

Police raid Hashmi's house
F.P. Report

MULTAN: Police raided the residence of senior politician Javed Hashmi on Thursday and arrested his son-in-law and servants. Taking to social media site X, former twitter, Hashmi said police raided his residence in Makhdoom Rashid area while the Tehreek-e-Insaf workers convention was in progress and arrested the PTI candidate and his servants.



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ISLAMABAD: Head of Al-Jomaih Group along with a delegation called on Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.

PM urges Saudi group to invest in Pakistan

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Thursday urged the Al-Jomaih Group of Saudi Arabia to invest in the alternative energy sector of Pakistan.

The prime minister, in a meeting with a four-member delegation, led by the Al-Jomaih Group head Sheikh Abdulaziz Hammad, said Pakistan and Saudi Arabia had brotherly ties which were getting further stronger. The Al-Jomaih Group had made a huge investment in the K-Electric.

The prime minister said that Pakistan greatly valued the Saudi investment and welcomed its investment in the energy sector.

He also lauded K-Electric strategy to invest in the alternative energy sector as it would help reduce the power tariff for the benefit of consumers.

The prime minister also expressed the hope that the K-Electric would further improve its infrastructure to ensure uninterrupted power supply to domestic and industrial consumers. The Al-Jomaih Group thanked the prime minister and the government team for resolving the long-standing issues faced by the company.

Apprising the prime minister of the company's 1500 megawatt projects, the delegation informed the prime minister that the projects would feature the usage of local resources

and alternative energy. Federal Finance Minister Dr Shamshad Akhtar, Energy Minister Muhammad Ali and relevant senior officers attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, the Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Thursday expressed his deep grief over the death of renowned politician and former National Assembly Speaker Elahi Bux Soomro. "Elahi Bux Soomro was a seasoned politician. His services for Pakistan's politics and parliament will always be remembered," he remarked. The prime minister prayed for peace of the departed soul and conveyed his condolence to the bereaved family.

Cop martyred in attack on ECP office in Turbat

F.P. Report

QUETTA: With the general elections almost two weeks away, a policeman was martyred Thursday in an armed attack on the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) regional office in Turbat, Balochistan.

According to police, an exchange of fire took place when the unidentified armed men attempted to enter the ECP office of the regional election commissioner in Turbat.

During the encounter, a police personnel, identified as Namrooz, laid down his life in the line of duty and foiled the militants' plot. After failing to enter the ECP office, the armed men lobbed a hand grenade into the office. Fortunately, no one was injured in the explosion. Meanwhile, the unidentified armed men managed to flee from the scene unchallenged.

After being informed, the police and law enforcement agencies rushed to the scene and launched investigations. The incident took place a day after Balochistan caretaker Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki visited Turbat city to review the measures being taken for the conduct of the general election in a transparent manner in the region.

Speaking on the occasion Domki had said the government was committed to ensuring the security of the candidates participating in the elections and maintaining law and order situation in the province to conduct the election peacefully. He had further said that the caretaker set-up had enhanced the steps taken for maintaining law and order situation during the electoral process and an effective strategy had been formulated for the restoration of peace in the province. Earlier this week, election offices of PPP-P candidates in Mastung and Kharan came under hand grenade attacks. Last week, PPP-P candidate for the provincial assembly Mir Asghar Rind also survived a grenade attack in Turbat.

Former PTI MPA arrested

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: The Anti-Corruption Establishment has arrested former PTI MPA Nazir Abbasi from Abbottabad. He is contesting from PK 42 as an independent candidate.

According to sources, the Abbottabad ACE arrested the former PTI member of the provincial assembly, Nazir Abbasi, in the corruption and bogus recruitment cases. PTI leader from Attock quits party, joins PML-N. Separately, in Attock, former PTI district president Waheed Murad left his party and joined the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz.

He announced his decision to leave the PTI during a press conference on Thursday. The PML-N candidate for PP 3, Hameed Akbar, and other Nawaz League workers were present on the occasion. Waheed Murad said that the country is surrounded by problems and it needs Nawaz Sharif at this time. "I am joining the PML-N for the country's interest and development," he added.

Khan and his spouse Bushra Bibi till January 31.

IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq heard the petitions filed by Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi seeking dismissal of the Nikah in Iddat case against them. The counsel for the PTI founder and Bushra Bibi, Salman Akram Raja, did not appear in the court today. His assistant lawyer requested the court to adjourn the hearing till next week.

However, Bushra's ex-husband Khawar Maneka's lawyer Raja Rizwan Abbasi pleaded with the court to vacate its stay order on the trial court's proceedings.

Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri issued the order. An intra-court appeal was filed by the chief commissioner and interior secretary challenging the decision of the single bench comprising Justice Babar Sattar who declared the Islamabad DC's authority to issue an MPO illegal.

Court extends its stay on Iddat Nikah case proceedings till 31st: The Islamabad High Court on Thursday extended its stay order barring the trial court from conducting proceedings on the illegal Nikah case against former premier and PTI founder Imran

IHC restores Islamabad DC's authority to issue MPO

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Deputy Commissioner's authority to issue the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) has been restored on Thursday.

The Islamabad High Court today restored the Deputy Commissioner's authority to issue the MPO. A division bench of the high court issued notices to the parties concerned on the appeals of chief commissioner and others against the single bench decision.

Accepting the petitioners' plea, the court issued a stay order on the verdict of the single bench. IHC Chief

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The Frontier Post

Sheikh Rashid hospitalized
F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Sheikh Rashid Ahmed complains of heart problem in Adiala jail and shifted to Rawalpindi Institute of Cardiology for treatment. Rashid Shafique, former minister's nephew told media that he was informed by the jail administration that former Interior Minister was being shifting to RIC after reporting heart problem.

Pakistan has credible evidence: Qazi

Indian agents involved in target killing of two Pakistani nationals arrested

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has "credible evidence" for Indian agents' link to the killings of two of its citizens on Pakistani soil, Foreign Secretary Syrus Qazi said Thursday, exposing the "sophisticated and sinister" Indian campaign of extra-territorial and extra-judicial killings.

"These are killings-for-hire cases involving a sophisticated international set-up spread over multiple jurisdictions," Foreign Secretary Syrus Qazi told reporters during a press conference in Islamabad. Qazi said that India's reckless and irresponsible act calls into question its reliability as a credible international player and its claims for enhanced global responsibilities.

Providing details of the "sophisticated and sinister" Indian campaign of killings inside Pakistan, Qazi said that the Indian agents used technology and safe havens on foreign soil to commit assassinations in Pakistan. "They recruited, financed and supported criminals, terrorists and unsuspecting civilians to play defined roles in these assassinations," he added.

The foreign secy blasted Indian media and social media accounts for their quick claims and glorification of the said killings as "successful retribution against 'enemies of India'" and projecting their capacity to carry out these illegal acts. "Potential assassins were recruited, using social media, talent spotters and fake Da'esh accounts," Qazi said.

He said that there was complete compartmentalisation of the various components of the operation with the employment of teams of financiers, locators, and assassins. "Elaborate exit plans were developed to obscure all potential tracks."

Qazi said that the information being provided was for two cases, the assassinations of Shahid Latif and Muhammad Riaz, while a few other similar cases were currently under investigation, which will be revealed in due course. Qazi said that on October 11, 2023, a group of criminals assassinated Latif outside a mosque in the city of Sialkot.

A detailed investigation revealed that an Indian agent, Yogesh Kumar, based in a third country orchestrated the assassination through criminals and terrorists, he added. Going deeper into the details of the killing, the foreign secretary revealed that

Kumar recruited Muhammad Umair, a labourer in that third country to act as a contact with local criminals in Pakistan to trace and assassinate Latif.

The recruited local criminals were able to locate and trace Latif, however, the killers-for-hire were unable to carry out the execution, Qazi added. "After some failed attempts, Muhammad Umair was personally sent to Pakistan to carry out the assassination. Muhammad Umair organised a team of five target killers which after the first failed attempt on 9 October 2023, succeeded in assassinating Shahid Latif on 11 October 2023."

The foreign secretary further stated that the law enforcement authorities apprehended the target killers, including Umair, based on confessional statements and technical evidence, thwarting their bid to flee Pakistan on October 12, 2023. Qazi said that all those involved in reconnaissance and killing have been apprehended and are being tried in a court of law.

He added that the FO also had evidence of transactions made in the process linking the entire chain to Indian agent Yogesh Kumar. Sharing the details of the second extra-territorial killing, Qazi said that another Indian agent was involved in killing of Pakistani national Muhammad Riaz. As per the foreign secretary, Riaz was assassinated in a mosque in Rawalakot during Fajr prayer on September 8, 2023.

He said that the law enforcement agencies tracked and apprehended the killer, Muhammad Abdullah Ali, on September 15, 2023, while boarding a flight at Jinnah International Airport, Karachi. "Interrogation revealed that Muhammad Abdullah Ali was recruited and guided by Indian agents Ashok Kumar Anand and Yogesh Kumar. Indian agents utilised social media app Telegram to recruit Muhammad Abdullah Ali, who was asked to locate Muhammad Riaz," Qazi revealed.

He further stated that Ali received payments through the middlemen based in a third country, and he was also provided with weapons and ammunition. "After a failed attempt on September 7, 2023, Muhammad Abdullah Ali succeeded in killing Muhammad Riaz on September 8, 2023," he added.

(Continued on Back Page)



GUJRAT: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing a public gathering.

Democratic system meant to serve people: Solangi

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Thursday said that the democratic system was meant to serve the people, who should have the power to hold their elected representatives accountable.

"Steps should be taken to reinvigorate the democratic system, which is only to take care of the people and not vice versa," he maintained. The minister was speaking as the chief guest at a seminar on "Electoral Code of Conduct: Ethical Practices of Stakeholders including Media", organized by the Press Information Department.

He said that as per the Constitution, Pakistan was a federal parliamentary democratic country and the people's elected representatives must do legislation to strengthen the system. The minister said that the concept of "recalling elections" was first introduced in Greece and the practice was now being followed by other countries, including Canada, the United States of America and Germany.

A certain percentage of

constituents should be empowered to recall their elected representatives by complaining to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) if they failed to meet their expectations, he added. Solangi said that the caretaker government was taking all possible steps to facilitate the ECP to hold free, fair and transparent elections on February 8 so that the people could elect candidates and parties of their choice in a peaceful environment.

He said that the Election Commission had issued a code of conduct, and the media houses management and media persons should be fully mindful of it. He said that some elements were involved in baseless propaganda and spreading rumours regarding the February elections.

It was being claimed that the elections would be postponed due to severe cold or security grounds, but that propaganda had now died down, he added. The minister said that the caretaker government had persistently highlighted its stance, and as its spokesperson he had time and again clarified that elections would be held as per schedule on February 8.

He said under the

Constitution, the country would be run as a federal parliamentary democratic system. He said through an amendment, the system of caretaker governments was introduced in the country to ensure neutrality at the time of elections.

Talking about the media, Solangi said that there were far less complaints against the mainstream media as compared to the digital media. On the digital frontier, he added, artificial intelligence, voice cloning, deep fake propaganda and robocalls could be utilised to spread fake news and lies.

He said that some elements wanted to create instability and chaos in Pakistan through baseless propaganda on the social media. However, the propaganda on the social media was being countered by the state machinery, including Pakistan

Telecommunication Authority, Federal Investigation Agency, and Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, he added. The minister said that making fun of political parties and their leaders was not in the interest of the country as it could make the people indifferent towards the system.

Supreme Court allows Sanaullah to contest polls

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court (SC) of Pakistan (SCP) has granted permission to PTI leader Sanaullah Mastikhel to contest the upcoming election from NA 91 Bhakkar. The decision overturned the Lahore High Court Multan Bench's earlier ruling.

During the proceedings, Chief Justice inquired about the status of ballot paper printing from Election Commission officials. Responding to the query, the officials confirmed that the ballot papers are ready for printing. The court was informed by Mastikhel's lawyer that his name was initially included in the list, and the election mark had been assigned. Subsequently, the Supreme Court nullified the decision of the Lahore High Court Multan Bench and directed the Election Commission to include Mastikhel's name on the ballot papers.

In a related matter, Perviz Elahi, President of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and former Chief Minister of Punjab, filed an appeal in the Supreme Court seeking to participate in the upcoming election. Elahi argued that his nomination papers were rejected based on objections raised by candidate Muhammad

Salim. The objection claimed Elahi had shares in Lahore Modern Flour Mills, which, according to him, is not operational and lacks a bank account. Elahi's application stated that he never purchased shares in the said flour mill, and its inactive status renders it a non-asset. He argued against being disqualified from the election based on this inactive asset, emphasizing that the intention behind non-disclosure of any asset should be examined. Elahi emphasized the principle that not every undisclosed asset should lead to disqualification and urged the annulment of the 2024 election decision.

Petrol, diesel prices may increase

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In the lead-up to the general elections scheduled for February 8, Pakistan is bracing itself for a potential surge in petrol and diesel prices.

Sources privy to the development said the Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar-led caretaker government after a series of consecutive reductions in petroleum prices, is considering a substantial increase of Rs 7 per liter, reported a section of the press. Should the decision materialise, it would mark the first uptick in petrol and diesel prices since November 1, 2023. Experts closely monitoring petroleum markets suggested that this time, the circumstances are unique, attributing the possible price hike to recent geopolitical events.

The attacks on ships in the Red Sea by Houthi rebels in the Middle East have led to a notable increase in global oil prices. In the past week alone, the international market has witnessed a surge in the price of petrol, climbing from \$83 to \$89 per barrel. Simultaneously, high-speed diesel prices have seen an increase from \$93 to \$97 per barrel.

The overall crude oil price has experienced an uptick from \$76 to \$80 per barrel. The unrest in the Middle East has significantly contributed to this surge, affecting oil prices worldwide. Despite the global surge in oil prices, experts anticipate a relatively moderate impact on petrol and diesel prices in Pakistan. The stabilization of the Pakistani rupee against the US dollar is cited as a mitigating factor. Analysts suggest that without this stabilizing influence, the increase in petroleum product prices could have been more pronounced.



Senior politician Illahi Bux Soomro 'passes away'

KARACHI (INP): Senior politician and former National Assembly speaker Illahi Bux Soomro passed away on Thursday.

According to family sources, politician Illahi Bux Soomro breathed his last at a private hospital in Karachi due to cardiac arrest. The senior politician was admitted to the hospital due to health issues.

The body of Illahi Bux Soomro will be transported to his ancestral village, Jacobabad, where his funeral prayer will be offered tonight, the family sources said. Soomro was the 16th Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan. He belonged to an influential political family of Sindh.

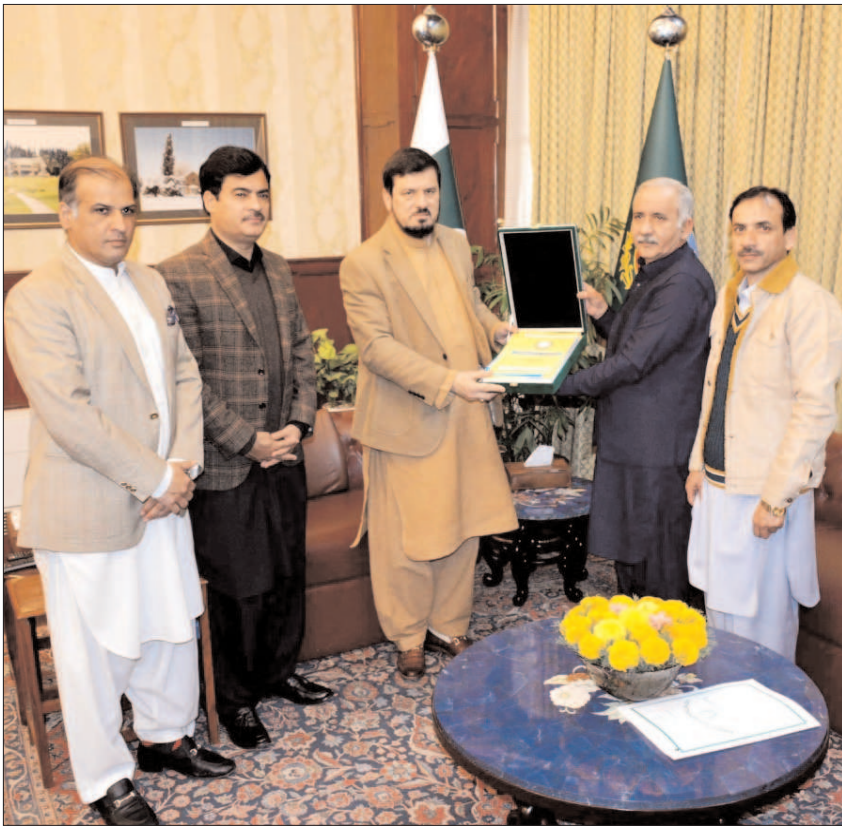
He held several federal ministries, including portfolios of the Ministry of Industries and Production, Ministry of Housing & Works, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of IT, Ministry of Science & Technology, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, and Ministry of Water and Power. Illahi Bux Soomro was one of few politicians who had been very close to the Presidents and Prime Ministers of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Software developed to trace bikers without helmets

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Safe City Authority (PSCA) has installed a unique software to trace motorcyclists travelling without helmets in the city and the authority will issue e-challans worth Rs 2,000 to violators.

Using CCTV camera software, the authorities would identify helmetless motorcyclists, later they would be faced penalties, announced by Inspector General of Punjab Dr Usman Anwar on Thursday. To ensure safety during city travel, wearing helmets was crucial to avoid accidents and hefty fines, reiterated the IG.

According to a spokesperson for the PSCA, the software to trace individuals riding motorcycles without helmets has been developed by the authority and after indication, they would be issued e-challans to their home addresses. Last month, over 21,000 motorcyclists were issued challans on roads for not wearing helmets, and 393 drivers under the legal age faced consequences.



PESHAWAR: Director General Audit Shahzad Naeem presenting Audit Report 2022-23 to Governor Haji Ghulam Ali at Governor House.

Japanese CG calls on Mayor Karachi

KARACHI (APP): Consul General of Japan in Karachi Hattori Masaru along with the Deputy Consul General Nakagawa Yashushi called on Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab in KMC head office on Thursday.

Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab welcomed the Consul General of Japan who discussed with him matters of mutual interest.

The Mayor Karachi said that cooperation between Pakistan and Japan is continuing in various fields and Japan's support to Pakistan in the industrial sector, including development projects, is valuable.

Mayor Karachi said that we want to take advantage of Japan's technical expertise in improving and modernizing infrastructure in Karachi. He said that Japanese companies would be fully supported for investment in Karachi since attractive opportunities are available for foreign investment in the city and the government is taking all possible steps to promote investment.

Today the world gives examples of Japan's development, in the future, Pak-Japan bilateral relations will be further strengthened and also the bond of friendship, he said.

Mayor Karachi apprised the Consul General of Japan about the ongoing projects for the development of Karachi, he said that the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation is taking steps at all levels to provide better facilities to the citizens, along with residential areas, basic infrastructure is being developed on better and modern lines in various industrial zones located in the city.

The district local bodies are responsible for providing necessary facilities to the citizens at the grass-

roots level and all the institutions are working together for the construction and development of the city.

He said that the communication and transport system in Karachi has also been improved and the sports and recreation centers in the city are being activated. The development projects launched in Karachi are yielding positive results and citizens are getting better municipal facilities than before, he added.

The Japanese Consul General on this occasion said that paving the way for development in an important city like Karachi is a positive process and we want to further expand mutual cooperation in various fields in Sindh province, the Japanese government wishes good luck for the development of Karachi and other cities of Pakistan.

IGP reviews preparations for forthcoming general polls

KARACHI (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Riffat Mukhtar Raja on Thursday presided over a meeting at Central Police Office to review the overall preparations and arrangements of the police for

upcoming General Elections 2024, including strategy plan, evaluation of available and required manpower and allocation of necessary resources.

During the meeting, IGP Sindh stressed the officers

for developing contingency plans with foolproof security measures specifically tailored for the elections.

He emphasized the need for sustainable and mutual communication, strict adherence to the election code of conduct, and the prompt implementation of all relevant orders.

IGP Sindh highlighted the significance of addressing even minor information or complaints during the election campaign, urging timely responses and the implementation of effective preventive and remedial measures.

Diligent officers work selflessly to serve people by formulating innovative public policies: CM

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (ret'd) Maqbool Baqar on Thursday said that a diligent public servant works day and night selflessly to serve the people by taking pains in formulating innovative public policies and interventions, and making sure that the policies and interventions were implemented effectively so that the public at large felt served.

He said, "If the public does not own the public servants, it should be taken as a sign of dissatisfaction. Against all the odds and challenges of this profession, he urged the officers to work with conviction and personal commitment."

He said this while speaking at the Graduation Ceremony of BS-19 officers who completed their 16-week-long Senior Management Course (34th SMC) at the National Institute of Management (NIM), Karachi. Those who attended the program include the Director General, NIM Dr. Lubna Ayub, Chief Instructor, Senior Management Course (SMC) Khaliq Shaikh and others.

The chief minister said this course, though being a mandatory requirement for promotion to BS-20 positions, must have brushed up the officers underwent existing repertoire tools and skills, and helped them gain

critical new insights on numerable issues and challenges through various training activities including lecture and panel discussions by distinguished speakers/scholars/economists.

He said that since the performance in the NIM course carried significant weight for officers' career advancement, therefore he hoped that the course participants must have invested their time, energy, and passionate efforts to gain knowledge, skills and necessary tools, for their personal and professional transformations as required for holding senior echelons of policy and decision making tiers of the government(s) at both the Federal and Provincial levels.

He said he was confident that the National School of Public Policy (NSPP) Syllabus containing themes on public policy, public financial management, leadership and communication skills, strategic planning and crisis management, decision making, and research and analysis, must have enabled the newly trained officers to take better cognizance of myriad challenges faced by our country, especially the critical twin challenge of the "good governance" and "public service delivery" during your numerable academic and practical assignments.

The CM said NIM Karachi being a constituent unit of the National Institute of Public Policy (NSPP), Lahore, is a highly prestigious training Institute of the country due to continuing academic and professional development rigour, unique training activities and traditions, professional commitment and dedication towards the professional development of trainee officers.

He added that the NIM Karachi provided myriad and varied opportunities to the course participants for professional interaction with policymakers and politicians, senior executives, scholars, and community leaders to enhance their 340-degree understanding of public policy challenges and help them think from different perspectives of various stakeholders.

He said that Government Departments, particularly training institutes, suffer from a relative disadvantage of scarcity of necessary resources, both in terms of human and financial. In this context, I would like to sincerely congratulate Dr. Lubna Ayub, the Director General and her Senior Management course and other support teams, for organizing the four-month-long course successfully with passion and professional commitment.

LHC disposes of Salman Akram Raja's petition

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Thursday disposed of a petition, filed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidate Advocate Salman Akram Raja against declaring him an independent candidate, and asked him to approach the Election Commission. The court further directed the Election Commission to decide the matter in accordance with law after its hearing. The division bench, headed by Justice Ali Baqar Najafi, announced the reserved verdict on the petition filed by Advocate Salman Akram Raja, who was contesting election from NA-128. The court had reserved its verdict on the petition after hearing detailed arguments of the petitioner's counsel and Election Commission's counsel, earlier in the day. The petitioner had requested the court to declare him a candidate of PTI and not an independent for the February 8 general elections.

تلاش گمشده
ایمٹ لائف کی نیسہ پالیسی
نمبر 506160482-6 کا مشفہ ضیاء
کہیں گم ہو گئی ہے۔ جس کی کچھ ملی ہو۔ یا اس
پر کوئی دہی رکھتا ہو تو وہ 30 دن کے اندر اندر
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کریں۔ بصورت کوئی قابل قبول نہیں
ہوگا۔

Social Welfare Department, gov't of Sindh handed over two buildings for establishing Drug Rehabilitation Centre



F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Social Welfare Department is paying an active role in combating the menace of drug addiction in Sindh Province.

The Social Welfare Department, Government of Sindh had handed over two buildings for establishing Drug Rehabilitation Centre (namely Benazir Shaheed ANF MATRC Sindh) in Dilboth Goth Malir, and Manghopir for one year to Anti-Narcotics

Force (ANF), Ministry of Interior & Narcotics, Government of Pakistan, the tenure of agreement ended on 18th December, 2023. Whereas, the Chief Minister Sindh graciously granted permission to extend the agreement for further two (02) years till December 2025.

In this regard, an agreement signing ceremony between Social Welfare Department, Government of Sindh and Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF)

held in the presence of Minister Social Welfare Dr. Saad Khalid Niaz dated 25.01.2024.

Whereas, it was attended by Mr. Sajid Jamal Abro Secretary Social Welfare Department, Brig. Umar Farooq Regional Director Anti-Narcotics Force Sindh, Lt Col. Shakiullah Joint Director ANF Sindh, Lt Col (R) Pervez Hussain Project Director Benazir Shaheed ANF MATRC Sindh.

