

Afghans return continue
F.P. Report
PESHAWAR: The process of repatriating Afghan nationals residing illegally in Pakistan remained in progress, with a total of 474,264 individuals having returned till the other day, border authorities informed on Wednesday. On this specific day, 708 Afghan citizens, including 194 men, 156 women, and 358 children, left Pakistan to return to their home country.

Fight against terrorism

PM hails role of armed forces

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday affirmed that as responsible citizens, the people of Pakistan must reject and collectively fight the vicious propaganda onslaught unleashed by the enemies against Pakistan in the recent past.

The prime minister, addressing the Pakistan National Youth Convention 2024 as the chief guest, said the youth could play a constructive role in dealing with this emerging national security challenge provided they remained focused, and fact checked all details through authentic information from the state institutions rather than falling prey to the propaganda.

Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir, NI (M), was the guest of honour. "We, as a nation, have fought the menace of terrorism most valiantly, offering unparalleled sacrifices," he said. Prime Minister Kakar appreciated the role of armed forces in the fight against the menace of terrorism with full commitment and professional excellence.

"Pakistan's successes in the war against terrorism would not have been possible without the participation and support of the youth who make 65% of our population," he added.

Addressing the conference, the COAS underscored that the youth were Pakistan's biggest asset, and all optimism of a brighter future was associated with them.

Conveying the message of hope, the COAS asked the youth to shun despondence. He referred to the historic role played by the youth in creation and development of Pakistan and exhorted them to partake in building the nation through discipline, honest toil and a genuine quest for knowledge. He highlighted the power potential of Pakistan, the demographic dividend, immense mineral wealth, a creative corpus of IT literate workforce, and great prospects in agriculture.

The COAS emphasized upon the importance of national unity and harmony to overcome multifarious challenges confronted by the country. He recounted the sacrifices made by the nation to counter the menace of terrorism and cautioned against machinations of Pakistan's ill wishers contributing towards extreme polarisation within the society.

"There can be no progress without internal cohesion," the COAS said and quoted the Holy Quran, Allama Iqbal and Quaid-e-Azam extensively, encouraging the youth to realise their true potential and serve the nation to the best of their abilities. He reaffirmed the resolve of the

14 more die of pneumonia in Punjab

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Pakistan's Punjab province has witnessed a rapid surge in pneumonia cases, resulting in the loss of 14 more lives, health department sources said on Wednesday.

In the past 24 hours, Punjab has reported a staggering 908 new cases of pneumonia, while Lahore, the provincial capital, recorded 197 fresh cases. This brings the total reported cases of pneumonia in Punjab for the year to 10,000, with Lahore alone reporting 1,570 cases and 45 associated deaths. The high number of cases has also led to extreme shortages of medicine in Lahore, where several children are being treated for various pneumonia, chest and other viral infections.

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. Signs and symptoms of pneumonia may include, chest pain when you breathe or cough, confusion or changes in mental awareness (in adults age 65 and older), cough, which may produce phlegm, fatigue, fever, sweating and shaking chills, lower than normal body temperature (in adults older than age 65 and people with weak immune systems), nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, shortness of breath.

The prime minister, chairing a meeting to discuss the strategy to reduce circular debt of the energy sector, said all the stakeholders would have to put in collective efforts for reduction in the circular debt.

He told the participants of the meeting that soon after coming to the power, the caretaker government took measures for economic revival and was taking all-out steps to reduce the circular debt. He said the anti-power theft operation had led to an enhanced recovery of the electricity dues of the power distribution companies.

The meeting were briefed about the current situation of circular debt of the petroleum and energy sectors, and different proposals were also put forward in this regard. Federal ministers Dr Shamshad Akhtar and Muhammad Ali, and relevant senior officers attended the meeting.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar addressing Pakistan National Youth Convention 2024.

Pakistan landed in crisis after my ouster: Nawaz

F.P. Report

NANKANA SAHIB: Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) Senior Vice-President Maryam Nawaz fired a broadside at political opponents, saying they are themselves responsible for self-sabotage as her father Nawaz Sharif didn't oust anyone via conspiracy.

Addressing a political gathering in Punjab's Nanaka Sahib, Maryam addressed various allegations hurled against her party and its supremo accusing them of conspiring against the then Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government. "Nawaz didn't oust you as you shot yourself in the foot [...] You yourself are responsible for destroying your party," Maryam said.

Speaking at the rally, Maryam also addressed the allegations against party supremo Nawaz of being a ladla (blue-eyed boy) and said, "It is said that Nawaz is a ladla, yes, but he is a

February 8 polls, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) Senior Vice-President Maryam Nawaz fired a broadside at political opponents, saying they are themselves responsible for self-sabotage as her father Nawaz Sharif didn't oust anyone via conspiracy.

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Dr. Gohar assumes office as Interior Minister

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Industries and Production Division Dr. Gohar Ejaz on Wednesday assumed the charge as caretaker Interior Minister.

Upon arrival at Ministry of Interior, Dr. Gohar Ejaz was warmly welcomed by the officials of the ministry. In the introductory meeting with the senior officials, the caretaker minister was given a detailed briefing regarding the Ministry of Interior and its subsidiaries. It should be mentioned here that the important portfolio was vacated after the resignation of Sarfraz Bugti as caretaker minister for interior.

Sarfraz Bugti had stepped down from the portfolio to contest the general elections of 2024. Dr. Gohar Ejaz was a notable figure in the dynamic second generation of business and industry leadership. Being the accomplished son of the late Senator Sheikh Ejaz Ahmed, he was a name synonymous with unparalleled business wisdom.

With a distinguished record, Dr. Gohar stands as a seasoned entrepreneur, dedicated philanthropist, and prominent stalwart in Pakistan's industrial landscape, specifically within the emerging textile sector. His extraordinary contributions were acknowledged when he was awarded the Sitara-e-Imtiaz civilian honor for his incomparable commitment to the nation by the former President of Pakistan in 2011. In addition, Dr. Gohar's remarkable achievements in business management garnered recognition, receiving him an honorary doctorate in management from the University of Punjab in Lahore.

Forces prepared to cope with any threat: COAS

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Syed Asim Munir has said the armed forces of Pakistan are fully prepared to cope with any sort of threat and conspiracy.

While addressing the participants of Pakistan National Youth Conference in Islamabad on Wednesday, he said Pakistan will never compromise on its sovereignty. General Asim Munir expressing full confidence in the bright future of Pakistan and upholding the past glory of forefathers said that Allah Almighty has bestowed Pakistan with numerous mineral resources, agriculture and

young human capital.

He said, "Feeling immense pleasure while interacting with the future leaders of Pakistan and eagles of Iqbal." The Army Chief said the sole objective behind the creation of Pakistan was that our religion, civilization and culture were totally different from that of Hindus but it does not mean that we should adopt western culture. He said the youth should trust their country, nation, culture and civilization.

The COAS said that youth of Pakistan should believe that they belong to a great country and nation. He said our youngsters are the torchbearers of bright traditions of the country

and the nation as well as the true outcome of the dreams of Allama Iqbal and Quaid-i-Azam.

Syed Asim Munir said the armed forces can fight terrorists but they too need cooperation and support of the entire nation. He said the negative propaganda, being spread on social media, was aimed at creating uncertainty and hopelessness in the country. He stressed the need for double checking the news on social media. He said without proper research and positive thinking, there will be a chaos in the society. The youth, on the occasion, chanted slogans "Long Live Pakistan, Pakistan Army and Quaid-i-Azam Zindabad".



SARGODHA: Chairman Pakistan People's Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing a gathering at Bhalwal.

IHC reserves verdict on pleas against Imran's jail trial

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday reserved its verdict on the pleas challenging Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan in the infamous £190 million and Toshakhana cases, following the completion of arguments from all parties.

The former PTI chairman had moved the high court — which last year declared his trial in jail in the cipher case null and void — to annul the trial in jail in the two corruption cases as well. Imran and

several others are facing charges of corruption of billions of rupees in the £190 million case also involving a property tycoon, and charges of corrupt practices involving the state gift repository in the Toshakhana case.

An accountability court on January 9 indicted Imran and his wife Bushra Bibi in the Toshakhana reference filed against them by the National Accountability Bureau Shoaib Shaheen said: "We do not say that the jail trial cannot be conducted but following the former premier changed his legal team. Judge Bashir

is currently holding the jail trial of the PTI founder in both cases with the approval of the federal cabinet, but Khan has challenged the jail trial before an IHC bench comprising Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri.

Today, while giving arguments on the petitions seeking annulment of Imran's jail trial in the two cases, his lawyer in the IHC, Advocate Shoaib Shaheen said: "We do not say that the jail trial cannot be conducted but following the parameters [for it] is necessary."

ECP replaces RO for symbol change

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has replaced the Returning Officer/Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) in NA-44, Dera Ismail Khan for "misusing" authority and making "inappropriate" changes to election symbol (of his favourite candidate).

According to an official statement, after reports of favoritism and misuse of authority by the officer, it was confirmed that the electoral symbol of a candidate had been allegedly changed without proper authorisation. The ECP replaced him with Syed Gulfam Abbas Shah, Additional Deputy Commissioner (F&P) of Dera Ismail Khan.

The commission directed the Chief Secretary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to suspend the officer and report the matter to the Establishment Division. Moreover, the commission constituted a three-member inquiry committee, headed by the Provincial Election Commissioner of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, to conduct a thorough investigation into the RO's actions and submit its report within six days.

Marriyum advises Bilawal

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) leader Marriyum Aurangzeb on Wednesday advised Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to remain in limits and be civilised. She asked him to talk about performance instead of using indecent language.

Talking to reporters outside an anti-terrorism court of Lahore, where she appeared in connection with a case relating to delivering a speech provoking people, Aurangzeb said Pakistan had buried the politics of abuses in 1990. She said PTI founder started culture of abusing others. She criticized the PPP chairman and said he was new in Punjab and perhaps he had not visited PKLI, Danish schools and other projects in Punjab.

SHC bars authorities from suspending internet services

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court (SHC) has directed the authorities concerned to ensure uninterrupted access to the internet to all citizens till February 8 general elections.

In its order on Wednesday, the high court restrained the authorities from suspending internet services and directed the respondents to submit their response on January 29. Advocate and human rights activist Jibran Nasir's had filed the petition in the SHC against frequent suspension of internet services in the country.

As the political canvassing picks up pace ahead of the next month's elections, users have experienced internet outages multiple times in recent days. The outage of social media platforms including Facebook, X, Instagram and YouTube was the second in two weeks on January 20. Following an hours-long

disruption last week, the P a k i s t a n Telecommunication Authority (PTA) blamed a "technical fault" in its optic fibre network for the nationwide internet outage.

On its official account on X, the PTA said: "The recent disruption in internet services was caused by a technical fault, which has been promptly rectified. Internet services have been fully restored nationwide." As per downdetector.pk, Google services as well as internet service provider PTCL also faced disruption. According to a report, the relationship between the state and media freedoms deteriorated during the past two years due to growing instances of censorship, violence against journalists, and government disdain for critical media.

The report titled "Under Siege: Legislative, Judicial and Executive Actions Stifling Freedom of Expression and Right to Information" was published by the Institute of Research, Advocacy and Development (IRADA) as part of its annual state of digital journalism series. During the period under review, the PTA blocked as many as 1.1 million URLs including 187 mobile applications. Out of these blocked or removed URLs and content, around 200,000 were alleged to be related to the contempt of court, against the defence of Pakistan or glory of Islam, defamatory and sectarian/hate speech content, the report stated.

The report also uncovers a significant number of content removal requests from the Pakistani government to big tech platforms such as Google, Meta, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter). For example, Between January 2021 to June 2022, Meta restricted access in Pakistan to 12,001 items reported by the PTA for allegedly violating local laws, according to the report.

Country's most parts to remain in grip of cold wave

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) on Wednesday said that the most parts of country will remain in the grip of cold wave in next 24 hours due to consistent low daytime temperatures.

According to PMD, dense fog was likely to continue in Islamabad, plain areas of Punjab, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and upper Sindh. Due to continuously low daytime temperatures, very cold weather was likely to prevail in fog-affected areas. On Thursday, mainly very cold and dry weather was expected in most areas of the country while partly cloudy in Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

However, light rain/snow was expected at a few places in upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan during the night. In Islamabad, cold and dry weather is expected and surrounding. Dense fog is likely to persist during morning/night hours.

In Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, cold and partly cloudy weather was expected in most districts of the province, while very cold in Chitral, Dir, Swat, Kohat and Malakand during the night. Dense fog was likely to persist in Charsadda, Mardan, Nowshera, Swabi, Peshawar, Laki Marwat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan and surrounding areas during morning/night hours.

In Punjab, cold and dry weather was expected in most districts of the province, while very cold and partly cloudy/cloudy in Murree, Galliaty and surrounding. Dense fog/smog was likely to persist in Bahawalpur, Sahiwal, Okara, Kasur, Lahore, Sialkot, Narowal, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, Attock, Jhelum, Mangla, Faisalabad, Jhang, Sargodha, Mandi Bahauddin, Toba Tek Singh, Khanewal, Multan, Khanpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Hafizabad, Bhakkar, Laayyah, Dera Ghazi Khan and surrounding. Day temperatures were likely to remain below normal in most districts of the province

due to dense fog.

In Balochistan, cold and dry weather was expected in most districts of the province, while very cold and partly cloudy in northern districts. In Sindh, mainly cold and dry weather was expected in most parts of the province. Fog/smog was likely to persist in Jacobabad, Hyderabad, Mohenjodaro, Sukkur, Larkana, Dadu, Ghotki, Khairpur, Kashmore and Padidan. Day temperatures are likely to remain below normal in most districts of the province due to dense fog.

In Kashmir/Gilgit-Baltistan, very cold and partly cloudy weather was expected in Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. While light rain/snowfall was also likely at few places in Gilgit-Baltistan during the night. During the last 24 hours, cold and dry weather prevailed over most parts of the country, while very cold in northern parts and north Balochistan.

Dense fog/smog prevailed over Islamabad, Potohar region, plain areas of Punjab, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and upper Sindh.

PTI's Hamad evade arrest
LAHORE (INP): Hamad Azhar, a prominent figure within the PTI, managed to evade arrest. The incident unfolded during a police raid in Jafaria Colony, Lahore, acting on information suggesting Hamad Azhar's presence at the location. As law enforcement closed in on the site, colleagues of Hamad Azhar created a commotion, providing a distraction that allowed him to escape before the police could apprehend him.



KARACHI: Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori meeting a delegation of Ministers from Gilgit-Baltistan at the Governor House. —APP Photo

CM launches e-Pay Sindh initiative for digital payment e-Service, e-registration, e-mutation

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (Retd) Maqbool Baqar on Wednesday said that the provincial government initiated a Single Digital Platform for all citizens of the province to minimize human interaction, to ensure transparency, departmental accountability and the disposal of all cases within seven working days as a step for transformation from manual mode to e-governance in the form of e-Services Sindh and e-Pay Sindh.

This he said while speaking at the launching ceremony of five transformative e-services - e-registration, e-Mutation, e-Pay Sindh and Industrial Estate Management System (IEMS) that would make it easier, faster and more convenient for people to access government services. Justice (R) Baqar said that the Sindh initiative includes a digital payment feature in the name of e-Pay Sindh. This feature allows citizens to make payments for government services securely and conveniently through their mobile devices, Easy Paisa, Credit Card, Debit Card, ATM Machines and Banks.

The launching ceremony of e-Services Sindh was held at a local hotel where the chief minister launched it by pressing a key of the computer. The

CM said this groundbreaking initiative will revolutionize the way citizens interact with the Sindh government.

The Board of Revenue introduced five transformative e-services that would make it easier, faster and more convenient for people to access government services. They include the E-Services Sindh Mobile App which is available at Google Playstore and App Store for Apple users. Currently, two departments have launched it but slowly all the departments will adopt it one by one. The Sindh Cabinet approved to inclusion of its legal framework into Rules of Business as e-Services Sindh and e-Pay Sindh by amendment in Secretariat Instructions 2014 last Monday.

Secondly, there would be e-registration for Registered Sale Deeds, a service that would allow citizens to register their sale deeds through online applications, payments and appointments for biometric verification and registration before the Sub-Registrars. This will save them the hassle of having to visit a government office and stand in long queues or problematic manual systems.

There is an e-Mutation for changing in record of rights of land, a service that will allow citizens to easily change the record of rights for their land online and

directly when registration will be done through e-Registration. It will be automatically updated online and will be available online for the general public. This will save them time and money and will also help to ensure that land records are accurate and up-to-date.

The Cabinet last Monday directed the Board of Revenue to digitally rewrite record of rights within the next six months. This digitally rewritten record of rights will be integrated with e-Registration and e-Mutation database. The City Survey Record of the entire province will also be digitized and integrated with this database within the next six months. Third, there is e-Pay Sindh - a service that will allow citizens to make all payments to the Sindh government through an online digital channel. This will make it easier and more convenient for people to pay their taxes, fees, and other dues.

Fourth, there is the Industrial Estate Management System for SITE Limited and Sindh Small Industrial Estates, a service that will provide a centralized platform for managing industrial estates in Sindh. "This will help to improve the efficiency and productivity of these estates, and will also attract new investment," the CM said.

Governor meets head of One-Man Commission on Minorities Rights

KARACHI (APP): Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori met head of the One-Man Commission on Minorities Rights Shoaib Suddle at the Governor's House here Wednesday.

Various issues related to the rights of minorities in Pakistan were discussed in the meeting. The Governor said that the minorities had played an important role in the making and the development of the country.

Kamran Khan Tessori said that all minorities including Christians, Hindus and Sikhs were living peacefully in Pakistan with full freedom.

He said that Pakistan was the safest country in the world for minorities and the Constitution of Pakistan also protected the fundamental rights of every person belonging to any religion.

SSP Capt (R) Faisal Abdullah Chachar promoted

KARACHI (APP): Capt (r) Faisal Abdullah Chachar, an officer of Police Service of Pakistan (BS-19) presently posted as Senior Superintendent of Police District Central Karachi, was promoted to BS-20 on a regular basis with immediate effect.

According to notification issued by the Establishment Division, on promotion from BS-19 to BS-20, the services of Capt (R) Faisal Abdullah will remain at the disposal of the Government of Sindh, until further orders.

Meanwhile, on promotion from BS-19 to BS-20, Capt (R) Faisal Abdullah Chachar relinquished the charge of SSP District Central Karachi with effect from January 24, 2024.

Inter-school speech competition held

LAHORE (APP): An inter-school speech competition was organised at Aiwan-e-Iqbal Lahore, in collaboration with the Unique Group of Institutions (UGIs), Behria Town Campus and Aiwan-e-Iqbal, which was presided over by Chairman Unique Group Professor Abdul Mannan Khurram.

Others attending the event were analyst and writer Dr. Mujahid Mansoori, actor and singer Sahira Tahir, Interfaith Harmony organisation Chairperson Safiya Ishaq.

UGI Chairman Abdul Mannan Khurram said the role of the new generation is important for development and bright future of Pakistan. He said "we will have to give Pakistan the position which is in accordance with the dream of Allama Iqbal and the Quaid-e-Azam.

He said the Unique Group keeps organising various events in the light of the thoughts of Iqbal and Quaid-e-Azam for guidance of its students, and today's event was also a link in that series.

Dr. Mujahid Mansoori said the seed of Pakistan's creation was sown on the basis of education, but it is a pity that the country is suffering from mismanagement and group politics for various reasons, which had caused an irreparable loss to it.

Project Director Behria Town Professor Mulazim Hussain said that famous personalities of the world were also skilled in the art of speech.

CM reviews law, order situation

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the head office of Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) at Qurban Lines late at Tuesday night where he chaired an important meeting regarding law and order situation.

The meeting reviewed security arrangements in connection with the general election, said a handout issued here on Wednesday.

The CM asserted that every step should be taken to ensure peaceful elections. Free, fair and peaceful general election was a national obligation, he said and added that the Punjab police would again fulfill its responsibility amicably, like in the past.

The meeting also reviewed progress of safety projects in Faisalabad, Gujranwala and Rawalpindi and the CM ordered to complete the

development schemes without any delay. He said the PSCA projects were very important for safety and security of people. He also inspected the police apartments project and appreciated the high construction standards.

The IGP briefed the meeting about security arrangements and construction of residences for the policemen.

CM chairs 37th cabinet meeting: The 37th Punjab cabinet meeting, which was held under the chairmanship of Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi on Wednesday, approved special allowance for doctors of Dera Ghazi Khan Institute of Cardiology and dissolution of board of directors of the Bank of Punjab.

It sanctioned release of funds to widen the road leading to Bibi Pak Daman

shrine and decided that widow of former Punjab chief secretary Abdullah Sumbal should be given possession of allotted house at GOR-1 immediately.

Re-issuance of Punjab Healthcare Commission (Amended) Ordinance, 2023 and approval of appointment to the posts of presiding officers in Punjab Labour Courts in Sahiwal and Faisalabad were granted along with nomination of presiding officer for District Consumer Court Lahore and constitution of Punjab Wildlife Management Committee. Amendments to Punjab Delegation of Financial Powers Rules, 2016 were approved as well.

Provincial ministers, advisers, chief secretary, IGP, Advocate General Punjab and administrative secretaries attended the meeting.

‘Complete ban on display of weapons during election-2024’

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Interior Minister Sindh Brigadier (Retd) Haris Nawaz on Wednesday said that there would be complete ban on the display of weapons during the general election-2024 and if any issues arise, the police, rangers and the army were fully prepared to handle them.

He was addressing a press conference along with caretaker Sindh Minister for Information, Minority Affairs, Social Protection and President Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi Muhammad Ahmed Shah at the Karachi Press Club here.

In a briefing to media, Brigadier (Retd) Haris Nawaz said that there should be no doubts that the preparations for the election are complete.

He emphasized that the responsibility for conducting elections lies with the Election Commission of Pakistan, while the Sindh government is fully cooperating. Funds have been released for the preparation of polling stations, and no department can claim a lack of funds, he said.

He said that polling booth rooms would only

have polling staff, while rangers and police would perform their duties outside the polling stations. Rangers will be allowed inside if the situation demands, he added.

He said that services from various departments, including Anti-Corruption, Forest department, FIA and health workers would also be available. Efforts are being made to avoid the need for private security officers, he said.

He mentioned that there were 5,954 normal and over 12,000 sensitive and highly sensitive polling stations.

A total of 122,000 police officers were included in the security measures, including 1984 personnel from the Pakistan Army.

The minister highlighted that the chief minister had allocated a budget to all departments and their aim was to conduct transparent and impartial elections. Measures will be taken to secure the process of returning ballot boxes from polling stations, he added.

He assured that the security situation is better, and so far, no unpleasant incidents have

occurred. Every possible step has been taken to improve the peace and security situation, he said.

He also informed media about the installation of cameras on 4,500 sensitive polling stations. Cameras in polling stations without electricity will be powered by solar systems, he added.

He said that the security situation is reported to be better, and all possible measures have been taken to improve peace and security.

Addressing the media, Muhammad Ahmed Shah stated that the Sindh government was fully prepared for the elections. It was decided from the first day that any ongoing developments would be communicated to the media.

He further mentioned during a discussion with journalists that an election cell was being established for the journalists, which would operate 24 hours a day.

He assured that he would personally monitor the issues arising in interaction with journalists. All necessary facilities will be provided to journalists in the election cell, he said.

Solangi stresses collective efforts to control thalassemia

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi has stressed the need for making collective efforts to control the fatal disease of thalassemia and hemophilia.

He stated this at a ceremony held on the 6th death anniversary of Munnu Bhai, here at Sundas Foundation (SF) on Wednesday.

The minister also visited the children suffering from thalassemia and hemophilia, and distributed gifts among them. He reviewed the blood exchange facilities, labs and donation delivery mechanism. He said that precautionary measure would have to be adopted in a better way, beside improving the relevant laws and ensuring their

effective implementation.

Solangi said that the Sundas Foundation was a great effort of Munnu Bhai and his service for the suffering humanity would always be remembered. He said that Munnu Bhai was primarily a philanthropist, who devoted his entire life to ailing children.

President Sundas Foundation Yasin Khan said that the Foundation had been engaged in the service of suffering humanity for the past 26 years, and was holding the flag of Munnu Bhai as an excellent team work. He added that thalassemia was a painful disease, but parents should ensure the test before marriage to protect their children from the disease.

