

Seven terrorists killed
F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: A fire exchange took place during an intelligence based operation in Sambaza Sector, Zhob District, near the Pakistan Afghan border. Own troops effectively surrounded and engaged the fleeing terrorists. Resultantly, seven terrorists were sent to hell who remained actively involved in terrorists activities against security forces as well as killing of innocent civilians.



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RAWALPINDI: Mr Sun Weidong, Vice Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China called on General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff, at GHQ.

Nawaz: Not easy to bring Pakistan back on track

KP can't afford experiences of political jugglers anymore, says Maryam

F.P. Report

MANSHERA: Pakistan Muslim League (N) Quaid and former Prime Minister, Muhammad Nawaz Sharif here Monday said that country would be brought back on track of development after winning the election 2024 and the 10 years long sense of deprivation of people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would be removed.

Addressing a big public gathering here in connection of 2024 election, Nawaz Sharif said that time has come to restart the development works from where it was left uncompleted in 2017. He criticized the poor performance of the party that came into power with a slogan of change in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and questioned that what it had done for people of the province during 10 years long rule.

The three times Prime Minister said bring the country's back on track of development would be back challenge and only PML-N has the ability to put it on road to progress and development. He said that time has come to work for development of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Nawaz Sharif said that a network of motorways including Hazara Motorway were established by his Government that promoted tourism and opened the entire Hazara division for investment. Besides construction of motorways, he said load shedding was eliminated and affordable gas and electricity provided to domestic and industrial consumers.

He said that employment opportunities were created and jobs provided to a large number of people during tenure of PML-N. "In Pakistan, there was no price hike during his tenure as Prime Minister and all essential services and commodities including bread, vegetables and edible items were available to people at reasonable rate," he said. "Had I was not ousted in 2017 there would have been an international standard airport at Mansehra today besides train service from Mansehra to Islamabad and Muzafarabad Azad Kashmir," he said. He vowed to construct airport and medical College at Mansehra. The public meeting was also addressed by PML-N Chief Organizer, Maryam Nawaz and KP President Amir Muqam besides others.



Chief Organizer and Senior Vice President, Pakistan Muslim League (N), Maryam Nawaz also addressed a mammoth electoral public meeting here also addressed and said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was an important province of Pakistan and it's people cannot afford experiences of political jugglers any more.

She urged people of KP not to give the future of their children into wrong hands and elect honest and committed leaders with the ability to address their problems swiftly without like and dislike besides putting the country back on track of rapid progress and development.

He said that a political party that came into power with a hallow slogan of change in and trumpeted Billion Trees Afforestation Project during its 10 years rule in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has failed to deliver and questioned that where are these trees?. Maryam Nawaz said that Hazara was a stronghold of PML-N and her party would get maximum number of seats from its districts including Mansehra. She said pace of economic development would be accelerated and relief to be provided to people and under privileged. She said that people of Mansehra had announced victory of Nawaz Sharif today. She said the 10 years long deprivation of people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would be addressed after PML-N come into power and development process would be restarted in the province where it was left in 2017. PML-N supporters raised slogans in favour of PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz Sharif. Engr Amir Muqam, PML-N KP President also addressed.

Vice FM of China calls on COAS

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Mr Sun Weidong, Vice Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China called on General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS), at GHQ today.

During the meeting matters of mutual interest and measures to further enhance bilateral defence cooperation were discussed.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister said that Pakistan and China are all weather strategic partners. He acknowledged Pakistan's efforts towards regional peace and stability and also conveyed China's satisfaction on security arrangements for CPEC projects.

COAS thanked the visiting dignitary for his warm remarks and said that relations between Pakistan and China are founded on a common understanding of regional peace, stability and prosperity for the people of both countries.

Meanwhile, Mr Sun Weidong, Vice Foreign Minister of China called on General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee at Joint Staff Headquarters, Rawalpindi. Matters related to bilateral security, defence cooperation, regional and international security environment were discussed during the meeting.

Peshawar's mobile market catches fire

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A horrific fire has been raging for the past seven hours, originating in the mobile market located at Sadar area of Peshawar as firefighting efforts are in full swing, with the involvement of 26 fire brigade vehicles and 130 dedicated firefighters.

The challenging operation has seen success, as 60 percent of the fire, categorized as third level, has been extinguished. The fire, which began in the basement shops of Time Center due to a short circuit, swiftly spread throughout the plaza, fueled by exploding mobile batteries.

The Time Center houses 200 counters dedicated to mobile shops, batteries, and repair services. The intensity of the fire prompted the deployment of four bowzers and snorkelers to aid in the firefighting operation. Emergency services from Mardan, Nowshera, Charsadda, and Khyber, along with Tarmar Rescue, have joined forces to combat the flames. Despite the challenging circumstances, the rescuers managed to save four individuals who were initially trapped inside the building.

The swift response to the emergency included the evacuation of adjacent houses to prevent further casualties. Thankfully, no loss of life has been reported thus far, as confirmed by Bilal Ahmad Faizi, a spokesperson for the rescue efforts. The safety measures extend to the presence of the army and other security agencies at the scene. The fire's origin in a densely populated mobile market has posed unique challenges, but the coordinated efforts of the firefighting teams and emergency services have made substantial progress in containing the blaze.

could comment on them. Condemning the malicious campaign against the superior judiciary and judges on social media, he said that character assassination of someone was a serious violation of the law and the Constitution. He underlined the need to discourage the culture of deceit and intolerance from society.

He said a joint investigation team had been formed to probe the anti-judiciary campaign and the relevant institutions including FIA and PTA were investigating the ongoing propaganda. He said that Article 19 of the Constitution defines freedom of expression with certain restrictions. The minister said that the caretaker government was set up under a constitutional process and it was written in the preamble of the Constitution that the country will be run by representatives of the people. He said that elections will be held across the country on February 8 and there should be no doubt about it.

The minister said that strict measures will be taken against those involved in illegal activities. Lashing out at those churning out lies and malicious propaganda to mislead the nation for their vested interests, he urged the general public to beware of misleading and fake news. He advised people to verify every bit of information before sharing it on social media platforms.

Rumours about elections have died, says Solangi

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Monday said that all assumptions and rumours regarding the general elections had died.

Delivering his speech at a function organized by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) here, he said that elections will be held on Thursday, February 8, 2024 and the people of Pakistan will exercise their right to vote. The minister said it was the responsibility of the caretaker government to provide support to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and it will fulfill its responsibility.

Being a parliamentary democracy, he said, the elected representatives had the rightful mandate to run the system in line with the country's Constitution. Urging the national media for responsible reporting on elections, Murtaza Solangi said, "The responsibility of the media had increased a lot with regard to general elections".

Important issues including the economy, foreign policy, education, and health were used to be part of the manifestoes of political parties, Murtaza Solangi maintained. He said that basic issues should be discussed and awareness among the

people on national issues should be increased.

"Today we are facing problems like population growth," Murtaza Solangi said that it should be controlled. He said it was the obligation of the political parties to fulfill promises made to the electorate. He opined that increasing awareness about national issues was the need of the hour. The minister said that under the 18th Amendment, provinces had been empowered. He also stressed for promotion of democratic attitudes within political parties.

He expressed the hope the political parties coming to power after the February elections would take steps for the resolution of real problems in the country.

Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi also addressing a press conference flanked by Director General Pakistan Telecommunication Authority Ahmed Shamim Pirzada and Director General Operations Federal Investigation Agency Waqar uddin. He said that elements involved in the malicious campaign against the superior judiciary would be taken to task but no group or person would be victimised.

The minister said that judicial decisions were in the public domain and as per the Constitution and the masses

The Frontier Post

Man gunned down son
F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A wicked person gunned down his son after arguments over political issue in Badhber area of Peshawar, police said on Monday. According to details, the accused exchanged hot words with his son over political issues. The verbal clash turned violent after which culprit Noor ur Rehman shot dead his son and escaped the scene of crime.

PM says Pakistan fully committed to success of CPEC

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar Monday said that Pakistan was fully committed to the success of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and stressed the need for both sides to continue to work closely to ensure timely completion of the ongoing projects.

He was talking to Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong who paid a courtesy call on him. The prime minister welcomed the Chinese vice foreign minister as well as members of his delegation and said Pakistan deeply valued its all-weather, strategic, cooperative partnership with China.

Recalling his visit to Beijing for the 3rd Belt and Road Forum in October 2023, he said that he was deeply touched by the warm sentiments of President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang towards Pakistan. He also conveyed his best wishes for the Chinese leadership.

In addition to Pakistan-China rela-

tions, the regional situation also came under discussion during the meeting. The Chinese vice foreign minister thanked the prime minister for the courtesy call and briefed him regarding various meetings held during the visit. He conveyed special greetings of the Chinese leadership to the prime minister. He said China and Pakistan were "iron-brothers". He assured that China would always remain a reliable partner in Pakistan's socio-economic progress.

Meanwhile, the Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar stressed upon constitution of a federal commission to review Islamabad Master Plan and said that review of the plan was among the top priorities of the Federal Government.

The prime minister also termed the bicycle lanes project 'an environmental friendly' and asked for its completion in the earlier. The caretaker prime minister chaired an important meeting on different matters of the Capital Development Authority (CDA). The meeting was attended by

Secretary Interior Aftab Akbar Durrani, CDA Chairman Capt (retd) Anwaar-ul-Haq and other senior officials, the PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

He was given a briefing over the bicycle lanes project in Islamabad and the Federal Capital's master plan. Under the bicycle lanes project, a total of 374km lanes and 150 parking stations would be constructed, it was told. The prime minister also emphasized upon the need of vertical construction in the new residential projects in Islamabad, and directed the relevant authorities to formulate an effective strategy to woo investors for the business purposes with construction of high-rise buildings.

He also directed the authorities to resolve the water issue of the capital city immediately by ensuring its smooth supply, besides construction of specific buildings (parking plazas) to overcome the parking problem. He also asked for an effective mechanism to reduce traffic pressure in the city.

Iranian FM due in Pakistan on 29th: FO

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office of Pakistan said on Monday that the Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian was due to arrive in Pakistan on January 29. A joint statement of the countries stated that diplomatic relations of Pakistan and Islamic Republic of Iran have been restored.

The ambassadors of two countries could return to their offices by January 26, it added. Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian was visiting Pakistan on Jan 29, on

invitation of his Pakistani counterpart Jalil Abbas Jilani. Pakistan and Iran have agreed to restore diplomatic ties and sending back to ambassadors to their postings after a stand-off.

During a telephonic conversation, Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian discussed return of the ambassadors back to their offices in respective capitals. The two foreign ministers stressed over brotherly ties and bilateral cooperation, said the foreign office in Islamabad.

Pakistan's caretaker foreign minister urged that the respect of national solidarity and sovereignty should be the basis of cooperation. The sides also agreed to de-escalate tensions.

The foreign ministers talked after both countries exchanged drone and missile strikes in each other's territory. The tit-for-tat strikes by the two countries were the highest-profile cross-border intrusions in recent years and have raised alarm about wider instability in the region since the war between Israel and Hamas erupted on October 7, 2023.

Educational institutions closed in Islamabad

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Following a threat alert regarding a potential terror attack, several educational institutes in Islamabad were closed to avoid any catastrophe on Monday sources said.

Sources claimed that the banned organization planned to take out multiple 'terror attacks' on educational institutes, particularly schools, and universities, in Islamabad. Sources in the threat alert suggested that the 'terror attacks' were carried out by female suicide bombers affiliated with the banned organizations between January 22-24.

The police officials in a statement claimed that the security arrangements in the capital are firmly in place, however, caution is advised for election rallies and public gatherings in the federal capital.

Earlier in 2021, the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) said that a security high alert was issued across the country given a possible terror threat and intelligence-based operations (IBOs) are being conducted in Punjab.

The CTD Punjab said in a statement that a security high alert was issued given a possible terror threat. The spokesperson added that IBOs are being conducted across Punjab as 23 operations were conducted in different districts during the last seven days.

Man's body found hanging from bridge

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In a shocking incident, a man's body was found hanging from a bridge in Islamabad, police said on Monday. The body kept on hanging pedestrian bridge in sector I-9 for several hours as it was not visible due to dense fog in Islamabad.

As per details, the deceased man whose body was retrieved from the bridge has been identified as Umar, a resident of Mardan's Katlang area. The police in its initial report said that the youth had committed suicide, while the investigation has been launched. Police officials stated that the family of the deceased man was not found even after several hours had passed.

Whereas, the hospital administration said that the incident seemed to be a suicide as per the initial investigation. Last month, in a shocking incident, a man committed suicide after shooting two in Shah Latif Town Karachi.

EU presses Israel on two-state solution

BRUSSELS: The EU's foreign policy chief on Monday insisted on an eventual two-state solution as he told Israel it couldn't build peace "only by military means" ahead of talks with Israeli and Palestinian top diplomats. Josep Borrell repeated the condemnation from the United Nations of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "unacceptable" rejection of calls for a Palestinian state after the war in Gaza.

"What we want to do is to build a two-state solution. So let's talk about it," Borrell said. He told Israel that "peace and stability cannot be built only by military means." "Which are the other solutions they have in mind? To make all the Palestinians leave? To kill off them?" Borrell said.

The surprise Hamas attack on October 7 on Israel and the subsequent devastating military response from Israel has plunged the Middle East into fresh turmoil and sparked fears of a broader conflict. But while the bloodshed appears to have

driven a long-term solution further out of sight, EU officials insist now is the time to talk about finally resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The 27 EU ministers will first meet with Israel's foreign minister Israel Katz, before sitting down separately with the Palestinian Authority's top diplomat Riyad Al-Maliki.

Katz and Al-Maliki are not expected to meet each other. The foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia will also hold talks with the European ministers.

The top EU diplomat said he had presented ministers from the bloc with a "comprehensive approach" toward trying to find a lasting peace including an international conference. Borrell risked incurring Israel's wrath by accusing it on Friday of having "created" and "financed" Hamas to undermine the prospect for a possible Palestinian state.

Borrell insisted the only way to get an enduring peace in the region was for a two-state solution to "be imposed from outside." The EU has struggled for a united stance on the conflict in Gaza as staunch backers of Israel such as Germany have rejected demands for an immediate ceasefire made by the likes of Spain and Ireland. "The reports we are receiving, even as late as last evening, are dire in respect to what's happening within Gaza," said Ireland's foreign minister Micheal Martin.

EU officials have sketched out broad conditions for "the day after" the current war ends in Gaza, calling for no long-term Israeli occupation, an end to Hamas rule and a role for the Palestinian Authority in running the territory. Hamas, the Islamist movement that controls the Gaza Strip, launched a surprise attack on Israel on October 7, resulting in the death of about 1,140 people in Israel, most of them civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures. Militants also seized about 250 hostages during the attacks, around 132 of whom Israel says remain in Gaza. — Arab News

Nawaz Sharif to take Pakistan out of crises: Salim Hoti adv claims

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Secretary Information Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) Lawyers Forum, Salim Shah Hoti advocate said that if became victorious in election on 8 February, the party under dynamic leadership of Nawaz Sharif will steer out country from crisis.

In a statement, he said that PML-N has always sought votes from the people on the basis of performance, while their political opponents misled the people with hollow slogans and abusive language.

He said that the narrative of Muslim League-N is development and national pride. He said that

Nawaz Sharif made Pakistan as a nuclear power on May 28 to strengthen Pakistan's defense while others attacked the army on May 9 which show the difference between two parties.

Salim Shah said that Nawaz Sharif launched several projects including CPEC, Motorways etc for the prosperity of the country. He said that PMLN saved the state by sacrificing its politics under the leadership of Shehbaz Sharif in the coalition government for 16 months.

He said that PMLN saved the country from bankruptcy without caring about the political consequences. He said that PTI and PPP have no welfare programs except

allegations. He said that People's Party Chairman Bilawal Zardari is resorting to unnecessary allegations against Muslim League-N to increase his political status.

PMLN Lawyer Forum secretary said that the people know the reality of all political interests including Bilawal and they will not be seduced by their mud-slinging campaign. He asked the people to make a wise decision on February 8 in the larger national interests.

He said that the country needs the dynamic leadership of Nawaz Sharif at this critical time who will bring the country out of political and economic instability and global isolation.

Pre-consultation with provincial stakeholders on women issues held

F.P Report

PESHAWAR: National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) held a consultation with provincial stakeholders in Peshawar on the preparation of National Report on "Need Analysis for Financing and Strengthening Institutions with Gender Perspective for Empowerment of Women and Girls" that will be presented by the commission in 68th Session of UN-Commission on the Status of Women.

The consultation program was arranged with the help and support of consortium partners (UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women & UNDP). Event was attended by

various Government officials KPCSW, SWWED KP, Human Rights institutions, gender experts, representatives from government departments, civil society organizations, NGOs, and media.

Theme of the sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women that will take place from the 11th to the 22nd of March 2024 is "achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective."

The subject consultation by NCSW in partnership Consortium members UNWOMEN, UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA aimed at preparing recom-

mendations for the report to be presented at the 68th session of UN Commission Status of women. The speakers in consultation raised related issues with a focus on economic empowerment of women and eradication of poverty. The participants exchanged the case studies of successful strategies, policies, and programs that have effectively empowered women and advanced gender equality.

Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar in her welcome remarks said that these pre CSW consultations by NCSW and Consortium partners aim at analyzing existing steps taken by the government, collaboration among government, civil society, the private sector, and international organizations.





NOTICE OF BRANCH CONVERSION

The following conventional branches of HABIBMETRO will be converted into Islamic Banking Branches in or before **November, 2024**. Kindly contact your respective branch staff for further information and clarification.

S. No.	Branch Code	Branch Name	City/Province	Branch Address
1	2-41	Abbottabad Branch	Abbottabad, KPK	Plot No. 841, Main Mansehra Road, Abbottabad.
2	11-17	Abul Hassan Isphani Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Plot No. SB-1, Divisional Commissioner's Employees Housing Society, Abul Hassan Isphani Road, Karachi.
3	4-92	Ahmedpur East Branch	Bahawalpur, Punjab	Khewat No.328/325 Min, Khatooni No.409, Ketchury Road, Ahmedpur East, District Bahawalpur.
4	4-81	Attock Branch	Attock, KPK	BVII-02/RH, Block-G, Union Council 2, Saddiqui Road, District Attock.
5	4-56	Bahria Town Branch	Lahore, Punjab	Plot No.40-B, Commercial Area, Sector-C, Bahria Town, Lahore, Punjab.
6	4-38	Besham Branch	Shangla, KPK	Main Shahrah-e-Resham (KKH), Main Bazar Besham, Teshil Besham, District Shangla, KPK.
7	4-99	Canal Road Branch	Faisalabad, Punjab	Khewat No.8826, Khatoni No.9319, Khasra No.74 / Mouza Malikpur Manawala, Chak No.2019, Faisal Colony, Canal Road, R.B. Faisalabad.
8	4-27	Chak No.111 SB Branch	Sargodha, Punjab	Pull No. 111, Chak No.111 SB, Faisalabad Road, Sargodha.
9	4-93	Chakdara Branch	Lower Dir, KPK	UOM Road, Tehsil Adenzai Chakdara, Chakdara, District Lower Dir.
10	1-36	Chandni Chowk Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Showroom No.2, Plot No.SC-12, Chandni Chowk (Old Sabzi Mandi), University Road, KDA Scheme No.7, Karachi.
11	4-16	Chiniot Branch	Chiniot, Punjab	Adjacent Session Court, Jhang Road, Chiniot, District Chiniot.
12	4-60	Chitral Branch	Chitral,KPK	Bank Square, Bypass Road, Ataliq Bazar, Chitral, KPK.
13	2-31	D.G. Khan Branch	D.G Khan, Punjab	Plot No.322, Jampur Road, Opposite DHQ Hospital, Balakh Sarwar City, Dera Ghazi Khan.
14	6-20	DHA Phase-I Branch	Lahore, Punjab	Plot No.104-G-1-C, G Block, DHA Phase I-C, Lahore Cantonment, Lahore.
15	6-23	Dargai Branch	Malakand, KPK	Property No. 241, Main GT Road, Dargai, Tehsil Dargai, District Malakand, KPK.
16	2-42	Bhalwal Branch	Sargodha, Punjab	Plot No.485, Block No.4, Liaqat Shaheed Road, Tehsil Bhalwal, District Sargodha.
17	4-79	DHA Phase VIII Lahore Cantt. Branch	Lahore, Punjab	Plot No.133, Sector BWD, Phase VIII-C DHA, Lahore Cantt.
18	4-30	Dharanwala Branch	Bahawalnagar, Punjab	174-M, Highway Dharanwala, Chishtian, Bahawalnagar.
19	12-9	E-11 Branch	Islamabad, ICT	Plot No.2, Markaz E-11/3, MPEHS, Islamabad.
20	12-7	EME Society Branch	Lahore, Punjab	Plot No.10, Block-D, DHA, Phase-XII (DHA EME Sector), Multan Road, Lahore.
21	4-5	F-11 Markaz Branch	Islamabad, ICT	Plot No. 39, Shop No. 1,2,20, 21,22,23,41 & 42 Sector F-11 Markaz, Islamabad
22	2-91	F-8 Markaz Branch	Islamabad, ICT	Plot No.18, National Press Trust (NPT Building) F-8 Markaz, Islamabad.
23	6-39	Faizpur Branch	Sheikhupura, Punjab	Plaza No. 30 & 31, Hassan Commercial Road, Al-Rehman Garden, Phase-II Near Saggian Bypass, Sheikhupura.
24	4-6	Faqir Wali Branch	Haroonabad, Punjab	Khewat No.9, Khatooni No.35, Corner Building, Ghalla Mandi, North East Gate, Highway Road, Faqir Wali, Teh Haroonabad.
25	2-74	Garden Town Branch	Lahore, Punjab	Plot / Flat No. 1 to 4, Usman Block, New Garden Town, Awami Complex, Lahore.
26	4-44	Gojra Branch	Toba Tek Singh, Punjab	P-21/2/SH, Ghalla Mandi, Railway Road, Gojra Tehsil Gojra, District Toba Tek Singh, Punjab.
27	4-50	Marrot Branch	Bahawalnagar, Punjab	Shop No.1, Khewat No.157/150, Khatooni No.403, Main Fort Abbas Road, Marrot, Tehsil Fort Abbas, District Bahawalnagar.
28	3-1	Gwadar Branch	Gwadar, Baluchistan	Khasra No.430, Khatooni No.192, Air Port Road, Gwadar, Balochistan.
29	3-31	Hala Naka Branch	Hyderabad, Sindh	Plot No.105, Deh Gujjo, Situated at Truck Stand, Hala Road, Hyderabad.
30	2-40	Haripur Branch	Haripur, KPK	Ali Center, Opposite Ameer Khan Plaza, Main G.T. Road, Haripur.
31	2-27	Hasilpur Branch	Hasilpur, Punjab	68/B, Baldia Road, Hasilpur.
32	1-60	Hussainabad Branch	Karachi, Sindh	R-479, Block-2, Hussainabad, Federal B Area, Near Tabba Heart Hospital, Karachi.
33	4-45	Jail Road Branch	Lahore, Punjab	S-77, R-36-43, Eden Centre, 43 Jail Road, Lahore.
34	4-52	Jhang Branch	Jhang, Punjab	Yousaf Shah Road, Khewat No.709, Mahal Civil Station, Tehsil & District Jhang.
35	2-1	Kamoke Branch	Gujranwala, Punjab	Al-Madni Plaza, G.T. Road, Kamoke, District Gujranwala.
36	2-89	Kashmir Road Branch	Rawalpindi, Punjab	Plot No.CB-1/33-34, Khayaban Hotel, Near Kamran Market, Kashmir Road, Saddar, Rawalpindi.
37	2-87	Khawazakhela Branch	Swat, KPK	Commercial Shops, Khwaja Market, Main Besham Road, Khawazakhela.
38	4-28	Khushab Branch	Khushab,Punjab	Plot No. 4169, Fawara Chowk, Khushab.
39	2-39	Kharian Branch	Gujrat, Punjab	Main G.T. Road, Kharian, District Gujrat.
40	4-49	Kot Abdul Malik Branch	Lahore, Punjab	Khewat No.456, Khatooni No.731, Kot Abdul Malik, Mauza Abu Al-Khair, Tehsil Ferozwala, Distt. Sheikhupura.
41	3-36	Loralai Branch	Loralai, Baluchistan	Lease / Patta No. 977, Noorani Masjid Road, District Loralai, Baluchistan.
42	4-77	Mateela Branch	Sargodha, Punjab	Khewat No.63, Khatooni No.77, Mouza Mateela, Tehsil Kot Momin, District Sargodha.
43	3-29	Maizai Adda Branch	Qilla Abdullah Balochistan	Khewat No.30, Khasra No.77/1, Rahgi, Tehsil Gulistan, District Qilla Abdullah, Main Chaman Road, Maizai Adda, Balochistan.
44	4-18	Mianwali Branch	Mianwali, Punjab	Chowk Watta Khel, Sargodha Road, Mianwali.
45	2-14	Mouza Kachi Jamal Branch	Rahimyar Khan, Punjab	Ahmad Plaza, Bypass Road, Mouza Kachi Jamal, Khanpur, District Rahimyar Khan.
46	2-55	Murree Road Branch	Rawalpindi, Punjab	224-B, Block-B, Crown Plaza, Near Chandni Chowk, Satellite Town, Rawalpindi.
47	3-28	Muslim Bagh Branch	Qilla Saifullah, Baluchistan	Khasra No.1759, Khata/Khatooni No. 6/8, Mouza Muslim Bagh, Tehsil Saddar, District Qilla Saifullah, Baluchistan.