Babies from 35 weeks and weighing less than 2 kg can be blind if not screened on time



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Under the banner of Ophthalmology Department of Khyber Teaching Hospital Peshawar, a meeting of eye specialists from several other major hospitals of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was organized in relation to retinopathy of pre-natal children. Experts at the meeting said that since newborn care services are improving worldwide, many more premature babies are surviving.

Participants reported that preterm infants received more uncontrolled oxygen during their nursery and NICU stays. Some develop chest infections, diarrhea, anemia and other ailments and require blood transfusions and antibiotics. Sometimes twins and

triplets are born. All of these are risk factors for developing retinopathy in premature babies.

According to the participants, Pakistan Retinopathy of Prematurity Guidelines require retinopathy of prematurity screening for all preterm infants born at less than 35 weeks of gestation and birth weight less than 2 kg.

This retinopathy of prematurity screening in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has started in 2019 at MTI Khyber Teaching Hospital Peshawar. This screening is also done at LRH, Ayub Teaching Hospital, CMH Peshawar and Prime Hospital Peshawar.

In this important meeting, Assistant Professor Dr. Samina Karim of Hayatabad Medical

Complex, ROP Coordinator Rohi, Dr. Zaheer Babar from Peshawar Medical College, Dr. Noor Consultant Pediatric Ophthalmologist from Frontier Institute of Ophthalmology, Dr. Rabia from CMH Peshawar, Participated in the event and learned about the different stages of retinopathy of prematurity, treatment options and future retinopathy of prematurity in other hospitals of KP. A plan to expand services was discussed.

On attending the meeting, Director of the Program, Ophthalmology Department Prof. Dr. Sadia Sethi welcomed the guests while Chairperson Dr. Nazli Gul thanked the participants for participating in this important meeting.

TESCO RE-TENDER NOTICE

Sealed bids for the sale of redundant Transmission line (66 KV Jandola-Wana) TESCO are invited from interested bidders to dispose off the said line on "As is where is" basis.

S. No.	Item Description	Unit	Approximate Quantity	Tender No	Place of Tender Opening	Deadline for submission of bid	Opening Date & Time
1	Iron Scrape	Kg	594361	40	TESCO Regional Store Hayatabad Peshawar	At 10:30 AM 14.02.2024	At 11:00 AM 14.02.2024
2	Aluminum Scrape	Kg	44971.2				

Terms & Conditions

1. The redundant transmission line can be physically inspected up to 13.02.2024 at site round the clock by the bidders before closing date.
2. Time compliance will be strictly observed and no bids accepted past 10:30 AM.
3. Tender documents can be purchased for Rs.5000/- (Non-refundable) up to 13.02.2024 during working hours from the office of Director (MM) TESCO Room No.206 Wapda House Peshawar.
4. 25% Bank draft of the bid amount in the favour of CEO TESCO must be accompanied with bid.
5. Tenders with any cutting/overwriting and ambiguity will be rejected.
6. All sales shall be made to the bidder offering the highest price subject to the approval of Competent Authority.
7. The material is sold on the clear understanding that the bidders have inspected and satisfied themselves of the material they are bidding for. No complaints after the sale shall be entertained.
8. After the Final Approval / issuance of Letter of Acceptance, remaining 75% amount is to be deposited within 21 working days. In case of failure to deposit the balance 75% amount within due date, the bid will be deemed cancelled and Bank draft amount will be forfeited.
9. All Govt. Taxes are included in the reserved price.
10. Rights for cancellation of tender or any change in schedule are reserved.

PID(P)H# 030/2024

Director (MM) Room No.206 Wapda House Peshawar Ph# 091-9214106

ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
 GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA
CAREER OPPORTUNITY CORRIGENDUM

To be substituted with No.INF(P)0104/24 and dated 18.01.2024.

Applications on the prescribed form are invited for appointment against the post of Principal Girls Cadet College Mardan on contract basis for a period of three (03) years from the desirous candidates, having the following qualification and experience:

Post	Qualification / Experience Initial Appointment	Age	Method of Recruitment
Principal (BPS-20) Girls Cadet College Mardan	M. Phil or equivalent (1st Division) from a recognized university with 15 years of administrative / teaching experience in BPS-17 and above in public sector, preferably with two years' experience of management / administration	45 to 55 Years	By initial recruitment Note: appointment will be purely on contract basis for a term of 03 years.
	OR Retired Female Officer from armed forces not less than the rank of Brigadier or equivalent from respective education corps		

Applications, complete in all respects along-with C.Vs and education certificates, should reach to the undersigned **within 15 days** of the date of advertisement. Those who have already submitted their applications do not bother to submit again. Only short listed candidates will be called for interview for which no TA/DA will be given. Experience claimed must be supported by certificate(s).

(TAJ MUHAMMAD)
Section Officer (Autonomous / Bodies)
Elementary & Secondary Education Department,
Govt. of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Civil Secretariat, Peshawar
Phone No. 091-9223530

INF(P)0154/24

Mobilink Bank
PUBLIC NOTICE
 Auction of Gold

Finance facilities were extended by Mobilink Bank against the security of deposit and pledge of gold to the customer mentioned below. The customer has neglected and failed to repay the finance extended to them by Mobilink Bank along with the markup thereon.

Branch	Peshawar
Branch code	0016
Date of auction	29th January 2024
Time	03:00 AM
Call Deposit	PKR. 800/-

Customer Name	CNIC #	Address
Yasmin Bibi	17301-4268581-4	Ashtakhras Bala, Tehsil, Peshawar.

Notice is hereby given to the customer in above mentioned that if payment of entire outstanding amount financed along with markup is not made by them to Mobilink Bank within 1 day of the publication of this notice, Mobilink Bank shall auction the gold ornaments and no further Public Notice shall be issued to call upon the customer to make the payments.

Mobilink Bank



PESHAWAR: Representative of UNICEF Pakistan, Abdullah Fadil and Secretary Labour Department Fakhre Alam giving shield to Adviser to KP CM, Dr. Riaz Anwar during the launching ceremony of KP Child Labour Survey.

DG Audit KP calls on Governor, present report

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Director General Audit Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shehzad Naeem here Thursday called on KP Governor, Haji Ghulam Ali and presented audit report of provincial expenditures and revenue in year 2022-23.

Director Audit, Sajid Khan and Audit Officer, Aadi Shah was also present on the occasion. Speaking on the occasion, KP governor termed report a step forward towards transparency and said that audit guaran-

tees clarity and judicious use of funds by government departments.

He highlighted significance of proper implementation of recommendations mentioned in the audit report and it would further improve transparency and clarity in financial matters. Governor said that recommendations are not against any department but they are meant to formulate a result oriented planning to avoid financial irregularities in future.

He also directed to inform relevant depart-

ments about irregularities in their financial affairs and added that provincial government and public sector departments are working to ensure good governance and transparency. Later a delegation of trader community met with KP Governor and informed him about the loss of Time Center's shopkeepers. Governor assured cooperation to traders and said that provincial government and concerned authorities would be contacted to provide them financial help to cover losses incurred by fire.

Federal Ombudsman visits KP Secretariat

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Federal Ombudsman Ijaz Ahmad Qureshi paid a visit to Provincial Ombudsman Secretariat and held a meeting with Provincial Ombudsman Syed Jamal Ud Din Shah here at his staff here the other day, said a press release issued here on Thursday.

Provincial Ombudsman Syed Jamal ud Din Shah welcomed the Federal Ombudsman and briefed him regarding the role and activities of the Provincial Ombudsman.

He also apprised him in connection with the complaints and redressal method of the complaints at secretariat level. He also said that in the year 2023, provincial Ombudsman Office has received a record number of complaints which were more than the previous years and majority of complainants received relief by resolving their grievances within a specific period as prescribed in the Ombudsman act.

He also congratulated the Federal Ombudsman for their election as President of Asian Ombudsman Organisation and hoped that he will continue to focus on the promotion and wellbeing of the Ombudsman office at International level.

Ijaz Ahmad Qureshi while speaking on the occasion appreciated the role of Provincial Ombudsman Secretariat for providing speedy relief to the common man. He also eulogised the role and steps taken by Syed Jamal Ud Din Shah as Provincial Ombudsman for opening of regional offices at DI Khan, Malakand and Abbottabad which will enable the people of that areas to lodge their complaints near their region avoiding to visit Provincial Secretariat. The Federal Ombudsman also lauded the competency of Investigation Officers for taking each and every case on merit and deciding the matters well in time.

He stressed upon the staff to work hard and do not take any pressure while deciding the cases independently. The important issue is how to deal with complainants and provide satisfaction while they visit your office. Always deal with complainants politely. He was also praiseworthy for the media cell role and advised them to play their role towards awareness of the people so that the role of Federal as well as Provincial Ombudsman can be highlighted. At the end Provincial Ombudsman Syed Jamal Ud Din Shah presented a souvenir to the Federal Ombudsman.

KP Labour dept launches first ever child labour survey

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Labour Department has launched its first ever Child Labour Survey 2022-23 conducted across all districts of the province including the newly merged districts in a ceremony held here at a local hotel.

KP Child Labour Survey 2022-23 is the second provincial survey in Pakistan, after Punjab, it was said during the event attended by various government departments, UN agencies, donors, academia, and civil society organizations. This survey collected data from 49,734 households including 5,976 urban and 43,758 rural, achieving a response rate of 92.5 percent despite harsh weather and security challenges especially in the Newly Merged Districts.

According to the survey report, the child population aged 5 - 17 years is approximately 8.28m in the province, adding that 11.1 percent of them are working children; of which 80 percent are in child labour while 73.8 percent of them are working in hazardous conditions. Referring to children population from 14 - 17 years, it said that 21.6 percent are working children and 15.5 percent are in child labour or hazardous work respectively.

The report revealed that the major four industries for child labour include agriculture, forestry and fishing at 51.6 percent; water collection at 19.1 percent; wholesale and retail trade at 9.7 percent and manufacturing at 7.7 percent. The causes of children being in labour are multi-dimensional, it said adding that these include, head of household having no or primary education only 44.7 percent, household being in the poorest wealth condition 31.8 percent, household being the beneficiary of BISP's assistance 26.3 percent, migration of the head of household 14.6 percent, and household losing at least one parent 6.6 percent.

The KP-CLS report also provided a detailed analysis of the effects of child labour on children which include physical and psychological effects, limiting their equitable opportunities to be fully educated,

abuse at work places, economic exploitation and health consequences, etc. It said child labour has been historically a huge issue with negative consequences on the development and wellbeing of children and a challenge for government and other actors to address. Having greater realization of this, Labour Department with the support from UNICEF and Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) took a bold step towards filing the evidence gap and conducted an in-depth survey across all districts of the province, including New Merged Districts (NMDs). KP Child Labour Survey 2022-23 is the second provincial survey in Pakistan, after Punjab.

The chief guest of the event Riaz Anwar Khan, Advisor to the Chief Minister for Labour Department, while addressing the forum said, 'now that we have the findings from this unique survey and its recommendations, it becomes utmost important and obligatory on all of us especially those engaged in the policy making to take these findings serious and utilize it for wider policy reforms and programmes necessary for the eradication of child labour'.

Secretary Labour, Muhammad Fakhre Alam, emphasized that 'the enormous amount of resources invested in the KP-CLS is just the beginning of a new long-term initiative and commitment of KP government and Labour Department. Now that we have sufficient understanding of the child labour issue in the province, the next logical step is ensuring the full utilization of this evidence for policy reforms and designing programmes to eradicate child labour and provide children decent living and equitable opportunities for education and development. And to achieve this vision, we look forward and welcome collaborations and support from all relevant stakeholders and partners'. Mrs. Jo Moir, Development Director, British High Commission Islamabad said child labour is a global issue but of particular importance in Pakistan.

She also highlighted that approximately 35 percent of reported child abuse cases across Pakistan are in the

workplace, adding the drivers of child labour are complex including poverty and social behavior that push children into labour which in turn deprive them of their right to education and health. She also emphasized that the drivers of child labour are multifaceted and call for multi-sectoral and collective response.

She appreciated the Labour Department's efforts and urged for improving the governance to deliver on the international and national commitments and engaging communities to change social norms that condone child labour. She also emphasized on the need for supporting parents and families to access better opportunities for their children.

Abdullah Fadil, Representative UNICEF Pakistan extended his appreciation of the Labour Ministry and the Labour Department for successfully completing the KP-CLS and launching its report to a wider group of government department, donors, UN agencies, academia and civility society. He urged the audience to use this data and evidence for further in-depth scientific studies, policy analyses and influencing equitable allocation of public resources to help address the issues of children involved in labour and their families.

He also addressed to the stakeholders from various civil society organizations, academia and social activists and asked them for using this data to generate social discourse around this social problem and positive social and behavior change aiming at the eradication of child labour. He also emphasized on the fact that since eradicating child labour would require long term commitment and investments therefore invited the donor fraternity and other investment agencies for taking advantage of this rich data and evidence and supporting policies, programmes and social change initiatives to help government address this issue comprehensively and holistically. He urged all the stakeholders and the government to take pragmatic steps while using this evidence of the survey to change the conditions in which these children are living and promise them better future'.

QWP leader calls for free, fair elections

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Thursday said the one questioning the transparency of the upcoming general election slated for February 8 should recall the massive rigging committed in the 2018 polls.

Addressing a gathering in Shabqadar tehsil in Charsadda district, he said the 2018 general election was massively rigged in favour of a certain political party, but its leader did not raise any objection to it. "The one, who is now languishing in jail, did not talk about the preferential treatment, which his party enjoyed, and was brought to power through manipulation," he maintained. Aftab Sherpao believed the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lost its electoral symbol bat as the party failed to

conduct the intra-party elections in accordance with its constitution, holding the PTI founding chairman responsible for the situation his party was facing.

He said that the claims to rope in independent candidates for the formation of the next government amounted to insulting such contenders and this would undermine the democratic process. "The people would point the finger at the entire electoral process and it would lose its credibility," he remarked.

The veteran politician advised the people to elect sincere candidates, who had a proven track record of serving the people irrespective of their political leaning. "The people should not fall for catchy slogans," he said, the ones promising the moon were nowhere to be seen after getting elected.

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. Aftab Sherpao maintained that the mainstream political parties were least bothered to highlight the issues facing the residents of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He said that whichever party came to power in KP would have to work for the uplift of this province as it has lagged far behind.

PEN calls on Minister, issues of schools discussed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A representative delegation of private educational institutions organization "Private Education Network", called on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Newly Merged Districts Affairs, Industries, Commerce and Technical Education Dr Aamer Abdullah here at his office in Civil Secretariat Peshawar and discussed with him some issues faced by the private educational institutions and sought their possible cooperation in this regard.

The delegation was comprised by Vice Presidents of the organization and members of the Private Schools Regulatory Authority Fazlullah Daudzai and Syed Anas Takreem Kakakhel, other office bearers of the organization from Nowshera district Qazi Fazal Hakeem, Rashid Maqbool and

Noorshad, while on this occasion the Special Secretary Elementary and Secondary Education Department Samar Gul, Managing Director Private Schools Regulatory Authority Tanzila Sabahat and other relevant officials of the Education Department were also present.

The delegation apprised the caretaker minister about certain issues being faced by private institutions pertaining to education boards and various other matters related to the department regarding private schools. On this occasion, the caretaker minister directed the concerned officials of the education department that private educational institutions are serving the society in providing education and the department should take possible steps to solve their real problems.

He said that the Private Schools Regulatory

Authority should facilitate in this procedure of various taxes for private educational institutions while PSRA should call the committee meeting for resolving the issue of fee grading mechanism for private schools. He directed the concerned authorities to take steps for bringing equal the examination registration fees of the students of public and private institutions through various boards, while the department should issue orders to the boards to organize the elections of the board of governors and instructed to take action in case of violation of such instructions of department.

The caretaker minister directed that the education department in its policy regarding examination halls should provide ease to the students to avoid inconvenience while the matter of alleged ban on inter-board migration should also be solved possibly.

SCCI demands allowing import of cotton in trucks

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fuad Ishaq urged the government and ministry of National Food Security and Research to review procedural and regulation changes and allow import of cotton in open trucks that will not only increase foreign exchange and textile export, but also cut additional monetary burden on importers.

The SCCI chief while chairing a meeting of traders/importers here at the chamber house said government and authorities concerned had brought procedural change with regard to import of cotton. Under the new regulation, he said import of cotton from Afghanistan has been made mandatory in containers.

He, however, said traders and importers are facing hardships owing to unavailability of containers and to meet this condition.

To comply with this condition, Fuad Ishaq said traders and importers will have sent empty containers from Pakistan to Afghanistan then cotton loaded in these containers and imported to Pakistan, because of which traders/importers will pay fourfold the transportation cost. The meeting was attended by the chamber former senior vice president Engr Mansoor Elahi, traders and importers.

Fuad Ishaq told the meeting that importers fully acknowledged the importance of fumigation including cotton, and assured fully adhering with its procedure. However, he said that during import of cot-

ton, it fully covered by plastic and canvas when transported in open trucks, effectively serving the purpose of fumigation.

The SCCI chief urged the government, federal secretary for National Food Security and Research and other relevant authorities to issue immediate orders, allowing import of cotton in open trucks, which couldn't only earn hefty foreign exchange for the country but also enhance textile export and lower additional burden of the importers.

Fuad Ishaq said smooth import of cotton was in the best interest of Pakistan. Therefore, he said SCCI and business community/traders and importers urged the government to withdraw procedural changes with regard to import of cotton.

NDMA cell granted IAWG membership

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Spokesperson NDMA Gender and Child Cell of NDMA has been granted Membership in the Steering Committee of Inter-Agency Working (IAWG) on 24th Jan 2024, an International Coalition of Organizations; Working collectively to advance Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights in Humanitarian Settings.

This is a great opportunity for NDMA's Gender & Child Cell to collaborate with other members of IAWG share best practices & contribute to global efforts to improve health issues. NDMA Pakistan looks forward to working with its partners & stakeholders to achieve common goals.

120 KP lady teachers suspended

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: More than 120 lady teachers were suspended in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for not attending training sessions for upcoming general elections, reported on Thursday.

Overall 133,048 presiding and senior assistant presiding officers' were being trained in 125 training centres of the province. Training of 27,600 teachers was completed. Provincial Election Commission, taking notice of the reports, has directed action against the absentees.

Kurram district women education department in a notification said it has suspended 97 female teachers for not appearing in the training session.



PESHAWAR: PPP candidates for upcoming elections interacting with public during campaign.

Govt patronage essential to youth for better Pakistan: Faig

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Muhammad Faig Shah, founder and chairman of the Amun Taraqqi Party said if Pakistan would put in the right direction then leadership and priority should be given to 160 million young men and women.

Addressing a public gathering and corner meetings ahead of Feb 8 general election on Thursday, Shah said our party manifesto has maximum focused on youths, wherein youth will play an important role

for leadership, education, employment and authority.

Youth should come forward themselves and make Pakistan a true welfare state as per the struggle of founding leader of the country Quaid E Azam, wherein ignorance, unawareness and dynastic/inheritance politics will be eliminated forever, Shah said.

Furthermore, he said leadership will come with ordinary people in a democratic way, besides economic and social issues would be resolved on priority basis. Our first priority

is youths, the ATP chief said, adding practical programs will be initiated for technical education in countless government-run institutions.

Also, he said new industrial zones will be established and the main focus to be given to agriculture and research under the ATP agenda, aimed that the whole nation will jointly put their share in national progress. Shah noted a large number of highly-qualified young people have faced hardships to get jobs in the country.



PESHAWAR: A delegation of 'Private Education Network', called on Caretaker Minister for Newly Merged Districts Affairs, Industries, Commerce and Technical Education Dr Aamer Abdullah.



In brief

Meeting reviews general elections Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Deputy Commissioner Swat, Dr. Qasim Ali Khan chairing a meeting on Thursday reviewed preparation for upcoming elections. The meeting was also attended by Regional Election Commissioner, Fazal Hakeem, District Election Commissioner, Farid Ullah, District Police Officer, Shafiullah Gandapur, District Comptroller Accounts, Roothullah and concerned officers. The meeting discussed various matters to general elections including provision of vehicles and security of polling staff. Participants of meeting also visited Regional Election Office to review preparation for polls. Deputy Commissioner also inspected rooms and working of CCTV cameras. He also directed concerned departments to work in liaison and utilize available resources for peaceful holding of general elections.

Five workers kidnapped

AWARAN (INP): A group of five labourers and a technician of a telecom company have been kidnapped by unknown armed men in Awaran district of Balochistan province, reported on Thursday. According to sources, the workers had gone to Sajidi Bazar in Hoshab tehsil of Kech district in Turbat to install a mobile tower, from where they were reportedly abducted near Dandar Dhale Bazar which is 7 km away from Awaran. The disappearance of the workers was revealed when they did not reach their office in Awaran. Sources said that the abducted workers belong to Punjab. Officials of the mobile phone company have also confirmed the abduction of their employees. The district administrations of Awaran and Kech are making efforts to recover the kidnapped workers, sources added.

Three killed, over 20 injured

NAWABSHAH (INP): At least three people including a woman were killed while more than 20 others injured in collision between university bus and a passenger van here on Thursday. According to details, according to poor visibility caused by dense fog, a university bus carrying students rammed into a passenger van at Sawani Raho bus stop near Qazi Ahmed area of Nawabshah. As a result of collision, a woman among three people was killed while over 20 others sustained injuries. The deceased included Dadad Umerani, Safdar and another while the injured were identified as Dhani Bakhsh, Sohail Jamali, Zahid Ali Bhatti, Abdul Rasheed, Wajid Ali, Riaz, Pardesi Odh, Qadir Bakhsh, Mahshooq Dahiri, Pareshey d/o Dost Ali, Nadia d/o Anwar Kaloi, Gul Sher Bhatti s/o Zeeshan and others.

Two notorious robbers injured

KASUR (INP): Two notorious robbers were injured and held with arms and a bike after exchange of fire here on Thursday. According to details, a special team of police launched crackdown over report of presence of robbers involved in murder of a citizen Muhammad Saleem near Mochipura over resistance during robbery. Upon sight of police, the robbers started firing and attempted to flee from the scene. In retaliatory firing, two robbers were injured and arrested with two pistols and a motorcycle while their other accomplices managed to escape. The detainees including Sajid alias 22 Wheeler hailing from Kot Ali Garh and Kashif alias Kashi belonging to Kaky Khurd were wanted by police in more than 37 serious criminal cases.



LANDI KOTAL: Senator Mushtaq Ahmed Khan talking to media persons on the occasion of opening ceremony of conference hall of Press Club. — F.P. photo

Rulers ignore tribesmen in last seven decades

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Although tribesmen have played their due role in the independence and development of the country, the rulers have neglected them in the last seven decades.

Talking to local media persons on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the conference hall in Landi Kotal press club, district Khyber last day, Senator Mushtaq Ahmed Khan said that the tribal rendered matchless sacrifice for the

sake of their motherland however they were still deprived of their basic rights.

Promises made at time of merging cannot be materialized till the moment that is a cheating of rulers and a deliberate effort to keep them underprivileged, he added. He went on that in the modern time, the tribal sought for having potable water that put a question mark on the efficiency of the former parliamentarians of the constituencies.

Flanked by district

Khyber leadership of Jamaat-e-Islami Senator Mushtaq Ahmad Khan assured the tribal that if the JI candidates elected in the upcoming general election, they would address the miseries of locals. He urged the local journalists to utilize their energies in the best interest of the people. On a query he maintained that it was binding on the Election Commission of Pakistan to ensure free and fair election as voting was the lonely solution to the problems being faced by the citizens.

598 polling stations to be established in Shahdadkot

F.P. Report

SHAHDADKOT : The polling stations have been completed by the district administration in connection with the general elections to be held on February 8 in the entire country, while 598 polling stations will be established in two National Assembly and four provincial assembly seats of Qamber Shahdadkot district.

Among the polling stations of the district, 142 polling stations have been declared highly sensitive, while 170 polling stations have been declared sensitive.

While 139 polling stations have been declared normal, 70 of the 295 polling stations of the second National Assembly seat NA-197 have been declared highly sensitive, while 78 polling stations have been declared sensitive and 178

polling stations have been declared normal.

District Returning Officer and Deputy Commissioner Qamber-Shahdadkot have sent a complete report about the polls to the Election Commission, Deputy Inspector General of Police Larkana Division and SSP Qamber-Shahdadkot through a letter, in which CCTV cameras have been installed at the most sensitive polling stations, including making special arrangements for security while the process of installing CCTV cameras at the polling stations has been started rapidly after the identification of the most sensitive and sensitive polling stations by the District Returning Officer. Personnel have been deployed to maintain the

polling stations.

Meanwhile, a program was organized under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Qamber-Shahdadkot Sachad Haider Qadri to distribute relief checks to the victims of the flood affected areas in the year 2022. In cooperation with the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), relief checks of Rs. And Reema Khatun Tehsil Sajawal Junejo, Zameer Hussain Taluka Warh, and Muhammad Khan Taluka Nasirabad are included. On this occasion, Assistant Commissioners and Collectors of all seven Talukas were also present, while at the end of the program, Deputy Commissioner Sachad Haider Qadri prayed for the deceased.

