

ECP meeting today
ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has summoned an important meeting on the election 2024 results today (Sunday). Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja will preside the ECP meeting, says in media reports. Sikandar Sultan Raja will be brief on February 8 election, the results in the meeting and the delayed announcement of election results.

PPP's door open to every political party: Bilawal

— governments in centre, Punjab and Balochistan not to be formed sans PPP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD / LAHORE: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari responding to questions by panels of journalists on various private television channels said that he is thankful to the people of Pakistan for supporting the Party and voting in the elections. The result so far show that the PPP is the only party with representation in all four provinces.

The PPP is the Party linking all four provinces. The full results have not been announced yet. We are not yet aware of the decisions of the independent candidates. It is too soon to predict who will be forming the government in the centre and the provinces. "I can tell you this much, that no one can form the government in the centre, Punjab or Balochistan without the PPP's support" Chairman Bilawal said. The PPP contested these elections as per its manifesto and a new thinking.

"The message I have given to the people of Pakistan is that we wish to bury the politics of hatred and division and can no longer continue the traditional manner of doing politics", Chairman Bilawal said. We wish to reduce the political instability because it is vital for economic stability. So far, the PPP has not engaged officially with the PML-N, PTI or any other party. Once the results are finalised, then the Central Executive Committee of the Party which had nominated me as the candidate will

sit again and devise the course of action, Chairman PPP said.

It is in the interest of the country that we forge a political consensus on the way forward in the CEC of the party. We will try to forge this political consensus and would like to bring some positive change for the people of the country. If the government is formed, then we will not be able to resolve the problems of the people without addressing the political toxicity.

Responding to a question, Chairman Bilawal said that the PPP contested the elections based on its manifesto and will try its best to implement it. We will not be able to form the government on our own, Chairman PPP said. Hence, it might not be possible to implement every policy of the Party. On the economic front, we should take every possible measure to ensure that the country is prosperous. We have to introduce reforms in our SOPs in this case. In the government that is formed, we along with our allies would have to devise solutions. If we deem privatisation to be the sole solution, then that will be adopted.

If I am successful in convincing our allies to take the route of public-private partnership, then that will be adopted as we have had a successful experience in Sindh, Chairman PPP stated. From infrastructure schemes to the mining in the Thar Coal Project or establishing educational and healthcare institutions, we have utilised public-private partnership in

Sindh. We can deliver through this method, Chairman Bilawal said that he has never been a member of the SIFC and he is not privy to the intricacies, but the economic policies would have to be based on consensus. As far as the elite subsidies or devolution are concerned, the PPP is steadfast on following through with them, and we will make efforts to implement our manifesto to whatever extent possible.

Responding to another question regarding the rumoured meetings with political counterparts, Chairman Bilawal further said that he is in no position to confirm any such meeting. This is the preliminary stage. The PPP is still waiting for the results to be confirmed. The decisions of the independent candidates are also awaited. We will be in the position to engage with other political parties, be it the PML-N, PTI or other independent candidates after the results are finalised.

Answering a question regarding the Lahore election, Chairman PPP said that he was winning as per the initial results but overnight, the position changed. 61000 voters had entered through the PPP's polling stations as per the tally received through the Party's mobile app prior to the discontinuation of internet and mobile services. We are not disappointed at all, Chairman PPP said. These elections have revealed the PPP's true potential which is unlimited.

Continued on Back Page)

Voters exercised their constitutional right without any hindrance: PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has said that the voters in the currently held general elections exercised their constitutional rights, and by and large, they voted for their favorite candidates despite security challenges.

"It is the beauty of a vibrant democracy, and in Pakistan, it is a transformational democracy, also a brave democracy, considering the security challenges," he opined during an interview with the Turkish broadcaster TRT. To a question, he said that the next parliament would decide to hand over the power to that party who would meet the required magical number to form the new government.

The prime minister said that their responsibility as a caretaker government was to ensure security, and ahead of the elections, two terrorist incidents in Balochistan province occurred, which reminded the people of the real-time threat. The government always had more responsibility when it came to security, he added.

Responding to a question about the suspension of the mobile services, he said that to face the security challenge, they had to block the communication channels; otherwise, they did not have any political motive whatsoever. Elaborating his viewpoint, he said that considering that the terrorists would confine themselves to these two provinces would be a fallacy, there might be other potential attacks in other provinces.

He said they did their best to secure them. It was only mobile services that were suspended while the internet service was available. He did not think that this suspension had hindered the huge democratic exercise. The results

showed that it was, by and large, a free and fair exercise. The caretaker prime minister said that even though people went out and peacefully exercised their right to vote, for the time being, he didn't have figures as to how many people had voted.

Probably it would have been a record, which meant that everyone was allowed and their votes were counted. So else was democracy, he added. Two provinces were badly hit by terrorist attacks, and if it was kept in mind, people came out and bravely voted for their candidates, which was not usual but rather quite unusual, he opined. He said, "The people of Pakistan are quite brave; they came out and voted."

To a query regarding change in previous governments, he said there were perceptions and realities, and in the last two decades, the change in governments, like in post-2002, happened on the floor of the parliament. The vote of no confidence against the previous PTI's government was passed on the floor of the house with 179 votes, he added.

"So how can anyone call it an undemocratic exercise and intervention from outside forces?" he said, adding that even when Imran Khan was elected, people called it a product of a so-called selection process. But the reality was that he (Imran Khan) was elected with the support of 179 members of parliament, he added. The prime minister said that the people were unfair in their criticism of Pakistan's political system.

"Political parties and the parliament are the biggest stakeholders in this whole exercise of statecraft arrangements," he asserted. About the issue of

PTI's election symbol, he said it was subjected to a judicial process and related more to the structure of a political party. Prime Minister Kakar said that it was about the democratic exercise and how political parties were governed by the laws of the land.

And in the largest interest of democracy, he saw it in a quite sanguine way, which had set a precedent for all the political parties to go through that process, and in the future, people would be appreciative of this judicial decision, he added. He further said the working and performing democracy in Pakistan would grow and evolve.

The prime minister, to another question, said Pakistan had a transitional and evolving democracy, and it had had three direct military interventions in the past, and no one could deny it. When there was a transition of power to the civilian government, there had always been pull and push, he said, adding that in his view, they should keep the larger interests of the population in mind while negotiating this power framework structure. One was the reference to the constitution, and the other were the existing pragmatic exercises.

He said so; the ideal was constitutionalism and pragmatic arrangements between institutions. So, you had to evolve from that idealism, but if you leap, jump, and confront the whole structure, the social chaos becomes the risk factor and jeopardy in itself. The caretaker prime minister also expressed his best wishes and prayed for the political and economic stability of the people of Pakistan. He said that he anticipated a coalition government, but it was up to the political parties to negotiate.

Army chief congratulates nation on successful conduct of elections

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: COAS Gen Asim Munir congratulates the entire Pakistani Nation, Caretaker Government, Election Commission of Pakistan, Political Parties and all winning candidates on successful conduct of general elections 2024.

According to ISPR statement on Saturday, Asim Munir said that free and unhindered participation by Pakistani people to exercise their right of vote demonstrated their commitment to democracy and the rule of law as enshrined in Constitution of Pakistan.

He said that leadership and personnel of law-enforcement agencies deserve our highest appreciation for creating a safe and secure environment for the electoral process, despite overwhelming odds. The

constructive role played by national media, civil society, members of civil administration and judiciary enabled the successful conduct of the largest electoral exercise in national history, the army chief added.

Gen Asim said Pakistan's diverse polity and pluralism will be well-represented by a unified government of all democratic forces imbued with national purpose. Elections and democracy are means to serve people of Pakistan and not ends in themselves. The nation needs stable hands and a healing touch to move on from the politics of anarchy and polarisation which does not suit a progressive country of 250 Million people.

He said: "Elections are not a zero-sum competition of winning and losing but an exercise to determine the mandate of the people. Political

leadership and their workers should rise above self-interests and synergise efforts in governing and serving the people which is perhaps the only way to make democracy functional and purposeful."

The COASA said that the people of Pakistan have reposed their combined trust in the Constitution of Pakistan, it is now incumbent upon all political parties to reciprocate the same with political maturity and unity. "As we move forward from this national milestone we must reflect on where the country stands today and where our rightful place should be in the comity of nations. COAS wishes that these elections bring in political and economic stability and prove to be the harbinger of peace and prosperity for our beloved Pakistan," the COAS concluded.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman PTI Gohar Khan addressing a press conference.

Shehbaz calls on Zardari to form govt; contacts MQM

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Former Prime Minister and PML-N (PTI) President Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday met with former President Asif Ali Zardari here.

Shehbaz Sharif conveyed Nawaz Sharif's message on forming a coalition government. The two leaders met at the caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi's house. Pakistan People's Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was also present during the meeting.

Shehbaz Sharif met Asif Ali Zardari after receiving the task of negotiating with political leaders to form a coalition government. Shahbaz Sharif also conveyed the message of PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif in his meeting with Asif Zardari. On this occasion, both parties agreed to work together and hold meetings for government formation. During the meeting, Shahbaz Sharif also contacted MQM Coordination Committee leader Khalid Maqbool by telephone and invited him to come to Lahore.

MQM-P delegation in Lahore

F.P. Report

LAHORE: A delegation of Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM-P) has reached Lahore to meet Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leadership, ostensibly to deliberate on formation of government in Centre, on Saturday.

According to details, the MQM-P delegation comprises of Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori, convener Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Mustafa Kamal and Farooq Sattar. The delegation is scheduled to meet PML-N leadership – Nawaz Sharif and his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif – to deliberate on future course of action.

The meeting came as leaders from a number of major political parties held meetings before the completion of counting of votes, apparently in the hopes of gathering sufficient numbers to form governments in the Centre and the four provinces. A day earlier, Nawaz Sharif invited all the political parties to sit together and form a government to pull Pakistan out of the difficulties.

"We can't hold elections again and again; every one should together play a positive role in bringing Pakistan out of this crisis," the former prime minister said in a pre-mature victory speech as the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is yet to release all the results of the Feb 8 elections.

The PML-N supremo said his party respects the mandate of all parties, including the independents. "We are inviting everyone today to rebuild this wounded Pakistan and sit with us," he said.

Gohar: PTI to form govt in centre, Punjab and KP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan on Saturday claimed that President Arif Alvi would invite his party to form the government as they had gotten a majority in the National Assembly.

"We have no quarrel with anyone, we want to move forward. We will proceed and form a government in accordance with the constitution and the law," Gohar Khan said addressing the media in Islamabad. He said the people freely exercised their right to vote. The presiding officers counted the votes and prepared Form 45, he added. The PTI chief said the results should be made according to Form 45 as they had received all those forms.

He said the economy

would not be able to tolerate the suppression of people's voice and forming a desired government. "No obstacle should be created for the PTI and results should be announced as soon as possible. As per the law, the final result is extracted from Form 45 and we have received all the results," he said adding that the final results should be announced before 12:00am tonight.

Gohar said their independent candidates were in contact with them. They were loyal to the party and would remain so, he said adding that they would make their independent government. He said the PTI would go towards intra-party elections within 15 days after completion of the process. The people had given a big mandate to the PTI, he maintained. He also said all the cases on

the PTI founder were fake.

The PTI chairman said they would reach a decision soon regarding the reserved seats as well as what party they should join. He said they would hold peaceful protests in the constituencies where results were stopped. "The workers are requested that protest is a right, but it should be peaceful," he said.

He said advertently an attempt was made to defeat them on the seats they had won. He claimed that the PTI had won elections on 170 seats.

He also said his party clinched 39 out of 35 NA seats from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Gohar said they would decide about the chief minister's post after consultation in two days. He claimed that his party would form a government in Punjab as well.

Mohsin Dawar injured in North Waziristan firing

F.P. Report

MIRAN SHAH: National Democratic Movement (NDM) Chairman Mohsin Dawar was injured in a firing incident in North Waziristan's Miranshah, media reported on Saturday citing police officials.

The incident took place when Dawar's supporters were protesting against the delay in election results. According to the protesters, the police started firing and shelled tear gas during the demonstration.

Moreover, some of Dawar's associates also sustained injuries in the incident. The police said that Dawar, along with others who were injured, have been taken to Miranshah Hospital. Miranshah District Police Officer (DPO) Rokhanzeb Khan, in conversation with media, said the firing took place at a protest rally of a political party.

"During the firing, four people including political figure Mohsin Dawar were injured. The armed persons

present in the demonstration opened fire," the DPO said. The NDM politician was contesting from the NA-40 constituency in North Waziristan for a seat in the National Assembly and lost against a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed independent candidate Aurangzeb Khan, who won the seat with 20,443 votes.

Earlier this year in January, Dawar's convoy came under a gun attack by terrorists in Tappi village in North Waziristan. North Waziristan District Police Officer (DPO) Rohan Zaib confirmed to media about the attack but noted that the politician remained safe due to the law enforcers deployed for his security. According to the police, several gunshots were fired at Dawar's convoy but he remained safe because his car was bulletproof and the security personnel accompanying him fired back at the assailants, which forced them to flee from the scene.

"Cowardly attacks can-

not dampen our spirit. The patrons of the attackers should come in the field themselves instead of using others' children against us," Dawar said in reaction to the attack. Commending the police and security personnel part of his convoy on swift action, the politician said that the assailants ran away after facing retaliation. He then vowed to continue his party's election campaign, saying that nothing can stop his political struggle.

Former human rights minister Shireen Mazari said that the attack on Dawar was "totally condemnable". In a post on X, referring to two PTI workers killed in clashes in Shangla a day ago, she said, "Yesterday, two young people [were] killed in Shangla and now this." PPP leader Farhatullah Babar has demanded an investigation into the attack on Dawar and sought punishment for "trigger happy personnel" who allegedly fired shots at the former legislator.

Tehran 'never sought' to expand war in region: FM

TEHRAN: Iran has never sought war in the region, the country's foreign minister has said on a visit to Lebanon to discuss Israel's war on Gaza and its impact on regional security. "Iran and Lebanon confirm that war is not the solution, and that we absolutely never sought to expand it," Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-abbollahian said at a news conference alongside Abdallah Bou Habib, Lebanon's foreign minister, in Beirut on Saturday.

However, he threatened that any widespread attack by Israel on Lebanon would be Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "last day". His visit to Beirut came as the United States and Israel have continued to blame Iran and its aligned

armed groups in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen for escalating tensions in the region via attacks on US and Israeli targets. "After months of aggression by the Zionist regime [Israel] in Gaza and the West Bank, Tel Aviv has not achieved any of its stated goals," Amir-abbollahian told reporters.

"The continuation of America's support for the Zionist regime and for Netanyahu will have no results but a final defeat," he said. During his visit, the Iranian diplomat met Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, speaker of Lebanon's Parliament, Ziad Nakhale, the secretary-general of the Islamic Jihad Movement, and some Hamas officials. He also

met Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

After his meetings in Lebanon, Amir-abbollahian is scheduled to visit the Syrian capital Damascus, where Iran also allegedly wields influence over its groups. He is then due to head to Qatar, which has been the main mediator between Israel and Hamas. Some political analysts viewed the Iranian foreign minister's trip tour to Lebanon and other regional countries as a way of influencing the outcome of negotiations on the Gaza war. Iran was not represented in Saudi Arabia at a meeting on Thursday, where ministers from Arab nations discussed initiatives for Gaza after the war ends. — Aljazeera

Sh Rashid released from jail

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi anti-terrorism court has ordered to release Sheikh Rashid approving bail in May 9 riots case. The anti-terrorism court's Judge Malik Ijaz Asif heard the bail plea of Sheikh Rashid in May 9 riots case. The former interior minister was ordered to submit surety bonds of 0.2 million and would be released from Adiala jail after filing surety bonds to police.



RAWALPINDI: Firefighters struggling to extinguish the fire that erupted in shops at Mughal Sarai Market Raja Bazaar. —APP Photo

25 shops gutted in fire

RAWALPINDI (INP): A blaze erupted on the third floor of the Rajabazar Mughal Sarai Market in Rawalpindi, causing damage to around 25 shops.

The incident occurred in Rawalpindi, prompting a swift response from the firefighting team.

Over 60 firefighters were mobilized to tackle the fire and conduct rescue operations. Their efforts were focused on bringing the flames under control and preventing further spread to nearby establishments.

The fire incident has caused significant disruption to the market area, with shop owners and local authorities assessing the extent of the damage. Investigations are underway to determine the cause of the fire.

Efforts are ongoing to ensure the safety of residents and businesses in the vicinity, as well as to mitigate any potential risks associated with the aftermath of the incident.

Fatima Surayya Bajia remembered

LAHORE (APP): The 8th death anniversary of famous TV playwright and Urdu novelist Fatima Surayya Bajia was observed across the country.

The literary icon, received ample recognition for her contributions to literature. Shama, Afshan, Aroosa, Ana and Tasveer are her memorable plays.

Fatima Surayya received multiple awards at home and abroad including the Pride of Performance and Hilal-i-Imtiaz. She died in Karachi in 2016 on this day due to throat cancer.

Javed highlights investment in health sector

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Punjab Health Minister Professor Dr. Javid Akram emphasized the significant strides made in the province's health sector, revealing a staggering investment of Rs 90 billion.

Speaking at a conference organized by the Pakistan Academy of Family Physicians at a local hotel here on Saturday, Dr. Akram commended the organizers for addressing crucial health issues and stressed the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle.

He expressed concern over the high prevalence of hypertension and diabetes in Pakistan, urging proactive measures. Dr. Akram underscored the pivotal role of family medicine and called for decisive action against perpetrators of inhuman acts.

Additionally, he reflected on Pakistan's demographic trajectory, foreseeing its ascent to the third-largest country by population in thirty years.

JI staged protest outside ECP provincial office in Karachi

KARACHI (INP): The three political parties including Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) staged a protest outside the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) provincial office in Karachi, denouncing what they claimed to be electoral rigging in the general election 2024.

As the results of the general election of 2024 emerged, the political parties staged a protest outside ECP's provincial office and denounced against the alleged electoral rigging while demanding fair electoral results.

A heavy contingent of police has been deployed

around the office of the Provincial ECP office, while officials of the law enforcement agencies also took up positions to control the situation.

Earlier, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) announced sit-in protests outside the ECP office, demanding a thorough review of the results of the general election 2024.



KARACHI: The Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed talking to media persons. —APP Photo

CM visits PSCA, reviews monitoring process

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the Punjab Safe Cities Authority's Head Office at Qurban Lines and reviewed the monitoring process through the Digital Wall.

He inspected the monitoring system of Faisalabad, Gujranwala and Rawalpindi Safe City projects being connected through the cameras. He shook hands with the staff members of the Safe Cities Authority and commended them on doing an effective monitoring work.

The CM paid a visit to the Anti Graded Command, Control and Communication Centre and conversed with the communication officers. He also visited the Data Centre. The MD PSCA briefed him about the monitoring system.

The CM chaired a meeting at the Head Office of PSCA in which complete satisfaction was expressed over making excellent arrangements along with an effective security plan. Mohsin Naqvi paid tributes to the Cabinet Committee for

Law & Order, administration, police, and the law enforcement institutions. "People used their right to franchise in a peaceful environment across Punjab. The whole team performed their national obligation in a very nice manner for holding transparent, free and fair elections. An important phase for holding the general elections passed away peacefully by the grace of Allah Almighty and owing to the day and night hard work of the Punjab government. We profoundly thank Allah Almighty on the holding of general elections peacefully and nicely," he said.

The police, administration and the law enforcement agencies jointly maintained the law and order in the province, he mentioned. "Excellent security arrangements in every city of Punjab including Lahore had been made," he added. The IG Police, Secretary Home, CCPO Lahore, MD PSCA and officials concerned were also present.

CM opens police Khidmat Markaz at Shadman: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister

Mohsin Naqvi inaugurated the state-of-the-art Police Khidmat Markaz 'Abshar' at Shadman (Jail Road) here on Saturday.

He visited the Khidmat Markaz and undertook a test drive by sitting in the driving simulator. He inspected the counters being established for the facilitation of the general public at the Khidmat Markaz. He witnessed various sections of the Khidmat Markaz and reviewed facilities being provided to citizens.

The CM monitored the self-kiosk machine at the Khidmat Markaz and appreciated the excellent arrangements being made for citizens besides commending the IG Police and his team. The CM apprised that two self-kiosk machines have been installed at the Khidmat Markaz where citizens can themselves inquire about the provision of facilities at the Khidmat Markaz.

IG Police Doctor Usman Anwar briefed him about the Khidmat Markaz. The CCPO Lahore, Secretary Health, DIG Operations, CTO and officials concerned were present.

Pneumonia claims lives of 3 children

LAHORE (INP): The battle against severe pneumonia continues unabated as the province grapples with the loss of three more children to the disease. Over the past 24 hours, Punjab reported 366 new cases of pneumonia, with Lahore alone accounting for 172 new cases within the same period.

Fortunately, no fatalities were reported from pneumonia in Lahore during the same 24-hour timeframe. However, the overall toll remains concerning, with Punjab recording 338 deaths and 23,290 pneumonia cases this year, while Lahore has seen 61 deaths and 4,823 cases.

Health experts attribute the surge in pneumonia cases in Punjab to the prevalent smog resulting from winter air pollution. As the region contends with this environmental challenge, efforts to mitigate the impact on public health remain a pressing concern.

IT exports increase by 32 percent

KARACHI (APP): The Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Dr. Umar Saif on Saturday said that IT exports had increased by 32 percent in the last two months due to their policies.

While congratulating the newly elected members of the National and Provincial Assemblies in the general elections in a programme titled 'Town Hall' of Pakistan Software Houses Association (Pasha), he said that the formation of the government was necessary for the country, the nation, and economic stability.

Dr. Saif said that the caretaker government had formulated a roadmap for the promotion of the digital economy for the upcoming government.

He said, 'If the continuity of all our measures is endorsed then billions of dollars of revenue can be obtained,' he said adding that the IT and Telecom sector had become the backbone of Pakistan's economy.

The Minister said that the provision of facilities to the IT sector was need of the hour. Pasha Chairman Zohaib Khan appreciated the caretaker minister Dr. Umar Saif for his excellent services to the IT sector.

Later, he presented a memento to the Minister.

Hajj app launched to facilitate pilgrims: Aneeq Ahmed

KARACHI (APP): The Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed on Saturday said that an app had been launched to facilitate the Hajj pilgrims.

While talking to media persons during his visit to New Haji Camp, he said that, this app will guide the pilgrims from Hajj flight to their stay in Saudi Arabia and all other relevant details will be available on the app including videos for the training of pilgrims.

Aneeq said that all the pilgrims would be provided with a free single-colored QR code suitcase so that they could easily identify their belongings.

He said that every pilgrim will be given a mobile SIM of a Saudi company for free which will have 180 minutes for international calls.

He further said that the Caretaker government reduced the price of the official Hajj package by Rs0.1 million.

While talking about the building of the New Haji Camp, the Minister said that the building had been renovated and a vaccination center had also been established for Hajj pilgrims.

He said that the 'Interfaith Harmony Conference' was organized under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Religious Affairs, in

which the ambassadors from 30 countries were invited.

