

Funeral prayers offered
F.P. Report
RAWALPINDI: Funeral prayers of Lance Naik Rehmat Ullah, age 30 years, resident of dis-trict Dera Ghazi Khan and Sepoy Muhammad Zaman, age 28 years, resident of district Tank were offered in Headquarters FC Balochistan (North), Quetta. Both soldiers embraced shahadat while fighting the terrorists in Mach, Bolan on the night of 29/30 January 2024.

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RAWALPINDI: General Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff presiding over the 262nd Corps Commanders' Conference in GHQ.

Toshakhana reference: Imran, Bushra Bibi sentenced to 14 years

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: A day after the punishment announced in the cipher case, the PTI founding chairman and his wife Bushra Bibi were convicted and disqualified from holding any public office in the Toshakhana reference on Wednesday.

According to the verdict announced by Muhammad Bashir, an accountability court judge, the couple will face 14-year rigorous imprisonment besides a 10-year period ban on vying for public offices in any capacity. The sentencing also entails a hefty fine of Rs787 million in a case that revolves around the illegal acquirement and sale of precious gifts received from the other countries, which are stored in the state-run treasury called Toshakhana.

During Wednesday's hearing, the PTI ex-chairman was presented before the judge who asked him about his statement under Section 342, as he marked his attendance while his wife skipped the hearing. In his reply, the accused, who is already convicted in the cipher case, said it was in his cell as he had been presented only to record his attendance.

"Submit your reply immediate. Don't waste the court time," the accountability court judge ordered after the PTI founder's response. However, the former head of his party questioned the reason behind the

haste and mentioned that the sentencing in the cipher case too was hurriedly announced.

As he left the courtroom for the prison cell, he said his defence counsel hadn't arrived yet and the document would be sent only after consulting them. Earlier on Tuesday, the PTI founder and his close associate Shah Mehmood Qureshi were sentenced to 10-year rigorous imprisonment in the cipher case, as the special court established under the Official Secrets Act announced its verdict in the keenly-observed episode.

It was a natural consequence of the saga, triggered by violating the oath taken as a prime minister, which endangered Pakistan's security, damaged its relations with other nations and got the then opposition leaders labeled as foreign agents only because they had exercised their constitutional right of tabling a no-confidence motion against the PTI government.

Bushra Bibi surrenders: Bushra Bibi, wife of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan surrendered after 14 years imprisonment awarded by Accountability Court (AC) in Toshakhana case.

The development came after an Accountability Court (AC) awarded the imprisonment and a fine of Rs787 million to PTI founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in

Toshakhana case. Bushra Bibi arrived at Adiala jail and surrendered before the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) who were already there to arrest her after the conviction.

In today's hearing, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder was brought to court, however, Bushra Bibi did not appear. After being asked about his statement of 342, the former prime minister replied: "The statement is in the room. I was only called to appear before the court." ?

The judge directed Imran Khan to submit his statement immediately and remarked: "Don't waste court time." "The lawyers have not come yet, I will submit the statement after showing them," the PTI founder and then left the courtroom. The Toshakhana case became a major sticking point in national politics after the Election Commission of Pakistan disqualified the PTI chief for making "false statements and incorrect declaration" last year.

It also comes just a day after a special court established under the Official Secrets Act sentenced Imran and his foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi to 10 years in prison for the breach of state secrets. Special Court Judge Abul Hasnat Zulqarnain announced the verdict in cipher case soon after recording the statements of the two accused under Section 342 during the hearing on Tuesday.

Power tariff jacked up by Rs5.62/unit

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) Wednesday increased the electricity tariff by Rs5.63 per unit on account of monthly fuel adjustment (MFA).

The decision was announced after the NEPRA completed a hearing on the Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA) petition seeking a hike in electricity tariff by Rs5.63 per unit under fuel monthly adjustment for December 2023. The approval will put an additional burden of Rs49 billion on the power consumers. The consumers will pay an additional amount in next month's electricity bills.

The recent power hike will not affect K-Electric and Lifeline consumers. The NEPRA said it will release the detailed verdict later. It is to be noted that the NEPRA jacked up the power tariff by Rs4.13 per unit under fuel adjustment for November.

Plea to dismiss Nikah case disposed off

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Petition seeking dismissal of the 'un-Islamic' marriage case against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and former first lady Bushra Bibi was disposed of by the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday.

Presiding over the hearing of the case, Chief Justice IHC Aamer Farooq announced the reserved verdict, disposing of the plea submitted by deposed prime minister and former first lady. In the order, Justice Aamer Farooq said that the petitioners have been indicted and the high court cannot interfere.

After the court's decision, the stay order on trial of Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi now vacated. The trial court in Rawalpindi will be able to proceed with this case.

PTI-affiliated candidate shot dead in Bajaur

F.P. Report

KHAR: An independent candidate for NA8 and PK22 Rehan Zeb has been shot killed and three others were injured critically in firing opened by unidentified armed men at Sadiqabad Phatak area of Bajaur district headquarters Khar, on Wednesday.

According to details, police claim that Rehan Zeb along with his friends was going for his election campaign in Bajaur when armed men fired at them near Siddique Phatak. Rehan Zeb and his three friends sustained bullet injuries in the firing and were rushed to Headquarters Hospital in Khar where he succumbed to injuries.

The injured persons were identified as Sultan



Rome, Talha Yousaf and Fazal Amin. It is worthy to mention that Rehan Zeb was an active worker of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and was contesting from NA-8 as an independent candidate after having some rifts with party leadership for not allotting him the party ticket.

A large number of his supporters and relatives gathered in front of Headquarters Hospital Khar after hearing the trag-

ic news of Rehan Zeb's death. The public had placed dead body of Rehan Zeb at Civil Colony road Khar and started protest against his killing in bright daylight.

PTI said Rehan Zeb was a party-backed candidate for a National Assembly seat and strongly condemned the killing. It said that the fact that PTI-affiliated candidates and public gatherings were being targeted by terrorist attacks raised big question mark on the fairness of polls.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Wednesday postponed the elections on the National Assembly's NA-8 and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's PK-22 constituencies after an election hopeful was shot dead within the parameters of the constituencies.

History of KP police full of sacrifice, gallantry: CM

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah said that history of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police is full of sacrifices; from police constables to higher officers, everyone has made sacrifices to protect the lives and properties of the general public, entire nation is proud of their invaluable sacrifices; adding that our police personnel are performing their duties with utmost dedication, bravery and courage, and putting their own lives at risk.

"The way our police force is fighting against terrorism is matchless", he remarked and added that the government and entire nation stood by the police to eliminate this menace of terrorism.

This, he said while addressing the ceremony held here on Wednesday to pay tribute to the martyrs of the Police Lines blast. Caretaker provincial ministers Barrister Feroz Jamal Shah Kakakhel, Engineer

Ahmed Jan, Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry and IGP Akhtar Hayat Khan Gandapur also addressed the ceremony.

The chief minister Syed Arshad Hussain Shah in his address, said that cowardly attacks of the enemy cannot demoralize the police force; morale of our police personnel is as high as ever and they are always ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the nation and country.

He maintained that law and order was the top most priority of the caretaker provincial government, and it is taking all possible steps to facilitate police force for this purpose, adding that issues being faced by the police force would be resolved and all their requirements would be fulfilled on priority basis. Apart from this, the provincial government will also bear the expenses incurred on the treatment of injured police personnel, he said and made it clear that directives to this effect have already been issued to relevant depart-

ments. The chief minister on this occasion, also announced to deposit Rs 10 million for Police Shuhada Welfare Fund.

The chief minister, during his visit to police line, visited the Monument of police martyrs and offered Fatiha for the eternal peace of the Martyrs. Earlier, the chief minister attended and addressed the prize distribution ceremony of Peshawar Lawyers Unity Sports Gala, that was organized by Peshawar High Court Bar Association. The chief minister distributed medals and trophies among position holder players of different sports competitions. He, on the occasion, also announced special grant of Rs 3.00 million for Peshawar High Court Bar Association.

Syed Arshad Hussain Shah further assured provision of land, required for the construction of committee hall and hostel for lawyers in Peshawar and directed the concerned authorities to take necessary steps in this regard.

Pakistani people can speak for themselves: Matthew

Jalil Afridi

WASHINGTON DC: US State Department Spokesperson, Matthew Miller said that the people of Pakistan can speak for themselves regarding what they think about the US.

Miller made these remarks while answering *The Frontier Post* whether President Biden foreign policy with regard to Pakistan has been successful and whether the people of Pakistan have gained respect and liking for the United States in last four years.

Matthew Miller answered several questions during the press briefing at US State Department with regard to Imran Khan conviction in the cypher case. Miller termed Imran's conviction as an internal legal matter of Pakistan and express resolve to continue strong relations with Pakistan.

While replying to a question about growing relations between the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and China, Matthew Miller stated that until girls education issue is improved in Afghanistan, the US will not have formal relations with the Taliban.

The Frontier Post while criticizing the Biden administration for softening its stance on girls education reminded Matthew Miller that all previous US administrations and media outlets like *The Frontier Post* have always taken a firm stance for girls education and it seemed that President Biden and his team is no longer serious in this issue. Matthew Miller insisted that the US wants to see "improvement" in girls education in Afghanistan.

Advisor, SAPM call on PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to PM on Aviation Air Marshal (R) Farhat Hussain Khan called on caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday and discussed matters relating to mutual interests.

The advisor briefed the prime minister about the ministerial matters and the progress of the government's reform measures in the aviation sector.

In a separate meeting, Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on Health Dr. Amir Bilal called on the prime minister and discussed matters of mutual concerns.

ECP decides to reduce size of ballot papers

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Wednesday said that a decision had been made to reduce the size of the ballot paper for the upcoming election scheduled for February 8.

In a high-level meeting convened to discuss the reprinting of ballot papers in certain constituencies, the Election Commission said that the decision to downsize the ballot paper was a response to a shortage of special security paper and time constraints.

The commission has decided that in areas where a reprint of ballot papers is deemed necessary, the printing process will commence only after the completion of the printing of ballot papers for all other Constituencies across the country.

However, the feasibility of this decision depends on the availability of special security paper and the timely functioning of printing presses. The ECP discussed the challenges posed by the need to reprint ballot papers in some constituencies, particularly in obtaining the required special security paper and completing the printing process in a timely manner.

LHC rejects Elahi's plea

LAHORE (INP): The Lahore High Court rejected petition of Chaudhry Pervaiz seeking 'Peacock' as election symbol in election. The high court bench upheld the election commission's decision with regard to the election symbol, which had allotted 'donkey cart' as symbol to Pervaiz Elahi. Elahi had sought a review over the election symbol allotted to him with a petition in the LHC and pleaded for 'peacock' to be given to him as symbol for election.

Terrorists to be dealt with iron hands: COAS

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS) presided over the 262nd Corps Commanders' Conference (CCC) held at GHQ, on Wednesday. Forum paid rich tribute to the supreme sacrifices of Shuhadas including officers and men of the Armed Forces, Law Enforcement Agencies and the citizens who have laid their lives for ensuring peace and stability in the country.

Forum resolved that terrorists, their facilitators and abettors, working on behalf of hostile forces to destabilise Pakistan, will be dealt with full might of the state. COAS stated that Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity are sacrosanct and inviolable. Pakistan believes in peaceful co-existence with all states, however, there would never be any compromise over country's sovereignty, national honour and aspirations of Pakistani people.

The forum was briefed on the callous Indian campaign of extra-territorial and extra-judicial killings, perpetuating state-sponsored terrorism and targeting Pakistani citizens. The forum agreed that blatant violation of international laws by India and its real face be exposed to the world. The international community has already shown serious concerns over the criminal behaviour of India and its use of state apparatus for killing spree around the world.

The forum reiterated unequivocal support for Palestine and the people of Gaza

while noting the extremely negative fallout of the conflict and the potential to spill over in the wider region. The immediate need for a permanent ceasefire and enduring solution to the Palestinian question was unanimously recognised. In the same vein, Pakistan's resolve to support the people of IIOJK for their right of self determination was reiterated. Pakistan would continue to morally, politically and diplomatically support Kashmir brothers and sisters till justice is served in accordance with relevant UNSC resolutions.

The forum also discussed deployment of Pakistan Army to assist Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in the peaceful conduct of General Elections 2024. Pakistan Army will perform assigned duties as per the Constitutional mandate, under the guidelines of ECP. No one would be allowed to indulge in violence in the name of political activity and sabotage the quintessential democratic exercise of conduct of free and fair elections.

The forum acknowledged and appreciated the steps taken against spectrum of illegal activities and criminal mafias including smuggling, hoarding, money laundering, power theft and illegal aliens. The participants emphasised that such actions and their positive impact on the economy and well being of the people need to continue without any let up.

The forum was briefed on operational preparedness of the formations. COAS asked formation commanders to continue their focus on the training, administration and morale of the soldiers.

Govt jacks up petrol price by Rs13.55 per litre

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The outgoing caretaker government has jacked up the petrol price by Rs13.55 on Thursday night.

The latest price hike comes in light of ongoing tensions in Middle East as Israel continues to press war on Gaza. Updated POL prices go into effect from February 1 at midnight.

"Government of Pakistan has decided to

bring changes in the current prices of petroleum products during the fortnight starting from 1st February 2024, as recommended by Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA)," a statement issued by the Finance Division read.

After the revision, the price of petrol now stands at Rs272.89 per litre, while the price of high-speed diesel stands at Rs278.96 after a hike of Rs2.75 per litre.

Earlier this month, the

price of petrol was slashed by Rs8 per litre but retained the existing price of diesel at Rs273.21 per litre for the next fortnight.

According to a notification by the finance ministry, petrol will be available at Rs259.34 per litre from January 16 following a reduction of Rs8.

However, the diesel rate was retained at Rs276.21 per litre. Meanwhile, no changes were mentioned for the prices of light-diesel oil and kerosene oil.

Security forces kill 12 more terrorists in Mach

F.P. Report

QUETTA: The security forces Wednesday killed of 12 more terrorists in Balochistan's Mach city, taking the death toll of militants to 22, as the country witnesses a rise in terrorism. The sources said the operation that began on January 30 thwarted terrorists' attacks, while a clearance operation was still underway in the restive province's city.

The security forces had killed nine terrorists on Jan 30 — including three suicide bombers — and injured three in retaliatory actions following multiple terrorist attacks in Balochistan's Mach and Kolpur towns. The incidents come just days before the February 8 national elections, turning the situation volatile, as political actors and parties have also been targeted during electioneering.

As the forces clamp down on terrorists in the province, four brave security personnel embraced martyrdom along with two innocent civilians on Jan 30. Terrorists also attacked multiple areas in Balochistan and KP, hampering electioneering ahead of the general polls. Three separate hand

Multiple blasts target Balochistan

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Balochistan Wednesday was rocked by multiple terrorist attacks in various cities resulting in several injuries. Three separate hand grenade attacks were carried out against the Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) election offices in Quetta and Kalat's Mangochar — with the former incident wounding three people.

The strikes were followed by another hand grenade attack on the PPP candidate Zahoor Buledi's house in Kech, confirmed Deputy Commissioner (DC) Hussain Jan. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, the Awami National Party (ANP) also came under attack as assailants opened fire on the party workers in Chaman city resulting in the death of a worker identified as Zahoor Ahmed.

The incident took place as ANP workers were busy in electioneering activities in the PB-50 constituency, confirmed party spokesperson Zamrak Achakzai. Condemning the incidents, Balochistan's caretaker Home Minister Zubair Jamali said that such attacks would not deter the public's resolve against the menace of terrorism. Furthermore, independent candidate Rehan Zeb Khan was shot dead on Wednesday in Bajaur district, police said.

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ISLAMABAD: SAPM on Health Dr. Amir Bilal called on Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.



CM inaugurates first govt cancer care hospital

LAHORE (APP): The first cancer hospital at the government level has been made operational on the special direction of Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi.

The CM inaugurated the Mayo Cancer Care Hospital at Manawan, here on Wednesday.

Mohsin Naqvi while announcing to provide free treatment facility to the patients in the cancer hospital revealed that every patient will be provided free treatment and no patient suffering from any stage will be denied treatment in the first government cancer hospital. For the time being, the cancer hospital comprises 100-beds and will be increased up to 1000-beds in the coming few years.

The CM visited the cancer hospital and reviewed facilities being provided to the patients. He obtained a token from the machine and ordered to simplify the automated system, adding that besides English writing, Urdu writing should also be displayed on the token machine for the facilitation of the patients. The CM reviewed the treatment mechanism of the cancer patients and monitored the whole Chemotherapy mechanism. He visited the room for collecting blood samples and also planted a sapling in the lawn of the hospital.

Mohsin Naqvi issued directions to write in the Urdu language on the sign boards for the facilitation of patients. He revealed that Chemotherapy and surgery will be carried out in the cancer hospital. All the administrative and financial affairs of the cancer hos-

pital have been handed over entirely to the King Edward Medical College University. A state of the art hospital has been built for the treatment of cancer patients at the government level, he added.

The CM apprised that the cancer treatment is highly expensive which a common man cannot afford, adding that free treatment will be provided to the patients in this hospital. It is a dire need of the people of Punjab to have a high-quality cancer hospital at the government level. It is the foremost responsibility of the government to provide a state of the art hospital for cancer patients at the government level, he added.

CM Naqvi while addressing the inaugural ceremony of the Mayo Cancer Care Hospital apprised that the first complete cancer care hospital of Punjab has been established. No patient suffering from any cancer ailment will be denied treatment facilities in the Mayo Cancer Care Hospital. Even the patient suffering from the last cancer stage will also be provided treatment facilities in the Mayo Cancer Care Hospital, he said and added that it is highly deplorable for not having a complete hospital to provide cancer treatment facilities in a population of 13 crore. There were cancer departments in the hospitals but there was not a single complete hospital.

Mohsin Naqvi stated that owing to a few weeks of hard work, the Manawan Hospital has been turned into Mayo Cancer Care Hospital. The government has established a cancer

hospital and now it is the responsibility of the doctors and the staff to provide complete care to the cancer patients. If the doctors of cancer care hospital take the ownership then the hospital will earn a great name and fame, he added.

The CM directed to ensure care of the patients like being done in the private hospitals otherwise it will become a routine government hospital. The doctors will have to take the ownership of the hospital for ensuring better treatment facilities. It is a great milestone to establish a complete hospital for the treatment of cancer patients in a big hospital of the big Punjab province. It will become a cancer hospital comprising 1000 beds by the Grace of Allah Almighty in the coming ten years, he added. The cancer care hospital will be exemplary if the management succeeds in formulating a better system for the cancer treatment. The diagnosis of cancer is considered equal to giving death information. If the cancer patients are encouraged then their lives can be saved, he added. If anyone is diagnosed with cancer ailment then he must be aware about visiting the Mayo Cancer Hospital. The government has established a hospital and provision of treatment and fulfilling other responsibilities is in the hands of the doctors. The doctors and the staff will have to adopt a professional attitude. The patients across Punjab will be provided free treatment facilities in the Mayo Cancer Care Hospital, he added.



KARACHI: MQM Pakistan leader Rauf Siddiqi addressing press conference. —INP Photo

Imran, wife not political prisoners, says Shehla Raza

LAHORE (APP): Senior leader of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and former deputy speaker Sindh Assembly, Shehla Raza, said on Wednesday that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan, his wife Bushra Bibi and party's central leader Shah Mehmood Qureshi were not political prisoners.

In a statement issued, she said that no political party was involved in the cases against them. She reiterated the PPP's promise to release every political prisoner after coming to power on February 8.

Chief secretary inspects Central Jail

LAHORE (APP): Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman visited Central Jail Kot Lakhpat on Wednesday to check the facilities being provided to prisoners.

He inspected the jail hospital, vocational centre and food preparation room, and issued necessary instructions on-the-spot. He said quality food and sanitation were basic needs of prisoners. He said that reforms were under way to improve the condition of prisons across the province, adding that provision of video call, internet and e-library facilities to prisoners was a laudable initiative.

The chief secretary asked the Prisons Department to improve procedure of prisoners' meeting with their families and pay special attention to provision of technical training to the inmates. He appreciated the quality of carpets made by prisoners in jail.

IGP Prisons Farooq Nazir briefed the chief secretary about the measures being taken for welfare of prisoners. Home Secretary Shakeel Ahmad and officers of the Prisons Department were also present.

Seven arrested for overcharging

LAHORE (APP): In response to complaints of overcharging, the district administration raided the Mayo Hospital parking area and arrested seven people on Wednesday.

According to a spokesperson for the deputy commissioner's office, the action was taken on directives of the DC and Chief Executive Officer Lahore Parking Company Rafia Haider on various complaints. The team led by Additional Deputy Commissioner General Muhammad Shojain Vistro ensured a comprehensive crackdown against contractors and employees involved in overcharging and arrested seven accused, and also got registered a case against them.

Sindh CM urges govt partners to help establish social protection system

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (Retd) Maqbool Baqar on Wednesday urged the provincial government's partners to help establish a social protection system that empowers and safeguards the most vulnerable segments of the society.

Speaking at a "Consultative Seminar on Social Protection in Sindh", he commended the organizers in bringing together diverse perspectives and expertise for exploring ways to strengthen the social protection system in the province.

The chief minister expressed gratitude to the participants for their valuable contributions to the crucial dialogue, highlighting the collaborative spirit that was essential for

the success of the government's endeavours.

He stated that the Sindh Government "provides effective social assistance and protection to the most vulnerable people".

He emphasized the crucial role of a well-coordinated and comprehensive social protection system in alleviating poverty and promoting equity among the diverse population of the province.

He also stressed the importance of being aware of the significant impact the government's decisions could have on the lives of "those who rely on these systems for their well-being". He said that the discussions in the seminar and the associated documentation had shed light on the challenges within the social protection framework.

Sindh Govt declares Feb 5 as public holiday

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Government has announced to observe February 05 (Friday) as a public Holiday across the province in connection with "Kashmir Solidarity Day".

According to a notification issued here on Wednesday, February 05 will be observed as a public holiday across the province on the occasion of "Kashmir Solidarity Day, except for those engaged in essential services, all public and private institutions will remain closed. To signify political and moral support in the struggle for self-determination and to honour their martyrs, a one-minute silence will be observed at about 20 am on February 05, the notification stated.

LESCO detects 407 power pilferers

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) detected a total of 407 connections from where consumers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts: Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara, on the 144th day of anti-power theft campaign.

A LESCO spokesman told the media on Wednesday that the company also submitted FIR applications against 407 electricity thieves, out of which 170 FIRs were registered with the respective police stations, while six accused were arrested. On the 144th consecutive day of the anti-power theft campaign, the spokesman added, large commercial consumers were also found involved in electricity theft and all of them were also disconnected and charged with detection units. Among the seized connections, 13 were commercial, two agricultural and 392 domestic, and all the connections were disconnected and charged with a total of 319,132 units as detection bill amounting to Rs 10,924 million.

JUI-F candidates withdraw in favour of MQM-P

KARACHI (APP): Several candidates fielded by Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazal-ur-Rehman (JUI-F) for National and provincial assemblies slots in Karachi during the February 8 elections have announced to withdrawal in favour of the candidates of Muttahida Quami Movement Pakistan (MQM-P).

The announcement to this effect came in a joint press conference by MQM-P senior leader and candidate for NA-237 Rauf Siddiqi and JUI-F leader Molana Ghayas, at Karachi Press Club here.

They told the media at KPC that the JUI-F-supported candidate from NA-237 Karachi Maulana Ehsanullah Hazarvi has withdrawn in favour of MQM-P candidate Rauf Siddiqi, JUI-F candidate for Sindh Assembly seat

PS-104 Karachi, in favour of MQM-P candidate Daniyal Siddiqi and JUI-F candidate for PS-103 Jamal Khan Kakar has withdrawn in favour of MQM-P's Faisal Rafiq.

