

Candidate escapes in firing
F.P. Report

SWABI: PTI provincial assembly candidate for upcoming general elections escaped in firing on vehicle here on Tuesday. Unidentified armed men sprayed bullets on PTI candidate for PK-49, Irfan Jadoon but he survived in the assault and attackers fled the scene. Irfan Jadoon said that he was returning after attending a funeral procession when unknown gun sprayed two bullets on his vehicle.

PTI moves IHC
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder challenged Toshakhana and Al-Qadir Trust cases jail trial against him in Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Tuesday. The PTI founder and former prime minister Imran Khan filed two petitions against jail trial notification for Toshkhana and Al-Qadir Trust cases. NAB chairman and others have been made party in the case.



@thefrontierpost

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

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIX

No. 360

Regd. No. 241

RAJAB 06 1445 -- WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17 2024

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30



DAVOS: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq shaking hands with US Special Envoy on Climate John Kerry on the sidelines of World Economic Forum.

PHC disposed off contempt plea against ECP

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) dispose-of Contempt of Court plea against Election Commission of Pakistan after Supreme Court of Pakistan decision regarding upholding stripping of 'bat' as electoral symbol.

PHC's divisional bench comprised of Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Syed Arshad Ali dispose-of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf plea against ECP didn't complying with court's order for uploading party's certificate on website as well as allotment of 'bat' as electoral symbol.

PTI's counsel Shah Faisal Ilyas advocate argued that contempt of court plea isn't maintainable after Supreme Court of Pakistan decision set-aside the PHC's judgment regarding allotment of 'bat' as electoral symbol.

IG to appear before court in case of police failure: Inspector General

(IG) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to appear before Peshawar High Court (PHC) in case of police's failure in recovery of minor children on next hearing, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim observed, on Tuesday.

PHC's divisional bench comprising of Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and Justice Shakeel Ahmad heard plea regarding illegal confinement of children by their relatives while denying meeting with mother.

The counsel Umair Iqbal advocate argued that the petitioner is resident of Umarzai area of Charsadda district and a widow who was expelled from house by her-in-laws after dead of her husband named Sher Muhammad in 2021. He added that now working at different homes as daily wage laborer. PHC's divisional bench comprising of Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Syed Arshad Ali dispose-of the contempt of court plea. He argued that three minors named Sajawal Sher, Bilawal Sher and Danyal Sher

12, 9 and six years respectively were forcefully taking custody by their uncle Hassan along with sisters from the petitioner.

The counsel argued that the petitioner is not allowed to meet her children who are in possession of her-in-law for three years which is un-Islamic on one hand as well as unconstitutional. The petitioner approached PHC Human Right Cell as police didn't act despite several complaints in this regard, the counsel added.

Investigation Officer informed that the children custody is denied by their uncle and aunties on court inquiry. However, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim said then where are them? If they didn't animate with their mother and family denied their guardianship. PHC's divisional bench comprising of Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and Justice Shakeel Ahmad ordered recovery of children till next hearing otherwise IG Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to appear before court in this regard.

PM meets US Special Climate envoy

DAVOS (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Tuesday met US Presidential Special Envoy on Climate John Kerry on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum.

During the meeting, they discussed the local and global impacts of climate change. The two leaders also discussed the climate change related challenges being faced by the developing countries.

Meanwhile, the Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar met Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum. During the meeting, they discussed ways to promote trade and investment between the two countries. The prime minister is attending the 54th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland.

Meanwhile, the Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar emphasized the immediate need to realize the true potential of Pakistan's agricultural sector by scaling up investments in its modernization and mechanization for achieving food security.

He was talking to Brian Sikes, Chief Executive Officer of Cargill Inc - the largest private American global food corporation, who called on him here on the sidelines of the 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF). The prime minister appreciated Cargill's role in strengthening Pakistan-US trade relations and cooperation in the agricultural sector.

He also highlighted the government's initiatives for food security, especially the innovative initiatives in the agricultural sector under the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). Highlighting the government's measures to promote business and investment, the prime minister talked about the establishment of the SIFC, its measures to promote foreign investment in various sectors in a short period of time, and its positive effects. Brian Sikes lauded the facilities provided by the Government of Pakistan for investment in various sectors, especially agriculture and food security.

Asif replaces Omar as ECP secretary

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Almost a week after Omar Hamid Khan stepped down as Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) secretary, the electoral body Tuesday appointed Syed Asif Hussain to the key post ahead of the February 8 polls.

The development comes after Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikander Sultan Raja approved Khan's — who served as the electoral body's secretary from July 2021 to January 2024 — resignation while waiving the one-month notice period for the veteran bureaucrat. "ECP Secretary Omar Hamid Khan is an intelligent and hardworking officer, who is performing his duties with diligence. He is currently on medical rest due to some health issues. He will return to his duties immediately after his health recovery," the statement from the ECP read.

Meanwhile, the CEC has appointed Hussain, who was serving as a special secretary, as the ECP's new Secretary. The newly appointed ECP official had earlier undertaken the said additional charge in light of Khan's absence. Furthermore, the electoral body has also notified multiple transfers and postings of officers in the "public interest". The ECP has appointed Saeed Gul, who was serving as Punjab's Provincial Election Commissioner, as Director General Elections Cell & Head of Elections Wing at the electoral body's Islamabad secretariat. Meanwhile, Muhammad Farid Afridi, who was serving as Additional Director General Elections I, has replaced Ajiaz Anwer Chohan as the new Provincial Election Commissioner for Balochistan — with Chohan being appointed as Punjab's Election Commissioner.

ECP fears election delay

— directs officials to refrain from changing electoral symbols amid printing of ballot papers

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Tuesday expressed fears that the general polls could be delayed further if the symbols of candidates were changed despite signs already being allocated to them.

Pakistan's general elections have already been delayed by months, with some political actors demanding further postponements citing various reasons. However, the Supreme Court has directed officials to ensure polls take place on February 8.

In a statement, the polling authority said after the allotment of the election symbols, political actors are "having them changed through various forums". "It should be noted that after the allotment of the election symbols, the election commission has ordered the printing of ballot papers to the three printing corporations and the printing work has started," the statement mentioned.

The statement comes hours after sources told media that the election commission is mulling over the prospects of delaying polls for some constituencies if high courts allow independent candidates to change their electoral symbols. In a meeting headed by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikander Sultan Raja, the issue of appeals before high courts seeking changes in symbols was put forward, to which it was suggested that the dates could be amended for certain constituencies, the sources said.

The official version was along the lines as the ECP said: "If the process of changing the election symbols continues, then on the one hand, there is a fear of delay in the election because the ballot papers will have to be reprinted, for which the time is already limited, and on the other hand, the special paper ballot papers will be wasted." Stressing the wastage of paper, which is imported and Pakistan's already facing an acute balance of payment crisis, the ECP said for the 2018 elections, 800 tonnes of paper was used for printing the ballot paper, while this time, it is estimated that 2,070 tons of paper will be used in the 2024 elections.

Similarly, 11,700 candidates participated in the 2018 elections, while 18,059 candidates are partaking in the forthcoming polls. In 2018, 220 million ballot papers were printed, while this time 260 million ballot papers are being printed. In this regard, the election commission is holding a meeting on how to deal with this situation and how to ensure the implementation of the commission's repeated instructions not to change election symbols.

"A proposal is also being considered that if this process of changing election symbols does not stop, there will be no other option but to postpone the elections in such constituencies," the statement read. The development comes after Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders moved the Peshawar High Court (PHC) against the allotment of their symbols, stating that the election commission was in violation of the law.

However, the high court dismissed the petitions of the PTI leaders, including Shehryar Afridi, Asif Khan, Kamran Bangash, and Aftab Alam, who are contesting the elections as independent candidates following their party losing the 'bat' symbol. Electoral symbols — unique pictorial identifiers — are handed out by the ECP to political parties and candidates. Parties usually have long-standing symbols, which, for the PTI, was the cricket bat, referencing party founder Imran Khan being a celebrated former captain of the national cricket team.

The symbols appear on ballot papers, with voters able to put a stamp on their symbol of choice. The ballot paper also has names, but over 40% of Pakistan's 241 million population are illiterate, making the pictures extra important for recognition. A majority of Pakistan's constituencies are in rural areas where the literacy rate is around 50%, according to the economic survey of 2022-23.

Pakistan's election process involves thousands of candidates and dozens of political parties and symbols. A single ballot paper has a long list of options for voters. A total of 150 symbols have been assigned to political parties and another 174 will be given to independent candidates for this election.



RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff, General Syed Asim Munir visiting Pakistan Ordnance Factories.

COAS witnessed wide range of POF products

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir visited Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) Wah on Tuesday and said that the path to national progress is defined by indigenous and local industries like POF Wah.

The COAS was briefed about the production capabilities of Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF), its contributions towards

fulfilling the defence requirements of the Pakistan Armed Forces and export potential, an Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said.

The COAS witnessed a wide range of POF Products including indigenously designed and manufactured new weapons and ammo under test & trials. While addressing the POF officers and staff, COAS appreciated their contributions to the security and economy of the country by

making POF the prime defence industry of Pakistan.

"Path to national progress is defined by indigenous and local industries like POF Wah. We will continue to work for self-reliance and the latest technology which is essential towards ensuring reliability and strengthening the defence of Pakistan." COAS remarked. Earlier on arrival, COAS was received by Chairman POF Wah.

Maryam comes up with 'new solution' to skyrocketing inflation

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Giving a 'solution' to decades-high inflation being faced by the poverty-stricken countrymen, PML-N Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz Tuesday claimed the faster the votes are cast in favour of the lion — the electoral symbol of her party — the faster the tsunami of inflation would end.

The PML-N leader — who kicked off her party's

election campaign a day earlier — came up with the "new solution" while addressing a corner meeting during her visit to the PP-159 constituency of Lahore. Data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics showed the country's consumer price index (CPI) for December 2023 rose 29.7% from a year before.

Around 241 million people experienced its highest-ever inflation in 2023, with its currency dipping to his-

toric lows until a \$3 billion International Monetary Fund bailout package averted an imminent sovereign default in July last year. Recalling the "development, infrastructure, and mass transit projects" launched by the former governments of Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif, Maryam said that her party made new records of "service" in Lahore and urged the masses to vote for them on February 8.

FM embarks visit to Uganda

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani on Tuesday embarked on week-long official visit to Kampala, Uganda to participate in the 19th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Third South Summit.

The foreign minister will share Pakistan's perspective on endemic and contemporary global challenges related to international peace, security and development at the NAM Summit. He will underline the need for strengthening multilateralism and reinvigorating the NAM's role in promoting the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.

At the South Summit, FM Jalil Abbas Jilani will present Pakistan's vision on enhanced cooperation and solidarity among countries of the Global South to respond to common challenges and agree on an agenda for a prosperous and united South.

In a statement, Foreign Office Spokesperson Muntaz Zahra Baloch said that as a longtime member, Pakistan has contributed to and shaped the agenda of NAM and is strongly committed to further strengthening its role in responding to regional and global challenges relating to questions of peace and security.

Similarly, the spokesperson said Pakistan has remained an active member of the Group of 77 and China, and attaches high priority to cooperation among the Global South, including in sustainable development, poverty eradication and climate change. On the sidelines of the two Summits, the Foreign Minister was also expected to hold bilateral meetings with the heads of delegation of other participating countries.

Malta-flagged cargo ship hit by missile in Red Sea

SANA: A Malta-flagged cargo ship has been hit by a missile on the Red Sea, a maritime risk management company says as tensions in the key waterway ramp up. "A Malta-flagged, Greek-owned bulk carrier was reportedly targeted and impacted with a missile while transiting the southern Red Sea northbound," Ambrey said in an alert on Tuesday.

The Houthi's military spokesperson, Yahya Sarea, said in a statement that the Yemeni rebels targeted the Zografia ship with naval missiles on Tuesday as it was heading to Israel, resulting in a "direct hit". The ship, which has visited Israel since the war in Gaza began, was headed to the Suez Canal, changed course and headed to port after the incident, Ambrey said.

The empty ship was sailing from Vietnam to Israel with 24 crew members on board, a source in the Greek Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy said. The unnamed source told the Agence France-Presse news agency that the

vessel "sustained limited damage ... but remains in navigable condition and is continuing its journey", adding that there were no injuries.

The Iran-backed Houthis have attacked what they say are Israel-linked commercial vessels since November, disrupting maritime trade routes. The Houthis say the attacks are a response to Israel's bombardment of Gaza. The group has threatened to expand the range of targets of its attacks in the Red Sea to include United States ships in response to American and British strikes on its sites in Yemen.

US forces shot down a Houthi cruise missile targeting a US destroyer, and on Monday, a US-owned cargo ship in the Gulf of Oman was hit by a missile. Al Jazeera's Hashem Ahelbarra said the tensions in the Red Sea could "degenerate into something bigger, particularly the potential of war for an Iranian-American confrontation in Yemen".

"We're talking about an

extremely delicate situation in the Red Sea," Ahelbarra said. Earlier, Qatar's prime minister said liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments would be affected by Red Sea tensions and warned that the strikes on Yemen risk worsening the crisis. "LNG is ... as any other merchant shipments. They will be affected by that [exchange with the Houthis]," Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani told the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

"There are alternative routes. Those alternative routes are not more efficient; they're less efficient than the current route," he added. On Monday, the Bloomberg news agency reported that at least five LNG vessels used by Qatar had stopped on their way to the Red Sea. "[Military intervention] will not bring an end for this, will not contain it. So the contrary, I think [it] will create ... a further escalation," the prime minister added. — Arab News

Sheikh Rasheed arrested

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Awami Muslim League (AML) chief Sheikh Rashid has been arrested from outside a courtroom after his bail was rejected in a case related to the May 9 riots, media reported on Tuesday.

A case was registered against Rasheed for vandalism at the Metro bus station situated at Sixth Road in Rawalpindi. The former interior minister is being shifted to New Town Police Station. An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC), which rejected his bail, later adjourned the hearing of the riots-related cases till January 25. The former interior minister, however, denies all alle-

gations.

Talking to reporters after his arrest, Rasheed said he was not involved in the attacks on state installations. "With God as my witness, I was not present at the spots [where the attacks] took place." The politician's lawyer Abdul Razzaq Khan told reporters that the bail of the senior politico's nephew, Rasheed Shafique, was granted in all 13 cases related to the May 9 riots. "The AML chief, however, has been taken to the police station and will be produced before the ATC tomorrow to decide on his judicial or physical remand."

He welcomed the ATC judge for granting bail to Rashid in almost all cases.

The lawyer added that the politician was not directly involved in the Hamza Camp case. To a question, he replied that it would be impossible to organise Rashid's meeting with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan or PTI President Chaudhry Parvez Elahi in jail.

He categorically rejected allegations that Rasheed incited people to attack military installations or Lal Haveli was centre of all conspiracies. Meanwhile, the ATC granted bail to the politico and other accused in the General Headquarters (GHQ) attack case. The case had been lodged at the A R Bazaar Police Station against the accused.



ISLAMABAD: Special Representative to the Prime Minister for Religious Harmony & Islamic Countries and Chairman Pakistan Ulema Council Hafiz Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, South African High Commissioner to Pakistan M Madikiz. —APP Photo

LHC reserves verdict on bail plea of Wazirabad attack accused

LAHORE (APP): A Lahore High Court (LHC) division bench on Tuesday reserved verdict on a post-arrest bail petition of Waqas Ali, one of the accused involved in the Wazirabad attack on the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder.

The bench, headed by Justice Aalia Neelum, heard the post-arrest bail petition and reserved the verdict on conclusion of arguments by the parties.

The accused had approached the LHC for the relief of post-arrest bail, adding that the prosecution did not have any evidence to connect him with the matter.

It is pertinent to mention here that an anti-terrorism court of Gujranwala had dismissed post-arrest bail petition of accused Waqas Ali in February 2023.

In November 2022, PTI founder and several other party leaders were injured and a party worker was killed when the prime suspect Naveed Meher opened fire at a PTI rally in Wazirabad. The prosecution had accused Waqas of arranging a pistol for the prime suspect.

Youth shot dead over resistance during robbery

KARACHI (INP): Robbers gunned down a youth in presence of her wife over resistance here in Defence area of the metropolis on Tuesday.

According to details, Haji Muhammad Adnan 26, was present in Phase VIII of Defence along with his wife when robbers attempted to snatch cash and cell phone from the couple. Over offering resistance, the robbers shot dead Adnan and fled the scene. The body of deceased hailing from district Kalat of Balochistan was shifted to hospital.

The body was handed over to heirs after legal formalities and police after registering a case against unidentified accused started investigations.

Two robbers killed in police encounter

LAHORE (INP): Two robbers were killed while four others managed to escape after exchange of fire with police here on Tuesday.

According to details, key accused Qasim and Riaz along with their accomplices snatched Rifle from police and fled.

The police chased and intercepted six culprits riding two motorcycles near Shad Bagh area of Lahore and an encounter took place.

In fire exchange, key accused Qasim and Riaz were killed while their four accomplices managed to escape.

The bodies of killed robbers were shifted to hospital and according to police they were wanted in dozens of robbery cases.

CM Naqvi inspects upgradation of LGH, Ganga Ram hospital

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi inspected the upgradation work of Ganga Ram Hospital and Lahore General Hospital (LGH) at late night for 3 hours.

Upon noticing the sewerage line running through the hospital's verandah, the CM called the MD WASA, directing the immediate relocation of the line to an alternative site, said a handout issued here on Tuesday.

Emphasising the importance of fostering a green environment, he insisted on the plantation of samplings and landscaping in the vacant hospital space.

CM Naqvi issued a firm directive to ensure the completion of the upgradation work by Jan 31, without any compromise. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, particularly in the case of LGH emergency services, he stressed that every moment is crucial, and the deadline must be strictly adhered to.

Providing an overview of the ongoing efforts, CM Naqvi highlighted that the upgradation work spans an impressive six lakh square feet. He acknowledged the simultaneous commencement of various projects aimed at enhancing the overall condition of the hospitals. Expressing dedication to completing the projects before the stipulated deadline, he underscored the commitment to ensuring public convenience.

The CM affirmed his involvement in monitoring the progress of the undertaken tasks, reinforcing his commitment to the successful completion of the hospital upgradation projects.

Provincial Ministers Dr Javed Akram, Amir Mir, secretary health, secretary C&W, secretary tourism, commissioner and others were present.

CM reviews upgradation work at DHQ Hospital Gujranwala: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, dur-

ing his visit to Gujranwala, reviewed the upgradation work at DHQ Hospital.

Provincial ministers including SM Tanvir, Mansoor Qadir, Amir Mir, Bilal Afzal, Advisor Waqab Riaz, chief secretary, IG police & secretary C&W accompanied the CM, said a handout issued here on Tuesday.

Expressing concern upon observing hospital beds and equipment outside the building, CM Naqvi emphasized the importance of proper arrangements for the protection of hospital assets, labeling negligence in this regard as unacceptable.

He ordered the hospital administration to relocate the equipment to a secure location and directed that the upgradation project be completed within the specified time frame. The quality of work should be ensured as no compromise would be made on building standards, he said and directed to expedite the upgradation work.

IGP inspires new police recruits at passing out parade

KARACHI (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sindh Riffat Mukhtar Raja graced the 116th Passing out Parade of Probationary Inspectors (Law) and the 120th Passing out Parade of Recruits at Shahid Hayat Police Training College Saeedabad.

The event celebrated the achievements of 845 police personnel, with 28 probationary inspectors (law) and 817 recruits, including 389 female recruits.

As the chief guest, IGP Sindh, announced by bugle, meticulously inspected the parade, acknowledging the

dedication of the officers. During his address, he congratulated the passing-out officers, highlighting the rich legacy of the Sindh Police and the challenges they face in maintaining law and order. IGP Riffat Mukhtar Raja urged the new officers to uphold justice, tackle difficulties bravely, and emphasized the omnipresence of accountability.

He reminded them of their commitment to justice and their oath to protect society from wrongdoing.

Expressing pride in the new additions to the Sindh

Police family, IGP Riffat Mukhtar Raja assured efforts to provide a conducive environment for upholding the rule of law. He pledged not to compromise on the honor and dignity of the department, advocating for officers' welfare and highlighting their crucial role as protectors of lives and property.

The ceremony, attended by senior police officers, including DIGPs Training, Commandant Training College, and SSP Keamari, marked a momentous occasion for the newly minted officers.

LESCO recovers over Rs 24m from 904 defaulters

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) in collaboration with Tehsildars (Recovery) has recovered Rs 24 million from 904 dead defaulters in all the five districts - Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara - on the 124th day of its recovery campaign.

LESCO spokesman told media here Tuesday that on the 124th day, Chief Engineer O&M (T&G) Zafar Iqbal with the support of Tehsildar City Mujahid Zia and Tehsildar Shalimar Noreez Humayun recovered outstanding dues of Rs 13.01 million from 375 defaulters in Northern Circle and Rs 2.95 million from 81 defaulters in Eastern Circle respectively. Similarly, LESCO Manager (Material Disposal) Engineer Anwar Watto along with Tehsildar Model Town Rana Aarsal and Tehsildar Cant. Sajjad Qureshi recovered Rs 3.04 million from 69 defaulters in Central Circle, and Rs 1.27 million from 39 defaulters in South Circle; while Manager (Technical) Engineer Muhammad Farooq with the assistance of Tehsildar Nankana Sahib Muhammad Iqbal Rasheed

and Tehsildar Sheikhupura Muhammad Aslam Gujar recovered Rs 0.52 million from 47 defaulters in Nankana Sahib Circle and Rs 1.89 million from 86 defaulters in Sheikhupura Circle. He added that LESCO Manager E&S (PMU) Engineer Abbas Ali in collaboration with Naib Tehsildar Kasur and Okara Mirza Zahid Baig recovered outstanding dues of Rs 1.05 million from 118 defaulters in Okara Circle and Rs 1.20 million from 89 defaulters in Kasur Circle.

Up till now during the recovery campaign, the LESCO with the help of Tehsildars (Recovery) recovered more than Rs 1.990 billion from 67,919 dead defaulters in its all circles of operation. He elaborated that LESCO recovered outstanding dues of Rs 265.33 million from 9,280 defaulters in Northern Circle; Rs 489.19 million from 8,930 defaulters in Eastern Circle; Rs 255.84 million from 7,684 defaulters in Central Circle; Rs 109.15 million from 3,892 defaulters in South Circle; Rs 170.90 million from 6,192 defaulters in Nankana Sahib Circle; Rs

296.06 million from 8,258 defaulters in Sheikhupura Circle; Rs 126.38 million from 10,784 defaulters in Okara Circle and Rs 286.69 million from 12,899 defaulters in Kasur Circle.

Ashrafi greets South Africa for initiating ICJ case on Palestine

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Prime Minister's Special Representative for Religious Harmony and Pakistani Diaspora in the Middle East and Muslim Countries, Hafiz Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi on Tuesday congratulated the people and the Government of South Africa for filing a case in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) concerning the Palestine issue. He was talking to South Africa's High Commissioner to Pakistan, Mthuthuzeli Madikiza during a meeting at the latter's office, a news release said.

Ashrafi said both the people and the Government of Pakistan appreciated the initiative taken by South Africa. South Africa's High Mthuthuzeli Madikiza affirmed his country's solidarity with the Palestinian people in the face of oppression. South Africa was fully committed to actively oppose the oppression experienced by the Palestinian people, he added.

PU's online admission

LAHORE (INP): The Examination Department of Punjab University on Tuesday announced the schedule for submission of admission forms for Associate Degree in Arts / Science / Commerce Part-I & Part-II and BA Hearing Impaired annual examinations 2024.

According to details, all regular, late college, private, improve division, additional subjects and special categories (MBBS, BDS, Pharm-D, General Nursing, Fazil, Wafaq-ul-Madaris) candidates are informed that admission forms will be submitted online only and no admission form will be accepted by hand or by post.

The last date with single fee for receipt of online admission forms for said exams from January 19, 2024 to February 29, 2024. Details are available at www.pu.edu.pk.

Complaint in consumer court

KARACHI (PPI): A complaint was filed in a local consumer court against alleged overcharging by a shoe company.

According to a press release on Tuesday, a citizen, Ahsan Bari Channa advocate, through his lawyer Kazim Hussain Mahesar filed a complaint in the court of consumer protection judge South Karachi under Section 26 of Sindh Consumer Protection Act against a Lahore-based shoe company.