SF Patron Sohail

Warraich said that Munnu Bhai was a master in every art, and he learned a lot from him and even today carries out his mission.

Senior journalist Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Shami said that Munnu Bhai always loved the deprived sections while his writings would always remain among us.

Well-known columnist Dr. Sugra Sadaf said that Munnu Bhai always spoke against exploitation of humanity. SF Director Khalid Abbas Dar and Hafizullah Niazi said that Sundas Foundation was honestly spending the donations on deserving patients, and "we appeal to philanthropists to actively participate in this noble cause". At the end, special 'dua' was offered for Munnu Bhai.

3 held for getting money to send people abroad illegally

LAHORE (APP): The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) arrested three people on Wednesday for getting money from people on the pretext of sending them abroad for employment.

According to a spokesman of the agency, a raid was conducted in Sabzazar area of Lahore and Mudassar Hayat and Gulzar Awan were arrested from Al-Imran Trade and Technical Centre.

The arrested accused were running an organisation without licence to send people to various countries including Dubai, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf countries. The FIA recovered seven passports and numerous travel documents.

Traffic Scouts Programme launched

LAHORE (APP): In an effort to address traffic issues around busy and vital roadways, the Lahore Traffic Police have initiated the Traffic Scouts Programme for schools and colleges. In the initial phase, school guards and helpers were briefed on basic traffic rules, and over 100 educational institutions met with circle officers from the Lahore Traffic Police to discuss administrative matters.

According to a spokesperson for the department, guards and helpers were equipped with traffic violators' pamphlets and badges.

Chief Traffic Officer Ammara Athar emphasised that the Traffic Scouts Programme scope would be expanded further. Starting from February 1, students would be included in the programme, where traffic scouts would educate friends and family members about traffic laws.

The programme aims to enhance the organizational traffic system with traffic scouts receiving commendations and extra marks in exams.

AKU celebrates international day for education with launch of innovative academic programme

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) launched its newest academic offering - a 1.5 year Bachelor of Education (BED) programme while commemorating UNESCO's sixth International Day of Education 2024.

The theme for this year's International Day of Education is to promote inclusive and quality education for all. Faced with the daunting tasks in the country's educational landscape fraught with discrepancies in educational standards, gender inequality in access to education, inadequate school facilities, and insufficient number of qualified teachers, the new programme seeks to address these challenges by offering capacity development of aspiring teachers and those in the early years of their teaching career.

Articulating the aims of the new programme,

Professor Farid Panjwani, Dean of AKU-IED, noted that it seeks "to make a significant educational impact by enhancing teacher status, increasing employability in both public and private sectors, providing international opportunities, and elevating the overall quality of teaching and learning." He observed that the 'programme is more than an individual academic pursuit; it is envisioned to serve as a model of excellence in teacher development, contributing not only to the advancement of education in Pakistan but also beyond its borders.'

One of the distinguishing features of the B.Ed. programme is its flexibility, allowing individuals currently working either full-time or part-time to study for the degree. The inclusion of practicums, where student teachers (STs) will be placed in various schools, is a vital aspect of the journey.

The new programme is underpinned by the same commitment to access to

quality education, as all other AKU programmes are. Associate Professor Kim Insley from Institute of Education University College London (IoE), UK, remarked, "AKU-IED is embarking on developing a programme designed to empower teachers in schools to solve their own challenges in the classroom; to be critically thinking and reflective practitioners."

The launch of this programme comes in response to concerning statistics in the education landscape, including poor student learning outcomes, the crucial role of quality teaching, and a lack of formal training for a significant percentage of schoolteachers in the country.

With a renewed commitment from governments towards teacher quality, as evidenced by policies like the teaching license policy in 2023 in Sindh, AKU-IED's BED programme seeks to address these challenges head-on.

پبلک نوٹس برائے طبی تجاویز / اعتراضات برائے نفاذ نئے فیس / ٹیکس

بذریعہ اشتہار مذکور خاص عام نوٹس کیا جاتا ہے کہ تحصیل میوہیل ایڈمنسٹریشن بالاکوٹ نے روز بروز اعتراضات کے پیش نظر اور قاعدہ عام کے کاموں، میوہیل سرکاری فراہمی یقینی بنانے اور عوامی مفادات کے پیش نظر تحصیل میوہیل اپنی تسلسل کو قائم رکھنے اور اس کو بہتر سے بہتر بنانے کیلئے لکھل گورنمنٹ ایکٹ 2013 (27 ویں) کے پارٹ III، شیڈول 3 with read 42 سیکشن 5 کے تحت مندرجہ ذیل نئے فیس / ٹیکس سرکار کے کارآمد رکھتی ہے اگر کوئی شخص ادارہ اس سلسلہ میں کوئی اعتراض یا تجویز رکھنا ہو تو وہ مندرجہ ذیل شیڈول کے مطابق اپنا اعتراض / تجویز فوری اوقات کار میں ساموائے تعطیلات جناب TMO صاحب کے نام تحریری طور پر ارسال اور اعلیٰ رکن کے تدارجہ ضرور کے بعد وصول ہونے والے اعتراضات / تجاویز قابل قبول نہ ہونگے۔

۱۔ اعتراضات / تجاویز جمع کرانے کی آخری تاریخ: 12-02-2024

۲۔ اعتراضات / تجاویز کی سماعت کی تاریخ: 16-02-2024

۳۔ حتمی رپورٹ / ٹیکسیشن کی تاریخ: 20-02-2024

۴۔ تاریخ نافذ فیمل ٹیکس بار: 01-03-2024

نمبر شمار

1

ترقیاتی فیمل از کیش پلانٹ (ریٹ بجری، ٹھاکہ / کنکریٹ چارو میجر)

10 ویلز یا اس سے زیادہ ٹرک / ڈیپر (06 ویلز) ٹریکٹر / ٹریلر، ڈیپر میجر مرادوانا شہر سواری ڈرائیون

میلے-600 روپے

میلے-500 روپے

میلے-300 روپے

میلے-200 روپے

میلے-150 روپے

میلے-100 روپے

INF(P) 13/24

بمقام: چیئر مین تحصیل لکھل گورنمنٹ بالاکوٹ

اشتہار: تحصیل میوہیل ایڈمنسٹریشن بالاکوٹ

PAKISTAN CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY (PCAA)

INVITATION TO BID

پاکستان سول ایوی ایشن اتھارٹی

Sealed bids (in accordance with PPRA Rule No. 36(b)) are invited by below mentioned office for the following requirements in Pak Rs.:-

Description & Bid No.	Bid Fee (PKR) (Non-Refundable)	Fixed Bid Security (PKR)	Bid Submission Date/Time	Bid Opening Date/Time/Place	Last date for issuance of Bidding Documents	Basis PKR (Price)
Procurement of Smart LED TVs for Various PCAA Airports / Offices HQ/CAA/1992/233/XXLN	2,000/-	As mentioned in Bidding Documents	13-02-2024 1030 Hours	13-02-2024 1100 Hours Log. Center (S) (Log. ANS Branch)	12-02-2024	F.O.R.

Bids may be submitted as per conditions set out in Bidding documents downloadable (free of cost) from the CAA website www.caapakistan.com.pk/visible/ / downloadable after publication/uploading of Invitation to bid notice) and obtainable physically from the address given below on any working days between 0900 Hrs to 1230 Hrs by paying Bid Fee (non-refundable) through deposit slip in Account No. 6-1-2-20614-714-115525 (Title of account: "Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority") in Habib Metropolitan Bank Ltd. Star Gate Branch Karachi and submitting the request letter along with bank deposit slip, proof of Active Taxpayer, GST/NTN certificates of the bidder. No Bidding Documents would be issued on the Bid opening date. Bids must be dropped in Bid drop Box placed at under mentioned office by or before due date as per schedule. Bids will be opened in the public on the date, time mentioned in IT form. If it's a holiday/off day on the date of opening, the bid will be opened on next working day at the same time and place.

Note: All bidders downloading the bidding document from CAA website shall immediately inform PCAA through Intimation letter (along with proof of active taxpayer letter FBR) [ATI for Sales Tax and Income Tax] and GST/NTN certificates at the address below OR on email: sajid.noor@caapakistan.com.pk, for inclusion in subsequent communication. PCAA will not be responsible for any lack of communication or non-receipt of information/Intimation letter by bidders due to ignorance / violation of this instruction.

Time period for performance of contract: Till the satisfactory completion of contract and warranty period.

PCAA reserves the right to accept/reject any or all bids due to cogent reasons which will be communicated to bidders on request. This advertisement is also available on PPRA website www.ppra.org.pk and CAA website www.caapakistan.com.pk.

Warning: Any financial instrument submitted by bidder, if found fake or got dishonored at any stage would result in blacklisting and legal action as per law.

Additional Director, Logistics (ANS), Logistics Center (South), HQs Civil Aviation Authority, JIAP Karachi Pakistan Tel: 021-9907-2265 Fax: 021-99242675 www.caapakistan.com.pk

PID(K)2100/23



KP govt demands special focus on NMDs from Centre

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Newly Merged Districts Affairs, Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Dr. Aamer Abdullah in this regard, has forwarded suggested projects to the Planning Commission Islamabad pertaining to communication and works, trade and IT sector, industrial development, energy, agriculture, irrigation, health, education and other sectors in NMDs that will be included in PSDP under five years new plan.

In proposed communication projects construction of Peshawar, Mohmand, Bajaur and Timergara four line Motorway has been included. Similarly, maintenance and rehabilitation of existing trade corridors in NMDs, at a cost of 10 billion rupees is also included in these proposals.

The provincial minister has proposed the establishment of Axle Load Control Regime on the provincial highways to protect the roads from overloading in five places of the merged districts at a cost of 500 million rupees, while at a cost of one billion rupees on important national and provincial highways Service/Rest areas will be developed. Furthermore all the merged districts will be connected with each other through highway.

The provincial minister also proposed to include the construction of Peshawar, Tirah, Orakzai and Para Chinar road for promotion of tourism and connectivity, while 40 km of Sara Roga Sarwaki road, 120 km of Wana Jandola road and Wana Tank road. Construction of 180 km Pezo Makeen Mangalotai road to connect the region with D.I.Khan motorway, construction of new road to connect the coal

extraction sites areas in Orakzai with district headquarters, construction of alternative road to Kuram for communication link to the province through Tirah and Orakzai have also been included in proposals.

Similarly, the minister proposed for the national plan that fiber optic connectivity will be provided in 8 district headquarters and 25 tehsil headquarters to ensure the availability of better internet facilities in the merged districts. Likewise, for the promotion of border trade, the establishment of new border markets and border cities centers along with the establishment of customs stations in the districts of Khyber, Bajaur, Mohmand, and South Waziristan Upper and Lower are also included in the proposals of the caretaker minister.

The provincial minister has proposed to provide energy to the populace from off-grade solar system at a cost of 30 billion rupees in all the merged districts, while the construction of Bara Dam Khyber, Larazan Dam Tank, Khan Mir Kalay Dam Orakzai and Tank -Zam Dam are also included in these proposals.

Similarly, the provincial minister has proposed the solarization of all basic health unites in these districts and promotion of macro hydro power or solar energy development in these areas by giving incentives to the private sector for inclusion in national plan. Moreover, the caretaker minister has also forwarded various projects worth of billion of rupees related to industrial development, minerals, agriculture, irrigation, forestry, vocational education and training, health, tourism and many other areas of social development for NMDs to include it in five year plan under federal government.

DG highlights surge in pneumonia cases

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Director General Health Services, Dr. Shaukat Ali, on Wednesday expressed concern over the increasing cases of pneumonia due to the intensity of the cold weather. He appealed to parents to take special care of their children by ensuring they wear warm clothing when going outside.

According to the spokesperson of the Director General Health Services and Director Public Health, Dr. Arshad Roghani, in October of last year, 6,219 cases of pneumonia were reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while by December, the number of children under the age of 5 affected by pneumonia had risen to 11,551.

Dr. Roghani added that in the last three months, the highest number of cases, 8,068, were reported in males, with 4,000 cases in Haripur, 3,200 in Dera Ismail Khan, and 2,800 in Peshawar. He further highlighted that during the same period, 2,700 cases were reported in Swabi, 1,000 in Charsadda, and 900 in Lakki Marwat. Director General Health Services emphasized the need for immediate preventive measures and advised parents to be vigilant, especially in colder regions, to protect their children from the harsh weather conditions and the associated health risks.

CS visits fire affected plaza in Saddar

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary visited the commercial plaza in Peshawar Sadar Bazar, which was affected by fire. He met with traders and shopkeepers during his visit, accompanied by Commissioner Peshawar Muhammad Zubair and Deputy Commissioner Afaz Wazir. Expressing deep sorrow over the fire incident, the Chief Secretary, while addressing the media that this incident is unfortunate but expressed gratitude that no lives were lost. However, he highlighted the extensive damage to numerous shops and stalls, emphasizing the significant impact on traders and shopkeepers.

The Chief Secretary mentioned ongoing efforts to assess damages, awaiting a comprehensive report on the incident. He noted satisfaction that nearby buildings were safeguarded from the fire, avoiding additional harm. He further said that proper directives for the enhancement of fire safety system has been issued.

Dr. Arshad Aziz Malik, ceremoniously cut the ribbon, formally inaugurating the Alkhidmat Award for Journalists, which is designed to recognize the exceptional contributions of journalists to the development of welfare society.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony witnessed the presence of AKF KP General Secretary Shakir Siddiqui, Provincial Vice President Dr. Samiullah Jan, Director Media Dr. Yousaf Ali, Provincial Media Manager Noorul Wahid Jadoon, Director Alkhidmat Hospital Nishtarabad Peshawar Dr. Iqtidar



PESHAWAR: Provincial president of Al-Khidmat Foundation, Khalid Waqas Chamkani and President Press Club Arshad Aziz Malik talking to media persons after signing an MoU.

AKF KP announces Alkhidmat Award for journalists

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Alkhidmat Foundation Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (AKF KP) announced the Alkhidmat Award for Journalists (AAJ) on Wednesday. The occasion also marked the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between AKF KP and Peshawar Press Club (PPC), solidifying their collaboration in the domains of health, education, orphan sponsorship, and relief for the journalist community.

President AKF KP, Khalid Waqas, and President PPC, Arshad Aziz Malik, ceremoniously cut the ribbon, formally inaugurating the Alkhidmat Award for Journalists, which is designed to recognize the exceptional contributions of journalists to the development of welfare society.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony witnessed the presence of AKF KP General Secretary Shakir Siddiqui, Provincial Vice President Dr. Samiullah Jan, Director Media Dr. Yousaf Ali, Provincial Media Manager Noorul Wahid Jadoon, Director Alkhidmat Hospital Nishtarabad Peshawar Dr. Iqtidar

Ahmed, General Secretary PPC Irfan Musa Zai, Former President PPC M. Riaz, and Manager Social Media Marketing AKF KP, Ahmed Abdullah, alongside other cabinet officials of PPC and senior club members.

Addressing the gathering, President AKF KP, Khalid Waqas, acknowledged the invaluable services rendered by the Peshawar journalist community in collaboration with Alkhidmat Foundation over the past two decades. Their unwavering dedication was evident in their response to various natural disasters, including earthquakes, floods, the global epidemic Corona, and bomb blasts, during which they made enduring sacrifices.

President Khalid Waqas emphasized the pivotal role played by both Alkhidmat Foundation and the journalist community in fostering a welfare-oriented society. He extended heartfelt appreciation to the journalists, announcing the Alkhidmat Award for Journalists, which entails cash prizes and shields across different categories. The initiative aims to recognize and applaud journalists for

their remarkable efforts in highlighting the welfare activities of Alkhidmat Foundation and promoting awareness of humanitarian service.

He further expressed Alkhidmat's enduring commitment to the welfare of the journalist community and announced the signing of an Memorandum of Understanding with Peshawar Press Club. The MoU, comprising health, education, orphan sponsorship, and community services, signifies Alkhidmat Foundation's pledge to provide relief to deserving journalists.

President PPC, Arshad Aziz Malik, extended gratitude to Alkhidmat Foundation, commending their proactive efforts in support of the journalist community. He lauded the launching of the Alkhidmat Award for Journalists, highlighting its potential to inspire and motivate journalists. President Malik emphasized that the health, education, orphan care, and other welfare agreements forged by Alkhidmat Foundation would alleviate the challenges faced by journalists, ensuring facilities for those truly in need.

KMU IPH&SS, extends warm welcome to new batches



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Institute of Public Health and Social Sciences (IPH&SS) Khyber Medical University (KMU) is thrilled to announce the commencement of the academic year 2024, ushering in new batches of Master of Public Health, MPhil Community Dentistry, and BS Public Health students. An engaging orientation session was conducted today, providing comprehensive insights into the academic programs and acclimating students to the enriching academic and social environment at IPH&SS KMU.

The orientation session familiarized new students with the esteemed faculty, dedicated staff, cutting-edge learning resources, and the vibrant academic landscape at KMU IPH&SS. Distinguished faculty members, including Vice Chancellor KMU and Dean Prof Dr Zia Ul Haq, Director and Associate Prof Dr Khalid Rehman, HOD Family Medicine and Associate Prof Dr Abdul Jalil Khan, Assistant Prof Dr Maria Ishaq Khattak, and Lecturer Shiraz Fazid, delivered insightful and inspiring messages, establishing a positive tone for the fresh batch's academic journey.

A significant focus of the orientation was on the institute's code of conduct. Students received guidance on expected behavior, ethical standards, and the core values upheld by IPH&SS-KMU. This emphasis underscores the institute's commitment to fostering a respectful and conducive learning environment. Dr Ikram Khan, coordinator for MPH, has played a pivotal role in organizing the event, ensuring its seamless execution and success.

Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq, Vice Chancellor and Dean, warmly welcomed the new students to the transformative journey at IPH&SS, aligning their academic pursuit with the institute's commitment to excellence in public health education. Dr. Khalid Rehman, Director and Associate Professor, emphasized the importance of professionalism and integrity, encouraging students to embrace these values for a collaborative and enriching academic experience. He said that the Institute of Public Health and Social Sciences looks forward to a fruitful academic year, nurturing the next generation of public health leaders.

and Lecturer Shiraz Fazid, delivered insightful and inspiring messages, establishing a positive tone for the fresh batch's academic journey.

KP PSC postpone interviews

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Service Commission, with a view to facilitate the candidates has decided to postpone the interviews of all subjects scheduled w.e.f. 06.02.2024 to 09.02.2024 due to non availability / engagement of public transport in General Elections 2024.

All the candidates whose interviews are scheduled w.e.f. 06.02.2024 to 09.02.2024 will be informed through SMS, e-mail as well as telephonically regarding postponement of their interview. Next date of the interviews shall be intimated to the concerned candidates later on.

Police chalks out security plan for general election

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar Police has finalized comprehensive security arrangements to ensure the peaceful conduct of general elections in the district. A special security plan has been devised, deploying over 12,000 police officers and personnel across approximately 1280 polling stations. In line with the plan, Frontier Constabulary personnel will also be stationed at over 500 highly sensitive polling stations.

Notably, female police officers, including members of the Anti-Terrorism Squad, City Patrolling, Quick Response Force Mobiles, BDS units, and Sniffer Dogs teams, will be working alongside local police to fulfill security responsibilities at 42 joint polling stations.

For the 2024 general elections, the security plan encompasses 150 normal polling stations, 630 sensitive, and over 500 highly sensitive stations. Security measures will be enforced

through CCTV cameras, drones, and personnel vigilance.

The plan also includes monitoring systems at the divisional level, ensuring constant surveillance through CCTV cameras and drone cameras at sensitive polling stations. Special attention has been given to hotspots, with additional checkpoints established on both internal and external routes of the city. Mobile and rider squads will patrol urban and suburban areas, while government properties and offices will be closely monitored through marked vehicles.

Security responsibilities have been assigned to officers and personnel from various units at 695 polling stations, including 543 per mile and 42 joint polling stations. The plan involves sweeping of all polling stations using BDS and Sniffer Dogs.

Drones and body cameras will be utilized for surveillance at sensitive polling stations throughout

the district. Special response commandos have been entrusted with handling any emergency situations. Additionally, specific measures against anti-social elements include information-based search and strike operations.

CCPO Syed Ashfaq Anwar emphasized the importance of not allowing unauthorized individuals inside polling stations. He urged the public to cooperate with security forces and report any suspicious activity promptly. The CCPO also instructed police personnel to refrain from using mobile phones during duty, demonstrate impartiality, and maintain a tolerant demeanor.

CCPO Syed Ashfaq Anwar appealed to all citizens to collaborate with security forces to demonstrate a secure and peaceful environment. He encouraged reporting any suspicious person or activity to the nearest police station or relevant security personnel for the safety of lives and property.



PESHAWAR: PPP leader for NA-31 Arbab Alamgir addressing party workers during election campaign.

Minister hails Pakistan Lacrosse Federation

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Provincial Minister for Social Welfare and Women's empowerment, Justice Retired Irshad Qaiser, while addressing the closing ceremony of the first Women's National Lacrosse Championship, congratulated the management committee and said that it was a very wonderful and memorable event in which players and officials from all over Pakistan participated. I especially want to encourage all the players who performed well in this event.

She praised the officials

and said that they played an important role in organizing the event successfully with the hard work and dedication of the officials, this event has been made a memorable one.

Caretaker Provincial Minister, Justice retired Irshad Qaiser, while praising the Pakistan Lacrosse Federation, said that the federation worked very hard in organizing this event. The Federation organized an event that will play a major role in promoting the sport of lacrosse in Pakistan.

Caretaker Provincial Minister also appreciated the Executive Director of Asia Pacific Lacrosse

Union, Mr. Chris Massoni, who participated in the event and offered his services to promote the game of lacrosse in Pakistan. She hoped that this event would open a new way for the promotion of lacrosse in Pakistan.

May the game of lacrosse in Pakistan grow, flourish and the players of Pakistan achieve success at the national and international levels. At the end of the ceremony, Caretaker provincial minister for social welfare and women's Empowerment Justice retired Irshad Qaiser distributed prizes among the winning team and players.

Killer awarded life imprisonment

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Criminal Model Court Judge Syed Badshah on Wednesday delivered a verdict in the case of a heinous crime where a perpetrator, Muhammad Ibrahim, was found guilty of murdering seven individuals, including his wife and three young sons.

The court sentenced him to life imprisonment along with a substantial fine of Rs 10 lakh. The tragic incident unfolded on June 21, 2021, on Phandu Road in the jurisdiction of Chamkani police station. The police report indicates that domestic violence triggered the criminal.

Muhammad Ibrahim, to open fire inside his residence. The violent act resulted in the untimely demise of seven people, including his wife and children. Following a thorough trial, the court's decision has brought a measure of justice to the grieving families as Muhammad Ibrahim now faces a life-time behind bars and a significant financial penalty.

Power to remain suspended

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) on Wednesday notified that due to maintenance work power supply will remain suspended from Peshawar University Grid Station on 25th and 30th January from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.



PESHAWAR: Parents of eight years old Shabir talking to media persons for assistance.

SCCI calls for equipping rescue institutions with modern vehicles

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fuad Ishaq along with senior vice president Sanauallah Khan, vice president Ijaz Khan Afridi visited Time Centre in Saddar Bazar Peshawar wherein more than 200 shops and counters of mobiles and accessories burnt to ashes by yesterday's inferno.

The SCCI office bearers examined the damages of mobile phones, accessories and building, worth millions of rupees in yesterday's horrific fire. The horrific fire engulfed the whole Time Centre Peshawar, said in a press release here on Wednesday.

During the visit, the SCCI chief and members of his cabinet were saddened over losses of millions of traders and shopkeepers and expressed sympathy with them. The office bearers assured the SCCI will make all efforts to get compensation for the affected traders for their losses and restore their business by holding talks with provincial government and relevant authorities.

They added the chamber will play an effective role to provide relief to the affected traders and shopkeepers of the Time Centre Peshawar. Fuad Ishaq while talking on the occasion stressed the need for taking initiatives to strengthen and equipping with modern technologies and tools to government rescue departments to cope effectively with fire incidents, emergency and calamities situation and prevent from huge human and financial losses.

The SCCI chief assured the affected traders of Time Centre Peshawar that the door of the chamber is open for them around the clock and will remain open and if they require assistance, should come to the chamber anytime so the chamber will utilize all resources to resolve their issues on priority grounds. Office bearers of the chamber on the occasion offered prayers for early restoration of business of traders and shopkeepers, affected by yesterday's horrific fire incident in Time Centre Peshawar.



