

Joint drills kicks off F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Opening ceremony of two weeks long Joint Exercise AI-BADAR-VIII was held at National Counter Terrorism Centre, Pabbi with participation of contingents from Pakistan Army and Bahrain National Guards. AI-BADAR is an annual bilateral joint exercise in Counter Terrorism domain between Pakistan and Bahrain.



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RAWALPINDI: Foreign Minister of Iran, HE Amir Abdollahian called on Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.

SBP maintains interest rate at 22%

F.P. Report

KARACHI: State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) Monetary Policy Committee Monday announced maintaining the status quo, leaving the key policy rate unchanged at 22%. The MPC's decision to maintain the key policy rate unchanged — for the fifth time in a row — is in line with market expectations as high inflation persists due to the rise in energy prices.

In a concerning update, SBP Governor Jameel Ahmad stated during a press conference in Karachi that inflation remains elevated, necessitating an upward revision of the annual target to 23-25%. The decision to keep the rate status quo is the last under the caretaker government before the country's general election next month. It also comes in the midst of Pakistan's \$3 billion Standby Arrangement (SBA) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The bank's governor said the decision was warranted due to "elevated" inflation, but that the rate in January was expected to ease from the previous month when it was 29.7%. It forecast that inflation would decline at a faster pace from March and full-year average inflation would be 23-25%.

"SBP opted for a wait and see approach during this policy (meeting) and refrained from abruptly starting a monetary easing cycle," said Tahir Abbas, head of research at Arif Habib Limited. "Economic indicators are gradually improving and inflation

is expected to decline significantly from March 2024 onwards, where we believe that (the) SBP is expected to start a monetary easing cycle," he said.

The country's external accounts and foreign exchange reserves have also improved, the current account deficit is expected to shrink, and although inflation remains elevated, it would start declining faster from March, Ahmad said. Pakistan's key rate was raised to an all-time high of 22% in June to fight persistent inflationary pressures and to meet one of the conditions set by the IMF for securing the bailout.

While the rescue programme has helped to avert a sovereign debt default, some of the attached conditions, such as raising its benchmark interest rate, increasing government revenue, and increasing electricity and natural gas prices, have complicated efforts to curb inflation and have dampened business sentiment. Despite negative real rates, the business community had been pushing for a rate cut for some respite amidst economic challenges.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) confirmed Monday it would issue new currency notes in line with the international security features soon, clarifying it would not be a disruptive switchover. "The new notes will be printed with an international security feature. The notes will have new serial numbers, designs, and high-security features," the central bank's governor said.

PHC wouldn't allow arrest from court's premises: Chief Justice

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan ordered District Police Officer (DPO) to appear before court on 31st January against arrest of Local Government Chairman Nabi Ullah from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) from the court's premises, on Monday.

The counsel Shah Faisal Ottomankhel advocate argued that the petitioner is village council chairman Nabi Ullah was arrested by Cant Police station personnel from court's premises despite he had obtained bails in three cases. He argued that

the whereabouts of Nabi Ullah is unknown to his family after his abduction by policemen.

In the meantime, Chief Justice observed that how can police arrest a person from court's premises? And added that PHC wouldn't allowed it. PHC's Chief Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan ordered DPO Kohat appear before court on 31st January in arrest of PTI leader from court's premises in the premises of Kohat district.

Meanwhile, PHC's Justice Sahibzada Asadullah extended interim bail pleas of eight PTI's workers including Former Minister for Law Imtiaz Shahid

Qureshi till 12th February. The counsel Syed Sikandar Hayat Shah advocate argued that PTI workers including Imtiaz Shahid, Aftab Alam, Daud Shah, Naseem Afridi, Eid-u-Rehman, Shafi Jan, Khurram Shahzad and Shinwari are nominated different cases and obtained Bail before Arrest from PHC.

The counsel argued that petitioners are candidates in upcoming general elections scheduled on 8th February and requested for extension in interim pleas. Moreover, PTI leader and independent candidate for Punjab Assembly PP66 Chaudary Muhammad Ali obtained transit bail till 10th February.

SC orders FIA to withdraw summons to journalists

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court (SC) on Monday ordered the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to withdraw notices issued to journalists for criticism on the judiciary. Last week, the FIA issued summons notices to 65 individuals including 47 journalists from mainstream media and social media over a 'malicious anti-judiciary campaign'.

According to media reports, the orders were passed by a three-member bench of the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justice Aminuddin Khan and Justice Musarrat Hilali. Office bearers from the Journalists Association of Supreme Court appeared in the hearing while Attorney General Mansoor Awan represented the government.

Justice Qazi Faez Isa remarked that the country is damaged if a mockery is made of the judiciary. However, he added that journalists should not be harassed or intimidated just because they criticized something. The chief justice also said that cases should not be filed against journalists for merely expressing right to free speech. The three-member SC bench ordered FIA to withdraw the notices served to the journalists.

It is pertinent to mention here that the caretaker government constituted JIT to investigate a campaign reportedly launched against the judiciary following the Supreme Court's (SC) verdict that upheld the Dec 22 decision of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) depriving PTI of its iconic symbol — 'bat'.

Imran, Qureshi disrupt court proceedings

RAWALPINDI (INP): An unpleasant situation developed during the hearing of the US cipher case at Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi on Monday when former prime minister and PTI ex-chairman Imran Khan and PTI Vice-Chairman Shah Mehmood Qureshi lost their temper and started shouting, forcing the judge to take a breather.

The atmosphere in the Official Secrets Act court was vitiated during the cross-examination of Azam Khan, former secretary to prime minister. As the presiding judge lost control of the situation, he opted for a short break in the proceedings. On Saturday too, both Imran and Qureshi flared up after they learnt that their lawyers had been replaced by state counsels.

During the last hearing, Special Court judge Abul Hasanat Mohammad Zulqarnain had decided to appoint state counsel for representing the two accused, as the defence lawyers again failed to appear before the court. The move triggered chaos in the court as both the accused reacted angrily, forcing the special court judge to issue warning to them.



were still operated by the federation and more than 300 billion rupees is spent by the government to run them annually. Moreover, our elite is given subsidies worth 1500 billion rupees every year. Hence, the PPP decided to not only shut the 17 ministries but dedicate the entire amount saved from the subsidies given to the elite to the downtrodden masses of the country. From the time of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to today, the development expenditure has gone down from 12% to 2% of the GDP. We wish to revisit the entire development model of the country. We have to base our entire economic frame-

The Frontier Post

Sanam Javed re-arrested

LAHORE (INP): Police on Monday arrested PTI activist Sanam Javed in another case after getting bail from the Anti-Terrorism Court. Sanam Javed was granted bail after arrest in a case related to setting the PML-N office on fire by the ATC against surety bonds of Rs200,000. The PTI activist and candidate from NA-119, NA-120, and PP-125, was taken into custody by police in case no 768, registered against her under terrorism charges.

PM, Iranian FM vow to boost ties

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister of Iran Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on Monday called on Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar and discussed matters of mutual interest.

Underscoring close relations between Pakistan and Iran, the prime minister reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further consolidate bilateral ties. He also emphasized the need to address common challenges through collaborative and cooperative approaches, rooted in the respect for international law and the principles of the United Nations Charter, in particular territorial integrity and sovereignty of both Pakistan and Iran. The prime minister conveyed his warm sentiments for President Ebrahim Raisi and extended an invitation for him to visit Pakistan at his earliest convenience.

PM says, no solid reason yet to justify polls delay; assures fairness: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Monday said that no solid reason had yet come to the fore to justify a delay in the general elections, assuring that the government was committed to holding polls as freely and fairly as possible.

The prime minister, in an interview with a newly launched television channel (Aik News) said the candidates were canvassing and all the rumours would fall to rest by the

evening of February 8 - the date for general elections in the country.

Regarding the usual complaints of rigging before or after the elections, he said that learning lessons from the past, the parliament needed to address all the flaws regarding the laws, administration, or the Election Commission. He said the observers would monitor and local and international media would report on the activity, assuring that as per the standards in the region, the elections would be by and large be free and fair.

He observed that the political parties were also involved in the poll rigging by making fake ID cards and casting the votes of deceased persons. He said voting time would be from 9 am to 5 pm on February 8 and everyone should use his constitutional right to vote to ensure a good turnout.

Emphasising the key focus on the improvement of the national economy, he said unfortunately no political party had yet come up with an agenda to boost the country's economic health. He said all the electoral claims made by the parties including jobs, shelters, cheap electricity, food security, and others were directly related to a stable economy.

He said the political parties needed to come up with a plan for revenue generation and widen the tax net. Exemplifying a 91% tax-to-GDP ratio in the Scandinavian countries, he said Pakistan's ratio stood at just

9%, adding that enhanced taxation would also make the government accountable to the masses.

Responding to a question about his foreign visits, he recalled that soon after assuming the office, he attended the UN General Assembly session - "a forum which cannot be ignored" and later interactions in Europe where he had a stopover for plane refuelling. He also mentioned attending the BRI Forum in China, the ECO Summit, and the COP28 session where he got the opportunity to interact with world leaders and sign bilateral agreements.

He explained that the caretaker government had to play a role to run day-to-day affairs, including foreign policy matters. About the repatriation of illegal foreign nationals, he said Pakistan had expelled only those with no identity and record and that such individuals would be allowed to return after obtaining valid passports and visas.

Discussing social media, he called it a challenge that empowered individuals irrespective of their educational and mental capability and advocated for its regulation like the mainstream media. He said the criticism of the caretaker government for doing things beyond the mandate was not genuine as all of its actions were legitimate and vetted by the Law Division besides the backing of cabinet's approval.

Pakistan, Iran FMs resolve to expand ties

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Iran have resolved to expand their cooperation especially in the political and security domains. The understanding came at a meeting between Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani and Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Islamabad on Monday.

Later addressing a joint news conference, Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani said that the threat of terrorism poses a common challenge to both the countries. He said they have agreed to adopt collective and collaborative approaches to confront this menace by full leveraging the robust institutional mechanism that already exists between the two countries. Jalil Abbas Jilani said respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity remains the fundamental principle of this cooperation.

Sharing important outcomes of the meeting with the Iranian counterpart, Jalil Abbas Jilani said they have agreed to establish a high level consultative mechanism at the level of the foreign ministers which will meet alternatively in both Iran and Pakistan on regular basis to oversee the progress that is being made in various areas of their cooperation.

The Foreign Minister said there was an agreement to cooperate to fight terrorism in our respected areas. We need to address and allay each other's concerns with regard to terrorism and in this connection, the two sides have agreed to station the liaison officers at the earliest date. These liaison officers, he said, will be deployed in Turbat and Zahedan.

The Foreign Minister said both the sides have agreed to prioritize economic uplift and development of our border areas. He said it has been agreed to fast track operationalization of five remaining border markets.

Jalil Abbas Jilani said the two sides recognized that close relationship between our two countries is not only imperative for shared prosperity and development of our peoples but also an important source of stability for the region. He said this bilateral relationship is underpinned by strong bonds of amity

and brotherhood.

In his remarks, the Iranian Foreign Minister said both the countries enjoy great cultural, geographical and historic commonalities. He said given the history of these relations, there have never been any territorial differences or border problems. He said this is a manifestation of our good bilateral relations. He said they in fact are a single nation located in two different geographical positions.

The Iranian Foreign Minister said his country considers Pakistan's security as the security of Iran and the whole region. The Iranian Foreign Minister said both the countries strongly respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each other. He categorically stated that through joint cooperation, the two countries will not allow the terrorists to endanger our common security.

The Iranian Foreign Minister said they have agreed that our borders will be translated into borders of trade, development and progress. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said the two sides have also agreed to expand pilgrimage tourism and finalize projects on energy cooperation. The Iranian Foreign Minister also appreciated Pakistan's stance in support of Palestinian people.

Meanwhile, Pakistan and Iran agreed to work towards promoting the mutually desired goals of peace and prosperity, based on mutual respect and a collective approach to address the confronted common challenges.

The agreement came during a meeting between Caretaker Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani and Iranian Minister of Iran Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who arrived here in the wee hours of Monday, according to a Foreign Office statement. The two sides discussed bilateral cooperation, underlining the importance of robust dialogue and cooperation as the pathway for a positive, forward-oriented and upward trajectory in bilateral relations. Upon arrival at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, FM Jalil Abbas welcomed his Iranian counterpart, before holding comprehensive talks to enhance bilateral dialogue, engagement and further strengthen the bilateral ties.

Iran's FM calls on COAS

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Foreign Minister of Iran, HE Amir Abdollahian called on General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M) COAS, at GHQ on Monday. Realizing the historical, religious and cultural ties that bind Pakistan and Iran, both sides emphasized on strengthening bilateral ties and fostering greater understanding of each other's concerns.

COAS underscored the centrality of respecting the other state's sovereignty and territorial integrity, calling it sacrosanct, inviolable and the most important cardinal of state-to-state relationship.

The two sides observed that terrorism was common threat that needed to be tackled through collaborative efforts, better coordination and intelligence sharing. COAS emphasized the need for sustained engagement and utilizing available communication channels to address security concerns. Both sides agreed to operationalize the mechanism of deployment of military liaison officers in each other's country at an early date to improve coordination and efficiency of response against common threats.

Both sides reaffirmed the resolve to remain closely engaged and not allow any spoilers to drive a wedge between the brotherly nations. Pakistan and Iran are fraternal neighbours and the destiny of both nations are intertwined. Both sides reiterated their commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in the border region which was identified as an indispensable requirement for the well-being of people living on both sides.

Pakistan facing grave economic crisis, says Bilawal

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in a Q/A session on "Chuno Nayi Soch Ko" at the Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (SZABIST), expressed his gratitude to the administration of the institute, and especially the students in attendance.

Bilawal said that the PPP has curated a detailed manifesto, as well as a 10-point 'Awami, Muashi Muahida'. The PPP has addressed the main issues faced by the Pakistani people, including climate change among a plethora of pressing issues such as inflation, poverty and unemployment. The PPP consulted various experts on the severity of the dangers posed by climate change. The largest collection of snow and ice, after the North and South poles, is in the Himalayan range in Pakistan. Until now, the world was under the impression that only the polar bears and penguins were endangered due to the climate change.

It did not occur to anyone what would become of the 250 million

people living directly underneath the third-largest collection of ice and snow anywhere on the planet. Chairman Bilawal said that not only the Pakistani people but the international community needs to be apprised of the fact that Pakistani is a frontline state and its contribution to carbon emissions is less than 1% yet its survival is at stake. The solution to this problem cannot be reached alone, and the threat of climate change needs to be combatted in collaboration with the rest of the world.

Bilawal said that along with this existential crisis, Pakistan is also facing a grave economic crisis. The unprecedented increase in the living costs has not been proportional to the increase in the income of the people. The traditional trickle-down economics, which caters to the elite of the country is no longer a viable option as it has been unsuccessful. If the downtrodden are empowered with the same resources used to benefit the elite, only then can the economy function. The PPP analysed the statistical figures of the country, and it was surprising to discover that the 17 ministries which were to be devolved

work around a 'Climate Resilient Pakistan' to protect the country and its people.

We need to take this challenge by the horns, Chairman Bilawal said. We have to improve our irrigation, communication, agriculture and energy infrastructure. If we invest in these sectors, we cannot only combat climate change but generate employment for the people nationwide. These are difficult decisions, but they need to be taken. The mindset of the bureaucracy of Islamabad neither wishes to work, nor does it let anyone work. Moreover, there are powerful lobbies in the elite that have influence over the government. A powerful reaction is expected from the powerful sectors. However, since the PPP government is spending the money on the people through the 'Benazir Mazdoor Card', 'Benazir Kissan Card', 'Youth Card', BISP, solar energy parks among other projects, the woes of the elite and the bureaucracy would not outweigh the benefits being provided to the people.

Responding to questions, Bilawal said that in his travels across Pakistan, he was most touched in

Gilgit Baltistan. He said that he was questioned about Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's book, as well as climate change. Chairman Bilawal said that the issue of climate change is most significant for the people of Gilgit Baltistan but actually, this threat is rampant all over the country. In the recent catastrophic floods, one-third of the country was submerged in water including regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and South Punjab. One cannot breathe in Lahore. Prior to the floods, Pakistan was facing one of its longest droughts along with forest fires in KP and Balochistan. The PPP proposes to put an end to the traditional manner of development planning.

The people of Pakistan do not trust the current system of the distribution of electricity, hence the PPP aims to construct green energy parks in every district all over the country in partnership with the private sector. Chairman Bilawal said that the PPP's 300 units policy is being criticised, but it aims to not give the same amount of subsidy to big industries, but the people directly.

Responding to another question,

Bilawal said that the 10-point economic agenda presented by the PPP is a testament of the Party's basic philosophy still being 'Roti, Kapra Aur Makaa'. However, implementation on a manifesto cannot take place without a fresh view and perspective. Chairman PPP said that the politics of hate and division is at its peak in Pakistan and has divided the entire society.

Hyper-partisanship and hyper-polarisation have crippled the economic and democratic fabric, contributing to the societal 'fever' we are currently witnessing. If the political parties of the country continue to engage in the politics of revenge and personal vendetta, then the country cannot progress. The economic crisis that every citizen of the country is facing is one of the worst in our history. Moreover, the country is also suffering through a revival of terrorism as it raises its head once again. Hence, it is unfortunate that current political actors only plan to contribute to the politics of hatred and division, not diminish it. The PPP wishes to bury this form of traditional politics.



PESHAWAR: Governor Haji Ghulam Ali addressing a ceremony after inaugurating the website of Governor Secretariat in Peshawar.

Security measures for general elections

KARACHI (APP): A high-level meeting chaired by IGP Sindh Riffat Mukhtar Raja delved into police security arrangements and readiness for the upcoming 2024 general elections.

The officers received briefings and directives to conduct on-ground assessments of security measures and deployments in their respective areas. IGP Sindh emphasized the importance of finalizing and implementing election preparations at the zone and district levels, considering past incidents. Riffat Mukhtar stressed the need for heightened security, especially during nighttime political events and gatherings, based on leaders' confidence and recommendations.

The Sindh Police chief underscored the immediate reporting of any code of conduct violations to the Election Commission and urged strict legal action against individuals involved in weapon displays or disturbances in the areas. The meeting saw participation from Additional IGP Karachi, DIGPs, and district SSPs, ensuring comprehensive discussions on election security strategies.

KU cancels two admissions

KARACHI (APP): The University of Karachi on Monday canceled the admissions of two students from the morning program-2024 after the verification from the KU Examination Department and the Board of Intermediate Examination Karachi.

The in-charge KU Directorate of Admissions Dr Saima Akhtar mentioned that both admissions were canceled with immediate effect as their marksheet were forged. According to details, Syed Muhammad Nasir son of Syed Jamal Nasir, having form number 676693 and marksheet seat number 109416 was enrolled in BS Third Year in the department of Karachi University Business School. He had submitted a tempered marksheet while Muhammad Umer Ansari son of Abdul Waheed had submitted a forged marksheet to get admission in the BS First Year of the Department of English. His admission form number was 671275 and his marksheet seat number was 788787.

PU awards ten PhD degrees

LAHORE (APP): Punjab University (PU) has awarded PhD degrees to its ten scholars after approval of their thesis.

According to spokesperson, Mudasar Ali Nadeem S/o Malik Manzoor Ahmad awarded PhD degree in the subject of Sociology, Nadia Naseer D/o Naseer Ahmad Mughal in the subject of Molecular Biology, Sajila Hina D/o Malik Muhammad Azram in the subject of Chemistry, Abeeha Batoool D/o Bakhtiar Ali Zahid in the subject of High Energy Physics, Tuba Nafees D/o Nafees Ahmad Bajwa in the subject of Total Quality Management, Aaisha Amjad D/o Amjad Hussain in the subject of Sociology, Sohaib Ahmad S/o Muhammad Ifitkhar Arshad in the subject of Polymer Technology, Muhammad Muneeb Hashmi S/o Muhammad Aamir Hashmi in the subject of Agriculture Sciences (Horticulture), Hamna Asad D/o Asad Qadeer in the subject of Mathematics and Muhammad Yousaf S/o Imdad Ali in the subject of Mathematics.

CM ensures full support for peaceful elections

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi held a meeting with Provincial Election Commissioner Punjab Ijaz Anwar Chauhan to discuss the peaceful conduct of upcoming general elections and review the preparations.

Mohsin Naqvi, in his

remarks, assured full support from the Punjab government for the seamless execution of the election process. He emphasized the implementation of the Election Commission's code of conduct, and measures will be taken to ensure compliance.

The chief minister fur-

ther stated that law enforcement, including the police and other security agencies, will play a pivotal role in upholding the rule of law during the electoral process.

The Provincial Election Commissioner acknowledged the valuable cooperation of the Punjab government in this regard.

Civil Services Academy's probationary officers visit CCP for interactive session

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: As part of their training under the 51st Common Training Programme (CTP), a syndicate group of 20 probationary officers from the Civil Services Academy visited the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) for an interactive session.

Mr. Saeed Ahmad Nawaz, Member (Office of Fair Trade, MIU), CCP, presided over the session. While speaking on the occasion, he discussed the proactive measures undertaken by the CCP, including the establishment of a Market Intelligence Unit (MIU), to effectively imple-

ment the Competition Law. The syndicate group was led by the faculty in charge, Mr. Rehmat Wali Khan, Deputy Director. The group members, who are currently researching the "Implications of Fifth Industrial Revolution (IR 5.0) on Public Service Management in Pakistan," asked multiple questions. While responding to the questions, Mr. Nawaz underscored the significant challenges and opportunities presented by the advent of the Fifth Industrial Revolution.

The syndicate group also benefited from a comprehensive presentation delivered by Mr. Shahzad Hussain, DG (Advocacy)/Registrar of CCP. The presentation

explained the substantive provision of Competition Law dealing with Abuse of Dominance, Prohibited Agreements, Deceptive Marketing, and Mergers & Acquisitions. It also traced the historical trajectory of Competition Law, highlighting its pivotal role in fostering a competitive environment conducive to Pakistan's economic progress.

Reflecting on the visit, the syndicate group members expressed gratitude to the CCP for the warm hospitality and offering invaluable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities posed by IR 5.0. They found the engagement beneficial for their research.

Various problems can be solved if people pay taxes: Mayor Karachi

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab on Monday said that Karachi's economic situation and infrastructure are not major challenges and many problems can be solved if people pay taxes.

He said this while talking to Consul General of Austria Mrs. Andrea Wicke who along with Commercial Consul Dr. Johannes Brunner and Chairman PM Task Force for Strategic Reforms Unit, Hussain Islam called on the Mayor Karachi in his office here.

The Mayor Karachi said that his doors are always open to all people for solving public problems, in this regard the current administration has adopted an open door policy to increase public relations and solve all the problems of the city as soon as possible.

Earlier, Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab welcomed the Austrian Consul General and mem-

bers of his delegation at Jamshed Nasserwanji Building (KMC head office) and discussed matters of mutual interest with them.

Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab informed Consul General Austria about the history of City Council and KMC on this occasion. He said that Pakistan and Austria can promote mutual cooperation in the fields of infrastructure development, education and research. Both countries can learn from each other's experiences and ensure better facilities for their citizens, he added.

He said that Austria can provide assistance to students from Pakistan in education and other fields, German language is spoken in Austria and we can help the youth to learn it so that they can have opportunities to make a better future in Austria.

