

PTI's Eman Tahir arrested
F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader, Eman Tahir, has been arrested from outside Peshawar High Court (PHC) on Wednesday. The PTI leader – who had been in hiding since the May 9 events – had arrived at the Peshawar High Court (PHC) to obtain transit bail. The court granted Eman Tahir bail and ordered her to submit surety bonds worth Rs200,000.



@thefrontierpost

First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIX

No. 347

Regd. No. 241

JAMADI-US-SANNI 22 1445 -- THURSDAY, JANUARY 04 2024

PESHAWAR EDITION

08 PAGES

PRICE. 30

PHC restores ECP's order stripping party of 'bat' symbol

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) revoked the status quo and restored Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) decision to declare PTI intra-party polls null and void as well as stripping it bat as electoral symbol, on Wednesday.

On December 26, the high court announced the verdict on Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI's) petition challenging the ECP's verdict, which had stripped PTI of using the 'bat' symbol. A single-member bench comprising Justice Ijaz Khan announced the reserved verdict on a review plea filed by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) against the January 26 single-member bench order. Barrister Gohar Khan and Advocate Anwar represented the PTI in this case.

During the hearing on Wednesday, Advocate Anwar said that the PHC announced its verdict on December 26, however, it has not yet been implemented. "The political parties, in the court, said that they stand with the Election Commission," said Anwar. "Can the ECP approach the court against the high court's ruling?" questioned PTI's lawyer.

"Did your party file any contempt case in this matter?" asked Justice Khan. He further said that the PTI wants the ECP to conduct free and fair elections. It worthy to mention that ECP had filed a review petition in the high court against its December 26 decision which had suspended the ECP's order and restored the party's 'bat' symbol till a final decision on the matter.

The ECP, in its order, had declared PTI's intra-party polls "illegal" and seized its election symbol of the 'bat' symbol. Following its order, the PTI approached the PHC seeking restoration of its party symbol ahead of the general elections slated for February 8. In its petition, the ECP then requested the court to review the PTI's intra-party elections and its decision related to the election symbol. Earlier, the court heard the arguments and then adjourned the hearing till yesterday (Wednesday).

Meanwhile, the PTI announced to approach Supreme Court (SC) against PHC verdict, restoring ECP order which had stripped the party of its electoral symbol 'bat'. This was announced by PTI Barrister Gohar Khan while talking to journalists, and dubbed the PHC's verdict

"biggest reflection of the ECP's biasness", saying that it has decided to approach Supreme Court (SC) against the Wednesday's order.

Gohar Khan questioned over the "legitimacy of election" after the ECP deemed the PTI's intra-party polls "unconstitutional" and revoked the party's iconic 'bat' electoral symbol. "If you take away the 'bat', the world will not recognize your election," he said.

PTI chairman said that the electoral watchdog was "chasing the case" like it had never done so in the past, urging the Supreme Court (SC) to "do us this kindness and listen to us.". Meanwhile, the PTI chief also said that his party would not boycott the election. "We will boycott [the polls] under any circumstances," he said, adding: "We will urge the SC — the 'bat' is not necessary, give us some other symbol.

"If the Supreme Court does not restore the bat, all the PTI candidates would the contest elections independently," he added. Earlier in the day PHC restored the ECP decision to declare PTI intra-party polls null and void and stripping it of its election symbol 'bat'.

NEPRA okays hike in power tariff

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The National Electric Power Regulation Authority (NEPRA) on Wednesday approved the K-electric plea to increase the power tariff for Karachi by Rs 2.87 per unit.

According to the power regulatory authority, NEPRA approved the hike in electricity in the wake of the quarterly fuel adjustment for second time. With this hike, the burden on Karachi power consumers in the wake of quarterly fuel adjustments will reach Rs 4.12. The hike was approved under the adjustment period from January to March 2023.

The power regulatory authority has sent the decision to federal government to notify the hike. Earlier, at the request of the caretaker government, the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) approved the tariff hike to maintain the uniform electricity tariff across the country.

According to the issued notification, the power regulatory authority approved the surge of Rs1.72 per unit for K-Electric (KE) consumers on account of third-quarterly adjustment charges for the previous financial year. The notification stated that a rise of Rs 1.25 per unit was approved under the adjustment period from January to March 2023, along with Rs 0.47 per unit sanctioned for the adjustment period from October to December 2022.

The national power regulatory, NEPRA, sent the official notification of the electric tariff hike to the federal government, meanwhile, electricity consumers in Karachi have to pay additional charges from January to March 2024 bills.

ECP indicts Imran, Fawad

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Wednesday indicted Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and former information minister Fawad Chaudhry in a case of contempt against the electoral body and the chief election commissioner.

A four-member bench of the electoral body, headed by Sindh Member Nisar Ahmad Durrani, conducted the hearing of the case in Adiala jail, where both the leaders are incarcerated. The former prime minister and ex-minister were present in the courtroom during the hearing and denied the allegations mentioned in the charge sheet. The ECP then adjourned the hearing on the contempt case till January 16.

The electoral body had initiated contempt proceedings against the former PTI chairman, former party leader Asad Umar and Fawad for insulting the commission and its chief during various public meetings, press conferences and several interviews. According to the notice, politicians face the charges of passing unparliamentary, intemperate, and contemptuous remarks against the ECP on various occasions.

The political leaders were asked to either personally appear before the commission bench to clear their position or through their counsel. Instead of appearing before the bench, they challenged the commission's jurisdiction in several high courts. However, the Supreme Court in January 2023 allowed the commission to initiate proceedings against them and on June 21, the ECP decided to frame charges against them which was yet to be done.

As per a copy of the charge sheet, the PTI founder and former minister launched a contemptuous campaign against the ECP under a plan in 2022. "The accused used non-parliamentary language against the ECP in a public gathering in Bhakkar on July 12, 2022," it stated while mentioning a few other similar instances.

Iranian General grave blasts death toll rises to 103

TEHRAN: Two explosions killed more than 100 people and wounded scores at a ceremony in Iran on Wednesday to commemorate top commander Qasem Soleimani who was killed by a US drone in 2020, Iranian officials said, blaming unspecified "terrorists."

Iranian state television reported a first and then a second blast during a crowded anniversary event at the cemetery where Soleimani is buried in the southeastern city of Kerman. An unnamed official told state news agency IRNA that "two explosive devices planted along the road leading to Kerman's Martyrs' Cemetery were detonated remotely by terrorists."

State television said that at least 103 people had been killed and 211 others injured, making it one of the worst such attacks in Iran, which has faced similar incidents in the past from various groups, including Daesh. No one claimed responsibility for Wednesday's blasts.

Red Crescent rescuers tended to wounded people at the ceremony, where hundreds of Iranians had gathered to mark the anniversary of Soleimani's death. Some Iranian news agencies said the number of wounded was much higher. "I heard a very loud sound and then felt pain in my back ... then I could not feel my legs," a wounded woman at a Kerman hospital told state television.

Reza Fallah, head of the Kerman Red Crescent Society, told state television the huge crowd was making it hard to get the wounded out. Other videos aired by Iranian media showed dozens of bodies strewn around with some bystanders trying to help survivors and others hurrying to leave the blast area.

"A terrible sound was heard there, despite all the security and safety measures. We are still investigating," Fallah said. Later, the state news agency said the cemetery had been evacuated and closed until further



notice. The government announced that Thursday would be a day of mourning.

While the authorities have not publicly assigned blame, Iran's Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi vowed a strong response. "Those who committed these crimes should expect a strong and decisive response by Iran's security forces," Vahidi told state TV, adding that "everything is under control now and calm has been restored." In 2022, Daesh claimed responsibility for a deadly attack on a Shiite shrine in Iran which killed 15 people.

Earlier attacks claimed by the group include deadly twin bombings in 2017 which targeted Iran's parliament and the tomb of the Islamic Republic's founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Baluchi militants and ethnic Arab separatists have also staged attacks in Iran. The US assassination of Soleimani in a drone attack at Baghdad airport and Tehran's retaliation by attacking two Iraq military bases that house US

troops brought the United States and Iran close to full-blown conflict in 2020.

As chief commander of the elite Quds force, the overseas arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Soleimani ran clandestine operations in foreign countries and was a key figure in Iran's long-standing campaign to drive US forces out of the Middle East. Tensions between Iran and Israel, along with its ally the United States, have reached a new high over Israel's war on Iranian-backed Hamas militants in Gaza in retaliation for their Oct. 7 rampage through southern Israel.

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi militia have attacked ships they say have links to Israel in the entrance to the Red Sea, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. US forces have come under attack by Iran-backed militants in Iraq and Syria over Washington's backing of Israel and have carried out their own retaliatory air strikes. — Arab News

SIFC Committee reviews progress to improve investment climate

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Apex Committee of Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) chaired by Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday reviewed progress on various measures being undertaken to improve the investment climate.

The Committee approved various policy level interventions to further facilitate the investors including strengthening of domestic dispute resolution mechanism. The committee also reviewed various projects and initiatives being pursued through the platform of SIFC.

It reviewed progress on privatization and appreciated the collaborative approach of various stakeholders in timely completion of various critical benchmarks and gave directions to maintain the momentum. PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. The meeting was attended by Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir, members of the caretaker federal cabinet, caretaker provincial chief ministers and high level officials. The committee also developed consensus on fast tracking the infra-

structural development to facilitate the investors, especially in remote areas of the country. The committee appreciated the ongoing inclusive approach towards human resource development to support emerging needs in key sectors of economy. The federal ministries presented progress on the projects being steered in key sectors and gave plans for timely realization of the envisaged investments.

The PM directed all the stakeholders to vigorously pursue various SIFC's initiatives to ensure their accomplishment within stipulated timeframe. The COAS assured unwavering resolve of the Pakistan Army to support government's initiatives aimed at economic recovery of the country.

The committee showed satisfaction on overall progress achieved in the key sectors under SIFC. It appreciated the enhancing level of economic engagements with friendly countries including finalization of Bilateral Investment Treaty with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well as signing of memorandum of understandings (MoUs) and Framework Agreements with United

Arab Emirates and State of Kuwait respectively. The forum gave directions to convert these sovereign commitments into economic reality at fast pace. It also showed firm resolve to take action against smugglers, hoarders and market manipulators that had impacted the economic trajectory and to provide immediate relief to the common citizens.

Meanwhile, the Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar expressed his deep grief over the loss of lives in terrorist attacks in Kerman an area located in Iran. On X, the prime minister said that Pakistan condemned this heinous act and stood in solidarity with Iran.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the Iranian government and the people at this difficult time," he further posted. According to global media outlets and Iranian state media reports, at least 103 people were killed by two bomb explosions near the tomb of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani on his 4th anniversary. A large number of people were also wounded when the blasts hit a procession near the Saheb al-Zaman mosque located in the southern city of Kerman.

PTI's plea seeking level-playing field: SC issues notices to officials

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued notices to the Punjab Inspector General of Police (IGP), chief secretary and advocate general on Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) petition seeking level-playing field ahead of the February 8 general elections.

A three-member bench led by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Musrat Hilali heard the matter and adjourned the hearing of the case till January 8. The proceedings of the case were broadcast live on SC's website and YouTube channel.

PTI lawyer Latif Khosa presented arguments on behalf of Advocate Shoaib Shaheen, who filed the appeal in the court. On December 22, the top court directed the ECP to address the PTI's concerns regarding the level-playing field on the former ruling party's petition.

In line with the court's order, the ECP representatives met the PTI delegation and assured them of addressing its grievances in the lead up to the February 8 national vote. However, the party filed another petition on December 26, seeking contempt of court proceedings against the ECP over the electoral body's alleged failure to ensure a level-playing field.

In its petition, it lamented the electoral body's failure to implement the

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CJ asks govt to give in writing that there'll be no more disappearances

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa on Wednesday asked the federal government to give in writing that there would be no more enforced disappearances in the country. The development came as a three-member bench led by Justice Isa and comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Musarat Hilali, heard the petition of Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan and other petitioners on the unlawful practice of enforced disappearances, praying for declaring it as violative of various articles of the Constitution. "We do not want a statement from any section officer. The Government of Pakistan should give us in writing that no one will be illegally disappeared anymore," the CJP said during a hearing of the case.

Aitzaz had prayed the court to declare that enforced disappearances are violative of Articles 4, 9, 10, 14, 19, and 25 of the Constitution besides declaring that the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances does not adequately comply with legal and international standards. Similarly, he asked the apex court to set up an effective and purposeful commission. He prayed the apex court that the commission should be headed by a judge of the Supreme Court while members of the commission should be the Supreme Court Bar Association president, Pakistan Bar Council vice chairman, Lahore, Sindh, Peshawar, Quetta Bar Association heads, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan chairman, National Commission on Status of Women chairperson, ISI Director General, IB additional director general and Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists president. In Wednesday's hearing, the CJP lamented that the country has been "fractured" by its people, saying that the state needs to change its mindset as court verdicts alone are not enough to end the practice of enforced disappearance. At the outset of the hearing, Ahsan's counsel Shoaib Shaheen cited the Supreme Court's verdict on the 2017 Faziabad sit-in. The CJP inquired how the Faizabad sit-in verdict is related to enforced disappearances. Advocate Shaheen maintained that the court has mentioned the role of intelligence agencies in the verdict. At this, the CJP asked Shaheen to explain the part of the Faizabad sit-in decision that applied to the participants of the Baloch protesters protesting against enforced disappearances. The counsel replied that the Faizabad verdict stated that peaceful protest is the right of every citizen and called for action against those who resorted to violence. "I am surprised that you are referring to the Faizabad dharna verdict," the CJP remarked. The top court adjourned the hearing of the case till January 9.



GAZA: People and relatives offering funeral prayer of their loved ones after bodies were taken from Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital's morgue after Israeli attacks.

IHC stops admn from forcing Baloch protesters to end sit-in

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday stopped local authorities of the federal capital from harassing and removing Baloch protesters by force from the National Press Club.

Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani issued directives to authorities in the federal capital while hearing a case pertaining to the alleged harassment and the use of force against Baloch families protesting against extra-judicial killing and enforced disappearances. Additionally, the high court also ordered in-person appearance of Islamabad's deputy commissioner (DC) and senior superintendent police (SSP) Operations in the next hearing on January 5.

Justice Kayani was hearing a petition filed by a Baloch activist Sammi Deen Baloch against alleged harassment of protesting families by police. At the outset of the hearing, Ataullah Kundi Advocate, who appeared as Sammi's lawyer, apprised the court that Baloch families have staged a sit-in outside the National Press Club in Islamabad.

The police had arrested several women and children after lodging cases before the court ordered their release, he added. Authorities later attempted

to vacate the sit-in venue by forcing women to sit in buses, said the lawyer, adding Islamabad policemen were continuously harassing them by seizing speakers and sometimes by creating tense situations of relaunching crackdowns.

The judge questioned whether the protesters were advancing to somewhere other than their venue. The lawyer replied that Baloch marchers were not advancing anywhere. The judge remarked that Shahra-e-Dastoor, in other words, Constitution Avenue has a history of hosting big demonstrations and sit-ins.

Some people had used the same spot to stage months-long sit-ins on Shahrah-e-Dastoor and hurled abuses at the courts, he continued. While reprimanding the federal capital's authorities, Justice Kayani observed that Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI) was responsible for handling the situation but the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) apparently had no interest in holding local government (LG) polls despite court orders.

He added an administration was now running Islamabad's municipal authority and no one had an interest to accept the constitutional rights of the citizens. Later, the IHC judge issued orders, barring

authorities from harassing and removing the Baloch marchers by force besides ordering DC Islamabad and SSP Operations to ensure their personal appearance in the next hearing. The hearing was adjourned till January 5.

Dawar survives gun attack

F.P. Report

MIRAN SHAH: Former lawmaker and National Democratic Movement (NDM) Chairman Mohsin Dawar remained unhurt after his vehicle came under fire in North Waziristan's Miranshah on Wednesday, police said.

North Waziristan District Police Officer (DPO) Rohan Zeb said Dawar was targeted during an election campaign in the area. "The vehicle carrying the former lawmaker was bulletproof," he told reporters. Zeb said security guards accompanying Dawar responded with gunfire, adding that the attackers used short machine guns (SMGs) in the assault. The DPO said an additional contingent of police had been sent to the NDM leader after the attack.

Keamari Police operation nets drug dealers

KARACHI (APP): Keamari District's Pak Colony Police Station conducted targeted operations at two separate locations in Old Golimar, resulting in the arrest of two suspects engaged in drug dealing and gang-related activities, as confirmed by SSP Arif Aslam Rao.

The apprehended individuals, identified as Javed and Zaid Ahmed, were found in possession of explosives, drugs, and over 0.2 million rupees.

A hand grenade was seized from Javed, while Zaid Ahmed was found with 115 grams of crystal meth and 0.2 million rupees in cash.

Both detainees have ties to drug peddling and gang warfare, with Javed being sought by the police in two attempted murder cases. The arrests were made in Old Golimar, and ongoing investigations include the registration of cases against the accused.

Minister acknowledges nurses role in health sector

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Punjab Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare Dr. Jamal Nasir said on Wednesday that nurses play a crucial role in treatment and care of patients. He acknowledged their services with appreciation for serving humanity, emphasizing the need for essential measures to fulfill the genuine demands of nursing staff.

Dr. Jamal Nasir held discussions with a delegation from the Young Nurses Association on Wednesday, assuring them of compassionate consideration of their demands and pledging to convey these concerns to the chief minister.

The Young Nurses expressed gratitude to Dr. Jamal Nasir, thanking him for the meeting and appreciating his acknowledgment of their demands.

KU workshop emphasizes IP rights, responsibility, challenges

KARACHI (APP): The Office of Research, Innovation, and Commercialization of the University of Karachi organized a two-day long workshop for the faculty capacity building on IP Rights at the KU Chinese Teachers Memorial Auditorium on Wednesday.

The chief guest of the inaugural session of the first day of the workshop, the Chairman of Sindh Higher Education Commission, Professor Dr S. M. Tariq Rafi during his address mentioned that he believes this workshop would help create awareness among the faculty members and scholars that Intellectual Property (IP) Rights will give legal protection to research work of our teachers, scholars, and researchers. He asked them to learn more about IP Rights, its responsibilities, prospects, and challenges in detail. He shared that the provincial HEC is taking steps to bring academia and the business community closer so that our universities do not lose talent and their products can be safeguarded through IP Rights.

Traders delegation meets governor

LAHORE (APP): A traders' delegation, led by Chairman Anjuman-e-Tajran Lahore (Quaid-e-Azam Group) Waqar Ahmad Mian, called on Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman at Governor's House, here on Wednesday.

The governor said the business community was playing a key role in socioeconomic development of the country. He said he had frequently been meeting delegations belonging to the business community. He said strengthening of the business community would create employment opportunities in the country.

Governor Balighur Rehman said businesspeople not only feed their families but also become a source of employment for many other families. He said it was commendable that the businesspeople were active in philanthropic work and lending a helping hand to people in need. He said that the business community came forward and helped people during earthquake, Covid epidemic, and floods.

The trader body representatives informed the governor about various problems they were facing including law and order issues, parking, electric wires, streetlights, etc. The governor promised conveying those problems to the relevant departments for their swift resolution. The delegation comprised Imran Bashir (patron-in-chief), Anjuman-e-Tajran Lahore (Quaid-e-Azam Group), Malik Ijaz (Chief Patron), Nasir, Ahmed Ansari, Salik Ashfaq and Malik Farooq Hafeez and others.

Javed emphasises patient care as top priority

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Punjab Health Minister Professor Dr. Javed Akram Wednesday highlighted the paramount importance of patient care during an unannounced inspection at Children's Hospital here.

He affirmed that under the guidance of Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, the ongoing construction at Children's Hospital Lahore was under thorough review. Strict measures against any delays had been asserted, with a deadline set for the completion of the hospital's revamping by January 15.

Dr. Javed Akram reiterated the government's commitment to enhancing healthcare facilities, mentioning the successful progress of revamping projects in over a hundred government hospitals across Punjab. The minister expressed intolerance for any shortcomings in the ongoing projects and assured that they are closely monitored on a daily basis.

Furthermore, he emphasised that the revamping project at Children's Hospital Lahore is a priority, and upon its completion, the facility will be opened to the public. The directive has been issued to the Vice-Chancellor, Executive Engineer (XEN), and all contractors involved to ensure timely completion at all costs.

Patient feedback at Children's Hospital Lahore has been positive, with individuals expressing satisfaction regarding the treatment facilities. Present at the surprise visit were Vice-Chancellor University of Child Health Sciences Professor Dr. Masood Sadiq, MD Professor Dr. Tipu Sultan, contractors, and related officers. The commitment to improving healthcare infrastructure in Punjab remains steadfast, as the government focuses on delivering enhanced medical services to the public.

LTO Karachi surpasses target with Rs.1221 tax collection in H1 FY2023-24

KARACHI (APP): Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) Large Taxpayers Office Karachi for the first time crossed one trillion benchmark of half yearly collection by incurring taxes amounting to Rs.1221 billion during July to December 2023.

In the first six months of fiscal year 2023-24, tax collection surpassed the target of Rs.1216 billion and registered a growth of 26.79% over the corresponding period of FY22-23 in which tax collection stood at Rs.963 billion, Commissioner Inland Revenue LTO Karachi, Girdhari Mal informed while briefing the media here on Wednesday.

He said that the milestone was achieved despite nominal growth on imports at 2.5 % and as such substantial growth of 47 % has been achieved in domestic taxes. He expressed optimism that LTO will achieve tax collection of over Rs. 2.5 trillion in the current fiscal year 2023-24 as economic indicators including GDP growth, currency stabilization, foreign trade, current account, revenue generation and inflation expectations were showing improvement along with boom in stock market.

The indicators suggest that "economic slump is converting into economic recovery," he noted and vowed that FBR was striving to contribute in government's efforts for steering the national economy out of economic woes.

He said that HIFY 23-24 tax collection witnessed positive growth in Banking, Cotton Ginning, Electric and Electronics, FMCGs, Insurance, Pharmaceutical, Software and Shipping sectors while Automobile and auto parts, construction and oil exploration sectors remained in negative zone.

Another benchmark of 300 billion was reached in monthly tax collection of December 2023 as LTO generated taxes of Rs.320 b against the assigned target of Rs.316 b, he stated adding that it depicted 39% increase as compared to Rs. 230 billion collection of December 2022.

Refund of Rs.75 b were issued during HIFY23-24 with 103% increase over previous year's Rs.36 b while volume of Advance taxes increased from Rs. 230 b of HIFY22-23 to Rs.385 b collected in six months of the current fiscal year, he said.

LTO has conducted an in depth analysis of tax at domestic and import stages while collection ratio from direct taxes and non-withholding taxes improved as well, he said.

Sharing details of cases under litigation, the commissioner IR said that there were 1019 cases under hearing in the Supreme Court involving an amount of Rs.38 billion, 2408 cases in High Courts involving disputed amount of Rs.331 b while Tax Tribunals were hearing 4787 cases having accumulated tax amount over Rs.1121 billion.

Responding to a query he said that FBR has initiated automation process in 1996 and it has passed through gradual improvements and now most of the processes in FBR has been automated.

On another query he said efforts were under way for tax compliance and filling as it was observed that there were a certain number of people who were carrying out substantial transactions but they were non filer. He added that action is being taken to stop provision of certain facilities to them and their phone sims may also be blocked.



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Under-training ASPs meet Naqvi, discuss changing 'thana' culture

LAHORE (APP): Around 34 under-training ASPs of the 50th common training programme at the Pakistan Police Academy called on Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi at his office, here on Wednesday.

Addressing them, the CM emphasised the need to change 'thana' culture, abandon the archaic policing system and embrace the new era of policing to serve the public better. He highlighted that good conduct towards citizens and effective policing are the hallmarks of a successful police officer, making their tasks easier. He emphasized that Islamic teachings and basic human values encourage positive interactions with the public. The CM stressed the importance of maintaining a positive reputation and building a successful career through improved public handling and effective policing.

Mohsin Naqvi urged police and administrative officers to pay attention to resolving the issues faced by citizens. He encouraged young police officers to engage in positive interactions with the public, demonstrating good behavior and dedication to problem-solving. He emphasized that both public handling and policing skills are equally essential, with a 50 percent focus on each.

Furthermore, he advised police officers to exhibit good behavior towards citizens, seniors, and visitors, and to handle situations that cannot be resolved according to the law with patience and empathy.

He praised the efforts of district police officer (DPO) Dera Ghazi Khan, who won the hearts of the public through open kutchery sessions, showcasing the positive impact a police officer could have on the community. Discussing his efforts for departmental reforms, CM Naqvi added that over 20,000 policemen have been promoted in the past 11 months. He also highlighted the promotions of more than 40,000 officers and employees in various departments. The CM announced plans to upgrade 737 police stations, with 36 already completed. He also mentioned resolving the issue of government land allocation for 150 tented police stations in 11 months and asserted that every police station will be established on state land.

Addressing the challenges faced in upholding the rule of law, Naqvi acknowledged the difficulties in enforcing certain laws but stressed the importance of maintaining good behavior and conduct. He expressed concern about individuals driving without licenses, citing a recent incident in which six family members lost their lives due to an underage driver in the DHA area.

District judiciary decides more than 3mln cases in 2023

LAHORE (APP): The district judiciary of Punjab has decided a remarkable 3,083,235 cases in 2023 following the directives of Lahore High Court (LHC) Chief Justice Muhammad Ameer Bhatti.

According to statistics released by the Directorate of District Judiciary here on Wednesday, the sessions courts concluded 890,532 cases, and civil courts settled 2,192,703 cases across the province, from January 1 to December 31, 2023.

Similarly, during the last year, at least 3.1 million new cases were filed in the district courts of the province encompassing 906,897 sessions cases and 2,202,488 civil cases.

LHC Chief Justice Muhammad Ameer Bhatti commended the performance of district judiciary, adding that the decisions of such a large number of cases despite limited resources were outstanding. He emphasized that the substantial filing of new cases demonstrated the growing public trust in the courts' ability to address their concerns. He acknowledged the challenges posed by the sheer volume of cases and underscored the judiciary's responsibility to deliver prompt and quality justice, aiming to maintain and enhance the citizens' trust in the judicial system.

43rd death anniversary of Nashad observed

LAHORE (APP): The 43rd death anniversary of the legendary Pakistani music composer, Shaukat Ali Nashad, was observed here and across the country.

Associated with the lineage of musical talents, Shaukat Ali Nashad's father, Ghulam Hussain Khan, was a well-known tabla player, and together, they collaborated with the musician Ghulam Haider. Shaukat Ali Nashad, through his father, delved into the intricacies of the musical art, learning the secrets and nuances of the craft. His musical arrangements for several timeless songs have left an indelible mark on the music industry.

