

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has announced launch of its nationwide election campaign from Monday, January 15. A spokesperson for the PML-N said Maryam Nawaz would address a public rally on the first day of the campaign at Iqbal Stadium, Okara. Rana Sanaulah, former interior minister and PML-N Punjab President, confirmed to the media party supreme Nawaz Sharif would spearhead the election campaign.



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PM arrives in Zurich to participate in WEF meeting

ZURICH (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar arrived here on Sunday to participate in the 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos to be held from January 15 to 19. Pakistan's Permanent Representative to Geneva Bilal Ahmed, Pakistan's Ambassador

to Switzerland Amir Shaukat and high level officials received the prime minister.

In the meeting, the prime minister would deliver a keynote address on the theme "Trade Tech's Trillion Dollar Promise", the Foreign Office Spokesperson wrote her official X account. PM Kakar would attend three key the-

matic events on 'preventing an era of global conflict; restoring faith in the global system and preventing economic fracture'.

On the sidelines of the event, he would also hold meetings with the government and business leaders.

During his visit, Prime Minister Kakar would lead a special "Invest in Pakistan" event.

Another resolution seeking delay in polls lands in Senate

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Another resolution seeking a delay in the February 8 polls moved in the Senate on Sunday, citing the weather and the security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Senator Hilalur Rehman of the Independent Parliamentary Group submitted the resolution citing severe cold weather, snowfall, and security challenges as the hindrances for the general elections.

"Severe cold and snowfall in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are depriving the citizens to cast their ballots while the candidates are also facing numerous challenges to run their campaigns," said the resolution.

"In the same way, due to security concerns in the country, especially in KP, candidates are facing threats of terrorist attacks while campaigning," it said, adding that it was also creating obstacles and limiting candidates' participation in their campaigns.

It added that the date of Feb 8 to hold the elections is not suitable. The resolution urged the ECP to delay polls to a date which was acceptable for all the relevant stakeholders.

It merits mention here that it was the third resolution moved in the upper house demanding delay in elections. A similar resolution was tabled in the Senate a couple of days ago.

The resolution was moved by Senator Hidayatullah, a member of

Pakistan's upper house from the Independent Parliamentary Group.

It is to be noted that earlier this month, the Upper House of Parliament adopted a resolution, which was moved by independent Senator Dilawar Khan during a session with only 15 lawmakers in attendance. It sought polls delay in the light of extreme weather in hilly areas and the deteriorating security situation. "The Constitution upheld the right to vote for every citizen of Pakistan and the Election Commission of Pakistan was bound to conduct free and fair polls in contingent upon inclusivity and ensuring the participation of all regional people."

Taiwan election: China says US 'gravely wrong' to congratulate new leader

BEIJING (Agencies): China has accused the US of sending "a gravely wrong signal" to those pushing for Taiwan's independence after Saturday's election result.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken sent Taiwanese president-elect William Lai a message of congratulations following the result.

Beijing called the message violation of Washington's commitment to maintain only unofficial ties with Taiwan. Mr Lai has vowed to protect Taiwan from an increasingly aggressive China.

But Beijing sees Taiwan as its territory and fiercely challenges any government that says otherwise.

Messages of congratulations for Taiwan's new leader poured in from all over the world after the election, including from Mr Blinken - who emphasised the partnership between Taipei and Washington, which he said was rooted in democratic values.

"We look forward to working with Dr Lai and Taiwan's leaders of all parties to advance our shared interests and values," he said in a statement. Mr Blinken also

stressed that the US, one of Taiwan's biggest allies, is "committed to maintaining cross-strait peace and stability".

The top US diplomat was also quick to say that such collaboration should "further our longstanding unofficial relationship" and be "consistent with the US One China policy". Under the policy, the US recognises and has formal ties with China rather than the island of Taiwan, which China sees as a breakaway province to be unified with the mainland one day.

KP CM for accelerated efforts on humans capital exports stretagy

PESHAWAR (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah underlined the need to ensure accelerated implementation of the provincial government's Human Capital Export Strategy and directed all the concerned departments and institutions to move ahead on fast track with clear targets and well planned activities.

He also directed them to indicate their targets to this effect immediately; and said that the government will extend its support accordingly. "All concerned have to contribute effectively at their parts for this noble cause", he added.

He was chairing a high level meeting in this regard, held here at Chief Minister's House, Peshawar. Besides the caretaker cabinet members, chief secretary, additional chief secretary, administrative secretaries of the concerned departments and high ups of TEVTA, ETEA, PMRU, Foreign Aids, SIDB, IT Board and other relevant institutions attended the meeting. Chairman Higher Education Commission, divisional Commissioners, deputy commission-

ers, vice chancellors of the public sector universities, chairmen of educational boards and representatives of other partner institutions also attended the meeting via video link.

The meeting was briefed in details about the gap analysis between the universities and provincial government departments and proposed the various gap bridging strategies including creation of specialized post graduate healthcare programs, integration of hands-on training and internships, introducing specialized courses in cutting-edge technology, updated vocational training programs, integrating modern vocational and digital skills training and soft skills development into Madrassa education etc. In order to implement the proposed bridging strategies, action plan for each intervention along with ultimate targets, institutional framework, stipulated timelines and expected outcomes was also presented in the meeting.

Addressing the participants, the caretaker Chief Minister said that gap bridging between the universities and provincial departments is much needed. He directed the quarters concerned to take immediate steps for

this purpose adding that a separate meeting with the vice chancellors of public sector universities be held as soon as possible.

He maintained that only through team work and collaborated efforts, we can implement this flagship program in its letter and spirit, adding that all the partners should stay satisfied and fully committed; the provincial government will extend its all-out support for the purpose and any kind of reservation would be addressed on priority basis.

"We will make all possible efforts to assist and empower our talented youth", he remarked and added that all the relevant institutions especially public sector universities have to be proactive; their role would be instrumental in this overall process. He urged upon Vice Chancellors to introduce more and more market-based courses for the ongoing admissions in universities. He further directed the authorities concerned for necessary steps to effectively utilize the scholarships already available within the various public sector universities as well as to attract new scholarships in different fields for facilitating the deserving talented youth of the province.



KHAIRPUR: Chairman Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing to public gathering during Election Campaign.

Bat out, upcoming battle between arrow, lion imminent: Bilawal

DERA MURAD JAMALI (APP): Chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, stated on Sunday that the electoral symbol of the bat is no longer relevant, and a forthcoming contest will be between the arrow and the lion.

Speaking at a public gathering in Dera Murad Jamali, District Balochistan, the PPP Chairman promised that if the PPP comes into power, it will bring relief to the people. "I pledge to complete the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline project and address the Kashmir issue if the government formed under my leadership after the election," he assured.

He assured that the PPP will diligently fulfil the 10-point election manifesto, emphasizing that doubling salaries would be his primary focus once in government. The PPP Chairman stated that the

party would offer 300 units of free electricity per month to impoverished families. He mentioned that should the people choose a PPP chief minister in Balochistan, he would provide free educational and healthcare facilities in each district.

He announced to establishment of a university in Naseerabad and build a hospital like NICVD in the area.

Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari expressed his commitment to contesting elections to change the fate of the people and serve them. He emphasized his intent to stand alongside the people. The PPP Chairman appealed to the residents of Balochistan, urging them to support the party of Martyrs and provide him with an opportunity to reform the healthcare system in Balochistan.

He mentioned that Shaheed

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto initiated a 5-marla land scheme for families without homes, while Shaheed Benazir Bhutto introduced a 7-marla scheme.

Bilawal said that the PPP after winning the election, will construct around 2 million houses within a year and will also given the ownership rights of these houses.

He remarked that the flood victims of Nasirabad did not receive such initiatives. He pledged that with the people's mandate, the upcoming PPP government will construct houses for the flood victims and grant them ownership rights.

He stated that the forthcoming PPP government will launch the Kissan Card, Mazdoor Card, and Youth Card, providing financial support to these segments. Additionally, the incoming PPP government will initiate a program to combat hunger.

Elections on Feb 8 in interest of country, political parties: Solangi

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Sunday that it was in the interest of all political forces and parties concerned that general elections should be held on February 8.

Speaking at the seventh edition of Think Fest 2024, the minister said it would be good for the country if the elections were held on the scheduled day i.e., Thursday, February 8.

He reminded that it was clearly written in the preamble of the Constitution that Pakistan would be run by the elected representatives.

The minister said that in the run-up to the elections, everyone was complaining about the level playing field.

The Pakistan Peoples Party and the Muslim Pakistan League (N) were voicing their complaints in that regard while Maulana Fazlur Rehman also complained of a lack of level playing field in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

"In fact, the working class of Pakistan does not have a level playing field," Solangi maintained.

Without a fundamental change in the system enabling the common man to contest elections, there would not be a level playing field, he remarked.

The minister stressed that every political party should give its members the right to vote in the election of its office-bearers.

He said in his opinion, the yesterday's Apex Court decision was a good precedent. It would have been better if there were legal experts in the panel who could explain the legal position, he added. Termining political instability and economic survival of the coun-

try main challenges, Solangi said the next government might be facing economic issues.

"We need improvement in the economy. With the principal amount of the overall budget used for servicing big loans and other payments, it is difficult to run the country," he said.

The minister said that the agriculture contributed about a quarter of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), but the tax collection from the sector was very low.

Moreover, he added, the population was increasing rapidly, which was burdening the sectors like health and education.

He said Pakistan was also bearing the brunt of climate change as well.

"We have to improve relations with our neighboring countries, as, otherwise, we cannot become economically strong," Solangi maintained. About the protesters from Balochistan in Islamabad, he minister said that they were offered to hold their sit-in either at F-9 Park or H-9 but they insisted on going to the D Chowk in Red Zone.

"No group, be it political or religious, is allowed to enter the Red Zone," Solangi said.

He said the police had to take action when the protesters camping outside the National Press Club tried to enter the Red Zone. Later, the government's negotiation committee held talks with them and then the women and children arrested by the police were released first. Another 163 people were released in the second phase and finally the remaining 34 were also set free.

Medical facilities, including an ambulance were also provided to the

protestors, he added.

The Balochistan governor and other members of the committee persuaded the protesters to go back peacefully, he said.

The minister said that there was a need of a negotiating committee having representation of major political parties that could give a better solution to this problem.

Solangi terms press clubs as main pillars of press freedom:

Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Sunday that press clubs were the main pillars of press freedom. Addressing the cheque distribution ceremony among the representatives of press clubs across the Punjab here, he said that journalists were an important part of the society.

Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi and Provincial Information Minister Aamir Mir also addressed the cheque distribution ceremony of the press clubs.

The information minister appreciated the Chief Minister Punjab for approval of Rs 9.45 million grant for press clubs in the province. He said that Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi always took care of public needs and he was always engaged in public service.

"On behalf of the Ministry of Information and the Government of Pakistan, we thank the Chief Minister of Punjab for taking measures for the welfare of journalists", he added.

Earlier the caretaker federal minister, chief minister Punjab and information minister Punjab distributed among the journalists.



LAHORE: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Murtaza Solangi addressing a Seminar (Muzakara) organized by Think Fest at Al Hamra Hall.

Maldives calls for withdrawal of Indian troops by March 15

MALE (Reuters) - The Maldives has called for India to withdraw troops from its territory by March 15, an official said on Sunday, in a step that will further strain ties between the South Asian neighbours. President Mohamed Muizzu won election last year on a pledge to end the Maldives' "India first" policy, in a region where New Delhi and Beijing compete for influence.

A contingent of around 80 Indian soldiers are stationed on the Indian Ocean archipelago to provide support for military equipment given to the Maldives by New Delhi and assist in humanitarian activities in the region.

In talks at the foreign ministry between senior delegations from both

countries, Muizzu proposed that the soldiers leave. "In this meeting, on behalf of President Muizzu, the Maldivian delegation proposed the removal of Indian troops by March 15," Ahmed Nazim, Policy Director at the President's Office told reporters. "This date was proposed in the agenda by the government and specifically the president. These discussions are ongoing." In his campaign, Muizzu called New Delhi's huge influence a threat to sovereignty and pledged to remove Indian troops.

"The most important point to note here is that Indian troops cannot stay in the Maldives. That's the policy of this government. It is also the president's pledge and what the people of Maldives

want," Nazim added. India's foreign ministry confirmed that a wide range of issues on bilateral cooperation were discussed between the two countries but the statement was quiet on the issue of the soldiers departure from the islands.

"Both sides also held discussions on finding mutually workable solutions to enable continued operation of Indian aviation platforms that provide humanitarian and medvac services to the people of Maldives," the statement said. China and the Maldives upgraded their relationship during Muizzu's first state visit to Beijing last week by agreeing to a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" that sets the stage for the Asian giant to up its investments in the Maldives.

Only one dengue case reported

LAHORE (APP): Dengue has almost been eliminated from Punjab as only one case was reported in the whole of province on Sunday. The latest Health Department data reveals that so far 16 confirmed dengue cases were recorded across 36 districts in Punjab during the year 2024 as 10 cases were reported in Lahore, two each in Rawalpindi and Faisalabad and one each in Gujrat and Vehari.

Currently, hospitals in Punjab are treating a total of 7 patients. In Lahore, one dengue patient is currently under treatment. The Secretary of Health Punjab, Ali Jaan Khan, issued a plea to citizens, urging them to maintain clean and dry surroundings as a preventive measure against dengue fever. He also called for cooperation with health department teams that are working tirelessly to combat the virus.

For those in need of dengue treatment, information, or wishing to register complaints, a free helpline is available through the health department at 1033.

Free travel facilities to students

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Provincial Transport Minister Ibrahim Hassan Murad on Sunday announced a three-month extension of free travel facilities for students, following special instructions from the Punjab Chief Minister. In a statement issued here, he said that students up to grade 12 could travel free in the Orange Line Metro Train.

The minister added that in the recent holidays, this process was interrupted for some time, while thirty thousand students were benefiting from this facility on a daily basis and till now millions students have benefited from this facility.

He said that the Speedo bus service would also provide the free travel facility to students. While fulfilling its education-friendly vision, the Punjab government is also ensuring the provision of free of interest motorcycles on EVs technology for students so that more youths could continue their education journey easily.

Call for caution amidst harsh winter conditions

LAHORE (APP): Professor Dr. Ashraf Jamal, Head of the Pulmonology Department at Allama Iqbal Medical College/Jinnah Hospital, emphasized the need for heightened care among the elderly and young children in the current foggy and cold weather. Talking to APP on Sunday, Dr. Jamal warned of increased air pollution resulting from the combination of fog and smog during severe cold spells. He highlighted a surge in chest infections, fever, and pneumonia cases, particularly among children and the elderly. He underscored the vulnerability of these groups to adverse weather effects and urged special precautions, including the use of warm clothing and consumption of hot drinks.

Arfa Karim a torch-bearer for new generation: CM

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has said that Microsoft Certified IT Professional Arfa Karim is a torch-bearer for the new generation. In his message on the death anniversary of Arfa Karim, he said "the daughter of the nation Arfa Karim is alive in our hearts even today". She brightened the name of the country and the nation in the world at an early age, he said and added that the enlightenment which the talented daughter created in the field of information technology would remain bright forever.

The CM said that Arfa Karim is a symbol of steadfastness and courage. Through her God-gifted talent and abilities, she made the world know that the Pakistani male and female children do not lag behind anyone in the field of science and technology, he said. "We are benefiting from the information technology to the maximum for provision of relief and valuable services," he added. Mohsin Naqvi highlighted that Arfa Karim is the name of a mission which is linked to the maximum usage of information technology.

CM Naqvi okays grant of Rs90m for Punjab press clubs: Punjab Chief Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi on Sunday said he was proud that he belonged to the fraternity of journalists.

Addressing a function held to distribute cheques among press clubs of the province, the chief minister announced a grant of Rs90 million for the clubs.

He said that journalism was the name of 'honesty and responsibility'. "A lot of responsibility rests on our shoulders," he said, and added that he attached great importance to the provision of facilities to journalists. He urged them to concentrate on digital media since the future belonged to this form of journalism. "Those who don't change themselves according to changing times lag behind others," the CM opined. There were many things, he went on to say, in which Pakistan was behind other countries. Speaking on the occasion, Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Murtaza Solangi said, "We are grateful to the chief minister for taking steps for the welfare of journalists," he added. Punjab Minister for Information Amir Mir and others were also present on the occasion.

Karachi ranked 3rd most polluted city in world on AQI

KARACHI (INP): Karachi becomes third most polluted city of the world on Sunday as eastern winds bring the air quality to unhygienic level.

The metropolis was measured to have 190 reading of particulate matter on the air quality index.

Earlier, health experts described Karachi's air quality as "very unhealthy" and advised citizens to restrict their outdoor activities especially during peak pollution hours.

It is to be mentioned here that AQI as high as 151-200 is considered unhealthy, while an AQI reading between 201 to 300 is more harmful and AQI reading over 300 mark is extremely hazardous.

Experts said that the air becomes heavier in the winter, causing poisonous particles in the atmosphere to move downwards and making the atmosphere polluted. As a result, a layer of polluted particles, including large amounts of carbon and smoke, covers an area.

The smoke produced by factories or by burning coal, garbage, oil or tyres, enters the atmosphere and its impact appears at the onset of the winter and remains till the end of the season, experts said.

Although southwestern winds blowing from the sea in Karachi, work as a filter for the air, these winds remain mostly suspended during the winter, experts said.

Gas theft crackdown 316 connections disconnected in Punjab, KP and Islamabad

F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 316 connections; Rs 5.6 million fine imposed

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 17 connections on illegal use of gas while another 24 on use of compressor and also imposed fine 3.29 million against gas theft cases. The team also lodged an FIR against gas pilferers. In Rawalpindi the team disconnected 74 connections on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 0.14 million have been booked against gas theft cases. During the crackdown in Islamabad the regional team disconnected 6 connections on illegal use of gas. In Multan 1 connection was disconnected on illegal use of

gas while another 49 on use of compressor. The team also lodged an FIR against gas theft.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 69 connections on account of direct use of gas and illegal use of gas and also imposed fine of Rs 2.05 million against gas theft cases.

In Sahiwal, six connections were disconnected on compressor use while another one on illegal use of gas.

In Sheikhupura 49 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 0.06 million booked against gas theft cases.

In Bahawalpur the team disconnected 10 connections on use of compressor. In Faisalabad the team disconnected 3 connections on illegal use of gas while another 7 on use of compressor. The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.06 million against gas theft cases.

Nawaz bringing new vision: Musadik

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz leader Musadik Malik said on Sunday that those who had violated law must be held accountable.

Talking to media here he said that PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif was bringing a new vision

among people on the basis of his performance. He said that people would give their decision on February 8, adding that the PML-N had launched various public welfare projects in Punjab.

"A development comparison between Sindh and Punjab will make the

situation crystal clear," he said and added that interference in democracy was not good at all.

He further said that what Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said about Nawaz Sharif's tenure was not correct. "Abbasi was not criticizing the PML-N but himself," he maintained.



LAHORE: A vendor is busy making tea for customers in the city.

Final lists of candidates for all National, Punjab Assembly seats from Lahore

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has released the final lists of candidates for the National and provincial assembly seats in Lahore, with 266 names vying for 14 seats in the Lower House of parliament.

Following are the candidates in the race for all the NA seats from Lahore, as per the ECP list:

NA-117
As per the election commission, 20 candidates are contesting from this constituency:

Abdul Aleem Khan from the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party

Asif Hashmi, PPP

Independent candidates Ali Ijaz Buttar on the symbol of a bowl, Akmal Bari on an iron and singer Abrarul Haq on the symbol of a guitar

Jahangir Ahmed of the Jamaat-e-Islami

NA-118
Among the 13 candidates in the race for this seat are:

Hamza Shehbaz Sharif, PML-N

Shahid Abbas, PPP-Parliamentarians

PTI leader Muhammad Khan Madni contesting as independent candidate on the election symbol of a sheep

Aliya Hamza Malik with the symbol of a dice

Muhammad Shoukat from the Jamaat-e-Islami

NA-119
There are 18 candidates vying for this seat:

PML-N leader Maryam Nawaz

PPP-P: Iftikhar Shahid

A host of independents, including Nadeem Sherwani on the symbol of cricket stump

NA-120
Moreover, among the 27 nominees in the running for this constituency:

Ayaz Sadiq of PML-N

Munir Ahmad of the PPP-P

NA-121
There are 15 candidates for this constituency, including:

PML-N Sheikh Rohale Asghar

Independent Wasim Qadir on the symbol of cricket stump

NA-122
There are 21 candidates in the race for this seat, including:

PML-Nis Khawaja Saad Rafiq

Independent candidates Azhar Siddique on the symbol of a medal and Latif Khosa the alphabet ĖKf

NA-123
There are 16 candidates in the race for this seat, including:

PML-N's Shehbaz Sharif

Afzal Azim Pahat, an independent candidate, on the radio symbol

Jamaat-e-Islami's Liaquat Baloch

PPP-P's Muhammad Ziaul Haq

NA-124
From the 13 candidates in the race for this constituency are:

PML-N's Rana Mubashir Iqbal

PTI's Sardar Azimullah and Zameer Ahmed are in the field as independent candidates contesting on the symbols of watch and dolphin, respectively

NA-125
There are 19 contenders for this constituency, including:

PML-N's Muhammad Afzal Khokhar

PPP-P's Chaudhry Abdul Ghafoor Khan

PTI leader Jamil Asghar Bhatti as an independent candidate on the drum symbol

NA-126
There are 19 candidates contesting from this seat, including:

PML-Nis Saiful Mulook Khokhar

PPP-Pis Amjad Ali

Jamaat-Islami's Ameerul Azim

And a host of independents

NA-127
For this seat of the National Assembly, there are 25 contenders, including:

PPP-Pis Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari

PML-Nis in Attaullah Tarar

PTI's Shabbir Ahmed Gujjar as an independent candidate on the hookah symbol

Ji's Syed Ehsanullah Waqas

Huqooq-e-Khalq Party's

Muhammad Muzammil

NA-128
For this seat of the National Assembly, there are 22 candidates, including:

Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party's Awn Chaudhry

PTI's Salman Akram Raja as an independent candidate on the racket symbol

MQM-Pakistanis

Agha

Muhammad Ali Khan

PPP-Pis Adeel Ghulam Mohyuddin

Ji's Liaquat Baloch

NA-129
There are 19 candidates running for this seat, including:

PML-Nis Hafiz Nauman

PTI's Mian Muhammad Azhar allotted the cricket stumps as an independent candidate

Ji's Ahmad Jamil Rashid

PPP-Pis Aurangzeb Shaafi Burki

NA-130
There are 18 candidates vying for this seat, including:

PML-Nis Nawaz Sharif

PTI leader Yasmin Rashid on the laptop symbol as an independent candidate

PPP-Pis Iqbal Ahmad Khan

MQM-Pis Samia Naz

Ji's Sufi Khaliq Ahmad Butt

Punjab Assembly seats

Moreover, 813 candidates are contesting for the 30 seats of the Punjab Assembly from Lahore.

For PP-146, PML-Nis Ghazali Saleem Butt is in the race among 20 candidates; for PP-147, there are 24 candidates, including PML-Nis

Hamza Shehbaz and PTI Leader Muhammad Khan Madni as an independent candidate on a ěbedi symbol.

