

Netanyahu rejects Hamas conditions

JERUSALEM (Reuters): Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday rejected conditions presented by Hamas to end the war and release hostages that would include Israel's complete withdrawal and leaving Hamas in power in Gaza. "In exchange for the release of our hostages, Hamas demands the end of the war, the withdrawal of our forces from Gaza, the release of all the murderers and rapists," Netanyahu said in a statement.



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LAHORE: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing a mammoth public gathering of the Party.

Iran, Pakistan flights resume amid easing tensions

KARACHI (INP): In a sign of improving relations between Iran and Pakistan, commercial flights between the two countries have resumed after a brief hiatus.

According to aviation sources, Iran's Mahan Airlines flight arrived in Lahore from Tehran on Sunday, carrying more than 100 passengers.

The flight landed at Lahore Airport from Tehran, sources said.

Flights between the two countries were suspended due to Pakistan-Iran tensions over border security and regional issues.

The resumption of flights is expected to boost trade, tourism, and people-to-people contacts between the two neighboring countries. On Friday, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Jalil Abbas Jilani, had a telephone conversation with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir Abdollahian. The two ministers discussed the recent developments in the region and the bilateral relations between the two countries.

Jilani briefed Abdullahian on Pakistan's position and reiterated that the defence of national security and sovereignty was the most important for Pakistan. He said that the red lines regarding Pakistan's security were clear and that Pakistan would not allow any violation of its territorial integrity. He also expressed Pakistan's desire to resolve the issues through dialogue and peaceful means.

Both sides agreed to reduce the recent tension and to enhance cooperation and coordination between the two countries. Pakistan and Iran traded air strikes on militant targets this week. The rare military actions in the porous border region of Baluchistan -- shared between the two countries --

- further stoked regional tensions already enflamed by the Israel-Hamas war.

Iran carried out a missile and drone attack on what it called "terrorist" targets in Pakistan on Tuesday night, with Pakistan in turn striking militant targets inside Iran on Thursday.

Pakistan recalled its ambassador from Tehran and said Iran's envoy -- on a visit home -- was blocked from returning to Islamabad. The United Nations and the United States appealed for restraint, while China offered to mediate.

Tehran and Islamabad both said they hit their own domestic militants sheltering on foreign territory.

A collective death toll of 11 -- mostly women and children -- was reported from both sides of the border that bisects an arid region where militant movements have simmered for decades.

Pakistan Army, Royal Saudi Land Forces commences in Okara Garrison

RAWALPINDI (APP): The joint military training of the Pakistan Army and Royal Saudi Land Forces organized by the Multan Corps commenced in Okara Garrison.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release on Sunday, the military forces of the two countries presented an exemplary military drill at the beginning of the joint training.

On this occasion, the national anthems of both countries were also played during the unveiling of the national flags. The Garrison Commander was the chief guest of the ceremony. Through the joint training programme, the forces of both countries will have classroom sessions and the opportunity to hone their collective combat skills.

At the end of the opening ceremony, the Chief Guest presented badges of joint training to the officers and men of the forces of both countries.

Nawaz to launch campaign in KP today

MANSEHRA (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Nawaz Sharif will address a public gathering in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Mansehra district on January 22.

Three-time former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who returned home last year after four years of self-imposed exile in London to lead his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party in general elections, will run from the north-western town of Mansehra. Nawaz Sharif will run for NA-15 (Mansehra-II) seat.

Captain (retired) Safdar and Sardar Yousaf have been tasked to review arrangements for the public gathering. Sources further say Maryam Nawaz will also accompany Nawaz Sharif in the Mansehra public gathering.

Addressing his maiden public gathering of election 2024 campaign, Nawaz Shari said that he was ousted from power by the five Supreme Court judges just because he refused to take a salary from his son.

No normal Israel ties without path to Palestinian state: Saudi foreign minister

RIYADH (Agencies): Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said there can be no normalisation of ties with Israel without resolving the Palestinian issue, he told CNN in an interview that aired on Sunday.

Asked if there could be no normal ties without a path to a credible and irreversible Palestinian state, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud told CNN's Fareed Zakaria: "That's the only way we're going to get the benefit. So, yes, because we need stability and only stability will come through the resolving the Palestinian issue."

The foreign minister's remarks were part of an interview originally taped on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum held last week in Davos, Switzerland, and aired Sunday on CNN.

De-escalation of the conflict in Gaza and halting civilian deaths is a key focus of Saudi Arabia, the

minister said. "What we are seeing is the Israelis are crushing Gaza, the civilian population of Gaza," he said. "This is completely unnecessary, completely unacceptable and has to stop."

The local health ministry in Gaza says more than 25,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 62,000 wounded in Israel's assault on the region since an Oct 7 attack on Israel by the Palestinian group.

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 had earlier 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.

country's better interests. He highlighted the PDM government's dedication to Pakistan's economic survival during its 16-month rule without political agendas. Shehbaz Sharif highlighted the imperative need for rapid economic development in the country, adding that PML-N as a party dedicated to

addressing the pressing challenges facing the country. He emphasized that quick economic progress was not only beneficial for the people but overall progress of the nation.

Shehbaz expressed confidence in PML-N securing sufficient seats to form the government at the center. He claimed

that "PML-N will 'surprise' everyone in the February 8 election."

Providing insights into the party's preparedness, Shehbaz mentioned that the PML-N has fielded 208 candidates for the 266 National Assembly general seats. Overall, the party issued 671 tickets for the 859 seats across five legislatures, he added.

The Frontier Post

Pneumonia claims lives of 8

LAHORE (INP): As many as eight children died of pneumonia and related cases in different areas of Punjab in a single day amid intense cold weather. Punjab Health Department said on Sunday that 799 suspected pneumonia cases were reported across the province in 24 hours. According to the statistics, 108 suspected pneumonic cases were reported from provincial capital Lahore in a single day.

Death toll soars as fighting rages across Gaza, Israel raids West Bank

GAZA STRIP (AFP/APP): Fighting raged across Gaza and Israeli units raided the West Bank on Sunday after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has faced growing domestic criticism, rejected calls for post-war "Palestinian sovereignty".

Alongside fierce fighting in southern Gaza and across the besieged territory, strikes in Syria and Iraq raised fears of a wider conflagration.

Hamas-run Gaza's health ministry reported at least 165 people killed over the previous 24 hours -- more than double Friday's toll.

An AFP correspondent reported gunfire, air strikes and tank shelling that was especially heavy in Khan Yunis, southern Gaza's main city.

Witnesses also told AFP that Israeli boats were bombarding Gaza City and other areas in the north early on Sunday.

In Rafah, near the border with Egypt, at least five people were killed in a strike that hit what the Gaza health ministry said was a civilian car. Israel's relentless bombardment and ground offensive have killed at least 24,927 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

Violence has also surged in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, where the military said it had demolished two houses in Hebron that it said had belonged to two Palestinian gunmen who had carried out an attack on a road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem in November.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian fighters in the West Bank village of Maithalun, south of Jenin, as well as in the West Bank towns of Arura and Qalqilya. The United States, which provides Israel with billions of dollars in military aid, has urged it to take more care to protect civilians but they have disagreed over Gaza's future governance.

Netanyahu and US President Joe Biden discussed the post-war future of Gaza in a call on Friday, their first in almost a month.

Biden said it was still possible Netanyahu could agree to some form of Palestinian state, but Netanyahu's office said in a statement on Saturday Israel "must retain security control over Gaza to ensure that Gaza will no longer pose a threat to Israel".

That, it said, was "a requirement that contradicts the demand for Palestinian sovereignty".

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said at the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Uganda the Palestinian right to statehood "must be recognised by all" and that its denial was "unacceptable".

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA says about 1.7 million people have been displaced in Gaza, with about one million crowded into the Rafah area.

The UN humanitarian agency OCHA reported just 15 bakeries operating across Gaza and that the

availability of water "is shrinking every day".

UN agencies have warned better aid access is needed urgently as famine and disease loom.

The war has sent regional tensions soaring, with a surge in violence involving Iran-backed Hamas allies from Lebanon to Yemen and beyond.

Iranian media said an Israeli strike on Damascus killed the Revolutionary Guards' spy chief in Syria and four other Guards members, prompting a threat of retaliation from Tehran's foreign ministry.

Israel, which declined to comment on the Damascus strike, has intensified attacks on targets in Syria since the October 7 attacks.

Deadly exchanges have also occurred regularly between Israeli forces and Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Lebanon's official National News Agency reported two deaths in an Israeli strike on Saturday, and Hezbollah later said one of its fighters had been killed.

In western Iraq, a military base used by US-led coalition forces came under missile attack, US Central Command said. The Tehran-aligned Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for the attack.

The US military also said it carried out fresh strikes on Saturday against Yemen's Huthi rebels, who say they have been hitting Israeli-linked shipping in the vital Red Sea shipping lanes in solidarity with Gaza.

Chairman Bilawal addresses PPP's public gathering in Lahore

E.P. Report

LAHORE: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing a mammoth public gathering of the Party in Lahore said that he wishes to send a message to every person living in this city, province and country that they should not be disappointed.

Pakistan facing an unprecedented economic crisis, with a historic surge in inflation, unemployment and poverty. The people are suffering, with the economic crisis on one hand and the social, political and democratic crises on the other. Pakistan is facing unabashed security challenges, as terrorists are again trying to emerge.

Those who are still engaging in the politics of hatred and division are further dividing our society and country. The PPP will bury the politics of hate and division forever, with the support of the people. The PPP will help the country emerge from this plethora of crises. Pointing out the terrorists who are making efforts to submerge the country in chaos once again, Chairman Bilawal said that he will not let them do so.

Chairman Bilawal said that he is contesting from Lahore himself in this election. It is said that Lahore is the heart of Pakistan.

Currently, the heart of the country is shattered and we have come to Lahore to help heal the country once again by combatting all the problems faced by the country. They try to mock

the PPP by taunting us that our strength is low. They need to be apprised that Lahore belongs to the PPP, not them. The citizens of Lahore set themselves on fire as a sign of protest over the killing of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. This is the same city that welcomed Shaheed Mohatma Benazir Bhutto in a historic manner, and made her the first woman PM of the Muslim Ummah. Lahore is the city of people with honour, courage and loyalty. Chairman Bilawal said that we are believers of the 'convoy of the 72' and will continue to tread the path of justice and truth.

Chairman Bilawal said that the PPP was distanced from Lahore and the province of Punjab due to a conspiracy, which harmed the labourers, farmers, youngsters, women and minorities of the region. 'Showbaz' and 'Waseem Akram Plus' were imposed on Punjab. "Is it the fate of the people of Lahore to bear such imposition repeatedly?", Chairman Bilawal questioned. We cannot hand Pakistan over to these traditional politicians who have all come to power, some once and others thrice. They forget the people and their promises upon coming to power. PPP is the sole political party that fulfils its promises to the people.

Chairman Bilawal said that he has himself prepared the '10-point agenda' of the PPP because he knows that the common people are suffering due to inflation, poverty and unemployment. Quaid-e-

Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto fulfilled his promise of 'Roti, Kapra Aur Makaan' by taking from the elite and giving to the farmers and labourers. Chairman PPP said that the PPP once again, aims to adopt the narrative of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto by taking from those who are benefitted annually through subsidies worth billions. Chairman Bilawal said that if the 17 federal ministries are devolved, as per the 18th Amendment, then the money saved can be spent on the people. The elite enjoy subsidies worth 1500 billion rupees, and the PPP resolves to spend them on the downtrodden masses, the labourers, farmers and students. If the people give the PPP an opportunity to serve them, then the Party resolves to implement its 10-point charter.

The Jiyalas of Lahore should go to every doorstep to apprise the people of the Party's objective to double their income within five years, along with the numerous initiatives it plans to introduce. Chairman Bilawal said that he will implement Quaid-e-Awam's promise of shelter to the people, by building three million houses will over the country and giving ownership to the women of the households.

The Jiyalas should apprise the brothers and sisters living in temporary housing that the PPP aims to improve their living standards and regularise their houses. All those troubled by their electricity bills should be made aware that

upon electing Chairman Bilawal, they will be provided 300 units of electricity free-of-cost through solar power. While addressing the women of Lahore, Chairman Bilawal said that his mother was martyred but he wishes to serve the women of the country just as a son would.

The Party aims to expand the Benazir Income Support Programme and provide interest-free loans to the women so that they can gain financial independence and make their contribution in the economy. The farmers of the country should be told that the PPP is the only Party that is of the view that 'Kissan Khushaal Toh Mulk Khushaal'. The PPP intends to introduce the 'Benazir Kissan Card' to provide financial assistance and insurance to the farmers for their crops. The labourers too will get their due share of rights, and will be provided social security through the 'Benazir Mazdoor Card'.

Chairman Bilawal said that the Jiyalas should apprise the youngsters of the sheer importance of their right to vote, given to them by Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The PPP feels the pain of the youth, that goes from pillar to post in search of employment despite having several educational qualifications. Through the 'Youth Card', the PPP aims to provide financial assistance to the youngsters of the country, while simultaneously equipping them with the skills needed to flourish professionally.

Twenty-five killed after Ukraine shells Donetsk

DONETSK (Reuters): Twenty-five people were killed and 20 injured when Ukrainian forces shelled the Russian-controlled city of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, Denis Pushilin, the Russian-appointed head of the Donetsk region, said on Sunday.

According to Alexei Kulemzin, the city's Russian-installed mayor, Ukrainian forces bombarded a busy area where shops and a market are located. Pushilin said the city was shelled by Ukrainian artillery. There was no immediate Ukrainian comment. Reuters photographs and video taken at the scene showed crying people, some of whom said they had lost relatives, and bodies lying on blood-soaked snow near one of the city's markets. Pushilin announced a day of mourning on Monday in the Donetsk People's Republic, the name given to the part of the region Russia says it

has annexed.

He said emergency services were working at the scene and forensic specialists were trying to collect fragments of the weapons used in the attack. In Moscow, the Russian Foreign Ministry called the attack "a barbaric act of terrorism" by Ukraine that was carried out "with the use of weapons supplied by the West".

"The Russian side categorically condemns this treacherous strike against the civilian population," a ministry statement said.

Russia, which launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine almost two years ago, has voiced outrage in the past when Ukrainian attacks have killed civilians in Donetsk and other areas. Russia's own campaign of air strikes and heavy shelling, however, has killed thousands of Ukrainian civilians.

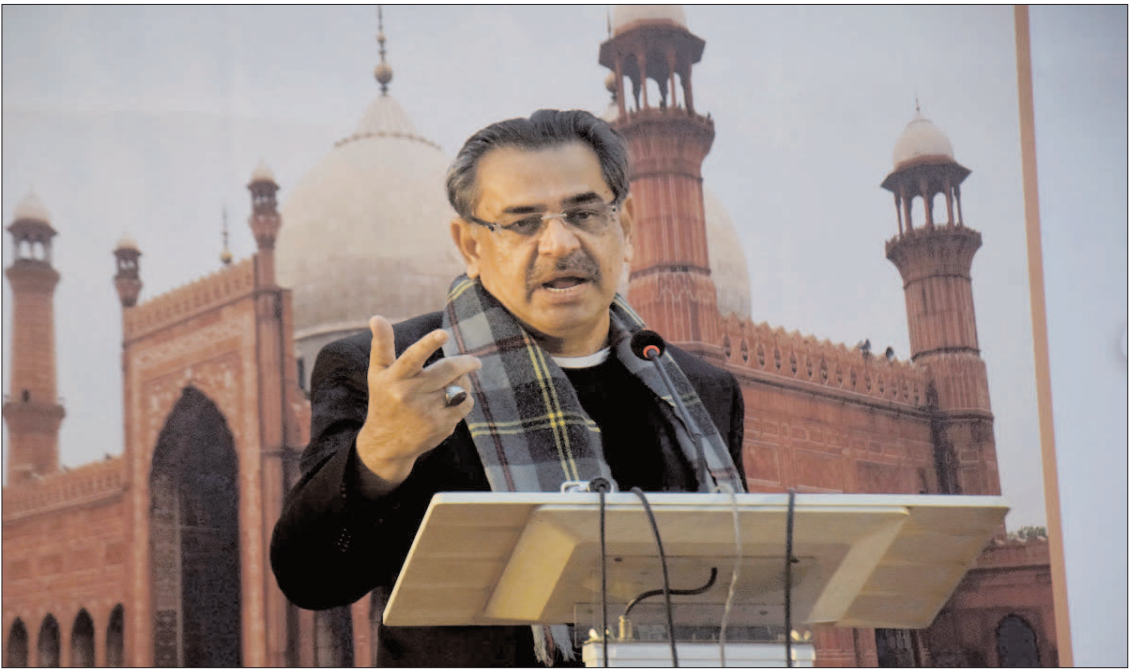
The governor of the Ukrainian-controlled part of the region, Vadym Filashkin, said Russian attacks killed at least two people at two locations east of the city of Donetsk on Sunday.

At Kurakhove, about 45 km (28 miles) west of Donetsk, shelling killed a 31-year-old man and injured another person, while a 62-year-old man was killed and a 70-year-old man injured at Krasnohorivka between Donetsk and Kurakhove, he said. "I call on everyone who remains in Donetsk: evacuate!" Filashkin said in a post on the Telegram messaging app.

Donetsk is one of four regions in Ukraine's east and south that Russia claimed to have annexed in late 2022 in a move condemned as illegal by most countries at the U.N. General Assembly. Russia does not fully control any of the four regions.

Timely election, the only way out: Shehbaz

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president Shehbaz Sharif asserted on Sunday that the nation was ready to enter the election, emphasizing the need for nationwide polls despite challenges. Talking to a private news channel, he urged all stakeholders to prioritize unity for the



LAHORE: Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Aneeq Ahmed Khan addressing during free medical camp titled role of Mimbber and Mehrah in Healthy Society organized by Primary and Secondary Healthcare Department Punjab at Badshahi Masjid.

Aneeq inaugurates free medical camp at Badshahi Masjid

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed inaugurated a health camp at Badshahi Masjid here on Sunday, and stressed the need for collective efforts to establish a healthy society. Addressing the inaugural ceremony and a seminar on 'Role of mosques, mimbber and mehrah for healthy society', he said there were more than 250,000 mosques in the country, which should be made a centre of medical and other facilities. He added that these mosques should be given the status of community centres.

Caretaker Federal Minister Health Dr Nadeem Jan, Punjab Health Minister Dr Jamal Nasir, Minister Auqaf Sayed Azfar Ali Nasir, Chairman Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Abdul Khabeer Azad, Joint

Secretary Ahmad Nadeem, Secretary Auqaf Dr Tahir Raza Bukhari and others were also present.

Aneeq Ahmed said that medical camp had been established at historic Badshahi Masjid and other mosques of big cities like Karachi, Rawalpindi and Islamabad in which dentists, ultrasound, sugar screening and other facilities are being provided free of cost to people. He vowed that the scope of these facilities and camps would be extended to other areas of the country soon. He said that all provincial department concerned are playing an active role for establishing and maintaining free medical camps; however, continuity and commitment are important for provision of the best medical facilities to people.

The religious minister appealed to consider mosques in the lists of prior-

ities as these could play an effective role in developing and establishing healthy society. He termed education and health the major aspects of any society and stressed the need to extend great importance toward these vital sectors. Well-being is not an inheritance but a process of continuity that is achieved over time, he added. Caretaker Federal Health Minister Dr Nadeem Jan commended the initiatives undertaken in the health sector, expressing confidence that these efforts would yield positive outcomes in future. He went beyond conventional views, emphasising that the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah served not only as a place of worship but as a vital component of the societal system, addressing diverse matters concurrently. The minister conveyed his aspiration to replicate

this system in mosques nationwide, drawing inspiration from the organizational structure at the Prophet's Mosque. He underscored the continuous endeavors of his ministry to foster a healthy and prosperous society.

Dr. Nadim Jan shed light on the multifaceted role of mosques, envisioning a society marked by happiness, educational advancement, progress, and tranquility, all propelled by the influential and powerful voice emanating from the mosque's pulpit. The program witnessed additional insights from prominent figures, including provincial ministers, secretaries and religious scholars. At the end, Chairman of Ruet-e-Halal Committee and Imam of Badshahi Masjid Syed Abdul Khabeer Azad offered dua for the country development, people's prosperity and their good health.

Arsenic concentration in groundwater reaches alarming levels

LAHORE (APP): Experts warned on Sunday that arsenic concentration in groundwater has reached alarming levels, and drinking arsenic-contaminated water is one of major causes of arsenicosis, a clinical syndrome in people of urban centres in the country.

If water has been contaminated by toxic substances, reliable drinking water treatment is essential, they believe. Professor of Chemistry Dr. Muhammad Ijaz Bhatti told APP that inorganic arsenic is found in groundwater worldwide, which is present as an ionic arsenate or uncharged arsenite depending on the redox potential.

Water is ranked second only to oxygen in terms of its significance for human survival, being an essential element for human body, he said. Approximately, 40 to 60 per cent of the human body's weight consists of water, he said adding drinking water is regarded as safe and suitable for consumption, when it adheres to the guidelines set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) or the regulatory body of any region. Bhatti said.

Furthermore, one of fundamental human rights is access to safe and potable water, yet the majority of the world's population, particularly in less economically advanced nations, is deprived of the essential commodity, regrets the WHO. Arsenic is a tasteless and odorless element that belongs to the nitrogen family in the periodic table.

It combines with other elements to form arsenical compounds in the form of inorganic and organic in nature, he explained.

Inorganic derivatives are more toxic than organic products, and inorganic arsenic has been recognised as a substance that can cause cancer in humans. He said arsenic is predominantly found in groundwater as arsenate (V) and arsenide as (III).

The main forms in which arsenic is found in groundwater of the country are arsenide. In Pakistan, for instance, only 30 per cent of the population has access to piped water, which is rarely subjected to thorough analysis for drinking water parameters, leaving 70 per cent of the population drinking water of unknown quality.

Likewise, in Punjab, most populace uses groundwater for drinking purposes. Groundwater is pumped out through wells, by hand pumps and electric pumps.

Therefore, it is need of the hour to measure the concentration levels of arsenic in drinking water, pumped out from ground in Lahore and other parts of the province, he said. Meanwhile, particularly in Lahore, regular studies have shown very high concentrations regionally which can lead to chronic poisoning, that is harmful to health.

To a query, he said as a treatment, GEH 102, is a high-performance adsorbent based on granular ferric hydroxide. Made in a patented manufacturing process, it was specially developed for selective removal of arsenic from water, he said. Recognised for its high quality and purity, GEH 102 adsorbent complies with all requirements of DIN EN

15029 for drinking water treatment. In addition, it is certified in accordance with NSF/ANSI Standard 61.

GEH 102 removes both arsenates and arsenites. Its adsorption capacity is dependent on the characteristics and composition of the water treated as well as the operating conditions due to drinking arsenic-contaminated water.

Meanwhile, in a recent study, by the provincial Local Government and Community Development department in the Punjab province, 4,547 drinking water samples were collected and analysed using atomic absorption spectrometry technique. The study outcome reveal that arsenic levels in drinking water varied from 6 to 12 ng ml-1 with a mean value of 8.5±1.6 ng ml-1, that is below the recommended WHO guidelines of 10 ng ml-1 for drinking water.

Former LDA Director Aslam Langah told APP that environmental health hazards are not limited to the developing world, rather environmental risks have also been generated in wealthier countries and are primarily attributed to urban air and water pollution. Noted pulmonologist, critical care physician, Dr Muhammad Ahmad said that dramatically occurrences of rising respiratory disorders, the lungs and other organs that help you breathe, Stomach, and Asthma cases, throughout the global cities was increasing at an alarming level.