Noteworthy compositions by Shaukat Ali Nashad include 'Jaane Keh Kar Jo Bulaaya To Bura Maan Gaye' (Saleem Raza), 'Un Ki Nazron Se Mohabbat Ka Jo Paighaam Mila' (Runa Laila), 'Meri Zindagi Hai Naghma Meri Zindagi Tarana' (Noor Jehan), 'Le Aayi Phir Kahan Par Qismat Humein Kahan Se' (Noor Jehan), 'Tum Mile Pyar Mila, Ab Koi Armaan Nahin' (Ahmed Rushdi), 'Mere Dil Ki Hai Aawaz Ki Bichhda Yaar Milega' (Masood Rana), 'Tere Bina Yun Ghadiyan Beeti, Jaise Sadiyan Beet Gayi' (Masood Rana), 'Zindagi Mein To Sabhi Pyar Kiya Karte Hain' (Mehdi Hassan), 'Aap Ko Bhool Jaayen Hum, Ine To Bewafa Nahin' (Mehdi Hassan, Noor Jehan), among others.

PTV producer Agha Qaiser told APP that between 1964 and 1980, Shaukat Ali Nashad composed more than 400 songs for over 63 Pakistani films. His contributions to the world of music earned him acclaim, and he is especially credited with introducing the talented vocalist Runa Laila to the artistic realm. Shaukat Ali Nashad passed away on January 3, 1981 and he rests in eternal peace in Lahore.

اطلاع									
تعداد									
میل آراض									
نمبر شمار	نام ملحدیت	رقبہ راض	رقبہ راض	نمبر شمار	نام ملحدیت	رقبہ راض	رقبہ راض	نمبر شمار	نام ملحدیت
1	شاہ جہان پانچ ملحد پانچ	2237.2	کرادہ چارہ چارہ	91	کونوان ملحد پانچ	1483.71	کرادہ چارہ	92	کرادہ چارہ
2	شاہ جہان پانچ ملحد پانچ	2365.72	کرادہ چارہ	93	کرادہ چارہ	372	کرادہ چارہ	94	کرادہ چارہ
3	پانچ ملحد پانچ	167.544	کرادہ چارہ	95	کرادہ چارہ	134.4	کرادہ چارہ	96	کرادہ چارہ
4	پانچ ملحد پانچ	485.52	کرادہ چارہ	97	کرادہ چارہ	5058.24	کرادہ چارہ	98	کرادہ چارہ
5	پانچ ملحد پانچ	4348.163	کرادہ چارہ	99	کرادہ چارہ	2501.112	کرادہ چارہ	100	کرادہ چارہ
6	کرادہ چارہ	237.39	کرادہ چارہ	101	کرادہ چارہ	3512.34	کرادہ چارہ	102	کرادہ چارہ
7	کرادہ چارہ	626.85	کرادہ چارہ	103	کرادہ چارہ	646	کرادہ چارہ	104	کرادہ چارہ
8	کرادہ چارہ	394.2	کرادہ چارہ	105	کرادہ چارہ	167.05	کرادہ چارہ	106	کرادہ چارہ
9	کرادہ چارہ	210	کرادہ چارہ	107	کرادہ چارہ	893.58	کرادہ چارہ	108	کرادہ چارہ
10	کرادہ چارہ	1919.873	کرادہ چارہ	109	کرادہ چارہ	151.8	کرادہ چارہ	110	کرادہ چارہ
11	کرادہ چارہ	866.45	کرادہ چارہ	111	کرادہ چارہ	416.85	کرادہ چارہ	112	کرادہ چارہ
12	کرادہ چارہ	262.404	کرادہ چارہ	113	کرادہ چارہ	748.8	کرادہ چارہ	114	کرادہ چارہ
13	کرادہ چارہ	3230.55	کرادہ چارہ	115	کرادہ چارہ	969.075	کرادہ چارہ	116	کرادہ چارہ
14	کرادہ چارہ	2957.15	کرادہ چارہ	117	کرادہ چارہ	1830.84	کرادہ چارہ	118	کرادہ چارہ
15	کرادہ چارہ	4833.27	کرادہ چارہ	119	کرادہ چارہ	257.04	کرادہ چارہ	120	کرادہ چارہ
16	کرادہ چارہ	2585.2	کرادہ چارہ	121	کرادہ چارہ	237.6	کرادہ چارہ	122	کرادہ چارہ
17	کرادہ چارہ	234.5	کرادہ چارہ	123	کرادہ چارہ	840.99	کرادہ چارہ	124	کرادہ چارہ
18	کرادہ چارہ	5053.62	کرادہ چارہ	125	کرادہ چارہ	1123.62	کرادہ چارہ	126	کرادہ چارہ
19	کرادہ چارہ	217.775	کرادہ چارہ	127	کرادہ چارہ	1256.96	کرادہ چارہ	128	کرادہ چارہ
20	کرادہ چارہ	2104.324	کرادہ چارہ	129	کرادہ چارہ	338.656	کرادہ چارہ	130	کرادہ چارہ
21	کرادہ چارہ	2302.656	کرادہ چارہ	131	کرادہ چارہ	299.109	کرادہ چارہ	132	کرادہ چارہ
22	کرادہ چارہ	1373.7	کرادہ چارہ	133	کرادہ چارہ	149.34	کرادہ چارہ	134	کرادہ چارہ
23	کرادہ چارہ	1024.92	کرادہ چارہ	135	کرادہ چارہ	132.5	کرادہ چارہ	136	کرادہ چارہ
24	کرادہ چارہ	2693.7	کرادہ چارہ	137	کرادہ چارہ	1393.802	کرادہ چارہ	138	کرادہ چارہ
25	کرادہ چارہ	138.6	کرادہ چارہ	139	کرادہ چارہ	142.024	کرادہ چارہ	140	کرادہ چارہ
26	کرادہ چارہ	306.605	کرادہ چارہ	141	کرادہ چارہ	848.76	کرادہ چارہ	142	کرادہ چارہ
27	کرادہ چارہ	1307.425	کرادہ چارہ	143	کرادہ چارہ	996.084	کرادہ چارہ	144	کرادہ چارہ
28	کرادہ چارہ	307.5	کرادہ چارہ	145	کرادہ چارہ	660.212	کرادہ چارہ	146	کرادہ چارہ
29	کرادہ چارہ	759.45	کرادہ چارہ	147	کرادہ چارہ	669.6	کرادہ چارہ	148	کرادہ چارہ
30	کرادہ چارہ	61.5	کرادہ چارہ	149	کرادہ چارہ	1083.75	کرادہ چارہ	150	کرادہ چارہ
31	کرادہ چارہ	385.065	کرادہ چارہ	151	کرادہ چارہ	2575.108	کرادہ چارہ	152	کرادہ چارہ
32	کرادہ چارہ	341.85	کرادہ چارہ	153	کرادہ چارہ	52415	کرادہ چارہ	154	کرادہ چارہ
33	کرادہ چارہ	84	کرادہ چارہ	155	کرادہ چارہ	3431.892	کرادہ چارہ	156	کرادہ چارہ
34	کرادہ چارہ	294.4	کرادہ چارہ	157	کرادہ چارہ	2202.356	کرادہ چارہ	158	کرادہ چارہ
35	کرادہ چارہ	782.4	کرادہ چارہ	159	کرادہ چارہ	733.75	کرادہ چارہ	160	کرادہ چارہ
36	کرادہ چارہ	534.132	کرادہ چارہ	161	کرادہ چارہ	1969.8	کرادہ چارہ	162	کرادہ چارہ
37	کرادہ چارہ	52.5	کرادہ چارہ	163	کرادہ چارہ	411.25	کرادہ چارہ	164	کرادہ چارہ
38	کرادہ چارہ	506.454	کرادہ چارہ	165	کرادہ چارہ	315	کرادہ چارہ	166	کرادہ چارہ
39	کرادہ چارہ	336.3	کرادہ چارہ	167	کرادہ چارہ	1076.1	کرادہ چارہ	168	کرادہ چارہ
40	کرادہ چارہ	112.5	کرادہ چارہ	169	کرادہ چارہ	112	کرادہ چارہ	170	کرادہ چارہ
41	کرادہ چارہ	54	کرادہ چارہ	171	کرادہ چارہ	174.4	کرادہ چارہ	172	کرادہ چارہ
42	کرادہ چارہ	702	کرادہ چارہ	173	کرادہ چارہ	626	کرادہ چارہ	174	کرادہ چارہ
43	کرادہ چارہ	501.02	کرادہ چارہ	175	کرادہ چارہ	100	کرادہ چارہ	176	کرادہ چارہ
44	کرادہ چارہ	1798.2	کرادہ چارہ	177	کرادہ چارہ	1002.456	کرادہ چارہ	178	کرادہ چارہ
45	کرادہ چارہ	224	کرادہ چارہ	179	کرادہ چارہ	649	کرادہ چارہ	180	کرادہ چارہ
46	کرادہ چارہ	587.48	کرادہ چارہ	181	کرادہ چارہ	1358.721	کرادہ چارہ	182	کرادہ چارہ
47	کرادہ چارہ	2080.695	کرادہ چارہ	183	کرادہ چارہ	5511.785	کرادہ چارہ	184	کرادہ چارہ
48	کرادہ چارہ	112	کرادہ چارہ	185	کرادہ چارہ	1445.248	کرادہ چارہ	186	کرادہ چارہ
49	کرادہ چارہ	48	کرادہ چارہ	187	کرادہ چارہ	1836.987	کرادہ چارہ	188	کرادہ چارہ
50	کرادہ چارہ	1314.294	کرادہ چارہ	189	کرادہ چارہ	108.875	کرادہ چارہ	190	کرادہ چارہ
51	کرادہ چارہ	477.1	کرادہ چارہ	191	کرادہ چارہ	9966.72	کرادہ چارہ	192	کرادہ چارہ
52	کرادہ چارہ	36	کرادہ چارہ	193	کرادہ چارہ	1029.6	کرادہ چارہ	194	کرادہ چارہ
53	کرادہ چارہ	156	کرادہ چارہ	195	کرادہ چارہ	285	کرادہ چارہ	196	کرادہ چارہ
54	کرادہ چارہ	1894.88	کرادہ چارہ	197	کرادہ چارہ	1940.85	کرادہ چارہ	198	کرادہ چارہ
55	کرادہ چارہ	672	کرادہ چارہ	199	کرادہ چارہ	2093	کرادہ چارہ	200	کرادہ چارہ
56	کرادہ چارہ	1741.068	کرادہ چارہ	201	کرادہ چارہ	4352	کرادہ چارہ	202	کرادہ چارہ
57	کرادہ چارہ	162.5	کرادہ چارہ	203	کرادہ چارہ	1200	کرادہ چارہ	204	کرادہ چارہ
58	کرادہ چارہ	149.5	کرادہ چارہ	205	کرادہ چارہ	13253.66	کرادہ چارہ	206	کرادہ چارہ
59	کرادہ چارہ	130	کرادہ چارہ	207	کرادہ چارہ	1151.514	کرادہ چارہ	208	کرادہ چارہ
60	کرادہ چارہ	225.85	کرادہ چارہ	209	کرادہ چارہ	120	کرادہ چارہ	210	کرادہ چارہ
61	کرادہ چارہ	89.95	کرادہ چارہ	211	کرادہ چارہ	1219.34	کرادہ چارہ	212	کرادہ چارہ
62	کرادہ چارہ	42	کرادہ چارہ	213	کرادہ چارہ	1116.9	کرادہ چارہ	214	کرادہ چارہ
63	کرادہ چارہ	695.032	کرادہ چارہ	215	کرادہ چارہ	481.67	کرادہ چارہ	216	کرادہ چارہ
64	کرادہ چارہ	2119.5	کرادہ چارہ	217	کرادہ چارہ	94.64	کرادہ چارہ	218	کرادہ چارہ
65	کرادہ چارہ	181.412	کرادہ چارہ	219	کرادہ چارہ	3127.303	کرادہ چارہ	220	کرادہ چارہ
66	کرادہ چارہ	454.72	کرادہ چارہ	221	کرادہ چارہ	15326.7	کرادہ چارہ	222	کرادہ چارہ
67	کرادہ چارہ	517.92	کرادہ چارہ	223	کرادہ چارہ	221	کرادہ چارہ	224	کرادہ چارہ
68	کرادہ چارہ	305.66	کرادہ چارہ	225	کرادہ چارہ	4406	کرادہ چارہ	226	کرادہ چارہ
69	کرادہ چارہ	301.6	کرادہ چارہ	227	کرادہ چارہ	405	کرادہ چارہ	228	کرادہ چارہ
70	کرادہ چارہ	313.2	کرادہ چارہ	229	کرادہ چارہ	102	کرادہ چارہ	230	کرادہ چارہ
71	کرادہ چارہ	940.3966	کرادہ چارہ	231	کرادہ چارہ	1850	کرادہ چارہ	232	کرادہ چارہ
72	کرادہ چارہ	250.4	کرادہ چارہ	233	کرادہ چارہ	5649	کرادہ چارہ	234	کرادہ چارہ
73	کرادہ چارہ	154.2	کرادہ چارہ	235	کرادہ چارہ	3024	کرادہ چارہ	236	کرادہ چارہ
74	کرادہ چارہ	535.25	کرادہ چارہ	237	کرادہ چارہ	770	کرادہ چارہ	238	کرادہ چارہ
75	کرادہ چارہ	412.5	کرادہ چارہ	239	کرادہ چارہ	6048	کرادہ چارہ	240	کرادہ چارہ
76	کرادہ چارہ	1356.396	کرادہ چارہ	241	کرادہ چارہ	3706	کرادہ چارہ	242	کرادہ چارہ
77	کرادہ چارہ	135	کرادہ چارہ	243	کرادہ چارہ	3927	کرادہ چارہ	244	کرادہ چارہ
78	کرادہ چارہ	129	کرادہ چارہ	245	کرادہ چارہ	2849.5	کرادہ چارہ	246	کرادہ چارہ
79	کرادہ چارہ	295.064	کرادہ چارہ	247	کرادہ چارہ	1176	کرادہ چارہ	248	کرادہ چارہ
80	کرادہ چارہ	240.57	کرادہ چارہ	249	کرادہ چارہ	9912	کرادہ چارہ	250	کرادہ چارہ
81	کرادہ چارہ	131.8	کرادہ چارہ	251	کرادہ چارہ	1435.18	کرادہ چارہ	252	کرادہ چارہ
82	کرادہ چارہ	163.5	کرادہ چارہ	253	کرادہ چارہ	8070.84	کرادہ چارہ	254	کرادہ چارہ
83	کرادہ چارہ	501.41	کرادہ چارہ	255	کرادہ چارہ	9759.75	کرادہ چارہ	256	کرادہ چارہ
84	کرادہ چارہ	386.4	کرادہ چارہ	257	کرادہ چارہ	78	کرادہ چارہ	258	کرادہ چارہ
85	کرادہ چارہ	406.362	کرادہ چارہ	259	کرادہ چارہ	684	کرادہ چارہ	260	کرادہ چارہ
86	کرادہ چارہ	55.6	کرادہ چارہ	261	کرادہ چارہ	225	کرادہ چارہ	262	کرادہ چارہ
87	کرادہ چارہ	#REF!	کرادہ چارہ	263	کرادہ چارہ	9888	کرادہ چارہ	264	کرادہ چارہ
88	کرادہ چارہ	286.2	کرادہ چارہ	265	کرادہ چارہ	2003	کرادہ چارہ	266	کرادہ چارہ
89	کرادہ چارہ	534.356	کرادہ چارہ	267	کرادہ چارہ	1176.59	کرادہ چارہ	268	کرادہ چارہ
90	کرادہ چارہ	147	کرادہ چارہ	269	کرادہ چارہ	2024	کرادہ چارہ	270	کرادہ چارہ

Governor discusses financial affairs of varsities

— suggest strategy to achieve self-dependency

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali here Wednesday chaired a meeting that was convened to discuss financial affairs of higher education institutions.

The meeting among others was attended by Chairman Higher Education Commission, Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad, caretaker education minister, Dr. Muhammad Qasim, caretaker minister for Information technology, Dr. Najeeb Ullah, Secretary HEC, Arshad Khan and vice chancellors of Peshawar, Malakand universities and other concerned officials.

The meeting deliberated matters relating to financial affairs of universities and proposals to resolve existing financial problems. The meeting was informed that financial problems of universities could not be solved from federal funding but these problems needs support of provincial government besides implementation of administration and financial plan to achieve self-dependency.

Meeting was told that HEC has approved extension of Distant Learning Education Policy that would also help reducing financial problems of varsities.

Speaking on the occasion, Governor expressed concern over financial matters of universities and stressed to take timely and result oriented decisions.

He regretted financial position of universities and said that government is spending huge amount on provision of best facilities to students adding that we must realize our responsibilities to find a way out and resolve current issues.

Governor said that our collective aim is to prepare youth to meet challenges of contemporary world. He also suggested formulation of education system for strengthening financial position of universities.



PESHAWAR: Additional Chief Secretary Home Muhammad Abid Majeed presiding over a meeting regarding eradication of polio.

ACS directs for eradication of polio in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Additional Chief Secretary Home Muhammad Abid Majeed on Wednesday directed the relevant authorities to utilize all available resources to expedite efforts and achieve the desired results for eradication of polio in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He emphasized the need to address the difficulties and challenges in the complete eradication of the polio virus and stressed the importance of implementing all possible measures.

He highlighted that it is essential to remove all obstacles and adopting preventive measures and raise awareness among the public about the need of polio eradication.

He urged all stakeholders to strengthen their contacts to ensure the success of the polio campaigns. These directives were issued during a special meeting held in Peshawar at the Home Department, Civil Secretariat, in Peshawar, where relevant Secretaries, Commissioners, Regional Police Officers, Deputy Commissioners, District Police Officers, Coordinator Provincial Emergency Operations Center, representatives of the Pakistan Army and international partners.

During the meeting, all concerned Commissioners, Regional Police Officers, Deputy Commissioners, and District Police Officers participated through video link. Additional Chief Secretary Home received a detailed briefing about the current situation of polio in the province and the steps being taken for its eradication.

Regarding the challenges faced during polio campaigns, Additional Chief Secretary Home instructed the administrative and police officials of the concerned districts to prioritize and resolve these issues on a priority basis, with no tolerance for any negligence in this regard.

He acknowledged and appreciated the sacrifices and efforts of the law enforcement departments and polio workers. He urged parents to ensure that children under the age of five receive the necessary anti polio drops during the campaign and called for full cooperation from the relevant authorities to make Pakistan polio-free.

RTS issues showcase notice to DPO Swabi

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Right to Public Service Commission (RTPSC/RTS) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa issued showcase notice to District Police Officer (DPO) Swabi and Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Peshawar for registration of First Information Report, on Wednesday.

CCPO Peshawar had submitted before the commission that a complaint is registered in Roznamcha for mobile snatching case at Board bazaar from a citizen despite registration of FIR. However, RTS ordered CCPO Peshawar for registration of FIR in this regard.

Moreover, DPO Swabi also doesn't complied with RTS orders as the commission had directed for submission of report in case of land grabbing while police weren't registered FIR. RTS had issued showcase notice to DPO Swabi due to failure in compliance with the commission's orders.

Although, RTS had turned down a complaint from Dir Lower due to lack evidence in police torture case. The commission is committed for provision of public services within stipulated timeframe.

A two members bench of RTS heard three complaints from different areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and observed that the commission will ensure accountability of public servant to assure good governance in the province.



PESHAWAR: Candidate for PK 90 Amjad Khan Afridi addressing a public meeting. — F.P. photo by Ghulam Murtaza

Dr. Mehboob-ur-Rehman honored with Robert Burn Humanitarian Award-2024

PESHAWAR (APP): Chairman Mehboob Medical Institution of the Habib Physiotherapy Complex Dr. Mehboob-ur-Rehman was honored with International Robert Burn Humanitarian Awards-2024 as the runners-up among 169 nominees from all across the world.

Looking after his social and humanitarian activities Dr. Mehboob-ur-Rehman, the first Pakistani of being honored by world famed Robert Burn Humanitarian Award-2024 wherein around 169 nomination were filed and among them Dr. Mehboob-ur-Rehman was short-listed in the top 10 club initiation and later on was awarded as the top runners-up for the year-2024.

Talking to APP Dr. Mehboob-ur-Rehman, who dedicated his international award to the martyred and homeless children of Palestine, has short-listed among 169 nominees from all across the world for their meritorious services in social and humanitarian work. He said it is a great honor as the runners-up of the Robert Burn Humanitarian Award-2024.

Dr. Mehboob-ur-Rehman, who is Chairman Mehboob Medical Institute, Habib Physiotherapy Complex, Hayatabad got the award of being the first Pakistani honored for the award of his services in the field of social and humanitarian work.

It is a big achievement of Dr. Mehboob-ur-Rehman, who also served the ailing persons free of cost in the 2005 earthquake, 2010 flood, Afghan war and other humanitarian services. It is hoped that the government of Pakistan, while recognizing his services, would soon announce a civil award for Dr. Mehboob-ur-Rehman.

The students of Mehboob Medical Institution (MMI) also held a reception in the honor of

Dr. Mehboob-ur-Rehman and congratulated him for winning The Robert Burns Humanitarian Award-2024. The Robert Burns Humanitarian Award is a globally-respected honour bestowed annually on a group or individual who shows selflessness and dedication in a bid to save, enrich or improve the lives of others through the protection and promotion of human rights and work to deliver social reform.

The Robert Burns Humanitarian Award is an award presented annually around the time of Robert Burns' birthday to a group or individual who has



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah witnessing MoU signing between KPITB and Pak-Austria Fachhochschule Institute for implementation of youth training and employment program.

KP govt initate 'High Impact Economic Plan'

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government has initiated a comprehensive economic plan "High Impact Economic Plan" with the purpose of bringing the Newly Merged Districts of the province on at par with other regions of the country and province, in the process of development.

In view of the abundance of natural resources in the merged districts, have been prioritized in the above mentioned development plan so that to make maximum utilization of them. 10 important sectors included industry, commerce and technical education, mines and mineral development, agriculture, energy and power, livestock, forestry and environment, Irrigation and water, sports, tourism and youth affairs, roads and communication and border economy have been declared as important targets for the development process.

According to the economic plan issued here on Wednesday, an estimate of Rs. 142,614 million has been earmarked for development initiatives in these districts wherein, 139494 million rupees will be provided by the provincial government, while 3120 million rupees will be included as the share of donor funds.

Similarly, about 96 ongoing and new development projects of the merged districts have been included in the overall plan.

These projects included 23 road projects, 11 industries, 12 agriculture, 5 minerals, 8 tourism, sports and youth affairs, 3 energy and electricity, 7 livestock, 7 forestry and environment, 9 water and 11 border economy projects that will be completed.

In the economic plan, according to the expected results in the merged districts, about 61525 acres of land to be brought under irrigation while 41310 acre-feet of surface water storage capacity to be created.

Under the plan, rehabilitation and improvement of 629 km of roads in the next three years have been targeted, while 274 km of new roads will also be constructed during the same years.

Similarly, 320 farmers in the merged districts to be engaged in dairy farming during the next three years. 650 farmers will be trained with modern husbandry practices and 1900 high yield breeds will also be given to the relevant people.

According to the plan, electricity through off-grid solar system will be provided to 200,000 households in the seven districts while provision of electricity to 384 BHUs through off-grid solar system every year also included in the same comprehensive plan.

In the total 96 included projects of plan, 69 new/ongoing schemes will be financed by government, 21 potential schemes can be financed through donor agencies, while six projects will be completed through public private partnership.

Efforts to declare Peshawar load-shedding free continued

PESHAWAR (APP): The provincial task force is working fast-track basis to declare Peshawar a load-shedding free model district. In the last few days, record recovery has been made from the defaulting consumers and use of illegal electricity has been eliminated in most of the feeders including Peshawar and D.I. Khan and now these feeders will be declared load-shedding free.

These views were expressed by the head of provincial task force for energy, Additional Chief Secretary Home and Tribal Affairs, Mohammad Abid Majeed, while presiding over the seventh meeting of the forum, said a press release issued here on Wednesday.

Besides, Divisional commissioners, Regional Police Officers, Secretary Energy and Power Nisar Ahmad Khan, representative officer of Industries department and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) Qazi Tahir also attended the meeting of the task force.

It was informed in the meeting that a provincial task was created for the recovery of dues from electricity consumers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and to stop misuse of electricity. In a short period of 3 months, the force has so far recovered more than Rs. 7.74 billion while joint teams of the Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) formed against power pilferers and defaulters have imposed fines to the tune of Rs. Rs. 40.041 millions. Similarly, 57482 power connections have been disconnected and more than 20,000 cases registered against power pilferers while 924 accused were arrested.

In addition to this, the successful campaign has also brought significant reduction in the line losses. After Mardan, the provincial capital

Peshawar was also selected to be declared a load-shedding free model city.

The campaign is continued on 83 feeders in Peshawar in six phases. The first three phases include recovery and measures against electricity theft. The first three phases targets have been achieved by almost 100% while campaign on the remaining feeders in Peshawar will be completed in next few days.



PESHAWAR: Right to Information listening people complaints.

Cold, dry weather to prevail in KP

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

It said that dense foggy conditions are expected over Charsadda, Nowshera, Mardan, Peshawar, Swabi and D.I. Khan districts as well as over Motorway (M1)/Highways at night and early in the morning. The public are advised to be cautious during travelling.

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

The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in centigrade at different stations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were Peshawar 18/04, Chitral 18/-02, Timergara 19/01, Dir 20/-02, Mirkhani 20/00, Kalam 15/-06, Drosh 16/02, Saidu Sharif 19/01, Pattan 23/11, Malam Jabba 12/00, Takht Bhai 16/03, Kakul 18/02, Balakot 20/01, Parachinar 14/00, Bannu 18/06, Cherat 10/06, DI Khan City 19/02.

The lowest temperatures recorded in the province was -06°C in Kalam and -04°C in Tirah valley of Khyber district.

Dr. Mehboob-ur-Rehman honored with Robert Burn Humanitarian Award-2024

saved, improved or enriched the lives of others or society as a whole, through self-sacrifice, selfless service, hands-on charitable or volunteer work, or other acts.

The judging panel is chaired by David Anderson, Chief Executive of South Ayrshire Council, and includes journalist and broadcaster Kaye Adams; actor, writer and painter John Cairney; Nat Edwards, director of the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum; Habib Malik, former RBHA winner and head of Islamic Relief Scotland; Robert Stewart, President of the Robert Burns World Federation; Guy Willoughby, former RBHA winner and chief executive of the HALO Trust; and Rob Woodward, chief executive of STV.