Rescue 1122 devised plan for elections

F.P. Report

MARDAN: on the instructions of Director General Rescue 1122 Dr. Khateer Ahmed, a meeting was held in District Office Rescue 1122 Mardan under the leadership of District Emergency Officer Imran Khan Yousafzai regarding the general polls to be held on February 8th.

All Station House Incharge, Emergency Officer, Control Room Incharge and other officials attended the meeting. The District Emergency Officer Mr Imran reviewed the preparations for the general election to be held on February 8th and formulated a special plan.

He stated that rescue 1122 in Mardan will deploy ambulances, fire vehicles, and operational vehicles at various locations, to deal any kind of untoward situation. He also said All rescue stations and control rooms will be on high alert, all personnel's leave of staff has been cancelled. Along with daily emergencies, timely assistance will be provided in case of any emergency situation.

Load shedding irks masses: In recent

times, the problem of gas load shedding and overbilling, including cruel load shedding of electricity has become a cause of public concern. Everyone has become deaf to listen to the problems of the people. The district government and the administration are playing the role of silent spectators, which is a cause for cancer.

He said that the residents of different areas including Mardan it has become normal to face illegal and cruel load shedding of electricity but now we are facing continuous load shedding of gas which is affecting the daily life of people badly. The effect of load shedding of gas is becoming very harmful. People are getting humiliated especially in extreme weather conditions when the temperature has gone down to zero degrees gas has become indispensable for heating water and cooking purposes and not only the common citizen is facing difficulties due to lack of constant gas supply, but business people, and children going to schools and colleges are also badly affected while consumers are reporting gas bills that are 300% higher than normal consumption levels.



HYDERABAD: Lawyers and PTI activists holding a protest against raids on houses of their candidates.

Blind murder case of lady traced; killer arrested

F.P. Report

TANK: City Police have traced the blind murder case of a lady and arrested the killer within 48 hours.

On the directions of DPO Ifthikhar Ali Shah, SHO City Police Station Rehmat Khan Baloch and Investigation Officer Fazal Mehmood Khan traced the blind murder case of a lady allegedly killed by her husband Ahmad Ali and was buried in a room at his house Pir Kach area.

The police have traced the killer with the help of latest technology and also recovered pistol used for murder. The DPO Ifthikhar Ali Shah and SP Investigation Haji Nasir Khan commended police team to solve the mystery blind murder case.

Stray cheetah shot dead in Khyber

F.P. Report

BARA: A cheetah who was strayed into a residential locality in Khyber District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and attacked a man, was shot dead by the local residents, reported on Thursday.

The wild beat attacked the man in Bara area of Khyber district injuring him seriously. The locals rushed to the site and shot the animal dead. While the officials of Forests and Wildlife Department did not turn up at the attack site despite being informed, the local residents skinned the dead cheetah even the police reached there.

The locals accused the Forests and Wildlife Department of illegally cutting trees in the jungle, due to which the wild animals are now heading towards populated areas. A number of wild animals including several cheetahs were killed in many such incidents before.

Woman killed in Landikotal

F.P. Report

LANDIKOTAL: A woman killed while another man sustained bullet injuries when two rival parties exchanged gun firing in each other in Khyber Matakkel village in Landikotal, sources said on Thursday.

The sources said two rival families first exchanged harsh words over the land dispute that led to gun firing. As results, a woman, wife of Ali Hazrat Afridi, who were not from the either rival party hit with a bullet and died on the spot. Nabi Afridi was also injured and taken him to hospital. As the incident happened police reached to the spot and arrested one person from each side and started investigation.

Ex MPA among four injured in road accident: Former Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) Shafiq Sher Afridi among four people was injured in a road accident here on Thursday.

According to details, the car of former MPA met with accident on Pak-Afghan highway when he was returning from an election campaign. The former MPA Shafiq Sher and his four allies sustained minor injuries in the accident.

PTI position in Dir strengthens

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The position of Pakistan Tahreek Insaf has further strengthened in Lower Dir as several candidates contesting for PK 14, PK 15 and NA 7 on Thursday announced to withdraw in favour of the PTI nominees in these constituencies. The candidate of Rabita Jamiat Ulama Islam (RJUI) Sherani group for NA 7 Maulana Gul Naseeb Khan, a former senator withdrew in favour of the PTI candidate Syed Mahboob Shah while the party candidate for PK 15 Bahadar Zeb also withdrew in favour of the PTI nominee former MPA Humayun Khan.

They made the announcement during a press conference at the Chakdara press club. Speaking on the occasion they said that both the PTI and RJUI were allies and they had submitted their nomination papers. Maulana Gul Naseeb, who is also the general secretary of his party, said the PTI chief Imran Khan was in jail and suffering hardships, so they could not leave him alone. He said the RJUI voters would fully support the PTI candidates in both the constituencies and would gift both the seats to Imran Khan.

Meanwhile another PTI disgruntled candidate Muhammad Inam Khan who was contesting for NA 7 as an independent also withdrew in favour of the PTI nominee Syed Mahboob Shah. In this connection former speaker national assembly Asad Qaisar along with party other leaders visited the residence of Inam here the other day and convinced him to withdraw in favour



of the PTI candidate. Speaking on the occasion the former speaker Asad Qaisar said the party was passing through a critical period and all disgruntled workers should withdraw for the sake of party founder Imran Khan. The former speaker also promised the party would offer a good position to Malik Inam Khan in future.

Yet in another development, the PTI former district president Ghulam Hussain also announced to withdraw in favour of the party candidate for PH 14 and former MPA Muhammad Azam Khan. He was contesting on PK 14 as an independent candidate and a large number of party workers were supporting him. He made the announcement during a press conference at the Timergara press club in the presence of Muhammad Azam Khan, PTI tehsil chairman Naseeb Rawan, village council chairman Kalimullah, Malik Ziaul Haq and others. Speaking on the occasion Ghulam Hussain who withdrew in favour of Azam Khan, said that a jirga of party senior leaders convinced him and he decided to withdraw from the run.

Meanwhile local police took the PTI candidate for NA 7 Syed Mahboob Shah and PK 16 Malik Shafiullah

into custody when both were coming to attend a workers' rally at Timergara. The two were released after an hour. The PTI workers led by their tehsil president Iqbal Ahmad Tajik, former tehsil councillor Kashif Kamal and Muhammad Inam Khan inaugurated the party's election office at Timergara, the Lower Dir district headquarter.

They condemned the arrest of the PTI candidates and demanded their immediate release. They said the PTI candidates and workers were being pressured for keeping them away from the Feb 8 general elections. The speakers said that despite all odds the PTI would sweep in all constituencies in Lower Dir.

The PTI is still facing rifts in NA 6, PK 17 and PK 18 wherein the party disgruntled activists on Thursday refused to withdraw from the race. The PTI diehard activist Ali Shah Mishwani is contesting as an independent for NA 6 where the party has awarded its ticket to former MNA Muhammad Bashir Khan. Similarly Malik Abdullah Shah, another PTI activist is confronting the party candidate former MPA Malik Liaquat Ali in PK 18. Both the dissident party workers are running their election campaigns in their respective constituencies.

Security arrangements for election 2024 directed

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: According to the details, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of Regional Police Officer Faisalabad Dr. Abid Khan at the meeting room of DPO Office Toba Tek Singh. In-charge branches and SHOs participated.

During the meeting, the RPO issued orders to the SDPOs and SHOs of the entire district to make fool-proof security arrangements on the occasion of Election 2024 and to be on alert throughout the district to perform their duties. Apart from this, he issued instructions to continuously monitor the movement of miscreants and subversive elements to avoid any untoward incident.

Regional Police Officer Faisalabad Dr. Abid Khan ordered the SHOs of the entire district that there should not be any kind of hindrance in the peaceful conduct of Election 2024. All voters, polling station staff, ballot papers and ballot boxes will be ensured security throughout the district.

Regional Police Officer Faisalabad Dr. Abid Khan said that zero-tolerance policy should be adopted against display of weapons, aerial firing, advertisement of hateful content. All the supervisory officers should make the candidates bound by the code of conduct, strict legal action will be taken against the police officer who shows partiality.

In order to deal with any unpleasant situation, additional police personnel including anti-rights force should be ready in the line, every SHO should be fully aware and alert regarding the sensitive polling stations. In order to speed up the exchange of information, mutual relations with all institutions should be kept strong, every small to big information should be immediately noted to the control room.

The implementation of the regulatory procedures of the Election Commission will be ensured in all cases, the supervisory officers should also take care of the basic needs of the police officers on duty.



LARKANA: A labourer busy in work at a local bricks kiln.

DC for timely completion of land record computerization

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Khalid Iqbal issued directives on Thursday aimed at streamlining administrative processes and enhancing services for the residents of the region. He expressed these views while chairing a meeting of the District Revenue Review Committee in Abbottabad.

Khalid Iqbal emphasized the timely completion of the computerization of land records, the inclusion of transfers in the sub-district registry, and the computerization of positions under sub-district inheritance transfers. He also highlighted

the importance of improving services in urban areas.

Additional Assistant Commissioner (AAC) of Revenue Arshad Mahmood and Deputy Director (DD) of Service Delivery Center Sajjad Khan gave a comprehensive briefing on revenue and computerization initiatives. DC directed the magistrates, tehsildars, and assistant tehsildars to issue instructions for facilitating residents visiting district administrative offices. Moreover, DC issued instructions for the enhancement of services and facilities at Patwarkhanas and Service Delivery Centers to better

cater to the needs of residents visiting these locations.

Drug peddlers held with narcotics

SIALKOT (INP): The district police on Thursday claimed to have arrested three drug peddlers with narcotics.

According to police, Kotli Loharan police, during a crackdown against drug-peddlers, arrested Mudassar Ali, Faizan Ali and Umer with 3.6-kg hashish. Police sent the accused behind the bars after registering separate cases.



Taiwan president-elect says he hopes for continued firm US support

TAIPEI (Reuters): Taiwan president-elect Lai Ching-te said on Thursday he hopes that the United States can continue to firmly support Taiwan, as he met the first group of US lawmakers to visit Taipei since he won an election earlier this month.

Lai, from Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the current vice president, will take office on May 20. China, which claims Taiwan as its own territory, believes he is a dangerous separatist and has rejected his offers of talks. Meeting with the leaders of the US House of Representatives Taiwan Caucus, Republican Representative Mario Diaz-Balart and Democratic Representative Ami Bera, Lai said democracy and freedom were core shared values with the US.

"Taiwan is situated in the first island chain and stands on the front-line of China's authoritarian expansionism. This makes Taiwan a crucial strategic location. Stability across the Taiwan Strait is extremely important to regional and global peace and prosperity," Lai said. Lai added he would continue to defend the cross-Taiwan Strait status quo of peace and stability. "I hope the United States can continue to firmly support Taiwan, deepen bilateral cooperation



and relations and work with other democratic partners to ensure peace and prosperity in the region," he said.

"I also hope that the two co-chairs and our friends in the US Congress can continue to support Taiwan in bolstering its self-defence capabilities," Diaz-Balart told Lai his main message was that US support for Taiwan was firm, real and "100% bipartisan". "Rest assured that you have the support of the United States Congress," he said. Taiwan's government rejects China's sovereignty

claims, saying only Taiwan's people can decide their future.

The United States is Taiwan's most important international backer and arms seller despite the lack of formal diplomatic ties. China has repeatedly warned the United States to stop its support for Taiwan and the issue is a constant irritant in Sino-US relations. Last week, Lai and President Tsai Ing-wen hosted two former senior US officials visiting as part of an unofficial delegation sent by US President Joe Biden.

Maldives gives port clearance to a Chinese ship

COLOMBO (AP): The Maldives government said that it had given clearance to a Chinese ship to dock in its port, a move that could further irk India with whom the tiny archipelago nation is involved in a diplomatic spat. The Maldives foreign ministry confirmed local media reports that research vessel Xiang Yang Hong 3 was headed to the Maldives. It didn't give a date of arrival.

A ministry statement said that "a diplomatic request was made by the government of China to the government of Maldives, for the necessary clearances to make a port call, for rotation of personnel and replenishment." It said the ship won't be conducting any research while docked in Male port. "The Maldives has always been a welcoming destination for vessels of friendly countries, and continues to host both civilian and military vessels making port calls for peaceful purposes," it said. The ship arrives amid a diplomatic dispute between the Maldives and

its giant neighbor India. There was no immediate comment from the Indian government.

The spat started when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted pictures on social media of himself walking and snoreling in Lakshadweep, an Indian archipelago that looks nearly identical to islands in the Maldives. The Indian government believes that the white sand beaches of Lakshadweep have untapped potential for tourism. However, some in the Maldives saw it as a move by Modi to lure tourists away from its famous beaches and island resorts. Three deputy ministers posted derogatory remarks on social media against Modi, which sparked calls in India for a boycott of the Maldives. The dispute deepened when Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu visited China, India's regional rival, and on his return, spelled out plans to rid his small nation from dependence on India for health

facilities, medicines and import of staples.

The largest number of tourists who came to the Maldives last year were from India, and Muizzu said that Chinese visitors had been leading the way before the COVID-19 pandemic and that steps would be taken to double their numbers. He also said in an indirect reference to India that his country's smaller size didn't give any other country the license to bully it, and added that China respects Maldives' territorial integrity firmly. India and China have been vying for influence on the Maldives as part of their competition to control the Indian Ocean. India, the closest neighbor to the Maldives, has considered the country to be in its sphere of influence. China, meanwhile, has enlisted Maldives as its partner in its Belt and Road initiative meant to build ports and highways to expand trade - and China's influence - across Asia, Africa and Europe. Pro-China Muizzu was elected to office in

November on a platform to evict Indian military personnel stationed in the Maldives. On his return from China, he proposed a meeting with Indian officials that the troops be withdrawn by mid-March.

At least 75 Indian military personnel are said to be stationed in the Maldives, and Muizzu had accused his predecessor of compromising national sovereignty by allowing Indian personnel on Maldivian islands. The known activities of the Indian military include operating aircraft and assisting in the rescue of people stranded or faced with calamities at sea. Sri Lanka, another island nation close to India, recently declared a year-long moratorium on research ships docking in its ports. While the official stance of the government has been that it's for the purpose of capacity building of local experts participating in joint research missions, the move is seen as a result of concerns raised by India over a planned visit of a Chinese ship.

North Korea appears to demolish 'reunification arch'

SEOUL (AP): North Korea appears to have torn down a huge arch in its capital that symbolized reconciliation with South Korea, a week after leader Kim Jong Un dismissed decades of hopes for peaceful reunification with the war-divided peninsula's south, according to satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press.

South Korea's military also said that North Korea fired several cruise missiles into waters off its western coast. Kim last week described the Pyongyang monument as an "eyesore" and called for its removal while declaring that the North was abandoning long-standing goals of a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of the North's constitution to define the South as its most hostile foreign adversary.

Satellite images from Planet Labs PBC appeared to show the destruction of Pyongyang's Monument to the Three Charters for National Reunification, also called the Arch of Reunification. An image clearly showed the arch missing along a roadway. Clouds and snow cover made it difficult to ascertain when North Korea tore down the monument, but it

appeared to be within the last few days. NKNews, a website focused on North Korea, first reported on the satellite images. The arch was a 30-meter (about 100-foot) tall structure that looked over a highway leading to the city of Kaesong near the border with South Korea.

The cruise missile launches were North Korea's second known launch event of the year, following a Jan. 14 test-firing of the country's first solid-fuel intermediate range ballistic missile, which reflected its efforts to advance its lineup of weapons targeting US military bases in Japan and Guam. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said that the US and South Korean militaries were analyzing the latest launches. It did not immediately confirm the exact number of missiles fired or their specific flight details. "Our military has increased surveillance and vigilance and is closely coordinating with the United States while monitoring for further signs and activity from North Korea," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have increased in recent months as Kim con-

tinues to accelerate his weapons development and issue provocative threats of nuclear conflict with the United States and its Asian allies. The United States, South Korea and Japan have been expanding their combined military exercises in response to the North's missiles tests. Kim characterizes these drills as rehearsals for an invasion. In the latest tit-for-tat, North Korea said last week that it conducted a test of a purported nuclear-capable underwater attack drone in response to a combined naval exercise by the United States, South Korea and Japan, as it blamed its rivals for tensions in the region.

Cruise missiles are among a broad range of weapons North Korea has been testing in recent years as it attempts to build a viable nuclear threat against the United States and its Asian allies. Since 2021, the North has conducted several flight tests of what it describes as long-range cruise missiles, which it claims can cover ranges of up to 2,000 kilometers (1,242 miles) and are nuclear-capable. While North Korean cruise missile activities aren't directly banned under UN sanc-

tions, experts say those weapons potentially pose a serious threat to South Korea and Japan, as they are designed to fly like small airplanes and travel along landscape that would make them harder to detect by radar. There are concerns that North Korea could dial up tensions in a US election year. Experts say the North would aim to increase its bargaining power as it plans for eventual negotiations with whoever wins the November presidential vote.

North Korea also has a long history of ramping up pressure on rival South Korea when it doesn't get what it wants from Washington. During the speech at Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament where Kim announced that his country would no longer pursue reconciliation with the South, he accused South Korea of acting as "top-class stooges" of the Americans and repeated a threat that he would use his nukes to annihilate the South if provoked. Analysts say North Korea could be aiming to diminish South Korea's voice in the regional nuclear standoff and eventually force direct dealings with Washington as it looks to cement its nuclear status.

Lula to intervene in fatal clash between farmers, Indigenous tribe

BRASILIA (Reuters): Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva vowed a federal response after a conflict between Indigenous people and farmers over land in southern Bahia led to the shooting death of a tribal leader.

The incident underlines years of tensions between Brazil's Indigenous peoples and agricultural settlers over land rights. Former far-right President Jair Bolsonaro supported farm-

ers' rights, but Lula has backed Indigenous claims as part of his broader pledge to preserve the environment. "The Pataxó people can be sure that federal government will help resolve this situation," Lula said in a radio interview.

About 200 land owners gathered in pickups at a farm outside the town of Potiragua to evict an Indigenous community and recover the land claimed by the Pataxó tribe. The attack

resulted in the fatal shooting of Maria Fatima de Andrade, a leader known as Nega Pataxó, while another leader was wounded by gunshots and taken to hospital, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples said. Bahia police arrested two farmers on charges of homicide and attempted homicide.

"This attack on the Caramuru Indigenous territory is unacceptable," said Sonia Guajajara, who was appointed last year by Lula

to head the newly-created ministry and be the first Indigenous person in Brazil to be a cabinet minister. Police said they arrested a Pataxó man for possession of a homemade firearm, while a farmer was wounded in the arm by an arrow. Clashes over farmland claimed by Brazilian Indigenous groups as their ancestral lands have become violent as Brazil's farm belt has expanded towards the Amazon.

Russia seeks emergency UNSC session on plane crash

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Russia has called for an emergency UN Security Council session to discuss the crash of a Russian plane that Moscow says was carrying captured Ukrainian soldiers to a prisoner exchange.

Russia has accused Ukraine of deliberately shooting down the military transport plane carrying 65 captured Ukrainian soldiers to the prisoner exchange in what it called a barbaric act of terrorism that had killed a total of 74 people. Lavrov told a press conference at the United Nations that Russia had called for the Security Council meeting to be held at 3 p.m. ET (2000 GMT).

He called the downing of the aircraft a "criminal" act by Ukraine and said Russia sought the session so the Ukrainians could explain how the plane went down. "The Ukrainian prisoners of war were transported to the Belgorod region in order to conduct yet another swap that was agreed between Moscow and Kyiv," Lavrov said. "Instead of this, the Ukrainian side launched an air defence missile from the Kharkov region. It targeted the airplane and was a fatal strike."

Ukrainian military intelligence said Kyiv was not asked to ensure air space security around the Belgorod area in southern Russia, as had been the case during previous prisoner of war swaps with Moscow. It said Russia's accusations that Kyiv shot down the transport plane could be "a planned action to destabilize the situation in Ukraine and weaken international support for our state."

China rebuts Vietnam's claims

BEIJING (Reuters): The Chinese foreign ministry said China's claims to the Parcel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea were backed by "history" after Vietnam over the weekend repeated it had sufficient evidence to claim sovereignty over the islands.

The Parcel and Spratly Islands, known as the Hoang Sa and Trong Sa islands in Vietnam, are in the South China Sea, a busy global maritime waterway almost all of which is claimed by China. Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Brunei are among other claimants. Vietnam has "full legal basis and ample historical evidence" to assert its sovereignty over the two island chains, its foreign ministry said on Saturday, in response to a query from the media on China's "invasion" of the Parcel Islands in 1974.

"Viet Nam's sovereignty over the Hoang Sa Islands has been established since at least the 17th century in accordance with international law, and exercised in a peaceful, continuous and public manner by successive Vietnamese states," it said. But the Chinese foreign ministry said China's claims are "fully supported by history and jurisprudence." "China was the first to discover, name, develop and manage these islands and archipelagos, and continue to exercise sovereign jurisdiction over them," said Wang Wenbin, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, at a regular news conference.

"China always opposes relevant countries' illegal claims on China's territory and will continue to firmly safeguard its sovereignty," Vietnam's re-assertion of its claims coincides with months of vigorous claims by the Philippines in other parts of the South China Sea after dramatic maritime encounters between Chinese and Philippine vessels near disputed territory. In December, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Vietnam and sealed an agreement to move towards the building of a community with a "shared future" between the two countries.

Thousands strike against Argentina's President

BUENOS AIRES: In the biggest show of resistance to date against far-right President Javier Milei, Argentinian workers have taken to the streets for a general strike, bringing swaths of downtown Buenos Aires to a standstill. It was an unprecedented mobilisation. Never before in modern Argentinian history has a mass strike been called less than seven weeks into a new presidency.

But leaders from Argentina's largest labour union say the nationwide protests reflect the urgency they feel as Milei pursues radical economic and political reforms he likens to "shock therapy". Thousands of protesters swarmed the square in front of Argentina's Congress, denouncing Milei's sweeping plans to overhaul the government, privatise public industries and slash spending. Some banged pots and carried signs accusing Milei of being a "traitor". Other banners featured the portrait of working-class icon Evita Peron. Elizabeth Gutierrez made her way to the gathering after working an overnight shift as a nurse. She explained she was motivated by steep increases in food prices since Milei took office.

"Before we used to have asados [barbecues] every Sunday. Not now. Even rice is very expensive," Gutierrez said. "Rents have shot up. You can't live off your salary any more: It's not enough." "The people are here to defend their nation," she added. Another protester, 63-year-old retiree Alicia Pereyra, voiced opposition to Milei's efforts to deregulate the economy, including plans to "modernise" labour law and ditch rent regulation. "He wants us to be slaves,"

Pereyra said. Draped in an Argentinian flag, Pereyra worried about her ability to make ends meet in the face of Milei's reforms. Her retirement income amounts to only 85,000 pesos per month - about \$70. She said basic necessities had become so costly under Milei that she is unsure whether she will be able to access the medicine she needs for a chronic illness.

Even small luxuries are now out of reach. Pereyra described how she and her husband opted for orange juice instead of wine to make their New Year's toast for 2024, breaking a long-running family tradition. "It's a horrible feeling of not knowing what's going to happen tomorrow," she said. "[Milei] is turning our heads upside down." Argentina had already been suffering from record triple-digit inflation when Milei took office on December 10. Elected on the promise that he would fix the sputtering economy, Milei quickly moved to implement austerity measures that he said were needed to get Argentina's finances in order. In his inauguration address, he warned the country that Argentina's situation would get worse before it got better. And he was right. One of his earliest measures was to devalue the Argentinian peso by 54 percent, which accelerated the already sky-high inflation rates.

According to the National Institute for Statistics and Censuses (INDEC), Argentina ended 2023 with annual inflation of 211.4 percent, the steepest rate in Latin America, surpassing even Venezuela. The year also clocked the fastest inflation hikes since 1990, resulting in higher prices for consumers. Santiago Manoukian, chief

economist at the consulting firm Ecolatina, told Al Jazeera that December's price increases will continue hitting consumers' pocketbooks for the next several months. Salaries will have a hard time keeping up.

"We believe that real wages fell in December more than in any other month since at least 2002," he said. "Purchasing power is going to continue to go down." That trend is expected to slow consumer spending, which Manoukian said will likely result in a recession and an uptick in unemployment and poverty. Four in 10 Argentines were already in poverty when Milei took office, according to national data. Milei coupled his currency devaluation measure with immediate cuts to government spending, including consumer subsidies. One presidential "mega-decree" in December reformed or overturned dozens of laws and paved the way for the privatisation of state-run companies. Another decree axed 5,000 government jobs.

