

Afghans return continue
ISLAMABAD (INP): The repatriation of illegal Afghan residents from Pakistan is still underway. Even before the announcement by the government of Pakistan to arrest and forcefully repatriate the Afghans living in Pakistan, a large number of illegal residents crossed the border into Afghanistan out of fear of arrest. In this connection, on December 29, 1,207 allegedly illegal Afghan citizens left Pakistan, out of which 374 were men.

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Imran's nomination papers rejected

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan's nomination papers were rejected for a National Assembly constituency from Punjab's capital and his home city, Mianwali, officials of the provincial election commission confirmed Saturday.

The former prime minister had filed his nomination papers from Lahore's NA-122 and Mianwali's NA-89 constituencies ahead of the upcoming polls slated for February 8, 2024, while Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Nawaz Sharif's papers have been accepted for NA-130 in Lahore. The development comes as a major blow to the party whose leadership is facing a plethora of cases — especially pertaining to the May 9 riots — with senior leaders, including Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi and others, behind bars.

"The PTI founder has been convicted," the returning officer (RO) assigned to scrutinise the nomination papers of the NA-122 constituency said, explaining the basis of the decision, dealing a blow to the PTI ahead of the polls. The objections, raised by PML-N's Mian Naseer, had referred to Khan's five-year disqualification in the Toshakhana case wherein the electoral body had found him guilty of corrupt practices under Section 167 of the Elections Act, 2017.

"PTI founder's proposer and seconder do not belong from NA-122," the objection added. From Toshakhana's disqualification to having an illegitimate daughter and defaulting on Rs3.6 million social security funds, multiple objections were raised on Khan's nomination papers filed from his NA-89 Mianwali stronghold — a constituency which he has won previous elections from.

Concurring with the objections, the returning officer rejected the former prime minister's nomination papers. Separately, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) also rejected PTI Vice Chairman Qureshi's nomination papers from Multan's NA-150, NA-151, PP-218, and Tharparkar's NA-214.

Meanwhile, former federal minister and PTI leader Hamid Azhar's nomination papers were rejected from PP-172. However, all is not lost for the PTI founder and his associates as they can appeal against the rejection of their nomination papers by January 3, which will be decided upon by the Appellate Tribunal by January 10. The electoral body will publish the revised list of candidates on January 11. With the nomination papers of Azam Swati and Zulfi Bukhari also reject-

Maryam, Bilawal's papers approved

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Saturday approved nomination papers of Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari from different constituencies.

Maryam's spokesperson said her nomination papers from multiple Lahore and Sargodha constituencies were approved by the returning officers (ROs), but added that she would contest general elections from the constituencies where the party would decide. The PML-N scion submitted nomination papers for three National Assembly constituencies — NA-119 and NA-120 — and four Punjab Assembly constituencies — PP-159, PP-160, PP-165 and PP-80.

Two local lawyers had raised objections against Maryam's nomination papers, citing PML-N leader's conviction and alleging her of forging signatures on nomination papers. The RO, however, rejected the objections and approved her nomination papers subsequently. Meanwhile, Bilawal's nomination papers were approved from Lahore's NA-127, said PPP leader Zulfiqar Ali Badr.

Separately, in a setback to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the ECP rejected the party founder Imran Khan's for a National Assembly constituency from Punjab's capital and his home city, Mianwali. The former prime minister had filed his nomination papers from Lahore's NA-122 and Mianwali's NA-89 constituencies ahead of the upcoming polls slated for February 8, 2024.

Furthermore, relevant ROs rejected PTI's Zulfi

Usman's mother, sister-in-law's nomination papers rejected

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The nomination papers of the Dar family of PTI leader Usman Dar from the National Assembly constituency of NA-71 of Sialkot have been rejected. Usman Dar's mother, Rehana Dar, and sister-in-law submitted their nomination papers from Sialkot's constituency, NA-71, to participate in the 2024 general elections, which were rejected on Saturday.

It should be noted that Usman Dar's brother, Umar Dar's wife, also submitted nomination papers from NA-71. Both mother-in-law and sister-in-law had submitted papers against PML-N leader Khawaja Asif from NA-71. The papers were rejected by the returning officer (RO) over non-payment of social security dues and non-disclosure of assets. Earlier in the day, Usman's brother Umar Dar was arrested from Lahore and police claimed he was wanted by the police in five cases. Dar's mother Rehana alleged in a video message that Umar was abducted from home to stop him from participating in the elections.

On the other hand, an application was filed in the Lahore High Court against Umar Dar's arrest. The petition has made the Punjab police chief, Lahore CCPO and others parties in the case. The petitioner has adopted the stance that Umar Dar went to a private hotel for dinner on Friday where more than 40 people, including those in police uniform, abducted him. The plea asked the court to order that Umar Dar be recovered and produced in court. According to the police, Umar Dar is wanted in five cases of incitement and anti-state sloganeering in May 9 cases.

Bukhari and Azam Swati's papers from different constituencies. Commenting on the development, PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif's counsel Advocate Jahangir Jadoon told the journalists in Mansehra that it was essential for the candidate contesting polls to be present in the country.

Jadoon, who filed objections against Swati, said the PTI leader was only asked to appear before the RO after which the objections would be withdrawn. The RO later confirmed that the PTI leader's nomination papers were rejected from NA-15.

Swati's lawyer Sohail Swati said his client's papers were rejected due to claims that his signatures were fake

and that he was an absconder in case filed against him. He said the election tribunal would be approached against the decision. Bukhari, on the other hand, said his papers were not being accepted due to claims that his signatures were not genuine, which he termed "ridiculous". The close aide of PTI founder Imran Khan said he even had them notarised and counter signed by the oath commission.

Announcing to move court against the decision, Bukhari also alleged that six people including his lawyers, proposers and seconders had been abducted. "My lawyers, proposers and seconders have been abducted from inside.

5 terrorists killed in N Waziristan IBO: ISPR

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Five terrorists including a terrorist commander were killed in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Mir Ali area of district North Waziristan on Friday, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement on Saturday.

The military's media wing said security forces conducted the IBO on the reported presence of terrorists on December 29. "During the conduct of operation, after intense fire exchange, five terrorists, including terrorist commander Rahzaib aka Khuray, were sent to hell," the ISPR stated.

The killed terrorists, according to the statement, remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against security forces as well as extortion and target killings of innocent civilians. "Weapons and ammunition were also recovered during the operation," the ISPR added. It said locals of the area appreciated the operation.

Meanwhile, sanitisation operation was being carried out to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area, as the security forces were determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country, the military's media wing mentioned in the press release.

Two children killed in Bolan blast

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Two children — aged 10 and 12 years — were killed in a roadside bomb blast in the Bolan district of Balochistan on Saturday, police officials confirmed.

The roadside bomb went off in the Mach area of Bolan, the officials noted, leaving two children dead including 10-year-old Babar and 12-year-old Ahmed Jan. The powerful explosion occurred near shops located behind a police station on Jail Road in Bolan's Mach area, they added, with no group taking responsibility of the attack so far.

According to police, the explosive material was installed on a handcart. The glass windows of nearby buildings shattered due to the intensity of the blast. Police shifted the bodies of the deceased children to the civil hospital and summoned the bomb disposal squad (BDS) for collecting more evidence.

Girls' school set ablaze by miscreants

F.P. Report

BANNU: Miscreants set fire to a girls' school in district Bannu's Meryan Tehsil Friday night amid an increase in militancy in the tribal region.

The overnight incident targeted the Government Girls Higher Secondary School in Kotka Mumbati Barakzai, which suffered significant damage. The school's science lab was turned to ashes. The miscreants stole solar panels and other items and vandalised the school's boundary wall as well. They also wrote threatening graffiti near the main gate, warning of additional attacks if the school tried to resume classes.

In the wake of the incident, police officials collected evidence from the site, kicking off an investigation into the terror act, the District Police Officer Iftikhar Khan said. The schools in the district are currently closed due to the winter break. Meanwhile, the incident marks the first instance of a school being set ablaze in Bannu following the upswing in militant attacks which came after the government's decision to terminate the ceasefire with the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan last year.



KARACHI: Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf awarding Commandant Gold Medal to best SSC cadet during 120th Midshipmen and 28th SSC Course Commissioning parade at Pakistan Navy Academy Manora.

No peace sans Kashmir solution: Naval Chief

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Course Commissioning Parade of 120th Midshipmen and 28th Short Service Commission (SSC) was held at Pakistan Naval Academy (PNA), Karachi. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. The commissioning contingent comprised of 88 Midshipmen out of which 60 were from Pakistan, 01 from Kingdom of Bahrain and 27 from Kingdom of Saudi Arabia along with 44 officers of SSC Course including 12 lady officers.

While emphasising on geo-strategic environment, Chief of the Naval Staff asserted that peace and stability in South Asia will remain elusive unless the long-standing issue of Kashmir is resolved in accordance with the aspirations of its people and the UNSC resolutions. He urged the international community to play its role in cessation of human right violations and atrocities in the illegally occupied Indian held Jammu and Kashmir whose citizens must be allowed to exercise their right of self determination.

During his address, Naval Chief

also emphasised the immediate need to end the sufferings in Gaza as indiscriminate use of force on Palestinian civilians is a gross violation of human rights and war crimes that must cease forthwith. He further reiterated that Pakistan would continue its diplomatic, moral and principled support to Palestinians and urge for a just, comprehensive and enduring solution to the Palestinian question, in line with relevant UN resolutions. He added that Pakistan looks forward to a stable and secure Afghanistan; which is key to regional integration, growth and prosperity.

The Chief Guest felicitated the commissioning term and their parents. He commended the parents for instilling a spirit in their children to serve the nation, which ultimately led them in joining this prestigious Service. He also lauded Pakistan Naval Academy for imparting quality training and expressed his hope that cadets from friendly countries trained at PNA will serve as our brand ambassadors to enhance bonds of endearment and affinity. Chief of the Naval Staff also advised the youth on new dimension of warfare, which is the use of social media for disinformation, that has become an essential

segment of fifth generation warfare.

Later, Chief Guest gave away awards to the distinction holders. The prestigious Quaid-i-Azam Gold Medal was awarded to Lt Muhammad Talha Masood PN for his overall best performance. Midshipman Ayan Yameen claimed the coveted Sword of Honour, whereas Midshipman Sanaullah Safer clinched the Academy's Dirk. Officer Cadet Abdullah Waheed was awarded Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee Gold Medal, Officer Cadet Sultan Abdulrahman Hamad Saleh Alrowaiie received Chief of the Naval Staff Gold Medal while Commandant Gold Medal was awarded to Officer Cadet Asia Safdar from Short Service Commission Course. Proficiency Banner was claimed by Fox1 Squadron.

Earlier in his welcome address, Commandant Pakistan Naval Academy Commodore Muhammad Khalid highlighted the main characteristics of academic and professional training afforded to Pakistani as well as friendly countries cadets. The parade was attended by senior civil, military officials and parents of cadets.

‘Faiz is gone, what will you do now?’: Zardari to Sanjrani

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: An amusing small talk between Pakistan People's Party Co-Chairman (PPP) Asif Ali Zardari and Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani took place on Friday during the wedding reception of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman's son in Islamabad.

The former president and Sanjrani were seated at a table, along with other politicians, when their banter began with Zardari asking the senate chairman what he would do without the support of former director general (DG) Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Lieutenant General (ret'd) Faiz Hamid, who took an early retirement from military services in November last year, a day before the

change in command of the country's army. "Faiz is gone, what will you do now?" the PPP stalwart asked Sanjrani as both were seated at the same table, close enough to strike the conversation.

Responding to Zardari's quip, the senate chairman hinted towards seeking his support and said: "[But] you are still there." At this, Zardari responded to him tauntingly. He then asked the senate chairman to think when doing politics.

"Their reign does not last forever, but ours does," he quipped. Several national politicians including Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Jamaat-e-Islami Deputy Chief Liaqat Baloch, Abdul

Ghafoor Haideri and Akram Durrani among others also attended the wedding ceremony. Nikkah of Fazl's son, Maulana Asjad Mahmood, was solemnised by Sahibzada Khalid.

In August 2019, Sadiq Sanjrani survived the no-trust motion in a shocking victory in the then opposition-led upper house of the parliament. The opposition was in the majority with 64 senators present at the time of voting but the motion failed to get the required no of votes. The final vote count was 50 votes in favour of the motion, five votes rejected, and 45 cast against. It was then alleged by the opposition parties that Faiz Hamid played an important role in securing victory for Sanjrani. He was re-elected as the Senate chairman on March 12, 2021.

ECP has authority to decide on election-related matters

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Saturday categorically rejected the notion that the caretaker government had any involvement in either acceptance or rejection of the nomination papers of the aspiring candidates for the general election.

The caretaker government had nothing to do with the acceptance or rejection of nomination papers which was part of the constitutional process, the minister said while speaking in a Television (TV) talk show of the private media. "Only the Election Commission has authority to decide on election-related matters," the minister stressed.

He said the caretaker gov-

ernment was committed to assist the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in providing financial and administrative support to the electoral watchdog for the elections. Solangi said an amount of Rs17.4 billion had been released to the Election Commission of Pakistan in addition to Rs10 billion which was released earlier for holding elections.

To a question, he said the constitutional bodies had been working within their limits. The PTI was a registered political party, he said, adding all political parties were being given due coverage on the national broadcasters in line with their editorial policy. He said negotiations with Baloch protesters resulted in the release of all children and women in the first phase.

In the second phase, 163

male individuals were released, he said, adding the remaining 34 individuals were also freed in the third phase. He said peaceful protest was the right of every citizen. However, blocking roads, entering restricted zones, attacking the police, and throwing stones were beyond the scope of a peaceful protest and were not permitted at any cost, he added. The minister said the general elections would be held on February 8, 2024.

Meanwhile, Caretaker Federal Minister expressed deep grief and sorrow over the demise of senior Kashmiri Hurriyat leader Professor Nazir Ahmad Shawl on Saturday. In his condolence message, the minister said he was deeply grieved to hear the sad news of the death of Professor Nazir Ahmad Shawl.

Kyiv death toll after Russian air attack rises to 39

KYIV: The death toll from Russia's largest air attack on Ukraine rose to 39 on Saturday as rescuers continued to clear debris and rubble from the bombardment, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

Russia launched 158 missiles and drones on cities and towns across Ukraine on Friday in what Ukrainian officials described as the worst aerial bombardment since the start of the war in February 2022. "Works to clear up the consequences of yesterday's Russian attack are still underway. Almost 120 cities and villages, hundreds of civilian objects have suffered," Zelenskyy said on the Telegram messaging app.

Zelenskyy said 39 people were killed and 159 injured in the strikes that involved different types of ballistic and cruise missiles and Iranian-made drones. Ukrainian air defence said it shot down 87 Russian missiles and over 30 drones. In the capital Kyiv, at least 16 people were killed, the largest civilian death toll in the city during nearly 22 months of the war, said Mayor Vitali Klitschko. The city announced a day of mourning for the victims on January 1.

Klitschko said rescuers were continuing to pick through rubble in Kyiv where a warehouse and several residential and commercial buildings were hit. Rescue efforts continued in other cities and villages in the centre, south, and west of the country, local officials said. Local authorities raced to help repair thousands of smashed windows in residential buildings and to restore heating. The weather is unseasonably warm in most of Ukraine with temperatures hovering around four degrees Celsius but forecasters expect a dip to zero later in the week. — Aljazeera

Inflation clocked over 43%

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chicken and eggs as well as vegetables were among the items that pushed the SPI up yet again on year-on-year basis to 43.25 per cent as food inflation combined with rising energy tariffs continue worsening the cost-of-living crisis in Pakistan. Stagnant wages in the absence of any direct government cash support means purchasing power is shrinking at a rate that is unprecedented in the country's history.



ISLAMABAD: Amjad ALi Khan Yousafzai, Major General Masood Rehman Kiyani, General addressing to the members of Kamal Ata Turk Think Tank.

Health minister assures timely overhaul of hospitals

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Health Minister Prof Dr. Javed Akram said the ongoing revamping project in government hospitals across the province was being monitored on a daily basis.

He was visiting the Children's Hospital Lahore here on Saturday. He said that under the direction of Punjab Chief Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi, the ongoing construction project in the hospital was being reviewed. "There is not even one percent delay in the ongoing construction project in the hospital. The revamping work is going on successfully in more than one hundred government hospitals of Punjab," he added.

Dr. Javed Akram said that Children's Hospital administration, XEN and all contractors had been directed to complete the ongoing construction work in the hospital at all costs on time. Patients at the hospital told the provincial minister that they were satisfied with the treatment facilities in the hospital.

The minister inquired about medical facilities provided to the patients and expressed his satisfaction. On this occasion, Children's Hospital MD Professor Dr. Tipu Sultan gave a briefing to the minister.

Fog disrupts road traffic

LAHORE (INP): Fog continued to blanket the plains areas of Punjab and Sindh including Lahore on night between Friday and Saturday, paralyzing routine life and disrupting road traffic.

The thick fog has badly affected the flow of road traffic in several cities. According to a Motorway spokesperson, the Motorway M2 from Lahore to Kot Momin, Lahore-Multan Motorway M3 from Faizpur to darkhana, Motorway M4 from Abdul Hakeem to Faisalabad and Motorway M5 from Shershah to Rohri have been closed for all kind of traffic.

The Motorway police have appealed the drivers to use Grand Trunk (GT) Road for travelling. They have also urged the drivers to drive slowly and switch on fog lights. The Motorway police have also requested the people to stay home and avoid unnecessary travelling. Dense fog has also disrupted traffic at several places in the province at the National Highway due to low visibility.

Don't run PTI 'election campaign', says Javed Latif

LAHORE (INP): Javed Latif of PML-N on Saturday "advised" against "running election campaign" for PTI and said verdicts were issued against his party leadership in the past to please someone – in latest comments on the recent orders and comments passed by courts which allegedly represent favouritism.

Talking to reporters here, Latif said the PTI wanted to make the elections controversial and was aiming at getting a judgment which could achieve the aim.

He stressed that the polls scheduled for February 8 were vital to ensure economic stability and warned that any failure to carry out the basic democratic exercise on the given date would only worsen the situation in Pakistan.

Latif reminded the people that the PML-N didn't enjoy a level-playing field in 2018 and no one had

raised the issue back then. "Change the Constitution, if someone says May 9 [violence] isn't a crime," he remarked.

He recalled that the PML-N had contested the Senate polls without party symbol – a development after the Supreme Court stripped the party candidates of their right. "Someone is being declared innocent nowadays," Latif remarked.

The PML-N leader earlier on Thursday had questioned why the events related to the May 9 violence were being swept under the carpet and said the nation must be informed about the origin of facilitators.

On Thursday, PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif had said balance was being tilted towards the blue-eyed – the PTI founding chairman – and described the Peshawar High Court (PHC) ruling on the PTI

symbol "bat" as an attack on the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

Similarly, PML-N Senior Vice-President Maryam Nawaz blasted the PHC orders passed by a single-member bench. "Fake and fraudulent intra-party elections [of PTI] have been declared 'halal'. The ruling is the victory of the selection, but not the election."

"Those who seek a level-playing field are not ready to give the same to anybody within their party," she remarked and added that the jailed PTI founder had stolen the mandate of his own party.

On the other hand, JUI-F emir Maulana Fazlur Rehman pointed to the attempts to create an atmosphere of "judicial martial law" in the country and mentioned that the PHC judge was a close relative of a PTI candidate.



LAHORE: Student giving final touch to the paintings at Punjab Institute of Art and Culture. —APP Photo

Polling staff's training vital to ensure fair, transparent elections: Sharifullah

KARACHI (APP): The Provincial Election Commissioner of Sindh Sharifullah on Saturday said that the training of polling staff was significant to ensure free, fair, and transparent general elections.

While advising the polling officers and officials, he said that they

must pay attention to their training for the upcoming general elections.

According to ECP-Sindh spokesman, the PEC Sharifullah said that the election commission was fully committed to ensuring fair, free, and transparent elections.

The Spokesman said that the training sessions

for the polling staff continued since December 25 across the province, and would continue till January 11.

Whereas the Presiding Officers and Senior Assistant Presiding Officers' training sessions would start on January 13 and conclude February 01, he added.

New Year Eve: Section 144 imposed in Karachi

KARACHI (INP): The district administration has imposed section 144 in Karachi division on the eve of New Year.

According to the notification issued by the Karachi commissioner, section 144 will remain in force from Saturday (today) evening to January 1st, 2024.

The notification said that aerial firing will be banned in the metropolis while strict action will be taken against the violators.

Meanwhile, the Karachi traffic police have finalized a strategy to deal with drunk drivers on New Year's eve in the port city.

According to DIG traffic Iqbal Dara, the police have formed separate teams to launch crackdown against drunk drivers.

The police have acquired breathalysers to check alcoholism in suspicious drivers amid a growing number of such cases which have led to many fatal road accidents in Karachi, he said. He further said that case would be registered against drunk drivers and their cars would be seized.

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Thursday had completely banned all kinds of events regarding the New Year celebrations to express solidarity with the oppressed Palestinians.

He also urged the general public to show solidarity with the oppressed people of Gaza and observe simplicity at the beginning of the New Year.

In a special televised message, he said the entire Pakistani nation and the Muslim Ummah were deeply saddened by the massacre of the oppressed Palestinians, especially the innocent children, and the genocide of innocent Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

Dengue cases decline as temperature drops in Punjab

LAHORE (APP): In a positive turn, the recent drop in temperatures in Punjab has coincided with a decrease in dengue virus cases across the province.

However, concerns linger as Lahore continues to bear the brunt of the outbreak, reporting 7,027 confirmed cases. The latest data from the Health Department discloses a total of 15,182 dengue cases spread across 36 districts in Punjab this year. Despite the overall decline, Lahore, witnessing an additional 6 cases, remains a hotspot. Sialkot and Chakwal reported one case each in the last 24 hours.

Currently, 25 dengue patients are receiving treatment in various Punjab hospitals, with 8 of them located in Lahore district hospitals. Punjab Health Secretary Ali Jaan Khan issued a compelling plea, urging citizens to maintain clean and dry surroundings as a preventive measure. He stressed the importance of cooperation with health department teams actively working to curb the Dengue outbreak.

For those seeking dengue treatment, information, or wishing to register complaints, a free helpline (1033) is available through the health department. The secretary emphasized the need for vigilance and proactive measures to contain the alarming spread of dengue in Punjab.

CM directed IGP to control street crime, kidnapping for ransom

KARACHI (APP): The Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (Retd) Maqbool Baqar directed the Inspector General of Police to take measures to control kidnapping for ransom in the Katcha area and street crime in Karachi during a meeting.

The meeting was held at CM House on Saturday and was attended by Inspector General of Police Riffat Mukhtar and Additional IG Karachi Khadim Rind.

He also made it clear that the concerned police stations would be held responsible if any such incident occurred in their jurisdiction.

The Chief Minister expressed concern over the rising street crime in the city. He stated that the citizens are losing confidence as they don't feel safe on the roads and in open areas.

He also warned the police station that they would be held accountable if any street crime occurred within their jurisdiction.

Baqar said he has repeatedly directed the police to ensure police patrolling but those instructions have not been compiled in letter and spirit. At this, the IG police said that the orders of police patrolling had been complied with.

He said that the police stations and their mobiles have been properly equipped with wireless stations and upgradation of police stations was being made.

The chief minister said that kidnapping for ransom has again started taking place in Katcha area of the Larkana and Sukkur divisions. "I would not tolerate the rise of such a heinous crime in the Katcha area,"

he said and directed the IGP to ensure the safe and secure recovery of the kidnapped persons and continue to crack down against the bandits.

The Chief Minister and the Inspector General of Police discussed the tagging of repeat criminals to monitor their movements. It was proposed that a bracelet with a chip would be worn to the criminals involved in their second or third offense. The Chief Minister directed the IG Police to propose a draft law, which would be reviewed and introduced through an ordinance.

The Chief Minister instructed the Inspector General of police to ensure better law and order in the province so that the general elections could be conducted smoothly.



KARACHI: Passengers of the Pakistan Express wait for train at Cantt station platform, Train traffic is affected due to fog in the country. —APP Photo

Naqvi lays foundation-stone of multi-storey apartments

LAHORE, (APP): Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi laid the foundation stone of multi-storey apartments here on Saturday for low-ranked government employees. He was given a briefing about construction of the apartments tower.

Addressing the ceremony, he announced that four multi-storey apartments towers would be built for the government employees and new drainage system would be laid for the Chauburji Staff Colony and security would also be improved.

Mohsin Naqvi said that four office towers would be built in the CBD [Central business District], where the government offices would be shifted, in addition to the Civil Secretariat. He said that offices established in the rented buildings would be shifted to the CBD towers, which would save crores of rupees.

Work on the CBD tower would be launched after finalisation of its design. The CM said that residences from grade 11 to grade 14 of the government employees would be built in the 5-storey tower. A tube-well chamber and a generator room would also be established in the tower.

Fire-fighting system and alarms would also be specially installed. An underground water tank would also be built and lift would also be installed.

Parking of 30 vehicles, 40 motorcycles would also be provided in every tower.

Mohsin Naqvi said that six apartments would be built on every floor of the tower. He said it was a duty of the government to provide residences to all deserving government employees. The plight of Punjab Civil Secretariat was highly pathetic earlier, but now it had been transformed all together. The Secretariat has been beautified and its credit goes to Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman. Mohsin Naqvi said that the old building of P&D was a mega project on which work was ongoing.

A plan had been made to build four apartment towers consisting of six floors for the government employees in Chauburji. The quality of the apartments would be excellent. He said 700 families of the government employees were already living at Chauburji quarters and their living conditions would be improved.