S. No.	Branch Code	Branch Name	City/Province	Branch Address
48	4-8	Oghi Branch	Mansehra, KPK	Main Bazar, Shergarh Road, Oghi, District Mansehra, KPK.
49	1-41	Paposh Nagar Branch	Karachi, Sindh	6-A, Block V-A, Nazimabad No. 5, Karachi.
50	4-83	Pattan Branch	Lower Kohistan, KPK	Main Karakoram Highway, Pattan Bazar, Tehsil Pattan, District Lower Kohistan, KPK.
51	3-5	PECHS, Block-6 Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Shop No. 7 & 8, Plot No.7-A, Al-Kamran Center, Block-6, PECHS, Karachi.
52	1-86	PIB Colony Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Plot No.389, PIB Colony, Karachi.
53	4-3	PWD Commercial Area Branch	Rawalpindi, Punjab	Plot No. I-B, Main PWD Road, PWD Employees Cooperative Housing Scheme, Lohi Bhair, Rawalpindi.
54	1-4	Quetta Branch	Quetta, Baluchistan	Shop No. 2-7/35, Shahrah-e-Iqbal, Quetta.
55	3-32	Safoora Chowrangi Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Shop No.3 &4, Ground Floor, SB-19, Plot No.SB10, Sub Block/Sub-Sector No.7, KDA Scheme No.36, Gulistan-e-Johar, Karachi.
56	6-36	Sambat Branch	Swat, KPK	Khasra No. 493, Main Road, Mouza Sambat, Tehsil Matta, District Swat.
57	4-90	Satellite Town Branch	Sargodha, Punjab	48-A, Main Bazar, Satellite Town, Sargodha.
58	6-17	Shabqadar Branch	Charsadda, KPK	Khasra No. 322, Main Bazar, Peshawar Road, Shabqadar, Tehsil Shabqadar, District Charsadda, KPK.
59	12-2	Shadbagh Branch	Lahore, Punjab	Khasra No.1108/148, Khewat No.201, Khatooni No.386 to 500 Shershah Road, Mouza Baghanwala, Shadbagh, Lahore.
60	2-18	Shadman Branch	Lahore, Punjab	119, Shadman Colony No.1, Lahore.
61	2-20	Shahdara Branch	Lahore, Punjab	Plot No. N-127 R/1380/A, Village Kot Begum, Opposite Rustam Sohrab Cycle Factory, Shahdara, Lahore.
62	1-99	Stadium Road Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Shop No.A, Plot No. SB-11, KDA Scheme No.1-A (Extension) Stadium Road, Karachi.
63	4-74	Swari Bazar Branch	Buner, KPK	Khasra No. 3392, Trade Centre Plaza, Mardan Road, Opposite Passport Office, Sawari Bazar, Buner, District
64	2-50	Talagang Branch	Talagang, Punjab	Ground Floor, Himaliya Plaza, Opposite T.M.A., Chakwal Road, Talagang.
65	4-25	Tarnol Branch	Islamabad, ICT	Al-Zahid Hopital Building, Main GT Road, Tarnol, Islamabad.
66	4-68	Toba Tek Singh Branch	Toba Tek Singh, Punjab	Khewat No.4/4, Chak No.323 JB & 326, Muhallah Eidgah, Allama Iqbal Road, Tehsil & District Toba Tek Singh.
67	6-24	Totakan Branch	Malakand, KPK	Property No. 370, Main Bazaar Totakan, Tehsil Batakhelda, District Malakand, KPK.
68	3-39	Turbat Branch	Kech, Baluchistan	Plot No.28, Ground Floor, Khewat / Khatooni No.72, Mouza Saddar Bazar Ward, Ghulam Nabi Market, Main Road, Tehsil Turbat, District Kech, Baluchistan.
69	12-8	University Faisalabad Branch	Faisalabad, Punjab	Gate No.3, University of Faisalabad, Sargodha Road, Faisalabad.
70	4-17	Wazir Dhand Shakas Branch	Khyber, KPK	Wazir Dhand Shakas, Allah Daad Market, Jamrud Road, Khyber Agency, KPK.
71	2-12	Yazman Mandi Branch	Bahawalpur, Punjab	Bahawalpur Road, Yazman Mandi, District Bahawalpur.
72	4-11	Zahir Pir Branch	Rahimyar Khan, Punjab	Plot No.150, Block-III, Chachran Road, Near Telephone Exchange, Zahir Pir, District Rahimyar Khan.
73	6-45	Barnala Branch	Mirpur, Azad Kashmir	Khasra No.324, Khewat No.47, Khatooni No.462, Barnala, Tehsil Barnala, District Bhimber, Mirpur, AJK.
74	6-62	Ghakhar Mandi Branch	Gujranwala, Punjab	Khewat No.1285, Khatooni No.1947, Khasra No.3387 & 3388, Mouza Ghakhar, G.T. Road, Ghakhar Mandi, Tehsil Wazirabad, District Gujranwala.
75	6-71	Hazro Branch	Attock, KPK	Khasra No.692, Main Bazar Hazro, Tehsil & District Attock.
76	6-60	Tank Branch	Tank, KPK	Property No.610, Main Bazar Tank, Tehsil & District Tank, KPK.
77	3-40	Zhob Branch	Zhob, Baluchistan	Shop No. D/98, Commercial Area, Jamia Masjid Road, Qandhari Bazar, Zhob, Baluchistan.
78	6-80	Jampur Branch	Rajanpur, Punjab	Khata No. 762, Plot No. 245/1, Dajal Road, Mouza Jampur, Tehsil Jampur, District Rajanpur.
79	6-78	Abdul Hakeem Branch	Khanewal, Punjab	Khewat No.58/55, Khatooni No.192 to 199, Kacha Khu Road, Abdul Hakeem, Tehsil Kabirwala, District Khanewal.
80	6-77	Layyah Branch	Layyah, Punjab	Khata No. 240, Chak Mandi Town, Chobara Town, Layyah, Tehsil & District Layyah.
81	3-55	Gulistan-e-Johar Block-1, Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Shop Nos. 2,3,4,8,9,10, Ground Floor, Sabeen Park View, Plot No.SB-5, Block-1, Scheme-36, Gulistan-e-Johar, Karachi.
82	6-82	Muridke Branch	Sheikhupura, Punjab	Khewat No.816, Khatooni No.2050 to 2054, Mouza Muridke, Tehsil Muridke, District Sheikhupura.
83	1-66	Preedy Street Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Shop No. 12, 15, 16 & 17, Plot No.273/1, Coronation Building, Artillery Maidan, Preedy Street, Saddar, Karachi.
84	3-37	Writer's Chamber Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Plot No. 06, Survey No. RY-04, Writer's Chamber, Mumtaz Hassan Road, Off. I.I.Chundrigar Road, Karachi.
85	1-39	Landhi Industrail Area Branch	Karachi, Sindh	15 Milestone, National Highway, Landhi Industrail Area, Karachi.
86	11-24	South Park Avenue Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Plot No. 30-C, South Park Avenue, DHA, Phase-II (Ext.) Karachi.
87	1-61	Juna Market Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Phool Chowck, Plot No. 74 / NP-14, Napier Quarters, Juna Market, Karachi.
88	1-73	Mission Road Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Shop No. 2, Popular Tile Building, Survey No.1, Sheet RCI, Ranchore Quarters, Karachi.
89	1-40	Ceramic Market Branch	Karachi, Sindh	485/486, Rizvia Society, Nazimabad, Karachi.
90	1-45	Shershah Branch	Karachi, Sindh	D-283/1, S.I.T.E Area, Trans Lyari Quarter, Karachi.
91	1-89	West Wharf Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Showroom No.7 & 8, Pak Chamber, West Wharf, Karachi.
92	11-15	Bombay Bazar Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Plot No. Br. 3/5, Palmira Manzil, Bombay Bazar, Karachi.

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PESHAWAR: Mayor Haji Zubair Ali talking to media persons at Saddar mobile market after horrific fire.

Status of women in Islam very high: Governor

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor, Haji Ghulam Ali here Monday said that the share of women in Pakistan was about 52 percent in the country's population and their socioeconomic development was guaranteed for speedy progress and prosperity of the nation.

Addressing a function organized by the National Commission on Status of Women held at a local hotel here as a chief guest, the Governor said the increase of girls students compared to boys students in educational institutions of KP was a solid proof of women's education development.

The Governor said the status of women in Islam was very high, adding our

religion has given the right of property to them and nobody could change it. Haji Ghulam Ali said that women were given highest respect by our society being a mother, sister, wife and daughter and it was the responsibility of the government to ensure provision of all rights to them.

He said close liaison with politicians for enactment of legislation for protection of rights of women was imperative for safeguarding their rights legally and constitutionally. The governor assured full support to the national commission on status of women for progress, autonomy and development of women besides other organizations in this regard.

The function was also addressed by Nilofar Bakhtair, Chairperson, National

Commission on Status of Women. Nilofar Bakhtair said women of Pakistan were playing key roles in the development of their country and underscored the need for protection of their rights as guaranteed in the constitution. The Chairperson said women should be given their due share in property and stressed on creation of awareness among the women about their property, constitutional and legal rights.

She urged the stakeholders and policy makers to take measures for the protection of women rights in the country. Nilofar Bakhtair highlighted achievements and goals of the organization for development and empowerment of women. Later, she presented a shield to the governor.

Police launch crackdown on street crimes

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: Under the directives of SSP Operations Kashif Aftab Abbasi, a crackdown has been initiated against gangs involved in street crimes, including robberies, car lifting, and other criminal activities. A successful operation led by SHO Chamkani, Muhammad Ashfaq Khan, in the supervision of ASP Chamkani, Syed Talal Ahmad Shah, has yielded significant achievements for Chamkani Police Station.

During various operations, multiple gangs involved in street crimes were exposed, leading to the arrest of six suspects. The apprehended individuals are allegedly involved in street crimes, robberies, snatching incidents, car lifting, and motorcycle thefts.

According to ASP Chamkani, the arrested suspects include residents from neighboring country, including Afghanistan, and from various districts, including Charsadda. Substantial seizures during the operations include cash amounting to one lakh, four vehicles, four motorcycles, and 30 valuable mobile phones. Additionally, gold jewelry and weaponry used in criminal activities were also recovered.

ECP making efforts to ensure participation of deprived segments in polls

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Joint Provincial Election Commissioner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Aziz Bahadar has said that they are making efforts to ensure the participation of all deprived sections of the society including women in the general elections.

He expressed these views while talking to a delegation of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Women Commission here on Monday. Nasreen Khattak was leading the delegation consisting of the Director (Programme) Women Commission Miss Amna Durrani and others.

Deputy Director (Media Coordination) Sohail Ahmed and Assistant Director (Social Inclusion) Syed Ahmed Naqvi were also present on the occasion. Speaking on the occasion, Aziz Bahadar highlighted the role of observers in holding of transparent elections and added that registered organizations can apply for Accreditation Cards as per prevailing procedure.

He briefed the delegation about the relevant constitutional, legal framework and steps taken by the Election Commission for comprehensive and reliable elections, including the election laws regarding the minorities and marginalized classes of the society and the

measures for them.

He said that gender desks are being established in the Election Commission Secretariat in Islamabad and the office of Provincial Election Commissioner Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Similarly, the monitoring and control room is also functional, which monitors any complaint and sends it to the office of the concerned District Monitoring Officer for timely action.

The delegation of the Women Commission apprised the Joint Provincial Election Commissioner about the problems related to the low turnout of women voters and their electoral process related steps and asked questions regarding measures taken by the Election Commission and also presented their suggestions in this regard. Nasreen Khattak told that with the assistance of the Election Commission they will monitor pre-poll arrangements in specified districts.

Meanwhile, out of 33,048 presiding and senior presiding officers, the training of 23,810 were completed for general election 2024. The Provincial Election Commissioner has taken serious notice of 6.6pc absent staff and contacted the Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The Chief Secretary directed all the Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners. The authorities of KP

Elementary and Secondary Education were also summoned at PEC Office with direction to immediately fulfill the shortage of staff and initiated disciplinary proceedings against the absent employees. The training of 1,33,275 assistant presiding and polling officers have already been completed. The training is underway at 125 training centers after it was started from December 25 last and will continue till February 1, 2024.

Action against absent employees during training

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Election Commissioner Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shamshad Khan during the training of polling staff on Monday took a stern stance against absenteeism, issuing a strict disciplinary decision.

Shamshad Khan directed all deputy commissioners to ensure the certainty of attendance during polling staff training and emphasized immediate suspension and rigorous disciplinary action against absent employees.

Gas theft crackdown continue

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 337 connections; Rs 4.47 million fine imposed

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 15 connections on illegal use of gas while another 11 on use of compressor and 1 FIR Lodged against gas thief. The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.55 million against gas theft cases. In Rawalpindi the team disconnected 53 connections on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 0.35 million have been booked against gas theft cases. In Multan 12 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 29 on use of compressor and 1 FIR Lodged against gas thief. The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.02 million against gas theft cases.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 97 connections on account of direct use of gas and 5 FIRs Lodged against gas thieves. The team also imposed fine of Rs 3.27 million against gas theft cases.

In Bahawalpur the regional team disconnected 49 connections on illegal use of gas while another 16 on use of compressor. The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.22 million against gas theft cases.

In Sahiwal, 9 connections were disconnected on compressor use. In Faisalabad the regional team disconnected 2 connections on illegal use of gas while another 14 on use of compressor. The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.03 million against gas theft cases. In Sheikhpura 30 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 0.03 million booked against gas theft cases.



PESHAWAR: Principal Amanullah Shah giving away award to a student during a ceremony at Shaheed Haris Nawaz High School.

NAB initiates enquiry against DG Livestock

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: As the Honorable High Court Peshawar dismissed the status quo plea of Dr. Alamzaib DG Livestock Extension Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while NAB has initiated shocking turn of events against Dr. Alamzaib, the Director General of Livestock Extension in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, unfolding serious events of corruption. The accusations suggest a widespread misuse of authority and financial misconduct within the department.

Sources reveal that NAB has been initiated several enquiries against Dr. Alamzaib, claiming embezzlement of funds allocated for various livestock development projects. Concerns have been raised about the transparency of procurement processes and the handling of financial resources under his administrative Authority.

Officials close to the investigation state that evidence is being gathered to substantiate these allegations, including financial records and testimonies

from employees within the Livestock Extension department. The scope of the inquiry encompasses multiple projects aimed at improving livestock practices and boosting the meat & poultry sectors in the region.

The news of Dr. Alamzaib's alleged corruption has sparked outrage among farmers and stakeholders who had hoped for positive developments in livestock management under his leadership. Calls for a thorough and impartial investigation are growing, with demands for accountability and transparency within the government agencies.

While Dr. Alamzaib has not made an official statement regarding the allegations, there is anticipation that he will be required to address these concerns in the coming days. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has assured the public that it is committed to upholding the principles of accountability and will take appropriate action based on the findings of the investigation.

As the inquiry unfolds,

MCCI, IT Board KP holds joint session

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A joint session was organized by Mardan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and (Dushal) IT Board Khyber Pukhtunkhwa on Start-up Business and Online Registration and Procedure for Getting Grants for Digitizing Business in which members of Mardan Chamber's Executive Committee, Chairman of Youth Parliament Irshad Ahmed, presidents of central organization Tajran district of Mardan, secretary general and representatives of various sectors participated fully.

Country facing challenges of political instability: Sherpao

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Monday said that the country was facing three major challenges, including political instability, poor law and order and skyrocketing inflation.

Addressing a public meeting in Shabqadar tehsil in Charsadda district, he said that the next elected

government would have to take solid steps to revive the economy and provide relief to the people in the face of backbreaking inflation. He said that the next government would also have to work to ensure political stability, which was required for a stable economy.

He said that economic stability was linked to political stability. "The government would have to find out-of-box solutions to pro-

vide relief to the people," he said, adding that the skyrocketing inflation had made life miserable for the poor.

Aftab Sherpao said that at present, the government was compelled to follow the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He said that the people would lose hope and would become disillusioned with the political system if they were not provided relief.



PESHAWAR: PML-N candidate for PK-31, Sobia Khan and others waving hands to supporters during public gathering.

Cold weather to prevail

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Regional Meteorological Center Peshawar on Monday predicted that very cold and dry weather is likely to occur in most districts of the province.

It said that dense foggy conditions are likely to occur over Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera, Mardan, Karak, Bannu, Laki Marwat, Swabi, D.I. Khan and Tank districts as well as over Motorway (M1) / Highways in morning and night hours.

Persistent use of e-cigarettes badly affects human health

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 behest 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 prob-

lems 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 legisla-

tion 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

Two dies of electricity shock F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Two labourers were died while another injured due to electricity shock in village Jalalpur Kuhnah. According to details, three labourers Hamza Khan son of Roshan Khan, Meer Zai son of Ghaffar and Safi-ur-Rehman son of Jabeen Khan residents of Swat were engaged in boring to install water handpump at Dera Chadhar near village Jalalpur Kuhnah. Suddenly, iron pipe of handpump was touched to electricity wire passing over the Dera. They were received serious electric shock. As a result of which, Hamza Khan and Meer Zai were lost their breath at the spot while Safi-ur-Rehman injured. Injured and dead bodies shifted to hospital. The victims were come to the Jalapur Bhattian to earn their livelihood.

FIA arrests six human traffickers

GUJRANWALA (INP): The anti-human trafficking circle of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) arrested six human traffickers as crackdowns against elements involved in human smuggling continue. According to details, during operations of FIA six human traffickers including an offender were arrested. The detainees included Muhammad Ilyas, Bashir Ahmed, Abdul Rauf, Zubair Ahmed, Mehboob Khan and Shamas ur Rehman. Officials said that four human traffickers were arrested from Daska district Sialkot, Mehboob Khan was detained from Mandi Bahauddin while Shamas ur Rehman was held from Chak Jugna Gujranwala. The nabbed human traffickers were wanted by FIA for last many years. They had received millions of rupees from citizens in the name of sending them to Europe and other foreign countries and arranging handsome employment opportunities for them there. Illegal documents and passports were recovered from possession of the detainees who were being investigated.

Residents protest against SEPCO F.P. Report

SHAHDADKOT: For the past three months, Samaj Siddhark Sikander Sanam Jahandil has been protesting against the Sukhar Electric Power Company (SEPCO) in front of the press club against electricity loadshedding, additional charges and illegalities of the staff in Qamber-Shahdadkot district of Sindh for 54 days. It was announced that the ongoing protest by the civil society will be postponed until the elections. According to the details, while talking to the media, representatives of the civil society, Haji Abdul Malik Chandio, Lakaka Muhammad Ali, Samaj Sidharak Sikandar Sanam Jahandil and others said that in the country. The electricity department has completely failed, especially in Qamber-Shahdadkot district of Sindh, SEPCO WAPDA staff's abuses with consumers are on the rise, increasing loadshedding in the city for 15 to 18 hours daily. It has become normal and illegal extra charges are being collected in the monthly electricity bills while the Wapda staff is charging the consumers. Legitimate connections are being cut unnecessarily, he appealed to the Federal Minister for Electricity and said that steps should be taken to control the electricity crisis in Qamber-Shahdadkot district before the elections and the WAPDA staff should be made available to the consumers.