The Mayor Karachi said that the biggest problem of Karachi is the supply of

drinking water, fifty percent of the water is wasted due to leakage in the lines. Work is underway on two new projects to supply water in different districts of the city, 80 MGD of additional water will be available to Karachi from these projects, he said.

He said that the city administration is also solving the transport problems on a priority basis, Karachi currently needs 2000 buses, but 300 new buses are being added for the citizens, which will allow the citizens to travel within the city with ease.

He said that there are attractive opportunities for foreign investment in Sindh province including Karachi, which Austrian investors can take advantage of. We would welcome foreign participation and cooperation in public welfare projects and foreign investors will be fully supported and helped in this connection, he said.

Police in Lahore kill most-wanted dacoit in 'encounter'

LAHORE (INP): A dacoit was killed allegedly in an encounter with the police in Shahdara area of Lahore on Sunday night, while his two accomplices, taking advantage of darkness, fled from the spot.

According to Shahdara Town SHO Amir Shahzad, the police personnel signaled three dacoits on a motorcycle to stop. "But instead, they started firing at them indiscriminately," he said, added, "The cops retaliated due to which Faizan Khan alias Heeto, who was wanted in dozens of cases of robberies, was killed."

The SHO said that a stolen motorcycle, bullets and pistols were also recovered from Faizan.

The police official disclosed that two days ago the robbers had seriously injured a citizen by repeatedly attacking him with a knife on the suspicion that he may be an informer. "Hunt has been launched for the arrest of remaining two dacoits," he concluded.

Man shot dead in Shahdara In a similar incident in the same area, unidentified persons mounted on a bike shot dead a 40-year-old man.

Police said that assailants pumped 13 bullets into the body of the deceased, who had been identified as Ifitkhar, due to which he died on the spot.

Family members of Ifitkhar, however, alleged that the police had not handed over to them the body. They shouted, "Death to Shahdara police."

They also demanded the inspector general of Police (IGP), Punjab to ensure the immediate arrest of the suspects.

Two new driving test centers set up in Lahore

LAHORE (APP): In a move to enhance convenience for city residents, the Lahore Traffic Police has set up two new testing centers at Fortress Stadium and Deffence Phase 8, reducing the need for residents in other societies and areas to travel far.

Starting from 9am to 5pm, these centers offer services to residents, ensuring accessibility throughout the day. With eight police service centers across the city, Lahore residents can benefit from various services. This initiative, under the directives of the Inspector General of Punjab Police, prioritizes the provision of police services.

In a statement issued here, Chief Traffic Officer Ammara Athar said that Lahore Traffic Police has introduced online learner permits, renewal, and international license services. Thanks to online services, there is a significant 90% reduction in rush at licensing offices.

In a crackdown against drivers without licenses, cases are being filed, emphasizing the importance of adhering to licensing regulations. So far, the campaign has resulted in action against 27,000 drivers operating without licenses.

Traffic police is committed to ensuring road safety and compliance with licensing regulations, she added.

Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari addresses Jiyalas of Lyari

F.P. Report

KARACHI : Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, daughter of Prime Minister Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, said that the Pakistan Peoples Party will win the general elections on February 8 and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will become the Prime Minister of the country.

She said that PPP and the people together can change the destiny of Pakistan. According to a press release issued by Media Cell Bilawal House, Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari visited Lyari in Karachi as part of PPP's nationwide election campaign, where she was warmly received by the people.

Addressing the public at various places in Lyari, Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari said that the PPP is the sole party that has presented a poor-friendly and people-friendly manifesto.

We promise to eradicate poverty, build a people's government and make the people and poor workers of

Pakistan prosperous. The PPP has provided quality healthcare to people and free education to children.

Issuance of the Benazir Mazdoor Card has begun in Sindh, now it will be extended to other provinces. We started Peoples Bus Service and Green Bus Line Bus Service for the people of Karachi. Bibi Aseefa reiterated the PPP's commitment to regularise temporary housing and give ownership rights to the women.

300 units of free electricity will be provided to the public through solar energy parks, Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari said. She appealed to the people to use the power of the vote wisely and make Chairman Bilawal the PM by voting for the symbol of the arrow.

She said that by stamping the arrow on February 8, the people should give Bilawal Bhutto Zardari an opportunity to serve them. On February 8, the people have to remember the sign of the arrow.

"When you and I work

together, no power can stop us", Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari resolved while beckoning the people of Lyari to pledge that they will make Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's nominated representatives successful.

Before the arrival of Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, Jiyalas and Jiyalis were present in large numbers to welcome her. She was welcomed by a sea of people. People of all ages participated in the rally, including a large number of women. Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari remained outside her car during the rally and responded to the slogans of the people.

PPP candidates for the National Assembly and Sindh Assembly seats in Lyari, Sardar Nabil Gabol, Usman Hungoro, Yousuf Baloch, Salim Mandwiwala and Malik Fayyaz accompanied Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari. PPP Karachi Division President Saeed Ghani, General Secretary Javed Naguri and other local leaders were also present in the rally.



DCM Schofer visits emperor Jehagnir's mausoleum in Lahore

LAHORE (APP): Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) at the U.S. Embassy, Islamabad Andrew Schofer on Monday visited the mausoleum of the Mughal emperor Nurruddin Mohammad Jahangir and hailed the artistic finesse of the 17th century architectural masterpiece.

Nurud Din Muhammad Salim, known as Jahangir, (1569-1627) was the fourth Mughal emperor who ruled India from 1605 to 1627.

The tomb was decreed to be built at Dilkusha Garden - favourite sojourn of the Mughal emperor in Lahore - by his descendant emperor Shah Jahan. The mausoleum was completed in 1637.

DCM Andrew Schofer was accompanied by US Consul General to Lahore Kristin Hawkins and Public Affairs Officer Karl Rogers. After a warm welcome by the Walled City of

Lahore Authority (WCLA) officials, Andrew Schofer was shown round the tomb while he also had a bird's eye view of the sprawling gardens and adjacent tomb of Asif Khan from one of the minarets of the tomb.

DCM Schofer showed keen interest in the Mughal architecture and briefed on the facade of the mausoleum and was briefed about the the red sandstone inlaid with marble motifs which were preserved in original. Schofer expressed deep admiration for the architecture embellished with pietra dura.

Visiting tomb of the emperor Jehangir, the diplomat was shown round the arcades and the embellished marble on the tomb. He was informed that the intricate vegetal art work was only second to Taj Mahal Agra in India. He was also shown the 500 year metal gate which has been preserved in original.

From the roof-top, the DCM Schofer climbed one of the ornamental minarets projecting from each corner of the building and are decorated with geometric inlaid stone. The 100 meter long minarets are least affected by the ravages of time.

DCM Schofer, in his remarks, hailed the cultural heritage of Pakistan and hailed the authorities for taking good care of the monuments which help in tracing history. He said the Ambassador's Fund for the Cultural Preservation has contributed to the preservation of several building in Punjab.

Later, DCM Schofer was also briefed about the adjacent Akbari Sarai - a large caravan inn - originally built for travellers as well as caretakers of Jahangir's tomb. Later, the DCM Andrew Schofer was presented a memento by the WCLA.

PFA discards 2,000 litre substandard milk, 400kg inferior-quality sweets

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) stopped the production of a food point and penalized 10 food business operators (FBOs) with Rs283,000 cumulative fine besides discarding 2,000 litres of sub-standard milk and other inferior-quality edibles.

On the directions of PFA Director General Muhammad Asim Javid, PFA's watchdogs examined several milk carrier vehicles, sweets shops and restaurants in Gawalmandi and City areas. He said that the dairy and food safety teams inspected the food quality and safety parameters in a daylong operation.

A team of PFA raided a sweets unit and stopped its production by imposing an emergency prohibition order (EPO) till further orders. He said that the raiding team witnessed

poor cleanliness arrangements, the presence of expired food items and tempered MRDs on food products.

He said that PFA imposed hefty fines on a candied fruit production unit and eateries for pre-serving food in rusty drums, failing to present the necessary record to the raiding teams and violating the Punjab Pure Food Regulations.

Apart from that, the provincial food regulatory body warned seven food outlets, asking them to improve the hygienic condition, he added.

Moreover, dairy safety teams inspected 67 milk carrier vehicles loaded with over 100,000 litres of milk by placing screening pickets in Lahore, Sheikhpura and Kasur.

The director general said that the teams dis-

posed of 2,000 litres of substandard milk after proving contamination of polluted water, low level of fats and a lack of nutritional values in it during lactoscan tests. Meanwhile, the authority discarded 400kg of sub-standard sweets, 370kg of rotten candied fruit, 378kg of raw food and a huge quantity of oil.

Muhammad Asim said that the PFA's slogan of providing healthy food "From Farm to Fork" is not merely a saying but is the top priority of the authority while the authority would continue its indiscriminate action against counterfeiters and adulterators till complete elimination from Punjab.

He asked people if they see adulterated items being made somewhere, report it to PFA on its 1223 helpline.



LAHORE: Young artisan busy carving design on wood at his workshop. —APP Photo



PESHAWAR: Secretary Information Syed Abdul Jabbar Shah and Director General Information Muhammad Imran in a group photo with journalists during their visit to Press Club.

Civil Services academy's probationary officers visit CCP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: As part of their training under the 51st Common Training Programme (CTP), a syndicate group of 20 probationary officers from the Civil Services Academy visited the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) for an interactive session.

Saeed Ahmad Nawaz, Member (Office of Fair Trade, MIU), CCP, presided over the session. While speaking on the occasion, he discussed the proactive measures undertaken by the CCP, including the establishment of a Market Intelligence Unit (MIU), to effectively implement the Competition Law.

The syndicate group was led by the faculty in charge, Mr. Rehmat Wali Khan, Deputy Director. The group members, who are currently researching the "Implications of Fifth Industrial Revolution (IR 5.0) on Public Sector Management in Pakistan," asked multiple questions. While responding to the questions,



Mr. Nawaz underscored the significant challenges and opportunities presented by the advent of the Fifth Industrial Revolution.

The syndicate group also benefited from a comprehensive presentation delivered by Mr. Shahzad Hussain, DG (Advocacy)/Registrar of CCP. The presentation explained the substantive provision of Competition Law dealing with Abuse of Dominance, Prohibited Agreements, Deceptive Marketing, and Mergers & Acquisitions. It also

traced the historical trajectory of Competition Law, highlighting its pivotal role in fostering a competitive environment conducive to Pakistan's economic progress.

Reflecting on the visit, the syndicate group members expressed gratitude to the CCP for the warm hospitality and offering invaluable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities posed by IR 5.0. They found the engagement beneficial for their research.

RMI holds white coat ceremony

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Rehman Medical College (RMC) Peshawar held a white coat ceremony on Monday to welcome its first-year MBBS students. The ceremony was attended by students, their parents, and guests of honor, including Dr. Riaz Anwar, Advisor to Caretaker Chief Minister, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Health.

During the ceremony, students and their parents planted saplings and took an oath to be dedicated to their chosen profession. They vowed to uphold the highest ethical standards in their medical practice.

Dr. Anwar, in his address, praised RMC for its high standards and outstanding faculty. He said that RMC is one of the best medical colleges in the country and has always been a top choice for students. "RMC has the best infrastructure and faculty in Pakistan," said Dr. Anwar. "It has everything a student needs to succeed in the medical profession." He also congratulated the parents on their children's achievements.

Dr. Anwar encouraged the students to study hard and to dedicate themselves to their chosen profession. He said that they have the potential to make a real difference in the world. Dr. Mukhtar Zaman, Principal of RMC, said that RMC's merit list was the highest among all private medical colleges in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the recent Khyber Medical University admissions process. This, he said, is a testament to the fact that RMC is still the top choice for students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The white coat ceremony is a traditional event that marks the arrival of a new batch of students in medical and dental colleges.

Weapons banned

F.P. Report

KOHAT: The district of Kohat has imposed a ban on the display of all weapons, including licensed ones, for a period of 15 days on Monday here.

According to the DC Office, this decision, taken under Section 144, comes in the wake of heightened security threats and aims to ensure the safety and security of the people in Kohat. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Dr. Azmatullah Wazir has taken a strong stance to protect the lives and property of the residents and maintain tranquility in the district.

PML-N's manifesto to bring green revolution

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) Lawyers Forum provincial president Kifayatullah Khan and Provincial Information Secretary Saleem Shah Hoti said that Muslim League-N is struggling for green revolution and timely provision of justice in the country.

In a joint statement, they said that the manifesto of the Muslim League-N will lead to the end of the frustration and instability in Pakistan so as to put country on path of development. They said that agriculture would be given status of industry, revolutionary measures would be taken for the betterment of farmers, and to make the country self-sufficient in food.

PML-N Lawyers said that global climate change had negatively affected Pakistan and PML-N would take concrete steps to improve the environmental conditions which would be instrumental in national progress. The PML-N leaders said that constitutional, legal, judicial and administrative reforms would be introduced to improve the efficiency of the justice system and provide quick and affordable justice to the people. They said that according to the spirit of the federal parliamentary system, the supremacy of the parliament would be ensured.

By amending the criminal and civil procedure codes, cases will be decided in months instead of years. They said that the institution of NAB would be replaced with effective

anti-corruption institution and Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution of Pakistan 1973 will be restored in their original form.

Establishment of commercial courts, reforms in family and child custody laws, review and improvement of prison manual as well as establishment of E-courts are included in the manifesto. They said that all the appointments in the judiciary would be made on merit and in a transparent manner.

PML-N stalwarts said that strong measures would be taken to overcome inflation and poverty and increase income and provide employment opportunities to people. They asked the people to vote the lion on February 8 and support the Muslim League-N to change the destiny of the country.

Cold weather with rains predicted for KP

F.P. Report

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

However, it said rain (snowfall over the hills) is expected in Chitral, Lower & Upper Dir, Malakand, Buner, Swat, Shangla, Kohistan, Torghar, Battagram, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, Swabi, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Kurram, Hangu, Orakzai, Bannu, North & South Waziristan

districts.

Isolated light rain is also expected in Mardan, Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera, Kohat, Karak, Lakki Marwat, Tank and D.I. Khan districts. During the last 24 hours rain recorded in millimeter at different stations of KP was Dir 45mm, Pattan 34mm, Parachinar 28mm, Kalam 22mm, Malam Jabba 19mm, Saidu Sharif 17mm, Chitral 11mm, Balakot 10mm, Mirkhani 09mm, Timergara 07mm, Drosh 06mm, Takht Bhai 04mm, Peshawar (City Trace & A/P 01) and Kakul &

Risalpur Trace (each). Snowfall recorded in (inches): Kalam 10 and Malamjaba 08.

The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in centigrade at different stations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were Peshawar 18/09, Chitral 12/03, Timergara 10/03, Dir 09/01, Mirkhani 11/01, Kalam 04/06, Drosh 10/01, Saidu Sharif 14/03, Pattan 16/06, Malam Jabba 02/04, Takht Bhai 16/09, Kakul 17/01, Balakot 14/08, Parachinar 08/00, Bannu 22/05, Cherat 13/02.



PESHAWAR: Children searching valuable items after fire incident in Times Centre.

ASJ grants interim bail to ANP candidate

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Additional Session Judge Peshawar Bakht Alam granted interim bail to Awami National Party candidate Dr. Naveed Ullah charged for firing on election rally of independent candidate Malak Tariq Awan and ordered submission of record till 6th February, on Monday.

According to prosecution, police had booked both candidates for PK82 Dr. Naveed Ullah and Malak Tariq Awan after firing in election rally in which two political workers were injured in the premises of Gulbahar police station.

ANP candidate had approached session's court for interim bail plea which is accepted and ordered police for submission of record till 6th February. ATC convicts for nine years imprisonment: Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Peshawar has convicted Rafi Ullah for nine years imprisonment along with Rs2 lac fine in firing on police vehicle.

According to prosecution, the accused had opened firing on police party during raid at Shalober area of Tirah valley Inspector Umar Khan was injured. ATC had convicted Rafiullah for nine years imprisonment along with Rs2 lac fine after conclusion of arguments and trial.

Gas leakage claims two more life

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Gas leakage claimed on Monday the lives of a husband and wife in a private hostel room near Comsats University Abbottabad.

According to the Mirpur police station in Abbottabad, husband Khurshid and wife Sofia, residents of Haripur, were living in a private hostel room near Comsats University in Abbottabad and suffocated to death when they left the gas heaters on.

After receiving the information, Rescue 1122 reached the spot and shifted both to the Ayub Medical Complex, where doctors declared them dead. This was the third incident of deaths caused by gas leakage or suffocation in the district of Abbottabad, where nine people lost their lives.

Fazl announces election meetings schedule

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a move to intensify electoral campaign for general elections 2024, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Monday announced the schedule for public meetings in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman is set to address a public gathering in Tank on February 2nd, kicking off his series of election meetings. On February 3rd, the religious scholar would deliver a speech in Bannu and on February 4th in Lakki Marwat. The campaign will continue on February 6th with Maulana Fazlur Rehman addressing a gathering in D I Khan. As the electoral momentum builds up, these public engagements aim to connect with voters and garner support for Maulana Fazlur Rehman's political agenda in the upcoming elections.

Rescue 1122 prepares for snowfall

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Rescue 1122 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has completed preparations to provide essential services to tourists in the hilly mountain and tourist areas where snowfall has started after a long dry spell.

Dr. Khateer Ahmed, Director General of Rescue 1122, said that operational vehicles and staff have been fully activated, and points have been established during snowfall at tourist destinations.

After a long dry spell, snowfall and rain have started in the mountains of Swat, Shangla, Dir Upper, Chitral, and other areas of Malakand Division since Monday night.

Ghulam Ali opens Governor's Secretariat website

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali formally inaugurated the website of the Governor's Secretariat here on Monday.

The website was inaugurated during a ceremony held here in the Governor's House. Besides, Caretaker KP Minister for Education, Dr Qasim Jan, Secretary IT Board Mohammad Ali Shah, Vice Chancellors of the University of Peshawar, Khyber Medical University and Agricultural University Peshawar, Director

IMSciences Dr Usman Ghani, officers of the Governor's Secretariat and IT Board also were present on the occasion.

With the launching of the website 'http://governorkp.gov.pk', the people will get easy access to the Governor KP and day-to-day affairs of the Governor's Secretariat. All affairs of the Governor's Secretariat will now be available online.

Through this website, the employees of the universities could file applications against the administrative decisions of their

respective university while any order on their online appeal will also be available on it. Addressing the inaugural ceremony, the Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali said that today is the era of information technology, so the public should also be provided information on the basis of the requirements of the modern era.

The website, he said, is created for the access of the people to the affairs of the Governor's Secretariat and is the beginning of a journey towards the modern era.

PHS call for ban on e-cigarettes, vapes in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Public Health Stakeholders of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Monday called for unanimous and aggressive efforts for permanently ban the use and sale of e-cigarettes and vapes in the province for the best interest of public health and sustainable tobacco control.

Blue Veins, a civil society organization, organized a public health stakeholder consultation to deliberate on the interim ban by the KP government on vapes and e-cigarettes. The consultation aimed to discuss the future strategies and the way forward following the KP government's decision, as outlined in a notification issued by the Home and Tribal Affairs Department.

The notification mandates all Deputy Commissioners to enforce a complete ban on the sale of e-cigarettes and vapes to individuals below 21 years in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and prohibits their sale and storage within a 50-meter radius of educational institutions for 60 days.

The consultation, chaired by Haroon Saleem,

Assistant Commissioner Headquarters Peshawar, had active participation from officials of the health department, tobacco control cell, government functionaries, health experts, CSOs, media, and other stakeholders. The participants unanimously endorsed the need for comprehensive provincial-level legislation to ban the sale and storage of electronic cigarettes and vapes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The participants lauded the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government's proactive approach in imposing an interim ban on vapes and e-cigarettes. They commended the government's swift and decisive action, emphasizing its commitment to public health and the well-being of its citizens, especially the youth.

Assistant Commissioner Haroon Saleem expressed his views, stating, "The district administration and the provincial government are strongly committed to safeguarding our citizens from the harmful effects of tobacco and nicotine. We will take every necessary action to enforce this ban and protect public health."

Despite being promoted as a safer alternative to traditional cigarettes and a tool for cessation, it was emphasized that there is no scientific evidence to support these claims. E-cigarettes and vapes contain nicotine, which is highly addictive, challenging the harm reduction narrative used by the tobacco industry.

Sana Ahmad, Program Coordinator at Blue Veins, emphasized the importance of comprehensive legislation. "It's crucial to have legislation that encompasses the inputs of all stakeholders. This will ensure that the laws we implement are effective, inclusive, and geared towards the well-being of our community."

Mian Ateeq, a public health expert representing the Prevention Alliance for Sustainable Tobacco and Nicotine Control, added, "The ban on e-cigarettes and vapes is a significant step towards public health safety. It's important to continue this momentum and create a robust legislative framework that addresses all aspects of tobacco and nicotine control."



PESHAWAR: Customs Officer DSP Aziz Ur Rahman Khalil is being awarded with a certificate after completing one-week investigation training from Police School of Investigation.

Warm welcome to new class of future dentists at KCD

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber College of Dentistry (KCD) hosted a grand white coat ceremony to welcome its first-year BDS students for session 2028. The event was attended by students, proud parents, esteemed faculty, and distinguished guests, while stage secretary was Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aiman Khan, Oath taking ceremony led by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Samrina and Dr. Nighat Shafique explained the significance of whitecoat to the students. During the ceremony, the Dean of KCD, Prof. Dr. Syed Nasir Shah, praised the college for its high standards, which make it the best dental college in the entire country. In addition, the Chairman of the Board of Governors (BOG) for KTH/KMC/KCD, Dr. Umar Ayub Khan, and the Dean of KCD congratulated the students on their achievements.

This year instead of raging, senior students set a new standard by ditching the harmful tradition and embraced a culture of warmth, respect, and support. Senior students took the initiative to personally welcome their juniors, they presented beautifully wrapped giveaways to their juniors, they decorated an eye catching photo-booth and also arranged a spectacular balloon laughing ceremony in the KCD's lawn.

This shift in tradition is not only making KCD a more welcoming and inclusive environment, but it's also setting a positive example for other institutions in the region. Speaking at the ceremony, the Dean of KCD Prof. Dr. Syed Nasir Shah spoke about the significance of the white coat ceremony. He referred to it as the 'Professional Birth' of the students, who have been chosen for this noble profession to provide relief and serve humanity. He highlighted that human beings are masterpieces of ALLAH's creation and the students have been given the authority to add beauty, health, and confidence to their patients' smiles. It is a huge responsibility given to them by ALLAH to

bring desirable changes to the human face and help improve people's lives.

During his speech, Chairman BOG Dr. Umar Ayub Khan emphasized the significance of providing compassionate dental care and encouraged the students to utilize their education to make a positive impact in their community. He also emphasized the importance of choosing BDS as a career path, and how, over the next four years, students would learn about compassionate dental care and how to alleviate the suffering of patients.

Furthermore, he also discussed the possibility of arranging donations in emergency situations for the betterment of patients, highlighting the institute's commitment to providing the best possible care to those in need. He thanked faculty and congratulated the students and their parents and said that the white coat ceremony is a traditional and symbolic event that marks the beginning of a promising journey for aspiring dental professionals.