Named in honour of Scotland's son, Robert Burns, this much sought after humanitarian award applauds the efforts of people who bring hope and inspiration, often in desperate situations, and help change lives for the better.

As Scotland's National Bard, Robert Burns is celebrated as a pioneer of his generation, with his dynamic vision inspiring the founders of socialism and liberalism. The humanitarian values he embraced in his short life are captured for eternity in his rousing world famous works which are now his legacy. Burns' work continues to inspire people from all walks of life and in all corners of the globe.

Since its formation in 2002, the Robert Burns Humanitarian Award has recognized the dedication, celebrated the selflessness and paid tribute to the sacrifice of each recipient of the award - all exceptional people with incredible stories to tell.

The winner of the 2024 Robert Burns Humanitarian Award is Dr. Mehboob-ur-Rehman said: "I am humbled and honoured. I am so thankful to Almighty Allah, my family, my patients, and my colleagues across Pakistan and in the World for this recognition. To be recognized with an award that bears Robert Burns' name itself is a privilege for me and is very special indeed. Thank you to South Ayrshire Council and the judging panel who have chosen me for this wonderful award. I dedicate this award to my mentally retarded children and I will always work towards their care in the community. He also congratulated Dr. Renuka Ramakrishnan for winning the award-2023.



In brief

Marble unions threaten sit-in F.P. Report

BUNER: The marble stakeholders unions staged protest demonstration at Baba Seri in Salarzai on Wednesday against ban on explosives and demanded its early withdrawal otherwise threatened of protest in front of DC office and set-in till acceptance the demand. The union leaders announced suspending all related services till acceptance the demand too due to marble mines factories transport and royalty to suffer, they claimed. The protestors were carried banners and play cards inscribed slogans in support of demand and shouted loudly too. They were blocked main Buner Swat road for two hours. Those addressed union leaders Imdadullah advocate Gul Roz Khan Khurshed Khan Sajad Khan Shukat Khan political figures JUI Amer Mufti Fazal Ghafor, ANP leader Haji Roif Khan JI Amer Mohamad Halem Bacha. The speakers were criticized the policy of banning red wire explosives due to which the marble excitement was suspended and about fifty thousand families suffered a lot and they faced worst. They accused mafia was behind to sell out one roll of red wire explosives of normal price rupees 12 thousand in black against rupees 2 lac which was a threat to peace in the region too while chances of misusing legally provided red wire explosives would be more protected as compared black marketing. They formed a ten members committee for devising strategy for talks and strike as well.

CIA police foil abduction bid

SADIQABAD (INP): Crime Investigation Agency (CIA) police on Wednesday foiled an attempt to kidnap nine individuals by the dacoits in the Katcha area. The police spokesperson claimed that the CIA police conducted an operation and foiled the attempt to kidnap the nine musical band members who were allegedly called near Sadiqabad on the pretext of a marriage function. The band members were on their way to meet the kidnappers in the Katcha area, where the CIA police took all nine individuals into protective custody at the Sindh-Punjab border. Later upon inquiring about the wedding where the band was headed, there was no wedding in the nearby area. In a separate incident, five policemen have been 'abducted' along with weapons by dacoits in the katcha area of Sindh's Shikarpur. According to sources, dacoits attacked a police check post at Kot Shahoo locality of a katcha area and 'took' five policemen hostage. SHO Kot Shahu, Mehboob Brohi, and Head Muharrar are among the five policemen 'kidnapped' by the dacoits. The dacoits fled toward Katcha along with the abductees. Meanwhile, heavy contingents of police have been summoned for the operation to recover the 'abducted' cops.

FIR against dead person lodged

DERA GHAZI KHAN (INP): What could be described as a weird incident, Dera Ghazi Khan Border Police in Karor Laal Esan registered an FIR against the father of former PTI MNA who had passed away seven years ago. Abdul Wahid Khan Niazi, father of Abdul Majeed Khan Niazi, was wanted by the police in the case registered under the 16 maintenance of public order (MPO). The incident, which has left people astonished, raises a question mark over the professionalism of the country's law-enforcement agencies as such incidents are seldom heard of in other countries.

Anti-polio campaign to kicks off from 8th

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai has directed the concerned authorities to use all resources to make the anti-polio campaign successful which is starting from 8th January,



on Wednesday.

Appreciating the outstanding performance of Mardan Division in the previous polio campaign, he directed to make a good strategy for the upcoming campaign. He was addressing a meeting of the Divisional Task Force for Polio.

Deputy Commissioner Mardan, DC Swabi, DPO Mardan, DHO Mardan Dr. Javed Iqbal, DHO Swabi Dr. Abdul Latif, representatives of the World Health Organization and other relevant officials attended the meeting.

The meeting was told that 2041 teams have been formed to administer polio vaccine to 466 thousand children in Mardan district while 1188 teams have been formed to vaccinate 320 thousand children in Swabi district. The meeting was told that since November 2020, no new cases of polio have been reported in Mardan division, while the environmental patterns of Mardan have also been cleared.

Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai has said that joint efforts will have to be made to eradicate the dangerous disease of polio and no obstacle will be tolerated in completing this

national cause. Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Water and Sanitation Services Company Mardan (WSSCM). He also inspected the various sections of the company, General Manager Engineer Muhammad Khalil Akbar

briefed the Deputy Commissioner on WSSCM operations and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project progress. The Deputy Commissioner was informed that under the KPCIP project a modern Scientific Sanitary Landfill Site and Sewerage treatment plant will be established in Mardan. He said through the Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP) project the domestic sewerage connections of six urban union councils will be connected with STP for treatment and reuse of water for irrigation purpose.

The Deputy Commissioner was informed that since 2016, WSSCM has received twenty seven thousand three hundred and fifty complaints in which twenty seven thousand two hundred and seventy have been resolved. He said that WSSCM is collecting garbage on door to door basis from Mardan city, while safe drinking water is provided to five thousands consumers in urban Mardan.

DC was briefed that Right to Public Services Commission (RTS) declared WSSCM the best

company for four consecutive times in the field of Solid Waste Management. He said that all the available resources will be utilized to provide best sanitation services to the citizens of Mardan. He said that providing the best services delivery to the citizens is our top priority.

Chief Financial Officer Naveed Akhtar, Manager Planning and Projects Imran Zaman, Deputy Manager Customer Relations Rahatullah, Assistant Manager Works Waqar Ali Shah and Personal Secretary to Deputy Commissioner Ishtiaq Khan were also present in the meeting.

Carpenters association elects new cabinet: All Carpenters Association Kasai Bazar election year 2024-26 won by Markaze Tanzeem-e-Tajirani (Zahir Shah Group). According to the results, Gul Syed was elected president while Hafiz Sohail Ahmed was elected general secretary. Zahir Shah Group's candidate for the presidency, Gul Syed, got 202 votes while his rival Nafeesur Rahman got 200 votes.

Similarly, on the post of General Secretary, Hafiz Sohail Ahmed got 228 votes while his opponent Aamir Sohail got 191 votes. On this occasion, the provincial general secretary of the central organization Tajran and the president of the Mardan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Zahir Shah, while talking to the media, said that the businessmen of the All Carpenters Association voted for those who raised the voice of truth.

They congratulated President Gul Syed and General Secretary Hafiz Sohail Ahmed, Zahir Shah expressed the hope that the elected President and General Secretary will continue their struggle for the welfare of All Carpenters Association.

HEC Chairman opens Al-Ghazali Library

F.P. Report

HARIPUR: HEC Chairman Professor Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed inaugurated the Al-Ghazali Central Library and Science & Technology Park at the University of Haripur. According to the university's registrar's statement, a splendid ceremony was organized to mark the opening. The event was attended by the Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Shafiqur Rehman, registrar Riaz Ahmed, section heads, chairpersons, deans, faculty, staff, and renowned Pashto author Javed Iqbal Afghar, who warmly welcomed the special guest, HEC Chairman Professor Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed.

During the inauguration, Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, along with Professor Dr. Shafiqur Rehman, unveiled the Al-Ghazali Central Library and Science & Technology Park. Following the inauguration, they visited the newly established Islamic Garden, planting a tree to commemorate the occasion. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed also took the opportunity during his visit to appreciate the horticultural exhibition, showcasing bonsais, rangoli designs, citrus fruits, vegetables, and attractive food

stalls, aimed at fostering students' creative abilities and enhancing their educational experience.

An admirable initiative during the ceremony was the distribution of toll cuts using funds provided by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan under the LCF-55 grant. Emphasizing social responsibility and empowerment, the University of Haripur demonstrated its commitment by distributing sewing machines and toll kits among the needy and impoverished, in collaboration with philanthropists.

Expressing gratitude for HEC's cooperation, Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Shafiqur Rehman highlighted the significance of the day's events, praising the Al-Ghazali Central Library and Science & Technology Park for their contributions to educational advancement and technical innovation. He anticipated the transformative impact of these initiatives on the university's academic landscape.

The University of Haripur, under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Shafiqur Rehman, initiated a comprehensive program to support vital aspects of students'

lives, emphasizing mental health interventions and providing religious counseling, acknowledging the importance of mental well-being in academic success and personal development.

HEC Chairman Professor Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed expressed optimism for Pakistan's higher education future, commending the University of Haripur's efforts in providing modern facilities for its students. He lauded the Al-Ghazali Central Library and Science & Technology Park for reflecting a commitment to excellence. He anticipated their role in nurturing the aspirations of future innovators and researchers.

The ceremony concluded with a symbolic gift presentation of birds by Dr. Syed Mazhar Nizami, Chairman of the Department of Forests and Wildlife. Professor Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed was also presented with a souvenir from the University of Haripur as a symbol of enduring collaboration between the institution and the Higher Education Commission. This ceremony signifies the educational excellence, innovative spirit, and community welfare efforts of the University of Haripur.



QUETTA: Chairman of Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Abdul Khair Azad addressing a press conference.

Admn blamed for supporting PTIP

Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: The leaderships of all political parties in Nowshera had blamed district administration along with other departments favoring Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Parliamentary (PTIP) president Pervaiz Khattak during election campaign, on Wednesday.

This was claimed by Jammiat Ulema Islam Fazal (JUIF) district Emir Qari Muhammad Aslam, general secretary Mufi Hakeem Ali Haqqani, Al Haj Pervaiz Khan, Awami National Party leader Zahid Khan, Abdus Samad, Irfan, Qaumi Watan Party Waliur-Rehman, PMLN Amjad Nawkhary, Sharif Alam and JI Syed Raza along with others while addressing media personnel at Nowshera press club.

The speakers claimed that district administration along with other departments are favoring PTIP by abrogating constitutional obligation. They argued Election Commission of Pakistan to ensure accountability of executive and administrative officials for political affiliation.

The political leadership threatened that if impartial administration didn't ensure during election campaign then they will be compelled to arrange protest on larger scale in favor of their demands.

PTI-P to secure majority in KP

F.P. Report

TIMERGARA: Central Vice President Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf PTI Parliamentarians (PTI-P), former Provincial Finance Minister and provincial assembly candidate for PK 16, Muzaffar Syed Advocate has said that PTI-P are a strong political force which was fully represented in the February 8 elections. He said Pervaz Khattak will be the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He expressed these views while talking to the media in Timergara and various gatherings in his constituency. He said that Pervaz Khattak is an experienced and experienced politician.

Dir voters asked to vote ANP candidates

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Several workers of the Pakistan Tahreek Insaf and Jamaat-i-Islami along with their families joined the Awami National Party during a function held at the hujra of Malik Wazir Khan at Maira Khall here on Wednesday. The ANP spokesman and candidate for NA 7 Zahid Khan was chief guest on the occasion.

Those who joined the ANP include Malik Wazir Khan, Gul Zada, Shabir Khan, Ziarat Khan, Nimat Khan, Habibullah, Zahir Shah, Farid Khan and Ibrahim Khan.

Several other political activists including Qadar Khan, Luqman Ghani, Azizul Haq of the JI and Liaq Said, Sher Hayat and Shamsur Rehman of the PTI also joined the ANP at Bandagai Munjai area. The function was also addressed by the ANP can-

didate for PK 14 Malik Muhammad Zeb.

The ANP spokesman said that his party was the real representative political party of all Pukhtun living across the country. He welcomed and capped the newcomers and promised them that the ANP would not leave them alone. He said that ANP did not believe in mere slogans but it believed in practical work.

He claimed that being a senate member he had provided gas facility and electricity to thousands of local residents, built a three-storey Bacha Khan OPD at Timergara hospital and spread a net of link roads. He said the ANP sought votes from locals on the basis of its past performance. He asked the participants to analyze the development projects in Dir completed by the ANP as compared to the rest of political parties. The ANP

nominee said the voters should vote for the parties which better serve the masses. He said the incomplete projects in Dir would be completed if the people voted for the ANP candidates in Lower Dir.

Zahid Khan along with the ANP candidate for PK 14 Malik Muhammad Zeb and PK 16 Sajjad Yousafzai also inaugurated the party election office at Timergara. Speaking on the occasion he said that people of Dir had never voted for him but he always served its people.

He said the ANP spent Rs 7.5 billion on supply of gas, construction of bridges at Odigram and Chakdara, construction of Maidan and Jandol grid stations and black topping of link roads when he was a member of the senate. He asked the locals to vote for his party if they wanted Dir to be developed and prosperous.

PPP to bring prosperity in Balochistan: Zehri

F.P. Report

HUB: Senior leader of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and President of Hub District and Spokesman for Balochistan Asif Ali Zardari Mir Ali Hassan Zehri has said that nowadays it is the era of social media and it is not possible to deceive the people anymore. The era of factory extortion, smuggling, occupation, bullying threats, looting and closed room politics is now over.

PPP will fight the mafia imposed for many decades by the power of the people and win the next elections by defeating the self-interested and anti-people elements through the democratic process. These views were expressed by Mir Ali Hassan Zehri at the Allahabad Football Ground addressing the gathering program and rally. He said that the opponents have become frightened by the popularity of the Peoples Party and have resorted to new tactics.

He said that because of not being able to compete in the field of politics, now the opponents have come down to personalities and are think-

ing that they will fool the people by making fabricated allegations, but the people of Hub and Lasbela are not fooled by their tricks and deception and the situation is that the people are demanding an accountability of decades of deprivation and the robbers who usurped the rights of the people have been hiding their faces for forty years. We don't just talk, we believe in practical measures and service to the people is our aim.

Meanwhile, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri reached the Allahabad football ground to address the inclusion program and Jalsa. He welcomed who joined the Pakistan People's Party. On this occasion, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri addressed the meeting and said that today, seeing the sea of people in this great meeting, I felt happy and pleased that the people have become conscious and have rejected the false and empty claims of the vested interests. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri further said that a large number of our mothers and sisters are also present in today's meeting, for whose participation I am extremely grateful to

them for giving us respect. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said on this occasion that the role of our mothers and sisters will be very important in the upcoming elections and they will play an important role in the success of Pakistan Peoples Party by using their right to vote.

Addressing the gathering, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri welcomed those who joined the Pakistan People's Party and assured that the Pakistan Peoples Party will fulfill the hopes of the people and after the success of the upcoming elections, the public interest projects will be urgently implemented and work will be done. Speaking on this occasion, the tribal elders and leaders appreciated the public services of Mir Ali Hassan Zehri and assured him of their full support and hoped that by succeeding on the platform of the party, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri has the ability to change the state of the city and after winning the upcoming elections, he will use his full potential to improve the welfare of the area and solve the basic problems of the people as well as their long-standing problems.

Embracing diversity: The essence of tolerance in Pakistan

Shah Asad Khan

PAKISTAN is a land effervescent with diversity which encapsulates a gamut of cultures, languages, and traditions. Its historical journey, rooted in the ancient civilizations and shaped by diverse influences, has woven a rich tapestry of ethnicities and beliefs. In this vibrant milieu, the nation's strength lies in its ability to nurture tolerance and inclusivity within its socio-political fabric. Pakistan's historical narrative is a testament to the amalgamation of diverse influences. The legacy of the Indus Valley Civilization, the imprint of Persian, Central Asian, and Mughal cultures, and the subsequent British colonial rule have all contributed to the mosaic of traditions, languages, and customs that define Pakistan today.

Pakistan is a country steeped in history and tradition, pulsates

with a vibrant mosaic of cultures, religions, and ethnicities. From the snow-capped peaks of the north to the sun-drenched beaches of the south, the country presents a kaleidoscope of diversity, where the ancient customs and cultures intermingle with modern aspirations.

Linguistically, Pakistan boasts a symphony of languages, over 70 in total, each one a unique thread woven into the national fabric. Urdu, the national language, resonates with its poetic verses and rhythmic prose, while Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Seraiki, and numerous others add their distinct flavors to the linguistic landscape. This rich tapestry of tongues echoes the country's long and fascinating history, bearing witness to migrations, conquests, and cultural exchanges that have shaped the Pakistan's identity as a multicultural nation.

Religion plays a pivotal role in Pakistani society, with Islam being the dominant faith. However, the country is far from a monolith.

Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Baha'is form sizable minorities, each adding their unique traditions and beliefs to the national mosaic. Mosques, churches, temples, gurdwaras, and other religious sites dot the landscape, standing as testaments to the tolerance and inclusivity that have been hallmarks of Pakistani society for centuries. Pakistan's ethnic makeup is equally diverse, with Pashtuns, Punjabis, Sindhis, Baloch, Kashmiris, Saraikis, Muhajirs, and numerous other groups contributing to the country's rich cultural tapestry. Each group possesses its own distinct customs, traditions, languages, and attire, adding a layer of vibrancy and complexity to the national identity. From the Pashtunwali code of honor in the north to the vibrant Sindhi Ajrak textiles in the south, Pakistan's ethnic diversity is a source of immense pride and cultural richness.

The Pakistani citizens inherit the spirit of resilience and unity which gleams through their

efforts to promote tolerance and understanding, irrespective of their religion, caste, and ethnic background. Interfaith dialogues, cultural exchange programs, and civil society initiatives are playing a crucial role in breaking down barriers and fostering mutual respect among citizens. The emphasis on education, particularly inclusivity in the curriculum, is the key to instilling values of tolerance and acceptance in our future generations.

Despite its inherent strengths, Pakistan's journey towards embracing diversity has not been without its challenges. Issues of sectarianism, religious intolerance, and ethnic discrimination have reared their heads at times, threatening the delicate fabric of national unity. However, the vast majority of Pakistanis recognize the importance of tolerance and inclusivity for a strong and prosperous future.

Pakistan's diversity is not merely a statistic representation. It is in fact the beating heart of

the nation. It is the source of its creativity, its resilience, and its unwavering spirit. By embracing its rich tapestry of cultures, religions, and ethnicities, Pakistan can continue to thrive as a beacon of unity and inclusivity in the region and even beyond.

While diversity is a source of strength, Pakistan faces challenges in fostering tolerance and inclusivity. Ethnic and sectarian tensions sometimes overshadow the celebration of diversity, resulting in societal rifts. Religious pluralism, a foundational principle, encounters occasional frictions, emphasizing the need for continuous efforts to ensure harmony. Furthermore, socio-economic disparities exacerbate these challenges. Marginalized communities often face discrimination, hindering the realization of a truly inclusive society. Overcoming these hurdles requires concerted efforts at various levels of society.

At the policy level, strides

have been made to protect and promote minority rights. Quotas for minority representation in legislative bodies and safeguards for places of worship underscore a commitment to inclusivity. Looking ahead, sustaining efforts toward tolerance and inclusivity is crucial. Embedding the importance of diversity in national narratives and policies, alongside fostering dialogue and understanding, will pave the way for a more cohesive and harmonious society.

Pakistan's journey towards fully embracing its diversity is ongoing, but the progress made thus far is commendable. Through continued efforts to promote tolerance, understanding, and inclusivity, Pakistan can ensure that its future is as vibrant and harmonious as its present. May the spirit of unity and acceptance continue to guide the nation as it steps into a brighter tomorrow, celebrating the essence of tolerance and the beauty of its diverse tapestry.



China targets friendly media, diplomats to ‘tell story of Xinjiang’

BEIJING: Albanian-Canadian historian and journalist Olsi Jazexhi believed in early 2019 that reports about human rights violations in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang) of Western China were lies.

Accounts from people who had fled the area as well as reports from human rights organisations were painting a picture of human rights abuses being perpetrated on a massive scale. Muslim minorities in Xinjiang - the majority of whom are Turkic-speaking Uighurs - were reportedly being deprived of basic freedoms, their cultural and religious heritage was being destroyed and at least 1 million of them had been interned in a vast network of detention camps. The international community had taken notice and the United Nations had raised its concerns.

But Jazexhi was unconvinced. "I was certain that the stories were a scheme constructed by the US and the West to discredit China and divert attention away from their own human rights records regarding Muslims," he told Al Jazeera. The Chinese government itself vehemently rejected the allegations, acknowledging the existence of the camps but describing them as vocational skills training centres necessary to combat alleged extremism. To see the truth for himself, Jazexhi contacted the Chinese embassy in Tirana about visiting Xinjiang. He was soon invited to join a media tour for foreign journalists mostly from Muslim countries and in early August 2019, he was on a plane bound for China. "I went to defend the Chinese government," he recalled. But he quickly found that defending the Chinese narrative was a far more difficult task than he had anticipated.

In the first few days in Xinjiang, he and other foreign journalists had to sit through a series of lectures given by Chinese officials about the history of the region and its people. "They were portraying the indigenous people of Xinjiang as immigrants and Islam as a religion that was foreign to the region," Jazexhi said. "It was incorrect." His disillusion only continued when he and other journalists were taken by their Chinese hosts to one of the so-called vocational training centres outside the regional capital of Urumqi. "They said it was like a school but it was clearly a high-security site in the middle in the desert," Jazexhi said. "They also told us that the people staying there were not allowed to leave so it was obviously not a school but a prison and the people there were not students but prisoners."

Once they entered the site, Jazexhi had

a chance to interact with several Uighurs and it quickly became clear they were not the "terrorists" or "extremists" Beijing had claimed. "I was talking to people that had been taken there for simply practising Islam by, for example, entering a religious marriage, praying in public or wearing a headscarf," he said. "One of them told me that she was no longer Muslim and that she now believed in science and in Chinese President Xi Jinping." Jazexhi confronted the accompanying Chinese officials. "I told them that what they were doing was very wrong," Jazexhi said. The interactions led to a quarrel between Jazexhi and some of the Chinese hosts. When he finally left Xinjiang, he was deeply shocked.

He had thought he was going to expose Western lies but he had instead witnessed oppression on a massive scale. "What I saw was an attempt to eradicate Islam from Xinjiang," he said. Since Jazexhi's visit, the UN Human Rights Council has found that Chinese restrictions and deprivations in Xinjiang may constitute crimes against humanity. The US government as well as lawmakers in Australia, Canada, France and the United Kingdom have labelled the Chinese treatment of Uighurs and other Turkic-speaking Muslims in the region a genocide. Meanwhile, several countries have imposed economic restrictions on goods from Xinjiang in response to evidence of forced labour in the region. Amid the criticism, Beijing has continued to arrange visits - primarily for diplomats and journalists from Muslim countries - to Xinjiang. Chinese media have reported about at least five such media tours taking place in 2023, with Xinjiang visits also arranged for foreign diplomats and Islamic scholars. Moiz Farooq, who is the executive editor of Daily Itehad Media Group and Pakistan Economic Net, visited Xinjiang in the middle of December as part of a delegation of media representatives from Pakistan. Much like Jazexhi in 2019, Farooq went to Xinjiang with the intent to observe for himself that the stories he had heard were not true. "There is a lot of propaganda about Xinjiang out there and I wanted to witness it with my own eyes," Farooq told Al Jazeera.

Unlike Jazexhi, Farooq left Xinjiang impressed by the region's level of development and assured that the local Muslims were largely living a free and content life. "I was able to talk to as many different people as I wanted at bazaars and restaurants about their standard of living and I, along with the rest of the delegation, were totally unrestricted," he said. — Aljazeera

Iraq war: Australia launches inquiry

CANBERRA (AP): Prime Minister Anthony Albanese ordered an inquiry into why 20-year-old Cabinet documents relating to Australia joining the United States-led Iraq invasion remain secret, saying Wednesday that Australians have a right to know why their country went to war in 2003.

The National Archives of Australia released 2003 Cabinet records in keeping with an annual Jan. 1 practice following the expiration of a 20-year secrecy provision. But 78 documents relating to the Iraq war were withheld because they were prepared for the National Security Committee, a subset of Cabinet ministers who make decisions relating to national security and foreign policy.

Committing Australia to war was the committee's decision. Albanese blamed the former conservative government of Prime Minister Scott Morrison for failing to follow the usual practice of handing over all documents to the archive three years before their due release date.

Retired public servant Dennis Richardson had been appointed to investigate over two weeks whether the documents had been withheld as part of a political cover up, Albanese said. A former conservative government's decision to send Australian combat troops to back US and British forces in the Iraq invasion was opposed by Albanese's center-left Labor Party, then in opposition, and triggered Australia's biggest street protests since the Vietnam War. Albanese said the archive should release the documents once they have been examined for any national security issues that could exempt them from rules mandating they be made public after 20 years.

"Let me make it very clear of what my government's position is: Australians have a right to know the basis upon which Australia went to war in Iraq," Albanese told reporters. "If this doesn't occur, we'll look at whether the government needs to take further action to ensure that there's transparency here," Albanese added. The government department responsible for passing the documents to the archive blamed "administrative oversights" likely caused by pandemic disruption for them not reaching the archive in 2020.

The department said in a statement the archive now had the documents and would consult with security agencies before deciding whether they could be released. The archive said in a statement it would decide within 90 business days whether the documents would be made public. The archive had received the documents on New Year's Eve and was giving priority to examining them, the statement said.

Japan jet crash: Why escape from plane inferno succeeded

TOKYO (BBC): Passengers dashed to the emergency exits of a burning Japan Airlines jet without their hand luggage, in compliance with the flight crew's instructions. Leaving their valuables behind was a "major factor" behind the swift evacuation of all 379 people on board, right before the aircraft was engulfed in flames on the runway of Haneda Airport in Tokyo, aviation experts say. Japan Airlines Flight 516 turned into a fireball after it collided with a coastguard plane as it landed. Five of the six people on board the smaller aircraft died.

The flawless evacuation on the Japan Airlines jet has astounded the world and won praise from many. Aviation experts and flight crew tell the BBC it boiled down to the flight crew putting their rigorous training in place and "well-behaved" passengers who obeyed safety protocols. "I don't see a single passenger on the ground, in any of the videos I've seen, that has got their luggage with them... If people tried to take their cabin luggage, that's really dangerous because they would slow down the evacuation," said Prof Ed Galea, director of the Fire Safety Engineering Group at the University of Greenwich. The state of the aircraft, an Airbus A350, made the evacuation difficult, Prof Galea said. "This accident was far from ideal.

