

**Kakar meets Shujaat**  
**F.P. Report**  
ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Tuesday visited the residence of PML-Q chief Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain. During the meeting, the prime minister inquired about well-being of the veteran politician. The two leaders also discussed the overall situation of the country. Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi also accompanied the prime minister.

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**Bilawal reaches Lahore**  
**F.P. Report**  
LAHORE: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Tuesday reached the provincial capital to attend the party's Central Executive Committee (CEC) meeting slated to be held on Jan 3. PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will preside over the meeting at Bilawal House, Lahore. The CEC will discuss the overall political situation in the country.

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LAHORE: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar meeting with President on PML-Q, Chaudhry Shujaat at his residence.

## Senior Hamas official killed in Israeli strike

BEIRUT (Reuters): An Israeli drone struck a Hamas office in the southern suburbs of Lebanon's capital Beirut on Tuesday, killing four people, Lebanon's state news agency reported.

Senior Hamas official Saleh Al-Aroui was killed in the incident, Al-Manar television station of Hezbollah reported. Al-Manar also said an explosion was heard near the Hadi Nasrallah highway close to a road junction.

It gave no details of the explosion, which comes a day before a speech by Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. A Reuters witness said the explosion may have been caused by a drone that hit the second floor of a building in the crowded neighborhood.

Hezbollah, an ally of Hamas, has been exchanging near-daily fire with Israel across Lebanon's southern frontier since the eruption of the Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza in early October. Israeli air strikes and shelling have killed more than 100 Hezbollah fighters and nearly two dozen civilians, including children, elderly and several journalists, according to Hezbollah and security sources.

Meanwhile, clashes between Hezbollah and the Israeli army in recent days have caused widespread damage to civilian properties in Lebanon's border area, with hospitals in the capital and southern region finalizing emergency plans in case of war.

Israeli bombardment on Friday evening and Saturday damaged many houses in border towns, as well as power grids. Sirens were sounded more than once in many Israeli settlements along the Blue Line after they were evacuated, according to Israeli media.

Explosions were heard in Tyre and Bint Jbeil, after Israel's Iron Dome defense system intercepted guided rockets launched from Lebanon.

Heavy Israeli shelling mainly targeted the Shebaa Farms area on Saturday afternoon. Photos on social media showed the magnitude of the destruction to the house of the mayor of the Rab Al-Thalathine border village. Footage also revealed the extent of damage to the electricity grid in the Burj Al-Moulouk town. Andrea Tenenti, spokesperson for the UN forces in Lebanon, said that UNIFIL "remains fully committed to their mission represented by restoring stability in southern Lebanon, and are doing their utmost to prevent the escalation of hostilities."

Tenenti said that the head of mission and force commander, Maj. Gen. Aroldo Lazaro, is inspecting the operational region to assess the situation and listen to peacekeepers' concerns. Analysts warn that tit-for-tat escalation along the border could develop into a war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, prompting hospitals in Beirut and the south to implement a precautionary emergency plan under the direction of the Ministry of Health.

A Beirut hospital official told Arab News that her site has "completed its plan and we have opened a special route for ambulances transporting the wounded." She added: "We have allocated zones of different colors to receive the wounded depending on the severity of their case. We have also secured human, logistical and pharmaceutical staff." People are fleeing towns adjacent to the Blue Line toward safer regions.



Meanwhile, all educational institutions in the country remain closed until further notice. In Tyre — a southern city 22 km away from the border region of Ras Al-Naqura — more than 1,500 Lebanese and Syrian families are believed to be scattered across accommodation centers set up inside schools.

Hundreds of Lebanese families have chosen to move to other regions in Chouf, Mount Lebanon, Metn and Beirut. In July 2006, a war between Israel and Hezbollah broke out, killing more than 1,200 Lebanese and injuring 4,400, mostly civilians. On the Israeli side, the war claimed the lives of 160 people, mostly soldiers. The 30-day conflict prompted about 1 million Lebanese to flee their towns and caused unprecedented material damage, especially to Dahieh, known as the "southern suburb" of Beirut.

Walid Jumblatt, former leader of the Progressive Socialist Party, voiced concerns that "Lebanon may not be able to escape the possibility of a widening circle of war." Jumblatt said he was working with the head of the Progressive Socialist Party, his son Taymour Jumblatt, to "make the necessary logistical efforts to accommodate those displaced from areas that could be targeted in the event of an Israeli attack."

## 4 terrorists killed in operation

**F.P. Report**

RAWALPINDI: Security forces on Tuesday, conducted an intelligence-based operation in North Waziristan District, on the reported presence of terrorists.

During the conduct of operation, intense fire exchange took place between own troops and the terrorists, as a result of which 4 x terrorists were sent to hell including a suicide bomber.

The killed terrorists remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces and were planning to conduct a high profile terrorist attack, which was averted due to proactive response by the security forces. Arms, ammunition and explosives were also recovered from killed terrorists.

Sanitization operation is being carried out to eliminate any other terrorist found in the area as the security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country.

## Pakistan eyes to boost 'ties' with US

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tuesday underscored the need to further bolster ties with the United States in 2024, carrying forward the momentum gained during the past year. The commitment was renewed in a meeting between Caretaker Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani and US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome today.

Jilani and Blome held discussions focusing on some major aspects of bilateral relations including the recent visit of Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir to the United States, according to an official statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The interim foreign minister underlined that in 2024 both countries should continue to build on recent exchanges and the momentum gained in the ties.

Blome, in his meeting with Pakistan's top diplomat, discussed a wide range of important bilateral issues, including expanded diplomatic engagement, the safe and efficient processing of Afghan citizens eligible for resettlement to the US, as well as other issues of mutual interest, the US Mission Acting Spokesperson Thomas Montgomery said in a statement.

Last month, Gen Munir had paid his maiden two-day visit as army chief to the US, where he met key political and military personalities to discuss potential areas of bilateral and regional cooperation. The COAS had also met US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin at the Pentagon where he discussed regional security developments and potential areas for bilateral defence cooperation.

balance of power in the region. While emphasizing the significance of indigenization and human resource development, COAS wholeheartedly endorsed PAF's dedication to technological advancements and operational excellence, reassuring that the Armed Forces of Pakistan are fully prepared to thwart any aggression. COAS also appreciated PAF's efforts for transportation of Relief Goods for the victims of Gaza conflict.

Following the ceremony, a spectacular airshow was conducted, featuring various PAF fighter jets, training aircraft and UAVs. The Chief Guest and the attendees later witnessed a static display showcasing the diverse PAF fighter, air mobility and UAV fleet.

## COAS lauds PAF for 'ensuring balance of power in region'

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: An Induction and Operationalization Ceremony was held at an operational base of Pakistan Air Force, on Tuesday. General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M) Chief of Army Staff, attended the distinguished ceremony as the Chief Guest. Upon his arrival at the base, Chief of Army Staff was received by Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force. The ceremony showcased the newly inducted weapon systems and defence assets of PAF.

Upon his arrival, a smartly turned-out contingent of Pakistan Air Force presented Guard of Honour to the COAS. During his speech CAS highlighted the latest inductions in the PAF's arsenal comprising of J-10C fighter jets, air mobility platforms, modern Radars, Unmanned Aerial Systems, Loitering munition capabilities and Long Range Vectors which have significantly bolstered the aerial defence capabilities



of the country. CAS also mentioned that Center of Excellence for Air Mobility & Aviation Safety, College of Air Defence and reinvigoration of Air Power Centre of Excellence alongside operationalization of National Aerospace Science and Technology Park has provided PAF the capability to stay abreast with the evolving challenges. He emphasized upon the progress achieved by PAF in the emerging domains of Cyber and Space technologies to ensure an impregnable defence of the country.

COAS in his speech lauded the operational preparedness of Pakistan Air Force in incorporating state-of-the-art weapon systems, substantially contributing in ensuring the

# The Frontier Post

## No one has impunity to spread violence: PM

**F.P. Report**

LAHORE: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Tuesday reiterated that the State would not allow anyone to unleash violence and kill people in the name of political, ethnic and religious divides as it was its responsibility to ensure law and order.

The prime minister, in a lengthy interaction with the students of the Beaconhouse National University, said that no one could be given a licence to kill and eliminate others on the basis of political, ethnic and religious differences.

"To maintain law and order is the responsibility of the State, and I assure you that such elements will never prevail on the State of Pakistan," he asserted. The prime minister, elaborating his viewpoint while responding to a question, said that the one who reverted to fighting with the State and the countrymen would get the befitting response.

He said that the government would not allow terrorists and militants to kill people with impunity as they had openly declared fight against the State and the civilians in the country. "We have accepted their challenge," he said and expressed the resolve to fully respond to all threats with full force. To another query, he said that the government functioned primarily on revenue generation system. The country had a tax collection of over Rs 9,000 billion, but there was tax evasion of more than almost Rs 10,000 billion. The lack of effective revenue system had been a persistent problem which required effective steps to rectify.

He said that it was a consistent story with different past political set-ups and military dictators. For strengthening of economy, it was the first and foremost requirement to develop a robust tax system, he added, citing the Scandinavian countries with the highest tax revenue figures to their GDP (Gross Domestic Product). The caretaker prime minister said that if the interim set-up in the

country could achieve the tax target, then why not an elected government? If they were not able to achieve such, then there was a serious flaw in the governance system, he opined.

He also underlined the need of improvement in the structure of bureaucracy and the governance system. About a question related to Gaza, the caretaker prime minister said that Israel was displaying a force of brutality with impunity. Pakistan had used the forum of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and other international fora and engaging with the European, United States and diplomats of other countries by reminding them that if such a senseless behaviour on part of Israel continued, it would be radicalizing about 1.4 billion Muslims across the world, he added.

He reiterated that Pakistan was continuously insisting that someone should stop the war and create a humanitarian corridor. About 9,000 children had lost their lives in Gaza so far, he lamented. The prime minister said that the world was speaking about an independent Palestine with pre-June 1967 borders and with Al Quds Al Shareef as its capital. He reaffirmed that Pakistan was genuinely committed with the Palestine cause and utilizing all the diplomatic circles to convey its message.

Responding to another question regarding the protest of Baloch families in Islamabad, he said holding protests and demonstrations within the limits of laws throughout the world was a basic right but when those parameters were violated then laws were enforced by the governments. He said that the use of a water cannon against the Baloch protestors was much criticized though he could cite about 200 incidents of its use in the European countries against protestors.

The caretaker prime minister said that the law enforcement forces retaliated when they were pelted upon with stones. All the arrested people had been released subsequently, he added. He further maintained that the

women were agitating before the National Press Club, Islamabad which was their right, adding they were giving media interviews and enjoyed freedom of expression.

"What the government has done wrong! The government enforces law as it has to be enforced whether anyone like it or not," he added. The prime minister agreed to a student's remarks that there were serious concerns over the judicial system in the country which required to be addressed. He also stressed upon change in behaviour and equal application of laws on all.

In a veiled reference to the political history, he said that institutions were used and admired for personal benefits. Caretaker Prime Minister Kakar, replying to a query, said that youngsters should explore opportunities abroad as such trends should not be considered as brain drain. "They are the assets for the country and the people should understand the cycle as it is not a negative tendency," he said, adding such trends were seen throughout the world.

He also agreed that there was a lack of good rules and regulations in the medial education. To address the mental health issue, the caretaker government could not go for legislation, but it could only draft its recommendations for the upcoming government, he added. The caretaker prime minister said that in Pakistan, democracy was in the transitional phase as it was not a settled one. Non democratic forces often took advantage of non-performance of the democratic system, he added.

He regretted that the principles of democracy were violated by those who did not consider them in their advantage, adding that certain issues required a thorough debate and advised the youth to be genuine and try to find out genuine solutions to the country's issues. The prime minister said that non-state actors and terrorists had been killing people in Balochistan. The State had the every right to respond to violence, he added.

## CJP Isa hints at concluding disqualification case on 4th

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa has said the Supreme Court will try to conclude the hearing on the lifetime disqualification case on January 4 (Thursday) — an important judgment that will determine whether lawmakers' ineligibility to contest polls should be for a lifetime or five years under the amended Election Act 2017 in line with Article 62 (1)(F).

A seven-member larger bench led by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Qazi Faez Isa heard the case of lifetime disqualification of lawmakers. The other members of the bench include Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Aminuddin Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Musarat Hilali.

The proceedings of the case were broadcast live on SC's website and YouTube channel. On December 11, 2023, the chief justice while heading a three-member bench hearing a matter related to the disqualification of a former PML-N provincial lawmaker Sardar Meer Badshah Khan Qaisrani last month, took notice of the contradiction between its judgment and the legislation made through an amendment to the Election Act pertaining to the lifetime disqualification.

The chief justice had observed that the Supreme Court's judgment on lifetime disqualification and the amendments made to the Election Act 2017 could not exist simultaneously. He further said either the legislation enacted by parliament to the Elections Act or the judgment delivered by the Supreme Court will prevail.

An apex court judgment in the year 2018 had held that any person disqualified under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution would be lifetime. Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and then Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Jahangir Tareen were disqualified by the Supreme Court under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution in 2017.

The court had ruled that Nawaz had been dishonest to the parliament and the courts, and thus, he could not be deemed fit for his office. Later, an accountability court awarded him 10-year imprisonment in the Avenfield apartments and seven years in Al-Azizia references. However, the Islamabad High Court acquitted him in both cases after the former premier returned to the country.

In 2023, the coalition government of PDM made an amendment to the Elections Act 2017, decreasing the legislator's disqualification to five years retrospectively. The matter is of immense importance as the general elections are being held on February 8, while the Election Commission of

Pakistan has rejected the nomination papers of most of the main aspiring candidates of PTI including its founder Imran Khan. The electoral body, however, has accepted the nomination papers of most of the PML-N candidates including its supremo Nawaz which invited criticism from PTI leaders on the role of the commission.

At the outset of the hearing, Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan implored the bench to review its decision regarding the lifetime disqualification. At this, CJP Isa asked the AGP as to what in his opinion should prevail — the amended Election Act 2017 or the Supreme Court's verdict on lifetime disqualification. The AGP said he would support the Election Act 2017 as it was enacted by the federal government. However, the AGP said the declaration of lifetime disqualification will remain effective unless the Supreme Court's verdict remains in place. Justice Shah wondered whether it was possible to amend the Constitution via simple legislation or whether a constitutional amendment was required. Justice Mazhar said the limit of disqualification is not fixed in Article 62 (1)(F).

A person convicted of murder and treason could contest elections after a ban of some years, said Justice Shah asking if it is not inappropriate to disqualify someone for life over a "petty reason". After Tareen's lawyer Makhdum Ali Khan informed the court that Article 62 was added to the Constitution via presidential order in 1985, CJP Isa wondered whether a person who removed judges and violated the Constitution, be of good character. The CJP was referring to former military ruler Gen (ret'd) Ziaul Haq. CJP Isa said, in his opinion, the original Constitution should be relied upon if there is any contradiction between a Constitution and the amendments made to the Constitution later.

"I will rely on the legislation [enacted] by elected representatives and not on the [laws introduced] by the dictator," he observed. What's the difference between Articles 62 and 63? During the hearing of the case, CJP Isa asked Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan to explain the difference between Articles 62 and 63.

To which, the AGP said Article 62 deals with the eligibility of parliamentarians while 63 is related to disqualification. The CJP observed that the sub-clauses of Article 62 that deal with the public office holder's character created difficulty. "How can the character of any person be determined? Is the attorney general a person of good character?" the CJP remarked saying that he asked the question related to AGP as an exam-

## 'Private armies are illegal': SC

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa Tuesday maintained that private militias are illegal and they cannot be against the state, as the Supreme Court conducted the hearing of a case pertaining to missing persons and enforced disappearances in the country.

The case was taken up by the apex court following petitions filed by multiple individuals including veteran politician and lawyer Aitzaz Ahsan. The timing of the case is also significant, as Islamabad is currently witnessing a sit-in by the families, including women and children of the Baloch missing persons, who arrived in the capital after starting a long march from Turbat.

A three-member bench headed by CJP Isa and comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Musarat Hilali took up the case and conducted its hearing. The chief justice, following the adjournment of the hearing till tomorrow, said the court will now ensure the resolution of the missing persons issue, also summoning the Attorney General for Pakistan, Mansoor Usman Awan, to arrive before the bench in the next hearing.

"If we solve it together, the problem of missing persons will be resolved," he said, adding that the resolution of this matter will strengthen Pakistan internally. CJP Isa also acknowledged the rights of citizens to conduct peaceful demonstrations who were protesting against the disappearances of their loved ones.

"There are also concrete cases of missing persons," the CJP said. The chief justice also remarked that people in Pakistan often disappear after joining certain organisations, pointing at the anti-state entities present in the country. "The tradition of joining these organisations should end."

He maintained that what is happening in Pakistan does not happen anywhere in the world. CJP Isa insisted that all parties must "accept responsibility" in this matter. The chief justice, however, pointed out that the petitions filed by Ahsan reflected a "political" inclination while raising the issue of enforced disappearances, as those named "disappeared" in the petitions were all politicians of a particular political party.





## PU PSC signs three MoUs

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab University's Pakistan Study Centre (PSC) signed three memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with Pakistan Study Centre, Karachi University, Area Study Centre, Jamshoro University, Sindh and Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab.

In this regard, a signing ceremony was held in the Committee Room PSC in which Director PSC Prof Dr Naumana Kiran, Incharge, Pakistan Study Centre, Karachi University Dr Erum Muzaffar, Director Area Study Centre Jamshoro University, Sindh Dr Mukaish Kumar and Director PU Centre for South Asian Studies Dr Naheed S. Goraya signed the respective MoUs.

According to the MoUs, the Centers have agreed to explore joint educational and research activities, exchange of faculty, research personnel and graduate students for research to promote better understanding of national and international issues. Centers also work on the exchange of information in fields of interest to both parties, participation in seminars, conferences, table talks, dialogues and academic meetings. The institutions will collaborate and cooperate in the supervision and co-supervision for the research work conducted as the partial fulfillment of postgraduate degree, access to academic materials, publications, library books.

## MCL identifies 181 unauthorized constructions for immediate action

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Municipal Corporation has completed the identification of 181 unauthorized constructions for the new year, with decisive actions to follow.

Special Regulation Unit Administrator MCL Rafia Haider detected these illegal constructions, forwarding the details to the Planning Wing for immediate action.

According to a spokesperson of MCL, the Chief Officer of Lahore Municipal Corporation has issued a directive, releasing details of the unauthorized constructions and instructing prompt action. A significant number of commercial, residential, and industrial constructions were identified in various parts of the city.

Administrator MCL Rafia Haider emphasized strict monitoring and instructed the Planning Wing officers to gather reports on unauthorized constructions within seven days. Failure to submit reports will result in disciplinary actions against the responsible officers.

In a stern statement, Administrator MCL Rafia Haider declared a zero-tolerance policy towards any form of unauthorized constructions in the city, vowing not to grant approval for such activities.

# The first lady for integrated efforts to ensure child protection

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The First Lady Samina Arif Alvi, Tuesday, stressed the need for effective implementation of Zainab Alert Act, an integrated single helpline, and close coordination among all the relevant organizations and stakeholders for speedy recovery of missing children.

The first lady, while chairing a meeting during visit of Roshni Helpline- a non governmental organization working for recovery of missing children- emphasized that a universal helpline for receiving public complaints and joint and coordinated efforts through a single platform would result into more effective and timely outcomes. There were several organizations both in public as well as private sector working separately to provide relief to citizens and they have different helplines to receive grievances, she noted adding that however it might confuse the aggrieved citizens about who should be contacted with in a certain situation.

Begum Alvi suggested that there should be a single and integrated helpline to receive the public complaints and calls for emergency assistance and all the organiza-

tions working in different domains should work under one umbrella so that citizens could access the helpline easily and the matter could be referred to the most relevant organization for prompt and effective action. Founder of Roshni Helpline Muhammad Ali and other board members briefed the First Lady about vision, performance and initiatives of the organization for protection of children particularly recovery of missing children.

They informed that Roshni Helpline has close coordination with ministry of Human Rights, Sindh Police, provincial child protection agencies, Pakistan Railways, Council of Islamic Ideology and many other government and non-governmental organizations.

They informed that Roshni Helpline served more than 20,000 families and assisted in the recovery of over 9000 missing children since its inception while several steps were taken to enhance the awareness and outreach.

Begum Samina Arif Alvi appreciated Roshni Helpline for its endeavor and services for the recovery of missing children.

Later, Roshni team presented a souvenir shield and its performance report to the First Lady.

## Minister reviews PUNJMIN performance

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Mines and Minerals Ibrahim Hassan Murad, during a meeting held here on Tuesday, reviewed the performance of Punjab Minerals Development Corporation (PUNJMIN) and advocated its digital transformation.

PUNJMIN Managing Director provided updates on salt projects, coal projects, and the Mianwali project, emphasizing progress through a detailed presentation.

During the briefing, it was revealed that PUNJMIN is set to digitize its operations, adopting Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP). However, the initiative requires skilled professionals in IT, mining engineering, and accounting. A request for relaxation in new recruitment

has been sent to the Chief Minister's office. The minister highlighted the importance of digitalization for enhancing the corporation's efficiency, citing its profitability due to effective government strategies. He noted the positive impact of increased industrial salt prices on government revenue. Stressing the need for continued improvement, the minister instructed PUNJMIN to implement e-bidding and e-auction systems to curb corruption.

Furthermore, the minister urged transparency in all affairs to facilitate strategic expansion of the mines sector.

The meeting also included a presentation on a ten-year revenue comparison, reinforcing the commitment to elevating PUNJMIN's performance.

## BOP launching SME environment & performance index

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Bank of Punjab (BOP) and Reenergias entered into an Agreement on 29th December 2023 for the development of a "Pakistan SME Environment & Performance Index (BOP-PAK-SEPI)". The Index shall be the first of its kind, track the environment and the performance of SMEs in Pakistan on a periodical basis.

SEPI will incorporate the existing Business Enabling Environment Index for Pakistan (BEEIP) developed with financing support of USAID and Pakistan by Reenergias-Ipsos, and shall be a dynamic tool providing the much-needed detailed insights into the performance of the SME sector as a whole along with providing granular details on SME sub-segments and clusters helping more informed policy making, regulation, and targeted financial interventions as it shall be capturing demographic cuts along with Women-Led and Export-Oriented SMEs.

The Index shall be developed in 2 phases. Phase-I shall consist of Key Informant Interviews



(KIIs) with the relevant stakeholders, i.e. BOP, SBP, SECP, etc. and secondary data gathering from the existing data repositories of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, SMEDA, World Bank, etc. relating to the Pakistani SME Value Chains. Phase-II shall consist of the Primary Research for actual data gathering through questionnaire-based market survey of SMEs across all geographies and value chains including Agri.

Reenergias is a for-profit social impact advisory and delivery firm that has partnered with Ipsos, a global leader in market research, to undertake the primary research for the Index.

Speaking at the occasion, Mr. Asif Riaz (Group Head Consumer Banking – BOP) said that development of the BOP-PAK-

SEPI shall enable BOP to increase financing to SMEs under a better-informed and targeted manner, specifically for Women-Led and Export-Oriented SMEs. He added that the Index shall add value for policy makers, regulators, multi-laterals, donors and banks in increasing access to finance for the MSME sector.

Mr. Amer Zafar Durrani (President – Reenergias) lauded the initiative, foreseeing an improved flow of much-needed credit support for SMEs along with targeted policy making through better-informed decisions for the MSME sector. The initiative underscores BOP's commitment to boost investments, increase access to finance, and contribute to the country's economic development in SME Sector.



KARACHI: Begum Samina Arif Alvi being briefed during her visit to Roshni Helpline office.

## UAE's cloud seeding team calls on CM Punjab

LAHORE (APP): Ahmed Al-Kamal, head of the cloud-seeding team from the United Arab Emirates' meteorology department, chief pilot Michael Anstis and pilot Col Ubaid called on Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi at his office on Tuesday.

The CM thanked the team members for their endeavors to induce artificial rainfall to reduce smog and expressed gratitude for the UAE's cooperation, acknowledging it as the first-ever successful attempt at artificial rainfall in Lahore's history.

Chief Minister Naqvi stated that the Punjab government appreciates the collaboration with the UAE, and reiterated the need for artificial rainfall to combat smog. He assured that further efforts would be made to induce artificial rainfall, once again, when the required atmospheric conditions are met, with the assistance of the UAE team.

