

LAHORE (INP): A new dengue case was reported in the province, bringing the total to 17 new patients this year. The latest case hailed from Sargodha district as confirmed by Health Secretary Punjab Ali Jan Khan in a press statement issued here on Monday. As no dengue patients were under treatment in Punjab hospitals, Health Secretary Ali Jan Khan urged citizens to maintain clean and dry surroundings to prevent dengue.

LAHORE (INP): Former federal minister and Vice President Pakistan Muslim-Nawaz (PML-N) Punjab, Sumaira Malik on Monday resigned of the office besides quitting the party. Without assigning any reasons, she sent her one-liner resignation to provincial president Rana Sanaullah. She has also parted ways with the party ahead of general elections to be held on February 8, 2024.

Houthi missile hits US-owned ship in Red Sea

AL-MUKALLA: The UK Maritime Trade Operations organization said it received reports of a missile hitting a ship south-east of Yemen's southern city of Aden, shortly after residents in the central province of Al-Bayda and neighboring Abyan province reported seeing a missile fired from a Houthi-controlled area. UKMTO "has received a report of an incident 95NM South East of Aden, Yemen. Master reports port side of vessel hit from above by a missile," the agency said. The warning came roughly an hour after locals in Abyan's Lawdar district — which is close to the missile's supposed launch site — reported seeing a missile launched from Houthi-controlled territory in Al-Bayda's Mukayras fly over their neighborhoods.

The missile was launched at around 3:55 p.m. from a hilly position held by the Houthis in Mukayras, and residents heard an explosion and observed missile smoke in the sky," Mohsen Al-Markhi, a journalist from Lawder, told Arab News by telephone. Another missile launched by the Houthis exploded near a village in the southern province of Al-Dhale on Monday, only hours after the US shot down a Houthi missile aimed at a US Navy ship in the Red Sea. Residents in the Jahaf

Iran says Houthis will keep up Red Sea attacks as long as Israel continues Gaza war

TEHRAN: Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi militia will persist in targeting "Israeli ships" in the Red Sea as long as Israel continues its war in Gaza, Tehran's top diplomat said on Monday.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, speaking at a press conference in Tehran alongside his Indian counterpart, said that stopping the "genocide" in Gaza was the only way to put an end to the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. "[The Houthis] assured us that they will not disrupt maritime security, but their position is that they will take action against Israeli ships as long as the war in Gaza continues," state media quoted Amir-Abdollahian as saying. The solution is to "stop the war and genocide in Gaza," he said. Since November, the Houthis have been targeting vessels in the Red Sea that they say are either linked to Israel or heading to Israeli ports, justifying their actions as support for Palestinians amid the ongoing war between the Gaza-based Palestinian militant group Hamas and Israel, which began on October 7. Hamas, like the Houthis, are also supported by Iran. — Alarabiya

district reported a massive explosion on Monday after a ballistic missile fell in a hilly part of the district. Locals sent Arab News a video of a large ball of dust and smoke rising from the site after the missile blasts.

Residents say the missile was not targeting their neighborhoods and landed before it reached its intended target. Yemen's Defense Ministry news site reported that the ballistic missile was fired from the Houthi-controlled Al-Jaefri village in Al-Dhale and detonated in an area between two minor villages in Jahaf. Since the

start of the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea in November, residents across Yemen, primarily those living in or near Houthi-controlled territory, have reported seeing Houthi missiles and drones flying over their areas, while others exploded near their farms after failing to reach their targets.

This comes as the US Central Command said that an anti-ship missile launched by the Houthis was shot down by a US fighter aircraft near Yemen's coastal city of Hodeidah before reaching its target, the USS Laboon naval destroyer. — Arab News

Political parties bound to hold intra-party polls: Solangi

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Monday said that every political party was bound to hold intra-party elections under their constitution.

The apex court's decision about the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's elections had set a precedent which would further promote democracy within the parties, the minister said while speaking in a talk show of the Pakistan Television. He said the Election Commission did not take notice of the irregularities in the PTI's intra-party elections, rather a complaint to the effect was filed with it.

"Democracy is not only necessary in the country but also within the political parties," he said. Every one in democracy had the right to criticise and the caretaker government could not usurp that fundamental right, the minister added. The basic role of the caretaker government was to act as a bridge between two elected governments, and the incumbents were their responsibilities amicably, he remarked.

Solangi said under Article 218(3) of the Constitution, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was responsible for holding free, fair and transparent elections and the caretaker government was committed to assist it in that regard. He said that every citizen should exercise their right to vote a per conscience.

To a question, he said the Pakistan Peoples Party, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and one other party were campaigning about lack of a level playing field. On the contrary in 2013 many political parties had such complaints. The minister said all the political parties were being given equal coverage on the state media that were working on the tax payers' money.

Petrol price slashed for next fortnight

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In a sigh of relief, the caretaker government on Monday reduced the price of petrol for the next fortnight by Rs8 per litre to Rs259.34 per litre.

The Finance Division notified the new prices of the petroleum products for the next fortnight starting from January 16 (Tuesday), as per the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority's (Ogra) recommendations.

However, the diesel rate was retained at Rs276.21 per litre. There was a reduction in kerosene oil and light diesel oil rates by Rs1.97 and Rs0.92 per litre in the fresh revision. In the past fortnight, the government had maintained petrol and diesel rates at Rs267.34 and Rs276.21 per litre respectively. The price of Kerosene oil had dropped to Rs188.83 after a reduction of Rs2.19 per litre while Light Diesel Oil will be sold at Rs165.75 as the government has increased the commodity's price by Rs1.11.

National Party leader calls on Nawaz

F.P. Report

LAHORE: National Party leader Dr Abdul Malik Baloch called on Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz chief Nawaz Sharif in Jati Umra in Lahore on Monday.

Overall political situation of the country and Balochistan, upcoming general election and other issues of bilateral interests came under discussion during the meeting. Important decisions with regard to the strategies for national and provincial assemblies constituencies were made during the meeting. Emphasising the need for better coordination between National Party and PNawaz Sharif, Malik Baloch presented his point of view regarding ensuring transparency in the upcoming general elections before Sharif.



GRINDAVIK: A volcano has erupted in southwestern Iceland, sending semi-molten rock spewing toward a nearby settlement for the second time in less than a month.

Elections can't be postponed

— ECP tells Senate on polls delay resolution

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has rejected a demand made in a Senate resolution seeking a delay in the February 8 polls, stating that all arrangements have been completed and it will not be "advisable" to put off the polls.

The ECP statement comes in response to Senate's January 5 resolution moved by Senator Dilawar Khan and passed by the house amid thick attendance. The resolution had cited harsh weather conditions in hilly areas and the deteriorating security situation as reasons for delaying the polls.

In the statement today, the ECP said it deliberated on the resolution in the meeting and observed that caretaker governments had been issued directions for "beefing up security matrix and provide congenial environment to the electorate" for peaceful elections. Moreover, the electoral body said it submitted commitment before the Supreme Court that for holding elections on Feb 8, 2024.

Similarly, the ECP said it would not be out of place to mention that in the past general elections and local government polls have been held in winter season. Earlier on Monday, Independent lawmaker Dilawar Khan urged Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani to ensure implementation of his resolution — recently adopted by the upper house of parliament — seeking a delay in the February 8 polls.

To the surprise and disbelief of many, on January 5, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution to postpone the February 8 general elections in the country. In a letter sent to the Senate chairman, Senator Dilawar said despite the House's explicit urging and the subsequent dispatch of a copy of the resolution to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), "it is disconcerting that no tangible steps have been taken by the ECP to postpone the General Elections scheduled for February 8, 2024."

As mover of the resolution, Senator Dilawar said he firmly believed that the concerns articulated

in the resolution must be promptly addressed. "The essence of holding free and fair elections appears compromised without a resolution to the issues raised." The senator said it is imperative to ensure the postponement of the elections for effective "participation of people from all areas of Pakistan and across the entire political spectrum in the electioneering process". "Your [the Senate chairman] swift attention to this matter is highly appreciated, and I eagerly anticipate an update on the steps taken in this regard," the letter added.

Following the passage of Senator Dilawar's resolution, two more resolutions were submitted to the upper house's secretariat by independent Senators Hidayat Ullah and Hilal-ur-Rehman last week. All three senators have cited cold weather and security situation as reasons for delaying the elections in the country. The general elections in the country are scheduled to take place on February 8 with all political parties and independent candidates have been allocated electoral symbols.

150 parties, sans PTI, allotted electoral symbols

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: About 150 political parties, who are vying for the National and provincial assembly seats in the upcoming general elections, were allotted electoral symbols by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), media reported Monday.

However, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) — the previous ruling party of the country — was missing from the list of parties uploaded on the ECP website following the 'bat' symbol verdict announced by the Supreme Court on Saturday last week. According to the list, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) has been allotted 'tiger' symbol, Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPP) 'arrow', Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) 'sword', Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-Nazriati (PTI-N) 'batsman', Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) 'eagle', Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) 'kite', Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) 'book', Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JI) 'scale',

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Parliamentarians (PTI-P) 'turban', Balochistan National Party (BNP) 'axe', Awami National Party (ANP) 'lantern', Balochistan National Party Awami 'camel' and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) 'cow'.

Last week on Saturday, the electoral body issued an order, directing the returning officers that poll symbol should not be allotted to any candidate who belongs to another party. The five-member bench of the commission, headed by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, issued the order, which said: "Therefore, in exercise of powers, conferred upon the commission under Section 4 of the Elections Act, 2017, the commission hereby, directs that no symbol of any political party is allowed to any such candidate who is member of another political party and seeks allocation of symbol of other political party."

The ECP had already notified 177 symbols for independent candidates. Meanwhile, the returning officers in the Islamabad Capital Territory allotted

electoral symbols to contesting candidates and a total of 119 candidates were issued symbols for three NA constituencies.

As per the statistics shared by the returning officers, a total of 44 candidates would be in the fray in NA-46, whereas as many as 29 candidates will contest as independents from this constituency. Candidates from 16 political parties would also try their luck in this constituency to reach the legislature.

A transgender is also contesting from this constituency with 'green chilli' as the electoral symbol. A total of 37 candidates would be vying for NA-47, including 25 independent candidates as well as 12 candidates from different political parties. In NA-47, independent candidate Chaudhry Ilyas Meherban was given 'battery' as a symbol. Likewise, Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar would contest with 'clock' symbol. From NA-48, a total of 38 candidates will be in the fray, including 27 candidates to contest as independents, while candidates of 11 parties will also try their luck in this constituency.

'It's the right time' for Israel to scale back Gaza war: White House

JERUSALEM (AP): The White House said Sunday that "it's the right time" for Israel to scale back its military offensive in the Gaza Strip, as Israeli leaders again vowed to press ahead with their operation against the territory's ruling Hamas militant group.

The comments exposed the growing differences between the close allies on the 100th day of the war. Also Sunday, Israeli warplanes struck targets in Lebanon following a Hezbollah missile attack that killed two Israeli civilians — an older woman and her adult son — in northern Israel. The exchange of fire underscored concerns that the Gaza violence could trigger wider fighting across the region.

The war in Gaza, launched by Israel in response to the unprece-

dent Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, has killed nearly 24,000 Palestinians, devastated vast swaths of Gaza, driven around 85 percent of the territory's 2.3 million residents from their homes and pushed a quarter of the population into starvation. Speaking on CBS, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said the US has been speaking to Israel "about a transition to low-intensity operations" in Gaza.

"We believe it's the right time for that transition. And we're talking to them about doing that," he said on "Face the Nation." Israel launched the offensive after the Hamas attack killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took 250 others hostage. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead until Hamas is destroyed and all

of the more than 100 hostages still in captivity are freed.

The war has sent tensions soaring across the region, with Israel trading fire almost daily with Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group and Iranian-backed militias attacking US targets in Syria and Iraq. In addition, Yemen's Houthi rebels have been targeting international shipping, drawing a wave of US airstrikes last week. Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, said his group won't stop until a ceasefire is in place for Gaza.

"We are continuing, and our front is inflicting losses on the enemy and putting pressure on displaced people," Nasrallah said in a speech, referring to the tens of thousands of Israelis who have fled northern border areas.

PTI raises alarms as 'horse-trading' feared

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan has expressed fears that independent candidates could increase the chances of horse-trading as the Imran party going to contest the February 8 general elections sans a symbol.

The former ruling party lost its legal battle last Saturday when the Supreme Court announced its verdict in the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) favour, depriving PTI of its 'bat' symbol just days ahead of the general elections.

After losing its 'bat' sign, the party, which rose to power in 2018, held election authorities responsible for depriving it of hundreds of reserved seats by stripping the party of its electoral symbol.

Speaking to reporters in Rawalpindi on Monday, the politico, however, hoped that even PTI-backed candidates would still follow party directions when it comes to voting following the formation of the next assemblies. In the PTI's bid to get 'justice', the party will also be filing a review petition against the top court's verdict which "deprived nationals of their due rights and dented democracy", he said.

Gohar, however, clarified that his party would formulate its strategy in compliance with the apex court's judgment. "PTI leaders, workers, and candidates should not get disappointed and stay peaceful besides expediting efforts to protect their votes," the ex-PTI chairman added.

The politician, who was elected as the PTI chairman before the party's intra-party poll was declared null and void, also announced that the list of party-backed candidates and their symbols would be unveiled on the official website and

PID stimulates electoral understanding among masses

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Press Information Department (PID) was dedicated to stimulate electoral understanding among the masses regarding February 8, 2024 general elections by holding awareness campaigns.

In this regard, the PID has already launched a series of seminars to ensure active civic engagement and participation in the electoral process and elections slated for February 8. According to the PID, the stakeholders being invited to the seminars included representatives from mainstream political parties, the Election Commission of Pakistan, media, academia, civil society and the general public.

These seminars would serve as a platform to educate citizens on the importance of voting, the electoral system, and the role of elected representatives, it added. The PID said, "By fostering public awareness, the seminars seek to empower individuals to make informed decisions, ultimately contributing to a more robust and accountable democratic system."

On January 11, the PID organized its first seminar titled 'Pakistan elections 2024: The Economic Reforms Agenda of Political Parties' here at a local hotel in Islamabad which had across-the-board representation from the stakeholders. According to the PID, the spotlight was on the economic reform agendas presented by political parties of Pakistan gearing up for the 2024 elections. "The electorate is keenly interested in the economic visions put forth by diverse political entities and this exploration aims to provide a concise overview of the economic landscapes envisioned by the key players in Pakistan's political arena."

other social media accounts to facilitate voters within the next three days. A journalist questioned about expected PTI's alliance with Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM) ahead of general polls in a bid to curb horse trading and his meeting with the religious-political party's chairman Allama Raja Nasir Abbas. Gohar rejected holding any meeting with the MWM chief.

Regarding the incarcerated PTI founder's release, he replied that the party hoped for the early release of Imran Khan, however, the case number for the hearing has not been allotted so far. To another question about the raid at his house, Barrister Gohar said that Inspector General (IG) Islamabad gave assurance to hold accountability of the responsible officials and some cops were also

PHC accepts Aimal Wali apology

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan dispose-of Contempt of Court plea against Awami National Party (ANP) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Aimal Wali Khan after submission of apology as well as admission before media for usage of harsh words regarding judiciary, on Monday.

Earlier, Chief Justice PHC had ordered Aimal Wali for submission of apology in written as well as clarification before media which was fulfilled by ANP provincial presidents as per law.

The written reply stated that I am apologized for my rhetoric which had hurt sentiments of Chief Justice PHC and also regretted mishap in the premises of High Court during his appearance.

It is worthy to mention that Aimal Wali had used derogatory rhetoric against Chief Justice of PHC which was challenged by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Fazal Muhammad Khan of Charsadda district.

Meanwhile, Anti-Terrorism Court granted further three days remand to alleged culprit involved in firing in front of Judicial Complex in which Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) personnel was killed while three others were injured. The alleged culprit identified as Abdul Wahab was produced before Anti-terrorism Court after completion of physical remand but police argued further remand due to unfinished interrogation. The alleged culprit was arrested with weapon of offense under the allegation of opening firing over old rivalry in front of Judicial Complex in which one CTD personnel was killed while three others were injured.



One new dengue case reported

LAHORE (APP): A new dengue case was reported in the province, bringing the total to 17 new patients this year.

The latest case hailed from Sargodha district as confirmed by Health Secretary Punjab Ali Jan Khan in a press statement issued here on Monday. As no dengue patients was under treatment in Punjab hospitals. Health Secretary Ali Jan Khan urged citizens to maintain clean and dry surroundings to prevent dengue. During the past month, Lahore recorded a total of 10 dengue cases while Rawalpindi and Faisalabad reported two cases each.

In an effort to combat dengue, the secretary health advised collaboration with the health department teams. He emphasized the importance of citizens contacting the health department's free helpline at 1033 for information, complaints, or dengue-related medical assistance.

PITB, Al-Khidmat Foundation sign MoU

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Information Technology Board's e-filing and office automation system received a huge success at government level. Now the private sector also requested its services. The PITB and Al-Khidmat foundation signed an MOU here on Monday.

Following the successful implementation of e-Foas at public sector under the direction of chairman PITB Faisal Yusuf and supervision of DG Government Digital Services Wing Muhammad Waseem Bhatti, private sector had also taken up the services.

The MoU was signed between the Government Digital Services Wing of the PITB and Al-Khidmat Foundation. Director General Government Digital Services Wing Muhammad Waseem Bhatti and Vice President of Al-Khidmat Foundation Dr Muhammad Mushtaq Ahmed Mangat signed the MoU. DG Government Digital Services Wing Muhammad Waseem Bhatti said that after the acceptance of e-Foas in government departments, its implementation was now expanding to the private sector too. He said its implementation would help private institutions to improve their departmental affairs and service delivery.

New BoD of Lahore Parking Company formed

LAHORE (APP): Under the directives of the Punjab chief minister, a new board for a parking company has been formed to initiate effective measures.

Administrator Metropolitan Corporation Lahore Rafia Haider issued a notification for the establishment of the Lahore Parking Company's new board, comprising seven members. The board of directors has been nominated for a three-year term, including the deputy commissioner Lahore and secretary District Regional Transport Authority Lahore. The newly-appointed board will include the chief executive officer of Lahore Parking Company, chief traffic officer, and chief officer of the Metropolitan Corporation Lahore.

CM inaugurates e-service mobile app at BISE Lahore

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, during his visit to the Lahore Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE), inaugurated the e-service mobile application. Mohsin Naqvi also announced the launch of a mobile app designed to unify all education boards under a single platform, directing the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) to ensure its functionality across all boards within a week. Students can access the specific services of their respective boards by entering the board's name.

The chief minister unveiled the plaque and initiated the BISE mobile app with a symbolic button press. Personally reviewing the application, he navigated through features such as e-payment, degree and result card verification, NOC issuance, and migration certificate issuance. He also observed the streamlined process for duplicate and triplicate degree issuance through the e-app. Chief Minister Naqvi commended the efficiency of degree verification for government institutions facilitated by the BISE e-app.

Speaking to the media post the app's inauguration, Mohsin Naqvi shared his concern

for students during a surprise visit to the board's office 15 days ago. Promptly, a meeting was convened with the provincial minister and secretary to address the students' issues. The transition from a manual to an online system has now made board services accessible online. Expressing regret that this technological advancement should have occurred earlier, Chief Minister Naqvi assured that services for all education boards would be online in the coming days. Online applications for degree confirmation, NOC, migration certificates, and other documents, along with online fee payment, will be facilitated, enhancing accessibility for students.

Acknowledging the critical need for reforms in the education sector, the Chief Minister pledged to work towards betterment despite time constraints. He emphasized the significance of providing quality education and health facilities to the public. Naqvi lauded the efforts of the entire team involved in launching the BISE Mobile App and expressed pride in the dedicated work of PITB, which is actively engaged in projects like Safe City and Hospital Information Management Systems (HIMS).

Commissioner reviews progress on new e-registry centers

LAHORE (APP): Commissioner Muhammad Ali Randhawa has revealed plans to set up state-of-the-art e-registry centers in Raiwind and Shalimar.

The officers have been assigned responsibilities for the successful establishment and operation of the new e-registry centers in the provincial capital.

In a meeting held on Monday at his office, the commissioner examined progress of establishing e-registry centers in Lahore. Stressing the collaborative role of these centers with urban communities, Randhawa underlined his commitment to providing relief in accordance with contemporary needs. The proven success of Punjab's first e-registry model center has already delivered significant relief to citizens. Randhawa affirmed that the upcoming

registration centers would mirror the efficiency of the initial model, embracing a corporate sector approach. He emphasized a rigorous evaluation of project progress on a daily, 24-hour basis.

The commissioner said that these e-registry centers would adhere to deadlines, boasting modern facilities for optimal functionality. He highlighted the provision of comprehensive facilities under one roof, catering to regional revenue matters for residents. Additional Commissioner Abdul Salam Arif, Development Director Javid Rashid Chohan, ADC Lahore Omar Maqbool, Chief Engineer LDA Israr Saeed, Chief Engineer Iqar Hussain, Deputy Director Hafiz Iqbal and other officers attended the meeting.

NAB's objective is to resolve the issue of corruption in a civilized manner: Nazir

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Chairman National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Lieutenant General Retired Nazir Ahmed while addressing the civil bureaucrats in Sindh secretariat here today on Monday said that he wants to assure the officers that NAB will not harass them and they should openly play their key role in the development of the country.

He further said that he is bringing reforms in NAB and no officer will be subjected to a media trial during the process of complaint verification and inquiry. He further said that complaints written under fictitious names or anonymous will not be accepted in NAB. He further said that he knows the bureaucrats are working under immense pressure. Adding that due to the ongoing cases in NAB, the development / construction projects get delayed which should not happen and the projects should be completed on time. Addressing the officers, he asked the civil bureaucrats to hold open Katcheries and try to solve the problems of the people by listening to them in person. Chairman NAB announced facilitation desk will be established at Chief Secretary Sindh Office



wherein concerns and complaints of officers of Govt. of Sindh will be discussed and all efforts will be made to resolve such matters on fast track basis. He further said that in order to ensure open door policy and accessibility for all monthly open hearing (Khuli Katcheri) are being conducted at NAB Offices.

In the meeting, Chief Secretary Sindh Dr. Muhammad Fakhre Alam introduced the officers to Chairman NAB. The Chief Secretary Sindh said that there were reports of corruption in the pension fund in Sindh, in which action is being taken against the officers involved.

In the meeting, Director General NAB Sindh Javed Akbar Riaz said that during the investigation of pension fund, replied from some secretaries were called and relevant information was

taken from them, on the basis of which NAB has conducted an inquiry against the relevant officers / persons. Director General NAB Sindh Javed Akbar Riaz, Chairman Planning Board Shakeel Ahmed Mangnejo, Additional Chief Secretary Home Muhammad Iqbal Memon, IG Sindh Riffat Mukhtar Raja, Additional Chief Secretary Local Government Manzoor Ali Sheikh, Senior Member Board of Revenue Zahid Abbasi, Chairman Anti-Corruption Zulfiqar Ali Shah, Secretary General Administration Muhammad Ali Khoso, Secretary Information Nadeem ur Rehman Memon, all the secretaries attended while all the Divisional Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners attended the meeting through video link.



LAHORE: Student of Pakistan Institute of Fashion and Design finalizing her project.



LAHORE: Woman busy in selecting and purchasing Household items at Delhi Gate.

Younus Dagher for bonding between govt, sincere non-profits to ensure quality schooling for every child

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh government has to join hands with the sincere education sector non-profits to provide quality schooling facilities to children from rural and underprivileged parts of the province in the form of public-private partnerships.

Caretaker Sindh Revenue, Industries, and Commerce Minister, Younus Dagher, stated this, while speaking as the chief guest at a ceremony held here to honour students enrolled in the charitable schools of non-profit Green Crescent Trust (GCT) who recently passed the matriculation examinations with distinction.

Caretaker Sindh Revenue Minister appreciated that the GCT in the past 29 years had established 166 charitable schools having an enrolment of over 31,799 students from the deprived families in Sindh. "I would like to greet the leadership, donors, and supporters of the Green Crescent Trust for establishing such a vast schooling network whose enrolment roughly equals to serving the educational needs of a medium-sized city," said Dagher.

He said the Sindh government should learn from the exceptional success of the committed charities in the education sector like the GCT to effectively overcome the shortcomings of the state-run schooling system. He said the partnership to be forged between the Sindh government and devoted education sector charities would go a long way to provide quality schooling facilities to every child in the remote and

rural parts of the province.

