

Soldier embraced *Shahadat*
F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: A fire exchange took place between security forces and terrorists in North Waziristan District. Own troops effectively engaged terrorists' location and apprehended one terrorist in injured condition. However, during intense exchange of fire, Havaldar Muhammad Zahir (age: 41 years, resident of District Mardan), having fought gallantly, embraced *Shahadat*.



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6 cops martyred in blast near police van in Bajaur

F.P. Report

KHAR: As many as six policemen were martyred and 27 wounded in a bomb explosion targeting a police vehicle in Belot Farsh area of Mamund tehsil in Bajaur district, on Monday.

According to District Police Officer (DPO) Bajaur and Rescue 1122 spokesman that the cops were going to provide security to the polio vaccination teams when a roadside bomb exploded, killing six policemen and injuring 27 others. The martyred cops were identified as Habib ur Rahim, Munasib Khan, Muhammad Rauf Khan, Khan Muhammad and Ali Rehman.

As per Rescue 1122 the injured identified as Adnan, Haroon, Siraj, Wali Jan, Sahibzada, Lehaz Ali, Rehman Gul, Shahid, Zafar Khan, Ahmad, Abdul Raziq, Muhammad Israr, Jahangir, Faiz ur Rehman, Sadbar, Hafiz, Hayat Ullah, Sher Muhammad, Abdullah, Sahib, Nemat Ullah, Sher Alam, Jalil, Habib Ullah and Ameer Zada. The deceased and injured have been shifted to Khar hospital, where an emergency was declared.

Police said blood donation was sought by the hospital authorities for treatment of the victims. All the casualties were police personnel. However, ten policemen critical injured have been shifted to Peshawar while 12 were under treatment at Bajaur Headquarters Hospital.

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar strongly condemned the terrorist attack on the police personnel assigned to provide security to the polio workers in Bajaur.

Paying tributes to the security personnel and the polio workers, the prime minister said the terrorists would never succeed in their nefari-



ous designs. At least five police officials were martyred and 22 wounded in a bomb explosion targeting a police vehicle in Belot Farsh area of Mamund tehsil in Bajaur district on Monday.

Police and Rescue 1122 said the cops were going to provide security to the polio vaccination teams adding that more deaths were feared as some of the injured were in critical condition. PM Kakar offered his heartfelt condolence to the bereaved families and prayed to Allah Almighty for the elevation of ranks of those martyred in the terrorist attack and early recovery of the injured.

The prime minister reiterated his resolve to continue the anti-polio campaign till the complete eradication of the virus in the country. He said the people should not listen to the propaganda against the polio vaccine as the world renowned Islamic scholars and Jami Al-Azhah, Egypt had already endorsed the anti-polio programme.

Meanwhile, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) candidate for National

Assembly Syed Akhunzada Chattan condemned terrorist attack on police vehicle during polio eradication campaign and argued for identification of culprits behind the attack. This he condemned while addressing press conference at Bajaur press club along with party workers and argued for comprehensive policy for elimination of terrorism and extremism from the society.

PPP leaders urged both Pakistan and Afghanistan governments for collective efforts for elimination of extremism from the region which will pave way to the prosperity. He added that Pakhtun belt had badly impact due to foreign since last four decades and its high time to formulate inclusive policy for peace as well as socio-economic uplift of the people.

Moreover, District Bar Association also condemned terrorist attack on police van and offered prayers for martyrs as well as for early recovery of injured. The lawyer community argued for elimination of terrorists with iron hands.

Pak rejects designation as 'country of particular concern' by US

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Monday categorically rejected its designation as "a Country of Particular Concern" by the United States State Department, calling it "detached from ground realities".

"We are deeply dismayed that the designation is based on biased and arbitrary assessment, detached from ground realities," Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said in a statement.

She said that Pakistan was a pluralistic country, with a rich tradition of interfaith harmony. In line with its Constitution, Pakistan had undertaken wide ranging measures to promote religious freedom and protect minority rights, she added.

"We note with deep concern that India, the biggest and serial violator of religious freedom, has once again been excluded from the US State Department's designation list. This is despite clear recommendation by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) as well as public concerns raised by international human rights constituencies about India's maltreatment of religious minorities. This conspicuous omission raises serious questions about the credibility, transparency and objectivity of the entire process," the spokesperson remarked.

She said that Pakistan remained convinced that such discriminatory, unilateral and subjective exercises were counterproductive and undermined the shared objective to advance religious freedom globally.

"Pakistan strongly believes that the contemporary challenge of religious intolerance, xenophobia and Islamophobia can be best countered through constructive engagement and collective efforts based on mutual understanding and respect. With a similar spirit, Pakistan has bilaterally engaged the US," the spokesperson added. She said that Pakistan's concerns about the designation were being conveyed to the US side.

CTD official martyred in court firing

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An official of Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) was martyred while three people were injured in a firing incident within the premises of Peshawar's judicial complex on Monday. Police arrested the suspect.

According to details, the suspect wearing black robe and white shirt, with a black tie like lawyers visited session court and opened fire at CTD personnel. As a result of firing, a CTD official was martyred while three others including a cop sustained bullet wounds.

Police arrested the suspect from crime scene along with weapons and shifted to police station for further investigations. The body and injured were shifted to Lady Reading Hospital (LRH) Peshawar. Police said that the incident seems to be outcome of personal enmity and further investigations were underway.

SC ends lifetime disqualification

Nawaz and Tareen eligible to contest polls

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: After much deliberation, the Supreme Court of Pakistan Monday ended the lifetime disqualification of lawmakers, recalling its earlier order of disbarring politicians from running for office ever, boosting hopes for political bigwigs who are eyeing to contest polls on February 8.

The Supreme Court declared that no person can be barred for a lifetime from running in elections if they are disqualified under Article 62 (1)(f), setting aside its landmark judgment in the Samiullah Baloch case. A seven-member larger bench — headed by CJP Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Aminuddin Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, and Justice Musarrat Hilali — conducted the hearings of the case, which were broadcast live on the apex court's website.

The bench announced the verdict with a 6-1 majority as Justice Yahya Afridi disagreed with his fellow judges, backing the apex court's previous judgment. The legal conundrum arose after the parliament passed the amendments in the Elections Act 2017, restricting the disqualification period of a politician to five years, instead of a lifetime, contrary to the SC's order, which deemed disqualification under Article 62(1)(f) as "permanent".

The latest judgment finally allows Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Nawaz Sharif and Istekham-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) chief Jahangir Tareen to run for office as they were disqualified for life. While announcing the reserved verdict, the chief justice noted that since the election schedule was issued, it was "necessary" to release the order at the earliest.

In the previous hearing, the chief justice remarked that disqualifying anyone from life from parliament was "against Islam" as he quoted a verse from Surah Sajdah which explains that human beings are not bad but their deeds are. While talking to media, senior anchorperson Shahzeb Khanzada and Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (Pildat) President Ahmed Bilal Mehbob said that the order "came at the right time".

In the written order, the SC noted that Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution is not a self-executory provision as it does not by itself specify any period for disqualification. "There is no law that provides for the

procedure, process, and the identification of the court of law for making the declaration mentioned in Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution and the duration of such a declaration, for the purpose of disqualification thereunder, to meet the requirements of the Fundamental Right to a fair trial and due process guaranteed by Article 10A of the Constitution."

The interpretation of Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution in imposing a lifetime disqualification upon a person through an implied declaration of a court of civil jurisdiction while adjudicating upon some civil rights and obligations of the parties is beyond the scope of the said Article and amounts to reading into the Constitution, the order noted. Such reading into the Constitution, the order mentioned, is also against the principle of harmonious interpretation of the provisions of the Constitution as it abridges the fundamental right of citizens to contest elections and vote for a candidate of their choice enshrined in the Constitution, in the absence of reasonable restrictions imposed by law.

"Until a law is enacted to make its provisions executory, Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution stands on a similar footing as Article 62(1)(d), (e), and (g), and serves as a guideline for the voters in exercising their right to vote," the order read. "The view taken in Samiullah Baloch case, treating the declaration made by a court of civil jurisdiction regarding breach of certain civil rights and obligations as a declaration mentioned in Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution and making such declaration to have a lifelong disqualifying effect amounts to reading into the Constitution and is therefore overruled."

The order added that since Section 232(2) added in the Elections Act, 2017, on June 26, 2023, prescribes a period of five years for the disqualification incurred by any judgment, order, or decree in terms of Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution, there "remains no need to examine its validity and scope in the present case". However, Justice Afridi said he disagrees with his colleagues as the extent of a lack of qualification of a member of the parliament, as envisaged under Article 62(1)(f) is neither lifelong nor permanent, and the same shall remain effective only during the period the declaration so made by a court of law remains in force. "Therefore, the conclusion so drawn by this Court in Sami Ullah Baloch Versus Abdul Karim Nousherwani (PLD 2018 SC 405) is legally valid, hence affirmed," the Supreme Court's judge added.

PPP will get justice from Supreme Court: Bilawal

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari talking to the media after attending a hearing of the Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto reference in the Supreme Court accompanied by his aunt, Sanam Bhutto and sister Aseefa Bhutto Zardari said that we hope that the PPP will get justice. We think that it is an opportunity to correct history. Its legal precedent was never mentioned in any case. The way this verdict was reached on the behest of a dictator is being repeated again and again. We also have the opportunity to correct our future course and ensure that such doors are closed forever. We hope that that we will get justice and Justice Qazi Faez Isa and his brother judges will give a decision according to the law.

Responding to questions by the journalists, Bilawal said that we desired that the case should have been heard regularly instead of being adjourned till after the elections. We hope that the case will be decided after the elections. The elections are being held on 8 February even if the United

Nations passes a contradicting resolution as I have said earlier.

The PPP has recently won the local bodies elections in Karachi and Hyderabad. When the PTI was in power, the PPP defeated Imran Khan and the PTI from Multan and Karachi in the by-elections. We also defeated PML-N in the by-election in Karachi. This will be the very first time when the PPP will head not only the local government in Karachi but also the provincial government along the federal government. Hence, we will be able to perform more efficiently in Karachi. We are contesting against every party and are the only party which has presented a 10-point economic agenda which can deal with the poverty, inflation and unemployment.

Replying to another question, Bilawal said that the "cricket bat" was never an election symbol and it was conjured to facilitate Imran Khan and give him undue favour in the elections. It was given to the PTI because the Pakistani people take interest in cricket. It is a fact that our symbol "sword" was snatched and since then we

are contesting on the "arrow" as our election symbol.

The imprisonment of Imran Khan has nothing to do with the elections. If he is innocent, he should be released and if he has done something wrong then should be in prison. When Imran Khan used to initiate false and concocted cases against us, he used to say that the institutions are free and we should approach them. What Imran Khan did in Pakistani politics is getting back to him. We should create an environment where politicians can do politics. Imran Khan will have to repent, and then we will be able to create a better environment. We do not think that our judicial system is so transparent that a death sentence can be given to anyone. The PPP holds a principled and ideological stance against death sentence. Khan used to say that if 200 people are hanged publicly, then the system will be corrected. Khan has to bring a change in his own views about this. The impression that what is being done to a particular political party now has not happened before is wrong. The situation earlier was worse than it is now.

Bangladesh PM says vote 'victory of people'

DHAKA: Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina says her fifth term in power is a "victory of the people", dismissing the opposition's allegation that the vote was a "sham". "I have been fighting throughout my life to ensure people's democratic rights," the 76-year-old leader said while addressing a news conference at her residence in capital Dhaka on Monday.

Without naming the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which boycotted Sunday's polls, Hasina said, "They didn't come to the election as they feared people's judgement", adding that the absence of one party did not mean "democracy is absent" in Bangladesh. The 12th parliamentary elections in the South Asian country saw an official voter turnout of about 40 percent, its third lowest ever. The BNP and some independent observers, however, questioned the

veracity of that figure.

BNP leader Abdul Moyeen Khan called it a "fake election" and said the Awami League-led government was "illegitimate", demanding the vote be cancelled. During a press briefing at the party office on Monday, Khan demanded a new election under a neutral caretaker administration to form "a credible and responsible government". "A government of the dummy, by the dummy, for the dummy will be established if Hasina attempts to form any kind of government through this dummy election," he said.

Khan said the BNP will continue its protest to "restore people's democratic rights" amid a months-old crackdown by the government. "We have a responsibility towards the people. We can't let our country turn into a complete authoritarian state," he said.

The Jatiya Party, which is now the main

Kakar congratulates Hasina on re-election

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Monday congratulated Sheikh Hasina on her re-election as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. The prime minister, in a post on the social media platform X, said, "I congratulate Sheikh Hasina on her re-election as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. I wish Sheikh Hasina a successful term in office and look forward to enhanced cooperation between Pakistan and Bangladesh under her leadership."

opposition group in parliament, also disputed the poll turnout and said the vote took place only to re-elect Hasina and her party members, "not to count of people's votes". The party bagged 11 out of 300 parliamentary seats, while the governing party won 222. The independents won 61.

Hasina herself won 249,962 votes from her constituency Gopalganj, about 165km (100

miles) south of Dhaka, while her nearest rival secured just 469 votes, local media reports said. Jatiya Party leader GM Quader said the election was fair only in the constituencies the Awami League wanted it to be fair. "But in other places, they just declared the numbers and names of the winning candidate. It was all pre-set," he said.

Envoys from several nations, including



India, Russia, and China, congratulated Hasina on securing a record-extending fourth consecutive term. The United States, which had warned of a visa ban on Bangladesh's government officials if the vote was unfair, has not issued any statement yet. The European Union and other Western governments had also put pressure on Hasina to ensure a free vote. — Aljazeera



PU awards 10 PhDs

LAHORE (APP): Punjab University has awarded ten PhD degrees to the scholars in which Sonia Ashraf D/o Muhammad Ashraf Abid in the subject of International Relations, Armaghan Farid S/o Muhammad Ali in the subject of International Relations, Mehmood Aslam S/o Muhammad Aslam in the subject of Environmental Sciences, Zaheer ul Din Babar S/o Talib Hussain in the subject of Communication Studies, Inam Ul Haq S/o Ihsan Ul Haq in the subject of Sociology, Muhammad Zahid Zaheer Iqbal S/o Muhammad Iqbal Javed in the subject of Islamic Studies, Waqas Baig S/o Hakeem Iqbal Baig in the subject of Commerce, Kiran Ikram D/o Malik Ikram Ilahi in the subject of Sociology, Gaittee Sahar Sharif D/o Sharif Sahab Din in the subject of Zoology and Anum Arooj D/o Niamat Ali in the subject of Environmental Sciences.

Online fuel monitoring system in Railways

ISLAMABAD (APP): The online fuel monitoring system of the Railways is ready for installation and will be functional from January 10. It was informed during a meeting presided over by Caretaker Minister for Railways, Shahid Ashraf Tarar.

The implementation of this system promises enhanced operational efficiency, real-time fuel tracking, and substantial financial savings, ushering in a new era of innovation and effectiveness in the realm of railway management as well as performance. The meeting, according to the railway spokesperson, also discussed the railway business plan and options to increase revenue.

PML-N believes in empowerment of people: Rana

KARACHI (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Rana Mashhood has said that his party strongly believes in democracy and empowerment of people through democratic process. Talking to media in Karachi on Monday, he said that Lahore had been stronghold of the PML-N and will remain so.

Rana Mashhood said the PML-N's top leadership including party supremo Nawaz Sharif and President Shehbaz Sharif were committed to make all efforts for welfare of country and its people. Highlighting the party's faith in the people, he hinted at no objection from them against Bilawal or any other candidate in Lahore constituencies. The PML-N leader raised concern about utilisation of funds in Sindh and highlighted persistent issues of transports and portable water in Karachi. He also mentioned an existing plan of Shehbaz Sharif for development of Karachi city. Rana Mashhood announced a broad alliance in Sindh and asserted that pending matters would be resolved shortly. He also underscored PML-N's commitment to democracy and development.

CM displeased with CBD flyover project delay

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi conducted an extensive visit to CBD Punjab Boulevard, scrutinizing the ongoing construction at Main Boulevard and the Walton Road Railway Crossing Flyover Project.

Expressing concern over project delays and unresolved issues, the chief minister voiced displeasure about the 22-day setback and emphasized the need for timely completion. Expressing dissatisfaction with the progress, Naqvi questioned the delay and urged immediate resolution of any outstanding issues. He emphasized the preciousness of each day and underscored the urgency of adhering to the project timeline. Naqvi specifically noted the absence of work on the bridge connecting Lahore Bridge, Reprimanding the authorities, the chief minister directed them to expedite the project for the citizens' convenience. He reviewed the project's status and instructed the utilization of all necessary resources to ensure its early completion. Naqvi highlighted the significance of CBD Punjab Boulevard, Kalma Chowk to Walton Road, for providing easy access to CBD Punjab, Quaid District, and CBD Punjab Baab District.

Briefing on the project's progress, officials from CBD and NESPAK mentioned the completion of 130 out of 148 piles for the CBD Punjab Boulevard Walton Road Railway Crossing Flyover. They reported ongoing casting of girders and MSC wall, with 70 percent completion of girders for the Walton Road Railway Crossing Flyover. Additionally, the sub-base water bound and top base of CBD Punjab Boulevard reached 100 percent completion. The Walton Road Railway Crossing Flyover is designed with two-way three lanes. Provincial ministers Amir Mir, Azfar Ali Nasir, Secretary Housing, Commissioner Lahore, CCPO, Deputy

Commissioner Lahore, and other officials were present.

CM condoles loss of lives in Bajaur blast: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has strongly condemned the blast near a police vehicle in Bajaur.

The chief minister expressed a deep sense of sorrow and grief over the loss of lives of five policemen. He prayed for early recovery of the injured and extended heartfelt sympathies to the families of the police martyrs.

CM orders to complete Manawan Cancer Hospital this month: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has ordered to take steps for the completion of Mayo Cancer Hospital in Manawan this month. He was chairing a meeting at his office here on Monday where a thorough review of matters related to Mayo Cancer Hospital Manawan took place. The deliberation also encompassed discussions on the proposed relocation of the cancer ward from Mayo Hospital to Manawan Cancer Hospital. Planning and Development Chairman, Additional Chief Secretary, Secretary Finance, Secretary Communication and Works, Secretary Health, VC King Edward Medical University and others attended the meeting.

The CM mentioned that chemotherapy and surgery would be performed at the cancer hospital, and its administrative and financial matters would be governed by King Edward Medical University. There is no government-run cancer hospital in Punjab; therefore, efforts are underway to establish a state-of-the-art hospital at the government level, he said. Free treatment would be provided to deserving patients as cancer treatment is extremely expensive and beyond the reach of the common man, the CM stated.

Terrorist attack on cops guarding polio teams condemnable: Ashrafi

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council and Special Representative of the Prime Minister for Religious Harmony and Pakistan Diaspora in the Middle East and Islamic Countries, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi has said that terrorist attack on police officials guarding polio vaccination teams in district Bajaur of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was strongly condemnable.

Extending prayers for the forgiveness of the martyred policemen, he emphasized that antagonistic forces within Pakistan are obstructing the country's efforts to eliminate polio. Tahir Ashrafi expressed hope that these adversaries will not achieve their malicious goals, and he believes that the sacrifices made by secu-

rity personnel will eventually yield positive outcomes. Emphasizing the need for a robust nationwide awareness campaign on polio, he highlighted the government's unwavering commitment to the success of this initiative. The Chairman PUC expressed confidence that due to the concrete measures implemented by the government, polio will be soon eradicated from the country.

Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council and Special Representative of the Prime Minister for Religious Harmony and Pakistan Diaspora in the Middle East and Islamic Countries, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi commended the bravery and dedication of polio workers operating in remote regions, along with the security personnel collaborating with them.

CS orders for effective axle load management system

LAHORE (APP): Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman on Monday directed the transport department to make the axle load management system more effective in the province. He gave this directive while presiding over a meeting at the Civil Secretariat. The meeting decided that the toll tax on all roads would be collected online to ensure transparency.

The chief secretary said that axle load management was being successfully implemented on 1700 kilometers of highways in the province and permanent weigh stations had been established at nine places in the province for checking freight vehicles. He said that as per law, an action was being taken against vehicles for overloading. The chief secretary said that roads built at a cost of billions of rupees were damaged due to non-implementation of axle load laws, adding that accidents and damage to roads could be avoided through axle load management.

He lauded Secretary Transport Dr

Ahmed Javed Qazi and Chairman PITB Faisal Yusuf for their efforts in the successful implementation of axle load management system.

The chief secretary said that instead of constructing new roads, priority was given to the repair and reconstruction of 133 inter-district roads and work on 104 roads of these roads would be completed soon.

Transport Secretary Ahmed Javed Qazi gave a detailed briefing at the meeting. He said that signboards regarding the weight limit for freight vehicles had been installed at the entrances of all the districts.

He said that with the assistance of the National Highways and Motorway Police, Punjab Highways Police, axle load rules had been implemented on 17 important corridors. The administrative secretaries of different departments, including law, communications and works, officials of Punjab Highways Police and officers concerned attended the meeting while all divisional commissioners participated through video link.



LAHORE: Workers busy in cleaning the Canal with the help of Machinery near Mall road in the Provincial Capital.

Spencer Eye Hospital an asset of Karachi: Murtaza

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab has said that Spencer Eye Hospital is an asset of Karachi and we will not allow it to be destroyed.

He said this on the occasion of a surprise visit to Spencer Eye Hospital on Monday. Municipal Commissioner Syed Afzal Zaidi and other officers were also with him.

He said that the presence of all doctors and paramedical staff in the hospital should be ensured and those guilty of negligence should not be forgiven in any case.

He said that improving medical institutions run by KMC is the priority and whatever steps are necessary will be taken in this regard.

Barrister Murtaza Wahab inspected the various wards, operation theaters, refraction rooms, and doctor's rooms of Spencer Eye Hospital and checked the attendance register of the staff.

He enquired about the medical procedures used in the hospital and directed them to adopt modern procedures for eye treatment in the hospital and to update all the equipment and machinery to modern requirements.