Highlighting the success of the first-ever artificial rainfall in Lahore, the CM mentioned that air quality levels remained below 200 for several days. He expressed hope that, with suitable atmospheric conditions in January, artificial rainfall could once again be employed to bring further reduction in smog levels.

The chief minister commended the UAE's team for their dedication and emphasized that the people of Pakistan will not forget the efforts of the UAE in this crucial initiative. The

successful artificial rainfall operation in Lahore now stands as a significant milestone in the history of weather modification, he added. Acknowledging the unparalleled cooperation from the leadership of the United Arab Emirates, Naqvi thanked Ahmed Al-Kamal and his team members.

Al-Kamal expressed optimism for another successful artificial rainfall experiment in January, and expressed gratitude for the warm hospitality in Lahore, stating that Pakistan is their second home.

Provincial ministers Amir Mir and Bilal Afzal, weather modification expert Brig. Nadeem, Director General Environment Protection Department, Chief Meteorologist Ch. Muhammad Aslam and CAA's Senior Joint Director Muhammad Altaf were also present.

**CM visits PIC, inspects finishing work:** The ground floor of the Punjab Institute of Cardiology's emergency block will be opened for patients soon, offering advanced cardiac care, as 99 percent upgradation work has been completed due to the continuous monitoring and inspections of Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi.

The CM conducted a detailed visit to PIC's emergency to inspect the finishing work. He ordered to enhance the quality of doors, and flooring especially tiles, and railings, and emphasized the need to ensure high

standards for beds.

The CM also directed the swift initiation of a lab collection center near the main gate and urged for the completion of the finishing work with the highest standards. After the opening of the upgraded emergency, efforts will be redirected towards improving the remaining portion, he added.

Provincial Minister Amir Mir, Secretary Communication and Works and others were also present.

**CM reviews progress on new Ravi Bridge:** Demonstrating an unwavering commitment to public infrastructure development, Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi conducted a thorough inspection of the ongoing development work of the 540-meter-long four-lane new Ravi Bridge.

While observing advancements in piling and drilling works of the new Ravi bridge, he ordered to burn the midnight oil to complete it by Jan 31.

The CM also inspected the roads' construction around Shahdra Chowk and directed to accelerate the pace of work to complete different tasks in the coming days.

Commissioner/ DG LDA and the contractor briefed that two new machines have been installed to expedite the process and 11 piles of new Ravi bridge have already been completed. Similarly, 23, out of 96 girders, have been prepared as well, they added. Provincial Minister Azfar Ali Nasir and others were also present.

## Over 8.6m domiciles registered

LAHORE (APP): Through the Domicile Management System, developed by the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) for the Punjab government, more than 8.6 million domiciles have been registered across Punjab from January to December 2023.

This emerged during a progress review meeting presided over by PITB Chairman Faisal Yousaf here at Arfa Software Technology Park (ASTP) on Tuesday, says a PITB press release.

The meeting was further informed that the number of users of the Domicile Mobile App had reached 961,473.

Domicile Management System has freed the citizens from long queues and extra rounds of the respective Tehsil/District offices and enabled them to apply for domicile through their smart phones from the comfort of their homes, it added. In his remarks on the occasion, Chairman Faisal Yousaf said, "With the integration of the domicile fee with e-Pay Punjab, the citizens have been facilitated regarding the online payment of fees. The government has received more than Rs. 100 million in revenue so far."

## LDA seals, demolishes multiple illegal constructions

LAHORE (APP): In a major operation against illegal constructions, the Lahore Development Authority (LDA) conducted raids and sealed several properties besides numerous unauthorized structures in the city on Tuesday.

The team led by Operation Chief Town Planner II Azhar Ali, conducted operation in Johar Town, PIA Society, Gul-e-Daman Society and Gulberg Society. LDA teams dismantled illegal billboards in Gulberg Society.

## NPA delegation acknowledges Lahore Police excellence in meeting with CCPO

LAHORE (APP): A delegation comprising ASPs undergoing training as part of the 50th Common Training Program at the National Police Academy (NPA) Islamabad met with CCPO Lahore Bilal Siddique Kamyana in his office.

The 33-member delegation, led by Deputy Commandant National Police Academy DIG Naem Ahmed Sheikh, was briefed on the professional training, performance, crime prevention, and other responsibilities of the Lahore Police.

CCPO Bilal Siddique Kamyana, addressing the officers under training, highlighted the revolutionary reforms underway in the police department under the leadership of IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar. He emphasized that all police stations in Lahore have been upgraded to world-standard model police stations, with notable developments and effective handling of administrative issues.

Bilal Siddique Kamyana outlined measures being taken for the welfare of police martyrs' families, including initiatives for quality education, residences, and the mar-

riage of girls. He credited Lahore Police for playing a pivotal role in establishing a safe society and urged the officers under training to prioritize competence, professionalism, and a spirit of service.

The CCPO emphasized that the police profession is a lifestyle based on public service and underscored the importance of quality investigation for delivering justice. He encouraged the officers to focus on providing timely justice to the people, emphasizing that honest, hardworking, capable, and dutiful officers are valuable assets to the police department.

The delegation commended the professional services of Lahore Police, and the ceremony concluded with the exchange of commemorative souvenirs.

Present on the occasion were DIG (Operations) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, DIG (Investigation) Imran Kishwar, DIG (Security) Kamran Adil, SSP (Admin) Atif Nazir, SSP (Operations) Syed Ali Raza, SSP (Investigation) Anush Masood Chaudhry, SSP (Legal) Ghulam Hussain Chauhan, SSP (IAB) Abdullah Lak, and SP Dolphin Zohaib Ranjha.

## PPP against postponement of elections: Nisar Khuhro

KARACHI (APP): Provincial President Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Sindh chapter, Senator Nisar Khuhro Tuesday said that the PPP wanted general elections in the country and would not support any move aimed at postponing polls beyond announced date of February 8 in any case.

He was addressing a press conference along with General Secretary PPP Sindh Senator Waqar Mehdhi and President Karachi division Saeed Ghani at Bilawal House.

On the occasion, Vice President Muslim League-N Sindh advocate Sheikh Javed Mir also announced joining PPP.

Nisar Khuhro said that the narrative of postponing general election beyond the scheduled date would tantamount to "Delaying democracy and denying democra-

cy". "According to the constitution, term of the caretaker government was only three months, so we demand conduct of free, fair and transparent elections on February 8, 2024 so that power could be transferred to elected representatives of the people," he reiterated.

The people should be given an opportunity to elect their representatives having affiliation with any political party and their mandate must be accepted and respected, Khuhro maintained. Armed forces of Pakistan are capable of dealing with the menace of terrorists under the National Action Plan and the same was done in the past, he said accusing that, Imran Khan later came into power and fueled terrorist sentiments in the society.

He said that the PPP Parliamentary Board has

finalized recommendations for issuing party tickets to the final candidates in all constituencies for the general elections and announcement in this regard would be made in coming days after approval of the party leadership.

Khuhro said that the 10-point manifesto given by Bilawal Bhutto Zardari would be fully implemented by the PPP after forming the federal government.

Competitors of PPP were afraid of their defeat and they were resorting to forming alliances but PPP already fought such alliances in the past and it was ready to face them now as well, he said adding that People's Party's was in alliance with the people, so it would not become part of any alliance and would contest the elections from its own platform.



LAHORE: PHA worker busy trimming grass at a local nursery.



# Governor stresses doctors to work with passion

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali on Tuesday stressed medical professionals to work with passion and focus energies to resolve problems of ailing community.

He was addressing certificates distribution ceremony of community midwives in Provincial Health Services Academy Peshawar. The ceremony was also attended by Vice Chancellor PHSA, Dr. Shahzad Ali Khan, Secretary Health, Mehmood Aslam Wazir, Director General Health, Shoukat Ali Khan, health

experts and students.

He said that medical professionals should serve humanity with dedication and professionalism besides playing role to address differences in society. He also inaugurated academic blocs and Centre of Excellence and Applied Sciences for Bachelor Degree Program in Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Post Graduate Paramedical Institute.

Governor also distributed certificates among midwives who have completed education in the academy. Congratulating parents on the occasion, he

urged midwives to help out ailing community and added that role of community midwives is to reduce mortality rates of newborns and mothers.

He said that government was spending huge amount to improve healthcare delivery system regretting that common man is still not receiving benefits of our efforts. He said that we should avoid blaming each other and strive for the welfare and facilitation of general public.

Governor also paid tribute to administration of PHSA for improving edu-

cation standard and preparing midwives according to meet challenges in existing health scenario.

**Governor condoles over death of former CJ**  
**PHC:** Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali Tuesday condoled over the death of former Chief Justice (CJ) Peshawar High Court (PHC), Justice Qaisar Rasheed.

In a condolence message issued here, KP Governor prayed for the eternal peace of departed soul and granting courage to bereaved family members to bear the loss with equanimity.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah addressing launching ceremony of youth training and employment program.

## Police thwarts major terror attack

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a successful operation, Peshawar Police, utilizing advanced technology, thwarted a terrorist plot. According to SSP Operations Kashif Aftab Abbasi Peshawar Police in the tribal district of Khyber and the border area of Peshawar, successfully controlling the transportation of terrorists through thermal weapons.

Kashif Abbasi disclosed that near Juma Khan Khawar, the police were actively searching for positions to counter an impending attack by militants on a police station and checkpoint. Cops managed to repel the extremists using thermal weapons.

The SSP operations stated that 8 to 10 militants had planned to launch an attack on the police station and checkpoint, but the police successfully thwarted their attempt.

SSP Kashif Abbasi emphasized that a search operation has been initiated in the region, underscoring the commitment to ensuring the safety and security of the area.

The use of cutting-edge technology played a crucial role in the operation's success, preventing a potentially devastating terrorist attack in the vicinity.

## Ex-CJ PHC Qaiser Rashid passes away

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Former Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Qaiser Rashid has been passed after prolonged illness of kidney disease at private hospital. His kidney transplant was operated last while his wife donated the organ to him.

Former PHC's Chief Justice Qaiser Rashid was born on 31st March 1961 at Thana village of Malakand Agency. He had passed matriculation from Cadet College Kohat in 1976 while enrolled in Islamia College for Faculty Science (F. Sc) and completed it in 1978.

The deceased was graduated from Khyber Law College University of Peshawar in 1984 and became

ome professional lawyer while elected Member Pakistan Bar Council on 22nd December 2010. He served as Additional Advocate General, Legal Advisor National Bank of Pakistan, Inspection Judge and In-charge Judge PHC.

Former Chief Justice Qaiser Rashid also served Senior Judge PHC from 28th June 2018 to 16th November 2020 and took oath as Chief Justice after departure of Justice Waqar Seth to eternity, 9th January 2021. He served as Chief Justice PHC till 30th March 2023 till his retirement.

It is worthy to mention that former Chief Justice PHC Qaiser Rashid had upheld public interest cases especially regarding protection of environment, forests and riverbanks. As well as illegal construction, encroachment and illicit mining related cases were decided on priority basis. He was continuously part clean bench and called concerned officers to court for assurance of public interest's cases.

Former Chief Justice Qaiser Rashid was first person arrested under Section 3 of Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) in 2007 Lawyer's Movement and sent to Dera Ismail Khan jail.

KP Bar Council, PHC Bar Association and Peshawar Bar Association along with other legal bodies condole departure of Former Chief Justice Qaiser Rashid and claimed that gap can't be fulfilled in decades.

## Secretary Excise streamlines tax operations

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Secretary Excise Syed Fayaz Ali Shah made an Surprise visit to the Tax Facilitation Center (TFC) in Hayatabad and the Excise & Taxation Officer (ETO) Three office, conducting a detailed examination of various administrative sections related to property taxes in the newly constructed Excise Directorate, TFC, and ETO-III Offices.

Secretary Excise Fayaz Ali Shah, considering public convenience, immediately initiated measures to streamline and facilitate all matters related to vehicle registration and token tax, property tax, professional tax, and Excise Department. He informed the Frontier Post that the Tax Facilitation Center would now consolidate all taxes related to the Excise Department under one roof, providing ease and convenience to the public. He emphasized that facilities would be extended to the public with a citizen-friendly approach, and officers were directed to maintain a positive attitude in dealing with inquiries at the offices.

Secretary Excise highlighted that officers were given strict instructions to exhibit a positive demeanor while dealing with queries in offices. He stated that a proactive approach was adopted to ensure that the public faces no difficulties in availing facilities. Secretary Excise also mentioned the specific directives given to officers for the collection of property taxes.

This sudden visit and subsequent directives from Secretary Excise Fayaz Ali Shah aim to enhance efficiency and accessibility in tax-related matters, demonstrating a commitment to citizen-centric policies within the Excise Department.



PESHAWAR: A view of construction work of Bara Bridge Alamgudar area.

## PESCO notifies power suspension

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) on Tuesday notified that due to maintenance work power supply will remain suspended from Peshawar University Grid Station on 4th and 9th January from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Consequently, it said consumers of University Campus, Canal Town, Malakandher, Engineering, Regi, Taj Abad, Taj Abad 2, Agriculture, Mera Achini, HMC, Ring Road, Danish Abad, Ghrib Abad, Rahatabad 1, CMB and Abdara feeders will face inconvenience.

It said that power supply will also remain suspended from Rehman Baba Grid Station on 3rd and 8th January from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of Kachori, Shalozai, Safdar Abad, Khanmust, New Hazar Khwani, Surizai, Phandu Baba, Urmur 2, Hazar

Khwani, Yakatoot, New Chairman Daftar, Jameel Colony, Ring Road, Beri Bagh, Rashid Ghari, Surizai, Akhon Abad, Ring Road 2, SIDB feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from Kohat Road Grid Station on 3rd and 8th January from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of PAF Express, Kohat Road, Wazir Bagh, Sonehri Masjid, Bana Mari, Civil Quarter, Nothia, Murshad Abad, Abasin, Old Deh Bahadar, Deh Bhadar, Wazir Abad, Ameen ColonyJ Bara, Nodhya Payan, Murshid Abad, Dora Road, Nodiya Bahadar, Lundi Arbab 1,2,3, Sheikh Muhamadi, Pishtakhara, Swati Gate, Gulbarg, Scheme Chowk, Chairman Daftar feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from Peshawar City Grid Station

on 3rd and 6th January from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of Sikhandar Abad, Zaryab, Phandu Road, City Home, Bana Mari, Urmur, Islamabad, Faqir Abad, Sheikh Abad, Molvi G, Nishtarabad, NHA feeders will face inconvenience. The power supply will remain suspended from Abbottabad – Nathia Gali Transmission Line on 3rd and 4th January from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of 132 KV Nathia Gali grid connected feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will also remain suspended from Mardan Grid Station on 4th January from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of Shah Dandh, Rural, Zandai, Ghari Daudzai, Col Jawad Khan, Lakson Tobacco Factory, Tawas, Babinai, Ahmad Abad, Rural 1 feeders will face inconvenience.

## PIC pathology lab acclaims international recognition

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Institute of Cardiology (PIC) has claimed yet another international recognition as the American College of Pathologists has declared the test reports of the PIC pathology laboratory of international standard.

According to the spokesperson of the hospital, PIC is the first government hospital in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to participate in the proficiency quality testing of American College of Pathologists,

adding that American College sent more than 250 blood and other test samples to PIC lab to ascertain the proficiency of the lab.

The test reports of PIC lab were declared 100 per cent correct and according to international standards, said spokesperson. The lab tests included samples from hematology, chemical pathology, microbiology, blood bank and bedside machines of patients.

She said that the samples from the American College included tests for diagnosis

of kidney, liver, hepatitis, cholesterol, sugar, and various blood diseases.

The lab also diagnosed various medicines used to identify various germs and treatment of diseases, which were found to be absolutely correct.

The approval of the PIC lab report by the American College of Pathologists was a great achievement, said the hospital director Dr. Nimat Shah, adding that it was mission of PIC to provide international standards' treatment and facilities to the patients of the province and from all over Pakistan.

In three-year, PIC has earned a lot of achievements at the national and international level due to the best services, treatment and strategies, which was a source of pride, said Dr Nimat Shah.

PIC has also received the honor of being the first government ISO certified hospital of Pakistan for providing treatment according to international standards, he noted.

## Hamza Foundation pay thanks to donors

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The year 2023 has been challenging but this has renewed our belief in the kindness and generosity of our supporters and donors who have humbled us by continuing to be the backbone of Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassaemia Center and Blood Transfusion Services Peshawar.

Thank you all for your contributions to our mission. Your contribution makes a real difference to the lives of 1485 registered patients of Thalassaemia, Hemophilia and Blood cancer. As we begin the year 2024, let's come together to help and support the noble cause of Hamza Foundation.

Please come forward and give a helping hand to Hamza Foundation as a HOPE OF LIFE for thousands of poor Thalassaemia, Hemophilia and Blood cancer kids. Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassaemia Center and Blood Transfusion Services Peshawar Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan while can be contacted No. 0915845553.

## FF admin congratulates PPC cabinet

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Fatimid Foundation Administrator Badar Hussain congratulated newly elected cabinet of Peshawar Press Club and wished his hopes for their role of accountability and transparency, on Tuesday.

Fatimid Foundation Administrator Badar Hussain congratulated PPC newly elect president Arshad Aziz Malak along with his cabinet and hopeful for playing their role for uplifting society.

He added that consecutive 2nd victory of PPC cabinet show their courage for representation of journalist community.

Fatimid Foundation administrator lauded role of journalists in society for ensuring accountability and transparency.

## Aseer appointed as member

PESHAWAR (APP): The competent Authority has appointed Hissam-ud-Din (Aseer Mangal) eminent literacy writer and columnist as member of the Standing Committee for civil Awards as culture and literature expert to advise the government about the suitability of persons for the conferment of Civil Awards.



PESHAWAR: A view of dense foggy weather early morning hours in provincial capital.

## SUIT, HERA join hands to initiate joint projects

PESHAWAR (INP): Sarhad University of Science and Information Technology (SUIT) Peshawar and Higher Education Regulatory Authority (HERA), Govt. of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa here on Tuesday signed an agreement to jointly initiate projects of combined nature aimed at promoting higher education in the KP in particular and in other provinces in general.

The agreement was signed by Chairman HERA, Fazle Qadir and Vice President SUIT, Azmat Ali. Member board of Trustees of SUIT, Taimoor Riaz, high ranking

officials of the University and HERA were also present on the occasion.

The agreement is aimed at searching and seeking different projects related to imparting training, holding workshops, seminars, symposia, conferences and research based projects in various government and semi government departments of KP and in other provinces.

Talking on the occasion, the Chairman HERA said that this agreement was the first of its kind in the province, where a government department and private university joined hands to initiate projects of

mutual interests for the spread and promotion of higher education in KP.

He was of the view that the agreement was open to execute its jurisdiction in other provinces, as well as in other sectors, including elementary and secondary education and professional and technical education. He also stated that different NGOs and foreign funding agencies would be engaged in these projects.

The Vice President SUIT also congratulated the Chairman HERA for such a big leap in the right direction to execute joint projects in the field of education.

## Cold, dry weather predicted

PESHAWAR (APP): The Regional Meteorological Center Peshawar on Tuesday predicted that mainly cold and dry weather is expected in most districts of the province, while very cold in upper districts and hilly areas.

It said that foggy conditions are expected over Charsadda, Nowshera, Mardan, Peshawar, Swabi and D.I. Khan districts as well as over Motorway

(M1) / Highways at night and early in the morning.

During the last 24 hours cold and dry weather prevailed over most districts of the province. Rainfall recorded (in mm) during the last 24 hours at different stations of KPK was nil.

The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in centigrade at different stations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were Peshawar 21/04, Chitral

17/-02, Timergara 19/02, Dir 20/-02, Mirkhani 19/00, Kalam 14/-05, Drosh 15/02, Saidu Sharif 19/01, Pattan 24/08, Malam Jabba 11/02, Takht Bhai 20/02, Kakul 18/02, Balakot 19/02, Parachinar 17/02, Bannu 21/04, Cherat 17/03, DI Khan City 20/05.

The lowest temperatures recorded in the province was -06°C in Tirah valley of Khyber district and -05°C in Kalam.



PESHAWAR: Youngsters playing marble balls in outskirts of City.

## HMC provides treatment

PESHAWAR (APP): Hayatabad Medical Complex (HMC) served a total of 1,253,287 patients in its OPD and Emergency Department while treated 27,675 Afghan national patients during the year 2023.

Spokesperson of the Hospital on Tuesday said that the hospital admitted 106,824 patients and performed 44,718 major and minor surgeries. The Radiology Department assisted 25,024 patients, while the Pathology Department supported 150,558 patients, conducting 1,021 bone marrow tests.

Similarly, the Thalassaemia Department provided free treatment to 1,941 children. Approximately 23,920 patients underwent cancer examinations this year, with 3,715 impoverished cancer patients receiving comprehensive treatment.

The Cardiology Department examined 23,319 patients, conducting heart surgeries for 359 individuals. The hospital's Endocrinology Department initiated in 2014 under the Free Insulin Program, registered over 1,714 patients, providing free treatment to 4,389 diabetic patients.





## In brief

### Two killed in accident

MULTAN (INP): Two passengers were killed and several others critically injured when a bus overturned due to dense fog near Ahmedpur Sharqia a city in Bahawalpur District on Tuesday morning. According to rescue, a passenger bus travelling from Karachi to Bahawalpur turned turtle due to fog, as a result, two persons lost their lives on the spot, a private news channel reported. Police and emergency personnel helped clear the wreckage and assist the injured at the scene.

### TPC elects new cabinet

#### F.P. Report

TAKHTBHAI: Takhtbhai Press Club (TPC) elected Muslim Khan Sabir and Akbar Khan Yousafzai president and general secretary respectively along with new cabinet for 2024 unanimously, on Tuesday. The general body session chaired by Dost Muhammad Darvish which had nominated new cabinet unanimously as Muslim Khan Sabir and Akbar Khan Yousafzai as president and general secretary respectively. TPC new cabinet comprising of vice president Wahab Yousafi, joint secretary Javed Alam Mohmand, finance secretary Izaat Muhammad Khapalwak, Office Secretary Muhammad Shahid Khan and Haji Dost Muhammad Darvish as chairman general body.

### Cop reunite child with parents

MULTAN (INP): Police successfully located a child and handed him over to his parents hours after he was reported missing by his father in Muzaffarabad police area in Multan, police said on Tuesday. Police spokesman said that police started search for the child soon after his father Syed Zeeshan informed Muzaffarabad police that his four years old son Qalb-e-Abbas has gone missing. SHO Aslam Masih and his team successfully searched the boy and handed him over to his parents. Parents thanked police officials, prayed for their well-being and appreciated them for their swift response.

### Teenager crushed to death

MULTAN (INP) A teen aged girl was crushed to death by bus while crossing the road near Nazaro Wale Hatti, Tehsil Alipur. Rescue sources told on Tuesday that the bus No. APA-02 hit the pedestrian girl while she was crossing the road carelessly. The deceased identified as Irum d/o M.Ijaz was rushed to the THQ Hospital Alipur where she succumbed to the internal head injuries as per her medical report. Police have started investigation.

### Encroachments removed

FAISALABAD (INP): The district government removed encroachments from Sheikhpura Road and warned the encroachers of other parts of the city to remove their setups voluntarily or be ready to face action. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Abdullah Nayyar Sheikh led the anti-encroachment drive while Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Municipal Corporation Zubair Watto and others were also present. Speaking on the occasion, the DC said that encroachments created problems for people, therefore, the government had decided to rehabilitate all roads by removing all kinds of encroachments from them. In this connection, a vigorous campaign was launched and heavy machinery used to demolish ramps and other type of encroachments.



JAMSHORO: Students taking keen interest during art, design and heritages Expo at university.

## JI plans to open separate shopping markets, edu institutions for women

### F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Jamaat-i-Islami chief and party candidate for NA 6 Sirajul Haq has said that his party will introduce the Islamic Sharia economic system in the country and will provide 350 units of electricity to every consumer free of cost after coming into power. He was addressing a public gathering at the hujra of Malik Nazar Jan at Musabad Munda as chief guest in his own constituency here on Tuesday.

The JI chief is contesting elections on NA 6 Lower Dir. Several political activists including Malik Nazar Jan, Malik Faiz Musakhel, Ali Khan, Qari Abdul Rehman and Habib Hassan along with their families announced to join the JI on the occasion. The gathering was also addressed by the JI candidate for PK 17 Izzul Mulk Afkari, Qazi Azizul Haq Usmani, Haji Niaz Malook, Haji Kalimullah and others. Siraj said that Palestine and Kashmir would be freed from the enemies. He alleged the major political parties like the PML-N, PPP and PTI had made the country and its citizens poor during their governments. He said the previous rulers were involved in corruption and that was why they failed to end corrupt practices.