In brief

JI guarantees basic rights F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Central leader of Jammet-i-Islami (JI), Senator Mushtaq Ahmad Khan has said that it is the manifesto of Jamaat-e-Islam (JI) to ensure basic rights of laymen. Instead of serving the people, the rulers have looted the country for the last seven decades. The views were expressed by the Senator Mushtaq Ahmad Khan while addressing a public gathering, organized by JI, Khyber in connection with the election campaign held here at Takiya, Sultan Khel village of Landi Kotal on Wednesday evening. He said that the purpose of JI participation in the election was to make certain the true Islamic welfare state where every citizen of the country could get free, education, health and justice etc. If JI comes into power, it will get rid-off of America and European slavery he added and said it will curtail incentives being enjoyed by the one percent elite class. He criticized the ex-parliamentarian of Khyber and said the tribesmen were still deprived of potable water, health and other facilities that was unfair to them.

PPP local leader shot dead

JAMSHORO (INP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) local leader Abbas Khoso was shot dead by unknown assailants in broad daylight in Jamshoro district on Wednesday. According to the details, two armed motorcyclists opened fire on the PPP district council member Abbas Khoso who was at a shop. The PPP leader was shifted to hospital but succumbed to his wounds. The attackers managed to escape from the scene. Soon after the incident, police reached the crime scene and cordoned off the area for investigation. An investigation into the case has been launched, said police. Earlier this month, unidentified assailants gunned down a local leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in an attack in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's Swabi, police officials said. According to police, unknown motorcyclists opened fire on the vehicle of Shah Khalid in Swabi Ada area, resulting in his death. The gunmen managed to escape the crime scene following the incident.

Reporter goes 'missing'

GUJRAT (INP): A reporter of a private TV news channel stationed in Gujrat, Aamir Mahmood Butt has gone 'missing', according to his family. An application has been filed at Civil Lines police station regarding the missing of Aamir Mahmood Butt, who went missing last night in Gujrat. Sharjeel Memon, son of reporter, said his father left the house around 8 pm last night and did not return, while his cellphone is also switched off. Meanwhile, the police have denied any information about the 'missing' journalist.

Arms smuggling attempt foiled

ATTOCK (INP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) on Wednesday thwarted a major attempt to smuggle automatic weapons into Punjab that might have been used for terrorism in the province. The ANF seized a large cache of arms from a Toyota Hiace near Attock Toll Plaza and arrested the suspect, who was identified as a resident of Mianwali. The weapons included 10 Kalashnikovs, 2 shotguns, five 30-bore pistols, one Beretta pistol, 33 Kalashnikov magazines and shotgun magazines.

Sherpao expresses displeasure at inflated gas bills

F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: To ensure transparency in the polls, Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Wednesday asked the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to make public its polling scheme for the general election slated for February 8.

Addressing a gathering in Sherpao village in Charadda district, he said the ECP should have announced by now the polling scheme for the upcoming general election containing constituency-wise lists of polling station, number of registered voters and other relevant details.

Lauding Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa for his efforts to correct the wrongs committed in the

previous PTI government, he said the former deputy speaker of the National Assembly enjoyed perks and privileges for five years on the basis of a stay order and created a constitutional crises in the end. "This was travesty of justice and the one responsible for it should be made to face the music," he said.

He also expressed concern over the inflated gas and electricity bills and said that the government should consider the problems being faced by the people, who were already facing record inflation. He said that though the consumption of electricity had fallen during the winter, the consumers continued to receive inflated power bills. He also expressed displeasure at the inflated gas bills despite the fact that the

people were facing gas loadshedding.

Aftab Sherpao said that the people were running from pillar to post due to rising inflation coupled with inflated gas and electricity bills. He said that steps should be taken to redress the grievances of the people and they should be provided relief in the face of backbreaking inflation. He promised that the QWP if voted to power would spare no effort to provide relief to the people. Shedding light on the election manifesto of his party, he said that reforms would be introduced in all the sectors, including health, education and agriculture. He said that the country had lagged far behind, therefore, concerted efforts were needed to put the country on the path to progress.

Bridegroom joins JI on his wedding day in Dir

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A newlywed bridegroom Ajmal Khan at Sadbar Kaly in Sambarbagh on Wednesday (his wedding day) announced to quit the Awami National Party and join the Jamaat-i-Islami during his wedding party attended by the JI district chief and candidate for PK 17 Izazul Mulk Afkari, former district councilor Sarbiland Khan, Rahim Shah and other party activists.

The JI candidate thanked the groom and his family for supporting him. He said the JI was the only political party which struggled for the development and prosperity of the district. The JI district chief claimed that they had completed record development works here during the MMA government. He appealed to the public and especially youths to vote for the JI on February 8 so that a real change could be brought in the country.

Meanwhile the Awami National Party local leader in Maidan Umar Zaman along with his family and relatives also announced to part ways with his party after serving it for 34 years and join the Jamaat-i-Islami. The ANP activist made the announcement during a function held at Manial Maidan with the JI



chief Sirajul Haq in the chair. The JI chief is contesting election for NA 6. The function was also addressed by the JI chief Sirajul Haq, JI nominated candidate for PK 18 Saeed Gul, JI Maidan chief Haji Fazal Wahab, JI youth wing district president Ateequr Rehman, Al-Khidmat Foundation district president Hafizullah Khaksar and others.

Speaking on the occasion, Umar Zaman said that he was joining the JI along with his family members and relatives on their own free will. He said that during the current political scenario he realized that it was the JI only that could steer the country out of crises. The JI chief Sirajul Haq and party candidate for PK 18 Saeed Gul welcomed the ANP activist and said that

he had made a wise decision.

Also on Wednesday, the Pakistan Rah e Haq party district Chairman Maulana Ziaul Haq Haidari along with his supporters announced to support the Pakistan Tahreek Insaf nominee for NA 6 Muhammad Bashir Khan and PK 17 Ubaidur Rehman.

The announcement was made during a function at an orphanage in the Mandizo area of Jandol. Speaking on the occasion Maulana Ziaul Haq Haidari said that he had been inspired from the PTI founder Imran Khan and that was why he decided to support his candidates in Lower Dir. He asked voters to reject all other politicians and support the PTI for the bright future of the country.



QUETTA: Executive Director, FDI, Uzma Yaqoob addressing a press conference.

Wheel jam strike of transporters continue

F.P. Report

MARDAN: The wheel jam strike of transporters over the transfer of bus stands in Mardan continues for the second day. Riders face severe hardships. Chamtar Bus Terminal lacks facilities and is a failed project. Walid Mir Kashmiri, President of Transport Association Mardan, and the owners of the transport hubs said that after receiving a notice from the administration to forcibly transfer the transport to Chamtar Bus Terminal a few days ago, the transport hubs were closed and the vehicles were parked.

Due to which the transport to Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Abbottabad, Swat, Charsadda, Nowshera, Swabi, Pirbaba, Timargara,

Lahore, Faisalabad, Karachi and other cities of the country remained completely closed.

After the weekend, commuters including government employees and businessmen going to other cities and provinces are facing severe difficulties. They further said that Chamtar Terminal lacks complete facilities like hotel, state lights and no waiting room. On this occasion, leaders of transporters and local business organizations clarified that Chamtar Bus Terminal is a complete failed project of TMA.

RPO directs police to perform election duties with impartiality: Regional Police Officer (RPO) Mardan Region, Muhammad Suleman has directed police

force to remain impartial during election duty and take indiscriminate action against elements involved in disrupting electoral process.

He was chairing a meeting convened to discuss preparations for upcoming general elections. The meeting was also attended by concerned police officials and District Police Officer. RPO directed police force to remain impartial and take timely action those trying to disrupt polling by force.

He also directed to utilize resources for procurement of electoral material to designated places and necessary arrangement for safety of election staff. He also directed steps to ensure uninterrupted polling according to code of conduct issued by election commission.



SHANGLA: Candidate for National Assembly Syed Fareen Khan addressing public gathering during election campaign.

3 laborers die in Kohistan accident

F.P. Report

KOHIKISTAN: In a late-night road mishap, at least three laborers were killed and seven others critically wounded when a mini dumper carrying them, skidded off the road and fell in a gorge in Achar Nala area of Upper Kohistan, police informed on Wednesday.

According to police the incident occurred during night hours in Upper Kohistan where a Mazda Diana vehicle carrying laborers met with an accident. Soon after receiving information, rescue teams and ambulances reached the site and started the rescue operation. Police said 10 critically injured were shifted by the rescue teams to Dasu Hospital where three of them succumbed to their injuries. Police said the rescue operation took two hours to complete, adding that seven laborers were admitted at the hospital for treatment.

15 injured in fog related road mishaps

SHEIKHUPURA (INP): At least 15 people including children and women were injured in separate fog related road accidents in different localities of Sheikhupura, police and rescue sources said on Wednesday.

According to details, due to poor visibility caused by dense fog, a passenger van and a truck collided on Faisalabad Road. As a result of collision five people including Sana Liaquat, Shabana Abbas, Asif Arshad, Akram Shah and Faheem Ahsan sustained injuries.

AT Gujranwala road near Motorway bridge, an over speeding mini-truck hit a rickshaw leaving Zunera Rizwan, Madiha Younas and Liaquat Rafique critically injured.

A private car and a rickshaw collided near Sacha Souch chowki at Sargodha road resulting in injuries to six-year-old Rida Usman, 8-year-old Aliyan Usman and 12-year-old Maria Ghani seriously injured. At Bandoke road in Farooqabad area, a car hit a motorcycle leaving Muneer Ahmed 40, Meerab Munir 06, Muneeb Ahmed 08, and Tehreem Munir 30, injured. The injured were shifted to different hospitals and police after registering separate cases in all in incidents at respective police stations started investigations.

Farewell ceremony held

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: On the retirement of 8 police officers and employees associated with District Police Toba Tek Singh, a farewell ceremony was held at DPO Office Toba Tek Singh. On this occasion, DSP Headquarters Ghulam Abbas was also present. Among the retiring officers and employees, Inspector Shaukat Ali Javed, Sub-Inspector Mohammad Jahangir, Sub-Inspector Zulfikar Ali, Head Constable Abdul Majeed, Constable Abdul Wahid and Clerks Muhammad Rafiq are included. While Inspector Ghulam Mustafa and Inspector Muhammad Nazir are retiring from the police department on 31.01.24.

Tareen became the last ray of hope for voters

Saqib Mushtaq

LODHRAN: Central Chairman of IPP (Stabilization Pakistan Party) Jahangir Khan Tareen, started his election campaign from National Assembly Constituency NA-155 of Lodhran, thousands of educated voter's youths and girls welcomed Jahangir Tareen by showering flowers on him.

Lodhran is the only district in South Punjab where the literacy rate is decreasing every year and the ten police stations of Lodhran have seen an increase of about one thousand cases every year, in the year 2023 roundabout (thirteen thousand FIR (first investigation report) register in the ten police stations of Lodhran district, 70 percent FIRs cases are politically motivated.

The educated class of Lodhran is fed up with the local politicians who only do court politics and even sell jobs including development works. In the by-elections of 2015, Jahangir Tareen won nearly 140,000 votes for the first time in the history of Lodhran, in which 75% of the votes were from the youth.

Jahangir Khan Tareen wearing warm tochi and wool jacket is becoming popular again in voters, old men and women consider Jahangir Tareen as the savior of Lodhran's problems. Jahangir Tareen is the chairman of the IPP political Party and is contesting from two National Assembly constituencies in South Punjab, Jahangir Tareen is contesting from



NA 155 in Lodhran and NA 149 in Multan.

When Jahangir Tareen goes to the voters, the voters welcome Jahangir Tareen to the beat of the drum. Jahangir Tareen took massive steps for educated degree holder youth and now on January 29 he is going to lay the foundation stone of South Punjab's largest University of Information Technology which will consist of sixteen acres which will meet all the requirements of the modern world.

Voters' selfies with Jahangir Tareen's personal plane are also very viral on social media. The people of Lodhran have only one demand to get rid of the politics of "Adalat Thane" (Court & police station) and lay a net of development projects so that the infrastructure of the district can be perfect.

Earlier educated and unemployed youths and girls from all over the district were waiting for the arrival of Jahangir Tareen because Jahangir Tareen has not only made Lodhran district nationally known but the name of Lodhran is now also taken internationally.

Ali Tareen, the only son of Jahangir Tareen, took the stars of the cricket world from the streets of South Punjab and joined them in the Tareen Cricket Academy and then introduced them to the regional level, provincial level, national level as well as the international grounds.

From the year 2018 to 2021, Jahangir Tareen has done various development works worth about seven billion rupees in Lodhran district, including new road networks, supply of needle gas, electricity poles and transformers, supply of clean water, construction of new schools, speedo bus service, restoration of computer land record center in rural areas, starting of family hospital for citizens, equipping thousands of boys and girls with precious education through the forum of Tareen Education Foundation, Tareen Cricket Academy are included. Lodhran's civil society and respected lawyers also appreciate Jahangir Tareen's exemplary actions, but the victory of Jahangir Tareen will be decided in the national assembly elections on February 8 2024.

Winter Feast second edition kicks off

F.P. Report

GHIZER: Seven days Winter Feast 2nd edition 2024 under the patronage of Gilgit Baltistan is kick started at Khalti frozen lake District Ghizer GB from 22nd January 2024.

Three Days Winter sports event covers mainstream winter sports games including Ice hockey Curling Speed race and traditional winter sports of Gilgit Baltistan

where 20 teams from across GB are participating in the event.

The concept of Sevendays has been derived from the initial seven days of birth of snow leopard which are considered as its observation period to learn how to survive in extreme cold, furthermore the snow leopard has an important role in over all food chain of mountains eco system. Thus the event has also a major focus on the

environment and Climate change. The event also includes the exhibition of cultural stalls, musical events, fireworks, and more. Thousands of people from all walks of life witnessed the winter sports event. The purpose of the event is to promote winter tourism potential of Gilgit Baltistan through and tourism promotion events so as the GB may be branded as four season tourism hub globally.



LARKANA: Labourers busy in loading sand on tractor trolley from Rice Canal.



Marcos says does not endorse Taiwan independence

MANILA (Reuters): Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said he does not endorse Taiwan independence and reiterated his country was committed to its One-China policy, a response to China's outrage over recent remarks in congratulating Taiwan's election winner.

Marcos said in an interview with GMA News TV aired that his congratulatory comment to Lai Ching-te earlier this month, where he referred to him as president, was a "common courtesy". "The One-China policy remains in place. We have adhered to the One-China policy strictly and conscientiously since we adopted (it)," Marcos said.

"We are not endorsing Taiwanese independence. Taiwan is a province of China." The congratulatory message, however, drew a sharp rebuke from China, with its foreign ministry spokesperson telling Marcos last week to "read more books to properly understand the ins and outs of the Taiwan issue". That prompted a fierce response from the Philippines defence minister, who criticised the Chinese official for "low and gutter-level talk".

Marcos in the interview added he was for peace and "does not want conflict" in

the region. The Philippines and China have been at loggerheads this past year, coinciding with Marcos making overtures to defence ally the United States, including widening base access to the US military. China has seen that as a provocation and part of a challenge by Washington to its Taiwan policy.

The Philippines and Taiwan have unofficial ties as both maintain an "economic and cultural office" in Taipei and Manila serving as a de facto embassy. Meanwhile, the Philippines armed forces will guarantee the "unimpeded and peaceful" exploration and exploitation of natural resources within the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) as it shifts its focus to external defence, Manila's defense secretary said. "We are evolving into a defence concept which projects our power into areas where we must, by constitutional fiat and duty, protect and preserve our resources."

Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro told the Manila Overseas Press Club.

Teodoro also said the Philippines will "increase the tempo" of activities with allies and major partners in the West Philippines Sea and other parts of the country and "exercise these partnerships to the full".

Manila calls the portion of the South China Sea that is within its EEZ as the West Philippine Sea, where it has had a series of confrontations with China with both trading accusations of provoking conflict.

In addition to the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei claim parts of the South China Sea disputed by China, which claims almost all of the sea, a conduit for more than \$3 trillion of annual ship-borne commerce. The Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 said China's claims had no legal basis, a ruling Beijing rejects. Plans by a Philippine firm to drill for oil and natural gas on the Reed Bank in the South China Sea have been hampered for years by the territorial dispute.

"We are not the ones encroaching on the EEZ of another country sea. The encroacher has a vast area of sea," Teodoro said. "We do not want a fight, we want peace but it should be based on international law and sustainability." "We will not bend over backward," Teodoro said. China and the Philippines agreed last week to improve maritime communication and to properly manage conflicts and differences in the South China Sea through friendly talks.

Putin, Sisi mark new phase of Egypt's Russian built nuke plant

CAIRO/MOSCOW (Reuters): Russian President Vladimir Putin and Egypt's Abdel Fattah al-Sisi inaugurated the construction of a new unit at Egypt's Dabaa nuclear power plant via video link, as Moscow moves ahead with its global nuclear ambitions.

The power plant is being built by the Russian state corporation Rosatom at a reported cost of \$30 billion, and will consist of four power units with a combined capacity of 4.8 gigawatts. The two presidents were opening the construction of the fourth and final unit, according to Egyptian state media. "The cooperation between our two countries continues and is developing. Egypt is a close friend of ours and a strategic partner," Putin said.

Egypt, which faces increasing power demand from a population of 105 million, is seeking to position itself as a regional energy hub that exports electricity to neighbouring countries, and to diversify its energy sources. Since Sisi became president in 2014 the country developed a surplus capacity for electricity generation but has been grappling with power cuts since last summer after heatwaves drove up demand for cooling. Production of natural gas used for power generation has also been dipping, and Egypt resorted to burning more polluting fuel oil in some power stations as it tried to keep up LNG exports - an important source of scarce foreign currency.

Europe should boycott Alabama

ROME (Reuters): A peace group with close ties to the Vatican said it will appeal to European businesses and tourists to boycott the US state of Alabama if it went ahead with the execution of an inmate by nitrogen gas this week. The warning by the Sant' Egidio Community involves Kenneth Smith, who was convicted of a 1988 murder and who survived a botched execution attempt by lethal injection in 2022.

His lawyers appealed to the US Supreme Court last week to block the second attempt, saying it violates the US Constitution's Eighth Amendment ban on cruel and unusual punishment. Smith's case has also alarmed the UN human rights office, which said last week that the execution planned for Jan. 25 could amount to torture and violate US commitments under international law. At a news conference where he spoke about an eventual boycott, Mario Marazziti, Sant' Egidio's expert on the death penalty, mentioned that Germany automaker Mercedes Benz has a plant in Alabama and that many Europeans go to the southern state for its golf courses.

This is a proposal that we will make if the execution of Kenneth Smith goes ahead," he said, adding that he believed European trade or investment in Alabama amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars a year. "There is a moment in which you have to choose. Even for South Africa, it seemed that to boycott could not be effective but it became decisive to end the apartheid regime. I think we must try something that has not been tried so far," Marazziti told Reuters in a separate interview.

He told the news conference that Europeans could "study alternatives to their investments in the United States" depending on how states dealt with human rights issues. The Sant' Egidio Community, which has branches in many countries and brokered peace deals, has close ties to the Vatican. Pope Francis, who supports a global ban on capital punishment, has often praised the group. Smith's lawyers have argued that the decision to gas Smith by strapping to his face a commercially made industrial-safety breathing mask connected to a canister of pure nitrogen comes with risks of botching the second attempt to execute him. Marazziti rejected a statement by Alabama Solicitor General Edmund LaCour that using nitrogen was the most painless and humane method. "There is no painless method of execution," Marazziti said.

Syria says there were no grounds for Jordanian air strikes on its soil

AMMAN (Reuters): Syria said there was no justification for Jordanian air strikes on its territory that its neighbour said had targeted drug dealers whose border incursions posed a threat to Jordan's national security. Jordan has stepped up a campaign against drug traffickers after clashes last month with dozens of people it suspects of links to pro-Iranian militias carrying large hauls of narcotics over its border from Syria, along with arms and explosives.

A deadly strike last Thursday, among several since last year on hideouts of drug dealers and warehouses linked to militias in Syria's south, killed 10 civilians, including children, according to regional intelligence sources corroborated by accounts of residents and witnesses. "The escalation that we have witnessed in the past few months," a Syrian foreign ministry statement said, "is not at all consistent with what was agreed upon from both sides."

Two Jordanian officials, who asked not to be named, said civilians had not been targeted and that the strikes followed repeated warnings in high-level meetings with Syrian officials. They said the rise in incidents coincided with increasing attacks on US bases in Kurdish-controlled northern Syria and in Iraq by pro-Iranian militias in solidarity with Palestinian militants fighting Israel's offensive in Gaza. Jordan's government, like its Western allies, says Lebanon's Iranian-backed Hezbollah group and other pro-Iranian militias who control much of southern Syria are behind the surge in drug and weapons smuggling.



Iran and Hezbollah deny this, saying the accusations are part of a Western plot against them. Syria's government denies that its security and military forces work closely with Iranian-backed militias involved in drug trafficking. Jordanian officials say they have provided names of key drug dealers, manufacturing facilities and smuggling routes to Syrian authorities. "No real measure was taken to neutralise this threat and smuggling attempts have witnessed a dangerous increase in numbers," a foreign ministry statement said in response to the Syrian announcement. The kingdom expected Syria to take speedy and effective measures against those behind the smuggling operations, the Jordanian statement said. Supplies of a Syrian-made amphetamine known as captagon reaching Gulf Arab states via Jordan are worth billions of dollars a year

and finance a host of pro-Iranian and pro-government militias spawned by more than a decade of conflict in Syria, according to US and European officials.

Both Washington and the European Union last year imposed sanctions on senior officials associated with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for alleged involvement in captagon trade, which they say is also a financial lifeline for his inner circle. Assad's government denies any role in captagon trafficking. Some Jordanian officials say pro-Iranian militias in both Iraq and Syria are using the drug war to pile pressure on Jordan, a staunch US ally that hosts hundreds of US troops. Washington has given Jordan around \$1 billion to bolster border security since Syria's civil war began in 2011, and has recently sent more military aid to that end. Western intelligence sources say.

Turkey approves Sweden's NATO membership bid

ANKARA (Reuters): Turkey's parliament ratified Sweden's NATO membership bid, clearing the biggest remaining hurdle to expanding the Western military alliance after 20 months of delay. Turkey's general assembly, where President Tayyip Erdogan's ruling alliance holds a majority, voted 287-55 to approve the application that Sweden first made in 2022 to bolster its security in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

All NATO members need to approve applications from countries seeking to join the alliance. When Sweden and Finland asked to join in 2022, Turkey raised objections over what it said was the two countries' protection of groups it deems terrorists. It endorsed Finland's membership in April last year but, along with Hungary, had kept Sweden waiting. "We support NATO enlargement to improve the alliance's deterrence efforts... We hope Finland and Sweden's attitude towards fighting terrorism sets an example for our

other allies," Fuat Oktay, head of parliament's foreign affairs commission and a ruling AK Party member, said during debate. "I greatly appreciate the Turkish Parliament's decision to approve Sweden's entry into NATO today." US Ambassador Jeff Flake said in a written statement. He said Turkey's "commitment to the NATO Alliance clearly demonstrates our enduring partnership."

Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom also welcomed the Turkish parliament's approval. "We now look forward to President Erdogan signing the ratification document," Billstrom said in a written statement. Erdogan is expected to sign the legislation within days, leaving Hungary - whose Prime Minister Viktor Orban has friendly relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin - as the only member state not to have approved Sweden's accession. Orban said earlier he had invited his Swedish counterpart to visit and negotiate his country joining the bloc. Hungary's parliament is in

recess until around mid-February. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed the Turkish move and said: "I also count on Hungary to complete its national ratification as soon as possible."

Turkey and Hungary maintain better relations with Russia than other members of the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

While opposing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Turkey has criticised Western sanctions on Moscow. For its part, Russia has cautioned that it would respond if NATO bolstered military infrastructure in the two Nordic states. Sweden, whose membership bid marked a historic shift away from a non-aligned security policy, would enhance NATO defences in the Baltic Sea region facing Russia. Turkey's delays had frustrated some of its Western allies and enabled it to extract some concessions. Ankara had urged Stockholm to toughen its stance on local members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which the European Union and United States also deem a terrorist group.

