

Rashid's papers approved
F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: An appellate tribunal on Thursday granted appeals of Sheikh Rashid against rejection of his nomination papers in two constituencies. Appellate tribunal declared returning officers' decisions as void and approved nomination papers of Sheikh Rashid for Rawalpindi's National Assembly constituencies NA-56 and NA-57.



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ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar addressing 'Envoys Conference'.

Disqualifying anyone for life against Islam: CJP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa Thursday remarked that disqualifying anyone for life from parliament is "against Islam", as the Supreme Court conducted the hearing of a case pertaining to lifetime disqualification of lawmakers under Article 62(1)(F) of the Constitution.

The apex court had taken notice of contradictions regarding the duration of disqualification in the Election Act, 2017, and an apex court verdict during a past hearing on a petition filed by former PML-N provincial lawmaker Sardar Meer Badshah Khan Qaisrani last month. Qaisrani had challenged his lifetime disqualification over a fake degree in 2007.

"This is a constitutional issue, which we are going to settle once and for all, and we will try to conclude it quickly in order to prevent confusion for the returning officers (ROs) while receiving nomination papers for the upcoming elections," CJP Isa had remarked during the previous hearing of the case.

A seven-member bench — headed by CJP Isa and comprising Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Aminuddin Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, and Justice Musarrat Hilali — presided over the hearing.

Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan and lawyers Reema Omar, Azir Bhandari and Faisal Siddiqui, who have been appointed as amici curiae also appeared before the court. Proceedings were broadcast live on SC's website and YouTube channel.

During the hearing, the top judge said that the court was seeking "clarity" on whether the disqualification period for a lawmaker was five years — as per the amendment in Election Act 2017 — or a lifetime ban under the aforementioned article which deals with the criteria to contest elections. CJP Isa said that the solution to this matter is present in Islam.

"The Holy Quran mentions that the status of humans is very high," the top judge said, referring to a verse from Surah Sajda which explains that human beings are not bad but their deeds are. "Disqualifying anyone [for life] is against Islam," he added.

The top judge said that Article 62(1)(F) calls human beings bad but lifetime disqualification closes the door to repentance. He said that a person can be forgiven if he repents. "How can the court close the door to repentance if the God didn't," CJP Isa remarked. Earlier, the chief justice said that lifetime disqualification under Article 62(1)(F) was determined according to one's own perception and not the Constitution. He also warned against spreading confusion related to elections, as the polls are being held on February 8. "Filing cases in different courts will create obstacles in the way of elections," he noted.

Lawyer Khurram Raza who was representing petitioners Fayaz Ahmed Ghori and Sajjadul Hasan faced immense grilling by the seven-member bench — headed by the

chief justice — for his defence of lifetime disqualification of parliamentarians. At one point, CJP Isa observed that the counsel he was siding with "dictators".

The lawyer argued that the constitutional amendment is needed to end lifelong disqualification. At this, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel asked the lawyer whether the Parliament cannot legislate. "Parliament legislates but the Supreme Court interprets it," Raza responded.

During the hearing, Bhandari tried to convince the court to uphold its 2018 ruling in Samiullah Baloch case that the disqualification under Article 62(1)(f) was supposed to be "permanent", and find a middle way to address the matter. Meanwhile, Faisal Siddiqui maintained that the top court had defined the period of disqualification but the mechanism to define this period was not right.

The point was raised whether the Samiullah Baloch verdict — which has attained its finality as it had never been challenged before — can be nullified by hearing the matter in form of petitions or not. He also contended that parliament cannot avert the apex court's verdict through plain legislation. After hearing the arguments, the court adjourned the hearing till 9am today (Friday).

The fate of many politicians, including Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Nawaz Sharif and Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) founder Jahangir Tareen, depends on the verdict of this case. Whether the aforementioned politicians can contest the upcoming polls or not will be determined by the outcome of the case.

The SC conducted the last hearing of this case on January 2, during which CJP Isa advised against assuming that a particular party was being favoured. Earlier, during a hearing on December 11 last year, CJP Faez Isa observed that the Supreme Court's judgment on lifetime disqualification and the amendments made to the Elections Act 2017 could not exist simultaneously.

He had said either the legislation enacted by the parliament to the Elections Act 2017 would prevail or the judgment, delivered by the Supreme Court. "The issue has to be settled once and for all," the CJP had remarked and referred the matter to a three-member committee, constituted under Section 2 of the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Act, 2023 that decides fixation of cases before benches of the apex court.

The Supreme Court, in a judgment in 2018, had held that any person disqualified under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution would be considered disqualified for lifetime. Later on, the former coalition government of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) made an amendment to the Elections Act 2017, decreasing the legislators' disqualification to five years, retrospectively. Former three-time prime minister Nawaz and IPP chief Tareen are the only two lawmakers who were disqualified for life in June and December 2017, respectively, after they were found to be "dishonest" under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution.

Graft conviction IHC restores 10-year disqualification F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court Thursday restored the 10-year disqualification period for graft convicts sentenced by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) under its accountability laws.

The injunction was made by the court's division bench consisting of Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani and Justice Saman Rafat Imtiaz, suspending the verdict issued by its single bench. According to the single bench verdict, the disqualification period spanned five years instead of 10.

Decision came during the hearing of a plea filed by NAB against the reduction of the 10-year disqualification of its convict to five years. Senior Special Prosecutor

NAB Muhammad Rafi appeared in the IHC, informing it about Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) politician Faiq Ali Jamali's sentence being upheld by the Supreme Court.

Following the IHC's injunction, Jamali's 10-year disqualification has been restored. A day earlier, the PML-N gave the ticket to Jamali for contesting polls for a seat in the Balochistan provincial assembly.

"According to NAB law, the disqualification will be for 10 years," the prosecutor told the court. NAB, on January 1, approached the IHC in a matter pertaining to permission for persons convicted under the NAB Ordinance to contest the February 8 general elections. NAB requested the high court to suspend its single bench decision and restore the 10-year disqualification period for the NAB convicts to contest elections.

The anti-graft watchdog stated that persons convicted under the NAB law have been referring to the decision of the single bench of the high court for contesting the upcoming elections. According to NAB, a single bench of the IHC had in June last year reduced the disqualification period of NAB convicts to five years instead of 10 years. The bureau has requested the high court to suspend the impugned decision on the intra-court appeal.

PTI moves SC to reclaim 'bat' symbol F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Thursday moved the Supreme Court in its last-ditch effort to reclaim its iconic 'bat' electoral symbol ahead of the February 8 polls. The electoral symbol is crucial to any political party as voters are aware of which candidate to vote for on the polling day; however, if PTI does not have a unified symbol, it might lose votes due to confusion among the people.

If the top court does not restore the PTI's electoral symbol, it will have to play the election innings without the bat, with its leaders calling it a "major setback" to the party as it has been contested on the sign in several polls.

Pakistan to always champion Jammu & Kashmir cause: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Thursday said that Pakistan would always champion the Jammu and Kashmir cause and its resolution as per the United Nations Security Council resolutions and the wishes of the Kashmiri people.

He was speaking at the ongoing Envoys' Conference being held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from January 4-6, 2024. Pakistan's envoys from important capitals are participating in the conference and are deliberating on various facets of Pakistan's foreign policy.

Welcoming the prime minister, Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani outlined the framework of discussions at the Envoys' Conference and its importance as a deliberative forum on diplomatic challenges and opportunities for Pakistan in view of the global and regional developments. He underscored the need for strengthening the anchoring role of the Foreign Office in foreign policy formulation and implementation.

The prime minister, in his key-note address, shared his perspective about the pressing demands on the conduct of Pakistan's foreign policy to align it with present-day imperatives. He said that the foreign policy should be

guided by a vision of Pakistan as a progressive, economically ascendant state that prioritizes the socio-economic well-being of its people.

It should also continue to aim for peace and mutually beneficial relations across the globe, he added. Pakistan would continue to stand for international law and purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, mainstreaming economic diplomacy and support the Palestinian cause, the prime minister said.

He termed the conference timely and relevant against the backdrop of profound transformations taking place in the region and around the globe. He reaffirmed his trust in Pakistan's diplomacy and diplomats in their capability to fully deliver despite pressing odds, and expressed the hope that the deliberations of the conference would lead to practical suggestions to navigate Pakistan's foreign policy through present day challenges. PM Kakar extended his best wishes to the Foreign Office and Pakistani diplomats in safeguarding the country's interests and advancing its global stature.

SIFC playing active role to attract investment from Gulf countries: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar said that the Special Investment Facilitation

Council (SIFC) was playing an active role in attracting investors from Gulf countries, including Qatar, to benefit from opportunities in key sectors of the economy.

The prime minister, in a meeting with Ambassador of Qatar in Islamabad Ali Mubarak Ali Essa Al-Khater, said that Pakistan and Qatar enjoyed strong, fraternal ties. He expressed Pakistan's desire to expand bilateral cooperation across all spheres, particularly trade and investment.

He also conveyed warm regards to the Amir of Qatar. The prime minister encouraged the Qatari ambassador to explore the potential for cooperation in tourism and media sectors. He said that Pakistan appreciated the role played by Qatar in diplomatic efforts that led to a temporary ceasefire in Gaza.

He stressed the need for concerted efforts by the international community, particularly Muslim Ummah, to bring peace in Palestine. As this was Ambassador Al-Khater's first call on the prime minister since presenting his credentials in November, he congratulated the envoy on assuming ambassadorial responsibilities in Pakistan and hoped that the bonds of friendship between the two countries would further strengthen during his tenure.

Faizabad commission: Faiz rejects allegations

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Former director general of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Faiz Hamid has recorded his statement before the Faizabad sit-in commission, denying allegations of conspiring against the government, sources told media on Thursday.

The former spymaster was summoned by the panel — investigating the 2017 sit-in staged by the Tehreek-e-Labbaki Pakistan (TLP) — thrice but he failed to appear before it. He was then sent a questionnaire by the commission to which he responded and stated that he held negotiations with the TLP on the directions of the government.

According to the sources, the commission had summoned the former army officer on January 2 (Tuesday) but he didn't appear before the panel. This was the third time that the former ISI chief remained absent from the

hearing being conducted by the inquiry commission,

which earlier summoned him in the second week of December last year and then on December 29, sources said. However, the first notice couldn't be delivered.

In November last year, the caretaker federal government constituted the inquiry commission for the implementation of the Supreme Court's 2019 Faizabad verdict. The probe panel was constituted on the orders of the Supreme Court of Pakistan under the chair of retired IGP Akhtar Ali Shah after the apex court rejected the fact-finding committee report constituted by the government.

On November 15, Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa remarked that the commission would be empowered to summon anyone, including former army chiefs, prime ministers, and chief justices. The inquiry commission is required to submit its report

to the top court on January 22.

The probe panel had also summoned Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President and former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif on January 3 but he too didn't appear and requested the commission to send him questions. He has now been sent a 21-point questionnaire to answer.

Earlier, former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, ex-interior minister Ahsan Iqbal, then-secretary to PM Fawad Hasan Fawad, and other senior officials serving in Islamabad and Punjab who were involved in the episode had appeared before the probe panel. In November 2017, the top court took suo motu notice of the three-week-long sit-in, which was held against a change in the finality-of-Prophethood oath, termed by the government as a clerical error, when the government passed the Elections Act 2017.

'Bat' symbol: LHC dismisses PTI's petition F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Thursday dismissed the plea challenging the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) order declaring

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) intra-party polls as "unconstitutional" — the decision that also revoked the party's iconic bat electoral symbol.

LHC Justice Jawad Hassan announced the reserved verdict and declared PTI leader Umar Aftab Dhillon's petition inadmissible. The PTI leader seeking to regain his party electoral symbol in Punjab, pleaded with the court on Wednesday to rescind the commission's order and direct it to publish the PTI's certificate for the intra-party election on its website.

The petitioner claimed that the symbol was illegally withdrawn as the matter of intra-party polls did not fall within the jurisdiction of the electoral body. He said the ECP was not a court of law and it could not question the validity of appointments within a party or intra-party election. The complainant's lawyer said different tactics were being adopted to create hurdles for the PTI candidates as first they were being stopped from filing nomination papers and then they were not being allowed to use the 'bat' symbol.

During the arguments, the PTI lawyer said the Peshawar High Court (PHC) had reinstated the party's electoral symbol. Upon which, Justice Jawad had said the PHC verdict on an appeal against the order was still pending.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting addressing an event organized by Pakistan Disabled Foundation for special persons at National Press Club.

KP cabinet okay draft of an Ordinance amending PPC and CPC

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cabinet approved the draft of an Ordinance amending various Sections of Pakistan Panel Code and Criminal Procedure Code enhancing punishments and penalties for all those organizing unlawful assembly, rioting and disobeying an order lawfully promulgated and/or causing obstructions, or injury to persons lawfully employed. Specifically, these amendments relate to the violation of sections 147, 148 and 188 of PPC.

The 21st meeting of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cabinet, presided over by Chief Minister Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah, took place at the Secretariat in Peshawar on Wednesday. The meeting was attended by ministers, advisors, special assistants, the Chief Secretary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, additional chief secretaries, and relevant administrative secretaries.

According to details the Cabinet

approved amendments to Sections 147, 148, and 188 of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860 and in Schedule II of the Criminal Procedure Code 1898 by enhancing the punishment of the said sections to create deterrence and to stop unlawful assembly and rioting etc. and to maintain the writ of the state and peace.

While the existing punishment u/s 147 of PPC was "up to two years or with fine, or both" it was increased to "up to three years and shall also be liable to fine up to two hundred thousand rupees. In default of payment of fine additional imprisonment for three months." In schedule-II "may be arrested without warrant "non-bailable" has also been added. With regard to Section 148 the existing punishment was "up to three years or with fine, or both" has been replaced by "up to five years and shall also be liable to fine up to five hundred thousand rupees, which shall not be less than one hundred thousand rupees. In default of payment of fine,

additional imprisonment for six months" while in schedule -II "May be arrested without a warrant" and "non-bailable" have been added. In respect of the punishment u/s 188 which was "up to one month or with fine which may extend to (six hundred rupees) or with both" was replaced with "up to one year and shall also be liable to fine up to one hundred thousand rupees, which shall not be less than twenty-five thousand rupees.

In default of payment of fine, additional imprisonment for one month. While the punishment for an offense causing "danger to human life, health or safety, etc." under this section was "up to six months or with fine which may extend to (three thousand rupees), or with both" has now been enhanced to "up to three years and shall also be liable to fine up to two hundred thousand rupees, which shall not be less than thirty-five thousand rupees. In default of payment of fine, additional imprisonment for two

months."

The cabinet approved the extension of the project Settlement and Digitization of Land Record in Merge Districts from seven (7) to 25 subdivisions/tehsils in the said merged districts. The revised estimate of the project was approved with an enhanced cost of Rs.1777.829 million. The Cabinet approved the release of a sum of Rs. 5 hundred Million for the Irrigation Department for maintenance, repair and desilting of different water/ Irrigation schemes, desilting of canals and construction of embankments on rivers for protection from floods.

The cabinet approved a supplementary grant for payment of enhanced cost as per decisions of different courts for the lands acquired for police buildings in different parts of the Province. These lends include 933 Kanal land for Heavy Firing Range in Nowshera, 3 kanal land for Police Station Barawal Dir Upper, 207 Kanal land for Police Lines

Charsadda, 7 Kanal land for Police Station Bahrain Swat, 81 kanal and 14.5 marla for Police Lines Dagar Buner. The decretal amount to be paid to land owners amounts to Rs.366.099 million.

The Cabinet approved the posting of Mr.Imad Ali a BS-20 PMS Officer against the vacant post of Managing Director Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Urban Mobility Authority. Section 7, of the Urban Mobility Authority Act required that such appointment is to be made by the Government means the cabinet.

The posting is subject to clearance from the Election Commission. The cabinet approved the creation of different posts for the newly created Research Cell at the Directorate of Prosecution, Home and Tribal Affairs Department in compliance with the recommendation of the Affix Committee meeting on the Implementation Status of the revised National Action Plan. The cabinet allowed the relaxation of ban for the

creation of one post of Deputy Director of Research BS-18 and one post of Assistant Director in the said Directorate.

The cabinet also proved the creation of two post of psychologist BS-18 and one BS-19, in the Prison Department providing opportunities of promotion to the existing psychologists, as per the directives of the judgment of the Peshawar High Court. The cabinet unanimously demanded of the Federal Government and National High Ways Authority to provide an interchange and bypass from G.T.Road to Motorways in/for Abbottabad City. It is worth mentioning that despite being a big city and despite passing through it, but the Motorways has no interchange for the said City. The Cabinet also offered Fatiha for the departed soul of Farmer Chief Justice @ Qaiser Rasheed Khan of the Peshawar High Court. It also offered Fatiha for the on the demise of the father of Secretary Agriculture Mr. Javed Khan Marwat.



261 startups graduate under PITB programme in 2023

LAHORE (APP): A total of 261 startups graduated under the National Expansion Plan (NEP) of National Incubation Centres (NICs) Programme, a collaborative effort of the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) and Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MoITT), from January 2023 to December 2023.

This was stated during a progress review meeting, presided over by PITB Chairman Faisal Yousaf at Arfa Software Technology Park, here on Thursday.

The participants in the meeting were apprised that 87 startups of the NEP NICs initiative graduated from Punjab, 64 from Sindh, 20 from Azad Jammu and Kashmir, 39 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 31 from Balochistan and 20 from Gilgit-Baltistan.

In his remarks, Chairman Faisal Yousaf said that the objective of the National Expansion Plan of NICs was to democratise entrepreneurship, boost business activity across the country, grow the IT industry and promote economic growth in Pakistan. "The incubation programme is tailored to the needs of early stage startups and runs on a zero-equity model," he added.

In partnership with the public universities, 13 tech incubation centres have been set up across the country where startups are provided with free-of-cost workspace, mentorship, networking opportunities, monthly stipend, business support and legal guidance for a period of six months.

Minister stresses bringing accident ratio of mine workers to zero

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Mines and Minerals Ibrahim Hassan Murad said on Thursday that an advisory board of all departments related to mining should be formed and the accident rate should be brought to zero, while ensuring safety of mine workers.

Presiding over a review meeting on welfare of mine workers and other measures at his camp office on Thursday, he said the demand for Pakistani labour was very high worldwide, and education and skills should be imparted to them. The meeting also discussed establishment of joint helpline for the Mines Labour Welfare Commissioner (MLWC) and Chief Inspectorate of Mines (CIM), steps and strategies to get real-time images of underground mines on monthly basis, amendments to the Mines Act, 1923 to introduce e-challan, list of pending challans, mines rescue stations online monitoring, increasing student seats in mining as well as survey diplomas, calls received with location at mines rescue stations during last five years, trend of mining accidents for last 10 years, target of senior research officer for the next two months, a detailed review of target of collection of samples by officers, establishment of Mining School/Institute in district Khushab, recruitment to key posts, strict action against lease holders for repeated violations, online inspection portal and other issues reviewed in details.

CM inaugurates new extended emergency of PIC

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi inaugurated on Thursday the new emergency of Punjab Institute of Cardiology (PIC).

In a record period of six weeks, the Punjab Institute of Cardiology's emergency had been completely renovated with a 50 beds extension to the new emergency building. The CM inaugurated the state-of-the-art new emergency department of the PIC, through the latest computerised system. The patients' records have also been secured forever. The extension and renovation has been materialised due to the continuous monitoring and visits of CM Mohsin Naqvi. The work was completed in record time.

Naqvi made a detailed visit to the

upgraded emergency room and reviewed the facilities provided for cardiac patients. The chief minister inspected the ICU, echo room and other facilities and checked the quality of new beds. He also directed authorities concerned to make special washrooms for special people.

The caretaker chief minister observed the newly designed system from arrival of patients to treatment at the reception and directed to keep more plants in the adjacent corridor.

On this occasion, Mohsin Naqvi said that provision of cardiac monitoring system should be ensured on every bed. He congratulated the hospital administration and their entire team for timely completion and good performance.

Sindh Police reports significant arrests, operations from September to December

KARACHI (APP): In the span of four months, between September and December 2023, the Sindh Police made substantial strides in law enforcement activities across the province.

According to the performance report presented to IGP Sindh Riffat Mukhtar Raja, a total of 6655 proclaimed offenders and 11252 absconding accused were apprehended through rigorous raids, snap-checking, patrolling, and various other operations. The comprehensive report highlighted a range of achievements, including police encounters, dismantling criminal gangs, arrests related to robbery, terrorism, target killings, and the capture of kidnappers. Across Sindh, a detailed breakdown revealed the arrest of 6820 robbers/criminals, 23 terrorists, 6 target killers, 10 notified robbers, 5 highway robbers, and 6 kidnappers.

Notably, the report indicated that 97 dacoits met their fate during 972 encounters with the police, while 1340 criminal gangs were neutralized throughout Sindh. In Karachi alone, among 393 police encounters, 3812 dacoits/criminals, 1 terrorist, 2 highway robbers, 6 kidnappers, 855 proclaimed offenders, and 3631 absconders were apprehended. Additionally, 39 dacoits/criminals were eliminated, resulting in the eradication of 1133 gangs from the city.

Across various districts, similar successes were evident. In the Hyderabad range, 1699 accused, 998 proclaimed offenders, and 2111 absconding accused were arrested, accompanied by the elimination of 59 dacoit gangs. Similar efforts in other ranges, such as Mirpurkhas, Shaheed Benazirabad, Sukkur, and Larkana, demonstrated significant arrests, encounter statistics, and gang neutralisations. Moreover, the report highlighted successful encounters between the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) and criminal elements, leading to the arrest of suspects, target killers, and terrorists.

The enforcement operations yielded a substantial cache of seized arms and ammunition, including hand grenades, rounds of ammunition, pistols, rifles, shotguns, SMGs, and other weaponry. Additionally, crackdowns against the drug and gutka/mawa mafias resulted in the arrest of numerous suspects, the seizure of substantial amounts of narcotics, and the closure of numerous illicit manufacturing units. The crackdown against the drug mafia led to the arrest of 5203 suspects, confiscating significant quantities of ice, heroin, hashish, and illicit liquor. Furthermore, in the action against the gutka/mawa mafia, 4447 accused were apprehended, and a substantial amount of gutka/mawa was confiscated, resulting in the closure of 79 manufacturing units.

Drive to vaccinate 10.3m children against Polio in Sindh

F.P. Report

KARACHI: A meeting of the Provincial Task Force on Polio Eradication chaired by Sindh Chief Secretary Dr Muhammad Fakhre Alam was informed that more than 80,000 polio workers in the 30 districts will be part of this t day vaccination drive.

The meeting was attended by Additional Chief Secretary Home Muhammad Iqbal Memon, Commissioner Karachi Muhammad Saleem Rajput, Additional IG Karachi Khadim Hussain Rind, Coordinator Emergency Operations Center Sindh Arshad Ali Sodhar, representatives of WHO, UNICEF and other relevant officials of National Emergency Operations Center. All divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners also participated in the meeting via video link.

The meeting discussed the overall status of the poliovirus and strategies for its containment. Arshad Ali



Sodhar, Coordinator Emergency Operation Center Sindh, briefed the attendees, highlighting the report of two polio cases reported in Karachi, a concerning situation that necessitates an effective polio campaign in the city. He further mentioned that the workforce training and security plans for the upcoming polio campaign have been finalized.

During the meeting, Chief Secretary Sindh, Dr. Muhammad Fakhre Alam, emphasized the need to launch the anti-polio campaign effectively in the current high-risk union councils to achieve the desired

results. He instructed all deputy commissioners to closely monitor the polio campaign and ensure that their respective officers submit daily reports.

Chief Secretary also directed the Health Department to ensure that children are administered polio drops at all railway stations and bus terminals. He also instructed education department officials to ensure that polio drops were administered to children in both private and government schools during the campaign. He also appreciated the cooperation of local government representatives during the polio campaign.



ABBOTTABAD: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali addressing the annual day ceremony at Pak Saudia Public School and College.

Ashrafi urges parents to ensure polio vaccination

LAHORE (APP): In a bid to eradicate polio from Pakistan, Prime Minister's Special Representative and Pakistan Ulema Council Chairman Hafiz Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi emphasised the importance of administering polio drops to children here at the Director General Health office on Thursday.

During the inaugural ceremony of the polio vaccination drive, he addressed concerns surrounding vaccine's safety, referencing an international 'Ulema and Muftian' conference in Egypt, which declared polio

drops as Halal and not harmful to children's health. Dismissing unfounded claims linking vaccine to reproductive system issues, he reassured the public about its safety.

