before the Senate Standing Committee for Power today. The caretaker federal government assured the IMF to maintain the circular debt of the power sector.

Free, fair polls prerequisite for peace: JI

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Sirajul Haq has said that free and fair elections are prerequisite for peace, stability and prosperity in the country.

Addressing various corner meetings in his constituency, NA-6 in Lower Dir on Friday, he advocated for a single-day polling process across the entire country, rejecting any proposals for delay or postponement in specific areas based on weather conditions or security concerns.

Sirajul Haq contended that forming a weak government without a genuine mandate after the elections would be insufficient to address the challenges confronting the country. He expressed concern that the nation stands on the brink of multiple crises and emphasized the necessity of a strong democratic government to navigate through these challenges.

Highlighting the shared responsibility of both former democratic and martial law governments for the current problems faced by the people, the JI chief criticized these ruling entities as family and relative-centric, prioritizing personal interests over the welfare of the public. The actions of these former rulers have damaged the economy and weakened institutions, resulting in the deterioration of the rule of law and accountability in the country, he said.

Expressing skepticism about those who have frequently formed governments in the past and are now claiming to resolve the issues, he asserted that they have been exposed and are incapable of addressing the prevailing crises. Consequently, he positioned the JI as the sole hope for the people. Sirajul Haq pledged that, if elected, the JI would establish the rule of law, repair the economy, and transform Pakistan into a state capable of confronting international challenges. He envisioned a Pakistan that could effectively advocate for the rights of Palestinians, Kashmiris, and the entire Ummah.

So-called money laundering case

India requests Pakistan to extradite Hafiz

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: India has requested Pakistan to extradite Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, the chief of the banned Jamaat Dawa (JuD), the Foreign Office confirmed Friday.

"Pakistan has received a request from the Indian authorities, seeking extradition of Hafiz Saeed in a so-called money laundering case," Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said in a statement. However, there might be no plans to follow up on India's request, as according to the spokesperson, "no bilateral extradition treaty exists between Pakistan and India".

India blames Saeed for being involved in attacks across the borders, however, the chief of the banned outfit has denied all claims. A Pakistani court had sentenced Hafiz Saeed, founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the armed group blamed by the United States and India for the deadly 2008 Mumbai siege, to 31 years in prison in two cases of terrorism financing.

An anti-terrorism court in Lahore had found Saeed guilty of terrorism financing in April 2022 and sentenced him to 32 years in jail. Hours before Zahra's confirmation, India had also confirmed it had formally requested Pakistan to extradite Saeed, according to India's foreign ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi.



"We have conveyed a request along with relevant supporting documents to the Government of Pakistan," Bagchi told reporters in a media briefing. Saeed conviction in 2022 was not the only one. Arrested in 2019, he was already serving a 15-year sentence after being found guilty of terror financing in 2020. Saeed, who was put behind bars many times before over the past decade, denies being involved with armed operations, including the 2008 attacks in Mumbai, which killed 166 people.

Agriculture holds immense importance: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar on Friday said that agriculture held immense importance for socio-economic development of the country at the grassroots level.

The prime minister, addressing the National Farmers' Convention as the chief guest, appreciated the collaborative work of ministries and departments for achieving various milestones under the umbrella of Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) and stressed the need to expedite various initiatives, according to a press release issued by the PM Office's

Media Wing. Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir was the Guest of Honour on the occasion. The event was attended by federal ministers, agricultural experts and senior government officials. The COAS, in his address, emphasised that the farmers were the backbone of the country's agriculture sector.

"It's your untiring hard work, toil and determination that plays a pivotal role in ensuring food security for millions of Pakistanis. You make us and the entire nation proud," he added. He said that the climate change and water scarcity were realities that chal-

lenged Pakistan's food security and necessitated use of technology and close government-public collaboration as being done under SIFC.

"Pakistan is endowed with immense potential and abundant resources. Together, we will navigate through these challenging times, by the grace of Allah, and attain our goals across every sector, InshaAllah," he added. The COAS said that the dividends of all initiatives by SIFC would help Pakistan come out of the economic crisis. "United, we as a resilient nation will lead Pakistan towards a progressive and prosperous future, In Sha Allah," he added.

Shehbaz calls for efforts to end Karachi's woes

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Shehbaz Sharif on Friday announced contesting the upcoming general elections from Karachi's NA-242 constituency.

He contested from the NA-249 constituency of Karachi in the last general elections which he lost to the then-Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Faisal Vawda by a slight margin. On December 23, Mutahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) said that no seat adjustment had been decided with the PML-N over the NA-242 constituency in district Keamari.

The party's spokesperson had refuted all reports regarding the seat adjustment with Shehbaz Sharif-led party in the aforementioned constituency, terming them "baseless". The spokesperson added that MQM-P Senior Deputy Convenor Mustafa Kamal is the party's candidate for the seat.

Addressing a news conference in Karachi after meeting MQM-P leader-

ship on Friday, Shehbaz said the public transport issue in Karachi would be resolved, provided that PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif was voted to power on February 8. The former prime minister said: "The issue of transport will be resolved for good under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif after February 8. People (just) have to make Nawaz Sharif successful through votes."

He discussed political situation and election matters among other things with the MQM leadership, thanking the Karachi-based party for its cooperation during the last government. Sources said a committee would discuss the matter of seat adjustment between PML-N and MQM in two to three days. Vowing to transform Karachi and resolve the residents' basic issues after PML-N coming into power, Shehbaz said Nawaz would end the problem of water scarcity. The coming election would decide Pakistan's future, he added.

Karachi was the city of lights and gateway to Pakistan, he said, adding that they all had to work

collectively to tackle the challenges. "Why did the Green Line project take five to six years? While Metro Bus was established in Lahore in 11 months," he said. The PML-N president admitted the coalition government led by him could not reduce the "inherited inflation" during their rule of 16 months. He said he had visited Karachi many a time. The metropolis should be given its right, he said.

The former premier said Karachi paid trillions of rupees in tax yet the tanker mafia provided water to the citizens. He said the Karachi to Hyderabad motorway had vanished and the traffic was completely slow on the artery. "The motorway will also be constructed if Nawaz Sharif became the prime minister," he said. He said Karachi was a hub of banking, shipping and trade as well as the highest tax-paying city, but the broken roads and dilapidated buses ruled here, he added. He also vowed to strengthen relations with the MQM after the latter supported the coalition government rule.

MQM's Raza Haroon, Anis join PPP's ranks

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Senior politicians formerly associated with MQM, Raza Haroon and Anees Advocate, along with their comrades joined the PPP on Friday, as electioneering picks up pace ahead of the February 8 general elections.

The announcement of their affiliation with the PPP came after the duo met former president and party's co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari in Karachi. Haroon, who also served as a provincial minister, earlier joined former Karachi mayor Mustafa Kamal's Pak Sarzameen Party

(PSP) in 2016, but later left this faction as well. On the other hand, Anees was also an MQM dissident who joined PSP in 2016.

An official statement issued by PPP on this occasion said that Zardari welcomed Haroon and Anees, who were former members of MQM's Rabita Committee, to the party. The politicians discussed the "charter of Karachi" regarding the development, establishment of peace and security, and friendly environment in the port city during the meeting.

"[Former] president Asif Ali Zardari said that the PPP's Charter of Karachi

will have a far-reaching impact on the future of the city. He said that the PPP is the party of the people of Karachi. We are working to restore the lights which were taken away by the rivals of peace and the merchants of hate," the statement read. On the occasion, the ex-president mentioned the PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's 10-point election agenda, saying that the PPP will bring such developmental projects for Karachi and every other city and town of Pakistan after coming into power, which will provide relief to the common man in this time of inflation.

PTI leader Murad Saeed's papers rejected

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Returning Officer (RO) Swat rejected the nomination papers of five PTI leaders including Former Federal Minister of Communications and PTI leader Murad Saeed to oust them from contesting general election scheduled on 8th February 2024, on Friday.

According to details, nomination papers of former Member National Assembly MNA Saleem-ur-Rehman, former provincial housing minister Dr. Amjad Khan, Divisional president and former MPA Fazal Hakeem Khan and MPA Mian Sharafat Ali were also rejected whom submitted to participate in the general election.

PTI leader Murad Saeed had submitted nomination papers for National Assembly Constituency NA-4, Swat, former housing minister for PK-8 Swat, former MNA Saleem-ur-Rehman for NA-3, Divisional President Fazal Hakeem Khan for PK-4 and Mian Sharafat Ali for PK-3 to contest the general elections 2024, which was rejected by the Returning Officer Swat.

The Returning Officer has rejected the papers of the former Federal Minister, former provincial minister and others for being absconders from courts of law. It should be remembered that Murad Saeed has also submitted nomination papers for NA-3 apart from NA-4.

In this regard, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Sohail Sultan Advocate and Kamal Advocate said that we had completed all the documents required by the Election Commission, they will appeal against the decision in the Peshawar High Court he added.

It should be remembered that PTI leader Murad Saeed has been hiding since the events of May 9 and others as well. Scrutiny of candidates' papers for the upcoming elections is also going on in Swat. It is to be mentioned that for three national and eight provincial constituencies of Swat 433 candidates had submitted papers. The process of scrutiny will continue till December 30. According to the Election Commission, more than half of the candidates have been scrutinized so far, while the final lists will be announced and released on first January 2024.

'Terrible system' prevailing under caretaker govt: IHC

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) Friday reprimanded the caretaker government, stating that a "terrible system" is prevailing in the country and questioned its neutrality.

"A terrible system is prevailing under the caretaker setup that even consultation for elections is not allowed," Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb remarked, raising doubts over the government's intentions towards the conduct of the upcoming polls slated for February 8. "Does the caretaker government want to derail the elections?" he asked.

The judge's query came during the hearing of a plea filed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gauhar Khan and other lawyers, seeking to meet the party's founder Imran Khan in jail. The lawyers argued that the legal team wanted to consult Khan over the decision to distribute 700 party tickets, as polls approach. Taking notice of the plea, the judge granted them permission to meet Khan for consultations ahead of the polls next year, subsequently disposing of the petition.

The court, in its order, mentioned that the PTI

founder should be allowed to meet the party's chairman under the supervision of Adiala jail superintendent. "Allowing consultation for elections is a fundamental right," the court maintained, adding that the party possesses the right to consult the founder over tickets. He also asked the caretaker government to remain neutral in the elections.

The court added that the opposition to the PTI founder and chairman's consultation raises questions over the neutrality of government. The additional attorney general and Adiala jail superintendent also appeared in court during the hearing of the plea. Both the attorney general and advocate general objected to the plea, inviting the court's ire.

"Was the additional note from the Supreme Court not enough for you? Do you want me to write a note against you?" Justice Aurangzeb asked, slamming both the government representatives. The judge stated that the attorney general and advocate general's office represent the caretaker government and should be impartial.

IHC rules DC lacks authority to issue 3MPO: Justice Babar Sattar of the

Islamabad High Court (IHC) has declared that the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Islamabad does not possess the authority to issue 3MPOs.

The court heard the case of the arrest of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Shehryar Afridi and Shandana Gulzar under the 3MPO. The court accepted the pleas of Afridi and Gulzar, challenging the MPO order, and deemed the 3MPO powers under Act PO 18, 1980 as illegal. Justice Babar Sattar delivered a decisive verdict, stating that the power to issue 3MPOs should be exclusively vested in the federal cabinet, not in the hands of the Deputy Commissioner.

Following the court's decision, Babar Awan addressed the media at the Islamabad High Court, stating, "Justice Babar Sattar has emphasized that action should be taken against those arrested under 3MPO."

Awan further criticized the powers granted to the Deputy Commissioner and the Commissioner under martial law orders, deeming them incorrect. The court's ruling has rendered the 3MPO order invalid, emphasizing that only the Cabinet can issue such orders within Islamabad.

Election 2024: ECP revises various stages of schedule for reserved seats

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Friday revised various stages of the schedule for reserved seats for women and non-Muslims in the national and provincial assemblies.

As per the revised schedule issued by the ECP, the last date for the scrutiny of the nomination papers is January 13, while the last date for filing of appeals against decisions of the returning officer is January 16, 2024. The revised list of candidates will be published on January 20. Candidates can withdraw their papers by the 22nd of the next month while the final list of the contesting candidates will be released on January 23.

On December 15, the ECP had issued the much-awaited

schedule for the general polls, set to take place on February 8, 2024, following the Supreme Court's order. The polling process began on December 19, when the returning officer (RO) issued a public notice, while the ECP also resumed the training for the ROs and district returning officers (DROs). The election programme also applies to the reserved seats for women and non-Muslims in the national and four provincial assemblies of Punjab, Sindh, KP, and Balochistan.

On December 24, the ECP's second deadline for filing nomination papers for the national and provincial assemblies' seats concluded at 4:30pm. Earlier, the electoral watchdog set a deadline of December 22 for filing the nomination papers, however, the date was extended to facilitate

the aspiring candidates and political parties. As per the schedule, scrutiny of the nomination papers will be carried out from December 25-30.

Appeals against the acceptance or rejection of nomination papers can be submitted until the 3rd of January and decisions on these appeals will be made by January 10. The list of candidates would be displayed on January 11, and candidates would have the option to withdraw until January 12. The electoral symbols will be allotted on the 13th of January, and polling for the general elections will be held on February 8. Meanwhile, the ECP has given more time to foreign observers who want to monitor the general elections. Now, they can submit their applications from December 31 to January 20.



PESHAWAR: KP Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah chairing a meeting regarding issues of Ayub Teaching Hospital, Abbottabad.

Quality award ceremony held at KMU

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Medical University (KMU) took a significant stride in promoting institutional development through a historic quality award function organized by Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) KMU. The event, held at the Hafeezullah Auditorium, was spearheaded by the dynamic leadership of Dr. Syeda Asia Bukhari. The primary goal was to recognize and reward outstanding performance within affiliated institutions, fostering a culture of excellence and continuous improvement.



The chief guest for the event was Muhammad Arshad Khan, Secretary Higher Education Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who graced the occasion with his presence. Notable attendees included VC KMU Professor Dr. Zia Ul Haq, former VC KMU Professor Dr. Hafeezullah, Dr. Jameel Ahmad from HEC, Vice Chancellor of Hazara University, Ziaul Islam, Chairman of Policy Board, and Prof. Dr. Shafiq, Member of Quality Assurance Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In his opening remarks, Vice-Chancellor Professor Zia Ul Haq expressed gratitude to the chief guest and other dignitaries for their unwavering support. He commended the commitment of the Quality Enhancement Cell in promoting excellence and specially acknowledged institutions that successfully achieved their predetermined performance targets. The KMU Quality Enhancement Cell identified and awarded the top-performing institutions, recognizing their dedication to continuous improvement and innovation.

During the event, Secretary Muhammad Arshad Khan underscored the fundamental importance of health education and emphasized the crucial role of maintaining quality in educational institutions. His passionate commitment reflected a sincere approach to responsibilities, demonstrating a keen interest in the overall educational landscape. Arshad Khan highlighted the need to balance ongoing expansion with the maintenance of quality, stressing that standards of academic excellence should never be compromised.

The Chief Guest extended invitations to distinguished individuals from institutions

such as Women Medical and Dental College, Jinnah Medical College, Ayub Medical College, North West School of Medicine Peshawar, NCS University System Peshawar, and KMU Institute of Basic Medical Science. In recognition of their distinguished service, these institutions were conferred with W category awards of high quality. Additionally, participants were also awarded certificates of appreciation, with notable mentions including IPMS, IPH, IHPE, IPPM, and other affiliated institutions.

The event stands as a testament to Khyber Medical University's unwavering commitment to fostering a competitive academic environment, promoting continuous improvement, and achieving excellence in both education and healthcare. These initiatives firmly establish the institution's dedication to maintaining high standards of quality in its educational and healthcare endeavors.

KP decides to open bank accounts for prisoners

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has made the decision to open bank accounts for prisoners across the province.

According to official sources on Friday, the recently released Welfare Fund Rules 2023 by the KP home ministry stated that prisoners will now have their own personal bank accounts to support their families.

Negotiations are currently in progress with the Bank of Khyber (BoK) for the establishment of these accounts, as mentioned in the official statement. The government outlined a distribution plan where 10% of the prisoners' income will go to the government, 30% to the prisoners themselves, and 60% to the Welfare Fund. Additionally, prisoners will be permitted to engage in various activities such as carpet making, furniture crafting, PCO operations, and canteen services.

This initiative aims at improving the living conditions of prisoners, with a particular focus on the well-being of children, women, and destitute and resourceless inmates, as emphasized by Wafaqi Mohtasib Ejaz Ahmed Qureshi during a meeting on Prison Reforms. The meeting focused on reviewing and implementing recommendations outlined in the Report on Prisons.

Submission of papers for election continue

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In connection with the general elections, the registration of the documents of the candidates continues here on Friday.

According to the Provincial Election Commission spokesperson, so far, 89 papers have been completed on the specific vacancies of women in the Provincial Assembly.

Scrutiny of 36 candidates for women seats in the National Assembly, while 22 candidates for minority seats in the Provincial Assembly has been completed, said Election Commission spokesperson. So far, the process of scanning the documents of 147 people has been completed, said Election Commission Spokesman. Scrutiny of documents of candidates will continue till December 30. Election Commission Spokesman said.

Bike lifter gang busted

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The police busted a five-member bike lifter gang and recovered nine stolen motorcycles here on Friday. According to details, Kohat police launched massive crackdown against bike lifter in different areas.

During operations, five-member bike lifter gang headed by Hisham hailing from Ashiq Colony was arrested. The police recovered nine stolen motorcycles from possession of the detainees. Various cases were registered against the nabbed bike lifters at Muhammad Riaz Shaheed police station and further investigations were underway.

Secretary describes one year accomplishments of Health Dept

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Health Secretary Mehmood Aslam Wazir on Friday in his annual performance message said the Health Department has achieved many accomplishments in the year 2023.

He said that this year, the department has effectively contained the dengue cases to 747 without any fatalities. He said by activating seven closed hospitals, medical services are now provided on a double shift basis, both in the morning and evening, compared to the previous practice of offering services only during daytime hours.

Speaking about the impediments related to fake, unregistered, and spurious drugs, Health Secretary Mahmood Aslam Wazir revealed the

establishment of the province's first mobile drug lab in Pakistan. This mobile lab travels to different locations to provide on-site analysis of medicines.

He mentioned initiatives taken for Sehat card sustainability. These initiatives allow the underprivileged to receive free treatment, while those who can afford it, purchase health card packages for their own medical needs.

Mehmood Aslam further disclosed that the records and other data of over a hundred thousand employees of the Health Department have been digitised. All postings and transfers are now transparently accessible through this web portal. He elaborated on the initiation of geo-tagging for both public and private hospitals and clinics across the province to eliminate quacks and unregistered clinics.

According to him, the Health Department has introduced the first-ever inventory of medical and non-medical equipment in its history. This inventory will enable a quick assessment of machinery in the province's hospitals, ensuring immediate deployment where needed.

Mehmood Aslam Wazir emphasized the continuous implementation of biometric attendance in all hospitals. Additionally, a feedback system regarding the cleanliness and treatment at hospitals has been instituted, where patients' opinion are collected by noting their numbers and contacting them through calls.

ANP to continue struggle despite threats: Aimal Wali

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial President Awami National Party (ANP), Aimal Wali Khan Friday said that his party would not budge from its stance against extremism and keep continue its struggle for rights of Pashtuns, said a statement issued from Bacha Khan Markaz.

Reacting to a threat

alert, he said that ANP is firm on its resolve and ready to face any hurdle in its struggle for rights of Pashtuns. He said that these threats are not new for the party as ANP workers faced numerous such attacks with valor abiding by Bacha Khan golden principles of non-violence.

He said that ANP had always raised voice

against leniency towards militancy and added that during their government PTI granted pardon to elements that were involved in killing of innocent and guiltless people. Aimal Wali also reminded people about release of militants for politicking and said that ANP workers would not desist from making any sacrifices for their rights.

IG FC for construction of Sara Kanda Lajmeri Road

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: For the establishment of better trade relations with Afghanistan by focusing on the development of a particular road, Sara Kanda Lajmeri Road.

Inspector General Frontier Corps South Haroon Hameed and Deputy Commissioner South Waziristan Naseer Khan have issued special

instructions for a survey of this road. A special team, including engineers from the Communication and Works department, security personnel (FC), local officials, and national representatives, has been sent for the survey of the said road.

The road is strategically important for trade with Afghanistan, and its construction is expected to facilitate trade and improve traffic flow, benefiting local

traders and the general public. The road has been a long-standing demand of traders and business communities in the region, as its construction would ease trade with Afghanistan and prevent any disruptions or road closures. Due to its proximity and resistance to seasonal conditions, the road is considered secure, and local tribes are committed to ensure its safety.

Seminar highlights transformative impact of 'Energy' project

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In Peshawar, Pakistan, the Center for Intelligent Systems and Network Research (CISNR) at UET, with the support of GIZ Pakistan, recently hosted an impactful seminar at Monal here.

This pivotal event, held at Monal Peshawar centered on the project titled "Energy Efficiency through Digitization." The seminar drew over 130 participants, having presentation from CDA, PDA, Tehsil Municipal Administration, Water Sanitation Services Company and others.

It served as a focal point for discussions on energy savings, policy recommendations, carbon credits, and exemplary case studies from partner municipalities under the project. Muhammad Irshad, Project Manager at GIZ, commended CISNR's exceptional work in energy management and AIoT.

Deputy Manager Ayaz Durrani from WSSC Abbottabad shared a

compelling case study on how the implementation of Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) technology led to the detection of billing anomalies, resulting in substantial cost savings. This highlighted the practical impact of technological integration in utility management.