The claimant maintained that he bought a box of shoe polish from the store of that company situated at Saddar Karachi but he was overcharged illegally. He prayed the court for action against the respondents and payment of damages.

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SUIT NOTICE
In the Court of Miss Ambareen Navid Judge Banking Court-I Peshawar
Federal Judicial Complex, Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar
Case No:12/1 of 2024 Date of hearing 26-02-2024 suit for the recovery of Rs.1,463,296.48 HBL Sakha Kot Branch Vs: Noor Ali Rehman
Notice Versus:- Noor Ali Rehman son of Fateh Mand, R/o:- House No.134, Sector M-1, Lake city holding Lahore. Present Address:- Gheen Hydro Engineering Pvt. Ltd: Gujar Garhi Chowk, opposite Chiragh Steel works Distt: Mardan. Permanent Add:- Shalmano Post office Bilay baba, Pirabad Tehsil Alpori Distt: Shangila. Where as the plaintiff bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs.1,463,296.48 Against you under section 10(2) of the Financial Institution (Recovery of Finance) Ordinance 2001, you are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court of appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/ publication of the notice in the newspaper. Failing which an exparty decree shall be passed in favour of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Issued today On 13-01-2024 under my signature and seal of the Court.
Registrar, Banking Court, 1 Peshawar

SUIT NOTICE
In the Court of Miss Ambareen Navid Judge Banking Court-I Peshawar
Federal Judicial Complex, Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar
Case No:13/1 of 2024 Date of hearing 26-02-2024 suit for the recovery of Rs.561850.66 HBL Nowshera cantt: Vs: Arsalan Branch, Nowshera
Notice Versus:- Arsalan son of Yaghi gul, R/o:- Mohallah Shah Meer, Garhi, Nowshera Kalan, Distt: Nowshera. Where as the plaintiff bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs.561850.66 Against you under section 10(2) of the Financial Institution (Recovery of Finance) Ordinance 2001, you are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court of appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/ publication of the notice in the newspaper. Failing which an exparty decree shall be passed in favour of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Issued today On 13-01-2024 under my signature and seal of the Court.
Registrar, Banking Court, 1 Peshawar

Sindh CM 'distressed' over surge in crimes

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (ret'd) Maqbool Baqar on Tuesday expressed his distress over the surge in crimes in both urban and rural areas of the province, with "the law enforcement apparatus continues to be complacent".

The chief minister, in a letter to the Inspector General of Police and Director General of Rangers, said he was distressed over "the surge in crimes in the major cities and rural areas which include robbery, murder,

rape, kidnapping, drug trafficking, impersonation, mobile snatching, targeted killing, and extortion among other serious crimes.

The newspapers and electronic media abound with reports of incidents of the above crimes."

Baqar said that in the wake of upcoming general elections, there had been multiple reports of attacks on the candidates, "who in a few cases have even been kidnapped in broad daylight".

"The most vulnerable segments of our society, that is, women, children,

and the elderly have borne a disproportionate brunt of these crimes.

Journalists, lawyers, doctors, businessmen, and other professionals face a bigger threat to their lives and property, but the law enforcement apparatus continues to be complacent."

The chief minister directed the IGP and the DG Rangers to take immediate measures for stemming the rising tide of crime in the cities and rural areas to protect and safeguard the fundamental rights of the citizens as enshrined in the Constitution.

Political forces need to do politics based on public service: Ch. Sarwar

LAHORE (INP): Chief Organizer Pakistan Muslim League (PML), Chaudhry Sarwar has said that the political parties of country need to do politics based on public service.

He stated this while talking to General Secretary of party from Lahore, Muhammad Nadeed Pehlwan who called on him on Tuesday and discussed with him prevailing political situa-

tion, party issues and issued relating to February 8, general elections.

Chaudhry Sarwar said that the country and its people were going through worst situation of the history.

He urged the political forces to set aside the politics of self-interest and to make sincere efforts to drag the country out of prevailing crises.

The PML leader vowed to vigorously participate in the political activities aimed at serving masses.

Nadeed Pehlwan informed the Chief Organizer about the organization matters of party and took guidance from him.

He said that the PML was representative of aspirations of masses and will never disappoint them.

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER SINGLE STAGE SINGLE ENVELOPE

The Procuring Entity, Executive Engineer Maintenance-II G&W Department Peshawar, invites sealed bids from eligible firms/contractors enlisted with C&W Department, licensed by the Pakistan Engineering Council in the appropriate category and duly pre-qualified with the Maintenance-II C&W Department for the works as under:-

S. #	Name of Work	Estimated Cost (In Million)	Earnest Money 2% Earnes Money+ Stamp Duty	(a) Last Date of Submission of Form (b) Date & Time of opening	Completion date
1	M&R of Residential Building of PHC SH: Extension and Conversion of Car Porch into Drawing / Dining Hall at Judicial Lodge at RCG-13	PK-C-6 and above	Earnest Money 2% Earnes Money+ Stamp Duty	a) 06-02-2024 At 12:00 Noon b) 06-03-2024 At 12:30 Noon	As Per Work Order

TERMS & CONDITIONS

- Bid Documents Instruction Condition to bidders can be downloaded up to one day prior to the opening date from C&W web site www.cwd.gkp.pk. A Complete set of Bid Solicitation Documents may be obtained on submission of a written application one day prior to the opening date from office of the undersigned otherwise bids submitted without these documents will non responsive.
- Original Bid Security in the shape of Call Deposit in the name of Executive Engineer Maintenance-II C&W Department Peshawar shall accompany the bid.
- All bidders are required to be registered with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority established under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Act 2013 (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa No XXI of 2013) for works, consulting and Non-consulting services as listed in Schedule-II of the Act ibid.
- Each bidder shall submit his bid through sealed cover as under -
(a) ORIGINAL and each copy of the bid shall be separately sealed and put in separate envelopes and marked as such.
(b) The Envelope containing the ORIGINAL and copies will be put in one sealed envelope and addressed to Executive Engineer Maintenance-II C&W Department Peshawar.
- The item rate system is replaced by Above/Below system on BOQ based on Market Rate System.
- Bid will be valid for **Ninety (90)** days.
- If the bid rate / cost of two or more than two bidders are same then the successful bid will be decided through toss.
- All Federal/Provincial duties/Stamp duties/Taxes will be recoverable as per directions of the Government issued from time to time.
- Execution of Work will be subject to release / availability of fund.
- The Competent authority reserves the right to reject any or all the tender by assigning the cogent reason in consultation with authority at any time prior to the award of contract.
- All other terms & conditions can be seen on official webs to of the C&W Department or from the office of the undersigned on any working day during office hours.
- A part of Notice Inviting Tender (NIT) Moreover, the bidding entry fee @ 0.03% of tender cost may be revived, and collected along-with earnest money, which will be non-refundable.
- Additional bid security Should be received as per Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Regulatory Authority Notification No.S.R.O(14)/Vol: 1-24/2021-22 dated 10.05.2021/6058-71**
 - The Contractors quoting the bids up to a limit of 10% below Engineer Estimate shall submit bid security to the extent of 2% only of Engineer Estimate.
 - The contractors quoting their bids more than 10% below upto Engineer's Estimate shall submit along with their bid 8% Additional Security of Engineer Estimate cost in addition to 02% bid Security. If the bid is not accompanied with the required additional Security then it will be considered as non-responsive and the 02% bid security shall be forfeited in favour of Govt; and the second lowest bidder and so on well be considered accordingly.
 - [Similarly, a contractor quoting bid more than 20% below shall submit with his bid an additional security on Engineer's Estimated cost equal to the differential amount of submitted bid and Engineers' Estimate along with detailed rate analysis] . In case of more than 20% below bids, if the bid is not accompanied by the detailed rate analysis and / or required amount of additional security, then the said bid shall be considered as non-responsive. All the securities submitted along with such non-responsive bid shall be forfeited in favour of Government and the 2nd lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly.
 - In case detailed rate analysis submitted with the bids is, in view of the Procuring Entity, not convincing, the Head of the Procuring Entity may declare such bid as non-responsive without any forfeiture of bid securities and record reasons thereof.
 - The procuring entity may offer the contract to next lowest bidder after due diligence in the context of financial difference between such two bids or may advertise procurement opportunity afresh.
 - After commencements of work by the successful bidder, the procuring entity may replace the Additional Security with a bank guarantee of the same amount from the scheduled bank; if the already deposited security is not in the form of bank guarantee.
 - The Additional Security shall be released to the contractor in four installments i.e. 1st installment of 25% to be released upon completion of 25% of the project, 2nd installment of 25% to be released upon completion of 50% of the project, 3rd installment of 25% to be released upon completion of 75% of the project and the 4th installment of 25% to be released after 100% completion of the project.
 - All previous orders, instructions and regulations issued regarding additional security shall stand superseded.

**Executive Engineer
Maintenance-II C&W Deptt:
Peshawar**

INF(P) 96/24



PESHAWAR: PTI-P leader Engineer Saleem Akhtar Durrani addressing a press conference.

ATP leader voices concern over inflation

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Muhammad Faiq Shah, founder and chairman of the Amun Taraqqi Party said those people who gave the gift of inflation, uncertainty, lawlessness and host of issues to the nation, once again come out to seek vote.

Addressing a public gathering in Peshawar and districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tuesday said the rulers imposed on the nation are responsible for the current crisis situations and asked people to beware and shouldn't come in their fake promises and claims. Someone deceived the nation in name of roti, kapra and makan and someone slogan of change but practically, rulers have left no stone unturned to add to miseries of poor people, he added.

From Khyber to Karachi, people are criticis-

ing present and previous rulers for their alleged corruption and mismanagement of present who are currently easily gaining clean chit in graft cases, Shah said. The party leader said elites and upper class gained prompt justice while people are faced with hardships of justice as cases piled up in lower and upper courts but no one is available to hear them.

Faiq said price-hike has touched a new toll, stating that local administration has kept mum to take action against profiteers and left the inflation-stricken in lurch. Almost all segments of the society, including businessmen, traders, industrialists, working class and daily wagers are highly upset under the prevailing uncertain situation, the ATP chief noted.

He added people, including the business community, have been highly per-

turbed over increasing gas and power tariffs. Shah said no serious policy has been devised to improve export, trade, businesses and stabilization of the crisis-hit country' economy. He said Pakistan has become an experiment site, as everyone has come into power and looted the country then fled on pretext of self-imposed exile.

The party leader made it clear that this will not be functional anymore in the country as time has come to hold these people accountable, stating people's hands will soon be on the collars of the politicians and rulers. Shah vowed his party will hold strict accountability and assessment. He reminded ATP had brought a comprehensive agenda, hoping that the destiny of the whole nation would be altered if the party-crafted plan would be implemented with true spirit.

Pak secures position in research index globally

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan has achieved slot in top ten countries in the field of research after Covid-19 pandemic by publishing one lac 50 thousand and 15 researches in the different fields of the knowledge.

According to details, during last four years 27 countries including China, United States of America and European nations had published 15 million 41 thousand and 579 while China is heading the world.

Moreover, Associate Professor Dr. Waseem Hassan research article is also published in Online Science Journal, a global reputed organization. The position is based on four parameters set for ranking while academia had appreciated committed of teachers for equality education.

PTI's Noreen withdraws paper

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) member Arif Yousaf's wife, Noreen Arif, has withdrawn on behalf of Syed Qasim Ali Shah.

Senior Mashran Team, including Taimur Jhagra, Sher Ali Arbab, Ghulam Bilal Javed, Ghulam Hussain Chand, Irfan Saleem, and other Mashrans, arrived at Arif Yousaf's residence. After the Jirga held at Arif Yousaf's residence, it was announced that her wife will withdrawn in favour of Syed Qasim Ali Shah who was Naib Nazim of PTI in district council of Peshawar.

BRT surpasses 329,000 passengers

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in Peshawar has marked a milestone with a daily ridership surpassing 329,000 commuters, signaling growing public trust in the service. According to a spokesperson for Trans Peshawar, the system currently operates 244 buses, all fully operational.

However, the success story is not without challenges, as the institution faces difficulties arising from incidents of stone pelting. Over the last two days, six buses experienced broken windows in such incidents, leading to the temporary removal of these buses for repairs. This has exerted additional pressure on the remaining operational buses.

PHA Mega city discussed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Caretaker Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation, Justice Retired Irshad Qaisar chaired a meeting and discussed matters related to Pakhtunkhwa Housing Authority (PHA) Mega City. The meeting was also attended by Caretaker Minister, Dr. Aamir Abdullah, CM's advisor, Ashfaq Khan, Secretary Housing and concerned officials.

Election 2024 brings boost to business of painters, artists community in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): Besides printing and advertising industries, the 2024 general election has also brought boom to the business of painters and artists community in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where they receive maximum capital.

Associated with painting business for the last 12 years, painter Shahzaib Ali (25) a resident of Nowshera wake early in the morning and continued work till late night to fulfill the heavy painting orders of political parties and election candidates besides their supporters in politically fertile Peshawar division.

"I have received plenty of orders from supporters of different political parties for painting the portraits of PMLN Quaid Muhammad Nawaz, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Awami National Party Aimal Wali Khan, JUIF Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman and others for election campaign 2024," he said.

Inherited the painstaking business from his father, Shahzaib said that prices of portraits depend on the size and colours besides frames. The motivated painter said that he engaged two extra painters to fulfill the pressing demands of candidates. Receiving booking orders from supporters and candidates of merged tribal districts to the tune of Rs5lac, he said that he prepares 40 to 50 paintings of political leaders per day.

He hoped that their business would be further shined as election become more nearer in the country especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Like Shahzaib, the painters, printers and advertisers of Mohallah Jahnagi, Peshawar have also received heavy orders from thousands of candidates

and religio-political parties for election 2024 earning handsome profits.

The painters, advertisers and printers are busy like a honeybee in preparation of posters, advertisements, graphics designing, promotional cards, billboards, pana-flex for election 2024. Printer Zardad Ali said, "These business shined enormously these days in Peshawar where he engaged six extra labourers, who worked till late night to meet demands of printing materials of the tickets holders and independent candidates," adding the painters, printers and advertisers of Peshawar also received heavy orders from merged tribal districts and Attock district of Punjab province.

Ali said the closure of Charsadda and Mardan paper mills have made a negative impact on the printing business in Peshawar where prices of finished goods significantly increased due to transportation of election related papers from Punjab and electricity-cost. "Painting is a pain-sticking business. The painters, printers and advertisers are sometimes over-worked like presently in election days and often short of orders suffered financial losses during COVID-19 pandemic at Peshawar where approximately 40,000 people including 3,000 painters, printers, publishers and graphic designers are directly or indirectly associated with it."

He claimed that printers and publishers having quality printing machines and skilled labourers received heavy orders to the tune of Rs five million and to receive more profit as election comes nearer. Zafar Khan Khattak, President, All Printers, Painters and Publishers Association

KP told APP that Peshawar based painters, printers and publishers started earning great profits in posters, designing, advertisements and party flags courtesy to 2024 General Election.

He said Peshawar's printers and publishers mostly go to Lahore to repair major technical faults once developed in their machines, as most local mechanics lack expertise and thus face financial problems." He said it is a very costly practice and sometimes we have to pay up to Rs50,000 to Rs one lakh for its repair and maintenance including payment of transport charges, adding 3D printing and paper business would further shine once the general election comes closer.

He said priorities may be given to young entrepreneurs and young printers, painters and advertisers to promote printing and paper industries besides advertisement and fine art as a profession with great scope in employment generation for youth. He said KP was geographically placed in a relatively disadvantageous location in terms of its long distance from Karachi seaport, and the KP exporters have to pay an extra amount compared to Punjab and Sindh provinces to transport raw election related materials here.

The experts said painting business could further flourish in Peshawar, if required expertise, quality manpower and a mechanism were provided to control prices of colours, papers and inflation. They said that social media has negatively impacted the traditional painting business and hoped that the election 2024 would help improve such businesses in the country.

KMU QEC advances academic excellence with strategic initiatives

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a pivotal meeting convened at Khyber Medical University (KMU), Dr. Asia Bukhari, Director of Quality Enhancement presided over discussions that showcased a significant stride toward achieving academic excellence. Focal persons representing affiliated colleges and Institutes of KMU actively participated, both online and in person, focusing on key agenda items, primarily centered around targets set for the annual progress report for the academic year 2023-2024.

A major highlight of the meeting was the deliberation on establishing a permanent Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) office in each institute under KMU. Decisive steps were underscored, particularly in terms of staff appointments, including the appointment of a head and support staff.

In-depth discussions delved into workshops and seminars dedicated to the Self-Assessment Report, empha-

sizing comprehensive teacher and course evaluations across all academic programs. Surveys targeting specific programs were conducted, with detailed reports provided to program teams and assessment teams.

Active participation in meetings organized by KMU to empower QECs was highlighted as crucial for success. The meeting also explored membership in a quality assurance (QA) network/association, showcasing a commitment to broader collaboration. Strategies for robust publicity of QEC activities through various media channels were emphasized, underlining their functionality. The meeting also placed significant importance on active participation in international events organized by the Pakistan National Quality Assurance and Accreditation (PNQAHI). Consideration of the functionality and updates of the QEC website/web-page received full attention, with actions discussed, including the provision of information on college sta-

tistics, accreditation, and the renewal of academic programs.

Detailed discussions were conducted regarding the compilation of executive summaries for target programs for the implementation plan for corrective action. A comprehensive review and discussion of corrective actions for implementation plans were also part of the agenda.

The meeting underscored the importance of the agendas discussed in preparation for the upcoming 4th International Conference of PNQAHI and the Annual General Meeting (AGM) scheduled for March 2024. Cooperation and effective implementation of the discussed projects were strongly emphasized for a successful event. Khyber Medical University is a leading institution committed to excellence in medical education, research, and healthcare. With a focus on continuous improvement and quality enhancement, KMU strives to shape the future of medical professionals and contribute to the advancement of healthcare standards.



PESHAWAR: PPP provincial women wing president, Senator Rubina Khalid talking to media persons.

Traffic police charges people in tented glasses

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: On the instructions of Inspector General (IG) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Akhtar Hayat Khan, City Traffic Police Peshawar imposed fines on 18,800 people last week for using fancy number plates, unregistered vehicles and black glasses.

Under the leadership of Chief Traffic Officer Dr. Zahidullah, City Traffic Police Peshawar took actions against those using vehicles without number plates and black glasses in different sectors of the city, according to which 3800 for using fancy number plates, 6000 for using black glasses, action was taken against 9000 people for driving unregistered vehicles and motorcycles and black glasses and fancy number

plates were removed from the vehicles and fines were imposed on the violators.

Chief Traffic Officer Dr. Zahidullah has said that Peshawar City Traffic Police will use all its capabilities to ensure the implementation of the rules while strict legal action will be taken against the violators.

He further said that the use of black glasses and driving of vehicles without number plates is prohibited, against which City Traffic Police Peshawar is alert and no one will be treated lightly because the law is the same for everyone, special and general, from which no one is exempted. do not have. He further said that the citizens should cooperate with the traffic police, civilized nation Always observed traffic rules.

Medical camps held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In response to the onset of winter, Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps North organized free medical camps in various areas including Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Swat, Dir, Buner, and Chitral.

At these free medical camps, doctors and nursing staff conducted over seven thousand free medical examinations, providing essential medications to the patients, said officials here on Tuesday. Some cases requiring further treatment were referred to relevant district hospitals.

'JUI-F cannot run campaign in KP'

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazal leader Hafiz Hamdullah on Tuesday claimed that JUI-F is 'barred' from carrying out the election campaign in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ahead of the general election 2024. "Pamphlets are being distributed in KP with warnings not to allow JUI-F corner meetings," Hafiz Hamdullah said while exclusively talking to a news channel.

The JUI-F leader said the security situation is not ideal in KP, JUI-F candidates cannot go outside for election work in the evening. Commenting on PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif, Hafiz Hamdullah hoped that the three-time former premier would not repeat the mistakes he had made in the past.

Coming into power through "lotas" (turmeats) is not "asooli" (principal) politics but "wasooli" (pay-back) politics, the JUI-F stalwart said. He urged all the political parties to ensure no space for "lotacracy" in democracy. Hafiz Hamdullah said coming into power through power politics instead of masses, is not a good omen for democracy.

He said JUI-F will welcome the masses' decision if they choose Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz or Pakistan People's Party on February 8. Meanwhile, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has completed all preparations to hold polling for the National and Provincial assemblies next month. While talking to state-run TV, ECP Spokesperson Syed Nadeem Haider urged the general public to exercise their right to vote on polling day.



PESHAWAR: Farmers busy in preparing of Gur at Garhni.



In brief

Pak Navy holds free medical camp F.P. Report

QUETTA: In continuation to efforts for uplifting to provide standard health facilities along the Coastal areas of country, Pakistan Navy established free medical camp at Coastal village Kappar, Balochistan. Free medical camp was established by Pakistan Navy doctors, paramedic staff in collaboration with Sahil Welfare Association. In this medical camp hundreds of patients including women and children were provided free medical treatment. A dedicated team of doctors and paramedic staff comprising of Medical, ENT, General Surgeon, Gynecologist, Skin Specialist and GDMO examined the patients and provided them with free consultation and medicines. The local populace of the area was also provided information about maternal health and nutritional requirements of mother and children. The patients were enlightened about common infections, personal health, hygiene, child healthcare and prevention of diseases and sanitation of living areas. Pakistan Navy is committed to provide continued quality medical facility for the people settled along the Coastal belt. The establishment of medical camp at Kappar is practical manifestation of Pakistan Navy's resolve for uplift of coastal belt.

ANP to secure majority in polls F.P. Report

TAKHTBHAI: Awami National Party (ANP) Malik Saifullah Khan argued reduction in edible items, petrol and electricity prices for provision of relief to public in wake of upcoming general elections. This he said while talking to media personnel in front of Takhtbahi press club and added that fresh election will lead to political as well as economic stability in the country. He argued public that patriotism is key for socio-political stability in the country. ANP leader also argued Election Commission of Pakistan for concrete steps to ensure free and fair elections. He added that ANP will secure maximum representation from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for both provincial and national Assembly.

Driver killed, 7 students injured

SHEIKHUPURA (INP): Driver of a school van was killed while seven students injured in an over speeding dumper hit a school van here on Tuesday. According to details, a school van taking students to school was hit by a reckless driven dumper near Narang Mandi area of tehsil Muridke of district Sheikhupura. As a result of collision, the driver of school van was killed on the spot while seven students sustained injuries. Dumper driver fled the scene. Police and rescue teams reached the scene and shifted the bodies and injured to hospital. The police impounded the dumper and after registering a case against driver at large started efforts for his arrest.

11 arrested

SARGODHA (INP): Sargodha police after launching a massive crackdown against criminals on Tuesday has arrested 11 criminals across the District. Police said that the teams raided at different localities and held-Inaam, Wasim, Rashid, Imran, Kamran, Suleman, Tahir, Kaleem, Wajahat, Nouman and Khaleel, besides recovering 2.6 kg hashish, 1.3 kg heroin, 345 liters liquor, 12 pistols, 04 guns, 235 bullets, 333 empty bottles and valuables worth in millions of rupees from them. Further investigation was under way.



KAPPAR: A Pakistan Navy doctor examining patients during free medical camp in Balochistan.

PTI-P to form govt in KP, claims KP minister

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Pakistan Tahreek Insaf Parliamentarian (PTI-P) candidate for PK 16 and former provincial minister finance Muzafar Syed advocate has said that incomplete projects in the area will be completed if he was elected as MPA again. He was addressing a party corner meeting at Soghalay Talash as chief guest here on Tuesday.

The gathering was also addressed by the PTI-P leader Barrister Aurang Zeb Khan, Shahab Utmami, Haji Rahim Dad Khan, Haji Wali Rehman, Dr Naik Zada and others. Several political workers on the occasion announced to support the PTI-P in the upcoming general elections.

The former provincial minister said that several development projects like the Talash bypass road, Timergara Medical College, establishment of degree colleges for boys and girls at Talash etc, which were initiated by him as a minister, remained incomplete during the last five years. Muzafar Syed was defeated by the PTI Malik Shafiqullah Khan in the 2018 general election. He said that he joined the PTI-P led by former chief minister Perviz Khattak as he knew him well.

He said that Mr Khattak would be the next chief minister in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and he would

work for development of the province. The former provincial minister asked the people of his constituency to vote for the PTI-P. He said that work on the much-awaited Gopulm Irrigation channel would be started once the PTI-P came into power in the province. He said that he would complete all the incomplete development projects if elected as MPA from the area.