Expressing gratitude to the Punjab Health Department for successfully eliminating polio in the province, Ashrafi asserted the government's commitment to eradicating the polio virus nationwide by 2024. He acknowledged the sacrifices made by individuals, including army, police, and health workers, who lost their lives in the mission of polio eradication.

Ashrafi appealed to the public to show respect to health workers administering vaccines and warned of accountability before Allah for parents if their child suffers disability due to the failure of vaccine administration. Open to a debate to address any reservations, he underscored the urgency of collective efforts in achieving a polio-free Pakistan.

In a show of solidarity, Ashrafi also condemned the recent terrorist attack in Iran, emphasising Pakistan's shared struggle against terrorism and expressing empathy for the victims.

Three project started to generate energy from waste materials: Mayor Karachi

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab has said that three projects had been started to generate energy from waste which would not only make Karachi clean but also create sources of energy.

Chairing a meeting here on Thursday, the Mayor said that Sindh was the first province in Pakistan that got energy from waste. Where this project has been started, we want to ensure the development of the city and take steps to solve the problems as soon as possible, he said.

Managing Director Sindh Solid Waste Management Board Naseemuddin Mirani, Project Director SWIP Zubair Ahmed Channa, officials of Green Waste Energy, Khan Renewable Energy and Engroee energy besides Karamullah Waqasi Spokesperson for Political Affairs for Mayor, Dil Muhammad, General Secretary PPP Central District Javed Mureed, Chairman UC and other concerned officers were also present on this occasion.

The Mayor Karachi told the officials of the companies that the public had high expectations from us, so complete the feasibility study and process of generating energy from waste as soon as possible.

In this regard, the briefing given by the companies on the timeline of the project was not satisfactory. The

Mayor said to revise the timeline of completion of the project and give another briefing within a week and tell how long the project will be completed in phases.

According to details, Green Waste Energy will produce synthetic gas from waste, while Khan Renewable Company will generate 45 megawatts of electricity from waste and Engro Energy company is working on a project to produce RDF, while the companies have been allotted space at the landfill site Jam Chakro and Gondpas for the project.

Mayor Karachi visits office of CPNE: Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab has said that he wants to serve the citizens of Karachi with dedication and we have solved their issues, and this process of public service will continue in future.

He said this on Thursday during a visit to the office of the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE). He said that the remaining period of three and a half years should be focused on solving the problems of Karachi. He lauded the role played by the CPNE in the development and promotion of journalism. The CPNE formulated guidelines for positive and constructive journalism, which raised the quality of journalism at the city, province and country levels, he said. On this occasion, Ijazul Haq,

Aamir Mehmood and other senior journalists and editors were also present in large numbers.

Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab met the editors of newspapers and other journalists and said that newspapers identify the problems of the city which guides us. Through newspapers and electronic channels, we easily communicate our performance to the public. Journalists associated with newspapers, magazines and electronic media are our valuable assets. He said that the contract for Karachi Zoo had not been awarded for three years. In the recent tender, four times more bids were accepted and Rs. 6.5 crores were received, and the same vehicles are putting out fires in time. There is a need to improve the response and efficiency, he said.

He said that the road of NICVD was built by the KMC and this area belongs to the cantonment but the city is ours, so the road was built, cantonment Board underpass and overhead bridge in the Johar area were built by us. He said that we need to pay more attention to the water, roads and transport problems in Karachi as 30 more buses will ply the roads from next week and 50 electric buses will be operated on a BOT basis. A biogas project is coming up in Cattle Colony and land for the project is already allotted.

Lahore Police arrested 11,254 anti-social elements in 2023

LAHORE (APP): In a comprehensive crackdown on anti-social elements throughout 2023, the Lahore Police registered an impressive 11,096 cases against drug dealers, leading to the arrest of 11,254 individuals.

Capital City Police Officer Lahore Bilal Siddique Kamyana disclosed these statistics in his official statement issued here on Thursday.

Highlighting effectiveness of the operations, the CCPO outlined the recovery of substantial quantities of illicit substances from the arrested

accused. This includes over 7,102-kg of hashish, more than 168 kg of heroin, over 61 kg of ice, and a staggering 151,619 liters of confiscated alcohol.

The cases were distributed across various divisions, with 2,394 registered in Cantt Division, 1,182 in Civil Lines, 2,404 in City, 1,634 in Iqbal Town, 1,404 in Sadar, and 2,078 cases in Model Town. Additionally, last year witnessed the registration of 10,063 cases related to illegal weapons, resulting in the arrest of an equal number of suspects.

From these arrests, law enforcement recovered 655 rifles, 461 guns, 8,786 pistols, and a considerable cache of 130,660 bullets. CCPO Lahore has directed a heightened focus on intelligence-based operations to intensify efforts against drug peddlers, emphasizing that those engaged in the nefarious drug trade deserve no leniency.

Furthermore, indiscriminate actions are being taken against individuals involved in the unlawful sale and purchase of weapons.

DC distributes helmets among motorcyclists

LAHORE (APP): In a significant move for road safety awareness, Deputy Commissioner Rafia Haider took a crucial step by distributing helmets among motorcyclists through a partnership with a private bank.

Over 100 free helmets were distributed among bike riders at Istanbul Chowk here on Thursday as a part of the ongoing road safety awareness campaign, aiming to raise a sense of responsibility among people. On the occasion, Rafia Haider emphasized the mandatory use of helmets for motorcyclists, highlighting the campaign's goal to reduce head injuries and enhance safety on roads.

The helmet distribution initiative would continue to raise awareness in the community, she added.

Efforts being made to make features of country's tourism application: Wasi Ahmad

LAHORE (APP): Special Assistant to Caretaker Prime Minister on Tourism Syed Wasi Ahmad Fatimi on Thursday said that efforts were being made to make features of country's tourism application.

He said this while addressing the inauguration ceremony of Prime Minister's Youth Programme Table Tennis Talent Hunt Women Sports League at Government College University.

He said that it was very essential for country to have its tourism application as it meant a lot for tourists and travellers.

Special Assistant to Caretaker Prime Minister on Tourism Syed Wasi Ahmad Fatimisaid that in

Gilgit Baltistan there was no proper training centre for mountaineering and climbing, adding that Memorandum of Understanding had been signed with Gilgit Baltistan University with an aim to set up initial training centre for mountaineering and efforts were also being made regarding its curriculum.

He said, "It is very good sign that country's women have proved their mettle in different fields of life and always remained stuck to their traditions." He said it was responsibility of male members of society to motivate girls towards sports.

Syed Wasi Ahmad said that he had increased women representation

quota to 51 percent in all those areas where he had the authority to do. He said that almost 50,000 girls and boys had become part of Talent Hunt Programme though it was very good sign but this figure should further increase. Sports was very essential for proper growth of students as it developed personality in a graceful manner, he added. He further said, "Sports teaches us to respect each other."

He said, "No doubt that healthy mind is always better than unhealthy mind and it is evident from various Hadiths of our beloved Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)." GCU Vice Chancellor Dr Ahmad Adnan and others were also present.



LAHORE: Special Assistant to Prime Minister Allama Tahir Ashrafi and Chairman Pakistan Ulema-e-Islam Council giving polio drops to children during launch of anti-polio drive at DG Health Office.

Govt to block CNICs of defaulters for recovery

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The provincial task force is working fast to declare Peshawar as loadshedding free model district. In the next few days, most of the feeders in Dera Ismail Khan, including Peshawar, wherein target recovery from defaulting consumers and the use of illegal electricity have been eliminated, will be declared load-shedding-free. The federal government should take special measures through legislation against defaulter users.

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 provincial task force, in which important decisions were approved. The meeting was also attended by divisional commissioners, regional police officers, Secretary Energy and Power Nisar Ahmad Khan, representative officer of Industries department and Chief Executive PESCO Qazi Tahir.

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 serving as an example to thousands of electricity thieves and imposed fines of more than Rs. 40 million. 41 thousand 253 raids were conducted by the joint teams of PESCO, district administration and police across the province, in which 57 thousand 482 connections were disconnected. More than 20 thousand cases have been registered and 924 accused have been arrested.

In addition to this, the line losses of the successful campaign have also been significantly reduced. After Mardan, the provincial capital Peshawar was also told about the ongoing operation to make it a load-shedding free model city. The campaign is ongoing on a total of 83 feeders in Peshawar in six phases, in which three phases include recovery and measures against electricity theft. But almost 100% of the work has been completed, while in the coming days the campaign will be completed on the rest of the feeders

and Peshawar will be declared a free model district of Peshawar.

Moreover, almost all the feeders have been cleared in Dera Ismail Khan. In the meeting, the cleared feeders of Peshawar should be immediately declared loadshedding free and steps should be taken to recover from the defaulting consumers from the federal government, blocking their identity cards, passports and other assets. The approval was given while the police authorities have been asked to appoint a focal person in connection with the identification regarding taking the help of the police to complete the campaign on the remaining feeders of Peshawar.

At the end of the meeting, the head of the task force, Abid Majeed, stressed on the authorities that the provincial government wants to make the campaign to declare Peshawar a load-shedding free district after Mardan successful. It is also engaging steps of CCPO engaging police force against illegal Afghans, eradication of polio campaign while also providing services for the Energy Task Force for National Cause.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain chairing 21st meeting of Provincial Cabinet.

KP hit by heavy fog

PESHAWAR (APP): Most districts of KP, including Peshawar, are hit by heavy fog all around with people facing difficulties especially those reporting to their respective offices by 8.00 a.m. as the visibility is recorded zero.

In the city of Peshawar, early morning fog reigns, visibility is low and due to fog in Peshawar, citizens are advised to use fog glasses. It has also confirmed that the M1 Motorway from Peshawar to Rishkai and Burhan Interchange is closed due to heavy fog. Motorway officials said.

The Swat Express Motorway has been temporarily closed due to fog. Motorway officials confirmed. Weather in Peshawar has become colder due to fog. Meteorological Department officials said here Thursday. He said the minimum temperature of Peshawar city is 5 degrees Celsius while the maximum temperature is 13 degrees Celsius. The humidity level in the city of Peshawar is a record 81 percent, Meteorological Department officials said.

CTD issued report

PESHAWAR (APP): The terror financing cases have increased during the last year, a report of the Counter Terrorism Department KP released here revealed on Thursday.

According to the report released by CTD, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa it says that the increase in terror financing cases during the past six years and 90 terror financing cases were registered in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during 2022 and 298 in 2023.

A total of 960 people were named in terror financing cases, of which 311 were arrested and 44 were killed, reports said. A sum of Rs. 13.46 millions was recovered in terror financing and in Peshawar region, 46 cases in 2022 and 179 cases in 2023 were registered in this regard.

One suspect was convicted in 179 cases of terror financing in Peshawar region last year and according to CTD, cases have also been registered for providing financial support to terrorists in the name of hundi, bank, smuggling or donation.

EC receives 329 appeals against of nomination papers

PESHAWAR (INP): As many as 329 appeals have been filed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa against approval and rejection of nominations papers for the general elections.

According to the Provincial Election Commissioner (EC) Office, 14 applications have been filed against approval of nomination papers on National Assembly seats in appellate

court among which 6 were filed in Peshawar Bench, 6 in Abbottabad Bench and 2 in DI Khan Bench.

A total of 102 applications have been filed against rejection of nomination papers among which 53 are filed in Peshawar Bench, 2 in Abbottabad Bench, 34 in Mingora Bench, 4 in DI Khan Bench and 9 in Bannu Bench.

The figure of applica-

tions filed against approval of nomination papers for Provincial Assembly seats is 14 among which 5 are filed in Peshawar Bench, 7 in Abbottabad Bench and two are filed in DI Khan Bench.

A total of 199 applications were filed against rejection of nomination papers for Provincial Assembly seats among which 107 are filed in Peshawar Bench, 10 in

Abbottabad Bench, 52 in Mingora Bench, 6 in DI Khan Bench and 24 are filed in Bannu Bench.

Cumulatively 329 applications were received among which 116 applications are against approval of nomination papers for Provincial Assembly seats while 213 applications are received against rejection of nomination papers for National Assembly seats.

Committee agrees to expedite crossover of vehicles on daily basis

PESHAWAR (APP): A meeting of Pak-Afghan border management committee at Custom Station Torkhem agreed to expedite the crossover of vehicles from both sides to 900 trucks daily to clear the long queues of goods-laden vehicles waiting for clearance.

The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Additional Collector Customs (Appraisalment), Muhammad Rizwan.

Other officials present in the meeting were Deputy Collector Enforcement, Saiga Abbas, Assistant Director FIA, Yasir Arafat, Assistant Director Anti Narcotics, Salman, Maj Murad from Frontier Corps, DC Appraisalment Customs, Hammad, Assistant Collector, Farya Abbas Naqvi, Deputy Collector, Fahad Ahmad,

Transit Superintendent, Saddiq Akbar.

Those who represented the business community included the Coordinator Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi, Vice Chairman of All Pakistan Customs Agents Association, Vice President of PAJCCI, Shujah Muhammad, Farooq Ahmad, President of Torkham Custom Agents Association, Haji Aimal Khan, Ex. President Custom Agents Association, Nasir Shinwari and others.

The meeting held a threadbare discussion on the slow clearance process of trucks, causing delays in the transportation of consignments besides the return of empty containers, ensuing in financial losses to the business community of both countries.

Participants of the meeting decided to convey a message to Afghan side for reducing break period for clearance starting from 2:00 a.m to 10:00 a.m causing lining up of trucks on both sides. Custom Clearing Agents were also asked to start GD (Goods Document) filing from early morning to ensure timely clearance of trucks.

Additional Collector

Customs, Muhammad Rizwan assured businessmen that a new scanner will be arranged till March of 2024 which will also help in early clearance of trucks.

Speaking on the occasion, Coordinator PAJCCI, Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi appreciated the efforts of Custom Collectorate in arranging meetings of stakeholders of Pak-Afghan trade with the objective to streamline of commerce and trade in the region.

He lamented the delay by NLC in the completion of a new terminal at Torkhem as a result of which delays are faced in the clearance of trucks.

Zia said NLC had claimed completion of construction work in June 2023 but still the project is not completed.

He also demanded a revival of the issuance of a permit (Rahadari) of Rs. 5000 by a Political Agent for all the Afghanistan-bound trucks.

After the extension of the district administration system to FATA, different departments have started collecting taxes under different pretexts from export and transit-bound trucks to Afghanistan, inflicting a financial burden on the business community, Zia

complained.

Vice Chairman All Pakistan Customs Agents Association, Farooq Ahmad laid stress on the provision of reasonable time for implementation of the decision regarding the ban on the import of items from Afghanistan mentioned in the negative list.

Soon after deciding on the creation of a negative list, clearance of containers was stopped, affecting the business community whose goods had reached Karachi port or were in the pipeline.

Farooq insisted on increasing vigilance and monitoring at borders to curb smuggling instead of imposing a ban on the import of different items.

Speaking on the occasion, Additional Collector Customs, Muhammad Rizwan said the purpose of holding such meetings is to get input from stakeholders for the improvement of trade between the two countries.

The points raised in the meeting are noted for presentation to high-ups for making decisions for resolution of issues. He also asked businessmen to keep on approaching officials regarding any complaints for timely redressal of different problems.



PESHAWAR: Additional Chief Secretary Home & Tribal Affairs Mohammad Abid Majeed presiding over Provincial Task Force for Energy meeting.

Authorities initiates cracks down on illegal sale

PESHAWAR (APP): The Drug Control and Pharmacy Services department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has initiated a comprehensive crack-down against the illegal sale, storage, and distribution of alternative medicines across various districts of the province.

The department has acted swiftly in response to reports received from different districts about unlawful practices related to alternative medicines including food supplements, nutraceuticals, Unani, Ayurvedic, homeo-

pathic, and herbal products.

Drug inspectors have been specifically tasked to launch a special campaign in their respective districts. During raids conducted on the 1, 2, and 3 of January 2024, the teams of drug department targeted illegal sale, storage, and distribution of alternative drugs in districts including Abbottabad, Bajaur, Bannu, Bunir, Chitral, DI Khan, Kurram, Mardan, Haripur, Manshera, Lakki Marwat, Nowshera, Orakzai, Dir Lower, Dir Upper, Swabi, Kohat, Malakand, North Waziristan, Peshawar,

Swat, Shangla, Charsadda, and Tank.

A total of 412 medical stores were inspected and 118 suspected samples of alternative medicines were collected on Form-5 during these operations.

Meanwhile, Secretary Health Mahmood Aslam Wazir has underlined the department's commitment to maintaining zero tolerance for those involved in the illegal sale, storage, and distribution of alternative medicines asserting that these stringent measures will persist to ensure public safety.

3 months most innovative Skill Development Programme held



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The PCSIR Laboratories Complex, Peshawar (Dimension Stones Centre) in collaboration with Sarhad Rural Support Programme organized three (03) months most innovative Skill Development Programme (October-2023 to January-2024) on the Topic "TECHNICAL AND EMPLOYABLE SKILL ADVANCE ON MARBLE AND MOSAIC WORK" at Dimension Stones Centre of PCSIR Labs Complex, Peshawar.

The impressive closing ceremony was held on Thursday, in which, Course Completion Certificates were distributed among the 25 successful trainees. Eminent Scientists, Engineers from PCSIR Labs, Complex, Peshawar and renowned HRD Experts

from SRSP attended this remarkable event. Luminaries of the Certificates distribution ceremony were Mr. Jehangir Shah, Director General-PCSIR Labs, Complex, Peshawar, Syed Awlad Hussain, Chief Executive SRSP, Engr. Ahmad Ali, Chief Engineer/Head Dimension Stones Centre, PCSIR-Peshawar and Dr. Javed Abbas Bangash, Director (P&D)-PCSIR Peshawar, who in their speeches, shed light on the significance of this vital skill development training program for youth belonging to newly merged districts of KPK and declared this capacity building program as a landmark initiative which became materialized through meritorious contributions of PCSIR-Peshawar and SRSP. The

prominent speakers were of the firm conviction that this Training Program will equip the trainees with most sophisticated techniques on Marble and Mosaic Works, its value addition and formation of most advanced Marble and Mosaic products, which can be exported by making huge financial dividends. They also stated that this Program will generate employment opportunities for the youth of newly merged impoverished districts by enabling them to earn their livelihoods and start their own business in Marble/Dimension Stones, Mosaic, Soap Stones, and Granite etc.

Jehangir Shah, Director General-PCSIR-Peshawar and Engr. Ahmad Ali, Chief Engineer/Head Dimension Stones Centre, PCSIR-Peshawar in their speeches also highlighted the objectives of the Dimension Stones Centre by stating that it is to ensure rapid development in the industrial sector of Dimension Stones by producing export quality products through introduction of new advanced level training programs in the emerging trades with modern-age techniques of teaching and state-of-the-art machineries.

i). To produce export quality products from the semi-finished

products through fine tuning.

ii). To establish state-of-the-art export quality model unit in public sector which can be readily replicated by the private sector, through installing/fabricating similar machinery by means of Reverse Engineering.

iii). To provide trained manpower for coping the problems of lacking of skilled manpower in the private sector.

They further stated that Allah has blessed Pakistan with a variety of abundant mineral resources especially Marble and Granite. About 30 varieties are found in the region and newly merged districts. Although Pakistan is fulfilling the local demand of Marble but imports Granite for local use. Granite mining and processing industry is in its infancy and there are some processing units in operation based on imported machinery in the whole of Pakistan which are unable to meet even the local demand.

Marbles are used in construction, floor tiles, monuments, sculptures, cemetery stones, paving, benches etc. More than 300 Billion Tons of reserves are estimated in Pakistan in almost every color of Marble including white, grey, pink, green and yellow.

Power suspension notified

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) on Thursday notified that due to maintenance work power supply will remain suspended from Jamrud grid station on 7th, 14th and 21st January from 9 a.m to 3 p.m.

Consequently, it said consumers of PIC, Hayatabad 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Heath Care Hospital, Health Excellence, Northwest Hospital, Kidney Center, RMI, Kacha Ghari, Karkhano, Gul Abad, P.I.C, Hayatabad Surgical, Peshawar General, Foundation Hospital, Wood, Northern Bottling, Industrial Estate, Express 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, PHA, Omrak, Olampia, Industrial Estate, Mohmand Steel, Al Hafiz, Frontier Tech Wood, PPI 1, 2, Mica Steel, Alhaj, BSF, Olympia 2 and Gulabad feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will also remain suspended from Mingora Grid Station on 6th, 9th and 11th January from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. resultantly, consumers of Malam Jaba, Express Saidu Hospital, Bandai, Mingora 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Kabal, Nawa Kali, Saidu Sharif, Barikot 2, Odigram, Kabal 4, Matta 2, Faiza Ghat, Kabal 2, Gulda, Margharaz, Saidu Hospital, Kabal 3, Gogdara, Takhta Band, Qambar, Singar, MES, Haji Baba, Shin, Saidu Baba, Bara Bandai, Shah Dara, Hospital Express feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from Mardan Grid Station on 5th and 10th January from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. resultantly, consumers of Mohabatabad, Express, SIDB, Shaikh Maltoon, Industrial, SIDB, Janabad, Pakistan Chowk, Canal Road, New Charsadda Road, New Manga, Saleem Khan, Gujar Ghari, Town, Muslim Abad, New Saleem Khan, Bacha Khan, MED, Benazir Children Hospital, Muhabatabad Road, Nissata Road, Sheikh Maltoon, Ahmat Abad, Misri Abad, PRC, Eid Ghah, Green Area, New Sheikh Maltoon feeders will face inconvenience.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Minister Justice (R) Irshad Qaisar presiding over a meeting of PHA Mega City.

Upskill KP Programme funded by SEED launched

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: On Thursday, atomcamp, an Islamabad-based edtech platform, launched the Upskill Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Programme, funded by the SEED Programme under the Foreign, Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO).

In collaboration with IMSciences University Peshawar, the initiative aims to empower women and youth in the region by offering free courses in essential fields such as Data Science, Artificial Intelligence, Digital Marketing, Entrepreneurship, and Web Development.

This program intends to equip individuals with job-ready skills, fostering economic development. The programme serves as a gateway for trainees to accelerate their freelancing careers, secure employment, or venture into entrepreneurship, ultimately contributing to the overall growth of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region. Fizza Amjad, CEO of atomcamp, expressed during the launch, "Through this program, we envision a future where education, skills, and

innovation come together to unlock boundless opportunities. Together with our partners at IMSciences and the support of SEED, we believe in creating a ripple effect of positive change that will uplift communities and contribute to the growth of the entire region."

Beyond the mentioned opportunities, the programme holds the potential to address gender and youth disparities by fostering inclusivity and diversity. By offering mentorship programs, networking events, and internship placements, it not only imparts technical skills but also facilitates professional connections, creating a supportive ecosystem for women and youth to thrive in traditionally underrepresented fields. Additionally, the programme's emphasis on soft skills development enhances participants' communication and collaboration abilities, further preparing them for success in diverse professional environments.

The recent launch event not only emphasized the programme's significance but also encouraged attendees to explore the vast

opportunities it presents, fostering connections for potential future collaborations. "IMSciences is thrilled to collaborate with Atomcamp on the Upskill Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Program. This initiative aligns perfectly with our commitment to advancing education and fostering innovation," said Usman Ghani, the Director of the Institute of Management Sciences.

On this event, Taimur Khan, institutional development expert at SEED, highly appreciated the program. He said, "SEED works closely with the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (GoKP) to increase growth, employment and prosperity of the province. The Upskill Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Program is an initiative that will pave way for economic empowerment of women and youth."

The event was also attended by representatives from different universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa such as City University, UET Peshawar, and University of Peshawar. They shed light on the pivotal role of the program.



In brief

Revenue targets discussed F.P. Report

MALAKAND: Commissioner Malakand, Saqib Raza Aslam on Thursday convened a meeting to discuss and review revenue targets and pending arrears. The meeting was attended by deputy commissioners, deputy directors computerization land record Shangla and Swat and concerned officials of revenue department. On the occasion, meeting was briefed about district revenue targets and the progress being made to recover pending amount. Chairing the meeting, commissioner expressed satisfaction on overall performance of revenue department and directed to achieve targets being given to revenue officers. He also directed to facilitate and provide necessary assistance to revenue field officers in performing official duties.