JUI-F's candidate for PS-102 Qari Saif-ur-Rehman has withdrawn in favour of MQM-P's Amir Siddiqi, JUI-F's candidate for PS-101 Maulana Abdul Salam Soomro in favour of MQM-P's Moed Anwer and JUI-F's candidate for PS-98 Molvi Abdul Aziz has withdrawn in support of MQM-P's Arsalan Pervaz, they said.

JUI-F leader Maulana Ghayas said that the decision to withdraw the party's candidates in favour of MQM-P was taken by the central leadership of the party and we are ensuring compliance with the directives of our

leadership.

He also called upon the MQM-P leaders to withdraw their party candidate Rana Shaukat in PS-99 (formerly PS-97) in favour of JUI-F's candidate Aslam Ghauri to which Rauf Siddiqi said that he would convey this message to the MQM Rabita Committee.

Rauf Siddiqi also expressed gratitude to JUI-F leader Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman for taking this important decision during the general elections in 2024 and said the JUI-F chief has always supported his party in all testing times.

In reply to a question, he said that MQM-P has already decided to withdraw its candidate in PS-105 in favour of Grand Democratic Alliance's (GDA) Irfanullah Marwat during the February 8 elections.

Applied research to attract funding for universities

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Higher Education Commission (PHEC) Chairman Prof Dr Shahid Munir has said that universities have to promote applied research and linkages with industries to create alternative sources of funding.

He was addressing a symposium on 'Frontiers of Engineering Materials' organized by Punjab University Institute of Metallurgy and Materials Engineering and Office of Research Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC) here on Wednesday. On this occasion, PU Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Khalid Mahmood, Dean Faculty of Chemical and Materials Engineering Prof Dr Abdullah Khan Durrani, Director Institute of Metallurgy and Materials Engineering Dr Mohsin Ali Raza, Director ORIC Prof Dr Shakil Ahmed, Deputy Director Prof Dr Aqil Inam, faculty

members, researchers, experts from various industries, engineers and a large number of students were present.

In his address, Dr Shahid Munir said that materials and metallurgy are fields whose research work will not decline even for the next 50 years. He said that discovery of materials to develop wonderful products will remain the axis of research. He said that researchers from the Royal Institute of Technology have developed a nano paper: a sheet stronger than steel, even a bullet cannot break it. He said that the American Defense University has made puncture-less tyres, by replacing air with thermoplastic gum in tyres.

Dr Khalid Mahmood said that ORIC has been reactivated to promote research culture and linkages with industry in Punjab University. He said that PU's chemical and

metallurgy departments have produced eminent engineers who are serving not only in Pakistan but all over the world. He said that students should benefit from the experiences of industry experts and engineers in the symposium.

Prof Dr Abdullah Khan Durrani said that Punjab University has all kinds of facilities related to materials which can be used by industry people.

Prof Dr Mohsin Ali Raza said, "If the industries work with us, we can solve the problems being faced by the industry." He hoped that the symposium would improve the relationship between academia and industry.

Prof Dr Shakil Ahmed said that metallographic and poster competitions in the symposium will give students an opportunity to learn. He said that all resources are being utilized to promote research culture in PU.

City's district East police discusses security arrangements for election-2024

KARACHI (APP): Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) district East Karachi Syed Irfan Ali Bahadur on Wednesday chaired a meeting regarding security arrangements for the general elections -2024 in a meeting at Rangoon Wala Hall here.

Investigation SSP, Special Branch SSP and Divisional SPs attended the meeting, said a spokesperson of the district East police. Other police officers including SDPOs, Investigation DSPs, SHOs, SIOs, Intelligence staff, QRF East and HMs of district

police also participated in the meeting.

The meeting was informed about the standard operating procedures (SOPs) issued by the higher officers with regard to security arrangements for elections.

SSP East Syed Irfan Ali Bahadur during the meeting took a complete review of the current situation of law and order in the district and the arrangements made by the police on the occasion of the general elections. SDPOs and SHOs were issued orders for the comprehensive strategy and

effective policing on the day of the general elections.

On the occasion, a fool-proof plan was also devised for the security of all polling stations, polling staff and polling including ballot boxes, ballot papers, etc.

It was also decided that anti-riot/reserve and QRF platoons should be kept ready and alert all the time to deal with any emergency situation. It was also decided that it is mandatory to provide breakfast and food for the people on time. The police officers should provide full security

ty at the entry and exit gates of the polling stations in their areas to ensure that every person is searched.

In the Court of Jehangir Khan Judge Banking Court-II Federal Judicial Complex Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar

Case No: 137/1 Next Date: 26-2-2024 Suit for recovery of **Rs.21,16333/33**
NBP Main Branch Mardan Vs. Muhammad Nauman(Late)

Notice Versus: (1). Muhammad Nauman(Late) S/o Khan Faraz Proprietor of Sameer Hosiery Garments and General store through his Legal Heirs. (2). Khan Faraz S/o Zardullah R/o of Swabi Road Mohallah Nobat Abad Mardan House No.160 Baghadda Road Mohallah Sanobar Abad Mardan. (3). Mst Husna w/o Khan Faraz both are the legal heirs of Muhammad Nauman S/o Khan Faraz(Proprietor of Sameer Hosiery) both resident of shop No.2 street No.2 Muhammad Khan Plaza chatoo chowk, Hoti Tehsil & Distt Mardan. (4). Muhammad Nawaz S/o Sang-e-Marmar (Guarantor) R/o People Colony, Par Hoti, Swabi Road Mardan. Where is the Plaintiff Bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of **Rs.21,16333/33** against you under section 10(2) of the Financial Institutions (Recovery of Finance) Ordinance 2001. You are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court to appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/ publication of the notice in the newspaper filling which an ex-parte decree shall be passed in favor of the plaintiff Bank with costs.

Banking Court-II Peshawar



PESHAWAR: KP Governor Haji Ghulam Ali called on by a delegation of Textile Mills Association.

Snowfall lays white shawl on Tirah valley

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Tirah Valley of the Khyber district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has witnessed its inaugural snowfall of the year, turning the region into a picturesque winter scene.

The locals said, following an extended dry spell, a blanket of snow has now covered the valley, further enhancing its natural beauty. Both the residents and visitors were relishing the enchanting ambiance created by the snowfall in Tirah Valley.

Renowned for its stunning landscapes, the valley is drawing a surge of tourists eager to explore the newly snow-covered terrains of the beautiful valley. This recent snowfall has emerged as a highlight for travelers seeking a winter retreat in Tirah Valley. The transformation of the valley into a snow-covered paradise signifies a significant shift in its seasonal appearance.

Tourists issued travel advisory

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Owing to the unfavorable weather conditions, tourists visiting Galiyat, Thandyani and other resorts of Abbottabad district have been advised to adopt complete precautionary measures to avert mishaps.

The district administration said on Wednesday that following snowfall in Gilliyat, roads were being cleared by the Galiyat Development Authority (GDA) on a priority basis however, the visitors must ensure the complete fitness of their vehicles before visiting Galiyat.

The tourists were advised to ensure a proper fuel quantity in their vehicles and use wheel-chains on snow-covered roads. The drivers should drive their vehicles in low gears and ensure availability of food and drinking water in vehicles.

The visitors were further advised to avoid travelling during night, fog and snowfall and use fog-lights and double indicators in case they were on roads. In any situation, the district admin said, the land-line numbers of Control Room Abbottabad, 09929310553, District Resource and Communication Center 09929310556 and Control Room Galiyat on number 0992355130 should be contacted.

QWP for fair, peaceful elections to end challenges

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Wednesday underscored the need for ensuring the holding of the free, fair and peaceful elections so that the challenges facing the country could be addressed.

Addressing a gathering at Dhakki Union Council in Charsadda district, he said the country was facing a host of problems, including rising inflation, poverty, poor law and order and unemployment. Aftab Sherpao said that whichever political party came to power after the general election would have to make concerted efforts to revive the economy and put the country on the path to development.

He said political instability coupled with skyrocketing inflation had halted the progress of the country.



“We cannot afford to be distracted from the challenges at hand,” he said, urging the political forces to join hands to steer the country towards political and economic stability. Expressing concern over the step-motherly treatment being meted out to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the QWP leader said the province had lagged far behind in the race of development as the previous government comprised on its rights.

He said the residents of KP were facing record loadshedding of electricity and gas despite the fact that the province was self-sufficient in both commodities. “We will not rest until the province gets its due rights,” he said. Aftab Sherpao said the QWP would not let the people down and would come up to their expectations by honouring the pledges.

He said the QWP would spare no effort to work for the development of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the well-being of its residents. He said his party believed in serving the people without any consideration for political affiliations. He advised the voters to check the track record of the candidates before casting their ballots.

Protested against load shedding held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Residents of different areas took to the streets here on Wednesday and held protest demonstration against the unscheduled and prolong loadshedding of electricity and gas that had severely affected daily routine of consumers.

The protesters led by Zishaan Kashmiri, were chanting slogans against the government and relevant officials of WAPDA and gas departments. Addressing on the occasion, key members of the protesters alleged the gas company for over billing, saying that the consumers were compelled to pay higher tariffs even for short supplies. They asked and stressed the authorities concerned to realize the public pain from electricity and gas load-shedding and its high prices.

The protestors lamented that their school going children were getting late to their educational institutes owing to unscheduled and prolong load-shedding of electricity and gas as the preparation of breakfast took much time.

Similarly, employees who were working in government and private firms were also facing difficulties and hurdles due to the electricity and gas load-shedding. They demanded of the incumbent rulers to solve the said issue forthwith, otherwise, they would be forced to launch aggressive anti-government protest and agitation.

Governor assures support to KPTMA

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali has said that problems of textile industry would be resolved and efforts would be made to further strengthen textile sector.

He was talking to a delegation of KP Textile Mills Association that was led by Muhammad Taimur Shah. Textile association informed governor about their problems urging him to make efforts for resolution.

They apprised governor about their concerns regarding rumors about increase in gas prices and said that it would prove detrimental to textile sector. They said that KP is producing ample gas adding our province should be given precedence in gas supply.

They said that industrial sector of KP is consuming 35 MMCFD gas while textile sector is using only 10 MMCFD. They said that issues of textile industry should be resolved keeping in view its contribution to national economy.

Speaking on the occasion, KP governor assures cooperation to delegation and said that their concerns would be conveyed to relative authorities for consideration. He said that provincial government is also making efforts to facilitate textile sector and added that all the stakeholders adopt a positive approach in existing financial scenario.

KDA meeting reviews facilities to tourists

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Kagan Development Authority (KDA) meeting on Wednesday reviewed the provision of facilities to tourists visiting Kagan valley during snowfall season.

An important meeting of KDA chaired by its Director General (DG) Shabeer Khan was held at its head office and attended by Deputy Director

KG and other officials concerned.

The meeting had a detailed look into guidance and provision of facilities to tourists visiting the snowfall region of the valley.

During the meeting, it was directed to clear the roads leading to Shogran and Naran of snow so that tourists can easily approach these areas without any hindrance and enjoy the weather.

The meeting was told that staff with machinery have been deployed at various localities and put on high alert.

Increasing proficiency of Kagan Development Authority (KDA), several projects of tourists' interest including practical measures for walking track in Naran, more green line belts and construction of camping ground came under discussion during the meeting.



PESHAWAR: KP Caretaker Minister for Local Government Aamir Nadeem Durrani chairing a meeting of Tehsil chairmen.

Code of conduct for elections Crackdown against violators continues

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The crackdown of the District Monitoring Officers (DMOs) of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is continued against the violation of the code of conduct for the general elections across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

According to details shared by the ECP here on Wednesday, a fine of Rs.5000/- has been imposed on the Chairman Neighbourhood Council Gul Bagh District Hangu Arif Khan while the Chairman Village Council Mardu Khel has been ordered to appear on February 01, 2024.

Similarly, a penalty of Rs.25000 has been imposed on an independent candidate from PK-58 Mardan, Zulfiqar Khan while Tehsil Chairman Ghazni Khan, District Lakki Marwat was summoned today (Wednesday). A fine of Rs.20000 has been imposed on a candidate of JUI-F from PK-90 Kohat, Haji Mohammad Shoaib while the Tehrik-e-Labaik candidate from PK-90 Kohat, Mufti Saifullah Qureshi, TL candidate from PK-92 Kohat, Mufti Zur Wali Shah and TL candidate from NA-35 Kohat, Najibullah Durrani have been fined to the tune of Rs.3000/- each for violation of the code of conduct.

Furthermore, a fine of Rs.10000 has been imposed on an independent candidate from PK-91 Kohat, Daud Afridi and while Shehryar Afridi and Lal Saeed Afridi, independents candidate from NA-35 and ANP candidate from PK-92, Masood Khan Khalil have also been summoned by the DMOs today over violation of code of conduct by them.

The DMO of district D.I. Khan has imposed a fine of Rs.30000/- each on candidates from PK-113 including Imran Javed alias Sohail Rajpoot, Ahmad Karim Kundi and Mayor City Council, Omar Amin Khan. The PML-N candidates from PK-113, Sarhan Ahmad, Zahid Mohibullah of the Jamaat-e-Islami and Tanvir Jatoti, an independent candidate from NA-44 have been summoned today.

The candidates of ANP and JI from PK-100 Bannu, Asghar Nawaz and Akhtar Ali have been fined to pay Rs.10000/- each while a fine of Rs.10000/- each was imposed on JUI-F candidate from NA-39 Bannu, Zahid Akram Durrani while Syed Qaiser Abbas Shah of the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf Parliamentarians, Professor Ibrahim of JI and JUI-F candidate from PK-92 Sher Azam were fined Rs.20000/- Rs.10000/- and Rs.10000/- respectively. Meanwhile, according to statistics shared by the ECP a collective fine of Rs.12,85000 has been imposed on various candidates and others for violation of the code of conduct of the elections in Peshawar, Malakand, Hazara, Mardan, Kohat, Bannu and D.I. Khan divisions.



PESHAWAR: PPP candidate for PK-81, Misbah-ud-Din addressing party workers during election campaign.

‘Grand peace fair’ ends with enthusiasm at UoP

Kashif Ullah Khalil

PESHAWAR: The two-day ‘Grand Peace Fair’ concluded here on Wednesday with a commitment to make combined and integrated efforts for the promotion of peace and culture, irrespective of personal, political and ethnic affiliations.

The event was jointly organized by The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA), the Department of International Relations and the International Student Association (IRSA). The event aimed to promote sustainable peace through tourism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, especially in the Newly Merged Districts of erstwhile FATA.

Caretaker Minister for Higher Education Qasim Jan and Brigadier Sajjad Mahmood were the chief guests of the event. President of IRSA Ahmad Ali Khan and Incharge of IRSA Dr. Khurshaid were also present on the occasion. The first-day event included the Pakistan National Security Conference to portray the prevailing regional security situation and its impacts on Pakistan.

On the final day, the panel included Caretaker Minister for Higher Education Qasim Jan, Vice-Chancellor Peshawar University Muhammad Saleem, Chairman IR department Dr. Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardi, Manager of Culture and Marketing Information Hamyoon Khan, Dr. Saif Ullah and Zia-U-Rehman Zia.

Participants emphasized peaceful cohesion and national integration of tribal people after the merger of erstwhile FATA in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa constitutionally. They stressed that youth can play a key role in national integration. KPCTA Manager of Culture and Marketing Information Humayun Khan said that the potential



of indigenous customs stands at Rs. 13 billion in the global economy, which can create endless opportunities for people living in remote areas from Karachi to the Himalayan valleys in the north.

On the occasion, the students of newly merged districts showcased the artifacts of their respective districts, including Hujra, depicting the culture of tribal areas. Food stalls were also established by students. Various cultural musical events, including traditional Waziri Attan dances were also arranged by KPCTA. The instrumentalists from the newly merged districts enthralled the participants with their performance.

Maulana’s political legacy; family steeped in religious, political service

PESHAWAR (APP). In a unique blend of religious scholarship and political activism, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazal (JUIF) Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman's family has left an indelible mark on Pakistan's political landscape. The legacy spans across generations, with each member contributing to politics, academia and public service.

In a significant political development, the family of prominent Pakistani politician Maulana Fazlur Rehman is set to play a major role in the upcoming general elections scheduled for February 8, 2024. Five family members have tossed their hats into the political arena, contesting from various Constituencies in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The patriarch of the family, Maulana Fazlur Rehman himself, is contesting from NA-44, Dera Ismail Khan-1, marking a stronghold for the family in this electoral contest against political rivals including PPP's Faisal Karim Kundi and PTI support Ali Amin Gandapur. In the National Assembly (NA) constituency NA-41,

Lakki Marwat, Asjad Mehmood, the younger son of Maulana Fazlur Rehman, is vying for a seat for the first time against PTI backed Sher Afzal Marwat.

Similarly, NA-43, Tank, will see Asad Mehmood the elder son representing the family's political interests against Independent candidates Dawar Khan Kundi and Abdullah Nangyal Bettani. Continuing the family's political legacy, Maulana Ubaidrehan the younger brother of Maulana Fazlur Rehman is contesting from NA-45, Dera Ismail Khan-2 and would face the former MNA Sheikh Yaqoob, PTI support Dawar Khan Kundi and PPP's Fatehullah Miankhel.

Adding another layer to the family's electoral footprint, Maulana Lutfur Rehman another younger brother of Maulana and former opposition leader in the KP assembly is participating in the provincial assembly elections from PK-114, Dera Ismail Khan. While the elder son of Maulana Ataur Rehman Salwan Mehmood has withdrawn his nomi-

nation papers submitted for provincial seat PK-111 Dera Ismail Khan.

Two sister-in-law of Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Rehana Ismail PK and Shahida Akhtar NA have been nominated for women reserve seat. It is pertinent to mention here that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidate and former federal minister Ali Ameen Gandapur defeated JUIF chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman from NA-38 Dera Ismail Khan with an overwhelming victory against the latter.

Similarly, Maulana also remained unsuccessful from the other constituency NA-39 district DI Khan against PTI's Shaikh Yaqoob who bagged 79,334 votes against 52,031 obtained by JUIF Ameer. However, the elder son of Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Asad Mehmood made his way to the National Assembly from the NA-37 constituency district Tank in 2018 Pakistani general election while defeating the PTI candidate with almost half of the margin.

Maulana Fazlur Rahman's second brother, incumbent Senator Maulana

Ataur Rehman, had made headlines by securing seats in the National Assembly from Tank during the 2002 and 2008 general elections. Meanwhile, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani's cabinet included Maulana Ata-ur-Rahman as the Federal Minister for Tourism during his tenure.

Maulana Fazlur Rahman's third brother, Maulana Lutfur Rehman, held positions as a two-time member of the Provincial Assembly and had led the opposition in the KP Assembly. The fourth brother of Maulana, Hafiz Zia-ur-Rehman, graduated in BS Engineering and served as a government officer and now has resigned from his job to join politics.

The youngest brother, Maulana Ubaidur Rehman, graduated from Jamia Darul Uloom in Peshawar. He would contest from NA-45 seat DI Khan for the first time. Born on June 19, 1953, in Abdul Khel, Dera Ismail Khan, Maulana Fazlur Rehman initiated his political journey in 1970. He was elected Member of

National Assembly from Dera Ismail Khan seat for the first time in 1988 elections. In the general elections of 1993, he was elected a member of the National Assembly and Chairman of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs from the same seat. In the 2002 elections, he won two seats in the National Assembly, NA-24 and NA-25, after which one seat was vacated, which was won by Maulana Ataur Rehman in the by-elections.

From 2002 to 2008, Maulana served as leader of the opposition in the National Assembly. He was also elected MNA from three constituencies of Tank, Dera and Lakki Marwat in 2013 general elections. He also held key positions, including Chairman of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs. Over the years, he has maintained a strong political presence, winning seats in multiple elections.

In the 1970 general elections, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto contested against father of Maulan Fazl ur Rehman, Maulana Mufti Mahmood

for NA seat in Dera Ismail Khan. Despite winning in five other constituencies, Bhutto faced defeat against Mufti Mahmood, who secured victory with a margin of 13,000 votes. As the election date approaches, political analysts are closely watching the dynamics of these contests, anticipating the impact of Maulana Fazlur Rehman's family engagement on the broader political landscape.

The elections on February 8 will reveal whether this family-centric strategy translates into electoral success, shaping the political narrative in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It's worth mentioning here that all these came in credit of Mufti Mehmood, who had a prominent political standing in the country's politics. Maulana Mufti Mahmood had two marriages. He had two sons, Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Maulana Ataur Rehman from his first wife and had three daughters and three sons including Maulana Lutfur Rehman, Hafiz Ziaur Rahman and Maulana Obaidur Rahman from the second wife.



In brief

4 die as vehicle falls in ravine F.P. Report

DIR UPPER: At least four people were killed and six others injured when a vehicle carrying them skidded off the road and fell into a ravine in Kharkai area of Upper Dir on Wednesday morning. Local police and Rescue 1122 said the ill-fated station-wagon vehicle was carrying passengers from Dir when it skidded off the road and fell in a ditch. Police said slippery road conditions due to snowfall and overloading of the vehicle caused the accident. The medical teams of Rescue 1122 Dir Upper shifted the dead and injured to Barawal, Timergara and Dir Upper hospitals. Police said the identity of the deceased and injured was being ascertained.

PPP campaign gets momentum F.P. Report

PABB: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) will prioritize marginalized segments after obtaining treasure benches for elimination of poverty and malnutrition from the country because other political parties stand for protection elite status quo. This was claimed by PPP NA34 Nowshera Muhammad Adress Khattak while addressing party workers during election campaign in different areas of Nowshera district. He claimed his father and uncle had established chain of developmental projects across the district. PPP candidates for PK87 Abdullah Ishaq, PK88 Sajid Iqbal Azakheli and PK89 Munawar Kamal Advocate were also present during the election campaign as well as addressed the party's workers.

Two political workers held F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Police held two political workers along with arms for their involvement in areal firing in the premises Saddar Kamalia police station, on Wednesday. According to the details, Khalid Mehmood organized a corner meeting in the limits of Police Station Sadar Kamalia, in which Chaudhry Shahid Gujjar, an independent candidate for Provincial Assembly from PP-123 Constituency, participated. Muhammad Asif and Khalid Mahmood and Shahid Mahmood were firing in the air and shouting at the reception. On the information of public air firing, the police took timely action and arrested the accused Muhammad Asif and Khalid Mahmood on the spot along with the weapons, while the accuse Shahid Mahmood managed to escape. The police registered a case against the accused who fired in the air and started investigation. The police say that raids are being conducted to arrest the accused Shahid Mehmood.

Youth killed in accident

BAHAWALNAGAR (INP): A youth was killed when an over speeding mini-truck hit a motorcycle here on Wednesday, police said. According to details, the accident took place on main highway of Minchinabad district Bahawalnagar where a reckless driven mini-truck knocked down a motorcycle. As a result of accident, the bike rider youth was killed on the spot and driver responsible for accident managed to escape from the scene. The rescue team shifted the body of youth of nearby hospital and police after registering a case against driver at large started raids for his arrest.



KOHAT: KP Caretaker Minister for Finance, Revenue, Excise, Taxation and Anti-Narcotics Ahmad Rasool Bangash formally inaugurating the reconstruction and upgradation of Liaquat Memorial Women and Children Teaching Hospital.

‘Paani Do Vote Lo’ drive begins in Landi Kotal

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: On the eve of general election, “Paani Do Vote Lo” (Give us water and take our vote) campaign started by zealous youths here in various localities of Landi Kotal, district Khyber aimed to attract attention of candidates for the solution of long last problems, scarcity of drinking water.

Ilyas Shinwari, leader of Qaumi Masail Committee Landi Kotal who ran the “Paani Do Vote Lo” campaign said that due to ignoring the attitude of the ex-parliamentarians when they were in power, they started the drive as if it was real time to reject them. On the arrival of the general election, they initiated the campaign to seek a solution for their most neglected miseries.