Japan quake toll rises to 62 as rescuers struggle to reach cut-off villages

TOKYO: Japanese rescuers continue to search for survivors from earthquake in Ishikawa prefecture as authorities warned heavy rain, landslides and repeated aftershocks could hamper relief efforts. The regional government said on Wednesday that 62 people had been confirmed dead and more than 300 injured, 20 of them seriously.

It warned the death toll was likely to climb further. The magnitude-7.6 quake struck off the Noto Peninsula, flattening houses in Suzu on its northern coast and triggering fires that ravaged parts of nearby Wajima City. It also ripped up roads, adding to the challenge of search and rescue. More than 31,800 people were in shelters, the government said.

"More than 40 hours have passed since the disaster. We have received a lot of information about people in need of rescue and there are people waiting for help," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said after an emergency task force meeting. "Rescue efforts are being made by the local authorities, police, firefighters and other operational units, while the number of personnel and rescue dogs is enhanced." Kishida said the central government was trying to bring help to the worst-affected parts of the Noto Peninsula by ship because roads had been left almost impassable. Japan's Self-Defence Forces was also using helicopters to reach cut-off villages, the Kyodo news agency reported.

Complicating the relief effort, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said heavy rain was expected, which could increase the risk of landslides. In Suzu, Mayor Masuhiro Izumiya said there were "almost no houses



standing". "About 90 percent of the houses [in the town] are completely or almost completely destroyed... the situation is really catastrophic," he said, according to broadcaster TBS.

Nearly 34,000 households remained without power in Ishikawa prefecture, the local utility said. Many cities were without running water. The US Geological Survey measured the quake at a magnitude of 7.5, while the JMA put it at 7.6 and issued a major tsunami warning, which was later lifted. Quake was one of more than 400 to shake the region up until Wednesday morning, according to the JMA. Four of the world's tectonic plates meet in Japan making the country particularly prone to earthquakes.

It experiences hundreds every year, but most cause little to no damage. Although casualty numbers from quake have continued to climb, the prompt public warnings, relayed on

broadcasts and phones, and the quick response from the general public and officials appeared to have limited some of the impact. Toshitaka Katada, a University of Tokyo professor specialising in disasters, said people were prepared, with evacuation plans worked out and emergency supplies in stock. "There are probably no people on Earth who are as disaster-ready as the Japanese," he told The Associated Press news agency.

The number of earthquakes in the Noto Peninsula region has been steadily increasing since 2018, a Japanese government report said last year. In 2011, Japan's northeast was hit by one of the most powerful earthquakes ever recorded. The 9.0 magnitude undersea quake triggered a massive tsunami that wiped out entire communities and brought disaster to the Fukushima nuclear plant. At least 18,500 people were killed. — Aljazeera

Sister of North Korean leader derides South Korea's president

SEOUL (AP): The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has derided South Korea's conservative president for being "foolishly brave" but called his liberal predecessor "very smart" - rhetoric likely meant to help stoke domestic divisions in South Korea.

Her statement came as a response to South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's New Year's Day address, in which he said he would bolster South Korea's military capability and enhance its alliance with the United States to cope with North Korea's evolving nuclear threats. Since taking office in 2022, Yoon has made such comments numerous times. Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, used Yoon's latest remarks as an opportunity to fire off derisive rhetoric against him.

"This person ... has persistently called for 'peace by force' and got hell-bent on the beefing up of the extended deterrence and the South Korea-US joint military exercises, thus putting the destiny of (South Korea) on the last extremity," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by state media. Some observers say she may be seeking to boost anti-Yoon sentiments in South Korea among those opposing his North Korea policy ahead of April's parliamentary elections. Kim Yo Jong said that Yoon's "foolishly brave" stance and

"fanatical military confrontation posture" have led to North Korea beefing up its military programs. She said Yoon's New Year's Day speech once again provided North Korea with a justification to obtain "more overwhelming nuclear fighting capability." Later she compared Yoon with his liberal predecessor, Moon Jae-in, calling the former South Korean president "very smart and crafty."

She said that Moon's appeasement policy left North Korea wasting time and failing to press forward with its arms buildup programs. She said Moon pleaded for North Korea to impose a moratorium on its missile and nuclear tests while bolstering South Korea's own national security by procuring advanced US fighter jets and winning US consent in acquiring more powerful missiles. But her praise of Moon contradicts earlier statements in which she and her government have previously berated him severely. In 2021, she called Moon "a parrot raised by America" after he criticized North Korean missile tests. In 2019, in one of the most disdainful insults directed at Moon, an unidentified North Korean government committee spokesperson said that Moon's comments hoping for better ties would make even the "boiled head of a cow break out into side-splitting laughter." "Kim

Jong Un and Kim Yo Jong are likely missing Moon's period because he was easier to deal with," said Moon Seong Mook, an analyst for the Seoul-based Korea Research Institute for National Strategy. "They likely strongly wish Moon's allies would win the parliamentary elections and later regain South Korea's presidency, so they are trying to meddle in South Korean politics." On Wednesday, Yoon's Defense Ministry called Kim Yo Jong's statement "an irrational claim and sophistry that makes no sense." A ministry statement said South Korea's military will strongly and swiftly punish any provocations by North Korea. Moon Jae-in, who governed South Korea from 2017-2022, was a champion of inter-Korean rapprochement. He met Kim Jong Un three times in 2018, touching off a flurry of short-lived exchange programs between the rivals and helping arrange the first North Korea-US summit held between Kim and then-US President Donald Trump. But North Korea turned a cold shoulder on Moon and cut off ties after its diplomacy with the United States fell apart in 2019. Moon's engagement policy drew both praise and criticism. His supporters credited him with achieving cooperation with North Korea and avoiding major armed clashes, but opponents say he was a naive

North Korea sympathizer who ended up helping the North buy time to advance its nuclear program in the face of international sanctions and pressure.

Since the collapse of the nuclear diplomacy with the US, North Korea has been pushing hard to modernize its nuclear arsenal. That has prompted South Korea and the US - now led by Yoon and President Joe Biden - to expand their military exercises and increase the temporary deployments of strategic US assets like bombers, aircraft carriers and a nuclear-armed submarine. North Korea views such moves as a major security threat. Moon Seong Mook, the expert, said Kim Jong Un appears "really angry" because his advancing nuclear program has failed to give him a strategic dominance on the Korean Peninsula. Many experts say Kim Jong Un will likely intensify his weapons tests ahead of the US presidential election in November because he believes he can wrest major concessions like sanctions relief if Trump returns to the White House. Moon Seong Mook said North Korea won't likely win what it wants even if Trump is reelected. But some say Trump may meet Kim again and offer concessions, as the US is now preoccupied with other urgent issues like the Ukraine-Russia and the Israel-Hamas wars.

US Senator accused of accepting gifts from Qatar

WASHINGTON (BBC): US Senator Bob Menendez has been accused in a new federal indictment of accepting bribes from Qatar - the second foreign country he is alleged to have improperly aided. The latest allegations accuse him of a corruption scheme from 2021-23.

A lawyer for the New Jersey senator said the justice department claims were "baseless" and "bizarre conjectures". Mr Menendez, a Democrat, pleaded not guilty in October to charges alleging he acted as an illegal agent of Egypt. He has faced growing calls to resign, including from his own party, but has so far refused to step aside. The indictment unveiled alleges that Mr Menendez accepted gifts, including tickets to see car races, in exchange for comments praising the Qatari government. The document does not contain any new charges, but includes new details of his wife - Nadine Menendez. Mrs Menendez, who is also charged in the same alleged

bribery and extortion scheme, has also pleaded not guilty. Three New Jersey businessmen named in the case have denied charges as well. The latest allegation extends the alleged plot by one year, and it includes his time as the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee - a post he quit after the initial charges were filed in September. Mr Menendez, 70, has denied any wrongdoing. The new indictment claims he assisted one of the accused businessman - Fred Daibes - by making public comments in favour of Qatar in order to help him secure an investment.

An attorney for Mr Daibes, Tim Donohue, told BBC News his client had no immediate comment. After introducing Mr Daibes to an investor who is a member of the Qatari royal family, prosecutors say Mr Menendez "made multiple public statements supporting the Government of Qatar". He then supplied the statements to Mr Daibes to use as a tool to convince the unnamed Qatari royal to

invest in his New Jersey real estate project. "You might want to send to them. I am just about to release," Mr Menendez allegedly texted Mr Daibes in August 2021, referring to a press release that contained favourable comments about Qatar.

About a month later, the senator and Mr Daibes attended an event in New York hosted by the Qatari government. Days later, the indictment says, Mr Daibes sent the senator photographs of watches ranging in price from \$9,990 to \$23,990 (£7,900 to £19,000), asking Menendez: "How about one of these?" In 2022, ahead of the meeting with Mr Daibes and the Qatari investor in London, Mr Menendez allegedly texted both of them: "Greetings, I understand my friend is going to visit with you on the 15th of the month. I hope that this will result in the favorable and mutually beneficial agreement that you have both engaged in discussing." Among the benefits Mr Menendez received from the Qataris, the indictment alleges, were tickets to a

Formula One Grand Prix race in Miami, Florida.

It also claims that one day after returning from a trip to Qatar and Egypt and being picked up at the airport by Mr Daibes driver, the senator performed a web search for "how much is one kilo of gold worth". A search of the Menendez house in June 2022 discovered, among other things, two one-kilo gold bars that the government says were provided as part of the bribery plot. Agents also discovered hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash that bore Mr Daibes' fingerprints and DNA. Adam Fee, a lawyer for Mr Menendez said in a statement, "the government's new allegations stink of desperation".

He said the prosecutors' claims are all "based on routine, lawful contacts between a Senator and his constituents or foreign officials". "At all times, Senator Menendez acted entirely appropriately with respect to Qatar, Egypt, and the many other countries he routinely interacts with," the lawyer added.

China removes official after video games rules spark turmoil

HONG KONG (Reuters): China removed an official at a government body overseeing its press and publications regulator, five sources who were briefed on the matter said, days after Chinese gaming stocks were hit by proposed rules to curb spending on video games.

Feng Shixin was removed last week from his position as head of the publishing unit of the Communist Party's Publicity Department, the sources said. The department oversees the National Press and Publication Administration (NPPA) which in turn regulates China's vast video games sector.

China's State Council Information Office, which handles media queries on behalf of the Chinese government, including on personnel matters, did not immediately respond to a request for comment and

Reuters was unable to obtain Feng's contact details to reach him for comment. The five sources said Feng's removal was linked to rules the NPPA announced last month that sent stocks in the world's largest video games sector, including industry giant Tencent, plunging.

The sources declined to be identified as authorities had yet to officially announce Feng's departure. Feng has in recent years represented the Chinese government at events to discuss authorities' efforts to regulate the industry, including game approvals and real-name verification requirements for gamers. Reuters was not able to establish how long he had served in his current role. The NPPA's proposed measures, which seek to curb spending and the use of rewards that encourage the playing of video games, triggered fears

that authorities were once again cracking down heavily on the sector and wiped nearly \$80 billion off the market value of China's two biggest gaming companies. Analysts also said the plans brought the risks of potential regulatory changes back to the fore in the minds of investors, hurting confidence at a time when Beijing has been trying to boost private sector investment to spur a slowing economy. Five days after the rules were announced, the NPPA struck a more conciliatory tone, saying it would improve them by "earnestly studying" public views.

Beijing cracked down heavily on its video gaming sector in 2021, setting strict playtime limits for under 18s and suspending approvals of new video games for about eight months, citing gaming addiction concerns.

The Frontier Post

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Pakistan healthcare budget

CARETAKER Minister of National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination, Dr. Nadeem Jan has proposed the allocation of two percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the health sector. In response to a calling attention notice in the upper house regarding the non-availability of vaccines, especially the anti-diphtheria serum in the country, the minister said that our request to the next government would be to allocate at least two percent of the GDP for health, a sector that has been overlooked by all previous governments.

Pakistan's health sector faces numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, institutional corruption, a shortage of healthcare professionals, lack of healthcare infrastructure deficiencies, limited access to healthcare in rural areas, and socio-economic disparities affecting healthcare access for many citizens. These issues have contributed to a depletion of the health sector's capacity to meet the healthcare needs of the population. Historically, chronic underfunding, burdened with bureaucratic corruption and inadequate distribution of resources particularly collapsed the state-owned healthcare system in the country. Meanwhile, political instability and diverging priorities of competing civic groups further ruined the system due to the everyday experiences of the political leadership. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended about 6% of the country's GDP for low-income nations, whereas Pakistan's healthcare expenses revolve around 0.4% of the national GDP to fulfill the healthcare needs of over 240 million populace that is not more than a peanut to feed a colossal elephant.

Ironically, this funding is usually distributed by the administrators among major urban population centers and rural areas based on political interests instead of public needs or geographical requirements of certain administrative regions. Therefore, access to healthcare services is marked by stark disparities with the rural population and low-income communities in far-flung rural areas lack essential infrastructure and state-of-the-art healthcare facilities. Successive political governments introduced several initiatives including Sehat Health Card, health insurance, and Medical Teaching Institute (MTI) projects to improve the situation through increased investment, policy reforms, and other strategies to strengthen healthcare services across the country but those efforts remained short of required goals because of growing healthcare needs of the population which is increasing at an unbelievable rate of 2.3% per annum. Meanwhile, the private health sector and the pharmaceutical industry have shaped into cartels, blatantly using its stronghold for hikes in the prices of essential medicines and medical services including labwork, CT Scan, MRIs, and tests for serious diseases that are not available in state-run healthcare facilities in the country. Presently, several important medicines and vaccines including the anti-diphtheria serum and rabies are not available, while several deaths have occurred due to a shortage of those essential medicines in the country. This is a recurrent phenomenon that is the outcome of institutional corruption and the administrator-mafia nexus, which has not been permanently dealt with by Pakistani leaders over the past years.

Although, the Caretaker Health Minister has floated a same idea of allocating two percent of the GDP to the health sector, but our rulers have some more urgent priorities such as VIPs' security, Ministers' protocol, modification in lethal arsenals, initiation of construction projects and attached lucrative incentives that supersede public health, children education, and social well-being of the masses. As the newly elected government will assume office in the next few weeks, the time would illustrate the legacy of the incoming rulers, whether they raise the healthcare funding by 2% of the GDP or keep the masses lingering with the same issue in the coming years and decades.

Hazard of e-cigarettes

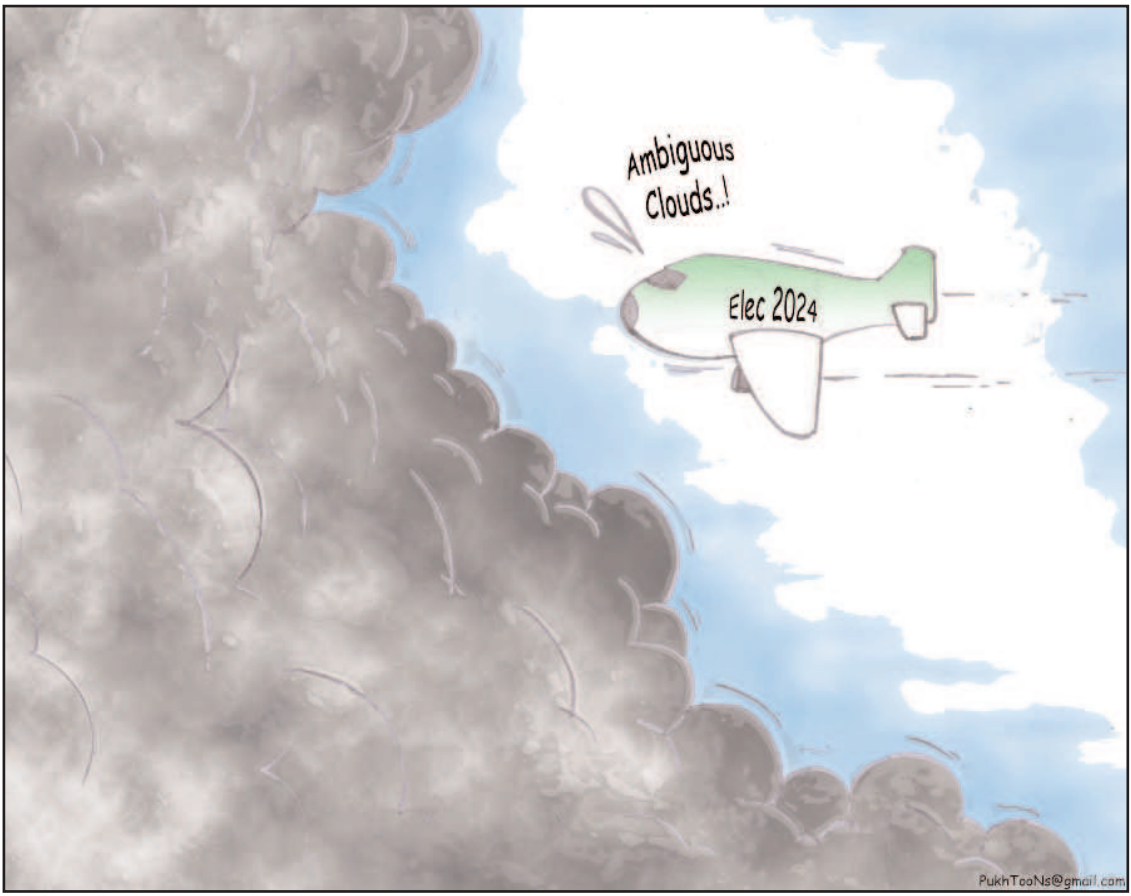
A concerning rise in the use of E-Cigarettes and vapes has been observed among the youth particularly college and University students in almost all parts of the country. Although these devices are often perceived to be safer and less harmful alternatives to traditional tobacco products, they are laden with highly addictive nicotine and Other harmful chemicals. Meanwhile, the cost difference and misperception regarding side effects and health hazards attached to e-cigarettes rapidly attracting habitual smokers and new addicts especially youngsters and women, poses a significant public health challenge.

There is a common perception in our society that e-cigarette is less hazardous than traditional tobacco products that are purely delusion and incorrect. The recent research has negated this theory and declared it equally poisonous like tobacco cigarette due to use of massive nicotine and other chemicals that directly effect lungs and sensitive body organs of the users. Unfortunately, e-cigarettes and vapes growing prevalence among people of all age-groups including men and women poses a significant public health challenge. That is very alarming in the absence of a comprehensive federal or provincial policy to regulate the sale and use of these products. This regulatory vacuum has led to unchecked access, making it easier for underage individuals to obtain and use e-cigarettes and vapes.

Due to serious health risks attached with the use of e-cigarettes and vapes, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recently recommended a global ban on flavoured vapes and urged for strict age restrictions on their sale, Pakistan Health Ministry and concerned departments have yet not access the gravity of this issue and these hazardous products were easily available in the market. Due to skyrocketing price-hikes of tobacco products, the middle and lower middle classes are rapidly switching from tobacco cigarette to e-cigarette that should be a great concern for health professionals. There is dire need of effective measures including legislation and regulation, awareness campaign, and control on sale/ purchase and use of e-cigarette and vapes so our young generation could be secured from dangerous health risks attached with the use of these hazardous products in the future.

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Israeli government should be pressured to curb settler violence

Yossi Mekelberg

CONFLICTS bring with them many wrongs and very few rights. Some of them are open to interpretation, but there are also certain acts that are indisputably illegal and immoral and a cause of aggravation in an already highly charged situation. Such is the case of Israeli settler violence in the West Bank. Until now, there has hardly been any genuine effort to stamp out this ugly behavior. However, this situation seems to be changing somewhat, with moves not by the Israeli authorities but at least by certain members of the international community.

Within a short space of time, the US, the UK and also Belgium have announced punitive measures against settlers who are involved in attacks on Palestinians; attacks that range from verbal abuse to actual bodily harm and even murder.

Early last month, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that his country would impose travel bans on extremist Jewish settlers implicated in attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank. On X, Belgian Deputy Prime Minister Petra De Sutter wrote: "Violent settlers will be denied entry into Belgium and I will be proposing that Belgium advocates for an EU-wide travel ban." And in the UK, Foreign Secretary David Cameron used the same social media platform to announce: "We are banning those responsible for settler violence from entering the UK to make sure our country cannot be a home for people who commit these intimidating acts." It remains to be seen whether other EU member countries, or any from outside the bloc, will follow suit, but this is the first time that some momentum has been built up behind calls for the Israeli government to take much firmer action to stop settler violence and hold its perpetrators accountable. Until these measures were announced, the response to this exponentially growing, ugly and damaging behavior was no more than lip service. And it is doubtful whether these measures alone, as much as they represent a step in the right direction, could stop a phenomenon that is fueled by extreme far-right, religious

and xenophobic sentiments that enjoy, at least tacitly, the support of the Israeli government.

For years, the international community failed, without exception, to stop the most deliberate and detrimental obstacle to any peace agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians based on a

contradiction of the very logic of settling this long-running conflict in a satisfactory and sustainable manner for both sides. Furthermore, those in the international community who have had the power to stop the settlement project have done absolutely nothing. It remains to be seen how a future peace agree-

makes it more concerning is that they have representatives in the Knesset, including in key government positions.

Members of the ultranationalist-religious Jewish Power party are reported to be putting pressure on the prison service to improve the conditions of convicted Jewish terrorists. One of its Knesset members, Limor Son Har-Melech, has described Amiram Ben Uliel, a terrorist serving three life sentences plus 20 years for a deadly firebombing in the West Bank village of Duma, in which three members of the same family were burned alive while another was badly injured, as a "holy righteous man." No one on either side of this conflict who commits such deplorable acts of terrorism should ever be described in these terms because not only are they terrorists but also enemies of those on both sides who would like to coexist peacefully. Moreover, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a settler himself, last year called for the state to "erase" the Palestinian town of Huwara after it was attacked by rampaging Jewish settlers. Should those who incite or glorify such acts of violence not themselves be banned from entry to countries that respect the rule of law?

There is an obvious link between the decisions of certain countries to bar violent settlers from entry while their governments are sticking their necks out to support Israel in its war in Gaza post-Oct. 7, despite the extremely high and utterly unacceptable death toll among civilians and the devastation inflicted upon the entire Strip. As much as denying settlers the right to enter certain countries is a step in the right direction, most pressure should be exerted on Israel's leading politicians to stop turning a blind eye to these despicable acts by settlers and ensure that the Israeli army refrains from giving the perpetrators any protection at all when they attack Palestinians - and that those who engage in these vile, terrorist activities face the full force of the law. If the Israeli government does not take these steps, then the international community should hold it responsible for settler violence and ensure that it faces the consequences.

This network has been deliberately designed to prevent a Palestinian state from ever becoming a reality, while the Palestinians who live there have been marginalized and discriminated against. Not only has this been done in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention, but also in contradiction of the very logic of settling this long-running conflict in a satisfactory and sustainable manner for both sides. Furthermore, those in the international community who have had the power to stop the settlement project have done absolutely nothing.

two-state solution: the ongoing Israeli settlement project in the West Bank. From a small and insignificant messianic dream of extreme Orthodox religious-nationalist Jewish members of the Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) movement to settle the land of their ancestry, five decades later there emerged a nightmare for those who envisage a peace agreement between two sovereign Israeli and Palestinian states that would coexist peacefully side by side.

A monstrous network of settlements has now become the home of more than 700,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, supported by an infrastructure that mainly serves these settlements but not the local Palestinian population. This network has been deliberately designed to prevent a Palestinian state from ever becoming a reality, while the Palestinians who live there have been marginalized and discriminated against.

Not only has this been done in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention, but also in

ment might be reached despite the expansion of the settlements, but what cannot wait any longer is the urgent need to deal with those groups of settlers that are resorting to violence, intimidation and coercion against ordinary Palestinians, while usually targeting the most vulnerable among them. They do this not only with complete impunity, but on many occasions with the protection of the Israeli security forces.

I have previously argued that, by staying silent in the face of settler violence, the entire Israeli society is complicit in these abhorrent acts of cruelty. I would also like to argue that the same applies to the international community and the organs of collective security that have also made a conscious decision to turn a blind eye to this phenomenon. Admittedly, the vast majority of settlers are not involved in any actual violence against the local Palestinian population. However, there is a persistent group of the most extreme settlers, mostly known to Israel's security forces, who engage in this terrorist activity. And what

Serbia's election crisis threatens EU aspirations, regional stability

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim

IN the heart of the Balkans, Serbia finds itself at a critical juncture following disputed elections that have cast a shadow over the nation's democratic credentials. The outcome of these elections not only holds significant consequences for Serbia's domestic political landscape, but also poses a threat to the country's aspirations of joining the EU, potentially destabilizing the entire region. As the stakes escalate, it is imperative that a swift and transparent resolution is reached to safeguard Serbia's democratic future and foster regional stability.

Last month's elections in Serbia were marred by allegations of irregularities, voter suppression and concerns about the integrity of the electoral process. Such disputes not only undermine the trust of the Serbian people in their democratic institutions, but they also raise eyebrows among EU member states, which closely scrutinize aspiring members' adherence to democratic norms and the rule of law. As well as being an internal affair, the resolution of this electoral quagmire is a litmus test for Serbia's commitment to democratic principles - a key criterion for EU accession.

For Serbia, the EU represents a beacon of economic prosperity, political stability and the promise of a brighter future. The bloc's accession process is a transformative journey that demands unwavering dedication to democratic values, the rule of law and transparent governance. The current electoral impasse threatens to derail this journey, potentially jeopardizing the dream of EU membership that has been a driving force behind the country's political and economic reforms. The EU, wary of potential parallels with Hungary's democratic challenges, has consistently emphasized the importance of upholding democratic standards as a prerequisite for membership. Brussels has closely monitored the electoral processes in aspiring member states, demanding fair and transparent elections as a fundamental criterion.

Serbia's inability to resolve the disputes surrounding last month's elections not only calls into question the adherence to these principles, but also risks alienating the country from the path toward EU integration. The consequences of a delayed resolution extend beyond Serbia's borders, casting a dark cloud over the stability of the entire Balkan region. The Western Balkans have long been a tinderbox of historical tensions and geopolitical complexities. Any sign of democratic backsliding or political instability in one nation has the potential to reverberate across the region, threatening the delicate balance achieved through years of diplomatic efforts and reconciliation.

Regional stability is a key concern for Brussels and any disruption in the Balkans could have far-reaching consequences. The EU has a vested interest

est in fostering peace and cooperation in the region, as evidenced by its historical involvement in mediating conflicts and supporting postwar reconstruction. A destabilized Serbia not only risks reigniting historical animosities but could also open the door to broader regional instability. The unresolved electoral disputes in Serbia have the potential to become a rallying point for political polarization, further dividing the nation along ideological lines. In a region where historical grievances still simmer beneath the surface, a fractured political landscape can be a catalyst for unrest. The EU, cognizant of the fragility of the Balkans, cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the internal political dynamics of aspiring member states.