The additional chief sec-

retary also addressed the ceremony. Provincial Minister for Information Amir Mir, Chief Secretary, Secretary C&W, CCPO Lahore, Commissioner Lahore, Deputy Commissioner and officials concerned were also present.

Punjab CM inaugurates Bait-ul-Mal Mobile App: Caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi inaugurated the Bait-ul-Mal Mobile App in Lahore today, a pioneering initiative aimed at enhancing transparency in benefit disbursement.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony, the Chief Minister emphasized the app's role in ensuring transparency in payments to beneficiaries through the Bait-ul-Mal Portal App.

He further highlighted that the newly launched mobile application provides a streamlined process for submitting applications for various forms of assistance, including educational scholarships and marriage grants.

The Bait-ul-Mal Mobile App represents a significant step forward in leveraging technology to facilitate and improve the efficiency of social assistance programs in Punjab.

Art & Culture keeps tourism potential like rest of world: Amir

LAHORE (INP): Provincial Minister for Information and Culture Amir Mir has said that like the rest of the world, Pakistan should make art and culture a means to promote tourism.

The arts are no longer just entertainment but have become an industry as well. Like other industries, investment for the promotion of art and culture is also an important need of the hour. The ongoing efforts for the promotion of arts in Punjab are also linked in this regard.

The aim behind organizing Arts and Culture Expo 2023 is to provide a platform for providing employment to low income skilled and unknown artists

from the backward areas of Punjab. Amir Mir expressed these views while addressing the inaugural ceremony of the first Arts and Culture Expo 2023 being held under the auspices of Punjab Arts Council at Al-Hamra Cultural Complex Gaddafi Stadium.

Talking to the media, the Provincial Minister apprised that the Punjab Arts and Culture Expo 2023 organized by the Punjab Arts Council will last for three days. The Expo will be made an annual feature in the cultural activities of Punjab. After Lahore, such exhibitions will also be organized in other districts as well, he added.

Provincial Ministers Mansoor

Qadir, Bilal Afzal and Wahab Riaz also accompanied Minister Aamir Mir on the occasion. Expertise in handicrafts from different cities of Punjab, artisans, skilled artists, athletes and students of universities teaching art and craft participated in the Expo. More than 100 stalls of traditional food besides clothes, handmade pottery, beautiful wooden display items, home use and renovation items along with beautiful samples of painting and calligraphy were displayed in the Expo. On the one hand, regional games were being shown while on the other hand artists were seen performing their art on the beat of drums.



LAHORE: A view of fog at Ferozepur Road in the Provincial Capital. —APP Photo

SIDB evacuates six kanals govt land



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In light of the directions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce, Technical Education and Newly Merged Districts Affairs Dr. Aamer Abdullah, the Small Industries Development Board (SIDB) on Saturday evacuated Six Kanals of valuable provincial government land, owned by the board, from the land grabbers mafia at Pashtun Ghari in Pabbi.

In this regard, on the instructions of caretaker minister, a joint operation team of relevant administration and board, under Assistant Commissioner Pabbi Khula Tariq, DMD

SIDB Nauman Fayyaz and Director Finance Muhammad Sher, conducted operation in Pashtun Gari on road side location and demolished the land grabbers and plot mafia-built boundary walls around the said property.

The evacuated land is the property of SIDB which will soon be secured in boundary walls and will be utilize for public interest purposes under the board.

It is merit to mentioned that as the minister was informed regarding the said government land occupation, he directed the local administration and board management for taking stern action with regard to evacuate this valuable public property.



PESHAWAR: Provincial leader of PPP Abid Ullah Yousafzai talking to media. — F.P. photo

Faiq suggests formulation of consultative boards

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Muhammad Faiq Shah, founder and chairman of the Amun Taraqqi Party suggested setting up consultative and decision-making boards, with representation of public, social and trade segments and relevant institutions to eliminate 'Tug of War' for gaining power, authority.

Talking to different delegations including social, political activists and political workers here on Saturday, Shah urged national institutions to play

their proactive role in this regard.

He recalled his party had already given a comprehensive plan and it is ready to propose policy by sitting with institutions.

Commenting on the prevailing political scenario, Shah termed Feb 8 polls as tantamount to 'hoodwinked' of people.

There was no chance for voters, and poor people who took active part in the election, he added.

He noted the 'Hue and cry', echoes of 'selection' is being overwhelmed in the country.

So, why would the national wealth be wasted on elections?

The ATP chief stressed protection, authority and justice of vote and voters is essential, stating that without it, stability won't come in the country.

He made it clear that this undemocratic experiment cannot become successful, saying that elites are intolerable for people.

A one month is being left but there is prevailed a complete vague situation and no one is sure about holding of the election, Shah observed.

He stated power has been snatched while turbulence was increasing in every province and irrelevance with people, adding that the state is heading toward a fragile situation.

The only solution to eject from the current crisis situation is to form policy boards, consisting of all institutions, public segments, think tanks and media, Shah asserted, adding that all policies should be with these boards.

He continued these proposed boards would hold strict accountability and frame concrete policies, which will bear fruitful results. Faiq emphasised parliament's need to fulfill its constitutional duty of legislation.

He said his party is ready to sit with institutions and give workable policies to them and in this regard, a practical sketch was already released.

The party leader asked candidates to carry out door to door campaign and convey the message of the party to create a democratic awareness and they will gain right of decision making.

He called for ensuring social and economic justice to people and their equal participation in the electoral and democratic process.

Arshad Aziz re-elected as president of PPC



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: With the country gaining the electioneering for the General Elections to be held on February 8, 2024, the journalists of Peshawar casted their votes on Saturday to elect the officer bearers of the Peshawar Press Club.

The Unity Democratic Panel led by senior journalists Riaz Khan and Arshad Aziz

malik won a clear victory as Senior journalist Arshad Aziz Malik was re-elected as President of PPC after getting 402 votes while his closest opponent Arif Hayat managed only 57 votes.

Similarly, Irfan Mussazi was re-elected as general secretary by getting 372 votes while his opponent Bilal Ahmed managed to get 82 votes.

Tayab Usman was elected as Vice-President after being voted by 360 journalists. Gul Rehman Haqqani (381 votes) and Rizwan Sheikh (341 votes) were elected as Joint Secretary and Finance Secretary Respectively.

On the election day, large number of journalists from Peshawar participated and elected a new cabinet of PPC.

Meanwhile, for the Government Body of the PPC Cabinet Shahid Afridi, Ihtisham Bashir, Irshad Ali, Muhammad Riaz, Ameer Muawiya, Shehzad Ahmed, Imran Ayaz, Imran Yousafzai, Qaleem Qureshi, and Abid Khan were elected.

Fistula awareness event held

PESHAWAR (APP): Teaching Hospital here on Saturday hold an awareness event about fistula and its prevention.

The event, jointly organized by the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Mercy Teaching Hospital, the Fistula Foundation, and the Pakistan National Forum on Women's Health (PNFWH), aimed to educate the general public and community leaders about the prevention and treatment of postpartum complications. The event attracted a diverse audience comprising community leaders, healthcare professionals, and members of the general public.

Dr. Sajjad Ahmad Siddiqui, National Program Manager of the National Fistula Project in Pakistan, Associate Prof. Dr. Samdana Wahab, from Mercy Teaching Hospital and Assistant Prof. Dr. Nazish Hayat stressed to create awareness and facilitate people in this regard.

New Sahara Hospital inaugurated

PESHAWAR (APP): For the rehabilitation of the drug addicted patients, a new hospital with the name of "Sahara" (Hope) was formally inaugurated in Chakdara Tehsil of the District Dir Lower where men and women addicted with drugs would be kept for the treatment.

To save one human life is to save the entire humanity, District Health Officer Dir Lower Irshad Ali said.

New Sahara Hospital Narcotics and Psychiatry was inaugurated in Chakdara in which notable Dr. Iqtar, Dr. Irshad Ali, DHO Dir, Dir Lower, former DHO Dr. Muhammad Rehman Shaheen and central leader of ANP Hussain Shah Yousafzai were present.

Speaking on this occasion Bala Kisan said that there was a dire need for a drug hospital in our area Chakdara as compared to other areas. He said this hospital would benefit the area a lot and was a good initiative.

The youth who are suffering from drugs, marijuana, heroin, alcohol, opium and various psychological diseases will benefit from this new Sahara Drug and Psychiatry Hospital and the youth here will be saved from going to hospitals in other areas.

Youth-led initiatives propel social harmony

Awrang Khan

In an age marked by global uncertainties, the active involvement of youth in cultivating social cohesion through peace initiatives is proving to be a dynamic force. The youthful energy and innovative perspectives are not mere symbols but active agents driving positive change, weaving unity across diverse communities, and transcending traditional boundaries.

The narrative of youth engagement in promoting social cohesion is shifting beyond rhetoric. Various organizations and community leaders now recognize the transformative power embedded in the minds of the younger generation.

This proactive approach aims to channel the enthusiasm and creativity of the youth towards building a harmonious society, casting them as architects of meaningful change. At the grassroots level, young leaders are not just following; they are taking the lead, spearheading projects that address local issues and foster understanding among diverse communities. Initiatives range from impactful cultural exchange programs to meaningful dialogues on diverse topics. These grassroots endeavours are not merely patching societal gaps but are actively weaving a tapestry of shared values.

The digital era has further magnified the impact

of youth-led peace initiatives. Social media, in particular, serves as a potent amplifier for disseminating messages of unity and solidarity. Online campaigns, purposeful hashtags, and shared stories create a virtual space where young individuals from different backgrounds can connect, collaborate, and amplify their voices for a shared cause.

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping the perspectives of the younger generation. Youth-led educational initiatives, focused on promoting understanding, tolerance, and conflict resolution skills, are gaining traction. Integrating peace education into school curriculum and extracurricular activities is not just an idea but a reality that sows the seeds of peaceful coexistence from an early age.

From conflict-ridden regions to urban centres grappling with social tensions, there are compelling stories of youth-led success in fostering social cohesion through peace initiatives. Take, for instance, the "Youth for Peace" project in a conflict-stricken area, where young individuals actively engage in community-building activities, dismantling barriers, and nurturing a sense of shared identity. Despite the promising strides, challenges persist. Limited resources, societal biases, and political intricacies can impede the effectiveness of youth-

led initiatives.

However, viewing these challenges as opportunities for growth and innovation allows for the development of sustainable solutions, empowering young leaders to navigate obstacles with resilience and creativity.

Recognizing the interconnected nature of our world, international collaborations have become imperative in promoting global social cohesion. Youth-led organizations, with support from governments and international bodies, are forging powerful alliances to address transnational issues like climate change, human rights, and poverty. These collaborations amplify the impact of youth initiatives and cultivate a sense of global citizenship. As we look to the future, the active involvement of youth in fostering social cohesion through peace initiatives stands as a beacon of hope. Governments, organisations, and communities must persist in investing in empowering the younger generation, acknowledging their potential as transformative agents for a more peaceful and united world.

By providing platforms for dialogue, education, and collaboration, societies can tap into the extraordinary power of youth engagement, paving the way for a legacy of harmony that resonates for generations to come.

Syed Kamil's killers didn't arrested till 17th anniversary

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The 17th martyrdom anniversary of Bureau Chief of News One Shaheed Syed Kamil Al Mashadi to be observed today (on Sunday).

According to details, Shaheed Syed Kamil was killed on 31st December 2007 by unknown murderers. After the passage of seventeen year of his murder police had failed to find his killers.

The son of Shaheed named Syed Mujtaba Abbas has demanded from the government of Pakistan to provide him justice.



Party's workers demand fair distribution of tickets

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The residents and business community of Peshawar Cantt demanded of the central leadership of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to award ticket for PK-81 to deserving candidate instead of parachute candidates or those involved in photo sessions.

They stressed that it

should be given to the former Deputy Organizer PTI Peshawar, Syed Qasim Ali Shah, who stands with the party during challenging times. Syed Qasim Ali Shah's connection to a political family in Peshawar, particularly his father's notable services as Mayor and Provincial Minister, is acknowledged and praised.

leader of the business community in Peshawar Cantt, and others have unanimously decided to provide complete support if Syed Qasim Ali Shah is nominated. He emphasized that not only the business community but also residents of Cantt have expressed their demand for Qasim Ali Shah to be given the ticket for PK-81.

In a recent gathering

held by party members at Ghulam Hussain Chand's residence a team was formed to fully support Qasim Ali Shah and ensure success in the upcoming elections.

The collective decision was made that PK-81 ticket should be given to Syed Qasim Ali Shah, reflecting the joint demand of Peshawar Cantt's residents and business community.



PESHAWAR: Members of Peshawar Press Club casting votes during PPC Elections-2024. — F.P. photo by Ghulam Murtaza

This is how politics works?

Sayed Sajid Shah Bokhari

The world is practicing a very high model of Politics to serve the native on large scale. It is a matter of fact to understand a mechanism that how politics works? In the words of renewed scholar politics is a game which is played by politicians merely, to amuse others with pretty slogans. How the experts had drawn a map to explain the politics and its status in developing countries. I told my son you will marry the girl I choose. He said no. I told him, she is Bill Gates daughter. He said ok. I call Bill Gates and said, I want your daughter to marry my son. Bill Gates said, no. I told Bill Gates, My son is the CEO of World Bank. Bill Gates said Ok. I called the president of World Bank and asked, him to make my son the CEO. He said, no. I told, him my son is Bill Gates son in law. He said, Ok. This is actually how politics works?

Although amongst 195 countries in the world 77 do possess democratic type of governments as the world believes in involvement of people to elect their own representatives as they wish.

The leaders elected by the people then have had a system to decide the future of the country. We always follow Europe and the leading countries of Europe like France, Italy, Japan, Germany and USA practices this sort of government. The countries lying in Latin America and mostly in Asia also possess this system. The world goes against the Monarchs and Kings because transparent and good governance could be ensured.

In such kind of government ballot paper conceal the developmental approaches towards humanity, Justice, transparency, accountability and best practices. Unfortunately, in developing countries the democratic institutions had corrupted the institu-

tions by so called politicians and in many countries by Generals in combination with important stakeholders and pillars of the state. In developing countries forums had been established with ancestral dynasties in the past. Unfortunately the major role of these stakeholders is to plunder the national wealth (like NRO in Pakistan).

In country like Pakistan this game is in practice since its inception and the political leaders had secured prominent position in society by exploiting the system. Before each general election the parties and their leaders present a charming view to attract the people. There are many slogans and narrations to divert the people attention. Once the slogan was (Food, Cloth and Shelter), latter on the slogan was changed if we will not do it, who will do it. But in all forms the communities saw bad sort of experiences in achieving the targets.

Now a days, the theme of politics lies in the hands of Millionaire and Billionaire. The spending of money has increased distrust in communities because on the name of democracy, mostly the politicians exploit the people and can be a big source of corruption and nepotism always. The second abhorrent thing is setting dynasties through democracy. The dynasties set at the political horizons now claim the state as their sole property, where they can execute the process of bankruptcy. Still the people in Pakistan consider the game of politics as the most corrupt practice which develop worst situation always.

Once the politicians came in to power they forget their commitment and set their own norms and families establishment as outcome of the process. The Scenario about Politics is same everywhere in the world but the way, and attitude makes it different, in Europe and Asia particularly in

Pakistan. In Europe politics gives vision to the politicians, strengthen political institutions, ensuring justice and transparency in their policies.

In Pakistan the democratic model is evolved from government to government based on personal interest settled by Mafia. You might have seen how the most powerful Chancellor of Germany Angela Merhall left her office who remained in power for 16 years. The history of Barak Obama and Michal Obama and her only daughter could be seen viral on internet in working place. Even the Ex-Iranian President Ahemed Najjad adopted a profession to teach at the university level. No one should mind but can anyone help me to show any stalwart politician in Pakistan who went to home without corrupt practices, embezzlement, harassment even through who have Article 62 and 63 in our constitution to be followed as a law.

Politics is one of the best professions to serve humanity no doubt. The most recent developed tool of Democracy proved to be one of the best tools excursive by rulers to involve people in the affairs of state. During the last century Monarchs and Kingship had negative implications on the society. Just imagine 9 Kings in Europe were close relative and they had a single objective to rule on the people by hook or by crooke. The emergence of parties, developing constitutions, rehearsal of Kings and Queens was a single agenda point.

The innovation in politics and setting Goals to achieve targets could be one of the most required outcomes to benefit the communities by politicians. In most countries of the world Politics is profitable Business, particularly in the under developing countries politicians can get name, fame, status and bank balance as end product.



In brief

BPC elections to be held on 4th F.P. Report

BUNER: The Buner Press Club general body meeting decided holding elections for new cabinet on January 4, 2024. The general body meeting was held in chair of president Muhibul Haq on Saturday. The registered members attended the meeting. The general secretary A R Abid presented yearly activities report with financial status of the BPC. The members decided fresh elections to be held on January 4, 2024. The ongoing cabinet handed over the fiances the logistics to the executive committee for holding fresh elections for which schedule to be announced on January, 1, 2024. The elections to be held under supervision of the DBB president and secretary as mentioned in the BPC constitution.

DC Kohat visits GC Kohat F.P. Report

KOHAT: Deputy Commissioner Kohat Dr. Azmatullah Wazir visited Government College Kohat along with Election Commissioner and reviewed security, installation of CCTV cameras, parking, distribution of election materials, collection point of election results, district control room and other arrangements during the general election. Deputy Commissioner Kohat Dr. Azmatullah Wazir issued instructions to the concerned authorities to perform their duties diligently regarding the general election so as to ensure transparent election and full implementation of the code of conduct.

DRO accepts 276 nomination forms

HYDERABAD (INP): The District Returning Officer (DRO) has accepted 276 nomination forms after completing the process of scrutiny. According to the statistics shared here on Friday, DRO Tariq Qureshi has accepted 66 forms for the 3 seats of the National Assembly and 210 forms for 6 seats of the Sindh Assembly in Hyderabad. Some 15 forms had been rejected, including one of NA and 14 of PS, while the scrutiny was still pending of 47 NA forms and 73 PS forms. The DRO has accepted 18 forms submitted for NA-218, 23 forms for NA-219 and 25 forms for NA-210. Likewise, 27 forms for PS-60, 30 for PS-61, 21 for PS-62, 50 for PS-63, 60 for PS-64 and 22 for PS-65 have sailed through the process of scrutiny. The highest number of the pending forms pertain to PS-63 and PS-65 for which 25 candidates each await the completion of the scrutiny.

Dumper crushes 3 bikers to death

LAYYAH (INP): A speeding dumper crushed three motorcyclists to death late on Friday night in Juman Shah suburban area of Layyah district, police said on Saturday. The deceased were identified as Allah Wasaya, Bilal and Azam and their bodies were shifted to DHQ Hospital by the rescue personnel. After the accident, the dumper's driver fled the scene along with his vehicle. However, the police started an investigation after receiving information of the accident.

Youth killed

NANKANA SAHIB (INP): A youth was killed when an over speeding dumper knocked down a motorcycle here on Saturday, rescue sources said. According to details, a reckless driven dumper hit a motorcycle head-on near Chak No 10 of Nanakana Sahib.

Dir youths demand increase in police constables posts

F.P. report

LOWER DIR: Local youths who have qualified a written test and interview for recruiting in the police department demanded the government to increase the posts of constables.

Talking to local journalists at the Timergara press club the qualified youths including Kashif Khan, Sanaulah, Fawad Ahmad, Sajidullah, Saeed anwar, Riaz Khan and others said that a total of 300 youths had qualified for recruitment in police department but only 54 of them were accommodated.

They said that the qualified youths were waiting for their recruitment as there had been no vacancies in the Lower dir district. They said that candidates securing 54 marks were not appointed while several candidates getting only 25 marks in other districts had been recruited. They said that they were getting overage so the government

should increase the number of posts in the district.

Press club election: Wahid Khan Tajik was elected as president and Noor Zaman Musakhel as general secretary for the Jandol press club. The elections were held for the year 2024 at Munda. Similarly Waheedullah Mishwani was elected as vice president, Habibullah as deputy general secretary, Liaqat Seemab as finance secretary, Shah Hussain as joint secretary and Shuiab Hadi as office secretary.

AIQU to hold convocations in provincial headquarters from Jan 31st: The Allama Iqbal Open University (AIQU) has announced plans to hold Convocations 2024 in a unique way in different cities across the country to highlight the effectiveness of the university as well as confer degrees to students in prestigious ceremonies. The AIQU regional director Maaz Ahmad and

coordinator Muhammad Ayaz told local journalists at Chakdara that the convocations would be held in the provincial headquarters; Karachi, Lahore, Quetta, Peshawar and Muzaffarabad. They said the convocation of students from Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan and Rawalpindi division, Attock, Chakwal, Jhelum and Islamabad will be conducted only for PhD scholars at Islamabad on Jan 31st. They asked the degree holders to ensure their registration on the university website by Jan 5th, 2024.

Maaz said that Ph.D, M.Phil scholars, M.Ed and other programmes students getting over 70 per cent marks were eligible to get themselves registered. He said that convocation in Karachi would be held on March 3rd, in Lahore on April 28, in Quetta on May 19, in Peshawar on June 9 and in Muzaffarabad on June 30.

Routine immunization must for prevention of diseases

F.P. Report

ZHOBI: Commissioner Zhob Division Tariq-ur-Rehman Baloch has said that routine immunization is crucial for the prevention of over ten diseases including the crippling polio.

For an effective vaccination programme, the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) needs to be strengthened and vaccination coverage should be improved in order to meet the target of fully immunized children. Expanding awareness campaigns, seminars should be organized on a monthly basis to highlight the significance of vaccination.

He expressed these views while addressing an advocacy session organized by EPI in collaboration with UNICEF for community members, stakeholders, notables and religious scholars. The session was attended by the representatives of various non-governmental organizations

including the World Health Organization, government officials, elected local body members and journalist Rafiullah Mandokhail.

Briefing the participants on the importance of immunization, UNICEF Coordinator Zubair Sherani said that Pakistan is among the low-income countries, where routine immunization coverage stands at a dismal rate. Approximately, 17 percent of the children's deaths - dying from vaccine preventable diseases, can be prevented by increasing their routine vaccination coverage.

'Routine vaccines save millions of children's lives annually, particularly of those children who are suffering from low immunity. Vaccination is a safe and an effective way to help them survive, thrive and reach their full potential in life,' he reiterated UNICEF's resolve to 'vaccinate every child' in Pakistan.

On the other hand, UNICEF Deputy

Representative in Pakistan Dr Inoussa Kabore has recently said that Pakistan has reduced zero dose of immunization by 29 percent — from 611,000 to 431,000. DHO Dr Muzafar Shah, Communication Officer UNICEF Nazir Mardazai, Team Leader Human Development Foundation Naeem Gul Mandokhail and general secretary Para medical staff association Qasim Mandokhail also spoke on the occasion. The speakers asked the media persons to show some compassion for the health sector and marginalized communities, realizing their social responsibilities. They also urged the parents to get their children vaccinated against fatal diseases. The diseases putting the lives of children at risk are included childhood tuberculosis, polio, pneumonia, whooping cough, tetanus, meningitis, hepatitis-B, diarrhea, pneumonia, typhoid and measles.



TANDO ADAM: Grooms and brides during a mass marriage ceremony held in a local garden.

PTI-P to bring back KP on uplift track: Pervaiz

Fazal Haq

MARDAN: Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Parliamentarian (PTI-P) Pervez Khattak has said that Pakistani politicians are not sincere with the country. The country is sinking but the assets of a few political families are increasing day by day, the country is suffering from economic instability due to wrong policies. Taxes, gas, electricity prices are increasing day by day.

He expressed these views while addressing a workers' convention near Katlang Babuzai Interchange. Mardan Former MPA DDAC Chairman Malik Shaukat and others also addressed the workers' convention. They said that the poor people do not know what the future of the country. He said that big projects like Swat Expressway, Bus

Rapid Transit (BRT) and Health Card are our plans, while voting, think about who is responsible for the destruction of this country. Pervez Khattak clarified that when Imran Khan was ruling the province, he flatly refused to give funds to the province. If the traitors of the country are elected again, then the God of the country will be the guardian, they will form the government in the province based on their performance in the election 2024.

On this occasion, Nazia Shah, leader of Awami National Party and former President of Women Chambers of Commerce & Industry's, broke ties with Awami National Party and formally joined PTI parliamentarian, Pervez Khattak wore the hat.

ASP commits for free & fair elections: ASP Sheikh Maltoon Resham Jahangir has said that all

resources will be used for the peaceful conduct of the elections on February 8, 2024. On the special orders of DPO Mardan Najibur Rehman While giving a briefing to the police officers regarding the election security arrangements, ASP Resham Jahangir said that fool proof security will be arranged for all the polling stations to make the general elections of February 08 peaceful and all the available resources will be used in this regard.

The SHOs, Bat Officers and Chowki In-charges should visit all the polling stations and record all the security related situations and incidents and hold a meeting with all the candidates and leading members and urge them to abide by the law in all circumstances and conduct the election. Ensure compliance with the Commission's Code of Conduct.



SHANGLA: KP IGP Akhtar Hayat Khan inaugurating Command and Control Centre. — F.P. photo

Bannu press club elects new cabinet F.P. Report

BANNU: Pir Niaz Ali Shah was elected as president of Bannu press club by grabbing 13 votes to ten votes of his rival candidate in the election held at the press club building.

Election to the top slot was held at the press club building under the supervision of a three members committee comprising Abdus Salam, Muhammad Waseem and Mehboobur Rehman. Regional information officer Muhammad Sarwar Mehmood Khattak, Syed Munir Shah Advocate and Arifullah Advocate attended the election process as observers.

A one-on-one contest took place between Pir Niaz and Umar Diaz Khan for the office of president. Polling began at 9:00AM and it continued till 01:00 PM without any break.