It was an affirmative development in tribal society that poor masses joined their voices for the cause, he opined. He observed that the youth community would boycott the election and would never cast their votes in the upcoming election, if they did not get a guarantee for the solution of their problem.



The disheartened tribesmen through wall chalking and banners hovered in their villages asked candidates contesting for Provincial and National Assemblies seats to supply them potable water before carrying out election drives in their villages.

Sharifullah, resident of Khuga Khel said that the candidates of the constituencies were sympathized and made false promises during their election campaign however after succession they forget miseries of their voters and spend their energies for their own interest rather than to think of poor masses. In this time, we will not be deceived and ask the candidates to resolve prior their core problem of scarcity of drinking water. It would also sensitize the winning candidates of the

upcoming election not to neglect their voters, he added.

When the former provincial assembly member of the constituency Shafiq Sher Afridi was contacted on the matter he said although he was in opposition in the previous Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government he strived hard to address the long last demand of the people.

Former MPA further said that because of the constant drought of climate change, the water table in Landi Kotal had further deepened but he had functional gravity schemes in various localities to overcome the problem of scarcity of potable water. He vowed that if elected Ali Masjid or Shelman water supply schemes would be initiated to resolve the water issue in Landi Kotal one for all.

Sewerage treatment plant inspected F.P. Report

MARDAN: Project Director Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project (KPCIP) Syed Zafar Ali Shah paid a surprise visit to the Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP) and inspected the ongoing developmental work. He also chaired a meeting in which Director Technical Mian Muhammad Shakeel, Chief Engineer Cities Implementation Unit (CIU) Mardan Engineer Muhammad Khalil Akbar, PMSC Resident Engineer Arshid Qayum Babar, General Manager Matracon Imran Haider and Deputy Manager Project Qasim Mumtaz Awan were present, on Wednesday.

General Manager WSSCM and Chief Engineer of CIU Mardan Engineer Muhammad Khalil Akbar briefed the Project Director and stated that under KPCIP project a modern sewerage treatment plant will be constructed. He told through the sewerage treatment plant (STP) project the domestic sewerage connections of six urban union councils will be connected for treatment. The construction work on eighty-two kilometers sewerage network is in full swing and will complete in the specified time. The construction work in Rorya is ninety percent completed while survey has been completed in the rest of Union Councils.

Four thousand and three hundred manholes and thirteen thousand sewerage connections will be constructed. The STP is being built on seventeen acres of land and it will treat six million gallons of wastewater on a daily basis through activated sludge processes. Project Director Syed Zafar Ali Shah shown satisfaction over the ongoing developmental work and urged that the projects should be completed in specified time. He said that the provincial government is trying to improve the living standards of the citizens. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project has been launched in five cities of the province with the aim to improved sanitation services living standard of the citizens.

Women and children teaching hospital's construction kicks off

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Finance, Revenue, Excise, Taxation and Anti-Narcotics Ahmad Rasool Bangash formally inaugurated the reconstruction and upgradation of Liaquat Memorial Women and Children Teaching Hospital and TMA Shabistan Plaza in Kohat on Wednesday.

According to details, Rs.2 billion has been approved for the reconstruction and upgradation of the hospital while Shabistan Plaza has been completed at a cost of about Rs.432 million. Medical Superintendent Liaquat Hospital Dr. Hashim Jamshed Syed, Principal Kohat Medical University Professor Dr. Musarat

Jabeen and Dr. Fauzia Gul also addressed and thanked the Finance Minister for taking keen interest in the affairs of Liaquat Hospital.

Earlier, Tehsil Mayor Kohat Qari Sher Zaman and TMO Muhammad Shoaib briefed the provincial minister regarding municipal services, revenue target and taxes collection. On this occasion, the Minister also inaugurated the plantation campaign by planting saplings in Liaquat Memorial Hospital, Jinnah Municipal Library and TMA Office.

The caretaker minister said that Kohat is his mother district, he grew up here and got education. This district and its people have a right on him and for that he will work accordingly.

Addressing the doctors, Ahmad Rasool Bangash said that their profession is very sacred and by doing it better, the success of this world and the hereafter is assured, so they should keep their sacred profession and extend selfless service to the ailing community. He assured that he will meet the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to solve all the problems of Liaquat Memorial Hospital.

Later, the minister also visited the office of Kohat Development Authority and Kohat District Headquarter Teaching Hospital and besides checking the attendance of the staff, he also got aware of their problems and assured them of immediate solution to their problems.

Candidates flay DRO discriminatory attitude

F.P. Report

SUJAWAL: Candidates belonging to different political parties as well as independent candidates have expressed grave reservations over the indifferent attitude of District Returning Officer (DRO) and District Election Commissioner over their indifferent and impartial attitude towards non-PPP candidates.

During a press conference at a local press club in Sujawal independent candidate Zeeshan Khawaja,

Abdul Rahman Malah, Abdul Sattar Kehar, Lal-Bux Jatui of PML-N, Syed Mumtaz Shah and Ashraf Tahem of Sindh Taraqi Pasand Party among others, accused DRO of backing PPP candidates through different tactics.

Zeeshan Khawaja said that they were asked to attend the meeting called

by DRO for understanding the code of conduct launched by Election Commission of Pakistan for upcoming elections the other day, but when they reached the DRO office none of the concerned authorities were available. "We waited for the district returning officer as well as the election Commissioner but none of them arrived and eventually we left the office after waiting for around two hours";

He claimed and added that state machinery was being used to support the candidates of Pakistan People's Party. Corroborating the statement of Zeeshan Khawaja STP candidate said that District Chairman of Sujawal had been issued notice a few days ago over his open support to PPP candidate by the Assistant Commissioner that showed

that resources were being marshaled and utilized to pave PPP's way to power. Abdul Rahman Malah said that opponents of PPP in district Sujawal were being victimized and that also fell within the ambit of pre-poll rigging. Syed Mumtaz Shah and Lal Bux Jatui vowed not to withdraw their candidature and challenge the stereotyped and ancestral politics in the coastal region.

Abdul Sattar Kehar whose brother Mahmood Kehar is member of PPP district council also lashed out at PPP candidates as well as the government machinery and alleged that the government officials were being pressurized to work for PPP candidates. They urged Election Commission of Pakistan to take notice of DRO's attitude towards candidates of other parties, except PPP.

Man commits suicide after killing wife

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: A man committed suicide after killing his wife and injuring his mother-in-law over domestic dispute. According to detail, Sajid Cheema resident of village Kot Mubarak married with Irahm resident of Gala Shailar Wala Mohallah Bahawalpura two year ago but after some month later differences were developed between the couple and Irahm returned to her parent's home. Last day, Sajid Cheema came to Hafizabad for carrying her wife back his home but Irahm refused to go with his husband.

On this situation Sajid Cheema frustrated and he opened fire on his wife Irahm and his Mother-in-Law Fozia. As a result of which, Irahm was killed on the spot while Fozia injured critically. Later, accused Sajid Cheema committed suicide to fire himself. Police reached on the spot and shifted dead bodies to morgue for autopsy while injured Fozia shifted to Trauma Centre Hafizabad. Further investigation is underway.

Independent candidate commits for redressal of grievances: Former Federal Minister and Independent

Candidate for constituency PP-39, Chaudhry Liaquat Abbas Bhatti said that I aware of all problems and difficulties of the people of the Tehsil Pindi Bhattian including Sukheki Mandi whereas serving the people is my mission and I would keep on serving the people in future to elect member of Provincial Assembly with the support of the people.

He expressed these views while addressing a corner meeting at Mohallah Muhammad Pura in Sukheki Mandi town. Prominent landlord and social worker of Dubbar Bhattian Abdul Rauf Bhatti was also accompanied by him. He said that as Federal Minister and MNA I was provided different facilities to complete development projects with the cost of billions of rupees including Sui gas, electricity, healthcare, communicational, educational and municipal services to the people of Tehsil Pindi Bhattian and Sukheki Mandi.

I desire to resolve all problems of the people at their doorsteps on priority basis because Sukheki Mandi is my hometown, he said. He also said that ex-member of Punjab Assembly was totally ignored the Sukheki Mandi

area and did not a single development scheme was completed to provide basic needs of life to the people of this area.

Prominent trader Rauf Ahmad Mughal, Bilal Khalid Awan, Haji Liaquat Ali Awan, Raja Sageer Ahmad, Ijaz Inayat Mughal, Mirza Saleem Baig, Muhammad Yousaf Awan announced to support Chaudhry Liaquat Abbas Bhatti and work hard to his success in the election on 8 February.

Youth killed in road mishap: A young boy was killed on the spot while his uncle injured when a dumper truck crushed them on Lahore Road last night.

According to details, Muhammad Nawaz was on its way on motorcycle to Chonghi No. 5 on Lahore Road when they reached near Mohallah Islampara, another motorcycle hit them and they fall on the road. Meanwhile, a dumper truck was crushed them, as a result of which, Kashif Raza was killed before reaching Rescue 1122 ambulance from Hafizabad while his uncle Muhammad Nawaz was critically injured. Injured Muhammad Nawaz has been shifted to hospital while dead body handed over to his relatives.

Five passengers killed, several injured in mishap

SHIKARPUR (PPI): A horrible traffic accident occurred on Mian Sahib-Jacobabad road in the jurisdiction of Mian Sahib Police Station on Wednesday.

According to a police report, a speeding wagon went out of driver's control, overturned on the road and hit the tree. As a result, five persons identified as Tariq Ali Burro, Sajjad Ali Sarki, Afghan Lashari, Hafiz Ghulam Nabi Mastoi and driver Nihal Jakhani died on the spot while 12 passengers, including Muhammad Aamir, Abdul Nabi, Shamaseen, Ali Ahmed, Muhammad Ameen, Muhammad Moosa, Ali Nawaz, Sumair Ali, Abdul Rahman, and Musamat Saba Parveen, were injured.

The bodies and injured were transported to

Government Hospital Mian Sahib for medico legal formalities. The cause behind the incident was said to be breaking of the wagon's tie-rod. Some injured were referred to a Jacobabad hospital.

Meanwhile, the Shikarpur police with the support of intelligence and other law enforcement agencies arrested a notorious dacoit Khairoo Teghani from a private hospital of Rahimyar Khan on Wednesday.

According to SSP Office Shikarpur, on a tip-off, the Shikarpur police with the help of law enforcement agencies conducted a raid at a private hospital of Rahim Yar Khan in Punjab province and succeeded in arresting the most wanted notorious dacoit Khairoo Teghani. The Government of Sindh had announced Rs7 mil-

lion as head money for his arrest.

Police further claimed that some three days ago, the gangster Khairoo Teghani was injured in an encounter took place between the outlaws and police in Katcha area of Garhi Tegho and later his companions took him away in injured condition for treatment.

The Shikarpur police continued their search and succeeded in arresting him. The arrested dacoit was the ringleader of a notorious gang of of bandits in Sindh.

Teghani was involved in more than 40 heinous offences including killing of police officers, kidnapping, road robberies, murders, police encounters and other crimes. The arrested dacoit Teghani was in a critical condition.

None can now bar women of taking part in political process: Shad Begum

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Leading rights' activist and winner of the US Department of State's International Women of Courage Award in March, 2012, Ms Shad Begum has expressed pleasure and satisfaction on women voters' mobilization in the most conservative societies like Dir, Bunir, Shangla, Kohistan and newly merged tribal districts and termed it a way forward for women' empowerment and development.

Talking to *The Frontier Post* at Talash during her brief visit to the district here on Wednesday, Ms Shad also appreciated the election commission of Pakistan role to ensure women participation in election and discourage their disenfranchisement.

Shad Begum is the founder and an executive director of the Association for Behaviour and Knowledge Transformation

(ABKT), an organization working for the economic and political empowerment of the marginalized segments of society in backward areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. She has so far won several national and international awards in recognition for her social and humanitarian services.

She said that political parties had realized the importance of women, who constitute more than 50 per cent of the whole population. She said that due to close contests all the political parties wanted to bring more and more women to polling stations, which was a good omen.

She said the ECP had taken prompt and timely notices of the decree issued by religious clerics in Kohistan to declare women canvassing as un-Islamic. She said the ECP rejected the controversial decree about banning women participation in elections and warned to nullify the whole process if women were barred

from taking part in electioneering.

Ms Shad said the ECP had formed a gender desk that would actively observe and monitor various activities regarding women participation from Feb 1 to 8 throughout the country. She said that women activists like her, had been in close liaison with the ECP's gender desk. She said that now it was impossible to bar women from taking part in politics. She asked the political parties to include women activists in their policy making bodies so that women could be represented with a true spirit.

"I was pleased to see this time that all major political parties including PPP, PTI, JI, JUI-F, ANP and PML-N are not only mobilizing their women voters in Dir but also imparting trainings to them how to cast votes and work as polling agents", Shad Begum said, adding that there seemed a high acceptance for women vot-

ers and female polls' candidates. Giving the example of Dr Saveera Parkash, a PPP candidate from Bunir district belonging to a Hindu religion, she said that she had been receiving an overwhelming reception and regards not only from women but also from men in her electioneering campaign. She said that it was a sign of satisfaction for her that several women candidates in Dir, Kohistan, Bunir and other parts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were in the running. Ms Shad said that once there was a time when no one could even think about women participation in elections as voters or to contest elections but now the tradition had changed and women leaders within their cultural norms were leading in society.

About women mobilization in Lower and Upper Dir, she said that several political parties including JI, ANP, PTI and PPP had formed special teams



of women leaders which had been motivating and mobilizing women voters in both the districts. "I have information that these parties have been training women activists to work as

polling agents", she said, adding that now women from parts of the province were inviting them to come and train women voters for rightly exercising their right to vote.



Indonesian presidential candidates try to harness power of music

MEDAN: On a blisteringly hot and thundery day in the city of Medan, fans peeled off their T-shirts and hoisted each other up onto shoulders to get a better view of one of Indonesia's most famous rock bands. "Don't forget to spread the virus of peace across Indonesia" Slank's frontman and lead vocalist, Akhadi Wira Satriaji, better known as Kaka, screamed to the thousands of people who had come down to Istana Maimun, the palace of the Sultanate of Deli, to rock out with their favourite band.

The crowd, known as "Slankers", roared their approval and grabbed selfies with their idol, as Kaka crouched near the edge of the stage, shaking hands and bumping fists with thrilled fans. But while the atmosphere was electric, Slank had not come to Medan on Indonesia's western island of Sumatra, just to put on a good show. In Indonesia, there is a tradition of presidential and vice presidential candidates enlisting popular musicians in their campaigns in an attempt to boost their electability.

"Political elites and political parties have actually been using artists to gain support or votes for a long time," said Hikmawan "Indra" Saefullah, who played guitar in the Indonesian indie band Alone at Last from 2002 to 2013 and is a lecturer in Indonesian Studies at the University of New England. "Whether it is effective or not is rather difficult to measure unless you want to wait until the election results come out. Even then, it is difficult to know for sure whether a candidate's victory was the result of votes from a supporting artist's fans or not. Because voting is secret. So who knows?" The Slank gig was organised in conjunction with a visit to the city by presidential hopeful and former governor of Central Java, Ganjar Pranowo, and his running mate Mahfud MD, the former coordinating minister for politics, legal and security affairs. To some supporters, the concert was the perfect mix of music and politics.

Johnny and Dian, both construction workers, told Al Jazeera that they were lifelong Slankers and fervent supporters of Ganjar. "We like their songs because they are easy to listen to and understand, and they appeal to young people," 30-year-old Johnny said. "Slank also often come to Medan to perform and we also go to see them." Dian, also 30, added that he liked Slank because they "sing from the heart" and that he would vote for Ganjar and his party, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), because Slank supported them. For Dian, the band and



the candidates are a natural fit. He noted Slank was interested in social justice, while the PDI-P, a secular-nationalist party, had traditionally been affiliated with the interests and rights of workers across Indonesia. "Ganjar will work for the people and will make changes for the Indonesian populace. He supports grassroots workers more than other candidates," Dian said. Slank was founded in 1983 by a group of then-teenagers in Jakarta and takes its name from the term "slange'an" which means "free men" in Betawi, the language of the Betawi ethnic group in the capital.

Slank has also long been known for the political nature of many of its songs and lent its support to current Indonesian President Joko Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, when he ran for the presidency in 2014 and 2019 on a PDI-P ticket. Now that Ganjar is the PDI-P presidential candidate (Jokowi has served the maximum two terms in office), Slank is also backing him ahead of the presidential election on February 14. "They want to build a perception among the public that they will be left behind or 'not cool' if they don't support the PDI-P and Ganjar [by saying], 'See, Slank support him, why wouldn't everyone else?'" lecturer Saefullah said of the alliance. Also in the crowd at the concert were market-sellers 34-year-old Ratna and 28-year-old Lisa who said that they had come to the event to support Ganjar who they praised for being "an intellectual candidate".

Among his election promises, Ganjar has said will improve Indonesians' work life, including raising salaries, paying off farmers' debts and eliminating the corruption and nepotism that have long plagued the job market in Indonesia. He has also pledged to distribute social assistance more evenly and widely across the archipelago of 278 million people.

"The cost of living is rising in Indonesia and essentials are becoming more expensive," Ratna said. "Rice and cooking oil are more expensive now while salaries are still low. We want salaries to be reasonable, which is why we support Ganjar." However, not everyone in the crowd was convinced. Mulia, a 20-year-old communications student at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, told Al Jazeera that he had come to the concert to see Slank but that he had yet to decide who to vote for.

"Maybe I will choose Ganjar. It seems like he is close to young people and he might do more for the youth of Indonesia if he is elected," he said. "It depends how I feel when I see him. If I like him, then I'll vote for him." Ganjar, himself, made only a brief appearance at the concert. Given a traditional Sumatran welcome dance, he made his way through the crowd, a flower garland around his neck, greeting supporters who screamed and grasped his hands while taking selfies on their phones. But, while Ganjar stood alongside Ratna and clapped enthusiastically to the music, he did not address the crowd and soon left for another event with running mate Mahfud.

Other candidates are also hoping the power of celebrity translates into votes. Former Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto and running mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who is also Jokowi's oldest son and the current mayor of the city of Surakarta or Solo, have been endorsed by Indonesian rock band Dewa 19. Meanwhile, Rhoma Irama, the so-called "King of Dangdut", a form of Indonesian folk music, has thrown his support behind the former Governor of Jakarta Anies Baswedan and the deputy speaker of the People's Representative Council, Muhaimin Iskandar. — Aljazeera

UK police arrest man over Rwanda genocide

LONDON (BBC): A man has been arrested in Gateshead by police investigating genocide and crimes against humanity that took place 30 years ago in Rwanda. The 69-year-old was questioned over the 1994 genocide in which 800,000 people were killed.

Specialists from the Counter Terrorism Policing War Crimes Team worked with Counter Terrorism Policing North East to make the arrest last Thursday. Officers said the man has since been released on bail while enquiries continue. The War Crimes team is a national unit run within the Counter Terrorism Command of the Metropolitan Police. Commander Dominic Murphy said the investigation follows "allegations of the most serious offences you can imagine" and anyone who perpetrated the atrocity "should face justice wherever they are in the world". He added: "Gathering the evidence to support a potential future prosecution is a complex process that requires diligence and precision.

"While an arrest is a significant milestone in any investigation, officers will continue to work to progress this inquiry." The investigation is not connected to ongoing war crime inquiries which were launched in 2018, looking at five other UK based individuals. Between April and June 1994, it is estimated that 800,000 Rwandans were killed in the space of 100 days.

Ireland deal could end deadlock

BELFAST: Northern Ireland's largest British unionist party has agreed to end a boycott that left the region's people without a power-sharing administration for two years and rattled the foundations of a 25-year-old peace treaty. The breakthrough could see the shuttered Belfast government restored within days - with Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein holding the post of first minister for the first time.

After a marathon late-night meeting, Democratic Unionist Party leader Jeffrey Donaldson said that the party's executive branch had backed proposals to return to the government. He said agreements reached with the United Kingdom's government in London "provide a basis for our party to nominate members to the Northern Ireland Executive, thus seeing the restoration of the locally elected institutions". "The result was clear. The DUP has been decisive. I have been mandated to move forward," Donaldson told reporters. The breakthrough after months of inconclusive negotiations came after the UK government last week gave Northern Ireland politicians until February 8 to restore the Northern Ireland Assembly and the local government or face new elections. UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called it a "positive step" towards restoring the institutions and "delivering for the people of Northern Ireland," his spokesman said.

Sunak's Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris told reporters that "all the conditions are now in place for the assembly to return", with little opposition expected in Westminster. The deal contained "significant changes ... to make sure our internal market works properly", he added, saying he did not believe it would require renegotiations with the European Union. Reporting from Belfast, Al Jazeera's Harry Fawcett said that while the deal had not been finalised, it was a major step towards the power-sharing executive at Stormont, the seat of the Northern Ireland Assembly. An approved deal would allow the DUP and the nationalist pro-Irish Sinn Fein to elect a speaker for the Assembly as early as next week. It would also see Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neill become first minister - the first time a nationalist has held the post after her party overtook the DUP in the last Assembly election in May 2022. Mary Lou McDonald, leader of Sinn Fein, said that was of "very great significance" and she was optimistic the Assembly would be back up and running before the February deadline. — Aljazeera

‘We are obliged to end the war’: A new Russian unit fights for Ukraine

KYIV: When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, 32-year-old Johnny, from St Petersburg, set himself a goal. He wanted to overthrow Vladimir Putin's administration. In fact, he would have liked to kill the Russian president with his own hands, he told Al Jazeera in a cafe at a remote petrol station on the outskirts of Ukraine's capital.

In October, Johnny joined other Russians fighting for Ukraine and against their homeland as part of the Siberian Battalion, a unit formed last summer by the Civic Council, a Russian opposition group based in Poland. "We want to democratise Russia. And it won't be possible in the current state. Russia must fall apart into smaller pieces. I don't care if it's going to be small like Belgium. ... Places like Yakutia and Chechnya and other regions should be able to secede if they choose to," Johnny said.

According to Denis Sokolov, 54, the group's coordinator, 50 fighters from the unit are currently in training or battling in Ukraine. Another 40 are being checked over by Ukraine's security services as they wait to cross the border. He said there are thousands of other Russians willing to join the fight against Moscow, boasting that the Civic Council receives up to 10 applications per day. Those who want to sign up must first depart for a third country for safety reasons. And from there, it takes months to process an application.

"Ukrainians do not trust Russians, and there are reasons for this. But this war was unleashed by the regime in our name, and we are obliged to end it," Sokolov said. At the time of publishing, neither Polish nor Ukrainian authorities had responded to Al Jazeera's request for comment on the Civil Council and Siberian Battalion. Since the onset of the war, hundreds of Russians have turned on their country and bolstered Ukraine's forces. According to the International Crisis Group, their motives are diverse. "Most of the recruits from the Russian Federation hail from the North Caucasus - majority-Muslim regions that have a long history of advocating for separation from the central government," the group said in October.

"There are also, however, ethnic Russians fighting on behalf of Ukraine. Some are simply sympathetic to the Ukrainian cause or see joining it as a part of their own struggle against Russian President Vladimir Putin. "Others, however, are far-right activists who hope the war will end with not just the collapse of Putin's government but also the creation of a new, ethnically homogeneous Russian state." The far-right fighters, the think tank said, are the "most battle-ready" of the Russian units. Russian troops are officially part of Ukraine's international legion, fighting with the permission of its defence ministry, and using Ukraine's weaponry.

Venezuela accuses US of ‘blackmail’ over sanctions

CARACAS: Venezuela has criticised Washington's decision to reimpose oil and gas sanctions and warned it could halt deportation flights for Venezuelan migrants who are in the United States without documents. "All of Venezuela rejects the rude and improper blackmail and ultimatum expressed by the US government," Vice President Delcy Rodriguez wrote on X.