For PP-148, the PML-N has fielded Muftaba Shujaar Rehman against 15 other candidates, including the PTI's Salman Abbas as an independent candidate on the ěaircraft symbol. The PP-149 constituency has 37 candidates in the race, including

Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party President Abdul Aleem Khan, PTI's Nadeem Sherwani and Zubair Niazi as independent candidates on ěparroti and parachute symbols.

For PP-168, PTI's Nadeem Abbas Bara has been allotted the ěcricket stumps symbol, for PP-169 Mian Mahmoodur Rasheed has got the ěracket symbol, for PP-171 former Punjab minister Mian Aslam Iqbal has been allotted the ěaircraft symbol as an independent candidate, Azam Khan Niazi given a ěbrick symbol and Bajash Niazi ěcricket stumps for PP-172 and Dr

Yasmin Rashid allotted the ěcoin symbol for PP-173.

PU awards ten PhD degrees

LAHORE (APP): Punjab University has awarded ten PhD degrees to scholars in various disciplines.

According to the varsity spokesman here Sunday, these scholars included Muhammad Aslam Khan son of Shad Muhammad in the subject of Islamic Studies, Muhammad Javed Iqbal son of Muhammad Rashid Ghias in the subject of Zoology, Qamar Un Nisa daughter of Muhammad Sajid Iqbal in the subject of Philosophy, Tahira Yasmin daughter of Ahmad Din in the subject of Chemistry, Gohar Iqbal son of Ch. Muhammad Nazeer in the subject of Persian, Majid Hussain son of Abdul Razaq in the subject of Punjabi, Samra Kousar daughter of Amanullah in the subject of Molecular Biology, Nasir Ali son of Sher Ali in the subject of South Asian Studies (Specialization in International Relations), Shazia Ashraf daughter of Muhammad Ashraf in the subject of Botany and Muddassira Arshad son of Arshad Jamil Khokhar in the subject of Computer Science.

Regular stands would also be allocated for parking the loader rickshaws, he informed. He further said that Rawalpindi city was facing traffic problems due to non-registration of thousands of Qingqi passenger and loader rickshaws.

The administration had

Admin starts registration process of Qingqi passenger & loader rickshaws

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district administration has started a campaign for registration of Qingqi passenger and loader rickshaws, said a district administration spokesman. He informed that after the registration process, the zoning process of the city would be completed and according to Qingqi zoning, the route permits would be issued.

Regular stands would also be allocated for parking the loader rickshaws, he informed. He further said that Rawalpindi city was facing traffic problems due to non-registration of thousands of Qingqi passenger and loader rickshaws.

The administration had

given six months amnesty to Qingqi passenger and loader rickshaws, he said adding, special registrations counters had been established at two different places in Rawalpindi for the registration of the passenger and loader rickshaws. Vehicle Inspection Centers would also be open seven days a week for fitness certification of the passenger and loader rickshaws, he added.

The spokesman further informed that the Commissioner had directed the authorities concerned to lodge FIRs against vehicles' Jumma Bazaar ban violators. "There is a complete ban on Jumma Bazaar of the vehicles in the city, he said adding, FIRs would be lodged against the dealers and the vehicle owners found violating the ban," he added. "Rawalpindi city is very congested and the traffic problems were increasing due to illegal parking and other violations," he said. "Jumma bazaar of vehicles causes traffic problems as well as security risk," he added.

He said that strict legal action would be taken against the violators under Section 144 already imposed by the Deputy Commissioner. In the next phase, an open space outside the city would be identified where the vehicle Jumma Bazaar would be set up, he added.

Persistent fog disrupts train services across Pakistan

LAHORE (APP): In an ongoing struggle against dense fog, train operations in various parts of the country continue to face disruptions, causing delays in several key services. According to the latest update from Pakistan Railways on Sunday, many trains were delayed, affecting travel schedules for passengers as 1-Up Khyber Mail train was running late for 4 hours, 5-Up Greenline for 01 hour, 7-Up Tezgam for 2:15 hrs, 9-Up Allama Iqbal Express for 3:30 hrs, 11-Up Hazara Express for 1:30 hrs, 13-Up Awam Express for 1:30 hrs, 15-Up Karachi Express for 2 hrs, 17-Up Millat Express for 4:30 hrs, 25-Up Bahauddin Zakariya Express for 4 hrs,

33-Up Pak Business Express for 5:30 hrs, 37-Up Fareed Express for 2 hrs, 41-Up Karakoram Express for 4:45 hrs, 45-Up Pakistan Express for 4 hrs, 47-Up Rehman Baba Express, 4:45 hrs and 145-Up Sukkur Express was late for 5:30 hrs. While 2-Down Khyber Mail train was running late for 2 hrs, 6-Dn Greenline for 1:30 hrs, 8-Dn Tezgam for 2:30 hrs, 10-Dn Allama Iqbal Express for 4:15 hrs, 12-Dn Hazara Express for 01 hrs, 14-Dn Awam Express for 1:15 hrs, 16-Dn Karachi Express for 3:15 hrs, 18-Dn Millat Express for 3:30 hrs, 26-Dn Bahauddin Zakariya Express for 3:15 hrs, 28-Dn Shalimar Express for 2:15 hrs.

Cold, dry weather forecast for Sindh

KARACHI (APP): The Pakistan Meteorological Department on Sunday predicted cold and dry weather for most parts of the Sindh province during the next 24 hours.



LAHORE: Visitors viewing paintings during Painting and Calligraphy Exhibition in collaboration with Formanite School System and Walled City Authority.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah chairing a meeting regarding Human Capital Export Strategy of the provincial government.

25 political heavyweights flex muscles on various constituencies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PESHAWAR (APP): Like the previous general elections, the politically fertile Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has again attracted over 25 heavyweights of various political and religious parties, who would contest election 2024 in the province.

According to Election Commission of Pakistan, besides others stalwarts, PMLN Quaid, Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Shahzada Ghustasp Khan are contesting election 2024 from NA-15 Mansehra. PMLN KP President, Engr Amir Muqam filed nomination papers from two national assembly and one provincial seats including his home district Shangla and Swat.

Chief of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), Maulana Fazlur Rehman is trying luck in his home district ie NA-44 Dera Ismail Khan where he will face Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Faisal Karim Kundi and former Federal Minister Ali Amin Gandapur.

PTI leader Ali Amin Gandapur is contesting election as independent candidate after Supreme Court upheld Election Commission of Pakistan's decision regarding revoking 'bat' symbol of PTI on the controversial intra-party election.

Gandapur had won 2018 election from the same constituency, while PPP's Faisal Karim Kundi and Maulana Fazlur Rehman was also elected to the national assembly from the same constituency in the past elections.

PTI has awarded tickets to central chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan for NA-10 Buner, central general secretary Umar Ayub Khan for NA-18 Haripur, former National Assembly speaker Asad Qaisar Khan for NA-19 Swabi, and Sher Afzal Marwat for NA-41 Lakki Marwat, who were contesting election as independent candidates after SC verdict.

ANP's central senior vice president and former Chief Minister Ameer Haider Hoti will contest for NA-22 Mardan, ANP central general secretary Mian Iftikhar Hussain for PK-89 in Nowshera, and senior leader Ghulam Ahmad Bilour for NA-32 in Peshawar.

ANP provincial president Aimal Wali Khan will contest for NA-25 in Charsadda, while provincial general secretary of the party Sardar Hussain Babak for PK-27 Buner.

PPP awarded tickets to its provincial president Najmuddin Khan for NA-5 Upper Dir, Anwar Saifullah Khan for NA-43 Tank, and Faisal Karim Kundi for NA-44,

D I Khan.

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) central amir and former senator Sirajul Haq will contest the election for the National Assembly from his native town Dir, while the provincial amir of the party, Prof Ibrahim, will try luck from PK-102 Bannu, and former senior provincial minister Inayatullah Khan for PK-13, Upper Dir.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-Parliamentarian (PTI-P) Chairman and former chief minister Pervez Khattak will contest from NA-33 and PK-88 from his native district Nowshera, where he was elected to the national and provincial assemblies on the PTI tickets twice in 2013 and 2018 election.

On NA33 Nowshera-1, tough electoral battle is expected among Pervez Khattak, Pakistan Muslim League-N Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Secretary and former member provincial assembly, Ikhtair Wali Khan, Awami National Party's Khan Pervez, Barrister Sarwar of Pakistan Tahrik e Insaf and Ijazul Haq of Jamiat Ulema Islam-F.

A unique phenomena of 2024 general election is the participation of all family members of PTIP Chief, Pervez Khattak including his son-in-law Dr Imran Khattak and his sons whose nomination papers were accepted for all the national and provincial assemblies' seats.

Pervez Khattak filed nomination papers for NA-33, PK-87 and PK-88 while nomination papers of his nephew and son-in-law Dr Imran Khattak were accepted for NA-34 and PK-89 respectively.

Pervez Khattak's sons Ibrahim Khattak and Ismail Khattak are contesting from PK-85 and PK-86, respectively. Former KP Information Minister and Awami National Party leader, Mian Iftikhar Hussain are eyeing on PK-89 while PMLN's Ikhtiyar Wali filed nomination papers for NA-33 and PK-88.

Awami National Party's Khan Pervez, Barrister Sarwar Khan and Mustafa Anwar of PTI, Fayyazur Rahman of PMLN, Mufti Shakatullah and Ijazul Haq of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl and independents nomination papers for NA-33 Nowshera-I were also accepted.

Major-Gen (r) Saad Khattak of Aam Admi Party, Mian Babar Shah of ANP, Mian Khaliqur Rahman, Haji Akbar, Daud Khattak of PTI, Shaiq Amin of Tehreek-e-Labbai, Hamza Pervez of PMLN, Alhaj

Pervez Khan of JUIF, Idrees Khattak of PPP and others are contesting from NA-34 Nowshera-II and others provincial constituencies.

NA-33 Nowshera-I was previously won by PTI's Siraj Muhammad Khan in 2013 general election after securing 54,266 votes against Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah of PMLN's with 34,537 votes while in 2018 general election it was clinched by Pervez Khattak who contested on PTI ticket with 82,118 votes against Khan Pervez of PPP with 35,658 votes.

Pervez Khattak was also elected from NA-34 Nowshera-II on the ticket of PTI in 2013 general election after securing 70,053 votes against runnerup Daud Khan Khattak of ANP with 21,493 votes.

Later, Pervez Khattak resigned from NA-34 and retained NA-33 Nowshera-I. Later, his son-in-law Dr Imran Khattak won NA-34 in by-election after securing 48,043 votes against Daud Khattak of ANP's with 27,569 votes.

In the 2018 election, this constituency was again won by Dr. Imran Khattak who contested on PTI's ticket after securing 90,256 votes against Jamal Khattak of ANP's with 47,132 votes. The total registered voters in NA-34-Nowshera-II are 377,306.

Similarly, former chief minister and central vice president of the PTI-P Mehmood Khan will contest for two National Assembly and one provincial assembly seat from Swat on the ticket of PTIP.

Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) central chairman and former Federal Minister Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao will contest for NA-24, Charsadda, and his son Sikandar Khan Sherpao had been elected to the provincial assembly thrice but lost to a PTI candidate in 2018 the general polls — will contest for KP Assembly from Charsadda.

Moreover, Awami National Party's (ANP) central president Asfandiyar Wali Khan will not be contesting polls due to illness and awarded his son Aimal Wali Khan to contest election 2024 from Charsadda.

Electioneering has picked up momentum in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after allotment of electoral symbols to the candidates despite cold weather.

The political parties and their candidates started addressing corner meetings and election rallies persuading voters about their programs and manifestos.

59.322mn registered female voters to decide fate of 175 political parties in election 2024

PESHAWAR (APP): Despite cold weather conditions, the electioneering campaigns have started gearing up in the country including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where over 128.585 million registered voters including 59.322 million females and 69.263 million males would decide the fate of 175 political parties in the general election 2024.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a total of 21.928 million voters including 11,437 million males and 9,983 million females would exercise their right of franchise in favour of their political parties and independent candidates for the next five years.

Prof Dr. A.H.Hilali, former Chairman of the Political Science Department, University of Peshawar told APP on Saturday that female voters' role during the election 2024 would be crucial and any political party.

"I eagerly await to poll my first vote on February

8, 2024 election," said Sidra Qaiser, a young voter/school teacher of Nowshera district while talking to APP. She said the casting of the vote was a national obligation and she would vote for a political party's candidate after seeing its manifesto.

Professor Dr. Hilali said all eyes would be on voters' turnout in the 2024 election after the overall turnout rates for the elections in 2008, 2013, and 2018 were 45 percent, 54 percent, and 50 percent, respectively. He said the women voters' turnout in the 2018 general elections stood at 40 percent with 21 of 46 million registered women voters participating in polling.

"The political parties need a lot of work to mobilize women voters as about 40% of female vote on the average which is considerably low as per international standards." He said PPP leadership was taking credit for BISP, 1973 constitution, development works in

Sindh and 18th constitutional amendment besides a new slogan of constructing three million houses for the poor.

He said PMLN was advocating for constructing motorways, lawari tunnel, restoration of peace in KP, Karachi and atomic tests at Chagi in 1998. Similarly, ANP was trying to attract voters about renaming NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the construction of universities in the province. Dr Malik said that free and transparent elections are very important for the continuity of democracy and addressing the country's challenges like economy, climate change issues besides controlling price hike and inflation that adversely affected the common man.

He said women were about 50pc of the country's population and their women participation in elections provides the citizens with a uniform way to voice their opinions and choose who and what is best for them.

Social media to play instrumental role in Election 2024

PESHAWAR (APP) :In democratic setups, free and transparent elections provide a strong base for democracy and ensure that the government chosen through polls is of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Showcasing the signs of a healthy democracy in a country, a free, fair, and transparent election provides legitimacy to an elected government to take decisions in the national interest and the welfare of people for the next five years.

"Election gives the authority in the hands of the public and provides them the freedom to elect the government of their choice, which will work for their growth and development besides resolution of the country's problems," said Professor Dr. A.H. Hilali, former Chairman, Political Science Department, University of Peshawar, while talking to APP.

In the 2013 and 2018 general elections, he said, social media played an impactful role in deciding the fate of political parties. "The PTI's social media strategies and social mobilizers compared to other political parties had helped in establishing government for a second consecutive term in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," he said.

According to a report from Digital Pakistan 2023, the number of internet users in Pakistan swelled to a record 87.35 million in January last year, showing a 4.4 million increase between 2022 and 2023. The number of social media users also increased to a record 71.70 million in 2023, including 37.30 million users of Facebook, 71.70 million users of YouTube, 12.95 million on Instagram, and 16.51 million on TikTok. Similarly, about 11.95 million people are using Facebook Messenger. 9.30 million LinkedIn, 25.70 million snapchat, and 4.65 million users of X (Twitter) in the wake of an increase in mobile connections to 191.8 million in January 2023 in Pakistan.

Professor Hilali said the process of filing and scrutinizing nomination papers for the 2024 general elections was completed, and social media's role would be crucial in the 2024

election. He said all political parties, including PML-N, PPP, PTI, ANP, JUIF, MQM, IPP, and PTIP, have shown their presence on every major social media platform for political gains. He said all political parties and leaders have opened official pages with blue-ticks on Facebook and Facebook groups for communication with party members as well as with their fans and voters. Besides other social media platforms, he said all political leaders, including Nawaz Sharif, Bilawal Bhutto, Khalid Maqbool Saddiqui, Pervez Khattak, and Jahangir Tareen, opened official X (former Twitter) handles with blue ticks for authentication, along with official pages on Instagram by the young political leaders.

"For me, manifestos of political parties are important, and every person can see the programs of these parties by visiting their social media websites and pages with a single mobile click," said Ehtisham Qaiser, a lecturer of Urdu literature, while talking to the news agency.

Dr. Hilali said the success of political parties in the 2024 general election would largely depend on the political behavior and psychological-economic factors, past service records and manifestos of political parties, rather than the launching of personal attacks, blame games, characters assassination of political leadership, and dragging state institutions into politics in public meetings or issuing statements on social media platforms. According to the ECP, approximately 127 million registered voters would exercise their right of franchise in the 2024 general election, out of whom about 72.31 million (56.9 percent) were registered in Punjab, 26.65 million in Sindh (21 percent), 21.69 million voters (17.1 percent) in KP, and 5.28 million (4.2 percent) in Balochistan.

There were around 57.1 million youth voters aged between 18 and 35, making up 45 percent of those who were eligible to vote. The number of voters aged 36 to 45 comes to 27.79 million, i.e., 21.88

percent, and the two age groups, if seen together, comprise 84.81 million voters, or two-thirds of the total 127 million voters in Pakistan.

Dr. Hilali said the young voters, especially female voters representing nearly 50 percent of the population, would be a key factor in deciding the fate of political parties in the February 8 election. He said about 22 million children aged 5-16 were still out-of-school (OSC) in the country, including 4.7 million in KP, due to poverty and socioeconomic imbalances, and bringing them under the education net would be a big challenge for the government.

Dr. Imran Khattak, a former member of the national assembly and PTIP leader who was contesting the election from his home district of Nowshera, said that bringing down the prices of edibles, promoting industrialization for job creation for youth, and improving the economy would be his priority areas if voted to power. Syed Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha, a former state minister, said that the PPP believed in the power of the masses rather than social media and would construct three million houses for the poorest of the poor and homeless after coming into power.

He said that labor cards would be launched, and stipends under BISP programs would be enhanced to bring poor families out of poverty.

Ikhtair Wali Khan, PML-N KP Spokesman and former MPA, said that his party, if voted to power, would take the country out of economic challenges and promote agriculture and industrialization for the creation of job opportunities and achieving autonomy in food.

The experts said that in the wake of chilly weather and security challenges, the importance of social media was further increased in the 2024 elections, and all the political parties have already started projecting their programs through different social media websites for quick dissemination of information besides grabbing maximum seats in national and provincial assemblies.

KPFS&HFA operation continue against adulteration mafia in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority grand operation continued against adulteration mafia in Peshawar, Charsadda, Swat, and Dera Ismail Khan, spokesperson Food Authority said here Sunday.

The Food Safety Team in Peshawar raided food factories on Charsadda Road and Mohmand Economic Zone, and a ghee mill located in Mohmand Economic Zone was raided on a viral video on social media. 10 tons of non-standard ghee were exported and seized.

Action was taken against Ghee

Mills after the samples were declared unsatisfactory, the spokesperson said, adding that non-food-grade colors and 2100 kg of non-standard spices were also seized from a spice factory on Charsadda Road and the factory sealed.

On receiving secret information from the food safety team, the factory was also raided in Swat, the spokesperson said. In the factory in Swat, fake spices were being packed in the name of the products of two multinational companies, the spokesperson said.

More than 2,000 kg of fake spices and packing materials were

seized from the factory; the factory was also sealed, the spokesperson said.

He said about 7,000 liters of expired mineral water and 700 liters of carbonated drinks were seized from a distributor in Dera Ismail Khan, where the food authority team took them into official custody.

The spokesperson said, "Crackdowns against industries, wholesalers, and distributors will continue as directed by Director General Food Authority Shafiuallah Khan. He said adulteration in food items will not be tolerated under any circumstances."

Schools in KP set to reopen today amid lingering winter chill

PESHAWAR (INP): After an extended winter hiatus until January 14 (today), all public and private schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are gearing up to reopen their doors tomorrow (Monday).

The region has been in the grip of a severe cold wave since the beginning of January, prompting residents to huddle indoors and seek solace in hot beverages like green and black tea.

Inter board Karachi employees take charge of exam papers transportation

Acknowledging the challenging weather conditions, the provincial government, on January 7, announced a week-long extension to the winter vacations for both public and private schools in non-mountainous districts. The decision was made in light of the prevailing cold wave and dense fog that has blanketed the region.

In addition to the extended break, adjustments have been made to the timings of middle, high, and higher secondary schools to accommodate the winter season. This move aims to ensure the safety and well-being of students as the temperature continues to drop, with recent snowfall in mountainous areas contributing to the icy conditions.

Health concerns, particularly for children, have been raised by medical professionals, prompting the government to take proactive measures.

An official from the

education department revealed, "Doctors have declared the severe cold dangerous for children, forcing the government to extend the vacations."

Originally slated to run from December 23 to 31, the winter vacations have now been prolonged to mitigate the impact of the harsh weather on students. As the academic institutions prepare to resume normal activities, the community remains vigilant, adapting to the persistent winter challenges.



PESHAWAR: A vendor is busy preparing traditional food item for his cutomers at his workplace. —INP Photo

ANP hails SC verdict as victory of democracy

PESHAWAR (APP): Provincial President Awami National Party (ANP) Aimal Wali Khan on Sunday hailed the recent Supreme Court ruling and termed as a victory for democracy.

In a statement issued here, Aimal Wali Khan said that over the past two days, both sides presented compelling evidence, shedding light on the transparency of the case.

Aimal Wali Khan pointed out that a specific political party failed to provide a substantial defense, shifting the narrative from critiquing principles to questioning ethical standards.

Expressing concern over the validation of 800,000 votes within an hour, Khan raised alarms about potential foul play and emphasized the importance of maintaining integrity in the electoral process.

He said that it is responsibility of every citizen to work for the strengthening of democracy and development of country.



In brief

Two dacoits in police custody injured

BUREWALA (APP): Two dacoits in police custody were injured by the firing of their own accomplices during a police encounter. According to details, Gaggi Mandi police were bringing two dacoits, Danish and Najam, for recovery. Meanwhile, three unknown accomplices of the accused opened fire on the police team near Chak No. 201/EB to get their accomplices freed from police custody. Both dacoits sustained serious injuries from the firing of their own accomplices. SHO Gaggi Mandi police station Adnan Jameel Tipu shifted the injured to the hospital for treatment. Police teams were formed for the arrest of the fleeing dacoits. The injured dacoits were active criminals and were from an inter-district dacoit gang. 19 and 22 cases were traced, respectively, against Danish and Najam in districts Vehari, Donga Bonga, City B division Kurianwali, and Sadar Bahawal Nagar.

Foolproof security arrangements

MULTAN (APP): City Police Officer (CPO) Sadiq Ali said that foolproof security arrangements were being ensured at churches to avoid any untoward incident. In a statement issued here on Sunday, he said, "Best security arrangements have been made at churches to provide peaceful environment to Christian community to perform their religious activities." He said, "Walk through gates have been installed at entry points of the churches while lady police officials have also been deployed." The CPO added that all SDPOs and SHOs were monitoring the arrangements at churches in their respective areas, however, he himself was monitoring the security arrangements. He directed police officials to remain alert while performing security duty at churches. He urged them to keep vigil on suspicious persons and activities in surroundings of the churches.

Fog likely to persist in Bwp

BAHAWALPUR (APP): The local Met Office Sunday predicted a dense fog and very cold weather for city for the next 24 hours. The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded were 16 degrees centigrade and 08 degrees centigrade during the last 24 hours. The fog and very cold weather have also been forecast for rest of the region.

Four outlaws held

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): Shahr Sultan Police on Sunday claimed to have arrested four outlaws and seized valuables and cash worth Rs 3.5 millions from their possession. According to official sources, a police team led by ASI Ghulam Qasim raided at scattered places and managed to arrest four alleged outlaws. The team recovered one car, seven motorcycle, one laptop, one cow, arms and cash Rs 200,000 from their possession. The police is conducting more raids to arrest their accomplices. The identity of the arrested outlaws would be shared soon, said police officials.