The Mayor said that in the past

Spencer Eye Hospital was famous all over the world including Pakistan for eye treatment and patients from far and wide used to come here for treatment. Cornea transplantation was done regularly here to restore eyesight to a large number of people, he said. He said that this hospital was the only hospital in Karachi and Pakistan where the best and most experienced eye surgeons provided services and the most complex operations were successfully performed. If attention had been paid to it in the past, this hospital would have been providing the best eye treatment facilities even today, he added.

Barrister Murtaza Wahab also met the patients in the hospital on this occasion and asked them about their problems.

He said that monitoring committees consisting of people's representatives have been formed for KMC-run hospitals, in the light of their report and suggestions, the process of providing medical facilities in KMC hospitals will be improved and more facilities will be provided to the citizens.

He said that Spencer Eye Hospital is established on an area of more than an acre which

includes staff accommodation, all the wards of the hospital should be fully functional, utilizing the facilities available for eye operations in the hospital is important because a large number of people come here for treatment and operation who cannot afford the expensive treatment of eye diseases in private hospitals, so this hospital is a ray of hope for them.

He said that the cleanliness and security arrangements in the hospital would also be improved and better facilities would be provided.

He directed the hospital administration, that they should fulfill their duty and provide the best possible facilities to the patients who come here for treatment, all the requirements to make Spencer Eye Hospital functional will be fulfilled so that the citizens can get the best possible and standard eye care.

He said that Karachi Metropolitan Corporation spends a lot of money on providing medical facilities to the citizens, therefore KMC hospitals should be useful for the citizens.

The administrative officers, doctors, and staff working in the hospitals should perform their work as worship.

Social Welfare policy formulation meeting held

LAHORE (APP): A consultative meeting was held on the formulation of social welfare policy under the chairmanship of Provincial Minister of Health, Social Welfare and Baitul-Mal Professor Dr. Javed Akram

Secretary Social Welfare Zahoor Hussain, DG Mudassar Riaz Malik and other stakeholders participated. During the meeting, the first draft of the social welfare policy was presented to the provincial minister Prof. Dr. Javed Akram.

The Minister said that the purpose of the social welfare policy, which was formulated for the first time in 75 years, will be the protection and reha-

bilitation of the weaker sections. Social welfare policy will be in accordance with the Constitution of Pakistan, SSD objectives and other rules and regulations, he said and added that social welfare policy will determine the direction of the social welfare department and improve the services. Industrialists will be upgraded under social welfare policy.

The caretaker provincial health minister said that integrated drug rehabilitation centers will be established in the divisional headquarters under the social welfare policy. Departmental capacity building will be done under social welfare policy.

Rehabilitation of differently abled people will be ensured under social welfare policy, he added.

Dr. Javed Akram highly appreciated the efforts of Secretary and DG Social Welfare.

Secretary Department of Social Welfare and Baitul Mal Zahoor Hussain said that cooperation between other government institutions and NGOs will be promoted through the policy.

Director General of Social Welfare and Baitul-Mal Mudassar Riaz Malik said, "After consulting all the stakeholders, we will formulate a social welfare policy."

CM issues directive to officials to control crime, maintain law in provincial areas

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Sindh Justice (Retd) Maqbool Baqar on Monday issued directives to Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sindh for taking immediate measures to control crime and maintain law and order situation in the provincial areas.

He directed IGP to take

He said that DIGs and SSPs should take notice of heinous activities in Sukkur and Larkana ranges.

Expressing concerns over rising criminal cases, he ordered the IGP to take action against the officers concerned on duty who are unable to maintain law

and order situation in their areas. He also directed IGP to immediately recover the abducted persons and present a report without delay. He said that

police officers should also take measures regarding security so that next elections could be held in a peaceful environment.

Livestock dept to make app for farmers' guidance

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Punjab Minister for Livestock Ibrahim Hassan said on Monday the department was preparing an application for better guidance of farmers.

He said this while presiding over a meeting here. The minister said that the name of the application would be 'Livestock Kisan Rehnumai application.' He said there would be two prominent features of the application and the registration option would be optional. He further said that voice assistance feature would be included in the Frequently Asked Questions section of the application in Urdu and English languages. Opinion of farmers would be included in the application besides livestock podcasts and shows, he maintained.

PFA DG inaugurates 'Eat safe food campaign'

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Food Authority (PFA) Director General

Muhammad Asim Javid inaugurated the 'Eat Safe Food Campaign' intending to improve the food quality at dhabas and food stalls.

In the first phase, Lahore's 15 markets have been selected for this campaign and it is to be extended very soon across Punjab. Hygiene training will be given to small food points workers without charging any fee while medical screening of all food handlers and other workers will also be done.

The PFA DG expressed these views while talking to the media on the occasion of inaugurating the campaign at Shadman Market.

He said that this initia-

tive of PFA will help improve the diet and health of the common man.

He said that initially the campaign was started from 15 different markets of the provincial metropolis including Barkat Market, Taxili Gate, G1 Market, Chauburji, Regal Chowk, Shadman Market, Food Street Old Anarkali, Food Street Shahi Qila, Kareem Block, Gawalmandi Food Street, Lakshmi Chowk, Liberty Market, Moon Market, Iqbal Town, Moon Market Gulshan Ravi, Neela Gumbad Anarkali markets.

He said that the PFA had introduced a special licence category with a reasonable fee for small businesses under the campaign. He said that it was

very important for every food business to obtain a licence from the competent authority.

Muhammad Asim Javed said that complete instructions and guidelines were also being given to small-scale food businesses, local shops, food points and street hawkers. He added that the directive contains complete instructions regarding conducting food business in accordance with the rules.

He said that the purpose of the Punjab Food Authority is to bring reforms to the food business as per international policies. The continuous checking process will be sustained to maintain the quality of food, hygiene and food standards, he said.



LAHORE: Workers are busy in making traditional curtains (chik) in their daily routine at their work place.

CM condemns explosion on police van in Bajaur

PESHAWAR (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Syed Arshad Hussain Shah on Monday strongly condemned a bomb explosion near a police van in district Bajaur.

The CM expressed the loss of precious lives in the terrorist attack and conveyed his heartfelt sympathy and condolences to the families of the martyrs. He also prayed for the elevation of the ranks of the martyr's patience for the bereaved families.

He directed the district administration to ensure the timely provision of medical aid to those injured in the blast.

Syed Arshad Hussain said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police has made eternal sacrifices for the protection of people's lives and property, adding that such cowardly incidents could not demoralize the police.

The people of the province and the government salute the sacrifices of the police, said the Chief Minister and vowed that the families of the martyrs would not be left alone rather they would be supported in every possible way.

Minister for Information condemns Bajaur blast

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Information and Public Relations Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel on Monday condemned Bajaur blast.

In a statement issued here, the minister prayed for the departed soul of

deceaseds and early recovery of the injured.

He expressed sympathies with the bereaved family members.

He said that emergencies were directed in the nearby hospitals to provide best treatment.

It's worth mentioning here that at least six police officials were martyred and 27 wounded in a bomb explosion targeting a police vehicle in Belot Farsh area of Mamund tehsil in Bajaur district.



PESHAWAR: Advisor to Caretaker CM Muhammad Ashfaq Khan presiding over a meeting.

KPIC directs varsities to disclose minority quota

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission has asked all provincial universities to disclose the 2% admission quota for minorities on their official websites, as per Section 5 of the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2013.

According to a press release issued here on Monday, the directive requires universities to detail the admission process under the minority quota, ensuring compliance with the RTI Act. This initiative is not just about adherence to legal provisions; it symbolizes a commitment to the empowerment and upliftment of minority communities in the province.

The Civil Society of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has lauded the Right to Information Commission for this critical notification, the PR added.

Proactive disclosure is essential for fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.

Furthermore, the admission quota for minorities is

a vital tool for empowering these communities, offering them equal educational opportunities and a pathway to societal uplift. In a parallel and equally significant move, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chapter has requested all relevant universities to share their compliance status regarding the 2 per cent admission quota for minorities within 15 days.

This underscores the commitment of both the KP Information Commission and the NCHR towards ensuring fair educational opportunities for all.

Qamar Naseem, a civil society activist and Program Manager at Blue Veins said: "Collaboration between National Human Rights Institutions and Civil Society Organizations is a cornerstone in the advancement of rights for minorities and other vulnerable groups. When these entities work in tandem, they create a powerful synergy that

amplifies advocacy, strengthens policy implementation, and ensures that the voices of the marginalized are not just heard, but acted upon.

This partnership is essential in building a society where equality and justice are not just ideals, but tangible realities for all."

Mohammad Rizwan, Provincial Coordinator of the NCHR, reflected on the commitment of the Commission towards minority, said: "Our goal is not just compliance, but the realization of a society where minority rights are not an afterthought but a priority. This move is a step towards that goal."

Simran Nadeem, a christian community student while sharing her perspective on the impact of improved compliance with the minority education quota, said: "This initiative is particularly beneficial for minority girls, offering us the chance to pursue higher education and achieve our dreams. It's a path to empowerment and societal inclusion."



PESHAWAR: Chief Traffic Officer Dr. Zahid Ullah presenting shield to retiring DSP Hazratullah.

Treating hearing loss can reduce risk of early death

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Adults who use hearing aids to treat hearing loss can reduce their risk of death by a large percentage, according to a new study.

Earlier this week, researchers at the University of Southern California (USC) published the findings in The Lancet Healthy Longevity journal.

"What we found was that there was a 24% lower risk of mortality for people who use hearing aids," Dr. Janet Choi, an assistant professor of clinical otolaryngology-head and neck surgery with the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine, and an otolaryngologist with Keck Medicine of USC, said in a statement,

per CNN.

The study looked at data from 10,000 people, including more than 1,800 individuals who identified as having hearing loss.

Of those, a small group reported using aids at least once a week, as compared to a larger sum of individuals who reported never using such devices.

After studying mortality rates between 1999 and 2012, researchers found there was no difference between people who used hearing aids occasionally and those who never utilized them.

The study found, however, that users who regularly wore hearing aids had a significantly lower risk of death.

Hearing loss, according to the Mayo Clinic, affects

more than half the people in the United States older than age 75.

Factors that lead to hearing loss can include damage to the inner ear and the buildup of earwax overtime, the medical organization adds.

Currently, about 30 million people ages 12 and older in the United States have hearing loss in both ears, the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders reported. The organization adds that over 28 million adults across the nation could benefit from using hearing aids.

In addition, among adults ages 70 and older with hearing loss who could benefit from such, fewer than 30% have ever used them.

KPBC to observe strike today

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council (KPBC) will observe strike from court proceedings today (on Tuesday) against both firing incident in front of Anti-terrorism court and Judicial Complex, on Monday.

KPBC vice chairman Zar Badshah and chairman Executive Committee Syed Mubashir Shah condemned both attacks as well as flayed security arrangements.

They argued that such incidents identifying security lapse in the system.

Moreover, Peshawar Bar Association held emergency meeting chaired by PBA President Ishfaq Khalil after the incidents which had created perception of insecurity among legal fraternity as well as in the litigants.

KPBC will observe boycott from court proceedings at PHC Principal Bench as well as in the adjacent district to record strike against firing incidents.

The legal fraternity argued government and security agencies for provision of full proof security in the premises of judiciary.

Ceremony for retired DSP held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar City Traffic Police organized a farewell ceremony in honor of the retired DSP Hazratullah, in which Chief Traffic Officer Dr. Zahidullah, along with SPs, DSPs and other staff in large numbers were present on the occasion.

Chief Traffic Officer Dr. Zahidullah said that DSP Hazratullah's services in traffic for Peshawar and the people of Peshawar are not hidden from anyone. He is an honest officer who played his full role in improving the traffic system in Provincial city.

About the retired DSP, he said he (DSP) had shown excellent performance in the ongoing campaign against the encroachment mafia across the city.

At the end of the ceremony, retired DSP Hazratullah was presented with a shield by Chief Traffic Officer Dr. Zahidullah from the traffic police.

KP-TEVTA announces training

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (KP-TEVTA) has announced a three-day business training programme for skilled males and females of specific districts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

According to KP-TEVTA, the training was being organized for the people of the districts Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Lakki Marwat, South Waziristan, North Waziristan and Tank who had completed technical education and vocational training from any college or institute.

The intending candidates could apply for the training programme online by visiting the weblink: <https://forms.gle/y4oJ4f79A4DUYvSb7>, it said adding that the selected participants would receive travelling allowances or other expenses following the rules.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah chairing a video link meeting to resolve public issues of Abbottabad city.

Schools reopened amid foggy weather, cold wave

PESHAWAR (APP): The education institutions from middle and above reopened in plain areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Monday amid foggy weather conditions and extreme cold wave after the winter vacations which was extended twice due to dense fog, smog and cold weather.

Despite the decision of the Education Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa there was confusion among parents, students and teachers about the authenticity of the reopening of schools' notification as several fake notifications were circulating on different social media platforms.

The presence of students at schools remained very thin on the first day due to the prevalence of dense fog within the provincial capital in the morning where the mercury dropped to 01C.

According to the notification of Elementary and Secondary Education department, the winter vacation in summer zones had been extended up to January 13 for all public and private "Primary schools", from PlayGroup to Class five throughout the province while middle, high and higher secondary

schools were reopened from January 08 with a little amendment in opening time at 9:30 a.m. to closing time at 3:30 p.m for a week only.

Two teachers succumbed to cold in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The severe cold weather in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, besides badly disrupting the routine life, has also caused fatalities in some areas as two teachers succumbed to cold in the province on Monday.

According to Rescue

1122, a teacher of Secondary School, Kichi Payand, Dera Ismail Khan fell to the ground due to severe cold.

The teacher was rushed to hospital but he could not survive.

In yet another incident, in Mardan, the teacher of

Government High School Gujjar Abad fell down on the ground soon after reaching the school on his bike.

He died on the spot.

The severe cold has also caused a fall in the attendance of students at various schools.



PESHAWAR: Protesters from Kurram holds placards during a protest rally. — F.P. photo by Ghulam Murtaza

Power suspension notifies on different KP feeders

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) on Monday notified that due to maintenance work power supply will remain suspended from RMT Grid Station on 9th and 11th January from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of Bank of Khyber, Scarp 1, ICF, Darmangi, Warsak Road and Jail feeders will face inconvenience.

It further informed that power supply will remain suspended from Peshawar Cantt Grid Station on 9th and 11th January from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of Bank of Khyber, Scarp 1, ICF, Darmangi, Warsak Road and Jail feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from Kholian Bala-Haripur Transmission Line on 9th January from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of 66 KV Haripur, Havelian and Kot 2 grid connected feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will also remain suspended from Mansehra - Oghi Transmission Line on 10th January from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. resultantly consumers of 132 KV Oghi, Battal, Jabri Power House grid connected feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from Abbottabad Grid Station on 9th and 10th January from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. resultantly consumers of Oghi and Battal grid connected feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply, it said will also suspended from Abbottabad - Nathia Gali Transmission Line on 9th and 10th January from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. resultantly consumers of 132 KV Nathia Gali grid connected feeders will face inconvenience.

Kundi condemns attack on police team in Bajaur

PESHAWAR (INP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Secretary Information Faisal Karim Kundi on Monday strongly condemned an attack on a police van deployed on the security of a police team in Tehsil Momand, district Bajaur.

He said it was highly condemnable that the anti-state elements were targeting the police volunteers and police personnel who were engaged to protect the future generation from crippling polio disease, adding that those who attacked the innocent were the worst enemies of humanity.

Kundi said that the sacrifices of the security forces especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police for the

sake of peace are irreplaceable. KP Police is at the top of the martyrdoms.

He expressed sympathy with the bereaved families and prayed for courage for them to bear the loss with fortitude.

Kundi also prayed for the early recovery of the injured persons.



PESHAWAR: People on way during dense fog engulfs whole city during morning time.



In brief

Explosion causes power outage F.P. Report

MARDAN: An explosion due to a short circuit was reported at a grid station located in the Mardan District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province on Monday, sources said. Sources within the Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) revealed that the 220-grid station was affected due to the explosion, resulting in power suspension in many areas of the district. Meanwhile, sources claim that repair work on the grid station has not been initiated even after passing 12 hours amidst dense fog in the area. Last month, the major power breakdown by K-Electric (KE) led to the shutdown of 72-inch line number 5 at the Dhabaji pumping station. According to the details, the electricity breakdown from K-Electric caused operational hurdles at the Dhabaji pumping station. The Water Corporation spokesperson reported that the feeders of the Dhabaji pumping station suddenly lost electricity. The CEO of Water Corporation directed to completion of the restoration work of the affected lines on an emergency basis, meanwhile the chief engineer of Water Corporation anticipated that the restoration work is likely to be completed within 24 hours. Furthermore, the chief engineer stated that the water supply to the city will continue through alternative lines.

Adulterated milk, ghee wasted

DG KHAN (INP): Local food watchdog wasted 340-litre adulterated milk and 68 kg of spurious ghee during a crackdown in different spots here on Monday. According to the spokesman of the Punjab Food Authority (PFA), a heavy fine was imposed on the owners of the milk shops situated at Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur and Muzaffargarh collectively. There were certain shortages of essential ingredients like fats detected in the milk being sold out in different markets in aforesaid districts. It would cost heavily on human lives and infants in particular after getting into their access, added the spokesman. At least three vehicles carrying substantive quantity of milk were found with excessive quantity of water seized as well. It was proved after checking by a lactometer and thus disposed of on the spot. At least three bakeries were also traced for selling stuff prepared with unhygienic and adulterated food ingredients. They were found for their unethical trade as the spokesman ascertained. A meat shop operating in Rajanpur was closed over the same charges as not meeting quality standards for the sale desired in the market, said the spokesman.

24 criminals arrested

SARGODHA (INP): Sargodha police after launching a massive and comprehensive crackdown against the criminals arrested 24 criminals including 12 proclaimed offenders, four court absconders and several others. Police said that different police teams raided in the areas under their jurisdiction and held Imran, Ahmed, Nouman, Naeem, Shakeel, Raheel, Rehman, Rehmat, Amjed, Adnan, Iqbal, Saqib, Saqlain, Majeed and others. Police also recovered 345 liters liquor, 200 empty bottles, 12 pistols, 11 rounds, 110 bullets, 2.4 kg hashish, 2.3 kg heroine and valuables worth in millions of rupees from them.



QUETTA: Balochistan Caretaker Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki chairing the provincial cabinet meeting.

Residents' lives on the mercy of criminals

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: The sense of insecurity increased in the city due to incidents of motorcycle lifting and purse snatching in the city Hafizabad.

According to details, an unknown motorcyclist snatched purse with Rs.20000/= cash and CNIC from lady attendant of District Public Library Hafizabad Jamila Bibi while she was going to bazaar from Kalma Chowk. In another incident, mother of Umeer Nazir resident of Mohallah Mazaf Khan was standing in front of Shaheen market adjunct of police station city, two motorcyclists came and snatched her purse with Rs. 25000/= and documents from her hand and sped away.

Meanwhile, Abu Bakar resident of Gharri Awan parked his motorcycle in front of a private hospital near DSP office. When, he returned from hospital, his bike was found missing. Police started investigation. Social workers demanded the DPO to make effective measures to control purse snatching and motorcycle lifting incidents in the area.

PPP observes 96th birthday of ZA Bhutto: The 96th birthday of former Prime Minister Zulifkar Ali Bhutto celebrated at district bar, on Friday. General Secretary PPP Hafizabad Muhammad Arshad Mehind Advocate, District President PPP women wing Hafizabad Madum Khalida Shahid Advocate Sarfraz Arshad Iyaz Cheema and large number of lawyers participated the function.

Addressing on this occasion, speakers said that a

reference was under trial in the Supreme Court of Pakistan regarding death sentence of late Zulifkar Ali Bhutto. It is hope that honorable Supreme Court of Pakistan would rectify the death punishment in the history of Zulifkar Ali Bhutto and declare death penalty a judicial murder, they hoped. They also said that Bhutto shaheed was gave unanimous constitution of 1973 but he was hanged in false case to give protection to Martial law and constitution breaker was given power to dictator for imposing wrong decisions. They said that workers of PPP and the people of the country were desired justice in the case of Zulifkar Ali Bhutto.

The speakers also said that PPP have no care of level playing field in general election and people of the country were our level playing field while PPP would not be made alliance with any political party. They further said that 'ladla' culture for some political parties would be weaken democracy in the country. The birth day cake was cut in the function and special prayer was offered for progress, prosperity and integrity of the country.

DC kicks off polio eradication campaign: Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad inaugurated the first five-day polio eradication campaign to give drops of polio vaccine to children at district headquarter hospital. DHO Dr. Faiq Ali Tarar, Medical Superintendent DHQ hospital Dr. Shakeel Ahmad Shahid, representative of World Health Organisation Dr. Touqeer Ahmad and other officers were also accompanied by the DC.

DC said on the occasion that drops of polio vaccine will be administer to more the two lakh and twenty-two thousand children below five-year-old in the district. She appealed the ulema, teachers, representatives of traders, media personnel and civil society to play their active role to make anti-polio drive successful.

She said that neither polio drops are harmful to health nor un-Islamic so parents must get administer polio drops to their children up-to five-year-old to save them from everlasting disability. DC directed the officers of health department to ensure administering vaccination of hundred percent target children during the campaign and any negligence or slackness would not be tolerated. She further said that health department Hafizabad was constituted 998 mobile teams to give drops of polio vaccine to more than two lakh and thirty-two thousand children in the district.

Al-Khidmat distributes wheelchairs: Al-Khidmat Foundation Hafizabad distributed wheel chairs among persons with disability at village Kolo Tarar. Nominated candidate Jaat-e-Islami for PPP-38, Dr. Muhammad Yaseen Ansari, Malik Shoukat Ali Phularwan and other office bearers were present on this occasion.