Aneeq said that 'Interfaith Harmony Dialogue' was held in University of Karachi, NED University and Iqra University Karachi and Islamabad campuses. The dialogue was also arranged in St. Patrick's Church in which Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Hindu, Parsi and Jain scholars participated. 'We conveyed the message of humanity to the world'.

He said that the project of establishing schools and clinics in mosques had been initiated by the Badshahi Mosque of Lahore and will be expanded across the country.



LAHORE: Girls visiting stall during Faiz Mela at Al-Hamra. —APP Photo

PINS launches training course to enhance nursing skills

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Institute of Neurosciences (PINS) has taken a significant stride towards enhancing the proficiency of its nursing staff by initiating a specialized training course.

According to a spokesperson for PINS said on Saturday, Nursing Superintendent Razia Shamim is overseeing the training program, which aims to elevate the standard of patient care and hospital management.

Speaking on the matter, Razia Shamim highlighted the comprehensive nature of the course, emphasizing its focus on improving patient care, ward manage-

ment, record-keeping, discipline, and healthcare protocols. She underscored the importance of such training in aligning healthcare professionals with modern medical standards, particularly in the intricate realm of neurosurgery.

"Nurses serve as the backbone of our healthcare system," stated Razia, acknowledging the indispensable role of well-trained nursing staff in ensuring successful patient outcomes. She expressed confidence that the training initiative would not only bolster the capabilities of nurses but also contribute to the delivery of world-class medical services at

PINS.

Furthermore, she affirmed PINS's commitment to continuous professional development, hinting at future endeavors to provide modern training facilities for nursing staff. The initiative reflects PINS's dedication to maintaining excellence in healthcare delivery and fostering a culture of continuous learning within the organization.

The training course signals a proactive approach by PINS towards advancing healthcare standards, ultimately benefiting patients and reinforcing the institution's reputation as a premier neurosciences center in the region.

President Alvi stresses upon need of multipolar world

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi has underlined the need of a multipolar world, based upon 'an emancipation of people' and allowing people to progress and to continue with trade.

In an interview with the Chinese media, the president said that the world was in flux and many areas were still troubled by conflicts that had deterred the growth of emerging economies. The president felicitated that the peace and cooperation demonstrated by the iron-clad bilateral relations between Pakistan and China had provided a stabilizing force in the changing world.

"The two countries always support each other's efforts to safeguard their respective core interests, and their deepening bond serves as a good example for the world," Xinhua quoted the president on Saturday as saying. The president said that both Pakistan and China loved peace and also highlighted the initiatives put forward by China, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), that focused on people's development.

"This (BRI) has shown the world a way of cooperating and a way of mutual development whereby movements of goods and people are made easier," he said, adding the initiative

benefited international trade and sustainable development. With regard to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), President Alvi said that the infrastructure, human resources, energy, and industry sectors in Pakistan were being improved with its help.

He also expressed appreciation that the loans from China did not come with strings. As the construction of the CPEC entered a new phase of high-quality development, the president envisioned enhanced cooperation with China in the sectors of information technology (IT), agriculture, vehicle manufacturing, etc.

PTDC hosts reception to honour two Polish explorers

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation hosted a reception to honor the remarkable achievement of two Polish women, Monika Witkowska and Joanna Mostowska, who have successfully completed the First Female Winter Ski Traverse of Deosai.

Deosai, the second highest plateau in the world after Tibet, witnessed this historic expedition as Monika and Joanna traversed its challenging terrain alone, enduring harsh weather conditions with temperatures dropping as low as minus 25 degrees Celsius. Their ten-day journey from January 27th to February 5th, 2024, showcased extraordinary physical endurance and determination.

Mr. Aftab ur Rehman Rana, the Managing Director of PTDC, congratulated the duo on their exceptional feat and highlighted the significant impact of their expedition on promoting winter tourism in Pakistan.

He emphasized that such endeavors would attract more adventure tourists to explore Pakistan's mountainous



regions during the winter season, traditionally considered an off-season for tourism.

Mr. Rana further elaborated on the beauty and biodiversity of Deosai, affectionately known as the "Land of the Giants," which has been designated as a national park.

He mentioned the conservation efforts that have led to an increase in the brown bear population, making Deosai an ideal

destination for ecotourism during the summer months.

In her remarks, Monika Witkowska expressed gratitude for the warm welcome and reception extended by PTDC. As an avid traveler and K2 climber, she emphasized the challenges they faced during the expedition, starting from Shushar lake and concluding near Sadpara village. Joanna Mostowska, a ski expert

and mother of four, echoed Monika's sentiments and praised the hospitality of the Pakistani people, affirming that Pakistan is a safe destination for international tourists.

The reception concluded with the presentation of shields, ajraks, and souvenirs to the guests, symbolizing the enduring friendship and cultural exchange between Poland and Pakistan.

Minister congratulates people for peaceful polls

PESHAWAR (APP): Caretaker Minister for Information Barrester Froze Jamal Kakakhel on Saturday said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa witnessed peaceful and well-organized electoral process, leading to the successful election of representatives. He extended heartfelt congratulations to the winning candidates.

Expressing satisfaction with the outstanding performance of security agencies and administrative authorities, Barrister Feroze Jamal Khakakhel commended their efficiency in ensuring a secure electoral environment.

The vigilant provincial government's mandate prioritized conducting free, fair, and impartial elec-

tions, and this commitment was diligently fulfilled, said Information Minister.

He praised the efforts made to uphold a peaceful atmosphere during the election process.

In response to any election-related grievances, the Information Minister advised candidates to approach the Election Commission office. He emphasized the importance of abiding by the law and refraining from taking matters into one's own hands.

The province is now poised to move forward under the elected representatives, and the Information Minister expressed optimism for a prosperous and harmonious future for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Six ex-CMs of KP defeated

PESHAWAR (APP): As many as six Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were defeated in their respective constituencies during 2024 election by their political rivals.

They include QWP Chief Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao, PTIP Chairman Pervez Khattak, Mehtab Abbasi, PTI Vice Chairman Mahmood Khan, JUIF IesdervAkram Durrani and Central Vice President ANP Amir Haider Hoti.

According to ECP results, Aftab Sherpao has been defeated on NA 23 Charsadda-I, Pervez Khattak on NA34 Nowshera-I, Mehtab Abbasi at Abbottabad, Mahmood Khan at Swat, Akram Durrani at Bannu and Amir Haider Hoti on NA 22 Mardan.

Haider Hoti has resigned from central vice President of Awami National Party after losing election and announced to serve the party as political worker.

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ANP Chief hails party workers

PESHAWAR (INP): Awami National Party (ANP) Chief Asfandiyar Wali Khan on Saturday hailed the party workers and office-bearers for running a vigorous election campaign in the elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In a special message to the party workers, Asfandiyar Wali Khan said that the party's candidates and workers had put in tireless efforts to reach out to the voters and convey the party's message. He said that the party's manifesto was successfully delivered to every household in the province.

Asfandiyar said that the ANP believes in continuous political struggle and will continue to fight for the rights of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Minister on Information Barrister Feroz Jamal Shah Kakakhel and Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Choudhry alongwith Election Commission Control Room staff of Home Department.

DEC Swabi congratulates citizens for peace polls

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: District Election Commissioner (DEC) Fahad Ali Shah congratulated residents of Swabi after conclusion of general elections 2024 peacefully.

DEC extended thanks to teachers, local administration and security forces for performing extraordinary on polling day. He added that the general election was concluded peacefully due to commitment of public servant deployed at the polling stations.

DEC also paid homage to services of media personnel, DRO, ROs, AROs, district monitoring officer, monitoring officers and master trainers.

Unlucky Peshawar: No CM from City since 1988

Ali Sheikh

In 2008 when Awami National Party emerged as the largest political party, it was expected that the party would announce its stalwart Bashir Ahmad Bilour Shaheed, but on contrary Amir Haider Khan Hoti a relative of ANP Chief Asfandiyar Wali was announced as the CM.

Arbab Jehangir Khan was followed by Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao (from Charsadda) as CM Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He remained in the office from December 1988 to August 1990. Mir Afzal Khan from Mardan assumed the role of chief minister from August 1990 to July 1993, while Pir Sabir Shah, elected from Haripur, served as the chief executive of the province from August 1993 to February 1994 and then Sherpao once again from April 1994 to November 1996 served as Chief Minister.

After the 1997 elections, Sardar Mehtab Ahmad Khan, from Abbottabad, held the chief ministerial position from February 1997 to October 12, 1999.

In 2002, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a six-party religious alliance, came into power and appointed Akram Khan Durrani from Bannu as the chief minister from November 30, 2002, to October 11, 2007.

After the 2008 elections, Ameer Haider Hoti from Mardan assumed the role of

Sudden fire broke out in house

PESHAWAR (APP): A sudden fire broke out in the house of a person, namely Mumtaz, in Ghari Amir Khan Warsak Road, an official of the Rescue 1122 said here Saturday.

The official said that the incident occurred due to a short circuit. As soon as the information was received, the fire vehicle of Rescue 1122 was dispatched to the accident site.

Rescue 1122 officials reached the site and started extinguishing the fire.

No casualties were reported as a result.

Firefighters professionally confined the fire to one place and completely brought the fire under control within 45 minutes, the official of Rescue 1122 said.

People of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa rejects big guns, veteran politicians in General Election-2024

PESHAWAR (APP): In the recently held General Election-2024, the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have rejected big guns, veteran politicians and old faces by supporting new faces regardless of party affiliations.

The former ruling party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, ANP, was wiped out from the province with former federal minister Ghulam Bilor, along with former member of assembly Samar Bilor, were defeated.

ANP Provincial President Aimal Wali also lost his seat from Charsadda along with former interior minister and chief minister Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao, former ANP Chief Minister Haider Khan Hoti and ANP central leader and former information minister Mian Iftikhar also failed to win seats.

Sardar Hussain Babak of ANP from Buner, while Aftab Ahmed Sherpao, the big name of Charsadda politics, also lost their seats and failed to attract the general public in their respective constituencies.

Surprisingly, six former Chief Ministers Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also lost their seats in the General Election along with some big names from PTI as

well.

The most powerful and veteran Politician and chief of Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao, former interior minister and PTI (Parliamentarian) Chairman Pervez Khattak, Mehtab Abbasi, PTI Vice Chairman and former Chief Minister Mahmood Khan from Swat, JUI-F leader Akram Durrani and Central Vice President ANP Amir Haider Hoti were among those lost their seats.

According to ECP results, Aftab Sherpao has been defeated on NA 23 Charsadda-I, Pervez Khattak on NA34 Nowshera-I, Mehtab Abbasi at Abbottabad, Mahmood Khan at Swat, Akram Durrani at Bannu and Amir Haider Hoti on NA 22 Mardan.

Amir Haider Hoti in response to losing the election, also tendered his resignation from Central Vice President of Awami National Party (ANP), accepting the decision of the people of his home town constituency Mardan where he initiated a recorded number of developmental projects in Education, Health, Sports etc. during his tenure as Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

APP: The Pakistan

Tehreek e Insaaf-backed candidates that so far won 80 seats of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, have emerged in a strong position to form the third consecutive government of the party in the province after addressing legal obstacles.

Results obtained from Form 47 of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa General Elections so far, results in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa show party position wherein independent candidates' lead in numbers game.

Out of the total 115 seats in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, General Elections were held in 113 seats, and the elections were postponed on 2 seats.

Among the 109 seats inconclusive results, 89 seats are in the name of independent candidates, 4 seats are awaiting results with ANP won only 1 seat in the province so far, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam won 7 seats, Muslim League-N won 5 seats, Jamaat-e-Islami and Pakistan People's Party won 3 and 3 seats, respectively.

However, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Parliamentary members also suffered the worst defeat, winning only 1 seat.

When contacted, PTI

leader Shahid Khan Shinwari said APP said meetings with party leadership continued and they have discussed all issues including legal and constitutional obstacles that have been facing by the party in forming the government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He said they have also discussed likely candidates names for Chief Minister and hopefully after the approval one name would come up from the central leadership of the party to be the next chief minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

It is worth mentioning here that in the first tenure of PTI (2013-18) Pervez Khattak was elected the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while in second tenure (2018-22) Mahmood Khan served as Chief Minister of the province.

Giving details, Shahid Khan Shinwari said that PTI backed candidates have obtained a maximum number of seats from Peshawar, Nowshera, Abbottabad, Swat, Charsadda, Swabi, Chitral, Bannu, Mohmand, Khyber and Mardan.

He said, only in Peshawar, PTI backed independent candidates won four seats out of five of the National Assembly and six out of 13 Provincial

Assembly seats. He said, according to election results issued by Returning Officers, except former MNA Noor Alam Khan of the Jamiat ulema-e-Islam (JUIF) who won NA 28 Peshawar-I, the independent candidates including Aamir Ayub secured victory in NA 29 Peshawar-II, Shandana Gulzar in NA 30 Peshawar-III, Arbab Sher Ali in NA 31 Peshawar IV and Asif Khan on NA 32 Peshawar V.

Ms Shandana, who is the daughter of former Commissioner Peshawar, Gulzar Khan (late) was voted to power after his father's employment and social services.

Independent candidate, Asif Khan has outclassed veteran politician and former Federal Minister for Railways Haji Ghulam Ahmed Bilour while former MNA Arbab Amir Ayub has also retained his seat.

However, former MNA Noor Alam Khan who resigned from PTI and joined JUI-F was able to comfortably defeat his political rival and former MNA Sajid Nawaz Khan. Independent candidate and former MNA Arbab Sher Ali has retained his seat defeating former Minister for Communications Dr. Arbab Alamgir Khan on

NA 31 Peshawar IV.

The independent candidates, who won six among thirteen provincial assembly constituencies include Arbab Wasim on PK 73, Sameeullah Khan on PK 76, Sher Ali Afridi on PK 77, Syed Qasim Ali Shah on PK 81, Meena Khan on PK 83 and Fazal Elahi on PK 84. Karamat Ullah Chagarmati and Arbab Zarak Khan of the Pakistan People Party also won PK 72 and PK 80 respectively.

The candidate of Awami National Party, and a good golfing player Arbab Usman won the Provincial Assembly seat on PK 75. Arbab Usman was the elder son of former Agriculture Minister Arbab Ayub Jan (late), who cashed in his father's development projects.

Ejaz Khan of JUI won PK 47 and Arbab Wasim of PTI (Parliamentarian) was declared winner on PK 73. Jalal Khan of Pakistan Muslim League won PK 79 and Zahir Khan of the same party declared victorious in PK 78. Independent candidate and former Senior Minister and Sports Minister KP Muhammad Atif Khan has won NA 22 Mardan-II after securing 114,748 votes, defeating former CM KP Ameer Haider Hoti who bagged

66,159 votes while former MNA Anwar Taj regained NA 23 Charsadda-I after defeating Aftab Sherpao who secured only 34,415 votes.

On NA 24 Charsadda-II, Aimal Wali who bagged 67,876 votes was defeated by independent candidate Fazal Muhammad Khan who secured 100,713 votes. Similarly, former speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser who contested election as an independent candidate with 115,635 votes retained his native NA 19 Swabi-I defeating JUI-F Fazal Haqqani who bagged only 45,567 votes respectively.

Political stalwarts that lost election 2024 including PTI Parliamentarians Chairman Pervez Khattak on NA-23 Nowshera-I, KP PMLN Information Secretary Ikhtair Wali Khan, former Environment Minister Wajid Ali Khan in Swat, JIP Central Ameer Maulana Sirajul Haq.

Independent candidate and former MNA Ali Muhammad Khan declared victorious on NA 23 Mardan after securing 102,175 votes and independent Shandana Gulzar secured victory at NA 30 Peshawar defeating former MNA Nasir Musazai of JUIF.

PTI affiliated candidates emerged to play pivotal role in formation of KP govt after winning 80 seats in Election 2024

PESHAWAR (APP): The Pakistan Tahrir e Insaaf-backed candidates that so far won 80 seats of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, have emerged in a strong position to form the third consecutive government of the party in the province after addressing legal obstacles.

Political and legal advisers said that PTI that remained out of election race after withdrawal of its election symbol by the Election Commission of Pakistan following the Supreme Court's judgment over its controversial intra party election, was in strong position to form its third successive government after 2013 and served the people of the province.

Advocate Syed Noman Bukhari, senior legal and constitutional expert told APP on Saturday that PTI was likely to face legal and constitutional challenges to form the government after losing its symbol despite winning election by its affiliated candidates.

Under the law, he said the independent candidates after winning elections is required to join a political party within specified period and form Govt.

In 2018 election, he said that several independent candidates of KP Assembly have joined Balochistan Awami Party and joined the coalition government of PTI.

Noman advocate said that joining of a political party by independent candidates was a legal requirement to obtain perks and privileges besides women reserved seats.

Meanwhile, PTI leader Taimur Salim Jhagra told reporters here that consultation on all issues including legal and constitutional obstacles have been started and all decisions would be taken with consultation by the political leadership.

The sources in PTI said that consultation on names of candidates for Chief Minister has been started and former Federal Minister Ali Amin Gandapur that won election from DI Khan was a potential candidate for the CM slot.

In the first tenure of PTI (2013-18) Pervez Khattak was elected the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while in second tenure (2018-22) Mahmood Khan served as Chief Minister of the

province.

PTI backed candidates have obtained maximum number of seats from Peshawar, Nowshera, Abbottabad, Swat, Charsadda, Swabi, Chitral, Bannu, Mohmand, Khyber and Mardan.

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Chairman, Qumi Watan Party, Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao, Provincial President of Awami National Party, Aimal Wali Khan, Pakistan Tahrir e Insaaf Parliamentarians Chairman, Pervez Khattak and former Chief Minister Ameer Haider Hoti had lost election in their respective national assembly constituencies.

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Following defeat,

Haider Hoti resigned from senior vice president of ANP and decided to serve party as a worker.

On NA 24 Charsadda-II, Aimal Wali who bagged 67,876 votes was defeated by independent candidate Fazal Muhammad Khan who secured 100,713 votes.

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Independent candidate and former MNA Ali Muhammad Khan declared victorious on NA 23 Mardan after securing 102,175 votes and independent Shandana Gulzar secured victory at NA 30 Peshawar defeating former

MNA Nasir Musazai of JUIF.

Professor Dr. A.H. Hilali, Chairman Political Science Department, University of Peshawar told APP that participation of large numbers of voters in 2024 election has reflected the people unshakable trust in the electoral process.

Talking to APP, he said 2024 election results has signified the diverse polity and pluralism in the country that would be well-represented by a unified government of all democratic forces imbued with national purpose to take the country's forward on road to progress and development.

He said elections were not a zero-sum competition of winning and losing but an exercise to determine the mandate of the people.

He said political leadership and their workers should rise above self-interests and synergise efforts in governing and serving the people which is perhaps the only way to make democracy functional and purposeful.

Professor Hilali said that young voters have

played a significant role in deciding fate of the contesting candidates during 2024 election.

He said that contest of 17,816 independent and party-affiliated candidates for 265 National Assembly, 296 Punjab Assembly, 130 Sindh Assembly, 113 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and 51 Balochistan seats — a total of 85 demonstrated their commitment to serve their countrymen.

Apart from the cowardly terrorist attack on police in Dera Ismail Khan (DI) that martyred four police, he said the polling day was peaceful with no major violent incident reported from anywhere in the country.

Professor Dr Hilali said the decision of voters need to be respected, and the majority party may be given chance to form Govt and implement its party manifesto.

He congratulated the entire nation for successful holding of the election and security forces for providing full proof security to voters that helped smooth and peaceful holding of February 8, 2024 election in Pakistan.



In brief

Two killed in various incidents F.P. Report

SWABI: Two persons were killed in incidents of violence and road mishap in different areas of the district. According to Police Station Swabi, a man, Jamshed Khan was killed when a motor car hit him in Panjpeer area. Driver of the car managed to escape from the site. In another incident that occurred in Maneri Payan, Ansar Ali was killed by firing of unknown assailants. Reason behind the killing has not been ascertained yet.

Fire broke out in sweet shop F.P. Report

BUNER: The rescue 1122 staff controlled the fire from further spending and protected rest of the shops. However, the items inside the shop were gutted and the shop badly damaged due to high heating. The rescue asked public to avoid going inside until the colling process is completed. As per the rescuers the colling process continued for long time. According to the initial reports, the fire was caused by gas leakage. In the first stage, the fire was confined to one place, while in the second stage, the surrounding buildings were secured, but there was no loss of life due to the fire, and the shopkeeper lost lakhs of rupees. The damage was done. The bazaar union was present during the fire extinguishing by the local police administration and the shopkeepers community of the bazaar and the nearby residents gathered and expressed their sympathy and appealed to the government for financial support to the affected shopkeeper.

3 POs busted in Sargodha

SARGODHA (INP): The district police arrested three proclaimed offenders (POs) on Saturday. Police said the teams of different police stations conducted raids at various areas and arrested Ghulam Haider, Muhammad Adnan and Ali Ahmed, who were wanted in dozens of cases of robbery, theft, attempt to murder etc.

PPP to play role: Nasir Shah

SUKKUR (INP): Peoples Party leader Nasir Hussain Shah has said, the PPP has swept Sindh in the election and will also play key role in formation of government in Punjab, on Saturday. Former Sindh minister said that no party could form government in centre without the PPP. PPP leader said, "We are not considering the PTI-supported winning candidates as independents," he said. "We will talk with them in group," he said. He said the independent winners apart of the PTI are our first priority. He claimed that the PPP will form government in Sindh and Balochistan. "Balochistan's chief minister would be from the People's Party," he said. "We don't require anyone for formation of government in Sindh but we respect the mandate of other parties. We will hold talks with other parties for making government despite our majority," he said.

Prayer meeting held

MUZAFFARABAD (INP): A prayer meeting was organized in Muzaaffarabad under the auspices of the International Forum for Justice and Human Rights on the occasion of the martyrdom anniversaries of Muhammad Afzal Guru and Muhammad Maqbool Butt. India had hanged Muhammad Afzal Guru in New Delhi's infamous Tihar Jail on 9th February in 2013 and Muhammad Maqbool Butt was sent to the gallows by India in the same jail on 11th February in 1984 for their role in Kashmir freedom movement.

RO office surrounded by JI and PTI workers during a recount

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The situation went very tense when hundreds of workers of the Jamaat-i-Islami and Pakistan Tahreek Insaf came face to face at the Timergara rest house during a recount of votes and probe into the alleged discrepancies in the Form-45 in PK 17.

Earlier the JI candidate Izazul Mulk Afkari was declared as a successful candidate with 25,124 votes. The runner up Ubaidur Rehman of the PTI backed candidate, who got 22,981 votes had challenged the result on which the returning officer PK-17 assistant commissioner Numan Pervaz ordered a recount of votes and probe into Form-45.

Hundreds of the PTI workers led by its candidate Ubaidur Rehman gathered outside the Timergara rest house where the recount was to be carried out. After an hour the workers of Jamaat-i-Islami also reached the venue and

chanted slogans against the RO and district administration.