But further changes are on the way. Nationwide strike comes as Congress prepares to consider a slimmed-down version of Milei's "omnibus law" the following day. Originally containing 664 articles, the bill sought to reimagine the country's elections, restructure the lower chamber of Congress and enact tough new restrictions on protests, including through penalties of up to six years in prison. The streamlined version is still massive, with over 500 articles. If passed, it would hand broad legislative powers to Milei's executive branch for an "emergency" period of one year. — Al Jazeera

Maine's court dismisses appeal of judge's decision

PORTLAND, Maine (AP): Maine's top court declined to weigh in on whether former President Donald Trump can stay on the state's ballot, keeping intact a judge's decision that the US Supreme Court must first rule on a similar case in Colorado.

Democrat Shenna Bellows concluded that Trump didn't meet ballot qualifications under the insurrection clause in the US Constitution but a judge put that decision on hold pending the Supreme Court's decision on the similar case in Colorado. In a unanimous decision, the Maine Supreme Judicial Court dismissed Bellows' appeal of the order requiring her to await the US Supreme Court decision before withdrawing, modifying or upholding her decision to keep Trump off the primary ballot.

"The Secretary of State suggests that there is irreparable harm because a

delay in certainty about whether Trump's name should appear on the primary ballot will result in voter confusion. This uncertainty is, however, precisely what guides our decision not to undertake immediate appellate review in this particular case," the court said. Bellows' decision in December that Trump was ineligible made her the first election official to ban the Republican front-runner from the ballot under the 14th Amendment. In Colorado, the state supreme court reached the same conclusion. The time-lines are tight as Maine's March 5 primary approaches. The US Supreme Court is hearing arguments on the Colorado case on Feb. 8, and Maine has already begun mailing overseas ballots.

The nation's highest court has never ruled on Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, which prohibits those who "engaged

in insurrection" from holding office. Some legal scholars say the post-Civil War clause applies to Trump for his role in trying to overturn the 2020 presidential election and encouraging his backers to storm the US Capitol after he lost to Democrat Joe Biden. Trump contends Bellows should have recused herself, and that she was biased against him. Trump said her actions disenfranchised voters in Maine, and were part of a broader effort to keep him off the ballot. Bellows, who was elected by the Democratic-controlled Legislature, said she was bound by state law to make a determination after several residents challenged Trump's right to be on the primary ballot. She put her decision on Trump's ballot eligibility on hold pending judicial proceedings, and vowed that she would abide by a court's ultimate ruling.

Ethiopia's quarrel with Somalia

NAIROBI (Reuters): Ethiopia's deal to lease a port in Somalia's breakaway region of Somaliland has infuriated the government in Mogadishu and prompted concern it will further destabilise the Horn of Africa region.

Under a memorandum of understanding signed on Jan. 1, landlocked Ethiopia would lease 20 km (12 miles) around Somaliland's port of Berbera for 50 years, in exchange for stakes in Ethiopian state-run companies and possible recognition as an independent nation. Somalia has responded by calling the deal an act of aggression and says it will block it. Ethiopia says it is merely striking a commercial arrangement to address a need for access to the sea.

Ethiopia, Africa's second most-populous country with 120 million people, depends for more than 90% of its trade on ports in neighbouring Djibouti, costing it more than \$1.5 billion a year in fees. In a speech in October, as Abiy publicly made the case for Ethiopia to gain sea

access, he cited an 19th-century Ethiopian general, who had called the Red Sea the country's "natural boundary."

Ethiopia lost sea access in the early 1990s when its then-province Eritrea seceded following a three-decade war. Abiy's drive to reclaim it is seen as enjoying wide political support. The prime minister also wants a sea base for Ethiopia's navy, which has been rebuilt in recent years but is currently limited to conducting training exercises on an inland lake. The Mogadishu government considers Somaliland an integral part of Somalia even though it enjoys effective autonomy.

While Somaliland declared its independence in 1991, it has not been recognised by any country. If Ethiopia does so, it could set a precedent that other countries would follow. Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud signed a law that claimed to nullify the deal, and his government rejected an African Union proposal for dialogue with Ethiopia,

saying it would not negotiate over its sovereignty. Given chronic instability in Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan as well as the Horn of Africa's strategic location across the Red Sea from the Gulf, some analysts fear the dispute could draw in outside actors if it escalates.

Middle Eastern powers, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey and Qatar, have been vying for influence in the region by making economic investments, opening military bases and selling weapons. So far, no country has publicly backed the port deal. The Arab League, of which Somalia is a member, reaffirmed its support for Somalia's sovereignty over Somaliland, as did the African Union, European Union and United States. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt, which has a frosty relationship with Ethiopia related to a dispute about a dam Ethiopia has built on a tributary of the Nile River, said he would not allow anyone to threaten Somalia.

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World Education Day and Pakistan's case

THE global community marked the sixth International Day for Education on Wednesday, the 24th of January 2024. The theme of this year's Global Education Day was learning for lasting peace. The theme highlights the importance of education in fostering peace and greater understanding that strikes a deep chord with contemporary issues faced by the majority of the world's nations including poverty, social injustice, inequality, discrimination, and intolerance which not only undermines the global peace but seriously spoil the domestic peace and environment in any country. Historically, literacy empowers and liberates people, building a better understanding of each other perspective, promoting tolerance, and enhancing peaceful coexistence among the comity of nations around the globe. Education improves lives by expanding capabilities which in turn reduces poverty, increases market participation, and has a positive impact on healthcare, social uplift, and national development, and reinforces democracy and the rule of the law. At the same time, education and literacy empower marginalized communities and promote equality and inclusiveness in society.

In today's modern world, when nations across the globe are galloping at a fast pace to reach their destiny, Pakistan faces an alarming situation in the education sector, where in the literacy rate stands at 58% and nearly 28 million children are currently out of school, which forms almost 40 per cent under 18 children in the country. Pakistan's education sector faces serious issues such as a lack of funds, policy lethargy, shortage of education facilities/ schools, social disparities, class-based education systems, low literacy rates, pedagogical conservatism, commercialization of the education sector, unskilled teaching staff, multiple mediums and diverse curriculum being taught in various schools systems and religious seminaries in the country.

Education is the most important element in the overall national life of any nation. A modern and competitive education system is of utmost importance to provide state-of-the-art education to school and university students so they can compete with the current day challenges effectively. The private education industry has been groomed over the past years while the numbers of public schools and students in government education institutions shrunk sharply because the public schools use old-age curricula and teaching practices emphasizing memorization of the lesson instead of concept-based study, formative assessment, and practical implementation of knowledge gained by the students.

UNESCO has set the literacy target at 4.6 in SDG4 and Education 2030 Framework for Action to advance literacy rate in member countries. Although, equitable and quality education has been identified as an important SDG4 goal for the country under Pakistan Vision 2030. Whilst, successive governments failed to prioritize and subsequently fund the education sector in the past years leading to educational degradation and deplorable literacy rate, least among the nations in the region. Statistically, Pakistan spent below 2% of its GDP in the education sector both at the national and provincial levels while none of the education policies, including those adopted in 1970, 1998, 2009, and 2017 could achieve their objectives so far.

Historically, the UN and the global community sensitize the world nations about their weaknesses and provide funds, advice, and technical assistance to member countries to coup up those challenges, however, the states themselves have to sort out their problems per their needs, preferences, and interests of the public. It is the responsibility of Pakistani leaders to uphold their commitment, prioritize public needs, and invest in human capital if they intend to improve the quality of life in the country. It is the call of the day, as early as work would be better for the country and its people.

Taliban's quest for good neighborliness

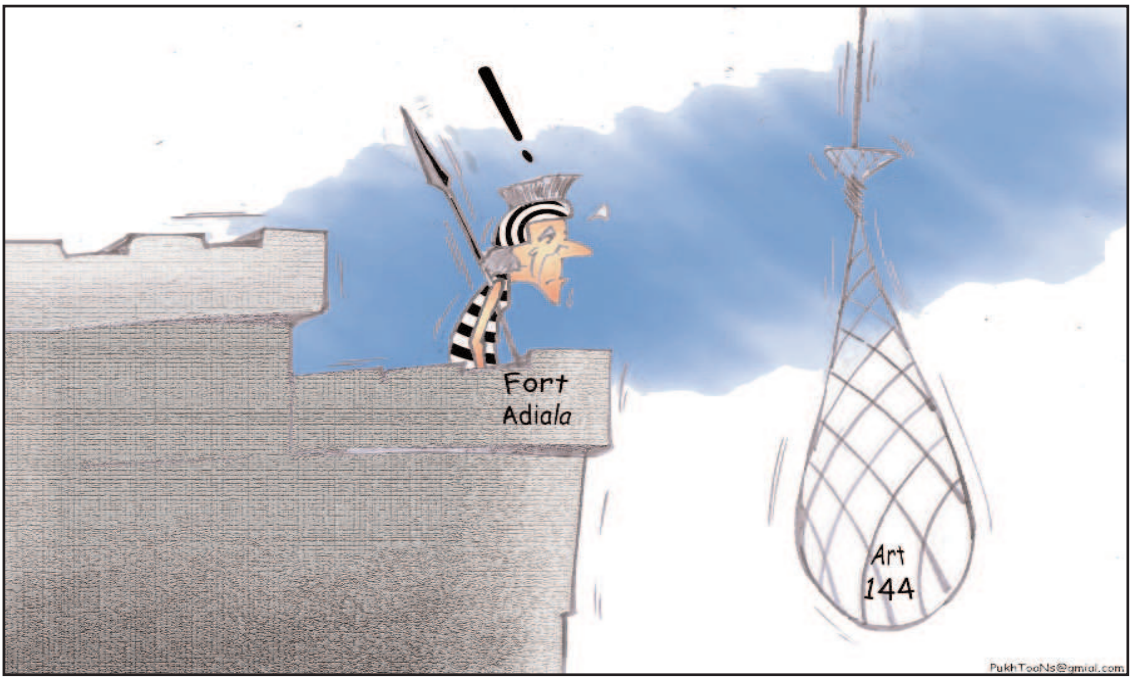
THE Acting Foreign Minister of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Mawlati Amir Khan Muttaqi, convened a meeting with the Ambassadors and Heads of diplomatic missions from all neighbouring countries including Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, India, Turkey, and Indonesia. Mr. Muttaqi told the foreign envoys 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. 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 special representatives by foreign countries in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan embarks on a new phase in its history after the Taliban movement regained its control of the Country over two years ago in August 2021. There were wide-ranging expectations and apprehensions in the global community, the Afghan public, and the neighbouring countries about the conduct of the Taliban leaders who previously ruled Afghanistan leading to the collapse of their government in late 2001. There was a mix of hopes and fears and the majority of the political analysts were optimistic about the newly formed Afghan government because of the Taliban's previous experience and assurances regarding the preservation of gains made by the country in respect of social development, civil liberties, human and women rights under the US occupation over the past two decades. However, the interim government did not uphold its pledges under the Doha agreement gradually reversed all fundamental freedoms and did not sever its ties with prescribed militant organizations. These circumstances attracted worldwide criticism and prompted concerns in neighboring states and the global community leading to Afghanistan's isolation at the global levels.

The Taliban interim government has taken an important diplomatic endeavour to improve its relations with neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, which would have far-reaching effects on regional peace and stability if backed by effective measures that could satisfy the concerns of regional states particularly concerning terrorism, that has rung bells in the entire region. Otherwise, such interactions would have no use except to attract headlines in the media.

Important Notice

The Frontier Post will not be responsible for the comments in the articles and letters. The Frontier Post requests the writers of articles and letters to please make sure that they write their email addresses and mention the names of the cities, towns, districts or tehsil of their residences at the bottom of their articles and letters.



Human rights an inspiring and simple goal

Zhang Wanhong

SINCE 2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the inclusion of "The state shall respect and protect human rights" in the Constitution of China, this is an appropriate time to review the development of human rights in the country.

Human rights are rooted in human dignity, and the cause of human rights is rooted in people's lives. In his New Year's message, President Xi Jinping said: "Our goal is both inspiring and simple. Ultimately, it is about delivering a better life for the people. Our children should be well taken care of and receive a good education. Our young people should have the opportunities to pursue their careers and succeed. And our elderly people should have adequate access to medical services and elderly care. These issues matter to every family, and they are also a top priority of the government. We must work together to deliver on these issues." We protect and promote human rights because they are an "inspiring yet simple goal". Human rights are protected and promoted in China to ensure the Chinese people lead a life of dignity, while governance is improved to achieve that goal. Over the past few years China has made tremendous achievements in human rights thanks to the intensifying modernization drive.

China eradicated absolute poverty and built a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the end of 2020. It improved "whole-process people's democracy", and promoted the rule of law in order to better protect and promote human rights. China follows a people-first development philosophy, which was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when it made the safety of the people its top priority.

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2022 vowed to "follow a Chinese path of human rights development, actively participate in global human rights governance, and promote all-around advancement of human rights". In line with that, China's development is the development of a huge population, including its material, cultural and ethical development, as well as the harmonious development of human beings and nature. As China's modernization advances, the cause of human rights also advances.

In the course of its long-term promotion of human rights, China has developed a unique human rights philosophy, which aligns with the contemporary Chinese concept of human rights. The contemporary concept combines the Marxist concept of human rights with China's concrete reality. The "free and comprehensive development of human beings" as per Marxism is the conceptual basis of China's human rights endeavors.

The contemporary concept of human rights also combines the Marxist concept of human rights with the traditional Chinese culture. Mencius said: "The one who wins people for the sake of the world is called benevolence", with benevolence (Ren) being the love for others, for society, for the country, and for the world, which reflects the broadmindedness of China's human rights cause.

China's development relies on the people, and it shares the fruits of development with the people while protecting and promoting human rights. On the global front, China carries forward the common values of humankind, such as peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom, while upholding multilateralism and helping build a community with a shared future.

Over the past four years, China has enacted 51 new laws and amended 113 old ones to promote human rights through legislation. It has signed a number of international human rights instruments, engaged in international human rights cooperation, and implemented the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to fulfill its international human rights obligations. It has also been protecting and promoting human rights in its political and judicial systems, implemented the National Human Rights Action Plan (2021-25), and invited civil society to participate in human rights governance, thus building a strong human rights protection system.

"The happiness of the people is the greatest human right." In terms of protecting human rights, China does not limit itself to just repeating abstract concepts, but makes efforts to understand the aspirations of the people.

First, in terms of economic, social and cultural rights, China has achieved fruitful results in food production, poverty alleviation and economic develop-

ment, which means it is protecting people's rights to subsistence, development, equal employment opportunities, fair wages and healthy working conditions, and preventing the violation of labor laws and workers' rights.

China has built the world's largest social security system, meaning it protects individuals' right to social security, and ensures "houses are for living in, not speculation" while improving the housing system - both home purchase and rental housing, meaning China protects individuals' right to housing. Also, China's education system ranks first in the world in terms of scale, with the government subsidizing student loans and thus effectively protecting people's right to education.

The government continues to upgrade the cultural service system and attaches great importance to the protection of minority cultures, and improve the healthcare system by, among other things, strengthening the grassroots healthcare institutions and widening the coverage of basic medical insurance. China also has been promoting the concept of "clear waters and green mountains are as valuable as mountains of gold and silver", and has made remarkable achievements on the environmental protection front, while reducing air and water pollution and soil contamination, thus protecting individuals' right to a healthy environment.

Second, in the field of civil and political rights, China has taken measures to combat and prevent terrorism, punish those involved in extremist activities in accordance with the law, while making those who engage in minor criminal acts aware that their actions are detrimental to the country's development and it is the duty of every individual to work for the betterment of society. The country has also taken measures to combat drug and human trafficking. As such, the government is safeguarding people's safety and security.

Also, the government is developing whole-process people's democracy, making sure the people are in charge of their own affairs, and launching a hotline which people can call to avail of government services, and seek redressal for their grievances. The government guarantees citizens' rights to freedom of religion in accordance with the law. The government also protects freedom of

speech.

And third, with regard to the rights of specific groups, China's adherence to the basic policy of equality between men and women, which penalizes domestic violence and encourages women to participate in economic and social fields as equals. China has also taken measures to eradicate crimes against minors and guarantee children get good education and medical care. Measures have also been taken to ensure the elderly people share the fruits of economic development and lead a happy life in their twilight years. To that end, it has improved the elder-care system. China believes that people with disabilities, too, can lead a fulfilling life, and thus provided them with living subsidies and nursing care subsidies, and built public facilities that are easily accessible for people with disabilities.

China guarantees, in accordance with the law, equal rights to all ethnic groups, and the increase in the populations of ethnic minority groups and the preservation of ethnic cultures mean the rights of ethnic minorities are protected. To quote Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of former US president Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world".

It is true that beyond the broader dimensions of human rights, people lead a simple life. Looking back, China has not only promoted the development of human rights but also introduced human rights in every aspect of social life.

Looking ahead, we should keep in mind that human rights are both an inspiring and a simple goal, and we should not only pursue the ultimate realization of universal human rights, but also adopt a down-to-earth attitude when it comes to improving the daily life of individuals.

The time is right for Israel to negotiate

Dr. Dania Koleilat Khatib

ON Monday, 24 Israeli soldiers were killed in Gaza in one day, including 21 in a single ambush. Obviously, Hamas is not weakened and the Israeli bombing campaign that has killed more than 25,000 people in the Strip, two-thirds of them women and children, has not affected Hamas' capacity to inflict casualties on its enemy's ranks. It is very clear that the Israeli army has failed to destroy Hamas. So, is it now time for Israel to realize that its policy is not working? Is it not time to salvage what it can and negotiate?

The more time that passes and the more war crimes Israel commits - from killing women and children to bombarding schools and hospitals and targeting journalists - the more it loses. So far, 76 Palestinian journalists have been killed since Oct. 7. Of course, Israel does not want anyone to uncover the atrocities it is committing in Gaza. This is a sign of weakness, not a sign of strength. In fact, as time passes, Israel is showing more and more that it is weak.

The mighty Israeli army, which at one point in time was touted as the strongest in the Middle East, cannot even handle an armed militia that has supposedly been under siege for 17 years. As every day passes and the civilian death toll grows, the more worldwide opinion turns against Israel. The EU's Josep Borrell this week bluntly criticized Israel, saying that its plan is not working and that it is "seeding hate" for generations to come.

Israel has still not laid out its plan for Gaza, except the Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich plan to push the Gazans to leave their land. But Palestinians have learned from the Nakba. If they left, they would never be able to go back. If they left, their existence as Palestinian people would be finished. There are few who are as tenacious as the Palestinian people. Bombs will not pacify them. Israel will have to admit that reducing the population of Gaza to 100,000 to 200,000, as Smotrich has suggested, will not happen.

Israel does not seem to have any plan. It is simply bombing and bombing. It is behaving like a gambler who keeps losing but keeps on doubling down, hoping they will win it all back at some point in time. Israel keeps on losing. It is losing its soldiers. It is losing social cohesion, as the hostages' families are angry that the government is prioritizing its own survival over getting their loved ones back home. It is losing its international standing. All Israelis will suffer from their country's negative image. This will affect them when they travel, when they do business and when they send their children abroad.

However, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is doubling down on his position. He stated on Saturday that he wants to keep Israeli control of all territories from the river to the sea and that there will be no Palestinian state. He has gone publicly and directly against US President Joe Biden.

Sen. Chris Van Hollen, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, clearly said in an interview that Netanyahu

had failed to abide by a US request to reduce civilian casualties and that the humanitarian catastrophe was going from "terrible to worse." He directly criticized the Israeli PM, saying that he was putting his own skin above rescuing the hostages. He also said it was time for a ceasefire and that Biden needed to go "big and bold" and put forward the vision of a two-state solution.

When everything seems to be going against Israel, is it not time to listen? Is it not time to be realistic? Israel is self-destructing, while the Palestinian side is showing resilience. Still Israel is holding on to its maximalist and unrealistic objectives and refusing a reasonable solution.

The head of the CIA has, along with Qatar and Egypt, put together a very reasonable plan. Its points include that Israel should withdraw from the Strip, a prisoner exchange should take place, a multinational force should take control of Gaza and a government of technocrats should be responsible for the Strip's civilian administration. If a force that is viewed as legitimate takes control of Gaza and if basic services are provided, then this will help dry out the social incubator that is fueling Hamas. If people are given hope, then they will not hold on to Hamas. This would also allow for the return of hostages.

Unfortunately, Netanyahu is still delusional. He thinks he has room to maneuver. But he does not. Now is the time to negotiate. He knows very well that the end of the war means his exit. The war might delay his exit, but the longer he waits the more difficult this exit will be. He knows that, sooner or later, he will have to leave, but if he clinches a deal that returns the hostages, at least he would have a token that would weigh in his favor. So far, at least 25 hostages have died in captivity, probably due to Israeli bombing. The Israeli army has only been able to free one hostage. It is very difficult to go door to door looking for hostages. And Hamas will not surrender. Borrell said that the only way forward is a two-state solution, whether Israel likes it or not. He wondered:

"What are the other solutions they have in mind? Make all the Palestinians leave? Kill all of them?" What does Borrell mean by this harsh criticism? Is it a veiled threat of sanctions if Israel fails to comply? Sanctions would kill Israel, as the country is very integrated with the global economy, especially Europe.

The International Court of Justice is set to deliver its interim verdict on South Africa's genocide case against Israel in the coming days. This will create immense pressure on Israel. Still, this government is more concerned with showing it is strong than being realistic and putting forward an executable solution. Now is the time to negotiate. British Foreign Minister Lord Cameron in this week back in the Middle East, hoping to convince the Israelis of the need for a sustained pause in the fighting, after which a return to hostilities would be difficult, and the need to accept a two-state solution - but will Netanyahu listen?

Arab News

Trump very likely to be the Republican nominee for president

Kerry Boyd Anderson

TECHNICALLY, the process of voting to choose the candidate who will represent the Republican Party in the presidential election has only just started. However, after Donald Trump's huge lead in last week's caucus in Iowa and his win in Tuesday's New Hampshire primary, many Americans are wondering if the race is effectively over already.

This year's Republican contest for selecting a presidential candidate is highly unusual, because a former president who is not the current incumbent is campaigning for the job. Typically, when a political party has an incumbent in the White House who is eligible to run for a second term, there is little competition within that party. This year, President Joe Biden is a Democratic incumbent running for reelection; while he technically faces a couple opponents, he is extremely likely to be the Democratic Party's nominee for president.

Similarly, in 2020, when Trump was the Republican incumbent running for reelection, his nomination was a foregone conclusion.

Now, Trump is campaigning to be the Republican Party's presidential nominee again. Since he only served one term in office, he is eligible to run again, but it is very unusual for a former president who lost the previous election to seek the office again. Add in Trump's unique qualities as a politician and major shifts within the Republican Party and its electorate and the race for the Republican nominee is unusual. However, that does not mean that it is unpredictable.

In 2023, multiple candidates declared their candidacy for the Republican nomination, but the race is now down to two serious candidates: Trump and Nikki Haley, the former South Carolina governor and ambassador to the UN. In the Iowa caucus - the first official voting for the nominee -

Trump won by a historic margin, with 51 percent of votes, which led Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis to end his campaign. DeSantis came in second in Iowa, with 21 percent of votes. It was a major blow to his candidacy. The Iowa electorate has the type of qualities that DeSantis thought would buoy him - politically and culturally conservative and deeply religious. His campaign poured funds into the state and DeSantis spent huge amounts of time there, all in the hope of finishing first or at least a very close second. His failure to achieve either outcome did not bode well for his campaign. DeSantis' attempts to market himself as "Trump lite" failed; many Trump supporters like DeSantis but would not choose him over Trump. While dropping out of the race, DeSantis endorsed Trump.

Haley's performance in Iowa was also disappointing but less so. She finished in third place, with 19 percent, not far behind DeSantis. Haley hoped to do much better in the New Hampshire primary. The state's more moderate and independent voter base is well suited to her image as a more traditional, moderate Republican. New Hampshire is quickly followed by the South Carolina primary and Haley expects to perform well in her home state.

In New Hampshire, Haley did well among "undeclared" - or independent - voters but Trump easily won among Republicans, leading to his victory in the state. Despite her loss, Haley pledged to continue on to the South Carolina primary, saying, "we are just getting started."

The future of Haley's campaign now depends heavily on her performance in South Carolina. She is trying to walk a very fine line between appealing to Republicans who prefer a candidate other than Trump, while not alien-

ating the many Republicans who like him. This may be an impossible task, but Haley hopes that a one-on-one race featuring her versus Trump will give her a viable shot at the nomination.

Fundamentally, most Republicans like Trump and he is very likely to win the nomination. The FiveThirtyEight polling average finds that 77.5 percent of Republicans have a favorable view of Trump and he is far ahead in polling of Republican voters. If Haley fails to win over large numbers of moderate Republicans, then it is very hard to see how any Republican could defeat Trump. Even in South Carolina, Haley's home turf, Trump is polling far ahead.