The Interim Sindh Revenue Minister said the government spent around Rs 3,000 to Rs 3,500 per month on every student enrolled in its schooling system but even then it couldn't match the quality of education imparted by committed non-profits like the GCT whose per-student spending is much less. He advised non-governmental organizations in the education sector to impart vocational training to their students besides the provision of IT learning facilities to help the government overcome the shortage of skilled workforce required for the advancement of Pakistan.

Dagher while appreciating the hard work by the students who were honoured on the occasion, advised them to stay fully focused on getting further education to brighten the future of their families and become capable of playing an effective role in the progress and development of Pakistan.

He assured the GCT office-bearers that he would sit with them to ponder over the issues of the education sector to jointly find the way forward for the uplift of the government schooling system.

Earlier speaking as the Chief Guest of the previous session, Caretaker Sindh Law Minister, Barrister, Muhammad Omer Soomro, said the shining examples of committed charities like the GCT gave much encouragement to the government to uplift its schooling network. He advised the students in the audience to continue with their hard work in their studies to emerge

as loyal and committed citizens who could meaningfully contribute to the development of Pakistan.

Also speaking as the guest of honour, Additional Chief Secretary of Sindh Home Department, Muhammad Iqbal Memon, praised that a large number of students from underprivileged families had secured distinction upon completion of their school education.

In his welcome remarks, GCT CEO, Zahid Saeed, said it was high time that sincere NGOs and the Sindh government joined hands and worked together to enrol around eight million out-of-school children in the province aged between four and 16. He lamented that despite the expenditure of hundreds of billions of rupees annually the provincial governments couldn't provide basic academic and infrastructure facilities at its schools. He said the concerned NGOs in the education sector and government by forging partnerships could jointly work to overcome the serious issues of the state-run schools.

On the occasion, the chief guests and guests of honour distributed commendation certificates among 112 students enrolled in the GCT schools who passed the SSC examinations with distinction.

The students also spoke and expressed gratitude to concerned philanthropists and donors for supporting quality schooling facilities for children from deprived families in Sindh. They also shared with the audience their goals in upcoming practical life after securing a higher education.

PU's 132nd convocation to be held on 20th

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab University's 132nd convocation will be held on Saturday, January 20 in Faisal auditorium.

A full dress rehearsal of the convocation will be held on Friday, January 19, at 8am at Faisal Auditorium in which student's participation is must. Invitation cards for students had been sent in this regard, however, the students who had not received the invitation cards may contact the Computer Degree Section, Punjab University Examination Department. The position holder students of BS, MA/MSc, M.Phil and PhD session 2022 will be bestowed medals and degrees.

Meanwhile, The Punjab University awarded seven PhD degrees to the scholars in different disciplines.

The degrees were awarded to Muhammad Rashid Iqbal S/o Muhammad Iqbal in the subject of Urdu, Hafiz Abu Bakar Usman S/o Saleem Ullah Zaman in the subject of Islamic Studies, Rehana Bano D/o Muhammad Hussain in the subject of Chemistry, Rahat Afza D/o Muhammad Nawaz in the subject of Art & Design (Art History), Kashifa Rashid D/o Mian Abdul Rashid in the subject of Special Education, Asma Kanwal D/o Zia Ullah in the subject of Special Education and Muhammad Ihsan Ullah S/o Choudhary Hidayat Ullah in the subject of Pharmacy (Pharmacology).

Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution Information Technology Department

Request for Proposal for providing maintenance and support services for Database & Software applications.

Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI) intends to hire services of a software/technology firm for the maintenance and support of its in-house applications for two years extendable up to one year on the same terms and conditions. The project will be titled "Maintenance, Support, and enhancement for Software and Database". Bids are invited from reputable firms to undertake the project in an efficient/timely manner and as per bid documents. Bidding will be conducted according to Rule 36(b), Single Stage Two Envelope procedure of PPRA Rules 2004 and is open to all bidders who meet the following eligibility criteria:

- The bidder is a registered firm under the Companies Act 2017 and is operating in Pakistan for at least five years.
- Must be in the latest active taxpayer list of FBR.
- The bidder must have completed at least two projects of database and software development / support / maintenance during last five years.
- The bidder should have, at least, an average annual revenue of Rs. 200 million during the last five years.
- The bidder must not be in litigation with EOBI and Federal/Provincial Governments and has not been blacklisted by the Federal and/or Provincial Governments or law courts in or outside Pakistan.

AVAILABILITY OF BID DOCUMENTS:

Bid documents shall be available from the date of publication of tender notice in the newspapers from the below mentioned address at Karachi or from EOBI Zonal Offices situated at 57-L Gulberg-III, Lahore, and Plot No. 32, 33, & 34, Sector G-10/4, Mauve Area, Islamabad, on production of a pay order of Rs. 5000 (non-refundable) drawn on any Pakistan-based commercial bank in favor of 'EMPLOYEES' OLD-AGE BENEFITS INSTITUTION, HEAD OFFICE, KARACHI."

BID CLOSING, OPENING, VALIDITY & BID SECURITY:

Bids prepared in accordance with the instructions in the bidding documents contained in the technical and financial proposals in separate envelopes, must reach at the below given address on or before January 31, 2024, at 11:00 am. Opening of technical bids is set for January 31, 2024, at 11:30 am at EOBI Board Room, 8th Floor, EOBI Head Office, PECHS Block-2, Karachi. All bids submitted must have a validity of 180 days. Financial bids shall be opened after the technical evaluation of the bids received, for which the technically qualified bidders shall be informed in writing. All bids are to be accompanied with a "SECURITY DEPOSIT" of Rs. 400,000 in favor of 'EMPLOYEES' OLD-AGE BENEFITS INSTITUTION, HEAD OFFICE, KARACHI."

BID REJECTION:

Incomplete, conditional, and/or bids without Bid Security shall be instantly rejected. Bids without proof of eligibility conditions stated above shall also be rejected.

Director (General Administration Department) EOBI Head Office, 190/1/B, P.E.C.H.S. Block-2, Near Blue Ribbon Bakery, Off Shara-e-Faisal, Karachi. Tel No: 021-99225397.



ECP allots electoral symbols to political parties for general election 2024

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has allotted the electoral symbols to all religious and political parties except PTI for the general election 2024. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) has been allotted symbol of 'tiger', Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) 'arrow', Pakistan Peoples Party (Shahid Bhutto) 'sword' and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-Nazriati (PTI-N) 'batsman'.

Similarly, the newly established Isteqdam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) has been allotted electoral symbol 'eagle'. Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) 'kite', Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) 'book' and Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JI) 'scale'. Likewise, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Parliamentarians (PTI-P) was allotted 'turban', Balochistan National Party (BNP) 'axe', Awami National Party (ANP) 'lantern', Balochistan National Party Awami 'camel' and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) 'cow'.

Approximately, 150 political parties

were allotted electoral symbols for general election 2024. The ECP had already notified 177 symbols for independent candidates. Constitutional and electoral laws expert, Syed Noman Bokhari advocate said that electoral symbols signify political approach and strength of political parties. He said without election symbol, the candidates lose the ability to convey an overall message to voters, leading to potential confusion.

He said in 1985, PPP had lost "sword" symbol after it was omitted from the list of available election symbols in a bid to politically harm it. However, the PPP had later regained both the arrow and sword symbols in subsequent elections and established its governments in 1988, 1993 and 2008. Contrary to popular belief, he said that "bat" has not always been PTI's election symbol, saying when PTI was formed, its symbol in the 1997 elections was a lamp.

However, the bat became associated with PTI, especially during the Cricket World Cup, ultimately becoming its distinctive electoral

symbol. Meanwhile, the name of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf was missing from the list of political parties uploaded on the ECP website following the 'bat' symbol verdict announced by the Supreme Court on Saturday last week.

On Saturday last, ECP in its order has directed the returning officers that poll symbol should not be allotted to any candidate who belongs to another party. The commission five members bench, headed by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, in its order said, "Therefore, in exercise of powers, conferred upon the commission under Section 4 of the Elections Act, 2017, the commission hereby, directs that no symbol of any political party be allowed to any such candidate who is member of another political party and seeks allocation of symbol of other political party." Noman said that intra party election was necessary for political parties under Election Act. He said electoral symbol was taken back from PTI after it failed to justify its controversial intra party election in ECP and Supreme Court of Pakistan.



PESHAWAR: People offering funeral prayer of Saeed Muhammad Hussain Gillani known as Saeed Agha.

Arbab Saqib promoted as Deputy MD SNGPL

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Senior General Manager Arbab Saqib has been appointed as Deputy Managing Director (Operation) Sui Northern Gas Pipeline Limited (SNGPL) after promotion by 618th Board of Director Meeting held on 13th January 2024.

According to details, Arbab Saqib has been appointed on Deputy Managing Director under Office Order 2486 while he served at different position in SNGPL. He is famous for consumer facilitation and modernization of SNGPL as an expert.

Arbab Saqib has served as General Manager SNGPL at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from 2013 to 2013. He had renovated old gas pipelines at Peshawar during excavation for Bus Rapid Transit. He had protected SNGPL from losses as Senior General Manager. Board of Director also promoted Chief Financial Officer Faisal Iqbal and General Manager Kamran Ikram to Head of Internal Audit.

PML-N Lawyers forum hails apex court verdict

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) Lawyers Forum Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has endorsed the Supreme Court Judgment and termed it in accordance with Constitution and law, on Monday.

A general body meeting of PML-N Lawyers was chaired by its President Kifayat Ullah Khan at Peshawar High Court. Rahman Ullah Shah advocate Supreme Court and Abdullah Abbasi advocate announced joining PML-N LF. Kifayat Ullah Khan welcomed the new entrants in the forum. He said that it would further strengthen

the forum. President Peshawar High Court Bar Association Tariq Afridi, PML-NLF leaders Syed Sardar Hussain, Atif Nazeer, Mussarat Ullah, Alamzeb Khan, Akbar Yousaf Khalil, Saleem Shah Hoti, Afroz Ahmad, Asad Khan, Taimur Afridi, Qaisar Baig, Muhammad Shabbir, Ashfaq Jhagra, Shah Nawaz Khan, Asif Nazeer, Manzoor Khalil, Safdar Khan, Saima Jaferri, Shahid Raza Malik, Ashaque Daudzai, Abid Ali, Shahid Qayyum and others attended the meeting.

The Speakers said that the country has been passing through critical juncture and some of vested inter-

ests were hellbent upon to damage the country. They said that the apex Court judgment had brought an end to the uncertainty and the judgment regarding symbol of bat would be instrumental for upholding the rule of law and supremacy of Constitution.

PML-N Lawyer Forum claimed that legal fraternity full support the apex Court's Judgment which would have far reaching political and legal impacts. The speakers regretted that political and economic stability was vital for the country therefore all democratic elements should come forward so as to jointly work for development of country.

Weather to be cold in most of districts in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The weather will be cold in most of the districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and very cold and partly cloudy in the upper districts including Chitral, Dir Upper, Swat and Kohistan.

The weather will remain cold in most districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and very cold and partly cloudy in upper districts with chances of light rain and light snowfall in Chitral, Dir, Swat and Kohistan, Meteorological Department said here on Sunday.

There is a possibility of fog in Charsadda, Mardan, Nowshera, Swabi, Lakki Marwat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan and surrounding areas, Meteorological Department officials said.

There is a possibility of fog in Charsadda, Mardan, Nowshera, Swabi, Lakki Marwat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan and surrounding areas, Meteorological Department officials said. The minimum temperature in Peshawar is expected to be 3 degrees Celsius, Mardan 4, Charsadda 5, Bannu 2 and Dera Ismail Khan 5 degrees Celsius, the official of the Meteorological Department said. Chance of light rain and light snowfall in Chitral, Dir, Swat and Kohistan, the official said.

PTI-P to transform political dynamics in province: Asia

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Former Provincial Minister Ms. Asia Jahangir said that due to the incompetence of traditional politicians in Bannu politics, the problems here could not be resolved. Hence the people is rejecting and trying the faces relying on the leadership of Pervez Khattak PTI-P, on Monday.

The people of Bannu will successfully defeating the candidates by breaking the chains of slavery of the people, by deciding decisions for their better future. She added that the politicians here are using politics as a business, which is not the leadership in true sense, but the dealer of the people.

Mohhtar Mah Asia Jahangir, while addressing a meeting held in Bannu's circle NA 39 and PK99,

under the leadership of Mirzada Khan Wazir, several leaders and young people announced their membership to PTI-P and formally wore hats and mufflers at the occasion. Asia Jahangir said that I have come to the field of action under the spirit of worship and service to politics.

The traditional politicians disappear after taking power and they lie after taking advantage of power for five years, but now the people had broken the chains of slavery by rejecting the tried and tested political dealers and saved their political and constitutional rights from further abuse who After being in power for 30 years, and propagated false claims and big mega projects. Because of this, today's so-called politicians are opposing us, but we will lead the way in

the political arena with public power and we will repay to the kindness of Pervez Khattak and Mahmud Khan.

As the traditional politicians could not get rid of electricity and other problems, which is a shame for those who rule here. In today's modern era, people are facing problems due to the lack of electricity and gas in areas like Bannu, she said. Former minister Asia Jahangir added that for the first time in the history of Bannu, women in the number of hundreds are joining the parliamentary political party, which is the message of political consciousness, when women have raised, the big towers have gone up and the people of Bannu will rise on the 8th of February By ending Khan Khwanis politics, and will support Pagdi.



PESHAWAR: PPP leader Syed Zahir Ali Shah offering dua after inaugurating election office.

CPSP team visits newly established Timergara Medical College

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Senior vice president of College of Physician and Surgeon Pakistan (CPSP) Prof Dr Shuiab Shafi has said that classes at the Timergara Medical College will start this year as the CPSP has given approval of the faculty and training of the FCPS at the college. He stated this while addressing a function at the college after visiting various units of the TMC and Timergara Teaching hospital as chief guest here on Monday.

The CPSP team along with the director general health services Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Dr Shaukat Ali, district health officer Dr Irshad Rughani and medical superintendent district headquarters hospital Timergara Dr Asghar Ali visited the TMC and examined its various units. Prof Dr Jehangir Khan, Prof Dr Wiqar Alam Jan and others were also present on the occasion. The MS Dr Asghar Ali briefed the SPSP visiting team about facilities available at the hospital and expressed satisfaction on it.

Prof Dr Shuiab said the posting of faculty for the TMC was in progress and soon the process would be completed after which classes at the college would be commenced. The KP director general health Dr Shaukat Ali on the occasion appreciated the visiting team and termed it a good news for the people of Dir. He said that commencement of classes at the Timergara Medical College had been

a long standing demand of the local population which would be realized soon.

He said that the whole political leadership had played its active role in the establishment of the medical college in Dir. The DG also appreciated efforts of the provincial secretary health Mahmood Aslam Wazir and caretaker health minister for taking interest in the project. He said that a proper notification regarding the upgradation of FCPS doctors would be issued within a couple of days.

PTI symbols: The Pakistan Tehreek Insaf candidates for one national assembly and five provincial assembly seats will contest the general elections with the symbols of wall clock while Bashir Khan, another PTI nominee for NA 6 will contest it with wickets. The election commission of Pakistan has allotted the symbol of 'wall clock' to the PTI candidates for PK 14 Muhammad Azam Khan, PK 15 Humayun Khan, PK 16 Shafiullah Khan, PK 17 Ubaidur Rehman and PK 18 Liaqat Ali Khan.

The PTI is also facing internal rifts within the party on the award of tickets as several other party activists are in the run as independent candidates. The PTI activists in PK 18 Malik Abdullah Shah on Monday announced that he would not withdraw from contesting the election. Talking to local journalists he said that all previous lawmakers from the PTI who had done nothing in the area had been awarded party tickets again

and the workers were not pleased with it.

He alleged the party leadership again had disappointed local workers in the award of tickets. Similarly another PTI activist Zakirullah is also contesting election as independent candidate for PK 16. The party has awarded a ticket to its previous MPA Shafiullah Khan in this constituency. The party has awarded a ticket to Syed Mahboob Shah for NA 7 while one of the PTI prominent activists, Inamullah Khan is also in the running in this constituency. The PTI dissident group has succeeded to get the symbol of 'pomegranate' in NA 6, NA 7, PK 14 and PK 16 in Lower Dir.

School teacher Naseemullah passes away

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Renowned senior teacher, headmaster Government Primary School Dialzak Road Peshawar, Naseemullah passed away on Monday.

Funeral prayers of the deceased was offered at his native town in Akbarpura Tarkha Kaley, district Nowshera. A large number of people including officials of education departments, teachers' community and residents of the area attended the funeral prayers.

CS visits PEHEL - 911 helpline center

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary visited the PEHEL - 911 Helpline Center in Peshawar managed by the Provincial Disaster Management Authority on Monday. Caretaker Advisor on Health Dr Riaz Anwar, Secretary Relief Rehabilitation and Settlement Inayat Ullah Waseem and senior officers accompanied the Chief Secretary, providing a detailed briefing on the facilities and services offered under this initiative.

The integration of various emergency helplines, including Rescue, Police, National Highway & Motorway Police, and other essential helplines with PEHEL 911 Helpline was explained. The PEHEL Helpline aims to provide easy access to all helplines through a platform, with future plans to connect social welfare, tourism, and cybercrime helplines to it.

The Chief Secretary instructed the relevant officers to ensure immediate responses through these helplines during emergencies to minimize potential losses. The primary goal of establishing these helplines is to maintain control over emergency situations and provide on-the-spot rescue services, as delays in such services can lead to increased losses in emergencies.

Agriculture park Wana to boost Pine Nut production in South Waziristan

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In the chilly and dry season, Pine Nut (Chilgoza), abundant in nourishing varieties, proves to be a unique gift of nature for South Waziristan.

Pakistan stands as the fifth-largest global producer of pine nuts, annually contributing between twenty five to thirty billion rupees, with half of this is from South Waziristan, accounting for eight to ten billion annually, said officials on Monday. The majority of Chilgoza

forests span the areas of South Waziristan including Badar, Shawal, Kharman, Angoor Ada.

While Chilgoza from South Waziristan is globally renowned, the local cultivators face challenges due to the lack of facilities and the spillover of insecurity from Afghan territories, causing prolonged distress for the local farming community.

Considering the struggles of cultivators, the Pakistani military, allocating a budget of 850 million rupees, has established a

modern Agricultural Park equipped with state-of-the-art Pine Nut processing plants and storage facilities. The aim of this Agricultural Park Wana is to ensure the safety and preservation of the produce and varieties from Waziristan's cultivators.

Undoubtedly, as the Pakistani military remains engaged in securing the nation's borders, it is also actively contributing to improving the lives of the local population by introducing facilities and conveniences.

ANP drops Shagufta Malik from final list of electoral candidates

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Awami National Party (ANP) has dropped its leader Shagufta Malik from final list of the electoral candidates for February 8, 2024 general elections.

The ANP taking back

party ticket from the former MPA has nominated Nisbatullah as part candidate in the said constituency.

Earlier, the party had nominated Shagufta Malik as its candidate from Khyber Assembly constituency PK-73 after

which she started her election campaign but her name was missing in final list of the candidates. On the other hand, the party sources said that Shagufta herself returned the ticket as she was ANP candidate on National Assembly seats reserved for women.



PESHAWAR: Mayor Haji Zubair Ali addressing participants after distributing sports items among youth.



In brief

DPO directs public facilitation
F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: District Police Officer (DPO) Abadit Nisar said that providing justice to the people is my first priority, on Monday. This he claimed while talking to the Daily The Frontier Post, and added that I am a servant of the people, it is my responsibility to listen and solve the problems. He further said that since I took charge as DPO in District Toba Tek Singh, DPO said that I have been trying to provide justice to the people and inshallah, continuous action is being taken against the criminals. I have ordered the SHOs. That people should not be humiliated in the police stations, solve their problems immediately and report to me. In the end, he said that the doors of my office are open all the time to provide justice to the people. He added that sustainable peace as well as exemplary law and order situation in the district. Meanwhile, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidate for National Assembly from NA-106, Choudhry Khalid Nawaz said that after being elected MNA, my first priority is health and education because there are many problems of health and education in our constituency.

MCCI president joins RJUI
F.P. Report

MARDAN: A prominent business leader of Mardan, President of the Chamber of Industry and Trade and the Central Organization of Traders Zahir Shah along with his family and colleagues, announced to join the JUI-F and withdrew from the two provincial constituencies PK-57 and PK-58 as compared to their candidates. On Monday at a press conference in presence of Maulana Amanat Shah Haqani, candidate for PK-57 and party's District General Secretary, Azam Khan candidate of JUI NA-21, Qari Niaz Ali candidate of NA-22, Kaleem Ullah Khan Toru candidate of NA-23, candidate for PK-58 Tajul Amin Jabal, 59 PK candidate Maulana Aqeel Ansari and others said that they are joining Rabita JUI unconditionally. He said this is the only party in which the workers are getting respect. Many other parties were also in contact, but after thinking and consulting with colleagues, decided to join JUI.

Quetta safe city project

QUETTA (INP): The Quetta Safe City Project has entered the final stage of completion which would be officially inaugurated by the end of January. According to the plan, over 1400 IP cameras have been installed at 225 locations in Quetta city and an effective monitoring system has been established to restore peace. Under the leadership of Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki, the caretaker provincial government has achieved another milestone of completion of the Quetta Safe City Project to provide security to the people. Quetta Safe City Project will play a key role in providing security to the citizens of the province. According to the Handouts issued here, the project consists of more than 1400 IP cameras at 255 key locations in Quetta City, with state-of-the-art surveillance systems. The state-of-the-art surveillance system will not only provide regional surveillance but also help law enforcement agencies in maintaining peace in the city.

Nation commits to root-out menace of terrorism: Samina

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri has strongly condemned the terrorist incidents targeting the security forces and common people. In one of her condemning newspaper statements, she said that the incidents of terrorism have increased to an alarming extent, behind which the specific agenda of the enemies to weaken the stability of the country and make it suffer from political and economic instability seems to be driven.

Senator said that the incidents of terrorism that took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Islamabad and other parts of the country in the last few days cannot weaken the nation's resolve against terrorism.

Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri said that cowardly terrorists want to undermine the country's stability through their terrorist activities, in which they will

never succeed. The entire nation stands by the side of our brave security forces, has put up a leaden wall in front of the cowardly enemy to crush the nefarious intentions of the enemies.

She said that the nation is proud of those who achieved martyrdom in the war against terrorists. Martyrs are the assets of the nation and they protected the nation by sacrificing their lives.

She said that the terrorist elements in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are openly playing terrorism, only the extremist elements that entered Pakistan from Afghanistan. It is also clear that the terrorists entering Pakistan from Afghanistan have the full patronage of India, which trains these terrorists on Afghan soil and sends them to Pakistan. She expressed hope that the Afghan authorities will once again seriously review the involvement of elements

involved in terrorist incidents in Pakistan and the involvement of India behind them and stop such actions that may threaten the security of Pakistan.

Samina Mumtaz Zehri further said that a handful of terrorists cannot shake the firm resolve of the nation. Our brave security forces are always active against the terrorists and the terrorists will never be allowed to succeed in their nefarious objectives and the nation will not be terrorized.

She said that the entire nation stands by the side of our security forces. Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri said that the sacrifices of the security agencies for the country are unforgettable and we will not let them go in vain. The determination of the nation against terrorism is unwavering and the entire nation will fight against the terrorists together and destroy the ambitions of the enemies.

Tank police register 2,572 cases: Report

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Tank Police highlighted their achievements in 2023, registered a total of 2,572 cases, including 763 related to narcotics, 516 involving illegal weapons, and 69 related to gunfire incidents.

On the direction of Inspector General of Police for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Akhtar Hayat Khan, and Regional Police Officer Dera Nasir Mahmood Satti credited District Police Officer Tank, Iftikhar Ali Shah, for overseeing the successful operations last year.

The report revealed that during the year, the police successfully restrained 2,486 individuals, including 646 wanted criminals, through strict control meas-

ures, resulting in the confiscation of a significant quantity of weapons, ammunition, and narcotics.

The seized items included 35 Kalashnikovs, 397 pistols, 125 rifles, 23 hand grenades, 42 daggers, 1 rocket launcher, 1 Bren gun, 2 M4 rifles, 4 bombs/IEDs, 2 Kalakows, and a staggering 11,044 cartridges. The Tank Police also intercepted 340,713 grams of cannabis, 34,698 grams of heroin, 16,636 grams of ice, and 3,735 grams of opium during operations against drug trafficking.