Two died and 18 injured

KOHIATAN (APP): At least two women died and 18 others were injured when a pak-up vehicle fell into a deep gorge at Village Qilla of district Kolai Palis. According to the Rescue 1122 sources, the pickup, which was carrying more than 20 family members who were going to attend a marriage ceremony, fell into a gorge, resulting in two women dying on the spot and 18 others, including women, children, and men, sustaining injuries.

IGP orders safe city project completion on urgent basis

FAISALABAD (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr Usman Anwar has ordered for completing the safe city project on urgent basis.

During his visit to Faisalabad here on Sunday, he went to Police Lines where he reviewed the safe city project while Managing Director (MD) Safe City Project DIG Ahsan Younus was also present. The IGP appreciated the safe city project and directed the departments concerned to accelerate work for completion of the project on war-footing. He said that safe city project would play a pivotal role in providing fully safe and secured atmosphere to people of Faisalabad and it was the first and foremost duty of the police also.

Later, the IGP also visited People's Colony police station, which was reconstructed under the

Special Initiative Police Stations (SIPS) project and made it most beautiful police station of the city.

He said that the police stations were being converted on special initiative protocol so as to make their service delivery better and easiest. Such steps would further be taken to provide maximum facilities to visitors at police stations, he added. Regional Police Officer (RPO) Dr Muhammad Abid Khan, City Police Officer (CPO) Captain (retd) Muhammad Ali Zia and others were also present on the occasion.

IG distributes plot documents among families of police martyrs: Inspector General (IG) Police Punjab Dr Usman Anwar distributed documents of plots among the families of police martyrs.

During his visit to

Faisalabad, the IGP presided over a ceremony and said that the services of police martyrs would be remembered forever as their sacrifices brought laurels to the department.

He said that it was the first and foremost duty of the police to provide safety and security to the lives and properties of the masses and in this connection, loyal police officials sacrificed their lives while performing

duties to control crime and provide a safe and secured atmosphere. The police department would remember sacrifices of its employees and take welfare steps of their families also, he added.

Regional Police Officer (RPO) Dr Muhammad Abid, City Police Officer (CPO) Captain (Retired) Muhammad Ali Zia and other police officers were also present on the occasion.

DBA Sargodha new office-bearers elected

SARGODHA (APP): Syed Mohsin Raza Shah Sherazi was elected President while Chaudhary Farrukh Javed Cheema of Justice Group General Secretary of the District Bar Association (DBA) Sargodha in the annual election 2024-25.

According to election results, issued by the election board here on Sunday, Syed Mohsin Raza Shah Sherazi was elected as DBA President with 1185 votes while his rival Asra Naseer Jalip of Sherazi Group could only grab 742 votes. Similarly, Faiz

Ahmad Bakher was elected as Vice President with 1038 votes whereas his rivals Asmat Zahra Awan and Ghulam Fatima Gujjar could get 808 and 71 votes respectively.

Meanwhile, Chaudhary Farrukh Javed Cheema was elected as General Secretary of Sargodha District Bar with 1033 votes while his rival Bilal Rasool Mahota could bag 898 votes. Muhammad Awais was elected as Joint Secretary unopposed.

While Sultan Salahuddin Ayubi was elected as

finance secretary by getting 1127 votes and his opponent Chaudhary Ifthikhar Ali Chadhar could get 769 votes. Aqeel Ahmad was elected as Library Secretary unopposed.

Mehmood ul Hassan, Shakeel ul Hassan Kanju, Mumtaz Ahmad Khokhar, Muhammad Javed, Nasir, Mehmood Sheikh, Muhammad Hamad Afzal, Azhar Iqbal, Muhammad Asim Raza, Muhammad Umar Ehsan and Habibullah were elected as executive members of DBA unopposed.

Demand for boiled eggs soar as weather turns cold

MULTAN (APP): The demand for boiled eggs has been soar as the weather turned intensely cold, and most of the child vendors have started their part-time work selling boiled eggs in the city and suburban areas.

Hundreds of preteen children turned to the seasonal business to support their families by selling boiled eggs. The child vendors can be seen hawking boiled eggs on severely cold and foggy evenings on the main roads, streets, and other public places like markets, railway stations, and bus terminals. The girls and boys of about eight to ten years of age usually prefer city areas like shopping plazas, markets, and tea shops, while the boiled egg vendors of teenagers and adults cover the bus stands and suburban areas of the city.

Talking to APP here on Sunday, a child vendor named Suleman said that he was eleven years old and that his father had passed away four years ago. He said that his mother gave him three dozen boiled eggs every night, through which he managed to earn about Rs 1,000 per day. He said that he has two elder

daughters and an elderly mother, adding that earning from boiled eggs was the only source of income for the family.

Suleman said that boys hostels were the main market for his business, where all eggs were sold in two to three hours, and then he returned home. He informed me that he was also continuing studies in fifth grade at a local government school in the morning. Another child vendor, Maryam, said that she covers the wholesale market of medicines at Clock Tower Chowk and sells more than two dozen boiled eggs every day. She said that some shopkeepers gave her extra money on humanitarian grounds, which helped her save more money. She said that she was not the only child vendor in her family, as her two preteen brothers were also doing the same work.

Naveed, a teenager vendor at MDA Chowk, told APP that he managed to earn some extra money daily as most of the people paid him more than the actual price of an egg. He said that "it's far better to sell eggs than to beg." He said that he

planned to expand his business in the next season by setting up a cart at the chowk.

He also lamented that some of the boys refused to pay after taking boiled eggs and fled away on their motorcycles, while others paid less than the actual price. He said that the business of boiled eggs requires less effort and investment, and there are also zero chances of loss in this business. A citizen, namely Hamza Riaz, said that he felt pity seeing these preteen and teenager children selling boiled eggs in cold weather. He said that he always paid extra money to child vendors to help them financially and also suggested that they at least cover them with woolen clothes to protect them from the cold.

It is pertinent to mention here that eggs were being sold at Rs 35 per egg at the shops, while boiled eggs were being sold at Rs 50 to 55 at different locations in the city. Some of the vendors informed us that they had sold boiled eggs for Rs 20 to Rs 30 last year, but now the rates of eggs in the open market have increased.

Livestock department urges citizens to invest in cattle rearing

MULTAN (APP): Livestock Department urged people of rural areas to rear animals instead of moving to cities to earn livelihood as it was highly profitable business.

This was stated by Deputy Director Livestock Department Dr Jamshaid Akhtar while addressing "Kissan Livestock Baithak" at village Khakhi in tehsil Jalalpur Pirwala.

He motivated the Livestock breeders to rear animals. He added that rearing cattle would not only help farmers economically but also contribute in strengthening country's economy. "Livestock had 14% share in GDP, he hinted. The farmers can enhance their profit by rearing high yielding breeds."

"Rather than leaving

your home and village to find employment in cities, it is better to stay in your village and make livestock business as a means of livelihood," said Dr Jamshaid. "Women can also earn income by rearing poultry and sheep. The Livestock Department provides free technical assistance and vaccination facilities to animal and poultry traders," said Deputy Director.

"About 70 percent of the local populace in south Punjab is linked to the livestock sector. Beyond just managing daily sustenance, livestock serves as a financial lifeline during unforeseen emergencies, that can be cashed in at any moment," maintained Dr Jamshaid Akhtar.

"The country is ranked

as the fifth-largest milk-producing nation globally. This potential can be improved further by investing in animal genetics, where the quality of semen plays a pivotal role in enhancing animal health, and consequently, milk and meat production," stated Jamshaid.

"On the national scale, approximately eight million individuals are engaged in cattle rearing."

On the occasion, Muhammad Iqbal Khakhi, a motivated cattle farmer, informed that he started cattle farming few months ago after noticing potential in this field. He stated that he was rearing over 50 cows and it was highly profitable business. He also urged other farmers to invest in cattle farming.



HYDERABAD: Labourer busy in shifting bricks during construction work of a house.

Winter Tourism – a precious earning source for GB people

GILGIT-BALTISTAN (APP): A land of mesmerizing valleys, towering mountains, chilly deserts, singing brooks and enchanting lakes – Gilgit Baltistan offers unlimited bounties of nature to visitors pouring in from across the country and abroad.

Boasting of world's great mountain ranges – the Karakoram, Hindukash, and Himalayan, this region is also home to pride of Pakistan – the K-2 and Nanga Parbat, the second-largest glacier Siachen and the breathtaking Deosai plain situated at 14,000 feet above sea level.

The marvel of Karakoram Highway carved through mountains, dozens of lakes scattered all cross Gilgit-Baltistan and tall pines speak volumes of its natural beauty and serene environment always praised by nature lovers.

But, despite all the natural beauty and loveable scene of the region, the potential for winter tourism is yet to be fully tapped and numerous destinations are yet to be either fully explored or developed to attract more tourists. Winter in Gilgit-Baltistan offers yet another opportunity to experience nature's raw beauty through festivals, skiing, snowboarding, trekking and much more and being in some money for the local people. Living in a distant and tough region, most of the region's population usually bank upon earning from tourism, handicrafts and dry fruits among whom tourism offering them sufficient dividend to keep the mare go. Sports and Tourism secretary GB Asif Ullah Khan said nearly two million local and international backpackers attended various winter and summer festivities in the area last year while more than 155 high-altitude climbers summited the world's second tallest mountain, K2.

"These activities provide for an ample opportunity of earning for the GB government and the local people

and we want to see more tourists coming to GB in winter as well," he said. "Therefore, we are promoting winter activities and endeavor to keep this area open for tourists throughout the year to experience unique traditions and culture of the local people," Asif Ullah said.

Although winter tourism is challenging and adventurous yet the nature loving souls do not miss to embrace the opportunity to see snow covered peaks and freezing lakes with mercury going down to around minus ten. So, the experts and local people desire from the government to play its due role for by promoting winter sports like skiing, ice hockey and mountaineering in difficult terrains and support cultural activities and festivals.

"Despite being in its early stages, Gilgit-Baltistan has hosted several winter festivals like Shyok Winter Festival and winter games at Khalti Lake, Naltar valley and other places," remarked Alam Khan, a local tourist guide. "But, there is dire need to properly advertising these events and improve infrastructure to boost winter tourism," Alam added.

Ice hockey stands out as a popular winter sport in Gilgit-Baltistan, with championships held in various districts. It's Naltar and Rattu areas are famous for skiing, with the National Ski Championship attracting international participants. With increased outreach and funding, new ski resorts can be established across Gilgit-Baltistan. Ali Akbar, a member and trekker of GB-based adventure tourism outfit has stated that while trekking is often associated to summers, winter trekking in GB has its charm and vast potential.

"Challenging treks like Gondogoro La Pass and Biafo Hisper Snow Lake Trek always await adventure seekers," Ali said. "Winter mountaineering – although a bit riskier, is yet an exciting opportunity offered by the high-altitude moun-

tains of GB. Scaling snow-capped mountains during winter can be a memorable expedition."

He mentioned that Naltar has already produced international-level athletes in skiing, showcasing the region's talent. "With grassroots-level investment in winter sports, Pakistan can aspire to win laurels at international events like Olympic."

Planning a winter trip to Gilgit Baltistan involves considering available hotels, heated rooms, transport and restaurants. Accessible places in winter include Kachura Lakes, Naltar valley, Hunza valley, Khalti lake in district Ghizer Khaplu, with Khunjarab being perfect for snow lovers. "Kachura Lakes in Baltistan region offer a picturesque winter experience as breathtaking Naltar and Hunza valleys are less to none in beauty and adventure," said Intiaz Ahmad, an expert for winter trekking. "The valleys across the region not only offer leisure time for tourists but also provide opportunity for local people to earn some money."

"As the region lacks industries and other commercial activities like rest of the country, tourism emerges as one of the major source of earning for people," he said and mentioned to businesses like hoteling, guiding, shopping, trekking, jeep travelling.

"As the regions vary from one another, the earning potentials in this region is associated to tourism, fruits, hoteling etc," he added. "Therefore, the government should promote tourism, small industry to produce handicrafts and flourish fruit market to exports its products to world destinations." The Nature has gifted Pakistan with majestic mountain peaks like Nanga Parbat, Tirich Mir and K2 and picturesque valleys, meadows, lakes and plains therefore it is urgently required to tap this potential for the welfare of local people, earning revenue for national kitty and promoting Pakistan's nature friendly image across the globe.

Revisiting dams construction quality in Balochistan

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan is a province dominated by arid climate having 85% dependency on

Agriculture and livestock where the precipitation ratio as compared to rest of the country is very low making water a precious commodity for its population. Therefore, to meet the needs of its population, respective governments resorted to construction of weirs, canals, channels and dams with the small and big dams tally touching around 1085 figure.

This is surely the largest number of dams in all the four provinces to meet the needs of Balochistan people who are mainly dependent on agriculture and livestock businesses.

But recent climatic impacts and torrential rains in the province had raised many questions about the quality of construction of these dams as dozens of dams suffered damages due to heavy down pour.

Experts believe there had been some technical flaws or absence of globally recognized development protocols that these dams could not sustain the changing weather patterns. They think the effectiveness of dams -the sole source of hope for residents of Balochistan's parched land - could not pay off fully due to reasons like improper management, quality of construction and lack of research institute on rainfall and disaster risk reduction procedures.

"Garuk Dam constructed in Kharan district is one such example where better planning could save billions of rupees," stated an Engineer of the Irrigation department.

He revealed that as per PC-1 of the cost of this under construction dam was estimated at Rs 12 billion but it reached Rs 27 billion. "The height of dam in revised PC-1 is decreased from 55m (180 ft) to 52m (171 ft) but the live storage capacity is increased from 24,896 AF to 27,073 AF."

Moreover, he said the discharge capacity is also increased from 60 Cusecs to 73.1 Cusecs increasing the

cost of spillway from Rs.1150.620 million to Rs. 5797.764 million.

According to reports, 38 dams alone in Qila Abdullah district were damaged besides over a dozen in Quetta, eleven in Khuzdar, nine in Hub, Dera Bugti and Bela seven in Kachhi, five each in Chagai Nushki, Harnai, Zhoab and Musa Khel, twelve in Duki, Surab, Kharan Washuk Mastung, Kech, Kalat, Surab and Kohlu districts.

"We need to strictly implement globally recognized standards in construction of dams in Balochistan," observed Dr. Deen Muhammad Kakar, a geological expert. "Geophysical, geological and feasibility surveys are three layer prerequisites we need to practice in construction of a quality dam."

"If we do not fully care for land's lithology and efficacy of the planned dam, we would waste our money," he said and mentioned to failure of 25 dams constructed in Chaman district that he claimed were constructed in the seismic zone.

"This situation demands proper designs, use of standard materials, maintain quality control through regular health checks to serve the real purpose of providing water to people," he added.

The experts also believe that reputation and competence of contractors must also be fully taken care of while awarding the contract because the contracts awarded to incompetent builders cost in billions to national kitty. "When we award contract to less qualified consultants, how could we be sure about quality of design and construction," stated Dr Deen Muhammad. This is a common apathy in our system that sometimes the contracts of certain projects are awarded either under political influence or on basis of personal relations. Therefore, this tendency must be shunned to save billions of rupees fleeced from our kitty. Although the challenge is

enormous yet the concerned government departments are confident to cope with this situation through multiple steps initiated recently.

"The government in collaboration with the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Air Aviation and Planning and Development department is working on construction of Automatic Weather Stations," said Abdul Razaq Khilji, Director General Water Resources Planning, Development and Monitoring Directorate of Irrigation Department. "This project would help us compile the data of rainfall and construct dams keeping in view the expected rainfall." He agreed that construction standards must be updated to international standards and stated, "a three-pronged approach including geological specialists could guarantee the dams' utmost success."

"Dams built without careful planning and necessary protocols prove to be potential target of harsh weather like we witnessed in 2022," Khilji said. "Unfortunately, we were unable to preserve thousands of cubic feet water after record-breaking rains in 2022." As the Irrigation Department is mandated to meet water needs of people besides monitoring and improving the depleting water table in 18 river basins across Balochistan, it is confident to come up to masses aspirations. "The present government is thriving hard to achieve those goals and there will be a considerable impact on the livelihood of people living in this province," commented Secretary Irrigation Hafiz Majid.

Since, Balochistan still needs a modern system to predict on rainfall and rainwater harvesting, the dams are normally built on the basis of last decade's rainfall data. Therefore, it is direly needed to establish state of the art land research center, an early weather warning system for rains and floods prediction and ensuring quality construction through judicious contract awarding mechanism.



Taiwan tells China to ‘face reality’ after election



TAIPEI (AFP/APP): Taiwan told China on Sunday to "face reality" and respect its election result, after voters defied Beijing's warnings and chose pro-sovereignty candidate Lai Ching-te as president. Voters spurned Beijing's repeated calls not to vote for Lai, delivering a comfortable victory for a man China's ruling Communist Party

sees as a dangerous separatist. Beijing, which claims Taiwan as its territory and has never renounced force to bring it under its control, responded to Lai's victory by saying it would not change the "inevitable trend of China's reunification". Lai, of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), had

vowed to defend the island from China's "intimidation" and on Sunday the island's foreign ministry told Beijing to accept the result. "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs calls on the Beijing authorities to respect the election results, face reality and give up suppressing Taiwan in order for positive cross-strait interactions to return to the

right track," it said in a statement. "An unofficial US delegation sent by President Joe Biden's administration will arrive in Taipei on Sunday, a move sure to anger Beijing." The delegation, including a former US national security adviser and a former deputy secretary of state will meet "a range of leading political figures" on Monday, the island's de facto US embassy said in a statement. "The statement did not say how long the visit would last. "After a campaign marked by diplomatic pressure from Beijing and near-daily incursions by Chinese fighter jets, Lai beat his nearest rival Hou Yu-ih of the Kuomintang (KMT) on Saturday by more than 900,000 votes. "In his victory speech, the 64-year-old Lai congratulated voters for refusing to be swayed by "external forces" trying to influence the election. "He said he wanted to cooperate with China -- Taiwan's biggest trade partner -- and maintain peace and stability, but pledged not to be cowed by Chinese belligerence. "We are determined to safeguard Taiwan from continuing threats and intimidation from China," he told supporters. "Four Chinese naval vessels were seen in waters around the island on polling day, according to Taiwan's defence ministry, and one high-altitude balloon passed

over. "China warned Taiwan's voters in the days leading up to the election to make the "correct choice", and that Lai would take the island closer to war. "Lai will take power on May 20 alongside his vice-presidential pick Hsiao Bi-khim, Taiwan's former representative to the United States. "Both were the targets of disinformation efforts during the campaign that experts linked to China. "Turnout of 72 percent showed an enthusiastic electorate and voter Tsai Jin-hui said on Sunday Beijing should mind its own business. "What China thinks is a matter for China. We are electing the president of our own country," the 62-year-old taxi driver told AFP. "I believe one day the world will recognise Taiwan as an independent sovereign state." "The United States and Britain congratulated Lai on his win, while the EU welcomed the successful holding of the election. "World powers are keen to see as much stability as possible between China and Taiwan, not least because of the vital role the island plays in the global economy. "The Taiwan Strait is one of the world's most important maritime trade arteries and the island itself is a major tech manufacturer, particularly of vital semiconductors -- the tiny chips used in everything from

smartphones to missile systems. "Lai and the DPP have toned down past calls for independence, saying there is no need for a formal declaration since Taiwan is effectively independent already, defending the island's sovereignty. "But China still sees them as skirting too close to the "I-word" -- a red line for the communist giant. "Beijing cut off official contact with current President Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP in 2016 and is not expected to budge with Lai, setting the stage for four more years of frosty cross-strait relations. "The ruling party's unprecedented third consecutive presidential victory will disappoint China, but it is unlikely to spur any near-term change in Beijing's reunification strategy," Bonnie Glaser, a Taiwan-China affairs expert at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, wrote in an analysis piece. "But the question in the coming days will be whether China decides on merely a diplomatic and rhetorical response to the election -- or steps up with a big show of force. "A visit to Taiwan by then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in 2022 sent Beijing into a fury, triggering China's biggest-ever military exercises around the island, involving warships, missiles and fighter jets "Further ahead, Lai's presidency could be affected by the US election in November, with the possible return of Donald Trump to the White House offering a very different prospect than Biden.

Leaders and blue bloods descend on Brunei for royal wedding climax

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN (AFP/APP): Lavish celebrations for the wedding of Brunei's Prince Abdul Mateen and his wife reached a climax Sunday with a glittering ceremony attended by government leaders and blue-blooded guests from Asia and the Middle East. "Mateen, 32, wore a ceremonial uniform while his 29-year-old bride was in a long white dress and sparkling jewels for the event at the sprawling Istana Nurul Iman palace. "They made their first public appearance as a married couple in a procession through the normally sleepy capital Bandar Seri

Begawan in front of thousands of onlookers. "The popular prince was one of Asia's most eligible bachelors until he tied the knot with Yang Amat Mulia Pengiran Anak Isteri Anisha Rosnah, who is from a prominent family in Brunei. "Mateen's father is Sultan Hassanah Bolkiah, the world's longest-reigning monarch and once the richest man on the planet. "There was a festive atmosphere in the city with free ice cream on offer and soft drinks for sale as people began to take positions along the parade route hours before it began. "Wearing a traditional formal outfit and matching

songkok hat, retired banker Haji Suhaimin Abas, 66, was among the elite Bruneians to receive an invitation to the wedding ceremony. "This is a very big celebration," he told AFP as he ate breakfast before going to the palace. "Royalty from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Bhutan were listed among the reported 5,000 guests. "Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos were among government leaders in attendance.

Pioneering AI artist says the technology is ultimately ‘limiting’

HAMBURG (AFP/APP): An artist who shook up the cultural world with a haunting female portrait created by artificial intelligence has decided she's had enough of the new technology for now. "Working with AI to create art is ultimately "very frustrating and very limiting," Swedish-based artist and writer Supercomposite told AFP. "For the moment, she has stopped working with AI and is writing a screenplay instead, saying her experience with AI art left her "burned out." "It creates this dopamine path in your brain. It's very addictive to keep pushing that button and getting these results," she said. "Supercomposite created the red-cheeked, hollow-eyed woman called "Loab" in 2022 when she was testing out the new artistic possibilities offered by AI. "Her posts on social media of Loab and about the process to create her went viral, with commentators describing the images as "disturbing" and saying they had "sparked some lengthy ethical conversations around visual aesthetics, art and technology". "Tools like Midjourney, Stable Diffusion and DALL-E have made it possible to generate images from written prompts. "Supercomposite -- whose real name is Steph Maj Swanson and is originally from the United States -- had been looking at so-called "negative prompts", designed to exclude certain elements from an image.

Colombia landslide toll at 33 as rescuers work against clock

El Carmen de Atrato (AFP/APP): Rescuers were working against the clock Saturday to find survivors of landslides that claimed at least 33 lives, mostly children, in northwestern Colombia, the country's vice president said Saturday. "I deeply regret the death of 33 people in this tragedy, mostly children, according to preliminary reports," Vice President Francia Marquez wrote on social media site X. "Search teams -- including firefighters, soldiers and local residents -- slogged through deep mud and debris in hopes of finding survivors, while relatives stood nearby, some crying inconsolably, others tearfully hugging. "Rescuers used stretchers to carry out bodies, while a helicopter hovered overhead. "I don't even know what to think, I'm worried, looking for my relatives," Andres Asprilla told AFP. He said four family members were missing. "Earlier, officials had put the toll in Friday's landslides, which hit a road linking the cities of Medellin and Quibdo in Choco department, at 23 dead and 20 injured.