QUETTA: A man selecting and purchasing jackets' from a roadside vendor.

Civic body arranges event for election candidates' future plans

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Political parties and their election candidates from the Lower Dir district have pledged to work for peace, development and employment in the area. They made the pledge during a function arranged by the Dir Quami Paseon, an apolitical civic body of elders at a local hotel at Timergara here the other day. The moot was designed to identify main issues faced by the people of Dir and to bring together different political parties and their nominated candidates to present their election manifestos and future plans.

Election candidates for the general elections including Brigadier (r) Saeed Khan and former provincial minister Muzaffar Said advocate of the Pakistan Tahreek Insaf Parliamentarian, Shad Nawaz Khan of the JI candidate for PK 16, JI district general secretary Hafiz Yaqubur Rehman, PPP district president Mahmood Zeb Khan, Ali Shah Mashwani a PTI dissident and independent candidate for NA 6, Alamzeb Advocate of the PPP candidate for NA 7, Maulana Muhammad Nabi Shah JUI-F candidate for PK 16,

PML-N candidate for PK 14 Malik Muhammad Numan, Pakistan Rah e Haq Party candidate for NA 7 Maulana Ubaidullah Anwar, ANP's Imran Takur and others presented their manifestos and future plans for the development of Dir.

Senior journalist and TV anchor Hassan Khan, president of All Sub engineers Welfare association Bashir Ahmad, president Anjum Tajir Timergara Haji Anwarud Din, teachers' representative Dr Salimullah and DQP activist Malik Shah Naseem also spoke on the occasion.

The election candidates and political parties agreed to end the politics of hatred and the use of abusive language against each other. They pledged to complete all the incomplete development projects like the construction of Talash bypass road, functionalizing of the Koto hydro power station, classes at the Timergara Medical College, establishment of an industrial zone, upgradation of local hospitals and educational institutions.

Speaking on the occasion the DQP chairperson and a property dealer Malik Jehan Alam Yousafzai called on all nominated candidates from

both Lower and Upper Dir to focus on development of the area and avoid the politics of opposition for the sake of opposition. He also asked local residents to elect their representatives who were well aware of the issues and problems faced by them. He said that disunity of politicians and lack of interest adversely affected the masses.

Speaking at the moot the election candidates pledged that they would force both the federal and provincial governments to initiate mega development projects in Dir. Almost all the speakers rejected the imposition of taxes in Malakand division and promised that they would try to extend the tax-free zone of the region as it had been the worst affected area.

Support announced: The Aqlati Ittihad Council, a body representing the minority community in the area announced to support the PPP nominated candidates for NA 7 Alam Zeb advocate and PK 16 Kamran Zeb Khan. The announcement was made during a function held at Timergara during which the representatives of Sikhs, Hundus and Christians announced to support the PPP candidates in the area.

Pakistan citruses fruit favored worldwide

F.P. Report

TOB TEK SINGH: Vice of Agriculture University Faisalabad Dr. Iqar Ahmad Khan has said that citrus exports have reduced from \$300 million to less than \$100 million. The challenges faced by the citrus can be dealt with effectively.

He expressed these views while presiding over a workshop for citrus farmers organized by Agriculture University Faisalabad, Department of Agriculture Punjab Government, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government and Federal Ministry of Food Security organized at Chak No. 332 JB Pir Mahal. Ahmed Khan said that the seed certificate rules will have to be fully implemented as low-seeded citruses are favored worldwide. He said that with the passage of time, citrus has faced various diseases which are affecting our citrus production badly.

Establishment of certified seed nurseries is the most important need of the hour for the restoration of citrus in Pakistan. A modern nursery mechanism has to be developed with public partnership. He said that the restoration of the existing citrus orchards is the need of the hour. A business model with banks will have

to be brought forward for the orchards so that the farmers can run their circle until the fruits come.

VC said that cluster areas of different types of citrus have to be created. Vice Chancellor of Agriculture University Multan Dr. Ishiaq Rajwana said that agricultural prosperity can be ensured by strengthening the relationship between farmers and agricultural experts. He said that this workshop Farmers will be able to overcome citrus problems by benefiting from it.

Secretary Board of Revenue Shafqat-ullah Mushtaq said that in the history of Sandal Bar, these villages were the first settled area in Jakhra in 1892. Jakhra area has special importance in Kino, he said that the relationship between scientists and farmers is indispensable for the development of the country. Dr. Anjum Ali Bhuttar said that all possible measures are being taken to make citrus more profitable, 500 citrus nurseries have been registered in Punjab so that the best citrus plants can be distributed to the farmers.

Director Extension Faisalabad Chaudhry Abdul Hameed said that 48,000 citrus trees are being planted in Faisalabad division. He said that the

quality of citrus in Toba Tek Singh is being affected due to lack of potash. Professor Dr. Jaffar Jaskani said that Pakistan is the 15th largest country in the world in terms of citrus production. After Sargodha, Toba Tek Singh is the leader in the production of cano.

Director Citrus Institute Sargodha Raza Salik said that 91% of the citrus area is cultivated with cano, he said that water saving can be made possible by drip irrigation. Farmers should harvest the fruit by January 31.

The second fertilizer should be given in the last week of January, Dr. Abdul Rahman said that the recommendations of agricultural experts must be followed to control the problem of sudden wilting in citrus. Dr. Basharat Ali, Director of Horticulture Punjab said that citrus should be considered as a premium crop. On this occasion, Dean of Agriculture University Prof. Dr. Qamar Bilal, Principal Toba Tek Singh Sub Campus, Dr. Ziaul-Rehman, Dr. Usman, Dr. Mohammad Azam, Dr. Aoun, Dr. Naeem Sattar of KPK and others were also present.

Operation against illegal housing societies

Syed Waliullah Shah

NEWSHERA: An operation against illegal housing societies kicks-off to eliminate outlawed infrastructure in the premises.

According to details, the operation was initiated as per directives of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Nowshera Khalid Iqbal while Tehsil Municipal Administration acted against illegal housing.

In this regard assistant commissioner Tanveer Ahmad, additional assistant commissioner Abdul Qayyum and tehsil regulation officer Shahana sealed mashallah society and smashed their walls with heavy machinery. Officer said that further proceeding will be happening on illegal housing and avoid from baying houses in illegal housing society.

Dead body recovered

F.P. Report

BUNER: Police has recovered dead body of missing Rahat Ali Akhunzada of Shalbandi from a garage at Bajkatta chowk late night on Saturday and arrested Abdur Rehman of Bajkatta and his driver Tufilul Rehman resident of Inzargi Katlang district Mardan.

Police claimed during investigation the accused contacts were helped trace the blind murder case and arrested the accused Tilfulul Rehman who confessed Abdur Rehman was shot dead Rahat Ali Khan over money deal. According to police the accused Tofulul Rehman told police Abdur Rehman was picked up Rahat Ali Akhunzada in his car from Daggar and then shot him dead with pistol at his private quarter in Cheena. He continued after killing they transported the body and drop it in a garage at Bajkatta chowk. The alleged murderer disclosed the accused Abdur Rehman was threw acid on the dead body too.

Uplift of Chitral top most priority: Talha

F.P. Report

CHITRAL: Due to the negligence of the rulers and elected representatives, the people of Chitral are still forced to live a stone age life. The roads here are not fit for humanbeing, people are deprived from their basic rights. If I get a chance, I will change the map of Chitral.

These views were expressed by Senator Mohammad Talha Mehmood, who is candidate for the National Assembly seat from NA 1 Chitral, who is contesting the elections from Chitral on the ticket of Jamiat Ulemaye Islam. He was visiting different areas of Tahsil Torkho, he addressed public gatherings.

The people of Veerkop, Shahgram and other areas gave him a warm welcome. The JUI workers welcomed him outside the city and took him in a convoy to the public meeting place. On this occasion, Haji Shakeel, the candidate of provincial assembly constituency PK-1, former Amir Sher Karim Shah and other members of JUI were also present with him.

Addressing the public gathering, Senator Muhammad Talha Mehmood, said that when I travelled to upper Chitral, it seemed that the people here are still forced to live in the stone age. He said that there is no electricity, no potable clean drinking water and no good roads. It takes several hours to cover a few kilometers on this road and the vehicle is also so dirty that it is unrecognizable. He said that Chitral is a tourist area where nature has created a lot but unfortunately due to the negligence of representatives elected from here in the past, the rulers have shown criminal negligence and ignored it.

Senator Talha Mehmood said that my welfare organization already does goodwill work in Chitral, during natural calamities, I help the victims, get free treatment for patients, set up free medical camps, free ration for the poor and essential Distribution of goods etc. He said that the candidates of other parties for the same seat have complained against me in the Election Commission of Pakistan office that I help people. But even after February 8th, if I continue these relief activities, then how can they stop me? He said that if I get an opportunity to serve and on February 8th, people caste their vote in my favor and elected me with a heavy mandate, then I promise that I will never attempt for exploitation of your right.

He said that some people criticize me that I had distributed relief goods in Chitral in paste so that I can contest election from here and succeed, but my welfare organization also work in Afghanistan, Palestine, Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. And also works in other countries and helps people financially in times of trouble from

which I am never contesting election.

Senator Talha Mehmood said that after the success in the recent elections, I intend to open two hundred handicraft centers for the women here, as well as build roads, bridges and paths here. He said that some critics are misleading people by saying that I will disappear after winning the election. But Nusrat Bhutto was also successful from here. Now I will not go anywhere from Chitral, I have bought my own house in Joghur and also opened the office of my welfare trust here.

He urged the people to elect a right and honest representative for their rights so that he doesn't get only his salary by sitting in the assembly and doesn't do anything other than playing discs. Talha Mehmood said that when I was the Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs, I withdrew billions of rupees from the government treasury and returned them to the pilgrims who had been taken more than they had.

On this occasion, Amir JUI upper Chitral Mulvi Sher Karim Shah and other leaders also expressed their views and criticized the elected representatives in the past. He said that Prince Iftharuddin, Maulana Abdul Akbar Chitrali were elected as members of the National Assembly twice, but they did nothing for Chitral.

While Criticizing Abdul Akbar Chitrali, he said that he spent five years in the assembly and took his salary, but after taking the vote, he did not return to this area to know about issues of people but after the dissolution of the assembly, he pasted his name on sign board while inaugurating some roads construction but work did start on that yet, but when the work did not start, the people also uprooted these boards and threw them away.

However, former MPA Hidayatur Rehman was not allowed to come to the meeting because his performance as a member of the provincial assembly for five years was also very disappointing, so he was directed by the elders of the party to not come here.

The election campaign rally was held in Shahgram where Senator Talha Mehmood said that if helping the poor people, giving sewing machines to widow women, giving free treatment to patients, giving free education to orphans, etc is a crime. I will continue to commit this crimes if anyone has the guts and can stop me from doing this, then stop it.

He said that if all the basic facilities are available to the people in other cities of Pakistan, why not here? I do not say that Lahore should be backward like Chitral but Chitral should be developed like Lahore. Development works can be laid in Chitral as well. The meeting concluded with the prayer words of Ustad al-Hadith Fateh al-Bari, which was attended by a large number of people.

Entrepreneurship stimulates job creation for rural communities

F.P. Report

ZHOB: 'Although unemployment is considered to be the most challenging social problem in poverty-hit Balochistan, but 'Balochistan Livelihoods and Entrepreneurship Program' financed by the World bank to promote enterprise development and livelihoods supports the local entrepreneurs and individuals to enhance profitability, job creation and income is a blessing for the province', said the speakers at a seminar entitled 'Citizen Engagement and Awareness Seminar' held at the Cultural hall here. The seminar was attended by male and female community members, journalist Rafiullah Mandokhail and people from different walks of life.

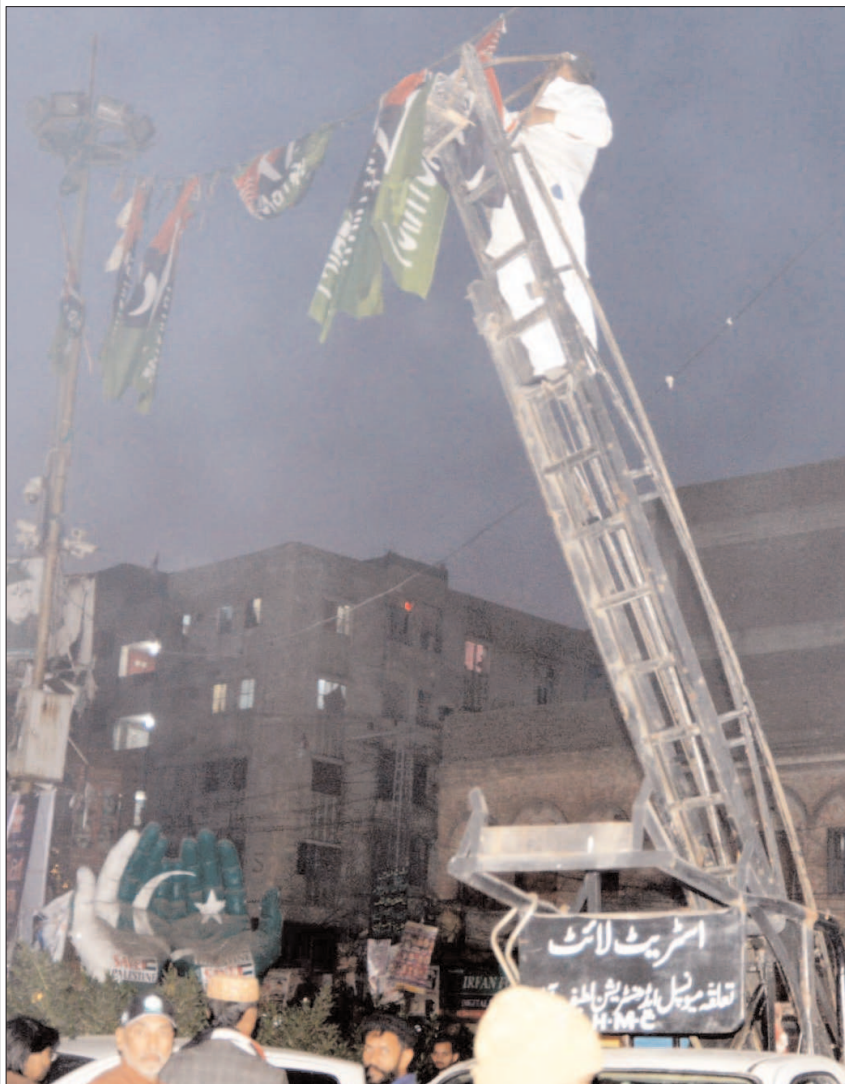
District Coordinator BLEP Afzal Khan in his keynote speech said that organizing the seminar was aimed at creating awareness and providing information to the youth on employment opportunities through entrepreneurship.

'In order to promote livelihoods through enterprise development and job creation, BLEP has been implemented in eight targeted districts in Balochistan including Zhob

and neighboring Sherani districts. The project is financed by the World Bank and executed by the Planning and Development (P&D) department Balochistan,' he said.

Speaking at the event, Deputy Director Mines and Minerals department Balochistan Abdul Razzaq Kakar and Director AWAR-Balochistan Muhammad Abid Sherani said that the five-year project has a significant role in poverty evaluation that aims at promoting agriculture and livestock sectors and equips the youth with vocational skills.

BLEP officials, forestry expert Haji Abdul Wahid, livestock expert Dr Iqbal, community development experts Kelamullah and Najibullah also spoke on the occasion and said that BLEP program works on different sectors including livestock, mining, tourism, small industries and forestry. Around 10,000 male and female unemployed youths have been imparted vocational training in electrical, plumbing, car-motorcycle repairing, carpentry, welding and IT sectors, along with the provision of tool kits. Moreover, tuck shops, Zaranj rickshaws and cattle have also been provided for the livelihood to thousands from the rural communities.



HYDERABAD: Municipal staff removing flags fixed on poles by different parties to accelerate election campaign.



Palestinian industries falter as Israel bombs Gaza

WEST BANK: As the occupied West Bank roils with near-daily Israeli raids, settler attacks and killings of Palestinians, an overlooked impact of the violence is starting to take its toll. The past few months, Muhamad Nairoukh, manager of one of the three biggest aluminium factories in the occupied West Bank, tells Al Jazeera, have been the worst for production and profits in a long time.

Life in the occupied West Bank is becoming more dangerous and complicated for the people living there, and alongside that, industry has crawled to a near halt as a result of Israeli actions, making it impossible to have "business as usual". Nairoukh manages more than 30 employees who keep the company his father founded in 1993 running. He has found himself having to cut costs recently as the company operates at 40 percent capacity, and production has been reduced by 60 percent.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) estimated at the end of December that the overall economic losses in Palestine, since the beginning of the Israeli aggression on Gaza, reached around \$1.5bn during the initial months of the war, equivalent to approximately \$25m per day, excluding direct losses in properties and assets. The Israeli checkpoints, which at best hold up shipments and at worse refuse to let them through, have increased the cost of internal transportation and shipping between Palestinian cities and overseas. Conversely, importing raw materials has become a logistical nightmare, significantly inflating production costs at a time when demand is plummeting due to the war.

Nairoukh added that the checkpoints also affect the ability of workers to get to work on time, with truck drivers having to reroute their shipments, which exposes them to danger in addition to the time it wastes. Importing raw materials, as Nairoukh does from countries including China, Italy, Spain and Turkey, has been complicated by the closure of ports at the beginning of the war, leading to delays that resulted in inflated costs. A shipment from China, he said, used to cost \$1,650 before the war but skyrocketed to \$7,600 afterwards, a 360 percent increase - the kind of rise in costs that he is not sure he will be able to absorb for much longer, especially as delays



mean cancelled orders and contracts. Samir Hazboun, secretary-general of the Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, told Al Jazeera that both extractive and transformative industries in Palestine are in trouble. He added that other factors, such as the fluctuating exchange rates for industries that import raw materials, also play a big role. Nairoukh and other business owners who service the construction sector, as he does, have found their sales plummeting as construction has come to a near-standstill.

As fewer and fewer public and private sector employees receive their salaries and Palestinians who used to work in Israel are barred from crossing the checkpoints, there is less money for even individuals to complete construction projects. While October to May is usually the construction high season, this year it was a season of significant loss instead. Collecting money owed on older orders is also becoming more complicated as cheques bounce because the people who wrote them a few months ago now have empty bank accounts.

In just one day, Nairoukh reveals, he had about 67,000 shekels (\$18,000) worth of cheques bounce. He is not likely to try to go after these individuals either, he says, as it is not possible to expect them to pay off such amounts when the situation is so dire for all Palestinians. But losing out on this potential income burdens his company financially even more. Hazboun predicts that, if these condi-

tions continue, there will be numerous economic collapses. For example, he says, only 30 to 35 of Bethlehem's 130 stone and raw material factories are operational. Nairoukh has felt this pinch in all aspects of his life as the father of two has had to postpone maintenance and renovation projects for the family home and may find himself reducing household expenses if the war persists.

He has kept his employees on and continued paying them, but he acknowledges that this may not be possible for much longer if the war persists, at which point layoffs may be necessary.

His employees also worry about their livelihoods. They consider themselves lucky to still have jobs but know full well that the situation is very precarious. Rakan Ibrahim Abu Al-Hur, who lives near Bethlehem, considers himself lucky to still have his job cutting and processing aluminium rolls. Responsible for supporting his parents and five siblings, he really hopes the situation improves soon. He tells Al Jazeera how difficult it is now to commute back and forth from his village of ash-Shawawra to Bethlehem for work. The checkpoint at the city's entrance is frequently closed or the inspection lines are long and slow, delaying everyone who is trying to get through. "I hope this all ends soon because if the war doesn't stop, everything will collapse and I'll lose my job," Rakan says sadly.

Landslide buries 47 in China

BEIJING: Rescue efforts are under way in south-western China's mountainous Yunnan province after at least 47 people were buried in a landslide. State news agency Xinhua reported that the disaster struck just before 6am in the village of Liangshui, beneath the town of Tangfang in Zhenxiang County. Authorities said rescuers were trying to find victims buried in 18 separate houses. Xinhua showed footage of men in orange jumpsuits and hard hats picking their way through piles of concrete blocks and twisted steel. There was snow on some of the rubble and on buildings that were still standing.

The cause of the landslide was not immediately known. Authorities said about 500 people had been evacuated. Landslides are common in Yunnan, a remote region of China where steep mountain ranges rise up into the Himalayan Plateau. China has experienced a string of natural disasters in recent months and Yunnan is among several provinces in the country's southern region currently experiencing a cold wave and bitter temperatures near or below freezing. The landslide comes just more than a month after a 6.2 magnitude earthquake struck the northwest between the Gansu and Qinghai provinces, killing at least 149 people and triggering heavy mudslides. Nearly 1,000 people were injured and more than 14,000 homes were destroyed. It was China's deadliest earthquake in nine years.