In addition to law enforcement actions, the Tank Police addressed 87 cases of tenancy disputes, filed 17 cases against hoteliers, and dealt with 64 sen-

sitive locations. The police responded to 2,000 clearance requests, 1500 missing documentation reports, and 590 requests for weapon verification, demonstrating their commitment to public safety.

Traffic violations did not go unnoticed, with the Traffic Police imposing fines totaling Rs. 677,760 in 2023. In an effort to address public grievances promptly, the Dispute Resolution Council received a total of 35 applications of these, decisions were made on 26 requests, while actions are still ongoing for the remaining 9 requests. The Tank Police's comprehensive approach underscores their dedication to maintaining law and order in the district.

Disaster preparedness training held for community

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Community Resilience Activity (CRA) North organized disaster preparedness planning training workshops for the people of Madyan's three villages, Paklai, Cherbet, and Shagai. The first workshop was held in October, a five-day workshop on Community Risk Assessment, a month later a Community Risk Disaster Planning Workshop and a three-day Community-Based Disaster Risk Management Concept Note Development Workshop were held.

According to the CRA organizers, 60 people from the three villages of Madyan participated,

including 45 men and 15 women. The objective of these workshops was to prepare and plan for disaster and hazard prevention so that these people can protect their areas from various natural calamities.

Apart from this, training was given on taking steps to reduce the concerns, checking the concerns, and comprehensive planning for the same. Organizers say that "in the first workshop, the participants were told about disasters and how to be safe from disaster risks, then they were given field visits to places where risks were high".

"A report was prepared for each village and a village developing plan was drawn up" they added. The

main objective of the workshops was to make people aware of disasters, emergency committees were formed at the village level, so that future threats could be dealt with.

On the last day of the workshop, Rescue 1122 Emergency Officer Malik Sher Dil Khan and Principal Secretary to AC Bahrain Karim Baksh participated. They reviewed all the workshops from CRA, the work done on risks, and guided the participants. They appreciated this initiative of CRA and said that after this training workshop, the people here will be able to prepare timely measures to be safe from future threats and possibly prevent threats.

Two die, five injured in separate incidents

FAISALABAD (INP): Two including a security and drug addict died while five others were injured in separate incidents in different localities of Faisalabad on Monday.

According to details, security guard of a private housing society identified as Muhammad Shahbaz s/o Allah Rakha was burnt to death when his clothes caught fire after electrocution. Body of a 50-year-old drug addict was found from Diglas Pura area of Faisalabad.

Meanwhile, five people including Sultan, Aftab, Shehbaz, Razia and Muhammad Javed were injured in head-on collision between two passenger buses near Sadhar bypass chowk, Samundri road. The bodies and injured were shifted to different hospitals and police after registering separate cases into all incidents started investigations.

Meanwhile, three persons were found dead in the areas of two police stations during the last 24 hours. A police report said that a 45-year-old man was found dead near Chak No 225-RB while

another person about 35 was found from Dhudiwala, Jarranwala road in Saddar police limits. Third body, about 45, was recovered from a pond in the precinct of Roshan Wala bypass. All the bodies, yet to be identified, were removed to the mortuary unit of Allied hospital.

Police award five officers: The Faisalabad district police on Monday awarded certificates to its five officers over their outstanding performance.

A police spokesperson said on Monday that SSP Operation Dr Rizwan Ahmad Khan awarded CC-III certificates to five officers certifying four Station House Officers (SHOs).

According to details, SHO Saddar police Rai Aftab Wasim was given certificate over busting dacoit gangs and completion of challans of about 150 cases. SHO Batala Colony Junaid Nazir Gujjar and ASI Rizwan Javed were awarded certificates over arresting dacoit gangs, drug peddlers and gamblers besides streamlining property related cases. SHO Chak Jhumra Rana Asim, SHO

Peoples Colony Rana Arshad Mahmood were also among the officers who received certificates.

Two killed in Gujranwala

GUJRANWALA (INP): At least two people were killed and over two dozen injured when a passenger coach overturned due to dense fog in Gujranwala, rescue sources said on Monday.

The ill-fated bus was heading to Lahore from Kohat when it overturned near DC Colony, Gujranwala as the driver lost control due to dense fog. The injured and dead were shifted to the hospital. In a separate incident, last week, three people died after a passenger bus plunged into the river in Bahawalpur. According to the rescue officials, the accident took place near Nowshera Jadede, Bahawalpur, where an over-speeding passenger bus overturned and plunged into the river leaving three killed and 17 others injured.

Students' demands evacuation of hostel from school



F.P. Report

BARA: A protest demonstration of students of Technical College, Bara was held on Monday asking the concerned authorities to vacate their college hostel, seized by the private school administration for the last five years.

Scores of the college learners took a rally from their college to Khyber Chowk, Bara while carrying placards inscribed with writings in favor of their demands. They chanted slogans against the district administration and management of the private school who had got hold of the college hostel.

Speaking on the occasion the students' leader Qadeer Afridi said that a three years lease contract of the hostel had been signed with the administration of Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum public school however they refused

to evacuate the building beside the fact that the contract had already expired in 2018.

He maintained that since long, the students of remote areas had been deprived of the hostel facility that was unfair to them, he added. We have conveyed our grievance to the concerned officials but to in avail, he added. The protestors threatened that if their demands were not addressed then they would initiate indefinite agitation till they get hold of their hostel.

Narcotics recovered in raid, culprit allegedly escaped: A huge cache of heroin and chemicals were recovered in a raid carried out in a narcotics factory here in Kharkai Abad area of Jamrud, district Khyber last night.

Briefing the media persons in a press conference held in Jamrud press club on Monday, District Police

Officer, Khyber Saleem Abbas Kulachvi said that on tip-off, a special team of police officials led by Station House Officer (SHO) Jamrud police station, Nafees Khan raided at narcotics factory, established in a private house.

During the search 70 kilogram of fine quality heroin and 10 kilograms of chemicals were recovered from the site. The accused successfully managed to escape from the spot before the arrival of the police officials, DPO said and added investigation had been kicked off to trace and apprehend the criminals.

It was a major action taken against narcotics since 2017, he added. He vowed that a crackdown of police against the contraband item would be in progress and zero percent tolerance would be exhibited to those who were found guilty in making and smuggling of narcotics.

PPP to clean sweep in Hub, Lasbela
F.P. Report

HUB: Senior leader of Pakistan People's Party, President of Hub district and candidate for PB-21 Mir Ali Hassan Zehri has said that the increasing popularity of PPP in Hub and Lasbela has put the opponents to sleep because they know that they have not done anything for the people of Hub and Lasbela and where they are going to vote, they are facing the wrath of the people. People are demanding an accountability from them.

He was addressing the joining programs of Pakistan People's Party in Chelzabad and Jam Colony in which hundreds of people joined the Peoples Party regularly. Meanwhile, upon reaching Chizelabad, Ibrahim Palal and other dignitaries received and welcomed Mir Ali Hassan Zehri. On this occasion, a large number of people were present in the hall. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri welcomed and congratulated those who joined the Pakistan Peoples Party for joining the party by supporting the right and trusting us. Under the leadership of Mir Maghs Khan Shambani Maghs, Mir Asif Shambani Maghs, Saad Shambani Maghs Farhan, Shambani Maghs, Sameer Shambani Maghs, Rehman Shambani Maghs, Saleem Shambani Maghs, Mir Yasir Maghs, Arslan Palal, Gulam Hussain Rind, Amjad Ali Rind and hundreds of other colleagues has formally joined the Peoples Party and reiterated their determination that they will make Mir Ali Hassan Zehri successful in the next elections with a huge majority.

While Speaking on this occasion, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that our opponents have only been talking for forty years while the fact is that they have turned Hub and Lasbela into ruins. Bhutani brothers have only filled their pockets while they have no concern with the problems of the people.

There are many problems including health, education, employment, clean drinking water, roads, sewerage, but our opponents have not paid any attention to this, while we will focus on these public problems on a priority basis. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that we have got released funds of more than 4 billion for these areas with our personal efforts, but the Bhutani brothers have taken a stay order against public projects, which is openly anti-people act.

The people are questioning why Bhutani Sahib continued to take anti-people actions. He said that where were the Bhutani brothers during the flood disasters last year when life was suffering and the people here were starving and thirsty in the cold weather.

WSSCK executed record development projects
F.P. Report

KOHAT: Like provision of basic amenities throughout the world are essential for progress and prosperity of the nations wherein a clean environment is also imperative for the human being because a healthy human can perform his responsibility as a responsible citizen of the state.

Over the past various terms, federal and provincial governments gave time to time due attention to provision of clean drinking water, cleanliness, sanitation like other issues but neither results came out nor a permanent solution was sorted out.

Taking extremely serious of this issue by provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it has not only formed water and sanitation companies but Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Citizens Improvement Project (KPCIP) was launched in collaboration of Asian Development Bank (ADB) and handed over projects to the sanitation companies worth billions rupees.

From 2017, the Water and Sanitation Company Kohat (WSSCK) has efficiently carried out operations in six urban areas of the city of Kohat and Kotal Township for cleanliness, sanitation and provision of clean drinking water. On the basis of good performance, the WSSCK won the public trust and its opera-

tional activities and services of people were also appreciated at governmental level as well.

Owing to hardwork and best performance, projects worth billions of rupees had been handed over to WSSCK under KPCIP, which formally launched from December 2022 by the former chief minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mehmood Khan, the projects include Kohat Sports Complex, establishment of Milam Women Business Development Centre, restoration of sewerage system and construction of new sewerage treatment plants in KDA and water supply system. The 353 km long water pipeline will be completely replaced in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project to ensure delivery of clean drinking water in Kohat city.

The project involves rehabilitation of existing 20 tubewells of WSSCK will be carried out and 10 new tube wells will be constructed to meet water shortage. Similarly, five new head reservoirs and three new surface reservoirs will be constructed to provide uninterrupted water supply to the public.

Likewise, the new water supply system will be fully solarized to deal with the problem of load shedding. Also, Construction of a new sewage treatment plant in KDA Phase 2 is under-

way at Zoroshwar, with a total area of 13 acres and will treat 3 million gallons of water per day, which will further be used for irrigation.

Apart from that the 75 km long sewerage network in KDA will be completely replaced. Pumping stations will also be constructed at two places in KDA for the sewage treatment plant. Under the KPCIP, a new and modern Milam Women Business Development Center is being established for the women of Kohat. Similarly, the upgradation work of Kohat Sports Complex to provide sports facilities to the citizens of Kohat is going on rapidly and 40% of these two projects have been completed so far.

For regular monitoring of all these projects, Asian Development Team missions visit Kohat regularly and they are briefed on the ongoing work on all the projects by Chief Executive Officer of WSSCK Kohat Arif Rauf and Chief Engineer Mian Mohsin Gul. Briefing is given about With the success of these projects, Kohat will be on the path of development very soon and the problems of sanitation and clean water supply will end. It should be noted that WSSCK played its role in cleaning the city by collecting 39900 tons of garbage from the city and cleaning 209 km of meter drains in the year 2023.

Despite pressure stand firm with Imran: Qaiser

F.P. Report

SWABI: In a resolute statement during a corner meeting in his constituency, Asad Qaiser, the leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and former Speaker of the National Assembly, revealed that he faced considerable pressure to leave the party.

However, Qaiser asserted that the unwavering respect shown to him by Imran Khan has compelled him to stay loyal, stating, "I received attractive offers and encountered immense pressure to depart from PTI, but as a Swabi Pakhtun, I cannot abandon Imran Khan. I live and die with him."

Addressing the crowd, Qaiser emphasized the power of the vote and the importance of decisions resting with the people. He stressed that the ultimate verdict would be made through the democratic process of voting, reaffirming his commitment to the party and its leader.

In the backdrop of political developments, the Election Commission has allocated various symbols to key PTI candidates for the upcoming elections. Notable

symbols include a 'wheel-chair' for Imran Khan, a 'racket' for Salman Akram Raja, and a 'cricket stump' for Mian Azhar from NA-129.

Other symbols assigned include a 'bottle' for Shahryar Afridi, a 'piala' for Shandana Gulzar, and a 'chamta' for Mehr Banu Qureshi. Shaukat Yousafzai received the symbol of a 'racket', Zain Qureshi got 'shoes', and Dr. Riaz Long obtained the 'rocket' symbol. Additionally, various candidates from different constituencies were assigned symbols such as 'dice', 'letterbox', and 'fridge'.

The Election Commission also disclosed symbols for PTI candidates in specific constituencies, with Meher Riaz Fatiana from NA-107 receiving a 'chair', Ashfa Riaz Fatiana and Syeda Sonia Ali Raza Shah from PP-123 and PP-124 respectively being allotted the 'bowl' symbol. Azhar Siddique from NA-122 secured the 'medal', Latif Khosa received the 'alphabet (K)', and Afzal Azim Pahat was assigned 'radio' from NA-123. Sardar Azimullah from NA-124 obtained 'ghari', while Zameer Ahmed received the symbol of a

'dolphin', and Jameel Asghar Bhatti from NA-125 got the symbol of 'dhool'. As Pakistan gears up for the upcoming elections, these developments underscore the significance of party loyalty, individual choices, and the diverse symbols that will represent candidates in their electoral campaigns.

Stolen auto rickshaw recovered
F.P. Report

NOWSHERA: Police has arrested alleged thief and recovered stolen auto rickshaw from his possession in the premises of Azakhel police station.

According to details, District Police Officer (DPO) Nisar Muhammad took notice of stolen rickshaw and gave task to Station House Officers (SHOs) of Aza Khel and Nowshera in the lead of (SDPO) Saeed Ismaeel. Police had registered First Information Report on complaint of Muhammad Jameel, Junaid and Peer Usman Shah.



Sunak gears up for battle on Rwanda bill

LONDON (BBC): The prime minister is facing another long week in the House of Commons. First up on Monday is his statement on British involvement in strikes against Yemen's Houthi rebels, and why the decision was made without consulting MPs. But attention will quickly turn - once again - to his flagship Rwanda immigration plan.

You might remember before Christmas, after vast amounts of hullabaloo, the government's plan passed its first big stage in the Commons. From Tuesday, it will be front and centre of a fresh Commons debate. The plan would see the government send some asylum seekers arriving in the UK to Rwanda for processing. The UK signed a deportation deal with the African nation in 2022 and insists the policy would deter people arriving to Britain on small boats via the English Channel. But the UK Supreme Court said the plan was unlawful because of the risk that asylum seekers sent to Rwanda could be returned to their home countries, where they could face harm. Now, ministers are working up a plan which they hope will be lawful: a bill declaring that Rwanda is a safe country. But some Conservative MPs reckon the plan isn't strong enough and is likely to fail, and so want to amend it.

Before I dive into the detail, I want to draw a distinction between two crucial things at Westminster generally, and in this row in particular: noise and numbers. Before Christmas, there was rather a lot of the former, and not a lot of the latter. In other words, those Conservative MPs who think the government's plans are wishy washy and won't work made a lot of noise to that effect, but didn't, in the end, vote against them. They know they got teased as "cowardly custards" by some. But they said they would be back in the new year. Well, here we are - and the volume is notching up again. Some are encouraged, even excited, that the Conservative Deputy Chairman, Lee Anderson, appears to have indicated he is willing to support some of the amendments. And the Business Secretary Kemi Badenoch isn't denying a report in The Times that she has privately warned the prime minister the current plans don't go far enough. But are there actually the numbers to defeat



the government? On Tuesday and Wednesday, at what is known as the Committee Stage of the law-making process, MPs will debate and vote on the plans. Loads of amendments have been tabled.

It will be up to the Deputy Speaker, Eleanor Laing, to determine which ones are selected. The leaders of three Conservative backbench tribes, the European Research Group, the Common Sense Group and the New Conservatives said at the weekend around 60 Tory MPs have backed amendments aimed at toughening up the legislation, as they see it. Many are particularly keen on two ideas. Firstly, stopping the very thing that stood in the way when the government tried to make this idea work the first time round.

Back in June 2022 a plane was ready to go - until it wasn't, when the European Court of Human Rights intervened at the last minute. So, some Conservative MPs want ministers to have the authority, as a default, to ignore these injunctions. Secondly, they also want to significantly limit the number of personal circumstances a migrant could cite to avoid being sent to Rwanda.

The key thing here is these amendments will not pass: The government doesn't support them, and neither do the opposition parties. So two things really matter: How many Conservative MPs are actually will-

ing to vote against the government's plans, if they are not changed? That vote, at what is known as Third Reading, will come if the bill hasn't been amended. I am struck at this stage that while those wanting amendments talk confidently about their support, they are considerably more circumspect when it comes to how many of those supporters would actually be willing to vote the entire Rwanda plan down and inflict a credibility crushing defeat on Rishi Sunak. Again, remember the difference between noise and numbers. As things stand, the mood music from government appears relatively confident.

They will argue the only chance to get the Rwanda plan up and running before the election is to back them. If things do start looking shaky from No 10's perspective, could they offer any concessions? They don't have much room for manoeuvre, as Conservative MPs broadly on the left of the party say the bill should remain as it is. And the Rwandan government has said publicly the plan must remain within international law, which is why some of those arguing for changes insist their ideas are compliant with this. Let's see. And remember, even if after this week's noise the government does win, the plans then head off to the House of Lords. There is plenty of mileage in this argument yet.

3 migrants drown at US border as Texas blocked their rescue

TEXAS: A woman and two children have drowned in the Rio Grande river as they tried to enter the United States from Mexico after Texas military officers prevented federal border officials from aiding them, according to US border officials and a member of Congress. The deaths come as a dispute over immigration intensifies between Texas Governor Greg Abbott, a Republican, and the administration of US President Joe Biden, a Democrat, with a record number of migrants and refugees having illegally crossed the border since Biden took office in 2021.

Under Abbott, Texas has increasingly sought to implement its own border controls, which have historically been the legal domain of the federal government. Officials said the three were attempting to cross the river near Shelby Park in Eagle Pass, which

is not a legal port of entry and is where the Texas National Guard this week added concertina wire and fencing. In a filing in the US Supreme Court, the federal government accused Texas of erecting new barriers to block federal Border Patrol agents from reaching a boat ramp they use to access the Rio Grande. Responding, Texas said the Border Patrol agents had largely stopped using the boat ramp in recent months and, until filing, it was "unaware of federal law enforcement's current objections and was working promptly to address them". Border Patrol agents learned of a group of migrants in distress as they attempted to cross the Rio Grande, according to the statement by US Representative Henry Cuellar, a Democrat.

Federal agents, failing to contact Texas officials by telephone, went in person

to the Shelby Park entrance to speak to the Texas Military Department (TMD) and the Texas National Guard officials there. "However, Texas Military Department soldiers stated they would not grant access to the migrants - even in the event of an emergency - and that they would send a soldier to investigate the situation," Cuellar's statement said. The Texas military officials "physically barred" US border agents from entering the area and performing their roles of arresting people crossing the border illegally and providing humanitarian aid, said Luis Miranda, a spokesperson for the US Department of Homeland Security. "The Texas governor's policies are cruel, dangerous, and inhumane, and Texas's blatant disregard for federal authority over immigration poses grave risks," Miranda said in a statement. "The State of Texas should stop

interfering with the US Border Patrol's enforcement of US law."

The bodies of the woman and two children were recovered by Mexican authorities, Cuellar said. The identities of the three people have not been made public. "This is a tragedy, and the State bears responsibility," Cuellar said. The TMD, offering a starkly different account, said it was contacted by Border Patrol at about 9pm for a migrant distress situation and a unit in the vicinity of the boat ramp actively searched the river but saw no migrants. When they saw Mexican authorities responding to an incident on their side of the river about 45 minutes later, they ceased search operations after reporting their observations to the Border Patrol, who confirmed that the Mexican authorities did not require additional assistance, the TMD said in a statement. — Aljazeera

Taiwan's Tsai and Lai welcome US support as Beijing fumes over election

TAIPEI: Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen and President-elect William Lai Ching-te have hailed the support of the United States for the self-ruled island in meetings with an unofficial delegation from Washington amid anger in Beijing at overseas governments' congratulations of Taiwan on its weekend election.

The US delegation - including former National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley and former Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg - arrived in Taiwan, a day after Lai, currently the vice president, won an unprecedented third term for the governing Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Beijing, which claims Taiwan as its own and has not ruled out the use of force to achieve its objectives, has long criticised Lai as a so-called "separatist". It cast the election as a choice between "peace and war".

In the event, Lai won 40.1 percent of the vote compared with 33.5 percent for Hou Yu-ih of the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) party, his nearest rival. During his meeting with the delegates on Monday at the

DPP headquarters, Lai said freedom and democracy were "the most valuable assets for the Taiwanese people, and the sacred mountains to protect Taiwan". Lai added that they were "core values" shared by both Taiwan and the United States, and "the foundation for the long-term stability in Taiwan-US partnership". He told the delegation their visit was "meaningful" and a demonstration of the strength of the partnership between Taiwan and the US. "It is of great significance to Taiwan," he said. Lai will formally take over as president on May 20.

The delegation earlier met President Tsai Ing-wen, who was ineligible to run for re-election having served two terms. "Taiwan's democracy has set a shining example to the world," Hadley said in comments released by Tsai's office. "We are honoured to have the opportunity to meet with you today to reaffirm that the American commitment to Taiwan is rock solid, principled and bipartisan and that the United States stands with its

friends," he added. "Your visit is highly meaningful. It fully demonstrates US support for Taiwan's democracy and highlights the close and staunch partnership between Taiwan and the US," Tsai told the delegates. The DPP says the 23.5 million people of Taiwan should decide the island's future and has said it backs the status quo, in which Taiwan governs itself but refrains from declaring formal independence.

Beijing insists that the island is part of its territory. After the election, it said that what it terms "peaceful reunification" was inevitable. It lashed out at countries that sent their congratulations to Taiwan over the smooth-running of the vote. In a statement, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned US Secretary of State Antony Blinken for congratulating Lai on his victory and added: "The basic fact that ... Taiwan is part of China will not change." Taiwan said that statement was "completely inconsistent with international understanding and the current cross-strait situation. It goes

against the expectation of global democratic communities and goes against the will of the people of Taiwan to uphold democratic values. Such cliches are not worth refuting." Washington follows a policy of what it calls "strategic ambiguity" on the island. While it maintains formal diplomatic ties with Beijing, it is required by law to support Taiwan and is opposed to any attempt to change the status quo by force.

The last time a US delegation visited immediately after an election was in 2016, after Tsai was first elected president. At that time, Beijing refused her offer of talks and cut off all high-level communications with the island. In the years since, it has sent fighter jets and navy ships into the skies and waters around the island and encouraged Taiwan's few remaining formal allies to switch allegiance. After his victory, Lai said he hoped for a return to "healthy and orderly" exchanges with China, and reiterated his desire for talks on the basis of dignity and equality. — Aljazeera

Mine landslide kills 22 in Tanzania

BARIADI (BBC): Twenty-two people have died following a landslide at an illegal mine in northern Tanzania, officials said. The incident occurred at Ng'alita mine in Bariadi district, Simiyu region, district commissioner Simon Simalenga said.

It occurred after a group of people started mining in an area where activity was restricted due to heavy rains, he told Reuters news agency. President Samia Suluhu Hassan expressed her "great sadness" at the news. "These fellow Tanzanians were small miners in the area, trying to earn a living for themselves, their families," she said in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter. Mr Simalenga said he was initially told that there were 19 to 20 people trapped in the mines, but that 22 bodies ended up being retrieved.

Faustine Mtitu, acting commander for the region's fire and rescue forces, said in quotes cited by AFP news agency that the search had been ended as he was "convinced that there are no more bodies trapped in the rubble." Mr Simalenga said the group of people began mining in the mineral-rich area about three weeks ago before the government brought in safety procedures. The area was restricted because of ongoing heavy rains, which have caused flash floods. "The regional mining officer visited them and stopped them from mining as it was working on the required procedures" Mr Simalenga said. Unregulated and illegal mining is common in Tanzania, which is one of the largest gold producers in the world.

Prison staff held hostage by inmates all freed

ECUADOR: All prison staff who were seized as hostages during prison riots in Ecuador amid a sharp uptick in violence have been freed, according to prison authorities. "Security protocols and the joint work of the police and the national army enabled the release of all the hostages who were being held in various prisons across the country," SNAI prison authorities said in a statement on the social media platform X.