Addressing the workers, the JI candidate Izazul Mulk Afkari who is also district chief of the party alleged that the RO had started recounting in his absence. He said that neither he nor his agent was present when the process of recounting began.

He said the RO had issued the Form-47 and declared him as a successful candidate. He asked party workers to remain peaceful. He said the workers would remain present outside the venue till the final decision. The charged workers of JI surrounded the rest house and remained there for hours.

The JI also staged a protest sit-in outside the rest house which was addressed by the JI youth wing district president Ateequr Rehman, JI district general secretary Hafiz Yaquubur Rehman, district secretary information Shuiab Ahmad and others. They said that the JI man-

date was being changed under a conspiracy. They said the district administration would be responsible if any untoward incident occurred.

On the other hand the PTI backed candidate Ubaidur Rehman claimed that he had won the seat with a margin of 4000 votes. The PTI workers also gathered outside the Timergara rest house and chanted slogans in favour of their party candidate Ubaidur Rehman.

The JI and PTI workers also chanted slogans against each other. A heavy contingent of police couples with personnel of the Frontier Corps was deployed in and around the rest house. Keeping in view the tense situation the RO did not announce the official result of the recount till filing of this report. The administration also held several rounds of talks with the JI protesting workers but the situation remained tense for the whole day. The JI protest sit-in is still continuing.

PPP rejects election results in Hub: Ali Hassan

F.P. Report

HUB: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) senior leader and spokesperson of former President Asif Ali Zardari Ali Hassan Zehri candidate from PB21 hub have refused to recognize the election results in the constituency and said that every conspiracy against the party is to plant will be resisted. He said that according to the facts on the ground, the Pakistan People's Party won with a clear majority in the PB21 Hub, but the results were changed by unseen forces, which is a complete manipulation of the people of the Hub, which we strongly and strongly condemn.

PPP leader said that the results will be challenged and the rights of the people will not be allowed to be robbed. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that our victory was clear till late night but suddenly the results were reversed and the public

mandate was stolen through negative tactics. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that Pakistan People's Party is the biggest and most beloved party of district Hub and people love Pakistan People's Party. I thank the people of Hub from the bottom of my heart for the trust shown in us by the people, who supported us bravely despite the bullying threats from the opponents, it is enviable and admirable.

I also thank my mothers, sisters, friends, youth and workers from the bottom of my heart for voting for Pakistan People's Party for their better future and freedom from oppressors. They chose a bright and new path and succeeded in it through democratic voting, but under a well-thought-out conspiracy, the same unsuccessful, self-interested and anti-people elements were imposed while abusing the people of the Hub once

again those reduced the Hub to ruins and mistreated the Hub's people for forty years. He praised the determination of the zealous people of Hub for not falling for the threats and hollow slogans of the opponents and supported the Pakistan Peoples Party despite the incidents of bomb blasts and shootings and completely rejected the self-interested and defeated elements.

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri assured that the way the people of Hub have expressed their trust in us, we also have a duty to make efforts day and night for our loved ones and resist the imposed elements. It will not be given at all. Whether we are in power or not, but we will remain in the hearts of our people. We will not hesitate to make any sacrifice to give rights to the people with our resources and relations and the voice of the people will be raised in every forum.



QUETTA: PTI's provincial general secretary, Salar Khan Kakar addressing a press conference.

'Limited parties' in coalition could be beneficial: PPP

HYDERABAD (INP): The seasoned politician Khurshid Shah emphasized that having a 'limited number' of political parties in the coalition government would be beneficial for decision-making and policy implementation.

In his recent interview, Khurshid Shah expressed his belief that a coalition formed by two major parties collaborating in decision-making processes would yield optimal results for the government. Drawing a comparison, Shah cautioned against the potential challenges that may arise with a coalition consisting of six or more parties, pointing out that such a scenario could result in a situation reminiscent of the complexities faced by the previous government, specifically referring to the difficulties associated with the PDM.

Highlighting his stance, Shah made it clear that he does not advocate for aligning with political entities sim-

Independent candidate complaint polls rigging

F.P. Report

KARAK: Javed Iqbal Khattak, independent candidate from constituency PK 97, has alleged that 66 polling stations of our constituency have been rigged through fake votes. If we have won, then I will go to their house and defeat them.

If we will leave for Islamabad and convey our grievances to the Chief Election Commissioner's office, if the administration does it by force, I will call my people to come out and see," he said. I maintain that if the nation rejects me, I will withdraw from politics, but I will not leave the mandate of the nation in an unconstitutional and fake manner.

ilar to the previous PDM government. Earlier in the day, the former President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto reached Lahore for a 'crucial post-election meeting'.

The PPP leaders are expected to hold a meeting with PML-N Supreme Nawaz Sharif during their visit to Lahore for an emer-

gency meeting with party leaders to consult on challenging the election results in NA-127. The PPP leadership is also expected to adopt a stance on their reservations regarding election results in the Punjab region. Furthermore, there is a potential chance of a post-election meeting between the leadership of PPP and PML-N in Punjab.



MUZAFFARABAD: Lawyers taking selfie during annual election of Central Bar Association.

Framers hold protest against hike in prices of fertilizers

F.P. Report

SHAHADKOT: The price of fertilizer urea artificially increased by the dealers, who double charging the prices of the so-called fertilizer urea shopkeepers / traders in the whole country, especially in Qamber-Shahdakt district of Sindh.

A joint protest was held in front of the press club by the settlers and landlords against the fertilizer urea SOLD shopkeepers, dealers and traders, who sell Urea. The protesters were holding placards and banners with slogans against the fertilizer mafia. Addressing the protesters, Ghulam Umar, Deedar Ali, Haji Gulzar Chandio, Habdar Ali, Khadim Hussain Chandio and others said that in Qamber Shahdakt district, there is arbitrariness with the traders, dealers, farmers, as they 6000 per bag are being sold instead government fixed price per bag 3710, no steps have been taken by the district administration in this regard.

The framers claimed that dealers creating an artificial shortage of fertilizer urea for agricultural land, most of the dealers are supplying abroad to Afghanistan, while the silence of the district administration has become a question mark, he said. He further said that the agricultural production in Qamber-Shahdakt district is being held back under a deliberate conspiracy. And steps should be taken to ensure the delivery of justice by taking notice of the arbitrariness of the dealers.

Child burn to death in Dir Lower

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A child named Muneeb died due to a fire in the house of Aziz-ul-Hakeem situated near Jail Chowk, Timergarah, Dir Lower, the Rescue 1122 officials said here Saturday.

According to detail, a fire erupted suddenly in the house of one Aziz-ul-Hakeem and on which a call had been given to Rescue 1122 Dir Lower. After receiving the call, the firefighting team rushed to the site of the fire and got control over the fire in 30 minute time.

During the rescue operation, the Rescue 1122 Rescue team entered the upper portion of the double story, they saw a kid burned to death in the upper portion room, said an official of the Rescue 1122 team. The body of the child was recovered and shifted to DHQ hospital Dir Lower.

Ongoing construction work inspected

F.P. Report

KOHAT: TMO Kohat Mohammad Shoaib Saturday inspected the ongoing construction work at Ab-basin Plaza and reviewed the materials used in the ongoing construction work.

On this occasion, Lal Ghaffar Khattak was also present, TMO Mohammad Shoaib said that no lapse in the speed and quality of work will be tolerated, the site engineers were also given clear instructions to keep direct supervision of the ongoing construction work.

Kidnapping of a girl Mardan police arrests six suspects

Anees Takar

MARDAN: In a significant police operation six suspects were apprehended for attempting to abduct a young girl from her home under the guise of marriage. The girl safeguarded by the police authorities and has been safely reunited with her parents while the seized weapon used in the abduction attempt has been recovered.

According to reports, District Mardan Thana Sarho Shah police received information regarding the forcible abduction of a girl identified as Shama from her residence by the sus-

pects wielding weapons. District Police Chief Najib ur Rahman promptly took notice of the incident and issued order the arrest of the involved suspects and issued directives for the safe recovery of the abducted girl.

Under the supervision of SP President Division Khalid Khan, DSP Ashiq Hussain, and Investigating Officer Muhammad Azam Khan, a specialized police team was formed to tackle the situation. The dedicated team worked tirelessly day and night tracking down each suspect and swiftly executing their plan to rescue the abducted girl and

hand her back to her parents.

The apprehended suspects including the central suspect Shakir from Gaddi Usmani Khel, Aqib Javaid, Sohail Ahmed from Shah Dhand Lond Khwarh, Islam Bacha from Bismillah Colony, Yunus and her wife from Tehsildar Kalay Takht Bhai were apprehended under the jurisdiction of Thana Takhtbhai. During their arrest three pistols used in the abduction were also confiscated. Further investigation into the arrested suspects is underway to uncover any additional information related to the case.

Democracy thrives through fair elections

Awrang Khan

FREE and fair elections hold significant importance within the intricate realm of democratic governance, serving as a unifying force that embodies the aspirations and opinions of an entire nation.

Ensuring a transparent, inclusive, and honest process is crucial for a functioning democracy, extending beyond mere voting. A free and fair election is akin to a solemn pledge, upholding the fundamental tenets of democracy, fostering a sense of confidence among the populace, and genuinely mirroring the desires of the people.

In the heart of every democratic society, elections serve as the mechanism through which power transitions from one leader to another. Ensuring the integrity of elections is crucial, as it allows for a level playing field where every individual's voice is heard and where the people have the power to elect their representatives. With a focus on collective aspirations and national direction, it transcends individual agendas.

Transparency is crucial for ensuring the integrity of any election. Ensuring that all individuals have convenient access to information regarding candidates, political parties, and the electoral process is of utmost importance. Having clear guidelines regarding campaign finances, candidate eligibility, and party objectives enables individuals to make informed decisions aligned with their personal beliefs.

Ensuring free and fair elections entails providing equal opportunities for everyone to participate. Addressing the issue at hand requires dismantling obstacles to voting, addressing inequities, and safeguarding the rights of all communities. Ensuring the inclusion of all individuals not only promotes fairness, but also enriches decision-making processes with a wide range of perspectives.

Technology plays a significant role in modern-day elections, especially in the digital era. Sharing information, reaching a wider audience, and improving election management are some of the benefits it offers. However, it also poses potential dangers such as cyber threats. Ensuring a fair electoral process requires striking a delicate balance between harnessing technology effectively and safeguarding against potential issues.

media serves as a vigilant guardian of political integrity. They closely monitor candidates, parties, and election institutions. Providing up-to-date and impartial news enables individuals to gain a clear understanding of current events, empowering them to make informed decisions rooted in truth rather than deception.

The global community also plays a significant role. International organizations and collaborative efforts facilitate the exchange of best practices, offer technical assistance, and monitor electoral processes. International oversight plays a crucial role in building trust, both domestically and internationally.

The threat of interference, whether it originates internally or externally, poses a significant risk to the integrity of elections. Ensuring the security of our cyber infrastructure, combatting the spread of misinformation, and safeguarding the independence of election bodies are all vital in safeguarding elections from external influences.

The importance of free and fair elections extends beyond the act of voting. Addressing any post-election issues or disagreements in a transparent manner is crucial. Resolving disputes in accordance with the law not only demonstrates the strength of the democratic process, but also conveys a sense of respect for citizens' choices.

The significance of free and fair elections goes beyond the mere act of casting votes. They embody a dedication to truthfulness, inclusivity, and ethical conduct. The commitment mentioned here serves as the foundation of a robust democratic society. In the realm of modern governance, countries grapple with various challenges. However, the significance of free and fair elections cannot be overstated. These elections play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of democratic progress, ensuring that the voice of the people reverberates within the corridors of power.



QUETTA: Leader of Awami National Party and chief of tribes Malik Amanullah talking to media persons.



Finland extends Russia border closure

HELSINKI (AP): Finland's government said that it would extend the closure of its long border with Russia for another two months until April 14, because it sees no signs that Moscow was stopping its "hybrid operation" of funneling migrants toward the frontier with the Nordic nation.

Finland closed the 1,340-kilometer (832-mile) land border late last year after about 1,300 migrants without proper documentation or visas had arrived across the frontier since September — an unusually high number, just months after Finland joined the NATO alliance. Most of the migrants hail from the Middle East and Africa. The vast majority of them have sought asylum in Finland, a nation of 5.6 million people. The government said in statement that "instrumentalized migration" from Russia poses "a serious threat to Finland's national security and public order."

Based on the information provided by the border, security and other authorities to the Cabinet, "it is likely that instrumentalized migration would resume if border crossing points were

opened at the eastern border," the government said. "We have seen no signs that Russia is changing its behavior. On the contrary, the information we have received confirms our assessment that Russia is continuing its hybrid operation," Interior Minister Mari Rantanen said. "We have reason to believe that this situation will continue for some time." According to Rantanen, there are "hundreds, if not thousands, of migrants" who are currently staying close to the border on the Russian side and waiting for the chance to cross into Finland.

Finland has earlier accused Russia of deliberately ushering the migrants to its normally heavily controlled border facing the Nordic country. In comments given to the Russian news agency RIA Novosti, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused the Finnish government of an unwillingness to hold dialogue on the border issue. "Helsinki stubbornly refuses to discuss with us the threats allegedly posed to Finland's security from Russia's side of the border,"

Zakharova was quoted as saying by RIA Novosti.

According to Zakharova, Finland is also avoiding direct contact between the two countries' border authorities — a claim that was quickly refuted by the Finnish Border Guard, which said it has remained in regular touch with its Russian counterpart throughout the border conflict. All eight Finland-Russia border crossing points for people have been closed since Dec. 15. The southeastern rail checkpoint for cargo trains in Vainikkala remains open for now. In January, the government agreed to keep the crossing points closed until Feb. 11.

Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's government originally chose to close the border with Russia in November, citing security concerns and Moscow's "hybrid warfare." It later opened two selected checkpoints in eastern and northern Finland on a trial basis, but the migrant influx continued. Finland acts as the European Union's external border in the north and makes up a significant part of NATO's northeastern flank.

EU announces 210m euros for Mauritania

BARCELONA (AP): The EU announced 210 million euros to help Mauritania crack down on people smugglers and deter migrant boats from taking off, as the number of people attempting the dangerous Atlantic crossing from West Africa to Europe rises sharply.

Mauritania, during a meeting with European officials in its coastal capital of Nouakchott, also noted that it was itself increasingly struggling to cope with the growing number of migrants and refugees entering its borders as security in the Sahel region declines.

European Union Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the extra funding for migration, but also for humanitarian aid and job creation, as she met with Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

"Insecurity and the lack of economic opportunity in the region are pushing many people to migrate," Von der Leyen told journalists as she stood next to Ghazouani and Sánchez in a live-streamed statement. "This causes many to fall into the traps of cynical smugglers and puts their lives in danger." While Mauritania's leader renewed his commitment to working with Spain and the EU to stop migrant departures he also highlighted the cost his country bore.

"Mauritania is paying a heavy price in the management of migratory flows," Ghazouani said, adding that his nation already hosts 150,000 refugees from neighboring Mali and increasingly is not just a transit country but a destination for migrants. One of the most stable countries in the Sahel, Mauritania has been hailed as a key partner in the fight against terrorism, and Von der Leyen announced an additional 22 million euros for a new anti-terrorism battalion in Mauritania that will patrol the border with restive Mali.

"We are witnessing the fall of democratic governments, rise of terrorist attacks, a spike in refugees and internally displaced people, and the worsening of an already acute food security crisis," Sánchez said. "I am well aware that Mauritania is at the front line of all the consequences." Spain's Canary Islands have increasingly become a stepping stone for migrants and refugees trying to reach continental Europe from West Africa. In January alone, some 7,270 migrants landed on the archipelago, about as many as in the first six months of 2023. The Atlantic route to Europe is one of the deadliest in the world, Von der Leyen said. Indeed, it is not uncommon for entire boats to vanish in the Atlantic with a few sometimes reappearing months later on the other side of the ocean with no survivors.

The Canary Islands had already been struggling with a record number of arrivals last year with nearly 40,000 people arriving on its shores on boats mainly from Senegal. This year, departures from Mauritania, which had appeared to be under control for most of last year, have surged again.

Big election rallies in Indonesia on final day of campaign

JAKARTA: Tens of thousands of supporters of Indonesia's presidential candidates have poured onto its streets as they hold final campaigns before heading to the polls in the world's biggest single-day election.

The contenders to lead the world's third-largest democracy are popular former governors, Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan, and ex-special forces commander Prabowo Subianto, who has soared in opinion polls with the tacit backing of the president, and with the incumbent's son as his running mate.

The elections on Wednesday will elect a new president and vice president, in addition to parliamentary and local representatives. Nearly 100,000 people filled capital Jakarta's main stadium for a rally in support of frontrunner Subianto, while more than 80,000 turned out for rival Baswedan at another stadium in the megalopolis on Saturday. Subianto, the 72-year-old former military strongman and Indonesia's current defence minister, is trying to reshape his reputation as a hardened army figure with a history of accusations of rights abuses.

Subianto, who leads the right-wing Gerindra political party, is backed by a coalition of other parties and has selected controversial 36-year-old Gibran Rakabuming Raka as his running mate. Thousands of Subianto's supporters, clad in his signature light blue, gathered at a stadium in Jakarta. Subianto is running with 66-year-old Mahfud MD, the former coordinating minister for political, legal and security affairs, with the two men having pitched themselves as people of humble origins who understand the people of Indonesia.

High-schooler Alfiatnan, 18, said she would vote for Subianto because



this was his third attempt at the presidency. "I think there's no harm [in] giving opportunity to someone who is trying. His optimistic spirit influenced me to choose him." Also in the running is Baswedan, the former governor of Jakarta who is running as an independent candidate. The 54-year-old was educated in the United States, entered academia and later went into politics as education minister. He is running with 57-year-old Muhaimin Iskander, the leader of the National Awakening Party, the largest Muslim political party in Indonesia.

Supporters of Baswedan filled an 82,000-capacity stadium in Jakarta for a grand final rally on Saturday, chanting Islamic prayers. Some stayed overnight to secure a spot to see the politician. The streets of Jakarta were brought to a standstill by hordes of scooters and cars heading to the back-to-back rallies. "We want to witness change," said Endang Pujiati, a retired teacher who drove hours to attend Baswedan's rally. "Anies is a trustworthy person, that's

why he could be a good leader."

A cooling-off period will begin from Sunday until election day, when contestants and their running mates will try to secure their succession to popular President Joko Widodo, who led Indonesia for two five-year terms and cannot run again. Voting is not compulsory but the country's election commission said the turnout was 81 percent in 2019, and more than 204 million of Indonesia's 270 million people are registered to vote. There are 18 national political parties across Indonesia, and 575 parliamentary seats can be taken by candidates. More than 20,000 legislative and administrative posts will also be contested by 259,000 candidates on Wednesday. If no candidate wins a majority, a run-off between the top two will be held in June. At stake is the leadership for the next five years of a mineral-rich Group of 20 economy of 270 million people positioning itself as a future destination for multinational firms in the electric vehicle supply chain. — Al Jazeera

Student killed in Senegal protests over polls delay

DAKAR: A student has been killed in the Senegalese city of Saint-Louis during violent protests against the postponement of the presidential election. Clashes between security forces and protesters gripped Senegal's capital and other cities, the first widespread unrest over the delay of a vote that many fear could lead to protracted instability.

In a statement on Saturday, the Ministry of Interior and Public Security said it had been informed of the death of student Alpha Yero Tounkara and that it would be investigated, but denied its forces were to blame. "The Defence and Security Forces did not

intervene to maintain order on the university campus where the death occurred," it said.

It was not immediately clear if protests continued on Saturday. Further violent standoffs with security forces will add to fears of democratic retreat. Less than three weeks before the February 25 presidential vote, parliament voted to push it back to December, sealing an extension of President Macky Sall's mandate, which has raised concerns that one of the remaining democracies in coup-hit West Africa is under threat.

The vote in parliament took place after opposition lawmakers were forcibly removed from the cham-

ber as the debate was ongoing. After parliament voted, 39 lawmakers in the opposition coalition, Yewwi Askan Wi, and several opposition presidential candidates filed legal challenges against the delay with the Constitutional Court.

In an attempt to quell the anger, Sall said he had postponed the election to restore trust in the electoral process after the list of candidates was put into question.

But anger remained high, with critics denouncing the move as an "institutional coup". "We are fed with Macky Sall, he already had two terms what else does he want?" a protester told Al Jazeera. — Al Jazeera

W African nations hurry to leave regional bloc

ABUJA (AP): The coup-hit nations of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are in haste to quit West Africa's regional bloc without following its rules of exit, the body said as its ministers met to deliberate on growing division and political tension in the region.

At the ministerial meeting in the Nigerian capital of Abuja, the bloc known as ECOWAS faulted claims made by the countries' juntas that their unprecedented decision to withdraw their membership was because of the coup-related sanctions the bloc imposed on their countries instead of supporting their development and peace efforts. The three juntas announced late last month that they

were quitting ECOWAS after the coups they staged soured ties with the bloc and international partners.

It's the first time in the bloc's nearly 50 years of existence that its members have withdrawn in such a manner. Analysts say it's an unprecedented blow to the group that could threaten efforts to return democracy and help stabilize the increasingly fragile region.

The president of the ECOWAS Commission, Omar Aliou Touray, told reporters at the meeting that the countries' "hasty decision" did not follow the requirements stated by the association's protocol, including a one-year notice period before such a process could be com-

pleted.

"More importantly, the three member states have not really reflected on the implications of this decision on the citizens," Touray said. Separately, senior government officials in the junta-led countries dismissed possible talks with ECOWAS over the issue, further diminishing any hopes of dialogue to resolve the crisis. While Niger's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the country is going ahead with the withdrawal plan "without delay," Mali's foreign minister Abdoulaye Diop accused the regional body of partiality and failing to act in other countries where democracy is being violated."

pleted.

"More importantly, the three member states have not really reflected on the implications of this decision on the citizens," Touray said. Separately, senior government officials in the junta-led countries dismissed possible talks with ECOWAS over the issue, further diminishing any hopes of dialogue to resolve the crisis. While Niger's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the country is going ahead with the withdrawal plan "without delay," Mali's foreign minister Abdoulaye Diop accused the regional body of partiality and failing to act in other countries where democracy is being violated."

Demands for Canada to stop supplying weapons to Israel grow louder

MONTREAL: Human rights advocates are accusing Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government of misleading the public over weapons sales to Israel, which have come under greater scrutiny amid the deadly Israeli bombardment of Gaza. At issue is legislation that prohibits the government from exporting military equipment to foreign actors if there is a risk it can be used in human rights abuses.

But regulatory loopholes, combined with a lack of clarity over what Canada sends to Israel, have complicated efforts to end the transfers. Dozens of Canadian civil society groups this month urged Trudeau to end arms exports to Israel, arguing they violate Canadian and international law because the weapons could be used in the Gaza Strip.

But in the face of mounting pressure since Israel's war on Gaza began on October 7, Canada's foreign affairs ministry has tried to downplay the state's role in helping Israel build its arsenal. "Global Affairs Canada can confirm that Canada has not received any requests, and therefore not issued any permits, for full weapon systems for major conventional arms or light weapons to Israel for over 30 years," the department told Al Jazeera in an email.