Meanwhile the PTI-P candidate for PK 14 Brigadier retired Saeedullah Khan demanded the government to take notice of the inflated gas bills and provide relief to the SNGPL consumers. Talking to local journalists at Timergara he said the SNGPL had sent inflated bills to its consumers. He said the poor consumers were unable to pay their gas bills and they had no option but to disconnect their connections. He demanded the SNGPL authorities to take notice of the matter and provide relief to the consumers in gas bills.

Nurses' importance: Director General Health services Dr Shaukat Ali has lauded the role of nurses in the health sector and termed them as a backbone in the whole sector. He stated this while addressing a function held at a private nursing college at Timergara during his brief visit to the district here on Tuesday. The district health officer Lower Dir Dr Irshad Rughani and Principal of

the college Naemullah also addressed the event.

The DG said that all available resources were being utilized for improving service delivery at public sector healthcare units. He announced that classes at the Timergara Medical College would commence this year. He said that a total of 150 nurses would also be trained at this college. He said the health department had resolved the issue of nurses' internship in the province and practical steps had been taken for accommodating the under-training nurses at government hospitals. He said that a primary healthcare programme had been launched under which all the basic health units (BHUs) and rural health centers (RHCs) were being provided with essential drugs and modern equipment.

2 killed in road accident

KANDIARO (INP): At least two were killed while several others were critically injured after a traffic collision amid intense fog and slippery road conditions near Kandiario a town in the district of Sindh on Tuesday.

According to rescue sources 1122, a tragic accident occurred where multiple vehicles collided due to low visibility and unfavourable road conditions.



MINGORA: PML-N leader Amir Muqam addressing public gathering in Swat.

General Bus Stand Mardan will be shifted to Chamtar: Secy RTA

F.P. Report

MARDAN: All category-D and other transport hubs including the general bus stand in Mardan will be shifted to the new bus terminal at Chamtar within four days. The new bus terminal covering an area of 734 kanals has been completed at the cost of Rs.237.30 million. It was decided here on Tuesday in a high-level meeting chaired by Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai.

Additional Commissioner Mardan Division Naem Akhtar, Deputy Commissioner Mardan Muhammad Fayyaz Khan Sherpao, DPO Mardan Najibur Rehman Bagwi, Superintendent Engineer C & W Imran Khan, Tehsil Municipal Officer Naveed Gandapur, Secretary Regional Transport Authority Wajid Khan, President Mardan Chamber of Commerce Zahir Shah and others concerned were present in the meeting.

Secretary RTA while giving a briefing said that the construction work has been completed on the new terminal at Chamtar where all arrangements for the convenience of transporters and passengers are complete. He said that at present there are eight category D bus stands besides one general bus stand of category C in Mardan city. There are orders of Peshawar High Court regarding the transfer of stands, while the caretaker chief minister has also issued clear orders in this regard. It was decided in the meeting that a

committee consisting of Secretary RTA, TMO and Police under the supervision of Deputy Commissioner Mardan will ensure the transfer of all stands to Chamtar Bus Terminal in four days.

Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai said in his address that the traffic problems in Mardan city will be solved to a great extent by shifting the addas where passengers will get better facilities in the new bus terminal. He directed the concerned authorities to take all necessary steps for the convenience of transporters and passengers in the new bus terminal. He said that the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will inaugurate this new bus terminal very soon.

Door-to-door election campaign kicks-off: Preparations for general elections in Mardan are fast, candidates are running, corner meetings have started, door-to-door meetings, people are not interested. A total of 147 candidates on three national and eight provincial constituencies faced each other in dangal after going to bat (bala) symbol, the PTI candidate is in the field as independent with various election symbols. A sickle symbol was allotted to a former senior provincial minister a drum symbol was given to one. DC Mardan's Fayaz Sherpao urgent message to the public regarding the holding of elections, elections will be held on time.

According to the details, the ongoing campaign by political

candidates for the general elections to be held on February 8, 2024 in Mardan, like the rest of the country, has accelerated and 147 candidates have come face to face in the field for the 3 national and 8 provincial constituencies of Mardan. Election symbols have been allotted. Other candidates of Awami National Party, including ANP's former Chief Minister Amir Haider Khan, were given lanterns, PPP's Khawaja Muhammad Khan and his son and other candidates got arrows.

PML-N's Fakhru Zaman, Jamshed Mehmood's lion, JUIF's a book to the candidates, a turban to Obaid Khan Lundkhwar of PTI parliamentarian and others, while according to the Supreme Court decision, former provincial minister of Tehreek-e-Insaf Atif Khan was given symbol of sickle, Abdus Salam Afridi dove, Zahir Shah Toru Airplane, Ali Mohammad Khan Dolphin, Ifthikhar Khan Mashwani bird's wing Tufail Anjum pillow, Muhammad Ayaz suckle, Mujahid Khan dove while Ikhtisham Advocate dove. While PTI's Sher Bahadur Khan has been allotted drum symbol, despite the acceleration in the election campaign, common citizens are showing disinterest.

It is clear that there are a total of 1239039 votes in Mardan, of which 7 lakh 19 thousand 872 male votes and 5 lakh 20 thousand 67 votes have been registered. Also, taking note of the conflicting news on social media regarding the holding of the

Cops recover stolen gold worth Rs2m

LORALAI (PPI): Loralai police claimed to have recovered gold worth Rs2 million stolen from a jewellery shop at Kakari Masjid Road area of Loralai in an operation conducted in Nasarabad area of Loralai on Tuesday. One man allegedly accused of stealing gold from jewellery shop was also arrested during the operation.

Following the directions of Deputy Inspector General of Police, Loralai, staff of Police Station Sadiq Ali Shaheed Loralai under the supervision of Abdul Rehman Luni, Station House Officer (SHO), Police Station Sadiq Ali Shaheed recovered gold worth Rs. 2 million stolen from a jewellery shop at Kakari Masjid Road area of Loralai in an operation conducted in Nasarabad area of Loralai.

Alleged accused namely Ajab Khan, resident of Nasarabad, Loralai, wanted in First Information Report (FIR) No202/023 under section 380-457, was also arrested during the operation. Recovered gold and detained person were shifted to Police Station Sadiq Ali. Further investigation is being conducted by the investigation staff of PS Sadiq Ali Shaheed.

Separately, owners of jewellery shops, Loralai under the leadership of Sabir Kudazai, District President, Anjum-e-Tajir, Loralai called on SSP Loralai, Muhammad Zafar and SDPO, Loralai, Kaleemullah and thanked police force for recovering the stolen gold.

Old enmity claims man's life

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: A man was shot dead over an old enmity here in the Chunda area in the limits of Yarik Police station. A man named Muhammad Jawad son of Nazir Ahmad belonging to Bahukhel tribe was killed here in the Chunda area.

Torkham border causing losses to traders: QWP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Tuesday said that the closure of the Torkham border was causing losses to the traders on both sides of the border, therefore, the government should reopen the border crossing.

Addressing a gathering of party workers at Sherpao village in Charsadda district, he said that both the sides should hold talks to sort out bilateral issues. Aftab Sherpao said the border closure would sow discord between the two countries, urging the government to solve all the issues through diplomatic channels.

He added that the closure of the Pak-Afghan border at Torkham would create problems for the business community, traders and other people. The QWP

leader said that trade volume between Afghanistan and Pakistan was already low, urging the government to take steps to boost trade and business activities between the two brotherly countries.

Calling for unity to steer the country towards progress, the QWP leader said that the political forces should set aside petty differences and join hands to address the challenges facing the country. Commenting on the skyrocketing inflation, Aftab Sherpao said that the people were grappling with a host of issues, including rising inflation, adding that relief should be provided to the have-nots as they were unable to feed their children let alone sending them to schools. He said that the people had high expectation of their leaders in times of crisis, therefore, they should work together to

address the prevailing challenges. The QWP leader said that the people would lose interest in the political system if the politicians continued bickering over non-issues. "The people are mature. They want an end to lawlessness, unemployment and poverty," he maintained.

Shedding light on his party's manifesto, Aftab Sherpao promised that the QWP would spare no effort to provide health and education facilities to their people besides working for the restoration of peace. He said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had lagged behind in the race of development so concerted efforts were needed to put the province on the path of prosperity. He lamented that the previous provincial government did nothing for the development of KP and left the province in dire straits.



CHARSADDA: QWP leader, Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao addressing party workers.

Eelum festival to be held on 20th

F.P. Report

BUNER: A grand carnival has been scheduled on 20th January at Eelum mountainous region in which different sport competitions should be arranged including motor-bikes and jeep rally by Pakistan Army and district administration, on Tuesday.

This was announced by Pakistan Army Captain Saqib while talking to media personnel and added that this festival would include more than two hundred motor bikes and jeep rally from Daggar college to Elum Ghar early morning on 20th this month. He claimed all of the riders registered themselves and to rush degree college Daggar Buner on 19th this month. They would be accorded warm welcome at Ambella and Swari.

He further added that this carnival would be a public friendly activity where all of public may participated with families. He shared this carnival

included cultural dances cultural music cultural food and cultural handicrafts stalls with different others stalls for facilitation and enjoyment of the visitors. He claimed that Hindu community would also visit the carnival to visit their places of worship where the Ram Chandar Gii and Seta Gii were spent years in isolation.

The captain claimed all out security for the carnival as the corps commander the chief minister and other high ranks officers and figures to visit the carnival as chief guests and special guests as well. He said that it would be first ever biggest carnival with the aim to attract riders and tourists from parts of the country and to provide an opportunity of joy to the people of Buner district and to promote tourism in this scenic beautiful historic popular Elum Ghar Buner. He invited all of locals to visit with families and assured all out security with

a message the main objective of the carnival is to display the touristic image of the popular Elum Ghar across the world.

License centers setup

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Traffic Police Officer Asif Rahim Butt while talking to daily The Frontier Post, said that license centers have been established across the district, where licenses are being issued immediately, on Tuesday.

The traffic police are performing their duties honestly. Indiscriminate actions are being taken against under-age drivers and drivers of motorcycles and other vehicles without license due to accidents, who are facing legal action with heavy fines. Citizens are requested not to drive a motorcycle or vehicle without a license.



election. Deputy Commissioner Mardan Fayaz Sherpao issued an emergency message on his official social media page and said that the campaigns on social media regarding the election are fabricated. He clarified that the citizens should ignore the disappearing posts on social media because the general elections will be held on the appointed time by the Election Commission for which as the Presiding Officer has made complete preparations and transparent elections will be held on February 08.

Independent candidates sworn for loyalty with PTI: Provincial and National Assembly nominees belonging to PTI, Mujahid Khan from NA-21 and Ekhtisham Khan Advocate from PK-61 were sworn in the presence of hundreds of workers and PTI leaders.

In case of success, they will fight all kinds of situations and will stick to Imran Khan's vision and PTI's manifesto. In this regard, a joint meeting of workers and independent candidates

nominated by PTI was held at Lundkhwar Medical Center, Lundkhwar in which PTI provincial leaders former provincial assembly candidates. Engineer Adil Nawaz, Ameer Sarfraz Khan, Zakaullah Khan Khattak, Rahim Jan, Engineer Fahim ud Din, Malik Jahan Zeb Khan Junga and Intiaz Khan besides other leaders and hundreds of PTI workers participated. On this occasion, the workers took an oath from the nominated candidates on the Holy Quran that if successful, they will remain loyal to Imran Khan and will fight against all kinds of situations will run with full enthusiasm and make PTI nominees successful.

Women varsity hosts 6th Intl conference: The 6th International Conference organized by Women University Mardan in collaboration with OIC, COMSTECH, and PAS-TIC, successfully took place in Islamabad. Prof. Dr. Ghazala Yasmin, Vice Chancellor of WU Mardan, extended a warm welcome to guests, participants, and students, expressing deep appre-

ciation for the collaboration of stakeholders within the academia. Distinguished international keynote speakers contributed to the event, including Prof. Eng. Dr. Faiz Ahmad from Saudi Arabia, Prof. Dr. Turan Uzturk from Turkey, and Prof. Dr. Amir Habib. Their insights enriched the conference, shedding light on the scientific aspects of sustainable development goals.

The event was graced by the esteemed presence of Mr. Najeib Ullah Marwat, Minister for Science & IT, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who served as a chief guest. Mr. Marwat addressed the present-day challenges faced by the education sector in IT and highlighted areas for improvement, emphasizing the importance of addressing these challenges for a sustainable future.

The overarching aim of the conference was to establish the intricate relationship between the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the various scientific disciplines. Participants engaged in discussions and presentations that explored innovative solutions, strategies, and research findings aligning with the broader objectives of sustainable development.

The 6th International Conference on Scientific Outlook of Sustainable Development Goals proved to be a significant platform for intellectual exchange and collaboration, fostering a shared commitment to advancing scientific contributions for a more sustainable future.



Arakan Army fighters claim control of key city in Myanmar

YANGON: The Arakan Army (AA), an armed ethnic group fighting as part of an alliance against the Myanmar military, has claimed control of a key western town near the border with India and Bangladesh. The AA, which was in an uneasy truce with the military until late October, said it took full control of Paletwa in Chin State, having overrun multiple military outposts.

"There is not a single military council camp left in the entire Palewa area," it said in a statement on its media page, which was accompanied by photos showing AA soldiers posing with their weapons outside key administrative buildings adorned with the group's flag as well as weapons, ammunition and military equipment it had seized. "The entire Palewa region has been successfully controlled by [the] Rakhine Army," the statement added. There was no comment from the military on the situation in Paletwa, or any reports in state-run media.

The capture of Paletwa is another setback to the generals who are facing the biggest challenge since they seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in a coup in February 2021. The AA claims to have about 30,000 troops and is part of the so-called Three Brotherhood Alliance with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta'Ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) that launched a major offensive against the military at the end of October. Known as Operation 1027, the offensive has wrested control of key towns and military outposts near the border with China in the north and given renewed momentum to the anti-coup movement. Dr Sasa, the minister of international cooperation in the National Unity Government set up by politicians removed in the coup, welcomed the AA capture of Paletwa.

"This is a significant success for the Nationwide Revolution, the Spring Revolution of Myanmar, the fight to free to entire population of



Myanmar from the genocidal military dictatorship and to restore Myanmar to the path of an inclusive federal democratic Union for ALL," he wrote on X. The AA's advance comes days after China announced it had brokered a ceasefire between the armed groups and the military in northern Shan State. A similar agreement in December quickly collapsed. The AA has been fighting the military in Rakhine, where a brutal military crackdown on the Rohingya in 2017 is now the subject of a genocide case at the International Court of Justice, in an attempt to secure autonomy for its ethnic population. Just before Myanmar's national election in November 2020, the AA agreed to a truce with the military but when the generals seized power the AA's political wing, the United League of Arakan (ULA), took the opportunity to extend and entrench its power in Rakhine and fighting resumed amid military concern at the AA's growing power.

Chin State lies north of Rakhine and Paletwa is situated along the Kaladan River about 20km (12

miles) from the border with Bangladesh. Nathan Ruser, an analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's Cyber, Tech and Security programme, who has been mapping the advance of anti-coup forces, said the town was the 42nd nationwide to be captured from the military with 16 still being contested. In addition, 25 battalion headquarters have been captured since the offensive started three months ago, "clearly marking the decisive shift towards offensive warfare by the resistance", Ruser wrote on X. The military coup triggered mass rallies demanding the restoration of civilian rule but when the military responded with brutal force, many protesters took up arms, joining forces with ethnic armed groups on the country's borders. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a Myanmar advocacy group that has been tracking the crisis, says at least 4,363 civilians and pro-democracy activists have been killed by the military in the escalating violence, and nearly 20,000 people have been jailed by the regime.

Iran strikes targets in Iraq and Syria as regional tensions escalate

IRBIL (AP): Iran fired missiles at what it claimed were Israeli "spy headquarters" near the US Consulate in the northern Iraqi city of Irbil, and at targets linked to the extremist group Islamic State in northern Syria. Four civilians were killed and six injured after missiles hit an upscale area near the consulate in Irbil, the seat of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region, according to the security council of the Kurdish regional government.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said in a statement that it had hit a headquarters of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, in the Kurdish region of Iraq. Another statement said it had fired a number of ballistic missiles at "terrorist operations," including Islamic State targets, in Syria and destroyed them. Israel did not immediately acknowledge the attack in Irbil and its embassy in Washington did not return a request for comment on

the Iranian allegation regarding the Mossad. The strikes come at a time of heightened tensions in the region and fears of a wider spillover of the ongoing war in Gaza. Since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war on Oct. 7, Iranian-backed militias in Iraq have launched near-daily drone attacks on bases housing US forces in Iraq and Syria, which the groups have said was in retaliation for Washington's support of Israel, and in an attempt to force US troops to leave the region. The United States strongly condemns "Iran's reckless missile strikes" in Irbil, said State Department spokesman Matthew Miller. He said the attacks "undermine Iraq's stability." A US defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details that had not been made public said the US tracked the missiles, which hit in northern Iraq and northern Syria, and no US facilities were struck or damaged in the attacks.

The official said initial indications were that the strikes were "reckless and imprecise."

However, the full extent of the damage from the strikes could not be independently assessed. An Iraqi security official said Irbil was targeted with "several" ballistic missiles but did not give further details. An official with an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia said 10 missiles fell in the area near the US Consulate. He said the missiles were launched by Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity.

Peshraw Dizayi, a prominent local businessman with a portfolio that included real estate and security services companies, was killed in one of the Irbil strikes along with members of his family, according to a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, by Mashan al-Jabouri, a former Iraqi member of parliament. Al-Jabouri said that one of the missiles had fallen on Dizayi's "palace,

next to my house, which is under construction on the road to the Salah al-Din resort." Other regional political figures also confirmed Dizayi's death.

In 2022, Iran claimed responsibility for a missile barrage that struck in the same area near the sprawling US Consulate complex in Irbil, saying it was retaliation for an Israeli strike in Syria that killed two members of its Revolutionary Guard. Iran's strike in northern Syria came after the Islamic State group claimed responsibility earlier this month for two suicide bombings targeting a commemoration for an Iranian general slain in a 2020 US drone strike. The attack in Kerman killed at least 84 people and wounded an additional 284 at a ceremony honoring Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani. Last month, Iran accused Israel of killing a high-ranking Iranian general, Seyed Razi Mousavi, in an airstrike on a Damascus neighborhood.

Ukraine commander says his troops, now on 'active defence'

KHARKIV REGION, Ukraine (Reuters): His demeanour is dispassionate and his message is clear: Ukraine's ground forces are focused first and foremost on defence along the eastern stretch of the 1,000-km (600-mile) front under his command. They should not be counted out, however, as an offensive force.

In an interview late last week, Colonel-General Oleksandr Syrskiy - a key figure in Kyiv's response to Russia's full-scale invasion - underlined the shifting realities on the battlefield that have tempered hopes of a major Ukrainian breakthrough. Despite initial optimism for a much-vaunted Ukrainian summer counteroffensive, Russian defences largely held, limiting early advances to a few kilometres in some spots before Moscow's forces hit back elsewhere. "Our goals remain unchanged: holding our positions ... exhausting the enemy by inflicting maximum losses," Syrskiy, Ukraine's number two commander, told Reuters. The 58-year-old, wearing combat fatigues and speaking cautiously at an undisclosed location in the eastern region of Kharkiv, noted how Russia was

looking to seize the initiative as the invasion neared its second anniversary. They were pressing in multiple directions along the eastern front, Syrskiy said, with the aim of wresting full control of the industrial Donbas region despite heavy losses in men and supplies. Russia also hopes to claw back ground it lost in the southern Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, he added.

Ukrainian troops, for their part, are staging smaller counter-attacks in what Syrskiy described as "active defence": keeping the enemy on its toes by seeking opportunities to strike while they look to regain the initiative. Engagements on both sides are on a smaller scale to conserve ammunition and men, he added, suggesting Russia has also learned to react and stem losses. "Offensives at the level of a battalion are a major rarity," said Syrskiy, adding that wider use of drones has forced the change in tactic. Ukraine says it does not have enough ammunition to sustain the desired level of attacks, and has urged Western partners to do more to supply it. Syrskiy has commanded troops against combined Russian

forces since 2014, when he earned his call sign "snow leopard". They fought a Moscow-backed insurgency in eastern Ukraine using "tactics that were similar to how this cat hunts," he explained. "This creature is very careful, cunning and courageous."

He burnished his reputation in September 2022, leading a lightning counteroffensive to retake swathes of the Kharkiv region which stunned Russian forces into a retreat. The operation capitalised on Ukraine's strengths, particularly nimble units capable of bypassing fortified positions to drive deep into enemy territory. But Syrskiy's record as a commander is not unquestioned. Through much of early 2023, he led Ukraine's defence of the eastern city of Bakhmut, where thousands of soldiers on both sides are widely believed to have been killed in the deadliest battle of the conflict so far. Some military analysts questioned whether fighting for a ruined city that was ultimately lost was worth so many dead and wounded. Syrskiy said Ukraine harmed Russia's war effort there by neutralising the Wagner merce-

nary group. Moscow still considers him a threat, Syrskiy said, evidenced by more than one assassination attempt. "Let's say this: we're familiar with rocket strikes," he said.

With artillery and trench warfare yielding few major advances, Syrskiy agreed with Ukraine's top commander Valery Zaluzhny that technology would likely play a major role if Kyiv wanted to win the war. Electronic warfare has intensified over the past year, Syrskiy said, as the proliferation of drones and other guided weaponry has created more opportunities for jamming. To gain an advantage, Ukrainian forces need higher quantities of advanced kit that works across multiple frequencies at once. But there were still opportunities to advance by creating what Syrskiy called a "artificial advantage", just as Ukraine had done in the fall of 2022. "No matter what, there will be certain areas that will be heavily defended, and other areas less defended," he said. The key, Syrskiy added, was to concentrate forces at the most vulnerable point at the best time, a principle which "has not lost its relevance".

Philippines to develop islands in S China Sea

MANILA (Reuters): The Philippines will develop islands in the South China Sea that it considers part of its territory to make them more habitable for troops, Manila's military chief Romeo Brawner told reporters. The plans come amid heightened tensions between the Philippines and China, both of whom claim territory in the South China Sea and have traded accusations of aggressive behaviour in the strategic waterway.

Apart from the Second Thomas Shoal, locally known as Ayungin, the Philippines occupies eight other features in the South China Sea, and considers them part of its exclusive economic zone. "We'd like to improve all the nine, especially the islands we are occupying," Brawner said after attending a command conference led by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. at the military headquarters. The features include Thitu island, the biggest and most strategically important in the South China Sea. Known locally as Pag-asa, Thitu lies about 300 miles (480 km) west of the Philippine province of Palawan. The military wants to bring a desalination machine for troops living aboard a warship that the Philippines deliberately grounded on Second Thomas Shoal in 1999 to assert its sovereignty claim, he said. Besides the Philippines, Brunei, China, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam have competing claims of sovereignty in the South China Sea, a conduit for goods in excess of \$3 trillion every year. Also included in the military's modernisation plans is the acquisition of more ships, radars and aircraft as the Philippines shifts its focus to territorial from internal defence, Brawner said.

Iceland volcano recedes

REYKJAVIK (Reuters): A volcano that erupted in southwest Iceland for the second time in less than a month appeared to be significantly less active despite indications of magma still flowing underground. "A black day" read the front page headline of Icelandic daily Morgunblaðid across an image of bright-orange lava fountains and houses burning in the town of Grindavik, some 40 kilometres (25 miles) southwest of the capital Reykjavik.

Although volcanic activity has eased, the eruption centres is a high-risk area and new fissures could open without warning, the Icelandic Meteorological Office said. "It is difficult to estimate how long this eruption will last," it said in a statement. Molten lava flows reached the outskirts of Grindavik, setting three houses alight, although the town had been evacuated earlier and there was no immediate danger to people. The crack in the earth's surface that opened close to Grindavik was no longer active, and lava production from the larger fissure north of the town was decreasing, vulcanologist Rikke Pedersen told Reuters. "Activity has dropped significantly overnight," she said. GPS measurements showed that magma continued to move in a southern area of the corridor beneath the town, the Meteorological Office said, adding that new cracks might appear within Grindavik in the next few days. It was the second eruption on the peninsula of Reykjanes in four weeks and the fifth since 2021.