Haley might be hoping that, if she is in the No. 2 spot, then Trump's campaign will stumble at some point, allowing her to rise up to the nomination. However, it is extremely difficult to imagine what could derail Trump's popularity with Republicans. Perhaps multiple criminal

charges? He already faces those, which appear to have boosted his popularity among Republicans. Highly controversial or offensive statements? That has never hurt him before. Accusations of undermining democracy and fomenting insurrection? Apparently not a problem. If none of these things have hurt Trump within the Republican Party, then what could still happen that would force large numbers of Republican voters to turn to another candidate?

Most likely, by Super Tuesday in March, when multiple states will hold primaries or caucuses, Trump will be the clear winner. Polls suggest that a majority of Americans are unhappy about a prospective Biden-Trump rematch, but that is the most likely scenario when voting for president begins later this year. Haley is now the last opportunity for Republicans to choose someone else to take on Biden, but it appears that most Republicans still prefer Trump.

We must accept truth: Western academics are Russian intelligence targets

Matthew Light

THE case of Dr. Vyachelsav Morozov, the professor of political science at Tartu University who was arrested by Estonian police and is now being prosecuted on charges of engaging in espionage for Russia, has brought to the fore concerns about Russian spies targeting academics and related professionals in Western countries. Like Morozov, I am an academic who has visited many countries in the post-Soviet region over more than twenty years. His arrest has stirred up distressing thoughts for me and other colleagues. It has also solidified my impression that members of our profession are at significant risk from the intelligence services of Russia and other hostile authoritarian regimes.

However, the concerns raised by this incident go far beyond this specific case. I know Dr. Morozov only very minimally, by correspondence, and will not comment on his possible guilt or innocence. He should and will have his day in court. Estonia is a credible rule-of-law state, and I trust that the case will be handled fairly.

Morozov was arrested against the backdrop of extreme pressure on Estonia from Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), which perceives the small EU and NATO member state as a nearby enemy and seeks its destabilization. There have been spectacular cases of Russian infiltration of Estonian institutions. At the same time, Estonia has also scored notable successes in unmasking Russian spies. Unlike most Western countries, which often prefer to handle such espionage cases discreetly, Estonia also makes a point of publicizing them to increase public awareness of Russia's malign intentions. But sadly, I do not believe this kind of case is in any way exceptional or specific to Estonia. Rather, after Morozov's arrest, I realized that despite being involved in post-Soviet research for some 20 years as a student and then professor, no university or government office has ever given me guidance about how to detect or respond to hostile intelligence interest in me, whether it be from Russia or any other state.

Yet, over my career, I have had

several disturbing experiences in the post-Soviet region, not only in Russia, when I had reason to believe I was under surveillance. I received suspicious phone calls, was photographed by strangers, and asked probing questions that seemed designed to elicit my attitude toward the Russian government. My friends and colleagues have been questioned by the FSB about me and my work, and I have faced some overt accusations by Russian officials and local press outlets that I was a spy. Many other Western researchers who visit the region to collect material for academic books and articles can attest both to such experiences and to their lack of preparation for them. We rarely discuss what happens because doing so is upsetting and frightening.

This points to two related Western blind spots. First, while the Russian state fails to provide its citizens with functioning social services or a high standard of living, it has highly effective intelligence services that take a broad view of who and what are useful. They are not only focused on stealing advanced technology and military secrets, but also burrowing into different professional networks to form connections that may be useful in some less spectacular ways. For example, they can access reliable information about specific occupational networks and the major figures in them. Second, western academics are neither as politically irrelevant nor as safe as we like to think. The view that graduate students and professors are buffered from politics and secure in their ivory towers is deeply ingrained in many people. In some societies in the Global North, it contains some truth. My dissertation reader, Professor Ivan Szelenyi, convincingly argued in his book "The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power" that after World War II university professors in wealthy industrialized democracies became a unique social category. They were paid a comfortable salary and allowed to conduct scientific inquiry without political constraints, while also being expected to refrain from overt political activism.

But Russia does not see things that way. During my field research as a US doctoral student in Russia, I was surprised when Russian interlocutors assumed I must be tied into official structures in the United States. Their perception of me as politically exposed, if not employed, jarred with my belief that I was harmless and neither represented nor worked for my government. In a sense, we both had a point. No, I wasn't working for the CIA. But it is true that Western universities are connected to powerful political institutions in ways that we do not always consider. My Russian contacts were completely correct to view their own country's universities as overtly politically influenced and controlled, as has now become even more apparent with nearly all university rectors in the Russian Federation signing a statement of support for the invasion of Ukraine.

Indeed, Western academics, particularly social scientists and historians who study sensitive world regions, but also others such as scientists in fields with defense applications, mix with government officials in a variety of relatively uncontrolled contexts. Contexts in which those officials perceive us as useful sources of information and even policy ideas, but also as politically innocuous, not to say irrelevant. Given the role of academics as information brokers between civil society and the state, it is highly naive to expect Russia to leave us alone simply because we perceive ourselves as outside, if not above, the grubby world of politics.

In fact, we are people who can learn official things in unofficial ways, or bring our knowledge to official attention. We can influence public and elite opinion. Those who study Russia and other post-Soviet countries are in contact with emigre communities the Kremlin wishes to surveil. All Western academics need to acknowledge the interest we present to Russian and other hostile intelligence services. While I am less knowledgeable about other professions, I believe the same point broadly applies to people like international journalists, who

have a similar role in brokering information and shaping opinions.

All of us are subject to the same techniques that allow Russian spies to recruit other Western citizens: appeals to greed or ideological predispositions or - in some cases - blackmail or threats. Those with family members still in Russia are at particular risk. This raises the twin questions of who in our own countries is watching out for Western academics, and what we can do to protect ourselves. There is reason to think Estonia's police and counter-intelligence services are more vigilant and effective than counterparts in many other Western countries in this respect, or at least more concerned about Russian interest in their country's institutions. I would like to think that they are aware of the strong connections between intelligence services and academic institutions, which have served as recruiting grounds for both Western spy services and - as in the notorious case of the Cambridge spy ring - their Soviet adversaries.

But while it is difficult to form definitive conclusions about the world of intelligence from the outside, I suspect most Western intelligence services are not very focused on potential Russian spies in academia. Possibly this is because academics are far down their list of concerns, and not seen as important or dangerous. So, what can members of our profession do to protect ourselves? While keeping mindful that our independence from political leaders and freedom to speak and write openly are what legitimate us as scholars, we need to become harder targets against Russia and other hostile actors.

However, exactly what that approach might entail still needs to be worked out. McCarthyite witch hunts, intrusive surveillance, and university entanglement with police, defense, or counterintelligence bodies are clearly the wrong answers. But sharing information among colleagues, and developing best practices within universities and professional associations to ensure that doctoral students and junior scholars are given the appropriate training would be a start.

The Moscow Times

Pacific islands have key role in US-China power plays

IN the Asian theater, the islands of the Pacific Ocean serve a specific function in terms of security awareness. The US and China continue to compete for influence and to project force on these islands and island chains, which are surrounded by vast expanses of water.

The world's oceans, as we know, can become hotly contested spaces when politics enters the mix. And islands can play an important role in terms of security or, conversely, malign behavior. The concept of "island chain strategy" is nothing new. It grew out of the lessons learned from the Second World War and the Korean War in the early 1950s. US security officials designed a five-chain concept for the Pacific Ocean islands, using geography as a tool. The island chains run north-to-south, with the first three mostly related to Taiwan and the Philippines, but also including Hawaii. Chains four and five focus more on the island chains that are contested today, especially those that lie deeper in the Indo-Pacific area.

China's interests in the Pacific Ocean have expanded greatly, drawing a response from the US and its allies, including Australia and Japan. In an attempt to counter China, the US is upping its presence on islands in the mid-Pacific for the first time in almost 80 years.

Certainly, islands can function as important hubs no matter where they are in the world, but in the Pacific they are particularly significant because of the distances involved and their power projection capability. US power in the Pacific is concentrated around a few large bases, including Andersen Air Force Base on Guam and Kadena Air Base on the Japanese island of Okinawa. But if too

Dr. Theodore Karasik

much American air power is concentrated there, missile strikes on these bases could potentially cripple the ability of the US to hit back at an adversary. Therefore, Washington is playing a shell game on islands in the Pacific Ocean in an attempt to match moves by China.

The US views China in this Pacific arena as a "pacing threat" that is growing over time, slowly spreading and creeping onto various islands. China seeks to supplant the US in the area by changing the status quo of the region, and the wider international system, to better align with its interests. Beijing seeks to challenge Washington and its allies and partners in the Pacific by leveraging its growing capabilities to coerce its neighbors. Beijing's strategists study how best to influence outcomes in the region on a case-by-case basis. In 2019, for example, it succeeded in getting the island nation of Kiribati to switch its diplomatic recognition of Taiwan to China. It also established a Huawei data center in Papua New Guinea as a way to corner the telecoms and data market there.

China is also involved in projects with the police in Fiji and has set up research centers in several places, including the Solomon Islands. In Samoa, China opened a Confucius Institute language school, which Washington views as a front for spreading Chinese influence. From China's viewpoint, the region it terms Oceania reflects the classic Chinese doctrine of "three warfares": psychological warfare, the media or public opinion, and lawfare, which is the use of legal systems and institutions to damage or delegitimize opponents.

In the Solomon Islands, for example, the Chinese

government used its influence across several issues in the media as a means to gain clout. High unemployment in the country has helped exacerbate the tensions that have allowed Beijing to exercise more influence there. If the Solomon Islands is destabilized, spillover effects on other Pacific Ocean islands are highly probable, which would challenge the interests of both the islands and the US. In an attempt to counter China, the US plans to focus on Pacific island airfields. The idea is for Washington to broaden its options for establishing military bases in the event of any hostilities arising from China's "three warfares" on any Pacific islands.

For example, the US is once again using Tinian in the mid-Pacific as a base for its air and maritime activities. Tinian is part of the Northern Mariana Islands, a US territory that is about 6,000 km west of Hawaii. Only about 3,000 people live on the 101 sq. km island, but it has multiple airports serving various types of aircraft. Strategically, Tinian and the nearby islands of Saipan and Guam have a rich history of US air operations. During the Second World War, all three islands served as bases for fleets of B-29 Superfortress bombers after they were captured from the Japanese. Islands such as Tinian offer the US and its allies significant outposts that they can use to disperse their forces throughout the region via an island-based hub-and-spoke system of military bases. These islands are strategically important resources that can help secure and expand national interests in a competitive strategic environment. Competition and confrontation between the Pacific powers over such islands is therefore now perennial.

This is the difference Jon Stewart could make in the 2024 election

Dean Obeidallah

IT only took eight years, but apparently Jon Stewart has finally decided to answer the plea from my May 2016 CNN article titled, "We need Jon Stewart back now!" At the time, my point was that we desperately needed Stewart back in "The Daily Show" host chair because he was the comedic antidote to then-candidate Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. And after Trump won that election, many - including myself - believed that if only Stewart had not abdicated his late-night show in August 2015, Trump might well have been defeated. That is why the news that Stewart is returning to "The Daily Show" in February as an executive producer and a host - even if just one day a week in that latter role - is more than the "Moment of Zen" he treated us to on his show for 16 years. It's truly a moment of celebration.

On a serious note, I don't actually believe my 2016 article had anything to do with Stewart returning. And no one - not even the award-winning host himself - can save us from Trump or any other societal problem facing our nation today. I am confident, however, that Stewart's weekly hosting will bring us much-needed laughs as he

points out the absurdity of the words and actions of people in power - including Trump, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene or even President Joe Biden. Stewart - while clearly leaning left on many political issues - had no qualms about directing his comedic barbs at Democrats while hosting "The Daily Show." And, of course, Stewart also became an insightful critic of the corporate media - much to the chagrin of some cable news outlets. (I'm especially looking at you, Fox News, but who could forget his famous comments on CNN's Crossfire in 2004, battling with then co-host Tucker Carlson?)

But ... and you knew a but was coming ... Stewart's history of effectively ridiculing and taunting Trump is what so many of us will be tuning in for. And if history is any guide, Stewart will get under Trump's pathetically thin skin, surely causing him to lash out on social media.

That's how it went before. Just one example came shortly before Trump announced his 2016 run, when Stewart discussed the other GOP presidential candidates. When he got to Trump, Stewart joked, "They're all very colorful

characters, but for me there can only be one F**kface von Clownstick." Stewart then did an impression of Trump, mercilessly mocking him for saying he had a secret, "foolproof" plan to defeat ISIS. How did Trump respond? With a series of angry tweets calling Stewart "a wiseguy with no talent," "the most overrated joke on television" who delivered "dumb clown humor" and more. For a comedian, having a person like Trump respond angrily on social media to your jokes is better than a standing ovation.

Now, however, there's an added concern that Stewart didn't have to deal with back in 2015 when he was last hosting "The Daily Show." If Trump were to win in 2024, he may go beyond simply slamming Stewart on social media and employ the apparatus of government to silence him. As a reminder, in 2019 as president, Trump threatened "Saturday Night Live" for parodying him by publicly demanding the Federal Communications Commission investigate the iconic comedy show. Trump even bemoaned that there was no form of "retribution" against the show for ridiculing him.

Given Trump has made "retribution" a central theme of his 2024 campaign, even vowing to be a dictator if he wins - but only for "one day" - Stewart has potentially more to lose. But as we've seen with his activism, Stewart has not backed down before to a fight with people in power.

For example, in 2019 he confronted members of Congress to their faces, slamming them for not helping 9/11 first responders. And in 2022, he again took members of Congress to task for not passing legislation to help veterans who contracted illnesses after being exposed to burn pits during their active service. In both cases, Stewart's work helped pass the legislation at issue. As I wrote in 2016 when pleading with Stewart to return to the airwaves, "In what will likely be a truly ugly and stress inducing general election contest," Stewart would offer "us a much needed comedic cathartic release." Those words are even more true today given that Trump - or as Stewart called him, "F**kface von Clownstick" - is the likely 2024 GOP presidential nominee. Given what is coming between now and November, we have all earned Stewart back, and at least a few Moments of Zen!

CNN

More Chinese works worthy of French versions

Benoit Vermander

THE year 2024, which marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France, has been designated the "Franco-Chinese Year of Cultural Tourism". During the months to come, many events will be held both in China and in France, with some of them already taking place.

For instance, the Harbin Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival harbors sculptures of Notre-Dame de Paris and of the Temple of Heaven. Also, Charles Gounod's opera, Roméo et Juliette, will be performed in Beijing, a Château de Versailles exhibition will be held at the Palace Museum (Forbidden City), and Les Misérables and Les Fourberies de Scapin are also on the program. Several major art exhibits, such as the one of Annette Messager at Shanghai's Power Station of Art, too are on the list.

Both sides have been making efforts to organize gala programs. Most importantly, and going beyond holding one-time events, China will continue to promote the translation and publication of the works of Chinese academics and writers in the French language, an effort that it has sustained for a number of years now. These translated works have introduced the French-speaking public to such major works as Eastern and Western Cultures and their Philosophies, by Liang Shuming, A Sociological Study of the Chinese Family System by Lin

Yaohua and From the Soil, an epoch-making study by celebrated anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (a biography of whom has also been translated and published).

Interestingly, reputable French academic publishing houses such as Presses de l'Inalco, L'Harmattan and Honoré Champion have participated in this endeavor of cross-cultural communication. China is to be commended for continuously improving the quality and number of these translations, making considerable effort to introduce modern and contemporary Chinese works to a larger international public. This state-led effort slightly corrects the large unbalance in the number of acquisitions: Chinese publishing companies translate many more books from the French language than their French counterparts do from the Chinese.

For sure, translated works of French social scientists or even philosophers may not be as numerous as was the case in the past (the French influence in these fields is not as dominant as was the case a few decades ago), but some sectors have shown a remarkable resilience. Among them, poetry probably comes first: the works of René Char, Yves Bonnefoy, Jean-Pierre Siméon, Yvon Le Men and Serge Pey have met with remarkable success in China. This is largely due to the untiring efforts of some remarkable Chinese translators, such as Shu Cai, a leading actor in the

exchange. Regular manifestations, notably the one called The Spring of the Poets (Le Printemps des Poètes), also contribute to making Sino-French poetic exchanges a field of lively interactions and cross-cultural fertilization.

These achievements are rooted in a reciprocal cultural fascination that goes back to the time of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and Louis XIV, whose reigns witnessed the first organized intellectual and scientific exchanges between the two countries (five "King's Mathematicians" sent by Louis XIV reached Beijing in 1688). But these achievements should not lead to complacency. New challenges need to be tackled. The French people's appreciation of Chinese cultural vitality has reached a plateau, with a certain weariness appearing when it comes to traditional arts and crafts as there is little knowledge among today's French people of the most contemporary artistic and literary expressions. New forums need to be developed, and efforts made for encouraging translations and adaptations of Chinese contemporary literary works in the French language and exhibition of contemporary artists' creation in France.

As a matter of fact, the French Embassy in Beijing organizes the "Fu Lei Translation and Publication Prize" every year to reward Chinese translations from

French on the Chinese mainland, an initiative started in 2009. But there is no similar award for encouraging the French translators and other bridge-builders who strive to popularize Chinese productions on foreign soils. Second, even if national cultural entities play a crucial role, cultural exchanges need to be fostered by companies and individuals. In fact, accrued efforts are already perceptible. For instance, the Fosun conglomerate supports the large Lantern Festival held in Paris, and the Shanghai-based fashion brand ICICLE organizes eight exhibitions of contemporary art between the two countries.

On their part, French companies, with a long presence in China such as Michelin, Cartier and L'Oréal, are involved in a number of events. But there is a need for others to join the endeavor, and encourage smaller, more local entities to foster grassroots initiatives. And third, direct and sustained exchanges between the artists, writers and thinkers of the two countries are essential to building long-term friendship. Exchanges among creators influence the way the citizens of the two countries appreciate each other's culture. As the history of French-Chinese exchanges show, artistic and literary creativity is triggered and nurtured by continuous interactions among partners who have learned from one another and are committed to continuing to do so.

The China Daily

AI tools must not be exploited at humans' expense

Mohamed Chebaro

AN online artificial intelligence-powered chat system for customer service was last week manipulated into composing a poem about how bad that company's customer service is. I am sure many of us have experienced being stuck trying to solve a problem with a banking app or track a delivery that has gone wrong, only to be driven to despair while trying to communicate the problem to an automated virtual customer assistant.

This British customer's ability to trick the AI function in a parcel delivery company's online chat system led the company to disabot the service. Its chatbot wrote a poem saying that it is "useless at offering help," adding that the company in question is a "waste of time" and a "customer's worst nightmare." The poem ended with the chatbot rejoicing at the company shutting the service down and claiming that, finally, customers 'could get the help they needed, from a real person who knew what they were doing."

This light-hearted exchange between chatbot and consumer could only temporarily mask the serious problems people face every day when trying to get a service, some support or simply some help to solve an urgent problem. After pressing the help button, customers are usually only able to ask a limited number of questions related to their inquiry. If they persevere, they might be given a telephone number, but then their call is answered by an interactive voice response system that greets them with endless prompts and automated menus. The whole experience leaves the user feeling powerless and perhaps even close to a nervous breakdown.

And this, we are told, is likely to get worse. Apparently, our world is to witness even greater reliance on digital tools that are being built quickly and tested lightly, without the human experience aspect in mind. Neither do they have the accountability framework to protect their human users from harm or abuse by a glitch in the coding or a bias by the person designing the

codes in the first place.

Our world is sleepwalking into yet another crisis that is likely to hit us at some point further down the line, as everyone is racing to embrace the mantra of "saving costs at any cost" and replacing employees with AI-powered chatbots. Based on previous experience, many believe that, if you thought Big Tech was bad, big AI firms are likely to be even worse.

Research published last year by the Pew Research Center reported on more than 300 experts trying to forecast the potential harms and threats societies face as a result of the constant, rapid evolution of our digital life. Some 37 percent said they were more concerned than excited about what today's trends say about where digital developments are headed. Meanwhile, 42 percent said they were equally concerned and excited. Only 18 percent were more excited than concerned.

The research also asked these experts to detail some impacts and adversities. Their findings make for a chilling read, since the development of digital systems continues to be driven by profit incentives in economic terms and power incentives in political terms. This will result in tools being used to control the public, such as through surveillance and data harvesting, rather than empowering them to have a smooth experience, act freely, share ideas and protest injuries or injustices.

For these experts, surveillance advances, sophisticated bots embedded in civic spaces, the spread of deepfakes, disinformation and facial recognition are all likely to impact human rights. Above all, increasingly sophisticated AI applications are likely to lead to job losses, causing a rise in poverty and the diminishment of human dignity.

What the experts fear most is the loss of the best knowledge in a sea of misinformation and disinformation, as the institutions previously entrusted with informing the public will be further decimated and facts will likely be lost

amid rampant bare-faced lies and targeted manipulation. They even argue that "reality itself will be under siege," as emerging digital tools will be able to convincingly create deceptive alternate realities.

Some of the experts also warned about the toll these digital systems are taking on people's health and well-being, as high levels of anxiety and depression are recorded as technology further embeds itself into every aspect of our lives. This increases alienation, loneliness and the potential for a belief in altered realities that could trigger the displacement of jobs and civil strife and endanger social cohesiveness.

Experts in the Pew study concerned with governance and human connections fear that norms, standards and regulations will not evolve quickly enough to shield the social and political interactions of citizens. The pace of change could even shake individuals' compass and their trust in each other and in the institutions and modes of governance.

Already, we are seeing signs of extreme polarization, cognitive dissonance and fragmentation eroding the fabric of society as we knew it. Surely there will be a few people with the wit and knowhow to give a chatbot or some other digital tool a taste of its own medicine by ridiculing the service company and its tools when they fall below the expected level.

Unfortunately, the conclusions of the Pew Research Center point to difficult and tumultuous times ahead. Unless, that is, states and regulators sharpen their skill sets to contest Big Tech and big AI companies and make sure they are accountable to the consumers they claim these AI-powered tools were initially built to serve.

The digital realm, despite its commercial raison d'être, should remain a tool that is used to serve human beings and facilitate the execution of their many chores. It should not leave them in limbo, in despair and riddled with anxiety as a result of a lack of accountability and transparency in business models that have been turbocharged by Big Tech and big AI, regulation-free.



PSX witnesses bearish trend, loses 524 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Thursday, losing 524.43 points, a negative change of 0.81 percent, closing at 64,298.01 points against 64,822.43 points the previous trading day.

A total of 460,691,033 shares valuing Rs 25.248 billion were traded during the day as compared to

479,982,148 shares valuing Rs. 22.501 billion the last day. Some 353 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 102 of them recorded gains and 233 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 18 remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were Oil and Gas Development with 49,679,574 shares at

Rs.135.31 per share, K-Electric Limited with 48,974,614 shares at Rs.5.26 per share and Hascol Petrol with 38,807,500 shares at Rs.8.67 per share.

Pakistan Tobacco Company Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.57.00 per share price, closing at Rs.1,085.00, whereas the runner-up was Lucky

Core Industries Limited with a Rs.55.43 rise in its per share price to Rs.794.52.

Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.199.98 per share closing at Rs.8,800.01, followed by Philip Morris (Pakistan) Limited with Rs.53.88 decline to close at Rs.676.12.

Food group imports decrease 19.48% in 06 months of FY 2023-24

ISLAMABAD (APP): Food group imports into the country during the first half of the current financial year decreased by 19.48 per cent as compared to the imports of the corresponding period of last year.

During the period from July to December 2023, different food commodities costing \$3.957 billion were imported as compared to the imports of \$4.914 billion in the same period of last year, according to the data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

During the period under review, the imports of the commodities that went down included milk cream, milk for infants at 25.93 per cent was

recorded at \$60.298 million as compared the imports of \$81.404 million, wheat unmilled by 34.84 per cent and reached \$39.126 million as compared the imports of \$609.434 million of the same period of last year.

Meanwhile, the imports of soybeans were reduced by 41.20 per cent which came down from \$155.20 million to \$91.147 million in the last three quarters of the current financial year as compared to the imports of the same period of last year.

The palm oil imports also reduced during the period under review as it went down from \$2.082 billion in the first six months of the last financial

year to \$1.388 billion in the same period of the current financial year.

Besides, the imports of sugar into the country decreased by 49.43 per cent and it was recorded at \$1.693 million as against the imports of \$3.347 million in the same period of last year. On the other hand, Food group exports from the country during the first half of the current financial year grew by 49.84 per cent as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of last year. During the period from July-December, 2023 food commodities valued at \$3.481 billion were exported as against the exports of \$2.323 billion of the same period of the last year.



RAWALPINDI: A shopkeeper arranging and displaying "Mehndi" related items to attract the customers at his shop in a local market.

Governor SBP inaugurates a Japanese Pottery Exhibition

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Mr. Jameel Ahmad inaugurated a Japanese pottery exhibition 'Yakishime - Earth Metamorphosis' at the State Bank Museum. He was accompanied by the Deputy Governor SBP Mr. Saleem Ullah and the senior management of the Bank.

