

460,881 illegal Afghan returned

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a concerted effort to address the issue of illegal immigration, the repatriation of foreign nationals, primarily Afghans, continues in Pakistan. During the last 24 hours, 693 illegal Afghan nationals were safely returned to their homeland, bringing the total number of repatriated immigrants to 460,881, Radio Pakistan reported on Sunday.



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Perpetrators of May 9 incidents facing judicial process: PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Sunday said the incidents of May 9 were still being investigated and action should be taken against those involved in them.

Speaking in a private television channel programme, he said those who perpetrated the incidents on May 9 were facing the judicial process.

Many persons were still avoiding the courts and were in hiding, he said adding they should have surrendered before the law to avail their legal rights but now they would face obstacles in carrying out their political activities related to the elections.

He said the Election Commission would ensure that nobody should get the impression that any person was made a target for his political affiliation. To a question, he said the leader of the house and leader of the opposition in the National Assembly agreed to his name and he was appointed as the caretaker prime minister.

He said he was supported by many people including his teachers to reach

the level of attainment in his life.

The prime minister said the people of Pakistan would elect their representatives on February 8 and his government would carry out a peaceful transfer of power to them.

By the morning of February 9, it would be known whom the people had elected, he observed.

He said the government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) failed to resolve problems of governance during its tenure as it lacked political maturity and got involved in confrontation with the institutions.

Talking about the issues of Balochistan, he said once militants realized that they would have to lay down their arms, the problems would be settled.

PM Kakar was of the view that the sanctity of the state should be observed as it was above any individual. He said Pakistan lost 90,000 of its citizens in the war against terrorism but not even nine persons were convicted in courts for the deaths.

The issue of terrorism could not be addressed, he said adding that horri-

fic incident like an attack on the Army Public School occurred and personnel of law enforcement agencies, citizens and politicians had been martyred since 2008.

"The criminal justice system is not working and it is a fact," he said adding reforms in the system could not be made by the last three parliaments. He said democracy would move forward gradually and would bring its fruits to the people as happened in Europe.

He said he believed in pure democracy but the democratic government should improve governance and perform to gain moral strength from the people of Pakistan. The military institutions were supporting the government in disaster management, economic issues, database management, education, health and space technology, he noted. He said the Special Investment Facilitation Council was formed to help the prime minister in taking informed decisions about the economy with the support of institutional input.

Four killed after unidentified men open fire on passenger bus in Parachinar

ISLAMABAD (APP): At least four people, including a woman, lost their lives and three others were injured in a firing incident on a passenger bus in Parachinar, the Kurram District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

According to the police spokesman, on Sunday, a passenger bus was heading from Parachinar to

Kohat when unknown assailants carried out the attack, resulting in the killing of four people and injuring three others.

The injured were promptly transported to a nearby hospital for medical assistance.

This was not the first incident of gunfire on a passenger bus in Parachinar. Last week, on December 30, near Sada

Bazaar, close to Parachinar, a passenger van heading towards Peshawar was targeted, resulting in one passenger sustaining injuries.

Just three days before this incident, near Hangu, another shooting incident occurred on a bus traveling to Parachinar, where two individuals lost their lives and four others were injured.

PML-N to take revolutionary steps to overcome inflation: Shehbaz

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz President Shehbaz Sharif said on Sunday that his party would take revolutionary steps to overcome inflation and mitigate the sufferings of people.

He expressed these views in meetings with party leaders including Khawaja Saad Rafique, Malik Afzal Khokhar and Mohsin Shahnawaz. Party affairs and general elections came under discussion in the meetings.

Shehbaz Sharif appreciated the spirit of party leaders and workers regarding preparations for upcoming general elections in the country.

He said that elections on February 8 would prove to be a starting point of the country's development and added that people had seen that no party came up to their expectations.

He said, "Only Nawaz Sharif has fulfilled promises made with the people. The PML-N will balance the economic policies whereas the trust of people and financial institutions would be restored."

Countrywide anti-polio drive to kick off

ISLAMABAD (APP): A nation-wide anti-Polio drive of varied duration will start on Monday (tomorrow) to administer vaccine drops to children under five years of age.

During the campaign, Polio teams of health department will go door to door in all 159 districts of the country.

In Punjab, during a week-long polio campaign over twenty three million children will be administered polio drops.

The health department has declared Lahore, Faisalabad and Multan as most sensitive cities in this regard. In Sindh, nearly 10.03 million children up to the five years of age will be administered with anti-polio vaccine drops during a week-long campaign.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, over seven point four million children up to five years of age will be administered anti-polio drops during five-day drive.

In Balochistan, over 2.5 million children up to five years of age would be administered anti-polio drops during week-long polio drive. In Gilgit-Baltistan, over two hundred fifty thousand children will be vaccinated during five day campaign. In case a polio team does not visit any home, the parents can access to helpline 1166.

SC to hear Z.A Bhutto reference today

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Supreme Court of Pakistan will hear a presidential reference on Monday pertaining to the sentence of former prime minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.

A nine-member larger bench of the top court presided by Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justice

Sardar Tariq Masood, Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Amin Ud Din Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi, and Justice Musarrat Hilali will take up the reference for hearing. The PPP has already

submitted its written comments to the apex court last day along with some additional documents including transcripts and video recordings of various interviews. The reference was moved in 2011 by the then president Asif Ali Zardari seeking to revisit the death penalty awarded to of Z.A. Bhutto.

JUI-F's Fazlur Rehman arrives in Kabul to discuss security, regional issues

KABUL (Agencies): Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Sunday arrived in Kabul to hold talks on regional and security issues with Afghan leaders.

The Afghan interim government had extended an invitation to the JUI-F chief last month to visit the country.

The trip will be Rehman's first visit to Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover in 2021.

The JUI-F said that Fazl had arrived in Kabul alongside a delegation. It also said Fazl met Afghan Deputy Prime Minister Maulvi Abdul Kabir. Acting Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, Maulvi Abdul Latif Mansoor and others were also present on the occasion, it said.

Tolo News also shared a video of Muttaqi saying he hoped Fazl's visit would have "a good impact on relations between the two countries".

Earlier in the day, the JUI-F's media cell said a high-level delegation of party leaders, including Maulana Abdul Wasi, Maulana Salahuddin, Maulana Jamaluddin, Maulana Salimuddin Shamzai, Aslam Ghauri and others would be

accompanying Fazl on his trip. During the visit, Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman will hold meetings with the Afghan Taliban leaders and discuss the regional and security situation, the JUI-F statement added.

The visit comes at a time when relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have suffered due to a spike in terrorist attacks, mostly claimed by the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban.

Islamabad has stated that the TTP and other groups use Afghan soil against Pakistan. While the Afghan Taliban have denied the charge, authorities remain unconvinced and have demanded action against the TTP, its sanctuaries, and the handover of its leaders.

In November, caretaker Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar said there was a 60 per cent increase in terrorism and a 500pc spike in suicide bombings since the Afghan Taliban came to power in August 2021.

Meanwhile, a report issued earlier this week by Islamabad-based think tank Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies said that over 82pc of terrorism-related deaths in 2023

resulted from attacks perpetrated by three major groups, including the TTP and its subsidiaries.

Speaking to media persons at his residence last night, Fazl said that discussion on the TTP issue was on the agenda during the visit to Afghanistan. "I have received an invitation with the approval of the Taliban supreme leader and will meet him," the JUI-F chief said, adding that he would travel to Kandahar for a meeting with Taliban supreme leader Sheikh Haibatullah Akhundzada, who rarely meets foreign delegates.

When asked if he would take up the issue of the TTP with the Afghan side, he said: "Yes there is a possibility. We will use our relationship for goodwill."

Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman also said that he would use the level of his contacts with the Taliban leaders to the benefit of both countries. "I will apprise the Taliban leaders of the stance of the government of Pakistan and whatever I have noticed during my meetings with the officials," the JUI-F leader added.

The Frontier Post

Tribunal dismisses appeal

LAHORE (APP): An appellate tribunal on Sunday dismissed an appeal against acceptance of nomination papers of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Vice President and Chief Organiser Maryam Nawaz for National Assembly constituency NA-119 (Lahore). The tribunal upheld the returning officer decision of accepting Maryam's nomination papers for the constituency.



KABUL: JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman meets Afghan officials in Kabul.

Don't pay to rumours, ECP fully functional: Solangi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Sunday urged the people not to pay attention to rumours.

In a post on his social media platform X, the minister while sharing a press release of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), said that the Secretary Election Commission was facing some health issues for sometime. "We pray to Allah for his complete and speedy recovery", the Federal Minister of Information said.

The minister said that ECP was fully functional and there was no crisis of any kind.

ECP rejects PTI's claims against level playing field: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has rejected Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)'s claims against level playing field for general election 2024, sources said.

According to sources, over 76 percent of the nomination papers of PTI candidates have been

approved by the ECP.

Sources revealed that the commission submitted the detailed report regarding the level playing field to Supreme Court registrar.

Earlier, the Supreme Court issued notices to the Inspector General Police (IGP) of Punjab Dr Usman Anwar, chief secretary and AG Punjab on Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) petition seeking contempt of court proceedings against the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for failing to address the party concerns regarding level-playing field ahead of the upcoming polls.

On Dec 22, the Supreme Court (SC) directed the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to address PTI's complaints regarding a level playing field in the general election 2024.

Following SC orders, the ECP took notice of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) reservations regarding the lack of a level playing field in the run-up to the upcoming general elections, scheduled for February 8, 2024.

The electoral watchdog

has sent a letter to provincial election commissioners, chief secretaries, and inspector-generals (IGs), ordering them to remove PTI's complaints about mishandling of its candidates and facing difficulties in filing nomination papers.

Ahead of today's hearing, the PTI submitted additional documents containing evidence of the alleged denial of the level-playing field before the apex court.

In the documents, the SC was informed that the nomination papers of as many as 668 PTI candidates were rejected by returning officers appointed by the ECP.

The plea moved on behalf of Barrister Gohar Ali Khan through Shaheen, sought a direction from the Supreme Court to ensure a level playing field by not arresting PTI candidates, workers, and leaders. seconders should not be harassed.

The petitioner urged the apex court to direct the respondents to provide a level playing field to the PTI for free and fair elections, in the interest of justice.

Tribunal dismisses Sanam Javed's appeals

LAHORE (APP): An appellate tribunal on Sunday dismissed the appeal against rejection of nomination papers of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) activist Sanam Javed for national and provincial assemblies constituencies.

The tribunal comprising Justice Tariq Nadeem heard the appeals and upheld returning officer decision to reject her nomination papers for constituencies NA-119, NA-120 and PP-150. The tribunal announced the verdict after hearing detailed arguments of the parties.

Sanam Javed's counsel argued that his client was eligible to contest the elections but the returning officer illegally rejected the nomination papers of his client. He pleaded with the tribunal to set aside the decision of the returning officer and accept nomination papers.

However, respondent's counsel submitted that Sanam Javed did not qualify to contest elections as she mentioned a joint account in her nomination papers. He submitted that as per rules, a candidate must have a separate account for his election expenses. He requested to dismiss the appeals and uphold returning officer decision. Sanam Javed had challenged the returning officer's decision of rejecting his nomination papers from NA-119, NA-120 and PP 150.

Western diplomats seek to prevent Gaza spillover after three months of war

JERUSALEM/AMMAN/C

AIRO (Reuters): Top U.S. and European diplomats campaigned in the Middle East on Sunday to keep the Gaza war from spreading across the region, but three months into the conflict, more bloodshed underlined the challenge as Israel presses ahead with its operations.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the European Union's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, were on separate trips to the region to try to quell spillover from the war into Lebanon, the West Bank and Red Sea shipping routes, where Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis have vowed to keep up attacks until Israel halts its campaign in the Palestinian enclave. "We have an intense focus on preventing this conflict from spreading," Blinken said at the onset of his trip.

He was in Jordan on Sunday and will later travel to Israel, the West Bank, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt during his fourth trip to the region.

Jordan's King Abdullah urged Blinken to use Washington's influence over Israel to press it for an immediate ceasefire, a palace statement said, warning him of the "catastrophic repercussions" of Israel's continued military campaign. Despite global concern over the death and destruction in Gaza and widespread calls for a ceasefire, Israeli public

Israeli strike kills two Palestinian journalists in Gaza, officials say

CAIRO (Reuters): An Israeli air strike on a car near Rafah in southern Gaza on Sunday killed two Palestinian journalists who were out reporting, according to health officials in Gaza and the journalists' union there.

Hamza Al-Dahdouh and Mustafa Thuraia were both freelancers. Al-Dahdouh had done freelance work for Al Jazeera and was the son of the Qatar-based TV station's chief correspondent in Gaza, Wael Al-Dahdouh. A third freelancer, Hazem Rajab, was wounded.

Al Jazeera Media Network condemned the killing of the two journalists and said it had been a deliberate attack. "We urge

the International Criminal Court, the governments and human rights organisations, and the United Nations to hold Israel accountable for its heinous crimes and demand an end to the targeting and killing of journalists," the network said in a statement.

The Israel Defence Forces did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the strike or on the TV network's allegation that the two journalists had been deliberately targeted. In a statement on Dec. 16, in response to the death of another Al Jazeera journalist in Gaza, the Israeli army, said "the IDF has never, and will never, deliberately target journalists".

opinion remains firmly behind the operation aimed at wiping out the Hamas group that rules Gaza, although support for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has fallen sharply. He has not taken responsibility for the security failures that allowed the Hamas Islamic militants to attack southern Israel on Oct. 7, but has vowed to press on with the retaliatory action.

"The war must not be

to be held by Hamas.

For Israelis, the deadliest day in the country's history and the accounts of atrocities that later emerged left a sense that the country's survival was at stake.

Israel's offensive has so far killed 22,835 Palestinians in Gaza, after 111 dead and 250 wounded were added to the tally over the past 24 hours, Palestinian health officials said on Sunday.

An Israeli air strike on a car near Rafah in southern Gaza on Sunday killed two Palestinian journalists who were out reporting, according to health officials in Gaza and the journalists' union there.

Meeting King Abdullah in Amman, Blinken "stressed U.S. opposition to forcible displacement of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza and the critical need to protect Palestinian civilians in the West Bank from extremist settler violence," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement. The fighting has displaced most of Gaza's 2.3 million population, with many homes and civilian infrastructure left in ruins amid acute shortages of food, water and medicine.

"We hope that ... Blinken looks at us with an eye of mercy, ends the war, ends the misery we are living in," Um Mohamad Al-Arqan said, as she stood by the tent where she is living.



Only one dengue case reported

LAHORE (APP): Dengue is effectively under control in the province as only one case emerged in Punjab on Sunday, according to the latest Health Department report. Across 36 districts in Punjab this year, a total of four confirmed dengue cases have been recorded, with three in Lahore and one in Faisalabad. Presently, hospitals in Punjab are attending to 7 patients, one of whom is undergoing treatment in Lahore.

Ali Jaan Khan, Secretary of Health Punjab, implored citizens to uphold cleanliness and dry surroundings as a crucial preventive measure against dengue fever. He underscores the importance of collaboration with health department teams diligently working to combat the disease. For those seeking dengue treatment, information, or wishing to register complaints, a toll-free helpline (1033) is available through the health department.

‘Light rain likely in Punjab, Potohar region, Kashmir’

ISLAMABAD (APP): Light rain/drizzle is expected in Punjab, Potohar region and Kashmir during the next 24 hours, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) forecast. Rain-thunderstorms with snow over mountains are likely in northern Balochistan and lower Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the period. Dense fog will continue to engulf plain areas of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Upper Sindh during this week.

The PMD has urged the citizens to remain cautious during the foggy conditions as per the synoptic situation, a shallow westerly wave was present over western parts of the country, and cold and cloudy weather is expected in most of the upper and western parts of the country, while very cold in northern parts.

During the last 24 hours, cold and dry weather prevailed over most parts of the country, while very cold in northern areas. Dense fog/smog prevailed over plain areas of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, upper Sindh, and Islamabad. However, 10mm of rain was recorded in Parachinar and Gwadar 03mm. The lowest minimum temperatures were Leh -12 C, Skardu -10, Kalam, Gilgit, Gupis -05, Astore 04, Rawalakot, Chitral and Srinagar -03C.

IG Punjab visited Qurban Police Lines

LAHORE (APP): The IGP Punjab visited Qurban Police Lines and inspected the work of under-construction police apartments.

He had a detailed review of the construction work of the apartments. Communication & Works Department and police officers briefed the IGP Punjab about the ongoing work. IGP Punjab visited all the floors of the under construction building and directed to complete the construction work within the stipulated time period.

CM reviews progress on Safe City, CPO Office projects at Rawalpindi

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the Safe City and new CPO Office projects at Rawalpindi and reviewed their progress.

According to a handout issued here on Sunday, while setting a deadline to complete the Rawalpindi Safe City and CPO Office projects by 31st January, he ordered completion of civil work of the projects at the earliest. He directed to make proper planning for the installation of cables and cameras from the onset, adding that work should be launched immediately after the completion of civil work.

The CM conducted a detailed inspection of the construction activities of both projects. He reviewed the pace of work on both projects and directed to complete them swiftly. He directed the CPO Rawalpindi to visit the projects daily and review progress on them. He urged all concerned to work hard day and night, adding that completion of the projects with a swift pace should be the foremost mission. In the first phase, security cameras would be installed at 92 sites of Rawalpindi. The Safe City project will not only help control crime but also traffic management. The CM was informed during the briefing that 70 percent work has been completed. The road cutting process is ongoing for the electricity supply and networking. Inspector General of Police Doctor Usman Anwar gave a briefing in this regard.

IG Police Dr Usman Anwar, Commissioner Rawalpindi Liaquat Ali Chhattha, RPO Rawalpindi Syed Khurram Ali and CPO Rawalpindi were also present.

CM orders early completion of Children Hospital upgrade: Punjab

Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi paid a detailed visit to the Children Hospital and reviewed progress on the upgradation work of the medical facility.

On the direction of the CM, upgradation work in the emergency, main corridor and other wards of the hospital has been expedited. The chief minister inspected the main corridor, reception counter and checked the quality of work and directed to ensure quality along with undertaking preventive measures in the electricity and air conditioning wiring work. He directed to complete the wiring work in three days and early completion of tiles installation work in the main corridor.

Mohsin Naqvi lauded the performance of the Secretary Communication & Works, Secretary Health and their team on undertaking swift work in the main corridor. He met with the labourers working late night and commended them for working with diligence. He issued directions for early completion of the ongoing upgradation work. Mohsin Naqvi said that task for the provision of better facilities in more than 100 hospitals of Punjab would be completed by 31st January. "The whole team is striving day and night to accomplish this task. The fruit of hard work with a noble intention would definitely be passed on to the people," he maintained. The Secretary C&W and Secretary Health gave a briefing about the work being done under the upgradation project. He said that installation of tiles and finishing work had been started. Provincial Minister for Information Amir Mir, Secretary C&W, Secretary Health, Commissioner Lahore, Deputy Commissioner and officials concerned were also present.

JUI-F names candidates for Punjab NA, PA seats

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) has announced its candidates for 53 national and 153 provincial constituencies of Punjab, including seats from Lahore.

The JUI-F has fielded Saleemullah Qadri from NA-130, NA-118 and PP-175 and Hafiz Ghazanfar Aziz from NA-128 for the upcoming elections.

Interestingly, Hamza Shehbaz is expected to contest from NA-118. Further, the party has fielded Maulana Safiullah from NA-92, Ziaur Rehman NA-56/PP16, Sajjad Wains NA-148, Muhammad Safdar Shehbaz NA-165/167/168/PP-254, and Maulana Yahya Abbasi NA-176/PP-273.

The statement also said that Maulana Yahya Abbasi from NA 176 and PP 273, Maulana Mudassar Irfan from PP 288, Abdullah Fahad Langriyal from PP 272 and Maulana Ziaur Rahman from PP 258 are among the other candidates of JUI.

The party expressed confidence that its candidates will win the support of the people in the upcoming elections. ECP unveils

constituency-wise polling station lists

Meanwhile, Returning officers (ROs), in line with the directives of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), have published the constituency-wise preliminary lists of polling stations.

Candidates and voters have the opportunity to submit their suggestions or objections regarding polling stations to the District Returning Officers (DROs) until January 11, 2024.

DROs are set to declare their decisions on these objections or suggestions from January 12 to 17, with the final list of polling stations to be revealed 15 days before the elections.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) yesterday completed priority-based training for election supervisory staff appointed for the smooth conduct of the 2024 general elections.

According to the electoral body, the training of 579,191 people has been completed, while the remaining 406,222 people will complete training by February 1.

707 Students appear in KU Evening Entry Test 2024

KARACHI (APP): As many as 707 candidates appeared in the entry test for the BS first year of the BSCS and BSSE (Computer Science) Evening Program 2024 at the University of Karachi on Sunday. The KU has received 855 online forms for the available 220 seats in both BS programs of the department of computer science.

A 100-minute-long entry test was started at 11 a.m., and 20 examination classrooms were established in the political science and computer science departments.

According to the in-charge of the KU Directorate of Admissions, Dr. Saima Akhtar, 75 candidates appeared, cleared the morning program entry test, and also submitted their online admission forms for the evening program.

She added that as they had already cleared their entry test, they did not need to appear in today's entry test, and their marks (score) would be considered while preparing the final result of today's entry test. The KU Vice Chancellor Professor Dr

Khalid Mahmood Iraqi, Director of the Evening Program Professor Dr Imran Ahmad Siddiqui, Professor Dr Anila Amber Malik, in-charge Directorate of Admissions Dr Saima Akhtar, Medical Officer Dr Muhammad Hassan Auj, Medical Consultant Dr Akmal Waheed, Campus Security Advisor Dr Salman Zubair, and others monitored the admission test proceedings.

Meanwhile, the staff of the KU Clinic, along with an ambulance, were also present during the test proceeding. The KU also established waiting areas for parents and guardians near the examination centers. Dr. Saima Akhtar said that the list of successful candidates would be uploaded within 24 hours.

She mentioned that the candidates could check their entry test marks (scores) on the official web portal, www.uokadmission.edu.pk, on Monday, January 8, 2024. Furthermore, she mentioned that the admission list for the evening program 2024 would be put on display on January 13, 2024.



LAHORE: Children enjoy swings at Local Park in the city.

Sindhi writers are playing their role in the betterment of our society: Ahmad Shah

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Caretaker Provincial Minister for Information, Minority Affairs, Social Security and President Arts Council Muhammad Ahmad Shah attended the Sindh Association of North America (SANA) Sindh Conference 2024. Sana Sindh Conference held at Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi.

Addressing the conference, he said, "We have gathered here to talk about human rights. Sindhi writers are also playing their role in the betterment of our society, many important topics will be discussed in the conference. He said that the youth can play their role in taking

the country forward, Sindhi youth also seem to be very active and they keep a close eye on everything. Mohammad Ahmad Shah said that the younger generation can take the country forward by being associated with the IT sector. Sindhi youth can work to connect people not only in Pakistan but all over the world, today's youth are the role model of Pakistan.