The hostages, which SNAI previously said were 158 prison guards and 20 administrative staffers, had been held hostage since last Monday, in at least seven prisons amid an escalating security crisis in the South American country. Images broadcast by the police showed the guards, many in tears, exhausted and supported by their colleagues shortly after their release.

"We are released ... Thank God we all got out safely," a prison employee said in a video posted on social media, waving the Ecuadorian flag and standing in front of one prison in southern Cotopaxi province. President Daniel Noboa congratulated SNAI, police and armed forces for the successful release of the prison staff, in a statement on X.

Ecuador is grappling with a security crisis that worsened this week with the on-air storming of a TV station, unexplained explosions in several cities and the kidnapping of police officers. The increase in violence began after President Noboa announced a state of emergency following the prison escape of Ecuador's most powerful narco boss - the Los Choneros gang leader, Adolfo Macias - over the weekend. At least 19 people have died in the violence, including civilians, prison guards and police in the last week, according to SNAI authorities. Earlier, SNAI also reported incidents at several prisons, including an armed confrontation with inmates at the prison in El Oro province that resulted in the death of a guard. There would be an investigation to determine those responsible for the hostage-taking, SNAI added in its statement. The police and the armed forces are also continuing to carry out security operations around the country. — Aljazeera

Kishida vows more funds to quake-hit zone

TOKYO (AP): Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said he was "speechless" by the severity and immense destruction of the disaster zone he saw during the helicopter ride on his first visit to the country's north-central region of Noto since the deadly Jan. 1 earthquakes, amid worries about spreading diseases in evacuation centers.

Kishida pledged to do his utmost to improve the living conditions of the evacuees and to rebuild their homes and restore their livelihoods as soon as possible. The magnitude 7.6 earthquake left 221 dead and more than 20 others still missing while injuring hundreds. More than 20,000 people, many of whom had their homes damaged or destroyed, are taking refuge at about 400 school gymnasiums, community centers and other makeshift facilities, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency report. Road damage has hampered rescue efforts, and though relief supplies have reached most regions affected by the quake, hundreds of people in isolated areas are getting little support. Additionally, in the hard-hit towns of Noto, Wajima and Suzu, elderly residents account for half their population, and many are facing growing risks of deteriorating health, officials and experts say.

"When I saw the severity of the disaster I was speechless," Kishida told reporters, saying the aerial

view showed gaping grounds, landslides crushing roads, and an elevation of the seafloor, changing the beautiful landscape on the eastern coast of the peninsula. "I also heard from the residents about their difficulties and worries." The prime minister said he took the evacuee's conditions seriously and promised support. "We will do everything we can so that you can have hope for the future," he said. Kishida also met with Ishikawa Gov. Hiroshi Hase in the prefectural government in Kanazawa, where he was given a list of requests, including central government funding for the reconstruction of key infrastructure, and emergency loans for individuals and small businesses. Many have criticized Kishida's government over what they called a slow disaster response although the cabinet has approved 4.7 billion yen (about \$32 million) for relief efforts and is backing the call for a secondary evacuation, including to facilities in the capital region.

Kishida said the cabinet plans to approve a second relief fund of 100 billion yen (nearly \$690 million) this week to help people rebuild their lives while doubling the reserve funds of the fiscal 2024 budget to 1 trillion yen (\$6.9 billion) to bolster funding for the reconstruction. The prime minister, in his disaster-response uniform, also visited a junior high school

that has turned into an evacuation center in Wajima where officials showed him the evacuees' severe living conditions. They spoke about the potential risk of spreading infectious diseases, such as influenza, COVID-19 and stomach flu due to the lack of running water and congestion. To mitigate immediate concerns about possible health problems and risk of death at evacuation centers, local and central government officials said they would provide the evacuees free accommodation at hotels and apartments - further away from their neighborhoods - until temporary housing was ready. But many of the locals have refused to move out, worried about their destroyed homes, belongings and communities. Hase urged residents to temporarily relocate to the recommended facilities to rest better and "protect your lives." Mototaka Inaba, a medical doctor who heads an international relief organization Peace Winds Japan, told an NHK talk show that a secondary evacuation of elderly residents was critical from a medical perspective but should be done in a way that didn't isolate them. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi also stressed in a pre-recorded interview with NHK the importance of relocating the residents taking into consideration their sense of community, jobs and education.

Denmark's King Frederik X takes throne

COPENHAGEN: Denmark's King Frederik X has ascended the throne, succeeding his mother, Queen Margrethe II, who has formally abdicated after 52 years as monarch. Margrethe, 83, stunned the nation on New Year's Eve when she announced she planned to become the first Danish monarch in nearly 900 years to voluntarily relinquish the throne.

The succession was formalised the moment she signed the declaration of her abdication during a meeting of the Council of State at Parliament, the royal palace said. Denmark, one of the oldest monarchies in the world, does not have a coronation. The meeting was attended by government representatives, Margrethe, Frederik, 55, his Australian-born wife Mary, 51, who is now queen, and their oldest son Christian, 18, who is the new heir to the throne. After the signing, Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen proclaimed Frederik king on the balcony of Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen. "My hope is to become a unifying king of tomorrow," Frederik said in his first speech as king. "It is a task I have approached all my life. It is a task I take on with pride, respect and joy," he spoke overlooking large crowds

of cheerful people. Moments later, he was joined on the balcony by his wife and children, including Princess Isabelle, 16, and twins Princess Josephine and Prince Vincent, both 13.

In close to freezing temperatures, tens of thousands of people from across Denmark converged on the capital to witness the events, in a sign of the huge popularity the monarchy is enjoying in the nation of nearly six million. "We have come here today because this is history being made in front of our eyes. We just had to be here," Soren Kristian Bisgaard, 30, a pilot, told Reuters news agency. "I'm very fond of the royal family. I have been in the Royal Life Guards myself, standing guard at the royal palace. I'm very proud to have done that and also to be here today," he added.

King Frederik and his wife take the throne at a time of huge public support and enthusiasm for the monarchy. The most recent survey done after Margrethe announced she would abdicate indicated that 82 percent of Danes expect Frederik to do well or very well in his new role, while 86 percent said the same about Mary. Born in 1940, Margrethe has been one of the most popular public figures in Denmark. The 1.82-

metre (6-foot) tall, chain-smoking monarch often walked the streets of Copenhagen virtually unescorted and won the admiration of Danes for her warm manners and her talents as a linguist and designer. A keen skier, she was a member of a Danish women's air force unit as a princess, taking part in judo courses and endurance tests in the snow. Margrethe remained tough even as she grew older. In 2011, at age 70, she visited Danish troops in southern Afghanistan wearing a military jumpsuit. As monarch, she crisscrossed the country and regularly visited Greenland and the Faeroe Islands, the two semi-independent territories that are part of the Danish Realm.

Frederik was born to Queen Margrethe and Prince Henrik in Copenhagen, Denmark. He has one sibling - younger brother Prince Joachim. Frederik is also part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark (also known as the Danish National Church), a requirement for the Danish royal family, particularly for reigning monarchs. He will reign as king over Denmark, Greenland and the Faeroe Islands. However, the formal power will remain with the elected parliament and Denmark's government. — Aljazeera

Namibia criticises German support for Israel

THE HAGUE (BBC): Namibia has condemned former colonial ruler Germany for rejecting a case at the UN's top court accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza.

Germany has offered to intervene on Israel's behalf in the case brought by South Africa at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. President Hage Geingob urged Germany to "reconsider its untimely decision to intervene as a third-party in defence". German colonisers massacred more than 70,000 Herero and Nama people between 1904 and 1908. Historians consider this to be the 20th Century's first genocide.

President Geingob said Germany could not "morally express commitment to the United Nations Convention against genocide, including atonement for the genocide in Namibia" and

at the same time support Israel. "The German Government is yet to fully atone for the genocide it committed on Namibian soil," he added.

The German government said the accusation of genocide against Israel was completely unfounded and amounted to a "political instrumentalisation" of the UN genocide convention. "In view of Germany's history and the crime against humanity of the Holocaust, the government sees itself as particularly committed to the genocide convention," it said. It said Hamas - which attacked Israel on 7 October, triggering the current war - aimed to destroy Israel, which was acting in self defence. Hamas killed about 1,300 people, most of them civilians, and took about 240 others hostage on 7 October. Since then Israel has killed nearly 24,000 people, mostly children and women, in its

retaliatory attacks on Gaza, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. The UN and humanitarian organisations have warned of the risk of famine in Gaza as well as the spread of disease among displaced people and have urged that more aid be allowed into the territory. The scale of the Israeli response prompted South Africa to ask the ICJ to consider whether Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. Pretoria's case included a litany of alleged Israeli offences, from the indiscriminate killing of Palestinian civilians to the wholesale destruction of Gaza's infrastructure. Israel has strongly rejected the allegation, calling it "baseless" and its legal team was scathing about South Africa's submission, arguing that if anyone was guilty of genocide, it was Hamas.

The Frontier Post

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

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Maldives' India out policy

AFTER a successful state visit to China, Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu categorically told his countrymen that the Maldives may be a small nation but will not be bullied by any neighbour. According to him, Maldives is an independent state and it is not a country that lies in the backyard of any other nation. Meanwhile, the Maldivian authorities issued a notice to India, calling for the withdrawal of troops by March 15. The Maldivian President was of the view that China respects Maldives' territorial integrity policy and its statehood.

The impressions of the Maldives-India row deepened every other day after anti-India Mohamed Muizzu got an unprecedented victory during the Presidential run in the archipelago nation in September last year. Historically, President Muizzu contested the nationwide Presidential election on a single-point agenda of ending foreign influence and ejection of Indian military troops from the country. After gaining power, President Muizzu paid his once foreign trip to China and signed a raft of deals, which included infrastructure construction, medical and health care, improvement of people's livelihoods, new energy sources, agriculture, and marine environmental protection agreements. Meanwhile, the joint communique issued during the visit manifests that the longstanding China-Maldives relations are built upon an exemplary model of mutual respect, peaceful co-existence, cooperation, and teamwork in all spheres.

The Republic of Maldives, an archipelago nation in South Asia, has been a battleground between two of its powerful neighbours, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of India over the past decades. Both Beijing and New Delhi had been in a close contest to install their henchmen in the tiny but strategically important country in the Indian Ocean region. Both China and India invested massively in Maldives in recent years to accomplish their political and strategic agendas. Interestingly, two local leading political groups are aligned with each of the contesting foreign powers, the Maldives Democratic Party of former President Abdullah Yameen which is seen as pro-India, advocates for more engagement with New Delhi while ruling President Muizzu and his Peoples' National Congress is inclined toward Beijing and struggling to improve Maldives ties with China. New Delhi considers the Indian Ocean archipelago to be within its sphere of influence but the country has shifted to China's orbit, which poured billions of dollars into Maldives so far. Maldives received more than one billion in loans from China for the construction of historic bridges to connect Capital Male with the airport island and other suburban localities near the capital. Chinese fiscal assistance to the Maldives was viewed with great concern by New Delhi, who in turn offered massive economic and military aid to Maale to counter Chinese influence in the neighbouring state.

Historically, Maldives had been a grazing field for Indian companies for exports of essential commodities, electronic products, vehicles, agri-products, food, medicines, healthcare, and other items of daily use, while India has the largest share in Maldives' tourism industry, that accounts for nearly a third of the country's economy. New Delhi had been exerting pressure on Maldivian rulers to influence their domestic and foreign policies causing strong anti-India sentiments and reactions at all levels. Although, Maldives-India relations were on a downward trajectory after President Muizzu assumed office in September, however, tagging of the Indian Prime Minister as Clan over social media websites by the Maldivian Ministers further deteriorated bilateral relations between the two nations. Presently, the tussle between powerful neighbours and the politics of local politicians and parties has brought the Maldives to the centre stage of the ongoing regional rivalry between China and India. Both belligerent powers and their proponents worked actively to bring the tiny nation into the sphere of their like-minded nation without considering the worst scenarios their nation could face in the future. The tiny state refused to accept Indian hegemony by not subduing pressure from New Delhi. New Delhi has met another strategic backlash in its futile efforts to gain the status of mini-power in South Asia, however, New Delhi is less likely to alter its dogma after the newest humiliation and setback.

Kingly habits of unelected leaders

THE caretaker Provincial Transport Minister Ibrahim Hassan Murad has announced a three-month extension of free travel facilities for students, following special instructions from the Punjab Chief Minister. According to an official press release from the Punjab government, this process was interrupted for some time in recent holidays, while thirty thousand students have been benefiting from this facility daily, and till now millions of students up to grade 12 have benefited from this facility on the Orange Line Metro Train and Speedo Bus Service. As claimed, in line with its education-friendly vision, the Punjab government is also ensuring the provision of free-of-interest motorcycles on EV technology for students so that more youths can continue their education journey easily.

The Punjab caretaker government is currently ruling the province beyond its legal tenure and blatantly taking steps that do not come under the prerogative of a caretaker setup even publicly elected governments do not implement such measures because of their grave consequence on national kitty. After renovating religious shrines, repairing graveyards, and installing street lights in the roadways of their family and friends, the Punjab interim leaders are now working for the improvement of the education sector and the Social Welfare Department. The interim setup handed over thousands of public schools to the private sector and deprived school teachers of pension and gratuity and is now offering free travel to thousands of students on government expenses on a regular basis over the past several months.

Presently, the Punjab caretaker leaders have successfully stretched their role well beyond their constitutional mandate due to the peculiar political situations in the country. The interim rulers are actively working in various domains including public development work, education, and health sectors in fake demonstration of their pro-public policies, presumably as a future investment for their political careers in the province at a later stage. Historically, Pakistan's prevailing economic degradation and unceasing woes of Pakistanis are not the results of the country's lack of resources, shortage of human capital or financial liquidity, and non-productivity of Pakistani soil but these conditions are the outcome of the kingly habits of the Pakistani rulers who always use National exchequer like their personal heirloom, distribute hard-earned taxpayers money among their discretionary projects along with offering subsidies, free electricity, flour, and sugar to promote their politics on public expenses. After all, Pakistan's economy neither grows nor comes out of the unceasing turmoil until and unless our leaders consider them accountable to the public and bring discipline in governmental affairs, which is the beginning point of the long journey toward self-sufficiency and progress.

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Fighting drug trafficking should be Syria's top priority

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

SYRIA, a nation torn apart by years of conflict, currently faces a critical and multi-faceted challenge that is often overshadowed by other issues: the escalation of drug trafficking and smuggling. As the country strives to rebuild and find stability, addressing the threat of the drug trade should be elevated to top priority on Damascus' national agenda.

The adverse effects of drug smuggling extend beyond Syria, permeating various countries in the region. This illicit activity not only poses a direct threat to the security and well-being of the Syrian population, but also creates ripple effects that impact the stability and socioeconomic conditions of neighboring nations.

Authorities in Jordan have recently thwarted several smuggling attempts, with some instances involving traffickers using drones to fly drugs across the border. Jordan has unfortunately been utilized as a transit route for the highly addictive drug Captagon. The Jordanian army has intensified its efforts against drug traffickers. These infiltrators have been found crossing the border with substantial quantities of weapons and explosives, prompting an escalated campaign against drug dealers. On Jan. 4, Jordan initiated airstrikes within Syria, targeting warehouses and hideouts it suspected were operated by Iranian-backed drug smugglers, as reported by Jordanian and regional intelligence sources. There are several critical reasons why fighting drug trafficking should be a central focus for Syria this year.

First of all, the link between drug trafficking and national security cannot be overstated. It goes without saying that the illicit drug trade often fuels the activities of nonstate actors, providing them with a lucrative source of funding. Particularly in Syria, where the prolonged conflict has given rise to various armed groups and militias, cutting off this financial lifeline is essential to efforts to diminish the influence and capabilities of these groups. In other words, by prioritizing the fight against drug trafficking, Syria can directly contribute to enhancing its national security and pro-

moting a more stable future.

Secondly, the economic consequences of drug trafficking are far-reaching, affecting communities, families and individuals. The proliferation of illicit drugs not only leads to addiction and health issues, but also fuels crime and corruption. Tackling drug trafficking is, therefore, a critical step toward mitiga-

The influx of illicit drugs exacerbates existing health issues and strains the already fragile healthcare system. Prioritizing the fight against drug trafficking is, in essence, a commitment to safeguarding the well-being of Syrian citizens and actively contributes to the creation of a healthier society. The Syrian government should more actively and robustly cooperate with other countries to tackle this issue. Addressing drug trafficking requires collaborative efforts, not only on a national level but also regionally and globally. Syria's commitment to combating the illicit drug trade can open avenues for more cooperation with neighboring countries and international organizations.

ing these socioeconomic consequences. By curbing the flow of illicit substances, the Syrian government can pave the way for economic recovery, fostering an environment conducive to rebuilding infrastructure and revitalizing communities.

The relationship between illicit drugs and public health crises should not be underestimated - and Syria is not exempt from this global challenge. The influx of illicit drugs exacerbates existing health issues and strains the already fragile healthcare system. Prioritizing the fight against drug trafficking is, in essence, a commitment to safeguarding the well-being of Syrian citizens and actively contributes to the creation of a healthier society. The Syrian government should

rorism.

In addition, there is a nexus between drug trafficking and a rise in other crimes. Unchecked drug trafficking contributes to a surge in drug-related crimes, including violence and theft. Prioritizing efforts to curb the flow of illicit drugs is, therefore, a preventive measure against the escalation of such crimes. By taking a proactive stance against drug trafficking, Damascus can create a safer environment for its citizens and lower the incidence of other related crimes. Furthermore, by actively addressing this issue, Syria can work toward improving its international standing. Demonstrating a commitment to eradicating drug-related challenges can enhance diplomatic relations, attract foreign investments and contribute to rebuilding Syria's reputation on the global stage. This is because the international community closely monitors all nations' commitment to combating illicit activities, including drug trafficking.

Finally, as Syria endeavors to rebuild and achieve long-term stability, tackling the root causes of the country's instability is paramount. Drug trafficking, with its wide-ranging social, economic and security implications, is a formidable obstacle to reconstruction efforts. By making the fight against the drug trade a top priority, the Syrian government can pave the way for sustained stability and create an environment conducive to comprehensive reconstruction. In a nutshell, the urgent need to prioritize the fight against drug trafficking in Syria cannot be overstated. Beyond its immediate impact on national security, this issue permeates various facets of Syrian society, affecting public health, economic recovery and overall stability. The detrimental consequences of drug smuggling stretch beyond Syria as well, affecting various nations in the region.

By elevating this cause to the forefront of the national agenda, Damascus can foster a safer, healthier and more secure future for its citizens, while also signaling to the international community its commitment to global efforts against organized crime and the illicit drug trade.

Israel's genocidal intent was clearly shown at ICJ hearing

Daoud Kuttub

IT is known that one of the biggest challenges, when attempting to blame any country for acts of genocide, is the need to prove that the country's leaders - both political and military - had both the intent to commit genocide and that this is what happened on the ground.

While the second part is relatively easy to prove, thanks to digital imagery in the form of videos and photographs, the intent is generally very difficult to prove.

Perhaps the most powerful and telling aspect of last week's South African representation at the International Court of Justice, where it has accused Israel of committing genocide in its war on Gaza, was the public statements made by Israeli officials and the videos of Israeli soldiers internalizing them. South Africa's written report included nine pages on the issue of intent.

In the case of Israel, proving the genocidal intent of its war on the Palestinians of Gaza has been made easier due to the public statements made by Israeli officials that declare this very goal. Many public pronouncements specifically calling for the annihilation of Palestinians have been made since the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas and they are naturally still available online. Modern technology serves as both a perpetrator, allowing officials to address the people, and a digital smoking gun for the accusers that cannot be easily denied.

What the South African legal team was able to do in a relatively condensed time frame during its oral presentation was make the connection between the words spoken by senior Israeli political and military officials and the way the troops understood those words.

For its part, Israel has tried a variety of ways to rebut these arguments, including the admission that, while many of the statements were "obscene," they did not amount to calls for genocide. Its argument focuses on two pillars: that the statements were either not made by senior officials or that they were not specific orders issued by the military or the war council.

Article 2 of the 1948 Genocide Convention defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

While the best way to show genocidal intent is to obtain evidence of orders made by the defendant or someone the defendant works for up the chain of command, another way is to show a clear pattern of actions that would inevitably result in a group's destruction. Intentions can be difficult

to ascertain but they may be discernible in propaganda, hate speech or in state policies.

The intent to destroy can be manifested in widespread discriminatory practices that culminate in gross violations of the human rights of a specific group. The intent to destroy can also be inferred from the widespread or systematic nature of acts and the type of weapons employed.

The South African team did not mince its words. Israel has "genocidal intent against Palestinians in Gaza," it told the International Court of Justice. Adila Hassim, representing South Africa, told the court: "Israel has subjected Gaza to what has been described as one of the heaviest conventional bombing campaigns in the history of modern warfare."

The South African team admitted that genocides are never declared in advance, "but this court has the benefit of the past 13 weeks of evidence that shows, incontrovertibly, a pattern of conduct and related intention that justifies a plausible claim of genocidal acts," Hassim explained.

Tembeka Ngucukaitobi, a brilliant lawyer for the High Court of South Africa, was very clear when he addressed the court, insisting that Israel's intent was evident "from the way in which this military attack is being conducted." Ngucukaitobi said there had been "reiteration and repetition of genocidal speech throughout every sphere of the state in Israel," such that "the evidence of genocidal intent is not only chilling but also overwhelming and incontrovertible."

Ngucukaitobi noted that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had twice recalled a biblical story that referred to what the prophet Samuel told King Saul. In it, Samuel tells Saul that God says: "I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites, and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." The South African lawyer noted that Netanyahu said to his soldiers: "You must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our holy Bible. And we do remember."

In a follow-up to this genocidal call by the Israeli commander-in-chief, a video of dancing Israeli soldiers with their guns held high was shown. They repeatedly chanted that they understood the command and that they knew what to do. Israel's top political officials, including the prime minister, president and defense minister, as well as various others down the line, have all spoken in terms of the need to annihilate the Palestinians and make Gaza unlivable. This is what has happened in the past three months. The intent to commit genocide, as well as the actual execution of it, have been proven beyond doubt at the International Court of Justice.

Arab News

AI will continue to make waves in 2024

Shen Yang

In the fast-changing global economic landscape in 2023, artificial intelligence emerged as a driving force behind global development across industries, marking a pivotal moment in technology revolution. The close relationship between AI technology and hardware advancement is apparent. The potential shortage of global GPU processors is driving hardware innovations, and thus pushing developers to create more economical alternatives. This adaptability to market demands and resource constraints represents a natural selection within the technology ecosystem.

The development of AI agents and intelligent systems signifies a shift from singular to multifunctional AI. The progress extends beyond simple conversational tools to complex tasks such as travel bookings and multimedia processing, showcasing technological maturity

and reflecting the diversity and adaptability to market demands, and facilitating the advance of AI across industries. The integration of AI with other fields, such as autonomous driving, humanoid robots and spatial computing, exemplifies the interconnectedness of industrial ecosystems. It not only fosters innovation but also boosts collaboration across sectors, creating interdependence for mutual growth.

In sectors such as retail and healthcare, generative AI's application illustrates technology's response to the specific needs of industries, providing users with customized solutions and presenting new growth opportunities. Simultaneously, the transformation of the information and communications technology industry and changes in regulations reflect the dynamic balance in the technology ecosystem. The advancement of AI technology may be constrained by infrastructure fluctuations

and skill mismatches. And regulations for AI development reflect society's concerns over the impact of technology on people's lives. A significant development in 2024 is the potential listing of AI chips (AI Pin), which is a major breakthrough in hardware development, and demonstrates technological advancement and the market's demand for specialized and efficient AI solutions, injecting new vitality into the technology ecosystem.

The permeation of AI in almost all sectors of the economy and its impact on various aspects of human life are a significant feature of internet science and technology and the industrial ecology. This has helped create a diverse and interconnected technological network. The "emergence of industrial ecology" is clearly evident in the rapidly evolving industrial ecosystem. Thanks to growth of the AI industry, new AI applica-

tions have been emerging continually, particularly in the field of AI companions. These companions are the result of not only technological innovation but also adaptation to human needs, marking the diversification of the technology ecosystem. In 2024, AI developers may primarily focus on achieving breakthroughs in autonomous learning and deep learning, facilitating the widespread application of AI in the healthcare sector and driving intelligent manufacturing, thus leading the transformation of several industries.