To salvage its democratic reputation and maintain its course toward EU accession, Serbia must prioritize a swift and transparent resolution to its electoral disputes. The government must demonstrate a commitment to the rule of law by conducting an impartial investigation into the alleged irregularities and ensuring that the electoral process is free from manipulation and coercion. The Serbian people deserve the assurance that their voices are heard and their votes count, laying the foundation for a credible and legitimate government.

Simultaneously, the EU must proactively engage in facilitating a resolution to the electoral crisis. The bloc's commitment to the stability of the Western Balkans necessitates a hands-on approach, leveraging diplomatic channels and encouraging all relevant stakeholders in Serbia to prioritize the democratic process. The EU's role as a mediator and guardian of democratic values is crucial in guiding Serbia toward a path of reconciliation and political stability. While the resolution of the electoral disputes is paramount, the EU must also acknowledge the broader challenges facing Serbia and the Western Balkans. Economic development, social cohesion and regional cooperation are equally vital components of the accession process. Brussels should provide tangible support, both in terms of financial assistance and technical expertise, to help Serbia address the underlying issues that may have contributed to the current electoral crisis. Serbia stands at a crossroads, with the outcome of its electoral disputes having far-reaching implications for both its domestic political landscape and the stability of the entire Balkan region. A swift and transparent resolution is not just a prerequisite for Serbia's EU aspirations, but also a crucial step in safeguarding the hard-earned peace and stability in the Western Balkans. The EU, as a beacon of democratic values and regional stability, must play a proactive role in guiding Serbia through this challenging period, reaffirming the shared commitment to a prosperous and united Europe.

call to military conflict.

At this critical juncture, Taiwan has to choose between peace and military conflict, and prosperity and decline. The mainstream sentiment in Taiwan favors peace over conflict, development over upheaval, dialogue over animosity, and cooperation over confrontation. It is important therefore that Taiwan residents adhere to the 1992 Consensus, oppose "Taiwan independence", and recognize the dangers posed by the DPP's separatist agenda. The Taiwan compatriots should fully understand the destructive nature of the DPP's scheme, do their part in steering cross-Strait relations back onto the right track of peaceful development, and safeguard peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait as well as their own safety and wellbeing. Making the right choices at this pivotal moment will contribute to maintaining peace across the Strait and foster peaceful cross-Strait relations.

The China Daily

Taiwan paying a big price for DPP's wrong policies

Zhong Houtao

In her recent "new year address", Taiwan's current leader, Tsai Ing-wen, has conveyed worrying signals that could lead to disastrous consequences for the island. The so-called "Tsai Ing-wen path" represents a path towards "Taiwan independence" and confrontation, which poses a significant threat to Taiwan's security, the interests of its people, and regional stability.

Since the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) assumed power in 2016, they have rejected the 1992 Consensus that recognizes one China and instead adopted a "pro-Taiwan independence" stance, exacerbating tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

In stark contrast, the authorities on the mainland have been making continuous efforts to enhance cross-Strait exchanges, aiming to genuinely improve the well-being of Taiwan residents. For instance, the Communist Party of China Central

Committee and the State Council, the country's Cabinet, have unveiled a decision on supporting Fujian province to explore a new path for cross-Strait integration and build a demonstration zone for improving cross-Strait ties. And 10 concrete measures have been implemented since Jan 1. The move can help maintain peace and promote prosperity across the Taiwan Strait.

However, the DPP, in a bid to strengthen its political position, has intensified its provocative moves, adding fuel to the fire. In fact, it is playing the "double independence" card by selecting "Taiwan independence advocate" Lai Ching-te and "hardcore Taiwan independence proponent" Hsiao Bi-khim to seek power of the island. Lai has a history of advocating "Taiwan independence", and is a self-proclaimed "pragmatic advocate of independence", and Hsiao is a die-hard support-

er of this ideology. This pair of two staunch "Taiwan independence" advocates is likely to intensify separatist tendencies and push Taiwan onto an irreversible path to doom.

Despite a record-high 2024 defense budget of NT\$606.8 billion (\$19.7 billion), nearly 3 percent of the island's GDP, Taiwan is not becoming safer. The island's defense spending continues to rise, yet it finds itself "sitting on a powder keg". The island's emphasis on military buildup, aligned with the United States' provocative plans, is aimed at positioning Taiwan as a hedgehog against the Chinese mainland, but the outcome is a sense of increasing danger and concern among Taiwan residents, especially youths. If the pro-independence forces continue to grip power on the island, they will make greater efforts to please the US,

potentially sacrificing Taiwan's key industries, such as semiconductor manufacturing. This risky move could hollow out Taiwan's industries and cause a brain drain as talents would follow relocating industries to the US.

Since 2016, the DPP has neglected the island's economic and social development. Rather than focusing on people's economic wellbeing, the DPP has been indulging in political vendetta, wrongly believing that eliminating political opponents would help it remain in power. The DPP's mismanagement and corruption have taken a toll on the island's economy, with the expected GDP growth rate in 2023 being a dismal 1.4 percent, a 14-year low.

The recent "2023 Chinese character" poll results in Taiwan reveal the public's sentiment. "Que", or "lack", secured the top spot in the poll with 8,565 votes, followed by "dan", or "egg". The combination of the two Chinese characters for "lack" and "eggs" highlights the pressing issue of shortage of eggs, symbolizing the DPP's governance failures. In fact, the discontent among Taiwan residents is palpable, with many of them openly expressing their frustration. Shortages in Taiwan go beyond eggs to water, electricity, land, labor, talents and, most critically, peace. As an export-oriented economy, Taiwan relies heavily on a stable regional environment for import of raw materials and export of finished products.

It is this fear that prompted many Taiwan residents to say that the island won't thrive unless the DPP falls. The DPP's pursuit of foreign alliances and its military ambitions have escalated tensions across the Strait. This is not surprising because DPP leaders have been advocating "Taiwan independence", which amounts to a

It is time to tax the rich... and their foundations

Lynn Murphy & Alnoor Ladha

WE are wrapping up yet another tumultuous year in which wars and disasters have ravaged communities across the world. These misfortunes have added to the misery of those who are already facing the ravages of harsh inequality, climate chaos, dispossession and marginalisation.

As in the past, part of the global response to these crises included the "generous giving" of various philanthropists. Indeed, their representatives joined heads of state, CEOs, celebrities, royalty, and government officials for the annual United Nations General Assembly in September and then for the UN climate conference (COP28) in November to seek "solutions". Many of them will meet again for the World Economic Forum in Davos later in January under the same guise. Yet, every year, nothing seems to change as the outcome of these events. This is partly because the very way elites see problems and solutions are limited by their gaze and worldview, which create and perpetuate the crises in the first place. But they are also ineffective because that is their purpose: They are structured to uphold the status quo, not to create deep systemic change.

The philanthropic sector was also not created to address the root causes of systemic problems, but to protect private financial interests. It is time for the world to realise this. The sooner we do so, the sooner we can find more relevant ways to truly bring philanthropy into the important and messy work of real social change.

We all know the rich are getting richer, controlling a huge percentage of wealth across the planet. According to Oxfam's recent Global Wealth Inequality Report, since 2020, the richest 1 percent have captured almost two-thirds of all

new wealth, nearly twice as much as the bottom 99 percent of humanity. Rich people pay virtually no tax (often 3 percent or less of their income) and their billions just keep on growing through the application of compound interest. In the next 20 years, most of this wealth will move between family members in the wealthiest 1 percent. In the US alone, it is estimated that between \$36 trillion and \$70 trillion in wealth will be transferred from one generation to another.

Calls to tax the rich are growing globally, and will be even more pronounced as this massive generational wealth transfer takes place. One of the key ways the rich address this pressure is through philanthropy. Philanthropic contributions are commended and perceived as a form of "giving back". Currently, the estimated global value of philanthropy is \$2.3 trillion, or approximately 2 percent of the world's GDP, with most of those funds held in endowments. This is larger than the annual GDP of countries like Canada and Brazil.

If philanthropy is inherently good, and more philanthropy is going to happen, what is there to worry about? Let us look at how philanthropy actually works in practice. For example, in the US, one aspect of philanthropy is the 5 percent payout rule which was put into US tax law in 1976. According to these legal provisions, a charitable foundation has to give just 5 percent of its overall endowment in the form of grants or programme-related investments annually in order to maintain its not-for-profit status.

In practice, this rule has become the ceiling for giving grants rather than the floor. The other 95 percent of the endowment is treated as tax-exempt investment money, which most foundations continually grow.

Let us break this down further. In 2020, the average rate of return for foundation endowments was 13.1 percent. If we take a \$100m foundation as an example, it would be required to give away just \$5m over the course of the year, but its endowment would have grown to \$113m minus \$5m for a year-end sum of \$108m. The following year, this expanded pie of \$108m would become \$122m minus roughly \$5.4m it would give away for a total of roughly \$117m. So, the \$100m becomes \$117m in just two years and continues to grow.

These endowment funds - or rather untaxed investment capital - are then funnelled into the usual engines of extractive capitalism: stock markets, bonds, real estate, fossil fuel companies, etc. This results in further wealth accumulation. While this 5 percent rule payout started in the US, it has been exported around the world and continues to be promoted as the global model for philanthropy: keep growing endowments, while foundations grant the minimum amount required. Their wealth and power grow while they trickle-down grants to those doing the hard work.

It does not take an accountant or an economist to understand the implications of this model. Only a fraction of tax-exempt philanthropic funding is actually used to address social and ecological issues while the majority is reinvested in life-destroying activities via the extractive markets with high, ongoing returns on investment. In most countries, any individual or corporation that makes a philanthropic donation receives a direct tax break against their income for the donated amount. As a result, philanthropy is an important part of a larger tax minimisation strategy, further concentrating wealth.

A recent investigative report by The Nation magazine estimated that Bill Gates may have received more money back in the form of tax breaks than he has given in philanthropic grants through the activities of the Gates Foundation. Another example involves MacKenzie Scott, one of the largest philanthropic donors in the US. Over the past couple of years, she has been celebrated for the size, type and speed of her grants. According to Bloomberg's Billionaire Index, in 2023, her wealth continued to grow, even though she gave away significant funds.

Despite receiving huge tax benefits and doling out the smallest fraction of their endowments as grants, philanthropists are elevated in our society as benevolent, generous, and magnanimous individuals. It is time to drop the hero worship of philanthropists and go beyond simple declarations to tax the rich. We need to start taxing endowments.

Consider what a tax on these massive philanthropic endowments could do. For example, democratically run citizens' funds created with the proceeds from taxing endowments could redistribute billions of dollars to front-line communities, Indigenous peoples, climate refugees, and even ecologies who have suffered the most from the extraction of resources and wealth. This can be the starting place for deeper structural change in philanthropy. What is needed is nothing short of a shift in worldview, a commensurate alternative approach based on a life-centric economy and a genuine desire to address the global poly-crisis. It is time to move from systems protecting individual and institutional entitlements to ones that are rooted in redistributing wealth for the collective entrustment of futures worth living.

Aljazeera

America's support of Israel will ultimately backfire

Ramzy Baroud

A famous quote by Franz Kafka says: "Every thing you love is very likely to be lost, but in the end, love will return in a different way." The same principle, I believe, applies to any other powerful feeling, including resentment, hate, anger and even rage. American officials should know this as they continue to support Israel with billions of dollars of military and economic aid, as well as anything and everything else that allows Israel to continue with its genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza.

The whole world is watching, listening, reading and getting angrier by the day at the direct American role in facilitating the Gaza bloodbath. Israel's military campaign in Gaza "has wreaked more destruction than the razing of Syria's Aleppo between 2012 and 2016, Ukraine's Mariupol or, proportionally, the Allied bombing of Germany in the Second World War" and "now sits among the deadliest and most destructive in recent history," the Associated Press reported last month, based on satellite data analysis.

Aside from the tens of thousands dead or missing in the rubble, an even higher number of people have been injured and maimed, including thousands of children. Many children are left "grappling with the loss of an arm or a leg," according to UNICEF. The agony of Gaza is being watched on television and is also being viewed through every possible communication medium. It is as if the world is suffering along with the children of Gaza, but without being able to stop or slow the genocide.

Yet, even when all European countries, save for a few, reversed their position on the war, joining the rest of the world in demanding an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, Washington continued to reject these calls. This is how US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield justified her country's use of the veto, striking down the first serious attempt by the UN Security Council to achieve a permanent truce on Oct.

18: "Israel has the inherent right of self-defense as reflected in Article 51 of the UN Charter." That same logic has been repeated many times by US officials, even when the extent of the Gaza tragedy became known to everyone, including the Americans themselves. This self-serving logic goes against the spirit of international and humanitarian law, which vehemently rejects the targeting of civilians during times of war and conflict, as well as the prevention of humanitarian aid from reaching civilian victims of war. Indeed, the vast majority of Gaza's victims are civilians and more than 70 percent of all those killed are women or children. Moreover, due to inhumane Israeli practices, Gaza's survivors are now dealing with an actual famine, which is an unprecedented event in the modern history of Palestine.

But Israel continues to prevent access to food, medicine, fuel and other urgent supplies, thus violating Washington's own laws on the matter. "No assistance shall be furnished to any country when it is made known to the president that the government of such country prohibits or otherwise restricts, directly or indirectly, the transport or delivery of US humanitarian assistance," the US Foreign Assistance Act (Section 620I) states. The Biden administration has done nothing to pressure - let alone force - Israel to adhere to even the most basic humanitarian laws during its ongoing genocide in Gaza. Worse, President Joe Biden is furnishing Israel with the tools it needs to prolong this destructive war.

According to a Dec. 25 report by Israel's Channel 12, some 20 ships and 244 US airplanes have delivered more than 10,000 tons of armaments and military equipment to Israel since the start of the war. These military supplies reportedly include at least 100 2,000-pound bunker buster bombs, which have been used repeatedly throughout the Israeli war, killing and wounding hundreds each time. The only tangible

action that the US has taken since the start of the war has been to create a coalition, named "Operation Prosperity Guardian," with the sole purpose of ensuring the safety of ships traversing the Red Sea, including into or from Israel.

The US, however, seems to have learned nothing from the past: from its devastating wars on Iraq, from the so-called war on terror or from its failure to find a balance between its support for Israel and its respect for Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims. On the contrary, some US officials seem to be entirely detached from this reality. At a press conference at the White House last month, US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby proclaimed: "Tell me, name me, one more nation, any other nation, that is doing as much as the United States to alleviate the pain and suffering of the people of Gaza. You can't. You just can't." But how are so-called dumb bombs, smart bombs, bunker busters and tens of thousands of tons of explosives "alleviating the pain and suffering" of Gaza and her children?

If Kirby is unaware of his country's role in the genocide in Gaza, then the crisis in American foreign policy is worse than we could have imagined. If he is aware, and he should be, then his country's moral crisis is arguably unprecedented in modern history. The problem in US politics is that administrations have a segmented view of reality, as they are intently focused on how their action, or inaction, is going to affect their political parties in future elections. But Americans who care about their country and its position in a vastly changing Middle East and rapidly shifting global geopolitics should remember that history neither starts nor finishes on a fixed November date once every four years. "In the end, love will return in a different way," Kafka wrote. He is right. But hate, too, tends to return as well, manifesting itself in myriad ways. More than any other country, the US should have come to that realization on its own.

Palestinian men are not 'terrorists in the making'

Yousef Al Helou, Meena Masood & Leah de Haan

IN just under three months, more than 21,000 people have been killed in Gaza, and many more are facing the risk of disease and death due to Israel's ongoing indiscriminate bombardment, ground invasion and siege. There has also been a significant increase in settler violence and the number of killings by Israeli forces in the Occupied West Bank.

In media coverage and reports by human rights organisations, international institutions and NGOs, especially in the West, attention has mainly been drawn to Israel's attacks on Palestinian women and children. Examples include the often-cited figure of more than 8,000 children having been killed and reports of many children having undergone amputations without anaesthesia. Even governments allied with Israel have voiced concern about the ever increasing number of dead Palestinian women and children. French President Emmanuel Macron, for example, said: "These babies, these ladies, these old people are bombed and killed. So there is no reason for that and no legitimacy." While such statements rightly decry the killing of women and children in Palestine, they ignore the killing of men.

Through this refusal to explicitly count and grieve their deaths, Palestinian men are denied civilian status. Their humanity is erased and they are portrayed collectively as "dangerous brown men" and "potential terrorists". This, in turn, permits Israel's killing of Palestinian men. Their killing is permitted precisely because they are Palestinian men. Their gendered and racialised status, specifically their blanket designation as

"Hamas terrorists", eclipses their civilian status, deeming them killable and un-grievable. Their killing is excused and justified within the context of "counterterrorism".

For example, Tzipi Hotovely, the Israeli ambassador to the United Kingdom, claimed in a televised interview in November that "over 50 percent" of the people Israel killed in Gaza in this latest round of violence were "terrorists". For such a percentage to be remotely accurate, all dead men (and even older boys) in Gaza must be presumed "terrorists" or at least "terrorists in the making". The blanket demonisation of men - underpinned by narratives about brown, especially Arab, men being inherently untrustworthy, dangerous and radical - is not new. These narratives, currently being used by Israel and its allies to excuse genocidal violence in Palestine, have consistently been used to justify the mass killing of brown men and boys over the years, including in the context of the so-called global "War on Terror" and the illegal invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

This is not a coincidence. Colonialism and genocide require the erasure of people's humanity and history. Israel's settler colonialism maintains dominance through violence and it legitimises this violence by denying the existence of a Palestinian nation and designating Palestinians as less than human. In the past three months, Israel has killed, maimed and starved tens of thousands of Palestinians. In Gaza, Palestinian men, and women, are digging their loved ones from under bombed buildings and burying their children with their bare hands.

Yet none of this has been recognised for what it is - grave crimes against civilians. And the experiences of Palestinian men are completely ignored. They are stripped of any complexity that underscores their humanity. They are not seen as the bakers, paramedics, journalists, poets, shopkeepers, fathers, sons and brothers they are, but branded en masse as "terrorists". In life, they are reduced to targets to be eliminated. In death, at best, they are deemed "collateral damage". At worst, their violent killing is celebrated as a win against "terrorism". Of course, like all human beings, Palestinian men have feelings. And yet, their fears, heartbreak, anxiety, frustration or shame are consistently erased from any narrative about them. The only emotion that is recognised in Palestinian men is anger. Yet this anger is not recognised as a rightful response to settler colonial violence and oppression. Instead, it is seen as an anger that is barbaric, irrational and dangerous. An anger that necessitates extreme measures to control, such as total sieges or carpet bombing.

Israel's decades-long occupation of Palestine and its apartheid regime mean that none of this is new. This latest chapter has merely accelerated a process of dehumanisation, demonisation and destruction that has long been under way. The tropes about Palestinian men, their inherent violence and barbaric anger have two major consequences. First, they pose an existential threat to Palestinian men and boys in the occupied Palestinian territories and beyond because they permit their maiming and murder. Second, because they

help designate half of the Palestinian population as dangerous and unreliable, they make an end to violence impossible.

Going forward, the following measures are necessary to correct course: Narratives of "radicalisation" that are being used by Israel and its allies to justify violence, such as collective punishment, must be challenged. Any deal for the release of captives must include Palestinian men, such as hundreds being held in so-called administrative detention. When a further "humanitarian pause" or, hopefully, a permanent ceasefire is agreed, aid must be delivered to meet the needs of boys and men alongside those of the rest of the population. Illegal settlers should be held accountable for the violence they inflicted on the Palestinian people, including Palestinian men and boys who are disproportionately killed. In the longer term, Palestinians' right to self-determination, the effects of militarisation on Israeli society, and the transgenerational effects of settler colonialism on Palestinian society need to be recognised.

Today, Palestinians in Gaza and the rest of the occupied territories are living through unacceptable horrors. Israel's current attacks on Gaza, as well as its decades-long occupation of Palestine and apartheid regime must come to an end. Palestinians - men, women and children - must be given the space to grieve what they have lost, heal their wounds and build a future for themselves. For this to be possible, first the humanity of Palestinians - all Palestinians - must be accepted. Palestinian men and boys, in life and in death, must be meaningfully recognised.

Sino-US people-to-people exchanges matter

Tom Watkins

THE world needs much more understanding than what it has now. China and the United States, as the world's two major powers, should lead the way in restoring people-to-people, cultural, educational, governmental and nonprofit exchanges to promote sound US-China relations while building a better collective future.

The results of the dialogue the two countries' leaders hold must have a trickle-down effect, helping other countries feel confident that there is a positive, prosperous future ahead for all. People-to-people exchanges are an integral part of President Xi Jinping's foreign policy. And I wish there was an equally big champion of people-to-people exchanges in the US, too.

Some would argue for "decoupling", disengaging or "de-risking" the US from China, but perhaps a bigger risk would be allowing domestic political pressure to drive the two countries apart. China-US economic and trade cooperation has brought benefits to the people of both China and the US for half a century. While we need to continue to work toward building sensible economic ties, it is vital that China and the US continue to follow the "Seven Cs" - communication, collaboration, cooperation, coordination and competition while avoiding unnecessary confrontations and conflict. This would allow the world to sleep well and prosper.

We also need to strengthen our people-to-people educational, cultural and sub-national collaborations and exchanges that have receded in recent years. These connections are the foundation of understanding and mutual respect, which in turn fuel the most important bilateral relationship in the world today.

Too much of the current political narrative is vilifying more than amplifying the cooperation aspect of the US-China relationship on both sides of the Pacific. Today, roughly two-thirds of Americans hold a negative view of China and some politicians would like to drive up that number. Recent years have seen some heartening progress in facilitating travel and people-to-people exchanges. China has resumed group tours to the US, and the two sides have agreed to increase passenger flights. Yet student exchanges remain significantly below pre-pandemic highs. The number of American students studying in China is frighteningly low. Going forward, we need to continue taking concrete steps no matter how minor they may be to rebuild these vital exchanges.

As the 21st century unfolds, both the US and China should be the beacons for building bridges rather than "Great Walls". As the China-US Heartland Association proclaims in its mission, "Not all

bridges are built of concrete and steel. Equally important bridges are built on friendship, culture, communication, cooperation and where these bridges exist, communities flourish." This approach would cement the people-to-people relationship between these two great nations in the hope of shaping a 21st century that benefits all of humanity. In a world fraught with tension and uncertainty, a concerted effort to address the problems and existential threats facing both countries, rather all of humanity, is needed. It is imperative that we find ways to develop a shared vision and common agenda in areas that are in our collective national interests while we have open dialogue on topics where we disagree.

I call on philanthropists, not simply governments in the two countries, to join forces to create and endow a robust international exchange, a people-to-people organization that connects students, (from grade school to life-long learners) artists, writers, athletes, tourists, educators, health and behavioral healthcare professionals, poets, sub-national government officials and NGOs between our two countries to listen, to understand and build bridges that will help sustain peace and prosperity for all. I propose calling it the "Deng-Carter

Exchange Bridge for International Peace and Prosperity" for the vision our respective leaders had. Former US president Jimmy Carter and late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping looked beyond our countries' many differences, found common ground and saw the value of connecting our people. We need to super charge this vision today.

They believed rapprochement and interaction between our people would make the world safer and benefit both the US and China. They were as visionary as they were wise. We need this enlightened thinking more than ever before.

The global connections formed through these exchanges and personal interactions are vital for fostering understanding and unity. They lay the groundwork for meaningful dialogues, thoughtful synergy, mutual respect, joint prosperity and peaceful collaborations. It's inspiring to see the positive impact these exchanges can and have had, shaping a better tomorrow for both our nations and the world. Going forward, all major global issues will intersect at the corner of Beijing and Washington. Building mutual understanding and respect today will assure we can celebrate the 100-year anniversary of this vital relationship in the future. The thought of the alternative is unthinkable. Our children, grandchildren and all of humanity will thank us for our efforts.

WHILE bidding farewell to 2023, I set myself a challenge to write a cheerful article to start the new year with. Unfortunately, I will have to disappoint. Despite all the greetings and best wishes, the world in 2024 looks bleak. The Ukraine war will soon enter its third year, with no end in sight. The Gaza war is soon to complete its third month and the Israeli government is telling us not to wish for a speedy end. Rather, it has promised that its military campaign against Hamas is likely to extend for many more months, with more death, fear of escalation and uncertainties.

However, the congratulations exchanged on the first day of the year between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden - on the 45th anniversary of diplomatic ties being established between the two countries - has given me a glimmer of hope for 2024. This looks likely to be a defining year for democracy, peace, stability, climate change, poverty and the cost-of-living crisis, to mention but a few.

In his message published by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Xi said the US and China had "weathered the storms and moved forward," which has enhanced the well-being of their peoples and contributed to world peace, stability and prosperity. This narrative could help spur some confidence that global leadership is still alive and cooperation is possible to lessen the impacts of crises, if world leaders try.

In the next year, however, I fear not for the survival of autocratic regimes, but for the democratic and quasi-democratic leaderships, as more than 2 billion people are likely to cast their votes in 60-plus elections in 2024. The most important of these is the one in the US, where a return of Donald Trump to the White House could challenge the country's democratic institutions. These elections will also signal how much more the world is likely to shift toward populism in the case of India and the hard right in the case of the European Parliament. The

Mohamed Chebaro

UK could be an anomaly if its voters lurch back to the center in order to do away with the 14 troubled years of Conservative Party rule, which has taken the country further to the right after Brexit. However, a surge in election meddling, both domestic and foreign, could conspire to keep alight the flames of the hard-right's torch.

In short, democracy and democratic practices have been at stake over the past few years and are likely to be further tested in the coming months. Social media could be weaponized to levels never seen before, with propagandists and misinformation merchants likely to capitalize on, monetize, prey on and manipulate citizens' choices like never before. Technological advances in the realm of fake and deepfake text, audio and video, supercharged by artificial intelligence tools and generative machine learning, could allow random individuals or rogue state actors to alter the views and choices of many voters ahead of closely contested elections.

The tech revolution has steamrolled the traditional media and tenets of the information superhighway. Tech companies, both the giants and small players alike, will continue to resist any regulation or accountability. Last year's elections in Slovakia were a case in point, with hundreds of thousands of posts containing disinformation flooding social media in the small Central European country. Instead of bolstering their moderation teams, many social media platforms have been cutting staff numbers in an attempt to bolster their market share. What is alarming in my view is the fact that democracy flourishes on freedom of expression. The irony is that, thanks to freedoms, especially those afforded by technological advancement, democracy could meet its end.