AJK announces winter vacations

MUZAFFARABAD (INP): Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) on Wednesday notified that amid severe cold and fog, educational institutions will remain closed from January 5 to 15. Bhimbhar Deputy Commissioner issued a notification that violating schools will be sealed and registration will be cancelled. Bhimbar DC said will not tolerate any negligence related to the health of students. "Orders have been issued to the administration of the three tehsils," Mirza Arshad Jaral said.

Eight injured in highway accident

QUETTA (INP): At least eight people were injured when a passenger van overturned near Mastung Quetta to Karachi highway early Thursday morning. According to rescue sources, the accident happened when a passenger bus overturned due to fog on the National Highway near Mastung, as a result, eight passengers were injured, a private news channel reported. Following the incident, rescuers, police, and local people rushed to the site and shifted the injured to a nearby hospital.

FC organizes free medical camp F.P. Report

GHALANAI: In a commendable effort to extend essential healthcare services to the residents of Mohmand District, Frontier Corps North orchestrated a Free Medical Camp. This initiative, held at Atta Bazar, Tehsil Khawazai, catered to 410 patients, encompassing 161 males, 98 females, and 151 children. Participants received thorough check-ups and complimentary medicines. On this occasion, medical professionals, along with nursing staff, offered valuable insights into seasonal diseases, contributing to community health awareness. The local community expressed gratitude towards Frontier Corps North for their timely and impactful healthcare initiative.

Inspection ordered

MULTAN (APP): Commissioner Multan division Engr Amir Khattak Thursday directed the deputy commissioners to begin inspection of all petrol pumps in their respective districts and penalize those using flawed or willfully tampered measurement equipment to fleece the people. Chairing a performance review meeting, the Commissioner said that petrol pumps involved in giving lesser quantity of petrol to motorcyclists and four wheelers would be penalized as per law.



MULTAN: Students performing in tableau during the 10 Years celebrations of The Women's University.

Anti-dengue drive to be completed in two phases

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Commissioner of Dera Zafarul Islam Khattak on Thursday said the administration has finalized its arrangements to carry out anti-polio campaign in Dera division which would be completed in two phases to eliminate the crippling disease from the society.

While presiding over a meeting here at his office regarding anti-polio campaign, he said in first phase, the anti-polio campaign would be held from January 8 to 12 in Dera Ismail Khan and Tank districts while in the second phase it would be held from January 15 to 19 in South Waziristan Upper and South Waziristan Lower districts.

The commissioner said the polio was a contagious disease and that parents must get their children of

under five years of age administered anti-polio drops in order to save them from the crippling disease. He said the polio teams would visit door to door to administer anti-polio drops to all children of under five years of age so that the polio vaccination campaign could be made successful.

The meeting was also attended by Regional Police Officer (RPO) Dera Nasir Mehmood Satti, Deputy Commissioner Dera Mansoor Arshad Khattak, District Health Officer Mahmood Jan, representatives of Local Government, WHO and EPI. Besides, Deputy Commissioners Tank, South Waziristan Upper and South Waziristan Lower participated online in the meeting. Speaking on this occasion, RPO Nasir Mehmood Satti said the fool proof security

arrangements would be ensured for polio teams.

Drug dealer held: The district police on Thursday arrested a drug dealer recovering over 1.6 kilograms of drugs from him here in the limits of Cantt police station. According to the police spokesman, the crackdown against the menace of drugs was continued successfully in the district following the strict instructions of District Police Officer (DPO) Abdul Rauf Babar Qaisrani.

A police team led by Cantt police station SHO Gulsher Khan arrested accused drug dealer Muhammad Rameez son of Mushtaq, a resident of Gilani Town. The police also recovered 1210 grams of hashish and 460 grams of heroin from his possession. A case has also been registered against the arrested accused.

BPC elections arranged F.P. Report

BUNER: The district Buner Press Club elections for the year 2024 were held under the supervision of senior counsels of the district Buner Bar Association Ghulam Mustafa Khan advocate and Shah Hasan Khan advocate on Thursday.

The most senior member Muhibul Haq for the second time chose as president unopposed with Sultan Ghani vice president Syed Bacha general secretary Naseb Yar joint secretary Shaukat Ali finance secretary respectively all unopposed.

The elections process was started from 1st of January for application the 2nd day for security the 3rd day for final list and the 4th day (Thursday) elections day. The DBB senior counsels who supervised the whole process make it sure there was no other panel and finally announced the result as all the cabinet chose unopposed. On the occasion, press club members felicitated the new office bearers and assured them all out support. They extended thanks to the DBB senior counsels for sparing precious times for the great cause of conducting BPC elections for the year 2024.

Food packages distributed

QUETTA (PPI): King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief), in a dedicated effort to alleviate the pressing nutritional challenges faced by the residents of Baluchistan is distributing 7,000 essential food packages across three districts - Sibi, Pishin, and Kalat that will benefit 49,000 individuals.

According to a report on Thursday, this project is part of the 3rd phase of the KSrelief Food Security Support Project for Pakistan (2023-2024). Each package, weighing 95kg contains basic food items to sustain a family for an entire month, including 80kg flour, five liters of cooking oil, 5kg sugar, and 5kg Daal Chana.

This project is being implemented in collaboration with the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) in Baluchistan, local governments, and executed through the collaborative efforts of KSrelief and its implemented Partner BSDSB.

The distribution underscores KSrelief's commitment to extending assistance to the most vulnerable populations of these districts. Approximately 49,000 individuals in these three districts will be benefiting from this humanitarian effort, showcasing the tangible impact of KSrelief in fulfilling its mission to provide relief where it is needed most.

Criminals held

SARGODHA (INP): The district police launched a crackdown on suspected criminals and arrested 13 on Thursday.

Police said different teams conducted raids and arrested Muzammil, Shahid, Tahir, Zeeshan, Zahoor, Zubair and others.

Six-year old missing baby found dead in Lower Dir

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A six-year old missing baby identified as the daughter of one Abdur Rehman, a resident of Khazana village was found dead in the fields near the Panjkora River at Khazana in the jurisdiction of Munda police station here on Thursday. The baby went missing from her home on Wednesday and the family searched for her all day. The body was found in fields on the bank of Panjkora River which was shifted to the district headquarters hospital Timergara for post mortem report. The hospital staff took samples from the body and sent them to Peshawar for laboratory report.

The Munda police registered a case and started investigations. Meanwhile the district police officer Ziaud Din along with SP investigation Zahoar Ahmad, SP Counter Terrorism Department Amjad Khan, DSP Bakht Jamal and SHO Munda Aminul Wahab visited the hospital and met with relatives of the baby. Later he visited the spot and directed the investigation team to

trace the case without delay. The DPO also constituted a special committee of police officials for speedy investigations and arresting the killer[s]. Talking to local journalists the DPO said the killers would not be spared and soon they would be brought to book and punished.

Meanwhile a woman fell down from a chairlift over the Panjkora River at Malikabad Akhagram and drowned. According to local residents one of the ropes of the chairlift broke and the woman fell into the river. They said the woman was on her way back from Khall after mourning one of her relatives' death. Three other children remained unhurt in the incident.

Power protest: Dozens of power consumers from several villages of Lajbok Dara staged a protest rally against the authorities of Peshawar Electric Supply Company (Pesco) outside the Timergara press club here on Thursday. The Jamaat-i-Islami tehsil Balambat chief Imranud Din advocated led the protesters who chanted slogans against the Pesco executive engineer and demanded his

immediate replacement.

The rally was also addressed by the former tehsil councillor Saiful Islam, Ikramud Din, Adnan Ahmad and others. They alleged that thousands of villagers in Lajbok Dara had electricity for only four hours. Later on speaking at a news conference the protesters' leaders said the duration of power outage had increased to 20 hours a day. They said the poor power consumers were facing hardships in this chilly winter due to prolonged power cuts.

They said that residents had no drinking water at homes and mosques due to load shedding. They said the Pesco XEN had been contacted again and again but to no avail. They said the power consumers were paying their electricity bills regularly and none of them had any outstanding amount but they were being subjected to face the brunt. They said the residents would again come onto the roads if the problem was not solved soon. They warned to besiege the Pesco offices at Timergara if the prolonged power outage was not ended by Jan 8.

Over 189,000 new voters registered in Dir

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A total of 189015 have been registered as voters since 2018 in the Lower Dir district taking the number of registered voters to 870852 including 481908 male and 389043 female voters. The number of registered voters in 2018 was 681837 including 403754 male and 278083 female.

The district has two national assembly seats (NA 6 and NA 7) and five provincial assembly constituencies (PK 14, PK 15, PK 16, PK 17 and PK 18). In the 2018 general elections the PTI won two national and four of the five provincial assembly seats. The Lower Dir district once was considered a stronghold of the Jamaat-i-Islami, the chief of which Sirajul Haq lost his seat to the PTI Bashir Khan of the PTI in 2018.

During scrutiny the concerned returning officers rejected the nomination papers of all ex-lawmakers of the PTI who announced

to challenge the rejection. A total of 21 candidates are now in the running in NA 6, 34 in NA 7, 33 in PK 14, 32 in PK 15, 27 in PK 16, 32 in PK 17 and 20 candidates in PK 18.

An official of the Election Commission of Pakistan told Dawn on contact that the ECP had set up 614 polling stations including 175 for men, 165 for women and 274 combined. The number of total registered voters in NA 6 is 457057 including 253972 male and 203103 female for which the ECP has set up 307 polling stations (79 male, 73 female and 307 combined).

The number of total voters in NA 7 is 413777 including 227837 male and 185940 female for which a total of 307 polling stations including 96 for male, 92 for female and 119 combined polling stations would be set up.

The number of registered voters in PK 14 is 182431 including 100696 male and 81735 female for which the ECP has planned

to set up 129 polling stations (31 for male, 29 for female and 69 combined). The number of registered voters in PK 15 is 178454 including 98063 male and 80391 female. According to the ECP plan, a total of 127 polling stations (47 male, 45 female and 35 combined) would be set up.

In PK 16, the ECP has set up 132 polling stations (37 male, 36 female and 59 combined) for a total of 171919 voters including 94719 male and 77200 female voters. In PK 17, the number of registered voters is 172353 including 96450 male and 75903 female for which the ECP has set up a total of 116 polling stations including 33 for male, 29 for female and 54 combined.

The number of registered voters in PK 18 is 165695 including 91881 male and 73814 female voters. The ECP has set up 110 polling stations in PK-18 including 27 for male, 26 for female and 57 combined polling stations.

JUI-F dismisses charges of seeking election delay

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) leader Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri on Thursday dismissed the allegations about the party's inclination towards a delay in the upcoming elections.

Talking to a private news channel, he asserted that the party has consistently demonstrated its commitment to active participation in electoral processes. Despite the challenges, Haideri high-

lighted the party's unwavering demand for fair and transparent elections as a core aspect of JUI-F's agenda.

Expressing deep concern over recent violent attacks targeting JUI-F leaders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, he emphasized the need to maintain peaceful conditions during the upcoming elections. He specifically advocated for a secure environment for JUI-F leader Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman, calling

for foolproof security measures to mitigate perceived security threats. Haideri urged the authorities to provide bullet-proof vehicles for politicians facing threats.

Reiterating the party's manifesto, he claimed that JUI-F primarily aimed to establish an Islamic welfare state, based on principles of justice and social equity. JUI-F envisions a state that prioritizes peace, eliminating corruption and reviving Pakistan's economy, he added.

Essential land acquisition matters addressed

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Khalid Iqbal chaired a meeting of the Land Acquisition Committee (LAC) for the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa State Improvement Project (KPSIP) at his office on Thursday and addressed essential land acquisition matters associated with the Municipal Services provision under the broader City Improvement Project.

Decisions were discussed during the relevant meeting for the allocation of land and the implementation of various schemes under the ambit of the project. Practical directives were also being issued to tackle emerging issues effectively. It was assured in the meeting that the efficient acquisition of land for the project's initiatives and

84kg hashish recovered F.P. Report

MARDAN: In a successful action, the Excise Department Mardan recovered a big consignment of hashish from a vehicle on Charsadda-Mardan Road.

According to the spokesman Excise Mardan on Thursday, the intelligence-based action was taken on Charsadda-Mardan Road where 84kg of hashish was recovered from a car. The spokesman said the narcotics were being smuggled to Punjab adding that the smuggler left the car on the roadside and managed to escape the area. He said a search operation has been launched in the area to arrest the escaped smuggler and further investigation was underway.

resolving potential challenges that may arise during the process.

The LAC reiterated its commitment to expediting the acquisition of necessary land, thereby facilitating the timely execution of the transformative Khyber Pakhtunkhwa State Improvement Project. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of

WSSCA Engineer Rehan Yousaf, Additional Assistant Commissioner (AAC) of Revenue Syed Muhammad Asif Iqbal, Assistant Commissioner (AC) of Abbottabad Arshad Mahmood, Land Acquisition Officer, and representatives from the Finance Department were in attendance.



GAZA: Displaced Palestinians shelter behind plastic sheets in the zoo in Rafah.

Why temples are a top campaign stop in Taiwan's election

NEW TAIPEI CITY: At Lixing Fude temple, one of the largest in the densely-packed district of Zhonghe in New Taipei City, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate William Lai Ching-te and DPP legislative candidate Wu Zheng lit incense and prayed for health, safety and peace for Taiwan. Left at the altar were offerings for the community's local god: fresh fruit baskets, green flags and water bottles with Lai's and Wu's faces on them.

After an opening ceremony, temple leaders offered the candidates large bunches of garlic sprouts - symbolising the popular phrase "dongsuan" that is often heard at campaign rallies and means "frozen garlic" in Mandarin, but sounds like "be elected" in Taiwanese. Then Lai and Wu, surrounded by local party and temple leaders, addressed the crowd of about 200 people packed into the temple's atrium. "For a long time, Taiwan has been an orphan in the world. But now it's different. Everyone is looking at Taiwan," Wu said. "We have to vote for Lai so we can continue the last eight years of [current president] Tsai's politics that make us well-known in the world." The fusion of political and religious life, marked by dozens of temple visits, meetings with religious leaders, and attendance at religious events and festivals, is a cultural staple during the Taiwan elections.

According to the American Institute in Taiwan, nearly 28 percent of Taiwanese follow folk religions (such as local deity worship), 20 percent practise Buddhism, and 19 percent Taoism, while 25 percent identify as non-believers. Many of Taiwan's local places of worship fuse Buddhist, Taoist and even Christian practices. More than just religious organisations, temples have long been the cornerstones of their local community, especially in rural areas. The Ministry of Interior estimates that there are 33,000 places of worship in Taiwan, averaging about one every square kilometre. Taiwan's faithful is such an important class of voters that Foxconn founder Terry Gou invoked deities

numerous times while floating the idea of running for president in 2019 and 2023, claiming earlier this year that the Buddhist-Taoist seafaring goddess Mazu came to him in a dream and told him to join the election to promote peace across the Taiwan Strait. (Gou qualified to appear on the ballot this year but withdrew from the race in November.)

Candidates also make stops at Taiwan's major religious establishments with huge followings such as Buddha Light Mountain, whose late leader, the "political monk" Hsing Yun, endorsed President Ma Ying-jeou of the China-friendly KMT and met Chinese President Xi Jinping several times. As Taiwan's presidential and legislative elections draw closer, some of Taiwan's major candidates have been making campaign stops at temples nearly every day. On January 13, the self-ruled island of nearly 24 million people will choose a new president and legislature in an election that will determine the future of its relations with China, which views Taiwan as its own and has not ruled out the use of force to achieve its goal. Hsu Ci-ting and Tseng Tong-ping are local volunteers at Lixing Fude. They say temples are not only convenient locations for candidates to meet voters but also a way for candidates to show their respect for local deities by praying for good fortune during the elections. "The candidates who come here can close the distance between themselves and the local people here," said Tseng.

Lin Kuan-jen, the temple's director, says temples have long been "a public place for Taiwan's democratic development and freedom of speech". Lin says he has known Lai since he was mayor of the southern city of Tainan from 2010 to 2017. He also supported young people during 2014's Sunflower Movement, a student protest against a proposed free trade agreement with China, where he met Wu. Hou Yu-ih, the candidate for the KMT and current mayor of New Taipei City, has also been invited to the temple before campaigning ends. Local temple leaders are commonly

involved in local politics and are well-connected in the community, receiving funding from influential elites, says Richard Madsen, a professor emeritus at the University of California San Diego and author of a book about religious development since Taiwan embraced democracy.

"Temples give out things like charitable donations and so forth ... so [if] you're a politician, you want to tap into those kinds of networks," he said, adding a note of caution. "[In] some places, these temples have been funded by local gangs, [and used for] for money laundering." Many of Taiwan's major religions and religious organisations also have historical and organisational ties to China, making them fertile ground for the Chinese Communist Party's influence and election interference. But a lack of government supervision of donations to temples and their exemption from property and income taxes makes that influence difficult to track, according to Lin Hsien-ming, an assistant professor at the Center of Teacher Education at National Pingtung University.

According to the Reuters news agency, Taiwan's government is on high alert for evidence of Chinese efforts to sway Taiwanese voters by funding China-friendly campaigns conducted via apps or group tours. Sources identified temples as one area of risk, particularly those that worship Mazu, who has a strong following on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. China frequently uses "one family" rhetoric in its discourse around Mazu, using the goddess's origins in China to show that "both sides of the strait are one family," and like Mazu, people in Taiwan come from China, said Lin.

Taiwan's legislature has attempted numerous times to draft new laws to modernise its religious regulation while maintaining democratic principles, often sparking an outcry. In 2022, the legislature passed a law allowing religious institutions to change property registration from individuals to the organisation, which is intended to help prevent individuals from appropriating temple assets. — Aljazeera

Investigators focus on air traffic communication after a Tokyo crash

TOKYO (AP): A transcript of communication between traffic control and two aircraft that collided and burst into flames at Tokyo's Haneda Airport showed that only the larger Japan Airlines passenger flight was given permission to use the runway where a coast guard plane was preparing for takeoff.

An orange fireball erupted from both aircraft as JAL flight 516 continued down the runway covered in flames and spewing gray smoke. Within 20 minutes, all 379 passengers and crew members slid down emergency chutes and survived. The pilot of the coast guard plane - a Bombardier Dash-8 - evacuated with injuries but five crew members were killed.

The Transport Ministry released a transcript of air traffic control communication of about 4 minutes and 25 seconds just before the crash. It showed no clear takeoff approval was given to the coast guard plane. According to the text, the Tokyo air control gave the JAL Airbus A350 permission to land on Runway C, noting that there is a departing plane, with the JAL pilot repeating the instruction. The coast guard plane said it was taxiing to the same runway, and the traffic control instructs it to proceed to the stop line ahead of the runway. The controller noted the coast guard gets the departure priority, and the pilot said he was moving to the stop line.

Their communication in the script ends there. Two minutes later, there was a

three-second pause, apparently indicating the time of the collision. Police began a separate probe into possible professional negligence. Tokyo police said that investigators examined the debris on the runway and were conducting interviews. They said 17 JAL passengers were slightly injured.

The JAL plane had flown from Shin Chitose airport near the northern city of Sapporo, and the coast guard Bombardier was preparing to depart for Niigata to deliver relief supplies to the central regions hit by powerful earthquakes that killed more than 60 people. Six experts from the Japan Transport Safety Board examined what remained of the aircraft, the board said. TV footage showed the severely damaged A350's wings among the charred, broken parts of fuselage. The smaller coast guard plane resembled a mound of rubble. Board investigator Takuya Fujiwara said his team recovered flight data and voice recorders from the Bombardier for analysis.

Investigators plan to interview the pilots, officials as well as air traffic control officials to find out how the two planes simultaneously ended up on the runway, JTSB said. The two sides had different understandings of their permission to use the runway. JAL Managing Executive Officer Tadayuki Tsutsumi told a news conference that the A350 was making a "normal entry and landing" on the runway and that the

pilot said he did not recognize the Bombardier. Another JAL executive, Noriyuki Aoki, said the flight had received permission to land.

Air traffic officials gave the JAL airliner permission to land while telling the coast guard pilot to wait before entering the runway, the Transport Ministry transcript showed. But according to an NHK television report, the coast guard pilot said he was given permission to take off. The coast guard said officials were verifying that claim. All passengers and crew members left their baggage and slid down the escape chutes within 20 minutes of the landing as smoke filled the cabin of the burning aircraft - an outcome praised by aviation experts. Videos posted by passengers showed people covering their mouths with handkerchiefs as they ducked down and moved toward the exits. Some passengers told news media they felt safe only after reaching a grassy area beyond the tarmac.

"The entire cabin was filled with smoke within a few minutes. We threw ourselves down on the floor. Then the emergency doors were opened and we threw ourselves at them," Swedish passenger Anton Deibe, 17, told Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet. "The smoke in the cabin stung like hell." Even after safely evacuating the aircraft, passengers on the tarmac were struck with new horror as flames engulfed the plane and one of the jet engines whirled to life as if it was about to take

off, William Manzione, who was on the flight, said. The crew shouted for them to run away from the plane.

"The feeling was this is about to explode," Manzione told Sky News. "That was the biggest moment of fear for me and the other passengers." The fire is likely to be seen as a key test case for airplane fuselages made from carbon-composite fibers - featured on the A350 and the Boeing 787 - instead of conventional aluminum skins.

"This is the most catastrophic composite-airplane fire that I can think of. On the other hand, that fuselage protected (passengers) from a really horrific fire - it did not burn through for some period of time and let everybody get out," safety consultant John Cox said. Haneda's three other runways reopened, but about 140 flights had been canceled alone due to the closure of the runway, transport officials said. The airport was packed as many holidaymakers wrapped up their New Year travel, including those who survived the fire and spent the night at the airport or at nearby hotels, trying to change their flights.

Haneda is the busier of the two major airports serving the Japanese capital, with many international flights, and is favored by business travelers due to its proximity to central parts of the city. Accident was the first severe damage to an Airbus A350, among the industry's newest large passenger planes.

US led coalition warns Houthis

WASHINGTON: A group of countries led by the United States have warned Yemen's Houthi rebels of "consequences" unless they stop their attacks on Red Sea shipping vessels. "Let our message now be clear: we call for the immediate end of these illegal attacks and release of unlawfully detained vessels and crews," said the statement released by the White House.

"The Houthis will bear the responsibility of the consequences should they continue to threaten lives, the global economy and free flow of commerce in the region's critical waterways". The United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Germany and Japan are among the 12 signatories.

The only country in the Middle East to sign the statement was Bahrain, which has a strained relationship with Iran, which is aligned with the Houthis. The statement comes after several reports that US President Joe Biden's administration is considering direct strikes on the rebels if the attacks continue. The Houthis have said that their attacks in the busy waterway are an act of solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza and that they are targeting ships with links to Israel.

The US has sent an aircraft carrier, the USS Dwight D Eisenhower, to the area and earlier announced a coalition of countries to protect movement in the Red Sea, through which 12 percent of global trade passes. The Houthis claimed responsibility for a previous attack on a merchant vessel in the Red Sea. "The naval forces of the Yemeni armed forces carried out an operation targeting the ship CMA CGM TAGE which was travelling towards the ports of occupied Palestine," the Houthis said on X.

The French operator CMA CGM said that its container ship was unharmed and suffered "no incident". A CMA CGM spokesperson said the ship was headed for Egypt. The Houthi attacks in recent weeks have mainly been concentrated on the Bab al-Mandeb Strait. Danish shipping giant Maersk extended a suspension of services through the waterway and the Gulf of Aden, south Yemen, "until further notice". — Aljazeera

Republicans want to impeach Maine official

PORTLAND, Maine (AP): Republicans who want to unseat Maine's secretary of state for barring former President Donald Trump from the primary ballot will face long odds impeaching a stalwart and influential Democrat whose party holds firm control over both Legislative chambers.

Shenna Bellows is the first secretary of state in history to block someone from running for president by using the US Constitution's insurrection clause. Trump, the early front-runner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, has appealed the decision to a Superior Court in Maine and he has asked the US Supreme Court to review a similar ban in Colorado. As Maine lawmakers returned to the Capitol to begin this year's legislative session, retribution against Bellows was among the first orders of business for many Republicans. They filed an order of impeachment against her, called for her to resign and encouraged legislators to vote her out of office.

"The secretary of state has jumped in way over her boots on this one," said Rep. Billy Bob Faulkingham, the House Republican leader. Bellows was elected secretary of state three years ago by the Maine Legislature, and Democrats have since maintained a solid majority in both houses, meaning there's little chance those same legislators would reverse course and oust her. Bellows said she stands by her decision to unilaterally remove Trump from the state's ballot, and isn't fazed by the calls for her impeachment. "This is little more than political theater produced by those who disagree with my decision," Bellows said. "I had a duty to uphold the laws and the Constitution and that's what I did. And what I will continue to do - to serve the people of Maine."