He further said that he worked with different communities for literature, you will learn a lot from this conference. The caretaker provincial information minister said the SANA Sindh Conference would play vital role in the development of Sindh. On this occasion,

Provincial Information Minister Muhammad Ahmed Shah while addressing the SANA Sindh Conference further said that we cannot depend on the private sector.

The youth will have to stand on their own feet so that they can get good job opportunities in the government sector. He said that education is the only way through which you can make the name of not only your province but the whole country bright in the world. Our Youth have proved their strength all over the world Sindh Soil has given birth to many famous people. He said that sindhi community is also working for Sindhi literature in Houston, Los Angeles and other parts of America.

Around 100,000 children develop type 1 diabetes in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Around 100,000 children are estimated to have type 1 Diabetes in Pakistan who need insulin for rest of their lives to live a normal and healthy life.

"Unfortunately, many of them are not diagnosed timely due to lack of awareness among parents and most of the treating physicians," senior endocrinologists and health experts said in a media briefing.

They said sudden weight loss, frequent urination and extreme hunger as well as change in the mood of the children were some of the symptoms of the Type 1 diabetes and if such signs and symptoms appear, parents should take their children to trained and qualified physicians and insist for checking the sugar of their child.

"Of the 100,000 children having type 1 Diabetes in Pakistan, many are not diagnosed timely and die within a

few days of the onset of the disease.

"If parents are aware of symptoms of type 1 diabetes and such children are treated by trained and qualified physicians, their lives can be saved by giving them insulin for rest of their lives", diabetologist and head of Changing Diabetes in Children Prof. Abdul Basit said. He said, "Our goal is to reach out to 3000 children whose parents cannot afford insulin throughout the country and provide them free of charge insulin to live a normal and happy life."

The ambassador of Denmark to Pakistan Jakob Linulf deplored that hundreds of children were dying as their parents didn't know that their children had Type 1 diabetes and they were not getting the right, which is insulin that could save their lives and help them live a long, healthy and happy life.

"There is a need to tell parents that early diagnosis of type 1 Diabetes can save lives of hundreds of children in Pakistan. There is also a need to train physicians and doctors regarding proper diagnosis of the Type 1 diabetes and putting them on insulin as per guidelines", the ambassador said.

Irum Ghafoor, Manager Changing Diabetes in Children said they have 16 Changing Diabetes in Children centers in different regions covering all provinces including Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and also the federal capital, Islamabad. "Through these centres, we have enrolled 1544 children across Pakistan by end of year 2023. Children living with diabetes who visit these centers, have access to free insulin and blood glucose monitoring equipment for better diabetes control", she informed.

Essence of Deen lies in the love of Holy Prophet (PBUH)

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islahee Jamaat & Aalmi Tanzeem ul Arifeen of shrine Hazrat Sultan Bahoo (RA) organized the Annual Melaad-e-Mustafa & Haq Bahoo Conference at Jinnah Convention Center, Islamabad. Patron-in-chief of Jamaat and Tanzeem Hazrat Sultan Muhammad Ali presided over the conference. Ambassadors of the republics of Palestine, Azerbaijan, Sudan, and Indonesia participated in the conference, said a press release here on Sunday.

Secretary General of Jamaat and Tanzeem Sahibzada Sultan Ahmad Ali while addressing the auspicious gathering said that the vitality of the message of Sufis has increased manifold nowadays. Sufis unfold the teachings of Islam in letter and spirit. The essence of Deen lies in the love of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Islam not only guides our material life but also grants a complete code of spiritual life. The Holy Quran draws social principles to bring social order to a society. Elimination of social unrest and the creation of a balanced society is what the Quran instructs. The fundamental message of Deen is to follow the commandments of Allah through the injunctions of the Holy Quran and obedience of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). The love for the

Holy Prophet (PBUH) is the fundamental prerequisite of Deen. One can never attain the actual essence of Deen unless he loves the Holy Prophet (PBUH) more than anything. It is manifested in the Holy Quran as a human being needs to strengthen their relationship with Allah, it needs to strengthen their relationship with the Holy Prophet (PBUH) in the same proportion. The Holy Quran teaches manners of the court of the Holy Prophet (PBUH).

The will of God is the will of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). One who fulfills the will of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) fulfills the will of God. Society

secures an important position in Deen. Holy Prophet PBUH said if one wants to complete one's Emaan, one has to surrender himself in front of the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah.

In this respect, love, peace, and harmony are the message of the Holy Prophet PBUH and we must ponder today what we have learned from the teachings of the Prophet PBUH. Do social and all other types of media present today teach the same message? Do actions on these channels depict our love and followership with the Holy Prophet (PBUH). The answer is very disappointing.

RDA accelerates its ongoing operation against illegal housing societies

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), on the directives of the Director General (DG) RDA Muhammad Saif Anwar Jappa, has accelerated its ongoing operation against illegal housing societies. Talking to APP, the RDA spokesman informed that the authority had issued 548 legal notices and lodged 212 FIRs.

He further informed us that the authority also sealed more than 183 offices of illegal housing schemes and demolished 195 illegal constructions. He said that the authorities concerned, on the orders of the DG, were taking strict action against the rule violators. The DG RDA, Deputy Commissioner Rawalpindi, and City Police Officer Rawalpindi were monitoring the operation against illegal

housing societies, launched on the special instructions of the Commissioner Rawalpindi division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta, to control the illegal business. RDA also sent 129 letters to the Cyber Crime Wing for legal action against rule violators, he added. The operation was underway against illegal housing societies without any discrimination, he said.

The citizens were advised not to invest in illegal housing schemes and to check their status on RDA's website, www.rda.gop.pk, before any investment, he added. The offices of several illegal housing schemes had also been demolished, and FIRs were also lodged against illegal and unapproved housing societies.

Strict action was taken against illegal housing schemes including Blue

World City, Multi Garden, Abdullah City, Avalon City, Faisal Town Phase-2, Rudn Enclave, Capital Valley, Shaheen Garden, Atlantic City, Century Town, High Capital City, Royal Farm/Residential/Apna Ghar, Chinar Enclave, Eman Garden, Theme Park View, Al-Imran Homes,

Imarat Hoon Farm Houses, Khan Builders, Kashmir Homes/Imam Hassan Towns, Usmania Fort Housing Scheme, Haider Residencia, Khalid Colony, Al-Baraka Garden, Zam Zam Villas, Eman Garden, Chinar Enclave, Gulshan-e-Abbas, Potohar Valley, Dua Garden, Anmol Garden, Ameen Housing, Watan Enclave, Cighu Farm House, Green Oaks (Harutus Flora), Manan City, Shakir Farms, and others.



LAHORE: Family selecting and purchasing old books from a roadside setup at Mall Road.



‘Development in merged districts first priority’

PESHAWAR (APP): The development and prosperity in the merged tribal areas is our top most priority with effective measures being taken to ensure the provision of basic facilities to the people, Governor Haji Ghulam Ali said here Sunday.

The tribes have a golden history of supporting the state and state institutions, we all have to play our role jointly for the safety, security and stability of the country, Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali added.

This he said while addressing two separate delegations including a 30-member Loya Jirga and 25-member representatives of the Bajaur Welfare Organization from Mohmand district at the Governor’s house to discuss regional issues.

Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali said that the development and prosperity of the merged districts is the first priority of the government and effective measures are being taken to ensure the provision of basic facilities to the tribal people.

The promises made to the people of the merged districts will be fulfilled and their deprivations will be eliminated, he said. For the development and prosperity of any society, peace, education and trade are indispensable, we all have to play our role jointly for the protection of the state, the establishment of peace and law and order.

During a separate meeting with the 30-member delegation of the Welfare Organization and the 25-member public representative delegation from Bajaur.

The Mohmandlaviya Jirga was led by Malik Muhammad Javed. Malik Jangriz Khan, Malik Maywand Khan, Malik Abdul Rahman and others were included in the delegation, while the Bajaur delegation included Tehsil Mayor Syed Badshah, Syeda Hamad Khan, Naeemullah, Malik Haji Sherzada, Daim Khan and John Muhammad and other elders and youths.

The Mohmand delegation informed the Governor in detail about the long and unannounced load-shedding of electricity, lack of educational facilities, trade related issues, lack of infrastructure, administrative issues and other basic facilities.

Due to the bad condition of the roads, the people are facing severe hardships, on which the speed of the work, setting up of Rescue 1122 in Baizi, solving the problems like domicile, identity card, verification, while the delegation of Bajaur district demanded of the governor.

He informed about load shedding of electricity, solarization of mosques, establishment of cremation ground in Kharbajore, field for sports and other needs. The Governor carefully listened to the delegations’ proposals and public problems and on the spot issued

orders to the relevant authorities to solve some problems while assuring full cooperation from his side to solve other problems.

The participants of the delegations thanked the governor for giving them the opportunity to meet despite their busy schedule and holiday on Sunday and said that it is clear as day in the entire province that the governor of the province is a public figure and he has proved it in practice.

There is no such example in the history of the province with the sincerity and love with which the people have been connected, for which the participants paid tribute to him. While talking to the delegations, the governor said that the federal and provincial governments wish to provide basic needs to the people of the merged districts.

Provision of health, education and life facilities should be ensured and all resources are being utilized in this regard. He said that the federal and provincial governments are taking special interest in the development and prosperity of the merged districts so that the deprivations of the tribal people can be remedied and these areas can also be brought at par with other developed areas of the country and the province.

He appreciated the efforts and sacrifices of the tribal people for peace and stability in the country. He said that the tribes have a golden history of support-

ing the state and the state institutions and he expects that the tribal people will continue to work with the same spirit in the future to maintain peace and order.

The people will play their role, especially the leaders who have the responsibility to play their role in the best way for the elimination of hatred and promotion of love and brotherhood. Promote traditions and values and strengthen the Jirga system in your areas so that small issues can be resolved quickly at the local level, thereby eliminating hatred.

He said that the country is going through a difficult time economically, but all the difficulties and challenges faced by the country can be overcome by mutual agreement and unity beyond the political differences and the time is not far when our country is also economically strong and a prosperous country in the region.

He said that the tribal areas have been blessed by Allah Almighty with immense natural resources, in order to use these resources in a proper way, modern technology and education should be utilized, which will also make it possible to end the poverty in the area.

He urged the public to pay attention to the acquisition of education in line with modern technology and the requirements of the current era and play their role in the development of the country.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce, Technical Education and newly Merged Districts Affairs Dr. Aamer Abdullah launching Digital Mobile App.

Certificate distribution ceremony held F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Agriculture Department organized a certificate distribution ceremony for Global G.A.P. (Good Agricultural Practices) among Bitter Gourd farmers in Charsadda a step towards sustainably strong and a prosperous country in the region.

The event, chaired by Project Director Dr. Bakhtiar Khan, marked a milestone in the “Introduction of Certification Facilities for Quality Assurance Creation of Market Linkages for Agriculture Interventions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa” project.

Under the ADP program, 10 Bitter Gourd farmers were awarded Global G.A.P. certificates, enabling them to access international markets and high-value retail chains.

The initiative, launched in 2017 with a total cost of Rs. 334.832 million, aims to improve agricultural processes and create market linkages for farmers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The ceremony also emphasized the importance of international standards, food safety, and the growing demand for organic produce.

DD Agriculture Extension Ali Khan highlighted the significance of enhancing product quality, while Dr. Bakhtiar Khan stressed the need for reduced pesticide usage and the promotion of high-quality production and export of fruits and vegetables.

The event included an open house discussion to explore ways to enhance the international competitiveness of the Bitter Gourd industry in the region.

Digital Mobile App to facilitate investors

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government under Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC), Sunday launched a digital mobile app in order to make services of the company easily accessible to investors and industrialists.

The launching of the digital mobile app is being considered a milestone towards the facilitation of investors and industrialists as the required services, facilities and information of the company would now be available on it.

With this initiative Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has become the first province of the country, which has introduced such a unique kind of comprehensive and useful app for industrialization in the public sector. The app was formally launched by the KP Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce, Technical Education and newly merged districts affairs Dr. Aamer Abdullah at the headquarters of KP-EZDMC, while Chief Executive Officer (CEO) KP-EZDMC, Javed Iqbal Khattak, other senior managing officers of the company was also present on the occasion.

It is worth mentioning here that the Provincial Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Dr. Aamer Abdullah had assigned this task of online availability of the services to the company, which has been achieved by the IT

section of the company within a short period of two weeks.

Addressing the launching ceremony of the app, the Provincial Minister appreciated the performance of the management and whole team of the company and termed it a visible step towards the facilitation of industrialists and investors of the industrial sector in the province.

He said that through this project, the public sector of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has taken a lead over other provinces of the country, for which he said the whole team of the KP-EZDMC deserves appreciation. The provincial minister directed making the digital online facility efficient and accessible with the passage of time, wherein all required services and information regarding industries and investment are available. The minister further directed for the inclusion of app use in existing by-laws of the company as a compulsory segment. He said that the app should also have complete data of vacant plots in all economic zones of the province and make the attractive incentives easily accessible to intending investors and gave a deadline of one week to the company for the completion of the task.

On this occasion, the provincial minister was told that in the first phase, the digital app would be available only on Android phones and after a few weeks, its availability would also be guaranteed on apple.

He was told that basicallly the required information regarding the company and two aspects of the required services from the company have been included in the app while industrial facilitation, industrial projects, latest information, assistance & cooperation and means for knowing feedback have also been included in it. In a similar way the intending investors could also submit an online application for the plot.

Meanwhile, the caretaker minister also presided over a meeting regarding matters relating to the affairs of the newly established economic zone in Chitral. During the meeting, the provincial minister was informed in detail regarding the completion of the concerned economic zone and issues relating to the provision of electricity to it.

The provincial minister was told that Chitral Economic Zone is fully ready for industrialization wherein 35 plots have already been allotted. However, it required provision of electricity as soon as possible. In this connection, he was told that a proposal of the provision of one megawatt green energy is under consideration, which for time-being is sufficient for several years.

In this connection, the caretaker minister directed the management of the company to review all technical aspects of this model and after completion of feasibility, present it to the board of directors for implementation.

Caretaker Minister pays homage to Captain Karnel Sher Khan Shaheed



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a solemn and respectful visit, Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel, the Caretaker Minister of Information and Public Relations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, undertook a detailed visit to the shrine of the revered Kargil war hero, Captain Karnel Sher Khan Shaheed Nishan-e-Haider.

During the visit, Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel laid wreaths, recited Fatiha, and documented his reflections in a commemorative book. Expressing gratitude for the opportunity, he conveyed, “It is my good fortune to recite Fatiha at the martyr’s grave. Such brave individuals bring immense joy to the lives of nations.”

The caretaker minister also extended condolences to the family of Captain Karnel Sher Khan, emphasizing the profound significance of the sacrifices made by the martyrs.

He remarked, “Captain Colonel Sher Khan Shaheed is the pride of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the only son who courageously earned Nishan Haider. The foundations of our nation have been fortified by the blood of these

heroes.”

Highlighting the invincible defense of Pakistan owing to the sacrifices of its soldiers and officers, Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel stressed, “The survival and development of the country are indebted to the blood of our martyrs. Every Pakistani, irrespective of religion, color, race, or political affiliation, has a duty to honor these brave souls.”

Reflecting on the tragic events of May 9, the caretaker minister condemned the acts of terrorism that marred the history of the country. He asserted, “The events of May 9 will be remembered as the darkest day. Those who attack and plan assaults on military installations and civilian property will be brought to justice in every case.”

In a gesture of appreciation, Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel commended the reconstruction work at the shrine and lauded the efforts of Corps Commander Peshawar Lt. Gen. Hasan Azhar Hayat. Additionally, he announced the government’s commitment to sending the brother of Shaheed Colonel Sher Khan to Saudi Arabia at the government’s expense to perform Hajj in honor of the fallen hero.

QWP for general elections on time

PESHAWAR (APP): Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Sunday rejected the Senate resolution seeking the postponement of the February 8 polls, demanded that the

general election must be held on its scheduled date without any delay.

Speaking at a press conference in Shahqadard tehsil in the Charsadda district, he said the Senate resolution demanding delay in holding the elections was meaningless.

Aftab Sherpao said that the election must be held in order to enable the people to elect their representatives.

Criticizing the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leadership, the QWP leader said that its popularity graph had started falling, but it was using the so-called regime change theory in a face-saving effort. He urged the people to use their right to vote in order to send their representatives to the assemblies so that they could work for the uplift of their areas. “We

will spare no effort to serve the people,” he vowed.

He said that his party had always served the people as it believed in working for the development of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

About the denial of level playing field, he said that the nomination papers of the PTI candidates had been accepted so this complaint was not based on reality.

He said the PTI was getting unprecedented relief from the courts.

Aftab Sherpao said Imran Khan was now looking to the US to help him bring to power by writing the article in a foreign magazine. “He is now asking the US to provide him level playing field after accusing it of regime change,” he said.

Aftab Sherpao said the voters must not fall for



catchy slogans as these were meant to hoodwink them. He advised the voters to check the track record of the candidates before casting their ballots.

He said that nobody cared to raise voice for the rights of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa facing finan-

cial crunch.

He said all uplift projects in KP were placed on the backburner. The QWP leader said the PTI ruled KP for almost a decade, but left the province in dire financial crunch and the province was buried under huge loan.

PMDC not agreed to 20% seat enhancement

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In the larger interest of organization it is clarified that PMDC has not agreed to 20% seat enhancement for MBBS and BDS programs in public/private colleges.

No application has been received to PMDC from KPK government nor PMDC has approval any such seat enhance.

Provincial /regional

authorities can enhance its seats in medical and dental colleges with due approval from PMDC which is the apex regulatory of the country. It is pertinent to mention that PMDC has a set criteria, rules and regulations and standards in line with the global commitments for its recognition with WFME.

Recognition of MBBS /BDS programmes and enhance of seats is done in

a due procedure which includes formal requests by provincial Governments or individual college through Ministry of Health.

PM&DC is a national regulatory body and according to the law no province can work or announce any enhancement independently.

PMDC firmly disseminates that seat enhancement in public or private colleges subjected to completion of the due process.

Govt extends vacations of primary schools

PESHAWAR (APP): The Elementary and Secondary Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has extended primary schools vacations in summer zones upto January 13.

Timing of Middle, High and Higher Secondary Schools has been rescheduled from 9:30 a.m to 3:30 p.m, said a notification issued here on Sunday.

Breaking shackles of poverty through welfare projects

PESHAWAR (APP): In a foggy morning, Zakir Khan, an impoverished fruit seller, starts his rickshaw journey from his mud house in the outskirts of the provincial metropolitan to Peshawar’s fruit market hoping to purchase apples, guavas, bananas, and other fruits on reasonable rate to support his eight-member family.

Assisted by his son Asadullah Khan, the 65-year-old vendor, donned in traditional attire – woolen Chadar and Chitrali cap, starts his day with Fajr prayer and after having breakfast, rushes to Chamkani fruit market in Peshawar expecting to get fresh fruits through open auction on reasonable prices and anticipates a profitable sale in the local market.

After purchasing fruits, he unloads his fruits-packed rickshaw at his hand cart in Pabbi fruits market at Nowshera after covering 15-kilometer distance from Peshawar and

working till night. “I have been associated with the painstaking fruit seller business since my childhood and recently my two sons Arifullah Khan and Asadullah Khan have started assisting me to sell all stock before night,” he said. “It is an extremely challenging business and sometimes he suffers financial losses in case fruits are not sold on time,” he said, adding that due to exorbitant prices of the fruits many customers just ask about prices of different fruits and return empty handed.

“Last year, citrus of Khanpur tehsil of Haripur and Manki Sharif of Nowshera districts was available at Rs180 per dozen that has now jumped to Rs 250 per dozen in local market with start of new year while apples per kg were sold at Rs 200 per last year against Rs 250 this year making difficult to continue this hard earned business due to discouraging response of consumers

and poverty,” he said.

“I have come to purchase fruits for birthday party of my granddaughter, but the prices were sky-high this morning and will come again at night hoping for reduction of prices of apple, guava and banana to celebrate the event with great pomp and show,” said Riazul Haq, a retired teacher while talking to APP at Pabbi fruit market.

Complaining about soaring prices of fruits and vegetables with the start of the new year in the local market, he said that district administration failed to regularly check fruits prices at market and take strict action against price hikers and hoarders.

“Poverty is the mother of all social ills including illiteracy, corruption, street crimes, drugs addiction and unemployment besides creating socio-economic imbalances in the society,” said Professor Dr Muhammad Naeem, former Chairman Economics Department, University of

Peshawar.

He said that thousands of youth were being graduated by the public and private sectors universities every year and could not find suitable jobs due to our outdated education system and lack of coordination between government departments, educational institutions and industries in terms of jobs creations, as result, increase in poverty ratio in recent years.

Professor Naeem while quoting a World Bank report said that the poverty ratio has raised from 34.21 per cent in 2022 to 39.41 per cent in 2023, pushing 12.5 million people below poverty line.

He said that Pakistan labour market was yet to recover fully from the 2022 devastated floods, COVID-19 pandemic and shabby economic situation and tough challenges were ahead of future government to tackle these issues on war footing basis.

“The 2022 floods had marred agriculture, tourism

and livestock sectors besides affecting over 33 million people in all provinces including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and an additional nine million people were at risk of being pushed into poverty in Pakistan,” he said.

Dr Muhammad Naeem underscored the need for strict financial and fiscal policies besides reducing reduction of expenditure outlay of the budget at centre and provinces levels, reforms in tax structure by shifting reliance from indirect to direct taxes, pension system and increase in assistance of Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) to control poverty and unemployment in the country.

Ms Javeera, spokesperson of BISP KP said that her organization was providing financial assistance to nearly 10 million deserving families through Benazir Kafalat Program. She said that children of these families were receiving education under

Taleemi Wazif initiative besides pregnant and lactating mothers and infants of beneficiaries were being financially assisted to combat stunting and malnutrition.

She also outlined the induction of a new poverty graduation program focusing on self-reliance of these poor families, technical education for their children, programs for orphans, widows and the creation of an endowment fund for the poorest of the poor.

Ms Javeera said that Rs 72 billion as quarterly installments of Rs 9000 per family for April-June 2023 were disbursed among eight million deserving beneficiaries till July 21, 2023.

Khushal Khattak, Program Manager, KP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (KP-TEVTA) said that an agreement was inked with five paramedical institutions for socioeconomic empowerment and

skills enhancement of youth of merged tribal districts.

As per the agreement, he said that 360 students of merged tribal districts would be provided two-year professional educational training in nine different paramedical technologies enabling them to get a dignified job in the health sector.

He said Rs500,000 to Rs five million soft loans were being provided to youth under Kamyab Jawan Program besides Rs 1 billion approved for provision of micro loans through Bank of Khyber to tribal youth.

Khushal said ‘Skills for All’ program was launched for promotion of technical education and vocational training while field internship programs along with Rs10,000 to Rs15,000 per month stipends were being provided to selected youth on merit.

He said over 76 per cent diploma holders of KP TEVTA have secured

employment in different sectors including health.

“To alleviate poverty, the KP government has launched Khushal Pakhtunkhwa Program to generate employment opportunities for youth and make poverty alleviation program in line with the people’s expectations.