Arevalo to take office despite efforts to block him

GUATEMALA CITY (AFP/APP): Bernardo Arevalo is due to be sworn in on Sunday as Guatemala's president after warding off months of judicial machinations to block him from office after his vow to clamp down on deep-rooted corruption. "The 65-year-old lawmaker, diplomat and sociologist pulled off a major upset when he swept from obscurity to win elections last August, firing up voters weary of graft in one of Latin America's poorest nations. "He has faced a constant barrage of attempts to impede him from taking office -- at the hands of graft-accused prosecutors closely aligned with the country's political and economic ruling class. "Arevalo has repeatedly denounced a "slow-motion coup d'etat." "Backed by the United States, European Union, Latin American countries and international organizations including the United Nations, Arevalo is due to replace Alejandro Giammattei. "Under Giammattei, several prosecutors fighting graft have been arrested or forced into exile. Rights groups also accused him of cracking down on critical journalists. "He was also accused of propping up attorney general Consuelo Porras, heading the campaign against the newcomer alongside senior prosecutor Rafael Curruchiche and Judge Fredy Orellana. "All three are listed as corrupt and undemocratic by the US Justice Department. "Prosecutors have tried to overturn the election results, strip Arevalo of immunity from prosecution, and his Semilla (Seed) party has had its registration suspended on fraud allegations widely seen as trumped up. "Guatemala is ranked 30th out



of 180 countries by Transparency International, which lists nations from most to least corrupt. "It is also one of Latin America's most unequal countries, a reality that has, along with high rates of violent crime, compelled hundreds of thousands to risk the perilous migrant journey to the United States in hopes of a better life. "Arevalo is the son of reformist Juan Jose Arevalo, who in 1945 became Guatemala's first democratically elected president after decades of dictatorship. "He was trailing far behind in opinion polls before the election, but fired up the youth, who dubbed him "Uncle Bernie" and spread his messages and press conferences on TikTok. "He also won the backing of the country's historically marginalized Indigenous population, which led sustained protests against the prosecutors' attempts to block Arevalo from office. "The chess-playing, jazz-loving polyglot is facing a tricky task ruling Guatemala.

"To start with, he inherits an attorney general who "attacked and criminalized" him and "threatened democracy to a degree we had not thought possible," said Edie Cux of Citizen Action, a local version of Transparency International. "They will have the president ambushed. At the slightest misstep they will want to lift his immunity... and remove him," added her colleague Manfredo Marroquin. "Arevalo himself has acknowledged there would be "difficulties, since these political-criminal elites, at least for a time, will continue to be entrenched in some branches of the State." "The new president would also have to deal with a deeply fragmented Congress. "He will have to address their concerns. But you cannot expect him to come with a magic wand. "His most important and urgent task is rebuilding democracy," former Human Rights Commissioner Jordan Rodas told AFP.

Adecco chief says AI will create new jobs

ZURICH (AFP/APP): Artificial intelligence raises serious concerns for jobs but it will also create new positions, the head of Adecco, the world's biggest temporary staffing agency, told AFP. From meteorologists to lawyers and screenwriters, generative AI capable of creating content -- such as the chatbot ChatGPT -- could change the contours of many professions. "But it will also create new positions, according to Denis Machuel, the chief executive of Zurich-based Adecco. "Machuel: "It's probably the largest disruption and revolution that we've seen in decades. It's going to be massive. And let's be clear, no one really knows or can really anticipate with a precise view what's going to happen in the next five years. "All this productivity enhancement helps people do more but also destroys some of the jobs people are doing. There is definitely an element of jobs being created and jobs that are being destroyed. We've seen that with the internet, with digitalisation. "What we've seen in the past tells us that there is more or less a balance between the two. "Technology brings a lot of better understanding of interaction between people and markets but it also brings complexity. And that

complexity requires more people to deal with it. "GenAI will bring productivity on one side but it will also bring more proof-points, more data, more ways of looking at relationships, products and services. And for all these, we need people." "Machuel: "It's probably a bit too early to precisely describe jobs that are fundamentally at risk. Because we have to look at the tasks behind them. "If you only compute information, gather information and synthesise it, then your job is at risk, be it a job in finance, in legal, in business, because... it is what GenAI does. "Probably white-collar workers will be more impacted than blue-collar workers -- at least in the short term. "Within the white collar space, the things that are linked to massive information management will be more disrupted than the skills that are linked to relationship building, to strategic thinking or problem-solving. "However, we know that there are limits. "Take the example of a lawyer or of a paralegal: computing an immense number of legal decisions can be done by GenAI. "However, the deep and subtle understanding of a complex legal situation and problem-solving skills that are needed to put things

together is still very human-related. "Usually, the sort of mundane tasks that can be automated are not the most exciting for people to do. So if you can automate that, it gives you more time to concentrate on the nicer things." "We've signed a partnership with Microsoft to create a career platform that will advise companies and workers on their path, supporting their reflection on the type of skills and jobs they could go for. "Opening horizons on things people didn't necessarily imagine but could be achievable for them. "There are quite a few workers whose skills are transferable. "The good news about GenAI is that there is a positive explosion of possibilities of upskilling and re-skilling through these tools. "We've created a curriculum vitae maker with an AI-powered tool that helps people generate their own CV. "On the daily tasks of our recruiters, I was mentioning this chatbot that interacts with thousands of candidates very quickly. "It gives the possibility for our recruiters to spend more time in the human relationship, and not in a database search. "That means a recruiter can spend more time with people than doing the mundane tasks."

New era for Denmark as Queen Margrethe abdicates

COPENHAGEN (AFP/APP): Denmark turns a page in its history on Sunday when Queen Margrethe abdicates and her son becomes King Frederik X, with more than 100,000 Danes expected to turn out for the unprecedented event. "The hugely popular chain-smoking Queen Margrethe II, 83, will leave her residence at Copenhagen's Amalienborg Palace shortly after 1:30 pm (1230 GMT) for a short carriage ride to Christiansborg Palace, the seat of government and parliament. "There, at a Council of State at 2:00 pm, she will sign a

declaration of abdication ending her 52-year reign, only the second time a Danish sovereign has stepped down, the last one Erik III almost nine centuries ago in 1146. "Her 55-year-old son Frederik -- who will also attend the Council of State along with his Australian-born wife Mary and their eldest child, 18-year-old Prince Christian -- automatically becomes king and head of state upon Margrethe's abdication. "Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen will then proclaim him King Frederik X on the balcony of Christiansborg Palace.

"The balcony serves only this purpose," joked historian Lars Hovbakke Sorensen in an interview with AFP. "The last time, in 1972 (when Margrethe became queen after the death of her father), there were more than 10,000 people on the square below. We're expecting more this time," he said. "Police expect at least 10 times that in the streets of the capital. "It's impossible to say how many but I think there will be more than 100,000 people." Copenhagen police official Peter Dahl told AFP, adding that police reinforcements had been called in from across the country.

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Privatization Merits a Fabian Policy

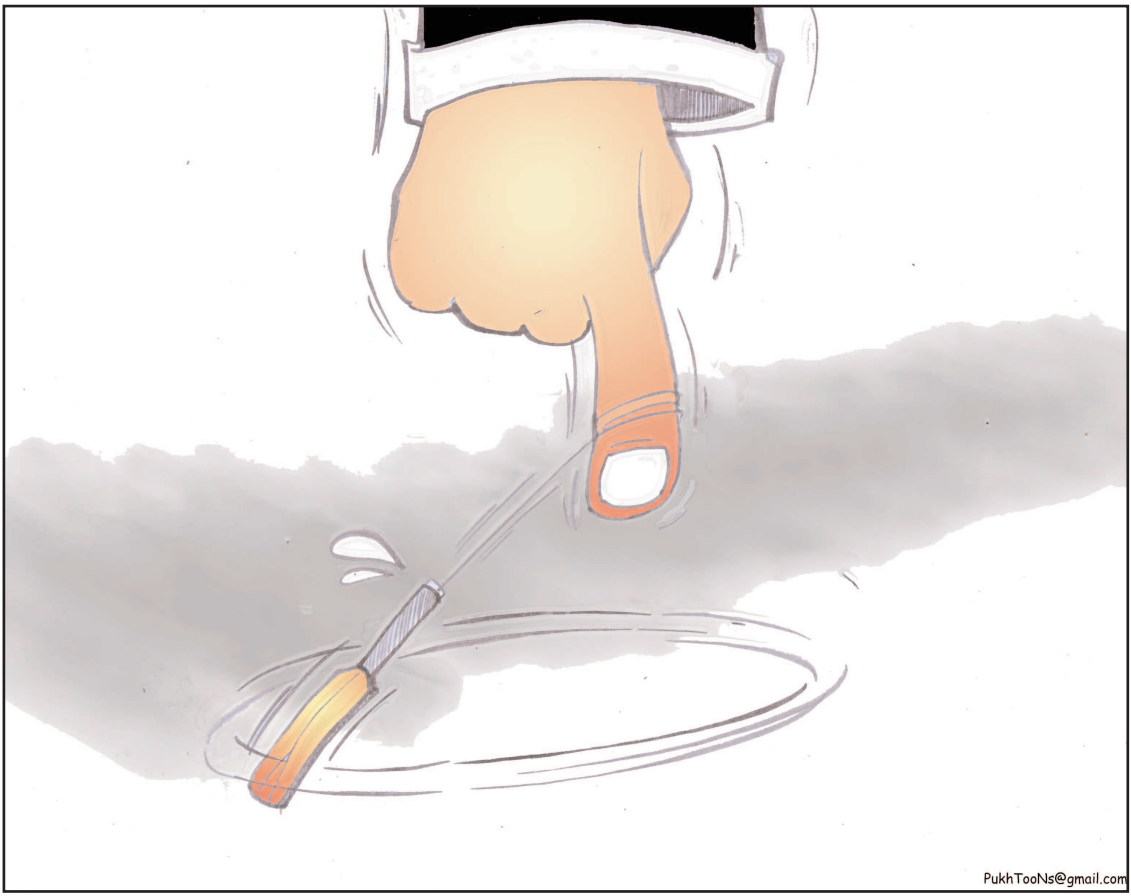
Caretaker Minister for Privatization has recently told the media that the Privatization Commission was fully prepared to privatize national flag carrier, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), and all legal and administrative formalities have been fulfilled. According to him, the Commission has taken on board the representatives from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), and the ministries of education, law, and finance Division to ensure transparency and fulfil constitutional obligations during the process. The caretaker leader ensured that no employee of the PIA was unjustly deprived of his legitimate rights. The privatization of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) is a long-held need of the country, and a debate on the subject has always remained high in the law-makers, scholarly circles and the media throughout the past decades after the national flag carrier persistently faced operational losses and became dependent on government funding to carry out its routine operations and debt payment. Although, selling out the hard-earned assets and auction of the state entities is not an easy decision for any government, political leadership as well as the public. However, sometimes difficult decisions and surgery of cancerous parts become unavoidable to escape the system collapse and protect the whole body from deterioration and decay. Founded in 1955, the PIA enjoyed three decades of glory and prestige up to the 80s. After the revival of democracy in the early 90s, the National Flag Carrier started witnessing institutional depletion due to political appointments and unnecessary gross induction of staff at the levels, politically motivated route allocation, flight plans and idle running of aeroplanes caused massive fiscal losses to the organization. According to the reports, there were over 500 employees per aircraft in the PIA while the aeroplane versus staff ratio in Qatar Airways was 1/133, Turkish Airlines 1/94, Emirates Airline 1/231 and Etihad employed 1/211 people, who maintained and operated a single aeroplane during this time. Meanwhile, Aviation Policy issues, Associations and Unions pressure, a lack of discipline and accountability, along with ill-equipped and demotivated workforce were other problems that acted as multiplying forces in the collapse of a highly prestigious and renowned airline of its time. Over the past three decades, the successive governments in the country have made concerted efforts and used multiple strategies including the appointment of military bureaucrats, seasoned aviators and renowned business experts along with funnelling huge amounts of hard-earned taxpayers' money on frequent intervals into the PIA but no recipe could ever be succeeded in making the airline sustainably stands at its feet and operates it's own in absence of funding from the government. There are several pros and cons associated with the privatization of any public entity in terms of government control, financial aspects, foreign investment and efficient public service delivery vis-a-vis potential joblessness, employees' rights, lack of government control and public welfare. However, the PIA has now shaped into an unbearable financial burden that causes persistent fiscal losses and seriously undermines the economic stability of the country and the decision to the effect was taken by the then government to prevent further deterioration of the national economy. At this moment, the caretaker government must undertake all necessary precautions including regulatory, consultative and constitutional effects to avoid any political, legal or financial backlash at a later stage. Whilst, optimum efforts must be made to balance economic gains with government needs and social responsibility to align the privatization of PIA with Pakistan's national interest to the maximum level. So, this endeavour proves to be a sane and blessing idea for the country and its people in the future.

The Human Rights Saga

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has again accused Afghanistan's Taliban administration of squeezing space and deepening suppression of women throughout 2023. According to the organization, in addition to the long-standing deprivation of women's fundamental rights in terms of the right to education, work, and assembly in public spaces, the suppression and detention of women have increased significantly over the past months. Human Rights Watch emphasized that the detention of protesting women including Julia Parsi and Neda Parwani, along with their family members signifies the allegations leveled by the global community against the Taliban regime. Meanwhile, the Spokesperson for the Afghan government reciprocated the Human Rights Watch charges noting that those women leaders receive orders from outside. The accusations from global human rights advocates against Afghan interim rulers over a series of measures including the imposition of a ban on girls' education, women's right to jobs in certain fields including media and NGOs, along with inter-city travel without a male companion are persistent since the change of regime in August 2021. However, the recent confirmation by the Afghan authorities regarding the arrest of several women for bad hijab has further intensified the debate in Western capitals, global think tanks, and scholarly circles, regarding the newest oppressive measures implemented by the Kabul rulers in recent weeks. Historically, Human and women's rights are wider subjects, while different religions, faiths, communities, and societies have different philosophies and interpretations of those sane values that represent their societal ethics, religious beliefs, living traditions, and norms. Muslim society and the male-dominant Afghan tribes have altogether conflicting ideologies and social norms concerning women's hijab, civil liberties, girls' education and jobs, etc. Hence, each side views this phenomenon purely from its own lens while ignoring the viewpoint/perspective of the other side. Western NGOs and Human Rights Defenders ambitiously propel the individual cases of human rights abuses in Muslim societies and make all efforts to make the victim stand against his/her society, tribe, and the entire system in the country. Western scholars term the ban on women's hijab and the burning of the Quran as domestic legislative issues in France, and civil liberties in Norway and Sweden respectively. The accusations from Western Human rights advocates against the Taliban are genuine but the statement of the Afghan representative is also not wholly untrue. Human Rights Organizations must not have political/ strategic use of human rights issues against any particular country or group while those divine ideas must be protected equally in all parts from Europe to East Asia and South to North Pole of the world, unbiasedly in the same letter and spirit.

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From a Palestinian in Gaza, thank you S Africa!

Haidar Eid

SOUTH Africa has had enough of the world's deafening silence on apartheid Israel's ongoing genocide of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The unprecedented number of war crimes and crimes against humanity Israel committed in the besieged coastal enclave in the past three months with complete impunity has put the credibility of international law at stake and sprung South Africa into action.

Its top legal minds compiled a 84-page document detailing evidence of these crimes and launched a landmark case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing Israel of committing genocide in contravention of the 1948 Genocide Convention. This is music to Palestinian ears. No other country, Arab or Muslim, has ever dared cross this "red line" before. After all, this is Israel, the colonial West's spoiled baby – the one project it insisted on keeping alive after the end of the era of colonialism, camouflaging it with slogans of the Enlightenment and arming it with its best weapons. Every state on Earth is undoubtedly aware of Israel's crimes, but none dares hold it to account in fear of what its colonial patrons may do in response.

Thankfully, post-apartheid South Africa eventually said "enough is enough" and took Israel to the top court of the United Nations. The nation that defeated a ruthless apartheid regime and built a multiracial, democratic state in its place recognised how the international community's silence is paving the way for Israel's deadly excesses, and it took an important step to put an end to it.

Indeed, charging Israel with the crime of genocide at the ICJ could bring an end to Israel's impunity, create the conditions for a much needed military embargo and leave Israel isolated on the world stage. Even more importantly, South Africa's case could lead to provisional measures that include an immediate ceasefire and the entry of sufficient humanitarian aid into Gaza. These measures are urgently needed because every day people are dying in their thousands in the strip. More than

23,000 people have already perished, and thousands more are missing under the rubble. About 70 percent of the victims of this horror have been women and children. I happen to be both Palestinian and South African and a survivor of the Gaza genocide. I've lost many relatives, friends, colleagues, students and neighbours to Israel's violence over the years.

In Gaza, I survived five attacks or, more accurately, massacres by apartheid Israel from 2008 to 2023. I've also experienced first hand the consequences of the deadly siege it has imposed on the strip since 2006. My entire neighbourhood was flattened by air strikes in the first week of the ongoing genocide. And I've been displaced four times since then.

Like every other inhabitant of this coastal enclave,

And in the many iterations of this deadly cycle that we lived through, at no point did we receive a single word of sympathy or support from the Bidens, Sunaks, Macrons, and von der Leyens of this world.

I lived through the same dark scenario with every massacre: Israel decided to "mow the lawn", the so-called international community conveniently looked the other way and, for many long days and nights, we faced the world's most immoral army alone – an army that has hundreds of nuclear warheads and thousands of trigger-happy soldiers armed with Merkava tanks, F-16s, Apache helicopters, naval gunships and phosphorous bombs. Once the massacre was over, everything returned to "normal", and Israel continued to kill us slowly with a suffocating siege that keeps our children malnourished, water contaminated and nights dark. And in the many iterations of this deadly cycle that we lived through, at no point did we receive a single word of sympathy or support from the Bidens, Sunaks, Macrons, and von der Leyens of this world.

All these massacres committed with impunity made it glaringly obvious

that apartheid Israel has the unequivocal backing of the white, "liberal" West to do as it pleases with Gaza and its people. These massacres were the dress rehearsals for the genocide that is under way today. They showed Israel that it can commit war crimes and crimes against humanity without receiving any sanction or condemnation from the international community. After all, no one said anything in 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2021, so why should it be any different now? This is the logic that has allowed Israel's leaders to be so open in the past few months about their intentions to "exterminate" Palestinians in Gaza.

Indeed, since the beginning of this latest massacre, this genocide, a wide range of Israeli officials from the president and the prime minister to prominent

members of the government, media and civil society have clearly voiced their intent for genocide. Just last week, Israeli Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu, who had previously said dropping a nuclear bomb on the Gaza Strip is "an option", urged Israel to find ways that are "more painful than death" to force Palestinians to leave the strip.

Israel's intent to commit genocide in Gaza may be more clear today than ever before, but it is in no way new. Back in 2004, Arnon Soffer, head of the National Defense College of the Israeli Offensive Forces and an adviser to then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, had already spelled out the desired results of Israel's unilateral disengagement from Gaza in an interview with the Israeli newspaper Jerusalem Post: "When 1.5 million people live in a closed-off Gaza, it's going to be a human catastrophe. Those people will become even bigger animals than they are today. ... The pressure at the bor-

der will be awful. It's going to be a terrible war. So if we want to remain alive, we will have to kill and kill and kill. All day, every day. ... If we don't kill, we will cease to exist. ... Unilateral separation doesn't guarantee "peace". It guarantees a Zionist-Jewish state with an overwhelming majority of Jews."

Now, 20 years after Soffer revealed Israel's intention to "kill and kill and kill" in the strip, Gaza is truly dying. People are being killed, maimed, starved and displaced en masse before the eyes of the world's nations, in what tragically has become the first globally watched genocide in history.

We, Palestinians, will not forget the sickening cowardice of the so-called international community, which has allowed and enabled this genocide. We will not forget how the nations of the world stood idly by as Israel's racist leaders openly claimed that we, the Indigenous people of Palestine, are the "Amalek" – the foe that, according to the Torah, God ordered the ancient Israelites to commit genocide against – and embarked on a racist, inhuman quest to "annihilate" all of us.

But we will never forget what South Africa did for us either. We will not forget how it showed us unwavering support and bravely took a stand for us at the world court when even our own brothers have turned their backs on us in fear. We will always remember how it linked our struggle, our most basic human rights, to global justice and reminded the international community of our humanity.

Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza, being committed out in the open and with impunity, has ushered in the end of the Western-led, rules-based international order. By bravely standing up for what is right and taking Israel to the ICJ, however, South Africa showed us that another world is possible: a world where no state is above the law, most heinous crimes like genocide and apartheid are never accepted and the peoples of the world stand together shoulder to shoulder against injustice. Thank you, South Africa!

Aljazeera

The many faces and deprivations of poverty

Ehtesham Shahid

THE Asian Development Bank's 2023 report, "Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific," explains the persistently relevant subject of poverty as one that "goes beyond lack of income or the absence of financial resources to meet basic needs." Multiple complex issues and situations converge to push people into poverty, the report claims, adding that, while extreme poverty in developing Asia is forecast to shrink to 1 percent of the population by 2030, rates of moderate poverty and economic vulnerability will remain disturbingly high.

The "complicated problems" surrounding poverty compelled stakeholders to include a new way of measuring it, the global Multidimensional Poverty Index, which became part of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. Instead of just looking at how much money people have, this approach analyses other things that make life difficult for impoverished people. These include insufficient food, clean bathrooms, good medical care, school or access to essential services, and a job. They use a score that looks at all these problems to determine poverty's direness.

Besides being a global measure of acute multidimensional poverty covering 100 developing economies, the Multidimensional Poverty Index also complements traditional monetary poverty measures by simultaneously capturing the acute deprivations in health, education and living standards that an underprivileged person faces. Cooking fuel, for instance, is one of the six indicators in the living standard dimension of poverty. Over the years, economists have highlighted the various facets of poverty and explained that it can adversely impact the poor's economic behavior, which is often construed as irrational.

Poverty can lead individuals to save little money and borrow too much to cover their essential expenses, leading to a vicious cycle. It can make people focus on immediate needs rather than planning for the future. However, the most poignant element of the Asian Development Bank's report is "paradoxical evidence," suggesting it may cost more to be poor, especially during crises and uncertainty.

It is akin to a daily wage worker having to co-pay the insurer more for a medical service than someone with comprehensive insurance providing zero co-payment. While poverty in all its forms is degrading and detrimental to the development of human potential, only a bottom-up approach can make a significant difference. If the poorest of the poor get a chance at life, those higher up the ladder will get inspired and find ways to survive and excel.

The UN Development Programme's global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023 says the higher the incidence of poverty, the higher its intensity. According to the study, 1.1 billion of the world's 6.1 billion population are poor and 485 million live in

severe poverty across 110 countries. Moreover, 534 million out of 1.1 billion people — i.e., half of all poor people — live in sub-Saharan Africa. More than a third of all poor, 389 million, live in South Asia and almost 84 percent of the poor live in rural areas. While all these figures present unique faces and deprivations, one solution cannot fit them all.

The UN Development Programme recommends addressing impoverished individuals' various interconnected challenges, which is crucial to combating poverty effectively. Research shows that people in multidimensional poverty typically experience multiple hardships and breaking down the global index into specific indicators clarifies the most common overlapping challenges. This means that stakeholders can concentrate on tackling impoverished individuals' many difficulties.