He said that various environmental synthesis reports are giving precautionary warnings that further erosion of ecosystems

(a major cause of inclusion of arsenic compounds in underground water) could lead to an increase in existing diseases such as malaria and cholera, as well as a rising risk of new emerging viral diseases in the world.

To a query Ahmad said that safe drinking or bathing water in mega cities can impose serious risks (both acute and delayed) to human health, adding microbe contamination of groundwater due to arsenic rich levels and high concentration of poisonous nutrients in sewage waters due to agricultural run-off are among the most serious threats.

Heavy metals such as lead (Pb), mercury (Hg), and chromium (Cr); pesticides; organic pollutants; microplastics; and emerging contaminants are posing challenges to the human health, he elaborated.

Arsenic-rich compounds in water are responsible for various types of cancer, allergies, neurological and cardiovascular disorders resulting in a large number of deaths worldwide.

Telling remedy, Dr. Ahmad said in this connection, microbial contaminants, arsenic compounds, toxic chemicals' contaminants created by anthropogenic activities, should be controlled immediately by limiting human activities and giving them awareness. These human activity outcomes are rapidly involving into arsenic watering to crops and a variety of food with increased potential that affect the natural hygiene-value, environment and human health, he further said.

as detection bill amounting to Rs 13.784 million.

Apprising the media about some major power pilferers, he explained that LESCO charged detection units worth Rs 880,000 to an electricity pilferer in Chunian tehsil of Kasur; Rs 300,000 and Rs 250,000 detection bills respectively to two customers stealing electricity in Johar Town Lahore, and Rs 200,000 fine to a power thief in Misri Shah area of Lahore.

CM inspects under-construction residences for police

LAHORE (APP): Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, along with the Punjab cabinet, paid a visit to the Qurban Lines on Saturday night and reviewed progress of the project to build residences for the police there.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Dr Usman Anwar apprised the CM and cabinet members about progress being made on the project.

Mohsin Naqvi inspected the ongoing work for building residences and ordered for completing the projects at the earliest. He said high-quality should be maintained in completing the work. Naqvi said that excellent residences were being built for the police. Three floors of the apartments would be completed before January 31 and allotted to the police officers.

The CM was informed that 24 apartments in a 6-storey building were being built for the police personnel in the Qurban Lines. Two lifts would also be installed in apartments.

CM announces 15pc quota for news room journalists in residential plots: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has announced granting residential plots to reporters, photographers and cameramen and 15 per cent quota for journalists working in the news rooms. Addressing a ceremony organised for journalists at the CM Office on Sunday, he said that for the first time in the history of Punjab, 3,300 residential plots had been granted to the reporters, photographers, cameramen and journalists of the News Room through a transparent balloting mechanism. Reporters will be granted 7-marla residential plots, while cameramen and photographers will be granted 3-marla residential plots through a transparent balloting mechanism. The advertisement for

eligibility for acquiring the plot will be advertised on Monday, January 22.

Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) will inform the journalists community about the mode for acquiring the plots. Mohsin Naqvi stated that approximately, one year of the incumbent government has passed. "Whichever city I visit, the only demand being made by the journalists community is to do something substantial for their welfare. Today, we have fulfilled our promise being made with our journalist brothers." He said that he is fully aware that majority of the journalists lead a low profile lifestyle and they hardly make both ends meal. Residence for the journalists is a big issue as residence is a basic need for the journalists across Punjab including Lahore.

Mohsin Naqvi apprised that a final shape to the journalists residential project has been given after holding a detailed consultation in this regard. It was our utmost strive to find a suitable place and make a long-term planning as well. "We have launched a residential scheme for the reporters, photographers, cameramen and journalists of the News Room belonging to the print and electronic media. We have allocated 200 acres of land in a nice phase of RUDA to resolve residential problems of the journalists community" he said. He informed that 2300 seven marla residential plots have been allocated for the reporters while 1000 three marla residential plots have been allocated for the photographers and the cameramen where they can submit their applications. 15 percent quota has been allocated for the journalists of the News Room. CM stated that RUDA has allocated a very nice place for the journalists. The eligibility criteria is easy for acquiring

a plot. Most of the journalists will qualify for the balloting.

Provincial Minister for Information Amir Mir and Minister for Housing Azfar Ali Nasir have done a great hard work for the well-being of the journalists, he said and added the plot eligibility criteria will soon be intimated through advertisements. The journalists can apply till 28th of January and balloting will be done before 8th February, he asserted. RUDA will provide a briefing to the journalists for acquiring the plots, he maintained. The sole motive behind it is that the journalists should be granted a plot on merit as they may belong to any group or a newspaper.

RUDA will inform the journalists with regard to qualifying and will provide a complete plan. It is our utmost strive to arrange balloting before 8th February so that the plots acquisition process can be completed. "We tried to award 10-marla plot but the journalists are in a great number. Every journalist can at least build his house through this scheme. We would try that the Bank of Punjab should provide loans to the journalists community on soft terms for building their houses" he said.

CM commended the whole team for working diligently for the well-being of the journalists especially Minister for Information Amir Mir and his whole team worked a lot with dedication. The journalists across Punjab including Lahore will be granted plots through balloting on merit. Mohsin Naqvi remarked that the journalists who have already been granted plots will not be given plots again. For the time being, reporters, photographers, cameramen and the journalists of the News Room will be granted plots.

Karachiites also want Nawaz Sharif: Atta Tarar

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz candidate Attaullah Tarar said on Sunday that the PML-N carried out a lot of development work in NA-127 constituency in the past. Addressing a workers convention in Township, he said that Bilawal-Bhutto Zardari should tell people what the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) had done for Karachi development during the last 15 years, instead of criticising the PML-N leadership.

Tarar said, "People of Karachi also want Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif." He said Bilawal had no agenda and that was why he was only criticising his political opponents. He said with the grace of Allah Almighty, the PML-N would win election in NA-127 constituency.

Pneumonia cases surge amid smog, cold weather

LAHORE (APP): Amidst smog and dry cold weather, Punjab is grappling with a concerning rise in pneumonia cases. In the past 24 hours on Sunday, seven children in Punjab and two in Lahore lost their lives, bringing the total fatalities to 179 due to pneumonia.

Health authorities report 230 new pneumonia cases in Punjab and 135 in Lahore within the same period. Lahore's total cases now stand at 1290, while Punjab has surpassed 7,963 cases. Hospitals, particularly in Lahore, are inundated with cases of pneumonia, chest infections, and viral infections.

‘Mahfil-e-Zikre Mustafa (SAWW)’ held

KARACHI (APP):

Mahfil-e-Zikre Mustafa (SAWW) was held at the Governor House Sindh here on Sunday. The Governor Sindh Mohammed Kamran Khan Tessori, well-known spiritual leaders, dignitaries of the city and a large number of citizens participated in the Mahfil.

Speaking on the occasion, the Governor said that the reasons behind our problems were that we did not follow the teachings of the Holy Prophet

(peace be upon him).

He said that Karachi was called the hub of the country's economy but no one paid proper attention towards it. Tessori said that the people should vote for those candidates, who could solve their problems. He on the occasion also announced to send people present in the Mahfil for Umrah and Hajj through balloting.

Governor inaugurates Society of Obstetric and Gynecology Oncology: The Sindh Governor

Mohammed Kamran Khan Tessori inaugurated the Society of Obstetric and Gynaecology Oncology at the Governor House for the treatment of various cancers in women.

According to a Governor House communique on Sunday, a MoU was also signed between Sogo and a local pharma company. The Governor said that the doors of the governor's house were open to everyone. He said we should work together in every field to improve the lives of the people.

Yoga centre opens at Jilani Park

LAHORE (APP): The Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) of Lahore has opened a state-of-the-art community yoga center at Jilani Park (Racecourse Park). According to PHA's spokesperson, there are several styles of yoga, ranging from gentle, meditative experiences to more physically intense formats. He noted that the center at Jilani Park, covering 5,445 square feet (one kanal), would allow enthusiasts to embrace this ancient form of fitness. Initially, the PHA intends to conduct two sessions, one in the morning and one in the evening, for participants, with a nominal fee. Later, the number of sessions will be increased to accommodate more visitors, he added.

Referring to the perils of noisy urban life, he observed that the new retreat was hidden in the center of the provincial metropolis on Jail Road. He said that the PHA was focused on making wellness more accessible, intending for the center to offer everything "under one roof."

Under Muhammad Tahir Wattoo, who assumed the office of director general in March of last year, the PHA has undergone a development spree, designing the city's first-ever government-owned Bonsai display center featuring dwarfed trees, opening a commercial nursery on Jail Road, and upgrading a dedicated rose garden.

The PHA has also taken drastic measures to bolster revenues to support government fiscal spending. Consequently,

its revenue, according to Wattoo, has more than doubled in one year. Separately, in the past year, the PHA conducted two tent pegging events to promote the traditional sport of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "We are committed to expanding opportunities for sports and recreational activities for the residents of Lahore," the DG added.

Yoga, believed to have originated thousands of years ago in India, gained popularity in the West only in the late 19th century. The industry is valued at over \$117.2 billion worldwide. Commonly understood as a physical stretching practice synchronised with breathing, the numerous benefits of yoga include lower blood pressure, increased strength and bone density, and reduced anxiety.



LAHORE: Heavy machinery is being used for carpeting on old Anarkali Main Road.

LESCO detects 429 power pilferers during last 24 hour

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) detected a total of 429 connections from where consumers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts -- Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara -- on the 134th day of the anti-power theft campaign.

A LESCO spokesman told the media on Sunday that the company also submitted FIR applications against 429 electricity thieves, out of

which 177 FIRs have been registered in respective police stations, while 22 accused have been arrested.

On the 134th consecutive day of the anti-power theft campaign, the spokesman added, large commercial consumers were also found involved in electricity theft and all of them were also disconnected. Among the seized connections were 08 commercial, 01 agricultural and 420 domestic. All the power pilferers were charged with a total of 349,124 units

Ex-MNAs Noor Alam, Sajid Nawaz in faceoff on NA 28

PESHAWAR (APP): Former Members National Assembly, Noor Alam Khan and Sajid Nawaz are at loggerhead on the politically fertile NA-28 Peshawar-1 constituency where election campaign has picked up momentum despite cold foggy weather.

As only 17 days left in February 8, 2024 general election in the country including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the political parties and independent candidates including the winner of 2018 and 2008 election, Noor Alam Khan and 2013 election Sajid Nawaz accelerated campaign at NA 28 to get maximum public support ahead of the D-Day.

Political observers said that although about a dozen of candidates are flexing muscle in this constituency, which was created from NA 29 and NA 30 constituencies during past delimitation, but one on one contest is expected between Noor Alam Khan and Sajid Nawaz Khan due to their parties votes bank.

In a public meeting at



Laram and Khazana villages, Noor Alam Khan who is contesting election 2024 on JUIF ticket said that creating of employment opportunities for youth through promotion of industrialization, poverty alleviation and promoting education besides provision of better healthcare services would be his top priority if elected to power.

He said that eradication of price hike and improving local economy would be his top priority areas if elected.

Noor Alam said he believed in power of the masses and would work for well being of the poorest of the poor and farmers after coming into power.

Sajid Nawaz, who is contesting election 2024 as an independent candidate and was backed by Pakistan Tahrik e Insaaf in public address at Darmang and Shah Alam villages vowed to promote agriculture and improve sanitation services if elected.

He said technical education would be promoted and the problems of load shedding



would be addressed besides improving roads infrastructure for better access from agriculture fields to market.

Noor Alam Khan had won the constituency in 2008 election on ticket of Pakistan Peoples Party after securing 27,038 votes and 2018 election on PTI ticket with 71,158 votes while Sajid Nawaz clinched it in 2013 election on PTI ticket after securing 66,528 votes respectively. Former MNA Qari Fayazur Rehman on MMA ticket was elected from NA 28 after he begged 33,567 votes in 2002 election.

The constituency comprises

on rural and urban areas of Peshawar including Haryana, Darmang, Larama, Khazana, Hasangari, Peshawar City and Haryana where literacy ratio is high besides most of its voters are associated with agriculture and government jobs.

"Poor sanitation, inadequate roads, unemployment and poverty would be major challenges for the new MNA elect to tackle after February 8, 2024 election," said Ali Khan, a voter belonged to Shah Alam village of the constituency.

"I will vote candidates for national and provincial assemblies seats on the basis

of their past service record and election manifesto of their parties," he said.

"In my opinion, the manifestos of political parties and past service records of candidates besides young voters would play a crucial role in 2024 election outcomes," said Professor Dr A.H Hilali, former Chairman Political Science Department, University of Peshawar while talking to APP.

Except PPP, he said the election manifestos of other political parties are still awaited and further delay in this regard would be counter productive for these parties.

Dr Hilali said the success of political parties in general election 2024 would largely depend on the political behaviour and psychological-economic factors, past service record and manifestos of political parties rather launching of personal attacks, blame games, characters assassination of political leadership and dragging state institutions into politics in public meetings or issuing statements on social media platforms.

Dr Hilali said that young voters were educated that would play an important role in deciding fate of electoral candidates. ECP statistics revealed that about 127 million registered voters would exercise their right of franchise in 2024 general election out of whom about 72.31 million (56.9pc) were registered in Punjab, 26.65 million in Sindh (21pc), 21.69 million voters (17.1pc) in KP while 5.28 million (4.2pc) in Balochistan.

Dr Hilali said nearly 50 percent of the population are comprised of female voters and their role are equally significant in election process.

He said around 57.1 million youth aged below of 35 years, making up 45pc of them who are eligible to vote. The number of voters aged 36 to 45 years comes to 27.79 million i.e. 21.88pc and the two age groups if seen together comprise 84.81 million voters or two-third of the total 127 million voters in Pakistan.

He said about 22 million children aged 5-16 years were

still out-of-schools (OSC) in the country including 4.7 million in KP due to poverty and socioeconomic imbalances and bringing them under education net would be a big challenge for future political government.

He said due to chilly weather and security challenges, the importance of social media were further increased in 2024 elections, and all the political parties have already started projection of programs through different social media websites for quick dissemination of information. He said all eyes would be on voters turnout in the country especially in hilly snowfall areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where bringing voters to polling stations would be a big challenge for political parties.

Dr Hilali said that split mandate is expected in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in election, adding role of strong communities besides effective voters mobilization on polling day to play crucial role in outcomes of election 2024.

Action against overcharging in transport hubs begins

PESHAWAR (APP): Under the directives of Deputy Commissioner Peshawar, Afaq Wazir, Additional Assistant Commissioner Ehsan Ali Shah on Sunday commenced inspections at various transport hubs along Kohat Road.

The primary objective of these inspections is to ensure the strict adherence to fixed fares.

The public is earnestly

requested to report any instances of overcharging at transport stations in Peshawar, and assured that their complaints will be promptly addressed.

During the inspections, numerous transport operators found guilty of charging riders beyond the prescribed fares were penalized on the spot.

In a commendable move, the overcharged amounts

were swiftly refunded to the affected riders. This proactive measure by the authorities aims to uphold fair practices within the transportation sector and safeguard the interests of the public.

The administration remains vigilant in its commitment to fostering a transparent and equitable environment for commuters in Peshawar.

Weather in KP to remain cold, partly cloudy

PESHAWAR (APP): Weather will remain cold and partly cloudy in most districts of the province, Meteorological Department said here on Sunday.

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

It may rise to more than 12 degrees Celsius, the official of the Meteorological Department said.

The humidity ratio in the air is 79 percent recorded and during the last 24 hours, the plains of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remained in

be careful.

Temperature will remain below normal in most areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to heavy fog. The current temperature in Peshawar is a record 6 degrees Celsius, Meteorological Department officials said.

It may rise to more than 12 degrees Celsius, the official of the Meteorological Department said.

The humidity ratio in the air is 79 percent recorded and during the last 24 hours, the plains of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remained in

the grip of heavy fog, said the Meteorological Department.

On Sunday the minimum temperature is minus 2 degree Celsius in Chitral, minus 3 degree Celsius in Dir, 1 degree Celsius in Malam Jabba, Saidu Sharif, 2 degree Celsius in Bannu, 3 degree Celsius in Dera Ismail Khan and 2 degree Celsius in Abbottabad, said the official of the Meteorological Department.

Snowfall continues on the hills in the upper areas, said the official.

Hospitals in KP faces financial difficulties

PESHAWAR (APP): There is a severe shortage of medicines in the hospitals of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a document issued by the Director General Health Khyber Pakhtunkhwa revealed here Sunday.

Hospitals face shortage of immunoglobulins, anti-rabies vaccine and emergency drugs, the documents said. Non-availability of

snakebite vaccine may lead to deaths, the document said.

According to the documents due to non-availability of funds, no order has been placed yet for procurement of medicines.

DG Health Services KP apprised Secretary Health about financial difficulties of hospitals through a letter available here. In his letter,

he said, Rs. 9 billion are urgently needed to solve the shortage of medicines and there is arrears of 2.67 billion rupees for purchase of medicines. Arrears and additional Rs 6 billion to be released while the Finance Department has given a budget of 99.77 million rupees in 2022 and 2023, the document disclosed.

Faiq for transparent polls

F.P Report

PESHAWAR: Opposing any attempt to delay the general elections scheduled for Feb 8, Muhammad Faiq Shah, founder and chairman of the Amun Taraqqi Party said on Sunday there is a dire need to hold transparent polls to change the destiny of the country.

Shah while addressing a public gathering and corner meetings in district Mardan and Charsadda of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ahead of general election said the nation had been grappling with uncertainty regarding the holding of polls due to the prevailing political and economic conditions in the country.

He warned any move to postpone election will bring further political and economic instability in the country.

ICP announces admission

PESHAWAR (APP): Islamia College Peshawar on Sunday announced admissions for MPhil and PhD programs.

Prospective candidates can access the online admission form, prospectus, eligibility criteria, and additional information at the official website www.icp.edu.pk.

According to notification, MPhil Program Applications are invited for the following disciplines: Arabic, Computer Science, Education, Islamic Theology, Management Sciences, Pakistan Studies, Political Science, Statistics, MBA (2 years) with specializations in Finance, Human Resource Management (HRM), and Marketing.

Candidates seek large tribes support for general elections

PESHAWAR (APP): The candidates of different political parties and independent heavyweights started approaching strong baradaris (tribes) to get their support to win general elections in 2024 as Peshawar witnessed a tough electoral contest on 5 NA, and 14 PK seats.

Besides veteran politicians and independent candidates, the political stalwarts sought the support of different tribes including Wazir, Mehsud, Khattak, Khalil, Shalmani, Afridi, Mohmand and Safi tribes to national and provincial assemblies seats in their respective areas.

ANP leader, Haji Ghulam Ahmed Bilour, who is contesting election for a record 11 times from Peshawar's NA-32 (previously called NA-1) has also started contacting influential tribes and baradaris to get an edge over rival candidates.

Bilour, who had won the

election against Benazir Bhutto Shaheed in 1990, is being challenged by Independent candidate Asif Khan, a PTI nominee.

Abdullah Yousafzai of PPP, Hussain Madani of JUIF, Sher Rehman of PMLN and Tariq Mateen of Jumaat-e-Islami are also flexing muscles on NA-32 Peshawar.

In the 2018 general election, Shaukat Ali of PTI was elected MNA after defeating Ghulam Bilour. Former prime minister Imran Khan also won the seat in the by-election in 2022 while Bilour was the runner-up.

Political observers said that a tough electoral battle is expected between Ghulam Bilour and independent candidate Asif Khan after former MNA Shoukat Ali quit-ed PTI.

As the February 8, 2024 election is approaching, the candidates are contesting against 5 national assembly and 13 Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa assembly seats have accelerated the election campaign and addressed rallies and corner meetings on Sunday.

In the 2018 general election, the politically fertile Peshawar had 14 representatives in the KP Assembly, however, it lost one seat in the wake of fresh delimitation in the 2024 election.

The candidates of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf had won all the five NA seats from Peshawar in the 2018 election. However, three of them are no longer part of the party. The PTI nominees are contesting the polls as independent candidates after it lost its iconic electoral symbol 'bat'.

Former speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Kiramatullah Chagharmati of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) is contesting against former MNA Noor Alam Khan of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUIF) and ex-MNA Sajid Nawaz of PTI as

independent candidate on NA 28 Peshawar-1 in 2024 election.

Former provincial minister Hafiz Hashmat of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Muhammad Fayyaz Khan of Awami National Party (ANP) are also in the run for NA-28.

Former MNA Arbab Amir Ayub who won the 2018 election on the PTI ticket is again candidate of the PTI as an independent candidate while other frontrunners included former MPA Saqibullah Chamkani of ANP, Akhundzada Irfanullah Shah of JUIF, Malik Amjad Awan of PPP and Ghulam Muhiyuddin of Jumaat e Islami on NA 29 Peshawar-11.

In NA-30 Peshawar, former PTI MNA Shandana Gulzar is contesting against Nasir Musazai of JUIF, Arbab Zain Umar of ANP, Raees Khan of PMLN, Kashif Azam of JI and Misbahuddin of PPP.

Operation against professional beggars launched; 12 apprehended

PESHAWAR (APP): In a determined effort to curb the prevalence of professional begging, the district administration and the social welfare department in Peshawar have initiated a targeted operation in line with directives from the Peshawar High Court and apprehended 12 beggars.

Under the vigilant leadership of Deputy Commissioner Afaq Wazir, Additional Assistant Commissioner Samira Saba, Department of Child Protection Officer Hafeez, and Manager Darlakfala Madam Hina spearheaded a coordinated

resulting in the apprehension of 12 individuals engaged in professional begging from various locations along University Road. These individuals, identified as professional beggars, were promptly transferred to rehabilitation centers overseen by the Department of Social Welfare.

These centers, equipped to address the unique challenges faced by those caught in the cycle of professional begging, aim to provide a comprehensive approach to rehabilitation.

At the core of this initiative is the commitment to offering meaningful alterna-

tives to begging.

The rehabilitation program encompasses vocational training, educational support, and counseling, aiming to empower individuals with the skills and resources needed for sustainable livelihoods.

By addressing the root causes that drive individuals to resort to begging, authorities seek to break the cycle and reintegrate them into mainstream society.

Upon successful completion of the rehabilitation program, the detained individuals will be granted release, provided they commit to refraining from pro-

fessional begging.

This approach not only enforces the law but also aims to address the underlying societal issues contributing to the perpetuation of begging.

Deputy Commissioner Afaq Wazir reiterated the continuation of such operations, emphasizing the commitment to eradicating professional begging from the city. "Our goal is not only to enforce the law but also to extend support and opportunities to those in need, ensuring they have the means to lead dignified lives," said Commissioner Afaq Wazir.

Persistent use of e-cigarettes badly affects health: KP experts



PESHAWAR (APP): The persistent use of e-cigarettes in Pakistani society has exposed the younger generation to serious respiratory, oral and brain issues that may prove fatal in later stages of life.

Besides an increasing possibility of drug addiction and long-term damage to brain and IQ development as well as the respiratory system, constant use of e-cigarettes along with other tobacco products can do even more damage to the human body than conventional cigarette smoking.

"Electronic cigarettes are equally harmful that of conventional cigarettes and their regular use can prove fatal due to

threats of lung, oral and mouth cancers," said Dr Malik Riaz Khan, Principal Medical Officer, Government Hospital Pabbi, Nowshera while talking to APP.