In brief

Carrying arms banned in Swat Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: District Magistrate Swat, Dr Muhammad Qasim Ali Khan on Monday under the Section-144 CRPC, imposed a complete ban on carrying firearms including the legal one. A notification to this effect said a complete ban has been imposed in the jurisdiction of Swat district on exhibition and carrying of all kinds of firearms including the arms having valid license. It said the violators of this order will face legal action under Section-188 PPC of the law. The order will remain enforced till 11TH February, the notification said and added that the personnel of the law enforcing agencies (LAEs) will remain exempted from the order.

Three robber gangs busted

MULTAN (INP): Muzaffarabad police have busted three notorious robber gangs and arrested six members of these gangs besides recovering looted valuables from their possession during a crackdown launched here on Monday. In line with special directives of the City Police Officer (CPO) Sadiq Ali, the police launched a special crackdown against criminals involved in depriving citizens of motorcycles and other valuables at gunpoint. The police team busted three notorious robber gangs including Altaf Gang, Abdullah Gang and Shaban Gang. The police arrested six members of these gangs including the ring leaders Muhammad Abdullah, Muhammad Altaf and Shaban. During the initial investigations, the police recovered looted valuables of worth Rs 1.2 million including seven motorcycles, cash, Rs 450,000 and mobile phones from their possession by tracing 24 cases. Further investigations were underway and more recoveries were expected from the arrested criminals, police sources added.

Wassan sees Bilawal as PM

KOT DIJI (INP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Manzoor Wassan, who is famous for his political predictions, has made yet another prediction, reported on Monday. Addressing a rally at Kot Diji, Wassan, in his latest prophesy, has claimed that all candidates who will be elected to assemblies as independents, will vote for PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in an election for the seat of prime minister, and that Bilawal will be the country's next prime minister. Furthermore, he has said that not only the PPP will make a clean sweep from Sindh in the elections, but the party will also manage to get a sizeable number of seats from Punjab and Balochistan.

Snowfall confine residents to homes F.P. Report

SHANGLA: The snowfall had paralyzed every segment life from power break down to hurdles in communication on roads across Shangla. According to details, the snowfall started after heavy downpour on Saturday which had caused several seasonal diseases like flu, chest infections and temperature among the masses. The intense weather had residents to houses due to cold. Moreover, two feet snowfall is recorded in mountainous areas including Shalkhu Sar, Manai Sar, Changa Sar, Ajmeer Sar and Kapar Banda while from six inches to one foot snow is recorded at Shangla Top as well as Yakh Tangi along with adjacent areas.



QUETTA: PML-N provincial secretary general, Jamal Shah Kakar addressing a press conference.

Security arrangements for polling day inspected

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Commissioner Mardan Division Shaikat Ali Yousafzai along with Deputy Commissioner/District Returning Officer Muhammad Fayaz Khan Sherpao and District Election Monitoring Officer/Additional Commissioner Naeem Akhtar and other relevant officials here on Monday visited the most sensitive polling stations of Government High School Guli Bagh and Government Primary School Guli Bagh. He reviewed the security arrangements, installation of security cameras and general cleanliness at both the polling stations.

Commissioner also visited Bulck Election Material Center at Government Post Graduate College Mardan and reviewed the situation. He directed the concerned authorities to strictly adhere to the required SOPs in the delivery and return of election materials and to ensure the safety of voters and election staff. He also directed special measures for smooth flow of traffic in the vicinity of polling stations.

Deputy Commissioner Mardan briefed the Commissioner about the foolproof arrangements made in this regard. He said that 389 polling stations in Mardan district have been

declared as the most sensitive, wherein other special arrangements including the installation of security cameras have been completed.

Free medical camp held for eye's diseases:

A free medical camp has been organized at Baghdada in which 206 patients given treatment by Save the Life Welfare Foundation and provided medicines. Doctors from Mardan Medical Complex and Dar ul-Shifa Eye Hospital Takhtbhai examined the patients in the free eye camp. Mardan Medical Complex Board of Governor member and prominent ophthalmologist Professor Dr. Zia Muhammad inaugurated the free eye camp.

Patients attending the camp not only received thorough examinations but were also provided with necessary treatments for various eye-related diseases. During the camp seventy six male and one hundred and twenty nine female patients received free treatment and sixteen were chosen for surgeries. Dr. Zia Muhammad stated that eyes are a great blessing and its protection is necessary for us. Due to the lack of timely diagnosis of eye diseases, the number of blind people is increasing day by day.

Deputy Director Information Shamsulhaq

yousafzai and District Emergency Officer Imran Khan yousafzai also visited the eye camp and meet with the volunteers of foundation. They paid tribute to the volunteers of the Baghdada and said that they will fully support the foundation in such kind of welfare activities.

Maulana Zia Ur Rahman Farooqi President of the Save the Life Welfare Foundation said in his address that this foundation was created to serve the humanity. This is a non-profit organization and we will aid the needy people beyond political, gender and religious affiliations. So far, the organization has distributed food package, organized free medical camp, cleanliness drive of Baghdada graveyard, distribution of winter package among poor and needy students, while in future the foundation will support widows, orphans and poor people.

On this occasion, Patron in Chief Maulana Abdul Haq, President Maulana Zia-ur-Rehman Farooqi, Chairman NC Baghdad one Ishfaq Lodhi, Vice-Chairman Malik Ilyas, Maulana Jawad Ahmad, Dr. Imtiaz Ahmad, Dr. Bilal Yousaf, Fida Hussain, Shahid Hayat Lodhi, Sahibzada Fazal Rabbani, Haji Ihsanul Haq and Mufti Asfandiyar Durrani were also present.

As many as 619 polling stations in Hafizabad

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Election Commission Pakistan have established 619 polling stations and 1910 polling booths for casting votes for 8 lakh 10 thousand and 723 male and female registered voters whereas 78 polling stations have been declared sensitive. Official sources told that 194 polling stations for male, 191 for female and 234 combined polling stations have been setup for 4 lakh 39 thousand and 770 male and 3 lakh 70 thousand and 953 voters in the district.

Election Commission have established one National Assembly (NA-67) while three Provincial Assembly constituencies PP-37, PP-38 and PP-39 in the district Hafizabad. There are two lakh forty four and 99 registered voters in the constituency PP-37 Hafizabad-1 and 201 polling stations have been established in this constituency, in constituency

PP-38 Hafizabad 2, 210 poling statins have been established for two lakh eighty six thousand and five hundred registered voters whereas in constituency PP-39, 208 poling statins have been setup for two lakh sixty thousand and 732 registered voters.

On polling day, officers of Army and Rangers accompanied by police will be perform duty for holding of election in peaceful atmosphere while a special control room have also been established DC Office and CCTV Cameras would also be installed at sensitive polling stations for monitoring law and order situation.

DBA to stand for rule of law:

Lawyers of District Par Association Hafizabad have demanded the rule of law and respect of vote and took a rally in this connection led by President District Bar Umar Khizar Hanjra and General Secretary Rai Waqar, Saturday. The rally was

started from Judicial Complex and concluded at Jinnah Chowk.

The lawyers were raising slogans including one county and two constitution and to give honour to vote. Addressing the participants of the rally senior lawyer and Ex-President. District Bar P.M Safadar Kharal nodding towards police officers said that these corrupt officers did not make the country but this country was had for rule of law and respect of constitution.

Ex. President Bar Shoaib Bhatti Advocate said that we desire that all parties be allowed to take part in general election of 8, February. President Bar Umer Khizar Hanjra said that lawyer community is united at same platform for rule of law and respect of constitution. We demand to ensure holding of general election free, fair and transparently so that people of the county could elect their real representatives.

Larkana turns into ruins despite millions of budget

F.P. Report

LARKANA: Larkana city, the birth district of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and the main center of Pakistan People's Party, turned into ruins despite budget of millions of rupees as well as the municipal development projects worth billions of rupees.

Even though the corporation has a budget of millions of rupees, all the business centers of the city have shrunk due to dirt, gutters and illegal encroachment of vendors on the public roads. In the areas, the water of the sewers is turning into ponds on the common roads.

Due to the smelly water in the markets and streets,

DIG briefed on operation

F.P. Report

KANDKOT: Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Larkana Division Nasir Aftab Pathan inspected the ongoing operation against dacoits in Mahar Kacha area of Kashmir, Kandkot district, on Monday. The operation is heading by Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Kashmir Bashir Ahmad Brohi. SSP was said that there is a series of firing between the police and dacoits at intervals in the area of Mehr Kacha and the vigilance has been tightened in different areas of Kacha while briefing DIG Larkana. He added that police have started a series of door-to-door searches.

the buyers are suffering from serious problems. In relation to a video of passing through Pani Ka Road, he said that the political parties Pakistan People's Party, GDA regretted the condition of the historic city of Larkana, known as the fort, that the elected candidates who won in

every election sat in the air-conditioning of the Assembly. PPP leader sleeps, he has no idea whether I have fulfilled the promises made to the citizens or not. Illegal encroachments should be eliminated so that the long-standing problem of the citizens can be solved.

Arms display in Khyber banned

F.P. Report

KHYBER: The district administration, Khyber imposed 144 last day, banning display of arms for fifteen days aimed to ensure a peaceful environment in the general election to be scheduled on 08, February 2024.

The restriction will be equally imposed on legal and illegal arms and will be effective till February 10. In a notification issued from the Khyber House said that with the purpose to make sure favorable atmosphere for political processions and public gatherings, the initiative was adopted on the direction of the Interior Ministry, Tribal Affairs and Provincial Government with immediate effect.

The district administration and the district police, Khyber, were striving hard for peaceful conduct of the general election, it stated. The notification had been dispatched to Assistant Commissioners beside the District Police Officer for necessary action.

Political parties occupied by elite

F.P. Report

KARAK: An independent candidate for NA38 named Mohammad Saleem Khattak said that participating in the election as an independent means that parties are occupied by some felt landlords, in which there is nothing for the poor.

This he claimed while addressing press conference at Karak and added that they are listening to my message that they should reach out to others because I cannot reach everyone while the resources of our district are being looted for 20 years. If I get the opportunity, Insha Allah, I will also distribute my wealth among the poor, if someone proves corruption on me or violates his promises, then his blood is forgiven for everyone.

Our corrupt politicians and bureaucrats are locked up and have started receiving tremendous appreciation from the people. While the area elders, the youth announced all kinds of support, help Salim Khan win by knocking on the election symbol ship on February 8 and help to establish a people's government.

PPP candidate withdraws from polls

F.P. Report

PABB: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) candidate for PK88 Safdar Shabab withdrew nomination forms in favor of Sajid Iqbal Azakheli and committed for joint election campaign for both provincial and national seats.

They announced it during a press conference and claimed that joint campaign should be launched for both NA34 candidate Muhammad Idress and Sajid Iqbal Azakheli.

This concluded in a meeting held at residence of Safdar Shabab in Saeed Ullah Khan, Al Haj Muhammad Anwar, Pabbi president Muhammad Ilyas, Imran Khan, Mian Bakhtiar Hussain and PSF president Shahzad were present to ensure pitch-up Sajid Iqbal for joining PPP.

ECP impose fines for violating election code

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) while taking actions against electoral candidates in the Lower Dir district as well as local government chairmen and imposed fines for violating the code of conduct during the election campaign. The Pakistan Tahreek Insaaf independent candidate for NA 7 Syed Mahboob Shah and PK 15 candidate Humayun Khan have been fined Rs 50,000 each by the district monitoring for violating the code of conduct.

According to a notification issued by the district monitoring officer here the other day, a village council chairman Murad Rehman of Gulabad Adenzai was also fined Rs 30,000 for running campaign for his party candidate while the official vehicle of the tehsil chairman Adenzai Fairoz Shah, brother of the NA 7 candidate Syed Mahboob Shah has also been seized by the election commission. The election candidates have been directed to deposit the amount of their fines in government treasury by Jan 29 positively and present the challan to the ECP.

Meanwhile the Lower Dir deputy commissioner Wasil Khan directed all the political parties and election candidates not to hold any gathering, procession or rallies without the prior permission from the concerned authorities. In a letter circulated here on Sunday the parties have

been informed that in the wake of current law and order situation the political leadership has to adopt security guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOPs) during their campaigns for protection of their leaders and workers.

The letter said that it has been observed that despite clear orders by the Peshawar High Court the same were not been followed which was not only putting the fugile law and order situation but was also hampering the provincial government in fulfilling its constitutional obligation of providing assistance to the ECP to hold free and fair election.

It said that various political parties were holding their rallies without obtaining prior permission that amounted to a violation of the court order and KP government act, 2020. The political leadership was called upon to strictly observe the SOPs duly endorsed by the Peshawar High Court.

Stolen vehicle recovered:

Police claimed to have recovered a stolen car owned by one Ihsanul Haq, a resident of Munda from Swat. The car went missing from the Shingrai area of Timergara a week ago. Talking to local journalists the station house officer Timergara said that the car was recovered from Swat and two accused Jibran and Ali Jan were arrested. The SHO said that one Kalashnikov, one pistol, 3 magazines and 52 cartridges were also recovered

from the possession of the arrested accused.

Scholars complet

M.Phil in mathematics: Mr Shakeel Muhammad, MPhil Scholar in Department of Mathematics, University of Malakand has successfully defended his MPhil thesis under the supervision of Dr. Amir Ali, Assistant professor in Department of Mathematics, University of Malakand.

The External Examiner was Dr. Gohar Ali, Associate Professor, Department of Mathematics, Islamia college university, Peshawar. The Chairman, Department of Mathematics, University of Malakand Prof Dr Mohammad Imtiaz Ahmad & Faculty Members Congratulated the MPhil Scholar & Research Supervisor in this regard.

Mr. Badshah Muhammad, MPhil Scholar in Department of Mathematics, University of Malakand has successfully defended his MPhil thesis under the supervision of Dr. Amir Ali Assistant professor Department of mathematics University of Malakand. The External Examiner was Dr. Muhammad Adil Khan, Associate professor Department of mathematics University of Peshawar. The Chairman Dr. Amtiaz Ahmad, Department of mathematics UOM & Faculty Members Congratulated the MPhil Scholar & Research Supervisor in this regard.

PESCO directs action against power pilferage

F.P. Report

BANNU: Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) Chief Engineer (Operation and Maintenance) Akhtar Hameed has asked the local authorities to expedite anti-power pilferage drive and ensure recoveries from industrial and commercial consumers by the mid of next month.

Chairing a high level meeting in Bannu, he said that recovery of arrears from defaulters must be made up to Feb 15. He said that slackness and negligence on part of local officials during the operation

against power thieves and defaulters would not be tolerated at all.

Among others deputy commercial manager Younas Khan, assistant manager Haidar Ali Khan, Bannu, Lakki and Karak executive engineers- Imran Khan Gandapur, Saeedur Rehman, Hizbullah Mehsud and Shahid Farooq were in attendance. The chief engineer asked the anti-power pilferage teams to eliminate illegal electricity connection from commercial areas in Bannu city and Naurang town of Lakki Marwat district.

"The removal of illegal connections will help to improve the power supply system and ensure provision of uninterrupted electricity to the business hubs in both districts", he maintained.

He appreciated sub divisional officers of Bannu (urban) and Naurang sub divisions for result oriented actions against electricity stealers. Later he inspected the PESCO circle offices' buildings and vehicles. On the occasion, the employees' leaders demanded construction of a new building for offices and replacement of old vehicles with new ones.



QUETTA: A view of flags of different political parties on the road for upcoming elections.

First time in Arifwala, a woman becomes village leader

PAKPATTAN (INP): In a significant development towards achieving gender equality, a woman has been appointed as the village leader (Lambardar) in Arifwala in district Pakpattan.

Amna Bibi, a resident of 22 KB village, received the official notification of her appointment from the Pakpattan Deputy Commissioner (DC), Sadia Mehr. Amna Bibi is the first woman to hold this position in Arifwala, and one of the few in the entire Punjab province. She will be responsible for overseeing the affairs of the village, such as resolving disputes, collecting taxes, maintaining records, and liaising with the district administration.

The appointment of a

woman as Lambardar by the deputy commissioner is considered as a positive step towards empowering women and promoting gender equality in rural areas. The Lambardari system in Pakistan is based on the pre-partition Indian land revenue system.

Lambardar is a semi-hereditary status in Punjab, Pakistan. Zamindars with considerable landholdings and hereditary status are usually serving as Lambardars. Currently, educated youngsters with landholdings and hereditary status are being appointed by deputy commissioners to replace old members of the families serving as Lambardars in Punjab. The first female Lambardar in West Pakistan was Begum

Sarwat Imtiaz who took oath in 1959. She was Lambardar of Chak 43/12 L. Chichawatni, district Montgomery (now Sahiwal).

Seven injured

MURIDKE (INP): At least seven persons of a family, including a woman and minor girl, sustained injuries when a pick-up overturned in Muridke.

According to details, the accident occurred at the Narowal Road in Muridke where a pick-up turned turtle after its tyre burst due to which seven persons sustained injuries. Police and rescue teams reached the spot and shifted the injured to a nearby hospital.



South China Sea tensions and Myanmar violence top agenda for envoys meeting

LAOS (AP): China's growingly assertive posture in the South China Sea and escalating violence in Myanmar topped the agenda for Southeast Asian diplomats meeting in Laos on Monday. The gathering is the first high-level meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations since Laos took over the rotating chairmanship.

The diplomats for the 10 nations with a combined population of nearly 650 million and GDP of more than \$3 trillion will work to strategize on issues of regional peace, security and stability. They were also discussing economic cooperation and other issues under the year's theme "enhancing connectivity and resilience." Of the ASEAN member nations, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Brunei and Laos, several have competing maritime claims in the South China Sea with China.

China claims virtually the entire South China Sea, through which an estimated \$5 trillion in international trade passes each year, which has led it into direct confrontations, most notably with the Philippines and Vietnam. The ASEAN meeting in the historic city of Luang Prabang comes on the same day that Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. was to be meeting with top officials in Hanoi, among other things to discuss the ongoing tensions in the South China Sea.

The Philippines has been looking for more support from its ASEAN neighbors, amid increasingly tense hostilities with China, primarily off of the Second Thomas Shoal, which many worry could escalate into a broader armed conflict that could involve Washington, Manila's long-time treaty ally.

The Philippine government protested the Chinese coast guard's use of water cannon, a military-grade laser and dangerous blocking maneuvers that had caused minor collisions off the Philippine-occupied shoal. China and ASEAN agreed in 2012 to a declaration on conduct in the South China Sea, seeking to "enhance favorable conditions for a peaceful and durable solution of differences and disputes," but there has been little sign of adherence to that in recent years.



Under last year's chair, Indonesia, ASEAN agreed with China on guidelines to accelerate negotiations for a South China Sea code of conduct, but that has yet to produce results. With communist Laos' close ties with neighboring China, and the fact that it is landlocked so has no South China Sea claims of its own, many have been skeptical that it will be able to achieve any breakthrough during its year as ASEAN chair. A draft copy of Laos' final statement to be issued later Monday, obtained by The Associated Press, makes no direct mention of China's claims, but does stress several times the need to respect the United Nations convention on the law of the sea. Under that convention, a UN-backed tribunal ruled in 2016 that China's expansive claims in the South China Sea on historical grounds were invalid and that Beijing had violated the right of Filipinos to fish in the shoal.

China has refused to participate in the arbitration, rejected its outcome and continues to defy it. In its statement, Laos says ASEAN discussed concerns "of the land reclamations, activities, serious incidents in the area, including actions that put the safety of all persons at risk," and "emphasized the importance of non-militarization and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimants." Laos is the first ASEAN country that shares a border with Myanmar to serve as chair since the military seized control of the country

in February 2021 from the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. ASEAN has developed a "Five-Point Consensus" plan for peace, which calls for the immediate cessation of violence, a dialogue among all concerned parties, mediation by an ASEAN special envoy, provision of humanitarian aid through ASEAN channels, and a visit to Myanmar by the special envoy to meet all concerned parties.

The military leadership in Myanmar has so far ignored the plan. At the same time, a humanitarian crisis is growing, with more than 2.6 million people forced from their homes due to escalating violence, according to the United Nations. Laos has already sent its special envoy to Myanmar for meetings with the head of the ruling military council and other top officials in an attempt to make progress on the five-point consensus.

Myanmar has been prohibited from sending its foreign minister or any political representative to the ASEAN meetings since the end of 2021 when it blocked the group's envoy from meeting with Suu Kyi. It is represented in Luang Prabang by a non-political Foreign Ministry official instead. In the draft of its final statement, Laos called Myanmar an "integral part of ASEAN" and said the group was committed to "assisting Myanmar in finding a peaceful and durable solution to the ongoing crisis" through the implementation of the five-point consensus.

Hungary far-right would lay claim to neighbouring region

BUDAPEST (Reuters): Hungary's far-right Our Homeland party would lay claim to a western region of Ukraine that is home to about 150,000 ethnic Hungarians if Ukraine loses its statehood due to Russia's invasion, the party's leader said. Our Homeland leader Laszlo Toroczka made the remarks at a conference where the party, which has six lawmakers in the 199-strong Hungarian parliament, hosted far-right leaders from Germany's AfD and the Dutch Forum for Democracy, among others.

"Regarding the war in Ukraine, our message is very simple: immediate ceasefire, peace and a resolution through talks," Toroczka said in a video posted on his party's website, calling for autonomy for ethnic Hungarians in western Ukraine. "If this war ends up with Ukraine losing its statehood, because this is also on the cards, then as the only Hungarian party taking this position, let me signal that we lay claim to Transcarpathia," he said, drawing applause from the crowd. The Hungarian Foreign Ministry and the Ukrainian Embassy in Budapest did not immediately respond to emailed questions for comment about Toroczka's remarks. In a December interview on public radio, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán expressed support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, according to a summary of his remarks published by government spokesman Zoltan Kovacs.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto is due to meet his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba and Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal in western Ukraine on Monday to prepare the ground for a possible meeting between leaders of the two countries. Budapest has clashed with Kyiv over what it says are curbs on the rights of roughly 150,000 ethnic Hungarians to use their native tongue. Last month all European Union states except Hungary, which is also a member of NATO, agreed to start EU accession talks with Ukraine. The bloc's leaders bypassed Orbán's opposition by getting him to leave the room when the decision was made. But leaders could not overcome his resistance to revamping the EU budget to channel 50 billion euros to Kyiv and are expected to revisit the issue at an emergency summit next Thursday.

China orders a Japanese fishing boat to leave waters

BEIJING (AP): China's coast guard said its officers ordered a Japanese fishing vessel and several patrol ships to leave waters surrounding tiny Japanese-controlled islands in the East China Sea. It marked the latest incident pointing to lingering tensions between the sides. China says the islands belong to it and refuses to recognize Japan's claim to the uninhabited chain known as the Senkakus in Japanese and Diaoyu in Chinese. Taiwan also claims the islands, which it calls Diaoyutai, but has signed access agreements for its fishermen with Japan and does not actively take part in the dispute.

Coast guard spokesperson Gan Yu said in a statement that the vessels "illegally entered" the waters, prompting its response. "We urge Japan to stop all illegal activities in the waters immediately and to ensure similar incidents would not happen again," the statement said. But the statement did not specify whether the vessels complied with the order. China's insistence on sovereignty over the islands is part of its expansive territorial claims in the Pacific, including to underwater resources in the East China Sea, the self-governing island republic of Taiwan with its population of 23 million, and virtually the entire South China Sea, through which an estimated \$5 trillion in international trade passes each year.