The digital realm that has developed over the past two decades has been revolutionary for humankind on all levels, including by enabling what has become known as

citizen journalism, with every human being now having the opportunity to create, publish and even trade in content. But this has also created the bandwidth for corrosive tools and toxic content, often authored by trolls or state agents, who have worked toward poisoning the debates, particularly in open, democratic societies. Here, in recent years, form has been preferred to substance and megaphone demagogues and their sensationalism have become the preferred address for large sections of society. Unlike in despotic regimes, these countries do not benefit from strong central state oversight and control. Against such a backdrop, the world should hold its breath. This year, democracy could be at the mercy of malicious groups or states, which could use the digital sphere to turn the concept on its head. They will aim to weaponize misinformation, fakes and deepfakes to drive a wedge in society and increase divisions and intolerance.

Few expect Vladimir Putin to be beaten in Russia's presidential vote in March, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's fate is seen as tied to the outcome of the war in Gaza; the longer the conflict lasts, the more likely it is that Netanyahu will be ousted before the end of 2024. Some elections remain in doubt, particularly Ukraine's presidential vote, which is due in March but is unlikely to take place while the country remains under martial law. But what will make or break it for democracy worldwide is November's US presidential vote and whether or not Trump returns to office, with the implications that would have for US foreign policy.

The democratic world should brace for seismic changes in 2024 - and maybe not for the better. Meanwhile, at the beginning of this new year and despite all the adversities that lie ahead, I intend to keep calm and carry on, while remaining hopeful that the voices of reason - such as the messages exchanged by the leaders of the US and China this week - might ultimately prevail.



FBR report reveals violation of tax laws

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has exposed a startling revelation that one out of every three candidates vying for the upcoming February elections is entangled in violations of tax laws. The report highlights instances of candidates either not being registered taxpayers, non-filers of income tax for at least one year in the last three years, or both.

According to media reports, this concerning trend sheds light on the pervasive non-tax culture in the country, with a significant number of aspiring national representatives showing a disregard for financial transparency and compliance with tax regulations.

Government sources disclosed that the Election Commission provided data on approximately 28,000 candidates, revealing that a

staggering 9,200 of them are either not registered with the FBR or have failed to file income tax for one of the past three years. Astonishingly, these candidates are allowed to contest the general elections despite clear violations of parliamentary acts.

Further analysis of the data indicates that over 4,200 candidates have not filed income tax returns for the past three years, while more than 5,000 candidates are not even registered with income tax authorities.

During the scrutiny process, the FBR identified more than 1,100 defaulters who promptly cleared their dues before the approval of their candidature. An impressive recovery of around six billion rupees was made from these candidates, exposing a pattern of nondisclosure of true wealth.

Remarkably, the amount recovered from these defaulters surpasses the total income tax paid by the members of the National Assembly and Senate in 2019. The FBR's current tax directory reveals that in 2019, the combined income of the members amounted to 11 billion rupees, with only 576 million rupees paid in taxes—equivalent to a mere 5.2 percent of their income, significantly less than the 35 percent tax rate imposed on salary earners.

A regrettable aspect of the situation is the inconsistency in the acceptance of candidature papers. Returning Officers reportedly rejected the papers of candidates who were filers but approved those of non-filers and unregistered candidates, further exacerbating the issue of non-compliance in the electoral process.

Govt to strengthening export: Gohar

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Caretaker Minister for Commerce, Industries and Investment Dr. Gohar Ejaz has said that the caretaker government remains committed to further strengthening Pakistan's export potential and creating a conducive environment for sustainable economic growth.

In a statement, the Minister said exports in December 2023 increased by 22.2% to 2.812 billion dollars. He said Pakistan's exports have recovered and are on a clear upward trajectory, reaching an impressive 2.8 billion dollars in December 2023.

The Minister said these positive developments are a testament to the government's ongoing efforts and the resilience of Pakistani businesses.

He expressed confidence that Pakistan would reach its targeted capacity of 3 billion dollars per month soon with the implementation of the new Industry Policy under the SIFC framework.

Fog leads to cancellation of 30 flights

ISLAMABAD (INP): As many as 30 flights of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and other national and international flights had to be cancelled after dense fog disrupted the flights' operation at the Islamabad International Airport on Wednesday.

The flights, which were cancelled, had to shuttle between Islamabad and Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi, Islamabad and Beijing, Islamabad and Sharjah, Islamabad and Riyadh and Islamabad and Jeddah.

Similarly, PIA's flights to Gilgit and Skardu were delayed for several hours.

The situation is no different with the flights of other airlines such as SereneAir, Airblue and AirSial which were delayed for over 12 hours.

PIA's incoming flight from Dubai landed at the airport after a delay of 18 hours.

On the other hand, the airport's management said that the flight's operation would resume as soon as visibility improved.

DRAP launches crackdown

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) on Wednesday decided to initiate a crackdown on fake medicines – manufactured by illegal pharma companies – which are presumably available in medical stores in Karachi.

In a major operation on December 12, 2023, the DRAP team conducted a raid on an illegal pharmaceutical factory in Karachi and confiscated a huge quantity of counterfeit drugs.

The central drug test laboratory declared the exported medicines as fake, along with the packaging, registration, and manufacturing date. The medicine regulatory team revealed that the workers in the factory were putting packaging of different companies over counterfeit antibiotic medicines, which are now feared to be available in the local market.

Meanwhile, the details related to the counterfeit medicine have already been dispatched to the relevant provincial office of DRAP in Sindh.

The DRAP officials revealed that counterfeit medicines are ineffective during the treatment and can increase the rate of mortality.

Emirates Airlines and PCAA celebrates collaboration



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Emirates Airlines and the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) celebrated 25 years of collaboration on Wednesday, recognizing the airline's continued success in operations to/from country's capital Islamabad.

A commemorative event was held at the airport acknowledging the airline's journey in the region and

the airport's contribution. Higher Emirates management expressed gratitude to Pakistan CAA and airport officials for outstanding services.

Key airport officials received certificates of appreciation personally signed by His Highness Sheikh Ahmed Bin Saeed Al-Makhdoom, the Honorable Chairman and CEO of Emirates Airlines and Group, in recognition

of professional excellence and ensuring successful airline operations.

The celebration included a cake cutting ceremony, symbolizing the sweetness of their shared journey and success. Since 1999, Emirates has grown from four flights per week at Benazir Bhutto International Airport to ten flights per week from Islamabad International Airport, reflecting its commitment to

connectivity and excellence.

The airport and airline have played a pivotal role in connecting Pakistan's capital to the world, providing seamless travel experiences and contributing to regional economic and cultural growth. The airport remains committed to Emirates' mission of world-class air travel and the anniversary celebrates the enduring success of their shared commitment.

Inflation, deficit and interest rates likely to decreased

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Wednesday that inflation, current account deficit and interest rate will decrease in the new year.

There is a possibility of an increase in business activities, employment and GDP which will have a positive impact, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain said that the political temperature would decrease if elections were transparent; if it is not, political instability will continue, and the new government will be unable to implement reforms.

Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that regional tensions, climate change, and food and oil prices can rise during this year, which could undermine efforts to stabilize the economy.

He said that the policy-makers need to speed up the economic recovery efforts so that the problems of the people and the business community can be reduced.

Mian Zahid Hussain added that last year, Pakistan had to go

through the most difficult situation in its history and there was an endless series of problems to deal with, including loans from IMF and friendly countries.

However, it has become difficult to continue this trend as Pakistan's industrialists have lost their competitiveness in the global market due to the huge increase in the cost of doing business, he observed.

Mian Zahid Hussain further said that the future of the country will be decided by whether the rulers have tried to learn from past experiences or not because if they continue with their previous style, then economic stability will become

a dream. During this year, apart from the elections, taking new loans from the IMF will also be a big challenge, requiring strong efforts and implementation of visible reforms.

Without these loans, repayment of past debts would be impossible and imports would become very difficult. If the politicians show prudence, financial institutions, tax and other reforms will be possible and governance will be improved, which will improve the country's condition.

But if politicians decide to follow the same old path, the country will be bankrupt. This time the new government will have to take decisions on merit and keep the economy separate from politics.

Ryanair hits out at Booking.com over flight cuts

LODON (BBC News): Ryanair has hit out at several online travel agents for taking its flights off their platforms without warning.

The airline said larger sites such as Booking.com, Kiwi and Kayak suddenly removed its flights in December.

It comes after an Irish High Court ruling banned screenscraper Flightbox from gathering Ryanair flight information for online travel agents.

Ryanair said the websites' removal of flights would increase empty seats by 1% or 2% in December and January.

It said that while ticket revenues may also be affected, the move was unlikely to "materially affect" its full-year passenger numbers or profit expectations.

The no-frills airline said it would respond by lowering fares for passengers booking directly through its own website.

In a statement, Ryanair described the online agents

as "pirates". It said it would "continue to make its fares available to honest/transparent online travel agents such as Google Flights," which it said "do not add hidden mark ups to Ryanair prices and who direct passengers to make their bookings directly on the Ryanair.com website".

Booking Holdings, which operates Booking.com and Kayak and Kiwi.com did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Ryanair said the "welcome removal" of its flights might have been a result of pressure from national consumer protection agencies or new customer verification measures it has taken.

The company has been in a long-running dispute with online booking sites, after the airline launched legal action in the US against Booking.com owner Booking Holdings and its subsidiaries including Kayak, Agoda and Priceline.

Ryanair also said its flights could have been

taken off the sites in response to a recent Irish High Court ruling against screenscraper Flightbox.

The ruling granted the airline a permanent injunction, stopping Flightbox from "unlawfully scraping Ryanair.com content" for online travel agents - the process of collecting information and data from websites. The row follows a boom in profits for the airline in November, after it hiked up prices.

The airline said passenger numbers rose 11% to a record 105.4 million in the six months to September, despite average fares rising by 24%.

That helped the carrier to report a near-60% rise in profits for the period to 2.18bn. Ryanair has reported a jump in profits after pushing up fares in the face of strong demand for summer air travel. Speaking on Wednesday, the company said the average number of empty seats per flight in December had increased from 8% to 9%.

Rupee registers nominal gain against dollar

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Pakistani Rupee continued to appreciate by 0.13% against the US Dollar, as it increased in value by 9 paisas in the interbank market.

On Wednesday morning, the mighty American currency started trading at Rs281.80 after losing a further 9 paisas in the interbank market.

On Tuesday, the Rupee had registered a nominal fall, and closed trade for the day at Rs281.89 against the US Dollar.

In the global market, the American currency rose broadly on Wednesday and stood near a two-week high against other major currencies, underpinned by a confluence of factors, including elevated US Treasury yields and a cautious turn in risk sentiment that weighed on Wall Street.

377 connections of gas disconnected: SNGPL

F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 377 connections; Rs 2 million fine imposed.

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 21 connections on illegal use of gas while another 25 on use of compressor.

In Rawalpindi the team disconnected 144 connections on illegal use of gas while another two on use of compressor and amount of Rs 0.0200 million have been booked against gas theft cases.

During the operation in

Islamabad team disconnected 7 connections on illegal use of gas.

In Multan 2 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 7 on use of compressor.

The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.0710 million against gas theft cases.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 53 connections on account of direct use of gas and illegal use of gas and also imposed fine of Rs 1.8936 million against gas theft cases.

In Mardan the team disconnected 12 connections on use of compressor.

In Sahiwal, three connections were disconnected on compressor use.

In Faisalabad 3 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 2 on use of compressor.

In Sheikhupura 39 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 12 on use of compressor and amount of Rs 0.22 million booked against gas theft cases.

In Bahawalpur the team disconnected 1 connection on illegal use of gas. The regional team of Sargodha disconnected one connection on illegal use of gas.

In Gujrat the team disconnected 43 connections on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 0.04 million have been booked against gas theft cases.

HABIBMETRO sign MoU with Kuickpay



F.P. Report

KARACHI: HABIBMETRO recently signed an agreement with Kuickpay to further enhance its digital presence and provide its corporate customers with an extended array of seamless payment options.

The signing ceremony was attended by senior management from both organisations. Khurram Shahzad Khan - President & CEO, HABIBMETRO along with Amanullah Sheikh - Head Corporate, Investment & Transaction Banking, Muhammad Jawad Shami - Head Transaction Banking and Ahsen Abidi - Senior Manager Transaction Banking were present at the occasion. Kuickpay was represented by Syed Saqib Ali - Group CEO, Arbab Ali - Managing Director, Syed Tasawur Hussain - SCD and Umair Ahmed Baig - COO.

HABIBMETRO is leading the way in the digital evolution of Pakistan's banking ecosystem. The

Bank's partnership with Kuickpay, the swiftest and most reliable online payment channel in the country, is aimed at creating more possibilities and enhancing convenience for our customers.

Through this agreement, HABIBMETRO will allow payments from an added range of payment service providers who are connected through the Kuickpay platform. The Bank has incorporated this strategic partnership in view of the specific transactional requirements of corporate customers and to enhance its capability to serve a diverse clientele.

"Digital prowess is unarguably the foremost requirement in today's banking," Khurram Shahzad Khan, President & CEO, HABIBMETRO expressed his views at the ceremony while reiterating the Bank's commitment to digital advancement. "We understand what it takes to succeed in the fast corporate lane and that is why we are

avidly seeking new ways of serving our corporate customers. Our partnership with Kuickpay is yet another initiative towards enhancing our digital payments suite."

"Kuickpay firmly believes in collaboration to continue its mission to enable its partners in streamlining their payment & collection mechanism through digital channels. Through this partnership, Kuickpay aims to complement HABIBMETRO's vision of digitizing payments & collections for its corporate clients," commented Saqib Ali Kazmi, CEO Kuickpay at the ceremony.

HABIBMETRO is a subsidiary of Habib Bank AG Zurich, which operates in 11 countries across four continents. As a trusted institution in Pakistan's financial landscape, HABIBMETRO is serving millions of customers through a nationwide network of over 500 branches in more than 200 cities.

NEPRA approves hike in electricity tariff

KARACHI (INP): The National Electric Power Regulation Authority (NEPRA) on Wednesday approved the K-Electric plea to increase the power tariff for Karachi by Rs2.87 per unit.

According to the power regulatory authority, NEPRA approved the hike in electricity in the wake of the quarterly fuel adjustment for second time.

With this hike, the bur-

den on Karachi power consumers in the wake of quarterly fuel adjustments will reach Rs 4.12. The hike was approved under the adjustment period from January to March 2023.

The power regulatory authority has sent the decision to federal government to notify the hike.

Earlier, at the request of the caretaker government, the NEPRA approved the tariff hike to maintain the

uniform electricity tariff across the country.

According to the issued notification, the power regulatory authority approved the surge of Rs1.72 per unit for K-Electric (KE) consumers on account of third-quarterly adjustment charges for the previous financial year.

The notification stated that a rise of Rs 1.25 per unit was approved under the adjustment period from

January to March 2023, along with Rs 0.47 per unit sanctioned for the adjustment period from October to December 2022.

The national power regulatory, NEPRA, sent the official notification of the electric tariff hike to the federal government, meanwhile, electricity consumers in Karachi have to pay additional charges from January to March 2024 bills.



In brief

Hockey team’s participation

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The International Hockey Federation (FIH) has confirmed the entry of the Pakistan Hockey Team in the Olympic Qualifier event, which will be held in Muscat, Oman from January 15 to 21. The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) received an email from FIH informing them about the entry of the national team in the event. PHF President Mir Tariq Hussain Bugti thanked FIH President Tayyab Ikram for ensuring the participation of the national team in the event. The Pakistan team will leave for Muscat on January 12 to participate in the Olympic qualifiers, where they will face tough competition from other Asian teams. The PHF has announced the squad for the upcoming event, which will be led by Imad Butt as the captain and Abu Bakr Mahmood as the vice-captain. The squad consists of 18 players and six officials. The squad is as follows: Abdullah Ishtiaq, Waqar, Arbaz Ahmed, Muhammad Abdullah, Sufiyan Khan, Imad Shakeel Butt (Captain), and Abu Bakr Mahmood (Vice Captain). The team also includes Murtaza Yaqoob, Abdul Mannan, Aqeel Ahmed, Moeen Shakil, Salman Razaq, Abdul Hannan Shahid, Ghazanfar Ali, Abdul Rahman Jr, Zikriya Hayat, Rana Abdul Waheed Ashraf, and Arshad Liaquat. The team management comprises Head Coach Shahnaz Sheikh, Coach Shakil Abbasi, Assistant Coach Olympian Dilawar Hussain, Goalkeeper Coach Amjad Ali, Physiotherapist Waqas Mahmood, and Physical Trainer Muhammad Imran Khan.

Atal convicted over Gaza post

GAZA (Agencies): Algerian international footballer Youcef Atal was handed an eight-month suspended sentence by a French court Wednesday for inciting religious hatred in a social media post about the conflict in Gaza. The 27-year-old defender, who plays for Ligue 1 side Nice, must also pay a fine of 45,000 euros (\$49,000) for sharing a video calling for a "black day for the Jews", the Nice criminal court ruled. He will further pay for details of his conviction to be published in regional daily Nice-Matin and national newspaper Le Monde. The comments at issue came in a video of a preacher, Mahmoud Al Hasanat, which Atal posted to his 3.2-million-follower Instagram account five days after Hamas' bloody October 7 assault on Israel. Israel in response launched a campaign against the militant group which has cost over 22,000 lives according to the territory's Hamas-run health ministry. After speaking about the children killed in the bombardments, Al Hasanat called on God to send a "black day for the Jews" and "guide the hand" of Gazans striking back. Atal was with the Algerian national team in his home country when he shared the video. He withdrew it the following day when Nice warned him it was likely to attract controversy, offering his apologies. Atal had apologized again to the court during the hearings, saying he had wanted to send a "message of peace" and did not watch the entire 35-second video before posting it. That argument did not convince prosecutors or plaintiffs, mostly Jewish organisations and the Professional Football League (LFP). "Sharing a video means being party to its message and lending it visibility," prosecutor Meggi Choutia told the court.

Aamir Jamal’s terrific counterpunch lifts Pakistan to 313

SYDNEY (Agencies): Aamir Jamal fashioned a remarkable innings to help Pakistan post 313 on the opening day of the third Test of the Benaud-Qadir Trophy at Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG). Australia then saw off the one over bowled by Sajid Khan without the loss of any wicket to finish the day 307 runs behind Pakistan’s first-innings total. Aamir, playing the third Test of his career, stole the spotlight with his brilliant counterattack that saw him amass 82 off 97 balls including nine fours and four maxims. Having come into bat when the team was in trouble at 220-7, Aamir’s batting heroics propelled Pakistan to a competitive total. Pakistan’s last-wicket pair of Aamir and Mir Hamza frustrated Australia as they stitched a partnership of 86 off 133 deliveries. Hamza deployed solid defence to stay unbeaten on seven from 43 balls while Aamir took charge on the other end and punished the opposition.

Aamir was finally dismissed by Nathan Lyon after miscuing a skier into the hands of Mitchell Starc, getting a standing ovation on his walk back to the dressing room. Earlier in the day, Pakistan had stumbled to 47-4 in the morning session after skipper Shan Masood decided to bat first. Both openers, Abdullah Shafique and debutant Saim Ayub, were dismissed for two-ball ducks before Pat Cummins delivered a double blow by removing Babar Azam (26, 40b, 4x4s) and Saud Shakeel (5, 12b). Shan failed to make the most of his reprieve, having been caught off a no-ball, and was dismissed by Mitchell Marsh for a modest 35 featuring three boundaries. After losing half their side for the score of 96, Mohammad Rizwan and Salman Ali Agha then batted with purpose to conjure a 94-run partnership in quick time. Rizwan top-scored for Pakistan with a quality 88 off 103 balls, smashing 10 fours and two sixes. Rizwan’s surge was

finally cut short when Cummins’ well-directed short ball saw him play into the hands of Josh Hazlewood. Salman continued his positive approach post the tea break, scoring his second fifty on the trot. He too fell victim to Australia’s short-ball tactics as Starc ended his feisty stay at the crease that saw him contribute 53 off 67 deliveries. Australia captain Cummins returned to inflict further damage and bagged the scalp of Hasan Ali for a five-ball duck, picking up his third straight five-wicket haul. The hosts will resume their first-innings reply tomorrow with the openers Usman Khawaja and David Warner, in his farewell Test, at the crease. Scores in brief: Pakistan 313 all out, 77.1 overs (Mohammad Rizwan 88, Aamir Jamal 82, Salman Ali Agha 53, Shan Masood 35; Pat Cummins 5-61, Mitchell Starc 2-75, Mitchell Marsh 1-27) Australia 6-0, 1 over (David Warner 6 not out).



SYDNEY: Mohammad Rizwan tried to save Pakistan with a fighting knock.

Naeel Qureshi beats Saqib in a thriller to face Aqeel Khan in quarterfinal

ISLAMABAD. (APP): Muhammad Shoaib, Aqeel Khan, Yousaf Khalil, Barkatullah, Muzammil Murtaza, Muhammad Abid Ahmad Nael Qureshi and Mudassar Murtaza moved into the quarterfinals by winning their respective matches at the 36th Federal Cup National Ranking Tennis Championships at Syed Dilawar Abbas PTF Tennis Complex, Garden Avenue, Islamabad on Wednesday. The best encounter of the day was held between upcoming youngster Ahmad Nael Qureshi and Saqib Hayat, which was won by the former after a thrilling three-set match 7-6(3), 4-6, 7-5. Qureshi won the toss and chose to receive. He built up the winning lead 4-2 by breaking the 1st and 5th games but Saqib bounced back brilliantly and levelled the set 6 games all. The set was decided in the tie break which was won by Qureshi 7-3. In the second set Saqib Hayat exhibited excellent game. He changed the strategy and built up the winning lead 4-2 He continued the same pace and won the second set at 6-4, leveling the match one set all. In the final set, Saqib Hayat continued his winning lead 4-2 by breaking the 1st and 3rd games but was unable to hold his winning streak against the promising

Qureshi, who not only changed his pace of game but also played aggressively and hit excellent cross court and down the lines to level the set 5 games all. By holding the 11 games, he took the lead 6-5. In the 12th game, Qureshi was in full form and did not allow his opponent to settle down. He won the game at 15-40 and finished the match by winning the set at 7-5, qualifying for the quarterfinal. In the quarterfinal, he will face 2nd Seed Aqeel Khan. In the Junior 18&U Singles, 6th seed Kashan Tariq struggled hard to win his encounter against Talha Khan in a thrilling three-set match 5-7 6-3 6-0. Following are the complete results: Men’s Singles 2nd Round: Muhammad Shoaib (PAF) beat Amir Mazari 6-1 6-1, Yousaf Khalil beat Hamza Roman 6-3 6-3, Muzammil Murtaza beat M.Salaar Khan 6-2 6-1, Barkatullah beat Shahzad Khan 3-1 (Retd.), Mudassar Murtaza beat Sami Zeb Khan 6-2 6-1, Muhammad Abid beat Huzaima Abdul Rehman 6-1 6-1, Ahmad Nael Qureshi beat Saqib Hayat 7-6(3) 4-6 7-5, Aqeel Khan beat M.Zaryab Khan 6-2 6-0. Junior 18&U Singles 2nd Round: Hamid Israr beat Rayzan Khan 6-1 6-2, Zohaib Afzal

Malik beat Saifullah Khan 6-3 6-3, M.Salaar Khan beat Abdul Basit 6-4 6-3, Muhammad Hamza Aasim beat M.Rehaan Noori 6-1 6-0, Kashan Tariq beat Talha Khan (PES) 5-7 6-3 6-0, Hamza Roman w/o Hasir Ahmad, Ahmad Nael Qureshi beat Amir Mazari 6-1 6-2. Junior 18&U Singles 1st Round (Unfinished match): Hamid Israr beat Waqas Janas 6-1 6-1, Talha Khan (PES) beat Inam Qadir 7-5, 5-7 7-6(5), Samer Zaman beat Ali Zain 6-3 6-2, Hasir Ahmad w/o Abdullah Khan, Hamza Roman beat Shawsawar Khan 6-4 6-4. Boys 14&U Singles 2nd Round: Zohaib Afzal Malik beat Raja Muhammad Taha 4-0 4-0, Muhammad Junaid Khan beat Junaid Meher 1-4 5-4(6) 4-0, Essa Fahad beat Azan Imran 4-0 4-1, Muhammad Shayyan beat Zayd Zaman 4-1 4-1, M.Hassan Usmani beat Rohan Sohail 4-2 4-1, Razik Sultan neat Waqas Janas 4-2 2-4 4-0, Zohaib Amjad beat Arslan Khan 4-1 4-1. Boys 14&U Singles 1st Round: Junaid Meher beat Abdullah 3-5 4-1 4-2, Rohan Sohail beat Aabdar Ali 1-4 4-1 4-0, Arshiman beat Mahd Mehmood 5-4(5) 4-2. Men’s Doubles were in progress till filling of this report.

Pakistan T20I squad set to depart for Auckland later tonight

LAHORE (PPI) Six members of the Pakistan T20I squad was set to depart later tonight for Auckland via Dubai from Lahore to feature in the five-match T20I series against New Zealand. The five-match T20I series will be played from 12 to 21 January in Auckland, Hamilton, Dunedin and Christchurch. The six members of the squad include Abbas Afridi, Azam Khan, Fakhar Zaman, Haseebullah Khan, Iftikhar Ahmed and Sahibzada Farhan. These six players, along with nine additional players – Ahmed Shehzad, Arif Yaqoob, Kamran Ghulam, Mohammad Amir Khan, Mohammad Haris, Mohammad Imran, Omair Bin Yousaf, Sajjad Ali Jnr and Shahab Khan – took part in the series preparation camp. These players underwent a four-day camp at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore, where under High-Performance Coach and camp commandant Yasir Arafat, they featured in two match scenarios and different practice sessions to equip themselves with the modern T20 cricket skills. The six players of the 16-member squad also trained for the fifth day on Tuesday, when the camp concluded. At the camp’s conclusion, Yasir Arafat, talking to the media, said, “We tried to engage these players in quality training with an eye on the requirements of modern-day cricket. The batting, fielding and bowling drills were arranged to emulate the attacking teams and how they dominate their oppositions. “Players also took part in two scenario matches. We have tried to equip these players with the skills that help in high-pressure games. “The T20 World Cup is not that far away. We will keep on exploring new options as well to solidify our bench strength. What I loved about this camp was the way PCB rewarded the domestic performers who did well in the National T20 Cup. The senior players like Fakhar Zaman and Iftikhar Ahmed mingled with the newcomers and it was a great learning experience for them.”