Meanwhile, Deputy Director Abdul Qadir Afridi of the Peshawar Development Authority (PDA) emphasized a significant shift in their energy management approach. He highlighted the transformation from a lack of awareness to successfully implementing an integrated energy team across critical sectors such as water supply, street lighting, and buildings. This evolution signified a crucial step toward comprehensive energy management within their municipality.

These case studies collectively highlighted the practical successes and transformative potential of technology-driven initiatives in enhancing energy management

across different municipalities targeted under the project, setting a precedent for efficient and sustainable practices within the region.

The seminar also unveiled fifteen robust policy recommendations addressing key municipal challenges such as digitized control, staff training, and the absence of comprehensive energy efficiency plans. These recommendations, rooted in observations of existing challenges, aimed to revolutionize operations by integrating energy data into decision-making processes, establishing efficiency benchmarks, and enhancing governance practices.

Moreover, this seminar's discourse on SCADA technology and e-governance signifies a monumental shift in Pakistan's municipal energy landscape. It not only lays the groundwork for a sustainable future but also amplifies the role of technology and policy in shaping a more energy-conscious society.

Education networking system to be improved in merged tribal area

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for newly merged districts affairs, industries, commerce and technical education, Dr. Aamer Abdullah has said that private network education system would be government educational institutions would be improved so that to impart quality education to the tribal youth in the merged areas.

He said this while holding a meeting with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Network of Private Educational Institutions "Dar Arqam Schools System Pakistan" and Chairman of Al-Ghazali Education Foundation, Waqas Jafari who called on him at his office in the Civil Secretariat here.

The meeting discussed in detail ways and means for the improve-

ment of the education systems in the merged tribal areas. The Caretaker Minister along with the delegation discussed various proposals regarding the improvement of the education system in the province, especially in the merged districts. Provincial President of Al-Khidmat Foundation Pakistan Khalid Waqas Chamkani was also present.

The Caretaker Minister and the head of private educational institutions deliberated on the possibilities of expanding the network of the above-mentioned schools in the merged districts and also discussed the matters of public private partnership proposal for some government educational institutions in the same districts.

In the meeting, the Caretaker Minister said that the provincial government is considering several useful proposals to maintain the

high quality of 10 governor model schools, established in the merged districts and to run them in a better manner, including referring them to the private sector through public-private partnership.

He said that if the said school system wants to have a partnership in these institutions in this regard, they should forward their formal proposal in this regard.

On this occasion, the caretaker minister also assured all possible support from the government in the expansion of franchises of best private schools in the merged districts and said that this offer is for all groups of best and reputable schools. In the meeting, Dar-Arqam educational chain expressed his willingness to the caretaker minister's offer and assured the provision of possible services on behalf of his institution in this regard.



PESHAWAR: Labourer busy in work at fruit market.

Mainly cold and dry weather to prevail in KP

F.P. Report

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

It said that foggy conditions are expected over Charsadda, Nowshera, Mardan, Peshawar, Swabi and D.I. Khan districts as well as over Motorway (M1) / Highways at night and early in the morning. During the last 24 hours cold and partly cloudy weather prevailed over most districts of the province. Rainfall recorded (in mm) during the last 24 hours at different stations of KPK was nil.

The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in centigrade at different stations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were Peshawar 26/07, Chitral 18/-01, Timergara 23/02, Dir 22/-01, Mirkhaini 12/01, Kalam 17/-04, Drosh 17/04, Saidu Sharif 22/02, Pattan 24/16, Malam Jabba 14/03, Takht Bhai 23/04, Kakul 21/03, Balakot 23/03, Parachinar 15/00, Bannu 26/04, Cherat 17/07, DI Khan City 26/10. The lowest temperature recorded in the province was -04°C each in Kalam and Tirah valley of Khyber district.

Grand operation against encroachment continue

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Deputy Director Regulation demolished 15 cabins with heavy machinery and confiscated one vehicle in city area Sardar Ahmad Jan Colony on the complaint of the residents of the area here on Friday.

According to details, residents of Sardar Ahmad Colony complained to Capital Metropolitan Government Director East Rehman Khattak that encroachment mafias have built cabins and temporary encroachments on govern-

ment land and footpaths in their area, causing severe difficulties for people to come through. Director East Rehman Khattak took immediate action and directed the Deputy Director Regulation to take immediate action, upon which Deputy Director Regulation Zil Hajja Ilyas along with Chief Demolition Inspector Qaiser Bacha Fazl Mahmood and demolition staff and local Police for a grand operation.

They conducted a grand operation against encroachment in Sardar Ahmad Jan Colony by using heavy machinery and during this time they demolished 15 cabins using heavy machinery while a vehicle lying outside the shops was also seized. Deputy Director Regulation Zil Hajja Ilyas instructed the shopkeepers to avoid trespassing in front of the shops and keep the footpath open for the public so that the shopkeepers do not face any difficulties in coming and going through. After the operation, the people of the area breathed a sigh of relief.

Seminar on multidisciplinary approach to hyperglycemia in pregnancy management held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A one-day seminar was conducted on "A multidisciplinary approach to the management of Hyperglycemia in Pregnancy (HIP)", arranged by The Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Peshawar Medical College in collaboration with The Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology Pakistan (SOGP) Peshawar chapter her at PMC the other day.

The seminar was attended by consultants, trainee medical officers, medical officers, medical students, house officers, nurses, lady health workers and midwives from different hospitals of Peshawar. The Organizers of the seminar were Professor Dr. Tehniyat Ishaq, HOD Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and the Co-chairper-

son of Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology Pakistan (SOGP) Peshawar chapter, Professor Dr. Shahnaz Parveen and Dr. Rabia Kareem.

The distinguished chief guests included Professor Dr. Sadaqat Jabeen, Professor Dr. Gul Rukh Qazi and Professor Dr. Parveen Azeem. The seminar commenced with an insightful keynote address by Professor Dr. Tehniyat Ishaq who elaborated on "Gravity of the situation", which was followed by a series of presentations and discussions by different speakers including Dr. Samdana Wahab (Associate professor OBGYN), Dr. Rabia Kareem (Assistant Professor OBGYN), Dr. Faheemullah (Endocrinologist), Dr. Abdul Munim (Ophthalmologist), and Dr. Sana Nafis (Pediatrixian),

which delved into various aspects of hyperglycemia in pregnancy.

Engaging discussions and thought-provoking questions from participants added depth to the conversations, fostering a collaborative atmosphere. The attendees gained valuable insights into real-world applications of the seminar's themes.

The seminar ended with a concluding note from the Chairperson of Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology Pakistan (SOGP), Professor Dr. Gulrukh Qazi. Shields were distributed among the organizers and speakers, recognizing their commitments.

The principal, PMC, Dr. Muhammad Aman appreciated the efforts of the organizers for the meticulous planning and execution of such an enlightening seminar.



In brief

Development works reviewed F.P. Report

BANNU: Commissioner Bannu Parwez Sabatkhel has asked the heads of line departments to expedite work on the ongoing uplift projects and ensure their completion in stipulated time frame. Chairing a high-level meeting at his office in Bannu on Friday, he said that his administration would strictly monitor uplift works in Bannu, Lakki Marwat and North Waziristan districts. Commissioner said that the government spent huge chunks of funds on developmental projects and it was the prime responsibility of concerned authorities to ensure transparent utilisation of public money. Line departments' heads from Lakki Marwat briefed the divisional commissioner about the pace of work on ongoing projects. Divisional Monitoring Officer (DMO) Hidayatullah, district education officer Farzana Sardar and officials of food, communication and works and other departments were in attendance. On the occasion, the DPO shed light on deficiencies and poor quality of work in the developmental projects and told the commissioner that a report about deficiencies and substandard work had been shared with relevant departments for quick remedial measures. Commissioner asked the relevant authorities to ensure use of quality construction material in uplift projects. He said that the officials involved in delaying development projects would face stern departmental action.

Man killed, another injured

AHMEDPUR SHARQIA (INP): One person was killed and another critically injured after an over speeding tractor trolley hit a motorcycle here on Friday. Rescue sources said that the accident took place on main highway in Ahmedpur Sharqia where a reckless driven tractor trolley knocked down a motorcycle carrying two people. As a result of accident, one person was killed on the spot while another sustained serious injuries. The body and injured were shifted to hospital and police after registering a case into the incident started an investigation.

12 arrested, arms recovered

SARGODHA (INP): Police after launching a massive crackdown against criminals arrested 12 accused and recovered narcotics and weapons on Friday. Police said policemen raided different localities and arrested Aslam, Tahir, Shakoor, Rasheed, Majeed, Suleman, Tahir, Taimoor, Waleed and Kamran. Police also recovered 234 liters of liquor, 1.2-kg hashish, 0.2-kg opium, seven guns and 14 pistols besides valuables.

Cheques distributed

SIALKOT (INP): The District Baitul Mal Committee distributed Christmas cheques worth Rs 20,000 each among 20 deserving families. Chairman District Baitul Mal Committee Chaudhry Shakeel Ahmed, Vice Chairman Malik Ahsan Ali and Deputy Director Social Welfare Sharif Ghumman besides members distributed the cheques. On this occasion, Chaudhry Shakeel congratulated the Christians who received the cheques. He said that the District Bait-ul-Mal Committee was ensuring the distribution of relief funds among the deserving people on merit.



TANDO ALLAHYAR: A villager lady filling water from a hand pump at the model of the Climate Resilience Markaz of bamboo housing by the Intellectual Property Organization, Government of Pakistan, in Pono village.

Uplift of Balochistan took a mission: Zehri

F.P. Report

HUB: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Hub President and Spokesperson of former president Asif Ali Zardari, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri has said that our aim is not to become MPA or MNA but our aim is to serve our people and solve their problems. He expressed these views while addressing the tribal and social leaders and workers who joined the Pakistan People's Party in a public gathering at Sarawan Colony in Hub. Khalid Khan Kakar, owner of Al Saudia Hotel, Lala Khair Khan, Haji Iqbal and social and political figure Haji Malik Banglazai welcomed and expressing confidence in Mir Ali Hassan Zehri's people-friendly initiatives, dignitaries from Kakar community and other communities of Sarwan Colony joined the People's Party.

On this occasion, Mir Hamza Kakar, Shah Mohammad Kakar, Usman Kakar, Abdul Samad Kakar, Lala Khan Kakar and hundreds of colleagues

formally joined the People's Party. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri wore the party muffler and said that I am grateful to all the dignitaries who supported the People's Party and gave us respect.

On this occasion, he said that neither the MPA seat nor the MNA seat is our destination. The way people love us and the People's Party, this feeling gives us a sense of victory and this is our destination. We consider it our duty to serve the people of the area and are well liked by the people. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that the former MNA of the area says that "walking in the streets will not do anything, the victory will be ours as before" but we want to tell them that the real service of the area is that the people know you and the people know you and Alhamdulillah we will get success from these streets.

While addressing the gathering, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that due to the performance of the People's Party, people are joining the party in droves. We

welcome those joining the party and assure them that we will stand with them in their sorrows and solving their problems is among our top priorities. Addressing the gathering, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that I do not claim that the hub will be made into Paris or London, but I promise that we will remedy the injustices imposed on the people here for many decades by vested interests.

Will and will make Hub city an ideal city. He further said that coming here, I found that my father's friends are also here and they also respect me as much as my father. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that we believe in love and humanity. We are serving the people regardless of race and color. He said that party leaders Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari sincerely want Balochistan to develop because equal development like all provinces is the right of Balochistan. He met another gathering of workers at camp office and welcomed those who joined the party.

Four burnt to death in Khuzdar

KHUZDAR (INP): Four people were burnt to death following a fatal collision between two vehicles in the Karak area of Khuzdar, police said on Friday. The fatal smash occurred between two Zamyad vehicles.

According to sources, a vehicle coming from Sindh rammmed into another vehicle carrying petrol. The crash ignited instant fire and the vehicles burst into flames burning to death four people on the spot. Edhi sources said that the bodies were shifted to the Teaching Hospital Khuzdar.

Two of the deceased belonged to Baghban, one belonged to Koshak and another was a resident of Panjgur. On Dec 13, four people died in an accident while two children sustained critical injuries in Khuzdar district of Balochistan.

Four members of a family died as their car collided with a pickup truck. The deceased included two men and two women while two children sustained critical injuries. The injured were rushed to Khuzdar District Headquarters Hospital.

Gomal Varsity issues special edition

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Gomal University has issued a special edition of the newsletter featuring one-year performance of the university under the leadership of Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Shakibullah.

The release of the exclusive edition was marked in an impressive ceremony held at the senate hall of the university where a copy of the new edition was presented to the vice chancellor, says the university's spokesman.

He said that the public relations department of the university had issued the newsletter. Dr. Ehsanullah Danish, senior member of the editorial board, director of Tank Campus speaking on occasion said that the university had achieved remarkable progress on administrative, co-curricular, research and academic fronts during the outgoing year under the patronage of the Vice-Chancellor. He said that the copy highlighted all these activities and achievements besides so many other such activities and it would be made part of the university's record. He also expressed special thanks to Muhammad Fazlur Rehman, in charge of the Press Information Department, Dera Region for his valuable contributions towards the newsletter.

News regarding PTI's seats adjustment denied

F.P. Report

MARDAN: District General Secretary (GS) of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Muhammad Ayaz Khan Safi Here has strongly denied the news spread in the media and other sources is completely baseless and fabricated regarding seat adjustments in Mardan district in the recent 2024 general elections.

He said that this news is based on lies and baseless. PTI is the largest political party of Pakistan and based on its previous performance and public popularity, it will contest the elections itself in Mardan district including other districts and will complete a clean sweep. And will not make any seat adjustment with any party or personality. This type of negative propaganda is done to mislead the voters. Which has nothing to do with reality. The voters, supporters and workers of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf are conscious and they are not going to fall for this kind of negative propaganda and tactics.

Dozens of activists join JUI-F in power show at Karak

F.P. Report

KARAK: Jamiat Ulema Islam Fazal (JUI-F) leader Mian Nisar Gul's grand power show in Karak City has been joined by dozens of family members including Mian Nisar Gul Kakakhel, Malik Imad Azam Advocate and Shah Abdul Aziz Mujahid. The three nominated candidates Mian Nisar Gul Kakakhel, Malik Imad Azam Advocate and Shah Abdul Aziz Mujahid left jail chowk in the form of a rally of hundreds of motorcycles and vehicles.

And they were also garlanded with flowers. On reaching the venue, he was also given a warm welcome by the people. Speaking on the occasion, Mian Nisar Gul Kakakhel thanked the people for the respect and welcome given to him and welcomed the newly inducted friends JUI-F. The names of the families who joined are Prof. Dr. Umar Hayat with family, Kamal Badshah with family, Liaquat Ali with family, Aftab Ahmad with family,

Ataullah with family, family in Karak city has joined Jamiat Ulema Islam by the hands of Mian Nisar Gul Kakakhel, Malik Imad Azam Advocate and Shah Abdul Aziz Mujahid.

The three nominated candidates, Mian Nisar Gul Kakakhel, Malik Imad Azam Advocate and Shah Abdul Aziz Mujahid left Jail Chowk in the form of hundreds of motorcycles and vehicles and organized public receptions at various places in Kirk City. The three candidates were showered with flower petals and garlanded with flowers.

On reaching Tapi Karak Jalsa Gah, he was warmly welcomed by the people. Addressing the event, Mian Nisar Gul Kakakhel thanked the public for the respect and welcome given to him and welcomed the newly joined friends to Jamiat Ulema-Islam.

The names of the heads of the families who joined are Prof. Dr. Umar Hayat with the family, Kamal Badshah with the family,

Liaquat Ali with the family, Aftab Ahmad with the family, Attaullah with the family, Ashfaq Ahmed with the family, Prof. Tehsil Badshah with the family, Ustad Munkul Shah Bum family, Yaqub Khan Bum family, Muhammad Wasim Bum family, Shamsullah Bum family, Naseemullah Bum family, Muhammad Imran Bum family, Muhammad Bilal Bum family, Muhammad Nishad Bum family, Muhammad Qasim Bum family, Muhammad Mushtaq Bum family, Aamir Khan Bum family, Asal Nawaz Bama family, Atifullah Bama family, Rafiullah Bama family, Nehadullah Bama family, Mossadegh Khan Bama family, Bilawal Khan Bama family, Shah Gul Bama family, Ashraf Khan Bama family, Inayatullah Bama family, Obaidullah Bama family, Inamullah with family, Shahzad Aamir Bama family, Saqib Rashid Bama family, Muhammad Ejaz with family and Waliullah Bama family have joined Jamiat Ulama Islam (F).

Citizens participation in policy making vital

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Speakers at a dialogue have stressed the need for citizens' participation in the budget making process, saying that the consultation with all stakeholders and simplification of the process will help to overcome deficiencies in the budget making.

Citizen Network for Budget Accountability, a network of civil society organizations had arranged the dialogue here in Lakki city on Friday, with local bodies' members, political and social activists, traders, lawyers, journalists and civil society members in attendance.

Inayatullah, a representative of the organisation, said that CPDI (Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives) had been work-

ing for the last one decade to improve budgeting and promote transparency in the entire process from the district to federal level in Pakistan. He shed light on a report released by CPDI on "Status of Budget Transparency in Pakistan and International Best Practices" and urged the government to launch a central digital platform to promote citizens' participation in budgeting. He said that the platform should be designed on a pattern to enable citizens to comprehend complex and difficult terminologies of budget making.

Other speakers including neighborhood council nazim engineer Latifullah Khan, a social activist Ikrarul Khan and Imran Marwat of Awami National Party asked the policy makers to prepare separate

budget estimates for women, minorities, children and disabled persons. They said that a citizen-centered budget should be presented in Pakistan.

The speakers asked the government to make legislation regarding provision of legal protection to citizens' participation in budget making. They said that discussing budget proposals with all stakeholders including civil society organisations and government agencies would promote transparency in the process.

Inayatullah underlined the need for increasing the role of parliamentarians in budget making, effective implementation of access to information laws and engaging finance committees of the parliament and provincial assemblies in budget making.

Ex-opp leader Raja Riaz's assets increased

FAISALABAD (INP): The nomination papers of former opposition leader Raja Riaz Ahmed have revealed a significant increase in his assets over the past year. According to the documents, his wealth jumped by Rs. 15 million between 2022 and 2023, bringing his total declared assets to Rs. 4.87 crore, says in media reports.

The details show that Riaz owns 205 kanals of agricultural land, a paper mill, and income of Rs. 1.08 million for the 2023 fiscal year. He has also paid income tax of Rs. 303,000

in 2023, compared to Rs. 117,000 in 2022 and just Rs. 3,000 in 2021.

Interestingly, the papers also reveal that Riaz enjoys a taste for travel, having undertaken three trips to Europe in the past three years. His most recent trip, an eight-day jaunt, cost him a hefty Rs. 17 lakh.

Furthermore, Riaz's asset increase since 2018 comes in at a staggering Rs. 3.71 crore, raising eyebrows in some quarters. In separate comments, Riaz reacted to the recent return of the bat electoral symbol to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-

Insaf (PTI) party. He congratulated PTI on reclaiming the symbol, stating that "now they cannot escape the electoral process." He also expressed confidence in his own party's ability to take on PTI in the upcoming elections, saying, "Bila has come to the field, we are also in the field, we will hit him with a gooly that he will always remember." Riaz's comments and the revealed details of his assets are likely to generate further discussion and debate in the lead-up to the upcoming elections in Pakistan.

Police aspirants demand increase in seats

F.P. Report

TIMERGARA: The aspirants who qualified the test and interview for the recruitment of Lower Dir Police requested that they be recruited by increasing the quota to save them from getting over age.

Leaders Kashif Khan, Sana Ullah, Fawad Ahmed, Sajidullah, Saeed Anwar, Riyaz Khan along with others told the media at Timergara Press Club that 300 people belonging to Lower Dir had passed the test and interview in which only 54 people passed. While there are no more vacancies in the police for

Lower Dir, he said that those who scored 25 marks have been recruited in other districts, but candidates from Lower Dir who scored 54 marks have not been recruited.

There is cruelty and injustice with them. They said that they are being harassed by non-recruitment despite conducting the test and interview. By increasing the quota for those who passed the test, they should be recruited and their future should not be bleak.

Dozens of activists joined PPP: Dozens of families from resigned from different political par-

ties and joined the PPP. Qari Saeedullah, Farooq, and others along with their families joined the Pakistan People's Party, People's Party candidate and former MPA and People's Party PK-16 president, Ahmad Zamin Khan, Advocate and President of People's Party Tehsil Khal, Akhuzada Zahoor said that People's Party is the party of poor people, farmers and workers and People's Party has always fought for the rights of poor and downtrodden sections. He said that if the people trust him and make him successful, then he will not disappoint the people.

Election activities, arrangements reviewed in Tank

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Additional Deputy Commissioner General Tank and Returning Officer for the National Assembly constituency-NA-43 Tanveer Khan paid a visit to the officials concerned to ensure comprehensive arrangements. Returning Officer for the provincial constitu-

tionary PK-108 Shoaib Ahmed Khan also accompanied him and both officials monitored the training session and expressed satisfaction in this regard.

The Additional Deputy Commissioner mentioned that all staff should carry out their responsibilities in an exemplary manner, ensuring transparency.

According to the district administration, during the visit, he inspected activities with regard to the upcoming elections and issued directives to the officials concerned to ensure comprehensive arrangements. Returning Officer for the provincial constitu-

tionary PK-108 Shoaib Ahmed Khan also accompanied him and both officials monitored the training session and expressed satisfaction in this regard.

The Additional Deputy Commissioner mentioned that all staff should carry out their responsibilities in an exemplary manner, ensuring transparency.