Ukraine says it uncovers mass fraud in arms procurement

KYIV (Reuters): Ukraine's SBU security service said it had uncovered a corruption scheme in the purchase of arms by the country's military totalling the equivalent of about \$40 million. The announcement of mass procurement fraud, confirmed by Ukraine's Defence Ministry, will have a huge resonance in a country beleaguered by Russia's nearly two-year-old invasion.

The fight to root out endemic corruption remains a major issue as Ukraine presses its bid to secure membership in the European Union. The SBU said an investigation had "exposed officials of the Ministry of Defence and managers of arms supplier Lviv Arsenal, who stole nearly 1.5 billion hryvnias in the purchase of shells." "According to the investigation, former and current high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Defence and heads of affiliated companies are involved in the embezzlement," it said, involving the purchase of 100,000 mortar shells for the military.

The SBU said a contract for the shells was clinched with Lviv Arsenal in August 2022 - six months into the war - and payment was made in advance, with some funds transferred abroad. But no arms were

ever provided, the statement said, with some funds then moved to other foreign accounts. The statement said five individuals had been served "notices of suspicion" - the first stage in Ukrainian legal proceedings - both in the ministry and the arms supplier.

One suspect, it said, was detained while trying to cross the Ukrainian border. Corruption within the military has been a particularly sensitive issue in Ukraine as it tries to maintain wartime public morale and present its case to join the 27-nation EU. Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov was dismissed last September over various corruption cases despite enjoying a solid reputation in representing Ukraine in its discussions with Western allies. Although he was not alleged to have engaged personally in corruption, several cases hit the military under his stewardship, one for supplying troops with food, another over procuring suitable clothing for servicemen. Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made public his income over a two-year period as part of a drive to promote transparency and root out endemic corruption. In a post on the presidential website, Zelenskyy noted that his income had

declined in 2021 and further in 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine at the end of February. It was the first time he publicly declared his income. In 2021, the year before the invasion, Zelenskyy and his family reported income of 10.8 million hryvnias (\$286,168), down 12 million hryvnias from the previous year. The 2021 figure included income from the sale of \$142,000 of government bonds.

In 2022, the Zelenskyy family's income fell further to 3.7 million hryvnias as he earned less rental income from real estate he owned because of the outbreak of the war. Zelenskyy has called for public officials to disclose their incomes as part of efforts to increase transparency and eliminate corruption as Ukraine tries to meet the stringent requirements for its bid to join the European Union.

Western allies providing weaponry and financial assistance as well as international bodies like the International Monetary Fund have also sought assurances on efforts to eliminate corruption. Ukraine's National Agency on Corruption Prevention, one of several bodies devoted to exposing and eliminating graft, last month reopened to public scrutiny a register on declared income.

North Korea tests cruise missiles

SEOUL (Reuters): North Korea tested its new submarine-launched cruise missiles (SLCM), firing an upgraded missile for the second time in a week and accelerating its navy's nuclear armament, state media reported on Monday. Leader Kim Jong Un supervised the test of the missile, called "Pulhwasal-3-31," which is identical to the strategic cruise missiles that the North test-launched last week as part of upgrading its weapons system.

State news agency KCNA and official Rodong Sinmun newspaper said the missiles flew above the sea off the country's east coast for 7,421 seconds and 7,445 seconds and hit an unspecified island target, indicating the flight time exceeded two hours. Kim called the test a success, KCNA said, "which is of strategic significance in carrying out the plan...for modernizing the army which aims at building a powerful naval force." South Korea's military said that the North fired multiple cruise missiles off its coast but did not provide

details. On Monday, it said the claimed flight time was an exaggeration saying it tracked the missiles real time and also played down the possibility it was propelled by solid fuel. Last week, the North said it had tested a new strategic cruise missile, implying it was designed to carry a nuclear warhead, but at the time did not mention it was being developed for submarine launch. State media photographs published on Monday showed a missile launching into a cloudy sky from the water trailed by a plume of smoke which obscures the type of platform it was being fired from.

North Korea's cruise missiles are typically less controversial and are not explicitly banned under UN Security Council resolutions. But analysts have said intermediate-range cruise missiles were no less a threat than ballistic missiles and are a serious capability for North Korea. In recent months, the North has tested an array of weapons that include ballistic missile systems

that are under development and an underwater drone. Kim separately inspected the construction of a nuclear submarine and discussed issues related to the manufacturing of other types of new warships. KCNA said but gave no details. North Korea last year launched what it called its first operational nuclear attack submarine, which analysts said appeared to be a modified from an existing submarine and likely designed to carry ballistic and cruise missiles. There was scepticism over the real-world utility of such a vessel, especially compared to the more advanced land-based missile systems, because its diesel propulsion generates noise and is limited in range, according to weapons experts. South Korea's military said on Monday it believed the submarine "has no military use" and the vessel appeared to be under repair or maintenance. Kim said at the time the country would accelerate the programme to build nuclear-powered submarines.

Yemen's Huthi rebels open seized cargo ship to sightseers

SANAA (AFP): More than two months after Yemen's Huthi rebels captured the Galaxy Leader cargo ship and detained its crew, the Iran-backed rebels have turned the vessel into a domestic "tourist attraction". For about a dollar per trip, male-only groups of visitors can board wooden boats five times a week to the hijacked car carrier, which the Huthis hail as a trophy in their fight in solidarity with the Palestinians.

Since shortly after the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza broke out on October 7, the Huthis have launched a spate of missile and drone attacks on passing commercial ships which they say are linked to Israel. A US-led naval coalition has responded by patrolling the Red Sea, and US and British forces have struck military sites of the Huthis, now designated a "global terrorist" group by Washington, to keep open the vital shipping lane. This has done little to dampen the mood on the sightseeing trips to the seized vessel, which is now decorated with Yemeni and Palestinian flags and banners displaying anti-American and anti-Israel slogans. On a recent visit, Zubair al-Haidari, from the Huthi-controlled capital Sanaa, said he had travelled for five hours to see the "Israeli ship" anchored off

Hodeida on the Red Sea coast. It is our "pride and honour... that our armed forces have accomplished this wonderful work in supporting our oppressed brothers in Palestine and in Gaza," he told AFP. He was among some 10 visitors taking pictures with their mobile phones as they chewed khat, a plant that generates a mild high and is widely consumed in the Arabian peninsula's poorest country. On board the ship, some visitors performed a traditional dance featuring the daggers that many Yemenis carry tucked into their belts, accompanied by chants glorifying the Huthis. On the deck of the Galaxy Leader, none of the visitors interviewed by AFP said they had seen the 25 crew members who are Bulgarian, Filipino, Ukrainian and Mexican and whose fate remains unknown. The Galaxy Leader is owned by a British company, which is in turn owned by an Israeli businessman. It had been chartered by a Japanese company when it was captured on November 19 by the Huthis, who said they were acting in "solidarity" with people in the besieged Gaza Strip. Israel's military campaign was sparked by Hamas's October 7 attack, which resulted in about 1,140 deaths in Israel, mostly civilians, according

to an AFP tally of official Israeli figures. Militants also seized around 250 hostages.

Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas and Gaza's health ministry says the military offensive has killed at least 26,257 people, about 70 percent of them women and children. Amid the Gaza war, the Huthis have launched numerous attacks against shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, threatening an essential global trade route. Hizam al-Assad, of the Huthi political bureau, referred to the Galaxy Leader as a "tourist attraction" and said the visitors were "proof that the Yemeni people... are impatient to meet the enemy and confront him". Another visitor, Hamada al-Baydani, said he had travelled 400 kilometres (250 miles) from Al-Bayda, to see the seized ship, which he labelled "a source of pride for Yemenis". Several days after detaining the vessel, the Huthis published a video showing a military general welcoming a group they said was the crew, but the militants have not provided any information on their fate since. After an hour on board under the scorching sun, the visitors made their way back home, chanting "God is the greatest, death to America, death to Israel".

Japan's SLIM probe regains power more than a week

TOKYO (Reuters): Japan's SLIM spacecraft has regained power, its space agency said on Monday, more than a week after it achieved an unconventionally precise lunar landing but ran out of electricity because its solar panels were at the wrong angle. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) re-established communication with its Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM), a JAXA spokesperson said, nearly nine days after the probe's touchdown made Japan the fifth country to put a spacecraft on the moon.

The probe was likely able to generate power thanks to a change in the sunlight's direction, JAXA said. SLIM resumed its operations to analyse the composition of olivine rocks on the lunar surface with its multi-band spectral camera, in search of clues about the origin of the moon, the agency added. SLIM touched down on the moon within 55 m (180 ft) of its target in a crater near the lunar equator on Jan. 20. JAXA said it proved an advancement in what it called vision-based "pinpoint" landing - a technology that could be a powerful tool for future exploration of hilly moon poles seen as a possible source of fuel, water and oxygen. SLIM lost the thrust of one of its two main engines shortly before the touchdown for unknown reasons and ended up drifting a few dozen metres away from the target. The lander safely stopped on a gentle slope but appeared toppled with an engine facing upward in a picture taken by a base-ball-sized wheeled rover it deployed. The probe's solar panels faced westward due to the displacement and could not immediately generate power. JAXA manually unplugged SLIM's dying battery 2 hours and 37 minutes after the touchdown as it completed the transmission of the lander's data to the earth. JAXA does not have a clear date when SLIM will end its operation on the moon, but the agency has previously said the lander was not designed to survive a lunar night.

Marcos, Duterte supporters rally as family rift deepens

MANILA (Reuters): Former Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte's son urged President Ferdinand Marcos Jr to resign, calling him lazy and uncompassionate in a deepening rift between the two politically powerful families. Marcos teamed up with Duterte's daughter Sara to make her vice-president in their 2022 election win. But cracks in the families' alliance have emerged as the incumbent has veered away from his predecessor's anti-drugs and foreign policies.

Sebastian Duterte, who is mayor of Philippines' third most populous city Davao, said there had been a resurgence in crime after his father's hardline campaign had been relaxed. At a leadership forum, he also accused Marcos of endangering innocent Filipinos by allowing the Americans in, a reference to expanded US access to military bases, including several close to Taiwan. The older Duterte had forged closer ties with China. Sebastian Duterte also opposed Marcos' decision to restart peace negotiations with communist

rebels, saying he did not know anything about the suffering of people living in areas that used to be rebel strongholds. "You are lazy and you lack compassion. That's why we are unhappy," he said. There was no immediate comment from Marcos' office. He spoke just before Marcos took the stage at a government-led rally in the capital to drum up support for his "Bagong Pilipinas (New Philippines)" campaign, where he has promised to improve state services and budget transparency. Marcos' alliance with the Dutertes was crucial to his presidential victory, so a souring of their relations could have implications in his bid to solidify his support base ahead of the mid-term Senate and congressional election next year.

Sara Duterte, who is also education secretary, attended the president's rally before flying to Davao to join her father and siblings at a prayer rally against moves to amend the Philippine constitution, which Marcos backs. Some opponents of constitutional

change, including the Dutertes, say it is driven by an agenda to change the political system and remove term limits, including that of the president, who can currently serve just one six-year term. "He is putting politics first, their self-preservation ... rather than focusing on the job," Sebastian Duterte said. "Mr. President, if you have no love and aspirations for the nation, resign." Like her brother, Sara Duterte has openly defied some of Marcos' policies, including the peace talks with communist rebels which she said was an "agreement with the devil." Asked for comment on her brother's remarks, Sara Duterte said on Monday: "I can only surmise he is coming from a place of brotherly love, coupled by the common sentiment that I do not deserve the despicable treatment that I am receiving from some sectors within the circle of the president." Sara Duterte did not elaborate, but said she "will stay true" to her work at the education ministry.

France steps up security as farmers' protest looms

PARIS (Reuters): France stepped up security measures as farmers prepared to converge on Paris as part of nationwide protests from agricultural workers demanding better pay and living conditions. Farmers in France, the European Union's biggest agricultural producer, have complained of unfair competition from rivals in more lightly regulated countries. Over the last week, they have set up roadblocks on motorways to highlight their cause. They have also damaged property, including local government offices.

Some farmers' unions called for protesters to set up transport roadblocks around the capital on Monday, and to target the Rungis food market near Paris. "Our aim is to encircle Paris," farmer Daniel Fauchoux told BFM TV, as he prepared to travel to the

capital in a convoy of farmers' vehicles and tractors. The Paris police body said that, in response to this, it was increasing security around Rungis and the Paris Roissy airport. It also published videos on its social media account of armoured police vehicles taking up position by Rungis. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said those measures were to ensure no tractor could get into Paris, but he nevertheless warned of disruption on Monday in the Ile-de-France region, which covers Paris and the nearby suburbs. He added that around 15,000 police would be used as part of the security operation. "Transport will be very difficult tomorrow in Ile-de-France," said Darmanin. "We are losing a bit of our economic growth as a result of these

roadblocks," he added. The French protests follow similar action in other European countries, including Germany and Poland, ahead of European elections in June in which the far right - for whom farmers represent a growing constituency - are predicted to make gains. French far-right leader Marine Le Pen - President Emmanuel Macron's closest opponent in the 2017 and 2022 elections - visited some of those demonstrating in northern France. "We have got to get our farming out of these free trade agreements," she said. The government dropped plans to gradually reduce state subsidies on agricultural diesel, and announced other steps to reduce the financial and administrative pressures farmers face. Nevertheless, many farmers want more.

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Pakistan's future lies in democracy

FORMER President and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Supremo, Asif Ali Zardari has recently said that all the problems facing the country can be solved through democracy and that what can be done with democracy, cannot be achieved in the war. According to him, only genuine, politically groomed and thriving civic groups can meet the public expectations in these devastated political and economic conditions in the country. A seasoned politician and former president acclaimed that the PPP will give the Balochis and Balochistan their due rights, both share and dignity, while only genuine political parties can solve the problems facing the country. According to him, although there is no perfect democracy in the country even now, it gradually strengthening.

Pakistan is one of the few countries in the world that came into existence as the result of the years-long political and peaceful democratic struggle of its founders in the mid-20th century when democracy was not as flourishing as today. Democracy offers countless benefits and plays a vital role in the promotion and strengthening of individual freedoms, political participation, and peaceful transitions of power. The democratic process enhances social stability, and economic development through civic engagement, transforms the system responsive to diverse public needs, fosters accountability, encourages economic development, and facilitates peaceful conflict resolution through political processes, and dialogue. At the same time, the continuous democratic process ensures accountability of the leaders, the governments, and political parties as well.

Historically, Pakistan has gone through multiple forms of government since its independence in 1947. Ranging from military dictatorships, and civilian authoritarian regimes to military-controlled democracies and military-democracy partnerships, all experiments have been tested and failed throughout seven and a half decades. Unfortunately, multiple military rules, politically motivated policies, and economic decisions caused a sense of deprivation among certain ethnic communities and geographical regions giving birth to separatist movements and insurgencies. A peculiar security state environment coupled with the extensive involvement of security agencies in politics badly tarnished social cohesion and national unity in the past. In fact, Sindhi ethnic movements, Baloch insurgency, and Pakhtun nationalism have grown rapidly due to misconduct and wrong priorities of dictators and biased politicians.

Over the past two years, the politics of hatred, name-calling, and travesty introduced extremist behaviour and largely polarized Pakistani society. Pakistan is passing through a crucial transition period that merits utmost caution and sagacity from the state institutions and the political parties to safely pass through this point in time. There had been rumours regarding unspecified extensions in the tenure of the current caretaker setups or the formation of a unity government to deal with the current economic crisis and political chaos. However, those baseless forecasts died their death and the newly publically elected government would assume charge of the government very soon. Realistically, only a democratic system includes representation of diverse voices, protection of individual rights, peaceful transitions of power, and responsiveness to public needs/demands. Henceforth, all state institutions and other stakeholders must play their due role in strengthening democracy and stabilization of the political process in the country, because only civic activities groom societies, strengthen institutions, and consolidate social and economic gains in any nation in this universe.

Viceroy's political work

GOVERNOR Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori has recently announced a lucrative scheme for senior citizens and elderly persons in the province. According to the details, the governor vowed that the Sindh government would bear expenses of Hajj and Umrah for persons above 75 years, who have not performed the holy pilgrimage in their life. The governor told the senior citizens to register themselves with the Governor House and they would be sent to holy mosques after balloting. The governor also advised the disadvantaged students to approach 1366 and the government would also bear their education expenses from the national exchequer. Governor Sindh pledged that he would continue to visit hospitals and shopping centers to listen to the grievances of the common man.

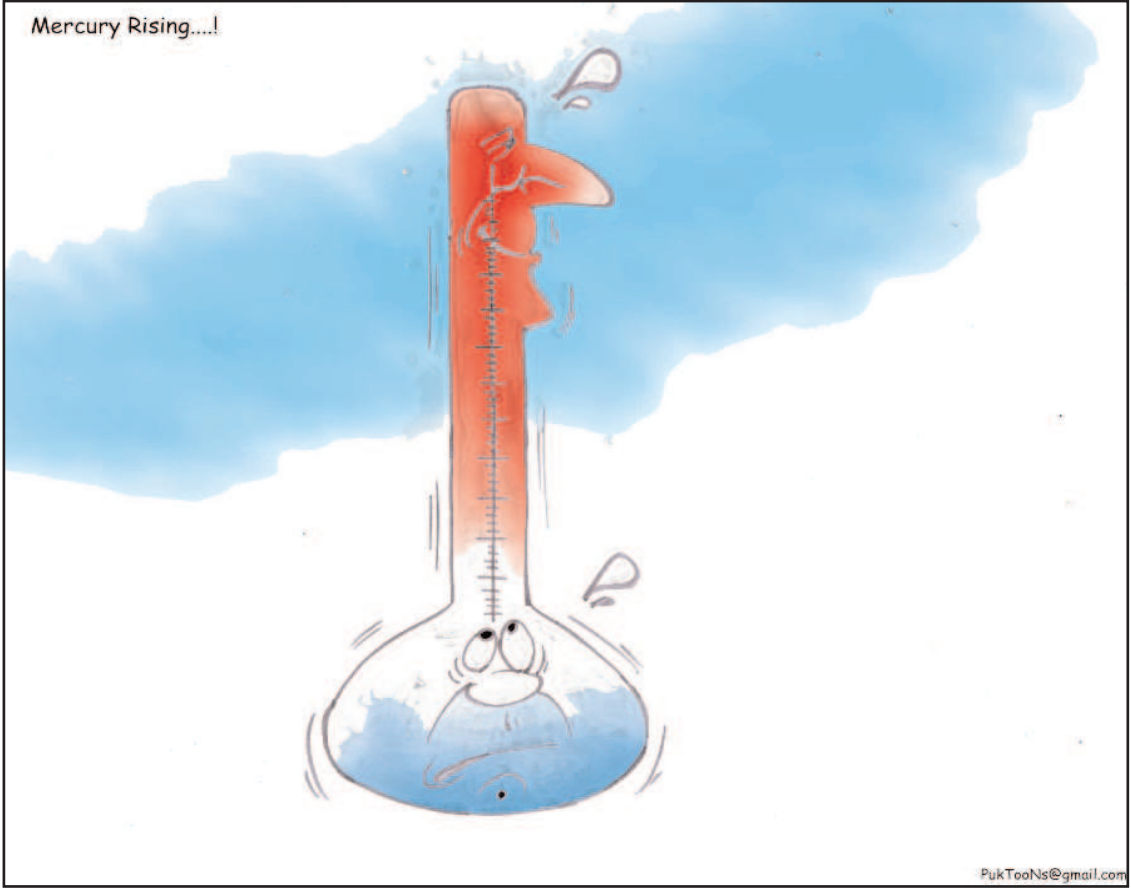
After a long pause, the honourable governor of Sindh joined the already ongoing race for the political work among the interim rulers in the center as well as provinces ahead of crucial general elections in the Country. Interestingly, Governor Sindh took the lead from all of his competitors by opening a separate window for elders' hajj scheme, and need based scholarship and assistance to the poor despite the Sindh government already launched such facilities to deserving people in the province. No other leader and civic group could ever bring the idea of government sponsored hajj and umrah for the elderly persons over 75 years of age. Previously, the PPP government provided free travel to the masses on state run mass transit systems in the province, the governor may offer a free of cost electricity or gas for the poor, while a free ferry trip to Bundal Island or manora could also provide entertainment to the masses.

Although hajj and umrah are exempted to the Muslim men and women due to their age factor or financial conditions, but Pakistani leaders proved to be so pro-public that they are determined to provide those discretionary religious rituals to the poor at all cost. As the election season has entered its crucial phase, the public must expect such politically motivated announcements from the leaders the days ahead. Finally, the vote turnout and electoral results would illustrate the effectiveness of these strategies on D-Day.

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Mercury Rising....!



ICJ ruling was a legal victory at the cost of Palestinian lives

Andrew Mitrovica

Ineed to preface this column with the following proviso: Given the scale of the cruel circumstances, my reading of the much-anticipated preliminary ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in response to South Africa's brief accusing Israel of genocide is of little, if any, importance.

Since the court issued its findings, I have chosen instead to heed the reactions of the Palestinian diaspora and their surviving brothers and sisters in what remains of Gaza, the occupied West Bank, and beyond. Their voices count. Not mine. Of course, more than 26,000 Palestinians - and counting - no longer have a voice. They are dead. Annihilated by a fanatical Israeli cabinet that has killed hundreds more Palestinians while a gallery of white, Western columnists like me parse the significance and merits of the court's just announced "provisional" measures. We must always remember that blatant and instructive fact.

Two camps have emerged. The first has hailed the court's decision as a watershed moment. Israel has been held finally to account after decades of evading accountability for the litany of outrages it has committed against generation after generation of Palestinians. The other lasting and overarching import of the court's decrees is that Israel's Western-backed and tolerated licence to displace, maim and kill Palestinians without consequences is over. Near unanimously, the court was convinced that South Africa made a plausible case demonstrating that Israel has displayed the intent to execute genocide. As a result, the court is required, by international law, to proceed with a full hearing and, ultimately, to render a verdict on the seminal question: Is Israel guilty of the crime of genocide in Gaza? Near unanimously, the court, in effect, rejected the establishment media notion that the calamity unfolding in Gaza was a "war" between adversaries; but, rather, is prima facie evidence of a deliberate campaign by Israel to erase, wholesale, a people and a nation. As such, Israel was required by international law to enact "immediate" steps to stop the horrors it has unleashed with such

unremitting ferocity over the past four months. Towards that end, the court instructed Israel, near unanimously, to deliver a report to South Africa in a month for its review. Israel is obliged to detail how, when and where it has taken the compulsory measures not only to prevent genocide, but also the incitement to genocide and to allow humanitarian aid to reach

Palestinian people will henceforth be judged on their own merits rather than against the long shadow of European history." In this broader context, Rabbani argues that the understandable chagrin over the justices not calling explicitly for a "ceasefire" is moot since Israel signalled - publicly and repeatedly - that it would continue with its "killing rage" whatever the

He is not alone. "The court gave Israel another month to continue killing, displacing, and starving us," Gaza-based journalist Aseel Mousa told the Middle East Eye. "Israel [has] an opportunity to continue to exterminate us while supplying us with scraps of the food, medicine, and essential life necessities we need."

the starving and destitute souls who call the devastated enclave home.