Cairo will not allow any threat to Somalia

CAIRO: Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has said Cairo stands shoulder to shoulder with Somalia and has slammed Ethiopia's agreement with Somaliland to obtain access to the sea and establish a marine force base. "Egypt will not allow anyone to threaten Somalia or affect its security," el-Sisi said, speaking at a news conference with visiting Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. "Do not try Egypt, or try to threaten its brothers especially if they ask it to intervene," he said. Somaliland, a region strategically located by the Gulf of Aden, broke away from Somalia in 1991 as the country collapsed into a civil conflict. The region has maintained its own government despite a lack of international recognition. On January 1, in a memorandum, Ethiopia said it would consider recognising Somaliland's independence in return for the port access. It would lease 20km (12 miles) of coastland around the port of Berbera, on the Gulf of Aden, for 50 years for military and commercial purposes. Ethiopia's current main port for maritime exports is in the neighbouring country of Djibouti. Sheikh Mohamud, the president of Somalia, rejected the deal as a violation of international law and said: "We will not stand idly by and watch our sovereignty being compromised." He arrived in Egypt over the weekend to rally support for his government. Besides meeting President el-Sisi, he met with Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit and Al-Azhar Mosque's Grand Imam, Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb. "My message to Ethiopia is that ... trying to seize a piece of land to control it is something no one will agree to," el-Sisi said, noting cooperation on development was a better strategy. Ethiopia rejected criticism from Egypt over the deal, saying it was merely a commercial agreement aimed at securing access to the sea and not an attempt to annex land. "It isn't annexation or assumption of sovereignty over the territory of any state," Redwan Hussien, national security adviser to the prime minister of Ethiopia, said in a post on X. Relations between Egypt and Ethiopia have been tense for years over a major dam Ethiopia has built on the Blue Nile. For over a decade - along with Sudan - the countries have been trying to reach a negotiated agreement on the filling and operation of the \$4bn Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. — Aljazeera

DR Congo's President Tshisekedi sworn in for second term

DR CONGO: The Democratic Republic of the Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi has been sworn in for a second five-year term following highly contested elections in December.

"I am taking back the baton of command that you entrusted to me. We want a more united, stronger and prosperous Congo," Tshisekedi, 60, said during the inauguration ceremony in the capital.

"I am aware of your expectations," he declared, referring among other things to unemployment, youth, women's rights and national cohesion. With tensions simmering in the vast nation's volatile eastern provinces, the leader known as "Fatshi" picked Kinshasa's 80,000-capacity Martyrs sports stadium for the inauguration ceremony. The stands were packed well before midday with singing and dancing in full flow awaiting the arrival of several invited heads of African states and traditional chiefs from the country's 26 provinces. Tshisekedi was first sworn in as president in January 2019, after controversially defeating Joseph Kabila. He won the first time promising to improve living conditions in the DRC

- which boasts mineral riches but has a largely impoverished population of 100 million - and put an end to 25 years of bloodshed in the east.

The Congolese president has not kept those promises, but this time around, he campaigned strongly on his first-term achievements such as free primary medication, asking for another mandate to "consolidate" the progress. The Congolese president made a landslide victory in the December 20 elections winning more than 70 percent of the vote. The election had more than 40 percent turnout, with some 18 million people voting. Even before the results were announced in late December, opposition candidates - including businessman Moise Katumbi who finished behind Tshisekedi with 18 percent of the vote - said they rejected the results and called on the population to mobilise. The logistical problems included many polling stations either opening late or not opening at all. Materials were sometimes lacking, and many voter cards were rendered illegible due to smudged ink.

Voting in the election had to be extended into a second day, something

local observers and civil society organisations have deemed illegal, and parts of the country were still casting ballots five days after election day. Martin Fayulu, who has said he was also robbed at the last presidential vote, garnered 5 percent. Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege, who won the prize winner for his work with rape victims, scored 0.22 percent. These candidates called for the election results to be cancelled. Katumbi and Fayulu had appealed to supporters to "show their discontent". They urged people "to stand up and say 'no'", from wherever they happen to be. AFP reporters said tyres were burned on the streets of Goma, the main hub of the conflict-torn eastern province of North Kivu. In the provincial town of Beni, also in the east, youths tried to set up barricades but police intervened.

The electoral commission, CENI, has recognised cases of fraud, vandalism and intimidation, as well as the use of illegal voting machines. The DRC has a history of disputed elections that can turn violent, and many of its citizens harbour little trust in the country's institutions. — Aljazeera

Nigeria police secure release of sisters

ABUJA (BBC): Nigerian police say they have successfully rescued five sisters who were held hostage after being kidnapped in the country's capital. The girls were freed in a joint police-army operation in a forest in northern Nigeria. They were taken from their home in Abuja earlier this month, along with another sister who was later killed.

The kidnappers had demanded a ransom for their release, but the statement made no mention of one being paid. Nigerian police said the girls had been reunited with their family following the operation, which took place near the Kajiuru forest in Kaduna State. The six sisters, aged from the early teens to 23, were taken hostage alongside their father, Mansoor Al-Kadriyar, on 2 January at the family home in Bwari, a suburb of Abuja. Witnesses said the girls' uncle ran to find help but was ambushed and killed, as were three police officers. The kidnappers released Mansoor on the condition he raise a large

ransom, but his 21-year-old daughter, Nabecha, a final year university student, was then killed as a warning, according to a family member who spoke to the BBC on condition of anonymity. Kidnapping has become rife in Nigeria, with hundreds of people abducted in recent years, largely by criminal gangs who see it as an easy way to make money. It has been particularly bad in the north-west of the country. The case of the Al-Kadriyar sisters prompted widespread anger in the country, with many arguing that the kidnapping emergency has continued despite government promises to bring it to an end. First Lady Remi Tinubu urged security agencies to "intensify their efforts" to end the kidnapping and security crisis, and demanded a "swift return of the Al-Kadriyar sisters".

The ransom for the girls' return was set at 65m naira (\$68,000; £53,000), leading to many Nigerians donating to a crowdfunding initiative. However, Defence Minister

Mohammed Badaru Abubakar urged people not to contribute towards the ransom, saying it would "only worsen the situation". "We believe we have to stop - as painful as it is. We have to stop responding to payment on ransom. If we stop, over time the kidnapping will not be profitable and they will stop," he said. No matter how desperate the circumstances, Nigerian law prohibits the payment of ransom money. However, many victims pay up because they do not trust authorities to secure the release of their loved ones. There has now been an outcry that the insecurity has reached the capital, prompting Abuja's police force to launch a special squad to tackle the kidnapping gangs. Mr Abubakar said he believed operations against the gangs elsewhere had forced them to move to areas near the capital. "The security agencies are working very hard to push them out and block the movements and finish them off once and for all," he said.

Cameroon starts first malaria vaccine program

CA MEROON (AP): Cameroon will be the first country to routinely give children a new malaria vaccine as the shots are rolled out in Africa. The campaign due to start Monday was described by officials as a milestone in the decades-long effort to curb the mosquito-spread disease on the continent, which accounts for 95% of the world's malaria deaths.

"The vaccination will save lives. It will provide major relief to families and the country's health system," said Aurelia Nguyen, chief program officer at the Gavi vaccines alliance, which is helping Cameroon secure the shots. The Central Africa nation hopes to vaccinate about 250,000 children this year and next year. Gavi said it is working with 20 other African countries to help them get the vaccine and

that those countries will hopefully immunize more than 6 million children through 2025. In Africa, there are about 250 million cases of the parasitic disease each year, including 600,000 deaths, mostly in young children. Cameroon will use the first of two recently approved malaria vaccines, known as Mosquirix. The World Health Organization endorsed the vaccine two years ago, acknowledging that that even though it is imperfect, its use would still dramatically reduce severe infections and hospitalizations.

The GlaxoSmithKline-produced shot is only about 30% effective, requires four doses and protection begins to fade after several months. The vaccine was tested in Africa and used in pilot programs in three countries. GSK has said it

can only produce about 15 million doses of Mosquirix a year and some experts believe a second malaria vaccine developed by Oxford University and approved by WHO in October might be a more practical solution. That vaccine is cheaper, requires three doses and India's Serum Institute said they could make up to 200 million doses a year. Gavi's Nguyen said they hoped there might be enough of the Oxford vaccines available to begin immunizing people later this year. Neither of the malaria vaccines stop transmission, so other tools like bed nets and insecticidal spraying will still be critical. The malaria parasite mostly spreads to people via infected mosquitoes and can cause symptoms including fever, headaches and chills.

What's behind mass protests against Germany's far-right AfD party?

FRANFURT: Protests against the far-right Alternative for Germany party (AfD) are gaining momentum in the European Union nation in the wake of a report that two senior party members joined a November meeting in Berlin, where planned mass deportation of citizens of foreign origin was discussed.

"Nazis, no thank you", "It feels like 1933, AfD ban now!" and "Investigate banning AfD" read some of the banners among other slogans at protests across the country against the AfD party's anti-immigrant stance that has rekindled Nazi-era Germany of 1930s and 40s. Thousands of people are expected to join new protests, as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called the protests against the far-right party "good

and right".

The European nation last week also faced protests from farmers, who have expressed their deep frustration with the centre-lefted government's failure to check inflation and a decision to scrap diesel tax breaks. The two protests are not connected. So who are Germany's far-right AfD and why their anti-immigrant stance has triggered countrywide mass protests? The mass protests were triggered after an investigative media organisation, Correctiv, released a report about the "undisclosed" meeting near Berlin, where a proposal to deport millions of immigrants and refugees, including some with German citizenship, was discussed. Among the participants at the talks was Martin Sellner, a leader of Austria's Identitarian

Movement, which subscribes to the "great replacement" conspiracy theory that claims there is a plot by non-white migrants to replace Europe's "native" white population. The anti-immigration party confirmed the presence of its members at the meeting but has denied taking on the "remigration" project championed by Sellner.

News of the gathering sent shockwaves across Germany at a time when the AfD is soaring in opinion polls, just months ahead of three major regional elections in eastern Germany where their support is strongest. Interior Minister Nancy Faeser went so far as to say in the newspapers of the Funke press group that the far-right meeting was reminiscent of "the horrible Wannsee conference",

where the Nazis planned the extermination of European Jews in 1942. The AfD was founded as a Eurosceptic party in 2013 and first entered the German Bundestag in 2017. Most polls now put it in second place nationally with about 20 percent support, far above the 10.3 percent it won during the last federal election in 2021. The party is especially strong in eastern Germany, where state elections are slated to take place later this year in Thuringia, Saxony and Brandenburg. The AfD is leading the polls in all three states with more than 30 percent support. Since its founding, the party has continually moved to the right and gained support for its fierce anti-refugee and anti-immigration views. — Aljazeera

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The BJP's Islamophobic politics

NARENDRA Modi-led Hindutva regime is all set to inaugurate the controversial Ram Mandir atop the ruins of 16 century old Babri mosque which will mark the culmination of another promise made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to their radical Hindu voters, and will serve as the biggest political testament for the Hindu majoritarianism over Indian Muslims. The Ram Temple inauguration at a time when the Hindu majority India is braced for a nationwide election in May this year had far-reaching effects on New Delhi's domestic politics, and future political landscapes, diminishing religious freedoms and minorities' rights, above all, it is more likely to put Hindu Nationalist BJP on the victory stand for a straight third time further paving the way toward a radical Hindu state on the ruins of Secular/ pluralistic India.

This moment also reminds the deplorable scenes witnessed by the civilized world over three decades ago in December 1992, when violent Hindu gangs stormed the Babri Masjid climbed atop the dome and demolished the building to clear the site for a Hindu temple. Nationwide protests erupted in India, and violence cost more than 2000 lives mostly Muslim women and Children. The inquiry commission constituted by the Indian government found dozens of people many of whom were BJP leaders and currently represent the Modi government, responsible for orchestrating, encouraging and materializing the heinous attack against the historic Babri Mosque in Ayodhya.

Historically, Narendra Modi and the ruling BJP benefited most from stirring up Hindu nationalism around the Babri Masjid, and through furling Hindu-Muslim controversy in domestic politics in India throughout the past, particularly in recent years since 2014. When RSS influenced Bhartia Junta Party swept into power, displacing the Secular Indian National Congress, that entirely changed the political, social and societal dynamics in current-day India.

The BJP then began to remake secular India into a Hindu supremacist state, that significantly added by India's Supreme Court decision allowing Hindus to build their Temple on disputed land. Prime Minister Modi laid the foundation stone of the Ram Temple at a groundbreaking ceremony in August 2020 and is now ready to harvest the fruit of the controversy what the BJP and other Hindu supremacists began more than 30 years ago to grasp the Hindu nationalist peers to make India so-called Akhand Bharat.

India is witnessing a sharp rise in Hindu extremism that has squeezed the Indian soil for religious and ethnic minorities from Kashmir to Nagaland and Punjab to Manipur. Although, minority rights in India is a long-held issue that emerged in the Hindu-majority nation just after getting independence from British colonial rule in August 1947. Besides, state suppression in Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir, Juna gadh, and Gurdaspur, the Muslims faced hate crime, communal violence, and prejudice at the hands of the Hindu majority due to their perceived bifurcation of Akund Bharat after Pakistan got independence. The demolition of the historic Babri mosque and the construction of the Ram Mandir over its land is a clear manifestation of Hindus' bias toward Muslims and growing Hindu majoritarianism in modern India.

In fact, the rift between Muslims and Hindus had always existed in history yet these faultlines became more visible and deeper after the Modi-led pro-RSS BJP regime came to power and started using both religion and nationalism as tools to flourish party politics. Meanwhile, the Modi regime undertook multiple legislative, administrative and political measures that widened the gap between the Hindu majority and the Muslims, who constitute the largest ever minority in any country in the world. It is important that the global community and Western media specifically highlight the minority rights issue in India along with reporting on the BJP's Islamophobic politics and inhumane use of Hindus' religious sentiment against ethnic and religious minorities to achieve victory in the elections.

Online banking fraud

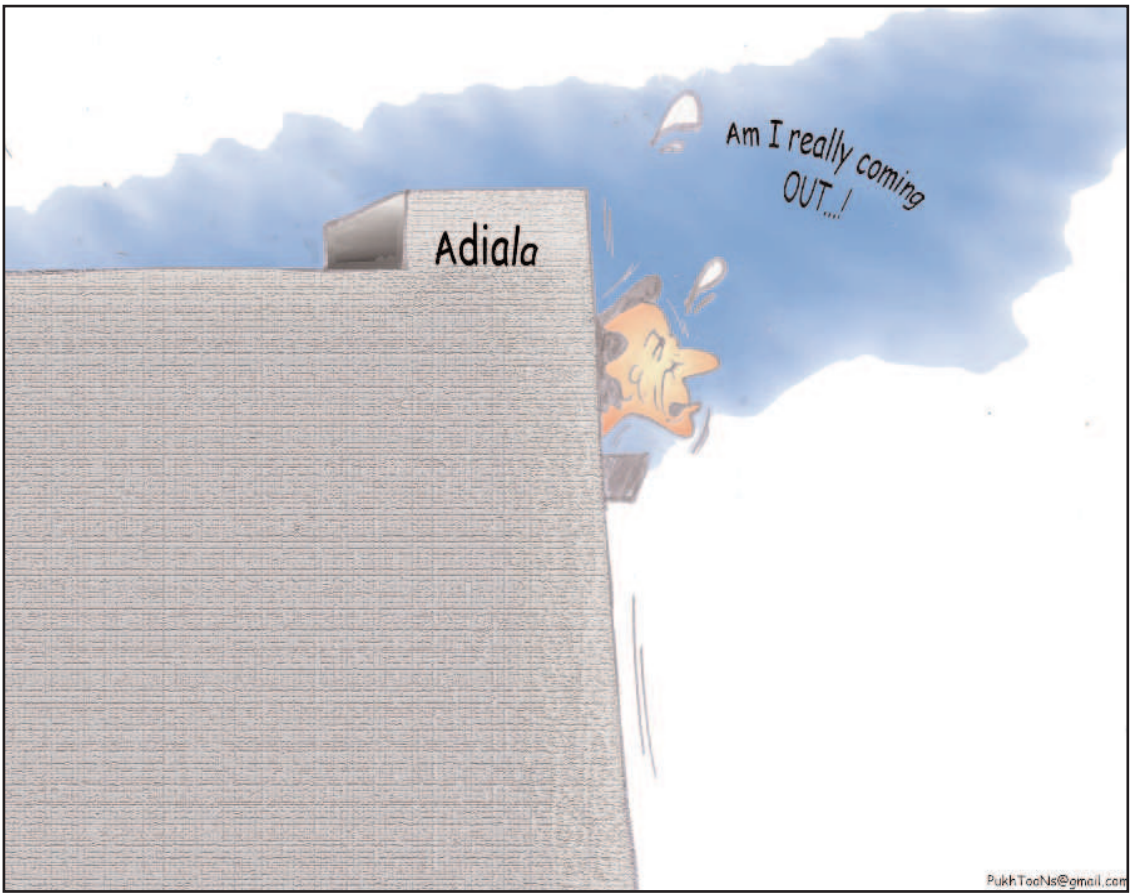
RECENTLY, President Dr Arif Alvi asked Banking Mohtasib to take up the matter of banking fraud with the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to ensure the issuance of essential Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), so that criminals could be blacklisted, and their access to the Banking industry could be blocked at earliest. The President also rejected two separate pleas filed by the United Bank Ltd (UBL) and Bank Alfalah Ltd (BAFL) 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.

Online banking scams, fraud and hacking are common in all parts of the world, while Pakistanis are not behind in this criminal activity. Online fraud often occurs after identity theft, clicking online phishing emails or messages, and unauthorized bank transactions. It's crucial to regularly monitor our account transactions, use strong passwords, and be cautious of phishing attempts to protect ourselves from such threats. A sharp upsurge has been witnessed in online banking fraud, and criminal activities concerning the private banking sector particularly the HBL, Bank Alfalah, Allied Bank, Jazz Cash and Easy Paisa accounts, where criminals broke their security measures and made fake calls by using their official number, help lines and fake IDs similar to them for getting sensitive account information from the customers. Meanwhile, criminal gangs use easy paisa and Jazz cash accounts/ cell phone numbers for the transfer of illegal money, receiving ransom and other unlawful actions that jeopardize the writ of the law and hurt the public interest at large.

Concerns about lax regulations and corruption have been a long-held problem in the banking sector of the country throughout the past. Unfortunately, the banks have been found non-compliant with the SBP's directives regarding the implementation of monitoring systems to detect fraudulent transactions. However, Pakistani Banks often blame individuals, and try to hide their monitoring, regulatory and security flaws making the matter worse for the individuals, the government and the Banking industry as well. The government and its relevant institutions including the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Finance Ministry and Financial Ombudsman must take proactive steps in enforcing and strengthening regulations in the banking sector to protect public interest and build confidence in the financial industry in the country. So, online banking fraud, money theft, and other serious crimes could be curbed permanently in the future.

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A progressive green growth narrative is crucial in big election year

WITH voters in 76 countries heading to the polls in 2024, this is a record-breaking year for democracy. Yet it coincides with an alarming rise in right-wing populism, which increasingly blames policies that address climate change for voters' economic hardships.

Despite the clear potential of green initiatives to boost incomes, productivity and economic growth, the progressive left struggles to articulate a compelling counternarrative. If the false dichotomy between economic prosperity and environmental sustainability persists, the green transition will lack the political support it needs to succeed. Consider the debate in the UK over the Labour Party's £28 billion (\$35.5 billion) Green Prosperity Plan, which it has presented as a key instrument to "make Britain a clean energy superpower." Instead of dwelling on the sums being spent, the conversation should focus on what it will take to complete the stated mission. The point is not to throw money at the problem and hope for the best; it is to offer a strategy for mobilizing massive private and public sector investment toward a collective goal.

To make clean energy the engine of its industrial, financial and innovation strategies, Labour needs a new narrative. It needs to show that a mission-oriented government working with businesses to invest and innovate in an outcomes-oriented way will result in new skills, jobs, productivity gains and higher wages. Labour can bolster its case with six arguments. First, there need not be any trade-off between climate action and economic growth. The UK has a huge green industry and capital markets it can tap into with mission-oriented public sector investment. Green industries will be worth more than \$10 trillion globally by 2050 and, in the UK, they are growing four times faster than the rest of the economy.

When public investment is guided by a clear mission, it can create new markets, crowd in private investment and increase long-term competitiveness. Germany's

green steel sector is a good example. It owes its growth to the German public bank's (KfW) green loans program, which helped create an entirely new market for carbon-efficient steel. Second, climate finance represents an investment, not a cost. Mission-oriented policies can generate private sector investment by increasing firms' productive capacity and spurring cross-sectoral economic activity that will have positive spillovers now and in the future. NASA's Apollo mission and moon landing required research and development not only in aerospace technology but also in nutrition, materials, electronics and software. Camera phones, foil blankets, baby formula and software are just a few of the hundreds of innovations that still benefit us today.

Strategies to address climate change can recreate this pattern with investments in infrastructure, transportation, agriculture, energy and digital innovation. Countries getting a head start on energy-efficient ways to produce steel and cement and cleaner ways to extract key minerals will become more competitive as green standards are normalized. And a digital economy that helps sectors go green will attract global investment. Likewise, a school meals program that ensures access to healthy, tasty and sustainable lunches for all children would require outcomes-oriented public procurement and cooperation with local green companies across the food supply chain. Third, missions require patient, long-term, risk-tolerant finance that can crowd in other forms of finance and drive transformational changes at different stages of the innovation and business cycle. If structured well, public finance can shape and even create markets by channeling loans, grants, guarantees and debt and equity-based instruments toward companies that are willing to invest in solving specific problems. While often presented as a form of "de-risking," this term misses the point. These cases call for risk-taking and hence

mechanisms for sharing both risks and rewards.

In the case of renewable energy, national development banks around the world have often invested in portfolios with higher-risk technologies that are working their way toward scalable commercialization. By leading on early-stage, high-risk and capital-intensive projects, public finance can function as an investor of last resort, not a lender of last resort, playing a critical role in creating and shaping new green markets. Fourth, public sector capabilities matter. An ambitious national clean-energy mission requires confident, competent and well-equipped national, regional and local governments that work together to deploy tools like outcomes-oriented procurement and investment. To deploy and operationalize a £28 billion climate plan effectively, the UK needs appropriate skills both in green industries and in public sector organizations. Yet many governments, including in the UK, have become over-reliant on big consultancies with extractive business models, resulting in a stunting of state capacity. With Labour having quadrupled its own reliance on consultants, a change of thinking is clearly in order.

Fifth, a green, just transition requires a new social contract, which means redefining the typical partnership between government and business. While profit rates are high globally, investment rates are not, owing to the increasing financialization of both finance and business. In the US and the UK, only 20 percent of finance goes into the productive economy, the rest flows into the more speculative finance, insurance and real-estate domains. In addition to redistributive policies (like a progressive wealth tax), putting public purpose at the heart of the economy requires pre-distributive measures. For example, Labour should embed conditionalities in the Green Prosperity Plan to ensure access to goods and services for consumers or to share profits resulting from public support with a wider range

of stakeholders, including workers. Companies receiving government support must commit to reinvesting profits in green innovation and better working conditions and pay. And, as the United Auto Workers' recent victory in the US shows, trade unions are critical to ensuring that greening the economy results in better skills, and that productivity increases are matched by higher wages.