GAZA: People stand over the shrouded bodies of loved ones killed during an Israeli bombardment at Nasser hospital in Khan Younis.

UN agency says 40% of Gaza's population 'at risk of famine'

NEW YORK: The United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees has warned that not enough aid is entering besieged Gaza, leaving 40 percent of its population "at risk of famine" amid Israeli curbs on entry of much-needed aid trucks to enter the enclave.

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) renewed its warning that the besieged enclave is "grappling with catastrophic hunger", as it reiterated calls for a "humanitarian ceasefire" as non-stop Israeli bombs rained from the north to the southern part of the enclave. "Every day is a struggle for survival, finding food and finding water," Thomas White, director of UNRWA affairs in Gaza was quoted as saying on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"The reality is, we need more aid. The only remaining hope is a humanitarian ceasefire," the agency said on X. A "total siege" imposed by Israel since the war began on October 7, and following years of crippling blockade, has deprived Palestinians in Gaza of food, water, fuel and medicine. The severe shortages have only been sporadically eased by humanitarian aid convoys entering primarily via Egypt.

Last week, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution on more aid for Gaza after days of delays, but aid groups and rights advocates described the resolution as "woefully insufficient" and "nearly

meaningless". The latest stark warning by the UN agency on the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Gaza came as Israeli troops continued to heavily bombard the territory, with the centre of fierce combat with Hamas fighters steadily moving south - where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians are sheltering. Air and artillery attacks and house-to-house fighting have become heaviest in the southern city of Khan Younis. Ashraf al-Qudra, spokesman for the Health Ministry in Gaza, reported more than 200 deaths "including entire families" over the past 24 hours in attacks across the territory. More than 80 percent of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been driven from their homes, the UN says, and many now live in cramped shelters or makeshift tents in the far south, in and around the city of Rafah near the Egyptian border.

Earlier, UN World Health Organisation (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called for "urgent steps to alleviate the grave peril" facing Gaza's people, including "terrible injuries, acute hunger and ... severe risk of disease". Last week, a UN-backed report warned that the entire 2.3 million population of Gaza is facing crisis levels of hunger, with 576,600 people at catastrophic - or starvation - levels.

According to the report, published by 23 UN and non-governmental agencies, the proportion of households in Gaza affected by high levels

of acute food insecurity is the largest ever recorded globally, eclipsing even the near-famines in Afghanistan and Yemen of recent years. Israel's relentless aerial bombardment and ground invasion have killed at least 21,320 people, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry.

Eylon Levy, the Israeli government spokesperson, has accused the UN of a failure to provide aid to civilians in Gaza. He claimed that Hamas hijacks aid and that the "UNRWA covers up for it", and blamed the UN's logistics for the closure of the Israeli-controlled Karem Abu Salem border crossing (called Kerem Shalom in Israel) this week. Israel has not provided any proof for its allegations against the UN agency.

Earlier this week, Israel said it would not renew the visa of a UN staff member in the country and will also deny the visa request of another UN employee as the global body has criticised Israel's targeting of civilians and hospitals during the Gaza war. An overwhelming majority of the more than 21,000 Palestinians killed are civilians. Israeli officials have brushed off international calls for a ceasefire - saying it would amount to a victory for Hamas. The United States - while providing crucial support for the offensive - has urged Israel to take greater measures to spare civilians and allow in more aid. But humanitarian workers say the amount of food, fuel and medical supplies entering is still far below what is needed. — Aljazeera

Leader of Sudan's RSF visits Ethiopia

KHARTOUM: The leader of Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, has visited neighbouring Ethiopia, where he has had discussions on the end of the war between the RSF and Sudan's army. Dagalo, known as "Hemedti", landed in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, in the second stop of his first known public foreign trip since the war erupted on April 15.

The trip comes weeks after RSF fighters captured the country's second-largest city, Wad Madani, once a hub for hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the eight-month war. Meeting was preceded by Hemedti's meeting with Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni at Museveni's country home.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said he had received the RSF leader and his delegation "for a discussion on securing peace and stability in Sudan", posting pictures of them seated around a restaurant table. Hemedti was received by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen at the airport in Addis Ababa.

Hemedti posted pictures of his arrival and a meeting with Demeke on X. "We discussed the need to bring a swift end to this war, the historical crisis in Sudan and how to best alleviate the hardships of the Sudanese people," Hemedti wrote. US- and Saudi-brokered talks have failed to end the conflict, which has killed more than 12,000 people and forced more than seven million people to flee their homes. Last month, Human Rights Watch accused the RSF of carrying out mass ethnic killings in Darfur.

Posts by Hemedti and Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs showed him exiting an aircraft belonging to Royal Jet, a United Arab Emirates airline, that flight records show had flown from Abu Dhabi to Uganda's Entebbe airport. The UAE has been Hemedti's most important foreign ally since before the current conflict. In November, a Sudanese general accused the UAE of backing the RSF and funneling supplies through countries that included Uganda. The UAE responded by saying it supported diplomatic dialogue in Sudan and the conflict's end while Uganda said the accusations were false.

Hemedti is next expected to visit Kenya, a source close to the RSF told the Agence France-Presse news agency. Al Jazeera could not confirm the planned stop through official sources. "After having visited Uganda and Ethiopia, Hemedti will go to Nairobi in order to try to rally the member states of IGAD to his cause before going to Djibouti to meet General al-Burhan," the source was quoted as saying, referring to Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the leader of Sudan's armed forces. — Aljazeera

Erdogan says Netanyahu no different than Hitler

GAZA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has compared Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Adolf Hitler, likening Israel's assault on Gaza to Nazi Germany's killing of Jews. In remarks at an awards ceremony in capital Ankara, Erdogan asked what difference there was between Netanyahu and Hitler.

Netanyahu later responded by pointing to Turkey's own history of alleged rights abuses. "They used to speak ill of Hitler. What difference do you have from Hitler? They are going to make us miss Hitler. Is what this Netanyahu is doing any less than what Hitler did? It is not," Erdogan said.

"He is richer than Hitler, he gets the support from the West. All sorts of support comes from the United States. And what did they do with all this support?"

They killed more than 20,000 Gazans," he said. Erdogan's remarks have come as Turkey ratchets up criticism of Israel, reversing a trend of growing ties between the two nations before Israel's assault on Gaza took a devastating humanitarian toll that has sparked outrage across the region.

The Turkish leader has previously levelled harsh criticism at Netanyahu and Israel, calling Israel a "terror state" with "unlimited" Western support in November. Under Hitler's rule, Nazi Germany embarked on an effort to systematically eliminate European Jews, killing six million through death and labour camps, mass shootings, and a variety of other methods.

The Israeli prime minister later hit back at Erdogan, criticising Turkey for its own record of

alleged rights abuses at home and in its conflict with Kurdish armed groups. "Erdogan, who commits genocide against the Kurds, who holds a world record for imprisoning journalists who oppose his rule, is the last person who can preach morality to us," Netanyahu said in a statement.

Despite such firm criticism, Turkey has maintained commercial ties with Israel throughout its nearly three-month assault on Gaza in a "genocidal" campaign that has killed more than 21,000 people, wounded 55,000 others and displaced almost the entire 2.3 million population. The Israeli bombings began on October 7 when the Palestinian armed group Hamas launched an attack on southern Israel, killing more than 1,100 people and taking about 240 captives. — Aljazeera

Ukraine welcomes latest US aid package

KYIV: Ukraine has welcomed the latest arms package from the United States to aid its fight against Russia as the war approaches the two-year mark. The package, valued at \$250m and announced, will include air defence system components, ammunition for HIMARS, 155mm and 105mm artillery rounds, stinger anti-aircraft missiles, and medical equipment.

"We are grateful to the American government and people for their unwavering support. Ukrainian people appreciate your leadership," the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence said on X. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said it would "cover Ukraine's most pressing needs". "US leadership in the coalition of over 50 countries providing Ukraine with military aid is critical to countering terror and aggression not only in Ukraine but around the world," he said.

US President Joe Biden

has asked Congress to provide another \$61 bn in aid to Ukraine. But Republicans are refusing to approve the package without an agreement by the Democrats to tighten security around the US-Mexico border. The White House has warned that without the additional appropriation, US aid for Ukraine's fight against Russia will run out by the end of the year.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said the West's strategic defeat on Moscow had "completely failed". Lavrov told Russian state media that the Group of Seven countries intend to discuss the "peace formula" proposed by Zelenskyy, which they agreed on at a "secret summit" held about 10 days ago. Meanwhile, a bulk carrier headed to a River Danube port to load grain hit a Russian mine in the Black Sea, injuring two crew members, Ukrainian officials said.

"A Panama-flagged civilian vessel was blown up on an enemy sea mine in the Black Sea ... The vessel lost its course and control and a fire broke out on the upper deck," Ukraine's southern military command said on Telegram. A captain, sailor and an Egyptian citizen were injured, with the latter taken to hospital in the city of Izmail, the head of the Odesa regional prosecutors office said.

Moscow has ramped up its attack in the Black Sea since leaving the United Nations-brokered grain deal in mid-July, which allowed for the safe passage of Ukrainian grain shipments. Ukraine has pushed back Russian warships in the western part of the Black Sea to allow some cargo ships in and out along a maritime corridor. But the water remains heavily mined, including by Russian planes, and is particularly dangerous in stormy weather. — Aljazeera

Indonesian students evict Rohingya from shelter demanding deportation

JAKARTA: Hundreds of university students in Indonesia's westernmost province of Aceh have stormed a temporary shelter for Rohingya refugees, demanding they be deported. Protesters forced more than 100 Rohingya out of a convention centre in the city of Banda Aceh, in the latest episode of discrimination against the persecuted minority group from Myanmar.

More than 1,500 Rohingya refugees have arrived on the shores of Aceh since mid-November in what the United Nations says is their biggest influx in eight years. Some of their boats have faced rejection by Indonesian locals and in some cases,

returned to sea. Videos of the incident showed the students, many wearing jackets with different universities' insignias, running into the convention centre's basement, chanting "Kick them out" and "Reject Rohingya in Aceh". The students were also seen kicking the belongings of the Rohingya men, women and children seated on the floor and crying in fear. The refugees were then led out, some carrying their belongings in plastic sacks and taken to trucks.

The protesters burned tyres and scuffled with the police guarding the frightened Rohingya, but officers ultimately permitted the removal of

the refugees by the students, according to the AFP news agency. Police helped the refugees board the trucks before they were taken to another government office nearby. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said in a statement it was "deeply disturbed to see a mob attack on a site sheltering vulnerable refugee families, majority being children and women" and called for better protection.

"The mob broke a police cordon and forcibly put 137 refugees on two trucks, and moved them to another location in Banda Aceh. The incident has left refugees shocked and traumatised," it said. — Aljazeera

Bangladesh capital most polluted

DHAKA: The capitals of India and Bangladesh are blanketed by a thick layer of toxic smog, as air quality plummets in both New Delhi and Dhaka. Dhaka briefly emerged as the world's most polluted city, with a "hazardous" index level of 325, according to Swiss climate monitor IQAir.

By midday, however, conditions improved slightly, with the index dropping to 177 - still in the "unhealthy" range. The air quality in Dhaka, one of the world's most crowded cities with more than 20 million residents, has worsened in recent years as fossil fuels are over-used, bringing health prob-

lems for the people. "We often suffer from asthma, fever and allergies while operating rickshaws on the streets," said Rafiq Mondal, who drives a vehicle for a living. "It is often very painful."

While authorities in Dhaka spray the streets with water to help the dust settle, residents want additional steps taken. "The air pollution is taking its toll," said resident Wasim Akhter. "With all the mega projects like the metro rail overhead, there is a lot of construction material everywhere ... Measures must be taken more seriously."

The World Bank has urged Bangladesh to coordi-

nate more closely with its South Asian neighbours to clean up the air. Air pollution, which is often a mix of solid particles, liquid droplets and gasses, accounts for one-fifth of deaths in the country each year, it said in a report. In New Delhi, which often leads the world's most polluted list, the AQI index read 378, according to the Central Pollution Control Board - a rating of "very poor". The dense fog in the Indian capital and across northern India led to the delays of more than 100 flights and the disruption of rail services as visibility reduced to barely 50 metres (164 feet) in some areas. — Aljazeera

The global economy in 2024: Key clues to watch out for

NEW YORK: The world economy has proved more resilient than most analysts anticipated at the start of 2023. In particular, global inflation has fallen without big surges in unemployment. But policymakers, desperate to engineer a "soft landing", are not out of the woods yet.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), global output, while highly fragmented, will slow in 2024 as high interest rates snuff out persistent inflation and, by extension, economic activity. The Paris-based organisation does not anticipate growth to edge up until 2025, at which point leading central banks are expected to aggressively slash borrowing costs. Until then, global gross domestic product (GDP) is forecast to rise by 2.7 percent next year, down slightly from 2.9 percent in 2023. The OECD's outlook points to a long fiscal hangover from COVID-19, followed by surging energy prices after Russia invaded Ukraine. Moreover, even if monetary policy does begin to unwind next year, global interest rates will remain high by recent historical standards.

Still, economic forecasting is an inexact science. Twelve months ago, predictions of a United States recession were widespread. Elsewhere, market makers were betting that high debt costs would trigger a spate of sovereign defaults across the developing world. Neither have occurred. Despite recent tensions in Israel-Palestine, the world economy slowly shed growth at a manageable pace in 2023. Looking ahead to next year, three macroeconomic variables - and how they interrelate - will be closely

monitored for clues about the direction of global output.

In an effort to lower inflation, the US Federal Reserve raised its benchmark interest rate from near-zero last March to 5.25-5.5 percent today. The experience showed that the American economy, the largest in the world, can withstand high borrowing costs. At the same time, unemployment has fallen to near multi-decade lows even as inflation has edged down. The upshot is that US output has, somewhat surprisingly, chugged along at an annualised pace of 2 percent.

This has persuaded many analysts to ditch their start-of-year gloom. "The Fed is on course to avert a recession and achieve benign disinflation, which would constitute a soft landing," Raphael Olszyna-Marzys, an international economist at private bank J Safra Sarasin, told Al Jazeera. That said, cracks are beginning to show. "Unemployment is slowly creeping up and consumers have fewer pandemic-era savings. This will increase the need for debt, including at the corporate level, and increase financing risks from higher interest rates," he said.

"And once an economic slowdown gets under way, it risks feeding on itself," he said, adding that while falling inflation will be an important factor in determining monetary policy, "weakening growth will almost certainly determine when the Fed will pivot." Federal funds futures are a straightforward gauge for determining when traders think US interest rates will change. According to CME FedWatch, a tool that tracks the probability of Fed rate changes, there is a 76 percent chance of a rate cut next

March.

For Olszyna-Marzys, meanwhile, "the kind of economic weakness, namely a recession, that would precipitate rate reductions is only likely in the second half of 2024". He anticipated cuts amounting to 1 percent next year, after June, predominantly to boost domestic growth. But rate cuts will also encourage investment into emerging market countries, which will offer relatively higher rates of return.

"As such, I expect a one percentage point drop in the Fed Funds rate to raise global GDP by 1 percent," he said. He pointed out that "keeping rates steady" would have the opposite effect. "An external shock, like an unexpected jump in oil prices, could lift inflation again and force the Fed to keep rates on hold ... or even lift them. That would undermine US, and even global growth."

Shortly after Hamas's October 7 attack - and subsequent Israeli retaliation - the World Bank used its Commodity's Market Outlook to warn that Brent crude oil (the international benchmark) prices could spike if producers in the region were drawn into a wider conflict. In a worst-case scenario, the bank estimated that global oil supply could shrink by six to eight million barrels a day, which would send prices to between \$140 and \$157 a barrel. Under a smaller disruption, the report added that prices could still hit \$102-\$121 a barrel.

For now, oil markets appear to have shrugged off the effects of Middle East tensions. Even accounting for recent Houthi rebel attacks on ships in the Red Sea, Brent crude is

trading at under \$79 a barrel, down from \$92.4 in mid-October. There are several reasons for this. First, the global economy is better positioned to withstand a supply shock than it was during the 1973 oil embargo when prices quadrupled. Today, the Middle East accounts for 30 percent of world supply, down from 37 percent 50 years ago.

Linked to this, US energy supplies have burgeoned in recent decades. At the same time, economic activity has become more fuel efficient while renewable energy is more readily available. For John Baffes, head of the World Bank's Commodities Unit and lead author of the Commodity Markets Outlook report, traders appear to have "discounted a possible military escalation [into their price forecasts] for now".

"Many traders got burned last year, overestimating the scale of disruptions to oil supplies following Russia's invasion of Ukraine," said Baffes. "So, they'll want to see material risks in Israel-Palestine before they start pricing that in." He added that "even if Brent did rise by \$20 due to Middle East supply issues [as under the Bank's 'smaller disruption' scenario], we still don't think it would have a material impact on global growth ... in the region of 0.1 percent."

Baffes told Al Jazeera that "the alarmism around high energy prices and global GDP reflects a retrograde view that we're still living in the 1970s. Supply chains have moved on. It's time economists do the same." Economists are also keeping an eye on China, due to its size and deep linkages with the global economy.

Activity there has ripple effects on world trade, international supply chains and commodity prices.

After three years of strict "zero-COVID" controls, China, the world's second-largest economy, was expected to bounce back when it suddenly reopened last December. But growth has since been fragile and output constrained by a property sector slowdown. In 2020, Beijing began limiting property developers' use of debt financing. The real estate sector, which accounts for 23 percent of China's GDP, has since slumped amid falling house prices and developer defaults.

"Property is weighing on China's recovery," said Sheana Yue, China economist at Capital Economics. "Consumers remain suspicious of the sector. After the crackdown on leverage, lots of pre-purchased homes weren't built when developers went bust." Credit rating agency Moody's lowered its outlook on China's A1 debt rating from "stable" to "negative" earlier this month, citing "increased risks from ... lower medium-term growth and the ongoing downsizing of the property sector".

China's property market also has close links to local government finances, which have come under strain in recent years. After the 2008 global financial crisis, local administrations embraced credit-fuelled infrastructure investment to boost growth. Demand, however, has slowed after decades of rapid urbanisation. Together with pandemic-linked spending, falling land sale revenues - a key source of income - have sapped budgets pushing some local governments to rely on Beijing

to pay their bills.

Indeed, Beijing has been driving the availability of credit in recent months. Broad credit growth - which measures all lending across the domestic financial system - rose by 9.4 percent in November from a year earlier. Government bond sales made up half of that increase. The reliance on government financing to drive growth suggests "the structure of credit is still not good," Yue said. "The data shows an economy that is stabilising thanks to the help of state support. While that's unlikely to change soon, it won't be good when it does."

Economists have been watching loan demand as a barometer of China's economic recovery. Slow credit growth is typically associated with economic contractions, as businesses and consumers become reluctant to borrow, choosing to hoard their savings instead. "We think the pace of credit expansion will fall from 10 percent this year to 8 percent next," Yue said. But she cautioned against reading too much into this, "it's a mistake to think that will have a big impact on GDP. By extension, the impact on global growth will probably be limited."

In the face of continued headwinds, China's Politburo, the government's top decision-making body, is expected to unveil further stimulus measures in the coming months. While these trends have reinforced expectations of a relatively benign outlook for global growth in 2024, historical evidence shows that soft landings remain elusive. As in 2023, forecasts may well fall wide of the mark again. — Aljazeera

The Frontier Post

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Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at Moraka's Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town, Peshawar.

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The Baloch and Kakar's New Year

THE Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BLC), one of the group organizing the Baloch protest march in Islamabad has given a one week dead line to the government to fulfill its demands otherwise they will put their case before the Baloch people.

Dr Mahrang Baloch, one of the organizer of the protest is demanding an end to enforced disappearance and extra judicial killings of their community. Who can deny the fact that enforced disappearance and extra judicial killings have taken place in both Balochistan and the recently merged tribal areas of Pakistan. And this has been happening since several years and decades now. One wonders why the government since day one did not come up with straight answers and the challenges it faced.

It's no secret that both Balochistan and former tribal areas of Pakistan better known as FATA since last two decades have been in the midst of international players and international terrorist groups. But did the government ever take the local people of these areas in confidence as to what was happening in their areas. Did their elected members ever explained to the locals the challenges that Pakistan was facing in these areas.

It was due to these misunderstandings that some locals in these areas started to believe that the government was involved hand in gloves with these terrorist groups. This mentality and thinking led to the creation of splinter groups, thus giving birth to individuals who stood up against the state. Today one can not deny that fact the many of such groups have international funding as well and they are even supported on social media groups all around the world.

Our dear Prime Minister Kakar, who hails from Balochistan and who is also a Pashtun instead of focusing on the problems of Pakistan, is instead focusing on Palestine and has decided not to celebrate new year because of the atrocities committed by Israel in Palestine. Will Israel stop these atrocities because Mr Kakar is not celebrating new year? The answer is no, Israel does not give a damn about what our prime minister does or does not.

Our suggestion to our dear prime minister and those who made him the caretaker is that sir kindly focus on the issues of Pakistan and Pakistanis. We seriously are lagging behind on several fronts. The ordinary Pakistan is going through suffering each and every day. Unemployment and prices of food items and utilities bills are beyond the affordability of most Pakistanis. Let's stop playing around and focus on Pakistan.

We have several enemies who would love to see us decay and drown. They are actively perusing our downfall and are providing all the tools in seeing Pakistan fall. We have to stand to these challenges as nation. A nation which is together. A nation which is behind its elected members of parliament. A nation which is behind its armed forces. Unity and elections are needed the most at this time.