The implicit meaning of the court's order was that Israel had to adopt a ceasefire. As South Africa's foreign minister, Naledi Pandor, explained to reporters outside The Hague: "I believe that in exercising the order, there would have to be a ceasefire. Without it, the order doesn't actually work." The irony is as inescapable as it is delicious. An apartheid regime has been directed by a court to answer to a country that, in due and patient course, freed itself from another apartheid regime. The court's judgement is particularly satisfying because it represents a stiff and damning rebuttal to the now discredited claim made by the usual diplomats in the usual capitals that South Africa's persuasive petition was "meritless" and "counterproductive". To its credit, the court has dealt an emphatic, fatal blow to that hollow bit of rhetorical chicanery. In a tangible and historic precedent, Israel and its complicit, evangelical sponsors, have been put on notice by the ICJ. About time. "History - with a capital H - was made today," the Palestinian writer and editor, Mouin Rabbani wrote on X. "Israel is as of today associated with the crime of genocide primarily as perpetrator, not victim. Israel's policies towards the

demanding 'Russia shall immediately suspend the military operation it commenced [in Ukraine.]'" I oscillate between these two, disparate perspectives. The comeuppance that Israel may or may not receive at The Hague severals months or years hence will be deserving and long overdue.

But the imperative of now; the imperative to halt the suffering and killing of Palestinians is the more urgent necessity. The optimist in me hopes that the ICJ's ruling hastens, somehow, the end - for good - of the murderous madness and the quick return of Israelis held by Hamas to their despondent families. The pessimist in me suspects that nothing will change soon on the ground in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. The slaughter of innocents will go on. Palestinian children, the old, and infirm will succumb to hunger and disease as their families huddle in a sea of flimsy, rain-soaked tents while Israel turns the whole of Gaza into dust and memory. And, despite the ICJ's injunctions, much of the world will enable Israel's wanton siege and carnage of Gaza today and tomorrow as it did yesterday.

Yet, the flippant few who dismiss the ICJ's stingy rebuff of Israel as symbolic or irrelevant should take careful note of how Tel Aviv and Washington have greeted the court's ruling. For its formulaic part, Israel has trotted out the tired canard that the ICJ is a hive of "anti-Semitic bias". What an unserious reply to a serious indictment. Meanwhile, in a calculated and cynical attempt to divert attention from the remarkable proceedings at The Hague, the White House announced a suspension of its relatively paltry aid to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in light of Israeli allegations that some of the organisation's staff were implicated in the October 7 attacks. Convenient timing, wouldn't you say? South Africa's daring gambit at the ICJ may already be paying welcomed dividends with word that a tentative agreement is close to release the Israeli captives in exchange for a temporary ceasefire. So, take a deep, well-earned bow, South Africa.

community would still be raging. It has relatively subsided for two reasons: the transatlantic community has had to divide its efforts between the Gaza and Ukraine wars and, secondly, there are more and more discordant views in the West about the legitimacy of Israel's attacks. If the critical point is reached, the US will probably devote more of its efforts to the Israeli side. This will give Russia the chance to regain some of its losses in Ukraine. Kyiv is encountering some difficulties in the continuation of the war. Several Western countries have invented excuses for not giving more money or ammunition to Ukraine. Similar difficulties have arisen in the US Congress. The Republicans are blocking \$50 billion in appropriations earmarked for Ukraine and this funding has gotten stuck with another obstacle

Yasar Yakis

that has nothing to do with Ukraine. They want to keep the Ukraine funding as a hostage while seeking to restrict the arrival of asylum seekers from Latin America. This means that the US support for Ukraine is sidelined for reasons that are not directly related to Ukraine. The Gaza war and the instabilities that have erupted elsewhere in the Middle East will also distract the attention of the international community. Gaza, for one, may absorb the entire attention of the US. It will probably give priority to Israel, both in terms of diplomatic efforts and military assistance.

When it comes to Israel, the funding will flow uninterrupted. After the Ukraine and Gaza wars, there is a tendency to spread the war to the Red Sea and other places in the Middle East. A world war-type hostility is less likely. Future wars will

Russia's democracy facing a participation crisis

Andrey Pertsev

THE Kremlin's political managers have long known what they want from the 2024 presidential election: a record turnout, and for President Vladimir Putin to get his largest ever share of the vote. Their plans had to be adjusted on the fly, however, when the leaders of two political parties said they would not run. Instead, Putin will run against stand-ins and spoiler candidates, undermining the Kremlin's narrative about the election's significance.

The extreme nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) will be represented by its leader Leonid Slutsky, who is the president's biggest rival in terms of formal status. The head of the Communist Party, Gennady Zyuganov, has declined to run, and will be replaced by Nikolai Kharitonov. Nor is the leader of the centrist New People, Alexei Nechaev, taking part: he will be represented by State Duma deputy speaker Vladislav Davankov. It's no secret that the Kremlin wanted Zyuganov and Nechaev on the ballot. Firstly, they are senior politicians known to the public. Secondly, their participation would have made it easier for the Kremlin's political managers to deliver the big Putin win they were seeking. In the 2018 presidential elections, Putin got 76.7 percent with a 67.5 percent turnout. Both these records must now be beaten.

In other words, the Kremlin can allow Putin's opponents up to 20 percent of the vote. If he were standing, Zyuganov would have been able to aspire to about 10 percent (approximately the current level of support for the Communist Party, which has recently alienated protest voters by supporting the Kremlin's war against Ukraine). The LDPR candidate could expect a few percentage points less than their level of support nationally (around 8 percent). The candidate from New People could, therefore, hope for about 3 percent. This sort of scenario would have been welcomed by Slutsky, who wants to be seen as a national politician and quieten his restive party (he took over in 2022 following the death of its prominent long-term leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky). Yet his run will only be deemed a success if he gets at least 5-6 percent of the vote like his predecessor usually did, and, ideally, comes in second after Putin. Slutsky clearly thinks this is possible. Such a scenario was less acceptable to the other candidates. If he'd decided to run, Zyuganov would likely have gotten his worst ever result. There is little chance the veteran Communist will take part in the 2030 presidential elections (he'll be 85 at that point), and he clearly didn't want to end his political career on such a disappointing note. It's likely that Zyuganov personally sought Putin's approval not to run, since his decision went against the wishes of Kremlin managers.

Nechaev followed in Zyuganov's footsteps. As a businessman, he could see that this election was a game he was doomed to lose. Nechaev's replacement, Davankov, is well known to Putin's political managers and the Kremlin's domestic political overseer, Sergei Kiriyenko. But he has one serious drawback from the Kremlin's point of view: he's just thirty-nine years old. Allowing such a young person on the ballot risks drawing attention to

Putin's advanced age (he turned seventy-one last year). Vedomosti newspaper reported in December that Kremlin managers were trying to convince Nechaev to stand. Ultimately, however, they were unsuccessful. Thanks to his ties to the influential Rotenberg brothers, Nechaev was able to obtain permission for Davankov to run in his place.

The absence of Zyuganov and Nechaev complicates the electoral math for the Kremlin. Some Communist Party supporters will be unhappy with Kharitonov's candidacy, and will not vote for him. That will make it harder to hit the turnout goal: Communist Party voters can usually be relied on to get themselves to the polling stations. Davankov's participation may also make it more difficult for Putin to get his record result. The issue is not Davankov's rhetoric, but the fact that he's a newbie-and relatively young. It's worth recalling businessman Pavel Grudinin, the Communist Party's candidate in 2018, who saw his ratings surge purely because voters saw him as a fresh face. The authorities had to resort to mudslinging to damage his popularity. The loss of higher-quality candidates means the Kremlin will have to opt for quantity. It's likely a few more names will appear on the ballot paper between now and the vote on March 15-17, such as Communist Party spoilers, or small-fry politician Andrei Bogdanov, who stood for the presidency in 2008, and got 1 percent of the vote. All of this upsets the Kremlin's long-laid plans: the elections were supposed to be a solemn spectacle-and solemn spectacles don't have minor candidates or spoilers. It is also clear that no anti-war candidates (for example, the liberal Boris Nadezhdin) will be allowed to stand. Russians are tired of the war in Ukraine, which means any candidate calling for an end to the fighting is guaranteed some support. And that could ruin the Kremlin's plans.

The absence of Zyuganov and Nechaev is yet more evidence of the deep crisis faced by the Kremlin's system of "managed democracy," which has been in place since the early 2000s. Among the reasons for the crisis is Putin's hunger for electoral records, and his love of plebiscite-style elections that reassure him he retains the love of the people. Another is Kiriyenko's numbers-based approach, and his use of tools like multi-day voting, online voting, and maximizing the turnout of state employees. Such tactics mean it's increasingly farcical to talk about "democracy"-even with the "managed" moniker. Taking part in such a rigged game is no longer an appealing prospect even for Russian in-system politicians. The Kremlin is trying to frame the upcoming vote as a major national event. It's being accompanied by huge exhibitions, competitions, and conferences. But the underwhelming caliber of Putin's opponents devalues all those efforts, and could even cast a pall over his inevitable victory. The whole process risks looking like a farce.

After the elections, the problems of "managed democracy" mean the Kremlin will be obliged to rethink Russia's political system. The obvious solution is to dismiss all thoughts of farce from people's minds by ramping up the levels of intimidation and fear, and further cracking down on dissent.

The Moscow Times

Ukraine crisis is going nowhere fast

WHEN the new relationship between Russia and the West was taking shape in the 1990s, Vladimir Putin categorically said that Eastern European countries should not join NATO. Then, in 1999, Russia signed the Charter for European Security, which specifically referred to the right of each state to choose and change its security arrangements and join alliances - but this commitment remains a dead letter.

The point we have now reached in the Ukraine crisis requires an updated assessment. Russia is trying to hold its position and not make any concessions to the West because it can sustain the war for a prolonged period. When, in 1994, Ukraine relinquished its nuclear arsenal to the Russian Federation, the security guarantees given by Moscow, Washington and

London became obsolete. Most likely, the question of Ukraine's nuclear arsenal will fall into oblivion and never be mentioned again.

With its sporadic successes, Ukraine has recaptured 54 percent of the territory that Russia occupied following its February 2022 invasion. However, Russia still occupies 18 percent of Ukrainian territory. Ukraine's offensive last year achieved few territorial gains. Hopefully, there will be no more annexations on either side. The annexation of Crimea by Russia is a different issue and has to be dealt with separately. The US foreign policy on Ukraine has remained unchanged since the outset of the war. Washington seems to be hesitant about what to do with Ukraine. It is giving the impression that it has adopted a "wait and see" policy.

Were it not for the Gaza war, the battle between Russia and the transatlantic

community would still be raging. It has relatively subsided for two reasons: the transatlantic community has had to divide its efforts between the Gaza and Ukraine wars and, secondly, there are more and more discordant views in the West about the legitimacy of Israel's attacks. If the critical point is reached, the US will probably devote more of its efforts to the Israeli side. This will give Russia the chance to regain some of its losses in Ukraine. Kyiv is encountering some difficulties in the continuation of the war. Several Western countries have invented excuses for not giving more money or ammunition to Ukraine. Similar difficulties have arisen in the US Congress. The Republicans are blocking \$50 billion in appropriations earmarked for Ukraine and this funding has gotten stuck with another obstacle

that has nothing to do with Ukraine. They want to keep the Ukraine funding as a hostage while seeking to restrict the arrival of asylum seekers from Latin America. This means that the US support for Ukraine is sidelined for reasons that are not directly related to Ukraine. The Gaza war and the instabilities that have erupted elsewhere in the Middle East will also distract the attention of the international community. Gaza, for one, may absorb the entire attention of the US. It will probably give priority to Israel, both in terms of diplomatic efforts and military assistance.

When it comes to Israel, the funding will flow uninterrupted. After the Ukraine and Gaza wars, there is a tendency to spread the war to the Red Sea and other places in the Middle East. A world war-type hostility is less likely. Future wars will

probably be fought as wars of attrition or proxy wars.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky last month announced that 450,000 to 500,000 additional soldiers would be needed to sustain his country's war effort. This is not an easy target to attain because there is war fatigue on all sides. In addition to regular war losses, there are also unaccounted losses of defense material. An official US report admits there is no unauthorized or illicit transfer of defense articles. However, a report by the US European Command conceded that it was beyond the scope of its inquiry to determine whether any arms had been misappropriated.

Another complicating factor has been added to Russian-Ukrainian relations. Last week, a Russian military plane carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war, together with three Russian officers and six crew mem-

bers, was shot down near the border between the two countries. The Ukrainian passengers were about to be exchanged. Meanwhile, Turkey's acquiescence to Sweden joining NATO has become a done deal, as the Turkish parliament last week approved the move. The other side of this deal was then fulfilled on Friday, when the US State Department notified Congress of the \$23 billion agreement to sell F-16 fighter aircraft to Turkey.

The Ukraine crisis is not likely to be solved if the West does not provide massive military aid and if this aid is not sustained. On the other hand, the West will probably not let Kyiv be overrun by Russia. Therefore, the war has the potential to drag on for a long period. And, as Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov put it last week, Ukraine will continue to get money from Western taxpayers.

Genocide ruling a vindication for international justice

LAST week's ruling by the International Court of Justice that Israel has a case to answer on accusations of genocide against the Palestinian people was cause for celebration as a reaffirmed vindication of the primacy of international law and the UN-centered global system, after decades of neglect and deliberate sabotage had allowed crimes against humanity to become the new worldwide normal.

No less a figure than US President Joe Biden hailed the court last November as "one of humanity's most critical institutions to advance peace around the world." Though Biden may now be regretting this praise, the court is indeed one of the few precarious bulwarks we have against savage laws of the jungle, and genocidal campaigns against Uighurs in China, Rohingya in Myanmar, Syrians, Ukrainians, India's minorities, and Darfur communities.

The calm and precise manner in which presiding judge Joan Donoghue - the American lawyer and legal scholar - delivered her judgment was particularly impressive. "An entire generation of children in Gaza is traumatized. Their future is in jeopardy," she warned.

Although the ruling stopped short of explicitly demanding a ceasefire, the court specifically ordered Israel to take "all measures within its power" to prevent the genocide of Palestinians and to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza. A defiant Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would not be constrained by the ruling, and retorted: "We will act as needed for our security." Nevertheless, a chastized Israel must submit a report in one month

Baria Alamuddin

confirming how it is implementing the court's orders. The judgment also rightly called out Hamas for its bloody Oct. 7 attack and ordered it to liberate the 130 or so Israeli hostages it still holds.

With judges nominated by countries such as the US, France, Germany, Australia and Japan, it cannot be claimed that the court is stacked against Israel - although British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak fumed that the decision was "totally unjustified." Member states such Russia, India and China - with problematic human rights records - can hardly be accused of nominating activists. Even the Israeli judge Aharon Barak voted for two of the court's six orders.

The rulings have blown a large and irreparable hole in the aura of impunity that Israel has forever enjoyed, evidenced by Netanyahu's furious reaction that they were a "disgrace that will not be erased for generations." Never have truer words been spoken regarding the Gaza carnage. Israel's international donors and champions will be understandably reluctant to find themselves accused of abetting genocide, particularly as the court will take several years to reach a final judgment. The EU demanded "full and immediate" implementation of the ruling. Countries must consider their legal exposure if selling arms to Israel, and there are implications for Israel losing voting and membership rights in international bodies if it refuses to comply. The ruling also provides rocket fuel for worldwide initiatives tobeycott Israel.

With 30,000 staff members, UNRWA is the UN's largest agency and one of its longest-running operations. Around 152 UN staff

have already been killed in Gaza. Whatever the substance of the latest allegations against a small number of staff members, for numerous states to suspend donations at this crucial moment is cruel and ill considered, every bit as much an act of collective punishment as Israel's post-Oct. 7 retaliation. It is difficult not to see this as yet another strand of Israel's efforts to starve and extinguish Gaza's population, while simultaneously seeking to discredit the UN. As Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said: "The tens of thousands of men and women who work for UNRWA, many in some of the most dangerous situations for humanitarian workers, should not be penalized."

Israel may hate having the G-word used against it, but genocide and ethnic cleansing are inscribed within the ethos of the brutal Gaza campaign. As Washington Post journalist Karen Attiah argued, Netanyahu's emphatic rejection of Palestinian sovereignty necessitates either dominating or eliminating the Palestinian people: "Either apartheid or ethnic cleansing. How can these words be understood any other way?" Numerous Israeli officials have been categorical about never allowing Gaza's civilians to return to their homes, or eradicating them altogether. Netanyahu has given credence to such calls with his reluctance to publicly clarify his vision for the Gaza endgame, and with his own quoting of Biblical injunctions that command: "Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants." Such manifestly genocidal statements persuaded the court to refer specifically to

"incitement" in its interim judgment.

Cheerleaders for Israel have angrily retorted that the court ruling is especially offensive wielded against Israel, a country that was forged in the ashes of the worst genocide in human history. The latter point is not in dispute. But actual historical genocide against Jews in no way permits Israel's leaders to embark on their own genocidal acts. Neither can such historical facts be used as a blunt instrument with which to bludgeon those holding Israel to account. The Nazi Holocaust is a compelling reason why the world has such robust - albeit weakly enforced - human rights and war crimes laws. In the aftermath of Hamas's atrocities, Israel's campaign of vengeance and annihilation has been so brutal that more than 30,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, are already almost certainly dead, including those lost under the rubble. In its rush to exact collective vengeance against Palestinians, Israel has brought itself full circle to the point where it is almost universally viewed as, like Hamas, the criminal and not the victim. As one analyst put it: "It is not the Palestinians alone who must be saved from Israel. Israel needs to be saved from itself." The urgency with which the US has revived behind-the-scenes negotiations toward hostage release and a longer-term ceasefire demonstrates how fundamentally the court ruling has reconfigured the Gaza status quo. This court ruling should be a first step toward wholesale rehabilitation of grievously abused international justice and conflict resolution mechanisms: a blueprint for how, when international justice speaks, the world is compelled to decisively respond.

Arab News

No, Brexit was not a terrible mistake

Roger Bootle

THIS week we will mark the fourth anniversary of the UK's departure from the European Union on 31 January, 2020. All the usual suspects are again pouring scorn on that momentous event and attributing many of our current ills to it. But does a sober assessment support this conclusion?

As many readers will know, I have form on this issue. I was an outspoken supporter of Brexit and, indeed, I wrote a book entitled "The Trouble with Europe". My view has not changed since. That said, it is difficult to argue that Brexit has yet brought any large economic benefits. Indeed, both theory and evidence suggest that it has brought some net economic losses, although these are probably fairly minor. It was always on the cards that there would be losses in the immediate future because leaving the single market made trade between ourselves and the EU more difficult, through increased paperwork and border delays. These difficulties weigh disproportionately heavily with small businesses.

Trade brings economic benefits as costs are cut and economies of scale are realised. Accordingly, reduced trade should negatively affect productivity and real incomes. In turn, these factors should have an adverse effect on investment and thence, again, on productivity. Potentially offsetting these costs, there were four sorts of benefit. First, the UK would be able to strike free trade agreements (FTAs) with other countries. Second, it would be able to diverge from European regulations. Third, it would save its annual contributions to the EU budget. Fourth, it could operate a completely new migration policy. In the event, although we have managed to roll over many pre-existing EU deals, we have only secured new FTAs with a few countries, principally Australia and New Zealand, as well as joining the trans-Pacific trade group CPTPP. The really big potential FTA, namely with the US, is effectively blocked by the Biden administration. Meanwhile, for all sorts of reasons ranging from not

wanting to cause difficulties in Northern Ireland to rank timidity, the UK has done next to nothing to recast its regulatory regime. Moreover, under the deal we struck, we are still making budgetary contributions to the EU, although now much lower than before. This year they should be just over £2bn, down from £12.5bn in 2020.

We have substantially reduced immigration from EU countries but under the new migration system, much increased immigration from the rest of the world has caused the overall number of workers coming here to soar. Many economists have tried to estimate the losses from Brexit. It is often suggested that GDP is 4-6pc lower than it would have been. Such estimates require elaborate economic guesswork involving some heroic assumptions, principally that the UK would have continued on its previous path of outperformance against most other EU members. In regard to what has actually happened, however, the facts are rather different. Since the Brexit vote in 2016, UK GDP is up by 8pc. The equivalent figures for France, Germany and Italy are 8.5pc, 5.8pc and 6.5pc respectively. And since the expiry of the Brexit transition period at the end of December 2020, the UK has outgrown not only France, Germany and Italy but also the US.

This is due to the depth of our Covid-related downturn in 2020 rather than to any Brexit benefits finally coming through. But it just goes to show the perils of trying to extract meaning from economic statistics covering such a turbulent period. A fair assessment should acknowledge that although Brexit has not proved to be the economic nirvana that some naive over-optimists imagined (I plead not guilty), neither has it brought the disaster that some other economists envisaged. Remember that the Treasury forecast that after a vote for Brexit, unemployment would rise from 5pc to 6.6pc and house prices would fall by 10pc. By the end of 2018, unemployment had fallen to 4pc and house prices had

risen by 5pc. Compared to some of the really big issues confronting the economy, Brexit is a sideshow. So why bother to leave the EU? The issue is essentially political. It is about the ability to vote in and out of office politicians who make the key decisions affecting our country. The EU is a profoundly undemocratic institution. The fact that our leaders have not yet followed through on this vote and put in place policies and laws that would make a big difference does not mean that the Brexit vote was a mistake.

It is early days. The UK joined what we now know as the EU in 1973. Do Remainers ask themselves if there were clear benefits from this decision in the years immediately afterwards? In fact, those were difficult times for the UK. The EU is an institution pointing in several directions at once, trying to reconcile the irreconcilable, with forces pushing towards full union side by side with forces still trying to preserve the powers of nation states. Its economic performance has lagged behind the leading economies in the world because it tends to make the wrong decisions on a whole host of economic and other questions. Forming the euro has been the biggest mistake of all.

We managed to dodge that one but if we had stayed in the EU, we would have struggled to retain our semi-detached status. In all probability, eventually we would have been dragged into all sorts of madcap integrations ranging from currency and fiscal matters to defence and foreign affairs. The benefits of being outside this failing organisation will manifest themselves over the coming decades as we are able to take different decisions from the EU on a wide range of issues, including the regulation of artificial intelligence.

Admittedly, if the UK makes a mess of its independence while the EU gets its act together, then we will have paid a not inconsiderable price for our exit. On the balance of the evidence, I believe that is unlikely. But only time will tell.

The Telegraph

No justification for Europe to cling on to colonial-era treasures

Ranvir S. Nayar

AMID rising global tensions and seemingly unending conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza and many parts of Africa, a bit of good news emerged last week. Germany and France have joined hands to launch a multiyear fund that will research the provenance of African heritage objects in the museums of both countries. The objective of the fund, currently pegged at 2.1 million (\$2.28 million), is to prepare the ground for the return of objects if they were looted from former colonies.

To start with, the two countries will research objects from Togo and Cameroon. The move, even if experimental, is a very welcome one, as it comes amid ongoing heated debate on the fate of thousands of artifacts that are lying in dozens of European museums, both public and private, after being brought back from the former colonies of various European powers. These former colonies have long been seeking the repatriation of objects they say were taken by force or simply stolen by the European powers - an argument that cannot be easily dismissed. In 2017, in a promising declaration, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that he would do everything in his power to return African cultural heritage looted by colonial France. Macron made this statement at the start of his tenure as president to coincide with the launch of his policy to intensify French engagement with Africa, notably the Sahel region. As part of this policy, France handed back 26 objects taken from its former West African colony of Benin.