Finally, the £28 billion plan must be seen as an investment in the country's financial future. Although public investment may increase the deficit in the short run, economic expansion that greens productive capacity in manufacturing and services will ultimately reduce the debt-to-gross domestic product ratio. The fiscal austerity of the past 15 years weakened not only the social fabric, but also the economy and its growth potential (as did Brexit, which reduced the market size for UK industry). By creating a dynamic hub of green investment and innovation across the economy, including public services like sustainable mobility, a mission-oriented government can improve the country's fiscal position over the long term. For both the climate and society, inaction is the costlier option. Sources of finance include UK green gilts - government bonds specifically designated for green initiatives - as well as proposed reforms to the UK's outdated public accounting rules. Currently, loans extended by state investment banks are counted as part of the overall public debt, while the returns they generate for the state go untallied. This quirk artificially inflates public debt figures. Simply by aligning its rules with global standards, the UK could leverage public banks, like the UK Infrastructure Bank, more effectively. With so many elections this year, a progressive green narrative is imperative. To persuade voters, it must show how new public and private investment aimed at socially and environmentally beneficial outcomes can create an economy-wide growth multiplier, good for people and planet alike.

Where is 'never again' for Gaza?

Afaf Al-Najjar

LAST week, we passed the 100th-day mark of Israel's latest episode of aggression against the people of Gaza. It was a depressing milestone to consider. A hundred days of Palestinians being mercilessly exterminated in all kinds of brutal ways: Israeli bombs ripping them apart, Israeli bullets piercing their skulls, and the Israeli-imposed siege starving them or killing them through otherwise treatable infections.

A hundred days in which the countries that said "never again" almost 80 years ago did nothing to stop our extermination. A hundred days in which we pleaded, humanitarian organisations pleaded, the United Nations pleaded and people in the streets across the world pleaded, but we were all ignored. Perhaps we should not be surprised at the silence. After all, Israel's brutal and illegal occupation was allowed to go on for decades till it beat all records and became longest-lasting in modern history.

Throughout this time, the Israeli occupying state, its governments and army have controlled virtually every aspect of Palestinian life: political, economic, social and - you may not believe it but - love life, too. Israel has been telling us what we can eat, what we can drink, what we can buy, where we can go, where we can travel, where we can live, where we can garden, where we can graze our cattle, where we can fish, where we can go to school, where we can get health services (if at all), and yes, who we can fall in love, get married to and settle with.

Israel has even tried to tell us who we are as a nation. It has told Palestinians that they are Arab, Muslim, Christian, Druze or Circassian, but not Palestinian. It has done everything and anything to break up the Palestinian social fabric. Israel has also persistently sown divisions between political forces in Palestine; in the past 15 years, it has made sure that any mediation seeking a unity government between the two biggest Palestinian parties, Hamas and Fatah, has failed. Political disunity has caused immense damage to the Palestinian community, ultimately leading to conflict and weakness from within.

Israel has also made sure that we remain poor and vulnerable not only through continuous dispossession - land theft, expulsions, and home demolitions - but also through economic dependence. It has purposefully kept the Palestinian economy on the brink of collapse, suffocating economic activity and private business. This has resulted in high unemployment rates and forced many Palestinians to work for the occupiers - sometimes even in illegal Jewish settlements literally built on their stolen land.

Israel has also consistently undermined Palestinian agriculture - traditionally one of the strongest economic sectors in Palestine. Restricted access to land and water resources has led to a dramatic reduction of Palestinian agricultural output, fundamentally disrupting traditional livelihoods. In Gaza, the economic devastation has been even worse, courtesy of the 17-year-long blockade imposed by Israel. It severely restricted imports and exports, effectively killing most trade with the outside world and wrecking the manufacturing and agricultural sectors. Israel even

counted the calories of foods it was allowing into Gaza to ensure we barely have enough to survive.

When we have resisted - peacefully or otherwise - the Israeli occupation has shown no mercy. It has killed, maimed, imprisoned, tortured and collectively punished. In the ongoing aggression against the Gaza Strip, this drive to decimate the Palestinian people has taken on genocidal proportions. In 100 days, in the killing fields of Gaza, Israel managed to slaughter at least 31,000 Palestinians - 23,000 who have been officially counted and at least 8,000 who could not be because their bodies are still under the rubble with no one to take them out.

The rest of us, who have survived, have faced the deadly combination of fear, hunger and thirst under Israel's indiscriminate bombardment and total siege. Over the past 100 days, the Israeli occupation has denied the entry of food, water, and medicine to the Gaza Strip. Not only that, but Israeli air strikes have targeted every source of life. From water wells and water treatment plants to bakeries, farms, electricity generators, and solar panels, Israel has systematically targeted any means of relief for the people of Gaza. It is important to note that the aid that comes into the Gaza Strip right now cannot cover the needs of even a small proportion of the population. People have become so desperate due to hunger and thirst that aid trucks that come in are sometimes attacked and ransacked. These goods are then sold in the streets for three to five times the regular price and thus never reach the most vulnerable who desperately need them.

Tales we have heard about the ghettos and concentration camps echo today in Gaza, where 2.3 million of us are crammed into ever-dwindling areas and forced to endure unlivable conditions. When you put side by side the accounts of atrocities both of these peoples faced, you will see that history is repeating itself, only this time the entire world is watching and it is doing nothing to stop it. The solemn vow of "never again", birthed from the ashes of the Holocaust, was meant to prevent the repetition of its horrors. The commitment etched into the collective conscience of the world was a promise to vulnerable peoples across the world that they would be protected, that their tormentors would be stopped. Yet, as we turn our gaze towards the ongoing Palestinian struggle, this pledge rings hollow. The shadows of past atrocities linger in the present-day experiences of the Palestinian people.

Still, as we marked 100 days of relentless slaughter, there was a spark of hope. South Africa stood up for the principle of "never again" and took the state of Israel to court, accusing it - before the eyes of the whole world - of committing genocide. South Africa has our eternal love and gratitude for standing up for what is right, for giving us hope when we had fallen into despair. In these dark times, "never again" cannot remain a mere phrase of remembrance; it must become a call to action. The world must act on its pledge to uphold the dignity and rights of all people, in every corner of the world and prevent yet another genocide from taking place.

Alfazeera

For the Indian Muslim, Ayodhya is everywhere

Insiyah Vahanvaty

FLIPPING through the radio channels on my drive to a meeting, I notice four out of the nine pre-sets blare triumphant tunes celebrating the upcoming inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. As I turn onto the road that connects Delhi and Gurgaon, I am confronted by an overwhelming burst of saffron.

Illegal squatters who have long since taken over the pavements across this stretch of road have now been roped into peddling saffron flags. Larger-than-life posters depicting a muscular Ram wielding a bow and arrow dominate the streets. Street hawkers eagerly offer smaller versions of the flag adorned with Ram's visage. Swords, paintings of deities and cut-outs of Ram punctuate every street corner. I greet the housing society guard with a nod, he responds with a delighted "Jai Shri

Ram" (Glory to Lord Rama). The mood is that of a religious carnival rather than an ordinary day of business in the city.

I learn from an enthusiastic WhatsApp message from an eager uncle in our housing society group that cinema chain INOX and Aaj Tak TV channel have tied up to livestream the triumphant inauguration of the Ram Mandir in 160 cinemas and more than 70 cities in India. Complimentary popcorn will be offered. My news app informs me that the Chairman of the Bar Council of India has requested the Chief Justice of India to declare a holiday in the Supreme Court and High Courts as a gesture "acknowledging the cultural and national significance of the event". Further, I read a bizarre news item about flight attendants on an Indigo flight dressed up as Ram, Lakshman, Sita and

Hanuman, greeting passengers at the gate. Apparently, a Lord Ram read out the boarding announcement. One has to wonder what truly devout Hindus feel about their beloved gods being reduced to a collection of cheap costumes at an airport or bout such blatant politicisation of religion that has little to do with true devotion.

As an Indian Muslim who grew up in the 1990s, this is all simply bizarre to me. In my view, the significance of a temple - or indeed, a mosque - lies in matters of personal faith and worship and should not be transformed into a political symbol of national pride in a secular country. The purported "cultural significance" of the Ram Temple appears to be immersed in the murky waters of the polarisation we are currently navigat-

ing. Secularism, once a proud virtue every politician embraced, tucking it safely into his political repertoire, appears to be buried so far below the mountains of saffron-tinged communalism, that I fear it may never be recovered. Never before has my generation seen such a complete capitulation of the state to religion, nor the complete invisibilisation of the Indian Muslim - evident in the fact that for the first time in independent India's history, India today has no Muslim Chief Ministers, Cabinet Ministers or MPs in the ruling party. In a simpler time, the very act of a sitting prime minister inaugurating a temple in secular India would have been considered improper and inappropriate.

What is also missing is an acknowledgement of the bloody past that has led to

this moment. For India's Muslims, these celebrations are a painful demonstration of majoritarianism and polarisation. The demolition of the Babri Mosque is still a collective memory of grief and loss. Many of us remember those killed in the riots that followed the destruction. Despite political promises, the mosque was never restored, and now, a grand temple is to be built over its ruins - a monument to Hindu supremacy. Browsing Twitter in the morning, I read a tweet by a Muslim influencer, appealing to Muslims in India to practice restraint. To lie low, stay home and not become provoked by the insulting messages and visuals they are sure to encounter. Predictably, the tweet was followed by an onslaught of precisely the kind of offensive messages they had cautioned against.

Among those living abroad, some have opted to

cancel their annual visits to India, gripped by the fear of potential violence. Others, living in Ayodhya speak of removing their loved ones from the town for some time. Weddings have been postponed or scaled down. Mosques lay eerily quiet on Friday as local Muslims chose to pray in their homes. Yet, media channels are falling over themselves to report that a majority of Muslims are "happy" and "emotional" at the construction of the temple. As Indian journalist Betwa Sharma put it: "If you celebrate while someone else is in pain, something is broken in our society." And yet, peace is the most precious commodity, clung to desperately. When something is too painful to endure, one simply awaits its passing, hoping for some form of closure. The Indian Muslim has become used to this. The winter has been a long and intimidating one.

Our possibly short national nightmare

ON August 9, 1974, the only unelected vice president in American history took the presidential oath of office at a White House ceremony. It was the day after President Richard Nixon resigned in disgrace.

"My fellow Americans, our long national nightmare is over," President Gerald Ford said. "Our Constitution works; our great Republic is a government of laws and not of men. Here the people rule." In words that sound almost foreign to our ears in the 21st century, Ford added, "As we bind up the internal wounds of Watergate, more painful and more poisonous than those of foreign wars, let us restore the golden rule to our political process, and let brotherly love purge our hearts of suspicion and of hate."

Last week the true-crime docuseries that shot to the top of the list of Netflix shows in the US was "American Nightmare." But it wasn't that kind of nightmare, or Gerald Ford's one, that presidential candidate Nikki Haley invoked Monday after her third-place finish in the Iowa caucuses. "Our campaign is the last best hope of stopping the Trump-Biden nightmare," the former UN ambassador said. She was referring to polls showing that the majority of Americans don't want a rematch between President Joe Biden and the president he defeated in 2020, Donald Trump. When the results of the New Hampshire primary are reported Tuesday, we'll have a better sense of whether anyone can stand in the way of that dreaded rematch. If not, it won't be as protracted a "national nightmare" as the two-year-long Watergate scandal that put Gerald Ford in the Oval Office. This year's election is on November 5 - and the inauguration is only one year away. Though, depending on your point of view, the real nightmare could begin after the swearing-in.

Haley is walking a tightrope, trying to challenge Trump's frontrunner status among Republicans without alienating his MAGA base. "There's an outside chance she can pull off an upset win, carry New Hampshire and pierce Trump's perceived cloak of invincibility, changing the course of the race," wrote Frida Ghitis. "But there's another way Haley can emerge victorious. That way has more to do with forces outside her control... If Trump is disqualified, somehow unable to run or perhaps convicted and made too toxic even for his supporters, the space could clear for the GOP's second-place finisher to step in and become the nominee. Call it the banana peel path." Haley has been wary of directly going after the former president's many vulnerabilities, while obliquely arguing that the nation can't risk having a president in or nearing his 80s and that "chaos follows" Trump, whether or not it is his fault. "Her ability to build momentum over the course of the primary showcases her political talent and ability to attract college-educated Republicans tired of having to explain away their support for a president whose hair-trigger social media posts verge into the unhinged," wrote Patrick T. Brown.

Daniel McCarthy isn't buying into the idea that Haley has momentum: "Former President Donald Trump's easy win in Iowa on Monday confirms that there really is no race for the Republican nomination this year. With a deep freeze discouraging turnout, the caucuses provided a hard test of voter enthusiasm. Trump's rivals failed it." "A measure of the former president's insurmountable strength within the party is that he not only beat Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley and Vivek Ramaswamy, he also overcame all of the institutional powers backing them - some of the most formidable interests in the GOP." On the Democratic side, Biden isn't even on the ballot Tuesday and isn't campaigning in New Hampshire, due to a dispute between state and national party officials over the primary's timing. Rep. Dean Phillips, a low-profile 54-year-old legislator from Minnesota, is running in New Hampshire, SE Cupp noted, and is polling more strongly there than around the nation. It's a longshot,

Richard Galant

Cupp noted, but "if Biden's poll numbers keep going in the wrong direction, if voters feel taken for granted or even overlooked by Democrats, if a symbolic win in New Hampshire gives voters a reason to look more closely at Dean Phillips, well he might give Biden a run for his money."

Karen Finney is the great-great-great-great niece of Confederate General Robert E. Lee and great-great-great granddaughter of a freed slave from Virginia. "Walking through the door of my grandmother's home in North Carolina," Finney wrote, "it was impossible to miss a portrait of Lee proudly displayed on the wall. At mealtimes, during what occasionally felt like indoctrination, she would admiringly describe our famous ancestor, 'the General,' as a benevolent slave owner and noble warrior." "As she explained it, Lee valiantly fought an unjust 'War of Northern Aggression' in defense of 'states' rights,' often referred to as 'The Lost Cause.' The South had been defeated, my grandmother insisted, only because the Northern army had more resources and slavery really wasn't so bad."

In Finney's view, the Lost Cause is the backdrop for Trump's suggestion that the Civil War could have been "negotiated," the rewriting of history in school curriculums under Florida Gov. DeSantis' administration and Haley's struggle over the question of whether America is, or ever was, a racist country. "Beyond absurdly omitting slavery as the root cause of the War, she made matters worse while trying to clean up her comments during a recent CNN Town Hall, saying she just assumed that slavery was a 'given' since all children learn about it in school in the South." Trump's remark that immigrants are "poisoning the blood" of Americans evokes the words of Adolf Hitler in "Mein Kampf," author Paul Moses pointed out. But he added that the concept goes further back - to the eugenics movement of the early 20th century.

In 1914, the year Edward Alsworth Ross became president of the American Sociological Association, he published a book warning that immigrants, Moses wrote, "would act on Americans' standards for cleanliness, morality and education 'like a slow poison.' A nation that relies on immigration to maintain its population 'deserves the extinction that surely awaits it,' he wrote...The prejudice beneath Ross' opinions was obvious, but his ideas were mainstream and respectable - he was considered a progressive reformer..." "But Ross came to regret the implications of his ideas about supposedly superior and inferior races, writing shortly after World War II that 'we never imagined the theory being made a hinge for German aggression to turn on.' That's what the phony claims of eugenics led to - Hitler's 'Final Solution,' which resulted in the murder of 6 million Jews. It's certainly worth having vigorous debates about immigration laws, but those who've been indifferent to or even supportive of Trump's increasingly clear turn toward racist, eugenic ideas should confront what they've enabled." Republicans describe the immigration surge at the US southern border as an "invasion" that presents a national security threat. Yet, John Avlon wrote, Trump and some members of the House GOP, want to tank an emerging compromise in the Senate that would couple border security measures with aid to Ukraine.

"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 Trumpified GOP that is more willing to demagogue an issue than actually deal with it." Trump sat in a Manhattan courtroom Wednesday while E. Jean Carroll testified in support of her defamation case against the former president. Last May, she was awarded \$5 million for battery and defamation when a jury found Trump liable for sexually assaulting her. Now Carroll is

seeking at least \$10 million in additional damages for Trump's 2019 comments about her allegation. As Danielle Campoamor wrote, "Carroll found herself facing down not only a man found liable for assaulting her, but also a former president and current presidential frontrunner - an unprecedented example of the power dynamics survivors face. While a victim of sexual assault receives death threats, her assailant receives endorsements and secures the Iowa caucus."

"During Carroll's testimony, Trump repeatedly shook his head, according to CNN reporters inside the courtroom, and could be heard 'loudly saying things' such as 'it's false,' 'she's gotten her memory back,' and, according to Carroll's lawyer Shawn Crowley, that the lawsuit is 'a witch hunt' and a 'con job.'" When the judge threatened to oust Trump from the courtroom, the former president said, "I would love it." The chaotic court proceeding is just one example of why the Supreme Court should clear the way for allowing television cameras at Trump's forthcoming election subversion trial, argued Robert C. Gottlieb. "Whether or not cameras are permitted, we know that Trump will continue to impugn the integrity of the proceedings, prosecutors and judge, twist the testimony and repeat his debunked conspiracy theories. His disturbing behavior that was on full display during Wednesday's court proceedings will undoubtedly continue during his upcoming criminal trial." "The American people are entitled to see and hear for themselves what goes on in the courtroom so that they can draw their own conclusions from the evidence."

The narrative of fast-worsening inequality over the past half century has been challenged in a new study by economists Gerald Auten and David Splinter. They used data to show that, compared to the 1960s, the pre-tax income of the top 1% has increased only by 2.6% and after accounting for taxes, the share of income going to the super-rich "hasn't budged at all," wrote Jordan McGillis. The study disputes a 2018 finding by Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman that the top 1% has seen its share of national pre-tax income go from 12% to 20% since the 1980s. McGillis says there's something else going on that tends to exacerbate inequality. Among rich Americans, marriage rates remain high, but they've plummeted for less affluent people, creating more single-person households with lower levels of income. "This cleavage makes possible what the Brookings Institution's Melissa Kearney describes as "two-parent privilege," an emerging phenomenon through which well-off couples transmit educational and economic advantages to their children. Viewed from this angle, it should not surprise us that many Americans think the rich are galloping ever further ahead." Elise Gould and Josh Bivens have a different take. Using Social Security Administration data, they found that the "share of earnings for the bottom 90% fell 9.7 percentage points between 1979 and 2022, while the share of earnings for the top 5% grew 8.8 percentage points. The very top - the top 0.1% of wage earners - nearly tripled its share of total earnings from 1.6% in 1979 to 4.6% in 2022... All of this straightforward data on earnings clearly shows a huge rise in inequality of pay in the US economy."

The US and the UK struck back at the Houthis, the Yemeni insurgent group that is targeting commercial shipping in the Red Sea, but the lingering question was about how effective such a series of strikes can be. "We think of war as a last resort," Elisabeth Kendall, head of Cambridge University's Girton College told Peter Bergen. The Houthis "think of it as a way of life." "The Houthis have this massive advantage, which is that they don't care about casualties, and they also don't have to be accurate, as we have to be accurate when we're operating in these theatres because we don't want to kill civilians. All

they have to do is lob missiles and drones into the Red Sea to have the effect that they want, which is to disrupt global shipping, rattle financial markets, create fear and look heroic at the same time. So, by taking out some of their launch sites, we have probably taken out some of their capability, but they will have expected that. They will have hidden some of their military assets," Kendall said. CNN Opinion senior editor Sheena McKenzie interviewed Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish, known as the first Palestinian doctor to hold a staff position at an Israeli hospital, and asked him about the future for Palestinian children amid the war in Gaza. "There is no future for them," he said. "How can we give them hope to stop this bloodshed? How can we start to give them a future, not to be an extremist or be a fanatic?"

"The cost of this war is not just what is happening now. The cost of war is the invisible ghost. It's the post-war. The physical, social, spiritual and mental wounds that lasts generations." (Hear more from Sheena McKenzie on the Tug of War podcast.) There is a lot of talk but very little real debate about the Israel-Hamas conflict on US college campuses, wrote Peter Rutland, a professor of government at Wesleyan University. "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'... 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."

When Holly Thomas was 12, she "received a large - unsolicited - Estee Lauder makeup sampler for Christmas. The box felt like a totem of my impending maturity, recognition that I would soon be allowed access to an as-yet out-of-reach club. I gave it pride of place on my bedroom table (swiftly rebranded as a "dresser" with the help of a soon-to-be filthy sarong), and before too long I was regularly being sent out of class, cheeks burning, to wash my contraband mascara off." "It wasn't a particularly edifying phase, but neither was it very consequential. Today however, skin care is a far more serious business. Gone are the days of teens aimlessly browsing random drugstores by day and smudging their pillows with iridescent bronzer by night. Now, kids don't just know how to cleanse properly, they've taken to beauty products with unprecedented zeal. Absurd though it sounds, that fervor is acutely ominous," Thomas wrote. "Dermatologists report children as young as nine, many of whom already maintain elaborate at-home skin care regimes coming to their offices for cosmetic consultations. Teens who've barely exited puberty are obsessing over the alleged 'preventative' anti-aging properties of Botox, and the internet is teeming with youngsters pleading for solutions to their 'wrinkles.' The fretting and groupthink involved bear all the hallmarks of a classic youthful infatuation. But this one comes with sinister undercurrents less familiar to the adults who went before them." "The most worrying thing about today's skin care craze isn't just that the financial and emotional buy-in are completely out of proportion to the "need" being addressed. They may set kids up for lasting damage. And thanks to the misinformation soup of social media, the gnarly, anxiety-provoking call is coming from inside the house."

CNN

Britain responds to Gaza's suffering

Baria Alamuddin

world, have ingested a daily diet of atrocities and carnage through both conventional and social media. It is not just those from Muslim and ethnic minority backgrounds, but also young people and university students who are outraged at how the country's political class ties itself in knots to avoid criticizing Israel. Hundreds of thousands of British people with experience of working in the Gulf states and the rest of the Arab world generally have a more nuanced understanding of the Palestinian cause.