"If they take the wrong step of intensifying the economic aggression against Venezuela ... as of February 13 repatriation flights for Venezuelan migrants would be immediately cancelled." The US began repatriating Venezuelan migrants on chartered flights in October, after a deal was struck between Nicolas Maduro and President Joe Biden for the "orderly, safe and legal repatriation" of undocumented Venezuelan migrants.

Rodriguez said that all other areas of cooperation would be reviewed as a countermeasure to the "deliberate attempt to strike a blow to the Venezuelan

oil and gas industry". The rejection comes in response to the United States' reimposition of sanctions on Caracas this week. Washington took action after Venezuela's top court upheld a ban blocking the candidacy of the leading opposition hopeful in a presidential election later this year. The US Department of the Treasury gave US entities until February 13 to wind down transactions with Venezuelan state-owned miner Minerven. The US Department of State said that Washington does not plan to renew a licence that has allowed Venezuela's oil to freely flow to its chosen destinations.

"Actions by Nicolas Maduro and his representatives in Venezuela, including the arrest of members of the democratic opposition and the barring of candidates from competing in this year's presidential election, are inconsistent with the agreements signed in Barbados," the State Department said in a statement. "Absent progress between Maduro and his representatives and the

According to Russian law, the definition of high treason was extended in April to include fighting for enemies - a crime that could result in life imprisonment. In contrast, the Kremlin has reportedly offered citizenship to foreigners who choose to fight alongside Russian forces. Johnny, which is a nom de guerre he adopted after joining the unit, waited for seven months to enter Ukraine. He contacted the Civic Council in March when the group was helping recruit fighters for the Russian Volunteer Corps, a far-right unit behind incursions into Russia in March and May.

The two groups have since parted ways. The Civic Council decided to form a new, more inclusive unit that would accept non-white and non-Christian Russian citizens. The Siberian Battalion is made up of an array of people and groups, including anarchists, Muslims and members of the Free Ingrida Movement fighting for the liberation of the St Petersburg region. "People are different. We are of different ages. Our values differ. But we all want to defeat Russia. And we believe that this is possible only by armed means," said Johnny, who has not told his family about his fighting or whereabouts. The Siberian Battalion was named after the vast Russian region rich in natural resources, stretching from the Ural Mountains in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east. "We understand that all of Moscow's wealth comes from Siberia and that Moscow - and the rest of Russia - live off of Siberian money," Sokolov said.

"Taking these resources away from the regime is important because, first, without them the empire will be less aggressive. Secondly, the peoples of Siberia have the right to manage their resources independently, not just Indigenous peoples, but everyone who lives in Siberia." The Siberian Battalion accepts people from other regions too, like 26-year-old Sizi, the unit's medic-in-training who was born in Moscow. The former customs official, who also ran his own business, arrived in Ukraine on the same day as Johnny and heard about the Civic Council when the organisation was recruiting for the Russian Volunteer Corps. But Sizi, which is a nom de guerre meaning "grey blue" in Russian, does not associate with far-right nationalism. In April 2022, he converted to Islam.

His parents found out about his decision when he was already in Ukraine. He has cut contact with everyone he knew in Russia. While it was not easy to accept that her only child went to war, Sizi said, his mother has not protested against his decision. "Everyone makes decisions for themselves. I realised that there is something more important than material wealth in this life," Sizi said. "If there's one thing to die for, it is freedom. And Ukraine is fighting for existence." — Aljazeera

France’s new PM vows to defend farmers

PARIS (AP): France's new Prime Minister Gabriel Attal vowed to boost employment, restore authority in the country's schools and support workers including farmers who have been protesting for days over their eroding incomes.

Three weeks after he was appointed by President Emmanuel Macron as France's youngest-ever and first openly gay prime minister, Attal sought to meet people's top concerns in a lively policy address to French lawmakers filled with announcements and promises. The speech alternatively drew applause from his supporters and noisy boos from the opposition benches.

"My priority is to boost employment," he told the National Assembly, France's lower house of parliament. Attal vowed to take action so that "work pays more" than "inactivity." "It's nonsense that the unemployment rate remains at around 7% at a time when so many sectors are looking to hire through-

out the country," he said.

Attal, 34, said his government will take measures to encourage employers to better pay workers who earn the minimum salary. He promised tax cuts on middle-class households. He also announced that jobless people who get a state-sponsored "solidarity income" will all be required to spend 15 hours per week in "activities" like job training or an internship, starting from next year. "Nobody is asking for the right to be lazy in our country," he said.

Attal expressed support for angry farmers, promising emergency cash aid and controls on imported food, in hopes that the moves will cool a protest movement that has seen tractors shut down highways across France and inspired similar actions around Europe. The prime minister, who was previously education minister, made a point of detailing measures to restore authority at school. He confirmed a plan to experiment with uniforms in some public schools as

part of efforts to move the focus away from clothes and reduce school bullying and vowed to diminish the time children spend on screens. He also announced the creation of a new "sentence of community service" for children under 16 who need to be sanctioned. "We need to get back to a clear principle: You break, you fix. You make it dirty, you clean. You defy authority, you learn to respect it," he said.

Another measure for children who disobey rules is to offer parents to send them to a boarding school, with state financial and other support, he said. Attal promised to "de-bureaucratize France" - or diminish the volume of red tape - to respond to criticism of farmers, employers and local officials about excessive bureaucracy. To support the country's struggling health care system, he said he will appoint a special envoy to "go abroad to find doctors who would be willing to come to France." He also said his government will find a system to

make patients pay if they take a medical appointment and don't attend it, a measure much expected by doctors. Urging the state to be "exemplary," he asked his administration to experiment with a four-day week, in which employees who want to arrive earlier in the morning and leave later in the evening can get one additional day off every week, while working the same amount of time as others. He also asked for working hours of cleaning people in administration offices to be scheduled at day time, not at night. "To be French in 2024 is to live in a country" fighting for "stability, justice and peace," he concluded.

"To be French in 2024 means being able to be prime minister while being openly gay" in a country that, 10 years ago, was divided over same-sex marriage, Attal added in reference to months of nationwide protests and wrenching debate before the law was adopted. "I see it as showing our country is moving forward."

Vietnam, Philippines sign deals on security in disputed South China Sea

MANILA: Vietnam and the Philippines have agreed to cooperate on maritime security in the South China Sea, that is claimed by Beijing almost in its entirety. The deals, signed during a state visit to Hanoi by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, will see the two countries' coastguards working together to prevent and manage incidents in the disputed waters.

The South China Sea is at the centre of territorial tussles between China, the Philippines and other countries. China claims almost the entire sea as its sovereign territory, while the Philippines, Vietnam and other Southeast Asian nations claim various islands, islets, reefs and shoals around their coasts. An estimated \$5 trillion in international trade passes through the waters each year. Tensions between the Philippines, a United States

ally, and China have intensified in recent months. At the end of last year, the Philippines accused China of "swarming" the Whitsun Reef off its coast. China, for its part, accused the Philippines of "provocations" at disputed Second Thomas Shoal where Manila has complained about the Chinese coast guard's use of water cannons, a military-grade laser and dangerous blocking manoeuvres leading to ship collisions. Earlier this month, China held military drills in the South China Sea as the US and the Philippines conducted their own joint exercises in the same waters. The high-seas faceoffs are fuelling fears of a wider conflict.

Vietnam and the Philippines have signed two agreements on "incident prevention in the South China Sea" and "maritime coopera-

tion" among coastguards, said a Vietnamese official. The deals could irritate Beijing, particularly if they pave the way to compromises between the signatories on their own competing claims. Marcos said Vietnam was "the sole strategic partner of the Philippines" in Southeast Asia, stressing that maritime cooperation was the foundation of that relationship. Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh said Marcos's visit had helped boost bilateral relations. "The world and regional situation is evolving in a rapid and complicated manner and therefore we need to unite and cooperate more closely," he said. The two countries' leaders met after foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) met in Laos and "underscored the importance of the full and effective"

implementation of the declaration on conduct in the South China Sea that the bloc agreed with China in 2002 and 2012. "We reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety and freedom of navigation in, and overflight above, the South China Sea," the foreign ministers said in a statement.

The Philippines and Vietnam and both members of ASEAN, which has been trying to agree a code of conduct with Beijing for the South China Sea for years without success. Several ASEAN nations brought up the tensions in the South China Sea, Laos's Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith told reporters, who added that Laos hoped to have a third reading of the code of conduct with China "as soon as possible." — Aljazeera

Colombia and NLA rebels extend cease-fire

BOGOTA (AP): Colombia's government and the nation's largest remaining rebel group announced they will extend their current cease-fire by one week, while delegates from both sides who are meeting in Cuba continue to discuss policies that could secure a longer lasting truce. In a joint statement, the government and the National Liberation Army said they will abide by the conditions of the current cease-fire, which began in August and was set to expire.

The current cease-fire agreement says that both sides will not attack each other, and that one of the

goals of the cease-fire is to "improve the humanitarian situation" of communities affected by fighting. However, there are no provisions in the current cease-fire that stop the rebels from kidnapping civilians for ransom or from recruiting minors, two practices that have continued to take place in the last months. The rebels meanwhile have complained that during the current cease-fire, the military has launched operations in areas under their control.

Joint statement, both sides said they will continue to discuss ways to "strengthen" the cease-fire.

Colombia's government has been pressing the rebels to stop kidnappings. But the group has asked the government for alternate ways to finance their operations, and have said that they will only stop kidnappings as part of a new cease-fire agreement. In October, the cease-fire between the government and the ELN entered a critical moment when a group of rebels kidnapped the parents of Luis Diaz, one of Colombia's most famous soccer players. Diaz's mother was quickly rescued by police. While his father was released 12 days later, after numerous protests and mediation efforts.

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Another setback to national politics

A special court awarded 10 years of rigorous imprisonment to former Prime Minister Imran Khan and the PTI's second-in-command and ex-Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in cipher case, connection with disregard to their official responsibility and failure to uphold state secrets under the Official Secret of Pakistan. The special court Judge announced the verdict in the presence of the accused at the Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi. Meanwhile, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) termed the court's decision a complete mockery and disregard of the law, vowing that Pakistan stood with the both accused, who enjoyed popular support from the masses till this time.

Nearly a year ago during a public rally in Islamabad on March 27, then-Prime Minister Imran Khan waved a piece of a letter portraying an official memo containing highly sensitive information graded as secret, authored by Pakistan's envoy to the United States, and addressed to Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Khan told his emotional supporters that a foreign diplomat had threatened the Pakistani envoy to replace Khan from the premiership to garner support from the West otherwise Pakistan would face worse consequences. Khan maligned the opposition and government institutions including the Army for conspiring with a foreign country by launching a no-confidence motion against his government. Khan championed the gathering amid sloganeering of his supporters but a highly sensitive matter relating to the country's foreign policy was compromised and became a topic of public discussion in the streets, Hujras, and TV talk shows. The US State Department denied the allegation and refused the existence of any such plan, conspiracy, or coercive conversation with the Pakistani envoy in Washington. A nationwide crisis erupted on the issue of cipher and alleged foreign conspiracy. The National Security Committee (NSC) convened its meeting on the issue and a stern protest was lodged with Washington on this undiplomatic conduct of US official. Islamabad downgraded its bilateral relations with the US and both countries went through a brief period of tense diplomatic relations and least intergovernmental engagement., which caused significant damage to Pakistan's foreign policy and economic interests at the global level. Last year, a US-based online media outlet published the text of a leaked secret Pakistani cable, produced from the meeting by the ambassador and transmitted to Pakistan, which caused further embarrassment and shame for the Pakistani nation at the global level. Later, a case was registered by the state against the former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister for unauthorizedly holding secret documents and twisting the facts to achieve their ulterior motives and personal gains in a manner prejudicial to the interests of state security. The event it is pertinent to mention that on December 13, a special court established under the Official Secret Act indicted both of them in the case.

Realistically, Pakistan fell victim to the politics of the ego and populism, wherein, Senior bureaucrats got on board with certain political groups, ignoring their official responsibility and unconstitutional conduct. Such selfish policies and biased attitudes compromised national interests and gave birth to political chaos and anarchy in our society. The recent conviction of a former Prime Minister and his top aide is an unfortunate event and a grave setback to our National politics however all that was the result of misuse of authority, non-abdication to the state law, and publically commission of misconduct. In fact, authority comes with responsibility, and public leaders need more caution, liability, and sagacity because of multi-tier accountability from the Constitution, the media as well as the public. The cipher case also offers a lesson to civic groups and public leaders to segregate politics from personal rivalries, likes, and dislikes and deal with political business within its legal jurisdiction, because nation-building and public service is no less than worshipping God.

Meloni's plan, hatred or love for Africa

ITALY'S far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni came up with an ambitious plan to stem the numbers of unwell come migrants through proposed projects aimed at diversifying energy resources and forging a new, non-predatory relationship between Europe and Africa. During the Afro-European Summit, Italian Primer suggested multiple measures and development initiatives in areas such as education, health care, water, sanitation, agriculture, and energy infrastructure with an initial endowment of 5.5 billion euros. The primary purpose of Rome's investment in the world's poorest and most disadvantaged region is to create jobs and opportunities in Africa and discourage its youths from making dangerous migrations to Europe across the Mediterranean Sea.

Historically, the influx of foreign migrants from across Asia and Africa through legal and illegal means to mainland Europe has been a gigantic problem for the European Community while the situation in the states on the EU's southern and eastern borders/shores along with the Mediterranean Sea has struck havoc, which is worsening every single day. Italy's far-right leader Giorgia Meloni won the election on an anti-migrant agenda and coming into power she placed a curb on migration and banned humanitarian ships carrying migrants from docking at Italian ports. After Italy's inhumane and stanch anti-migrant policies failed to produce desired results, Italy's Meloni held a global huddle of European and African leaders and presented the idea of Africa's development so Africans could avail all those comforts and luxuries for which millions of people from across Africa reached European countries and caused bulk problems for European leaders.

Interestingly, third-world countries have always accused developed Western nations of prejudice and biased conduct when it comes to the transfer of technology and the division of resources to less developed communities and regions in the world. Despite the fact, that Western businesses and manufacturing giants use low-paid labour, raw materials and natural deposits from the backward world. Group 77 and non-aligned nations had been fighting against Western discrimination at the global level over the past decades but failed until European leaders conceived the idea to develop the African continent to get rid of the ever-growing influx of migrants to their most privileged and advantageous region. Although Meloni and other far-right Europeans used prudence to deal with the Africans however the time would illustrate the success of their strategy in the future.

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Israel sorely lacking a post-Gaza war regional strategy

Yossi Mekelberg

IN an Israeli government stuffed with hawks, far-right extremists and self-serving politicians, Gadi Eisenkot, a war Cabinet minister and former army chief of staff, is something of a revelation in his thoughtfulness and honesty. He is a former general with plenty of military experience but is a novice in politics and was elected to the Knesset only at the last general election after he joined the center-right National Unity party led by Benny Gantz.

Until Oct. 7, he and his party were in opposition, but in its aftermath they did not want to leave the decision-making in these difficult times in the hands of a prime minister charged with corruption and his dangerously delusional ultra-right coalition partners; and so they joined the war Cabinet. Eisenkot looks like prime minister material every step of the way, with his strategic thinking and understated authority. As part of a government that lacks direction and is being carried away by its own extreme and irresponsible populist rhetoric, it was refreshing to hear him, in a wide-ranging interview on Israeli TV last week, present more balanced views and warn against allowing trigger-happy ministers to dictate the direction that Israel is currently taking. This was especially remarkable considering that, only last month, his son was killed in the fighting in Gaza and he and his family are still in mourning.

Nothing in the interview violated the collective responsibility of all who serve in government, but what was said should still keep most listeners in Israel and abroad awake at night. More than disclosing new information, Eisenkot confirmed what we all suspected - that Israel is operating with no overall strategy in relation to the war in Gaza and there is no grasp of the complex regional picture. By the same token, he was frank enough to admit that the government is not telling its own people the truth about what is happening in Gaza and whether it is getting any closer to achieving its war objective; reading between the lines, it is not. It is an open secret that there is little to no trust between the different components of this government

in terms of motivation and judgment in conducting this war, which creates an ominous volatility. Hence, one of Eisenkot's most revealing disclosures on Channel 12's Uvda ("Fact") program was that the presence of his National Unity party had prevented an almost instant, massive attack on Hezbollah in Lebanon, which would have meant Israel fighting on two fronts.

der. However, conditions changed after the Hamas attack and a full-blown confrontation with Hezbollah, as Eisenkot warned the Cabinet, "would have fulfilled (Hamas' Gaza leader Yahya) Sinwar's strategic vision" of bringing about a regional war.

For many years, Israel's strategists were more concerned with developments in Lebanon than with either

lation when either side feels that their enemy is crossing a certain red line.

In hindsight, the brakes on the Israeli government's actions in the form of the National Unity party proved to be crucial and may have avoided a regional war that might have united Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Houthis in Yemen and led to them joining forces with Hamas and Hezbollah. Eventually, however, National Unity will have to leave the coalition and demand a general election. Moreover, we learned from Eisenkot something many of us suspected from the beginning of this war, mainly because of the opening conditions: that there are too many in the Israeli government who do not comprehend the limitations of the use of force - a misunderstanding that usually leads to the prolonged and excessive use of it. Moreover, whereas for the wider public the release of the hostages is the No. 1 priority, this is not necessarily the case when it comes to the prime minister and his original partners in this coalition.

A moral government should take the view that protecting its citizens takes precedence over eliminating an enemy. For now, Israel is not prioritizing the safety and return of the hostages; instead, it is entrenching its soldiers in the killing fields of Gaza with no exit plan and no mechanism to facilitate one. It carelessly lacks any strategic vision of what a desirable future scenario for Israel might be. This point is especially concerning, as the ultra-right in government are calling for the reoccupation of Gaza and the construction of Israeli settlements there, and soon Netanyahu might need to cave in to such demands in order to stay in power. Eisenkot's interview has injected a sense of realism regarding both the dangers ahead and the costs this war has already incurred.

More significant is that there is a need to come clean and acknowledge that a war of this kind can achieve only a limited strategic objective, while the country's long-term goals can only be accomplished through negotiation and the arduous process of peace-building. But is there a constituency that is ready to listen to this message?

The tension on the northern border has been a security concern for many years and, back in 2018, Israel decided to take on Hezbollah in Lebanon, embarking on "Operation Northern Shield," exposing and thwarting the organization's cross-border attack tunnels from Lebanon. For many months, long before Oct. 7, occasional skirmishes with Hezbollah had taken place along this border. However, conditions changed after the Hamas attack and a full-blown confrontation with Hezbollah, as Eisenkot warned the Cabinet, "would have fulfilled (Hamas' Gaza leader Yahya) Sinwar's strategic vision" of bringing about a regional war. For many years, Israel's strategists were more concerned with developments in Lebanon than with either the West Bank or Gaza, which were each regarded as "under control."

This revelation makes it clear that, from Day 1 of this conflict, Netanyahu and the hawks in his government, as much as senior Israeli army commanders, locked themselves into another dangerous misperception of what military power can, or more importantly cannot, achieve. And because of their initial appalling failure to foresee and prevent the Hamas attack, they sought to redeem themselves by military adventurism and/or they saw an opportunity to do something they have wanted to do for a long time. The tension on the northern border has been a security concern for many years and, back in 2018, Israel decided to take on Hezbollah in Lebanon, embarking on "Operation Northern Shield," exposing and thwarting the organization's cross-border attack tunnels from Lebanon. For many months, long before Oct. 7, occasional skirmishes with Hezbollah had taken place along this bor-

der. However, conditions changed after the Hamas attack and a full-blown confrontation with Hezbollah, as Eisenkot warned the Cabinet, "would have fulfilled (Hamas' Gaza leader Yahya) Sinwar's strategic vision" of bringing about a regional war. For many years, Israel's strategists were more concerned with developments in Lebanon than with either the West Bank or Gaza, which were each regarded as "under control." We may never know exactly what the intentions of Hamas' leadership were in targeting civilians in such a horrific manner on Oct. 7, unless it was as bait to draw an excessive response from Israel in the hope that this would galvanize the so-called Axis of Resistance and even more moderate Arab countries to unite against Israel. And, first and foremost, to lure Hassan Nasrallah and Hezbollah to open a northern front. At a time when emotions of fear, anger and revenge coalesce with the need to ensure a country's immediate and long-term strategic interests, its leadership must contain its emotions and narrow political calculations in favor of seeing the bigger picture. Hezbollah has undoubtedly been provoking Israel, but it is mainly engaging in symbolic and very limited cross-border skirmishes, despite the occasional esca-

EU and the Indo-Pacific: Partners for a more stable and prosperous world

Josep Borrel

AT the start of 2024, Europeans are of course deeply concerned by the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and by the conflict that has broken out again in the Middle East. However, we are not forgetting the broader picture: the center of gravity of the world's economy has shifted to the Indo-Pacific region, with close to 50 percent of the world's gross domestic product and 60 percent of the world's population. Peace and stability in this region are crucial for Europe and the world.

In recent years, the EU has worked steadily to improve its cooperation with the region, in particular by becoming, in 2020, a strategic partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, launching an Indo-Pacific strategy in 2021, holding a successful EU-ASEAN Summit in 2022 and adopting the Samoa Agreement with Pacific countries in 2023. We will accelerate the path in 2024.

The economic links between the EU and the Indo-Pacific region have reached an impressive level, unimaginable 40 years ago. Maritime routes in the region have become the arteries of the world: every day, 2,000 ships transport goods across the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea to Europe and back. However, the security environment is deteriorating. Major tensions are rising, from the South China Sea to the Taiwan Strait, the Korean Peninsula and the Red Sea. There is less trust among the main global and regional players; less respect for international law and multilateral agreements; and force and coercion are on the rise. We are at risk of going back to a world where "might makes right." The EU intends to counter this trend.

Multilateral solutions and regional approaches are in our DNA and we will always defend international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the nonproliferation regime. To defend the rules-based world order, we want to cooperate more closely with our partners committed to multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific region.

The EU maintains regular security and defense dialogues with China, Japan, India, Australia, South Korea and other nations. However, our cooperation increasingly extends beyond dialogue to concrete and operational activities. Under our strategic partnership with ASEAN, security cooperation is also becoming more and more a major component. We are participating with members of ASEAN in regional navy exercises and the navies of our Asian partners are cooperating with us in Operation Atalanta, near the Horn of Africa. These are good examples of what we can do together.

To go further, we propose to use our member states' advanced capabilities to become a "smart security enabler," helping

to build the capacities of our partners in the region on maritime security, cybersecurity, counterterrorism and foreign information manipulation and interference. We need each other to help stabilize this world. The challenges we are facing do not allow us any other way than to cooperate closely to help avoid conflicts and ensure respect for international law. To protect freedom of navigation, EU member states are already increasing their deployments between the EU and the Indo-Pacific. The region can count on us as a reliable partner.

On the economic side, Russia's aggression against Ukraine has shown us the high cost of the EU's excessive dependency on Russian gas. We are therefore focusing on improving the EU's economic security by reducing this type of excessive dependency. However, this does not mean closing our borders. On the contrary, it should lead to developing our economic ties with many countries in the Indo-Pacific region in order to de-risk our economy and diversify our supply chains. In this context, the EU has recently signed a free trade agreement with New Zealand and negotiations are ongoing with India, Indonesia and Thailand. We are also engaging with Japan, South Korea, Singapore and India to ensure stable and diversified supply chains in the field of digital technologies and have proposed to our Indo-Pacific partners to work together on the sustainable extraction and processing of the critical raw materials necessary for the green and digital transitions.