Citing reports, he said that about 6.2 per cent of the population used vaping/e-cigarettes while 15.9 million (12.4pc) used smokeless tobacco. "The young adults, especially college and university students, when consumed these products do not realize the long term harmful impacts of e-cigarettes and at a later stage expose themselves to serious lung related diseases, nicotine addiction, depression and anxiety," he said.

In recent years, electronic

cigarettes or vapes have gained popularity among youngsters and students as a fashionable alternative to traditional tobacco smoking. Supporters claimed that e-cigarettes are less harmful than conventional cigarettes but the true intensity of the habit is still unknown to the public.

"I started first naswar, then e-cigarette as a fashion and now conventional cigarette due to unemployment and today I could not go a day without a vape," said Sajid Khan, an e-cigarette smoker of Pabbi.

"These drugs have snatched my happiness and prestige," Sajid Khan said, adding my family had left me abandoned

after smoking and I felt angry at myself when children started laughing at me due to my ugly attire.

Dr Riaz said every segment of society: non-governmental organizations and social bodies are on the same page to control the alarming use of e-cigarettes, stressing the need for collective efforts to save youngsters from the harmful habit.

Blue Veins and the Provincial Alliance for Sustainable Tobacco Control Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has also urged the provincial government and concerned authorities to remain vigilant of the manipulative ways of the tobacco industry emphasizing the need for concerted efforts to combat these nefarious strategies.

"Governments and civil society organizations must remain active and vigilant against third parties and front groups that are working with the support of the tobacco industry," stated Sana Ahmad, Program Coordinator of Blue Veins, a civil society organization while talking to APP.

"These entities are working on the behalf and support of tobacco companies pushing agendas that serve the industry's interests ignoring public health. "E-cigarettes often contain nicotine, an addictive substance that can cause increased heart rate, high blood pressure, and negative changes in brain function. The phenomena especially concern young people, as

their brains are still developing," she opined.

Dr Qazi Shahbaz, Chairman, the Provincial Doctors Association said that in protecting public health and preventing a new generation from falling prey to nicotine addiction and its harmful consequences, we cannot allow the vaping industry to undo the progress made in tobacco control so far.

Inhaling the vapour from e-cigarettes can lead to respiratory problems and some studies suggest that e-cigarette aerosol can irritate the airways and cause inflammation leading to coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath, he said.

Cases of severe lung injury associated with vaping or e-cigarettes have also been reported. The harmful habit can also cause symptoms such as chest pain, and difficulty in breathing and in some cases it can be fatal, he said, stressing a result-oriented plan at a higher level to prevent the spread of e-cigarettes.

Dr Ihtisham, Chest Specialist LRH said vaping often perceived as a safer alternative to traditional smoking, is a growing concern in the medical community. There is a lack of convincing evidence to support that vapes are effective tools for quitting smoking, he said and maintained that on the contrary use of vapes introduces a new set of health risks, including respiratory issues that should not be ignored.

He said that nicotine, even without the combustion of tobacco, can have irreversible effects on the cardiovascular system, increasing chances of cardiovascular diseases. Aerosol emitted from E-cigarette is not harmless water vapor as it contains various chemicals including formaldehyde and acetaldehyde which are known to be harmful and some of these chemicals are produced during the heating process of the e-liquid.

"Provincial Alliance for Sustainable Tobacco Control Khyber Pakhtunkhwa called for an immediate ban on vapes and e-cigarettes in Pakistan. The alliance demanded aligning policies with recent directives by the World Health Organization (WHO) which recommended that governments should treat e-cigarettes similarly to traditional tobacco products and enforce a complete ban on it for the sake of our future generation.

Coordinator, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tobacco Control Cell, Ajmal Shah told APP that new trends in the use of tobacco products are enticing the youth with slogans like "Quit smoking and start vaping" and such slogans should be discouraged. Unfortunately, these moves are attracting people, especially youngsters towards the use of e-cigarettes, vaping, and heated tobacco products.

The experts called for a ban on e-cigarettes and vaping

keeping in view its harms to public health and increasing use of modern tobacco products among youth. They also suggested introducing anti-E-cigarette legislation and making amendments to the existing anti-smoking laws.

They said it was the responsibility of the government to take action for protection of the masses from the harmful effects of e-cigarettes and to make society tobacco-free.

In a land mark development, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has imposed section 144 to ban storage, sale and use of e-cigarettes and vapes to minors and within vicinity of educational institutions in the province.

"The decision has been taken in wake of alarming increase in use of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) and vaping devices particularly among children and youth in the province," according to a notification of KP Home Department.

The order imposed complete ban on sale of e-cigarettes and vapes to individual below the age of 21 years throughout the KP. Similarly sale, storage and use of e-cigarettes and vapes within a distance of 50 meter radius of all educational institutions in KP is prohibited.

It said to safeguard the health and well-being of our citizens, especially younger generation, Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898 be imposed for a period of 60 days.



In brief

Six sustain burn injuries

MULTAN (APP): At least six persons sustained burn injuries as fire erupted into a house near Peeran Ghaib road here on Sunday. According to Rescue officials, a family lighting fire into a room and suddenly their clothes and beds caught fire. Resultantly, six persons sustained burn injuries. Rescue teams rushed to the spot and shifted five victims to the Nistar Hospital after providing first aid. The Rescue teams also extinguished the fire.

One held for killing police constable

MULTAN (APP): Police have arrested an accused for killing police constable over some issues about two weeks ago in premises of Qadarpur Raan police station here on Sunday. According to police sources, Constable Sajid Pervez s/o Muhammad Ashfaq resident of Muhallah Jindwah Qadarpur Raan was present in marriage ceremony of his cousin when accused Muhammad Waseem s/o Muhammad Basheer entered the marriage hall with a weapon in his hand. He opened fires at Sajid Pervez, killed him on the spot and himself managed to escape from the scene. The police team reached the spot and started the investigations into the incident while a case number 26/24 under section 302 was registered against the accused. Taking notice of the incident, City Police Officer (CPO) Sadiq Ali formed a special team under the supervision of SP Gulgasht Division Ayaz Hussain to arrest the criminal. The police team arrested the accused Waseem and recovered weapon from his possession, however, the accused confessed that he killed Sajid Pervez for informing the police about his involvement in drug peddling. Further investigations were underway from the accused, police sources added.

'Friends' turn out to be killers

SIALKOT (APP): The blind murder of a 15-year-old youth was solved and the killers turned out to be two "friends." According to police, 15-year-old Sameer had been abducted by suspects and arrested in the Shatab Garha area of Ugoki police station a few days ago. As soon as the case was registered, under the leadership of DSP Sadder Circle Sabir Hussain Chhattha, SHO Ugoki police station Inspector Asghar Ali reached the spot along with a team and started collecting evidence. Police arrested Shah Noor and Hanan of Shatab Garha. When they were interrogated, they said they had killed Sameer after molesting him and dumped his dead body in the fields. The police recovered the body and handed it over to the family after the post-mortem. DPO Sialkot Mohammad Hasan Iqbal has announced certificates of appreciation and cash for the police team for tracing the blind murder and arresting the two killers.

4515 liter illegal fuel recovered

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): The district police have recovered 4515 liters of fuel on Sunday during the ongoing crackdown against illegal fuel agencies across the district, said a police spokesman. He said that a crackdown was launched against illegal fuel agencies across the district following the directions of District Police Officer (DPO) Abdul Rauf Babar Qaisrani. During different operations conducted in this regard, the police recovered 4380 liters of illegal Diesel and 135 liters of Petrol.



SIALKOT: Former Federal Minister for Defence Khawaja Muhammad Asif is addressing to the participants of Workers Convention at PML-N House at Paris Road.

High-stakes battle in NA 148 as Gilani, Dehr and Mahay competes

MULTAN (APP): As the momentum in electoral activities intensifies with the approaching February elections, tough competition is being expected between former prime minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani and Ahmed Hussain Dehar in NA 148. With just a few weeks remaining in the polling, significant developments have taken place in crucial constituencies of Multan. NA-148, in particular, holds great importance, witnessing a contest between former prime minister Yousaf Raza Gilani, PML-N candidate Ahmed Hussain Dehar and Independent candidate Barister Taimur Altaf Mahay. Moreover, the electoral battleground encompasses areas starting from Bosan

Road and extending up to Sher Shah. It includes parts of Nawabpur Road, Qadirpur Ran, Chowk Kamaraan, Moza Muzaffarabad, Qasim Bela and some other areas. The majority of the constituency is in rural areas however, nearly 20 percent area is comprised of the Urban population. In the previous elections, Ahmed Hussain Dehar secured success from this constituency on a PTI ticket but later parted ways with the party during a no-confidence motion. Abdul Qadir Gillani was the candidate on the PPP ticket during the Election 2018. Noteworthy political analyst Sarfraz Ali Ansari mentioned that it was the old constituency of former prime minister Yousaf Raza

Gilani, setting the stage for a challenging competition.

While expectations lean towards Yousaf Raza Gilani, who has a strong foothold in this constituency, he claimed. However, Ahmed Hassan Dehr has also improved as he got support from some important tribes in the constituency. Gilani, having been elected as prime minister from this constituency, has initiated numerous developmental projects in the area. Another analyst Nasir Zaheer highlighted the both parties are actively pursuing their electoral campaigns, and Yousaf Raza Gilani has intensified efforts. However, tough competition contest is being expected, he added.

PML-N Abbottabad organizes meeting

ABBOTTABAD (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Abbottabad Sunday chaired a meeting under the chairmanship of Provincial General Secretary Murtaza Javed Abbasi and District President Malik Muhabbat Awan for the preparations of Maryam Nawaz's rally and public gathering to be held next week.

The meeting primarily focused on the arrangements and preparations for an upcoming rally featuring Maryam Nawaz, the Senior Vice President and Chief Organizer of the PML-N. District Secretary of

Information for PML-N, Suhail Awan gave a detailed briefing to the meeting. While addressing the participants, Murtaza Javed Abbasi expressed confidence in the warm reception that Maryam Nawaz Sharif would receive from the people of Abbottabad. He emphasized that the rally in Abbottabad would be a historic event, marking a renewed era of progress and prosperity under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif. Murtaza Javed Abbasi underscored Nawaz Sharif's distinct ability to fulfill promises, particu-

larly highlighting his commitment to eliminating load shedding and stabilizing the economy. District President Malik Muhabbat Awan, in his address, asserted that in the upcoming days, Mian Nawaz Sharif would guide the country out of crises and towards a path of progress. Besides the workers of PML-N, the meeting was also attended by PML-N candidates for various constituencies, including Malik Arshad Awan (PK-45), Sardar Farid Ahmed Khan (PK-42), and Sardar Orangzeb Nalotha (PK-44).

Livestock counter at BFC to promote cattle, poultry farming

MULTAN (APP): The Livestock Department established a special counter at the Business Facilitation Centre (BFC) to issue 13 different sorts of Non-Objection Certificates (NOC) to ensure investment in different sectors of Livestock.

Director Livestock Multan Division Dr Muhammad Ashraf said that NOCs were being issued for animal feed mills, poultry feed mills,

animal compound feed mills, poultry feed, Halal Certification, artificial insemination, livestock semen/Embryo importer, Livestock semen distributor, mini production units and some others.

He added these NOCs are being issued within 30 days. The counter will ease the process. The counter will also help promote business in the region. The persons who want to get proper awareness about these business-

es are also being guided properly, Dr Ashraf stated.

Deputy Director Jalalpur Pirwala Dr Jamsheed also urged citizens to invest in the Livestock sector as it has immense potential. The investor could maximize their economic return, he added. New economic opportunities will emerge from the Centre. The persons who will invest in the Livestock sector will also be aided regularly by the department, he concluded.



MULTAN: Workers busy installing Sewage pipes.

Applications for wheat demonstration plots

MULTAN (APP): The agriculture (extension) department in Dunyapur has sought applications from farmers for demonstration plots of wheat crops to participate in the competition by January 31.

Talking to APP on Sunday, Assistant Director of Agriculture Chaudhry Shahid Iqbal said that interested farmers have been asked to submit their applications with the department before the deadline. He said that the field staff has been directed to finalize plots of five acres each from every union council. Shahid maintained that after the scrutiny of the plots, the top three farmers would be selected to contest the competition, adding that prize money of about Rs 150,000 would be awarded to the winner.

In response to a question about the availability of urea fertilizer, AD Agriculture said that fertilizer was being distributed equally among all districts of the province. He said that the crop needs Urea until 65 to 70 days of wheat cultivation, adding that the department was striving hard to ensure the availability of fertilizer to farmers at controlled rates by keeping in mind the importance of the fertilizer at the current stage of the crop. Shahid further said that different initiatives were being taken by the department to create awareness among the masses about preventive measures for increasing crop production. He said that mega gatherings were being organized twice a year at the district level while seminars were being organized from village to village by the Tehsil office repeatedly.

PML-N to win elections with thumping majority: Rana Sana

FAISALABAD (APP): Former Federal Interior Minister and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Punjab President Rana Sana Ullah Khan said that the party would win the upcoming general elections with a thumping majority due to its popularity in the masses.

Addressing worker convention organized under the auspices of Central Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith Pakistan here on Sunday, he said that the country was making tremendous progress under the leadership of Mian Nawaz Sharif before 2018 when an incompetent person was imposed on the nation who inflicted the country with economic and moral crises. This hostile man spent his energies only to tame the opposition with mental and physical torture for his vested interests. Resultantly, the country suffered multifaceted crises, he added.

Rana Sana Ullah termed the government and opposition as two wheels of a vehicle and

said that both were imperative for national progress and prosperity. He said that the PTI leader followed only one statement throughout his tenure that "Main Opposition Ko Nahi Chhooron Ga". "That's why he could not launch any worth-mentioning development project in the country," he added.

He said that when Nawaz Sharif formed his government in 2013, the country was under the severe grip of loadshedding and terrorism. "However, the PML-N leadership overcame the menaces and put the country on the road to progress and prosperity. The PMLN is a pro-people party and due to its popularity, 20 to 25 candidates from each constituency appeared to contest the general election from its platform. This situation created great difficulties for the central leadership of the party in the distribution of tickets," he maintained.

"However, it is an indisputable and logical fact that only one candi-

date from one constituency could be fielded by any party. Hence, the top leadership of the PML-N took better decisions on the distribution tickets by redressing apprehensions of all party workers and activists for greater national interest," he added.

He said that some apprehensions were also raised by Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith and the same were addressed amicably. "Now the PML-N and Central Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith would form the government together after winning the February 8 elections," he added.

He also thanked all leaders of Central Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith Pakistan who promised to support the PML-N in the upcoming election.

Former state minister Talal Chaudhary, former MNAs Mian Abdul Mannan, Hajji Akram Ansari, ticket holders of PML-N from Faisalabad participated in the convention in addition to district, provincial and central leaders of Jamiat-e-Ahl-e-Hadith.

Subhani urges people to vote for PML-N for country's bright future

SIALKOT (APP): Former Member National Assembly (MNA) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) candidate for constituency NA-70 Chaudhry Armaghan Subhani urged people to vote for his party for a bright future of the country. Addressing a worker convention in the Kundanpur area of his constituency, he said whenever the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) took over the charge, the country and the nation progressed. "On February 8, the PML-N will once again win and start the journey of development and prosperity of the country and nation from where it was stopped," he added.

Armaghan Subhani said that not a single project could be started for public welfare during the four years of the Pakistan Tareek-e-Insaf (PTI) government. "Boys and girls danced in PTI public gath-

erings. They would bring DJs and singers to their rallies. This was the so-called Naya Pakistan. Respect for elders was abolished. This false person cheated our youths with slogans of creating 10m jobs and building 5,000,000 houses, but did any youth get a job during the PTI regime, did any poor get a house? This person has given nothing but lies and fraud," he added.

He said, "I assure you that we will work day and night for your better future and together with our leaders, we will be able to bring the country out of darkness. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is the only party whose leader Muhammad Nawaz Sharif made the country's defence invincible and made it a nuclear power. Our leader made it clear to the whole world that we would not compromise on the integrity of our country."

Daska drainage inspected: Deputy Commissioner Muhammad

Zulqarnain paid a surprise visit to Daska and reviewed work on the drainage project under construction at a cost of Rs772.4 million.

Assistant Commissioner (AC) Daska Anwar Ali and Public Health Engineering officers were also present on this occasion. Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Zulqarnain said the project was important for drainage of rainwater in Daska, which continued rapidly. He said that the length of the drain was 21,000 feet while 32,000 feet of the existing drain would be restored. He said that the project was 22% complete. "The city has been divided into two zones for the project which will drain the rainwater from the entire tehsil headquarters out of the city," he added.

He directed that the quality of the material should be ensured and all resources be utilized for its completion within the stipulated time.

Revitalizing handicrafts for economic gains, culture promotion

MULTAN (APP): Handicrafts, being integral to cultural fabric of any society, serve as touching reflections of nations' identity and history besides offering avenues for economic uplift.

Traditional handicrafts are tangible beauties and a sense of comfort for all. The artisans, who are often characterized as soft-hearted people, harmonize hands and minds in the pursuit of matchless work. Their exquisite creations embody aesthetics and creativity to develop and maintain deep connection with nature.

Although after the industrial revolution, the machines replaced human beings to create more refined and bulk production of commodities yet the relics of handmade goods still continue to sustain – thanks to art loving people. The artisans of South Punjab, a culturally rich region where rhythmic hum of skilled hands once shaped clay, fabric and leather into intricate pieces of art, are still struggle to survive not knowing how long they could sustain in this changing world.

Known for ages-old crafts of Mud Pottery, Block Printing, Okair Sazi, Camel Skin Work and much more, the artisans in the region are facing an uncertain future. The decline in demand for handmade items, driven by the allure of machine-made alternatives, cast a shadow on the skilled artisans and rich heritage they have been upholding for generations.

Siddique, a seasoned potter with 45 years of experience, paints a gloomy picture as he feared extinction of nearly a hundred items crafted from locally sourced mud.

"In the city, once there had been over a thousand families, dedicated to pottery, scattered across hubs like Chowk Kumharanwala, Mohalla Kumharan, and some areas in Interior city, Siddique said. "But, today only a handful of potters remain and younger generation is showing zero or little interest in embracing this ancient skill."

"We loved our art and felt proud to be artisans. But, situation has changed. Both the machines and our younger generation, would ultimately extinct this culture," he regretted. But determined Siddique said, "although the number of potters is on decline, I would continue to shaping mud pots and preserving the cultural significance of handmade vessels."

The decline is not limited to pottery alone as the modernization was eating up the revered art of Block Printing. "Nearly 50 small factories and units in the region had fallen prey to industrial revolution and modernization," remarked Waheed, a skilled artisan in Block Print Cloth.

"The demand for traditional block-printed clothes has significantly reduced in this era of modern fabrics," he stated. "Now only people like me continue with Block Printing as we cannot do other business."

"Okair Sazi", the artistry of carving leather into intricate designs also faces a similar fate.

Haq Nawaz, the lone artisan in the city, speaks of this unique skill that once commanded demand from Europe, especially Germany. "Today, Okair Sazi's rarity and high cost limit it to specific customers from big cities." Another important legacy of handicrafts – the camel skin work is also facing the similar situation.

"I visited 32 countries by the dint of this art. Those were the good old days. But, the situation has changed now," remarked Abdur Rehman Naqash, a torch-bearer of unique craft.

"The artisans and handicrafts in our country are not supported like the artisans in Turkey, China and India where traditional skills are actively promoted by the governments also integrating them into educational curricula," he stated. "We in South Punjab direly need practical patronage to promote our traditional handicrafts." Recalling the past, Naqash said, this art is also fading away. Once flourishing, with nearly 50 arti-

san families specialized in camel skin work, the craft's allure captured global recognition. "Our intricate lamps and decoration articles once found a place of prominence in homes across Europe and China."

"But, now only four to five families in the region are attached to this unique skill as younger generation is showing disinterest and reluctant to inherit these skills," he regretted.

The rise of plastic decorative articles has further eclipsed the demand for camel skin work, posing a grave threat to a once-thriving industry.

With a family legacy of nearly 900 years in this craft, Naqash stressed practical recognition of our skills. "While experienced artisans worldwide are honored with degrees, our artisans are kept aloof of educational institutions for not having a degree. Unfortunately, we weigh the qualification from degree and not the experience." "Our matchless artisans, although having over 40 years experience, were denied jobs in universities for not having a degree. But such artisans are awarded PHD degrees in developed countries," Naqash said. "I myself delivered lectures in many international universities." He said in many countries, the Arts Councils arrange special classes on doctors' recommendations to rehabilitate mentally depressed patients. Besides inclusion of art in curriculum, Naqash also proposed national level workshops to gather artisans from diverse regions for experience sharing and fostering innovation. Recognizing the importance of changing market demands, the government should patronize artisans by setting their profession on modern lines for boosting export of traditional crafts.

Returning to pottery for its being humane and eco-friendly can save million of Pakistanis from harmful effects of plastic utensils and rejuvenate its business for securing earning for local artisans and boost our exports.



Senegal presidential candidate list excludes opposition leader Sonko

DAKAR (AFP/APP): Senegal's Constitutional Council on Saturday published a final list of 20 candidates for the February 25 presidential election that excludes jailed opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and Karim Wade, the son of former president Abdoulaye Wade.

Those listed include Prime Minister Amadou Ba, chosen by President Macky Sall as his successor after Sall announced in July that he would not seek a third term.

Also named were former prime ministers and rivals Idrissa Seck and Mahammed Boun Abdallah Dionne, the ex-mayor of Dakar Khalifa Sall and Bassirou Diomaye Diakharr Faye, presented as a substitute candidate for Sonko. Faye, 43, a member of Sonko's dissolved party, is also detained but has not yet been tried.

He has been in prison since April 2023 for "contempt of court" and "defamation against a corporate body" over a Facebook post.

Sonko, who came third in the 2019 presidential election, has been at the centre of a bitter stand-off with the state that has lasted more than two years and sparked often deadly unrest. The 49-year-old opposition figure has generated a passionate following among Senegal's disaffected youth, striking a chord with his pan-Africanist rhetoric and tough stance on former colonial power France.

The Constitutional Council rejected Sonko's candidacy due to his six-month suspended sentence for defamation, which was upheld by the Supreme Court on January 4.

He had also been handed a hefty fine for defamation and insults against Tourism Minister Mame Mbaye Niang.

In other legal cases, Sonko was sentenced in June to two years' imprisonment for morally corrupting a young person and has been jailed since the end of July on other charges, including calling for insurrection, conspiracy with terrorist groups, and endangering state security. He has denied the charges, saying they are intended to prevent him from running in February's election, which the government rejects.

The published list of candidates also includes two women, gynaecologist Rose Wardini and entrepreneur Anta Babacar Ngom.

It is the first time Senegal has organised a presidential election with so many candidates, constitutional lawyer Babacar Gueye told AFP.

Nikki Haley questions Trump's mental fitness after gaffe

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley turned a spotlight on Donald Trump's mental fitness Saturday, after the former president falsely accused her of failing to stop the violent assault on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Trump, speaking Friday at a campaign event days ahead of New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation primary election, appeared to confuse Haley with then House speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Referring to the January 6 insurrection by a mob of his supporters, Trump, after saying his rival's name repeatedly, told a crowd: "Nikki Haley is in charge of security. We offered her 10,000 people -- soldiers, National Guard, whatever they want -- they turned it down. They don't want to talk about that."

Haley, Trump's top rival in the New Hampshire contest, pointed out not only was she not in charge of security at the Capitol, she was not even in office at the time.