This two-week exhibition by the Japan Foundation is among the activities by the Consulate General of Japan in Karachi to promote cultural exchange between Japan and Pakistan. This year, the exhibition is jointly organized with State Bank Museum and Pakistan Japan Cultural Association (PJCA) Sindh.

Speaking on the occasion the Governor SBP highlighted that Japanese culture in general and Japanese ceramic culture in particular have always been a topic of interest to the public in Pakistan. He elaborated that cultural exchanges and people-to-people contacts are instrumental in fostering understanding and goodwill between nations. 'The Cultural Agreement signed in 1957 between Pakistan and Japan has been the bedrock for bilateral relations and lays the groundwork for broadening and deepening the cultural relations between the two countries', he said.

Appreciating the historic collaboration between the financial institutions of the two countries, Mr. Ahmad shared that the third-ever overseas branch of the Bank of Tokyo was opened in Karachi in



1953. He was of the view that collaboration between both countries can facilitate and strengthen trade and investment besides helping the exchange of information, best practices, and regulatory frameworks in financial systems.

Mr. HATTORI Masaru, Consul General of Japan was delighted to see the interest in Japanese culture by the Pakistani audience. He reiterated that the Consulate will strive to bring and curate Japanese cultural exchange programs to further strengthen the relations between the two countries. The exhibition, which runs until February 7th 2024 introduces the ceramics technique yakishime which fires unglazed wares at high temperatures. By presenting more than 80 pieces of yakishime from the earliest examples to con-

temporary work, this exhibition provides an excellent opportunity to people of Pakistan to experience a sensibility and aesthetic unique to Japan. Along with the pottery exhibition, Japan related lectures and workshops featuring Calligraphy, Indigo Dye, Pottery, Origami will be organized at the State Bank Museum. The annual Japanese Calendar exhibition is also going to take place at the same venue from January 26th to February 7th.

Diplomats, Bankers, Art lovers, and city notables attended the ceremony. The exhibition is open to public, with free entrance from January 25th to February 7th 2024. Further information about the exhibition and other activities is available at the Consulate website and Facebook page.

2nd Federal & 4th Engineering CAPSTONE EXPO 2024

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Engineering Council - PEC conducted 2nd Federal CAPSTONE EXPO (FYDP- Final Year Engineering Design Projects Exhibition) and 4th Regional CAPSTONE (A project of PEC Pakistan Development committee - PPDC) on 23rd JAN'2024 at "PAK - CHINA FRIENDSHIP CENTER", ISLAMABAD. In this Expo 27 Universities participated and 252 shortlisted projects were showcased out of which 72 projects were PEC sponsored.

In CAPSTONE Engineering Universities showcased their Engineering students' projects that pertain to market/industry, in which industries were present along with Islamabad Chamber of commerce to participate and select projects as per their business need. CAPSTONE is the PEC initiative 1st time in Pakistan by PEC Pakistan Development Committee.



This opportunity granted by PEC free of cost to help our universities gain more market exposure as well as be able to network with world-class manufacturers of different varieties of engineering products. Market compatible projects being sponsored by PEC. More than 2000-foot fall at the inauguration ceremony whereas visitors over 4000.

Engr Muhammad Najeeb Haroon Chairman Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) inaugurated the ceremony as chief guest along with the guests from Islamabad Chamber of commerce (President ICCI, Mr Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawri, SVP ICCI, Faad Waheed,

Ambassador from Indonesia, Jiflawan G.P and Ambassador from Kyrgyz republic, Ulanbek Totiaev).

Engr Muhammad Najeeb Haroon highlighted on the Engineering community critical role especially in such situation in which Pakistan is currently trapped. Its continuous and consistent struggle that can make a difference and bring the country back on track to development journey. Old mistakes and practices to end up and have to come up and work upon to make the country self-sufficient that is the only bail out for Pakistan and that's possible only when Engineers play their role with the state and PEC support. In house engineering and local-

ization of industry is only possible when engineers put their role in with the support of PEC. PEC focusing on same objective targets started new projects to create opportunities for engineers. Deliverables of such initiatives will result in new start-ups, engineering entrepreneurs, industry localization, inhouse solutions and Engineering services. He appreciated the efforts of different committees on different projects and PPDC for this milestone of CAPSTONE EXPO which has set the direction of new competition of industry related projects and same will be portrayed at international level and Silicon Valley INSHALLAH.

41st edition of e-Kacheri received various complaints

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The 41st edition of e-Kacheri received various complaints from passengers, including lack of luggage trolleys and faulty elevator at Islamabad International Airport, a lost handbag at Lahore's Allama Iqbal International Airport, and a passenger reporting stolen money (\$5000) at Karachi's Jinnah International Airport.

However, the main focus of the session was on flight cancellations, delays, diversions, and refund delays, particularly related to Serene Air. The Additional DG CAA instructed the relevant directorate to take action and enforce regulations and requested affected passengers to provide more details via email. He emphasized passenger rights and the importance of raising awareness in this regard.

The Director Air Transport (AT) mentioned ongoing investigations and urged passengers to lodge complaints on the Prime Minister Delivery Unit (PMDU) website. He added that information on passen-

ger rights is displayed at airports for filing complaints. He also informed that ticket refunds for credit card purchases typically take one month to process.

The Additional DGCAA instructed the implementation of a one-counter-all-checks policy to address complaints about repeated checks by security staff and other agencies at Multan International Airport, and also stressed

that security officials have a duty to act and behave professionally and courteously toward passengers. The Deputy Director General Airport Services provided an update on luggage trolleys, with the majority already sent to airports and the rest to be delivered soon.

Additional DGCAA directed measures to ensure the availability of trolleys and investigate

incidents. He instructed to inspect CCTV footage to address complaints about lost items and stolen money. Other complaints, such as delayed payments to a contractor and the delayed arrival of zamzam water bottles, were also addressed. The Additional DGCAA expressed gratitude for feedback and reiterated the commitment to improving airport facilities for passengers.



JS Investments' inaugurates wealth centre in DHA phase 8

F.P. Report

KARACHI: JS Investments is proud to announce the opening of the JS Investments Wealth Centre in DHA Phase 8, Karachi. This momentous occasion marks a significant leap forward in customer-centric wealth management, embracing the digital age while providing clients with versatile options tailored to their preferences.

The Wealth Centre introduces a multifaceted approach, offering clients

the choice between self-service digital interactions and personalized guidance from dedicated Wealth Managers. The objective is to empower individuals on their investment journeys, customized to their unique needs and comfort levels.

Commenting on this landmark achievement, Ms. Ifrat Mankani, CEO of JS Investments, stated, "I believe that wealth building and wealth creation are integral components of a diversified financial portfolio. Our Wealth Centre is designed to

guide clients through these distinctions, aligning with their risk tolerance, financial objectives, and appetite for innovation. In this era of digitalization, we empower tech-savvy individuals to take control while offering a helping hand to those who prefer our guidance. Together, we embrace the future of finance."

The key Features of the JS Investments Wealth Centre include an interactive self-service screen for exploring the product suite and wealth centre services,

on-the-go customer support through QR codes, and the Spark Room, offering self-service investment tools such as goal-based and risk-based investing. In addition to offering seamless digital account opening, our expert professionals are available to guide clients every step of the way.

JS Investments cordially invites the public and media to visit the new Wealth Centre in DHA Phase 8 and experience firsthand the future of wealth management.

Shanghai, Hong Kong rally on China stimulus hopes, Asian markets mixed

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Shanghai and Hong Kong stocks built on their recent rally Thursday as traders awaited fresh pledges of stimulus from Chinese officials a day after they announced a measure to boost bank lending, though other Asia markets fluctuated.

Another record close for the S&P 500 on Wall Street provided a positive lead for investors, while a string of data including on US economic growth and jobs could give some idea about the Federal Reserve's plans for interest rates.

Hong Kong and Shanghai rose for a third straight day on hopes Beijing will put in place more help for the stuttering economy after Wednesday's decision to cut the portion of cash banks must keep in reserve, a move aimed at freeing them up to lend more.

The 50 basis point cut to the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) was the first since September and twice as

big as usual, which analysts said showed officials were getting increasingly worried about the economic outlook.

Authorities also said they would unveil more support policies soon. The cut added to an upbeat mood in the two cities that came on the back of reports that Alibaba co-founders Jack Ma and Joseph Tsai had bought about \$200 million worth of shares in the firm in a signal of their confidence in the ecommerce titan.

Equities jumped more than one percent in Shanghai, while Hong Kong was also well up, having piled on around six percent in the previous two sessions. "China is still worth watching given the valuations have come down so far," JPMorgan Asset Management's Kerry Craig told Bloomberg Television.

"There could be a near-term rally if we do see further policy announcements coming through."

However, there were warnings that

the government needed to do a lot more to restore confidence in the world's number two economy, which has been hammered by a debt crisis in the vast property sector and weak overseas demand for its goods.

"While the RRR cut triggered an impressive rally, markets will struggle to go higher as investors have their focus back to the economic fundamentals and uncertainties ahead of crucial political meetings in the coming two months," said Redmond Wong at Saxo. And National Australia Bank's Rodrigo Catril added that it was "hard to see how a modest decline in borrowing rates will trigger a boost in credit demand. "Beijing still needs to address structural issues, particularly within the property sector, while more support is needed for the consumer to boost economic momentum."

In other markets, Sydney, Wellington, Taipei and Jakarta advanced.

Gold rates dip by Rs.1,400 to Rs.213,800 per tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs.1,400 and was sold at Rs.213,800 on Thursday in the local market compared to its rates of Rs.215,200 on last trading day. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat also decreased by Rs.1,200 to Rs.183,300 from Rs. 184,500 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat declined to Rs168,024 from 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 prices of gold in the international market decreased by \$12 and was traded at \$2,035 against its sale at \$2,047, the Association reported.

Court Notice

IN the Court of Abdul Haleem Civil Judge V/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Dagar. Appeal No. 1/12/2/. Institution 13/2/2023. Date of hearing. 30/1/2024. Said Abrar Ali VS Mohamad Uzer .Notice to no 4.Akhtar Husain. 5.Tahir Husain. 7. Javed Iqbal sons of Norenan resident of Kalabat tehseel Gadezai district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 30/1/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

IN the Court of Samina Sehar Civil Judge XIII Bannu. Suit No.01/12(2)Institution No.04.09.2023 Next date of hearing 06-02-2024 case title:Samandar Ali Shah VS Safdar Ali Shah Notice TO.1.Safdar Ali Shah S/o Samandar Ali Shah R/O Bazar Ahmad khan Tehsil of District Bannu. Presently U.A.E. Musafa NO.33.Whereas in the above case titled the service of above defendant (s) is not possible through ordinary means, therefore, you defendant (s) / are informed through this publication that on 06-02-2024 at 8.00 AM. You has / have to appear before this court either personally or through attorney or through counsel to pursue the suit noted above, otherwise, Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you.

Court Notice

IN the Court of Jauhar Ali Safi Civil Judge I /Alaqa Qazi Buner at Dagar.Suit No 236/1. Institution 15/3/2023. Date of hearing. 23/2/2024. Mohmad Rehman etc VS Zarshad etc. Notice to no 8. Mohmad Bashar s/o Mohmad Rashad. 9.Mer Bahadur s/o Sher Bahadur resident of Torwarsak.Kass 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 dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 23/2/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.



In brief

Two Zimbabwe cricketers banned

HARARE (AFP): Zimbabwean international cricketers Wessly Madhevere and Brandon Mavuta have been banned from all cricket for four months for recreational drug use. Both players have also been fined 50 per cent of their salaries for three months, according to a statement by Zimbabwe Cricket on Thursday. A third player, Kevin Kasuza, has been suspended for the same offence but has yet to appear before a disciplinary committee. All-rounder Madhevere, 23, and leg-spinner Mavuta, 26, admitted at a disciplinary hearing that they had breached Zimbabwe Cricket's employment code of conduct. The pair were suspended after testing positive for drug use following an in-house test in December. They missed Zimbabwe's recent tour of Sri Lanka. Zimbabwe Cricket's statement said mitigating factors had been taken into account, "with both players showing remorse and having already started working on withdrawing from the habit". Madhevere made his international debut at the age of 20 and was regarded as one of Zimbabwe's most talented young players but has yet to fully impose himself at international level. Mavuta has taken 12 wickets in four Tests but has had modest returns in white-ball internationals. Kasuza, 30, tested positive for drug use during an in-house test last week and will appear before a disciplinary committee soon. Kasuza has played in seven Test matches, the most recent in May 2021, but has not appeared in white-ball internationals.

Judge proposes Rubiales trial

MADRID (Agencies): A Spanish judge has proposed that former football federation president Luis Rubiales should stand trial over the women's World Cup kiss involving captain Jenni Hermoso. Mr Rubiales grabbed Ms Hermoso's head and kissed her during the presentation after Spain's victory in Australia. She said the kiss was "not consensual", a statement denied by Mr Rubiales. A judge has found there is enough evidence for the matter to proceed to trial. During a hearing at the Audiencia Nacional, or High Court, in Madrid, the judge described the kiss as "not consensual and... a unilateral and surprising initiative". Prosecutors previously charged Mr Rubiales with sexual assault and coercion. Penalties for such a kiss range from a fine to four years in prison. The incident has involved several Spanish football executives including Ms Hermoso's former coach, a former marketing manager and the sports director of the men's team. Jorge Vilda, Rubén Rivera and Albert Luque are accused of pressuring Ms Hermoso to say publicly the kiss had been consensual. The judge in Madrid said the trio should also stand trial. Lawyers involved in the proceedings now have 10 days to make a formal trial request before a court. Ms Hermoso, Spain's top scorer, testified before the court investigating her allegation for more than two-and-a-half hours earlier in January. According to Spanish media, she said the kiss was "unexpected and at no time consensual". A statement issued shortly after the final that was attributed to Ms Hermoso had indicated the kiss had been consensual. But she later complained of being pressured by officials of the Spanish football federation to put her name to the statement.



MELBOURNE: Aryna Sabalenka (R) embraces Coco Gauff (L) of the United States after winning match point in their semifinals singles match on day twelve of the 2024 Australian Open.

Rashid Khan withdraws from PSL as he continues rehab

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Rashid Khan has withdrawn from the Pakistan Super League as he continues to take a cautious approach in his return from back surgery. Rashid has played for Lahore Qalandars in each of the last three PSL seasons, winning titles in 2022 and 2023. He was retained by the franchise in the 'silver' salary bracket ahead of December's draft, on the understanding that he was unlikely to be available for the 2024 edition but could then be retained for future seasons. He has since officially withdrawn from the tournament as he continues his rehabilitation, having undergone surgery in November. Qalandars will be able to secure another player in Rashid's place in the supplementary and replacement draft, which the PCB confirmed will be held virtually on Monday. Rashid travelled to India

with his Afghanistan teammates during their T20I series earlier this month, but was not deemed fit enough to play, having previously withdrawn from both the Big Bash League and the SA20. "It is a case of us making sure that we are really careful with his back," Jonathan Trott, their head coach, said. "He is such an influential player: we have to make sure he is 100% ready and not rush him back from that type of surgery... when he is ready, he will be the first one to get on the field. He has got a few more appointments and check-ups to make sure everything is OK, so there is no real timeframe. I hope it is sooner rather than later, but there is no pressure and no rush." ESPNcricinfo understands that Rashid is on course to be fit in time to fulfil his IPL commitments with Gujarat Titans. He could even feature for Afghanistan at some stage

before then, most likely during Ireland's multi-format tour to the UAE which runs from February 28 until March 18. Lahore Qalandars will also sign a partial replacement for Dan Lawrence, who was drafted into England's Test squad to face India after Harry Brook withdrew for personal reasons. Noor Ahmad, a platinum pick for Peshawar Zalmi, has withdrawn due to international commitments while Zalmi will also sign a partial replacement for Naveen-ul-Haq. Karachi Kings will sign partial replacements for Kieron Pollard and Tim Seifert, while Quetta Gladiators need a partial replacement for Wanindu Hasaranga. Tom Curran, who recently sustained a knee injury while playing in the Big Bash League, has withdrawn from the full PSL season after he was initially drafted by Islamabad United.

S. Korea to face Saudi in Asian Cup last 16 as group phase wraps up

DOHA (AFP): Son Heung-min's South Korea will face Saudi Arabia in a heavyweight last-16 clash at the Asian Cup with Thailand, Jordan, Bahrain and Indonesia also all going through at the end of the group phase Thursday. South Korea were unconvincing once more as they conceded a 105th-minute equaliser in a mad-cap 3-3 draw with minnows Malaysia, whose competition was already over going into the game. Jurgen Klinsmann's side finished runners-up in Group E behind Bahrain, meaning they avoided pre-tournament favourites Japan in the next round in Qatar. But the Koreans won only once and drew two of their group-phase matches, conceding six goals in the process, and will need to play a lot better when they face Roberto Mancini's Saudi Arabia on Tuesday. "We did not want to avoid Japan, we wanted to go through in first place,

that was our goal," said the German legend Klinsmann. "Malaysia played so well. They played with a lot of heart and you've got to give them a lot of credit for that performance." "Saudi Arabia is our next one and it will be a battle," he added. South Korea and Tottenham skipper Son thought he had won a topsy-turvy game with a cap 3-3 draw with minnows Malaysia, whose competition was already over going into the game. Jurgen Klinsmann's side finished runners-up in Group E behind Bahrain, meaning they avoided pre-tournament favourites Japan in the next round in Qatar. But the Koreans won only once and drew two of their group-phase matches, conceding six goals in the process, and will need to play a lot better when they face Roberto Mancini's Saudi Arabia on Tuesday. "We did not want to avoid Japan, we wanted to go through in first place,

and prepare to face Japan, which is a very strong team," said Bahrain coach Juan Antonio Pizzi. "But I believe in the ability of my players and have confidence we will get a positive result." Saudi Arabia, one of the most successful teams in the history of the Asian Cup with three titles, had already qualified out of Group F. Roared on by hordes of their fans at Education City Stadium, one of the venues for the 2022 World Cup, they were held 0-0 by Thailand to top the group in a lively draw that clocked up four disallowed goals. In the other Group F match, Oman drew 1-1 with Kyrgyzstan and finish third. Both sides were eliminated, allowing Indonesia to squeeze through without playing on the day. It is their first time to reach the knockout phase in their history. The last 16 begins on Sunday.



BRADENTON: Georgia Hall of England plays her shot from the fifth tee during the first round of the LPGA Drive On Championship.

India make rapid start after England all out for 246

HYDERABAD (Agencies): India raced to 119-1 to give some context to England's 246 all out on an action-packed first day of the first Test in Hyderabad. After winning a crucial toss on a pitch already offering so much to the spinners, the tourists found themselves 60-3 and 137-6. But captain Ben Stokes, playing for the first time since having knee surgery in November, made a superb 70 to marshal the tail.

Stokes, who lofted three sixes, shared 38 with debutant Tom Hartley and 41 with Mark Wood as England added 109 for their last four wickets. Eight wickets fell to spin, including three each for Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja. England appeared to be in the game, only for India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal to make light of the conditions. He dished out some particularly brutal treatment to left-arm spinner Hartley, whose first ball in Test cricket was belted for six. Jaiswal raced to a half-century from 47 balls, adding 80 for the first wicket with captain Rohit Sharma in 12 overs, before the skipper skied Jack Leach to Stokes at mid-on. Left-hander Jaiswal ended on 76 not out to leave India 127 behind at the close. Hartley conceded an eye-watering 63 from only nine overs and England have already burned all three of their reviews.

Hyderabad lives up to the hype. This was a compelling first day, one that lived up to all of the pre-series hype. Though it followed the pattern of England's previous battles against spin in this country, the way the tourists looked to counter both the conditions and India's skilful bowlers was utterly riveting and lapped up by a noisy crowd. For all the talk of spin - both teams have picked three spinners - India swung the new ball but used it poorly. England had added 41 in eight overs before a frustrated Rohit called on his slow bowlers and the complexion of the game changed. Through a combination of loose shots, superb bowling and some marginal decisions, England went through spells of losing 3-5 and then 3-16 to be in danger of subsiding, before Stokes played another of his back-to-the-wall specials. Given the pitch, England's total felt competitive - it was higher than seven of the eight totals they made here three years ago - yet Jaiswal immediately showed his intent in the second over by belting Hartley over the leg side. Even in these conditions, the debate will be whether England were right to pick three spinners, especially two as inexperienced as Hartley and 19-year-old Rehan Ahmed. Yes, the surface is helpful, but are these bowlers good enough to exploit it? The answer is still to be revealed, though the early signs are not good. In theory, England have the advantage of bowling last - if India let them. Super Stokes keeps England competitive. When Ben Duckett and Zak Crawley were tucking into some wayward new-ball bowling from Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj, it looked as though England's 'Bazball' tactics would overwhelm India in the way they have done so many other opponents.

Sabalenka, Zheng march into Australian Open final showdown

MELBOURNE (AFP): Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka will clash with Chinese 12th seed Zheng Qinwen in the Australian Open final after both women powered to straight-sets victories in the last four on Thursday. World number two Sabalenka kept her title defence on track by blasting past American fourth seed Coco Gauff 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 with the roof closed on Rod Laver Arena. Zheng then stormed into a debut championship match with a stirring 6-4, 6-4 victory over gallant Ukrainian qualifier Dayana Yastremska. In doing so, the 21-year-old became the first Chinese finalist in Melbourne since her idol Li Na won the title in 2014. Zheng's previous best Slam showing was the quarter-finals at the US Open last year, when she was easily beaten by Sabalenka in their only previous meeting. The Belarusian will be favourite again to claim her second major crown on Saturday in what promises to be a bruising showdown between two hard-hitters who sometimes train together. "I was able to focus on myself," said Sabalenka of beating Gauff and avenging her defeat in last year's US Open final. "I was prepared that she was going to move well and put all the balls back and I was just ready for anything.

That was the key, and the support here." The win ensured she became the first player since Serena Williams in 2016 and 2017 to reach back-to-back Australian Open finals. No one since Victoria Azarenka in 2013 has mounted a successful women's title defence at Melbourne Park. Sabalenka said before her match that she was motivated by revenge after 19-year-old Gauff's breakthrough three-set triumph at Flushing Meadows. But it proved to be her toughest assignment at the tournament so far, having dropped just 16 games leading into the clash. "It's always a great fight (against Gauff). She's a great player and I enjoy playing her," she said. "I really hope that in the future we are going to play many more finals." Positive There were six service breaks in an unpredictable opening set that Sabalenka led 5-2 before the American came storming back to set up a tiebreak that the Belarusian dominated. Gauff saved two break points in a crunch 11-minute game to open the second set before the match settled into a more normal rhythm, with eight straight service holds. That all changed in the ninth game when Sabalenka dialled up the pressure, attacking Gauff's second serve to

break for 5-4 and serving out for the win. "Tough match for me tonight, but overall a positive tournament," said Gauff. "I had chances in both sets, but she played better." Zheng, whose exploits ensure she will break into the world's top 10 for the first time next week, was buoyed by a large Chinese contingent in the crowd. Yastremska broke first, but four double faults in the next game immediately nullified her advantage. Zheng broke again in the seventh game, after which the Ukrainian left the court, apparently for treatment for a stomach issue. She returned but failed to get back on terms. The players exchanged service breaks in the second set before Zheng broke to love in the seventh game, which ultimately proved decisive. "I'm super-excited to have such a great performance today and arrive in the final," said Zheng, who was lifted by meeting Li Na in Melbourne last week for the first time. "My opponent was playing unbelievable tennis. It is tough to explain my feelings now." Zheng won her first WTA title at Palermo and followed it up with a second in Zhengzhou at the back end of last year, while making the last eight at the US Open and winning an Asian Games gold medal in a breakthrough season.