The EU also wants to cooperate more actively with Indo-Pacific countries toward a green and sustainable future. The Green-Blue Alliance with the Pacific islands is helping to strengthen their climate resilience. Together with our G7 partners, we have also agreed Just Energy Transition Partnerships with South Africa, Indonesia and Vietnam and the European Investment Bank is already investing 500 million (\$542 million) to accelerate Vietnam's green transition in a way that benefits both people and the planet. In short, we are well aware of the crucial importance of the EU's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. We are demonstrating it with a Pacific Day in the European Parliament on Feb. 1, highlighting our burgeoning cooperation with our Pacific island partners. The next day, our third Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum will bring together foreign ministers from the region and the EU. We will then hold our biennial EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting. In a world of geopolitical turbulence and great power rivalry, these three high-level meetings illustrate the strong and shared interest that the EU and the Indo-Pacific countries have to cooperate more closely in order to enhance their security, prosperity and resilience.

Arab News

West should not have bought Israel's claims against UNRWA

Daoud Kuttab

THE synchronized decisions of many Western countries to suspend their financial support to one of the most important UN agencies in the Middle East is not an innocent act. The Israeli government, not known for its truthfulness, has concocted evidence against 12 Palestinians - who are among 13,000 employees of the UN Relief and Works Agency - that they shared with major Western capitals. Tel Aviv claims that those 12 participated in the attacks on Israelis on Oct. 7 and that they used UN vehicles.

Not a single piece of information has been made public or independently verified, which fits into the Israeli routine: make an accusation, provide superficial evidence and refuse to cooperate with any serious investigation. Months later, after the damage is done, Israel hopes and

expects that the issue will be forgotten. The amazing thing is the speed of the domino effect that has taken place, with little attention paid to the claims or any acceptance of the fact that UNRWA has dismissed the 12 accused and has begun a serious investigation.

The history of Israeli lies is so big and has been thoroughly and repeatedly proven that one wonders why so many respected countries fell for them once again. Here are a few recent cases. Israelis claimed that there were babies who were beheaded on Oct. 7 and the news got all the way to the US president, only to be debunked and even denied by the Israeli army. Systematic rape has been claimed and insisted on, yet no proof has been provided.

Previously, Israel accused six Palestinian human rights organizations of being terrorist groups,

with the aim of getting Western donor countries and foundations to stop supporting them. That failed when funders insisted on irrefutable proof and Tel Aviv could not provide it. In fact, Israel has not even moved to arrest the heads of the organizations that it claims are terrorists. It has banned Ubai Aboudi, the US-Palestinian head of the Bisan Center for Research and Development, from leaving the West Bank - a clear violation of the US-Israeli understanding - yet no attempt has been made to arrest him.

Perhaps the most blatant unproven accusation was levied against the former Gaza head of the World Vision Organization, Mohammad El-Halabi. Israel accused El-Halabi of diverting \$50 million to Hamas, yet it was unable to provide a single piece of evidence to back up this

accusation. Never mind the fact that the sum involved is more than 10 times bigger than the humanitarian organization's entire budget for the Occupied Territories. El-Halabi, who has been in jail for six years, has refused to accept a plea bargain that would give him freedom because he insists he did not do anything wrong.

El-Halabi, who lost 40 percent of his hearing during the torture and interrogation phase, withstood the physical pressure. However, the 12 UNRWA staff fired last week may not be able to withstand any torture and may sign anything under duress. In this UNRWA case, as in all the others, Israel will refrain from total cooperation with the UN, but will give it cherry-picked evidence. In a few months, the agency will not be able to fully complete its investi-

gation, but the damage will have been done.

Even if we are to accept that a tiny fraction of the employees of this well-disciplined agency committed a crime, why would an entire agency be punished? And, more importantly, why punish the Palestinian people who desperately need its services? UNRWA is the most reliable and present organization that can adhere to the orders of the International Court of Justice in delivering aid to Palestinians.

The timing of the Israeli decision (we have no idea how long they have held the information that they blitized Western capitals with) is also suspect. Israel clearly had other motivations for its synchronized efforts in major capitals. The world court, a UN agency, accepted and quoted the reports of other UN agencies during its interim verdict on the genocide complaint against Israel. In

retaliation, what Israel has tried to do is show the unreliability of a UN agency.

Furthermore, anyone following Israel's position on UN agencies in general and UNRWA in particular knows that it abhors them. UNRWA reminds it and the world of the Palestinian refugee issue and the right of return of Palestinian refugees, as stated in UN General Assembly Resolution 194.

The problem is not only in Israel's selfish, unethical and even genocidal efforts, but also the part played by many Western countries, which either consciously or unconsciously once again fell for synchronized Israeli lies and deception against an important UN agency. This agency has nothing to do with the opinions or even actions of a few Palestinians, regardless of whether or not Israel's allegations about them are true.

Where is America in 2024 ... and where is it going?

Eyad Abu Shakra

AMID the influx of political gifts granted to Israel by major Western countries on Holocaust Remembrance Day and the sympathy shown for its leaders following the position of the International Court of Justice on the actions it has taken - and continues to take - in the Gaza Strip, political analysis has been focused on Israel. However, there have also been accelerating and unfamiliar developments unfolding in the US over the past two weeks.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' decision to pull out of the Republican Party primaries may have surprised some observers. DeSantis, whom many considered an ideal candidate to win the upcoming presidential election, decided that it would be best to cut his losses and leave the arena early on, even though he came second to Donald Trump in the first primary election in Iowa.

The following qualities determined the strengths and weaknesses of DeSantis' candidacy, first against Trump in the primaries and then in the presidential race against Joe Biden.

Firstly, he was a candidate whose extreme conservatism was indisputable. He was vying for the nomination in a party where the influence of the extreme conservative right is growing strongly and rapidly. Secondly, he is among the young politicians expected to shape the future of the Republican Party after the "personalized" Trump era.

Thirdly, he was among the first politicians to recognize the significance of pushing back against immigration and asylum seekers.

To this end, he unequivocally adopted so-called Trumpian policies, sometimes seemingly even going further than the "founder," who sought a "separation wall" with Mexico. Finally, he is the governor of the third most populous state in the US, which is also the third-largest "Latino state" (after California and Texas) and, along with Texas, a major stronghold for the Republican Party. However, it seems that, at some point, DeSantis' qualities began worrying his "mentor." Trump went from seeing the man as a promising student to an arch-rival seeking to inherit his position too quickly. The truth is that Trump's apprehension about any serious candidate challenging him from the right is growing in parallel with the increasing doubts about his ability to carry on his electoral campaign until the fall, given the myriad of legal issues and minefield of political allegations he must overcome.

This reality becomes increasingly evident, not only from Trump's stance toward DeSantis, but also in his position toward his only remaining competitor, Nikki Haley, the former governor of South Carolina, who became a serious rival after the withdrawal of the governor of Florida. Haley might stand to benefit if the problems of the former president accumulate and the provocations he instigates, or sometimes gets dragged into, increase. In fact, following the Iowa caucuses and then the New Hampshire primary, "sensible" voices within the party have urged Haley to remain in the race against Trump so that the

Republicans do not find themselves without a plan if something unforeseen were to happen in the next few months. In addition, the recent court ruling against Trump in the defamation case brought by writer E. Jean Carroll, whom he was ordered to pay more than \$83 million, is not the first and may not be the last verdict that goes against him. Nevertheless, the former president continues to pursue his familiar tactic of rousing his supporters by accusing the current administration of targeting him and manipulating the judiciary to fight him.

Meanwhile, another potential successor of Trump's has made use of the "virtues" of agitation and populist rabble-rousing to assert himself: Texas Gov. Greg Abbott. Abbott, who governs a state that borders Mexico and has a long (political, cultural and bloody) history with it, decided that Texas would curb immigration on the border with its own forces, without referring to the federal government. The Supreme Court (despite its conservative majority) ruled last Monday, by a narrow 5-4 margin, in favor of the federal government's right to remove the barbed wire installed on the border with Mexico. However, Abbott, who is part of the extreme right in the Republican Party, decided to challenge the court's ruling and the government's policy. He has decried the federal government for being soft on immigration and added more barbed wire. He also encouraged his fellow right-wing Republican state governors to ignore Washington and order their national guards to protect their bor-

ders. Six states did indeed follow the example of Texas, including Florida, which faces the Caribbean Sea, and Montana in the far north, on the border with Canada.

Their mutiny brings the 1861 instigation of the American Civil War to mind. At the time, the state of South Carolina militarily rebelled against the federal government's anti-slavery policy and fired the first secessionist shot on Fort Sumter in Charleston. At that time, as is the case today, the pretext was "state rights." The argument was that, in a federal political system, the center (i.e., the central government) should not impose its will on the component parts (i.e., the states). As for the new challenge, it is the second in modern American history after the storming of the Capitol, the seat of the federal legislative authority, by Trump supporters on Jan. 6, 2021, following the refusal of the outgoing president to acknowledge his electoral defeat a few months earlier.

What do we see before us today? The US, the world's leading power, suffers from very serious structural problems. Foremost among them is the collapse of the broad national consensus on political principles. There are explicit disagreements over how to define democracy, political legitimacy, the independence of the judiciary and the transfer of power, to say nothing of the trivialization and threat to public freedoms, including academic and media freedoms. The collapse of a broad consensus in a pluralistic entity in which citizens have the right to bear arms, amid a climate of violent and exclusionary polarization, carries the portents of major risks.

Jordan drone strike: Is the US being pulled into another Mid East war?

Ibrahim Al-Marashi

ON Sunday, January 28, The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group that includes the militias Kataib Hezbollah and Harakat al-Nujaba among others, claimed responsibility for a drone attack that killed three US military personnel and injured 34 others in a base in northeastern Jordan, near the Syria border.

In the media coverage of the attack, it was repeatedly mentioned that these militias have launched 165 attacks on US troops - 66 in Iraq and 98 in Syria - since October 2023. While it helps put the attack in context, this is a misleading figure. This conflict began much earlier than last October, and thus the total number of attacks the US has faced from these militias is actually much higher.

Indeed, Sunday's drone attack was just the latest episode in an undeclared war between the United States and Iran-affiliated Iraqi Shia militias that has been raging across the region for more than five years. More than six years ago, in October 2017, in an article published on this very page, I predicted that US President Donald Trump's controversial decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or the "Iran nuclear deal", would result in attacks by Iran-backed Iraqi militias on US forces in Iraq and across the region.

The attacks began soon after the US withdrawal, and overtime settled into a pattern of carefully managed tit-for-tat skirmishes. The superiority of US defence systems, coupled with its state-of-the-art drone arsenal, meant that the few casualties of the low-intensity conflict have consistently been on the Iraqi side. Most of the projectiles fired by the militias, both missiles and drones, were easily intercepted and destroyed by US forces. It was clear that the point of these attacks was to harass American forces, not cause a high number of fatalities. In fact, these militias most likely did not think their

weapons could ever evade the American anti-aircraft defences and cause American casualties.

In December 2019, however, a Kataib Hezbollah attack on an Iraqi military facility resulted in the death of an American-citizen working as a translator for the US military. That single casualty ended up triggering the most tense episode in the conflict so far. Trump retaliated in January 2020 by assassinating the militia's leader, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, as well as the head of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force, General Qassem Soleimani, causing fears that World War III was about to break out.

Now, there are not one, but three US casualties, and given the ever-intensifying confrontations between US and Iran-backed militias across the region, once again there are growing fears that the US may respond to the attack on its forces in Jordan in a way that would spiral the long-running conflict out of control. Sure, Joe Biden is not Trump, and he is expected to be more cautious in his response than his predecessor. But 2024 is an election year, and the Biden administration is facing immense domestic pressures. No matter what Biden decides to do, it will not be enough to satisfy the Republicans who are already calling for Iran to be directly targeted, and even Tehran to be bombed.

Trump, who will likely be running against Biden in November, already blamed Sunday's deadly drone attack in Jordan on Biden's "weakness and surrender". "This attack would NEVER have happened if I was President, not even a chance," he wrote in a social media post on Sunday, "Just like the Iranian-backed Hamas attack on Israel would never have happened, the War in Ukraine would never have happened, and we would right now have Peace through-

out the World. Instead, we are on the brink of World War 3." Faced with such provocation, President Biden may feel the need to take drastic action to not appear weak on the eve of a critical election.

Iran, for its part, appears more than eager to avoid being pulled into hot conflict against the US at a time when its so-called "Axis of Resistance" is actually on the rise in the region. Indeed, Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, and Israel's consequent assault on Gaza, resurrected and strengthened the Iran-led anti-US alliance between Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and the Harakat and Hezbollah in Iraq. Further, Houthis demonstrated that they can disrupt Red Sea shipping, and thus international trade, without much consequence for themselves, adding to Iran's perceived power on the world stage. The Iraqi militias, just like the Houthis, are likely enjoying the fact that they managed to humiliate Washington by killing US servicemen in Jordan, and hoping that their unexpected success would elevate their status within the Axis. Iran, however, appears to have a much different assessment of the situation.

The Islamic republic has long been discouraging its proxies from taking action that could transform its carefully managed low-intensity, low-fatality proxy conflict into a costly all-out direct war against the US. It, for example, has not pushed the Lebanese Hezbollah to enter into a high-intensity conflict with Israel amid its war on Gaza. Thus, there is reason to assume Iran is actually not that pleased with the "success" of the attack on the base in Jordan, and is hoping to avoid any further escalations. "This attack would NEVER have happened if I was President, not even a chance," he wrote in a social media post on Sunday. "Just like the Iranian-backed

Hamas attack on Israel would never have happened, the War in Ukraine would never have happened, and we would right now have Peace throughout the World. Instead, we are on the brink of World War 3."

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Aljazeera

Make good on debts

Zhou Taidong

credentials. International NGOs leverage their funds, raise their profile and expand their network.

In practice, however, it is far from certain that many of the foregoing benefits are materialized. First, the size of the transactions has been small and the debt relief has been modest. Most debt swaps have been in the two-digit million US dollar range, with the largest swap to date occurring in 1992 between Poland and a group of creditors, for a total value of \$580 million. According to the United Nations Development Programme (2017), the total value of debt treated by debt swaps amounted to \$2.6 billion and had funded development or nature-related spending of about \$1.2 billion.

Second, transaction costs have been high. Debt swaps have historically been linked to specific projects that need to be identified, structured, and monitored. Setting up suitable projects requires professional expertise, coordination across multiple parties, and time-consuming negotiations (two to four years according to the OECD). Performance indicators attached to swaps induce high administrative costs, as the debtor government's own systems and procedures are bypassed and parallel structures are often needed for project implementation and monitoring. This issue worsens when the interested creditor countries do not have the expertise or an extensive set of agencies to implement the swap. High transactions and monitoring costs shrink the pool of creditors that might be interested in debt swaps, while the small scale of the swaps stands in the way of achieving economies of scale.

Third, the added value seems to be limited. There are studies indicating that countries implementing debt-for-nature transactions tend to have lower deforestation. The 2015 Seychelles debt swap also claims to have increased the share of its protected marine area to 30 percent. Nevertheless, questions remain in terms of the extent to which these swaps provide "additionality" over investments that governments might have already budgeted. There are also risks of "greenwashing".

In the meantime, debt swaps have historically aimed to promote both specific investments and policy actions on the one hand and to provide some debt relief on the other, but not to provide comprehensive debt relief or restore debt sustainability in unsustainable debt cases. Over recent years, China has become the largest bilateral creditor of many countries. Despite its drawbacks, debt swaps can provide a new channel for dealing with external debts. Arguably, they can provide multiple benefits for China,

including reducing the default risks of debtor countries, promoting green Belt and Road cooperation, pushing forward economic and social development in partner countries, and improving China's global reputation at low costs. Besides, debt swaps also provide a new mechanism for implementing the Global Development Initiative, which prioritizes development finance and green development. In October 2023, the first debt swap agreement for development was signed between China and Egypt, although no details on implementation are available as yet. To give such a mechanism a try, China could take the following actions.

First, learning from international experiences and expanding new development partnerships. To explore the necessity and feasibility of debt swaps, Chinese ministries and financial institutions can establish dialogues with countries and agencies that have implemented such swaps, including the Agence Francaise de Developpement, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the UNDP. This can also provide entry points for innovating development finance and improving third-party market cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative.

Second, following the approach of "piloting first and scaling up". China can identify and select countries by considering such factors as default risks, climate vulnerabilities, and the willingness and capacity of partner countries. When pilots are initiated, close monitoring should be conducted so that the effects and regulatory and policy conditions are fully understood. When pathways are clearer, such mechanisms can be expanded to other countries and regions.

Third, setting up a policy coordination mechanism. China needs to define the leading agency and participating ministries and financial institutions, applicable debtor countries and types of debts, terms of swaps, as well as the roles and responsibilities of respective participants.

Fourth, adhering to the principle of mutual respect and ownership of partner countries. China can provide overall directions in the usage of funds and monitoring mechanisms in implementing debt swaps. For example, China can request the funds to be disbursed to promote a green Belt and Road, but give the partner countries the driving seat in specific decisions. China should insist on its long traditional South-South cooperation principles when working with the debtor government to jointly formulate implementation and management arrangements, including deciding key performance indicators.

The China Daily

Farmers' revolt & France

Anne-Elisabeth Moutet

NO battle plan survives contact with the enemy," said Bismarck's great field marshal Count von Moltke, a piece of wisdom Emmanuel Macron (who's just given a funeral oration for the late Wolfgang Schäuble in serviceable German) might want to ponder. His brand-new cabinet and brand-new 34-year-old PM, Gabriel Attal, were supposed to bring relief, and a breath of fresh air, to government.

Instead, after the own goal by new education minister Amélie Oudéa-Castera, who has attracted controversy over her reasons for moving her son from a state school to Paris's poshest, private Catholic Lycée, le Président is facing a much more serious crisis: farmers are rising in anger.

As in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, and Poland, columns of tractors blocking roads, and demonstrations barring access to prefectures across the country, are giving rise to a fear of a gilets verts revolt, akin to the 18-month 2018 gilets jaunes popular rebellion that scarred the fabric of politics for far longer than it actually lasted.

"Being a farmer in France amounts to reading Kafka on a tractor," the environmental journalist Emmanuelle Ducros wrote this week in L'Opinion, a centre-Right daily, in a piece detailing in excruciating detail the thicket of rules and regulations blighting French farmers.

These come from local, regional, national and European agencies, often contradict one another, and each require their own field of application (a farm can be "zoned" in as many as

five different areas, operating under different rules managed by different bodies, almost all empowered to fine and ban).

There are norms for everything: for a chicken farm producing eggs, the rulebook is 167 pages long, and includes the minimum width of a chicken cage (30cm), the inclination of the bottom part (14 degrees), the trapdoor size (40cm wide, 35cm high), and more rules on dust, ventilation, and shape of perch. There are 14 separate regulations on how to properly trim a hedge bordering a field, depending variously on the zoning code, national heritage code, environmental code, and so on.

Subject to whether a ditch is classified as such, or as a small brook, you either must, or are forbidden, to clean it up. The Common Agricultural Policy investigators require timestamped and geo-localised pictures of each field to prove cultivation on the right dates, and use a channel on an EU satellite to spot any deviation. Days when work is banned, to allow birds to nest, clash with those mandating trimming. France is known for the "over-transposition" of EU regulation: to placate the French Green party (who join the politics of Jeremy Corbyn with the bolshness of Extinction Rebellion), many rules have been pushed further by the government. No wonder that French farmers spend 20 per cent of a very long working week on paperwork.

As a result, they watch with fury their produce being priced out of a market that has been hit by inflation like everywhere else,

while competitors from countries France has free trade deals with undercut them. Morocco, which isn't bound either by the French employment code or most of the Brussels sanitary or green regulations, can sell 420,000 tonnes of tomatoes a year at 2.49 a kilo, while the French ones cost 4.50, earning centimes for the growers. Brazilian or Thai chicken goes at 5 a kilo, against 11 for a French-raised bird. France waived import duties for Ukrainian grain when the country was invaded by Russia, but this doesn't help French wheat growers. The situation turned nasty this week, with a family of farmers demonstrating peacefully mowed down by a car running a roadblock. It was described as an accident, with the driver charged for involuntary manslaughter. But the issue has become a tinderbox.

So far, Attal has spent a lot of time sweet-talking farmers. His one stroke of luck is that, unlike the Yellow Vests, farmers traditionally have unions and professional organisations who seem determined not to raise the stakes unless they see clear provocation. They, as well as the government, are careful not to alienate the public: the French love their farmers and the countryside, which they see as the base of France's traditions, from gastronomy to landscapes, and even greatness. But the danger remains that a mishandling of such an electric situation may yet add votes to the extremes, mostly on the Right. There's no general election scheduled in France before 2027; but the June European elections could become a life-size poll on Macron's loss of the people's trust.

China's Asia-Pacific moves much more peaceful than US

Muhammad Asif Noor

IN the evolving geopolitical landscape of the Asia-Pacific region, the dynamics of international relations are constantly in flux. The joint statement issued by the United States, Japan and the Republic of Korea at the recent "Trilateral Indo-Pacific Dialogue" and China's response to it offer an insight into the complex interplay of regional power politics.

China has remained a proponent of peace, emphasizing the importance of adopting a regional approach to settling differences without the interference of non-regional countries. Dialogue and consultation are the only way to manage, even resolve, differences between countries.

The concerns the joint statement raised over China's claim in the South China Sea and the allegations it made against China (including accusing China of "escalatory behavior") were firmly rebutted by Beijing. To be sure, Beijing's response is not merely a matter of diplomatic posturing but also deeply rooted in the country's broader vision for the region - a vision characterized by peace, stability and cooperation.

China's economic endeavors and cultural impact have positioned it as a key player shaping the dynamics of the region. This role is distinct from that of the United States, which often appears to adopt a combative stance, heav-

ily influenced by traditional power dynamics. In contrast to the US, which is often viewed as an outsider exerting its influence on the region, China has always made efforts to preserve peace, and promote collaboration and cooperation, strived for unity and collective progress. When it comes to the South China Sea, for China, it is not just a place through which the country's strategic maritime routes pass but also an essential part of its maritime domain. As opposed to the confrontational approach of the US and its two allies, China advocates using peaceful dialogue and consultation to resolve disputes, in line with international laws and conventions, notably the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Moreover, China sees the formation of such trilateral groupings as a step toward creating exclusionary blocs - a move that it argues is counterproductive to the collective goal of regional peace and stability. China favors inclusivity and multipolar cooperation over alignments that more often than not are aimed at building power blocs reminiscent of the Cold War-era days. This shows China wants to help build a world order in which no single country or coalition dictates the rules of engagement.

On the Taiwan question,

Beijing's position is clear. The one-China principle is the bedrock of its foreign policy. For Beijing, any external interference in the Taiwan question or support for separatists on the island is a violation of the one-China principle and a challenge to the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. From Beijing's viewpoint, the key to maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is the unwavering adherence to the one-China principle.

China's response to the trilateral dialogue and the joint statement reflects its larger vision for and deep understanding of the region. The Asia-Pacific, as seen by Beijing, is not a battleground for geopolitical contests but a region for cooperation and development. This view is totally different from the strategy of forming alliances and blocs, which, according to China, only serves to heighten tensions and create divisions.

China's call to abandon the Cold War mentality is a significant aspect of its international relations. Instead of forming alliances and blocs, which often lead to tensions and conflicts, and shift people's attention from common threats such as deteriorating global governance and worsening climate change, China promotes a new type of international relations marked by mutual respect, cooper-

ation and shared benefits - and aimed at maintaining long-term peace and prosperity in the region.

China's emphasis that the regional players make more efforts to maintain peace and stability underscores its vision of a multipolar world order, in which the international community operates on the basis of equality and collective decision-making, and all countries, regardless of their size and national strength, contribute to shaping the regional and global narratives.

China's response to the US-Japan-ROK joint statement reflects a nuanced interplay of its principles, national interests, and vision for a fairer and equitable regional and global order. At its core, China's stance is about safeguarding its sovereignty, fostering cooperation and helping build a balanced, multipolar world order.