"They're saying he got confused, he was talking about something else," the former UN ambassador and South Carolina governor said at a New Hampshire rally.

"The concern I have is, I'm not saying anything derogatory, but when you're dealing with the pressures of a presidency, we can't have someone else that we question whether they're mentally fit to do this."

Trump and other Republicans have repeatedly attacked 81-year-old President Joe Biden over his age and raised doubts over whether he has the mental acuity to serve a second term.



NASA regains contact with mini-helicopter on Mars

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): NASA has re-established contact with its tiny helicopter on Mars, the US space agency said Saturday, after an unexpected outage prompted fears that the hard-working craft had finally met its end.

Ingenuity, a drone about 1.6 feet (0.5 meters) tall, arrived on Mars in 2021 aboard the rover Perseverance and became the first motorized craft to fly autonomously on another planet. Data from the helicopter are transmitted via Perseverance back to Earth, but communications were suddenly lost during a test flight on Thursday. Ingenuity's 72nd lift-off on Mars.

"Good news today," NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) wrote on X, formerly Twitter, late Saturday.

The agency said that contact had finally been made with the helicopter by commanding Perseverance to "perform long-duration listening sessions for Ingenuity's signal." "The team is reviewing the new data to better understand the unexpected comms dropout during Flight 72," it added. NASA previously said that Ingenuity had attained an altitude of 40 feet (12 meters) on Flight 72, which was a "quick pop-up vertical flight to check out the helicopter's systems, following an unplanned early landing during its previous flight." But during its descent, "communications between the helicopter and rover terminated early, prior to touchdown," the agency said.

JPL had noted on Friday that Perseverance was temporarily "out of line-of-sight with Ingenuity, but the team could consider driving closer for a visual inspection." In a response to a post on X asking if Ingenuity would be able to fly again, JPL said Saturday that "the team needs to assess the new data before that can be determined." NASA has lost contact with the helicopter before, including for an agonizing two months last year. The mini rotorcraft, which weighs just four pounds (1.8 kilograms), has far exceeded its original goal of undertaking five flights over 30 days on the red planet.

In all, it has covered just over 10 miles (17 kilometers) and reached altitudes of up to 79 feet (24 meters). Its longevity has proved remarkable, particularly considering that it must survive glacially cold Martian nights, kept warm by the solar panels that recharge its batteries during daylight hours. Working with Perseverance, it has acted as an aerial scout to assist its wheeled companion in searching for possible signs of ancient microbial life.

EU ports urged to team up to fight 'very creative' drug smugglers

BRUSSELS (AFP/APP): Drug smugglers in the EU have become so "very creative" that the bloc's sea-ports should join forces to combat their ever-changing tactics, Belgian Interior Minister Annelies Verlinden told AFP.

That idea is to be promoted Wednesday when Verlinden, along with the European Commission, meets top representatives from around 20 EU ports, Europol officials, other interior ministers and sea transport executives to launch the European Ports Alliance. The inauguration will take place in Antwerp, the Belgian port city that is the main gateway for cocaine trafficked into Europe. Despite stepped-up screening, cocaine seizures at the vast Antwerp port each year breaks records. Last year, 116 tonnes of the drug were intercepted there. And Antwerp is frequently rocked by violence linked to gangs fighting over the hugely lucrative smuggling. The traffickers "are always very creative and that is our challenge -- they pay no heed to laws on working time, right to privacy, borders," Verlinden said. "So we need to cooperate to be effective," she said. "We need to create this network to combat organised crime."

The port alliance aims to crack down on both the smuggling and the infiltration of the ports by criminal networks.

Private sector buy-in is needed because the steps to be taken could impact legal trading, so a good "balance" needs to be found, the Belgian ministers said.

The partnership has a goal of harmonising security measures, to reduce the ability of the gangs to cast around for ports with laxer checks -- and also to avoid trading companies moving away to ports with less red tape and security delays. "We know that the companies are very flexible and, if something isn't working, that they can go elsewhere in a heartbeat. We also want to avoid that," Verlinden said, stressing how economically crucial Antwerp's hub was to Belgium. "In Antwerp, we have a record number of seizures, but we never know what we didn't manage to seize," the minister said, listing reinforced measures with security services, customs officers and a port security corps. Antwerp's hub now boasts a mobile scanner that passes over selected containers. Five other scanners are to be delivered this year. Around 100 more customs officers are also expected to be assigned to the port.

According to Belgium's customs service, only 1-2 percent of arriving containers are scanned.

"What we want is to scan all containers coming from risk countries," including in Latin America and west Africa, Verlinden said. She noted that some of those containers might transit through another port not considered a risk.

The minister also backed the increased use of cameras, but acknowledged that they raised problems when it came to companies wanting to protect trade secrets.

Communication is also key. In 2021 Belgium had a breakthrough when, in collaboration with French and Dutch police, it cracked the encrypted communications network Sky ECC favoured by criminal gangs.

That led to a cascade of arrests and raids, and a drug trafficking trial of 120 suspects currently underway in Brussels.

"We know that we are upsetting the criminal groups and that is creating a reaction of panic, and that heightened violence could be linked to the panic," Verlinden said.

The decrypted Sky ECC messages also laid bare a high level of corruption in Belgium. "We realised that members of the customs service, the police, courts, lawyers could have been implicated in these criminal networks," she said.

"On corruption, you have to be strict.... That's a fight that goes on," Verlinden said, after two Belgian police officers were recently charged in a drugs case. "I don't believe -- and I say this sincerely -- that we are living in a narco-state. But we needn't go further in space or time to realise (the danger of) the mafia in Italy. Obviously we shouldn't head towards that sort of situation."

France's politicians woo the country's angry farmers

VIERZON (AFP/APP): France's new Prime Minister Gabriel Attal paid tribute to the country's agriculture sector this weekend, responding to the growing discontent of farm workers angry at red tape and high costs.

Another rising political star, Jordan Bardella of the far-right National Rally was also declaring his sympathy for the farmers, who he said were sick of the strictures imposed by "Macron's Europe".

Attal, speaking at a public meeting in the central town of Saint-Laurent-d'Agnay Saturday, insisted that agriculture was "an absolutely major subject... that I take very seriously".

Praising the nation's farmers, he promised to work to make life easier for them by reducing unnecessary red tape.

At virtually the same time, Bardella was visiting a dairy farm at Queyrac, in the southwest, denouncing the policies of President Emmanuel Macron.

There is growing anger against "the European Union and the Europe of Macron", who wanted "the death of our agriculture", said Bardella, a member of the EU parliament.

French farmers are exposed to unfair competition from products from around the world that do not respect the strict standards they have to observe, he added.

Bardella will lead the National Rally into the European elections in June, where some political observers think it could pose a major challenge to France's mainstream parties. Across the country, France's farmers have been voicing their anger in recent weeks -- and they have a long list of grievances.

They are unhappy about rising costs, bans on pesticides cleared for use in other parts of the world, a sense of being crushed by the strict standards imposed on them, and what they see as unfair competition from Ukrainian imports.

The price of diesel is another sore point, an issue that helped sparked the yellow vest protests that caused Macron so many problems during his first presidential term.

In the southern Occitanie region, one group of farm workers started a blockade of the A64 motorway late on Thursday at Carbonne, some 45 kilometres (28 miles) southwest of Toulouse.

On Saturday, dozens of tractors were still blocking access, with about a hundred protesters gathered around braziers at their makeshift camp.

"You get to a point when you can't take any more," said Benoit Fourcade, a 50-year-old cereal farmer.

If France ever banned the controversial weed-killer glyphosate, he would leave his fields fallow and sign up at the nearest factory, he vowed.

"We are not happy putting people out like this," said Nicolas Suspene, a 44-year-old farmer who is also the mayor of a nearby village. "But how else do we make ourselves heard?"

President Macron's office instructed prefects across France to get out and meet farmers this weekend. And on Monday, Attal will meet leaders of the main farming unions.

Later this week, the government is due to present its latest plans on how to help the next generation of farmers -- their average age at the moment is 51.4 years. But the plans have already been criticised by the sector as too timid.

100 years after his death, Russians shrug at Lenin's legacy

MOSCOW (AFP/APP): For almost a century after his death, Vladimir Lenin's carefully preserved body has lain in a purpose-built mausoleum on Red Square -- a glaring reminder of Russia's communist past.

But the father of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution that founded the Soviet Union -- and the 100th anniversary of his passing -- have largely been ignored by ordinary Russians.

Few official events have been scheduled to mark the centenary on Sunday, beyond a Communist Party ceremony at his tomb in the shadow of the Kremlin.

For President Vladimir Putin, who has publicly chided Lenin for his supposed role in dividing the Russian Empire into nation states like Ukraine, this is convenient.

Putin, now mired in an almost two year assault against Kyiv, has instead championed Joseph Stalin -- the man who led the USSR to victory in World War II, and who purged all his political opponents in a years-long reign of terror. When Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin) died on 21 January 1924, Soviet authorities at the behest of Stalin began embalming his body and building a mausoleum.

The red and black polished stone temple has stood at the heart of Red Square since October 1930, and briefly housed Stalin's remains until 1961.

Huge crowds of people queued to pay their respects to Lenin in Soviet times, but today, ceremonies honouring the revolutionary are attended mainly by those nostalgic for the communist era, flags and red carnations in hand.

His embalmed body has become, primarily, a tourist attraction. Once every 18 months, the mausoleum is closed to allow scientists to re-embalm his body and repair the damage caused by time.

Only 23 percent of Lenin's body remains intact, housed in a glass sarcophagus at a constant temperature of 16 degrees Celsius, the TASS state news agency has reported.

Since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, a debate about whether to close the mausoleum and bury his body has regularly cropped up in Russian media. But the proposal has been met with fierce resistance from communists and has never seriously been considered by the authorities.

Putin rarely mentions Lenin. So his attack on the instigator of the October Revolution, days before ordering his troops into Ukraine on 24 February 2022, was notable.

In a vitriolic speech questioning Ukraine's statehood three days before the attack, the Kremlin leader accused Lenin of having "invented" Ukraine when he founded the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

By giving the Soviet republics a degree of autonomy, Putin argued, Lenin allowed the emergence of nationalism and the eventual implosion of the USSR.

"It was because of Bolshevik policy that the Soviet Ukraine came into being, which (one) would be perfectly justified to call Lenin's Ukraine," Putin raged.

"He is its inventor, its architect," he continued.

"And now," Putin said, "grateful descendants have torn down Lenin's monuments in Ukraine."

But Lenin has not been completely erased. His likeness still dominates many city centres in Russia, even though most of the statues were removed when the USSR collapsed.

In Moscow, a 22-metre (72-foot) Lenin monument still looms over Kaluga Square. In Ulan-Ude, in Eastern Siberia, a head of the revolutionary stands on a pedestal 14 metres high.

And in Antarctica, at the Pole of Inaccessibility, there remains a bust of Lenin outside a defunct Soviet research station -- now mostly buried in the snow.

Of all the Soviet leaders, it is Stalin that the Kremlin chief refers to most often -- not to denounce his appalling record of repression, but to praise the statesman and wartime leader who defeated Adolf Hitler's Germany.

Putin has always sought to frame his military campaign against Ukraine through the lens of World War II, comparing Ukrainian authorities to the Nazis and presenting the conflict as an existential struggle for Russia's survival.

For the Kremlin, Stalin remains a model of victory and power, while Lenin is a loser.

"The current leadership needs Stalin because he is both a villain and a hero," Alexei Levinson, a sociologist at the independent Levada institute, told AFP. "He won the war, so all his atrocities are erased," he said.

In contrast, Lenin's achievements have been undone or never materialised, he explained.

"Lenin is the leader of the world revolution -- it never happened. Lenin is the leader of the world proletariat -- it doesn't exist. Lenin is the creator of the socialist state -- it is no more," he said.

"And no-one wants to build it anymore either."

'Barbenheimer' sitting pretty as Oscar nominations to be unveiled

LOS ANGELES (AFP/APP): Nominations for this year's Oscars will be unveiled on Tuesday, with the "Barbenheimer" juggernaut expected to roll on to the climax of Hollywood's awards season with multiple chances at glory.

After a combined \$2.4 billion global box office take, "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" -- two films linked only by their simultaneous release last July -- are seen as locks for a suite of nods for the 96th Academy Awards, which take place on March 10.

"It continues to be their year, and we expect them to dominate the nominations," Pete Hammond, columnist for industry site Deadline, told AFP. With its clutch of five Golden Globes and momentum on its side, "Oppenheimer" -- Christopher Nolan's masterly portrait of the father of the atomic bomb -- appears to have the edge in the race for best picture, the Academy's top prize.

Greta Gerwig's popular "Barbie" -- a sharp satire about misogyny and female empowerment -- is playing catch-up after an initial burst of awards optimism faded. The film, which had nine nominations for the Globes, left with just two consolation prizes -- best song and a newly created trophy for box office achievement. And, said Hammond, it faces an uphill battle to turn its audience gold into major Oscars success. "Comedies, or something considered lighter, are generally at a disadvantage against something a little heavier," he said.

"So in the world of Barbenheimer, 'Oppenheimer' definitely has the advantage because it's got gravitas; it's important." Rounding out the best picture category, nominations are widely expected for Martin Scorsese's crime saga "Killers of the Flower Moon" and Venice Film Festival winner "Poor Things," a female-focused take on the Frankenstein myth. Christmas boarding school tale "The Holdovers" is already being spoken of as a durable seasonal classic, while Leonard Bernstein biopic "Maestro," which sees Bradley Cooper in front and behind the camera, also appears well placed.

The well-received French film "Anatomy of a Fall," which won two Golden Globes including best screenplay, might fare well in a world where voters no longer seem scared of subtleties. Between Justine Triet's "Anatomy," Gerwig's "Barbie" and "Past Lives," a Korean-American drama by Celine Song, the fight for the best picture Oscar could include three works directed by women, a historic first.

Over nine-and-a-half decades of awards, only 19 films by female directors have been nominated for the top prize. "It could be the biggest year ever for women, in terms of the best picture race," said Hammond.

In the acting categories, the two summer block-

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UN's Due Role in Palestine Dispute

The UN Secretary-General has recently observed that the Palestinians' right to build their own state must be recognized by all stakeholders and the global community. While addressing the Non-Aligned Movement summit, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres noted that the refusal to accept a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians, and the denial of the right to statehood for the Palestinian people, are unacceptable. According to him, such a stance would indefinitely prolong the conflict that has become a major risk to global peace and security, exacerbate polarization, and embolden extremism everywhere in the world.

There is an ongoing conspiracy and debate in the Western media regarding the Palestinian statehood that was forcefully snatched by the Jews and their long-held ally and infamous colonial power, the UK dating back to the 1940s through the creation of the illegal state of Israel. Since then, countless Palestinians have been killed, and millions have been pushed out of their homes and living in exile in refugee camps in neighbouring countries and elsewhere in the world. In fact, the ongoing bloodshed in the Palestinian Gaza territory was prompted by the October 7 attack on Israel by Hamas fighters. The Hamas attack was out of frustration and utter disappointment due to decades-long Israeli occupation and betrayal of the global community particularly the neighbouring Arab states who normalized their ties with Tel Aviv one by one leaving bereaved Palestinians alone.

During the current Gaza conflict, a single Hamas attack killed about 1,140 people, most of them Israeli civilians, whereas, Israel's relentless bombardment and ground offensive since then have killed at least 24,927 people in Gaza, mostly women and children. Meanwhile, Israel's unceasing bombardment turned the thickly populated enclave into robles and continuous sieged, urban battles and reckless intimidation compelled more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million population to forced displacement to other areas. Unfortunately, the rogue Israeli regime still opposes the creation of a viable Palestinian state on the principle of a two-state solution, in line with the UN resolutions on the Palestine issue. Furthermore, the Israeli government aims to entirely remove Hamas from Gaza seeking the permanent role of the Israeli military in thickly populated Muslim-majority territory. Such oppressive policies and unlawful actions do not guarantee peace and security for Israel as well as Palestinians who have been compelled to suffer and react to such oppression over the past seven and a half decades.

Historically, the entire global community except a few countries including the US and the UK have condemned Tel Aviv's illegal occupation of Palestinian land and support the Palestinians' right to build their state on their own land. The Non-Aligned Movement has recently strongly condemned the illegal Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip and called for a lasting humanitarian ceasefire. The forum also called for the independence and sovereignty of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, to achieve a two-state solution.

Historically, the primary responsibility lies with the UN, which must differentiate the Palestine resistance movement from terrorism and stress Israel to implement UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution on the Palestine dispute on an urgent basis so an Independent Palestinian state could be formed as early as possible. That is the only way forward to ensure peace and enhance stability in the Middle East region. If Natenyaho's doctrine is ever implemented, it will give birth to anarchy, and promote further extremism and violence, while no power could guarantee peace and a safe haven for Israelis in the coming years and decades until Palestine issue is resolved legitimately.

Access to Information, Facts and Fictions

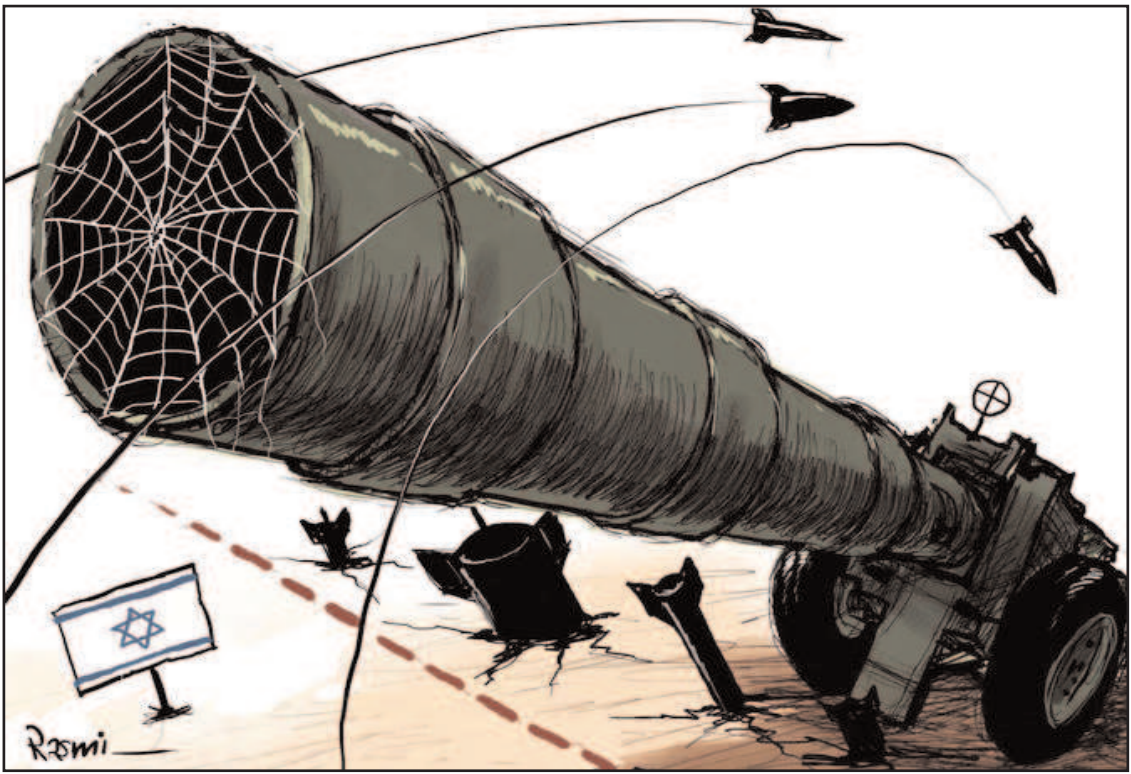
Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa has declared that access to information is a constitutional right of every citizen, and it is not just a matter of discretion of the leaders, courts or adjudicators. Article 19A categorically mentions the people's fundamental right of access to information. This clause gives unhindered rights to all citizens to get any information, and it is the primary duty of all government entities, whether federal or provincial to provide any information demanded. The Chief Justice further noted that the Supreme Court was also subject to Article 19A of the Constitution, hence all important cases were being broadcast live so that people understand and raise questions.

Access to information is a fundamental right of every citizen, it allows every individual access to government-held information relating to public work, governance, and important functions of the state institutions except sensitive matters relating to national defence, security, and foreign affairs. Historically, public access to government information is crucial because it promotes transparency, and enhances the accountability of public leaders, government servants, and institutions. At the same time, it prevents corruption, regulates governance, and enhances public participation in the decision/policy-making process in the country.

The government of Pakistan adopted Article 19A of the Constitution over two decades ago, while all federating units also reproduced those clauses in provincial legislative catalogues that confer citizens access to all information relating to public matters but those sane attractive promises and acclaimed legacies are only present on paper in sacred constitutional books whereas an altogether different and bitter situation exists in all institutions at all levels. Over the years, human rights activists, journalists, and researchers mostly received no or little response, twisted facts or blanket views from the government institutions rather the rulers and powerful bureaucracy became enemies of the journalists and rights activists when such information likely to expose corruption and misconduct of the ruling elite. Although, honourable judges, political leaders, and top bureaucrats sitting in high offices often make sane verdicts regarding people's right to access government information but they never act on complaints or review statistics that shed light and expose the pathetic implementation of relevant clauses of the Constitution. In fact, all data relating to public affairs, development works, civil liberties, and the functioning of the government, to promote transparency and ensure public welfare at the optimum level.

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Humanitarians must do more, and better, in Sudan

Mukesh Kapila

WHEN did Sudan's civil war start? This is a surprisingly difficult question to answer, with the most common response being April 2023. But that was just the start of the current phase, triggered by a falling out between Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti, the commanders of the Sudanese Armed Forces and rival militia the Rapid Support Forces respectively.

In reality, there has been little peace in the country since independence in 1956. Its first civil war raged from 1955 to 1972 and a second followed between 1983 and 2005, punctuated by the Darfur genocide in 2003-2004. South Sudan broke away in 2011 and conflicts rumbled on in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile.

Several factors lie behind the turmoil: ethnic, ideological, and religious differences; grievances around representation in governance; greed over possession of the nation's immense natural wealth; and the geopolitical interests of outsiders.

Along the way, any brief experimentation with civilian democracy was extinguished by military regimes.

The question of when Sudan's strife will finally end is easier to answer: not yet, and not for some time. The country's power brokers and their external sponsors are not ready to make peace as no side has achieved ascendancy in the existentialist struggle between the belligerents.

Also consider history's iron rule: The past must be squared away before a better future can be built. We can learn that from the Palestine-Israel conflict, even if peace-makers in Sudan do not. Attempting to brush aside the harm and hurt of the past, especially the Darfur genocide, without ensuring accountability, justice and restitution simply means repeating Sudan's toxic history. Nevertheless, history also offers the consolation that all wars do eventually end. And experience teaches us that the spirit of humanity is eventually required to bridge the divide between war and peace. Preventing that precarious passage from being completely ruptured is the role of humanitarian provision.

This is important in Sudan. Not only out of pity for the desperate, suffering people of the country. Nor as a cynical calculation that assistance now will reduce the burden on the international purse of future recovery. More importantly, human-

itarianism is about reaching the place where wars begin: the minds of men. The Sudanese people are deeply traumatized, whether as victims of terrible and degrading atrocities or as the perpetrators who inflict them on others without compunction. Brutalized psyches cannot be expected to think peacefully. But could paranoid minds be opened by humanitarian solidarity?

All else having failed, this is certainly worth trying. But we are not doing very well on the humanitarian front. Among Sudan's population of 49 million, 25 million people need assistance, 6 million are internally displaced and 1.5 million are new refugees.