Under this landmark program, half million youth would be sent abroad for employment besides attention would be paid to information technology’s courses according to the demands of the international market,” said Feroz Jamal Kakakhel, KP Information and Tourism caretaker Minister.

Besides approval of Rs 218.7 million for de-morning initiative for school-age children of underprivileged families, he said scholarship and ETEA merit stipend programs were launched to provide better education opportunities to underprivileged children of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



In brief

Cars with tinted glasses banned

TANK (INP): The district administration Tank has imposed a ban on plying vehicles with tinted glasses by enforcing Section 144 across the district. According to notification, the order would remain enforced for a period of 10 days until January 15 or unless withdrawn or modified, imposing a ban on displaying or brandishing of arms, ammunition and plying of vehicles with tinted glasses. It says due to the prevailing law and order situation and recent terrorist attacks on police personnel at various places of Tank district, the ban has been imposed to ensure public peace and tranquility. It said that anyone found violating the ban would be punished under section 188 P.P.C.

Father kills daughter

DADU (INP): In a shocking incident, a father shot dead his 16-year-old daughter for refusing to marry in Sindh's Dadu district, police said on Sunday. According to details, the man opened fire at his daughter Firdous Rafiqan and later shot himself after girl refused to marry on his will. The incident was reported in the limits of Bhand Mari Police Station in Dadu's Mehar. The victim's brother, Wassim, said his father wanted to marry his sister and on refusal, she was shot dead. Police say the victim's body has been transferred to the hospital for legal formalities. It should be noted that before that the brutal man in Gujranwala had taken the life of a wife and a 13-year-old daughter, the accused was tried to be caught by the locals of the area but he escaped.

Man strangles wife to death

GUJRANWALA (INP): A man strangled his wife to death and set her body on fire in jurisdiction of Ladhewala police station in Gujranwala, police said on Sunday. Accused Sajid strangled his wife Mariyum by wrapping electric wire around her roll neck. After killing wife, the culprit set her body on fire by sprinkling petrol and fled the scene. The deceased had married the accused six months earlier after taking divorce from her first husband. The police registered a case against murderer of wife and started raids for his arrest.

Police ensures security

MULTAN (APP): Foolproof security arrangements were made on the occasion of Sunday prayers in churches across the district under the directions of CPO Sadiq Ali. The concerned SPs, SDPOs and SHOs checked the police officials as per the security plan and briefed them about duty. Along with the security personnel in Civil clothes, the allied agencies also monitored the surrounding environment and the activities of unrelated persons. On this occasion, CPO Sadiq Ali directed police officers and jawans on the duty of churches to remain alert while performing their duties.

Anti-polio drive starts today

SARGODHA (INP): A five-day anti-polio drive begins today (Monday), in which 663,793 children under five years of age would be administered anti-polio vaccine in the district. This was stated by Chief Executive Officer Health Authority Dr Aslam Asad here on Sunday. He said that to make the polio campaign a success, 3,331 teams including 169 UCMOs, 612 area in-charges, 3,036 mobile, 206 fixed and 89 transit teams would be formed in 167 union councils.

Healthcare development: Important role of graduates recognized

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali on Sunday recognized the important role of graduates in the ongoing development of healthcare and emphasized the importance of their contribution to the wider healthcare landscape.

He said this while addressing KMU-IMS & KIDS Kohat 1st most annual convocation 2024.

He said that the role of medical and dental graduates play in shaping the wider health landscape is commendable.

Chief Guest Governor Haji Ghulam Ali congratulated the graduates of Medical and Dental Colleges and Gold Medalists. He appreciated their unwavering dedication to medical knowledge and their outstanding efforts.

Highlighting the importance of the convocation, the Governor thanked VC KMU Prof. Dr. Ziaul Haq, Principals, and all the attendees for making the event a memorable gathering for teachers, proud graduates, parents, and distinguished guests.

During the ceremony, Governor Haji Ghulam Ali announced that 286 students were awarded MBBS and BDS degrees. He termed awarding gold medals to 200 students as a great honor for colleges, KMU, and their parents.

The Governor praised the important role of KIMS, KIDS, and KMU in shaping the future healthcare workforce.

He said that these gradu-

ates will use their tireless efforts and ability to raise the quality of healthcare not only in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but in the whole of Pakistan.

Vice Chancellor KMU Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq, while presenting the welcome speech, described the participation of Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other distinguished guests in this convocation ceremony as wonderful.

He also deeply acknowledged the continuous support from the parents and congratulated the all medical and dental graduates, gold medalists including their parents.

He expressed confidence in their abilities to improve access and the quality of healthcare, recognizing that their achievements will continue to play a significant role not only in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but also globally.

Dr. Zia Ul Haq said that the world is looking to them for their future, aspirations, and partnership.

He described the convocation as a collective celebration, highlighting academic achievements.

He said that these graduates are now equipped with in-depth knowledge and skills related to health and are ready to serve, hoping that these students will contribute to the development of the healthcare landscape across the country.

On this occasion, Vice Chancellor Prof Dr. Zia Ul Haq, Registrar KMU Inam Ullah Khan Wazir, Former Vice Chancellor KMU Prof

Dr. Hafeezullah, Dean Basic Medical Sciences KMU Prof Dr. Rubina Nazli, Dean Clinical Sciences Prof Dr. Fauzia Gul, Principal KIMS Prof. Dr. Musarat Jabeen, and Principal KIDS Prof. Dr. Fahimullah participated.

Principal Musarat Jabeen congratulated the graduating doctors, faculty members, and parents.

Dr. Musarat thanked the attendees for making the auspicious occasion of the KIMS and KIDS convocation ceremony a memorable event.

She highlighted the 18-year scenario of KIMS and KIDS, proudly acknowledging the graduation of students in the fields of MBBS and BDS.

She expressed pride in the excellent educational quality and services provided by the institutions.

Dr. Musarat emphasized that these graduates will uphold the reputation of their colleges and Khyber Medical University through their dedication in the field of medical and dental, not only in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but also in the entire country.

Dr. Jabeen also demanded funds from Governor KP for the construction of College Road, Auditorium Hall and Boys Hostel.

During the ceremony, former Vice Chancellor of KMU Prof. Dr. Hafeezullah, Prof Dr. Aziz Marjan, Prof Dr. Shujat Ali Khan and Dr. Umar Ayub Khan were also honored with the Lifetime Achievement Awards.

DC inaugurates anti-polio campaign in Larkana

LARKANA (APP): The Deputy Commissioner Larkana Dr. Sharjeel Noor Channa on Sunday inaugurated a six-day National Polio Campaign by administering Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) to children up to the age of five years at EPI Centre, CMC Children Hospital Larkana.

The drive is being launched by the Health Department and will continue till January 13, 2024, throughout the district.

Speaking on the occasion, DC Larkana said that eradication of polio is a challenge for the whole nation and everyone has to perform an important role in achieving this national cause. He expressed the hope that during the immunization drive, all children across the country would be administered anti-polio drops for up to five years of age.

In this regard, he said that the officials of the

health department are working hard with dedication, honesty and full devotion to making a disease-free district.

He directed the mobile Teams which were established by the Health Department they should ensure to administrate polio drops to children under age five.

He advised the Parents, Teachers, representatives of NGOs and Scouts to realize their responsibilities and cooperate with Mobile teams during the campaign.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Larkana also visited CMC Children's Hospital and reviewed arrangements made for patients suffering from various diseases.

During his visit, he enquired about the problems of patients and directed the Medical Superintendent of CMC Hospital to ensure the provision of proper healthcare

facilities in all wards and the OPD Block of the Hospital.

He also visited various departments of CMC Children's Hospital Larkana, including the emergency ward, medical general ward, emergency ward for newborn children, new oxygen plant, and medical store.

He took notice of the shortage of Medicines in the hospitals, poor cleanliness and security issues.

DC Larkana directed the concerned authorities to resolve the basic problems of the patients and warned the negligent officials and take stern and legal action against them.

The Director Health Services Larkana division, the Medical Superintendent of CMC Hospital Larkana, DHO Larkana, Representatives of WHO, UNICEF and other officials of the Health Department were present on the occasion.

Training for hospital waste management held

SARGODHA (APP): Training for hospital waste management was held at Dr Faisal Masood Teaching Hospital here on Sunday.

According to a handout, the ninth session/ phase of waste management system training was organized under the management of District Health Authority Sargodha, PMA and Private Hospital Association Sargodha.

Divisional focal person Dr. Sikandar Hayat Warraich, Faisal Rashid from Infection Control Department and program Director District Health Development Center Dr. Ayesha Wajid, District

Manager Infection Control Department Faisal Rasheed participated in the training.

Dr Ayesha Wajid imparted trained to healthcare workers including doctors, nurses, operation theatre assistants (OTAs) and Class IV employees of various private hospitals, clinics and laboratories. The trainers imparted training regarding how to collect hospital wastes, its transportation and method of its disposal.

Over 350 employees of private hospitals have been trained so far. Later, certificates were also distributed among all participants in the training.

Security arrangements

The district police made strict security arrangements at churches in Sargodha and other parts of the district here on Sunday.

A spokesman for district police said here that District Police Officer Muhammad Faisal Kamran had ordered foolproof security for churches and all other religious places of the Christian community.

An adequate number of police officers and personnel were deployed in and around churches. Personnel of Elite Force, Traffic Police and other law enforcement agencies were also deployed at important points on Sunday.

Parents not to allow underage to drive

SARGODHA (APP): Deputy Superintendent of Traffic Police Muhammad Arshad Gondal said that parents should not allow underage children to drive.

Talking to APP here on Sunday, he appealed to parents not to endanger their children's lives by letting them drive at a young age because they do not have the road sense, panic in difficult times, lose control of the vehicle and become victims of accidents.

The DSP Traffic said that in this regard, IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar and DIG Traffic Police Mirza Faran Baig have issued

special instructions to the traffic police to take legal action to stop underage children from driving so that the lives of citizens could be protected.

He said that citizens should obtain their driving licences as soon as possible and if any citizen has any problem, they could come to his office directly without any reference.

Muhammad Arshad Gondal said that the media could play an important role in this regard and convey an appeal to people that they should not endanger their children's lives and never hand over their vehicle to them.

Development projects reviewed

SIALKOT (APP): Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Zulqarnain has said that Rs.10.1 million will be spent on the project under the supervision of the district council for the restoration of 8 km long streetlights from Sambrial Chowk to Sialkot International Airport and the project would be completed by the end of this month.

He expressed these views while reviewing the progress of work. CO District Council Ulfat Shehzad was also present.

Later, Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Zulqarnain also reviewed the project of 3-story District Education Complex Sialkot at a cost of Rs. 177 million under the supervision of the Building Department. SDO Building Chaudhry Ijaz said that 70% construction had been completed. The DC directed completion of the project at the earliest.



HYDERABAD: A view of fog in Hyderabad City.

Qadir hails decision of restructuring FBR

QUETTA (APP): Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Petroleum and Resources and Economic Affairs, Senator Muhammad Abdul Qadir on Sunday welcomed the decision of the restructuring of FBR to make it able to achieve the goals.

In a statement issued here, he said that another major challenge for the FBR is to increase the scope of the tax net.

He said that over a million people do not pay tax at all, adding that unless they are brought into the tax net, it will not be possible to achieve the revenue collection targets.

He said that a policy board consisting of bureaucrats, technocrats and tax experts should be formed which would be able to achieve the goals for the coming years by examining all the complexities.

Abdul Qadir said political interference and transfer posting issues in FBR are adversely affecting the performance of the institution.

The FBR's Policy Board will be consisted on highly qualified experts to run the tax authority in a professional manner, so that the tax collection authority can be run in a professional manner, he said.

The Chairman Standing Committee said that the tax machinery would be divided into FBR and FBC. The officers appointed at the district level should ensure 100 percent tax collection in anyway, he added.

He said the promotions and rewards for the best and poorly performing officers in achieving tax collection targets should be implemented.

RPO visits police station

SARGODHA (APP): Regional Police Officer Shariq Kamal Siddiqui on Sunday visited the cantonment police station and Police Khidmat Center along with DPO Muhammad Faisal Kamran.

He said that the prime duty of police is to protect the lives and property of people. District Police Officer Muhammad Faisal Kamran briefed the RPO on the latest facilities.

The RPO reviewed the record of the police station, applications received at the front desk and the progress of cases under investigation.

He inspected the lockups and inquired about the prisoners.

RPO Shariq Kamal Siddiqui also met citizens, who had come to the Police Khidmat Center and inquired about the facilities from them. The citizens welcomed the new changes and called it a revolutionary step.

Police recovers 680 liter fuel during crackdown

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (INP): The district police have recovered 680 liters of diesel and petrol on the fifth day of the ongoing crackdown against illegal fuel agencies across the district, said a police spokesman on Sunday.

He said that following the directions of District Police Officer Abdul Rauf Babar Qaisrani a crackdown has been launched against illegal fuel agencies across the district.

The police have registered cases against eight persons involved in the business of illegal fuel in different areas of the district.

During the crackdown, the police also recovered two fuel units, nine plastic tanks and 10 bottles.

The DPO said that indiscriminate legal actions would be continued against the business of illegal fuel.

Two accused arrested after exchange of fire

The district police have arrested two accused after an exchange of fire between the police and criminals here in the limits of Daraban police station.

According to police spokesman, a police team led by Daraban Police Station SHO Abdul Ghaffar Khan conducted a raid in

Kot-Laalu area for arrest of four accused.

He said the police party was on the way when four accused opened fire at them near Keekar forest in Kot-Laalu area while the police team also retaliated the firing. As a result, two accused fled from the scene by taking advantage of the forest while two of them named Khurshed son of Moosa Khan, Ali Khan son of Mizey Khan were arrested.

The police also recovered two pistols along with six cartridges from them. The police also registered another case against four outlaws.

2486 outlaws arrested, narcotics recovered

TANK (APP): Tank police have arrested 2486 outlaws including 646 absconders recovering over 395 kg narcotics and a cache of arms and ammunition during various operations conducted against anti-social elements over the last year.

The district police, under the leadership of District Police Officer (DPO) Ifthikhar Ali Shah, registered a total of 2572 cases including 763 against drug dealers, 516 for possessing illegal arms and 69 of aerial firing, said a yearly performance report issued here.

Giving details, the spokesman of the district police said the police while taking actions against the menace of drugs recovered

340.713 kilograms of hashish, 34.698 kilograms of heroin, 3.735 kilograms of Opium and 16.636 kilograms of Ice drug.

Besides, the district police also recovered a cache of arms including 35 Kalashnikovs, 397 pistols, 125 rifles, 23 hand grenades, 42 daggers, one rocket launcher, one bren gun, two M-4 rifles, four Bombs/IEDs, two Kalakov guns and 11044 cartridges during 2023.

Similarly, the Tank traffic police issued a total of 20703 challans including 3621 to motorcycles/auto rickshaws, 183 to vehicles with tinted glasses and 598 to drivers without driving licenses.

The traffic police imposed fines amounting Rs 677760 over different violations of traffic rules in the city during last year.

Moreover, the Dispute Resolution Councils (DRC) set up for immediate resolution of public issues received a total 35 applications during last year. Of these, the 26 applications were decided while the action over the remaining nine applications was underway.

District police officer Ifthikhar Ali Shah appreciated the performance of police force and directed all the police stations to take all possible measures for eliminating all type of crimes from the society.

5 children hospitalized for suffocation

FAISALABAD (APP): Five children of a family were hospitalized due to suffocation in the Samundri police limits.

Rescue 1122 spokesman said here on Sunday that a family had lighted a fire in their house to beat the cold but the fire caused suffocation. As a result, five children of the family, including Zinasha, 18, daughter of Ghulam Muhammad, her sisters Aliya, 15, Eman Fatima, 10, brother Abdullah, 7, and cousin Meerab, 7, daughter of Sadeer, started feeling dizziness. Rescue 1122 shifted them to Allied Hospital.

11 fertiliser dealers arrested: Agriculture officers nabbed 11 fertiliser dealers and sealed 6 shops on the charge of profiteering in the last three days.

Agriculture Director Chaudhary Abdul Hameed said here on Sunday that teams of the agriculture department were active across the district and they took action against the sale of spurious and adulterated fertiliser as well as profiteering.

The teams detected the sale of spurious and adulterated fertiliser at 17 points where shopkeepers were also involved in profiteering. Therefore, the agriculture teams lodged cases against them and 11 accused were arrested on the spot while six shops were sealed and 460 bags of fertiliser were confiscated. The teams also imposed

a fine of Rs142,000 on fertiliser dealers on the charge of profiteering in three days, he added.

Kiln sealed on pollution charges: Environment Protection Department has sealed a brick kiln and imposed a fine of Rs100,000 on its owner on the charge of polluting the environment.

A spokesman for the environment department said here on Sunday that Deputy Director Environment Johar Abbas checked kiln houses and found a brick kiln operational in Chak No. 3-JB Sargodha Road without zigzag technology and polluting the environment. Therefore, he sealed it and imposed a fine of Rs.100,000 on its owner, he added.

Sale of fish rises during winters in Multan

MULTAN (APP): In the midst of the biting cold weather, the sale of fish has witnessed a notable surge in the city, with a multitude of temporary shops springing up to meet the increased demand.

The popularity of this aquatic delight has soared, attributed to its perceived suitability for extreme weather conditions.

Temporary stalls, offering an array of fresh fish varieties, have become a common sight across the city including fish market, MDA Chowk, Pul Baraan, Gardezi Market, Gulshan Market, Chowk Kumhraan, Sameejabad, Chenab River, Muzaffarabad, Mumtazabad, Faiz-e-Chowk and scores of many other areas.

Among the options available, larger fish are

being priced at Rs 600/kg, while smaller varieties are selling at a slightly lower rate of Rs 550/kg. Multan's residents, including individuals such as Ramzan, Arham, Haris, and others, have expressed their delight at the availability and affordability of this winter-friendly delicacy.

According to citizens, fish has become the go-to dish during the prevailing harsh weather, providing not only a tasty treat but also a source of warmth and comfort. The affordability of fish at the current prices has further added to its appeal, making it a popular choice for families braving the cold.

Medical experts, including doctors Waqas Arqam and Dr. Maqbool, have endorsed the consumption

of fish during chilly weather. They highlight its benefits in maintaining normal body temperature, making it a healthy and warming choice for individuals looking to stay resilient against the cold.

As the city embraced the winter, the surge in fish sales not only offered a comforting culinary experience but also provided a welcome economic boost for temporary vendors trying to make the most of the prevailing weather conditions. Muhammad Bilal, a shopkeeper at Faiz-e-Aam Chowk, stated that a large number of citizens were found purchasing fish during the foggy weather. He however expressed pleasure adding that his income increased by many folds for the last few days.



Hindu nationalists denigrate India’s founder Gandhi for advocating Hindu-Muslim unity: WP article

WASHINGTON (APP): Seventy-five years after his assassination, India's founding father Mahatma Gandhi, who is regarded in the West as the exemplar of nonviolent protest, has become a casualty of India's lurch toward Hindu nationalism, a prominent Indian journalist wrote in a leading U.S. newspaper, while highlighting that his killer is now being reimagined as a martyr and hero.

"The Mahatma is now reviled by extremists for failing to establish a Hindu government in India when he had the chance. Instead, Gandhi advocated Hindu-Muslim unity in one secular state," journalist Rana Ayyub, an outspoken critic of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said in her op-ed in The Washington Post.

At the outset, the article pointed out that on Gandhi's 154th birthday anniversary, three of the top 10 trends on X (formerly Twitter) in India celebrated Nathuram Godse, the Hindu fundamentalist who

assassinated the Indian leader. A month before that, it said, at one of the biggest Hindu festivals in India, posters of Godse were displayed along with those of Hindu deities in the state neighbouring Gandhi's birthplace of Gujarat.

Godse blamed Gandhi for the loss of Pakistan during partition (although Gandhi opposed partition), felt Gandhi was pro-Muslim and feared that Hindus would continue to lose ground if Gandhi remained as an influence on the government.

Godse was a member of the Hindu nationalist paramilitary organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is the ideological fountainhead of Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Ms. Ayyub said. And since Modi was first elected in 2014, the narrative blaming Gandhi has taken hold.

"On Colaba, a bustling, touristy street in Mumbai, a seller of memorabilia across from the Taj Mahal Palace hotel was not impressed when

I picked a bronze souvenir depicting Gandhi on the 1930 Dandi March, protesting Britain's tax on salt. He said the only people who buy things like that are 'White foreigners'," Ms. Ayyub wrote.

"The merchant, who hails from Gujarat, did not wish to be named but told me that a new generation of Indians has a different opinion of the man referred to as 'the father of the nation.' He tells me that Gandhi partitioned India to appease Muslims and appear as a humanist to the world."

"The world loves to put pseudo-secularists like him on a pedestal but we are now aware of his reality," Ms. Ayyub quoted the merchant as saying. "This school of thought is not an aberration. Modi has referenced M.S. Golwalkar, who led the RSS at the time of the assassination, as a major inspiration. It was Golwalkar who had stated at a rally of the Hindu right-wing on Dec. 7, 1947, that 'Mahatma Gandhi wanted to keep the Muslims in India so

that the Congress [party] may profit by their votes at the time of election ... We have the means whereby such men can be immediately silenced, but it is our tradition not to be inimical to Hindus. If we are compelled, we will have to resort to that course too.' A month later, Gandhi was killed.":

Ms. Ayyub wrote: "At the Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat, one of the homes of the Mahatma, I encountered teenagers posing for selfies and picnicking on the lawn. When I asked questions about Gandhi, they seemed uninterested; one remembered that his face is on the Indian rupee. A college student mocked Gandhi, writing him off as merely the grandfather of 'Pappu' (a derogatory term coined for Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi, who is not in fact related to the Mahatma).

"Gandhi has never been this unpopular. The 1982 Richard Attenborough biopic about him won eight Academy Awards and introduced a new

generation to the Indian independence fighter. As recently as 2006, a Bollywood blockbuster "Lage Raho Munnabhai" saw Gandhi become cool again on the streets of India. The film depicts a small-time con man who in an attempt to win back his lost lover goes through a transformation as he accidentally runs into the works and writings of Gandhi. Through Gandhi's ideas of nonviolence, social justice and secularism, the protagonist is able to fight societal evils and in the process win back his idealistic lover.

A catchy blockbuster song reminisces about the life of Gandhi and invokes him to return from the dead to save the country.

"However, since ultranationalist Hinduism took hold, Gandhi's image has floundered. In 2019, a prominent member of parliament from Modi's BJP, Pragya Singh Thakur, called Godse a 'patriot' on the floor of the house. Only after a national outcry

did Modi condemn her words, calling them 'very bad and very wrong for society.'

"Still, the Hindu Mahasabha, another extension of the RSS, now celebrates Gandhi's murder in public as 'Shaurya Divas' (Bravery Day), and on the 71st anniversary of Gandhi's assassination, in 2019, re-created his murder for the cameras to loud applause from followers. In June of this year, Modi's Union Minister, Giriraj Singh, called Gandhi's assassin 'India's good son' while speaking to reporters during a tour. The Congress Party's general secretary, K.C. Venugopal said, 'The PM's silence tells you he approves of their every word.' 'Over the past several years, history textbooks in India have been revised to excise facts that don't support the favoured narrative.