US biggest threat to other countries' security

FORMER US secretary of state Mike Pompeo, who was previously head of the Central Intelligence Agency, was at least frank and explicit when he said of the organization: "We lied, we cheated, we stole." His prideful admission underscores the extreme lengths to which the United States will go to compromise the national security of other countries in pursuit of its own interests.

In yet another example of what dirty tricks the CIA has been playing overseas, current and former agency officials told The Wall Street Journal that China's national security agency all but blinded the CIA in the country a decade ago when it cracked its network in the Chinese mainland. As many as two dozen agents working for the CIA were rounded up. The CIA is still struggling to rebuild its human espionage capabilities in China, which according to the report is the agency's top intelligence target.

That the US spy agency wants to be active in China is no surprise given its history, which is marked by illegal activities such as torture, kidnapping, assassination plots, illegal surveillance of foreign leaders and US citizens, as well as engineering civil unrest and the overthrowing of regimes. The blithe way in which the current and former CIA officials talked about how the agency has conducted and will continue to conduct activities targeting China reveals the double standard Washington has adopted in terms of national security.

The US has used national security as an excuse to launch its full-scale campaign to contain China, which includes trying to prevent Chinese high-tech companies such as Huawei having access to any external markets worldwide, blocking high-tech US-based investments going toward the country, and trying to decouple China from the global industry and supply chains in the name of "de-risking". Washington has repeatedly — unwarrantedly and unsubstantiatedly — described China as the "most consequential threat" to US national security.

Thus when a Chinese civilian balloon for meteorological research drifted off course due to strong winds and entered US airspace in February, anti-China hawks in Washington seized the chance to whip up anti-China hysteria by describing the balloon as part of China's extensive aerial surveillance program targeting the US, an accusation that was fabricated out of thin air for the occasion, as the Joe Biden administration later admitted.

The latest disclosure of CIA's activities in China once again proves that it is the US, rather than any other country, that is the fundamental source of chaos in the international order, and poses the biggest threat to the national security of other countries and world peace and stability.

The China Daily

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Far-right renaissance haunts Europe

Chris Doyle

JUST how strong is the far right in Europe? And is it getting more popular? These are questions that trouble many people. Democrats question what it means for European liberal democratic politics and the institutions that ensure equality and the rule of law. Antiracism campaigners are alarmed by what this signifies for European societies.

European Muslims, perennially depicted as outsiders and scapegoats for so many issues, ponder what is in store for them. Jewish communities are understandably terrified. Asylum seekers and refugees wonder if fortress Europe is going to become even more hostile. Others fear just how much all this benefits the agenda of President Vladimir Putin of Russia.

The answers are far from simple. It is a mixed picture. Sometimes it is hard to determine whether the far right's status is as a result of a continental trend, a specific country or regional issues. How scared should democrats be? Are these far-right movements capable of crashing European democracies? The increasing success of the far right is not an overnight phenomenon. Many will recall the political earthquake that was the success of Jorg Haider in Austria, when his Freedom Party won 27 percent of the vote in 1999. As with Italy, there was never really any national soul-searching in Austria after the Second World War, which perhaps explains why the far right was never really ostracized as it was in other countries. In the Netherlands, Pim Fortuyn was almost an iconic figure, a status cemented by his assassination in 2002. Jean-Marie Le Pen reached the runoff in the French presidential election of the same year.

Some far-right parties are in power, either running governments or as part of a coalition. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban is the longest-serving EU leader and a champion of the far right who prides himself on standing up to Brussels, NATO and even embracing Putin. Georgia Meloni, a leader with neo-fascist roots, has been the Italian prime minister for more than a year. So far, she has perhaps not been as extreme in office as on the campaign trail, but nonetheless she still wholeheartedly embraces the central tenets of the far right and has praised Benito Mussolini.

For democrats, anti-racism campaigners and those who value the goals of the EU, all of this is alarming. Many ask if democracy will suddenly crash or if it will die a slow, painful death. They see the far-right discourse as having become mainstream and normalized. The success of these groups has shifted politics. Where once mainstream conservative parties would shy away from any association with the likes of Le Pen, many now openly consider working with them in coalition governments. They are no longer beyond the pale. Racism is very much a factor. In a poll of 6,752 people of African

In Finland, the far-right Finns Party came second in April's general election with 46 seats, only two behind the conservative National Coalition Party. The Finns Party got seven seats in the ensuing coalition government's Cabinet and forced it into much tougher anti-immigration positions. In Slovakia, Robert Fico and his Smer party won the September parliamentary election. This is a man who once stated that "Islam has no place in Slovakia."

Other states may soon have the far right at the helm. Its followers have scored some impressive results, most recently in the Netherlands, where the Party for Freedom led by Geert Wilders won the most seats in last month's election. Wilders is perhaps the most anti-Muslim of all of Europe's far-right leaders. The Freedom Party of Austria looks likely to win the Austrian elections in 2024. In March, the Portuguese will go to the polls, with the right-wing bloc, supported by the far-right Chega party, favorites to form the next government. But the far right does not have it all its own way. Consider Poland. In its general election of Oct. 15, liberal leader Donald Tusk and his allies defeated the right-wing nationalist Law and Justice party. The UK's Conservative Party, which has at times veered very close to the far right, looks like losing its hold on power after 14 years in office in elections likely to be held in 2024. The anti-immigration Alternative for Germany became the third-largest party in Germany, as well as the largest opposition group, after the federal elections of 2017, but it did not fare so well in 2021.

This is tied to the enduring belief that "indigenous" populations are being replaced. I met Meloni supporters near Milan. One was clear that, for her, "Meloni is the first leader for a long time who spoke up for Italians, who put Italian interests first." This is a continual theme: that so-called indigenous populations have been cast aside and ignored. This means that solutions to the immigration issue must be found, but they need to be properly thought out and not pander to base instincts. They should appreciate how much an aging Europe actually needs and benefits from immigrant communities and labor. Are economic issues a factor? The 2008 financial crash, the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have combined to spark a sense of economic insecurity. A recent Eurobarometer poll found that 73 percent of respondents in the EU think that

their standard of living will go down in the next year. This makes many feel less welcoming of migrants, who are too often perceived as coming to take jobs. Many point to the parallels of the 1930s and the rise of fascist parties after the 1929 crash.

Has politics just become more polarized? The far left and the Greens are doing well too, such as in Germany and in the last European Parliament elections in 2019. Is this a crisis of the center in politics? Have consensus and compromise disappeared? Could disorder and extremism spill over to the streets? Rioting in Dublin in November indicated that this could be the case, as the Irish far right bared its teeth. Observers have been warning about this for some time, even though no far-right politicians have yet been elected in Ireland.

To what extent will policies be affected? Immigration policies have toughened almost everywhere, even in countries that used to be seen as immigrant-friendly. Other issues may get blocked by far-right parties. Orban is determined to prevent Ukraine's accession path to EU membership, which needs unanimity among the existing 27 members. Will the far right act as a brake on the inexorable expansion of the EU itself and its ever closer integration? Euroscepticism is now widespread, including on the left. All this will matter in EU politics in 2024. The European elections in June will be a crucial barometer of the level of support for the far right, the popularity of the EU itself and, in many ways, the direction of travel for the continent. Further ahead, many are nervous about the French presidential elections in 2027, with Marine Le Pen being seen as a shoo-in for the second round and very much a contender for the presidency.

The traditional parties need to wake up. They are not seen as delivering at all and are often perceived as out of touch with the concerns of citizens. The same can be said for the EU in Brussels, which is often seen as anti-democratic and unaccountable. It is time for bolder leadership that addresses the challenges and finds solutions in a constructive, evidence-based fashion, but with vigor. The renaissance of the far right in Europe is not inevitable but it cannot be ruled out either.

Arab News

Big risks facing world in 2024

Frida Ghitis

EVERY year matters, every year is pivotal and every year brings surprises - good and bad. But it's impossible to escape the sense that the world stands near a precipice and that in 2024 we will either take a step forward, upending the world order, or a step back, returning to a version of "normalcy."

What will 2024 bring? "Predictions are tough, especially about the future," goes the quip, a truism attributed to Hall of Fame catcher Yogi Berra, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Niels Bohr, and many others. The obviousness highlights just how uncertain the future is - as we learned in 2020 - and how frustrating the quest for answers can be, given the magnitude of the stakes. Without a doubt, the US election is one of the dominant concerns around the globe today. I have lost count of how many people have told me during recent travels how worried and baffled they are that Americans might return former President Donald Trump to the White House. In fact, The Economist magazine declared that "Donald Trump poses the biggest danger to the world in 2024," describing him as a shadow looming over us all.

The election will determine whether Trump's chaotic presidency with its authoritarian traits was only a fluke of US history, or whether it is the Joe Biden presidency that amounts to no more than a four-year pause in America's descent into authoritarian isolationism. The answer will have severe repercussions across the globe.

A second Trump presidency would almost certainly be more extreme on multiple fronts. The former president has vowed to use the Justice Department to seek vengeance against his political opponents, undermining US institutions, undercutting democracy and flirting with dictatorship. These actions would strengthen those who claim that Western-style democracy is a failing system, fortifying the emerging bloc of anti-Western autocracies - Russia, China, Iran and North Korea - a team of tyrants that seek to challenge the West's global influence as they, all heavily armed, threaten their neighbors.

Trump has spoken enough for US allies and adversaries to understand the risks - or potential, depending on your perspective - of a Trump 2.0 term. And his pronouncements have led America's allies to question how committed Washington would be to their defense if he returns to office. The former president already declared he would end the war in Ukraine in 24 hours. He has questioned whether the US should defend South Korea and has alluded to countries like Japan and South Korea obtaining nuclear weapons to defend themselves.

The comments about Ukraine undoubtedly caught the attention of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the autocrat Trump doesn't like to criticize, and even praised, as he encircled Ukraine. The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said Putin will not be satisfied with a limited victory in Ukraine, "especially not before the American election, which may present him with a much more favorable scenario." In other words, Putin will continue attacking, hoping a Trump victory in November would pull the

rug out from Washington's support for Kyiv, helping Russia obtain total victory over Ukraine.

As countries previously under Moscow's heel and others have warned, if Russia wins in Ukraine, Putin could see a path to reclaiming other parts of the former Soviet empire, perhaps trying to conquer tiny Moldova and even the Baltic states that are now members of NATO. NATO is supposed to defend all its members, but Trump has already cast doubt on whether the US would help an embattled ally. Despite the recent bipartisan approval of a bill that would ban a president from unilaterally withdrawing the US from NATO without congressional approval, the president would have wide latitude in responding to global military challenges. We see this almost daily during today's crises, as Biden has ordered US warships to the Mediterranean and the Red Sea in an effort to prevent the expansion of the war between Israel and Hamas - a conflict that already threatens to become regional - or repeatedly sends stern messages vowing support for Taiwan as a warning to China, whose leader just repeated his vow to reunify the island.

If the US stands back as Putin pushes his neo-imperialist goals, China could be tempted to try its hand at seizing Taiwan and further bullying its neighbors. The very prospect of an emboldened China would deal a blow to nuclear non-proliferation efforts. It would also trigger global tremors of volatility. The end of Pax Americana, however flawed, would propel more midsize powers to take up arms against their rivals. And yet, Trump may not win the election. If Biden is reelected, the chances of restoring global stability are much greater. But they are far from assured.

In fact, the US is just one of scores of countries set to hold elections, including important nations such as Mexico, India, Indonesia, Russia and the UK. The outcome of some are preordained; Russia's election, for example, is a charade. But others could signal new directions in the years ahead. One thing we do know is that no one lives forever. Key world figures - Biden, Trump, Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei - are in their late 70s and 80s. Khamenei was said to be ill in 2022, but his office has denied the reports. We don't know who will succeed him, how radical his successor will be, or how Iranians will respond when the moment comes. Let us forget, 2024 will also surely bring happy surprises. We don't know what (they are surprises!), but there's a considerable chance that problems could be resolved for the better.

I'm generally not pessimistic about the future. Today, the US is in good hands. The economy is doing remarkably well. The West, despite its challenges, is united. People everywhere prefer freedom to bondage. Many dark scenarios have a flip side, a potentially happy outcome. Much of it is up to the people making decisions, from voters to world leaders. And countless people around the planet are working to secure a better future. The very notion that we stand on the edge of the precipice can motivate us to take a step back, away from the abyss, and turn toward a more peaceful, promising path.

CNN

The unraveling of military rule in Myanmar

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim

AS the civil war in Myanmar rages on, the tide seems to be turning against the military junta that seized power in February 2021. What was initially perceived as a swift and decisive takeover has evolved into a protracted conflict marked by resistance, resilience, and a growing possibility of the rebels emerging victorious. As the opposition surges forward, Myanmar's military government finds itself in a precarious position.

The military junta's bid for control was met with widespread condemnation and resistance from Myanmar's people. Pro-democracy activists, ethnic minorities, and even some defecting soldiers joined forces to resist the oppressive regime, turning Myanmar into a battlefield for freedom. The junta's actions, including the brutal crackdown on protests and

the arbitrary detention of political figures, have only fueled the flames of discontent and resistance.

One of the critical factors that has tipped the balance against the military is the unity among diverse ethnic groups. Myanmar is a nation characterized by a rich tapestry of ethnicities, each with a unique identity and history. The military's attempts to suppress these groups have backfired, as it has only strengthened their resolve to resist and fight for autonomy. The rebels have formed strategic alliances, pooling their resources and people to mount a formidable challenge. The Karen National Union, the Chin National Front, and other armed ethnic groups have been at the forefront of the resistance. The military's inability to subdue these groups has not only prolonged the conflict but has also led to a significant drain on its resources. The rebels have proven

adept at guerrilla warfare, leveraging their knowledge of the difficult terrain to wage an effective campaign against the military. This has created a quagmire for the junta, leading to a situation where they are stretched thin and unable to consolidate control.

The rebels' ability to garner international support has also played a pivotal role in their resilience. The global community has increasingly sided with the people of Myanmar, imposing sanctions on the military regime and providing diplomatic and material support to the resistance. The military's isolation on the international stage has undermined its legitimacy and further emboldened the rebels. The shifting dynamics in Myanmar have broader implications for the region. If the rebels were to emerge victorious, it would mark a significant blow to

authoritarianism in Southeast Asia. The success of the resistance could inspire similar movements in neighboring countries, setting off a chain reaction that challenges oppressive regimes across the region.

Moreover, the victory of the rebels could usher in a new era of stability and cooperation in Myanmar. The military's rule has been marked by repression, human rights abuses, and economic mismanagement. A return to civilian-led governance, with the involvement of diverse ethnic groups, could pave the way for inclusive policies that address the longstanding grievances of marginalized communities. This, in turn, could lead to a more stable and prosperous Myanmar, contributing to regional peace and development. However, the road to victory for the rebels is fraught with challenges. The mili-

tary, despite its setbacks, remains a formidable force with a history of ruthless tactics. The international community must continue to exert pressure on the junta, both diplomatically and through sanctions, to ensure that the rebels have the support they need to persevere. A failure to do so could result in a prolonged conflict with devastating humanitarian consequences.

China's role in the Myanmar conflict adds another layer of complexity to the situation. As Myanmar's largest neighbor and a historical ally of the military, China has been cautious in its approach. While officially expressing concern over the violence, China has refrained from outright condemnation of the junta. This delicate balance reflects China's strategic interests in the region, including access to Myanmar's rich natural

resources and the protection of its Belt and Road Initiative projects. The rebels must navigate this geopolitical landscape skillfully, seeking to garner support without becoming entangled in power struggles between external actors. A delicate diplomatic dance is required to ensure that the international community remains committed to the cause of democracy in Myanmar, rather than pursuing narrow geopolitical interests.

A victory for the rebels would be a triumph for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. It could set a precedent for other oppressed nations in the region. However, the international community must remain vigilant, and ensure that the rebels receive the support they need to overcome the formidable challenges posed by the military. The world is watching - the fate of Myanmar hangs in the balance.

UK should pivot back to ME

Alistair Burt

OCT. 7, 2023, and the weeks following have sent shock waves around the world, and through European capitals as much as any. In the minds of many in the Middle East and North Africa, Europe, including both the EU and the UK, had shown a steady waning of interest over the past decade or so, coinciding with the presumed retreat of the US, but punctuated by spurts of activity, as over Iran and its nuclear ambitions. Whatever the reality of this perception, what must now be clear is that such a declining interest is no more. The world has changed. There can be no return to Oct. 6.

The EU has been long bedeviled by a sense of relative underperformance in the region, both in terms of ambition and delivery. Despite the bloc's commitment, through its "Global Strategy" of 2016, to promote "multilateral cooperation" and "foster dialogue and negotiation on regional conflict," little was seen of any substance, as regular damning surveys on its influence suggested. The impression of a continental Europe too close to US policy, while increasingly disunited, had real substance. Policy differences with the Visegrad Group, not least over Israel, and the very real differences of geographical emphasis between eastern and southern EU states told their own stories.

The UK's policy toward the Middle East and North Africa has, in recent years, been something of a roller coaster. At the beginning of the last decade, then-Prime Minister David Cameron sought to redress what he considered to be years of a previous governmental neglect of old friends by announcing a "Gulf Initiative." This resulted in Foreign Secretary William Hague creating a raft of bilateral, high-level policy and strategy groups across the region, all of which have survived and prospered over the years, providing a regular platform for discussions across a range of issues, such as trade, visas, security and investment to mutual

benefit. The minister of state designated for this took the title of "Minister for the Middle East and North Africa," at first with other roles and then, from 2017 to 2019, with a sole focus on the region both at the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The overall impression was that the MENA region mattered to the UK, from finance to defense. Events from 2011 needed such proper attention. The handling of the various crises related to the Arab uprisings exercised the Foreign and Commonwealth Office - said to be at its busiest since the Second World War - and intensified relationships through the UK's participation in the various international diplomatic "small groups" set up to tackle the events and consequences throughout the region.

There were successes in respect of Daesh, though at immense costs in human terms, and the significant efforts made by the UK in relation to the Iran nuclear deal, but also setbacks, as with Syria in 2013. However, overall, that the region mattered to the UK could not have been doubted. Any internal rifts of policy involving the UK were settled as the country left the EU. The Brexit vote, and subsequent exit from the EU, should have mattered least to the region. The EU's lack of engagement and the UK's much longer history meant that the loss of London's EU status had little practical effect and relationships would be little affected in theory. But the years of implementation of Brexit from 2016 onwards coincided with other changes that had an impact on how the UK has been seen.

The ministerial title and singular role was dropped and, for a while, the Middle East was separated from the North Africa portfolio. Relatively small administrative changes in the UK looked different when seen from abroad. The collapse of the Department for International Development into the

Foreign and Commonwealth Office came at the same time as the reduction in the UK's commitment to development from 0.7 percent of gross national income to 0.5 percent, with programs supporting economic projects and refugees in the region being cut. But perhaps the biggest visible change in positioning came with the publication of the UK's "Integrated Review" of defense, security, development and foreign policy in 2021. The review was designed to recognize growing global turbulence but, with stretched and finite resources, positioning the UK afresh in one sphere came at a cost to others. The tilt to the Indo-Pacific in both economic and security terms matched that of some other states, but the overall sense that the Middle East had been downgraded was hard to miss or explain away.

The "refresh" of the policy this year helped a little, as did the reconstituting of elements of the Middle East minister's role under the hard-working and engaged Lord Ahmad. But the review so concerned the UK's House of Commons that it has now commissioned a Foreign Affairs Select Committee inquiry into MENA policy. The inquiry's chair, Alicia Kearns MP, has made no secret of her concerns that there had not recently been "sufficient focus" on the region. The UK played its part in supporting some positive diplomatic and economic initiatives in 2022 and 2023. An end to the region's conflicts and wider stability is very much in the UK's interests, not just for trade and energy supplies, but also for the new Middle East that so many long for.

That the region has grown more assertive in its foreign policy, as in discussions with Saudi Arabia and the UAE with Iran, without the need to look over shoulders to Washington, is a positive development, though the UK has a keen interest in ensuring that one superpower in the region is not replaced

by any others. London welcomed and supported the Abraham Accords, bringing together as they did key Gulf and North African allies with Israel, hinting at a new integrated region, as did the prospect of normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

But there was a nagging doubt about the marginalization of the Palestinian issue in these discussions and constant warnings of clouds ahead. The UK was not the only state to hope that the slipping down of Israel-Palestine on the diplomatic agenda represented reality rather than wishful thinking, while the expansion of settlements, increased violence in the West Bank and pressures on the holy sites in Jerusalem escalated and bandwidth was consumed by Ukraine. Now, London and other European capitals are united in dealing with the horrors of the terrorist assault on Oct. 7 and the dreadful humanitarian aftermath being seen daily in Gaza. The human costs in the region, both now and in the future, of a failure to finally resolve issues between Israel and the Palestinian people hardly bear thinking about. But the impact on Europe of conflict, terror and migration is not negligible either and is already having an impact on its streets and its politics - and this ahead of a big election year for Western democracies.

It is not too late for Europe to step up its game in the MENA region, recognizing current events as the defining issue of our times. The issue of Israel and Palestine - after too many years of too many vested interests saying "no" - still has a greater power to disrupt than those which followed 2011. The UK has convening diplomatic power, history and every incentive to urgently work with others on the comprehensive resolution that is now the only plausible way forward, as patching up and pure military options will never secure justice, peace and security for all. It is time.

The weapon of nuance in Israel's war on Gaza

Somdeep Sen

‘Your work doesn't look good in this political context. If someone asks me about your work, I won't say anything positive about it. You need to think about how you are becoming a liability for me and the institution ... It's best to keep your head down and stay quiet.’