As the Asia-Pacific region continues to emerge as a key geopolitical arena, understanding these perspectives becomes essential for navigating the complex currents of international relations. And the path to stability and prosperity in the region passes through mutual respect, constructive dialogue, and a commitment to the principles that prioritize peace and collaborative growth. China's advocacy of the Pacific vision stands as a testament to its commitment to these ideals, enriching the discourse on regional geopolitics.



PSX turns around to bullish trend, gains 137 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bullish trend on Wednesday, gaining 137.44 points, a positive change of 0.22 percent, closing at 61,979.18 points against 61,841.74 points the previous trading day.

A total of 276,464,818 shares valuing Rs 9.271 billion were traded during the

day as compared to 436,120,659 shares valuing Rs.15,286 billion the last day. Some 349 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 165 of them recorded gains and 151 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 33 remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were K-Electric Limited with 36,273,372

shares at Rs.4.54 per share, Bank of Punjab with 20,853,316 shares at Rs.6.20 per share and Hascol Petrol with 14,174,000 shares at Rs.7.91 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.1,551.83 per share price, closing at Rs.22,364.33, whereas the runner-up was

Sazgar Engineering Works Limited with a Rs.13.48 rise in its per share price to Rs.211.19.

Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.100.00 per share closing at Rs.8,200.00, followed by Colgate-Palmolive (Pakistan) Limited with Rs.40.33 decline to close at Rs.1,404.00.

Minister for Energy inaugurates Oil, Gas and Minerals Career Expo



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Energy, Mr. Muhammad Ali inaugurated the first-ever national level 'Fueling Futures Career Expo 2024' on January 31 at Pakistan China Friendship Centre, Islamabad. The two-day Career Expo has been organised by the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) in collaboration with Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL).

The event witnessed an overwhelming attendance of students, faculty, and company representatives. MD and CEO PPL Mr. Imran

Abbasi welcomed the large number of students from across the country and thanked the participating companies and universities for making the two-day Career Expo a success. The platform provides an opportunity for students to interact with the leaders of the energy and minerals industry and to learn from their experiences with the view to selecting, pursuing careers in Oil, Gas and Mineral sector, he added.

In his keynote address, the Federal Minister Mr. Ali emphasized that the event is planned for students to explore Career opportunities with energy and minerals being show-

cased by respective companies today. He shared that there is massive transformation happening in the Energy sector globally. Energy should be affordable, accessible, and sustainable, he underlined.

The Minister highlighted that Pakistan is energy deficient and an oil importer. Hence there is opportunity to convert the energy deficiency to surplus. Also, there are many in demand mineral resources in the country with opportunities for their extraction in future. He advised students to make their career decisions based on future environment and needs with Energy and Minerals being critical sectors. Overall overwhelming response at the Career Expo with around 5000 students from across Pakistan in attendance along with faculty members and staff of around 30 universities and schools. The managing directors, senior management, and staff of 14 participating oil, gas and mineral companies.

The two-day Career Expo with the theme, 'Fueling the Future' comprised of company presentations, sessions on significance of oil, gas and mineral sector and opportunities, besides various career counselling dialogues and company and university stalls at the venue.

The event is managed by PPL in partnership with RG Blue Communications.

IBA Karachi organizes Annual Career Fair 2024

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi, hosted its Annual Career Fair 2024, at the IBA Main Campus. Organized by the IBA Career Development Center (CDC) in collaboration with a Student Committee, the event aimed to connect corporate entities and emerging ventures with the vibrant student body of the Institute.

This year's Career Fair witnessed an impressive turnout, with over 170 companies and 40 career counsellors participating in the event. Representatives from various sectors, including banking and financial institutions, social and service sector, industrial manufacturing, and information technology, engaged with the diverse pool of talented stu-



dents at IBA. Inaugurating the ceremony, Executive Director, IBA Karachi, Dr. S Akbar Zaidi, expressed his enthusiasm for the event, stating, "The Annual Career Fair is a crucial platform for our students to interact with industry leaders, explore career opportunities, and gain valuable insights into their respective fields."

Additional remarks were provided by Head, IBA-CDC, Syed Atif Murtaza Qaiser; Registrar IBA, Dr. Asad Ilyas; Head Culture Enablement, Bank Alfalah, Rehan Naeem; and HR Leader, Ismail Industries Limited, Mr. Anif Hussain Nomani.

One of the highlights of the event was the inclusion

of 'Career Vista', powered by Bank Alfalah. This platform facilitated interactive panel discussions and one-on-one sessions with 40 industry experts.

Professionals from renowned brands including P&G, Z2C Limited, Oxford University Press, National Foods, Hilal Foods, Meezan Bank, and others provided personalized guidance to the students, assisting them in navigating their career paths.

The IBA Career Fair 2024 came to a successful fruition with the support of our sponsors. Bank Alfalah served as the Lead Sponsor, Ismail Industries Limited as the Platinum Sponsor, and Meezan Bank and National Bank of Pakistan as Silver Sponsors. Bronze Sponsors included Z2C Limited, Tafsol, and DP World, while Pepsi Co contributed as the Beverage Partner.



ISLAMABAD: An MoU signing ceremony held between FGEHA and MS Hammer Property in Islamabad presided over by Director General FGEHA Captain Zafar Iqbal (Retd.).

Gohar urges private sector to help achieve \$100b exports target

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) that called on him led by its Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, an ICCI news release said.

He said that the business community should partner with the government in accelerating the economic development.

The business community should also take an active part in corporate social responsibility activities to address issues of the poor segments of the society and

promote welfare activities in the country, he added. Gohar Ejaz assured that he would cooperate in resolving the key issues of the businessmen to facilitate them in business promotion. Speaking on the occasion, ICCI President

Ahsan Bakhtawari said that the Chamber was making efforts for the establishment of an expo centre and a new industrial estate in the region and urged the government to

cooperate in that regard. He also urged for giving the ICCI representation in the Export Development Fund, besides setting up a facilitation desk of the Passport Office at its office and a separate immigration counter at airports for the taxpayers.

ICCI Senior Vice President Faad Waheed requested the government to announce a special package for the Small Medium Enterprises and the industry in the next budget.

Engro Corporation announces transition in leadership

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Engro Corporation, Pakistan's premier business conglomerate, has announced the appointment of Ahsan Zafar Syed as President & CEO Designate.

Ghias Khan will continue to serve as President & CEO of Engro Corporation until the end of his term in April 2024.

Ahsan, currently CEO of Engro Fertilizers, began his professional career with Engro (then Exxon Chemical Pakistan Limited) over 30 years ago. Ahsan played a pivotal engineering role in the construction of the EnVen plant for Engro Fertilizers, which



is the second-largest single train urea plant in the world. To date, the EnVen plant has been Engro's largest project and investment, amounting to USD 1.1 billion at the time. As the CEO of Engro Energy, power and mining projects

collectively amounting to USD 1.9 billion were established under Ahsan's leadership, enabling Engro's energy vertical to successfully unearth the country's largest coal reserves in Thar.

In a PSX notification, "The Board has also expressed its deepest gratitude towards the existing President & CEO, Mr. Ghias Khan, whose leadership and dedication has helped in the substantial growth of the Company."

Over the last 7 years, Engro has achieved historic performance milestones under Ghias's leadership. Its flagship business, Engro Fertilizers, recently became the most

valuable fertilizer company on the PSX, the Thar project was completed successfully. VOPAK became a partner in its LNG Terminal, while Engro also started a new telecommunication infrastructure vertical through Engro Enfrashare and established Engro FZE in Dubai to enter regional trade. Ghias implemented Engro Corporation's current operating model, based on which the Engro enterprise received several awards - most recently four of its Group companies were in the top six of the PSX awards for 2023 and Engro was voted as a leading employer of choice.

FFC holds First Corporate Briefing for the Year 2024

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Fauji Fertilizer Company (FFC) held its First Corporate Briefing for the year 2024 as part of its best corporate governance practices.

FFC has been recognized by Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) as first amongst Top 25 Companies consecutively for 13 years attributed to its Compliance of Code of Corporate Governance, Company Performance and Efficient Management.

In the same backdrop the subject briefing for the year ended 31st December 2023 was held at FFC's corporate Head Office, Rawalpindi. Virtual access was also provided to all desirous stakeholders. Prominent capital market analysts and dignitary from Pakistan Stock



Exchange attended the event. Manager Corporate Affairs & Shares, Syed Imran Rizvi opened the briefing and apprised the house about significance

of the event. Chief Financial Officer, Syed Atif Ali briefed the house about FFC's performance for the year-ended 2023 and assured Company's commitment to achieve

higher standards of performance and sustained earnings. He further ascertained Company's perseverance in ensuring continual improvement for its stakeholders.

Xiaomi unveils Redmi Note 13 series in a spectacular launch event

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Xiaomi, the global technology leader, set the stage ablaze with the grand launch of the Redmi Note 13 series at Avari Lahore. The event was graced by the presence of brand ambassador Ahmad Raza Mir, Naimal Khawar, Ayesha Beig, Bilal Munir, Ali Abbas aka Mastech, Ameer Dagha, and many more influential personalities. The Redmi Note 13 series is poised to become a fan favorite, offering cutting-edge features and performance enhancements that cater to the diverse needs of Xiaomi enthusiasts.

Key Announcements:

The Redmi Note 13 series includes three models: Redmi Note 13, Redmi Note 13 Pro, and Redmi Note 13 Pro+5G. Xiaomi's eco products which include Watch 4, Redmi Buds 5 & Redmi Buds 5 Pro were also launched and were on display. Sufian Ahmed, Head of Marketing at Xiaomi, unveiled the prices, variants, and specifications of the new series during an engaging keynote.

Entertainment Extravaganza:

The launch event featured a mesmerizing musical performance by Maanu and Taha G, adding a

vibrant touch to the celebration. Xiaomi generously distributed giveaways for their latest products to the esteemed guests. Cyberdog 2, Xiaomi's futuristic robotic companion, made a captivating appearance, showcasing the company's commitment to innovative technology. Attendees had the opportunity to network in Xiaomi's dedicated networking area, fostering connections and discussions. The media wall and photobooth created interactive zones, allowing attendees to capture and share memorable moments.

The IoT booth provided a hands-on experience with Xiaomi's ecosystem of

smart devices. The launch event was not only a success in terms of product announcements but also an unforgettable experience for attendees.

Delicious culinary offerings and top-notch entertainment complemented the showcase of Xiaomi's latest innovations.

Availability: The Redmi Note 13 series is now available for purchase, offering consumers the chance to own the latest in Xiaomi's exceptional lineup. For more details on pricing and availability, please visit Xiaomi's official website and distributors: Daraz, Mistore, CoreCart & Xiaomi Sale.

Court Notice

In the Court of Qaisar Khan Afridi Additional District Judge II/Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Dagar, Appeal No.73/13, Institution 6/7/2023. Date of hearing, 16/2/2024. Mashoqur Rehman VS Mst Fareda etc Notice to no. 7.Zakir s/o Shamsher, 10/2.Nasebur Rehman, 10/3. Javedur Rehman sons of Saifur Rehman, 12/1.Tahir s/o Said Ghafar, 23.Mst Shah Ezat, 28.Mst Kynat ds/o Fazal Azem, 33.Musa s/o Suleman, 39. Suleman, 40.Farman, 42.Jihanzeb Gul, 43.Parvez Gul, 44.Iqbal Husain sons of Ashraf Gul, 45.Mst Nargas d/o Ashraf Gul, 46. Ramez Raja s/o Merzada, 48/3. Abdul Rehman, 48/4.Naemur Rehman sons of Abdul Malok, 50/2.Khalilur Rehman s/o Nor Rehman, 51/1.Tahir s/o Said Ghafar, 52.Fazal Subhan s/o Amerzada, 55.Mst Sahibzay daughter, 56.Azem Khan, 57. Nasem Khan sons of Hakemzay resident of Elai tehseel Daggar district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 16/2/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Graana.com and Agency21 join forces to introduce 'The Avenair'

F.P. Report

LAHORE: In a grand celebration last weekend, Graana.com and Agency21 came together to launch The Avenair, the newest luxury residential complex on MM Alam Road, Lahore.

Avenair's elegant range of studio, 1, 2, and 3-bedroom apartments, is designed for discerning individuals who value both style and comfort. The structure stands completed, with move-in scheduled within the next 6 months. This architectural masterpiece promises to be the epitome of modern living, blending elegance with functionality. The glittering launch event was graced by the presence of Mr. Farhan Javed, the Group Director and Co-Founder of Graana.com. Mr. Javed, accompanied by his dedicated team, journeyed from Islamabad to extend his wholehearted support to the Graana central team and bestow his personal blessings upon this illustrious project. Speaking at the event, he said, "We are thrilled to collaborate with The Avenair team in bringing this masterpiece to life. Lahore has always been close to our hearts, and The Avenair perfectly aligns with our vision to focus on community projects and elevate Pakistan's real estate. We look forward to future collaborations and ventures that will further enhance this beautiful



city." Sending his best wishes on the occasion, Sharjeel A. Ehmer, Group Director of Agency21 said, "The Avenair is just the first of our collaborations for Lahore. The overwhelming response from the public strengthens our belief that these community-centric projects are the need of the hour." The CEO of Avenair, Mr. Hashaam Manj, also stressed upon similar ideas in his address. "We are grateful for the support of Graana.com and Agency21 in realizing the dream of Avenair. This project is not just about luxury apartments; it's about crafting a legacy of elegance and unparalleled living experiences."

Graana.com, the exclusive marketing partner, and Agency21, the exclusive sales partner, have come together in a unique collaboration to bring The Avenair to fruition. This partnership symbolizes a commitment to quality and excellence, ensuring that The Avenair will not just meet but exceed

expectations. Behind The Avenair stands the vision of the late Mr. Jawad Hassan Manj, founder and CEO of JS Developers. His legacy is passionately carried forward by his son, Mr. Hashaam Manj, the current CEO. Under his leadership, The Avenair is more than just a residential complex; it's a tribute to a vision of innovation and excellence in real estate. During this momentous occasion, both Graana.com and The Avenair exchanged shields and souvenirs, cementing their partnership and expressing their shared commitment to forging a prosperous future together. The Avenair, with the combined strength of its partners, is a catalyst for change in Lahore's real estate landscape. Its strategic location, coupled with unparalleled amenities, makes it a coveted address gives Lahoris a project that ensures investment security and promises to redefine community living.



In brief

England to play Austria, Italy

MANCHESTER (Reuters): England will play Austria and Italy in a pair of February friendlies in Spain in preparation for Women's Euro 2025 qualifying. The Lionesses will travel to southern Spain for a warm-weather training camp before the international games at Estadio Nuevo Mirador in Algeciras against Austria on Feb. 23 and Italy on Feb 27. Qualifying for the Euros kicks off in April. "So there's no time to waste in February," England manager Sarina Wiegman said. "Heading to Spain with hopefully warmer weather and great facilities will allow us to maximise every minute together." Playing two games against good opposition in Austria and Italy, should be excellent preparation for another big year ahead." England are the defending European champions and finished runners-up to Spain at last year's Women's World Cup. They narrowly missed out on qualifying for this year's Paris Olympics.

Sri Lanka announce balanced squad

COLOMBO (Agencies): Sri Lanka will host Afghanistan for a multi-format tour in February 2024. The one-off Test between the two sides takes place between 2 and 6 February at the Colombo SSC. Dhananjaya de Silva, the newly named Test skipper will lead the side, while Kusal Mendis has been named as his deputy. The squad features a host of experienced names in Dimuth Karunaratne, Angelo Mathews, and Dinesh Chandimal. The bowling attack will be led by Kasun Rajitha, Ramesh Mendis, and Prabath Jayasuriya. Sri Lanka Test squad: Dhananjaya de Silva (c), Kusal Mendis (vc), Dimuth Karunaratne, Nishan Madushka, Angelo Mathews, Dinesh Chandimal, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Ramesh Mendis, Asitha Fernando, Vishwa Fernando, Kasun Rajitha, Kamindu Mendis, Prabath Jayasuriya, Lahiru Udara, Chamika Gunasekara, Milan Rathnayake Three players uncapped at the Test level make it to the squad: Lahiru Udara, Chamika Gunasekara, and Milan Rathnayake.

CM likely to become PCB chairman

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi is all set to become the chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for three years term, as board Election Commissioner Shah Khawar has summoned a special meeting of the Board of Governors (BoGs) for the election of the PCB Chairman on Tuesday (February 6) at 2.00 pm at National Cricket Academy Lahore (NCA). The notice of the meeting has been issued as per the provisions of the constitution of the Pakistan Cricket Board 2014. It is mandatory for all the members of the BoG to attend the meeting in person, a PCB spokesman said. The PCB board is comprised of Mustafa Ramday (PCB Patron's nominee), Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi (PCB Patron's nominee), Sajjad Ali Khokhar, President Regional Cricket Association AJK, Zafarullah Jadal, President Regional Cricket Association Dera Murad Jamali, Tanveer Ahmed, President Regional Cricket Association Larkana, Tariq Sarwar, President Regional Cricket Association Bahawalpur.

Pakistan down Switzerland 10-1 to clinch Challenger Trophy



ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan men's field hockey team defeated Switzerland 10-1 in Oman on Wednesday to clinch the Challenger title, after a disappointing run at the Hockey 5s

World Cup tournament.

The Challenger Trophy is another tournament specifically for teams who are unable to make it to the quarterfinals of the Hockey 5s World Cup.

The South Asian country, who beat Nigeria 11-5

in the opening match of the Hockey5s World Cup last week, crashed out of the world championship when they lost to Poland 8-7 on Monday.

"Goals galore from Pakistan on their way to a massive 10-1 victory over

Switzerland in the Challenger Trophy match," the International Hockey Federation wrote on social media platform X.

The green shirts had also succumbed to defeat against the Netherlands on Sunday.

Hockey5s, also known as Field Hockey5s, is a variation of traditional field hockey that has gained traction in many countries around the world. H5s involves five players on each team, including one goalkeeper, instead of the usual 11.

The matches, as a result, are much faster and designed to ensure hockey becomes a more exciting sport for spectators. Sixteen teams, divided into four pools are featuring in the first-ever Hockey 5s World Cup.

Faisalabad wins all Pakistan Inter Board Girls Handball C'ship

MULTAN (APP): Faisalabad Board won All Pakistan Inter Board Girls Handball Championship, held at Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Multan.

The all Pakistan Championship was played on League basis. Lahore Board remained runner up after thrilling contests. The Champion Faisalabad won matches against Multan, Mardan and Lahore.

Lahore Board clinched two victories by defeating Mardan and Multan. Mardan remained at third position by defeating Multan. Assistant Secretary Multan Mujahid Hussain and Sports In-charge Malik Nisar Ahmed distributed prizes among the best players and winners.

Pope reaches new heights, Babar at 5th position in Test batter rankings

ISLAMABAD (APP): England batter Ollie Pope has been rewarded for his heroics during the first Test against India by reaching a new career-high rating on the latest ICC Men's Test Batting Rankings.

Pope stunned India with a magnificent 196 in the second innings of England's thrilling 28-run triumph in the opening Test of the crucial ICC World Test Championship series on the sub-continent and rose a mammoth 20 places to 15th on the rankings that were updated by the ICC on Wednesday.

It was Pope's highest Test score away from home and the fourth highest individual innings by an England men's player in a Test in India and the in-form right-hander made a big jump up the rankings as a result.

New Zealand veteran Kane Williamson remains out in front as the No.1 ranked Test batter in the world and there is a minor re-shuffle inside the top 10 following England's triumph in Hyderabad and the conclusion of the tied series between Australia and the West Indies.

Australia opener Usman Khawaja gains two places to eighth following a half-century in the opening innings of the second Test against the Caribbean side at the Gabba, while Pope's England teammate Ben Duckett also improves as he gains

five places to 22nd after knocks of 35 and 47 against India.

Former Pakistan captain Babar Azam secured the fifth position, accumulating 768 points.

India veteran Ravichandran Ashwin maintains his place at the head of the Test rankings for bowlers following his six wickets against England, with teammate Jasprit Bumrah closing in on top position as he gains a spot and jumps to fourth following six scalps of his own in Hyderabad.

There's also a trio of quicks from the West Indies rewarded for their strong showing against Australia, with Kumar Roach (up two places to 17th), Alzarri Joseph (up four places to 33rd) and Player of the Match at the Gabba Shamar Joseph (up 42 spots to equal 50th) all making some ground following the upset victory.

India star Ravindra Jadeja enjoys a healthy buffer at the head of the Test all-rounder rankings, but he may have a new challenger soon if England veteran Joe Root can continue his recent decent performances with the ball.

While Root is more renowned for his efforts with the willow, the 33-year-old collected five wickets against India with his more than handy spin - and even opened the bowling for England during the second innings.



MULTAN: Players in action in handball match played between Mardan Board and Lahore Board teams during Pakistan Inter Board Girls Handball C'ship.

Lahore, Karachi declared joint champions of National Women's T20 Tournament



RAWALPINDI (APP): Lahore and Karachi were declared joint champions of the National Women's T20 Tournament 2023-24 after rain forced the final match to be abandoned without a ball bowled. The allotted prize money of PKR 1.5 million was divided between the two teams.

Lahore ended the league stage reigning supreme in the points table enjoying a 10-game winning streak. Karachi had secured their place in the final after edging over Rawalpindi with a superior NRR.

Rawalpindi captain Aliya Riaz and Multan captain Gull Feroza were jointly declared players of the tournament. Both players earned five player of the match awards – the

most in the tournament.

Aliya was the third highest run-getter of the tournament, finishing with 370 runs in 10 games, including three half-centuries and an unbeaten century. She also picked up 10 wickets in the tournament. Gull, the second highest run-scorer, produced 479 runs on the back of five half-centuries, and had five dismissals behind the stumps.

Lahore's Sidra Amin was awarded the best batter of the tournament for amassing 494 runs in 10 matches, including three half-centuries and a century. Lahore leg-spinner Ghulam Fatima was the most successful bowler of the tournament with an impressive tally of 21 wickets in 10 games at an

average of 8.24 and economy rate of just 4.44.

Sidra Nawaz, also representing Lahore, was adjudged the best wicketkeeper of the tournament had 15 dismissals behind the stumps, including six catches and nine stumpings.

Scores in brief:

Lahore v Karachi Match abandoned without a ball bowled

Players of the tournament – Aliya Riaz (370 runs & 10 wickets) (Rawalpindi) and Gull Feroza (479 runs & five dismissals) (Multan)

Best batter – Sidra Amin (494 runs) (Lahore)

Best bowler – Ghulam Fatima (21 wickets) (Lahore)

Best wicket-keeper – Sidra Nawaz (15 dismissals) (Lahore).

India won't change batting approach against England's 'Bazball': coach

VISAKHAPATNAM (Agencies): India will bank on a traditional approach to bounce back in their second home Test against England, the team's batting coach said Wednesday, despite the tourists finding success with their attacking "Bazball" strategy.

England trumped the hosts to lead the five-match series 1-0, with the action shifting to Visakhapatnam starting Friday on a pitch expected to turn violently.

Ollie Pope's 196 turned the opening Test on its head, as the batsman frequently played the unorthodox reverse sweep to blunt the threat of the Indian spinners. But batting coach Vikram Rathour said the hosts would rely on their own strengths to counter the opposition, instead of imitating Pope's style.

"It's not something that you can just try. You need to be prepared for that, you need to practice it," he said.

"If you add more shots to your game it's always beneficial, but we play a traditional way. Our strength or strong areas are going straight and using our feet," he added.

"We haven't lost a series in 12-13 years, that means we are putting up more runs than the other team... I am sure the batters will find a way." Rohit Sharma's side suffered only their fourth home defeat in 47 Tests since 2013 in Hyderabad last week as England came from 190 runs behind after the first innings to snatch a stunning 28-run victory.