The background of Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse ... and the fact that Gandhi stood for Hindu-Muslim unity and opposed Hindu majoritarianism after

Independence have all been removed,' Outlook magazine revealed this year.

"Atul Dodiya, one of India's leading artists, is trying to keep the Mahatma alive through his paintings and retrospectives. An artist deeply influenced by Gandhi, he says his 1997 work on him titled 'Lamentation' was a result of the despair he felt after one of the worst communal riots in the history of India, the Mumbai riots that followed the 1992 demolition of the iconic Babri Masjid by leaders of the BJP and the RSS. He says it was the ultimate assault on Gandhian ideas. More than two decades of documenting Gandhi, and more than 200 paintings for various galleries later, he is trying to preserve the hope that India will not turn its back on the man who sacrificed his life for the freedom of the nation.

"But in today's India, the prime minister invokes Gandhi only when he needs him, usually in international gatherings."

US defense chief pledges transparency after hospitalization

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Saturday accepted responsibility for failing to disclose a recent hospitalization, following reports that even top White House officials and President Joe Biden were in the dark that he was ill and unable to carry out his duties.

The Pentagon waited until Friday evening to announce that Austin, 70, had been hospitalized four days prior "for complications following a recent elective medical procedure" -- a breach of standard protocol at a time when the United States is embroiled in the Middle East crisis.

NBC News reported Austin was in the intensive care unit for four days.

He remained at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on Saturday and a discharge date was not yet known, a Defense Department spokesperson said.

"I recognize I could have done a better job ensuring the public was appropriately informed. I commit to doing better," Austin said in a statement.

"But this is important to say: this was my medical procedure, and I take full responsibility for my decisions about disclosure."

He added that he would be "returning to the Pentagon soon," thanking doctors and staff at Walter Reed for their care.

Austin resumed "full duties" Friday evening, the Defense Department spokesperson said.

Austin's hospitalization comes with tensions soaring in the Middle East as a result of the Israel-Hamas war, with Iran-backed forces in Yemen striking shipping lanes while others in Iraq and Syria are attacking US troops with rockets and drones.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks was prepared to step in during Austin's illness, and

made some routine decisions on his behalf during the time, a Defense Department spokesperson told AFP.

Politico was the first of several media outlets to report that Austin had been in the hospital for three days before Pentagon officials told National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and other top White House officials.

Sullivan then informed Biden, the outlet said. It also reported that Congress found out about Austin's hospitalization 15 minutes before Friday evening's public statement. A White House official on Saturday did not discuss the timing of when Biden was informed of Austin's absence but said the two men "spoke this evening and it was a warm conversation."

"The President has full confidence in Secretary Austin. He's looking forward to him being back at the Pentagon," the official

told AFP. US Senator Tom Cotton, a Republican member of the Armed Services Committee, demanded an explanation.

"The Secretary of Defense is the key link in the chain of command between the president and the uniformed military, including the nuclear chain of command, when the weightiest of decisions must be made in minutes. If this report is true, there must be consequences for this shocking breakdown," he said in a statement Saturday. The Pentagon Press Association, comprised of journalists who cover the Defense Department, expressed "significant concerns" over the apparent cover-up. "The public has a right to know when US Cabinet members are hospitalized, under anesthesia or when duties are delegated as a result of any medical procedure," the group said in a letter to the Pentagon press secretary.

‘Barbenheimer’ heads to the Golden Globes

LOS ANGELES (AFP/APP): "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer," the unlikely pair of films that dominated the box office and spawned countless viral memes last summer, head to Sunday's Golden Globes as the favorites to claim the rebooted gala's top movie prizes.

Dubbed "Barbenheimer" after they were released on the same weekend and grossed a combined \$2.4 billion, the two movies boast 17 nominations between them at the Globes, which will kick off Hollywood's prize-giving season this year under new ownership.

"They are so different than each other, yet they were both successful," Globes producer Glenn Weiss told AFP. "We're thrilled that they're both very represented here."

Greta Gerwig's "Barbie," which turned nostalgia for the beloved doll into a sharp satire about misogyny and female empowerment, leads the way with nine nods.

It is tipped to win awards for best comedy film and best screenplay, and boasts three of the six contenders for best song. As the year's highest grossing movie, it is also likely to claim a newly created trophy for box office achievement.

Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer" -- which

tells the story of the inventor of the atomic bomb -- has eight nominations.

The favorite to win awards for best drama film, best director, and best score, "Oppenheimer" focuses on the rivalry between a brilliant scientist and a powerful politician, played by Cillian Murphy and Robert Downey Jr. respectively. They are strong contenders for best lead drama actor and supporting actor.

The ongoing hype surrounding "Barbenheimer," even months after the films' releases, is a welcome boon to the new owners of the high-profile but consistently scandal-dogged Golden Globes. Private investors including US billionaire Todd Boehly purchased the awards after years of controversy and declining audiences, and have invested heavily in resetting a night once billed as "Hollywood's biggest party." The Globes -- which for decades have offered huge publicity and a timely boost to Oscars hopefuls -- were boycotted by the industry after allegations of corruption and racism rose to the surface in 2021.

The show was taken off air entirely in 2022, and several A-listers skipped last year's edition.

Since then, the rowdy, obscure group of Los

Angeles-based foreign journalists that created the Globes 80 years ago has been disbanded, and a wider net of overseas critics was brought in to choose this year's winners.

"It's been a big reset for the Globes," said Weiss.

Despite the Globes' recent travails, Weiss hopes A-listers will be keen to finally celebrate together again, after an annus horribilis in which the industry was crippled by strikes.

Stars who were unable to promote their movies during the months-long Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) walkout may use the occasion to make up for lost time on the Oscars campaign trail.

Along with movie stars like Leonardo DiCaprio ("Killers of the Flower Moon"), nominees include big names from the world of music such as Billie Eilish and Dua Lipa -- both for best song -- and Taylor Swift for her recent concert movie. Presenters include Ben Affleck, Jodie Foster, Kevin Costner and Matt Damon. "We want this to be a great opening season party that everybody feels that energy from. We all have lived through strikes together. We all are now out of that," said Weiss.

Just don't expect the Globes scandals and consequent reforms to be mentioned by organizers.

"I kind of think that's been said," said Weiss. "Right now we're just making a party."

If Murphy loses out on best actor in a drama, it will likely be to Bradley Cooper, who plays Leonard Bernstein in "Maestro."

Cooper is also nominated for directing, and would be the first person ever bestowed acting and directing gongs for the same movie.

Elsewhere, Indigenous actor Lily Gladstone is a firm favorite for lead drama actress for her role in Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon," which has seven nominations overall.

"The Holdovers" could have two acting winners in Paul Giamatti and Da'Vine Joy Randolph, as a curmudgeonly history teacher and cook of a 1970s prep school, respectively.

Emma Stone is the frontrunner for best comedy actress for her no-holds-barred turn in surreal, sexy bildungsroman "Poor Things."

On the television side, "Succession," "The Bear" and "Beef" are expected to dominate the categories for drama, comedy and limited series, respectively. Comedian Jo Koy hosts the 81st Golden Globes, which airs in the United States on CBS and Paramount+ from 5:00 pm (0100 GMT Monday).

Woman in 90s pulled from rubble five days after Japan quake

SUZU (AFP/APP): A woman in her 90s trapped for five days under the rubble by a huge earthquake in central Japan was rescued against the odds, but snow and storms were expected to complicate relief efforts on Sunday.

At least 126 people died in the magnitude-7.5 tremor on New Year's Day and its aftershocks -- a toll that is sure to rise, with 222 others reported missing to local authorities.

The jolt and its aftershocks toppled buildings, sparked a major fire and triggered tsunami waves of over a metre.

The hope of finding survivors usually fades three days after a destructive quake.

But the elderly woman spent five days under the wreckage of a collapsed house in the city of Suzu before being saved on Saturday.

She was taken to hospital for treatment and was responding clearly to questions, according to public broadcaster NHK.

"Hang in there!" rescuers were heard calling to the woman in police footage from the scene published by local media.

"You're gonna be OK!" they shouted as rain fell around them. "Stay positive!" A Tokyo police spokesman confirmed to AFP that the rescue had been carried out by officers from Tokyo and Fukuoka, but could not give further details.

Many communities on the Noto Peninsula, where Monday's quake struck, have been cut off by damaged roads, with some of the estimated 1,000 landslides also blocking aid vehicles. Cold rain was forecast to turn to snow by Sunday afternoon in the peninsula on the Sea of Japan side of the country's main Honshu island.

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US regulator orders inspections on some Boeing MAX 9 planes after emergency

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): The US air safety regulator announced Saturday it was grounding some Boeing 737 MAX 9 airplanes pending inspections, a day after a panel blew out of one of the planes over the western state of Oregon.

The Federal Aviation Administration "is requiring immediate inspections of certain Boeing 737 MAX 9 planes before they can return to flight," the agency said on X, the former Twitter.

The agency said around 171 aircraft worldwide would be affected, with each inspection taking four to eight hours.

"Safety will continue to drive our decision-making," the FAA statement said. Alaska and United Airlines fly the largest number of MAX 9 planes, while Icelandair and Turkish Airlines have smaller fleets of these aircraft. Boeing has so far delivered some 218 737 MAX 9 planes worldwide, the company told AFP.

US-based Alaska Airlines grounded all 65 of its Boeing 737 MAX 9 planes on Friday after a flight carrying 171 passen-



gers and six crew was forced to make an emergency landing, with passengers saying a window panel blew out after takeoff.

Alaska Flight 1282 had departed from Portland International Airport and was still gaining altitude when the cabin crew reported a "pressurization issue," according to the FAA.

The plane quickly returned to Portland and there were no major injuries. Images posted on social media showed a side panel of the plane blown out, with emergency oxygen masks hanging from the ceiling.

"Following tonight's

event on Flight 1282, we have decided to take the precautionary step of temporarily grounding our fleet of 65 Boeing 737-9 aircraft," Alaska Airlines CEO Ben Minicucci said in a statement Friday.

"Each aircraft will be returned to service only after completion of full maintenance and safety inspections," he said.

Passenger Kyle Rinker told CNN a window popped off soon after take-off. "It was really abrupt. Just got to altitude, and the window/wall just popped off," he told the broadcaster. The Oregonian newspa-

per quoted passengers as saying no one was sitting in the seat next to the panel, but that a young boy in the middle seat had his shirt ripped off by the sudden decompression, injuring him slightly.

Another passenger, Vi Nguyen, told The New York Times that a loud noise during the flight had woken her. "I open up my eyes and the first thing I see is the oxygen mask right in front of me," Nguyen told the newspaper. "And I look to the left and the wall on the side of the plane is gone." "The first thing I thought was, 'I'm going to die,'" she added.

Citing footage shared by alleged members of the Familia Michoacana on social media and interviews with unnamed sources in the area, local media reported that 30 people had died after a drone attack.

In the footage shot in the desert, heavily armed men dressed in military clothing were shown piling bodies - some naked, their clothes scattered around the ground - on the hood and the rear of a red pickup riddled with bullet holes.

Some of the men appeared to have limbs

cut off and at least one had a head missing.

A severed head is shown being arranged atop the human pile by one man while another, holding the camera and filming the pickup from all sides, says in heavy Mexican swear words to "send more." Since being posted on Friday night, the video racked up 3.1 million views on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter.

Reuters was unable to independently verify the video, but several local media later published widely-shared videos

showing what appeared to be the same pickup and burned bodies.

Mexican authorities in the statement said they were aware of a "confrontation between the criminal groups of Familia Michoacana and Los Tlacos, which have a running dispute for control of the area." Police investigators in the area found no evidence of other crimes, the statement said, adding that villagers had declined to give DNA samples that would allow for the identification of the remains and advance investigations.

Mexican authorities investigate massacre after rival criminal groups clash in remote desert

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Israel’s plan for Gaza

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is currently on a weeklong trip to the Middle East after assigning a new task from Tel Aviv to initiate talks for a possible ceasefire and truce along with lobbying for a future governing mechanism for Gaza, the Palestinian territory being ruled by Hamas since 2007. During the first leg of the trip, Secretary Blinken reached Ankara and held hour-long meetings with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan on multiple issues relating to Turk-US relations, Sweden’s NATO bid, Hamas-Israel conflict, and the future of the Gaza Strip. After, Turkiye, and Greece, Blinken will be heading to UAE, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Israel, and the West Bank to discuss the ongoing conflict, the current humanitarian situation in Gaza, the release of hostages, expansion of humanitarian and relief operations, talks for the truce and future governing mechanism for Gaza.

After turning the Gaza Enclave into rubles through continuous bombardment, and shelling, Israel and its close ally, the United States currently moving toward the next stage of the Middle East plan that aims at further bifurcating the Palestinian land into small pieces, ruled by Committees comprising of several individuals with impaired autonomy and fractured nationhood. A strategy that will sew the seeds of disunity and internal fight within the Palestinians, keep them financially and militarily weak while enabling Israel to prey on them all individually as and when needed. At the same time, such a mechanism would prove to be the last nail in the coffin of the decades-old Palestine cause which is already on the deathbed after Israel and the United States concluded the Madrid Accord and the so-called Abraham Accords with PLO and regional Arab states respectively.

Historically, poor Palestinians are internally divided and polarized, as the months-long deadliest war in Gaza failed to move them toward unity against their staunch enemy to get freedom from Israeli occupation. The Israeli Army has been simultaneously targeting the West Bank and Gaza but Abbas-led Palestinian authority did not declare war against Israel due to the fear of losing power of a disabled government in the West Bank. At the same time, Palestinian warring groups are linked with opposing Arab blocs, as the Palestinian Authority is being backed by the KSA, the UAE, Jordan, and Kuwait, while Hamas enjoys support from Qatar, Iran, Egypt, and Turkiye. Interestingly, all Arab and Non Arab nations are using the Palestine card to garner their national objectives, securing their political, economic and military goals through bargains for or with the Palestine issue.

Washington wants countries in the region, including Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to play a role in reconstruction, governance, and potential security in the Gaza Strip after Israel succeeded in eradicating Hamas’s military infrastructure from war-torn territory. Turkey has relationships with many parties in the conflict, including Iran and the Palestinian militant group Hamas. The US allies Qatar and Egypt also host top Hamas leaders and could play a significant role in the fulfilment of the Israeli agenda being propelled by the United States. Secretary Blinken is stressing the regional leaders the need to work toward broader, lasting regional peace that ensures Israel’s security and advances the establishment of a Palestinian state at a suitable moment in the later stage but practically the US and Israeli plans have the sole divide and rule agenda for both, Palestinians as well as the Arabs and non-Arab Muslim countries to chase the idea of greater Israel, which protect western interests in the broader Middle East and North Africa region.

The stage is all set and cards are being used meticulously by Israel and its Western allies. The unforgettable sacrifices of Hamas and Gazans have provided another opportunity for Palestinian and Arab leadership not to show weakness and firmly stick with the Palestinian cause if they intend to realize the undying dream of their forefathers. Otherwise, they should be ready to suffer humiliation and wait for the time when the enemy repeat this episode with other nations in the region.

Education issues in Pakistan

Caretaker Chief Minister Sindh, Justice Retired Maqbool Baqar has emphasized that the teaching profession is the backbone of any nation and a strong teaching workforce is crucial for the sustainable development of any country. According to him, a nation’s sustainable development is reliant on the strength and capacity of its teachers who have the potential to shape the future and elevate society.

The state-run public school system in Pakistan has faced multiple challenges related to infrastructure, lack of funds, inadequate resources, shortage of trained teachers, and a lack of quality education. Issues such as overcrowded classrooms, outdated curricula, socio-economic disparities, and religious segregation have contributed to the degradation of the education system and radical fall in literacy rate in the country. After the 18th amendment, education became a provincial subject and the provincial government allocates funds and oversees educational activities within its jurisdiction whereas the federal government and Higher Education Commission perform a regulatory and liaison role at the federal level. Article 25A of the Constitution of Pakistan assures the provision of free & compulsory education up to the secondary level to all children but a polarized educational environment and multiple education systems together with four disciplines of religious education under the Pakistan Madrasah Education Board. Amid such a diverse and complicated educational landscape, improvement in literacy and raising education standards is an all-time and gigantic challenge for administrators.

The successive governments undertook several steps to address education-related issues through reforms aimed at the construction of new schools, induction of qualified teachers, refresher courses of faculty, curriculum updates, and access to quality education for all students including girls. However, financial and administrative issues along with institutional corruption have always marred governments’ efforts. The government also encouraged public-private partnerships and introduced awareness campaigns to emphasize the importance of education, especially for girls and older people. However, there is a dire need for a massive budget increase, induction of highly qualified teachers, and introduction of a countrywide single curriculum at all levels for multiple years, so a huge setback in the education sector might be recouped in the future.

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Netanyahu’s judicial coup is over ... for now

Yossi Mekelberg

Inevitably, there is a sense among most Israelis that life and politics could be, and probably should be, divided between before and after Oct. 7, and what preceded this fateful day is diminished by the war and sheer trauma that ensued.

However, the ruling by the High Court of Justice last week to nullify a law passed by the Knesset in July of eliminating the reasonableness clause to a Basic Law, followed by another ruling that postpones a further amendment that seeks to remove the power of the attorney general to declare a prime minister unfit for office — two major components in the government’s so-called judicial overhaul — were a stark reminder that Israel is not only deeply engaged in a war with Hamas in Gaza, and increasingly with Hezbollah in Lebanon, but for well over a year has been in a battle to save its democratic system.

Due to the importance of the reasonableness clause, a full 15-justice panel heard this case, and it passed its ruling with the slimmest of majorities, with eight justices ruling to strike down the law and seven to uphold it. But this tells only half the story, as 13 of them also wrote in their opinions that the court did have the authority to review Basic Laws and amendments made to them by the Knesset.

Both decisions have demarcated the specific and more general fault lines between the executive branch, supported by the legislative branch, and the judiciary.

In the first place, the court struck down an amendment that would have limited its ability to review the “reasonableness” of government decisions, or in other words, to judge whether actions of the executive branch meet the standard of reasonability.

Without this power, the government would have been granted by law a free hand when it comes to appointments to public positions, including of those who have been charged or even convicted of corruption, leaving the judiciary powerless to overturn such decisions or nullify any other policies that serve those in power and not the country.

If any government in Israeli history has made the case for the importance of the reasonableness standard to be overseen by the judiciary, it is this sixth government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

From its very early days, it has been trying to allow a Knesset member already convicted of corruption while serving as a Cabinet member, and later of tax fraud, to be reappointed as a minister in charge of two major government departments, an appointment that the High Court of Justice ruled, justifiably, to be “unreasonable in the extreme.”

Israel has an unusual system of governance, much of it due to the lack of a written constitution, which can leave a government tempted to take advantage and act in self-

interest instead of the interests of the people.

At the same time, it strengthens the perception of the judiciary as the gatekeepers on behalf of the nation, especially in a parliamentary system whereby the majority among the legislature is the one that forms the government, and hence can be reluctant to provide the necessary oversight of the executive’s

should have no legal or moral right to change legislative and other decisions taken by elected officials.

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Israel has an unusual system of governance, much of it due to the lack of a written constitution, which can leave a government tempted to take advantage and act in self-interest instead of the interests of the people. At the same time, it strengthens the perception of the judiciary as the gatekeepers on behalf of the nation, especially in a parliamentary system whereby the majority among the legislature is the one that forms the government, and hence can be reluctant to provide the necessary oversight of the executive’s (mis)behavior, of fulfilling the missing piece in the democratic checks-and-balances system, and preventing the executive from handing itself limitless power with impunity. The argument usually heard from members of the current coalition is that judges are appointed, unlike politicians who are elected, hence the courts should have no legal or moral right to change legislative and other decisions taken by elected officials. Needless to say, this is sheer populist demagoguery in an attempt to silence the judiciary with its assigned task of making a learned, legal decision on whether the legislature and executive are operating within the boundaries set by the law and democratic principles. Despite its lack of a written constitution, Israel has enacted Basic Laws, which have some constitutional standing and qualities, with the intention that should all of them be fulfilled they would become the country’s constitution. However, due to political complications as a result of fragmentation within the political system — much of it a reflection of that within Israeli society — the work on a constitution has never been completed, so it has been left to the High Court of Justice to provide the legal interpretations that all citizens, including and especially government officials, should abide by.

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within the political system — much of it a reflection of that within Israeli society — the work on a constitution has never been completed, so it has been left to the High Court of Justice to provide the legal interpretations that all citizens, including and especially government officials, should abide by.

Of equal if not more importance is the overwhelming support for the judges’ decision by an overwhelming majority that it is in the court’s authority to exercise a judicial review of Israel’s Basic Laws due to their constitutional status in Israeli jurisprudence, and if necessary intervene in exceptional cases and prevent the abuse of power by either the Knesset or the government.

The reaction from the political system, civil society and the media to the court’s decision was almost predictable, although those who led the protests and the campaign against the unscrupulous and aggressive judicial coup by the Netanyahu government were distinctively more explicit in expressing their satisfaction at having forestalled, at least for now, the country’s march toward a Netanyahu dictatorship; while those who promoted it were less vociferous in their protest against it, especially the main protagonists among them.

Much of the more subdued reaction of the chief culprits of the assault on the democratic system can be attributed to the fact that they are the very same people who are deeply implicated in the failure to prevent the disastrous attack by Hamas on Oct. 7 through their polarizing of the nation, not to mention being behind the failed strategy toward the Palestinian faction that left Israel exposed to external threats.

That has not stopped some of the more extreme elements within the coalition from threatening that when the war is won (whatever that means), they will then return with vigor and continue to undermine the judiciary.

The battle to save Israeli democracy is not over, and preserving the separation of powers and the checks-and-balances mechanisms is an essential and necessary condition, but not a sufficient one.

Israel needs to rid itself, through a general election, of the current anti-democratic government, and then produce a written, liberal-democratic constitution. Moreover, its people and leaders should internalize that there can be no liberal democracy as long as there is an occupation and violation of the rights of an entire nation, which means that not all its citizens are equal in the eyes of the law.

For too long, anti-democratic elements in Israel have been allowed to dominate the political and social discourse. Without its independent judiciary, Israel’s democracy is in existential danger, and it should be praised for reasserting itself in the face of the vicious attacks by democratically elected anti-democrats.

Consumer behavior plays a key role in preventing misuse of data

Ehtesham Shahid

Few among us can avoid the menace of unsolicited marketing calls. Even if you outsmart those that come through a landline, thanks to careful use of caller IDs, if you answer an anonymous mobile call you might find yourself listening to someone inquiring about your level of interest in a property deal or, worse still, promoting one of the online stock-trading fancies that seem to be omnipresent these days.

What lies behind such ordeals are organized data leaks, in which your number is stolen, shared, sold or even traded, all for a quick buck. It is perhaps the worst manifestation of the value of data and the most obvious example of its misuse. Fortunately, use of data can also have profound and beneficial effects on our lives. For example, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when uncertainty hung heavy in the air and individuals and businesses faced unprecedented challenges, a data-driven pivot helped transform the situation.