"The permits which have been granted since October 7, 2023, are for the export of non-lethal equipment." But advocates say this misrepresents the total volume of Canada's military exports to Israel, which totalled more than \$15m (\$21.3m Canadian) in 2022, according to the government's own figures. It also shines a spotlight on the nation's longstanding lack of transparency around these transfers.

"Canadian companies have exported over [\$84m, \$114m Canadian] in military goods to Israel since 2015 when the Trudeau government was elected," said Michael Bueckert, vice president of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, an advocacy group. "And they have continued to approve arms exports since

October 7 despite the clear risk of genocide in Gaza," Bueckert told Al Jazeera. "Unable to defend its own policy, this government is misleading Canadians into thinking that we aren't exporting weapons to Israel at all. As Canadians increasingly demand that their government impose an arms embargo on Israel, politicians are trying to pretend that the arms trade doesn't exist."

While Canada may not transfer full weapons systems to Israel, the two countries enjoy "a consistent arms trade relationship", said Kelsey Gallagher, a researcher at Project Ploughshares, a peace research institute. The vast majority of Canada's military exports to Israel come in the form of parts and components. These typically fall into three categories, Gallagher explained: electronics and space equipment; military aerospace exports and components; and finally, bombs, missiles, rockets and general military explosives and components. But beyond these broad categories, which were gleaned by examining Canada's own domestic and international reports on weapons exports, Gallagher said it remains unclear "what these actual pieces of technology are."

"We don't know what companies are exporting them. We don't know exactly what their end use is," he told Al Jazeera. Global Affairs Canada did not immediately respond to Al Jazeera's question about what "non-lethal equipment" the government has approved for export to Israel since October 7. "What does this mean? No one knows because there's no definition of that and it really could be quite a number of things," said Henry Off, a Toronto-based lawyer and board member of the group Canadian Lawyers for International Human Rights (CLAHR).

Human rights lawyers and activists also suspect that Canadian military components are reaching Israel via the United States, including for installation in fighter jets such as the

F-35 aircraft. But these transfers are difficult to track because a decades-old deal between Canada and the US — 1956's Defence Production Sharing Agreement — has created "a unique and comprehensive set of loopholes that are afforded to Canadian arms transfers to the US", said Gallagher. "These exports are treated with zero transparency. There is no regulation of, or reporting of, the transfer of Canadian-made military components to the US, including those that could be re-transferred to Israel," he said.

The result, he added, is that "it is very difficult to challenge what are problematic transfers if we do not have the information with which to do so". Despite these hurdles, Canadian human rights advocates are pressuring the government to end its weapons sales to Israel, particularly in light of the Israeli military's continued assault on Gaza. Nearly 28,000 Palestinians have been killed over the past four months and rights advocates have meticulously documented the impact on the ground of Israel's indiscriminate bombing, and its vast destruction of the enclave.

The world's top court, the International Court of Justice, also determined last month that Palestinians in Gaza face a plausible risk of genocide.

Against that backdrop, eliminating weapons transfers to Israel is effectively a demand for "Canada [to] abide by its own laws", said Off, the Toronto lawyer. That's because Canada's Export and Import Permits Act obliges the foreign minister to "deny exports and brokering permit applications for military goods and technology ... if there is a substantial risk that the items would undermine peace and security". The minister should also deny exports if they "could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws" or in "serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children", the law states. — Al Jazeera

How Taiwan's elections challenge power of China's Communist Party

BANGKOK: If free and fair national elections are considered the hallmark of a democratic state, Taiwan has much to boast about. In January, the self-ruled island held its eighth presidential election concurrently with a parliamentary vote. Just 160km (100 miles) away on the other side of the narrow Taiwan Strait, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has ruled China since 1949, and though the party often claims that it governs a democratic state, there is no electoral process comparable with Taiwan's.

China's President Xi Jinping has referred to "whole-process people's democracy" to describe the Chinese political system where the "people are the masters" but the party-state apparatus runs the people's affairs on their behalf. Ken Cai*, a 35-year-old entrepreneur from Shanghai, does not subscribe to Xi's definition of democracy. "The truth is that [mainland] Chinese people have never been allowed to choose their own leaders," Ken told Al Jazeera. "That is just propaganda."

Ken's critical assessment stands in sharp contrast to an assertion often presented by the CPC that their one-party rule is considered satisfactory by Chinese people. President Xi has long said that China is following a unique development path under the guidance of its distinctive system of governance. Chinese officials have also presented criticism of Beijing's

record on human rights and democracy as being based on a lack of understanding of China and the Chinese people. That is why Taiwan's hosting of successful multiparty elections challenges Beijing's argument that liberal democracy is incompatible with Chinese culture. At the same time, Taiwan's liberal democratic system clashes with Xi's vision of a rejuvenated Chinese nation firmly under the CPC's control and a wayward Taiwan eventually unified with the Chinese mainland.

"The Taiwanese experience is a clear affront to the CPC narrative," said Chong Ja Ian, associate professor of China's foreign policy at the National University of Singapore. Taiwanese elections are a far more sensitive topic for Beijing than elections in other democracies as the democratic example being set by Taipei can be a more direct source of inspiration for people in mainland China, said Yaqiu Wang, research director for China, Hong Kong and Taiwan at the United States-based advocacy group Freedom House. "When you see that people from your own in-group have democracy and can elect their leaders, it can cause particular frustration with your own non-elected leaders," Wang said. "That makes Taiwanese elections a threat to the CPC," she added.

It was perhaps not surprising that while leaders from countries such as

Japan, the Philippines and the US congratulated Taiwan on the successful conclusion of its elections, the Chinese government did not. Relations between China and Taiwan have been in a downward spiral ever since the outgoing president, Tsai Ing-wen, was elected in 2016. The CPC views Tsai, her replacement President-elect William Lai Ching-te, and other members of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as foreign-backed separatists and has not ruled out the use of force in its future plans to unify Taiwan with China.

Chen Binhua, spokesperson for Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO), reacted to the election results by saying that Lai's 40 percent vote share and the DPP's loss of its parliamentary majority revealed that the party "cannot represent mainstream public opinion on the island", and the outcome "will not impede the inevitable trend of China's reunification". On social media in China, many reacted to Chen's comments by focusing on Beijing's own democratic credentials. "Enough, already — how can you criticise others' elections when you don't even allow elections at home," one user wrote on the Chinese social media platform Weibo.

"So a general election doesn't represent mainstream public opinion? What new sort of understanding is this?" read another comment, while a

third even attacked Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office directly: "[TAO is] the most shameless, useless, piece-of-trash government department." All three comments have since been removed by censors. Ailene Long*, a 31-year-old translator from the Chinese city of Shenzhen, told Al Jazeera that she found comments criticising Taiwan's election ridiculous when measured against the shortcomings in China's political system.

"You can't ask questions about public opinion in Taiwan when people in China have never been allowed to choose anything other than the Communist Party," Ailene said. Freedom House's Wang observed a lot of similar Chinese responses popping up across Chinese social media platforms as the Taiwanese election results came in. "But a lot of them were quickly removed — even within a couple of minutes many were gone," she told Al Jazeera. Hashtags, comments and news about the Taiwanese election were repeatedly removed from Chinese social media by the state's vast censorship network. Along with the tight censorship, there were also signs that the Chinese authorities on Taiwan's election day had tried to drown the interest on Chinese social media by inflating other hashtags.

Such actions were a way for the authorities to remove displays of public criticism, according to Wang, but

the underlying sentiment remained one of discontent with the Beijing government. Ken Cai from Shanghai thinks that a lot of the online commentary about Taiwan's election was really about airing dissatisfaction with the situation in China. "The economy is not good for a lot of people, many are struggling so they take the opportunity to release their frustration with the government," he explained.

For Ken, Taiwan's elections also demonstrate how far Beijing and Taipei have diverged. Ken recounted how his grandparents told him how they used to be afraid of Taiwan's Nationalists attacking China, and that they heard stories from Taiwan about crackdowns on Taiwanese people. After the Kuomintang (KMT), known as the Chinese Nationalists, were defeated by the Communists in the Chinese Civil War, they fled to Taiwan in 1949 where they initially held ambitions about reconquering mainland China. To cement their hold over Taiwan, the KMT imposed martial law, cracked down on civil liberties and rounded up Taiwanese opposed to their rule. "But today it seems like Taiwan has free elections, a good economy, good relations with Western countries while China has none of those things," he said.

In his view, the democratic deficit in China became particularly apparent during the COVID-19 outbreak in

Shanghai in 2022 when most of the metropolis was placed under a strict lockdown. "The lockdown was worse than COVID," he said. "A lot of people suffered, but the government didn't listen to us or care about us, and maybe that would have been different in a more democratic system." For Ailene Long in Shenzhen, the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic convinced her that China needs political reform with the recent Taiwanese elections presenting an attractive alternative.

Ailene paid close attention to the elections in Taiwan where she studied at a university for two years beginning in 2013. Now the chilly air blowing between Beijing and Taipei has made it increasingly difficult for her to arrange work trips and visit her friends in Taiwan. "So, I was hoping that the opposition party would get elected this time so that things would get easier again," she said, referring to Taiwan's largest opposition party, KMT, which has traditionally been more China-friendly than the DPP. On the election weekend, she was disappointed when the final vote tally showed a victory for the DPP's Lai, but at the same time, she respects the result. "And I think the Chinese government should learn to respect such elections as well and perhaps also be more open to having similar ones in China," she said. — Al Jazeera

The Frontier Post

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Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at Moraka's Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town, Peshawar.

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Pakistan at a new crossroad

A hung parliament emerged in the aftermath of peaceful and smooth nationwide polls, that manifest the countrywide vote bank and ranking of all civic groups and present traditional public approval of major political parties in the country. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed candidates are leading with more than 90 seats to their name, while the PML-N is trailing behind. The PPP retained the status of the country's third-largest political party, followed by the MQM-P, the JUI-F, and other ethnic or religious groups. As of today, no single party can form its sovereign government, while a coalition government will be formed by two or more parties through a mutually agreed power-sharing mechanism to rule the country for the next five-year term.

The Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf (PTI), has appeared to be the biggest political group in the aftermath of the election-2024, as the PTI-backed independent candidates brought the highest scores in the National Assembly. The PTI leadership ruled out allying with the PML-N or Pakistan Peoples Party to form the federal government. Despite receiving popular support from the masses, the PTI leadership did not acknowledge other parties' mandate accusing the ECP and state institutions of manipulating the election results against the party. The PTI leaders claim to form an independent government however, no effort or activity has been seen in that regard so far. Meanwhile, Nawaz Sharif, the PML-N Supremo and party's candidate for the premiership gave a victory speech on Friday and jubilated his party's performance in recent Elections. According to Nawaz, the PML-N respects the mandate of all the political parties and independent candidates and invites them to join it to realize the collective agenda of a prosperous Pakistan. The three-time Premier seeks to form a unity government in alliance with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islam (F), and the Mutahida Qoumi Movement (MQM-P). While referring to the country's fragile economy, Nawaz urged all the national institutions and politicians to play a positive role in steering the country out of the current crises.

Historically, the public and the country have experienced utmost political unrest and chaos in the past two years, where-in the politics of hatred, confrontation, and animosity not only spoiled the social environment in the country but brought the nation to the verge of an all-out collapse. Unfortunately, the domestic political tussle between the PTI and the PDM government seriously undermined national interest as the PTI provincial governments in Punjab and KP opposed the IMF-Pakistan deal, while PTI called on its overseas supporters to shortcut their remittances to hit hard the coalition government that conversely affected the common citizens. The country has reached the election day after prolonged political chaos and anarchy. The turnout was magnificent, the public massively participated in the electoral process and used its right to vote. The public verdict is very obvious, now it is the duty of Political leadership and civic groups, to use this opportunity in the best interest of the country without perpetuating further chaos and polarization. All civic groups must respect each other mandate and use laid-down procedures if there is any discrepancy in the election results instead of maligning institutions. As. minor errors and mistakes might occur in such a large-scale nationwide activity.

At this moment, the PTI leadership must demonstrate political maturity while not repeating the previous mistake. The PTI can form its government through partnerships and collaboration with other like-minded groups as a unitary party government is not possible at this point. Otherwise, its rival parties will turn PTI's success into failure through teamwork and cooperation. No leader or party should ignite a fresh wave of confrontation and anarchy over mere assumptions, rumors, and media speculations. Pakistan can not afford further polarization, and chaos. Courts' hearings, election drama, demonstrations, and protest sit-ins are not a solution to every issue. So, all relevant stakeholders, state institutions, and political groups must play their due role to bring peace and stability to the country.

Urban planning and nation's plight

CARETAKER Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has directed the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to have a special focus on the construction of vertical buildings for providing houses to a maximum number of people, instead of using valuable agricultural land in the allotment of plots to government employees.

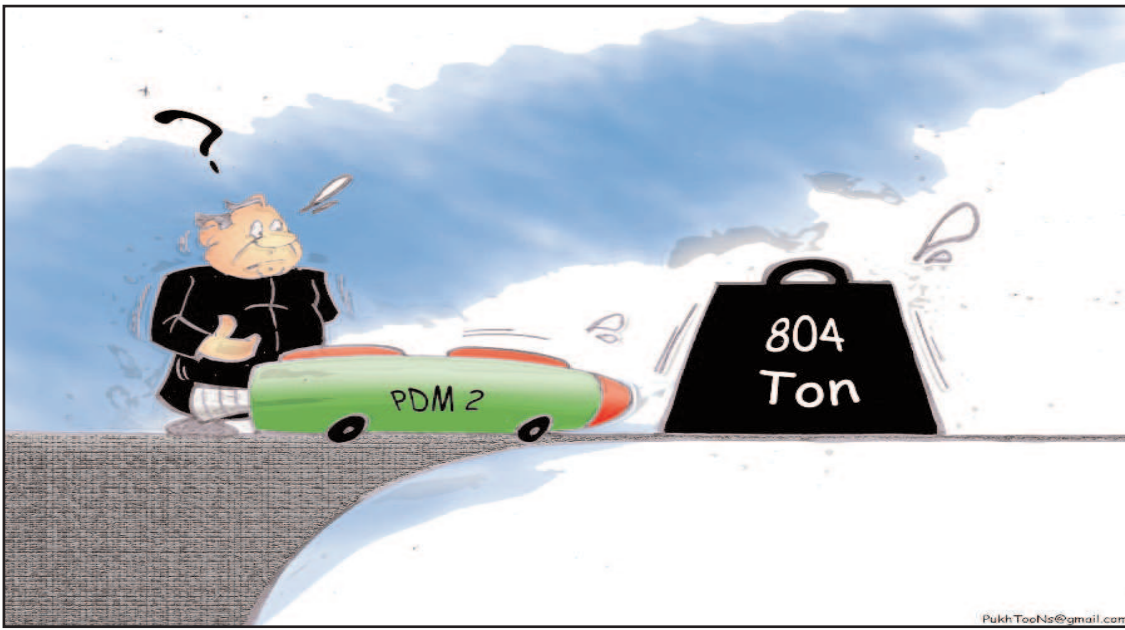
Town and Urban Planning is the essence of modern living that not only makes optimum and judicial use of available space but also enables governments, builders, architects, and administrators to provide maximum comforts and innovations to the community. Town Planning helps us in the preservation of the natural environment coupled with social amenities along with economical use of available resources including drinking water, electricity, gas, and other communication and internet facilities through pooled resources and collective arrangements within a specific neighborhood.

Unfortunately, our nation could not implement those sane ideas in our everyday life whereas our cities and towns have been shaped into wild growth and unplanned construction. Currently, all residential colonies and major cities face identical problems of sewerage, clean drinking water, ungoverned traffic, encroachment, poor construction, lack of greenery, parks, and recreational places, community services, and the rule of the law. Meanwhile, illegal and unauthorized housing societies have grown unrestricted across the country causing multiple administrative and legal issues for the governments along with turning lucrative cultivating land into grey structures and proposed commercial hubs. Ironically, these problems are multiplying every day with no sense of responsibility in the regulators, administrators, and law enforcers to stop this self-creation of disaster by the public.

Although, the Prime Minister has flouted a sane idea, however, there is no scarcity of rules and regulations, whereas multiple government institutions and regulating bodies are functional to regulate construction and control property businesses. Even then, construction giants are rapidly swallowing precious green land and building houses, and markets over it. The problem lies in the no implementation of the law, no fulfillment of responsibility, and no accountability of the corrupt, criminals, and crooks. Until and unless government officials and the public do not uphold the constitution and implement the law, no change can be brought to this country.

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Watching the Watchdogs: Israel's legacy of media deception stumbles

Rami G Khouri

IN the last two weeks, the Israeli government put on a masterclass on how to use the Western media to spread fake news and propaganda and to justify anti-Palestinian actions taken by the United States and its allies. It worked – but only in part.

On January 26, in a landmark preliminary ruling on South Africa's genocide charge against Israel, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) found it "plausible" that Israel is committing acts that violate the Genocide Convention; and demanded that it take "immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip."

Israel ignored this, and within hours, launched a deception campaign to weaken UNRWA, the UN's main humanitarian agency for Palestinian refugees, to inflict further suffering and death on nearly two million displaced, injured, sick and starving Palestinians in the Strip.

Israel passed on to Western media a "dossier" alleging that about a dozen UNRWA staff in Gaza have been working for Hamas and even participated in the group's October 7 attack on Israel. After the compliant media immediately relayed these unsubstantiated allegations to the world without bothering to do any independent verification, the US and other countries suspended vital funding to UNRWA. Meanwhile, prominent politicians started calling for it to be "shut down" as Israel has long sought in its efforts to reverse the recognition of Palestinians it displaced as "refugees", and invalidate their right of return to the lands in Israel stolen from them.

None of this was new or extraordinary. Mainstream media organisations in the West, from the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal to CNN and NBC, have long helped Israel spread its propaganda and achieve its political aims.

For the past century, these organisations and their counterparts in Europe routinely disseminated Israeli narratives without questioning their veracity, while ignoring, downplaying or misrepresenting Palestinian perspectives. Their efforts helped Israel win the war on narratives and continue its settler-colonial assault on Palestinians with near total impunity. Well, until recently – because the ugly tradition of Israel successfully laundering its lies and prop-

aganda through Western legacy media is now being exposed and challenged, and appears to be starting to dissipate in the information era dominated by new media.

Indeed, since October 7, a flurry of independent investigations into events in Israel-Palestine and Western media reports about them exposed how Israel has been using legacy media organisations in the West to deceive the world, silence Palestinians and their allies, undermine international law, obscure its systemic human rights violations and further its settler-colonial agenda. The initial Western media coverage of the terror allegations against UNRWA was perhaps the best example of this phenomenon.

Israel suddenly came up with an "explosive" dossier on alleged links between Hamas and UNRWA staff because it wanted to divert attention from the ICJ ruling on its own genocidal acts, and instead raise doubts about the crucial UN agency's credibility. Thanks in large part to the Western media's uncritical reporting, Israel's plan succeeded, at least partially, as it triggered significant funding cuts and a congressional hearing in the US on "UNRWA Exposed: Examining the Agency's Mission and Failures".

Members of Congress accused UNRWA of having "longstanding connections to terrorism and promotion of antisemitism" seemingly based on nothing other than Israeli claims circulated in the media. They also introduced a bill titled the "UNRWA Elimination Act" calling for the complete disbanding of the humanitarian agency and transfer of all its responsibilities to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). But independent reports and investigations quickly revealed major holes in the Israeli narrative that mainstream media had eagerly adopted and disseminated.

As Western journalists outside the mainstream, Global South media like Al Jazeera, activists and scholars started to ask questions about the claims against UNRWA, Israel's story started to unravel. Unable to provide any hard evidence on UNRWA staff involvement in the October 7 attacks, the intelligence agency that distributed the "dossier" said its information came from "interrogations of Palestinian prisoners". The revelation further raised suspicions among journalists and scholars who follow the conflict, as Israel is known to use torture to extract false confes-

sions from Palestinian prisoners. Realising the global community is questioning their story, Israel's intelligence agents simply changed it and started to say they obtained the information through surveillance.

As numerous countries stood up for UNRWA, and Israel faced scrutiny about its allegations against the US agency, and shared its shaky "intelligence documents" with even more journalists. An analysis of the dossier by Britain's Sky News revealed that these documents claim only six, not 12 as initially suggested, UNRWA staff entered Israel on October 7. It noted that "the Israeli intelligence documents make several claims that Sky News has not seen proof of and many of the claims, even if true, do not directly implicate UNRWA".

After also analysing the documents, Britain's Channel 4 reached a similar conclusion and said the six-page-long dossier "provides no evidence to support the explosive claim that UN staff were involved in terror attacks on Israel". The terror accusations against UNRWA were perhaps the most striking example of exposing major Western media for uncritically circulating Israeli fabrications and propaganda since October 7. But it was hardly the only one.

The Israeli claims about "terror tunnels" and "Hamas command centres" under Gaza hospitals, which were repeated by most Western media without any scrutiny or attempt at verification were also proved to be baseless by several open source investigations, in-depth reporting by local journalists on the ground and extensive video evidence. In February, Al Araby TV filmed what Israel claimed was a "Hamas tunnel" it discovered under Sheikh Hamad Hospital in northern Gaza, which proved to be nothing but a water well.

Earlier, in December, an explosive New York Times report on Hamas's weaponisation of sexual violence during the October 7 attack was criticised for its weak sources and sloppy reporting. The paper of record eventually had to pull a podcast episode it had prepared on the subject. Speaking of the Times' sexual violence report and podcast, The Intercept investigative site said, "the critics have highlighted major discrepancies in the accounts presented in the Times, subsequent public comments from the family of a major subject of the article denouncing it, and comments from a key witness

seeming to contradict a claim attributed to him in the article."

The Electronic Intifada published several articles and podcasts with more details of the New York Times' investigation of its mass rape story, mostly confirming the lack of credible evidence or eye-witnesses in the stories that Israeli institutions, including the armed forces, shared with the global media. The progressive investigative website Mondoweiss explained in a report, entitled "We deserve the truth about what happened on October 7", that "researchers cross-referencing claims against the list of terror victims maintained by Israel's own Social Security Administration have shown that several horrifying stories first responders and [Israeli military] members initially told reporters do not reflect actual people or deaths".

Britain's Guardian published an extensive report on how "CNN is facing a backlash from its own staff over editorial policies they say have led to a regurgitation of Israeli propaganda and the censoring of Palestinian perspectives in the network's coverage of the war in Gaza". The Oct7factcheck project – an exhaustive collection of claims, where they originated, who propagated them, and whether the evidence confirms or refutes them put together by the Tech for Palestine initiative – has also published the results of independent investigations into a dozen or so of the most dramatic Israeli accusations and reports about the Hamas attack, which were uncritically repeated by most of Western media, debunking most of them as untrue and lacking evidence.

They show, for example, that some of the evidence Israel submitted to the ICJ hearing – evidence republished by mainstream Western media without question – was false. "Over the last four months, claims about October 7 have influenced the public narrative," they noted. "Stories of atrocity, sometimes cobbled together from unreliable eyewitnesses, sometimes fabricated entirely, have made their way to heads of state and been used to justify Israel's military violence."