According to results, Pir Niaz grabbed 13 votes while his rival secured 10 votes out of a total 23 polled votes. The regional information officer announced the results and declared Pir Niaz Ali Shah as the president of the press club for 2024. Later the newly elected president announced his cabinet members with consultation of senior members of the press club. Other office holders included Haji Abdul Manan as patron in chief, Muhammad Sohail as senior vice president, Khan Zameer, Nasrullah and Sher Muhammad as vice presidents, Abdus Salam Baitab as general secretary, Muhammad Waseem as deputy general secretary, Zahid Muhammad as joint secretary, Naseeb Zahid Wazir as finance secretary, Imran Ali Nashad as press secretary and Shahid Muhammad as member of executive body.

Four of a family killed in accident

SHEIKHPURA (INP): At least four members of the same family were killed in a tragic road accident in Punjab's Sheikhpura district on Friday. According to details, the accident occurred on Lahore-Sialkot Motorway when a car overturned as its tyre burst, resulting in the death of four persons of the same family.

The ill-fated family members were returning to Sambrial after attending a wedding. Police and rescue teams reached the spot and shifted the dead bodies to Tehsil Headquarters (THQ) Hospital. Last month, at least five passengers drowned in a tragic accident when a car, en route from Mailsi to Multan for a wedding, submerged into the canal.

According to the rescue officials, the overspeeding car went out of control and fell into the Dhamaki canal located near Mailsi city, meanwhile, all the five passengers — aged under 18 — traveling in the car were drowned.

Meanwhile, jubilant aerial firing claimed life of a man leaving another critically injured here, police said on Saturday. Heavy aerial firing was witnessed during 'Rasm e Hina' in Farooqabad area of Sheikhpura. Two people were injured in the firing and rushed to hospital where one person succumbed to his wounds while condition of other was also stated to be critical

JUI-F launches election campaign in Swabi

F.P. Report

SWABI: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam District Swabi Saturday formally started the election campaign with District Amir, Deputy Amir and National Assembly Constituency NA-19 candidate Maulana Fazal Ali Haqqani launched door to door campaign by meeting the people of the entire district.

"We have started our campaign in Murghaz, we had a special meeting with the cousins of the former Speaker National Assembly, Asad Qaiser, Malik Amir Rehman, Tariq Khan, Muhammad Idris Khan, Muhammad Shiraz

Khan, Malik Amjad Khan and invited them to join the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F). "We thanked them and welcomed them for joining the party and in this regard an announcement would be made in a big public meeting," District Amir JUI-F said.

Meanwhile the delegation met with the scholars and students of Madrasah Ahya Al-Qur'an Wal-Sunnah in Maniri Payan Swabi. National Assembly candidate Maulana Fazal Ali Haqqani and provincial assembly Maulana Hussain Ahmad Haqqani assured support and all possible cooperation to the people of the Gandaf, members of

Faqra Foundation, President Haji Yar Muhammad, Malik Fazal Tahir and Haji Noor Akbar announced their support for the nominated candidates for National Assembly Maulana Fazal Ali Haqqani and Provincial Assembly Alhaj Ghafoor Khan Jadoon in an organized ceremony in this regard. Tehsil Chairman Rahim Jadoon, Maulana Taj Nabi Khan, Ajun Khan Jadoon, Mufti Tahir Hassan, Mufti Adam Khan, Maulana Bilal Maulana Habibzada, Salman Jadoon, Fazal Sher, Malik Amir Sultan and other scholars including Tipu Khan and Dilawar Khan participated.

Govt vows to recover millions from MAPCO

MUZAFFARGARH (INP): In compliance with directives from the Punjab government, a comprehensive strategy has been devised to reclaim substantial sums from individuals missing from Mapco and Agricultural Development Bank records.

An essential meeting presided over by Tehsildar Iqbal Abbasi, took place in Alipur to formulate a plan aimed at addressing the defaulters associated with both Mapco and Agricultural Development Bank.

The session saw the active participation of representatives from Agricultural Development Bank Mapco and officials from the finance department. Tehsildar Ali Purna, in his address to the media, disclosed that he had been appointed as the recovery Tehsildar for MAPCO and Agricultural Development Bank. This appointment, made under the directives of Commissioner Dera Ghazi Khan Division, entrusts him with the responsibility of recovering significant amounts from defaulters within Tehsil Alipur.

Deputy Commissioner Mian Usman Ali of Muzaffargarh, in a parallel

development, has officially declared the outstanding amounts owed by individuals associated with MAPCO and the Agricultural Development Bank as land revenue arrears. This move underscores the government's commitment to pursuing recovery diligently and underscores the gravity of the situation concerning the defaulted amounts.

The concerted efforts of all stakeholders, including the Tehsildar, representatives from the financial institutions, and government officials, highlight the gravity of the financial discrepancies and the government's dedication to resolving the issue. As the plan is set into motion, it is expected to yield significant results in reclaiming the crores of rupees owed by defaulters in MAPCO and the Agricultural Development Bank.

DC takes action regarding delays in receiving payments from sugar mills: Deputy Commissioner Mian Usman Ali of Muzaffargarh, has taken prompt action in response to complaints from farmers regarding delays in receiving payments from sugar mills.

Acting on the matter, the

Assistant Commissioner carried out a raid Tandlianwala sugar mill, seizing relevant records for further investigation. Expressing concern over the reported issues, Deputy Commissioner Mian Usman Ali has issued a directive to the concerned sugar mill, compelling them to make the outstanding payments to the farmers by January 4. Emphasizing compliance with the Sugar Factories Control Act of 1950, the Deputy Commissioner underscored that the legislation mandates sugar mills to disburse payments within a 15-day timeframe. In the event of non-compliance, strict actions will be taken against mills failing to fulfill their financial obligations to the farmers.

This decisive step by Deputy Commissioner Mian Usman Ali reflects the administration's commitment to ensuring the welfare of farmers and upholding the regulatory framework governing sugar mills. The move aims to address the grievances of farmers and enforce timely payments, thereby fostering a more equitable and transparent relationship between sugar mills and the agricultural community.

Residents flay demolishment of bridge

F.P. Report

TIMERGARA: The people of Lower Dir expressed grief over the demolition of the century-old historical link bridge Balambat built during the British era.

The connection bridge built during the British period, a part of it was washed away by the river in the flood of 2010, but the remaining half of the bridge is firmly established in its original condition and people sit on it during the summer season and enjoy the coolness of the river. Enjoying the weather and the surviving part of the affected bridge was a mirror of British built standard and a national asset but due to unknown reasons, the PKHA department asked the contractor to demolish it.

A contract of 10 lakh rupees has been allegedly given for the demolition and demolition of the historical Blombat bridge built during the British period. It was a standard

monument of the era, what benefit will the government and people get from its demolition, it was abused by demolition.

JUI meeting held: The meeting of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Tehsil Khal was held under the chairmanship of Amir Tehsil Khal Malik Umar Hayat under the leadership of Akhunzada Humayun Syed. In the meeting, District Amir Sirajuddin candidate NA 7 Maulana Muhammad Huzaifa Naib Amir and Maulana Faridullah candidate PK 14 and Tehsil worker's in large numbers. Ameer Sirajuddin and others addressed the meeting.

JUI-F decided to support the candidates who are contesting on the book symbol in the coming elections and participate fully in the campaign and provide all kinds of financial and financial support to make their candidates successful.

Meanwhile, the second meeting of Malakand Youth Assembly was held in

Timergara at District Assembly Hall. Honorary Speaker MPA Shazeer Khan preside over the meeting. In the meeting, Executive Body Chairman Qazi Hanif, General Secretary Malik Shah Naseem, Information Secretary Mansoor Zareen Youth Chief Minister Sulaiman Hussain, Peaceful Party Chief Malik Farman, Progressive Party Chief Sajjad Khan, Youth Deputy Speaker Hamza Adil, Youth Ministers and MPAs participated, all the members expressed their views and said that Malakand Youth Assembly is an opportunity for youth.

There is a flat form which will empower the youth generation politically, socially and economically because the youth is the backbone of any society or state, especially in Pakistan 70% of youth are the future of Pakistan. The youth of K is frustrated, unfortunately there is no proper system to train our young generation.



‘We can’t tell her truth’: Gaza’s hospitals filling with lone orphans

GAZA: When nine-year-old Razan Shabet was brought to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital one month ago, she was unconscious with a severe head injury, a brain haemorrhage and broken legs and arms. For the first four days, she was listed as “101 Unknown”. Nobody knew who she was.

Today, the doctors and nurses at the hospital, where she remains housed in a tent in the compound, having been discharged from emergency medical treatment, still do not have the heart to tell her that both her parents are dead. In the weeks since she first arrived at the hospital, medics have managed to work out that she and her family had been caught in an Israeli air strike on the Nuseirat refugee camp, where they had fled from their home in Tuffah, northern Gaza. Razan was the only survivor.

Ever since she woke up on day five, she has asked for her parents. “The most difficult question we receive is from a child asking you where their father or mother is, and they are already killed,” said Dr Ibrahim Mattar, an emergency doctor at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. “When she asked, I just kept silent and told the child that she should be okay. “She is intelligent, amazing and so cute. She doesn’t know her family was killed, she believes they are all okay. And we really cannot tell her the truth since we are keen that her treatment goes well,” Mattar added. More than 8,200 children have been killed by Israeli air strikes and invading forces since the war began on October 7. Many more have been injured and most are deeply traumatised. Some have lost both parents – in some cases, all of their relatives have been killed. The medical professionals left to care for them in the aftermath have no idea what to do with them – there is simply nowhere for them to go.

A growing proportion of those being brought to hospitals following air strikes and assaults are children, Mattar said, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to care for them. “Razan was crying out at midnight while all other patients were asleep,” he said. “She could not sleep or rest without analgesics, so we had to give her extra doses. I kept reading her stories during the night to distract her from her pain.”

Administering high doses of painkillers has become the only

option to keep frightened, lonely children in a great deal of pain quiet, but it is far from ideal. In a lot of cases, there is no suitable medication available for children, so they are given adult doses rather than nothing at all. Mattar worries about the future health implications of this, he said. Since the war on Gaza began, hundreds of thousands of residents have taken shelter in schools and hospitals in the hopes they might be safer there than in their homes – or simply because their homes have been destroyed and they have nowhere else to go.

With more injured children arriving every day, hospitals have become a de facto home for those who have no parents or family with them. Baby Hassan Meshmesh was saved from under the rubble at just five days old after an Israeli air strike hit his home in Deir el-Balah in November, killing 58 members of his family. He has now been at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital for more than a month – nearly the whole of his short life. “The entire nursing crew takes care of Hassan,” explained Warda al-Awawda, one of the nurses at the hospital. “We try to make sure he feels safe and responds positively to his treatment.”

The hospital has finally been able to locate a distant relative of the baby – Mohammad Meshmesh, 54 – who visits him in the hospital and helps to care for him. Another child who is living alone there is Motaz Abu-Isa, who is seven years old and has recently been discharged from emergency medical care. He has spent 20 days at the hospital without his parents, with a fractured hip, legs and arms. His only relative, Mohammad Abu-Isa, told Al Jazeera: “He lost his family. I was responsible for him. He was eating only one meal a day – some bread with some tomatoes. He was waiting for the war to end to go to the UAE and join his uncles. Now, instead, he will travel there for treatment. He desperately hopes this will end very soon.”

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of displaced Palestinians in Gaza have been forced to flee again towards the south after Israel intensified assaults in the centre of the besieged enclave killing more than 180 people in the past 24 hours. The Israeli army said in a post on X that it was “expanding the operation in the Khan Younis area” of Gaza, previously sheltering hundreds of thousands of people displaced from the north – initially the focus of



Israel’s ground assault.

Israeli shelling near El Amal hospital in Khan Younis killed 41 people over the past two days, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) said, adding that the casualties in repeated Israeli attacks near the facility include “displaced persons seeking shelter”. The UN humanitarian office said an estimated 100,000 more displaced people had arrived in the already-teeming southern border city of Rafah in recent days following the intensification of fighting around both Deir el-Balah in central Gaza and Khan Younis to its south.

Earlier this week, Israeli forces ordered Palestinians out of the crowded central districts of Bureij, Maghazi and Nuseirat, as tanks advanced from the north and east. Attacks on those areas have intensified in recent days, with many residents fleeing to the already-crowded Deir el-Balah, pitching makeshift tents made from sheets of plastic on whatever open ground they could find.

“We suffered a lot. We had the whole night without shelter, under

rain and it was cold, we were with our kids and elderly women,” Um Hamdi, a woman cooking porridge over an open woodfire, surrounded by children, told the news agency Reuters. Nearby, grey-bearded Abdel Nasser Awadallah stood inside a wooden frame set up to be wrapped in plastic to make a tent, and spoke of the family he had lost.

“I buried my children, a child 16-year-old, another one aged 18. Something I really can’t believe, I buried my children at 6:00am while their bodies were still warm. Also my nephew was two years old, I buried him, I buried my wife,” he said. Addressing the UN Security Council, the Palestinian UN envoy Majed Bamyaz said the widescale destruction of Gaza by Israeli operations has made it clear their sole goal is forced displacement.

“They want to make sure that Palestinians in Gaza have no homes to return to,” he said. “They want to make sure they have no life to return.” “They want to make sure that life in Gaza is no longer possible, with one aim, what they call ‘volun-

tary migration’ ... the codename for forced displacement. These are the options for Palestinians: Destruction or displacement, death or displacement,” he said.

On Christmas Eve, the Maghazi refugee camp witnessed one of the deadliest attacks since Israel launched its military offensive on October 7. While the official number of those who were killed stands at 90, residents of the camp near Deir el-Balah told Al Jazeera that in reality, the figure is much higher as entire residential blocks were wiped out. Israel issued a rare apology for killing civilians in the massive air raid that triggered one of the biggest exoduses of the war so far, saying the munitions used were not appropriate for a packed refugee camp and that the high death toll “could have been avoided”. The UN says more than 90 percent of Gaza’s 2.3 million people have been displaced, and many are now fleeing for the third or fourth time.

Many now live in cramped shelters in the 365sq km (141sq miles) of land or in makeshift tents around the southern city of Rafah, on the border with Egypt – which has also not been immune from Israeli attacks. Rafah was hit by new air raids as Egypt prepared to host a high-level Hamas delegation for talks to try and end the nearly 12-week war that has devastated the besieged Palestinian territory. Reuters journalists at the scene of one air raid that obliterated a building in Rafah saw the head of a buried toddler sticking out of the rubble.

The child screamed as a rescue worker shielded his head with a hand, while another swung a sledgehammer at a chisel, trying to break up a slab of concrete to free him. Neighbour Sanad Abu Tabet said the two-storey house had been crowded with displaced people. After morning broke, relatives came to collect the dead wrapped up in white shrouds. Israel’s relentless aerial bombardment and ground invasion in Gaza have killed at least 21,507 people, mostly women and children, according to Gaza’s health ministry. Egypt has taken more of a leading role in pushing for a ceasefire, including introducing a plan to end the fighting. It includes captive and prisoner exchanges between Israel and Hamas.

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”. Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan said that the group will not release more Israeli captives without a “complete and full ceasing of aggressive activities against our people through negotiations that are aligned with our people’s interest”.

The director of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees in Gaza (UNRWA), Thomas White, said that a UN aid convoy had come under fire by the Israeli military. While there were no casualties, White condemned the attack on humanitarian workers. “Essentially, we are delivering aid under fire,” White told Al Jazeera, explaining that the incident took place as a convoy was returning from northern Gaza along a route designated by the Israeli Army.

“They took that route, they encountered some tanks, and those tanks used heavy machine guns to fire at the vehicles,” White said, adding that while there was some damage to one of the vehicles, UNRWA staff was not injured. Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the UNRWA, slammed Israeli forces for firing at the aid convoy. In a post on X, Lazzarini said “shooting” and “other attacks” on aid workers and convoys obstruct “life-saving” operations in the Strip.

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 been only sporadically eased by humanitarian aid convoys entering primarily via Egypt.

International bodies say supplies being let in through Israeli inspections are a small fraction of the enclave’s vast needs. Last week Israel bowed to international pressure to open a second crossing it said would double the number of supply trucks daily to 200, but just 76 were able to enter, according to the United Nations, compared with 500 before the war. 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. UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths described on social media what he called “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 on X. — Aljazeera

South Africa files case at ICJ accusing Israel of ‘genocidal acts’ in Gaza

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa has filed a case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing it of crimes of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza after nearly three months of relentless Israeli bombardment has killed more than 21,500 people and caused widespread destruction in the besieged enclave.

In an application to the court, South Africa described Israel’s actions in Gaza as “genocidal in character because they are intended to bring about the destruction of a substantial part of the Palestinian national, racial and ethnic group”. “The acts in question include killing Palestinians in Gaza, causing them serious bodily and mental harm, and inflicting on them conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction,” the application said.

The ICJ, also called the World Court, is a UN civil court that adjudicates disputes between countries. It is distinct from the International Criminal Court (ICC), which prosecutes individuals for war crimes. As members of the UN, both South Africa and Israel are bound by the court.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has compared Israel’s policies in Gaza and the occupied West Bank with his country’s past apartheid regime of racial segregation imposed by the white-minority rule that ended in 1994. Several human rights organisations have said that Israeli policies towards Palestinians amount to apartheid. South Africa said Israel’s conduct, particularly since the war began on October 7, violates the UN’s Genocide Convention, and called for an expedited hearing. The application also requests the court to indicate provisional measures to “protect against further, severe and irreparable harm to the rights of the Palestinian people” under the Convention.

“South Africa is gravely concerned with the plight of civilians caught in the present Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip due to the indiscriminate use of force and forcible removal of inhabitants,” a statement from South Africa’s Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) said, adding that the country has “repeatedly stated that it condemns all violence and attacks against all civilians, including Israelis.” “South Africa has continuously called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire and the resumption of talks that will end the violence arising from the continued belligerent occupation of Palestine,” the statement added.

Israel has rejected global calls for a ceasefire saying the war would not stop until the Hamas group, whose October 7 attack triggered the current phase of the conflict, was destroyed. Some 1,200 people were killed in the Hamas attack in Israel. The Palestinian group has said its attack was against Israel’s 16-year-old blockade of Gaza and expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. Settlement expansions pose the biggest hurdle in the realisation of a future Palestinian state comprising Gaza, occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. In the latest development in Israel’s war on Gaza, tens of thousands of newly displaced Palestinians in the centre of the Palestinian enclave were forced to flee further south as Israel expanded its ground and air offensive in the centre of the enclave.

Israel has faced global condemnation for the mounting toll and destruction and is accused of meting out collective punishment on the Palestinian people. The court application is the latest move by South Africa, a vociferous critic of Israel’s war, to ratchet up pressure after its lawmakers last month voted in favour of closing down the Israeli embassy in Pretoria and suspending all diplomatic relations until a ceasefire was agreed.

Al Jazeera’s Gabriel Elizondo, reporting from the United Nations headquarters in New York, said the move was “clearly a very important step to try to hold some accountability to Israel.” “Now that South Africa is pushing this to the ICJ, it will be on [the UN’s] agenda to try to make a ruling on this very important question,” he added.

On November 16, a group of 36 UN experts called on the international community to “prevent genocide against the Palestinian people”, calling Israel’s actions since October 7 a “genocide in the making”. “We are deeply disturbed by the failure of governments to heed our call and to achieve an immediate ceasefire. We are also profoundly concerned about the support of certain governments for Israel’s strategy of warfare against the besieged population of Gaza, and the failure of the international system to mobilise to prevent genocide,” the experts said in a statement.

Israel has rejected South Africa’s move as “baseless”, calling it “blood libel”. “South Africa’s claim lacks both a factual and a legal basis, and constitutes despicable and contemptuous exploitation of the Court,” Israel’s minister of foreign affairs, Lior Hiat, said in a statement posted on X. “Israel has made it clear that the residents of the Gaza Strip are not the enemy, and is making every effort to limit harm to the non-involved and to allow humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip,” the statement added. “It does rally public opinion to the reality of what’s going on in Palestine, not just in Gaza but also in the West Bank,” said Al Jazeera’s senior political analyst Marwan Bishara. According to Article 2 of the Genocide Convention, genocide involves acts committed with the “intent to destroy, either in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.”

“Where the disagreement lies is whether there is intent or no intent,” Bishara said. “The three leading Israeli officials have declared the intent, starting with Israeli President Herzog when he said there are ‘no innocents’ in Gaza, the defence minister who said Israel will impose collective punishment on the people of Gaza because they are ‘human animals’,” Bishara said, adding that prime minister Netanyahu also used a biblical analogy in a statement widely interpreted as a genocidal call.

The Palestinian ministry of foreign affairs welcomed South Africa’s move, and called on the ICJ to take immediate action to “prevent further harm to the Palestinian people”. “Israel’s stated policy, acts and omissions are genocidal in character are committed with the requisite specific intent to the destruction of the Palestinian people under its colonial occupation and apartheid regime in violation of its obligations under the Genocide Convention,” a statement by the ministry said. — Aljazeera

Argentina not to join BRICS bloc

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina has announced that it will not join the BRICS bloc of developing economies, fulfilling a campaign promise by newly elected far-right President Javier Milei who has pledged to pursue closer ties with the West.

In a letter dated December 22 but released, Milei told the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa that the timing for Argentina’s membership in the bloc was not opportune. Milei said in his letter that his approach to foreign affairs “differs in many aspects from that of the previous government. In this sense, some decisions made by the previous administration will be reviewed.”

Argentina’s new president, a self-described anarcho-libertarian who has pushed forward a series of radical economic reforms since taking office in December, has said that he will pursue a foreign policy that aligns with Western countries, moving away from the previous administration’s efforts to build ties with other developing countries. Former centre-left President Alberto Fernandez had promoted Argentina’s inclusion in BRICS as a way to foster economic relations with the bloc, whose members account for about 25 percent of world GDP. Argentina had been set to join on January 1, 2024.

Reporting from the capital city of Buenos Aires, Al Jazeera correspondent Monica Yanakiew said that Milei has already issued sweeping changes during his three weeks in office. “He has already made dramatic changes in all walks of life, from expediting divorce procedures to deregulating prices to eliminating subsidies, everything is changing here now,” she said. During his campaign, Milei railed against countries ruled “by communism” such as China and neighbouring economic power Brazil and said he would pursue greater alignment with “free nations of the West” such as Israel and the US in his economic and foreign policy.

However, in his letter to the BRICS leaders, Milei said that Argentina would seek to “intensify bilateral ties” in order to increase “trade and investment flows” without joining the group. — Aljazeera

Sudan paramilitary traps civilians in breadbasket state

KHARTOUM: When Sudan’s second largest city, Wad Madani, fell to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on December 18, Afnan Hind and her family fled to a nearby town to stay with relatives. But the paramilitary group came there too and prevented residents from leaving.

Hind and her family were trapped by a group that kills civilians, rapes women and girls, and loots citizens of their wealth. Days later, she said, RSF fighters stormed their apartment to steal a car parked outside. “My uncle just gave them the keys without resistance. He feared for [the girls in the house].” Hind, 21, told Al Jazeera. “There was immense terror of what the RSF were going to ask for.”

According to civilians, UN agencies and local monitors, the RSF is obstructing people from leaving towns and cities in Gezira state, whose capital is Wad Madani. Gezira is the breadbasket for the rest of Sudan and was a haven for hundreds of thousands of displaced people who relocated from the war-torn capital, Khartoum, earlier in the war, which began in April. About 300,000 people fled – many for a second time – to regions under army control when the paramilitary attacked Gezira, but many are now denied passage through RSF checkpoints.

Those stuck in Gezira said the RSF has committed a myriad of human rights abuses, including subjecting women and girls to sexual violence and killing people for refusing to leave their homes. However, many people don’t have a way to escape, even if the RSF lets them. “The RSF came to our village and looted all the markets and all the cars,” Hind said. “We are left with no food and no way to leave.”

Four days after the RSF entered Gezira, Mohamad Ahmed* and his family were looking to flee. They wanted to go south to nearby Sennar state, yet the road was too dangerous due to clashes between the army and the RSF. Ahmed said his family

decided to walk to a nearby coast where they found a boat to take them to safety.

“The boat basically takes 60 people and it works with paddles. It’s a really old boat,” Ahmed told Al Jazeera. “We are really blessed because we were so exhausted and it seemed that there was no way out for sure.” Others haven’t been so lucky, according to Alain Ouattera, the deputy head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Sudan. He told Al Jazeera that people still in Gezira face a worsening cholera outbreak and the RSF’s attacks may have spoiled a harvest required to feed people across Sudan.

He added that the army impedes aid shipments to RSF-controlled areas, compounding the challenges of delivering life-saving supplies to civilians stuck in Gezira. “For us to get aid to [civilians in Gezira], we have to cross all these regions under [the Sudanese army’s control]. But to get the travel permit required to take aid from one state to the other takes ages,” Ouattera said. “It’s not only risky to get supplies [to civilians], but it’s also so challenging because of all the impediments.” Relief agencies, civil society groups and the UN are calling for the RSF to establish safe corridors out of Gezira.

“The idea is to have a sort of humanitarian corridor not only for us to access people but also for people to safely leave active conflict zones,” Ouattera said. The Sudanese journalist syndicate also recently called on all international bodies to “facilitate safe passage for hundreds of thousands of women, children and elderly civilians stranded in hazardous regions”. But Yousif Ezat, the RSF’s spokesperson, told Al Jazeera that fighters are not preventing people from fleeing or looting cars. He claimed the RSF was cracking down on highjackers by confiscating cars and trucks from drivers unable to prove they own their vehicle.