Addressing the ceremony, Dr. Muhammad Yaseen Ansari said that Jamaat-e-Islami is struggling for enforcement of Islamic system in the country and people of the country should support he candidates of the Jamaat-e-Islami. He also inaugurated newly established unit of Al-Khidmat Foundation at Kolo Tarar.

Durrani family to clean sweep during election

F.P. Report

BANNU: Zohaib Akram Khan Durrani, the son of former Chief Minister Akram Khan Durrani, has said that the power of the Durrani family has always been heavy in the politics. Akram Khan Durrani will be successful with a large majority, and the so-called politician has always been defeated.

The series of canvassing will begin in Bannu, the air says that four provincial and one national seat will be presented to Maulana as a gift. He expressed his views on the side of party leader Malik Asif Khan Mandan in Bannu area Mamma Khel PK101 and PK102 constituency in Bannu city.

Addressing the reception held at the event, Malik Asif Khan Mandan, Mumtaz Law Dan Sinan Durrani Advocate, Malik Tufail Khan, Malik Inam Khan, Malik Nasir Bilal, Malik Nasir Gul Khan, Malik Nadeem Khan, Hassan Khan Durrani, Amjad Khan and other leaders and party officials were also present. They said that PTI has treated the sons of the southern districts like a stepmother during the last ten years and has heated up the market for corruption and looting during its tenure.

Regular commission and scale rates were set, but during the 16 months of the PDM, by removing all the excesses from the children, the people brought their

right to their doorsteps. They want to maintain their political reputation by acting in the opposition, but the people have reached their political limits and the people have understood that the Jamiat Ulema Islam and the Durrani family have given development projects worth billions of rupees for the children, which are still on record today.

He said that Jamiat Ulema Islam during its power here created health, education and employment opportunities, which is why every young person is present in every corner of the country today and they are providing their services in various courts and government offices.



HYDERABAD: A health worker administering polio drops to a child during anti-polio campaign.

BISE Mardan launches online migration to facilitate students

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Education Board Mardan (BISE) has crossed another important milestone and launched online migration system while freeing the students from the cycles of banks, they should also provide facilities for depositing admission and other dues through Easy Paisa and Jazz Cash.

A biometric ceremony was held in this regard in the E&SE Department of Peshawar yesterday. Abdul Karim, Additional Secretary of the Elementary and Education Department, was the chief guest on this occasion. Mardan Board Chairman Farid Ahmad Khattak, Secretary Professor Inamullah Toru, Controller of Examinations Professor Ishrat Ali, Computer Programmer Farman Ali Khan, Legal Officer Sajjad Tariq and Peshawar Board Chairman Nasrullah Khan among others participated in the ceremony.

In the ceremony, Mardan Board Chairman Farid Ahmad Khattak, Board Secretary Prof. Inamullah Toru and Controller of Examinations Prof. Ishrat Ali started the project. Chairman Farid Ahmad Khattak while addressing that the project will provide facilities to the children to submit admissions, migration, certificate and other dues at the door step. Once started the online migration. By which the students have got rid of the cycles of the board, the children will be able to do their own migration by filling the online form and paying the fee.

Farid Ahmad Khattak said that in the current era of digitalization, we fully believe in the use of modern technology and all technical facilities are being provided to the students to benefit from them. Appreciating all the successful ones, the credit goes to Chairman Board Farid Ahmad Khattak. He said that Mardan Board has crossed many important milestones in the last one year. He said that children are our future and they should not get full opportunity to benefit from modern technology brought positive changes in the examination and marking system by adopting modern methods in a short period of time, other boards should benefit.

MCCI lauds media role: President Mardan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) Zahir Shah has said that journalism is the pillar of the state and journalists are playing a fundamental role in the development of the region and promoting democracy along with pointing out social evils through their pen.

He expressed these views along with his delegation on the occasion of congratulating the newly elected president of Mardan Press Club, (MPC) M. Bashir Adil, General Secretary Fazal Haq, Vice President Faqir Hussain Hoti, Joint Secretary Khurshed Wahab and Finance Secretary Pervez Shaheen. The delegation comprises Chairman of the Markaze Tanzeem-e-Tajirani Gulam Sarwar Saraf, General Secretary Waqar Ali Bacha, presidents and general secretaries of various markets.

MPC President M. Bashir Adil thanked President Zahir Shah. On this occasion Zahir Shah said that Mardan Press Club has always responded to the voice of the oppressed and promoted positive journalism. Journalists have a great role in the development of Mardan. Businessmen and journalists will fulfill their responsibilities together.

Robbery victim seeks action against dacoits in Dir

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: One Ihsanullah, a resident of Khall on Monday demanded the Inspector General of Police and Regional Police Officer Malakand division to take notice of a robbery case in his house and ensure justice to the victim family. Talking to local journalists at Timergara he said that despite the passage of four weeks, the case of an armed robbery at the gun point in Khall had not been registered so far due to which the victim's family felt dissatisfaction.

He pointed out that on December 12, at night, some armed men entered his house and took the family hostage at gunpoint and fled after looting Rs. 200,000 and 5 tola gold ornaments. He said that despite the passage of four weeks, the case could not be registered. He said that he along with local elders visited the Khall police station rewesting police to register the case, but the police are being hesitant to file an FIR against the accused.

Meanwhile the station house officer Khall told Dawn on contact that proper report had been registered against unknown accused and investigation was in progress. The SHO said the culprits would soon be brought to books. He

however said the victim was not cooperation with police.

Price review: Deputy Commissioner Lower Dir Wasil Khan has said that immediate action should be taken against the butchers and bakers who overcharge customers in the district. He expressed these views while presiding over the price review meeting regarding food items in his office on Monday while issuing orders to the officers of the district administration and various departments.

District Food Controller Kashif Ehsan and Assistant Director Consumer Protection Council Sohail Nasir briefed the participants regarding the market rates. Sardar Badshah, Additional Assistant Commissioner Adenzai, Majid Ahmed Food Controller, Dr. Akbar Ali of the livestock department, Deputy Additional Food Controller, President Anjuman Tajirani Timergara Anwaruddin and others participated in the meeting. The DC directed the AC Timergara Dr Nida Iqbal and District Food Controller Kashif Ehsan to check the records of all wholesale dealers in the market and prepare a report.

The meeting compared the rates of food items with neighbouring districts. The

DC asked the officials to take action against the butchers and bakers charging higher rates than the official rate list and ensure supply of quality meat to consumers as per government rates. He said that legal action will be taken in case of not implementing the price lists issued by the district administration and not displaying it on a prominent place. He said that legal action will be taken against those who take self-imposed rates and sell substandard meat. Action should be taken against the butchers who slaughtered the calves.

Book fair: The district administration with the support of Youth Affairs Department and tehsil municipal administration Timergara and National Book Foundation has planned to organized a two-day book fair on January in Timergara to attract the young generation and book's lovers. An official of the administration told local journalists that all kinds of books will be available at 50% discount rate in the book fair. DC Wasil Khan will inaugurate the book fair on January 10. All the principals, headmasters, teachers, education experts, public, parents and students of the district have been asked to take advantage of this offer.

Tribesmen announce boycott from election

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Residents of Loy-Shelman, the remote and bordering areas of tehsil Landi Kotal demanded the candidates to resolve their problems prior seeking for their votes in the upcoming general election.

In a meeting convened by the Qaumi Masail Committee (QMC), Landi Kotal was held in Angaran ground, Loy-Shelman on the last day that was attended by people from different walks of life. Speaking on the occasion Hamza Shelmani, office bearers of

QMC including Illayas Shinwari, Kaleemullah and others said that in the last years, the areas had been totally ignored and it lacked all basic needs being enjoyed by the down towns.

Roads are in dilapidated condition while the locals in this modern era transport their patients 25 kilometers away to Headquarter Hospital, Landi Kotal for treatment because of a shortage of medical facilities that is unfair to them, they remarked. They went on that unscheduled power off had made their lives miserable while the wom-

enfolk traveled for miles to pitch a bucket of potable water to meet their needs.

Previous parliamentarians neglected them and never initiated a plan to address their problems, they regretted. They threatened that until providing basic facilities they would never cast their votes in the upcoming election, to be scheduled on 08 February, 2024. It is to be stated here that district Khyber has one National Assembly seat (NA-27) and three Provincial Assembly seats (PK-69, PK-70 and PK-71).



MARDAN: Commissioner Shaukat Ali Yousafzai presenting bouquet to newly elected members of Press Club.

Promotion of primary teachers suspended

F.P. Report

LARKANA: In Larkana district of Sindh province, after the protests of the teachers against the promotion of primary school teachers, it was clarified in the negotiations held in the PTLF by the officers of the education department that the promotions issued have been cancelled.

The new DPC was announced in this regard, the Primary Teachers' Organization (PT alf) Primary School Teachers Association leaders Ashfaq Dhamrah, Irshad Tonio, Nazir Abbasi and others while talking to reporters said that the orders issued as HST which were issued by the Director of Education Larkana Division are being cancelled.

A new DPC committee has been formed for the new promotions of teachers, which will issue promotion orders through the seniority list of teachers in two weeks, while the teachers' organization has announced to end the

protest after the problems are resolved.

Shopkeeper killed on resisting dacoits: Armed men robbed a shopkeeper, during the resistance, the shopkeeper's son was killed. During the shopkeeper's resistance, unknown armed persons opened fire and killed the shopkeeper Ali Bakhsh Kalhoro in front of his son. Pathan Jatoti was arrested.

On the other hand, the heirs staged a dharna at Mukiya SSP Chowk in Larkana for the murder of the deceased shopkeeper. When he was sitting in the shop, the accused looted and brutally killed the deceased Ali Bakhsh Kalhoro and if this is not terrorism then what is it? On the other hand, SSP Larkana issued strict orders to the SHO of Hudud Jail to register a case against the accused and arrest them in any case.

SMBBU Professor holds two jobs: In Shaheed Moharra Benazir Bhutto Medical University (SMBBU) Larkana, Assistant Professor, has

been revealed to be a civil servant holding grade 19 in a medical college of Balochistan province, Chandka Medical College, Larkana has revealed this while the vice-chancellor and registrar of SMBBU University are investigating the matter.

According to the details, Chandka Medical College Larkana Principal Professor Zameer Hasan Soomro wrote a letter to SMBBU University Registrar Dr. Safdar Sheikh recommending him to take departmental action against Assistant Professor of Pathology Dr. Wasif Saleem and said that the attached assistant professor is in grade 19 resigned from his post while serving equally which was accepted by the Registrar of SMBBU University without any departmental action Bay, according to the documents received from disclosure Dr. Muhammad Wasif Saleem was appointed as Assistant Professor of Pathology in SMBBU University in the year 2020.



Bhutan holds general election as economic crisis hits ‘national happiness’

TRONGSA (AFP): The picturesque Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is set to hold a general election with serious economic challenges calling into question its longstanding policy of prioritising "Gross National Happiness" over growth. Both parties contesting vote are committed to a constitutionally enshrined philosophy of a government that measures its success by the "happiness and well-being of the people".

Some voters are expected to trek for days to cast their ballots in the landlocked and sparsely populated country, similar in size to Switzerland. Foremost in the minds of many are the struggles facing the kingdom's younger generation, with chronic unemployment and a brain drain of migration abroad. "We don't need more new roads or bridges," farmer Kinley Wangchuk, 46, told AFP news agency. "What we really need is more jobs for young people."

Bhutan's youth unemployment rate stands at 29 percent, according to the World Bank, while economic growth has sputtered along at an average of 1.7 percent over the past five years. Young citizens have left in record numbers searching for better financial and educational opportunities abroad since the last elections, with Australia as the top destination. Around 15,000 Bhutanese were issued visas there in the 12 months to last July, according to a local news report - more than the preceding six years combined, and almost 2 percent of the kingdom's population.

The issue of mass exodus is central for both parties contesting the poll. Career civil servant Pema Chewang of the Bhutan Tendrel Party (BTP) said the country was losing the "cream of the nation". "If this trend continues, we might be confronted with a situation of empty villages and a deserted nation," the 56-year-old added. His opponent, former prime minister and People's Democratic Party (PDP) chief Tshering Tobgay, 58, sounded the alarm over Bhutan's "unprecedented economic challenges and mass exodus".

His party's manifesto quoted gov-



ernment statistics showing that one in every eight people were "struggling to meet their basic needs for food" and other necessities. Tourism, a small share of Bhutan's economy but a key earner of foreign currency, has yet to recover from the disruptions of the coronavirus pandemic. Last year, the government cut the substantial daily fee paid by foreign visitors to ensure the industry remains sustainable and prevent ecological harm.

But foreign tourist numbers in 2023 were only around a third of 316,000, the number of tourists four years prior. The previous government pursued several projects to diversify the economy, including a special economic zone on the Indian border and plans with a Singapore-based company to raise funds for a cryptocurrency-mining scheme.

Both parties have pledged a huge ramp-up of investment in hydropower, its primary source of energy. The BTP manifesto said installed hydro-capacity was just 10 percent of potential, with the PDP pledging the development of steel, cement and other support industries that would provide much-needed jobs. Bhutan's mountain valleys and abundant water resources have created "ideal conditions" for hydropower development and export to India, according to the World Bank. Nearby Nepal this week signed a lucrative hydropower deal to provide 10,000 megawatts over the

coming decade to energy-hungry India, which is overwhelmingly dependent on coal but taking some tentative steps to decarbonise. Bhutan held elections for the first time in 2008 after political reforms established a bicameral parliament soon after the start of the reign of the present king, who remains hugely popular. Campaigns in the Buddhist-majority nation have always been subdued affairs, with strict rules mandating that election materials can only be posted on public notice boards. A primary contest in November narrowed the race down to two parties, with both the previous government's lawmakers and their former opposition knocked out. The party of former Prime Minister Lotay Tshering, a doctor known for conducting surgeries on weekends as a "de-stressor" from the pressures of office, polled just 13 percent. Bhutan has around 800,000 people and lies sandwiched between the two most populous countries, China and India.

Both neighbours are watching the vote with interest, as they eye strategic contested border zones. A "cooperation agreement" was inked between Bhutan and China in October after talks over their disputed northern frontier sparked concern in India. New Delhi has long regarded Bhutan as a buffer state firmly under its orbit and effectively ran the country's foreign policy until 2007.

Mexican authorities investigate massacre

MEXICO CITY (Reuters): Mexican authorities in the violence-plagued southwestern state of Guerrero said they were investigating a gruesome massacre that took place in a part of a remote desert where two rival criminal groups have been fighting for control.

Police investigators had found five burned bodies stacked onto a burned vehicle when they arrived in Buenavista de los Hurtado, the state attorney general said in a statement shared.

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, 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. Reuters was unable to get comment from villagers.

China curbs five US arms manufacturers

BEIJING: China has announced sanctions against five US arms manufacturers over weapons sales to Taiwan. Beijing claims the self-ruled island as part of its territory and has not ruled out the use of force to achieve its goals, while the United States is required by law to provide Taiwan with the means to defend itself.

The sanctions come ahead of Taiwan's January 13 presidential and parliamentary elections, which China has claimed are a choice between war and peace. Last month, the US State Department approved a \$300m arms package to strengthen Taipei's joint battle command and control system, prompting Beijing to say it would take unspecified "counter-measures" against the companies involved.

China's Foreign Ministry sanctioned the companies BAE Systems Land and Armament, Alliant Techsystems Operation, AeroVironment, ViaSat and Data Link Solutions. "The countermeasures consist of freezing the properties of those companies in China, including their movable and immovable property, and prohibiting organisations and individuals in China from transactions and cooperation with them," the ministry said in a statement. "The US arms sales to China's Taiwan region... seriously harm China's sovereignty and security interests," it added. Beijing has increased pressure on Taiwan since Tsai Ing-wen was first elected president in 2016, claiming she wants independence. Tsai has said it is up to the people of Taiwan to decide their future. Her vice president, William Lai, is running for the top job against Hou Yu-ih of the more China-friendly KMT. Taiwan has reported regular sightings of Chinese warplanes and balloons around the island in the weeks running up to the election and has warned Beijing against seeking to influence the outcome of the poll. — Aljazeera

US investigators recover key part from Alaska Airlines jet

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said the "key missing component" from the Boeing 737 MAX 9 jet involved in an Alaska Airlines emergency landing had been recovered from the backyard of a suburban home.

The plug door tore off the left side of an Alaska Airlines jet following take-off from Portland, Oregon, en route to Ontario, California, depressurizing the plane and forcing pilots to turn back and land safely with all 171 passengers and six crew on board.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) ordered the temporary grounding of 171 Boeing MAX 9 jets installed with the same panel, which weighs about 60 pounds (27 kg) and covers an optional exit door mainly used by low-cost airlines. The missing plug door was recovered by a Portland school teacher identified only as "Bob" in the Cedar Hills neighborhood who found it in his backyard, NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy said, saying she was "very relieved" it had been found.

She had earlier told reporters the aircraft part was a "key missing component" to determine why the accident occurred. "Our structures team will want to look at everything on the door - all of the components on the door to see to look at witness marks, to look at any paint transfer, what shape the door was in when found. That can tell them a lot about what occurred," she said. The force from the loss of the plug door was strong enough to blow open the

cockpit door during flight, said Homendy, who said it must have been a "terrifying event" to experience.

"They heard a bang," Homendy said of the pilots, who were interviewed by investigators. A quick reference laminated checklist flew out the door, while the first officer lost her headset, she said. "Communication was a serious issue... It was described as chaos," Homendy said the cockpit voice recorder did not capture any data because it had been overwritten and again called on regulators to mandate retrofitting existing planes with recorders that capture 25 hours of data, up from the two hours required at present.

Homendy said the auto pressurization fail light illuminated on the same Alaska Airlines aircraft on Dec. 7, Jan. 3 and Jan. 4, but it was unclear if there was any connection between those incidents and the accident. Alaska Airlines made a decision after the warnings to restrict the aircraft from making long flights over water to Hawaii so that it could return quickly to an airport if needed, Homendy said. The Seattle-based carrier said earlier in a response to questions about the warning lights that aircraft pressurization system write-ups were typical in commercial aviation operations with large planes.

The airline said "in every case, the write up was fully evaluated and resolved per approved maintenance procedures and in full compliance with all applicable FAA regulations." Alaska Airlines added it has an internal policy to restrict aircraft

with multiple maintenance write-ups on some systems from long flights over water that was not required by the FAA. The FAA said the affected fleet of Boeing MAX 9 planes, including those operated by other carriers such as United Airlines, would remain grounded until the regulator was satisfied they were safe. The FAA initially said the required inspections would take four to eight hours, leading many in the industry to assume the planes could very quickly return to service.

But criteria for the checks have yet to be agreed between the FAA and Boeing, meaning airlines have yet to receive detailed instructions, people familiar with the matter said.

The FAA must approve Boeing's inspection criteria before the checks can be completed and planes can resume flights. Alaska Airlines said it had still not received instructions from Boeing. Alaska Airlines canceled 170 flights and a further 60 on Monday and said travel disruptions from the grounding were expected to last through at least midweek. United, which has grounded its 79 MAX 9s, canceled 230 flights, or 8% of scheduled departures. The accident has put Boeing back under scrutiny as it awaits certification of its smaller MAX 7 as well as the larger MAX 10, which is needed to compete with a key Airbus model. In 2019, global authorities subjected all MAX planes to a wider grounding that lasted 20 months after crashes in Ethiopia and Indonesia linked to poorly designed cockpit software killed a total of 346 people.

Putin praises Russian ‘defenders’ as Ukraine deflects another barrage

MOSCOW: Celebrating Orthodox Christmas, President Vladimir Putin has pledged to support soldiers defending Russia as his army sent another barrage of drones and missiles at Ukraine overnight.

Speaking on the eve of Orthodox Christmas, the Kremlin chief promised military families that his government would offer increased backing to "Russian warriors" engaged in the invasion of Ukraine, launched in February 2022. Unlike last year, Putin did not call this year for a ceasefire. "Many of our men, our courageous, heroic guys, Russian warriors, even now, on this holiday, defend the interests of our country with arms in hand," he said as he met bereaved families of Russian soldiers who have died in Ukraine.

However, anger persists in some quarters over Russia's treatment of its soldiers in the "meat-

grinder" of Ukraine. In particular, following a mobilisation drive in September 2022, a lack of training and equipment was criticised. The wives of Russians mobilised to fight in Ukraine demanded the return of their husbands from the front. Many of those soldiers were spending Christmas in trenches, with the front-line war largely bogged down. Amid the stalemate, air raids have increased in frequency and intensity. Ukraine's air force reported on Telegram that it had shot down 21 out of 28 drones launched by Russia overnight, largely in the south and east of the country. Three cruise missiles also targeted the country, it said, without offering further details. "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. The drones were

predominantly destroyed by mobile teams, saving "scarce" air defence missiles, he added.

Dnipropetrovsk regional authorities said on Telegram that 12 people were injured in a drone attack in the city of Dnipro. The previous day, the Ukrainian authorities said a Russian missile attack killed 11 people and injured 10 in the eastern city of Pokrovsk. A Russian-installed official accused Kyiv of shelling parts of Donetsk now under Moscow's control. Orthodox Christmas celebrations were cancelled in the Russia border city of Belgorod, where 25 people were killed on December 30 in Ukraine's deadliest cross-border attack of the war. The city has come under further sporadic rocket attacks within the past week. In a separate greeting issued on the Kremlin's website, Putin called on Russians to follow the "unshakable" val-

ues of "goodness, mercy and justice" and on the Russian Orthodox Church to help strengthen "the institution of families" and patriotism.

Facing a presidential election in March, Putin has sought to further extol "traditional values". The Orthodox Church has long been a reliable pillar of his regime and has helped stoke support for the invasion of Russia's neighbour. Ukraine is also Orthodox, but this year it changed its tradition of joining Russia in celebrating Christmas on January 7. Instead, it officially marked the December 25 holiday for the first time as part of an ongoing effort to remove Russian influence from the country. The change was enacted in a law signed by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in July, reflecting both the Ukrainians' dismay with the 23-month-old Russian invasion and their assertion of a national identity. — Aljazeera

Relentless bombing and ‘constant death’: A bleak start to 2024 for Syria

IDLIB: Shaher Masri and his family heard bombs near their home shortly after noon prayers on the first day of the new year. The Syrian regime and its Russian allies had allowed no pause for the holidays, this time bombing a bakery a few metres from the house Masri, 29, his wife and four children have been living in for the past four years in the village of Jakid al-Adas, near Darat Izza in northwestern Syria.