In response, Stockholm introduced a new anti-terrorism bill that makes being a member of a terrorist organisation illegal. Sweden, Finland, Canada and the Netherlands also took steps to relax policies on arms exports to Turkey. In parliament, Oktay said Erdogan's AK Party endorsed Sweden's NATO bid after its positive steps fighting terrorism. The AKP's nationalist allies MHP and the main opposition CHP also endorsed Sweden's bid. Opposition nationalist, Islamist and leftist parties rejected it, while four MPs abstained. Erdogan, who had sent Sweden's bid to parliament in October, linked the ratification to US approval of sales of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey. The White House backs the sale and some analysts expect a deal to swiftly follow Turkey's approval of Sweden's bid. But there is no clear time frame for the US Congress to approve the deal.

NK tears down monument symbolizing union with SK

SEOUL (Reuters): North Korea has demolished a major monument in its capital that symbolized the goal of reconciliation with South Korea on the orders of leader Kim Jong Un, who last week called South Korea a "primary foe" and said unification was no longer possible.

Satellite imagery of Pyongyang showed that the monument, an arch symbolizing hopes for Korean reunification which was completed after a landmark inter-Korea summit in 2000, was no longer there, according to a report by NK News, an online outlet that monitors North Korea.

Reuters could not independently confirm that the monument, known informally as the Arch of Reunification, had been demolished. Kim called the monument an "eyesore" in a speech at the Supreme People's Assembly on Jan. 15,

where he ordered that the constitution be amended to say the South was a "primary foe and invariable principal enemy," official media said. Tensions have spiked on the Korean peninsula following intensifying military manoeuvres by the South Korean and US militaries in response to weapons testing by the North, which said it was readying for a "nuclear war" with its enemies. The arch, formally known as the Monument to the Three Charters for National Reunification, stood 30 meters tall and was symbolic of the three charters, which were self-reliance, peace and national cooperation, according to South Korean government records. Asked if North Korea appeared to be changing its posture on conflict with the South, White House spokesperson John Kirby told reporters, "We're watching this very

very closely." He added: "I would just tell you that we remain confident that the defensive posture that we're maintaining on the peninsula is appropriate to the risk."

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, who took office in 2022, has taken a hard line against the North, calling for immediate and tough responses to North Korea's military actions that have raised tensions on the Korean peninsula. North Korea has vowed to "wipe out" South Korea if attacked by the South and US forces. Late last year, the North declared as no longer valid a key agreement signed with the South in 2018 aimed at de-escalating military tensions. Following Kim's speech last week, the North's assembly abolished key government agencies that have been instrumental to decades of exchanges with Seoul.

Blinken pledges \$45m to boost West Africa security

ABIDJAN (Reuters): US Secretary of State Antony Blinken pledged \$45 million in additional financing to help fight conflict and bring stability to coastal West Africa, where insecurity linked to jihadist insurgencies has increased in recent years. Blinken is on the second stop of a four-nation tour of Africa taking him to Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Angola from Jan. 21-26.

The purpose of the trip is to discuss US-African partnerships over trade, climate, infrastructure, health, security and other issues. It follows a summit in Washington with African leaders in December 2022. Security challenges in West Africa, the fallout of a coup in Niger last year and Russia's growing influence in the region are among key topics during Blinken's trip. He arrived in Ivory Coast's financial capital Abidjan and met President

Alassane Ouattara, after which he announced the extra financing at a joint press briefing. Ivory Coast is one of several coastal West African countries impacted in recent years by Islamist insurgencies that took root in Mali in 2012 and spread across the Sahel region despite costly, internationally backed military efforts to contain it. "We spent a lot of time discussing mutual security challenges," Blinken said. "We appreciate Ivory Coast's leadership in the fight against extremism and violence." The funding will supplement \$300 million the US has already invested in coastal West Africa over the past two years. "We have increased military training by 15 times and are investing in civil protection in Ivory Coast," Blinken added. Ouattara said security in the region remained a challenge. "That is why we do

appreciate the USA for their support in the area of intelligence and the fight against terrorism," he said. The US faced a setback in its fight against militants in the Sahel when military officers toppled Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum, a key ally, in July last year. The coup in Niger was one of a series of military takeovers or attempted power grabs that occurred in West and Central Africa over the past three years.

The instability has raised concern, particularly as juntas have cut ties with traditional Western allies such as the European Union and France, which withdrew thousands of troops from the Sahel last year. Blinken met Akinwumi Adesina, president of the African Development Bank, at a sub-regional rice research institute in the afternoon. He is scheduled to fly to Nigeria in the evening.

Maldives says Chinese vessel will not conduct research in its waters

COLOMBO (Reuters): A Chinese research vessel on its way to the Maldives will not conduct any research while in the archipelago's waters in the Indian Ocean, the Maldivian foreign ministry said. The Chinese vessel Xiang Yang Hong 03, which is en route to the Maldives, will only make a port call "for rotation of personnel and replenishment" while in its waters, the ministry said in a state-

ment. Such vessels are not officially military ships but India and other countries worry about the military use of their oceanographic research. Its presence is likely to raise concern in New Delhi, which has previously viewed such vessels close to its shores as problematic. "The Maldives has always been a welcoming destination for vessels of friendly coun-

tries, and continues to host both civilian and military vessels making port calls for peaceful purposes," the foreign ministry said. Permission to allow the ship to dock could further vex the ties between traditional friends New Delhi and Male, which have soured since President Mohamed Muizzu took office in November promoting an 'India Out' campaign.

Honduras ex-president gets new lawyer after DEA 'infiltration' claim

NEW YORK (Reuters): A US judge appointed a new lawyer to represent Juan Orlando Hernandez and delayed his drug trafficking trial a week after the former Honduran president claimed the US Drug Enforcement Administration sent a rabbi to "infiltrate" his defense team.

Jorge Bar-Levy, a Florida resident who told Reuters he was ordained as a rabbi in 2019, said he helped Hernandez find a New York lawyer and get kosher meals in jail. But Hernandez says Bar-Levy was actually "enlisted" by the DEA, citing a public statement by Bar-Levy. "That is not a fair trial, judge," Hernandez said in a Jan. 18 court hearing. US District Judge Kevin Castel appointed Renato Stabile as an additional lawyer to try the case alongside Raymond Colon, who has been Hernandez's main

defense lawyer since his April 2022 extradition but has since said he is in poor health.

Castel also pushed back the trial's start date to Feb. 12 in part due to Stabile's appointment. That came after the judge questioned Colon and Hernandez for an hour outside public earshot during a hearing in federal court in Manhattan. Hernandez, 55, was a key ally to the United States on immigration and anti-narcotics operations while leading Honduras from 2014-2022. But the Justice Department said he abused his power and ran the Central American country as a "narco-state" and took millions of dollars in bribes from cartels. Hernandez has pleaded not guilty. At last Thursday's hearing, Colon said Bar-Levy met with Hernandez's family and reported information back to the DEA. Colon

said he had also met Bar-Levy "many, many times." He compared the sequence of events to a melodramatic Latin American soap opera. "This turned into basically, as we say in Spanish, a novela," he said at the hearing. Castel ordered prosecutors to confer with the DEA. In a Jan. 19 letter, prosecutors acknowledged that Bar-Levy met with Hernandez's family and shared information with the DEA in 2020. But they said the DEA had no contact with Bar-Levy since then and called the claim the government directed him to infiltrate Hernandez's defense team "unfounded and incorrect."

They said they shared documents pertaining to Bar-Levy with the defense in August 2022. Bar-Levy also acknowledged meeting with Hernandez's relatives in early 2020 and sharing information with the DEA. But he said he told Colon

about those contacts in 2022, and disputed the claim that the DEA directed him to infiltrate Hernandez's defense. Bar-Levy told Reuters his initial meeting with Hernandez's relatives was shortly after the former president's brother Tony Hernandez was convicted on US drug trafficking charges. He said the family thought he could help with legal troubles. Bar-Levy said he had alerted the DEA of the meeting so the US government would not perceive him as a "collaborator" of a foreign government, but had not had contact with the agency since 2020. Bar-Levy said Hernandez asked him for help after he was arrested in Honduras in 2022. Bar-Levy said he referred the case to Colon, and later helped Hernandez get kosher meals in jail, but otherwise had no role in the defense.

Ex-Taiwan ally Nauru re-establishes diplomatic ties with China

BEIJING (Reuters): China and Nauru on Wednesday re-established diplomatic ties, Chinese state media reported, after the tiny Pacific island nation unexpectedly severed relations with its now former ally Taiwan.

During a ceremony in Beijing, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Nauru counterpart Lionel Aingimea formally signed a document to restore

relations, with ties at the ambassadorial level resuming with immediate effect. Democratically governed Taiwan lost Nauru, one of its few remaining diplomatic allies, to China on Jan. 15, just days after a new Taiwanese president was elected.

China claims Taiwan as its own territory with no right to state-to-state ties, a position Taiwan strongly

disputes. Nauru's government said it was seeking full resumption of diplomatic relations with China "in the best interests" of the country and its people. Nauru had recognised China before, between 2002 and 2005. "The government of the Republic of Nauru recognises that there is only one China in the world, the government of the People's Republic of China is the only legal

government representing all of China, and Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory," according to the document signed. Nauru also promised not to have any official exchanges with Taiwan. Taiwan's 12 remaining diplomatic allies include the Vatican, Guatemala and Paraguay, plus Palau, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands in the Pacific.

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FBR restructuring and economic stability

THE Federal Cabinet has recently okayed a summary put forth by the Ministry of Finance regarding the restructuring and digitization of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). According to the details, after a thorough discussion over the proposals with the cabinet members regarding the restructuring and digitization of the FBR, Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar directed the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee under the supervision of the caretaker Finance Minister to plan and oversee the task of restructuring and digitization of Country's tax authority. As said the committee would comprise federal ministers for privatization, foreign affairs, commerce, energy, law and justice, and information technology.

An effective and transparent revenue system is crucial for a country's economic growth, sustainable development and prosperity. It provides the government with the funds needed to invest in development, relieve poverty, and deliver services to the public. A well-designed revenue system promotes inclusiveness, encourages good governance, improves the accountability of governments by their citizens, and cultivates social justice and equality among the masses. Revenue System design and delivery are also closely linked to domestic and international investment policies in terms of transparency, anti-corruption, and fairness, and play a vital role in attracting investment and bringing growth to any nation. Pakistan being a low-income country faces serious structural, regulatory, and enforcement/implementation challenges in generating revenue from domestic resources. Pakistan's economy has been struck into multiple issues that include a small tax base, a large informal sector, misuse of transfer pricing, low per capita income, the least domestic savings and investment plus weak governance, corruption, and capacity problems of the tax regulator and tax collection departments. Meanwhile, spiralling inflation, currency devaluation, higher fuel prices, massive tax evasion, and drying up of foreign reserves are those issues that seriously affect tax collection and undermine national growth.

Historically, other than developed Western economies, several third-world countries in Asia, Africa, and sub-Saharan African nations adopted stringent measures and made significant progress in revenue collection in the past decade by mobilizing less than 17% of their GDP in tax revenues, below the minimum level considered by the UN as necessary to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Unfortunately, Pakistan lags in achieving its goal because of a lack of political will and persistent resistance from various societal, business, and institutional cartels including the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

The caretaker leaders have taken up the dearly needed bulk task even though they are left with limited days at their disposal. There is a dire need to adopt rational measures to broaden the tax base and prevent tax evasion through the inclusion of all applicable direct taxes on privileged segments of society and businesses including polity, feudal, landlords, and top bureaucrats, judges and generals to remove structural fault lines and political settlements at the federal and provincial levels. Meanwhile, no leader and government should sacrifice Pakistan's rightful customs and tariff duties in foreign and transit trade, online sale/purchase and use of Pakistan's air space, land, and sea routes, and facilities to any foreign nation or firm at any plea that cause fiscal loss to the country. Similarly, the ruling elite must observe economic and fiscal discipline vis-a-vis their politically motivated subsidies and cartels-driven economic policies during their rule by strictly adhering to laid down policies, rules/regulations, and the widely agreed upon Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation Act (FRDLA) to get rid of foreign loans and avoid recurrent financial crisis. Otherwise, no economist, no policy, and no digitization of the system could bring economic stability and fiscal predictability to our economy at any point in the future.

Development work and political ritual

THE Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has ordered State Bank and other financial institutions to freeze all development funds pertaining to local government institutions, with immediate effect till the results of the February 8 polls were announced. The Electoral Watchdog observed that it was imperative for the commission to take all necessary steps to prevent local government institutions and cantonment boards from taking any such action which amounted to influencing the results of the polls. The ECP added that it was necessary on its part to provide a level playing field for political parties and contesting candidates, because ensuring a just, honest, fair and smooth polls is the primary responsibility of the Electoral authority.

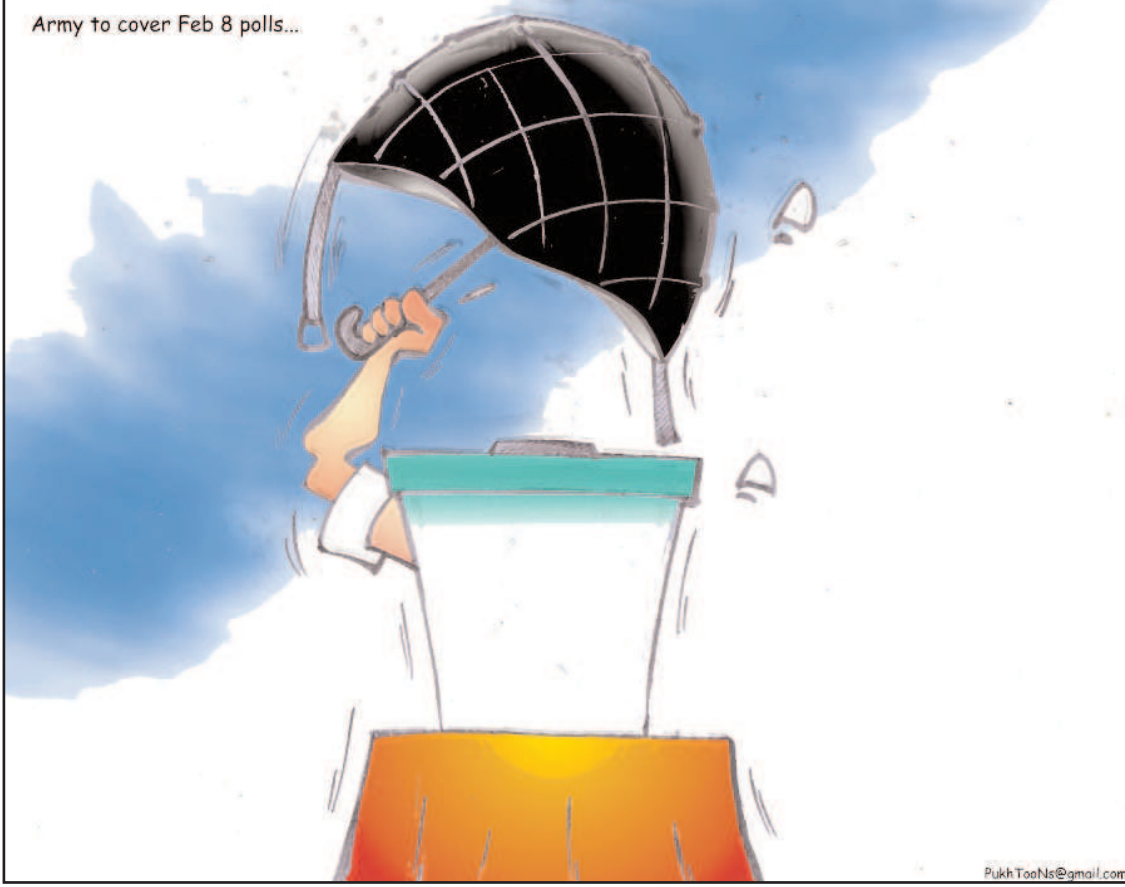
The Election Authority stirred up after a brief nap, to sensitize the civic groups and local governments about its responsibility more than a month after announcement of election schedule. In fact, it is a long held peculiar working style of our state institutions through which they often cried over split milk after the occurrence of theft and the escape of thieves from the scene. A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) has stopped all the ongoing developmental works in the province about two months but the Election Authority was asleep and could not undertake those important tasks timely.

Historically, the development work plays an important role in shaping election results in Pakistan, as it does in many other countries in the world. The initiation of development work, such as improvements in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities, significantly influence the voters, owing to the positive impacts of these activities on their lives and livelihood. The contesting political groups and their henchmen sitting in important offices including local governments and caretaker setups at provincial and federal levels have already taken all such actions including the initiation of development works, road construction, provision of electricity and gas connections etc, to improve public perception and influence people opinion through tactful use of public money. However, the ECP has fulfilled the important quote that late coming is better than never, so this important political ritual has been performed at the later stage ahead of curial polls in the country.

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Army to cover Feb 8 polls...

**Pizza, Gaza and an Israeli-made famine**

Andrew Mitrovica

IT'S not often that a columnist is obliged to make reference to pizza in the midst of a rogue-nation-made famine. But the times and decency demand it given that, as a defining aspect of its iron-clad siege of Gaza, Israel, by its own admission, has intended all along to bar food and water from reaching the devastated enclave and the children, women and men who, for the moment, populate it.

Now, in light of the outrages that Palestinians have endured and will continue to endure as Israel goes about annihilating Gaza with relentless ferocity, pizza might seem a picayune, even distasteful, starting point for a column that will invoke two blunt words throughout: genocide and famine. Still, this past week I came across a number of jarring images that, when considered side by side, tell us a lot about the sick scale of crimes we are witnessing being committed in Gaza and beyond as well as the disparate circumstances of the victims and the perpetrators of those horrors.

The first picture features two young Israeli soldiers, each carrying a tower of pizza boxes - a gift apparently from a popular pizza franchise. The soldiers, clad in green, are smiling. They appear giddy. The marketing adage on the spine of the boxes reads: "For the love of pizza." A companion image posted on Instagram stars a balding, portly Israeli soldier with a high-powered weapon slung across a shoulder. His right arm is resting on a stack of free pies delivered by the same Israeli subsidiary of a well-known American pizza chain. A hint of a grin crosses his bearded, bespectacled face.

Heart emojis on both snapshots are intended to convey, I suppose, gratitude for their fast-food bounty. The Israeli soldiers look happy. They are going to be well-fed. If the soldiers are troubled or disturbed by all the murderous madness engulfing the region, it doesn't show in this captured-on-cellphone instant

at least.

They're pleased. A surreal air of normality reigns amid the pervasive inhumanity. Dinner, happily, is served. Other pictures, of course, convey a much different and cruel story. A group of Palestinian boys and girls is pressed up against an iron gate in some part of decimated Gaza. They're wearing sweaters and hoodies to shield themselves against the winter chill.

That's where, according to the United Nations, famine is spreading with "incredible speed". Martin Griffiths, the UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and its emergency relief coordinator told CNN's Christiane Amanpour recently that the "great majority" of the 400,000 Palestinians characterised by UN agencies as at risk of starving "are actually in famine, not just at risk of famine".

The boys and girls have been enlisted or volunteered to find food and water for their families. They're carrying pots and a colander. One girl stands out. Her outstretched arm bends between the thick, black bars like a pretzel. She's holding a silver bowl. The girl seems to be crying out to someone in the distance to draw attention to her empty bowl. The row of nearby children follow in frantic suit, forced to plead for help too.

Millions of Palestinians will not plead. Instead, these days, they take what they can to survive. Two weeks ago in the cratered, apocalyptic remains of a neighbourhood west of Gaza City, dozens of Palestinian men and boys swarmed an abandoned truck like bees on a hive as they searched for flour and canned food. Gaza teems with hunger, want and desperation. Shops have been erased. Homes have been erased. Cemeteries have been erased. Schools have been erased. Mosques have been erased. Hospitals have been erased.

Hope has been erased.

The genocide unfolding day after hellish day in Gaza takes two forms. One is loud and quick. The other is quiet and slow. Both are lethal and, despite the predictable denials from the predictable Western capitals, deliberate. The litany of bombs and drones that Israel has unleashed on Gaza, which have killed thousands of Palestinians and maimed thousands more, are meant to kill and

tor told CNN's Christiane Amanpour recently that the "great majority" of the 400,000 Palestinians characterised by UN agencies as at risk of starving "are actually in famine, not just at risk of famine". Famines are caused by a combination of the pitiless vagaries of nature and the inevitable consequences of conflict. The famine that is gripping Gaza is not a "natural disaster" but the direct, orchestrated result of Israel's grievous actions and inaction. Most of the casualties of Israel's loud, quick genocide have been children. Its slow, quiet genocide is also bound to claim many more innocents. Dreadfully, Gaza's 350,000 children under the age of five are said to be particularly vulnerable. "Children at high risk of dying from malnutrition and disease desperately need medical treatment, clean water and sanitation services, but the conditions on the ground do not allow us to safely reach children and families in need," UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell said. This engineered famine is, by any legal or moral measure, a blatant war crime.

"The Israeli government is using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in the occupied Gaza Strip, which is a war crime," Human Rights Watch warned in a report published in mid-December. "Israeli forces are deliberately blocking the delivery of water, food, and fuel, while willfully impeding humanitarian assistance, apparently razing agricultural areas, and depriving the civilian population of objects indispensable to their survival." The metastasising famine, combined with the sure outbreak of disease, is likely to kill more Palestinians than Israel's constant shower of bombs and drones.

This will be the international community's disgraceful epitaph: Rather than stop a famine, it abetted Israel while its "strategic ally" tried starving Palestinians into capitulation and submission. Shame on them. Shame on them all.

Germany's far right is surging. Banning it would backfire

Paul Hockenoss

EVEN though the hard right has come to power in many European countries in recent years - either ruling on their own like in Hungary, or in coalitions such as in Italy and Finland - Germans never thought it could happen to them. After all, modern Germany is acutely conscious of the crimes that Adolf Hitler's Third Reich committed in the name of, and with plenty of zeal from, the German people.

In the postwar decades, democratic-minded Germans bent over backwards to wring out the toxins that catapulted the Nazis to power and, ultimately, enabled the Holocaust. But today, Germany is staring at a surging far right - and the country's mainstream politicians and democratic citizens, still by far the lion's share of the population, are understandably rattled.

At the center of Germany's distress is the Alternative for Germany (AfD), a party born in 2013 out of protest against the country's abandonment of the deutsche mark in favor of the euro. Since then it has veered steadily to the far right, where

its members tout barely veiled racism and Islamophobia. They deride the EU as a "failed project." Now a fresh scandal has Germans debating whether the party should be allowed to exist at all.

Last week, investigative outlet Correctiv reported that in November leading AfD members met with neo-Nazi groups to create a "master plan" to deport on a mass scale asylum seekers and German citizens of foreign origin. (The AfD has denied the plans are party policy, and co-leader Alice Weidel has since parted ways with one adviser involved). All of this comes as the AfD is riding higher than ever in opinion polls - making it the most popular party in some states - with regional elections on the horizon this fall. It captured several mayorships last year and increasingly teams up with mainstream conservatives - in the European Parliament as well as domestically - to hammer immigration, diversity and climate policies. Among my large number of foreign national - including naturalized Muslim - friends and colleagues in Germany, there is veritable uneasiness. If the far right's

ideas seep into the mainstream, as so much of the AfD discourse already has, could they really be expelled from the country they call home? Many Germans share their concerns. The bombshell of the November meeting has prompted mass anti-AfD demonstrations across the country and renewed calls to ban the AfD altogether.

Germany's constitution does permit the outlawing of enemies of the democratic system, and its highest court has done so twice: in 1952 and 1956, a fascist and communist party, respectively. In three of Germany's federal states, the state intelligence services are already monitoring the activities of particularly radical AfD branches that they label "extreme right" for using Nazi terminology and stirring up resentment against foreigners. Should they be found a genuine threat to democracy, the high court could eventually ban them, although the judicial process would take years. Germany, as a "defensive democracy," argues leading Christian conservative and governor of the state of Schleswig-Holstein Daniel Günther, "should use

the instruments at its disposal for the purpose of its own protection."