“To my knowledge, all roads are

open out of Gezira state,” he said. The UN envoy for Sudan, Clementine Nkweta-Salami, echoed calls for warring parties to establish safe corridors. “Parties to the conflict must allow civilians safe passage. People fleeing conflict – especially women, children and those with special needs – must be able to do so safely,” she tweeted. Trying to govern? The RSF is trying to trap civilians in Gezira to prove that they can govern, according to Kholood Khair, a Sudanese expert and the founding director of the think tank Confluence Advisory.

She told Al Jazeera that the RSF wants to give the impression that “everything is fine” even though most people fear for their lives under its rule. “It’s clear the RSF is trying to set up some kind of governance model, but we are also hearing real-life accounts ... of people feeling desperation, anxiety and stress. These reports counter any narrative that the RSF and their supporters are putting out about their ability to make people feel safe,” Khair said.

Women in particular risk being subjected to sexual violence. Just last month, local monitors reported that the RSF shot and killed one woman for resisting rape. She was three months pregnant. Yara Kau*, 21, said her family forced her to flee from Wad Madani. They had already tried to drive out of the city together, but they were turned back at RSF checkpoints, she said. Kau, her younger sister and two male relatives escaped on foot. They walked 40km (25 miles) towards a small town on the outskirts of Gezira. Along the way, two RSF fighters stopped and robbed them.

They also threatened to hurt them, but they let them go after seeing Kau’s sister break down into tears and clasp her Quran. Hours later, they reached a family friend who gave them his car, so they could drive for the last stretch of their journey. Kau is now in Sudan’s eastern city of Kasala, but she misses her parents, who are still in Wad Madani. — Aljazeera

Poland says Russian missile briefly entered its airspace

WARSAW: Polish military authorities have said that a Russian missile briefly passed through the country’s airspace before leaving, prompting concern from the country that borders Ukraine on the day Russia carried out attacks across several Ukrainian cities killing at least 30 people.

Poland, a member of the NATO military alliance, says that the object entered from the direction of Ukraine, entering about 40 kilometers (24 miles) before leaving after about three minutes. “Everything indicates that a Russian missile intruded in Poland’s airspace,” said Poland’s defence chief, General Wieslaw Kukula. “It was monitored by us on radars and left the airspace. We have confirmation of this

on radars and from [NATO] allies.”

The incident comes at a time of high tensions between Russia and European nations located near Ukraine, which Russia invaded in February 2022. Polish officials say they are working to further verify their findings and rule out the possibility of a technical malfunction. The Russian news agency RIA quoted Russia’s charge d’affaires in the country, who was summoned by the Polish government, as stating that Poland had provided no proof of a border violation.

In a social media post, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that the security alliance is monitoring the situation and communicat-

ing with Polish officials. “I spoke with President Andrzej Duda about the missile incident in Poland. NATO stands in solidarity with our valued ally, is monitoring the situation and we will remain in contact as the facts are established. NATO remains vigilant,” Stoltenberg said.

Operational commander of the Polish army Maciej Klisz said that the country’s air defence network had been on high alert due to recent Russian missile and drone attacks in Ukraine and that fighter jets were sent to intercept the missile before it left Polish territory. The military also said that a ground search was being carried out in the area where the missile disappeared off the radar. — Aljazeera

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Geopolitics misserves Russian civil society

IN late 2005, I was sitting at a conference table in Washington with a group of young people from Chechnya. They were trying to win support for the scholarship program that had brought them from their war-torn homeland to universities in Europe. They were meeting with representatives from think tanks and grant-making foundations who mostly talked among themselves, since the Chechen students didn't really speak English.

One think tank staffer said with fervor, “We should ensure these young Chechens become pro-Western.” None of the others (some of whom went on to high-ranking positions in subsequent presidential administrations) objected or so much as raised an eyebrow. Surely, I thought, these students, whose young lives had been blighted by war, who had lost loved ones and their homes, should be “pro-themselves.” Surely we should support them unconditionally without ulterior motives. But I wasn't surprised. This blurring between geopolitical jockeying and ostensibly altruistic support for civil society abroad is what compelled me into activism in the first place.

This conflation has become only more pervasive since then. It has not made geopolitics better: we are embroiled in the largest war in Europe since WWII and witnessing unprecedented levels of armed violence in Israel and Palestine. It has left civil society worse off: less safe and free, with its activists estranged from their communities and less able to achieve the liberal-democratic gains ascribed to them. This applies to Russia and many other countries, adversaries and allies of the West alike. It is therefore appropriate and necessary to audit the ideas and policies that have brought us to the current nadir.

The fact that Western states' support for civil society abroad is tied to their geopolitical agendas is hardly controversial. Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, proudly announced the EU's “new geopolitical agenda on human rights and democracy” soon after the start of her term in 2020. But the paradigm and practice date back much further and have been employed by many Western states and organizations beyond the EU. Von der Leyen's actions since 2020, such as her bizarrely enthusiastic coyness up to Azerbaijan and full-throated endorsement of Israel's bombing campaign against Gaza, also illustrate that when human rights are conflated with geopolitics, geopolitics always comes first.

This “geopolitics of human rights agenda” is implemented via material and political support to local civil society in third countries. Western foreign policy elites engage with the aid-recipient countries in the post-Soviet space or Global South via the foreign aid industry much more intensively than by traditional diplomacy between sovereign equals. Wealthy Western states have come to view their controlling stakes in other countries' civil societies as the natural order of things. It is difficult to talk frankly about the dysfunctions arising from this reality because many of the policy consultants, aid officers and grant managers who work in foreign aid are genuinely motivated by solidarity with activists worldwide. They often hold deeply critical views of their countries' militarist, exploitative foreign policies and would reject the suggestion that their work serves those geopolitical ends. I should know because I have worked alongside them all my adult life. At times, I have been one of them.

But in the final analysis, foreign governments acquire those stakes in other countries' civil societies to exert power over their states for (geo-)political objectives: to destabilize an adversary, tarnish his global reputation, thwart or remove an uncooperative government, manage a friendly one. Foreign policymakers view civil society as a convenient instrument, especially once unruly activists and movements have been domesticated into a template that suits foreign aid industries: registered nonprofits staffed by smooth-tongued technocrats who are safely detached from their communities. Whether domesticated or in its messy, grassroots form, civil society punches above its weight. Activists can play a vocal and influential role in their societies, no less so than business and political elites who possess far greater formal levers of power. But they are also far more pliant to their donors' goals because they need resources.

Embattled activists feel much more understood and appreciated, their rightful leadership recognized, their causes championed by their Western partners than by their own government, community or even families who would prefer they pursued a more stable career. In fall 2012, shortly after Russia demanded that USAID end its activities in the country, I met with shell-shocked U.S. diplomats. Afterward, one of them took me aside: “We made a mistake,” he said quietly. “We shouldn't have supported Golos [a Russian NGO monitoring elections with a critical bent]. Yet resistance to fundraising from Russians continued to hold organizations back. When I gently suggested raising money from Russian citizens to the head of a leading human rights organization in 2012, right after the first “foreign agent” law was adopted, his expression made clear that he thought the idea not just pointless, but distasteful. He preferred to stay independent, he told me.

“Independent of whom?” I thought to myself. His fellow citizens? But by 2019, he had passed the fundraising torch to the younger generation in the organization, who remade their communications strategy with pro bono help from Russia's premiere advertising agencies. Within a year or two, they were raising a meaningful share of the organization's budget in small donations from average Russians. When they described this transformation to me, they spoke of relief, inspiration — and feeling independent. During that same period, the geopoliticization of civil society support accelerated and even veered into hybrid warfare. Accusing states of repressing civil society by depriving NGOs of foreign funding has been turned into yet another cudgel to use against geopolitical adversaries. Pious pretenses about civil society support being innocuous and non-political, have been dropped. By 2020, the last time the EU (the largest single donor to Russian NGOs) announced a grant call under its human rights and democracy program, it looked for projects on fighting “disinformation.” By 2021, an EU-funded initiative enlisted human rights lawyers in target countries to nominate individuals for sanctions. In the era when Western leaders are trumpeting a conflict between democracy and autocracy, conflating supporting civil society with the pursuit of geopolitical objectives has gone into overdrive. We are doubling down on the policies and ideas that led us to the current point instead of interrogating them, instead of releasing civil society from the stranglehold of geopolitics and our strings-attached money.

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Is Russia-Ukraine war set for a big freeze?

Dr. Diana Galeeva

ON the battlefield in the Russia-Ukraine war, the first half of 2023 was a period of buildup toward Ukraine's Kherson and Kharkiv counteroffensives. But there were no swift resolutions. The summer counteroffensive did not produce the desired results, partly because Kyiv did not receive the necessary weapons from its allies, President Volodymyr Zelensky has admitted to the Associated Press. Nonetheless, Ukraine continued with its counteroffensive.

On Dec. 1, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu claimed that the Ukrainian army had lost more than 125,000 people and 16,000 large-scale weapons since the start of the counteroffensive. “Total mobilization in Ukraine, supplies of Western weapons and the introduction of strategic reserves into battle by the Ukrainian command did not change the situation on the battlefield,” he said.

Given these developments on the ground, how will the 2023 phase of the war be assessed? What were its main challenges and developments? And, looking ahead, what can we expect in 2024? Zelensky last month stated that Ukraine needs “three victories” — for the US Congress to approve further military assistance, for the EU to continue its support, and for “open dialogue” on Ukraine's EU accession.

Through NATO, Ukraine's Western allies have promised 500 million (\$539 million) to deal with Kyiv's critical needs. They are also committed to a multiyear assistance program, in addition to billions of euros of financial aid. NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg last month linked these commitments to “our security interests” and urged members of the security alliance to continue backing Ukraine. At the 2023 Vilnius summit, NATO allies also reasserted that Ukraine would become a member of the alliance once specific conditions are met. This involves a careful balance of declaring unconditional ongoing support, including prioritizing Ukraine's security as part of “our” security,

while still setting conditions before the country can be fully welcomed into the bloc.

Individual NATO members have also shown additional commitments to the Ukrainian cause, but there are already signs of looming challenges in 2024. The US has provided more than \$40 billion in security aid to Ukraine. Germany and the Netherlands also recently increased their aid pledges for Ukraine. However, the future of these commitments risks becoming mired in domestic politics, as a proposed \$61 billion US aid package has been held up by Congress. Moreover, the war between Israel and Hamas, which broke out on Oct. 7 is having an effect. The US has reduced its supply of 155mm ammunition by “more than 30 percent,” a senior Ukrainian source told ABC News in November, despite Washington's assurances that the conflict in the Middle East would not have an impact.

With regards to European partners, a proposed 50 billion package from the EU is being opposed by Hungary, delaying its approval. It may also face disruption due to the financial crisis in Germany and the strengthening of the far right in several European countries, such as in the recent Dutch elections.

Along with this financial angle, the diplomatic aspect remains an obstacle. Not least is the fact that Ukraine's membership bid has already divided the union. “Ukraine is in no way ready to negotiate on its ambitions to join the European Union,” Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said last month. In a Foreign Policy article in 2022, Amanda Coakley had called Orban “Putin's Trojan horse inside the European Union.”

Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto, commenting on the European Commission's recommendation that accession negotiations with Kyiv should begin, suggested that Ukraine should not be admitted to the EU until the armed conflict there ends, otherwise it risks spreading throughout

Europe. Meanwhile, Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu warned that NATO allies need to stand firm in supporting Ukraine or risk right-wing and populist forces in the EU becoming even stronger.

The possibility of peace negotiations taking place is crucial to any analysis of how things will play out, but it is not at all clear that such a stage will be reached in 2024. Firstly, the disagreement between the two conflicting sides remains profound. Ukraine “cannot afford any stalemate,” according to Zelensky. The country previously lived under such conditions from 2014 to 2022 and cannot abide by it again in the future. According to the Ukrainian president, the conflict could end if Russia fulfills the conditions of the “peace formula” he presented. However, Moscow has ruled out negotiations based on the Ukrainian plan and called it unacceptable.

There have also been indications from both sides that they expect further conflict. Putin this month ordered an increase in the number of Russian troops of nearly 170,000, bringing the size of the army to 2.2 million, including 1.32 million troops. As for Ukraine, according to the latest polls, almost half of Ukrainians (44 percent) declared their readiness for compromises in peace negotiations with Russia, but about the same number (48 percent) were in favor of continuing hostilities. The survey was conducted by the one of the biggest nongovernmental and independent research organizations in Ukraine, the Rating group.

At the same time, there are other crucial partners in the war to consider. In November, Stoltenberg said that NATO members are not putting pressure on Ukraine regarding negotiations with Russia. According to him, strengthening Kyiv's position in future negotiations requires continuing to provide it with military assistance.

However, a minority of EU members oppose this view. Hungary's Szijarto said: “The propaganda saying that more fighting will create better conditions for

signing a peace agreement is false. Today, the conditions for peace talks are far better than any that there will be tomorrow.” The future course of the war is particularly closely connected with the US position. Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder noted in an October interview with Berliner Zeitung that Washington prevented the conflict from being resolved in March 2022. The US, in his opinion, is the only one that can resolve the issue of a settlement. Therefore, the 2024 US presidential election, in addition to the European Parliament elections, might contribute to evolving approaches toward the war and the role of Western countries in it. This would have a direct impact on the possibility of peace negotiations.

Finally, elections are also expected in Ukraine in the spring of 2024. However, they cannot legally be held during a time of martial law, which continues to apply in the country. Zelensky himself has said that it is “not the right time” for elections. Meanwhile, he is acutely concerned about the “Churchill phenomenon,” referring to the electoral defeat of successful British wartime leader Winston Churchill in 1945. Despite uniting his people for this “national struggle,” Zelensky has faced criticism, which might add a domestic challenger to his external struggles.

To sum up, it is clear that Ukraine remains dedicated to its current course, along with its allies. Meanwhile, Russia continues to build its important role among what it terms the “world majority,” i.e., countries in the Global South and the East, which will help it to sustain its economy and war effort. Amid such dynamics, the situation is unlikely to change in 2024, prompting a pessimistic assessment of the possibility of peace. However, the new year will witness fundamental developments, with planned elections in the US, Europe and Ukraine. It may be that, with many new politicians in power, there will be some shifts in the war. But if the geopolitical situation remains fairly static, there is a possibility that the Ukraine war will become a largely frozen conflict in 2024.

The real ‘Person of the Year’

Belén Fernández

IT'S the end of the year, and you know what that means: lots of hubbub about Time magazine's annual “Person of the Year,” a tradition that began in 1928 as “Man of the Year” but that now honours a “man, woman, group or concept.” Given the ghastly course of 2023, it seems one obvious choice for “Person of the Year” would be the Palestinian doctors and medical personnel currently risking their lives to save others from Israel's genocidal endeavours in the Gaza Strip.

Since October 7, the Israeli military has slaughtered more than 21,000 Palestinians in Gaza, among them at least 8,663 children. According to Healthcare Workers Watch — Palestine, an independent monitoring initiative co-launched by Texas doctor Osaid Alser, no fewer than 340 healthcare workers were killed by the Israelis between October 7 and December 19, including 118 doctors and 104 nurses.

Take, for example, the case of 36-year-old nephrologist Dr Hammam Alloh, a father of two young children, who was killed along with his own father in a November Israeli airstrike on their home. In an October interview with Democracy Now!, Alloh had responded as follows to the question of why he refused to abandon Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City and to move south in accordance with Israeli evacuation orders: “You think I went to medical school and for my postgraduate degrees for a total of 14 years so [as to] think only about my life and not my patients?”

And it is this sort of relentless altruism that has been continuously on display by Palestinian medics as Israel undertakes to eradicate the very concept of humanity by carpet-bombing civilians and targeting hospitals and ambulances. The assault on medical infrastructure and personnel has been actively abetted by a cohort of Israeli doctors who have leapt onto the military bandwagon in order to cheerlead the bombing of Palestinian hospitals.

Not only have Palestinian medics been converted into military targets, they have also had to contend with crippling shortages of fuel, medicines, and basic supplies — shortages that were already bad enough in so-called “peacetime.” Watching family members and colleagues die has effectively become part of the job, and the Israeli army has additionally busied itself abducting and torturing Palestinian healthcare workers.

In a recent interview with the Washington Post, British-Palestinian surgeon Dr Ghassan Abu Sittah — who has volunteered with medical teams in Gaza during numerous Israeli assaults over the years and who spent 43 days in the besieged enclave this time around — described having to make “peace with the idea” that he was not going to survive. Among his patients was a young girl, the sole surviving daughter of a female obstetrician at Al-Shifa hospital who was killed along with her other offspring in an Israeli missile strike. Abu Sittah recalled the girl: “Half of her face was missing. Half her nose, her eyelids had

been ripped from the bone.”

Despite the all-consuming horror, Abu Sittah reported witnessing great “acts of love” and resistance, as well, like with a three-year-old boy who had lost his family and whose arm and leg Abu Sittah was forced to amputate: “When I went to check up on him, the woman whose son was wounded in the bed next to him had him on her lap and was feeding him and her son.”

In sum, it's not just the doctors in Gaza who are heroes. Speaking of heroes, Palestinian journalists have also come under increasingly lethal Israeli fire for bearing witness to the increasingly lethal savagery being carried out in the Gaza Strip. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) notes that this war has constituted the “deadliest period for journalists since CPJ began gathering data in 1992”; between October 7 and December 23, sixty-nine journalists and media workers had been confirmed dead. Of these casualties, 62 were Palestinian, four were Israeli, and three were Lebanese.

On November 20, Palestinian journalist Ayat Khadura was killed in an Israeli airstrike on her home in northern Gaza — just two weeks after she had shared a “last message to the world” in which she stated: “We had big dreams but our dream now is to be killed in one piece so they know who we are.”

In another deadly episode documented by CPJ, Palestinian journalist Mohamed Abu Hassira was “killed in a strike on his home in Gaza along with 42 family members” on November 7. And yet in the view of the Western corporate media, the slaughter of journalists and their extended families in Gaza has evidently been deemed less than newsworthy.

On December 15, Al Jazeera Arabic cameraman Samer Abudaga was killed in an Israeli attack in southern Gaza, where he bled to death after Israeli forces kept ambulances from reaching him for more than five hours. Also injured was Abudaga's colleague, Al Jazeera bureau chief Wael Dahdoudh, who in a previous Israeli attack in October lost his wife, his son, his daughter, his grandson, and various other family members. In spite of unspeakable trauma, Dahdoudh has kept reporting.

The abundance of real-world heroism notwithstanding, Time magazine has selected American billionaire singer-songwriter and pop culture opiate of the masses Taylor Swift as its “Person of the Year” for 2023. As per the Time writup, Swift is in fact the “main character of the world.” (Prior recipients of the honour have included Adolf Hitler, Donald Trump, the Joe Biden-Kamala Harris duo, and Elon Musk — the “richest private citizen in history” who apparently charmed the Time team by “live-tweet[ing] his poops.”)

But while Swift may indeed be the current protagonist of a superficial world rapidly combusting in self-absorbed banality, one wishes more credit were given to real-world heroes. And as 2023 comes to a close with no end to genocide in sight, give me the people of Gaza as “Person of the Year” any day.

Aljazeera

Key trends in 2023 that shaped Turkiye's foreign policy

Sinem Cengiz

AS 2023 comes to an end, it is crucial to analyze the major trends that have influenced Turkiye's foreign policy this year. Unlike any other year, 2023 holds special significance as it commemorates the centennial of the Republic of Turkiye, and because it was marked by several significant challenges and opportunities.

The year started with a tumultuous and tragic incident which not only affected the country's foreign policy, but also its political and social landscape. In February, devastating earthquakes struck the southeast of Turkiye and the north of Syria. The international community's solidarity and response was very important, with some countries initiating “earthquake diplomacy” with Turkiye, including Armenia. Amid this tragedy, a border crossing between Turkiye and Armenia opened for the first time in 35 years to allow humanitarian aid through. This was symbolically important because the two

nations do not have diplomatic relations.

A few days after this tragedy, there was further cause for optimism in the region as Saudi Arabia and Iran restored diplomatic relations, facilitated by China, seven years after severing ties. The event was welcomed by Turkiye's policymakers in Ankara. It reinforced the perspective in Ankara that the deal could encourage Turkiye to cooperate with both Saudi Arabia and Iran on different regional issues without feeling the pressure of picking a side.

Against the backdrop of significant de-escalation in the region — with Ankara starting to normalize relations with several regional actors including Egypt, Israel and the Gulf states — Turkiye held one of the most important elections in its history. The outcome of the May polls was particularly important for the future trajectory of Turkish foreign policy, and saw Hakan Fidan becoming the new foreign minister. With the appointment of

Fidan, who had led the National Intelligence Organization for 13 years, the country entered a new phase in its foreign policy. Fidan is not only internationally known for his back-channel talks to improve Turkiye's diplomatic relations with the Gulf states but is also the leading actor in the country's normalization initiatives with Egypt and Israel.

In the post-election era, Turkiye's policymakers drafted a new approach titled the “Century of Turkiye.” In doing so, and to reflect the importance of the Gulf states, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan embarked on a tour in July encompassing Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE. Erdogan's tour was both symbolically and strategically significant, as several agreements were signed between Turkiye and the Gulf states that sought to diversify their economies, counter security threats and enhance their roles in the

region. This year also saw Turkiye and Egypt, after a decade of frosty ties, engage in efforts to mend relations. With the conclusion of Turkiye's general elections, the rapprochement process gained speed in summer, leading to the mutual upgrade of diplomatic missions to embassies. However, while there was relative calm in the region, from Egypt to Turkiye and from Syria to the Gulf, the conflict between Israel and Hamas in October intensified geopolitical tensions. Just like the rest of the world, Turkiye was caught off guard. The Gaza crisis has seemingly marked a turning point for the Middle East, altering the dynamics of Turkiye's foreign policy as well as delicate regional power balances. It has become a significant focus of Turkiye's foreign policy agenda, especially as there appears to be no light at the end of the tunnel for a resolution. Turkiye's top diplomat

has engaged in shuttle diplomacy, visiting regional countries and international stakeholders, and proposing a new mechanism of guarantors to resolve the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian issue — with the suggestion that Turkiye become one of the guarantors for peace and reconciliation.

In December, amid the Gaza war, the 44th Session of the Supreme Council of the GCC was held, which Erdogan attended. The inclusion of Erdogan reflected Turkiye's commitment to fostering stronger ties within the region, but also to structure and institutionalize its foreign relations, to encompass economic partnerships and security concerns.

In the last days of the year, the foreign affairs commission approved Sweden's NATO membership bid. Turkiye had already ratified Finland's bid to join NATO in April but kept Sweden waiting until the latter took more steps to cooperate on terrorism-relat-

ed issues. Turkiye's move was welcomed by the West, which seeks to strengthen the alliance with regard to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It was Moscow's actions in Ukraine that pushed Sweden and Finland to join NATO. Throughout the year, Ankara has cast itself as a mediator in the Russia-Ukraine war, and attempted to strike a balance between its nominally pro-Kiev policy, and cordial relations with Moscow.

This past year has seen escalating regional and international power rivalries that have resulted in growing uncertainty, and a changing geopolitical landscape marked by security challenges. Amid these concerns, Turkiye has entered its second century with a new foreign policy vision. Ankara's two objectives within this changing landscape were nuanced diplomatic relationships with all actors, and the vigilant and pragmatic assessment of global and regional shifts.

It is in the interest of NATO and Arab states to deepen relations

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg recently made an important visit to Saudi Arabia. This was the first such visit by a sitting secretary-general and will hopefully serve as the starting point for closer NATO-Arab relations in the coming years.

During his stop, Stoltenberg met with Saudi Arabia's Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman and GCC Secretary-General Jassem Mohamed Albudaiwi, in addition to other senior officials. He also delivered remarks at the Saudi Armed Forces Command and Staff College.

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, which started in 2004, currently forms the basis of NATO's relations with Arab states. Although all six members of the GCC were invited to join, only Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE have done so. In 2017, Kuwait became home to the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Regional Center. The focus of the regional center is to increase the shared understanding of security challenges between NATO and its partners in the region through high-level meetings and educational courses. Saudi Arabia, while not a member of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, has shown interest in improving relations with NATO in recent years. This makes Stoltenberg's choice of Saudi Arabia for his recent visit to the Middle East particularly significant.

However, little has been done to advance relations between NATO and the countries of the Middle East in recent years. After much enthusiasm in the early days of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, no new member has joined the grouping in years. The Middle East in general, and the Gulf region specifically, is often an afterthought in NATO's official strategy documents. This is shortsighted. Although NATO's remit is the transatlantic region, there is plenty of security overlap with the Middle East that requires attention.

Last October, Stoltenberg announced the formation of a team of experts to advise him on the best

ways to improve relations between NATO and the countries of the Middle East. They are expected to report their findings and recommendations at the NATO foreign ministerial meeting this coming April. As they undergo their review, there are several things that the group should be considering to

Luke Coffey

Middle East.

Finally, there is an ongoing and shared concern about counterterrorism. This should be another area of cooperation for NATO and the countries of the Middle East. Secondly, NATO should advocate expanding the membership of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. The leaders of NATO and Saudi Arabia should build on the success of the secretary-general's recent visit to Riyadh to formalize a closer relationship between the two sides. Since Saudi Arabia is a leader in the region, NATO cannot have effective engagement in the Middle East without close relations with Riyadh. As the secretary-general told an audience at the Saudi Armed Forces Command and Staff College: "I believe there is huge potential for NATO to do more with Saudi Arabia because we have mutual challenges."

advance relations.

Firstly, NATO must focus on practical areas of cooperation with the countries in the Middle East. This includes cooperation on regional maritime security — especially as shipping in the Red Sea becomes more problematic. Also, there should be increased cooperation on improving air defense capabilities. With the proliferation of ballistic missiles across the Middle East and the increasing numbers of drones being used, the topic of air defense should be at the top of the agenda for NATO cooperation in the region. Finally, there is an ongoing and shared concern about counterterrorism. This should be another area of cooperation for NATO and the countries of the

sides. Since Saudi Arabia is a leader in the region, NATO cannot have effective engagement in the Middle East without close relations with Riyadh. As the secretary-general told an audience at the Saudi Armed Forces Command and Staff College: "I believe there is huge potential for NATO to do more with Saudi Arabia because we have mutual challenges."