"I've never seen something more horrible. When we ventured out we found a man who had died while buying bread and breakfast for his family," Masri told Al Jazeera. That afternoon, artillery hit the town repeatedly, frightening civilians and damaging buildings, including a bakery, a mosque, a market and an electricity facility. The attack was part of a general assault on the villages of Darat Izza, Kabashin and Burj Haidar in the countryside west of Aleppo, which killed six people and injured 11 more, including four children, a baby and two women. It followed the bombing of the city of Idlib the previous day and Israeli air raids on the Aleppo and Neirab airports, as well as

several points belonging to the Syrian regime south of Aleppo.

Nada al-Rashed, a director of the Syrian Civil Defense (White Helmets), told Al Jazeera Syrians had welcomed the new year with the same motif they had bid the last one farewell: "with bloodshed". Masri and his family, who are originally from Jakid al-Adas in the Aleppo governorate, have already been displaced several times within northwestern Syria. They will not move again, despite the repeated bombing of Darat Izza - there is little point they say. But Masri remains hopeful. "We hope to get rid of [Syrian president] Assad in our new year," he said.

The regime aims to destabilise the population by taking out civilian infrastructure, al-Rashed said. "The absence of accountability and the impunity for the crimes committed by the Syrian regime is what gave it the green light to continue its attacks without deterrence." Yahya Sheikh Mohammed, 30, the nephew of the man killed near the bakery, told Al Jazeera he feels like he is living "in the midst of constant death". He

had rushed out to the street after the bombing to retrieve his aunt's husband's body, Mohammed said.

"We found another dead person as we were transporting the old man." By staging these attacks, the Syrian regime is hoping to drive a wedge between the northern Aleppo countryside - controlled by Turkey - and Idlib and the western countryside of Aleppo - under Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, allied to the Syrian opposition government and classified as "terrorist" by the regime - Mustafa al-Naimi, a journalist based in Turkey, told Al Jazeera. "Under the pretext of 'terrorism', Idlib governorate continues to be exposed to artillery and missile bombardment as well as air strikes," said al-Naimi, who is also a researcher at the Arab Forum for Analyzing Iranian Policies. He added that the military operations also prevented people living there from feeling safe and scared away any investment, which has added to Idlib's deep economic stagnation.

More than 90 percent of people in the region live in poverty and are reliant on international aid. However, the arrival of aid was

severely restricted last July by Russia vetoing a UN Security Council vote on renewing a cross-border aid mechanism through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey. The regime may also be venting its anger about being unable to respond to Israel's bombing of Iranian sites by striking either Israel or the United States bases east of the Euphrates, al-Naimi added.

The northwestern region of Syria has been subject to a ceasefire agreement brokered in 2020 with the assistance of Russia and Turkey. Still, the regime and its allied forces have repeatedly violated this agreement - on at least 1,200 occasions over the past year alone, according to the White Helmets. Al-Naimi said opposition factions controlling the northwest may not have the military capacity to mount a strong enough defence against the bombings. Opposition leaders remain defiant, however. "Our options are open and we have the ability to respond to the attacks," Khattab al-Shami, the military commander of the al-Fatah al-Mubin grouping of opposition factions, told Al Jazeera. — Aljazeera

Blaze at refugee camp leaves many homeless

DHAKA: Thousands of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh have been left without shelter after a fire ripped through a refugee camp, burning hundreds of homes, officials say. The blaze tore through the tightly packed complex of bamboo and tarpaulin shelters in the early hours of the day at a camp in the country's southeast, refugee commissioner Mizanur Rahman said. There is suspicion of arson, the official has said.

Bangladesh is home to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, many of whom have taken refuge there since a 2017 military crackdown on the mainly Muslim minority in neighbouring Myanmar. Those events are now the subject of a United Nations genocide probe. "At least 711 shelters were fully burned and 63 were partially damaged," Rahman said, adding that five education centres and two mosques were also destroyed. He said the fire made 4,000 people homeless. There were no casualties, and the fire has been brought under

control, he added.

"We have ordered a probe into the fire," he added. "We suspect it is an act of arson". Shafiqul Islam, the head of the Ukhiya Fire Station, separately told The Associated Press news agency that the fire broke out at approximately midnight at the Kutupalong camp in Ukhiya and spread quickly, fanned by strong winds. "The fire was big, and it destroyed about 1,040 shelters in the camp," he said.

"We took about two hours to get the blaze under control, engaging 10 fire units from Ukhiya and other stations in the district." Islam said that although it is not confirmed, preliminary statements from the refugees suggested that it was caused by a mud oven. The UN refugee agency said the "large fire damaged many refugee shelters", adding that it was "supporting people affected". Fires in the dozens of Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh are common, especially during the dry season from November to

April. But many of the camps are also riven by violence between rival Rohingya groups.

Police say security in the camps has worsened, with more than 60 refugees killed in turf wars and drug-related clashes last year, the highest number on record. In March 2023, a fire in Kutupalong camp - one of the world's largest refugee settlements - destroyed 2,000 shelters. Two years earlier, at least 15 Rohingya were killed and 50,000 left homeless after a blaze in the same camp. Conditions in Myanmar have worsened since a military takeover in 2021 and attempts to send back the Rohingya refugees have failed.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said on several occasions that the refugees would not be sent back by force. Rights groups say conditions in Myanmar are not conducive for repatriation. Muslim Rohingya face widespread discrimination in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, where they are denied citizenship and other constitutional rights. — Aljazeera

FBI arrests three people linked to January 6, 2021, insurrection

WASHINGTON: United States authorities announced the arrest of three people wanted in connection with the January 6, 2021, assault on the US Capitol, as the country marked the third anniversary of the violent attack by Donald Trump's supporters.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested Jonathan D Pollock, 24, his sister, Olivia M Pollock, 33 and Joseph D Hutchinson, 27, at a ranch in Groveland, Florida, the FBI said in a statement. The three will be arraigned on Monday. All are charged with assaulting officers, violent entry into the Capitol and other felonies.

The three had been indicted in April 2021. Jonathan Pollock had gone into hiding shortly after the attack while his sister and Hutchinson had been arrested in June 2021 and released on bond, but fled shortly before they were set to go on trial in Washington, DC last March. The FBI had offered a \$30,000 reward for information leading to

the arrest of Jonathan Pollock, who they "considered armed and dangerous".

According to a 53-page indictment, Jonathan Pollock and Hutchinson are on video recordings, repeatedly punching officers during the riots. Pollock is also alleged to have grabbed riot shields from officers, and he and Hutchinson are accused of using the edge of one to strike an officer in the neck or face. In June 2021, the Pollocks' brother, Gabriel, defended his siblings and Hutchinson in an interview with The Ledger, Lakeland's newspaper, saying: "I do feel like it is a political move that's being perpetrated, which - it's sad." "I think people are pretty fed up with the way the country's being taken away from the people," he added.

Three years ago, a crowd of thousands attacked the US Capitol in an effort to stop the certification of the 2020 election results, spurred on by false claims the election had been "rigged" against Republican

incumbent Trump. More than 2,000 people entered the Capitol building, smashing windows, ransacking offices, defeating in public spaces and searching for members of Congress. The assault was ultimately unsuccessful but it has set off alarm bells about the stability of US democracy and the growing influence of anti-democratic elements within the Republican Party. US President Joe Biden took a jab at Trump, who was the country's president at the time, calling him out for inaction on January 6 and election-related lies.

"It was among the worst derelictions of duty by a president in American history," Biden said in Pennsylvania. Trump hit back at Biden at a rally in Iowa. "Not one thing has gotten better under crooked Joe Biden. Everything's a mess," he said. But he only briefly addressed the events of January 6 repeating unfounded claims that the 2020 contest was marred by widespread voter fraud. — Aljazeera

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May 9 events, must not impede election

PRIME Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has recently said the incidents of May 9 were still being investigated and action should be taken against those involved in that anti-state violence. According to him, many persons were still avoiding the courts and were in hiding, now they face hurdles in carrying out their political activities and election campaigns regarding the upcoming general election in the country. Kakar categorically mentioned that the people of Pakistan would elect their representatives on February 8 and his government would carry out a peaceful transfer of power to them in due course of time.

The regretful events of the May 9 mob riots and violence are still calls to the public minds and many of the perpetrators remained in hiding over the past several months to elude justice and accountability. However, after the election season began and several political groups lined up for the nationwide polls, various PTI leaders who were previously deserters have now appeared on the political scene by submitting their nomination papers from respective constituencies. Presently, numerous PTI leaders including Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Asad Umar, Hammad Azhar, and others have been barred from the election in certain constituencies or facing serious obstacles in carrying out their election campaigns, whilst the ECP has rejected the nomination papers of certain leaders due to their involvement in the May 9 violence, on technical or legal grounds, etc.

Unfortunately, a deplorable narrative was crafted by the PTI leadership regarding the no-confidence motion, a legal/constitutional political process that led to the ouster of the PTI government and the events thereafter which completely subverted the innocent party workers/ supporters who unashamedly waged war against the state and institutions in the blind following of their leadership. Although a majority of the PTI leaders condemned the May 9 violence afterward, expressed remorse, and disassociated themselves from the party in a show up of their solidarity with the state and national Institutions, however many others persistently stuck to their narrative and defended their condemnable actions against the state. Those actions and hateful events were a manifestation of the political immaturity of the PTI leadership which attracted worldwide criticism from human rights groups, civil society, NGOs, media, and political activists in the country and abroad along with earning a bad name for the country.

Currently, the cases of May 9 rioters are under trial in the courts that will surely dispense legitimate justice by inflicting exemplary punishments on the culprits. Realistically, riots, violence, and anti-state activities such as attacks on military installations and the disgrace of Martyrs memorials are serious crimes that merit strict handling and stern action against the perpetrators whatever disguise they use. Politics has no space for violence and hate while no political group or politician can use violence and street power as a tool for achieving its/his political objectives. All citizens are equal and state law is equally applicable to all individuals irrespective of their position, political status, or party affiliation. Meanwhile, no political group or leader can claim impunity from legal prosecution or demand a lax application of the law based on his popularity, fame, or political stature.

At the same time, the PTI's complaints regarding no provision of a level playing field in the upcoming election must be given due importance as party leaders' having no blame for political violence must avail full freedom and unhindered rights of election campaigns without any bias or prejudice from any state institutions. It is the primary responsibility of the ECP and the caretaker setup to ensure equal treatment and opportunities for all political parties and candidates to conduct free, fair, and transparent polls, so a healthy political process begins and the nation moves toward political stability and calm.

Transgenders community, society, and the state

SPECIAL Assistant to Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment said that the government was committed to providing all fundamental rights to the transgender community at the gross root level. According to her, over 0.3 million transgenders were being registered with the concerned government department and the government was planning a mass campaign with the name of "Dukhtar" for protection, skilled training programs, and job provision for the trans community.

Transgenders are the most marginalized and highly deprived segment of our society. Transgender Community has been a victim of hatred, social injustice, and gender disparity in the broader Indo-Subcontinent throughout history. After the independence, Pakistani society also displayed a cold shoulder toward Transgender rights largely due to a lack of knowledge, prejudice, and ignorance. Due to social discrimination and the absence of a regular profession or job, most members of the transgender community beg on the streets causing adultery and polluting the environment in society.

Transgender persons are guaranteed all fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act not only paved the way for their recognition as transgender persons and respected citizens but also provided them with their due rights in society. In addition, the Act recognizes transgender people's right to property inheritance, voting, education, employment, healthcare, assembly, access to public places and to hold public office like other common citizens of the country. The government is working to collect exact data of transgender population, to provide them with education, health care, jobs, social security, vocational training, and other opportunities to make them productive and economically self-sufficient citizens of the country. Although public leaders often made tall claims and expressed bookish knowledge, however, ground realities are very bitter and deplorable. Transgenders are living a miserable life and facing utmost discrimination in society. All human beings are equal, however, any mental and health disability must not cause disparity and segregation among the members of the community whereas the state and society have a role in assisting special persons or persons with Disabilities including transgenders in enabling them to live a normal life in society. So, they do not become a burden on their family or state but play a constructive role in the development and promotion of society and the country.

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Why is Germany so viciously anti-Palestinian?

Denijal Jegi

SINCE Israel launched its latest war on Gaza, Germany has stood firmly by its ally. Even as warnings of a genocide committed by Israeli forces have mounted, the German government has not budged. On October 12, Chancellor Olaf Scholz proclaimed that "there is only one place for Germany" which is "side by side with Israel" and indeed it has not moved from this stance.

The German government has not only provided wide-ranging political and diplomatic support for Israel, but has also fast-tracked arms exports to facilitate the Israeli slaughter of Palestinian civilians.

The German political elite has vehemently rejected calls for a ceasefire in Gaza and relentlessly repeated the false claim that under international law, Israel has the "right to defend itself" from the Palestinian population it occupies. It continues to disregard decades of apartheid and ethnic cleansing. The German political elite has justified its stance with the alleged feeling of guilt for the Holocaust and the need to make amends by supporting Israel, considering its security "Germany's reason of state". But under the cover of "acting morally" and "atoning for its crimes", German politicians and officials are actually seeking to further normalise anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism, justify more draconian anti-immigration policies, and downplay the persisting anti-Semitism among white Germans.

The marginalisation of Palestinians within German society and the suppression of pro-Palestinian activism are not a new phenomenon in Germany. Long before October 7, the anti-Palestinian tactics of the German authorities were already escalating. Protests were banned, pro-Palestinian voices, including those of Jewish activists, were silenced, and cultural events and award ceremonies were cancelled. It is thus unsurprising that the crackdown on protests and police violence have increased in recent weeks. Numerous pro-Palestinian demonstrations have been banned, sometimes only minutes before they were supposed to begin, or allowed to take place only with heavy police presence. Bureaucrats have cited threats to public safety and potential display of anti-Semitism as reasons for the bans.

Hundreds of protesters were detained in the first weeks after Israel launched its war on Gaza. Many have experienced police violence and some have been put

under investigation for incitement to hatred. Even anti-Zionist voices among the small Jewish minority have come under attack. The freedom of speech in regards to pro-Palestinian activism has also been suppressed. Recently, the Federal Ministry of the Interior banned the slogan "from the river to the sea", considering it a call to destroy Israel. The state of Bavaria has labelled the phrase a "symbol of terrorism".

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), one of Germany's leading parties, has also made clear that the words "free Palestine" have no place in Germany and denounced the phrase as "a war cry of an internationally active terror gang", claiming it would mean "the extinction of the Jewish state, the only democracy in the region, by Islamist terrorists". Free speech has been under attack in educational institutions as well. With German universities following the government's pro-Israel stance, students who have protested on campus have faced police violence and smear campaigns in the media.

Pro-Palestinian symbols, such as the keffiyeh scarf, have been banned by some institutions. In one school in Berlin, a teacher physically assaulted a student who raised the Palestinian flag. This systematic suppression of pro-Palestinian activism reflects the dystopian-like reality in Germany in which opposition to genocide is viewed as an act of disloyalty to the German state and could thus justify criminalisation.

The German authorities have clearly identified anti-Palestinianism as a national interest and a state policy. They wholeheartedly support Israel's existence in its current apartheid form which requires continuous violence against the indigenous Palestinian population. This is, of course, not in contradiction to Germany's own genocidal history and continuous racism. The genocide in Gaza has further strengthened the already omnipresent xenophobic and racist sentiments in Germany. The German authorities have actively sought to portray Muslims and Arabs in particular, and ethnic minorities in general, as dangerous to German society.

On November 8, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier called on Germans of Palestinian and Arab descent to distance themselves from Hamas and anti-Semitism. Thus, he implicitly put an entire demographic under general suspicion of terrorism, as the Palestinian resistance

movement has been designated a "terrorist organisation" by the German state.

A little more than a week later, a draft law was submitted to the German parliament that tied German citizenship to a formal commitment to "Israel's right to exist". A month later, the state of Saxony-Anhalt issued its own decree, demanding from applicants for citizenship to declare their support for "Israel's right to exist". In November, Federal Minister of Justice Marco Buschmann said in an interview: "We do not want anti-Semites to become German citizens."

The claims that immigrants pose a terror risk and carry and spread anti-Semitism have been used as a justification to change Germany's migration and refugee policy. CDU leader Friedrich Merz said Germany could not accommodate more refugees from Gaza, claiming, "We have enough anti-Semitic young men in the country."

Already, legal measures are being taken to decrease immigration. In October, the federal government backed a draft law allowing for a tougher deportation policy that would make it easier to expel rejected asylum seekers. But the unhinged racist and xenophobic sentiments in the country are not only reflected in policies. They now define what appears to be a society-wide consensus captured in a manifesto published by German right-wing tabloid BILD, lecturing immigrants on how they needed to behave in Germany. Referencing the arrival of Arab refugees in the past decade, the newspaper laid out 50 points of instruction on what is permissible or not accepted in Germany.

The introduction to the manifesto states: "Our world is in chaos, and we are right in the middle of it. Since the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel, we are experiencing a new dimension of hatred in our country - against our values, democracy, and against Germany." Then it goes on to declare that Germany must say "NO!" to anti-Semitism and that "we love life, not death", "we say please and thank you", "we don't wear masks or veils" and "we don't marry off children. And men can't have more than one wife."

The rabid Islamophobia of the manifesto is more than apparent. But beyond that, it reflects the absurdity of white Germans considering themselves "under threat" and "victims" at a time when the Palestinian population is facing genocide in their own homeland.

It also exposes the deep-

rooted white supremacy in German society. Indeed, the reaction of the German authorities to what is going on in Gaza demonstrates that they want to strengthen and solidify racist hierarchies in German society: white Germans at the top and people from "the Third World", including victims of Israeli violence, at the bottom, doing in silence dirty menial jobs and being expected to show their gratitude and "integrate" into German society. But there is something even more pernicious about misrepresenting anti-Semitism in Germany as a foreign "import", brought to the country by non-white immigrants. This increasingly popular lie obfuscates Germany's brutal, anti-Jewish history and somehow dumps blame for the suffering of Jewish people onto Palestinians who are victims of a European racist, settler-colonial regime. It also covers up the German society's anti-Semitic present. Anti-Jewish sentiment still persists in Germany. According to official statistics, the vast majority of documented anti-Semitic incidents are committed by the political right.

It is not coincidental that the far-right party AfD has reached an all-time peak in popularity in recent weeks. According to polls from mid-December, it is now standing at 23 percent, second only to the right-wing CDU and far ahead of any of the parties in the current governing coalition. AfD representatives have glorified German ethno-nationalism and downplayed the crimes of the Nazi regime while consistently insisting that immigrants are anti-Semitic and demanding that the federal government prioritise combatting "imported anti-Semitism".

This combination of Zionism and toxic German nationalism may further fuel racist violence against minorities, including the Jewish community. Germany's anti-Palestinianism needs to be viewed not as a reaction to, but rather a continuation of, Germany's racist crimes. Palestinians and other victims of Israeli and German violence have never been considered human enough.

Like Germany's colonial genocides and its support for apartheid in South Africa and racist regimes elsewhere - which never received sufficient attention in public discourse - its role in the genocide in Palestine upholds racist hierarchies and its own self-image as a "civilised" and "morally superior" nation. The German-backed slaughter of Palestinians thus serves to strengthen the fantasies of white, ethnic German supremacy.

Aljazeera

First-time voters could swing Taiwan's election

Lin Nai-Chuan

MORE than a million young Taiwanese who just turned 20 will vote for the first time in this month's presidential election. According to Taiwan's Central Election Commission, there are nearly 1.03 million first-time voters aged 20 to 23 in this presidential election, accounting for almost 6% of the total voter population of 19.5 million.

With a voting rate of more than 70% among this age group in the 2020 polls, winning over young voters could be key to taking the election on January 13. So, what issues do Taiwan's young voters care most about? VOA spoke to several first-time voters with different educational experiences and in different Taiwanese cities to hear their views. They were all concerned about the island territory's low wages and the deterioration of cross-strait relations - neither a surprise amid economic struggles and Beijing's ongoing saber-rattling. Huang Shih Hsin, a junior at National Taipei University in New Taipei, worries that Taiwan's low minimum wage can't keep up with the high cost of living and inflation.

"With a minimum wage of less than NT\$30,000 [\$970 a month], my quality of life will definitely not be very good in the future," Huang told VOA. "Raising the minimum wage is discussed every election, but the minimum wage does not seem to have increased as a result." Chiang Min-Hsien, a 23-year-old convenience store clerk in Taichung, works the night shift, which he says brings in about NT\$26,000 (\$840) a month, less than the legal minimum wage, forcing him to live paycheck to paycheck. Chiang says it's not hard for young Taiwanese to find a job, but the annual adjustment of the minimum wage cannot keep up with soaring prices. He says almost none of his friends have any savings. The economy and low wages are not the only focus of Taiwan's young voters. Chiang says everyone should defend Taiwan's sovereignty amid saber-rattling from Beijing. "If there is really a war, we Taiwan cannot lose, and we will fight as long as we can," he told VOA. "I hope the presidential can protect our Taiwan. I don't want the Taiwan we were born in to disappear."