Beirut bombing sparks anger, fear in Lebanon

BEITUR: Lina Mounzer is convinced that Israel wants to escalate the war in Gaza. The Lebanese writer and researcher has a family home in Dahiya, the Hezbollah-controlled residential neighbourhood in Beirut that was bombed by a drone, killing seven people, including Hamas politburo member Saleh al-Aroui.

Israel has not officially accepted responsibility for the attack - in fact, Mark Regev, an adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tried, in a television interview, to distance his country from the attack, without outright denying that it was behind the bombing. But Mounzer has no doubt. "I think it is generally Israel's modus operandi," she told Al Jazeera. "They are warning that they will escalate. It's similar to when they bombed the first hospital in Gaza. When they realised that there wasn't going to be an [international outcry], then they started bombing hospitals left, right and centre."

On the streets of Lebanon, too, people are convinced Israel had attacked Beirut, much as it had laid siege to the city in 1982, and fears are mounting among Lebanese who are angry about their country's territorial sovereignty being violated, yet also concerned that any response from Hezbollah could pull Lebanon into a wider conflict. In addition to al-Aroui, six other people were also killed, including two senior Hamas military officials and, two members of Jama'a Islamiya, according to a person close to the Lebanon-based political movement. The men from Jama'a Islamiya provided services such as transportation for al-Aroui, a source close to the group told Al Jazeera.

"It's just the fear of an imminent attack on our capital and attacking people in our capital that is insane and unfathomable at this point," said Michelle Eid, a Lebanese researcher. "There are a lot of people in Lebanon against the [Israeli] attacks regardless of their political affiliation," she told Al Jazeera. After al-Aroui's assassination, Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant told reporters that he does not want an escalation with Hezbollah. After Hamas's surprise attack on Israeli military outposts and communities on October 7, Hezbollah - which is backed by Iran and part of the so-called Resistance Axis that also includes Hamas - began a low-intensity conflict with Israel on its southern border. While violence in the south has displaced more than 72,000 people and killed more than 120 - including civilians - many in Lebanon believe that Hezbollah has taken adequate measures to avert an all-out war with Israel. But Hezbollah is now in a tough spot, according to Mounzer. She said that the armed group

risks triggering an escalation if they retaliate for al-Aroui's killing, but they could also fail to deter future Israeli attacks if they do not. "To tell you the truth, I'm resigned to the idea that this [Hamas-Israel] war is going to widen," she added.

Many Lebanese civilians have faith that Hezbollah will not drag Lebanon into an all-out war. Karim Saifeddine, a Lebanese expert from southern Lebanon, said that extending the war to Beirut would be pointless. He added that the war in south Lebanon is relatively contained compared with what is taking place in Gaza and that most Lebanese would prefer to keep it that way. "I don't think an all-out war is something that neither most Lebanese want nor the political leaders of Hezbollah prefer," Saifeddine told Al Jazeera. "But I do believe Hezbollah will escalate. However, they will escalate within certain rules of engagement that may not elicit a major response from Israel." Ronnie Chatah, a Lebanese commentator and the son of former Finance Minister Mohammad Chatah, who was killed in a car bomb in 2013 that many accuse Hezbollah of conspiring, also said that neither Hezbollah nor Iran wants a major war.

"For Iran, keeping Hezbollah in Lebanon is more important than Hamas in Lebanon," he told Al Jazeera. "Hezbollah remains [Iran's] crown jewel and testing the limits of that crown jewel is not something that I think Iran wants to do right now." Saifeddine told Al Jazeera he believes that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has clear motives to continue the war in Gaza - and possibly escalate his northern front with Hezbollah - to extend his political career. According to a recent survey by the Israel Democracy Institute, which gauges public opinion every month, only 15 percent of Israelis want Netanyahu to remain in power after the war on Gaza. But 56 percent of Israelis support Netanyahu's continuing offensive on Gaza, while 50 percent support expanding the northern front with Hezbollah. "The ball is also in Israeli's court [not just Hezbollah's] and I believe they have an interest in prolonging this war and to find ways to use Israeli air supremacy against the various militants they are fighting," said Saifeddine

Eid, the Lebanese researcher, said that in many ways, the war has already reached her country, with Israel frequently invading its airspace with drones and planes, signalling their ability to escalate at any time. "To be honest, we can't even discern if it's a passenger plane or an Israeli plane because of how frequently the Israelis have been passing over us," Eid said. — Aljazeera

World must 'impose' solution to Gaza war: EU

LISBON: European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has said the international community must impose a solution to the Israel-Hamas war as both sides are unable to come to terms. "I believe that we have learned in these 30 years that the solution has to be imposed from outside because the two parties will never be able to reach an agreement," Borrell said at an event in Lisbon, Portugal.

"If this tragedy doesn't end soon, the entire Middle East might end up in flames", he said. Israel has bombed the besieged Gaza Strip since October 7, when Hamas fighters from the Palestinian territory stormed into southern Israel, killing around 1,200 people, and taking around 240 others hostage, according to Israeli officials.

In response to the Hamas attack, Israel declared war, launched a devastating bombardment of Gaza and later ordered a ground invasion that has left much of the territory in ruins. More than 22,000 people, mostly women and children, have been killed in the Israeli assault, according to

Palestinian authorities. The war reached the Lebanese capital Beirut, when a senior Hamas official was killed in a blast. Hamas said its deputy leader, Saleh al-Aroui, was assassinated in an Israeli drone attack. Israel has neither confirmed nor denied that it killed al-Aroui. Army spokesman Daniel Hagari said forces were in a high state of readiness and prepared for any scenario.

Hamas politburo member Husam Badran said in a eulogy for al-Aroui, "We say to the criminal occupation [Israel] that the battle between us is open." Israel had previously accused al-Aroui of orchestrating attacks on its citizens. A Hamas official said al-Aroui was "at the heart of negotiations" conducted by Qatar and Egypt over the release of hostages held by armed groups in Gaza. Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati said the death of al-Aroui on Lebanese territory aims to "draw Lebanon" deeper into the war, as the Lebanese armed group, Hezbollah, has traded near-daily fire with Israeli forces since the war began on October 7. "What

happened yesterday with the death of one of the leaders of Hamas is yet another factor that could push the conflict to escalate," Borrell said.

Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah is due to make a speech in Beirut after he previously warned Israel against carrying out assassinations on Lebanese soil and promised a "severe reaction". The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Lebanon warned that any escalation "could have devastating consequences for people on both sides of the border". Borrell added that he is planning to visit the Middle East, including Lebanon, to "explore ways out" of the war and would present to EU member states a proposal to create a mission in the Red Sea. Yemen's Houthis have been targeting vessels in the Red Sea since October in what they say are acts of solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza. Several shipping lines have suspended operations through the Red Sea due to the attacks and have changed routes to take the longer journey around Africa instead. — Aljazeera

Japanese rescuers race to find survivors

TOKYO: More than 50 people have been reported missing, as Japanese rescuers battle the cold to reach communities that remain cut off three days after a devastating earthquake struck the country's western coast. At least 78 people have been confirmed dead and 330 injured since the magnitude 7.6 earthquake off the Noto Peninsula on January 1, according to local authorities.

On Thursday, officials published a list of 51 people from three cities whose whereabouts could not be confirmed. More than a dozen communities have been cut off.

Soldiers, firefighters and police officers from across Japan are searching through collapsed wooden houses and toppled commercial buildings for signs of life. Experts say the first three

days are especially critical because the prospects for survival drop sharply after that. "This is a very difficult situation. But from the viewpoint of protecting lives, I ask that you make every effort to save and rescue as many lives as possible by this evening, when the critical 72 hours of the disaster will have passed," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said at a government meeting on Thursday. He announced that the number of troops dispatched to the area for rescue operations was being increased from about 1,000 to 4,600.

The narrowness of the hard-hit Noto Peninsula has added to the challenges in reaching some communities. Water, power and mobile phone services were still down in some areas. There have been nearly 600 aftershocks since the main

quake, raising fears of landslides with forecasts of rain adding to the risk. Naomi Gonno said she and her children got out of their house just as it came crashing down. Her children were screaming for their grandmother, and Gonno saw that her mother was trapped under the smashed house, with only her hand visible. She was able to squeeze her way out through a tiny space, Gonno said.

"I can't believe we're still alive," she said. "We are living in fear." In Wajima, where a massive fire ripped through parts of the port and the district surrounding it, people queued for water and food. The quake buckled and tore apart roads, making it even more difficult to access the hardest-hit areas. "Compared to other disasters, the road situation into Wajima is very bad. — Aljazeera

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FATA integration and leaders’ legacy

THE caretaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government has initiated a High Impact Economic Plan, a comprehensive economic strategy to bring the Newly Merged Districts of the province on par with other regions of the country and province. As said, 10 important sectors including 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. The caretaker leaders have earmarked an estimated cost of Rs. 142,614 million for development initiatives in these districts wherein, 139494 million rupees will be provided by the provincial government, while 3120 million rupees will be arranged through donor funds. A total of 96 initiatives including 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 will be completed under the initiative.

The KP interim government has conceived a gigantic development agenda that requires a colossal investment of several thousand million rupees together with multiple annuums to accomplish that magnificent development plan in the newly merged districts. As the newly merged districts undergo a transformative period, it becomes imperative to focus on mainstreaming residents of these areas and empowering them to actively participate in the province's progress. Historically, the merger of the Erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with the settled areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province marked a historic milestone for regional development and integration. The past successive governments including the PML-N and PTI gave utmost importance to the development and integration of Erstwhile FATA into mainstream areas over the past years. The federal government had pledged an annual allocation of 3% of the NFC award from the divisible pool for ex-FATA, intending to bridge the development gap, improve infrastructure, reduce poverty, and generate employment opportunities in the region. Meanwhile, the provincial government also allocates significant funds for the development and integration of newly merged districts to bring them on par with the rest of the areas.

The integration and development of Erstwhile FATA is a national cause, and all political governments irrespective of their political agenda, narratives and country's financial constraints have been eager to bring this disadvantageous region into the national mainstream through the provision of extra funds, allocation of quotas in government jobs, higher educational institutions, training, and professional institutes in a bid to expedite this process to the maximum level. However, as far as interim government is concerned, its mandate is very limited and initiation of such colossal development projects involving several hundred thousand rupees does not come in their jurisdiction and would adversely affect the provincial treasury and national exchequer along with causing significant financial for the next elected government in the province as well as in the centre.

As of now, sincere implementation of the 25th amendment in true letter and spirit stands as a transformative stride toward the integration of the former tribal areas into the country's mainstream. This signifies a pivotal shift, heralding socio-economic empowerment on the ontological insecurities if our leaders stuck to this nationally agreed upon instrument instead of preaching personality traits, ethnic legacy or party manifesto, that will not only integrate FATA into mainland Pakistan but will prosper the whole nation otherwise each sitting ruler will entail his agenda and every newly elected leader will pick a fresh begging bowl after sworn into office.

Pak-Afghan ties, hopes and scopes

PAKISTAN'S caretaker Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani has once again reiterated the country's commitment to continue the ongoing engagement with Afghanistan. The Foreign Minister's remarks came after a meeting with the governor of Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban movement and an important Afghanistan's province bordering Pakistan. Foreign Minister Gilani expressed Pakistan's willingness to continue its engagement & mutually beneficial ties with Afghanistan and stressed the imperatives of addressing all issues to harness the full potential for trade & connectivity between two brotherly nations.

Pak-Afghan bilateral relations witnessed a record low after banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) resumed its offensive against Pakistani state institutions and innocent civilians through a barrage of terrorist activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, bordering Afghanistan. According to a recent report released by the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), more than 1,500 Pakistanis were killed in 789 terror attacks and counter-terrorism operations in 2023. Which is a significant spike in the terrorism incidents in the past almost eight years after the successful culmination of Operation Zarb-e-Azb. The prevailing tension in the bilateral relations is seriously hurting both neighbours. Unfortunately, there has been a 60% increase in terrorism and a 500% increase in suicide attacks inside Pakistan since the Taliban came to power in 2021. The menace of terrorism and violence has perished over 2000 lives during this time, while the perpetrators of terrorism are enjoying safe havens, freedom of movement, boarding and lodging facilities across durand lines.

Historically, Pakistan and Afghanistan are two brotherly Muslim nations whose security, trade, economic development, prosperity and future is largely interdependent. Landlocked Afghanistan is more dependent on Pakistan for its external links, trade relations, and exports/imports from the rest of the world, while Pakistan's peace and prosperity is also linked with peace, and stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan had always played a role of a big brother and displayed utmost generosity and kindness in dealing with our Afghan brethren yet no nation can compromise its national security and territorial sovereignty at any cost. The Afghan interim leaders must consider Pakistan's compulsion and have correct purview of Pakistan security measures including tightening border security, regulation of foreign visitors/refugees and countering terrorism campaigns. Both brotherly nations can only move forward through cooperation and teamwork while confrontation and antagonism will hurt both interests in the long term. Hopefully, the Afghan side will reciprocate Pakistan's quest to normalize mutual relations that will not only benefit both countries and their people but the entire region will progress from such partnership and association.

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The eurozone isn’t about to collapse - it’s worse than that

Jeremy Warner

YOU’LL be pleased to know that the European Central Bank is working on the introduction of new bank notes which are "even more beautiful" than the ones already in circulation. So said Christine Lagarde, ECB president, in a New Year's address this week to mark the 25th anniversary of the launch of the euro.

Many European citizens, she noted with evident satisfaction, may not even remember a time before the single currency. This is probably just as well, because not only was the glorious variety of bank notes that populated Europe back then aesthetically far more pleasing than today's grimly homogenised versions, but it was also a time of much greater hope for the future and rather more impressive economic growth. Worry not, Lagarde enthused. The single currency continues to unite Europe, make it easier to work, conduct business and ensure price stability.

These claims may be at least partially true. Membership of the euro has indeed made it much harder, even impossible, for others to follow Britain in leaving the EU. Extracting the UK from Europe's bear hug has proved difficult and protracted enough even for a country with its own currency. Imagine the economic turmoil and dislocation if it also meant abandoning your established means of exchange and rebuilding monetary sovereignty from scratch. Lehman's on steroids would be about the sum of it.

All the same, unity in imprisonment is a bit of an odd concept. It is possibly also true that the euro has made it marginally easier to conduct business between eurozone states. Companies and individuals no longer have to worry about exchange rate risk, and can plan for the future accordingly. Yet the major efficiency gains anticipated by European industry from pricing policies and financial strategies have failed to materialise.

Nor do the exaggerated claims around price stability bear much scrutiny. The eurozone's aggregated inflation rate disguises big variations on the ground. A year ago, for instance, the inflation rate ranged from 6.7pc in Spain through

11.3pc in Germany to 21.7pc in Latvia. Even today, with the generalised price surge now receding, the differences are extreme, ranging from minus 0.7pc in Belgium to 6.9pc in Slovakia.

Despite 25 years of monetary integration, inflationary experience across the eurozone remains very different. In terms of interest rates, it is very much still the case that what may be appropriate for one country is likely to be inappropriate for another. What Eddie George, a former governor of the Bank of England,

required further integration dissipates in the face of the likely chaos of the alternatives. Up until the sovereign debt crisis, the Maastricht Treaty's "no bailout" clause was assumed sacrosanct, yet today the ECB underwrites government bond markets with impunity via massive asset purchase programmes.

Similarly, by borrowing directly from markets for the 800bn (£694bn) spending splurge of the NextGenerationEU economic recovery plan, the European Commission

Even so, the existential threat of a decade ago has largely gone away. With each passing crisis, Europe manages to move that little bit closer to what's needed, thus ensuring the single currency's survival. Political opposition to the required further integration dissipates in the face of the likely chaos of the alternatives. Up until the sovereign debt crisis, the Maastricht Treaty's "no bailout" clause was assumed sacrosanct, yet today the ECB underwrites government bond markets with impunity via massive asset purchase programmes.

called Europe's "one size fits all" monetary policy still struggles for economic legitimacy.

But for the actions of the European Central Bank in ignoring the single currency's notional ban on debt monetisation, the game would already be up - the eurozone would have broken up on the unforgiving rocks of the European sovereign debt crisis of 2009-2012. No monetary union is likely to last for long without fiscal integration, a properly functioning banking union, and a centralised treasury function. To push ahead with the single currency before the political consensus existed to put these basic building blocks in place was always putting the cart before the horse.

Even so, the existential threat of a decade ago has largely gone away. With each passing crisis, Europe manages to move that little bit closer to what's needed, thus ensuring the single currency's survival. Political opposition to the

drives a coach and horses through the original principle of a union of self-financing sovereign states. This is effectively fiscal union in embryonic form. Inch by inch, the EU is edging towards the federalism always envisaged by the founding fathers - a United States of Europe forged in crisis.

By forcing the pace of integration, the euro is working much as intended, even at the risk of provoking an almighty political backlash. Yet the economic justification has comprehensively failed. Aggregate per capita income in the eurozone did grow relatively strongly in the early years of the single currency, but this was also true virtually everywhere, and again within the euro area, performance was far from uniform.

For Italy, for instance, membership of the single currency has coincided with an unprecedented period of economic stagnation - the country is scarcely any

richer in per capita terms than it was a quarter of a century ago. A similar but much wider stagnation has settled on the eurozone as a whole since the financial crisis. But for rapid, catch-up growth in relatively low income accession states, the aggregates would have looked even worse.

This was not how it was meant to be. Instead, the single currency was meant to re-energise Europe after the sclerosis of much of the 1990s. Sadly it did not, for it was based on an economic misconception. Free trade obviously doesn't require the elimination of national currencies, but to Europe's high command it nonetheless seemed perverse to be deepening the single market through harmonisation of standards while at the same time allowing the continued sudden shifts in national competitiveness associated with currency adjustment.

Europe's immaculate conception of free trade was always at odds with the traditional neo-Keynesian view that currency realignment is a natural, market-driven way of correcting competitive imbalances between economies without imposing unnecessary hardship. Denied such flexibility, the rigidities of the eurozone were soon to find their expression in the punishing austerity and deep recessions of the European debt crisis. Analysis by the European Centre for International Political Economy found that GDP per capita in 14 EU member states, collectively representing 89pc of EU GDP, was lower in 2021 than when the euro was launched.

France and Germany were as rich as the 36th and the 31st US states in 2000, but 21 years later, French GDP per capita was lower than the 48th poorest US state, Arkansas, while German GDP per capita had fallen to become no more prosperous than the 38th US state, Oklahoma. Europe's long malaise cannot be entirely blamed on monetary union - the UK hasn't done much better, after all. But 25 years after its launch, the euro has failed to deliver on its economic promises. A once acute, life-threatening illness has merely given way to a chronic, long-term condition for which there appears no immediate prospect of cure.

So, too, is Orientalist

Weaponization of antisemitism stifling legitimate criticism of Israel

Ray Hanania

ANTISEMITISM, Islamophobia and anti-Arab discrimination, like all hatred for a person's race or religion, should be banned and severely punished. But too often, especially in America, accusations of antisemitism are leveled against all critics of the Israeli government's policies, while anti-Arab hate is ignored.

This has been going on since before the first Arab-Israeli war, with pro-Jewish groups advocating for the expulsion of Christians and Muslims from Palestine in the 1930s. Religious and racial bias against Arabs was accepted and even became a part of American foreign policy when politicians like President Harry Truman marginalized the claims of Palestine's non-Jewish population.

Because Israel defines itself as a "Jewish state," even though it has a large non-Jewish population, anyone who criticizes the policies of Israel's government are denounced as antisemitic. Arabs thus find themselves at a disadvantage when fighting anti-Arabism and are denounced as antisemitic during the debate over Israel and Palestine because the pro-Israel community has historically better understood the power of words and rhetoric through public relations and the influence of the American news media. Israel's Intelligence Ministry and many elected Israeli officials have openly called for the expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza into Egypt - a true form of anti-Arab hate.

The weaponization of antisemitism to silence critics of the Israeli government's violent policies not only dominates the Israel-Gaza war, but it also has a huge influence in the US, which is one of Israel's strongest allies and which allows Tel Aviv to commit war crimes without any consequences. America silences critics of Israel's government at the UN Security Council. Pro-Israel Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield last month vetoed a resolution calling for an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire" in Gaza. This veto reinforced the realization that the UN system suffers from a system of hypocrisy among certain powerful nations, even when it comes to humanitarian needs.

The weaponization of antisemitism is also growing on university campuses, where Jewish students have long enjoyed a greater sense of rights and privilege than Palestinian students. I led the Arab Student Organization at the University of Illinois in the 1970s. I faced constant opposition from the university leadership, which frequently denied funding for our events and rejected speakers who were pro-Palestinian. In comparison, the university often co-sponsored pro-Israel events. When we protested Israeli government policies, we were demonized as being antisemitic, not only by the university's professors but also in the school's newspaper, which had no Arab journalists. That situation pushed me to pursue journalism and abandon plans to become a doctor. Today, the bias against pro-Palestinian activists on college campuses in America is even worse. And it is empowered by the

bias of the mainstream news media.

Since the Oct. 7 wave of violence and carnage in Israel, the pro-Israel movement in America has done everything possible to define any criticism of Tel Aviv's response and its unjustified and egregious atrocities as antisemitic. More than 1,200 Israelis were murdered on Oct. 7, many in the most heinous manner, with reports of rape, beheadings and torture. Yet, since then, Israel has used anger to justify its widespread indiscriminate violence, which has taken 22,000 lives, including more than 8,000 children. Since Oct. 7, Israel has leveled nearly 70 percent of all the homes in Gaza.

Anyone who speaks out against this disparity or condemns the Israeli government's policy is angrily demonized as being antisemitic. No university is immune from this growing trend of one-sided demonization. The first Black president of the prestigious Harvard University was this week forced to resign. At first, Claudine Gay was assaulted with exaggerated claims that she tolerated antisemitism against Jewish students - without any mention of anti-Arab hate or protests by pro-Israel students supporting Israel's Gaza carnage. The media played a critical role in piling on the claims of antisemitism and marginalizing any references to anti-Arabism by accusing her of plagiarism. In the face of this overwhelming assault and bullying from Harvard professors, pro-Israel activists, the media and right-wing members of Congress - many of whom receive tens of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from pro-Israel political action committees - Gay announced she was stepping down.

What was Gay's crime? She responded to charges of antisemitism on campus in a balanced manner, narrowly defining it as "speech that incites violence, threatens safety or violates Harvard's policies against bullying and harassment." She acknowledged that there had been "reckless and thoughtless rhetoric" by both pro-Israel and pro-Arab student groups. But this threat does not address rhetoric or actions that are anti-Arab or anti-Palestinian for a specific political reason: only about 25 percent of American Muslims are Arab. And it also does not address Christian Arabs, who are a majority of the millions of Arabs living in America. The real stand should be to oppose both antisemitism and anti-Arabism.

What happened on Oct. 7 was horrific and unjustified. The perpetrators should be punished. But what has happened since then is just as horrific and unjustified and the perpetrators should also be punished. What Hamas has done is wrong. What Israel's government has done is wrong. Yet, calls to end the ongoing carnage against Palestinians have been stifled, while the outrage over violence against Israelis echoes at every level in America - an imbalance empowered by the weaponization of antisemitism and that ignores the equally atrocious violence that is killing far more Palestinian civilians, especially women and children.

Arab News

New year, ‘new Middle East’?

Belén Fernández

Israel killed some 1,400 people over 22 days in December 2008 and January 2009. In Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in 2014, the Israeli military killed 2,251 people in 50 days.

We have now apparently transitioned into an age of obscenely intensified birth pangs; Israel's latest assault on the Gaza Strip murdered more than 20,000 Palestinians in the first two and a half months alone, and destruction in the besieged enclave is of a scale the human mind can barely process. Like in Lebanon in 2006, the US has ramped up its support for the aggressors, while repeatedly agitating against a ceasefire or a halt to the savagery. From an aesthetic perspective, at least, the "status quo ante" is long gone in Gaza, the territory now resembling the aftermath of a nuclear holo-

caust. As it currently stands, the newest "new Middle East" is defined by Zionist genocide - the problem for Israel being that, no matter how much you bomb, you can't really annihilate a people that refuses to cease to exist.