Djokovic wrist injury dooms Serbia to Australia defeat

PERTH (AFP): Novak Djokovic suffered a frustrating fitness saga as a wrist problem led to the Serb’s upset 6-4, 6-4 loss to Australia’s Alex de Minaur in the quarter-finals of the United Cup in Perth on Wednesday. “I knew I was not going to be at 100 per cent physically, emotionally, mentally game-wise in the opening week of a season. “It’s all a part of the build-up for the Australian Open, that’s where I want to perform at my best.” Djokovic, who received multiple massages on court on his troublesome right wrist — hurt in training 24 hours earlier — fell victim to an inspired de Minaur, who led his side into a weekend semi-finals in Sydney. Aija Tomljanovic then sealed the 2-0 win for the team with her 6-1, 6-1 defeat of Serb 184th-ranked substitute Natalija Stevanovic. Stevanovic had replaced an exhausted Olga Danilovic, who featured in previous ties here alongside Djokovic. World number one Djokovic produced 31 unforced errors as his 43-match win streak in Australia was ended after 93 minutes on court against de Minaur. “I was not on my level, it was just one of these days where you didn’t feel your best,” Djokovic said. “Your opponent played very well. That’s all I can say. “I think I have enough time to get myself in the right shape for the Australian Open, and that’s what matters the most at this point.

Victory marked revenge for the low-key de Minaur, beaten by Djokovic a year ago at the Australian Open. The 24-year-old Australian was recording his first victory over a world number one, adding Djokovic to a list which also includes Rafael Nadal, the number two whom he beat here a year ago. “This was extremely special, Novak is an unbelievable competitor,” de Minaur said. “This feels surreal, I’m happy to do it here in Australia. When you go against Novak you just have to try and enjoy it. “You must keep fighting to the end. Today was my day — I’m happy I was able to get the win. “This one means a lot.” Djokovic was seen twice by the trainer in the opening set and at one point said: “The more I’m playing, it’s getting worse.” The 36-year-old with 10 Australian Open trophies was broken once per set, his second mis-cue coming on a double-fault. Poland power past China Earlier, top-ranked Poland overpowered China, with Hubert Hurkacz and

Iga Swiatek propelling them into the semi-finals with a singles sweep. The pair of straight-set victories in Perth put the tie out of reach and sent the Poles into a clash against either Norway or France in Sydney. Adrian Mannarino and Caroline Garcia had earlier booked France a last eight tie against the Norwegians with victory over Italy. Hurkacz secured a clinical 6-3, 6-4 defeat of Zhang Zhizhen before world number one Swiatek followed up, winning nine games on the trot at one point to beat Zheng Qinwen 6-2, 6-3 despite losing serve twice. Swiatek was eager to get to Sydney as the first nation to qualify for the semi-finals of the 18-nation mixed team tournament. “Bondi Beach here we come,” she said, after swatting aside Zheng who was the 2023 WTA Most Improved Player. “I’m looking forward to a day off.” Hurkacz fired 10 aces as he dismissed Chinese number one Zhang. “It’s always a tough match with him. He can play some amazing shots,” the winner said. In Sydney, journeyman Mannarino, who enjoyed his best-ever season last year, swept past Lorenzo Sonego 6-4, 6-4 before Garcia overcame a stubborn Jasmine Paolini 6-4, 5-7, 6-4. It gave France an unsailable 2-0 lead to put them into the knockout rounds. The last quarter-final slot will be decided when Greece meet Canada, with the winner facing the best runner-up from group play in Sydney. The Sydney quarter-finals are played on Thursday and Friday before the semis on Saturday and the final a day later.

Pakistan Army KP Inter-Regional Volleyball League begins

PESHAWAR (APP): The Pakistan Army Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inter-Region Boys Volleyball Championship got underway here at Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) Indoor Hall on Wednesday. Commandant CC Engineering Corps of the 11 Corps Brig. Syed Duraz Mehmood was the chief guest on this occasion who formally inaugurated the League to be organized jointly by Pakistan Army and Directorate General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He was accompanied by Director General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Abdul Nasir Mohmand, former coach national volleyball team and Secretary General KP Volleyball Association Khalid Waqar Chamkani, Col. Adeel, Regional Sports Officer Dera Ismail Khan, Kohat, Malakand, Hazara, Bannu, Peshawar, and a team from Peshawar Volleyball Academy, players and officials were also present. The colourful ceremony was started from the recitation of Holy Quran by Mikail of Peshawar, followed by the national anthem and March Past of all the participating eight teams, seven from as many Regions and one from Peshawar Volleyball Academy. Brig. Syed Duraz of Engineering Corps formally cut the ribbon during the opening ceremony. Coaches and managers of the eight

participation teams were introduced to him. Director Operation Salim Raza, Deputy Director Sports Amir Zahir Shah, Regional Sports Officers Mardan Suliman Khan, Peshawar (Zakir Ullah), Dera Ismail Khan (Anwar Kamal Burki), Kohat (Sajid Afridi), Malakand (Shakeel Ur Rehman), Hazara (Ahmad Zaman), Bannu (Shafqat Ullah), coaches Khalid Khan, Wasif Ullah, Administrator Peshawar Sports Complex Syed Jaffar Shah, players and spectators were also present. Speaking on this occasion, Brig. Duraz said that it is a special directive of the Corps Commander Peshawar Lt. Gen. Hassan Azhar Hayat to hold open trials and short-listed players from each of the seven regions including Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Kohat, Mardan, Malakand, Hazara and Peshawar in order to promote the game of volleyball in all across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is full of volleyball potential but during the last National Championship Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remained at No. 6 position, which is not justified at any level that is why it was decided to hold open trials, short-list talented players and provide them good coaching under qualified coaches. He said, we have decided to have international coaching facilities for the players

besides the selected top 20 players of the U16, 22, U18 and U21 who would be kept under rigorous training and coaching for a longer duration. During the training these selected and short-listed players would be provided honorarium besides proper diet as well. Brig Duraz said that eight teams have been divided in two groups in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inter-Regional Boys Volleyball League where two teams would qualify for the semi-finals and final according to round robin league. A selection committee, he said, would also monitor the performance of the players before short-listing them for the final team. He assured that all facilities would be ensured to the players during the League. He said in the first phase trials were conducted in each of the Regional Headquarters, followed by League competitions and soon after the League, the names of the selection probabilities would be announced to be trained and coached under qualified coaches. Earlier, in the first match Peshawar Academy team defeated Hazara Region by 3-2 in a thrilling match. Peshawar Academy team won the first two sets by 25-23 and 25-21 but failed to click and thus Hazara Region staged a comeback and won the set by 22-25 and 23-25. It was the last and decisive set won by Peshawar at 15-9.



SARGODHA: Players in action during Sargodha Squash League organized by Sargodha Division Squash Association at Squash Complex Sports Stadium. —APP Photo



In brief

ANF recovers 655 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting three operations across the country managed to recover 655 kg drugs and arrested three accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed that 640 kg hashish was recovered from a vehicle intercepted at Gahi Khan Chowk, Quetta and two suspects were arrested. In second operation, 14 kg hashish was recovered from Morgah border area in Khyber and 760 grams Ice was recovered from an accused netted at RCD Road Hub. Cases have been registered against the accused under Anti-Narcotics Act and further investigations are under process.

CDA to auction plots in next week

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has decided to conduct an auction of plots in Islamabad, alleviating the budgetary constraints faced by the civic body. According to the CDA official, the plot auction is set to take place from 10 to 12 January at the F9 Park in Gandhara Hall. Plots located on Blue Area, Centers, and Park Road will be included in the auction. The auction list includes petrol pumps, Class Three shopping centers, agro farms, and apartment plots, along with fruit and vegetable shops, IT centers, and hostel plots. A substantial 10 percent discount will be applicable for complete payments made within one month of bid acceptance. Furthermore, approval for construction plans will be granted upon the first installment payment.

Police arrest two bike lifters

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested two bike lifters and recovered seven stolen motorcycles from their possession, said a Police spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed that a team under the supervision of SHO, Race Course Police Station managed to net two bike lifters namely Shabbir alias Heera and Talha and recovered seven stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway. Superintendent of Police, Potohar said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind bars.

Dense foggy conditions may cause health issues

ISLAMABAD (APP): Dense foggy conditions, continuing in Punjab, plains of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and upper Sindh in coming days, as per the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD)'s forecast, can cause health issues among the citizens. The PMD in its advisory issued on Wednesday warned that exposure to the foggy environment can cause health issues among the citizens. Due to the stable atmosphere, prevailing dense foggy conditions will continue over Punjab including Islamabad, plains of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and upper Sindh. A rain-bearing westerly system is likely to enter Balochistan on January 04 and may affect parts of Balochistan till January 05. Under the influence of this weather system, light to moderate rain/wind/thunderstorm with snowfall over hills is expected in Chaghi, Quetta, Chaman, Ziarat, Qilla Abdullah, Qillah Saifullah, Loralai, Pishin, Mastung, Zhob, Kalat, Musa Khel, Kharan, Harnai, Sibbi, Noshki, Khuzdar and Makran coast on January 04 and January 05.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Parliamentary Committee on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed presenting a shield to CDA sanitation workers during the farewell party at E-7 Park.

PPPP leader Palwasha Khan calls for national unity, end to hatred

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan People's Party (PPPP) leader Palwasha Khan on Wednesday called for a collective effort to foster national unity and end hatred in the country. Addressing a press conference here, she emphasized the need to eradicate hatred from the country and advocated for a compassionate approach to resolving internal conflicts.

She addressed critical issues facing the nation and called for a collective effort to foster national unity.

Palwasha Khan stressed national unity for progress of the country and advocated for a compassionate approach to resolving internal conflicts.

During the press briefing, she urged political parties that are hesitant about participating in elections to openly declare their intentions. She stressed the importance of political transparency and encouraged a candid discussion about the aspirations of such parties.

Highlighting the potential

consequences of discussions surfacing before the elections, she expressed concerns about the aftermath. She called for addressing these issues before February 8, advocating for peace, security, and the preservation of lives in the country. PPPP leader reiterated her party's commitment to national interests and outlined the party's primary focus on providing employment opportunities for the people, emphasizing the initiation of a unique Benazir Income Support Program.

Commissioner visits UCs to ensure cleanliness arrangements

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta on Wednesday visited different Union Councils of the city to inspect and ensure cleanliness arrangements.

According to Commissioner Office spokesperson, the Commissioner visited Millat Colony, UC-42, Dhoke Khaba, UC-43, Dhoke Farman Ali, UC-44 and reviewed the performance of sanitation staffers working in different locations to make the city clean and neat. The Commissioner said that Rawalpindi would soon become a zero-waste and smog free area.

The Commissioner also talked to the Officials of UCs, local residents and sought their opinion for cleanliness situation.

Chairman Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) Sagib Rafiq, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) RWMC, Rana Sajid Safdar and other officers concerned were also present on the occasion. RWMC was actively working in different areas to provide a clean environment to citizens regardless of climate change and other constraints, Liaquat Ali Chhatta said adding, "We are committed to make Rawalpindi a zero-waste and smog-free city." He directed the officers to make all-out efforts for road washing, manual sweeping and waste lifting regularly which would also help eliminate smog in the area.

Seven drug dealers held

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested seven drug dealers and recovered more than 09 kg of drugs from their possession during a crackdown here on Wednesday. According to a police spokesman, Saddar Wah police held Adnan and recovered more than 02 kg of drugs from his possession 2.1 kg of drugs was recovered from Ghaffar while 1.3 kg of drugs was recovered from Danish and the same police recovered 1.5 kg of drugs from Shahid and 560 grams of charas was recovered from Rahmat.

Similarly, Taxila police recovered 1.6 kg of drugs from Jaffar while the same police recovered 560 grams of charas from Maryam.

Senator Mushahid hosts Christmas party in honour of sanitary workers

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senator Mushahid Hussain, who represents the Federal Capital in the Senate, held a Christmas-cum-New Year's Party in honour of sanitation workers at the E-7 Park, which was attended by about 150 persons.

Lauding the hard work, role and contribution of sanitary workers to keep Islamabad 'clean and green', he said: 'You are the real VIPs, given your honesty, dedication and hard work and we are proud of you'.

Senator Mushahid Hussain also awarded shields of appreciation to two retiring sanitary workers: Yaqoob Masih, who served for 42 years, and Saifur Rahman, who served for 38 years.

Talking to the media, Senator Mushahid Hussain said that knowing Islamabad is a city of the elites, where VIP Culture is prevalent and only VIPs are acknowledged or honoured, he wanted to set a different example, by 'honouring our unsung heroes', the poor, underclass belonging to the Christian community, who are the weakest and most oppressed section of Pakistani society.

He said 'usually, in Islamabad, we only honour VIPs or those holding high office'.

He said the 'sanitary workers are the real VIPs, because they serve selflessly, above and beyond the call of duty, at meager salaries, and it is because of them that our city is so clean and beautiful'.

Senator Mushahid Hussain said that 'we must uphold Quaid e Azam's vision of equality for all Pakistanis, irrespective of religion, caste or creed' and respect the National Flag where the white colour honours non-Muslim Pakistanis.

He also said 'humanity should be paramount and the real worship is serving humanity, above any prejudices or any consideration of colour, caste or creed'.

Last year too, Senator Mushahid Hussain arranged a similar function in honour of Manzoor Masih, a retiring sanitary worker and other members of CDA Sanitation staff.

The head of the CDA Labour Union, Chaudhry Yasin, and Senator Fawzia Arshad, PTI Senator from Islamabad also participated in the function.

Pakistani workers to be sent abroad through proper channel

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani workforce would be sent abroad through the agreements under the supervision of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development and no body would be allowed to use illegal ways to go abroad for a job or business.

An official source told APP here on Wednesday, he said that a well-educated and skilled workforce could play a vital role in the social development of the country to boost the fragile current economic situation of the state.

The government was committed and took various steps to provide and ensure the International Labour Organization (ILO) pattern rights to all Pakistani mine workers as soon as possible.

He said that all concerned departments would ensure the true implementation of the rights of workers.

So far, MOUs have been signed with about sixteen countries regarding employment in the Pakistani workforce. Some have more contracts under con-

sideration. Going abroad illegally should be discouraged. Taking the illegal route is not only wasting money but also facing difficulties.

To a question, he said that the OPF Regional Office Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has received a total of 151 complaints so far, out of which 114 have been resolved so far.

Most of the complaints were related to lands and law and order.

There is a need for awareness among people regarding overseas. The shortage of staff in OPF schools will be met in any case.

OPF schools will be opened in North and South Waziristan.

For the first time in history, four years of pending funds have been cleared with the full support of the Ministry of Overseas and HRD. In the year 2022-23, educational scholarships of 794.86 million to 3399 students, marriage grants of 122.8 million to 644 persons and death grants of 73.7 million to 130 persons have been provided.

NRA starts comprehensive programme for training of prisoners: Chairman

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Rahmatul-Lil-Alameen Wa Khatamun Nabiyyin (NRA), Khurshid Ahmed Nadeem has said the authority is starting a comprehensive program to improve the mental level and training of prisoners in Jails across the country.

Addressing a news conference here on Wednesday, Khurshid Ahmad Nadeem said that the main purpose of establishing the authority is to take practical steps in the society in light of the Last Prophet's life.

Khurshid Ahmad Nadeem further said that there is a desire to start different level programs to improve the condition of the people imprisoned in the jails and in this process, the assistance and consultation will be taken from the government as well as the civil society.

Rahmatul-Lil-Alameen

Wa Khatamun Nabiyyin (NRA) is preparing a special program for women and children in prisons under the title "Mercy for All" so that they can be a useful citizens of the society.

He said the role of mosques and media should be very important and responsible in making the society a peaceful and dignified.

The content regarding Seerat of Holy Prophet will also be ensured in spiritual places (Khanqahs'), adding, the training sessions will be held for journalists. However, the training programs are also being started for teachers.

With the cooperation of National Curriculum Council (NCC), we are going to make Seerat-e-Nabi a part of the curriculum, he informed.

Meanwhile, Chairman NRA said that the social media wing is being made active for public training

and work has been started on the YouTube channel to create awareness about the teachings of the Holy Prophet. He went on saying that all educational boards are being taken on board to make questions regarding ethics and Seerat as part of the curriculum.

Rehmatul Alameen Jamia Mosques will be built at district level, where people belonging to all school of thoughts will be able to offer prayers, adding, there doors will also be open for women.

These will be social centers, which will work for inter-religion harmony. We will make this authority active even for non-Muslims, because the Holy Prophet was sent not only for the Muslims, but as a mercy to the world".

The International Scholars are being invited, while National Seerat Conference will be organised, he concluded.

RDA gives concession to educational institutions

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on the directives of Director General (DG) RDA, Muhammad Saif Anwar Jappa has given concession to the educational institutions till end of the current academic year.

According to a RDA spokesman, the Land Use and Building Control Wing of RDA on the requests of the owners of the schools had suspended the legal action against illegal educational institutions till the end of the current academic year. He informed that the authority on the directives

of the DG had decided to give concession to the owners of the schools so that the educational activities of the children are not interrupted due to the legal action of RDA and the children could complete their academic year without any hindrance.

The spokesman said that in the light of this decision, all school owners who had established schools in residential buildings without approval were directed by the DG RDA to immediately get regularized the schools as per law or stop the illegal use of the buildings in residential

areas.

The school owners had also been instructed to submit an affidavit within 15 days to the RDA that they are ready to get regularized their illegal schools or stop the illegal use of the buildings, he said adding, the owners of the buildings will have to pay Rs 1000 fine per day until the schools are regularized or the buildings being used for the commercial purposes are vacated.

If the affidavit is not submitted within 15 days, legal action would be taken against the rules violators and the schools would be closed, he added.

Experts warn pollutants, dense fog leading to 'Pneumonia, asthma attacks

ISLAMABAD (APP): Health experts on Wednesday warned that the continued thick smog in various cities of the country has become a real threat to citizens' health, as the air pollution rate increasing to an alarming level and leading to multiple chest infection diseases like Pneumonia.

Talking to a Private news channel, a specialist of ENT Dr Afnan Hayat children and elders are physiologically more vulnerable to air pollution than adults because their brains, lungs and other organs are still developing, adding, that hospitals were on high alert with beds and ventilators set aside for extra emergency cases. He advised that pneumonia is undoubtedly a risky respiratory health infection which can become a big problem when air pollution levels flare up.

Citizens should keep themselves

indoors during fog times, the risk of pneumonia and other severe respiratory problems doubled and also increases the risk of mortality, he added.

"In case of fog and smog, people are advised to take some precautionary measures and vaccinate their children", he added. The expert also suggested plenty of rest, warm beverages, steam baths, or the use of humidifiers in houses for air moisture and timely consultations with doctors. Replying to a question, he mentioned that Pneumonia begins with symptoms of fever, cough and difficulty breathing. Not only adults can get pneumonia, but children and the elderly can also experience it. Interim Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare and Population Welfare Dr Jamal Nasir added that smog was an additional factor in the increased respiratory diseases.



ISLAMABAD: CDA workers busy in operation to extinguish after fire at Aabpara market.

MSF to utilize medicines

KABUL (BNA): In a productive meeting held on Tuesday, Dr. Abdulbari Omar, the general director of the Afghanistan Food and Drug Authority discussed the procurement of locally produced medicines with Philip Ribeiro, the head of Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Afghanistan. The primary discussions of the meeting revolved around Doctors Without Borders' commitment to sourcing drugs from Afghanistan for their operations within the country.

Highest number of tourist

HERAT (BNA): Ten foreign tourists hailing from Russia and Indonesia have embarked on a journey to explore enchanting city of Herat. This announcement was made by Mawlawi Rahmatullah Mohammadi, Director Tourism for Herat, who highlighted provision of necessary facilities to ensure a comfortable and memorable experience for these visitors. Mohammadi expressed his enthusiasm, stating, "We have successfully arranged all required amenities for our foreign tourists in Herat."

Iran expels over 500,000 Afghan migrants in 9 months



KABUL (Khaama Press): Majid Shojia, the commander of border police in Khorasan Razavi, Iran, has announced that over the past nine months, 520,000 illegal Afghan migrants have been identified and expelled from across Iran. IRNA reported on Tuesday, citing the commander of the border police of Khorasan Razavi, that these migrants were deported through the Dogharoun

border. He emphasized that the entry and presence of Afghan migrants in the country cause problems; therefore, their presence must be with legal permission. Otherwise, they will be identified and returned to their country. This is while, in recent months, the process of deporting Afghan migrants from countries like Iran and Pakistan has increased.

Previously, the commander of the border police of Khorasan Razavi had announced the deportation of 60,380 illegal migrants in the last month. Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, many Afghan nationals have chosen to migrate to neighboring countries such as Iran and Pakistan or to Western countries. They are driven by the desire for a better life and the need to

escape persecution, security threats, and a lack of financial and economic opportunities in their homeland. Upon reaching these countries, however, Afghan migrants often encounter a new set of challenges. The main plight begins as they face torture, harassment, deportation, and imprisonment. These hardships are pervasive and impact a large number of individuals seeking refuge. Therefore, the journey of Afghan nationals is marked by a continuous struggle, starting from the decision to leave their country to the difficulties they face in their destinations. The promise of a safer and more prosperous life remains elusive for many as they navigate through these harsh realities. It is worth mentioning that according to the statistics of the United Nations, about 3.5 million Afghan citizens live in Iran, most of whom are migrants without residency documents.

Being a woman in Afghan society difficult

KABUL (Khaama Press): She answers the phone with a weary voice. I can hear the sound of a sewing machine from the other end of the line. After some conversation, she ends the call with this statement: "Being a woman in Afghan society was difficult." Fatima Jafari, a medical graduate from Balkh Medical University, was deprived of pursuing a specialization in her field after the rise of the Taliban administration and consequently left Afghanistan. She now works in a garment factory in Iran. She can hardly believe that working with a sewing machine in an environment filled with humiliation and scorn has replaced her medical expertise. Gaining admission to Afghan medical universities, especially Kabul, Balkh, and Herat medical universities, is not easy. This field attracts the most candidates in the entrance exams, and anyone who eventually makes it to these universities has likely spent many sleepless nights studying.

Fatima was a diligent girl who did not give up easily and fought against deprivation and circumstances. However, now, all her hard work in pursuing education and academic degrees is just a memory that she recounts while working with the sewing machine. After completing her bachelor's degree, Fatima left Balkh to pursue a specialization course in Kabul. She started working at a health centre in Kabul. While her voice mingles with the monotonous sound of the sewing machine, she continues: "When I arrived in Kabul, my main goal was to specialize in surgery, but I had to start working early on because supporting me was a burden for my family, and I didn't want to impose any more on them." It's evident from the sounds that she is sitting behind the sewing machine, hurriedly stitching fabric. But all this haste in her work doesn't interrupt her conversation. She gradually reminisces about her first years at the university. She talks about the stress of the first day at university, the final term exams, and the teachers who wanted to force the students to study. These are now just memories, and Fatima is on a different path. Like thousands of other educated girls, with the fall of Kabul, Fatima saw the situation so dire that she decided to give up her efforts and focus on fleeing from that geography. According to her, "Being a woman in Afghan society was difficult, but now it's nothing but suffering; otherwise, why should we be punished so much?" Fatima's migration led her to Iran; now, she lives there with her mother and brother.

IE estimates Daesh numbers around 80



KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate's spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, said that the Daesh has been suppressed in Afghanistan and that between 70 to 80 Daesh members are estimated to be based in Afghanistan, and they are being hunted. He said that the sanctuaries of the Daesh group have been eliminated in Afghanistan. "Their number is less, and it is around 70 to 80 people. They are dispersed and are under investigation. All their centers have been eliminated. Many of them are in prisons and some of them are being hunted. They have less numbers and all those paths which were supporting them (Daesh) have been suppressed," Mujahid said. Meanwhile, political analysts said that the Islamic Emirate should prevent any

kind of attack from Afghan soil against other countries, to earn trust of the international community. "Since the Islamic Emirate came to power, there is physical security all over Afghanistan and it does not allow any group and individual, whether they are the Daesh or resistance or any other group," said Mohammad Ajmal Zurmati, international ana-

lyst. "Suppression of Daesh is linked to the national trust. National trust requires an end to lack of law, and lack of an official government," said Sayed Jawad Sijadi, political analyst. Earlier, the acting Defense Minister, Mawlawi Mohammad Yaqoob Mujahid, said that Pakistan and Tajikistan nationals were killed and arrested in attacks in Afghanistan.

ARCS Head: Need for humanitarian aid increased

KABUL (TOLONews): The President of the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS), Matiul Haq Khalis, said that the forced deportation of immigrants from neighboring countries and the earthquake in Herat have increased the level of people's need for humanitarian aid. Speaking at a ceremony to receive 5,500 aid packages from the King Salman Charity Foundation, Khalis noted that ARCS is working with international organizations to raise the amount of assistance in the districts and villages because recently returned immigrants face numerous difficulties there. "After spending 20 to 30 years abroad, when one of them [immigrants] arrives in their district and province, they have no place to stay there and face various problems," Matiul Haq Khalis said. Some immigrants who



have recently returned from Pakistan said that they are facing serious economic challenges and that these aids are not enough for them. They asked the Islamic Emirate to also provide them the work opportunities. "I am happy that I have received the aid, but we should be provided with the employment opportunities," Wali Khan, a returnee from Pakistan told TOLONews. "We returned from Pakistan and rented a house for 6,000 Afghanis, and we have no means to advance our lives," Khudadad, another returnee from Pakistan, told TOLONews. The International Committee of the Red Cross has provided 16 ambulances to the Afghan Red Crescent Society. Officials of ARCS said that they will send these ambulances to Nuristan, Bamyan and Uruzgan provinces.

"We returned from Pakistan and rented a house for 6,000 Afghanis, and we have no means to advance our lives," Khudadad, another returnee from Pakistan, told TOLONews. The International Committee of the Red Cross has provided 16 ambulances to the Afghan Red Crescent Society. Officials of ARCS said that they will send these ambulances to Nuristan, Bamyan and Uruzgan provinces.

Ministry: Over 25,000 begging children collected in one year

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA) said that it has collected more than 25,000 children who were begging from all over the country in the past one year. The ministry's spokesman, Samiullah Ebrahimi, said that they are trying to place these children in orphanages and provide them with educational opportunities. "The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs will place children who are

engaged in hard labor and who meet the requirements, in orphanages, where they will get all the necessities of life. The opportunity of education will also be provided for them," Ebrahimi told TOLONews. As the only breadwinner for his family, 15-year-old Basit makes his living by selling chickpeas in Kabul. "It's been three years that I work here. My father was unemployed and could not work because he was sick. I don't have an elder brother that is why I came

to work myself," Basit told TOLONews. "I hope that my father will be employed. I should go to madrasa and school myself and not come back to work," Boot polisher Waisuddin, 10, Basit's brother said. "My father has died. I work because I don't have a father or anyone else," Elias, another child, said. According to some family counselors, hard labor will have negative consequences for children in the future.