This can be achieved by analyzing data related to Multidimensional Poverty Index values, the percentage of people living in poverty, their severity, the total number of impoverished individuals and the factors contributing to their poverty. This approach aims to reduce severe multidimensional poverty.

Using multidimensional and monetary poverty metrics to measure things people lack that are not related to money is a good idea. These deprivations encompass various nonfinancial aspects of well-being and quality of life that can significantly affect a person's living conditions and opportunities.

Seeking an end to the poor population's deprivations goes beyond the call of conscience. People in poverty often face social stigma, exclusion and discrimination, which can profoundly impact their mental and emotional well-being. Poverty can also increase the risk of exposure to crime and violence, leading to a sense of insecurity and fear among affected individuals. Policies and initiatives aimed at poverty reduction should consider these broader dimensions of deprivation to improve the overall well-being of impoverished individuals and communities.

Poverty can also vary in terms of the degree of its manifestation. For instance, absolute poverty differs from relative poverty, which is defined as the standard of living within a particular society or community. Chronic poverty refers to long-term and persistent deprivation spanning generations. Individuals or families trapped in chronic poverty often struggle to escape due to structural barriers and lack of opportunities. Situational poverty is temporary and occurs due to specific life events or crises such as job loss, illness, natural disasters or divorce.

Understanding the various faces of poverty is essential to the development of targeted policies and interventions that can alleviate its effects and help create a more equitable and inclusive society. Poverty is not a one-size-fits-all issue; addressing its diverse dimensions requires a persistent, nuanced approach.

Gaza war and paralysis of UN Security Council

Maha Akeel

AT that time the war in Ukraine was the center of attention, and he commented on his inability to intervene to stop it. He described the situation at the Security Council as a "paralysis of political decision": the geopolitical divide had paralyzed the ability to take action.

This wasn't the first time the Security Council had failed to act to protect civilians and prevent wars and atrocities, but the war in Gaza that erupted a few weeks later has made that paralysis more severe and glaringly obvious. It clearly demonstrated that the Security Council was not living up to its primary responsibility, which is to maintain international peace and security. Member states individually have the power, particularly the permanent five, but they intervene only when it is in their interests, regardless of the killing, mayhem and suffering of the innocent.

This raises the question, what is the purpose of the

Security Council? At the time of his interview, Guterres was proud of the work of the UN's humanitarian sector. In Gaza, even that has been inefficient and inadequate because of Israel's refusal to allow humanitarian aid into the enclave, which had already been under Israeli blockade for 16 years. Even UN staff and facilities have been targeted, resulting in the deaths in just a few months of more UN personnel, not to mention journalists, than in any other conflict. Meanwhile, Palestinians in Gaza are being killed, forcibly evicted, displaced and left to suffer homelessness, starvation, thirst, disease, and now the cold weather as the whole enclave has been reduced to rubble and rendered uninhabitable — all in the eyes and ears of the world, including the Security Council.

For many who had some hope or belief in the international system, the disappointment and disillusion are great.

The already weak, disenfranchised and powerless now feel helpless and abandoned. However, there are still means to stop this vengeful, ferocious, inhumane aggression on Gaza and bringing the perpetrators to justice. South Africa has filed an application at the International Court of Justice in The Hague accusing Israel of breaching the 1948 Genocide Convention. The court is the UN's principal judiciary organ. Its role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by states, and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by UN entities and agencies.

After two days of hearings, the world now waits to see how much power the court actually has. In its request, South Africa asked for provisional measures to "protect against further, severe and irreparable harm to the rights of the Palestinian

people under the Genocide Convention" and "ensure Israel's compliance with its obligations under the Genocide Convention not to engage in genocide, and to prevent and to punish genocide." Will politics and power influence how the case moves forward? What are the expectations? Who will stand with which side? And who will enforce any ruling made by the court? The Gaza war has revealed many things: the double standards of the West, the hypocrisy, the dominance, and the hegemony. Human rights and international law seem to apply only to certain peoples. Freedom of expression and of the press are paramount only if they conform and align with those who define and determine their boundaries.

Western countries, especially the US, have lost much of their credibility and moral leadership. Perhaps one of the main revelations of this

war has been how much power and influence the Israeli lobby has on US politics and society. If you want to have a long and successful political career, if you want to continue working in Hollywood, if you want to keep your media job and academic standing, you need to be in the good books of "you know who" or you will be discredited and destroyed by the label of antisemitism, or find yourself entangled in other serious accusations.

Any country lucky enough to be in the orbit of protection of one of the five permanent members of the Security Council is assured of immunity from prosecution and the freedom to act with impunity. Otherwise, it can expect to be held accountable and responsible for violating international laws and obligations. Perhaps this is why armed non-state actors are finding more space to act, with diplomatic and peaceful means blocked. They are taking charge, dis-

rupting and challenging the status quo.

This is not a good sign for peace and security. In his TV interview Guterres expressed frustration at the high level of division and unpredictability among the Security Council members, which undermined trust in the UN's peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts. The outdated and dysfunctional state of affairs at the Security Council puts the whole world at risk of increasing violence and humanitarian suffering as people become more vulnerable to crises and disasters.

It is absolutely time to reform the council's structure, privileges and role. Leaving things as they are will not be conducive to peace and security, as more actors emerge with the means of disrupting and challenging the dominance and hegemony of those in power, creating new possibilities, environments and engagements that may lead to more crises, war and suffering.

Europe’s focus on Asia-Pacific powers continues to grow

Andrew Hammond

AS Europe enters a big election year, domestic politics in the region are being put on hold ahead of the big ballots ahead. However, much foreign policy activity is still underway with the potential to reshape global politics in the months ahead.

Indeed, in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and the Western project to “de-risk” from China, EU and non-EU nations are conducting a fundamental reap-praisal of their global relationships. This includes a reevaluation of resource-rich regions such as Latin America, where the EU hopes to conclude a trade and investment deal in January or February with Mercosur (the Southern Common Market) member states Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay.

However, another emerging, markets-rich part of the world will also be a key focal point for the EU in 2024: the Asia-Pacific. This includes a meeting of the EU-Asia-Pacific Forum and an EU-Association of Southeast Asian Nations ministerial meeting.

Of course, the Asia-Pacific has long been a region of interest for key European nations such as France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. Increasingly, however, a broader range of countries, including Italy, are showing growing interest, too. There are several reasons for this stronger European emphasis on the Asia-Pacific. In 2021, the EU formally issued its new strategy for the region, which was a key bureaucratic milestone. It aims to bolster regional stability, security, prosperity and sustainable development at a time of rising

challenges and tensions, in an attempt to uphold democracy, human rights, the rule of law and respect for international law.

Secondly, there is a growing recognition in Europe that the Asia-Pacific will continue to be one of, if not the, most dynamic areas of the globe. The region, if we define it to include countries stretching from the east coast of Africa to the island nations of the Pacific Ocean, is home to about three-fifths of the world’s population. It accounts for about 60 percent of global gross domestic product, about two-thirds of global growth, 40 percent of the EU’s total imports and, together with the EU, drives approximately 70 percent of global trade as well.

Thirdly, there is an urgent need in Europe to diversify supply chains. Not only is this defined in terms of reducing dependence on Russia but also China, and the Asia-Pacific will be a key part of resolving this conundrum. Fourthly, there is political recognition in Europe of the need to shoulder greater levels of global responsibility, including in what sometimes is perceived as the far flung Asia-Pacific. There is growing awareness that the policy fate of that region is increasingly interwoven with that of Europe, and so there is a need to try to have an impact on its affairs.

For Europe, this new sense of urgency represents a step forward in efforts to find strategic clarity on the Asia-Pacific. However, key divisions remain within the EU-27, let alone the powers in the wider European region, that might signif-

icantly stymie the development and implementation of a clear, coherent approach. One of these strategic fault lines is the intra-European differences over the rationale behind deeper engagement with the Asia-Pacific. For powers such as Germany, this has long been based on commercial motivations. However, there are others, including France, for whom a broader strategic calculus is more relevant.

This important schism within the EU was highlighted in a fascinating study by the European Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank that questioned policy-making elites in the 27 EU member nations about the issue. In almost half of those states, decision-makers and influencers said the EU’s policy in the Asia-Pacific should be defined as “a field of opportunity to pursue economic interests.”

However, their counterparts in the other half of EU nations identified a broader European motivational for engaging the Asia-Pacific beyond taking “advantage of these new economic opportunities.” More specifically, they cited the importance of maintaining a security focus on China.

While this schism is potentially very significant, over time it is possible that more of Europe will shift toward a more holistic, strategic lens through which to view its relationship with the Asia-Pacific, especially if relations with China continue to deteriorate. France, with its territories including New Caledonia and French Polynesia, and the islands of Mayotte and

Reunion near Madagascar, is the only EU nation with a permanent military presence in the region.

However, other EU nations are showing increased strategic interest there, including the promotion of free and open maritime supply routes as required under international law. In 2021, for instance, a German warship sailed in the South China Sea for the first time since the turn of the millennium.

Last year, an Italian offshore patrol ship completed an almost half-year deployment to the region. It called at ports in 14 countries including Singapore, Indonesia and South Korea. Within the vast Asia-Pacific geography, Europe’s diplomacy has traditionally focused on powers that are now part of the G20, including China, India, Japan and Australia.

However, the European Council on Foreign Relations study underlines how much the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a much sought-after partner for EU countries navigating the region. Indeed, the researchers found that the group is the single most popular mechanism for European engagement, receiving endorsements from 21 of the 27 EU members. The reasons for this vary, including the fact that Europe favors a multilateral, cooperative approach to foreign policy given its own post-war history. The EU is therefore at a pivotal point in its Asia-Pacific strategy. Big challenges remain but the emerging, market-rich mega region could potentially represent a huge opportunity for Europe to deliver on its goals, securing economic and political competitive advantages into the 2030s.

Gaps in space law fueling a Wild West attitude

Dr. Amal Mudallai

THE late President John Kennedy challenged America to lead in space. He said: “We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard.” Space is hard. Last week, we learned how hard it can be when we saw what promised to be a historic mission to the moon for the private sector fail, after a successful launch.

Astrobotic Technology and the United Launch Alliance’s launch of their lunar lander, Peregrine, on a Vulcan Centaur rocket from Cape Canaveral was a shared venture by Boeing and Lockheed Martin. While they provided the design, Blue Origin of Jeff Bezos provided the engines of the rocket that was carrying the lander into space and to the moon.

The mission, part of NASA’s Artemis Program and carrying the space agency’s payloads of scientific experiments, was to make history twice: as the first American landing on the moon’s surface in over 50 years, since the Apollo mission of 1972, and the first for a private company and the commercial sector to land on the moon. The lunar lander was supposed to soft-land on the moon’s south pole, but after a successful launch to orbit, the Peregrine developed problems with its propulsion system and the company tweeted that “the propellant leak” meant the landing was not happening.

But NASA and the private sector will have another attempt when they launch in February a second mission on the Falcon 9 rocket of Elon Musk’s SpaceX, on behalf of Intuitive Machines, carrying payloads for the American space agency. It aims to land on the moon on Feb. 22 if the mission is successful. This will make it the first private company to land on the moon, if it succeeds, after the failure of the ULA launch earlier this week.

These two missions represent the new, “different approach” that NASA is taking to space exploration. NASA administrator Bill Nelson said in a press conference last week that “we live in a golden era of exploration,” and “this time we go back to the moon in order to be able to learn, to live, to create, and to invent in order that eventually we can go to Mars” — but this time with commercial and international partners.

While upbeat and affirming that safety is NASA’s top priority, he announced what the space agency called an update to the Artemis program schedule, while the media called it a delay. Artemis II, a crewed mission that will circle the moon and not land, was pushed until September 2025, while Artemis III is slated for 2026 now, with astronauts including the first woman and man of color to land on the south pole. Artemis IV will remain on schedule for 2028, Nelson said.

NASA officials cited technical problems related to the capsule’s heat shield and “the electronics in the life support system” that need to be studied and fixed before any mission can take off, demonstrating how hard going to space can be. NASA deputy administrator Jim Free told the press: “We will launch when we are ready.”

Regardless of the challenges and delays in NASA’s Artemis schedule, a new era has dawned on space exploration. The commercialization of space has begun and there is no turning back. The space economy is “projected to grow 74 percent by 2030, hitting a value of \$642 billion,” according to the book “Space Economy” by Simonetta Di Pippo, former director of the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs.

The failed missions of today will be successful ones soon. The train has left the station for the space economy and the role of the private sector in space. While governments went to space first for inspiration and exploration for the sake of all humanity, governments and diverse private sector actors are motivated not only by exploration but by economic and commercial benefits, and with the goal of extracting the resources of the moon and other terrestrial bodies such as asteroids in the near future.

As the new era in space opens a new and promising chapter for humanity, it is important that space pow-

ers get it right because space faces being what American Defense Department officials call the three Cs: congested, contested and competitive.

Thousands of satellites roam the low Earth orbit and the geosynchronous orbit, where 80 countries have registered satellites in orbit and 11 countries have launch capability, according to NATO’s “Legal Gazette.” UNOOSA put the number of individual satellites in space at 11,330 as of June 2023, a 37.94 percent increase since January 2022.

The number of satellites in space is exploding. Consulting firm Quilty Space predicts that 22,000 new satellites will launch by 2030, and Musk’s SpaceX wants to launch 40,000. More satellites in space means more danger of collision and more debris.

The European Space Agency estimates that there are 170 million pieces of debris in orbit. While some are old and discarded satellites, or pieces of satellites that were destroyed during anti-satellite tests, others are as small as 1 mm. But even debris as small as a grain of sand can do a lot of damage, traveling at 17,000 miles per hour and presenting a great danger to other satellites, the International Space Station and other future space operations. This has led experts to warn

nations from Luxembourg to the UAE and Japan to the US are providing possible solutions while also inviting criticism.

In 2015, Congress passed the US Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act, which gives American companies the right to own space resources such as materials extracted from asteroids or the moon. Former President Donald Trump issued an executive order, while affirming American commitment to the Outer Space Treaty, that the US “does not view space as a global commons.” He directed his secretary of state to lead US government efforts to “object to any attempt to treat the 1979 Moon Agreement as expressing customary international law.”

That agreement, which was not endorsed by any of the major spacefaring powers, calls the moon and its natural resources “the heritage of mankind,” and prohibits ownership of its resources. The Outer Space Treaty also considers the “exploration of outer space,” including the moon and other celestial bodies, “the province of all mankind.” It affirms in its Article II that outer space “is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means.”

The Artemis Accords have their own principles

In the absence of new or updated international treaties on space which take into consideration new developments in space exploration, especially the entry of the private sector, nations from Luxembourg to the UAE and Japan to the US are providing possible solutions while also inviting criticism. In 2015, Congress passed the US Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act, which gives American companies the right to own space resources such as materials extracted from asteroids or the moon. Former President Donald Trump issued an executive order, while affirming American commitment to the Outer Space Treaty, that the US “does not view space as a global commons.”

of anarchy, bemoaning that space is becoming a graveyard with potential catastrophes if no solution is found. Many countries are working on debris monitoring and removal, but the technology is still in its infancy and the challenge is too big.

Space is also contested amid great power rivalry. Many space powers have already called space a warfighting or operational domain, and have established space forces. But the real competition will be over the moon and its resources. The moon is believed to be rich with material essential for producing energy such as helium 3, and other material critical for clean energy on Earth and helpful in energy transition. Asteroids are even richer, with gold and other rare earth materials. Competing over them will fuel conflict in space.

Di Pippo talks in her book about the negative impact that resource extraction from asteroids can have on Earth’s economy. She cites experts predicting that gold and platinum from asteroids that are rich in metals could quickly destroy the global economy. She also cites simulations that concluded that if a “considerable extraction of material from asteroids” takes place, the “price of gold would plummet by 50 percent with serious geopolitical consequences.”

This space race, and the entry of the commercial sector to space exploration, are happening at a time when space governance is weak and the magna carta of space law, the UN Outer Space Treaty, is outdated.

Gaps in space law are fueling a Wild West attitude when it comes to what is permissible in space, in addition to different interpretations of the laws and treaties that exist by spacefaring nations to fit their interests. In the absence of new or updated international treaties on space which take into consideration new developments in space exploration, especially the entry of the private sector,

that its members have to adhere to, and while they affirm their commitment to the Outer Space Treaty, they clearly state that “the extraction of space resources does not inherently constitute national appropriation under article II of the Outer Space Treaty.”

The Artemis Accords talk about establishing “safety zones” on the moon to “avoid harmful interference.” China and Russia have criticized these zones, and experts point to Article I of the Outer Space Treaty that says outer space “shall be free access to all areas of celestial bodies.” They point out that this raises questions regarding sovereignty on the moon and other celestial bodies.

We got a glimpse of what is in store for space this past week during the ULA launch when Native Americans protested that the payload carried DNA and human remains to the moon, desecrating it and violating their beliefs because the moon is sacred to them.

The company was carrying DNA from four presidents, and remains and other forms of DNA from around 200 people, some going to the moon while others were intended to go beyond to outer space, according to American media. NASA argued that the mission was undertaken by a private company, and it is not responsible for what a private company takes to the moon. Actually, this is not accurate. Article VI of the Outer Space Treaty is very clear that states party to the treaty “shall bear international responsibility for national activities in outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies, whether such activities are carried on by governmental agencies or by non-governmental entities.” The entry of the private sector to space exploration without new guidelines, laws and international treaties will open a Pandora’s box and a new domain for conflict, this time in the heavens.

Water security crucial for a beautiful and green China

Asit K. Biswas,Cecilia Tortajada & Zhao Changsen

WATER has had the greatest of impacts on China’s rulers and policymakers throughout history. Nearly half of the disasters in ancient China were related to water, and the rise and fall of dynasties were often linked to water availability and protection from floods. Extensive droughts have toppled at least six of the principal dynasties that ruled China. And the country’s capital was shifted twice in ancient China due to serious water scarcity.

In modern times, the catastrophic consequences of mega-droughts have been greatly reinforced by high levels of environmental pollution, shrinking water sources, and the need to supply potable water to huge pockets of populations. China accounts for nearly 21 percent of the global population but has only 6 percent of the world’s freshwater, and per capita water availability in China is about 25 percent of the global average. Hence, to ensure long-term water security, China’s water management practices and processes have to be one of the best in the world.

China has a rich history of water development. For example, three of the prominent irrigation projects completed before the Common Era are still in operation. The Zhengguo Canal in Shaanxi province, built more than 2,500 years ago, turned the 40,000 hectares of the originally barren Guanzhong farmland fertile. The Dujiangyan Irrigation System was built around 256 BC, and still irrigates more than 750,000 hectares of farmland. And the Lingqu Canal in Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, built around 214 BC, is today an integral part of the picturesque city’s socioeconomic life. Poor water management could be an existential threat to any country, because a country’s socioeconomic development depends on the availability of water and safeguards against floods. In fact, China’s top leadership has spo-

ken about water and water-related issues more than all other presidents or prime ministers of OECD countries put together.

Unlike coal, oil and natural gas, which break down after use, water is a renewable resource. This means used water can be collected and properly treated, and then reused. With good policies, this virtuous circle can continue indefinitely. Water management techniques and cost-effective technologies have been available for decades to make the circular use of water possible. For example, Windhoek, capital of Namibia, has been collecting, treating and purifying all its wastewater and then supplying it as potable water for more than 50 years now, without any adverse impacts on human health.

As a water-scarce country, but being much richer and technologically more advanced than Namibia, China can adopt similar types of circular economy practices, at least for the industrial use of water. China, like most other countries, has primarily used supply-side solutions to make water available whenever a city or town has required additional volumes of water. In recent decades, as the country’s water requirement has increased, it has fulfilled it through the extensive use of large-scale inter-basin transfers, including through the mammoth South-North Water Transfer Project. In the near future, however, China may need to use demand management practices to reduce the relatively high use of water by households, and the industrial and agricultural sectors. And although it has been reducing per hectare use of water in agriculture since 2005, similar breakthroughs have been slow in coming in the industrial and household sectors.

China’s per capita household water consumption is high. Even though water tariffs have been gradually increased since the early 1990s, they are still below the cost

recovery level and lower than those in many developing countries. Unless water prices are gradually increased to the scarcity value level, per capita water use will continue to be high, and the Chinese people will fail to embrace the water conservation ethos.

Higher prices will reduce per capita use of water by half without preventing any person from leading a healthy and productive life. Of course, the increased tariff should come with targeted subsidies for the poor. China’s per capita GDP has grown phenomenally, from \$318 in 1990 to more than \$12,700 in 2022. This continually increasing standard of living means Chinese people’s diets have changed radically from being primarily cereal-based in 1990 to one that is high on animal protein today. This change in diet has greatly increased the use of water to produce protein-based diet and has a big impact on the quality of water.

In fact, the overall quality of water in China has deteriorated due, among other things, to a massive increase in animal waste, especially because it is difficult to dispose animal waste in an environmentally friendly way even in highly developed countries. China’s economic and industrial development during the past four decades is unparalleled in history. But till the recent past the country could not properly manage its industrial wastewater, both in terms of quantity and quality. And yet in most countries, including China, industrial water use, as a percentage of total water used, has been steadily increasing.

In contrast, the use of water in agriculture has been declining. This means the volume of industrial wastewater has progressively increased, so has water pollution. To address the issue, the authorities have to better manage industrial wastewater. In this regard, the Water Pollution Prevention and Control

Action Plan that the Chinese government issued in 2015 signaled the beginning of a new era of proper management of industrial wastewater, because the plan, under the supervision of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, requires all industrial wastewater to be treated and tested to ensure it meets the safety standards before releasing it into rivers and canals.

On the positive side, it is now possible to reliably forecast rainfall seven days in advance. With China’s excellent water infrastructure and good hydro-meteorological observation, it is now possible to forecast heavy rainfall six to seven days in advance. Thus, reservoirs can be emptied before such heavy downpours to prevent heavy floods. With good planning and management, the impacts of one-in-100-year flood can now be drastically reduced, although it will require extensive use of sensors, robotics, artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data analysis, as well as satellites for images from inaccessible terrains to do so.

In the future, China has to upgrade the skills of experts and officials in all major river basins to better manage millions of data points, which have to be immediately analyzed and acted upon. Prolonged droughts, however, are altogether a different issue. Regrettably, given our present state of knowledge, it is not possible to forecast a drought with any degree of certainty. And there will unlikely be major breakthroughs in drought forecast before 2035 at the earliest. Ensuring water security in the future will be a challenging task for all countries, including China. But China has made remarkable progress in improving water management since 2005. And evidence suggests that it will continue to make advances in this field. Accordingly, there are good reasons to be cautiously optimistic of China’s water future.

The China Daily

China’s corrupt Rocket Forces are fuelling missiles with water

David Axe

THE Chinese People’s Liberation Army is counting on its rocket force, the PLARF, to deliver the first and most powerful blows against Taiwanese and allied troops in the event of an invasion of Taiwan. So it’s a big problem, potentially an historic one, that the PLARF reportedly is riddled with corruption. That corruption could weigh on the rocket force’s ability to do its wartime job. And if the PLARF can’t fire its 2,800 non-nuclear missiles, quickly and accurately, Taiwanese and allied forces might be at full strength as the rest of the PLA forces commence their campaign. All that is to say, advocates of a free and democratic Taiwan should hope the PLARF’s corruption problem is as bad as recent reports indicate.