Thirdly, NATO should use 2024 as an opportunity to highlight the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative by marking the 20th anniversary of its founding. The alliance can do so by holding a special meeting of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative at the heads of state and government level. This is rarely done as they normally meet only at the foreign

ministerial level.

Fourthly, as NATO marks this anniversary, it would be a good idea for the alliance to issue a strategy document outlining what NATO's goals and aspirations are in the region. When NATO published its most recent Strategic Concept, the document meant to prepare the alliance for future threats and challenges, there was barely any attention given to the Middle East. In fact, in a document that is just over 4,200 words, only one paragraph of about 80 words was devoted to the region. Furthermore, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative was not mentioned at all.

Finally, NATO should appoint a special representative for the Middle East and North Africa region, where personal relationships are paramount. It should appoint a highly respected diplomat with knowledge of the region to be an enduring point of contact between the alliance and the region.

NATO has its hands full right now. Russia's invasion of Ukraine will soon enter its second year. The defense and security of eastern Europe is a constant concern for the alliance. The uncertainty of the upcoming presidential election in the US is making many European members of NATO anxious. The alliance is also undergoing a debate about what role, if any, it should have in Asia with the rise of China.

Even so, NATO cannot ignore the Middle East. Recent history has shown that when it comes to geopolitics and security challenges, the transatlantic region and the Middle East are closely linked. There has also been a good track record of security cooperation to build on. For example, a number of Arab states such as the UAE, Jordan, Qatar and Bahrain have served as part of NATO-led missions in Libya, the Balkans and Afghanistan over the years.

The first 20 years of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative have delivered only modest results. It would be in the interest of NATO and Arab states to deepen relations over the next 20 years.

Arab News

In US, Arabs and Muslims are once again cast as suspect

FOR 80 days, Israel has been waging war on the Palestinians in Gaza with full diplomatic, economic and military support from the US government. The Israeli army has killed 21,000 people, carrying out what legal scholars agree amounts to a genocide and committing countless other war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Yet, rising moral outrage in the United States and across the world is being met with dangerous smear campaigns that weaponise racism to silence the Palestinian freedom movement.

Fuelled by and fuelling Islamophobia and anti-Palestinianism, extreme rhetoric has abetted unprecedented violations of Palestinian, Arab and Muslim American civil rights and even deadly violence against members of these communities. But the negative repercussions of this bigoted repression are not limited to Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims; rather they threaten fundamental moral and civic values that are the basis of democracy.

Over the past two and a half months, we have seen massive street demonstrations, open letters of condemnation, public resignations of officials, and other protest actions aimed at calling for a ceasefire, equal rights for Palestinians, and accountability for war crimes. But this mobilisation has been countered by attempts to portray the pro-Palestinian movement and any critique of Israel's genocide as "anti-Semitic" and supportive of violence or terrorism.

While these tactics are not new, this campaign has expanded in scale and scope to the point that it resembles a McCarthyist witch-hunt, relentlessly targeting Palestinian, Arab and Muslim Americans in particular, as well as allies who have stood against the US-funded violence and apartheid policies of Israel. Since October, thousands of individuals have fallen victim to this broad-brush smear campaign. On US university campuses, student activists have been disciplined by administrators, have had their student groups banned, have been doxxed on the internet, have had their faces and names plastered on billboards with false, defamatory captions, and have lost job offers.

Others who oppose genocide have been pressured to stay silent, faced threats, encountered intimidation and harassment online and in the streets, and endured economic repercussions, including the loss of employment. But this persecution has not been limited to the private sector and online spaces; it has also extended into the halls of power.

In November, a hearing was held in the US Congress in which "witnesses" falsely alleged that US-registered

Osama Abu Irshaid

charities, including the ones I am the director of - American Muslims for Palestine (AMP) and Americans for Justice in Palestine Action (AJPA) - are "providing support" to Palestinian resistance groups. These false allegations extended to the absurd claim that these organisations have called for a "genocide against Israel".

Members of Congress who have spoken out against Israel's atrocities or who have simply met with their constituents as part of annual "Palestine Advocacy Days" were also named and shamed during the hearing. These malevolent "testimonies" seek to make our political contributions and voices toxic in the halls of power by spreading lies and pushing Islamophobic tropes that rely on decades of anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim biases.

It is one thing to fight against slander and misinformation in the media, but it is another - and fundamentally more troubling - to be attacked with false accusations in Congress. That these testimonies containing false and bigoted claims were allowed to proceed shows the utter failure of our public institutions to protect Americans' right to dissent at a time when our tax dollars are being used to support Israel's genocide in Gaza. These defamatory, suppressive tactics have dangerous consequences. They fuel hatred and encourage people to act upon it.

According to the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, there has been a 417 percent increase in hate speech against Muslims since the war began. Civil rights groups like Palestine Legal and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) have also reported an unprecedented number of anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim attacks and discriminatory incident complaints over the past two months. They have seen a more than 200 percent increase compared with the previous year, and this is likely an undercount.

There have been not only verbal attacks and harassment but deadly physical violence, as well. On October 14, Wade al-Fayoume, a six-year-old Palestinian American child, was stabbed 26 times with a military knife by a man who was shouting, "You Muslims must die"; his mother was stabbed a dozen times but survived. On November 25, three Palestinian students were shot for speaking Arabic and wearing keffiyehs; all three sustained injuries from gunshot wounds, and one is now paralysed from the chest down.

A member of our own staff, Neveen Ayesh, was

shot at in her car and her home was broken into on November 11. Apart from inciting violence and intimidation against Palestinian, Arab and Muslim Americans, the smear campaigns are reinvigorating the post-9/11 atmosphere of suspicion, mass surveillance and collective victimisation. For decades, we have worked to expose the racism and double standards of successive presidential administrations and their anti-Muslim policies - from the watch lists and entrapment schemes, to the registries and bans.

We have demonstrated the waste of millions of taxpayer funds for programmes and initiatives that have targeted and deeply traumatised our communities, but produced no results in "improving national security". We have fought to ensure that no community is disproportionately policed and surveilled, no matter what they look like or where they come from. As pro-Israel groups wage a defamation war on our communities in order to obfuscate and distract public attention from Israel's crimes in Gaza, we risk losing that progress towards an inclusive, anti-racist democracy, as slander and lies overcome truth. That is why we call on media outlets, politicians, and progressive leaders to be vigilant about anti-Arab and anti-Muslim tropes that imagine our communities as extensions of governments or political groups in the Middle East, portray us as inherently suspect, and thereby endanger us.

There are three important ways to counter this smear campaign. First, we must recognise the long history of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia in the US and elsewhere, alongside other racism and criminalisation. Second, we must protect the right of individuals to speak up for Palestinian rights and defy attempts to impose a Palestine exception to free speech.

History teaches us that campaigns of suppression, slander and bigoted attacks may start with minority groups like Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims, but they do not stop there. These efforts create the social and legal template for repression of all political dissent. That is why, we, American Muslims, and all voices supporting the rights of the Palestinian people, must act together as a bulwark against attempts to reproduce dark eras of history - when the murder and victimisation of racialised "others" was justified, and when the truth was lost to war-mongering propaganda. Our ability to uphold the Palestinians' right to protest the genocide - and the right of moral people to stand with them - is a fundamental test of our commitment to justice, equal rights and freedom for all. We cannot compromise on these values.

Growing public support for Palestinians will play decisive role in US elections

US politics cannot be judged by its growing distortions and hypocrisies. Despite the media blackout on pro-Palestinian coverage and excessive exaggeration of pro-Israel propaganda, support for the Palestinians is steadily growing around the country. This will have an impact on the upcoming US elections, from the presidency down to local members of Congress.

There is no doubt whatsoever that what Hamas militants did on Oct. 7 was an unjustified brutal war crime. The fact that Israel has oppressed and brutalized Palestinians in Gaza, far more than it has in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, is no justification for the inhuman conduct of some Hamas fighters. It is hard to believe the propaganda of Israel's government, led by a corrupt Benjamin Netanyahu. But if even a small part of what the Israelis say is true, what happened on Oct. 7 is egregious and outrageous. Hamas must be removed.

Israel's apartheid policies certainly stoked flames of anger among many Palestinians. But outrage over brutal and unjust policy should never be the impetus for the inhumane conduct we saw. Yet, whatever the Hamas militants did does not justify what Israel's government is doing to the Palestinian civilian population. No matter what Israel's government, the biased and racist mainstream US news media, or the incompetent and stumbling administration do to defend Israel's war crimes and cruelty against civilians in the Gaza Strip, the real story is getting out. What the American public is seeing

of this horror, mainly on social media, is shocking. It will have a huge impact on the election.

Every day, I hear from many mainstream Americans who express anger at Israel's excessive violence and brutality. Israeli forces so far have killed more than 20,000 people, mostly civilians and including more than 8,000 children, and destroyed tens of thousands of homes and businesses owned by civilians who have nothing to do with Hamas. What we see and what US politicians are embracing is an outburst of Israeli government vengeance, mixed with selfish political exploitation to prop up an unstable Netanyahu government.

The targeting of Palestinians, Muslim and Christian, is driven by a racist stereotype promoted by Israel's morally bankrupt government. It is blindly defended by a host of elected US officials, including the White House, the Senate and Congress, many addicted to the massive infusion of campaign funding from pro-Israel political action committees. They also fear being tarnished during elections by false claims of antisemitism. Israel's morally blind defenders have weaponized claims of antisemitism in a bid to stifle growing outrage boiling up among the American public. Many Americans are afraid to condemn Israel publicly, fearing they will be muddled by Israel's hate-driven guardians. They clearly see Netanyahu's carnage in Gaza, and how even Jews who protest against the killings by both sides are demonized.

This conflict is not strengthen-

ing Israel, but is setting it up for political turmoil and eventual collapse. Americans are afraid to publicly say how they feel, fearing the damaging public bullying and name-calling. But they do not need to hide their feelings when they cast their votes. Recent polling shows significant cracks in American support for Israel.

Yes, Americans condemn the Oct. 7 Hamas violence. But they are extremely uncomfortable with the Israeli government response, and the use of \$14.3 billion in American tax dollars and an endless cache of US-made weapons and bombs in the Gaza carnage.

A New York Times/Siena poll conducted before Christmas shows Americans equally divided between defending and condemning Israel. The New York Times reports that American views on Israel are "fractured," and that is not good for Israel, which for generations has enjoyed unwavering American public support. Not anymore. Worse, the polling shows that the president's political base is split. Many, including Muslim Americans, who gave Joe Biden the push he needed to defeat Donald Trump in 2020 are abandoning him at lightning speed, not just temporarily, but permanently and in a long-term realignment of their political activism.

The growing #AbandonBiden campaign, driven by disillusioned Arab and Muslim American voters, will contribute to his defeat in 2024. Just look at election numbers from critical "swing states" during the 2020 election: Biden defeated

Trump in Michigan by only 154,188 votes, in Arizona by 10,457, in Wisconsin by 20,682, in Georgia by 11,779, in Nevada by 33,596, and in Pennsylvania by 81,660 votes. In Minnesota, which has a large Arab/Muslim population, Biden defeated his rival by 233,012 votes.

The size of these vote differences are dwarfed by the more than 155 million votes cast. Arab and Muslim Americans are doing what many Americans often do, voting "against" candidates in elections rather than "for" a candidate. Undermining Biden is not about supporting Trump. It is a long-term strategy with short-term deficits, such as the possibility of Trump's reelection. But Trump is battling an insurmountable 91 federal and state corruption indictments. He may not survive. This political disarray opens the door for a third-party candidate. Leading the field is Robert F. Kennedy Jr., son of the former US attorney general of the same name, and a nephew of former President John F. Kennedy, both of whom were assassinated.

There are no guarantees. But several things are clear: The American public is no longer in lockstep with the Biden administration, and it is unlikely Trump will return to his controversially-plagued throne. Meanwhile, Israel is racking up a "scorecard" on which Palestinian civilian deaths since Oct. 7 far outnumber Israeli fatalities, but at a huge moral cost that reveals the real face of Israel's immoral government. The US elections mean 2024 will be a year of "shock and awe" never seen before in the West.

ple of whether Brussels was right to impose on any nation measures that had been rejected by its electorate. As with the Conservatives, Euroscepticism in Labour became the obsession of a tiny faction. Freedom of movement, the single market and customs union all became no more than an inevitable part of political life, to be handled but never questioned. Which meant that, when David Cameron called the Brexit referendum, Labour was in no fit state ideologically to participate in the debate. Having avoided answering the fundamental democratic questions over the EU's mandate to dictate policy to its member states, Labour floundered, its political certainties of the last three decades exposed as having been built on sand.

When defeat for Remain arrived, it felt like a logical response to the arrogance of a political establishment that had interpreted Delors's words as a green light to impose a political agenda without the necessity of a messy electoral mandate. All that was needed instead was the attachment of a label bearing the EU flag. They were wrong, and so was Delors. Labour is still paying the price.

Jacques poisoned British democracy

JACQUES Delors, whose death was announced this week, could claim to have had a greater impact on British politics than any of his predecessors or successors as European Commission president. Indeed, he was key to the process by which the British Labour movement transformed itself from avowedly Eurosceptic to one that was overwhelmingly pro-EU.

Much is made of Delors's keynote address to the Trades Union Congress in 1988, when, according to the more rose-tinted version of events, his rhetoric so moved his previously belligerent audience that they almost instantaneously gave up on their previous attempts to end Britain's membership of what was then known as the European Community (EC). At the 1983 general election, Labour had pledged to negotiate Britain's withdrawal from the bloc, a promise fully endorsed by most of the party's trade union affiliates. But Delors's vision of a Europe with a "social dimension" - in which every worker in every member state was guaranteed better working conditions covered by a "collective agreement" with their employer - was only so attractive

because of the UK political context of the time. As in 1983, the 1987 general election had resulted in a landslide for Margaret Thatcher's (pro-European) Conservatives. The unions were facing the prospect of many more years of paying millions of pounds of their members' dues to a party that seemed incapable of moving from impotent opposition into government.

And then Delors came along with a new vision, offering the very radical social and economic change for Britain that the voters had overwhelmingly rejected, despite Neil Kinnock's glossy election campaign. No wonder the idea was an exciting one. If the unions and the Labour Party itself could swallow their scepticism about the EC - and let's face it, where had opposition to it got them so far? - then at least some of the progressive changes they wanted might still be secured without the need for the direct approval of the voters. The pill was sweetened by Delors's focus on solidarity, inclusion and co-operation - exactly the kind of language that was rarely heard on the lips of Mrs Thatcher, whose support for the single mar-

Tom Harris

ket was feared to mask a new era of cut-throat, pan-continental capitalism.

Delors's vision allowed the trade unions and the Labour Party to regard the EC as an ally of theirs in the fight against the prime minister. Future general elections may well be lost (and were) but so long as we remained in the EC, we could count on our Left-wing allies across the Channel to make the sort of changes that electoral and parliamentary arithmetic denied Labour the opportunity to accomplish. It was a fatal bargain. Less than a year after Delors's appearance at the TUC, Labour had transformed its position on Europe, winning an impressive victory over the Conservatives at the 1989 European parliament elections on a promise to work towards Delors's vision of a "social Europe". But the fundamentally undemocratic foundation of the new policy platform proved to be a ticking time bomb for the party.

Having successfully performed such a screeching and electorally successful U-turn on Europe, Labour became so devoutly pro-EU that it never felt the need to debate or even question the princi-

Keeping the hope for health alive

THE 2023 was a Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also visited in neighbouring Türkiye, were devastated by the terrible earthquake in February.

Without peace, there is no health, and without health, there can be no peace. Insecurity, poverty and lack of access to clean water and hygiene fanned the spread of infectious diseases in many countries. The resurgence of cholera is especially concerning, with a record number of 40-plus outbreaks around the world. And in terms of emergency preparedness and response, gaps remain in the world's readiness to prevent the next pandemic.

But 2024 offers a unique opportunity to address these gaps. Governments are negotiating the first-ever global agreement to protect communities, countries and the world from the threat posed by pandemics. The Pandemic Accord is being designed to bridge the gaps in global collaboration, cooperation and equity.

The accord, and plans to strengthen the International Health Regulations, represent monumental actions by governments to create a safer and healthier world. And as WHO closes out our 75th year as the "world's" health organisation, I extend by my sincere gratitude to health workers, partners and WHO colleagues, on our shared journey to achieve Health for All. Lastly, during this holiday season, I am sure that everyone will join me in hoping that the New Year will bring peace, health and prosperity for all people around the world.

advancing universal health coverage, ending tuberculosis and protecting the world from future pandemics. Each of these achievements, and many more, demonstrated the power of science, solutions and solidarity to protect and promote health.

But 2023 has also been a year of immense and avoidable suffering and threats to health. The barbaric attacks by Hamas on Israel on October 7 left around 1,200 people dead and more than 200 taken hostage. Reports of gender-based violence and mistreatment of hostages are deplorable. This was followed by the unleashing of a devastating attack on Gaza, which has killed more than 21,000 people - mainly women and children - and injured over 55,000.

At the same time, hospitals and health workers have been repeatedly attacked, while relief efforts are not coming close to meeting the needs of people. As of December 22, only nine of 36 health facilities in Gaza were partially functional, with only four offering the most basic of services in the north. For this reason, we call again for an immediate ceasefire.

War and armed hostilities, sadly, have plagued too many other locations around the world, including Sudan, Ukraine, Ethiopia and Myanmar, to name but a few. I saw first-hand the suffering of war-weary people in northwest Syria who, like communities I

Gohar stresses legal role to revive Pak Steel Mills

KARACHI (INP): Federal Minister for Commerce, Industry, and Production, Dr. Gohar Ijaz, emphasized the pivotal role of responsible legal actions in the restoration of Pakistan Steel Mills.

The session in Karachi, centered around the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TADAP) and Pakistan Steel Mills, provided insights into the factors contributing to the decline and closure of the steel mills.

During the discussion, the Federal Minister underscored the significance of audits spanning from 1982 to 2023. By closely examining the Performance Indicators (KPI) of Pakistan Steel Mills, the government and the State-Owned Enterprises Investment Committee (SIFC) can play a crucial role in the revival process through their responsible legal interventions.

In a related development, the caretaker government made the strategic decision to remove Pakistan Steel Mills from the Conjugation List, signaling a shift in approach towards addressing the challenges faced by the steel industry.

Additionally, officials from TADAP, led by Chief Executive Zubair Motiwala, extended an invitation to the Federal Minister to attend the upcoming "Fourth Pak-Africa Trade Development Conference (PATDC)" and Single Country Exhibition (SEC) scheduled to take place in Cairo, Egypt next month.

The fourth edition of PATDC and SEC is expected to attract participation from major economies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, including Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Mauritania. Over 100 Pakistani business owners and entrepreneurs are slated to form a delegation to Cairo, actively engaging in the exhibition and fostering trade ties with diverse international partners.

As the efforts to rejuvenate Pakistan Steel Mills gain momentum, the emphasis on responsible legal actions and strategic international collaborations becomes increasingly vital for the revival and sustainability of the steel industry in the country.

Weekly inflation clocked over 43%: Food prices and energy tariffs worsening cost-of-living crisis

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chicken and eggs as well as vegetables were among the items that pushed the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) up yet again on year-on-year basis to 43.25 per cent as food inflation combined with rising energy tariffs continue worsening the cost-of-living crisis in Pakistan.

Stagnant wages in the absence of any direct government cash support means purchasing power is shrinking at a rate that is unprecedented in the country's history.

With more increase in power and gas tariffs on the cards, there is very little likelihood of taming inflation despite the predictions made by the central bank and the government authorities.

One of the important but ignored facts is the booming food exports which are responsible for reduced supply and rising prices in the country – a trend showing complete lack of understanding or, at least, will on the part of government.

India just across our eastern border could have been a guide in respect, but no one has followed the example of New Delhi barring or imposing restrictions on exports of rice, onion and other food items – a policy designed to stabilise the domestic market and arrest inflation.

The figures released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) show that the SPI stood at 311.14 for the week ending December 29 compared to 310 recorded for the previous week and 217.20 last year.

However, the actual food inflation is much higher than the numbers given as the food prices charged from the consumers are much higher the official rates.

Earlier, the inflation rate in November – calculated by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) – had surged to 29.2pc on annual basis, which missed the estimates given by the State Bank of Pakistan and the finance ministry.

In the given scenario, the persistent rise in inflation means the rate recorded for December too would be higher than expected with the figures to be released early next week.

Meanwhile, this alarming trend is also a clear indicator of interest rates staying at the current record-high level, with a worst case scenario of another rate hike if inflation stays out of control.

Hence, Pakistan may not be among other countries around the world – both developed and developing included – where rate cuts are imminent next year, a possibility that is already weakening the US dollar in global currency markets – at least in the first quarter.

The higher interest rates will keep the economy crippled, thus no expansion in business activity and creation of job opportunities.

However, the only thing that Pakistan can hope for is a stable elected government after the February 8 elections, which is pro-business and has the will as well as the capacity to control prices and cut interest rates. But the elements involved in May 9 violence are already making efforts and using fake news as a propaganda tool to make the whole electoral exercise controversial to create and maintain political instability for a long period.

Swiss watchdog mulls clawing back bonuses

ZURICH (Reuters): Switzerland's financial regulator wants to discuss the ability to claw back bonuses from bankers as part of stronger powers following the fall of Credit Suisse and sale to UBS (UBSGS).

"The question is on the table and must be discussed now," FINMA Chairwoman Marlene Amstad told newspaper Schweiz am Wochenende, when asked about the right to demand bonuses be repaid.

"The Credit Suisse case shows that for decades the bank has incurred losses and at the same time paid out high bonuses," she said in the interview on Saturday.

"We therefore need a better legal basis so that FINMA can intervene earlier and more systematically."

FINMA has already demanded stronger powers to oversee lenders in future after it came under fire for its tepid response to the mounting problems at Credit Suisse before the bank's crash in March.

The regulator has previously said it wanted the ability to issue fines, publish details of enforcement proceedings, and increase accountability by establishing a set of rules that identify specific responsibilities for senior executives - mirroring a framework adopted in Britain.

FINMA cannot currently exercise these powers, with the decision on whether to grant them in future a matter for the Swiss parliament, said Amstad, who has led the watchdog since 2021.

"In the money business, money plays a role," she told the newspaper. "That's why we need fines and why we need the right incentives when it comes to remuneration."

The power to publicise FINMA's proceedings in future would also help, Amstad said.

"We have teeth and use them, but we should also be allowed to show them," she said. "Today, the law requires that many of our actions remain publicly invisible, which in turn can be interpreted as inaction."

"The Credit Suisse case has once again shown us how important it is to inform other market participants and the public. With this strict obligation of confidentiality regarding measures taken, Switzerland is an exception internationally."

FINMA also wanted to have a say in remuneration models at banks, although this did not mean setting wages, Amstad said.

"That's not our job," she said. "But we need more legal means to intervene in the remuneration system."

Boeing urges 737 Max inspections

LONDON (BBC News): Boeing is urging airlines to inspect its 737 Max airplanes for a possible loose bolt in rudder control systems. The airplane maker called for the inspections after an international operator discovered a bolt with a missing nut, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said.

An airplane's rudder is used to control the aircraft while in flight. "The issue identified on the particular airplane has been remedied," Boeing said.

"Out of an abundance of caution, we are recommending operators inspect their 737 Max airplanes and inform us of any findings. We informed the FAA and our customers and will continue to keep them aware of the progress."

The FAA said it was "closely monitoring targeted inspections of Boeing 737 Max airplanes to look for a possible loose bolt in the rudder control system".

Boeing has recommended that the checks - which take only about two hours - happen within the next two weeks.

Any problems involving a faulty rudder would likely be identified in a pre-flight check, as crews routinely examine the rudder system before flying, Boeing said.

Anthony Brickhouse, an air safety expert at the Embury-Riddle Aeronautical University, said that airlines "need to take it seriously".

Markets wary post 2023 US stock surge

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): As Wall Street closed the books on a surprisingly strong 2023, the focus is shifting to the US presidential election and other risks confronting equities in 2024.

Major indices faltered in Friday's final session of the year, but the declines were minimal compared with the winnings amassed over the last 12 months.

"This has been a great stock market year," said David Kotok, chief investment officer of Cumberland Advisors.

Propelled by so-called "Magnificent Seven" stocks, the Nasdaq led the major US indices with a gain of 43 percent.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average tacked on 14 percent while the broad-based S&P 500 jumped 24 percent.

The surge – which was mirrored by double digit gains on leading Asian and European bourses – has surprised leading market watchers who had bet on a recession in 2023 given the Federal Reserve's aggressive interest rate increases to counter inflation.

"We started the year fearful because there were concrete signs of recession," said Maris Ogg of Tower Bridge Advisors. "You end the year with complete euphoria."

Many of the gains accumulated since late October as market watchers cheered moderating inflation and a still-strong US labor market as indicating the US economy could avoid a recession.

The Federal Reserve's December forecast of three interest rate cuts in 2024 "poured more fuel in the market's fire," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

The market also benefited from emergency measures engineered by the Fed and other US bank regulators following the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank in March.

Steps such as guaranteeing all deposits of SVB and two other banks that ended up failing contained the crisis, avoiding a broad economic impact.

The market has also cheered advances in artificial intelligence in the belief that the technology will further boost productivity and growth.

Bullishness over AI helped produce the outsized gains for the "Magnificent Seven" stocks: Amazon, Apple, Google parent Alphabet, Meta Platforms, Microsoft, Nvidia and Tesla.