Lahore, Multan, Rawalpindi register wins in National Women's T20 Tournament



RAWALPINDI (Monitoring Desk): Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi registered wins in the seventh round of the National Women T20 Tournament 2023/24 after all six teams participated in games played across three venues in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. After restricting Quetta to 93-6, Lahore chased the target comfortably with nine wickets in the bag at Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium. Quetta posted a measly 93-6 in 20 overs after electing to bat first. Opening batters Fareeha Mehmood (17, 20b, 4x4s) and Dua Majid put up a partnership of 35 runs until the former was run out by Lahore captain Nida Dar. Dua (24, 32b, 4x4s) was caught behind on leg-spinner Ghulam Fatima's bowling. Tuba Hassan, the third batter in, scored a run-a-ball 14, with three boundaries before she fell to Noreen Yaqoob in the subsequent over. Jannat Rasheed was run out by Sadaf Shamas and captain Saima Malik fell victim to Fatima, reducing Quetta to 65-5 in 15.5 overs. Khadija Chishti (18 not out, 19b, 2x4s) and Ayesha Asim (10, 10, 1x4) were the other contributors with the bat. Fatima picked up two wickets for Lahore, while Noreen had one to her name. In reply, Lahore cruised to the target in just 11.5 overs. Sadaf Shamas and Sidra Amin propelled the chase with a 46-run opening stand. Ayesha Asim was the only wicket-taker for Quetta as she dismissed Sidra just after the powerplay. The opening batter walked back for a 28 off 19, with the help of six boundaries. Sadaf went on to hit an undefeated half-century (51 not out, 38b, 6x4s, 2x6s) that took Lahore over the line. Bismah Maroof also chipped in with an unbeaten 18 off 14 on the back of three fours while stitching a 53-run second-wicket partnership with Sadaf. For her performance with the bat, Sadaf was awarded player of the match. In another seventh-round

National Women's T20 Tournament, Rawalpindi won a last-ball thriller against Karachi after an eventual last over that saw a wicket followed by a match-winning boundary. Rawalpindi won the toss and invited Karachi to bat first. Muneeba Ali and Javeria Khan stitched an opening stand that yielded 52 runs. Left-arm spinner Tania Saeed struck to remove Javeria (25, 34b, 1x4) as the first wicket fell for Karachi. Omaima Sohail (10, 10b, 1x4) fell to Rawalpindi skipper Aliya Riaz for just run-a-ball 10, including one four. Right-arm pacer Humna Bilal delivered an exceptional over that resulted in three Karachi wickets; set batter Muneeba Ali departed after scoring a half-century (53, 44b, 6x4s), Karachi skipper Fatima Sana (10, 8b, 1x4) was trapped leg-before and the next batter in, Yusra Amir, fell in the same manner for a golden duck. Trouble deepened for Karachi as Aliya rattled Najiba Alvi's (4, 7b) stumps and Syeda Aroob Shah (8, 8b) was caught and bowled by Waheeda Akhtar, with the scorecard reading 116-7 in 18.2 overs. In the last over, Rameen Shamim and Syeda Masooma Zahra were run out by Waheeda and Farzana Farooq respectively as Karachi finished at 125-9. Humna, with three wickets to her name, was the pick of Rawalpindi bowlers. She was supported by her captain Aliya who had two wickets. Tania and Waheeda grabbed one wicket each. In turn, Rawalpindi lost both their openers in the powerplay while chasing 126. Wicketkeeper-batter Farzana was pinned leg-before by Rameen and had to go back in the second over for just two runs and Aima Saleem (15, 22b, 1x4) fell to the same bowler on the last ball of the powerplay, with the scorecard reading 21-2 in six overs. Fajar Naved added 14 from 28, with one four, before getting caught behind on Aroob's bowling. Natalia Parvaiz and Aliya

Riaz added 34 more to the total for the fourth-wicket partnership until Natalia (14, 13b, 2x4s) was caught by Muneeba to award Aroob her second wicket of the day. Aliya played a captain's knock to drive her team to a win. She impressed with an undefeated 67 from 45, on the back of seven boundaries and two maximums as Rawalpindi completed the chase in the final over. Humna Bilal, who had come to bat in the final over, brought victory for her side with a boundary on the final delivery of the game, with Rawalpindi inching over Karachi in a close contest. Aroob and Rameen were the only two wicket-takers for Karachi, accounting for two scalps each. Aliya was awarded player of the match for her incredible knock that took Rawalpindi to a five-wicket win. In the other National Women's T20 Tournament fixture, Multan skipper Gull scored an unbeaten half-century in the run chase against Peshawar and led her side to victory. After choosing to bat first, Peshawar suffered an early blow as Aleena Shah was run out for just a run in the first over of the innings. Momina Riasat and Raahima Syed built an 82-run second-wicket stand to counter the early setback. Raahima scored 34 from 43, including five boundaries before getting caught off Rehmat Noreen's bowling in the 15th over. In the subsequent over, Noor-ul-Iman pinned Momina leg-before for a run-a-ball 44 that showcased six fours. Tehzeeb Shah was run out in the same over for just six runs with Peshawar's scorecard showing 95-4 in 16 overs. Shabnam Hayat (12, 15b, 1x4) chipped in with some runs to help Peshawar to 116-5 in 20 overs. Gull Rukh, Rehmat and Noor had a wicket each. Multan chased the target of 117 in 15.1 overs on the back of an unbeaten half-century by opening batter Gull Feroza. Multan skipper anchored the chase very well, producing 68 from 51 and smashed an impressive 10 boundaries to take her team over the line. Aleena Masood (14, 9b, 3x4s), Gull Rukh (14, 15b, 2x4s) and Wajeeda Muneer (11, 10b, 2x4s) also added some runs to the total to help their team secure the win. Aleena Shah, Tehzeeb and Seema Gul got a wicket each for Peshawar. For her match-winning half-century, Gull Feroza was adjudged player of the match.



In brief

AIOU announces entry test schedule

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has announced the admission schedule for BS, M.Sc (Hons), M.Phil, and MS programs for the spring semester of 2024. Admission forms and prospectuses are available on the university's website, and students can apply online only. The last date for submitting admission form is February 15. Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood has issued special instructions to ensure transparency and adherence to merit in the admission process. Merit is the sole criteria for admission to the BS programs. However, to secure admission in MS/M.Phil and PhD programs, it is mandatory to pass the entry test and interview. According to the details, the entrance test and interviews of the MPhil and PhD programs of the Faculty of Education will be held on February 20. The date for test and interviews of the Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies is February 21. Entry tests and interviews for the faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities will be held on February 22, while the entrance test and interviews for faculty of sciences will be held on February 23. Merit lists will be uploaded on the university website within two weeks of interviews.

ANF recovers 138 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting eight operations across the country managed to recover 138 kg drugs and arrested nine accused including two women, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that 2 kg of Ice drug was recovered from a parcel at a Cargo Office in Lahore. In another operation, 1 kg of Ice was recovered from a parcel being sent to Bahrain from DHL, Sadar, Peshawar. In the third operation, 50 kg hashish and 40 kg opium were recovered from the possession of two accused arrested near M-1 Motorway Islamabad. 15 kg hashish and 12 kg opium were recovered from an accused netted near Motorway Bridge Peshawar. In the fifth operation, 6 kg of weed was recovered from the possession of 2 suspects nabbed near M-9, Jamshoro Toll Plaza. ANF team recovered 6 kg hashish from three accused including two women arrested near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza GT Road Attack. In the seventh operation, four kg of hashish was recovered from Kohat and in the eighth operation, 1 kg of heroin was recovered from the possession of an accused near Sher Shah Toll Plaza. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused while further investigations are under process, he added.

Art exhibition held at PAC

RAWALPINDI (APP): A painting exhibition was organized at the Punjab Arts Council (PAC) in collaboration with VSCOPK here Thursday. Director General PAC Syed Bilal Haider was the chief guest at the opening ceremony of the exhibition. More than 70 works of art by the students of twin cities were placed in the exhibition. Syed Bilal Haider also distributed certificates of appreciation to the students who participated in the exhibition. After the exhibition, a meeting of the Board of Management was held under the chairmanship of Director General Punjab Arts Council Syed Bilal Haider. Asma Butt, Babar Niazi, Aslam Mughal, Mohammad Azim Iqbal, Director Waqar Ahmed, Deputy Director Mohammad Shakur, Assistant Director Mohammad Suleman, Internal Auditor Saqlain Mehmood, Waqar Ali participated in the meeting.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Interior Minister Dr. Gohar Ejaz in a meeting with Secretary Interior, Chief Commissioner and IG Islamabad.

No compromise on quality hajj arrangements: minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Minister of Religious Affairs Aneeq Ahmed Thursday said that his government had taken multiple initiatives to ensure easy and quality hajj arrangements and no compromise would be made on it to provide maximum facilitation to the intending pilgrims.

Talking to PTV news channel, he said accommodation, meals and transportation for pilgrims would be improved with a more comfortable and convenient experience, adding, all arrange-

ments have been finalized under the government Hajj scheme in Saudi Arabia for the forthcoming Hajj. He said that the main objective of the Ministry was to improve arrangements in light of feedback received from the stakeholders, adding that, the government had also introduced a comprehensive and affordable hajj package to hujjaj this year.

To a query, he said the present government has also announced a significant reduction of Rs 0.1 million in government Hajj

expenses and would not compromise the quality of facilities to hujjaj.

"Without any cost, government is providing QR code, a suitcase of 30 Kg to all hujjaj which will help in locating their luggage", adding, government will also provide Pakistan Flagged Abaya to all the female hujjaj which will make them prominent and they will represent the country". He said strict monitoring of private tour operators should also be ensured so that pilgrims of private Hajj Scheme will not face any difficulties

Govt's clear direction must for just & holistic renewable energy transition: Experts

ISLAMABAD (APP): The experts at a roundtable have opined that amid growing inflation and energy demands, the government needed to ensure its course correction and clear direction as an imperative to achieve a just and holistic renewable energy transition. The roundtable titled, "Stocktaking Pakistan's Renewable Energy Progress 2024: Opportunities and Challenges", was jointly organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) and Pakistan Renewable Energy Coalition here on Thursday on the occasion of International Day of Clean Energy. In his opening remarks, Dr Khalid Waleed, SDPI Research Fellow, said the past three years were challenging for Pakistan in particular and the world in general in terms of poly crisis, post-COVID spiking, inflation and Ukraine-Russia war.

Amid all these pressing challenges, the developing countries like Pakistan need to align their policy discourse in line with their nationally determined contributions, he added.

Dr Waleed suggested that since the world has pledged

to phase out of fossil fuels, we need to narrow down the global trends to Pakistan level where the system and prevailing mechanisms are not supportive but capacity should be utilized to transform this system.

The country needs an autonomous regulator, digitized transmission, and corporate governance model for power sector management, he said and proposed that "let the market run freely with policy consistency that will garner more investors in the power sector." Syed Aqeel Hussain Jaafri, Director Policy, Private Power and Infrastructure Board, said market liberalization can pave the way for a flourishing market and encourage investors at the local and foreign levels. He added that the financing constraints in the prevailing market situation made many ambitious power projects nonviable. However, wind farms are facing curtailment at the moment due to lack of infrastructure to transfer power generated from south to north, he noted.

Ahtasam Ahmad from Renewables First Pakistan said it is crucial to seriously consider the Renewable

Energy (RE) integration that had limited roll out in the country. In order to achieve just energy transition, it is necessary to promote innovative instruments that have the potential to mobilize additional funds like philanthropic public private partnership (PPPP), institutional investor system, project aggregation and scrutinization, concession loans, debt swaps, alternative to sovereign guarantees, investment bonds, etc.

Tanveer Mirza, from UEP Wind Power, was of the view that it is not the issue of finance but, its the socioeconomic policies that need to be improved in such a way that attract the international investors. "We need to shift focus on transmission and distribution network improvement instead of power generation, whereas a real time analysis of IPPs is also important to gauge their power production status and identify which one of those are stagnant or working," he maintained. Faheem Ashraf from Solar Energy said energy is not the issue rather the power transmission system is the bone of contention.

CDA' environment-friendly projects gearing up towards strong E- buses, cycling

ISLAMABAD (APP): Spokesperson the Capital Development Authority (CDA) Nauman Khalid Thursday said that his department was taking drastic steps and introducing milestone environment-friendly projects including automated-car parking system, E-buses, tree-plantation and citywide bicycle route network which will promote climate-friendly E-mobility in Capital city.

Talking to a Private news channel, he said, "In order to reduce carbon emissions and protect environment cycling and E-buses project were being introducing in the federal capital where over 200 electric buses network will soon hit Islamabad roads." He said, "New electric buses will provide an environment-friendly means of transportation, contribute towards traffic reduction, facilitate citizens with the availability of new routes, and contribute towards improvement in climate."

Talking about Cycling project he explained, "The envisioned cycling track is an ambitious project to establish a secure citywide bicycle route network to promote safe and accessible cycling across Islamabad as well as an equitable com-

mute option for citizens."

He further added that CDA was also introducing automated car parking system with the collaboration of banks to tackle the longstanding car parking dilemma that has been plaguing the city for years.

Replying to a question about tree-plantation, he replied, "With the collaboration of universities CDA has recently launched a massive tree-plantation drive aimed at increasing the city's green cover."

"CDA is also collaborating with citizens, particularly educational institutions, to maintain the natural beauty of the capital city, which was developed on the concept of a green city," he added.

"CDA aims to prevent re-encroachment of the retrieved land and increase the green spaces across the city through a comprehensive tree-plantation drive, adding, along with planting new trees, a strategy should be made for proper maintenance of old trees so that they can be kept safe."

"A tree plantation campaign through CDA website will involving schools, religious seminars, traders, and housing societies has been launched for the first time," he added.

ICCPO holds online khuli katcheri

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCPO) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan on Thursday hold an online khuli katcheri to give the residents direct access to the police high ups to solve their issues on priority basis. A police spokesman said that the ICCPO Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan responded to the public queries via phone calls from 03:30 pm to 05:30 pm. ICCPO Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan listened to the problems of the callers and directed the concerned officers for their immediate solution.

The ICCPO said that the security plan regarding the upcoming election was finalized. Administrative and security measures are also being implemented regarding Election 2024.

Legal actions against illegal foreigners will continue during the election. Moreover, action will be taken against those who vote on fake ID cards. 10,000 officers and officials of the Islamabad Capital Police and other law enforcement agencies will perform security duties during the poll. ICCPO said that no laxity will be tolerated on the display of arms, protest, aerial firing, or disturbance of public order before, during and after the elections.

He further said that to maintain peace and tranquility during the election in the federal capital was the top priority of the Islamabad Capital Police. Citizens are requested to report any unusual activity on "Pucar-15" or at "ICT-15" app, he added.

Dr Nadeem bans sugary products in health ministry

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Health Dr. Nadeem Jan on Thursday announced to ban serving of sugary products in his ministry, asking other ministries to follow this after the advisory to be issued soon.

He was addressing a seminar jointly organized by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations, PANAH and other civil society organizations to address the issues of excessive use of sugary drinks and their fatal impact on human health. He said, "We committed to strengthen all initiatives to address health hazards associated with sweetened beverages." The minister said that our commitment to addressing Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) was deeply embedded in our National Health Vision, which led to the development of the NCDs Action Framework. Aligned with global targets, this framework outlines our strategic actions to tackle current challenges.

He said recognizing the impact of sweetened beverages on public health, the ministry was working diligently to regulate trans fatty acids to no more than two percent of the total fats in all foods.

Dr. Nadeem Jan added that through collaboration with the Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority, we aim to enforce front-of-pack nutrition labeling and warning signs on foods high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats.

He said that the ministry's partnership

with the Federal Board of Revenue involves increasing excise taxes on ultra-processed foods, particularly sugary drinks. He added this fiscal measure was a vital step to discourage the consumption of unhealthy products and promote better dietary choices.

The minister said, "We are committed to ensuring a healthy diet in public procurements and official meetings, setting an example for the entire nation."

Pakistan National Heart Association (PANAH), President, Major General (Retd) Masud ur Rehman Kiani said that focus should be on preventive health which was the most effective way to combat NCDs.

He said that unhealthy diet was among the major risk factors to many NCDs like heart diseases, diabetes, stroke, liver and kidney diseases.

He said that sweet drinks and ultra-processed foods are among the major unhealthy diets that people were consuming excessively.

He said that policies to reduce the consumption of these unhealthy foods will improve public health significantly.

"Increasing tax on sugar sweetened beverages is an evidence based policy to reduce its consumption and related chronic diseases." He said that there was a strong public support for this policy change as per opinion poll conducted by Pakistan Health Research Council in 2021.

Digitizing electoral process suggested to eliminate controversies

ISLAMABAD (APP): The speakers at a seminar on "Electoral Code of Conduct: Ethical Practices of Stakeholders including Media," Thursday stressed the need the importance of enforcing election laws and digitizing the electoral process to eliminate controversies in elections.

They also stressed the importance of implementing the Code of Conduct formulated by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in collaboration with stakeholders. It was the third seminar organized by the Press Information Department (PID) with the aim to stimulate discussions on elections and contribute to the economic advancement of the country.

ECP Spokesperson Syed Nadeem Haider, in his remarks, said that the Commission, in collaboration with the stakeholders, developed a Code of Conduct for the media, political parties, and candidates. Highlighting its key points, he mentioned that

the Code "prohibits speaking against national institutions, dissemination of hate material, discussing private individuals' lives, sets an upper limit of election expenditure at Rs 10 million for the National Assembly and Rs 4 million for provincial assembly seats, restricts wall chalking, and imposes limitations on the size of banners and pamphlets".

He said that the ECP had established multiple monitoring teams, deploying two teams in each district and constituency to oversee the Code's compliance. "Show cause notices will be issued, and fines imposed on those violating the Code," he added.

Dr Asmat Ullah of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) said that the voters' turnout was the lowest in Pakistan from among 169 countries. He demanded strict punishment for violators of the Code of Conduct. Dr Shahid Hussain of the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) mentioned that successive

governments had not brought significant changes to the people's lives. Soaring fuel prices, utility bills, and unemployment had made their lives difficult, leading to frustration among them, he added.

Dr Rooh ul Amin Khan of the International Islamic University (IIU) Islamabad highlighted that rigging allegations stemmed from insufficient infrastructure. He recommended collaboration between the Election Commission and academia to address the issue and combat misinformation often propagated through social media.

Journalist Iftikhar Sherazi suggested simplifying the implementation of the Code of Conduct.

Journalist Hafiz Tahir Khalil recommended conducting thorough investigations before reporting on fake news. Ms Shahida Naveed, President of Meri Pechan Welfare Foundation, Wahab Hassan and anchor person Ms Aniqia Nisar also spoke.

Sightsavers sets up free eye testing camp on Int'l Day of Education

ISLAMABAD (APP): Sightsavers - an international non-profit making organization - joined hands with the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training on Thursday to mark on the International Day of Education with the mission of "Clearing the Path to Education" and managed a free eye testing camp as a step to reinforce the strong connection between eye health and educational outcomes.

This was done under its School Health Integrated Programming project (SHIP) being managed in Islamabad which involves training teachers on eye screening of students, free screening of schoolchildren for vision problems by qualified optometrists and providing free spectacles and treatment where needed, a news release said.

Munazza Gillani, Country Director

Sightsavers, on the occasion, said that her organization "not only calls for inclusion of children with disabilities in learning process but also facilitates the process".

"We promote inclusive education and to ensure this we facilitate people and children with refractive error to have access to high quality services, checkup facilities, spectacles and the treatment they need."

She said by setting up a free eye camp they wanted to play their role in improving confidence, productivity and well being of the children as weak eye sight and issues of refractive errors were the biggest barriers in the learning process.

Senior Programme Manager, Sightsavers, Itfaq Khan, said that they were working towards preventing avoidable visual impairment and blindness of most vulnerable group of

people especially children, by providing and enhancing high quality eye care. He also said that inclusive education was not only a basic human right, but also a powerful tool for achieving sustainable development.

This activity was part of the event organized by the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training in National in National Library of Pakistan. The event had many educational stalls and attracted huge attention from children, students and parents. As many as 200 people visited Sightsavers Kiosk for free eye testing service. A team of qualified optometrists with supporting staff was present there to test the eyes and provide guidance to the people on eye care. The parents and teachers appreciated the step, saying that many children faced difficulties in learning due to weak eye sight and other eye problems, the news release said.



ISLAMABAD: Machinery being used for extension work of Park Road during development work in the Federal Capital.

2.5m girls deprived of education

KABUL (Monitoring Desk): Rina Amiri, the US Special Representative for Afghan Women's Affairs, has stated on the occasion of World Education Day that 2.5 million girls have been deprived of education as a result of the restrictive measures imposed by the Taliban government. Ms. Amiri wrote on her social media platform X on Wednesday, January 24th, that the Taliban regime's restrictive actions have denied access to education for 2.5 million girls in Afghanistan over the past two years.

Firewood prices soar

GARDEZ (Pajhwok): Residents of Paktia say firewood prices have sharply increased compared to its last year's rate and they cannot afford to purchase it. Faizullah, an inhabitant of the provincial capital, told Pajhwok that firewood prices had increased and many people, including him, could not afford to purchase it. He said: "Last year, 0.49 tons of wood was sold for 6,000 afghanis, but now its price has jumped to 18,000 afghanis and many people, including him, could not afford to buy it."

No need for a new UN envoy in Afghanistan, asserts FM Muttuqi



KABUL (BNA): During a meeting with foreign diplomats in Kabul, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttuqi, the Acting Foreign Minister of the Islamic Emirate, asserted that the presence of UNAMA and an independent central government in Afghanistan negates the need for a new United Nations envoy for the country.

He emphasized the importance of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's diplomatic relations with regional countries and called for ongoing consultations to foster and maintain positive engagement with Afghanistan.

The meeting, attended by ambassadors and heads of diplomatic representa-

tions from Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, India, Turkey, and Indonesia, focused on leveraging opportunities in Afghanistan based on the regional narrative and potential coordination in threat management.

The Acting Foreign

Minister urged the diplomats to convey the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's regional initiative to their respective countries.

The goal is to enable Afghanistan and the region to collectively capitalize on new opportunities for the benefit of their governments and people.

Islamic Emirate pledges to serve people as a key responsibility and honor

KABUL (BNA): In a gathering with scholars and prominent individuals in Kunduz province, Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, the Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs, emphasized that the Islamic Emirate views public service as a primary obligation and privilege.

As per a statement from the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, Hanafi addressed the social, economic, and security concerns in Kunduz, underscoring the Islamic Emirate's unwavering commitment to service provision. The local residents expressed their satisfaction with these efforts. Local officials recognized the challenges in education, healthcare, infrastructure, agriculture, and the recent drought, and called on the Islamic Emirate authorities to address these issues.



The Deputy Prime Minister reassured that the Islamic Emirate is committed to serving the people in

various sectors and will leave no stone unturned in addressing their concerns, including those related to

education, health, transportation, and the difficulties faced by farmers due to the recent droughts.

Historical and natural sites in Bamyan attract 20 foreign tourists



KABUL (BNA): Twenty international tourists, all hailing from Albania, have arrived in Bamyan province to explore its historical and natural wonders. Mawlawi Safiullah Raed, the Director of Information and Culture in Bamyan, informed the Bakhtar News Agency

about their arrival. He stated that the Information and Culture Department has extended a warm welcome to all foreign tourists and is providing them with the best possible assistance.

John Aloni, one of the tourists, expressed his delight at finally being able to visit Bamyan, a

place he had yearned to see for years. He described his happiness as immense now that his longstanding wish has been fulfilled.

Aloni also praised the excellent security situation in Bamyan, noting that they have not encountered any security issues so far. This observation reflects

the overall positive security conditions in Afghanistan.

With the establishment of the Islamic Emirate and the enhancement of security in Afghanistan, the number of foreign tourists visiting the country's historical and natural sites is increasing.

Karzai: Hope schools and universities will reopen for girls in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): On the occasion of World Education Day, former Afghan President Hamid Karzai called for the reopening of schools and universities for girls beyond the sixth grade in Afghanistan.

Hamid Karzai reiterated this demand on Wednesday and urged the Taliban administration to create favorable conditions for girls' education as soon as possible.

Karzai emphasized the fundamental role of education in a country's progress, coinciding with World Education Day celebrated globally on January 24th. Meanwhile, Amnesty International launched a campaign in support of girls' education in Afghanistan on January 24th, World Education Day.

It has been over two years since girls above the

sixth grade were prohibited from attending schools and educational institutions in Afghanistan.

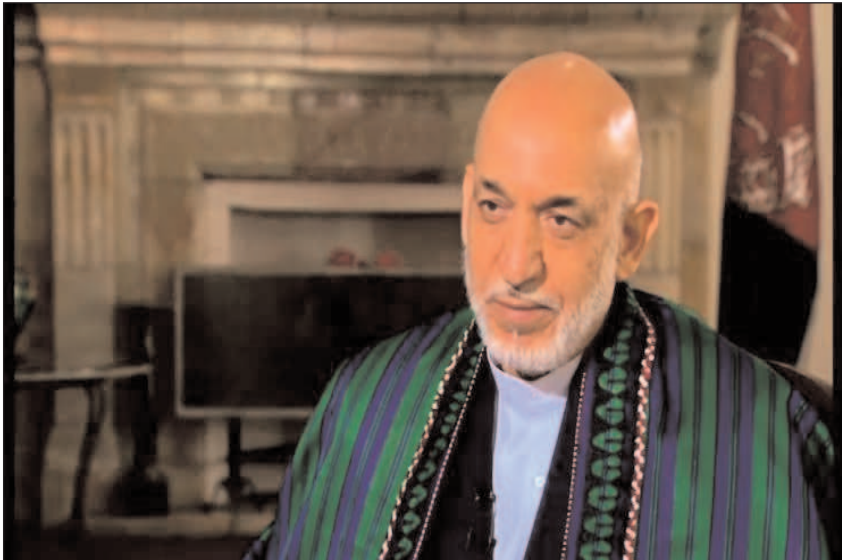
The Taliban has not made any new decisions

regarding the education of girls beyond the sixth grade in the country.