Live video footage showed glimpses of orange lava still flowing to the surface but in smaller volumes, and further away from the town. "Unfortunately (the lava) went a little bit more south than we had hoped for," Vidir Reynisson, head of Iceland's Civil Protection and Emergency Management, told a press conference. Nevertheless, defensive barriers built to the north of Grindavik had helped divert the flows of lava to the west, away from the town, Reynisson said. Residents of Grindavik, a town of some 4,000 people before it was evacuated in November, said it was difficult to watch televised images of the fires.

US mily academies focus on oaths and loyalty to Constitution

NEW YORK (AP): For 75 minutes, Maj. Joe Amoroso quizzed his students in SS202, American Politics, about civilian leadership of the military, the trust between the armed forces and the public, and how the military must not become a partisan tool. There was one answer, he said, that would always be acceptable in his class filled with second-year students at the US Military Academy. Hesitantly, one cadet offered a response: "The Constitution."

"Yes," Amoroso said emphatically. His message to the students, known as yearlings, was simple: Their loyalty is "not about particular candidates. It's not a particular person or personality that occupies these positions. It's about the Constitution." The emphasis for the next generation of military officers that their loyalty must be focused on the nation's democratic underpinnings rather than on any individual is a reflection of how the armed forces are being forced to deal with America's deep political polarization at a time when trust in traditional institutions is eroding. The role of the military in particular has come under scrutiny as former President Donald Trump runs to reclaim the White House and has laid out an aggressive agenda should he win. It includes potentially using the military in ways other presidents have not. That could mean invoking the Insurrection Act to send units to the border or patrol the streets of predominantly Democratic cities. Trump's rhetoric about top commanders also has raised concerns. While in office, Trump once referred to the military leaders in his administration as "my generals." Earlier this year, he suggested that a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, retired Army Gen. Mark Milley, be put to death for treason.

President Joe Biden, in his first campaign address of the year, warned about Trump's rhetoric on the military and its leadership. With cadets and midshipmen drawn from across the United States, students at West Point and other service academies are aware of the national mood and the potential for political divisions to seep into the military. They encounter an array of classes on the Constitution and, in some cases, the history of the civilian-military relationship. Each graduate who is commissioned takes multiple oaths at school and during their service. Milley emphasized the significance of the oaths in his retirement address last fall, appearing to take aim at Trump. "We don't take an oath to a king or a queen or to a tyrant or a dictator. And we don't take an oath to a wannabe dictator," he said. At the Air Force Academy, the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol was a top subject of discussion in the Civil-Military Relations class when junior and senior-year cadets began the spring semester the next day.

Iran sentences Nobel laureate

DUBAI (AP): A court in Iran has slapped imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi with an additional sentence of 15 months for allegedly spreading propaganda against the Islamic Republic, her family said. According to a post on Instagram by Mohammadi's family, the new sentence was handed down on Dec. 19. It said Mohammadi had refused to attend the court sessions.

The verdict also said that after serving her time, Mohammadi would be banned from traveling abroad for two years and would be barred from membership in political and social groups and from having a mobile phone for the same duration. The ruling also banishes her from the capital, Tehran, meaning she would likely have to serve the new sentence in another province in Iran. Mohammadi is held in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison where she is serving a 30-month sentence for spreading propaganda

against the ruling system, disobediences in prison and defamation of authorities. The latest verdict reflects the Iranian theocracy's anger that she was awarded the Nobel prize last October for years of activism despite a decades-long government campaign targeting her.

Mohammadi is the 19th woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize and the second Iranian woman after human rights activist Shirin Ebadi in 2003. The 51-year-old Mohammadi has kept up her activism despite numerous arrests by Iranian authorities and spending years behind bars. Earlier in November, Mohammadi went on hunger strike over being blocked along with other inmates from getting medical care and to protest the country's mandatory headscarves for women. Mohammadi was a leading light for nationwide, women-led protests sparked by the death last year of a 22-year-old woman in police custody that have grown into one of the most

intense challenges to Iran's theocratic government. That woman, Mahsa Amini, had been detained for allegedly not wearing her headscarf to the liking of authorities. For observant Muslim women, the head covering is a sign of piety before God and modesty in front of men outside their families. In Iran, the hijab - and the all-encompassing black chador worn by some - has long been a political symbol as well, particularly after becoming mandatory in the years following the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

While women in Iran hold jobs, academic positions and even government appointments, their lives are tightly controlled in part by laws like the mandatory hijab. Iran and neighboring, Taliban-ruled Afghanistan remain the only countries to mandate that. Since Amini's death, however, more women are choosing not to wear the headscarf despite an increasing campaign by authorities targeting them and businesses serving them.

Trump lawyer Tacopina withdraws from legal team

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Joseph Tacopina, an attorney on former US President Donald Trump's legal team, said he will no longer represent him in a criminal case in Manhattan related to alleged hush money payments or a separate appeal of a civil case. Tacopina withdrew from representing Trump in two of the former president's ongoing legal battles, including a state criminal case in which Trump was charged with falsifying business records over a hush money payment to a porn star before his victory in the 2016 presidential election, the lawyer confirmed in an email to Reuters.

The New York Times had earlier reported that Tacopina had withdrawn from the two cases. Trump has pled not guilty to the charges, and will

face a trial this year, although the timing is uncertain. Tacopina also will no longer represent Trump in his appeal of a verdict in a civil case brought by writer E. Jean Carroll, who accused him of rape, he confirmed. A jury in May awarded Carroll \$5 million after finding Trump liable for sexual assault and defamation. Trump has also maintained his innocence in that case. The shift in Trump's legal team comes as Iowans are set to cast the first votes in the 2024 campaign, with Trump as an early favorite to claim victory in the early contest in the Republican presidential primary.

Tacopina is a frequent cable news commentator who has represented high-profile clients including rapper Meek Mill, former

Yankees baseball star Alex Rodriguez and Donald Trump Jr.'s fiancée Kimberly Guilfoyle. Asked about Tacopina's shift, Trump spokesman Steven Cheung told Reuters, "President Trump has the most experienced, qualified, disciplined, and overall strongest legal team ever assembled as he continues to fight for America and Americans against these partisan, Crooked Joe Biden-led election interference hoaxes." Tacopina is one of several Trump lawyers to have stopped representing him in ongoing cases. At least three members of his legal team in Florida stepped down after Trump was indicted in June on charges he unlawfully kept national-security documents when he left office.

The Frontier Post

Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

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

Peshawar Office: 091-5700095, 0300- 9009001

Peshawar Fax: 091-5703687, Post Box No. 573

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

*USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

Anti-graft campaign and fake sacrosanctity

CHAIRMAN NAB Lieutenant General Retired Nazir Ahmed addressed the civil bureaucrats in the Sindh secretariat and assured them that the NAB would not harass officers and they should openly play their key role in the development of the country. NAB Chairman was of the view that the bureaucrats are working under immense pressure due to fear of NAB's action on charges of alleged corruption which causes delays in construction and development work. According to him, reforms are being implemented in the anti-graft watchdog and no officer will suffer media trial during the complaint verification and inquiry processes. In addition to that the NAB will not initiate inquiry on anonymous and fictitious complaints and the process of accountability will be accomplished in a civilized manner.

Bureaucracy is an important pillar of the state in modern governance. It plays a key role in architecting policy, carrying out development projects, and implementing strategies to facilitate socio-economic growth and nation-building in any country. Pakistani Bureaucracy enjoys utmost importance and authority because of unstable political governments, lax bureaucratic regimes, and weak command of elected leaders over governmental, administrative, and political affairs. Senior Bureaucracy advises the political executives to make key decisions regarding the national economy, budget, socio-economic development, governance, and smooth running of the government. Hence, the people who have important portfolios in the center, Provinces, and local governments are seriously exposed to white-collar crimes including misappropriation of funds, misuse of authority, and nepotism in certain ways during the conduct of their duties.

According to government statistics and independent Observers, Pakistan has unprecedentedly slid into institutional corruption over the past decades and this menace has equally ingressed in all public departments ranging from the Revenue Department to LEAs, the Education Department and Health Sector, Judiciary, local governments, and all services providing institutions are the victims of corruption of their employees and senior management. Similarly, military Cantonment boards, NLC, and logistics and supply divisions of the tri-forces are equally indulged in these social evils. The successive past governments and political leadership had categorically acknowledged this bitter reality, while President General Pervez Musharraf's government passed the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO) and laid down the foundation of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) nearly two and a half decades ago. Under the NAB Ordinance, all government institutions and public office holders including judges and generals, politicians, bureaucrats, government executives, businessmen, and contractors were vulnerable to corruption and liable to accountability during/after the government service and their term in public office and thereafter.

In the early stage, there was much hue and cry. Gestapo-type investigation and prosecution along with unlawful media trials of the accused caused insult and humiliation for concerned individuals, while the same was faced by the anti-graft watch at its failure in proving the case in the court. Interestingly, cunning bureaucracy assured the political leaders that junior bureaucrats lacked interest in their work due to fear of harassment and investigation from the NAB authorities which seriously caused delays in construction work, development projects, and service delivery to the public. This strategy worked perfectly and gradually NAB authorities excluded government executives from their scrutiny list narrowing it to only the political class as judges and generals were already exempted over pleas of their departmental accountability mechanism, businessmen deal in their own money while Police and LEAs investigate criminals and crooks. Currently, corruption is at its peak and Transparency International ranked Pakistan at 140th position among 180 countries around the globe. The government and NAB authorities must not issue clean chits to any specific group or class considering them immune from bad deeds particularly when that group is highly malignant and prone to corruption. However, the bureau must adapt new methodologies, the latest investigative techniques, and modern technical gadgets and conduct investigations in a civilized and lawful manner so no one escapes accountability and eludes justice in any disguise and fake sacrosanctity.

The policy of strategic ambiguity

A N unofficial American delegation comprising two retired senior government executives including former National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley and former Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg arrived in Tai Pei to convey a congratulatory message and reiterate US unhindered support for the newly elected President and his government the day after. The so-called unofficial delegation carried forward US strategic objectives in its host nation in the disguise of a private trip by offering rich tribute to the newly elected leader and assuring him of continued US support to self-ruled autonomous Island in the face of ongoing threat from Beijing. The trip of former US executives caused great concerns in Beijing, which claims the sole property rights of the island nation considering a part of its territory and is always ready to assimilate the tiny state into mainland China by use of force if necessary.

Historically, the Chinese government has used all its cards during the recently held electoral contest in Taiwan. Beijing is a staunch opponent of ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP), the incumbent President Tsai Ing-wen and President-elect William Lai Ching-te for their pro-US and anti-China policies over the past years. The Chinese government criticized Mr. Lai was a separatist and cast the election as a choice between peace and war. Amid coercion and intimidation from Beijing, the Taiwanese voters swept the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) presidential candidate Lai Ching-te into power, strongly rejecting Chinese pressure to spurn him. Lai's party, which champions Taiwan's separate identity and rejects China's territorial claims, was seeking a third successive four-year term, which the DPP secured successfully in the recent runoff. Luckily, Washington's allies made history by achieving an unprecedented straight third victory making the conditions conducive for the US strategists and worse for the Chinese government. The latest development has again spoiled the US-China relations that witnessed significant improvement over the past months. The Biden administration has intentionally spread ambiguity regarding the US official position over the Taiwan issue, by acknowledging one China policy on one hand and supporting Taiwanese independence on the other. Interestingly, US serving or retired officials appeared in Tai pei at sensitive occasions and reiterate Washington's support for separatists forces but the US government expresses innocence and disassociation from them. Apparently, it is the policy of strategic deception instead of strategic ambiguity that will persist until and unless China rebuts it or America achieves its goal in the Indo-Pacific region.

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**Deluded Netanyahu's 100 days of digging**

Ramzy Baroud

RULE No. 1 in the "law of holes" is that, "if you find yourself in a hole, stop digging." Law No. 2 is, "once you stop digging, you are still in a hole." These adages sum up Israel's ongoing political, military and strategic crises 100 days on from the start of its war on Gaza.

On Oct. 7, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was faced with the unprecedented challenge of having to react to a major attack launched by the Palestinian resistance in southern Israel.?This event is already proving to be a game-changer in the relationship between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Its impact will be felt for many years, if not generations, to come.

But Netanyahu was already in a hole long before the Al-Aqsa Flood operation took place - and he has no one to blame but himself.?

In order to stay in power and avoid three major corruption cases, Netanyahu labored to fortify his position at the helm of Israeli politics with the help of the most extreme government ever assembled and in a state whose very existence is the outcome of an extremist ideology.

Even the mass anti-Netanyahu protests held throughout Israel, which took place for months prior to the war, did not alert the Israeli leader that the hole he was digging was getting deeper or that the Palestinians, living under perpetual military occupation and siege, might find an opportunity in Israel's political and military crises.

He simply kept on digging.?Oct. 7 should not be perceived as a surprise attack, since the entire Gaza Division - the massive Israeli military buildup in the Gaza envelope - exists for the very purpose of ensuring that Gaza's subjugation and siege are perfected according to state-of-the-art military technology.?

According to the Global Firepower 2024 military strength ranking system, Israel is No. 17 in the world, mainly because of its military technology. This advanced military capability means that surprise attacks should not be

possible because it is not humans but rather sophisticated machines that scan, intercept and report on every perceived suspicious movement. In the Israeli case, the failure was profound and multilayered.

Following Oct. 7, Netanyahu found himself in a much deeper hole. However, instead of finding his way out - by, for exam-

ple, taking responsibility, unifying his people or, God forbid, acknowledging that war is never the answer in the face of a resisting, oppressed population - he kept on digging.

The Israeli leader, flanked by far-right ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir, Bezalel Smotrich and Amichai Eliyahu, worsened matters by using the war on Gaza as an opportunity to implement long-dormant plans to ethnically cleanse the Palestinians, not only from the Gaza Strip but also the West Bank.

Were it not for the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and strong rejection by Egypt and Jordan, the second Nakba would have become a reality.?

All mainstream Israeli politicians, despite their ideological and political differences, unanimously sought to outdo one another with their racist, violent and even genocidal language. While Defense Minister Yoav Gallant immediately announced that, in Gaza, "there will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed,"

the role of cheerleader and outright partner.?

Aside from the additional \$14 billion emergency aid package that is currently before Congress, Washington reportedly sent, as of Dec. 25, 230 airplanes and 20 ships loaded with armaments and munitions.?

According to a New York Times report published last week, the CIA is also actively involved in collecting information on Gaza and providing that intelligence to Israel.

US support for Israel, in all its forms, has been maintained despite the shocking reports issued by every respected international charity that operates in Palestine and the Middle East.

For example, the UN Relief and Works Agency said last week that 1.9 million of Gaza's entire population of 2.3 million have been displaced. Save the Children reported that an average of 100 Palestinian children are killed daily. Gaza's government media office has said that about 70 percent of the Strip has been destroyed.?

Even The Wall Street Journal concluded that the destruction of Gaza is greater than that of Dresden in the Second World War.?

Yet, none of this seems to concern US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who has visited the region five times in less than 100 days with the same message of support for Israel.?

What is astonishing, however, is that Gaza's threshold of resilience continues to prove unequalled. This is how determined the Palestinians are to finally achieve their freedom. Indeed, fathers and mothers, in a scene repeated numerous times, would be carrying the bodies of their dead children, howling in pain, while insisting that they will never leave their homeland.?

This dignified pain has moved the world. Even though Washington has ensured that no meaningful action will be taken at the UN Security Council, South Africa has sought the help of the world's highest court and demanded an immediate end to the war, along with recognition of Israel's atrocities as an act of genocide.

South Africa's efforts at the International Court of Justice have galvanized other countries, mostly in the Global South. But Netanyahu has kept on digging, unmoved, or possibly unaware that the world around him is finally beginning to truly understand the generational suffering of the Palestinians.?

The Israeli leader still speaks of "voluntary migration," of wanting to manage Gaza and Palestine and of reshaping the Middle East in ways consistent with his own delusions of grandeur and power.

One hundred days of war on Gaza has taught us that superior firepower no longer influences outcomes when a nation takes the collective decision to resist.?

It has also taught us that the US is no longer able to reorder the Middle East to fit Israeli priorities and that relatively small countries in the Global South, when united, can alter the course of history. Netanyahu may continue digging, but history has already been written: the spirit of the Palestinian people has won over Israel's death machine.

Arab News

Biden and the big border debacle

Belén Fernández

ing on the "Abbott express", if you will.

A January 5 press release from the governor's office praised Texas's "historic response to Biden's border crisis", which since August 2022 had included busing more than 29,400 "migrants" to Chicago, more than 35,600 to New York City and more than 12,500 to Washington, DC, all cities governed by Democrats. Some asylum seekers have also been flown by private plane. Of course, Abbott's xenophobic orientation is highly marketable in a state that prides itself on being at the vanguard of reactionary extremism. But while there is clearly a "border crisis" under way - as underscored by the unprecedented numbers of humans deeming it necessary to risk their lives to travel to the US - its dimensions do not exactly align with Abbottian fanta-

sies. For starters, the Biden administration is hardly presiding over an immigration free-for-all. As The Washington Post reported on December 29, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement deported more than 142,000 immigrants in the 2023 fiscal year, which was nearly twice as many deportations as were carried out the previous year. Biden has also made frequent use of his predecessor Donald Trump's beloved policy of dumping non-Mexican asylum seekers back into Mexico and has resumed direct deportation flights from the US to Venezuela. These flights are expected to increase significantly in 2024, which means that many more Venezuelans will get to re-encounter the hardships of existence in a country under debilitating - and even lethal - US sanc-

tions. To be sure, what is consistently excised from the discourse on immigration and asylum is that the United States's own relentless and flagrant violations of other nations' sovereignty plays a fundamental role in driving people from their homes in the first place - and often in the direction of the US itself. Meanwhile, the idea that Biden is somehow dismantling the US border is easily debunked by reality: a reality in which his administration waived a slew of federal laws and regulations in order to expand Trump's wall, in contravention of Biden's own promises.

Anyway, genocide isn't cheap. Given that the US has such vast resources at its disposal, it would be nice if the country would help people rather than kill them. The fact that Biden is being vilified as a sofie on immigration just renders

the whole arrangement all the more nauseating, shifting as it does the narrative even further to the fanatical right. About the same time that I rendezvoused with the Venezuelan family on the isthmus of Tehuantepec in November, I met a young asylum seeker from Mauritania who was also traversing Mexico with a number of his compatriots in the hopes of reaching the US border.

Having since made it to New York, he messaged me over the holidays in distress after spending too much time perusing xenophobic vitriol on X. In command of superb English as well as English slang - and intermittently addressing me as "bro" - he professed to be "shocked" at the online hatred emitted against folks who, like him, were simply seeking a better life. As Americans continue to internalise the US border while the US continues to violate everyone else's, there is a crisis afoot indeed.

Aljazeera

This past week, we all became South Africans

Andrew Mitrovica

INEVITABLY, contempt breeds disgust. Anyone with a scintilla of awareness and sympathy for the horrors that Palestinians have endured for generations knows the abiding ache that churns inside of us like a dormant volcano ready to blow with righteous anger.

So, we take to the streets, bridges and national malls in a necessary display of irenic solidarity and to point an accusatory finger at the hypocrites and their enablers who deny the inhumanity and injustices that we can all see being perpetrated in Gaza and the West Bank with deliberate, lethal efficiency by a fanatical regime seized with a "killing rage".

Lately, the hypocrites and their enablers, have worked hard - as they always do - to deny or discredit our South African allies who have done the right and honourable thing by holding Israel to account finally for the crimes it committed yesterday and the outrages it is sure to commit today and tomorrow.

South Africa is keen on seeing through its principled charge in a courtroom: that Israel has, by careful and deliberate design, carried out genocide and turned much of Gaza into dust. The result: despite the risks and recriminations, South Africa has succeeded in putting Israel in the dock - where scores of nations who signed on to the historic legal gambit believe it has long belonged.

The hypocrites and their enablers have responded - as they are also apt to do - with howls of hyperbole and indignation instead of addressing the substance of South Africa's detailed, persuasive indictment delivered with quiet, devastating precision at The Hague. True to condescending, colonial attitude-reeking form, the hypocrites, and their enablers - who believe that Israel is never at fault, never responsible, never to blame, and, of course, never guilty - have derided South Africa's stinging submission as misguided, "unhelpful," and "counter-productive."

Their pat, predictable reaction not only fuels sweeping disgust, but invites an admittedly rhetorical question: When is the pursuit of justice and accountability ever misguided, "unhelpful", and "counterproductive"? And what, in the disingenuous calculus of the hypocrites and their enablers, would constitute being "helpful" and "productive" in the odious, prevailing circumstances?

Silence? Blindness? Apathy? That may be their choice. It is not ours. While the hypocrites and their enablers are content to spout meaningless bromides and feign concern for the innocent casualties of an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe, we, along with our steadfast South African friends, are prepared to raise our voice, to act, and to demonstrate because history and decency demand it. Those of us who witness genocide and are moved by our conscience to stop it, became South Africans in spirit this past week. We ought to be grateful to a nation and a people who know and have experienced the calumnies and indignities inherent to a diseased,

apartheid ideology. South Africa's good fight is our fight. South Africa, to its eternal credit, took the lead when others refused or hesitated to come to the defence of imprisoned Palestinians, bearing the gifts of hope and empathy.

In shameful contrast, the presidents and prime ministers of so-called enlightened Western democracies have opted to enable, encourage, and excuse the perpetrator's wanton wrath rather than to protect, provide for, and console its mostly young, profoundly damaged victims. South Africa was compelled to take a stand, since, as the immortal freedom fighter Nelson Mandela once said, "The histories of our two peoples, Palestinian and South African, correspond in such painful and poignant ways." The pain is evident day after dreadful day. The scenes of death, destruction, and humiliation in Gaza and the occupied West Bank are reminiscent of the awful images that several decades ago dominated TV screens and pierced the heart and soul. We remember when the leaders of so-called enlightened Western democracies played collaborator to an apartheid state brimming with racists out of "strategic" interest.

"Yes, I called it genocide," Biden said on an airport tarmac amid the whirl of nearby engines. "It's become clearer and clearer that Putin is just trying to wipe out the idea of even being Ukrainian and the evidence is mounting." Biden did not share any of his "evidence" beyond insisting that Russia had done "horrible things" in Ukraine. "We'll let the lawyers decide internationally whether or not it qualifies, but it sure seems that way to me," Biden said. Ever the reliable "junior partner", Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau parroted - near verbatim - Biden's "genocide" writ. "I think, as President Biden highlighted, there are official processes around determinations of genocide. But I think it's absolutely right that more and more people be talking and using the word 'genocide' in terms of what Russia is doing, what Vladimir Putin has done," Trudeau told reporters.

He cited Russia's "targeted attacks" against civilians and Ukraine's culture and identity as "evidence" of genocide. Who needs a panel of judges at the International Court of Justice when the law firm of Biden, Trudeau, and Quickdraw decides unilaterally that Russia is guilty as charged? When South African lawyers presented a brief filled with concrete, not bombastic, "evidence" of Israel's intent and execution of genocide, Biden, Trudeau, and company retreated to the comfort of denial and ignorance. Just like "apartheid", "genocide" is a verboten word among the craven leaders of enlightened Western democracies when Israel is accused of "horrible things", including the targeting of civilians and the wholesale erasure of the culture and identity of Palestinians throughout their ancestral lands. If Israel receives its censure, South Africa should take a well-earned bow on behalf of humanity and the tattered remnants of international law.

the whole arrangement all the more nauseating, shifting as it does the narrative even further to the fanatical right. About the same time that I rendezvoused with the Venezuelan family on the isthmus of Tehuantepec in November, I met a young asylum seeker from Mauritania who was also traversing Mexico with a number of his compatriots in the hopes of reaching the US border.

Having since made it to New York, he messaged me over the holidays in distress after spending too much time perusing xenophobic vitriol on X. In command of superb English as well as English slang - and intermittently addressing me as "bro" - he professed to be "shocked" at the online hatred emitted against folks who, like him, were simply seeking a better life. As Americans continue to internalise the US border while the US continues to violate everyone else's, there is a crisis afoot indeed.

Aljazeera

The former president who did what Trump is trying to do

ON George Washington's birthday in 1892, former President Grover Cleveland urged graduating students at the University of Michigan to "take with you ... a strong and abiding faith in the value and potency of a good conscience and a pure heart. Never yield one iota to those who teach that these are weak and childish things, not needed in the struggle of manhood with the stern realities of life."