The JI chief asked his party workers to convey his message from house to house and voter to voter. "Our message is to rid Pakistan of



the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund by implementing the Islamic Sharia system", Siraj said, adding that abolishing the interest-based economy and co-education in the country was his first priority. He said the JI would establish separate colleges and universities for girls' education.

He said that separate shopping markets would also be set up for women. He said that small industries in the rural areas would be established and developed to provide jobs to skilled youths. The JI chief said that they had promised to provide free education during the Mutahida Majlis e Amal government and now students were getting free education upto grade 12th at public sector schools and colleges in the province. "We have done record develop-

ment projects in Dir including black topping of link roads, construction of bridges, provision of electricity, construction of schools and colleges, technical colleges, hospitals and countless other development projects", he claimed, adding that they had introduced the Islamic banking system in the province during the MMA government the model of which was being copied by other Muslim states.

The JI chief claimed that his party had been part of the government twice in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but none of its MPAs or ministers were accused of corruption. He said the JI was the only party which would end corruption in Pakistan and lay the foundation of an Islamic and welfare state. He joined Jamaat-e-Islami along with Haji Malik Nazar Khan, senior journalist Malik Faiz Musa Khel, Ali Khan, Qari Abdul Rehman and Habib Hasan family and resigned from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and joined Jamaat-e-Islami. On this occasion, District Amir and candidate for PK 17 Aizazul Malik Afkari, Maulana Qazi Azizul Haq Usmani alias Sharbani, Haji Niaz Maluk, Shamrad Khan, Haji Kaleemullah, Malik Abdullah, Chairman Samiullah, Chairman Inamuddin and Chairman Shirazuddin and many others were present. Workers and leaders were

## Four feeders to be made load shedding free in Dera

### F.P. Report

DI KHAN: Commissioner Dera Ismail Khan, Zafar-ul-Islam Khattak has said that four feeders of the district were being made load-shedding free in a week time.

Talking to media persons at his office, he said after recovery of dues during the ongoing drive in the district, four feeders including City One, Town Hall, Topanwala, and Saddar would be provided round the clock power supply to its consumers in the first phase.

In this regard, he said a letter had been written to

the Additional Chief Secretary Home Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to contact the federal government in this regard. During the second phase, the commissioner said in Rural Division and City Division too, four feeders- a process had also been initiated to make four feeders- City Two, Muslim Bazaar, CRBC, and Cantt-II loadshedding free.

Regarding election-related arrangements, he said the training of AROs and ROs in the four districts of Dera Division had been completed, adding submission of candidates' nominations papers and scrutiny process were also

completed. Similarly, he added elaborate security arrangements had been made to ensure the general elections in a peaceful environment.

He also said polio campaigns would be conducted in Dera Ismail Khan, Tank and south waziristan districts. President of the Traders Association, Chaudhry Jameel Ahmed was also present on the occasion. He said in Dera Ismail Khan Division the most sensitive, sensitive, and normal polling stations had been identified, with additional personnel requested for their security due to security concerns.

## Police arrest arrest eight more drug peddlers

KHAIRPUR (PPI): On the directives by SSP Khairpur Dr Samiullah Soomro, the Khairpur police have intensified its crackdown on drug peddling, resulting in the arrest of eight more drug peddlers.

According to a police report on Tuesday, the suc-

cessful operations, carried out by SHOs of Mirwah, Wada Machhion, Sobhoder, Wada Mahesar, and Ranipur Police Stations, have led to the substantial seizure of drugs. The apprehended individuals have been identified as Imtiaz, Lakhmir

Ujan, Makin Mangnejo, Bilawal Sheikh, Altaf Memon, Bashir Mangi, Jinsar Sandeelo, and Wahid Bakhsh Mallah. The confiscated items include 900 grams of hashish, 2050 grams of bhang, 2700 intoxicating betel nuts, and three bottles of alcohol.

## Two die in road mishap

BAHAWALPUR (INP): At least two passengers have died and 13 others have sustained injuries as their passenger coach overturned due to dense fog in Kot Khalifa area on the National Highway.

The official sources in the police and Punjab Emergency Service Department, Rescue 1122 said that a passenger coach loaded with passengers was on its way from Karachi to Bhakkar when it overturned near Bhalka bridge in Kot Khalifa area on Karachi-Lahore national highway.

"As a result of the accident, two passengers died on the spot and 13 others suffered critical wounds," they said, adding that two of the injured were told to be in very serious condition. The rescuer teams and ambulances of Punjab Emergency Service Department rushed to the scene and shifted the dead and injured to a hospital in Taranda area. The police sources said that the driver drove away the bus off the road due to heavy fog which had reduced visibility level to few meters and the coach overturned. The police have also started investigation into the incident. Further probe was underway.

## Rejection of nomination papers PTI candidaes to challenge decision

### F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Pakistan Tahreek Insaf former lawmakers from the Lower Dir district have announced to challenge the returning officers' decision of rejecting their nomination papers. Nomination papers of thirteen candidates including former MNAs of the Pakistan Tahreek Insaf Bashir Khan and Syed Mahboob Shah were rejected by the concerned returning officers in NA 6 and NA 7 Lower Dir.

The JI chief Sirajul Haq is contesting elections on NA 6 whose nominations were accepted. A total of 68 candidates had submitted nominations for both the NA seats out of which the nomination papers of 55 were accepted. The nomination papers of the PTI former MPAs including Malik Shafiullah Khan, Humayun Khan, Muhammad Azam Khan and Malik Liaqat Ali were rejected by the concerned ROs during the scrutiny.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan's latest information the number of voters in NA 6 is 457075 including 253972 male and 203113 female voters for which the ECP plans to set up 307 polling stations (79 male,

73 female and 307 combined).

The number of total voters in NA 7 is 413777 including 227837 male and 185940 female for which a total of 307 polling stations including 96 for male, 92 for female and 119 combined polling stations would be set up. In both the Lower Dir NA constituencies the ECP plans to set up a total of 614 polling stations for 870852 voters (481809 male and 389043 female voters).

In PK 14 Lower Dir-1, nomination papers of two candidates out of 35 including Azam Khan of the PTI were rejected. The number of registered voters in PK 14 is 182431 including 100696 male and 81735 female for which the ECP has planned to set up 129 polling stations (31 for male, 29 for female and 69 combined).

In PK 15, nomination papers of 10 candidates out of 42 including Humayun Khan of the PTI were rejected by the RO. The number of registered voters in this constituency is 178454 including 98063 male and 80391 female. According to the ECP plan, a total of 127 polling stations (47 male, 45 female and 35 combined) would be set up.

In PK 16, a total of 27 candidates including a woman are in the run. The nominations of 4 candidates including Malik Shafiullah Khan of the PTI were rejected by the RO. The ECP has set up 132 polling stations (37 male, 36 female and 59 combined) for a total of 171919 voters including 94719 male and 77200 female voters.

In PK 17, nominations of 5 candidates including a woman were rejected while nominations of 32 candidates were accepted by the concerned RO. The number of registered voters in this constituency is 172353 including 96450 male and 75903 female for which the ECP has set up a total of 116 polling stations including 33 for male, 29 for female and 54 combined.

The nomination papers of only one candidate Malik Liaqat Ali of the PTI were rejected by the RO in PK-18 and now 20 candidates are in the run. The number of registered voters in this constituency is 165695 including 91881 male and 73814 female voters. The ECP has set up 110 polling stations in PK-18 including 27 for male, 26 for female and 57 combined polling stations.

## Residents block road against load shedding

### F.P. Report

MARDAN: Residents of Palo Dheri protested against unannounced load shedding of electricity. The protesters blocked Rustam Mardan road for all types of traffic, due to which long queues of vehicles were formed and transporters and people were facing severe problems.

The protesters were carrying banners and placards in their hands, on which slogans against undeclared load shedding were written. The protestors shouted slogans against Pesco

Chief. The protestors said that WAPDA officials are treating Palo Dheri of Rustam Tehsil like a step-mother. There is not as much load shedding in other areas as there is unannounced load shedding in Palo Dheri. The power thieves have the support of WAPDA officials, while the people and landlords are yearning for a drop of water. On one hand, there is

drought, while on the other hand, crops standing in the fields are being destroyed due to unannounced load shedding by WAPDA officials.

If our load-shedding issue is not resolved, the protest will continue. After continuing the protest for three hours, SP Rural Division Muhammad Ijaz Sherpao assured to resolve the issue by successfully negotiating with the protestors. The protestors opened the road for all kinds of traffic.

**WUM commits for sustainable environment via awareness:**

Women University Mardan (WUM) has once again demonstrated its commitment to sustainability and environmental consciousness by securing an impressive global ranking in the UI Green Metric World University Rankings 2023.

Among 1,183 universities from 84 countries that showcased significant progress in integrating sustainable practices, Women

University Mardan proudly clinched the 764th position worldwide and stands at an admirable 37th position in Pakistan among general universities.

Furthermore, WUM proudly holds the desired 1st position among female universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The prestigious acknowledgment comes in the form of a certificate and a detailed fact file highlighting the university's commendable achievements.

Prof. Dr. Ghazala Yasmeen, Vice Chancellor of WUM, expressed her gratitude for the unwavering enthusiasm and support received throughout the UI Green Metric World University Rankings 2023. She attributed this success to the collaborative teamwork of the students, faculty, and administrative staff, emphasizing their dedication to fostering a sustainable and environmentally conscious academic environment.

## KP has no funds to pay salaries to employees: Sherpao

### F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Tuesday said the voters would face difficulty reaching the polling stations in the prevailing poor law and order.

Addressing a gathering in Tangi tehsil in Charsadda, he said the candidates would also face problems with running their election campaign. On this occasion PTI Nazim Muhammad Nisar Khan announced joining the QWP along with his family members and supporters. He said that the law and order was getting worse with each passing day. Aftab Sherpao said the political forces would have to join hands and work hard to steer the

country out of the prevailing circumstances. He said that the country faced three major challenges in the year 2023 which included political instability, economic crisis and rising acts of terrorism.

QWP said whichever political party came to power after the 2024 general election would have to work hard to address these challenges. He added that the ones demanding level-playing field should recall whether it was provided to the other political forces for the 2018 general election.

He said that experiments with the political system caused colossal loss to the economy therefore such practices should be stopped. He said the Imran Khan experiment caused economic stagna-

tion, inflation and political instability. "What service was done to the country by bringing him to power?" he asked. Aftab Sherpao said the voters must not listen to catchy slogans as these were meant to deceive them. He advised the voters to check the track record of the candidates before casting their ballots.

He said that nobody cared to raise voice for the rights of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa facing financial crunch. He said the cash-strapped province did not have funds to pay salaries to government employees. He said the provision of the treatment under the Sehat card was also suspended for want of funds. He said all uplift projects in KP were placed on the backburner.

## Indo-Afghan water aggression towards Pakistan

### Laiba Aziz

**THERE has always been no hope of good from India, but a country like Afghanistan, which Pakistan has always provided every kind of help to, has once again set an example of ingratitude.**

The recent threat by Afghanistan to cut off water supply from the Kunar River to Pakistan has ignited a dangerous spark in an already volatile region. While the intent to leverage water as a weapon may seem tempting, it is a gamble fraught with perilous consequences for both nations. To understand the true depths of this threat, one must delve into the intricate geography that binds these two

countries and the shared history that flows through their veins - a history inextricably linked to the lifeblood of the region: Water.

The Kunar River, a vital artery for Afghanistan, is not an entity unto itself. Its journey begins in the snow-capped peaks of Chitral, nestled within Pakistan's borders. Here, it is known as the Chitral River, carving its path through lush valleys before crossing the Durand Line into Afghanistan. It assumes the name Kunar and continues its nourishing journey, eventually merging with the mighty Kabul River. This interconnectedness paints a stark picture: Afghanistan's threats to cut off the Kunar's flow are not merely a slap on Pakistan's

wrist; they are a potential stranglehold on its own lifeblood.

The crux of the matter lies not in the technicalities of water distribution, but in the underlying political tensions. Afghanistan's recent threats stem from the propaganda by none other than India, who first tried to take help of the militant group; TTP that has plagued Pakistan for years, to destroy peace on the land of Pakistan, now have signed agreements and is assisting Afghanistan for the Hydral Project by providing engineers. However, resorting to water as a weapon is not only counter productive but also ethically questionable. It punishes innocent Pashtuns on both sides, turning a political dispute into a humanitarian crisis.

The story of the Kabul River is not just about geography; it is a story of shared history, intertwined destinies, and the delicate balance of life. To sever this connection, to weaponize water, is not only a violation of international norms but also a betrayal of the very essence that binds these two nations together; Pashtuns. Afghanistan has always been so rigid while claiming that Pashtuns on both sides of the border are one nation and that they should be united, but when it comes this project, they are behaving completely naive and have no concerns regarding the consequences it will implement on the Pashtuns across the border, specifically the areas of

Charsadda, Nowshera, Swabi, Mohmand and some other regions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

While planning on this water aggression, Afghanistan seems to be in a fallacy that Pakistan is not ready to handle this situation. Meanwhile, Pakistan's awareness of the interconnectedness of the rivers, has embarked on several ambitious water infrastructure projects, including tunnel canals designed to divert water directly from the Chitral River before it crosses into Afghanistan. The most recent example of tackling such issue is the Nelum-Jhelum Hydro-Power Project. Such efforts, while controversial, highlight the precarious balance of power at play. Afghanistan must choose the

path of wisdom, the path of cooperation, and leave the murky waters of conflict behind. The future of mass public, on both sides of the border, especially Pashtuns, depends on it.

Now this tri-lateral relationship of conflict raises the questions that, will Afghanistan recognize its own future being intricately linked to Pakistan's or not? And that the challenges both nations face - from terrorism to climate change - require cooperation, not confrontation. Also, will Afghanistan be wise enough to engage in dialogue, fostering regional cooperation, and upholding international water treaties which will be far more sustainable solutions than resorting to threats and brinkmanship?





## South Korea opposition chief stabbed in neck, in intensive care

SEOUL (Reuters): South Korean opposition Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung was stabbed in the neck during a visit to the southern city of Busan on Tuesday and was airlifted to Seoul after receiving emergency treatment, party and emergency officials said.

The suspect, wearing a paper crown with Lee's name on it, approached and asked for an autograph as Lee spoke among a throng of supporters and reporters. He then lunged forward and attacked him, video footage showed. Lee, who narrowly lost the 2022 presidential election, underwent surgery at Seoul National University Hospital and was in an intensive care unit recovering and conscious, party spokesman Kwon Chil-seung told reporters. He condemned the attack as "political terror".

Kwon said earlier medical staff suspected damage to a jugular vein. The attack by the assailant unfolded quickly while Lee was touring the site of a proposed airport. Television footage and a video clip on the social media platform X showed the man lunging with his arm stretched out and stabbing Lee in the neck, the force of the attack pushing Lee back into the crowd behind him.

Lee grimaced and collapsed. News photographs showed Lee lying on the ground with his eyes closed and bleeding, and people pressing a handkerchief against his neck. A Busan police official, Son Je-han, told a news briefing the assailant was born in 1957 and used an 18-cm knife bought online. He did not identify the suspect and said the motive was being investigated.

Police will seek a charge of attempted murder, media said. Jin Jeong-hwa, a Lee supporter who was



at the scene livestreaming the event, told Reuters there were more than two dozen police officers present. The assailant was quickly subdued by party officials and police officers, the footage showed.

President Yoon Suk Yeol condemned the attack. "This type of violence must never be tolerated under any circumstances," his office quoted him as saying. A former governor of Gyeonggi province, Lee narrowly lost to conservative Yoon, a former chief prosecutor, in the 2022 presidential election. He has led the main opposition party since August 2022. Lee is currently on trial for alleged bribery stemming from a development project when he was mayor of Seongnam near Seoul. He has denied wrongdoing.

South Korea's next parliamentary

elections are due in April. South Korea has a history of political violence although it has tough restrictions on gun possession. There is police presence at major events but political leaders are not normally under close security protection. Lee's predecessor, Song Young-gil, was attacked in 2022 by an assailant who swung a blunt object against his head, causing a laceration.

Then conservative opposition party leader Park Geun-hye, who later served as president, was slashed in the face at an event in 2006 and suffered a gash that required surgery. Her father, Park Chung-hee, who was president for 16 years after taking power in a military coup, was shot and killed by his spy chief in 1979 at a drunken private dinner.

## US Navy ending aircraft carrier's ME deployment

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier will return to its home port, the US Navy said, ending its deployment to the eastern Mediterranean, which started in support of Israel after the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas militants.

The nuclear-powered Ford, the Navy's newest carrier with over 4,000 personnel and eight squadrons of aircraft, became a powerful symbol of American support by rushing closer to Israel after the Palestinian militant group's attack. The attacks triggered a war in Gaza with Israeli forces reducing much of the territory to rubble, killing thousands and plunging its 2.3 million people into a humanitarian disaster.

Israel says the Hamas attack killed 1,200 people, Palestinian health authorities in Hamas-run Gaza say Israeli forces have killed nearly 22,000 people. "Immediately following Hamas' brutal attack on Israel, the USS Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group was ordered to the eastern Mediterranean to contribute to our regional deterrence and defense posture," the Navy said in a statement.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had extended the Ford's deployment three times in hopes that its presence would deter Iran and Iran-aligned groups, particularly

Lebanon's Hezbollah, from attacking Israel. US troops in Iraq and Syria have endured drone and rocket attacks by Iran-backed militia. Iran-aligned Houthis in Yemen have disrupted global trade by attacking commercial tankers and container ships in the Red Sea with drones and missiles. "DoD (Department of Defense) will continue to leverage its collective force posture in the region to deter any state or non-state actor from escalating this crisis beyond Gaza," the Navy said. The Ford will return to its home base in Virginia.

## Lai pleads not guilty

HONG KONG: Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai has pleaded not guilty to all charges in his closely-watched trial under the territory's national security law that could see him jailed for life. Lai, 76, has been in prison since December 2020 and faces two counts of "conspiracy to collude with foreign forces" under the China-imposed security law as well as "conspiracy to publish seditious publications" under a colonial-era sedition law.

His trial was delayed by a year – after the Hong Kong government questioned his choice of lawyer – seeking Beijing's intervention – and finally got under way in December. The founder of the now-defunct Apple Daily newspaper is one of Beijing's most vocal critics and has already been convicted on lesser charges related to the management of the media firm and his involvement in a vigil to mark the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

"Not guilty," Lai responded in English as each of the three charges was read out. Wearing a white shirt and a navy blue jacket, Lai was surrounded by three prison guards in the defendant's dock. He wore headphones to help him hear the trial more clearly, according to his lawyer. Other defendants in the case include three Apple Daily companies that have been taken over by the Hong Kong government, six former executives of the newspaper and two young activists related to an advocacy group called Stand With Hong Kong Fight For Freedom (SWHK).

Beijing imposed the broadly-worded national security law in June 2020, saying it was necessary to restore stability following the mass protests the previous year, which began amid popular opposition to a plan for an extradition bill with the mainland. Amnesty has said the law has "decimated" Hong Kong's freedoms and many pro-democracy politicians and activists have left the territory. — Aljazeera

## US watching Taiwan elections closely as China reiterates claim to island

WASHINGTON: Last month, Joe Biden and Xi Jinping strolled through the lush gardens of a grand California mansion engaged in a candid, intimate conversation. It was their first face-to-face summit in a year and the Chinese president was blunt – Taiwan, Xi told his US counterpart, was the most important and dangerous issue in the two countries' fractious relationship.

Beijing's policy towards the self-ruled island it claims as its own will again be under the spotlight when voters in Taiwan go to the polls on January 13 to choose a new president and parliament, and the United States will be watching closely. At the moment, William Lai Ching-te, the incumbent vice president and the candidate of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), is expected to emerge the winner. That result would likely rattle Beijing, which portrays Lai as a "separatist" bent on independence and ensure continued tension across the narrow strait that separates the island from China. "Washington is well prepared to deal with any choice that the Taiwan electorate makes, but there's certainly going to be different opportunities and challenges depending on what the results of the election are," Rory Daniels, the managing director of the Asia Society Policy Institute, told Al Jazeera, adding that the US would be considering strategies for the "appropriate political signals" to deter any Chinese military responses.

Beijing has stepped up pressure on Taiwan since voters first elected the DPP's Tsai Ing-wen as president in 2016, cutting off all official dialogue, conducting military activities around the island and encouraging Taipei's few remaining formal diplomatic allies to switch recognition to Beijing. The US, which maintains official ties with China, is, however, Taiwan's most significant international supporter and is bound by law to provide Taipei with the means to defend itself. In August, it approved the sale of millions of dollars of military equipment and weapons to the island.

Opinion polls put Lai just ahead of Hou Yu-ih from the opposition Kuomintang (KMT). While the KMT is seen as friendlier towards Beijing, none of the candidates supports the unification which is a cornerstone of Beijing's policy towards the island. All the candidates, to varying degrees, want to continue cooperation with the US and keep China's influence at bay.

Since taking office, Tsai, who argues that the people of Taiwan should choose their future, has bolstered cooperation with Washington, welcoming dozens of US politicians, including former House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi and meeting key representatives on stopovers in the US, despite fury in China. "She is now, I would argue, the best Taiwan presi-

dent the US will ever get," said Kharis Templeman, the programme manager of the Project on Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific at Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

A victory for the DPP's Lai, who has also visited the US, could further distance Taiwan from Beijing, which has accused Lai of calling for independence and risking war. When Pelosi visited Taipei in August 2022, Beijing launched unprecedented war games over and around the island and cut military communication channels with Washington.

"Lai will be very focused in the absence of open channels for dialogue with Beijing, making sure his US relationships are really strong," said Daniels. If the KMT's Hou were to win, Daniels says the US would need to figure out how to counter the probable increased influence of Beijing, but analysts say a Hou victory could also be potentially beneficial to US-China ties by lowering the temperature in cross-strait relations. "That would allow the US and China to move Taiwan from the centre of the relationship off to the side," Stanford's Templeman noted.

One caveat is that parliamentary elections will also take place on January 13 and while Lai is leading the surveys for president, experts say the DPP could lose its majority in the legislature. In that kind of scenario, the US government will be watching the candidates to see how they cope with inter and intra-party negotiations.

Questions have already been raised over the ability of the opposition parties to work together after the KMT and Taiwan People's Party's attempt to submit a unity ticket and mount a concerted challenge to the DPP collapsed in disarray. Hou and the TPP's Ko Wen-je ended up in an embarrassing public debacle, unable to agree on which candidate would run as the president. Whatever the outcome, the US will continue to stress the need for dialogue and avoiding military confrontation, especially since the military dialogue that was a casualty of Pelosi's visit was revived last month.

In recent years, the US has stepped up transits through the Taiwan Strait and Daniels says that carries a risk of being misconstrued. "We're going to see these minor flare-ups that each side thinks is for defensive purposes that are perceived as so aggressive by the other side, that it starts an escalatory cycle," Daniels told Al Jazeera. Instead of high-profile diplomatic visits that have raised the political and military temperature, Daniels suggests the US could push forward with more substantive commitments. "A US-Taiwan free-trade agreement would be a really strong signal of support in the relationship. And the US can deliver on its foreign military sales to Taiwan," Daniels said. — Aljazeera

## Ethiopia signs pact with Somaliland

ADDIS ABABA (BBC): Ethiopia has taken the first legal steps on a path that could one day enable the landlocked country to gain access to the sea, its government says. It has signed what is known as a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the self-declared republic of Somaliland to use one of its ports.

Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has previously described sea access as an existential issue for his country. His statement in October prompted tensions across the Horn of Africa. There were some fears, quickly dampened by the authorities, that this implied trying to take land from another of Ethiopia's neighbours, Eritrea.

The details of agreement with Somaliland have not been made public but a statement from Mr Abiy's office said it would "pave the way to realise the aspiration of Ethiopia to secure access to the sea". Talks leading up to the MoU have focused on the Somaliland port of Berbera. Mr Abiy's national security adviser, Redwan Hussien, also said on X that the arrangement could also enable Ethiopia to access a "leased military

base" on the sea.

An MoU is not legally binding, though it is seen as a statement of intent and can lead to a treaty imposing obligations on those parties who have signed. Nevertheless, the development is being portrayed by Addis Ababa as a major diplomatic victory. The prime minister, who signed the MoU with Somaliland's President Muse Bihl Abdi in the Ethiopian capital, wrote on X that "all that can be said is thank God".