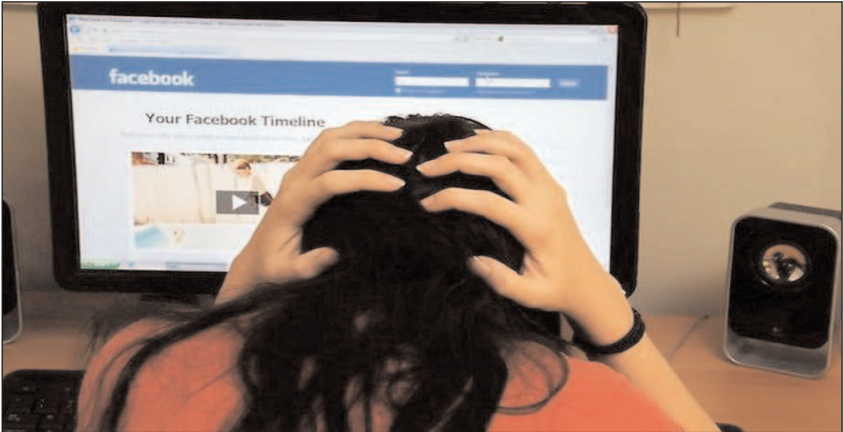
Karzai's call highlights the urgent need to address the educational rights of

Afghan girls.

The international community continues to advocate for the restoration of girls' access to education in Afghanistan.



Afghan women's online violence experiences: withdrawing from society



Zahra Rashidi

More than two years have passed since the re-emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan. During this relatively short period in terms of societal changes, women and girls have been deprived of their basic rights to move about, work, receive education, and pursue studies in Afghanistan.

This rapid regression, which is said to promote gender-based violence, also encompasses online violence, which has received less attention.

Simultaneously with the imposed restrictions and the enforcement of strict laws, the presence of women and girls in pursuing online education and other social-protest activities on social networks has become more vibrant than before. Women use social networks to follow their presence by performing various activities through

social networks.

Women and girls who spend more than five hours online daily and use social networks such as Instagram, Facebook, and X, formerly known as Twitter told Khaama Press that their main goal of being online is to pursue education and skills obtained through this medium. However, according to one of these women, not only have the streets and alleys of Afghanistan become unsafe for women, but the online space has also turned into a place for violence against women.

According to Khaama Press findings, the most common types of harassment and intimidation that girls and women face on social networks and in virtual spaces include phone harassment (sending text messages), sharing and disseminating images, extracting personal information, threatening to publish this information, sending

images and information containing unethical subjects, insult, humiliation, ID hacking, and various types of threats.

A girl residing in Jalalabad, who is 23 years old, shared her experience of encountering online violence with Khaama Press: "I created a Facebook account under my real name and then sent a friend request to my brother. After a while, I posted a picture of my half-face on the virtual page and encountered offensive comments from one of the male users."

She says that alongside the insulting messages she received, fake accounts were created in her name using her picture, and when her brother found out, he deleted all social networks from his phone. Laila Basim, a women's rights activist and senior member of the Women's Protest Movement, believes that social networks "have become accessible to the

public in Afghanistan before being culturally acclimated."

With more than 30,000 followers on Facebook, she has faced various forms of online violence: "When I use virtual pages and use my photos, we encounter hundreds of ugly and offensive comments from people, and they come to our posts to insult and humiliate, which is not the case in other societies."

According to her, users who target victims on social networks "try to express their complexes through the use of photos on virtual pages with pseudonyms." Research by a non-profit organization based in London, known as the "Afghan Witness," also indicates that after the re-establishment of the Taliban in Afghanistan, online violence against Afghan women activists, especially those who publish content on social networks such as X/Twitter, has increased. The findings of this research indicate that insulting content against women in the online space increased threefold (217%) from June to December 2021 compared to 2022.

In many cases, the harassment and intimidation of women activists in the virtual space have led them to withdraw from their activities under constant pressure. Researchers at Afghan Witness wrote that interviews revealed how women censor themselves or disengage from social networks to prevent online violence.

Khaama Press

World Education Day spurs wide reactions amid girls' exclusion

Tabasum Nasiry

The ongoing ban on girls' education in Afghanistan has raised global alarm for the past two years, making Afghanistan the sole country where girls are prohibited from attending school. These restrictions have also triggered significant international responses on World Education Day.

Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General in Afghanistan, Amnesty International, the World Food Program, the UN Women, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Rina Amiri, the Special Representative of the United States for Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, the former President of Afghanistan, and several other human rights organizations have strongly condemned the ongoing prohibition of girls' education in Afghanistan.

On World Education Day, Roza Otunbayeva, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Afghanistan, highlighted that the continued exclusion of girls from education in Afghanistan isolates the country globally. She emphasized that girls' education is not only desired by Western countries but also by Islamic nations.

She stressed, "I urge the authorities (Taliban) to understand that education is not just a moral obligation, but a vital necessity for the well-being

and peace of society."

Amnesty International has also launched a signature collection campaign to support girls' education in Afghanistan, calling on its supporters worldwide to sign the petition and expand the campaign to protect girls' education.

In a statement, Amnesty International said, "On World Education Day, Afghan girls share their stories, expressing both heartbreak and hope, as their fundamental human right to education continues to be violated by the Taliban."

The human rights organization known as "Freedom Now" also emphasized that Afghanistan is the only country where women are deprived of education and insisted that women's demands for meaningful international action against

the interim government in Afghanistan should not be ignored. According to this organization, the continuation of restrictions against women in Afghanistan is a "violation of international laws."

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees also announced that despite the challenges, "education is the beacon of hope for Afghans," as they continue to support and promote the education of girls and boys in Afghanistan.

Rina Amiri, the Special Representative of the United States for Afghan Women, condemned the ongoing prohibition of girls' education in Afghanistan on the occasion of World Education Day.

She stated that the Taliban administration's restrictive actions have deprived 2.5 million girls

of access to education over the past two years, and she called on the global community to stand in solidarity with Afghan women and girls to address the current crisis. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also reported that Afghanistan has the lowest quality of education in the world.

Meanwhile, UNESCO's education, scientific, and cultural organization's statistics indicate that after the suspension of girls' education, 1.1 million girls and young women have had no access to formal education, and 80% of girls and women have dropped out of school.

According to this organization's report, only 13% of children in grades two and three have basic reading skills, and only 18% have math skills.





PESHAWAR: KP Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah being handed over keys of Mobile Water Testing Laboratories.

President for special focus on uplift of GB

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday citing an immense potential in tourism sector of Gilgit-Baltistan, called for a special focus on the development of human as well as natural resources of the region.

He, in a meeting with elected members of Gilgit-Baltistan Council, reiterated the resolve for GB's durable socioeconomic development. Discussing the current situation and the problems faced by GB, he said the GB people were educated and highly skilled, and the literacy ratio in the region was also pleasing. President Alvi also stressed the need to uplift the GB's agriculture and farming sectors. He also assured the delegation to convey the issues faced by the GB people to the relevant forums.

PHC dismisses PTI petition

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court here Thursday dismissed the petition of Pakistan Tahrir e Insaaf seeking holding of general election under supervision of judiciary.

The division bench of Peshawar High Court comprises Justice Ejaz Anwar Khan and Justice Shakeel Ahmad announced the reserved judgment today and dismissed the PTI petition.

Senior lawyer, Moazam Butt advocate appeared on behalf of PTI who pleaded holding of general election 2024 under supervision of the judiciary. Earlier, the court heard the arguments of all stakeholders and dismissed the PTI petition.

TTP network busted, 17 terrorists held

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Security forces in an intelligence-based operation busted banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) network and arrested 17 terrorists including a terror commander from Karachi on Thursday.

The terrorists were involved in target killings, ransom and dacoity cases. The terrorists were planning to collect funds from traders for ransom, attack political and religious parties' leadership to create law and order situation in the country.

The arrested terrorists were brought to Pakistan by banned TTP in disguise of madrasa students. The terrorists were part of TTP network between 2007 to 2014 and were involved in attacks on security forces and NGOs at different places.

Pak Navy's exercise Sea kicks off

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Navy's exercise Sea Spark 2024 kicked off in Karachi today. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf was the chief guest on the occasion.

In Exercise Sea-Spark 2024, personnel and assets of the Pakistan Navy, Pakistan Army and Pakistan Air Force will participate in joint operations.

Eight mobile water labs handed over to KP govt

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: As an important development towards providing clean drinking water to the people by ensuring quick, accurate and hassle free testing of water-quality in the province, Mobile Water Testing Laboratories have been handed over to the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A ceremony to this effect was held here at Chief Minister's House Peshawar on Thursday with Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah as chief guest on the occasion.

Besides Provincial Cabinet Members, Additional Chief Secretary and spokesperson to Chief Minister Brigadier (R) Syed Mujtaba Tarmizi and Administrative Secretaries of the concerned departments, Country Director Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Pakistan Mr. Yeon Je Ho, Country Manager United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) Pakistan Ms. Jennifer Ankrum-Khan and other concerned officials attended the ceremony.

On this occasion, Country Director KOICA and Country Manager UNOPS formally handed over eight Mobile Water Testing Laboratories to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, under the project "Enhancing water quality monitoring system to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in Islamabad, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The project is aimed at to contribute towards addressing the lack of clean drinking water by enhancing water-quality testing capacity in the province.

Besides providing aforesaid Mobile Water Testing Laboratories, other important initiatives have also been taken under the project including procurement and installation of advanced laboratory equipment, upgrading the laboratory buildings and training of the staff working in those laboratories to ensure safe and efficient working environment and capacity enhancement of the water-quality testing Laboratories.

Similarly, under the project,

Management Information Software (MIS) has also been developed in order to strengthen the water-quality data management at provincial level as well as to enable the Ministry of Climate Change to have close collaboration with the provincial government for this purpose. Water Mobile Testing Laboratories, handed over to the province, would be utilized at divisional headquarters for testing the water-quality especially in the far-flung areas that will benefit over 50 % of the population of the province.

Addressing the ceremony, the caretaker Chief Minister has extended his sincere appreciation to partner organizations for successful completion of this important project of public welfare. He said that this collaborative project, made possible through the partnership between KOICA, UNOPS and the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, underscores the effectiveness of collective efforts in addressing development issues and the work towards achieving sustainable development goals adding that with generous funding from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), our joint endeavors have spanned eight districts within this province. He extended heartfelt gratitude to the esteemed partners for their pivotal role in transforming this initiative into a reality.

"Through these mobile laboratories, PHE department will be able to monitor and supply clean drinking water to the people of this province", he said and added that the Laboratories will also be used to respond to public health emergencies during natural disasters or spread of water-borne diseases.

He, on the occasion, also invited the partner organizations to put forth further initiatives for the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and anticipated the continuation of collaborative efforts in the future. He said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has talented and highly skilled human resource, and we would look forward for collaboration of partner organizations and providing skilled human resource to foreign countries.

Maryam criticises parties reliant on hollow promises

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz Thursday criticised political parties relying on empty promises and resorting to blame games, a veiled attack on her opponent, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari.

Maryam, while addressing a public gathering in Lahore's NA-119 on Thursday — the National Assembly constituency from where she is a contender for the upcoming polls — said in response that all the political parties except for PML-N have done nothing. "Other parties criticise and level allegations day and night," the politician added.

Maryam also said that some parties in Punjab have ruled the province for 15 years but they don't even have 15 developmental projects that they can men-

tion as their service to the masses. "A person [present] in Punjab is saying that Nawaz Sharif hasn't given the [party] manifesto. Nawaz Sharif will give the manifesto in the next few days," she added.

The PML-N stalwart further said that she's aware that she has to serve the people of the constituency. The politician then promised the masses that she'll have an active office in the constituency after she wins the elections, to resolve the people's issues and complaints. Maryam urged the people to think carefully before giving their vote as the vote decides the future of Pakistan.

Separately, PML-N President and former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif in his address to a rally in Mandi Bahauddin, also took a jibe at Bilawal without naming him, saying that someone said they would release the political prisoners if they come into power. "I suggest them to

announce the abolition of personal prisons as well," Shehbaz said, adding that his brother Nawaz, who is a three-time former prime minister, would establish a modern university in the city if he is given a chance.

The remark is opposed to Bilawal's stance according to which, Nawaz is determined to harm the country via his "habitual revenge politics" if he comes to power once again. The former foreign minister, who is also eyeing the prime minister's seat, insists on burying the old ways of politics as opposed to Nawaz, who he says would pursue politics of revenge if he is elected premier for a fourth time. As the nationwide polls draw closer, the political parties scramble to woo the voters in order to claim success, with Bilawal leading a gruelling four-week campaign but other parties began canvassing just last week.

Ahsan challenges Bilawal

F.P. Report

NAROWAL: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader, Ahsan Iqbal has claimed that Lahore like development was desired by citizens of Karachi. While addressing a youth convention in Narowal on Thursday, he said that PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari before criticizing the PML-N leadership should assess his own government's performance in Sindh.

Ahsan Iqbal asserted that under the rule of PPP's

governance in Sindh, Karachi has become a city of problems. He credited Shahbaz Sharif for transforming Lahore into a well-lit city during his governance from 2008 to 2018. "Lahore residents don't want Karachi to become like Lahore, but every Karachiite desires that Karachi to attain the standards of Lahore," he added.

The PML-N leader alleged that the focus of the PPP was only on Larkana. He challenged the Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to compare

his hometown, Larkana with PML-N's Narowal. "I challenge Bilawal to compare the development in Larkana with Narowal, and if Larkana outperformed Narowal, I will quit politics, but if Narowal surpasses Larkana, Bhutto should consider leaving politics," Ahsan Iqbal said. He advised Bilawal to refrain from making baseless and unethical statements related to PML-N, and highlighted the PML-N's contributions related to empowering youth by providing them laptops.

India rolls out red carpet for Macron

JAIPUR (AFP): President Emmanuel Macron was given a red carpet welcome and an elephant honour guard on Thursday as he started a two-day visit to India, with France eyeing lucrative deals with the world's fifth-largest economy.

Landing in Jaipur, state capital of Rajasthan, Macron will be hosted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a banquet in a 19th-century maharaja's palace. On Friday, he will be the chief guest in New Delhi at a colourful military march-past with massed ranks of tanks, dancing troupes, camel cavalry and a fighter jet fly-past.

India's foreign ministry says New Delhi and Paris are "strategic partners", while the French presidency says the trip will "consolidate and deepen diplomatic and economic relations". Despite concerns over human rights, differences over the war in Ukraine and Delhi's close ties with Moscow — India's key military supplier — the US and its European allies are courting New Delhi as a military and economic counterweight to China.

France hopes to build on its military contracts after the Indian defence ministry purchased French-made Rafale fighter jets and Scorpene-class submarines in multibillion-dollar deals. Macron — who, according to Indian media, is coming after US President Joe Biden was unable to take up an invite — is also hoping France can sell six EPR nuclear reactors.

Modi was guest of honour at France's annual Bastille Day celebrations last July, and Macron is to receive a similar welcome. The French president was last in India for the G20 summit in September. Paris and New Delhi collaborate on space and satellite technology, and the French delegation includes astronaut Thomas Pesquet.

The visit includes a stop at Jaipur's 18th-century Jantar Mantar astronomical observation site, before dinner with Modi at the Rambagh Palace, a luxury hotel. On Friday, Macron will watch a military parade in New Delhi for Republic Day, the 75th anniversary of India's constitution. Just as Indian soldiers marched down the streets of Paris in 2023, a French contingent will join the military spectacle, as French-built jets roar overhead.

Japanese Moon mission landed on its nose

TOKYO (BBC): Japan's Moon lander ended up on its nose when it made its historic touchdown on the lunar surface. The first picture of the stricken Slim spacecraft shows it rotated 90 degrees from how it should have come to rest.

This will go some way to explaining the difficulties it has had in generating the electricity needed to operate. The image was captured by the small baseball-sized robot called Sora-Q that was ejected from Slim moments before touchdown last Saturday. "An abnormality in the main engine affected the landing attitude of the spacecraft," the Japanese space agency Jaxa said in a statement.

It seems one of the two big thrusters on Slim (Smart Lander for Investigating Moon) stopped working during the descent. To get the picture to Earth, Sora-Q first had to transmit it to a second ejected roving robot, Lunar Excursion Vehicle 1, or Lev-1. This hopping robot has radio equipment that can contact mission control independently of Slim. The lander itself was shut down three hours after arrival because it could not get its solar cells to work. With the battery rapidly draining, Jaxa officials took the decision to hibernate Slim.

Their assumption — which seems to be borne out by the Sora-Q image — is that the main spacecraft is orientated in a way that prevents the solar cells from seeing the Sun. The hope is to wake Slim when lighting angles change at its landing location. Before hibernation, controllers were able to pull down a series of pictures of the surface taken by its on-board infrared camera. These show the spacecraft to be on a slope, surrounded by small rocks. Slim's landing location is at the edge of an equatorial crater known as Shioli.

Bilawal wants PML-N supporters to vote for PPP

F.P. Report

GUJRAT: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing a public gathering of the Party in Gujrat expressed his gratitude to the Jiyalas for showing up in such large numbers and expressing their love for the PPP despite the harsh weather.

Chairman Bilawal said that those who used to say that the PPP is not present in Punjab and are not contesting, have nothing to talk about but the Party these days. If there is any party that is serious about the elections, then it is the party of Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Only the PPP's Jiyalas are running the election campaign.

The PPP has held conventions and gatherings all over KP, Punjab, Balochistan and Sindh. As opposed to this, the PPP's rivals do not even leave their houses. There is a reason behind the lion not going out to hunt, but demanding someone else to hunt on its behalf. They do not even have a manifesto to show, as it is still being prepared. They cannot even tell the people how they will serve them after coming to power for the fourth time.

Bilawal said that he has prioritised the most essential issues faced by the Pakistani people, which are inflation, unemployment and poverty. He said he has himself prepared the 10-point Awami economic charter which will combat the plethora of issues faced by the people. The PPP's 10 promises to the people need to be conveyed to every doorstep. The right to vote is the power of the people, and this is what the people of Punjab need to be apprised of. The PPP resolves to not only increase wages, but double them within five years.

The party also resolves to provide 300 units of electricity free-of-cost to the deserving citizens of the country. The PPP aims to construct three million houses for the people all over the country, and give ownership to the women of the households. Simultaneously, the PPP government is resolving to regularise temporary houses while giving ownership to the residents so they too can experience the serenity of living in one's own place.

Moreover, the PPP plans to not only expand the revolutionary Benazir Income Support Programme but also provide interest-free loans to the women of the country so that they can gain financial independence and contribute to the economy of the country. Chairman Bilawal said that he wishes to serve the women of the nation as a son. 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 subsidises worth billions

to the elite.

For the youth, the PPP aspires to initiate the 'Youth Card' so that unemployment can be dealt with. Educational institutions and affiliated campuses will be constructed in districts all over the country so that the students are facilitated. The PPP achieved in Sindh what the other parties could not despite getting three opportunities. The people can access free healthcare treatments ranging from liver and kidney ailments to cardiac issues from institutions all over Sindh.

The PPP aims to construct similar institutions all over Punjab. This is not only to facilitate the people, but also those who have not been able to construct a single free healthcare institution despite getting three turns to do so. It was the dream of Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that no child or adult goes to sleep on an empty stomach. Hence, the Party plans to introduce the 'Bhook Mitao Programme' to combat hunger. This is the crux of the 10-point agenda and on February 8, when the symbol of the arrow is stamped, all these promises will be fulfilled.

Addressing the supporters of the PML-N, Chairman Bilawal said that the PML-N workers who had turned democratic and faced General Musharraf in the ARD, and talked of the sanctity of the vote, saw their own party leave its narrative. This is the same old PML-N of Dictator Zia-ul-Haq and IJI. If the workers of PML-N want democracy and for the sanctity of the vote to prevail, they should stamp the symbol of the arrow as this is the lion that sucks the blood of the farmers, labourers, youth and the downtrodden.

Addressing the workers of the PTI, Chairman PPP said that if they wish to stop Nawaz Sharif from becoming the PM for the fourth time, then they could either waste their vote by opting for independent candidates, which amounts to supporting the PML-N, or channel their energy and strategically use their right to vote. They should consider that the contest is between two parties, and to stop the lion in its path, the arrow of the PPP needs to be stamped. Chairman Bilawal said that he will stop the lion in its path, and when given the opportunity on February 8, he will himself book a ticket for them on February 9 to return to their Avenfield apartments in London.

It is their misconception that they have already won the elections after appointing an interim government in connivance with Raja Riaz coupled with the absence of the symbol of the bat. They are so confident that they do not even feel the need to campaign. However, if the people of Punjab and the country wake up, and decide to stop them, then nothing can stop them till they achieve their objective.

Israeli tanks batter hospital districts in Khan Younis

GAZA (Reuters): Israeli forces relentlessly bombarded areas around two hospitals in Gaza's main southern city Khan Younis on Thursday, pinning down large numbers of displaced people, residents said, in an offensive to take Hamas' main stronghold in the enclave's south.

Gaza health officials said at least 50 Palestinians had been killed in Khan Younis in the past 24 hours, including two children in an Israeli air strike that hit a residential home. The city is now encircled by Israeli armored forces and under almost non-stop aerial and ground fire, residents say.

Palestinian medics said Israeli tanks had cut off and were shelling targets around the city's two main still-functioning hospitals, Nasser and Al-Amal, trapping medical teams, patients and displaced people sheltering inside or nearby. Most of the Gaza Strip's 2.3 million population is now squeezed into Khan Younis and towns just north and south of it, after being driven out of its northern half earlier in Israel's blitz of the

Hamas-ruled territory, now in its fourth month.

Israeli forces' siege of Khan Younis' main hospitals, which Israel says Hamas militants use as bases for attacks — something the Islamist group and hospital staff deny — have made it near impossible for rescue crews to reach the wounded and dead. The fusillade from advancing Israeli forces forced many displaced people to set out again in search of ever dwindling places of safe shelter, medics and residents said.

Residents had said on Wednesday that Israeli announcements warning them to leave areas in the line of fire came only after the operation was under way and the main road out of Khan Younis already shut. On Wednesday, the United Nations said Israeli tanks struck a large UN compound in Gaza sheltering displaced Palestinians, killing at least nine people and wounding 75. But Israel denied its forces were responsible, suggesting Hamas might have launched the shelling. It said it was reviewing the

incident.

Israel said Hamas had "command and control centers, outposts and security headquarters" in the vicinity, which it described as "a dense area" with civilians as well as the premises of several hospitals where it said militants were active. At least 25,700 people have been killed in Gaza, one of the world's most densely populated and widely impoverished places, Palestinian health officials say, with large tracts of the heavily built-up enclave flattened by Israeli bombing.

Israel unleashed its war to eradicate Hamas after militants stormed through the border fence in a shock incursion into nearby Israeli towns and bases on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and seizing around 240 hostages. The International Committee of the Red Cross said less than 20 percent of the narrow coastal enclave — around 60 square km (23 sq miles) — was now refuge to more than 1.5 million people in the south "where the dramatic escalation of fighting threatens their survival."

Credible evidence

(Continued from Page 1)

Later, the law enforcement authorities apprehended the killer, his supporters and facilitators from various cities of Pakistan, and the case is being tried in a court of law. Qazi said that the investigators quickly identified the facilitators inside the country and in the third countries on the basis of confessional statements of Ali and technical evidence.

"We have documentary, financial and forensic evidence of the involvement of the two Indian agents, who masterminded these assassinations. We are releasing the passport details of Yogesh Kumar and Ashok Kumar," he added, per the foreign secretary, Pakistan had reached out to the governments of the relevant third countries in this regard.

Qazi also shared the conclusions drawn from the above-stated information,

saying that these cases reveal the growing sophistication and brazenness of Indian-sponsored terrorist acts in Pakistan. He said that the cases fit the pattern of similar cases that have come to light in other countries, including Canada and the United States, clearly showing that the Indian network of extra-judicial and extra-territorial killings has become a global phenomenon.

"Pakistan has remained a target of extra-judicial killings for some time now. We are now witnessing an increased sophistication in these operations as revealed in these two cases," he said. Qazi called for India's accountability on an international level for its "blatant violation of international law," saying that the assassination of citizens on Pakistani soil was not only a violation of the country's sovereignty but also a breach of the UN Charter. "This violation of

Pakistan's sovereignty by India is completely unacceptable," he stressed. He then demanded bringing to justice the killers, their facilitators and financiers involved in the assassinations of Pakistani nationals and extra-judicial and extra-territorial killings in other countries.

In the concluding remarks, Qazi said that Pakistan remains committed to protecting its people and securing its sovereignty. "Protection of Pakistanis and any foreign national on Pakistani soil is a high priority for the Government of Pakistan," he said. One of these two cases traces back to the Daska mosque shooting of Shahid Latif, who was an activist of the banned Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), in October last year. Pakistan called out the country involved in the attack as a "rogue nation" for carrying out the terrorist activity right after the incident.