These were the words of a colleague. The political context he was referring to was the harassment and attacks many of us had faced for publicly criticising Israel's war on Gaza and highlighting the long history of Palestinian suffering that preceded the October 7 attack. He subsequently reminded me of the importance of being "nuanced and taking a balanced approach" and recognising the emotions and sentiments on "both sides".

"Nuance" is an interesting word that I have been hearing a lot over the past 80 days. Recently, I received an inquiry from a European news outlet, looking to commission a "nuanced" article explaining "what Hamas actually are". I also read about the alleged "lack of nuance" independent presidential candidate and former Harvard professor Cornel West had identified in the letter expressing solidarity with Palestine issued by Harvard students days after the October 7 attack.

In this war on Gaza, we have seen many a weapon deployed against the Palestinian population. Yet, the call for "nuance" has emerged as the most unlikely one. But what does it mean to be nuanced at a time of extreme Palestinian suffering? From the perspective of those weaponising this word, it means the history and context of Israel-Palestine cannot be recalled. This, of course, results in the suppression of all forms of public critique of the actions of the Israeli state. Sociologist Muhammad Ayyash describes this as a form of toxicification of any perspective rooted in the aspirations of the Palestinian people and their lived experience of occupation and siege, as invalid, irrational, disruptive or simply "too unnuanced" for any respectable discussion of the politics of Palestine-Israel. Accusations of "lack of nuance" often morph into accusations of anti-Semitism. Harvard students who signed the "unnuanced" solidarity statement immediately became the target of a doxing campaign. A truck with digital billboards, funded by the conservative watchdog Accuracy in Media was seen circling Harvard Square, flashing the students' photos and names and labelling them "Harvard's Leading Antisemites".

They also faced pressure from faculty members and donors. Wall Street executives "demanded a list" of the students in order to "ban their hiring" and a prestigious law firm rescinded job offers to some of the students. But while the students were being charged with supporting a terrorist group and their violence, what they were really being targeted for was insisting that the events of October 7 did not happen in a vacuum and that the history of Palestine-Israel did not begin on that day. Rather, the statement explained, it was a consequence of the nearly two-decade siege of Gaza and 75 years of structural violence inflicted by the Israeli state on Palestinians that has included air strikes, land seizures, arbitrary detention, checkpoints and targeted killings. When Columbia University students released a similarly "unnuanced" statement that was uncompromising in its support for Palestinians, they too were doxed. The statement said the "weight of responsibility" for the violence and its human cost lay with "the Israeli extremist government and other Western governments, including the US government, which fund and staunchly support Israeli aggression, apartheid and settler-colonialism".

It added that the issue at hand was not the timing of the attack but its "root causes and [...] the] Israeli occupation and the deprivation of human rights, including the lack of respect for the Palestinian people's legitimate right to self-determination". Apart from allowing their students to be harassed and doxed over their pro-Palestinian views, universities have also gone on to censor scholars and public figures that have been deemed "unnuanced" and therefore "disruptive". The University of Vermont cancelled a public talk on "representation and misrepresentation of Palestinians in the US" by renowned Palestinian poet and journalist Mohammed el-Kurd, citing "safety concerns". Liverpool Hope University cancelled a talk by Israeli-British historian Avi Shlaim also citing "safety" concerns. Shlaim's lecture was expected to be "critical of the formation of the state of Israel".

Arizona State University cancelled a speech by Palestinian-American Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib. The university spokesperson insinuated that the event was not organised in a way that minimised "disruption to academic and other activities on campus". Institutions like Brandeis, Columbia, George Washington and Rutgers have also suspended their

respective chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) citing violations of a wide range of university policies, including organising events that "disrupted" classes. University leaders have also been keen to control how their staff and students speak about Israel-Palestine - often advising a middle ground. The University of Exeter published "general advice" that first underlines Hamas's status as a proscribed terrorist organisation under UK law. Subsequently, it advises staff and students to be "inclusive" in the way they comment on social media and cognisant of the sentiments of the "other" side, adding that "in the absence of nuance or context, comments often don't help and can create more division, hurt, and hate". At other universities, senior faculty members and administrators have sought to demonstrate how student activism can be "misinformed" and create a polarised campus environment "lacking in sophistication and nuance".

While claiming "sophistication", such uses of "nuance" actually seek to obfuscate history and reality on the ground in Palestine. They push for a narrative that overlooks structures and institutions of violence, oppression, subjugation and erasure that have marked the lives of Palestinians since the Nakba of 1948. Instead, what is going on in Palestine-Israel is portrayed as a conflict between two seemingly equal parties vying over the same piece of land. As one proponent of this narrative recently wrote in The Nation: "The intellectual poverty that would reduce human history to a battle between the oppressed and the oppressors is also just plain lazy." But there is nothing "lazy" about knowing and pointing out historical circumstances and context. Further, recognising the long history of Palestinian suffering that precedes and exceeds the events of the day does not preclude mourning the civilian deaths in Israel as a result of Hamas's attack on October 7.

A word that is meant to indicate a subtle difference in shade or meaning from what seems self-evident has emerged as an important weapon in this war that seeks to shift attention from the structures and institutions of violence and oppression Palestinians face. Within universities, "nuance" has been weaponised to target all those who strive to draw public attention to the plight of the Palestinians and demand a different shade or meaning is ascribed to what is apparent to many as a genocidal military onslaught by the oppressor on the oppressed.

BRI 'debt trap theory' is a trap itself

Liu Ying

SOME Western media outlets keep spreading rumors that countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative that need to repay loans to China are facing a "debt trap", thus hyping up the "debt trap" theory.

The problem is that the media outlets highlight the debt burden of developing countries, but never talk about the debt burden of developed economies. The US government debt, for example, exceeds \$33 trillion, with the government debt ratio exceeding 120 percent. The government debt ratios of economies such as Europe and Japan, too, are more than 100 percent. Of late, the Western media have been claiming that Sri Lanka's economy collapsed due to China's "debt trap". But the fact is that Sri Lanka faced an economic breakdown because it could not pay its high US dollar debt as the US Federal Reserve and other central banks hiked the interest rate.

Take the Puttalam Power Station in Sri Lanka for example. The power generated by this Chinese-built power station meets more than one-third of Sri Lanka's electricity demand, benefiting more than 20 million people. The vast majority of Sri Lanka's debts are Western debts. Loans from China account for only a small part of them, with most of them being preferential loans with far lower interest rates than commercial loans. So there is no such thing as a China-created "debt trap" in Sri Lanka. To analyze Sri Lanka's debt problem, we have to first understand the relationship between debt and interest rate hike; and between debt and development, investment and consumption. An important reason for Sri Lanka's debt problem is the appreciation of the US dollar due to the

mined that if it wants to get rich, it must first build roads, and raise funds, which is a very difficult task.

According to Asian Development Bank data in 2017, the annual infrastructure funding gap in Asia was \$459 billion per year. The Silk Road Fund, which was established in 2014, has a total capital of \$40 billion and 100 billion yuan. China also initiated the creation of the \$100 billion Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank with 109 active member states. Infrastructure and interconnectivity are the foundation of a country's economic development. Without infrastructure, there will be no flow of people, money and materials. Without the flow of these things, nothing can be built. And to build, you need funds. But developing countries, due to their weak economic foundations and low credit ratings, find it difficult to get low-interest loans.

China's infrastructure projects not only attract investments, boost consumption and promote economic growth for the co-building countries, but also bring core function to the co-building countries. In fact, the so-called debt trap theory has long been disproved by international professional research institutions and scholars. By 2030, the joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative will generate \$1.6 trillion in global benefits every year. It will help 7.6 million people around the world emerge from poverty and 32 million people escape moderate poverty. At the same time, China has taken measures to help developing countries address their debt problems, including but not limited to participating in the G20 debt reduction plan. The so-called debt trap is pure nonsense.

Realistic goals are key to achieving New Year resolutions

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

PEOPLE see the start of a new year as an opportunity for a fresh beginning and a chance to make positive changes in their lives. While New Year resolutions can be used as a motivating and constructive way to set goals, it is important to be realistic, and have a plan for implementation, to increase the likelihood of success.

These resolutions often center on key aspects of well-being, personal growth, and fulfillment. In this exploration, let us delve into some of the most common New Year resolutions and discuss practical strategies to achieve them. Without a doubt, health tops the list of resolutions for many people around the world - whether it is shedding a few kilograms, adopting a healthier diet, or committing to regular exercise.

One strategy to achieve this goal is to take a holistic approach by focusing on overall well-being rather than fixating solely on the number on the scale. This requires incorporating mindfulness practices, adequate sleep, and stress management into our routines. One should also set achievable fitness and dietary goals. Many health experts believe that gradual changes are more likely to be sustainable rather than drastic, short-term measures. Joining fitness classes, running groups, or engaging in online communities to foster a sense of accountability and shared motivation, are important as well. The other issue that often ranks high among New Year resolutions is creating financial stability - the desire to save more, reduce debt, and cultivate sound budgeting habits. Nevertheless, transforming fiscal aspirations into reality requires thoughtful planning and commitment. According to many financial advisers, this requires developing a detailed

budget to track income, expenses, and savings goals. Prioritizing building an emergency fund to cushion against unforeseen financial challenges is critical as well.

It is important to point out that even small, consistent contributions can make a significant impact over time. And one should invest wisely. If it is possible, attempt to explore investment opportunities to make your money work for you. One can also seek guidance from financial advisers in order to align investments with long-term goals. Another New Year resolution is linked to personal development and learning. Many people aspire to acquire new skills, pursue education, or foster personal or spiritual growth. It is worth noting that the journey of lifelong learning is not confined to academic institutions; it is a pursuit that spans careers and personal interests.

But one should have clear objectives for personal growth such as defining specific skills or knowledge areas where one wants to develop or improve. This clarity will guide one's learning journey. This can be followed by dedicating regular time slots to learning and personal growth. It does not have to be hours each day - consistent, focused intervals can yield significant results - and can be achieved by embracing various learning mediums, from online courses and workshops to local classes or mentorship opportunities. The ambition to progress in one's career, strike a better work-life balance, or explore new professional horizons frequently finds expression in New Year resolutions. One can clearly outline one's short- and long-term career goals, and then it is important to break them down into manageable steps to foster a

sense of accomplishment.

For continuous progress and enhancement, identifying and acquiring skills relevant to one's field is key. In an era of global interconnectedness, the evolving nature of industries demands adaptability and a commitment to ongoing learning, cultivating professional connections, attending industry events, and engaging in networking opportunities to broaden one's career prospects. Another important New Year resolution for many people is to strengthen and work on relationships. As we all know, the resolve to fortify relationships, spend quality time with loved ones, and enhance communication skills underscores the importance of human connections in our lives. When it comes to relationships, many experts believe that prioritizing quality time is vital.

Quality often trumps quantity in fostering strong bonds. This includes dedicated, meaningful interactions with family and friends, developing effective ways to communicate, working on active listening, expressing thoughts and feelings openly, and encouraging dialogue. Engaging in activities or experiences together can ensure shared memories that create lasting connections. In other words, effective communication forms the bedrock of healthy relationships. As a New Year resolution, many individuals also pledge to manage stress, practice mindfulness, and prioritize psychological well-being by acknowledging the significance of mental health. But according to many psychologists, one should first identify stressors and then create clear boundaries to manage stress effectively through various methods including mindfulness practices, meditation and deep-breathing exercises.

It is also crucial to establish

healthy boundaries, that is, striking a balance between work and personal life. Seeking support when needed by reaching out to friends, family, or mental health professionals when one encounters challenges is important as well. One should view seeking help as a sign of strength, not weakness. There are also resolutions to break unhealthy habits including quitting smoking, reducing alcohol intake, or overcoming other detrimental behaviors that reflect a commitment to personal well-being and longevity. One can begin by understanding the situations or emotions that trigger unhealthy habits - as this awareness is a critical step toward breaking the cycle. One method is to consider a phased approach to quitting or reducing unhealthy habits. Then, one should acknowledge and celebrate milestones, no matter how small. Positive reinforcement enhances motivation and resilience. Seeking professional support, such as counseling or support groups, can also be immensely beneficial.

In a nutshell, New Year resolutions serve as powerful motivators for personal growth and positive change. Whether it is adopting healthier habits, improving finances, personal and spiritual growth, or enhancing relationships, success often hinges on setting realistic goals, developing sustainable routines, and seeking support when needed. As we stand on the cusp of a new year and as many embark on their journeys toward self-improvement, the key lies in embracing the process, learning from setbacks, and celebrating the progress made along the way. May your new year bring not only resolutions, but also the resilience and determination to turn them into lasting achievements.

Ukraine is losing, but UK must stand by it

Richard Kemp

AS we look back at 2023, despite all of the problems we have faced, such as economic trauma and a spiralling immigration crisis, Britain can take at least some satisfaction in our role in the two most significant conflicts this decade and perhaps of this century so far: Ukraine and Gaza. But much greater challenges lie ahead.

In Ukraine, Putin's leading propagandist just gave a back-handed compliment to the UK, blaming us for the latest blow to Russia's Black Sea fleet with the claim that it was a British-supplied Storm Shadow missile that struck the Novochoerkassk landing ship in the Crimean port of Feodosia on Boxing Day. Devastating though that attack was, however, the prospects for Ukraine in this war remain bleak. Kyiv's long-fought counteroffensive has failed. At tremendous cost and despite heroic fighting, it has taken little ground and there is no immediate prospect of further advances. The opposite, in fact. While defending against Ukrainian efforts to break through their lines, Moscow has also been on the offensive and on Christmas Day its forces appear to have captured the town of Marinka in eastern Donbas. This would be the greatest battlefield success on

either side since Russia captured Bakhmut in May. It provides a pivot point to allow Moscow's forces to attack Ukrainian defences further south.

But it has even greater strategic significance; it is yet another body blow to Ukraine's international support, which has been flagging for months, with worse to come. The US has hit a political wall, with the delicate bipartisan support breaking down. It will be difficult for presidential candidates, in an election year, to justify spending more billions on Ukraine while Americans suffer from the legacy of a year of high inflation. The EU has also hit a wall. Yes, it can work around Hungary's Viktor Orban by funding trusts with all member states bar one. But across Europe, nationalist parties that need to gain electoral traction by focusing on their own people are now on the rise as the liberal international order is increasingly brought into question. As with the US, unlimited European funds for Ukraine may soon prove an impossibility.

It is only in Britain that we still see clear bipartisan support, with Labour and the Tories mostly reading from the same sheet. Britain has led the way in supplying critical anti-tank missiles, a range of

other munitions and vital intelligence and surveillance assets. But with our armed forces and armaments industries degraded to historically low levels by successive governments, we now have little more to give. Nonetheless, one of our greatest contributions to date has been prompting increased support by other countries, including the US, through diplomatic pressure as well as taking a lead in supplying long range missiles and tanks.

That effort, at least, must be maintained in 2024. Beyond weariness and the influence of the electoral calendar, the outlook for Ukraine has also been badly affected by the war in the Middle East. That has diverted political attention, and potentially the supply of munitions and other resources.

The two conflicts are linked in other ways too. Iran, whose funds are behind the war in Gaza as well as aggression by its proxies in Lebanon and Yemen, is a key weapons supplier to Moscow, which itself has taken a hard line on events in the Middle East. Recognising the immense benefits for him of this conflict, Putin has helped fuel anti-Israel sentiment. Along with the US, Britain has provided a bulwark against those

who wish to undermine Israel's legitimate self-defence. As with the Ukraine war, we are one of the few countries to maintain a solidly bipartisan stand in our support for Israel, despite the strongest efforts to derail it from the hard-Left. Together, these were represent the two greatest geopolitical challenges we face today and indeed for the foreseeable future: authoritarian dictatorships and violent Islamism, as well as the nexus between the two.

Next year will be defining in Europe and the Middle East. It seems likely to include further Russian victories in Ukraine as well as escalation of the current conflict between Israel and Lebanon. If Russia defeats Ukraine, it will be due to half-hearted support from the US and Europe - upon which Kyiv is wholly dependent - largely because of an unfounded fear of Putin. Israel is also dependent on US support, which in turn is influenced to some extent by America's allies in Europe. Their backing for Israel is already wavering in the face of a concerted propaganda campaign, as well as fear of Iran. Our priority should not be on pusillanimously trying to avoid escalation, but on doing everything we possibly can to ensure our allies win.

The Telegraph



Weekly inflation up by 0.37pc

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed an increase of 0.37 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on December 28, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday. The SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 311.14 points as compared to 310.00 points during the past week, according to the PBS data.

As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of

43.25 percent. The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centers and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups. The SPI for the lowest consumption group up to Rs 17,732, increased by 0.40 percent and went up to 306.04 points from last week's 304.83 points. The SPI for consumption groups from Rs 17,732-22,888, Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175 increased by 0.41 percent, 0.38 percent, 0.39 and 0.35 percent respectively. During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 15 (29.41 percent) items increased, 09 (17.65 per-

cent) items decreased and 27 (52.94 percent) items remained stable. The items, which recorded a decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week (WoW) included potatoes (8.66 percent), tomatoes (1.01 percent), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (0.61 percent), cooking oil 5 liter (0.44 percent), eggs (0.40 percent), mustard oil (0.24 percent), gurr (0.19 percent) and garlic (0.15 percent). The items that recorded an increase in their average prices on a week-on-week (wow) basis included onions (15.21%), chicken (4.76%), pulse moong (2.90%), pulse gram (2.89%), sugar (1.35%), bananas (1.05%), pulse masoor (0.78%) and pulse mash (0.54%).

On a Year-on-Year (YoY) basis, the items that witnessed decrease in prices included onions (12.57%), mustard oil (5.16%), vegetable ghee 1 kg (1.14%) and bananas (0.20%).

The commodities which recorded an increase in their average prices on YOY basis included gas charges for Q1 (1108.59%), cigarettes (93.22%), chillies powder (81.74%), wheat flour bag (73.81%), garlic (70.67%), tomatoes (65.26%), rice irri-6/9 (58.49%), rice basmati broken (58.47%), gents sponge chappal (58.05%) and sugar (54.25%).

SBP emphasizes on role of fiscal policy, effective administration for price, financial stability

KARACHI (APP): The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), on Friday, emphasized the role of fiscal policy and effective administration for price and financial stability, particularly rationalization of government spending, increasing revenue collection, strengthening food and energy supply chains, and enhancing productivity.

The central bank, in its Governor's Annual Report (GAR) for the fiscal year 2022-23 issued here, also vowed to continue taking decisions to prevent high inflation from becoming entrenched and keep inflation expectations anchored to achieve the medium-term target of 5-7% by the end of FY25, with FY24 inflation moderating to 20-22 per cent on account of the impact of contractionary monetary policy, improvements in domestic supplies, softer non-energy global commodity prices, and the high base effect.

However, the Report added that "this outlook hinges on the absence of adverse shocks stemming from geopolitical tensions and unforeseen climate events, and unfavourable movements in global commodity prices."

The GAR 2022-23 is published Under Section 39 (1) of the State Bank of Pakistan Act, 1956 which requires the governor to submit to the Parliament an annual report regarding the bank's objectives, the conduct of monetary policy,

the state of the economy and the financial system. The GAR stated that fiscal year 2023 was extraordinarily challenging, with a host of external and domestic shocks, amplified by lingering structural weaknesses, contributing to persistently high inflation amid a contraction in economic activities. The year witnessed the wide-ranging reverberating impact of the devastating monsoon floods, whereas elevated global commodity prices, less-than-envisioned fiscal consolidation, and the delay in the 9th review of IMF's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program added pressures on the external account, it added.

The report noted that the average headline National Consumer Price Index inflation surged to 29.2 percent in FY23 but it was in line with multi-decade high inflation in most advanced and emerging economies that maintained an aggressive monetary policy stance. Elevated global commodity prices, pressure on external accounts and ensuing exchange rate depreciation contributed to inflationary pressures amid uncertainty over the completion of the 9th review of the IMF's EFF program, inadequate external inflows and continued scheduled debt repayments, the GAR outlined. This was in addition to the pass-through of costlier fuel and food prices; exchange rate depreciation; increases in

energy prices and indirect taxes; high inflationary expectations and ensuing growth in wages. The report also noted that political uncertainty weighed on business and consumer sentiments and thus on economic activity. Real GDP contracted by 0.2 per cent, and budgetary targets for the government's fiscal and primary balances were missed by large margins amid less-than-planned tax revenues and lower-than-budgeted reduction in subsidies.

The SBP responded to these challenges by maintaining a contractionary policy stance, raising the policy rate by a cumulative 825 basis points during FY23, in addition to the 675 basis points increase in FY22, the Report noted. SBP had taken a host of measures to contain domestic demand and imports in the wake of growing pressures on PKR and the general prices, GAR FY23 said adding that while some of these measures were difficult given their implications on economic activity in the short term, they were necessary to meet external debt obligations as per schedule, and contain greater risks to macroeconomic stability over the medium term.

Regarding the SBP's objective of maintaining the stability of the financial system, the Report emphasized that the country's financial sector grew

SBP launches SUNWAI portal, app for customer complaints

F.P. Report

KARACHI: In continuation of ongoing efforts to strengthen the banking sector's efficiency and fairness in complaints handling and to address the issues faced by banking customers in complaints lodgment, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has launched 'Sunwai' - a customer complaint service portal and app. 'Sunwai' serves as a one-window operation for banking customers to register their complaints against

complaints at their convenience in either English or Urdu languages. Each complaint is assigned a unique tracking number which is communicated to users via SMS and email. Banks have been advised to ensure prompt and fair resolution of complaints well within turnaround times (TATs) as prescribed by SBP. This customer complaint service portal and app are expected to contribute significantly towards strengthening consumer trust in the banking industry.