In mid-December, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken advocated once again for a continuation of the war, arguing: "How can it be that there are no demands made of the aggressor and only demands made of the victim?" Anyone with a minimal grasp of logic may be surprised to learn that by "victim" he meant the state responsible for killing more than 20,000 Palestinians in Gaza in two and a half months. Anyway, inversions of reality are par for the course in the US political and media establishment.

So, too, is Orientalist

discourse. Since the onset of this latest bout of Israeli-induced carnage, there has been no shortage of paternalistic, infantilising lectures emanating from said establishment, which is bent on condemning Hamas - and by extension Palestinians in general - as uncivilised troublemakers who brought this whole apocalypse on themselves. To be sure, the United States's Orientalist disdain for a region on the receiving end of one Western "mission civilisatrice" after another is an integral component sustaining the whole imperial mission. After all, there's no better reason than unrelenting backwardness to bomb folks into something, um, new - a place where the US and Israel are entirely and unquestioningly calling the shots.

The case of Iraq, another Middle Eastern locale that has for decades been on the receiving end of calculated-

ly patronising US rhetoric as well as explosives, confirms that a "new" Middle East is hardly a better Middle East, at least in terms of human wellbeing and so forth. Writing for Time magazine at the time of Condoleezza Rice's "birth pangs" diagnosis in 2006, journalist Tony Karon remarked that Iraq was "Exhibit A of the Bush Administration's 'New Middle East,' and it's a bloody mess that is growing worse by the day."

It remains to be seen what can possibly be "born" from the present genocide in Gaza - another "bloody mess" that is naturally far messier for the babies, children, and larger people who actually have to live it and not for their assassins in Tel Aviv and Washington, DC. Whatever happens in the new year, a US-Israeli-birthed baby is by no means viable in the Middle East - and genocide should be aborted at once.

Aljazeera

Why Africa needs an entrepreneurial boom

For decades, Africa has been the world's most commodity-dependent continent. At the same time, it has become overly reliant on imports from the rest of the world: intracontinental trade accounts for only 15 percent of total African trade, compared to 60 percent in Asia and 70 percent in the EU. Worryingly, imports of manufactured goods into African countries have grown by more than 25 percent over the decade ending in 2022.

The continent's import dependency can be explained primarily by the dearth of African industrial entrepreneurs. And Africa's projected population growth and burgeoning middle class suggests that this dependency will only grow in the medium term, with significant implications for macroeconomic stability, unless local actors begin driving innovation and creating new products and services to meet the needs and desires of domestic consumers.

The problem, however, is not sustained import growth per se, especially when the rise of global value chains and increasing fragmentation of production have reduced the power of exports as a driver of short-term demand. Instead, the main issue is that African countries are participating in global value chains largely through backward activities, systematically exporting natural resources and primary commodities and importing manufactured goods, an imbalance that drains wealth away from the continent.

For African fossil fuel-producing countries, the carbon-intensive "round-tripping" model of exporting crude oil and importing refined petroleum has been costly, resulting in immense deadweight losses and foreign exchange leakages. In Nigeria, for example, the opening of a much-anticipated oil refinery could save the country \$26 billion annually. Moreover, in an era of hyper-globalization, when intermediate goods account for 50 percent of global trade, African countries' high level of forward participation in global value chains has scuttled prospects for structural transformation and shrunk the continent's

share of global trade to about 3 percent. It has also perpetuated the unhealthy correlation between growth and commodity price cycles, resulting in increased exposure to global volatility and persistent structural current account deficits.

While limited access to finance has been cited as a binding constraint on African economic development, what if the chronic deficit

Singapore, where tight labor markets have pushed unemployment to natural rates, a shortage of industrial entrepreneurs may be doubly costly for Africa, where persistent widespread poverty and high unemployment fuel insecurity and migration pressures. For example, the unemployment rate is at Great Depression-era levels - above 30 percent in two of the continent's largest economies,

gration and enhance Africa's economic dynamism. But to take full advantage of the economies of scale and the growth opportunities provided by the free trade area - most notably the drastic reduction in risk associated with investing in smaller markets - African entrepreneurs need the support of entrepreneurial states. Fostering business environments that ensure a level playing field for all participants, together with policy coordination at the regional and continental level, would go a long way toward increasing direct investment and stimulating the development of robust regional value chains.

African policymakers must also implement financial reforms to eliminate the credit rationing that has long undermined entrepreneurship. Finance is the lifeblood of business; yet, expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product, domestic credit to the private sector has remained very low across Africa, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where it averaged 37.1 percent of GDP in 2022. By contrast, the GDP share of domestic credit to the private sector in the 10 countries that US News and World Report ranked as being the best for entrepreneurship ranges from 83.6 percent in Germany and 129.5 percent in Singapore to 175.9 percent in South Korea and a whopping 216 percent in the US. In addition to providing easy access to capital, the most successful and enterprising countries share other important attributes: technological expertise, highly skilled labor, well-developed infrastructure (both physical and digital), transparent business practices and comprehensive legal frameworks. They are also globally connected and fully integrated into value chains, often as manufacturing powerhouses.

According to an African proverb, it takes a village to raise a child. Likewise, it will take a host of industrial entrepreneurs and proactive entrepreneurial governments to transform African economies and improve their global engagement with the rest of the world. Supporting local entrepreneurship is the surest path to a more self-reliant and prosperous continent.

Hippolytel Fofack

This would provide local entrepreneurs with a much-needed boost to operationalize continental trade integration and enhance Africa's economic dynamism. But to take full advantage of the economies of scale and the growth opportunities provided by the free trade area - most notably the drastic reduction in risk associated with investing in smaller markets - African entrepreneurs need the support of entrepreneurial states.

of entrepreneurs is equally limiting? After all, entrepreneurship, which improves competitiveness and business efficiency to lower prices for consumers, has become a leading driver of innovation and growth in many countries in recent decades. And Africa lags behind in this area: In the latest edition of US News and World Report's Best Countries for Entrepreneurship, the continent's highest-ranked country, South Africa, placed only 44th. One top-ranking country on that list, which includes some of the world's wealthiest and most complex economies, is Singapore. Recently, companies based in the city-state have pursued major growth opportunities across myriad sectors and industries in Africa, highlighting the continent's entrepreneurship deficit. The Tolaram Group, for example, created the instant noodle market in Nigeria, producing 4.5 billion packets annually and generating almost \$1 billion in annual revenue.

Compared to more diversified and higher-ranking countries like

Nigeria and South Africa. In other countries, economic informality - think of street vendors hawking imported toothpicks, candles, cell phones and batteries - has become a form of disguised unemployment. An increase in entrepreneurship on the continent would generate wealth more sustainably, expand employment and reduce migration flows. In many African countries, industrial entrepreneurs, in particular, could help diversify sources of growth, improve the current account balance and broaden the tax base. This, in turn, would expand countries' fiscal space, improve debt sustainability and gradually ease the constraints associated with capital scarcity.

Moreover, when the rules of origin for the African Continental Free Trade Area are finalized, they will serve as an "industrialization passport," enabling made-in-Africa goods to circulate duty-free. This would provide local entrepreneurs with a much-needed boost to operationalize continental trade inte-

China increases hope for 2024

THE year 2023 was, by all accounts, a very eventful one. While we saw great prospects for the future advancement of humankind, at the same time there were great challenges and dangers that threaten our own destruction. It was against this backdrop that China urged countries to act on the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative that it has proposed.

The Global Development Initiative calls for an action-oriented approach that closely addresses the most pressing livelihood needs of developing countries and promotes practical cooperation in key areas such as poverty reduction, food security, industrialization and connectivity. The initiative has received positive reactions from the international community.

The Global Security Initiative aims to work with the international community to carry forward the spirit of the United Nations Charter, advocate the spirit of solidarity to adapt to the profoundly changing international landscape and adopt a win-win approach to traditional and non-traditional security risks and challenges, so as to find a new security path featuring dialogue rather than confrontation, partnership rather than alliance, and win-win results rather than zero-sum outcomes. The Global Civilization Initiative reflects China's specific vision and

future direction in addressing global challenges. China stands for promoting the common values of all humankind and advocating the inheritance of civilizations. At the same time, China pays attention to the modernization of civilizations, and takes people-to-people exchanges and cooperation between countries as the means to learn from each other.

The three initiatives have captured the imagination of the world. They particularly take into consideration the specific circumstances of each country. This is brought out strongly in the Global Civilization Initiative, which was able to show the interconnections between world peace, socioeconomic development and national security. China was heavily involved in making efforts at the diplomatic level to solve several serious and knotty problems of our time in 2023.

In early 2023, China proposed a 12-point measure to resolve the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Those measures captured some very important aspects of the crisis and principles - such as territorial integrity; mutual security in which no country should seek greater security at the expense of another; and no use of nuclear weapons (indeed China insists on the principle that nuclear weapons should never be used, and a nuclear war never fought) - that could be applied generally for their resolution. However, as the

Donald Ramotar

Ukraine crisis drags on, we are beginning to witness some realism on the part of the Western powers. China's proposal is a good basis to begin talks.

The most burning issue in the international arena at present is the devastation of Gaza and the slaughter of the people there, including a large amount of children and babies. Here, too, China has made very sound proposals to end the offensive launched by the Israeli forces against the people of Palestine. At the UN Security Council, China called for an immediate ceasefire, as an indispensable step toward resolving the tragic killings in Gaza. To find a permanent settlement to the conflict, China emphasized on the two-state solution, with a viable Palestinian state being created taking into consideration its borders in 1967.

Unfortunately, the United States used its veto powers at the Security Council and the General Assembly of the UN to allow Israel to continue its carpet bombing of Gaza. In addition, it has supplied Israel with the most sophisticated weapons for use against the Palestinians. In recent times, we saw many countries calling for a cease-fire and a two-state solution. Millions on the streets are calling for this demand. We are thus optimistic that a permanent solution in line with China's proposal will emerge.

China has been working tire-

lessly to ease the tension in the Middle East, which is one of the most volatile regions in the world.

Its endeavors have met with much success. The most notable was its mediation that led Iran and Saudi Arabia to resume diplomatic relations. Already the two countries have assigned ambassadors to each other's capital cities. This would bring great benefits to the people of the two countries and to the region as a whole. The role of China in facilitating this has been welcomed and lauded. China has displayed remarkable restraint in the face of the provocations by the US in relation to its internal affairs, especially on the Taiwan question.

The US has been encouraging separatist forces on the island to seek independence. It has even been arming the island and taken several provocative steps against the mainland. These included the visit by the speaker of the US congress. However, China has stood firm in frustrating those measures. It continues to work for the reunification of the Chinese mainland and Taiwan in a peaceful manner. It encourages dialogue and had long ago made one of the most creative proposals, of "one country, two systems". That will prove to be a viable path. The world is a much safer place because of the work that China has been pursuing over the years, and particularly in 2023. We are certain that 2024 will bring even greater successes.

The China Daily

Boosting post-Brexit global appeal is key UK goal

Andrew Hammond

ONE of the central claims of many Brexiters has long been that leaving the EU would significantly enhance the UK's global economic attractiveness. However, a major UK government review recently concluded that there is a £50 billion (\$63 billion) a year - and growing - investment gap between the country and other advanced nations.

The eye-catching £50 billion figure comes from the fact that many of the UK's competitor economies generate about 12 percent of gross domestic product through business investment (both domestic and foreign), whereas the figure for London is about 10 percent. So, the potential prize is a big one, as Lord Harrington, who led the government review, rightly highlights. The stark fact is that foreign direct investment into the UK fell in value every year from the Brexit referendum in 2016 to at least 2021. This saw the country drop down the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development rankings for FDI flows from 12th place in 2015 to 20th in 2022.

Accounting firm EY asserts that the total number of FDI projects in the UK fell to 929 in 2022, putting it second in Europe behind France, which had 1,259. Britain also slipped to third in Europe for perceived attractiveness for FDI, behind Germany and France. To try to turn this troubling picture around, Harrington's review concluded that the UK government must radically reform its offer to foreign investors with the goal of making the nation the most attractive destination in Europe for internationally mobile investment. This includes by emulating the subsidised, strategic state-backed approach of larger economies like the US, the EU and China.

Harrington - who is on the moderate wing of the ruling Conservative Party and was a "Remainer" in the 2016 Brexit referendum - wrote in his report: "I have formed the view during this process that capitalism has changed. The reality is that many of our competitors chase investments

via their industrial strategies backed by substantial government support." One example is America's 2022 Inflation Reduction Act. In the report, Harrington proposed what is, in effect, the need for a clear new UK business investment strategy. He suggested focusing on five sectors as economic growth engines: green industries, digital, life sciences, creative industries and advanced manufacturing.

As a Conservative politician, Harrington was keen to stress that this would not see the UK government seeking to pick individual corporate winners, which would be anathema to many of the economic liberals in his party. However, he did advocate the need to "pick the race" (green technology, for example) in which the UK wants to entrench a global competitive advantage. Harrington also qualified his conclusions by stating that the UK cannot and should not try to outcompete bigger economies like the US with mega-subsidies like the Inflation Reduction Act. However, he nonetheless advocated that the UK's current offer must be significantly enhanced and that "a complete culture change" is needed in the nation's approach to attracting FDI.

Harrington engaged with more than 200 firms, financial institutions and sovereign wealth funds and his conclusions have been welcomed by many business leaders, including industry groups like manufacturers' trade group Make UK and the British Chambers of Commerce. However, the review represents a key political challenge for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. This is because he has repeatedly rejected calls for such a UK industrial strategy - as indeed did former Conservative prime ministers Liz Truss, Boris Johnson and David Cameron. The sole exception since 2010 was Theresa May when she headed the government from 2016 to 2019. While the interventionist thrust of Harrington's recommendations will not be shared by every UK politician, there

is a broad consensus that the nation needs to improve its FDI record. This includes attracting emerging market-rich geographies like the Middle East and Asia-Pacific.

Take the example of the Gulf Cooperation Council states - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE - which already enjoy a strong investment and trade relationship with the UK and are a key target for the London government for deeper economic relations. Outside of the EU, for instance, the GCC is one of the largest export markets for the UK, with total bilateral trade of about \$40 billion in 2019. There is also a significant opportunity in Asia-Pacific, given that at least 50 percent of global growth is forecast to take place there between now and 2035. Here, the UK is seeking to leverage its membership of the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, known as CPTPP, which also includes Australia, Brunei, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam.

While the CPTPP opportunity may be significant in the longer term, even the UK government's own assessment declares that the economic gains for the country will be fairly small in the medium term, at only about 0.08 percent of GDP over 10 years. However, optimists like UK Trade and Business Secretary Kemi Badenoch argue that CPTPP is akin to a startup and that those medium-term estimates do not account for the fact that some members - for example, Vietnam - are rapidly growing in importance in global trade. She also flags that a key perk of the new deal is greater access to all CPTPP markets, including a pledge to eliminate or reduce 95 percent of import charges or tariffs.

Now is the time for the UK to step up its global FDI game. This includes in the Middle East and Asia-Pacific, where the nation must now double down, economically, to try to take advantage of the investment and trade opportunities that post-Brexit deals could bring.

Drug smuggling from Syria threatens regional security

THE Levant region's beacon of stability is now facing the maladaptive threat of drug smuggling. The Jordanian security forces have become quite busy with the challenge of combating drug cartels, with reports of foiled drug trafficking attempts now more prevalent than ever before.

In December, Jordan's security forces arrested or neutralized several smugglers and seized millions of pills, including Captagon and methamphetamine, in heavy clashes with armed individuals on the Jordanian-Syrian border. A report by Alhurra highlighted that Syria has always been the main source of Captagon used in the region, especially in the Gulf, but the civil war in the country offered Syrian cartels more space to enhance their operations, enabling them to manufacture and export much more than they were able to previously.

A byproduct of the increased production and export has been an exponential increase in drug-related offenses in Jordan, including smuggling and trade. In fact, between 2011 and 2022, such offenses increased fivefold, according to data released by the Public Security Directorate. Between January and February of 2022 alone, Jordanian security forces seized more Captagon pills than over the entire course of 2021. The magnitude of this problem is felt deeply among Jordanians. In a survey conducted by NAMA Strategic Intelligence Solutions last November, 61 percent of Jordanians indicated that drug use, trade and smuggling was Jordan's most significant social issue, marking a 12-percentage point increase from the prior survey conducted in March 2023.

The same survey also found that more than 75 percent of Jordanians believe that illegal drug trafficking is a major issue for Jordan's borders and 56 percent believe Syria is the main

source. While more than half of Jordanians believe the country's security forces are doing enough to prevent drugs from entering Jordan, the challenge not only remains but has also become more threatening. What sets the recent trafficking incidents apart from previous operations are the volume and type of weapons seized alongside the drugs. In mid-December, Jordanian security forces engaged for several hours with armed groups along the northern border, seizing large amounts of automatic weapons, missiles and ammunition, in what is now clearly a systematic attack on the country's national security.

The malice of Syrian Captagon cartels is not to be taken lightly. Their attempts to smuggle heavy arms into Jordan - especially considering the current events in the region - necessitate an immediate change to the strategy utilized to counter armed cartels. Granted, Amman had advocated for the return of Syria and Bashar Assad to the Arab League, with the combating of drug trafficking at the helm of its rationale. Syria did agree to curb trafficking across its borders during a meeting held in early May, which convened the foreign ministers of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq and Egypt.

However, Syria's ties with Iran and the latter's control over the armed cartels raise questions over Syria's seriousness in this context. Thus, with the little political will shown by Syria to combat its cartels internally, Jordan should place little faith and confidence in Syria and Assad to aid in combating this threat, whether on their shared borders or on a regional level. Iraq, on the other hand, demonstrates more political will to combat drug trafficking, especially as more than 50 percent of Iraqi youth living near its northern western border are struggling with Captagon addiction,

according to the Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council. However, Iraq faces its own challenges in securing its borders and requires immense support.

Coordination and collaboration with Saudi Arabia, another country facing the challenge of Captagon trafficking, is necessary to combat the threat of the armed drug cartels. Jordan and Saudi Arabia seize millions of Captagon pills on a regular basis, yet drug trafficking attempts continue to increase in size and frequency, which is indicative of the magnitude of the challenge the two countries face. The exchange of experiences and strategic intelligence collaboration are imperative for both countries to adapt to the constantly changing nature of this challenge. Enhanced border security is crucial and is arguably more urgently necessary than ever before.

Since then, the challenge has grown and the context has shifted, especially with the war in Gaza, the operations carried out by the armed cartels and Assad's lack of political will to secure Syria's borders against trafficking. These developments ought to be addressed with increased financial, security and technological support to ensure Jordan's capacity to counter the trafficking of drugs and arms in the long term.

Overall, Jordan must not be left alone in this fight. Amman certainly fears a case of deja vu that is reminiscent of the unfulfilled financial promises to aid it in hosting Syrian refugees. The Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis was constantly underfunded, with a 70 percent deficit recorded for 2022's budget alone. A state that has incurred, for 10 years, more than two-thirds of the direct financial costs of hosting Syrian refugees should not be expected to also incur the costs of the security implications alone, especially when it comes to combating the trafficking of drugs and arms that threaten regional security, not just Jordan's.

WE'RE on the cusp of the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary, which have gained a not-always-deserved reputation for being game changers in the presidential nomination process. Ever since former Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter shook up the 1976 nomination process with a strong showing in Iowa that propelled him to victory in New Hampshire-turning him from "Jimmy Who?" into the frontrunner-the nation has turned its eyes toward the Hawkeye State to see if history will be made.

The truth is that Iowa has not been an infallible determinant of success. George W. Bush was the last Republican nominee to win Iowa. "Since the caucuses began in 1972," the Des Moines Register reported, "there have been 18 caucus winners between the two parties: 10 Democrats and 8 Republicans. Over half of those winners went on to secure their party's nomination in that cycle, but only three would be elected president." Remember Presidents Paul Tsongas and Pat Buchanan? You don't because even though they won the New Hampshire primary, they didn't win their party's nomination for the White House.

In 2024, it may be that caucuses and primaries are secondary to the drama that is playing out in courtrooms, arising from the four prosecutions of former President Donald

Trump, the GOP frontrunner. If there's going to be a reversal of fortune, it will likely grow out of legal discoveries and decisions that are made into the fate of the former president who, as of now, remains far and away the strongest candidate in the Republican pack.

In other words, it's all about the trials. Although Trump has been able to fulfill the political maxim of turning his greatest weakness into a strength-meaning January 6 and all that surrounded it-it is possible that turns the other way. Most important, there is some evidence suggesting that a conviction could change the ways that Republican and independent voters think in significant fashion.

While the indictments and trials have done little to hurt Trump politically thus far, and in many ways, they seem to have boosted his standing by fueling the anti-establishment message and making it difficult for opponents to secure much airtime, it is possible that a conviction would look very different. (Trump has denied wrongdoing in all of the cases brought against him.) Several polls have found that if he becomes a felon, more of the electorate might look at him in an unfavorable light. In the New York Times/Siena poll, for instance, Trump's lead in four swing states drops into a deficit.

Not only would Trump become

ing a felon, rather than an indicted former president, change perceptions of the situation but it also could very well focus much more attention on the substance of the criminal cases against Trump rather than on the atmospherics of the GOP primary race. Until now, most of the public has not really been paying attention to politics. Unlike the political junkies who focus on the doings of Washington on a daily basis, many Americans have been more concerned about paying the bills and taking care of their kids.

The issues that have resonated in recent years are those that voters perceive have the biggest immediate impact on them, including reproductive rights, the education wars, immigration, inflation and more. But given the way the political and judicial calendars now are starting to coincide, verdicts on Trump's potential guilt could, in at least one of the four cases, come when voters are beginning to become more focused on the election. Of course, if Trump is successful in delaying the cases until after the election, then the courts will be helping to solidify his position in the GOP race even further.

If Trump is convicted, President Joe Biden will also be freed up to speak more bluntly about what Trump has done and the threat that he-with Republican support-has

Julian Zelizer

CNN

Pakistan Stock Exchange loses 7.69 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed a nominal negative change of 0.01 percent by losing 7.69 points, closing at 64,639.16 points against 64,646.85 points the previous trading day.

A total of 548,989,972 shares valuing Rs.15.395 billion were traded during the day as compared to 639,616,328 shares valuing Rs. 20.282 billion the last day.

Some 360 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 155 of them recorded gains and 184 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 21 remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were K-Electric Ltd with 154,661,017 shares at Rs.5.65 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 37,141,119 shares at Rs.1.48 per share and Fauji Foods Ltd with 27,327,065 shares at Rs.10.74 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.50.00 per share price, closing at Rs.22,250.00, whereas the runner-up was Pak Suzuki Motor Company with a Rs.43067 rise in its per share price to Rs.625.91.

Mehmood Textile Mills Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.20.95 per share closing at Rs.500.00, followed by Thai Limited with Rs.9.50 decline to close at Rs.299.39.

Gold rates down by Rs.1,800 to Rs.218,200 per tola: The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs.1,800 and was sold at Rs.218,200 on Thursday compared to its sale at Rs.220,000 on the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs.1,543 to Rs.187,071 from Rs.188,614 whereas the price of 10 grams 22 karat gold went down to Rs.171,482 from Rs.172,897, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola silver decreased by Rs.20 to Rs.2,660 whereas that of ten-gram silver declined by Rs.17.14 to Rs.2,280.52.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$.15 and was sold at \$2,067 against \$2,082, the Association reported.

PTCL renews partnership with TPL trakker for provision of ICT services

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's largest telecommunications and integrated ICT services provider, PTCL Group (PTCL & Ufone 4G), and leading GPS tracking and IoT services provider, TPL Trakker have renewed their partnership for the continued provision of the state-of-the-art machine to machine (M2M) and ICT services to TPL Trakker under PTCL Group Business Solutions.

Group Chief Business Solutions Officer (GCB SO), PTCL & Ufone 4G, Zarrar Hasham Khan, and CEO, TPL Trakker, Rao Salman signed the agreement at TPL Trakker headquarters in the presence of senior officials from both organizations said a news release.

Under this agreement, PTCL Group will provide wireless connectivity and a host of bundled services to TPL Trakker, to enable the company's premium and efficiency-boosting vehicle tracking, performance management, and other IoT services.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Group Chief Business Solutions Officer, PTCL & Ufone 4G, Zarrar Hasham Khan said, "PTCL Group being the National company is proud to be major proponent of technological enablement and transformation in Pakistan. Our connectivity and ICT services provide great deal of ease and enablement to our enterprise customers, like TPL Trakker, who in turn extend game-changing products and services to the people of Pakistan. We are steadfast in our commitment to further enhancing conduciveness for tech-based innovation and transformation in Pakistan."