Among international markets, Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei index finished surged more than 28 percent in 2023, its best performance in a decade.

Frankfurt registered a yearly gain of 20.3 percent and Paris 16.5 percent, having recently hit record heights.

London, however, gained less than four percent in 2023, with analysts pointing to fears interest rates could stay high due to inflation.

For now, US investors are broadly confident of the inflation outlook.

"The market clearly closed out 2023 on a very hopeful note," said O'Hare.

Stocks could have further upside if the job market stays strong, O'Hare said.

However, stocks could suffer if the economic picture deteriorates or if the Fed backs away from interest rate cuts, he said.

Analysts are currently estimating healthy 2024 earnings growth of 12 percent.

But given higher labor costs 2024 could prove a "difficult" year for earnings, said Ogg, who also pointed to lofty equity valuations as a potential drag.

Then there is politics.

While investors likely already have the 2024 presidential election somewhere on their radar, the time frame was too distant to affect trading in recent months.

"The uncertainty premium of political dysfunction in the US is very high and not measurable," said Kotok, who noted the unpopularity of President Joe Biden and his likely challenger, former president Donald Trump.

"The country is faced with a Biden Trump rematch that it doesn't want," Kotok said.

Biden's approval rating was 39 percent at the end of 2023, according to Gallup.



ISLAMABAD: A vendor displaying seasonal fruit oranges for bidding to attract customers at fruit and vegetable market in Federal Capital.

FBR tax collection in six months crosses target

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Federal Board of Revenue has crossed the IMF's tax target in first six months of the current fiscal year, sources said on Saturday.

"The International Monetary Fund (IMF) had set Rs 4.425 trillion revenue collection target for six months while Rs 4.44 trillion tax has been collected in the period," sources said.

The target was 35% above in comparison to last six months of the previous year.

According to sources, the FBR collected 2.13 trillion with 730 billion increase in income tax, while 1.5 trillion were collected in sales tax and 265 billion rupees in federal excise duty.

The revenue board collected 540 billion rupees in customs duty, which were 100 billion rupees down to the set target.

More than 50 billion rupees target has been set for the last two days of the year.

All FBR offices and banks have been directed to keep open on Saturday and Sunday till late night for tax collection.

The tax defaulters' telephone, electricity and gas connections will be disconnected under the IMF conditions.

Gold rates decline by Rs900 to Rs220,000

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs.900 and was sold at Rs.220,000 on Saturday compared to its sale at Rs.220,900 on the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs.771 to Rs.188,615 from Rs.189,386 whereas the price of 10 grams 22 karat gold went down to Rs.172,897 from Rs.173,604, 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 \$8 to \$2,082 from \$2,090, the Association reported.

Telecom sector to be promoted

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Caretaker Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication (ITT), Dr Umar Saif has said the government is taking all possible steps to promote telecom sector in the country.

Presiding over a meeting at the headquarters of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority in Islamabad, the Minister announced to extend the national roaming to motorways and national highways to facilitate travelers, according to a Radio Pakistan's report.

The Minister expressed hope that the establishment of a Telecommunication Tribunal would expedite the resolution of consumer, telecom operator, and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) matters.

CCP directs brands to make full disclosure on product discounts

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) advises shoe and clothing brands offering discounts to ensure complete and visible disclosures regarding actual and discounted prices. Brands violating this directive may face enforcement actions by the CCP.

During the ongoing seasonal surge in discounts, particularly within clothing and shoe brands, CCP uncovered instances of deceptive marketing practices. Preliminary investigations indicate that such practices may violate Section 10 of the Competition Act, 2010, constituting deceptive marketing.

The CCP's survey and preliminary probe identified 27 brands offering 'flat' discounts on their products. However, CCP noticed that the 'Flat discount' didn't apply to all items. The discount advertised outside the shop was higher than the actual sale prices inside. The disclaimer about 'Terms & Conditions' had an illegible font size. In numerous cases, 'Terms & Conditions' weren't mentioned at all.

Additionally, certain offers, like 'Flat 50% plus 20% on bank cards,' had differing terms for online and retail purchases, leading to confusion and potentially misleading consumers into uninformed purchases. These discrepancies were observed in approximately 96% of the outlets surveyed.

This lack of disclosure containing essential information hampers consumers' ability to make informed decisions. CCP advises consumers to exercise vigilance and thoroughly review the terms and conditions of discounts and sales offers to avoid falling victim to deceptive marketing practices.

CCP has already issued "Guidelines on Section 10: Deceptive Marketing Practices," which also prohibit 'Bait and Switch Advertising'. It is the act of advertising a product at a low price but charging a higher price at the point of purchase.

These guidelines emphasize the responsibility of undertakings to ensure clear disclosure of terms and conditions across all media to avoid creating false impressions about the goods on offer. Fine print disclaimers and qualifications that are difficult to read or hide important information are strongly discouraged.

CCP remains committed to its mandate under the Competition Act, striving to ensure free competition, enhance economic efficiency, and protect consumers from anti-competitive behaviour.

CKD/SKD import decreases 42.77 per cent

SLAMABAD (APP): The import of completely and semi-knocked down (CKD/SKD) products into the country witnessed a decrease of 42.77 per cent during the first five months of the current fiscal year (2023-24) as compared to the corresponding period of last year.

Pakistan imported CKD/SKD products worth \$370.835 million during July-November (2023-24) as compared to the imports of \$647.943 million from July- November (2022-23), according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

Among the CKD/SKD products, the import of buses, trucks and other heavy vehicles went down by 57.24 per cent from \$168.552 million last year to \$72.065 million during the months under review while the imports of motor cars also dipped by 38.42 per cent from \$ 455.356 million to \$280.420 million. In addition, the import of motorcycles witnessed negative growth of 23.65 per cent from \$24.035 million to \$18.350 million.

Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, CKD/SKD imports into the country during November 2023 decreased by 35.28 per cent, from \$141.061 million in November 2022 to \$91.297 million.

Every month, CKD/SKD imports during November 2023 surge by 232 per cent when compared to the imports of \$27.495 million in October 2023.

TSX ends 2023 on a high note

TORONTO (Reuters): Canada's main stock index ended higher on the final trading day of the year, wrapping 2023 with gains, powered by a boost in energy and financial stocks.

The Toronto Stock Exchange's S&P/TSX composite index (.GSPTSE) was up 29.06 points, or 0.14%, at 20,958.44, a third consecutive weekly gain.

Although battling inflationary winds, Canadian stocks snapped last year's declines to climb 8% in the year, entering 2024 with fresh hopes of an interest rate cut by the Bank of Canada.

"In 2023, equity markets showed remarkable resilience, providing a significant snapback stock market recovery as the major stock market indices ascended the proverbial wall of worry," said Brandon Michael, senior investment analyst at ABC Funds.

"There remains many reasons to be optimistic and bullish on stocks in 2024... The economy is on strong footing, consumers' resilience, inflation is decelerating sharply and earnings continue to surprise."

US stocks closed modestly lower on the last trading day of 2023 and capped a robust year-end rally as investors eyed easier monetary policy in the year ahead.

In Canada, the energy sector (.SPTTEN) rose 0.3% as crude prices gained. Financials (.SPTTFS) rose 0.3% and closed the year 8.7% higher.

The information technology (.SPTTTK) index led yearly gains, soaring nearly 57%, helped by a 123% surge in Shopify (SHOP.TO). On Friday, they were down about 1.4% and dragged the broader tech index.

Healthcare (.GSPTTHC) stocks are up 23% for the year and the index marked its first gain in six years.

The materials sector (.GSPTTMT), which includes precious, base metals miners and fertilizer companies, was among the worst hit on Friday, dropping 0.4% and about 2.9% during the year.

The index was weighed by a dip in the prices of gold and copper as the dollar strengthened.

Trading remained slim during the day as investors broke for the year-end holiday. The TSX will be shut on Jan. 1 for New Year's Day.

On the corporate front, a US court approved Hut 8 to proceed with the full mining operations plan concerning Celsius Network bankruptcy proceedings. However, the shares reversed earlier gains to drop nearly 17%.

Shanghai launched pilot project

SHANGHAI (APP): Metro services in Shanghai launched a pilot project to transport express parcels during off-peak hours to reduce road congestion and carbon emissions of the courier sector.

The three-month trial run will involve certain sections of Line 1 and Line 2. Each train running on the two routes will designate some parts of its rear carriage to carry parcels in certain afternoon periods.

The items to be delivered include newspapers, magazines, and intra-city packages, which will go through strict security checks, according to the subway operator Shanghai Metro.

The service was launched by the Shanghai Metro together with SF Express and China Post, two leading courier service providers in China.

Xu Chen, an operations director of SF Express, said express delivery by subway would raise their efficiency by more than 20 percent compared with road transport. Chinese cities, including Beijing, Wuxi, and Shenzhen, had previously piloted the subway parcel delivery service.

He Yingze, director of the Division of Market Supervision and Inspection of the Shanghai Municipal Postal Administration, expected more subway lines and courier enterprises to participate in this service in the future.



In brief

RYK wins Kabaddi Tournament

SIBBI (Monitoring Desk): An All-Pakistan Kabaddi Tournament was organised in Sibbi district of Balochistan under the auspices of FC Balochistan (North). The tournament continued for a week, in which eight teams participated from different cities of the country. A large number of local people, including tribal elders of Sibbi district, students, and players of universities and colleges, attended the tournament. The final match of the tournament was played between Rahim Yar Khan Club and Khan Khudaye Marghzani Club, and won by the former after a thrilling contest. At the end, the winning team and players were awarded prizes and trophies. The enthusiasm of the players and locals in the final match was palpable. At the end of the final match, tent pegging and other cultural exhibitions were also organized, which were well appreciated by the participants. The players and local people, while appreciating the efforts of FC Balochistan (North), said that organizing sports in Balochistan will attract the youth towards positive trends.

Team selected for Athletic competitions

FAISALABAD (APP): The Divisional sports Department has selected athletic team to participate in the Inter-division competitions to be held in Lahore. In this connection, the Sports Department arranged 100 metre, 200 metre, 400 metre, 800 metre race, 400x4 metre relay race, javelin throw, shot put, high jump and long jump contests at Firdous Colony Jhang Road. The players belonging to Faisalabad, Jhang, Toba Tek Singh and Chiniot district participated in the contests and showed excellent performance. Divisional Sports Officer Chaudhry Tariq Nazir, District Sports Officer Sajida Lateef, Hajji Muhammad Rafi, Mudassar Baig, Muhammad Bashir, Rana Saleem, Naheed Raza and others were also present.

Chess C'ship' begins

LAHORE (APP): The Quaid-e-Azam Chess Championship 2023, organised by the Punjab Chess Association and Punjab Sports Board, started at Nishtar Park Sports Complex here on Saturday. As many as 235 players from all over the country are participating in the tournament. Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman attended the opening ceremony as the chief guest. He encouraged players from different provinces by playing chess with Rehan Nasir, Obida Manzoor and Mehmoed Lodhi. He also expressed keen interest in the bullet game between famous players Tanveer Gilani and Zohaib Gilani. Speaking at the opening ceremony, the chief secretary said that the Punjab government would provide all kinds of support for the promotion of sports, including chess. He said that as a player it is an honor to represent the country at the international level, adding that good players earn fame for the country and nation. He said that the game of chess is not only a source of entertainment but also improves mental capabilities. President Punjab Chess Association Dr. Naeem Rauf said that the country's first chess academy had been established in Lahore with the support of Punjab Sports Board. He mentioned that in this academy players were being provided training to compete at national and international levels.



Rodri scored City's late winner when they beat Sheffield United in August, and opened the scoring early on this time, with his fifth goal of the season.

Murray longs to play against Nadal and Djokovic again

Brisbane (AFP): Andy Murray conceded Saturday he longed for the chance to play again on the big stage against superstars Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal. Speaking ahead of the season-opening Brisbane International, the 36-year-old said he missed the days when he regularly met Djokovic, Nadal and Roger Federer at the business end of major tournaments.

Murray matched it with the big three for a decade between 2006-16 before a run of injuries resulted in time off court and a slide in his ranking.

While the others powered on to title after title, the Scotsman, now ranked 42, was forced to battle his way back, his career never reaching its former heights.

The last time he met Nadal was in the semi-finals of the Madrid Masters in 2016 and while he played Djokovic in the Madrid Masters last year, he had not met him since

2017 before that.

"Obviously I would like the opportunity to play against them again, ideally in the latter stages of big tournaments," Murray said. "That's something that obviously I've missed, that feeling, not had that opportunity really.

"If I get the opportunity to practise with them, I still really, really enjoy that. "It does bring back some good memories, but ideally, I'd want to be doing that in the tournaments, not in the first rounds."

Murray has been practising with Nadal in Brisbane as the Spaniard makes his comeback after almost 12 months away with injury.

He said Nadal was moving well and showing no signs of the hip injury that forced him off tour after the 2023 Australian Open. Murray also said Nadal appeared to have made only minor changes to his game in his time away from the tour. "His second serve is sig-

nificantly harder than what he did earlier in his career," Murray said.

"But yeah, the rest of the game, unless there's a physical issue, there's not really much reason for him to make huge changes to that - it's been pretty successful.

"When he's fit and healthy, that game style is what has worked really, really well for him, looking for his forehand, trying to dominate with that shot.

"If he wants to be successful in the future, that's what he should be looking to do. That's how he was trying to play today."

Murray takes on second-seeded Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov in the first round, a rematch of the 2013 Brisbane International final which Murray won in two close sets. Dimitrov won their last encounter at this year's US Open. "I need to play really well, certainly much better than there, if I want to get through it," Murray said.

Aisam, Aqeel clinch doubles title

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi and Aqeel Khan showcased their skills and experience to lift the men's doubles title of the 8th Serena Hotels National Ranking Tennis Championships 2023 at PTF-SDA Tennis Complex, Islamabad on Saturday.

The two veterans overcame the pair of Barkatullah and Yousaf Khalil 6-0, 6-2 in a one-sided affair. Meanwhile, in the boys 18 & under singles final, Ahmed Nael Qureshi of Westminster academy Islamabad overcame M. Hamza Aasim 6-3, 6-2 to annex the title.

Fixtures for Sunday: Ladies Single Final: 10:00 am (Sarah Mahbbob vs Meheq Khokhar)

Men's Single Final: 01:15 pm (Aqeel Khan vs Muhammad Shoaib)

Pat Cummins reacts to Hafeez's 'better than the other team' remarks

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Australia's captain Pat Cummins to Pakistan Cricket Team Director Mohammad Hafeez remarks regarding the better team of the Boxing Day Test.

The enthralling Boxing Day Test between Pakistan and Australia concluded on the fourth day when Pakistan, in pursuit of 317, bundled out on 237 in the second innings. The touring side was at one stage in a comfortable position to seal a historic victory when they required a further 100 runs with five wickets in hand.

However, Mohammad Rizwan's debated dismissal off Pat Cummins opened the floodgates for Pakistan and they collapsed from 219/5 to 237 all out.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Cricket Team Director Mohammad Hafeez not only criticized the umpiring in the Boxing Day Test but also claimed that the touring side played "better than the other team". "The whole game, I will sum up, our Pakistan team played better than the other team in general," stated Hafeez.

Later in the post-match press conference, Pat Cummins reacted to Mohammad Hafeez's remarks and highlighted the end result with a witty smile. "Ahhhh. Cool. They played well. I am glad we got the win," stated Cummins. "It doesn't really matter, does it? It is the team who wins at the end," he added. For the unversed, Australia took an unassailable 2-0 lead over Pakistan in the three-match Test series with a 79-run victory in the second Test.

The two sides will now square off in the third Test in Sydney, scheduled to commence on January 3. Australia Test squad

Pat Cummins (c), Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Mitch Marsh, Steve Smith, Mitch Starc, David Warner.

Pakistan Test squad

Shan Masood (c), Aamir Jamal, Abdullah Shafiq, Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Mir Hamza, Mohammad Rizwan, Mohammad Wasim Jr, Saim Ayub, Salman Ali Agha, Shaheen Afridi, Saud Shakeel, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Sajid Khan.

Man City beat Blades to close gap at the top

M A N C H E S T E R (Agencies): Manchester City ended a stellar year on a high note by beating a battling Sheffield United side to move within two points of Premier League leaders Liverpool.

Rodri gave the defending champions an early breakthrough when he latched on to Phil Foden's neat pass and fired into the bottom corner of the net from the edge of the area.

The Blades' packed defence meant City had to wait to add a second but Foden was the provider again when it arrived midway through the second half, with his low cross despatched by Julian Alvarez.

City, who were crowned Fifa Club World Cup winners before Christmas, displayed all five of the major trophies they have won in 2023 on the pitch before kick-off. It was a reminder to their rivals that they remain the team to beat this season, and so was the sight of Kevin de Bruyne in their squad after more than four months away with a hamstring injury.

The Belgium midfielder did not make it on to the pitch this time, but the sight of him warming up on the

touchline in the second half brought huge cheers from the home fans.

In contrast, the Sheffield United fans had little to get excited about, as their side offered little in attack other than a flurry of chances just before the break. Defeat felt inevitable as soon as City scored their second goal, and Chris Wilder's side remain bottom of the table, and without an away win this season.

City chasing more glory in 2024

City had dropped points through conceding late equalisers in each of their past three home league games, but there was never any danger of a repeat of that here. As well as the victory, which means they have secured back-to-back league wins for the first time since the start of November, they also had a first clean sheet in eight games to celebrate.

It had already been a productive festive period for Pep Guardiola's side, who saw all the teams above them drop points, and they appear to have put any talk of a pre-Christmas crisis well behind them. City can look back with

pride at their achievements in 2023, but they have lots to look forward to in 2024.

De Bruyne's seemingly imminent return to action is a major boost and they will hope to welcome Erling Haaland and Jeremy Doku back from injury in January, as they push on in search of more silverware.

Blades show spirit but lack quality

While Sheffield United showed plenty of spirit here, they were clearly short of sufficient quality to seriously trouble their hosts. The Blades end the year bottom of the table and they must make history if they are to stay up from here, as no Premier League team has managed that after earning so few points after 20 games.

It is difficult to assess exactly where Chris Wilder needs reinforcements going on this display, given the gulf between these two sides. But the fact that, so far, they have so far scored the fewest goals in the top flight, as well as conceding the most, suggests improvements are needed all over the pitch when the January transfer window opens, if they are to have any hope of survival.

Australia win Women's ODI series against India

MUMBAI (Agencies):

Australia have absorbed Deepti Sharma's historic five-wicket haul and Richa Ghosh's batting masterclass to notch a nailbiting, series-clinching three-run win over India in the second women's one-day international in Mumbai.

After a bungling, but-terfingered fielding display from India allowed

Australia to post 8-258, the hosts looked well on track in their reply at Wankhede Stadium on Saturday (Sunday AEDT) before faltering late to finish on 8-255.

The win ensures Australia maintain their record of never having lost a bilateral women's ODI series to India after moving to an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match rubber.

Annabel Sutherland (3-47) took all of her wickets in her telling spell at the death, including the key scalp of Ghosh on 96 when India were cruising

at 4-218.

After India were left to rue seven grassed chances, Australia's catching was similarly slipshod with Ghosh given lives on nought (by Phoebe Litchfield) and 36 (by Sutherland) before her majestic knock ended, caught Litchfield, bowled Sutherland.

With 22 required off the last three overs, Sutherland took 1-3 off the 48th and Ash Gardner 1-3 in the 49th to put the chase, suddenly, beyond India's reach.

Tahlia McGrath dropped a soda in the 50th over to deny Sutherland a fourth wicket, relieving debutant Shreyanka Patil, whose last-ball four proved academic.

"All the way, we held our nerve as much as possible," player-of-the-match Sutherland said. "It was pretty cool to have the chance to do that at the end."

"Nice that Midgey (captain Alyssa Healy) had faith

in me and I was able to do the job."

After the early loss of Yastika Bhatia (14), fellow opener Smriti Mandhana, whose absence through illness hurt India in the series opener, fashioned a typically classy 34 before lofting legspinner Alana King's second ball to McGrath in the deep. In-form Jemimah Rodrigues (44) added 88 for the third wicket before falling to a superb catch from a diving Litchfield. Ghosh was hampered by cramps but when she finally departed, so did India's hopes of levelling the series.

Earlier, Sharma became the first Indian bowler to collect a five-wicket haul against Australia in women's ODIs. Sharma extracted prodigious turn to snare 5-38, piloting the tourists' demise from 1-117 to 8-219 before King's cameo 28no, combined with India's shoddy fielding, boosted Australia's final total.

Palmer at the double as Chelsea sink battling Luton

Luton (AFP): Cole Palmer struck twice as Chelsea survived a late scare to banish their away-day blues with a 3-2 win against Premier League strugglers Luton on Saturday.

Mauricio Pochettino's side were in complete control when Palmer scored his second goal to put the visitors three up with 20 minutes to play. Palmer had opened the scoring at Kenilworth Road before Noni Madueke doubled Chelsea's lead late in the first half.

But former Chelsea midfielder Ross Barkley netted to spark a spirited finish from third bottom Luton, who scored again through Elijah Adebayo in a dramatic finale. Chelsea's second consecutive win was their first success away from home since a victory at Tottenham on November 6, ending a four-game losing streak on their travels.

If that was encouraging for Pochettino, the manner of their late bout of nerves suggested there is still much to work on for an inconsistent team languishing in 10th place.

Pochettino's first competitive win as Chelsea boss came in the reverse fixture against Luton back in August. But they have struggled badly since then and arrived at Luton hoping to avoid finishing 2023 with a 20th league defeat in the calendar year.

A self-described "football romantic", Pochettino admitted this week that he was relishing the opportunity to play against a club who just a few years ago were



fighting to avoid extinction in the lower leagues.

But Pochettino also warned his young team they would get a taste of "real football" on their trip to ramshackle Kenilworth Road. Nestled amid tight rows of terraced houses, Luton's tiny stadium is the antithesis of the Premier League's glamour clubs.

Chelsea initially appeared quite at home in their gritty surroundings as they quickly seized the momentum. Palmer's early strike was held by Luton keeper Thomas Kaminski, but it was a statement of intent that presaged Chelsea's opener.

Predatory Palmer

Luton were culpable as a poor clearance inside their own area went straight to Palmer, who accepted the gift with a clinical finish into the far corner for his seventh goal since signing from Manchester City in September.

Pochettino had restarted Madueke with a start after he came on to score the winner against Crystal Palace and the young winger repaid his manager's faith in the 37th minute.

Palmer has been one of the bright spots in Chelsea's troubled season and he also played a role in his side's

second goal. Picked out by Palmer on the edge of the area, Madueke was allowed too much time by Luton's defence as he unleashed a fierce strike that flashed into the roof of the net at the near post.

Nicolas Jackson's disappointing form since his pre-season move from Villarreal has played a key role in Chelsea's struggles.

The Senegal striker was off-key again with a tame shot from a good position that allowed Kaminski to save easily. With Chelsea less dynamic in the second half, Christopher Nkunku was sent on for Armando Broja as the Chelsea forward steps up his return to action after a long injury absence.

Palmer appeared to have put the result beyond doubt in the 70th minute when he sprinted onto Jackson's pass, cleverly rolled the ball around Kaminski and slotted home from close-range. But Chelsea wobbled with the finish line in sight -- Adebayo having a goal ruled out for offside hinted at a Luton revival.

Adebayo then hit the bar with a header before Barkley glanced his header into the far corner from a Luton corner in the 80th minute. And seven minutes later, Adebayo poked home from virtually on the goal line after Chelsea keeper Djordje Petrovic could only parry Alfie Doughty's header into his path.

Luton laid siege to the Chelsea goal in the final minutes, but the visitors escaped with a barely deserved victory.

Seven uncapped players in South African Test squad for New Zealand

JOHANNESBURG (Agencies): Only two of the players who were in South Africa's Test win over India on Thursday are in a 14-man squad for two Tests in New Zealand in February.

Cricket South Africa on Saturday named a squad which includes seven uncapped players, including a new captain in left-handed opening batsman Neil Brand.

Batsman Keegan Petersen and David Bedingham are the only players who were part of South Africa's innings win in the first Test against India in Centurion.

Due to a ruling by Cricket South Africa, no players contracted to franchises in the SA20 competition, which overlaps with the Tests, were eligible for selection.

Despite having to travel with a makeshift squad, Test coach Shukri Conrad said he was confident that the team would be competitive.

"The players selected for this tour have every chance of challenging New Zealand," said Conrad, who pointed out that most of the players had shown their ability while playing for South Africa A in recent series against West Indies A and India A.

Brand, 27, was born in Johannesburg but went to high school in England at King's College, Taunton.

He has a solid first-class record with 2906 runs at an average of 39.27. He is also a capable left-arm orthodox spin bowler who has taken 72 wickets at an average of 30.81.

The early announcement of the touring party

appeared to end speculation that opening batsman Dean Elgar might be persuaded to delay his retirement from international cricket beyond the second Test at Newlands in Cape Town, starting on Wednesday.

Elgar was named man of the match in the first Test against India after scoring 185 in South Africa's only innings. He will lead the team in the second Test following an injury to Temba Bavuma.

South African squad: Neil Brand (capt), David Bedingham, Ruan de Swardt, Clyde Fortuin (wkt), Zubayr Hamza, Tshepo Moreki, Mhlangeni Mpongwana, Duanne Olivier, Dane Paterson, Keegan Petersen, Dane Piedt, Raynard van Tonder, Shaun van Berg, Khaya Zondo.

Sandeep Lamichhane: Nepal spinner found guilty of rape

KATHMANDU (Agencies): Nepal spinner Sandeep Lamichhane has been found guilty of rape and could face up to 10 years in prison.