Gold rates decline

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs.1,900 and was sold at Rs.220,900 on Friday compared to its sale at Rs.222,800 on the last trading day. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs.1,629 to Rs.189,386 from Rs.191,015 whereas the price of 10 gram 22 karat gold went down to Rs.173,604 from Rs.175,097, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported. The price of per tola and ten-gram silver remained unchanged at Rs2,680 and Rs.2,297.66 respectively. The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$15 to \$2,090 from \$2,105, the Association reported.



KARACHI: Deputy Governor SBP calls on Caretaker Federal Minister for Commerce and Industries & Production Dr. Gohar Ejaz at Governor House.

PSX stays bullish, gains 398 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Friday continued with a bullish trend, gaining 398.81 points, a positive change of 0.64 percent, closing at 62,451.04 points against 62,052.24 points the previous trading day. A total of 590,592,624 shares valuing Rs.16,844 billion were traded during the day as compared to 676,243,466 shares valuing Rs. 20,278 billion the last day.

Some 359 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 207 of them recorded gains and 130 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 22 remained unchanged. The three top-trading companies were K-Electric Ltd with 141,792,931 shares at Rs.5.26 per share, Fauji Foods with 28,270,145 shares at Rs.11.14 per share and Worldcall Telecom with 27,871,949 shares at Rs.1.41 per share. Nestle Pakistan witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.203.00 per share price, closing at Rs. 8,203.00, whereas the runner-up was Raffhan Maize with a Rs.198.00 rise in its per share price to Rs.9,998.00. Unilever Pakistan Foods witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.99.00 per share closing at Rs. 21,900.00, followed by Sapphire Fiber with Rs.42.58 decline to close at Rs.1,657.05.

Plastic material export increases 33.76% to \$145 million in 5 months

ISLAMABAD (APP): The export of plastic materials from the country witnessed an increase of 33.76 per cent during the first five months of the current financial year (2023-24) as compared to the corresponding period of last year. Pakistan exported plastic material worth \$145.213 million during July-November (2023-24) as compared to the export of \$108.561 million during July-November (2022-23), showing growth of 33.76 per cent, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

In terms of quantity, plastic export also surged by 112.07 per cent from 68,100 metric tons to 144,422 metric tons, the data revealed. Meanwhile, year-on-year basis plastic exports increased by 59.85 per cent during November 2023 as compared to the same month of last year. The plastic material exports in November 2023 were recorded at US \$28.888 million against the export of \$18.072 million in November 2022, the PBS data revealed. On a month-on-month basis, the exports of plastic however dipped by 2.16 per cent in November 2023 when compared to \$29.526 million in October 2023.

Bank Holiday F.P. Report

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan will remain closed for public dealing on Monday, January 01, 2024, which will be observed as 'Bank Holiday'. All banks / DFIs / MFBS shall, therefore, remain closed for public dealing on the aforementioned date. However, all employees of the banks / DFIs / MFBS will attend the office as usual.

Shipping Activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Two ships, Vancouver and Epos carrying Containers and Coal, berthed at Container Terminal and Bulk Terminal respectively on Thursday. Meanwhile two more ships Myny and OM with Containers and LPG also arrived at outer anchorage of the port on Friday morning. A total of 06ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them, three ships Vancouver, Queen Winand Isabella Kosanleft the port on Friday morning and two more ships Sparto and Stellar Rioniareexpected to sail on today afternoon.

Argentina pulls out of plans to join Brics bloc

BERLIN (Agencies): Argentina's new President, Javier Milei, has withdrawn the country from its planned entry into the expanding Brics club of nations. In a letter to the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, Mr Milei said decisions taken by the preceding government had been revised. The Brics countries are often seen as a counterweight to the Western-led world. Argentina had been among a much-vaunted new tranche of six countries poised to join the grouping next month. It would have been admitted to the Brics club on 1 January, alongside Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Its change of heart comes after Mr Milei, a populist right-wing outsider, won a surprise election victory in November with radical pledges to overhaul the South American nation's ailing economy. He succeeded left-wing Peronist Alberto Fernández, whose views were more aligned with those of the bloc's existing members. Mr Milei said in his letter that his government's foreign policy "differs in many ways from that of the previous government". He added that although he did not consider it "appropriate" for Argentina to become a full Brics member, he was still committed to strengthening bilateral ties, particularly with the aim of increasing trade and investment flows. Although the Brics alliance is often portrayed as promoting a more multipolar world, it is economically dominated by China, which accounts for more than 70% of the bloc's combined GDP. Argentina's bid for membership under Mr Fernández had the support of Beijing, but Mr Milei has strongly criticised China. On the campaign trail, he described the Chinese government as assassins and said he would not work with communists. Argentina's changing attitudes highlight the delicacy of its economic and political position as it struggles to reverse decades of economic mismanagement.

Asian stocks open year's last trading day cautiously

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian stocks opened cautiously on Friday, largely continuing an end-of-year rally that has been boosted by investors' expectations of a US Federal Reserve rate cut as early as March. Hong Kong and Tokyo opened the last trading session of the year marginally higher, with Japanese bourses clawing back some ground after losing steam to a strengthening yen a day earlier. Currency markets remained largely flat Friday morning, but the US dollar is set to finish its worst year since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, with investors betting on a Fed rate cut and that other countries might keep rates higher for longer. Asian stocks are on track for their best year since the pandemic but continue to underperform global peers. Chinese markets, in particular, have been weighed by concerns regarding the country's sluggish economic recovery from its long-lasting and strict pandemic lockdowns. Still, there was positive news in the Chinese tech sector on Friday, with Huawei saying it expected 2023 revenue to grow by nine percent, despite facing continuing US sanctions. On Thursday, the Dow eked out a fresh record, while the S&P 500 fell a bit short of an all-time high despite finishing the day with modest gains. US equities have trended higher since late October as the market has embraced moderating inflation and a strong labour market in the belief the US economy can avoid recession. Data from the US Department of Labor on Thursday showed a slight increase in unemployment claims. The level remains low by historic standards, however. Analysts said they expected year-end market activity to continue to be positive, but within a relatively thin band of trading volumes. "Investors appear satisfied to let the market slide sideways into year-end, with sellers already done," said investor Louis Navellier in a note. Global oil prices have stabilised after worries regarding Red Sea shipping disruptions eased earlier this week, following the formation of a US-led naval coalition to police the route against attacks by Yemen's Huthi rebels. US oil prices fell more than three percent despite a weekly inventory report that showed lower stocks of crude oil and gasoline. Gold retreated from its recent rally in early Friday trade, down 0.9 percent from its highest level a day earlier. Tokyo - Nikkei 225 (BREAK): DOWN 0.2 percent at 33,470.37 Hong Kong - Hang Seng Index: DOWN 0.2 percent at 17,006.66 Shanghai - Composite: UP 0.4 percent at 2,967.41 New York - Dow: UP 0.1 percent at 37,710.10 (close) London - FTSE 100: FLAT at 7,722.74 (close) Euro/dollar: UP at \$1.1074 from \$1.1066 on Thursday Dollar/yen: FLAT at 141.42 yen from 141.41 yen Pound/dollar: UP at \$1.2737 from \$1.2728 Euro/pound: FLAT at 86.94 pence from 86.92 pence



LAHORE: A vendor selling dry fruit at his roadside setup.

Court Notice

In the court of Quat-ul-Ain Rashid senior Civil Judge/Judge Family Swabi, Asad Ahmed, VS. Mst. Deeba Bibi, Case number: 345/FC, Institution date: 19-10-2023, Hearing date: 30-01-2024. Subject: suit for restitution of conjugal rights. Notice to: (2) Zarshad Khan S/o Sarandaz Khan R/o Gar Yousafi, Teh. & Distt. Swabi, presently Building No. 0144, Block 0203, Mahrak Bahrain. The service through ordinary means is difficult, so you are informed to attend the court on 30-01-2024 personally, through counsel or attorney to avoid ex-parte proceeding.



Hafeez reveals Rizwan's reaction on controversial dismissal

MELBOURNE (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan Cricket Team Director Mohammad Hafeez revealed his conversation with wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Rizwan, following the latter's debated dismissal in the second Test against Australia.

Australian captain Pat Cummins bowled a sharp-rising delivery to Mohammad Rizwan, followed by an appeal for a caught behind. The on-field umpire turned down Australia's appeal but their captain Cummins opted to challenge the decision as he believed that Mohammad Rizwan may have gloved the ball.

TV Umpire Richard Illingworth thoroughly analyzed the appeal from different camera angles and was later convinced by the spike that appeared when the ball passed by Rizwan's wristband and asked the on-field umpire to revert his decision.

The HotSpot showed no mark of contact as Rizwan looked away from the ball at the last second.

Mohammad Rizwan, however, appeared confident that he did not glove the ball and expressed his frustration with the TV Umpire's decision before walking back to the pavilion in disappointment.

Pakistan's hopes of pulling off a record victory were all lying on Rizwan's shoulder, who was unbeaten on 35 with the touring side needing a further 98 runs.

Meanwhile, Pakistan team's Director Mohammad Hafeez at the post-match conference brought his conversation with Mohammad Rizwan to the limelight and echoed the latter's stance.

"I spoke to Rizwan, and I believe he is a very honest person. He told me that the ball did not touch anywhere near the gloves, and there should be conclusive evidence to overturn the decision of the on-field umpire," stated Hafeez.

"Based on what I know, the umpire gave it not out, and there was no conclusive evidence for the decision to be overturned. I don't know what more to say. In this instance, the technology turned out to be a curse rather than something helpful," he added.

It is worth mentioning here that Rizwan's dismissal sparked a match-defining collapse as Pakistan slipped from 219/5 to 237 all out and thus lost the match by 70 runs against Australia, who now lead the three-match series 2-0.

India call up Avesh for second test against South Africa

CAPE TOWN (INP): India reinforced their bowling attack by bringing in fast bowler Avesh Khan in place of Mohammed Shami for the second and final test against South Africa beginning in Cape Town on Wednesday.

Shami had been picked in the initial squad for the two tests, but was forced to withdraw due to fitness issues. His replacement Avesh has not played a test match for India, but has featured in 19 Twenty20 internationals and eight one-day internationals, taking 27 wickets.

On Friday, India were also fined 10% of their match fee and docked two ICC World Test Championship points for maintaining a slow over rate in their innings and 32-run defeat to South Africa in the first test.

"Chris Broad of the ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees imposed the sanction after India were ruled to be two overs short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration," cricket governing body ICC said.

India's test squad: Rohit Sharma (captain), Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Shardul Thakur, Mohammed Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah, Prasidh Krishna, KS Bharat (wk), Abhimanyu Easwaran, Avesh Khan.



MELBOURNE: Pat Cummins of Australia (C) celebrates the dismissal of Mohammad Rizwan of Pakistan during day four of the Second Test Match between Australia and Pakistan at Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Misbah says poor fielding leads to defeat in Melbourne Test

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Former Pakistan captain and coach of the national cricket team Misbah-ul-Haq Friday showed his dismay with the team's defeat in the Melbourne Test against Australia.

Despite an overall commendable performance, the team fell short, and Misbah-ul-Haq pinpointed poor fielding as a significant factor in the loss.

Misbah highlighted the unfortunate consequences of dropped catches in both innings of the match, emphasizing their impact on crucial moments. The lapses in fielding, according to Misbah, ultimately contributed to the team's downfall.

He said the playing conditions in Australia are tougher than elsewhere in the world. He said the team may not have been adequately prepared for the series in Australia.

"I think we don't fully prepare for the series in Australia," said Misbah-ul-Haq, underscoring the need for a more thorough and tailored approach when gearing up for matches in the challenging Australian conditions.

White-ball specialist Rauf, who has played only one Test and nine first-class matches in his career, turned down an offer to be part of Pakistan's tour of Australia and opted instead to compete for the BBL's Melbourne Stars.

Players stand to earn more from franchise cricket than international cricket, with Australia's Big Bash League a particularly enticing prospect for Pakistan's cricketers, who are banned from the lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL).

After a brief standoff with Pakistan's cricket board (PCB), Rauf was given permission earlier this month to make a limited appearance in the BBL, in which the 30-year-old has played four matches and taken six wickets.

"I think Haris should be part of this side instead, rather than (the BBL)," Afridi, who led the country in Test cricket, one day internationals and T20 between 2009 and 2016, told reporters on the sidelines of the second Test in Melbourne on Friday.

"In these conditions, the kind of pace he has, he would have performed well and enjoyed himself on the kinds of pitches Australia prepared in Perth and here." The third and final Test of the series will be played at the Sydney Cricket Ground from Jan 3.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Karate C'ship begins PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Cadet, Junior and Senior Male and Female Karate Championship got underway here at Hayatabad sports Complex in which more than 150 male and female players from all divisions across the province are participating.

The KP team would also be selected for the National Cadet, Junior and Senior Karate Championships to be held in Karachi. Association Coordinator and Administrator Hayatabad Sports Complex Shah Faisal and other important personalities were present.

Competitions in different categories will be held in the Championship including Cadet Boy 52 kg, 57 kg, Women 47 kg, 54 kg, Junior Boy 55 kg, 68 kg, Junior Women 53 kg, 66 kg Senior Men 50 kg, 55 kg, 60 kg, 67 kg, 75 kg, 84 kg.

The Women and Men players would also participate in the Team Competition, Individual Kata and Team Kata while Senior Women 45 kg, 50 kg, 55 kg, 61 kg, and 68 kg. The National Karate Championship will be organized in January next year.

Haris Rauf should be in Pakistan Test side, says Shahid Afridi

LAHORE (INP): Former Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi said fast bowler Haris Rauf should be playing in the three-Test series against Australia, where conditions would suit him, instead of the Big Bash League (BBL).

World number one Djokovic taking it 'season by season'

PERTH (AFP): World number one Novak Djokovic is hoping his latest trip to Australia is not the last, but admits that at 36 he is now taking it "season by season".

The Serbian superstar is the king of the Melbourne Park hard courts, winning the Australian Open a record 10 times, with an 11th in his sights next month.

He gets his preparations under way in Perth at the ATP-WTA United Cup on Sunday after another incredible season that brought three more Grand Slam titles for a record 24.

That included another Australian Open, taming Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-3, 7-6 (7-4), 7-6 (7-5) in the 2023 final.

New Zealand-Bangladesh T20I called-off due to rain

MOUNT MAUNGANUI (Agencies): Heavy rain forced the second of three Twenty20 internationals between hosts New Zealand and Bangladesh to be called off at Bay Oval on Friday.

New Zealand scored 72-2 in 11 overs, with Daryl Mitchell (18) and Glenn Phillips (9) on the crease when rain played spoilsport and halted the play.

Having put the Black Caps into bat under overcast skies at Mount Maunganui on Friday, Bangladesh struck early when opener Finn Allen was caught in the second over with New Zealand on nine for one.

Tim Seifert smashed 43 off 23 balls before being caught to end his second-wicket partnership of 49 with Daryl Mitchell before rain started to fall.

Bangladesh are currently leading the series 1-0 after their bowlers ran riot in the opening match last Wednesday, paving the way to a five-wicket victory in Napier. It was the visitors' first-ever T20I win over the Black Caps in New Zealand.

Asked to bat by Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, New Zealand made a disastrous start losing three wickets before reaching 134 for nine after their 20 overs.

The Black Caps bowlers gave home fans hope with the early wickets of Bangladesh openers Rony Talukdar and Shanto.



Australia beat Pakistan by 79 runs to win second Test and series

SYDNEY (INP): A fired-up Pat Cummins bagged five wickets and 10 for the match to earn Australia a nail-biting 79-run win in the second Test and clinch the series against Pakistan on Friday.

Set 317 to win, the visitors put up a stellar fight, but were dismissed for 237, with the last five wickets falling for just 18 runs.

Cummins was the chief destroyer, taking 5-49 to go with his first innings of 5-48 — only the second 10-wicket haul of his Test career. Just when it looked like the match would go down to the wire on the final day, the pacer stepped in to remove batter Mohammad Rizwan and claim his 250th test wicket.

Mitchell Starc chipped in with 4-55 as the tail collapsed after Shan Masood (60), Agha Salman (50) and Babar Azam (41) gave them a fighting chance.

It was always going to be a tough task, with the highest-ever successful fourth-innings run chase at the Melbourne Cricket Ground the 332-7 England managed in 1928, with no other team getting past 300.

Opener Abdullah Shafique departed for four during a tricky session before lunch, caught by Usman Khawaja in the slips off Starc following a period of intense pressure.

Iman-ul-Haq survived the initial blitz, but was not match after the break for Cummins, who sent down a probing ball that nipped back and trapped him lbw for 12.

Masood was given out lbw by the umpire on 12, but it was overturned on review and he quickly got back in his stride. He took a nasty ball to the ribs that needed treatment, but was undeterred and raced to a gutsy 50 before Cummins again came to Australia's rescue, enticing an edge to Steve Smith.

Plenty was resting on the shoulders of Azam as the side's premier batter and he looked in good nick. But after reaching 41, Josh Hazlewood got a ball to jag back and it clattered into his off stump.

Rizwan also looked dangerous on his way to 35 before Cummins again worked his magic, with Alex Carey collecting a catch behind the stumps after the ball went off the batsman's glove. Cummins then removed Aamer Jamal and Shaheen Shah Afridi in quick succession before Starc cleaned up.

Pakistanis padded up after the hosts were all out in their second innings for 262, after resuming on 187-6.

Mir Hamza was the best of the bowlers with 4-32, while Afridi took 4-76. Carey slammed 53 to help Australia build their overnight lead and quieten chatter about his form after losing his place in the one-day side to Josh Inglis.

He resumed on 16 after Australia had bounced back from 16-4 thanks to an attacking 96 from Mitchell Marsh and Smith's gutsy 50.

Carey, who made his first and only Test hundred in Melbourne a year ago, hit consecutive fours in his first over from Hasan Ali to build confidence.

At the other end, Starc lived dangerously and fell for nine with the impressive Afridi getting the breakthrough on a pitch still offering a bit for the bowlers. Azam took the sharp chance at slip after Starc miscued a drive.

Cummins made a breezy 16 but was caught behind by Rizwan off Jamal, while Lyon crunched two straight fours off Jamal, then was bowled for 11 three deliveries later.

Carey brought up his sixth Test half-century before being the last man out, lbw to Hamza.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Serena Hotels Tennis C'ships Shoab, Barkatullah, Yousaf, Mudassar win 2nd round fixtures

Jubran ul Haq 6-0,6-0; Abdullah Adnan bt Saqib Hayat 7-5,6-4; Aqeel Khan bt Shahzad Khan 6-1,6-2

Ladies Singles 1st Round: Natalia Zaman bt Kainat Ali 6-1,6-1; Sarah Mahboob Khan bt Laiba Iqbal 6-1,6-0; Soha Ali bt Sheeza Sajid 5-7,6-4,6-4

Men's Doubles 1st Round: Hamid Israr / Asadullah bt Mahatir Muhammad / Huzaima Abdul Rehman 6-4,6-0; M. Abid / Shahzad Khan bt Hamza Roman / Saqib Hayat 6-7(5),6-1(10-7); Sami Zeb Khan / M. Zaryab Khan bt M. Huzaima Khan / M. Talha Khan 6-4,5-7(10-4); Boys 18& under Singles 2nd Round: Muhammad Salar bt Shehryar Anees 6-2,6-1; Asad Zaman bt Sameer Zaman 6-0,6-1; Hamid Israr bt Huzaima Abdul Rehman 6-1,6-2; Ahmed Nael Qureshi bt Laraib Shamsi 6-0,6-0; Muhammad bt Hamza Hussain 6-4,6-4; Hamza Roman bt Amir Mazari 6-1,6-1; Ahtesham Humayun bt Rahim Veqar 6-1,6-3; Hamza Aasim bt Shahswar Khan 6-0,6-0.

Results: Men's Singles 2nd Round: Muhammad Shoab bt M. Huzaima Khan 6-0,6-4; Barkatullah bt Hamid Israr 6-2,6-2; Yousaf Khalil bt Hamza Roman 4-6, 6-3, 6-3 in a well-fought fixture, whereas Mudassar overcame M. Hamza Aasim 6-4, 6-0.

Matches of other categories also took place on Friday. Following are the results.

Results: Men's Singles 2nd Round: Muhammad Shoab bt M. Huzaima Khan 6-0,6-4; Barkatullah bt Hamid Israr 6-2,6-2; Yousaf Khalil bt Hamza Roman 4-6, 6-3, 6-3; Mudassar Murtaza bt M. Hamza Aasim 6-4,6-0; Muzammil Murtaza bt Sami Zeb Khan 6-1,6-1; Muhammad Abid bt

ISLAMABAD (INP): Tennis star Aisam-ul-Haq has declared his candidacy for the presidency of the Tennis Federation. The current president, Saleem Saifullah, has indicated he will not seek re-election.

An important federation meeting on Sunday will determine the plan of action for the upcoming election. The Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) has reached out to the Sports Board and Pakistan Olympic Association for their involvement in the elections.

The presence of Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) and Pakistan Olympic Association (POA) representatives is crucial for the presidential elections.

Aisam-ul-Haq has confirmed his interest in the PTF presidency, stating that with the confidence and full support of stakeholders, he is eager to contribute to the improvement of tennis.

Klopp expects Liverpool to maintain title bid without Salah

LONDON (AFP): Jurgen Klopp is adamant Liverpool will be able to maintain their Premier League title charge despite the imminent loss of Mohamed Salah to African Cup of Nations duty.

Salah will leave to play for Egypt at the African Cup of Nations after Liverpool host Newcastle in the Premier League on Monday. Liverpool sit two points clear of Arsenal at the top as they chase a first title since 2020.