Huge numbers have participated in pro-Palestinian demonstrations in major UK cities, which right-wing media and prominent politicians denounce as "hate-marches" peopled by "anti-British extremists." Ahead of elections due this year, the Conservative Party is furiously tearing itself apart in an ever more rightwards leaning death roll. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has a net popularity rating of minus 49, and Labour are a commanding 28 points ahead in the polls. But the Conservative solution to its chronic unpopularity has been to become embroiled in civil war over plans to deport refugees to Rwanda.

This proposal was initially blocked by the Supreme Court, which unsurprisingly ruled that Rwanda was not safe for asylum seekers. Sunak's solution is to ask Parliament to pass a law declaring Rwanda safe. Hard-liners wanted to go even further through potentially illegal measures to block the jurisdiction of institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights, enabling the government to violate human rights law with impunity. No wonder they are so hasty to make common cause with Benjamin Netanyahu's pariah regime! No less a figure than Baroness Kennedy, the leading barrister and member of the House of Lords, denounced the Rwanda measures as a "hated and hateful" piece of legislation, which at best could remove only a handful of asylum seekers at enormous expense. Such monomaniac obsession with this issue, while ignoring the dire state of Britain's public services and stagnant economy, is obviously not a vote winner for a kamikaze ruling party that long ago lost the will to govern responsibly.

Attitudes toward the BDS movement vary across the Western world. A number of major European cities have revoked twinning agreements with Israel, including Barcelona, which severed its relationship with Tel Aviv. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Germany and the US have canceled numerous events by pro-Palestinian figures on the basis of spurious allegations of anti-semitism. The municipality of Oslo, a city of huge symbolic importance to the peace process, passed a measure prohibiting "Made in Israel" labels on goods produced in illegal Israeli settlements. Ireland is pursuing legislation to ban trade with settlements. This follows a 2019 ruling by the European Court of Justice that all goods produced in "Israel-occupied areas" had to be labeled as such so as not to mislead consumers.

The European Court of Human Rights furthermore ruled in 2020 that anti-boycott legislation violated freedom of expression. The situation is radically different in the US, where 35 states have enacted laws to outlaw boycotting Israel. Although courts have pushed back against such restrictions on freedom of speech, several companies have been persecuted after desisting from investment in illegal settlements. Students at prestigious US universities who supported BDS have been added to recruitment black-lists.

It is perverse and outrageous that at a time when Israel is facing genocide charges at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Britain and other states are pursuing measures that would criminalize those taking a principled stand on crimes against humanity and the persecution of the Palestinian people. I love Britain as the free, democratic country that adopted me - so it hurts on every level to witness such illiberal measures being forced through, as if the free world wanted to undermine everything it stands for. Those who seek to penalize us for acting according to our conscience shouldn't just be kicked out of office, but should themselves face a reckoning for advocating measures that trample democracy, freedom and justice underfoot for their own political advancement.

Arab News

Experts' take on Taiwan question

Pan Hsi-tang, Marcus Vinicius De Freitas & Cao Xiaoheng

DEMOCRATIC Progressive Party candidate Lai Ching-te may have won the leadership election on the Taiwan island, but he failed to get the majority of the votes (he won just 40 percent of the popular votes). The DPP, too, suffered a loss in that it failed to win the majority of seats in the local legislature. This "double minority" outcome shows, compared with the previous election, fewer Taiwanese residents trust the DPP.

Despite the DPP's diminished standing in the local legislature, with none of the three parties having a majority, the intricate interplay and power dynamics among the three major parties will likely make political maneuvering and strategic calculations a routine affair. Does the fact that the Kuomintang, along with its two independent allies, and the Taiwan People's Party together make up the majority in the legislature mean they will more closely supervise the DPP's policies and powers? Or will the DPP authorities ride roughshod over the opposition's suggestions and decisions? This scenario raises concerns over the overall impact of Lai's win on Taiwan's political landscape and cross-Strait relations.

Lai's 40 percent vote share primarily came from the DPP's core supporters, indicating dissatisfaction with the party's governance under the outgoing Tsai Ing-wen administration. And yet the fact that the majority of Taiwan voters signaled their desire for a change in leadership is not being adequately acknowledged on the island. That Lai has been elected the island's leader on minority support poses a significant challenge to his political authority compared with Tsai's "complete governance". With only 40 percent support, Lai lacks broad representation and will face obstacles in

governance unless he collaborates with one of the two parties. In the 113-seat legislature, the Kuomintang's 52 seats, along with its two allies, will not give it even a simple majority. But the fact that the DPP has a seat less than the Kuomintang could prompt the TPP, with eight seats, to leverage its position to foster a strategic alliance with either of the two major parties, adding another layer of uncertainty to Taiwan's political future.

Despite close ties between the Kuomintang's Han Kuoyu and the TPP's Ko Wen-je, the TPP, under Ko's leadership, is expected to assert its autonomy, creating opportunities for both the blue (Kuomintang) and green (DPP) camps to form a front on specific issues. Thus the TPP could serve as check and balance for the DPP administration, and help stabilize cross-Strait relations and prevent turbulence across the Strait. However, TPP leader Ko has added another layer of complexity to the island's politics, by emphasizing that he won't exclusively align with either the Kuomintang or the DPP and, instead collaborate with the party that supports a good cause. The TPP's possible oscillation between the DPP and the Kuomintang risks creating distrust in both sides, because one of the parties will always be dissatisfied with the TPP's decision. Incidentally, the TPP has proposed four "legislative reform" measures, demanding clear commitments from the blue and green camps. Although this strategic move places the TPP in a favorable position, engaging in opportunistic dealings with both sides could disappoint those who want to see a new political culture, especially those who reject the idea of trading positions to cooperate with a party.

Also, given his earlier call to "oust the DPP", Ko faces a dilemma: if he collaborates with the DPP in the legisla-

tive assembly, his 3.69 million voters may question his political commitment. Therefore, Ko must carefully consider the implications before fostering a DPP-TPP alliance. More important, Lai's 40 percent vote share, coupled with his pro-independence stance, doesn't align with the majority sentiment in Taiwan. The election's clear message is that supporters of the 1992 Consensus in the blue camp, along with those in the white (TPP) camp who advocate that both sides of the Strait are one family, expect renewed dialogue and peace. Lai's pro-independence background and divisive stance, too, pose a threat to cross-Strait ties, and could escalate tensions across the Strait. The evolving cross-Strait scenario, distinct from eight years ago, suggests that Lai's leadership could worsen an already strained relationship. Notwithstanding Lai's rhetoric of using dialogue and communication to maintain peace across the Strait, the Chinese mainland sees it as an "empty promise" with limited positive responses.

And regardless of the DPP's efforts to highlight "US-Taiwan friendship", US intervention in the island's affairs is likely to be limited as long as Beijing-Washington relations remain stable. This is because the common interests of the US and the mainland far outweigh those of the US and Taiwan. In conclusion, the younger generation's strong support for Ko in the island's election is a rare phenomenon, although it fell short of helping realize the mainstream desire for a change in the island's political leadership. Now, with Lai's victory, uncertainties in cross-Strait relations are set to increase, and if Lai continues to promote his pro-independence ideology, restoring lasting peace across the Strait will become even more challenging.

The China Daily

'Forced labour' fallacy is doomed to shame

Xin Ping

RECENTLY, a United States congressional-executive commission held a hearing on so-called "forced labor in China's seafood industry", pulling an old trick of labeling China with "forced labor". It reminds me of the infamous Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act passed by the US Congress, which is the modus operandi of US politicians turning blatant disinformation into formal documents. The goal is to kick products and industries related to Xinjiang out of the global supply chain while tarnishing the image of China.

But, a lie is a lie. The concocted narrative of "forced labor" did not receive recognition from the international community. The fallacy has been exposed since the very beginning by indisputable facts and statistics. The mechanical picking rate of cotton in Xinjiang reached more than 80 percent as early as in 2019, and that in northern Xinjiang approached 100 percent in 2021. So there is little need for manual harvesting, let alone coercing someone into picking cotton.

Over the past several years, many foreign diplomats, media persons and representatives from

international organizations visited Xinjiang. None of them saw any truth to the claim of "forced labor". They all shared the view that Uyghurs and people of other ethnic groups in Xinjiang lead a happy life. Maxime Vivas, a French writer and journalist who wrote a book titled Ouïghours, pour en finir avec les fake news (Uyghurs, to put an end to the fake news) based on his two visits to Xinjiang, proved that the so-called "forced labor" is nothing but a lie. German automobile manufacturer Volkswagen and other foreign companies also said that no sign of "forced labor" was found. CBS has recently published an article based on the field visit to Xinjiang by one of its reporters, saying, "what we didn't see was evidence of the detention centers and prisons that turned Xinjiang into an international scandal, instead, we saw ethnic dancing, local wine production, and a village remodeled and beautified especially for tourists."

Turning a blind eye to the truth, some US politicians are bent on telling lies about China. For them, what matters is catching the public eye and gaining visibility. If China bashing can help them gain popu-

larity and achieve political goals, they will do it without hesitation, despite all facts to the contrary. They couldn't care less about the content integrity. For them, it is totally fine to spread false statements, mislead the general public and distort public opinion, better still, to get some kickbacks for catering to the anti-China groups. Why has Xinjiang's cotton industry become the target of those politicians? One reason could be shame of inhumane treatment of their own slaves. Every plantation in southern US witnessed forced labor in the 18th and 19th centuries, leading to the death of hundreds of thousands of slaves forced not only to work but to die. Presently, the US is still the epicenter of human trafficking and forced labor. Data shows that more than 14,500 people are trafficked into the US and become victims of forced labor every year, according to an earlier report of US Department of Justice. Today, there are still 400,000 Americans under servitude, a large number of children involved in illegal child labor, and between 240,000 and 325,000 children are at risk of sexual exploitation.

In addition, China hawks in the

US take the fallacious narrative of "forced labor" as a way to smear its "systemic rival", undermining China's stability and hindering China's development. They intend to do a lucrative business deal: a high return of containing China by a low-cost operation of lying and cheating. This is the same old US trick: taking human rights as a pretext to interfere in other countries' internal affairs, expanding its influence and cementing its hegemony. The recent hearing shows that the story of "forced labor" has been shifted to other regions and sectors in China. Deliberate lies do not need any proof. It never matters to those US politicians what the real situation in Xinjiang and other parts of China is. It matters even less whether their absurdity has affected the livelihood of the Chinese people. By cutting Xinjiang and other parts of China off from the global supply chains, they are depriving the legitimate rights of the local people to a better life. The fabricated story of "forced labor" risks resulting in "forced unemployment". It is irritating enough to hear someone keep harping on the same old string. If the US politicians do care about "forced labor", maybe they should take a serious look at their own history.

**Vacancy
Required**

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In brief

PTF announces Davis Cup team

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) on Monday announced the Davis Cup team for the World Group-I Playoff tie against India, scheduled to be held in Islamabad on the 3rd and 4th of February. The team comprises Muzammil Murtaza, Aisam ul Haq Qureshi, Aqeel Khan, Muhammad Shoaib and Barkatullah. Muhammad Abid will accompany the team as non-playing captain, said a press release.

PU win cycling championship

LAHORE (APP): Punjab university Women's cycling team clinched the trophy in 11th All Pakistan Interuniversity women cycling champion 2023-24' at Kinnaird College for Women University Lahore. Thirteen teams participated in the championship in which Ms. Uswa from Punjab University was the best cyclist of the championship. Similarly, PU Gymnastic Team got 2nd position in 20th All Pakistan Intervarsity G y m n a s t i c Championship 2023-24 at Government College University Lahore. Twelve teams participated in the event. PU Director Sports Prof Dr Zafar Iqbal Butt congratulated the teams and officials on the achievements.

Faisalabad wins tennis sports league

FAISALABAD (APP): The Faisalabad region won the Prime Minister Talent Hunt Table Tennis Sports League here on Monday. Deputy Commissioner Abdullah Nanyar Sheikh and Vice-Chancellor of Government College University Prof Dr. Nasir Amin distributed prizes among the winning teams. The concluding ceremony of the sports league was held at Government College University in collaboration with Directorate of Sports, Government College University Faisalabad and Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. Boys teams from five regions of Punjab participated in the event. The Faisalabad region won first position, Lahore region second and Multan/Bahawalpur region remained third.

Sindh wins title

KARACHI (APP): The Sindh men's softball team won the title of the 2nd Essa Laboratories Sindh Balochistan bilateral softball series in style. In the third and decisive match of the series played at the KMC Sports Complex Kashmir Road, Sindh scored 10 runs in their allotted 5 innings. Faraz Ajiaz, Samir Zulfiqar and Arbaza Ijaz scored 2 runs each. Balochistan team managed to score 5 runs in five innings, Captain Ahmed Yar Khan and Osama bin Shuja scored 2 runs. Sindh won the series 2-1 in style. In the prize distribution ceremony, chief guest Commissioner Karachi Muhammad Saleem Rajput along with Sindh Softball Association President Dr. Farhan Essa and Secretary General of Softball Federation of Pakistan Asif Azeem distributed trophies, awards and certificates to the players of both teams. Shiraz Asif was the best catcher of the series, Osama bin Shuja, was the best batter, Faraz Ijaz, the pitcher and Hafiz Moez were declared the best fielder of the event. Speaking on the occasion, the commissioner said that during the series, the players of Balochistan and Sindh were very impressed with the excellent game as well as the exemplary discipline.



MELBOURNE: Victoria Azarenka is in action during her round four singles match against Dayana Yastremska on day 9 of the 2024 Australian Open.

Mohsin Naqvi appointed chairman of PCB management committee

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Punjab Chief Minister Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi has been appointed as Chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Management Committee.

Mohsin Naqvi has also been nominated for the PCB Governing Board, replacing Zaka Ashraf.

Following Ashraf's res-

ignation, Naqvi was nominated by the Prime Minister of Pakistan as the Patron-in-Chief of the PCB. The decision to hold elections for the PCB has also been made within the next two weeks.

Naqvi — a media channel owner, who has been serving as the interim chief minister for a year — also confirmed his appointment while speaking to reporters

in Lahore soon after the news broke out.

"I will try to fix the issues affecting Pakistan cricket. Reforms in cricket are the need of the hour," Naqvi said.

On January 19, Zaka Ashraf resigned from the position of Chairman of the PCB Management Committee and as a member of the Board of Governors.

Kohli: India batter pulls out of first two Tests against England

NEW DELHI (Agencies): India batter Virat Kohli has withdrawn from the first two Tests against England for personal reasons.



The 35-year-old former captain has told India skipper Rohit Sharma and the side's management that "certain personal situations demand his presence and undivided attention".

The five-Test series begins in Hyderabad on Thursday.

Kohli's withdrawal comes one day after England batter Harry Brook returned to the UK for personal reasons.

Kohli, who has played 113 Tests for India, is fourth on their list of all-time leading run-scorers with 8,848.

He has not missed a Test for India for more than two years, when he was ruled out of the match against South Africa in Johannesburg with a back spasm.

"Virat has emphasised that while representing the country has always been his top priority, certain personal situations demand his presence and undivided attention," said a statement from the Board of Control for Cricket (BCCI) in India.

"The BCCI respects his decision and the board and team management have extended their support to the star batter and are confident in the abilities of the remaining squad members to step up.

"The BCCI requests the media and fans to respect Virat Kohli's privacy during this time and refrain from speculating on the nature of his personal reasons."

India will name a replacement in the squad for Kohli, who led the side in 68 Tests between 2014 and 2022.

No Pakistan player in ICC Men's T20I Team of the Year 2023

DUBAI (Monitoring Desk): Not a single Pakistan player was able to make a cut into the recently unveiled International Cricket Council (ICC) Men's T20I Team of the Year 2023.

The apex cricketing body recognised 11 players across the globe, who impressed with either their batting, bowling or all-round exploits throughout 2023.

ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year 2022 Suryakumar Yadav will lead the side which features his three compatriots Yashasvi Jaiswal, Ravi Bishnoi and Arshdeep Singh.

Jaiswal was named the opener alongside England's Phil Salt.

The young Indian opener, who made his debut in August 2023, accumulated 430 runs in 14 innings at a strike rate of 159 while Salt finished with 394 runs in just eight innings over the year, averaging 56.28 and

striking at 169.09.

Hard-hitting West Indies batter Nicholas Pooran was placed at Number 3, followed by skipper Yadav at number four, who scored two centuries in the previous year and led the side in the absence of regular captain Rohit Sharma.

New Zealand's leading run-scorer in T20Is in 2023, Mark Chapman secured the fifth spot in the ICC Men's T20I Team of the Year 2023 while Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza was placed at number six.

Chapman finished 2023 with 576 at 44.30 and with a strike rate of 141.87 while Raza exhibited his all-round brilliance throughout the year. The side boasts two more all-rounders Uganda's Alpesh Ramjani and Ireland's Mark Adair at number seven and eight respectively.

Uganda's Ramjani led the world in T20I wickets

for the year (55 at an economy of just 4.77) across 30 matches, and was a thorn in the side for opposition bowling attacks, scoring 449 runs at 28.06 (strike rate 132) down the order.

Adair made his mark in 2023, taking 26 wickets at an economy of 7.42, taking a wicket every 13 deliveries. India's Ravi Bishnoi, alongside Zimbabwe's Richard Ngarava and fellow Indian Arshdeep Singh, will complete the bowling attack.

Arshdeep bagged 26 wickets in 21 innings for India in 2023, while Bishnoi picked up 18.

ICC Men's T20I Team of the Year 2023

Suryakumar Yadav (c), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Phil Salt, Nicholas Pooran, Mark Chapman, Sikandar Raza, Alpesh Ramjani, Mark Adair, Ravi Bishnoi, Richard Ngarava, Arshdeep Singh.

Palestine eye 'historic' win to keep Asian Cup hopes alive

DOHA (AFP): Forward Tamer Seyam and his teammates "want to make a historic achievement for Palestine" when they face Hong Kong on Tuesday at the Asian Cup, where a first win ever at the tournament could propel them into the next round.

No side has played more Asian Cup matches without a win than Hong Kong (12 games) or Palestine (eight), but one victory could be enough for either side to squeak into the last 16 in Qatar.

Having weathered tough early fixtures against Iran and United Arab Emirates in Group C, both sides see an opportunity for a maiden win.

The tournament comes against the backdrop of the Israel-Hamas war in the Palestinian territory of Gaza, and Seyam said a victory would have special resonance for people back

home.

"Our match against Hong Kong won't be easy but we are well prepared and we want to make a historic achievement for Palestine," said the player, who scored in his side's 4-1 opening loss to Iran.

"If we are able to qualify our names will go into history."

"We have big hopes of qualifying as third or second," he said.

Coach Makram Daboub voiced qualified optimism that his side could come out on top against the team from southern China, who are yet to register a point in Qatar.

"I trust the players, if we play with the same level as against UAE, we will be able to win," he said.

Palestine took one point from that match, a thrilling 1-1 draw with 10-man UAE.

Daboub added that the team wanted to win for the "Palestinian people, who deserve to be happy".

"All the players are determined to win," he said.

"Hopefully we will be able to score early and ensure the three points."

His opposite number Jørn Andersen said Hong Kong were unfazed by facing an opponent with extra motivation beyond the football field, noting that his players too could make history for their team.

"I'm not thinking about what Palestine is thinking," he said.

"I think if we have the possibility tomorrow to go to the final round, be one of the 16 best teams in Asia, all Hong Kong will be proud of us and all the players know that."

"They will give everything for Hong Kong."



ISLAMABAD: Players of KGS and Habib school netball teams in action during National Inter School Girls Netball Championship Final at Liaquat Gymnasium. —APP Photo

Australian Open 2024

Alcaraz, Medvedev and Hubert Hurkacz win

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Second seed Carlos Alcaraz said he played "almost perfectly" in his fourth-round win over Serb Miomir Kecmanovic at the Australian Open.

The two-time Grand Slam champion won 6-4 6-4 6-0 to reach the quarter-finals for the first time at Melbourne Park.

"I'm feeling better and better every day," said Alcaraz, 20, who will play sixth seed Alexander Zverev next.

Elsewhere, Daniil Medvedev defeated Portugal's Nuno Borges and Pole Hubert Hurkacz beat wildcard Arthur Cazaux. Germany's Zverev advanced with a five-set victory against British number one Cameron Norrie.

Alcaraz through with dominant display

Spaniard Alcaraz produced a

dominant display to reach the last eight in Melbourne for the first time, impressing the crowd with powerful groundstrokes and breathtaking movement against world number 60 Kecmanovic.

The former world number one did not face a break point and hit 43 winners compared to 14 from his opponent, who simply could not get a foothold in the match despite playing his part in some exciting rallies.

"I did everything almost perfectly," Alcaraz said. "I think it was a very good match for myself. I pushed him to the limit in every point and obviously he has played a lot of matches in five sets so he was not 100 per cent," he added. "Every match I play here on Rod Laver [Arena] I feel more comfortable."

Looking ahead to

Wednesday's quarter-final against Zverev, Wimbledon champion Alcaraz said: "Playing at this level I will have my chances. I love playing against Sasha [Zverev] - I think we bring a high level of tennis, high intensity. I will try to bring my best tennis and let's see what happens."

I know what I'm worth - Medvedev

Earlier in the day, third seed Medvedev failed to convert two match points at 5-4 in the third set before beating world number 69 Borges 6-3 7-6 (7-4) 5-7 6-1 on Rod Laver Arena.

Medvedev was in control of the match before losing his composure in the third set, hitting several double faults despite serving well throughout the match with 13 aces and 75 per cent of first-serve points won.

"He made me run [in the] third set and that's why I missed a little bit too much. I was pretty dead to be honest. In the fourth set I managed to raise my energy," said 27-year-old Medvedev.

Borges, 26, deserved to take the match into a fourth set by producing a high level to keep rallies alive and hitting exquisite drop shots, but could not maintain his form to force a decider.

"Nuno was incredible on drop shots today. I was not happy he was going for drop shots because they were really unbelievable," Medvedev said.

"The third set was tough physically because he was playing very aggressively basically. As soon as I would hit one shot in the rally that was not aggressive or deep enough, he would just go full power. It was pretty

impressive."