The transportation and logistics sectors could see breakthroughs in making autonomous driving safer and more efficient, while the financial sector could undergo further transformation, as AI could make financial services more intelligent and efficient. And the healthcare sector could see more accurate diagnostic and better treat-

ment methods. As for the competition between China and the United States, it is complex in the field of AI, as the private sector, represented by companies such as OpenAI and Alphabet Inc, plays a crucial role in AI's development in the US. The US has also realized the importance of maintaining its competitive edge in science and technology and continuing to be the preferred destination for global AI talents.

China, on the other hand, has made significant strides in AI, particularly in image recognition and practical applications. But despite China's massive user base being an advantage in data collection, challenges, including a technological gap, remain. Nevertheless, China's pursuit of AI technology and substantial investments in the sector show its determination to become a global leader in AI. In terms of global positioning, the US focuses on generative AI to boost its economic and tech-

nological advantages, while China extensively applies AI in the security sector and for data integration. And while the US faces challenges in using advanced AI technology for military purposes, the Chinese government's close ties with the private sector will enable smoother application of AI technology.

Considering text-based large models, the gap between China and the US may narrow, while in multi-modal large models, the gap may widen. In data integration and industrial intelligence, China has the potential to become a leader in several industries, but it may lag behind the US in multilingual global applications. In conclusion, the competition is dynamic involving technological, economic, military and political factors, making it a continually evolving affair. The development of AI will continue to shape the future, with both China and the US playing crucial roles in this transformative journey.

'Business as usual' is disastrous for the environment

A report by a reputed scientific institution in the EU last week confirmed what many of us had been feeling would be the case for a long while: that 2023 was the hottest year on record. Last year saw extended heat waves in many parts of the world, especially in temperate countries like Canada, the US and many in Europe. The scientists also said that the planet was 1.48 degrees Celsius hotter than the pre-industrial era, only 0.02 C below the 1.5 C limit set out under the Paris Agreement if the world is to have any chance of limiting the havoc being caused by global warming around the planet.

The rise in temperatures in 2023 was caused by a mix of human and natural factors, as global carbon emissions continued their rapid rise, repeating the performance of the previous two years. It looks almost certain that carbon dioxide emissions crossed all previous limits to touch 36.8 billion tonnes in 2023. The other factor contributing to the heat was the return of a rather strong El Nino phenomenon.

It is estimated that the average temperature in the year was 0.17 C higher than in 2016, the previous hottest year - an alarming rise in the context of planetary science. Most scientists agree that the 1.5 C mark will almost certainly be breached in the current year.

This news ought to have sent the global community - political leaders, businesses and governments - into a tizzy about the alarming state

of the planet. Instead, within 24 hours, the news disappeared from the headlines and the world seemed to return to what it deems to be "business as usual."

And few things could offer a better sign of large corporations treating this news as business as usual than the launch of a campaign defending the increased use of fossil fuel by "Big Oil" - the largest fossil fuel producers in the US, the country which is the biggest culprit in terms of historical emissions and where emissions, overall and per capita, remain alarmingly high. The advertising campaign, known as "Lights on Energy," is said to have cost hundreds of millions of dollars and has already bombarded homes and streets across the US.

Its premise is that renewable energy can only do so much to provide energy security, meaning that fossil fuels are inevitable for many decades to come. It shows that the biggest businesses continue to belt out the same "there is no alternative" theory and try to package it in "scientific" and "social" terms.

The timing of the campaign was perhaps not predicated on the news about 2023 being the hottest year in history, but was rather focused on the upcoming US presidential election. Using the ongoing conflict in Gaza as cover, American fossil fuel producers have been increasing production incessantly, hitting record levels.

Ranvir S. Nayyar

The oil lobby is clearly banking on a raucous presidential campaign, with its biggest friend, former President Donald Trump, seeming set - despite the legal challenges he faces - to claim the nomination of the Republican Party in the primaries that will get underway shortly. And a battle between Trump and incumbent President Joe Biden could go either way, as Biden's current ratings are the worst of any president at this stage of his term in office.

The outcome of the presidential election will not be known for another 10 months, but the fossil fuel lobby, and not just in the US, is looking toward another year of record production. This once again shows exactly how seriously businesses, especially the big businesses that shoulder the lion's share of the blame for the current mess facing the world, are taking the current crisis.

While the US can take much of the main blame, other large economies are not blameless either. The other biggest contributor to historical and current emissions, the EU, is also heading in the wrong direction. An analysis published by the European Commission late last month showed that the bloc is set to miss its greenhouse gas emissions reduction target for 2030. The EU has set its members a legally binding target of cutting their emissions by 55 percent compared to the levels in 1990. The latest report by the

European Commission shows that member states are set to achieve only a 51 percent cut and so will violate their legal commitments. Moreover, the situation could yet worsen as not all the countries have submitted their detailed plans.

The state of affairs may not be much better in other large emitters, notably China and India, which continue to be over-reliant on fossil fuels. Moreover, the political leaders of such countries say, with some justification, that they cannot achieve their developmental targets if they are forced to reduce their fossil fuel consumption, while the West had a free run for more than 200 years. They also rightly blame the rich nations for not keeping their commitments to finance the climate transition in the developing world.

Hence, a new mechanism that allows developing countries to continue to progress, albeit with a clearly diminishing reliance on fossil fuels, needs to be put in place. Such a mechanism of differentiated and deferred responsibilities, already very functional and effective in agreements like the Montreal Protocol, ought to have been set in motion already. But the developed world has not shown any real appetite to get on this road. And thanks to its business as usual attitude, one can be certain that, for many years to come, the world will keep on getting hotter and increasingly uninhabitable, with unprecedented fallout for humans and every other form of life.

Plenty on the agenda should Putin and Erdogan meet

A visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to Turkey has been pending for a prolonged period. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan paid a working visit to Sochi at the beginning of September last year. It is now Putin's turn to visit Turkey. However, despite several attempts to schedule a trip, the two presidents' programs did not fit. Putin last month said he was prepared to travel to Turkey to meet with Erdogan, but the latter's schedule was tight because of the forthcoming local elections, which will be held on March 31. Putin did not spare any praise for Erdogan's efforts to contribute to the solution of the Gaza conflict.

The agenda of the intended Erdogan-Putin talks will be full of bilateral questions. Turkey's insistent demand to reopen the Black Sea grain corridor is one of them. Following its invasion in February 2022, Russia blockaded Ukrainian ports and made it impossible for Kyiv to export its grain. In July of the same year, Turkey and the UN brokered a deal establishing safe corridors through the Black Sea. The agreement expired in July 2023, when Moscow refused to agree to an extension.

The construction by Russia of a nuclear power station in Turkey's Mediterranean coastal city of Mersin is another important agenda item for the two leaders. It is a power plant owned by Russia on

Turkish territory. Construction is progressing more or less according to the schedule. The test stage was completed in April last year. The price Turkey will pay per kilowatt-hour is high because it was negotiated when the Turkish economy was badly in need of power. Nuclear fuel, which was one of the most important components, has now been delivered to Turkey. Power generation is expected to begin in October 2024. A second nuclear power plant is scheduled to be constructed in the Turkish Black Sea city of Sinop. Initially, companies from Japan and France were interested in the project, but security standards had to be raised. Now, the Russian company Rosatom is also interested in the project. If an agreement is finalized, it will become a large-scale plant with four power units. This could be another cooperative project between Turkey and Russia.

As a result of the Ukrainian war, the diversification of energy sources has become an important priority for Turkey. Pro-Ukraine activists claim that Ankara is indirectly helping Russia to bypass sanctions by buying its oil. But if Turkey were not to buy this oil, other countries would. Furthermore, Turkey is supporting Ukraine in many other ways.

As Western countries imposed an oil embargo on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine, Turkey used this opportunity to

Yasar Yakis

buy oil from Russia at a reduced price. In addition, Russia has granted Turkey a deferral on payment for some of its energy imports. Another important subject in Turkish-Russian relations is the question of the Turkish Straits being used for the transit of British navy ships. The UK and Norway made a deal with Ukraine that would help Kyiv increase its Black Sea security. It included the transfer of two British minehunters to the Ukrainian navy - an agreement that was first announced before war broke out. However, Article 19 of the Montreux Convention authorizes Turkey to block the passage of warships through the Turkish Straits in the case of war or an imminent threat of war. Therefore, Ankara became squeezed between a rock and a hard place, as the British request put it in a difficult position. If Turkey were to allow the passage of the ships through the straits, it would antagonize Russia. If it refuses, then Ukraine will be disappointed.

The Montreux Convention also provides that ships belonging to the navy of a Black Sea littoral country that are outside the sea at the moment conflict breaks out are entitled to return to harbor. Turkey has to decide whether it should allow the minehunters to transit, as it is unclear whether they should be considered as ships that already belong to the Ukrainian navy.

There is a tiny gray area. Turkey has to balance this issue with the utmost care.

The Gaza war is another important subject that Erdogan will definitely raise during the talks with Putin. Turkey frequently raises this issue in the international arena, but without a tangible effect. Smaller countries such as Qatar play more concrete roles. Russia has not got involved in the Gaza war but, unlike many Western countries, it supports the legitimate rights of the Palestinians. At the beginning of the Ukraine war, many observers thought that it could push Turkey toward the Euro-Atlantic community and sever Turkish-Russian relations. However, on the contrary, the dynamics of the conflict pushed Ankara and Moscow toward each other and Turkey played a positive role in mediating between Russia and Ukraine, as well as brokering the grain deal. Turkey's airspace has become the major air corridor for Russia to reach many international destinations.

Furthermore, the economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the Euro-Atlantic community have become an important advantage for Ankara. Turkey and Russia continue to benefit from this advantage. Erdogan and Putin seem eager to meet as soon as possible. If this does not happen before the crucial local elections in Turkey, it will definitely take place in their immediate aftermath.

Outsourcing Britain's nuke renewal insanity

Jeremy Warner

HERE we go again. Einstein's definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing and expecting different outcomes. You would think that the Government had learned its lesson on nuclear renewal after the debacle of Hinkley Point C. Clearly not.

Having already made the same mistake once, by pledging a replica of the ruinously costly Hinkley at Sizewell on the Suffolk coast, ministers are doubling down and promising a third such monstrosity somewhere else.

According to the Government's "Nuclear Roadmap", published last week, another of these leviathans in an as yet unspecified location is to be given the go-ahead later this year. On the most recent estimates, Hinkley Point C is expected to cost at least 80pc more than its original budget and is years behind schedule. Some fear that it won't be until the early 2030s before the reactors are fully operational, such have been the technical and safety complications encountered in the construction phase.

Ministers have also had to agree to punishingly expensive output prices to persuade the main developer, France's state-controlled EDF, to build in the first place, committing consumers to high electricity costs for decades to come. So much for the promise once made by the ever courteous Vincent de Rivaz, the one-time boss of EDF in Britain, that Hinkley Point would be cooking our Christmas lunches by 2017.

Even allowing for the learning process - theoretically, later projects to the same design should cost less, with past mistakes taken on board - it beggars belief that the Government should attempt to repeat such a tried and demonstrably poor value for money technology. To keep the costs of nuclear renewal off the public balance sheet and persuade investors to bankroll the programme instead, ministers have already had to radically change the funding model. Gone is the old "contracts for difference" approach used for Hinkley Point C, where developers bear all the risks through a guaranteed "strike price" once the reactors are operational.

As you might expect, EDF drove the hardest of hard bargains. The original £89.50 per megawatt hour strike price is already at £125 taking account of agreed inflation proofing, making it some of the most expensive electricity ever contracted for. During the recent energy price spike,

this was briefly made to look cheap, but wholesale prices have since subsided somewhat and despite jitters over Red Sea shipping routes, are today once more well below that level. In the event, the contract for difference model combined the worst of both worlds; Hinkley's high strike price has raised grave concerns around value for money, but at the same time it proved insufficient to attract further private sector nuclear investment.

Plans for new nuclear builds at Wylfa Newydd and Moorside were cancelled after the Government unsuccessfully tried to negotiate lower strike prices with potential developers. The same problem of ambitiously low strike prices is also bedevilling offshore wind, but that's a different story. So instead the Government has moved to a so-called "Regulated Asset Base" (RAB) model, allowing the regulator to impose a levy on consumer bills to help finance the rollout through its construction phase. This might help the developers a bit, since they are getting some of the finance up front at no cost, but for the humble consumer it means paying for nuclear power before we are even in receipt of it.

The more welcome news from the Government's Roadmap is the recommitment to deploy around 24GW of new nuclear power by 2050. This, however, remains just an aspiration. Delivery is another matter. Whether sufficient to meet the Government's separate net zero target, given that by then Britain's entire energy needs are supposed to be met by carbon free electricity generation, is equally open to question. Yet it is at least broadly compliant with Boris Johnson's original pledge, while still prime minister, on one new nuclear power station a year to help wean Britain off fossil fuels. Less clear is whether the private sector will bite, even with the new RAB-based funding model. But here's the overarching point. Given the experience of Hinkley Point C, why are we still pursuing the hugely costly, largely obsolete technology of EDF's gigawatt stations when there are perfectly viable, but smaller, homegrown alternatives just waiting for the opportunity to fill the gap?

The answer to this question, I suspect, is that having let the sad remnants of Britain's once world-leading nuclear power industry be bought up and run by EDF, the Government has become

Intent in the genocide case against Israel is not hard to prove

Raz Segal & Penny Green

THIS week, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) held a hearing for South Africa's formal request for provisional measures against Israel over its military assault on Gaza. The South African legal team argued that Israel is committing acts of genocide and therefore should be ordered to stop its military activities in the strip.

The crime of genocide has two elements - intention and execution - both of which have to be proven when accusations are made. In Israel's case, the apparent devastation of Gaza makes for a powerful argument that it is indeed carrying out genocide.

The mass killing of more than 23,000 Palestinians, almost half of whom are children and youth, with thousands more missing; the forced displacement of almost two million Palestinians who make up 90 percent of Gaza's population; Israel's imposition of "total siege" that now threatens to kill through hunger and infectious diseases hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the coming months; the laying of waste to Gaza through indiscriminate mass bombardments and the razing of whole residential neighbourhoods; the targeting of hospitals, doctors and other healthcare professionals; the damage and destruction of cultural, educational and religious sites, including hundreds of schools, universities, mosques, churches and libraries - all this is the visible execution of genocide, and the South African legal team laid it out clearly during the hearing.

Intention is usually harder to prove when accusations of genocide are made; the petitioner has to be able to prove "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such," in the language of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment

of the Crime of Genocide. But in Israel's case, intention too has been laid bare by an ample amount of evidence - as the South African legal team pointed out.

In arguing the case, they were able to draw on a new and comprehensive database, compiled by Law for Palestine, which meticulously documents and collates 500 statements that embody the Israeli state's intention to commit genocide and incite to genocide since October 7, 2023. The statements by people with command authority - state leaders, war cabinet ministers and senior army officers - and by other politicians, army officers, journalists and public figures reveal the widespread commitment in Israel to the genocidal destruction of Gaza.

Perpetrators of genocide rarely express their intentions in direct and explicit ways, so courts are left to infer such intent through an analysis of state actions or leaked memoranda. In the case of Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza, however, as the Law for Palestine database shows, people with command authority have been making genocidal statements repeatedly over the past three months.

They have dehumanised Palestinians in their rhetoric, and painted the population in Gaza, as a whole, as Israel's enemy. Bolstered by the hubris of settler colonial power and the knowledge that it has killed, maimed, destroyed, expelled, humiliated, imprisoned and dispossessed with more than seven decades of impunity and by the continued material and moral support of the United States, Israel is explicit and unashamed about their genocidal intent because they have imagined and prosecuted a war against people who they see as colonised "savages".

Israeli Defence Minister

captive to the company's demands and expertise, and therefore beholden to its say so. Sad but true, we've in effect outsourced a key part of our energy strategy to the French state, EDF's ultimate master. It's too late for Hinkley. That train has long since left the station. But there is still time left to change the approach for Sizewell C, and all the other former nuclear power station sites earmarked for redevelopment.

Rather than being rebuilt from scratch to house Hinkley lookalikes, these sites and others should instead simply be devoted to the budding new technologies of Small Modular and Advanced Modular Reactors, piled side by side or one on top of another until they match the output of bigger traditional reactors. Factory-produced SMRs promise to be both a cheaper and more readily available alternative than the bespoke monsters from the deep proposed by the likes of EDF. What's more, at least one of the aspiring SMR developers is British, Rolls-Royce.

There could scarcely be a better opportunity to marry Britain's intended green energy transition with the obvious desirability of industrial rebirth and increased export potential than to give Rolls-Royce the certainty it needs to move forward with development. Export opportunity always used to be cited as part justification for past "made in Britain" nuclear programmes, and never did it come to anything.

Only one of the original fleet of Magnox stations was sold abroad, and not a single example of the next generation advanced gas cooled reactor technology was ever built beyond these shores. A degree of scepticism is therefore fully justified. And to be fair, the Government has said it will by next summer select winners from a shortlist of six for an envisaged eventual fleet of SMRs. It is not as if it has ruled out the SMR route. All the same, at this stage, SMRs seem to be regarded as very much an unproven, fallback, or second tier solution.

If we are to spend £28bn a year of taxpayers' money on going green, as promised by Labour, we should at least be confident that a large part of the wider economic benefit is reserved for UK supply chains, and is not instead squandered on supporting jobs abroad in France, China, Denmark and the US. Sadly, this latter outcome is about the sum of the present approach to net zero - punishing economic sacrifice for Chinese gain.

The Telegraph

A turning point in Ukraine

Michael Bociurkiw

ON January 6, scores of people in the Ukrainian coastal city of Odesa braved winter temperatures and jumped into the Black Sea as part of the Christian holiday Epiphany - commemorating the baptism of Christ. This year's icy plunge had added significance. It marked the first time that the war-torn nation celebrated the Christian feast day according to the Gregorian calendar (on January 6) rather than the Julian calendar (on January 19).

Last year, Ukraine passed legislation shifting its Christmas celebrations in line with many Western dates - a step to further distance itself from traditions commonly observed in Russia. But for the past few weeks especially, it has been almost impossible to detach oneself from the looming presence of Russia, with heavy barrages of missiles and drones raining down on several Ukrainian cities, including Odesa. As 2023 drew to a close, Russia launched the biggest air attack on Ukraine since the beginning of its full-scale invasion. That was followed by another barrage on an almost equal scale just a few days later. The intensity and frequency of the attacks - on the back of reports that the Ukrainian counter-offensive is stalling and that western backers of Ukraine are holding back billions in funding - marks a major turning point in the war.

That, along with a massive shift of global attention towards the Israel-Hamas war, has Ukrainians justifiably worried. For the first time since Russia's full-scale invasion even the most battle-hardened of acquaintances are now voicing concern, especially after the second Russian barrage in the new year. "That morning was horrible. It wasn't just drones but rockets as well. And that's when it becomes really serious because we didn't know how many patriot rockets we have

left to take down the Russian rockets," Olga Radkevych, a friend and former OSCE colleague in Odesa told me. "We are talking human lives here and everyone realizes that if the United States stops supporting us that those attacks will become more frequent and more severe," she added. "People are so tired nowadays. You can see the weariness more and more. How much longer can a person live in such an environment?" Even as Radkevych dined with friends on New Year's Eve in a vain effort to try and forget about the war, a Russian drone buzzed around their neighborhood, demanding their attention and careful monitoring.

There was a time when security experts speculated that Russia's stockpile of weapons was running low. But the Kremlin has apparently managed to re-supply and is now reported to be using short-range ballistic missiles in Ukraine produced by its ally, North Korea. Meanwhile, the supply of drones from Iran seems almost limitless, amid worrying reports that Iran has transferred technology for more drones to be produced in Russia for a new stockpile that is "orders of magnitude larger" than previous stocks. As Russia's full-scale invasion grinds toward the two-year mark, and with seemingly no end in the near future, Ukraine's leaders have more to ask of their citizens.

It's expected that parliament will pass a new mobilization legislation that could bring up to 500,000 more men into battle. President Volodymyr Zelensky, who appeared to be maneuvering to distance himself from the controversial act, said it was needed to relieve those who've fought on the frontlines for months. In a blatantly political move, he placed the onus on the military brass, in particular Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, who's

also viewed as a potential political rival, to explain the rationale to the public. Zelensky has also suggested the minimum draft age might be lowered to 25 years from the current 27.

Tinkering with mobilization is a political hot potato few leaders dare touch. Even President Vladimir Putin waited several months before signing off on Russia's first mobilization since World War II. While it's impossible to put an exact number on Ukrainian war losses, anyone who visits the military portion of the Lychakiv Cemetery in Lviv can see that it's expanded to almost maximum capacity. This is a war being fought on many fronts. On a pre-Christmas visit to Kyiv, I saw a visible slowdown in economic activity and the spreading scars of war are now almost impossible to ignore.

Moments after emerging from the central train station, passengers come face to face with a tall office building facade heavily damaged from explosions. At a city center bistro once frequented by expats, Le Cosmopolite, a lone waitress had only two tables to serve. "People are getting poorer and it's getting worse and worse every month," she told me. With fears that two aid packages from the US and European Union, for \$61 billion and \$52 billion respectively - are stalled due to political bickering, the mood across Ukraine has turned understandably glum. The clock is ticking louder than ever. Ukraine has been running a massive budget deficit and there are reports that come February, it won't be able to pay public sector wages.

2024's big unfreeze? But there is at least one area where Ukraine can feel hopeful: Russian assets. Ukraine scored a big win last week when the EU approved sanctions against Russia's largest diamond producer, Alrosa, and its CEO. The

CNN



PSX witnesses bearish trend, loses 368 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Monday, losing 368.26 points, a negative change of 0.57 percent, closing at 64,269.38 points against 64,637.64 points the previous trading day.

A total of 382,012,304 shares valuing Rs.14.076 billion were traded during the day as compared to 643,307,931 shares valuing Rs.20.021 billion the last day. Some 363 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 96 of them recorded gains and 249 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 18 remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were K-Electric with 55,031,681 shares at Rs.5.85 per share, Pak Int. Bulk with 37,652,000 shares at Rs.7.09 per share and WorldCall Telecom with 25,000,275 shares at Rs.1.38 per share.

Philip Morris (Pakistan) Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.44.34 per share price, closing at Rs.635.59, whereas the runner-up was Pakistan Hotels Developers Limited with a Rs.33.94 rise in its per share price to Rs.508.94.

Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.200.00 per share closing at Rs.8,000.00, followed by Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited with Rs.150.00 decline to close at Rs.9,400.00.

Putting hope in every swing: 7th Engro LRBT Golf Tournament

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Layton Rehmatulla Benevolent Trust (LRBT) successfully organized the 7th Engro LRBT Golf Tournament on January 14th, 2024, at the prestigious Karachi Golf Club. The event aimed to raise funds to support LRBT's mission of providing free eye treatment to the underprivileged, ensuring that no man, woman, or child goes blind because they cannot afford the treatment.

Mr. Khawaja Iqbal Hassan, Director on the Board of Engro Corporation, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest, adding to the prestige of the tournament. The event saw participation from 36 teams comprising professionals from financial institutions, corporates, media, and business houses. These enthusiastic participants not only showcased their golfing prowess, but also contributed significantly to LRBT's noble cause.

The LRBT Golf Tournament has become an annual tradition, being held consecutively for the past 7 years. The primary goal is to generate funds that enable LRBT to continue providing free eye treatment across its network of 19 hospitals and 56 primary eye care clinics, reaching the most marginalized segments of the population nationwide.



During the closing ceremony, Mr. Najmus Saqib Hameed T.I., Honorary Chairman of LRBT, expressed his gratitude to all the participants for their generous donations and active participation, which contributed to the success of the event. He emphasized that the proceeds collected through the tournament would directly support LRBT's mission and enable the restoration of sight for 4000 underprivileged patients, empowering them to become contributing members of society.

Mr. Khawaja Iqbal Hassan, Director on the Board of Engro Corp, also addressed the gathering during the closing ceremony. He spoke about the importance of corporate social responsibility and how events like the LRBT Golf Tournament play a crucial role in making a positive impact on the community. Mr. Hassan actively participated in distributing prizes among the winners of the tournament.