This is the biggest national humanitarian caseload in the world. And other records for misery and deprivation continue to be set. Nearly 40 percent of the population are seriously food insecure, including 3.5 million children who are suffering from acute malnutrition. Ninety percent of Sudanese children get little or no schooling. Two-thirds of the population lack access to healthcare, and 80 percent of hospitals in conflict areas are non-functional. Outbreaks of disease, including malaria, measles, dengue and cholera, continue, and there is a resurgence of desert locusts.

The economy has shrunk by 12 percent since the start of the war and gross domestic product is expected to fall by 18 percent this year. In comparison, the decline in Syria over the course of its long civil crisis has averaged 5 percent annually.

A UN humanitarian appeal seeks \$2.7 billion in lifesaving aid for Sudan this year, compared with \$2.57 billion last year. However, only 42 percent of that 2023 UN target, which aimed to help 18.1 million people, was funded. This year the outcome is likely to be similar, though the targeted population is smaller, at 14.7 million. This suggests that this year's appeal is designed to help fewer people but overall needs have grown.

In any case, these UN numbers are somewhat moot as the organization's own reports reveal it managed to reach only 5.7 million people in 2023 — a third of its target. Even that number is disputed and rejected by some as an overestimation, with some independent surveys indicating that less than 16 percent of the population received aid. This means Sudan is unique in having the largest number of people in need of help and the smallest

number receiving assistance.

Even accepting the UN figures at face value, the reduced numbers of accessed beneficiaries should have been well catered-for with the relatively greater proportion of the appeal funded. But we do not know the true aid impact and especially what happened to the two-thirds of the target population not reached. Did they perish? That is unlikely according to mortality statistics.

That being the case, how did these non-recipients of UN aid manage to help themselves, or who helped them? The contribution of the Sudanese diaspora and local aid networks, including front-line "emergency response rooms" created by "resistance committees," is critical but not quantified, and UN coordination mechanisms do not include them.

There is also the continuing question about the current shortfall between the number of people assessed as being in need and the smaller number targeted by the official UN appeal. That gap currently stands at 10 million, an increase from 6 million last year. Who is responsible for serving the needs of these people? Probably the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other agencies that are not part of the official UN appeal. But we do not know for sure because data is not comparable, openly shared or verifiable. This also means the comparative efficiency of agencies cannot be assessed.

The UN appeal works with 165 partner agencies but their in-country presence and reach are unclear. It would be unethical if Sudan's agony was serving as a fundraising opportunity for organizations that are unable themselves to deliver aid on the ground but extract a proportion of donations as fees or overheads simply for acting as intermediaries for the groups that are actively providing assistance.

Such "rent-seeking" practices add to inefficiencies in the delivery process at a time when resources are severely constrained and the moral imperative is to use every available dollar to help ease suffering.

However, the difficulties of delivering aid inside Sudan cannot be underestimated. Red tape delays imports at Port Sudan. Aid convoys are harassed at checkpoints, including through the solicitation of bribes, the looting of warehouses, fraud and corruption. The fierce fighting causes unpredictable delays. International humanitarian

law is violated with impunity.

The courage and commitment of the humanitarian aid workers is not in dispute. Fifty-four of them were killed, wounded or kidnapped in 2023, a five-fold increase from the year before. But the hasty exit from the country by international workers transferred the risks to local staff who do not receive the same protection and benefits.

As suggested previously, humanitarians could potentially help build a movement toward peace in Sudan but only by tackling their own dysfunctions first. The first step is to regain stakeholder trust. Perhaps we need some sort of "blue tick" system for international and local bodies that verifies and certifies credibility.

Secondly, there must be greater transparency within the humanitarian sector through the sharing of consistent and verified statistics. Aid agencies alone cannot be the judges of needs, the jury that grades their own work, and the ones responsible for executing the delivery of aid. There are obvious conflicts of interest there that could perhaps be resolved through the introduction of independent accountability mechanisms.

Thirdly, with international organizations constrained from working in Sudan, localization of aid must be vigorously promoted as a way to develop context-specific solutions, generate greater value for money and, ultimately, increased outreach.

Fourthly, if negotiators cannot help end the fighting, let them expend more of their diplomatic capital on the issues of humanitarian access and challenges in protecting aid workers. This could build confidence and perhaps provide a path toward real peace.

To be fair, the problems of providing humanitarian aid in Sudan are not unique. They reflect a global aid system that is over-burdened with many crises. Given its complexities, Sudan perhaps is not the most obvious place to try to instigate difficult reforms that challenge entrenched practices. But a crisis is also an opportunity for change, especially when the survival of the suffering millions is as existential a struggle as the war is for the belligerents.

Although it would be good to be proved wrong, 2024 is unlikely to be the year that brings peace in Sudan. But neither must we allow it to be the year the world failed, yet again, to perform better in the name of humanity.

Settling the Middle East vs West Asia debate

Ehtesham Shahid

“Middle East” or “West Asia?” This somewhat divided nomenclature adds another layer to the region's already “complicated” label. Is it the “Middle East” because it is in the “middle” of the East? Is it “West Asia” because it is in the western part of Asia? So, why is the region mostly called the Middle East? It is “geographically ambiguous” to some, as it is “East” only from the “West's” perspective. The term West Asia has fewer challengers, but it isn't used as much.

According to Principles of Nomenclature and Classification, a fundamental problem for nomenclature is the existence of two or more names for the same taxon, for only one name can be considered correct or valid. Taxon is not so much of a contention in this case; a lack of union exists. The names of geographical regions have had historical, cultural, and sometimes even linguistic significance.

Some region's names are based on events that took place there. For instance, the “Balkans” in South-eastern Europe is named after the Balkan Mountains, which have played a significant role in the region's history. Geographical features often influence names, too. North America's “Rocky Mountains” are named for their rugged terrain, while the Amazon rainforest is named after the Amazon River.

Another school of thought maintains that the term Middle East has been associated with the broader region's cultural and historical ties to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Arab world and often implies a broader cultural and historical context. The exact boundaries of the Middle East or West Asia can vary depending on these perspectives. Moreover, both the terms have evolved and have historical, geopolitical, and cultural significance.

Some definitions may include specific countries, while others may exclude them. For example, Egypt and Turkey are sometimes included in the Middle East but are more accurately described as transcontinental countries. These terms are primarily geopolitical and do not necessarily

Both terms are widely used in practice, and their boundaries can be somewhat fluid. The choice between “Middle East” and “West Asia” often depends on the context, the specific focus of the discussion, and regional preferences. It only shows that naming countries and regions has often been a source of incongruities and anomalies due to historical, political, cultural, and linguistic factors.

Some regions have been named after prominent geographic features or valuable resources. For instance, the Sahara Desert is named after the Arabic word for “desert,” and Sierra Nevada means “snowy range” in Spanish. More importantly, political factors have played a role in naming regions with borders and administrative divisions, leading to new names, often for practical or administrative purposes. The widespread perception behind the term “Middle East” is that it originated in the 1850s in the British India Office. It is also documented that the name was more widely used after American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan used the term in 1902 to “designate the area between Arabia and India.” However, the term was used mainly in a Eurocentric context to refer to the countries and territories of the Ottoman Empire and the surrounding regions.

The Middle East is geographically situated on the western edge of Asia, bordered by Asia to the east and northeast. This geographical proximity and the interconnected history, culture, and trade between the Middle East and other Asian regions have contributed to its classification as part of Asia. Fortunately or otherwise, these terms have no strict, universally accepted definition, and their usage can vary depending on context and perspective.

“West Asia” is a more modern term that has gained popularity, especially in academic and geopolitical contexts, and is often seen as a more neutral and geographically accurate descriptor for the region. It is often used as an alternative to “Middle East,” avoiding some historical and cultural connotations associated with the region. Whichever way one looks at it, a nomenclature clash goes against the ethos of constructivism in international relations, which emphasizes the role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping state behaviour and global politics.

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reflect cultural, historical, or linguistic differences. Political considerations and regional sensitivities may also often influence the choice of terminology.

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Some examples from outside the region illustrate this argument. Geographic names can sometimes lead to anomalies when they do not accurately reflect the territory they encompass. For instance, the Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire) was named after its principal export, but it does not cover the entire country. The legacies of imperialist powers have been the most potent factor behind incongruous names. These examples illustrate how a complex interplay of historical events, political power dynamics, linguistic diversity, and cultural identities has shaped naming conventions. Seen in its entirety, incongruities in nomenclature can persist and often reflect colonial legacy, territorial disputes, or changing political circumstances.

Khaleej Times

A clear Saudi message at Davos 2024

Faisal J. Abbas

Arabia since the launch of Vision 2030.

However, it is not that the forum is holding a meeting in Riyadh that matters, but rather the topic of that meeting. The theme will be “growth through global collaboration” — something the Kingdom has long been keen on, given its economic, diplomatic and religious heft.

We have seen this at first hand many times. The Saudi focus on global cooperation has been evident in efforts during the coronavirus pandemic, the 2022 facilitation of the Russian/Ukrainian prisoner swap, and the rescue of civilians from Sudan in 2023.

To better understand what the thinking is in the Kingdom, I would strongly recommend listening to the responses by the Saudi Ambassador to the US, Princess Reema bint Bandar, to CNN anchor Becky Anderson at a session in Davos on Thursday. Princess Reema made it clear that Vision 2030 relied for its suc-

cess on regional stability and global cooperation.

She also clarified the Saudi position toward normalization with Israel. With the catastrophe in Gaza, geopolitics was heavily present at Middle East-related discussions in Davos. This was further ignited when Israeli President Isaac Herzog attempted to put the carriage in front of the horse when he told the forum that normalizing ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia would be “a key element of ending the war with Hamas and a game-changer for the entire Middle East.”

However, Princess Reema made it clear that “peace and prosperity, not normalization” were at the heart of Saudi policy. This has been the Kingdom's unaltered position since the Madrid Conference of 1991: Riyadh is willing to move forward with normalization, provided the plight of Palestinians is addressed and a solution

agreed upon. While the Saudi requirements and security guarantees needed from the US as part of a three-way deal are unlikely to change, it doesn't take a genius to note that the war in Gaza has only made things more complicated and increased the urgency of the Palestinian demands of Israel. “Palestinians deserve a state, sovereignty and a pathway that is irrevocable,” Princess Reema said before condemning the killing of innocent civilians on both sides and giving a powerful statement on the need for an immediate ceasefire.

This position was later echoed by the Kingdom's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan in an interview with NBC's Keir Simmons. “What we feel is key at this time is to find a credible, irreversible path to a Palestinian state,” Prince Faisal said. “I think ‘irreversible’ is the thing we need to underline because that is the thing that has been lack-

ing in the past.” Analysts differ on how soon we can see an end to the catastrophe in Gaza. However, it is clear that a ceasefire is likely to be tied to Hamas releasing all its hostages, as a first step. This may prove difficult because the release of hostages and a ceasefire means both sides would lose their leverage. That is why regional and US guarantees and support are much needed.

Some Israeli pundits are skeptical. Their argument is that, for more than one reason, it is in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's interest to keep the war going. Furthermore, Netanyahu on Thursday explicitly ruled out the second step — an irreversible commitment to a Palestinian state, which would probably lead to the collapse of his extreme right-wing governing coalition.

Yet the prime minister must understand that there is no easy way out of this quagmire. The Israeli left and opposition figures, some of whom were in Davos, argue

that to achieve peace, the US and other regional powers must force Netanyahu to resign and make way for a new government. But that is unlikely because, short of a new election, only a majority vote of the Knesset can remove the current government and name a new prime minister.

Thus, from the point of view purely of political analysis, Netanyahu has only two options. The first is to continue waging war and risk more global and international pressure, security risks and accusations of genocide. The second is to be remembered — as unlikely as this sounds — as the man who achieved peace against all odds, gave Palestinians a state and obtained recognition for Israel, not only by Saudi Arabia but by the whole Arab and Muslim worlds.

The second option begins with a ceasefire. Let us pray that it comes to pass, whether on Netanyahu's watch or that of any other Israeli leader.

Arab News

Why so many Americans are misapplying ‘settler colonialism’ to Gaza

The war between Israel and Hamas has caused turmoil on American college campuses, leading to the resignation of the presidents of Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania.

It is unfortunate that instead of having a serious debate about the causes of the war, the issue has been co-opted by partisans on the left and the right to pursue their long-standing conflict over identity politics and cancel culture.

The United States needs a serious and reasoned discussion about how to resolve the conflict in Gaza. The US is a key player: the only one that has any leverage over the government of Israel’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Institutions of higher learning, where students, faculty and staff alike are invested in the mission of academic freedom, should be fertile ground for fostering such robust discourse. On most American campuses, however, there is no real debate about the war. Instead, we see two parallel sets of conversations, some more civil than others, organized by those who “Stand with Israel” and those seeking “Justice for Palestine.”

This bifurcation is understandable, given the trauma experienced by both sides in the conflict and increasingly visible in images and accounts from the region. But it is alarming to see the gulf that separates the two narratives widening among Americans.

While most Americans support Israel, polls show that a majority of young Americans, including many college students, are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. For them, the Holocaust is ancient history, while they see the harrowing deaths of Palestinians in real time on their social media feeds.

Many college students are taught that American society is the product of “settler colonialism” — a history

of conquest and exploitation. In this simplistic framing, the plight of the Palestinians is just one more example of the familiar evils of settler colonialism. For those who see the conflict through this lens, the founding of Israel is treated as the equivalent of the European colonization of the Americas. The Gaza war is better understood as a conflict between two competing nationalist projects than as a case of settler colonialism. There are a number of inconvenient historical truths that complicate the “settler colonialism” narrative.

It is a conflict in which each side — with good reason — sees itself as an embattled and threatened minority. The Palestinians are vastly outmatched by the powerful Israeli security forces, but Israel lives in the shadow of the Holocaust and is outnumbered 50 to one by its Arab neighbors across the wider region.

The Palestinian side starts the historical clock with the 1917 Balfour Declaration, when the British foreign minister promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine. Or they go back to the founding of Israel in 1948 and the nakba, the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians.

For Jews, history does not begin in 1948, or 1917. Zionism was not a product of the British empire. It was born in Vienna, Vilnius and Lviv. It was a response to the realization that there was no place for Jews, assimilated or not, in the Austrian and Russian empires. The word pogrom comes from Russian and entered the English language in the late 19th century with reports of state-sponsored killing of Jews in the Russian empire. The word genocide was coined during World War II by Raphael Lemkin, a Jew from Galicia, where more than

Peter Rutland

100,000 Jews were killed in pogroms in 1921.

The founding of Israel should also be seen in the context of state-building and ethnic cleansing throughout the region. Alongside the Palestinians expelled from Israel, there were 900,000 Jews driven from their homes in Arab lands in the mid-20th century. As recently as 1991, 14,000 Ethiopian Jews, fleeing famine, were evacuated to Israel. Egypt and Jordan occupied Gaza and the West Bank, respectively, from 1948 to 1967 and were indifferent to Palestinians’ rights.

Another problem with the settler colonialism narrative is that it treats each side as a monolithic actor, playing the role of colonizer and victim, respectively. In reality there is a diversity of ideas and interests in both the Israeli and Palestinian camps.

The tragedy of the past 30 years is that moderates on both sides, interested in making a genuine peace, have been repeatedly outflanked by radicals screaming that compromise means betrayal. This process of “ethnic outbidding” can be seen in many conflicts, from Bosnia to Northern Ireland.

For years, Netanyahu has obstructed efforts to forge a compromise peace with the Palestinians. He actually helped Hamas after the group came to power in Gaza, because that meant the Palestinians were divided and unable to make peace with Israel. However, Israel cannot achieve security through military means alone.

Hamas started the war on October 7 to undermine Israel’s image in the world and deter other Arab states such as Saudi Arabia from following the example of the 2020 Abraham Accords, in which

the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan made peace with Israel. The pro-Palestinian left on American campuses seems to oppose Israel making peace with its neighbors on the grounds that it is not connected to the creation of a Palestinian state. I was shocked to hear a Palestinian professor argue in a Zoom lecture that the more civilians that are martyred by Israel, the closer they will be to liberation. The Hamas strategy seems to be working, with mounting global condemnation of Israel’s assault on Gaza and a surge in support for Hamas among Palestinians.

Hamas gets support from Iran, Turkey and Qatar. But the moderate Arab countries fear Hamas more than they fear Israel. That’s why the Arab League was unable to come up with a joint statement at its October 21 meeting in Cairo.

None of this is to excuse the mass killing of civilians in Gaza or the occupation regime in the West Bank — a literal case of settler colonialism. But peace will only be possible if we recognize that there are legitimate grievances on both sides. It is not a struggle between right and wrong, between good and evil, though partisans often frame it in those terms. The United States has a vital role to play. It is the only actor with the ability to force Netanyahu to de-escalate, as it has done repeatedly in past wars fought by Israel. At the same time, it is working with its Arab allies to come up with a solution that enables Israelis and Palestinians to coexist in peace.

Students and faculty on American universities should be working together to help forge a solution, and not using the conflict to open a new front in the culture wars and to score points against their political opponents in the US.

CNN

Israel facing the ICJ is lowest point in history

Yossi Mekeleberg

atrocities against their own people or those beyond their borders never face such an indictment.

Undeniably, antisemitism does exist and there are those who question the very right of the State of Israel to exist. But for Israeli society to use this as an excuse for the way in which the nation’s military is conducting the war in Gaza, whatever final verdict of the ICJ might be, is to avoid serious reflection on how Israel, through its own actions before and during the war, has created the conditions conducive to accusations of war crimes.

In the immediate wake of the atrocities committed by Hamas on Oct. 7, Israel enjoyed the sympathy of most of the world. Yet three months later, due to the way in which it is conducting its war on Gaza and killing so many thousands of innocent Palestinian civilians, accompanied by comments from senior Israeli politicians that could be interpreted as genocidal even if they are not attributable to those directly in charge of decision-making, Israel has lost much of this support.

Israelis commonly assert that what has landed their country in the dock at the Hague accused of genocide is the irresponsible language of some members of the current governing coalition, and even of a Cabinet that is genocidal by nature, as the South African prosecution team asserts.

According to this line of defense, such language is not reflective of official policy. Admittedly, at least to a non-legal eye, some of these references have been more typical of the intemperate, ugly and abhorrent nationalist language often heard in times of war, than of a plan to commit acts “with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, racial or religious group,” as set out in the definition of the crime of genocide.

But those in positions of power should know that

when they embark on a military campaign that involves killing thousands of civilians, displacing most of the population and bombarding their infrastructure and reducing it to rubble, such declarations will be interpreted differently.

Early in the war, for example, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu employed biblical language that compared Palestine to Amalek, a rival nation to ancient Israel. Passages in the Hebrew Bible recount how Israelites were told to destroy the Amalekites.

One minister suggested that Israel drop a nuclear bomb on the Gaza Strip. Another called for the territory to be razed to the ground. Even President Itzhak Herzog, regarded as one of the more moderate Israeli politicians, blamed all Gazans for the Oct. 7 attack.

“It’s an entire nation out there that is responsible. This rhetoric about civilians not aware, not involved, it’s absolutely not true. They could have risen up, they could have fought against that evil regime,” he said, setting a tone in which all of the Gazan people are equated with Hamas.

Some might argue that such statements should be regarded as typical, if admittedly rather vile and reckless and inexcusable, in times of war, and no more than that. However, the reason the international community is upset about and suspicious of the Israeli government’s intentions is that more than 24,000 Palestinians have been killed, the vast majority of them noncombatants, including thousands of children. This in addition to the enormous trauma inflicted on all Gazans, and demands from some senior Israeli politicians that they be transferred elsewhere.

This leads some in the international community to believe, rightly or wrongly, there is a bigger objective in play than simply the destruction of Hamas. And for this, Israelis need to take responsibility.

China’s vision of world features multipolarity and globalization

For serious China watchers, the recent Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs was a study of great importance. A barometer of the country’s foreign policy, the conference, the first in five years, reviewed the achievements made since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, counted the experiences gained over the past decade, and viewed the future as “a new stage where much more can be accomplished.”

Emphasizing that the building of a community with a shared future for mankind is “the core tenet” of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, the readout of the conference highlights two key visions: “an equal and orderly multipolar world” and “a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization”. The two visions offer a glimpse into the kind of world China hopes to help build.

New members for one community

According to China’s vision of a multipolar world seen through the lens of contrasts, in an unequal world, a few rich countries will get the best seats at the table and have the final say, leaving the vast majority of countries struggling to find their place and voice their opinions, let alone join the deliberation on the future of the international community.

In a disorderly world, the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and the

universally recognized basic norms governing international relations will be brushed aside, creating a breeding ground for conflict and confrontation which leaves innocent folks, no matter where they are, worse off.

Fortunately, heartening developments in the real world echo China’s vision. Shortly after the conference, on Jan 1, BRICS membership officially doubled from five to 10 with the inclusion of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, covering 45 percent of the global population and nearly 30 percent of global GDP. As the voice of the Global South strengthens, the prospects of multilateralism brighten.

Amid a sea of troubles, more and more passengers aboard the ship “Planet Earth” are pulling together to defend the cause of real, greater democracy and true multilateralism. As the ship has reached a critical juncture, the choice between “to be, or not to be” has increasingly become not only to be, but also to let each and every one be.

This choice is buttressed by the concrete input from the Chinese side. The projects and programs linked to the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative illustrate the efforts made by China to maintain peace and promote the development of the entire global community. So far,

Yi Xin

the future holds promise. As good old Chinese wisdom heralds, “a just cause finds great support” and “a journey with many companions gets far”.

New fruits for common growth

Economic globalization is a subject that can be broken down into small cases. A buzzword on Chinese social media last year was “durian freedom”, which means being able to eat as much durian as one craves without worrying about the price.

Durian, with its exotic flavor and rich taste, is a popular fruit among the Chinese people. An enabling trading environment has made it widely available in China in recent years, with imports growing from 220,000 tons in 2017 to 820,000 tons in 2022. The durian trade received a strong boost from such events as the China-ASEAN Agricultural Cooperation Forum and the Lancang-Mekong Fruit Festival, because they allowed Chinese and Southeast Asian businesses to quickly tap the niche market.

Chinese e-commerce giants stationed buyers in some Southeast Asian countries to secure the best quality durians. Other sellers flew abroad to promote local durians through livestreaming. China accounted for some 96 percent of Thailand’s durian exports, and Thailand and Vietnam soon expanded their durian plantation areas, creating local jobs and boosting revenue.

The durian story is one of free,

smooth trade that made the pie bigger and gave everyone a larger slice. The durian story also demonstrates the strong spending capacity and power of China’s growing middle-income group. As the global economy recovers, advanced and emerging economies alike stand to benefit from the vast Chinese market.

China’s vision for globalization does more than embrace win-win trade. It aims to clear the bottlenecks to facilitate the growth of emerging markets and developing countries. The term “universally beneficial” draws attention to growth imbalances between and within countries due to uneven global allocation of resources, and “inclusive” adverts to structural blockades driven by unilateralism and protectionism. Amid all this, it is reassuring to hear the world’s second-largest economy speak for the common needs of fellow developing countries. Making globalization more open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial for all is a timely move in response to those that have been calling for it for years.

Seventy-nine years after the end of World War II and 33 years after the end of the Cold War, amid the global transformation and turbulence, the two concepts China has put forward offer much-needed encouragement and strength. And what better time than now when the world has just entered a new year and many are still making their New Year resolutions.