CEO, TPL Trakker, Rao Salman said, "We are proud to announce a historic expansion of our collaboration with PTCL Group, propelling us towards undoubted leadership in the Pakistani IoT landscape. This renewed partnership reaffirms our joint commitment to our unwavering focus on connectivity and positions us as pioneers in developing and delivering cutting-edge IoT solutions. Capitalizing on our local insights and harnessing PTCL's specialized knowledge, we aspire to deliver state-of-the-art solutions that is customized to meet the distinctive requirements of our diverse clientele. This strategic alliance paves the way for innovation, efficiency, and seamless nationwide connectivity. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our stakeholders for their continued support as we embark on this transformative journey together."

PTCL Group and TPL Trakker excel in leveraging digital technology to enable and empower their respective customers, besides contributing immensely to the growth and development of ICT technologies in Pakistan. The mutual collaboration enhances their impact on a larger scale to help enrich and strengthen Pakistan's digital landscape.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Five ships namely, Marathapolis, San Francisco Bridge, Turan-C, Genco Aquitaine and Golar Arctic scheduled to load/offload Container, Rice, Coal and LNG,berthed at Container Terminal, Multi-Purpose Terminal, Bulk Terminal and Gas Terminal respectively on Wednesday.

Meanwhile three more ships, MSC Desiree, Maersk Tacoma and Oriental Jasmine also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim on same day to load/unload Containers and Chemicals respectively.

A total of eleven ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them four ships, Maratha-polis, San Francisco Bridge, Serengeti and Limra left the port on today morning and three more ships, Magma Fidelity, African Parrot and Rich Rainbow are expected to sail on same day.

A cargo volume of 180,164 tonnes, comprising 133,452 tonnes imports cargo and 46,712 tonnes export cargo carried in 3,447 Containers (1,390 TEUs Imports and 2,057 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 07 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them two ships, Bolan and FSM carrying Gas oil and LPG are expected to take berths at FOTCO and EVTL respectively on today.

While three more ships, As Sicilia, MSC Jemima and Al-Oraio with Containers and LNG are due to arrive at Port Qasim on Friday.

Court Notice

In the Court of Sidra Jalal Civil Judge-III/ Judicial Magistrate Tehsil Matta District Swat. Case # 136/1 Institution 15/07/2023. Next hearing date 25/01/2024. Akram VS Jehanzeb etc. Notice to defendant (5/2) Zafar Ali Khan (5/2) Dildar Ahmed (5/5) Muhammad Islam sons Taza Gul (6) Akbar Hussain (7) Safdar Ali sons Sher Alam (8) Fazal Rabi s/o Alamzeb r/o Kandol School Mohalla Barshore Tehsil Matta District Swat. In above mentioned case the respondent can't be served in the ordinary way, it is therefore proclaimed that if said respondents will not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8:30 a.m dated 25/01/2024. Ex-parte proceeding will be held against the mentioned respondents under my hand and seal of this court.

Court Notice

In the Court of Sidra Jalal Civil Judge-III/ Illaqa Qazi Matta District Swat. Case # 85/1. Institution 26/04/2022. Next hearing date 15/01/2024. Homyaun VS Mian Guly. Notice to defendant. (3/1)Haroon-ur-Rasheed s/o Bakht Rawan (late) (3/2) Taj Mahal s/o Bakht Rawan (late) r/o Baha Tehsil Matta District Swat. In above mentioned case the respondent can't be served in the ordinary way, it is therefore proclaimed that if said respondents will not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8:30 a.m dated 15/01/2024. Ex-parte proceeding will be held against the mentioned respondents under my hand and seal of this court.

Correction in Name

My correct name is Jibrail Shah s/o Darbar Ali, but mistakenly written in my educational documents as Gabrail Shah s/o Dilbar Ali. Please make necessary arrangements. Jibrail Shah s/o Darbar Ali, r/o Gulbar Shah Korono, Post Office and Tehsil Yakaghond, Mohmand District. Cell No. 0311-9459550.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication Dr. Umar Saif chairing 47th meeting of USF Policy Committee.

Total liquid foreign reserves rise to \$ 13.22b

KARACHI (APP): The total liquid foreign reserves of Pakistan increased to US\$ 13,220.6 million while reserves held by the State Bank reached \$ 8,221.2 million in the week ended on December 29, 2023.

The State Bank of Pakistan, in a statement issued here on Thursday, informed that SBP's reserves increased by \$ 464 million to \$ 8,221.2 million mainly due to official inflows of the Government of Pakistan during the week under review.

Meanwhile, net foreign reserves held by commercial banks stood at \$ 4,999.4 million, it added.

Total liquid foreign reserves held by the country, in the previous week ended on December 22, 2023, were \$ 12,855.7 million. Among them, foreign reserves held by the central bank were \$ 7,757.1 million while net foreign reserves held by commercial banks were \$ 5,098.6 million.

FCCI felicitates FPCCI VP

FAISALABAD (APP): President Dr. Khurram Tairq, Senior Vice President Dr. Sajjad Arshad and Vice President of Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) Hajji Muhammad Aslam Bhalli have congratulated Ms. Quratul-Ain on her election as Vice President of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI).

In a statement issued here on Thursday, they said Ms. Quratul-Ain remained part of the FCCI before her election as President Faisalabad Women Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FWCCI).

They said that she played a key role in nurturing this nestling female chamber and elevating it at the national level.

They also appreciated her efforts for the mainstreaming of the female populace at the local and national level.

"She also encouraged genuine female entrepreneurs to come forward and fill the gender gap in business sector", they said and added that her victory was a privilege for Faisalabad and she would bring laurels in future for the business community of this city too.

Tax credit recovered F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Large Taxpayers' Office, Karachi has successfully recovered erroneously claimed tax credit, U/s 65E of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001, of sum Four and Half Billion Rupees from an MNC. The investigation and subsequent recovery is made by the Additional Commissioner-IR Kashif Hafeez.

The MNC, being a responsible taxpayer, made deposit of demanded income tax in the National Exchequer.

The leadership at LTO, Karachi is praised for reflecting the highest standard of competence and professionalism.

The event illustrates the commitment of FBR to ensure tax compliance and fair play.

Copper export crosses \$1b mark in 2023

BEIJING (APP): Copper and articles thereof have seen an increase in export to China from Pakistan in recent years and in the first eleven months of 2023 increased by 9%, crossed one billion dollars mark, sources said.

Ghulam Qadir, Commercial Counsellor at the Pakistan Embassy in Beijing, told China Economic Net (CEN) that the Pakistani government is keen to boost copper and associated product exports to China.

He also mentioned that Pakistan's exports of copper to China have increased recently, and he anticipated that the value of these exports will rise as a result of refined copper products.

"Pakistan has been actively seeking foreign investments, particularly from big Chinese companies, to bring in value addition and produce more valuable products for the global market."

Having Chinese companies invest in Pakistan would not only provide a boost to the country's economy but also open doors for advanced technologies and expertise.

"This would enable Pakistan to enhance its manufacturing capabilities and produce high-quality, value-added products that can meet international standards," he added.

He continued by saying that Metallurgical Corporation of China (MCC), one of the major participants in the Chinese copper sector, is active in Pakistan and was crucial to the establishment of the Saindak copper mines starting in 1995.

Pakistani copper exporter Awis Mir, Chairman of DEA group told CEN that this is due to increased investment by Chinese companies with local Pakistani companies and increased demand for copper products in China after COVID-19, added that this trend is likely to continue as both countries are expected to benefit from increased economic cooperation.

Nikkei ends lower on year's first trading day

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 index closed lower on Thursday, Japan's first trading day of 2024, as the country reckons with the damage from a devastating earthquake.

The Nikkei 225 fell 0.53 percent, or 175.88 points, to end at 33,288.29, while the broader Topix index gained 0.52 percent, or 12.40 points, to 2,378.79.

"A wide range of stocks were sharply lower as major hi-tech stocks were sold at the US market, while buying was restrained by the Noto Peninsula quake," Iwai Cosmo Securities said.

After closing 2023 on Friday, the Tokyo market reopened after its New Year break, during which the US market marked two straight days of falls.

The drop comes as central Japan faces a massive earthquake disaster that killed at least 78 people and reportedly left more than 50 missing.

Japan is also dealing with the collision of two planes at its main airport in Tokyo, which rattled the nation.

The dollar fetched 143.65 yen against 143.24 yen in New York.

In Tokyo trading, semiconductor shares were lower, with Tokyo Electron plunging 4.95 percent to 24,005 yen and Advantest falling 3.79 percent to 4,615 yen.

Sony Group dropped 2.35 percent to 13,095 yen while Uniqlo operator Fast Retailing lost 1.25 percent to 34,550 yen.

Next warns of supply delays due to shipping attacks

LONDON (BBC News): Next has warned supplies of its products could be delayed if disruption to shipping in the Red Sea continues.

Attacks by Houthi rebels on vessels in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes have resulted in firms avoiding the area and taking longer routes.

Next said if access "difficulties" continue, delays to stock deliveries to the UK were "likely" early this year.

The warning came as the retailer reported better-than-expected sales in the run-up to Christmas.

The bumper festive period led to the High Street giant, which has about 460 shops in the UK and Ireland, to raise its profit forecast by 5% to £960m for 2024.

But it warned of supply chain "risks" in its trading statement on Thursday.

"Difficulties with access to the Suez Canal, if they continue, are likely to cause some delays to stock deliveries in the early part of the year," the retailer said.

Next is not the first company to warn of issues in receiving goods and products, with global supply chains facing disruption as a result of some of the world's biggest shipping companies diverting journeys away from the Red Sea.

Furniture giant Ikea said last month supplies of some of its products could also be delayed.

Next chief executive Lord Simon Wolfson told the PA news agency that the disruption could delay stock by "two to two-and-a-half weeks" to reach the UK. "It will impact on sales if this persists for a long time, but not dramatic levels," he added.

Assaults by Houthi rebels in Yemen on commercial vessels in recent weeks have resulted in many firms deciding to avoid one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, which sees vessels pass through the strait of Bab al-Mandab - a 20-mile wide channel that splits Eritrea and Djibouti on the African side and Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula - and then Egypt's Suez Canal further north.

The Houthi group has declared its support for Hamas and has said it is targeting ships travelling to Israel, though it is not clear if all the ships that have been attacked have actually been heading to Israel.

But because of the attacks and the threat, several container shipping companies have since diverted vessels to a much longer route around Africa's Cape of Good Hope and then up the west side of the continent, leading to shipping delays.

Defending ships from attacks is "very difficult", said Chris Long, director of intelligence for Neptune Port to Port Group, a private maritime security company operating in the Red Sea.

"There are no commercially available systems that you can put on a container ship that can protect you against the armament that the Houthis are deploying at the moment," he told the BBC's Today programme.

"Our guards are there primarily to provide reinsurance to the ship's captain to help prepare if they are attacked and to give advice of what to do in the event of attack, there is very little a ship can do to avoid it."

Some businesses have warned that container costs have increased in the past two weeks due to the disruption, prompting fears that prices in the shops could rise further.

But Next said it planned to "maintain zero inflation in selling prices" on last year as "cost price inflation in our own products is diminishing, mainly as a result of decreasing factory gate prices".

"The consumer environment looks more benign than it has for a number of years, albeit there are some significant uncertainties," the High Street stalwart added.

Lord Wolfson told PA that prices "would've been moving down, but we're having to hold them flat" due to the increased National Living Wage pushing up wage costs.

Next said sales of full-price items had risen by 5.7% over the nine weeks to 30 December, which was much stronger than expected.

Fiona Bailey, a senior lecturer in fashion business at Leicester's De Montfort University and a former buyer for Next, said the retailer's success was "down to quite a few factors", including its "stable leadership".

"They deliver the product the customer wants at the right price, and this is something they've been doing consistently for years now", she told the BBC's Today programme.

While Next performed well over Christmas, sportswear seller JD Sports struggled and downgraded its profit predictions for this year.

JD Sports said its profits would be up to £125m less than previously predicted, which was partly due to more price discounting than it expected, "reflecting more cautious consumer spending".



In brief

U-19 inter zonal cricket tournament

KARACHI (APP): One more match decided in the A.S.Natural Stone Under-19 Inter Zonal Cricket Tournament at Landhi Gymkhana Ground. The Tournament is being organized by Regional Cricket Association Karachi Sponsored by A.S.Natural Stone. Summarized Scores : Zone-III Whites beat Zone-IV Blues by 8 Wickets. Zone-IV blues 181 all out 42 overs. Run ullah 49, Adeel Gul 38, Qazi Saad uddin 31. Mir Hamza (lb) 4/26, Usaman Maqbool (ob) 2/30, Talah Rangi 2/43. Zone-III 185/2 in 27.4 overs. Zanair Aali 53 7x4 not out, Muanna Kazim 48, Muhammad Usman 35, Parashant Ravi 26. Kaif Abbas (sla) 2/46.

Mbappe says he has not made up mind on future

PARIS (Agencies): Paris St-Germain forward Kylian Mbappe says he has not made a decision about his future. The 25-year-old France captain's deal with the Ligue 1 champions runs out in the summer and he has been heavily linked with a move to Real Madrid. Mbappe told PSG in June that he would not be taking up an option for a further 12 months in his contract. "First of all, I'm very, very, very motivated for this year. It's very important," said Mbappe. Speaking after scoring for PSG as they beat Toulouse 2-0 to claim the French Champions Trophy, he added: "As I said, we've got titles to go after and we've already won one, so that's already done. After that, no, I haven't made up my mind yet. "But in any case, with the agreement I made with the chairman [Nasser Al-Khelaifi] this summer, it doesn't matter what I decide. "We managed to protect all parties and preserve the club's serenity for the challenges ahead, which remains the most important thing. So we'll say it's secondary." Mbappe joined PSG in 2017, initially on loan from Monaco before a 180m euro (£165.7m) move. He was set to leave on a free transfer at the end of the 2021-22 season but ultimately signed a two-year contract extension, with the option of a further year. However, after Mbappe told PSG he would not agree to the additional 12 months of the deal, he was not selected for their pre-season tour to Japan in the summer.

Luke 'will never forget' PDC title win

LONDON (Agencies): Luke Humphries says he will "never forget" becoming PDC world champion and world number one following his mental health struggles. Humphries has previously spoken openly, external about the anxiety that affected him on and off the oche, and almost led to him quitting the sport. He took a break from darts early in his professional career, but has since said he has learned to control the issue better. That has been demonstrated during a magnificent three months in which the 28-year-old has dominated the sport, culminating in beating 16-year-old Luke Littler 7-4 in a high-quality world final at Alexandra Palace on Wednesday. "It makes it more incredible for myself mentally because there was a time in my life when I was really depressed and I didn't think this was going to be it for me," the Englishman told Sky Sports. "I couldn't do it up on the big stage - I went through a lot of problems. To go on to be world number one and world champion has proved a lot in terms of my mental ability."

Spin-friendly SCG pitch keeps Salman, and Pakistan, hopeful

SYDNEY (Agencies): Perhaps the scorecard doesn't quite do justice to the opportunity Pakistan have here at the SCG in this final Test. Of the 47 fairly routine overs that were sent down on a grey second day in Sydney, there was one ball that provided Pakistan a faint glimpse into what a good third day might look like. And all things good that come through here run through the man who bowled it. In the 25th over, Agha Salman landed one on leg stump around a good length that ragged from the surface - drifting in, and then bouncing and spinning away - to take David Warner's outside edge. Babar Azam, at first slip now shortly after debutant Saim Ayub had put a catch down there, grasped onto it. What was deemed a lifeless pitch at the start of the day suddenly brimmed with possibility, especially when Salman was operating from one end. "For spinners, there is help if you put the ball in the right areas, there is assistance, and there will be more

as the Test match goes on," Salman said at the press conference. "You just have to bowl in the right areas as much as you can and I was trying to do that. Sajid [Khan] was getting some turn as well but the drift I was getting was greater." And that is where any improvement from Pakistan could give them a boost. It is perhaps not especially flattering for Sajid Khan that the man specifically flown in from the other side of the world and thrust into the side struggled to be more effective with some of the basics of spin bowling than Salman. Salman may officially be an allrounder but for much of his Test career, has been viewed as a useful lower middle-order batter. It is not a definition he agrees with, and over these three days, he has the chance to make a strong argument to that effect. "I always think of myself as an allrounder but this series I got more opportunities and people saw more of me bowl. But I always think I'm an allrounder and want

to play as an allrounder." Salman's demonstrative celebration when he took that wicket perhaps also illustrates how live the visiting side feels this game is. When Babar held on to that catch - just about - Salman leapt into the air in a mixture of joy and the release of pent-up celebration, players who had spent the last hour in resigned dejection perking up animatedly. "Davey's a big wicket," he said. "Whenever you get him out, he's a massive wicket. At that time, we needed a wicket. It was a reaction to getting a big player out." There was both praise and encouragement from the other side of the aisle, too. Usman Khawaja called it "a ripper of a ball", and, having grown up on these wickets, suggested he wouldn't be surprised if spin continued to assume greater importance as the Test goes on. That is particularly encouraging for Pakistan because it suggests a return to the sort of traditional SCG pitches that have had a reputation for helping spin bowlers out.

Federal Cup Tennis C'ships enter in semifinal stage

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 36th Federal Cup National Ranking Tennis Championships saw some awe-inspiring contests at the hard courts of PITF-SDA Tennis Complex, Islamabad during the course of the quarterfinals on Thursday. Sixth seed Mudassar Murtaza upset 4th Seed Muhammad Abid in a thrilling three-set match with a scoreline 5-7, 6-2 6-2, whereas top seed Muhammad Shaoib struggled hard to win his encounter against talented Yousaf Khalil in an exciting three-set match 7-5 5-7 6-2. Third seed Muzammil Murtaza faced tough resistance from 8th seed Barkatullah to qualify for the semifinal in a straight-set quarterfinal match 7-6(2) 6-4. Second seed Aqeel Khan conveniently won his encounter against upcoming proficient Ahmad Nael Qureshi 6-2 6-4. In the second set which was marked with aces and long rallies and the score went up to 4 all as both players held their respective serves, Aqeel broke the 9th game of talented Qureshi by hitting some winners down the line and forcing out the youngster in 6-4 by holding the 10th game. In the semifinal, Aqeel Khan will take on

Mudassar Murtaza on Friday, while Muhammad Shoaib will face Muzammil Murtaza on Saturday. In the junior 18 and under category 5th seed Muhammad Hamza Aasim, the upcoming proficient from Islamabad caused a major upset in the quarterfinal encounter against 3rd seed M. Salaar Khan. In pursuit of his victory, he added his foot speed and topspin to make him a force to be reckoned with. Hamza managed to oust the 3rd seed 6-2, 6-3. Top seed Hamid Israr, 2nd Seed Hamza Roman and 4th seed Ahmad Nael Qureshi comfortably won their matches and moved to semifinals. Results in brief: Men's Singles (Quarterfinals) Muhammad Shaoib beat Yousaf Khalil 7-5 5-7 6-2, Muzammil Murtaza beat Barkatullah 7-6(2) 6-4, Mudassar Murtaza beat Muhammad Abid 5-7 6-2 6-2, Aqeel Khan beat Ahmad Nael Qureshi 6-1 6-4. Men's Singles (Quarterfinals) Yousaf Khalil / Barkatullah beat Aabdal Haider / Zaid Mujahid 7-5 6-3 Mudassar Murtaza / Abdullah Adnan beat M.Zaryab Khan / Huzaima Abdur Rehman 6-4 7-6(4)

Muhammad Abid / Ahmad Chaudhary beat Hamza Aasim / M.Salaar Khan 6-1 6-3 Muhammad Shaoib / Muzammil Murtaza beat Semi Zeb Khan / Ahmad Nael Qureshi 6-3 6-3. Men's Singles (Pre-Quarterfinals) Aabdal Haider / Zaid Mujahid beat Hamza Haziq / Hamza Aasim 6-2 6-0 M.Zaryab Khan / Huzaima Abdur Rehman beat Saqib Hayat / Hamza Roman 7-5 7-6(5) Hamza Aasim / M.Salaar Khan beat Talha Khan / Kashan Tariq 6-3 6-3 Muhammad Abid / Ahmad Chaudhary beat Kamran Maqbool / Amir Mazari 6-1 6-1 Semi Zeb Khan / Ahmad Nael Qureshi beat Kamran Khan / Zalan Khan 6-3 6-0 Ladies Singles Soha Ali beat Shandana Rabbi 6-1 6-1, Natalia Zaman beat Sana Bilal 6-0 6-0, Kainat Ali beat Amna Khan 6-1 6-3, Amna Ali Qayum beat Asfa Shahbaz 5-7 7-5 6-2, Sheeza Sajid w/o Arzoo Ishfaq, Lalarukh Sajid w/o Mehaq Khokhok, Marrukh Sajid w/o Zara Khan. Junior 18 & Under Singles (Quarterfinals): Hamid Israr beat Zohaib Afzal Malik 6-1 6-2, Muhammad Hamza Aasim beat M.Salaar Khan 6-2 6-3, Ahmad Nael Qureshi

Bannu, Mardan, Peshawar record wins in Pak Army Inter-Regional Boys Volleyball

PESHAWAR (APP): Bannu, Mardan and Peshawar Regions recorded victories against their respective rivals in the ongoing Pakistan Army Inter-Region Boys Volleyball Championship being played here at the indoor hall of the Pakistan Coaching Center Peshawar on Thursday. Col. Adeel of the Engineering Corps and Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Volleyball Association Khalid Waqar Chamkani graced the occasion as guests and before the start of the matches the players of all the teams were introduced to them. Khalid Waqar Chamkani, who is also remained as Assistant Coach of the Pakistan National team, appreciated the Pakistan Army and Directorate General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for jointly supporting the Pakistan Army Boys Volleyball Talent Hunt wherein eight different teams including one team each from the seven Regions including Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Kohat, Mardan, Hazara, Malakand, and Peshawar and one team from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Volleyball Academy are

taking part in the Championship being played on Round Robin League wherein each of the team would play three matches. All the eight teams have been divided in two groups and the top two teams from each group would qualify for the semi-finals. He said it is good initiative wherein Pakistan Army is providing all financial support to Directorate General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for holding Talent Hunt League. Among the league, three teams including Under-16, Under-18 and Under-21 would be short-listed and would be trained and coach for longer durations. The players would not only providing training and coaching under qualified coaches but the players would get month stipends of Rs. 50,000, 20,000 and Rs. 15,000 per month. Khalid Waqar said that there is no dearth of talent in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and in the Junior team of 12 players 11 are from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including the captain and similarly in the 12 members teams of the Senior, 11 players are hailing from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

including the camp Aimal Khan, hailing from Swat. With this initiative good players would come up at National Junior and National Senior teams. Earlier, in the first match Bannu defeated Kohat in straight sets 3-0, the score was 25-21, 25-23 and 25-23. Kohat responded well but overall Bannu dominated the proceedings and did not allow Kohat team to strike back. For Bannu Wajid, Saud Khan, Shakeel Khan, Irfan Ullah played well and for Kohat, Atif, Sabz Ali, Rehan, Javed and Tariq Ullah played well. In the second match Peshawar defeated Malakand by 25-21, 25-20 and 25-23 in another one-sided match. For Peshawar international Tufail, Azad, Nigar, Awais Senior played well and for Malakand Afzal, Farhan, Luqman and Talha and Haris played well. In the other matches Mardan recorded victory against Dera Ismail Khan in straight sets, the score was 25-23, 29-27 and 25-21. Both Mardan and Dera Ismail Khan played well during the match, specially in the second sets wherein they were stretched to 29-27 before leveling the score on couple of occasions.



SYDNEY: Aamer Jamal had Usman Khawaja caught behind down the leg side.