The winning team of the 7th Engro LRBT Golf Tournament was led by Mr. Anis Ahmed, CEO of Abbott Laboratories Pvt. Limited. The runner-up team was the Dubai Islamic Bank team, showcasing the competitive spirit and camaraderie that characterized the entire tournament.



LAHORE: A vendor displaying chicken soup to attract the customers at his roadside setup during winter season in the Provincial Capital.

Cars' sale drops 55% during Jul-Dec

ISLAMABAD (APP): The sale of cars during the first six months of the current financial year 2023-24 has dropped by 55.50 per cent as compared to the same months of last year, a recent data released by Pakistan Automobile Manufacturing Association (PAMA) said.

According to the data, as many as 30,662 cars were sold during the months under review as opposed to 68,912 units in the same months of last year.

The breakup figures showed that 3,938 units of Honda Civic and City were sold during July-December 2023-24 as compared to the sale of 8,906 units during July-December 2022-23.

Toyota Corolla and Yaris car sales also declined by 56.24 per cent as it went down to 5,279 units from 12,065 units in the previous year. Suzuki Swift's sales also decreased by 68.75 per cent as its sales went down to 2,230 units from 7,136 units last year.

Sale of Suzuki Cultus declined to 1,908 units during the first six months of the current year, whereas during the same months last year, the sale was recorded at 5,143 units while the sale of Suzuki WagonR also decreased to 1,829 units from 3,769 units last year.

Suzuki Alto's sales also witnessed a sharp decline of 50.69 per cent from 27,614 units to 13,614 units during the current year, whereas the sales of Suzuki Bolan decreased to 1,179 units as opposed to sales of 2,436 units in the same month of last year.

Khushhali Microfinance Bank Limited celebrates highest recovery mark and deposit base for fiscal year 2023

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Khushhali Microfinance Bank Limited (KMBL), the first-specialized microfinance bank in Pakistan, commemorated its achievement for the fiscal year 2023 (FY 2023). The newly established recovery unit of the microfinance bank has set new benchmarks, achieving a milestone of over PKR 01 Billion in recoveries from the charge-off portfolio through its newly established recovery unit and call centre.

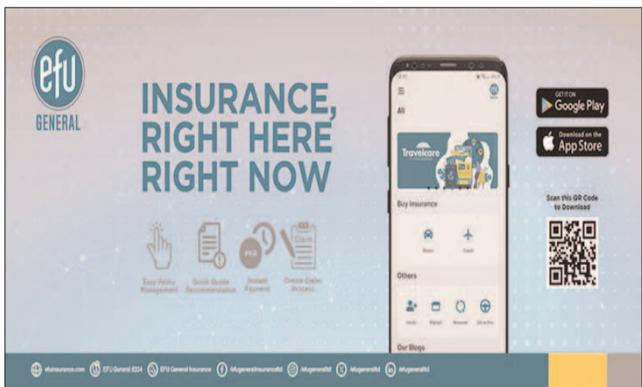
The microfinance bank also surpassed its deposit target, achieving PKR 101 Billion in deposits. These results highlight KMBL's remarkable resilience during challenging times. The achievement is largely attributed to the trust and confidence of retail (individual) depositors, constituting 90% of the total deposit and emphasizing KMBL's strong relationship with its customers.

To celebrate this accomplishment, the KMBL Team organized an in-house ceremony led by President & CEO Aameer Karachiwalla, accompanied by the management committee of KMBL. The event was a moment of pride and reflection, highlighting the collective efforts that contributed to the bank's success.

President and CEO Aameer Karachiwalla shared his thoughts on the achievement, stating, "This remarkable achievement is a testament to the dedication of the entire Khushhali Team and the unwavering trust our customers place in us. We are proud to be a catalyst for positive change in the lives of the communities we serve."



EFU General brings insurance round the clock



F.P. Report

KARACHI: EFU General Insurance Ltd. brings a mobile app, aimed to deliver a premium customer experience with enhanced accessibility for purchasing and managing motor and travel insurance policies at any hour of the day. The app ensures a simple, quick, and seamless customer journey.

This mobile app provides comprehensive details of policy coverage, quotes premium, allows users to make payments through a secure gateway and intimate claims. Customers will now have a simplified policy management system in the palm of their hands.

Simply get your Motor and Travel insurance policies round the clock conveniently and instantly," stated the spokesperson of EFU General.

The app aligns with digitising the insurance landscape and upholding the tradition of delivering premium services to the largest customer base in the non-life insurance sector in Pakistan.

Rupee gains 12 paise against dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistani Rupee on Monday witnessed an appreciation of 12 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs280.23 against the previous day's closing of Rs280.35.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market stood at Rs280 and Rs282 respectively. The price of the Euro decreased by 76 paise to close at Rs307.08 against the last day's closing of Rs307.84, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen remained lost 01 paise and closed at Rs1.92, whereas a decrease of 98 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs357.20 compared to the last closing of Rs358.18. The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 03 paise each to close at Rs76.30 and Rs74.72 respectively.

Asian stocks edge up after US inflation data, oil flat

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian markets rose Monday as traders weighed US inflation data that revived hopes for an early interest rate cut, but gains were tempered by geopolitical worries after fresh US-UK strikes on Huthi targets in Yemen.

The new raids on the Iran-backed rebels came after they threatened further attacks on Red Sea shipping in response to similar moves by Western forces on Friday. The developments sent oil prices surging around four percent Friday before the gains were pared as traders eyed a pick-up in non-OPEC production and signs of a slowing global economy. Both main contracts fluctuated Monday.

However, there are worries that the crisis, which comes as Israel continues its war with Hamas in Gaza, could erupt into a regional conflict that would likely hammer trade routes and send crude soaring past \$100. Bloomberg reported that several oil tanker owners with more than 350 vessels had paused journeys through the Red Sea, with more likely to follow as Western forces warn ships to stay away. The prospect of a wider conflagration sending energy prices up fanned worries that inflation could bounce back -- after falling through last year to the point where central banks are considering cutting interest rates.

Still, data Friday showing US producer prices fell last month for the third time in a row -- the best run since 2020 -- providing a boost to bets on a rate cut in the first quarter.



ISLAMABAD: A shopkeeper selling "doodh jalebi" in a local market of Federal Capital.

Court Notice

In the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Case No.5/12/2. Institution. 21/1/2023, date of hearing 22/1/2024. Abdullah VS Mohamad Afzal. Notice to 15/2/1. Mst. Raj widow. 15/2/2. Zahideen. 15/2/4. Khalideen sons 15/2/5. Mst. Samaat. 15/2/6. Shadmeena daughters of Israrul Arifeen resident of Maskipur tehsel Mandar district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 22/1/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

In the Court of Samina Sehar Civil Judge XIII Bannu. Suit No.184/FC, Institution No. 11.11.2023, Next date of hearing 07-02-2024 case title: Mst. Muskan VS Azeem Ullah. Notice to Azeem Ullah Son Rabbani R/o Hinjal Nawab Tehsil & District Bannu. Presently U.A.E. Whereas in the above case titled the service of above defendant(s) is not possible through ordinary means, therefore, you defendant(s) are informed through this publication that on 07-02-2024 at 8.00 AM. You have to appear before this court either personally or through attorney or through counsel to pursue the suit noted above, otherwise, Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you.

Lost & Found

I have lost my original degree of B.A Roll # 1629 Session 2005-2007 issued by Kohat University. If anyone finds please return it to Ahmed Ali S/o Ayub Khan R/o Garhi Risalpur Naway Kalay Hangu Road District Kohat.

IN THE COURT OF JEHangir KHAN JUDGE BANKING COURT-II Federal Judicial Complex Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar. Case No: 124/1 Next Date: 3-2-2024 Suit for recovery of Rs.856588/22 HBL Mardan Cantt Branch VS Muhammad Ibrahim Notice Versus: Muhammad Ibrahim S/o Sherin R/o Bakhshali Gujrat Tehsil & Distt. Mardan. Civic address post office DirKoat Tehsil & Distt Upper Dir. Office Address Government Shaheed Shafiq ur Rehman Higher Secondary School Gujrat Mardan. Where is the plaintiff Bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs.856588/22 against you under section 10(2) of the Financial Institutions (Recovery of Finance) Ordinance 2001. You are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court to appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/publication of the notice in the newspaper filing which an ex-parte decree shall be passed in favor of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Banking Court-II Peshawar



In brief

Williamson set to miss T20 series

WELLINGTON (Agencies): New Zealand captain Kane Williamson, who suffered a hamstring injury in the second Twenty20 against Pakistan, is unlikely to take any further part in the series, coach Gary Stead said Monday. Williamson was already set to miss the third game on Wednesday, and with the first Test against South Africa less than three weeks away, Stead said his star batsman would probably sit out the final two games as well. "With the test matches so close as well and in the big scheme of things (they are) a higher priority I think we'll try and make sure he's right for that," Stead said. New Zealand lead the five-match series 2-0, with Williamson contributing 26 off 15 before retiring hurt in Sunday's second encounter, in which his side won by 21 runs. Tim Seifert is expected to replace Williamson in the batting line, with Stead indicating Seifert was already set to replace Devon Conway as wicket-keeper at some stage in the series.

McGregor donates \$25,000 to fighter

LONDON (Agencies): Conor McGregor has donated \$25,000 to Irish MMA fighter Ryan Curtis after he sustained "life-changing" injuries in a training accident. Fighter Leah McCourt said Curtis, 31, had sustained "a broken back, a broken neck and a dislocated spine". Curtis has been a professional since 2015 and has fought on Cage Warriors and Bellator cards. McGregor posted on social media that he was "sending my support and well wishes" to the Dublin fighter. Belfast boxer Michael Conlan, MMA fighters Molly McCann and Dillon Danis and coach John Kavanagh have also donated to Curtis and his family. In a post on Instagram, Belfast's McCourt said "there is no exact end date as to when his treatment will be complete". "Ryan will never be able to do what he loves, and fight or train in MMA again. A sport he has dedicated his life to from the age of 11," she added. "Ryan has the most infectious positive outlook in life and has been through some of the most horrific circumstances, always coming out a better human, man and friend. He is still showing his positive outlook, his determination and mindset to overcome yet another challenge that life has presented."

Israeli footballer in Turkey arrested

I S T U N B U L (Agencies): An Israeli footballer who showed a message referring to the Israel-Hamas war during a first division match in Turkey has been arrested, several Turkish news outlets reported late Sunday. Earlier, the country's justice minister said it was investigating Israeli player Sagiv Jehzekel over suspected "incitement to hate". His club Antalyaspor, has already sacked him over the incident. Jehzekel, 28, and capped eight times by the Israeli national team, celebrated scoring a goal against Trabzonspor by gesturing to a message written on a bandage on his left wrist, which read "100 days. 07/10". The message was believed to be a reference to the 100 days of the Israel-Hamas war and the hostages held since the Palestinian militant group launched an unprecedented attack on Israel on October 7, killing about 1,140 people and abducting around 250 others. Israel says 132 hostages are still being held in Gaza.

National Women's T20 Tournament

Quetta, Lahore, Rawalpindi make victorious start

ISLAMABAD (APP): The opening day of National Women's T20 Tournament 2023-24 saw action unfold at three venues across Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Quetta edged over Karachi in a final-over finish at Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium, registering a win by six wickets. At Ayub Park Ground, Lahore dominated over Multan with a 10-wicket win after the latter were bowled out for 69. Rawalpindi cruised to a comfortable victory by seven wickets against Peshawar at the Diamond Club Ground.

Quetta v Karachi at Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi:

Karachi posted 119-6 in 20 overs after being invited to bat first by Quetta's captain Saima Malik. The match which was live-streamed on PCB's YouTube channel saw Anam Amin struck in the first over to take out Muneeba Ali for a second-ball duck. Then, right-arm pacer Khairun Nisa removed Yasra Amir on the last ball of the second over. In her subsequent over, she bowled a double wicket maiden to reduce Karachi to nine for four in four overs.

Javeria Khan stitched two important partnerships to bring a semblance of stability in the innings; a 31-run sixth-wicket stand with her captain Rameen Shamim followed by an unbeaten 60-run stand with Maham Tariq. Javeria's unbeaten half-century (74, 57b, 11x4s) allowed Karachi to get to a fighting total.

In turn, Rameen ran out opening batter Dua Majid, who walked back for a duck in the second over. The next batter in, Khadija Chishti (8, 15b), also fell to Rameen in the eighth over after building a 35-run partnership with Fareeha Mahmood. Fareeha went on to score a half-century (63, 61b, 10x4s) before she was dismissed by Maham. Jannat Rashid (10, 24b, 1x4) fell to Maham Manzoor as troubled deepened for Quetta. Tuba Hassan (34, 17b, 3x4s, 2x6s), the fifth batter in, salvaged the game for Quetta. She hit a four and a six in the final over to take Quetta over the line.

Multan v Lahore at Ayub Park Ground, Rawalpindi:

Multan's decision to bat first backfired as they were bowled out for a measly 69 in 19.1 overs. Opening batters Gull Feroza and Aleena Masood went out cheaply to bring the team down to six for two in 1.2 overs.

The third batter in, Gull Rukh, could only manage 14 from 22 including three boundaries, before she fell to left-arm spinner Nashra Sandhu. Multan's captain Umm-e-Hani, who hit 20 off 29 including two fours, was the top-scorer of the innings. Saiqa Riaz (14 not out, 21b, 1x4) was the other contributor with the bat.

Leg-spinner Ghulam Fatima was the most successful bowler for Lahore, bagging three wickets for 13 runs. Nashra bowled an outstanding spell; accounting for two wickets at the expense of just one run in 3.1 overs. Noreen Yaqoob, Fatima Khan and Areesha Noor bagged a wicket each. In return, Lahore cruised to the target in just 8.4 overs and 10 wickets in the bag. Sadaf Shams scored an unbeaten 35 from 30, including seven fours. She was supported by Sidra Amin, who hit 31 off 22, showcasing five boundaries and a maximum.

Peshawar v Rawalpindi Diamond Club Ground, Islamabad:

After being put to bat first, Peshawar was bowled out for 51 in 12 overs in the first innings, courtesy of a dominating performance by the Rawalpindi bowling attack. Raahima Syed (13, 16b, 2x4s) and captain Aleena Shah (13, 17b, 3x4s) were the top run-getters for Peshawar.

Rawalpindi's Tania Saeed accounted for three wickets for just four runs. She was supported by Waheeda Akhtar and Aliya Riaz, who grabbed two wickets each. Fatima Shah and Aima Saleem also had one each to their names.

Rawalpindi achieved the target in 6.2 overs, losing three wickets in process. Aliya played a captain's innings, hitting 23 from 13, including four boundaries and a six. Natalia Parvaiz (10 not out, 9b, 1x4) was the other contributor with the bat, as Rawalpindi got over the line.

Momina Riyasat and Tehzeeb Shah were the two wicket-takers for Peshawar, ending with a wicket each. All six teams will feature in second round matches tomorrow. The first ball will be bowled at 11am. The match between Peshawar and Karachi at the Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium will be live-streamed on PCB's YouTube channel.

Scores in brief:

Quetta beat Karachi by six wickets at Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium
Karachi 119-6, 20 overs (Javeria Khan 74 not out, Maham Manzoor 17 not out, Syeda Aroob Shah 13; Khairun Nisa 3-14)

Quetta 121-4, 19.5 overs (Fareeha Mahmood 63, Tuba Hassan 34 not out; Rameen Shamim 1-16, Maham Manzoor 1-19, Maham Tariq 1-26)

Player of the match - Fareeha Mahmood (Quetta)
Lahore beat Multan by 10 wickets at Ayub Park Ground:

Multan 69 all out, 19.1 overs (Umm-e-Hani 20, Saiqa Riaz 14 not out, Gull Rukh 14; Ghulam Fatima 3-13, Nashra Sandhu 2-11)

Lahore 73-0, 8.4 overs (Sadaf Shams 35 not out, Sidra Amin 31 not out)

Player of the match - Ghulam Fatima (Lahore)
Rawalpindi beat Peshawar seven wickets at Diamond Club Ground:

Peshawar 51 all out, 12 overs (Raahima Syed 13, Aleena Shah 13; Tania Saeed 3-4, Waheeda Akhtar 2-1, Aliya Riaz 2-11)

Rawalpindi 52-3, 6.2 overs (Aliya Riaz 23, Natalia Parvaiz 10 not out; Tehzeeb Shah 1-11, Momina Riyasat 1-21)

Player of the match - Aliya Riaz Scores in brief (Rawalpindi).

Arslan Ash bags Tekken World Tour Finals 2023 in US



ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan's Tekken star Arslan Ash has secured another major victory, winning the Tekken World Tour Finals 2023 (TWT 23) held in New Orleans, United States on Sunday.

Arslan overpowered CheryBerryMango (CBM) in the final 3-1 with a dominating display that saw him clinching the title.

Arslan, often regarded as the greatest of all time (GOAT) in Tekken, started his top-eight campaign with a thumping win over LowHigh 2-1 in the winners' semi-final to make it to the winners' final.

In the winners' final, Arslan's toughest challenge came against Ulsan, who the Pakistani overcame after a five-game battle that the 28-

year-old won 3-2.

After which, Arslan's final test of the night came against CBM who he easily defeated in the final.

After winning Evo Japan and Evo Vegas earlier, Arslan's win on Sunday night in the TWT 23 final saw him completing the treble 2023.

It must be noted in August, Arslan became a four-time EVO champion after winning the title in Las Vegas.

The 27-year-old impressed one and all with his skills and tracks and defeated Japan's AO 3-0 in the grand final.

Arslan became the only player in the world to win the prestigious event four times in Tekken 7. He won the title in Japan and Las Vegas in 2019 and repeated the same feat this year as well.

Arslan is considered by many as the greatest Tekken player of all time. He was also awarded the best E-Player of 2019 by EPSN.

Arslan is also a CEO 2021 Champion and the 2022 Combo Breaker Tekken 7 tournament winner, where he grabbed the title after defeating all of his 10 opponents.



O'Sullivan beats Carter to win eighth Masters title

LONDON (Agencies): Ronnie O'Sullivan fought back to claim a record-extending eighth Masters title with a thrilling 10-7 victory over Ali Carter at a raucous Alexandra Palace.

O'Sullivan, already the youngest-ever winner of the tournament, becomes the oldest-ever champion too, aged 48. He trailed 6-3 in the evening session but then reeled off seven of the next eight frames to seal his win.

O'Sullivan's victory means he earns the £250,000 top prize, with Carter taking home £100,000. The world number one, who collected his eighth UK Championship in December, had never previously won consecutive Triple Crown events in the same season.

However, he now has the opportunity to emulate Steve Davis, Stephen Hendry and Mark Williams, who are the only players to have won all three - UK Championship, Masters and World Championship - in the same campaign, with Scotland's Hendry achieving the feat twice.

"I don't know how I won this tournament. I've just dug deep, tried to play with a bit of freedom tonight and just tried to keep Ali honest," O'Sullivan told BBC Sport. "If he was to win, he would've had to scrape me off the table. I just wanted to see if he had it at the end and could he get over the line, that was my mindset coming into the evening.

"Ali didn't play great this evening, he played better this afternoon and he let me off the hook tonight. He didn't take on some balls I thought he would and that gave me belief. I just tried to take the most from it."

O'Sullivan goes through the gears as Carter stumbles. World number 10 Carter, a 2020 finalist, had talked of relishing the opportunity to face the man who beat him in both of their meetings in world finals in 2008 and 2012. And initially he was able to back that up, compiling breaks of 106 and 122 as he opened up a 5-3 lead on Sunday afternoon.

He then made the perfect start as play got under way in the evening, with a fine cut on a long red to the top left corner pocket helping him to extend his advantage. A refocused O'Sullivan, who was guilty of playing several over-adventurous shots earlier on, responded with two half centuries as he won the next three frames to level the match at 6-6 going into the interval.

Having seen his three-frame lead evaporate in just 37 minutes, Carter delivered a magnificent riposte with a difficult red to the right middle laying the platform for a record ninth century break of the tournament, surpassing the mark set by O'Sullivan in 2007 and 2009, with a wonderful 127.

But 40-time ranking event winner O'Sullivan took a nervy 14th frame and the pivotal 15th frame after Carter agonisingly failed to execute a superb attempted cannon on two reds and then missed a pink into the left middle.



MELBOURNE: Naomi Osaka of Japan plays a forehand in the Women's Singles First Round match against Caroline Garcia of France during day two of the 2024 Australian Open.

Salah rescues Egypt as Nigeria draw

ABIDJAN (Agencies): Mohamed Salah saved Egypt from an embarrassing defeat in their opening game at the Africa Cup of Nations on Sunday, while Nigeria were held by Equatorial Guinea despite Victor Osimhen getting on the scoresheet.

Ghana were also in action in Abidjan and suffered a shock 2-1 loss to Cape Verde as three nations with 14 AFCON titles between them all failed to get off to winning starts at this year's tournament.

There was drama at the Felix Houphouet Boigny Stadium in Ivory Coast's economic capital as Egypt needed a Salah penalty seven minutes into injury time to snatch a 2-2 draw with Mozambique in Group B.

The penalty was awarded following a VAR check for a foul on Mostafa Mohamed, and Salah's strike denied Mozambique a historic first ever AFCON win.

"I was sad seeing my players devastated at the end because we deserved the win," said Mozambique coach Chiquinho Conde.

His nation had not won a game in four past appearances at the AFCON, and their winless record now

spans 13 matches in total.

Mohamed had given record seven-time African champions Egypt the ideal start when he scored inside two minutes, but the sapping heat and humidity seemed to get the better of the Pharaohs.

Mozambique equalised through a Witnesse Quemo header on 55 minutes and completed the turnaround when substitute Clesio Bauque burst through to make it 2-1 three minutes later.

Salah saved Egypt, but it was not a convincing start to their campaign in Ivory Coast where they are attempting to win a record-extending eighth AFCON crown and a first since 2010, before the Liverpool superstar had made his international debut.

"I want to win every match I play and when we don't I am sad, but there are no easy games," said Egypt coach Rui Vitoria. "We were not the best team before the draw was made and we are not the worst now."

Suddenly Egypt's next game on Thursday against Ghana could be make or break for both, with the Black Stars reeling after conceding in injury time to

lose 2-1 to Cape Verde.

The Black Stars looked set to come away with a draw after Alexander Djiku headed home on 56 minutes to cancel out Jamiro Monteiro's first-half opener.

But Cape Verde pounced on poor defending to grab all three points in the 92nd minute, with substitute Garry Rodrigues tucking the ball into a gaping goal to the shock of Ghana fans in the crowd of just under 12,000.

"We want to show the world what we can do, that we are small but we can compete on footballing terms with all teams in Africa," said Cape Verde coach Pedro "Bubista" Brito.

The evening was also notable for the appearance as a substitute of Andre Ayew, with the 34-year-old becoming only the third player to feature in eight editions of the competition.

Yet of far greater concern to Ghanaians is the result for a country whose tally of four AFCON victories is bettered only by Egypt and Cameroon.

They went out of the last edition in 2022 in the group stage and Chris Hughton's team also came here off the back of a 1-0 defeat to the

Comoros in World Cup qualifying in November.

"We conceded a very poor goal, and hence it is a very disappointing night for us," Hughton said of Cape Verde's winner. "We have no choice but to make sure it is a favourable result in our next game against Egypt."

Three-time champions Nigeria are hoping the presence of African Player of the Year Osimhen can spark a successful campaign but they were held to a 1-1 draw by Equatorial Guinea in Group A.

Osimhen nodded in to level in the first half almost immediately after Iban Edu had opened the scoring in match that ended with both teams on one point, two fewer than Ivory Coast.

The tournament hosts beat Guinea-Bissau 2-0 in the same Ebimpe Olympic Stadium on Saturday. "I am not happy. This draw does not suit us. Our team created a lot of chances but we did not score," said Nigeria coach Jose Peseiro. Of concern to organisers will be the sight of a practically empty stadium, with very few fans attending the game in the 60,000-capacity ground.

Naomi Osaka loses, Coco Gauff wins and Marketa Vondrousova out

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Naomi Osaka's highly anticipated Grand Slam return at the Australian Open ended in a narrow first-round defeat by France's Caroline Garcia.

Two-time champion Osaka, at her first major since the US Open in September 2022 after giving birth last year, lost 6-4 7-6 (7-2) to the 16th seed.

While Osaka failed to create a break point, it was an encouraging performance against a quality opponent.