The speech embracing Washington's virtues was "perhaps the most unusual kickoff to a presidential campaign in American history," wrote Cleveland biographer Troy Senik. Nine months later, Cleveland won the presidency for the second time, becoming the only person in American history to serve non-consecutive terms in the White House. It is a feat former President Donald Trump is trying to duplicate this year.

Cleveland overcame scandal in his first run for president when he had to admit to having possibly fathered a child out of wedlock - his opponents derisively chanted, "Ma, ma, where's my Pa?" But his travails pale in comparison to Trump's 91 felony charges - and Cleveland's speech saluting homely American virtues is worlds away from the 2024 Republican frontrunner's repeated focus on his own grievances, spoken as he travels from primary appearances to courtrooms. And, of course, Cleveland didn't refuse to accept that he lost his bid for reelection - in 1888 to Benjamin Harrison - as Trump has, claiming without evidence that the 2020 election was a fraud. The first true test of Trump's comeback occurs Monday in Iowa, where caucusgoers will venture into sub-zero temperatures to choose between Trump, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former UN ambassador Nikki Haley, entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and others.

After months of speculation, we'll finally get some answers to a few questions: Is there an opening for any Republican aside from Trump? Will DeSantis' decision to focus on Iowa, where he's visited all 99 counties, pay off? Does Haley's momentum in New Hampshire, where she is second in the polls, also apply to Iowa? Most of our contributors thought Haley won Wednesday's CNN debate in Iowa against DeSantis, but Trump's absence from the stage again loomed large. "Haley sounded like someone looking to take on the genuine article - the Republican frontrunner," wrote W. James Antle III. "Her refrain of 'make America proud again' appropriated Trump's signature line while suggesting his term wasn't always a source of national pride. She went even more directly against his divisiveness and conduct during the January 6 Capitol riot." "There's a limit to how far that will take you in a Republican primary, as former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie can attest after campaigning hard against Trump only to drop out Wednesday. ... But if Haley can dispatch DeSantis and put up some resistance to Trump, the frontrunner might have difficulty continuing to avoid debates - and might not benefit from joining her on stage."

"But that is still a lot of 'ifs' for Haley," Antle observed. "Make no mistake," wrote SE Cupp, "Haley made conservative arguments. But for someone looking for a Trump alternative, who's turned off by the new GOP's regressive extremism, who wants to move past Trump's chaos, Haley made an appeal to them without giving up on her principles." Sophia A. Nelson argued that "Haley isn't quite there yet. She certainly has the intelligence and ability to be president. But ... she and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis engaged in petty, juvenile sniping at one another. She opened the night looking presidential and sounding sober-minded - right up until she told voters to go to Desantislies.com (which she repeated multiple times throughout the night). That was a low point - for me

and the room full of family members I watched the debate with."

Debate coach Todd Graham gave Haley a B for her performance: "Haley deftly pivoted away from Trump. She was more forceful in her criticisms of the former president than she'd been in previous debates. Haley knows it's now or never to highlight their contrasting styles and policies. This could be something to build on for future debates." DeSantis got a D+ from Graham: "His answers became alarmingly policy-free and could easily fit on bumper stickers." In the world of legal developments swirling around Trump last week, the most significant was the DC Circuit Court's oral arguments over his claim to immunity from criminal prosecution under nearly all circumstances. "Right out of the gate," wrote Laurence Tribe, Norman Eisen and Taylor Redd, "Judge Florence Pan, who emerged as the panel's most incisive questioner, presented Trump's counsel John Sauer with a hypothetical that exposed the unthinkable consequences of Trump's extreme position: Could a president who used his official authority to order SEAL Team Six to assassinate a political rival ever be prosecuted?"

They wrote that "placing presidents above the law - by making them immune from criminal accountability - gets separation of powers backwards and upends the rule of law." The SEAL Team Six hypothetical "resonated because it aligns with the Trump we have all come to know: a politician who has encouraged, promoted, justified and even praised political violence, as long as he sees it as a sign of support for him," Frida Ghitis observed. "And it resonated because Trump is once again sending very clear signals that he endorses and even encourages political violence to support his cause." He is calling those imprisoned for the Capitol riot "hostages," rather than people convicted of crimes, Ghitis noted. Trump's strategy of showing up for court sessions where his presence is not required appears to be working for him, along with his refusal to engage in debates. "There are many reasons for Trump's formidable lead in the Republican primary, but at the top of the list is the fact that Haley, DeSantis and others in the GOP have struggled to attract similar levels of attention as the former president, whose mastery of grabbing the media spotlight is unrivaled," wrote Julian Zelizer.

The US and UK launched reprisal strikes in Houthi-controlled parts of Yemen this week, after the Iranian-backed militants continually attacked commercial shipping in the Red Sea. Peter Bergen asked: How did we get here? He traced the conflict's roots back to 2015, when, in "a spectacular act of strategic folly, the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, then the Saudi minister of defense, launched a war in neighboring Yemen to prevent the rebel Houthis from taking over the country." Recognizing the disastrous consequences, the Saudis are now negotiating a peace deal with the Houthis, Bergen noted. "Saudi Arabia was not one of the named participants on Thursday night's strikes on Houthi targets. Yet, Saudi Arabia is a key reason that the Houthis are now so closely allied to Iran and so well armed." "Let's hope that the US-led strikes restore deterrence against the Houthis launching more strikes in the Red Sea. But already the regional conflict that the Biden administration was hoping to contain has spread to Yemen, to Israel's northern border with Hezbollah and to Iraq, where a recent US strike on the leader of an Iranian-backed militia has amplified calls for the removal of all US troops that remain in Iraq."

It's been a scary new year in the skies. Alaska Airlines cancelled hundreds of flights after a mid-cabin door plug blew off a Boeing 737 Max 9

plane as it ascended to 16,000 feet, forcing an emergency landing on January 5 at Portland International Airport in Oregon. It came three days after a runway collision at Tokyo's Haneda Airport. Last year ended with "no reported fatal accidents involving large commercial jets in scheduled service," noted Hassan Shahidi, CEO of the Flight Safety Foundation. "2023 has been widely hailed as one of the safest years in the history of aviation. And the air transport system is safe." "But the aviation system and its safety margins are showing signs of stress. ... Both regulators and the aviation industry must heed the recent warning signs and recommit to maintaining the highest standards and quality to build an even more resilient aviation system."

Shahidi added, "This moment is not just about maintaining our impressive safety record; it's about envisioning and creating a future where aviation safety is more resilient, more intuitive and more integrated than ever before." As Adrienne Bitar noted, "Oprah Winfrey recently disclosed that she had taken weight-loss medication, and some Americans felt betrayed. How could she, the queen of WeightWatchers and doyenne of dieting, be abandoning the equation of diet + exercise = slim?" "Maybe because Oprah is conceding an uncomfortable truth: Diets rarely work. It doesn't matter how much grit or willpower you have or how hard you're willing to work, the weight comes back; it nearly always does."

"If Oprah's army of chefs and trainers couldn't transform her into a size 6 without drugs, then maybe it's time to question the tired American (diet) dream..." Gypsy Rose Blanchard was recently paroled "after serving eight and a half years for helping to kill her abusive mother," wrote Sarah Gundle. Blanchard, the subject of a new Lifetime series, "was for years paraded before reporters and the public as a sickly cancer patient, before it was revealed that her own mother, Claudine 'Dee Dee' Blanchard, had been slowly poisoning her. The revelation drove Gypsy Rose to seek revenge by convincing her boyfriend to murder her mother." Dee Dee Blanchard's behavior, Gundle wrote, "was beyond the pale, rising to the level of evil. But as a psychologist, I often wonder if the so-called 'wicked mother paradigm,' like so many forms of othering, may be hiding more about us than it reveals about them."

"What if instead of asking questions about these evil mothers or avidly attending to the details of their children's lives, we viewed stories like these as an opportunity to ask difficult questions of ourselves and our own relationships? ... would Dee Dee Blanchard have been able to stop the train of destruction if someone had more doggedly recognized and confronted her mental illness?" Pope Francis came out squarely against surrogacy, calling it "despicable." Jill Filipovic wrote that "surrogacy is among the most ethically thorny reproductive questions. It creates many opportunities for exploitation, with wealthy people who want children willing to pay poorer women to carry and birth them. Feminists often rely on the concept of 'choice' when discussing reproduction, and choice is key, but it isn't the only concern. No choice, after all, is made in a vacuum. And with surrogacy arrangements often involving poor women in developing countries who carry babies for far wealthier people in rich and developed ones, the potential for abuse is high and the negotiating table perilously uneven." The Pope's stance fits with the Catholic Church's overall approach to gender and human life, Filipovic noted, but shows that he is far from the "progressive Pope" he is often made out to be. The church's views on such issues, she added, often amount to

"simplistic rules made by men with no actual experience or skin in the game, which largely regulate women's behavior, see our bodies as dangers to be managed and serve to keep us smaller."

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was hospitalized for days due to complications following prostate cancer surgery before President Joe Biden was informed. "There has rarely been a more fraught time during the Biden administration for the US secretary of defense to be out of commission than now," Peter Bergen wrote. "The Middle East is on fire, and one of America's chief firefighters was AWOL." "So, what, if anything, can Biden do? Probably not much. A public reprimand of Austin by Biden would also only serve to reinforce the view held by Republican critics that the Biden team isn't especially competent." And if Biden fired Austin, he would need the Senate to confirm a replacement in an election year.

If last week's rebooted Golden Globes are any indication, this year's award season is going to be dominated by "Oppenheimer" and "Barbie," the box office hits that were both released July 21. (The distributor of "Barbie" and CNN share a parent company, Warner Bros. Discovery.) "If the Globes are to be given credence as harbingers for Academy Awards," wrote Gene Seymour, "then 'Oppenheimer' would seem to have an edge - that is, unless you neglect the other big-screen winners Sunday, including 'Poor Things,' the Victorian period farce that won for best comedy or musical feature as well as a best female actor in comedy or musical prize for his star, Emma Stone." Seymour noted "the reformist spirit of this year's Globes, which made sweeping changes in their operations that included phasing out the scandal-plagued Hollywood Foreign Press Association and bringing greater diversity to the voting process."

For sports traditionalists, it's bad enough that the college football realignment is under way. Now the NFL's legendary Bill Belichick is out as coach of the New England Patriots, the team he led to six Super Bowl victories. Will Leitch argued that the "changes to college football seem potentially fatal. Sure, in the short term, they'll work: I'm as excited to watch next year's 12-team College Football Playoff as anyone. But in the long term, when you pattern yourself after the NFL in order to get some of their television juice, when you jettison the traditions and orthodoxies that made people fall in love with the sport in the first place, you stop being college football: You simply become Minor League NFL. And no one cares about minor league anything." Sports writer Jeff Pearlman classed Belichick's departure with the nearly simultaneous retirement of University of Alabama head coach Nick Saban as big losses for football. Not least, they represent a disappearing kind of team leader: "the grump coach."

"Belichick is a grump. Saban is a grump. One-word answers. Dismissive shrugs. Indifferent brush offs. Pointed stares. That look - that dreaded, nightmarish, awful look - that screams one of the following: 'What type of stupid question is that?' 'Who let you in here?' 'You are a millimeter of lint on my sweater.' Pearlman recalled, "When they addressed the media, it was usually done in a dark and dank office, a cracked-open Schlitz in one hand, a smoldering Cam in the other..." "I once interviewed Lou Pinella, manager of the Seattle Mariners, as he (simultaneously) peed at a urinal, smoked a cigarette and ate a turkey-and-Swiss hoagie. 'Ask me what you wanna know,' he said, 'then leave.'" "On the one hand, it's not always fun dealing with the grump. Actually, it's rarely fun dealing with the grump. But at least grumps are sincere and straightforward and generally incapable of posting a video to Instagram (without a grandchild's assistance)." *CNN*

Taiwan loses Nauru to China following ruling party's election win

TAIWAN announced that it will sever diplomatic ties with Nauru effective immediately Monday after the Pacific island nation announced its decision to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China.

In an official statement, the Nauru government said the diplomatic switch is in line with the "One China Principle," which mandates that the only legal government representing the whole of China is the People's Republic of China, and announced that Nauru will stop developing any official relations or official exchanges with Taiwan. During a news conference in the Taiwanese capital, Taipei, Taiwan's Deputy Foreign Minister Tien Chung-kwang said Taipei will immediately withdraw embassy staff and personnel from its technical mission in Nauru and asked the Pacific island nation to close its embassy in Taiwan.

"Since 2023, we have obtained information indicating that China has been actively reaching out to political figures in Nauru and trying to use financial aid to induce a diplomatic shift in Nauru," Tien said during the news conference. Tien told reporters that Nauru began to consider a diplomatic switch to China during the tenure of the country's former president Russ Joseph Kun last October. Despite a brief period of calmness in bilateral relations after David Adeang became Nauru's new president on October 30, 2023, Tien said Nauru continued to ask Taiwan for a huge amount of financial aid that surpassed what Taiwan would normally provide to diplomatic allies.

Tien said Nauru's decision to establish diplomatic ties with China despite the wide range of assistance that Taiwan has provided over the years is regrettable. He also condemned China's decision to poach another diplomatic ally from Taiwan following Taiwan's presidential election on January 13, describing the move as intentional and an attempt to deal a blow to Taiwan's democracy and freedom. "At a time when democracies around the world congratulate Taiwan on the success of the election, Beijing has

William Yang

chosen to suppress Taiwan in such a way," Tien said, adding that the move is a retaliation against democratic values and a blatant challenge to international order. While Taipei urged Beijing to abandon confrontation and return to the international order, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said it welcomes Nauru's decision to break "the so-called diplomatic ties" with Taiwan.

"There is but one China in the world, Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory, and the government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China," said an unnamed spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in a statement, adding that Beijing "stands ready" to work with Nauru. The news comes only two days after Taiwan held its presidential and legislative election, during which the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) which favors Taiwan maintaining its sovereignty, won an unprecedented third consecutive presidential term. Following the election, the Chinese government claimed the election outcome didn't reflect the mainstream public opinion in Taiwan and emphasized that the result couldn't change the fact that Taiwan is a part of China.

Some analysts say Beijing's decision to poach Taiwan's ally is a victory that the Chinese government can claim after it repeatedly used tough language to warn Taiwan of the possible consequence of electing the candidate from the DPP as the new president. "[The Chinese government] needs to follow through [their tough language] with some sort of response so this might be the first of a number of measures to come," Amanda Hsiao, a senior China analyst at the International Crisis Group, told VOA by phone. Since China has previously used similar moves to retaliate against Taiwan, some experts say Monday's news is unsurprising. "Many of us saw poaching a diplomatic ally as a tool in China's repertoire for how to punish Taiwan for another DPP victory and it's a means that they're willing

to do," Lev Nachman, a political scientist at National Chengchi University in Taiwan, told VOA. While Monday's development leaves Taiwan with only 12 diplomatic allies, Nachman said Taipei can neutralize the impact of Beijing's retaliation by repeating the narrative that these incidents are examples of "Beijing bullying Taiwan."

"As long as Taiwan stays on this messaging, I still think Taiwan will come out looking stronger than Beijing," he said, adding that the Chinese government's attempt to poach Taiwan's diplomatic allies will make Beijing look like a bully rather than making the DPP look weak. Since the new government led by Taiwan's president-elect Lai Ching-te won't be sworn in until May 20, Hsiao from the International Crisis Group predicted that Beijing might adopt more non-military measures to put pressure on Taiwan in the coming months since Monday's move shows that the Chinese government doesn't want to be seen as "excessively provocative."

"This response is to show Beijing's strong displeasure with the election results and I think it's possible that they might adopt more non-military responses," she told VOA.

"They could easily remove more Taiwanese products from the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement between Taipei and Beijing or fly more military aircraft on the median line. There's a lot of things they can do," Hsiao added. And while the US and China have been competing for influence in the Pacific region over the last few years, some experts think Nauru's switch from Taiwan to China will have limited impact on Washington's efforts to counter Beijing's expansion of influence in the region.

"Nauru is one of the smallest countries in the Pacific region and since the point of US-China competition in the South Pacific is about access, Nauru may not be that important in the bigger scheme of things for the US strategy," Ian Chong, a political scientist at the National University of Singapore, told VOA by phone.

VOA

Fertile ground

AFRICA is facing Wang Heng & Zhou Xingcan challenges such as climate change, threats to biodiversity, intensifying desertification, and increasing frequency of extreme weather events. The global energy supply-demand landscape has been affected by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has created significant challenges and brought increased uncertainties to global climate governance and exacerbated poverty and economic vulnerability in Africa.

According to a study by the International Monetary Fund, rising global temperatures could lead to a reduction in the GDP of African countries by 2.25 percent to 12.12 percent, depending on the extent of climate change. Another study found that nearly half of the countries in Africa are susceptible to the impacts of extreme weather on their GDP. The World Bank states that African countries hit by extreme weather conditions could see their poverty rates jumping from 64 percent to 79 percent, and their actual GDP growth rate could drop from the estimated 4.7 percent to 2.4 percent.

Additionally, Africa is grappling with issues such as soil erosion, salinization and declining soil fertility, with around 20 percent of its land area, or 6.6 million square kilometers, undergoing degradation. Glacier melting has also become a challenge, with famous high-altitude ice caps in Zambia and Zimbabwe shrinking. Environmental degradation not only directly harms Africa's natural resources and biodiversity but also leads to reduced food production, increased regional conflicts, the spread of infectious diseases and terrorism. The impoverished population has also been on the rise. Some African countries are also facing electricity shortages, with the International Energy Agency saying in a report released in June 2022 that there has been a rise of 25

million people without access to electricity in Africa since 2021. This can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the various crises it has caused. According to research by the African Development Bank, the GDP of South Africa was down by 2 percent to 4 percent each year due to power shortages.

Given the urgent need for green development in Africa, green cooperation has become a crucial part of China-Africa relations. Under the framework of the Global Development Initiative, China and African countries have engaged in extensive cooperation to enhance Africa's resilience and capacity for green development.

In addressing climate change, China and African countries have strengthened cooperation in areas such as meteorological monitoring, disaster prevention and reduction, water resource utilization, desertification control, land degradation, and drought prevention. Beijing has also supported African nations in protecting the ecology, environment and biodiversity, constructing a "Green Great Wall" in Africa, and assisting African countries in enhancing their climate adaptation capabilities. China has already initiated joint projects with several African countries to address climate change, including the construction of low-carbon demonstration zones and climate adaptation demonstration zones in countries such as Seychelles, and a total of 38 climate mitigation and adaptation projects in countries such as Ethiopia.

In terms of energy structure adjustments, there is a diverse level of development and energy needs among African countries. China is offering its assistance to the nations in developing clean energy sources such as solar, wind, biogas, and geothermal, supporting them in enhancing their

abilities and the stable supply of power to remote areas. According to data from the International Energy Agency, China undertook power generation projects in 24 sub-Saharan African countries in 2019, with 49 projects expected to be completed by 2024, mostly renewable energy projects. The projects will constitute 20 percent of the region's installed capacity during that period.

China and Africa should stimulate the vitality of green finance and accelerate the allocation of global resources in their green cooperation. Beijing can initiate a carbon management system through platforms such as the International Platform on Sustainable Finance and the Sustainable Banking Network in a bid to promote the establishment of unified green financial standards and enhance the efficiency for aligning with green capital. The nation can also collaborate with African partner countries to jointly formulate unified standards for defining green financial products. In doing so, the two sides can enhance their mutual understanding of green policies and make it easier for the two sides to match in the green financial sector. Both parties can fully leverage the effects from demonstration zones, constructing and expanding typical cooperative projects such as green industrial parks. The goal is to promote the reform of the China-Africa green infrastructure, address challenges facing African countries in the sustainable development of their infrastructure, and effectively enable African countries to adopt green standards in their construction sector.

Looking to the future, China and Africa should draw on their experiences and wisdom, jointly address the challenges of green development, jointly implement the Global Development Initiative, and promote the building of a global community with a shared future.

Biden admn's naive approach to Houthis

Dr. Mohammed Al-Sulami

THE Red Sea has been under scrutiny for months now, ever since the Houthi militia started threatening maritime navigation in this critical waterway. The continuous targeting of Israeli vessels or those heading to Israel caused much panic, leading many vessel operators to shun the waterway and decide to opt for the more time-consuming and costly option of navigating around the Cape of Good Hope.

Given this development and the disruptions to global supplies, it was inevitable that there would be a reaction from the West, particularly by the major powers, given the strategic nature of the waterway and the growing panic in global markets. The recent US-UK strikes have added more fuel to the existing fire and there is now much debate on what turn the Red Sea crisis will take and whether the strikes will be successful in decapitating the Houthis' military capabilities. In addition, debates are rife on wider related issues such as the impact of the Houthi escalation on the Gaza conflict, the Yemen talks and the Saudi Arabia-Iran rapprochement deal.

Before delving into the crux of the issue, it is important to mention that, in the Western media, there has been something of a mischaracterization or misinterpretation of the motivations behind the Houthis' targeting of maritime traffic in the Red Sea. They have been characterized as primarily driven by the Israeli aggression in Gaza and the Western failure to force a ceasefire. The Houthis are presented as championing an Arab and Islamic cause and taking direct

action. However, anyone from the region who understands the Houthis will realize that regional calculations are far from the real motivations behind their actions.

The Houthis have been having a torrid time domestically, with the Yemeni populace under its rule angered by the continuous deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and the failure of the Houthis to introduce good governance practices. Given this reality, along with a desire to project itself as a legitimate political actor and to carve out more leverage in the Yemen peace talks, the Houthis found it apt to spring into motion the Red Sea crisis and to justify it based on the Gaza crisis. It can be said that the Gaza crisis, despite its horrendous and bloody nature, happened at a good time for the Houthis, as they were able to ride on the back of it to justify their actions in the Red Sea.

Having discussed the true Houthi motivations, it is now necessary to look at the impact of their actions on the various issues mentioned previously. The Houthi belligerency in the Red Sea is unlikely to force the Netanyahu government to change course in the Gaza conflict. We have seen Israel continue unabated in its aggression and violation of sanctities since the Houthis started their attacks and violations in the Red Sea, with no wavering or hesitation.

The Biden administration has drawn a line between the Gaza crisis and the Red Sea escalation, with its intent on keeping the two files separate. Some argue this is virtually

impossible given that the Houthis have amplified the Gaza crisis in their narrative and discourse. However, the Biden administration, by separating the two files, aims to dampen regional and global concerns of the Gaza crisis spreading.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken's recent visit to the Middle East reflected this US approach, which has raised the ire of some regional countries, as they believe that the White House is burying its head in the sand and adopting a naive approach. They say that settling the Gaza crisis would no doubt help in isolating the Houthis immediately, as their narrative and discourse would fall flat and their true motivations and intentions would be exposed.

There is regional concern that the Biden administration is following the same course as other US administrations in not considering regional voices and pursuing a not well-thought-out approach, while overlooking the reconciliation processes contributing to stability and security in the region.

Saudi Arabia has been at the forefront of initiating and leading reconciliation processes like the one with Iran, with some successes, such as the exchange of ambassadors and opening of consulates despite Riyadh's concerns and demand that the Iranians do more to overcome trust deficit issues. The Kingdom does not want to see its efforts wasted and the region left to pick up the pieces after the recent US-UK military operations in Yemen. There are

regional concerns about the Iranians changing their calculations and throwing more weight behind the Houthis, especially if the strikes continue and the Iranians sense a real decapitation of Houthi military capabilities that would set back Tehran's forward defense strategy in Yemen.

To date, the Iranians have criticized the US-UK strikes, presenting them as a continuation of colonial aggression and violation of Yemeni sovereignty, while the Kingdom has urged all parties to show restraint at a tense time. The Biden administration needs to understand that it has fallen for the Houthi bait and the US-UK strikes, in fact, strengthen their arm and leverage at the domestic and regional levels.

In addition to the lack of US-UK strategy toward the Houthis, the Biden administration has adopted a somewhat soft approach toward Iran and has been unwilling to engage in any form of confrontation with Tehran. Hence, any actions against the Houthis are somewhat meaningless unless Iran is addressed, given its firm support for the Yemeni militia.

What is more puzzling when looking at the US approach is that, according to Sky News Arabia, the US informed the Houthis of the airstrikes in advance, allowing them time to shift munitions, equipment and technology. There could be different interpretations of this US move, but what is clear is that Washington lacks a strategy regarding the Houthis and its present approach is unlikely to impact or deter the group from destabilizing the Red Sea.