Data was used to track infection rates and identify geographical hot spots, leading to more effective government guidelines and compliant consumer behavior. It serves as a reminder that data-driven decision-making can help turn the tide in the face of adversity.

Somewhere between these two extremes of data use we find much of what an average data consumer or end user might experience. Corporations are pivoting their businesses around high-volume, high-velocity and high-variety information assets, appropriately labeled “big data.”

A Gartner report titled “Big Data Means Big Business” sums up the transformation that has taken place in recent decades: “Thirty years ago, leading businesses were those that best took advantage of available physical assets; today’s leading businesses are those that best take advantage of available information assets.”

Meanwhile, recent rapid progress in the development of artificial intelligence means businesses can sometimes face big challenges in using their own data, and that of others, to enhance their operations. Some blame this on limited tech infrastructure, including digital and data platforms that cannot meet their demands as yet. But often there are so many good and proven ways to use AI that organizations are simply swamped as they try to decide what options to focus on. They are faced with the problems of having too many choices, and a constant state of flux, as they try to formulate an adequate response.

The significant role of data and its future use has been described in several ways. An IPSOS report describes data as “the currency of a technological cold war.” It said that given the recent proliferation of data-protection initiatives worldwide, there is now more transparency and choice in how consumers are tracked but the picture remains incomplete.

“As we approach a cookie-less world, marketers and data companies will position and evolve their services to maintain business as usual,” it adds.

In simple terms, consumer data is the digital footprint left by consumers as they navigate the online world. This means that safeguarding consumer privacy is a regulatory imperative, to protect individuals from misuse of their data and breaches of privacy. However, this does not absolve consumers of responsibility for their behavior or ethical considerations relating to their online activities.

The World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report 2023 conceded that more sophisticated and extensive dataset analyses will “enable the misuse of personal information through legitimate legal mechanisms, weakening individual digital sovereignty and the right to privacy, even in well-regulated, democratic regimes.”

That places numerous responsibilities on consumers themselves, beginning with awareness of the data they generate and share in the digital world.

Good consumers understand that their online activities — including browsing, social media interactions, and online purchases — leave a digital trail. They should be conscious of the types of data they share, and with whom. Becoming more aware of this reality makes us more responsible consumers. This means we should take the time to review and adjust our privacy settings on online platforms and services we use. We should also try to understand how these settings affect our data exposure and take appropriate steps to protect our personal information.

On one level, the issue is about informed decision-making when it comes to sharing our data. This includes, for example, reading and understanding privacy policies, terms of service, and consent agreements before agreeing to share any information.

Responsible consumer practice also involves data minimization; in other words, only sharing the information that is strictly necessary for a specific transaction or service and avoiding the oversharing of personal details.

To be a good consumer in this day and age requires

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some level of digital literacy. Consumers should be able to recognize common online scams and phishing attempts, and know how to protect themselves from them. Beyond the privacy concerns, responsible consumers might also consider the ethical aspects of their online activities, such as supporting companies and platforms that prioritize ethical data practices and sustainability.

Where there is big data, can artificial intelligence be far behind? AI technology has had a significant effect on data consumption in various ways. It shapes how data is consumed, and is influenced by patterns of data consumption.

AI algorithms can now analyze large amounts of data, including user behavior and preferences, to personalize content and recommendations. The technology is used in digital advertising to analyze user data and deliver targeted ads, and AI-powered tools help organizations analyze large datasets more efficiently. Moreover, AI-driven predictive models can use historical data to forecast future consumer behavior and trends.

As AI continues to advance, its influence on data consumption patterns will grow, further shaping the ways in which individuals and organizations interact with, and utilize, data. Amid these rapid transformations, consumers would benefit from taking steps to avoid reducing themselves to mere data.

A major election year that will shape world for next decade

The year 2023 proved to be an important 12 months in terms of global politics and the economy. Yet 2024 could prove to be an even more pivotal year, especially given the important elections in which an estimated 2 billion people in dozens of nations will head to the polls — more, perhaps, than in any other year in modern history.

Little wonder, then, that the markets are already looking ahead to these eye-catching and potentially game-changing ballots around the world. They begin on Jan. 7 in Bangladesh and include elections in established and emerging great powers, such as the US and India, as well as pivotal middle powers such as Indonesia, Mexico and Russia.

The most-watched ballot, of course, will be the presidential election on Nov. 5 in the US (population 340 million). It seems likely that the incumbent, President Joe Biden, will stand for a second term, despite the 81-year-old's uneven poll numbers.

All eyes are on whether Donald Trump, 77, will be the Republican challenger, which would raise the significant possibility that the political maverick could become only the second person in history elected to the White House for non-consecutive terms. The first was Grover Cleveland, in 1884 and 1892.

While the outcome of the US presidential race is genuinely uncertain, the same cannot be said of the counterpart contest in Russia, on March 15-17. President Vladimir Putin, 71, is seeking a fifth term and widely expected to emerge triumphant in a nation with a population of

more than 140 million.

Indeed, such is Putin's political longevity, a new term will mean he will celebrate a combined 25 years of prime ministership and presidency this year. He is also on track to possibly even surpass Joseph Stalin's near 30-year reign as Russian leader.

Yet while Putin appears to be firmly entrenched in power, he is not politically invulnerable right now, as illustrated by the Wagner mutiny in June last year.

In Taiwan, population 24 million, the Jan. 13 presidential contest is being framed by China, which claims the island nation as its territory, as a choice between war and peace. Beijing has focused its criticism on Lai Ching-te, 64, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's candidate, warning that any attempted push for formal independence for Taiwan will mean conflict. The race to lead Indonesia, the world's fourth-most populous nation, with about 280 million people, is also being widely watched internationally, not least because popular incumbent President Joko Widodo, 62, known as Jokowi, cannot run for a third term because of term limits.

While he might well remain in power for several years, his authority might decay significantly if he fails to deliver the "victory" in the war in Ukraine he promised in February 2022.

From a regional standpoint, it is the Asia Pacific that will perhaps host the greatest number of pivotal elections. In India, polls suggest Prime Minister Narendra Modi, 73, is likely to rule the roost once again when the largest democracy in the world, with a population of more than 1.4 billion, goes to the ballot box between April

Andrew Hammond

and May.

Another leader looking for a renewed mandate is Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, 76, as she seeks further ballot success for the Awami League in a country with a population of about 165 million. While she has earned plaudits internationally for resettling hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, her government has been

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Though he is not on the Feb. 14 ballot himself, his political and economic legacy nevertheless looms large, including the so-called "Jokowinomics" (state-led developmental-

criticized for what is perceived as its increasingly authoritarian rule.

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The race to lead Indonesia, the world's

ism) that have helped bring a new wave of growth to the nation.

Moreover, his son Gibran Rakabuming Raka, 36, is standing as the vice-presidential running mate of Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto, 72, which has sparked criticism that Widodo is trying to establish a political dynasty.

But the Asia Pacific is not the only place where political action is ramping up in 2024. Other notable elections, outside of those in Russia and the US, will take place in Africa, where about a third of the conti-

nent's population will head to the polls, including in coup-hit Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso.

The election in South Africa, which has a population of 60 million and is a member of the expanding BRICS group of nations, might prove to be the most competitive in the post-apartheid era.

Certainly, the long-ruling African National Congress, currently led by Prime Minister Cyril Ramaphosa, 71, which first came to power three decades ago under Nelson Mandela, is likely to win the most votes. But polls indicate that its share of the vote could fall below 50 percent for the first time since it gained power in 1994, raising the prospect of a coalition government.

In the Americas, meanwhile, the 130 million population of Mexico will likely face a choice between Claudia Sheinbaum, 61, who was formerly in charge of Mexico City and is a member of the ruling Morena party, and Xochitl Galvez, 60, a former senator from the main opposition coalition Frente por Mexico, as their next president.

This choice between two women is a welcome first in the country's history and means that come December, Mexico, a nation sometimes known for its machismo, will be run by a female.

The outcomes of few of these high-profile ballots, which feature a large number of candidates in their 70s or older, are clear cut. What is certain, however, is that they will not only shape domestic politics and international relations, but also the global economic and financial landscape in the key decade that lies ahead.

The conceptual roots of the Global South's debt crisis

The widening debt crisis in the Global South largely emanates from a flawed multilateral system. But it also reflects the inadequacies of the dominant analytical and policy frameworks — specifically, their assumptions about the nature of money, the economic possibilities available to currency-issuing governments, and the underlying causes of developing countries' external indebtedness.

Viewed through the lens of Modern Monetary Theory, the limitations of mainstream economic thinking as applied to sovereign-debt crises become even clearer. The basic idea behind MMT is that unlike households or private firms, governments that control their own fiat currency cannot default (assuming their debt is denominated in their own currency). As they are not money-constrained, they can spend to achieve their goals. Their main constraint is the availability of productive capacity, which determines the risk of inflation.

When required resources are not locally available and can be purchased only with foreign currencies, developing countries might be forced to take on the burden of dollar-denominated debt. One could imagine resource-poor or climate-vulnerable countries making such a choice. But this ignores the fact that Global South countries

MMT explains why the most indebted countries, in absolute and relative terms, are not in distress. Consider that Japan's ration of sovereign debt to gross domestic product was 254 percent last year, while the ratio was 144 percent in the US, 113 percent in Canada and 104 percent in the UK. Yet none of these countries is experiencing a sovereign-debt crisis. By contrast, in 2020 Argentina, Ecuador and Zambia had much lower debt-to-GDP ratios when they defaulted on their external obligations.

The main difference is that Japan, the US, Canada and the UK are monetarily sovereign: Their public debt is denominated in their national currency, while their central banks maintain some control over the interest rates applied to that debt. Most governments in the Global South are at risk of insolvency because they borrowed in foreign currencies.

MMT implies that if rich countries desired to provide significant debt relief to the Global South, the main challenges would be coordination — between different creditors and debtors, as well as other relevant actors — and accountability, not affordability. Given that these countries cannot run out of their own currency, there are no financial constraints on canceling in whole or in part the public and publicly guaranteed external debt stock of 131 lower- and middle-income countries (excluding China, Russia and India). This debt stood at \$2.6 trillion in 2022 — an amount less than Germany's public debt.

Why do Global South countries that are currently in or at risk of debt distress borrow in foreign currencies in the first place? Economists' usual answer is that these countries would otherwise lack "money" and "savings." Such a view is based on an erroneous understanding of the nature of money. Currency-issuing governments cannot run out of their own money. Moreover, as the Bank of England has shown, banks are not intermediaries between savers and loan applicants; instead, they

Ndongo Samba Sylla

create new purchasing power every time they extend a loan.

This leads to another important observation derived from MMT: As money is not scarce, anything that is technically and materially feasible at the national level can be financed in the national currency. Developing countries need not issue foreign-currency debt to finance projects that require locally available resources such as labor, land, raw materials, equipment and technologies.

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often earn substantial income from exports. The issue is that a significant proportion of this income is remitted back to foreign investors — many of whom benefit from an inequitable global tax architecture — as profits or dividends. This is on top of the fraudulent practices that result in illicit financial flows.

Between 2000 and 2018, for example, African countries suffered greater financial hardship from profit transfers by foreign investors, dividend repatriation by subsidiaries to their parent companies, and illicit financial flows than from servicing external debt. They issued foreign-currency debt that paid high interest rates partly to plug the gap created by foreign nationals appropriating — both legally and illegally —

vast dollar earnings.

Consider Zambia, a copper-producing country that lost around \$10.6 billion in the form of illicit financial flows between 1970 and 1996 (355 percent of its GDP in 1996), \$8.8 billion between 2001 and 2010, and \$12.5 billion between 2013 and 2015. Zambia's public and publicly guaranteed external debt was \$1.2 billion in 2010, rising to \$12.5 billion by 2021.

If the Zambian government had better fiscal and technical control over its export sector, it would have accumulated sufficient dollar reserves to enhance food and energy self-sufficiency, and to finance investment in infrastructure and other public goods requiring the import of foreign productive capacity. There would have been no need to take on so much foreign-currency debt. The same could be said for other resource-rich African countries.

In a just world, countries subject to asymmetric tax

Houthi anarchy in the Red Sea must be halted now

For several weeks now the Iranian-backed Houthi militia in Yemen have been attacking commercial shipping and international warships in the Red Sea.

According to US Central Command, there have been almost 30 attacks involving anti-ship cruise missiles, armed drones, and hijackings. The targets of most of these attacks have been civilian vessels from countries that have nothing to do with the Israeli war on Gaza, which is the Houthis' purported pretext.

Houthi attacks against shipping in the region are nothing new. At the height of the conflict in Yemen's in 2016, the militia fired missiles at a US Navy warship near the Bab El-Mandeb, the strait that connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. Houthi forces also have deployed mines along Yemen's coast and used a remote-controlled boat packed with explosives in an unsuccessful attack on the Yemeni port of Mokha in 2017. The Houthis have also launched several naval attacks against ships in the Red Sea, including gunboats that damaged a Saudi oil tanker near the port of Hodeidah in 2018.

However, in recent weeks the Houthis have stepped up their attacks to unprecedented levels and intensity. If these attacks continue unabated, the

impact will be felt regionally and globally.

The Red Sea is one of the most important shipping lanes in the world. Some estimates are that 15 percent of global maritime trade passes through it, including almost a third of global container traffic. At a time when energy markets are already in flux, Red Sea maritime traffic includes 8 percent of global liquefied natural gas trade and 12 percent of seaborne traded crude oil. On average, about \$2.7 billion worth of trade passes through the Red Sea each day, equivalent to the annual gross domestic product of the Central African Republic.

As international shipping companies reroute around the Cape of Good Hope away from the Red Sea, the increased delay in shipping times will mean higher prices for consumers around the world. At the same time, low water levels created by a regional drought are causing shipping delays in the Panama Canal. The Northern Sea Route, along Russia's Arctic coastline connecting Europe with Asian markets, is not becoming the viable alternative to the Suez Canal that some had thought. Land trade routes, such as the so-called Middle Corridor through the South Caucasus, will be increasingly used but do not have nearly the same

Luke Coffey

capacity as maritime trade.

The countries around the Red Sea are affected as well. A large majority of Jordan's food imports are from ships transiting the Red Sea to the port of Aqaba. Already there has been a decline in imports through Aqaba. Meanwhile, Egypt depends on the transit fees it levies for use of the Suez Canal. Last year, these fees accounted for 2 percent of Egypt's GDP. In recent weeks transits through the canal have decreased by 20 percent.

Slowly, the international community is starting to mobilize a response to the Houthi attacks. Last month, the US, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, and the UK set up Operation Prosperity Guardian, a naval task force deployed in the Red Sea to protect commercial shipping.

This is not the first time in recent years that the international community has established a naval coalition for the region. Between 2009 and 2012, Somali pirates operating off the Horn of Africa, just a few hundred kilometers south of where the Houthis are threatening maritime traffictoday, caused an upheaval in global shipping. In response, an international counter-piracy

coalition deployed to fight the Somali pirates. As the international community looks to establish maritime security in the Red Sea, lessons should be learned from the counter-piracy operations more than a decade ago.

The first lesson to learn is that there must be a simple and streamlined chain of command. During the counter-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa, there were several international missions (for example, Combined Task Force 151, a NATO led mission, and a separate EU-led mission) which often caused confusion and ineffectiveness. There was no single overarching commander and the rules of engagement differed from one mission to the next.

Second, maritime security operations cannot be fought only at sea. It is understandable that countries do not want a major region-wide war to break out. However, if security in the Red Sea is to be restored, the command nodes and logistics infrastructure in Yemen facilitating attacks on international shipping must be taken out. This was also the case when pirate sites were struck in Somalia. Any notion that a successful maritime security operation will be limited to the sea is hopelessly naive. As long as these strikes are carried out in a surgical and deliber-

erate manner, the risk of war spreading will remain limited and deterrence will be restored.

Third, regional countries should be involved. Although Operation Prosperity Guardian is US led, regional countries have the most to lose if security in the Red Sea deteriorates. Luckily, for the past 20 years, the US Navy has invested heavily in improving the maritime capabilities of some regional countries. Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE have participated in, and in some cases have commanded, different maritime security operations in the Gulf, Red Sea and Horn of Africa. Security in the Red Sea cannot become a US or European dominated issue.

The free flow of shipping through the Red Sea should be a priority for the international community. The economic consequences arising from a major disruption of supplies would ripple across the globe.

Commercial and civilian ships are never a legitimate target for anti-ship cruise missiles and armed drones. Holding the crews of these ships hostage is modern day piracy.

This is unacceptable. This must be made crystal clear, using actions and not just words, to the Houthis and their regional backers.

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg

How UK can play a key role in ending Israel-Palestine conflict

Few European countries have had closer ties to Palestine than the UK, which ruled the country through the Mandate for Palestine for almost three decades and had the most important role in establishing the state of Israel. As such, its views on Gaza and the wider question of Palestine matter very much. London can and should play a greater role in this conflict than has been the case recently.

England's ties to Palestine are centuries-old. It participated in the Second (1145-1149), Third (1189-1192) and Ninth (1271- 1272) Crusades, with nominal involvement in some of the others. The adventures of King Richard (Richard the Lionheart) were the stuff of legend for a long time.

Its modern engagement goes back to the early 19th

century, but it solidified during the First World War. On Nov. 2, 1917, before Britain conquered Palestine, it published the Balfour Declaration, stating that it viewed "with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine." Those "non-Jewish" communities accounted for about 90 percent of the population at the time, according to UN figures.

The next month, British forces seized Jerusalem and then the rest of the country, which was administered by the British for the remainder of the war. In 1919, Britain extracted

control of Palestine through the Paris Peace Conference and appointed Herbert Samuel, a senior official responsible for drafting the Balfour Declaration, as the first high commissioner. In 1920, the League of Nations granted Britain, at its request, a mandate over Palestine to put into effect what it promised in the Balfour Declaration.

Palestine was under British rule for nearly three decades, during which time the country was engulfed in violence. The mandatory power facilitated the establishment of the state of Israel but failed to safeguard the rights of the majority of the population of Palestine. At times, it used excessive violence to suppress Palestinians' protests, while ignoring warnings from Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia, and others around the

world. The region has been in turmoil ever since, with many of the conflicts originating from or heightened by the failure to address the Palestinians' plight.

In 1947, Britain proposed a partition plan without taking into consideration the views of the Palestinians, who accounted for about two-thirds of the population at the time. They opposed the plan and described it as unfair, as it gave Jews more than half of the country even though they accounted for less than a third of the population. Britain got this partition plan approved by the UN General Assembly on Nov. 29, 1947. The plan envisaged the creation of separate Jewish and Arab states, operating under an economic union, and with Jerusalem transferred to UN trusteeship. Two weeks

later, London announced that the British Mandate would end on May 15, 1948. On the last day of the mandate, the Israeli Declaration of Independence was issued.

While scholars differ on the exact textual meaning of the Balfour Declaration and its implications, Britain's actions were unambiguous in facilitating the establishment of Israel in parts of the Palestinians' homeland. Given the bloody history that followed that fateful decision in 1917, including the current war of annihilation being waged by Israel against Gaza, one suspects that there may have been some doubts about the wisdom of that decision and the manner in which it was carried out.

But in fact, the UK appears to still be proud of

that achievement, judging from the centenary commemoration of the Balfour Declaration in 2017. Then-Prime Minister Theresa May said: "So, when some people suggest we should apologize for this letter, I say absolutely not." She added: "We are proud of our pioneering role in the creation of the state of Israel. We are proud to stand here today together with Prime Minister (Benjamin) Netanyahu and declare our support for Israel. And we are proud of the relationship we have built with Israel. And as we mark 100 years since Balfour, we look forward to taking that relationship even further."

There is no question that Britain's efforts played a large part in Israel's founding and that it would take its counsel seriously. The US, Israel's main and at times only backer, frequently defers to London's advice on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Other Europeans equally value the UK's opinion as the country most involved in the modern history of Palestine.

Despite the mixed memories of Britain's mandate in Palestine, many Palestinians and other Arabs value the country's advice, even when they disagree with it. They expect London to play a bolder and more constructive role.

The UK can play that role, especially amid today's polarization in the UN Security Council and the ensuing paralysis in the UN system. The US, the country with the most sway over Israel, is preoccupied with its upcoming presidential and congressional elections.

Arab and Muslim countries have presented serious proposals to address the war in Gaza and the wider Israel-Palestine conflict, calling for full normalization between Israel and its neighbors. What is on the table, the Arab Peace Initiative, is a historic compromise, along the 1967 lines, for two states living side by side in peace and security. Holding the rotating presidency of the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Saudi Arabia is spearheading the combined efforts of these two blocs to engage and reach a resolution to the conflict. They are being supported by the EU and almost every country around the world.

The UK could join these efforts. With its impeccable credentials, historical responsibility and unique role in Palestine, it can make a difference and help those endeavors bear fruit.

Rasheed: No business be allowed to exploit people

ISLAMABAD (INP): Former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt has said that exploitation of rights of citizens was not allowed in developed countries but business in Pakistan was unthinkable without exploitation.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, he said that key sectors and industries were operated without any regulatory oversight in Pakistan, allowing businessmen to rob the masses and promote poverty in the country.

Shahid Rasheed Butt said that in developed countries, no business was allowed to exploit the people and if it was done, it was made an example but the majority of businesses in Pakistan were milking the masses.

Irresponsible and greedy people, whose only aim was to make money, exploit people in the name of business, as most of the big businesses were in their hands, he added.

The business leaders said that many sectors were operating without a regulator and many regulators have been hijacked by big businesses.

For this reason, the wealth and influence of businessmen were continuously increasing while the country's population was getting poorer, he maintained.

He observed that weak oversight has allowed businesses to continuously seize the rights of the people, while the compromised regulators of various sectors burden the national treasury.

Many influential business groups have started

exploiting the people by putting their favourite officers at the head of the regulatory bodies, which was sad, he noted.

Shahid Rasheed said that presently, there was nobody to regulate FBR. The FBR officers also make decisions in case of dispute between the taxpayer and the tax collector and if the taxpayer does not agree with the decision, they appeal in the appellate forum, which takes years to get its result.

Due to this setup, the expected revenue of trillions of rupees is also stuck due to delay, he said, adding that in many cities of the country, including Islamabad, the bureaucracy increases property and other taxes whenever it wants.

The former ICCI President said businessmen dealing in oil, gas and

shares frequently get their favourite people appointed to the most important regulatory positions so that no one can stop them from plundering.

Those responsible for the crises of the stock market have never been punished, while consumers of electricity, gas and oil were also being robbed continuously, but the role of the regulator was no more than a silent spectator, he added.

Shahid Rasheed said that there was nobody to regulate the business of oil and gas production, due to which dozens of companies have fled Pakistan. And we have to import billions of dollars worth of gas.

He said that the whole nation has to bear the consequences of lacking a regulator in the agricultural sector.



KARACHI: Vendors selling fish at Ibrahim Haideri area in City.

Chicken meat, egg prices reach record high

LAHORE (INP): The prices of chicken meat and eggs have reached to record high in Lahore amid soaring inflation.