Dominant Nadal rolls into Brisbane quarters on comeback

BRISBANE (AFP/APP): Rafael Nadal said every day was an adventure as his comeback from injury gathered pace with an aggressive 6-1, 6-2 drubbing of Australian Jason Kubler at the Brisbane International on Thursday. Played in hot and humid conditions on Pat Rafter Arena, the Spanish great took 1hr 23min to see off Kubler, who battled hard but didn't have the weapons to trouble the 22-time Grand Slam champion. Nadal, 37, has not played on tour since suffering an injury at the 2023 Australian Open a year ago, resulting in two surgeries on his hip. "Every day is an adventure," he said of his comeback. "I take every day like an opportunity, and tomorrow is another one." Nadal said leading into the tournament that he had no expectations for the Australian summer. But the form he showed against former US Open champion Dominic Thiem in the first round and now Kubler suggests he could be a real threat at the first Grand Slam of the year at Melbourne Park. He raced to a 5-0 lead in the first set before Kubler got on the board, then broke the Australian's opening game of the second to stamp his authority on the match. "I started the match playing very well, with very good determination," Nadal said. "I tried to be aggressive

from the baseline and I think it worked very well. "I think it was a very positive match for me. Two victories after a long time being outside the professional tour is something that makes me feel good." He said his body was holding up well after the two matches. "The positive thing is that the first two matches haven't been super long," Nadal said. "Of course, I had some feelings after the first match. I mean, I have been a year without playing with the tension of a real match, so I felt a little bit some muscles tired here and there. "In general terms, I felt good." The only real blemish for the Spaniard was a warning for a time violation for taking too long to return to court after a bathroom break at the end of the first set. He later explained the humidity was so high that he had to do a complete change of clothes and was four seconds longer than he should have been. Nadal will next play Australian Jordan Thompson in the quarterfinals and remains on course for a blockbuster semi-final against second-seeded Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov, who demolished Germany's Daniel Altmaier 6-1, 6-2. **Gauff marches on but Raducanu out of Auckland Classic:** Coco Gauff stepped up preparations for the Australian Open with an emphatic

win at the Auckland Classic on Thursday but Emma Raducanu's comeback tournament was ended by Elina Svitolina in the last 16. The reigning US Open champion Gauff, 19, cruised into the quarterfinals with a 6-3, 6-0 win over rising Czech teenager Brenda Fruhvirtova in an all-teenage clash. But the 2021 Flushing Meadows winner from Britain, who is in her first tournament for eight months after operations on both wrists and an ankle, fell to the Ukrainian second seed 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/3), 6-1. Qualifier Fruhvirtova, 16, won only 10 points in the second set in a match that lasted just 70 minutes. "She started off playing very well and I was able to raise my level," said Gauff, who sent down five aces. "I thought I served well and I did better on the returns." The American will next play French eighth seed Varvara Gracheva, the world number 42. The 29-year-old Svitolina said she was exhausted after battling back from a set down before finally securing victory after a 2hr 49min marathon. "It was really difficult physically and I hope I can recover for tomorrow," said Svitolina after a gutsy display against Raducanu, 21. In the quarter-finals, Svitolina will play seventh seed Petra Martic of Croatia who beat China's Yue Yuan 6-2, 6-2.

M Yousuf wants U19 cricketers play aggressive cricket of 1990s

LAHORE (APP): Head Coach Pakistan U19 Men's cricket team Mohammad Yousuf has said that he wanted the U19 cricketers to play aggressive cricket and fight till the end at the ICC Men's U19 Cricket World Cup 2024 in South Africa. Addressing a pre-departure press conference at the Gaddafi Stadium here on Thursday, he said he wanted his young wards to inculcate in themselves the fighting spirit and aggressive style of cricket Pakistan Men's cricket team was known for in the 90s, adding that he wanted these young U19 cricketers to be aggressive without being abusive in sledging. Pakistan U19 Men's cricket team is due to leave on Saturday to take part in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2024 to be played in South Africa between January 19 and February 11, 2024. "Aggression is missing in our teams at all levels", adding that "cricketers must treat their opponents as adversaries on the field during the 100 overs of the match, irrespective of the opposition," the former stylish Pakistan batsman said. However, he said that the U19 World Cup squad was immensely talented and he expected these young cricketers to do well at the ICC Marquee event. About performance of the team in the recently concluded Asia Cup, he said he was very happy with the team's showing in the tournament, adding that the team stum-

bled in the semi-final against UAE U19 due to over-confidence. The Head coach said he was working with the team and, expressed the hope, these young U19 cricketers will do well at the whorl's largest stage. Mohammad Yousuf said that U 19 and the junior cricket is the area where great players can work on the technique of the young budding cricketers, adding that it is difficult to re-model a player's technique after he has matured and selected in the national team. Coaches in the region have a greater responsibility in harnessing skills and fitness of young players, adding that the coaches from the regions will be invited to the National Cricket Academy (NCA) for a workshop in order to remind them of their responsibilities. "The U 19 coaching staff should also visit the region and watch the players in action, so that they have a first-hand knowledge of the skills of the cricketers and manage a larger pool of players," the head Coach U 19 team said. On selection, he said score-sheet should not be the only criterion of selection of a player, adding that lack of form should not kill a potential candidate. He said a player should not miss selection for being out-of-form or lack in technique. On T 20 cricket, the former batting great said T 20 cricket earns money but produces mediocre cricketers, adding that the cricket clubs and

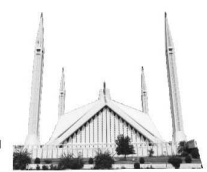
regions should ban T 20 cricket at the U 19 level in order to promote longer version of cricket in the country. He said the T 20 platform of Pakistan Super League (PSL) should be used to earn money but this revenue should be invested on the promotion and strengthening of U 19 cricket like our neighboring country did. Mohammad Yousuf was of the view that the T20 cricket was not capable of producing cricketers, adding that the greats like Hanif Mohammad, Javed Miandad, Inzimam ul Haq, Saqlain Mushtaq, Mushtaq Ahmed, Wasim Akram and Waqar Younus never played T 20 cricket in their careers. Mohammad Yousuf said the three-day cricket should be promoted at the district level or the 55 over league of the English Cricket Board (ECB) may also be replicated at the junior level. He said Saim Ayub was rightly picked over his performances in all formats of the game, adding that it was imperative to provide him ample opportunities once he has been pushed into the test cricket. Mohammad Yousuf hailed the PCB for picking indigenous coaching staff including former cricketing greats at all levels, adding that this would help harness skills of the players in a better way. However, he believed that the former legends must fully immerse themselves in the coaching job.

Victorious India are a danger anywhere in the world: Sharma

CAPE TOWN (AFP/APP): Indian captain Rohit Sharma said his team's seven-wicket win inside two days over South Africa in the second Test at Newlands on Thursday had shown their ability to play anywhere in the world. India bounced back from an innings defeat in the first Test in Centurion to share the two-match series, chasing down a target of 79 an hour after lunch despite a stunning century by home batsman Aiden Markram. The victory was set up by man of the match Mohammed Siraj, who took six for 15 in the first innings as South Africa were skittled for 55 before lunch on the first day. Apart from Markram, who hit 106 off 103 balls in South Africa's second innings of 176, batsmen struggled throughout the match on a pitch with

pace, seam movement and uneven bounce. "Even though the conditions were tough for the batters the bowlers still had to get the ball in the right areas," said Sharma. "We batted well to get a hundred-run lead. We knew it was going to be a short match and every run mattered. To get that lead was very important for us. "To come to this part of the world is always challenging but in the last four or five years we have become a very good travelling team. "For us to come out here and win like this gives us a lot of confidence that we can perform under any conditions." Dean Elgar, South Africa's stand-in captain in his last match before retiring from international cricket, admitted the hosts had mis-

read the pitch in deciding to bat first after winning the toss. "To the naked eye it looked like quite a nice one but it played totally different from what everyone thought it would play," said Elgar, who was named along with Jasprit Bumrah as players of the series. "It was a tough one for us. "We were pretty positive coming into this game. "The first innings killed us with the bat. India brought their intensity and used the conditions superbly." After 23 wickets fell on the first day, the second morning turned into a battle between Markram and Bumrah. The Indian bowler took six for 61 - and was denied the wicket of Markram when the batsman, on 71, edged a drive and wicket-keeper KL Rahul could not hold a catch above his head.



In brief

FUUAST organizes awareness seminar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Urdu University of Science and Technology (FUUAST) has organized a seminar for creating awareness among students about various kind of drugs and crimes, suggesting steps for their prevention and elimination from the society. The seminar was organized here by the International Relations Department of Federal Urdu University and Islamabad Police. Mr. Muhammad Shoaib Khurram, DIG Safe City and Traffic Police Islamabad along with his team attended the event as chief guest. Dr. Ehtishamul Haq, In-charge Islamabad Campus, Mohammad Aleem Raza Additional Registrar and Dr. Uzma Siraj, President, Department of International Relations welcomed the distinguished guests. The function was organized in the university auditorium in which a large number of students participated. DIG Muhammad Shoaib Khurram, told the students that IG Islamabad has issued special instructions that the Capital Police in various educational institutions should inform the students about social crimes and drugs and their prevention.

Death anniversary of Ustad Fateh Ali Khan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Death anniversary of distinguished classical singer and one of the most celebrated vocalists belonging to the Patiala Gharana of classical music, Ustad Fateh Ali Khan was observed on Thursday. Born in Patiala, in 1934 Ustad Fateh Ali Khan was the younger brother of the late classical singer, Ustad Amanat Ali Khan and elder brother of Ustad Hamid Ali Khan. After independence their family moved to Lahore and Fateh Ali and Amanat Ali Khan started performing together attracting the attention of music lovers. In 1945 they appeared for the first time on the big stage in Lahore at a concert sponsored by an influential music connoisseur, Pandit Jeevanlal Matoo. It was their performance at the All Bengal Music Conference in 1949, when Ustad Amanat was 17 and Fateh Ali was 14, that catapulted them to fame. From then on, the duo never looked back. Ustad Fateh Ali, along with his brother Ustad Amanat Ali, performed all across the world. Their classical and semi-classical singing won them countless admirers.

Police register 89 cases

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police have registered 89 cases against underage drivers during last 24 hours, said a police spokesman here on Thursday. Total 5486 FIRs were registered under the campaign launched against underage drivers while 89 cases were registered during last 24 hours. All possible steps were being taken to improve the traffic situation on the city roads and facilitate the citizens, he added. He informed that police on the directives of City Police Officer, Rawalpindi were taking action by the law against underage drivers. The CPO had directed the officers concerned to take solid steps to control traffic rules violations and underage driving, he said. He urged the parents to keep a vigilant eye on their children to avert road accidents. Police were also conducting awareness campaigns in schools and colleges to educate the students about the legal age requirements for obtaining a driving license, he added.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication Dr. Umar Saif chairing 47th meeting of USF Policy Committee.

ECP completes priority training for over half a million election staff

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has completed priority-based training for 579,191 election supervisory staff out of the total 985,413 appointed for the smooth conduct of the 2024 general elections. An ECP spokesman said on Thursday that the Commission had initiated training for nearly one million election staff during the last week of November, 2023, which would conclude by February 1, 2024. The remaining 406,222 election supervisory staff, including District Returning Officers, Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers, and others would

be imparted training before the deadline, he added. Strict disciplinary action was being taken against the staff who remained absent during the training programme, the ECP spokesman said. He said in compliance with the ECP's special directives, the central control room had been fully operational since December 26, 2023, addressing and resolving complaints promptly. To date, the central control room had received 45 complaints, all of which had been resolved, he added. The spokesperson said the central complaint cell at the Election Commission Secretariat also handled 165 complaints, promptly processing and issuing necessary

instructions to the relevant authorities. He said a network of 180 control rooms had been activated at the provincial, divisional, and district levels, collaborating with the Central Control Room to monitor elections and swiftly address complaints. Monitoring teams deployed nationwide in every district had also been mobilized to actively remove promotional materials daily, addressing violations of the code of conduct by candidates, the spokesperson added. He said the District Monitoring Officers had issued notices for various Code of Conduct violations, and subsequent legal action would be taken following inquiries.

DRO navigating election etiquettes, Candidates, officials gear Up for 2024 polls

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a crucial step towards ensuring fair play in the upcoming 2024 General Election, the District Returning Officer (DRO) and District Monitoring Officer (DMO) spearheaded a pivotal meeting to launch a awareness campaign and briefing for candidates regarding election code of conduct. The gathering, which included Senior Superintendents of Police (SSPs), served as a platform to instill a clear understanding of the Code of Conduct among all stakeholders, ICT spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabasum said while talking to APP on Thursday. He said that with the spotlight on transparency and accountability, the meeting boasted the presence of all three candidates vying for a seat in the National Assembly (NA). The candidates were meticulously briefed on the intricacies of the election code of conduct, setting the

tone for a fair and ethical electoral process. The heart of the discussion revolved around the campaign dynamics, where candidates received invaluable insights to navigate the nuanced landscape of political canvassing. Emphasizing the need for adherence to guidelines, the meeting shed light on the responsibilities entrusted upon the DRO, DMO, and the candidates themselves, he added. One standout directive issued was the requirement for candidates to secure prior permission from the DRO office before organizing rallies. This strategic move aimed to streamline the process, ensuring that public gatherings align with the guidelines set forth for a seamless and controlled electoral environment. He said that furthermore, candidates were cautioned against making announcements related to campaign development projects dur-

ing briefings. This precautionary measure aimed to foster an environment where the focus remained on conveying policies and engaging with voters, rather than diverting attention towards potential project promises. As the election fervor gains momentum, the significance of these guidelines cannot be overstated. The meeting served as a crucial milestone, equipping candidates with the knowledge necessary to conduct a campaign that not only resonated with the electorate but also adhered to the highest standards of ethical conduct. In the pursuit of a democratic process that stands the test of scrutiny, the meeting underscored the shared responsibility of all participants by instilling a sense of accountability and transparency, the 2024 General Election is poised to be a testament to the integrity of the democratic values.

HEC alerts students to confirm accreditation before admission in professional degree program

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has alerted the students to confirm accreditation of Professional Degree Programme before taking admission. According to the official sources, the professional degree programmes/qualifications cannot be offered or continued without accreditation by the corresponding professional councils. Even so, some universities still offer admission to unaccredited and invalid programmes causing serious threat to the future of students and leading to loss of time and monetary resources, they added. Therefore, students and their parents are advised to confirm, before taking admission, if the sought-after degree programmes are accredited by the concerned Professional Councils. For all non-professional programmes, make sure that the admitting university/sub-campus/affiliated institution is recognized by the Higher Education Commission. For convenience, HEC asked the students to visit the HEC web link: hec.gov.pk/site/HEIs. As per accreditation matters, the students seeking admission are advised to

confirm that the degree programmes they choose are accredited by respective Councils. The HEC shared the contact number of the Professional Councils i. e Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) 051-9219500-9206974, Pakistan Medical & Dental Council (PM&DC) 051-9190000, Pakistan Veterinary Medical Council (PVMC) 051-9108340, Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC) 051-9255813, Pakistan Council for Architects and Town Planners (PCATP) 051-2706668, Pakistan Pharmacy Council (PCP) 051-9204191 Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) 051-9206805, National Council for HomoeopathicH) 051-5409003 National Council for Tibb (NCT) 051-9204378, Allied Health Professional Council (AHPC) 051-9216775, National Agriculture Education Accreditation Council (NAEAC) 051-90802681, National Business Education Accreditation Council (NBEAC) 051-90800206-7, National Computing Education Accreditation Council (NCEAC) 051-90802771-2, National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE) 051-90808155-6, and National Technology Council (NTC) 051-90802786.

Global Health Security Summit to prepare epidemics control strategy: Dr Nadeem

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Health Dr Nadeem Jan on Thursday said that an integrated strategy to deal with epidemics would be formed at the upcoming Global Health Security Summit to be held in Pakistan. The minister, in a media briefing, said that the summit would serve as a great opportunity of bringing together, international and national experts in the field concerned and learning by sharing of expertise and knowledge for a safer world. He said that the Global Health Security Summit was being held on January 10 -11 in the Federal Capital. He said that the strategic objectives of the conference were to collaborate with global leaders in order to ensure equity-based pandemic preparedness financing for low and middle-income countries, and mutual exchange of knowledge and rich experience with member states and experts around summit thematic areas which focuses on vaccine equity, patent deregulation and transfer of technology. The minister said that the conference would secure global and regional partnership with international organizations for aligning its health security priorities

with those of global and regional priorities, in order to strengthen its core capacities through technical assistance. He said that the event would explore opportunities of joint working and pool funding for health security, across the region and globe in addition to the sustainable domestic funding for its five-year health security plan 2024-28. Dr. Nadeem Jan said that the Global Health Security Summit would be attended by top health experts from around the world. The minister said that holding of the international conference would present a positive image of Pakistan. It would prove that Pakistan could play a key role in the health sector. The purpose of the summit was to make Pakistan and the world safe from diseases, he added. Dr Nadeem Jan said that at the summit, an action plan would be decided to strengthen the health systems of poor countries. He said that at the conference, work would be done to strengthen the health system before the sudden epidemic. He said that effective measures were being taken to protect the people from global epidemics.

Dense fog creates challenging commute for capital's residents; health hazards

ISLAMABAD (APP): Dense fog blankets have created challenging commutes for the capital city like other parts of the country along with causing health hazards, especially for allergy patients in the last few days. The unusual dense foggy conditions prevailing in the capital attributed by weather experts to lack of rain during this Winter season amid climatic changes have not only disrupted road travel but flight operations too in the fog-bearing areas of the country. The persistent fog/smog due to the insignificant rain during this Winter season has caused diseases among the citizens especially those with allergy issues, old people and children. According to health experts, the major sufferers of seasonal diseases especially influenza, cough and fever are the children and old ones due to their weak immune systems. They have suggested taking those diets which can boost their immunity to fight seasonal diseases, revert to organic foods and handle such issues with home remedies. Naheed Raza, a mother of three children who daily

travels from Rawalpindi to Islamabad to attend her office, said, "Dense foggy conditions with reduced visibility is unusual for me while living in the capital for the last many years. Even I could see the visible fog after 11 am". "My children have suffered from prolonged sickness including influenza, cough and high fever three times during the last two months. The doctor was of the view that the virus has mutated into a dangerous one this Winter due to lack of rain so there is a need to boost the immunity of children by giving them organic food and using green tea with honey and ginger", she said. Keeping in view the health issues, the majority of the parents have demanded that the concerned authorities extend Winter vacations which have ended in some educational institutions or are about to end by weekend in the others. Showing her concern, a mother of two school-going children, Shagufa Shahid said, "If the dense foggy situation persists in the coming days, the authorities must consider extension in the vacations to save the children from fog/smog and chilly weather effects".

She said that the chilly weather due to dropping mercury will make it difficult for the kids to go to school in the coming days as the risk of catching the virus from other affected children in school still looms even if they are healthy. Talking to APP, Director Forecasting, PMD, Irfan Virk said that dry and cold weather will continue to prevail during this week and there are no chances of significant rain in the coming days except light rain in a few parts of Balochistan. He said that the fog patches ranging from normal to dense will continue in the plain areas of the country till the next rain. He said that dense fog is likely to continue over the plain areas of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Upper Sindh and Islamabad during this week therefore citizens are advised to be cautious. The PMD in its advisory also warned that exposure to the foggy environment can cause health issues among the citizens. The day temperatures are expected to drop 03-05 Celsius degrees in the coming days due to the foggy conditions.

Chairman PAVH on World Braille day stresses awareness about 'importance of braille literacy'

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Association of Visually Impaired Persons Khalid Mahmood Bajwa stressed on Thursday 'World Braille Day' the importance of raising public awareness about the 'importance of braille literacy' and urged investors to invest in it to broaden access to its technology materials, which would be pivotal steps towards developing an inclusive society. Talking to the PTV news channel, he explained that the theme of the day for 2024 is 'Empowering Through Inclusion and Diversity', adding that special persons needed special attention and noted that these steps would help improve the living standards of the special persons. He expressed that celebrating

'World Braille Day' aimed to raise societal awareness of the importance of language in the lives of the blind. "Pakistan takes an active part in the World Braille Day designated by the UN every year to encourage the visually impaired to read, write, and contribute effectively in their societies," he added. He further explained, "Braille is a tactile representation of alphabetic and numerical symbols using six dots to represent each letter and number, as well as musical, mathematical, and scientific symbols." He demanded, "Blind category receive full support from the state, adding that equal rights and treatment in the present society is a need of the hour where these people should pro-

vide the latest education facilities." PAVH also emphasized the importance of organizing workshops and courses to train employees, teachers, and students in the government and private sectors, not only in urban cities but in far-flung areas where these people are still not recognized. "The day's goal was to enable blind individuals with determination who are patrons of these libraries to access and enjoy reading these stories and novels," he added. Replying to a query, he said, "Braille represents alphabetical and numerical symbols using six touch-sensitive dots to represent each letter and number, including music, mathematics, and science symbols."



ISLAMABAD: Nursery workers busy in covers plants with plastic sheet to protect from cold weather at Peshawar Mor in Federal Capital.

540,000 afghan returned

KABUL (Ariana News): More than 540,000 illegal immigrants have been repatriated so far under the government's deportation drive against illegal aliens. In October, the government had given an ultimatum to all undocumented immigrants to leave Pakistan by October 31 or else, risk imprisonment and deportation to their respective countries. The government formally initiated a nationwide campaign to expel illegal foreign nationals, the majority of whom are Afghans.

Winter aid distributed

KABUL (Ariana News): Bayat Foundation distributed food and non-food items to dozens of needy families in Afghanistan's Bamyan province. The packages include flour, rice, cooking oil and warm clothes. "Today, we are witnessing the winter aid packages of Bayat Foundation in Bamyan province, which include clothes such as blankets, jackets, socks, as well as food items including flour, cooking oil and rice," said Sayed Hakim, a representative of Bayat Foundation.

320 criminal cases recorded in December



KABUL (TOLONews): The spokesman for the Kabul Department of Security, Khalid Zadran, said that at least 320 criminal cases have been recorded within one month in the capital. According to Zadran, more than 250 people linked to these crimes have been detained in the same

murder. They called on the interim government to take efforts to counter the criminal activities in the city.

"Now after 8:00 PM, if you walk in the street, they will take everything from you. I ask the government to make good efforts in security, so that the people can go to their work, school and back home peacefully," said Abdul Jabar, a resident of Kabul.

"The security was good previously. There has been some insecurity recently and also target murders happened. Someone cannot go out after 7:00 PM or 8:00 PM," said Mohammad Daud, a resident of Kabul.

In the past weeks, several people were targeted and murdered by unknown gunmen in various parts of the country.

Use of foreign currencies banned

NIMRUZ (Ariana News): Local authorities in Nimruz say that the use of foreign currencies for transaction and daily business is totally banned in the province.

According to local officials, it has recently been emphasized in announcements that no one has the right to use foreign currency in buying and selling, transactions and business.

Residents in Nimruz, which borders Iran, usually use Iranian Toman in their daily exchanges.

Provincial Directorate of Information and Culture has recently disseminated thousands of copies of notices over the ban on use of foreign currencies.

The purpose of the program is to raise the value of the Afghan currency.

The city order committee monitors markets in Nimruz on daily basis and those who use foreign currencies in transactions and buying and selling will face legal action.

Political figures react to explosions in Iran

KABUL (Khaama Press): Several political figures in Afghanistan, including former President Hamid Karzai, have emphasized the need to combat what they describe as regional terrorism in response to the deadly explosions in Iran.

Hamid Karzai, the former President of Afghanistan, wrote on his social media platform X that the explosion in a public gathering in the city of Kerman, Iran, was a "terrorist act and a heinous crime against humanity."

Others, including Rahmatullah Nabil, former head of National Security, Ahmad Massoud, leader of the National Resistance Front, and many other figures, have expressed that the disturbing phenomenon of terrorism is once again casting its shadow over the region.

Ahmad Massoud stated on social media that terrorism has been plaguing countries in the region for years and always victimizes innocent people. He continued to express solidarity by saying, "We stand together with the honorable people of Iran in the joint struggle for security and peace against extremist and foreign ideologies, united by our common culture, religion, and civilization."

Rangin Dadfar Spanta, the former Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, also stressed that "the fight against international terrorism must be answered with regional solidarity." According to him, "terrorism and its supporters should not be rewarded; terrorism cannot be eradicated through appeasement."

It is worth mentioning that as a result of multiple explosions in the city of Kerman, at least 103 people have been killed, and nearly 200 others have been injured.

The Islamic Republic of Iran declared a national day of mourning in the country following the deadly explosions, which left over a hundred dead.

The nature of the explosions has not been definitively determined, and no individual or group has claimed responsibility for them.

The collective response from Afghan political figures highlights that terrorism remains the primary cause of insecurity in the region.

Habat attempting to find way for girls' education

KABUL (TOLONews): Spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate said that the entire leadership is concerned about the issue and that the supreme leader, Hebatullah Akhundzada himself is striving to find a solution for this.