It would be wonderful indeed if pemicious and hateful parties could simply be banned out of existence - case closed and then get on with bettering society rather than poisoning it. But this route is tricky not just because it contradicts a basic democratic assumption, namely that the people choose their own governors. Illiberal governments, like that of Vladimir Putin's Russia, also outlaw dissident parties and persons in the name of protecting the state. And behind most successful parties, there is also a popular movement that backs it. A state may nullify a party but it can't as easily eliminate the sentiment fueling it. Often, banned parties pop up again with different names and cosmetically modified stands - and stronger than ever. Research at Brandeis University found that party bans increase media coverage and public awareness of anti-democrats, "making them more politically popular and legitimate." The AfD, as demagogic parties do,

Don't sacrifice workers at the altar of AI

Ranvir S. Nayar

IT seems likely that the buzz phrase for 2024 is going to be "generative artificial intelligence." Since March last year, when ChatGPT-4, a multimodal large language model, was launched by OpenAI, a company that has subsequently been acquired by Microsoft, generative AI has dominated discussions in almost every corporate boardroom and at international conferences of politicians, businesspersons and academics, as well as among laypeople.

It was no different at the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum, which recently concluded in the Swiss resort town of Davos. AI was one of the four core themes at the famed meeting, with 30 separate sessions held in the Congress Centre and about 100 others taking place at side events during the week. The subjects covered were varied, ranging from governance and the regulation of AI to using AI as a tool in education, healthcare and beyond.

At the forum, nearly half a dozen reports were presented by various groupings, each making one outlandish claim after another on the power of AI and how these organizations and others in their milieu were ready to harness the power of AI for the good of humanity.

Certainly, generative AI will prove to be a boon for corporate bosses, as it will allow them to improve productivity and reduce costs, almost entirely by rendering many workers redundant through processes of automation.

Most of the reports acknowledged that the technology was highly disruptive, with as many as 60 percent of workers vulnerable to it. Somehow, however, all the reports ended up claiming that AI would not only boost productivity - and hence the profitability of companies - but that it would also in the longer term generate far more jobs than it uproots, with numbers ranging from 12 million to 100 million. As is usual in reports on such hyped-up phenomena, which are often prepared in a rush and with much more reliance on conjecture and estimates than realism, the papers on AI's job creation potential seemed very thin on details.

It is clear that AI will render hundreds of millions of jobs redundant, at least partially, across many sectors of the economy, from banking and accountancy to media and law, besides manufacturing and even agriculture. Certainly, AI will also create jobs, but they will tend to be roles for highly qualified, well-educated people, while most of the jobs being destroyed will be staffed by less-educated people. This will impact a section of society that is not just the most vulnerable, but also the one that has been hit the hardest by the recent series of global events, from COVID-19 lockdowns to inflation and rising economic insecurity.

With the rapid adoption

of AI having already begun in some countries, and with it expected to accelerate around the world in the next year or so, millions of people could be caught unprepared for the ways in which their jobs could be threatened, or at least significantly altered, due to the use of AI. But little is being done to address these challenges, as company bosses seem to be focused entirely on increasing their profits. Meanwhile, governments are once again watching on from the sidelines rather than taking a major role in determining the rollout of AI and anticipating the social disruption that it is almost certain to bring.

AI is certainly not the first disruptive force to hit the world of work. There have been waves of change ever since the industrial era began about 300 years ago. Each wave has come with its own benefits and advantages for humans, while also leaving a lot of destruction in its wake. The sharp rise in global inequality, notably in the past half a century or even just the last two decades, is a clear indication of exactly how disruptive these changes can be for the masses, while disproportionately benefiting a very thin slice of society. A report released by British charity Oxfam at Davos 2024 revealed the scale of the inequality and how the gulf is widening rapidly each year, especially since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Oxfam report stated that, in the last three years, the wealth of the world's five richest men has doubled, while more than 5 billion people - or more than 60 percent of the global population - have become poorer. The arrival of AI and its embrace by global businesses is set to worsen the deal for these 5 billion, while potentially generating trillions of dollars in additional profits and corporate dividends. And that is why it is imperative for governments to step in and play a crucial role in minimizing the social disruption AI seems set to cause.

As corporate profitability around the world is at near-record, often eye-watering, levels, governments must make companies equal participants in ensuring that the workers rendered redundant by their adoption of AI are properly retrained or rehabilitated in other roles and that their wage levels are protected. This is because there is enough historical evidence to show that workers displaced by automation end up becoming significantly poorer and that the impact of their impoverishment is felt for generations, rather than just stopping with them.

Thus, not only should companies be made responsible for retraining their workers and minimizing job losses but, in the case of a job being lost, the workers must also get their fair share of the profitability growth that the companies subsequently reap. It may be time to ensure that the bosses also feel the heat of disruption, not just the workers.

Arab News

offers discontented, angsty people simple, if misleading, answers to the array of crises facing them today: rising prices, climate change, Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It explains their disaffection with the false accusation that migrants, international development expenditures, foreign powers and climate protection are responsible.

The great mistake that its adversaries make, as some German conservatives are now doing - a shift made long ago in Italy, Sweden and Austria - is to attempt to steal their thunder by espousing milder versions of fundamentally wrongheaded ideas. For the AfD and its European peers, immigration is topic number one. Germany's Christian conservatives have responded by clamping down ever harder - advocating for fewer civic rights and quicker expulsions of rejected asylum seekers, and even blaming migrants for wait time at dentists' offices. But studies show that time and again the accommodation of radical right positions benefits the hard right - and not its imitators. The mainstreaming of xenophobia makes it ever more palatable to the average voter and leads them into the

hard right's camp. The utmost imperative of democratic parties must be to present a united front against the hard right and confront their populist caricatures with evidence-based facts and rigorous arguments.

Conservatives above all must not give in to the temptation to leave the liberal camp in favor of far right. This might mean that conservatives will have to enter unwieldy coalitions with their traditional adversaries: green and leftist parties. This might sting, but the alternative - coalitions of hard rightists and conservatives in one boat - is by far the more dangerous option. Moreover, democrats of all stripes should expose the far right's populist arguments for what they are: exaggerations, falsehoods and demagoguery. The mainstream parties have the better arguments, and plenty of evidence to back them up. Germany's ascendant far right shows that all of Europe - and beyond, including the US - could be at a tipping point. The way to walk it back is to go on the offensive, including mass movement on the streets, not latch onto the hard right's tailwinds.

CNN

Replace Sunak as PM or face decade of decline under Starmer

Simon Clarke

THERE has been much debate among Conservative MPs in Westminster over which election 2024 will most resemble: is this 1992, John Major's improbable comeback, or 1997, his calamitous defeat? To those willing to look at the polls, the answer is devastatingly obvious.

In January, the Telegraph's YouGov MRP poll showed that were an election to be held, the Conservatives would fall from our current 350 MPs to 169, just four more seats than Sir John held in 1997. And as several experts have pointed out, that is, if anything, optimistic. The poll assumes the gap between Labour and Tories will narrow. And takes little account of tactical voting. Nevertheless, while bending over backwards to be fair, the poll still shows more Tory seats being lost than in 1997, the Red Wall being wiped out completely and shocking defeats in historic Tory constituencies like Chichester, Horsham and Banbury. The unvarnished truth is that Rishi Sunak is leading the Conservatives into an election where we will be massacred.

Denial of impending catastrophe is an extraordinarily powerful human instinct. Alan Clark, writing in 1998, the year after the Conservatives were obliterated, documented stories of Conservative MPs in the mid-1990s not believing what they were reading in the polls on the basis of warm conversations on the doorstep. "What defence mechanism of the psyche allowed, combined in, otherwise sensible and hard-headed men and women to induce this illusion? Every single device for measuring popular opinion was pointing consistently in the same direction." It is time to strip away illusion, and stop tolerating any indulgence of it. Our country, with all the challenges we face, is on the brink of being run by Keir Starmer's Labour for a decade or more. If Nigel Farage returns to the fray, as looks increasingly likely, extinction is a very real possibility for our party. And it is now beyond doubt that whilst the Prime Minister is far from solely responsible for our present predicament, his uninspiring leadership is the main obstacle to our recovery. Rishi Sunak has sadly gone from

asset to anchor. He lags Keir Starmer - himself no Tony Blair - by double digits on the "Best Prime Minister" metric. He leads Keir in just 139 seats across Great Britain; he is behind in 493. His personal approval ratings have collapsed, particularly amongst the key voters we need to win back, and are now lower than Boris Johnson and even Jeremy Corbyn's were when they resigned.

Remarkably, the Conservative party, hardly known for having a strong brand right now, outpolls Sunak in 88 per cent of constituencies - and in 98 per cent of the key seats we hold but are set to lose. Rishi has great strengths. He is decent to his core, fiercely intelligent and works fearfully hard. I saw these strengths up close whilst chief secretary to the Treasury when he was chancellor. But these strengths cannot compensate for two fundamental problems. He does not get what Britain needs. And he is not listening to what the British people want. Brexit and the 2019 general election were profound votes for change. But beyond believing we should live within our means, Rishi's analysis of the challenges we face and change we need is far too unclear. If there is a lodestar, it all too often seems to be deferring to the failing wisdom of the "high status" - elite international investors, lawyers, technocrats. Instead of conviction, we have convention.

Nowhere have these problems been more apparent than on immigration. In January, I was one of the Conservative MPs who was unable to support the Safety of Rwanda Bill, precisely because I believe it is unlikely to deliver the swift and certain action that is needed to deliver our promise to stop the boats. The British people cannot fathom why our Government is letting tens of thousands of people illegally cross the Channel every year. The Prime Minister seems to have sadly accepted novel, extreme and anti-democratic interpretations of international law that effectively tell the British people they cannot have a border. The British people likewise cannot fathom why net migration has exploded. Yes, ageing Western societies can

benefit from some skilled migration.

But it must be controlled, and we cannot accommodate annual net migration equivalent to the size of Sheffield. The British people are not blind. They see all this. They see that the Prime Minister's actions on illegal migration have consistently fallen short of his words. They see that he only acted on legal migration when he was forced to - when the November data showed an eye-watering 1.2 million people came to Britain in 2023. After a recent debacle, I sadly believe there is nothing he can do to win back the trust of the key voters who have left us on their primary issue. Migration is sadly not the only issue these problems have reared their head on. Inflation falling is vital and welcome, but where is the radical supply side programme to jolt our economy out of the low-growth rut we and much of the West are clearly trapped in?

Where is the home building mission in the best Conservative tradition, to address soaring house prices and rents? Where is the tax reform, welfare reform, the planning reform to enable us to build the infrastructure we need? Where is the crime clamp-down? Public service reform? The protecting of our culture from the malign actors and useful idiots undermining it? Where is the story about what it means to be British today and where we should go as a nation? Banning smoking and tinkering with what A-Levels look like in the early 2030s is not the action we need.

Now is not the time to despair. It is the time to act. For whether we deserve it or not, we still have the most monumental of opportunities: Keir Starmer. Labour have totally failed to seal the deal with the public. It is telling that in a match up between Keir Starmer, Rishi Sunak, and "Not sure", the latter option routs the former two - ahead in 558 of Britain's 632 seats. Starmer's answers to any of the above questions range from terrible to absent. The biggest political crisis facing developed nations is that electorates can't get what they need and are being given what they don't want. This is leading to an ever greater disconnect between rulers and

ruled, and has opened the door to extremists.

At the moment, having briefly recovered our position from 2019 under Boris, the Conservative Party under Rishi Sunak once again stands on the opposite, crumbling bank of this widening precipice. If we change the leader to a Prime Minister who shares the instincts of the majority and is willing to lead the country in the right direction, we will recover strongly in 2024. We would deny Starmer the blank cheque he is heading towards, and perhaps even win the election. Polls show just that. It is not a prediction or a forecast. But it does show that if we switch to a better leader, an overwhelming majority of constituencies would likely regard that leader as a better prime minister than Starmer by the time of the election. And it is well worth noting that almost all elections are won by the party with the leader the public rate most highly.

I know many MPs are afraid another change of leader would look ridiculous. But what could be more ridiculous than meekly sleepwalking towards an avoidable annihilation because we were not willing to listen to what the public are telling us so clearly? A change of leadership would not have to be a protracted affair. As was planned in October 2022, the contest need only take a week. Two days of MPs voting, a few more days before an online members' vote. Which is worse: a week of chaotic headlines in Westminster, or a decade of decline under Keir?

I know I will be attacked for saying this. Perhaps even accused of positioning myself or on behalf of another - emphatically neither of which I am doing. I am speaking out because the stakes for our country and my party are too high at this moment to stay silent. Every Conservative MP will need to live with the decision they make in the coming days for the rest of their lives. Failing to act would itself represent a decision. We have a clear choice. Stick with Rishi Sunak, take the inevitable electoral consequences, and give the Left a blank cheque to change Britain as they see fit. Or we can change leader, and give our country and party a fighting chance.

The Telegraph

Azerbaijan and China cooperation

Seymur Mammadov

IN the modern world, characterized by globalization and international economic cooperation, the relationship between China and Azerbaijan stands out as an exemplar of a successful and mutually beneficial partnership.

Over recent years, these two countries have significantly strengthened their economic and trade ties, evidenced by a surge in trade turnover and collaborative investment projects. The importance of this cooperation extends beyond bilateral interests, contributing to regional stability and economic development.

From January to October 2023, the volume of China-Azerbaijan trade reached an impressive 2.57 billion dollars, marking a 47.5 percent increase compared to the previous year. These figures clearly illustrate the growing significance of the economic relationship between the two countries. China, emerging as the largest source of imports, has become Azerbaijan's fourth-largest trading partner, reflecting the strategic importance of this cooperation. Exports from China to Azerbaijan predominantly consist of high-tech products. Encompassing mechanical apparatus, electronic equipment, and automobiles, these goods account for over 50 percent of the total export volume. This focus on advanced technologies significantly impacts Azerbaijan's socio-economic development, opening new prospects for local businesses.

In recent years, China-Azerbaijan relations have demonstrated substantial deepening, thanks to a series of political and economic initiatives. The visit of Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister, Shahin Mustafayev, to China marked a significant milestone in these relations. His participation in the opening ceremony of the 6th China International Import Expo and leadership in the 9th session of the China-Azerbaijan Intergovernmental Commission underscored the mutual interest and readiness to strengthen cooperation. During this platform, the parties exchanged views on investment and trade issues.

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Special attention was given to project collaboration opportunities in promising areas such as alternative energy sources, power generation, and the construction of power stations. These discussions not only promote the strengthening of bilateral economic ties but also open new horizons for joint innovative projects.

The Belt and Road initiative, launched by China, represents a vast project aimed at creating an extensive network of trade and infrastructure links across Asia, Europe, and beyond. Azerbaijan plays a pivotal role in this initiative, contributing to the development of new transportation routes and energy corridors. A significant achievement of Azerbaijan within this initiative is the implementation of major transport projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line and the Alat International Sea Port. These projects not only strengthen transport links between China and Europe but also foster economic development in the region.

Under the leadership of President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan is actively participating in the development of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), also known as the Middle Corridor. This initiative includes the creation of transport infrastructure in Karabakh and Eastern Zangazur, as well as planning for the future Zangazur Energy Transport Corridor.

In 2024, it is planned to reduce transit time on the Middle Corridor from 18-23 days to 14-18 days, marking a significant improvement over previous figures. Particularly impressive is the reduction of transit time within Kazakhstan from 6 to 5 days. These logistical improvements will not only speed up delivery but also make the route more competitive.

The volume of freight transport on the Middle Corridor in the first nine months of 2023 increased by 88 percent, reaching 2 million tons compared to 1.1 million tons for the same period in 2022. In 2022, the volume of freight transport along the route increased by

2.5 times, reaching 1.5 million tons, highlighting its growing importance in the global transport network. Energy cooperation between China and Azerbaijan holds a significant place in their bilateral relations, especially in the context of transitioning towards sustainable and renewable energy sources. In 2023, a substantial memorandum of understanding was signed between the energy departments of both countries, aimed at developing cooperation in the field of renewable energy.

As part of this collaboration, the Chinese company Dongfang is involved in constructing the 230 MW "Garadagh" solar power plant in Azerbaijan. This project is a crucial step towards increasing the share of green energy in the country's energy balance. Additionally, cooperation with China Gezhouba Group Overseas Investment opens new prospects for implementing renewable energy projects. Azerbaijan plans to significantly increase its green energy production to 7 GW by 2030, of which 5 GW will be directed for export through the Caspian-EU and Azerbaijan-Turkey-Europe transport corridors. These plans not only contribute to achieving environmental goals but also strengthen Azerbaijan's role as a key player in the global energy system. This will also enrich the Belt and Road Initiative with green and sustainable links.

The consolidation of relations between China and Azerbaijan in recent years demonstrates mutual benefit and strategic partnership. The trade growth, the enhancement of investment cooperation, the development of transport infrastructure, and joint projects in green energy are the cornerstones of this cooperation. Particularly significant is the integration of these efforts into the global Belt and Road project, opening new horizons for economic growth and strengthening regional stability. The interaction between China and Azerbaijan serves as an example of effective international cooperation, paving the way for shared prosperity and development.

The China Daily

Netanyahu aiming to destroy all paths to a Palestinian state

Osama Al-Sharif

WITH the world's eyes focused on the ongoing carnage in Gaza - which is now pushing deeper into its fourth month - little attention is being given to Israel's other war; the one in the West Bank. It may not be as deadly, but it is dangerous enough that it could trigger a new uprising, a collapse of the Palestinian Authority and an attempt by Israeli extremists to drive Palestinians out of villages and towns, i.e., ethnic cleansing.

This war has been going on for decades in the form of systemic land grabs, summary executions of civilians, the demolition of houses, the expansion of illegal settlements, military raids by the Israeli army into towns and refugee camps, the detention of Palestinians without charge and, more recently, the enabling of extremist Jewish settlers to terrorize local residents.

The spike in Israeli atrocities in the West Bank began as soon as Benjamin Netanyahu formed the most far-right government in the history of the state in December 2022. After bringing two of the most extremist figures in the political field - Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich - into his coalition, Netanyahu looked the other way as both men put their anti-Palestinian rhetoric and racist ideology into practice. Today, the PA and West Bank Palestinians are the target of a most nefarious, extremist scheme that has one goal in mind: to kill the idea of Palestinian statehood.

Since Oct. 7 last year, when Hamas carried out its attack on Israel, triggering a bloody response, the Israeli military has been carrying out almost daily

raids on Palestinian refugee camps and towns in the West Bank. The result? More than 360 Palestinians dead, including at least one Palestinian American, and more than 6,000 arrested. The deliberate destruction of infrastructure by Israel has been huge: public roads, electrical transformers, water pipes, private property and cell-phone towers, among others. Settler attacks have been on the rise since early last year. Human rights organizations reported that, from Jan. 1 to Sept. 19, Israeli settlers and forces killed 189 Palestinians in the West Bank and wounded 8,192. National Security Minister Ben-Gvir has weaponized more than 800,000 settlers by arming them and allowing them to kill Palestinians with impunity.

Meanwhile, Finance Minister Smotrich has blocked tax money from going to the PA, while pushing for its collapse. Although the PA is no longer popular among Palestinians, it remains the only recognized entity that represents them in the Occupied Territories. Netanyahu finds himself torn between killing off the PA entirely and keeping it on life support as long as it honors its security coordination commitments. Netanyahu has never supported the two-state solution or the Oslo Accords. Recently, he has appealed to Israel's conservatives by presenting himself as the one leader who would never allow a Palestinian state or give up full Israeli security control over all of historic Palestine.

There are two immediate objectives that he and his extremist part-

ners are trying to achieve. One is to isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, including pushing the remaining Arab residents out of the city through economic hardship and intimidation. The second is to absorb as much West Bank territory as possible into Israel, such as Area C, so that the only remaining areas are Palestinian towns such as Nablus, parts of Hebron, Jenin and Tulkarem. The refugee camps will be strangled so that they will eventually be abandoned. While Gaza and its future occupy the attention of world leaders, the fate of the West Bank is currently at stake. Without the West Bank, there can never be a Palestinian state. This is now the main concern of Netanyahu's partners. What happens next is yet to be decided.

If Netanyahu and his far-right partners continue calling the shots, then we should expect a scenario where Gazans are forced to flee into the Sinai desert and West Bank Palestinians slowly head to Jordan. Netanyahu is already appealing to Israeli voters as he prepares for a possible snap election in a few months' time. For him, completing a far-right project in the West Bank and Gaza has become his legacy - one that replaces the utter failure of Oct. 7.

Netanyahu's scheme could succeed. He knows the inner workings of US politics better than any other Israeli politician. He knows that President Joe Biden is fighting for his political life and that any hint of abandoning Israel would be used against him by the likes of Donald Trump and Nikki Haley. Netanyahu hopes the US presiden-

tial election will deflect attention from any foreign conflict. He wants to use this to prolong the war in Gaza, while destroying any hope for a contiguous Palestinian entity in the West Bank. The sad thing is that Netanyahu, despite his domestic ordeal, is getting away with murder, not only in Gaza but in the West Bank as well. He has rejected Biden's statements on the two-state solution and attacked the International Court of Justice. He has also ignored strong calls from families of the Gaza hostages.

The West Bank will get more tense in the coming days. Israel is reportedly relocating fighting units from Gaza to the West Bank. The Israeli security service is warning of a possible conflagration there. Pushing Palestinians to the edge will ignite a new intifada. Perhaps that is what Ben-Gvir, Smotrich and Netanyahu are wishing for. Such a scenario could lead to a new status quo; one that could disrupt the region. Without the West Bank, the two-state solution will become irrelevant. While the US is paying lip service to that solution, under Netanyahu such a path now seems impossible. This is a clear and present danger and the international community must step in to circumvent what Netanyahu and his partners are pushing for.

Derailing Netanyahu's plan requires solid international rejection. While the Biden administration finds itself in a bind at this stage, other countries should come out to denounce Israel's actions not only in Gaza but also in the West Bank. Focusing on Israeli atrocities in the West Bank is a must, but blocking its plan to destroy all paths to an independent Palestinian state is a duty.

Reform has just four weeks to transform British politics

Patrick O'Flynn

SOMETIMES a footballer will wax lyrical about a team-mate by telling an interviewer: "You should see some of the things he does in training." Of course, scoring improbable goals in training is pointless if a player cannot reproduce the same level of performance in real match conditions.

This, in effect, is the test facing the Reform UK party over the next few crucial weeks. The "in training" bit is roughly analogous to chalking up good opinion poll scores. On that metric the insurgent outfit of Richard Tice and Nigel Farage is doing very nicely, now averaging 10 per cent vote shares. But in real parliamentary contests Reform has achieved nothing like that, leaving many observers sceptical about its ability to withstand a general election squeeze from bigger parties which will attract vastly more media coverage during the campaign proper. Reform's leader

Tice has been performing more slick tricks on the training ground by telling journalists his party is in contact with more than one Tory MP about the prospect of defecting and then getting the story to run. Yet as those of us who worked with Farage

during the ascent of Ukip know, the defectors will only come if they see a viable prospect of electoral success.

It was Ukip's performance in parliamentary by-elections and the 2014 European elections which persuaded the sitting Tory MPs Douglas Carswell and Mark Reckless that they could win in its colours. If Reform wishes to recruit converts from the Conservative parliamentary ranks - and benefit from the ensuing headlines - it must show rapidly escalating support in the two by-elections to be held on February 15 in the Northamptonshire seat of Wellingborough and the Gloucestershire one of Kingswood.

The conditions in which these contests are being held are so advantageous for an insurgent party of the right that there can be no excuses. If the party flops, then critics will quite fairly point out that its lack of a local branch structure or local government base leaves it with very little in the way of a ground game. Presumably that deficiency would then leave it highly vulnerable to bombing in the local elections in May, throwing its

recent progress into reverse at just the wrong time in the electoral cycle.

Fortunately for Reform, it has installed two promising candidates - both former Brexit party MEPs - in the by-elections. In Kingswood its light blue colours are being sported by local farmer and businessman Rupert Lowe, a former chairman of Rishi Sunak's favourite football team, Southampton. Ukip got a 15 per cent vote share and came third in the seat at the 2015 general election, so there is certainly a decent base of potential voters for Reform. Given the circumstances of this by-election - the self-aggrandising resignation of Chris Skidmore - and the prevailing public mood towards the Tories, Reform should certainly be hoping to match that Ukip score from nine years ago.