However, since then, and especially since Macron's reelection two years ago, the efforts to return objects seem to have stalled. Meanwhile, Macron's African outreach policy lies in tatters, as a number of countries in the continent have turned hostile and Franco-African ties are now

at a historic low. It is this backdrop that makes the news of the fund seem especially welcome. One hopes that not only will the researchers be able to return many objects to Togo and Cameroon, but also that the results will encourage Germany and France to go even further.

In fact, the issue of the restoration of objects of heritage should be taken up at a global level. During the colonial period, almost every European power pillaged the colonies for their wealth, both in material terms for statues, objets d'art, gold, silver and precious gems and in intellectual terms, taking manuscripts, traditional knowledge and rare books. Large chunks of the collections in Western museums have their origins in the colonized world. One study found that German museums had more than 40,000 objects taken from Cameroon, a country that was colonized by Germany for just a few decades. If this is the volume of objects taken from just one country by its colonial ruler in fewer than 50 years, it is difficult to imagine how many objects might have been stolen from colonies that were ruled by the colonial powers for centuries. Be it South Asian nations like India or the countries in Latin America, it is possible that millions of objects stolen from these countries adorn the museums of Europe.

In today's world, there is no plausible justification that Europe can cite to defend itself on the issue of colonial heritage objects lying in its private or public collections. These objects belong to the people and countries from which they were taken. The restoration of these objects is not only the right thing to do, especially as a sign of the colonial powers' recognition of their past crimes, but it is also a crucial step in turning the page on that very painful period of human history, when humanity failed to dis-

play its best attributes. Some may argue that the objects of the colonies have only survived because they were secured and properly stored in museums in the West and that, if they had been left in the colonies, they may have been destroyed, especially in the turmoil that followed the end of the colonial period in many countries. Another argument that is used to justify their presence in Western museums is that these objects are shared human heritage and that, in a globalized world, people can enjoy seeing and studying these objects anywhere, not just in the country of their origin.

Both of these arguments are fallacious and an insult to the colonized. Thousands of heritage objects were destroyed during the wars inflicted by the colonial powers on their subjects, or even in the attempts of the colonizers to steal these objects and take them back. The large number of treasures lying in the wrecks of colonial-era ships in seas around the world are an indication of the scale of the looting and destruction. And while it is clear that poorer countries would struggle to access the same technological and human expertise for conservation as the colonial powers, the latter could try to make up for their past sins by both returning these priceless pieces of history and heritage to their rightful owners and also helping with their conservation. After all, the developing world can very easily make the case for reparations from the colonial powers for all the thefts and other crimes committed by them over the centuries. There are precedents of the West restoring artifacts and paying reparations, such as with many of the items seized by Hitler's Nazis before and during the Second World War. Postwar Germany went to great lengths to find the rightful owners of art and other artifacts. If it could be done in the wake of the Second World War, there is no reason it cannot be done on a much larger scale today.

Why, as a Palestinian American journalist, I had to leave the news industry

Malak Silmi

I was listening to a lecture at my local mosque when it suddenly felt like the imam was speaking directly to me. He was interpreting a few verses from the Quran. As he approached the sixth verse in the chapter and began to explain its meaning, my heart began to beat fast. "O believers, if an evildoer brings you any news, verify it so you do not harm people unknowingly, becoming regretful for what you have done," he translated.

I felt validated. God is telling us to fact-check. To avoid spreading rumours or misinformation. To question the source of information and to minimise harm. This was a command that I was following on an almost daily basis. I struggled to see how I was making a difference sometimes as a journalist, but in that moment, my faith reassured me that my efforts, no matter how small, were seen and rewarded by God Himself. I had read the Quran a few times in Arabic, but I was delving into the English translation for the first time. I was getting closer to my religion and God as I grew further away from my career. I constantly reminded myself that my purpose in journalism is to share factual and important information and to put my best work forward. I hoped one day I would be a correspondent for a US media outlet and get sent to the Middle East to report instead of one of the white journalists I usually saw on television.

This was a lofty goal for someone who grew up in Dearborn, Michigan, the city with one of the largest Arab populations in the United States. Despite being surrounded by people like me, I felt isolated when I chose to study journalism, as the majority of my peers had gone into engineering and medicine.

I lived in a city where there was a deep mistrust of the news media because of years of inaccurate or faulty coverage of the Middle East and Muslim and Arab communities in the US. Most of the time, we would only see ourselves in the news portrayed in a negative light or accused of "terrorism". The Arab families I grew up with did not tune into local news because the news did not serve them.

Most families moved to Dearborn to be near fresh pita and packed mosques, where you can take your time learning English because you can get by with just your mother tongue. My dad moved our family to Dearborn in 2000, and after the 9/11 attacks, it became a permanent stay. A man who lived in multiple countries and couldn't sit still in one place, all of a sudden held his family closer and refused to move. He mentally built thick gates around the city that were rarely ever crossed. I was only two years old, so I can't tell you about any immediate effects of 9/11 that I experienced. But I can tell you that I grew up in a household that never travelled unless it was to Jordan and Palestine. While some families went up to Mackinac Island during the summers, I never set foot there until I was 21.

As a family, we visited the two closest Great Lakes, but never made the two-and-a-half-hour journey to Lake Michigan because it was passing through too many white Republican counties where my dad didn't feel he could protect us against any possible hate speech or discrimination, especially since my mother and I wear hijabs. I grew up angry at my community for being so insular, but I later understood the decisions my parents' generation made. Their fears were partly fuelled by US media coverage of the invasion of

Afghanistan and Iraq and other post-9/11 policies like the demonisation of Muslims under the guise of "anti-terrorism" operations.

I wanted to become a journalist to correct the narrative. I wanted to accurately tell stories and hold people in power accountable. I was taught in college that journalism can change policies, expose government secrets and lies and absolve the wrongfully convicted. It drew me in. I wanted to redirect that power to myself and the communities I belong to who had been vilified by the news industry and the government for decades.

I fell in love with storytelling and reported for the campus paper while studying, and interned at multiple outlets in Michigan. I even had an opportunity to spend two weeks interning at the New York Times.

My mom was sharing my stories on social media, my dad was reading my bylines and asking further reporting questions, and my brothers and sister would call me with "exclusive tips" about incidents that happened in the halls of their school. I saved hard copies of all my stories printed in newspapers.

In 2021, I landed my first full-time job after college at a local paper in Texas where I was the only Muslim and only Palestinian in the newsroom. I pumped out about 400 stories in a year on breaking news and trending topics. Among them was one story that I hesitated to pitch, and later regretted ever writing. It was a news piece covering a local protest against an evangelical church raising money for Israel.

I took my own photos of the event, interviewed multiple protesters, most of whom were Palestinian, and included as much context as I could while staying concise. The story went through multiple editors in the newsroom before it was published. Usually, I got to look at the edits that were made, but this time I saw them after publication. Instead of highlighting protesters' concerns and informing readers of the conditions of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, the article mischaracterised the demonstration as just "another protest" that happens every year at this event. Several paragraphs were cut and the headline was changed to a more attractive line that called the fundraiser for another country just an "annual event".

The article quoted the church's founder and the keynote speaker for the event who had called for an end to anti-Semitism, but featured none of the Palestinians I had originally interviewed. I remember wanting to scream in my empty apartment when I saw the published piece. I felt like my voice was deleted. I felt shame as I faced direct backlash from the protest organisers who said the article lacked context and only gave space for the church's point of view. I felt like I was part of the problem, and no longer a part of the solution.

What I took away from that experience was that I should steer clear of localising international affairs. But then a few months later, the Russia-Ukraine war started and we began publishing articles localising it. I was assigned some of these stories: a local bar boycotting Russian vodka and a US journalist receiving treatment at a local hospital after getting injured in Ukraine. I tried to avoid bringing work troubles home, but I failed. My husband listened to my frustration and comforted me as I wept.

I saw the journalism that I wanted to be a part of and that was possible,

but learned that its standards could not be applied to my people. I saw the efforts that were put into getting the facts right and centring local Ukrainian voices. I saw what was possible for others but not for the Palestinian people. Despite my meeting with the editor-in-chief and voicing my concerns to try to create change "from the inside", my efforts felt fruitless and exhausting. There were several moments like these, which piled up and left me deeply frustrated until I decided to quit.

My experience was no precedent. Palestinian voices rarely make it to print or the air in the US given the heavy pro-Israeli media bias. When they do, they often face censorship. Some publishers are fearful of the blowback from subscribers or advertisers because their pro-Israel sensibilities may be hurt by a pro-Palestinian perspective or an objective report about Israel. Others think the stories we want to tell are about issues that are "too complicated" and that won't attract more viewers or clicks. After my experience in Texas, I took up another reporting job in Michigan where I immersed myself in covering local government. I loved my new workplace, but it was asking a lot from me to stick to a profession that was too slow to listen, even when listening was one of the most valuable skills for someone practicing it.

In August, I went to Palestine to visit my relatives there and spent some time with my maternal grandfather. He was born in 1946 in Beit Nabala, a village that was destroyed two years later during the ethnic cleansing of Palestine - what we call the Nakba - by Jewish militias as they laid the foundations of the new state of Israel.

My grandfather was exiled along with his parents to a refugee camp in the West Bank, where he lives until today. When I was still in school, he hoped I would study law and make it to the International Court of Justice to advocate for Palestinians. He was not very excited when I chose journalism, as he didn't understand the profession I thought I knew. He only knew that journalists in Palestine often put their lives on the line while reporting, and the West did not value their voices or even try to listen. But I was in the West and as a young Arab-American, I was listening to journalists like Shireen Abu Akleh (may God rest her soul) and Wael Dahdouch, who reported from the occupied West Bank and Gaza. I saw Ayman Mohyeldin become an anchor for MSNBC and bring previously unheard stories to the screen. I was inspired by their bravery and their efforts. I believed the industry was changing for the better, and the world was starting to listen.

One night, towards the end of my stay, I was seated by my grandfather in his house. The TV was on at an insanely loud volume; an anchor was sharing news of protests going on in Idlib, Syria. My grandfather turned to me and inquired about the news I cover, asking me to pull up the website on his old Samsung phone. I could see how proud he was of my work as he zoomed into the English text and tried to pick out words from his limited English vocabulary. It was at that moment when he was scrolling through my stories that I felt a deep sense of embarrassment and felt so naive for thinking one day I could make a positive difference for him and other Palestinians. I felt like I was wasting my time begging the industry to humanise people like him. Especially when he is still liv-

Aljazeera

SIALKOT: Elder vendor selling lace at his roadside setup.



In brief

Volleyball tournament

SIALKOT (APP): An Intercollegiate Girls Volleyball Tournament was organized by Govt. College Women University Sialkot to express solidarity with Kashmiris. It was supervised by Vice Chancellor (VC) Govt. College Women University Sialkot (GCWUS) Prof. Dr. Zarrin Fatima Rizvi in collaboration with Gujranwala sports board, Govt. Girls Post Graduate College Sialkot, Govt. College Post Graduate Satellite Town Gujranwala and Punjab College Gujranwala. The closing ceremony was witnessed by Director Sports Gujranwala Board, Ejaz Ghauri, Senior Vice President Sialkot Chamber of Small Traders and Small Industry and Founder Sialkot Pioneers Lions Club. He was impressed by the talent and vowed to support the next football match while giving away 5 export quality footballs to each participating teams through the Pioneer Lions Club of Sialkot.

Handball Championship

MULTAN (APP): All Pakistan Inter Boards Girls Handball Championship will commence on January 30 (Tuesday). The board of Intermediate and Secondary education (BISE) in Multan will be the host of the event. Players from across the country will participate in the mega event, said In-charge sports Multan Board Malik Nisar Ahmed. Malik Nisar, talking to media persons, informed that BISE Multan had the honour to feature such events in the past as well. He stated that BISE had successfully conducted gymnastic events and ensured top-quality arrangements.

Triangular Blind Cricket Series

I S L A M A B A D (APP): The second edition of the UAE Triangular Cricket Series for the Blind would kick off from February 22 to 25 at the ICC Cricket Academy Ground, Sports City, Dubai. Teams from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka would feature in the series conducted by Cricket Association for the Blind in India Samarathanam, World Blind Cricket Council and Well wishers of Blind Cricket in the UAE, said a press release issued here on Monday. Shabana Abdul Razak was the organizing committee Chairperson while other committee members included Secretary U Nagaraja Rau (Director Bhima UAE), Coordinators Fida Askar (Former Ranji Trophy Player) Suku, EK Radhakrishnan and Treasurer Anoop Ravi. World Blind Cricket Council Vice President and CABK Chairman, Rajanish Henry, expressed that the overwhelming support received from the UAE audience during the first edition of the UAE Triangular Cricket Series has inspired them to organize the second edition. Organizing international events of this nature contributes to creating an inclusive society, particularly through sports like cricket. This fosters increased connection between the visually impaired community and mainstream society. The triangular series offers visually impaired players an opportunity to showcase their talents, inspiring one another.

Pakistan's Hockey5s World Cup journey ends with 7-8 loss to Poland

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's hopes to secure a quarterfinal spot at the FIH Hockey5s World Cup 2024 were shattered as they conceded a 7-8 defeat to Poland in their last pool A match in Muscat, Oman on Monday.

Poland scored three consecutive goals in the first quarter with Holosyniuk Jakub, Rutkowski Wojciech and Bembenek Tomasz, netting on goal apiece in the 8th, 9th and 10th minutes respectively to put Pakistan under immense pressure, according to information made available here by Pakistan Hockey Federation.

Pakistan bounced back shortly with captain Rana Waheed Ashraf and Ali Ghazanfar scoring two back-to-back goals in the 13th and 14 minutes to help their side go into the break 2-3.

In the second half both the teams scored 5-5 goals. For Poland,

Jarzemowski Damian struck twice in the 18th and 21st minutes and Rutkowski, who had scored a goal in the first quarter netted another in the 22nd minute. Two stunning goals were scored by Glowacki Mikolaj and Nowakowski Mateusz in the 28th minute of the match.

Liaquat Arshad scored fourth goal of the match for Pakistan in the 20th minute.

Rana Waheed exhibited great resilience and fighting spirit as he scored three more goals in the 23rd, 26th and 30th minutes, but his efforts were not enough to get Pakistan over the line as they lost the important pool match to Poland 7-8 after a thrilling contest.

Poland became the second side from pool A to advance to the top-eight place playoffs in the competition. The Netherlands

was the first team to book their place in the quarterfinals at the back of a strong start in the event. They beat Poland 6-3 in their opening match and followed it up with a 5-3 victory against Pakistan.

Pakistan launched their campaign in the event on a winning note, thrashing Nigeria 11-5 in their inaugural match on Sunday but could not continue the momentum as they fell down 3-5 fighting hard against the Netherlands in their second match of the day.

Sixteen teams, divided into four pools are featuring in the event. Pakistan were in Pool A along with Nigeria, the Netherlands and Poland. The tournament is the first-ever Hockey5s World Championship, organized by International Hockey Federation and played with a different format of five players on each side.

Bugti determined to revive national game

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) President Mir Tariq Hussain Bugti is determined to revive the national game by providing plentiful of opportunities to players in coming future.

Bugti in a video message said our hockey teams were in Oman to feature in the Olympic qualifying round and FIH 5-a-side Hockey World Cup. "We were able to send both teams and they performed well. The way PHF was going it was difficult to send both teams for the competitions."

But due to Caretaker Prime Minister of Pakistan Anwar ul Haq Kakar and Caretaker Minister for Inter Provincial Coordination (IPC) Fawad Hasan Fawad kindheartedness and efforts we were able to send both teams for the mega events."

He said there was very less time (6 to 7 days) for scrutiny and send players for the 5-a-side Hockey World Cup. "We were also unable to call a foreign coach and we went on with what was available to us," he said.

He said our coaches and teams performed with all their might and displayed top notch in the mega events. We were losing to Poland by 3-0 but did a comeback and lost by 8-7. Winning and losing was part of the game, he said.

Bugti was of the view that PHF would provide more and more opportunities for players for participation in tournaments in coming future. "We will also hold more hockey activities and international events in the country as to revive national game. We will hopefully go ahead in the game this year," he said.



Bumrah reprimanded for breaching ICC code of conduct

ISLAMABAD (APP): India fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah has been handed an official reprimand for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct during the first match of the ICC World Test Championship series against England in Hyderabad on Sunday.

Bumrah was found to have breached Article 2.12 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to "inappropriate physical contact with a Player, Player Support Personnel, Umpire, Match Referee or any other person (including a spectator during an International Match)."

In addition to this, one demerit point has been added to Bumrah's disciplinary record, for whom it was the first offence in 24 months press release. The incident occurred in the 81st over of England's second innings, when Bumrah, after completing his follow-through, stepped in Ollie Pope's way as the batter went for a run, leading to inappropriate physical contact.

Bumrah admitted the offence and accepted the sanction proposed by Richie Richardson of the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees, so there was no need for a formal hearing. On-field umpires Paul Reiffel and Chris Gaffaney, third umpire Marais Erasmus and fourth umpire Rohan Pandit levelled the charge. Level 1 breaches carry a minimum penalty of an official reprimand, a maximum penalty of 50 per cent of a player's match fee, and one or two demerit points.



DOHA: Mousa Altamari competes for the ball with Hussein Haydar Ali during the AFC Asian Cup Round of 16 match between Iraq and Jordan.

Jordan score twice at the death to surge into Asian Cup last eight

DOHA (AFP): Jordan will meet tournament debutants Tajikistan in the Asian Cup quarter-finals after scoring twice in three minutes deep in stoppage time to stun Iraq 3-2 in a thriller on Monday.

Lower-ranked Jordan looked down and out heading into injury time at the end of the game only for Yazan Al-Arab to prod in for a 95th-minute leveller.

If that was hard to believe, better was to come two minutes later when Nizar Al-Rashdan curled in from distance to fire Jordan into the last eight. Iraq were left heartbroken and shell-shocked, having gone into the dying minutes dreaming of repeating their fairytale 2007 Asian Cup title triumph.

Jordan face a Tajikistan side in the last eight who are one of the shocks of the competition on their debut.

In Monday's other last-16 game, hosts and holders Qatar face Palestine. Jordan were the underdogs and ranked 24 places lower than

Iraq but were the better side in an eventful first half.

Midway through the first period striker Ali Olwan was denied when he shot straight at Jalal Hassan with only the Iraqi goalkeeper to beat. The stopper had to be alert on another occasion, rushing out of his box to bravely head the ball away from danger as a Jordan attacker bore down.

In front of a raucous crowd at the 45,000-capacity Khalifa International Stadium, Iraqi midfielder Ibrahim Bayesh stung the fingertips of goalkeeper Yazeed Abulaila from outside the box. Seven minutes from the break, Jordan -- who held South Korea 2-2 in the group phase -- manufactured another opportunity when Mousa Al-Tamari busted his way through the Iraqi defence.

The Montpellier attacker outmuscled two defenders but again found goalkeeper Hassan in the way. In the first minute of injury time

Jordan deservedly took the lead. The Iraq defence sloppily presented Yazan Al-Naimat with the ball and he raced towards goal before chipping over a flailing and overworked Hassan.

Iraq, who defeated pre-tournament favourites Japan 2-1 in the group stage, went on the attack after the break. Abulaila denied Bayesh with another spectacular save but Iraq's pressure paid off in the 68th minute when defender Saad Natiq nodded down and in from a corner for the equaliser.

Jordan went right up the other end and flashed an effort across goal, before Aymen Hussein controlled the ball unmarked in the box and thrashed for 2-1 and what he thought was Iraq's winner in the 76th minute. It was his sixth goal of the tournament but he was promptly given a second yellow card for over-celebrating and sent off. Then came Jordan's quickfire double at the death to leave Iraq reeling.

Indian Davis Cup team arrives Islamabad for Group I Play-Off tie against Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): A 10-member Indian squad, comprising five players and as many support staff arrived Islamabad on late Sunday for the Davis Cup World Group I Play-Off tie against Pakistan.

The Indian Davis Cup team is visiting Pakistan first time after 1964, a spokesman of Pakistan Tennis Federation said on Monday.

Besides five players

the Indian squad includes two physios, a coach, a manager, and a coordinator, he said. The tie is scheduled to be held on the grass courts of Sports Complex Islamabad on February 3-4.

The All India Tennis Association (AITA) had initially appealed to play the tie at a neutral venue, however International Tennis Federation tribunal rejected that. The most

recent tie between the two neighbouring countries took place in 2019 in Kazakhstan.

Pakistan Tennis Federation has already announced the team for the tie that comprises Muzammil Murtaza, Aisam ul Haq Qureshi, Aqeel Khan, Muhammad Shoaib and Barkatullah. Muhammad Abid will be the team's non-playing captain.

Russian skater Valieva suspended four years for doping

LAUSANNE (AFP): Teenage Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva received a four-year ban from the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Monday for failing a doping test prior to the 2022 Winter Olympics.

Valieva was found to have "committed an Anti-Doping Rule Violation (ADRV) under Clause 4.1 of the All-Russian Anti-Doping Rules of 24 June 2021," said the three-member panel in sport's highest court.

"A period of four years ineligibility is imposed on Ms Valieva, starting on 25 December 2021. "All competitive results of Ms Valieva from 25 December 2021 are disqualified, with all the resulting consequences (including forfeiture of any titles, awards, medals, profits, prizes, and appearance money)," CAS added.

The punishment will sit well with both the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the sport's governing body the International Skating Union (ISU) who had requested such a sanction.

Valieva was just 15 when she tested positive raising questions not just about her guilt and the Russian Olympic system after the Sochi Winter

Games of 2014 but how she was treated as a minor, the way the test was conducted and the value of the drug involved for enhancing performance.

The case came to CAS following Valieva's exoneration by Russia's anti-doping agency (RUSADA).

WADA and the ISU then appealed RUSADA's ruling, as did RUSADA itself. Three CAS judges met in Lausanne in September to hear the case with Valieva and some of the experts and witnesses taking part via videoconference.

"Gait disorders" In Beijing in February 2022, Valieva became the first female skater to land a quadruple jump in Olympic competition, helping Russia secure gold in the team event. The next day, she was told she had tested positive before the Games for trimetazidine, a drug used to treat angina but banned for athletes.

With CAS's ruling, the podium in the team event should now result in the United States being awarded gold, Japan silver and Canada bronze. Under the pressure of suspicion and attention, Valieva cracked in the individual event in Beijing, stumbling four times in the long pro-

gramme and finishing in tears as she tumbled from first to fourth.

At the end of the year, RUSADA ruled that Valieva bore "no fault or negligence" for the positive test. From the start, the case has presented a dilemma. Valieva's age, 15 at the time, should have guaranteed her confidentiality under WADA rules for "protected persons" younger than 16.

But Valieva's display in the team event in the Olympic arena had already drawn worldwide attention. The ISU is raising the lower age limit for its senior category from 15 to 17 from this year, citing the "physical, mental and emotional health" of competitors.

RUSADA tested the skater on December 25, 2021, as she won the Russian championships.