Corruption has long plagued the PLA. In past decades, powerful Chinese commanders ran their regiments and divisions as veritable fiefdoms: putting them to work in military-controlled businesses that lined commanders’ pockets but contributed nothing to war-readiness. Beijing has cracked down on corruption in recent years. The crackdown has intensified under Chinese leader Xi Jinping. But these efforts haven’t eliminated corruption, if new reporting from Bloomberg and other publications

is any indication.

In an apparent purge back in August, the Party replaced two PLARF generals as well as the defense minister. The purge hinted at a greater crisis. And now, Bloomberg has dug up the alleged details. US intelligence sources told Bloomberg that PLARF leaders had filled up some missiles with water instead of rocket fuel — and apparently pocketed the savings. At the same time, some of the PLARF’s underground missile silos, which protect its nuclear-tipped rockets, reportedly have defects that could prevent them from opening properly.

If true, these are serious issues. And they might hint that the Party still hasn’t rooted out endemic corruption in a critical fighting force. Besides overseeing China’s nuclear deterrent, the PLARF is China’s surprise-attack force. In the early hours of a war over Taiwan, the PLARF would lob hundreds of ballistic and cruise missiles at Taiwanese headquarters, air bases, supply depots and air-defense sites. Perhaps most importantly the PLARF would be trying to knock out Taiwan’s large army of anti-shipping missiles. The plan: to soften up Taiwanese defenses before the Chinese invasion force set out across the 100-

mile-wide Taiwan Strait.

And the PLARF has another main mission: preventing the United States and other countries from intervening in the invasion. Perhaps most alarmingly for the Americans, the PLARF has potentially hundreds of DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missiles that can range as far as 900 miles. The DF-21Ds could rain down on US Navy aircraft carrier strike groups — some of America’s most powerful forces for defending Taiwan. The carrier escorts might struggle to shoot them down. It’s not for no reason that some analysts call the DF-21D the “carrier-killer.” But what good are the DF-21Ds if — for instance — the officers in charge of them have sold off important parts, or hired their troops out to make money when they should have been training?

There’s no firm evidence the carrier-killer batteries are as dysfunctional as other PLARF batteries reportedly are. Then again, the corruption the media has discovered in the rocket force in recent months is exactly the kind of rot that could weaken the whole institution. Shen Ming Shih, a fellow at the Institute for National Defense and Security Research in Taiwan, said the PLA is still reluctant to go to war with Taiwan and the United

States at the same time — and would need another 10 to 15 years of modernization before it could risk an invasion.

But the PLARF’s corruption scandal probably won’t derail China’s strategy of gradual escalation in the so-called “gray zone” between peace and war, Shen and fellow panelists said at an August event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC. Beijing relentlessly harasses Taipei with ever-larger military exercises in the air space and waters surrounding Taiwan while also deploying its shadowy maritime militia — paramilitary sailors crewing hundreds of fishing boats — to intimidate and crowd out Taiwan’s allies from the disputed waters of the China Seas.

These methods do not depend on a perfectly-functional rocket force to work. They are gradual efforts to undermine Taiwan without attacking Taiwan — and they both weaken the island democracy over the long term while buying time for the Chinese Communist Party to set right the problems inside the PLARF. All bets are off if the PLARF’s corruption is endemic to the entire PLA, however. If the army, navy, air force and marines are also hollow forces, then Beijing has a much bigger problem than its inability to conquer Taiwan right now.



IMF funding alone can't speed up growth amidst instability: BMP

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Businessmen Panel (BMP) of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) has warned that a bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) alone was unlikely to speed up economic growth, as the political instability and lack of reforms would further deteriorate the financial situation in the country.

It should be mentioned here that the Executive Board of the IMF has completed the 1st review Standby Arrangement, allowing for disbursement of \$ 700 million, bringing the total disbursements to \$ 1.9 billion for Pakistan.

In a statement on Sunday, former President FPCCI and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar observed that amidst continuous of hike in cost of production in the country, what the Pakistan's econo-

my really needs is persistent and sound economic management. He asked the authorities for undertaking economic reforms and improving the regulatory environment to boost foreign investment so that financial stability can be achieved in the long-run.

The BMP chief stressed the need for reducing cost of doing business, besides evolving a new price control mechanism, as huge taxation, rising oil prices and constant jump in electricity and gas tariffs have lifted the inflation to decades high level in 2023.

Mian Anjum Nisar warned the authorities that inflation above 6 percent can hurt economic growth and a careful policy is required to keep it in control. He said that the pace of inflation is skyrocketing at a time when the economic activity is slowing down.

As the oil prices have been

increased and power tariff has gone up further the BMP chairman stated that the government has dropped a fuel bomb on the businessmen after it suffered an electric shock to meet the conditions of IMF for the revival of the stalled loan program- a recipe to shake the trade and industry. The former president FPCCI said that the decision would prove detrimental to the industries due to high cost of doing business and will also open the floodgates of inflation. In addition to making the electricity bills costlier and unaffordable for the consumers, the hike in base tariff would escalate prices of all household goods being widely used in every household, he added.

He termed the increase in tariff unlawful and a violation of NEPRA's own rules and regulations, as any increase in tariff has to be determined and implemented only after holding

public hearings but unfortunately they have solely decided to raise the tariff without holding public hearings, he argued.

Mian Anjum Nisar condemned the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority's decision to increase electricity tariffs, stating that the burden of power theft, mismanagement, and inefficiencies cannot be shifted to consumers on the pretext of fuel adjustment.

He said that Pakistan's industry had been harmed by the high cost of doing business, which discouraged investment in capacity and capability and called for easing the burden of heavy taxes on the power sector. The BMP chief stated that the constant increase in power tariffs on the pretext of fuel adjustment had increased electricity prices and added to the already high cost of trade and industry.



ISLAMABAD: Vendor displaying fish to attract the customers at weekly Bazaar in the Federal Capital.

China-Pakistan cargo route launched to facilitate air transport

ISLAMABAD (INP): A new air cargo route was launched linking Ezhou Huahu Airport in central China's Hubei Province with Lahore, said SF Airlines, China's largest air cargo carrier in fleet size.

The Ezhou-Lahore cargo route is the first international air cargo route launched by SF Airlines in this year departing from Ezhou Huahu Airport, China's

first cargo-focused airport, Gwadar Pro reported on Sunday. The Ezhou-Lahore route is planned to operate three times a week, providing over 300 tons of air transport capacity from Ezhou to Lahore every week.

The transported goods mainly include textiles, 3C electronic products, electronic equipment, etc.

The opening of this international cargo route is

an important measure for Huahu Airport to further increase routes to South Asia. It will provide an efficient and stable air logistics channel for economic and trade exchanges between China and Pakistan, and provide more logistics convenience for Chinese brands to explore the Pakistani market.

Previously, SF Airlines has opened two direct cargo routes from Ezhou

to South Asia, Ezhou-Delhi and Ezhou-Chennai.

The opening of the new Pakistani route will further strengthen Ezhou's South Asian air transport network. SF Airlines, the aviation branch of China's leading courier enterprise SF Express, to date has launched a total of 11 international cargo routes from Ezhou to global destinations.

China's e-commerce logistics index up in 2023

BEIJING (Xinhua/APP): China's e-commerce logistics index went up 4.2 points year on year in 2023 as the operation of the sector registered steady expansion, industry data showed.

The index averaged 110.1 points last year, according to the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing.

In December 2023, the index stood at 112.4 points, edging down 0.7 points from the previous month, the data revealed.

The federation attributed this decline to the shrinking of demand, as sales promotions of major e-commerce platforms had concentrated heavily on the big annual shopping festival in November. It also noted that e-commerce logistics demand still remained at a high level in December, with the categories of winter clothing and ice-and-snow tourism equipment proving major sources of momentum. The federation expected China's e-commerce logistics index to remain at a high level in January 2024, driven by enthusiasm for holiday consumption and the accelerated development of the ice-and-snow economy.

Decrease in petrol prices on the cards

ISLAMABAD (INP): The government of Pakistan is set to announce oil prices for the next fortnight on Monday, and good news for consumers could be in the offing. Reports said that the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority has finalised its working on the oil prices for the second half of the month of January.

According to the reports, the price of petrol could see a decrease of upto Rs10 per litre. The price of petrol currently stands at Rs267.34. The price of high speed diesel, which is currently at Rs276.21, could also see a marginal decrease of Rs1-2. The prices of kerosene and light diesel could also see similar decreases.

SCCI voices concern over increasing environmental pollution

PESHAWAR (APP): President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) Fuad Ishaq has expressed grave concern over increasing environmental pollution in wake of using alternative sources of fuel by people owing to low gas pressure issue.

He urged the caretaker Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah, Governor Haji Ghulam Ali, provincial Chief Secretary and district administration to make contact on emergent grounds with centre and resolve these issues once for all.

In a meeting with Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Peshawar Sania Safi in her office, Fuad Ishaq apprised him that the SCCI has taken up issue gas with federal government, relevant ministry and high ups in an efficient way because unjust was being carried out with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

During the meeting,

presidents of city bazaar, traders' leaders and members of the business community were present in a large number, said a press release issued here Sunday.

The SCCI chief said the people in Peshawar along with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been compelled to use the traditional way as an alternative source of fuel for fulfillment of requirements of routine life.

The traditional methods, like use of timber, coal and other sources are causing an increase of environment pollution, and there is fear of spread of lungs and respiratory diseases, Fuad added. The SCCI chief told the senior official that the total gas production of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is 550 MMCFDs whereas gas consumption in the province is 200MMCFDs and rest of 350MMCFDs were given in national grid if the 200MMCFDs were fully supplied to KP so the gas issues would be resolved.

Besides, he said that resolution of the gas issue would remove tension of people along with the wheel of business and industries would continue to run and people would also avail employment opportunities in the province. Fuad Ishaq said Article 158 of the Constitution of the country has guaranteed the first right of natural gas and other resources of the province where the natural gas is being produced.

The SCCI further said KP was put into the basket of RLNG, contrary to it, subsidy has been given to Punjab. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 3900 MMBTU gas for commercial consumers and 2700 MMBTU gas for industrial consumers while fertilizer sector was provided gas at low cost in Punjab, Fuad added.

He said that the weightage average cost of gas (WACOG) policy of gas should be determined at provincial level.

Machinery import goes up by 6.36% in five months

ISLAMABAD (APP): The imports of the overall machinery group witnessed an increase of 6.36 per cent during the first five months of the current fiscal year (2023-24) compared to the corresponding period of the last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. The total imports of the machinery group during July-November (2023-24) stood at \$ 2,935.576 million against the imports of \$2,760.055 million during the same period of the last year.

The import of agriculture sector machinery and equipment surged by 60.76 per cent from \$19.784 million to \$31,804 million; office machinery including data processing equipment

57.11 per cent from \$129.909 to \$204.095 million; construction and mining machinery by 3.87 per cent from \$33.260 million to \$34.546 million; electricity machinery and apparatus 17.10 per cent from \$778.902 million to \$912.073 million; telecom related equipment 74.36 per cent from \$455.625 to \$794.445 million; mobile phone 112.20 per cent from \$290.550 to \$616.541 million and other apparatus 7.77 per cent from \$165.075 million to \$177.904 million.

However, during the period under review, the import of power-generating machinery declined by 26.24 per cent from \$ 243.135 million to \$

179.337 million; textile machinery by 73 per cent from \$212.786 to \$56.803 million; and other equipment by 18 per cent from \$886.654 million to \$722.473 million.

Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, the machinery group imports increased 9.17 per cent during November 2023 compared to the same month of last year, from \$ 534.863 million to \$583.926 million.

On a month-on-month basis, the machinery imports into the country came down by 15.95 per cent during November 2023, compared to the imports of \$694.762 million in October 2023, according to the PBS data.

Consultation with stakeholders inevitable to promote skilled workforce

LAHORE (APP): Carpet Training Institute (CTI) Chairman Ejazur Rehman, has said that consultation with stakeholders is inevitable to revise and innovate the ongoing programmes for imparting skills. "A new strategic plan of action should be introduced for export industries," he expressed these views while talking to a delegation of prominent industrialists and exporters who visited CTI here Sunday.

Ejaz-ur-Rehman said that skill-providing institutions and industries should have close ties in the context of promoting vocational education, related techniques and training. He said that specific training institutions of industries receiving support from the Export Development Fund, industry representatives, exporters, provincial governments, private sector and organizations working in rural areas should be consulted for the future plan regarding training programmes whose first goal should be to face the challenges of the future.

'PFC playing active role in furniture industry's progress'

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) has played a pivotal role in expanding the global presence of Pakistani furniture by actively participating in 13 significant international expos and showcased the diversity and craftsmanship of Pakistani products during last year.

PFC Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Mian Kashif Ashfaq stated this while talking to a delegation of furniture manufacturers, designers and exhibitors led by Chaudhary Muhammad Araib Arain here on Sunday.

Mian Kashif said this strategic participation provided a platform for the council to forge connections with counterparts and foreign buyers, fostering opportunities for market exploration and trade collaboration.

He said the PFC's commitment to global outreach extended beyond expos, with visits to nine countries worldwide.

Exporters urged to capture Kyrgyz pharmaceutical market

LAHORE (APP): Kyrgyzstan Trade House (KTH) Chairman Meher Kashif Younis Sunday urged Pakistani exporters to capture Kyrgyzstan's US \$ 650 million pharmaceutical market.

Talking to a delegation of exporters led by Ms Sana Abdullah here at KTH on Sunday, he said that by strategically entering this market, Pakistan can not only boost its economic prospects but also contribute to the healthcare needs of Kyrgyzstan's seven million population.

He adding that by capitalizing on its pharmaceutical prowess, fostering strategic collaborations, Pakistan can successfully

capture a substantial portion of Kyrgyzstan's pharmaceutical market, contributing to the well-being of both nations.

Meher said Pakistan possesses a well-established pharmaceutical industry with a proven track record of producing high-quality medicines. Leveraging this expertise can help meet Kyrgyzstan's increasing demand for affordable and effective healthcare solutions, he observed.

Building strong relationships will not only enhance the distribution network but also foster trust in Pakistani pharmaceutical products.

Meher Kashif Younis said Health Minister

Kyrgyzstan Alymkadyr Beishenaliev who participated in the first-ever two days global health summit in Islamabad a couple of days ago also invited Pak pharmaceuticals manufacturers to visit his country for providing affordable and quality medicines in state owned pharmacies in government run hospitals.

He said Ulanbek Totuiaev Kyrgyzstan's Ambassador to Pakistan and KTH will continue to facilitate all exporters for promotion of bilateral trade between two countries.

Other members of the delegation, Ms Sadia, Hafsa, Amina and Nida, were also present.

PBF hails army chief's efforts for country's economic progress

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Business Forum (PBF) has expressed satisfaction with the military diplomacy and economic initiatives undertaken by the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) as the nation witnessed a positive shift in various sectors.

In a media statement issued here Wednesday, PBF President Khawaja Mahboob ur Rehman said that a wave of optimism is sweeping through the country as the caretaker government's economic policies,

coupled with the strategic decisions of the Army Chief, have resulted in tangible improvements in key economic indicators.

He said significant reduction in the value of the dollar against Pak rupee, that has seen a commendable drop from Rs 340 to Rs 280, prompted expectations of further stabilization.

The PBF President added, "The caretaker government has taken the best measures for the economy; the price of the dollar has fallen, and we anticipate even more positive changes when the new IMF and Asian Development Bank funds arrive, with hopes of the dollar reaching Rs 250."

The impact of these measures is evident in the Pakistan Stock Exchange, where a positive trend has now emerging, bringing relief to investors, he said.

Additionally, the reduction in petrol prices has garnered praise from the public, further raising a positive sentiment towards the government's economic policies. The PBF President appreciated the positive ini-

tiatives of the Army Chief. "There is a positive trend in the Pakistan Stock Exchange, and petrol prices have decreased.

These things are good for our country. Furthermore, the decrease in essential commodity prices, such as daily-use items, has not gone unnoticed which need to be monitored properly by deputy commissioners so that the masses may benefit."

The PBF President further stated that the measures taken by the Army Chief were for the betterment of the country and hoped for more improvements in future. "The unwavering resolve by Pakistan's security forces to combat illegal activities and secure the nation's economic interests, ultimately working towards

a more prosperous and stable Pakistan."

COURT NOTICE

In the court of sidra jalal civil judge-III/III.illaqa Qazi Matta Swat, case #.123/1. Institution 03/07/2023. Next Hearing date 06/02/2024. Gul Pasooda VS Syed Mian (late) Notice to legal heirs defendant(1/1) Mst. Bacha jehan widow (1/2) Bacha Syed (1/3) Bahadar Syed (1/4)Hazarat Syed (1/5) Muhammad adrees(1/6) zafar(1/7) Mian Muhammad sons (1/8) Musamatan. Jannat (1/9) Gul naz (1/10) kainat (1/2) Hifsa daughters Mian. Defendant # 2 legal Heirs (2/1)Syed akbar(2/2) Mian Syed jabar(2/3) Mian Syed ghafar(3/4) Syed shah(2/5) Mian Syed sardar sons.(2/6) Musamatan. Hussan begum (2/7) saleha bibi (2/8) zameena bibi (2/9) Atia begum daughters lai. Defendant #.3 legal Heirs (3/1) Mst. Ziata widow (3/2) Bahadar (3/3) Mian umar sons (3/5) Mst. yasmeen(3/6) Muhtaja (3/7) Syed (3/8) shaheen (3/9) shafaat daughters Qameer r/o pakanai koz shor tehsil matta district Swat. In above mentioned case the respondent can't be served in the ordinary way, it is therefore proclaimed that if said respondents will not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8:30 am dated 06/02/2024. ex-parte proceeding will be held against the mentioned respondents under my hand and seal of this court.

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Qaisar Khan Afridi Additional District Judge II/Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Dagar Appeal No. 102/13, institution 27/9/2023. Date of hearing. 13/2/2024. Nawab Said VS Ziarat Said etc. Notice to no. 2. Akhtar Said s/o Akbar Said resident of Pacha Kalay tehsel Gadezai district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendant can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendant will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 13/2/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.



ISLAMABAD: Customers selecting and purchasing old clothes displayed by the Weekly Bazaar vendors to attract the customers.



In brief

Inter-University Chess Championship
H Y D E R A B A D (APP): The All Pakistan Intervarsity Chess (Men) Championship started at the Liaquat University of Medical and Health Science (LUMHS), Jamshoro on Sunday. According to university spokesman, the championship organized in collaboration with the Higher Education Commission (HEC), would continue till January 17. The spokesman said 20 teams from different universities were participating in the championship. LUMHS Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Ikrām Dīn Ujīān, while welcoming the participating teams, said the game of chess strengthened the human mind as it was an exercise of intellect. Besides officials of participating teams, Director Sports of LUMHS Faisal Laghari was also present on the occasion. The teams of LUMHS, University of Punjab, Lahore, University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Islamiya University, Bahawalpur, Comsats University, Islamabad, NUML University, Islamabad, University of Karachi, IBA Sukkur, Institute of Business Management (IOBM) Karachi, Sindh University Jamshoro and Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro, among others, are participating in the championship.

Hockey World Cup Qualifiers
LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has officially declared a formidable ten-member national hockey team for the upcoming five-side Hockey World Cup Qualifier. The event will start on September 2 in Salalah, Oman. The squad was announced by Pakistan Hockey Federation President Mir Tariq Hussain Bugti after the recommendations of the National Hockey Selection Committee. 11 teams are set to participate in the five-side event. Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, China, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Oman will feature in the upcoming event. Olympian Waseem Feroz is appointed as head coach of the team while Lt. Col Yameen Khan will serve as the team's manager. According to the secretary general PHF, the Pakistan squad will depart from Islamabad on PIA Flight PK 131 at 10am on Monday (August 28). Pakistan's squad Goalkeepers: Abdullah Ishtiaq Khan, Ali Raza Defenders: Mohammad Abdullah (VC), Midfielders: Ahtisham Aslam, Mohammad Murtaza Yaqoob. Strikers: Arshad Liaquat, Zakaria Hayat, Rana Abdul Waheed (C), Abdul Rehman, Abdul Wahab.

Rohit achieves historic feat
INDORE (Agencies): Indian captain Rohit Sharma became the first player in the history of T20I cricket to feature in 150 matches during the second T20I against Afghanistan here on Sunday. Rohit Sharma holds the record for the most capped T20I player across the globe, followed by Ireland's Paul Stirling with 134 matches. Meanwhile, Virat Kohli is the second-most capped Indian player with 116 matches after Rohit Sharma. Notably, Sharma and Kohli made their return to the T20I format during the ongoing series after a hiatus of more than a year.



HAMILTON: Fakhar Zaman showed scant respect to spin.

Japan beat Vietnam in six-goal thriller at Asian Cup

DOHA (AFP): Two-goal Takumi Minamino admitted he was "surprised" by Vietnam after Asian Cup favourites Japan survived a scare in winning 4-2 to open their campaign in Qatar. The former Liverpool forward looked to have set Japan up for a comfortable afternoon when he scored early, only for Vietnam to come roaring back with two first-half goals. Minamino scored again before Keito Nakamura restored Japan's lead on the stroke of half-time, before substitute Ayase Ueda made the game safe with a late fourth. Japan are hotly tipped to lift a record-extending fifth Asian Cup but Minamino said their opponents will not make it easy for them over the next month. "I've been playing against Vietnam since I was young so I know how good a team they can be," said the 28-year-old, now at Monaco. "But it wasn't just in defence -- they were really good in attack as well. I was surprised by how good they were." Vietnam, who

are coached by Japan's 2000 Asian Cup-winning boss Philippe Troussier, equalised five minutes after Minamino's opener when Nguyen Dinh Bac glanced a looping backwards header over the Japanese defence. Pham Tuan Hai then stuffed home a loose ball at a free kick to put the Southeast Asians in front on 33 minutes. Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu said he was confident that his players would find a response. "They stayed calm despite going behind because they knew we had the whole 90 minutes and injury time to get the win," he said. "They never let their concentration drop." "Different level" Minamino led the fight-back by rolling a precise first-time shot just inside the far post in the 45th minute. Nakamura then put Japan back in front with a jaw-dropping strike from the edge of the box in first-half injury time. "The first half was very difficult because we went behind, but I think we showed our strength as a

team by coming back," said Minamino. "The first game of a tournament is always very important so I'm happy that we got three points." Japan and Vietnam met in the quarter-finals of the last Asian Cup in 2019, with Japan winning 1-0 before losing to Qatar in the final. Troussier led Qatar to Asian Cup glory 24 years ago in Lebanon and also took them to the last 16 of the World Cup on home soil in 2002. The Frenchman said that there was no disgrace in Vietnam losing to Japan. "When you see where the Japanese players are coming from, when you see their experience, when you see their bodies, it's clear that we are not boxing at the same level," he said. "But with our means and our potential we tried our best, that's why I am so satisfied." Moriyasu left Kaoru Mitoma out of his matchday squad as the Brighton winger continues his comeback from an ankle injury. Indonesia play Iraq on Monday in the other opening game in Group D.



MELBOURNE: Aryna Sabalenka in action against Ella Seidel of Germany in the first round on Day 1 of the 2024 Australian Open.