As new evidence reveals that stories that Israel offers the media about Palestinians and Hamas are fabricated, unsubstantiated, or exaggerated, international journalists tend to spend more time checking the veracity of Israel's propaganda offerings – and more time doing their job of reporting the facts and the truth.

'Greenlash' sees EU reshape its flagship sustainability plan

Andrew Hammond

THE European Green Deal has been one of the signature features of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's term of office. However, there are increasingly clear signs that this flagship policy may transition to a new phase this year, with a stronger emphasis on decarbonization and less focus on biodiversity and nature conservation.

A key driver for this potential evolution is a growing "greenlash" (backlash against green policies) across much of Europe. Recent days, for instance, have seen significant farmer protests in countries such as France, Italy, Spain, Romania, Poland, Greece, Germany, Portugal and the Netherlands.

Some of this discontent relates to local agricultural grievances in individual nations, but there is also a broad-based anger over cross-cutting economic, regulatory and green policies. Farmers across the continent highlight how costs of energy, fertilizer and transport have grown, while governments have been trying to keep a lid on rising food prices caused by the inflation spike following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Farmers' discontent is widely seen as part of a broader political backlash, driven by conservatives, against key elements of the European Green Deal. Even the moderate right-of-center European People's Party has recently partnered with the far-right European Conservatives and Reformists to oppose elements of the European Commission's green legislation. This includes the Nature Restoration Law, which will see the EU restoring at least 20 percent of the bloc's degraded areas by the end of the decade and all sites in need of restoration by 2050.

This political backlash may grow significantly in the context of the coming European Parliament elections. As opinion polls from this month show, the most likely election headline in June is a surge in support for right-wing and euroskeptical parties that are dubious of the European Green Deal.

This was highlighted by the strong support for the Freedom Party in last November's Dutch election. Indeed, the rightist European Conservatives and Reformists may become the third-biggest group in parliament. This coalition includes Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's far-right Brothers of Italy party. The far-right Identity and Democracy group, which includes Alternative for Germany, may also make sizable gains.

The biggest election losers might be the European Greens. One of the consequences might therefore be an anti-environmental majority in the parliament for the first time. This further indicates that the next stage of the European Green Deal could see a strong emphasis on decarbonization targets, with less political emphasis on sustainability issues around biodiversity and nature conservation.

Only this week, there have been new signals of this potential bifurcation in the European Green Deal, which has seen more than

50 major sustainability initiatives announced by the Von der Leyen-led European Commission since 2019. Successful as some of this agenda has been, the so-called greenlash may well mean that a different approach is coming on sustainability issues around biodiversity and nature conservation, especially if they continue to grow in controversy. The latest signal of this came on Monday, when Von der Leyen announced the withdrawal of a contentious pesticide law known as the Sustainable Use Regulation.

This had the ambitious goal of slashing the use of pesticides in half by 2030 and also envisioned the total prohibition of these products in sensitive areas, promoting the uptake of low-risk alternatives. Laudable as this might be to many, however, Von der Leyen said this week that the "proposal has become a symbol of polarization." This reversal is far from a one-off. Last week, the European Commission said that it would recommend a one-year delay to the introduction of rules that require farmers to keep a certain amount of land fallow or nonproductive.

And there was further evidence this week that the European Commission is doubling down on its decarbonization agenda, for which there is strong corporate interest. Part of the reason for this private sector attraction is the huge array of investment opportunities. The European Commission, for instance, estimates that reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 will require some 700 billion (\$754 billion) in additional investment by the bloc each year. That is a staggering sum.

As Europe seeks to become the first continent in the world to be climate neutral, its positioning at the forefront of this agenda is helping create the pathway for policy innovation, especially around the growing urgency of the energy transition. This is creating new incentives to transform the continent into a more resource-efficient and competitive economy. On Tuesday, just one day after the Sustainable Use Regulation reversal, Brussels announced 2040 climate target proposals for a massive 90 percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 1990 levels. This will require a huge deployment of renewable systems, the cessation of the use of coal and almost an end to the use of gas in the bloc's energy system. The recommended 2040 target also entails an earlier deployment of carbon capture, which will generate industrial carbon removals, complementing land-based removals sequestering carbon in biomass and soils and natural carbon removals.

At this stage, these 2040 plans are recommendations for the 27 member states rather than legally binding obligations, with a goal of stimulating multiyear dialogue to reach the targets. However, the direction of travel seems clear. The EU may therefore be at a key tipping point with its European Green Deal. Much could now depend upon the outcome of the European Parliament elections, which may see the election of an anti-environmental majority, fueling the greenlash.

West shifts blame: Accuses others for its faults

Mareb Al-ward

IT is obvious from the analysis of armed conflicts that each armed conflict has an extraterritorial impact on neighboring countries and this damage may extend to the world at large, depending on the geographical location, geopolitical interests and the actors' objectives, directly or indirectly.

An observer who rationally thinks away from bigotry and propaganda can see examples in both Ukraine's and Palestine's conflicts and how the repercussions have graded over time to include the world's main interests such as energy, supply chains and maritime navigation routes. In the midst of these and other conflicts, which are growing in many countries for domestic reasons and are fuelled by hegemonic ambitions and influence at the expense of others' interests and fears, the major powers should recognize their responsibilities to

wars, peace, security and global stability.

Unfortunately, the Western nations under the leadership of the United States do not want to play this role out of their great dominance over the international system, whose institutions, such as the United Nations and its Security Council, are eroding and eroding.

The sense of strength or desire to preserve it for the unilateral leadership of the world seems to make the United States of America act irresponsibly and even support the ignition of conflicts and the financing of the parties in the hope of inflicting a strategic defeat on its rivals like Russia, which is why it rejects realistic peace ideas from whoever came and tries to accuse their owners of supporting Russia and forgets that it does so the most.

The Ukrainian dispute could have been averted if the Washington-led West

had committed itself to its pledges to the Soviet Union not to expand militarily near its borders when it agreed to unite Germany, and US officials and academics with acclaimed insightful political analysis acknowledged that the responsibility for the conflict rested first with the West for abandoning its obligations and ignoring Russia's concerns even when it provided a vision to respond to it before the war. Everyone remembers the justification used by the West to impose its sanctions on Russia as a deterrent to the cessation of its military operations in Ukraine. However, despite the severity of the sanctions, Russia entered the war for the simple reason that it was forced to do so and could not stop without achieving its objectives.

We have seen the impact

of conflict and sanctions on the lives of the world's people at varying levels, from energy prices to grains and fertilizers to inflation rates and layoffs. Moreover, the specter of World War III has returned every time the threat or reference to the use of nuclear weapons has been made. What did the West do to achieve peace? The answer may be another question: does the West actually want peace? One indicator of seriousness would be balanced proposals, but instead, Russia's subordination and surrender were unreasonable.

Sadly, the West had tried to demonize every State or peace advocate and suggested ideas on that. No one was afraid that once America had anything to do with a crisis here or a conflict there, it relied on a parallel media and propaganda strategy of accusing its

competitors of involving them in responsibility even when they had no role, all to achieve the goal of diverting attention from its role and denigrating others by threatening and undermining global security and stability.

America continues to play the same role in Gaza through its military, financial, political and diplomatic support for Israel's occupation and acquitted it of all its crimes despite testimonies from United Nations organizations and press investigations. The call for a ceasefire has generally been considered by the West in support of what they call "terrorism". Some states have taken punitive action against peace seekers. Although such attitudes undermine stability and hinder peace, the West, as it uses double standards and interprets laws and values according to its interests.

The impact of the Gaza

War has reached Bab al-Mandeb's maritime routes. There is an impact on the route of ships, high insurance costs and commodity prices.

However, America does not want to recognize this relationship and tries to address it in a futile way without solving the fundamental problem of finding a just solution to the Palestinian question through the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian State. Nevertheless, there is a global awareness among people that the West is primarily responsible for threatening security and stability and that it still deals with others in the logic of its colonial past and confers exclusively on itself the right to self-determination, interfere in others' affairs, give them lessons and act as if it were the ideal world, which, of course, is not.

The China Daily

It is high time AU takes a firm stance against Ethiopia’s aggressions

ON January 23, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud spoke to Al Jazeera and warned that Ethiopia should not attempt to fulfil a controversial memorandum of understanding (MOU) it signed with the breakaway region of Somaliland on New Year’s Day.

Under the preliminary agreement, Somaliland would lease landlocked Ethiopia 20km (12 miles) of its coastline around the Port of Berbera for commercial and military purposes for 50 years. In return, Ethiopia would give Somaliland an undisclosed ownership stake in state-owned Ethiopian Airlines and, according to Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi, formally recognise the region’s independence from Somalia. Ethiopia has refuted Abdi’s interpretation of the nonbinding accord and instead said it only agreed to undertake an “in-depth assessment towards taking a position on the efforts of Somaliland to gain recognition”.

Nonetheless, Mohamud made it clear that he views the signing of the “illegal MOU” as a declaration of war, irrespective of the details of the obligations it puts on each party, and has urged his compatriots to “prepare for the defence of our homeland”. However, he did extend an olive branch to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in his interview with Al Jazeera, declaring that Mogadishu stands ready to enter a fair Somali-led negotiation process to enable Ethiopia to lease a Red Sea port in a lawful manner.

After a devastating civil war and the violent overthrow of then-Somali President Siad Barre’s authoritarian government, Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in May 1991 but has so far failed to achieve international recognition. In the wake of the New Year’s Day deal, a plethora of global actors – including the United Nations, European Union, United States, Arab League, African Union (AU) and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) – have reaffirmed their unequivocal support for Somalia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Some have gone a step further and rightly condemned Ethiopia’s underhanded actions.

“The memorandum constitutes

Tafi Mkaka

a blatant attack against Arab, African and international principles and a clear violation of international law,” said Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit at a ministerial-level emergency meeting on January 17. However, Moussa Faki Mahamat, the chairperson of the African Union Commission, has dropped the ball on the Somalia-Ethiopia situation.

Sounding fully averse to the truth, Africa’s top diplomat on January 4 called for “calm and mutual respect to de-escalate the simmering tension between Ethiopia and Somalia”. He acknowledged the need to respect the “unity, territorial integrity and full sovereignty of all African Union member states”, including Somalia and Ethiopia, and urged the “two brotherly countries to engage without delay in a negotiation process to settle their differences”.

Mahamat’s frankly empty statement was a major blunder. Where he should have adopted a firm position against Ethiopia’s unprovoked hostility towards Somalia, he opted to engage in pointless diplomatic parlance, effectively placating Abiy. And the Ethiopian leader clearly took note of this official accommodation from the AU.

On January 27, the ruling Prosperity Party of Ethiopia, of which Abiy is the president, passed a resolution pledging to transform the disruptive MOU into a “practical agreement”. This is classic Abiy. Since taking office in April 2018, he has come to symbolise the worst excesses of unchecked and unscrupulous leadership in the 21st century.

He has presided over a disastrous civil war in the Tigray region and a dreadful spate of human rights abuses. Amnesty International has accused Ethiopian security forces of committing serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, mass detentions, mass rapes and ethnic cleansing. During his nearly six years in power, Abiy has proved himself to be a confrontational and reckless leader who has no desire to play by the rules – at home or abroad.

Last year, he caused significant unease in the region when

he described Ethiopia’s landlocked status as an “existential crisis” and vowed he would secure access to a port on the Red Sea either through negotiations or force. We have since learned that he would also be willing to secure a port through a contentious agreement that would exacerbate instability in an already fragile neighbouring state and stoke further conflict in the restive Horn of Africa region.

Although he has walked back on the threat to use military action to obtain a port, he is clearly still determined to go to any length to secure a share of prime real estate on the Gulf of Aden. Still, Mahamat sought to frame Ethiopia’s flagrant aggression against a fellow AU member state as a routine disagreement between nations and a minor misunderstanding.

There are no differences to settle or matters to negotiate on Somalia’s part, as far as the unlawful MOU is concerned. Somaliland’s current standing is well known in Africa. Because officially it is still a region of Somalia and not a globally recognised sovereign state, Somaliland does not have the right to make any deals with other nations. Abiy knew this all too well before January 1 but decided to defy the rules and flex his country’s military prowess anyway.

In this context, Mahamat’s response is deeply underwhelming and can be perceived as a stamp of approval on Ethiopia’s blatant aggression against a fellow African nation. The AU’s top diplomat undoubtedly knows that the signing of the MOU violates various provisions of the UN Charter and the Constitutive Act of the African Union and that the AU’s Peace and Security Council is obligated to take action “where the national independence and sovereignty of a Member State is threatened by acts of aggression”.

Nonetheless, Mahamat did not point to any of this in his statement on the situation. Instead he called for both Somalia and Ethiopia to “exercise restraint, de-escalate and engage in meaningful dialogue towards finding a peaceful resolution of the matter, in the spirit of African solutions to African problems”. Let us be clear, turning a blind eye to clear and potentially cataclysmic ille-

galities by one African nation against another cannot be regarded as an “African solution”.

The AU have at its disposal an array of treaties, conventions, protocols and charters to police errant countries. It does have the capability to stand against countries that violate international laws – especially the obstinate serial offenders like Ethiopia – and it should do so regularly. In a speech to mark the opening of the 47th ordinary session of the AU Permanent Representative Council, Mahamat said the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Israel’s war on Gaza have led to “humanitarian tragedies of an unprecedented magnitude, characterised by flagrant contempt of the international law and international humanitarian law”. Then, unfortunately, he offered a strange, naive and frightening suggestion of how Africans can resolve similar conflicts within the continent.

“The only recourse that Africa has in the face of the challenges of our time is its unity and solidarity,” he said. This, according to Mahamat, a former prime minister of Chad, is how we can resolve conflicts in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is supposedly how we could regulate leaders whose nefarious ambitions rival Russian President Vladimir Putin’s and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s.

This is plain wrong and unhelpful. African unity and solidarity – or whatever these concepts represent in Mahamat’s imagination – are clearly not the panacea to unrestrained lawlessness in the Horn of Africa. An unwavering and indiscriminate dedication to implementing international law is what will safeguard peace across the continent. Hence, Abiy’s countless transgressions should serve as motivation to turn the AU into a highly responsive and efficient organisation.

Africa must change how it regulates extreme impunity and perceives conflict resolution. Let us put a stop to delusions about “sisterhood or brotherhood” and instead focus on the timely application of the rule of law. Abiy is currently testing Africa’s resolve to protect Somalia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The AU must censure Ethiopia and uphold the true spirit of international law.

Aljazeera

EU’s adaptability key to its future success

AS the EU this week marked the 32nd anniversary of its creation, it is a fitting moment to reflect on the journey of this historic alliance. The EU has undergone profound transformations, while facing numerous challenges and achieving notable successes.

In the Dutch city of Maastricht, a significant moment transpired on Feb. 7, 1992, as the Treaty on European Union was officially signed. This milestone not only established explicit regulations for the impending single currency, but also outlined frameworks for collective foreign and security policies, as well as fostering closer collaboration in justice and home affairs. The formal inception of the “European Union” was thereby marked by the enactment of this pivotal treaty.

The journey of the EU has not been without its hurdles. The union has confronted economic crises, political divisions, the unprecedented global challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and, more recently, the Russia-Ukraine war. In addition, the economic disparities among member states, as exemplified by the struggles of Southern European countries during the eurozone crisis, underscore the ongoing challenge of achieving economic convergence. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the EU has grappled with political divisions, most notably during the Brexit saga. The decision of the UK to leave the union in 2016 highlighted internal fissures and raised questions about the cohesion of the bloc. The aftermath of Brexit has necessitated a reevaluation of the EU’s structures and policies, particularly in areas such as trade, security and immigration.

In spite of these challenges, the EU has achieved significant milestones that have shaped its identity as a global player. For example, the creation of the euro currency in 1999 stands out as a symbol of economic integration and the fostering of trade and stability among nations.

The enlargement of the EU to include many more Central and Eastern European countries in the early 2000s brought about political and economic transformation, enhancing stability and cooperation in the region. Moreover, the EU has played a pivotal role in promoting peace and diplomacy. The union was

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 for its contribution to the advancement of peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe. The Schengen Area, which was established in 1995 and allows for passport-free travel among member states, exemplifies the bloc’s commitment to fostering unity and cooperation. When it comes to the economic perspective, it was believed that one of the primary advantages of EU membership would lie in the economic benefits derived from the single market. Member states have access to a vast consumer base, facilitating trade and economic growth. Indeed, the free movement of goods, services, capital and people has not only boosted economic activity but has also promoted cultural exchange and understanding among European citizens.

Another issue is related to environmental sustainability and social justice, which has led the EU to implement progressive policies. From stringent environmental regulations to the protection of workers’ rights, the EU has sought to create a harmonious and equitable society. Additionally, there has been an emphasis on research and innovation, which has propelled Europe to the forefront of technological advancements, fostering its competitiveness on the global stage.

While the EU has undoubtedly brought about positive changes, it is not immune to criticism. For example, the eurozone crisis of the early 2010s exposed the flaws in the common currency framework and revealed the challenges of maintaining economic harmony among diverse economies. Austerity measures imposed on struggling member states led to social unrest and raised questions about the effectiveness of the EU’s economic policies.

Moreover, the handling of migration issues has been a divisive topic. Disagreements among member states on burden-sharing and the lack of a unified approach have strained relations, revealing underlying tensions and disparities in the EU’s response to humanitarian challenges. In addition, the democratic deficit, characterized by a perceived lack of accountability and transparency in decision-making processes, has

been a recurrent concern. Some critics argue that unelected officials in Brussels exert too much influence, potentially undermining the democratic principles member states hold dear.

To strengthen the union, its leaders face the critical task of reinforcing it to navigate an ever-evolving geopolitical landscape. This includes implementing effective mechanisms to address economic disparities among member states. This can be achieved by focusing on promoting sustainable economic growth among all members, investing in education and innovation and fostering job creation to achieve greater convergence. And, in order to counter criticisms of a democratic deficit, EU institutions should prioritize transparency and inclusivity. Engaging with citizens through open dialogue and ensuring that decision-making processes are more accessible can help rebuild trust and strengthen the democratic foundation of the union.

More fundamentally, the EU ought to develop a unified and compassionate approach to migration, addressing both the humanitarian aspects and the concerns of member states. A comprehensive migration policy, based on solidarity and burden-sharing, can contribute to a more cohesive and cooperative union.

Finally, as the world faces challenges such as climate change, cybersecurity threats and global health crises, the EU must constantly adapt its policies to address these issues collectively. Strengthening cooperation in areas of common interest will reinforce the EU’s role as a leader in addressing global challenges. This can include embracing technological advancements and fostering innovation. Investing in research and development, promoting digitalization and ensuring that member states are equipped to navigate the digital age will also contribute to the union’s competitiveness on the global stage.

In a nutshell, the EU’s ability to adapt and overcome challenges and conflicts will determine its role in shaping the future of Europe and beyond. By addressing economic disparities, building a common approach to migration, adapting to global challenges and fostering innovation, EU leaders can chart a course for a stronger and more resilient union.

EU isn’t about to collapse. It’s worse than that

A few days after the Brexit referendum in 2016, I sat watching Martin Schulz, then president of the European Parliament, lecturing British voters about the supposedly terrible decision they had just taken. I remember reflecting: “Thank goodness we won’t have to care very much longer what people like you think.”

Well, it took a bit longer than we wanted, and even now the job is not quite 100 per cent done, but we did it. Indeed, no one here is listening any longer to what the president of the European Parliament thinks. A decade ago, probably some voters at least were vaguely aware of Schulz, even if they couldn’t tell you who exactly he was. I shouldn’t think you could now find one in a thousand who would recognise the name of the current president. (It is Roberta Metsola, from Malta, by the way. There, I told you so.)

I am not writing in praise of ignorance of foreign countries. I don’t think that’s a good thing. But equally, we don’t have the same incentive as before to watch and worry about what’s going on in the EU. For it can’t do anything to us any more, at least directly.

Of course the punishment mentality has not entirely gone away, despite all the concessions our current administration has made. The EU seems to wish to

David Frost

make it unnecessarily difficult and complex to cross its border. Brussels seems to think it is its business that we have brought in minimum service levels for strikes, a measure that clearly does not engage our trade agreement since it does not affect trade between us. We will just have to live with this.

But because we aren’t watching so closely, it’s been possible for a fantasy version of the EU to grow up, one in which it is growing faster and managing its politics better than us. But it really isn’t like that. Observe the EU of today. Economics first. The disaster zone of the euro is going to blow at some point. Germany, its beneficiary for so many years, is mired in recession. Business confidence ratings are comfortably positive in Britain, seriously negative in the Eurozone.

The OECD says that, in the real world not just in predictions, Britain has grown faster since we left the EU transition period than France, Germany, Italy and Poland. These are all slight variations on a generally anaemic performance by global standards. All of Europe needs to do better. But it’s not us that is holding the convoy back.

Politically, things look bad too. The far Right and Left are growing, and both wings of politics

have an unpleasant edge to them that is absent here in Britain. Yes, the Tory party here may have its problems, but its French equivalent has essentially disappeared, and all the political energy is on the fringes.

Its German equivalent is wiling, faced with competition from the Right-wing AfD. In Poland, Donald Tusk is proving that there is such a thing as centrist populism with his aggressive dismantling of the political structures established by his predecessors. The Spanish prime minister has made a fragile Faustian bargain with the Catalan separatists, but it won’t hold for long, and the devil will come for him sooner than he thinks. And in the Netherlands, Geert Wilders’ populist Right movement may be the most popular party, but the Left will now pull together an unpopular coalition to keep him out.

None of this looks exactly strong and stable. And it will get worse for the mainstream the longer it refuses to face up to what large cohorts of voters actually think. We can see one thing clearly from all this: real politics is still national in Europe. The problem is that the political structures aren’t. It’s all very well for columns of tractors to blockade parliaments, but only Brussels can change envi-

ronmental rules. National leaders are supplicants, national electorates can’t kick out the European Commission, and the European Parliament is part of the problem not part of the solution.

For as long as they are in the EU, Europe’s great nation states are incomplete democracies. So it’s hardly surprising there are so many political problems. People’s concerns will find an outlet somewhere – in national parliaments if they can, on the streets if they can’t. Does this mean the EU is going to collapse? I don’t believe so. The whole point of the EU is managed politics and it is supremely good at it. The powerful court and the vastly increased budget are the carrot and stick. One day the Commission turns the heat on Hungary and Viktor Orban backs off challenging Brussels. The next day it concedes to protesting farmers in the other direction and drops some environmental rules. Somehow the show keeps on the road.

One is reminded irresistibly of the Austro-Hungarian empire in its declining years, far less than the sum of its parts, preoccupied by its own baroque internal rules, and more of a hindrance than a help to its allies. It’s far from good that things are like this in Europe; but thank goodness we are, for now, out of the EU’s grasp.