Debutant spinner Tom Hartley returned figures of 7-62 to bundle India out for 202 while chasing 231 in Hyderabad. But it was England's brave new brand of cricket – dubbed "Bazball" after coach Brendon "Baz" McCullum – that allowed the tourists to strike back and win.

"A lot of our teams are playing more aggressively," opening batsman Zak Crawley told reporters. "The mindset when I first came to England was to... take your time and build a long innings and I didn't think that came naturally to me and a few of the others," he added. "A lot of us play a bit better under this regime."

Pakistan host India Davis Cup tie for first time in 60 years

ISLAMABAD (AFP): Pakistan host arch-political foe India this weekend in their first Davis Cup tennis clash on home soil in six decades -- one of the few encounters in any sport between the two nations in years.

The two sides meet in a Group 1 playoff fixture on the grass courts of the Pakistan Sports Complex in Islamabad, although it has yet to be decided if spectators will be allowed because of security concerns.

When India and Pakistan were forged out of violent partition 76 years ago, the split also created one of sport's greatest rivalries -- mostly in cricket, but also in

hockey and other events.

But political differences over Kashmir mean sporting teams from each side rarely visit the other unless taking part in sanctioned multi-national events.

"Hopefully this tie will act as an example of a bridge between Pakistan and India, as I'll love to see the Indian cricket team play in our country in the near future," home player Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi told AFP.

India team manager Sunil Jayman said the team were looking forward to the tie. "The whole team is extremely happy and excited to be in Pakistan," he told AFP. India last played a Davis Cup match against Pakistan in 2019, winning

4-0 in neutral Kazakhstan.

Pakistan last played on Indian soil in 2006, according to news outlet India Today. Neither side is rated particularly high in the world tennis pecking order, but Pakistan's Qureshi said he expected a competitive clash.

"Three of their players are in the top 100 of the world doubles rankings while the singles players are also competitive -- especially on the grass court," he said. "We'll try our level best to compete and give our all on the court." The two doubles and two singles matches take place on Saturday and Sunday, with Monday set aside as a reserve day in case of rain.

Curry scores 37 points as Warriors see off 76ers



CALIFORNIA (Agencies): Stephen Curry scored 37 points to help the Golden State Warriors to a 119-107 win over the Philadelphia 76ers.

It was the sixth straight game in which Curry, 35, scored at least 25 points, and third in a row in which he made six or more three-pointers.

Defeat was the fourth in a row for the 76ers, who lost Joel Embiid, last season's Most Valuable Player in the NBA, to a knee injury.

He will have a scan after limping off in the fourth quarter in California.

Seven-time NBA cham-

pions Golden State, whose assistant coach Dejan Milojevic died at the age of 46 this month, are 12th in the Western Conference with a 20-24 record.

"It's been an emotional ride for the whole team this whole year," Curry said.

"We have talked about the self-inflicted wounds - we lost games we should have won - [and] have had some things off the court in our family, dealing with that.

"There's always a sense of desperation for us. The vibes are as positive as they can be."

Embiid, who missed the 76ers' past two games with

knee and Achilles soreness, left the court at Chase Center after Warriors forward Jonathan Kuminga fell on his left knee as they contested a loose ball.

The 76ers are fifth in the Eastern Conference with a 29-17 record.

The Boston Celtics let slip a 20-point lead before recovering to beat the Indiana Pacers 129-124 in Boston.

The Los Angeles Lakers, without the injured Anthony Davis, suffered a second defeat in two days as they lost 138-122 at the Atlanta Hawks to leave them ninth in the Western Conference.

"We can, on any given night, beat any team in the NBA, and then on any given night we can get our ass kicked by any team in the NBA," said Lakers forward LeBron James.

The New York Knicks extended their winning streak to eight games with a 118-103 victory over the Utah Jazz at Madison Square Garden, while the Toronto Raptors came back from a 16-point first-half deficit to triumph 118-107 at the Chicago Bulls.



In brief

SSP hold "Khuli Katchery"

RAWALPINDI (APP): Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Investigation Rawalpindi, Zunaira Azfar here on Wednesday held a 'Khuli Katchery' in Police Lines Headquarters to address public complaints. According to a Police spokesman, the SSP issued directives to the officers concerned to take action and submit detailed reports on the complaints submitted by the citizens in 'Khuli Katchery'. She said that negligence on part of the officials concerned would not be tolerated. 'Khuli Katcheries' were being held to provide the citizens immediate relief and address their complaints besides it also helped improve standards of policing, she said and issued orders to the officers to complete inquiries and send reports within the given time frame. All-out efforts should be made to ensure the dispensation of speedy justice purely on merit to the people and improve service delivery standards in the district, she added. The spokesman informed that the Senior Police Officers under the Punjab government's open door policy were holding 'Khuli Katcheries' here to provide relief to the citizens.

PTA intensifies crackdown

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) in close collaboration with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) cyber crime circle, conducted raid against the BISP outlet at Sharqpur involved in activation of SIMs illegally. During the raid, 28 active SIMs were discovered. The FIA team confiscated active SIMs along with 01 HBL Konekt device as evidence, said a news release. In the joint operation, a person was apprehended by the FIA team. FIA is currently investigating the matter. PTA had filed a complaint regarding illegal issuance of SIMs by the sale channel. The raids are part of PTA's ongoing efforts to prevent the circumvention of the Multi-Finger Biometric Verification System (MBVS). This unwavering commitment underscores the authority's dedication to eradicate illegal issuance of SIMs, the news release added.

CTP issued traffic advisory

RAWALPINDI (APP): The City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi has issued a traffic advisory for the tourists coming to Murree advising the masses to stay in touch with the Police officials for any query or emergency situation at the hill station. According to the CTP news release, Chief Traffic Officer, Taimur Khan appealed to all road users to exercise extreme caution and follow the following instructions for their own safety. "Drivers are advised to keep their speed as low as possible and maintain a safe distance. Do not overtake other vehicles unless necessary. Avoid Low visibility makes it difficult to predict oncoming traffic, increasing the risk of accidents," he said. He also exhorted the masses to check the weather forecast and road conditions before setting off on their journey. "Plan your journey accordingly, and if conditions worsen, consider unnecessary travel delays. Follow traffic signals, road signs and lines strictly. These become even more important in the short term, helping to maintain order on the roads," it said. The City Traffic Police Rawalpindi emphasizes the importance of responsible driving during severe weather conditions.

Holy Prophet's Seerah must for Quran's comprehension: Aneeq

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed on Wednesday stressed for following the Seerah of Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) in true sense in order to have a full comprehension of the Holy Quran.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of the Seerat Chair at Federal Urdu University, he said that truth was the basic trait of Seerat. Follow the truth, speak the truth and its implementation in every sphere of life were the lessons derived from the Holy Prophet's Seerah, he added.

The minister said the establishment of the Seerat Chair at the Urdu University was a commendable initiative for guiding the new generation.

The greatness of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) would continue to be articulated until the Day of Judgment, and familiar-

ity with his life was essential for leadership, he added. Those doing the job of preaching Islam should align their conversations and discussion with the Holy Quran and Seerat Tayyiba, as both had been leading the human mindset and would continue to do till the end of time, he added.

"Today, we must reflect on whether we are disloyal to our Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him). Our religion is complete, containing solutions to all issues. Knowledge and action are both necessary," he said, adding that students must be made aware of challenges such as secularism, artificial intelligence, and contemporary issues.

Minister Aneeq said it was imperative to include a Seerat book in the curriculum from primary's to master's level. Vice-Chancellor Dr. Rubina Mushtaq, Dr. Mustafaez Ahmad Alvi, Dr. Ahtesham-ul-Haq, and

Dr. Hafiz Abdul Rashid also spoke at the event.

Dr. Mustafaez Ahmad Alvi, Head of Department of Islamic Thought and Culture at NUML, highlighted that the descent of the Holy Quran and the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) transformed the course of the world. He mentioned that the purpose of establishing the Seerat Chair was to help students to follow the Seerat Tayyiba in their practical lives. "Accepting religion and adopting Seerat are one and the same," he added.

Dr. Rubina Mushtaq, Vice-Chancellor of Federal Urdu University, remarked that the Western culture was having negative impacts on young generation. She said teaching the Holy Quran and Sunnah was essential for all departments of Urdu University.

Shields were presented to the dignitaries at the conclusion of the event.

Pakistan participates in high-level UN FAO conference

ISLAMABAD (APP): A high-level delegation from Pakistan participated virtually at a major international level conference held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to deliberate on multilateral efforts to bring reforms in agrifood system across the Asia-Pacific region after years of pandemic, climate emergencies, volatile markets, and economies that have affected millions of producers and consumers.

The regional conference for Asia and Pacific, is convened by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

UN) and hosted by the Government of Sri Lanka, says a press note.

Pakistani delegation comprised of economic consultant in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Dr. Haroon Sarwar Awan, FAO representative in Pakistan Florence Rolle, Deputy FAO representative a.i. Emmanuel Moncada and Assistant FAO representative (programme) Aamer Irshad. Highlighting the importance of APRC for Pakistan, FAO representative in Pakistan, Florence Rolle said that this country's

high-level participation in this important conference would help guide FAO's work here in Pakistan and across the Asia and Pacific region, as all FAO member nations sharing a common goal for achieving the SDGs by 2030, particularly the goals relating to hunger, poverty and inequality.

Dr. Haroon while speaking during the meeting informed that Asia-Pacific LDCs including Pakistan, grapple with looming debt distress, necessitating a departure from short-term crisis responses to strategic investments.

Ali advises students to make career decisions based on future environmental, sectoral needs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Energy, Muhammad Ali, on Wednesday advised the students to make their career decisions based on future environmental and sectoral needs.

While inaugurating the first-ever national-level 'Fuelling Futures Career Expo 2024' organized by the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) in collaboration with Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL), he highlighted the critical nature of the energy and minerals sectors, encouraging students to explore career paths in these areas.

The event witnessed an overwhelming attendance of students, faculty, and company representatives. Muhammad Ali said that the Expo is planned for students to explore career opportunities with energy and minerals being show-

cased by respective companies in the event.

The energy minister noted that there is massive transformation happening in the Energy sector globally and the commodity should be affordable, accessible, and sustainable for the consumers.

He said that Pakistan is energy deficient and an oil importer, and there is an opportunity to convert the energy deficiency country into the surplus.

"There are many in-demand mineral resources in the country with opportunities for their extraction in the future," he added.

MD and CEO PPL Imran Abbas on the occasion welcomed the large number of students from across the country and thanked the participating companies and universities for making the two-day Career Expo a success.

He said that the platform provides an opportunity for students to interact with the leaders of the energy and minerals industry and to learn from their experiences with the view to selecting, pursuing careers in the Oil, Gas, and Mineral sector. Around 5000 students from across Pakistan along with faculty members and staff of around 30 universities and schools have participated in the event.

The managing directors, senior management, and staff of 14 oil, gas, and mineral companies also attended the Expo. Expo with the theme, 'Fuelling the Future,' comprised company presentations, sessions on the significance of the oil, gas, and mineral sector and opportunities, besides various career counseling dialogues and company and university stalls at the venue.

Snow-clad valley in Northern areas, majestic Margalla hills of Islamabad attracts tourists

ISLAMABAD (APP): With the onset of snowy weather coupled with rain, various parts of the country are witnessing a majestic look with its picturesque views which have become an adventurous charm for tourists coming from other plain cities of the country. The snowfall and rain have boosted the tourism sector as tourists made a beeline to the valleys to experience the scenic views, according to a report aired by a private news channel.

Despite biting cold, a great rush of tourists was witnessed on Sunday at popular tourist destinations including Murree, Malam Jaba, Kalam, Naran, Kaghan, Swat, Hunza, Ziarat, Chitral and Kashmir, like every year. The first snowfall of the year in the upper areas of Swat, Malam Jabba, Murree hills has covered the high peak mountains and also spread a white sheet on the lakes located in the high altitude turning the area into a fairy world, said a visitor of GB.

The charm of the snowfall season in Murree is a captivating experience and offers a range of activities and sights to make it a must-visit destination, said a tourist while enjoying 4 inches of snow.

The capital city of Pakistan after rain also added majestic colours to the city that lies at the foot of Margalla Hills, said a visitor of the city.

Islamabad is a beautiful city with well-planned development and plenty of greenery, said a visitor from Punjab, adding, It would not be an exaggeration to say that Islamabad is amongst the most beautiful capitals in the world. "Trail 3 and 5 are the most attractive place for residents of the capital after a tough day at the office", said a local in Islamabad.

The Kalam Valley is an awe-inspiring tourist resort, with high peak and snow-capped mountains, majestic lakes, magnificent waterfalls, thick forests and lush green meadows, said a foreign tourist.

Tourists while enjoying snowy weather and adrenaline junkies alike say that Malam Jabba has a variety of options for the discerning traveler, said another visitor. Another local said Swat is also the best travel destination during winter. "The valley offers a variety of spots. This year we visited Malam Jabba for some fun and adventure and even went on the chairlift." According to PTDC and district administration of Rawalpindi, tourist are advised to use extra warm clothes, keep the window of the cars open for fresh air and continually clean snow from the exhaust pipe of vehicles. The tourists are also asked to switch off the engine while standing still and not use heaters for more than ten minutes in an hour.



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervez Ashraf launching the web portal for the Parliamentary Reporters Association (PRA).

Business community hails, FBR reconstruction, digitization plan

ISLAMABAD (APP): The business community on Wednesday declared Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) reconstruction and digitization plan as extremely important for the development and sustainability of the country's economy.

The federal cabinet approved FBR's reconstruction and digitization plan which was an important step of the current interim government and was welcomed by the business community, Chairman Federation Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), Karim Aziz Malik told APP here. He said through these tax reforms the capacity of the institution in tax collection would increase and it would prove to be a milestone for the country's economic development. The chairman said that the tax to GDP ratio in Pakistan was low compared to the rest of the countries, which should be in double digits, but the institution lacked this process in the past. Karim Aziz said that currently there were more than

two million tax filers in the country, but they should also have the data of taxpayers. He said that tax collection data was very important and automation in FBR was significant for economic progress in the country.

Digitization and automation would promote transparency in the institution and the initiative would also promote modern technology in the institution, he added. Aziz said that revenue collection was the backbone of the economy of Pakistan. He said that the government should work in these reforms to give relief to the traders.

Meanwhile talking to APP, President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Ahsan Bakhtawari said that tax reforms and reconstruction and digitization of FBR were an important steps of the government.

He said that the need to broaden the tax base in the country and the tax policy reforms were extremely important. The president said the country's economy depended on tax

collection and businessmen were always ready to pay taxes.

He said that the business community was currently onboard with the government and at this time the community considered the government's steps in tax reform as positive.

Secretary General of Pakistan Association of Large Steel Producers, Syed Wajid Bukhari told APP, that it was very important for reformers to separate policy wing in FBR, which would also have a good effect on tax collection. He said that structural reforms would increase institutional efficiency in FBR and businessmen would also benefit from it.

Bukhari said that the steel sector welcomed this initiative of the government and with this the sector would be in a position to play its better role in the national economy.

He said that the steel industry was currently one of the major tax payers in the country and the government wanted to take this industry on board in that regard.

Islooites get fresh breather as air pollution plummets after much-awaited rainfall

ISLAMABAD (APP): The federal capital residents on Wednesday received a fresh breather as months-long soaring air pollution plummeted after much-awaited rainfall and the air quality was reported healthy.

The air quality was healthy as the air pollutants ratio in the atmosphere was below the permissible limits of the national environmental quality standards of Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency.

The Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA) daily air quality report indicated a reduced ratio of air pollutants, recorded below permissible limits.

The agency is responsible to ensure the protection of the environment under the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act 1997.

The hazardous air pollutant particulate matter of 2.5 microns (PM_{2.5}), which was a hazardous atmospheric contaminant, remained 30.97 microgrammes per cubic meter on average which was lower than the national environmental quality standards

(NEQS) of 35 mic-programmes per cubic meter and denoted the air quality healthy.

PM 2.5 is generated through the combustion of an engine, industrial emissions, burning garbage or inflammable material and dust blown up by fast-moving cars plying on non-cemented patches of the roads.

The ratio of nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide (NO₂&SO₂ respectively) also remained below the NEQS that were mostly produced during the industrial emissions from the factories involving complex and extraordinary chemicals' use in production processes.

The NO₂ remained 10.20 microgrammes per cubic meter and SO₂ was 10.63 microgrammes per cubic meter. The EPA officials claimed that the vehicular emissions due to increased automobiles was one of the leading cause of bad air quality. Industrial emissions were already subsidised due to carbon-absorbing advanced technology installed at various steel manufacturing units.

According to health experts, the prolonged dry winters resulted in perpetuated presence of hazardous air contaminants in the atmosphere that made respiratory diseases and pneumonia endemic in the federal capital.

The population of the metropolis witnessed an abnormal rise in fog as well which was thicker and adamant then the previous years.

Official of Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination told APP that there was no let up in air pollution and fog since the onset of the winters due to dry weather, increased anthropogenic activities and shift in the weather pattern resulted unprecedented polluted air in the federal capital. The climatologists and weather experts are compiling the data on the phenomenon to track and trace the exact causes of the peculiar weather occurrence that resulted in losses due to air and land routes disruption, health impacts and social disruption due to halt or closure of educational institutions.

SECP approves 9 innovative Fintech models for live market testing

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has granted approval to nine fintech companies to conduct live market testing for their revolutionary business models. Having successfully completed the incubation period under the regulatory sandbox, these firms are set to introduce cutting-edge technologies such as blockchain, artificial intelligence, and fractionalization of assets, signaling a new era

in financial services.

The SECP's regulatory sandbox has paved the way for dynamic changes in Pakistan's financial landscape as it greenlights nine fintech companies for direct market testing. These companies, having undergone incubation, are now prepared to roll out innovative business models encompassing blockchain technology, artificial intelligence, fractionalization of gold and real estate, algorithmic trading, one-window

lending, education finance, and crowdfunding. The selected companies, including Fin Cloud Systems Private Limited, Loop Financial Services Private Limited, AKRU Pak Private Limited, CG Global Private Limited, X State Technologies Private Limited, Diamond Technologies Limited, Country Limited, Riels, Al Hilal Securities Advisors Pvt Ltd, and iBooks Seven Pvt Ltd, have successfully con-

cluded the incubation phase, marking a significant milestone in the SECP's fintech initiatives. During the live market testing phase, these fintech companies will extend their services to a limited number of customers for a specified period. This real-world trial aims to evaluate the effectiveness and viability of these innovative business models, ensuring they meet regulatory standards while providing valuable financial solutions to consumers.



ISLAMABAD: Group of probationary officers of 51st Common Training Programme (CTP) visiting senate museum at Parliament House.

19 Afghani released

KABUL (Khaama Press): Officials at the Consulate of Afghanistan in Karachi have confirmed the release of 19 Afghan nationals from Pakistani prisons. Abdul Jabbar Takhari, the Consul-General of the Taliban in Karachi, stated that approximately 19 Afghan prisoners were freed on Tuesday, January 31st. This diplomatic authority from the Taliban Consulate added that the released prisoners were freed as a result of efforts made by the Consulate from various jails in Sindh province.

Baghlan traffic accident

BAGHLAN (Pajhwok): The traffic police department in Baghlan has confirmed the occurrence of a grave traffic incident in North Salang's Shawl area. According to Mohammad Nazeer Abedi, the director of Baghlan traffic police, a picnic-style car overturned, resulting in the death of a woman and injury of seven others. All seven individuals injured in the incident are members of the same family, including five children, one man, and one woman.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

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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

US urges China to explain its relationship with the Taliban



KABUL (Khaama Press): Following the acceptance of the credentials of the Taliban's ambassador to Beijing by the President of the U.S. Department of State has stated that China should clarify its relationship with the Taliban.

Matthew Miller, the spokesperson for the U.S.

Department of State, reacted during a press conference on Tuesday, January 30, to reports indicating China's acceptance of the credentials of the Taliban envoy by asking whether China formally recognizes the Taliban government or not. He stated in the press conference, "I've seen those reports, and I think it's for

China to speak about their [Beijing's] relationship [with the Taliban] and whether they [China] have formally recognized the Taliban or not. I've seen some differing opinions from them."

This comes as Xi Jinping, the President of China, accepted the credentials of Bilal Kareemi, the Taliban ambassador to

Beijing, on Tuesday.

Abdul Qahar Balkhi, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Taliban, has announced that their ambassador in the Chinese capital, along with ambassadors from 41 other countries, presented their credentials to Xi Jinping during a formal ceremony held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

China maintains a close relationship with the Taliban but has not officially recognized them yet, and, like other countries, has raised conditions concerning human rights, counterterrorism efforts, and the establishment of an inclusive government.

The U.S. Department of State spokesperson, while urging China to respond to its relationship with the Taliban, also referred to the widespread human rights violations in Afghanistan, saying, "We very much want to see improvements in the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, and we want any country engaged with the Taliban to make progress on that front."

750 ethnic conflicts solved since Islamic Emirate rule: Abid

KABUL (TOLONews): Abdul Khaliq Abid, the deputy minister of tribal affairs and borders, in an exclusive interview told TOLONews that after the Islamic Emirate came to power, 750 ethnic conflicts have been solved in the country. Abid added that the Islamic Emirate is committed to solving the ethnic conflicts and more than 140 other conflicts are getting solved.

According to the deputy minister, after the Islamic Emirate came to power, people will no longer be allowed to marry off their daughters as retribution for murders committed by her male family members.

He added that this tradition [marrying off girls to compensate for murder] has been stopped across the country. Regarding solving ethnic feuds, Abid said: "Across the country, 750 big and small conflicts have been resolved. From 10 years to nearly 100 years these conflicts have existed, when several people were killed among these parties, and now they are resolved. He added that small and big conflicts in



Nooristan, Panjshir, Badakhshan and a number of other provinces have been solved and the long-time conflicts have changed to friendship.

According to this official of the ministry, after the Islamic Emirate came to power, no girls have been married off in exchange for murders committed by her family members.

He said: "No one can

marry off his daughter or his sister for the murder they committed because God has given a clear verdict for the murderer."

Meanwhile, a number of analysts consider it important to resolve conflicts in order to unite the citizens of the country.

"By solving ethnic enmities, people will trust the government and ethnic unity will be ensured among the citizens of the

country," Gul Mohammadi, a political analyst, told TOLONews.

Abdul Khaliq Abid, the deputy minister of tribal affairs and borders, in this interview added that the rights of all Afghan citizens are guaranteed throughout the country, and claims that the rights of minorities are not protected in the country are not true.

Denmark least corrupt country, Afghanistan falls back by 4 points

ATLANTA (Pajhwok): The government of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has rejected the latest report from the Transparency International on corruption in the country.

The Berlin-Based organization released its annual report for 2023 — the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) — in which Denmark was ranked the least and Somalia the most corrupt countries.

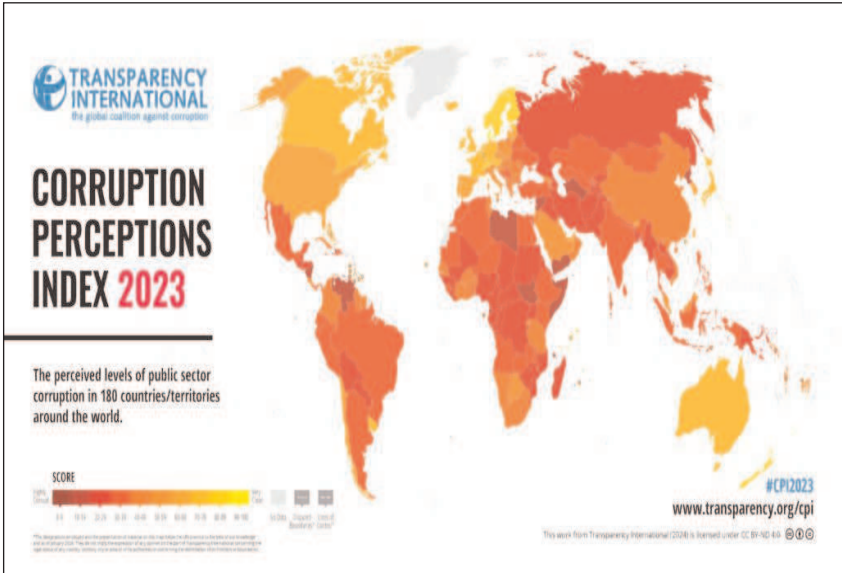
Afghanistan has fallen back by four points in the rankings. The report is based on surveys and questionnaires about corruption in 180 countries.