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Mr Abdi said the agreement included a section stating that Ethiopia would recognise Somaliland as an independent country at some point in the future. Somaliland's foreign ministry said in a statement later that the "historic agreement ensures Ethiopia's access to the sea for their naval forces, reciprocated by formal recognition of the Republic of Somaliland, marking this as a significant diplomatic milestone for our country".

It quoted Mr Abdi as saying that recognition came in "exchange for 20km (12 miles) sea access for the Ethiopian naval forces, leased for a period of 50 years". Ethiopia has not

commented on this aspect of the deal. Somaliland seceded from Somalia more than 30 years ago, but is not recognised by the African Union (AU) or the UN as an independent state. There has been no response regarding the announcement from Somalia, which considers Somaliland as part of its territory. But national broadcaster SNTV reports that there will be an emergency cabinet meeting on Tuesday to discuss the issue.

Ethiopia lost its access to the sea when Eritrea seceded in the early 1990s. With more than 100 million people, it is the most populous landlocked country in the world. Up to now Ethiopia has been using the port in neighbouring Djibouti for the vast majority of its imports and exports. In 2018 Ethiopia and Somaliland signed a deal that should have led to Addis Ababa owning a 19% stake of the port of Berbera, with the Emirati logistics company DP World holding a 51% share. But this fell through in 2022 as "Ethiopia failed to meet the conditions needed to acquire the stake before the deadline", the authorities in Somaliland reportedly said at the time.

## Survivors of Israel's siege of Beirut see history repeating itself in Gaza

GAZA: As poets and writers flit in and out of Sleiman Bakhti's bookshop and publishing house in Beirut's Hamra neighbourhood, he greets each one as an old friend, often handing them the latest book release.

He has been a "Hamrawi" for decades – living through Hamra's peaks and troughs, including the dark days of the civil war, which, despite their harshness, brought people together. "There was resilience and solidarity and hope for freedom against the enemy that wanted to destroy Beirut," Bakhti, now in his 60s, tells Al Jazeera in his shop.

That atmosphere of "light and hope", Bakhti says, stands in stark contrast to the ongoing slaughter in Gaza today, where each day new horrors are relayed to the world by the few remaining journalists on the ground. Long seen as a Middle East cultural and intellectual hub, Hamra had everything from movie theatres to publishers, to cafes full of political dissidents or exiles from around the region in the years leading up to the Lebanese Civil War.

Among the exiles were many Palestinians, including Yasser Arafat, leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and famous Palestinian writer and revolutionary Ghassan Kanafani. They had come to Lebanon

along with the rest of the Palestinian political leadership after being expelled from Jordan after its 1970 civil war. After the 1967 war in which Israel occupied more of Palestine, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were violently displaced from their homes in a second wave of expulsions after the Nakba of 1948.

Many ended up in neighbouring countries, including Jordan, from where resistance fighters launched attacks on Israel, drawing retaliations that eventually led to Jordan expelling them. Arafat and the Palestinian Armed Struggle Command had by then already signed the Cairo Accord with Lebanon, essentially approving the presence of Palestinian fighters and granting Palestinian control over Lebanon's 16 Palestinian refugee camps.

Israel used the presence of Palestinian resistance as justification for invading southern Lebanon and besieging West Beirut in 1982. The siege and aggression by Israel and their domestic allies the Lebanese Forces live on for West Beirutis who find it hard to forget what then-US President Ronald Reagan reportedly called a "holocaust" in a phone call with then-Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Many West Beirutis see parallels between the violence of 42

years ago and what is widely acknowledged as an ongoing genocide in Gaza. "The only difference now is how many people are dying," Ziad Kaj, a novelist and former member of the city's Civil Defense Unit, said.

More than 21,000 Palestinians have been killed since October 7, about half of them children. In the siege of West Beirut, some 5,500 people in Beirut and surrounding suburbs are estimated to have died, with staff at one hospital saying up to 80 percent of casualties were civilians. "I'm not surprised [by the Israeli tactics]," Kaj said.

In 1982, the Israelis and the Lebanese Forces set up checkpoints around West Beirut and cut off electricity. Communication with the outside was rare as phone lines were down. Israeli officials called on civilians to leave West Beirut and charged Arafat and the PLO with "hiding behind a civilian screen". Medical supplies, food and other necessities were severely restricted and scarce, despite occasional attempts to smuggle essentials in.

"West Beirut was surrounded," Kaj said. "There was no bread, water, or gas, and near-daily bombardment came from land, air and sea." "In the morning we would look for bread and often we wouldn't find it,"

Abou Tareq, a resident of Hamra in his 70s, told Al Jazeera. "Vegetables and meat weren't available at all."

History is being repeated today in Gaza, where Israeli officials frequently accuse Hamas of using "human shields" and 40 percent of the population is at risk of famine. In Beirut, the water shortage meant residents had to resort to sweet carbonated drinks or unclean well water that caused stomach ailments. In Gaza too, people have been forced to drink non-potable salt water. And much like in Gaza, there were so many casualties in Beirut that doctors did not always have time to administer anaesthesia.

Typhoid and cholera spread like wildfire among Beirut's children after the lack of garbage collection led to an increase in rat bites. Stress was pervasive, with accounts saying the bombing caused "extreme psychosomatic effects". People in Gaza have seen an increase in meningitis, chickenpox, jaundice and upper respiratory tract infections as their healthcare system has collapsed.

"Sometimes the bombing went on for 24 hours straight," Bakhti said of 1982. The famous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish lived in the Dabbouch building back then, Bakhti told Al Jazeera, pointing down the street. — Aljazeera

## Sudan's feared paramilitary leader signals ambition to rule the country

KHARTOUM: When Sudan's civil war erupted in April between the army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the paramilitary group's leader, Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo, went into hiding. Many speculated he had been seriously wounded or was even dead until he appeared in a photo-op with Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni on Wednesday.

The next day, Hemedti visited Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, ostensibly to discuss strategies to end Sudan's conflict. He also passed through Ghana and Djibouti. Analysts believe Hemedti's real motive was securing regional support to capture all of Sudan from the army. Last month, the RSF captured Gezira state – a breadbasket for Sudan – giving the group the clear upper hand against the army.

But rather than leverage military success in negotiations to end the conflict, Hemedti appears to have ambitions to rule all of Sudan, according to analysts, Sudanese journalists and diplomats. "Hemedti desperately needs people to feel that the RSF is a governing force. I think this is

why Hemedti went to meet heads of state," said Kholood Khair, a Sudan expert and founding director of the think tank Confluence Advisory.

"Hemedti will try as much as possible to fashion himself into this idea of being a leader," Khair told Al Jazeera. On December 9, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an eight-nation East African bloc, released a statement saying Hemedti and army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan would meet face to face in two weeks. But Hemedti went to Uganda the day before he was supposed to meet al-Burhan for ceasefire talks in Djibouti. IGAD postponed the talks for "technical reasons".

Hemedti met with Sudan's former prime minister and the leader of a newly formed civilian bloc, the Coordination of Civil Democratic Forces (Taqaaddum), Abdallah Hamdok, in Ethiopia. Taqaaddum has announced it also invited al-Burhan to meet at another date, but there has been no information about whether that invitation has been accepted. Khair believes Hemedti and al-Burhan are both partaking

in – and derailing – mediation efforts to buy time for their military operations.

"This is all a red herring ... to gain some international kudos while at the same time trying to gain some ground [in the war]," she told Al Jazeera. In October, the RSF captured several army garrisons across the sprawling western region of Darfur, just as the US-backed mediation talks in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, were about to resume after a lengthy hiatus. Jonas Horner, an independent expert on Sudan, told Al Jazeera the RSF's expansion as it takes more states to the north and east is not sustainable.

He noted that the paramilitary has recruited heavily from its tribal base in Darfur in exchange for allowing the fighters to loot cities they capture. But the pillaging of homes, hospitals, United Nations warehouses and markets has led to popular resentment and hatred of the group, he said. "[The RSF's] atrocities and their hardcore cruelty ... is probably their single biggest obstacle and makes the prospect of them governing the country far more difficult," Horner said. "I think so many

Sudanese ... are never going to be comfortable with the RSF governing them," he added. Despite committing a myriad of human rights abuses, the RSF is trying to bring law and order to regions under its control, Sudanese journalist Mohamad el-Fatih Yousif said from Darfur. He told Al Jazeera that the paramilitary has created a department called Civil and Political Management, whose paid employees are responsible for repairing basic services like hospitals, electricity grids and water stations in South Darfur's capital, Nyala.

"There is relative safety right now in Nyala," el-Fatih Yousif said. "All the RSF fighters that were looting Nyala left. They all went to Gezira state." The RSF has also established a local police force in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, most of which it controls. Police forces have also been instructed to maintain order throughout Darfur. Many activists and analysts are mocking the group's ostensible attempt to combat criminality and blame the RSF for most of the theft, violence and lawlessness in the country. — Aljazeera

## South Korea protests to Japan about tsunami alerts

SEOUL (Reuters): South Korea has protested to Japan over a tsunami advisory issued by its neighbour following the powerful New Year's Day earthquake that featured a map displaying a group of its islands also claimed by Tokyo, officials in Seoul said on Tuesday.

Although ties have improved in recent years, the two remain at odds over the sovereignty of the islets, called Dokdo in South Korea and Takeshima in Japan, which lie about halfway between them in the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea. South Korea offered condolences for disaster, but

added that the islands, shown on the map issued by Japan's weather agency, were not subject to any territorial dispute.

"Our government has sternly protested to Japan through a diplomatic channel and requested corrective action," Lim Soo-suk, a spokesperson of the South Korean foreign ministry, told a briefing. Earlier on Tuesday, President Yoon Suk Yeol's office said he had sent a letter to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, offering condolences for the victims and families as well as support for recovery efforts.

At least 48 people were

killed after the quake, with a preliminary magnitude of 7.6, and subsequent tsunami waves, hit Japan's west coast. Rescuers were struggling to reach isolated areas where buildings had been toppled, roads wrecked and power cut. The territorial row was one of the lingering items of contention in the neighbours' ties, along with the mobilisation of forced labour at companies and of women in wartime brothels during Japan's 1910-45 colonisation of the Korean peninsula.

Japan also protested after annual drills around the islets last month by South Korea's military.



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# Dilemma of level playing field

THE Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has recently pressed the government to provide a level playing field to all political parties, including the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), as the electioneering ahead of the February 8 polls faces gags. According to Co-Chair HRCP, instead of spoiling the election atmosphere, concerned departments must work to organize a free and fair election and all parties should be given ample time and equal opportunities to campaign for the next polls.

There is much noise and a heightened debate in the media and scholarly circles on the issue of a level playing field and alleged discrimination in dealing with certain political groups by the state institutions in respect of election campaigns, submission of candidates' papers and alleged arrest and harassment of PTI candidates ahead of a crucial general election scheduled to be held on February 8. Interestingly, several civic groups including the PPP, the MQM Pakistan, the PML-N, the Awami National Party and Sheikh Rashad's one-man party, the Muslim League Awami accused the ECP and the interim government of biased conduct and discrimination in dealing with them and demanded a level of playing during upcoming polls.

Although, the complaint from the Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is somehow justified because the party remained in a clash with the previous government and military establishment over the past almost one year and a half. Scores of PTI workers have been arrested in the aftermath of the May 9 riots and many are still behind bars while others escaped backlash after announcing disassociation from the party. Although, rioters and gangsters have no place in the political process yet the law abiders and peaceful political workers must be given a chance and equal opportunity to represent their party by participating in the election to give validity to the electoral process. Pakistan has passed through months-long political unrest and the sole recipe to end political antagonism is credible elections that need to be free, fair, and transparent to ensure that Pakistan moves in the direction of democratic progress, political stability and economic revival.

Previously, the PTI has complained to the Electoral watchdog and the Apex court of not availing a level playing field, whereas the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has now taken up the case while saying that the state's response to PTI is disproportionate and unlawful. According to the HRCP, party workers and supporters are being cracked down, leaders are being pressurized in a familiar pattern, and a large-scale rejection of candidates' nomination papers further cast doubt over the electoral process that has now begun in the country.

Historically, a level playing field in the electoral process is crucial for ensuring fairness, transparency, and the integrity of democratic elections. Hence, the provision of an equal opportunity to all political parties and candidates to compete for votes, regardless of their resources, political affiliation or influence is of utmost importance. It sets a healthy electoral environment and promotes a more inclusive and representative democracy, along with building voters' confidence in the democratic institutions, electoral system, and election regulator in the country. Anyhow, impartiality and provision of a level playing field for all stakeholders become more essential in the modern age, where nothing can be hidden from the eyes of media, rights advocates and common citizens as well. It is the primary responsibility of the ECP and the caretaker government to ensure a level playing field, equal treatment and opportunities for all political parties and candidates to conduct free, fair and transparent polls, so the turmoil-hit nation moves toward stability and equanimity.

## Red Sea, a crisis in making

REGIONAL tensions have spiked in the MENA region and adjoining waters since Israel started its inhumane assault on Gaza following the October 7 attacks. The Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Oman, and the Red Sea became highly militarized zones with the influx of Western warships and the movement of regional Navies amid conflict in Gaza. The United States and allies set up a multinational naval task force in early December for the Red Sea following a flurry of missile and drone attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels on merchant vessels. Recently, an Iranian Destroyer Alborz entered the Red Sea through the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, a strategic waterway on the southern tip of the Red Sea that caused a grave risk to regional peace and stability.

Currently, regional tension mounted as the United States and its allies have been accusing Tehran of providing crucial support to Houthis for their recent attacks on Israeli-flagged cargo vessels together with attacks on US troops in Iraq in recent days. The US Navy targeted Houthi rebels attempting to board a cargo ship off Yemen, killing 10 fighters and sinking their boats. Meanwhile, the British government also expressed readiness to take direct action against the Houthis to deter threats to freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

Red Sea a vital shipping route has drawn into the regional tension which spilled over from the ongoing Hamas-Israel Conflict in Gaza. Houthi rebels use missiles and drones to target Israeli and American ships sailing through the important sea routes that deal in nearly 12 per cent of global trade passes through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. These international waters are open to all countries and at times staunch adversaries including the US, the NATO and Iranian ships amassed in the area, while the chances for any intentional/accidental mishap have increased many folds.

The Western coalition which is a long-held opponent of Iranian revolution and its nuclear activities is currently seeking an opportunity to attack Iran to permanently remove the risks animating out of Tehran. The situation in the Red Sea can turn any time into wider conflict if both sides do not observe caution. This adventure will cost a huge price to the world if escalates in the future.

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## Britain must back up the US in the Red Sea

BETWEEN 7 October and yesterday, the Iranian-backed Houthis have fired over 70 missiles and drones into the Red Sea. Early shots, fired on 26 October, were aimed at Israel itself and intercepted by USS Carney. Within a few weeks, they were firing at "ships connected with Israel". In what was a well-orchestrated crescendo, this then broadened again to 'ships going to and from Israel'.

By now the USS Mason, Thomas Hudner, HMS Diamond and French Ship Languedoc had joined Carney in achieving surface-to-air "kills". Two successful hijackings occurred as well. The US Navy has shot down two missiles heading towards a container ship in the southern Red Sea. This has delivered the Houthi end state - disrupting freedom of navigation in an international chokepoint through which twelve per cent of global trade passes.

All the while the nation with the lead for keeping sea lanes open, whether they like it or not, has been on an entirely defensive footing. Early on, US announcements were at pains to emphasise that nothing had been fired at them when, given the geography of the Red Sea, it would have been equally easy to claim this the other way. The White House decided early that "disciplined restraint" was to be the policy in the Red Sea. In early December the Houthis escalated further, with their targeting becoming largely random. No one was safe: ships were hit and catching fire, including the Hong-Kong-flagged Maersk Gibraltar. The backlog of shipping companies unwilling to run the gauntlet increased rapidly with major carriers such as MSC, Maersk, CMA CGM, Hapag-Lloyd and BP deeming the risk too high, either re-routing around the Cape of Good Hope or pausing whilst looking for increased US assurance.

To an extent this came on 18 December, when US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin announced the formation of Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG) and invitations to 20 or so countries were sent. On Boxing Day the USS Laboon, another Arleigh-Burke destroyer, joined the fight. It shot down twelve drones, two land attack

cruise missiles and, most impressively, two anti-ship ballistic missiles. This doesn't mean that OPG isn't working. Coalitions of this complexity take time to settle, but there are flaws that need to be addressed if restoring freedom of navigation - its end goal - is to be achieved.

First, the US hasn't gone to sufficient lengths to delineate between support for this freedom of navigation task and their support for Israel in Gaza. Their point of origin is, of course, the same, but the task has diverged. This is not clear enough yet, at least not to France, Spain and Italy who are currently saying, "we'll support this task, but not under them". Second, OPG remains entirely defensive. You don't need to be an Air Warfare Officer to realise that this is both unsustainable and risky. They have more \$20,000 drones than we have \$2 million dollar missiles. Besides, playing defence and nothing else eventually sees the opposition score.

The net result is that OPG has got off to a rocky start. Yesterday it was reported that 299 vessels with the capacity to carry 4.3 million containers have either changed course or plan to - double the number from a week ago. So what is the UK doing about this brewing maritime situation? The answer is "quite a lot". Britain has two warships there, more than anyone deployed except the US and the Chinese. HMS Diamond, a Type 45 destroyer was sent there specifically for this task. HMS Lancaster, a Type 23 Frigate has left her forward base in The Gulf and come round to the Gulf of Aden to support.

But it's broader than just the ships. UK defence is well positioned to assist across a wide range of activities. Bases in Cyprus, Duqm, Bahrain and Diego Garcia all form part of the well-founded UK logistics and alliance networks that are essential to sustaining operations at this sort of range. Cyprus in particular gives a range of options albeit more in the Eastern Med rather than the Red Sea. There is a part of our tool kit currently alongside in Portsmouth Harbour that should be dispatched now - the HMS Queen Elizabeth.

Tom Sharpe

She's vulnerable, but not infinitely vulnerable as some would believe, especially not there - and without diving into the tactics behind layered defence, there are plenty of ships out there who could protect her, just as they are protecting the USS Dwight D Eisenhower in the Gulf of Aden right now. Her aircraft have now chalked up some air-to-air kills which all help in the sustainability battle.

Aircraft carriers are a strategic asset whose value lies beyond numbers of jets and bombs. The USS Ford in the Eastern Mediterranean is a live case study in the deterrent effect of a carrier. They are a mobile embassy, allied HQ and airfield all in one. It just so happens that they can conduct offensive operations when asked to, but this should not lead to the conversation around their utility. The HMS Queen Elizabeth is not the complete package in terms of numbers of jets, solid support (ammunition and spares) and airborne early warning. Decades of defence parsimony has assured this. The narrative that this is acceptable because she is a 50-year project is for another time. The one that says "she doesn't need all these things because she is designed to operate as part of a coalition" also makes me uncomfortable.

Retention is a key RN issue, but providing she is sent to the right place to do her job, this would not be a problem. Global deployments without going ashore or loitering in the Eastern Mediterranean hoping to be tasked, as the Littoral Response Group have been doing since 7 October, cause people to leave. Sending them up threat on core tasking does not. The US Navy is stretched thin and the USS Ford on her maiden deployment has been extended twice.

The USS Dwight D Eisenhower was deployed early - how long will she be expected to stay on task? What happens if she breaks down, or when she has to go into port for maintenance? Conversations with the US about trust and posture towards Israel should take place behind closed doors. In the meantime, Britain should be overtly assisting

them to reassure shipping companies that the Red Sea is safe again.

There is a book to be written on international chokepoints, their connectivity, their effect on global trade and now any country that depends on them should invest in navies to protect them. The Houthis should probably write the foreword: this trend could escalate fast next year. Elements of the British government led by the FCDO aren't clear on how to use our carriers just now. That the Foreign Secretary was responsible for the early demise of the entire capability in 2011, weeks before it was needed off Libya, might be part of this.

There is a feeling that deploying is in itself escalatory rather than a sensible precaution in response to an international maritime crisis. And if you are a military planner, or a budget holder, constantly trying to ring out every last drop of cash, you could fall into this same hole. Compare this mindset to the US, who had the USS Ford extended and the Ike out of the door within days of 7 October, even before the Houthis started lighting up the Red Sea. Get them there early where they can deter, shape, influence, deescalate and only if necessary strike. HMS QE can't do any of these things from Pompey harbour. Meanwhile, uncertainty in the Red Sea prevails and prices in your house will go up as a result. This is not an 'out of sight' problem and for now, OPG is not solving it. To do so, it must distance itself from events in Gaza to garner the international support it needs to be sustainable. It also needs a non-escalatory strike element that removes Houthi munitions, degrades their will to fight and sends a clear message to anyone else wanting to jump in that we still have teeth.

In UK defence terms, now is not the time to be worrying about beautifully crafted long-term plans and short-term resource bills. Get the ship and her network out of the door now. This is a perfect task to demonstrate to those who paid for it the huge utility of the carrier. If not, then why have it? History almost universally shows that failing to act decisively, no matter how delicate the situation, ends up costing more anyway.

## France escapes a further downgrade

Zaid M. Belbagi

THE Financial Times in March claimed that France was "becoming the new Britain," riding the wave of international business relocations and free market reforms that were underway. As foreign direct investment into Paris climbed above those going into other European capitals, it seemed that France was experiencing a post-pandemic boom, with falling energy imports and firm business investments offsetting a fall in consumer spending. However, after months of political upheaval and social disturbance, the current reality is markedly less upbeat.

Shortly after being downgraded by Fitch, France this month narrowly missed another negative review by S&P. As the economy begins to buckle under its debt burden, France's prospects of unseating London once again seem distant. In fact, King Charles' first state visit to France since becoming monarch - which was billed as a "celebration of Anglo-French relations" - was discreetly postponed as burning cars and tear gas adorned Parisian streets in lieu of the blue and red bunting. Successive strikes and violent demonstrations met the president's invocation of special executive powers to bypass parliament to raise France's legal retirement age. Though this will now come into law, the experience has left ratings agencies jittery. Despite Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire and Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne going to great lengths to present France's public finances to S&P in the best possible light and the country avoiding a further downgrade, the recent meeting does not bode well for France. The eurozone's largest economy is now forecast to remain stagnant, which in the current global economic circumstances is explicable, but the nation's financial situation is staggeringly precarious.

Having left the group of 10 countries with the best economic ratings, France's gradual regression since losing its prestigious AAA rating a decade ago has now become more severe. Months of disturbances and protests have not helped. However, more concerning to a government that has sought to jump-start the economy is that the hard-won pension, unemployment insurance and production tax reforms seem not to have registered with international agencies, which remain principally concerned with the country's wider deficit and debt. These, according to Fitch, will be difficult to reduce amid France's "political impasse," which can often lead to "sometimes violent" social disturbances. In May, the French economy grew at its slowest pace in recent months, as the services sector lost momentum.

The very sector that President Emmanuel Macron had hoped to cultivate in order to make France more competitive is sluggish and, in some cases, shrinking. Poor ratings will exacerbate this issue, with the French private sector seeing valuations fall as a result. Despite private sector employment having risen at its strongest rate in almost a year, recent data

has shown a marked softening in business confidence as sagging demand and concerns over the domestic situation hit hard.

The shrinking business sector comes after record inflation has already eroded household purchasing power and caused the largest rise in production costs since July 2020. It is little surprise, therefore, that a Reuters poll of economists' expectations has forecast 0.0 percent growth. Such news is concerning for France's government, which was relying on growth, as Le Maire has said, "to accelerate France's debt reduction and reduce the public deficit to below 3 percent by 2027." That is, of course, because France has huge debts. Aside from the gargantuan 55.6 percent of its gross domestic product that goes on public expenditure, the French government borrowed vast amounts - "whatever it takes," in Macron's words - to protect households and the private sector during a succession of draconian lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. With debt having now surged to 111 percent of economic output, in comparison to Germany's 66 percent, France has seen itself drawn into the troubling group of Southern European countries, such as Greece and Portugal, which hold the EU's highest debt ratios. The debt is so high that the Banque de France estimates the country accounts for 8.1 percent of global debt liabilities. This figure, which is second only to the US, is reflective of decades of borrowing to support government expenditure. With interest rates set to rise further, the government might struggle to meet its obligations. Interest on the French public debt amounted to almost €euro;50 billion (\$53 billion) in 2022.