Meanwhile, US Open champion Coco Gauff cruised through thanks to a pep talk. The 19-year-old American, who won her maiden Grand Slam title at the US Open in September, won 6-3 6-0 against Slovakia's Anna Karolina Schmiedlova.

I look good so just have fun. I was able to relax," the fourth seed said. But Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova suffered a shock exit on day two.

Vondrousova, ranked seventh in the world, became the highest seed to fall so far in round one, suffering a 6-1 6-2 defeat by Ukrainian qualifier Dayana Yastremska.

Afterwards, Yastremska said her grandmother's house was recently hit by a rocket in her home country. The 23-year-old said the resistance showed by her country against the Russian invasion is what motivates her on court.

"To talk about what is going on in Ukraine in a couple of seconds is not enough," she said in her on-court interview. "I'm proud of Ukraine, proud of the

people, the warriors and the people. "When I was in Brisbane, before the match I was told a rocket arrived on my grandmother's house. It was hard to play."

"We need to remember about (the war) and give as much support to Ukraine as possible." Elina Svitolina, another Ukrainian who has spoken at length about the impact of the war, is also through.

The 19th seed needed 59 minutes to complete a 6-2 6-2 win over Australian wildcard Taylah Preston. Tunisian sixth seed Ons Jabeur took just 67 minutes to beat Ukrainian qualifier Yulia Starodubtseva 6-3 6-1.

But Croatian 21st seed Donna Vekic lost 6-4 6-4 to Russian Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, while Czech 31st seed Marie

Bouzkova had an early exit against 19-year-old compatriot Linda Noskova, losing 6-1 7-5.

Murray says 'definite possibility' he has played final Australian Open: Five-time finalist Andy Murray said Monday there was a "definite possibility" that he has played his final Australian Open after slumping out at the first hurdle.

The 36-year-old put up stiff resistance in a 61-minute first set against Argentine Tomas Martin Etcheverry, but the 30th seed slowly ground him down to win 6-4, 6-2, 6-2.

Murray had a frustrating end to 2023, winning just one match in his last four tournaments, and said previously that unless his form picked up the curtain could be coming down on his career.

13th Rashid D. Habib Memorial Golf from 18th January

F.P Report

KARACHI: Bank AL Habib's 13th Rashid D. Habib Memorial National Professional Golf Tournament 2024 will tee off on Thursday, 18th January at the Karachi Golf Club (KGC). The final round will be played on Sunday, 21st January 2024.

More than a hundred top golfers will compete in the Professionals' category for the most coveted four-day National Competition of the Annual Golf Season. Last year, Waheed Baloch of KGC, successfully defended his title by carding 277, 11 under par, to win the tournament. Muhammad

Shahzad was the runner-up by carding 278, 10 under par. Pakistan's Number One Muhammad Shabbir Iqbal of Islamabad was placed as the second runner-up.

Prior to this event, a two-day match for local KGC Professionals, Senior Professionals and KGC Caddies, the 23rd edition of Rashid D. Habib Memorial Golf Tournament, is being played on 16th and 17th January, 2024, to support and develop professional golf at KGC.

The total Prize Money of PKR 12 million includes PKR 9.4 M for Best Performers in the National Professional

Category, PKR 1.95 M for KGC Professionals, Caddies and Senior Pros, as well as Appearance Money of PKR 650,000. The Appearance Money is distributed amongst the top five Professionals and top three Senior Professionals, as per PGF's current ranking.

The lucky players achieving the first hole-in-one will also be rewarded with a Toyota Corolla and a Suzuki Alto in National and Local KGC categories respectively.

Prizes will be distributed by the Chief Guest, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf NI(M), T Bt. on 21st Jan 2024.



In brief

Six held for carrying illegal weapons

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested six illegal arms holders and recovered arms, and ammunition from their possession during a crackdown here on Monday. According to a police spokesman, Airport police held Irfan and recovered 01 pistol of 30 bore from his possession and 01 pistol of 30 bore was recovered from Raju while the same police recovered 01 pistol of 30 bore from Waqas. Similarly, Wah Cantt police arrested Suleman and recovered 01 pistol of 30 bore from his custody. While, Jatali police recovered 01 pistol of 30 bore from Osama.

Following operation, Rawat Police nabbed Naeem and recovered 01 pistol 30 bore from his possession. Police have registered separate cases against the accused and further investigation was in progress. SSP Operations appreciated the performance of police teams adding that strict action will be continued against those who were carrying illegal weapons.

ANF recovers 417 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting seven operations across the country managed to recover 417 kg of drugs and arrested six accused, said an ANF headquarters spokesman here on Monday. He informed that 156 kg hashish and 48 kg opium were recovered near Mandra Toll Plaza Rawalpindi and two suspects were arrested. 52 kg hashish, 41 kg opium and 21 kg morphine were recovered from the Nokandi area. In the third operation, 85.2 kg of hashish was recovered near Western Bypass Quetta and an accused was arrested. 10 kg of hashish was recovered in two different operations in the Khar border Bajour area. 2.1 kg hashish and six bottles of liquor were recovered from Gulberg Colony Faisalabad and an accused was netted during the operation. 1.1 kg Ice was recovered from an accused near GTS Chowk Faisalabad while one kg Ice was recovered near ring road Peshawar and an accused was arrested. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and further investigations are under process.

PID awareness campaigns

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Press Information Department (PID) is committed to foster electoral understanding among the masses through awareness campaigns ahead of the general elections in 2024. The PID, in this regard, has already launched a series of seminars to ensure active civic engagement and participation in the electoral process and elections slated for February 8. According to the PID, the stakeholders being invited to the seminars included representatives from mainstream political parties, the Election Commission of Pakistan, media, academia, civil society and the general public. It said these seminars would serve as a platform to educate citizens on the importance of voting, the electoral system, and the role of elected representatives. "By fostering public awareness, the seminars seek to empower individuals to make informed decisions, ultimately contributing to a more robust and accountable democratic system," the PID added. On January 11, the PID organized its first seminar titled 'Pakistan elections 2024: The Economic Reforms Agenda of Political Parties' here at a local hotel in Islamabad which had across-the-board representation from the stakeholders.



ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment, Mushaal Hussein Mullick addressing the second consultative meeting of Kashmir Advisory Committee.

'Country needs smart solutions to combat current challenges'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training, Madad Ali Sindi Monday emphasized on adopting smart solutions for addressing the current challenges being faced by the country, matching the pace of the developed countries. He was speaking at the launching ceremony of "Global Education Monitoring Report 2023" arranged by the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training in collaboration with UNESCO, EdTech Hub, and ITA.

Madad Ali said that the current challenges being faced by the country require smart solutions and it is high time that Pakistan matches the pace of the developed countries of the world. Chairing the event, the minister said that it is heartening to see that Pakistan has recently given high importance to the use of technology in imparting education. "Evaluating technology's role in imparting education is need of the hour", he added.

He said that the role of technology in reducing the number of out-of-school children in the country is of great significance, which he termed as his top priority. He said that quality of education is another challenge that has been given the highest priority under his command.

He said that he has placed special emphasis in ensuring that the schools in the federal area have the basic necessities available to provide a safe, secure and enabling environment to students.

Madad Ali said that the Ministry of Education was adept in making sure that technology's benefits can be passed on to the masses in the COVID 19 era.

He highlighted the development and launch of teleschool and educational radio channels in the COVID era by the education ministry.

Madad Ali highlighted the findings of the report which pointed out that technology can also leave behind underprivileged students. He said that his ministry will ensure that the use of technology is adapted in such a way that

no child is left behind irrespective of his/her background.

He said that his ministry will ensure that our learning outcomes and educational programmes will be aligned with technology in such a way that the negative aspects of technology are completely curbed.

Madad Ali said that he hoped that the fundamental right to education of all children of Pakistan would be guaranteed through the smart use of technology.

About the GEM report, the minister said that this year's GEM report topic is of utmost importance.

The event addressed key questions about technology in education including appropriateness, equity, scalability, and sustainability. The report emphasized evidence-backed technology use, the impact of COVID-19 on education, the digital divide, and the importance of teacher involvement. It commends Pakistan's efforts but highlights infrastructure gaps and the need for responsible technology integration.

Wasif Ali Wasif remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): Famous Urdu poet, teacher, writer and Sufi scholar Wasif Ali Wasif was remembered on the occasion of his birthday on Monday. He was born on January 15, 1929, in Khushab and is famous for his unique literary style. Probably no contemporary Urdu writer is more cited in quotations than him. Master of aphorism, he has almost a miraculous ability to capture a rainbow of meaning in a few dewdrops of well-chosen words.

Many of his aphorisms have become proverbs in recent years.

His book "Kiran Kiran Suraj" containing these aphorisms remained a best seller for many years. He used to write short essays on topics like love, life, fortune, fear, hope, expectation, promise, prayer, happiness, sorrow and so on with the clear objective of highlighting the true spirit of Islam. He died on January 18, 1993, and was buried in Lahore.

His works include Shab Chiragh (Urdu Poetry), Kiran Kiran Sooraj (Aphorism), The Beaming Soul (English Version of Kiran Kiran Sooraj), Dil Darya Samundra (Essays), Qatra Qatra Qulzum (Essays), Ocean in Drop (English version of Qatra Qatra Qulzum), Harf Harf Haqeeqat (Essays), Bharay Bharolay (Punjabi Poetry), Shab Raaz (Urdu Poetry), Baat Say Baat (Aphorism), Gumnam Aadeeb (Letters), Ziker-e-Habeeb (Na'ia Poetry), Dareechay (Aphorism), WasifYat (Essays), Kulyat-e-Wasif Ali Wasif (Poetry), Aqwaal-e-Wasif Ali Wasif Ka Encyclopedia.

96 FIRs registered

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police registered 96 FIRs on Monday while a total 6205 FIRs have been lodged against underage drivers during a special campaign till now, said a police spokesman. He informed that police on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi, Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani were taking action by the law against underage drivers. The CPO had directed the City Traffic Police officers to take solid steps to control traffic rules violations and underage driving, he said.

Pakistan, Kyrgyz agree to strengthen health ties

ISLAMABAD (APP): A bilateral meeting was held between the caretaker Minister for Health Dr. Nadeem Jan and the Health Minister of Kyrgyz Republic Alymkadyr Beishenaliev on the sidelines of the Global Health Security Summit.

Dr. Nadeem Jan welcomed the Kyrgyz dignitary and expressed gratitude on behalf of the Government of Pakistan for the participation of the Kyrgyz delegation in the Global forum hosted by Pakistan.

The Kyrgyz Minister appreciated the initiative of Pakistan's Health Minister in organizing the first-ever Global Health Security Summit.

He appreciated the befitting arrangements made by Pakistan for the summit

which he termed as unparalleled and the hospitality of the host during his stay in Pakistan.

Both sides discussed at length the potential to further strengthen cooperation in the health sector.

The Kyrgyz Minister said Pakistan has a good experience in the pharma sector and Kyrgyz Republic can benefit from it.

Both sides discussed bolstering cooperation in the field of medical education.

The Kyrgyz side shared that currently, 12,000 Pakistani students are studying in different universities of Kyrgyz Republic.

It was agreed to develop an MoU in the field of medical education which will be shared with PMDC for review.

CDA decides to build model village in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has decided to build a new model village in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT).

This model village will be built on 3621 kanal of land which will be completed within two years. The 4500 residential plots of 10-marla will be devel-

oped in this model village. A commercial center and three class 3 shopping centres will be built in this village. A Jamia mosque will be constructed and a health centre will also be established in this model village.

CDA official said all the plots of this model village will be allotted to those affected people

whose land was acquired by CDA for Park Enclave.

The plots will be given to the affected people of Mauza Kurri and Rihara in this model village.

This project has been facing dillydally for nine years. Now Islamabad High Court (IHC) ordered CDA to initiate this project and complete it within two years.

British Home Office delegation meets Interior Secretary

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation from the British Home Office headed by Simon Ridley met Interior Secretary Aftab Akbar Durrani to discuss issues of mutual interest. British High Commissioner Jane Marriott also participated in the meeting.

It was agreed in the meeting to further promote cooperation for the prevention of counter-terrorism and human trafficking. It was also agreed to further increase the cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of the two countries. The meeting also reviewed the progress on extradition agreements between Pakistan and the United Kingdom.

Simon Ridley informed the Interior Secretary about fake universities in the UK and discouraging people staying illegally on student visas in the United Kingdom.

The visa system for Pakistani nationals was being fully digitalised, whereby the visa acquisitions would become easier, he added.

Aftab Akbar Durrani said that Pakistan was providing all possible facilities for the transfer of Afghan refugees to Britain.

He informed the delegation that the government recently reduced the fee for overstaying of illegal migrants from \$800 to \$400.

Railways to ensure quality dining facilities in maximum passenger trains

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways is planning to attach quality dining facilities with most of its passenger trains that would help the travelers to provide fresh eatable items during their journey in the trains across the country.

In the new service, the passengers would enjoy a better environment with enhanced dining facilities as at a time, 45 passengers could take food in the upgraded dining car, an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP.

He said the premium dining car has a menu list of 40 food items, including barbecue and pizza while keeping in view demands of the passengers, ovens (Tandoors) have been installed to provide fresh roti (plain bread).

Initially, the official

said that two dining cars have been attached to Zakariya Express (Up and Down), followed by two more to be attached with the up and down trains of Hazara Express.

The official said that after this, five more trains would be equipped with restaurant on-wheel service, followed by the other ones.

"We are focusing on improving our other services too," he added. Earlier, Pakistan Railways launched a state-of-the-art dining car called 'Restaurant on Wheel' last month.

The modern dining car has been introduced initially for passengers travelling through Bahaudin Zakariya Express.

"Within its limited resources, the department is trying its level best to improve the services.

Besides introducing the modern dining car facility, Pakistan Railways has also decided to improve the service related to cleanliness and passengers' rest and sleeping," he added.

The official said that it is an air-conditioned dining car having a beautiful ambience. It is a restaurant on wheels where the passengers can enjoy quality delicious food like the restaurants in the cities.

Official in the Ministry of Railways said besides Tandoors, the dining car is equipped with microwave ovens and other facilities which are generally available in modern kitchens.

If someone doesn't want to take a meal in the dining car, waiters would serve them food on their seat, he added.

'Women-driven EV 'Pink scooties' to take over streets of Punjab soon: Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Provincial Transport Minister Ibrahim Hasan Murad said on Monday that the Punjab government has initiated a plan to introduce 'Pink EV Pink Scooties' to make women safer, which will provide livelihood to women for economic and domestic needs.

Talking to the PTV news channel, he said that the government of Punjab has initiated a program scheme to empower Pakistani females by introducing 'Pink Scooties', adding, that the government through a lucky draw will give over 2000 to 3000 scooties in the first phase of this scheme.

He explained that this scheme has various positive impacts on women and girls, adding, that women with Pink EV scooters will not wait at the bus stops for

long hours for buses, vans and other transport they can travel from one place to another with a safe and friendly atmosphere.

This ambitious initiative reflects the government's commitment to sustainable transportation solutions and environmental conservation, he added.

Talking about EV motor-bikes and Rickshaws, he said that this initiative aims to provide a sustainable and eco-friendly mode of transportation while promoting the use of electric vehicles.

He said the Punjab government has begun the registration of electric vehicles through the Punjab Bank of Pakistan, adding, that the government has offered a 95 per cent discount on the registration fee and a 75 per cent discount on the token tax of the vehicles.

He said we will give over 26 thousand electric motor-bikes and rickshaws to the public on an interest-free basis, adding, that key components of the Green Wheels program include allocating 2,000 electric three-wheeler bikes to special individuals, 2,000 for government employees, and another 2,000 for women in both government and private sectors, all with interest-free terms.

To another query about free transport facilities for students, he mentioned that the government was providing maximum relief to students, allowing them to travel for free on all Orange line Buses. To avail themselves of the free bus service, students are required to be in uniform and carry their school or college ID cards, he added.

Islamabad police witness 33% surge in fine collection during four months

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Capital Police have observed a significant uptick of 33 percent in the collection of fines related to issued challans for traffic violations during the last four months of the preceding year, in contrast to the initial eight months of 2023.

In the previous year, fines aimed at discouraging traffic violations in the federal capital were heightened following a formal notification from the Federal Ministry of Interior. This adjustment was implemented to bolster compliance with traffic rules and subsequently reduce violations.

The Islamabad Police noted a 33% increase in the collection of fines related to challans issued during the last four months of the previous year, corresponding to the tenure of the caretaker government, as compared to the initial eight

months of 2023. ICCPO Dr Akbar Nasir Khan emphasized that the escalated fines are designed to uphold the implementation of traffic rules and ensure stringent compliance, thereby playing a crucial role in preventing accidents.

Islamabad police force is dedicated to enhancing awareness among citizens regarding the significance of adhering to traffic laws. The rigorous enforcement of these regulations is vital for safeguarding lives and property.

In addition to the heightened fines, the Islamabad Capital Police plan to broadcast special radio programs on FM Radio 92.4 to educate the public about traffic regulations. Citizens are earnestly urged to respect traffic laws and actively contribute to transforming Islamabad into a safer and more civilized city.



RAWALPINDI: A view of banners displayed on poles at Airport Road in connection with upcoming general elections.

CARE announces classes

KABUL (Agencies): The CARE organization has announced the establishment of local classes for girls' students throughout Afghanistan, enabling them to complete two grades in a single calendar year and advance to the next grade. CARE published a report titled "Imagining the Fight for Girls' Rights in Afghanistan." CARE emphasizes that the instructors in these educational classes are from areas where girls are deprived of going to school.

Afghanistan exports reach \$166m

KABUL (BNA): The National Statistical and Information Authority (NSIA) states that the total value of the country's exports in the current solar year's month of Qaws (December 2023) was \$166.5 million. According to a statement issued by NSIA, the overall value of exports was \$166.5 million, while the total value of imports was \$791 million, based on the figures linked to the country's exports and imports last month.

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

Balkh agriculture sector suffers due to climate change



MAZAR-I-SHARIF (Pajhwok): Climate change has affected the agriculture sector of northern Balkh province and has reduced crops' yield, farmers said on Monday. A farmer from Dehdadi district Khwaja Habibullah, who has been associated with farming since 40 years, said he had never seen such a serious drought in his life. The agriculture sector

sustained financial losses due to the drought, with farmers bearing the brunt of the situation, he said. Abdul Sami, another farmer, said the yield of crops had dropped significantly due to lack of rains and snowfall and as a result, the farmers suffered a lot. "If it does not rain or snow that protects crops from pests, most of the crops will dry up," he said.

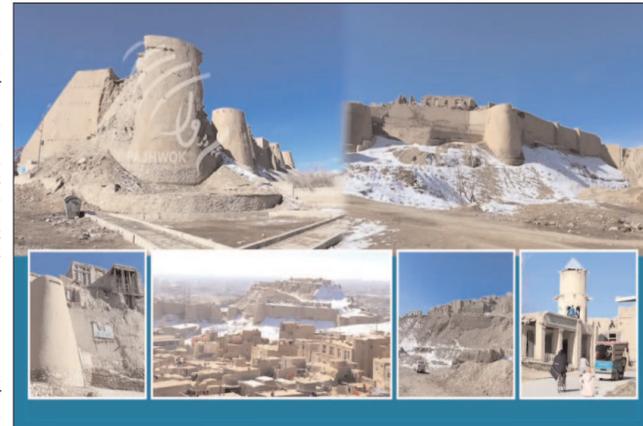
Gull Mohammad, another farmer, also expressed his concern about the lack of rain and snow this year as well. He said: "Farmers are worried that the rain-fed crops will not grow, the available water cannot irrigate our fields, God knows what will happen." Provincial officials admit drought-related problems. Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation department head

Mohammad Hussain Azimi told Pajhwok Afghan News the mercury was high this year compared to the previous years. Azimi said: "It rained around 200 millimeters and 500mm annually in the past, unfortunately it rained only 8mm this year." In addition to Balkh province, Kabul and other provinces also received less rain this year.

Some historical sites in Ghazni on the verge of collapse

GHAZNI CITY (Pajhwok): Residents of southern Ghazni province say some historical sites in the province are on the verge of destruction, asking the government to pay attention to their preservation. Abdul Rahman, a tribal leader, told Pajhwok Afghan News that many historic monuments and cultural sites existed in Ghazni, but they got destroyed due to lack of attention.

He said one of the historical monuments in Ghazni was Ghazni fort, which was about 3,500 years old, and 15 of the total 36 towers had collapsed and the rest were on the verge of collapse. He said: "The minarets of Ghazni, the old city, Bala Hisar, Hazrat Usmani's mosque, Begum Minaret, Sardar Tapa, Sheikh Abdul Salam tomb, Sheikh Abdul Razzaq's tomb and some other historical places and monuments have a great value, but are in worse condition." Another tribal elder, Sufi Malakhil said that if Ghazni's historic sites were not preserved, they would get ruined.



He said: "Each cultural work and monument is actually a leaf of our proud history, if these sites get destroyed, it will mean a page from history is vanished. The disappearance of pages means that the history, cultural and continuity of values between our generation will disappear." Mullah Hamidullah Nisar, director of information and culture of Ghazni,

told Pajhwok: "Efforts are underway and we have contacted the ministry several times in this regard, so that many historical sites of Ghazni can be restored." According to him, in the beginning of this year, 10 historical sites were damaged in Ghazni due to earthquake, including Ghazni fort, the floor stones of the minarets, and several other areas. These

sites will be restored this year, he said. He asked international cultural organizations to extend their support in protecting historical monuments. About 100 historical sites and monuments in Ghazni are registered with the Ministry of Information and Culture. Ghazni was declared the Center of Islamic Civilization in 2013.

No trade via Torkham, Kharlachi as talks fizzle out

PESHAWAR (Pajhwok): Pakistan-Afghanistan trade via Torkham remains suspended as officials failed to reach an agreement on resolving the issue of visa restrictions on truck drivers. A meeting between Torkham-based officials from the two countries fizzled out on Sunday when no trucker was allowed to cross the Durand Line, Dawn reported.

Although the deadlock on travel curbs persisted, authorities agreed to convey messages from each side to their respective seniors, the newspaper said. With no breakthrough in sight, customs officials "advised" Pakistani fruit merchants to transport their merchandise back to Peshawar for safe storage. Enforcing the visa and passport conditions for Afghan drivers and helpers, Pakistan shut the busy crossing — a major commercial hub — for all sorts of cargo traffic on Saturday. In a tit-for-tat response, Afghan border police personnel also imposed simi-

lar curbs on Pakistani drivers. As a consequence, cargo traffic came to a halt. Meanwhile, trade between the neighbours through the Kharlachi crossing in Kurram also came to a standstill. Several Pakistani trucks loaded with fish were denied entry into Afghanistan via Kharlachi,

said customs clearing agent Qari Nazim Gul Shinwari. Due to the closure of the Torkham crossing, he told reporters, they had sent around 14 trucks to Kharlachi. But they were refused entry into Afghanistan. Amid traffic congestion on both sides of the

Torkham gate, customs and security officials continued trying to break the stalemate. With long queues of goods-laden vehicles stranded on both sides, not a single truck was allowed to enter Afghanistan or Pakistan on Sunday. Pedestrian movement, however, stayed unaffected.



Greater government support urged for women entrepreneurs

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): The owner of only women restaurant in western Herat province said she helped generate work opportunities for a number of women by opening a restaurant. Malalai Farotan, the owner of Subh Bahar Restaurant, during an interview with Pajhwok Afghan News said she opened this restaurant in Herat City, the provincial capital, seven months earlier in order to create work opportunities for women.

The inauguration of the restaurant was warmly welcomed and that she was able to provided 14 women with employment opportunities during the period. Farotan said that they serve their customers traditional food in the restaurant, the customers could get food in the restaurant as well as ordered food for their outside events. As part of innovations, Sobh Bahar restaurant also created a library inside the restaurant for her customers so they can study besides getting food in the restaurant. Malalai Farotan asked the government to take practical steps in supporting the female entrepreneurs and businesswomen to become capable to win bread for their families.