Russian Medvedev has reached five Grand Slam finals but has won only one - the 2021 US Open. He has faced either Novak Djokovic or Rafael Nadal in every final though, players with 46 major titles between them.

The two-time Australian Open runner-up said he is "ready" to go one step further and finally clinch the title.

"I know what I'm worth. I know how good I can play. I proved it at the US Open, especially for myself, playing some tough opponents, in my opinion, like game style-wise. I managed to beat them," Medvedev said.

"I'm ready. Hopefully I can show it on the tennis court. We can talk forever about who is ready, who is the favourite. You need to win."

Medvedev will face ninth seed

Hurkacz in the last eight after the 26-year-old ended Frenchman Cazaux's brilliant run.

World number 122 Cazaux had beaten eighth seed Holger Rune in the second round but could not cause another upset as Hurkacz won 7-6 (8-6) 7-6 (7-3) 6-4 on John Cain Arena.

"I served well and he was serving well as well so I needed to stay aggressive and I'm really happy with today's performance," said former Wimbledon semi-finalist Hurkacz.

"I haven't been into too many Grand Slam quarter-finals and I am super excited."

It will be Hurkacz's first quarter-final in Melbourne and he has a 3-2 record over his opponent Medvedev, although the Russian is 2-1 on hard courts against the Pole.



In brief

PTA conduct raids

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) zonal office Lahore, in close collaboration with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Cyber Crime circle, had conducted raid against VOIP grey setup in Shahdara, Lahore. During operation, the VOIP setup was found involved in the termination of international calls by using illegally activated SIMs, said a news release issued here on Monday. The team had recovered some 796 active SIMs, 2 gateway exchanges (32 ports), 11 gateway exchanges (16 ports), 3 routers, and 4 network switches and apprehended an individual for further investigation. The FIA team also confiscated active SIMs along with all devices as evidence, the news release added. The PTA had lodged a complaint with FIA, prompting the action based on information about the illegal termination of international traffic bypassing legal gateway exchanges. These raids are part of PTA's ongoing efforts to curb the circumvention of the Multi-Finger Biometric Verification System (MBVS).

School vans collided due to fog

ISLAMABAD (APP): Eight female students, including 1 male student got injured in a collision between private school vehicles on Monday in Rajar Bypass, Charsadda due to heavy fog. According to a private news channel, Rescue-1122 team reached the spot immediately after the incident was reported and shifted the injured students to the hospital. Hospital sources said that 4 students were seriously injured in the accident and have been shifted to Peshawar for further treatment.

Criminals arrested for opening fire

ISLAMABAD (APP): Dhamial police here on Monday arrested an outlaw namely Abdullah and his accomplices for opening firing on a police party during a decoity bid. The spokesman said that the police arrested Abdullah in injured condition and shifted him to a nearby hospital. The outlaws also injured a constable namely Shahid Qamar in 2023. The police registered case against the accused and started investigation.

Call for public awareness

ISLAMABAD (APP): Health expert Monday stressed that there was a need to create more awareness, particularly amongst the youth about donating safe blood on a voluntary basis as the availability of blood in a hospital is essential every day, especially when there is a major operation or child birth. Talking to PTV news channel, Consultant Physician Internal Medicines Dr Alia Babar Hameed said that unfortunately in our country mostly people only donate blood when there is an emergency-like situation but with awareness drives media should highlight the importance of blood donation to save precious human lives. She said that safe donating blood is not only helping the ailing humanity, but it also prevented the person from various diseases. It is our collective responsibility to encourage the population age between 18 to 60 to embrace the noble act of blood donation, as it is through joint efforts that lives can be saved, she added. Lack of awareness on health benefits of donating blood keep many eligible male and female donors from donating blood, she said, adding, if eligible people donate blood regularly and voluntarily it will save lives of people.



ISLAMABAD: Police officials busy searching vehicles during routine security check in the Federal Capital.

Dense fog patches cause transport havoc for capital's residents

ISLAMABAD (APP): Dense fog blanketing the capital city, like other parts of the country, has sparked traveling chaos for the commuters during the morning and night hours through reducing visibility along with causing health hazards for the vulnerable groups since the last many days. The unusual dense foggy conditions prevailing in the capital ascribed by the weather experts to absence of rain during this Winter season due to climatic changes have not only disrupted the road travels but flight operations too in the fog bearing areas of the country. The persistent fog/smog due to the insignificant rain during this Winter season have caused diseases among the citizens especially old people and children with low immunity level.

According to the health experts, the major sufferers of the seasonal diseases especially influenza, cough and fever are the children and old ones due to their

weak immune system while the number of pneumonia cases among the children has also witnessed surge during this month. The health experts have suggested taking those diets which can boost their immunity to fight with seasonal diseases, revert to organic foods and handle such issues with home remedies. Those with serious conditions especially continuous fever must contact the health providers immediately.

"While living in the federal capital for the last 20 years, dense foggy conditions with reduced visibility level are unusual for me. Even I could see the visible fog these days at day time also", Maimoona Ali, a mother of three children who daily travel from Rawalpindi to Islamabad to attend her office.

"My children have suffered from prolonged sickness including influenza, cough and high fever twice during this months. The doctor was of the view that

the virus has mutated into a dangerous one this Winter due to lack of rain so there is need to boost immunity of children by giving them organic food and using green tea with honey and ginger", she said.

Murad Khan, a father of two school going kids, said, "I was travelling from G-9/4 to F-7/1 in the morning around 7:45 am to drop my kids to the school and hardly saved from an accident due to zero visibility".

"I couldn't see the car in front of me due to the dense foggy conditions which is very risky and unsafe", he said while urging the concerned authorities to change the timings of schools during the dense foggy conditions.

Keeping in view the health issues, majority of the parents have demanded of the concerned authorities to announce relaxation in the timings of the educational institutions during the morning hours to save them from any untoward situation.

FJWU students urge to preserve ancient cultural symbols of ponds, Banyan trees

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU) students' delegation have urged the Deputy Commissioner Jhelum to preserve ancient cultural symbols of ponds and Banyan trees facing existential threat due to rising urbanisation and infrastructure expansion.

The students (BS-VIII and BS-IV) of the Department of Anthropology had an educational trip to Jindi Forest (Lehri) and Rohtas Fort (Dina), Jhelum for the courses "Anthropology of Arts and Aesthetics" and "Culture, Biodiversity and Climate Change" with their respective instructors. Dr. Shafia Azam and Dr. Syed Mehmood Nasir (Visiting Faculty, Department of Anthropology, FJWU and Former IG Forest).

The Deputy Commissioner of Jhelum, Captain Retired Samiullah Farooq, as well as District Forest Officer, Sudhir Mughal warmly welcomed and hosted the faculty and students of the Department of Anthropology, FJWU. The Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Jhelum gave a briefing about the forest and sub-divisional officer (SDO) Archaeology gave a briefing about the history of the Rohtas Fort. The students volunteered to clean the track in the forest and faculty planted a plant in the Fort area.

Talking to APP, Dr Syed Mehmood Nasir said that the Peepal (Ficus religiosa) is an Indian anthropological cultural symbol particularly found in the Potohar as Al-Beruni describes it in detail in his book Kitab Ul Hind

ponds with Ficus religiosa and other Ficus species & some temples that were part of hindu architecture.

In the mid 80s then secretary forests Ch Ashraf launched a development project titled "restoration of historical ponds in Potohar", he added. He said one of the undeclared objectives was to save these ponds from encroachments in an era when there wasn't archeological department in districts. "Over time GT road expansion was resisted by the Rawalpindi Forest Circle and it was agreed with NHA to change some road alignments to save old Ficus trees. However, these saved trees gradually died over the years mainly because that the adjoining ponds disappeared and now you can see many plazas.

Commissioner directs authorities to complete Kahuta-Azad Patan road work in three months

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta chairing a meeting held here on Monday regarding Rawalpindi Kahota-Azad Patan Road directed the authorities to complete the construction work on the project in three months.

Deputy Commissioner, Sudhnoti, Raja Sadaqat Khan, Director Development Nazia Sudhan, Director Local Government, Sabatin Kazmi, Assistant Commissioner Kahota, Fazlur Rehman, Xeon Highway Azad Jammu Kashmir, Nadeem Sarwar, SDO Muhammad Owais, Xeon Highway Umeer Ahmed, Deputy Director Community Development Mazhar Nadeem and other officers concerned attended the meeting.

The repair and rehabilitation work of Kahota-Azad Patan Road should be completed in three months, the Commissioner said adding, a target of planting 85,000 saplings along the road had also been set.

Liaquat Ali Chhatta said that Kahota Panjar-Azad Patan thoroughfare is a very important road which is strategically

important as a defense route and also main link to Azad Kashmir. Some portions of this road were affected by heavy transport, landslides and water, he added.

The Kroot Company was taken on board and it would start work on S-5 from February 1 after completing its necessary operations, he informed.

The Commissioner directed the administration of Rawalpindi and Azad Kashmir to ensure the provision of security and other facilities to the engineers in this regard. Funds amounting to Rs 1299.103 million were approved for widening and repair of the 31 km long Kahota-Panjar Azad Patan Road in Tehsil Kahota. 66 percent of the released funds had already been utilized, he said. Section G-1 i.e. 0-18 km of the project had been completed, the Commissioner said adding, work on G-II i.e. next seven km is still in progress while a detailed design of the S-5 had also been submitted. Immediately after approval of the design, work on it would be started in the next month of February, Liaquat Ali Chhatta added.

CDA to build two electric bus depots

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has taken a delayed decision for the construction of two electric bus depots in Islamabad.

The first batch of 30 out of 160 China-made buses arrived in Islamabad in the first week of the current month but the construction of two bus depots, which would take another six months, has been taken now. The second batch of buses would arrive by the end of next month. One of bus stations costing Rs632.06 million would be constructed at Tramari Chowk, while the second station costing Rs604.4 million would be constructed between sectors I-9 and H-9, said a CDA official.

He said the bus depots would be equipped with the necessary facilities like the charging stations, drivers' rest area, maintenance shed and washing area. The Authority has invited bids from the registered construction firms by January 24.

Pakistan-Qatar agreements to boost job prospects

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (SAPM OP&HRD), Jawad Sohrab Malik, led a successful official visit to Qatar, culminating in the signing of several Agreements & Letter's

of Intent (LOIs) with top Qatari companies intended to significantly enhance employment opportunities for the Pakistani workforce in Qatar.

The signing of these agreements with renowned Qatari firms, including Qatari Diyar-Saudi Bin Laden Group Construction (QD-SBG), Hamad Bin Khaled Contracting Company W.L.L (HBK), Ali Bin Ali Holding W.L.L, Sheikh Jabor Bin Mansour

Bin Jabor Bin Jassim Al Thani (JMI) Holding, Tabeeb Care Medical Services, and Al Rawnaq International Commercial Projects, marks a crucial step in strengthening bilateral relations between Pakistan and Qatar in the field of human resource development, a news release said.

In addition to these agreements, the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, Jawad Sohrab Malik held a significant meeting with Hamad Saleh Al Qamra, Chairman of Al Qamra Holding, focusing on the

recruitment of Pakistani manpower for various company projects. The visit also included a tour of the View Hospital, a part of Elegancia Health Care, where the recruitment of Pakistani health professionals is underway following a recent MoU between Elegancia Health Care and the Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) of Pakistan.

The primary objective of these initiatives is to create enhanced employment avenues for Pakistani workers in Qatar. SAPM Malik highlighted the potential of Pakistan as a key manpower exporter and detailed the government's efforts to streamline this process through quality recruitment agencies, skill development, and addressing foreign employers' needs. The CEOs of the Qatari companies expressed satisfaction with the Pakistani workforce and their willingness to increase Pakistani manpower in their companies, adhering to the governmental regulations of Qatar. The meetings also shed light on the growing demand for skilled labor in sectors like services, maintenance, hospitality, and construction, following Qatar's significant infrastructural development. Jawad Sohrab Malik also held separate in-depth one to one meetings with Qatar's Labour Minister, Interior Minister, and Qatar's Education Minister during his 3-day visit.

'FIA cyber crime working to nab culprits behind spreading hate material on social media'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Director Cyber Crime of Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Waqar uddin Syed on Monday said that FIA cyber crime is working round-the-clock to apprehend the culprits behind spreading hate material on social media.

The cyber crime is on high alert on spread of hate material on social media, he said while addressing a press conference flanked by the caretaker federal minister for information and broadcasting Murtaza Solangi here.

Director FIA cyber-crime Waqar uddin Syed said: "No one would be allowed to create anarchy or malign state and its institutions through malicious campaign on social media."

So far, FIA cyber-crime wing has identified more than five hundred accounts and monitoring many others, he disclosed. The mandate of the joint investigation team is to submit a report in two weeks time, he

said adding that FIA cyber-crime wing is working day & night to apprehend the culprits and bring them into the ambit of law.

He stated that cyber crime wing is monitoring all social media applications and platforms which are being used by individuals to spread venomous and misleading content against the state institutions. The cyber-crime wing will not delay any action against those found involved in spreading hate material or running malicious campaign on social media, he said. He added that all police stations and reporting centers have been directed to take immediate notice and action against those using social media applications and platforms as a weapon for maligning state institutions. He said that cyber crimes didn't have boundaries and therefore, it is difficult to say at this point whether these accounts were being operated or used within the country or outside the state.

Speakers term Education Statistics Report data bank for policy-making organizations

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speakers on Monday termed the Educational Statistics Report 2021-22 of Pakistan Institute of Education a data bank for policy-making organizations to take effective measures in improving educational facilities for out-of-school children. Speaking as a special guest at the report's launching ceremony, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani emphasized the need to address poverty, health issues, social, and societal problems to bring out-of-school children back into the education system.

Wani highlighted the crucial role of the education sector in controlling the population and advocated for conditional financial assistance from the Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal and the Ehsaas Income Support Programme to enroll children in schools.

Commenting on the report, Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani mentioned that the teaching ratio in Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Kashmir was commendable, but efforts were required in other provinces as well.

He stressed the need to work on educational matters at the provincial level, as provinces were more aware of educational affairs in their regions.

He highlighted the concept of home schools introduced in Gilgit-Baltistan, emphasizing its benefits in bringing out-of-school children into the education system.

Wani stated that collaboration between the ministries of education,

health, information technology, and population, along with individual efforts, was necessary to enhance educational practices at the grassroots level. He compared it to diagnosing a disease, stating that with the diagnosis in hand, the report provided insights into the problem, and now efforts must focus on addressing it effectively. PIE Director-General Dr Muhammad Shahid Sardar, in his remarks, mentioned that the Institute had compiled its report after five years. He said the officials of PIE gathered data from all four provinces, including Azad Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, and over 100 stakeholders using a global standard methodology. Four SDG 4 indicators had been considered in the data.

He stated that after the report's release, the Institute would hold consultative sessions, intending to solidify policymaking and implement actions to bring out-of-school children into the education system.

According to the Pakistan Institute of Education's report, despite challenges such as COVID-19, the country witnessed an increase of 12.28 million children in enrollment from 2017 to 2022.

The total number of educational institutions, including public and private schools, stands at 313,418, with a breakdown of 227,506 (73%) formal schools, 43,613 (14%) religious schools, 25,106 (8%) non-formal basic education institutions, 10,087 (3%) education foundations, 4,182 (1%) technical and vocational insti-

tutes, and 2,487 (1%) degree colleges, 220 universities, and 217 teacher training institutions.

Out of the total 313,418 educational institutions, 176,184 (56.2%) are affiliated with the government sector, while 137,234 (43.8%) belong to the private sector.

The report reveals a total registered student population of 54,870,964, with 29,359,376 (53.5%) students enrolled in government institutions and 25,511,588 (46.5%) in private institutions.

The report further provides insights into the number of teachers, with 889,885 (42%) belonging to government institutions and 1,249,746 (58%) to private institutions. It also highlights the challenges in enrolling new students in primary education, revealing that in Punjab, 74% of eligible children are enrolled, 55% in Sindh, 68% in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 35% in Balochistan, and 91% in Islamabad Capital Territory. The report indicates that the global standard of 30 children per class in classrooms is being pursued, with the current student-teacher ratio improving to 37 in the academic year 2021-22.

The officials from Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, World Bank, Foreign Commonwealth Development Organization, UNESCO, UNICEF besides other stakeholders, attended the event. The provincial education departments officials also joined the event through video links.



ISLAMABAD: People sitting around fire to keep them warm during heavy fog at Khanna Pul.

IEA supports investors
KABUL (BNA): The Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce, Nooruddin Azizi, spoke at the inauguration of a seminar on coordination among provincial representatives. He stated that the Islamic Emirate has provided facilities for industrialists, traders, and investors, supporting their plans. According to a statement from the Ministry, Azizi referred to the seminar as an effective step for exchanging experiences among the staff of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

Two traffic incidents kill 4
KABUL (Agenices): Local officials in Faryab province are reporting that two separate traffic incidents have resulted in 4 deaths and 6 injuries. According to reports, on Sunday, January 21st, local authorities in Faryab province confirmed that two separate traffic accidents in the Andkhoy and Khan Charbagh districts of Faryab province have left 4 dead and 6 injured. A child was also among the victims of these traffic accidents in Faryab.

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

Hazaras in Afghanistan being targeted deliberately



KABUL (Agencies): The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in its latest report on the human rights situation in Afghanistan, covering the months of October and December 2023, has documented several targeted attacks against Hazaras and stated that the perpetrators of some of these attacks remain unidentified. This UNAMA report, titled "Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan," has been compiled by the Human Rights section of the organization within the

separate attacks against Hazaras were planned and carried out. Three deadly attacks against Hazaras in Pul-e Khumri (during a gathering of worshippers) and Kabul (at a sports club and a bus station) on October 13, October 26, and November 7, 2023, resulted in the killing and injuring of at least 126 individuals (40 killed and 86 injured). While ISIS claimed responsibility for all three of these deadly attacks, the UNAMA report mentions the mysterious targeting of Hazaras in Herat as the main factor in these attacks remaining unidentified and unknown. The United Nations has just released a report on the human rights situation in Afghanistan, at a time when global protests continue in response to what is perceived as the genocide of Hazaras, with demonstrations taking place in nearly 40 cities across different countries around the world.

Islamic Emirate seeks European Union’s assistance for infrastructure development in Afghanistan

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs, met with Ms. Raffaella Iodice, the European Union representative in Kabul. He emphasized that Afghanistan needs crucial assistance in health, education, and infrastructure sectors. According to a statement from the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, the meeting took place at the Sapidar Palace. Ms. Iodice discussed the European Union's ongoing assistance to Afghanistan, emphasizing that humanitarian aid is now reaching needy families without concerns about administrative corruption. She expressed satisfaction with the security situation in Afghanistan, noting that they could travel to provinces without worries and observe the people's situation up close. Ms. Iodice stated that Afghanistan, being one of the countries affected by climate change, requires special attention from the international community to provide necessary assistance in preventing climate-related damages. She called for the expansion of relations between Afghanistan and the European Union. The Deputy Prime Minister emphasized the need for fundamental assistance to Afghanistan in the fields of health, education, and infrastructure. He thanked the European Union for its role in Afghanistan and assistance to Afghan migrants. He stated that corruption is no longer a concern in Afghanistan, and issues like drug trafficking and violence have been addressed, ISIS has been suppressed, and borders are under control. The Deputy Prime Minister criticized the forced deportation of Afghan migrants by Pakistan without considering the conditions, stating that it goes against all laws, and strongly condemned it.

Applicants for Islamic Emirate forces increasing: Official

KABUL (Agencies): Abdul Hakim Hemat Akhundzada, the commander of the Police Academy of the Ministry of Interior, said that the number of applicants to join the Islamic Emirate's forces has tripled. The commander of the academy said that this year the provinces will be prioritized. "Some provinces like Zabul (will be prioritized), the province from where only 7 people have been recruited into the Police Academy, 9 people from Paktia and 29 people from Jawzjan province were recruited in the past ten years," Abdul Hakim Hemat Akhundzada said. According to Akhundzada, the number of the selected people for the Police Academy will be announced after the exam. Officials in Police Academy recruit individuals who have completed their 12th grade (or further education), as well as those who were previously enrolled but unable to complete due to the takeover of Kabul. "There is the measurement of height as the height is considered,



they are processed and then referred to the health commission after their measurement of height," said Mohammad Rasool a trainer in the academy. The Ministry of Interior said there are efforts to recruit disciplined and professional people to the security forces. "Our police should be professional, disciplined, and uniformed. As you see, there are hundreds of police in the capital and provinces and more units who have been trained in short-term and long-term training," said Abdul Matin Qani, the spokesman of the Ministry of Interior. "We want the Islamic Emirate to carry out this process in a transparent manner and to select each person in the academy according to his merits," said an applicant to the Police Academy. Abdul Hakim Akhundzada also added that efforts to upgrade the academy into a university continue within the framework of the Ministry of Interior.

Islamic Emirate committed to principle-based freedom of expression

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs, held meetings today with Mohammad Sadiq Chakari, former Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs, and Mujib Rahman Bahir, the head of Ariana News, along with other national figures. In these meetings, which also included Hussein Jafari and Dr. Dai al-Haq Abed, Chakari highlighted the recent actions of the Islamic Emirate in political and economic domains. He expressed that good opportunities have emerged for Afghans after decades and should be utilized effectively. He added that the Islamic Emirate desires the welfare of all Afghans, and in this government, coercion, injustice, and biases have been eliminated. The attendees continued to share their opinions and suggestions in written forms on various matters with the Deputy Prime Minister. Kabir stated that the Islamic Emirate is the common home for all Afghans, and every Afghan has the right to share their opinions and advice with government officials. He added that government offices consider themselves responsible for solving people's problems. During the meeting with Mujib Rahman Bahir, the head of Ariana News, the Deputy Prime Minister discussed the situation of private media in the country. Bahir mentioned that private media, based on their principles, have maintained the relationship between the government and the people, striving to portray the true image of Afghanistan to the world.