The Telegraph

Mass migration is slowly bankrupting Britain

Annabel Denham

FOR a while, many fooled themselves into thinking there was no economic challenge that could not be surmounted by mass migration. Nearly a million job vacancies? The shortage occupation list can whittle that down, perfectly matching skilled supply to labour market demand. A social care staffing crisis? Import cheap foreign workers, even if it undermines the Brexit promise that only the “best and brightest” would come to Britain once we took control of our borders.

The great irony is that, while immigration was a motivating factor for many who voted to leave the EU, in the past four years we have witnessed an extraordinary liberalisation of our visa system. The latest population projections show immigration adding six million people to the British population over the 15 years from 2021 to 2036. This has coincided with a reorientation of migration flows away from Europe and towards the rest of the world. One study, for instance, found that in the year to September 2023, fewer than 4,000 visas were issued to French nationals, compared to over 150,000 for people from India.

Politicians and bureaucrats, who may feel immensely relaxed reading the latest forecasts, have over

the years convinced themselves of the unalloyed benefits of mass migration. Highly-skilled and highly-paid, they said, it would turbocharge economic growth. That conviction was aided by the Government’s failure to produce research establishing which types of migrant are fiscally positive or negative, but a close look at the data reveals the economic case for mass migration, once so compelling, is now collapsing.

Over the past five years, two million people from outside Europe arrived in Britain through net migration, a small proportion of whom came for work. The rest entered as the relatives of workers, international students, the relatives of these students, or as asylum seekers and refugees. In 2023, 144,000 health and care visas were issued, but a further 174,000 dependants came, too. These health and care visas account for two in five of all work visas. Two-thirds of these are for care workers and fall under the least skilled occupational classification. And with all jobs on the shortage occupation list, they are being brought in to work for less.

Student migration to the UK reached an all-time high in 2022, when around 484,000 study visas

were issued. This demand was driven in part by the decision to reintroduce graduate visas, opening a backdoor to the British labour market through which international students flew, some having studied for short MA courses at less selective, lower quality institutions. But this is only one side of the ledger. The myth has long been perpetuated that, because migrants are overwhelmingly of working age, they will not be a drain on public services.

Government impact assessments seem to have overlooked that migrants still need housing, roads, transport, the NHS – just look at the queue for Bristol’s newest dental surgery. They may need benefits and, eventually, a state pension. As David Miles, OBR executive member, this week warned, immigrants who stay “grow older and have children, so the favourable tax to spending balance does not persist”. Studies have shown that low-paid immigrants and their dependants will, over their lifetimes, be net recipients of public funds. We may find ourselves with a considerable long-term bill, one far higher than paying British workers to do the jobs, at a time when debt is already at around 100 per cent of the econo-

my.

The trouble is, British workers can’t – or won’t – do the jobs. Around 4,000 people a day are now applying for sickness benefit. New estimates show more than 400,000 extra people have dropped out of the labour market amid record long-term sickness, meaning a staggering 9.25 million of those aged 16-64 are not working or looking for work. This ought to cause widespread panic, but migration covers it up, while conveniently allowing politicians to duck difficult decisions. We are living in a false economy. One where GDP is growing at snail’s pace, but GDP per capita has started to click into reverse. Where British workers languish on benefits while the Government ramps up its low-skill, low-wage immigration regime.

In 2019, the Entrepreneurs Network think tank found that 49 per cent of the UK’s fastest-growing companies had at least one foreign-born founder. By 2023, the figure had dropped to 39 per cent. Britain should have a functioning visa system, one that welcomes the highly-skilled and provides refuge to those genuinely seeking asylum. What we have instead is a con. No one is fooled anymore.

Is Biden an out-to-lunch president?

SPECIAL counsel Robert Hur’s report on President Joe Biden keeping classified documents at his home from the time he was vice president in the Obama administration is notable for the details of that case but also for the devastating portrait it paints of an out-to-lunch president.

A quick tour of the report, released Thursday, highlights: “Mr. Biden’s memory was significantly limited, both ... in 2017, and in his interview with our office in 2023.” The report, which recommended that the president not be charged, portrays Biden as someone who comes across as a “well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory.” When he talked to officials in the special counsel’s office, Biden could not remember the years when he was vice president, nor did he remember, “even within several years” when his son Beau died. The latter is fairly astonishing given how close Biden was to his son and what a wrenching pain Beau’s death in 2015 at the age of 46 was for the Biden family.

White House officials and Biden’s personal attorney Bob Bauer said the report made inappropriate and incorrect statements about the president’s memory, noting the interview with prosecutors took place in the immediate aftermath of the October 7 attack on Israel and suggesting Biden’s attention was elsewhere. “The report uses highly prejudicial language to describe a commonplace occurrence among witnesses: a lack of recall of years-old events,” Bauer said in a follow-up statement to Hur. In a press conference Thursday evening, the pres-

Peter Bergen

ident slammed the special counsel for putting in the report that he did not remember the year of Beau’s death and that his “memory was significantly limited.” A seething Biden told reporters “I don’t need anyone. I don’t need anyone to remind me when he passed away.”

Yet the special counsel’s report hardly stands alone. Consider that during Thursday’s press conference, President Biden, right after defending his memory, mistakenly referred to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as the president of Mexico. And this week, speaking at a campaign event, the president confused French presidents François Mitterrand, who died in 1996, and Emmanuel Macron, the French president today. On Wednesday, talking at another campaign event, Biden mixed up the German chancellor Helmut Kohl, who died in 2017, with Angela Merkel, who is still with us.

At a White House media event on Tuesday, Biden struggled to remember the name of the terrorist group Hamas and had to be prompted with the right word by a staffer. None of this will be news to Fox News viewers who are treated to a steady diet of the president’s gaffes, memory losses and unsteady walks from place to place. And it certainly helps explain why nearly half of Democratic voters are seriously concerned about Biden’s age, according to a CNN poll released last week.

Americans have had presidents in the past who have had memory problems. Towards the end of

President Ronald Reagan’s second term, he was forgetful, and in 1994, years after he left office, he disclosed that he had Alzheimer’s. After World War I, President Woodrow Wilson was incapacitated by a stroke, which his wife kept secret while she effectively ran the White House, but that was before TV, intrusive media and nuclear weapons.

So, do Biden’s memory lapses raise questions about whether he should have his finger on the nuclear trigger? I have no idea, since it is hard to determine his medical condition based on what we are seeing on TV and reading about his memory lapses in the special counsel’s report, but it certainly seems worrisome. And yet, for the many Republicans, Democrats and independents who think Biden is a doddering old man, think back to the last State of the Union when Biden did a skillful end run around some of the more conservative Republicans attending by getting them to publicly assent not to make cuts to Social Security and Medicare.

On March 5 comes Super Tuesday, with 15 states voting for their delegates to the Republican Convention. If Trump sweeps the table on Super Tuesday, all eyes will be on Biden’s State of the Union two days later on March 7. If Biden’s performance is as shaky as it was when he talked to the special counsel, his assertion that he is the right guy to defeat Trump will likely be greeted with considerable skepticism. But if he pulls off another State of the Union as good as his last one, Biden is back in the fight.



New govt will have to announce long-term economic plan: FRIA

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Ferozepur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) has said that the newly-elected government will have to put in place a long-term financing plan to meet its very large external debt obligations for the next few years, as a timely announcement of the results, leading to a smooth formation of a new government will reduce policy and political uncertainty.

The FRIA senior vice chairman and PIAF EC member Shahbaz Aslam said that this is crucial for the country that is facing very challenging macroeconomic conditions, with fragile balance of payments, weak growth and high inflation. He said that political stability is essential for economic stability. The business community is anxious to improve the economic situation, however, the caretaker government deserves congratulations for holding free and impartial elections.

Shahbaz Aslam said that the government will need to negotiate for another International Monetary Fund program, after the

current one expires in April 2024. Until a new program is agreed to, Pakistan's ability to secure loans from other bilateral and multilateral partners will be severely constrained.

Even under a new IMF program, the new government will be tested on its willingness and ability to implement and sustain reforms, particularly revenue-raising measures, that may be politically unpopular, but required to improve macroeconomic conditions, he added. He said that Pakistan's sovereign dollar bonds extended losses to more than 5 cents, data showed on Friday, as both Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif claimed victory in neck-and-neck results from Thursday's elections in the debt-laden nation.

All of its sovereign dollar bonds slid, with the September 2025 maturity falling the most, shedding just over 5 cents to trade at 82.4 cents on the dollar.

The FRIA SVC said that possibility of a political stalemate in Pakistan leading to delays in both reforms and crucial foreign funding has sparked a sell-off in its international

bonds and fuelled analysts' fears of further economic misery for the country.

Pakistan is in an economic crisis, with dwindling foreign currency reserves that will be further strained by a \$1 billion bond payment due in two months, while its \$3 billion funding program with the International Monetary Fund expires on April 12.

Pakistan will be entering into more severe political and economic instability if no party emerges with a simple majority, he said and added that most important is credibility of elections and legitimacy of the government - any government which lacks credibility will not be able deliver on much needed reforms.

Securing funding will be a top priority, with the country having not yet fully covered its external financing requirements for 2024 and its near \$100 billion external debt burden casting a long shadow over the

A new government is expected to quickly take the necessary steps for example on governance of state-owned enterprises to complete the last remaining review of the current \$3 bil-

lion IMF Standby Arrangement - a bridge loan that helped pull the country back from the brink of default.

Doing so would secure it a final \$1.1 billion tranche before the current IMF program expires in mid-April - with the government then having to secure a follow-up program straightaway.

We expect one of the most immediate policy initiatives taken by the new government will be to negotiate a new IMF Extended Fund Facility program, which typically runs for about 3-4 years, he said.

While the country's international bonds make up just 3.4% of its total public debt - dwarfed by the near 13% it owes to China, external debt amortisation is high in percent of FX reserves, according to calculations. China is a major creditor for Pakistan and has in recent times rolled over loans to the country, as have the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Political fragmentation might make it harder to push through painful and unpopular but necessary measures such as widening the tax base, analysts said.



HYDERABAD: A carpenter busy in making part of a traditional bed (charpai) at his workplace.

Gold rates decline by Rs.1,200 to Rs.214,300

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs.1,200 and was sold at Rs.214,300 on Saturday compared to its sale at Rs. 215,500 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs.1,028 to Rs.183,728 from Rs.184,756 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went down to Rs.168,416 from Rs.169,360, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram Silver remained stagnant at Rs.2,600 and 2,229.08 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$8 to \$2,045 from \$2,053, the Association reported.

FCCI membership started

FAISALABAD (APP): A membership renewal campaign of the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) for the year 2024-25 has started which would continue till March 31.

An FCCI spokesman said here on Saturday that the members have been requested to contact the FCCI along with required documents for renewal of the membership.

He said that the working hours of the FCCI are from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. while on Saturday the timing would be from 9 a.m. to 12:30 noon. The renewal fee for corporate class is Rs.8,350 while it would be Rs.3,350 for associate class, he added.

S&P 500 ends above 5,000 points

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): The S&P 500 finished above 5,000 for the first time, extending a rally on solid earnings and economic data that have raised confidence the US economy can avert recession.

Large tech companies such as Google parent Alphabet and Amazon continued to enjoy outsized support from investors, also lifting the Nasdaq.

"This is an environment that emphasizes the importance of following the leaders," said Adam Sarhan of 50 Park Investments.

"When you look at the leading stocks in Wall Street, clearly you can see technology continues to lead time and time again."

The broad-based index finished at 5,026.61, up 0.6 percent, notching its 10th closing record of 2024.

The tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index jumped 1.3 percent to 15,990.66, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 0.1% to 38,671.69.

China's auto parts import value down 12.4% in 2023

BEIJING (APP): China's auto parts import value fell 12.4 percent year on year to 29.84 billion US dollars in 2023, data from the General Administration of Customs showed. However, auto parts import value increased by 9.1 percent in December 2023 compared with a year earlier, totaling 3.01 billion US dollars. Last year, China's new car sales exceeded 30 million units for the first time, up 12 percent year on year. Vice Minister of Commerce Sheng Qiuping said at a press conference earlier this month that car ownership had reached 340 million in China -- ranking first in the world.

SECP takes action against 1,849 violations — imposes fines Rs962 million

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has taken robust action against corporate misconduct, adjudicating a total of 1,849 cases for violations of regulatory standards in the first half of the current financial year.

With fines totaling approximately Rs 962 million, the SECP's crackdown aims to uphold compliance and transparency within the corporate sector. Notably, during the same period from July to

December, the SECP issued judgments in 11 cases concerning illegal collection of public deposits, resulting in penalties amounting to around Rs. 58 crore and disqualification of directors for five years.

Furthermore, regulatory orders were issued against listed companies, resulting in fines totaling Rs 17.5 million for improper investments. The digital landscape also faced scrutiny, with fines amounting to Rs 1.3 crore imposed on seven companies within

the sector.

The SECP's vigilance extended to insurance companies and Takaful operators, initiating adjudication proceedings in eight cases related to various infractions such as inadequate account maintenance, breaches of credit and guarantee, and insufficient security provisions.

This stringent enforcement underscores the SECP's commitment to maintaining integrity and accountability within Pakistan's financial markets.

MCB Islamic Bank posts phenomenal PTP of 10.6b

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Board of Directors of MCB Islamic Bank Ltd, in its meeting under the Chairmanship of Raza Mansha, reviewed the performance of the Bank and approved the financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2023.

The bank posted a remarkable profit before tax of PKR 10.6 billion for the year ended December 31, 2023 as compared to PKR 3.2 billion in 2022. This achievement has been a result of leveraging low-cost deposit mobilization, timely investment ventures, and adherence to prudent financing practices.

Deposits have increased to PKR 204 billion, reflecting an impressive 33% growth compared to PKR 154 billion as of December 2022. The Bank's Current

and Saving Account (CASA) mix stands at a healthy 74%, with non-remunerative Deposits comprising 31% of the total deposit mix. Notably, the Bank achieved substantial growth of PKR 13.33 billion (27%) in Current Accounts during the year highlighting customer trust and strategic focus.

Total assets reached PKR 267 billion while Net Financing closed at PKR 89.35 billion and investments rose to PKR 132.54 billion which depicts the bank's concentration on efficient capital management, superior asset quality, and a high-yielding portfolio. The bank achieved an operating income of PKR 18.92 billion.

The P&L statement of the bank showcased a robust performance with profit after tax of PKR

5,153 billion for the year, demonstrating a significant improvement compared to PKR 1,548 billion in the preceding year.

The improvement in the Bank's profitability also increased the earnings per share after tax to PKR 3,314 as opposed to PKR 0,996 for the comparative period.

MCB Islamic Bank's remarkable achievements portray its unwavering commitment to fostering growth and practicing sound financial management. The bank is steadfast in its dedication to consistently delivering substantial value to its stakeholders. We express our sincere appreciation to our esteemed customers for their ongoing support and trust, affording us the privilege of meeting their financial needs and obligations.

Risks more balanced, no urgency on rate cuts

HURST, Texas (Reuters): Dallas Federal Reserve Bank President Lorie Logan said she is in no rush to cut interest rates, and while there has been "tremendous progress" on bringing down inflation, she wants more data to confirm the progress is durable. "The risks that I'm seeing in the economy are becoming more in balance, but I do think we need to take time here to continue to look at the data," she said at the Tarrant Transportation Summit in Hurst, Texas.

She said she supported the Fed's decision last month to leave the policy rate on hold in the 5.25%-5.5% range, even as Fed Chair Jerome Powell signaled that rate cuts are likely later this year.

"I'm really not seeing

any urgency to make any additional adjustments at this time," she said, adding that the labor market is still tight and she wants to "build our confidence whether the progress that we've seen on inflation will be sustained over the medium term."

It's a refrain that many of Logan's colleagues - including fellow hawks like Richmond Fed President Thomas Barkin as well as the more dovish-leaning Atlanta Fed President Raphael Bostic - have voiced of late: that there is still more work to do on bringing down inflation, and the economy's strength means the Fed can hold rates where they are to maintain that downward pressure on prices.

Inflation is at the Fed's 2% goal as measured on a

six-month annualized basis, she noted, and even on a year-over-year basis it is below 3%.

"I think we are in a good place," she said, with a "fairly benign outlook, with inflation continuing to be sustained near our target, with healthy growth and a labor market that's loosening but still robust."

But there are risks, Logan said, including the potential for geopolitical stresses or renewed supply chain problems to stall or reverse progress on inflation.

Logan said the Fed's ongoing shrinking of its balance sheet has been "going well," though she did not offer any details or provide her views on the outlook for when the Fed may slow or end that process.

Cisco to cut thousands of jobs

NEW YORK (Reuters): Network giant Cisco (CSCO.O), opens new tab is planning to restructure its business which will include laying off thousands of employees, as it seeks to focus on high-growth areas, according to three sources familiar with the matter.

The San Jose, California-based company has a total employee count of 84,900 as of fiscal 2023, according to its website.

The company is still deciding on the total number of employees to be

affected by the layoffs, one person said. An announcement could come as early as next week, as the company prepares for its earnings call on Feb. 14.

In November 2022, Cisco announced during an earnings call a restructuring that impacted roughly 5% of its workforce which lead to \$600 million in severance and other charges.

Cisco declined to comment. The move would come at a time when tech companies, including telecommunications makers Nokia

(NOKIA.HE), opens new tab and Ericsson (ERICB.ST), opens new tab, cut thousands of jobs last year in a bid to lower costs.

Several big tech firms such as Amazon, opens new tab, Alphabet, opens new tab and Microsoft (MSFT.O), opens new tab have implemented layoffs in recent weeks. Cisco had cut its full-year revenue and profit forecasts in its previous earnings call, in a sign that demand for its networking equipment was slowing.

BRUSSELS (Reuters): EU member states and MEPs struck a preliminary deal on

Moody's cuts indebted oil firm rating

MEXICO CITY (Reuters): Ratings agency Moody's downgraded its rating for Mexico's state-owned oil firm Pemex by two notches to B3 from B1 previously, citing poorer credit quality.

Moody's, which has a negative outlook for the firm, said it assumed the company was receiving high government support, and that this support could be jeopardized by a 2024 deterioration of Mexico's fiscal conditions. Pemex is among the world's most indebted oil companies, with financial liabilities exceeding \$100 billion.

The agency said it expected a considerably higher fiscal deficit in Mexico on the back of high borrowing costs, social spending and emblematic government projects.

Moody's said it expects costs for further supporting Pemex to have increased by the time Mexico's next administration comes into power in October.

The downgrade comes the same day Mexico's government ordered the expropriation of a hydrogen plant at a Pemex refinery that had been sold to France's Air Liquide, opens new tab under the previous administration.

JSW Group to set up \$5b in EV projects

LONDON (Reuters): JSW Group will set up electric vehicles and battery manufacturing projects in the country's eastern state of Odisha at a cost of 400 billion rupees (\$4.82 billion).

The company and the state government have signed a memorandum of understanding "for the establishment of EV And EV Battery Manufacturing Project" in two cities, they said in a joint statement.

The Indian cement to energy conglomerate JSW Group had formed a joint venture in India with China's SAIC Motor (600104.SS), opens new tab in November, with a focus on green mobility and developing the electric vehicle ecosystem.

Through its phased projects in Odisha, JSW Group will take on both domestic and international players in India's EV market.

Electric models made up around 2% of India's car sales last year, with Tata Motors, opens new tab dominating the market, but the government is targeting a 30% share by 2023.

Global equities notch 3rd weekly gain; US yields up

NEW YORK/LONDON (Reuters): Global equities rose on Friday, with the S&P 500 crossing the 5,000-point milestone for the first time ever, as US inflation data raised expectations of an interest rate cut this year, while closely watched US Treasury yields rose.

The greenback reversed earlier gains, falling 0.06%.

Oil LCOc1 notched a gain for the week on worries over a broadening conflict in the Middle East after Israel rejected a ceasefire offer from Hamas.

The MSCI All Country stock index (.MIWD000000PUS), opens new tab climbed 0.4% to a third straight weekly gain.

The mood in stock markets was buoyed by Wall Street, where the S&P 500 index (.SPX), opens new tab rose above 5,000 points, helped by big gains in megacap stocks such as Nvidia (NVDA.O), opens new tab.

The chipmaker climbed to a record high after Reuters reported it was building a new business unit.

"The new closing high over 5,000 bodes well over the intermediate to longer term, with a key technical level being cleared today," Larry Tentarelli, Chief Technical Strategist with Blue Chip Daily Trend Report, in North Andover, Massachusetts.

"We believe that the combination of very strong corporate earnings, strong jobs data, strong GDP data and declining inflation are an excellent backdrop for equities going forward."

US monthly consumer

prices rose less than initially estimated in December, but underlying inflation remained a bit warm, data showed on Friday. The data revision did little to alter expectations for central bank rate changes.

US inflation data for January is coming next week.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average (.DJI), opens new tab fell 54.64 points, or 0.14%, to 38,671.69, the S&P 500 (.SPX), opens new tab gained 28.70 points, or 0.57%, to 5,026.61 and the Nasdaq Composite (.IXIC), opens new tab gained 196.95 points, or 1.25%, to 15,990.66.

The yield on benchmark US 10-year notes rose 0.7 basis points to 4.177%, from 4.17% late on Thursday.

The 2-year note yield, which typically moves in step with interest rate expectations, rose 3.2 basis points to 4.4883%, from 4.456% late on Thursday.

Gold prices came under pressure from the stronger yields, with spot gold down 0.44% at \$2,024.16 an ounce. US gold futures settled 0.4% lower at \$2038.7.

Brent crude futures settled up 0.7% at \$82.19 a barrel, and US crude futures finished up 0.8% at \$76.84.

European shares ended slightly lower under pressure from rising yields and sliding L'Oreal shares.

The pan-European STOXX 600 index (.STOXX), opens new tab closed 0.1% lower, but still eked out a weekly advance of 0.2%.

L'Oreal (OREP.PA),



In brief

Leicester cruise into quarter-finals

LONDON (Agencies): Leicester City put six goals past Birmingham City to book their place in the Women's FA Cup quarter-finals. Birmingham were in front after just two minutes at Pirelli Stadium when Dearna Goodwin put through her own net but Leicester mounted a swift comeback, courtesy of goals from Janice Cayman and Shannon O'Brien, to lead after 23 minutes. Libby Smith levelled for the visitors shortly before half-time but Leicester restored their advantage when O'Brien met the ball at the back post to slot in her second of the afternoon. Leicester's class told in the second period as the Women's Super League (WSL) side scored three unanswered goals through Saori Takarada, Deanne Rose and Aileen Whelan. The Foxes have scored 10 goals across their two FA Cup fixtures this season and are through to the last eight of the competition for the first time since 2020-21.

Ronnie pulls out of Welsh Open

BERLIN (Agencies): Ronnie O'Sullivan has withdrawn from next week's Welsh Open to protect his mental health. The world number one was due to compete at Llandudno but says he will be unable to do so because of "stage fright". O'Sullivan, 48, withdrew from the German Masters in Berlin last week to prioritise his "health and wellbeing". In a social media post he said: "It's hard to explain but for years I've suffered from stage fright brought on by anxiety." The seven-time world champion added: "It's not something I can predict or control but I try to manage it as best as I can. I'm sorry to everyone who's bought tickets but I just can't get my cue out when I feel like this and I think this is what's best for me right now." O'Sullivan, who has already won the Masters and UK Championship this season, has been an outspoken critic of the snooker schedule. The four-time Welsh Open winner said he still wants to be involved in the tournament and will work as a TV pundit at Venue Cymru, Scotland's Liam Graham will instead face Welshman Dominic Dale in the first round when the tournament begins on Monday, 12 February.