Despite the government's efforts to attract big business and build the French services and industrial sectors, the reality is that the spending reductions that are now necessary require cuts in politically sensitive policy areas. Just like the tumult following Macron's pension reforms, the cuts required to placate the avalanche of warnings over France's finances will require unpopular measures. Despite the French government's derision of Fitch's analysis, the US agency's warning that protests and political deadlock could put pressure on Macron to change course on his fiscal policy or even reverse his reforms reflects a wider lack of confidence in the government's ability to reduce the deficit. With four more years in office, a minority government and a 26 percent popularity rating, President Macron faces serious political challenges ahead. Increased economic growth and activity, coupled with the cuts in expenditure that are necessary to alleviate France's debt burden, will require several years to materialize.

However, the president does not have the benefit of time that was enjoyed by his predecessors. S&P has warned that it could lower France's rating in the next 18 months if debt levels do not fall. Macron's grandstanding has helped him win a second term; however, his management of France's debt precipice will seal his legacy.

## The case for bottom-up AI

Jovan Kurbalija

CHATGPT and other generative artificial intelligence tools are rising in popularity. If you have ever used these tools, you might have realised that you are revealing your thoughts (and possibly emotions) through your questions and interactions with the AI platforms. You can therefore imagine the huge amount of data these AI tools are gathering and the patterns that they are able to extract from the way we think.

The impact of these business practices is crystal clear: a new AI economy is emerging through collecting, codifying, and monetising the patterns derived from our thoughts and feelings. Intrusions into our intimacy and cognition will be much greater than with existing social media and tech platforms. We, therefore, risk becoming victims of "knowledge slavery" where corporate and/or government AI monopolies control our access to our knowledge.

Let us not permit this. We have "owned" our thinking patterns since time immemorial, we should also own those derived automatically via AI. And we can do it! One way to ensure that we remain in control is through the development of bottom-up AI, which is both technically possible and ethically desirable. Bottom-up AI can emerge through an open source approach, with a focus on high-quality data. Bottom-up AI challenges the dominant view that powerful AI platforms can be developed only by using big data, as is the case with ChatGPT, Bard, and other large language models (LLMs). According to a leaked document from Google titled "We have no Moat, and Neither Does OpenAI", open source AI could outcompete giant models such as ChatGPT.

As a matter of fact, it is already happening. Open source platforms Vicuna, Alpaca, and LLama are get-

ting closer in quality to ChatGPT and Bard, the leading proprietary AI platforms, as illustrated below. Open source solutions are also more cost-effective. According to Google's leaked document: "They are doing things with \$100 and 13B params that we struggle with at \$10M and 540B. And they are doing so in weeks, not months." Open source solutions are also faster, more modular, and greener in the sense that they demand less energy for data processing. As algorithms for bottom-up AI become increasingly available, the focus is shifting to ensuring higher quality of data. Currently, the algorithms are fine-tuned mainly manually through data labelling performed mainly in low-cost English-speaking countries such as India and Kenya. For example, ChatGPT datasets are annotated in Kenya. This practice

is not sustainable as it raises many questions related to labour law and data protection. It also cannot provide in-depth expertise, which is critical for the development of new AI systems. At Diplo, the organisation I lead, we have been successfully experimenting with an approach that integrates data labelling into our daily operations, from research to training and management. Analogous to yellow markers and post-its, we annotate text digitally as we run courses, conduct research or develop projects. Through interactions around text, we gradually build bottom-up AI. The main barrier in this bottom-up process is not technology but cognitive habits that often favour control over knowledge and information sharing. Based on our experience at Diplo, by sharing thoughts and opinions on the same texts and issues, we gradually

increase cognitive proximity not only among us colleagues as humans, but also between us humans and AI algorithms. This way, while building bottom-up AI, we have also nurtured a new type of organisation which is not only accommodating the use of AI but also changing the way we work together. ChatGPT triggered major governance fears, including a call by Elon Musk, Yuval Harari and thousands of leading scientists to pause AI development on account of big AI models triggering major risks for society, including high concentrations of market, cognitive, and societal power. Most of these fears and concerns could be addressed by bottom-up AI, which returns AI to citizens and communities.

By fostering bottom-up AI, many governance problems triggered by ChatGPT might be resolved through the mere prevention of data and knowledge monopolies. Current legal, policy, and

market mechanisms cannot deal with the risk of knowledge monopolies of generative AI. Thus, bottom-up AI is a practical way to foster a new societal "operating system" built around the centrality of human beings, their dignity, free will, and realising creative potential, as Diplo proposed via our humAlnism approach, we began developing back in 2019.

Technological solutions for bottom-up AI are feasible today. Will we use them as an alternative to top-down AI? For the time being, it remains anyone's guess. Some individuals and communities may have more incentives and abilities to experiment with bottom-up AI than others. Some may continue to rely on top-down AI out of sheer inertia. And the two approaches may even co-exist. But we owe it to ourselves and to humanity to question what is being served to us, and to both explore and encourage alternatives. And, ultimately, to make informed decisions.



# Philippines has gone off course in South China Sea

Ding Duo

RECENTLY, the maritime situation at Ren'ai Jiao has attracted attention from the international community. Ren'ai Jiao is an integral part of China's Nansha Islands, and China's territorial sovereignty over Ren'ai Jiao is based on China's overall claim to Nansha Islands as a mid-ocean archipelago. Under the pretext of "technical malfunction of warships", the Philippines has been illegally staying on Ren'ai Jiao for a long time and has also tried to illegally occupy Ren'ai Jiao by building permanent facilities, thus violating China's territorial sovereignty.

China's response to the Philippines' illegal transportation of construction materials at Second Thomas Shoal is based on the need to safeguard territorial sovereignty, not out of geopolitical considerations, nor is it a countermeasure to the Philippines-US alliance to enhance synergy, nor is it taking advantage of the "opportunity" of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Middle East conflict to "expand" in the South China Sea, as some commentators have wrongly speculated. While firmly safeguarding its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights, China insists that the parties resolve disputes through direct negotiation and consultation, properly manage maritime differences and avoid escalation of crises and is committed to promoting the implementation of temporary arrangements such as joint development of resources. At the same time, China does not accept or recognize the South China Sea arbitration award, nor does it accept any claims or actions based on it.

This stability and continuity of China's South China Sea policy is rooted in its own interests in the South China Sea and a clear understanding of the nature of the South China Sea issue, and will not deviate from a right way despite the US and the West intentionally or unintentionally promoting the "de-disputed", "quasi-adjudicated" and "pan-securitization" of the South China Sea narrative, nor will it fall into self-denial due to erroneous accusations in the interna-

tional arena of public opinion and the escalation of maritime affairs between China and the Philippines. It is clear from the recent statements made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defense, and the China Coast Guard that China is objectively and rationally describing the facts and restoring the truth when it comes to the maritime situation at Ren'ai Jiao, and admonishing the Philippines, which hardly contains any harsh words or emotional language.

On the other hand, the Philippines has indulged in maritime provocations in a hyped manner, with high-level officials from different departments, including the Philippine Coast Guard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Security Council, and the Department of National Defense, making emotional and inflammatory statements from time to time, and even threatening to prosecute China again before international judicial and arbitration bodies, expel the Chinese ambassador to the Philippines, unite more countries to carry out maritime patrols, or conduct security reviews of Chinese investments. This kind of political and diplomatic rhetoric will not help ease differences and cool down the situation but may further deteriorate political mutual trust between the two sides and make people even more confused about the direction of the Philippines' China policy and South China Sea policy.

In response to the situation at Ren'ai Jiao, some political forces in the Philippines have either hyped up for personal gain or have been instigated by the United States and other countries outside the region to create chaos. This political ecology has further led to the regression of the Marcos Jr. administration's policy in the South China Sea. If there are sectors in the Philippines that could benefit from maritime tensions, the Philippine Coast Guard can be said to be strongly driven by specific interests. By continuously emphasizing maritime conflicts, the Philippine Coast Guard can secure more financial support, gain greater influence, voice and

visibility in the Philippine political ecology and domestic public opinion, and even give coast guard officials more room for promotion. Senior Philippine coast guard officials have threatened on various occasions that they will "more frequently adopt means that can force China to respond more often than diplomacy." There are certainly high-sounding "reasons" behind this kind of statement, but there are obviously many actual "benefits" that cannot be put on the table, but everyone in the Philippines knows about it. Since January, the Philippines and the United States have been discussing their alliance obligations to each other and their role in maritime emergencies. The Biden administration has asked the Marcos Jr. administration to gradually translate the Philippines' obligations to the United States under the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty into a list of matters. In return, Marcos Jr. also wants the United States to be clearer about the specifics and conditions under which the treaty could be triggered in the South China Sea, as well as what kind of military and intelligence support the United States could provide to the Philippines. Clearly, the Philippines is also trying to test the extent to which the United States will meet its security commitments to the Philippines by transporting construction materials to beached warships.

The US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty is a product of the Cold War, and the Ren'ai Jiao issue is a bilateral issue between China and the Philippines and has nothing to do with the United States. The United States has repeatedly threatened China with the implementation of the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty and endorsed the Philippines' illegal claims, which has encouraged Philippine opportunism at Second Thomas Shoal and has also had a bad affect. The Philippine-US military and security cooperation has a long history and profound impact, and at present, nationalism is rising in the Philippines, and the "China threat theory"

still has a large market in the Philippines, and even the China-Philippines economic and trade cooperation, which brings tangible benefits to the Philippines, is accompanied by so-called "economic coercion" and "security threats" in the Philippines. Under such circumstances, it is difficult for the objective and rational voice of the Philippines to be heard, and some people of insight have even been labeled as betraying the national interests of the Philippines and have been attacked in the domestic public opinion arena. The Philippines believes that the South China Sea arbitration award provides a so-called international legal basis for its Ren'ai Jiao claim. The South China Sea arbitration case is an erroneous attempt by the Philippines, instigated and supported by the United States, to reduce the space for China's sovereignty and maritime rights and interests on the premise of "legalizing" the Philippines' illegal occupation of Nansha islands and reefs. In this case, the arbitral tribunal violated many basic principles that should be followed by international judicial and arbitration institutions, exceeded its authority in exercising its jurisdiction, and rendered an award that was full of loopholes. Far from resolving disputes, the ruling has squeezed the political space for both sides to manage their differences. If the Philippines clings to the illusion that "award is international law and a guidepost" and falls into the illusion that China will accept a solution that is not fair and just, the logical result may be that the South China Sea dispute will enter an unsolvable dead loop.

At present, China-Philippines relations are facing serious difficulties, and the root cause is that the Philippines has changed its previous policy on China and the South China Sea and has reneged on its commitments. At a time when China-Philippines relations are at a crossroads, the Philippines needs to learn from history and learn valuable historical experience from the ups and downs of the situation in the South China Sea over the past decade.

The China Daily

# Crossed wires: How geopolitics misserves Russian civil society

Almut Rochowanski

IN late 2005, I was sitting at a conference table in Washington with a group of young people from Chechnya. They were trying to win support for the scholarship program that had brought them from their war-torn homeland to universities in Europe. They were meeting with representatives from think tanks and grant-making foundations who mostly talked among themselves, since the Chechen students didn't really speak English.

One think tank staffer said with fervor, "We should ensure these young Chechens become pro-Western." None of the others (some of whom went on to high-ranking positions in subsequent presidential administrations) objected or so much as raised an eyebrow.

Surely, I thought, these students, whose young lives had been blighted by war, who had lost loved ones and their homes, should be "pro-themselves." Surely we should support them unconditionally without ulterior motives. But I wasn't surprised. This blurring between geopolitical jockeying and ostensibly altruistic support for civil society abroad is what compelled me into activism in the first place.

This conflation has become only more pervasive since then. It has not made geopolitics better: we are embroiled in the largest war in Europe since WWII and witnessing unprecedented levels of armed violence in Israel and Palestine. It has left civil society worse off: less safe and free, with its activists estranged from their communities and less able to achieve the liberal-democratic gains ascribed to them. This applies to Russia and many other countries, adversaries and allies of the West alike. It is therefore appropriate and necessary to audit the ideas and policies that have brought us to the current nadir.

The fact that Western states' support for civil society abroad is tied to their geopolitical agendas is hardly controversial. Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, proudly announced the EU's "new geopolitical agenda on human rights and democracy" soon after the start of her term in 2020. But the paradigm and practice date back much further and have been employed by many Western states and organizations beyond the EU. Von der Leyen's actions since 2020, such as her bizarrely enthusiastic cozing up to Azerbaijan and full-throated endorsement of Israel's bombing campaign against Gaza, also illustrate that when human rights are conflated with geopolitics, geopolitics always comes first.

This "geopolitics of human rights agenda" is implemented via material and political support to local civil society in third countries. Western foreign policy elites engage with the aid-recipient countries in the post-Soviet space or Global South via the foreign aid industry much more intensively than by traditional diplomacy between sovereign equals. Wealthy Western states have come to view their controlling stakes in other countries' civil societies as the natural order of things. It is difficult to talk frankly about the dysfunctions arising from this reality because many of the policy consultants, aid officers and grant managers who work in foreign aid are genuinely motivated by solidarity with activists worldwide. They often hold deeply critical views of their countries' militarist, exploitative foreign policies and would reject the suggestion that their work serves those geopolitical ends. I should know because I have worked alongside them all my adult life. At times, I have been one of them.

But in the final analysis, foreign governments acquire those stakes in other countries' civil societies to exert power over their states for (geo-)political objectives: to destabilize an adversary, tarnish his global reputation, thwart or remove an uncooperative government, manage a friendly one. Foreign policymakers view

civil society as a convenient instrument, especially once unruly activists and movements have been domesticated into a template that suits foreign aid industries: registered non-profits staffed by smooth-tongued technocrats who are safely detached from their communities. Whether domesticated or in its messy, grassroots form, civil society punches above its weight. Activists can play a vocal and influential role in their societies, no less so than business and political elites who possess far greater formal levels of power. But they are also far more pliant to their donors' goals because they need resources.

Activists are the kinds of people who feel born to put the world right. It is their very singlemindedness that can make them seem more pliant towards their donors. Activists have long mental lists of urgent needs that keep them up at night, compelling them to play nice for support. Money offers the most straightforward way out of this predicament. For much of the post-

sections, not other regulatory areas that might throw a wrench into NGOs' work. Russian civil society has been playing an exhausting cat-and-mouse game with the state for the past decade. They have focused on outsmarting increasingly obsessive restrictions with increasingly contorted legal-financial strategies, so they could keep receiving foreign funding. Only in the last years before Russia's invasion of Ukraine did something shift in a big way among Russia's leading human rights organizations: after years of skepticism that it would be an effective strategy and the realization they could not rely on foreign donations forever, they started raising significant amounts of money at home.

Yet resistance to fundraising from Russians continued to hold organizations back. When I gently suggested raising money from Russian citizens to the head of a leading human rights organization in 2012, right after the first "foreign agent" law was adopted, his expression made clear that he thought the idea not just pointless, but distasteful.

***But they will silence their unease and take the money. Money that allows their clients to have a lawyer at their side, a shelter to hide in, and a therapist to put their lives back together. They're used to making compromises, and this isn't the worst by a long stretch. Embattled activists feel much more understood and appreciated, their rightful leadership recognized, their causes championed by their Western partners than by their own government, community or even families who would prefer they pursued a more stable career. In fall 2012, shortly after Russia demanded that USAID end its activities in the country, I met with shell-shocked US diplomats. Afterward, one of them took me aside: "We made a mistake," he said quietly. "We shouldn't have supported Golos [a Russian NGO monitoring elections with a critical bent]."***

Cold War era (in some countries, to this day), money for activism was only ever available in the form of grants from abroad. If money is the short answer, the longer answer is more complicated. There is a further psychological component that cannot be ignored. Most activists I have worked with would give me a blank stare if I mentioned geopolitics. They would not know what it means and have better things to think about. Some might get annoyed, uncomfortable, or offended that anyone would tie their earnest work to something so tawdry.

But they will silence their unease and take the money. Money that allows their clients to have a lawyer at their side, a shelter to hide in, and a therapist to put their lives back together. They're used to making compromises, and this isn't the worst by a long stretch.

Embattled activists feel much more understood and appreciated, their rightful leadership recognized, their causes championed by their Western partners than by their own government, community or even families who would prefer they pursued a more stable career. In fall 2012, shortly after Russia demanded that USAID end its activities in the country, I met with shell-shocked US diplomats. Afterward, one of them took me aside: "We made a mistake," he said quietly. "We shouldn't have supported Golos [a Russian NGO monitoring elections with a critical bent]. We got way too far into Russia's electoral politics."

Since then, Russian civil society has been hit by one restrictive measure after another, each more obsessive than the last, beginning with the notorious "foreign agent" law. Significantly, these policies zeroed in on foreign funding and con-

He preferred to stay independent, he told me. "Independent of whom?". I thought to myself. His fellow citizens? But by 2019, he had passed the fundraising torch to the younger generation in the organization, who remade their communications strategy with pro bono help from Russia's premiere advertising agencies. Within a year or two, they were raising a meaningful share of the organization's budget in small donations from average Russians. When they described this transformation to me, they spoke of relief, inspiration - and feeling independent.

During that same period, the geopoliticization of civil society support accelerated and even veered into hybrid warfare. Accusing states of repressing civil society by depriving NGOs of foreign funding has been turned into yet another cudgel to use against geopolitical adversaries. Pious pretenses about civil society support being innocuous and non-political have been dropped. By 2020, the last time the EU (the largest single donor to Russian NGOs) announced a grant call under its human rights and democracy program, it looked for projects on fighting "disinformation." By 2021, an EU-funded initiative enlisted human rights lawyers in target countries to nominate individuals for sanctions. In the era when Western leaders are trumpeting a conflict between democracy and autocracy, conflating supporting civil society with the pursuit of geopolitical objectives has gone into overdrive. We are doubling down on the policies and ideas that led us to the current point instead of interrogating them, instead of releasing civil society from the stranglehold of geopolitics and our strings-attached money.

The Moscow Times

## Fostering peace and progress in Middle East

Hinry Huiyao Wang

CHINA'S position as the third-most-favored mediator among Palestinians according to an Arab News YouGov poll, trailing Russia and the EU, comes as no surprise. This ranking aligns with the perception of Palestinians and resonates with China's fair stance and thoughtful contributions to peace in the Middle East. Notably, China played a pivotal role in brokering the Saudi-Iran rapprochement in March, underlining its commitment to fostering dialogue and reducing tensions in the region.

The thaw between Riyadh and Tehran highlights the importance of having a reliable and impartial mediator, rather than a major power flexing its muscles and overpowering smaller nations. It is evident that a mediator who operates in good faith, ensuring reliability and fairness, can inject new momentum into the process of easing hostility. China's contribution, after hard work by Oman and Iraq, was instrumental in facilitating the resumption of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Middle East rightfully belongs to the people of the region, and its future should be determined by them. Irrespective of the complexity and challenges involved, a mutually acceptable solution can only be achieved through equal-footed dialogue based on mutual respect.

It is no coincidence that both Saudi Arabia and Iran enjoy substantial trade links with China. China holds the position of being the top trading partner of both nations, and it stands as the largest

buyer of their oil. Recent years have witnessed the strengthening of these relationships through significant agreements, including the signing of a 25-year cooperation deal with Iran in 2021 and a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement with Saudi Arabia in 2022. These developments position China with unique persuasive power and a strong incentive to advocate for detente. The re-establishment of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran is set to exert influence on regional developments. The widespread welcome from almost all regional countries is indicative of their belief that these agreements will contribute to political stability and economic development. The Saudi-Iran deal can be seen as a continuation of the ongoing process of Middle Eastern normalization, which has gained momentum in various dimensions, including intra-Gulf/Arab efforts.

Many regional countries have been actively diversifying their foreign relations, seeking to improve ties with different regional and global powers. This strategic approach aims to break dependencies on specific global powers and enhance autonomy in decision-making. From the perspective of the Chinese people, the turbulence in the Middle East, including the Palestine-Israel conflict, is seen as a legacy of the problematic geopolitical order established during the era of colonialism. The imperial powers partitioned the Middle East, reshaped political maps, and reduced the region to a provider of

oil pipelines and gas stations - largely for just a few. The historical reality of the Middle East, reinforced by international power structures, continues to shape the challenges faced today.

China's approach to the Middle East is informed by its own history, marked by a period of humiliation in the 19th and 20th centuries. The lessons learned have guided China to avoid repeating such experiences and to refrain from imposing its will on others, particularly through force or coercion. China unequivocally rejects the replication of failed interventionist approaches pursued by others. It instead seeks neutral engagement with all parties based on mutually beneficial agreements, coupled with empathy. China established formal diplomatic relations with Palestine in 1988, preceding its relations with Israel by four years. In 2013, China presented a four-point proposal emphasizing the importance of an independent Palestinian State, peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel, and the establishment of a sovereign Palestine state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital - a right inherent to the Palestinian people.

The recent escalation of the Palestine-Israel conflict serves as a stark reminder of the pressing need to address the Palestinian question. The international community must prioritize this matter, placing it high on the international agenda. A steadfast commitment to the two-state solution, advocating for the early resumption of peace talks, and addressing the legitimate aspi-

rations of the Palestinian people are essential steps toward realizing their dream of establishing an independent Palestinian state. China's vested interest lies in witnessing a peaceful and prosperous Middle East. With its expanding economy and trade relationships, China has become a vital partner to countries in the region. China's Belt and Road Initiative spans the Middle East and seeks to contribute to much-needed infrastructure development that will benefit participating countries, including China itself, in the long run.

China has said that it does not intend to change the existing international order, nor to challenge or displace the US. Instead, China aims to foster development, including complementing domestic and international development programs throughout the Middle East. At a time when the West experiences fatigue with Middle East affairs, China's substantial investments, trade and aid provide public goods that foster development and stability in the Middle East. In the aftermath of prolonged turmoil in the region, a developmental approach to peace-building is worth exploring. Addressing the root causes of regional insecurity, such as economic stagnation, high unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, rapid population growth and brain drain, should take precedence over exporting governance models. Expanding mutually beneficial trade and investment, facilitating economic assistance, and prioritizing sustainable development are paramount for achieving long-lasting peace in the Middle East.

threat to freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait is laughable because safe shipping lanes in the two waters matter more to China than the US, or any other country.

Even the US president is not in a position of strength. Biden's dismal approval rating of 39 percent in 2023 is the worst among eight US presidents since Jimmy Carter. Burns blindly accused China of severing contacts between the US and Chinese governments. But he seems to have forgotten that it was former US president Donald Trump who terminated the 90 high-level dialogue and exchange mechanisms, a policy that Biden has not reversed.

It's easy for Burns to blame Chinese news media outlets for distorting US politics and society. But he knows full well that the US strength which in turn enables it to bully China, as Burns tried to do when he bragged about the US' access to nine military bases in the Philippines. But there is no reason to believe the US has the right to gang up against and bully China, because the US is the biggest threat to global peace and stability. The US' accusation that China poses a

## US' position of strength is its real weakness

Chen Weihua

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken seems to have a short memory because he claimed at a news conference on Dec 20 that "we will continue to engage with China from a position of strength" and boasted about the United States' alliances in the region while claiming that China was a threat to peace and stability.

Blinken appears to have forgotten how he was rebutted in Anchorage, Alaska, in March 2021, by Yang Jiechi, then top Chinese diplomat, that "the US does not have the qualification to say that it wants to speak to China from a position of strength". Yang's rebuttal became so popular that it appeared on many merchandises, from T-shirts to phone back covers sold on e-commerce platforms.

Chinese people are fed up of the condescending tone used by US politicians against China. That the US is extremely lonely as a permanent UN Security Council member and does not appear to occupy a position of strength becomes clear when you see how repeatedly it has vetoed resolutions for a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip. Even its allies in

Europe have not sided with it on this issue. The US' reputation has taken a beating, as the whole world, especially the Global South, has witnessed its hypocrisy on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Even US diplomats warned US President Joe Biden that "we are losing support of Arabs for a generation" by blindly supporting Israel.

Speaking at the Brookings Institution in Washington on Dec 15, US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns blamed Beijing for not using its influence in the Middle East to end the Israel-Palestine conflict. By doing so, he deliberately turned a blind eye to the hectic diplomatic efforts by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and China's permanent representative to the UN Zhang Jun. The truth is that the US has been providing military support for Israel and has endorsed its repeated bombings of Gaza, which have claimed the lives of more than 21,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and caused a horrible humanitarian crisis.

While top United Nations officials, from UN Secretary General





# Chinese business team meets Planning Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): A high-profile business delegation of China, led by the Chairman of Chang Chinag Chamber of Commerce Li Ting, met with Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Muhammad Sami Saeed on Tuesday.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed potential collaboration opportunities between Pakistan and China in various sectors, fostering business expansion and exploring new investment avenues, a news release said.