They sent the sample to the WADA-accredited laboratory in Stockholm. The lab found a minute concentration of trimetazidine but, delayed by the Covid pandemic, the result was not delivered until the middle of the Olympics.

After being cleared by RUSADA, Valieva returned to competition, taking second place in the Russian championships at the end of 2022.

PSL franchises rope in several players in supplementary, replacement draft

ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): Several players were added to Pakistan Super League (PSL) teams as the six franchises held a supplementary and replacement draft for the 9th edition of the Twenty20 cricket league, according to the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

The PSL is Pakistan's professional T20 men's cricket league which was launched in 2015 by the PCB. The league has won praise from sports fans throughout eight editions and is regarded as one of the most entertaining T20 cricket leagues around the world.

The replacement and supplementary draft is an important event of the league that sees franchises name replacements for players who are partially or fully unavailable for the tournament.

"Several supplementary and replacement players have been added to the six HBL Pakistan Super League squads, for the ninth edition that begins on 17 February, during the Replacement Draft," the PCB said in a statement.

Peshawar Zalmi, announcing their replacements, drafted Waqar Salamkheil in the silver category for Lungi Ngidi, who was not available for the whole season after being picked in the PSL draft in December. Fast bowler Khuram Shahzad will be partially available, with pacer Arshad Iqbal named as his replacement in silver category. Gus Atkinson is

set to replace Noor Ahmed, who is not available to Peshawar Zalmi due to international commitments. Meanwhile, they have reserved their pick for the replacement of partially available Naveen ul Haq. Lahore Qalandars reserved their picks for Rashid Khan, fully unavailable and Dan Lawrence, partially unavailable to the franchise, according to the PCB.

Islamabad United, too, reserved their pick for Tom Curran, who will not be part of the side for this HBL PSL edition. Karachi Kings have called in Zahid Mehmood as a partial replacement of Kieron Pollard while they have reserved their pick for Tim Seifert, who will be available after the conclusion of the New Zealand T20Is. Quetta Gladiators' Bismillah Khan will replace Wanindu Hasaranga after Sri Lanka's Hasaranga will leave the squad during the tournament owing to his international commitments.

In the first and second pick of the third supplementary round, left-arm pacers Luke Wood and Obed McCoy were bagged by Peshawar Zalmi and Islamabad United, respectively. Karachi Kings had the third pick and they went for English middle-order batter Leus De Plooy, while the fourth pick belonged to Lahore Qalandars who took on board Sri Lankan wicketkeeper-batter Bhanuka Rajapaksa, who featured

for Peshawar Zalmi in the last PSL season.

Multan Sultans had the fifth pick in the third supplementary round and they went for the experienced West Indian wicketkeeper-batter Johnson Charles, who has represented Sultans and Quetta Gladiators in previous PSL seasons. Quetta Gladiators, with the last pick of the round three, drafted English batter Laurie Evans, who previously appeared in his solitary PSL season for Multan Sultans in the 2019 edition.

The fourth round of the supplementary picks saw Sultans bagging the exciting 19-year-old Muhammad Shahzad, who was part of Pakistan U19 at the ICC Men's U19 World Cup 2022. Haider Ali was drafted into the Islamabad United squad, with the batter all set to feature in his fifth PSL season and Islamabad being his third franchise.

Quetta Gladiators reserved their pick in the fourth round. The fourth pick of the round saw Peshawar Zalmi drafting in left-arm wrist spinner, Sufiyan Mueem, who was part of the same team in the last PSL season. With the fifth pick in this round, Lahore Qalandars picked up Tayyab Abbas, a product of their player development program. Karachi Kings drafted 21-year-old Mohammad Rohid as part of their squad.

Liverpool have 'big job' to replace Klopp, says Van Dijk



LONDON (AFP): Virgil van Dijk admits Liverpool have a "big job" to replace Jurgen Klopp when the German steps down at the end of the season.

Van Dijk is coming to terms with Klopp's shock decision to quit once the current campaign is over.

The Reds captain does not believe uncertainty over Liverpool's long-term future will affect their ambitions this season.

They crushed Norwich 5-2 in the FA Cup fourth round on Sunday in the first game since Klopp's bombshell announcement.

But he knows Liverpool must get it right when they pick Klopp's replacement.

"The club will have a big job on their hands, that is well known," Van Dijk

said. "To replace not only the manager but the whole staff and there are so many things that will change."

"I'm very curious which direction that will go in but when that will be announced we will see our situation. "It will be the end of Jurgen Klopp's era - I am still part of it that's why I don't like to talk about it -- and that is my main focus."

"Hopefully we will have the success we all dream of and by then probably there will be more clarification about what the club wants for the future and then we will see." Asked whether he saw himself being part of the next era, Van Dijk added: "That's a big question. I don't know."

Bigger tests await

Liverpool on Klopp's farewell tour, with Chelsea visiting on Wednesday before they head to Arsenal next weekend.

Dutch defender Van Dijk, 32, insists nothing will be different about Liverpool's approach as the Premier League leaders chase silverware in four competitions.

"Nothing has really changed. Obviously things will change at the end of the season and in the new season but at the moment it doesn't and we have to keep doing the same things," he said.

"It's easier said than done but I sense the rest of the boys think like that as well and it is the job for me to ensure we keep it that way. "We are all human beings and we have emotions -- some players feel different about the manager's announcement than others."

"That's absolutely normal because everyone thinks in different ways but I didn't notice the professionalism being dropped or the level of standard. "The training sessions I have seen in the last couple of days were not different than before."



In brief

Four kite sellers nabbed

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Police has nabbed 04 kite sellers and recovered dozens of kites and strings from the accused during various actions in different areas. According to a police spokesperson, Sadiqabad police recovered 15 kites and 02 strings from the accused Ibrahim. During other raids in the Westridge area, police recovered 26 kites and strings from accused Shiraz, Sohail and Abu Bakr. According to details, separate cases have been registered against the accused. Appreciating the police actions, SSP Operations Flight Lieutenant (R) Hafiz Kamran Asghar said those endangering the lives of citizens through kite flying and kite selling cannot escape the grip of the law.

Gang involved in theft held

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested a three-member gang involved in house robberies, motorcycle theft and recovered 04 stolen motorcycle and stolen amount more than Rs 2,00,000 from their possession during crackdown here on Monday. Naseerabad police during course of action held the accused include Imran, Sagar and Shams. Police have registered separate cases against all of them and further investigation was in progress. SP Pothohar Nasir Nawaz appreciated the performance of police teams adding that strict action will be taken against anti-social elements. He made it clear that it is prime duty of police to protect the lives and properties of people.

ANF seizes 592 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting eight operations across the country managed to recover over 592 kg drugs and arrested seven accused, said an ANF headquarters spokesman here on Monday. He informed that 2 kg of Ice was recovered from the possession of a Bahrain-bound passenger going from Sialkot Airport. 64 Ice-filled capsules were recovered from the stomach of a Jeddah-bound passenger netted at Lahore Airport. 284 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of an accused rounded up near Gahi Chowk Quetta. 150 kg opium and 150 kg morphine were recovered from an empty house in Kuchlak Pishin while four kg hashish was recovered from an accused arrested near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza, Attock. The spokesman informed that 1 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of an accused nabbed near GT Road, Attock. In the seventh operation, 1 kg of hashish was recovered from an accused near Bano Bypass Kohat.

PTA raid on VOIP grey setup

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) along with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) conducted a successful raid against the grey trafficker at NES-PAK Housing Society, Lahore. During the raid, 188 Active SIMs, nine VoIP Gateways (32 ports), 05 Laptops and 2 Network Switches were recovered. Two persons have been arrested at the spot, said a news release issued here on Monday. FIA is further investigating the matter. The successful raid against the illegal setup is a part of PTA's efforts to prevent the circumvention of the Multi-Finger Biometric Verification System (MBVS) and is made possible because of continuous monitoring, commitment and persistent efforts by PTA in curbing the menace of grey traffic thus curtailing the loss to the national exchequer.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Interior Minister Dr. Gohar Ejaz offering dua during ground breaking ceremony of new building of Police Station Golra.

Federal Ombudsman assures to address issues of business community

ISLAMABAD (APP): Wafaqi Mohtasib (Ombudsman) Ejaz Ahmed Qureshi on Monday said that the business community was playing an important role in the economic development of the country and assured of his cooperation in addressing their grievances.

While talking to a delegation of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Ajaz Ahmed Qureshi said that a separate portal for ICCI will be created to solve the grievances of the business community and if the complaints are not resolved within thirty days, they will be automatically transferred to the Ombudsman for redress.

He said that ICCI should form a committee to liaise with his organization for redress of complaints. He further said that about 200 institutions and departments of the federal government come under their jurisdiction and his organization dealt with 194,000 complaints last year.

More than 85% of the decisions were implemented, he said adding that every complaint in the Federal Ombudsman is decided within sixty days due to which there are no pending complaints.

He said that 22 regional offices and complaint centers are already available for immediate redressal. Soon regional offices in Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir will be opened.

These far-flung offices would benefit the common people a lot, he added.

Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President ICCI that ICC has more than 8,000 members who play an important role in the development of the economy by promoting industrial and commercial activities.

He said that ICCI members have to face issues with Federal Board of Revenue and other institutions and urged to appoint a focal person of the Federal Ombudsman for ICCI to help solve the issues of the business community. He said that if the problems of the business community are solved soon, the economy will develop better.

DC Murree visits different areas to review arrangements

RAWALPINDI (APP): Deputy Commissioner (DC) Murree, Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi on Monday morning visited various areas including Jhika Gali, Kashmir Point, Mall Road, Kuldana and other areas and reviewed the arrangements finalized by the administration to facilitate the tourists.

Later, the DC also visited control room. Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi said that after first snowfall of winter in Murree, all the staff concerned and machinery were fully operational.

Personnel from various departments were present at all the tourist facilitation centers to guide and assist the tourists, the DC added. He informed that machinery and human resources were being used to remove snow from the roads.

ECP successfully trains 970,000 polling staff

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has completed the training of 96% of the polling staff, which includes 970,000 out of a total of 976,000 staff members. An ECP spokesperson said in a statement that the training for the remaining 6,000 polling staff would conclude within the next four days.

He said the preparations of February 8 general elections were being completed swiftly. The ballot paper printing, conducted in three government press offices, is proceeding well. Initiated on January 16 after the assignment of election symbols by the RO, this task is set to conclude by February 2 in the next four days.

According to an ECP spokesman, the ballot paper printing, carried out in three government press offices, is progressing smoothly. Commenced on January 16 after the election symbols were assigned by the Returning Officer (RO), this task is expected to be completed by February 2 in the next four days. The spokesman stated that, in collaboration with security agencies and the District Administration, the

process of delivering ballot papers to all four provinces has commenced.

This delivery is being conducted using both road transportation and air transportation. Moreover, starting January 29, 2024, the public can avail themselves of the 8300 SMS service to obtain information about their polling station and other details. The 8300 SMS service, introduced from January 29, 2024, allows the public to access information about their polling station and other details.

To obtain their vote information, voters are required to send their Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC) to 8300.

All voters are urged to promptly check the vote details for themselves and their family members to avoid any issues at the polling station. The Election Commission has initiated an inquiry into the clashes and shootings between two political parties in Karachi, as well as the snatching of postal ballots in Swabi district. Reports have been sought from the Chief Secretary and IG for possible actions against those involved under election laws.

Breastfeeding awareness drives safest way of preventing outbreak of 'Pneumonia cases'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Punjab Caretaker Health Minister Professor Javed Akram Monday expressed that the low rate of breastfeeding is a major cause of the pneumonia deaths among kids. Talking to a private news channel, he said that lack of breastfeeding can also result in stunted growth in children and so the health department is taking steps to encourage this feeding and nursing of infants in early ages.

To another question, he said that the Punjab has reported around 17,000 pneumonia cases so far this, with a mortality rate of

1.3 percent.

He said media need to run massive awareness campaigns to educate the public about benefits of mother feed and for timely vaccination.

"A majority of victims of pneumonia are malnourished kids with low immunity," he said, adding, mothers must breast-feed their children to boost their immunity against such diseases. Minister for Health said that malnutrition and promotion of breastfeeding remained a top priority agenda of the current government as relevant ministries and departments

have been endlessly engaged in efforts to address the issue of malnutrition and to control Pneumonia cases.

Replying to a question, he said the there was rise in pneumonia cases in Punjab to the prevalent winter season resulting air pollution, especially smog. Smog, a consequence of air pollution, has been identified as a significant factor contributing to the spike in pneumonia cases.

The minister added that the situation is improving with the intensity of the winter season subsides in the coming months.

Railways to digitalize its multiple services

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways is taking steps to become an E-office soon to digitalize its service and improve internal efficiencies through electronic administration.

The e-office platform aims to cater for the need for effectiveness and transparency in Governmental processes and service delivery mechanisms as well as help government departments to go paperless.

The idea is being implemented with the help of the National Information Technology Board (NITB) which will be responsible for providing the relevant training to the staff of Pakistan Railways.

E-Office is a digital workplace solution that replaces the existing method of manual handling of files and documents with an efficient electronic system.

According to an official source, Pakistan Railways will be on e-office soon which will not only facilitate the users but also make the entire system of the department transparent.

Listing other steps taken by the department, the source revealed that Pakistan Railways has developed a software application for journalist concession card management.

All the related data for journalist concession cards across the country is managed by the Directorate of Public Relations. The software has been prepared and is linked with the centralized reservation centre as well.

About the Networking Monitoring System (NMS), the source said that the software has been deployed on the premises of the Directorate of IT with the help of this system all network deployed all over the railways

network is being monitored critically and in case of any disconnections the concerned service provider is taken up and pursued till the fault is removed. The efficiency of the network is being monitored through this system from audit perspective as well, it said.

Regarding the provision of internet facilities at different levels, the source said that the entire railway headquarters office is covered with internet service. Internet facility is also been provided at the Ministry via the PR Headquarters office (as a backup link).

It was decided by the management of Pakistan Railways to develop an e-ticketing system with the latest technology indigenously. To implement this idea, Pakistan Railways hired IT professionals from the market and developed the software, which has been deployed and in operation since May 2016. As the e-ticketing system has now been deployed on the latest tools and techniques, to facilitate the management of earnings at the day's end, a train train-wise earning portal has been devised.

This portal indicates complete information about the financial aspect from the commercial point of view and provides the live incremental financial position concerning passenger earing. The software for the email exchange server has been installed in the IT Directorate with the viewpoint that emails being used previously from the web hosting company were bounced back as a result e-ticketing client of Pakistan Railways was not in a position to approach this office in case of complaints and claim of

refund. In addition to the above facility the email addresses have also been issued to the officials of Pakistan Railways to communicate on officials' email within or out of the organization, it added. They developed the software for the court cases for all of the Pakistan Railways System. The software has now been developed and deployed on the premises of the consumers in all divisions.

In light of the present scenario, the legal department is being facilitated regarding information on all basic ingredients of every legal case and progress made so far.

To a question, the source said Pakistan Railways has launched an awareness campaign to educate the public about the risks associated with trespassing, crossing railway tracks, and carrying prohibited items such as gas cylinders, weapons without a license, cartridges, drugs, and daggers. "The campaign is launched on the directives of Minister for Railways Shahid Ashraf Tarar and Secretary Syed Mazhar Ali Shah which will not help the department to control accidents but also win the confidence of the passengers of the rail" he added.

The official source said, "Pakistan Railways will use all the social media platforms including print, electronic media, twitter, Facebook, poster and pamphlets to create an awareness among the citizens about a safe train journey." He said the department has also asked all the divisional superintendents to ensure checking of luggage of passengers at entry points with scanners, metal detectors and walkthrough gates.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Madad Ali Sindhi Visited the Federal Government College of Home Economics and Management Sciences.

Education institutions play vital role against drug addiction among students

ISLAMABAD (APP): Consultant, Anti Drugs & Narcotics Campaign Syed Zulfikar Hussain Monday expressed his serious fear over the rising number of drug addiction among students and called for taking up necessary steps for prevention of drug use as it has emerged as a serious threat in the present digital lives of society.

Talking to the PTV news channel, he said that earlier the problem used to prevail among males, but now it has spread among females and children in our country in an alarming proportion, adding, that there is a dire need to urgently combat the situation with the coordination efforts of academic institutions. He said that it is not just self-interest habit but motivation by their near one and friends' company which was the most important factor, which led to the drug use.

He said addiction to narcotics must be eradicated from its roots to safeguard the youth and prosperity of

the country, adding, that drug use can be reduced through public awareness seminars and campaigns.

Experts recommended there should be awareness of the dangerous effects of narcotics in the youth of Pakistan. He said that appropriate treatment facilities should also be established for children and female drug users.

The problem of drug abuse is likely to explode in the next decade, particularly affecting children under age 14, adding, that the impact of the increasing drug abuse will be seen in both urban and rural areas of the country due to the busy schedules of parents and excessive use of digital gadgets.

He said the adverse effects of drug abuse are immense and it not only harms the brain but other organs of the body which soon loses immunity to fight disease. The individual cannot lead a productive life for himself, his

family or society and hence one should guard oneself against drugs, he added. "Education is only best weapon against drugs", he added. "Children need to be taught about the dangers of consuming drugs", he mentioned. He said that the government is collaborating with non-government organizations, including educational institutes, to raise awareness among people, especially youngsters, about the harmful effects of drugs on society. Replying to a question, he explained that there is a problem in the family's communication with the children, adding, all busy with other things such as chatting through their mobile phones.

We believe that the modern communication systems have created a sort of isolation with the family," he said.

"There is a need for strong communication between the parents and the children", he advised.

Disposable vapes ban could lead to relapse in people trying to quit smoking

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A fresh study has indicated that banning disposable vapes might negatively impact 2.6 million people as well as discourage the use of e-cigarettes from then on in the United Kingdom.

This research comes from a recent discussion among UK officials to ban disposable vapes to prevent minors from becoming addicted to the product.

The study was conducted by the University College London and funded by Cancer Research UK and was published by the journal Public Health. It highlights the importance of tobacco harm reduction products to reduce the harm caused by tobacco addiction by being a less risky habit.

The research further mentions that more adults in the UK have begun to favour e-cigarettes over combustibles. If a ban was to be enacted, it would negatively impact the image of disposable vapes and prevent smokers from seeing it as a safer alternative.

The researchers argue that while it is important to prevent minors from using

these products, it should not affect the health of the rest of the UK. A senior author of the study, Professor Jamie Brown, said: "Ban may discourage the use of e-cigarettes among people trying to quit smoking and may induce relapse among those who have already used disposables to quit." He further argues that tobacco cigarettes are more harmful to the body but those are not currently heavily restricted and by banning vapes, the government creates an image that these products are more harmful for one's health, further discouraging its use.

The study was based on a survey of 69,973 adults. It has discovered an increase of vape users in the population as it was 0.1 percent in January 2021 and now rises to 4.9 percent in August 2023. If disposable vapes are banned, it may result in those new smokers shifting to tobacco instead. The co-lead author of this study, Dr Sarah Jackson, said: "In the event of a ban, it would be important to encourage current and ex-smokers who use disposables to switch to other types of e-cigarettes rather than going back to just smoking tobacco."

Air corridors facilitated \$150m

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Commerce and Industry said that \$150 million in exports have been made abroad through air corridors in the past year. Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, the spokesman of the ministry, said that they are trying to increase the amount of exports through air corridors. According to the official, in the past year, trade worth \$290 million dollars has been made from air corridors to other countries.

Polio vaccination campaign

KABUL (BNA): A new round of polio vaccinations for children has begun in several parts of the country. The Ministry of Public Health, in collaboration with international organizations, has launched the first round of sub-campaigns for polio vaccination in 2024. The plan is to vaccinate five million children under the age of five by the first of February. Dr. Qalandar Ebad, has expressed his commitment to eradicating polio in Afghanistan and emphasized the importance of continuous efforts.

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

IEA: Daesh no longer poses threat to Afghanistan



KABUL (Pajhwok): The Islamic State, also known as Daesh, no longer poses any threat to Afghanistan, the interim government said on Monday.

Afghan forces had significantly beefed up border security. Zabiullah Mujahid made the statement while commenting on an Indian newspaper's report regarding Pakistan's attempt to pave the way for ISIS fighters' entry into Afghanistan. The Sunday Guardian quoted TTP sources as saying the Pakistan army clashed with Afghan forces on Jan. 20 to enable Daesh terrorists to steal into Afghanistan. In reaction to the report, Mujahid said: "Afghanistan's borders are secure. Our security forces are alert and prepared to deal with any kind of threat ..." IEA officials, including the defence minister, say the militant outfit has been vanquished in Afghanistan.

Muttaqi advocates engagement at the Regional Cooperation Initiative Meeting



KABUL (Monitoring Desk): Afghanistan hosted a Regional Cooperation Initiative meeting, bringing together representatives and ambassadors from 11 neighbouring and regional countries in Kabul. The key topics of discussion at the meeting included fostering positive interaction between regional countries and the Taliban government, enhancing coordination in regional cooperation, developing a unified regional narrative, and collaborating to harness economic opportunities in the region. The participating countries included India, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Indonesia and Kyrgyzstan. Acting Foreign Minister of Taliban Amir Khan Muttaqi emphasized that the meeting aimed to establish a "region-centric narrative" for constructive engagement between Afghanistan and its regional neighbours. The focus of regional cooperation discussed at the meeting included exploring mutually beneficial regional pathways, building a positive narrative for engagement, enhancing soft and hard connectivity for regional economic development, and advocating for the removal of unilateral sanctions on the region and Afghanistan. Muttaqi highlighted the Taliban's "economy-centered foreign policy" and the positive developments in trade and transit since their takeover in August 2021. He underscored that respecting each other's interests, choices, government structures, and development models was crucial for fostering positive engagement. Muttaqi pointed out that Afghanistan's past experiences with imported plans and interventions did not lead to the desired outcomes and that Afghanistan is now a sovereign and safe country. He also said Afghanistan seeks positive engagement and mutual interests instead of confrontation or controversy. Afghanistan acknowledges its challenges, stemming from decades of foreign invasions, interventions, and internal conflicts, and is committed to finding solutions. Muttaqi expressed the hope of achieving regional consensus through mechanisms like Afghanistan's neighboring countries' ministerial meetings and the Moscow format to address mutual interests and incentivize agreements. Dr. Mohammad Naeem, head of the Afghan embassy in Doha, reiterated the Taliban's commitment to fostering positive relations with regional countries and active participation in regional initiatives. Afghanistan aims to convey its readiness to actively engage in regional efforts and build constructive relationships with neighbouring and regional nations. The "Afghanistan Regional Cooperation Initiative" meeting commenced on Monday evening at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the Taliban's control in Kabul. Originally scheduled to start Monday morning, the meeting was delayed and began at 4:30 PM Kabul time. The Taliban-controlled National Radio and Television had previously reported that the meeting was delayed due to adverse weather conditions. This marks the first time that the Taliban has hosted a regional meeting with the participation of ambassadors and special representatives from neighbouring and regional countries in Kabul. This meeting comes as the United Nations Secretary-General is scheduled to host the second conference on Afghanistan in Doha at the end of the month.

Scholarships announced for female Afghan refugees

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has announced scholarships for female Afghan refugee students. The commission on Sunday invited applications for the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) fully funded Master's scholarships for the academic year 2024. The scholarships will enable female Afghan refugees to pursue two years Master's study at HEC-recognised universities in Pakistan. HEC said the scholarship programme, funded by the DAAD, was open for all disciplines. With regard to eligibility criteria, the HEC said female Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan, with valid Proof of Registration (POR) Card could apply for the scholarships.