Dennis Chou, a photographer's assistant in Taipei who has just completed his military service, says that as a reserve soldier he can't imagine what it would be like to fight on the front line. He hopes both sides of the Taiwan Strait can communicate and avoid conflicts. But he also told VOA that he believes China's "liberation of Taiwan" is an attempt to exploit Taiwan in the name of protection. He says Taiwanese people will not sign unequal treaties or become Beijing's subordinates. "[It's like] the superpower is collecting protection fees from civilians as a gangster," Chou said. "We have to withstand this pressure." But he notes confrontation is not the best

move. "Because [Taiwan's] military power, economy, and population are not comparable to China's, ideally, we should maintain the status quo." University junior Huang says Taiwanese people have long felt numb to the fact that the Chinese fleet will come to "visit Taiwan several times" every election, and it does not affect their lives. Marconi Lan, a graduate student at National Taipei University in New Taipei, says the election's result won't necessarily lead to the two extremes of "war and peace." He told VOA a ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) reelection won't necessarily lead to war, while the Kuomintang (KMT) being in power would not be a guarantee of peace. But Beijing's stepped-up military moves around Taiwan ahead of the election don't necessarily sway Taiwan's youth toward the more independence-leaning and ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) or the nationalist party, Kuomintang (KMT), which is against declaring independence and favors closer ties with China.

Somewhat surprisingly, all the young voters VOA spoke to say they support the third-party candidate, the Taiwan People's Party's (TPP) Ko Wen-je over the DPP's William Lai, a former vice president who has led most polls, and the KMT's Hou Yu-ih, former mayor of New Taipei City. The young interviewees say they would vote for Ko, a former surgeon and mayor of Taipei, because they were tired of the traditional fight for power between the two main parties. Graduate student Lan says Ko has his vote because of his attitude. "He shows that he has always focused on getting things done well, regardless of any other factors."

Photographer assistant Chou has high expectations for Ko's new political direction because he thinks Taiwan's electoral culture is full of flashy and empty political ideas, making young people no longer trust the political parties that have long governed the island. Jason Zhang, a senior at a junior college of medical care in Taoyuan, says the two major parties' political opinions haven't changed much in the past two presidencies, while "Ko has his own ideas, and his perspective is closer to what we the public see." Wang Hong-zen, a political science professor at Taiwan's National Cheng Kung University, says Ko is winning first-time voters with his hip way of communicating. Wang says Ko abandons official language and simplifies concepts so that young people can easily grasp the key points.

Wang says Ko's campaign doesn't follow traditions, citing his creation of an online TV channel as a fresh and exciting way to gain popularity. "Politicians need to add fresh approaches to their traditional publicity and discourse when discussing political opinions," he told VOA. "If you use the old methods, you may find they don't work anymore." Whether Ko's approach can win enough support for him to become president of Taiwan's 23 million people will be known only after polls close on January 13. VOA

Middle East faces multitude of challenges in 2024

Yasar Yakis

the century-old party.

Turkiye's EU accession process continues to be dormant. It was mentioned among the titles of the EU agenda, but it was not debated. The bloc's foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell last month mentioned that the European Commission would assess a report regarding the situation and the potential of common areas of interest pertaining to Turkiye. However, it has now been decided to take up this question in a future session. As an explanation, the commission said that it was decided to do so because of the hotter developments in the region.

Ankara volunteered to host, in 2026, the 31st Session of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, COP31, but it was criticized for not making any active preparation in advance of the event and that it did not have a clear-cut policy on this subject. The Climate Change Performance Index, which is regularly published by a

German institution called Germanwatch, hinted that Turkiye's preparations were too slow.

There is a group of 63 countries that are responsible for 90 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. In 2022, Turkiye was 47th in this list. It has now dropped to 56th and is included in the category of "very low-performing countries." Meanwhile, the thaw in Turkish-Greek relations continued in 2023 and was crowned with a meeting of the High-Level Cooperation Council, which met on Dec. 7 in Athens. If both sides continue to demonstrate good will and moderation, there is no reason why these relations cannot continue to normalize.

In the international field, the Ukrainian crisis has dominated the agenda for more than a year, with no prospect of an early outcome. The EU provided Ukraine with only \$19.3 billion in 2023. A further \$50 billion was prom-

ised by the US, but it has so far fallen victim to domestic political considerations. Ukrainian President admitted that the counteroffensive launched by Kyiv last July did not yield the expected results. He still hopes that his country may win the war with the support of Western countries, but admitted that the international community should be ready to sustain a protracted conflict.

More recently, the Gaza crisis has been added to the agenda of international relations. Following its invasion of Ukraine, it was mainly Russia that blocked decisions in the UN Security Council; now, however, the US has taken the lead in doing so. As a result, the mechanisms that were created after the Second World War for the peaceful resolution of conflicts have become ineffective. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan tries to promote the idea that "the world is bigger than five (the permanent

members of the UNSC)," but with little impact in the international arena. Some leaders have also proposed the introduction of a mechanism to force countries to pay compensation for the damage inflicted on other countries.

The EU has decided to start accession negotiations with two more countries, Ukraine and Moldova. Furthermore, Georgia was last month granted candidate status and an EU commune noted that, if Bosnia and Herzegovina sufficiently harmonizes its regulations with the EU, accession negotiations may be initiated with this country as well. The situation on the Azerbaijani-Armenian front showed some improvements last year. The two governments stated that peace negotiations have already started and that they expected the support of the international community. The negotiations were conducted throughout the year on three different platforms, namely Russia, the US and the EU. No peace treaty has

yet been signed, but a positive atmosphere is evolving for potential stability in the region. As a gesture of goodwill, Armenia withdrew its candidacy as a host country for COP29 and supported Azerbaijan's bid instead.

The issue of climate change continues to be a major worry for the future of our planet. The steps taken so far have remained modest. COP28 was held between Nov. 30 and Dec. 13 in Dubai. The most concrete outcome of the meeting was a document assessing the global situation in the field of the climate. It was admitted that, with a view to limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, there is a need for a quick and sustainable reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Some 118 states committed themselves to increasing threefold the world's capacity for renewable energy by 2030. 2023 was a year of important developments for the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, 2024 does not augur well.

Calling for an end to war is not the same as calling for peace

Oleksa Drachewych

AS 2023 drew to a close, a fresh round of columns calling for a negotiated settlement to the war in Ukraine appeared in Western news outlets. These articles, in part, stem from increased reports of President Vladimir Putin's alleged willingness to enter ceasefire negotiations, as well as the perceived failures of Kyiv's counteroffensive to claw back large swaths of Ukrainian territory this past summer.

While reports indicate Putin is interested in a ceasefire, his public statements suggest otherwise. At his press conference last month, he said that Moscow's objectives in Ukraine have not changed. Russia remains unwilling to cede any territory it took since launching its invasion. Furthermore, Putin allegedly told Chinese leader Xi Jinping that Russia is prepared to continue the war for five years. Ukrainian officials have been equally consistent about their demands - President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukraine will not enter peace negotiations unless Russian forces leave the country. Kyiv has also proposed its own peace plan that emphasizes justice for victims of Russian war crimes, full restoration of Ukrainian borders - including annexed Crimea - and security guarantees for Ukraine.

While Russia and Ukraine's conditions for peace remain irreconcilable, some diplomacy has taken place, as seen in the Black Sea Grain Initiative, prisoner swaps, and backchannel discussions that have been held with Moscow. Calls to end the war based on the two countries' current military positions, defined by a perceived stalemate, are growing by the day. Many of these calls focus on handing over Ukrainian territory to satiate Russia's desires, which may bring about a temporary end to the fighting. But focusing only on the military sit-

uation leaves an incomplete picture of why peace between the two countries would not be achieved.

The most significant consideration is that Russia is engaging in a colonial war against Ukraine. Russian officials and media have also framed the war through the prism of Russian nationalism. Russia's weaponization of the memory of the Second World War adds another layer by conflating the Soviet experience with the Russian experience. This way, the Kremlin seeks to buoy claims that Russia is rekindling the Second World War through its efforts to "denazify" Ukraine. As Ukrainians have grown more united in defense of their country, Russia has thrown more weight into its efforts to destroy Ukraine. The terror bombing of Ukrainian cities and the violence Russian forces have committed against civilians shows the Kremlin's true colonial intent.

Meanwhile, Russia has increasingly set its economy on a war footing. Reports of continued expansion of the Russian military also indicate Moscow has no intention of slowing down its war. While these new conscripts may not be ready until at least late 2024, the Kremlin looks prepared for a long war. But Ukraine is fighting a defensive war and a war of liberation. We know about filtration camps, forced passportization, and the erasure of Ukrainian culture in occupied territories. Moscow has taken hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia. Increasingly, reports confirm Russian authorities' intent to have Ukrainian children raised as Russians, which violates the UN Genocide Convention.

Russia also underreports the loss of life in occupied territories. Kyiv's desire to liberate these territories is

not simply about regaining Ukrainian land, but also about rescuing civilians living in hellish conditions. Any peace plan that does not include some measure of justice for these victims of war will leave their wounds unhealed. If there are no notable consequences, Russia will learn it can act aggressively, and illegally, and succeed. Reparations and international tribunals will be a crucial step to redress the damage Russia has inflicted upon Ukraine and may also help prevent a renewed war in the future. Finally - and critically for peace negotiations - Russia has repeatedly shown itself to be unreliable. The Minsk Agreements failed in part because Russia continually undermined them. A new ceasefire that would simply freeze the war can only repeat the mistakes of the Minsk Agreements. Hence why another key aspect of any peace agreement will be security guarantees for Ukraine. Russia is unlikely to accept Ukraine's accession to NATO or the European Union. But no neutral power exists that could provide security guarantees.

A lack of trust in Moscow is why Ukraine has criticized calls for a ceasefire. Kyiv believes Russia would use a ceasefire to regroup and launch another invasion in the future. However, it could also allow Ukraine to do the same, as Russia's invasion unlocked international military support at a scale Ukraine had never received in the past. Signing a ceasefire agreement with no guarantees for replenishing Ukrainian military supplies would deprive Kyiv of the one advantage it still has in continuing to defend itself - the war is still on the minds of its allies even if fatigue is setting in. Ukraine still believes it can win the war with additional military aid. Peace is unlikely to come soon. While Russia's war against Ukraine

began in 2014, the full-scale invasion is not even two years old. Ukrainians want nothing more than peace. But peace is possible only if Russia is pushed out of Ukrainian territories.

Looking ahead, factors outside of Russia and Ukraine could play a key role in how the war evolves. Continued support for Ukraine has started to wane among Republicans in the United States. The looming US presidential election, and the possible re-election of Donald Trump, could lead to military aid drying up completely, which could have cascading effects on European nations and their support. In this scenario, an emboldened Putin may once again attempt to capture Kyiv and overthrow Zelensky's government. Russia could get what it wants in Ukraine just by waiting. Ukraine's path to peace would be best assured if Kyiv's allies give it the military and political support it needs to drive Russian troops out of the country. In this case, Moscow may be forced to accept defeat in Ukraine. But, for now, this situation appears unlikely barring Ukraine's allies commit fully to providing the support and military aid necessary to secure Ukrainian liberation.

In either case, wars are unpredictable. In 2022, Ukrainian forces took military analysts by surprise as they not only stopped Russia's advance toward Kyiv, but also liberated major cities in eastern parts of the country. Regrettably, there were no major breakthroughs last year. Russia is unlikely to change its war aims in 2024, while Ukraine will not settle for anything less than the full liberation of its territory. Ukrainian resistance remains strong. Yet, the policy choices by Kyiv's allies could bring about an end to the war, although not necessarily lasting peace.

The Moscow Times

US Supreme Court steps into a minefield

WHEN George Washington died in 1799, Congress tasked his Revolutionary War comrade Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee with composing a eulogy. "First in war - first in peace - and first in the hearts of his countrymen," Lee wrote of Washington. The first president was "pious, just, humane, temperate and sincere; uniform, dignified and commanding."

Yet as president, even the saintly Washington wasn't immune to criticism, and any idea that Americans would warmly venerate their leaders vanished with his successor, President John Adams. One newspaper editor, who the administration would later arrest, called Adams "old, querulous, bald, blind, crippled, toothless." As we head into the first-in-the-nation voting in the 2024 primary this month, none of the presidential candidates is first in the hearts of their countrymen. Joe Biden is 81, the oldest president ever and one who is struggling with John Adams-level unpopularity.

Former President Donald Trump is also deeply disliked by a majority of American voters and suffers the added liability of being the first former president to be criminally indicted (four times). Colorado's top court ordered Trump's name to be taken off the ballot for his role in trying to overturn the 2020 election and Maine's secretary of state followed suit, but other states have rejected similar arguments. On Friday afternoon the US Supreme Court announced it would hear arguments on the case February 8. It places the nine justices at the center of a presidential election for the first time since the court's pivotal ruling that stopped the recounting of the votes in Florida in 2000, handing the presidency to George W. Bush. On Friday near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where Washington hunkered down for the 1777-1778 winter with an ailing and battle-bruised Continental Army, Biden sought to cast Trump's campaign as an existential threat to American democracy. Trump responded by accusing Biden of "pathetic fear-mongering."

It's been three years since Trump supporters stormed the Capitol on January 6. Harry Dunn, who served in the Capitol Police for 15 years, was one of those guarding the symbol of American democracy that day. "Those who took part in the assault against the Capitol used all kinds of weapons against the officers defending it: Flagpoles were used as pikes. Metal bike racks that they had torn apart became bludgeons," Dunn wrote. "Some of the police officers who fought alongside me were screaming in pain from the injuries they suffered while battling the attackers. Many officers were temporarily blinded and coughing from chemical irritants being sprayed in their faces. Police officers like myself who were Black were verbally assaulted with racial epithets, in addition to the physical blows we endured."

"Our scars, both physical and emotional, still run deep and serve as a constant reminder of the fragility of our democratic institutions." Dunn announced this week that he is running for a House seat representing a Maryland district. As SE Cupp noted, Biden, with only 39% of voters satisfied with his job performance, has "the lowest approval rating of the last eight administrations at the same point in their presidencies." Republicans are bashing him for the surge of migrants across the southern border.

How should the president react? Close the border, Cupp argued. "It's a humanitarian crisis, an economic crisis and a crisis of national security. That is, in every way, the responsibility of the president to address ... Closing the border will force Democrats and Republicans in Congress to the table, to get something done finally. Why? Democrats will want the border re-opened as soon as possible, and Republicans won't want Biden to take away one of their biggest - and frankly best - talking points." This month's first contests in the presidential primary - the Iowa caucus on Jan. 15 and

Richard Galant

New Hampshire primary on Jan. 23 - will test Trump's so-far unshakable lead in the GOP race. Judging by the polls, former UN ambassador Nikki Haley and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis could potentially upstage Trump, but they have a fair amount of ground to make up. In back-to-back CNN town halls Thursday, each made their case. "In need of a political Hail Mary, DeSantis executed as well as could be expected, but his performance seems unlikely to have sparked a fire," wrote Patrick T. Brown. "Haley, on the other hand, can be content to play the long game, hoping her surprisingly good poll numbers in New Hampshire hold before the campaign trail turns south to her home state. Her performance Thursday night - offering fairly traditional

who failed at his most important job: keeping the country safe." Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "has also failed since October 7 in refusing to take responsibility for the disaster, repeatedly affirming, 'We're going to answer all these questions,' about what went wrong. But now, 'Let's focus on victory.'"

"The fact that Netanyahu expects the reckoning to come after the war creates an incentive for him to prolong it. As Israel decides how to pursue the conflict with Hamas going forward, that's a conflict of interest that is unacceptable and dangerous." The New York Times is suing OpenAI and Microsoft Corp., claiming their artificial intelligence models use the newspaper's work without permission. As law professor Seán O'Connor wrote, the case raises a fundamental question:

The US has more than made up for the jobs it lost during the pandemic, wages are increasing faster than prices and the economy is growing. "Look at the data and ask yourself whether Americans overall - and America itself - are better off now under Biden than at the end of the Trump presidency? The answer is yes."

GOP orthodoxy with a blend of compelling personal narrative and present-yet-understated identity politics - may offer GOP voters who are seeking an alternative to Trump their most likely vehicle. The key question, one that Iowa will shed some light on come January 15, is how many of those voters actually exist."

The traditional "game changers" associated with Iowa and New Hampshire may instead result from Trump's experiences in court this year, argued Julian Zelizer. "While the indictments and trials have done little to hurt Trump politically thus far, and in many ways, they seem to have boosted his standing by fueling the anti-establishment message and making it difficult for opponents to secure much airtime," Zelizer wrote, "it is possible that a conviction would look very different." (Trump has denied wrongdoing in all of the cases brought against him.) If the economy is the determining factor in the election, Biden should have an edge, according to John Avlon. The US has more than made up for the jobs it lost during the pandemic, wages are increasing faster than prices and the economy is growing. "Look at the data and ask yourself whether Americans overall - and America itself - are better off now under Biden than at the end of the Trump presidency? The answer is yes."

A drone kills a Hamas leader in Beirut, Israel exchanges fire with Hezbollah across the Lebanese border, the Iran-backed Houthi militia attacks commercial shipping in the Red Sea, suicide bombings for which ISIS has claimed responsibility kill at least 84 people in Iran. Every day brings more signs of the violence and instability plaguing the Middle East, Peter Bergen pointed out. "This all makes for a simmering mess, because while armed drones and proxy forces allow powers like the US, Israel and Iran to avoid all-out conventional wars, reliance on drones and proxies is also playing with fire as they move all these powers closer to all-out conflict. The history of warfare, after all, suggests that it is the most uncertain of human enterprises, and seemingly relatively unimportant events like the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914, which became a key trigger of World War I, can instigate broader conflicts," wrote Bergen.

In the midst of the Mideast conflict, there are questions about Israel's leader. "Now that the war against Hamas has entered a new phase, with Israeli military officials announcing they will start withdrawing from Gaza several brigades in advance of lengthy, but apparently lower intensity, more targeted fighting," wrote Frida Ghitis, "Israelis can turn their attention to the urgent matter of the prime minister

"When artificial intelligence firms set their systems to scrape and ingest millions of painstakingly produced news stories, is it comparable to art students learning to paint by recreating the 'Mona Lisa' - or unfair misappropriation?" The defendants will likely argue that they're just making "fair use" of the work, under copyright law. "Can a generative AI reproduction of previously published news and commentary be fair use? I don't think so," O'Connor observed. "Some journalists become more widely read than others not just because they publish first or have better insights but also because they express their ideas well ... Generative AI's use is not 'transformative' in that it is not commenting on or critiquing the original story or shifting it to a different medium, purpose or context. It is, instead, reproducing substantial parts of others' work simply to compete in the same market channels as the original."

"Rather than mastering the styles of other experts to develop new and better ones, it is a snaking hose flailing around uncontrollably, spewing thoughtless sequences of text based solely on probabilities that one word comes after another in human expression," Aubrey Gordon began her career writing under the pen name "Your Fat Friend." As Sara Stewart noted, Gordon and filmmaker Jeanie Finlay have collaborated on a widely praised documentary with the same title.

The name came from a letter Gordon sent to a friend explaining "how she, as a 350-pound woman, would like to be addressed." "Just say fat," Gordon reads from her essay in the film. "Not 'curvy' or 'chubby' or 'chunky' or 'fluffy' or 'more to love' or 'big guy' or 'full-figured' or 'big-boned' or 'queen size' or 'husky' or 'obese' or 'overweight.' Just say fat."

"As Gordon acknowledges, many thin people (whether they are medical professionals or strangers) presume they know better than a fat person what that person should and shouldn't eat. Gordon recalls one woman removing a melon from her grocery cart, telling her it has too much sugar. 'It's a melon!' Gordon exclaims incredulously to the camera," Stewart noted. "But as she and other fat activists have publicly said for years now, it's laughable to think they are unaware of nutrition and health recommendations, of the benefits of exercise and the dangers of diabetes and other obesity-related diseases. Listening to her describe a nonstop intrusion of strangers' cutting remarks and disapproving looks and overheard comments from people desperate to lose five or 10 pounds - anything, Gordon points out, to avoid looking like her own body - is to begin to understand the severity of the damaging scrutiny to which fat people are subjected."

CNN

International solidarity key to addressing Sudan refugee crisis

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

THE war in Sudan persists unabated and continues to inflict profound suffering on the populace. The country's refugee crisis has emerged as a dire humanitarian challenge, casting a shadow of despair over the region and placing significant strain on neighboring countries. As thousands flee the violence and instability in Sudan, the international community must confront the urgency of this situation and devise comprehensive solutions to alleviate the burdens on host nations and, more importantly, provide hope and a future for the refugees.

Among the nations grappling with a substantial influx of Sudanese refugees is Chad, a country that is also struggling with its own challenges. It has seen a substantial increase in its refugee population and prominently stands out as a host country battling the complexities of supporting a large displaced population. The influx of refugees is putting a strain on the nation's limited resources.

However, it is not alone in shouldering this burden, as other countries in the region, including South Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic and Libya, have also become significant recipients of those fleeing the conflict in Sudan. The plight of Chad and other neighboring countries demonstrates the interconnectedness of this regional crisis, necessitating a comprehensive international response to alleviate the burdens these countries face.

These countries need support to

tackle the repercussions they are facing as a result of hosting large numbers of Sudanese refugees. Behind the staggering statistics lies the human toll of the Sudan refugee crisis. Families are torn apart, many children do not have access to education and more and more people face the trauma of displacement. In addition, the absence of adequate health-care and sanitation facilities exposes refugees to the risk of disease, compounding their already precarious existence.

It is also important to point out that the journeys undertaken by refugees to reach the relative safety of one of Sudan's neighboring nations are often harrowing and fraught with difficulties. From traversing treacherous terrain to facing the constant threat of violence, those seeking refuge embark on a perilous odyssey, thus highlighting the desperate circumstances that force them to leave their homes in search of security and stability.

The shared experience of these refugees underscores the regional nature of the crisis. A collective and concerted international response is required to alleviate the strain on the host countries and also address the conflict, which has compelled such extensive displacement.

In the event that the Sudan conflict persists, countries like Chad and Egypt could endure heightened political and economic challenges. This is primarily because the ongoing influx of refugees has the potential to exert

a substantial impact not only on host nations' economies, but also on their social, political and environmental dynamics.