They also take on Arsenal in the FA Cup third round and Fulham in the League Cup semi-finals in January, meaning Salah's absence could not come at a worse time. He is Liverpool's top scorer with 16 goals this term and his absence in the Ivory Coast, for potentially over a month if Egypt go deep into the tournament, leaves Klopp with a major void to fill.

"It is not the first time, it is a really at least very average situation that you lose your goalscorer but we had it even worse in the past

when Sadio (Mane) and Mo left," Klopp told reporters on Friday.

"We came somehow through it and traditionally one of them went pretty far in the tournament, which made it worse."

Klopp will also be without Japan midfielder Wataru Endo while he plays at the Asia Cup at the same time as Salah departs.

"We knew the Africa Cup of Nations from time to time appears and Mo has to go and we have Endo as a participant of the Asia Cup as well, so it is like it is. We have to deal with it and we will," Klopp said.

"Each long-term plan I could have had depends massively on who is available. We would have solutions today, I hope we have that after the Newcastle game as well."

The return of Diogo Jota after a month out injured is a boost as the Portugal international scored a comeback goal against Burnley on Boxing Day.

Jota's versatility means he can operate across the



Aisam declares to contest PTF presidential election

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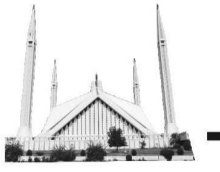
forward line, as can Cody Gakpo, while Harvey Elliott has played in Salah's position even though he is more of a midfielder in Klopp's system.

"The return of each of the boys is super-important but Diogo especially. Everybody was quite positive about our five options, but I don't think we had it that often to be honest," Klopp said.

"Especially with the amount of games we play it is so important these boys can rotate and now with Mo leaving and Endo leaving we need everyone to get back."

However, Liverpool left-back Andy Robertson's recovery from a dislocated shoulder is now likely to keep him out now for the whole of January.

The Scotland captain, sidelined since October, was expected to return next month. "Robbo still needs more range in his shoulder. Obviously it was a big surgery, still not even close to team training or whatever," Klopp said.



In brief

Police bust gang

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police have busted a gang allegedly involved in theft of transformers cases and arrested four accused including two IESCO employees, said a police spokesman here on Friday. He informed that Kallar Syedan police conducted a raid and arrested four accused namely Usman Javed, Hamza, Pinda Khan and Muhammad Usman, four for their involvement in theft of transformers. Usman Javed and Hamza are assistant linemen in IESCO, he added. Five stolen transformers worth millions of rupees were recovered from their possession, he said adding, a crane being used in the theft of the transformers and a vehicle were also recovered. The accused used to steal government and private transformers and sell their parts. The accused have disclosed several incidents of transformer theft in different areas of Gujranwala, Mandra and Kallar Syedan. City Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani appreciated performance of Superintendent of Police, Saddar, DSP Kahuta and Kallar Syedan police team for arresting the most wanted gang members. The CPD said that all those involved would be brought to justice. The spokesman informed that other accomplices of the accused would also be arrested.

ANF recovers 209 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting seven operations across the country managed to recover over 209 kg drugs and arrested seven accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed that 1.760 kg Ice was recovered from a parcel booked for Dubai at a courier office in Rawalpindi. 1.2 kg hashish was recovered from a Doha-bound passenger going on Flight No. QR-633 at Islamabad Airport. 115 grams Ice was recovered from a passenger's luggage at Allama Iqbal International Airport. The accused was leaving for Sharjah by flight number PA-412. 121 kg heroin and 75 kg morphine were recovered from Bostan area of Pishin. A total of 4 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects in Peshawar while 4 kg hashish was also recovered from two suspects near Customs Chowk Peshawar. 2 kg hashish was recovered from an accused arrested near Board Bazar Peshawar. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused while further investigations are under process.

Sino-Pak dual diploma programs

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chinese company TANG Int'l Education Group unveiled three China-Pakistan dual diploma programs at Aligarh Institute of Technology (AIT), Karachi. The Institute will collaborate with Fujian Polytechnic of Information Technology, China for the programs and provide training under CTE Model (Chinese + Commerce Culture + Training + Employment). "Under the three 3-year diploma programs, 70 AIT students will have the chance to study in China on fully-funded scholarships", Eng. Mansoor ul Hassan Siddiqui, Regional Director of TANG Pakistan, told Gwadar Pro. He said that the admission process has been completed and the program will start soon. The newly-launched programs cover the disciplines of IoT, Mechatronics Technology and Electronics.



ISLAMABAD: SAPM on Human Rights & Women Empowerment Ms. Mushaal Hussein Mullick addressing International Kashmir Conference on "The Role of Women Youth & Diaspora on Kashmir".

Govt introducing 'Contract Base Smartphones Policy' from Jan 15

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker IT and Telecommunication Minister Dr Umar Saif Friday disclosed that his ministry with the coordination of all other stakeholders of telecom companies from January 15, 2024 will launch a 'Contract based smart phone policy' in which people travelling to other countries will get latest model phones on easy installments, which will benefit economy.

Talking to a private news channel, IT minister said that our aim to incentive responsible financial behavior and ensure that smart phone accessibility continues to expand, adding, we need a robust mechanism to protect investors from defaults, suggesting measures such as blocking mobile phones and, potentially, national identity cards of defaulters. Minister said that under this policy, telecom companies will have the opportunity to directly offer

smartphones to customers through installment plans, thereby expanding the benefits of mobile broadband, especially among low-income segments in Pakistan. Replying another question, he also announced that his ministry from January 7 to 10 have been introducing a 'Standardized Quality measurement Tests' across universities in Pakistan to ensure job opportunities for fresh graduates.

Ministry has made significant decisions to revamp IT education in universities in collaboration with HEC, the National Computing Accreditation Council, the Examination Testing Council, the Pakistan Software Export Board, and the Pakistan Software Houses Association. He said further explained the program that countrywide students around 20 to 25,000 who will pass the test will be offered job opportunities through the

Industry Placement Program.

He said that we will allocate funds to support special industry courses in universities, designed to prepare students for current industry trends and needs, we aim to increase our trained manpower in industrial sector.

He also highlighted the importance of aligning educational institutions with industry requirements and facilitating industry-specific training manpower.

Minister also asked the universities to take rapid action to start new quality courses in entrepreneurship and exports for students which would help boost economy of the country.

To another query, he replied that we have planned to make exponential growth in IT sector as it is necessary for us to bring productivity revolution in our economy by using Information and Communications Technology.

PPP not forming any alliance with PTI: Ghani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Sindh former minister Saeed Ghani Friday made it clear that Pakistan People's Party is not forming any political alliance with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in coming elections and urged political parties for unity on the 'Charter of Economy' to take the country out of current crisis.

Talking to a Private news channel, PPP leader said his party did not believe in politics of hate, ego, and division, adding, that we will participate in the coming election in line with its manifesto out-

lined. "PPP leadership does not believe in the politics of confrontation rather it is pursuing the politics of reconciliation", adding, that seat adjustment is a routine matter of elections. He recalled that Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto always advocated the need for politics of friendship and reconciliation.

Replying to a query, he stressed that the upcoming generations need a better economy and Pakistan still can prosper, adding, that participating in elections is the right of every political party equally.

To another question, he said that PPP leadership has unveiled a 10-point election manifesto with an emphasis on welfare schemes, adding, that if elected to power, PPP will double salaries, provide 300 free solar power units for the poor, free health-care, construct 3 million houses for flood affectees and broaden BISP scope.

He said PPP had initiated the Benazir Income Support program which was being recognized globally, Ghani also asserted that the PPP will play a pivotal role in steering the country out of crises.

Commissioner for providing all possible facilities to tourists during snowfall season

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Liaquat Ali Chhatta here on Friday chaired a meeting on Murree Contingency Plan and directed the authorities concerned to provide all possible facilities to the tourists during snowfall season. Deputy Commissioner Murree, Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi, Director Development, Nazia Sudhan and heads of other departments concerned attended the meeting. Under the Murree Contingency Plan, additional 140 traffic police personnel had been deployed in Murree, the Commissioner said and directed that there should be no delay in preparations at the local level for the implementation of the plan.

The biggest problem of Murree is traffic jam, he said adding, the role of police and traffic wardens is the most important. The concerned forum will be approached to ensure early appointment of a separate DPO for Murree district, Liaquat Ali Chhatta added.

A large number of tourists are expected to arrive in Murree on the occasion of New Year's Night.

The administration should complete all the arrangements and the officials of the departments concerned would not be allowed to remain absent from their duties.

Facilitation Centers had been set up at 13 different places in Murree at Satara Meel, Lower Topa, Jika Gali, GPO, Kashmir Point, Kuldana, Kali Matti, Masiyari, Sindhan, Sunny Bank, Bhorban, Thanda Jungle and Saharbagla.

13 SMDs had been made functional within Murree city and public service messages are displayed on the SMDs to inform the tourists, he added. The Commissioner informed that a 24/7 helpline had also been arranged by the Tourism Department for guidance of the tourists and to update them about weather and traffic conditions. The vehicles entering the city are being monitored through digital counting at the 17 Meel Toll Plaza. As many as 26 CCTV cameras have also been installed on all the main roads to monitor the traffic situation, Liaquat Ali Chhatta informed.

On this occasion, the Deputy Commissioner Murree informed that all the departments were put on high alert in view of the forecast of snowfall in the coming days. A consultant has also been hired for the parking plaza in Murree who will be visiting the site soon, he added.

Traffic Police Murree had acquired the frequency of FM 88.6, the DC Murree said adding that a special website would also be activated soon for the convenience and awareness of the tourists. The DC further said that the website would help update the tourists and they would be able to get latest information about the weather, traffic conditions at various intersections, hotels and other necessary updates before coming to Murree. Information, warning boards and up-to-date status are displayed at various places for the convenience of tourists within the city, he added.

Senate session adjourned again to meet on Monday

ISLAMABAD (INP): The second convening of the 334th Senate session was adjourned again on Friday after the Upper House lacked quorum, right after the recitation of the Holy Quran when Senator Kamil Ali Agha of Pakistan Muslim League pointed out the quorum to the Presiding Officer before commencement of the proceedings.

Senator Rubina Khalid was the Presiding Officer who chaired the session, directed for the head count of the senators, right after the pointing out of quorum, to confirm the exact number of members of the House to continue the Senate proceedings.

Senator Muhammad Tahir Bizinjio of the National Party after the recitation of the Holy Quran interjected the chair to allow him to take the floor to discuss the matter of Balochistan rights' activists, however, due to the identification of the forum, he was not allowed to proceed.

The Presiding Officer, Senator Rubina Khalid of Pakistan People's Party Parliamentary (PPPP) urged the Senator to remain patient till the head count and would be allowed after it. The Senate session was adjourned to meet again on January 1st, 2024 (Monday) at 1430 hours.

'Need to transform education system'

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chairperson of National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), Nilofar Bakhtiar has stressed the need of transforming education system to combat the social issues including prevention and mitigation of emerging issues of Gender-Based Violence. She stated this on Friday while addressing a ceremony organized by Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Islamabad.

The event was organized relating the issues of Gender-Based Violence and gender disparity in education. The title of the project was 'Gender Mainstreaming & GBV for human capital investment project (KP-HCIP)' with the aim of mitigating GBV and violence against children in 1000 schools in 13 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Govt. fully committed to facilitate Hajj pilgrims; Secretary Religious Affairs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Highlighting the government's commitment to facilitating pilgrims, Secretary Religious Affairs Attur-Rehman outlined the government's concerted efforts to enhance facilities for all pilgrims embarking on this sacred journey.

Talking to Pakistan Television News on Friday, he stated that as the balloting for Hajj 2024 was announced, the Ministry was gearing up for the preparation of Hajj 2024. According to details, 69,438 applications were received under the Regular Hajj Scheme, and 63,805 of them were successful in the balloting. "A waiting list of 5,633 unsuccessful applicants has been prepared based on their cities of departure," he added. Speaking on national TV, the secretary mentioned that, for the first time ever, short Hajj is being facilitated by Pakistani authorities.

In a move aimed at enhancing the pilgrims' experience, the Secretary emphasized the introduction of short-term Hajj facilities within Pakistan. Notably, each pilgrim will receive a suitcase with a network SIM with a QR code, enhancing security and preventing the misplacement

of luggage. Moreover, he said the Ministry plans to provide complimentary Pakistani flag-themed abayas for all women pilgrims, along with a free 7GB data card, further enhancing the Hajj journey experience. Unlike previous years, the training period has been doubled, focusing more on practical training than lectures. Pilgrims will undergo training in camps with an emphasis on social interactions and community engagement, addressing issues during the training, he added. Addressing the financial aspect, Attur-Rehman mentioned the reduction of the Hajj package cost by one lakh rupees. Additionally, efforts are underway to minimize airline ticket expenses, prioritizing the convenience of the pilgrims, especially those from Karachi included in the Road to Makkah initiative, he expressed.

He said that pilgrims were required to have two vaccinations, both of which will be available within the camp at the appropriate time. He expressed gratitude for the aid the Saudi Arabian government had given and mentioned the possibility of more relief in a number of sectors.

Ulema, Mashaykh observe 'Children's Protection Day' nationwide

ISLAMABAD (APP): Religious scholars and leaders representing various schools of thought, on the call of Pakistan Ulema Council, on Friday observed 'Children's Protection Day' nationwide. The Ulema and Mashaykh, in their Friday sermons, urged urge the public to ensure administration of polio vaccine their children, thereby safeguarding them from potential lifelong disabilities.

PUC Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, Allama Ziaullah Shah Bukhari, Pir Naqibur Rahman, and others, in their sermons, said it was imperative to emphasize that the administration of polio drops was entirely lawful as they had no adverse impact on human structure and did not induce weakness in children. They said, "Islamic

Shariah also advocates avoiding risks to oneself and one's children. Thus, it becomes a parental responsibility to get administered polio drops, and those who neglect this duty may, unfortunately, subject their children to the consequences of polio. Such negligence would be viewed unfavorably by Allah and society." The scholars and leaders asserted that opposition or resistance to polio vaccination in Pakistan was rooted in ignorance. Those who spread propaganda against the vital campaign were, in essence, jeopardizing the health of children, they added.

Historically, they said polio was prevalent in different parts of the world, including America, Great Britain, European countries, and India. "However, these nations dedicated relentless efforts to control

and eventually eliminate the disease. Today, they stand free from its grip. Regrettably, Pakistan still grapples with polio," they maintained.

They said international health organizations were diligently working to eradicate the disease by administering vaccinations to children and Islamic scholars actively supported such initiatives. Despite those efforts, they said, certain elements, driven by ignorance or ulterior motives, continued to obstruct the progress in combating polio. The religious scholars and leaders emphasized that vaccines were a form of medicine, and the teachings of the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) regarding the use of medicine were unequivocal. Polio was an ailment for which there was no cure once contracted.

HEC extends deadline for registration till January 03

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Higher Education Commission (HEC), has extended the deadline, till January 03, 2024, for registration in the Centralised Test being held for Computer Science and IT graduates - leading to apprenticeship in top IT companies of Pakistan.

The test date shall however remain intact i.e. January 07, 2024, said a press release on Friday.

The students enrolled in the 7th semester of Computer Science/IT related disciplines offered in recognised public and private sector universities and affiliated / constituent colleges are encouraged to register through Virtual University (VU) link <https://www.vu.edu.pk/Gra duateTest/>.

The decision to extend the registration deadline was made in a virtual meeting of Vice Chancellors/Rectors and Heads of Departments of Computer Science/IT of all public and private sector HEIs in order to ensure that

maximum number of eligible students register themselves for the subject test and avail this opportunity.

Chairman HEC advised the universities, especially the IT and Computer Science Departments, to ensure that 7th semester students register themselves and participate in the test. He emphasized the HEIs to expedite nominating their focal persons for smooth communication regarding all aspects of the test being conducted. He stated that the primary objective of this initiative is to ensure that IT graduates are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and attributes to excel in the ever-changing IT industry. He added that the test will allow us to identify the academic / training gaps in fresh IT graduates, which may be addressed through specialized modules / apprenticeships or boot camps to be aligned with industry requirements.

HEC, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders including Ministry of IT



ISLAMABAD: Family members of Christian community enjoy swing at G-7.

5000 Afghans return to Afghanistan

KABUL (BNA): According to the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, nearly 5,000 Afghans have returned to Afghanistan from Iran and Pakistan in the last two days. On the second and third day of this month of the solar year, 734 families, totaling 3,064 people, returned to the country through Torkham. On the second day of the month, 1,906 Afghans from Iran were deported or voluntarily returned to the country.

Islamic Bank pledges \$1.1m

KABUL (Agencies): The Islamic Development Bank has recently made a significant financial commitment, pledging \$1.1 million to bolster maternal and childcare health services in Afghanistan's Bamyan province. This initiative is part of broader efforts to enhance healthcare facilities in the region. The World Health Organization (WHO) made the announcement, highlighting the importance of this contribution in addressing the area's critical healthcare needs.

Asia is comparable to a living body composed of soil and water. The heart that beats inside the body is Afghanistan. The destruction of Afghanistan would be the destruction of Asia. And in its progress and prosperity lies the well-being of Asia. - Allama Iqbal

Kazakhstan removes Islamic Emirate from banned group list



KABUL (TOLONews): Kazakhstan ambassador to Afghanistan Alim Khan Yasin Galdiev in a meeting with the acting foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, said that his country has taken the Islamic Emirate off the list of groups whose activities are banned in this country.

The deputy spokesman for the Foreign Ministry, Hafiz Zia Ahmad Takal, quoted Alim Khan Yasin Galdiev as saying that Kazakhstan wants to expand its economic and political relations with Afghanistan.

"Kazakhstan's Supreme Court has officially removed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from the list of banned groups whose activities are banned in its territory and wants to expand its relations with Afghanistan in the fields of trade and politics," Zia Ahmad Takal said on X.

"Governments make decisions based on their national interests at the international level. Kazakhstan's national interests require that

Afghanistan does not pose any threat to it and its surrounding countries. Similarly, the Taliban also needs legitimacy," said Shaker Hayat, a political analyst. The acting foreign minister praised this decision of Kazakhstan, saying that it will be beneficial for the two countries, and called for more cooperation between the two countries.

"It is more important that the neighbors of Afghanistan should have mutual trust with Afghanistan like this. Kazakhstan is a bit far away and its importance is less," Tariq Farhadi, a political analyst, told TOLONews.

Khalil Rahman Haqqani: Israel's attack shows cruelty, inhumanity

KABUL (TOLONews): The acting Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, Khalil Rahman Haqqani, called the Israeli attack on Palestine an inhumane act and against all human norms. Haqqani made the remarks at a graduation ceremony for 62 students of a religious school in Paktia province.

"They [Israelis] have occupied the Holy Jerusalem. They insulted our Islamic rituals. Don't we see the cruelty of these infidels?" he said.

Abdul Latif Mansour, the acting minister of energy and water, who also participated in the ceremony, said that all religious scholars should not try to get jobs in the government.

He asked the religious scholars to serve the society in madrasas and in mosques.

"If all the religious clerics join the government, a gap will be created in our nation. When there is a gap, we will be separated from the nation. Therefore, we should not leave the mosque empty for anyone, nor the schools, nor the government," Mansour said.

Meanwhile, Aziz Rahman Mansour, the deputy minister of hajj and religious affairs, said many skilled workers around the nation will complete the construction of major projects like the Qosh Tepa Canal. Earlier several residents had already stressed the need of hiring specialists for technical and professional positions.

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Muttaqi: Foreign policy based on national, religious interests

KABUL (Agencies): Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in a meeting with a delegation of Iranian journalists and media officials, said that the Islamic Emirate is pursuing its foreign policy based on national and religious interests and that it is not under the influence of any side.

During the meeting, the acting foreign minister also called security, national unity and the prohibition of poppy cultivation as some of the "biggest achievements" of the Islamic Emirate.

Muttaqi also described Iran as a good neighbor of Afghanistan. "If we want connectivity, Afghanistan should be the axis of connection between countries. The security and stability in Afghanistan have a direct impact on the foreign policies of the country, which must be taken into account, and we want the cooperation of countries in this regard. In general, I must say that without a doubt, the Islamic Emirate's policy is designed based on religious and national values and will proceed based on

them," Zabihullah Mujahid, the Islamic Emirate spokesman said. Some political analysts said that international norms should be taken into account in international relations while focusing on internal values and developing suitable internal and external policies.



Tajikistan president reports increased security on border with Afghanistan



KABUL (TOLONews): Emomali Rahmon, the president of Tajikistan, recently said at a conference that he has established 75 security checkpoints on the border with Afghanistan in the past year.

Emomali Rahmon said: "In one year, 75 high-quality border security checkpoints were built on the border with Afghanistan and Tajikistan." At the same time, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan has said

that Islamabad will continue to negotiate with the Islamic Emirate on issues related to the security and management of the Durand Line. Pakistan Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said: "Pakistan participated in meetings and mechanisms aimed at promoting peace in Afghanistan. It also remained committed to dialogue and engagement with Afghanistan as the two countries continue to explore avenues of

cooperation especially in the economic domain. We also remained engaged with Afghan authorities in the issues relating to security and border management." But the Islamic Emirate emphasized that the territory of Afghanistan is safe and countries should not worry about it. The spokesman of the Islamic Emirate Zabihullah Mujahid said: "The creation of bases and checkpoints in other countries is based on the information and needs of that country, but what is certain and fixed is that there is no threat to anyone from Afghanistan." Earlier, the chief of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Joint Staff claimed that northern Afghanistan is a threat to the member countries of this organization and the members of the Joint Staff of CSTO are voting to curb the threat of terrorism from Afghanistan.