The candidates must have completed an HEC-recognised undergraduate degree (16 years of education) with at-least 2.5 cumulative grade point average (CGPA), the commission explained.

Religious scholars should prevent escalation of violence against women in Afghanistan: Human Rights Activists

Hakim Bigzaad

The Afghanistan Human Rights Activists Council has urged religious scholars to intervene and stop the ongoing detention of girls by the Taliban administration in Kabul and various provinces. They seek to prevent further escalation of violence against women in the country. In a statement issued on Saturday, January 27th, the Council expressed concern that the actions of the Taliban are becoming increasingly hostile towards women. However, Tahera Naseri, a women's rights advocate and the founder of the Women's Freedom Movement, argues that the Taliban and

religious scholars share a similar perspective on women. Consequently, human rights activists in Afghanistan do not expect any practical results from religious scholars in preventing the violence. She explained in an interview with Khaama Press that no religious scholar has protested or expressed dissatisfaction against more than 50 restrictive directives issued by the Taliban's leadership that affect women's lives. Therefore, there is no expectation for religious scholars to intervene to prevent violence. It is worth noting that a recent video recording featuring Mullah Yahya Anabi, the imam of a mosque in Panjshir, has

surfaced, where he praises the Taliban for detaining Hazara girls. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) also reported that Taliban security forces under the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice have detained more girls in the western part of Kabul, predominantly inhabited by the Hazara ethnic group, and in the Khair Khana district, predominantly inhabited by Tajiks. Meanwhile, Shiite religious scholars in western Kabul previously requested that officials from the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice hand over the issue of girls' hijab (veiling) to

them and prevent the detention of girls and their transfer to security agencies. Human rights activists in Afghanistan continue to urge organizations and UN human rights rapporteurs to document and report on "crimes against humanity" in Afghanistan. The Council's statement also calls on countries to refrain from recognizing the government of the Taliban due to widespread human rights violations. The issue of recent detentions of girls has raised serious concerns among citizens, particularly regarding the humiliation and denigration of girls and women by UNAMA.

Amu Darya's daily oil extraction will surpass 2,000 tons, says Chinese company

KABUL (KHAAMA PRESS): Chinese company Afg-Chin Oil and Gas Limited has announced plans to activate 24 new wells in the Amu Darya basin in 2024, aiming to increase daily oil extraction to over 2,000 tons. The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum confirmed that the company's head recently met with the Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum to discuss their ambitious agenda for 2024. Among the discussed plans are the construction of oil reserves with a substantial capacity of 6,000 tons and the establishment of an oil refinery. Additionally, they plan to repair two idle wells and drill 22 new ones. Afg-Chin Oil and Gas currently possesses an oil reservoir capable of holding 4,000 tons, but they intend to construct a new reservoir in the Qashqari area of Sar-e-Pul Province,



increasing its capacity. Acting Minister of Taliban, Shahabuddin Delawar stressed the importance of transparency in the mining process during the meeting. He also emphasized the need to employ specialists and engineers from Afghanistan. These developments are part of the efforts to make Afghanistan self-sufficient in the oil and gas sector, which might signal a push towards greater economic independence. With the activation of these new wells and the expansion of oil infrastructure, Afghanistan aims to strengthen its position in the energy sector and reduce its reliance on external sources for oil and gas.

Iranian officials see decline in Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan as an opportunity

KABUL (Khaama Press): An official from Iran's South Khorasan province has highlighted a decline in Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan, identifying this as an opportunity for Iran to strengthen its trade ties with Afghanistan. As reported by the IRNA news agency, Ahmad Ariafar, the general director of industry, mines, and commerce in South Khorasan, emphasized that Afghanistan holds great potential for Iran's technical and engineering services. These developments come in the wake of recent tensions between Iran and Pakistan in the Balochistan region, which have led to casualties on both sides. In a recent incident, nine Pakistanis were



killed by unidentified armed individuals in Balochistan, Iran, further escalating tensions between the two neighboring nations. Furthermore, Pakistani authorities imposed a mandatory visa requirement for Afghan truck drivers, leading to the closure of the Torkham border gate for over 11 days. This closure resulted in significant financial losses for Afghan traders, leaving them deeply discouraged. Jawad Qana'at, the governor of South Khorasan,

added that to boost exports to Afghanistan, they are striving to make the Mahirud border crossing with Afghanistan operational 24 hours a day. According to IRNA, Alireza Khama Zar, the head of the Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture in Iran's Birjand city, mentioned that products like cement, tiles, ceramics, eggs, and food items are primarily exported from South Khorasan province to countries including Uzbekistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan. Iran ranks among Afghanistan's most significant trading partners, facilitating a robust economic relationship.





KARACHI: President Dr. Arif Alvi inaugurating Sundas Foundation Centre for providing blood and hematological services to patients.

Hamas reiterates that Gaza war must end for any hostage release

DOHA (Reuters): Hamas said on Monday that releasing hostages it is holding would require a guaranteed end to the Israeli offensive in Gaza and withdrawal of all invasion forces, reiterating its position after Israel held a meeting with Qatari and Egyptian mediators.

“The success of the Paris meeting is dependent on the Occupation (Israel) agreeing to end the comprehensive aggression on Gaza Strip,” senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri told Reuters. It was not immediately clear if, with this condition met, Hamas would free all or some of the 132 hostages Israel says remain in Gaza. Hamas had previously said a full release would require that Israel free all of the thousands of Palestinians held on security grounds in its prisons.

A Palestinian official, close to mediation talks, who requested anonymity, said that for Hamas to sign a follow-up deal to the November truce in which it released dozens of hostages, it wants Israel to agree to end the offensive and withdraw from Gaza — though implementation would not necessarily be immediate. The agreement would have to be endorsed by Qatar, Egypt and the United States, the official said. Those countries sent top delegates to discuss the Gaza hostages crisis with senior Israeli intelligence figures on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Israel said “significant gaps” remain after ceasefire talks Sunday with the United States, Qatar and Egypt but called them constructive and said they would continue in the week ahead, a tentative sign of progress on a potential agreement that could see Israel pause military operations against Hamas in

exchange for the release of remaining hostages.

The US announced its first military deaths in the region since the war began and blamed Iran-backed militants for the drone strike in Jordan that killed three American service members amid concerns about a wider conflict. The statement from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office on the ceasefire talks did not say what the “significant gaps” were. There was no immediate statement from the other parties.

The war has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, destroyed vast swaths of Gaza and displaced nearly 85 percent of the territory’s people. Israel says its air and ground offensive has killed more than 9,000 militants, without providing evidence. The Oct. 7 Hamas attack in southern Israel killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and militants took about 250 hostages.

With Gaza’s 2.3 million people in a deepening humanitarian crisis, the United Nations secretary-general called on the United States and others to resume funding the main agency providing aid to the besieged territory, after Israel accused a dozen employees of taking part in the Hamas attack that ignited the war. Communications Director Juliette Touma warned that the agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, would be forced to stop its support in Gaza by the end of February.

Intelligence meeting included CIA Director Bill Burns, the head of Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency, David Barnea, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and Egyptian intelligence

chief Abbas Kamel. Ahead of the meeting, two senior Biden administration officials said US negotiators were making progress on a potential agreement that would play out over two phases, with the remaining women, elderly and wounded hostages to be released in a first 30-day phase. It also would call for Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza. The officials requested anonymity to discuss the ongoing negotiations.

More than 100 hostages, mainly women and children, were released in November in exchange for a week-long ceasefire and the release of 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, speaking to troops, said that “these days we are conducting a negotiation process for the release of hostages” but vowed that as long as hostages remain in Gaza, “we will intensify the (military) pressure and continue our efforts — it’s already happening now.”

At least 17 Palestinians were killed in two Israeli airstrikes that hit apartment buildings in central Gaza, according to an Associated Press journalist who saw the bodies at a local hospital. One hit a building in Zawaida, killing 13 people, and the other an apartment block in the Nuseirat refugee camp, killing four. Also Sunday, 10 Palestinians were killed in a strike that hit a residential building in the Shati refugee camp in Gaza City, said Dr. Moataz Harara, a physician at Shifa Hospital, where the dead were taken. Israel’s military said troops were engaging in close combat with Hamas in neighborhoods of the southern city of Khan Younis, Gaza’s second-largest.

Terrorist killed in operation

F.P. Report

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

During the conduct of operation, intense fire exchange took place between own troops and terrorists as a result of which Terrorist Naikman Ullah was sent to hell.

The killed terrorist remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities including target killing of innocent civilians. Weapons, ammunition and explosives were also recovered from the killed terrorist. Sanitization operation is being conducted to eliminate any other terrorist found in the area. Security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country.

JUI-F to establish rule of law: Fazl

F.P. Report

LARKANA: Jamiat Ulema Islam Fazal (JUI-F) organized an event in Jamia Islamia in connection with the election campaign in Larkana and Qamber-Shahdadkot districts. Maulana Fazlur Rahman said that in democratic politics, all the responsibilities are imposed on the rulers and politicians and they are responsible according to their position and oath.

JUI-F Emir claimed that the politicians take the services of the people but the stage of elections is such that all their responsibility is on the people because they elect the politicians, so the general election on February 8 is a day of public responsibility while no one is having a bad time. It is up to the people to say, he added that we have spent 75 years in the neighboring world of our region.

He added that I want to say that if Pakistan is created, the Muslims of the sub-continent have sacrificed for this dear country in which millions of martyrs have been martyred and the debt owed to you is not to any human being but to Allah Almighty, which we have not paid till today, when If there will be elections, I will tell the rulers and the parliament that no one should listen, Maulana Fazlur Rehman added that in our country, strong bandits and police are weak. Which state is this?

Where I leave as a citizen, it is not known whether I will return home in the evening or not. Today, the people of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are fighting elections in the midst of fear, while we have such incidents on a daily basis in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Raisin has come because of this, while we are begging everywhere to establish peace and order, we were blessed with the opportunity to govern in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but what we could do during the government was revealed to the people.

Imran’s ego caused damage to PTI: Khattak

F.P. Report

NEWSHERA: Chairman, Pakistan Tahrik e Insaaf Parliamentarians (PTIP), Pervaz Khattak here Monday said that egoism of PTI founder has caused serious damage to PTI.

He vowed to alleviate poverty and eradicate unemployment besides generate employment opportunities for youth if voted to power. Addressing a public gathering at Rashakai village of Nowshera district, Pervaz Khattak said that PTIP’s politics was revolving around masses and their problems would be addressed on priority basis.

Pervaz Khattak said that due to his people friendly policies and development projects during his tenure as Chief Minister in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, PTI had achieved landslide victory in 2018 election besides helped PTI founder to become the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Pervaz Khattak said that Nowshera district was saved from floods after construction of banks of River Kabul during his tenure as CM KP. He urged party workers to get unite for February 8, 2024 general election and elect committed representatives with a will to deliver and address their problems.

Appeals against military trials verdict

Justice Tariq Masood quits SC bench hearing

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A six-judge bench of the Supreme Court which was due to take up a set of intra-court appeals (ICAs) against declaring the military trials of civilians as unconstitutional Monday was collapsed after Justice Sardar Tariq Masood dissociated himself from the bench.

On January 26, the apex court had constituted a six-member bench led by Justice Tariq Masood and comprising Justices Aminuddin Khan, Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Hasan Azhar Rizvi, Musarat Hilali and Irfan Saadat Khan for hearing the ICAs. After dissolution of the bench on Monday, the matter was again referred to the judges committee for formation of a new bench.

In its first hearing of the matter earlier, the six-member bench had conditionally suspended its prior decision to invalidate military trials for 103 civilians till a final judgment on the matter. The SC stated that the ongoing military trials of the civilians, accused of involvement in attacks on army installations during the unrest following the arrest of former premier Imran Khan on May 9 last year, would carry on for now but the final decision would be subject to its final ruling.

The majority 5-1 verdict stemmed from a string of ICAs filed by the caretaker federal government and the interim provincial governments of Balochistan, Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa challenging the previous unanimous ruling nullifying the military trials.

Last year on October 23, the apex court had declared the trials of civilians in the military courts as unconstitutional and held that 103 persons and others who may be placed in connection with the events

arising from May 9th and 10th May could be tried by criminal courts established under the ordinary or special law of the land.

The 25-page detailed judgment, written by Justice Muneeb Akhtar, had the majority decision of four judges. The bench was headed by former Justice Ijazul Ahsan and comprised of Justice Muneeb Akhtar, Justice Yahya Afridi, former Justice Mazahir Ali Akbar Naqvi and Justice Ayesha A Malik.

The detailed judgment also included an additional 48-page note by Justice Ayesha Malik. Justice Ayesha held that the offences under the Official Secrets Act were triable before the ordinary criminal courts, which guarantees fair trial, due process and independence as mandated by the Constitution. However, none of the 103 persons detained were reported for offences under the said Act. ?et applications were made under Section 549 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 (Cr.P.C.), for their delivery to military authorities. On Dec 28, 2023, in a letter to the three-member Judges Committee of the Supreme Court, former Chief Justice Jawad S Khawaja objected to the bench headed by Justice Sardar Tariq Masood for hearing intra-court appeals against the decision to stop the trial of civilians in military courts.

He requested that a seven-member larger bench should be formed according to seniority, under the chairmanship of Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa, to hear the appeals. He also claimed that he got the right to object to the bench as he was the petitioner in the main case, and that Justice Sardar Tariq Masood could not hear the case due to his earlier opinion on the matter.

MQM-P, PPP trade accusations

KARACHI (INP): As the battle for the Karachi throne nears, the MQM-P and the PPP on Monday exchanged the blame for the incident which claimed one life and was followed by torching of vehicles a day earlier.

In this connection, MQM-P Convenor Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui told reporters that his party wasn’t responsible for the efforts to create fear in the Karachi and that the caretaker setup in Sindh was biased and a continuation of the PPP rule. About the Feb 8 elections, he said the day would bring the political death of those behind killings and violence, adding that the PPP had justified the killing of the MQM-P worker.

The day started with MQM-P senior leader Mustafa Kamal saying his party worker was killed by armed men carrying Kalashnikovs in the Nazimabad neighbourhood of the mega city in the presence of four police vehicles at the time of the incident. Talking to media, he said

the murderers were from the PPP and mentioned that the MQM-P workers had been shot dead in different parts of Karachi in the past in six separate incidents.

He accused Dr Asim — a close associate of former president Asif Ali Zardari — of orchestrating the incident in which Ahmed Faraz — a UC in-charge of the MQM-P — was killed and said they had a video proof of the armed man opening fire while standing next to a police vehicle. The police didn’t arrest the killer but picked up the MQM-P worker who had received bullet wounds, he said, adding that the police, instead of shifting the injured man to a nearby hospital, spent time on the road while driving around in the area, which resulted in his death.

Dr Asim has been tasked with conquering the Karachi Central district [a MQM-P stronghold], Kamal alleged and asked the state to provide justice to them. Otherwise, they would not be responsible for the consequences.

About the allegation that the firing was a result of locals torching two vehicles, he questioned whether they should have showered petals on them. The people reacted after the gruesome murder, he said.

The PPP has resorted to these tactics after the realising that their 15-year investment is coming to an end and they are destined to face defeat on Feb 8. Later in the afternoon, Saeed Ghani said the PPP had a successful rally in the area — historically dominated by the MQM-P — and the rival party resorted to violence in the response, adding that Kamal had been hurling threats even before the latest episode. He alleged that the MQM-P had opted to use the old tactics based upon violence and threats, as he called for a judicial inquiry into the incident. Police were nowhere near the spot where the killing took place, Ghani claimed. Earlier, it was reported that one person was killed and another wounded in a clash between the rival PPP and MQM-P workers on Sunday night.

Akhtar Mengal gets SC’s nod to contest elections

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Monday allowed Balochistan National Party- Mengal (BNP-M) President Sardar Akhtar Mengal to contest the February 8 general elections from Quetta’s constituency of NA- 264.

A three-member bench of the apex court headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa threw out a plea filed against the acceptance of Mengal’s nomination papers by Yasir Ahmad — one of his contenders in the constituency — and gave a clean chit to the BNP-M chief to contest the upcoming polls.

Last month, Mengal’s nomination papers were rejected by a Returning Officer (RO) in Khuzdar in connection with his alleged offshore company. The BNP-M leader, however, termed the RO’s decision a “well-planned conspiracy.” Meanwhile, the Mengal challenged the RO’s decision before the election tri-

bunal. On January 5, the Baloch leader secured relief from the election tribunal as his nomination papers were accepted for the February 8 elections.

One of his contenders, meanwhile, challenged the election tribunal’s decision in this regard in the top court, which announced its verdict in favour of Mengal today. Earlier, he had announced that his party would go to the “court of the masses” if the nomination papers were not accepted by the election tribunal.

On the other hand, the ECP is set to hold free, fair and peaceful general elections as per the schedule. Almost 51% of the polling stations have been categorised “sensitive” by the ECP for the upcoming general elections on February 8. Out of the total 90,675 polling stations, according to the electoral authority, 46,065 have been categorised as sensitive and 18,437 as highly sensitive.

ECP sources said that the

total number of sensitive and most sensitive polling stations in Punjab has reached 18,620, and these include 12,580 sensitive and 6,040 most sensitive, whereas as many as 32,324 of the total 50,944 polling stations in the largest province have been declared as normal. The ECP on Friday issued the final polling scheme for the February 8 general elections, envisaging a total of 90,675 polling stations with 2,76,402 polling booths to be set up across the country for over 128 million voters.

A senior official conceded that over 150,000 fewer polling booths are being established than required under the law, which will make it almost impossible at various places for all present to vote if the turnout is high. As per the scheme, in Punjab, 50,944 polling stations will be established for the general elections, followed by 19,006 in Sindh, 15,697 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 5,028 in Balochistan.

South Punjab’s development PML-N’s top priority: Shehbaz

F.P. Report

RAJANPUR: PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif on Monday assured the people of Rajanpur of the revival of development projects after coming into power.

Former three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz, Hamza Shehbaz and other PML-N

leaders are carrying out vigorous election campaigns across Punjab ahead of the general elections. Shehbaz Sharif reached Rajanpur to address a public gathering in connection with the February 8 general elections on a helicopter. The development of South Punjab remains PML-N’s top priority, he added.

The former prime minister thanked the people of Pakistan for their continued support for Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. Recalling the 2010 super floods, the PML-N president said he reached Rajanpur to oversee the relief work in the region being the then-chief minister.

EU providing 100m for post-flood resilience

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The European Union (EU) would provide an additional EUR 100 million to reinforce Pakistan’s resilience in the aftermath of the devastating 2022 floods that severely impacted the nation.

According to press statement issued by Economic Affairs Division, EU Ambassador to Pakistan, Ms. Riina Kionka and Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Dr. Kazim Niaz signed five new EU grant agreements in this regard. “These agreements, under Team Europe’s response to the 2022 post-flood Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction Framework, signify a substantial commitment of nearly EUR 100 million (equivalent to over PKR 30 billion),” the statement added.

The new EU support package aims to fortify Pakistan’s resilience in the aftermath of the floods, bringing the total Team Europe response to the 2022 floods to over EUR 930 million. The specific focus areas include revitalising the rural economy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and restoring the disrupted livestock value chains in flood-affected Balochistan.

Notably, these activities align with the expansive EU Global Gateway initiative, the largest EU investment program designed to propel the global green transition. Moreover, the package extends its impact by fortifying Pakistan’s long-term resilience through targeted investments in human rights, gender equality, and civil society. On the occasion, Dr. Kazim Niaz thanked the EU for their support and further emphasised that there were unmet needs in the flood affected areas that require assistance of development partners.

Russia and Ukraine bicker over tiny front-line village

MOCOW: Russia has claimed its forces have taken control of the village of Tabaiyka in Ukraine’s Kharkiv region, but Kyiv has denied the claim. Moscow claimed it had taken the tiny village on Monday in a defence ministry statement. However, Ukrainian officials quickly asserted on national TV that Kyiv remains in control. The disagreement illustrates the state of the bogged-down and muddled front line in conflict, which has now been ongoing for nearly two years.

The Russian army said it has “liberated” Tabaiyka, but Volodymyr Fityo, head of communications for Ukraine’s ground forces, said: “This does not correspond to reality. There are battles taking place near

this locality.” Fityo added that “Moscow nevertheless was “trying to advance in all directions”. The village of Tabaiyka lies near the border with the Luhansk region and had a population of 34 people before Moscow’s invasion.

Both the Kremlin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy have denied the conflict has reached a deadlock, despite the sprawling front line barely moving in months. Russia has for months been trying to advance into the Kharkiv region, hitting its main city several times and killing 11 people in an attack last week.

Ukraine’s major counter-offensive in the summer failed to push the invading Russian forces back signifi-

cantly. Kyiv is now seeking additional soldiers for the front, in contrast to during the early days of the war in 2022 when droves of patriotic volunteers were seen. With the front line largely at a standstill, the two foes have concentrated in recent weeks on air strikes, with cities and infrastructure in Ukraine and Russia targeted.

Moscow hit large swathes of Ukraine with drone and missile attacks, Kyiv’s Air Force said on Sunday. The Russian Air Force said Moscow attacked the central Poltava region with two missiles fired from its Iskander ballistic missile system. It also launched three surface-to-air missiles over the Donetsk region in the east. — Aljazeera

TNFJ announced supporting PPP in polls

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari visited the headquarter of Tehreek Nafaze Fiqhe Jafariya (TNFJ) Pakistan, in Satellite Town Rawalpindi. Talking to journalists on the occasion Chairman Bilawal said that he has come here to revive the relations of the times of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. He said that the politics of hate and division is harming Pakistan. We need to be united and we will struggle together for a stronger and better Pakistan.

The head of TNFJ, Allama Agha Syed Hussain Muqaddasi announced to support the PPP in the upcoming elections. Syed Nayyer Hussain Bokhari accompanied the Chairman PPP. The Secretary General

TNFJ, Allama Basharat Hussain Imami. Additional SG Allama Syed Qamar Haider Rizvi, Chairman political cell Zulfiqar Ali Raja, Secretary public relations Syed Hasan Kazmi and coordinator Syed Ali Mehdi were included in the delegation which met the PPP Chairman.

Responding to questions, Chairman PPP said that the PPP was not in PDM when in coalition government. We joined the coalition government to reduce the problems the country was facing. Perhaps the other party was not interested. We need to solve our problems unitedly and there is benefit in working together. Chairman Bilawal said that he does not listen to the speeches of Mian Nawaz Sharif but I have challenged him for a debate as it is a tradition internation-

ally so that everyone can talk about their manifesto. Shehbaz Sharif had said that he wanted to have that debate in Sindh which I had accepted. I do not know why Mian Sahib is running away from the debate. Pakistan specially Punjab has always supported brave people. Mian Sahib wants to become PM for the fourth time and if he knows about his own policies then he should come to Sindh and debate with me in any city of Sindh whether in Gambat, Karachi or Tharparkar.

Replying to another question Chairman Bilawal said that we are in politics for the last three generations. Shaheed Zul-fikar Ali Bhutto, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and our government from 2008 till 2013 fulfilled the promises made in our manifestos.