China Daily

Does GOP really want to solve the border crisis?

John Avlon

Do House Republicans really want to solve the border crisis? Not if they bow to Donald Trump’s latest demands.

This seems cynical even by current Bizarro world standards. Because if you constantly tell people that America is suffering an “invasion” that will require mass deportations on day one, you’d think there’d be real urgency to solve the problem right now.

That urgency is reflected in the actions of the US Senate, where conservative Oklahoma Sen. James Lankford has been working diligently with Democrats like Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York to come up with a border security bill that can muster 60 votes in the center. After a White House meeting, there was renewed optimism that a deal can get done with a vote soon, coupling border security with much-needed aid to Ukraine, which is fighting a literal border invasion from Russia. But then the House of Representatives needs to take up the bill — and that’s where Speaker Mike Johnson is facing more threats from his far-right flank, who have been signaling that they will balk at any border security bill until a Republican is president.

Right-wing resistance is entirely consistent with a Trump-ified GOP that is more willing to demagogue an issue than actually deal with it. In an interview with Fox News Wednesday night, Johnson confirmed he’s also been getting pressure from Trump to reject the bipartisan Senate deal. Apparently, the art of the deal only applies if Trump gets credit. The MAGA crew would rather fear-monger and fundraise off an alleged invasion at the Southern border than stop it — because they’re afraid President Joe Biden or Democrats might get some credit for helping to stem the tide of migrants trying to cross our border.

Even the most generous explanation — that they don’t believe that a Democratic president will implement the tough measures they believe are necessary — doesn’t hold water if they really believe that this is the most urgent issue facing our nation. If a Republican is elected next year, they can presumably deal with those deficiencies. But refusing to support a bill that could help solve the problem with concrete

measures negotiated by conservative colleagues in the Senate shows a fundamental lack of faith in deliberative democracy. Compromise is not the same thing as surrender.

This is one of many issues where Speaker Johnson is on a collision course with Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. Democrats have already made significant concessions to conservative priorities to get this bill down the field. Before the New Year’s break, Schumer said, “I think [Republicans] realize that Democrats have moved much more to the middle on border security.”

To be clear, this is not the comprehensive immigration reform grand bargain that most Democrats would like to see and that President Biden has called for. It is a narrow bill dealing with border security. Given the overflow of migrants and asylum seekers at the Southern border now bleeding into cities like New York, it is pragmatic to reform enforcement of asylum laws and expedite those claims while strengthening border security. Perfect is never on the menu, especially when you’re approaching politics from an all-or-nothing perspective.

As Scott Jennings, a CNN analyst and longtime advisor to McConnell, told me via text: “Republican voters have been clamoring for something — anything — to stop what they believe is an invasion. I just don’t understand how you can bring a Democratic president to his knees on the topic and then walk away from the win? Take the win!”

This message was reinforced by South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, who advised his recalcitrant colleagues, “If you think you’re going to get a better deal next time, in ’25, if President Trump’s president, Democrats will be expecting a pathway to citizenship for that ... So to you Republican colleagues, this is a historic moment to reform the border.”

The sense of historic and moral urgency should only increase when you consider that the Biden administration has called for connecting border security with funding for Ukraine in its effort to repel Russia’s actual invasion. In the not-so-distant past, this — like support for Israel in its war

against Hamas after the horrific terror attacks of October 7 — would have received broad bipartisan support. It is a matter of America standing up for freedom, self-determination and civilization against unprovoked acts of war.

But the line between democracies and dictatorships seems blurry for some folks these days. The tough-guy posture of populists folds fast in the face of Russian President Vladimir Putin, as Trump reflexively praises the dictator even after the invasion. Largely as a result, support for Ukraine has become a divisive issue on the right — which means it’s conservatives who are reluctant to stand up to Russian aggression, in a complete reversal of Reagan-era principles.

On Wednesday afternoon, I spoke to a soldier who’d volunteered to help defend Ukraine, who was at the US Capitol making the case to lawmakers. Mark is a British-born US citizen from Texas who served three tours in Ukraine with an international brigade. “This is a classic good versus evil — there’s no ambiguity,” he told me. “This war will go in whatever direction the US and American politicians decide. If they’re too busy infighting between political parties and playing games, Ukrainians will lose and ultimately, we — in the West — will lose.” Karla Webber’s son Andrew was killed volunteering in Ukraine. He was a West Point educated Army officer who graduated from law school after serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. She shared with me a text Andrew sent explaining why he felt compelled to return to a combat zone, despite having a wife and two kids at home: “I view the invasion of Ukraine as the most dangerous threat to freedom and democracy abroad. I believe that for the United States to abandon the people of Ukraine at this stage, when they have experienced so much hardship and suffering in the name of freedom from fear, is nothing less than an abandonment of the cherished ideals I’ve spent a lifetime — at home and abroad — supporting and defending in war and peace.” Andrew, she told me, believed that “people in leadership positions need to do the right thing and usually that’s the hard thing.” That’s the message members of Congress need to hear — and act on — as the clock ticks on Capitol Hill.

Biden or Haley? For some Democrats, it’s about who can stop Trump

If you’re a Democrat, or someone who intends to vote that way in the fall, I have a hypothetical exercise for you.

Let’s say I could snap my fingers and make it so that former U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley would win the Republican nomination and end the Trump nightmare once and for all. (In this exercise, I’m like some meddling god from “The Odyssey.” I can even stop Trump from inciting another riot.)

But here’s the catch: In addition to banishing Trump, Haley would also be magically proclaimed the winner over President Biden in the general election, thus handing the White House back to the Republicans. Would you take that deal?

My assumption — with no data to back it up, but plenty of anecdotal evidence — is that some sizable plurality of Democrats would say: “in a heartbeat.” Which gets to a very strange dynamic in the Democratic Party right now.

Whether or not Haley emerges from New Hampshire as a credible threat to Trump (the group-think right now is that she won’t, and we all know how the group-think is always right), her candidacy has exposed a divergence of priorities when it comes to the president and his supporters. Biden wants to stake his claim to another term, while many Democrats would sacrifice him

tomorrow if it meant stopping Trump.

Biden, as I’ve written before, is making a pretty reckless bet with our democracy, and it’s too late now to fold. Instead of announcing a year ago that he would be stepping back and letting the party sort through a new generation of potential leaders, he and his team decided that an 81-year-old incumbent, visibly slowed and enduringly unpopular, was the party’s only viable option.

The main rationale behind this, as you’ve probably heard, is that Biden is the only Democrat who has managed to beat Trump (exactly two have tried, by the way), and thus he is probably the only Democrat out there who can beat Trump again.

Even if they actually buy this pretty shaky argument, however, Biden’s strategists surely know that the inverse is almost certainly true, too. That is: If Biden is the only Democrat who can beat Trump, then Trump is the only Republican Biden can actually beat.

Right now, 10 months out from the election, it’s hard to imagine Biden winning a campaign against a candidate who is decades younger, generally sane and not facing multiple indictments. White House aides might insist that they’re not rooting for

Matt Bai

Trump, and I’m sure it brought them no visceral joy to see his supporters celebrating after a resounding victory in Iowa. But they must also know that Biden won’t get another four years unless Trump is the foil.

For a lot of moderate voters, however, that’s one whopper of a risk to take. Someone less charitable might even call it selfish.

Trump doesn’t merely promise four years of bad government. As my colleague Robert Kagan has written, and as a startling number of Trump’s former aides have now warned, his return might well plunge the country into dictatorship. It’s not an outcome you want riding on a few contested votes in Pennsylvania.

So you can forgive some sizable segment of voters, including Democrats — I don’t know what the number is, but I’m betting it’s not less than a third — for being not so much pro-Biden as anyone-but-Trump. Better to spend four years fighting over abortion rights, an issue on which Republicans keep losing anyway, than to watch the Constitution itself put through a shredder.

We’ll know after New Hampshire whether Haley is a genuine threat to Trump or more like this year’s John Kasich. At least she’s consolidating the anti-Trump vote, which is a first in the party. (Florida Gov. Ron

Washington Post



UAE defies global FDI decline with a 28% increase in investments



DUBAI (Gulf News): The UAE has emerged as a leading destination for foreign direct investment (FDI), according to a new report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Despite a worldwide 18 per cent decrease in FDI inflows in 2023, the UAE recorded a significant 28 per cent increase in new foreign investment projects, positioning it second globally after the United States.

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister of the

UAE, and Ruler of Dubai, took to Twitter to share the significant achievement.

"In the latest UNCTAD report on global economies, FDI inflows dipped by 18 per cent in 2023. Yet, the UAE stood out, securing the second highest surge in foreign investment projects at 28 per cent, following the US.

This underscores our enduring appeal for investments, competitive edge, and talent attraction. As we step into the new year, we do so with optimism and confidence. A heartfelt

thank you to all who have invested in and continue to believe in the UAE economy. Looking ahead, we anticipate an even brighter future, Insha'Allah," Sheikh Mohammed said.

Adding to the UAE's economic success story, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and Chairman of The Executive Council of Dubai, highlighted Dubai's continued economic growth.

The city's GDP grew by 3.3 per cent in the first nine months of 2023, indicating steady progress towards achieving the objectives of the Dubai Economy Agenda D33. This ambitious agenda, launched by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, aims to rank Dubai among the top three urban economies globally within the next decade.

"Driven by the strategic vision of its leadership, Dubai has set an example for economic strength, resilience and innovation. With the dedicated efforts of our government teams and international business partners, we look forward to achieving many more milestones in 2024," Sheikh Hamdan tweeted.



LAHORE: A vendor is busy in displaying and selling Warm hats, scarves and gloves at his roadside setup as country is facing severe cold weather conditions. — APP photos

No benefit of lowering CAD without industrial growth: PIAF

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: As the country has surprisingly reported a lowering current account deficit (CAD), the Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) has warned the authorities that the balance of accounts should not be at the cost of industrial growth, which is constantly declining.

PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol, in a statement, observed the reduction in CAD was due to lower imports, as there were no significant increases in exports or inflows. However, the government still struggles to meet the decreasing CAD due to low foreign exchange reserves, as Pakistan's current account posted a deficit of \$74 million in previous month of 2023 while on a yearly basis, it was significantly lower, i.e. over 91%, than the \$849 million recorded in the same month last year. During the first eight months of FY23, Pakistan's current account deficit decreased by 68% to \$3.8 billion from \$12 bil-

lion in the same period last year.

As per the central bank data, the country's exports increased to \$3.418 billion in Oct 2023 against \$2.902 billion in Oct 2022, reflecting a jump of 18%. On the other hand, total imports lowered by 3% to \$5.17 billion in October 2023 against \$5.35 billion in the same period last year. According to the SBP, Pakistan posted a current account deficit of \$1.06 billion in July-October of FY24 as compared to a deficit of \$3.1 billion during the same month of last fiscal year (FY23), depicting a massive decline of over \$2 billion. The central bank in its last Monetary Policy Committee meeting noted a substantial improvement in the current account balance, as the deficit narrowed over 58% YoY to \$947 million in Jul-Sep FY24, while almost leveling out in Sept 2023.

The current account is a key figure for cash-strapped Pakistan that relies heavily on imports to run its economy. A widening deficit puts pressure on the exchange rate and drains official for-

eign exchange reserves that stood at a little over \$7.6 billion, according to the latest data.

PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol stated that the government's strict policies along with high cost of doing business owing to multiple increases in fuel cost and energy tariffs have almost halted the industrial production.

He complained that the significant drop in imports through administrative controls in the past to manage the low foreign exchange reserves had badly impacted economic activities, he pointed out. The move led to massive unemployment as companies were unable to import the raw material necessary to keep their manufacturing wheel running.

While expressing deep concern over the severe gas crisis, he stated that the emerging situation has terribly affected industrial activities as well as exports, which would have a devastating impact on the already ailing economy and the lives of millions of poor people due to massive lay-

offs.

How long an industrialist can bear the burden of paying salaries and wages to most of the idle employees if he is unable to produce at full capacity due to the unavailability of raw material amid persistent gas shortage. He said that the reserves have depleted to a four-year low of \$6.7 billion, raising the specter of default on international payments and foreign debt repayments. He said that the current account deficit declined and the primary reason was a 32% decline in imports compared to the same month of last year.

However, exports and remittances decreased by 13% and 14% respectively. He said that surprisingly the cumulative export earnings and workers' remittances (at \$4.35 billion) surpassed total imports (\$4.26 billion), which suggests the balance of payments has significantly improved in recent months. It is unfortunate that exports are falling due to the global recession while remittances are declining because the businesses have to live with.

Malik Iftkhar urges people to buy 'Made in Pakistan' products

LAHORE (APP): SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry's former president Iftikhar Ali Malik has urged the people to buy 'Made in Pakistan' products to promote the local market that will curtail the import bill and keep the foreign reserves in good shape.

Talking to a traders delegation led by Muslim Khan Buner here Sunday, he added that economically, prioritizing locally made products bolsters the country's industries, generates

employment opportunities and increases economic growth. "When people choose Pakistani goods over imported ones, it strengthens the domestic market contributing to a more robust and self-reliant economy. It also leads to a positive cycle of increased investment, innovation and competitiveness," he argued.

Iftikhar Ali Malik suggested enhanced collaboration between public and

private sector to make this initiative successful. He added that government must formulate policies which support local industries, while businessmen must ensure the quality and competitiveness of their products, that align with the ethos of 'Made in Pakistan, Buy Pakistani.' He said it symbolizes a collective effort to build a stronger, more self-reliant and culturally rich Pakistan. Embracing this slogan can contribute to a

thriving economy.

Iftikhar Ali Malik said "Be Pakistani" encourages a shared responsibility for the country's well-being, and also promotes a sense of unity and collective pride, transcending regional, linguistic and ethnic differences. He asserted, "Choosing products made within the borders reflects a commitment to the nation's progress, sending a powerful message about solidarity and patriotism to the world."

Strong manufacturing industry urged to boost country's position in global supply chains

LAHORE (APP):A strong manufacturing industry enhances a country's position in global supply chains, attracts foreign investment and fosters economic partnerships. Promotion of manufacturing industry is need of the hour as it is a key driver of economic development and has a significant impact on the national economy.

This industry also plays a key role in GDP growth, innovation and global competitiveness. Meher Kashif Younis, Coordinator to Minister of State and Federal Tax Ombudsman, expressed these views while addressing a conference on "Impact of Manufacturing Industry on Economy" held here on Sunday.

Meher was of the view that a thriving manufacturing sector creates a ripple effect that stimulates overall economic health.

He said the manufacturing industry significantly contributes to a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The production of goods domestically not only fulfills local demand but also opens avenues for export, ensuring the trade balance. This diversification of the economy helps mitigate risks associated with relying heavily on a single sector.

The Coordinator added that manufacturing industry acts as a catalyst for innovation and process of designing, producing, and refining products

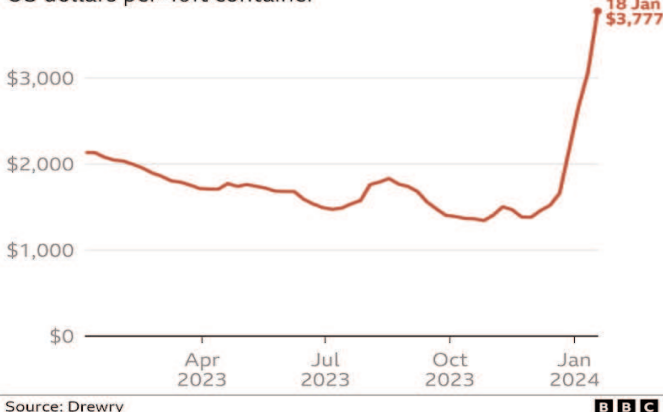
often leads to technological advancements. "It also fosters a culture of innovation, creating a positive feedback loop where advancements in manufacturing processes drive overall economic progress."

He said global competitiveness is another crucial aspect influenced by a robust manufacturing sector. He said countries with strong manufacturing capabilities compete effectively in the international market.

Meher Kashif Younis said striking a balance between economic growth and environmental responsibility is essential for the long-term viability of the manufacturing sector. He said it plays a pivotal role in shaping the economic landscape of a nation.

Red Sea 'scary' for ships' crews, says captain

Shipping costs have skyrocketed
Spot freight rates for major East West trade routes, US dollars per 40ft container



LONDON (BBC): "The situation is quite scary. It's dangerous actually," Captain Chirag tells the BBC from on board his ship.

Along with his crew, he's worried about the ongoing attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea area.

Since November, Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have repeatedly tried to board vessels or hit them with missiles.

Despite US and UK-led air strikes, they have vowed to continue attacking a vital route for global trade.

Captain Chirag, who didn't want his full name or that of his vessel disclosed because of security concerns, says that on the day those air strikes happened his company told him to have an evacuation plan ready to get to a safe location. In the end it wasn't needed.

Several ships have been hit by missiles in recent weeks, although no injuries have been reported.

The welfare organisation Mission to Seafarers says there are almost 1.9

million men and women working on ships around the world. Collectively they move 90% of the world's goods across the oceans.

Speaking from his vessel in the Gulf of Aden, Captain Chirag explains the stress the attacks are causing.

"The safety of the crew, their life, it comes first and after that safety of the vessel and environment," he says.

"You cannot be at mental peace always. You will be worried. So even my family - they are scared all the time and they were anxiously praying [for] the vessel [to] come out of this area safely."

Crews on other ships that he has spoken to are also quite scared, he says.

The wellbeing of seafarers is "paramount", according to Arsenio Dominguez, the secretary general of the UN's International Maritime Organization (IMO), whose responsibilities include keeping international shipping safe and secure.

Mr Dominguez told the BBC that whilst there has been a lot of focus on the global economic consequences the attacks are causing, the seafarers are "unsung heroes".

"It's the seafarers that are out there day in day out, making all these things possible," he said.

"We need to remember that they are actually victims, innocent victims, of this particular case and we have to remember that they are just as human as you and I."

The first ship to be attacked was a car carrier, the Galaxy Leader. The vessel and its crew are still being held by Houthi rebels in Yemen and they have turned the vessel into a tourist attraction.

Mr Dominguez says "there's a lot of diplomacy" going on behind the scenes to secure their release.

The wider crisis, he says, "is one of the biggest challenges that the IMO has faced" and the interruptions to global trade "will have a negative effect on you, on me and everyone on this planet".

Financial services group Allianz has forecast that "if the crisis persists for several months" global inflation could be pushed up by half a percentage point to 5.1%, just as it appeared that the worst of recent price rises were over.

This increase would largely be driven by the rise in shipping rates, which are due to the extra costs the industry is facing as a result of avoiding the Red Sea by taking the longer, safer route around the south of Africa.

That could in turn reduce global economic growth, Allianz forecasts. Extra costs include higher pay for crew, more fuel and the huge increase in "war risk" insurance that ships need to navigate the Red Sea region.

77% of UAE consumers likely to respond to fraudsters' messages

ABU DHABI (Khaleej Times): While 61 per cent of consumers in the UAE claim to be scam-savvy, 90 per cent of them are likely to miss fraud warnings, according to a study.

The Stay Secure study conducted by Visa also found that 77 per cent of consumers are likely to respond to positive messages from fraudsters.

As part of its effort to fight financial crimes, Visa signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Dubai Police to join the Operation Centre for Economic Crimes (OCEC). The agreement underscores both organisations' commitment to combatting fraud and financial crime while reinforcing their long-standing partnership.

The MoU was signed by Lieutenant-General Abdullah Khalifa Al Marri, Commander-in-Chief of Dubai Police, and Charles Lobo, Visa's regional risk officer for CEMEA.

The Dubai Police chief



affirmed the force's commitment to decisively confronting such crimes, noting that the UAE has exerted significant efforts to combat economic crimes. He explained that the MoU represents a step forward in the joint efforts, projects and initiatives bolster against fraud and cybercrimes.

Dr Saeeda Jaffar, Visa's senior vice-president and group country manager for GCC, commented: "In today's digital-first world, scams are evolving in

sophistication with criminals using new approaches to trick unsuspecting consumers. The OCEC is a decisive step forward in the fight against financial crimes. The agreement fulfills Visa's commitment to enhancing cooperation with our public and private sector partners to better protect consumers, businesses and the wider payments ecosystem."

Under the terms of the agreement, Visa will help establish the goals, structure, and processes of the

OCEC, organise knowledge transfer, conduct training and workshops on payment security and financial crime, participate in initial meetings, pilot and concept validation, and cooperate on live investigation cases.

Located at the Dubai Police HQ, the OCEC is an innovative initiative leveraging innovative methods and cutting-edge technology to protect residents, businesses and local communities against financial crimes.



In brief

Pakistan squad to return home

DUBAI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan's T20I squad is set to depart from Auckland, New Zealand on Monday and reach Pakistan on Tuesday after a brief layover in Dubai. The players will leave for their respective cities from Dubai, meanwhile, Pakistan's T20I captain Shaheen Afridi and wicketkeeper Azam Khan will stay in the city to partake in the ongoing ILT20, where they are both part of Desert Vipers. Iftikhar Ahmed and Sahibzada Farhan will reach Peshawar from Dubai, while Aamir Jamal and Usama Mir will depart for Lahore and Sialkot respectively. Haris Rauf, Zaman Khan and Muhammad Nawaz along with coaches Umar Gul and Yasir Arafat will leave for Islamabad, whereas, Saim Ayub and Haseebullah will touch down in Karachi. Babar Azam, Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Mohammad Rizwan and Abbas Afridi will depart separately from the squad as they will depart from Christchurch for Dhaka on Monday to participate in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). For the unversed, Pakistan lost the T20I series against New Zealand 4-1 after they registered a 42-run win in the fifth T20I in Christchurch today. Pakistan defended the lowest successful total in New Zealand during the fifth match of the series today as they bowled the host on a meagre 92 while defending 134. This was only the second instance of New Zealand getting out at a score under 100 in a T20I game at home.

Kylian Mbappe sends PSG

PARIS (Agencies): Kylian Mbappe grabbed two goals and a pair of assists as Paris Saint-Germain brushed past third-tier Orleans 4-1 on Saturday to reach the last 16 of the French Cup. Mbappe opened the scoring with a neat low finish before doubling his tally in the second half from the penalty spot following a handball in the area. The France captain, with 28 goals in 26 appearances for PSG this season, set up his team's third by clipping a cross for Goncalo Ramos to head home. Orleans got a consolation through captain Nicolas Saint-Ruf, with 17-year-old Senny Mayulu getting his first PSG goal after being played in by Mbappe. "We're used to it. These are normal performances for Kylian Mbappe," said PSG coach Luis Enrique. "It was match that could have become difficult, against a team that plays in a lower division but plays good football. It could have been tricky if we had eased up." Wissam Ben Yedder scored a hat-trick as Monaco defeated second-tier Rodez 3-1 earlier in the day, while last season's runners-up Nantes lost to lower-league opponents. Ben Yedder struck his first from the penalty spot and then netted twice more in the second half after Stone Mambo had equalised for Ligue 2 side Rodez. Malik Tchokounte's header earned second-division Laval a 1-0 win at Nantes, who won the competition in 2022 but were thrashed in the final by Toulouse last year. Nice held off Bordeaux to advance 3-2 with Morgan Sanson notching a brace for the team second in the top flight. Brest, flying high in third place in Ligue 1, avoided an upset away to fourth-tier Treilissac, coming from behind to win 2-1 with late goals from Kenny Lala and Martin Satriano.



CRISTCHURCH: The New Zealand team is all smiles after winning the five-match series 4-1.