UNSC expected to vote on draft resolution on Afghanistan assessment

KABUL (TOLONews): The UN Security Council said in a report that it is due to "vote on a draft resolution on the Afghanistan independent assessment, which was requested by resolution 2679 of 16 March."

The draft text was proposed by Japan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the co-penholders on the file, the report said.

"The Security Council is expected to vote on a draft resolution on the Afghanistan independent assessment, which was requested by resolution 2679 of 16 March. The draft text was proposed by Japan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the co-penholders on the file," Security Council report reads.

In the meantime, Heather Barr, director of the Women's Rights Division at Human Rights Watch, said on X that the purpose of this process is the full reintegration of Afghanistan into the international community, provided that the Islamic Emirate comply with their obligations under international law.

"France proposed language noting one objective of the process is the full reintegration of Afghanistan into the intl community, PROVIDED Taliban comply w/their obligations under intl law. This text was not incorporated into the draft by the penholders," Barr noted.

However, the Islamic Emirate said that in such meetings, instead of criticisms, concerns should be resolved through legal and diplomatic channels.

"We want that realities, improvements and achievements that we have in Afghanistan to be considered, and they should look at Afghanistan as an opportunity because the stability and security that have been ensured are the result of many sacrifices," said Zabihullah Mujahid, the Islamic Emirate spokesman.

According to some political analysts, the Islamic Emirate should accept the terms and demands of the UNSC for the sake of Afghanistan's complete reintegration into the international community.

"If the Islamic Emirate wants to be reintegrated to the international community and UN, it should accept the conditions of the international community, and interact with them in accordance with the culture, religion and the interest of Afghanistan," Zakiullah Mohammadi, a political analyst told TOLONews.

The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in an assessment of the situation of Afghanistan to the UN Security Council, recommended a roadmap for reintegration of the country into the international system. On 16 March 2023, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2679 requesting the Secretary-General to provide the Security Council an independent assessment on Afghanistan, no later than 17 November 2023.

In the assessment seen by TOLONews, Guterres stated that the urgent needs of the Afghans require a general shift away from politically driven aid approaches towards increased and more sustainable assistance, "especially in key sectors such as food security, livelihoods and health."



Fatima translates and publishes 'Clever Girl' book to inspire hope amid Taliban rule

Hakim Bigzaad

Fatima Malikzai, a young woman deprived of education by the resurgence of the Taliban administration, has translated and published a book for children. Ms Malikzai aims to create hope for thousands of girls deprived of education.



Fatima was a first-year student at Kabul Medical University when the Taliban regime suspended the presence of girls in universities until further notice. A year has passed since girls were denied education, and there has been no progress in reopening the universities.

With a calm yet determined personality, Fatima spent over two years of her life under the shadow of the Taliban administration, engaging in media activities and handicrafts. "Clever Girl" is an educational children's book Fatima has compiled and translated from various sources.

In an interview with Khaama Press, she explained, "In this book, I have tried to define everyday guidance for children in the form of stories. How children should interact with their parents and more."

Fatima's motivation for compiling this book stemmed from her involvement in Pashto literature, especially children's literature, which Afghan children lack access to due to the current situation.

The lack of access to books is a significant challenge for children in Afghanistan, with no responsive institution or child rights advocate currently present in the country. According to the author, it took four months to translate this book. She added, "I am saddened by the situation of returning children from Pakistan and those affected by the Herat earthquake, who are deprived of education. I want to work more in the field of education and children's literature."



KARACHI: MQM-P Convener Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui and PML-N leader Shehbaz Sharif talking to media persons.

Israel bombs Gaza as Egypt hosts Hamas to discuss truce proposal

GAZA: Israel pounded Gaza on Friday, nearly 12 weeks into the war started by the October 7 attacks, as Egypt hosted a Hamas delegation for talks aimed at ending the conflict that has devastated much of the besieged Palestinian territory.

With vast areas of northern Gaza in ruins and largely deserted, Israeli air strikes and ground combat have focussed on central and southern districts, driving ever more displaced families into crowded areas around Rafah near the Egyptian border. Intense fighting around central Deir Al-Balah and the biggest southern city, Khan Yunis, has driven about 100,000 newly displaced people into already-overcrowded Rafah, said the UN humanitarian office, even as targets there were bombed too.

Rafah residents combed through rubble for survivors and bodies after a deadly air strike Thursday. One local man, Tayseer Abu Al-Eish, said he was at home when "we heard a loud explosion and debris started falling on us. My daughters were screaming." The relentless bombardment has caused mass civilian casualties and sparked global calls for a cease-fire as alarm has mounted over the dire fate of Palestinians enduring hunger and sleeping in makeshift shelters in the cold winter months.

After another strike, in Deir Al-Balah, one bereaved mother, Suhair Nasser, wept as she cradled the bodies of her twin children, exclaiming that "the house was bombed and the debris fell on the kids on December 28, their birthday." The military said it had "eliminated dozens of terrorists" across Gaza over the past 24 hours and was "extending operations in Khan Yunis," the hometown of Hamas's Gaza chief Yahya Sinwar.

Gunmen of Hamas, considered a "terrorist" group by the United States and European Union, launched an attack on October 7 that left about 1,140 people dead, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures. The Palestinian militants also took about 250 people hostage, more than half of whom remain captive inside the war zone, some of them believed dead. Israel's relentless military campaign since then has killed at least 21,507 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza.

Israel's army says 168 soldiers have been killed inside Gaza. Hamas's military wing, the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades, said Friday it had launched a fresh barrage of rockets at southern Israel. An Israeli siege

imposed after October 7, following years of crippling blockade, has deprived Gaza's 2.4 million people of food, water, fuel and medicine. The UN says more than 80 percent of Gaza's population has been driven from their homes, with many now living in cramped shelters or tents around Rafah.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said 308 people seeking shelter in their facilities have been killed. UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths bemoaned "an impossible situation for the people of Gaza, and for those trying to help them." "You think getting aid into Gaza is easy? Think again," he wrote Friday on X, formerly Twitter. A UN aid convoy came under fire by the Israeli military without causing casualties, UNRWA said.

The severe shortages have been only sporadically eased by humanitarian aid convoys entering primarily via Egypt. A truckload of fresh food, including meat, eggs and fruit, reached a Rafah market Friday, bringing some relief. "This is the first time eggs and some types of fruit have entered Gaza from Egypt," said vendor Muntasser Al-Shaar.

"All types of fruit are missing in the markets. There are some types of vegetables but they're really expensive." While Israel has repeatedly vowed to destroy Hamas, Cairo has proposed a plan involving renewable cease-fires, a staggered release of hostages for Palestinian prisoners and ultimately an end to the war, say sources close to Hamas. Speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, a Hamas official said the delegation would "give the response of the Palestinian factions, including several observations" regarding the proposal Egypt recently submitted to Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Hamas would seek "guarantees for a complete Israeli military withdrawal" from Gaza, the official said. Looking at post-war Gaza, the proposal provides for a Palestinian government of technocrats after talks involving "all Palestinian factions," which would be responsible for governing and rebuilding the territory. Israel is yet to formal comment on the Cairo plan but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told families of hostages on Thursday that "we are in contact" with the Egyptian mediators and promised that "we are working to bring them all back."

Egypt's State Information Services chief Dia Rashwan said the plan was "intended to bring together the views

of all parties concerned, with the aim of ending the shedding of Palestinian blood." In Tel Aviv, hundreds rallied on Thursday calling for a cease-fire. "Israelis, Palestinians, Muslims, Jews, Christians — this is everybody's home," said one demonstrator, teacher Itay Eyal, 51, who stressed that all sides are entitled to "life, freedom, sovereignty and dignity."

He said "the atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7 will never be pardoned and excused" but added that "if you don't see the historical context, then you're condemned to repeat the same tragedy over and over again." Tensions have also flared in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian motorist who had wounded four people in an alleged car ramming attack. The Gaza war has also seen violence flare elsewhere across the Middle East, where Israel has long waged a shadow war with its arch foe Iran and armed groups allied with Tehran.

Israeli forces have traded heavy cross-border fire with Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah since the Gaza war erupted. On Friday the army said it struck "Hezbollah infrastructure in southern Lebanon" after rocket fire from there. A US warship shot down a drone and an anti-ship ballistic missile fired Thursday by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi militia, the US military said.

The Houthis have repeatedly targeted vessels in the vital Red Sea shipping lane with strikes they say are in support of Palestinians in Gaza. The United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees said Friday an aid convoy came under fire by the Israeli military in the Gaza Strip, without causing any casualties. "Israeli soldiers fired at an aid convoy as it returned from northern Gaza along a route designated by the Israeli army — our international convoy leader and his team were not injured but one vehicle sustained damage," UNRWA's director in Gaza, Tom White, wrote on X.

According to UNRWA, the incident took place on Thursday afternoon. The Israeli military responded to requests for comment saying that it was looking into reports about the incident. Earlier on Friday the UN humanitarian chief, Martin Griffiths, wrote a post on X describing what he called "an impossible situation for the people of Gaza, and for those trying to help them." Griffiths said that aid convoys had been shot at, without elaborating. "You think getting aid into Gaza is easy? Think again," he said. — Arab News

Meeting reviews issues of Ayub Teaching Hospital

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An important meeting to review the issues of Ayub Teaching Hospital (ATH) Abbottabad was held here on Friday with the caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah in the chair.

Advisor to Caretaker Chief Minister for Health Dr. Riaz Anwar, Secretary Health Mahmood Aslam, Chairman BoG ATH Mushtaq Jadoon along with other members of BoG, Hospital Director ATH Dr. Athar Lodhi and officials of the health department attended the meeting.

The participants were briefed about the various issues being faced by the Ayub Teaching hospital Abbottabad and were informed that due to the flood water entering the hospital, the building is under threat and urgent measures are required to

save it. It was further informed that the hospital consists of 1400 beds but funds are being provided only for 1000 beds due to which, the hospital is facing financial difficulties. Similarly, necessary equipment is needed to start Cardiac Surgery in the hospital.

Trainee Medical Officers (TMOs) of Ayub Teaching Hospital are not getting honorarium of category B as TMOs of other hospitals are provided with. The Chief Minister directed the concerned authorities to take immediate steps to resolve the problems faced by the hospital adding that proper summaries with regard to address all the aforementioned issues should be sent for the approval of the provincial cabinet.

The Chief Minister further directed them to arrange the required equipment/machine in order to

start cardiac procedures in the hospital. He said that Ayub Teaching Hospital is the largest teaching hospital in the region and issues faced by it will be solved on priority basis.

He urged upon Board of Governors to suggest measures in order to improve services delivery in the hospital. The Board of Governors of the hospital thanked the Chief Minister for his immediate directives to resolve the problems of the hospital. He also welcomed the Chief Minister's announcement for upgrading Ayub Medical College to the status of full-fledged university.

Chairman, Board of Governors Mushtaq Jadoon, expressing his views on the occasion, said that upgradation of Ayub Medical College to the status of a university is the need of the hour, which would be a great gift of the Chief Minister to people of the region.

JUI-F unveils names of candidates on reserved seats

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: JUI-F has announced the names of the candidates on women reserved seats for National and provincial assemblies on Friday.

The names of Shahida Akhtar Ali, Naeema Kishwar, Hina Bibi and Sadaf Yasmin have been finalized for women reserved seats from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while Zarin Bibi from Sindh, Aliya Kamran Murtaza, Aasiya Nasir, Safia Hafeez and Safia Mufti Fazalur Rehman have been finalized from Baluchistan.

Similarly, the names of Hina Owais, Aiman Abdurazaq Abid Lakho will be the party candidates on women reserved seats in Sindh Assembly while Aatika Ameer Hamza, Javeria Sadiq and Rabia Nadeem have been finalized for Punjab Assembly.

For women reserved seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, Rehana Ismail, Asma Alam, Sitara Aftreen, Aiman Durrani and Madina Gul Afridi have been awarded party tickets. For Balochistan Assembly, the names of Shahida Rauf, Safia wife of Mufti Fazalur Rehman, Masooma Ahmad Baloch and Bibi Zulekha bint Maulana Amir Zaman have also been finalized.

Senate session adjourned

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The second convening of the 334th Senate session was adjourned again on Friday after the Upper House lacked quorum, right after the recitation of the Holy Quran when Senator Kamil Ali Agha of Pakistan Muslim League pointed out the quorum to the Presiding Officer before commencement of the proceedings.

Senator Rubina Khalid was the Presiding Officer who chaired the session, directed for the head count of the senators, right after the pointing out of quorum, to confirm the exact number of members of the House to continue the Senate proceedings. Senator Muhammad Tahir Bizinjo of the National Party after the recitation of the Holy Quran interjected the chair to allow him to take the floor to discuss the matter of Balochistan rights' activists, however, due to the identification of the forum, he was not allowed to proceed.

The Presiding Officer, Senator Rubina Khalid of Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarian (PPPP) urged the Senator to remain patient till the head count and would be allowed after it. The Senate session was adjourned to meet again on January 1st, 2024 (Monday) at 1430 hours. It is to be noted that at the commencement of each session the Chairman Senate nominates a panel, in order of precedence, of not more than three Presiding Officers. In the absence of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman, a member of the panel present, having precedence, presides over the sitting of the Senate.

Senate Body discusses suspension of gas supply

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Senate Standing Committee on Petroleum discussed the suspension of gas supply in industrial units in the province of Sindh for two days a week, causing a production loss of 28 percent, as well as a delay in the completion of the supply.

The Senate Body on Petroleum met with Senator Mohammad Abdul Qadir at Parliament House on Friday. Officials of the Ministry for Energy (Petroleum Division) briefed that every year, more than 10% of gas was depleted from reservoirs at different gas fields, while the demand for gas is increasing day by day. This year, SSGC (Sui Southern Gas Limited) is receiving around 90 MMCFD less gas compared to last year.

Secretary of the Ministry for Energy (Petroleum Division), Mohsin Agha said that the decline has been continuous for the last 8 to 10 years, and they are looking forward to a comprehensive plan that would scrutinize policymaking. The committee members conducted a thorough analysis of supply statistics and gas depletion over the years. They recommended the Ministry for Energy officers (Petroleum Division) to address the discrepancies for conclusive results.

Furthermore, the officers from the ministry provided a briefing on LPG rates, explaining that OGRA (Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority) determines LPG prices for produc-

ers, the margin of MCs (Marketing Companies), and consumers. The pricing was based on various parameters, including the producers' price per metric ton, which was determined on monthly basis according to the Saudi Aramco Contract Price (40% Propane: 60% Butane). The distribution margin was fixed at Rs. 35,000 per metric ton, equivalent to Rs. 413 per cylinder. Additionally, there was a petroleum levy on indigenous production at Rs. 4,669 per metric ton, translating to Rs. 55 per cylinder. GST, previously at 17% and now increased to 18% since February 2023, applies to the aforementioned parameters. The officers also clarified that the compilation of these figures makes up consumer price. The Secretary Ministry for Energy (Petroleum Division) further stated that they were actively exploring indigenous sources and will address infrastructure constraints in their efforts to stabilize gas prices.

The Chairman of OGRA, Masroor Khan, provided the committee members with a briefing on the reasons behind the increase in oil and gas prices. Senator Saadia Abbasi pointed out that the rise in cylinder prices was attributed to the taxes imposed on people. Similarly, the Chairman of the committee, Mohammad Abdul Qadir, suggested that officers explore and utilize gas transportation via seaports and large ships to mitigate price increases, ultimately benefiting the larger population struggling with

the rising costs. The Chairman of OGRA stated that their FBR mechanism already operates at the sea border. However, currently, operating on large ships was not feasible, and efforts were underway to determine how to increase LPG operations at Karachi ports.

In conclusion, the Chairman of the committee, Mohammad Abdul Qadir, recommended that officers from the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) reach out to international companies and encourage them to invest. He noted that since 2015, the ministry has been purchasing LNG, limited to 2-3 bidders, despite numerous bidders worldwide. Allowing private entities could make the price more competitive. He also highlighted that several government and private companies are non-operative due to minor disputes, suggesting that the ministry should resolve petty matters to achieve positive collective results.

The Secretary of the Ministry for Energy (Petroleum Division) assured the committee members that they were looking forward to a comprehensive plan and policy review, and improvements in the results can be expected within a few weeks.

The meeting was attended by Senator Saadia Abbasi, Senator Atta ur Rehman, Senator Fida Muhammad, Senator Mohsin Aziz, Secretary of the Petroleum Division, Chairman of OGRA, and senior officials from the Ministry for Energy (Petroleum Division).

PHC fixes hearing against Gandapur interim bail

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) has fixed hearing on 5th January of Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa president Ali Amin Gandapur interim bail by accepting the provincial government plea for early hearing, on Friday.

PHC's Justice Dr. Khurshed Iqbal issued notice to PTI provincial president Ali Amin Gandapur for 5th January 2024 in interim bail petition.

Additional Advocate General informed that PHC Dera Ismail Khan had granted interim bail to Ali Amin Gandapur but didn't fix for further hearing till today. PTI's provincial president obtained interim bail on 20th September but didn't fix for further arguments while argued for early hearing in the case. Additional Advocate General claimed, PHC has issued notice to PTI Khyber Pakhtunkhwa president Ali Amin Gandapur in this regard and fixed hearing on 5th January on provincial government plea.

PHC orders RO Khyber to continue process:

Peshawar High Court (PHC) directed Returning Officer Khyber to continue proceedings as per 18th December orders regarding constituencies of PK-70 & 71 and issued notices to respondents for submission of reply, on Friday. PHC's Justice Fazal Subhan heard writ plea against incorporation of three villages of PK70 into PK71 within the night.

The counsel Shumail Ahmad Butt advocate argued that the petitioners had submitted nomination papers for general election on PK70 but the Election Commission had incorporated three villages including Waris Khan Kaly, Hazrat Galai and Bazar Galai into PK71 within a night.

The counsel further argued that the guarantees and witnesses of petitioners are registered voters in PK70 but now their premises have been shifted to PK71 which create hurdles in approval nomination and it may lead to cancellation of papers.

Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) orders dated 18th December 2023 had shown the three villages in the premises of

PK70 which is shifted to PK71 against the law as well as Supreme Court of Pakistan verdicts, the counsel added. The lawyer Shumail Ahmad Butt advocate contended that now scrutiny is under processes and changes in constituencies should may lead to cancellation of nomination papers of the petitioners.

PHC's Justice Fazal Subhan directed concerned Returning Officer Khyber to continue processes as per Election Commission orders dated 18th December after initial arguments and ordered respondents for submission of reply. Meanwhile, PHC ordered respondents for submission of reply regarding denial by Returning Officer PK-91 from scrutiny of Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) candidate Kohat-II while adjourned further hearing 4th January.

The counsel Syed Sikandar Shah advocate argued that concerned RO didn't scrutinizing PTI candidate nomination papers while added that PHC had suspended appointment of new Returning Officer which is challenged by ECP before Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Pak Navy conducts fleet annual efficiency competition parade

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Navy Fleet Annual Efficiency Competition Parade was held at Pakistan Navy Dockyard, Karachi. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf graced the occasion as Chief Guest. Event marks the culmination of a rewarding and eventful operational year for Pakistan Navy ships, submarines and aircrafts.

Upon arrival at the venue, Chief Guest was received by Commander Pakistan Fleet Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi and a smartly turned out contingent presented the Guard of Honour. Chief of the Naval Staff in his remarks expressed complete satisfaction and confidence over operational preparedness of Pakistan Navy Fleet. He acknowledged and praised

the dedication and professionalism of officers and men in successfully achieving operational objectives and milestones for the year 2023. The Admiral commended PN Fleet's efforts and contributions towards maritime security.

The Chief Guest also mentioned about the modernization plan of PN wherein various platforms are being inducted in the Fleet. He underscored that induction of these platforms will immensely contribute towards capability enhancement of the Fleet. He also dilated upon the evolving maritime security environment in the region which requires Pakistan Navy to remain ever vigilant and fully prepared to safeguard national maritime interests.

The Admiral urged all the participants to be fully

cognizant of the latest technologies and work with utmost dedication and honesty. Earlier, in his welcome address, Commander Pakistan Fleet Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi highlighted PN Fleet's operational achievements during last year.

He further highlighted that PN Fleet maintained high level of combat readiness throughout the year while Fleet units participated in various Bilateral and Multilateral exercises in home and foreign waters besides undertaking Regional Maritime Security Patrols and Overseas Deployments. During the ceremony, Chief of the Naval Staff gave away efficiency trophies to units adjudged best in their respective squadrons and interacted with Officers and CPOs/Sailors of Pakistan Navy Fleet.

ECP likely to challenge PHC's stay order

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is likely to challenge the stay order of the Peshawar High Court in the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) intra-party elections case.

On Dec 22, the electoral watchdog stripped Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) of its electoral symbol 'bat' in a decision on founding member PHC Justice Kamran Akbar S Babar's petition challenging the intra-party elections to be in line with the rules.

The decision was taken in a consultative meeting

chaired by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja to review the Peshawar High Court's verdict on Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) intra-party elections that restored the electoral symbol of 'bat'. The electoral body has reportedly decided to move the divisional bench of Peshawar High Court for the dismissal of the stay order on the PTI intra-party elections verdict.

PHC Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhal announced the verdict after reserving his order on a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) petition against the Election Commission of Pakistan

PTI takes ECP to LHC

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has formally challenged the Election Commission's decision to withhold the list of reserved seats for women in the Lahore High Court. On Friday, PTI applied to the Lahore High Court, challenging the ECP's stance on not disclosing the specific seat allocations.

In the filed petition, PTI asserts that the PHC has already suspended the Election Commission's decision to nullify the intra-party election. The petition urges the Lahore High Court to issue an order compelling the Election Commission to release the list of reserved seats for women.