Comprising eight members, the delegation represented diverse industries such as import and export, technology, electronics, machinery, office supplies, apparel, and building mate-

rials. The discussions centred on strengthening bilateral ties and identifying strategic areas for mutually beneficial partnerships.

Minister Sami Saeed emphasized key sectors for investment, including Agriculture, Information Technology & Telecommunications, Mines & Minerals and Energy sectors.

He highlighted the opportunities to utilize Special Economic Zones (SEZs), stating that Pakistan encourages foreign investment, especially Chinese investors for the joint ventures and relocation of industries to Pakistan.

The minister also highlighted Pakistan's demographic dividend as youth was more than 60 per cent

of the country's population, providing ample business opportunities, especially in the field of IT sector.

He reiterated Pakistan's commitment to providing a secure business environment for investors making the 'investor-facilitation' a top priority.

"One-window operation for foreign investors, ensuring security and comfort in our industrial zones, is our government's utmost priority. We encourage B2B investments and welcome businesses to explore opportunities in sectors like agriculture, food, IT, Artificial Intelligence, and industrial cooperation," the minister added.

Sami Saeed reaffirmed the government's commit-

ment to advancing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), notably the flagship programme - China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

As a token of appreciation, the delegation presented special souvenirs to the Planning Minister, reciprocated by a souvenir, presented by the Minister to the delegation.

Pakistan is committed to facilitating and encouraging foreign investment, ensuring a mutually beneficial relationship with China and other nations. This endeavour aims to promote prosperity and growth, benefiting both nations and contributing positively to regional and global economies.



ISLAMABAD: Business delegation led by Chairman of Chang Chinag Chamber of Commerce China Li Ting with Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives Muhammad Sami Saeed.

## FTO disposes of 17,101 complaints in 3 years

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) on Tuesday released its three years performance report from 2021 to 2023, during which the department disposed of around 17,101 complaints.

Addressing a press conference, FTO Registrar Muhammad Majid Qureshi along with Advisor Media Nazim Saleem and Advisor Customs Dr Arslan Subcutageen highlighted performance of the FTO year by year.

The performance report covered three major aspects of the organization including registration of complaints, disposal of complaints, and implementation of the recommendations.

As per the details, the FTO settled down 8,128 complaints out of 8,076 in 2023, provided relief to 6,106 and 2,867 complaints in 2022 and 2021 respectively. The number of registered complaints stood 5,752 in 2022 and 2,816 in 2021.

A cargo volume of 160,397 tonnes, comprising 120,463 tonnes imports cargo and 39,934 tonnes export cargo carried in 2,852 Containers (1,937 TEUs Imports and 915 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

The commodity-wise break-up of import and export cargo is highlighted as there are 06 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them three ships, Rich Rainbow, Limra and Maersk Kensington & another ship, MSC Archimids carrying Palm oil, LPG and Container are expected to take berths at LCT, EVTL and QICT respectively on today, while two more Container ships, Marathopolis and San Francisco Bridge are due to arrive at Port Qasim on Wednesday.

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: HABIBMETRO signed a partnership agreement with ACE Money Transfer to facilitate safe and legal remittance services for overseas Pakistanis, especially in the UK, Europe, Canada, and Australia. The partnership aims to contribute to the country's economy by offering reliable and convenient means for sending remittances to Pakistanis residing abroad.

On behalf of HABIBMETRO, Mr. Khurram Shahzad Khan - President & CEO, Mr. Syed Ather Ahmed - Head Commercial (South) & FI, Mr. Syed Intikhab Hussain Rizvi - Country Treasurer, Mr. Muhammad Raza Dyer - Head Operations, Mr. Mohammad Mujtaba Askari - Head Global Remittances, Mr. Syed Wajeeh ul Hunsain - Unit Head Global Remittances and Mr. Tauseef Rafique - Unit Head Global Remittances attended the signing ceremony.

Aftab Ashraf Gondal - Chairman ACE Group of Companies, and Senior Management of ACE Money Transfer represented the company at the agreement



signing ceremony.

HABIBMETRO is a subsidiary of Habib Bank AG Zurich, which operates in 11 countries across four continents. As a trusted banking institution in Pakistan, HABIBMETRO is serving millions of customers through a nationwide network of over 500 branches in more than 200 cities. HABIBMETRO is committed to advancing digitalization within the banking landscape of Pakistan. The Bank is dedicated to continuous innovation to enhance the applicability and experience of its services.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mr. Khurram Shahzad Khan, President & CEO of

(info@fto.gov.pk) swiftly.

He said The Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA) was also requested to instruct the Cellular Mobile Operators (CMOs) for disseminating tax-complaint related messages to the general public through different cellular companies Mobilink, Ufone, Telenor, CM Pak and SCO.

Following which, almost 60,000 calls were received in FTO office asking questions regarding functions and objectives of FTO office and modes of filing complaints. Such calls numbering 80,000 were also received on FTO's office WhatsApp number 0334-0544460.

It is important to highlight that the President of Pakistan has upheld decisions and recommendations of the FTO in 86.01 percent of the representations filed by FBR and complainants against these decisions.

A Helpline has also been established in FTO Secretariat, Islamabad to

facilitate the aggrieved taxpayers and help out general public in order to guide them about the modes of filing of complaints.

The Revenue Division (FBR), Majid Qureshi said, had been responding positively on the recommendations of FTO and had accordingly improved some of its systems by issuing SOPs/Circulars/Orders including the SOPs for De-Registration of NTN/STRN of deceased taxpayers.

He said the FTO office was committed to rescuing taxpayers and public on their legitimate complaints against tax officials and system which undermined their legal rights through maladministration ultimately leading to financial corruption.

Replying to a question, Advisor Customs Dr Arslan Subcutageen said that the FBR auctioned several non-custom paid vehicles on directives of the FTO which fetched Rs 7 billion in 2023.

## HABIBMETRO and ACE Money Transfer join hands

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Speaking at the ceremony, Mr. Khurram Shahzad Khan, President & CEO of

HABIBMETRO said, "At HABIBMETRO, we are passionate about delivering secure and efficient financial services that cater to the financial needs of our customers. HABIBMETRO's partnership with ACE Money Transfer is in alignment with our commitment to providing overseas customers with a more streamlined and regulatory-compliant remittance process."

Sharing his insights about the joint venture, Aftab Ashraf Gondal expressed, "Facing pressing economic woes, Pakistan must curb black market remittances and promote regulated channels. At ACE Money Transfer, we have a track

record of over two decades of channelling legal remittances through regulated routes. Our partnership with HABIBMETRO Bank anticipates a significant boost to Pakistan's remittance inflows."

ACE Money Transfer (registered name "Aftab Currency Exchange Limited"), based out of the United Kingdom, with Global offices in Europe, Australia, and Canada, is a Fintech providing remittance services. It offers impeccable online money transfer services to millions of expatriates with an extensive network of 375,000+ locations spread across 100+ countries worldwide.

## Pakistan Cables lifts 11th FPCCI Awards 2023



### F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Cables Loyalty Club mobile app won the 11th FPCCI Award in the category of Digital Transformation and Technology ceremony held in Islamabad. The award was presented by the

Governor of KPK, Mr. Haji Ghulam Ali to Mohammad Ahad, Assistant Manager Marketing & Brands, Pakistan Cables Ltd.

The Pakistan Cables Loyalty Club App is the first of its kind mobile app which allows the Loyalty Club members a conven-

ient way to submit and redeem points. Pakistan Cables always thrive to upgrade its services for its stakeholder making the process easier and accessible by introducing technological solutions.

This is Company's third win in technological innovation and overall fourth win. Previously, Pakistan Cables won the awards for first e-commerce website and launching ACCC Conductors in Pakistan.

About Pakistan Cables Ltd. Founded in 1953, Pakistan Cables is the premiere and most reputable cable manufacturer in Pakistan.

Being the only wire and cable manufacturer listed on the PSX since 1955, it is also a member company of the Amir S. Chinoy Group.

The company has the largest geographical footprint in Pakistan with presence in over 200 cities. It is ISO 9001:2015, ISO 14001:2015 and various cables type tested by KEMA, Netherlands.

## Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Three ships namely, MSC Jemima, Luna Rossa and IVS Crimson Creek carrying Container, Wheat and Coal, berthed at Container Terminal, Grain Terminal and Bulk Terminal respectively on Monday.

Meanwhile four more ships, Maersk Kensington, Rich Rainbow, FSM and Limra also arrived at outer anchorage of the Port Qasim during last 24 hours to load/unload Containers, Palm oil and LPGs respectively.

A total of ten ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them two ships, Ullswater and Sunray are left the port on today morning and three more ships, MSC Jemima, Leila Confidence and Al-Bidda are expected to sail on same day.

The commodity-wise break-up of import and export cargo is highlighted as there are 06 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them three ships, Rich Rainbow, Limra and Maersk Kensington & another ship, MSC Archimids carrying Palm oil, LPG and Container are expected to take berths at LCT, EVTL and QICT respectively on today, while two more Container ships, Marathopolis and San Francisco Bridge are due to arrive at Port Qasim on Wednesday.

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### COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Qaisar Khan Afridi Additional District Judge II/Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Dagar. Appeal No.46/13, Institution 3/6/2023. Date of hearing. 3/2/2024. Gul Zada VS Mst Fatihon etc. Notice to no. 6.Hasan Zada. 7.Etibar Ali sons of Yured resident of Ghurdara tehsel 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 3/2/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

### COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Qaisar Khan Afridi Additional District Judge II/Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Dagar. Appeal No.59/13, Institution 16/6/2023. Date of hearing. 3/2/2024. Mst. Fatihon etc VS Gul Zada etc. Notice to no. 2.Hasan Zada.3.Etibar Ali sons of Yured resident of Ghurdara tehsel 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 3/2/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

## PSX witnesses bearish trend, loses 312 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Tuesday, losing 312.18 points, a negative change of 0.48 percent, closing at 64,349.60 points against 64,661.78 points the previous trading day.

A total of 671,665,363 shares valuing Rs.24.451 billion were traded during the day as compared to 625,147,050 shares valuing Rs.18.525 billion the last day.

Some 378 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 105 of them recorded gains and 252 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 21 remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were K-Electric Ltd with 79,854,616 shares at Rs.5.30 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 46,483,335 shares at Rs.1.53 per share and Bank of Punjab with 34,951,735 shares at Rs.6.88 per share.

Sapphire Textile Mills witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.86.76 per share price, closing at Rs.1,569.68, whereas the runner-up was Hoechst Pakistan with a Rs.31.53

rise in its per share price to Rs.1,320.00.

Pakistan Tobacco Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.58.47 per share closing at Rs.1,072.11, followed by Mari Petroleum Company with Rs.47.11 decline to close at Rs.2,100.19.

**Rupee sheds 03 paise against Dollar**

The Pakistani Rupee on Tuesday witnessed a depreciation of 03 paise against the US Dollar in the inter-bank trading and closed at Rs281.89 against the previous day's closing of Rs281.86.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market stood at Rs281and Rs283.5 respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by 68 paise to close at Rs310.81 against the last day's closing of Rs311.49, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen gained 01 paise and closed at Rs1.99, whereas a decrease of 75 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which trad-

ed at Rs359.34 compared to the last closing of Rs358.59.

The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham increased by 01 paise to close at Rs76.75 and the price of Saudi Riyal remained unchanged and closed at Rs75.16.

**Gold rates up by Rs.1,600 to Rs.221,300 per tola**

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs.1,600 and was sold at Rs.221,300 on Tuesday compared to its sale at Rs.219,700 on the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs.1,372 to Rs.189,729 from Rs. 188,357 whereas the price of 10 grams 22 karat gold went up to Rs.173,918 from Rs. 172,661, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten-gram silver remained unchanged at Rs2,680 and Rs.2,297.66 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$.12 and was sold at \$2,094 against \$2,082, the Association reported.

## Pakistan's exports to China increase by 39.44%

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's export of goods and services to China witnessed an increase of 39.44 per cent during the first five months of the current fiscal year (2023-24) as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of last year, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported.

The overall exports to China were recorded at US \$1223.532 million during July-November (2023-24) against exports of US \$877.444 million during July-November (2022-23), SBP data revealed.

On a year-to-year basis, the exports to China also surged by 36.29 per cent from \$199.058 million in November 2022, against the

exports of \$271.316 million in November 2023.

Meanwhile, on a month-on-month basis, the exports to China decreased by 14.90 per cent during November 2023 as compared to the exports of \$318.842 million in October 2023, the SBP data revealed. Overall Pakistan's exports to other countries witnessed an increase of 4.99% in the first five months, from US \$11.915 billion, to US \$12.510 billion, the SBP data revealed.

On the other hand, the imports from China into the country during the months under review were recorded at US \$4741.099 million against US \$5045.390 million last year, showing a decline of 6.03 per cent in

July-November (2023-24).

On a year-on-year basis, the imports for China witnessed an increase of 10.71 per cent from US \$906.128 million in November 2022, against the imports of US \$1003.248 million in November 2023. On a month-on-month basis, the imports from China into the country witnessed a nominal increase of 0.99 per cent during November 2023, as compared to the imports of US \$993.401 million during November 2023, according to the data.

The overall imports into the country witnessed a decrease of 16.02 per cent, from \$25.341 billion to US \$21.281 billion, according to the data.





## In brief

## Sharma expects 'challenging'

CAPE TOWN (Agencies): India's young batsmen will simply have to find a way to cope with South Africa's "challenging" conditions, Indian captain Rohit Sharma said on Tuesday. Sharma said he did not expect conditions for the second Test, starting at Newlands on Wednesday, to be much different from those at Centurion, where India were beaten by an innings in the first Test last week. "The pitch looks pretty similar to Centurion," he said. "Maybe not full of grass but there is enough covering of grass on the pitch." Sharma missed his team's tour two seasons ago because of injury but said teammates who were in Cape Town said conditions appeared to be much as they were then, when the highest team total in a tightly-contested match, won by South Africa, was 223. Three of India's top six batsmen are on their first tour of South Africa and they all struggled at Centurion. Sharma, who only made give and nought, said they would have benefitted from the first game. "At some stage we all have to be exposed to conditions like this," he said. "I am sure they will have learned a lot from the first game and tomorrow is another opportunity for them to understand what is required. "It is challenging but that's what Test cricket is about," he said. Sharma said inexperience had also affected India's bowling in Centurion. "That can happen, it's understandable, but it's about putting your faith and trust in them to get the job done."

## Emma battles to victory at Auckland

AUCKLAND (Agencies): Emma Raducanu said she is "grateful to be healthy" again after winning her first match following eight months out with injury at the Auckland Classic. The Briton, playing for the first time since wrist and ankle surgeries, fought through a tense deciding set to beat world number 134 Elena-Gabriela Ruse. She let slip a 5-2 lead in the third set and missed two match points at 5-3 before eventually winning 6-3 4-6 7-5. "It's pretty amazing to just be out here and playing," Raducanu, 21, said. "I'm just really happy to be back on the tour and can't wait to start this season and carry on hopefully injury-free and healthy. "It's difficult after having such a long hiatus, but I'm grateful to be healthy, grateful to be able to move my body, not bed-ridden and in a wheelchair." After the final point, the 2021 US Open champion, who needed a wildcard to enter the tournament having dropped to 301 in the rankings, covered her face with her hand in a celebration mixed with pleasure and relief. The tougher test of Ukrainian second seed Elina Svitolina awaits in the second round. Raducanu battles to long-awaited victory Raducanu said she felt "reborn" before her comeback, having had surgeries on both wrists and her ankle in May. She showed little sign of rustiness in a comfortable first set in which she was particularly strong on serve. Ruse, 26, then raised her level and snatched the momentum with her powerful groundstrokes in taking the second set. After a tight start to the decider, Raducanu, who looked free of injury throughout the match, moved into the ascendancy by breaking to love for a 3-2 lead and continued by confidently taking the next two games.

## Australia unchanged for Sydney Test, Pakistan leave out Shaheen and Imam

SYDNEY (AFP) : Australia opted Tuesday against playing a second spinner in the final Test against Pakistan at the Sydney Cricket Ground, naming an unchanged line-up for David Warner's farewell match.

Skipper Pat Cummins confirmed Australia's fast-bowling trio had all recovered well from the second Test in Melbourne four days ago after clinching the three-match series with a tense 79-run win.

Pakistan have made two changes. There is a Test debut for Saim Ayub, who will open the innings replacing Imam-ul-Haq while senior fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi has been left out for off-spinner Sajid Khan.

"You always have to look at the bigger picture after a game like the MCG. We've learned the lessons, at least we've put ourselves in those positions from where we could compete in or dominate games," Pakistan captain Shan Masood said Tuesday.

"It's now about not repeating mistakes, and if we can put in similar

efforts to the one in Melbourne, we'll be winning a lot of Tests."

The SCG has a reputation for taking turn, but the hosts did not consider bringing a second spinner into the team to partner Nathan Lyon, Cummins said. The pitch looked well-grassed on the eve of Pakistan's final match of their Australia tour, which will also be opener Warner's 112th and final Test.

"The weather looks pretty good this week and that's not always the case in Sydney," Cummins said ahead of the Test, starting Wednesday. "The groundsman seems happy with where it's at. It looks like decent coverage of grass, so it should be a good week ahead."

The Sydney Test has a history of being rain-affected with 26 washed out days, the most of the Australian Test venues. But there is only a medium chance of showers this week.

Meanwhile, Warner made a public plea for the return of his baggy green caps after they went missing from his bag while being transported from

Melbourne. In a post on Instagram, the veteran said some of his possessions got lost in transit.

"Someone has taken my backpack out of my luggage from Melbourne to Sydney ... inside this backpack was my Baggy Green cap," Warner said.

"It's something that I would love to have back in my hands walking out there this week."

After months of speculation about his place in the team, Warner will get the send-off he desired in his home city after scores of 164, 0, 38 and six in the Pakistan series so far.

"Best-case scenario is a (Warner) hundred and maybe a leg-spinner to take the last wicket of the game out of the rough," Cummins said.

"If he could score some runs and go off in style with a few fours and sixes, I think that'd be a pretty fitting end. 'Warner Week' has started."

Warner, 37, goes into his final Test having plundered 8,695 runs at an average of 44.58, with 26 centuries and 36 half-centuries.

## 'Emotional' Nadal wins on return from injury

BRISBANE (Agencies): Rafael Nadal impressed on his long-awaited return after almost a year out with injury as he beat Dominic Thiem at the Brisbane International.

Nadal, contesting his first singles match in 349 days, won 7-5 6-1. Spain's 22-time Grand Slam champion has indicated this season will likely be the last of his illustrious career. "Today is honestly an emotional and important day for me after probably one of the toughest years of my tennis career," 37-year-old Nadal said.

"I had the chance to come back after a year and play in front of an amazing crowd and play at a very positive level on the first day, [It] is something that makes us feel proud - my team and family who have been there every day in the last year." Wildcard Nadal is using the tournament to prepare for the Australian Open, which starts on 14 January in Melbourne.

He will play Australian Jason Kubler, ranked 102, in the last 16 on Thursday. Nadal begins comeback in possible final year

The last time Nadal was seen in singles action he struggled with injury as he lost to Mackenzie McDonald in the second round of the 2023 Australian Open.

He had an operation on his left hip in June and has since slipped to 672nd in the world rankings.

Nadal began his comeback by partnering compatriot Marc Lopez in a doubles loss to Australians Max Purcell and Jordan Thompson in Brisbane on Sunday, two days before his first singles test. At times on Tuesday, it appeared as though Nadal had never been away. He set the tone by winning 21 of his opening 24 points on serve, displaying skill, poise and athleticism to the delight of the expectant evening crowd.

Thiem, the 2020 US Open champion who has had his own injury problems, had come through his first five service games without any scares. But Nadal, with famed intensity and reassuringly sharp movement, seized his opportunity in the 12th game - taking his fourth break point to wrap up the first set.

## Injury worries for Djokovic, Tsitsipas as Serbia squeeze into quarters

PERTH (AFP): Novak Djokovic insisted Tuesday a sore right wrist which required on-court treatment was "not a major concern" as he led Serbia into the quarter-finals of the United Cup.

The world number one dropped a set in grinding past the Czech Republic's Jiri Lehecka 6-1, 6-7 (3/7), 6-1 and required several visits from the trainer.

He did not take part in the deciding mixed doubles, instead watching from the team bench as Olga Danilovic and Hamad Medjedovic defeated Czech pair Miriam Kolodziejova and Petr Nouza 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 10-8.

It put Serbia into a last-eight clash with Australia on Wednesday. The result means that defending champions the United States are out, with one more day of quarter-final play in Perth to go before the event shifts to a weekend finish in Sydney.

"It happened in the warm-up today before the match," said Djokovic of the wrist issue, which comes barely a week ahead of his defence of the Australian Open. "I basically got constant treatment before the match, during the match, after the match, you know, trying to address the issue

that I'm facing today in the best possible way.

"I know professional sport in general, these things happen. I think it's not a major concern, because I still managed to finish the match and managed to play well, even though I maybe wasn't feeling 100 percent.

"Hopefully I'll have enough time to recover for tomorrow's tie against Australia," added the 24-time Grand Slam champion.

Czech Wimbledon winner Marketa Vondrousova started the tie by defeating Danilovic 6-1, 3-6, 6-3, handing Djokovic a comeback assignment as he took on Lehecka to take it to the deciding doubles.

"It was amazing, I didn't have luck in singles but

thank god we have Novak with us," Danilovic said after sending Serbia through in the doubles. The 113th-ranked Medjedovic added: "I know how tired Olga was, she gave everything she could, and did it for us." Poland will face China in the other Perth quarter-final on Wednesday.

Lower back pain In Sydney, Stefanos Tsitsipas, beaten by Djokovic in the Australian Open final

last year, also struggled with an injury, to the lower back.

The Greek world number six was expected to meet Chilean number one Nicolas Jarry, but sat it out, leaving teammate

Stefanos Sakellaris to step up.

Sakellaris, just 19 years old and ranked 416, put up an outstanding fight against the 19th-ranked Jarry, but fell short 6-3, 3-6, 7-5.

Greek world number eight Maria Sakkari had earlier earned a commanding 6-0, 6-1 victory over Chile's outclassed Daniela Seguel.

Tsitsipas returned for the crucial mixed doubles decider with Sakkari, but they lost 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 10-6 to Seguel and Marcelo Tomas Barrios Vera.

"It's amazing, amazing," Barrios Vera said. "It's our second match as a team, so we're super happy."

Tsitsipas, who reached the Australian Open final last year, losing to Djokovic, was clearly struggling on serve late in the match, grimacing as he held his back.

While watching Sakkari's singles, he told the host broadcaster "there are a few chances I might not play and there are a few chances that I might" against Chile.



Georgia Wareham got a wicket with her first ball.

## Australia crush India in third ODI to complete series sweep

MUMBAI (Agencies): Left-handed opener Phoebe Litchfield's magnificent century powered Australia Women to crush India in the third ODI by 190 runs and clean-swept the three-match series.

Opting to bat first in the third WODI, Australia put up a massive total on the board, courtesy of a marathon opening partnership between Litchfield and skipper Alyssa Healy.

The openers added 189 runs for the first wicket to give Australia a flying start.

Both the batters appeared confident to breach the triple figures and add further to the misery of the hosts but Pooja Vastrakar finally broke the shackles in the 29th over.

Vastrakar cleaned up Healy, who fell agonizingly short of her well-deserved

century. She scored 82 in 85 balls, hitting four boundaries and three sixes.

Healy's dismissal sparked a collapse in Australia's batting unit and they lost three more wickets - Ellyse Perry (16), Beth Mooney (3) and Tahlia McGrath (0) - in quick succession before Phoebe Litchfield also perished briefly after amassing her century.

Litchfield top-scored with a 125-ball 119, laced up with 16 boundaries and a six.

Later, Ashleigh Gardner (30), Alana King (26) and Annabel Sutherland (23) contributed notably with important cameos to propel Australia to a dominant total of 338/7.

Shreyanka Patil led the bowling attack for India with 3/57, followed by

Amanjot Kaur with two wickets while Vastrakar and Deepti Sharma made one scalp apiece.

Set to chase a mammoth 339, the Indian batting unit failed completely and could only accumulate 148 runs before bundling out in the 33rd over.

Opening batter Smriti Mandhana remained the top-scorer for India with a run-ball 29 up the order.