As per details, the Poultry Association has rejected the list of the hike in chicken meat and egg prices. The association is selling chicken meat at their own prescribed prices, which are higher than the official rates and The Poultry Association has categorically refused to accept the official rate list.

The chicken meat is being sold at Rs 602 per kilogram and egg prices are Rs 384 per dozen in different areas of Lahore as the administration have no control over the prices of chicken.

Last month, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) directed the National Price Monitoring Committee (NPMC) to continue regular coordination with the provincial governments for measures to ensure price stability and to check hoarding and profiteering. The meeting of the cabinet committee was presided over by Caretaker Federal Minister for Finance, Revenue, and Economic Affairs, Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, according to press statement issued by finance ministry.

The decision followed a briefing by PBS on the inflation situation and the latest trends of prices of various essential commodities.

SNGPL cuts off 347 illegal connections for gas theft

F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 347 connections; Rs 3.47 million fine imposed.

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 13 connections on illegal use of gas while another 23 on use of compressor.

In Rawalpindi & Islamabad the team disconnected 98 connections on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 0.30 million have been booked against gas theft cases.

In Multan 25 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 25 on use of compressor. The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.050 million against gas theft cases.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 93 connections on account of direct use of gas and illegal use of gas and also imposed fine of Rs 3.05 million against gas theft cases.

In Mardan the regional team disconnected 04 connections on illegal use of gas while another 12 on use of compressor.

In Sahiwal, three connections were disconnected on compressor use. In Faisalabad 03 connections were disconnected on compressor use.

In Sheikhpura 47 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 0.03million booked against gas theft cases.

The regional team of Sargodha disconnected 01 connection on illegal use of gas.

Regional Trade Agreements vital to reinvigorate growth: VP PBF

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Vice President, Pakistan Business Forum (PBF), Chaudhry Ahmad Jawad has said that devising regional trade agreements among South Asian countries was need of the hour to improve the economic well beings of billions of people; though Pakistan's regional trade was below the desired level which needs to be seen in whole prospective before SIFC.

He said, "In international relations it is a common axiom that a state can change its friends but it cannot replace its neighbours due to geographical compulsions. If neighbours cannot be replaced, ideally a state should enjoy at least cordial relations with its surrounding states if not the best relations".

Talking to the members of FPCCI here on Sunday, Chaudhry Ahmad Jawad said that Pakistan must start putting sustainable and inclusive economic growth, above all we must created a cycle of profligacy and austerity.

As the average annual economic growth between 2010 and 2023 has been lackluster, around 4 percent, and has been accompanied by a rise in

Pakistan's total debt as a share of its GDP, from 55 percent to 76 percent. Bangladesh, in contrast, grew at an annual average of 6.2 percent over the same period, while its debt to GDP ratio rose from 30 percent to 39 percent.

Ahmed Jawad viewed the big step Pakistan could take to reinvigorate growth that would be to embrace trade with its neighbours, which is currently almost nonexistent. "The World Bank research, reveals that Pakistan's exports could increase by 80 percent, with commensurate impacts on GDP and employment, if it had a normal trading relationship with its neighbours".

The PBF official said deeper economic engagement with neighbouring countries could also help address other acute problems in Pakistan's economy, including rampant inflation, which has led to an increase in poverty over the last year; a rent-seeking private sector that constantly lobbies for protection and favorable tax treatment; and the long-standing energy crisis, exacerbated by the ongoing economic calamity.

In this way, a vibrant trading relationship with neighbouring countries can help us understand to realize significant structural gains in an organic rather than mandated manner: by inducing productivity improvement and innovation, reducing price distortions, and enabling higher inflows of foreign direct investment; Jawad said and added such gains are likely to be quite important for the Pakistani economy.

However to find the trade potential we may be use the gravity model of trade. The gravity model uses variables GDP, distance, RTA (Regional Trade Agreements) imports and exports of the reporting and partner countries, common language, tariffs and non-tariff measures, and many other variables concerning trade. The value of trade was directly related to the mass (GDP) of the economy and indirectly related to the distance between them. In short, trade was directly proportional to the product of the GDPs of economies and indirectly proportional to the distance between them.

"Statistically, a one percent change in the tariffs rate will decrease 0.3 percent in Pakistan's total trade. Moreover, a one percent increase in the GDP of the partner coun-

tries will increase Pakistan's total trade by 0.5 percent".

The VP PBF further stated that in 2021-22, Pakistan's major trading partner countries for exports were United States, China, United Kingdom, Germany and Netherlands and for imports they were China, United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, United States and Saudi Arabia.

Similarly for Afghanistan, the Pakistan Business Forum stated that to realise the true potential of trade Pakistan and Afghanistan ought to improve trade facilitation, which at the moment is quite nebulous. The APTTA emphasises upon such facilitation. Trade facilitation could be enhanced through streamlined payments settlement and improved insurance mechanisms. For this, an integrated banking system needs to be developed. Moreover, use of bonded carriers, visa issuance, trade financing, tax collection, and documentation also need to be simplified.

As trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan mounted to \$2.5 billion in 2010 but dropped to \$1.6 billion, registering a slight increase to over \$1.8 billion in 2022-23.

Inflation continues to hurt economic growth: PIAF

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Industrial & Traders Associations Front (PIAF), Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol has warned

the authorities that rising inflation continued to hurt economic growth, demanding a careful policy to keep it in control, as the prices of essential commodities continued to stay away from the reach of the financially vulnerable segments, with data showing the annual short-term inflation well above 40 percent.

In a statement issued on Sunday, he said that the government computes the Sensitive Price Indicator on a weekly basis to evaluate the price fluctuation of necessary commodities by evaluating the rates of 51 items collected from 50 markets in 17 cities of the country. The SPI report for the week ending on January 4 reflected an increase in the rates of 19 commodities, decrease in nine and

stability in 23.

Quoting the data, PIAF Chairman Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol observed that trade and industry have suffered from the doubled-edged sword of food and energy prices with transport inflation peaking to a record 65% while the annual inflation rate increased to 24.9% in 2023.

The SPI for the current week ended on 04th January, 2024 increased by 0.81 percent, the PBS said in its report. Major increase is observed in the prices of Tomatoes (16.04 percent), Chicken (13.98 percent), Eggs (3.20 percent), Onions (3.04 percent), Bananas (2.13 percent), Pulse Gram (2.12 percent), Sugar (2.04 percent), Pulse Moong (1.68 percent), LPG (1.19 percent), Firewood

(0.51 percent) and Georgette (0.23 percent)."

The year on year trend depicts increase of 42.86 percent, it added.

Pakistan's rapidly depreciating national currency and its rising energy imports led to significant inflation, prompting the central bank to retain the policy rate at 22 percent last month to mitigate the situation.

The bank also informed in one of its recent reports to parliament it wanted to prevent high inflation from becoming entrenched in the coming months and hoped to bring it down to nearly 20 percent in the current fiscal year.

Faheem Saigol said that the inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) continued

to increase in the wake of higher prices of food and energy despite a recent cut in the prices of petroleum products, as essential commodities have still not seen a decline in prices, leaving trade and industry frustrated.

The PIAF Chairman observed that the index spiked 38.28 percent when compared with the corresponding week of last year, as out of the 51 essential commodities covered by SPI, prices of 17 (33.33 percent) items increased, rates of another 17 decreased and prices of the remaining 17 items remained unchanged compared to the previous week. On a weekly basis, the price of tomato rose 6.28 percent, egg 3.48 percent, powdered salt 2.75 percent, cooked

beef 1.06 percent, garlic 1.04 percent, tea (prepared) 0.73 percent, beef 0.39 percent and potato 0.35 percent.

Among non-food commodities, the electricity charges for Q1 rose 8.59 percent, energy savers 0.55 percent, shirting 0.47 percent and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) 0.31 percent, according to the PBS.

The year-on-year trend depicted price increases in the range of 58-137 percent among different items. Faheem Saigol said that Pakistan has been facing a high inflation for the past couple of years partly due to massive depreciation of the rupee against the US dollar and partly due to a surge in global commodity prices like

energy cost. The country largely meets its energy demand through expensive imports.

He stressing the need for putting the economy on a sustainable growth trajectory by providing incentives to the industry, lamented that the economy is facing multiple challenges of falling exports, high inflation, low growth and declining foreign reserves, with fiscal accounts under immense pressure on account of heavy interest payments.

Businessmen Panel (BMP) chairman said that the drop shows the government would find it difficult to achieve the industrial growth and export target, leading to more pressure on foreign exchange reserves of the country.

Court Notice

In the Court of Sidra Jalal Civil Judge-Iii/Judicial Magistrate II, Matta Swat. Case # 53/1. Institution 25/3/23. Hearing date 24/01/2024. Mst. Bibi Shahi Ranra VS Bacha Khan etc. Notice to defendant (4/1) Mst. Bakht Khurram widow (4/2) Akbar Ali (4/4) Hayat Ali (4/7) Rahman Ali (4/8) Barakt Ali sons Bacha Khan (4/9) Mst. Sheesh Begum (4/10) Mst. Naseem Akhtar (4/11) Mst. Farhat (4/12) Mst. Hidayat (4/13) Mst. Muneeba (Nabalegha Bawalayat Khud) (4/1) Ghulam Qader s/o Sher Abbas khan (6) Iqbal s/o Ghulam Qader (7) Sherin Zada (8) Muhammad Saeed (9) Muhammad Laiq (10) Muhammad Asghar sons Kabaly (12/3) Pir Zada (12/4) Malik Zada (12/5) Lal Zada (12/6) Shahib Zada (14/1) widow Sajeena (14/2) Saleem Zada (14/3) Akhtar Ali (15) Pir Zada (17) Lal Zada (18) Shahib Zada son's Bakhtayar (19) Abdul Hakeem s/o Fazal Rehman r/o Tangi Shah Gawara Tehsil Matta 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 24/01/2024. Ex-parte proceeding will be held against the mentioned respondents under my hand and seal of this Court.

Solid economic plan needed as uncertainty looms in 2024

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has called for solid economic plan from all the stakeholders, terming the new year of 2024 as the uncertain one in view of deteriorating energy crises following the tough conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund amidst upcoming elections, making this period more complicated and unstable for the economy.

The FPCCI former president and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar said all political parties should provide their economic stability plans to avert further losses and delays, warning that numerous global issues are impacting world economies. He said the upcoming government

should prioritize resolving the energy crisis by providing sufficient and affordable electricity and gas to industries. The import bill should be reduced by imposing bans on luxury products. He highlighted controlling inflation to ensure affordable living costs for the masses and containing the cost of production for businesses at a local level. He pleaded for formulating economic plans aimed at reviving growth in large-scale manufacturing, small and medium-sized segments, the service sector, and exports.

He stressed the need for a revisit of the economic policies, as the economic indicators throughout the 2023 remained very depressed amidst high inflation, low exports, depleting foreign reserves and continued uncertain position of the local currency.

FPCCI former president Anjum Nisar said that almost all indicators of the economy continued to show poor performance during 2023, including volatile exchange rate, unprecedented hike in markup rate, repeated increases in electricity rates, gas shortage, price spiral, mismanagement and bad governance, becoming the hallmarks of the government.

He observed the negative economic indicators and uncertainty over resumption of the International Monetary Fund program continued to push the rupee towards a new historic low against the US dollar especially in first half of the calendar year of 2023.

He said that massive fall of rupee value continued to damage the economy, as the rupee witnessed a huge depreciation; one of the

highest devaluations of local currency in Pakistan's history in this period.

Mian Anjum urged the policy makers to concentrate on increasing tax-to-GDP ratio which was the lowest in Pakistan in the region in 2023.

The BMP leader warned if the government failed to take appropriate measures for economic revival, the trade and industry will face a complete shutdown, asking the government to convene a conference, taking the business community onboard.

The FPCCI former president observed that besides increasing exports and controlling imports the government will have to take administrative measures, as a large demand of cash dollars are seen in the market. He argued that this devaluation of the currency was dictated by the IMF thro-

ugh prior actions and it has nothing to do with macro-economic fundamentals.

He said that there was a complete breakdown of economic policymaking, as the country's fiscal policy had become subservient to monetary and exchange rate policies.

He said that the monetary tightening and exchange rate depreciation resulted in higher inflation, public debt and debt servicing. The empirical evidence showed that the one percent monetary tightening hiked the inflationary pressure by 1.3 percent in the case of Pakistan, he added.

The government needs to devise a strategy on war-footing to increase foreign investment in Pakistan so as to stop the upward trajectory of the dollar, he added.

The rupee during

through the whole year remained uncertain, as the uncertainty pertaining to the IMF program was causing pressure on the Pakistani rupee while the country's foreign exchange reserves have also declined, which was another source of concern for investors, he said.

Media reports called for a fully-fledged and sound plan with a highly competent team to handle local challenges forthwith, but unfortunately, they have no solid plans or directions. The 2023 could be divided into two parts, as a tough time was witnessed until June when there was no IMF program, and the country was near default. Then the IMF program came, the caretaker setup took over, and the first review of the IMF went better, he said, adding that the second review of the

IMF on track would be good. He said when it comes to the second half of 2023, it has brought macro-wise stability relatively.

He foresees the new year full of challenges for businesses and industries in Pakistan due to political uncertainty on global and local fronts.

Although 2024 is considered the year for general elections, fears are looming for a possible political crisis in the country.

The incumbent government should come up with drastic measures to give confidence to local industrialists-cum-entrepreneurs and foreign investors through industry-friendly and investment-friendly policies.

In this regard, the interest rate should be gradually reduced to boost economic activity and industrialization within the country.



In brief

Inter collegiate Hockey tournament

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan Rangers (Sindh) Inter school and Inter collegiate Hockey Tournament will start from January 10 at Olympian Islahuddin and Dr. Muhammad Ali Shah Hockey academy. As many as 12 girls and boys teams will participate in the tournament, a communique said here on Sunday. The tournament will continue till January 15. The tournament will be inaugurated in the morning of January 10. Teams from six boys schools and six girls colleges will participate in the event. Olympian Sameer Hussain has been appointed as the organizing secretary.

Henry denounces death threats

MILAN (Agencies): Thomas Henry has lamented the death threats he and his family received after he missed a last-gasp penalty in Verona's 2-1 defeat at Inter Milan on Saturday. Frenchman Henry, 29, thwacked the post from the spot in the 10th minute of stoppage time at the San Siro, a defeat which left Verona inside the Serie A relegation zone. "To all those people who think they know football better than anyone else and who both insult and wish death on me and my family, I hope that one day in your little lives you'll find peace," said Henry on Instagram. Henry had put Verona level seconds after coming on as a second-half substitute, just his third goal for the club since August as he has been restricted to short appearances off the bench this term after tearing knee ligaments in January last year. However Davide Frattesi netted what turned out to be the winner in the 93rd minute before Henry fluffed his spot-kick.

Kohli, Sharma back in India's squad

NEW DELHI (Agencies): The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Sunday announced a 16-member squad for the upcoming three-match T20I series against Afghanistan, featuring returning Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma. The star batters are set to make their return to the T20I format during the series after a hiatus of more than a year. They haven't played the format since India's semi-final defeat against England in the T20 World Cup in November 2022, prioritizing ODI and Test cricket. Rohit Sharma will lead the team, while Hardik Pandya and Suryakumar Yadav, who captained India in his absence are out with injuries. Pandya led India in T20I cricket since the T20 World Cup 2022, however, he was ruled out during the ICC World Cup 2023 with an ankle injury, which led to Yadav being named captain. Yadav and Pandya both are nursing ankle injuries currently and are expected to achieve full fitness prior to the T20 World Cup. The three-match series against Afghanistan will be India's last T20I series ahead of the upcoming T20 World Cup 2024, which is scheduled to be played in the USA and West Indies. Meanwhile, Afghanistan named a 19-member squad for the series, commencing on January 11 in Mohali. India T20I Squad : Rohit Sharma (c), Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Tilak Varma, Rinku Singh, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Shivam Dube, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Ravi Bishnoi, Kuldeep Yadav, Arshdeep Singh, Avesh Khan, and Mukesh Kumar.



KRANJSKA GORA: Petra Vlhova of Team Slovakia in action during the Audi FIS Alpine Ski World Cup Women's Slalom.

Nadal: Spaniard to miss Australian Open following hip injury

BRISBANE (Agencies): Rafael Nadal will miss the Australian Open and instead return to Spain for treatment on a hip injury he sustained at the Brisbane International.

Nadal, 37, made his long-awaited return after almost a year out with injury this week, winning his first two matches in Brisbane in straight sets.

But he was injured in his quarter-final loss to Jordan Thompson on Friday. Nadal said a scan had shown a micro tear on a muscle but not in the same area as his previous long-term injury.

The Spaniard, who had not played a singles match for 349 days prior to his opening win over Dominic Thiem, said the result was "good news" but he was "not ready to compete at the maximum level".

He said in May, after being forced to miss the French Open for the first time in 19 years, that 2024

would "probably" be the final year of his career, meaning he may have already played his last Australian Open, a tournament he has won twice.

But while his latest injury felt in a similar place to that which led to "one of the toughest years" of his illustrious career, crucially it appears it is not as significant as he initially feared.

"I have worked very hard during the year for this comeback and as I always mentioned my goal is to be at my best level in three months," 22-time Grand Slam champion Nadal said on social media.

"Within the sad news for me for not being able to play in front of the amazing Melbourne crowds, this is not very bad news and we all remain positive with the evolution for the season."

"I really wanted to play in Australia and I have had the chance to play a few matches that made me very

happy and positive.

"Thanks all for the support and see you soon!"

The Australian Open starts in Melbourne on 14 January.

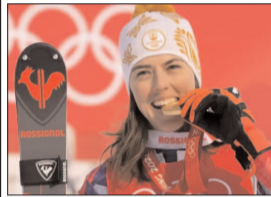
Nadal will now focus on returning to fitness in time for the French Open, which begins on 20 May and where he is a record 14-time champion.

His most recent appearance at a Grand Slam was the 2023 Australian Open, when he struggled with injury in a second-round loss to Mackenzie McDonald.

That was his final appearance on court before having an operation on his left hip in June and the former world number one has since slipped to 672nd in the rankings.

With Nadal's withdrawal, this will be the first Australian Open since 1999 without either Nadal or Roger Federer, who retired in 2022, featuring in the men's singles main draw.

Vlhova wins slalom as Shiffrin suffers rare blunder



KRANJSKA GORA (AFP): Petra Vlhova produced two excellent runs on a difficult course to win the slalom at Kranjska Gora in Slovenia on Sunday while World Cup overall leader Mikaela Shiffrin completed a poor weekend by sliding out in the first run.

Vlhova clocked 51.30 seconds in the tightly-gated opening run before following up with 56.32sec in the second. The Slovenian put half a second on Lena Duerr in the second run with the German finishing 0.72sec behind.

Leona Popovic was third after the first run but a mistake halfway down the second knocked the Croat out of contention and allowed the American AJ Hurt to claim her first World Cup podium.

The 23-year-old Californian, who made her World Cup debut in 2018 when she was just 17, was 16th fastest on the first run, over two seconds behind Vlhova, but pulled out the fastest run second time time around to finish 0.87sec behind the Slovenian.

Her teammate Shiffrin, however, endured a poor weekend. Having finished only ninth in Saturday's giant slalom, her worst result in the discipline since November 2022, the five-time World Cup overall winner straddled a gate in the second sector and failed to finish, ruling her out of the second run.

It is the first time since the Beijing Winter Olympics in February 2022 that Shiffrin has gone out in her favourite event - 56 of her 93 World Cup victories have come in the discipline.

Vlhova is now just five points behind Shiffrin in the discipline standings but remains 207 behind the American in the overall, although she has jumped past Federica Brignone into second.

Shoaib defeats Aqeel to win Federal Cup Tennis C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Promising Muhammad Shoaib clinched men's singles title of the 36th Federal Cup National Ranking Tennis Championships after overpowering seasoned Aqeel Khan in the final of the 36th Federal Cup National Ranking Tennis Championships at PTF-SDA Tennis Complex, Islamabad on Sunday.

The 22-year-old Shoaib pulled off a straight set victory 6-2, 6-4 in the final fixture that lasted for one hour and 18 minutes.

Shoaib got off to a flying start, taking a 4-2 lead by breaking first game of Aqeel and kept the same pressure to win the first set at 6-2. In the second set Aqeel fought back but Shoaib did not allow him to settle down as he exhibited excellent tennis from the base line, breaking the 7th game of Aqeel to build up the winning streak 4-3. Aqeel in the process hit a double fault.

Shoaib continued the same pressure and in the 10th game he hit strong serve. He won the set by hitting ace to win the title.

Earlier in the day, in the ladies singles Sarah Mahboob annexed the title by eliminating upcoming youngster Amna Ali Qayum from Islamabad in a well-fought straight sets final. Sarah won the toss and chose to serve.

Both the players exhibited excellent game down the line and cross-court.



Sarah took the lead 5-4 and broke the 10th game of Amna and won the set at 6-4. In the second set both the players again played the marvelous tennis with the combination of excellent cross-court and down the lines.

Sarah took the lead of 5-3 by breaking the 8th game of Amna, who fought back bravely and managed to level the score 5 games all by breaking the 9th game of Sarah. In the 11th game, Sarah took the serve advance and again developed the winning lead 6-5.

In the 12th game, Amna was unable to maintain her confidence and hit two double faults. Sarah took the advantage and comfortably broke the game and won the set at 6-4 7-5.

In the boys & girls 10 & under Muhammad Arsh from Karachi won the

title by defeating the 2nd seed Muhammad Faizan in straight set 4-2 4-1.

Usama Azhar, Director Sport PTV and Majid Bashir Senior Executive Vice President of Islamabad Tennis Association attended the closing ceremony as guest of honour and distributed the prizes amongst the winners and runners-up. Secretary PTF Col. (r) Gul Rehman, M.T.Cheema, Senior Executive Vice President, ITA also distributed the prizes to winners and runner-ups.

Results in brief:
Men's Singles Final
Muhammad Shoaib beat Aqeel Khan 6-2 6-4
Ladies Singles Final
Sarah Mahboob Khan beat Amna Ali Qayum 6-4 7-5
Boys & Girls 10&U Singles Final
Muhammad Arsh beat Muhammad Faizan 4-2 4-1.

Pak Army Inter-Region Boys Volleyball League final on Monday

PESHAWAR (APP): The final of Pak Army Inter-Regional Volleyball Championship will be played between two finalist teams - Peshawar and Bannu at 11.30 am here at the Indoor Hall of the PSB Coaching Center Peshawar.

The Volleyball being played by eight teams including seven regional teams from Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Kohat, Mardan, Malakand, Hazara and Peshawar and one team from Peshawar Volleyball Academy which was jointly organized by Pakistan Army and Directorate General Sports KP in order to find out new faces at the junior and senior levels.

Peshawar defeated Mardan in straight sets, the score was 25-21, 25-23 and 25-22 in the first semi-final while in the second semi-final Bannu outclassed the strong Peshawar Volleyball Academy team in straight sets, the score was 25-23, 27-25 and 29-27.