The implications of such a sustained crisis extend beyond the immediate economic strain, permeating various facets of the host countries' functionality. For instance, the ramifications may include increased competition for limited resources, while social tensions may arise from cultural diversity and political pressures may be exacerbated by the demands of managing a large displaced population.

In addition, it is worth noting that the environmental landscape may also experience stress due to intensified resource consumption and altered demographic patterns associated with refugee settlements. As a result, addressing the Sudan conflict becomes not only a humanitarian imperative but also a strategic necessity in order to avert the potential destabilization of neighboring nations. The scale of the Sudan refugee crisis demands a robust and coordinated international response. The burden should not fall solely on the shoulders of neighboring nations; instead, a global approach is imperative. The international community must collaborate to provide financial assistance, medical aid and logistical support to alleviate the strain on host countries. Furthermore, diplomatic efforts should be intensified. Sustainable initiatives should be put forward to end the conflict, while

political dialogue and international mediation are essential in order to curb and halt the violence that is driving Sudanese people from their homes.

The UN, regional organizations and influential nations must also unite to exert diplomatic pressure on all parties involved and facilitate a resolution.

It is crucial for the UN, working with the African Union, to play a pivotal role in aiding Sudanese refugees by ensuring access to essential services such as nutrition, primary health-care, mental health support and child health services.

Equally crucial is the assistance extended to the host countries grappling with insufficient resources to effectively manage the surge of refugees. This multifaceted approach, encompassing both direct support for the displaced populations and bolstering the capacities of host nations, is indispensable in addressing the complex challenges arising from the Sudan refugee crisis.

In a nutshell, the Sudan refugee crisis is not an isolated issue; it is a test of our collective humanity and commitment to the principles of compassion and solidarity. As the world witnesses the suffering of millions, the need for immediate action becomes increasingly evident. The international community must rise to the occasion, providing both financial and diplomatic support to ease the burden on host nations. Only through a united effort can we hope to bring an end to the suffering of the Sudanese refugees.

Baria Alamuddin

THE situation on Lebanon's southern border already feels like a hot war, with a rapid escalation in two-way missile barrages. These clashes have caused the deaths of dozens of Lebanese civilians and well over 140 Hezbollah personnel. Lebanese Army positions have been repeatedly hit.

About 75,000 people have been displaced, schools have been closed and much of the south increasingly resembles a closed military zone. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said the latest exchanges were about "reinforcing the equilibrium of dissuasion," but there can be no equilibrium in open conflict - only countless victims and escalatory cycles of vengeance. More than at any previous juncture since this conflict erupted, Nasrallah's latest sermon was defined by bellicose fighting talk. He belabored about a "historic opportunity" to liberate lands occupied by Israel. "The war today," he said, "is not only for Palestine but also for Lebanon and its south, in particular the region south of the Litani River."

Some within Israel's leadership have been advocating a decisive confrontation with Hezbollah since the Hamas attack on Oct. 7 - to the horror of the US administration, which exerted all its diplomatic leverage to head off such an eventuality in the knowledge that America and its allies would be dragged into a widened conflict against Iran's plethora of regionwide paramilitary assets. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian and Iraqi militants would be expected to join the battle, with Bashar Al-Assad having little say over a fierce new front opening up throughout Syria.

According to The Washington Post, the latest assessment by the US

Defense Intelligence Agency is that Israel would struggle to prevail in a widened conflict with its forces heavily committed in Gaza. Israel's latest partial withdrawal of forces from Gaza is to some degree calculated with the eventuality of a northern eruption in mind. As tensions further soared in recent days, the US deployed a new fusillade of diplomatic activity, including another regional trip by Secretary of State Antony Blinken. The State Department said it was "in no one's interest - not Israel's, not the region's, not the world's - for this conflict to spread beyond Gaza." King Abdullah of Jordan warned Blinken of the "catastrophic repercussions" of the conflict.

Visiting Lebanon, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell echoed the sentiment that "nobody will win from a regional conflict." French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna told her Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian that "the risk of regional conflagration has never been so significant. Iran and its associates must immediately stop their destabilizing actions." Last week's killing of Saleh Al-Aroui, Hamas's main emissary to Hezbollah and Iran, in an Israeli drone strike in Beirut may in retrospect be regarded as the moment when provocation passed the point of no return. Hezbollah described subsequent rocket barrages as an "initial response" to Aroui's death, which Nasrallah said was "a major, dangerous crime about which we cannot be silent, adding that Lebanon in its entirety could fall victim to Israeli aggression if the assassination went unpunished.

Only a few days before, an Israeli

airstrike in Syria killed Sayyed Razi Mousavi, a senior Quds Force commander, and a US strike killed a commander of the Nujaba faction of the Hashd Al-Shaabi. While Nasrallah and his acolytes have a reputation for issuing empty threats in response to such assassinations, matters are rapidly accelerating beyond anybody's ability to control them. About 200,000 Israelis have already been moved out of sizable regions in the north and south.

Israeli leaders are mooted the prospect of Israeli-controlled buffer zones, including a chunk of southern Lebanon and a several kilometer swaths of territory in Gaza, which itself is only a few kilometers wide. But these options, leaving aside that forced population transfers are illegal in international law, would be likely to worsen the conflict: Israel-occupied southern Lebanon from 1985 to 2000 was a casus belli for Hezbollah and a formative phase in giving it asymmetrical battle experience - not to mention an immense symbolic victory when Israel was eventually compelled to leave with a bloody nose.

Lebanon's parliamentary Speaker Nabih Berri has emphasized the importance of implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which commits both sides to a UN-monitored buffer zone and requires Hezbollah to withdraw beyond the Litani River. Nasrallah in his latest speech hinted that after the cessation of hostilities he could be open to border demarcation negotiations. This appears to be a focus of behind-the-scenes brinkmanship by Western interlocutors. There is a comparable inflammatory situation of reciprocal

[illegible]



In brief

Jaweria announces retirement

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Jaweria Rauf has announced retirement from international cricket after representing Pakistan Women's cricket team in four ODIs and 13 T20Is between 2013 and 2021. Jaweria Rauf made her T20I debut against South Africa during the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in 2012, while her ODI debut came in 2013 against Ireland. She started her competitive career in 2011 and it spanned over 12 years where she participated in various domestic competitions. Jaweria Rauf expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to represent the Pakistan women's team while announcing her decision to retire. "With a blend of nostalgia and gratitude, I announce my retirement from international cricket. It has been an incredible journey filled with highs and lows," said Rauf. "I consider it an honour and privilege to have represented my country at the highest level. I'm grateful to the Pakistan Cricket Board for all the opportunities," she concluded.

Bahawalpur, AJK register easy wins

ISLAMABAD (APP): Bahawalpur pulled off a comprehensive 10-wicket victory over Abbottabad in PAF T20 Championship Trophy at PAF Cricket Ground E-9 Islamabad on Monday. Batting first, Abbottabad scored 184 runs, courtesy to Naemullah, who scored 84 runs. In reply, Bahawalpur chased the target in just 9.4 overs without any loss with opening pair Moin and Rashid scoring unbeaten 97 and 75 runs, respectively. Moin was named man-of-the-match for his superb innings. In the second match, Islamabad won the toss and opted to bowl first against Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). AJK scored 251 for the loss of three wickets. Nisar scored 112 not out and Kamran Akhtar scored 73 runs for them. In reply, Islamabad could score 210 runs for the loss of three wickets, conceding defeat by 41 runs. Matiullah was the top scorer with 70 runs. Nisar was awarded man-of-the-match for his brilliant century. On Tuesday, AJK will take on Abbottabad, while Bahawalpur will face Islamabad.

Hansen to miss Six Nations

LONDON (AFP): Ireland's Six Nations title defence suffered a blow on Monday when wing Mack Hansen was ruled out of the forthcoming tournament with a dislocated shoulder. Hansen is due to undergo surgery after sustaining the injury during Connacht's United Rugby Championship clash against Munster on New Year's Day. "Mack Hansen (shoulder) will undergo surgery today for a dislocated shoulder and is expected to be unavailable for three to four months," Connacht said in a statement. Hansen's injury is the latest setback for Ireland, coming just three days after veteran prop Dave Kilcoyne was sidelined for up to six months. Munster's Kilcoyne, 35, also suffered a shoulder injury that needed surgery. Six Nations champions Ireland kick off their campaign against France in Marseille on February 2. Hansen, 25, has developed into a key player for Ireland head coach Andy Farrell, scoring nine tries in 21 Tests since making his debut in February 2022. He will also miss Connacht's final two European Champions Cup pool games against Lyon and Bristol.

Pakistan shooter Kashmala qualifies for Paris Olympics

JAKARTA (Monitoring Desk): Pakistani shooter Kishmala Talat on Monday qualified for the Paris 2024 Olympics after bagging a silver medal at the Asian Shooting Championship. Talat ranked second in the Women's 10m Air Pistol event with a remarkable score of 236.6 points at the Asian Shooting Championship in Jakarta, Indonesia. India's Esha Singh clinched gold with 243.1 points, while her teammate Rhythm Sangwan claimed bronze with 214.5 points. Talat, 21, is now the third Pakistani shooter to qualify for the Paris Olympics, after Gulfam Joseph and G.M. Bashir, and the first female.



She had clinched a bronze medal in the 10m Air Pistol event at last year's Asian Games as well, winning Pakistan's only medal alongside a silver in team squash and a bronze in kabaddi. In 2019, Talat bagged silver at the South Asian Games.

Talat was among 12 outstanding Pakistani athletes to receive the prestigious IOC scholarship in 2022 in preparation for the Paris Olympics. Javelin star Arshad Nadeem was one of the first Pakistani athletes to qualify for this year's Olympics after clinching silver at the World Athletic Championships in Budapest last August, behind India's Neeraj Chopra. The 27-year-old hopes to repeat a podium finish with Chopra at the Olympics, as the duo have developed a friendly rivalry over the years. Nadeem became a national icon after winning gold at the 2022 Commonwealth Games with a monstrous 90.18-meter throw.

South Africa's Klaasen retires from Test cricket

CAPE TOWN (Agencies): South Africa wicketkeeper-batter Heinrich Klaasen has retired from red ball cricket despite the country's Test coach Shukri Conrad suggesting he would form part of his plans in 2024. Powerful middle order hitter Klaasen has become a mainstay of the South African white ball side, with his record-breaking 174 from 83 balls against Australia in a One-Day International in September underlining his ability. He played four Tests between 2019 and 2023, managing 108 runs at an average of 13.00, but was set to return to the team this year according to Conrad, with current wicketkeeper Kyle Verreynne failing to impress. "After a few sleepless nights wondering if I am making the right decision, I



have decided to retire from red-ball cricket. It's a difficult decision that I have made because it is by far my favourite format of the game," Klaasen said in a statement on Monday. "But for now a new challenge awaits and I am looking forward to it." The 32-year-old has not elaborated on what that challenge may be, but with confirmed stints coming up

in the SA20, Indian Premier League, the Hundred and Major League Cricket in the United States, it appears he will feature prominently in the global leagues in the short-term format. Cricket South Africa's Director of Cricket Enoch Nkwe confirmed Klaasen was still part of their white ball plans. "We look forward to seeing him excel in the white-ball arena and continue to make valuable contributions to South African cricket in the years ahead," he said. South Africa recently lost opener Dean Elgar to Test retirement, while others who have prematurely given up first class cricket to focus on the T20 circuit include Quinton de Kock, AB de Villiers, Faf du Plessis and David Miller.



ADELAIDE: Barbora Krejčíková of Czechoslovakia plays a forehand during their match against Anna Kalinskaya at Memorial Drive.

Barcelona edge brave Barbastro to reach Copa del Rey last 16

MADRID (INP): Barcelona reached the last 16 of the Copa del Rey but were given a scare by fourth-tier Barbastro in an entertaining 3-2 win on Sunday. The record 31-time winners took a two-goal lead through Fermin Lopez and Raphinha before Adria de Mesa pulled one back for the hard-working hosts. Substitute Robert Lewandowski netted from the spot for the Spanish champions but Marc Prat smashed in a late penalty for the hosts, who refused to give up. It seemed like the match was over, (but) these games always get complicated," Barca coach Xavi told Movistar. "It's a positive result, our play was positive in many moments, and we're in the last 16." Barcelona took the lead early on when Frankie de Jong chipped a ball over the top for Raphinha and Lopez arrived in the box at the perfect moment to tuck away the Brazilian's low cut-back. Joao Felix headed in the second from a Lopez cross but was left fuming when it was disallowed for offside. Replays indicated the forward was not in an illegal position, but video reviews are not used in the Copa del

Rey until the last 16. "I don't understand why there isn't VAR in this competition, even though these are lower-level grounds," added Xavi. Barbastro goalkeeper Arnau Fabrega saved free-kicks from Felix and Raphinha as the visitors dominated as expected at the 5,000-seater stadium. Raphinha doubled Barcelona's lead from close range early in the second half after young defender Hector Fort whipped in a deep, swirling cross to him at the back post. Former Barca youth player De Mesa pulled Barbastro back into the game just before the hour mark, prodding home from close range during a scramble in the box from a corner. Xavi reacted by sending on 18-year-old Brazil striker Vitor Roque, who recently arrived from Athletico Paranaense, as well as defender Inigo Martinez. The Basque central defender only lasted a few minutes before limping off again, having only just recovered from a hamstring problem. Remarkably Barbastro could have levelled but Jaime Ara headed badly off target when well-placed to score. Ferran Torres was just as guilty at the other end,

unable to capitalise when sent through, but Barbastro handed Lewandowski the chance to restore his team's lead from the spot. Javi Lopez handled the Polish forward's header and he sent the goalkeeper the wrong way, gently rolling the ball into the other corner. Barbastro pulled another goal back in stoppage time when Marc Prat smashed home a penalty following a foul by Lopez, but could not find another to force extra time. "We're letting in a lot of goals, it's something that we have to improve on," Lopez told Movistar. Barcelona joined Real Madrid and Atletico in the next round after the capital clubs progressed on Saturday. Villarreal's tie at Unionistas de Salamanca on Sunday was abandoned at the start of extra-time because of floodlight failure. The third-tier side had pegged their La Liga visitors back in the final stages to level the score at 1-1 after 90 minutes in the round of 32 clash, in front of nearly 6,000 fans. Play will be resumed Monday at 1530 GMT. La Liga side Las Palmas crashed out 2-0 at second-division Canary Island rivals Tenerife in one of few shocks in the round.



LONDON: Ronnie O'Sullivan of England plays a shot in his first round match against Ding Junhui of People's Republic of China during day two of the MrQ Masters Snooker 2024.

Krejčíková crashes out to qualifier in Adelaide first round

ADELAIDE (AFP): Former French Open champion Barbora Krejčíková and fifth seed Beatriz Haddad Maia were high-profile casualties on day one of the ATP-WTA Adelaide International on Monday, both crashing out to qualifiers. Czech fourth seed Krejčíková was beaten by Anna Kalinskaya 7-5, 3-6, 7-5 while Brazil's Haddad Maia met the same fate at the hands of another Russian, Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, losing 6-3, 6-4. "It was a great match, she's a very good fighter," the 75th-ranked Kalinskaya said of Krejčíková, who was playing her first match of the season ahead of the Australian Open. "She made the match very complicated. I'm happy I won, I'm playing better tennis every day."

Kalinskaya, who needed nearly three hours to see off her opponent, now awaits the winner between American Claire Liu and Russian world number 15 Daria Kasatkina. The 59th-ranked Pavlyuchenkova, who lost to Krejčíková in the 2021 French Open final, advanced with 29 winners, breaking Haddad Maia three times. "I tried to follow my game plan. She's a fighter and if you give her a chance to come back, she will," said Pavlyuchenkova. She will next play either big-serving Karolina Pliskova or 49th-ranked Katerina Siniakova. Top seed Elena Rybakina, who beat reigning Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka to win the Brisbane International on Sunday, had a first-round bye. Her round of 16 opponent will be Cristina Bucsa after the Spaniard defeated Italian Jasmine Paolini 6-3, 6-3. Rain played havoc at the WTA Hobart International with only two matches completed. Top seed Elise Mertens safely went through, overcoming American Danielle Collins 6-2, 6-3.

Rizwan appointed Pak T20I vice-captain

ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced on Monday that it had appointed wicketkeeper batter Muhammad Rizwan as the new T20 vice-captain of the national squad, days before the green shirts kick off a cricket series against New Zealand. Since making his debut against Bangladesh in 2015, Rizwan cemented his place as a regular in Pakistan's white-ball cricket squads. The star batter, who is also captain of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) franchise Multan Sultans, is considered one of Pakistan's strongest opening batters in the shortest format of the game. He has played 85 T20Is, amassing 2,797 runs,

including one century and 25 half-centuries. Behind the stumps, Rizwan has taken 41 catches and 11 stumpings. "The Pakistan Cricket Board has appointed wicketkeeper batter Muhammad Rizwan as vice-captain of the T20 national team," the PCB said in a statement. "Rizwan is part of the national T20 squad selected for the New Zealand series." Speaking to PCB Digital, Rizwan said it was an "honor" for him to be named vice-captain. "I am thankful to the PCB for entrusting me with this responsibility. I am looking forward to working closely with the captain, coaching staff, and my teammates to contribute to the team's success," he said.

Pakistan arrived in Auckland for the five-match T20I series against the Black Caps on Monday morning. The series will kick off from January 12, and will be left-arm pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi's first assignment as captain of the national squad. "Training for the five-match T20I series against New Zealand will start tomorrow," the PCB wrote on X. Afridi was handed leadership of Pakistan's T20 squad in November after former captain Babar Azam stepped down as skipper of all formats of the game. Azam's decision came after Pakistan's hapless performance in the 50-over World Cup in India, where the 1992 champions failed to qualify for the semifinal stages of the tournament.

Zeeshan Bhatti lifts National Tenpin Bowling Championship title

ISLAMABAD (APP): Rising bowler Zeeshan Bhatti from Karachi lifted the Men's Singles title of the 16th National Tenpin Bowling Championship after beating Waqar Abdul Qadir Parkh in the final here at Leisure City Bowling Club, Jinnah Park on late Sunday. Ali Nauman and Faisal Feroze ended third and fourth, respectively. In the final, Zeeshan scored 358 points, while Waqas Parkh collected 331 points. It was Zeeshan's first appearance of in the national championship. At the end of the final, Mohammad Riaz Khan Turkalani along with Hamad Khan and President of Pakistan Ten Pin Bowling Federation (PTBF) Ijaz-ur-Rahman distributed prizes among the players. Ali Saldira and Ibrahim Saldira won the men's doubles event. In the men's doubles event, Shabbir Lashkarwala and Aleem Agha secured the second position while Ayan Bhatti and Waqas



Parkh finished third. Similarly, Ibrahim Saldira won the amateur title while Tayyab Bilal and Azazur Rahman secured the second and third positions respectively. Umar won the men's deaf title, while Wajid and Adeel ended second and third respectively. In the women's deaf competition, Zahra got the first position, Noor Al-Ain took the second position, and Asma remained third. Commenting on his performance, Zeeshan Zeeshan said: "I am happy with my performance. It was a tough competition as the top 16

players were featuring in it. "It was my first participation and winning the title in first appearance is a great achievement for me at the national level. I will remain focused on my game and will work hard to represent Pakistan at international level." Waqas Parkh said: "It was a thrilling final showdown. Zeeshan did very well to annex the title. I congratulate him on this victory. The first round score was leveled 159-159 but he did well in the second round and hit a couple of strike to win the championship."

“Steve Smith can break Brian Lara’s 400 record,” says Clarke



SYDNEY (Agencies): Former Australia captain Michael Clarke pinned massive hope on experienced batter Steve Smith, stating that the latter could break Brian Lara's record of a marathon 400-run knock. David Warner's retirement from Test cricket sparked a selection dilemma for Australia Cricket as the current Test champions, now seek potential contenders to replace the Southpaw at the top of the order. While there are several contenders from their domestic circuit including Cameron Bancroft, Matt

Renshaw, and Will Pucovski, who also have a modest international experience in their arsenal. Meanwhile, Australia's World Cup-winning captain Michael Clarke threw his weight behind Steve Smith to take up that role, expressing his hopes that the right-handed batter can do wonders as the opener. "If he wants to do it, I think they will allow him to do it. Listening to Patty Cummins' quotes, I think it's a simple swap," said Clarke on ESPN Around the Wicket Podcast. "I think Cameron Green is going to come in to open the batting for David Warner unless Steve Smith wants to do it. If he does, they might go Steve Smith to open and Cam Green at No.4 or Green to No.6," he added. Michael Clarke further lauded Smith's abilities and stated that it would not be a surprise if he broke Brian Lara's record of 400 not out. "He [Smith] is that good a player. It might be that challenge he's looking for. If he opens, he will be the best opener within 12 months," stat-

ed Clarke. "Don't be surprised if he breaks Brian Lara's 400 record because he's that good and now he's got the whole day." Steve Smith, on the other hand, also spoke about the possibility of him taking the top spot in Australia's batting order, during an interview with ABC Radio after the conclusion of Day 3 of the third Test against Pakistan, stating he was pretty keen for the role. "I'm actually happy to go up the top. I am pretty keen if that is what they want to do," said Smith. "I'm sure the selectors and 'Ron' [head coach Andrew McDonald] and Patty [captain Pat Cummins] will have a chat after this game, but I am certainly interested. For sure," he added. It is worth mentioning here that Smith has never opened for Australia in his 13-year-long Test career. The right-handed batter has scored 9,514 Test runs at an average of 58.01 and with the help of 32 centuries. He currently bats at No.4, where he averages 61.50.



In brief

08 illegal arm holders arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested eight illegal armholders and recovered arms, and ammunition from their possession during a crackdown here on Monday. According to a police spokesman, Rawat police held five illegal arms holders, Abdullah, Arif, Faizan, Osama and Israr and recovered 05 pistols 30 bores from their possession. Similarly, Naseerabad police arrested Sagar and recovered 01 pistol 30 bore from his custody and 01 pistol 30 bore was recovered from Shamsur Rahman. While Saddar Wah police recovered 01 pistol 30 bores from Ariz Shah. Police have registered separate cases against the accused and further investigation was in progress. SSP Operations appreciated the performance of police teams adding that strict action will be taken against those involved in carrying illegal weapons.