Besides her, Deepti Sharma and Jemimah Rodriguez offered brief retaliation in the middle by scoring 25 each but their efforts were not enough Australia romped to a massive victory.

For Australia, Georgia Wareham bagged three wickets while Megan Schutt, Sutherland and King picked up two wickets each.

## Pakistan Army hold Volleyball uniform among eight Regional teams

PESHAWAR (APP): The Pakistan Army Tuesday distributed volleyball uniform among eight Regional Teams including Dera Ismail Khan, Kohat, Malakand, Hazara, Bannu, Peshawar, and a team from Peshawar Volleyball Academy here at PSB Coaching Center Hall on Tuesday.

Col. Adeel of the Engineering Corps was the chief guest on this occasion and before the start of the distribution the players, coaches and managers of the eight participation teams were introduced to him. Director Operation Salim Raza, Deputy Director Sports Amir Zahir Shah, Regional Sports Officers Mardan Suliman Khan, Peshawar (Zakir Ullah), Dera Ismail Khan (Anwar Kamal Burki), Kohat (Sajid Afridi), Malakand (Shakeel Ur Rehman), Hazara (Ahmad Zaman), Bannu (Shafqat Ullah), coaches Khalid Khan, Wasif Ullah), Administrator Syed Jaffar Shah, players and spectators were also present.

The colourful ceremony was started from the recitation of Holy Quran by Mikail of Peshawar, followed by the national anthem and March Past of all the participating eight teams, seven from as many Regions and one from Peshawar Volleyball Academy.

Speaking on this occasion, Col. Adeel said that it is a special directive of the Corps Commander Peshawar Lt. Gen. Hassan Azhar Hayat to hold open trials and short-listed players from each of the seven regions including Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Kohat, Mardan, Malakand, Hazara and Peshawar in order to promote the game of volleyball in all across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is full of volleyball game potential but during the last National Championship Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remained at No. 6 position, which is not justified at any level that is why it was decided to hold open trials, short-list talent-

ed players and provide them good coaching under qualified coaches.

He said, we have decided to have international coaching facilities for the players besides the selected top 20 players of the U22, U18 and U16 who would be kept under rigorous training and coaching for a longer duration. During the training these selected and short-listed players would be provided honorarium besides proper diet as well.

Col. Adeel said that a Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inter-Regional Boys Volleyball League would be commencing from Wednesday (January 3) with all the eight teams taking part. A selection committee, he said, would monitor the performance of the players before short-listing him for the final team.

Earlier, he called each of the Regional teams and distributed uniforms - (a shirt and trouser) among the players one-by-one. He also advised the players to give their cent percent during the League.

## PHF announces squad for Olympic Qualifiers

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Hockey Federation Tuesday announced squad for the upcoming Olympic Qualifier event. Imad Butt will assume the captaincy, while Abu Bakr Mahmood has been appointed as the vice-captain.

Following the recommendations of the National Hockey Selection Committee, under the leadership of Olympian Kaleemullah Khan, President PHF Mlir Tariq Hussain Bugti's final approval has paved the way for the unveiling of the 18-

member Pakistan hockey team. The committee, comprising Olympians Naseer Ali, Rahim Khan, and Leaque Lashari International, meticulously evaluated the players' performances during the conclusive trials.

The Olympic Qualifier event, scheduled to take place from January 15 to 21 in Muscat, Oman, will witness the participation of key players, including goalkeeper Abdullah Ishtiaq, Waqar, Arbaz Ahmed, Muhammad Abdullah, Sufiyan Khan, Imad Shakeel Butt (Captain), and Abu Bakr

Mahmood (Vice Captain). The team also includes Murtaza Yaqoob, Abdul Mannan, Aqeel Ahmed, Moeen Shakil, Salman Razaq, Abdul Hannan Shahid, Ghazanfar Ali, Abdul Rahman Jr, Zikriya Hayat, Rana Abdul Waheed Ashraf, and Arshad Liaquat.

The management team comprises Head Coach Shahnaz Sheikh, Coach Shakil Abbasi, Assistant Coach Olympian Dilawar Hussain, Goalkeeper Coach Amjad Ali, Physiotherapist Waqas Mahmood, and Physical Trainer Muhammad Imran Khan.

## Anunoby helps new NBA club upset high-flying T-Wolves

NEW YORK (AFP): British forward O.G. Anunoby sparked in his first NBA game for the New York Knicks, helping his new club upset Western Conference leader Minnesota 112-106 on Monday.

New York's Julius Randle scored a game-high 39 points while Anunoby added 17 points and six rebounds only hours after arriving from Toronto in a Saturday trade.

The 26-year-old London-born defensive standout, who won an NBA crown with the Raptors in 2019 and led the league in steals last season, was learning about his new team on the fly after more than six seasons in Toronto.

"Even during the game, they were telling me, 'Go here. Do this'," Anunoby said. "They were helping me out for sure, a lot of them, and I'm thankful for it."

"Everything really. New terminology. Just trying to figure everything out best I can, so a lot of read-and-react today.

"Each day I'm going to

get better at everything, learning the plays, learning the terminology, learning the steps. I'll learn every day."

Anunoby's strong showing after arriving at a hotel and getting his physical Sunday night impressed Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau. "I thought, first game, impressive, just to be ready and kind of figure it out on the fly," Thibodeau said.

"Played smart, played off people well, played great defense, hustled, moved without the ball, shot good shots, made good plays, so very good start."

Thibodeau tried his best to keep things simple on the veteran playmaker, who has career averages of 11.8 points, 4.3 rebounds, 1.6 assists and 1.2 steals a game. "You don't want him overthinking things," Thibodeau said. "Just give him a basic framework and we can add day by day. If you get lost just play." Anthony Edwards scored 35 points to pace the Timberwolves, who fell to 24-8.

Pacers defeat Bucks Indiana guard Tyrese

Haliburton just missed a triple double in leading Indiana to a 122-113 victory at Milwaukee, where Greek star Giannis Antetokounmpo had a triple-double in defeat.

Haliburton had 26 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds for the Pacers (18-14), who also had 25 points and 13 rebounds from Canadian reserve guard Benedict Maturin.

Antetokounmpo delivered 30 points, 18 rebounds and 11 assists for the Bucks, who fell to 24-9 and 2.5 games behind Eastern Conference leader Boston.

Defending champion Denver, led by Jamal Murray's 25 points, routed visiting Charlotte 111-93 to pull within two games of Minnesota at the West.

The Nuggets also had 22 points from Michael Porter Jr. plus 13 points and 11 rebounds from two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic of Serbia.

Italian forward Simone Fontecchio scored a game-high 24 points to lead host Utah over Dallas 127-90.

## Rooney hit hard by 'setback' after Birmingham City sacking

LONDON (AFP): Wayne Rooney said it would "take some time to get over this setback" after he was sacked as manager of Championship side Birmingham City on Tuesday following a disastrous spell in charge.

The 38-year-old former Manchester United and England star was appointed in October but oversaw just two wins in 15 matches with Monday's 3-0 thumping by Leeds, their ninth defeat under him, proving the final straw.

Birmingham -- who have NFL legend Tom Brady as a minority shareholder -- are embroiled in a battle against relegation, slumping to 20th from sixth since Rooney took over.

"Despite their best efforts, results have not met the expectations that were made clear at the outset," read a statement from the club.

"Therefore, the board feels that a change in management is in the best interests of the football club."

Rooney replaced John Eustace, who was sacked just after he had guided Birmingham to two successive wins which propelled them into the play-off places.

"Football is a results business -- and I recognise they have not been at the level I wanted them to be," said Rooney.

"However, time is the most precious commodity a manager requires and I do not believe 13 weeks was sufficient to oversee the changes that were needed."

"Personally, it will take me some time to get over this setback."

"I have been involved in professional football, as either a player or manager, since I was 16."

"Now, I plan to take some time with my family as I prepare for the next opportunity in my journey as a manager."

Rooney's chequered managerial career is in stark contrast to his stellar playing days.

He was credited with doing a

decent job at Derby in tricky circumstances.

He saved them from relegation in 2021 -- by a point -- after four months in the role.

However, his first full season in charge (2021/22) the club was penalised 21 points for being in administration and English Football League breaches, while they were barred from dealing in the transfer market.

Although they made a decent fight of it they were relegated to the third tier League One and Rooney left in June 2022 with the club still in administration.

His next destination was the MLS club DC United in July 2022.

They finished bottom of the Eastern Conference, but they improved in the 2023 campaign, finishing 12th.

His overall record, though, as a manager is unimpressive with just 41 victories and 73 defeats in 152 matches.





## In brief

### Excise Deptt to hold vehicle registration

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a move to facilitate the citizens of Islamabad, Excise Department will be holding a vehicle registration and token tax camp at the parking lot of Katchnar Park today from 3 to 5 pm. The camp will be held on the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon. ICT spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabasum said on Tuesday. In addition to the vehicle registration and token tax services, the Islamabad Facilitation Center Doorstep ICT Vehicle will also be present at the camp. The Doorstep ICT Vehicle provides a variety of services, including Domicile Certificate, Birth Certificate, Power of Attorney, International Driving Permit, Fuel Permit (Domestic/Commercial), and Motor Vehicle Registration. This is a great opportunity for Islamabad residents to get their vehicles registered and pay their token taxes without having to go to the Excise Department office. The camp is also a convenient way for citizens to obtain other essential services from the Islamabad Facilitation Center.

### AIOU gears up for convocation

ISLAMABAD (APP): The convocation of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is scheduled to take place on January 31, 2024, at Jinnah Convention Center in Islamabad. The preparation review meeting was chaired by the Vice Chancellor of AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, and during the meeting, it was decided to include the students of Azad Jammu and Kashmir region in the convocation being held in Islamabad. The meeting was attended by the Deans, Professors, and principal officers. It is pertinent to mention here university had previously planned a convocation on June 30, 2024 in Muzaffarabad to facilitate students from AJK. However, now students from Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan, AJK and Rawalpindi Division (Attock, Chaklala, Jhelum and Rawalpindi) will participate in the convocation on January 31 at the Jinnah Convention Center in Islamabad).

### RDA lodges 212 FIRs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) in its ongoing operation against illegal housing societies has issued 548 legal notices and lodged 212 FIRs, said RDA spokesman. He further informed that the authority also sealed more than 183 offices of the illegal housing schemes and demolished 195 illegal constructions. He said that the authorities concerned on the orders of the Director General (DG), RDA Muhammad Saif Anwar Jappa were taking strict action against the rules violators. He said that the DG RDA, Deputy Commissioner Rawalpindi and City Police Officer, Rawalpindi were monitoring the operation against illegal housing societies, launched on the special instructions of the Commissioner Rawalpindi division Liaquat Ali Chhatta. RDA also sent 129 letters to the Cyber Crime Wing for legal action against the rules violators. The operation was underway against illegal housing societies without any discrimination, he added. The citizens were advised not to invest in illegal housing schemes and check their status on RDA's website [www.rda-gopk](http://www.rda-gopk) before any investment, he added.



ISLAMABAD: A view of thick fog that engulfs the whole city during morning time in the Federal Capital.

## PIMS ED takes notice of allegations about FCPS seats selection

ISLAMABAD (APP): Executive Director of Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) Professor Dr Imran Sikander has constituted an inquiry committee after taking notice of the allegations of irregularities in the selection of FCPS seats.

According to Dr Mubasher Doha, spokesperson to the PIMS ED, the committee will submit its report within three days after the investigation.

Dr. Mubasher Doha said that the PIMS administration believed in transparency and merit, and the inquiry committee formed on the request in that regard would investigate the matter transparently.

The findings of the three-member committee headed by Prof Dr

Mazhar Badshah with Professor Dr Altaf Hussain and Professor Dr Arif Khan as its members, would be made public and action would be taken against those found responsible, Dr Mubasher Doha, spokesperson to the PIMS ED added.

The spokesperson said that PIMS Dean Professor Dr Rizwan Taj had not interfered in the matter of selection, as full powers had been given to the selection committee and head of department.

There was no intervention of the hospital administration in the matter of selection of post-graduate seats, he reiterated.

Dr Mubasher Doha, spokesperson to the PIMS ED said that a transparent procedure had been devised in that regard, according to which the

graduate had a degree from public, private or abroad and marks were given accordingly.

Apart from that, marks obtained in research and MBBS or academic record were also taken into consideration for selection, he added. The spokesperson said that the head of the department of the respective faculty was included in the committee for the selection of graduates.

Dr Mubasher Doha, spokesperson to the PIMS ED said that the final decision regarding the selection was made on merit and added that the reports of irregularities regarding the hospital administration were baseless. "The hospital administration will fulfill its obligations regarding the implementation of transparency."

### Railways staff efforts for record revenue earning of Rs. 41 billion

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federal Minister for Communication, Railways and Maritime Affairs, Shahid Ashraf Tarar has commended the efforts of Railways Staff and management for record revenue earning of 41 billion rupees during the first half of the fiscal year 2023-24.

There is a 46 percent increase in revenue of Pakistan Railways in comparison to the same period of last year, said a news release. Pakistan Railways earned revenue of 24 billion rupees from passenger trains and 11.5 billion from freight trains in the first six months. Income from other sectors was about five billion rupees.

The increase in revenue is the result of effective and efficient reforms introduced by Pakistan Railways management and the tireless work and dedication of railway employees. Ministry of Railways has introduced several reforms since last year to bring operational efficiency to the department. The introduction of ERP has brought greater efficiency in human resource management and transparency in financial matters.

The launching of RABTA APP has made travelling management easy for passengers. In addition first-ever Land Rules were approved by the government for better utilization of Railways land to create more revenue generation avenues for the Railways.

### Police arrest two bike lifters

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested two bike lifters and recovered eight stolen motorcycles from their possession, said a Police spokesman here on Tuesday.

He informed that a team under the supervision of SHO, Rawat Police Station managed to net two bike lifters namely Naeem and Nazam and recovered eight stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. He said that the accused, Naeem is a record holder. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway. Superintendent of Police, Saddar said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind bars.

## Dr. Nadeem Jan proposes allocation of 2 pc of GDP for health sector

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Minister of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, Dr. Nadeem Jan on Tuesday proposed allocation of two percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the health sector.

In response to a calling attention notice moved by Senator Prof. Dr. Mehr Taj Roghani regarding the non-availability of vaccines, especially the anti-diphtheria serum in the country, with a specific focus on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa leading to the unfortunate deaths of chil-

dren, the minister said that our request to the next government would be to allocate at least two percent of the GDP for health, a sector that has been overlooked by all previous governments.

Regarding the Anti-Diphtheria Serum (ADC), he clarified that the provision and procurement of ADC was the responsibilities of the provinces. However, he added that the federal government can play a role in facilitating resource generation and providing guidelines in this regard.

## Ashrafi optimistic of polio eradication during current year

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Special Representative for Religious Harmony and Pakistani Diaspora in Middle East and Muslim Countries, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi on Tuesday expressed the optimism that there would be polio eradication from the country during the Year 2024. During the visit to the National Emergency Operations Center, he said

Ulema and Mashaykh unanimously had affirmed that polio drops were permissible, thus preventing disability.

Ashrafi, who is also the Chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council, said all institutions, including religious scholars and leaders were fully collaborating with relevant agencies for polio eradication in the country.

During the visit, Ashrafi took round of the

Control Room including various departments where he was given a comprehensive briefing on the programme.

On this occasion, Coordinator Dr. Shahzad Baig also accompanied with the Prime Minister's Special Representative. Being the Chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council, Ashrafi reaffirmed full cooperation for complete polio virus eradication from Pakistan.

## Wafaqi Mohtasib takes notice of rabies vaccine's shortage

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federal Ombudsman, Ejaz Ahmed Qureshi has taken a serious notice of the non-availability of the anti-rabies vaccine in the federal government hospitals and dispensaries located in the federal capital.

He also summoned the heads of the National Institute of Health (NIH) and Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) on January 9, 2024 in this regard.

He said that the non-

availability of such essential vaccines for human life in major hospitals of Islamabad is a matter of deep concern.

According to details, a resident of Islamabad, Nazim Hussain sent an e-mail to the Wafaqi Mohtasib stating that his son was bitten by a rabid dog. He approached various hospitals in Islamabad to get his son vaccinated but he was told that the vaccine was not available.

Responding to the complaint promptly, the Wafaqi Mohtasib directed his Registrar, Muhammad Saqib Khan to conduct an inquiry in this connection.

The Registrar contacted the heads of both these organizations and it was confirmed that the said essential vaccine was not available. The Wafaqi Mohtasib ordering an immediate probe into the matter, has summoned the heads of both institutions.

## Islamabad police chief emphasizes effective policing, transparency for public trust

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr Akbar Nasir Khan has called upon all police officials to garner public appreciation through robust policing and increased transparency in their affairs. According to details, Dr Akbar Nasir Khan held a high-level meeting at the Central Police Office Islamabad, to assess the current situation of crime, a public relations officer said.

The meeting was attended by AIG Operations, SSP Operations, AIG Investigation and Complaints, SSP Investigation, all zonal DPOs, SDPOs and all Incharge Police Stations.

During the meeting, the performance of all divi-

sions was evaluated, and each officer was individually scrutinized. ICCPO praised the officers for their outstanding performance and encouraged them.

He also directed them to continue learning for further improvement and ensure commitment towards the process of self-accountability. Instructions were given to take action against those carrying arms outside the institutions enforcing the law.

ICCPO emphasized maintaining the law and order situation in the city, enhancing the security of government and other important installations, intensifying the campaign against drug dealers and professional beggars.

He also directed the officials to expedite the provi-

sion of facilities to the public, setting an example through police stations, and enforcing the law according to the rules and regulations against those violating the law. Officials were also directed to enhance security on internal and external routes of the city and keep a strict eye on suspicious elements. ICCPO directed officers to encourage subordinates for good performance and assured of rewards.

Measures were emphasized to ensure the protection of the lives and property of citizens, making the arrangements even better. ICCPO Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan stressed the need for bravery, civility, and transparency to be the distinguishing features of the Islamabad Capital Police.



ISLAMABAD: UAE Ambassador to Pakistan Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Al-Zaabi called on Caretaker Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication Dr. Umar Saif.

## HEC announces Jan. 3 as last date to apply for Centralised Test

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has announced January 3 as the last date to apply for the Centralised Test for the graduates of Computer Science (CS) and Information Technology (IT) to get apprenticeships at the top IT companies in the country.

According to the official sources, the test is being conducted by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in collaboration with the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), Ministry of IT & Telecom (MoITT), Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB), Pakistan IT Industry Association (P@SHA) and National Computing Education Accreditation Council (NCEAC).

The Centralized Test will be taken for the students of the 7th Semester of CS and related disciplines through the Virtual

University Platform.

This is part of an academia-industry cooperation programme to facilitate the placement of talented IT students in the IT industry to acquire hands-on experience on the latest technologies for better job opportunities in local and international markets. As per HEC, the last date for registration of the test is January 03, while the test will be held on 7th January.

However, as per eligibility criteria for the test, the students who are currently enrolled in the 7th Semester of BS/BE Computing or related disciplines.

The student application submission is through this portal. The students were asked that the focus areas of the test include Operating Systems, Software Engineering, Data Structures, Networking, Programming, Databases, Problem Solving/Analytics.



99,000 acres land reclaimed

JALALABAD (Ariana News): Officials in Nangarhar said during their annual accountability report that since the start of 1402 solar year, nearly 99,000 acres of usurped state-owned land have been reclaimed. "98516 acres of usurped land have been taken back and 132837 land is under investigation by the technical board," said Saeedullah Banuri, the deputy governor of Nangarhar. Banuri also said that efforts are underway to reclaim other usurped lands in this province.

A path towards prosperity

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, Deputy PM for Political Affairs, has assured the people of a future marked by prosperity and parity with other countries globally. He emphasized the unity of thought and belief among the nation as crucial for the well-being and strengthening of the Islamic system in the country. Kabir highlighted Afghanistan's spiritual and religious standing, citing the people's historic victories in various periods of unity and struggle.

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

## Climate change and drought main factors behind rural people's migration to cities



HERAT (BNA): During a meeting with the deputy representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Afghanistan, the governor of Herat province, Sheikh Mawlawi Islam Jar, expressed concern about the continuous

expulsion of Afghan migrants from neighboring countries.

He noted that the expulsion of migrants, particularly during the winter season, has made it difficult for those who have been forced to flee.

During the discussion,

the governor of Herat also emphasized that climate change and drought had resulted in widespread migration of rural residents to Herat city, the provincial capital.

He mentioned that currently, the only challenge people face is economic

hardship.

Meanwhile, the deputy representative of the UNHCR stated that their support measures have increased under these circumstances, and they will continue to assist returnees and other vulnerable people.

## UAE team at UN asserts defense of women's rights in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): As the United Arab Emirates' non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council ends, the country's delegation has stated that it has defended the rights of women, peace, and security in Afghanistan over the past two years. However, experts say that the situation of women has remained dire, and the efforts of the international community have been ineffective.

The United Arab Emirates and Japan were the two non-permanent members of the UN Security Council responsible for Afghan affairs over the past two years.

A draft resolution of the UN Security Council concerning Afghanistan, which was approved a few days ago, was proposed by the United Arab Emirates.

Abdumunib Rasa, a political analyst, says that the non-permanent membership of the United Arab Emirates in the Security Council has not been very effective in improving the situation of women in Afghanistan.

With the resurgence of the Taliban administration in Afghanistan, more than 50 restrictive decrees have been issued affecting the lives and work of women in the country.

The main concern of the international community regarding Afghan women has been the prohibition of education and work for girls and women, a situation that continues to this day.

However, Zarqa Yaftali, a women's rights activist, welcomed the efforts of the United Arab Emirates' delegation to the Security Council, adding: "Your unwavering support for Afghan women is truly commendable. We eagerly await your continued cooperation in the future as a member of the United Nations."

## Chainaki, a traditional Afghan food

KABUL (TOLONews): Chainaki is a traditional Afghan food beloved by Afghans, especially in the cold months.

Chainaki is a mix of meat, oil, onion and tomato in water boiled in a teapot. Bread is also added.

Chainaki is a historic dish in Afghanistan.

Wahidullah has been working in a restaurant that makes Chainaki, which he inherited from his father.

He has been working in the restaurant for 25 years now.

"People are mostly interested in Chainaki because Chainaki is an old dish and it is famous here," he said.

The people seek out Chainaki food during the winter season.

"We are from Badakhshan and we came here to eat Chainaki in this place. It is ancient," said Mohammad Tahir, a resident of Badakhshan.

"My father used to come a lot here, almost every week," said Ramin, a resident of Kabul.

## Arbitrary sale of medicines in village shops irks Samanganis

AIBAK (Pajhwok): A number of residents of rural areas in northern Samangan province have expressed concern about what they say unauthorized sale of medicines in small pharmacies and grocery stores.

They say this problem has long been existed, but no action could be taken against it so far.

Some shopkeepers in remote villages of Samangan sell medicines to the locals arbitrarily and without doctor's prescription.

Speaking to Pajhwok Afghan News, Ebadullah, a resident of Dalkhki village in Aibak City, said: "It is a

## Mosques and Madrassas should remain free for scholars to speak truth

KABUL (Ariana News): Acting Minister of Refugees and Repatriation Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqqani said on Monday that under the previous regimes, some clerics would follow wrong government policies, and in order for the scholars to speak the truth and not be influenced by anyone, it is necessary to keep madrassas and mosques free and independent.

Speaking at a graduation ceremony in a madrassa in Logar province, Haqqani emphasized that madrassas in remote areas should be strengthened and people should continue to support them, according to a statement issued by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation.

He said that students should be trained in such a



way that they could always defend the truth.

Haqqani advised the graduating scholars to prioritize common issues instead of controversial ones, and strive for unity of the people.

Haqqani also visited the provincial directorate of refugees where he said that regardless of religion or sect, people have rights over the Islamic Emirate and the Islamic Emirate is responsible towards them.

## 1m internally displaced transferred to home areas

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation has given statistics that there are three million internally displaced people in the country, one million of whom were transferred to their home areas.

Abdul Mutalib Haqqani, a spokesman for the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, said that the preparations for the transfer of about 60,000 internally displaced people to their provinces in the near future are being made by the Ministry.

Abdul Mutalib Haqqani said: "We have almost three million displaced people inside Afghanistan, of which one million have been transferred to the provinces, they have been given food aid, transportation and have been transferred to their villages."

Mohibullah, who came to Kabul from Laghman



due to insecurity and has been living in Kabul for several years, said that his and his family's difficulties multiply with the arrival of winter.