Both Bannu and Peshawar Volleyball Academy teams gave each other a tough fight which was largely enjoyed by the capacity crowd present on

this occasion. The Inter-Regional Volleyball Championship and Talent Hunt program at PSB Gymnasium is aimed at finding out upcoming talented players across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and training and coaching them for longer duration so that they could play for the national teams at Junior and Senior levels.

In the second semi-final, Bannu Region defeated Directorate of Sports Peshawar Volleyball Academy by 3-0 and reached the final. The final will be played on Monday morning between Peshawar and Bannu. On the occasion of the semi-final, the organizing committee members Iqbal Khan, Zulfikar Ali, Shaker Nawaz, Administrator Peshawar Sports Complex Syed Jafar Shah, Regional Sports Officer Zakirullah, Secretary of Provincial Volleyball Association Khalid Waqar, Regional Sports Officer Shafaqullah, Kashif Farhan, Zakirullah, Volleyball coaches Hidayat Ullah and Wasifullah and other personalities were present.

AB 'not happy' with short India S Africa Test series

CAPE TOWN (Agencies) : Former South African captain AB de Villiers has expressed disappointment over South Africa and India playing a Test series featuring only two matches, which ended in a 1-1 draw. South Africa thumped India by an innings and 32 runs in Centurion during the first Test, however, the visiting team made a resounding comeback in the Cape Town Test, registering a seven-wicket victory on the second day to level the series.

AB de Villiers took to his YouTube channel and voiced his displeasure over the absence of a Third Test while blaming T20 cricket for it. "I am not happy that there is not a third Test. You have to blame the T20 cricket going around the world for that," he said in a video on his YouTube channel. "I do not know whom to blame, but I sense something is wrong. If you want to see all the teams compete and see who is the best Test team in the world, something has to change." De Villiers also expressed his concern for the future of Test cricket, accepting the fact that players choose T20 cricket over Test cricket because of financial gains. "It (South Africa's Test squad for New Zealand) has sent shockwaves around the cricketing world and has made it clear that Test cricket is under pressure, for that matter even ODI cricket and the whole system is turning around T20 cricket.

Aston Villa beat Middlesbrough for first FA Cup win since 2016

LONDON (Agencies): Aston Villa won an FA Cup tie for the first time since 2016 after Matty Cash hit a late winner at Middlesbrough.

Championship club Boro were close to earning a replay when Cash's attempt from outside the box took a heavy deflection and beat Tom Glover.

Australian keeper Glover had earlier frustrated the Premier League visitors at a vibrant Riverside Stadium with a string of saves to keep out young Colombia forward Jhon Duran (twice) and captain John McGinn.

Villa's frustrations grew when Ezri Konsa's glancing header bounced back off a post before Poland full-back Cash struck his fourth goal of the season in three different competitions.

It earned Villa, seven-time FA Cup winners who last lifted the trophy in 1957, a first victory in the competition since defeating League Two Wycombe in a third-round replay in 2016.

They had suffered eight straight defeats and been on the wrong end of upsets against League One Peterborough in 2018 and League Two Stevenage in 2023.

"We were speaking before the match about the FA Cup, a very historic cup competition, maybe the best cup competition in the world," said Villa boss Unai Emery. "We're speaking about our players, how much they were successful in this competition - not a lot! Only Emiliano [Martinez] and Calum Chambers won with Arsenal."

"A long time Aston Villa was successful in this competition with seven titles. Of course we are here trying to do another step ahead in this club." Middlesbrough have already enjoyed one impressive cup run this season after reaching the semi-finals of the Carabao Cup, where they face Chelsea over two legs on Tuesday and 23 January.

But they managed just one attempt on target when Martinez kept out Morgan Rogers before half-time. Villa, second in the Premier League, felt they should have won a penalty when Isaiah Jones clipped Alex Moreno in the second half. But with no video assistant referee (VAR) in operation at grounds outside the Premier League, play was allowed to carry on. With a replay at Villa Park looming, Cash found the net following an assist by substitute Douglas Luiz.

Relief as Villa get the job done

There was understandable relief from Emery and his players when referee Robert Jones blew the final whistle, sparking celebrations from Villa's travelling fans. They have waited a long time to see their side win a match in the competition and can now look forward to Monday's fourth-round draw.

Although Ollie Watkins start-



ed on the substitutes bench, the Villa boss fielded a strong side.

The tie was still in the balance by the time the England forward

was introduced with 20 minutes to go. Nicolò Zaniolo, another substitute, went close with a curling attempt from distance

before Cash added to goals he had scored this season in the Premier League (2) and Europa Conference League.



In brief

02 injured in firing incident

ISLAMABAD (APP): Two people were injured in a firing incident on Sunday when an unidentified motorcyclist opened fire on Dolphin Police personnel near PIMS Hospital in Islamabad. According to police spokesman, the assailants fired upon Dolphin Police, prompting a retaliatory response. In the exchange of gunfire, two suspects were injured and subsequently apprehended by Dolphin Police. The prompt response from Dolphin Police resulted in the arrest of the alleged gunmen, preventing further escalation of the situation. The police were actively investigating the incident, including checking the records of the arrested suspects. The motive behind the shooting remains unclear and authorities are working to gather more details to ascertain the circumstances leading to the incident.

Dr Fazal appointed as Dean Faculty of Education

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr. Arif Alvi has appointed Prof. Dr. Fazal-Ur-Rahman as the Dean of the Faculty of Education at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) for the next three years. The Ministry for Federal Education and Professional Training notified the university of his appointment, and the university has issued an official notification in this regard. It is pertinent to mention here that according to the Act of AIOU, the President of Pakistan serves as the Chancellor of Allama Iqbal Open University. Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, congratulated Dr. Fazal on his appointment and expressed his hope that the faculty members under his guidance would work even harder towards the development of the university and aligning the curriculum with contemporary requirements. Deans, faculty members and principal officers also congratulated Dr. Fazal and considered his appointment a positive omen for the prosperity and progress of AIOU. They wished him good luck in his new position. Prof. Dr. Fazal-Ur-Rahman thanked the President Dr. Arif Alvi, VC AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, and the faculty members for their support. He promised to do his best to fulfill the trust of the higher authorities and contribute to the development of the university, particularly its faculty.

PIEDMC directed to submit report

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta has directed the Punjab Industrial Estate Development and Management Company (PIEDMC) authorities to complete the survey of the 5000 acres Economic Zone site on the Rawalpindi Ring Road and submit a report next week. According to a Commissioner's office spokesperson, a delegation of PIEDMC during a meeting with Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Liaquat Ali Chhatta gave a detailed presentation on the proposed site at Rawalpindi Ring Road Economic Zones and the facilities to be provided to the businessmen. The task of site survey for establishing an economic zone on 5000 acres land along the Rawalpindi Ring Road had been given to PIEDMC Lahore, the Commissioner informed. The officers concerned were also instructed to arrange a visit of the PIEDMC delegation immediately to the site and provide them with all the necessary information and support.



ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment, Mushaal Hussain Mullick addressing the workshop on "Wellness and Communication Development for non-binary and transgender individuals."

Govt is committed to provide all fundamental rights to trans community: Mushaal

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment, Mushaal Hussain Mullick here on Sunday said that the government was committed to provide all fundamental rights to the transgender community across the country at gross root level. She was addressing at the concluding ceremony at a workshop on wellness and communication development for non-binary and transgender persons, organized by AQ Khan Foundation. She said that over 0.3 million transgenders were registered with concerned government department and the government was planning to the mass campaign with the

name of "Dukhtar" rest of the country for the protection, jobs and skilled programs for trans community. Transgender persons are guaranteed all fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan. In addition, the Act recognises transgender persons' right to property inheritance, voting, education, employment, healthcare, assembly, access to public places and to hold public office, she said. Mushaal underlined that trans community was playing its vital role for the development of the country and they were contributing at every level with their sincere efforts and hard working. She said that the govern-

ment would constitute committees at district level for collecting the proper data of transgenders, to provide the education, health care, jobs, social security, social media trainings, vocational trainings and other opportunities to make them a productive and economically independent citizens.

"We all are human beings and have the rights to do every positive act for the development and promotion of the society and state", she added. The SAPM also appreciated the best efforts of Dareecha organization for the development of trans community. Ms Jameela, Sheela, Usman and Aksh were also address and highlighted the problems of trans community.

SHO Cantt suspended

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Station House Officer (SHO) Cantt Police Station has been suspended over negligence and poor cleanliness in Cantt Special Initiative Police Station. According to a police spokesman, SHO Cantt Ishtiaq Cheema had been suspended due to negligence and poor cleanliness of the Special Initiative Police Station. He said that the CPO, Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani had warned that any kind of negligence would not be tolerated in the measures taken for the convenience of the citizens. Different police stations across the province were being upgraded and renovated under the Special Initiative Police Stations program and senior police officers were also monitoring the performance of the police officers, he said.

Pindites desire permanent solution to water shortage

RAWALPINDI (APP): With the population influx going unchecked and the water paucity aggravating, the residents of Rawalpindi have urged the civic authorities for timely steps to avert water shortage.

As the residents especially in congested areas face this dilemma every summer, they have drawn attention of Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) to address this problem prior to the summer starts.

People living in Dhoke Kala Khan, Qayyumabad, Muslim Town, Sadiqabad, Committee Chowk, Shah Khalid Colony, Bagh Sardaran, Adiala Road, Defence Road, New Lalazar, Morgah, Kalyal, Munawar Colony, Asghar Mall, City Saddar Road, Kohati Bazaar, Peoples Colony, Adiala Road and Dhoke Syedan Road are stated to be the worst hit communities during peak season every year.

Although, in all 480 WASA tube wells are stated to be operating across the city, yet the Agency falls short of meeting water needs of the public as some of these tube wells need repair or face water sucking issues as water table downs to 400 to 600 feet in certain areas. The WASA is sometimes felt helpless to meet the water needs of growing population even after receiving 13 million gallons water per day from Rawal Dam and six million gallons from Khanpur Dam.

This situation compels the consumers to buy tanker water who in return are becoming a mafia to exploit consumers by charging extra money for water supply.

"Every summer we face water shortage especially during peak season," said Amjad Ali, a resident of Muslim Town. "Although the authorities claim to supply water uninterrupted, yet our needs remain unmet."

He mentioned to issues like ruptured pipelines, low capacity performing tube wells and wastage of

water by residents. "We are not blaming WASA alone as water provision and its conservation is a shared responsibility."

"But, it needs certain mechanism to address this issue. We desire civic agencies to address these issues prior to upcoming summer," Ali said.

Residents of several other areas Ariya Mohallah, Dhoke Munshi, Rehmatabad, Noorani Mohallah, Banaris Colony Kachi Abadi, Dhoke Dalal Khan, Walyat Homes and Mumtaz Colony have also complained of same situation and urged a workable strategy to address this issue.

"Every summer this phenomenon repeats. Despite claims of authorities many of us had to wait water for hours and even for days," said Naem Ahmed a resident of Ariya Mohallah.

"Whether it is shortage of resources or the capacity issue, we are the ultimate victims," he said. "This situation compels residents to buy tanker water and we have to pay twice. Once to WASA and then to private tanker operators, who charge us as per their will." Another resident Rashid Mahmood has specifically drawn the attention of district administration towards massively and unchecked charging by private water tanker operators.

"These tanker operators take full advantage of water shortage during summer," he said and claimed that they charge Rs 3000 to Rs 5000 for each tanker during summer.

Therefore, he said, the concerned authorities must not only enhance water supply capacity but also devise some mechanism to set the water tanker price.

As the water shortage is becoming a country-wide issue, some efficient strategies and strict measures were urgently required for judicious water supply, its conservation and reigning in tanker mafia to bring some respite

"offer affordable internet services in Pakistan while enabling increased investment in our national space program".

National Space Policy which will enable private-sector companies to offer affordable internet services in Pakistan, while enabling increased investment in the country's national space program.

He expressed confidence that 5G services in the country would be launched by July this year and 300MHz spectrum would be offered for auction.

He said that before the launch of 5G services, the optic fiber network had to be enhanced. Currently, only 6,000 mobile towers are connected with the optic fiber of around 56,000 towers across the country. Dr Saif said his ministry had taken a significant decision to revamp IT education in universities in collaboration with the Higher Education Commission, National Computing Accreditation Council, Examination Testing Council, Pakistan Software Export Board, and Pakistan Software Houses Association.

"Under the program, around 31,000 students have registered themselves for the test so far, and successful among them will be offered jobs through the Industry Placement Programme."

Dr Saif disclosed that the government would initiate a project to establish 10,000 e-Rozgar centers across the country that would be equipped with the latest facilities for freelancers and startups.

The minister while highlighting the initiatives taken by the government to bolster exports of the IT and telecom sector, said, "The sector's official export is currently \$2.6 billion, but the actual figure is around \$5 billion as the industry parks a major portion outside the country to pay salaries of their international employees placed with foreign clients and incur monthly expenses for cloud hosting, marketing and sales on platforms like Google, Amazon, LinkedIn etc."

Rescue-1122 urges citizens to follow traffic laws to avoid mishaps

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rescue-1122 Rawalpindi has advised the citizens to strictly follow traffic rules, as road accidents could be avoided if they properly followed the safety laws.

According to a Rescue-1122 spokesman, 16,429 road traffic accidents were reported to Rescue-1122 in Rawalpindi district during 2023. A total of 16,525 people were victims of the road accidents. Emergency Rescue Service Rawalpindi provided timely rescue services to all victims, 164 people were killed, 8040 were seriously injured, and 8321 were slightly injured in road traffic accidents during 2023, he added.

Rescue Service Rawalpindi maintained its average response time and reached the scene on the spot. Most of these road traffic accidents involved car and motorcycle riders,

he informed.

16,525 traffic accident victims included 14,008 males and 2,517 females, he said, adding that the main causes of the accidents include speeding, careless driving, one-wheeling, wrong turning, tire bursts, and others.

Most of the victims of the accidents were between the ages of 21 and 40, he said. Rescue Service Rawalpindi was also trying to reduce road traffic accidents, and awareness and training programs in schools, colleges, and other programs are ongoing to reduce traffic accidents, he added.

Meanwhile, a police spokesman informed that Rawalpindi district police, under an effective operation against underage drivers, were taking action in accordance with the law, and 66 cases were registered in a single day.

He informed me that a total of 5622 FIRs were registered under the special campaign launched against underage drivers, while 66 cases were registered during the last 24 hours.

Police, on the directive of City Police Officer Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani, were also conducting awareness campaigns in schools and colleges to educate

the students about the legal age requirements for obtaining a driving license, he said. All possible steps were being taken to improve the traffic situation on the city roads and facilitate citizens, he added. He informed them that the CPO had directed the officers concerned to take solid steps to control traffic rule violations and underage driving. He urged the parents to keep a vigilant eye on their children to avert road accidents.

Authorities directed to complete Rwp Safe City Project by January 30

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta, has directed the authorities concerned to utilize all resources to complete the Rawalpindi Safe City project by January 30. The commissioner was informed that the project would be completed in two phases and that all-out efforts were being made for the immediate activation of the Safe City system.

The deadline of January 30 had been set by the Punjab government to make the Rwp Safe City Project functional, he informed. The administration had given permission to FWO to cut the road, he said, adding that 92 sites were identified in phase one and civil teams were engaged in the excavation. The work was in progress at 61 sites, he informed.

All the departments should fully cooperate with FWO to make the project functional until the deadline, the commissioner instructed.

In the new system of Safe City Authority, the software would be devel-

oped in a machine learning model, he informed.

The cameras would be capable of instantly alerting the system by identifying the faces of the suspects. In the first phase of the project, the cameras would be installed at 370 different sites and points, including major intersections, major mosques, churches, commercial points, Muharram procession routes, and petrol pumps.

The Safe City project would be very beneficial for the citizens of Rawalpindi, the commissioner added.

Rawalpindi Safe City would help improve the sense of security among the citizens, Liaquat Ali Chhatta said. The Safe City Project would help in digital intelligence-based crime control and maintaining law and order in Rawalpindi city. The project would also help in regulating traffic on city roads, he added. There is no room for further delay in the project to provide a peaceful and safe environment to the citizens, the commissioner added.

Murree snowfall season Wardens directed to make best arrangements to regulate traffic

RAWALPINDI (APP): Regional Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khurram Ali and City Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani have directed the Chief Traffic Officer, Rawalpindi Taimoor Khan and City Traffic Police Officers deployed in Murree to make best arrangements to regulate traffic during snowfall season.

According to a CTP spokesman, 163 traffic wardens and officers of traffic police had been deployed at all important points of Murree to regulate traffic and facilitate the tourists. Traffic police had devised a comprehensive plan for Murree for the snowfall season according to which entry of heavy vehicles in the city would be banned, he added. He said an emergency Help Line 051-9269200, had also been introduced for facilitating the tourists. The citizens, having complaints, could contact police round the clock, he said. Help Line center was also serving as control room from where all possible facilities were being provided to the tourists and all out efforts were being made to cope with any untoward situation.

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has chalked out plan to enhance the licensing system at traffic headquarters Faizabad for providing maximum facilities to citizens who have been aspiring to get different types of driving license as per prescribed procedure, said a Spokesperson on Sunday.

As a result of drastic measures taken by ITP authorities for public convenience, the number of applicants was increased significantly. The ITP licensing department is processing around 3000 license applications on a daily basis which has been tricked from around 500 applications.

Earlier, the ITP had fixed criteria to entertain around

500 daily on a first come first get basis which was now changed. The ITP spokesperson recalled, "Now there is no binding for citizens. If any applicant will visit the traffic office within office timing, he/she will be accommodated for license."

As per statistics shared by ITP spokesperson, the traffic police has issued 48,347 new driving licenses, renewed 20,375 licenses upon expiry, and issued 95,333 learner permits. Furthermore, 10,930 duties were performed by traffic police officers and officials in various national and international delegations, assemblies, and public order situations. However, 32 officers were injured while performing their

duties. Idea of the establishment of additional desks for processing at headquarters was also under consideration which, according to an official, will be implemented soon.

The Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Muhammad Sarfraz Virk also held a meeting with the licensing department at his office on Sunday to assess the measures implemented for enhancing citizen convenience. The CTO focuses on providing comprehensive facilities and equal treatment to all applicants for licensing. The CTO Virk categorically instructed meeting's participants that the criteria of equal treatment to the applicants should not be compro-

mised, which, he reaffirmed, is also necessary for building confidence among citizens on ITP. He also directed them to keep implementing a merit-based assessment system for driving tests.

Moreover, some instructions were given to the education team to raise awareness about traffic laws and road safety among driving learners and citizens. These collective efforts aim to transform Islamabad into an accident-free city, prioritizing the well-being of its residents. During the meeting, the outstanding performance of the police officials was recognized and special instructions were issued to further enhance their services.

Two killed in blast

KABUL (TOLOnews): The blast in the Dasht-e Barchi area of Kabul city sparked strong reactions among Afghan politicians. Spokesman Kabul Department of Security, Khalid Zadran said that an explosion occurred in Kabul city's PD6. The explosion targeted a bus, and based on initial information, 2 people were killed and 14 others were injured. Hamid Karzai condemned the blast and called it a "terrorist" attack which is "against Islamic and human values."

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Jamadi-us-Sanni 25, 1445 — Monday, January 08, 2024

Food aid provided by WFP

KABUL (Khaama Press): WFP announced that it provided over 350,000 metric tons of food aid to the people of Afghanistan in 2023. Despite various challenges, WFP stated on Sunday, through a message on its official social media platform X, that it will continue assisting vulnerable people of Afghanistan. WFP's announcement comes as findings from an institute called "Institute Al-Biruni" indicate that unemployment and family indebtedness have increased in Afghanistan.

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

Quake-affected families get houses in Kushk

HERAT (TOLOnews): Fifty houses in a quake-affected village in Kushk/Rabat-e-Sangi district of Herat province have been opened for occupants. These houses were built for the earthquake victims in forty days.

Ahmadullah Muttaqi, head of Herat's information and culture department, said: "These houses were built in a standard way as the Islamic Emirate promised to build them within a month to solve the main problems of these people."

"They are resistant because there were earthquakes in the beginning when the work of these buildings was going on, but no problems occurred,"

said Ghulam Mahboob Alizada, head of the construction company.

According to the reports, each house has 2 rooms and a small hallway, which cost 200,000 afghani.

Fatema, who was living under tents with her 6 family members after the earthquake, told TOLOnews: "The houses that have been built have nothing, neither a toilet, nor a kitchen, nor a bathroom, and we don't have any things to spend time inside these houses, neither carpets nor dishes."

A number of earthquake victims said that the lack of toilet, kitchen and implements are still one of their main problems.

"One house for a 10-

member family is really hard because single boys and girls are also among them," said Faqir Ahmad, a resident of Kushk/Rabat-e-Sangi of Herat province.

"It is a house and it has neither a washroom nor a kitchen. In these conditions, life is still difficult," said Ghulam Mahiuddin, a resident of Kushk district of Herat province.

Based on the statistics of local institutions in Herat, 3,666 houses are being built in the quake-affected villages of this province.

The construction of some houses has been completed and hundreds of other houses are expected to be put into operation in the coming days.

\$27m worth of saffron exported

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC) said that Afghanistan has exported saffron worth \$27 million in the past eight months.

Ministry spokesperson Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad said that the overall quantity of saffron is nearly 3 metric tons, and it is exported to various countries of the world.

"During the eight months of the 1402 solar year, about 28,620 kilograms of saffron, worth 27 million dollars were exported, mostly to India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Indonesia, Spain, Germany, the US, and England," Jawad said.

Meanwhile, the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI) said in addition to the fact that the price of saffron has increased in the world market compared to the previous government, the production of this product has also increased.

"Saffron used to be cheap compared to the past, especially during the republic government. But now, the prices have since gone up, and production of saffron has grown in comparison to the past. However, its transportation is a bit difficult," said Khanjan Alkozi, a member of ACCI.

According to saffron exporters, despite the fact that Afghanistan has been going through multiple droughts for a number of years, farmers' efforts have resulted in a significant output and export of saffron to nations around the world.

Businessmen asked the Islamic Emirate to provide more facilities for transporting saffron to foreign countries through air corridors.

"Fortunately, Afghan saffron has found its place in the global market. We are hopeful that we will have more exports and that the Islamic Emirate will pay more attention to the export of Afghan saffron or transfers of this product," Mohammad Nadir Maliki, a businessman, told TOLOnews.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), 200 farmers have received training to enable them to increase the production of this spice in other provinces in an effort to promote the saffron plant throughout the nation.

Afghan and Iran customs bodies meet to resolve issues



KABUL (Ariana News): The office of the deputy prime minister for economic affairs said on Sunday that meetings of the joint committees between Afghanistan and Iran have been held and previous agreements were discussed in order to resolve problems and expand trade and transit relations between the two countries.

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) stated

that it was agreed that customs units at the three border crossings – Islam Qala, Nimroz and Abu Nasr Farahi – and the Iranian side, will remain open for 16 hours a day, up from eight hours.

Also, an agreement was reached between the two countries for the purpose of increasing exports and imports, so that the number of vehicles transporting goods on a daily basis would

increase from 550 to 1,200.