The 23-year-old - Nepal's most high-profile cricketer - was arrested in October 2022 and is currently on bail.

The court concluded that the victim was 18 at the time of the offence, and not a minor as had been previously reported. Lamichhane is due to be sentenced on 10 January but his lawyer said they will appeal against the verdict.

"We did not expect this judgement, we are frustrated," Sabita Bhandari Baral told Reuters.

"We'll definitely appeal." Lamichhane - who has played in Australia's Big



Bash and the Indian Premier League - was suspended as Nepal captain in September 2022 following the rape accusation. After a warrant was issued for his arrest, he was taken into custody after flying home to Kathmandu from playing in the Caribbean Premier League (CPL).

At the time, he said on Facebook he was returning to co-operate with the

investigation and denied any wrongdoing.

Following his release on bail, Lamichhane returned to the Nepal side in February amid protests for a Cricket World Cup League 2 tri-series against Scotland and Namibia.

Players from both opposition nations refused to shake his hand, but Lamichhane continued to play for Nepal throughout 2023.



In brief

Solangi grieved over demise of Nazir Shawl

ISLAMABAD (INP): Caretaker Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi has expressed deep grief and sorrow over the demise of Professor Nazir Ahmed Shawl, a prominent figure in the struggle for the right of self-determination in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. In a condolence station on Saturday, the minister said that Professor Nazir Ahmed Shawl was a strong voice of the people of Occupied Kashmir. Murtaza Solangi prayed for the departed soul to rest in eternal peace and courage to the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss with fortitude.

ANF recovers 238kgs of drugs

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) is continuing its operations against drugs smuggling as it has recovered 238 kilograms of drugs during four operations. According to ANF spokesman, 4.3kgs of ice was recovered from the parcel booked for Australia at the courier office located in Shahrah-e-Faisal. 120kgs charas was recovered from Coastal Highway, Pashni. 111.6 kg charas was recovered from Roghni Road near Chaman. As many as 2.4kgs charas was recovered near Murree Road Rawalpindi. A case under the Anti-Narcotics Act has been registered against the arrested accused and investigation has been started.

Romani's birth anniversary marked

ISLAMABAD (INP): Birth anniversary of renowned Urdu poet Shabnam Romani was observed on Saturday. Known in literary circles with his pen name, Shabnam Romani, Mirza Azeem Baig Chughtai was born on December 30, 1928. Shabnam Romani wrote several books, including Jazeera, Doosra Himala, and Tohmat. Romani was born in Budaun, India, but moved to Pakistan and lived most of his life in Karachi. He was the publisher and editor of Quarterly Aqdar, a literary Urdu magazine. He wrote a regular column in the Daily "Mashriq" in Karachi. At the age of 80, Romani died on February 17, 2009, after a long illness. Shabnam's works include Masnavi Sair-e-Karachi (1959), Jazeera, Tohmat, Doosra Himala, Hyde Park, Mozay Chilghozay, and Hurf Nissbat.

Over 6600 Policemen to be deployed

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have finalised security arrangements on the eve of New Year's night, informed a police spokesman here on Saturday. More than 6,600 officers and jawans of Rawalpindi Police will be deployed whereas 263 traffic police officers will also be on duty to maintain the flow of traffic. Rawalpindi police have also made special plans for tourists in Murree. Over 350 officers will perform duties for the convenience and protection of tourists in Murree. As many as 57 special pickets will be established across the city to prevent vandalism and aerial firing. On the other hand, the City Traffic Police (CTP) has set up a special squad to check one-wheeling. Strict action will be taken against underage drivers also. The main reason for traffic accidents is the carelessness and negligence of the parents because most of the young drivers leave the house without informing their parents with cars or motorcycles and indulge in speeding, reckless driving and wheeling which leads to fatal road accidents, he added.

KAC explores strategies to address HR violations

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Act brought by Amit Shah and Modi.

She observed that the amendment act introduction mere weeks before the Indian Supreme Court's verdict implied a foreknowledge within the Modi-led government regarding the outcome of the impending India Supreme Court decision.

Mushaal Mullick emphasized that the concluding year presented the world with two formidable challenges: the situations in Palestine and IIOJK. She underscored the imperative for collaborative efforts among the people of both regions underlining the shared struggle for their self-determination.

She noted that the people of Palestine and IIOJK are enduring the barbarism imposed by occupation forces in their quest for the fundamental right of self-determination.

Urging the global community to pay attention to the escalating atrocities in these regions, she called for collective action to address the pressing human rights concerns in Palestine and IIOJK.

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ing of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Act brought by Amit Shah and Modi.

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Mushaal Mullick underscored the unity across all segments of society in championing the just

cause of Kashmir. She acknowledged the Kashmir diaspora as a valuable asset in the ongoing struggle for the freedom of Kashmir.

She highlighted the pivotal role of the Kashmiri diaspora in amplifying awareness globally about the human rights violations in IIOJK perpetrated by India.

She pointed out that the elimination of peaceful Kashmiri leaders by India on baseless pretexts could drive the youth of Kashmir toward adopting alternative means in their pursuit of freedom. She also voiced deep concerns over India's decision to ban peaceful Kashmiri political parties.

Mushaal Mullick reiterated Pakistan's steadfast commitment to the Kashmiri people, affirming that Pakistan would continue providing moral, diplomatic, and political support to the oppressed population of the region.

She also advocated for the strong measures to uplift the morale of the people of IIOJK. She expressed gratitude to all the participants of the consultative session for their invaluable recommendations.

She assured them that their insights would be disseminated to relevant stakeholders for consideration and further action.

Jamal Shah vows fostering bilateral cultural collaboration with China

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Culture and National Heritage, Syed Jamal Shah, on Saturday welcomed a distinguished delegation from China's TV/Film Industry and vowed to foster bilateral cultural collaboration.

The delegation led by Mr. Zhang Yang, Director CFIC and Chairman of Chang Jiang, included key figures Mr. Hu Qiang, Chairman of Film Producer – Yihai Culture Communications, Co, Ltd, and Liang Ting, Chairman of Li Ting International, said a press release.

Other members of the delegation included Supervisor Yuan Li, Executive Director Tang Chao Song, Deputy General Manager Liu Liqiang, and Group Coordinator Zhang Linhui.

The purpose of the meeting was to explore avenues of cultural exchanges, focusing on pan-cultural exports, visiting performances, cultural products, circulation of new artworks, art exhibitions, cultural exhibitions, galleries, music, festivals, and more. Both parties stressed the pivotal role of enhancing cultural connections between

Pakistan and China.

During the discussions, Minister Jamal Shah highlighted the robust bond between the two nations and unveiled plans for the second China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) cultural caravan. This initiative aimed to bolster economic ties and strengthen cultural bonds not only between Pakistan and China but also with the Central Asian States.

Minister Jamal Shah underscored the importance of cultural bridges alongside economic endeavors under CPEC. He specifically mentioned the groundbreaking film "Ba-Tie Girl," a significant co-production between Pakistani and Chinese filmmakers, symbolizing the enduring friendship between the peoples of China and Pakistan.

In a separate meeting, Minister Jamal Shah expressed his pleasure at the collaboration between the two nations in the creation of "Batie Girl," a film released in Pakistan in 2023. The movie, a milestone in cultural cooperation, signifies the vibrant cultural exchange between the countries.

Minister Jamal Shah showcased Pakistan's rich artistic heritage, inviting Chinese companies to contribute to the growth of both nations' film industries. Expressing interest in establishing cinema houses in Pakistan, he highlighted the nation's 157 cinema houses and its aspiration to expand the cinema industry.

Zhang Yang, Chairman of Chang Jiang group, emphasized the plethora of collaboration opportunities in the entertainment industry. He expressed Chinese delegation has an interest in investing in the Pakistani drama and film industry for joint production, presenting Pakistan as a beautiful country and an attractive tourism destination.

The discussions concluded with Minister Jamal Shah extending a warm invitation to the Chinese Film/Tv delegation for collaborative ventures, fostering creativity in cinema, revival of Pakistani Film Industry, and enhancing mutual understanding through joint productions.

Director General PNCA Muhammad Ayub Jamali was also present in the meeting.

Over 18,000 IBOs conducted across country in 2023

ISLAMABAD (APP): As many as 18,736 intelligence-based operations (IBOs) have been conducted by the security forces across the country in 2023, resulted in the elimination of 566 and the arrest of 5,161 terrorists during various actions taken to maintain peace and security in the country.

According to the data available from this news agency, effective security measures have been taken by the forces against terrorists in the year 2023.

In the year 2023, in view of the situation of unrest in the region, effective anti-terrorism measures were taken for national defense and security. The data indicated that the traces and evidence of recent terrorist incidents in the country was linked to terrorist sanctuaries in Afghanistan.

In the year 2023, the security forces took timely action and exterminated many wanted terrorists. Due to the effective operations of intelligence agencies, Gulzar Imam Shambe and Sarfaraz Bengalzai, the most important commanders of the Baloch National Army left terrorism and rejoined the national mainstream.

However, 15,063 intelligence-based operations were conducted in Balochistan and 109 terrorists were sent to hell. As many as 190 intelligence-based operations were conducted in Punjab, 14 in Gilgit-Baltistan, and 1,987 in Sindh while 10 terrorists were sent to hell.

Pakistan Armed Forces,

other law enforcement agencies and people have made selfless sacrifices in the war against terrorism. More than 1,000 people, including more than 260 officers and soldiers of the Pakistan Army, sacrificed their lives for the sake of the country in the terrorist attacks.

Pakistan forces have taken numerous steps to make the country a cradle of peace, from which there is a bright hope that the coming time will be one of peace and stability. Pakistan forces will continue the war against terrorism with the full support of the people until the end of the last terrorist.

In the coming year, the security forces, together with the law enforcement agencies, will continue the war against terrorism with a new dimension and determination.

HEC trains Cohort-VIII of pre-service faculty for placement under IPFP

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE) and Higher Education Commission (HEC) have completed training for Cohort VIII of the National Faculty Development Programme (NFDPP).

The faculty will serve the public sector universities under the Interim Placement of Fresh PhDs (IPFP) programme, according to a press release yesterday. NAHE designed the Pre-Service NFDPP as a pioneering initiative to prepare and certify recently graduated PhD holders for their teaching roles in higher education institutions.

This pre-service training imparts critical techniques and skill sets that will enhance their teaching practices in the future.

The programme ensures a seamless transition from theoretical knowledge to practical implementation, with special emphasis on effective pedagogical methods.

During her address at the closing ceremony, Managing Director NAHE, Ms. Noor Anna Malik extended congratulations to the newly certified IPFP Fellows for their successful completion of the training and their enthusiastic participation throughout the programme. She highlighted that the fellows undergo a meticulous training process specifically structured to underscore the incorporation of innovative methodologies, with micro-teaching being a notable example.

This pedagogical

approach encourages candidates to refine their teaching techniques by actively seeking and incorporating constructive feedback from resource persons, peers, and self-evaluation, as she underlined. Ms Noor Anna Malik emphasised the importance of incorporating societal norms and values and drew attention to the practical implementation of subject knowledge.

She encouraged the candidates to extend their role beyond teaching by actively engaging in meaningful research, fostering innovation, and cultivating critical thinking skills. Director General of NAHE, Mr. Muhammad Faisal Butt, also spoke on the occasion and congratulated the participants.

IRSA releases 26,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD, Dec 30 (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Saturday released 26,300 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 37,800 cusecs.

According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1476.51 feet and was 76.51 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 17,300 cusecs and 8,000 cusecs respectively.

The water level in River

Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1156.30 feet, which was 106.30 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded at 6,800 cusecs and 4,600 cusecs respectively.

The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 17,400, 17,100, 19,600 and zero cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 6,900 cusecs of water were released at Nowshera and 6,800 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.

Tauseef's death anniversary observed

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The ninth death anniversary of Pakistan's renowned poetess, fiction writer, educator, intellectual, and columnist, Mohtarma Afzal Tauseef was observed on Saturday.

Born in Hoshiarpur, Afzal Tauseef's family relocated to Lahore after the partition. She commenced her professional journey as a lecturer at Staff College Quetta, and later continued her academic contributions in various colleges in Lahore.

Among Afzal Tauseef's noteworthy Punjabi publications are 'Talhi Meray Bachray,' 'Keeda Na Punjab,' 'Hath Nah La Khashmaday,' 'Panjiwan Ghanta' (short stories), 'Man Dian Vasitaan' (autobiography), 'Aman Walay Millan Gay' (essays).

Her Urdu publications include 'Andheron Ka Safar,' 'Dard Ki Dehleez,' 'Zameen Par Loot Aanay Ka Din,' 'Haari Report Se Aakhri Faislay Tak,' 'Ghulam Nah Ho Jaye Mashriq,' 'Election, Jamhooriyat, Marshal Law,' 'Soviet Union Ki Akhri Arzoo,' 'Libya Sazish Case,' 'Yeh Ghulam Jamhooriyat Hai' (columns), 'Lavarees' (short stories), and 'Dekhi Teri Duniya' (columns).

Her column, titled 'Karwa Sach,' continued to feature in various newspapers for an extended period. Afzal Tauseef received further recognition when the celebrated poetess, Amrita Pritam, portrayed her in the book titled 'Dusre Aadmi Ki Beti' ('Daughter of Another Man').

In 2009, the Government of Pakistan honored Afzal Tauseef with the Presidential Award for Excellence in recognition of her literary contributions. Ms Afzal Tauseef passed away on December 30, 2014, in Lahore. She rests at Iqbal Town's Karim Block Cemetery.

Pakistan should embrace AI as opportunity to advance IT exports, economy: Speakers

ISLAMABAD, Dec 30 (APP): The Speakers at an international conference on artificial intelligence on Saturday said the country should embrace the revolution of artificial intelligence (AI) as an opportunity to advance its information technology (IT) exports and economy by exploring billions of dollars worth of global market.

The speakers hailing from diverse backgrounds were addressing the two-day 1st International Conference on Artificial Intelligence & Society (ICAIS) (December 30th and 31st) commenced here at the Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) being organised by Global Center for Legal Thoughts (GCLT) in collaboration with Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Administration, PAL, IQRA, SIP, Al-Karam International Institute, Bahria University, and National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST).

The conference convened minds and ideas, engaging into a multifac-

eted relationship between artificial intelligence and society. The moot served as a platform for in-depth discussions on cutting-edge advancements, ethical considerations, and the broader societal implications of AI.

Former Deputy Attorney General of Pakistan, Justice Dr Syed Mohammad Anwar said the AI revolution had two sides of its rise as one was benign and the other hostile. Taking the second part first, he said, "Our ideologies are under the onslaught of social engineering being carried out under the garb of AI-based social networking sites. Our thinking is being changed deliberately which is reflected in many decisions of the key public, private, social, and civil entities."

He underlined that the AI was the technology of the real world and it was not a bad thing, adding collection of information was the primary aspect of artificial intelligence. However, there was an urgent need to

place protection guards against social engineering as our basic norms and ethics were being tainted through maligning and misleading content.

"The source of information needs to be verified while viewing AI-based content. Moreover, there is a need to develop a filter in mind to scrutinize every information."

Religiously, he said the AI and IT had positive aspects as the books that were not available were now easily available on religion and many other aspects, adding, "It has developed a global jurisprudence among the Muslim scholars, hence the differences and gaps between all sects of the religion of Islam have vanished and developed consensus."

"Ulema (Muslim scholars) have greatly benefited through AI and IT for Qirat (recitation) and tajweed, learning and teaching of Holy Quran," he noted. The entire nation, he said needed to work on IT as the

country had not completely ventured into the domain of this vast subject.

He demanded the GCLT that the discourse should not be limited to this conference but rather be made a permanent forum

to study the negative impacts of AI on our society and to benefit from its positive aspects.

NUST, Chairman, National Centre for Artificial Intelligence (NCAI), Dr Yasir Ayaz said AI is the main technology spearheading technology advancement for the past one and a half decades in the world. He added that many technology-based industries were focussing on AI as it was embedded in every technology solution like social media, apps, networking tools banking tools, etc.

He highlighted the achievements of the NCAI and its students who grabbed global acclaim and attention through their novel innovations and most modern AI solutions through their indigenous

efforts. "There is no doubt that AI is the only technology driving economic development as the current industrial era is the era of human and robot society," he added.

Dr Ayaz said AI investment and development can help the country generate billions of dollars in revenue, adding, "We can get a new share from this new technology unfolding in the world. Many Pakistan foreign entrepreneurs and international companies are opening their businesses related to AI in the country as it has 16,000 IT professionals and over 20,000 new graduates which is the potential if trained and equipped well can help tap unexplored foreign revenue."

He mentioned that the NCAI developed the Lahore Safe City AI-based security solution for Rs20 million which was proposed for Rs20 billion, but the NCAI developed it with locally-made solutions.

Dr Ayaz proposed that the African countries were

looking for cheaper solutions like ours which can help us promote our AI exports in that region and emerge as a new partner in this domain as Chinese products were getting expensive after the US or European tools.

Prof Dr Habib-ur-Rehman Asif, Bahria University extended his gratitude to the GCLT for its initiative and termed the conference a remarkable step.

"There is ample proof of innovation and learning of advanced knowledge in Quran and Hadith, whereas the nation had to realise its role in seeking advanced knowledge," he said. He commended the NCAI efforts as remarkable and called it a ray of hope.

Secretary, of the Council of Islamic Ideology, Dr Hafiz Ikran ul Haq also addressed the conference and shed light on the religious aspect of advanced learning and highlighted the need to explore AI as a weapon of modern advancement in the present-day domain.

Azerbaijan to open embassy

KABUL (Khaama Press): Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has officially revealed its plans to reopen its embassy in Afghanistan in 2024. This significant decision underscores Azerbaijan’s strong commitment to fostering stronger diplomatic relations with Afghanistan, signifying a promising step towards deeper bilateral cooperation between the two nations. Azerbaijani media outlet Report covered the news, citing the press office of Azerbaijan’s Foreign Ministry.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Jamadi-us-Sanni 17, 1445 — Sunday, December 31, 2023

Weather station established

KABUL (Ariana News): A new meteorological station has been established at Kabul International Airport, the Ministry of Aviation and Transport of Afghanistan confirmed. The Ministry of Aviation and Transport of Afghanistan said that the weather station was installed by the Department of Meteorology. This weather station will be used to prepare meteorological, aviation “METAR” and “SPECI” reports for domestic and foreign flights.

Da Afghanistan Bank protected Afghani value

KABUL (TOLONews): Da Afghanistan Bank said that the value of the Afghani in 2023 has increased by 26.4 percent compared to the previous year.

Haseebullah Noori, the spokesperson of Da Afghanistan Bank, emphasized that this bank is trying to protect the afghani against foreign currencies by implementing better monetary policies.

Reportedly, implementation of better monetary policies, promotion of Afghan currency in the country, prevention of foreign currency smuggling, prevention of unnecessary expenses at the government level, increase in exports, and the initiation of some national and international projects in the country are the factors that have contributed to the stability and increase of the afghani currency value.

“Currently, the afghani is one of the most stable currencies in the region and we are trying to make more progress in the field. The afghani has increased by 26.4% in 2023 compared to 2022, which is a great achievement for Da Afghanistan Bank,” said Haseebullah Noori.

The Union of Money Exchangers of Sarai Shahzada said that the value of the afghani has increased due to the lack of liquidity in the country’s markets. “Currently, the dollar is high, the Afghani is low, there is supply and demand in everything...,” said Ibrahim Khan Zadrani, head of the union.

Some economists said

that the increase in the Afghan currency value will also affect the decrease of the prices. “The increase or decrease of afghani currency will harm the citizens of the country. The Islamic Emirate should make a procedure and solution because the increase or decrease of the Afghani destabilizes the market,” said Mohammad Nabi Afghani, an economist.

“The goods that enter Afghanistan can have a positive effect because the more the Afghani loses its value against foreign currencies, the more expensive the goods will be for the consumer,” said Seyar Qurishi, an economist.

Earlier, foreign media reported that the value of the afghani increased by 14% in the past year.

Farmers demand cold storages to avoid losses

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): A number of farmers in western Herat province express concern about the lack of standard cold storages to preserve their products and ask the government to construct the facilities.

The farmers say agricultural products are mostly produced in summer when they easily perish, so farmers have to sell their products at low prices due to lack of export and storage facilities. They say if agricultural products are preserved for winter, their prices would increase.

If the government builds cold storages, it will enable farmers to supply their agricultural products in all seasons of the year at reasonable and controlled prices.

One of the farmers, Haji Juma Gul, told Pajhwok Afghan News that he used to grow apples, grapes, peaches, potatoes, tomatoes and other vegetables, but he could not preserve them to other seasons and had to sell them at low prices.

He said cold storages would benefit farmers who currently suffered financial losses in their absence.

Haji Mehr Gull, another grower, said farmers grew onion, potatoes, garlic and other vegetable only in one season of the year and bought the same during the three other seasons.

He said Herat was an agricultural province where different crops were grown. He said growers should be encouraged and supported by construction of standard cold storages so they could supply their products on time to the markets.

“Cold storages are needed in most of parts of Herat,” he said.

Agricultural officials say Afghanistan is an agricultural country and the government is paying serious attention to the sector especially to the wellbeing of farmers.

An expert on agricultural issues, Abdul Wahid Sadiqi, told Pajhwok that cold storages played an important role in preservation of agricultural products.

“If the government builds such facilities for farmers to preserve their harvests, many farmers’ needs will be met and their products will be sold at a reasonable price in all four seasons of the year.”

Provincial Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation department officials say they have taken measures to meet farmers’ need and have reactivated a cold storage facility.

Reducing taxes: Private sector demands govt cooperation

KABUL (TOLONews): The representative of the Afghanistan Traders & Investors Union (ATI) asked the political deputy of the PM Mawlawi Abdul Kabir to cooperate with the private sector with ways to collect and reduce taxes.

The representative of ATI in this meeting discussed with the Political Deputy of the PM the commercial challenges and the losses caused to the private sector due to the suspension of more than 300 containers of commercial goods in Karachi port.

Basir Taraki, Executive Director of Afghanistan Industrial Association (AIA) for Kabul said: “We industrialists also try to produce high quality goods, because tax is based on the electricity consumption, each sector must measure a plan for itself, and an arrangement or procedure should be arranged for each sector, and they should pay the tax based on their consumption.”

The political deputy of the PM, pointing to the



importance of the activities of industrialists and merchants in the country’s economic progress, said that it is their responsibility to provide facilities for all domestic and foreign merchants. However, the spokesman of the Islamic Emirate told TOLONews that the collected taxes from various sectors, especially the private sector, will be spent in governmental and infrastructure and development projects. The spokesman of the

Islamic Emirate, Zabihullah Mujahid, said: “All the citizens of the country should be sure that the money that is collected for various government revenues as taxes, Islamic taxes and tithes are all returned to the treasury and are used again for a legal purpose.

Some experts also believe that tax collection that is done in a balanced way is beneficial to the country’s economy.

“When the country’s economy is stagnating,

expansionary policy should be used, and when the country’s economic situation is booming, contractionary policy should be used. In general, if it is collected in a balanced form, it can benefit the depreciated economy,” said Abdul Zohor Mudaber, an economic expert.

The private sector of the country has always complained about the lack of electricity, restrictions on issuing visas and banking restrictions in the country.

Sar-e-Pul farmers call to commence work on Sultan Ibrahim Dam

JAWZJAN (TOLONews): The farmers in Sar-e-Pul demanded the start of practical work on the Sultan Ibrahim Dam.

It is said that with the construction of this dam, the residents of Sar-e-Pul and Jawzjan provinces will have access to drinking water, agriculture and electric energy.

“Sar-e-Pul and Jawzjan will benefit first from the water and second with electric energy, and working opportunities will be provided for our people and we appreciate these kinds of projects,” said Ghulam Sakhi, a farmer in Sar-e-Pul.

“The Islamic Emirate should build the Sultan Ibrahim dam as soon as possible so that water can be stored and added to the river and to supply water to our agricultural lands,” said Mohammad Ibrahim, another farmer in Sar-e-Pul.

The directorate of Sar-e-Pul’s marine area said that in addition to storing 1 million cubic meters of water and producing 40 megawatts of electricity, this dam also irrigates 55 thousand hectares of agricultural land.

Ghulam Sakhibik, technical consultant of the directorate of Sar-e-Pul marine area said: “Sultan Ibrahim Dam has the ability to store one million cubic meters of water and has the ability to produce 40 megawatts of electricity, and it also irrigates 55,000 hectares of agricultural land

in the two provinces of Sar-e-Pul and Jawzjan.”

“If this dam is built, we can control our lack of water and control the water so that it is not wasted,” said Jamshid Faizi, director of Sar-e-Pul marine area management services.

Sultan Ibrahim dam is located 30 km from the center of Sar-e-Pul province and the water that flows into this dam originates from Sufak Lake and Qala-e-Shahr in Kohistanat District in the province.

Bayat Foundation distributes aid to hundreds of needy families

KABUL (Ariana News): Bayat Foundation once again distributed winter relief packages to hundreds of needy families in Kabul.

Foundation officials said the aid packages of food and non-food items will reach all the provinces of the country and will continue until the end of the winter season.

“In continuation of Bayat Foundation’s winter

aid, which we distributed in some provinces; fortunately, we are in Kabul today and distributing food and non-food aid to a number of needy and displaced people,” said Haji Mohammad Ismail, deputy head of Bayat Foundation.

The packages include flour, rice, cooking oil and warm clothes.

The families who have

benefited from these donations ask other charitable organizations to help Afghans in need during these difficult times.

Aid recipients have said that Bayat Foundation’s assistance was provided when they faced various economic problems.

“I thank Bayat Foundation, may God bless them, and may God reward

them for helping people,” said an aid recipient.