Planning minister seeks DSSI report to ensure prevention of edibles' profiteering, hoarding

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Muhammad Sami Saeed on Tuesday sought a detailed report from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) on the active usage of the Decision Support System on Inflation (DSSI) for price monitoring of edibles, checking profiteering and hoarding.

He passed these directives while chairing a meeting of the National Price Monitoring Committee (NPMC) to review the prices of essential commodities, a news release said. One of the salient features of DSSI, which provides market-level information, city-wise comparison of prices, and time series data at the commodity level, is the comparison of rates issued by Deputy Commissioners and those

collected by the PBS every week. The minister also directed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to engage with the Pakistan Poultry Association to identify and resolve the supply issues of poultry products.

Besides, he asked provincial governments and the administration of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) to vigorously pursue smooth availability of essential items, especially in the preview of the upcoming holy month of Ramazan, seeking report demand and supply situation of specific commodities used in the fasting month.

Among others, the meeting was attended by the representatives of the Ministries of Food Security and Research; Commerce; Finance; Industries and Production, and Climate

Change, besides provincial governments, PBS, Trading Corporation of Pakistan, Utility Stores Corporation, Pakistan Agricultural Storage & Services Corporation Limited (PASSCO) and ICT administration. During the meeting, the PBS Chief Statistician presented an overview of the price situation in the country for the week ended on January 11, 2024, and apprised the meeting that the Sensitive Price Index (SPI) increased by 1.4 per cent over the previous week (WoW) and increased to 44.2 per cent over corresponding week the previous year.

He explained that the current spike in SPI was driven by perishable items including tomatoes, onions and poultry products like chicken and eggs. During this week, he said prices of 21 items increased and eight items' decreased

while prices of 22 items remained stable.

The chief statistician said a decline was observed in the prices of food items such as potato, vegetable ghee and sugar. Whereas, the prices of tomatoes, onion, chicken, eggs and electricity observed an increase during the reference week. The minister asked about the measures taken by the provincial governments and the ICT administration to curtail the gap between wholesale and retail prices. In response, the representatives of the provincial Food and Industries Departments of Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa explained that strict monitoring of prices had been ensured by imposing heavy fines, conducting raids and sealing the shops found involved in profiteering.

Sindh gov't partners with TAAP to revamp travel agency landscape

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Minister for Tourism, Environment, Climate Change & Coastal Development, Arshad Wali Muhammad, joins forces with Travel Agents Association of Pakistan (TAAP) today. Collaborative discussions during the meeting generated significant policy proposals to streamline and regulate the travel agency landscape within the province.

Arshad Wali Muhammad outlined a series of impactful changes, including the mandatory acquisition of a TAAP NOC for both obtain-

ing and renewing travel agency licenses, effectively ensuring industry adherence to ethical practices and consumer protection. Furthermore, empowering clients with greater control, the proposed policy change would require an NOC from TAAP before switching travel agencies, effectively curbing unethical practices. To simplify the fee structure, the Sindh Tourism Department plans to implement a standardized annual fee to be finalized mutually with TAAP across all three travel agency license categories, regardless of IATA affiliation. Recognizing the need

for enhanced efficiency and transparency, the caretaker Minister emphasized the crucial role of digitalizing the licensing process.

"This collaborative endeavor with TAAP represents not only a commitment to regulating the travel industry but also a concerted effort to cultivate a culture of transparency and professionalism," stated Minister Arshad Wali Muhammad. "We are confident that these transformative changes will pave the way for sustainable growth and prosperity within the Sindh travel sector, benefiting both industry stakeholders and travel enthusiasts alike."

Shipping Activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI

(APP): Shipping activity reported at the Port where four ships namely, MSC Sindy, Al-Safat, PHC Fortune and Bateleur scheduled to load/offload Containers, Rice and LPG, berthed at Container Terminal, Multipurpose Terminal and Sui Southern Gas Terminal respectively on Monday.

Meanwhile another ship 'Ashico Victoria' to load/unload Rice also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim on same day. A total of eight ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them two ships, Al-Safat and Al-Jasra are left the port on today and another containers ship 'MSC Sindy' is expected to sail on same day. A cargo volume of 123,643 tonnes, comprising 73,284 tonnes import cargo and 50,359 tonnes export cargo carried in 2,636 Containers (685 TEUs Imports and 1,951 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 08 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them a bulk cargo carrier 'Poly World' & two more ships, MSC United-VIII and High Challenge are expected to take berths at PIBT, QICT and LCT on today, while two more container ships, Wide Alpha and Maersk Cape Town are due to arrive at Port Qasim on Wednesday.

Millat Tractors Ltd. Vendors Conference 2024

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Celebrating their Engineering Success, Millat Tractor Limited hosted a grand "Vendors Conference 2024" at Faletti's Hotel, Lahore on 16th January 2024. The topic of this conference was "60 Years of Growing Together".

This was a historic event as Millat Tractor Ltd. is the pioneer in auto sector in localization of parts. MTL has come a long way in localization and now is a family of more than 200 vendors (both local and foreign) With guidance of MTL, these vendors



are manufacturing auto parts of international quality in Pakistan. Chairman Millat Group Sikandar Mustafa Khan and CEO Millat Tractors Ltd., Raheel Asghar, congratulated all the vendors for their untiring efforts, dedication and improvement

in quality which resulted in the success of Millat Tractor Ltd., not only in Pakistan but in many global export markets as well. Millat Group and its vendors truly deserve appreciation and congratulations for having achieved 60 years of success together.

UBL Ameen partners with philanthropic organizations for UBL Ameen Esaar Account

F.P. Report

KARACHI: UBL Ameen has signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with Indus Hospital and Health Network (IHNN), ChildLife Foundation, The Citizens Foundation (TCF) and Akhuwat, institutions which are serving humanity in the field of Health, Infant Care, Education and Employment respectively. This collaboration stemmed from the launch of "UBL

Ameen Esaar Account" which is a one of its kind Islamic liability product that not only caters to banking requirements of consumer, but also contributes to the welfare of society. UBL Ameen has designed Esaar Account to incentivize the customer for contribution to humanitarian causes. The Bank sponsors free of cost Takaful plan for securing risk of Income loss due to Death or Accidental/permanent disability of account-

holder for succeeding 12 months in addition to Reimbursement of Medical Expenditure as a token of gratitude. The idea behind contribution for the sake of welfare of society is that the bank allocates a certain amount from its own pocket, based on the balance maintained in the account by the customer, and distribute among above-mentioned four organizations for onwards spending among deserving people.

This contribution gives customer a sense of satisfaction for playing their part in noble cause. From UBL's side, the signing ceremony was attended by Mr. Alee Khalid Ghaznavi, Group Executive – Islamic Banking, UBL, and senior executives of the Bank. Donation amounts allocated under UBL Ameen Esaar Account since its inception were handed over by UBL Ameen team to respective representatives of these organizations.



ISLAMABAD: Woman purchasing clay-made items to attract customers in the Federal Capital.



SWITZERLAND: Caretaker Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication Dr. Umar Saif visits Google House at Davos.

Motorbikes, three-wheelers sale decreases 13% during Jul-Dec

ISLAMABAD (APP): The sale of motorbikes and three-wheelers in the country witnessed a decrease of 13.70 per cent during the first six months of the current fiscal year (2023-24) as compared to sales of the corresponding months of the last year.

During July-December, as many as 541,821 motorbikes and three-wheelers were sold against the sale

of 627,835 units in July-December (2022-23), according to the Pakistan Automobile Manufacturing Association (PAMA).

The sale of Honda motorcycles dipped by 10.01 per cent from 522,770 units to 470,399 units whereas the sale of Suzuki motorcycles witnessed a decrease of 64.42 per cent from 20,762 units to 7,386 units during the

months under review.

Similarly, the sale of Yamaha motorbikes also went down from 6,823 units to 4,583 units while the sale of Road Prince motorbikes witnessed a sharp decline of 53.38 per cent from 17,336 units to 8,082 units.

The sales of United Auto motorcycles witnessed a decrease of 16.25 per cent from 50,384 units to 42,196

units. Meanwhile, the sale of United Auto three-wheelers however surged from 770 units to 1,097 units showing growth of 42.46 percent, while the sale of Sazgar three-wheelers also witnessed an increase of 27.40 per cent from 3,868 units to 4,928 units. The data revealed that Qingqi three-wheeler sales had decreased 28.64 per cent from 3,481 units to 2,484 units.

Meezan Bank & IBA join hands to launch Meezan Justuju

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Meezan Bank, Pakistan's leading Islamic bank has recently launched Meezan Justuju - a fully funded talent development program for fresh graduates in collaboration with IBA-CEIF (Institute of Business Administration - Centre for Excellence in Islamic Finance). The Program's initial screening, conducted through a written test at Meezan House, received an overwhelming response, attracting participants from various disciplines.

Meezan Justuju is a

two-month certificate

course designed to equip fresh graduates with comprehensive knowledge and expertise in Islamic banking and finance, dedicated to meeting the growing demand for skilled professionals in the industry.

The Program's curriculum has been strategically developed to prepare a pool of talent well-versed in Islamic finance, enabling them to pursue diverse career paths within Islamic banks, Takaful companies, Mudarabah companies, Islamic asset management companies, and Islamic banking divi-

sions or windows.

Mr. Ahmed Ali Siddiqui - Group Head Shariah Compliance at Meezan Bank, while speaking about the program, stated, "Meezan Justuju is a testament to our commitment to nurturing Islamic finance talent. By providing the youth with the right skills and knowledge, we aim to bridge the existing skill gap in the industry. This Program serves as a stepping stone for fresh graduates to initiate promising careers and contribute to a more responsible and equitable financial system."

Large industry grows 1.59% in November

ISLAMABAD (APP): The production of Large Scale Manufacturing Industries (LSMI) increased by 1.59 percent on Year-on-Year (YoY) basis during the month of November 2024 compared to the output of the same month of last year, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. On Month-on-Month (MoM) basis, the large industry grew by 3.63 percent in November 2024 compared to October 2024, PBS reported. However, the industry witnessed negative growth of 0.80 percent during the first five months (July-November) of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period of last year.

Asian markets down as traders fret over rate cut outlook

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian stocks ticked lower Tuesday as Middle East concerns overshadowed hopes for an early Federal Reserve interest rate cut, with traders now awaiting the release of key data out of China and the United States later in the week.

With Wall Street closed Monday for a holiday, there were few catalysts to drive buying, while analysts warned investors might have overdone their optimism about how much the US central bank will loosen monetary policy this year.

Equities soared at the end of 2023 as several reports showed inflation coming down and the jobs market softening while the Fed indicated that it was preparing to reverse more than a year of hiking.

Bets had been building that officials would announce a rate reduction as soon as March.

However, January has seen the wind come out of the sails after minutes from the central bank's December meeting showed decision-makers keen to keep rates elevated for some time, while a closely watched employment report smashed forecasts and consumer prices rose more than expected.

"The current market pricing indicates anticipation of nearly seven rate cuts in 2024, driven by the belief that the disinflation process is firmly entrenched and unlikely to be easily dislodged," said Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management.

"It's essential to recall that the market consistently underestimated the Federal Reserve's willingness to raise rates during the hiking cycle."

"So this prompts a straightforward question: Is the market now overesti-

mating the Fed's readiness or capacity, particularly in the context of prevailing inflation dynamics, to implement rate cuts over the next 12 months?"

While inflation is on a general downward path, there is a worry that it could pop back up anytime, particularly with tensions in the oil-rich Middle East showing no sign of calming. Investors are now awaiting the release this week of US data on retail sales, industrial production and jobs, among other things. Asian markets mostly fell Tuesday, with Tokyo suffering a small drop after six straight gains that saw the Nikkei burst to a 34-year high thanks to rising inflation and a weak yen that helps exporters.

Hong Kong was also in the red ahead of data on Chinese economic growth and retail sales due Wednesday. Shanghai was

flat. There were also losses in Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Wellington, Taipei and Manila.

The weak performance followed losses in Europe that came after data showed the continent's biggest economy Germany shrank slightly in 2023 as costly energy, high interest rates and cooling foreign demand took their toll.

Tokyo - Nikkei 225: DOWN 0.3 percent at 35,792.06 (break)

Hong Kong - Hang Seng Index: DOWN 0.4 percent at 16,148.06

Shanghai - Composite: FLAT at 2,886.33

West Texas Intermediate: DOWN 0.4 percent at \$72.39 per barrel

Brent North Sea Crude: DOWN 0.1 percent at \$78.10 per barrel

Dollar/yen: UP at 146.11 yen from 145.77 yen on Monday

Gold rates decline by Rs.600 to Rs.217,300 per tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs.600 and was sold at Rs.217,300 on Tuesday compared to its sale at Rs. 217,900 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs.514 to Rs.186,300 from Rs.186,814 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went down to Rs.170,775 from Rs.171,246 the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported. The price of per tola and ten gram Silver remained stagnant at Rs.2,650 and 2,271.94 respectively. The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$8 to \$2,067 from \$2,075, the Association reported.

Court Notice

IN the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar.Case No.225/1, Institution.18/7/2023, date of hearing 31/1/2024. Hidayatullah VS Azizullah. Notice to no 1.Azizullah alias Aziz. 2.Aziz Hasan. 3.Shamad Husain.4.Sakhed Hasan sons of Kareem Husain resident of Elai thehsel Dagar 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 dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 31/1/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

IN the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar.Case No.184/1, Institution 9/6/2023, date of hearing 31/1/2024. Mst. Taj Begum VS Bahrul Rehman. Notice to no 8/6.Mst Khaista d/o Nory.10.Sherzada s/o Saadat.11.Umra Khan s/o Abdul Jabar resident of Dagar Mera thehsel Dagar 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 dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 31/1/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Public Notice

Nasrullah Khan son of Fazal-u-Rehman resident of House No.181/C, Sheikh Multoon Town Mardan is owner of 10-marla plot No. 227/H located in Sheikh Maltoon Town Phase-I Maran. He has submitted an application that he lost original deed of the 10-Marla plot No. 227/H of which he is legal heir. He also submitted an application for obtaining duplicate deed of the plot. In this regard, if there is any objection/claim by anyone, please inform the undersigned within 15 days from the publication of this advertisement, otherwise, duplicate deed will be issued by relevant officer of Mardan Development Authority to the applicant. Housing Officer, Urban Area Development Authority Mardan (Phone: 0937-9230434)



In brief

Abbas Afridi ruled out of 3rd T20i

ISLAMABAD (APP): Abbas Afridi has been ruled out of the 3rd T20i against New Zealand due to discomfort from a low grade abdominal wall muscle strain. His scan has shown no sign of significant injury, and he will be managed symptomatically, Pakistan Cricket Board said in a press release on Tuesday. The decision about his availability for the last two games will be made later on.

Team Abdul Muqeem clinches Title

KARACHI (APP): Team Abdul Muqeem Khan won the title of Abdul Azeem Khan Memorial 5 A Side boys Hockey tournament 2024 by defeating Team Abdul Aziz Khan by 4-1 in the final at Mini Astro Turf of KHA sports Complex. The tournament was organized by Karachi Hockey Association. Muhammad Hassan Khan, MNA candidate of Pakistan People's Party for NA 248, Ejaz - former Director KE/famous hockey associate and Intl. Asif Ahmed Khan graced the occasion as Chief Guest and Guests of honor. Olympian Hanif Khan, Gulfriz Ahmed Khan - Chairman KHA, Muhammad Shah - Custom's former Hockey Player, Mohsin Ali Khan - KHA, Laeeq Lashari - National Selector and many others witnessed the final day matches and closing ceremony. Abdul Muqeem Khan beats Abdul Aziz Khan in the final by 4 - 1. International Abdul Wahab played outstandingly, scored two goals and declared Man of the Match while Ahmed and Essa Khan scored a goal each for the winners. Abdul Bari scored the only goal for Aziz Khan. Abdul Hafeez Khan took the third position by beating Abdul Naeem Khan. The following awards were distributed by our significant guests.

- Emerging Players
1. Abdul Bari (Aziz Khan)
2. Rohan (Aziz Khan)
3. Aryan Khan (Hafeez Khan)
4. Abdul Sami (Abdul Saeed)
5. Reyyan Ali (Abdul Muqeem)
6. Wajahat Ali (Abdul Naeem)

- Best Emerging player
1) Fakhr Ali (Saeed Khan)

- Top scorer
1) Wajahat Ali (Naeem Khan)

- Best player of the tournament
1) Danial Rashid (Saeed Khan)

- Best Forward
1) Bilawal Khan (Hafeez Khan)

- Best Midfielder.
Muftaba (Muqeem Khan)

- Upcoming players
1. Ibrahim (Saeed Khan)
2. Hanzla (Moid Khan)
Token of appreciation Nadeem - CFC
Imtiaz ul Hassan
Munhil Niazi
Farhan raju
Laeeq Lashari.

Lara hopes to see Test cricket prosper

LONDON (Agencies): West Indies batting legend Brian Lara has suggested giving Test cricket importance in all countries, rather than only India, England and Australia, in order to prosper. Lara who is currently in Australia as part of the broadcasting team for the upcoming two-match Test series between the hosts and West Indies, has opened up about his love for Test cricket and suggestions to save the game. "As someone who has played Test cricket, the love I have for the game, it is something I don't want to see die," said Lara. "I'm hoping that we can find a way outside that triangle of nations of India, Australia and England to bring back importance to West Indies, Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa."

'Pain-free' Raducanu breezes into Australian Open second round

MELBOURNE (AFP): Former US Open champion Emma Raducanu said it was "amazing to be playing pain-free" after an impressive 6-3, 6-2 win over American Shelby Rogers in the first round of the Australian Open on Tuesday.

The British player stunned the tennis world when she triumphed at Flushing Meadows in 2021 as a qualifier, but only on one other occasion has she reached the fourth round of a Grand Slam.

The 21-year-old has slumped to 296 in the rankings an eight-month layoff with ankle and wrist injuries but showed glimpses of her best against the 161st-ranked Rogers, converting three of five break points.

"I honestly didn't know if I'd ever get to this stage," Raducanu said after her victory. "It's just amazing to be playing pain-free."

"I had pain for so long. I was playing since before

the US swing in 2022 all the way before surgery.

"It was difficult because I wasn't able to train, I wasn't able to practise. Then having to go play and compete against the best in the world with an hour a day, while not playing for two weeks trying to settle the pain down, is very difficult."

Raducanu, who will face China's unseeded Wang Yafan in the second round in Melbourne, said her time away from the court made her "very hungry".

The British player contrasted her emotions now with her troubles at last year's Australian Open, when she lost in the second round before missing the three remaining Grand Slams in 2023.

"The Emma who walked on court 12 months ago had a huge cyst removed (from her knee) about 10 days before, had to offload," she said.

"I travelled here on a wheelchair. I only started

hitting three days before the match. That whole process was a lot of stress. We weren't sure if I was going to be able to play here."

She added: "Now there's just a lot more calm. I think I'm more level-headed. I think things around me have settled. I do feel better, and there's just less I'd say highs and lows around. It's just more of an equilibrium."

Raducanu, who has been criticised for chopping and changing her coaching team, has reunited with childhood coach Nick Cavaday, who is with her in Australia.

"It's nice to be with Nick," she said. "I've known him since I was a kid, feel very comfortable there. Just all aspects really of my life I feel like are calming down and settled."

"Obviously when you come back after eight months, have experienced three surgeries, you're just really grateful to be able to move freely."



MELBOURNE: Emma Raducanu of Great Britain celebrates in their first round match against Shelby Rogers of the United States during the 2024 Australian Open at Melbourne Park.

Nasir Hossain banned for two years

DHAKA (Agencies): Bangladesh allrounder Nasir Hossain has been banned from all cricket for two years by the ICC for breaching the Emirates Cricket Board's Anti-Corruption Code during the 2020-21 Abu Dhabi T10 League. He will be eligible to resume playing international cricket on April 7, 2025.

Hossain was one of eight people associated with the Pune Devils franchise who were charged by the ICC in September 2023.

He accepted the three charges against him and received a two-year ban, of which six months are suspended.

According to the ICC's Anti-Corruption Unit, the first charge against Hossain was that he "failed to disclose to the Designated Anti-Corruption Official (without unnecessary delay) the receipt of a gift that was offered to him that had a value of over US\$750, namely the gift of a new iPhone 12."

The second charge was that Hossain "failed to disclose to the Designated Anti-Corruption Official full details of the approach or invitation he received to engage in Corrupt Conduct via the new iPhone 12."

And finally, "he failed or refused, without compelling justification, to cooperate with the Designated Anti-Corruption Official's investigation in relation to possible Corrupt Conduct under the Code, including (without limitation) failing to provide accurately and completely any information and/or documentation requested by the Designated Anti-Corruption Official (whether as part of a formal Demand pursuant to Article 4.3 or otherwise) as part of such investigation."

Hossain has played 19 Tests, 65 ODIs and 31 T20Is for Bangladesh, and while his last international match was in January 2018, he was playing domestic cricket as recently as May 2023.

Pakistan launch Olympic qualifying bid

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan began their bid to qualify for a first Olympics in 12 years with a 6-1 loss against Great Britain on Monday in Oman, the Pakistan Hockey Federation said in a statement ahead of Pakistan's game against China today, Tuesday.

Pakistan, three-time Olympic champions, have failed to qualify for the last two editions of the Games. GB's men have not won an Olympic medal since 1988 and missed out on a semi-final spot to India at Tokyo 2020.

"In the ongoing Olympic qualifier event in Muscat, Oman, Pakistan lost to England by six goals to one in their first pool match," PHF said. "Abdul Hanan Shahid

scored the only goal for Pakistan." Pakistan could not take advantage of the four penalty corners received during the match, while the England hockey team received 12 penalty corners.

"The England hockey team established the lead from the beginning of the match and played with a better strategy, scoring two penalty corners, one penalty stroke and three field goals, while the only goal from Pakistan was scored by Abdul Hanan Shahid through a field goal," PHF said.

Last year, the International Hockey Federation stripped Pakistan of hosting rights for the Olympic Qualifier tournament due to "non-cooperation and interfer-

ence in the PHF's affairs" by the government, marking a setback for the South Asian country which was once counted among the global powerhouses of the sport. According to the FIH, China, Spain and Pakistan were supposed to host the qualifiers from January 13 to 21. The matches in Pakistan were scheduled to be held in Lahore.

Field hockey, Pakistan's national sport, once propelled the country to Olympic gold and global glory, but the game has waned in popularity and participation over the past two decades.

According to the latest rankings released by the IHF last August, Pakistan is ranked at number 15 in the world in field hockey.

Lionel Messi, Aitana Bonmati scoop awards for FIFA's best players in 2023

LONDON (Agencies): Lionel Messi was crowned as FIFA's best men's player for 2023 on Monday, while Aitana Bonmati added to her collection of individual accolades at the awards ceremony in London.

Messi claimed the award for the third time, but the 36-year-old was a surprise victor ahead of Erling Haaland on an otherwise glorious night for Manchester City.

The award only covered the period after Messi had led Argentina to World Cup glory from December 2022 to August 2023. During that time the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner had a subdued end to his career at Paris Saint-Germain, despite winning the Ligue 1 title, before joining MLS side Inter Miami in June.

Messi quickly made his mark in the United States as he helped the franchise, part-owned by David Beckham, to their first trophy by winning the Leagues Cup in August.

Haaland was favourite to win after scoring 52 times in his debut season with City as the English side won a treble

of Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup. After receiving the same number of points from a scoring system based on votes from national team captains, coaches, journalists and fans, Messi was crowned victor thanks to more first-choice nominations. Messi's former club teammate Kylian Mbappe was third.

However, all three of the men's finalists did not attend the ceremony leaving Arsenal and France legend Thierry Henry, who was co-hosting the event, to pick up the award in Messi's absence. Bonmati's selection as the best women's player was never in doubt as she completed a clean sweep of personal awards after helping Spain to win the World Cup and Barcelona to Champions League glory in 2023.

The 25-year-old also won the Ballon d'Or, Golden Ball for Player of the World Cup and UEFA's Player of the Year in recent months. "A couple of weeks ago when 2023 came to an end I was nostalgic because 2023 was an

exceptional and unique year I will remember for the rest of my life," said Aitana Bonmati.