Somalia has once again been announced as the most corrupt among the countries survey by TI, which was founded in 1985.

A country that gets zero marks is the most corrupt in the world, and one that gets 100 marks is the cleanest.

Among the corrupt countries, IEA-ruled Afghanistan which has been ranked 171st among 180 countries in terms of corruption. Afghanistan obtained only 20 points in the 2023 rankings, compared to 24 a year earlier.

The provision of justice and the implementation of law play an important role



in countering corruption at domestic and international level, the TI said in its report. However, the interim government of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) rejected the Transparency International's report.

IEA spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid wrote on his X handle: "Afghanistan is a corruption-free country and is in 162nd position, which is a good performance, compared to the previous year ..." In terms of governance;

he said, it did not mean that corruption had increased in Afghanistan. The level of transparency in other countries may have improved."

The report identified Somalia, Venezuela and Syria as the most corrupt countries and Denmark as the cleanest one.

Yemen, South Sudan, Nicaragua, North Korea, Haiti, Equatorial Guinea and Turkmenistan were also also among the graft-tainted nations.

In Denmark, Finland and New Zealand, graft

levels fell most dramatically last year. Norway, Singapore, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany also fared well. The Transparency International called the rule of law and justice the two most important pillars of democracy, whose absence could have caused negative consequences. Of the 180 countries of the world, only 18 have introduced reforms over the last 12 years, to fight the menace and achieved success.

Inclusivity not discussed at Kabul Conference: Mujahid



KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate said that the issue of an inclusive government was not talked about in Monday's Afghanistan's Regional Cooperation Initiative Conference in Kabul.

The conference, which was attended by representatives of eleven regional countries including Russia, Pakistan, Iran, India, China, and Indonesia finished on Monday evening behind closed doors.

The spokesperson for the

Islamic Emirate told TOLONews that the outcome of the conference will strengthen regional solidarity and will help addressing joint regional security menaces. "This was one of the important conferences in Afghanistan, which will lead to regional solidarity. In the conference, joint security threats were also discussed that require the contribution of all countries" to address the threats," said Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson

for the Islamic Emirate.

Prior to the convention, Zamir Kabulov, Russia's special representative for Afghanistan, said that the inclusivity of the Afghan government will be part of the agenda in the conference, but Zabihullah Mujahid denied the issue.

Mujahid said that the Islamic Emirate's stance over the nature of government in Afghanistan is clear and that this issue should not be provoked by other countries. "Inclusive gov-

ernment was not part of the agenda of the meeting. We have clarified our stance which is that inclusivity is an Afghan issue not the issue of other countries. Other countries should talk over issues which belong to them," told Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate.

"Russia reiterated its requests from Taliban which is establishment of an inclusive government, a government where all people and political movements are given parts," said Wais Naseri, a political analyst. "There is a regional and international consensus about resolving the issues of Afghanistan which is need for intra-Afghan talks and a special representative for the talks," said Wahid Faqeri, another political analyst.

Talking about the UN's next month meeting about Afghanistan, the acting foreign minister of the Islamic Emirate, Amir Khan Muttaqi said that special representatives for Afghanistan should present a realistic picture of the country at the meeting.

Doha Conference spotlights Afghanistan; women seek active role

Hakim Bigzaad

With the Doha Conference on Afghanistan coming up on February 18th and 19th, some women's rights advocates are urging the United Nations to ensure that Afghan women have a significant role in this event.

Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for Antonio Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, has stated that the two-day conference on Afghanistan, scheduled for February 18th and 19th, will have women and the civil society of Afghanistan represented alongside the country's representatives.

The key agenda for this conference includes proposals put forth by Feridun Sinirlioglu, a former Turkish diplomat. Additionally, discussions

during this conference are expected to revolve around the appointment of a new United Nations envoy for Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, some women's rights advocates have expressed that the presence of Afghan women at the Doha conference is essential, and they should be able to represent Afghan women effectively.

Mina Rafiq, a women's rights activist, asserts that women should have a meaningful presence in such conferences to have a say in their own destinies. She further adds, "In previous conferences, true representatives of women were absent, rendering them ineffective. In the Doha conference, women who actively protest and fight against Taliban policies should be invited."

Heather Barr, Deputy Director of the Women's

Rights Division at Human Rights Watch, emphasizes that if the United Nations appoints a special envoy for Afghanistan affairs, it must ensure that this representative has a comprehensive understanding of the human rights situation of women in Afghanistan and engages in ongoing consultations with the women.

Similarly, Tahera Nasery, a women's rights advocate and founder of the "Women for Freedom" movement, tells Khaama Press that those who can represent Afghanistan women are those who have been affected by the restrictive policies of the Taliban but have still fought for their rights.

According to Ms. Nasery, the demands of Afghanistan women should be raised by Afghan women themselves, not by individuals selected as "representatives"

by the United Nations. It is worth noting that representatives from the Taliban have also been invited to the Doha conference. Approximately eight months ago, the first Doha conference was held, with Afghan women's representatives notably absent.

Shafiq Razminda, a women's rights activist and member of the National Unity Umbrella of Afghanistan Women, mentions that their movement is organizing a virtual meeting to select a delegation to participate in the Doha conference. Human rights experts at the United Nations describe the situation of women under the rule of the Taliban as "gender-based violence," while some members of the British Parliament have initiated research to examine the status of "gender apartheid" in Afghanistan and Iran.

—Khaama Press





ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of China, Mr. Jiang Zaidong, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheed Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force at Air Headquarters.

Chief Justice orders DPO Kohat to appear in-person before PHC

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan ordered once again District Police Officer (DPO) Kohat for in-person appearance for arrest of Local Government Kohat chairman Nabi Ullah from court's premises, on Wednesday.

PHC Chief Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan observed that how a person is arrested from the court's premises despite he had surrendered before the court. The concerned officials may face Contempt of Court proceedings if deems necessary, Chief Justice remarked.

The counsel Khurram Zeeshan advocate argued that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) village council Kohat chairman Nabi Ullah was arrested by police on 19th January from court's premises and added that

his whereabouts are still unknown.

The counsel further added that no one is aware about him after 12 days of his arrest despite the petitioner had obtained bails in three different cases. In the meantime, Station House Officer Cant Police Station Islam-u-Din denied custody of Nabi Ullah, however, Assistant Advocate General requested for provision of time for submission of report in this regard.

It is a fundamental question that how can a citizen is arrested from premises of court? Chief Justice observed and added that concerned officials may face Contempt of Court proceedings in this regard while ordered DPO Kohat for appearance in-person on next hearing.

AD&SJ convicts' murderer to death penalty: Additional District and Session Judge (AD&SJ) Iftikhar Elahi convicted murderer for death

penalty along with Rs5 lac fine in famous Kalu Khan murder case. The counsel for complainant Syed Mubashir Shah argued that accused Farooq Ahmad had killed Abdullah resident of Sheikh Jana in June 2022 over oral dispute.

The complainant filed First Information Report against Farooq Ahmad at Kalu Khan police station Swabi and the culprit was produced before competent after his arrest. The prosecution had submitted several evidences and witnesses which is enough for provision of maximum punishment to the murderer, Mubashir Shah advocate argued. However, the counsel for petitioner argued that evidences and witnesses are self-contradictory and requested for acquittal. AD&SJ Iftikhar Elahi convicted the murderer for death penalty after conclusion of arguments.

Israel strikes Gaza, regional tensions high as Hamas studies truce proposal

GAZA/DOHA: Israeli forces carried out new air strikes in Gaza on Wednesday as Hamas studied a new proposal for a ceasefire and the release of hostages held in the Palestinian enclave. Witnesses said Israel had stepped up air strikes on Gaza City in the north, and bombardment parts of Khan Younis in the south, despite what appeared to be the most serious peace initiative for months in the Israel-Hamas war.

World powers hope to prevent a wider conflict, but tensions in the Middle East remained high after Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis said they would keep attacking US and British warships in the Red Sea in solidarity with Palestinians. Relations between Tehran and Washington are also tense after the deaths of three US soldiers in a drone strike in Jordan that US officials blame on Iran-backed militants. Washington has not yet outlined its response, but Iran's Revolutionary Guards said on Wednesday they would respond to any US threat.

Gaza health authorities said 26,900 Palestinians had been killed — including 150 over the past 24 hours — in the war that was triggered after Hamas fighters stormed from Gaza into Israeli towns on Oct. 7 killing 1,200 and taking 253 hostages. Israel's military said its forces had killed at least 25 Palestinian militants in Gaza in the past 24 hours, and that three Israeli soldiers had been killed — taking to 224 the number of troops killed during Israel's ground offensive.

Smoke rose above Gaza City after the latest air strikes, some of which targeted the headquarters of the Hamas-run interior ministry, Hamas-run media and residents said. The Al-Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza also came under fire and tanks pounded areas of Khan Younis around Nasser Hospital, the largest still functioning in the south, witnesses said.

As the health system deteriorates, Palestinian medics say they have formed field medical points to help reach front lines, as treating the wounded in Khan Younis has become increasingly difficult amid street battles and artillery strikes. "There's a lot of injuries among the displaced who were in the industrial quarter and some schools," said Nassim Hassan, the head of the Emergency Unit at Nasser Hospital, adding that "many of the injured left loaded on carts, tuk-tuks, cars or even on foot."

Much of the densely populated Gaza Strip has been devastated by almost four months of Israeli bombardment, and most of its 2.3 million residents have been uprooted by fighting that international aid agencies say has caused a humanitarian crisis. Thomas White, the agency's Director of Gaza Affairs, said in a video that UNRWA had been forced to move its operations out of Khan Younis to the west of the city.

"We've lost a health clinic, major shelters — facilities that were supporting the people of Khan Younis," said White. The Red Crescent said on Tuesday Israeli forces had stormed Al-Amal hospital in Khan Younis and asked displaced people and staff to evacuate at gunpoint. An Israeli military spokesperson denied this.

The Red Crescent said on Wednesday a 75-year-old woman and a 45-day-old girl had died at Al-Amal after suffering a lack of oxygen for several days, and been buried in the hospital compound. Israel did not immediately comment on the report. Health officials in Gaza say the situation has been complicated by Israeli allegations that some staff from the UN refugee agency for Palestinians (UNRWA) were involved in the Oct. 7 attack on Israel, prompting some countries including the United States to pause funding to the agency.

A senior Hamas official told

Reuters the Gaza ceasefire proposal involved a three-stage truce, during which Hamas would release the remaining civilians among hostages captured on Oct. 7, then soldiers, and finally the bodies of dead hostages. The proposal followed talks in Paris involving intelligence chiefs from Israel, the US and Egypt, with the prime minister of Qatar.

Palestinians welcomed the possibility of a ceasefire but said fighting must end permanently. "Any ceasefire that doesn't end the war and return us to our homes in Gaza City and the north is not worth it," Ahmed, who fled his home in Gaza City for Rafah in the south, said by telephone. "We are exhausted," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu repeated his vow not to pull troops out of Gaza until "total victory."

Israel says it will not stop fighting until Hamas is eradicated. Hamas says it will release its remaining captives only as part of a wider deal to end the war permanently. The conflict has triggered concern of an escalation in an already tense region. The US and Britain have carried out strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen over the group's attacks on Red Sea shipping, but the Houthis' military spokesperson said on Wednesday the group would continue what it called acts of self defence.

With tensions also high over Saturday's drone attack on US service members in Jordan, the US says it has decided how to respond but has not said how. Iran-aligned Iraqi armed group Kataib Hezbollah has said it is suspending all its military operations against US troops in the region, but Iran remained resolute. Iranian Revolutionary Guards chief Hossein Salami said no US threat would be left unanswered, and Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said: "The US has to stop its threats and focus on a political solution." — Arab News

EU aims to launch a Red Sea naval mission

BRUSSELS: The European Union plans to launch a naval mission in the Red Sea within three weeks to help defend cargo ships against attacks by Houthi rebels in Yemen that are hampering trade and driving up prices, the bloc's top diplomat said Wednesday.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he wants the mission to be up and running by Feb. 17. Officials say that seven EU countries are ready to provide ships or planes. Belgium has already committed to send a frigate. Germany is expected to do the same. Last week, US and British forces bombed multiple targets in eight locations used by the Iranian-backed Houthis. It was the second time the two allies have conducted coordinated retaliatory strikes on the rebels' missile-launching capabilities.

The Houthis have waged a persistent campaign of drone and missile attacks on commercial ships since the start of the Israel-Hamas war in October, but Borrell insisted that the EU mission will not take part in any military strikes. — Arab News

Ukraine, Russia complete first prisoner swap

MOSCOW (BBC): Russia and Ukraine say they have exchanged captured soldiers - the first such swap since the crash of a Russian plane that Moscow claimed had 65 prisoners of war (PoWs) on board. Russia's military says each side got 195 soldiers back on Wednesday.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky says 207 Ukrainian soldiers and civilians were returned. Kyiv questions Moscow's claims that Ukrainian PoWs were on the plane that was downed last week. Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed on Wednesday that the Il-76 military transport plane had been downed by an American Patriot system in the western Belgorod region.

The Russian military earlier claimed that 65 Ukrainian soldiers had been on the plane heading to the area for a prisoner exchange. Six Russian crew members and three officials escorting the PoWs were also on board, the military said, adding

that there were no survivors. Moscow blames Ukraine for bringing down the plane, which Kyiv has neither confirmed or denied.

None of the details surrounding those on board has been independently verified and both sides have called for an international investigation. In a brief statement on Wednesday, the Russian defence ministry said the latest prisoner exchange was completed after negotiations with Kyiv. "The released military personnel will be transported by military transport aircraft... to Moscow for treatment and rehabilitation," it said.

"All those released are provided with the necessary medical and psychological assistance," the statement said, adding that the United Arab Emirates was involved in the negotiations. Footage released by the ministry purportedly shows those exchanged Russian soldiers boarding a bus before their flight to Moscow. President Zelensky wrote in a post on

social media: "Our people are back. 207 of them. We return them home no matter what."

"We remember every Ukrainian in captivity. Both warriors and civilians. We must bring all of them back," he said, thanking Ukraine's top security officials for making the latest exchange possible. A video filmed by the Ukrainian authorities shows the released men tumbling off buses with shouts of "Glory to Ukraine!" The men are wearing Russian prison uniforms - their heads are close-shaven - and many look very thin after months, or in some case up to two years in captivity. Some cry - as they talk to relatives by phone. Zelensky's head of office Andriy Yermak said among those released were National Guard members, border guards as well as police officers. It is the 50th PoW exchange since President Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Trade volume with SL must be increased, says Alvi

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has said that Pakistan attached great importance to its bilateral relations with Sri Lanka, which spanned over seven decades of the strong bonds. He stated this while talking to Pakistan's High Commissioner-designate to Sri Lanka Major General (Retd) Faheem Ul Aziz who called on him here on Wednesday, said a President House news release.

Dr Arif Alvi emphasized the need to further promote the people-to-people and cultural contracts between Pakistan and Sri Lanka, besides consolidating the ties in the fields of economy and education.

Bilateral trade volume with Sri Lanka must be increased to its full potential, he said adding that the goodwill feelings of the two countries towards each other should be converted into strong economic ties. President Alvi said that Pakistan had Buddhist heritage sites which were of great importance for the promotion of tourism activities in the country. The president congratulated Major General (Retd) Faheem Ul Aziz on his appointment as Pakistan's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka.

PTI terminates membership of two leaders

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Wednesday terminated the party membership of two senior leaders from Balochistan. As per details, the Information Secretary of PTI's Balochistan chapter Sardar Hasan Shah said that the party membership of Sardar Khadim Hussain and Sadiq Agha have been terminated. He said that step was taken as both the leaders refused to withdraw from the elections against PTI candidates.

Furthermore, Sardar Khadim Hussain and Sadiq Agha are contesting the upcoming elections as independent candidates from PB-41. Tuesday, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) issued a show cause notice to Khurram Sher Zaman, contesting the general election 2024 as PTI candidate from the constituency NA-241.

The PTI issued a show cause notice to Khurram Sher Zaman after he convened PTI candidates on January 28 for a rally in constituency NA-241 near Teen Talwar, Clifton but failed to appear at the location himself. The notice accused him of misusing the name of the PTI founder to take out a rally in Clifton, which led to an FIR against 4500 workers of PTI.

In the show cause notice the political party announced to initiate an inquiry against Khurram Sher Zaman for sabotaging the election campaign in Karachi. In a separate development, PTI served a show cause notice to Saifullah Abro who withdrew in favor of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari from NA-194, Larkana for the General Elections 2024.

Hammad Azhar withdraws SC appeal

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: PTI leader Hammad Azhar has withdrawn his appeal in the Supreme Court against rejection of his nomination papers from NA-129 on Wednesday. A junior lawyer told the court that Hammad Azhar does not want to pursue his appeal against nomination papers rejection.

An appellate tribunal had rejected nomination papers of the former federal minister of the PTI government. Justice Mansoor Ali Shah question, why the high court had given reference of Article 62 (i)-F in its decision. "The verdict has been clear that the Article 62 (i)-F not applicable by itself," Justice Shah remarked. Counsel Aftab Yasir said that the court's decision has also come with regard to the eligibility of a proclaimed offender. "The court decision will not benefit to Hammad Azhar due to withdrawal of his appeal," Justice Shah said.

Nawaz dreaming to become PM for fourth time: Bilawal

F.P. Report

MALAKAND: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressed a huge public gathering in Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and said that the Pakistan Peoples Party never got a level playing field in elections. In 2007, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was assassinated, in 2013 the Party was not allowed to run its campaign, in 2018 we were not allowed to come out and meet the people. Now, they say that there is a threat of terror. Despite all I have come today to be among my brothers of Malakand, Chairman Bilawal said.

The people of Malakand defeated the terrorists after rendering great sacrifices. The people of Malakand also lived through the selected rule. Now, the people of Malakand have an opportunity to elect the candidates who have been steadfast with the people through thick and thin. Bilawal said that we are in 2024. A former prime minister is not allowed to contest the elections but that is being celebrated. We are not those who celebrate the plight of our opponents. However, a party is celebrating that one of their opponents is out of the elections. In 2018, another party was celebrating in a similar manner. Before that, Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani was not allowed to contest elections. We are not a party which celebrates such occurrences because we are the Jiyalas of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto who did not teach us such politics.

All these traditional politicians do the same politics every five years. Imran Khan was also doing the politics of hate and division. Nawaz Sharif too did the politics of hate when he came to power thrice. If he becomes the PM for the fourth time, he will do the same again and people will suffer. My message to these



politicians would be to not play with the future of the nation. We had thought that Nawaz Sharif will respect the vote but to no avail. Imran Khan used to call every opponent a thief but he does not repent either. Khan and Nawaz Sharif should realize that what goes around comes around. Khan arrested the sisters and daughters of his opponents which is against our religion, politics and traditions of the Pakistani nation. How long the people will continue to witness the same. I promise that if you elect me as your PM, then I will establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission because the nation needs reconciliation, Chairman PPP resolved. We do not want for politics to be turned into personal vendetta because the country is harmed and the economy suffers.

Bilawal said that Nawaz Sharif is dreaming to become the PM for the fourth time but has not come here to ask for your vote and support. Maulana Fazal ur Rehman who is a senior politician and head of a large party in KP, has not come here to you but I have come to you to ask for your vote and support, Chairman Bilawal said. I am not like them and do not look right and left but to the people because Quaid-e-Awam taught us that the people are the source of power. I started my election campaign from this province where they used to say that the weather is cold and terrorism is rampant in this area. No one can match the number of

rallies and conventions I held in this province because I respect the people who decide who their PM will be, Chairman PPP expressed.

Governments formed by the people are like the governments of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and President Zardari which serve the people. Governments like those of Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif do not serve the people. Such leaders forget the people when in power. The only way to stop the politics of hate and ensure that Nawaz Sharif does not become the PM for the fourth time is to vote for the PPP on February 8. There is only one symbol which can stop the lion in its path, hunt the lion and provide people justice. We have a plan to change the fate of the people, Chairman Bilawal said.

Bilawal said that he is contesting the elections because Pakistan is under threat. We are passing through the worst economic crisis because of the same politics of hate and division. The people of Pakistan bear the burden of this poverty, inflation and unemployment. The terrorism is raising its head just because of this traditional politics. We had chased out the terrorists from FATA, PATA and the entire KP but Imran Khan allowed them back. I will stop these terrorists and will crush them, Chairman Bilawal resolved. No country can be run by the politics of hate, division and personal vendetta.



HYDERABAD: Leader of Pakistan People's Party Aseefa Bhutto Zardari making victory sign to supporters during election rally.

Myanmar military further extends state of emergency

YANGON: Myanmar's ruling military government has extended the state of emergency in the country for six months. The National Defence and Security Council decided to prolong emergency rule for another six-month stint on Wednesday, just ahead of the previous term's expiry at midnight. The move further delays elections that were promised following the coup that put the military government in power in February 2021.

The Southeast Asian nation has been in turmoil since the coup, which ended a 10-year experiment with democracy and sparked mass protests and a crackdown on dissent. The military says it is not able to lift the state of emergency while it is battling armed opposition across the country.

"Myint Swe, the acting president, announced the extension of the state of emergency ... as the situation is not normal and to be able to continue the process of combatting terrorists," the government said in a statement. The council discussed "preparations for holding multi-party elections" and a national census at its meeting in the military-built capital of Naypyidaw, the state added, without giving further details.

The military has continu-

ously extended emergency rule since it took power in February 2021, toppling ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government. More than 4,400 people have been killed in a crackdown on dissent since, according to a local monitoring group. The military-drafted 2008 constitution, which the current government has said is still in force, requires authorities to hold fresh elections within six months of a state of emergency being lifted.

However, the government is struggling to crush widespread armed opposition to its rule and recently suffered a series of stunning setbacks to an alliance of ethnic minority armed groups. More than two million people have been displaced by the violence, according to the United Nations.

Since 2021, Myanmar has faced a barrage of international sanctions, undoing years of progress and leaving the economy 10 percent smaller than it was in 2019. On Wednesday, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch were among those calling on the international community to cut off the military's access to jet fuel.

The UN and human rights groups have accused military generals of rights abuses in their crackdown on the opposition, including crimes

against humanity. Furthermore, economists say the generals who toppled the previous government increasingly rely on illicit revenues from gem mining and logging.

The country's anti-coup forces, however, say they are moving closer to victory against the military. "After three years, the Spring Revolution is stronger than ever," Duwa Lashi La, the acting president of the National Unity Government (NUG), an alliance of ethnic armed groups and resistance fighters, told Al Jazeera on Tuesday. "With each passing day, we are edging closer to victory. The criminal military will never crush the will of the people."

Myanmar has undertaken a vast and secretive prison-building programme, according to new satellite analysis, prompting fears it has been carried out to jail thousands of pro-democracy protesters.

Analysis of the images taken before the February 2021 military coup — which ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi — through to January 2024, indicate that 27 of 59 prisons identified in the south-east Asian country showed signs of large-scale expansion or the construction of new wings or buildings. — Al Jazeera