No responsive authority exists in Afghanistan to address gender-based violence



Hakim Bigzaad
The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has released its latest report on the human rights situation in Afghanistan for the past three months of 2023. This report addresses recent concerns about women's rights, including the detention of girls, the enforcement of the veil (hijab), and the expulsion of women from work. The report emphasizes that there is no responsive agency for gender-based violence complaints in Afghanistan. This report was published on Monday, January 22nd, and it mentions that UNAMA has conducted interviews with 71 government officials, including four women, who are part of the Taliban administration. According to the report, discussions were also held with 87 civil society activists, including 30 women. The UNAMA office added

that they have not interviewed victims due to ethical and security considerations. **Gender-based violence against girls and women** The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan states that there is no applicable legal framework for addressing gender-based violence complaints in the ruling authority (Taliban government), and there is no clarity on this matter. According to UNAMA, victims prefer not to approach government authorities due to fear and intimidation by Taliban officials and instead opt for informal means to resolve disputes. This office describes the judicial institutions of the Taliban as entirely male-dominated. **Women's rights and enforcement of the veil (hijab)** The report states that the authorities in the ruling government continue to impose restrictions and pressures on women. The most recent case

of detaining girls in various areas of Kabul, including Dasht-e-Barchi and Khair Khana, is mentioned in the report. It is noted that in these two areas of Kabul, girls, mostly from the Hazara and Tajik ethnic groups, were detained primarily for not wearing appropriate hijab. They were released on bail after being detained, following guarantees provided by their families. UNAMA has emphasized that they are investigating reports of the release of girls in exchange for money. They describe these detentions as violent and still demeaning. UNAMA also recalls a case in which officials of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Nangarhar province on October 22, 2023, prevented approximately 400 women from working in a garment factory due to not observing proper dress code. The report also mentions

that 200 women from an electricity company were fired on November 22 due to financial problems, but no male employees were dismissed. The UNAMA office states that officials from the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice are actively monitoring the orders issued regarding restricting women's rights in health centers, institutions, and public places. UNAMA further adds, "In early October, three female health workers were detained for going to work without a male guardian. These women were released after their families signed written guarantees of not repeating this action. Since December 2, in Paktia province, women without male guardians have been prohibited by the officials of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice from accessing healthcare facilities."

Human Rights violations, women’s detention and Hazara Target killings in Afghanistan

KABUL (Agencies): On Monday, January 22nd, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) released a report highlighting the human rights situation in Afghanistan from October to December 2023. The report primarily addresses the continued restrictions on women and girls, incidents of violence against the Hazara community, and violations of women's human rights in Afghanistan. The United Nations Mission in Afghanistan has documented a widespread expulsion of women from their workplaces in various provinces over the past three months, as outlined in their recently published report. The report states that on October 22nd, in Nangarhar province, the Taliban prevented about 400 women from working in a pine nut processing factory, while men were allowed to continue working. UNAMA noted that no reasons were provided for this prohibition. On November 22nd, in Balkh province, a Taliban-controlled power plant expelled 200 women for financial rea-

sons, but no male employees faced the same action. **Taliban detained women over dress code violations** According to UNAMA, the Taliban has predominantly detained and arrested women and girls, especially in the Hazara-populated Dasht-e-Barchi area, with some being taken from Khair Khana, a region primarily inhabited by Tajiks. The organization also said that in December, a

Taliban official told a single woman in a health center that she would lose her job if she didn't get married. UNAMA quotes the Taliban Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention Vice official as saying that "working for single women is inappropriate." **Violence against Hazaras community and Shi'as** The United Nations Representation in Kabul announced that in the past three

months of 2023, a blast in Baghlan, two explosions in Kabul, and three targeted assassinations in Herat targeted Hazaras and Shi'as communities. UNAMA reported that in these attacks, at least 49 people were killed, and 88 others were wounded. The report mentions three mine attacks specifically targeting the Hazara and Shia populations during these three months. On October 13th, in Pul-e Khumri city, a suicide bomber detonated explosives among Shia worshippers in a mosque, killing 21 people and injuring 30 others. On October 26th, an explosion from a planted mine inside a sports club in Dasht-e-Barchi, west of Kabul, left eight dead and 35 injured. On November 7th, another bus bombing targeted the Dasht-e-Barchi area of Kabul, killing 11 and injuring 21. ISIS Khorasan Province claimed responsibility for all three attacks and stated that the Shia community members were their intended targets. Furthermore, the United Nations Office in Afghanistan's report also states that in the past three months of 2023, "a series

of targeted killings of Shia religious scholars took place in the Jibrail district of Herat city." On October 22nd, a Shia religious scholar was shot and killed. On November 23rd, two Shia religious scholars were gunned down, and on December 1st, six individuals, including two Shia religious scholars, were killed, and two others were injured. So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the Herat attacks, and the perpetrators remain unidentified. Since the Taliban assumed control in Afghanistan, ensuring security has posed significant challenges for the group. In response to these challenges, they have imposed various restrictions that have severely curtailed the basic human rights of women and girls, particularly their access to education and employment. However, despite these restrictions, the prospects for women and girls in the country remain uncertain. The Taliban's grip on power has created a climate of uncertainty and fear, leaving many women and girls unsure about their rights and freedoms in the Taliban regime.





ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar chairs a meeting of Capital Development Authority.

KP Caretaker CM directs BoR to collect record of mutation

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Syed Arshad Hussain Shah has directed the high ups of Board of Revenue (BoR) to collect all the records/transactions of mutation from across the province, said an official handout issued here on Monday.

He has further directed all Deputy Commissioners (DCs) to provide the land transaction records made during the last two months in their respective districts, and submit those records to Chief Minister's Secretariat for verification/scrutiny to the effect that no extra money has been charged by the relevant revenue staff in the mutation process.

The Chief Minister's Complaint Cell, after receiving the records of mutation, will telephonically contact the concerned citizens to know whether they have been charged extra money by the concerned revenue staff for mutation or otherwise, and in case any extra money is charged, strict action will be initiated against the relevant revenue officials.

It merits a mention here that the Chief Minister had received some public complaints from few places of the province regarding such mal-practice on the part of the revenue staff, and this initiative of the Chief Minister is aimed at preventing such alleged mal-practices.

To this effect, the Chief Minister has urged upon the general public to proactively register their complaints in the Chief Minister's Complaint Cell adding that their identity will not be disclosed and action will be taken against the official involved in such practices. Syed Arshad Hussain Shah has made it clear that his government has a zero tolerance policy against



corruption in all its forms, and there will be no room for corrupt people in this government.

Meanwhile, a large number delegation consisting of local bodies representatives from Tehsil Khanpur and members of Makhnaya Tahaffuz Movement (MTM), headed by former MNA Raja Aamer Zaman called on caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah here at Chief Minister's House Peshawar on Monday and apprised him of the issue related to Galyat Development Authority. Provincial Caretaker Ministers Barrister Feroz Jamal Shah Kakakhel and Engineer Ahmed Jan, chief secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry and other relevant officials were also present on this occasion.

Other delegates included president of Makhnaya Tahaffuz Movement Chaudhry Saghir Ahmad, Zulfiqar Abas, Chudhry Khalil Ahmad, Malak Amjad, Muhammad Dawood, Muhammad Riaz, Mujeeb-ur-Rahman, Yaseen Abasi, Waqar Sadiq, Muhammad Ishaq and others.

The delegates, expressed their great concerns about the Galyat Development Authority and strongly demanded that four Patwar Circles of Makhnaya be transferred from the jurisdiction of GDA and handed over to Tehsil Municipal Administration

Khanpur. Its merit to mention here that aforementioned Patwar Circles of Makhnaya had been given in the jurisdiction of GDA in 2020.

The delegates informed on the occasion that GDA did nothing for the development of the areas during the last four years, but created hurdles and impediments for the local people in addition to unduly enforcing its By-laws in the rural residential areas. They requested that such rural residential areas should be administered under the relevant Tehsil Municipal administration; and this will be better not only for the poor people of the area but for GDA as well.

They maintained that the authority was actually created for Nithyagali and other adjoining areas of Galyat; but giving such a faraway areas of Makhnaya under its jurisdiction is unjust. In this regard the Chief Minister directed the quarters concerned to prepare a formal case in line with the prevailing rules and regulations for consideration of the provincial cabinet. He made it clear that a realistic and viable proposal be submitted for the purpose. The Chief Minister said that it is the responsibility of the government to resolve the genuine issues of its citizens adding that the caretaker provincial government will take every possible step to this effect.

SC bars journalists from recording videos in court

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In its new guidelines, the Supreme Court (SC) barred the journalists from recording a video or YouTube program inside the Supreme Court building.

As per the Supreme Court's issued new guidelines, the journalists can only enter the court's premises by showing the Identification cards that confirm their affiliation with the relevant media houses.

The court in its verdict made it prohibited for journalists to record a video or YouTube program inside the Supreme Court's premises and directed that only one reporter from each channel will be allowed in the courtroom during the hearing of an important case.

Meanwhile, the audio link will be provided to the remaining journalists in other courtroom. It is worth mentioning here that the President of the Press Association Supreme Court, Tayyab Baloch, penned down a letter to the registrar for the entry of journalists on the media card.

Pneumonia claims lives of 9 more children

MULTAN (INP): At least nine more children died of pneumonia in Punjab during the last 24 hours due to an increase in cold weather citing the Punjab health department. Pneumonia is an infection that inflames the air sacs in one or both lungs. The air sacs may fill with fluid or pus (purulent material), causing cough with phlegm or pus, fever, chills, and difficulty breathing.

As many as 275 cases of pneumonia in children have been reported on Monday alone. This brings the total number of cases in Pakistan's largest province to 9,570. Meanwhile, the death toll has reached 188 in Punjab. The high number of cases has also led to extreme shortages of medicine in Lahore.

Symptoms of pneumonia, the signs and symptoms of pneumonia vary from mild to severe, depending on factors such as the type of germ causing the infection, and your age and overall health. Mild signs and symptoms often are similar to those of a cold or flu, but they last longer. Lower than normal body temperature (in adults older than age 65 and people with weak immune systems) Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea Shortness of breath. Newborns and infants may not show any sign of the infection. Or they may vomit, have a fever and cough, appear restless or tired and without energy, or have difficulty breathing and eating.

IHC issues arrest warrants of officials

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad High Court issued non-bailable arrest warrants over absence of the recordkeepers of DC Rawalpindi office and Adiala Jail on Monday. The high court was hearing contempt case against the DC and others over arrest of PTI leader Shaharyar Afridi.

The court summoned deputy commissioner Rawalpindi and Superintendent Adiala Jail in personal capacity. "The officers should appear before the court and inform, why the court's order was not enforced", Justice Babar Sattar said.

Advocate Shah Khawar appeared in court on behalf of SP Jameel Zafar and requested to put off the case hearing till February's second week. "Court intends to hear the case on daily basis," Justice Sattar said to Shah Khawar Advocate. "The court will hear the case this week, it is the case of documents, you prepare for the case, the case will be concluded in this week," Justice Babar Sattar said.

The court also issued notices to DC Rawalpindi and Superintendent Adiala Jail. "I know the law and the legal procedure, you can go in appeal," Justice Sattar said. "A trial should not be conducted in a manner when the case heard on a day and then adjourned for one month," the Justice said.

I am contesting to bury politics of hate: Bilawal

F.P. Report

SAHIWAL: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing a public gathering in Sahiwal said that he is grateful that the Jiyalas of Sahiwal have come to this gathering despite the harsh weather.

Bilawal said that Pakistan is currently going through challenging times. The PPP is the only party which can solve the problems faced by the people whereas all other parties and politicians who are contesting these elections are doing the politics of hate and division. If they come to power then they will victimise their political opponents.

The way poverty, inflation and unemployment are on the increase we cannot resolve these issues if we continue to be divided. I am contesting to bury the politics of hate and division, Chairman PPP said. We need the ideology of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto at this difficult period of our history. The 10-point Awami economic agreement which we have presented is the key to solve these problems.

We will deal with poverty and inflation through this agenda. We will have to tread the same path as Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto when it comes to looking after the farmers, labourers and youth and confronting poverty and inflation. We had introduced the Benazir Income Support Programme for our women and we will not only extend this programme also provide interest-free loans so that the women of our country can start their own businesses and contribute in the country's economy. We will also introduce the "Benazir Kissan Card" for the farmers of Sahiwal and Pakistan. The PPP's philosophy has been that "Kissan Khushhal, Pakistan Khushhal". We will provide crop insurance for the smaller farmers. We will give the financial help to the farmers through the "Benazir Kissan Card" instead of giving subsidy of 1500 billion rupees to the elite.

The PPP will provide help to the labourers through "Benazir Mazdoor Card" so that they get their rights. This facility will be extended to every kind of labour force. We will also provide the "Youth Card" to the young population to help them financially for a year and also aim to provide

them training and other facilities to acquire expertise.

We will look after the youth till they get employment. We think that health is the right of every citizen. We will provide a system of health which allows for the establishment of free healthcare institutions all over the country, a feat we have already achieved in Sindh. We will establish universities and campuses for the youth at their doorstep in their own district. These are all promises included in the 10-point Awami economic agreement.

The other parties want to divide us whereas we are contesting elections on our manifesto, Chairman Bilawal said. We will not use foul language against our political opponents. Chairman PPP directed all those in attendance in the gathering to take the Party's manifesto to every doorstep and make them aware that the PPP is the only party which serves the people. We want to introduce a new kind of politics which revolves around serving the people. We will change the fate of the nation in one term as we do not need four terms in the government to fulfil our promises.

We will change the destiny of the nation and the country. You have to work hard and take this message to every brother and sister of Sahiwal in the next 18 days, Chairman Bilawal said to the Party workers. We should opt for a new form of politics, the purpose of which is to serve the people, farmers, labourers, youth and the downtrodden masses of the country. Only two parties are contesting these elections. If you want to bury the politics of hate and division then you have to elect the Pakistan Peoples Party in these elections, Chairman PPP said.

Bilawal said that he will change the fate of the country. If the people wish for a new leadership then they should stamp the arrow of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. If they believe that those engaging in the traditional form of politics should sit at home, then too, the symbol of the arrow is to be stamped. Chairman Bilawal said that he desires to complete the incomplete mission of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. When the PPP will be victorious, the people will be victorious. We will together complete the mission of Quaid-e-Awam and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, Chairman PPP resolved.

JI to end toxic polarization that plagued country: Siraj

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Ameer Jam-aat-e-Islami (JI), Sirajul Haq has said the toxic polarization has plagued the country for many years. While addressing an election rally in his constituency NA-6 Lower Dir on Monday, he vowed to initiate the grand national dialogue among the political stakeholders to resolve the issue of the bitter divide. Sirajul Haq held the former ruling parties equally responsible for the bitter divide in society. The culture of abuse has pervaded politics, replacing the tolerance and difference of opinion based on reason, he added.

He said that the JI would build a strong Pakistan by establishing unity among

the ranks of the nation if voted to power. He appealed to the people to choose the JI in the upcoming polls scheduled to be held on February 8. The JI leader said that he has developed an election manifesto considering the challenges facing the country. Have also kept in mind the long-term planning in the preparation of the manifesto, he added.

"We need 40-year economic planning to meet the needs of the increasing population." Sirajul Haq said that the current population of the country would grow to double in the next three or four decades adding the state and the government responsible for providing all basic facilities to the citizens. But, he said, the past governments per-

sistently ignored the public welfare, prioritizing self-serving. The PML-N, the PPP and the PTI failed to deliver and thanked the traditional and social media that the former rulers stood exposed now, he said.

He said that the voters must not choose the tested parties in the election and vote for those who are honest and capable of delivering. He said the JI would bring reforms in the education and health sectors and build universities for women's education in every division. "We modernize the railways and energy infrastructure." Siraj said the JI would work to abolish electricity theft and line losses and eliminate the culture of sending inflated bills to consumers.

ECP strikes down notification postponement

F.P. Report

SARGODHA: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Monday canceled the notification of postponement of elections in NA-83 and NA-85 Sargodha. ECP Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja heard the case of postponement of elections in NA 83 and NA 85 Sargodha wherein Sargodha DRO and Returning Officers (ROs) appeared.

The PML-N candidate told the Election Commission that he received a notice from the returning officer that a candidate had died in his constituency and the death certificate of the deceased candidate is dated January 15. He said it happened on January 2nd, the funeral prayer was held on January 3rd and there was a conspiracy to postpone the elections in two constituencies. "DC Sargodha has also conducted an inquiry into the matter, I request that the elections should not be postponed," he said.

Sargodha DRO told the ECP CEC that he has conducted an inquiry, in which it has been proved that Sadiq Ali died on January 2—the statements of Sadiq Ali's mother, and daughter, Imam-e-Masjid were recorded. ECP's CEC Raja inquired why the RO did not conduct an inquiry before postponing the elections.

"Now it has been proved that Sadiq Ali died on January 2, we were provided with a fake death certificate," said returning officer NA-85. Secretary Union Council (UC) said that he verified the news and issued the death certificate at the request of the son. The deceased's village numberdaar (village head) told ECP about usage of his forged signature for issuance of the death certificate. On this occasion, the ECP Chief Election Commissioner scolded the secretary of the UC for interfering during the hearing and commented he committed wrongful act and kept on talking in the hearing as well.

Israeli forces storm Khan Younis hospital

GAZA: Israeli forces, advancing deep into western Khan Younis in Gaza's bloodiest fighting of the new year so far, stormed one hospital and placed another under siege on Monday, cutting the wounded off from trauma care, Palestinian officials said.

Troops advanced for the first time into the Al-Mawasi district near the Mediterranean Coast, west of Khan Younis, the main city in southern Gaza. There, they stormed the Al-Khair hospital and were arresting medical staff, Gaza health ministry spokesman Ashraf al Qidra told Reuters. There was no immediate word from Israel on the situation at the hospital. The military spokesperson's office had no comment.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said tanks had also surrounded another Khan Younis hospital, Al-Amal,

headquarters of the rescue agency, which had lost contact with its staff there. Qidra said at least 50 people were killed overnight in Khan Younis, while the sieges of medical facilities meant dozens of dead and wounded were beyond the reach of rescuers. "The Israeli occupation is preventing ambulance vehicles from moving to recover bodies of martyrs and the wounded from western Khan Younis," he said.

The Israeli military spokesperson's office had no immediate comment on the situation at Al-Khair hospital. Israel says Hamas fighters operate from in and around hospitals, which Hamas and medical staff deny. "Hamas embeds its operation within and under hospitals and other medical facilities," said Elad Goren of COGAT, the Israeli defense ministry branch that coordinates with the Palestinians. "A particular

effort led by a dedicated team has been put on making sure that civilians have access to medical care."

Residents said bombardment from air, land and sea was the most intense in southern Gaza since the war began in October, as Israeli tanks surged across Khan Younis from the east toward the Mediterranean coast. Video filmed from afar showed scattered civilians wandering a ghost city, crowded with tents with abandoned laundry flapping on lines, as gunfire rattled and columns of smoke rose into the sky.

Israel launched an offensive last week to capture Khan Younis, which it now says is the principal headquarters of the Hamas militants responsible for the Oct. 7 attacks on southern Israel that killed 1,200 people, according to Israeli tallies. — Arab News

PHC stops arrest of PTI's candidate till 25th

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court comprising of Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Ijaz Anwar ordered respondents for submission of record against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and independent candidate for PK95 Imran Khan Sonami as well as stopped police along with other law enforcement agencies from his arrest till 25th January, on Monday.

The counsel Fazal Maula advocate argued for submission of record of cases registered against PTI candidate for PK95 Kurram and added the petitioner is initiating election campaign in the constituency but there is fear of his arrest.

Additional Advocate General informed that the petitioner is nominate in one case with police while he has obtained bail in the offense. However, Justice Shakeel Ahmad observed that you {government} is arresting in

other after obtaining bail in one case. He added that what is happening in the country? National Accountability Bureau (NAB) lawyer informed that there is no case against the petitioner at the bureau. Federal Investigation Agency also informed that the petitioner isn't nominated in any case with the agency.

In the meantime, Additional Advocate General argued that the court may stop his arrest in any other case, however, Justice Waqar Ahmad observed that you {government} has shown their decision for the fate of petitioner in future.

PHC's divisional bench comprising of Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Waqar Ahmad stopped police along with other law enforcement agencies from arresting Imran Khan Sonami as well as ordered submission of record while adjourned further hearing till 25th January.

AD&SJ grants interim bails in firing case:

Additional District and Session Judge (AD&SJ) Peshawar Bakht Alam has granted interim bail to four alleged culprits involved in firing on election rally and stopped police from their arrest till 29th January while ordered submission of record.

According to prosecution, Malak Imran, Malak Noor, Malak Fahim and Malak Yawar had opened firing on independent candidate PK82 Malak Tariq Awan and his son Malak Rauf over old rivalry.

Police had registered First Information Report against Malak Imran, Malak Noor, Malak Fahim and Malak Yawar as well as Malak Tariq Awan along with other under sections 148, 149 and 506 of Criminal Procedure Code. AD&SJ granted interim bail to Malak Imran, Malak Yawar, Malak Noor and Malak Fahim while turned down bail pleas of Malak Tariq Awan along with his son due to absentia.



SAHIWAL: Chairman Pakistan People's Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing a public gathering.

Iran holds funerals for Guards killed in alleged Israeli strike

TEHRAN: Hundreds of mourners gathered Monday in Tehran for the funerals of Revolutionary Guards killed in Syria, in what Iran called an Israeli strike. It was the latest incident adding to regional tensions and fears of wider conflagration during the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

The strike in Damascus on Saturday killed five members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the military force said. Iranian media later reported the victims included the group's intelligence chief for Syria, and his

deputy. Mourners carried aloft coffins bearing some of the victims, draped in colors of the Iranian flag, before a stage bearing pictures of IRGC General Qassem Soleimani who was killed three years ago by the United States. A funeral dirge sounded.

State media reported that funeral processions were planned for three of the five IRGC members killed. Asked about the strike, Israel's military said it does not comment "on reports from the foreign media." The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor

reported at the time that the strike hit the Damascus neighborhood of Mazzeah where leaders from the IRGC and pro-Iranian Palestinian factions live.

A total of 13 people were killed, added the British-based monitor which has a network of sources in Syria. The strike came four days after the IRGC said it hit an Israeli "intelligence headquarters" in Irbil, the capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region. Baghdad said the missiles struck a businessman's family home. — Arab News