“May God bless Bayat Foundation, which helps needy families,” said another aid recipient.

Bayat Foundation has already distributed much aid needed to hundreds of needy families in Kabul and other provinces, along with deported immigrants from Pakistan.

Woman blends colours to defy life’s restrictions



KABUL (Khaama Press): The sharp carpet-weaving knife swiftly cuts the knots, and a moment of distraction might lead to injured fingers, which has happened to her multiple times. It seems she is in a hurry, but it is normal to finish the carpet sooner.

After a brief pause, I start the conversation by asking her name. With all the weight, she lifts his head from her work and looks at me with tired eyes, saying, “My name is Razia Hosseini. I am originally from Maidan Wardak, Afghanistan.”

Razia was working at a non-governmental institution just two years ago. With the fall of the republic and the ban on women’s work, she has been forced to turn to carpet weaving to support her family of seven.

Razia says: “Twenty-two years ago, when we came from Iran, my younger sisters and I learned carpet weaving, and it was our means of earning until the twelfth grade.”

While swiftly moving her hands during carpet weaving, she narrates: “We went through a long and winding road to reach university and secure a better job, shaping a relatively peaceful life for ourselves.”

Ali Ahmad, Razia’s father, who has a back injury, says: “My daughters wove carpets at night so they could attend to their studies during the day to lead a decent life.”

He adds, “When Razia and her younger sister became employed, I would prostrate in gratitude that my daughters’ struggles were over and they had made something of themselves.”

Razia’s father spent many years doing hard labour in Iran, and the adverse effects now incapacitate him.

He explains, “My back was injured in the brick ovens in Iran, and since then, I haven’t been able to do heavy labor. I’m illiterate and can’t earn through writing. We came from Iran hoping our children could study in their own country, but today neither Razia nor Marjan can go to work, nor can their younger sisters go to school or university.”

The reminder that Razia is forced to forget all her achievements and years of education to do hard work with minimal income is painful for her. This recollection makes her pause for a moment to rest her fingers.

Razia says, “In the blink of an eye, we lost decades of achievements that we fought tooth and nail to earn.”

She resumes her work. The sharp carpet-weaving knife in her hands moves so fast among the vertical threads that it makes the viewer dizzy. But it seems Razia is in a hurry.

In front of her, vertically tied white threads, from top to bottom, are knotted, with colourful threads appearing above and below the working area of the carpet-weaving knife; the results are visible as the carpet patterns emerge one after another from under Razia’s hands, becoming more complete.

Veiled rebellion: Female medical students go underground in Afghanistan

KABUL (Al Jazeera): Lima stayed home the last time the Taliban inspected the hospital where she secretly trains as a nurse.

After five years of medical training, Lima, 28, should be one year into her residency as a doctor, perfecting her diagnostic skills. Instead, she takes temperatures and administers injections, tasks she has been doing at an emergency room in Kabul for three months now. While this is not the work she expected to be doing at this point in her career, she’s happy to at least be doing this.

“Being at the hospital means I can stay close to my field. It helps me to stay connected to it,” Lima told Al Jazeera over the course of several telephone calls. She is identified by her first name only for safety reasons.

Lima was just weeks away from graduating from a medical school in Kabul when the Taliban banned higher education for women last December, interrupting her studies and that of thousands of other women. Women already qualified as doctors, nurses and other medical workers are permitted to continue in their jobs, but no new women may enter the field or undertake training.

More than 3,000 women who had already graduated from medical schools before the ban were barred from taking the board exams required to practise, depriving the country – already struggling from a dire shortage of female medical workers – of a desperately needed infusion of new doctors.

For Lima, medicine has been a lifelong dream. She longs to become a surgeon, partially because she knows there is a shortage of them.

“My biggest hope is to help people,” she said.

Her family moved home to Afghanistan from Pakistan so she could attend university in Kabul where she thrived – she did well in her classes and was appointed her

class’s “leader”, handling administrative tasks.

On the day they heard about the new ban on women completing medical studies, Lima and her classmates were having lunch together. They cried together because of what this would mean for their future and because they were worried they would not be able to see each other again. The Taliban’s strict ban on women leaving their homes without a male chaperone makes meeting friends near-impossible.

After the news broke, Lima called one of her professors and persuaded him to let her and her classmates take one of the exams they were scheduled to take that week. It was not for an official grade but just for them to know they could do it. The professor agreed, but when Lima and her classmates arrived at the university to take the test, the Taliban, armed with guns, were already guarding the doors.

A secret internship
Almost a year later, many women have refused to give up on their chosen path and have continued studying on their own or online, hoping that they will one day be allowed to study officially at university and medical school again. Some women have managed to work around the restrictions, finding secret internships and residency opportunities.

“It’s like a refreshment for my studies, for my knowledge. This is the best way for me to do something for my goals,” says Noor*, whose name has been changed to ensure her anonymity. Like Lima, she was just about to graduate from medical school when the Taliban’s ban brought her studies to an abrupt halt. The order hit her hard.

She spent months studying solo, holding on to medicine as “the only goal” she ever had in her life. She reviewed her notes, read thick medical books in English and took online courses, focusing on what she

believed to be any gaps in her knowledge. But working alone for weeks on end, she says she fell into a depression and had to listen to motivational speakers for an hour per day just to muster the will to keep going.

In September, nine months after the ban, Noor lost hope that the university would reopen and called the hospital that had offered her a two-month internship back in 2020. They agreed to let her come in to complete it. Everyone treats it as a secret.

When the two months were up, the hospital allowed her to stay on to continue observing surgeries for as long as she wished. Noor says she is too afraid to even think about what would happen if the Taliban discovered her studying there. It is unclear what would happen if she was discovered, but women found studying medicine or undertaking internships would likely be removed from hospitals and banned from returning, if not worse. There have already been arrests of activists who tried to defy the ban on girls’ education.

Whatever the risks, however, women refuse to stop trying to defy the ban on higher education completely.

“Never in the history of Afghanistan have we had so many educated, well-aware-of-the-world and well-aware-of-their-duties-and-rights women. It’s impossible to silence them, it’s impossible to push them aside,” says Fatima Gailani, a London-based women’s rights activist and former president of the Afghan Red Crescent Society, in an interview over WhatsApp.

Women’s healthcare at stake
Despite the Taliban’s initial promise to take a moderate approach towards women’s rights after it seized power in August 2021, the ban on higher education is just one of many steps that the armed group has taken to further segregate the country and limit women’s role in society.

In the immediate aftermath of August 2021, the Taliban banned girls from going to school beyond the sixth grade and imposed strict rules requiring women to wear hijabs and to travel only with a male chaperone. They closed down beauty salons and blocked women from working with domestic and international non-governmental aid groups, sparking international outrage on the matter.

“Afghanistan under the Taliban remains the most repressive country in the world for women’s rights,” said Roza Isakovna Otunbayeva, head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in March, presented the latest report of the secretary-general on the country to the Security Council.

Afghanistan has an urgent need for female doctors as they are often the only healthcare providers available for women and children. While there is no explicit law that forbids it, many traditional Afghan families do not allow their female relatives to be seen by male doctors. This is a particular issue in rural areas where women often have to travel for hours to see a female doctor. Once the current generation of female doctors and nurses retires, even this may not be an option.

“The women here in Kabul and in the provinces are suffering from a lack of women doctors. They are suffering from [lack of] access to health facilities. They are suffering from a lack of access to the treatments that they want,” says Aminulhaq Mayel, deputy country director at the Swedish Committee in Afghanistan, a foreign aid organisation.

In 2020, the World Health Organization estimated that 24 women were dying each day in Afghanistan from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes. While this ranked as one of the highest rates in the world, it was significantly lower than 2001.

Airstrikes hit camps in central Gaza

Biden administration approves new weapons sales to Israel

DEIR AL-BALAH: Israeli warplanes struck two urban refugee camps in central Gaza on Saturday, as the Biden administration approved a new emergency weapons sale to Israel despite persistent international cease-fire calls over mounting civilian deaths, hunger and mass displacement in the enclave.

Israel says it is determined to pursue its unprecedented air and ground offensive until it has dismantled Hamas, a goal viewed by some as unattainable because of the militant group's deep roots in Palestinian society. The United States has shielded Israel diplomatically and has continued to supply weapons. Israel argues that ending the war now would mean victory for Hamas, a stance shared by the Biden administration which at the same time urged Israel to do more to avoid harm to Palestinian civilians.

The war, triggered by the deadly Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel, has displaced some 85 percent of the Gaza Strip's 2.3 million residents, sending swells of people seeking shelter in Israeli-designated safe areas that the military has nevertheless also bombed. That has left Palestinians with a harrowing sense that nowhere is safe in the tiny enclave. Residents in the urban refugee camps of Nuseirat and Bureij, two recent hot spots of combat, reported Israeli airstrikes overnight and into Saturday.

Nuseirat resident Mustafa Abu Wawee said a strike hit the home of one of his relatives, killing two people. "The (Israeli) occupation is doing everything to force people to leave," he said over the phone while searching along with others for four people missing under the rubble. "They want to break our spirit and will but they will fail. We are here to stay." A second strike late Friday in Nuseirat targeted the home of a journalist for Al-Quds TV, a channel linked to the group Islamic Jihad whose militants also participated in the Oct. 7 attack. The channel said the journalist, Jaber Abu Haddos and six members of his family were killed.

Bureij resident Rami Abu Mosab said sounds of gunfire echoed across the camp overnight, followed by heavy airstrikes Saturday. With Israeli forces pushing deeper into Khan Younis and the camps of central Gaza, tens of thousands of Palestinians streamed into the already crowded city of Rafah at the southernmost end of Gaza in recent days. Drone footage showed a vast camp of thousands of tents and makeshift shacks set up on what had been empty land on Rafah's western outskirts next to UN warehouses. People arrived in Rafah in trucks, in carts and on foot. Those who did not find space in the already overwhelmed shelters put up tents on roadsides slick with mud from winter rains.

The State Department said Friday that Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Congress he approved a \$147.5 million sale for equipment, including fuses, charges and primers, that is needed for 155 mm shells Israel bought previously. It marked the second time this month that the Biden administration is bypassing Congress to approve an emergency weapons sale to Israel.

The department cited the "urgency of Israel's defensive needs" as a reason for the approval, and argued that "it is vital to US national interests to ensure Israel is able to defend itself against the threats it faces." The emergency determination means the purchase will bypass the congressional review requirement for foreign military sales. Such determinations are rare, but not unprecedented, when administrations see an urgent need for weapons to be delivered without waiting for lawmakers' approval.

Blinken made a similar decision on Dec. 9 to approve the sale to Israel of nearly 14,000 rounds of tank ammunition worth more than \$106 million. Both moves have come as President Joe Biden's request for a nearly \$106 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and other national security needs remains stalled in Congress, caught up in a debate over US immigration policy and border security. Some Democratic lawmakers have spoken of making the proposed \$14.3 billion in American assistance to its Mideast ally contingent on concrete steps by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to reduce civilian casualties in Gaza during the war with Hamas.

More than a week after a UN Security Council resolution called for the unhindered delivery of aid at scale across besieged Gaza, conditions have only worsened, UN agencies warned. Aid officials said the aid entering Gaza remains woefully inadequate. Distributing goods is hampered by long delays at two border crossings, ongoing fighting, Israeli airstrikes, repeated cuts in Internet and phone services and a breakdown of law and order that makes it difficult to secure aid convoys, they said.

Nearly the entire population is fully dependent on outside humanitarian aid, said Philippe Lazzarini, head of UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. A quarter of the population is starving because too few trucks enter with food, medicine, fuel and other supplies — sometimes fewer than 100 trucks a day, according to UN daily reports. UN monitors said operations at the Israeli-run Kerem Shalom crossing halted for four days this week because of security incidents, such as a drone strike and the seizing of aid by desperate Gaza residents. — Aljazeera

Nawaz to leave country before polls, claims Aitzaz

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Veteran politician and senior lawyer Aitzaz Ahsan has predicted that PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif would leave the country before elections and watch the results unfold from there.

"He lives abroad anyway," said Ahsan in an interview. In the interview, the PPP stalwart also claimed that JUI-F leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman was "retreating [from elections]", claiming that from the two drums that are beaten — either of victory or retreat — Rehman seemed to be "beating the drum of a retreat".

Previously, the lawyer had also called Sharif a "ladla" (favoured) and had claimed that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and the caretaker government were trying to ensure Nawaz Sharif wins a two-thirds majority in next year's general elections. Nawaz, who had returned to Pakistan on October 21 after spending four years in self-imposed exile, said he had "no wish for revenge" and stressed on beginning a "new journey" towards growth.

As far as the PTI's ongoing tussle with the election commission goes, Ahsan said it would be unwise for the election watchdog to pursue this matter any further. The ECP and the PTI have been exchanging blows over the past few days. The controversy stems from the electoral watchdog's earlier decision to strip PTI of its symbol following the annulment of its intra-party elections for not complying with the Elections Act and the party's own constitution.

PTI's new chairman, Gohar Khan, had also claimed there was a conspiracy brewing against the party to snatch its electoral symbol 'bat' and exclude it from the upcoming elections. "Is the election commission conducting elections or contesting them?" Ahsan asked, adding that the Commission cannot — and should not — go to high court regarding the bat symbol against PTI as it will show its bias against the party.

The lawyer was referring to the ECP's decision to challenge the Peshawar High Court's (PHC) order reinstating the PTI's election symbol. Sources familiar with the matter told media the ECP initially considered appealing directly to the Supreme Court but ultimately opted for a review petition with the PHC, which is scheduled to revisit the case on Jan 9. The ECP is also on notice to appear before the bench on the date. The commission has yet to adhere to the PHC's specific directives, including publishing PTI's intra-party elections certificate on the ECP's official website and reinstating the party's election symbol.

Ahsan further added that disputing a judgment would create a chain, "If the High Court reverses the decision of the District Court, should the District Judge go to the Supreme Court to ask why the High Court has given a decision against his decision?"

Fawad handed over to NAB on remand

ISLAMABAD (INP): An accountability court in Islamabad on Saturday approved former federal minister Fawad Chaudhry's six-day physical remand in a case related to misappropriation in construction projects in Jhelum.

Accountability Court Judge Muhammad Bashir conducted the hearing of the case today. Fawad was brought to the court after the completion of his 10-day physical remand. The court remarked that the investigation of the case should be completed while Fawad should also be allowed to meet his lawyers. The former minister will be presented before the court on January 5, 2024.

Fawad was taken into custody earlier this month by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in connection with the corruption case. NAB Chairman Lt-Gen (ret'd) Nazir Ahmed Butt had signed an arrest warrant for apprehending the politician after which he was taken into custody from Adiala jail — where he was incarcerated in a separate fraud case.



ABBOTTABAD: KP Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah inaugurating Hazara Campus of Khyber Medical University.

Ex-DG ISI skips inquiry commission's hearing

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Former director general (DG) Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Lieutenant General (ret'd) Faiz Hamid has yet again skipped the hearing of the Faizabad Dharna Inquiry Commission (FDIC), as he did not appear before the commission on Friday, The News reported on Saturday quoting sources.

This was the second time that the former ISI chief has remained absent from the hearing being conducted by the inquiry commission, which earlier summoned him in the second week of December this year and then on December 29, sources said. The commission has, therefore, issued the former spy chief another summon notice through the Defence Ministry, ordering him to cooperate in the inquiry, the sources maintained.

The former ISI chief has now been asked to record his statement in the second week of January 2024 for the third time. Gen (ret'd) Faiz is being summoned to record his statement on the sit-in staged by the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) at the Faizabad flyover in Islamabad in November 2017.

Meanwhile, Joint Director General Intelligence Bureau (IB) Sajid Kiani had, on December 19, recorded his three-hour-long statement before the inquiry commission wherein he ruled out any aspect of interference from any other institution during the operation against the TLP, the sources had said. Sajid Kiani was serving as senior superintendent of police (Operations) in Islamabad in 2017 at the time of the Faizabad sit-in.

The probe panel was constituted on the order of the Supreme Court of Pakistan under the chair of retired IGP Akhtar Ali Shah after the apex court rejected the finding committee report constituted by the government. On November 15, Chief

ECP files review plea against PHC decision

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Saturday filed a review petition at the Peshawar High Court (PHC) against its single bench ruling on Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) iconic electoral 'bat' symbol.

On December 26, the high court announced the verdict on PTI's petition challenging the ECP's verdict, which had declared the party's intra-party polls "illegal" and stripped it of using the 'bat' symbol. While announcing a reserved verdict, the PHC suspended the ECP's order and restored the party's 'bat' symbol till a final decision on the petition. The court also stated that a double bench will hear the matter after winter vacations.

In its petition, the ECP has requested the court to review the PTI's intra-party elections and its decision related to the election sym-

bol. The Election Commission, in its petition, requested the court to fix the plea before a division bench in the larger interest of the public. It said that the ECP is charged with the duty to conduct elections honestly, justly fairly and in accordance with law.

The petition read that Article 218(3) allows the electoral body to organise and conduct the elections, adding that the ECP is also responsible for making all necessary arrangements ahead of the polls. "This court [...] observed that election is a process which starts with the issuance of the election programme and consists of the various links and stages in that behalf as, filing of nomination papers, their scrutiny, the hearing of objections and the holding of actual polls. If any of these links is challenged it really (is) tantamount to challenging the said process of election," it said.

"This case implies that

where a violation of the standards mentioned in Article 218(3) has not as yet taken place, the Election Commission is legally empowered under Article 218(3) to exercise its powers pre-emptively in order to avoid a violation of these standards," said the petition.

The plea said that the petitioners have sought "interim relief" for the suspension of ECP's order as well as for the publication of an intra-party certificate on its website along with the restoration of the 'bat' symbol. "That this Hon'ble Court under the settled law cannot grant Final Relief as an interim relief, hence the interim relief so granted vide order dated 26th December 2023 is against the law as well as against the dictum laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in its Judgment reported as 1997 SCMR 1508," it added. The ECP prayed the court to recall the "interim relief" granted by the single bench on December 26.

CM inaugurates KMU Hazara campus

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Khyber Medical University has established its campus for Hazara Region at Abbottabad. Formal classes will commence in the campus KMU Institute of Health Sciences Hazara from next month. Caretaker Chief Minister KP Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah formally inaugurated the campus during his visit to Abbottabad the other day.

While briefing the Chief Minister about the programs to be offered in the campus, it was told that the campus was established to cater for the need of the entire Hazara Region, and it will fulfill the needs of post-graduation in medical field adding that a campus is offering a diversity of undergraduates programs including Allied Health Sciences, Nursing and

Pharmacy. It was further told that medical graduates can get the opportunity of admission in Public Health, Health Research, Epidemiology and basic medical sciences post graduates degree program.

The Chief Minister termed the establishment of KMU Hazara Campus as an important step to promote medical education in the region and said that with the establishment of the campus, the medical graduates of the region would get facility of specialized training in various medical specialties at their door steps. While lauding the role of KMU in producing trained human resource in various medical fields, Arshad Hussain Shah expressed the hope that the University will continue its activities in a more effective manner. Besides Vice Chancellor KMU, Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq and Commissioner Hazara,

Zaheer Ul Islam, high ups of district administration and KMU management were also present on the occasion.

Later on, the Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah engaged with the delegations from Mansehra Bar Association, Abbottabad Bar Association, and Haripur Bar Association to address their issues. The delegation apprised the Chief Minister of the issues faced by the lawyers' communities in these districts. Accompanied by Commissioner Hazara Division Syed Zaheerul Islam, Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad Khalid Iqbal, and DPO Abbottabad Umar Tufail, the Chief Minister discussed ways and means to resolve those issues with the delegations comprising Sardar Basharat, Muhammad Rafiq Yusuf, Asad Saeed Khan and others.

Shehbaz solidifies anti-PPP poll alliance

F.P. Report

KARACHI/LAHORE: In a decisive push to forge an anti-PPP electoral alliance in its stronghold Sindh, PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif wrapped up his two-day Karachi visit on Friday after finalising a deal with the six-party coalition Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) and securing MQM-P's assurances for a long-term political partnership.

Sharif also pledged Centre-funded water and transport projects for Karachi, contingent on his party's victory in the upcoming general elections. During his multiple interactions with the media and addresses to workers and leaders, Mr Sharif refrained from directly naming individuals or parties. However, he pointed out on several occasions how Karachi's infrastructure "was ruined" during the past 15 years and "bad governance" had turned the metropolis into "worse than a rural area".

On the second and final day of his visit, he also shared his plans for Karachi, where he wanted the Centre, along with provincial and local governments, to become actively involved in infrastructure building, establishing water supply schemes and introducing a modern transport system. He showed sympathy with the Urdu-speaking community, stressing that despite their "great sacrifices" to found Pakistan, they were still deprived of drinking water.

"I don't want to accuse anyone, but this city wasn't given the rights it deserves," the former prime minister told reporters after meeting MQM-P leaders at their party headquarters. "This city became home to millions who migrated to Pakistan after sacrificing their lives and wealth. Their women were humiliated [during Partition and migration] and they paid a huge price for creating this great country," he said.

"But it's a shame that the city, which now generates trillions for the national economy, isn't even getting drinking water. The roads and infrastructures are ruined. The buses plying here don't even meet the standards of those operating in rural areas," he added. Sharif promised to turn around the situation with the help of his political allies, and for that, he vowed that the PML-N would come up with a comprehensive strategy, taking his partners MQM-P and others on board.

Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui of the MQM-P seconded Mr Sharif's views and said the two parties were enjoying coordination and harmony that had never been witnessed in the past. Their partnership, he said, would lead to a better future for urban Sindh and other parts of the province. Earlier, the two leaders held brief talks at the MQM-P headquarters and agreed to give their teams more time to finalise a deal on an electoral alliance before taking matters into their hands for a consensual decision.

Later, Mr Sharif drove to the residence of GDA chief and spiritual leader of Hur Jamaat, Syed Sibghatullah Shah Rashdi, better known as Pir Pagaro, where the two agreed on the alliance for the Feb 8 polls. Assisted by senior PML-N leaders Khawaja Saad Rafique and Ayaz Sadiq, Mr Sharif finalised the initial sketch of the alliance with Pir Pagaro, and both agreed to settle the terms and details between the two sides at a lower level.

IHC declares DC's authority on MPO unconstitutional

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has declared that arresting individuals based on suspicion of future breach of peace is unconstitutional. The ruling comes as a major blow to the controversial Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) law, which has been criticized for its potential for abuse and political targeting.

The court issued the decision while hearing petitions challenging the detention of several individuals, including PTI leader Shehryar Afridi, under the MPO, Justice Babar Sattar issued an 89-page order, stating that the DC Islamabad's authority to issue MPO orders exceeded legal boundaries and was against the law. The court ruled that the federal government, acting as both federal and provincial governments for Islamabad, has individual powers under the constitution. Arresting someone based solely on the suspicion of future threats to peace is deemed unconstitutional.

The judgment emphasized that issuing arrest orders without sufficient evidence amounts to an

abuse of power. Five petitions against detention orders by the Deputy Commissioner were approved, while one petition is pending disposal. The court directed the implementation of the order and sent a copy to the Secretary Cabinet Division.

Furthermore, the court declared the Chief Commissioner's 1992 notification assigning powers to DC Islamabad as against the law. It urged the federal government to formulate rules related to the use of provincial powers within three months. The judgment clarified that, for Islamabad, the federal government acts as the provincial government, not the Chief Commissioner.

The conflict between Article 3(2) of the MPO and Article 10(4) of the Constitution was highlighted, with the court stating that no person should be arrested merely based on the potential to commit an act. Concrete evidence is necessary for issuing detention orders. The judgment criticized the historical misuse of preventive detention laws for political purposes, especially before elections.

The court emphasized

that detention under the MPO is illegal, as the law should come into play after an offense is committed. The federal government, not the Chief Commissioner, holds the authority to apply federal and provincial laws in Islamabad. The court referred to the Mustafa Impex judgment, stating that the approval of the cabinet is necessary for exercising special powers.

Details presented in the Islamabad High Court revealed that DC Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon issued 67 MPO orders from May to September 2023, primarily against PTI leadership or their members. The court noted allegations of political targeting by PTI leadership based on their affiliation. All challenged MPO orders were either annulled, withdrawn, or rendered ineffective.

The court condemned the District Magistrate for using authority with malice, stating that contempt of court proceedings against the Deputy Commissioner are pending. It emphasized the need for a fair trial and refrained from making further observations against the DC until the trial is completed.

Siraj terms election must for getting rid of graft

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Jamaat-i-Islami chief Sirajul Haq has said the next general elections to be held on Feb 8, 2024 are important for getting rid of corruption, injustice and slavery. He was addressing a workers' convention at Shatai Dara area as chief guest here on Saturday. The gathering was also addressed by theJI candidate for PK 14 Sahibzada Yaqub Khan, former MNA Maulana Asadullah, JI tehsil chief Imranud Din advocate, Maulana Inayatullah Islahi and others.

The JI chief said that the nation would be rid of the IMF and World Bank clinches if his party was

given the chance to rule. He alleged the previous rulers had destroyed the country morally, economically and politically. He said that it was the right time for the nation to get freedom from a few families in politics. He said the JI was fully participating in the existing political process to impose the Islamic sharia law in the country through ballot. "We want an interest-free economy and true justice in Pakistani courts", Siraj said, adding that without justice no society could stand up.

About the JI manifesto he said that the establishment of a true justice system, provision of free quality education, provi-

sion of standard healthcare facilities, development of rural areas, construction of roads, establishment of industrial zones, interest-free loans for skilled youth and monthly stipend for aged citizens were the priorities of his party.

The JI chief said that unfortunately corrupt elements were respected in the country who always bought members of assembly with their wealth. He said the voters should cautiously use their right to vote during the upcoming general elections as free, fair and transparent elections were the only solution to all problems faced by the nation.