The Restaurant Chef Maryam Amiri told Pajhwok that she felt calm and safe in her working environment and she cooked four types of food (Mantoo, Ashak, Bulani & Sambosa) and accepted orders out of the restaurant. She added were no men

staffs in the restaurant and all of the services were provided for the female customers by females. She as a bread winner of her family said, such working environments are needed all over the city of Herat for females especially. The customers of this restaurant also said they felt very comfortable in this restaurant and by visiting this place with their family members they experienced a different environment. One of the customers of this restaurant Hamida said that she bought ready food from this restaurant for her family or served the food here in this restaurant. She added, so far they arranged some invitations and ceremonial programs in this restaurant, they all felt safe and comfortable because of the all females staffers. Some of the experts of economic affairs believe that the pri-

mate sector, women's business supporting organizations and the government should expand the field of women's business in the country. Economic Affairs Expert Gullab Haidari said the Afghanistan Chambers and Commerce and Investment (ACCI) has to play a major role in the promotion of businesswomen and entrepreneurs and there was need for these institutions to introduce new ways of promoting women businesses. Bahar Saljoqi, head of the Women Chambers, Commerce and Investment (WCCI) referring to the growing women entrepreneur interest in the business said the WCCI had taken steps to create more opportunities for business women. However, the officials of the local administration said that they had provided all the necessary

facilities to the traders and also cooperating with the businesspeople. Maulvi Nisar Ahmad Ilyas, the governor's spokesman, that they were cooperating with businessmen and a lot of efforts had been made in this regard. According to Ilyas, the local administration was creating a suitable environment for commercial activities in this province and has also organized several exhibitions to support businessmen, especially women businessmen. According to the WACCI officials, currently 560 women in Herat are engaged in business activities officially and more than ten thousand others are engaged in informal business activities, of which twenty to thirty percent of them are involved in modern trade and the rest of them trade traditionally.

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Dollar dips 21pc against afghani but prices fall by 13pc last year

KABUL (Pajhwok): Year 2023 saw the prices of essential daily-use commodities falling by up to 13 percent in Afghanistan and the value of the afghani surging by 21 percent against the US dollar compared to 2022, Pajhwok has learnt. However, in international markets, the prices of basic items dropped by an average of 14 percent in 2023.

Some people complain prices fell less than the increase in the value of afghani and some analysts say the rates fell slightly because the economic mafia does not allow them to fall, along with other reasons. Analysts say that the government should seriously prevent monopoly and hoarding. But the Kabul municipality says it strictly monitors the rates and allows no one to be involved in hoarding. According to Pajhwok's weekly economic reports, on Dec. 31 2022, the price of a 49-kilogram of Kazakhstani flour was 2,200afs, a 24-kg bag of Pakistani rice 3,000afs, a 49-kilogram sack of sugar 3,000afs, 16-litre tin of cooking oil 1,800afs, one kilogram of Indonesian green tea 350afs and the same amount of black

African tea was 400afs. On the same date, one litre of petrol was sold for 75afs, one litre diesel for 91afs and a kilogram of liquefied gas 62afs. But a year after on December 31st of 2023, a 49-kilogram sack of Kazakh flour cost 1,600afs, a 24 kilograms of rice 2,600afs, 49-kilograms of sugar 3,100afs, 16-litre cooking oil 1,350afs, a kilogram of Indonesian green tea 350afs and the same amount of African black team 400afs. Also, one litre of petrol was sold for 72afs, one litre of diesel 61afs and a kilogram of liquefied gas 51afs. But last year, one US dollar was traded for 89afs, but this year it exchanges rate dropped to 70.3afs. Compared to 2022, the value of the dollar against the local currency fell by 21 percent, but the rates of essential goods dropped by an average of 13 percent in 2023.

Rates of goods in international market According to the information of the Trading Economic page, compared to 2022, the prices of basic goods in the world market fell by 14 percent on average in 2023. On December 31st of 2022, the price of per pound sugar was

\$18.9, a kilogram of tea \$2.92, wheat (USD/Bu) \$767, rice (USD/cwt) \$14.9, Palm Oil (MYR/T) \$897.18, Crude Oil WTI (USD/Bbl) \$76.3, and Natural gas (USD/MMBtu) \$3.67. But on the same date in 2023, the price of sugar per pound was \$20.9, a kilogram of tea \$2.7, wheat (USD/Bu) \$618, rice (USD/cwt) \$17.1, Palm Oil (MYR/T) \$795.31, Crude Oil WTI (USD/Bbl) \$72.4, and Natural gas

(USD/MMBtu) \$2.83. high rates. Nasser Ahmad, another resident of Kabul, acknowledged that after the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate, the prices had been controlled to an extent, but considering the decline in the dollar's rate and unemployment, the government should take more serious steps in this regard. "The value of the afghani is increasing with each passing day and we ask businessmen to consider the purchas-

ing power of the people, if someone does injustice, the government should deal them legally," he added. "Mafia behind price-hike" Abdul Nasir Reshtia, an economic affairs expert, said preventing the smuggling of dollars from Afghanistan, the use of foreign currency in business transactions as international humanitarian assistance led to the increase in the value of the afghani against the dollar. He said: "Afghanistan is an importing country, it buys all goods in dollars, but why the increase in the value of the afghani has no much effort on the prices, this is because Afghanistan does not have an organized railways system, it does not have a well-equipped transportation system, and the prices of goods imported to the country are very high. Also, there is still mafia that has monopoly and is involved in hoarding and does not let the prices drop."

According to him, the government needs to seriously fight to break the monopoly of mafia and make the markets competitive so that the prices of goods could decrease. He said the Afghan govern-

ment should create other facilities in the fields of export, domestic production and investment in order to maintain the value of the afghani. Niamatullah Barakzai, a spokesman for the Kabul municipality, told Pajhwok Afghan News that their department has been distributing price lists in the markets of Kabul since last two years and was closely monitoring their implementation. He added: "Currency alone does not have an effect on commodity prices, but it can be a reason. Essential items are mostly imported goods and sometimes their prices go up in the world markets, as you know when the war in Ukraine started, there was no oil in Europe, the dollar was in stable, but the prices went up once." "Of course, this has an impact on Afghanistan's market, and the issue of transport and distance is also important, but Alhamdulillah, this problem has been mostly solved now," he explained.

Barakzai said if last year's price lists were compared with the current ones, the prices of basic goods had changed a lot and had decreased. He said the municipality strongly prevented hoarding.

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Source of power is people: Bilawal

F.P. Report

MEERO KHAN/QAMBER-SHAHDAD-KOT/LARKANA: Chairman Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has said that Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) wants to play alone in the field by keeping opponents out of the pitch, as many PPP candidates were not allotted the arrow symbol in Punjab. "We will fight with unwavering determination and courage. People support us, we will form the government by thwarting the 'fourth time prime minister conspiracy,' he vowed.

According to the press release issued by Media Cell Bilawal House, the PPP chairman, while addressing a press conference in Meero Khan town of Qambar-Shahdadkot district, said that the election campaign by his party had been going on for a long time and now it seems that the elections are near. "We are going from place to place seeking the support of the people of Pakistan. Because the PPP is the only party that trusts the people, whose manifesto says that the source of power is the people," he added.

Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that the solution to the problems of inflation, unemployment and poverty faced by the nation is the 10-point "People's Economic Agreement" presented by him. He said that the purpose of politics is to serve the people, solve the problems faced by them, and represent them. "What our old politicians are doing is the politics of hatred and division. Their politics is not on a manifesto, but they have turned differences into personal rivalries. We appeal to the people to support a new thinking on February 8, and support a new politics that focuses on serving the people," he added.

Termining the devastation caused by the floods during the year 2022 as a major issue of Sindh, the PPP chairman said that due to unprecedented floods last year not only thousands of houses destroyed, but also 50 percent of the government schools in the province were also wiped away. He said that as Foreign Minister, he had brought the whole world together and arranged funds for the rehabilitation of flood victims as well as convinced the federal government to provide financial assistance. "I was assured, by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), by everyone, that there would be no hindrance in the work being done for the flood victims. But right now, according to my reports that there are constant obstacles in this regard," he pointed out. He said the construction of flood victims' houses, awarding the land ownership to them and funding from the federal government were currently stalled.

Pointing out the lack of level playing field in general elections due next month, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that

the Punjab administration was targeting PPP candidates under the influence of PML-N, adding that the arrow symbol was not being allotted to PPP candidates. He said that the MNA candidate from Chakwal, the candidates from PP-20, PP-21, NA-59 Talagang, PP-119 Toba Tek Singh, NA-122 Lahore were not given the arrow symbol. "Of the five provincial assembly seats below the constituency I am contesting from NA-127, Fayaz Bhatti has also been denied the arrow symbol," he said, adding that the tactics were adopted by the ROs under pressure from the PML-N, and the ECP has been approached on this matter.

Sharing the schedule of his election campaign with media, the PPP chairman said that he will give a full launch and briefing on his manifesto, People's Economic Agreement, in Larkana tomorrow (Tuesday). He said he would address rallies in Badin and Sanghar on January 17, Naushahro Feroze and Dadu on January 18, Rahim Yar Khan on January 19, Kot Addu on January 20 and Lahore on January 21.

Addressing the people of Lahore and South Punjab, he said: "Come and support the PPP, now the election is between the arrow and the lion. I am sure the people will support the PPP. Because the PPP is the only option that can not only defeat the PML-N, but also bury the politics of hatred and division forever by uniting everyone."

In response to a question, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that there is no power at this time who wants to postpone the elections, while Chief Justice Qazi Faiz had also declared that elections will be held on February 8. "Those who had the misconception that there will be no elections will suffer. Those who were trying to postpone the elections would feel the harm, and those who wanted to run away from results, they would also suffer, Insha Allah," he added.

PPP chairman said that after winning the elections, his top priority would be to implement the 10-point "People's Economic Agreement". He said that the budgets would not be made in Karachi but in the light of public opinion by holding "Open Kachehris". He said that among other projects, construction of a new dam on the lines of "Darawat Dam" in Qambar Shahdadkot district would also be among his priorities, so that the area could be protected from flood water coming from Balochistan every other year. PPP Women Wing Central President Faryal Talpur, PPP Sindh chapter President Nisar Ahmed Khuro and other leaders were also present on the occasion. Meanwhile, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, during his visit, was accorded an unprecedented welcome by the Jiyalas and the people.

Missing ex-PTI candidate returns home, IHC told

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Monday disposed of the petition, seeking the recovery of Abdullah Mumtaz Kahlun, former PTI candidate for the Punjab Assembly (PA) seat from Sargodha, who had gone missing from the Islamabad International Airport a few days ago despite safe landing order by the IHC, has returned home.

IHC Chief Justice (CJ) Justice Aamer Farooq heard the petition. Babar Awan, counsel for Kahlun, told the IHC on Monday that his client's family had informed him that Kahlun was finally home.

On the court order, the officials of Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Interior and the deputy attorney general attended the hearing. It is to be noted that following the news of Kahlun's disappearance, which had sent shockwaves across the nation, the IHC had on Tuesday issued notice to the concerned authorities to trace him with the help of CCTV footages.

Torrential rains leave 11 dead in Brazil

RIO DE JANEIRO: Torrential rains that turned avenues into rivers have killed at least 11 people in Brazil.

The storm hit northern parts of Rio de Janeiro particularly hard, the Fire Department said. People in the area died in landslides, drownings and electrocutions. Firefighters were still searching for a woman who went missing after her car fell into a river.

Water from the storm reached the roofs of cars on some stretches of Avenida de Brasil, a major thoroughfare in the city. Mayor Eduardo Paes decreed the situation an "emergency" and urged people to stay at home for their own safety and to avoid disrupting rescue and recovery efforts. A dozen bus lines shut down and several metro stations were closed because of water on the tracks.

Some parts of the city received a month's worth of the usual level of rain in January in just 24 hours. A report from firefighters showed they had responded to 200 storm-related events. In Acari, one of the worst affected neighbourhoods, waters flooded the basement offices of the Ronaldo Gazolla Municipal Hospital and businesses were hit hard. "I arrived at work and everything was flooded. Every year the same thing happens when it rains hard here, it turns into a pool, a lagoon," said Alexandre Gomes, trying to remove water from the store where she works. A national agency that monitors natural disasters said there was a high risk of landslides in eight towns in the surrounding Rio de Janeiro state. — Aljazeera

May 9 riots: Police arrest suspect

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Lahore police on Monday claimed to have arrested another suspect involved in the May 9 riots. Nageebullah, a resident of Bajaur district, was wanted by Sarwar Road police in a case related to vandalism on May 9 riots, that were triggered across the country after the arrest of the former prime minister in the Al-Qadir Trust case. The police said the presence of Nageebullah was confirmed at Jinnah House during vandalism with the help of geo fencing.

Last year in November, Karachi police arrested a suspect involved in setting a Peoples Bus on fire during the May 9 riots. According to details, District East Police arrested the suspect named Zeeshan involved in terrorism and riots on May 9 during an action near Shahra-e-Faisal.

The countrywide protest broke out on May 9 after the former prime minister was taken into custody on the premises of the Islamabad High Court in the Al-Qadir Trust "corruption" case. Corps Commanders House in Lahore and other military installations were also attacked by the violent protesters.



ISLAMABAD: Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf exchanging views with High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to Pakistan, Admiral (R) Ravindra C Wijegunaratne at Naval Headquarters.

Israeli bombardment kills 55 in Gaza residential areas

GAZA: Israeli bombardment on homes in Khan Younis left at least 33 people dead and dozens more wounded. Most of the injured were shifted to Nasser Hospital, Al-Jazeera reported. On the other hand, 22 people were killed and a huge number of others injured as a result of Israeli forces targeting al-Thalatheni Street in the central Gaza Strip.

In a makeshift tent of cloth and plastic, Ismail Nabhan huddled by a fire with his children and grandchildren as his family, displaced by the war in Gaza, struggled to stay warm. "Two days ago there were strong winds, we tried all night to fasten the nylon. We're living in a desert and the sea is in front of us -- the cold has multiplied," said the 60-year-old, who has fled his home in central Gaza.

Thousands of tents have been erected by some of the 1.9 million people the United Nations estimates have been internally displaced in the Gaza Strip since the war erupted on October 7. Israeli tanks and aircraft hit targets in southern and central Gaza and there were fierce gun battles in some areas as the conflict reached 100 days since the October 7 outset of deadly war by Israel.

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. Fighting was 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 Palestinian resistance fighters were martyred.

The military also said its forces destroyed several rocket pits used by Hamas to fire missiles at Israel. "We

are not seekers of wars. We are seekers of freedom," Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said through video link in Istanbul, adding the group's unprecedented October 7 attack was, in part, a response to the years-long Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Family members of Palestinians killed in Israel's military campaign in Gaza shared grief-ridden stories with thousands of protesters who gathered in downtown Washington on Saturday demanding an immediate ceasefire. In one of the largest pro-Palestinian demonstrations to date in the US capital, the protesters repeated their call for US President Joe Biden to stop sending arms to Israel and chanted "free Palestine" and "cease-fire now."

Some people chanted: "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." Adam Abosherieah, one of the speakers, said over 100 family members, including his 83-year-old father, mother, and brother, have been killed in Israeli air strikes. "Dozens of my family members' bodies are still under the rubble," Abosherieah, a pharmacist from New Jersey, said. "President Biden can easily put a stop to this genocide ... He can easily pick up the phone and call Israel to stop this madness."

Hamas armed wing spokesman Abu Ubaida said that the fate of many Israeli hostages has become unknown. In his first televised appearance for several weeks, marking the 100th day since the outbreak of the war, Abu Ubaida said many of the hostages "may have been killed", blaming their fate on Israel. He added "any talks before stopping the Israeli aggression are worthless."

The October 7 cross border attack into Israel came in response to 100 years of "massacres against our people carried by the occupier and its

gangs," he added. China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi called for the establishment of a Palestinian state and a ceasefire 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. 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. — Aljazeera

Imran lost facilitators and patronage: Maryam

F.P. Report

OKARA: Senior Vice President of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Maryam Nawaz while referring to the recent resignations tendered by two SC judges has said that every individual involved in committing excesses to Nawaz Sharif was facing ultimate justice.

Speaking after formally launching her election campaign at Iqbal Stadium in Okara on Monday, she appreciated the people who remained loyal to Nawaz Sharif and his party despite the tough period they had gone through.

Despite fog and intense cold weather a large number of people attended the rally. Maryam Nawaz said, "You are acting like pharaohs, but are now running away like rats. A person standing for truth like

Nawaz never back down. Nawaz had left the office with grace, they are escaping while trying to hide their faces."

She said a terrorist party couldn't get an election symbol and proposed "petrol bomb" as election symbol for them to share their reality. The PTI chairman was in habit of favouritism when the judges used to greet him by saying "good to see you", she said and added that he had lost the facilitators and patronage.

"The facility of issuing decisions on basis of phone [calls] made by the mother-in-law [of former chief justice Umar Ata Bandial] isn't available now," she said. "You and your facilitators have been caught red-handed while cheating." Nawaz was removed from the office again and again, but brought back

each time by these umpires, Maryam said while pointing to the crowd and asked the people to give a heavy mandate to the three-time prime minister for an effective government and swift decision making.

The PML-N chief organizer said that Nawaz was already busy in devising plans to ensure cheaper services and goods to the masses and promised that she would work for extending their basic rights to women, including employment opportunities.

She also told the gathering that modern health and education facilities would be provided at district level after winning the February 8 elections. Earlier, a charged crowd greeted her at Phoolnagar in Kasur, as she reached the town on her way to Okara from Lahore.

North Korea says it tested solid-fuel missile

SEOUL: North Korea said it has tested a new solid-fuel missile fitted with a hyper-sonic warhead as it continued efforts to develop more powerful, harder-to-detect weaponry. The launch took place and came as Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui headed to Moscow amid concerns in the United States and elsewhere that Pyongyang was selling weapons to Russia for use in Ukraine in return for Russian technological expertise.

Detected by neighbouring Japan and South Korea, the launch was designed to test the reliability of new multi-stage, high-thrust solid-fuel engines and an intermediate-range hypersonic manoeuvrable controlled warhead, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported on Monday. KCNA added that the test-firing "never affected the security of any neighbouring country and had nothing to do with the regional situation".

The missile flew towards the East Sea, travelling approximately 1,000km (621 miles), Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement, adding that authorities in Seoul, Washington, DC and Tokyo were analysing the specifications. Japan's Defence Ministry said its

maximum altitude was at least 50km (30 miles). North Korea's last missile test was of a Hwasong-18 solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which it fired into the East Sea on December 18.

It previously tested new solid-fuel engines for an intermediate ballistic missile on November 11 and November 14. Leader Kim Jong Un last week branded Seoul his "principal enemy" and warned he would not hesitate to annihilate South Korea. "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 as saying by KCNA.

Analysts said the timing of the latest test was a concern. "This launch is more than just a test as it comes immediately after the Kim regime escalated warlike rhetoric toward South Korea and just before North Korea's foreign minister travels to Russia," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul said in emailed comments.

"Pyongyang's show of force should be of concern beyond Seoul, as its military cooperation with Moscow

adds to the violence in Ukraine, and because it may be more willing to challenge the U.S. and its allies while global attention is fixed on the Middle East." In separate KCNA commentary on Monday, North Korea accused Seoul of escalating tensions in the region with military drills and calls for more armaments by South Korean officials.

"Even a little spark can be a catalyst for enormous physical conflicts between the two most hostile countries," the commentary said. Analysts say Kim's move to designate South Korea as a separate, enemy state, could potentially help justify the use of nuclear weapons against Seoul in a future war.

Despite its difficult economic situation, Pyongyang conducted a record-breaking series of weapons tests in 2023, including its first solid-fuel ballistic missile, which experts called a major technological breakthrough. It also put its first spy satellite into orbit, after two failed attempts. Analysts say it benefited from Russian expertise after Kim travelled to Russia's Vostochny Cosmodrome to meet President Vladimir Putin. — Aljazeera

Volcano erupts in Iceland, sending lava into fishing town

GRANDAVIK: A volcano has erupted in Iceland, sending molten lava flows to the outskirts of a small fishing town and engulfing homes. At least three houses were set alight as lava reached the edge of the port of Grindavik, according to live images broadcast on public television.

There were no reports of deaths or injuries and airline flights were not affected. Iceland's President Gudni Johannesson described the disaster as a "black day" for his country. "No lives are in danger, although infrastructure may be under threat," Johannesson said on the social media site X.

The eruption occurred just before 8am local time (8:00 GMT) after local authorities evacuated the 4,000-strong population of

the town following a series of small earthquakes, the Icelandic Meteorological Office said. A crack that opened in the ground about 450 metres (500 yards) from Grindavik had turned into a fissure measuring about 900 metres (984 yards) long as of 6.45pm, the Meteorological Office said.

A second fissure opened at about midday on the edge of town, measuring about 100 metres (109 yards) by evening, according to the office. It is the second time the volcano located southwest of the capital Reykjavik has erupted in less than a month and the North Atlantic nation's fifth volcanic eruption in less than three years.

Grindavik was evacuated in November after large cracks opened in the earth

in advance of an eruption on December 18. Before eruption, emergency workers had been building defensive walls around the town, which residents had returned to on December 22, but had not completed work on the barriers. Local resident Sveinn Ari Gudjonsson described the disaster as "tragic" for the close-knit community, which he likened to a family.

"It's unreal, it's like watching a film," Gudjonsson, 55, told the AFP news agency. Iceland, which is home to about 370,000 people and located some 1,300km (807 miles) northwest of the United Kingdom, is home to more than 30 active volcanoes, making the north European island a prime destination for volcano tourism. — Aljazeera

Govt to hold parleys with disgruntled Baloch leaders

QUETTA (PPI): Balochistan's Caretaker Minister for Information Jan Achakzai said today that the caretaker government was ready to hold parleys with disgruntled Baloch leaders.

Addressing a press conference at Balochistan Civil Secretariat, he said that people of Balochistan had rejected those nurturing foreign agenda, adding that Pak-Army could not be reversed from its principled stance.

The information minister said that those, who had misled the nation, were threatening to go to the mountains, adding that it was known as to how to settle score with any persons hiding in mountains and caves. Achakzai said that the caretaker government had restored railway line between Sibi and Harmai after 17 years, which had revived economic and other activities. He said that the government had introduced single document regime policy for travelling along the border, adding that Chaman and Chagai borders were open for all those who had completed all the legal formalities.

PEC shocked over death of employees

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Election Commissioner Khayber Pakhtunkhwa Shamsah Khan has expressed deep sorrow and grief over the tragic death of 4 employees of Election Commission of Pakistan due to gas leakage in Kashmir district of Sindh. He said this today while addressing a condolence reference for the funeral of a deceased employee. And the staff participated in the condolence reference.

The deceased include an election officer, two data entry operators and a sub-assistant. Provincial Election Commissioner and Joint Provincial Election Commissioner in their message expressed heartfelt sympathy and regret to the families of the deceased.

PTI ex-MPs approached PHC against electoral 'symbol'

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) former lawmakers especially prominent leader Pakistan Shehryar Afridi of the has approached the Peshawar High Court (PHC) to challenge the allotment of the election symbol "bottle" by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), on Monday.

Moreover, former provincial minister Kamran Bangash, Asif Khan, Aftab Alam and Shafiqullah had challenged allotment of 'symbol' for general election scheduled on 8th February.

The petition was filed by Syed Sikandar Hayat Shah on behalf of petitioner. ECP granted violin to Kamran Bangash while his opponent obtained piano which will create confusion for voters.

also challenged their electoral symbol with similar grounds.

The ECP assigned electoral symbols to PTI leaders, now contesting as independent candidates, for the 2024 general elections scheduled for February 8. ECP assigned the symbol of a bottle to Afridi, which has prompted him to file a petition with the provincial court. Former federal minister Afridi contends that the allocation of symbols often prioritizes ex-members, highlighting a concern within his application. He contends that candidates' opinions should be considered before finalising the assignment of election symbols.

Afridi claims that despite repeated attempts to seek clarification from the Returning Officer (RO), he has received no response. This perceived lack of communication has further fueled his legal challenge against the ECP's decision. The petition filed with the PHC names the ECP, District Returning Officers (DROs), and ROs as respondents, marking them

PBA demands removal of check posts

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar Bar Association (PBA) provided 24 hours ultimatum for removal unnecessary check posts and policemen from the premises of High Court and District Courts otherwise they will be compelled to initiate adverse action, on Monday.

In this regard PBA held an emergency meeting which was chaired by the president Ishaq Khalil while press secretary Luqman advocate, Peshawar High Court Bar Association president Tariq Afridi, Lajbar Khan, Nauman Kakakhel, Noor Alam Khan, Fida Gul, Azhar Yousof, Gohar Salim, Shakeel Gillani, Alam Khan, Nowroz Khan, Maulana Shamsul-Haq and Yasir Khattak along with other lawyers were present.