Australian Open Djokovic, Sabalenka in ruthless form to reach quarter-finals

MELBOURNE (AFP): Novak Djokovic was at his dominant best in a straight-sets demolition job to reach the Australian Open quarter-finals on Sunday, with Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff in equally ruthless touch. The Serbian superstar recaptured his top form to surge into the last 16 after dropping sets in his opening two matches while ill, and he stepped up another level against Adrian Mannarino. The French 20th seed, who at 35 is just a year younger than Djokovic, has been enjoying a late career resurgence. But he was taught a lesson by the world number one, who won the first 13 games in powering through to the last eight of a Grand Slam for the 58th time, equalling Roger Federer's men's record. "I played great, from the first to the last point," said the defending champion, who is red-hot favourite to collect an 11th Melbourne title and a record 25th Grand Slam crown. "It's going in a positive direction, health-wise, tennis-wise so I'm really pleased with where I am at the moment." He will face 12th-seed Taylor Fritz next after the American beat last year's runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas 7-6 (7/3), 5-7, 6-3, 6-3. "The times I have played him I haven't brought my best level and you need to if you are going to complete with someone like Djokovic,"

said Fritz of the Serb. Djokovic almost always plays the night session on Rod Laver Arena, but was bumped to the afternoon this time. That's because home hope Alex de Minaur, seeded 10, is bidding to make the last eight for the first time, with Russian fifth seed Andrey Rublev standing in his way. The winner will face in-form fourth seed Jannik Sinner, who blasted past last year's semi-finalist Karen Khachanov 6-4, 7-5, 6-3 and is yet to drop a set. "An honour" Defending women's champion Sabalenka has also been in imperious form and was in complete charge against unseeded Amanda Anisimova on Margaret Court Arena, sweeping past the American 6-3, 6-2. Fourth seed Coco Gauff, attempting to become the first woman to back up a US Open title with a Grand Slam win in Australia since Naomi Osaka in 2020-2021, has been almost as impressive. She swatted aside Poland's unseeded Magdalena Frech 6-1, 6-2 in just 63 minutes on Rod Laver Arena, with the 85-year-tennis legend watching from the stands. "It was an honour to play in front of you, so thank you for coming to my match," said 19-year-old Gauff, who had never progressed beyond the fourth round at Melbourne Park in four previous attempts. "First Aussie

quarter-final. Super happy to be in this position and be here.... It's cool to get over that hump." She will now meet Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk, who beat Russian qualifier Maria Timofeeva 6-2, 6-1. With seven of the women's top 10 seeds knocked out in the first week, including world number one Iga Swiatek, both Gauff and Sabalenka have a glorious chance to win their second major title. They are on the same side of the draw and will not meet in the final, with a potential last-four clash looming instead. Sabalenka has conceded just 11 games in four matches and is favoured to win another title to go with her breakthrough Grand Slam crown last year. Should she go all the way, the 25-year-old will be the first woman to retain the title since compatriot Victoria Azarenka completed the feat in 2013. "I'm getting stronger because I enjoy the atmosphere and I really want to stay here as long as I can, till the very last day," she said. Her next opponent will be ninth seed Barbora Krejickova after she ended the dream run of Russian 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva, who beat sixth seed Ons Jabeur on her way to the fourth round. Andreeva pushed the Czech player to three sets, but ultimately could not find the killer blow.



American Mikaela Shiffrin (C) celebrates with second placed Croatia's Zrinka Ljutic (L) and third placed Sweden's Anna Swenn-Larsson.

Shiffrin wins Jasna slalom for 95th World Cup victory

JASNA, SLOVAKIA (AFP): American Mikaela Shiffrin kept her nerve to bag a record-extending 95th career World Cup win as she snuck to victory in the women's slalom in Jasna on Sunday. Shiffrin clocked 52.91 seconds and 55.30sec in the two legs down the icy Lukova slope in the Slovakian resort for a winning combined total of 1min 48.21sec. It was her fifth slalom victory of the season and the 58th of her World Cup career. She also became just the second alpine skier to reach 150 World Cup podiums, five short of Swedish legend Ingemar Stenmark's record of 155. The win also saw her surpass Stenmark with her record-setting 82nd slalom podium. Croatian teenager Zrinka Ljutic bagged her second career podium finish in finishing second, at 0.14sec, while Sweden's Anna Swenn Larsson rounded out the podium (+0.81). "Today it was definitely a big push to keep all my energy going all the way through the second run," said Shiffrin, whose lead

shrunk to 0.02sec on the last intermediate split before she skied the fastest final sector of anyone in the field to ensure victory. "I knew she (Ljutic) put down an amazing run and I had to push," Shiffrin added: "It was not easy on the second run. I could hear the crowd going crazy for a couple of athletes and I'm like, 'No, this race is very far away from over and I need to push.' "I didn't feel perfect but I felt good, so I'm super happy with it." The second leg, in which the top 30 finishers from the first leg race in reverse order, was an exciting affair. Heading into the final 10 racers, Germany's world slalom bronze medallist Lena Duerr duly took the lead, with nine racers to follow. Austrian Katharina Truppe and France's Marie Lamure both made mistakes to fall out of the reckoning. Camille Rast then took the race by the scruff of its neck, laying down an electric run to finish more than one second ahead of Duerr's time to set up a nail-biting climax. Her Swiss teammate

Michelle Gisin couldn't cope with that pace, but Swenn Larsson could, grabbing the lead before watching Swedish teammate Sara Hector, the comfortable winner of Saturday's giant slalom ahead of Shiffrin, make a mistake. "Managed the pressure" Switzerland's Melanie Meillard temporarily grabbed the final podium spot, leaving just Ljutic and Shiffrin to come down. Ljutic, 19, made no mistake with a clean descent, taking the lead to pile the pressure on Shiffrin. Setting out of the start but with a 0.52sec lead, the American saw that advantage quickly cut back but she kept her nerve to deliver the seventh fastest second leg. It was enough for the 28-year-old to edge the Croat and claim yet another victory on the circuit. "I'm really happy that I skied even better in the second run than the first," Ljutic said. "I'm proud of myself for managing this pressure in the second run. "I took a glimpse of what it's like to be so close to the win," she added.

McIlroy wins fourth Dubai Desert Classic title

DUBAI (AFP): Rory McIlroy won a record fourth Dubai Desert Classic title on Sunday by one shot after storming back from a 10-shot deficit going into the weekend at the Emirates Golf Club. McIlroy made two massive birdie putts towards the end of the front nine – a 31-footer on the par-4 eighth, followed by a 16-footer on the ninth – to move to 15-under par and lead by three shots. At the same time his playing partner and overnight leader American Cameron Young struggled and made the turn at two-over with two bogeys. On the back nine, McIlroy made a bogey on the par-5 13th and could not add another birdie, but that was enough for a winning total of 14-under par 274. Poland's Adrian Meronk once again showed his massive talent, and a last-hole birdie gave him a solo second place at 13-under par. World No 25 Young, searching for his first win on elite tours, finished third at 12-under par. With his fourth title at the Emirates Golf Club, the world No2 McIlroy surpassed South Africa's Ernie Els and became the most successful player in the 35-year history of the championship. Chile's LIV Golf star Joaquin Niemann made the most of his limited starts on the European tour, finishing tied fourth at 10-under alongside Spain's Pablo Larrazabal and Canada's Aaron Cockerill.



Pakistan avoid whitewash, beat NZ by 42 runs

CRISTCHURCH (Agencies): Exceptional bowling by Iftikhar Ahmed led Pakistan to a 42-run win over New Zealand in the last game of the five-match T20I series. Pakistan posted 134-8 in 20 overs while batting first in Hagley Oval, Christchurch. In return, New Zealand were bundled out for a paltry 92 as the visitors successfully defended a low total to avoid a series whitewash. Pakistan captain Shaheen Shah Afridi won the toss and elected to bat first. Tim Southee struck in the first over to remove debutant Haseebullah for a duck. The seasoned duo of Mohammad Rizwan and Babar Azam put up a 53-run second-wicket stand to bring some stability to the innings after the early setback. Ish Sodhi brought an end to the partnership in the 10th over as Babar (13, 24b, 1x4) was caught by Glenn Phillips at deep midwicket. Fakhar Zaman hit a quick-fire 33 from 16, including a boundary and four sixes, to get the scoreboard moving for his team. Southee got his second wicket of the day when Fakhar mistimed a shot to Lockie Ferguson at long-off. Mohammad Nawaz fell to Sodhi for just one run on the last ball of the 14th

over. On the subsequent ball, Rizwan was caught by Rachin Ravindra on Matt Henry's bowling after scoring a run-a-ball 38, including four boundaries. Iftikhar Ahmed and Shaheen were dismissed by Ferguson and Henry respectively to bring Pakistan to 114-7 in 18.2 overs. Sahibzada Farhan, the seventh batter in, contributed 19 from 14, including a six and four, before getting out to Ferguson in the last over of the innings. Abbas Afridi also chipped in with an unbeaten 14 from six, including two maximums. Southee, Ferguson, Sodhi and Henry all accounted for two scalps each as Pakistan were restricted to 134-8 in 20 overs. Defending a low total, Nawaz aided Pakistan by removing Ravindra for just a run in the second over of the innings. Finn Allen (22, 19b, 3x4s, 16) was the next batter to walk back to the pavilion, as he was caught by Haseebullah off Zaman Khan's bowling. Will Young hit 12 from 11, including two fours, before Iftikhar Ahmed caught him at deep square as Nawaz got his second wicket of the day. Shortly after, Mark Chapman was run out to bring New Zealand down to 54-4 in the 11th over.

Iftikhar trapped Tim Seifert (19, 30b) leg-before while captain Mitchell Santner fell to leg-spinner Usama Mir for a run-a-ball four. Trouble deepened for the home side as both Sodhi and Henry fell victim to Iftikhar, for a run each. Phillips' (26, 22b, 1x4, 1x6) fighting effort went in vain as skipper Shaheen cleaned up the last two wickets to bowl out New Zealand for 92 in 17.2 overs. Iftikhar was the pick of the bowlers for the visitors, returning with three wickets for 24 runs in his four overs, and was adjudged player of the match. Shaheen and Nawaz grabbed two wickets while Zaman and Usama removed a batter each. Scores in brief: Pakistan beat New Zealand by 42 runs Pakistan 134-8, 20 overs (Mohammad Rizwan 38, Fakhar Zaman 33, Sahibzada Farhan 19; Tim Southee 2-19, Ish Sodhi 2-22, Lockie Ferguson 2-24, Matt Henry 2-30) New Zealand 92 all out, 17.2 overs (Glenn Phillips 26, Finn Allen 22, Tim Seifert 19; Iftikhar Ahmed 3-24, Mohammad Nawaz 2-18, Shaheen Shah Afridi 2-20) Player of the match – Iftikhar Ahmed (Pakistan) Player of the series – Finn Allen (New Zealand).



MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic is in action during his round four singles match against Adrian Mannarino on day eight of the 2024 Australian Open.

Ahmed Baig New Title Holder for the Rashid D. Habib Memorial Golf 2024

F.P. Report KARACHI: The 13th Rashid D. Habib Memorial National Professional Golf Tournament 2024 concluded on Sunday at the Karachi Golf Club (KGC), where Ahmed Baig from Lahore emerged as the new title holder after a remarkable performance throughout the tournament. Ahmed Baig, who led the tournament from day one, demonstrated exceptional skill, firing a gross score of 275, finishing under 13 and securing the coveted trophy. Muhammad Zubair from KGC claimed the runner-up position in this category with an impressive six under par. In the senior professionals category, Nisar Hussain claimed the trophy, with Muhammad Siddique and Muhammad Tariq securing the runner-up positions. Muhammad Sahil and Umar Shahzad clinched the first and second positions, respectively, in the junior professional category. A highlight of the tournament was Zubair Hussain from PAF achieving a remarkable Hole-In-One on the second day. Using a 5 Iron on the Red Course's 7th Hole, a Par 3 at KGC with a distance of 210 Yards, Zubair's skillful shot earned him acclaim and a brand-new Toyota Corolla car. Another car for the hole-in-one winner in the Local KGC Category remained unclaimed. The 23rd edition of Rashid D. Habib Memorial Golf Tournament featured a two-day match for local KGC Professionals, Senior Professionals, and KGC Caddies, held on January 16th and 17th, 2024. In the Caddies category, Shahid Malik scored 154, 10 over par, to claim the trophy for 2024. M. Javed and Kamran Zahoor were the runner-ups with 157, 13 over par. Ashiq Naz led the KGC Senior Professional Category

with six over par, and M. Iqbal secured the second position. In the KGC Professionals category, M. Nawaz grabbed the trophy with Ali Sher as the runner-up. Top professionals, including Muhammad Shabbir, Ahmed Baig, Muhammad Munir, and Minhaj Maqsood Waraich, received an appearance fee of PKR 100,000 each. Additionally, PKR 150,000 was equally distributed among the top senior professionals, including Muhammad Tariq, Nisar Hussain, and Muhammad Akram. Chief Guest, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf NI(M), T Bt, and Bank Al Habib's Chairman, Abbas D Habib, distributed prizes amongst the winners. Admiral Naveed Ashraf commended the efforts of Bank Al Habib and KGC in hosting this popular golf event, expressing appreciation for the delightful weather in Karachi for golf.





In brief

6589 FIRs registered

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Po-lice registered over 6589 FIRs against underage drivers during a special campaign so far, said a police spokesman. He informed that police on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi, Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani were taking action by the law against underage drivers. The CPO had directed the City Traffic Police officers to take solid steps to control traffic rules violations and underage driving, he said. The parents were also advised to discourage driving by underage drivers adding that fatal road accidents occur due to speeding and reckless driving of the drivers particularly underage.

Five die, two injured in accidents

ISLAMABAD (APP): At least three people were killed and two others were wounded in a fog-related road accident in Kasur on late Friday night. According to private news channel, an accident occurred at the Kutchery Road in Pattoki where a truck collided with a trailer parked on the road side due to dense fog, killing three persons on the spot and injuring two others. Police and rescue teams reached the spot after getting information and shifted the dead and injured to a nearby hospital. In another incident, two people died when a passenger van crashed into a loader near Jehan Khan on Jhang Road in Bhakkar. According to Rescue officials, the fatal smash between the passenger van and loader resulted in on-the-spot deaths of two passengers, while seven other travelers sustained injuries. They said that the accident occurred due to dense fog engulfing the area. The injured were shifted to the DHQ Hospital for immediate medical treatment.

Salma Mumtaz remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): Veteran film actress Salma Mumtaz was remembered on her 12th death anniversary on Sunday. Born in 1926 in Jalandhar, she moved to Pakistan after partition and settled in Lahore. Salma Mumtaz made her film debut as an actress in the 1960 Urdu language film, Neelofar. She performed in more than three hundred predominantly Punjabi language films during her career. Salma also became known for portraying roles of mothers and motherly figures opposite well known actors, including Waheed Murad, Mohammad Ali, and Shahid. Some of her best known films included Dil Mera Dharkan Teri, Puttar Dai Piyar, Heer Ranjha and Sheran Di Jori. Salma Mumtaz also worked behind the camera as a film director and producer. He brother, Pervaiz Nasir, was a film producer. Her younger sister was the late actress, Shammi. Television actress Nida Mumtaz is her daughter. Salma Mumtaz died in Lahore on January 21, 2012, from complications of a long battle with diabetes at the age of 85.

IIU offers Sunday Arabic classes

ISLAMABAD (APP): The International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI), invited applications from students interested in enrolling in short Sunday courses to learn the Arabic language. According to the University official, a 24 week Arabic learning course, taking place only on Sundays, is set to begin on February 18, 2024. Admissions are open in three phases: certificate for individuals without prior knowledge of Arabic, diploma for those who complete the certificate course, and advanced diploma for those who finish the diploma course either at the Islamic university or elsewhere.

Non-state actors threat to regional, national security: Mushahid

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Defence, Mushahid Hussain Sayed has said that the Iran crisis resolution was the 'model of crisis management', whereas the non-state actors have become a threat to the regional and national security now linked to regional geopolitics.

He was speaking at the Pakistan-China Institute dialogue on "Outlook of Security Situation in South Asia in 2024" organized under Friends of Silk Road (FOSR) Initiative that took place simultaneously at two venues; Islamabad and Quetta Press Club, said a news release issued here Sunday.

In his opening speech, Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed highlighted the significance of the current scenario, dominated by turbulence and transformation. In this context, he analyzed China's Global Security Initiative (GSI) as a new framework for peaceful resolution of security issues, since GSI focuses on security as being indivisible, based on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. It seeks also to promote a security governance framework, including A.I., cyber security and related security threats based on accepted international norms of behavior enshrined in the UN Charter and international law.

He strongly condemned the ongoing Genocide and Crimes against humanity in Palestine by

Israel. Delving into security issues, he discussed three new realities; the shattering of the Middle East status quo after October 7, serious challenges posed by Non-State Actors, and the complex security situation between Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan which is now inextricably intertwined with regional geopolitics, necessitating dialogue and diplomacy.

Senator Mushahid Hussain termed the swift and smooth resolution of the Iran crisis as 'model of crisis management and crisis resolution' adding that the two crises, Pulwama 2019 with India and Panjgur 2024 with Iran, had helped Pakistan in establishing certain 'regional rules of behavior based on our red lines in our troubled neighbourhood'.

He said 'Iran is not India, but a brotherly Muslim neighbour with which Pakistan has no fundamental conflict of interest'. In this regard, Senator Mushahid Hussain especially praised the Pakistani leadership for their deft handling of the Iran crisis, maintaining a mature and measured, cool and calm approach, while avoiding jingoism.

In his speech, Senator Mohammad Abdul Qadir emphasized the urgent need to address the economic challenges facing Balochistan. Highlighting the province's high poverty rate, unemployment, and wealth disparity despite rich resources, Senator Qadir stressed the importance of responsible

resource management and equitable development. He underscored the transformative potential of Gwadar Port, citing Chinese investments in infrastructure that have already fueled economic growth, job creation, and increased trade. He cited tourism as a factor in development and growth.

Lt. General (r) Muhammad Afzal, former Chairman NDMA and DG FWO, delivered a PowerPoint presentation on "Western Route-CPEC opportunities for development and stability." The presentation explored the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and areas of interest for both nations. The analysis highlighted achievements in road infrastructure and power generation under CPEC but emphasized the need for prioritizing rail, addressing immediate concerns in water storage and IT infrastructure, and role of privates sector.

Muhammad Amir Rana, Director of Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), underscored the pivotal role Baluchistan plays in the economic development of the country, given its strategic location on classical routes connecting Asia, East Asia, and Central Asia.

In addressing the global North-South divide mirrored in Pakistan, Rana attributes it to inherited administrative systems from British colonial era. Rana emphasized the shared objective of redressing wrongs of the past

and upholding rights of the local communities in Balochistan, advocating for a focused resolution to address long standing demands. He regretted that 'no attempt at reform' had been made by Pakistan especially in neglected areas like Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan.

In his address, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, Director General of the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI), emphasized the paramount importance of Pakistan's unwavering relationship with China, 'since China is a trusted friend'. Shedding light on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and CPEC, which he underscored 'addressed key deficits in development and energy'. Ambassador Mahmood also highlighted that President Xi Jinping's GSI was 'an alternative paradigm promoting peace building in a world becoming more dangerous'.

Ambassador (r) Masood Khalid, former Ambassador to China, highlighted CPEC's transformative journey for Pakistan. Reflecting on the challenging security situation in 2013 that deterred all foreign investors, he underscored China's groundbreaking investment through the CPEC as it was then the only country willing to invest in China. Ambassador Khalid's remarks shed light on how China's commitment has defied skepticism, reshaping Pakistan's economic landscape and fostering a new era of col-

laboration.

Sultan M Hali, renowned Security Analyst and author of seven books on China, dispelled various conspiracy theories surrounding China, the Belt and Road Initiative and CPEC. He referred to a 1976 Survey of mineral and natural resources of Balochistan which could be useful in mining and exploration. Emphasizing that CPEC stands as a guarantor of Pakistan's prosperity, Hali highlighted the nation's capability to diligently undertake necessary preparations and leverage opportunities within the framework of CPEC.

In their speeches, journalists from the Quetta Press Club, highlighted the critical role of the media in shaping public perceptions of the security situation in Balochistan.

Shahzada Zulfikar, former President of Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), Nurul Haq Bugti and Daniyal Butt, urged the government to pay special attention to the common people of Balochistan, especially the youth, 'hold fair and free elections in Balochistan', and instead of 'slogans and promises, government should eliminate bad governance and corrupt practices' so that a conducive environment be created for successful development of CPEC.

In his closing remarks, Mustafa Hyder Sayed, Executive Director of the Pakistan-China Institute (PCI), expressed gratitude to all speak-

ers. Emphasizing the significance of 2024, especially for Pakistan and CPEC, Mustafa Sayed stressed the need for constructive discussions to improve CPEC outcomes. He announced the forthcoming release of a report by PCI, based on the Seminar, providing insight into the needs of Balochistan's stakeholders, especially the people of the province, and proposing a way forward in the context of security challenges which would serve as useful input for policy-makers. Over hundred participants consisting of media, civil society, parliament and academia participated in the dialogue. The dialogue also featured a candid and insightful Questions and Answers session.

The dialogue featured speeches by Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Chairman, Senate Defense Committee Defense and Pakistan-China Institute; Senator Mohammad Abdul Qadir; Lt. General (r) Muhammad Afzal, Former Chairman NDMA and DG FWO; Amir Rana, Director, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS); Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, Director General of Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI); Ambassador (r) Masood Khalid, Former Ambassador to China; Sultan M Hali, Security Analyst; Shahzada Zulfikar, former President, PFUJ, and Mustafa Hyder Sayed, Executive Director, Pakistan China Institute.

The dialogue was chaired by former Pakistan Ambassador to China, Moin ul Haque.



ISLAMABAD: A view of thick fog that engulfs the whole city during early morning.

Fog paralyzes Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Disrupts flights, trains daily life

ISLAMABAD (APP): Dense fog brought Rawalpindi and Islamabad to a standstill on Sunday, causing chaos in the twin cities. Early morning flights, trains, and road transportation faced disruptions as visibility dropped to a mere 50 meters in some areas.

The adverse weather conditions are expected to persist, affecting daily life and raising concerns about the well-being of residents. The twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad experienced a crippling fog on Sunday, severely impacting routine activities. Early morning flights, both domestic and international, faced delays and

disruptions, as did rail services and vehicular movement on city roads and motorways. The visibility dropped to a challenging 50 meters in various areas during the early morning hours, gradually improving later in the day.

The Islamabad International Airport was enveloped in fog by 11 pm on Saturday, causing further complications for air travel. The Meteorological Department official highlighted the current cold wave, predicting its grip on the Potohar region, northern areas, Central Punjab, and the entire country on Sunday. Despite a gradual improve-

ment expected by the end of the next week, the official warned of continued cold, dry, and foggy conditions across Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The Meteorological Department official stated that there are no immediate signs of rain in the coming days, with a possibility of rainfall in the twin cities only after January 28. The minimum temperature in Rawalpindi and Islamabad was recorded at a chilly 2 degrees Celsius. The recent cold wave, combined with the persistent fog, has exacerbated living conditions, with power load shedding and low gas pressure adding to the difficulties.

‘Rwp Ring Road project to be completed by July 31’

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Liaquat Ali Chhatta has said that Rawalpindi Ring Road project would be completed by July 31. He informed that the work had been started at the bridges of river Swan and Sil. Thalian Interchange is also being remodeled while the modeling of traffic network of Ring Road and Motorway is also in progress, he said.