Australian Open 2024: Novak Djokovic beats qualifier Dino Prizmic in his longest first-round match

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Defending Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic said it was like "playing myself in the mirror" after he came through the longest first-round Grand Slam match of his career against teenage qualifier Dino Prizmic. Djokovic, chasing a record-extending 11th men's title in Melbourne, needed four hours and one minute to beat the 18-year-old 6-2 6-7 (5-7) 6-3 6-4. Croat Prizmic, facing his childhood idol on his debut appearance at a Grand Slam, saved six match points before Djokovic, 36, secured victory. "[He has] so much potential. He has everything that he needs and can still improve," world number one Djokovic said of his opponent, ranked 178th. "The way he is mentally pres-

ent on the court, I like it a lot. He never gives up. "I felt like I was playing [against] myself in the mirror. He has no weaknesses, really." Djokovic, who could achieve a record 25th Grand Slam singles title this month, later said he had felt "under the weather." While the Serb will face Alexei Popyrin or Marc Polmans in the second round, Prizmic - crowned French Open boys' champion last year - has a bright future ahead on the evidence of his breakthrough performance on Rod Laver Arena. Sunday's match surpassed Djokovic's previous longest in the first round of a major, which was a three-hour-57-minute encounter against Gael Monfils at the US Open in 2005. Few could have anticipated

the absorbing tussle which would develop after Djokovic took a straightforward first set. But Prizmic hinted at what was to come when he broke Djokovic for the first time for a 3-1 lead in the second, before holding his nerve in the tie-break with his fourth set point. That set up a rollercoaster third set, which Djokovic claimed by winning four successive games - but only after Prizmic had battled back with a double break from 2-0 down. And even as the result began to appear a formality in the fourth set when Djokovic continued his run of games for a 4-0 lead, his teenage opponent refused to go quietly, breaking back before saving four match points in the ninth game to force the top seed to serve out victory.

"He deserves all the applause. He is an amazing player, he handled himself incredibly well on the court. This is his moment," Djokovic said. "It could easily have been his match as well. He showed great mentality and resilience. I certainly want to be in his corner. So hopefully he will invite me, because he will make some big things in his career that's for sure." "Panicking" Rublev wins in five sets Fifth seed Andrey Rublev was "completely panicking" but survived a comeback from world number 78 Thiago Seyboth Wild to edge a five-set thriller. The 26-year-old Russian, who will aim to reach his first major semi-final in 2024, won 7-5 6-4 3-6 4-6 7-6 (10-6) to set up a second-round meeting with Japan's Taro Daniel or American

Christopher Eubanks. "I started to have emotions in the fifth set. I screamed a couple of times. I was complaining. So [in] the fifth set when I started to feel panic [it] was tougher to manage emotions," said Rublev. Rublev has at times struggled to contain his emotions on court. Against Carlos Alcaraz at the ATP Finals in November he hit himself so hard with his racket that he drew blood. His compatriot and good friend Daniil Medvedev, also lost to Brazilian Seyboth Wild in five sets at last year's French Open - a factor Rublev said added to the pressure he felt. "Daniil, Daniil. Almost all the fifth set, every game at least one or two times. I was thinking about what happened to Daniil because [in] the fifth set I was inside completely panicking."

Elsewhere, former semi-finalist Matteo Berrettini withdrew before his first-round match against Stefanos Tsitsipas because of a foot injury, meaning the Greek seventh seed will instead play Belgian Zizou Bergs. American 12th seed Taylor Fritz also had to come through a five-set opener, fighting back from two-sets-to-one down to beat Argentine Facundo Diaz Acosta 4-6 6-3 3-6 6-2 6-4. Compatriot Frances Tiafoe, seeded 17th, also progressed by beating Croat Borna Coric 6-3 7-6 (9-7) 2-6 6-3. Croatia's 2018 runner-up Marin Cilic lost 6-1 2-6 6-2 7-5 to Hungarian Fabian Marozsan. The Australian Open has been extended to 15 days this year in an attempt by organisers to avoid late finishes - with this its first Sunday start.

New Zealand beat Pakistan by 21 runs to take control of T20 series

HAMILTON (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan fell 22 runs short while chasing 195 against New Zealand at Seddon Park, Hamilton in the second T20I of the five-match series. On the back of an outstanding half-century by Finn Allen, New Zealand posted 194 for the loss of eight wickets in the first innings. In return, Pakistan were bowled out for 173 courtesy of a solid performance by the home side's bowling attack. Pakistan won the toss and opted to field first. A 59-run opening stand between Finn Allen and Devon Conway allowed New Zealand a breezy start. Aamir Jamal provided the first breakthrough for Pakistan by removing Conway (20, 15b, 3x4s) in the last over of the powerplay. New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson then stitched a 52-run partnership with Allen before he tight hamstring forced him to retire hurt after contributing a 15-ball 26, including three fours and a six. Allen's attack saw him produce 74 from 41 balls, showcasing seven boundaries and five maximums before he fell to a googly by Usama Mir in the 13th over, handing the latter his maiden T20I wicket.

Seventh batter in, Mitchell Santner, made 25 from 13, including three fours and two sixes to help bring back momentum for New Zealand, who ended their innings at 194-8 in 20 overs. Right-arm pacer Haris Rauf, who bagged three scalps in one over, was the most successful bowler for Pakistan. He was supported by fellow right-arm pacer Abbas Afridi, who accounted for two wickets. Aamir and Usama had a wicket each. Chasing 195, the visitors struggled at the start losing opening batters Saim Ayub (1, 3b) and Mohammad Rizwan (7, 5b, 1x6) inside the first two overs. Babar Azam and Fakhar Zaman batted well to add 87 runs for the third-wicket partnership, bringing a semblance of stability to the innings. Adam Milne struck in the 10th over to turn the tide for New Zealand as he disturbed Fakhar's stumps, who walked back after scoring a fiery 25-ball 50, studded with three fours and five sixes. Pakistan then lost Iftikhar Ahmed, Azam Khan and Aamir cheaply to bring the total to 125-6 in 14.3 overs. Babar completed his 32nd T20I half-century (66, 43b, 7x4s, 2x6s) before he was caught by Tim Southee off

Ben Sears' bowling. Pakistan captain Shaheen Shah Afridi added a quick-fire 22 from 13, including one four and two maximums, attempting to keep Pakistan in the game, until he fell to Milne. A four-wicket haul by Milne, complemented by two wickets each by Sears, Southee and Ish Sodhi helped dismiss Pakistan for 173, to award New Zealand their second consecutive victory. Allen was adjudged player of the match for his impressive performance. Pakistan and New Zealand play the third T20I on 17 January at University Oval, Dunedin. The first ball is expected to be bowled at 0500 PKT while the toss will take place at 0430 PKT. Scores in brief: New Zealand win against Pakistan by 21 runs New Zealand 194-8, 20 overs (Finn Allen 74, Kane Williamson 26 (retired hurt), Mitchell Santner 25; Haris Rauf 3-38, Abbas Afridi 2-43, Aamir Jamal 1-42, Usama Mir 1-39) Pakistan 173 all out, 19.3 overs (Babar Azam 66, Fakhar Zaman 50, Shaheen Shah Afridi 22; Adam Milne 4-33, Ben Sears 2-28, Tim Southee 2-31, Ish Sodhi 2-33) Player of the match – Fin Allen (New Zealand).



LONDON: Ronnie O'Sullivan of England watches Ali Carter of England play a shot lines up a shot during day eight of the MrQ Masters Snooker 2024.

Masters 2024: Ali opens up early lead over Ronnie in final

LONDON (Agencies): Ali Carter opened up a 5-3 lead over Ronnie O'Sullivan in the opening session of Sunday's Masters final at Alexandra Palace. O'Sullivan, 48, who is chasing a record-extending eighth title, and Carter, 44, both made century breaks as they shared the first four frames. Carter then enjoyed a sublime run of 122 and won two of the next three frames to establish an advantage. The best-of-19-frames final will resume at 19:00 GMT. World number one O'Sullivan, who won the UK Championship in December, has never won successive Triple Crown events in the same season but signalled his intent by taking the opener. However, while a recurring theme of his run to the final has been opponents failing to capitalise on lapses or some over-adventurous shots, Carter appeared to relish his sur-

roundings. Four years on from a loss to Stuart Bingham in the showpiece match, the world number 10 looked assured against the 40-time ranking event winner, who holds virtually every record in the sport and comfortably won both of their meetings in world finals in 2008 and 2012. Carter's century in the fifth frame was his eighth of the tournament and equalled the mark set by O'Sullivan in 2007 and 2009. He was also able to take the third and sixth frames, in which both players had more than one opportunity among the balls. The only minor negative for Carter, which was immediately rectified with a run of 74 in the afternoon's concluding frame, came in the seventh when he was unable to get going having been presented with two decent starting reds before O'Sullivan compiled a break of 86.

Shaun Marsh announces retirement from professional cricket

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Former Australian opening batter Shaun Marsh has announced to retire from all forms of cricket after Melbourne Renegades' match against Sydney Thunder during the ongoing season of the Big Bash League (BBL). The 40-year-old had an impressive BBL season for struggling Melbourne Renegades, scoring 181 runs in five games at an average of 45.25 and a strike rate of 138.16, including three half-centuries. However, his team is lying in the seventh spot with only two victories out of nine games in the season. Marsh expressed his admiration and gratitude towards his Melbourne Renegades teammates during an interview with a local Australian media outlet. "I have loved playing for the Renegades, I've met some great people over the last five years and the friendships I've made will last a lifetime," Marsh said. "This playing group is special. They've been amazing to me, amazing teammates and even better friends. "Our members and fans are some of the most passionate out there and I'm so thankful for their support over the journey. Stick with us, there's a huge amount of talent in this group and I have no doubt they'll lead this group back to the top. "To the Renegades' coaches and staff and everyone behind the scenes – thank you for backing me in from the start and over my final years. It's made my job a little easier out in the middle," he concluded.



In brief

AIOU announces admissions

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has announced the admissions for the first phase of Spring 2024 semester across the country, including AJK and GB from Monday, January 15. Admissions in this phase include Matric, FA, I.Com, certificate courses, BS (face to face), MS/MPhil, and PhD programs. Prospectuses and admission application forms for all the programs are available online on the university website (www.aiou.edu.pk), said a press release issued here Sunday. Admission in BS (face to face) MS/MPhil and PhD programs can only be applied online whereas admission application forms for matriculation, intermediate and I Com can be submitted manually as well as via online mode. The admission forms and prospectuses for certificate courses, matriculation, FA programs are also available at university's main campus, regional campuses, swift centers and prospectus sale points established across the country. Admissions in second phase will commence from March 1, 2024.

Arfa Karim remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): Today is the 12th death anniversary of Arfa Karim Randhawa - the youngest Microsoft Certified Professional of the world. She died on January 14, 2012 in Lahore at the age of 16 due to an epileptic attack. Arfa Karim, who was in a small village near Faisalabad on February 2, 1995, became the youngest Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP) by passing the MCP examination at the age of just nine in 2004. Microsoft owner Bill Gates invited her to visit the company's headquarter in the United States when she was 10. She won many awards and international recognitions for her brilliance in the world of Information Technology (IT). She was awarded the Fatima Jinnah Gold Medal in the field of Science and Technology in 2005 by the government. She also received the Salam Pakistan Youth Award the same year. Arfa Karim was also given the Pride of Performance award. A well-equipped software technology park in Lahore has been named after her.

PIMS denies reports

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) has contradicted the news item appearing in a section of press on closure of its Operation Theatre (OT). In a statement on Sunday, Dr Mubashar Mushtaq Dahan, spokesperson to Executive Director PIMS said that such news about the federal capital's largest government hospital were baseless. According to the records, supplies are being received in PIMS for emergency operations, he added. He said that supply was being provided according to the demand of the procedure. The list displayed outside the OT is baseless and the PIMS administration has nothing to do with it. Who put the list outside the OT and under what purpose, investigations are being done, he said. "PIMS has sent a request for release of funds to the concerned department while the OT was not closed and still working." He said that caretaker Federal Minister for Health Dr Nadeem Jan is ensuring effective measures for the release of funds. He said that these funds would also be released by the end of this month due to the efforts of the Minister for Health.



ISLAMABAD: An attractive view of the Pakistan Monument in the Federal Capital.

Introduction of electric buses as a breath of fresh air

ISLAMABAD (APP): The introduction of metro buses on different routes has brought much relief to the commuters of the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, but still, plenty of daily travelers continue to face the issues of rude behavior and attitude of drivers and conductors of public vans on those routes that are not traversed by the metro buses.

A number of commuters, including the elderly, pointed out that the majority of drivers and conductors of public transport, including vans, who are plying vehicles on the Islamabad Expressway, were particularly impolite and indecent to the passengers, besides causing undue waste of precious time.

They demanded of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to look into the woes and immediately roll out recently purchased electric buses by linking these massively populated areas lying at the outer fringes of the Capital Territory, including the

Islamabad Expressway.

Last week, the CDA welcomed the arrival of the first batch of 30 new electric buses being introduced on additional routes to provide climate-friendly means of transportation for the citizens of Islamabad.

According to the CDA media wing, following an agreement regarding the procurement of 160 electric buses from China, the first batch of the 30 new zero-emission buses arrived at the Zero Point bus terminal.

As announced, the second batch of electric vehicles (EVs) is expected to arrive in February or March this year, and the denizens hope that it will be utilized to facilitate them.

In the meantime, frequent altercations took place in private vans on a daily basis due to unfair charging and self-inflated fares, particularly after the significant reduction in petroleum products, Muhammad Zareen Bacha, an employee of a private firm in Blue Area, told APP on Sunday.

He particularly mentioned public vans No. 136 and 124 and said that the majority of conductors seemed to be illiterate and did not produce a fare list whenever asked to by the travelers, as they often charged them extra.

Similar were the views of Ayesha Jabeen, a housewife, as she lamented the proper checks on the rude behavior and conditions of public vans where extra passengers were forced to board without considering the seats allocated for women's commuters.

Moreover, it is also observed that different vans have installed CNG cylinders and extracted fares equivalent to those fixed for the usage of petrol and diesel. Zubair Talha, a NUML university student, says that he travels from the Police Foundation to H-9 on a daily basis and noted that these vans had installed CNG kits but never witnessed any relevant authority to check the safety of these kits or the fares charged by the van owners.

Hafeez Jalandhari remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): Renowned Urdu poet, the creator of the country's national anthem, Abul Asar Hafeez Jalandhari was remembered on the occasion of his 124th birth anniversary on Sunday.

Born in Jalandhar on January 14, 1900, Hafeez Jalandhari migrated to Lahore after the independence of Pakistan in 1947.

He wrote the lyrics for the national anthem in 1952. Hafeez Jalandhari actively participated in freedom movement and used his writings to propagate for the cause of Pakistan. He also wrote the Kashmiri Anthem, "Watan Hamara Azad Kashmir". He also wrote many patriotic songs during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965. For his literary and patriotic services to Pakistan, Hafeez Jalandhari was awarded the Hilal-e-Imtiaz and Pride of Performance by the Government of Pakistan.

2200 CCTV cameras being installed to maintain law and order: Dr Jamal

RAWALPINDI (APP): Caretaker Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare and Population Welfare Punjab Dr Jamal Nasir on Sunday said that 2,200 Closed Circle Television (CCTV) cameras were being installed at 306 points in the city to improve the law and order situation in the city. During a visit to the City Police Office to review the ongoing work of the Safe City Project, he informed that 300 labourers were working day and night on the Safe City project to complete the task.

He said that under the Safe City project, 2200 cameras would be installed at 306 locations while Rs 230 million had been provided for the construction of the CPO office. Dr. Jamal Nasir said that in a short time, work had been started on mega projects in all sectors, including the Rawalpindi Ring Road project, which was

stalled for a long time.

He said that the revamping of Holy Family Hospital (HFH) was a historic project that would be remembered by the people of Rawalpindi for decades which would significantly improve healthcare facilities. The minister said that around 83 percent of work on the old HFH block had been completed while 65 percent of work on the basement was finished. He added that most parts of the HFH would be opened to the public by January 31.

Dr Jamal informed that the Planning and Development Board had approved Rs 1500 million for the revamping and renovation of the Hospital while 600 labourers were working in different shifts to complete the work within the stipulated time. Funds have also been released to upgrade Rawalpindi's parks, he added.

NCHR signs MoUs to promote HR education

ISLAMABAD (APP): In order to promote human rights education among university students, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with a number of higher education institutions (HEIS).

The recent MoUs were signed with Shifa Tameer-e-Millat University in Islamabad and Fatima Jinnah Women's University, Rawalpindi. This collaboration underscores the shared commitment of both entities to empower individuals, foster a culture of respect, equality, and justice amongst students, and prevent human rights violations through education.

This initiative is aligned with the crucial role of education and awareness in the protection and promotion of human rights.

"By engaging with universities and educational

institutes, the NCHR aims to create a lasting impact, fostering a society that values and upholds the principles of human rights. We look forward to creating a more just and inclusive society through widespread human rights literacy," said chairperson NCHR Rabiya Javeri Agha.

She said, "NCHR recognizes the pivotal role of human rights institutions in contributing to the formulation and execution of human rights education programs." In line with this objective, the Commission has been actively engaged in forging partnerships with esteemed universities and educational institutes across the country.

"This partnership, in accordance with its mandate under Section 9(h) of its Act, is crucial to NCHR's program on human rights education, building knowledge about

human rights, changing attitudes and behaviors, and promoting a culture of tolerance and peace."

An NCHR team, led by Member Balochistan Prof. Farkhanda Aurangzeb, recently engaged in several meetings with key stakeholders in various universities. The team recently held two meetings at the Higher Education Commission (HEC), with Chairman Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad emphasizing the renewal of an MoU to strengthen collaboration in the realm of human rights education.

Notably, fruitful discussions were held with Professor Dr. Tahir Khaliq, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at Shifa Tameer-e-Millat University, Islamabad, and Vice Chancellor of Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Dr. Uzaira Rafique.

RDA gears up operation against illegal housing schemes

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), on the directives of the Director General (DG), Muhammad Saif Anwar Jappa, has geared up its ongoing operation against illegal housing schemes, said RDA spokesman Hafiz Irfan.

Talking to APP, he informed me that the RDA had issued notices to three illegal housing schemes, namely Shah-e-Khrasan at Mouza Chakra on Chakri Road, Imperial City at Mouza Sahang on Mandra-Chakwal Road, and Ring Road Town at Mouza Harka, Basali, near Chak Khan Road, Rawalpindi.

The notices were issued to Saeed Rizvi, Masood Azmat, and Umar Awan, the owners of three illegal private housing schemes.

He informed that the Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering (MP&TE) Directorate of RDA had also lodged FIRs against four illegal housing schemes: Kashmir View Residencia, Phase-I and II in Mouza Sanghori Satto, GB Valley in Mouza Singhori Satto, Natha Dolal, Sain Singhori in Mouza Singhori, and Pak Kashmir Housing Project in Mouza Pothi Binjyal at Mandra-Chakwal Road in Tehsil Gujar Khan.

Cases were registered against the owners of four illegal housing schemes, namely Malik Tariq, Qazi Naveed, Sharif Khan, Sajid Chaudhry, Sajid Munir, Sardar Maqsood Khan, Sardar Awais, Chaudhry Seemab, and Yaqoob, in Mandra police station, Tehsil Gujar Khan. The Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering (MP&TE) Directorate RDA had also issued

notices, he said, adding that the DG had directed the Director MP&TE to take action in accordance with the law against illegal advertisements and marketing. FIRs should also be lodged against the owners of illegal housing schemes, as the authorities were directed.

The spokesman informed us that the sponsors of illegal housing schemes were also warned to stop marketing their unapproved and illegal housing projects.

Hafiz Irfan said that the citizens were advised not to invest in illegal housing schemes and asked to check the status of the schemes at the RDA's official website, www.rda.gop.pk.

He informed me that the Planning Wing of RDA had also requested the Cyber Crime Wing of FIA to take legal action against illegal and misleading advertisements of the unapproved housing schemes.

The spokesman said that without a NoC and approval from the RDA, launching a housing scheme, apartment project, commercial building, etc. within the controlled area of the RDA is illegal, and all sorts of advertisements, marketing, and development of such projects are also illegal.

The spokesman further informed us that the authority had issued 548 legal notices and lodged 212 FIRs.

He further informed us that the authority also sealed more than 183 offices of illegal housing schemes and demolished 195 illegal constructions. He said that the relevant authorities, on the orders of the DG, were taking strict action against the

rule violators.

The DG RDA, Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Rawalpindi, and City Police Officer, Rawalpindi, were monitoring the operation against illegal housing societies, launched on the special instructions of the Commissioner Rawalpindi division, Liaquat Ali Chatta, to control the illegal business.

RDA also sent 129 letters to the Cyber Crime Wing for legal action against rule violators, he added.

The operation was underway against illegal housing societies without any discrimination, he said.

The offices of several illegal housing schemes had also been demolished, and FIRs were also lodged against illegal and unapproved housing societies.

Strict action was taken against illegal housing schemes including Blue World City, Multi garden, Abdullah City, Avalon city, Faisal Town Phase-2, Rudn Enclave, Capital Valley, Shaheen Garden, Atlantic City, Century Town, High Capital City, Royal Farm/Residencia/Apna Ghar, Chinar Enclave, Eman Garden, Theme Park View, Al-Imran Homes, Imarat Hoon Farm Houses, Khan Builders, Kashmir Homes/Imam Hassan Towns, Usmania Fort Housing Scheme, Haider Residencia, Khalid Colony, Al-Baraka Garden, Zam Zam Villas, Eman Garden, Chinar Enclave, Gulshan-e-Abbas, Potohar Valley, Dua Garden, Annol Garden, Ameen Housing, Watan Enclave, Cighu Farm House, Green Oaks (Harutus Flora), Manan City, Shakir Farms and others.

Rwp Safe City Project to be inaugurated on Jan 30

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chatta has directed the authorities to swiftly complete Rawalpindi Safe City Project which would be inaugurated on January 30.

According to a Commissioner office spokesman, the commissioner during a visit to the safe city project site reviewed the construction work of the project.

"January 30 is the deadline for making the Safe City Project Rawalpindi functional in the light of the directives of the Chief Minister of Punjab," the spokesman informed. All-out efforts were being made to complete the work within stipulated time frame, he said.

In the first phase of the project, cameras would be installed at various sites, major intersections, main mosques, churches, commercial points, Muharram procession routes, petrol pumps and other places, he added. The spokesman informed that the Safe City Project would help improve law and order in the city and enhance the sense of security among the citizens.

The project would not only help control crime and maintain law and order situation but also to regulate traffic on city roads, he added. The Commissioner had also visited

Rawalpindi Gymkhana, Business Facilitation Centre, Allama Iqbal Library and Sixth Road Metro Station to review the ongoing construction work.

The authorities were directed to complete the construction work of all the projects as soon as possible.

The Commissioner visited different projects to check all the arrangements ahead of the inauguration of the projects by Chief Minister Punjab, he informed.

Sixth Road Metro Station would be opened for the public after the inauguration. The authorities were instructed that the construction work of Metro Station Sixth Road should be completed in couple of days. The spokesman said that 98 percent development work of Allama Iqbal Library and Business Facilitation Center had also been completed.

At present, Allama Iqbal Library has 20,000 books while 50,000 books would be arranged for the library, he said adding, a separate space would be allotted in the library for the students. Establishment of business facilitation center at Rawalpindi Development Authority would help promote economic activities in the region, the spokesman said.



ISLAMABAD: Youngsters playing cricket at local ground in the Federal Capital.