Speaking at X space on TOLONews, Zabiullah Mujahid said that the issue of girls' education will be resolved in way the Islamic Sharia law, Afghan tradition and different thoughts of the Afghan society are considered.

Mujahid added that the issue is consistently raised in our leaders' meetings with the country's elders and influentials figures and the government has taken it into account.

Responding a question

of TOLONews about the ban on female education in Afghanistan, Mujahid said: "This is our internal issue, and our people are always sharing this with us. This issue is raised when there are meetings between our leaders and elders of the country. The supreme leader himself is trying to find a rational way for this issue. So again, this is our internal issue which should not be politicized."

While considering the girls' education as negative aspect of the caretaker government in Afghanistan, Mujahid added, that should not overshadow the achievements made in the country.

"If the world is judging Afghanistan on this [ban on girls' education], that is right, but this is just the



empty part of the glass, what about the filled part of the glass, what about the achievements we have made?" asked the spokesperson.

The spokesperson termed that issue of girls' education a 'pretext' by the world reasoning that the

international community will have another pretext not to recognize the Afghan government even after the girls are allowed to go higher schools and universities.

He endorsed the ban on girls' education has prevented their [Islamic Emirate] legitimization.

Kabul residents complain of issues withdrawing funds from banks

KABUL (TOLONews): The residents of Kabul complained about challenges in withdrawing money, saying that they are only able to withdraw 100,000 Afis within a period of one month.

They urged the interim government to consider the issue seriously.

"I request that the banks implement their activities based on laws and also the ATM machines be activated," said Abdul Hamid, a resident of Kabul.

"Unfortunately, the banks don't implement their work as per the Central Bank's instructions. The ATM machines should

be activated, so that the people can withdraw the money easily," said Mohammad Turkistani, a resident of Kabul.

This comes as the Central Bank says that efforts are underway to address the challenges in the banking sector.

"People can now take more money from their accounts compared to before. The commercial banks are obliged to adhere to the rules of the Central Bank," said Hassibullah Noori, a spokesman for the bank.

The economists said that banking facilities will increase the level of invest-



ments. "As much as the clients of the bank are able to withdraw the money, the more money will be invested in economic fields by them,"

said Abdul Zahor Mudabir, an economist. This comes as more than \$9.5 billion of Afghanistan's assets were frozen after the Islamic Emirate came to power.

US supports UN' appointment of Special Representative

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United States Department of State has announced its support for the United Nations resolution regarding appointing a UN Special Representative for Afghanistan.

Matthew Miller, the United States Department of State spokesperson, emphasized on Wednesday, January 3rd, that Afghanistan's integration with the global community is possible if the country adheres to its international commitments.

He viewed the United Nations Security Council resolution as a clear message to the Taliban admin-

istration, the people, and the world, signifying Afghanistan's integration into the global community.

The United Nations Security Council adopted the resolution last Friday to increase engagement with the Taliban regime and Afghanistan, as well as to appoint a Special Representative for Afghanistan.

It is worth noting that the UN Security Council resolution has faced a reaction from the Taliban administration, which has labelled it an "unnecessary" action.

Additionally, the spokesperson for the United States Department



of State expressed concerns about the Taliban's lack of willingness to establish an inclusive government and the repeal of restrictions

against women and girls in Afghanistan, emphasizing that these decisions have caused "irreparable damage" to Afghan society.

1000s of Afghan women, girls join online study programs

KABUL (TOLONews): The Financial Times reported that following the ban on female education in Afghanistan, thousands of Afghan women and girls have been able to join online study programs in the US and UK.

The University of the People, a US-accredited non-profit higher education institution, said that more than 21,000 Afghan women had applied in the past year for its degree courses, with more than 3,100 currently enrolled to study subjects including business, computer science, health and education.

The providers say "they have seen strong demand from Afghanistan for courses on subjects including English language, science and business since the Taliban extended their ban on female attendance at schools to include higher education in December 2022."

"Tens of thousands of Afghan women and girls have been able to join online study programmes despite the Taliban government's ban on female education, according to inter-

net-based course providers," the report reads.

Meanwhile, some university lecturers while urging the reopening of schools and universities, said that Online study programs cannot be useful in the long run.

"This is an effective way to use this opportunity, but in the long run it cannot be enough and it is better that schools and universities open for girls," said Hekmatullah Mirzada, a university lecturer.

"Online courses do not have much efficiency," said Imal Rasa, another university lecturer.

Sanam, who was enrolled in the third year at a private university in Kabul, said that she began taking online courses after being denied from going to university.

She said that online programs were not so effective to her.

"Due to the problem of internet and the shortage of electricity, we cannot get the lessons properly through online, and the teachers cannot teach the way they teach in face to



face classes," Sanam told TOLONews.

FutureLearn, which was launched by the Open University in the UK in 2012 and has been owned by Global University Systems since December 2022, offers more than 1,200 courses, with English language accounting for four of the five most popular classes among Afghan students.

People said power cuts and erratic digital connections were issues for Afghan women and that it provided asynchronous sessions and online textbooks to allow students to catch up as well as scholarships to cover their costs.

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Victims call for permanent housing solutions

HERAT (BNA): Dozens of families affected by the devastating earthquake in Herat province have been provided with temporary shelter as they await the completion of their original homes. The cabins, totaling 37 in number, were handed over to the earthquake survivors in the Karnil Wardak area of the Zinda Jan district.

Shakib Shahabi, the project manager, stated that the construction of these standard cabins was made possible with community assistance, amounting to a cost of \$70,000.

The cabins were specifically allocated to families facing serious shelter needs.

During the ceremony held to mark the handover,

Mawlawi Hayatullah Mohajer, the Deputy Governor of Herat, highlighted the ongoing efforts of the Islamic Emirate to support the earthquake victims.

He noted that over a thousand houses have been constructed for the affected communities, with some still under construction.

While the earthquake

survivors expressed gratitude for the temporary cabins, they emphasized the need for permanent housing solutions.

They voiced their hope for the swift completion of their original homes, which are currently being constructed.

The construction work for the homes of the Herat earthquake victims is acti-

vely underway, indicating progress in addressing the long-term housing needs of the affected families.

Authorities and relief organizations continue to collaborate to ensure the well-being and recovery of the earthquake survivors, aiming to provide them with safe, comfortable, and permanent housing as soon as possible.

350 soldiers received military training



FAIZABAD (BNA): After completing a months-long training program, 350 newly trained soldiers from Badakhshan's Omar Salis Division performed a military parade.

According to Mullah Hafez Mujahid, commander of the Omar Salis Division in Badakhshan,

soldiers demonstrated their readiness to defend religion, people, and Afghanistan's borders.

Soldiers were armed with guns and equipment and drove in military vehicles during this parade.

Lt. Haji Zada Karimi, chief of the Omar Salis Division, stated that 350

soldiers acquired military skills such as the use of various weapons, investigation, as well as Islamic education during this training session.

A discharged soldier from this military training, Dawod Mokhtar Wardoji, says he is ready to defend his motherland and its people.

Medicines smuggling to country down 80%

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Afghanistan Food and Drugs Authority (AFDA) says it has collected and destroyed 700 tonnes of low quality and expired food and 6,700 types of medicines last year and sealed 890 pharmacy stores in Kabul.

Medicine Imports: According to figures from AFDA acting director, Afghanistan imported medicines worth over \$1BN from other countries during the past one year, with medicines worth \$785 million entering the country legally while the rest smuggled into the country.

About smuggling of medicines into the country, the acting director said that in 2023 drug smuggling decreased by 80 percent.

Hundreds of medical stores sealed in 2023 in Kabul city:

AFDA spokesman Dr. Javed Hajeer told Pajhwok Afghan News today they

monitored 6,327 pharmacy stores in Kabul in 2023.

According to Hajeer's figures 5,157 pharmacy stores were monitored during day shift and 1,170 were monitored during night shift of working.

He said 893 pharmacies were closed for operating arbitrarily, lacking documents, pharmacist absenteeism or closure at night time.

Hajeer's information shows out of 893 sealed pharmacies, 402 had no night shift pharmacists while 354 pharmacies were sealed for documents related issues.

During the monitoring process 312 drug stores were issued recommendation letters over lack of hygiene.

Destroying low quality and expired food, medicines:

AFDA collected 6,997 types of illegally imported and expired medicines from

drugstores nationwide, Hajeer said.

He added different types of antibiotics, analgesics, painkillers, sedatives, anti-allergic and vitamins were among the medicines collected.

Most of the illegally imported or smuggled drugs had been brought to the country from Pakistan, Iran, India, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and some other countries.

During past year, nearly 60 types of fake food or medicines were identified by quality control labs.

The destroyed food included different kinds of dairy products, cereals, desserts considered harmful for the health of the people.

If such items were consumed, they could have disastrous consequences.



GAZA: Displaced citizens carrying their belongings as they once again flee to the south following a night of heavy bombardment by Israeli forces.

Palestinian death toll rises to 22,438

GAZA: Over the past 90 days, a total of 22,438 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip, Gaza health ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qudra said. At least 57,614 others have been wounded, the majority of them women and children. Some 125 Palestinians were killed and 318 wounded in the past 24 hours, the ministry added. About 7,000 others are missing and are presumed dead under the rubble of their homes. The army said that five soldiers sustained life-threatening wounds during fighting in Gaza between yesterday and today. The injuries were mainly from battles in south Gaza, it said.

Al Jazeera's Imran Khan says that while the assassination of Hamas's deputy chief Saleh al-Arouri was a "shocking event" for people in Beirut, his funeral was not about exacting a call for revenge but rather "a showing of defiance and unity". "All of the various Palestinian factions here in Lebanon came out in force," Khan said, speaking from Beirut. "A delegation of about 20 senior Hezbollah leadership also joined them as a sign of respect and of unity," Palestinian refugees who

have lived in Lebanon's refugee camps for several generations also showed their respects, Khan reported.

After a raid that went on for 40 hours, the Israeli army has withdrawn from the Nur Shams refugee camp in Tulkarem, the occupied West Bank. Hundreds of Palestinian men were arrested and interrogated, and at least 13 suffered broken bones after being beaten up by soldiers. Al Jazeera's Tareq Abu Azzoum says that the Israeli army bombardment of the Gaza Strip has been constant. "In the past couple of hours, the Israeli military has been concentrating its attacks on the middle governorates and also in the southern part of the territory, in particular in Khan Younis, where at least 25 Palestinians have been killed," he said, reporting from Khan Younis.

"There is a clear deployment of Israeli snipers on Salah al-Din road especially near the villages of al-Musaddar and Zawaydah, which are considered to be the main links between the middle and southern parts of Gaza," he went on to say. "There is also ongoing artillery shelling in Maghazi and Nuseirat refugee camps. It seems

that Israel is transferring from one phase of destruction to another phase, which is concentrated on the middle and southern parts of Gaza."

Ryan Farraj, a Palestinian youth who travelled to Beirut for Saleh al-Arouri's funeral march from the Mieħ Mieħ refugee camp, said many of those marching had come from far away. Carrying a Palestinian Islamic Jihad flag, he told Al Jazeera it took him two and a half hours to get to the funeral, but he said it was worth it for him "to commemorate someone who died for the Palestinian cause".

Mohamad Ali, who came from the Ain El Helwa refugee camp, told Al Jazeera that al-Arouri set an example as a revolutionary. He added that when he grows up he wants to become a martyr for the Palestinian cause just like al-Arouri. Salma Qadumi, 32, tells Al Jazeera that she and dozens of other people moved to Deir el-Balah after leaving the Zawaydah area, where they had been displaced for two months. "Last night, at approximately 10:00pm, we heard huge sounds of bombings, artillery shelling, and bullets firing," she said. — Aljazeera

Welfare of special persons demanded

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Thursday expressed the optimism that political parties would take into account special steps and initiatives for the welfare of special people in their manifestos. "Political parties should come up with the programmes for special people in their election manifestos and programmes," Murtaza Solangi said while delivering the speech at a function, organized by Pakistan Disabled Foundation for differently-abled persons. He said legislation for the welfare of special persons was also the responsibility of the elected representatives.

He said special persons or differently-abled persons also had the right to vote. He said that they should present their justified demands to the leadership of political parties and vote for those parties which would fulfill their demands. "No one was disabled in the real sense as nature had blessed humans with unlimited abilities," he said, adding those who could not see with eyes, might adjudge a lot with their hearts.

In the developed countries of the world, the requirements of special people were taken care of as all people enjoyed equal rights, he added. The minister said that unfortunately in Pakistan, building codes did not take into account the facilities of special people.

3 children die in N Waziristan explosion

F.P. Report

MIR ALI: At least three children were killed in a landmine explosion in Mir Ali area near Khajoori check post in North Waziristan on Thursday noon.

Local police informed; the tragic incident took place in fields near Honeymoon Hotel in Mir Ali where the children were grazing their goats. The three children aging between five to fifteen fell prey to the explosion and died at the scene. Police said the shepherd children belonged to Zakirkhel village of Khajoori tehsil. Bodies of the ill-fated children were shifted to Mir Ali Hospital for medico legal procedure. Police have started investigation into the incident.

PML-N, Q may strike seat adjustment deal

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q) are expected to strike a deal on seat adjustment for the general elections in the coming days. According to media reports, the sources said the PML-Q wanted seat adjustment on four National Assembly and eight provincial assembly seats.

PML-Q leaders Salik Hussain, Monis Elahi, Hussain Elahi and Tariq Bashir Cheema succeeded in those NA constituencies. On the other hand, the PML-N is also in talks with the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) for seat adjustment.

PPP's only rivals poverty, inflation, unemployment: Bilawal

F.P. Report

LAHORE/KARACHI/ISLAM-ABAD: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing a workers' convention of the Party in Jati Umra, Lahore said that he is grateful to Chaudhary Abdul Ghafoor for not only joining the PPP but contesting the election on its ticket. The PPP will run its full-fledged electoral campaign in NA-125 and will be triumphant.

Chairman Bilawal said that the PPP is contesting the elections from every constituency. It is contesting the elections to win. The workers of the Party have to work hard day and night. We do not believe in the politics of hatred and division, and will take our manifesto to the people, and contest the elections based on that, as done by our ancestors, Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

The Jiyalas have to go to every doorstep and apprise the masses of the '10 promises' the Party has made. Our 10-point agenda and the economic plan it contains should be conveyed to the people. We have to make the people of Raiwand understand that if they wish to form a government of the people, labourers, farmers and students, then PPP is the sole option, not the PML-N or PTI. The first question you have to ask the people is whether they have got buying power, and the answer will not be affirmative. Our first promise with the people of Pakistan is to double their income within five years, as an effort to increase their buying power.

This is our first promise and target. The second question that you need to ask the people is whether they can afford to pay their electricity bills. Our second promise is to provide 300 units of electricity free of cost to the downtrodden masses of the country. Our third promise is to provide free, quality education so that every child

has the opportunity to learn. Only the PPP can do this. It is the only party that has established education institutions in every province, from Kashmir to Karachi. Our fourth promise is to provide free of cost, quality healthcare as we have done in different districts of Sindh, including NICVD, Gambat, SIUT etc.

These are not mere claims, like the PML-N and PTI. We have done this in Sindh, and wish to serve the people of the entire country in the same manner. Has the government given any free-of-cost hospital in Raiwand? When they face cardiac issues, they run to London. At that time too, we had told them that we have established NICVD and they should have gone there. When they face such issues again, which they ought to after February 8, they can access the same medical treatment in Raiwand, when the PPP establishes hospitals here. Our fifth promise is to build three million houses for the less fortunate and give the women ownership, as we are doing in Sindh. Imran Khan had promised five million houses to the people but could not even build one.

We are following the footsteps of Shaheed Quaid-e-Awam, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who introduced the '5 Marla Scheme' and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto who brought the '7 Marla Scheme'. We also wish to give ownership to those living in temporary housing all over the country so they too can feel the security of having a place to call home. We will not only provide them with houses but also regularise temporary accommodation. Our sixth promise is to expand the revolutionary, internationally acclaimed Benazir Income Support Programme introduced by President Zardari to incorporate education, employment and health.

We wish to restore all the features of the programme that faced hindrances during the Sharif and Khan tenures in the past, who tried to

snatch its name and rob the people of their rights. Our seventh promise is to introduce the 'Kissan Card' for our farmers, so that the small farmers of the country can directly reap the benefits of the subsidies that are otherwise enjoyed by mill owners and industries. Similarly, we wish to bring a 'Mazdoor Card' for our labourers so that they can attain financial and health benefits, and get their due rights. We wish to support the youth, that constitute 70% of the country's population.

They face immense challenges during this tumultuous time, especially when it comes to getting jobs after completing their education. They are told that they do not have the experience to work despite having the required qualifications. We wish to introduce the 'Youth Card' and assist these youngsters financially for a year as they look for employment opportunities. Through this card, we will also provide facilities to the students, especially scholarships and student loans for the deserving youngsters. Our last point, which we believe is imperative is the 'Bhook Mitao' programme which we wish to initiate at the level of the union councils, because with the way in which inflation, unemployment and poverty have increased in an unprecedented manner, so has hunger. The PPP will derive a solution for this as well.

Bilawal expressed his gratitude to the Party workers, and directed them to take the PPP's '10-point' manifesto to every doorstep and make them understand that the PPP wishes to put an end to the traditional politics of hate and division. The PPP wishes to introduce a new form of politics, so that we can change the fate of the people. We do not consider any party our competition, enemy or opponent. Our only rival is the poverty, inflation and unemployment, which can only be defeated by choosing the symbol of the arrow and making the PPP victorious.

Sea phase of Int'l Exercise Barracuda-XII held

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sea phase of International Exercise Barracuda-XII was held today at North Arabian Sea. Chief Minister Sindh Maqbool Baqar graced the occasion as Chief Guest and witnessed the sea phase of the exercise onboard Pakistan Maritime Security Agency Ship KASHMIR.

Air and Surface assets of Pakistan Navy, PMSA, Pakistan Air Force and other national stakeholders participated in the sea phase of exercise. Exercises on containment of oil spill, Search and Rescue operations and anti piracy were demonstrated by Pak Navy and PMSA aircrafts, PN & PAF helicopters and PMSA ships. The drills were witnessed

by fifteen foreign observers and representatives of various National stakeholders. The foreign observers applauded the efforts being put in by all the stakeholders specially the efforts of Pakistan Navy and PMSA to fight any disaster at sea.

Earlier, opening brief of the exercise was held at Karachi. Foreign Observers and delegations from relevant stake holders attended the brief wherein the aims and objectives of Exercise BARRACUDA-XII were highlighted. Moreover, scholarly papers on response of Oil Spill and Search and Rescue at sea were presented by both National and International speakers.

International Exercise Barracuda-XII is a Marine Oil Spill exercise and is

aimed to enhance capacity and proficiency of National stakeholders to combat the menace of pollution at sea. The successful 3 days event served as a testament to the power of international collaboration in contending against marine pollution incidents.

The sea phase of BARRACUDA XII reinforces the commitment of all involved national and international stakeholders to uphold international maritime regulations. As the curtains draw on this successful endeavor, the lessons learned and relationships built during this exercise will serve as a foundation for continued cooperation in addressing future challenges in maritime safety and environmental protection.



KARACHI: Search and rescue operation conducted during exercise Barracuda-XII in Arabian Sea under basupicbes bof Pakistan Navy and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency.

Myanmar military govt pardons 9,000 prisoners

SHAN STATE: Myanmar's military government has pardoned more than 9,000 prisoners, including 114 foreign nationals, to mark the country's Independence Day. Friends and families of prisoners gathered outside the high-security Insein Prison in the commercial capital Yangon as the releases were set to start on Thursday and expected to take place over several days.

The identities of those slated for release were not yet known, and there was no indication that any political prisoners would be freed. Thursday's announced amnesty, part of an annual release, comes as the govern-

ment faces a crisis in the country's north, where ethnic armed groups have captured military and border posts, threatening to block trade with China.

Against this roiling backdrop, the Independence Day celebrations were devoid of the usual pomp and circumstance, and military chief Min Aung Hlaing was notably absent from the proceedings. In a statement, his administration said 9,652 prisoners would be freed. "Myanmar's military generals are up to their same old tricks, releasing large numbers of common criminals and a bunch of foreign prisoners during a major national

holiday and trying to dress that up as 'progress' on human rights," said Phil Robertson, the deputy Asia director at HRW.

The military came to power in a coup in February 2001 after ousting civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, brutally suppressing protests and cracking down on all forms of dissent. Suu Kyi, 78, is currently in prison, sentenced to 33 years on an array of politically motivated charges from corruption to flouting COVID-19 restrictions. Her party was dissolved last year after failing to comply with tough new party registration laws. — Ajazeera

PTI leader Firdous appeal accepted

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court's (SHC) election appellate tribunal on Thursday accepted PTI Central Vice President Firdous Shamim Naqvi's appeal against the rejection of his nomination papers from Karachi's NA-236 constituency for the Feb 8 polls.

Naqvi was among several PTI leaders whose nomination papers were rejected. On Monday, he had approached the election tribunal against the decisions of returning officers regarding his papers. The former lawmaker, who is currently confined at his house in connection with a case related to the violent incidents of May 9, had filed the appeal through his lawyer and human rights activist Jibran Nasir.

According to Nasir, his client had filed three identical nomination papers from the same constituency as a precautionary measure after incidents of harassment and abduction of seconders and proposers were reported, especially from Punjab. However, the lawyer had maintained that all such papers were rejected by the RO on the ground that the appellant's party had lost the electoral symbol.

Today, Justice Khadim Hussain presided over the proceedings while Advocate Hasaan Sabir, the objector to the papers, appeared before the court along with Nasir. Following the hearing, Nasir said the tribunal accepted "all of our three appeals filed on behalf" of Naqvi.

"He is cleared to represent his party and contest elections," he wrote in a post on social media platform X, formerly Twitter. The counsel added that the tribunal had declared the objections to the papers "illegal". At the outset of the hearing, Nasir informed the court that the nomination papers of PTI leaders were being rejected on political basis, which was why his client had submitted more than one application.

However, Justice Hussain directed the lawyer to talk only about the law. Nasir contended that the papers were rejected due to the absence of a party symbol. The judge observed that the PTI would later take a decision on it candidates and wondered why the papers had been rejected in the "first stage of the checking process". Justice Hussain also inquired about the stage at which a party symbol was needed according to the law. "Has the PTI expressed indifference to the candidate?" he asked.

Iran holds day of mourning

TEHRAN (AFP): Iran observed a day of mourning on Thursday for the at least 84 people killed when twin blasts ripped through a crowd commemorating the slain Revolutionary Guards general Qasem Soleimani.

The death toll was revised down from around 100 the day after what Iranian authorities labelled a "terrorist attack" that also left hundreds wounded near Soleimani's tomb in the southern city of Kerman. No one claimed responsibility for the explosions in Iran, which has suffered deadly attacks in the past from militants as well as targeted killings of officials and nuclear scientists blamed on arch-foe Israel.

The blasts ripped through crowds who had come to honour Soleimani, four years after a US drone strike in Baghdad killed the veteran senior commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali

Khamenei on Wednesday blamed "evil and criminal enemies" of the Islamic republic, without naming them, and vowed a "harsh response".

Regional tensions have surged amid Gaza's bombardment sparked when Hamas launched its October 7 surprise attack on Israel, which Tehran welcomed while denying any involvement. President Ebrahim Raisi's political deputy, Mohammad Jamshidi, charged on social media platform X that "the responsibility for this crime lies with the US and Zionist (Israeli) regimes, and terrorism is just a tool."

The United States rejected any suggestion that it or its ally Israel were behind the deadly blasts, while Israel declined to comment. "The United States was not involved in any way, and any suggestion to the contrary is ridiculous," said State Department spokesman Matthew Miller. "We have no reason

to believe that Israel was involved in this explosion," he added, expressing sympathies to the victims of the "horrific" explosions and their families.

Soleimani, who headed the Guards' foreign operations arm the Quds Force, was also a staunch enemy of the Sunni extremist Islamic State group which has carried out attacks in majority-Shiite Iran. Regional tensions have surged amid Gaza's bombardment, drawing in Iran-backed armed groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

Hamas fighters infiltrated Israel on October 7, killing around 1,140 people, most of them civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures. In response, Israel launched a relentless offensive that has reduced vast swathes of Gaza to rubble and claimed over 22,400 lives, according to the health ministry in the Gaza territory.