He said that Parks and Horticulture Authority

(PHA) would give a plan for plantation on both sides of the Ring Road.

Over 18 percent physical work of the Ring Road project had been completed, Liaquat Ali Chhatta informed. He said that the Ring Road project would be completed by July 31 and the project would be inaugurated on August 14.

There will be no compromise on the quality of the construction work, he added. Five interchanges, 11 overpasses and bridges

on two rivers, six canals and a railway bridge would be constructed on the Ring Road besides 15 subways.

The design of the rest area on the Ring Road would also be prepared soon, the Commissioner said. Liaquat Ali Chhatta said that the completion of the ring road project would greatly help improve the traffic system of Rawalpindi city, adding that this project would provide employment opportunities to local residents.

EPA team inspects 383 vehicles, indicates diesel HTV major smoke contributor

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Environmental Monitoring Team of the Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA) and the Islamabad Traffic Police conducted a week-long Vehicular Emission Control and Monitoring Campaign from January 9 to 17 across the federal capital.

During the campaign, a total of 383 vehicles were inspected across various categories, including 80 buses, 47 vans, 30 cars, 120 minitrucks, 93 trucks, and 13 tractors. However, heavy transport vehicles (HTV) using diesel fuel were identified as the primary contributors to smoke emissions, with fines imposed on 27% of the vehicles, a news release said.

A rigorous test of soot carbon smoke emissions led to the imposition of 105 fines on vehicles exceeding the National Environmental Quality Standard (NEQS) emission levels by over 40% against the Ringelmann scale.

The initiative aimed to address the growing concern about air pollution in Islamabad caused by vehicular emissions. The basic objective of the survey was to ascertain the factual position of vehicular emissions during the dry spell of winter and their contribution to the formulation of smog in the current fog episode.

Air pollution, a significant environmental issue, refers to harmful substances in the air that can adversely affect human health, animals, and the overall ecosystem. One major contributor to air pollution is vehicular emissions, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur oxides, particulate matter, and soot carbon. Soot carbon, emitted from diesel vehicles, contributes to air pollution and poses serious health risks.

According to Article 11 of the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act, 1997, "no person shall discharge or is allowed to discharge or emit any effluent, waste, air pollutant, or noise in any amount, concentration, or level that is in excess of the National Environmental Quality Standard." The campaign was initiated under the direction of Farzana Altaf Shah, Director General, Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency, Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, and headed by Dr. Zaigham Abbas, Director (Lab/NEQS), Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency, Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination. The campaign strategically covered seven locations across Islamabad, each carefully chosen to monitor and control vehicular emissions effectively.

Averting climate effects for economic growth, food security

ISLAMABAD (APP): Falling among top five countries vulnerable to climate change, Pakistan faces a unique challenge of balancing its economic growth with the adverse effects of climate change and ensuring food security for its people.

Mostly relying on agriculture that is highly prone to climate change impacts like erratic rainfall, droughts and floods, the country's economy, GDP growth and climate finance have become crucial factors in overcoming environmental crisis and ensuring economic stability.

Understanding the recent happenings, the experts believe that growing environmental challenges were posing serious threat to our sustainable development and livelihood.

With its economic growth intricately linked to ability in adapting to and mitigating climatic effects, global organizations like World Bank, UNEP, UNDP and climate watchdogs have extensively studied and reported on Pakistan's climate vulnerability.

The World Bank, in its report titled "Pakistan Climate Change: A Risk Assessment," has cited Pakistan as highly susceptible country to extreme weather events like floods, droughts and heat waves.

In view of serious implications of these events on our agriculture, water resources, infrastructure and human health, the report emphasizes need for immediate action to build resilience and adapt to changing climate. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) also in its report titled "Climate Change in Pakistan: Impacts and Adaptation Strategies," has mentioned the adverse effects of climate change on our agriculture, coastal areas and biodiversity and urged for sustainable development practices, ecosystem conservation and adoption of climate-resilient strategies.

"We are at the crossroads of both climate change and economy due to our vulnerability to climate change, recurrent climate catastrophes, fossil fuel based economy and energy mix," remarked CEO, Climate Resilient International, Aftab Alam Khan. "Simply taking the energy sector, we have a mixture of fossil

fuel consumption and gradually permeating renewable energy into the existing system. Since, there is inconsistency in just energy transition at household or corporate level, it was hampering our way to a climate resilient future," Khan said. He stressed across the board capacity building for a holistic and effective outcome and said, "effort in silos would hardly bear any fruit as the task of managing climate crisis demands nation's response as a whole." The massive youth bulge, the third most crucial component has been given lesser representation in policy endeavors, he added. "They can become a conduit for desired outcomes in terms of achieving climate resilience at national level."

Khan mentioned that existing curriculum was inconsistent to pave way for a well planned and intricately designed response to the complex issue of climate change.

At the same time, he said, the climate change crossroads serve as a great opportunity for Pakistan to achieve many ambitious goals and the just energy transition to net zero emissions and a carbon free economy could provide basis for setting up climate resilient infrastructure.

Meanwhile, Climate Watchdogs like IPCC and GCRI have mentioned to disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable communities, particularly women, children and marginalized groups and stressed inclusive and gender-responsive climate policies for disaster risk reduction measures.

These assessments also underscore the urgent need for international cooperation, financial support and technology transfer to assist Pakistan in its climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.

Therefore, it is crucial for Pakistan to collaborate with international organizations, governments and stakeholders to address its climate vulnerabilities and build a sustainable and resilient future for its people. "The contemporary state of climate related urgencies needs a thorough attention to address this issue," stated Dr. Athar Hussain, a Climate Expert and Professor of Meteorology at COMSATS

University Islamabad, Pakistan. "The burden of climate urgencies has to be carried by ourselves in partnership with our global stakeholders by educating and raising awareness among our people to create a climate resilient nation," he added. Since, the country is at a critical juncture facing the challenges of economic growth and sustainable development it is taking significant steps to mitigate climatic impacts by prioritizing climate finance, integrating climate change considerations into policy frameworks and implementing adaptation measures.

Pakistan recognized the importance of climate financing in supporting sustainable development initiatives and actively engaged with international organizations like Green Climate Fund (GCF) to secure financial assistance for climate change adaptation and mitigation projects.

It revised its National Climate Change Policy to integrate climate change considerations into development planning and promote low-carbon growth.

This policy framework paved way for increased investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable infrastructure projects that helped reduce greenhouse gas emissions and created new employment opportunities.

The country has received funding from international sources, including GCF to support water management, afforestation, disaster risk reduction and climate-resilient agriculture projects. Pakistan also scaled up its Afforestation Project to plant over two billion trees to combat deforestation and carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, green employment, women entrepreneurship and sustainable land management. But, despite these measures the country is yet to go a long way to create a climate-resilient economy as it needs an ongoing process, continuous efforts, collaboration and innovation. Pakistan must continue to invest in renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure and climate-smart agriculture to ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for its citizens.



DONETSK: People remove debris at a food market following, what local Russian-installed authorities say, was a Ukrainian military strike in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict in Donetsk, Russian-controlled Ukraine.

President for blacklisting bank fraudsters, directs banks to refund Rs 2.74m

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi has asked the Banking Mohtasib to take up the matter of banking frauds with the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to get the essential standard operating procedures (SOPs) issued so that the proven fraudulent personnel's CNICs could be blacklisted, placed at the central negative list, besides ensuring that no banking/financial facility could be extended to them by the banking industry. The president issued these directions while rejecting two separate representations filed by the United Bank Ltd (UBL) and Bank Alfalah Ltd (BAL) directing the banks to pay Rs 1.9 million and Rs 0.744 million respectively to their customers who fell victim to online banking fraud at the hands of fraudsters, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release on Sunday. As per details, Qaiser Mehmood who was holding an account with UBL received a call from a number resembling the Bank's helpline and the caller advised him to acti-

vate his disabled digital banking app. He activated his app, after which Rs 2 million were transferred from his account through multiple transactions. Similarly, Brigadier (ret'd) Muhammad Arif Shaikh received a call from fraudsters asking him for his banking credentials to remove some technical flaws from his account. Later, an amount of Rs 994,000 were transferred from his account through 19 transactions. They had asked their respective banks to refund their money, but to no avail. Feeling aggrieved, they separately approached the Banking Ombudsman to get relief. The Ombudsman directed the banks to refund the lost amounts to the customers. The banks, then, separately filed representations against the Ombudsman's decisions with the President. The president held personal hearing of the cases, and having listened to the parties and going through the available record, decided the cases in the com-

plainants' favour. He observed that the banks were found non-compliant with the SBP's directives regarding the implementation of monitoring systems to detect fraudulent transactions. He said that multiple consecutive transactions were conducted but it did not raise alerts and allowed the money to pass through the system. He noted that the banks also failed to establish the legitimacy of transactions in terms of Section 41 of the Payment System and Electronic Fund Transfers Act, 2007. The president said that the banks failed to submit any proof of compliance with the directions of SBP despite being given ample opportunity and concluded that malpractice and maladministration stood established on part of the banks and they were liable to make good the financial loss of the complainants. President Alvi, therefore, rejected the representations of UBL and BAL and directed them to pay Rs 1,998,500 and Rs 744,000 to the complainants.

Maryam launches election campaign; PTI candidate backs her

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz Chief Organizer and candidate from constituency NA 119 Maryam Nawaz on Sunday formally started her election campaign in the constituency. Addressing a meeting of her campaign team in NA 119, she said that she would never leave the constituency. She said that progress of each person and family in the constituency was her responsibility and added that people of the constituency had always supported her. She said that she would meet people in the constituency on January 25. Maryam Nawaz said that she does not consider herself a leader but wanted to serve people. "PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif's message of progress would be conveyed to every house," she said and added that the PML-N would win the general elections with a thumping majority. She said that her party had made a development plan for the next five years. It is pertinent to mention here that PTI candidate Mehar Muhammad Waseem and his supporters would make a formal announcement of joining the PML-N on January 25. He along with his supporters met Maryam Nawaz Sharif and announced support to her in NA-119.

PML-N unveils 212 candidates for 266 NA seats

ISLAMABAD (APP): Amidst the intensifying election campaigns leading up to the February 8 polls, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has nominated 212 candidates to vie for 266 National Assembly seats. Senior PML-N leader Ishaq Dar shared the list, indicating that PML-N candidates are set to leave 51 NA seats uncontested. Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will participate in the polls for NA-15 (Mansehra) and NA-130 (Lahore) constituencies. PML-N Chief Organizer Maryam Nawaz is set to run for election in NA-119, while Hamza Shehbaz will contest NA-118 in Lahore. Meanwhile, party President Shehbaz Sharif will vie for seats in NA-123 and NA-132. PML-N has chosen not to field candidates in the following constituencies: NA-4 (Swat-III), NA-19 (Swabi-I), NA-20 (Swabi-II), NA-21 (Mardan-I), NA-22 (Mardan-III), NA-44 (Dera Ismail Khan-I), NA-45 (Dera Ismail Khan-II), NA-48 (Islamabad-III), NA-54 (Islamabad-III), NA-64 (Gujrat-III), NA-88 (Khushab-II), NA-92 (Bhakkar-II), NA-117 (Lahore-I), NA-128 (Lahore-XII), NA-143 (Sahiwal-III), NA-149 (Multan-II). Additionally, candidates from PML-N are not participating in the elections for NA-165, NA-185, NA-190 to NA-204, NA-206 to NA-210, NA-212, NA-214, NA-215, NA-217, NA-218, NA-221, NA-223, NA-224, NA-228, NA-239, NA-245, NA-264, and NA-266. The former ruling party, PML-N, has been in discussions for seat adjustments with different political parties, notably Jahangir Tareen's Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP). The absence of PML-N candidates in certain constituencies is attributed to their seat adjustment agreement with IPP.

Wholesale destruction' of Gaza unprecedented: UN chief

UNITED NATIONS (APP): UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said that the 'wholesale destruction' by Israeli bombardments of Gaza is unprecedented, as he pushed for recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to statehood by everyone. "The wholesale destruction of Gaza and the number of civilian casualties in such a short period are totally unprecedented during my mandate," he said in an address to the latest summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which concluded in Kampala, Uganda, on Saturday. The UN chief said, the refusal to accept the two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians and the denial of the right to statehood for the Palestinian people is unacceptable. "This would indefinitely prolong a conflict that has become a major threat to global peace and security; exacerbate polarization and embolden extremists everywhere," he said. "This summit falls at another moment of deep division, human rights, international law, the Geneva Conventions, and the UN Charter are being flouted with impunity. I will not relent in my call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and an immediate unconditional release of all hostages," he added. Leaders from the 120-member NAM met amid deep division globally, including rising geopolitical tensions, climate catastrophe, widespread poverty and raging conflict in Sudan, Ukraine and Gaza. Although humanitarian workers are doing their best to deliver aid,

they face constant bombardments and daily dangers, amid enormous constraints posed by damaged roads, communication blackouts and access denials. Meanwhile, disease and hunger are deepening, he said. He said people are dying not only from bombs and bullets, but from lack of food and clean water, hospitals without power and medicine and gruelling journeys to ever-smaller slivers of land to escape the fighting. "This must stop. I will not relent in my call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages," Guterres said. "And we must do all we can to prevent spillover of this conflict across the region — in the West Bank, across the Blue Line between Israel and Lebanon, and in Syria, Iraq and the Red Sea." The NAM was established in the midst of the Cold War, when leaders of newly independent countries sought a neutral stance and avoided joining either of the two major power blocs, headed by the United States and the defunct Soviet Union. Guterres said the "swirl of uncertainty and instability" in the world today offers new opportunities for countries and the organization to lead the way towards deeper cooperation and shared global affluence - the theme of the summit. As global affluence depends on peace which requires institutions that reflect today's world, he pointed to the need to reform bodies such as the UN Security Council which is "para-

lyzed by geopolitical divisions that block effective solutions." Recalling that the NAM has long highlighted the issue, he said the UN Summit of the Future in September offers a unique opportunity to consider reforms and promote ideas to rebuild trust and strengthen multilateral collaboration. Meanwhile, countries are moving backwards in achieving sustainable development, another requirement for peace. People are going hungry and communities lack access to basics such as healthcare, clean water, proper sanitation and education. Guterres repeated his call for reforming the "outdated, unjust and unfair global financial system" so that all countries benefit, and urged governments to invest in education, health, nutrition and social protection systems. Last September, world leaders meeting at the UN demonstrated support for both a \$500 billion annual stimulus package to boost sustainable development and his call to reform the global financial system. At the COP28 conference two months later, countries operationalized the long-awaited Loss and Damage Fund to support nations that are most vulnerable to climate change. However, contributions so far have been limited, and developed countries have not fulfilled many of their longstanding commitments on climate finance, he said. The Secretary-General urged the NAM to hold leaders to keep these promises this year.

India's Ram temple symbolizes Hindu supremacy over Muslims: US media

NEW YORK (APP): The controversial Monday's inauguration of Ram Temple atop the ruins of Babri mosque marks the culmination of a promise made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and allies, and serves as the "biggest political testament yet to Hindu supremacy over Indian Muslims," according to TIME magazine. Hindu militants stormed the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992, climbing atop the building's dome as they demolished it to clear the site for a Hindu temple. The temple site was bitterly contested for decades with both Muslims and Hindus laying claim to it and was a flashpoint for nationwide riots that killed more than 2,000 people, mostly Muslims. A subsequent report commissioned by the Indian government found dozens of people—many of whom are now BJP political leaders—responsible for orchestrating and encouraging the attacks. The BJP benefited from stirring up Hindu nationalism around the Babri Masjid, and in 2014 swept into power, displacing the more pluralistic Indian Congress Party, Time correspondent Audrey Truschke wrote in a dispatch from New Delhi. The BJP then began to remake secular India into a Hindu supremacist state, the dispatch said. Following a second BJP national victory in 2019, India's Supreme Court, whose autonomy has been undercut by the Modi government—issued its final judgment that decided

the fate of the Babri Masjid site, it said. The court called the mosque's destruction "an egregious violation of the rule of law," but nonetheless ruled that a Hindu temple could be built on the mosque's rubble. Modi laid the foundation stone at a groundbreaking ceremony in August 2020, and will finish what the BJP and other Hindu supremacists began more than 30 years ago by consecrating the Ram temple surrounded by his Hindu nationalist peers. Still, the event will be marked by conspicuous absences, TIME said. Leaders of the opposition Congress party will skip the festivities, in protest over what they rightly see as a consecration that is more a political ploy than a religious ceremony. Even some Hindu leaders agree, arguing that the Rm temple cannot be consecrated since it remains incomplete, and therefore violates Hindu scriptures. They also object to the participation of divisive political figures like Modi. Yet the Indian Prime Minister is pressing ahead with inaugurating an incomplete temple, even at the price of alienating Hindu religious leaders, because of India's May 2024 general election in which the BJP hopes to secure another national victory, TIME said. "If history is any guide, this tactic of harnessing majoritarian sentiment for political gain may well succeed". The Ram temple's inauguration portends dark times ahead not just for India's Muslims but also some Hindus who remain committed to

pluralism and tolerance, the dispatch said. Hindu supremacists have long sought to reduce the broad-based Hindu religious tradition to their hateful political ideology, and the Ram temple is a "sizeable step toward that goal". Muslims are second-class citizens in Modi's India, regularly subjected to human rights violations, the dispatch highlighted. Freedom House now classifies India, once heralded as the world's largest democracy, only "partly free" on account of the "rise in persecution affecting the Muslim population." And there are signs that the Ayodhya temple may only mark a new era of the Hindu supremacist war on mosques, the dispatch said. There are numerous cases in Indian courts seeking to demolish more of them in favour of building Hindu temples in Varanasi, Mathura, and other cities. "Such demolitions may unleash more violence on India's beleaguered Muslim minority, and further cement the feeling that the country is for Hindus, and Hindus alone," TIME said. Meanwhile, CNN reported that Ayodhya's 500,000 Muslims are in a state of "grief and anxiety" as the inauguration nears. The leading TV network quoted a 65-year-old Maulana Badshah Khan as saying that he fears a repeat of the religious violence that erupted more than 30 years ago, when Hindu nationalists destroyed the 16th century mosque. Badshah Khan said he believes the event is a clear sign of how Muslims are becoming marginalized under the leadership of Modi's BJP.

Attack on PTI, PPP election offices leaves several injured in Karachi

KARACHI (INP): Tensions soared in Karachi as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) accused the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) of orchestrating attacks on their respective offices. The clashes resulted in injuries to several political workers from both parties. According to media reports, the incident unfolded at the electoral office of PTI candidate Arsalan Khalid in Constituency NA-248 of the National Assembly. Over ten individuals, including Arsalan Khalid, were reportedly injured in the attack. PTI's spokesperson laid blame on MQM workers, alleging that the assault was orchestrated by them. The wounded party workers were swiftly transported to Abbasi Shaheed

Hospital and Jinnah Hospital for medical attention. In response, PTI supporters staged a protest at Liaquat Ali Khan Chowk against the incident. Simultaneously, in the vicinity of Hyderabad Town, within the limits of PS-250 and PS-129, an attack was reported on the Pakistan Peoples Party's office. Four party workers sustained injuries in this assault. Khawaja Sahil Mansoor claimed that MQM workers were behind the attack. Four PPP workers, injured in the incident, have lodged complaints against the assailants. Just days earlier, during a rally following an organizational meeting in Karachi, unknown assailants opened fire, injuring two individuals. The incident occurred after Pakistan Peoples Party's candidate Agha

Rafiqullah concluded the gathering. Agha Rafiqullah remained unharmed during the incident, and the police are currently investigating the case. Meanwhile, in the provincial capital of Lahore, an explosive attack targeted the electoral office of a Pakistan Peoples Party candidate in Constituency PP-162. Police have initiated an inquiry into the petrol bomb attack. The complainant, Mirza Abbas Khokhar's son, alleged that unknown individuals threw petrol-filled bottles, setting fire to the office. The assailants reportedly stole valuable items, including 30 chairs and a generator worth around 1.5 million rupees. These incidents highlight the escalating political tensions and security concerns as the election season intensifies across the country.

Nearly 90 dead after fierce winter storms strike US

OREGON (BBC): Nearly 90 weather-related deaths have been recorded across the US after the country was pummeled by ferocious winter storms for the past week. The deaths include at least 25 in Tennessee and 16 in Oregon, which remains under a state of emergency following severe ice storms. Tens of thousands of people also remain without power across wide swathes of the country. Icy conditions are expected to continue until the middle of the week. A total of 89 weather-related fatalities have been recorded across the country over the past week, according to a tally maintained by CBS, the BBC's

US partner. While the death toll has been greatest in Tennessee and Oregon, fatalities have also been reported in Illinois, Pennsylvania, Mississippi, Washington, Kentucky, Wisconsin, New York, New Jersey and elsewhere. In one incident in Portland, Oregon last Wednesday, three people were electrocuted to death when powerful winds caused a power line to fall and strike the vehicle in which they were traveling. A baby who was in the vehicle survived. Other deaths remain under investigation, including that of a person killed in a five-car crash in Kentucky and four in Illinois. Five people - most of them presumed to be

homeless - died over the course of just four days in Seattle, according to the Associated Press. In Mississippi, the weather has prompted officials to warn drivers to "drive only if necessary" and "be aware of black ice" on the state's roads. Colleges and universities in the state have delayed students return from winter break due to the conditions. Mississippi officials are also investigating whether online rumours about potential storm-related water shortages prompted residents to store water in their bathtubs. The move caused a temporary drop in water pressure and dry faucets for thousands of residents in Jackson, the state's capital, which has historic water issues. While electricity has largely been restored in areas of the US that lost it due to the winter weather, tens of thousands of people remain without power across the country. As of Sunday afternoon, the total included nearly 10,000 people in Oregon, 8,000 in North Carolina, 7,000 in California and 4,300 in Kentucky. Icy conditions and chilling winds are expected to continue at least through the beginning of the week. After that, a thaw is expected, with some meteorologists warning that warm air and rain could cause flooding in parts of the Midwest and north-eastern US.

Pakistan, China agree to enhance cooperation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan and China on Sunday agreed to enhance focus on high-quality advancements in industry, agriculture, information technology, science and technology to ensure tangible socio-economic benefits for the people through the evolution of CPEC. The agreement was reached during the 4th meeting of CPEC Joint Working Group on International Cooperation and Coordination (JWG-ICC) held here. The meeting, which was co-chaired by Foreign Secretary Muhammad Syrus Sajjad Qazi and Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, Sun Weidong, exemplified the commitment of both countries

to foster international cooperation and coordination. The two sides reviewed with satisfaction the progress made since the third meeting of the Joint Working Group held virtually on 21 July 2022. The meeting underscored CPEC's pioneering role in strengthening international and regional connectivity while appreciating the open and inclusive nature of this flagship project. Noting that Pakistan and China were All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partners and Iron Brothers, the Foreign Secretary reaffirmed the importance of CPEC in promoting win-win cooperation and sustainable development. He also emphasized on welcoming interested third parties to

explore mutually beneficial avenues of cooperation. The two sides rejected the disinformation campaigns and distorted reporting on CPEC and stressed the need to counter fallacious narratives and misinformation. Recalling the deliberations of the Second and the Third Pakistan-China Think Tanks Forum in September 2022 and July 2023, the two sides expressed joint support for media and think tanks cooperation. They also agreed on sharing of best practices and generating an intellectual knowledge pool of CPEC and BRI development through enhanced international communication and cooperation.