"I'm proud of being part of a powerful generation of women who are changing the rules of the game and the world." Pep Guardiola was named best coach after masterminding City's first-ever Champions League success. "We're here because we won a lot and the thousands of people involved in our success," said Guardiola.

"I'm really happy for the season we had because it was an incredible journey. In the end we did it, but the pleasure of being there was incredible." Haaland was joined by five of his club teammates — Kyle Walker, John Stones, Ruben Dias, Bernardo Silva and Kevin De Bruyne — in the team of the year. Real Madrid's Thibaut Courtois, Jude Bellingham and Vinicius Junior, Messi and Mbappe made up the 11. City's Ederson won men's goalkeeper of the year, while England and Manchester United stopper Mary Earps picked up the women's award.

Peshawar Premier Football League Season-I begins in a colourful opening ceremony

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Premier Football League Season-I got underway here at historical Tehmas Khan Football Stadium on Tuesday in a colourful opening ceremony attended by a large number of football fans.

Deputy Director Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Wajid Yousaf was the chief guest on this occasion who formally inaugurated the 15 teams battle in a colourful opening ceremony. District Sports Officer (DSO) Miss Gul Rukh, Chief Organizer Khalid Khan, Director Football League Ismail Afridi and former international footballer Basit Kamal and others were present.

The League would carry a prize money of Rs. 100,000 for the winners and Rs. 50,000 for the runners-up wherein a total of 15 top teams are taking part. According to Khalid Khan, the winning team will be

given a cash prize with glittering trophies as well.

In the opening match played between Khyber Green and Dara Adam Khel Stori wherein both teams exhibited classic display of short-passes and attacking moves. Dara Adam Khel Stori showed the best game and defeated the team of Khyber Green by a tennis goal margin 6-0 while in the second match Abbottabad Combined defeated Manri Swabi by 2-1. Fifteen teams from across the province and Islamabad are participating in the league. He said the 11-day Football League is being played on League basis and would play an important role in the promotion of football as the game of football is declining in Pakistan and this type of League will give the players an opportunity to present their hidden talent.

He said that he is also grateful to Shama Industries Nowshera, Mamson and Director Anti-Narcotics Force Col. Ehsan who also provided full support in organizing this Peshawar League. About Tehmas Khan Football Stadium, he said, the ground is famous for football matches and the same ground hosted not only national but also international matches as well that is the reason people participate in large numbers from remote areas to watch the matches there.

Fifteen teams from across the province and Islamabad are participating in this Peshawar League, including SparTex Swat, Dara Adam Khel Stori, Khyber Green, Dara 90groups, Khyber Markhor, SDFC Peshawar, Dara Dostan Atesh, Akakhel FC Kohat, Shaheen FC Islamabad, DFA Chitral, Faji Karam, Muneri FC Swabi, Compound Academy Abbottabad. Three matches will be played on a daily basis, he said.

climax. His five for 48 in the second innings included the prized wicket of a well-set Mohammed Rizwan - Cummins' 250th in the longest format - ensuring Australia snatched victory in dramatic fashion.

Cummins is nominated for the top men's award in the ICC Awards 2023 for his performances during the calendar year - the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy - and will be hoping to add to his collection of personal accolades following a fine year in all formats.

Pat Cummins wins ICC Player of the Month award

DUBAI (Agencies): The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday revealed the ICC Men's Player of the Month award winner for December 2023 after shortlists were announced last week.

Australia captain Pat Cummins caps a spectacular 2023 with the ICC Men's Player of the Month award for December, following a supreme bowling performance in his side's victorious Test series against Pakistan.

Cummins was at the forefront of Australia's Test success over Pakistan

in December, demonstrating the leadership and bowling prowess which personified Australia's surge to success in 2023, winning their maiden World Test Championship mace, and their sixth Men's Cricket World Cup crown earlier in the year.

The highlight of another spectacular month for Cummins came in the side's second Test victory over Pakistan in Melbourne. The pacer took ten wickets in the match, which included an inspiring spell as the match approach a nervy

climax. His five for 48 in the second innings included the prized wicket of a well-set Mohammed Rizwan - Cummins' 250th in the longest format - ensuring Australia snatched victory in dramatic fashion.

Cummins is nominated for the top men's award in the ICC Awards 2023 for his performances during the calendar year - the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy - and will be hoping to add to his collection of personal accolades following a fine year in all formats.

National Women T20 Tournament: Karachi, Lahore, Multan victorious on 2nd day

ISLAMABAD (APP): Karachi and Multan registered their maiden wins, while Lahore grabbed their second consecutive win on day two of the National Women's T20 Tournament on Tuesday. At Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium, in the match that was live-streamed on PCB's YouTube channel, Karachi outclassed Peshawar by 101 runs courtesy to half-centuries by Muneeba Ali and Javeria Khan.

At Ayub Park Ground, Multan found success against Quetta after the latter fell 22-run short while chasing 130. An unbeaten half-century by Sidra Amin, followed by a three-wicket haul by Ghulam Fatima took Lahore to their second win in as many games, as they beat Rawalpindi by 41 runs at the Diamond Club in Islamabad. Peshawar v Karachi at Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi: Karachi posted a mammoth total of 183-2 in 20 overs after they were invited to bat first by Peshawar. Opening batters Muneeba Ali and Javeria Khan allowed Karachi a breezy start courtesy of a 93-run stand.

Momina Riasat provided the breakthrough for Peshawar when she removed Muneeba (64, 41b, 8x4s, 2x6s). A 60-run stand between Javeria and Yusra Amir further solidified Karachi's position in the game. Javeria completed her second consecutive half-century (51, 39b, 6x4s) before she was dismissed by Salwa Raheem. Yusra remained unbeaten at 39 from 29, including four boundaries and a six. Skipper Fatima Sana also contributed 15 from 11 and hit two fours. Peshawar's chase got off to a faltering start as Raahima Syed was run out for a duck in the second over and Tehzeeb Shah was trapped leg-before wicket by Aimen Anwar for just a run. Then, Momina fell to Masooma Zahra after scoring 10 from 18, including a boundary. Syeda Aroob Shah picked up two wickets on consecutive deliveries to further push Peshawar against the wall.

Captain Aleena Shah's fighting knock of an undefeated 44 from 66, including seven boundaries, went in vain as Peshawar ended with 82-6 in 20 overs, awarding

Karachi victory by 101 runs. Multan v Quetta at Ayub Park Ground, Rawalpindi:

Quetta won the toss and decided to field first. Aleena Masood was run out for a duck by Quetta captain Saima Malik. Gull Feroza and Gull Rukh built a commendable partnership, that yielded 88 runs, to bring stability to Multan's innings. Anam Amin struck to take out Gull Rukh (38, 37b, 5x4s), breaking the partnership. Gull Feroza (75 not out, 66b, 9x4s), playing a captain's innings, hit an unbeaten half-century to take Multan to a fighting total of 129-3 in 20 overs. Saqia Riaz (14, 16b, 2x4s) was the other contributor with the bat.

For Quetta, Anam bagged two wickets for 24 in four overs.

Gull-e-Uswa struck early to remove Fareeha Mehmood (5, 10b, 1x4) inside the powerplay. Trouble deepened for Quetta in the seventh over when Khadija Chishti (10, 12b, 2x4s) fell to Asma Shareef and Tuba Hassan was run out for a duck. Opening batter Dua Majid's resilient knock of 42 from 48, including three fours, kept hope alive for

her team until she was run out by the Multan skipper. Saima also chipped in 12 from 10, including one four. Quetta only managed to get to 108-9 in 20 overs, losing against Multan by 21 runs. Samina Aftab, who grabbed two wickets, was the pick of the bowlers in the second innings.

Lahore v Rawalpindi Diamond Club Ground, Islamabad:

After opting to bat first, Lahore suffered an early blow as right-arm pacer Waheed Akhtar removed Sadaf Shams (6, 8b, 1x4) in the third over. Bismah Maroof replaced Sadaf on the crease to stitch a 42-run stand with her captain Sidra Amin.

Rawalpindi captain Aliya Riaz broke the partnership by disturbing Bismah's stumps, who had to walk back after scoring 12 from 20. Iram Javed (22, 20b, 3x4s, 1x6) build a 60-run stand with Sidra, before falling to Aima Saleem.

Kaynat Hafeez (22 not out, 13b, 3x4s) also contributed with the bat. Sidra top-scored for the side, hitting an unbeaten 85 from 60, showcasing 12 boundaries and a maximum, to take Lahore to 160-3 in 20 overs.

Aima (25, 25b, 4x4s) and Fajar Naveed (16, 19b, 3x4s) propelled Rawalpindi's chase with a 52-run opening stand, until it was cut short courtesy of Areesha Noor who removed Fajar in the seventh over and dismissed Aima in the ninth over. Natalia Parvaiz (24, 21b, 2x4s) and Waheeda Akhtar (19, 20b, 3x4s) attempted to keep Rawalpindi in the game.

Leg-spinner Ghulam Fatima and left-arm spinner Nashra Sandhu both picked up three-wicket hauls, while Areesha Noor had two wickets to her name as Rawalpindi were restricted to 119-9 in 20 overs.

All six teams will feature in third round matches on 18 January. The first ball will be bowled at 11am. The match between Peshawar and Lahore at the Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium will be live-streamed on PCB's YouTube channel.

Scores in brief:

Karachi beat Peshawar by 101 runs at Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium:

Karachi 183-2, 20 overs (Muneeba Ali 64, Javeria Khan

51, Yusra Amir 39 not out; Salwa Raheem 1-28, Momina Riasat 1-30)

Peshawar 82-6, 20 overs (Aleena Shah 44 not out, Mahnoor Qayyum 12, Momina Riasat 10; Syeda Aroob Shah 2-14)

Player of the match - Muneeba Ali (Karachi)

Multan beat Quetta by 21 runs at Ayub Park Ground:

Multan 129-3, 20 overs (Gull Feroza 75 not out, Gull Rukh 38; Anam Amin 2-24)

Quetta 108-9, 20 overs (Dua Majid 42, Saima Malik 12; Samina Aftab 2-20)

Player of the match - Gull Feroza (Multan)

Lahore beat Rawalpindi by 41 runs at Diamond Club Ground:

Lahore 160-3, 20 overs (Sidra Amin 85 not out, Kaynat Hafeez 22 not out, Iram Javed 22; Aima Saleem 1-7, Waheeda Akhtar 1-26, Aliya Riaz 1-33)

Rawalpindi 119-9, 20 overs (Aima Saleem 25, Natalia Parvaiz 24, Waheeda Akhtar 19; Nashra Sandhu 3-20, Ghulam Fatima 3-22, Areesha Noor 2-30)

Player of the match - Sidra Amin (Lahore).



In brief

Police arrested accused

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Capital Police Tarnol police station and Homicide Unit police teams have arrested an accused involved in a murder case and recovered a murder tool from his possession. On November 9, 2023, the accused Umar Farooq shot Qamar Farooq, Faraz Ahmad and Ahmad Ali in Tarnol police station jurisdiction, from which Qamar Farooq succumbed to his injuries and died. Upon receiving the information the Tarnol police team immediately registered an FIR no. 872/23. Following this incident, a special investigation team was constituted. The police teams utilized all available resources and used technical and scientific methods and arrested the accused Umar Farooq and recovered the murder tool, a 30-bore pistol from his possession, while further investigation was underway. ICCPO Dr Akbar Nasir Khan directed all senior officials to an effective crackdown against the accused involved in criminal activities and to ensure the safety of lives and property of citizens on a priority basis.

Police bust 3 street criminal gangs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have busted three street criminal gangs by arresting six of their active members allegedly involved in street and other crimes and Rs 229,000, six mobile phones, weapons, and other valuables from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Airport police held three street criminals namely Raju, ring-leader, Waqas and Irfan and recovered Rs 150,000, weapons and other items from their possession. New Town police arrested two street criminals namely Zubair Khan and Ibrahim and recovered Rs 75,000, two mobile phones and other items from their possession. In another raid, Morgah police apprehended a street criminal, Hamad and recovered Rs 4000, four mobile phones and other items from his possession. Senior Superintendent of Police, Operations directed the police to make efforts to net other members of the gangs. Separate cases have been registered against the accused while further investigations are under process.

Police arrest 11 lawbreakers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District police in an action against suspected drug peddlers, bootleggers, illegal weapon holders and other lawbreakers here on Tuesday arrested 11 accused besides recovering over three kg charras, 16 litres liquor, 130 kites, a Kalashnikov, three 30-bore pistols, ammunition and other items from their possession. A police spokesperson said that Wah Cantt, Airport, Naseerabad and Taxila police rounded up six accused namely Sajjad, Hafeez, Haseeb, Amir, Mushtaq and Saqlain and recovered three kg charras, 16 litres of liquor and other items. Kalar Syedan, Bani, Sadigabad and Taxila police netted Tayyab, Ahmed, Naseeb, and Amjad and recovered a Kalashnikov, three 30-bore pistols and ammunition from their possession. Meanwhile, Taxila police arrested a kite seller namely Usama and recovered 130 kites from his possession. The spokesman further informed that Rawalpindi District Police also registered 84 FIRs against underage drivers during the last 24 hours. He said that police on the directives of the City Police Officer, Rawalpindi were taking action against underage drivers.



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervaz Ashraf inaugurating the office of the Parliamentary Reporters Association at Parliament House.

Dr. Saif discusses digital collaboration with international organizations, global leaders

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunication, Dr Umar Saif, discussed digital collaboration aimed to enhance Pakistan's global image through the "Digital Pakistan" initiative during sideline meetings with international organizations and global leaders.

The minister is currently participating in the World Economic Forum held in Davos, Switzerland, from January 15 to 19, according to a news release.

Accompanying the minister is a delegation, including the Chairman of the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA) Zohaib Khan and representatives from the Special Investment Facilitation Center (SIFC). The IT delegation's focus is to showcase the progress made by SIFC, including the 50% dollar retention policy for IT companies, the activation of the Special Technology Zones Authority (STZA) through the appointment of its board of governors, and the introduction of Pakistan's First Space Policy, opening up new opportunities in the country's space sector.

The delegation primarily engages in bilateral meetings with representa-

tives from various countries on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum. Global leaders, including Pakistan's Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar and other prominent figures, are expected to attend the event.

During these meetings, Dr Umar Saif highlighted efforts to introduce the "Digital Pakistan" brand at an international level and expressed the desire to foster collaboration between Pakistan and various international entities.

In a meeting with the Secretary-General of the Digital Cooperation Organization, Deemah Al Yahya, discussions centred on digital cooperation, emphasizing the potential benefits of such collaborations. Bilateral talks with Qatar's IT Minister, Mohammed bin Ali bin Mohammed Al Mannai, and Rwanda's Minister of Communication, Paula Ingabire, explored opportunities for mutual cooperation. A significant development is the expected collaboration between Pakistan's Startups Fund and counterparts in various countries, focusing on joint initiatives in cloud services. Dr Umar Saif's visit included a tour of Google's headquarters, where discussions with Vice President Behzad Behzadi delved into con-

versations about Generation AI technology. The minister said that he visited the Google House at Davos to explore the latest advancements in Google Generative AI technology.

A mutual agreement on the dual use of artificial intelligence at both government and private levels in Pakistan was established, aiming for better utilization of AI resources.

Dr Umar Saif mentioned that collaborative projects between Pakistan's Ministry of IT and Google are already underway, with a commitment to enhancing cooperation in information and communication technology. Emphasizing collaboration between the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) countries and Google, Dr Umar Saif expressed readiness to explore every possible avenue for cooperation in information and communication technology.

During meetings with global organizations, he highlighted Pakistan's trajectory towards becoming a 'Digital Hub' in the near future. The global recognition of Pakistani talent in freelancing, skill development, and e-commerce was acknowledged during these interactions, showcasing the growing influence of Pakistan in the digital arena.

Railways earn Rs 41 bln in six months

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways has earned an amount of Rs41 billion in the first six months of the current fiscal year 2023-24 despite facing the challenges of floods during monsoon season and financial crunch.

During the first six months of the previous fiscal year (2022-23), the department had generated Rs28 billion which reflected 46 percent increase in the revenues during the same period in the current fiscal year (2023-24), an official in the Ministry told APP.

As per the figures, he said that out of the revenue of Rs41 billion, earnings from passenger trains were recorded at Rs24 billion whereas the freight sector managed to earn Rs11 billion. The official said that other sectors of the department added around Rs5.5 billion to the total revenue generation.

At present, he said that

Pakistan Railways is operating 96 passenger trains, up from the previous year when 86 trains were running. Similarly, during the previous year, on average it operated 3.75 freight trains while the number reached seven freight trains this year.

He said the department emphasized that the issue of delay in payment of salaries to employees has now been resolved and things will be more streamlined, once work on the Mainline-I (ML-I) project kicks off.

The official said that owing to inflationary pressures, led by high fuel costs, Pakistan Railways has increased its fares, both for passenger and freight segments that would help the cash-strapped corporation to fetch better revenues in the next few months.

To a question, he said that Pakistan Railways has

beefed up precautionary measures to reduce passenger train accidents and only six minor accidents with no causality took place on the entire railway network in the country during the last three months.

"Only two train accidents have taken place in September, no accident happened in October and four train accidents occurred in November due to effective steps of the department," he added. The drastic decrease in accidents has been witnessed due to the efforts being undertaken to reduce trespassing at unmanned level crossings and unauthorized locations, he added.

"Our staff is continuously monitoring the railway tracks across the country and conducting thorough inspection of the trains as the safety of the passengers is the top priority of the department," he said.

'PPP believes in transparent elections, sanctity of vote'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Shazia Marri Tuesday said that elections are part of democracy and PPP truly believed in the transparency of elections and the sanctity of public votes for the betterment of the country.

Talking to a Private news channel, she said that equal opportunities to all political parties and every party had full right to participate in the elections, adding, polls would have no credibility if one party was kept away from the electoral process in the country. She expressed the hope that the poll organizing authority would conduct general elections on time as promised, adding that a level playing field for all political parties in the run-up to the general elections will ensure a free, fair and transparent electoral exercise. She also criticized PML-N's ill economic policies in the past and held them responsible for current inflation and other economic woes.

Shazia Marri said that her party leadership always stands for democracy and wants to ensure the economic stability of the country.

ANF seizes 211 kg drugs in seven operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting seven operations across the country managed to recover 211 kg of drugs and arrested nine accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Tuesday.

He informed that 2.5 kg hashish was recovered from a passenger going to Sharjah by Flight PK-181 at Islamabad Airport.

Five hashish-filled capsules were recovered at Bacha Khan Airport from the possession of a Abu Dhabi-bound passenger going on flight PK-217.

In the third operation, 200.4 kg of hashish was seized near Kohi Chowk Khyber and two suspects were arrested. Six kg hashish was recovered from the possession of an accused rounded up near Airport Road Quetta. 1.180 kg hashish was recovered from an accused near Lakeview Park Islamabad. The spokesman informed that 900 grams of weed was recovered from an accused nabbed near Cantt Station Karachi.

Pakistan, Kazakhstan forge cultural ties

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a significant diplomatic rendezvous, Ambassador Yerzhan Kistafin of Kazakhstan met with Caretaker Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture, Syed Jamal Shah, at the National Heritage and Culture Division in Islamabad on Tuesday.

The discussions centred on bolstering cultural exchanges and fostering people-to-people connections between Kazakhstan and Pakistan, particularly in the realms of art, culture, heritage, and cinema. The meeting reflects the shared commitment of both nations to deepen understanding and strengthen their already friendly and brotherly relationship.

The Minister emphasized the paramount importance of cultural ties, acknowledging the rich cultural heritage and picturesque landscapes of the region.

Both parties expressed a keen interest in enhancing collaboration in film and cinema to further fortify bilateral cultural relations. Pakistan plans to organize the sec-

ond phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) cultural caravan, inviting artists from Central Asian states, including Kazakhstan, to showcase the region's cultural diversity.

The Ambassador commended the warm reception and affirmed future collaboration in various sectors, including cultural exchanges, art, heritage, museums, and film. Kazakhstan announced plans to organize a film screening at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), further promoting cultural ties between the two countries.

This diplomatic engagement marks a pivotal moment in the ongoing efforts to strengthen the cultural bonds between Kazakhstan and Pakistan.

As both nations recognize the vast potential for collaboration in various fields, the future holds promising prospects for deepening these ties and fostering a more profound understanding between their people.

Experts stress political parties to give clear agenda of reforms, improved governance

ISLAMABAD (APP): Researchers and experts at a Think-Tank moot on Tuesday urged mainstream political parties to come up with a clear agenda of key-sector reforms and an improved governance system ahead of the general elections 2024, matching the country's pressing needs.

It was the 4th moot "Transforming Economy & Society", organized by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) in collaboration with its partners.

They underscored the significance of transforming the economy and society in Pakistan, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of this imperative endeavor.

Speakers, who were representing different Think Tanks at the moot, stressed that addressing the challenges and opportunities faced by the nation required

a comprehensive and collaborative approach.

Participants voiced a collective concern that if attention is not given towards these critical issues now, the consequences may become insurmountable in the future.

They emphasized the urgency of embracing reform for the betterment of Pakistan, with the consensus that proactive measures are essential to avoid reaching a point of no return.

In his opening remarks, PIDE Vice-Chancellor Dr Nadeem ul Haque said Pakistan, once envisioned as the next Asian Tiger, found itself grappling with persistent governance challenges since its inception into the League of Nations.

Despite successive governments' promises of transformative change and substantial reforms, he said the efforts undertaken

appeared akin to attempting to bail out a sinking ship with a thimble. "The enduring consequence is shouldered by the people of Pakistan, who continue to bear the brunt of these challenges."

Dr Haque underscored the crucial need to recognize the historically passive nature of the demand side for reforms throughout the country's history.

Addressing this passivity, he argued, was pivotal in fostering a more engaged and participative society as the nation sought a path towards sustainable and impactful reforms.

Dr Haque further noted that political party manifestos often highlighted broad policy directions and commitments. "Ideally, these commitments should be thoroughly evaluated when a party assumes power.

NA Speaker inaugurates office of Pakistan Parliamentary Reporters Association

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Speaker of the National Assembly, Raja Pervaz Ashraf on Tuesday inaugurated the office of the Pakistan Parliamentary Reporters Association (PRA) in green surroundings of the Parliament House. In the opening ceremony attended by PRA representatives, members, and senior journalists from the National Assembly, the Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervaz Ashraf congratulated on the establishment of the Parliamentary Reporters Association and the PRA office at the National Assembly Secretariat.

Highlighting the Press Gallery's pivotal role, the Speaker emphasized its indispensability, stating that without it, the Parliament remains incomplete. Addressing the deep connection between the media and the Parliament, Speaker Raja Pervaz Ashraf underscored the role of the media in bridging the gap between the public and the

Parliament, acknowledging the crucial function of parliamentary reporters in keeping the public informed about legislative activities.

Expressing his commitment to providing a conducive environment and excellent facilities for parliamentary reporters, the Speaker declared it a top priority. The journalists in the press gallery have consistently played a crucial role in bringing public concerns to the attention of the highest echelons of power, stated the Speaker.

Declaring the Parliament as an institution representing 25 crore people (250 million people), the Speaker asserted its status as the source of power and the focal point of all institutions. In a call for national unity, Speaker Raja Pervaz Ashraf stressed the necessity for all institutions to work collaboratively for the country's development and progress. Urging the overcoming of mutual differences, the Speaker asserted

that democracy and the strength of the Parliament are indispensable for the nation's progress. Emphasizing respect for all institutions belonging to Pakistan, the Speaker urged collective efforts to address and solve the challenges being faced by the country.

In a call for political unity, Speaker Raja Pervaz Ashraf urged all political parties to come together to address the country's issues. Regarding the incident of May 9th, the Speaker deemed it extremely shameful and suggested refraining from mentioning it. Highlighting May 28th as a day that made Pakistan's defense invincible, the Speaker called for collective efforts to uplift Parliament and strengthen democratic destinies.

In conclusion, the Speaker reiterated the Pakistan Peoples Party's belief in democracy, emphasizing the importance of unity for the nation's progress.



ISLAMABAD: A worker is busy in the maintenance work of CCTV cameras installed in Federal Capital.

Training workshop held for police investigation officers

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police have organized a training workshop dedicated to enhancing the skills of Police Investigation officers and fostering a more professional approach to handling investigation cases.