In Wellingborough, things are even rosier for the party. Its candidate is deputy leader Ben Habib, a fluent political communicator with an air of credibility and seriousness about him that is not always a given among right-wing populists. At the 2015 general election, Ukip came second here with a 20 per cent vote share.

The Brexit party came first with a 40 per cent vote share in Wellingborough district at the 2019 European elections too. This is a by-election forced by the recall procedure amid sleaze allegations against the outgoing MP Peter Bone. So again the potential for crushing the Tory vote share is huge. And once more, that Ukip score from 2015 is a reasonable benchmark by which to judge Reform.

If we wake up on the morning of Friday, February 16, to the news that Reform has secured a 20 per cent vote share in Wellingborough and 15 per cent in Kingswood - or even exceeded that - then the party leader's attempts to win Tory parliamentary defectors will be worthy of serious coverage, as will its potential to become the big new story in electoral politics. A further frenzy about what it could achieve if Farage returned fully to the fray would then ensue. But for such en-Tice-ment to succeed breakthrough results will need to be discernible in the tough match conditions of two by-elections in which the Conservatives will be fighting tooth and nail for every vote. We are about to find out if Reform UK is for real.

A real global system needs a different type of leadership

Eyad Abu Shakra

DOES the world not deserve respectable leaders who put an end to the appeasement of the masses with slogans and populist actions? Many believed that increased awareness and culture in the 21st century would create a bulwark against this sort of behavior and that it would be voted out at the polls if it were tested.

We have seen too many examples over the past few weeks to count, so where do we start? From the US? It seems that the most powerful force in the world is sleepwalking toward repeating the scenario of the 2020 election, in what looks like it will be a race between the same two men, who are in their late 70s/early 80s and who introduce nothing new: Democratic President Joe Biden and his Republican predecessor Donald Trump. Or from Britain, where a Conservative government - whose prime minister and many senior ministers have immigrant backgrounds and belong to minority groups - has built its populist political strategy around the expulsion of asylum seekers?

Or should we begin with Germany, a country whose great civilization was tarred by Nazism and whose historical guilt complex, along with a network of political interests, coalesce to leave it defending the atrocities committed in Gaza by the children of the victims of Nazism? Or from France, which maintains delusions of being a global power that understands the anxieties of the peoples of the world and understands the contradictions of its civilizations, but it has put a young duo in charge of foreign policy. This duo has not undergone the experience or adopted the value systems necessary to develop a mechanism for dialogue and understanding with others. Or from the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland, where we heard a rattled populist who was carried to power by the despair of the Argentine people deliver a foolish lecture on politics and economics, attacking every known system of governance in the world?

These are just examples of the things we have seen and

continue to see. They reflect a regrettable state of affairs; politicians lack the credibility needed to build a global system that is worth complying with and respecting. From the Gaza Strip to Argentina and from the Indian subcontinent to Ukraine, all the slogans that emerged at the end of the Cold War are collapsing. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, many believed that the grand battle had ended decisively. Thus, there seemed to be no justification for delaying humanity's march toward happiness, peace, coexistence, prosperity and justice. However, it later became apparent to hundreds of millions of naive and well-intentioned people that human nature is not as they had been led to think it was in places of worship, partisan forums or the "trenches of struggle." Moreover, the victorious bloc was not a charity seeking to bring people together, nor was it a hospital whose mission was treating diseases. Rather, it was a fierce warrior in an arena that did not accommodate the weak.

Indeed, as soon as the Cold War ended, putting an end to the East-West conflict, we saw the emergence of various ethnic, religious and sectarian struggles and wars that sought to "correct historical wrongs." It did not take long for war to erupt in the Balkans and for the map of Europe to be redrawn. This was followed by the wars in the Caucasus and then we reached Ukraine. Moscow's return to the arena, this time in a nationalist guise, was one of these attempts to right perceived historical wrongs. It came armed with a strong memory and a bitter indignation.

Meanwhile, the West, elated by its victory, ignored the factors driving Moscow, as well as the dynamics of China's rise and the ascent of religious politics as an alternative to nationalism and secularism in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. Especially in the Middle East, Washington's insistence on being the only one entitled to conclude regional peace initiatives created not only a terribly imbalanced approach to ensuring

true and lasting peace; it also precipitated the rise of an extremely radical right in Israel. Indeed, the Israeli right was fully convinced that it had the right to drive US policy in the region and exploit America to further its projects.

As we have seen and continue to see, the decline in the quality of US leadership (be it Republican or Democrat) over recent decades has made it easier for the Israeli religious right to openly declare its intentions. Today, with the Gaza crisis, we find that what were once small fringe groups of religious right-wing factions in the Knesset are now imposing their political agenda on the Israeli government. This government has, in turn, imposed its political agenda on Washington. It has been empowered by the launch of a US election year, during which the Republican and Democratic parties compete to appease the pro-Israel lobby. Even outside of Washington, this lobby has exploited the Oct. 7 attack to reshape the political narrative on the Arab-Israeli conflict to its liking. In this effort, it was helped by the new Western definition of "antisemitism." It also capitalized on Iran's expansionist ambitions and Europe's alarming descent into populism and hostility toward immigrants, refugees and, more broadly, Muslims in general.

Here, it is worth noting that such lobbies are no longer satisfied with just infiltrating parties on the right and left - as is the case in the US, Britain, France and others. They are now also seeking to influence forces that had long been considered marginal and idealistic, unworthy of being infiltrated, such as green parties. The logical explanation for this phenomenon is the decline in the quality of leadership and ethical standards of political institutions, even with democratic accountability. This accountability is hindered when the pro-Israel lobby infiltrates both major political alternatives through services, money and influence. As the British politician and historian Lord Acton once wrote: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."



ISLAMABAD: Vendors displaying bananas for auction at Fruit and Vegetable market Pirwadhai in Federal Capital.

PSX stays bullish, gains 368 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Wednesday, gaining 368.21 points, a positive change of 0.57 percent, closing at 64,822.43 points against 64,454.22 points the previous trading day.

A total of 479,982,148 shares valuing Rs.22.501

billion were traded during the day as compared to 425,709,896 shares valuing Rs.24.995 billion the last day. Some 353 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 199 of them recorded gains and 131 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 23 remained unchanged. The three top-trading

companies were K-Electric Limited with 67,844,221 shares at Rs.5.42 per share, Hascol Petrol with 39,612,500 shares at Rs.8.40 per share and Pak Petroleum with 34,477,717 shares at Rs.127.70 per share. Attock Petroleum Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.28.81 per share price, closing at

Rs.412.88, whereas the runner-up was Ibrahim Fibres Limited with a Rs.23.00 rise in its per share price to Rs.394.00. Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.50.00 per share closing at Rs.3,300.00, followed by Pakistan Services Limited with Rs.50.00 decline to close at Rs.840.00.

Signing of Exploration Licences and Petroleum Concession Agreements (PCAs)

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: OGDCL's focus on aggressive exploration strategy resulted in acquiring of exploration blocks. OGDCL participated in Government announced Bidding Rounds for new Exploration Blocks in June, 2023 and November, 2023. OGDCL won four Exploration Blocks as Operator with 100% Working Interest and two Exploration Blocks as JV partners. The financial Investment by OGDCL would be around 12 Million USD.

A signing ceremony of Petroleum Concession Agreements (PCAs) and Exploration Licences (ELs) for the Blocks was held on 24th January, 2024 at 1030 hours at SIFC Secretariat, Prime Minister Office, Islamabad. Signing Ceremony was graced by Minister of Petroleum, Director General SIFC. The ceremony



was chaired by Secretary Petroleum, DGPC, MD/CEO OGDCL and other members.

MD OGDCL signed the PCAs of Sehwan EL (Sindh), Zindan-II EL (Punjab), Kotra East EL (Baluchistan) and Murradi EL (Sindh) with 100% Working Interest. Two non-operated PCAs were also signed. Saruna West EL (Baluchistan) and Gambat-II (Sindh) with OGDCL's 30% Working Interest.

Jubilee Life becomes official insurance partner for HBL PSL Season 9



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Jubilee Life

Insurance, the largest private sector insurance company in Pakistan, partnered with Pakistan Cricket Board as the Official Insurance

Partner for HBL PSL Season 9. The announcement was made at the Gadaffi Stadium, Lahore, and was attended by Syed Usman Qaiser, Head of Marketing and Brand Management, Jubilee Life Insurance, Naila Bhatti, League Commissioner HBL PSL, and Sohail Sheikh, Director HBL PSL.

This is the 7th consecutive year that Jubilee Life has partnered with HBL PSL as the Official Insurance Partner. The partnership has been lauded by both sides as a significant opportunity for the mutual growth and development of the two brands. The HBL PSL Season 9 is set to begin on February 17 in Lahore.

US Ambassador visits IBA's Center for Entrepreneurial Development to endorse the startups landscape

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Center for Entrepreneurial Development (CED) at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi welcomed the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, Donald Blome, for a networking meeting where Executive Director IBA, Dr. S Akbar Zaidi provided an overview of the IBA Karachi.

Director, IBA-CED, Dr. Lalurukh Ejaz presented a compelling overview of the center's programs and initiatives. The ambassador was accompanied by U.S. Consul General in Karachi, Conrad Tribble; and Public Affairs Officer, Lee MacManis and others.

The Ambassador enthusiastically engaged in discus-



sions with founders of several notable startups of IBA-CED, including Valeem, Logexcourier, Get Go Rides, Khud Muhafiz, and winners of IBA-CED's GreenInovate Waste Management Challenge Royella Trading,

and Dominator Bio Tech. He commended their work and appreciated their vision behind the startups.

Gold rates remain stagnant Rs.215,200 per tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold witnessed no change and was sold at Rs.215,200 in the local market on Wednesday. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat and 10 gram 22 karat also witnessed no change and was traded at Rs.184,500 and Rs.169,124 respectively, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported. The price of per tola and ten gram Silver remained stagnant at Rs. 2,600 and Rs. 2,229.08 respectively. The gold was traded at \$2,047 in the international market, the Association reported.

Rupee gains 12 paise against dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistani Rupee on Wednesday witnessed an appreciation of 12 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs279.67 against the previous day's closing of Rs279.79. However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market stood at Rs278.9 and Rs280.9 respectively. The price of the Euro decreased by 83 paise to close at Rs304.20 against the last day's closing of Rs305.03, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs1.89, whereas a decrease of 71 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs355.63 compared to the last closing of Rs356.34. The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 03 paise each to close at Rs76.14 and Rs74.57 respectively.

USC sole entity with largest digital network in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Utility Stores Corporation (USC) is the sole corporation with the best database that efficiently records online transactions from over 4000 stores and 130 warehouses simultaneously. The corporation has the Best Point of Sales System, Human Resource Management, Supply Chain Management, and Financial Management Masterpiece System, said a news release here on Wednesday.

‘Pakistan needs more investment in productive sectors for economic growth’

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan needs to increase the level of investment in productive sectors to revive economic growth by generating foreign exchange and productivity, besides properly projecting the Special Investment Facilitation Council's motto worldwide.

Coordinator to Minister of State and Federal Tax Ombudsman, Meher Kashif Younis, expressed these views, while addressing a seminar on "Impact and importance of FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) on Economy", here on Wednesday.

Meher Kashif said, "Our investment to nominal GDP ratio was lowest in the region at 13.6 per cent in 2023, compared with 15.7 per cent in the year

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In the Court of Abdul Halem Civil Judge V/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Dagar.Case.No.95/1 Institution 3/3/2023. Date of hearing, 10/2/2024. Nozer Khan VS Darvesh Khan. Notice to no 54.Faro d/o Said Mohamad .58.Aselem Khan.59.Mohamad Saleem sons of Mst. Safia. 84.Sarazamin Khan s/o Gul Nazar Khan. 96.Mst.Ziat Begum w/o Taj Ali Khan. 97.Umer Dad s/o Mian Dad. 98.Abdul Qayum sons Kareem Dad. 129.Sher Nawab Khan s/o Sherullah Khan. 155.Umerzafa s/o Shehzada. 156.Abdul Wazir s/o Abdul Karim. 170.Yasrat d/o Bakht Biland. 171.Norul Haq. 172.Abdul Hanan sons of Bazer. 178.Ikramul Haq s/o Shamsul Haq. 185.Mohamad Jamil s/o Wazir Gul. 188.Hazrat Gul s/o Khanay. 190.Razi Gul s/o Akbar. 193.Salman s/o Nawas.198.Said Wahid Shah. 199.Said Mehmod Shah sons of Ezat Shah. 210.Azizur Rehman s/o Amir Abdullah. 213.Fazal Mohamad s/o Charihi. 214.Abdullah s/o Muza Khan. 173/1.Ehsanullah s/o Ghulam Said. 118/1.Rehman Rasol s/o Habib Hahfor. 121/1.Said Majid.121/2.Faroq sons of Snet Mohamad.201/1.Mst Miraj Bibi. 202/2.Suhban Said. 201/3.Mohamad Yousaf .201/4.Hjani Subhan sons of Fazel Said. 130/1.Mst. Bakh Roidara. 130/2.Mst. Zeba daughters of Amer Khela. 138/1.Mujibur Rehman .138/2.

Habibur Rehman. 138/3.Furhad. 138/4.Atiqur Rehman sons of Ghulam Rehman. 195/1. Alam. 195/2.Asgar. 195/3.Asad. 195/4.Ghani Tehman. 195/5. Qadar Khan. 195/6.Afsar Khan sons of Shamsur Rehman. 208/1.Zardullah Khan 208/2. Arsalah Khan. 208/3.Muhsin. 208/4.Mst. Zakia. 205/5.Mst Meena widow of Asmatullah Khan. 121/3.Mst.Riasat d/o Sher Mohamad. 137/2.Jhanezb s/o Ghulam Said resident of Torwarsak tehseel Daggar district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 10/2/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

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BUNER
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NAMES CORRECTION

My Correct name is Amin Ul Haq while mistakenly my name written in educational documents as Amin Ul Haq Dawar please make the required correction in it. Amin ul Haq S/o Jan Muhammad Dawar.

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I Muhammad Junaid s/o Muhammad Sadiq Hassan resident of mohallah Muslim Abad Tehsil and Distt. Hangu, am the owner of plot no 485 3 Marla, registration no 619, category general public located in Hangu Township, Now I want to appoint Muhammad Kashif Khan s/o of Muhammad Shafi resident of Village Regi Peshawar, as general attorney for the said plot. If anyone has objection to the said plot, he/she should inform the undersigned within 15 days of the publication of this public notice PHA Office ATI campus opposite Islamia College Peshawar, Contact No. 0919224289.

It is hereby, notified for the information of public at large that the share holding, Management and Directorate of M/S Nishat Sarhad Textile Mills Limited has since been transferred and taken over by the Directors and Shareholders of M/S Haroon Ur Rasheed Mills (Pvt) Limited, Peshawar and the shares certificates of former defunct M/S Nishat Sarhad Textile Mills Limited has lost its value and efficacy having no legal force. It is further clarified that if any person or persons indulges to purchase and claim any right on the basis of such certificates is not binding upon the rights of percent Shareholders. Directors and Management of M/S Haroon Ur Rasheed Textile Mills (Pvt) Limited.

TDAP sensitize exporters on banking channels for Eurasia, CAR

KARACHI (APP): Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) organized an awareness session to sensitize exporters about available banking channels for financial transactions between Pakistan and countries of Eurasia and Central Asia. The main objectives of the event organized at TDAP headquarters in Karachi were to provide a platform for networking and knowledge-sharing for empowering exporters with the necessary information to navigate the complex landscape of international trans-

actions, said a statement issued here. The event witnessed the participation of over 30 attendees in person and more than 50 participants online which demonstrates the growing interest and importance of cross-border trade in the region.

Chief Compliance Officer Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), Shamwail Sohail, addressing the session provided attendees with a comprehensive understanding of the working dynamics of ICBC Pakistan.

He delved into the ways

ICBC facilitates Pakistani and Chinese businesses and banks in settling cross-border transactions, as well as meeting the financing needs of both countries.

Shamwail Sohail elucidated ICBC's role in arranging Renminbi (RMB) transactions, encompassing buying, selling, borrowing, or lending for participating banks in Pakistan. He emphasized the bank's commitment to facilitating seamless financial transactions between Pakistan, Eurasia and Central Asia.

Pakistan exports seafood worth \$199m in first half of current fiscal year

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan earned \$199.023 million by exporting 92,621 metric tonnes of fish and fish preparations during the first half of the current fiscal year, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Wednesday.

As compared to the exports of \$225,217 million during July-December (2022-23), the fish exports during the July-December 2023 witnessed decline of 11.63 percent, according to PBS data. In terms of quantity, the exports of fish and fish preparations however increased by 5.12 percent during the first six months when compared to exports of 88,110 metric tonnes during the last fiscal year.

On a year-on-year basis, the seafood exports decreased by 5.94 percent to \$37.075 million in December 2023 as compared to the exports of \$39.415 million in December 2022.

In terms of quantity, the exports witnessed a 20.29 percent increase by going up from 16,694 metric tonnes last year to 20,081 metric tonnes this year.

On a month-on-month basis, the seafood exports declined by 2.52 percent when compared to the exports of \$38.035 million in November, according to the PBS data.

In terms of quantity, fish exports increased by 11.17 percent in December compared to the exports of 18,064 metric tonnes in November. The overall

food group exports from Pakistan increased by 49.84 percent during the first six months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period of last year.

Food exports during July-December (2023-24) were recorded at \$3,481,200 million as compared to the exports of \$2,323,275 million in July-December (2022-23), a surge of 49.84 percent, according to the latest PBS data. In terms of quantity, the gold imports declined by 80 percent when compared to the imports of 60 kilograms during November 2023.

It is pertinent to mention here that the country's overall merchandise trade deficit contracted by 34.29

percent during the first half of the current fiscal year compared to the corresponding period of last year.

The Trade deficit from July-December (2023-24) was recorded at \$11.148 billion as against the deficit of \$16.965 billion in July-December (2022-23), showing negative growth of 34.29 per cent.

During the period under review, the exports increased by 5.17 percent to \$14.981 billion compared to the exports of \$14.244 billion during the corresponding period of last year, according to the latest PBS data. On the other hand, the imports narrowed by 16.28 per cent and were recorded at \$26.129 billion compared to \$31.209 billion last year.



In brief

Badminton tournament

MULTAN (APP): Badminton tournament was held at South Punjab police office here on Wednesday. Additional Inspector General South Punjab Masood-ul- Hassan was the chief guest. AIG Investigation Javed Iqbal Khan, personal secretary Javed Ali Asim, personal staff officer Mohammad Irshad Inspector and Nazr Mohammad Inspector were also present on this occasion. Two teams qualified for final after winning pool matches in badminton doubles. In team A, AIG Operations South Punjab Arslan Zahid and Deputy PRO Rana Muhammad Asif while Traffic Warden Adil Mushtaq and computer operator Azam Qayyum were included in team B. Team A which included AIG Operation Arsalan Zahid and Muhammad Asif won match with two goals against zero. AIG Operation Arslan Zahid won the final of Badminton Singles from 2-0 from Adil Mushtaq. Speaking on this occasion, Additional IG South Punjab Masood-ul-Hassan, said that sports was an important component for spending a healthy life. He said that such activities should be organized in future to promote sports activity and boost the morale of the young players of the area. Later, prizes were distributed among the winning teams.

Soon Lacrosse to get recognition in Pak

A B B O T T A B A D (APP): Executive Director of the Asian Pacific Lacrosse Association Chris Gino Wednesday highlighted the lacrosse's global significance and said that soon it would get recognition in Pakistan. He expressed these views while talking to media after a four-day long training camp in Abbottabad. Gino revealed that the World Lacrosse Federation has entrusted him with the responsibility to bring the game to the country and take essential steps for its promotion. He said that addressing the challenge of limited lacrosse equipment availability in Pakistan, Gino mentioned that he has brought 20/20 sticks for both men and women to introduce players to the game in a new and engaging way. The executive director also shared exciting news about upcoming initiatives by the Pakistan Lacrosse Federation and the KP Lacrosse Association, aiming to elevate the status of the sport in the country, contribute to its recognition, and foster player development. Expressing gratitude, Chris Gino acknowledged the support from the Hazara division administration, the KP government, and the Governor of KP. He emphasized their substantial assistance in promoting lacrosse, thanking them for their efforts in facilitating the growth of the sport in the region. Highlighting the similarities between lacrosse and field hockey, Gino underscored the mental and physical development benefits for players.

Bopanna becomes oldest world No.1

M E L B O U R N E (AFP): India's Rohan Bopanna will become the oldest number one in men's doubles history after reaching the Australian Open semi-finals on Wednesday at the age of 43. Bopanna, who attributes his longevity to yoga, turned professional more than two decades ago and his previous highest ranking was third, which he reached in 2013.



EAST LONDON: Ahmed Hussain struck twice early to dent Nepal's sprightly start.

Japan into Asian Cup last 16 as Iraq win five-goal thriller

DOHA (AFP): Japan cruised into the Asian Cup last 16 on Wednesday and a possible date with South Korea, as already qualified Iraq came out on top in a five-goal thriller. Ayase Ueda struck in each half to go with a late Indonesia own goal as pre-tournament favourites Japan won 3-1 to finish runners-up in Group D behind Iraq. Japan will now face the winners of Group E -- South Korea's group. Jurgen Klinsmann's South Korea are currently second on goal difference behind Jordan and face Malaysia in their final group match on Thursday. Iran are lurking as possible quarter-final opponents for Japan and coach Hajime Moriyasu said they were primed for the best the rest could throw at them. "Iran and South Korea are top-level teams in Asia and both very strong. They both have their own style that is different from ours and we respect them," he said. "It is a step-up in quality as we move into the race for the title." Moriyasu made eight changes to his starting lineup from the shock 2-1 defeat by Iraq, bringing in an entirely new defence. He kept faith in goal-

keeper Zion Suzuki, who was at fault against Iraq and was racially abused online after the game. But there was still no place for Brighton winger Kaoru Mitoma, who was left out of the match-day squad for a third straight game as he struggles for full fitness. Japan were awarded a penalty in the sixth minute after a VAR check ruled that Indonesia defender Jordi Amat had dragged down Ueda in the box. The Feyenoord striker dusted himself down and dispatched the spot-kick past goalkeeper Ernando Ari. Japan doubled their lead seven minutes after half-time when Ritsu Doan cut through the Indonesia defence down the wing and Ueda was on hand to tap home his low cross. Ueda went looking for his hat-trick and his shot pressured Indonesia defender Justin Hubner into firing the ball into his own goal in the 88th minute. Sandy Walsh volleyed home from close range in the 91st minute to give Indonesia a consolation. They finished third in the group and will have to wait until the first round concludes on Thursday to see if they go through as

one of the four best third-placed teams. 'Brave Hussein' The 2007 champions Iraq, who had already topped the group, scored in the 12th minute of injury time against 10-man Vietnam for a thrilling 3-2 win. Aymen Hussein scored twice, including the decider at the death from the penalty spot, to take his tally to a tournament-leading five goals. Vietnam led three minutes before the break when Bui Hoang Viet Anh poked home off a Khuat Van Khang free-kick. That would be Khuat's last major attacking involvement -- he was sent off in first-half stoppage time for a second yellow card. Rebin Sulaka equalised immediately after the restart and then Hussein, on as a substitute, made it 2-1. Hussein missed a penalty and it looked like he would be made to regret it when Nguyen Quang Hai got behind the Iraqi back line to score on the stroke of the 90th minute to make it 2-2. But Vietnam gave away another penalty deep in added time and on this occasion Hussein did not miss. "He was brave to take the second penalty," said Iraq coach Jesus Casas.