"We ask the Islamic Emirate to give us land, we don't have any place, we don't have food," Mohibullah said.

"We want the government to help us, we need a lot of help this winter," said Anwar, another displaced

person. Humaira, who is Mohibullah's daughter-in-law, said that she is worried about the future of her children.

"Our children do not have access to school. They cannot study. We have not been helped," Humaira said.

The ministry has pledged to address the challenges of internally displaced people and provide assistance to them.

## Ministry close to achieving its specified targets



KABUL (BNA): Acting Finance Minister Mullah Mohammad Naser Akhund says the ministry is actively working to meet its revenue collection targets.

He made these statements during a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs Mawlawi Abdul Kabir.

Along with providing a work report, the Acting Finance Minister indicated that facilities for clients have been provided at all customs offices, and the

Ministry of Finance is working toward its revenue collection goals.

He stated that competent individuals had been assigned to the ministry's central and provincial offices, resulting in favorable adjustments in the appropriate fields.

The statement further mentions that the deputy Prime Minister met with Mawlawi Hesamuddin Saberi, the head of personnel reforms, organizations, and public administration,

and Mullah Wali Jan Hamza, the Kabul Police Chief, to discuss some important matters.

The Deputy Prime Minister, while praising the performance of the aforementioned authorities, remarked that one of the Islamic Emirate's goals is to rebuild the country, and government officials have managed their jobs more effectively so that the Islamic Emirate can provide better services to the public.

## Karzai welcomes UN Resolution on Special Envoy for Afghanistan



KABUL (Khaama Press): Hamid Karzai, the former president of Afghanistan, has welcomed the recent United Nations Security Council resolution appointing a special envoy for peace in Afghanistan.

On Tuesday, he stated on its social media platform X that "the Security Council's Resolution 2721 on Afghanistan represents respect for sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, national unity,

and the alignment of the international community to ensure stability and development in Afghanistan."

Karzai called for "national understanding and representation of the people's will," access to education for girls and boys, and women's participation in all aspects of society as pathways to Afghanistan's progress, peace, and stability.

He, said that the key to overcoming problems and achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan lies in the hands of the Afghans themselves.

Karzai welcomed this resolution, while a few days earlier, the Taliban's Ministry of Foreign Affairs deemed the appointment of a special envoy for

Afghanistan "unnecessary" and stated that the government of this group was not consulted in passing this resolution.

The UN Security Council, following an "independent assessment and recommendations" by Feridun Sinirlioglu, the organization's special coordinator for Afghanistan, passed a resolution on Friday.

Thirteen members of the Security Council voted in favour of the resolution, but Russia and China abstained.

The resolution encourages the Security Council members and other regional and international actors to implement Sinirlioglu's recommendations and calls for appointing a special envoy for Afghanistan.

## Afghanistan records \$2 billion worth of exports in 2023

KABUL (Khaama Press): Officials from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of the de facto administration have announced that Afghanistan exported goods worth nearly \$2 billion to regional and global countries during the year 2023.

Abdul Salam Akhundzada Jawad, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of the Taliban, stated on Monday, January 2nd, that Afghanistan's major exports were to countries such as Pakistan, India, China, the United Arab

Emirates, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan.

He mentioned that Afghanistan's exports this year have increased by two per cent compared to previous years and emphasized the need for the world to lift restrictions to develop Afghanistan's trade further.

The spokesperson stressed that Afghanistan had exports worth \$1.9 billion in 2023, representing a two per cent increase or \$41 million, despite the renovation of the Salang highway, reduced coal

exports, and problems with neighboring countries.

According to the ministry's data, exports to Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan have decreased, but there has been an increase in exports to India, China, and Kazakhstan.

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce of the Taliban considered the process of increasing exports, establishing a trade data centre, a single centre for export documentation, reviving the export enhancement project, and

increasing human resources for the growth of exports as significant achievements for Afghanistan's future.

In recent months, restrictions on Afghan traders' assets in Karachi have led to a loss of two million dollars for two individuals.

Furthermore, in its latest report, the World Bank mentioned that Afghanistan's exports in the first three months of the last year increased by four per cent, and the country exported goods worth \$600 million from January to April.

## Nuristan residents: Lack of proper roads causing challenges



NURISTAN (TOLONews): The residents of Nuristan say that they face serious challenges due to damage on the Nuristan-Kunar highway and asked the government to fulfill their promises in this regard.

They also say that the damage of this highway has also increased the traffic accidents.

"The car was parked here, and flew down, and people were trying to get out from the back," said Mohammad Salim, a Nuristan resident. "We ask the government to pave our roads to address our problem," said Shafiullah, a driver in Nuristan.

According to the residents, due to much damage

on the road, they travel a hundred kilometers in six hours. And except for special cars, no other types of vehicles can travel this way.

"The road is too damaged, and in the winter, there is a lot of frost on it and it is not easy to pass," said Asif Khan, a resident of Nuristan.

"Usually, our cars have

problems because the road is very bad," said Ikramullah, a driver in Nuristan?

"Due to such damage on the road, we cannot take the patients to the doctors," said Abrar ul Haq, another driver. The local authorities say that the reconstruction of this highway has been in the budget of the upcoming financial year and the reconstruction will start soon.

"In the upcoming year, inshallah, this highway will be reconstructed," the Ministry of Public Works has assured us of the reconstruction of this road and said that in the financial year, the construction of this road has been taken from the budget of the Ministry of Finance," said Faisal, the Deputy Governor of Nuristan.

The construction of the first part of the Kunar-Nuristan highway was started under the previous government, but after political changes in the country, the construction paused and has not been resumed.





ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi in a group photo with the officials of Federal Ombudsman Secretariat for protection against harassment at workshop during his visit to FOSPAP head office.

## ECP asks Pemra to cease broadcast of poll surveys

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Tuesday asked the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) to cease the broadcast of poll surveys by news channels as they have the potential to impact the unbiased decision-making of voters.

The ECP, in a letter addressed to PEMRA, highlighted the detection of certain channels airing poll surveys - a practice explicitly prohibited by clause 12 of its Code of Conduct for the National Media. The Commission urged the regulator to swiftly address news channels' actions in alignment with the Code of Conduct, and provide it a compliance report.

It underscored that clause 12 of the Code of Conduct "explicitly instructs both print and social media to abstain from conducting poll surveys at polling stations or constituencies". The ECP reaffirmed the prohibition on print and electronic media from conducting surveys and polls at polling stations and constituencies, citing the potential influence on voters and disruption to the election process.

According to the Code of Conduct, content disseminated on print, electronic, and digital media during the election campaign should refrain from expressing opinions detrimental to the ideology, sovereignty, integrity, or security of Pakistan, public order, or the independence of the judiciary in Pakistan. The letter specified that during the election campaign and on the polling day, both print and electronic media should refrain from making allegations or statements that jeopardize national solidarity or incite law and order issues.

"This directive extends to all media personnel, newspapers, and official digital media accounts of channels," the ECP said. The Commission also prohibited the media from reporting any content that

could be perceived as a personal attack on candidates or political parties based on factors such as gender, religion, sect, caste, or baradari.

In cases where one candidate accuses another, the media is instructed to seek comments from both parties, according to the Commission's guidelines. Among other provisions, the ECP encouraged the journalists from print, electronic, and digital media, as well as social media influencers and media houses, to initiate civic and voter education programmes targeting marginalized groups like women, transgender individuals, youth, minorities, and differently-abled persons.

"This initiative aims to enhance voter turnout and promote their active participation in the electoral process throughout the election period," the letter added. Furthermore, it emphasized that any media personnel from print, electronic, and digital media should not impede the election process and must visibly display their accreditation card provided by the Election Commission of Pakistan.

The letter specified that accredited media individuals, accompanied by a camera, would be permitted to enter a polling station only once to capture video footage of the voting process. "However, they must uphold the secrecy of the ballot and refrain from recording the screened-off compartments. While media personnel are allowed to witness the counting process, restrictions apply during the actual voting to protect the integrity of the electoral process." "While covering the polling process, media individuals are prohibited from obstructing, either directly or indirectly, any pre-election, election, or post-election procedures. "Media houses are also restricted from broadcasting unofficial results of a polling station until at least one hour has elapsed after the conclusion of polling," the ECP said.

## KP CM launches 'programme for training and employment'

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: As an important component of Khuslul Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Program, the Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah has formally launched the "Program for Training and Employment" under which targeted youth would be imparted with market-based training and skills in the various potential fields. Under the first phase, more than one lac youth across the province, would be trained and placed in the targeted local and international markets; Crash Courses in IT, Nursing, Paramedics and other sectors would be arranged and for this purpose, a number of MoUs have also been signed between the various provincial departments and relevant institutions.

A ceremony to this effect was held here at Chief Minister's House on Tuesday with the caretaker Chief Minister as the chief guest. Besides provincial cabinet members, Chairman Higher Education Commission, administrative secretaries of the concerned departments, repre-

sentatives from the partner organizations/institutions, senior journalists and a large number of students attended the ceremony.

On this occasion, as many as seven MoUs were signed between various departments of the provincial government and relevant institutions. According to the details, Institute of Management Sciences Peshawar signed two different MoUs with the department of youth Affairs and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa IT Board. Similarly, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TE-VTA) signed two MoUs, one with Higher Education department and other with the Accelerated Skills Development Program. An MoU was also signed between KP IT Board and Small Industries Development Board (SIDB). Apart from this, Comsats and Pak-Austria Fachhochschule Institute of Applied Sciences have also signed MoUs with Directorate of Youth Affairs and KP IT Board respectively.

Addressing the ceremony, Caretaker Chief Minister Syed Arshad

Hussain Shah said that unemployment has been a long-standing problem in this country; it was always painful to see our youth unemployed and jobless. That's why, he added that after taking responsibilities as the caretaker Chief Minister, he has decided to do something better for the youth of this province; newly launched Training and Employment Program is the practical demonstration of that vision.

"Although the caretaker government's mandate and tenure is relatively limited, and our first responsibility is to extend support to the Election Commission for holding general elections in a peaceful and transparent manner", he said and added that the caretaker provincial government will take all possible measures to this effect. However, the chief minister said that his government is also trying its best to do something better for the wellbeing of the people. "Our Human Resource Export Strategy would have great impacts on the life of general public especially the youth.

## Alvi visits FOSPAP head office

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Tuesday stressed improving the status of women by providing them with an enabling work environment to increase their economic participation.

The president highlighted that following the rights granted by the religion Islam, it was the responsibility of the society to give them their due share and create a safer society for them. He expressed these views while chairing a meeting during his visit to the Federal Ombudsman Secretariat for Protection Against Harassment at Workplace (FOSPAP) Head Office, in Islamabad. Federal Ombudsperson for Protection Against Harassment at Workplace Fauzia Viqar, Secretary FOSPAP Arif Karim, advisers and officials of FOSPAP attended the meeting.

President Alvi called for taking appropriate legislative measures at the federal and provincial levels to ensure the protection of women's property rights, besides discouraging the transfer of property by women to their family members due to pressures. He said that he was conducting personal hearings of the Ombudspersons' cases to expedite the process of justice. He stated that highlighting important decisions of FOSPAP in harassment and women's property cases through media would help increase awareness about the role of the Ombudsman.

The president said that police at the local level needed to improve their response to women's complaints in property cases, adding that police officials should be educated about the provisions of the Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act, 2020. He urged FOSPAP to further increase its outreach and efficiency to provide speedy justice to women in harassment and property cases at their doorsteps.

He also advised FOSPAP to enhance its linkages with NGOs and women's rights organizations in Pakistan to seek suggestions for improving women's status. The president said that providing a harassment-free and enabling environment to women in both the public and private sectors was essential for their economic and social empowerment. He underlined the need for increased engagements with the business community, particularly the chambers of commerce and industries, to provide employment to women as well as sensitize them about the importance and provisions of the Protection against Harassment at Workplace Act, 2010.

# PTI 'bat' symbol case: PHC adjourns hearing till today

**Humayun Khan**

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) will hear the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) petition challenging its single bench ruling on Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) electoral 'bat' symbol and intra-party elections on Wednesday (today).

The electoral body had filed a review petition at the high court against its December 26 decision which had suspended the ECP's order and restored the party's 'bat' symbol till a final decision on the matter. The ECP, in its order, had declared PTI's intra-party polls "illegal" and followed it of using the 'bat' symbol. Stripping its order, the former ruling party approached the PHC seeking to restore its party symbol ahead of the general elections slated for February 8.

In its petition, the ECP then requested the court to review the PTI's intra-party elections and its decision related to the election symbol. Earlier today, a single-member bench comprising PHC's Justice Ijaz Khan conducted the hearing and reserved the verdict. However, the PTI lawyers did not appear before the court and later requested to hear them before deciding the plea.

After this, the court adjourned the hearing till today. During the hearing, the ECP's lawyer presented his arguments and told the court that the body had filed a review plea against the high court's order. He added that the ECP also issued a notice to the PTI in this regard. "PTI did not conduct the intra-party elections properly. Questions were raised on ECP's powers and it was said that ECP's decision was unconstitutional," the ECP counsel said.

The lawyer said that the single bench suspended ECP's order and

issued a stay order without hearing the electoral body's arguments. The stay order granted by PHC was not an interim relief but is tantamount to final verdict on the matter, said the lawyer. "The PTI also filed a petition in the Lahore High Court (LHC) when you can't move second court after filing a plea in another," said the ECP's lawyer.

Justice Khan asked if there was anyone present from the petitioner's party in the court. At this, the ECP lawyer said that there was no one. He then requested the court to withdraw the December 26 order, adding that a bench should be constituted to hear the case properly.

Meanwhile, the advocate general said that the federation doesn't want to be a party in the case. "We have nothing to do with it, we should be removed from this case," he added. The court then reserved the verdict after hearing the arguments.

**PHC orders to submit record of cases against Murad Saeed in 7 days:** A single bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Ijaz Sabi ordered respondents including federal and provincial governments for submission of records of cases registered against former Federal Minister Murad Saeed, on Tuesday.

The counsel Shah Faisal Ottomankhel Advocate argued that petitioner's son is former Federal Minister and charged in different cases after toppling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led government in April 2022. He added that further cases were registered after 9th May 2023 incidents against Murad Saeed.

The provincial government didn't provided information regarding cases against former Federal Minister while raising his residence and Hujra as well as harassing relatives, the lawyer argued. He requested for provision of record of cases as PHC had granted relief to other petitioners in this

regard. Former Federal Minister Murad Saeed is submitting nomination papers for upcoming general elections scheduled on 8th February as willingly appearing before court to face the charges and argued for stopping his arrest in all cases, the counsel stated. However, Justice Ijaz Sabi remarked that Supreme Court of Pakistan has set-aside PHC decision regarding stoppage of arrest of suspect by observing that how court can stop custody of accused. He further observed that how court can stop police from arrest of accused and added that the respondents would be directed for submission of record of cases.

Additional Advocate General Danyal Asad Chamkani argued that PHC had already turnaround relief plea to former Federal Minister Murad Saeed in a writ plea filed Qazi Anwar Advocate by observing that the petitioner/ accused (Murad Saeed) neither singed Wakalat Nama nor present before court while added that yesterday (on Tuesday) is similar situation as his father is present as petitioner. PHC's Justice Ijaz Sabi ordered respondents including federal and provision governments for submission of reply within seven days in this regard.

Meanwhile, PHC has granted transit bail to two candidates for Punjab Assembly named Arsalan Hafeez and Imran Yousaf till 13th January. The counsel Habib Qureshi advocate argued that the petitioners are senior lawyers and submitted nomination papers for Punjab Assembly which were rejected on the ground of cases registered against them. He added that the petitioners were not aware regarding their nomination cases and willing to appear before concerned court but there is fear of their arrest. PHC has granted transit bail to two candidates for Punjab's Assembly till 13th January 2024.

## Pashteen gets post-arrest bail in Tarnol police case

ISLAMABAD (INP): The session court in Islamabad on Tuesday approved the post-arrest bail of Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) chief Manzoor Pashteen in the Tarnol police station case.

The federal capital police after completing the judicial remand presented the PTM chief Manzoor Pashteen before the senior civil judge Shabbir Bhatti's court, where the court after hearing the argument approved the post-arrest bail of the PTM chief. The court directed to submit a surety bond of Rs 5000 against the bail, meanwhile, the police and the prosecu-

tor submitted the record of the case in the court.

It is pertinent to mention here that a trial court in the federal capital has rejected the police's request for further remand of the PTM leader and has ordered the PTM chief to be placed in judicial custody on December 31. In another hearing last month, on December 07, the ATC in Islamabad handed over Manzoor Pashteen to Islamabad police on a seven-day physical remand against a case registered in Tarnol police station.

Islamabad Police produced Manzoor Pashteen before Anti-Terrorism Court

Judge Abul Hasanat Muhammad Zulqarnain on Thursday morning and sought his physical remand. During the hearing, Pashteen's lawyer opposed the physical remand request. He said that Manzoor Pashteen was "abducted" from Balochistan and three days later he was produced in the court on Tuesday. The lawyer told the court that Manzoor Pashteen's car was also "fired" upon in Balochistan. After hearing the arguments, the court handed over Pashteen to the police on a seven-day physical remand and ordered the police to produce him again on December 14.

## Russia pounds Ukraine's two biggest cities

KYIV (Reuters): Russia pounded Ukraine's two biggest cities in a new wave of heavy air strikes on Tuesday, killing at least five civilians and prompting calls for the West to quickly provide more military assistance.

The missile and drone attacks on the capital Kyiv and the northeastern city of Kharkiv also wounded dozens of people, caused widespread damage and hit power supplies, officials said. Russia has intensified its attacks over the New Year period, with President Vladimir Putin warning on Monday that a Ukrainian air strike on the Russian city of Belgorod, which Moscow said killed 25 civilians, would "not go unpunished".

Smoke belched out of the charred side of a high-rise residential building in Kyiv where mayor Vitali Klitschko said an elderly woman was killed and 49 people hurt. Emergency services later recovered another corpse from the building. A 91-year-old woman was killed in a missile strike on Kharkiv that also wounded dozens and a

married couple was killed in an attack in the area around Kyiv, local officials said.

"Russia will answer for every life [that it has] taken away," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on the Telegram messenger.

Russia later said one man was killed and seven people injured in another attack on Belgorod. Russia stepped up missile and drone strikes on December 29, when it launched its largest air attack of the war, killing at least 39 people. Kyiv had warned for weeks that Russia appeared to be stockpiling missiles for big attacks.

Russia holds swathes of territory in eastern and southern Ukraine, and there is no end in sight to the war as next month's second anniversary of Moscow's full-scale invasion approaches. Russia depicts a Ukrainian counteroffensive launched in mid-2023 as a failure and front lines have changed little in recent months.

Ukraine relies heavily on military and financial support from its allies, but over \$110 billion in aid from the

United States and the European Union has been delayed by political wrangling. Several Western leaders, and foreign diplomats in Kyiv, said it was critical for Ukraine to receive more support.

"Ukrainian air defence works well but Ukraine must get more help. New Year's celebrations are over and the West must get serious and act now," Latvian President Edgars Rinklevics wrote on social media platform X. Ukraine downed all 10 incoming "Kinzhal" missiles fired in the latest attack as well as 59 of the 70 cruise missiles and all three Kalibr cruise missiles, army chief General Valeriy Zaluzhnyi said.

But he added: "There is no reason to believe that the enemy will stop here. Therefore, we need more systems and munitions for them." Klitschko said gas pipelines were damaged in Kyiv's Pecherskyi district, and electricity and water were cut off in several districts of the capital. Heating and water supplies were damaged in Kharkiv, mayor Ihor Terekhov said.

## JUI-F ready to work with PML-N, says Fazl

**F.P. Report**

D I KHAN: As political parties are in full gear to win the trust of each other, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) supreme Maulana Fazlur Rehman has hinted at forming an electoral alliance with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) for the forthcoming general elections - scheduled for February 8.

Talking to journalists in DI Khan on Tuesday, he said the country had witnessed development and prosperity during the PML-N's tenure. Fazl added that his religio-political party is ready to work with the Nawaz Sharif-led party to serve the country.

The JUI-F chief — who was also head of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), the multi-party alliance which led the previous government — said that it would not be the first time for both parties to jointly contest elections. All political parties, he said, had always respected each other's mandate except for the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) whose mandate was rejected by the entire nation.

Maulana Fazl has once again cast doubts over the staging of the most sought-after polls, saying that it would be a big challenge for the election organising authorities if they fail to establish polling stations due to cold weather. Low turnout of voters after such failures would open doors to election rigging, he added.

He also slammed PTI founder and former prime minister Imran Khan, whose government was removed via a no-confidence motion in April 2022, for shaking the economic, political and diplomatic foundations of the country. Fazl further said that Pakistan had even lost confidence in its global allies during the PTI government, whereas, the country's GDP turned negative.

## Human trafficking menace insurmountable sans improved economic situation: Solangi

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Information and Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Tuesday said that the issue of human trafficking would remain an insurmountable menace unless the overall economic situation of the country was improved benefiting the downtrodden masses who risk their lives for pursuing better future abroad through illicit means.

The minister was responding to various queries raised by the Senators during the fourth meeting of the 334th Session of the Senate held here under a limited presence of the members of the Upper House. The questions pertaining to the government measures and their outcomes to curb the human of human trafficking were put to the floor by Senator Kamran Murtaza of Jamiaat Ulema-i-Islam Pakistan (JUI-P),

Senator Mushtaq Ahmed Khan of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JIP) and independent Senator Nuzhat Sadiq.

Solangi noted that the Senators had raised important points, whereas the solution lied in the fact that the country had to fix its economy. He said that the state as per its capacity, was taking measures but the issue demanded a holistic and national approach towards it. "Unless the underlying issues are resolved, things will not improve. We are going into the election process, the senators, should pay attention to the basic issues: establish a plan and consensus on the economic direction of the country so that our children do not give their lives in different seas and deserts of the world," Murtaza Solangi said.

In response to Senator Mushtaq's question seeking response pertaining to human trafficking through land routes and involvement of the

authorities linked to the border areas' management, the minister said that the complaint of human trafficking was true to a certain extent, but the issue of corruption was not of today, it was the problem of the system.

Referring to the Jinnah's inaugural address at the creation of the State Bank of Pakistan, the federal minister said, "Quaid-e-Azam's speech on August 11, 1947 also drew attention to this issue." He also added that the awareness was being raised about human trafficking as the state and media organizations were also making their efforts in this regard. Murtaza Solangi emphasized that, in order to end human trafficking, the nation needed to fix its economic situation.

In response to Senator Mushtaq's question pertaining to encroachments made by Islamabad Club on the precious land of the federal capital, Murtaza Solangi said that the

Building Control Section of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) wrote a letter to the management of the Islamabad Club on February 24, 2023 to end the encroachments. However, the Islamabad Club management had requested that there were problems in shifting due to arrival of high-level personalities, he added. Murtaza Solangi said the Islamabad Club management has assured that no mature structure is being established alongside its premises.

He requested the Chair to send this matter to the Standing Committee concerned, on which the Chairman Senate directed to send the matter to the relevant Standing Committee. In response to the questions of Senators Bahramand Khan Tangi, Mushtaq Ahmed and Dinesh Kumar on dual nationality of Pakistanis and other issues, the minister for information said a list of countries with which

dual citizenship arrangements were in place was provided to the House and its members. "The list of 21 countries is given in response to the question. After 2019, the children of Pakistanis born in Germany will get German citizenship as per the latter's new immigration laws," Murtaza Solangi added.

Senator Mushtaq Ahmed in supplementary query, presented the proposal of a joint resolution of South African and Pakistani parliament to facilitate Pakistani overseas and boost trade ties between the two states and the continent. The minister said that Senator Mushtaq's proposal would be presented to the Cabinet.

Replying to the questions of Senators Mushtaq Ahmed, Bahramand Tangi and Dr Meher Taj Roghani, Solangi said that there were water problems in different areas of the federal capital.

However, there is a water facility of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) in Tiramuri and Alipur Farash, whereas the groundwater had depleted Tarlai area, he said and added that there was no ICT scheme in Chatta Bakhtawar, whereas water supply in Chak Shehzad was managed by the CDA.

The Minister admitted that the water supply issues were existing in the federal capital along with the crisis of water table depletion in some areas whereas tubewell scheme was not possible in those areas. He said that water was limited in its volume like minerals which was ruthlessly wasted by the elites of the country whereas the poor were not involved in water wastage. The minister called for plan for water supply in the water scarce areas along with an awareness campaign on judicious water usage to protect the precious commodity.