PDMA issues alert to cope with cold wave

LAHORE (APP): In view of the recent severe cold wave, Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) has issued an alert, and instructions to deputy commissioners across the province to launch a campaign on precautionary measures. A letter has been issued by the PDMA to all DCs in which PDMA Director Nazia Jabeen said that little carelessness in cold, fog and snow can be dangerous. "Citizens should be informed about safety measures. Awareness should be created about the use of heaters and dangerous gases," she added. All necessary instructions should be provided to tourists and district administrations should conduct vigorous campaigns at the local level, giving necessary information to people through all communication tools including media, she added.

Police Animal Rescue Center established

RAWALPINDI (APP): In a significant move towards animal protection, Rawalpindi witnessed the inauguration of its first Police Animal Rescue Center, as envisioned by Inspector General of Police Punjab, Dr. Usman Anwar. The centre has been operational under the supervision of ASP Taxila, Kainat Azhar Khan, and aims to address the plight of animals subjected to cruelty. The primary objective of the Police Animal Rescue Center is to provide immediate assistance, treatment, and care for animals found on the streets, in homes, and in places where they are bought and sold. The centre also emphasizes taking legal action against individuals engaged in acts of cruelty towards animals. The dedicated police sub-inspectors, veterinary doctors, and technicians, the rescue centre have collaborated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to ensure the delivery of high-quality treatment and care for the animals. This collaborative effort demonstrates a commitment to the well-being of animals in the region. City Police Officer (CPO) Khalid Mehmood Hamdani encourages citizens to play an active role in promoting animal welfare. Individuals witnessing any form of cruelty towards animals can report incidents by calling the helpline at 051-9293081. Hamdani assures that the identity of the person reporting the incident will be kept confidential. Furthermore, the initiative welcomes volunteers, especially students, to contribute to the efforts of the Police Animal Rescue Center. Hamdani emphasizes that once animals are treated at the centre, they will be available for adoption, providing a chance for compassionate citizens to provide a loving home.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Privatisation, Fawad Hassan Fawad chaired a consultative session with Financial Advisors for divestment of PIACL.

Govt all set to host Pakistan' first 'Global Health Security Summit': Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Health Minister Dr Nadeem Jan said on Monday that the government is all set to host the country's first 'Global Health Security Summit' in Islamabad from January 10 to 11, in which World Health Organization experts, ministers, UN Representatives of the United Nations and other officials will attend.

Talking to a private news channel, the Minister said that the Global Health Summit will not only improve the image of our country but also the confidence of international stakeholders in our health

sector and its ability to tackle challenges of unprecedented scale.

He said the main strategic objectives of the summit are to collaborate with world leaders to ensure equity-based pandemic preparedness, financing for low- and middle-income countries, and mutual exchange of knowledge, as well as member states, and exchange experiences with experts in the thematic areas of the Summit.

He said the theme of the summit is "Together for a Healthy Planet" and key topics of the summit include the impact of global health security on nation-

al security, pandemic preparedness and response, climate change and emerging public health.

"Our motto is no one is safe until everyone is safe", he said. Every country was praising our effort for holding this world health summit, he said, adding, that we want to increase the flow of credibility, funding and infrastructure to handle the viruses. Replying to a query, he said Dr Jan said that after the pandemic, countries normally pay little attention to the devastating diseases, however, Pakistan has taken the lead in alarming the world that the worst may yet to come.

1700 cops deployed to protect polio teams

RAWALPINDI (APP): As many as 1,700 police personnel have been deployed to provide security to 870 polio teams during the seven-day anti-polio campaign kicked off here on Monday.

A police spokesman said senior police officers have also been deployed with the teams. To ensure the security of the teams, the police personnel were also patrolling in their respective areas, he added.

Senior Superintendent of Police, Operations Rawalpindi said that fool-proof security arrangements were finalized for the security of the anti-polio teams. He said all available resources would be utilized for the security of the polio teams in Rawalpindi district.

NUST extends scholar support programme

ISLAMABAD (APP): As part of its efforts to promote educational equity, the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) has reached an understanding with the Qazi Foundation, to provide financial aid for deserving university scholars hailing from the district of Chakwal.

Facilitated by the Office of Deputy Commissioner Chakwal, the newly forged partnership derives from a broader commitment between the two organisations to strengthen research, innovation, and educational initiatives in the region. At the signing ceremony held at the DC office, Qurat-ul-Ain Malik, Deputy

Commissioner, acknowledged NUST's contributions to inclusive growth at the national level and extolled the philanthropic efforts of the Chakwal community towards transformative education. At the occasion, Maria Qadri, Director University Advancement Office-NUST, presented an overview of the need-based programme, and expanded upon how this agreement would profoundly impact the lives of present and future generations of students. Qazi Akbar, on behalf of his brother Qazi Ashraf - Head of the Qazi Foundation, endorsed the agreement and reaffirmed his commitment to the cause. The partnership will initially help generate funds for as many as 14 students currently enrolled in multiple programmes at NUST, besides the conduct of admission awareness sessions for enhanced visibility across the district.

Mushaal urges Int'l community to provide support against stopping illegal measures in Kashmiris, Palestine

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Human Rights and Women's Empowerment Mushaal Hussain Mullick on Monday urged the international community to provide immediate assistance against illegal actions and to protect civilians in Gaza and Kashmir.

Talking to a private news channel, she said that IOJK and Palestine have turned into prisons where thousands of people, including women, lawyers and youths, have been imprisoned and employees were being fired.

The brutal use of force and pellet guns against the Kashmiris is witnessed by the world, she said, adding, that there is no denying the fact that without the resolution of the Kashmir issue, regional peace is not possible. No power in the world can deprive any nation of its fundamental rights so Kashmiris and Palestine will get their right to self-determination shortly, she expressed hope.

She lamented that the world powers are not taking serious notice of grave human rights violations committed by Israeli and Indian troops, adding, that many innocent civilians have been martyred by Israeli and Indian forces.

Israeli forces are not hesitant in targeting hospitals and schools, she mentioned. She also stressed that the Muslim Ummah should unite in favor of the Palestinian and Kashmiri people, adding that Muslim countries should boycott Israel diplomatically and economically.

It is the need of the hour that Muslim Ummah must take some concrete steps and devise some joint mechanism to pressure Israel to stop genocide in Palestine, she added. Replying to a query, she said Pakistan is committed to its stance that it will not accept Israel and India until the Palestinian as well as Kashmiri people get an independent state as per UN resolutions.

Motorways, highways closed after fog engulfs country's plains again

ISLAMABAD (INP): Dense fog, which shows no sign of relenting, again prompted the closure of motorways as well highways for traffic in the country on Monday morning.

Different sections of the motorway had to be closed after fog engulfed Islamabad and the areas around it.

Motorway (M 1), from Islamabad to Peshawar, M 2, from Islamabad to Balksar, Swat Expressway from Colonel Sher Khan to Ismaelia, Hazara Expressway from Burhan

to Jhari and M 14 from Hakla to Yark were declared off-limits for vehicles after fog considerably reduced visibility.

Spokesman for the Motorway Police (MP) said that the purpose of closing motorways was to prevent accidents and hence ensure the safety of motorists.

He asked people to avoid travelling unnecessarily in the morning when fog is usually dense and return to their homes before evening after fog engulfs the plains again. He also advised them to

use fog lights while travelling, drive at a slow pace, and keep distance from other vehicles. "Before starting your journey, dial 130 for information," the spokesman said to the commuters, adding, "You can also get updates by logging on to the website of the National Highways & Motorway Police." Cold wave grips Lahore, other parts of Punjab On the other hand, minimum temperature in Lahore dropped to 6 degrees Celsius on Monday morning.

Equipping youth with IT is need of hour: VC AIOU

ISLAMABAD (APP): Vice Chancellor, Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood on Monday said that there is a dire need to equip young people with information technology to achieve speedy progress at domestic and international level.

If the entire system of the university had not been digitized in time, it would not be possible to carry on educational activities during the COVID-19 period, he said while addressing the inaugural ceremony of the newly constructed building of the Directorate of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Dr. Nasir Mahmood said that no one in Pakistan has such a platform and students have got online facilities because of digitalization, adding that problems are being solved on priority basis by reason of modern technology.

He said that digitalization was the vision and mission of Dr. Zia ul Qayyum. Despite the interruption caused by COVID-19, he said, AIOU continued its educational activities, which is the credit to the former VC. Executive Director, Higher Education Commission (HEC) and former VC AIOU, Prof Dr. Zia ul Qayyum, were also present on the occasion as

the chief guests. Expressing gratitude to the university administration for continuing its efforts for digitalization policy, Dr. Zia said that good initiatives should be carried forward to strengthen institutions. He said that new ICT building is a modern facility, and it should be run by planning. After digitization, he said it is imperative to pay special attention to the quality of education and course development, particularly in standardizing the texts of undergraduate, BS, postgraduate diploma programs, and associate programs. Registrar AIOU, Raja Umar Younis, deans, and principal officers also participated in the ceremony.

Rwp Ring Road project to be completed within stipulated time frame

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta here on Monday said that the Rawalpindi Ring Road project would be completed within the stipulated time frame.

During a visit to the Ring Road Project Camp Office, Liaquat Ali Chhatta was given a briefing on the progress of work on the Ring Road project.

The Commissioner reviewed the construction work by visiting different areas from Khasala Khudard to Thalian Interchange.

He warned that negligence in construction work would not be tolerated.

Five interchanges, 11 overpasses, bridges on two rivers, six canals and a railway bridge would be constructed with 15 subways

on the ring road. A rest area would also be constructed on the ring road, he informed.

The Ring Road Project would be a great gift for the people of Rawalpindi. This project would provide employment opportunities to the local people, he added. No way would be given to any society located near the ring road project, he said.

Training workshop on 'Science Communication and Diplomacy in Agriculture' to start from Jan 22

ISLAMABAD (APP): A two-day training workshop on "Science Communication and Diplomacy in Agriculture" will be organized under the auspices of COMSTECH and Sindh Agriculture University Tandjam from January 22.

This two-day joint training workshop, to be held at Sindh Agriculture University, Tandojam, aims to equip participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively communicate scientific concepts in agriculture and apply science diplomacy principles for international collaboration in the field.

According to an official of COMSTECH, the schedule incorporates a mix of theoretical sessions, practical exercises, and interactive activities to enhance participant engagement and learning. Scientists and students conducting research in agriculture as well as journalists, media (electronic, print and social), and public

relations experts working at universities, NGOs, NPOs and are interested in knowing more about how to communicate decision-makers and the public about the technology to encourage science-based policies may attend the workshop.

Coordinator General of OIC COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. Iqbal Choudhry will be the Patron In Chief of the workshop while VC Sindh Agriculture University, Dr. Fatah Marri will be the Patron. Consultant Science Communication and Diplomacy OIC COMSTECH, Dr Syed Javaid Khurshid and Director University Advancement, Sindh Agriculture University, Tandojam, Dr Ismail Kumbhar will be the focal persons.

Science communication plays a pivotal role in fostering public understanding, engagement, and collaboration in the realm of science and technology.

In the OIC Member States, nations are aspiring to establish themselves as knowledge-based economies and regional leaders in science, technology, and innovation. Science Communication is an evolving field with immense potential. Various institutions and organizations are actively contributing to the development of science communication in the country, yet challenges such as low public awareness, scientific literacy, and critical thinking persist.

About the outcomes of the workshop, the official informed that the participants and students will comprehend how scientific knowledge is organized, used and disseminated about historical science communication practices. The participants will learn specifics on how to prepare a manuscript, communicate, with media platforms and editorial staff and convey expert knowledge to the audience and non-experts.

ANF recovers 75 kg drugs in six operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting six operations across the country managed to recover 75 kg of drugs in six operations and arrested four accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Monday.

He informed that 700 grams of Ice drug was recovered from a passenger's trolley bag at Bacha Khan International Airport.

The accused was leaving for Doha by flight number QR-601.

60 kg hashish and 2.5 kg Ice were recovered from the Shahdara Lahore area

and an accused was arrested during the operation. A total of 10 kg of hashish was recovered in two separate operations near the Khar border in the Bajaur area.

2.4 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of a motorcycle rider in Peshawar and an accused was arrested.

500 ecstasy tablets were recovered from an accused in Peshawar Mor Rawalpindi.

Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and further investigations are under process.



RAWALPINDI: Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervez Ashraf awards medal among the position holder student during Convocation of Punjab College Gujar Khan.

Four dead in grenade attack

HASRAK, Nangarhar (Ariana News): The Head of Education for Hasark in Nangarhar was wounded and his four daughters killed in a hand grenade attack on his house, officials confirmed Monday. Officials said unknown people threw a grenade at Ghulam Jilani Hanafi's house. Hanafi's wife was also wounded in the attack. Spokesperson of Education Department, confirmed the incident, and said the motive is not clear and no individual or group has claimed responsibility.

Switzerland to reopen office

KABUL (Khaama Press): Switzerland preparing to reopen its humanitarian aid office in Kabul by summer of 2024. Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit intends to deploy four members to work in Kabul. Local employees are expected to join the office, as confirmed by Federal Department of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman, Léa Zürcher. The presence in Kabul will help better understand the situation on the ground and improve project monitoring and coordination with other donor countries.

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

Tehran does not support IEA opponents: Envoy



KABUL (Ariana News): Hassan Kazemi Qomi, Iran's Ambassador and Special Representative to Afghanistan, stated in a meeting with the Deputy Political Chief of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) that Iran does not support opponents of the current government in Kabul.

The meeting between Iran's ambassador and Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the Deputy Political Chief of the Taliban, took place on Monday night.

According to a newsletter issued by the Prime Minister's Office, citing Iran's ambassador, it is stated that the foreign policy of Iran towards the Islamic Emirate is based on cooperation, and numerous agreements have been signed between the two countries. The Iranian ambassador stated in the meeting with Mawlawi Abdul Kabir that his country has signed treaties with Afghanistan in the areas of trade, agriculture, electricity, and mines,

and is ready for cooperation in other sectors as well. According to Qomi, Iran wants the regional transit sector to grow in order to help boost the economic situation of regional countries. The Iranian ambassador reiterated that his country does not support the opponents of the Islamic Emirate but is making efforts for Afghanistan to be part of constructive cooperation. He emphasized that the groups and circles that sow discord and hypocrisy

between Iran and Afghanistan will never succeed. On the other hand, the Deputy Political Chief of the IEA, mentioned the recent attack in the Iranian city of Kerman. He said Daesh was a common enemy of Afghanistan and Iran, and emphasized that its goal is to destabilize the region and kill innocent people. Kabir in turn stated that the IEA's policy is clear, and no one, including Iran, will be threatened by Afghanistan.

Customs tariffs on imported items increased

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI) in a statement announced the increase in tariffs on some imported goods.

Ministry spokesperson Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad said that in order to support domestic production and prevent similar imports, they have increased tariffs on imported goods. The spokesman said: "Based on this decision, the tariff for tomato sauce goes from 10% to 30%, washing powder from 12% to 16%, live chickens from 20% to 40%, matches from 5% to 10%, barbed wire from 10% to 30%, layer board from 5% to 8%, iron nail from 8% to 12%, digital scales from 2.5% to 5% and threshing machines from 16% to 20%."

The Afghanistan Chamber of Industry and Mines (ACIM) emphasized that in order to increase domestic production and achieve self-sufficiency in Afghanistan, it is necessary for the Islamic Emirate to provide facilities for industrialists. Sakhi Ahmad Paiman, the first deputy of ACIM, said: "We expect the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to take more serious measures to increase the tariffs of imported goods and pay attention to sustainable electricity supply, so industry will grow and work will be provided for our compatriots."

Meanwhile, a number of businessmen emphasized that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry should provide facilities for businessmen in the country. "Creating export and transit agreements between the countries of the region, especially for Afghanistan, is a necessary thing to be able to increase our economy and economic activities outside the borders of the country," said Mahboobullah Muhammadi, a businessman. Earlier, the MOCI said that Afghanistan has achieved complete self-sufficiency in 126 items of domestic production and partial self-sufficiency in 104 other items of domestic production.

Family debt surges by 67%: Survey

KABUL (Khaama Press): Research from an institute shows that unemployment and family debt have gone up in many areas of the country in the last two years under the Taliban government.

Survey results from the Al-Biruni Institute show that the level of family debt in Afghanistan increased by 67 per cent in 2023 compared to 2021. This institute's "Surviving the Crisis: A Socio-Economic Assessment of the Middle Class in Kabul" report has been published.

According to the findings of this center, the unemployment rate among men has increased to 31 per cent and among women to 8 per cent in Afghanistan. Still, 15 per cent of the interviewees have stated that they have been forced to sell their household belongings due to poverty and unemployment.

Reports from United Nations agencies in Afghanistan also indicate that more than 23.7 million people in this country are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, and 15.8 million are grappling with food insecurity.

NORCAP, which operates under the auspices of the Norwegian Refugee Council, reported in 2022, following the return of the Taliban regime, that 76 per cent of families are in debt. The report from this organization stated, "Financial barriers and a lack of employment are recognized as the primary drivers of poverty and vulnerability. 80 per cent of families have an income of less than one dollar per day per family member."

IE: 3,000 operations conducted in 2023

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Interior said that in 2023, it conducted nearly 3,000 operations to suppress terrorist groups and armed individuals in the country.

Abdul Matin Qani, the MOI spokesman, said that female security forces were also present in the launched operations.

The spokesman added: "About 3,000 operations were conducted last year by special security forces against terrorist and evil groups, including ISIS." Qani emphasized that in these operations, the sanctuaries of ISIS were also destroyed. The spokesman of the ministry also added: "Of course, the female security forces also participate in the operations and they do their duties in searches and assessments." "Taliban should consider and manage such operations to provide more security in the country," said Dewa Patang, a women's



Akhtar Rasikh, a military analyst. A number of women's rights activists called the presence of female security forces in security institutions important and emphasized that women should be provided with work in various sectors. "Seeing the current situation in Afghanistan, it is very important that women are engaged in work in different sectors and that attention is given to them," Dewa Patang, a women's

rights activist. "The role of women and girls in the security forces is an urgent necessity considering the national interests of Islamic principles and Afghan traditions," said Lailuma Sherzai, a women's rights activist. The Ministry of Interior had previously said that nearly 2,000 security force members are women, and they are busy working as before the Islamic Emirate came into power.

Collecting opinion regarding governance: Ministry of Information launched campaign

HERAT (TOLONews): The Ministry of Information and Culture launched a campaign to collect the opinion of the people regarding governance.

Speaking at a gathering in Herat, the acting Minister of Information and Culture, Khairullah Khairkhwah, said that every citizen has the right to share their problems and wishes with the government's officials.

He also stated that the government is not violating the rights of any citizen.

"The Islamic Emirate is for the people. It is not 100 percent governmental. It means that everyone can go anywhere and explain their problem," he said.

Khairkhwah said that all governmental organizations are obliged to address the challenges of the people within a short time. "Our departments and



organizations should not fail to do their activities. The people should not be disappointed by us," said Noor Ahmad Islamjar, governor of Herat. "I want to say that a Madrasa can never replace a school. Both are needed, the madrasa and the school. But education exists in a principal manner in the seminary," said

Khalil Azaad, social activist. The campaign launched by the Ministry of Information and Culture is titled "Prosperous and Responsible Government". The campaign will include the people, analysts, investors and social activists who will share their views with the government officials.

Laadli highlight ongoing women's struggle

KABUL (Khaama Press): Fataneh Bayat, an Afghan journalist and the recipient of the Laadli Award, asserts that winning this award highlights that Afghan women still breathe under severe constraints.

The Laadli Award, presented annually by an Indian organization known as "Population First" to promote gender equality, was awarded to Fataneh Bayat and Mina Habib, two Afghan female journalists.

Ms. Bayat, speaking to Khaama Press, stated, "Ms. Mina Habib and I were candidates for the Asian award from Afghanistan, and fortunately, we received it. I dedicate this award to all female journalists who are actively working alongside men in these challenging circumstances."

Ms. Bayat reveals that she has worked in media for over a decade and gained recognition for creating a documentary about



the victims of the explosion at the "Abdul Rahim Shaheed" school. Regarding this, Bayat explains, "I was teaching at the time of the explosion and documented images of the victims, which were reflected in reports. Later, I made a documentary using these images, which received acclaim at a university in Finland."

Ms. Bayat also mentions that alongside her media activities, she is involved

with a business company and simultaneously teaches at a government school. Reporters Without Borders states that after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, over 80% of female journalists have lost their jobs. According to Ms. Bayat, women in Afghanistan face difficulties in various sectors, and she calls upon the global community and the Taliban administration to expand opportunities for women in the workforce.

IEA praises Sinirlioglu's work as United Nations Coordinator

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate has praised the mission of the United Nations Coordinator of the Special Representative for Afghanistan, Feridun Hadi Sinirlioglu, saying that he has somewhat presented the realities of Afghanistan on the international stage.

The spokesperson of the caretaker government of Afghanistan, Zabiullah Mujahid, said that the Islamic Emirate has had good relations with the UN envoy so far. "He has played a positive

role so far because he has been optimistic, which we praise. The UN should send a replacement who is optimistic like him so that he/she can present the realities of Afghanistan to lead to resolving ambiguities about Afghanistan," said Zabiullah Mujahid, the spokesperson of Islamic Emirate.

The United Nations announced that Sinirlioglu's mission as the organization's special coordinator for Afghanistan has been extended until February 2024 to convene the grand

meeting about the country. In addition, political analysts said that Sinirlioglu's appointment was efficient for Afghanistan. "Sinirlioglu's mission is a good one but not a complete mission. The mission should get more serious and open a path for intra-Afghan talks," said Sangar Amirzada, an international relations' expert.