Afghanistan, Turkmenistan trade ties

KABUL (BNA): In a significant development aimed at strengthening trade ties between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, Nooruddin Azizi, the Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce, held a productive meeting on Saturday with Khawaja Awzov, the Turkmenistan ambassador to Kabul. During the meeting, both sides expressed their commitment to boost Afghanistan's exports to Turkmenistan and discussed strategies to improve the trade balance between the two nations.

Turkish police detain 100 refugees

KABUL (Agencies): Following the expulsion and detention of Afghan refugees in Turkey, the government of this country has announced that they have detained 99 Afghan refugees from the city of "Erzincan." These refugees were detained during an operation on a truck on the Erzincan-Tercan highway. Turkish police cited the reason for detaining these refugees as "not having valid Turkish residence permits" and three of them were also arrested on charges of "human trafficking" during the operation.

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

Interior Ministry officials crackdown on Poppy cultivators in Takhar



TAKHTAR (BNA): In a concerted effort to combat the illicit drug cultivation, the Deputy of counter-Narcotics of the Interior Ministry, Mullah Abdul Haq Hamkar Akhund, has warned poppy cultivators in Takhar province of legal action. During a visit to the region, Akhund declared that individuals found cultivating poppy on less than half a jirib of land would face six months of imprisonment. A meeting was convened with the aim of preventing poppy cultivation, aligning with the directives of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), scholars, influential mujahideen, government officials, and local military authorities in the province. The participants unanimously agreed that poppy cultivation is strictly forbidden in Islam and called for concerted efforts by Muslims to eradicate this persistent menace. Highlighting the grave risks associated with the drug, Akhund emphasized that Afghanistan currently has 350,000 drug addicts, with 140,000 having already undergone treatment, and 20,000 currently receiving treatment. He stressed the urgent need to eliminate opium and poppy cultivation in Afghanistan's future, expressing the nation's unequivocal stance against its cultivation. During the session, Mawlawi Shams al-Din Shariati, the head of oversight and judgments under the command of Amir al-Mu'minin, along with other officials, underscored the necessity of serious efforts to eradicate poppy cultivation. They made it clear that all forms of narcotics trafficking and cultivation are strictly forbidden, and the authorities are committed to their complete eradication. The Interior Ministry's firm stance against poppy cultivation reflects the government's determination to combat the drug trade, protect public health, and uphold Islamic principles. The implementation of stricter penalties for poppy cultivators sends a strong message that the authorities will not tolerate the cultivation and production of illegal narcotics, aiming to create a drug-free Afghanistan for future generations.

About 8,000 child laborers have been identified

KABUL (TOLONews): The Department of Labor and Social Affairs of Badakhshan announced the identification of nearly 8,000 children who are engaged in hazardous work in this province. According to the ministry, education has been provided for more than 300 of these children by an aid organization. Abdul Saboor Foladi, an official of Labor and Social Affairs of Badakhshan, said: "Approximately 7,000 to 8,000 children have been surveyed on the road, the ADWSO office has covered approximately 300 children and has created a center near the security command where the children are trained daily." Poverty, and the difficult living conditions of families have caused children, instead of going to school and continuing their education, have to work hard labor. A gold mine is located in the 8th district of Faizabad city, the capital of Badakhshan Province, where a part of the mining workforce is made up of children deprived of education. "It's been three or four years since we left school and I was in class eight, now we are working in this mine, pulling ropes from this 40-50 meter tunnel," Ahmad Fawad told TOLONews. "Our economic situation is bad and I was in the sixth grade of school, which I left to help with my father's farm work," said Ebadurrahman, a child laborer. These children said that in exchange for their work, they get a wage of two to three thousand Afghani every month to support their families.



Afghanistan conducted \$779m trade with India in 2023: Official

KABUL (Agencies): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC) said that Afghanistan conducted trade worth \$779 million with India in 2023. A spokesman for the MoIC, Abdul Salam Akhundzada, said that of \$779 million in bilateral trade, \$579 million were exports while \$200 million were imports. "Afghanistan's trade with India in 2023 worth \$779 million, with \$579 million in exports and \$200 million in imports," Jawad said. The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI), called India a good market for Afghan fresh and dry fruits. "If India cooperates and brings ships via Chabahar port, we can sell the fruits to India instead of selling them to Pakistan with low prices. But the ships are not coming from India, and we are facing so many problems," said Khan Jan Alokozai, a member of the ACCI. The traders meanwhile called on the Islamic Emirate's officials to boost facilities to pave the ground for improvement of regional trades. "Due to lack of agreements for export, due to lack of an organized framework for transit, existing problems at the custom offices and lack of air-corridors, important economic programs have been reduced," said Mahbobullah Mohammadi, a trader. The Islamic Emirate's spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid meanwhile said that they will provide further facilities for the traders and attempt to solve banking challenges. "We attempt to eliminate the hurdles; thus, our traders will be able to transfer the money with an open hand."



Ministry of refugees and repatriation ensures registration all returnees: Haqani

KABUL (BNA): Alhaj Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqani, the Acting Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, held separate meetings with officials of migrant affairs in Faryab and Panjshir provinces, stressing the importance of registration and providing assistance to all returnees. During the meeting with Mala Saifuddin Jahedi, the head of migrant affairs in Faryab province, it was reported that hundreds of families had returned to the province from neighboring countries and were receiving both food and non-food assistance through collaborative efforts with government entities and institutions. The Acting Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqani, highlighted the shared responsibility of providing services to migrants and emphasized that no migrant should be left without assistance or registration in migrant offices. He called for increased efforts and better coordination with relevant entities to enhance support for returnees. He stressed the need for transparency and improved coordination in migrant affairs to ensure effective and efficient support for those in need. The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation is committed to addressing the needs of returnees and ensuring that no individual is left behind. By prioritizing registration and offering comprehensive assistance, the ministry aims to create a supportive environment for returnees as they reintegrate into their communities.



AWCC signs memorandum of cooperation with Ariana Airlines

KABUL (Agencies): Officials at Afghan Wireless Communication Company (AWCC) say a memorandum of cooperation was signed between this company and Ariana Afghan Airlines. AWCC officials said they are committed to cooperating in various sectors with Ariana Airlines and that this institution has provided many services to the people of Afghanistan in difficult times. "Inshallah, this will be the beginning of cooperation, we want to remain a partner with you in every field that is related to us," said Aliullah Sarwari, CEO of AWCC. The head of Ariana Airlines Rahmatullah Agha also said that Ariana Airlines has been operating for seventy years and that the company is a national company and belongs to all the people of Afghanistan. Rahmatullah Agha appreciated AWCC's pledge of cooperation and said that they have recently purchased two new airplanes, one of which has already arrived in Kabul. The second one will land in Kabul airport in a month, he said. Last week, AWCC completed work on two reconstruction projects at Kabul Airport and started work on a development project.



Kabul's Kart-i-Sakhi residents face potable water shortage



KABUL (Pajhwok): Some residents of Kabul say they have been lacking access to potable water since last two years and travel long distances to fetch waterhome. Amruddin, a resident of Kart-i-Sakhi area, told Pajhwok Afghan News their area faced water shortage. He said some residents purchased water from tankers, but many families who were poor brought water homefrom long distances. According to him, lack of water has caused many problems for the people. He said private companies had contracts to supply water and had activated water supply system, but due to drought the entire area could not be supplied water for two years. Amruddin who travels a kilometer every day to fetch water, said: "Earlier, the private company would charge 50 afghanis per cubic meter of water and give water to people once a week." "But now the situation has worsened, the price has increased to 90 afghani per cubic meter, however, there have been no changes in the water supply system, rather water distribution has decreased." He asked the officials concerned to address theproblem as soon as possible and closely monitor private companies to provide better services to the people. Rashid, another resident of Kart-i-Sakhi, also complained about water shortage. He said they would be supplied water once a weekpreviously, but currently they had no water for more than a month and they purchased it from tankers at an exorbitant price. He said in the last two years, the problem of water scarcity had increased and they were supplied water once a month, insufficient to solve their problems. He also asked the government to pay attention to the issue. Farid Ahmad, a resident, who had come to Shakhishrine to get some water, said: "People face many problems due to water shortage and they carry water from here to their houses on mountain with great difficulty. This area has been facing water shortage since last two years." He said local people could not buy water from tankersdue to economic problem and their children and women travel long distances to take water home from the mosque for free. "I walk for 20 minutes to half an hour to get water from the Kart-i-Sakhi mosque, and when I come here, I wait for hours until my turn comes because of rush." Ahmad takes 20 barrels of water every day on the top of the mountain. He asked the Islamic Emirate to solve the water shortage problem. Also, 10-year-old Nabiullah, who carries ten barrels of water every day, said that water came in pipeline so he had to travel a long distance to fetch drinking water. Shafiullah Zahedi, head of the water supply and waste water company, had previously told Pajhwok that the decrease in the level of underground water and recent drought had caused water shortage problem for all the residents of Kabul. He said their department had devised three short-term, medium-term and long-term plans to solve water shortage problem. The implementation of the long-term plan would resolve the water shortage issue in Kabul.

US presidential election heats up as frigid Iowa tests Trump

DES MOINES (AFP/APP): Voters venture into sub-zero temperatures Monday to kick off the Republican presidential nomination race with the Iowa caucuses, the first major test of whether runaway front-runner Donald Trump is as much of a sure thing as he appears.

With a commanding lead in polls, the ex-president is expected easily to win the Midwestern state's first-in-the-nation vote as he bids to be the Republican standard-bearer against President Joe Biden in November.

'But Iowans may have to contend with the coldest conditions in the modern era of presidential election campaigns, with blizzards and a potential wind chill of -26 degrees Fahrenheit (-32 degrees Celsius) forecast.

'Trump and his leading rivals, Nikki Haley and Ron DeSantis, were forced to cancel appearances in the home stretch as the threat to Monday's turnout added intrigue to a campaign season that is already something of an unknown quantity.

'Despite his apparent strength, Trump has been indicted four times since he was last a candidate, and is preparing for the potential collapse of his business empire in his native New York in a civil fraud trial.

'If DeSantis's massive ground effort, coupled with a recent Haley surge, can drag Trump under 50 percent by several points, that will be the first meaningful sign that Trump can be defeated," said political analyst Alex Avetoom, who worked on Republican John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign.

"However, this paradigm-shifting reality -- that Trump could be defeated -- happens if, and only if, the rest of the field consolidates behind one anti-Trump candidate."

'For all the talk of miracle bounces, the Iowa race is hardly competitive: A new Suffolk University poll has Trump at 54 percent among likely caucus-goers, with Haley surging into second place but still only at 20 percent. "I'm voting for Trump again," 37-year-old trucker Jeff Nikolas told AFP, adding that "he may be bullheaded, but he can actually get stuff done."

'The Suffolk University survey was more bad news for Florida governor DeSantis, who scored just 13 percent and has seen his claim to be heir apparent to the post-Trump Republican Party eclipsed by Haley. 'The former South Carolina governor is looking to outperform expectations to cement her claim to be Trump's top challenger going into her preferred state of New Hampshire the following week.

'Iowa is a notoriously poor predictor of the eventual nominee, but it is considered crucial for winnowing the field and as a springboard to the next few battlegrounds, which include Haley's home state.

'Stung by defeat in 2016 after skipping much of Iowa's campaign trail, Trump has built up an impressive network of "precinct captains" to corral votes this time around -- but he has been as notable for courtroom appearances as campaign events.

'In a state that likes to meet its candidates face-to-face, DeSantis has been at pains to highlight his own

ground game, which has taken him to all 99 counties.

'The Iraq veteran and conservative hard-liner will be under heavy pressure to drop out however if he finishes third -- although Avetoom cautioned against counting him out.

'Poll respondents are not necessarily Iowa caucus-goers, and the DeSantis precinct operations... are run by first-in-class operatives that have collected an impressive tally of caucus support pledges," he said.

'Edward Segal, a former press secretary for Democratic and Republican lawmakers, echoed the benefits on a strong ground game, pointing to at least nine presidents who toured Iowa by train during campaigns.

'Whistle-stop campaign trains can still serve as eye candy to help attract the attention of voters and the media," the analyst told AFP.

'A good night for Trump on Monday, he added, would be "getting 60 percent or more of the vote."

'The Republican primary also features a number of low-polling candidates, including biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, who has promised a third-place finish in Iowa but didn't qualify for the final televised debate.

'Iowa's Democrats will also attend caucuses -- meetings at which local members of a political party gather to register their candidate preferences -- on January 15 but will vote by mail from January until March.

'Biden is expected to comfortably defeat self-help author Marianne Williamson and Minnesota congressman Dean Phillips.

N. Korea fires 'unidentified ballistic missile': Seoul military

SEOUL (AFP/APP): North Korea fired a ballistic missile on Sunday, Seoul's military said, days after Pyongyang staged live-fire exercises near the tense maritime border with the South.

"North Korea fires unidentified ballistic missile towards East Sea," Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement, referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

'The Joint Chiefs of Staff said had it detected the launch but gave no further details. 'Japan's coast guard said that an "object, potentially ballistic missile, launched from North Korea," citing information from the country's defence ministry, and warning vessels to take care. 'North Korea's last missile test was of a Hwasong-18 solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile, which it fired into the East Sea on December 18.

'The apparent test comes days after North Korea conducted a series of rare live-fire drills near the maritime border with the South, prompting counter-exercises and evacuation

orders for some South Korea border islands.

'Leader Kim Jong Un also earlier this week branded Seoul his "principal enemy" and warned he would not hesitate to annihilate the South, as he toured major weapons factories.

'The historic time has come at last when we should define as a state most hostile toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea the entity called the Republic of Korea (South Korea)," Kim was reported Wednesday as saying by the official Korean Central News Agency.

'Analysts said at the time that the shift was significant, signifying a shift in Pyongyang's approach to Seoul into "ultra-hawkish mode".

'Relations between the two Koreas are at one of their lowest points in decades, after Kim enshrined the country's permanent status as a nuclear power into the constitution and test-fired several advanced intercontinental ballistic missiles.

'Last year, Pyongyang also successfully put a reconnaissance satel-

lite into orbit, after receiving what South Korea claimed was Russian assistance, in exchange for arms shipments for Moscow's war in Ukraine.

'Kim has also test-fired a string of advanced intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) including a purported solid fuel version.

'At Pyongyang's year-end policy meetings, Kim threatened a nuclear attack on the South and called for a build-up of his country's military arsenal ahead of armed conflict that he warned could "break out any time".

'Pyongyang declared itself an "irreversible" nuclear power in 2022 and has repeatedly said it will never give up its nuclear weapons programme, which the regime views as essential for its survival.

'The United Nations Security Council has adopted many resolutions calling on North Korea to halt its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes since Pyongyang first conducted a nuclear test in 2006.

First female lawyer elected as President Attack Bar

ATTOCK (APP): For the first time in the over 70 years of history of Attock Bar, a female lawyer Farzana Raja was elected as President here on Sunday in Attock.

As per details, she was elected president with 245 votes while Malik Usman Advocate was elected General Secretary by securing 233 votes.

Over 250 members of legal fraternity cast their votes.

After announcement of official results, Ms Raja vowed to uphold the honor of the judiciary and making providing litigants speedy justice.



IOWA: Former U.S. President and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump dances as he campaigns in Indianola, Iowa.

Fierce fighting in Gaza as war hits 100 days

DOHA/GAZA (Reuters): Israeli tanks and aircraft hit targets in southern and central Gaza on Sunday and there were fierce gun battles in some areas as the war reached 100 days since the Oct. 7 attack led by gunmen from the Islamist Hamas movement.

Communications and internet services were down for the third day running, complicating the work of emergency and ambulance crews trying to help people in areas hit by fighting. The clashes were concentrated in the southern city of Khan Younis, where Hamas said its fighters hit an Israeli tank, as well as in Al-Bureij and Al Maghazi in central Gaza, where the military said several fighters were killed.

Hamas' armed wing spokesman, Abu Ubaida, said on Sunday the fate of many Israeli hostages captured on Oct. 7 has become unknown.

In his first televised appearance for several weeks, marking the 100th day since the outbreak of the war, he said many of the hostages "may have been killed", blaming their fate on Israel.

Hamas showed it retained rocketry capacity, launching a fresh salvo on Sunday at Ashdod, an Israeli town 40 km (25 miles) away. There was no word of any casualties.

Abu Ubaida said the group had been told by "several parties in the resistance fronts that they will expand their strikes on the Israeli enemy in the coming days."

The Israeli military said it destroyed several silos used by Hamas to fire missiles at Israel.

Over the past 24 hours, the Gaza health ministry said 125 people had been killed and 265 wounded, bringing the total number confirmed to have been killed since the start of the war to almost 24,000, with more than 60,000 wounded.

Israel's military said it has killed around 9,000 Palestinian fighters, and lost 189 soldiers, in the Gaza war so far. Speaking through video link to a conference in Istanbul, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh praised the Oct. 7 attack by the group's fighters who rampaged through Israeli communities around the Gaza Strip, killing more than 1,200 people and seizing around 240 hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

"We are not seekers of wars. We are seekers of freedom," he said, saying the attack was, in part, a response to the blockade Israel and neighbouring Egypt placed on the Gaza Strip after Hamas seized control of the territory in 2007.

The Iranian-backed group is sworn to Israel's destruction.

The Israeli military says it has shifted to a new phase of the war, focused on the southern end of the territory, where almost 2 million people are now sheltering in tents and other temporary accommodation, after the initial phase centred on clearing the northern end including Gaza City. In the northern Gaza Strip, health officials said an Israeli air strike killed a local journalist, raising the number of journalists killed in the Israeli offensive to more than 100, according to the Gaza government media office.

In a statement on Dec. 16, in response to the death of a journalist in Gaza, the Israeli army said it "has never, and will never, deliberately target journalists".

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has brushed off calls for a ceasefire, saying Israel will keep going until it achieves complete victory over Hamas and recovers the 132 remaining hostages.

The military says, though, the next

phase of the war will see months of more targeted operations against the movement's leaders and positions.

On Israel's northern border with Lebanon, where there has been a constant, low-level exchange of fire between troops and fighters from the Iran-backed Hezbollah militia, the military said it killed four armed militants trying to cross the border.

It said several anti-tank missiles were fired into northern Israel, one of which hit a house in Kfar Yuval village. Medical officials said a 76-year-old woman and her son were killed. The son was in the village's security squad, the military said.

In Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, Nana, a 17-year-old high school student displaced from northern Gaza, said 100 days of war "turned our life upside down."

"We demand the occupation not only to end the war but also compensation for the psychological damage of displacement and the hardships endured," she said.

The war in Gaza has also stoked violence in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. The Palestinian health officials said Israeli forces killed five Palestinians, including boys aged 14, 16 and 17, in three separate incidents in the West Bank.

The Israeli military said two Palestinians in a car rammed through one of its checkpoints near Hebron and opened fire on pursuing troops. They were killed by return fire, the military said. Asked about a 14-year-old boy killed near Jericho, it said soldiers had shot at Palestinians who threw explosives at them. Palestinian health officials said two boys aged 16 and 17 were killed near Ramallah in the West Bank. The Israeli military said troops shot two Palestinians throwing a bomb at an army base.

China FM in Egypt calls for Gaza ceasefire and Palestinian statehood

CAIRO (AFP) : China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi called Sunday for the establishment of a Palestinian state and a cease-fire in Gaza, where 100 days of the Israel-Hamas war have killed thousands.

In a press conference with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry in Cairo, the top Chinese diplomat said "it is necessary to insist on the establishment of an independent, fully sovereign state of Palestine on the 1967 borders, with east Jerusalem as its capital."

A joint statement from the two ministers urged an immediate end "to all acts of violence, killing and targeting of civilians and civilian

establishments." Israel launched an intense military campaign in response to Hamas's deadly October 7 attack on southern Israel, which resulted in about 1,140 deaths, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

In Gaza, at least 23,968 people have been killed, the majority of them women and children, according to the health ministry in the besieged Hamas-ruled territory.

Shoukry and Wang called for "an international summit for peace to find a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian cause by ending the (Israeli) occupation

and establishing an independent, contiguous Palestinian state."

The Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, seat of the Palestinian Authority, are separated by Israeli territory. Both were seized by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has previously called for an "international peace conference" to resolve the fighting. China has historically been sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and supportive of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Wang is currently on an African tour that will see him also visit Togo, Tunisia and Ivory Coast.

UN experts slam German support for Israeli genocide at world court

UNITED NATIONS (APP): Germany's decision to become the first country to legally defend Israel's deadly war on besieged Gaza at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) as a third party had drawn a significant number of negative reactions from across the world, including UN experts. "Shocking abdication of all responsibility by Germany," wrote Balakrishnan Rajagopal, UN special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, on X.

"May better angels prevail," he wrote. "Germany should be supporting efforts to enforce the Genocide Convention, not oppose it."

During the ICJ's two days of hearings earlier in the week, South Africa instituted proceedings that accused Israel of genocide against Palestinians and said Tel Aviv's aggression aimed to bring about "the destruction of the population" of Gaza. Separately, Taleng Mofokeng, UN special rapporteur on the right to health, also criticized Germany for trying to prevent Israel from being tried for crimes it has been committing with its ongoing war against Palestinian fighters.

"The state (Germany) that committed more than one genocide throughout its history is trying to undermine the efforts of a country (South Africa) that is a victim of colonialism and apartheid, to protect another genocide and an occupying nuclear power (Israel)," she lamented on X.

"Germany? Are you for real? We hope you can do better!," she added.

German federal government spokesperson Steffen Hebestreit previously announced on X that Berlin "firmly rejects the accusation of genocide made against Israel."

It has no basis whatsoever. We will therefore speak as a third party in the main hearing before the International Court of Justice," he added.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz had attributed his country's unconditional support for Israel after Oct. 7 to Germany's historical responsibility for the Holocaust.

Berlin had put forward the same reason when blocking demonstrations of support for Palestine in Germany on the grounds of combating anti-semitism. During this period, more than 100 pro-Palestinian demonstrations were not allowed in the country, while in the capital, students were banned from carrying Palestinian shawls and stickers with Palestinian flags on them. In the state of Bavaria, the slogan: "Palestine will be free from the river to the sea," used in pro-Palestinian demonstrations, was banned on the grounds it was "anti-semitic." Scholz was the first foreign head of government to visit Israel after Oct. 7. Israel's Ambassador to Germany, Ron Prosor, announced that Germany has become Tel Aviv's "best ally in Europe" after the unconditional and unlimited support it has given since Oct. 7. Tensions have been running

high across the West Bank amid an Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip following a cross-border attack by Hamas on Oct. 7.

The Israeli escalation resulted in the killing of 347 Palestinians and injury to 4,000 others, including 593 children, since Oct. 7, according to the Ministry of Health. The arrest of 5,822 Palestinians has been recorded, according to prisoner affairs institutions. Israel has launched air and ground attacks on the Gaza Strip in retaliation for the Hamas' cross-border attacks, killing at least 23,843 Palestinians, mostly children and women, and injuring 60,317 others, according to health authorities in the enclave.

Meanwhile, Namibia said Sunday that Germany committed the first genocide of the 20th century on Namibian soil and "is yet to fully atone for the genocide."

Namibia rejected Germany's support to Israel's attacks in Gaza, the presidency of Namibia said in a statement on X. President of Namibia, Hage Geingob, expressed "deep concern with the shocking decision communicated by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany yesterday, 12 January 2024, in which it rejected the morally upright indictment brought forward by South Africa before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza."



MUZAFFARABAD: Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment Mushaal Hussein Mullick interacting with the refugees of Kashmiri Refugees Camp.