Pakistan-origin England's Shoaib issued Indian Visa

LONDON (Agencies): Pakistan-origin England's young spinner Shoaib Bashir on Wednesday, finally issued India visa to partake in the five-match Test series, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) confirmed. Bashir will now travel to Hyderabad where he will join England squad over the weekend. Shoaib Bashir, born and raised in Surrey, faced India Visa saga due to his Pakistani heritage. The 20-year-old spinner is not the first international cricketer to have gone through such a situation. Right-arm pacer Saqib Mahmood had to miss the England Lions tour of India in 2019 while all-rounder Moeen Ali arrived late to partake in the Indian Premier League (IPL) in 2022. Australia's left-handed opener Usman Khawaja,

whose parents were born in Islamabad, faced visa rows and arrived late for his team's tour of India last year. Notably, Bashir, who was staying back in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the company of ECB's director of cricket operations Stuart Hooper, had to travel back to England to resolve the issue at the India High Commission. "Shoaib Bashir has now received his visa, and is due to travel to join up with the team in India this weekend," an ECB spokesman said. "We're glad the situation has now been resolved." Earlier on Wednesday, England's Test captain Ben Stokes expressed his disappointment over the long-going Shoaib Bashir India Visa saga and revealed that it had the touring squad

considering the option of not flying to India. "I'm pretty devastated that Bash has had to go through this," Ben Stokes told reporters in Hyderabad. "When I first found the news out in Abu Dhabi, I did say we shouldn't fly until Bash gets his visa, but that was a little bit tongue in cheek," the England captain said. "I know it's a way bigger thing, doing that. That was probably just (my) emotions around the whole thing. "There was never a chance that we were not going to travel around this, but Bash knows he's had our full support." It is worth mentioning here that a late issuance of India Visa to Shoaib Bashir resulted in him failing to make a cut into England's Playing XI for the first Test against England.



SYDNEY: Brisbane Heat celebrate with the BBL trophy.

Shah Khawar takes over as PCB chairman

LAHORE (APP): Shah Khawar, Advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, and the Election Commissioner of PCB, has assumed the powers as the PCB chairman. According to the notification, issued on January 23, 2024 from the Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC) Ministry, and by virtue of Article 7(2) of the PCB Constitution, the Election Commissioner is vested with the powers of Chairman PCB.

Shah Khawar said: "I would like to thank the Patron of the PCB, Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, for reposing trust in me. My primary responsibility will be to hold the election of Chairman PCB in a free and transparent manner at the earliest."

Heat crush Sixers to win Australia's BBL final

SYDNEY (AFP): Brisbane Heat crushed the Sydney Sixers by 54 runs to win their second Big Bash League (BBL) title and emphatically take the crown of being Australia's champion Twenty20 team in Sydney on Wednesday. The Heat posted a challenging 166 for eight before routing the Sixers for 112 off 17.3 overs in front of a sell-out crowd of 43,153 at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Paceman Spencer Johnson was named man of the match with bowling figures of 4-26 while dashing opener Josh Brown clubbed 53 off just 38 balls following his pulsating 140 off 57 balls in the challenger match to get the Heat into the final. "We wanted to make amends after last year. Nice to contribute. To get a couple of wickets and win it's pretty special," left-armer Johnson said. The Heat, led by Brown's prodigious hitting and Matt Renshaw's 40 off 22 balls, set up a competitive total batting first.

Brown, who hammered 12 sixes in his rollicking 140 to propel the Heat into the final, clubbed three sixes and five fours in his half-century before he was out lbw to veteran spinner Steve O'Keefe. Renshaw played a key cameo in his quickfire knock with the powerplay proving to be expensive for the Sixers, as they conceded 31 runs off it.

But Sydney came back strongly as paceman Sean Abbott picked three wickets in his final over to end with four for 32.

O'Keefe, 39, playing in his final match for the Sixers, finished with 99 BBL career wickets, bowling tidily to deliver figures of 1-26 off four overs.

But it was no contest as the Heat's quality set of bowlers demolished the Sixers before their Sydney fans with Johnson's four wickets, backed by leg-spinner Mitchell Swepson's two for 19 and Xavier Bartlett's two for 12.

Skipper Moises Henriques top-scored with 25 off 27 balls for the Sixers and wicketkeeper Josh Philippe chipped in with 23 (22).

Pakistan edge spirited Nepal to maintain winning run in U19 World Cup

EAST LONDON (Agencies): Azan Awais's unbeaten half-century in the run chase powered Pakistan to a hard-fought five-wicket victory over Nepal in the 14th match of the ICC Men's U19 World Cup on Wednesday. Opting to bat first, Nepal could only register 197 runs on the board and unfolded on the final delivery of the innings. Nepal had a fairytale start to their innings as they raced to 29/0 in four overs. But Ahmad Hassan castled Arjun Kamal (6) in the next over to provide a much-needed breakthrough to Pakistan.

Bipin Rawal then put together a one-sided partnership with Aakash Tripathi (6) before receiving notable support from skipper Dev Khanal. The pair added 37 runs for the third wicket before Khanal fell victim to Ali Asfand in the 18th over. He scored 23 off 37 deliveries with the help of three boundaries.

Nepal then further slipped to 96/5 in 26.4 overs when their batting

mainstay Rawal fell prey to Arafat Minhas.

He remained the top-scorer for the side with a cautious 39. His 68-delivery featured four boundaries and a six.

Following his departure, Deepak Dumre (26) and Subash Bhandari (20) made notable contributions at the backend. Arafat Minhas led the bowling attack for Pakistan in their second U19 World Cup fixture with 3/23 in his 10 overs.

He was supported by Ubaid Shah and Ahmad Hassan, picking up two wickets each. In pursuit of 198, Pakistan accumulated 201 for the loss of five wickets and 14 balls to spare, courtesy of a well-crafted half-century by Awais.

The former champions had a decent start to the run chase as their openers Shamyl Hussain and Shahzaib Khan added 80 runs for the first wicket.

The pair had put Pakistan in command but their back-to-back dismissals in the 22nd over caused a stir in the run

chase. Shahzaib and Shamyl both remained notable contributor in the run chase with a 37 each.

The Green Shirts stuttered further when they lost two more wickets in quick succession and had slipped to 104/4 in 28 overs.

However, Azan Awais joined forces with Ahmad Hassan and launched an astounding recovery.

The pair added an important 64 runs for the fifth wicket before Hassan perished after putting Pakistan in touching distance. He scored 29 off 37 deliveries, hitting four boundaries.

Meanwhile, Awais stood his ground firm and carried his bat all the way through to steer Pakistan over the line in the 48th over.

He top-scored for Pakistan with a 82-ball 63 which featured six boundaries. For Nepal, Aakash Chand took three wickets while Dipesh Kandel and Aakash Tripathi made one scalp each. Pakistan next face New Zealand in their last group-stage U19 World Cup fixture on Saturday at the same venue.

Australian Open

Alcaraz loses to Zverev & Medvedev beats Hurkacz



Alexander Zverev celebrates match point during the quarterfinals singles match.

M E L B O U R N E (Agencies): Carlos Alcaraz was knocked out of the Australian Open when Alexander Zverev held off a spirited comeback by the Spaniard to win an absorbing quarter-final at 01:20 local time.

Germany's Zverev was rewarded for a rapid start to win 6-1 6-3 6-7 (2-7) 6-4 against Spanish second seed Alcaraz.

Zverev served for victory at 5-3 in the third set but Britain's Cameron Norrie in the previous round in a gruelling five-setter - produced his very best level in an inspired start.

Zverev used his huge first serve and heavy groundstrokes to devastating effect in a one-sided opening set.

Alcaraz won just two receiving points in the opener, and made 11 unforced errors, as Zverev took the lead in just 29 minutes.

With the majority of the crowd seemingly behind the Spaniard, a sense of shock swept around Rod Laver Arena.

It continued to linger as Zverev maintained a sky-high level, demonstrating the talent which has seen him long predicted to win one of the sport's major prizes.

Midway through the second set, Alcaraz finally started to find his range with the forehand before Zverev fought off two break points for 3-3.

But any thoughts from the Spanish fans it could be the start of a longer revival proved unfounded as Zverev won four games to a row for a two-set lead. Zverev continued to apply pressure in the third

set, moving 3-1 ahead when Alcaraz handed over another break with a double fault and a backhand long from deuce.

Serving for victory, Zverev dug himself out of trouble at 0-30 with two enormous first serves but Alcaraz - knowing it was now or never - responded again to break for the first time.

Suddenly Alcaraz had momentum. With his belief increasing, he wallopped a series of stinging winners in the tie-break and provided hope to his vocal supporters.

Zverev received treatment on a foot issue before the fourth set and many of the thousands who had stayed on Rod Laver Arena beyond midnight might have envisaged seeing the contest go into a decider.

But Zverev ensured that did not happen. He broke for 5-4, helped by Alcaraz making three loose errors with his backhand, and did not miss a first serve as he wrapped up victory.

"When you're up 6-1 6-3 5-2, you start thinking. I mean we're all human. It's not helpful," said Zverev.

"I fought back quite well in the fourth set, didn't let go and [was] very happy to finish the match."

Medvedev digs deep to neutralise Hurkacz

While Zverev will be aiming for his Melbourne final, Medvedev already has that experience, having been runner-up to Novak Djokovic in 2021 and Rafael Nadal in 2022.

Now he is one more victory away from a third shot at the title after seeing off Hurkacz.

"I feel a bit destroyed right now," said Medvedev, who clinched victory in just under four hours.

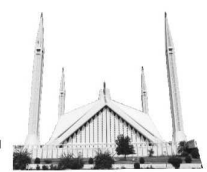
"He played good, I won't be tough on myself. I just had to try and do whatever I could. If I lose, I lose, it's OK."

Hurkacz is one of the finest servers in the game but Medvedev is one of the best returners - teeing up an intriguing duel between the pair.

Medvedev struck first by breaking the Pole's serve early in the match but Hurkacz quickly recovered, before the Russian took control of the tie-break for the advantage.

With conditions again hot in Melbourne, Medvedev's level dropped in the second set as Hurkacz picked up the pace but the Russian recovered strongly at the start of third to move ahead again.

Another masterful returning game saw Medvedev go a break up early in the fourth and the contest looked to be heading towards a straightforward conclusion.



In brief

Pneumonia claims lives of 14 children

ISLAMABAD (APP): As many as 14 children have lost their lives to pneumonia in Punjab during past 24 hours, according to provincial health department on Wednesday. Around 979 new cases of pneumonia were reported across the province in the past 24 hours. In Lahore alone, 197 new cases emerged in a single day, resulting in the unfortunate demise of two children, a private news channel reported. In Punjab, a total of 10,520 cases of pneumonia were reported during ongoing year, resulting in 208 fatalities. In Lahore alone, there were 1,570 reported cases of pneumonia, with 47 resulting in deaths during the same period. Pneumonia, an infection causing inflammation in the air sacs of the lungs, has manifested as a serious health concern. Symptoms include cough with phlegm or pus, fever, chills, and breathing difficulties, leading to severe consequences.

Commissioner visits Asghar Mall area

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta on Wednesday visited Asghar Mall area and reviewed the ongoing road construction work. The Commissioner directed the authorities that the development work should be completed as soon as possible. He said, there would be no compromise on the quality of the construction work. The soil testing would be conducted after the road work is completed, he added. Asghar Mall Road should be developed as a model, Commissioner Liaquat Ali Chhatta instructed. The construction work should swiftly be completed to provide relief to the citizens, he added.

DG directs to renovate parks, road

RAWALPINDI (APP): Director General (DG), Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) Ahmed Hassan Ranjha here on Wednesday directed to renovate parks and main roads of the city on urgent basis. PHA had started renovation of the parks and roads in the city, said a press release. The DG directed to improve the security of parks of the city. The PHA will also repair lights, swings and walking tracks in the parks.

ANF seizes over metric ton chemicals

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting an intelligence-based operation managed to recover 7500 intoxicated tablets, over one metric ton chemicals, 300 grams methamphetamine and arrested two accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed that a drug dealer carrying intoxicated tablets was arrested from Peshawar's Changan Chowk. On pointation of the arrested accused, a sting operation was conducted against a drug dealer group. The group was involved in the processing and branding of the drugs made from methamphetamine. Another drug supplier was arrested as a result of the sting operation and 7500 intoxicated tablets (PSP) were seized from the possession of the arrested accused. During the operation, 300 grams methamphetamine and more than one metric ton liquid and powder chemicals were also recovered. The arrested suspects were engaged in marketing of the new types of intoxicated tablets in important cities across the country. They were especially targeting the youth in the educational institutions.



ISLAMABAD: Labourers busy in tiding the bags of chaff (husk from wheat) loaded on vehicle in Federal Capital.

Minister stresses for quality education in shaping bright future

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training, Mr. Madad Ali Sindhi on 'World Education Day' stressed the pivotal role of quality skilled-based education in shaping the bright future of the country and encouraged youth to prepare themselves to confront future challenges.

Talking to a private news channel, he said that bringing children outside of schools into the educational system is need of hour to address poverty, health, social, and societal issues.

He said that Pakistan is moving at a fast pace to develop the education infrastructure and poli-

cies at every level, adding, that BISP-like programs should introduce more to enrol more students in schools.

He said that there is also a need for more trained and skilled teachers and the caretaker government was taking steps practically, adding, that skill-based education will only meet market requirements.

"We must transform our education system following the modern trends," said the minister.

"A human resource equipped with skills is the prerequisite to deal with the needs and requirements of the modern age driven by unprecedented technological advancements", the

minister mentioned.

He said that the caretaker government was working on comprehensive policies which would be adopted keeping in view the human resource demand of the country, region and other world nations.

He said that the ministry with the coordination of relevant departments will utilize all existing infrastructure and enhancement of teachers' capacity building, besides increasing the outreach of education.

He also expressed the hope that the upcoming government would focus and improving the skill development capacity of the people by taking different steps.

RTO seals counterfeit cigarette manufacturing factory F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: On the directions of Member (IR-Operations) Mir Badshah Khan Wazir and under the supervision of Chief Commissioner Regional Tax Office Rawalpindi, a counterfeit cigarette manufacturing factory was raided and sealed in the area of Jhangi Syedan in Rawalpindi.

The Additional Commissioner Headquarters Riaz Khan headed the raid which was carried out by Assistant Director Shujaat Khan and his team. The RTO Team recovered machinery and counterfeit cigarettes worth millions of rupees and then sealed the factory.

The said factory was secretly built in the basement of a building, where counterfeit cigarettes of various brands were being manufactured and supplied all over Pakistan.

Workshop held to strengthen Parliamentary practices

ISLAMABAD (APP): A workshop titled "Parliamentary Interface: Learning Experience of Provincial Assembly Secretariats" commences at the National Assembly on Wednesday in order to strengthen Parliamentary practices.

The workshop, jointly organized by National Assembly and Mustehkam-Parliament aimed at nurturing a constructive dialogue and deliberation among national parliaments' on crucial issues influencing parliamentary and legislative agenda. The participants received a comprehensive overview of the National Assembly, its functions, procedures, and a detailed explanation of the committee system and legislative processes from Muhammad Mushtaq, Special Secretary (Legislation) of the National Assembly in different sessions of the event.

During the session on 'Committee System and Legislative Process', Muhammad Mushtaq provided an in-depth briefing on the committee system and its importance in the legislative process. He also conducted a walkthrough explaining how bills are introduced, reviewed, and passed within the National Assembly and joint sessions of the Parliament. The senior officers from National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies of Balochistan, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are actively contributing to the dynamic exchange of knowledge taking place at Parliament House.

The Executive Director of Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) Muhammad Anwar shared valu-

able insights to foster collaborative learning environment in order to promote best Parliamentary practices.

He elucidated the technicalities of the committee system and legislative processes. The session proceeded with a question & answer segment, where the officers from Provincial Assemblies actively seek clarification on the elaborated topics.

The officers from Provincial Assemblies were taken on a guided tour of the National Assembly, encompassing the National Assembly Hall, Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Secretariat, library, media and various departments.

During the tour, they were briefed on the roles and responsibilities of different units within the Secretariat.

In the last session of the Parliamentary Interface, the participants from Provincial Assemblies recommended for organizing similar programs, workshops, and seminars to facilitate meaningful global exchanges among stakeholders and governance experts.

The event focused on knowledge-sharing, strategic discussions, and interactive learning to enhance governance at both the National and Provincial levels.

The session concluded with a vote of thanks. The officers expressed appreciation for the National Assembly Secretariat for providing the opportunity to visit this prestigious institution and gain insights into its procedures, functions, and key.

Raja confident of surprising victory in Punjab ahead polls

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) senior leader Raja Pervaiz Ashraf expressed confidence on Wednesday that his party was ready to give a surprise in Punjab during the upcoming general elections scheduled for February 8.

Talking to a private news channel, Ashraf highlighted the possibility

of forming alliances with other political parties after general elections.

He emphasized, "In politics, there is no permanent opposition that restricts politicians from engaging in negotiations with each other."

Ashraf said, "Every party and candidate try their level best to clinch victory in the elections."

Discussing the PPP's election campaign, Ashraf commended the party's efforts, stating, "The PPP is running an excellent electoral campaign."

Praising PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari for his leadership, Ashraf noted, "Asif Ali Zardari is a seasoned politician and he has taken correct decisions during difficult times."

Civil society berate civic agency for intending to repossess Islamabad Zoo

ISLAMABAD (APP): The civil society and environmentalists of the federal capital on Wednesday berated the Capital Development Authority (CDA) for its intention to repossess the erstwhile Islamabad Marghazar Zoo currently operating as the only Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Center under the ambit of the Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB).

The CDA, development agency of the federal capital, in a recent news article published in a national daily expressed its intention to regain the control of the Zoo from the IWMB. However, IWMB already has plans to revive the closed Zoo as a visitors' information and educational center on wildlife.

A civil society member running a wildlife rescue and rehabilitation organization on the premises of old Zoo while requesting anonymity told APP that the Islamabad High Court (IHC) 2020 verdict has clearly stated that Islamabad zoo should be permanently shut down and that management handed over to IWMB and that IWMB should work towards prevention of cruelty to animals in ICT with help of govt agencies like Chief Commissioner and IG police officers.

The Wildlife Rescue non-governmental organization is also partnering with the IWMB to assist its operations at the Rescue Center.

He said that through donations from civil society they are supporting IWMB in running the Rescue and Rehabilitation centre as they have little funding from the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination due to paucity of govt funding after 2022 floods.

The IWMB, he said under the leadership of its chairperson, Rina Saeed Khan had planned to resurrect a "most-modern" 'Wildlife Conservation and Information Centre'. Khan said the blueprint for the Wildlife Centre was ready, designed by famous architect Raza Ali Dada who had created the conceptual design of the Centre.

The wildlife enthusiast was of the view that the CDA already had the land possession of Shakarparian National Park and Lake View Park where it could conduct its endeavours pertaining to public education and recreation so why was it after the land of the Zoo?

The Zoo is located next to the Margalla Hills National Park which is home to a thriving species of plants, insects, mammals, reptiles and anteaters etc. "This zoo should be transformed into a well designed and better managed public information and education center on the wildlife of the national park as many people are unaware of the species existing in the national park. We have to co-habit with wildlife as MHPN is the only living ecosystem of leopards and pangolins next to a human population in the world," he added.

He mentioned that many countries were banning and declaring wildlife captivity in zoos as illegal like Costa Rica whereas in the US and Pakistan there were laws that declare wildlife captivity illegal.

He regretted that the Parliament of Pakistan had approved the Islamabad Nature Conservation and Wildlife Management Act, 2023 aimed at empowering the IWMB but it was not enacted so far as it was not being sent

to the President for signing due to red tape. While citing a similar example to Islamabad Zoo that faced the worst administration and maltreatment of animals under the CDA regime prior to be shut down, he said that the King's Zoo in Nepal was converted into an education and wildlife rehabilitation center after the end of the King's rule in Nepal. It is currently being visited by school students for sensitization and education and headed by a vet who got his professional degree from Norway in wildlife management.

The Chitwan National Park was managed by the Nepali Army that resulted in zero poaching in the protected area, whereas the elephants being released in the national park were used for patrolling by the Nepalese Army that made it the best example of an environment friendly patrolling without fuel-based jeeps.

When contacted, Chairperson IWMB, Rina Saeed Khan said the IHC verdict was not challenged by any stakeholder including the CDA after judgement was passed in 2020 that made the decree a law which must be followed in all cases. However, in terms of repossession of the Zoo which was out of the question as per the IHC verdict the relevant forum was the Court, she added.

The Zoo's poor governance and maltreatment of animals brought a bad name to the country whereas the Margalla Wildlife Center (currently the Wildlife Rescue Center component is up and running in Islamabad Zoo) has so far successfully rescued and rehabilitated approximately 381 animals since 2020, including mammals, birds, and reptiles.

In 41 years Wafaqi Mohtasib successfully addressed grievances from almost 2.1 mln households

ISLAMABAD (APP): Since its establishment during past 41 years, the Wafaqi Mohtasib has successfully addressed grievances from almost 2.1 million households, with 193,028 complaints resolved in 2023 alone.

January 24 holds special significance in the history of the Wafaqi Mohtasib, as it came into existence on this day 41 years ago in 1983. To commemorate the 41st year of the Wafaqi Mohtasib's existence, simple yet impressive ceremonies will be held in all regional offices to observe this momentous occasion, said a news release issued here Wednesday.

In a message on the occasion, Wafaqi Mohtasib Ejaz Ahmed Qureshi said that the increasing number of complaints reflects the trust and confidence the general public has in the institution, which is strengthening day by day.

He expressed confidence in achieving the core values of Ombudsmanship, including the elimination of maladministration and the promotion of good governance to pave the way for the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

He said that January 24 holds special significance in the history of the Wafaqi

Mohtasib, as it came into existence on this day 41 years ago in 1983.

The institution, he mentioned, has followed a positive trajectory and provided speedy and free administrative justice to millions of households, particularly the disadvantaged and marginalized segments of society.

The increasing number of complaints received by the offices, he said, is a clear indication of the people's trust in the institution's capacity to address issues of maladministration, inefficiency, neglect, and discrimination.

Looking ahead to the New Year, he said that enhancing the institution's outreach and accessibility will continue to receive special attention.

This involves opening regional offices and sub-offices, conducting open forums in remote areas, and inspection visits to improve service delivery for agencies generating persistent complaints.

Raising awareness among the general public about the mandate and scope of the institution's work through regular interaction with electronic, and print media and periodic awareness lectures will add value to these efforts.



ISLAMABAD: Two motorcyclists on the way at Islamabad Expressway loaded with dry branches of tree for domestic use in Federal Capital.

Delegation of Kyrgyz arrives in Kabul

KABUL (BNA) In a significant step to enhance bilateral trade and transit ties, an official delegation from the Kyrgyz Republic, led by the Minister of Economy, has arrived in Kabul. The delegation, comprised of representatives from the private sector, responded to an official invitation extended by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of Afghanistan. The overarching objective of the visit is to consolidate and expand the trade and transit relations between Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan.

3 coal miners suffocate to death

SAMANGAN (Agenices): Local officials in Samangan province say that three miners lost their lives following the release of methane gas in Samangan province. According to reports, citing Samangan province officials, the incident occurred on Tuesday, January 23rd in the Darra-e-Sof district in the upper part of Samangan province. Based on reports, the incident occurred precisely when methane gas leaked inside a coal mine, resulting in the loss of three miners' lives.

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

Afghanistan calls for regional peace talks to enhance positive interaction with neighboring countries



KABUL (BNA) The Actin Foreign Minister of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, convened a meeting with the ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions from Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, India, Turkey, and Indonesia in Kabul today, Wednesday.

The meeting was to underscore the importance of regional peace talks in fostering increased and sustained positive interaction with Afghanistan.

During the meeting, Minister Muttaqi emphasized the need for constructive engagement between Afghanistan and its neighboring countries, as well as the international community. He reiterated that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan seeks to establish friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all nations, promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.

Furthermore, the Foreign Minister emphasized that in the presence of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the independent central government, there is no requirement for the appointment of new special representatives.

This statement highlights the Islamic Emirate's commitment to working within existing frameworks and institutions to address regional challenges and foster cooperation.

As Afghanistan embarks on a new phase in its history, the international community will closely observe the outcomes of these regional peace talks and their potential to strengthen cooperation, deepen understanding, and lay the foundation for a peaceful and prosperous future for Afghanistan and its neighboring countries.

Deputy PM advocates for enhanced public-official cooperation for Afghanistan

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs, emphasized the need for increased interaction and coordination between officials and the public to build a stable Afghanistan and address the people's concerns.

He shared these views in separate meetings with Dr. Lufullah Khairkhwa, Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Sheikh Madaar Ali Karimi Bamyani from the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, and several scholars.

In these meetings, Dr. Khairkhwa and Sheikh Bamyani outlined the operational processes of their respective departments, assuring that their doors are always open to the public and that issues are addressed promptly.

The scholars present expressed their satisfaction with the government.



Deputy Prime Minister Kabir reiterated that building Afghanistan, ensuring stability, addressing the people's issues, and providing timely responses necessitate effective actions.