"His role was to find problems and find solutions for them. He has made a roadmap for full integration of Afghanistan in the inter-

national system," said Bilal Fatemi, another international relations expert. Feridun Hadi Sinirlioglu was appointed as the UN's special coordinator for Afghanistan in April 2023 who met with various officials and ministers of the Islamic Emirate during his tenure. The UN coordinator presented to the UNSC his independent assessment on Afghanistan in November last year in which he highlighted ways for full integration of Afghanistan into the international system.

AUAF resumes classes; this time online and especially for girls

KABUL (Ariana News): The American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) has announced that it is back — this time online with a Transition to Success (TTS) program for Afghan students living in the country, including women and girls.

According to a statement issued by the university and post to X, the AUAF said the program was aimed at supporting higher education opportunities for Afghan students, particularly women and girls, inside Afghanistan, and to maintain an educated workforce "which will be the basis for political and economic stabilization in Afghanistan".

The program will be

completed in one year and is designed for students who have completed grade 9 and 10 and who could not finish grade 11 due to the ban on girls education inside Afghanistan.

According to the statement, this educational program is in line with and adheres to the main values of the American University of Afghanistan, values that include commitment to freedom of expression, pluralism, free research, equal opportunities, individual rights, tolerance, and dignified personal and professional behavior.

AUAF closed its doors in Kabul in the wake of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's takeover. Autho-

rities meanwhile banned women and girls from attending university in December 2022.

A number of female students welcomed the provision of this educational opportunity.

"I recommend that first a face-to-face lesson should be provided for a student, and the foundation of a student's lesson should be laid face-to-face, because students learn the basics of social communication and being part of the community through face-to-face lessons, and after that we can replace the online lesson with the face-to-face lesson, in that case there is no problem," said Tajala, a student.

Some women's rights activists believe that in the current situation, online education is the only educational opportunity for Afghan girls.

"Although I am not saying that online learning can be a 100% substitute for face-to-face knowledge, but in the current situation, online knowledge has become a suitable substitute for face-to-face knowledge and can fill most of the gaps created in Afghanistan's academic environments," said Adala Zamani, a women's rights activist.

The Islamic Emirate says that they are not against modern science and efforts are underway to provide education for girls.

Taliban detains group of women at Khair Khana, Kabul



KABUL (Khaama Press): According to sources, the Taliban detained a group of women in the Khair Khana area.

Sources said that the Taliban's Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice officials have detained and imprisoned dozens of women and girls in Kabul, citing the reason as "non-compliance with Taliban's dress code."

The group arrested several women along the route from the Parwan Hotel to Gola-e-Park using a Ranger vehicle.

Meanwhile, reports say that earlier on the same day, the Taliban had detained a group of girls and women in the Taimani area of Kabul.

In recent days, the Taliban's Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has initiated a new wave of detentions of girls and women in various areas of Kabul.

Earlier, the group detained several girls and women in the west-

ern area of Kabul, including Dasht-e-Barchi, due to their hijab and clothing.

The Taliban's Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice had previously confirmed to the media that they had detained some women in western Kabul on charges of "improper dressing." However, they did not specify the exact number of detainees.

There have been reports indicating that the group is detaining more women in different areas of Kabul.

Some sources in Kabul have mentioned that when the family members of the detained girls in western Kabul approached Taliban offices, they were asked to demonstrate against supporting the hijab that the Taliban had in mind.

After being coerced into protests, they demanded the release of the detainees, but Taliban officials refused to free them.

Afghanistan exposed to worst drought in 30 years

KABUL (TOLONews): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in a report said Afghanistan endured its worst drought in 30 years last year.

According to the report, the repercussions of climate change in Afghanistan extend far beyond rising temperatures. Agriculture, water, energy, health, forestation, biodiversity, ecosystems, livelihoods, and the economy are all affected.

The report said: "Afghanistan endured its worst drought in 30 years last year, compounding the challenges it now faces in its third consecutive year of

drought-like conditions, something which has kept levels of food insecurity in Afghanistan among the highest in the world."

As stated in the report, Afghanistan's vulnerability is starkly illustrated by the rise in its mean annual temperature, which surged by 1.8° between 1951 and 2010—nearly twice the global average.

OCHA added that 30 out of 34 provinces are grappling with severe or extremely poor water quality.

According to OCHA, desertification has affected over 75% of the land in northern, western, and southern regions. Rain-fed

agriculture, upon which 60% of the population depends, is threatened due to changes in precipitation patterns.

This agency expressed that natural disasters are on the rise in intensity, and severity, making Afghanistan the fourth most at-risk country and the eighth most vulnerable and least prepared to adapt to climate change.

Earlier, a number of farmers and citizens of the country said that due to the lack of water, they have suffered huge losses and their agricultural lands have been destroyed due to the lack of water.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar chairing a review meeting regarding Afghan Transit Trade and anti-smuggling operations.

‘We are SC, not running anyone’s political campaign,’ CJP tells Khosa

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa observed on Monday that the Supreme Court is not running anyone’s campaign. The CJP’s remarks during a hearing of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) plea seeking contempt of proceedings against the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for allegedly failing to ensure level-playing field to the party ahead of February 8 elections.

“We are the Supreme Court, not the government, we are not running anyone’s campaign,” the CJP said after PTI counsel Latif Khosa complained that the party members were being subjected to political victimisation ahead of February 8 elections. A three-member bench led by CJP Isa and comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Musrat Hilali heard the matter.

The proceedings of the case were broadcast live on SC’s website and YouTube channel. PTI lawyer Latif Khosa presented arguments on behalf of Advocate Shoaib Shaheen, who filed the appeal in the court. At the last hearing, the SC issued notices to the Punjab inspector general of police (IGP), chief secretary, and advocate general, seeking their response on the PTI’s allegations regarding alleged harassment of their candidates and party leaders.

On December 22, the top court directed the ECP to address PTI’s concern regarding the level-playing field on the former ruling party’s petition. In line with the court’s order, the ECP representatives met the PTI delegation and assured them of addressing its grievances in the lead up to the February 8 national vote.

However, the party filed another petition on December 26, seeking contempt of court proceedings against the ECP over the electoral body’s alleged failure to ensure a

level-playing field. A day earlier, the ECP submitted its response to the top court on the PTI’s level-playing field allegations.

During the hearing, PTI counsel Khosa told the bench that adverse actions were being taken against the PTI members through Section 144 and Maintenance of Public Order (MPO). At which, the CJP said section 144 and MPO will be for everyone and not just for PTI.

“Neither Section 144 nor MPO has been challenged before us,” the CJP added. The CJP also reminded the PTI counsel that the Supreme Court is not a political forum, asking him to use other forums for political purposes.

“Stop whining here. If you don’t have trust in any Pakistan’s institution then what should be done,” the CJP said after Khosa complained that nomination papers of their top leaders were rejected by returning officers.

Responding to Khosa’s assertion, Justice Mazhar pointed out that according to the report of the Election Commission nomination papers of more than 76% of PTI candidates were approved. “Does PTI want elections?” CJP Isa asked Khosa. To which, Khosa replied: “100%, we want elections.”

The CJP said the Election Commission’s mandate is to conduct elections in the country. “[...] these are the institutions established by you [parliament]...respect these institutions,” the top judge remarked.

Referring to the ECP report submitted to the top court, the CJP asked Khosa to deny the facts if they believed they were wrongly stated in the report. Khosa complained that PTI has not been granted permission to hold political gatherings and nomination papers of senior leader Shah Mahmood Qureshi were rejected by the RO.

At which, the CJP responded that the Supreme Court cannot direct any

RO not to reject anyone’s nomination papers. The CJP inquired from the PTI counsel if he had read the report submitted by the ECP in response to the PTI’s petition. CJP Isa said the PTI would have to come up with something in writing if it was rejecting the ECP’s report. After hearing the arguments, the SC ordered PTI to submit its response to the ECP’s plea and adjourned the hearing till next Monday (January 15).

ECP Special Secretary Dr Syed Asif Hussain on Sunday rejected the PTI’s allegations that it was not being provided a level playing field for the February 8 elections and asked the Supreme Court to “dismiss the contempt petition with a penalty”. The ECP official said this in reply to the PTI petition, demanding the SC to begin contempt of court proceedings against the ECP secretary, inspectors general of police (IGPs), chief secretaries of the four provinces and interior secretary over non-compliance of the apex court order passed on December 22, 2023.

The ECP special secretary said that on the SC order, the commission held a meeting with the PTI delegation and heard their grievances. He said their complaints were addressed and they were assured that a level playing field would be provided to all the parties and candidates without any discrimination. Hussain said the electoral body had issued instructions pertaining to the complaints to the Islamabad chief commissioner, all the four chief secretaries, provincial election commissioners and IGPs.

He added that the orders were also issued to the district returning officers and returning officers. The special secretary said that until December 26, 2023, a total of 33 complaints were made by the PTI and actions were taken on all of them. The IGP, chief secretary and ROs also submitted reports regarding action on the PTI complaints, he added.

Election Tribunals accepts 31 pleas, 10 rejected

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) accepted 31 appeals while rejected 10 against Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) decisions during hearing of 53 pleas for contesting general election scheduled on 8th February in three different Election Tribunals, on Monday.

PHC Election Tribunals accepted appeals of Abu Turab, Aftab Alam, Khurram Zeeshan and Sania Haider along with 27 other appellants. The rejected appellants including of NA-31 Peshawar candidate Taimour Hassan, Dost Muhammad NA-21 Mardan and Hurria Khan from PK-83 along with seven other candidates.

PHC’s judges including Justice SM Attique Shah, Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Waqar Ahmad heard 53 appeals against Returning Officers decision in 31 were accepted, 10 rejected while hearing adjourned in 12 pleas.

During hearing Syed Sikandar Hayat Shah, Alam Khan Adenzai, Shah Faisal Ottomankhel, Muhammad Ayaz Khan and Farooq Malik advocates appeared before PHC Election Tribunals on behalf of appellants. Moreover, Muhammad Shahid appeal from PK-34, Sakhi Jan from PK-73 Peshawar, PK81 candidate named Asghar Khan, PK82 Samad Mursalin and PK83 Sarfaraz Mursalin appeals were rejected by PHC Election Tribunals.

Shehbaz, Azhar, others allowed to contest polls

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Appellate tribunals on Monday allowed PML-N leader Shehbaz Sharif, PTI leader Mian Azhar and others to contest elections. PML-N President and former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif was cleared by an appellate tribunal to vie for election from NA 242 (Karachi).

Appellate tribunal, while rejecting the appeal of Masood Khan Mandokhel, allowed younger Sharif to take part in election for NA 242. Tehreek-e-Insaf candidate Mian Azhar got go ahead by an appellate tribunal from NA 129 (Lahore) constituency with acceptance of his nomination papers. Tribunal judge Justice Tariq Nadeem heard the appeal of PTI candidate and declared returning officer’s decision as null and void.

An election tribunal rejected appeal of PTI candidate Ebad Farooq from PP 150 against RO’s decision to reject papers. An election tribunal upheld decision of the returning officer in respect of PPP candidate Jamal Raisani. The RO had rejected nomination papers of the PPP candidate from NA 264 (Quetta).

PTI candidates Atif Ayub Mayo and Ammar Ali Jan were cleared by election tribunal to contest polls from PP 160. Both had challenged RO’s decision for rejecting their nomination papers. While allowing the appeal of both PTI candidates, Justice Tariq Nadeem of Lahore High Court said everyone should keep in mind that judges were hearing the appeal of candidates with open mind and heart. He remarked that court was deciding appeals as per law and constitution. He said they had no prior mindset.

PTI candidate Muhammad Farooq’s nomination papers for PS 125 were rejected. The appellate tribunal judge upheld the decision of the returning officer. Similarly, PTI candidates Amjad Khan from PS 116, Hassan Zaib from PS 118 and Abdul Qayyum from PS 63 (Hyderabad) were granted permission to vie for election. The appellate tribunal turned down ROs decision of rejecting their papers.

The appellate tribunal would continue hearing and deciding the appeals filed by candidates against ROs’ decision till January 10. Meanwhile, GDA candidates Zulfiqar Mirza and Fahmida Mirza’s nomination papers were not accepted by the election tribunal. The tribunal upheld the decision of RO. Ali Amin Gandapur was also allowed to contest polls by an appellate tribunal from NA 144 and two provincial assembly constituencies.

Israel hits south Gaza as Blinken seeks de-escalation

GAZA: Israel hit targets in south Gaza and across its border with Lebanon, the army said Monday ahead of a visit by the top US diplomat who is seeking to avert a wider war.

Gaza’s health ministry said 73 dead and 99 wounded had arrived at Al-Aqsa hospital in central Gaza’s Deir Al-Balah city over the previous 24 hours. Three months into its battle with Gaza-based Hamas militants, Israel’s army says its focus has moved from the northern Gaza Strip to “dismantling” militants in the center and south of the Hamas-ruled Palestinian territory.

In the southern city of Khan Yunis, troops and warplanes overnight Sunday-Monday struck 30 militant targets which a military statement described as “significant.” These included underground targets and weapons storage facilities, it said. A drone also killed 10 militants “preparing to launch rockets toward Israeli territory,” the statement added.

Also overnight, the military said it had hit “numerous Hezbollah targets” in Lebanon. Israel and Lebanon’s Iran-backed Hezbollah movement, a Hamas ally, have engaged in regular cross-border fire during the war that began an October 7 with Hamas’s unprecedented attack against Israel.

But a strike last week in a Beirut stronghold of Hezbollah has been a major factor contributing to rising fears of spreading conflict. A US Defense Department official has told AFP that Israel carried out the strike that killed Hamas’s deputy leader Saleh Al-Aruri. The Hamas attack which triggered the war resulted in about 1,140 deaths in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.

The militants, considered a “terrorist” group by the United States and European Union, also took around 250 hostages, 132 of whom remain captive, Israel says. At least 24 are believed to have been killed. Israel has responded with relentless bombardment and a ground invasion that have killed at least 22,835 people, most of them women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

On his fourth regional trip since the war began, Blinken held talks earlier Monday

with President of the UAE Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi. Blinken’s visit comes alongside that of other top Western diplomats trying to stop the conflict from spreading and to boost desperately needed aid to Gazans.

In Qatar on Sunday, Blinken warned that the violence could “easily metastasize” into a regional conflict. Over the weekend Qatari officials also hosted relatives of captives still held in Gaza, said Ruby Chen, father of 19-year-old captive Itay Chen. The release of more hostages “serves the bigger objective, as they see it, which is creating regional stability,” Chen said on returning to Tel Aviv.

Qatar earlier helped mediate a one-week truce that saw dozens of hostages freed in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Talks with Hamas on a new truce are “ongoing,” the emirate’s prime minister said. Since October, violence has surged in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, and Yemen’s Iran-backed Houthi rebels have launched more than 100 drone and missile strikes toward targets in the Red Sea, a major global trade route, and Israel.

Washington, Israel’s main ally that provides it with billions of dollars in military aid, has grown increasingly concerned over the war’s civilian death toll. Most of Gaza’s population has been displaced, according to the United Nations, leaving them in overcrowded shelters or tents in the winter chill.

The World Health Organization has warned of the risk of famine and disease, with only minimal aid entering as people struggle to find water and other necessities. Washington has said Blinken will press Israel on its compliance with international humanitarian law and ask for “immediate measures” to boost aid to Gaza.

“Our home and my son’s home have been destroyed and we have 20 people martyred in our family. I don’t know where we will go even if I survive,” said Gaza resident Nabil Fathi, 51. Two journalists working for the Qatar-based Al Jazeera network were killed on Sunday when their car was struck in southern Gaza’s city of Rafah, near the border with Egypt, the broadcaster said. — Arab News

PML-N, PPP, IPP welcome SC’s verdict on lifetime disqualification

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), and the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) welcomed the Supreme Court’s (SC) landmark judgment, ending politicians’ lifetime disqualification under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution.

After much deliberation, the Supreme Court of Pakistan ended the lifetime disqualification of lawmakers and declared that no person can be barred for a lifetime from running in elections if they are disqualified under Article 62 (1)(f). Setting aside its verdict in the Samiullah Baloch case, the apex court recalled its earlier order of

disbarring politicians from running for office ever, boosting hopes for political bigwigs who are eyeing to contest polls on February 8.

A seven-member larger bench — headed by CJP Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Aminuddin Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, and Justice Musarrat Hilali — announced the verdict with a 6-1 majority as Justice Yahya disagreed with his fellow judges, backing the apex court’s previous judgment.

Hailing the fresh verdict, Central Secretary Information of the Nawaz-led party Marriyum Aurangzeb termed it “a step

towards restoration of constitutional sanity”. “History has vindicated Nawaz Sharif and restored his honour, while Saqib Nisar’s short-lived vengeful act has been dishonourable discarded,” she said in a statement.

Marriyum claimed that the provision of lifetime disqualification was an instrument created for one reason and one agenda to persecute and exclude the “longest-serving prime minister from national politics forever”. “The architects of this sinister provision in the law should be held accountable for adulterating the constitution of Pakistan, which was the highest level of offence in the Islamic republic,” she added.

Zulfiqar, Fahmida’s appeals rejected

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Appellate Election Tribunal in Karachi on Monday rejected the appeals filed by Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) leaders from Badin Zulfiqar Mirza, also a former Sindh home minister, and his wife Fahmida Mirza, also a former National Assembly (NA) speaker, against the rejection of their nomination papers by the returning officers (ROs).

Both Fahmida and Zulfiqar had filed papers for the NA and the Sindh Assembly constituencies NA-223 Badin and PS-70, PS71 and PS-72, respectively. The tribunal, in its verdict, said that Fahmeeda was a loan defaulter.

He went on to say that the RO had rejected the papers of both husband and wife over the violation of the Election Act and the constitution of Pakistan.

Three days ago, on Thursday, the tribunal had issued notices to the returning officers and the Election Commission of Pakistan on the appeals filed by Fahmida and Zulfiqar against the rejection of their papers.

Papers of both husband and wife had been rejected a week ago. On the other hand, an appellate election tribunal in Lahore, comprising Justice Muhammad Tariq Nadeem, accepted the appeals filed by former Punjab governor and PTI leader Mian Azhar and his son PTI leader Hamad Azhar against the rejection of their nomination papers for NA-129, Lahore by annulling the decision of the ROs. Yesterday, Justice Ahmad Nadeem Arshad had accepted the appeal of Hamad against the rejection of his papers for PP-171.

KP CM chairs meeting to address public issues

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An important meeting to address the public issues of divisional headquarter Abbottabad was held here at Chief Minister’s House Peshawar on Monday. Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah chaired the meeting from Islamabad via video link. Besides, Caretaker Provincial Ministers Engineer Ahmed Jan, Engineer Aamir Nadeem Durrani and spokesperson to Chief Minister Brigadier (R) Syed Mujtaba Tirmizi, the meeting was attended by Additional Chief Secretary Syed Imtiaz Hussain Shah, administrative secretaries of the concerned departments, commissioner Hazara Division, RPO Hazara and other relevant officials.

The meeting discussed urgent nature of issues being faced by general public with the aim to resolve the same, and reviewed implementation status of the directives issued by the caretaker Chief Minister during his recent visit to district Abbottabad. Briefing the participants, it was informed that RPO Hazara and District Police officers were regularly making surprise visits to the relevant police stations, whereas multiple measures

including police patrolling were being undertaken in order to ensure the protection of passengers on Karakoram Highway.

It was decided in the meeting to convene a special meeting of the high ups of National Highways Authority in order to address the issues related to Hazara Motorway. Similarly, the chair expressed great concerns over unnecessary delay regarding implementation of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project and decided to hold a meeting of all the concerned authorities this weak so as to settle down the matters related to this important project further deciding to have an alternate arrangement for solid waste management in Abbottabad city till the KP-CIP is implemented.

Moreover, it was decided to devise a strategy on emergency basis for the disposal of flood water with the aim to protect Abbottabad city from floods and rain water. The chief minister on this occasion, directed the concerned authorities to take pragmatic steps to ensure visible progress on Abbottabad Water Supply Scheme. Moreover, Agriculture Department was directed to come up with a plan for preventing

growth of prathenium in Abbottabad as well as other districts of the province.

The concerned authorities were also directed to take necessary steps for providing the required funds for shifting utilities from the under construction Thandiani road as well as to make physical progress on the construction of Qalandar Abad Bypass and other road projects. Similarly, Exice and Police departments were directed to have a joint strategy to effectively prevent the inter-district trafficking of Narcotics and to take action against the actual sources of Narcotics in the province.

Besides, TMOs and other relevant authorities were directed to take an effective action against encroachments in Abbottabad city. The concerned authorities were also directed to immediately post Anesthesia Specialists at Ayub Teaching Hospital and District Headquarter Hospital Abbottabad. It was also decided to hold a separate meeting for addressing the issues related to Khana-e-kasht and Khana-e-Milkiyat in Hazara region. The participants were informed that payment of honorarium to Khutaba in Abbottabad and all other districts would soon be made.

Tribunal upholds RO’s decision of rejecting Elahi, wife’s papers

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: An election tribunal has rejected former Punjab chief minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) President Chaudhry Parvez Elahi and his wife Qaisara Elahi’s appeals against the rejection of their nomination papers from two constituencies.

Justice Chaudhry Abdul Aziz conducted the hearing on Elahi and his wife’s appeals, challenging the decision of the returning

officer (RO) to reject their nomination papers from NA-59 and PP-23, declaring them “disqualified” for contesting general elections. The election commissions’ Law Officer Falak Sher and Assistant Director Law Zulqarnain Haider appeared in the hearing.

The tribunal upheld RO’s decision regarding their disqualification after finding objections to the nomination papers correct. The nomination papers of the senior politician and his

wife had been rejected by the returning officer during the scrutiny process. A series of objections were raised against them, which included the concealing of assets, non-disclosure of shares in different companies, Qaisara’s foreign visit, non-compliance with the rule to open separate bank accounts for expenditures in both constituencies, technical mistakes in documents and submitting documents without verification from the oath commission.