The initiative, driven by the directives of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, aimed to implement capacity-building programs for the force's investigation officers, emphasizing the need for a professional approach in dealing with various cases.

The training workshop took place at the Police Lines Headquarters in Islamabad, attracting participation from investigation

officers of the Islamabad Capital Police.

As part of the program, esteemed judges and lawyers were invited as guest speakers to deliver lectures and provide insights on the improvements in investigations post the implementation of Police Order 2002, basic and advanced investigation techniques, the Pakistan Penal Code, and crime scene investigation. These workshops are designed to enhance the skills of police personnel, enabling them to effectively resolve cases. Such capacity-building programs are set to be an ongoing effort, ensuring the continuous professional development of policemen in the future.

Worsening economic

KABUL (Agenices): The latest report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Afghanistan indicates a worsening economic insecurity under the control of the Taliban regime. Released on Sunday, the organization report reveals that 69% of Afghanistan's population faces a shortage of necessities, including healthcare, essential goods, suitable living conditions, and vital job opportunities.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

RAJJAB 06, 1445 — WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2023

Solar power project

KABUL (Agenices): A solar power system was opened in Nangarhar to irrigate more than 4,000 hectares of land with a total cost of 143 million Afs. The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) says that the project was financially supported by the Asian Development Bank, and besides irrigating the land, will produce 1.2 Megawatts of electricity. "Will be used for irrigation of hundreds hectares of land.

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

Afghanistan-Turkey trade reached \$100m in 2023



KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce said that in 2023, Afghanistan had \$100 million worth of trade with Turkey in which \$23 million were exports from Afghanistan.

At the same time, the Deputy PM for Administrative Affairs, Abdul Salam Hanafi, in the meeting with a number of Turkish businessmen, emphasized the development of trade and investment.

He said that right now all the facilities have been provided to increase trade

between the two countries.

Abdul Salam Hanafi said that Turkish businessmen can invest in mining, the construction of manufacturing factories, agriculture, energy and technology in Afghanistan.

"The exports and imports of Afghanistan with Turkey have been \$100 million in 2023, of which \$23 million was exports and \$77 million imports," said Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, the spokesman of the MoIC.

The Chamber of Commerce and Investment said that the joint chamber

will be established with Turkey.

"The Chamber of Commerce and Investment of Afghanistan works in a basic way, we want some regional and global projects through the railway from Afghanistan to Turkey, because it will cost less and we will also get in touch with the world through the railway," said the acting head of ACCI, Mohammad Younus Momand said.

On the other hand, some economic experts emphasized that the Islamic Emirate, to attract further investment, should engage with the international

community.

"As much as our strategic economic relations or our economic and political interaction with regional and neighboring countries increases, it paves the way for the solution of our economic problems," said Abdul Naseer Rishitia, an Economic Expert.

Before this, a delegation led by The deputy PM for Economic Affairs, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, on a trip to Turkey, met with the Turkish officials and talked about the development of trade.

Taliban changes educational curriculum to align with Sharia

KABUL (Agenices): The Taliban's Ministry of Education has just made changes to school lessons for grades one to six, bringing them in line with Islamic Sharia law.

Mansoor Ahmad Hamza, the spokesperson for the Taliban's Ministry of Education, stated in an interview with national radio and television on Monday, that the ministry has removed lessons that were contrary to Islamic Sharia law from the educational curriculum and replaced them with content consistent with Sharia law. He added that the ministry has made these changes to textbooks for grades one through six.

However, in the interview, the Ministry of Education's spokesperson did not provide details regarding the specific topics that have been removed.

This happens as, once again in Afghanistan, women and girls are not allowed to go to schools



and universities.

Previously, the Taliban officials had announced that women and girls were prohibited from attending educational institutions until further notice, but after more than two years, no new decisions regarding the reopening of

schools beyond grade six have been made.

Earlier, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the political deputy head of the cabinet, had mentioned that the Taliban, within the framework of the Ministry of Education, has a special focus on religious schools.

Reports indicate that two years after the return of the Taliban to Afghanistan, the number of religious schools has significantly increased compared to the past, and the Taliban aims to establish religious and jihadist schools in the country.

Over 40,000 Afghan citizens obtain Turkish Residence Permits

KABUL (Agenices): According to data from the Turkish Ministry of Interior's Migration Authority, 41,978 Afghan citizens have obtained residence permits in Turkey.

The authority announced on Tuesday that over 30,000 more Afghan asylum seekers in Turkey have received short-term residence documents.

According to the latest data from the Turkish Migration Authority, the number of foreign nationals officially living in the country in 2024 has reached 1,107,032 individuals. The authority stated that Afghan citizens, with 41,978 residence permits, rank ninth among the highest applicants for residency in this country.

The authority also reported that citizens of Turkmenistan, Russia, and Iraq are the top recipients of Turkish residence permits, respectively.

The authority has also released statistics on



undocumented migrants who were detained in 2023 and during the current year.

According to the provided statistics, the highest number of detained undocumented migrants in 2024, with 2,480 cases, were Afghan citizens.

The authority states

that in 2023, Afghan citizens also had the highest detention rate among undocumented migrants, with 68,677 Afghan migrants detained in various regions, and some of them were deported. The authority mentioned on Tuesday that in less than a

month, nearly 3,000 Afghan nationals without residence permits have been detained.

Turkey serves as one of the primary migration routes for thousands of Afghan refugees who transit through the country in hopes of reaching Europe.

Cabinet meeting discussed challenges of cargo transportation facilities in Salang Pass

KABUL (BNA): Mullah Mohammad Hasan Akhund, Prime Minister of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, chaired the thirteenth cabinet session, which discussed a variety of national issues.

According to a Prime Minister Office statement, the High Commission for Migrants was instructed in this session to take active steps to address employment, housing, and other challenges of repatriates.

Deputy Public Works Minister Abdul Karim Fatah directed representatives from Kabul's municipality and the ministries of Transport and Aviation, Rural Development, Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, and Urban Development and

Housing to determine the boundaries and dimensions of highways, sideroads, and internal routes within

provinces during the meeting. Additionally, the Ministry of Public Works was directed by the cabinet to address the

challenges of passenger vehicles through the route of Salang highway and provide a thoughtful solution for it.



Deputy PM meets with Baghlan scholars, discussed public services

KABUL (BNA): During a discussion with Baghlan scholars, Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs, underlined the Islamic Emirate's commitment to serving the people.

According to a state-

ment from the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, during the meeting, Sheikh Abdul Qadir Baghlani, who represented these scholars, informed the Deputy Prime Minister about social, cultural, and security issues in Baghlan province.

He stated that the residents of that province are satisfied with the Islamic Emirate's efforts to ensure security and provide social services.

The scholars also advised the Islamic Emirate's leadership to prioritize educational facilities

in Baghlan province and address problems on this regard. Deputy Prime Minister stated that the Islamic Emirate regards delivering services to the public as one of its primary responsibilities and would spare no efforts to serve the people across various fields.



Selling girls as child brides in Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan raises concerns

Tabasum Nasiry

The increase in forced marriages and underage marriages of girls in Afghanistan has become one of the most serious concerns. The Washington Post's report on this issue indicates that child marriages have significantly increased throughout Afghanistan due to poverty and educational prohibitions.

On Monday, January 15, The Washington Post, in collaboration with the "Too Young to Wed" organization, published an article titled "In Afghanistan, either sell your daughter or endure hunger."

This report tells the stories of 118 girls who have been forced into child marriages in the Herat province's Sabz village, and 116 other families waiting for buyers for their underage daughters.

According to this report, families are forced to sell their daughters not only due to economic collapse but also due to increasing restrictions and educational prohibitions. They hoped their daughters could find good jobs and contribute to the family's income through education.

However, Taranum Saeedi, a women's rights activist, speaking to The Washington Post, said that the closure of schools has left over a million adolescent girls without education. She emphasized that these deprivations have



caused "irreparable crises and destinies" that have led families to consider marrying off their daughters in exchange for education.

Ms. Saeedi told The Washington Post, "Lack of awareness, incorrect traditions, the dominance of religious leaders and fatwas, poverty, and families' desperation – all contribute to forcing girls into forced and underage marriages."

She stressed that underage marriages have been prevalent in Afghanistan and most Islamic countries for a long time, with the main reason being to reach the legal age of nine, which is considered the age of religious maturity.

According to The Washington Post, child marriages in Afghanistan have increased, and parents are forced to sell their daughters for as little as \$2,000 to provide food for

the rest of the family.

The report also warns that girls forced into marriage between the ages of eight and ten are exposed to verbal, physical, and sexual abuse after marriage.

Saleha is one of the girls who was sold into marriage at the age of seven three years ago, and her father told The Washington Post, "I sold my daughter because of poverty and hunger to save others' lives." He said, "I feel guilty, but I had no other choice." However, this arrangement was later annulled with the help of the "Too Young to Wed" organization, and Saleha is now attending school.

Khushbakht, another girl who was sold into marriage for 150,000 Afghanis two years ago, says, "I want to be with my mother."

Underage and forced marriages are serious con-

cerns that have increased following the rise of the Taliban regime due to what is called "the prohibition of girls' education."

Earlier, the United States Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported statistics stating that after 2021, 35% of girls in Afghanistan were married before reaching the age of 18, and 17% were married before reaching the age of 15. SIGAR emphasized that 578 cases of forced marriages were recorded between December 2022 and February 2023, with 361 of them involving marriages at a young age. Stephanie Sinclair is a renowned photographer who founded an organization called "Too Young to Wed" to persuade families to prevent marriages of underage girls.



ISLAMABAD: US Ambassador to Pakistan, Mr. Donald Blome called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force at Air Headquarters.

S Arabia could recognise Israel if Palestinian issue resolved, says FM

DAVOS (Reuters): Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said on Tuesday the kingdom could recognise Israel if a comprehensive agreement were reached that included statehood for the Palestinians.

"We agree that regional peace includes peace for Israel, but that could only happen through peace for the Palestinians through a Palestinian state," Prince Faisal bin Farhan told a panel at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Asked if Saudi Arabia would then recognise Israel as part of a wider political agreement, he said: "Certainly."

Prince Faisal said securing regional peace through the creation of a Palestinian state was "something we have been indeed working on with the US administration, and it is more relevant in the context of Gaza". Securing a normalisation deal with Saudi Arabia would be the grand prize for Israel after it established diplomatic ties with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco, and could transform the geopolitics of the Middle East.

The kingdom, the most powerful country in the Arab world and home

to the most sacred sites in Islam, wields considerable religious clout across the globe. After the eruption of conflict last October between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas that rules Gaza, Saudi Arabia put on ice US-backed plans for the kingdom to normalise ties with Israel, two sources familiar with Riyadh's thinking said, in a swift reordering of its diplomatic priorities.

The two sources told Reuters there would be some delay in the US-backed talks on normalisation of Saudi-Israeli ties, which is seen as a key step for the kingdom to secure what it considers the real prize of a US defence pact in exchange. Before Oct 7, when Hamas fighters launched an attack on southern Israel, both Israeli and Saudi leaders had signalled they were moving steadily towards establishing diplomatic relations that could have reshaped the Middle East.

The Palestinians want a state in territories captured by Israel in a 1967 war, with East Jerusalem as their capital. US-sponsored negotiations with Israel on achieving that stalled more than a decade ago.

Among the hurdles have been Israeli settlement of occupied land and feuding between Western-backed Palestinian authorities and Hamas who reject coexistence with Israel.

"There is a pathway towards a much better future for the region, for the Palestinians, and for Israel, that is peace, and we are fully committed to that," said Prince Faisal. "... a cease-fire on all sides should be a starting point for permanent sustainable peace, which can only happen through justice to the Palestinian people," he added.

Israel's hard-right government has played down the prospect of making significant concessions to the Palestinians as part of any potential normalisation deal with Saudi Arabia. The conflict in Gaza has raised fears of wider regional instability. Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah have frequently clashed along the border with Israel, while pro-Iranian militias have attacked US targets in Iraq. Attacks by Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis have disrupted shipping in the Red Sea and they say they will not stop until Israel halts its bombardment of Gaza.

PPP to solve economic, political crises: Bilawal

F.P. Report

NAUDERO/LARKANA: Chairman Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has said that the people's government formed after winning the general elections scheduled on February 8, will solve the economic and political crises facing the country and cut off the head of terrorism. He reiterated his commitment to do as much as possible for the prosperity and well-being of the people and said that unless I provide employment to every household, I will not be satisfied.

According to a press release issued by Media Cell Bilawal House, the PPP chairman, while addressing a luncheon party organized in honor of the workers and office-bearers at Bhutto House Naudero, said that it has always been his endeavour to meet the expectations of the party workers.

"You elected us in 2018 and sent us to the National Assembly, so I exposed the Selected Raj to the world on the very first day. We fought firmly against those who wanted to rob the rights of the people," he said. He foiled the conspiracy to once again set up one unit in the country and continue the Selected Raj," he added.

Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that Pakistan is standing in such a place today that on the one hand there is an economic crisis, on the other hand the society is suffering from hatred and division, while the situation is

also bad regarding law and order, and said: "The impact of the situation in Afghanistan is visible from the Kutch area to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the People of Pakistan are bearing the brunt of these consequences. At this time, no one has any feeling, no one is worried about what the people are suffering. They have no idea that due to the decisions taken in Islamabad, the people have to bear the burden of the record inflation, unemployment and poverty in the country.

The PPP chairman expressed concern that the impact of politics of hate and division in Pakistan was reaching every household. "The politics of abuse has now become the politics of personal enmity. They should understand that what is happening to their opponent today will also happen to them tomorrow," he warned.

Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that the terrorists and terrorist organizations who martyred Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, and who were resisted by the Jiyalas, the people, the police and the army jawans and who did not have the ability to raise their heads again, are raising their heads once again.

"Why are they raising their heads? Because as a state, we had decided that we will talk to the same terrorists by relying on the sacrifices made by our people. They invited them to come to Pakistan, come in large numbers. Come to Karachi and build your own

house. When we were having tea in Kabul, we had no idea how the people of Pakistan would have to bear the brunt of it," he pointed out.

Addressing the party workers, he said that if you supported, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became the Prime Minister of the country, became the Quaid-e-Awam, became the leader of the Muslim Ummah and became the founder of the nuclear program. Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto became the first Prime Minister of the country and the first elected Prime Minister of the Islamic world. When you were together, I became the country's young foreign minister. If you support me, I will become the young Prime Minister of the country.

"We don't think about what Imran Khan and Shehbaz Sharif did in their respective constituencies as prime ministers, but we are answerable to Garhi Khuda Bakhs. He said that in the year 2022, there were floods in other parts of the country including Sindh, but steps were taken only for the rehabilitation of the victims. He said that the flood victims of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Southern Punjab are still homeless, while two million houses are being constructed for the flood victims in Sindh. He said that this is the first example in the whole world that the government is not only giving houses to the flood victims, but they are also being given land titles.

US envoy calls on Air Chief

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: US Ambassador to Pakistan H.E. Mr. Donald Blome called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force in his office on Tuesday.

During the meeting, both dignitaries expressed their mutual desire to elevate the training momentum between the two sides through enhanced collaboration in air force to air force mutual exercises.

Furthermore, they emphasized the importance of fostering a robust exchange of delegations and knowledge sharing to bolster the capabilities of both the PAF and the US Air Force. The discussion also centered around collaboration in the recently established techno parks, with a focus on leveraging technological advancements to enhance operational effectiveness and efficiency. The reorganization of mutual cooperation parameters was also deliberated upon, with an aim to fortify existing ties and explore new avenues for joint ventures and strategic partnerships.

The Air Chief accentuated the cordial relations that exist between the two nations while emphasizing his steadfast determination to elevate the existing synergistic partnership between the two key allies. Chief of the Air Staff further said, "Pakistan deeply values its robust diplomatic, economic and defence ties with the United States of America which are firmly rooted in mutual consensus concerning all important matters pertaining to regional peace, security and stability."

The visiting envoy lauded the commendable level of professionalism of Pakistan Air Force personnel and acknowledged the remarkable strides made by PAF through indigenization under the current leadership. The US Ambassador also expressed his admiration for Pakistan's unwavering commitment to facilitate regional peace and stability. Both sides concurred to further optimize the existing military-to-military relationship between the two countries with specific focus on enriching training and bolstering operational competencies.

The meeting between the US Ambassador and Chief of the Air Staff manifests the deep interest and willingness on both sides to further consolidate the longstanding bilateral strategic ties into concrete and mutually rewarding defence partnership.

Media has key role in shaping public perception during elections: Solangi

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Tuesday highlighted the crucial role of media in shaping public perception about elections through coverage, analysis and debates.

The minister, in a meeting with Pakistan Observer Chairman Faisal Zahid Malik, underlined the need for unbiased, authentic and fact-based media coverage of the general elections, scheduled for February 8. Challenges faced by the media, the regional press, the role of the media in the upcoming general elections 2024 and the freedom of press came under discussion in the meeting.

The minister said that the media acted as a bridge between the candidates and electorates during the elections. The government was striving to provide training and technical assistance to the journalists for coverage of the electoral process, he added. Solangi said the caretaker government fully believed in the freedom of press and expression which was a fundamental right and could not be denied in any circumstances.

He acknowledged the role being played by journalists in the development and prosperity of the country. Pakistan Observer Chairman Faisal Zahid Malik appreciated the government's commitment to the freedom of press and the welfare of journalists.

Meanwhile, the Federal Caretaker Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Tuesday that all those countries which had touched the zenith of development had done so by empowering local government.

"Throughout my own experiences and understandings there is no democracy without local government", he said while delivering his speech at a two-day Conference for the Civic Hackathon "Problem Identification". The minister opined that probably lack of a strong local government system was probably one of the major problems in Pakistan's political history.

Terming the conference for the civic hackathon problem identification as a very interesting initiative, he said it aimed to bring together experts from the public, private sector and civil society to collectively identify the most pressing civic issues in the country - in order attempt to later develop a digital solution for it. He said that in Pakistan, there was a lot of potential to focus on developing innovative local solutions. However, he said that the problems were often identified in isolation by the public sector and in his opinion this more participatory approach of conducting a problem identification conference and later a civic hackathon would provide more sustainable results.

Solangi said that the government of Pakistan now recognized the increasing need and advantage of a culture of evidence-based decision-making that is participatory - meaning that it engaged citizens and that was need-based so to ensure the effective allocation of resources. He said that during the 18th Amendment, Article 140 was amended by adding sub article called 140-A reading: "Each province shall by law establish a local government system and devolve political, administrative and financial responsibility and authority to the elected representatives of the

local government".

He said that was the reason many political commentators and some parties had started pressing that the local government laws of the provincial government must be in harmony with this article of the Constitution. Solangi said this very important conference was not about just digital literacy or just finding digital solutions, at the heart of the problem was governance itself. "People are at the center of this whole exercise that you are conducting so we should know what our problems are, who our target audience is, and where are we heading with this digital exercise", he added.

The minister said he believed that ultimately this process would help improve public service delivery, bridge the digital divide and strengthen local governments. Solangi said that local governments were not only custodians of such digital solutions but also the main drivers of change at a local level across the country.

He extended his sincerest thanks to the participants from the public and private sectors, local government officers from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, academia, and experts in the field of local government. The minister hoped that collective brainstorming for the joint identification of a problem statement would enable local governments in Pakistan to strengthen digital transformation. He also thanked the Federal Republic of Germany especially the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH which had been working in Pakistan since 1961 and has offices in several provinces for supporting this important initiative.

Siraj denounces Senate resolutions, terms them unconstitutional

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Sirajul Haq denouncing the Senate resolutions calling for a delay in elections, asserting that they are unconstitutional and only serve to cast controversy over the sanctity of the parliament without any real impact.

Addressing a press conference at Mansoorah on Tuesday, he emphasized the importance of fair elections in accordance with the date specified by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). Sirajul Haq warned that the JI would resist any tactics aimed at depriving the masses of their fundamental right to choose their representatives.

Reiterating the JI's consistent demand for a level playing field for

all political parties in the elections, he emphasized that polls were crucial for ensuring stability and peace in the country.

The JI chief expressed confidence that the politics of dynasties would no longer thrive in Pakistan, as awareness among people about their rights has increased. He said February 8, would guarantee the rule of the people.

He said those who remained in power during past five years failed to deliver. He criticized family-based political parties, likening their functioning to a property business. He pointed out that these parties distributed tickets among relatives, sidelining party workers. Siraj called on those seeking the position of prime minister for the fourth time to present their past performance.

Similarly, he questioned those claiming to provide free electricity up to 300 units, urging them to account for their actions during their 15-year rule over Sindh.

Addressing the country's abundant resources, the JI chief identified bad governance and corruption as the primary issues. He accused long-time rulers of utilizing state resources for personal gain, depriving the masses of essential services. He criticized the ruling elite for looking towards Washington to maintain power and for remaining silent on Israeli atrocities, fearing a reaction from the United States. Siraj asserted that the JI was the only party consistently advocating for the rights of the people and promised that, if voted into power, the JI would ensure the rule of law in the country.

KP govt to go allout for ensuring free, transparent election: CM

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An important meeting to take stock of the preparations of the provincial government for holding General Elections 2024 was held here on Tuesday by Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah in the chair.

Besides Caretaker Provincial Ministers Dr. Aamir Abdullah and Barrister Feroz Jamal Shah Kakakhel, Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary, Inspector General Police Akhtar Hayat Khan Gandapur, Additional Chief Secretary Home Muhammad Abid Majeed and other relevant high ups attended the meeting. Divisional Commissioners and Regional Police Officers also attended the meeting via video link.

Briefing about the preparedness and arrangements made so far, the participants were informed that for the first time, General Elections for national and provincial assemblies are going to be held simultaneously in the settled and merged districts of the province, adding that the elections would be held for 45 general seats of the National Assembly and 115 gen-

eral seats of the Provincial Assembly in the province.

It was informed that a total of 15737 polling stations would be established across the province out of which 4812 polling stations have been declared the most sensitive, 6581 sensitive and 4344 polling stations normal adding that 1919 polling stations would be established in the snow-bound areas of the province.

The authorities told that the total number of registered voters in the province is 21692381. Briefing about the security arrangements for holding general elections in the province, it was informed that 11 security personnel would be deployed at each most sensitive polling stations in the southern belt and merged districts of the province, whereas seven security personnel would be deployed at each most sensitive polling stations in the rest of the districts.

Similarly, 7 security personnel would be deployed at each of the sensitive polling stations and 4 security personnel at each of the normal polling stations in the merged and southern districts. Whereas, in the rest of the districts, 5 security personnel at each sensitive and 4 at the each

normal polling stations would be deployed. It was further informed that the provincial government would require a total of 115430 security personnel for holding general elections, whereas only 89959 police personnel are currently available; and thus, the government is faced with the shortfall of 25471 security personnel. The Ministry of Interior has been approached for the provision of additional 4 Wings of Frontier Corps and 165 Platoons of Frontier Constabulary as well.

Moreover, it was informed that on the special directives of the caretaker Chief Minister, 26213 additional security personnel have been arranged so far from the different provincial departments. In order to monitor the law and order during the elections, Command and Control Centre has been established at the home department, whereas, district wise contingency plan has been prepared by the police department.

Similarly, Rescue Emergency Plans and Health Emergency Plans have also been prepared for the upcoming general elections. Moreover, the authorities told that a total of 5552 CCTV Cameras are



available for installation at polling stations, whereas Rs. 986 million have been released for providing additional 11668 CCTV Cameras for this purpose. Similarly, ramps for differently abled people are available at 11689 polling stations, whereas 1536 more ramps are under construction.

They also informed that the relevant deputy commissioners have chalked out their formal plans for polling in the snow-bound areas of the province; required machinery and manpower would be available for clearance of snow from the roads during the elections.

Similarly, a comprehensive mechanism has been devised for coordination amongst all the stakeholders in order to ensure fair and peaceful holding of general elections. Addressing the participants on the occasion, the chief minister said that the provincial government will go all out for holding general elections in a peaceful, fair and transparent manner. He directed all the Divisional Commissioners, RPOs, Deputy Commissioners and DPOs to ensure implementation of the plans and decisions of the provincial government in letter and spirit for this purpose.

He made it clear that instructions and code of conduct issued by the Election Commission for holding general elections must be implemented at all levels. All the available machinery and resources of the provincial government would be utilised adding that Divisional and District administrations would have to play their respective role in an effective manner for holding free, fair and peaceful general elections in the province; the provincial government will extend its all out support for this purpose, he concluded.