In these meetings, the 20-day ban on Iranian trucks entering Afghan territory was also removed. Both parties also announced the cancellation of some fixed fees for the purpose of promoting business, the office said.

Iran has scrapped one fee of \$104 dollars (5,000 afghanis).

The aim of these meetings is to follow up on the

agreements made with Iranian officials during the last visit of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Economic Deputy of the Prime Minister, to Iran.

During Baradar's visit to Iran, a number of memoranda of understanding were signed to increase trade and transit between the two countries, and it was also agreed to appoint joint committees to follow up on issues.

Fitrat: Reports of poppy cultivation in concerning

B A D A K H S H A N (TOLOnews): The chief of staff of the Islamic Emirate, Qari Fasihiuddin Fitrat, said that the Islamic Emirate is concerned by reports of rising poppy cultivation in Badakhshan.

He made the remarks at a gathering to introduce new officials in the province of Badakhshan.

"There are remarks that after the ban on poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, there is no cultivation of [poppy] but in Badakhshan, and that people are freely cultivating it. This has caused concern for the Islamic Emirate's leadership," he said.

"Many religious clerics said that the cultivation of drugs is haram [forbidden], and the leadership of the Islamic Emirate is serious about this issue. The issue of poppy cultivation will be followed seriously," said Sayfuddin Tayib, deputy head of the general direc-



torate of the administrative affairs of the Islamic Emirate.

The deputy Interior Minister for counter narcotics, Abdul Haq Akhund, said that they are trying to pursue the issue in early seasons in a bid to not cause harm to the people.

"It is due time now we

should inform the people so we do not inflict harm to the people and not take actions that he/she will not be able to cultivate other crops on his/her land as well," he said.

The Islamic Emirate's leadership in a statement announced a nationwide ban on poppy cultivation.

Jawzjan doctors warn against self-medication

S H I B E R G H A N (Pajhwok): Some physicians and health officials have expressed concern over widespread self-medication in northern Jawzjan province.

Given the risks associated with the practice, they asked people to eschew taking medicine without consultations with doctors.

With the advent of winter, respiratory diseases have spread among the people and most of them have reportedly resorted to self-medication.

Medicine use without doctor's advice

A resident of Jawzjan, Habibullah, said he cannot visit the doctor due to economic problems and often purchases diarrhea and respiratory illness medicine from pharmacies.

Habibullah said: "I have a sore throat and pneumonia, but cannot pay the doctor's fee. I came here to by medicine for myself. I know this can harm me but I have no other choice."

Sahar Rahimi, another resident of Shiberghan, also confirmed buying painkillers for headache. "I have a severe headache and I usually take Paracetamol or other painkillers."

Sahar said she knew the

use of painkillers without doctor's prescription could be dangerous for health.

Doctors: Avoid arbitrary use of drugs

Loqman Baig, a Shiberghan-based doctor, told Pajhwok Afghan News: "With the arrival of winter, many people contract flu, pneumonia and respiratory illnesses. Unfortunately, most of people prefer the arbitrary use of medicine, which is so risky for their health."

People commonly use medicine without seeking advice from the doctor, a practice that must stop, he said, calling for public given awareness. He added every medicine had its side effects.

Dr. Baig asked the people to avoid the use of medicine without the prescription of doctors.

He added: "It is dangerous to take medicine without consultation with doctors. The arbitrary use of drugs harms the liver, heart or kidneys."

A doctor of internal diseases at the main provincial hospital, Dr. Hashmatullah Enayat, also cautioned against the use of medicine without prescription.

Enayat insisted: "All sick individuals must visit

doctors for proper treatment. They should not arbitrarily take medicine, especially antibiotics."

He regretted: "Some people even give the same type of medicine to the elderly and children. It's so dangerous and has disastrous side effects. The use of medic in this manner weakens the immune system and causes permanent diseases."

According to Enayat, people with kidney problems, acute stomach conditions, allergies, cardiac issues and a weak respiratory system must avoid the arbitrary use of medicine.

Public Health director Qari Sayed Zabihullah Hussaini also called self-medication a health hazard. He said efforts were underway to ban the use of medicine without doctors' prescription.

In addition to free lab examinations, all patients were given a 40 percent discount on medicine at governmental hospitals, the director said.

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has fixed the doctor's fee at 150 afis, assistant-professors' at 200 afis and professors' at 300afis, according to Hussaini.

Sesame cooking oil price skyrockets in Balkh

M A Z A R - I - S H A R I F (Pajhwok): The price of sesame cooking oil has jumped unprecedentedly due to its export to the foreign countries, according to some producers of this variety of cooking oil.

Currently one kilogram of sesame cooking oil is sold against 400 afis in Balkh while two years ago the rate of the same quantity of cooking oil was 200 afis. Sesame producers have asked the government to ban the export of sesame seeds.

Jummah Murad, one of the producers of the cooking oil, told Pajhwok Afghan News due to drought and decline in rainfall the sesame yield reduced and in addition the sesame seed is also exported outside the country.

He said two years ago one kilogram of sesame cooking oil was sold against less than 200 afis

while currently the rate of the same quality is 400 afis.

Another producer Parviz said this year the cultivation and yield of sesame had reduced due to which the price of cooking oil had jumped unprecedentedly.

He said: "The cultivation of sesame had reduced, most people started cultivating asafetida and other plants therefore there is sesame seeds shortage in the market which led to the cooking oil price hike."

Common people, however, demanded the sesame price should reduce to its original rate.

Khairuddin, the resident of Mazar-I-Sharif, said he used sesame oil in cooking from the past 15 years.

He added this variety of cooking oil is beneficial for the health and its taste is different from other cooking oils.



He demanded the reversal of sesame cooking oil to its original rate so that people could get benefit from it.

Balkh Agriculture and Livestock Director Shamsuddin Khalid

acknowledged the problem and said efforts were underway to stop the export of sesame seeds.

He assured the sesame cooking oil producers and said the Agriculture Department was committed

to support farmers in every sector.

It is pertinent to mention that people in the Northern provinces mostly used sesame cooking oil in the cooking of Qalbula Palaw and other types of rice.

12 people killed, wounded in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): Afghanistan and Pakistan last week discussed potential conflicts on the Durand Line and the Ministry of Defense said dozens of Tajiks and Pakistanis involved in attacks in Afghanistan had been killed.

Casualties Last week, five people were killed and seven others were injured in various incidents of violence nationwide.

One person was killed and five others were injured after two families clashed in Khwaja Sabzposh district of western Faryab province.

In the same province, unidentified gunmen killed

one person in Sherin Tagab district. A man was first poisoned and then strangled in Bandar district.

A child was killed and two others were injured when an old mortar shell exploded in Gezab district of Uruzgan, where a young man was shot dead.

In the previous week, five people were killed in different incidents of violence across the country.

Before the regime change in August 2021, hundreds of civilians, insurgents and security forces would get killed and maimed every week.

Afghan delegation's visit to Pakistan

Last week, an Afghan

delegation led by Acting Governor of Kandahar, Mullah Mohammad Shirin Akhund, arrived in Islamabad.

The delegation discussed with Pakistani officials possible conflicts along the Durand Line and to assist the peoples on both sides.

Akhund and acting Pakistani foreign minister Jalil Abbas Jilani discussed facilities and interaction between the two countries.

Jamiat Ulema Islami (JUI-F) party leader Maulana Fazal Rahman has said he will visit Kabul next week to create an atmosphere of trust between Kabul and Islamabad.

Tajiks involved in

attacks killed

Acting Defense Minister Maulvi Mohammad Yaqub Mujahid, who also heads the Security and Settlement Affairs Commission, said last week that foreigners, especially citizens of Tajikistan, had been involved in attacks in Afghanistan. He said dozens of them had been killed and arrested.

He said tens of Tajik citizens were killed during a security forces' operation and dozens of others were captured alive.

He said the overall security in the country had improved and criminal incidents declined by 90 percent during the past 12

months compared to the same period last year.

IEA spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid had said the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, had fallen prey to exaggerated assessments, statistics and figures based on false information about the presence and activities of Daesh in Afghanistan.

UN next meeting on Afghanistan

Russia's special representative for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov says the UN will likely convene a meeting on Afghanistan in the second half of January.

He said currently they were waiting for a specific date. "Everyone will talk

about it (Afghanistan) there."

Also, Stephanie Tremblay, associate spokesperson for the UN Secretary General, said the UN Secretary General intended to hold the second meeting of special representatives for Afghanistan at an appropriate time.

Recently, United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution calling for the appointment of a special envoy for Afghanistan to increase engagement with the country and its leaders.

It followed an independent assessment report issued in November that called for greater engage-

ment with Afghanistan following the return to power of the Islamic Emirate in August 2021.

The resolution asked UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to name a special envoy to promote the independent report's recommendations, particularly regarding gender and human rights.

The resolution was adopted after 13 members of the Security Council voted in favor, while Russia and China abstained.

Russia and China said they were against the appointment of a special representative for Afghanistan.

The Islamic Emirate also said the appointment of a

new envoy in the presence of UNAMA was unnecessary.

It said Afghanistan has a strong central government, could manage its internal affairs and was fully capable of conducting foreign policy.

Aid continuity

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) donated 16 ambulances worth 20 million afghanis to the Afghan Red Crescent Society.

Saudi Arabia donated food worth 350,000 US dollars and Switzerland provided \$4.25 million for earthquake survivors and Afghan families returning from Pakistan.

Bilawal sees Bhutto as actual possessor of Lahore

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing corner meetings in constituency NA-127 in Lahore at Peco road Kot Lakhpat, Township and General Hospital Metro Chowk on Sunday said that he is delighted to be among the jiyalas. "You are my representative and ambassador in this constituency and you will deliver my message, PPP's message to every house in the area" Chairman Bilawal said to the jiyalas.

He said that This city of Lahore does not belong to a business man or trader or a sportsman. This city belongs to Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. These people think that by martyring Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and their jiyalas, they can frighten us but this is their misperception. Ha has come to his own city from where Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto contested the elections and now he is contesting election from this city.

Chairman PPP said that they ask us that why we have come to Lahore. We asked them why they had come here. They were imposed by General Zia ul Haq. They were

imposed by General Hameed Gul in Punjab and they were imposed on Punjab by General Faiz Hameed. We are doing politics in the city because of jiyalas. We are doing politics for the poor people, laborers and white-collar people. We are doing politics for the hardworking people of this city. We are looking for support from the people and we only need their support.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said to the jiyalas that they have to deliver his message of economic agenda which consists of 10-points to the people. InshaAllah, we will fulfill all these points and defeat poverty, unemployment and inflation.

The first of PPP's economic agenda is that we will double the salary of people in five years. The second point is to provide free electricity to poor people up to 300 units. The third point of our agenda is to provide free education for all. Our fourth point is to provide free and quality health facilities to everyone so that the people who go to London for their treatment would stay here and get the treatment of international standard.

Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had introduced 5-marla scheme and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto had introduced 7-marla scheme and now I will provide homes to thirty

lac people and the ownership to those houses will be awarded to the woman of the house. Addition to this all the katchi abaadis will be regularized. We will extend the Benazir Income Support Program. We will introduce "Mazdoor Card", "Kissan Card" and "Youth Card." We will introduce "Bhook Mitao" Program for which I have a plan for every union council level. Chairman Bilawal said. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that now we will contest the election and defeat others in their own home.

They are traditional politicians. They are politicians of hate and division and victimization as they are the representatives of the elite whereas the PPP represents the downtrodden and common people of Pakistan. We have to change the fate of the country.

The PPP is the alternative of traditional politics with its young leadership. You all have to represent me and contest this election, Chairman said. "InshaAllah you will be victorious, Arrow will be victorious, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto will be victorious. Most of all people will be victorious, you will be victorious and people of Lahore will be victorious", Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said.



RAFAH: Al Jazeera journalist Wael Al-Dahdoh attends the funeral of his son, Palestinian journalist Hamza Al-Dahdoh, after Hamza was killed in an Israeli strike, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

U.S. opposes displacement of Palestinians, Blinken assures Jordan's King

AMMAN/DOHA (Reuters): U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken assured Jordan's King Abdullah on Sunday that Washington opposes the forcible displacement of Palestinians from Gaza or the occupied West Bank, as he hoped to kickstart talks on Gaza's future.

The King had raised Jordan's concerns over displacement in the meeting, according to a palace statement, as Israel pushes on with its military campaign that has turned much of Gaza to rubble and left its 2.3 million residents on the verge of starvation, according to aid workers.

In his meeting with King Abdullah in Amman, Blinken "stressed U.S. opposition to forcible displacement of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza and the critical need to protect Palestinian civilians in the West Bank from extremist settler violence," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement. Most of Gaza's residents have been displaced by the conflict, and violence has also flared in the West Bank, including in a deadly clash in the city of Jenin on Sunday.

King Abdullah told Blinken that Washington had a major role to play in pressuring Israel into an immediate ceasefire, and warned of the "catastrophic repercussions" of the continuation of the war in Gaza, which began when Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and taking 240 hostage.

Israel's subsequent air and ground assault had killed 22,722 Palestinians by Saturday, according to Palestinian health officials.

Blinken is touring the region amid heightened fears Israel's offensive against Palestinian Hamas militants in Gaza will spark a broader regional conflagration.

The trip comes after a drone strike in Beirut killed a senior Hamas leader and Israel exchanged fire with Iran-backed militia Hezbollah across its northern border with Lebanon. Washington is also rallying allies to deter attacks on Red Sea shipping by Houthi militants who control most of Yemen. Blinken arrived in Jordan late on Saturday and met King Abdullah on Sunday before traveling to Qatar for meetings with Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and Prime Minister Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, who also serves as foreign minister.

In Doha, Blinken will discuss efforts to free the more than 100 hostages still believed to be held by Hamas after an earlier agreement mediated by Qatar broke down, a senior State Department official said.

Blinken will end the day in the United Arab Emirates.

Washington wants Israel's Arab neighbors to play a role in reconstruction, governance and security in Gaza in expectation that Israel's assault will eliminate Hamas, which has run the territory since 2007.

The U.S. delegation aims to gather Arab states' views on the future of Gaza before taking those positions to Israel, the U.S. official said, acknowledging that stances would be far apart. In a camp for displaced people in Rafah, southern Gaza, some Palestinians called on Blinken to live up to U.S. calls for a two-state solution to the conflict. "We hope that it is a visit for our benefit, for peace's benefit and for the benefit of establishing a Palestinian state next to a Jewish state, in line with U.N. resolutions ... and with what America has been calling for," said Moussa al-Atawneh, a 76-year-old displaced man.

In Amman, Blinken visited a World Food Programme (WFP) warehouse storing canned food bound for Gaza. WFP acting country director for Palestine Laura Turner said ahead of meeting Blinken that he should push to halt the conflict and for Israel to open border crossings into northern Gaza. "That's where the population is that we haven't been able to access for six weeks and we're most concerned about," Turner said, adding that aid sent north from southern Gaza was being taken en route by other Palestinians also in dire need of food. Blinken said the U.S. was working to keep aid routes into the strip open and to multiply them. "We are intensely focused on the very difficult and indeed deteriorating food situation for men, women and children in Gaza, and it's something we're working on 24/7," Blinken said.

Russia launches 28 drones, three missiles at Ukraine, Ukraine's air force says

DNIPRO CITY (Reuters): Russia launched 28 attack drones and three cruise missile at Ukraine overnight, Ukraine's air force said on Sunday, adding that its air defence systems destroyed 21 of the drones. The air force said on its Telegram messaging channel that Russia targeted mainly the south and east of Ukraine, and did not say what happened to the three cruise missiles.

"The enemy is shifting the focus of attack to the frontline territories - Kherson and

Dnipropetrovsk regions were attacked by drones," Air Force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat told national television.

Reuters could not independently verify the report. There was no immediate comment from Russia.

Dnipropetrovsk regional authorities said on Telegram that 12 people were injured in a drone attack in Dnipro city.

They also said an educational institution and its dormitory, two multi-apartment buildings and one administrative building

were damaged.

Ihnat said drones were predominantly destroyed by mobile teams, saving "scarce" air defence missiles. He said Ukrainian forces used some missiles to repel two recent major Russian attacks and "processes are under way to continue to provide Ukraine with the number of missiles needed to repel air attacks".

Russia deployed almost 300 missiles and more than 200 drones in attacks in the last days of 2023 and the first days of 2024.

Italian foreign minister calls for formation of EU army

ROME (Reuters): The European Union should form its own combined army that could play a role in peacekeeping and preventing conflict, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said.

In an interview with Italian newspaper La Stampa, Tajani said that closer European cooperation on defence was a priority for the Forza Italia party that he leads.

"If we want to be peacekeepers in the world, we need a European military. And this is a fundamental precondition to be able to have an effective European foreign policy," he said in an interview published on Sunday. "In a world with powerful players like the United States, China, India, Russia - with crises from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific - Italian, German, French or Slovenian citizens can only be protected by something that already exists, namely the European Union," he added. European defence cooperation has risen up the political agenda since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine almost two years ago.

However, efforts have been more focused on NATO expansion, with EU nation Finland joining the alliance last year and Sweden also on track to become a member.

Tajani also said the 27-nation EU should streamline its leadership and have a single presidency, rather than the current structure of a European Council president and a European Commission president. The foreign minister became leader of Forza Italia following the death of Silvio Berlusconi last year.

Pakistan Navy maintains continuous monitoring of maritime situation



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy is ensuring permanent presence in the Arabian Sea to keep our and international Sea Lines of Communications under intense surveillance.

The purpose is to protect Pakistan bound and international shipping traversing through our area. In this regard 2-3 ships are always patrolling the areas on which Pakistan bound and international merchant ships are plying. In addition extensive

air surveillance is also being undertaken to ensure the safety of international Sea Lines of Communications passing through our maritime area. Pakistan Navy deployed its ships in wake of the recent maritime security incidents in the Arabian Sea.

Trump rallies supporters in Iowa on Capitol riot anniversary

NEWTON, UNITED STATES (AFP/APP): Donald Trump hit the campaign trail Saturday in the first-in-the-nation presidential nominating state of Iowa, vowing to win "for the third time" as Americans marked the anniversary of the deadly assault on the US Capitol by a mob of his supporters.

Many watched in horror three years ago on January 6, 2021, as rioters -- egged on by the ex-president and fueled by his false claims of voter fraud -- stormed the seat of US democracy in a bid to halt the transfer of power. In a rambling, two-hour speech Saturday to supporters in Newton, Iowa, Trump did not delve into the events of that day, but described those jailed over their roles in the assault as "hostages." He has said that if elected, he will pardon many. Trump mocked President Joe Biden, his putative rival in November's election. He said Biden has overseen economic decline and invited chaos at the nation's borders, while failing to stop Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "I would've absolutely stopped Putin," he said.

Trump warned of World War III if Biden is re-elected, adding, "This is our last chance to save America."

Never having given up on the fiction that he won the 2020 election, Trump declared that in November he will win "for the third time."

The runaway leader in the race for the 2024 Republican presidential

nomination, Trump was impeached for inciting insurrection and faces multiple felony charges over his conduct leading up to and during the violence. In an evening appearance at a middle school in the town of Clinton, Trump gave another meandering speech in which he attacked Biden as too old to govern, incompetent and leading the United States to ruin with overrun open borders.

"We are a failing nation," Trump said in the hour-long address.

"We're going to bring it back from hell," he added.

Biden, who offered blistering criticism of Trump in a speech Friday, has no public events planned this weekend, the White House said.

Trump leads rivals Nikki Haley and Ron DeSantis by more than 30 points in Iowa, which stages its Republican nominating contest -- known as a "caucus" -- on January 15, kicking off the 2024 primary season. Trump has described January 6 as "a beautiful day" and has made the "great patriots" and "hostages" imprisoned over the riot a cause celebre. The false claim that Democratic election theft led to January 6 has become orthodoxy among many Republicans, with hard-liners in Congress promoting the fantasy that the chaos at the Capitol was a "false flag" operation by federal agents.

A Washington Post/University of Maryland poll released Thursday found

that 44 percent of Trump voters believe the FBI organized and encouraged the riot. But polls also show that Democrats and independents hold strongly negative views of the riot and the rioters, and of Trump's role in encouraging them. "We will never forget the horrific events of January 6, 2021," Democratic House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said in a statement Saturday, adding that those responsible "must be held accountable, because in this country no one is above the law."

Vice President Kamala Harris posted on social media that a victory by those "who seek to dismantle our democracy" would bring violence and chaos. The House, controlled at the time by the Democrats, impeached Trump for inciting the violence, which was linked to the deaths of five police officers and several rioters, although he was acquitted by allies in the Senate and denies all wrongdoing. A later congressional investigation concluded that the violence was the culmination of a criminal conspiracy led by Trump to subvert the election. The ex-president is facing multiple federal and state felony charges related to the events.

MSNBC on Saturday released chilling new video footage from January 6 showing two Republican lawmakers speaking with Capitol rioters who scream at and taunt them through the broken windows of the House chamber doors.

North Korea vows military strike if any provocation, fires artillery rounds

SEOUL (Reuters): North Korea will launch a military strike immediately in response to any provocation, Kim Yo Jong, the sister and key ally of leader Kim Jong Un, said on Sunday, as it fired artillery shells near its border with the South for the third day in a row.

The remarks come after South Korea's military said the North had fired more than 60 artillery rounds on Saturday near their disputed maritime border, following a similar volley of more than 200 the previous day.

North Korea again fired about 90 rounds on Sunday, the South said. The North's army said they did not pose any threat to

the South as the firing drill was conducted parallel to the border.

"I make myself clear once again that the safety catch of trigger of the Korean People's Army (KPA) had already been slipped," Kim Yo Jong, one of the most powerful members of Kim Jong Un's regime, said in a statement carried by state news agency KCNA.

"As already declared, the KPA will launch an immediate military strike if the enemy makes even a slight provocation," Kim said, using the official name of the North Korean army. Although South Korea held its own fire drills in the sea on Friday in response to the artillery

shells, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said there was no plan to do so after Saturday's events.

The drills on both sides of the border on Friday sparked warnings for residents of South Korean border islands to seek cover in bomb shelters, although there were no reports of shells crossing the maritime border. In the statement, Kim denied the artillery shell firings on Saturday and said the North had detonated explosives as a deception tactic.

South Korea's military rejected Kim's statement as low-level psychological warfare, urging North Korea to cease military activity that raises tension near the border.

Tribunal dismisses appeal against papers' rejection

LAHORE (APP): An appellate tribunal on Sunday dismissed an appeal filed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Hamid Azhar against rejection of his nomination papers for National Assembly constituency NA-129 (Lahore).

The tribunal comprising Justice Tariq Nadeem heard the matter and upheld returning officer decision after hearing detailed arguments of parties. The returning officer had rejected the nomination papers of Hamid Azhar for being proclaimed offender in cases related to May-9 and the tribunal dismissed Hamid Azhar appeal on the same ground. Meanwhile, nomination papers of Hamid Azhar and his father Mian Azhar were accepted for provincial Assembly constituency PP 171 Lahore.