"This will cause children to become violent in the future and treat both their family members and their own children with violence," Jahan Ara Ghiasi, a family counselor, told TOLONews. Earlier, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), said that children in Afghanistan are considered the most vulnerable children in the world, and in addition to violence and discomfort, hunger and health problems also threaten their lives.

Afghan pine nuts exports increased



KABUL (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce have announced that exports of Afghan pine nuts have increased recently. Officials in the ministry say that in the last eight months, more than 5,000 tons of pine nuts worth \$14 million have been exported to the United Arab Emirates, China, Qatar, UK, USA, Australia, Netherlands and other countries. "In the last eight months, pine nuts exports

worth approximately 14 million dollars were exported mainly to China, India, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, US, UK, Australia, Netherlands and other countries," said Abdulsalam Jawad Akhundzada, the spokesman of the ministry. "Although it was the best in terms of price and quality, but most of last year's pine nuts still remain in the markets, which should be exported to Arab countries and US through

international expos, and must be supported by subsidy programs by the government to other domestic factories and should be regulated," said Mahboobullah Mohammadi, an investor. Meanwhile, officials in the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock also say that they are trying to increase the production of pine nuts in the country. The ministry's spokesman adds that pine nuts are produced in a traditional way, and they have managed this process properly and pre-

vented waste. "Pine nuts are in the natural forests, and in the forests where there are pine nuts, we have tried to increase the yield of pine nuts," said Misbahuddin Mustain, the spokesman of the ministry. Experts say that the government should pay more attention to the production and export of pine nuts and introduce this product in global markets. Afghan pine nuts enjoys a special reputation. In the past years, the product used to be exported to global markets through air corridors, but now that the air corridors are not fully operational, a small amount of pine nuts is exported outside the country. According to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Afghanistan exported goods worth nearly \$2 billion to regional countries and beyond during the year 2023. Its spokesman stated on Monday that Afghanistan's exports were mainly to countries such as Pakistan, India, China, the United Arab Emirates, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan.

Disasters killed 100s, destroyed 70,000 acres

KABUL (TOLONews): The State Ministry for Disaster Management Affairs said that 350 people died in various natural disasters in the past nine months in the country. According to the ministry, in that time, 4,000 homes were totally or partially destroyed whereas 70,000 acres of agricultural land were also destroyed. "Around 70,000 acres of land has been destroyed due to natural disasters. Up to four thousand homes have been destroyed either completely or partially. We have reached the affected people quickly," said Mullah Janan Saiq, speaker for the ministry of state for disasters management. In the meantime, those who have been affected by drought and other natural disasters are concerned about the continuation of drought and lack of crops. The people say that farmers have endured great losses due to lack of

water for their land. "Farmers are facing grave problems due to lack of water. Gardens have dried due to less rainfall this year," said Abdul Khalil, a drought-affected farmer. "When there is drought, the trees do not grow, the trees face different diseases which cause heavy losses to farmers," said Muhammad Afzal, another drought-affected farmer. Based on the statistics of the state ministry for disaster management, natural calamities of the past nine months have mostly affected the residents of Herat, Bamyan, Daikundi, Panjshir, Parwan, Takhar, Ghor, Kandahar, Samangan and Badakhshan provinces.

Meanwhile, the spokesman said that 25 provinces of the country are predicted to be vulnerable to floods and other natural disasters in the ongoing solar year. "In the current year, 25 provinces are facing different threats from natural disasters, we have highlighted 300 spots as most vulnerable to the calamities," said Mullah Janan Saiq, speaker for the ministry of state for disasters management. In the meantime, those who have been affected by drought and other natural disasters are concerned about the continuation of drought and lack of crops. The people say that farmers have endured great losses due to lack of

Women in Afghanistan face increased restrictions in 2023

KABUL (Khaama Press): Since the Taliban regime regained power in August 2021, it has issued over 50 decrees to limit women's public and private roles. By 2023, these restrictions have become more severe, significantly affecting women's lives. The Taliban's restrictive actions against women can be categorized into four areas: deprivation of women from participating in political arenas, limitations on women's participation in social activities, prohibition of continuing education, and restriction of women from participating in economic activities. Although the Taliban had previously announced that within the framework of Islamic Sharia, women and girls would be given the right to work and education, no decision has been made by the Taliban administration for more than two years to show respect for women's rights.

The Taliban subjected private university students in Afghanistan to gender segregation less than a month after taking control of Afghanistan. On September 12, 2021, the Taliban Ministry of Higher Education announced a similar action for public universities. This process continued until the complete removal of girls from the realm of university education and continues to this day. According to experts, the higher education system in Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban has faced a definitive collapse, such that 30% of university professors have left Afghanistan. The education sector in Afghanistan has also been on the verge of collapse since the arrival of the Taliban administration. These two cases and numerous other instances have contributed to concerns about the promotion of a mindset based on gender apartheid.

Ms. Najiba Ayubi, a women's rights activist, said, "No society can witness progress and development without the presence of educated and knowledgeable women. What is imposed on Afghan women today is a great injustice that can negatively affect several generations and will forever weigh heavily on the shoulders of the current rulers." Women and girls have also faced the same fate in media activities. Khaama Press's findings show that the restrictions imposed against freedom of expression and women's participation in the media have contaminated this field with discrimination, leading women journalists to prefer being unemployed or leaving the country. The prohibition of broadcasting women's voices in some provinces, the refusal of the Taliban's officials to interview

women journalists, the imposition of mandatory clothing, and the compulsory covering of women presenters' faces are among the most prominent cases that have severely limited the activity of women journalists in the media. Findings by journalist-supporting institutions, including organizations that support free media in Afghanistan, indicate that the presence of women in Afghan media has decreased by more than 90% after the Taliban administration took over. On December 24, 2022, the Taliban banned all female employees in national and international non-governmental organizations. The Ministry of Economy of the Taliban asked these organizations to suspend female employees until further notice. Now, the question is whether the restrictions against women will decrease in 2023.

The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security in 2023 announced that Afghanistan has been identified as the worst country for women among 177 countries in the global index of women's status that year. Khaama Press's findings show that the restrictions imposed in 2021 and 2022 have been strictly enforced by the Taliban's executive forces in 2023. The implementation of more than 50 restrictive orders this year has led women to describe 2023 as "an experience of inhumane limitations." These findings, based on previous Khaama Press reports, also show that in addition to dozens of cases of deprivation and prohibition against women, further restrictions have been imposed. The prohibition of women's activities in beauty salons is among the restrictions imposed in the

summer of 2023. An order that destroyed the employment of about 60,000 female beauticians. Rana Saedi, one of the beauticians, told Khaama Press, "After the prohibition of education, I tried to work in a beauty salon to improve my condition, but after the prohibition of beauty salon activities, I was also banned from doing this work and now I am in a bad economic situation." The year 2023 was also marked by the suppression of street protests, and several women's rights activists were arrested during the year. Julia Parsi, Parisa Azadeh, Neda Parwani, Bahara Karimi, and Manizha Seddiqi are among the protesters who were detained by the Taliban for more than three months and were released in early December. From the beginning to the end of 2023, the United Nations Security Council

held at least three sessions on Afghan women. However, the holding of these sessions did not bring about much change in the restrictions imposed on women. Najiba Ayubi, a women's rights activist, told Khaama Press, "Regrettably, Afghan women are deprived of all their individual and collective rights, from August 15, 2021, to today, the situation for women is getting worse every day, and the decrees restricting them are increasing. Unemployment and poverty are rampant; women and girls who dreamed of higher education and progress are now imprisoned in their homes." According to her, "The deprivation of girls from education can have short-term and long-term dire consequences and add to the many current problems." Meanwhile, in the midst

of all these restrictions, the rates of suicide, mental health issues, and forced and underage marriages among women and girls in Afghanistan have unprecedentedly increased. Soraya Paikan, a women's rights activist, told Khaama Press, "For the development of a society, modern and progressive knowledge is necessary. We should not waste time and opportunity to achieve this goal." She says, "Women, who are a very important part of society, are prohibited by the governing authorities from acquiring knowledge and education. The damage of this action by the Taliban is severely hindering the community from advancements in science and knowledge." These statements are made while the Taliban regime always emphasizes that its treatment of women is in accordance with Islamic Sharia.

Islamabad to continue engaging with Kabul: FM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's caretaker Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani Wednesday reiterated the country's commitment to continue the ongoing engagement with Afghanistan. The foreign minister's remarks came after a meeting with the Afghan province Kandahar's Governor Mullah Shirin in Islamabad.

"Reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to continued engagement & mutually beneficial ties with Afghanistan. Also stressed the imperatives of addressing all issues to harness the full potential for trade & con-

nectivity," Jilani wrote on his X account. Jilani's meeting with the senior Afghan official — who also serves as the country's deputy of strategic intelligence of defence ministry — comes in the backdrop of an alarming increase in terror incidents in Pakistan, which, as per the Annual Security Report released by the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), saw more than 1,500 Pakistanis being killed in 789 terror attacks and counter-terrorism operations in 2023.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Afghan embassy in Islamabad had said that the sixth round of the Afghanistan-

Pakistan Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) was to include discussions pertaining to "resolution of potential conflicts along the Durand Line and the establishment of essential facilities for people on both sides." It is pertinent to know that the two neighbouring countries have been witnessing strained relations owing to increased terror attacks in Pakistan, which the country blames on safe havens inside Afghanistan, resulting in the caretaker government's decision to expel millions of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan — a decision which hasn't sit well with the Taliban administration.

PPP writes to CEC about election symbols

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In-charge central election monitoring cell of Pakistan Peoples Party, Taj Haider in a letter addressed to the Chief Election Commissioner.

"We have the honour to invite your kind attention towards the fact that there are some election symbols in the list of approved ECP election symbols which bear close resemblance with the Election symbol (Arrow) of our Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians. A list of such symbols is given are: Pencil, Ball point pen, Pen, Screwdriver and Toothbrush. This resemblance can confuse ordinary voters and there is a danger that our votes can be stamped on these symbols if these were allotted to other candidates.

We would also bring to your notice that in bye elections 2018 Mr. Jehangir Treen's prayer in the High Court that the election symbol of PML(N) candidate (Batsman) who was contesting against him should be removed since Mr. Tareen's symbol (Bat) had a resemblance with the symbol of his opponent, was upheld by the Honourable High Court.

Your honour will appreciate that the resemblance of the symbols mentioned by us with our election symbol (Arrow) is much closer to that which was upheld by the Honourable High Court in Mr. Tareen's case. Your honour may be pleased to notify that the five symbols mentioned above by us should be dropped from the list of approved election symbols."

Sartaj Aziz laid to rest

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Former foreign minister Sartaj Aziz was laid to rest at the H8 Graveyard in Islamabad. Sartaj Aziz's family members, relatives and friends attended the funeral prayers in large numbers.

Sartaj Aziz's family members, relatives and friends attended the funeral prayers in large numbers. Former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Dr Tariq Fazal, Chaudhry Tanveer Hussain, Shakeel Awan, Farhatullah Babar, former federal minister Nisar Memon, Ijaz Ul Haq, Sardar Mehtab Khan, Raja Zafarul Haq, Siddique Alfaroq, Zubair Qasuri, and former PIO Rao Tehseen Ali Khan also attended the funeral prayers.

Ambassadors of various countries including the Kuwaiti envoy were also present in the funeral prayers. Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) leader and former finance minister Sartaj Aziz had passed away on Tuesday night.

Earthquake jolts Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (INP): The federal capital Islamabad and its neighbouring regions experienced a sudden jolt today as earthquake tremors sent shockwaves across the landscape, causing panic among residents. The seismic activity was also felt in Rawalpindi, Attock, and Chakwal.

The seismological centre said that the magnitude of the earthquake was 4.9 on the Richter scale, the depth of the earthquake was 137 kilometres underground, the epicentre was the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border, and the tremors were felt at 2:24 p.m. No loss of life or property was reported from any part of the capital.

PHC approves Zartaj Gul's transit bail

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) on Wednesday night approved a transit bail of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Zartaj Gul after much ado inside the court premises.

"It is not our tradition to arrest a woman," PHC Chief Justice (CJ) Mohammad Ibrahim Khan remarked during the hearing while lamenting the deployment of a heavy police contingent outside the court premises. The court restricted the police present outside the court from arresting the former federal minister after she made a desperate plea against her possible arrest.

Gul, earlier on Wednesday, refused to leave the court's premises fearing arrest in a case pertaining to the May 9 riots, while also apologising for the violent events that took place following PTI founder Imran Khan's arrest. The police reportedly deployed additional contingents — including six more female police officials — outside the court and Ababeel Squad personnel patrolled outside.

In view of the situation, PHC CJ reached the court late this evening and set up the court to hear Gul's plea. "Both of us should resign if you cannot bring out a solution to the matter," CJ Ibrahim said while addressing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's advocate general. He said that the female politician hadn't attacked the police to have this much contingent deployed.



Gul among 51 other PTI leaders including Murad Saeed, Ali Amin Gandapur, Hammad Azhar, and Omar Ayub face charges in a case related to the attack on Gujranwala Cantt on May 9. An anti-terrorism court had issued directives to seize the properties of the said politicians.

Earlier, speaking to journalists at the PHC, the politician broke into tears and said that she felt like fighting a war instead of contesting general elections as heavy contingents of police force were deployed outside the court to arrest her. The politico asked her voters not to be worried over the tense environment as she was standing firmly and fearlessly with her ideology. She pinned hopes on the judiciary for providing her justice.

Gul said that her nomination papers were rejected by the election commission. The staffers of the election commission were

taken hostage in DG Khan. "Imad Tahir was arrested from the same court this morning and now the forces are present outside to arrest me," Gul said, stressing that she should be granted bail as she has personally appeared and "surrendered" before the court.

"I have not committed any crime. I am just standing with my ideology and I only want to contest polls, which is my right to represent DG Khan," she added, appealing to the lawyers, PHC chief justice, and bar to give her "justice" and order police to refrain from arresting her. She also requested the legal fraternity to take a stand for the rule of law. Some female cops had earlier reached PHC's bar room in an apparent bid to arrest the PTI leader. However, the members of the Insaf Lawyers Forum resisted their attempt. The bar room was then locked after media persons and cops asked to leave.

Ulema call for religious harmony and peace

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Ulema and religious scholars at the Pakistan Aman Conference on Wednesday called for religious harmony, tolerance and peace in line with the teachings of Islam.

"Islam is a religion of peace that teaches respect for humanity, religious harmony, tolerance and a society free from violence," Majlis Ulema Pakistan Chairman Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad while chairing the conference, organized by the Majlis Ulema Pakistan at the Quetta Press Club. Maulana Azad, who is also Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Chairman, said that Pakistan was united and would always remain united.

He said the nefarious designs of the enemy against the country had failed with the strong support of the mosque and the pulpit through promoting the 'Paigham-e-Pakistan'. The enemy powers wanted to weaken Pakistan by creating chaos, but "we will not allow their evil agenda to succeed," he vowed.

Maulana Azad said the armed forces and security agencies had strengthened the defence of the homeland by rendering unprecedented sacrifices. "All scholars and the entire nation stand with their brave armed forces and security agencies for the security and safety of Pakistan."

"It is a great statement and Fatwa, which the scholars and the great Sheikhs will make the voice of every house through the pulpit and mehrab (the mosque and the pulpit), will make it (Pakistan) stable," Maulana Azad said. He reiterated that the "Paigham-e-Pakistan" was a great narrative which had broken the back of menaces of terrorism and extremism and strengthened the national unity and solidarity when it was disseminated through

'the mosque and the pulpit'.

He said that the recent statement of Chief of the Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir for the protection, peace and stability of the country and elimination of terrorism from its soil was the voice of the entire nation. "The people of Balochistan are zealous, honest and patriotic, who have always made great sacrifices for Pakistan," he added.

Maulana Azad said that Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar had shown solidarity with the oppressed Muslims of Gaza by banning New Year programmes. "Today, the entire Muslim Ummah stands with the oppressed Muslims of Palestine and Gaza. It is a duty to cooperate with the oppressed people of Gaza," he added.

Scholars from all schools of thought, including Maulana Anwar Haqqani, Dr. Attaur Rehman, Qari Abdul Hafeez, Qari Abdul Rashid Hazarvi, Mufti Muhammad Rozi Khan, Allama Syed Muhammad Hashim Mousavi, Padri Saimon Bashir, Sardar Jasbir Singh, Allama Syed Nasrullah Hussaini, Maulana Muhammad Jan Qasmi, Qari Mehruallah, Maulana Syed Naqibullah Agha, Pir Habibullah Shah Chishti, Sardar Muhammad Iqbal Khilji, Maulana Mukhtar Ahmed Habibi, Maulana Najibullah Salafi, Sheikh Wilayat Hussain Jafari, Maulana Ahsan ul Haq, Allama Dr. Muhammad Musa Hussaini, Maulana Atiqur Rahman, Maulana Sundar Saeed, Molana Raz Muhammad Achkzai and Molna Muhammad Ali Mazlom, besides social and political figures and journalists also addressed the conference. They said that the message of Pakistan Peace Conference was a message of peace and love for the whole of Pakistan.

"No one will be allowed to spread chaos and sectari-

anism in Pakistan. We will not allow any agenda or conspiracy of the enemy to succeed as the stability of Balochistan is the stability of Pakistan. "We will make our country stronger and stronger. The Paigham-e-Pakistan is the most important need of the hour, let us play our part in making this narrative public," they pledged.

At the end, special prayers were offered for national security, development and prosperity, unity of the Islamic world, protection of the Harmain Sharifeen, Muslims of Gaza and Palestine, and Occupied Kashmir.

Justice Mazahir Naqvi submits reply

ISLAMABAD (INP): Justice Mazahar Naqvi on Wednesday submitted a detailed response against the second show cause notice in the Supreme Judicial Council, sources said.

In his response, Justice Mazahar Naqvi pleaded before the judicial council rejected the complaints against him, stating that after hearing constitutional petitions in open court, the action of the judicial council was unjustified. It is pertinent to mention here that the Supreme Judicial Council had given Justice Mazahar Naqvi a last chance to submit his response in time.

Meanwhile, the next hearing of the Judicial Council against Justice Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi will be held on January 11. It is worth mentioning here that the complaint was filed against Supreme Court Justice Mazahir Ali Akbar Naqvi in the Supreme Judicial Council. The complaint was filed against the apex court judge in the judicial council, by Mian Dawood Advocate.



ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi being briefed about the role and performance of National Book Foundation, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Ukraine, Russia swap POWs in first deal in months

MOSCOW (AFP): Russia and Ukraine said on Wednesday that they had exchanged hundreds of captive soldiers, the first such prisoner-of-war exchange in months.

The two warring sides had carried out several rounds of exchanges during Moscow's 22-month-long invasion, but the process had stalled in the latter half of last year. In almost simultaneous statements on Wednesday, the Russian defence ministry and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced they had received over 200 soldiers each.

"More than 200 of our soldiers and civilians have been returned from Russian captivity," Zelensky said on Telegram, posting a video of uniformed men celebrating. Ukraine's human rights ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets said 230 Ukrainian people — 224 soldiers and six civilians — were released in total, marking what he said was the 49th exchange between the two sides. Moscow's defence ministry said 248 of its soldiers were returned in a deal that came about after "complex" negotiations mediated by the United Arab Emirates.

Identical rulings by ROs surprises Judge

ISLAMABAD (INP): Hearing at the Election Tribunal of the Islamabad High Court on Wednesday, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir expressed astonishment at what appeared to be arbitrary decisions made by separate returning officers. The tribunal was addressing an appeal lodged by Shaheen Advocate Shoaib Shaheen, contesting the rejection of his nomination form.

During the proceedings, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir noted with surprise that the returning officers for both NA 47 and NA 48 constituencies were identical. Shaheen contested this, asserting that the officers for the two constituencies were different. However, Justice Tahir pointed out that there was not a single word of difference in the orders issued by the two returning officers, suggesting a striking similarity that raised suspicions about the decision-making process.

Shoaib Shaheen defended his stance, claiming that while the officers might be different, the orders seemed to be crafted in the same place, evident from their exact replication.

Expressing concern, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir emphasized the lack of variation between the two orders, raising questions about the independence and fairness of the decision-making process. After the arguments from both parties, the Islamabad Election Tribunal reserved its decision on the matter.

PTI leader Niazullah Niazi, addressing the media outside the Islamabad High Court, shed light on the unusual circumstances surrounding the objection-raising process on December 30. Niazi revealed that the returning officers spent four hours that night scrutinizing nomination papers and raised objections that he described as "ridiculous." He further stated that even the judge found some objections amusing. Notably, an identical decision was issued by three different circles of returning officers, adding another layer of suspicion to the overall electoral proceedings. The Election Tribunal's decision is now eagerly awaited as questions about the integrity of the election process in NA 47 and NA 48 linger.

Ruin in Gaza as Israeli onslaught continues to rage

GAZA: The Israeli military has hit Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis yet again, with relentless artillery shelling and air strikes on residential areas. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society headquarters was targeted for the third time in less than a week. Several people were killed and wounded.

A main supporter of Gaza's healthcare system, the damage to the medical equipment inside will further the human suffering here and the miserable situation of hospitals. To the south in the city of Rafah, to which hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Palestinians have fled, non-stop shelling continued into Wednesday morning. Meanwhile, Israeli bulldozers were on agricultural land creating a "buffer zone", and squeezing people into an even smaller area of the Gaza Strip.

UN agencies have voiced alarm over the spiralling humanitarian crisis. Most of the enclave's population of 2.4 million remains under siege and bombardment, displaced and huddled in shelters and tents, and short of food. "Living conditions... are just hopeless," said 43-year-old Mostafa Shennar, who fled Gaza City, now largely a devastated urban combat zone, and has been living in Rafah. Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas and warned the war, raging since Hamas's October 7 attack, may continue "throughout 2024". Efforts towards a ceasefire have so far yielded no results.

Meanwhile, general strike has been called across the cities of the occupied West Bank in protest against the assassination of seven members of Hamas, including the deputy head of its political bureau, Saleh al-Arouri. The strike was called by Palestinian armed groups that asked people to stay home on Wednesday and only leave to march in demonstrations against the drone attack on the outskirts of Beirut.

The slain men are Saleh al-Arouri, who was also the commander of the Qassam Brigades in the occupied West Bank; Samir Fendi, who commanded the Qassam

Brigades in Lebanon; Azzam al-Aqraa, who commanded the Qassam Brigades in southern Lebanon; and members Mahmoud Shaheen, Mohammed al-Rayes, Mohammed Bashasha and Ahmed Hamoud. All seven will be buried in Lebanon. Funerals will be held for Hamoud and Shaheen on Wednesday in the Burj al-Barajneh camp for Palestinian refugees and Taalbaya, respectively. Al-Arouri will be buried on Thursday in the Shatila refugee camp while Fendi is to be buried on Friday in the Rashidiya refugee camp and Mohammed Bashasha will be buried on the same day in Sidon.

Al-Arouri came from Aroua, a town near Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. Many locals were mourning his death, and streams of visitors went in and out of his family home on Wednesday to pay their respects. His sister Dalal Muhammad Suleiman, 52, described his passing as a seismic event and praised his humility and strength of character, saying he was "like a mountain".

But her brother had long reflected on the likelihood of his death, she added. "Even though losing him is a deep wound, we will take comfort in knowing that he followed his chosen path to the end. He devoted himself to the struggle," she said. When al-Arouri was younger, Suleiman said, he had "a love for altruism, bravery and a dedication to giving more to others than to himself".

"Even in his early school years, he avidly followed the news, had a keen interest in politics and his cultural pursuits were reflected in his office." Others in town also remembered him fondly. A classmate, Nasser Abdel Karim, 58, told Al Jazeera how they played together at school and went to mosque together for prayers. In Hebron, also in the West Bank, the strike emptied the streets on Wednesday morning as shopkeepers heeded the call to close their businesses and people stayed home. — Al Jazeera

PTI's plea

(Continued from Page 1)

apex court's directions — despite being notified by the Punjab ECP — wherein it had ordered the poll organising authority to address the PTI's concerns. The application referred to the top court's ruling, in response to the PTI's earlier petition filed under Article 184(3) of the Constitution complaining of being denied equal opportunities in the political arena, where it directed the electoral body to meet with the party's representatives and address its relevant concerns.

The party, in its recent application, contends that the ECP secretary failed to abide by the apex court's December 22 verdict as PTI candidates continued to be harassed and arrested even after the top court's ruling. Furthermore, the plea — which mentions the ECP and interior secretaries as parties to the case along with the Inspector General Police (IGPs) of all four provinces — also levels serious allegations against the Punjab IG, labelling him as the "mastermind" behind

the crackdown against the PTI. Seeking action against those responsible for violating the court's order, the party had prayed to the court to ensure that its candidates are allowed to hold rallies and political gatherings. At the outset of the hearing, CJP Isa reprimanded Khosa for using the Sardar title with his name. "Stop using words like Sardar, Nawab and Peer," the CJP said while expressing displeasure over the use of such a title.

CJP Isa asked Khosa to show evidence that the ECP had violated the court's direction regarding the redressal of PTI's level-playing field grievances. "I have brought the CD containing all evidence," Khosa replied adding that the PTI leaders were not allowed to submit their nomination papers. "The entire Pakistan has seen what is happening with PTI." At this, the CJP advised the PTI counsel against making "political speech" in the courtroom and asked him to only talk about the Constitution and law. The CJP inquired whether the petition was accusing of the

IG and the chief secretary behind the actions against the PTI leader. "What does the IG and the chief secretary have to do with the election?" the CJP wondered.

"Do you want action against individuals or the Election Commission?" the CJP asked. Khosa replied that it was the responsibility of the Election Commission to conduct transparent elections. "Of course, we are saying that it is the responsibility of the Election Commission. You are seeking contempt of court against IGs and the chief secretary," the CJP said in response. Justice Mahar inquired how many nomination papers of PTI candidates were approved from national and provincial assembly seats. "You [Khosa] are only telling the rejection of the nomination papers, also tell about the approval," he added. "Do you want the Supreme Court to play the role of Election Commission?" the CJP asked after Khosa complained about rejection of PTI candidates' nomination papers by the returning officers.

گیس بل سے کیوں ہیں پریشان؟

بجٹ کا فارمولہ ہے نہایت آسان

یاد رکھیں!

گیزر کی رنگ آلود چار اور تھرب تھرو میٹ بجاری گیس بل کی بڑی وجہ ہے

گیس بل میں بجٹ کیلئے

اپنے پرانے گیزر کی سروں کروائیں

گیزر میں گیس سیور کون کا استعمال یقینی بنائیں

PTD (C) 2077-D