UN launches initiative; Community Kitchens for Afghan women

KABUL (Agencies): The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has announced the establishment of a Community Kitchen to create employment opportunities and generate income for women. UNDP emphasized through a message on its official social media platform X that women can enhance healthy meal options, support the local economy, and strengthen social connections through this initiative.

According to the United Nations Development Program, this collaborative kitchen ecosystem encompasses a network of social entrepreneurship through food preparation, animal husbandry, childcare services, flower shops, solar

solutions, and management. Masouda, one of the women actively working in one of these kitchens, mentioned that by creating this kitchen, they can economically support themselves and their families. She expressed her satisfaction with the establishment of these kitchens for women in Afghanistan, emphasizing that it not only benefits her but also provides opportunities for other women in need.

This initiative stresses that this kitchen serves as a "powerful tool for empowering women," and it continues to help women build self-confidence and become active agents of change in their communities through resource sharing and fostering entrepreneurial skills.

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report, the UNDP's social kitchen ecosystem in the Bagrami region of Kabul has created 20 job opportunities, with 10 of them specifically designated for women, benefiting 300 families.

Previously, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) office had stated that restrictions on women in Afghanistan had resulted in economic losses ranging from \$600 million to \$1 billion.

The situation, according to this organization, significantly worsened after August 2021, especially for women who now face

severe limitations, being deprived of education and many job opportunities.

Kanni Wignaraja, the Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Regional Director of the UNDP in Asia and the Pacific emphasized, "We focus on direct support for women-owned businesses, job creation, essential social services, renewable energy, and risk management to sustain local economies, ensure food and energy security, improve people's welfare, and protect them from disasters." This comes amid women's exclusion from education and employment in government institutions, with more than one-third of women facing restrictions in private and international organizations.

They said that Afghan refugees are getting arrested by Turkish and Iranian police and then are beaten and finally deported.

Khair Mohammad, 40, who has been deported three times from Turkey, said: "I went there to earn something for my family, we were working as guards then the police came and took us. They also beat us."

Refugees who have recently been deported from Turkey and Iran have asked the caretaker government to address the challenges of the deported.

"We want the elders of the government to do something for us so that we don't have to leave the country," said Taj Mohammad, a deported refugee.



Afghanistan's collapse blamed on US 'deep state': Amrullah Saleh

KABUL (Agencies): Amrullah Saleh, former Vice President of Afghanistan, revealed information in an interview with the Russian newspaper "Nizavisimaya" published on Monday, January 22nd, regarding the views of American officials on Afghanistan and the meetings they had with senior American officials before the collapse of the Ghani government.

Amrullah Saleh stated that the republican system in Afghanistan did not collapse overnight but rather began to unravel in the spring of 2011, following the death of Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda in Pakistan.

This gradual process was initiated through an agreement between the United States and the Taliban in February 2020 in Doha, lasting for ten years.

Mr. Saleh believes that Russia's annexation of Crimea in Ukraine had a significant impact on American policy in Afghanistan. After this event, American meetings with the Taliban accelerated, ultimately leading to the Taliban's rise to power in 2021, as sustaining the Afghan government required substantial resources. Saleh is of the opinion that, similar to the Cold War era, Islamist extremist forces are more advantageous for the United States in the region compared to democratic and pluralistic forces.

The former Deputy Head of the Afghan Presidency provided details about meetings he, Ashraf Ghani, and Abdullah Abdullah had with the President, Defense Minister, and the Director of U.S. Intelligence two months before the fall of the republic in June 2021.

Saleh mentioned that before meeting with Joe Biden on June 23, 2021, during a dinner with



American generals, ambassadors, and influential figures, General David Petraeus, the former CIA chief, told Ashraf Ghani that American political and military forces were planning to "deal with criminals in your country and financially support them. If you dare to act in such circumstances, I congratulate you, but our actions will resemble those of criminals."

He said that the next day during his meeting with President Biden, he asked three critical questions: "Is the Doha negotiation process between the U.S. and the Taliban a peace process or preparation for a regime change in Afghanistan?"

Will your logistical, financial, and military support continue after the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan?"

If the Taliban besieges Kabul, do you have a backup plan in emergency conditions, and how can we prevent the collapse of the republic?"

According to Saleh, Biden had said that these fundamental questions should be answered by General Lloyd Austin, the U.S. Secretary of Defense.

He stated that during the meeting with the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Austin also evaded giving a clear answer. Lloyd Austin mentioned that the U.S. would continue its military assistance after leaving Afghanistan and conduct airstrikes if Kabul were besieged by the Taliban. Details of this assistance will be clarified later in Kabul. Amrullah Saleh said that he, along with Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, met with William Burns, the head of the U.S. Intelligence Agency. Burns assured that the U.S. would maintain its reputation and credibility as a reliable partner and would stop the Taliban militarily if they besieged Kabul.

However, he also emphasized to these three Afghan officials that the next Afghan government must be established through a peace agreement with the Taliban, as the U.S. would oppose any other option.

Mr. Saleh told the Russian newspaper that at the end of this trip, they did not receive any specific answers to their questions from the Americans, and in practice, no military support or airstrikes were carried out. During the Security Conference in 2020, Mr. Saleh revealed a meeting involving President Ghani, Mike Pompeo, Heiko Maas, and Jens Stoltenberg. Pompeo directly requested Ghani's support for the Doha agreement with the Taliban, a request that Ghani declined. Saleh believes that the Afghan government's biggest mistake was trusting the United States and not prioritizing the peace process, leading to the exploitation of government weaknesses and a lack of regional allies.

Saleh pointed out that the collapse of the Afghan republican system wasn't driven by either the Republican or Democratic parties but rather by undisclosed power entities within the U.S., often referred to as the "deep state." He emphasized that the betrayal of Afghanistan is attributed to this deep state, composed of influential individuals shaping the country's strategies. They decided that Afghanistan was no longer worth the previous support, regardless of the consequences."

FBI recovers slain American aid worker's remains in Afghanistan after years

KABUL (Agencies): The FBI has announced the discovery of the remains of Sydney Mizell, an American aid worker and educator who had been missing for 15 years, in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

According to The New York Times, the U.S. Federal Police made the statement on Saturday, stating that Sydney Mizell's remains were "recovered in Kandahar province, southern Afghanistan, and returned to his family."

Sydney Mizell, a 50-year-old American who taught English, embroidery, and sewing at Kandahar University while also working with an aid organization, was abducted in 2008 along with his driver, Mohammad Hadi, in Kandahar by armed individuals and had gone missing. The FBI has stated that Ms. Mizell was likely killed in 2008 and buried near Kandahar. Autopsy reports also indicate that



this American aid worker was shot in the head, and his skull was damaged.

It is worth noting that the U.S. State Department had previously offered a \$5 million reward for any information regarding this abduction case.

The New York Times reported that Sydney Mizell's kidnapping had become one of the oldest unresolved kidnapping cases in America, and with the discovery of his remains, it has officially come to an end.

The motive behind his murder and the perpetrators remain unidentified at this

time. The Taliban-ruled Afghanistan has not provided any information regarding the case. The recovery of Sydney Mizell's remains brings some closure to a long-standing mystery surrounding his disappearance and the tragic events that followed.

Afghans expelled from Turkey, Iran report mistreatment

KABUL (Agencies): Some expelled refugees from Turkey and Iran complain about the misbehavior of soldiers of these two countries against the citizens of Afghanistan.

They said that Afghan refugees are getting arrested by Turkish and Iranian police and then are beaten and finally deported.

Khair Mohammad, 40, who has been deported three times from Turkey, said: "I went there to earn something for my family, we were working as guards then the police came and took us. They also beat us."

Refugees who have recently been deported from Turkey and Iran have asked the caretaker government to address the challenges of the deported.

"We want the elders of the government to do something for us so that we don't have to leave the country," said Taj Mohammad, a deported refugee.



the host countries deport Afghan refugees and added that the Islamic Emirate has discussed with the authorities of Turkey, Iran and some other countries preventing the mistreatment of Afghan refugees.

Zabihullah Mujahid, said: "The situation of refugees in both countries, countries where Afghans live, is worrying. But the Islamic Emirate has discussed with the officials of those countries, including Turkey, to remove the high pressure from refugees."

This comes as Turkish media has reported the arrest of 76 Afghan refugees at a checkpoint in the central village of Tanriyar of that country.

Country facing a plethora of challenges: Bilawal

F.P. Report

SARGODHA: Chairman Pakistan People's Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing a mammoth gathering of the Jiyalas in Bhalwal, Sargodha said that he is pleased to be standing on the soil of Punjab, among the Jiyalas of Punjab. He expressed his gratitude to the people for showing up in historic numbers despite the harsh weather.

Bilawal said that the country is at a crossroads, and is facing a plethora of challenges, including poverty, unemployment and inflation. Then, the country is also facing democratic and societal crises. The traditional politics of hatred and division has caused a divide between the entire society, families and institutions.

Pakistanis are being made to fight amongst themselves. The PPP has decided to strive for Pakistan, and bury this traditional politics of hatred and division that has only ever caused devastation. The PPP is contesting the elections only for the people, farmers, labourers and the youth. No other political party is concerned with the problems that the people face, they only care for their political ambitions and to come to power for the fourth time.

The PPP, on the other hand, is contesting the elections to implement on its manifesto and narrative that it has inherited from Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. The PPP does not engage in the politics of hatred and division, nor does it use foul language against its opponents.

PPP said that he has himself prepared a 10-point socioeconomic charter for the people to combat the current crises, which is an agreement between him and them. Those contesting for the seat of the PM for the fourth time are yet to apprise the people of their manifesto. When the lion comes to power, the blood of the people, farmers, labourers and youth is sucked. The PPP, on the contrary serves the people. We wish to establish a government of the people.

The PPP's first promise to the people is to double their income. This is followed by the Party's aim to provide 300 units of electricity free-of-cost to the deserving citizens of the country, and other parties are trying to copy this aim. Another promise to the people is that the PPP will construct three million houses for them throughout the country and give the ownership to the women of the households, as it is already doing in Sindh. Moreover, the Jiyalas need to convey the message to all those living in temporary housing that their space would be regularised and they will gain ownership. The PPP initiated the revolutionary Benazir Income Support Programme, and as an effort to combat poverty, we aim to not only expand the BISP but also provide

interest-free loans to the women of the country so that they can run their household and gain financial independence while contributing to the economy of Pakistan. The PPP is the only party that believes in, 'Kissan Khushaal, Mulk Khushaal'.

Hence, the Party is aiming to provide the 'Benazir Kissan Card' and the 'Benazir Mazdoor Card', to provide crop insurance and financial assistance to all small farmers, and social security to labourers, instead of giving subsidies worth billions to the elite. President Zardari had prioritised our own farmers, and this resulted in us becoming sugar and wheat exporters from being importers within a year.

Addressing the youth of the country, Chairman PPP said that they need to realise that the vote is their source of power, which was given to them by Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. It is in the hands of the people to render the conspiracy against the country redundant, by making their vote count and choosing not to opt for a person who is aiming to come to power for the fourth time. Chairman Bilawal said that the PPP has introduced the concept of the 'Youth Card', especially for the youngsters that have to go from pillar to post for employment despite possessing the educational qualifications. It was Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's dream that no child or adult goes to sleep on an empty stomach, which is why the PPP aims to bring forth the 'Bhook Mitao Programme'.

The PPP will also construct free-of-cost healthcare institutions all over Punjab, as it has done in Sindh. This is especially important for Punjab, because its politicians are habitual of going to London to receive treatment. They were not able to establish a single institution despite getting three turns as we did in Sindh. Hence, the PPP will construct healthcare facilities in Sargodha, as well as Raiwand. Moreover, the Party also wishes to establish educational institutions such as universities and affiliated campuses not only in the major cities, but also in small towns and districts. The PPP resolves to cater to every stratum of the society, Chairman PPP said.

Bilawal said that the promises that the PPP is making to the people are not mere claims, they are a reflection of the PPP's history. The Party has always fulfilled its promises to the people, be it in the eras of Quaid-e-Awam or Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. The people have suffered through the eras of dictators General Zia and General Musharraf, as well as Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan. The people of the country need to decide whether they wish to suffer through the same politics again, in which even the families of one's opponents are not spared.

Sindh to deploy scouts during polls

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh government on Wednesday decided to deploy Boy Scouts for election duty on February 8. As per details, the Sindh home ministry has penned a letter to the body for the provision of the Scouts for duties on election's day.

The Sindh Boy Scouts Association has been requested to provide volunteers for duties outside sensitive and highly sensitive polling stations in Thatta, West and South districts of Karachi. The home ministry has demanded 700 scouts out of which 300 scouts will be utilized for CCTV monitoring while 400 will be deployed at the polling stations in district West of Karachi.

Earlier in the day, Sindh Police informed the election commission about election security arrangements with over 625.4 million expenses. The police have suggested deployment of 1,22,000 personnel for security of general elections in Sindh. "The province has 1,05,000 policemen available, 17,000 less than the required personnel", police sources said.

A total of 19,004 polling stations will be established for the election in Sindh with 6,457 extremely sensitive and 6,593 sensitive polling stations. "Every normal polling station will require deployment of four policemen, sensitive 6 personnel and extremely sensitive 8 police officials," Sindh police department said in a plan shared with the ECP.

IMF mission to visit after elections

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Following Pakistan's assurance to impose new taxes, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Wednesday "decided" to send its review mission to Pakistan after election 2024, sources said.

IMF will continue further talks on the Standby Arrangement (SBA) programme with the newly elected government of Pakistan after highly anticipated general elections. However, the "IMF has not confirmed the schedule for conducting the second review". The last confirmation was made by the monetary fund in July 2023 which stated that the talks on the 2nd review will be held with the new government.

The International Monetary Fund has already made a \$1.9 billion disbursement out of the total \$3 billion under the nine-month Stand-By Arrangement (SBA). Sources said that newly elected government in Pakistan is expected to take full charge till the end of February 2024 after the general election.

It is important to note here that the International Monetary Fund Standby Arrangement (SBA) programme is set to end on April 12, 2024. If the second review is conducted successfully then Pakistan will likely receive the last tranche of \$1.1 billion in April 2024. On January 17, Pakistan received \$700 million loan tranche from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) under the nine-month Stand-By Arrangement (SBA).

The development comes days after the Executive Board of the IMF completed the first review of Pakistan's economic reform programme supported by the SBA. The Board's decision allowed for an immediate disbursement of around \$700 million, bringing total disbursements under the arrangement to about \$1.9 billion.

Another PIA steward slips away in Canada

ISLAMABAD (INP): Another Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) flight attendant has gone missing in Canada following the arrival of the national airline's flight from Islamabad to Toronto, reported on Wednesday. Faiza Mukhtar, the flight steward in question, was part of the flight crew travelling from Islamabad to Toronto.

"Air hostess Faiza Mukhtar was deputised at PIA flight PK 781. She vanished in Toronto when the flight landed at Toronto airport," said PIA spokesperson.



ISLAMABAD: Relatives of Balochistan missing persons carrying their luggage, going towards hometown after end of protest.

WB team, KP CM discuss matters of mutual interest

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A delegation headed by Country Director World Bank Najay Benhassaine called on caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah here at Chief Minister's House on Wednesday and discussed with him matters of mutual interest with special focus on development projects being executed in the province with the financial assistance of the World Bank.

Caretaker cabinet members Barrister Feroz Jamal Shah Kakakhel, Syed Masood Shah, Engineer Ahmed Jan, Engineer Aamir Nadeem Durrani, Dr. Najeeb Ullah, Dr. Syed Sarfaraz Ali Shah, spokesperson to Chief Minister Brigadier (R) Syed Mujtaba Tirmizi and Additional Chief Secretary P&D Syed Imtiaz Hussain Shah were also present on the occasion.

The meeting discussed the matters related to timely completion of ongoing development projects being implemented with the assistance of World Bank. Prospects of mutual cooperation in the near future especially development projects for merged districts were also discussed on the occasion. Speaking on this occasion, the chief minister said that World Bank is playing an important role in the development of backward



areas; the bank is currently assisting various projects of public welfare in the province.

Touching upon the priorities of his government regarding development of newly merged districts, the chief minister said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially merged areas had been affected badly during the war against terrorism. "Militancy is not a problem of this province but the entire country as well as international community is also faced with this challenge", he remarked and added that people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are on the front line in the war against terrorism.

That's why, he said that this war has badly affected our economy, peace, development and all other sectors of society. He made it clear that fast track development of newly merged districts is the priority area of the provincial government adding

that, despite the numerous challenges and difficult financial situation, special efforts are being made for this purpose; and the government also need cooperation from international donor agencies and developmental organizations in this regard.

He said that economic development and prosperity is the more better and an effective tool to combat the negative impacts of militancy and terrorism. He maintained that the provincial government has devised "Human Resource Export Strategy" under which, youth of this province would be imparted with market-based crash courses, thereby enabling them to get job opportunities. Youth of this province are highly talented; they just need to train in accordance with the needs and requirements of modern market and for this purpose, the government will also require support and cooperation from donor agencies, he concluded.

Russia accuses Ukraine of downing plane

MOSCOW: A Russian official has accused Ukraine of shooting down a military transport plane in an incident that it says killed 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and nine others. The Ilyushin Il-76 was taken down of Wednesday, the Russian Ministry of Defence said, as it was travelling from a military aerodrome near Moscow to Belgorod.

Close to the border with Ukraine, Belgorod has been targeted in recent weeks by Ukrainian air strikes. The ministry claimed, without offering evidence, that radars had detected the launch of two Ukrainian missiles. "On board were 65 captured Ukrainian army servicemen being transported to the Belgorod region for exchange, six crew members and three escorts," state news agency RIA Novosti quoted the Defence Ministry as saying. It did not provide any evidence for the claim.

Andrei Kartapolov, a Russian MP close to the Defence Ministry, claimed the plane was targeted by three missiles, which were either US or German-made. "It was done deliberately to sabotage the prisoner exchange," he asserted. The Kremlin told reporters that it was investigating the reports. Ukraine's intelligence agency said in a statement it had no "reliable or comprehensive information" on who was on board the plane or in what number". Andriy Yusov, a representative of the Main Intelligence Directorate of Ukraine's Ministry of Defence, confirmed that an exchange of prisoners between Russia and Ukraine was being prepared for Wednesday.

This was reported by Ukraine's state broadcaster Suspilne citing Radio Free Europe, a media outlet based in the Czech Republic. Yusov added that the prisoner exchange would not be going ahead. A video posted on Telegram by Baza, a channel linked to Russian secu-

city services, showed a large aircraft falling and exploding in a vast fireball. Regional Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said on social media that investigators and emergency workers had already arrived at a site in the Korochansky, one of Belgorod Oblast's districts. "The plane fell in a field near a populated area. Everyone on board died," Gladkov said on his Telegram channel. Alongside the POWs, six crew members and three guards were also reported killed. The Il-76 is designed to airlift troops, cargo, military equipment and weapons. It usually has a crew of five and can carry up to 90 passengers. In December, Russia accused Ukraine of carrying out a "terrorist attack" on civilians in the city of Belgorod, which killed 25 people. Last week, the Kremlin accused Kyiv of an attack on the occupied city of Donetsk, which killed 27 people. Ukraine has denied the claim. — Arab News

ity services, showed a large aircraft falling and exploding in a vast fireball. Regional Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said on social media that investigators and emergency workers had already arrived at a site in the Korochansky, one of Belgorod Oblast's districts. "The plane fell in a field near a populated area. Everyone on board died," Gladkov said on his Telegram channel. Alongside the POWs, six crew members and three guards were also reported killed. The Il-76 is designed to airlift troops, cargo, military equipment and weapons. It usually has a crew of five and can carry up to 90 passengers. In December, Russia accused Ukraine of carrying out a "terrorist attack" on civilians in the city of Belgorod, which killed 25 people. Last week, the Kremlin accused Kyiv of an attack on the occupied city of Donetsk, which killed 27 people. Ukraine has denied the claim. — Arab News

Elahi takes nomination rejection to Apex court

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Former Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi has taken his case to the Supreme Court, contesting the decisions made by both the Election Commission and the Election Tribunal regarding the rejection of his nomination papers.

In the appeal filed, Elahi targets the Lahore High Court's ruling on January 13, seeking the annulment of the decision. The rejection was based on objections raised by candidate Muhammad Salim, who alleged that Elahi holds shares in Lahore Modern Flour Mills.

Elahi contends that not only are the accused flour mills inactive, but no bank account has been opened in his name, and he vehemently denies purchasing any shares in the said flour mill. According to him, an inactive flour mill should not be considered as an asset. The petition argues that disqualifying him from the election based on this flour mill contradicts established principles. Merely not disclosing an asset should not automatically result in disqualification, and the intention behind non-disclosure should be scrutinized.

Pervaiz Elahi asserts that the attributed value of the shares is a mere 24,850 rupees, a negligible amount compared to his total disclosed assets of 175 million rupees. Among these assets, he claims to have revealed over 57 million rupees in cash.

He argues that the omission of such a small share cannot be considered malicious. Furthermore, objections were raised regarding the non-disclosure of seven arms licenses. Elahi defends himself, stating that there is no column in the nomination papers for disclosing arms licenses. The legal battle unfolds as Pervaiz Elahi fights to overturn the decisions that could impact his candidacy in the upcoming elections.



LAHORE: Chinese Consulate General Zhao Shiren talking to media persons at Press Club.

'Mass casualties' at UN complex as Israeli forces advance in Gaza

GAZA/JERUSALEM (Reuters): A UN training center sheltering tens of thousands of displaced people was hit on Wednesday, causing "mass casualties" as buildings blazed, a senior UN relief official said as Israeli forces advanced through southern Gaza's main city.

Israeli forces also cut off southern Gaza's main hospitals in their assault on Khan Younis, Palestinian officials said, and closed the main escape route for hundreds of thousands of residents and people who have sought refuge there. In response to questions about the fire at the center — run by UNRWA, the UN relief organization for the Palestinians — the Israeli military said the wider area was a significant base of Hamas militants.

"Dismantling Hamas' military framework in western Khan Yunis is the heart of the logic behind the operation," it said. Several sources had earlier told Reuters that Israel and the Hamas group that runs Gaza had made some progress in weeks of proxy talks on a 30-day ceasefire, during which Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners would be freed and more aid would enter the enclave.

But that prospect appeared distant on Wednesday. In their biggest operation in a month, Israeli

tanks have pushed through Khan Younis, where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians are sheltering after leaving the north — the early focus of the war. Their main target appears to be the area around Khan Younis' long-standing refugee camp, which includes the Nasser and Al-Amal hospitals and also the training center run by UNRWA.

"Fighting is escalating in Khan Younis ... the @UNRWA Training Center sheltering 10Ks of displaced people has just been hit — buildings ablaze and mass casualties — safe access to/from the center has been denied for 2 days — people are trapped," Thomas White, the director of UNRWA affairs in Gaza, said on X. Residents reported fierce gunbattles in the west of the city, where the military said it had killed "numerous" squads of gunmen "with sniper, tank and aerial fire."

Gaza health ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qidra said in a statement: "The occupation is isolating hospitals in Khan Younis and carrying out massacres in the western area of the city ... "Hundreds of injuries, patients, and childbirth cases face serious complications due to the lack of access to Nasser Medical Complex." The Palestinian Red Cross Society, which runs the Al-Amal hospital,

said troops had blockaded its staff inside and imposed a curfew in the area, including its local headquarters, where three displaced individuals had been killed.

Israel says Hamas fighters operate in and around hospitals, which hospital staff and Hamas deny. On Tuesday, the Israeli military had ordered the evacuation of the area, which the UN humanitarian office said held half a million people, four-fifths of them displaced by fighting in other parts of the coastal strip. However, Israeli tanks advancing eastward down the Al-Bahar road toward Nasser hospital blocked the escape route from the city toward the Mediterranean coastal highway.

The highway leads toward Rafah on Gaza's southern edge bordering Egypt — already crammed with more than half the enclave's 2.3 million people. Some people resorted to dirt roads to try to escape Khan Younis, residents and freelance reporters leaving the area said. Palestinian health officials said at least 25,700 Gazans had been killed in the war, including 210 in the previous 24 hours, with thousands more feared lost under the rubble of destroyed buildings. Israel says it has killed around 9,000 militants in total, a figure that Hamas dismisses as an attempt to "portray a fake victory."