U19 CWC 2024 final on Sunday

BENONI (Agencies): India and Australia are set to meet in the show-piece finale of the ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup 2024, a repeat of their Finals in last year's ICC World Test Championship and ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023. Both sides, undefeated in the tournament thus far, will have an opportunity to add yet another silverware to their cabinet. On the other hand, India have won the U19 Men's Cricket World Cup on five previous occasions, and have a record sixth title on the line. If they manage to win, this will be their first successful title defence. The teams have met in the U19 Men's Cricket World Cup final twice before with India emerging victorious on both occasions (2012 and 2018).

Iran asks FIFA to ban Israel over war in Gaza

TEHRAN (Agencies): Iran's football federation said Saturday it has asked world football's governing body, FIFA, to suspend Israel's football federation over the country's war in Gaza.

In an announcement posted on the Iranian football federation's website, Iran asked FIFA to "completely suspend" the Israeli federation "from all activities related to football".

The request also asks for "immediate and serious measures" by FIFA and its member associations "to prevent the continuation" of the Israeli "crimes and provide food, drinking water, medicinal and medical supplies to innocent people and civilians".

The war in Gaza began on October 7 with an unprecedented attack by

Hamas militants against Israel. It resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.

In response, Israel vowed to eradicate Hamas. It launched air strikes and a ground offensive that have killed at least 27,947 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip.

Iran has hailed Hamas's October 7 attack as a "success" but has denied any direct involvement.

The Islamic republic does not recognise Israel, its sworn enemy, and prohibits all contact between Iranian and Israeli athletes.

The Iranian authorities last August gave a lifetime ban to Mostafa Rajaei, a

weightlifter, after he shook hands with an Israeli competitor at an event in Poland, state media reported at the time.

The Iranian weightlifting federation also dismissed the head of the delegation for the competition, Hamid Salehinia.

In 2021, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urged athletes "not to shake hands with a representative of the (Israeli) criminal regime to obtain a medal".

A group of Middle Eastern football associations, including Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, have also "asked world football chiefs to ban Israel over the war on Hamas in Gaza," Sky News reported on Thursday.

Beijing cancels Argentina friendly as Messi fallout continues

BEIJING (Agencies): Argentina's friendly against Ivory Coast, scheduled to be held in Beijing in March, has been canceled, the Chinese city's football association said on Saturday, following a backlash against Lionel Messi's failure to play in a match in Hong Kong.

Beijing's announcement came a day after Hangzhou's sports authorities also canceled a friendly between Argentina and Nigeria after Messi's failure to play for Inter Miami in Hong Kong on Sunday caused widespread anger among fans.

"Beijing does not plan, for the moment, to organize the match in which Lionel Messi was to par-



ticipate," the Beijing Football Association said in a statement to local media.

Messi, who did not play in the friendly in Hong Kong due to a reported injury, appeared as a second-half substitute on Wednesday in Inter

Miami's friendly against Vissel Kobe in Tokyo.

Organizers of the Hong Kong friendly, Tatler Asia, announced a 50 percent refund on tickets, which cost up to nearly HK\$ 5000 (\$639), following criticism from the Hong Kong government.

Gut-Behrami wins GS to overtake Shiffrin

SOLDEU (AFP): In-form Swiss skier Lara Gut-Behrami ousted injured Mikaela Shiffrin at the top of the overall title standings with victory in the World Cup giant slalom in Soldeu on Saturday.

Gut-Behrami finished only ninth behind Italian Marta Bassino in the first leg, but produced a fast second to claim victory in a combined time of 1min 59.27sec.

"My first run was not what I wanted, I felt a little bit too round and maybe too passive on my skis," admitted Gut-Behrami.

"The second run I just tried to attack, to move forward and try to be fast on every metre on the slope. I had a big mistake on the finish, so I'm really happy that in the end it worked out."

The result saw the Swiss racer surge to 1,214 points in the overall standings, five ahead of Shiffrin, who suffered a knee injury in a downhill at Cortina last month and has yet to fix a



return date.

"The globes, they give them in March and not before," Gut-Behrami cautioned.

"And I think also this season we saw that to win something it's not just skiing well, it's not just your technique, it's about being healthy and staying safe."

"My first priority is to come to the end of the season, and sometimes we forget that. It's not always talking about points or wins, it's more about skiing great and staying safe."

Depending on when Shiffrin might make her comeback, Gut-Behrami is well poised for a second overall title, having previ-

ously triumphed in 2016. She has also finished second on three occasions, and third once.

The victory was the 32-year-old Swiss skier's 43rd on the circuit, on which the Olympic super-G gold medalist has been an ever-present for 16 seasons.

New Zealander Alice Robinson finished second at the Andorran ski resort, just one-hundredth of a second behind Gut-Behrami.

American AJ Hurt rounded out the podium at 0.15sec.

"It's always a bit bitter-sweet coming second with one hundredth (behind)," said Robinson.

"For sure I'm a little bit disappointed that I couldn't get the win but a podium is still a really good result."

It was a fourth giant slalom podium for the 22-year-old Robinson, who won three World Cup races as a teenager.

"I've gotten to a point where I'm feeling a lot more consistent than I've ever felt," she said.

Haaland double sinks Everton as Man City go top



MANCHESTER (AFP): Erling Haaland scored for the first time since November as the Manchester City strikers' double fired the champions to the top of the Premier League with a gritty 2-0 win against Everton on Saturday.

Pep Guardiola's side were well below their best as they laboured to break down stubborn Everton at a nervous Etihad Stadium.

But Haaland struck twice late in the second half to get back on the score-sheet for the first time since returning from an absence

of nearly two months due to a foot injury.

They were the Norway star's first Premier League goals since he netted against Liverpool on November 25 and his first in five games in all competitions since he scored against Leipzig in the



BENONI: Uday Saharan and Hugh Weibgen pose with the Under-19 World Cup trophy.

Kohli to miss rest of England Test series

NEW DELHI (Agencies): India batter Virat Kohli will miss the rest of the Test series against England for personal reasons.

The 35-year-old ex-captain previously withdrew from the first two Tests.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said on Saturday that Kohli also will be absent from the remaining three Tests.

"Virat Kohli will remain unavailable for selection for the remainder of the series due to personal reasons," the BCCI announced in a statement.

"The board fully respects and supports Mr Kohli's decision."

When missing the first two Tests, the board had said "certain personal situations demand his presence and undivided attention".

Kohli, who has played 113 Tests for India, is fourth on their list of all-time leading run-scorers with 8,848. The series is level at 1-1 with three games to play, starting with the third Test in Rajkot on Thursday, 15 February.

Kohli, who led the side in 68 Tests between 2014 and 2022, had not missed a Test for India for more than two years, last doing so when he was ruled out of a match against South Africa in Johannesburg with a back spasm in January 2022. India won the second Test by 106 runs in Visakhapatnam on Monday to level the series.

Batter Shreyas Iyer, who played in the first two Tests, also did not feature in the 17-man squad named for the remainder of the series. Spinner Ravindra Jadeja and batter KL Rahul, who both played in the first Test, have returned to the squad but will only play "subject to fitness clearance from the BCCI medical team", the board added.

There is also a call-up for uncapped seamer Akash Deep.

India squad for remaining Tests: Rohit Sharma (capt), Jasprit Bumrah,

Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, KL Rahul (wk), Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel (wk), KS Bharat (wk), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Akash Deep.

Dahani's seven-wicket haul puts SNGPL in command of the final

RAWALPINDI (APP): Shah Nawaz Dahani takes seven-wicket haul for SNGPL as WAPDA were bundled out for a paltry 140 in 34.4 overs on the second day of the final of the President's Trophy Grade-1 here at the Pindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi on Saturday.

At stumps, SNGPL were 121 for five in 36 overs, leading by 460 runs.

Resuming their first innings with a deficit of 474 runs, WAPDA batters had no clue to face fiery spell from right-arm fast bowler

Shahnawaz Dahani. Dahani, who has represented Pakistan in 13 white-ball matches, claimed seven wickets for 42 runs in 12.4 overs. The 25-year-old fast bowler was supported by another

pace bowler Mir Hamza, who bagged two wickets for 30 runs.

For WAPDA, captain Iftikhar Ahmed was the only notable run-getter, as the right-handed batter top-scored for his side with a 59-ball 52, smashing four fours.

Test batter Umar Akmal was other contributor with the bat, scoring run-a-ball 28, laced with six boundaries.

WAPDA were bowled out for 140 in 34.4 overs, handing SNGPL a lead of 339.

SNGPL, in return, didn't enforce a follow-on and managed to score 121 for five in 36 overs, when stumps were drawn. Test opening batter Abid Ali, top-scored for SNGPL in the second innings with 38

off 59 balls, which included six fours. The first innings centurion Saud Shakeel returned undefeated on 18 off 47 balls.

For WAPDA, left-arm spinner Asif Afridi, the second highest wicket-taker in the tournament, bagged three wickets for 43 from 16 overs.

Scores in brief:

SNGPL 479-7, 80 overs (Shah Nawaz Farhan 161, Saud Shakeel 123 not out, Kamran Ghulam 101, Mubasir Khan 44; Tahir Hussain 2-78, Iftikhar Ahmed 2-105) and 121-5, 36 overs (Abid Ali 38, Kamran Ghulam 28; Asif Afridi 3-43)

WAPDA 140 all out, 34.4 overs (Iftikhar Ahmed 52, Umar Akmal 28; Shahnawaz Dahani 7-42, Mir Hamza 2-30).

Aisam wins Pakistan Tennis Fed election for President



KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Tennis ace Aisamul Haq Qureshi became the first active player to hold the President's office as he sets eyes on reviving the sport in Pakistan. He is now the elected chief of the Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF), replacing outgoing-president politician Salim Saifullah.

Aisam's tenure will be for four years till 2028. The election of the federation took place on February 10, eight out of 15 units voted for Aisam making him the winner of the poll while retired Major General Asghar Nawaz received seven votes at the PTF SDA Tennis Complex in Islamabad.

On his victory he expressed a gamut of emotions. "I'm happy, excited, humbled," Aisam told The Express Tribune after the win in the election. "And more importantly I am fired up to serve Pakistan tennis and revive it."

He has put Pakistani tennis on the map, he has been the only Pakistani player to represent the country at all four grand slams regularly. His name is synonymous with Pakistan when it comes to tennis in the international community, sports and otherwise.

"I have always put Pakistan first, and this is just going to be on a grander note,

if given a chance," Aisam had told The media this week. "Allah has given me respect and my name is recognised so I will be using my platform to boost Pakistan tennis. I am here to help the players, I am here for others."

Retired Lt. Col Zia Uddin Tufail got eight votes compared to Major Suleman Junaid's seven as he will take on the duties of the PTF General Secretary.

Arif Qureshi received nine votes to Umar Farooq's six for the post of treasurer.

It was just last week that Aisam played Davis Cup World Group-I play-off against India along with Aqeel Khan, M Shoaib and Muzammil Murtaza, Barkatullah and Captain Muhammad Abid.

He had a flying start at the first singles rubber however, he picked up an injury that also caused him to not only lose the match but also miss the doubles rubber.

Pakistan lost 4-0 but after a close competition in each rubber. Aisam had told media earlier that he would make sure that everyone moved together should he become the president.

Champions League on November 28.

City are back on top of the table for the first time since November 24, but Liverpool, who are one point behind in second place, will return to the summit if they beat lowly Burnley at Anfield later on Saturday.

Guardiola's men have won their last 10 games in all competitions, but the Spaniard might be a little concerned with the labourious way they took to the task against struggling Everton.

City are unbeaten in their last 22 league games at the Etihad, but third bottom Everton didn't make it easy for them.

Everton's haven't beaten City since 2017 but Guardiola had painful memories of a 1-1 draw against the Merseysiders last season and had urged his players not to let their

guard down.

City monopolised over 80 percent of the possession in the first half an hour, they found it impossible to prise open Everton's massed defence.

Julian Alvarez and Phil Foden had shots blocked as Everton threw themselves into tackles with abandon.

Haaland stretched to head over from Jeremy Doku's cross when Foden was lurking in a more dangerous position behind the striker.

Haaland to the rescue Guardiola cut an anxious figure on the touchline, constantly gesticulating towards his players in a bid to get them to pass quicker and with more precision.

Everton keeper Jordan Pickford raced off his line to beat Matheus Nunes to the ball right on the edge of the area.

There was a warning for

City when Jack Harrison blasted over from Ashley Young's cross.

When the ball dropped kindly for Manuel Akanji inside the Everton area, the City defender looked certain to break the deadlock, but James Tarkowski made a last-ditch block as VAR ignored the hosts' appeals for handball.

It was the first time City had failed to have a shot on target in the first half of a home league game since August 2022.

As City's angst mounted, Rodri's woeful long-range strike sailed into the stands to the sound of frustrated groans from home fans.

Guardiola had seen enough of City's struggles and sent on Kevin De Bruyne and Kyle Walker early in the second half.

City belatedly found some rhythm and their longest wait for a shot on

target in a league game since September 2021 finally ended in the 71st minute.

Everton made a hash of clearing a corner and the ball broke for Haaland, whose fierce strike deflected in off Pickford's leg to spark wild celebrations from the Norwegian and his relieved team-mates.

Guardiola this week said you don't need a Harvard education to understand the threat posed by Haaland and De Bruyne.

Everton clearly hadn't studied hard enough on that subject as De Bruyne's precise pass sent Haaland motoring towards goal.

Over-powering Jarrad Branthwaite, Haaland left the Everton defender flailing on the turf as he sprinted clear to slot a cool finish past Pickford as he marked his 50th Premier League start in style.



In brief

Pakistan urges Int'l community to harness new technologies

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan has urged the international community to harness new technologies like artificial intelligence for the betterment of the people. Speaking at the Annual UNGA-IPU Parliamentary Hearing in New York, Pakistani representative Senator Mohsin Aziz said that without regulation, these new technologies would become lethal. He also emphasized the necessity of treaties and conventions to address the potential threats posed by these technologies. Senator Aziz underlined the need for awareness of weaponization of information, communications, and technologies and cyberspace to ensure peace and security.

Salah Ud Din wins PP-286 seat

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N), Salah Ud Din Khan has won the Punjab Assembly election from PP-286, Dera Ghazi Khan-I by securing 37,513 votes. According to the unofficial result issued by the Returning Officer/ECP, his runner-up was Farhat Abbas Baloch, an independent candidate who bagged 35,699 votes. Voters turn-out remained 50.53 per cent.

DC leads crackdown on alms seekers

ISLAMABAD (APP): On the directions of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon, a relentless crackdown on beggars has been initiated across the capital city. According to ICT Spokesman, Dr. Abdullah Tabassum, the Assistant Commissioner City, Anil Saeed, spearheaded an operation on Saturday resulting in the apprehension of ten beggars from various localities. These individuals were promptly handed over to Kohsar police station for further legal action. He said that in a concerted effort to address the issue comprehensively, professional beggars were targeted in order to make Federal capital a liveable place for the citizens. Meanwhile, the underage beggars were also compassionately handed over to the Edhi Center for appropriate care and support, he added. It is pertinent to mention here that these operations are conducted on daily basis under the vigilant oversight of Assistant Commissioners, signaling a sustained commitment to curb begging activities within their jurisdictions.

Four suspects held

ISLAMABAD (APP): Police claimed to have arrested four suspects involved in aerial firing while celebrating jubilation for elections and recovered illegal weapons from their possession. According to the spokesperson for the police, a video of aerial firing went viral a day before while celebrating the victory of the elections in the limits of the Shah Shams police station area. CPO Sadiq Ali took notice of the incident and ordered the immediate arrest of the accused. A special team consisting of SHO Shah Shams police station Muhammad Imran Gill and other police officials was formed and the police team took timely action and arrested the four suspects involved in the incident. The accused included Ali Asghar, Rana Junaid, Sheikh Waqar and Hassam Saeed. The police have also recovered two SMG rifles, 30-bore pistols and bullets from them. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused in Shah Shams police station for exhibiting weapons and aerial firing by violating Section 144. Further police action is being taken against the accused.



ISLAMABAD: A large number of people in queue to get free food at G-11. —APP Photo

Govt reaffirms commitment to end polio in country

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federal Government has reaffirmed its commitment to ending polio and called for continued support and stronger global partnerships reach this key milestone. Addressing virtually a special session on polio eradication on the side-

lines of 2024's UNICEF Executive Board, the Federal Secretary for Health, Iftikhar Ali Shallwani said that vaccination rate has increased in Pakistan over the time. He added that Pakistan's target remains zero cases and

the country is much closer to this goal than ever before.

The Health Secretary also highlighted the strong synergy and partnership between the country's EPI and Polio Eradication Programme to reach children with life-saving vaccines.

Amjad Islam Amjad remembered on 1st death anniversary

ISLAMABAD (APP): The first death anniversary of renowned poet, playwright, and literary icon Amjad Islam Amjad was observed here on Saturday. Amjad was a renowned poet, screenwriter, and lyricist who inspired generations through his literary work. He was born on August 4, 1944, in Lahore. He made valuable contributions in the fields of drama and poetry. Amjad was renowned for his contributions to poetry, drama, and literature, inspiring generations through his literary prowess.

He left an indelible mark on the literary landscape with his extensive work, which includes over 40 books authored throughout his illustrious career. His contributions were recognized with prestigious awards such as the Pride of Performance and Sitara-e-Imtiaz, honoring his exceptional literary achievements. Amjad's impact extended beyond borders, with his work transcending cultural boundaries. Notably, he penned the lyrics for the famous Bollywood song "Mann Ki Lagan" in 2003, marking the debut of Rahat Fateh Ali Khan in the Indian music industry.

His legacy lives on through timeless television series like "Waris," "Dehleez," "Samandar," "Waqt," "Fishaar," "Din," "Raft," "Eendhen," and "Inkaar," which continue to captivate audiences.

on Sunday (February 11).

The posters displayed by various Hurriyat organizations in Srinagar and other areas of the occupied territory said that these great sons of the soil sacrificed their lives for the better future of the Kashmiri people. They also asked the people to hold prayer meetings for the Kashmiri martyrs.

The posters deplored that India was violating international law in IIOJ&K to suppress the ongoing freedom movement.

They reiterated the Kashmiris' resolve to continue their freedom struggle and called upon the international community to play a role in the settlement of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions.

Complete shutdown to be observed in IIOJK tomorrow

ISLAMABAD (APP): Complete shutdown will be observed tomorrow (February 11) in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K) to mark the 40th martyrdom anniversary of prominent Kashmiri leader, Muhammad Maqbool Butt.

According to Kashmir Media Service, "Call for the shutdown has been given by the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front and other pro-freedom organizations."

India had hanged Muhammad Maqbool Butt in New Delhi's Tihar Jail on February 11, 1984 for his leading role in the Kashmiris' ongoing freedom movement and buried him in the premises of the prison. Indian authorities

had not returned the mortal remains of the martyred leader to his family for proper burial despite consistent demand by the people of the occupied territory.

The APHC and other Hurriyat leaders and organizations paying rich tributes to Muhammad Maqbool Butt maintained, "Martyrs are the real assets of the Kashmiris' freedom struggle against Indian yoke, the sacrifices of Kashmiri martyrs will not be allowed to go waste and their mission will be accomplished at all costs."

On the other hand, posters with pictures of Muhammad Maqbool Butt and Muhammad Afzal Guru appeared in different areas of occupied Kashmir appealing to the people to observe a complete strike

Indonesian Embassy facilitates nationals at early voting event

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Committee for the Indonesian General Elections with the support of the Indonesian Embassy in the federal capital conducted an advance polling event on Saturday at the premises of the Embassy.

This early voting was held for the upcoming general elections in Indonesia scheduled to be held on 14 February 2024, said a news release.

The event provided an opportunity for the Indonesian nationals in Pakistan to participate in the electoral process as well as fostered a sense of community and camaraderie among the Indonesians and their families.

The elections in democratic Indonesia will determine not only the new President and Vice President but also parliamentary and local representatives.

On this occasion, the Embassy made comprehensive arrangements to facilitate more than 800 citizens along with their

families from all over Pakistan to participate in the voting process including Islamabad Capital Territory.

While another approximately 200 Indonesian nationals will exercise their democratic right to vote in the Indonesian Consulate General in Karachi on Sunday.

In addition to serving as a platform for exercising political rights, the event transcended its primary purpose and evolved into a vibrant social gathering.

Attendees, both old acquaintances and new friends, seized the opportunity to reconnect, share stories, and celebrate the joyous occasion together.

The atmosphere was filled with laughter, music, and the taste of Indonesian cuisine as participants enjoyed the bazaar featuring food stalls, a musical event, health facilities, and a children's play area.

"This event is designed not only as a political event but also as a moment of sharing happiness for Indonesians despite politi-

cal differences," said Arrozi Munib, Head of the Indonesian General Elections Committee in Islamabad.

"The ballot process was done smoothly with no significant hurdles on the ground," added Zulfikar Alamsyah, Head of General Elections Supervisory Committee.

Moreover, the Embassy extended invitations to Pakistani think tanks and journalists, highlighting the significance of the electoral process in fostering strong democratic ties between Indonesia and Pakistan and further amplifying the message of cross-border cooperation and mutual respect.

One of the distinctive features of the event was the marking of voters' fingers with special purple ink, symbolizing their active participation in the electoral process.

This visible demonstration of civic duty underscored the commitment of voters to shaping the future of their homeland through democratic means.



ISLAMABAD: Workers paint the grills of a pedestrian bridge on Srinagar Highway. —APP Photo

ICCI hope, new government to put economy on sustainable growth trajectory

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) on Saturday hoped that the new government to put the economy on a sustainable growth trajectory.

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) in a statement hoped that the newly elected government would put the economy on the path of a sustainable growth trajectory by taking priority measures to address the key issues of the business community and maximizing ease of doing business in the country, said a press release issued here.

He said that Pakistan has plenty of natural resources and a great potential to emerge as a strong economy.

He stressed that the newly elected government should focus on good governance and regulatory reforms to unlock the true economic potential of the country and make it a hub

of business and investment activities.

Ahsan Bakhtawari said that the rising inflation, high energy prices, unaffordable bank markup, policy inconsistency, complicated regulatory regime, import restrictions, etc. are some of the major factors that are hindering the growth of business activities and emphasized that the newly elected government should engage the private sector in consultation to address these issues on priority basis and facilitate the better growth of trade and industrial activities in the country.

ICCI President said that the newly elected government should focus on enhancing regional trade to promote exports and investment opportunities.

He said that the new government should encourage export diversification and cooperate with the private sector in producing value-added goods to boost exports.

He said that the new government should facilitate the private sector in embracing

digital transformation that would help foster innovations and create new jobs for youth. He reiterated that ICCI would extend all possible cooperation to the new government in endeavors targeted to make Pakistan a hub of business and economic activities.

Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI said that high energy costs in Pakistan have made the industry and exports uncompetitive and emphasized that the newly elected government should focus on renewable energy to reduce high production costs and make exports competitive in the international market.

Engr. Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI said that streamlining the regulations and ensuring policy consistency should be the key focus of the newly elected government to attract local and foreign investment and promote business activities in the country.

Experts say independent candidates may face legal, constitutional challenges despite win

ISLAMABAD (APP): The independent candidates backed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf are likely to face legal and constitutional challenges to form the government despite winning seats in the general elections, experts have said.

Advocate Syed Noman Bukhari, senior legal and constitutional expert told APP on Saturday that under the law, the independent candidates after winning elections were required to join a political party within a specified period and form government.

In the 2018 election, he said,

several independent candidates of the KP Assembly joined the Balochistan Awami Party and joined the coalition government of PTI.

Noman Bukhari said that joining a political party by independent candidates was a legal requirement to obtain perks and privileges besides women-reserved seats.

Meanwhile, PTI leader Taimur Salim Jhagra told reporters here that consultation on all issues including legal and constitutional obstacles had been started and all decisions would be taken with con-

sultation by the political leadership.

PTI-backed candidates have obtained a maximum number of seats from Peshawar, Nowshera, Abbottabad, Swat, Charsadda, Swabi, Chitral, Bannu, Mohmand, Khyber and Mardan.

In Peshawar, PTI-backed independent candidates won four seats out of five of the National Assembly and six out of 13 Provincial Assembly seats.

Political stalwarts that lost the election 2024 include PTI Parliamentarians Chairman

Pervez Khattak on Nowshera-I, KP PMLN Information Secretary Wali Khan, former Environment Minister Wajid Ali Khan in Swat, JIP Central Ameer Maulana Sirajul Haq.

Professor Dr A.H. Hilali, Chairman Political Science Department at the University of Peshawar told APP that the participation of large numbers of voters in the 2024 election reflected the people's unshakable trust in the electoral process.

He said the 2024 election results signified the diverse

polity and pluralism in the country that would be well-represented by a unified government of all democratic forces imbued with a national purpose to take the country forward on the road to progress and development.

He said elections were not a zero-sum competition of winning and losing, but an exercise to determine the mandate of the people.

He said political leadership and their workers should rise above self-interests and synergise efforts in governing and serving the people which is

perhaps the only way to make democracy functional and purposeful.

Professor Hilali said that young voters have played a significant role in deciding the fate of the contesting candidates during the 2024 election.

He said that contest of 17,816 independent and party-affiliated candidates for 265 National Assembly, 296 Punjab Assembly, 130 Sindh Assembly, 113 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and 51 Balochistan seats — a total of 85 demonstrated their commitment to serve their countrymen.

Decker reiterates help for UN

KABUL (Ariana News): US Chargé d’Affaires for Afghanistan Karen Decker has met with UNAMA Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Indrika Ratwatte. Decker said on X that during the meeting she emphasized strong support for UN’s work in Afghanistan. “US is the largest humanitarian donor in Afghanistan, providing lifesaving aid to the Afghan people,” she added. This comes as the UN has repeatedly warned that Afghanistan is facing humanitarian crisis, funding is drying up.

The Frontier Post

Rajjab 30, 1445 — Sunday, February 11, 2024

100 houses provided to victims

KABUL (BNA): The Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) has handed over the keys to 100 houses to families affected by earthquake in Khost province. As per a statement from the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS)’ Office, Mawlawi Matiullah Khalis, the President of the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS), personally distributed the houses to the affected families in the Spera district of the province.

Japan announces funding for border management

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Development Program in Tajikistan has announced that the Japanese government, through its International Cooperation Agency (JICA), will finance the “Border Management” project between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. According to Central Asia’s Times newspaper on Friday, February 9th, this project was launched in early 2015 and will continue until 2025. Reports indicate that preventing drug trafficking from Afghanistan to

Tajikistan and facilitating cross-border trade are among the objectives of this project. It is worth mentioning that since the start of this project, both sides have established a new border inspection post in “Langar” and equipped the old inspection posts in “Khamroghi and Shogun.” Earlier, in 2018, Japan allocated around \$4.6 million to improve infrastructure at the border with Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Tajikistan’s Drug Control Agency claims that there is no sign of a decrease in drug traf-

ficking from Afghanistan to Tajikistan in the past two years, and trafficking of various drugs from heroin and opium to methamphetamines continues unabated. Despite the ongoing efforts and investments in border management projects, the persistence of drug trafficking remains a significant challenge in the region. The collaboration between Japan and Tajikistan underscores the importance of international cooperation in addressing cross-border challenges such as drug trafficking and trade facilitation.

OIC’s Afghanistan envoy meets FM

KABUL (Ariana News): Special envoy of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for Afghanistan, Tarig Ali Bakheet, met with Tajikistan’s Foreign Minister Siyosiddin Muhriddin, in Dushanbe. After delivering a written message from the OIC Secretary-General to the minister, the two parties discussed the efforts of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Republic of Tajikistan to support the Afghan people, in light of the resolutions adopted by the Council of Foreign Ministers in this regard, OIC said in a statement. They also exchanged views on issues of mutual interest to Tajikistan and the OIC especially in areas of humanitarian, cultural and social affairs, according to the statement. They agreed to keep the momentum resulting from their fruitful cooperation while highlighting the commitment of Tajikistan to support OIC goals and its active role in hosting multiple OIC events, the statement added.

Pakistan’s exports to Afghanistan up by 3.6%

PESHAWAR (Pajhwok): Pakistan’s export of goods and services to Afghanistan rose by 3.63 percent during the first half of the current fiscal year. The State Bank of Pakistan said overall exports to the neighbouring country were recorded at \$260.716 million between July-and-December. According to data from the central bank, exports to Afghanistan stood at \$251.580 million during July-December (2022-23). But on a year-to-year basis, SBP said, exports to Afghanistan fell by 26.83 percent from \$38.297 million in December 2022 to \$28.019 million in December 2023. On a month-on-month basis as well, the exports slumped vy 46.02% in December 2023 as compared to the exports of \$51.911 million in November 2023.

Mohammad Sharif Osmani, chancellor of Balkh University. “We need religious scholars, also we need engineers. I think we need educated people in both classes in our country,” said Hizbullah, a participant from Sar-e-pol province. The National Examination Authority (NEXA) said that religious scholars from the junior and senior courses in the nation’s provinces—including women and girls—have taken the test. Those who score highly will be awarded academic and educational credentials.

Haqqani stresses need for education



KABUL (TOLOnews): The head of the National Examination Authority, Abdul Baqi Haqqani, emphasized the importance of contemporary education in the nation in addition to religious sciences, during the religious scholars’ exam ceremony in the northern region of the country. Haqqani said that they would show the world that Afghanistan is capable of excelling in the field of education. According to the official, the Islamic Emirate will prove to the world that Afghanistan is not only the center of war, but also the center of science and

progress. “We sent the message of Jihad to the world, and now the world wants the message of science. As Afghanistan is the source of Jihad, it is also the source of religious and contemporary sciences,” Haqqani said. Local officials of Balkh and the participants of the exam also said contemporary education is beneficial for the progress and development of the country in addition to religious education. “Assigning people to professional positions will lead to progress in the country and society,” said

Herat engravers seek government support to promote their art

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): Some engravers in western Herat province have stressed over government and public support and demanded the exploration of opportunities for the promotion of their art inside and outside the country. They said that the artists in the field of engraver should have the opportunity to communicate with the art community outside the country and find their way to international exhibitions. A number of artists have gathered in Dar al-Fonun center of Qala Akhtar al-Din in Herat, they brought various works of art from simple tools and materials and demanded that their works to be introduced to the world. They say that introducing and participating in national and international

exhibitions will promote the art of Afghan carving and will provide an opportunity for artists to communicate with the art community abroad and improve the reputation and recognition of their works abroad. Abdul Wahid, one of the engravers who is active in this sector from the past few years, told Pajhwok Afghan News he decorated and engraved different items and also exported prayer beads to Madina Monawar as well. He said the breads he made were of different types and sold them to businessman in Saudi Arabia but he had no direct access to customers abroad which is a point of concern for him. In the past 12 years, Abdul Wahid was able to generate work opportunities for seven other people

directly and over 10 people indirectly. He demanded the exhibition of his work at national and international markets. Farid Ahmad, another engraver from Herat province, asked people and government to take steps for the promotion of engravers so that they would be able to produce high quality items. People visiting Darul-Fonun asked the government to promote engravers and their art. Ghulam Hazrat, one of the visitors, said artists tried to present a good and positive image of the country’s art to domestic and foreign tourists with their art and believed that besides government, everyone should support this portion of society. Cultural affairs experts

believed that support to engravers could help promote the culture and history of a country and government should provide all kind of support to engravers. Aqa Gul Haider, one of the experts, said the artists’ work could be effective in attracting more tourists to the country, and on the other hand, it can introduce Afghan culture to foreign countries. He said the Ministry of Information and Cultural Affairs should introduce artists and engraves to the international exhibitions. Mawlawi Ahmadullah Muttaqi, head of the Information and Cultural Affairs Department, said government was doing all its efforts to support artists and in the future they would be introduced to international exhibitions.

Kabir: Islamic Emirate effectively recognized



KABUL (TOLOnews): The Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, said Afghanistan’s political and commercial relations with some countries of the world constitutes recognition of the country’s current government. Speaking at the International Conference on Climate Change (ICCC), at Nangarhar University, he said that without the Islamic Emirate, no can guarantee that Afghanistan’s soil will not be used against other countries. “The Islamic Emirate has been officially recog-

nized, because your [world countries] representative office and embassy are open in our country and our embassy operates in your country, commercial ports are open, your goods come to our country and our goods to your country,” he said. Mawlawi Abdul Kabir also called for an improvement of Afghanistan’s relations with the world, and pledged that Afghanistan’s soil will not be used against other countries. “No one else is able to guarantee this except the Islamic Emirate, as it possesses total sovereignty

over 34 provinces and over 400 districts, and security ensured. The Islamic Emirate will not allow anyone to use Afghanistan’s soil against its neighbors and the world,” he further stated. Criticizing the 20-year presence of NATO in Afghanistan, the Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs further said that the Islamic Emirate and the people of Afghanistan will not allow a military presence of foreign countries in Afghanistan again. “Throughout history, Afghans have never caused trouble for anyone; it was

the foreigners who violated our territory. Afghans are calm and peaceful people and we don’t want to create problems for the world,” Mawlawi Abdul Kabir said. “Borders are protected. The Islamic government is ruling and security is provided throughout the country,” said Mullah Mohammad Younus Akhundzada, acting Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. The official of the Islamic Emirate said that efforts are underway to make Afghanistan self-sufficient in various sectors.

Jawzjan women demand specific place for selling handicrafts

S H I B E R G H A N (Pajhwok): Women who sell handicrafts complain about the lack of a suitable place for their business in Shiberghan, the capital of northern Jawzjan province. However, the Shiberghan municipality says it is striving to find a suitable place for these women. Besides household chores, most women in Jawzjan also make handicrafts and do embroidery works, bead making, neck, and Afghani clothes and then sell these items in the market. Farzana, 40, who has been selling handicrafts on the streets of Shiberghan for nine years, complained about the lack of a suitable place to sell her products and wanted the government to pay serious attention to it.

“I’m a widow, I earn a living by selling handicrafts. I have two children, here we buy second-hand goods and sell them at a low price,” she explained. Complaining about economic hardships, she said: “I’m the breadwinner of the house, we have many problems, but we don’t have a specific place to carry our business forward.” Meanwhile, Shabnam, another seller of handicrafts, also complained about the lack of a suitable place to sell her goods. “I have been selling handicrafts for seven years. I take care of the house myself. I have four children. I sell handicrafts on the streets from morning to evening. There are hand-embroidered clothes for

children, women and men.” She was also worried about the lack of buyers and said: “Our sales are not good, we cannot sell a pair of clothes in a week. If the government pays a little attention to us and creates a special market for women, it will be very good.” Marzia, another handicrafts seller in Shiberghan, also called it important to build a permanent place for women selling handicrafts and added: “We sell handicrafts on wet ground in winter and under the scorching sun in summer.” “We used to have a good sale, our customers would come from districts and villages, but recently, our sales have declined and we are at a loss,” she added.

She urged the municipality to find a special place for women to sell handicrafts in the city, but the rent should not be too high. But Shiberghan mayor Maulvi Habibullah Qana said most of these crafts-women were not ready to go to the special markets considered for them. He said that he was trying to allocate a place for women’s handicrafts. He said in the proposed place, the women would pay rent and market their products. He added: “We have collected these women from the streets several times and sent them to special places, but most of them were unable to pay the rent due to lack of sales. Now we are trying to find a suitable place without rent.”

Nangarhar University hosts int’l conference on climate change

KABUL (BNA): Nangarhar University, in partnership with the Ministry of Higher Education, launched the International Conference on Climate Change in Jalalabad city, the capital of Nangarhar province. The conference was graced by the presence of Mullah Abdul Kabir, Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs, the head of the Office of Administrative Affairs, Acting Ministers of Higher Education, Agriculture, Livestock, Urban Development, Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Economy, and the State Minister for Disaster Management, among other government officials.



The conference, which also saw participation from both domestic and foreign researchers and professors, is aimed at discussing and analyzing research papers on the impact of climate change in Afghanistan.

70 inmates complete literacy program



KABUL (BNA): Officials announced on Saturday that seventy inmates at the Central Prison of Zabul

province have successfully completed a literacy program. This nine-month initia-

tive has enabled these individuals to attain basic education and receive their graduation certificates.

Badghis disabled persons complain about people’s behavior

QALA-I-NAW (Pajhwok): Some individuals with disabilities in western Badghis province complain about people’s inappropriate behavior towards them. But officials say awareness programs about the rights of the disabled people are being expanded. Speaking to Pajhwok Afghan News, a number of disabled people in Badghis talked about derogatory words residents use for them. Shujauddin, a physically-challenged person in Aabkamri district, who lost his left leg five years ago in a landmine explosion, told Pajhwok Afghan News: “People do not treat me

properly, most of them call me lame or disable.” He said millions of people lost their body parts due to 40 years of war and insecurity. He added: “We were disabled in the war, what is our fault that we are called by ugly nicknames? When someone calls me lame! I get very disappointed.” “My request to the people is that if I am a disabled, I am your brother, they should not call me like that.” Mohammad Osman, another disabled person, told a similar story and said: “Instead of feeling sorry for us, people call us names, they call me lame or crippled. I ask people if

they don’t help me, they should not humiliate me either.” This person, who lost a leg in a landmine explosion, said the level of awareness and knowledge among people about the rights of the disabled people should be raised. Social affairs experts and some residents also emphasize on increasing awareness programs. Shukurullah, a resident, said that people with disabilities also have the right to live with dignity in the society and they should not be treated like this. He added: “Unfortunately, some people treat people with disabilities very badly

and insultingly. We are Muslims. We should know how big a sin it is to hurt someone.” Also, Nisar Ahmad Akbari, a professor at Badghis University, says that all people have the same rights and disabled people should not be treated badly or improperly. He added: “Allah (swt) has given dignity to human beings and regardless of whether they are white or black or disabled, Islam emphasizes that all human beings are equal in terms of dignity and no one should be insulted under any circumstances.” He suggests that all people, responsible institu-

tions, especially the Directorate of Martyrs and Disabled Persons, should take steps to resolve this problem and inform the people about the rights of disabled persons through the media and imams of mosques. Mohammad Ismail Rahmani, the head of social affairs, martyrs and disabled people of Badghis, told Pajhwok they were trying to expand awareness programs about the rights of the disabled people. He said in cooperation with relevant bodies, they were spreading awareness about the rights of the disabled through the media, mosques and pulpits.

MOFA rejects global objections on elections

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson on Saturday took note of statements from certain countries and organizations on the general elections held in Pakistan and said: "We are surprised by the negative tone of some of these statements, which neither take into account the complexity of the electoral process, nor acknowledge the free and enthusiastic exercise of the right to vote by tens of millions of Pakistanis."

The FO spokesperson said: "These statements ignore the undeniable fact that Pakistan has held general elections, peacefully and successfully, while dealing with serious security threats resulting primarily from foreign sponsored terrorism."

"Some statements are not even factual. There was no nationwide internet shutdown. Only mobile services were suspended for the day to avoid terrorist incidents on the polling day. The elections exercise has demonstrated that the concerns of many commentators were misplaced," the FO statement claimed. The MOFA spokesperson said: "Pakistan held the elections as part of its commitment to building a stable and democratic society. While we value constructive advice from our friends, making negative commentary even before the completion of electoral process is neither constructive nor objective."

The statement reads, "Pakistan will continue to work towards building a vibrant democratic polity. Every election and peaceful transition of power brings us closer to that goal. We do this not on account of the concerns expressed by others but because that is the aspiration of our people and the vision of our founding fathers."

Russian drone strike kills 7 in Kyiv

KYIV (AP): A Russian drone strike on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, killed at least seven people overnight, including three children, Kharkiv region governor Oleh Syniehubov reported Saturday. He said the Iranian-made Shahed drone hit civilian infrastructure in the Nemyshlyan district on the city, causing a massive fire that burned down 15 private houses.

Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said more than 50 people had been evacuated and that emergency workers had contained the blaze by Saturday morning. The Ukrainian air force said air defense systems destroyed 23 out of 31 Iranian Shahed drones launched by Russia overnight. The drones primarily targeted the north-eastern Kharkiv region and the southern province of Odesa, the statement said.

Odesa regional governor Oleh Kiper said four people were injured there by the overnight drone attacks. The attacks came in three waves, he said. The first targeted the regional capital — the port city of Odesa. All nine drones were shot down, but the debris damaged port infrastructure and injured one person.

The second and the third waves targeted port infrastructure in the Danube river area, Kiper said. A total of 12 drones were shot down and three people were injured. Romania's Ministry of National Defense said on Saturday that Russia carried out overnight drone attacks on Ukraine's river ports of Ismail and Reni, near the border with Romania.

The ministry said that an F-16 jet of the Turkish Air Force was deployed from a Romanian airbase around 1:15 a.m. to carry out "reconnaissance missions" in national airspace to monitor the situation. Text alerts were also issued to residents in two counties adjacent to the attacks.

NATO member Romania has discovered drone debris on its territory several times before, following sustained attacks on Ukraine's port infrastructure as Moscow attempted to disrupt Kyiv's ability to export grain and other produce to world markets.

Huge number of candidates challenge election 2024 results

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Hectic legal activity is expected over next few days as several results of general elections 2024, showing PML-N candidates' winners, are challenged in high courts, with opponents alleging that their defeat was a result of "rigging", on Saturday.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) affiliated independent candidates have moved the Lahore High Court (LHC), challenging the results of the PP-164 and NA-118 — where father-son duo, Shehbaz Sharif and Hamza Shehbaz secured victory.

In his petition, independent candidate Yousuf Mio, who contested against PML-N president, claimed that the returning officer (RO) did not allow the petitioner to enter the office. "The results were announced in the petitioner's absence," stated the application, urging the court to direct returning officer to announce the results as per Form-45.

"The court also bar the Election Commission from issuing the final result", the petitioner said, requesting the court to declare form-47 results' null and void. Meanwhile, Alia Hamza's husband, whose wife contested against Hamza

Shehbaz, challenged the result and noted that the PML-N candidate lost the election as per Form-45.

On the other hand, Dr Yasmeen Rashid also challenged former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's victory in Lahore's NA-130 constituency in Lahore High Court (LHC). Another independent candidate Shehzad Farooq challenged Maryam Nawaz's success from Lahore's NA-119, while another PML-N winner Ata Tarar's success in NA-127 has also been challenged in court by PTI-supported independent candidate Zaheer Abbas Khokhar.

Rehana Dar, mother of Usman Dar, petitioned the high court for recounting of votes in Sialkot's NA-71, challenging the success of PML-N veteran Khawaja Asif in the Sialkot constituency. Furthermore, PTI backed candidates Shoaib Shaheen and Ali Bukhari moved Islamabad High Court (IHC), challenging the results of constituencies NA-47 and NA-48 respectively.

Talking to journalists, Shoaib Shaheen said, "We have requested the registrar's office to schedule an immediate hearing. We urge the chief justice to expedite the case since all

of Islamabad knows that NA-47 is my constituency. I have the Form-45. We have won this election with a significant majority."

The PTI-backed independent candidate blamed the powers that be for "pressuring the returning officers." He further added, "Today, you are replaying the crime you committed in the past. Now the only hope left is the judiciary." According to the results announced by Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), PML-N leader Tariq Fazal Chaudhry was declared victorious after scoring 102,502 votes while PTI-backed independent candidate Shoaib Shaheen got 86,396 votes and Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, an independent candidate, secured 17,916 votes.

Khurram Shahzad Nawaz, a joint candidate of the PML-N and Istehkam-i-Pakistan Party (IPP), won NA-48 (Islamabad-III) with 69,699 votes while Syed Mohammad Ali Bukhari stood second with 59,851 votes and Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar third with 18,572 votes. The PML-N made a clean sweep after 16 years by grabbing all three seats of the National Assembly in the federal capital.

60m exercised their right to vote on Feb 8: FAFEN

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Approximately 60 million voters went to the polls in Pakistan on Feb 8 to elect their representatives in 265 National Assembly and 590 provincial assembly constituencies in one of the country's most competitive political contests, says Fafen.

The Free and Fair Election Network (Fafen) issued a report on Saturday, saying the elections followed two tumultuous years of political upheaval, discord and polarisation, which left behind a debris of constitutional confusions, judicial misadventures, communal stress, economic downturn and growing public distrust in electoral institutions — issues that must be taken up by the future government as its top priorities.

Fafen added that despite a spiral of allegations by multiple political parties about not getting a level playing field as well as a spike in militant violence in some parts of the country, none of the political parties backed out of the electoral race. All parties continued until the last minute their efforts to muster up public support, which augurs well for Pakistan's struggling democracy. In addition, the pre-election perception of an unlevel playing field does not seem to have prevented the accusing political parties from gaining electoral ground.

Notwithstanding the general perception that pre-election media freedoms were constricted and sporadic incidences of restric-

tions on expression and speech, in fact Pakistani print, electronic and digital media continued to contribute tremendously to strengthening the political and electoral process.

The media kept voters informed through their undiluted reporting, which helped voters make informed choices. Independent civil society groups deserve praise in particular for focusing attention on rights and liberties during the election process, including infringements of the rights of citizens and political parties.

The report said unfazed by a spate of scathing criticism from some political parties, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) must particularly be acknowledged for having organised the country's largest electoral exercise — with the greatest number of candidates and highest number of voters — in a reasonably orderly manner.

More than 1.1 million election officials performed election duties in a highly challenging political environment. They ensured the integrity of voting and counting processes at the polling stations that largely remained free of controversy, notwithstanding sporadic complaints by political parties and candidates about not getting the election results forms to which they are legally entitled.

More than 0.7 million police and military officials stood guard across Pakistan and outside polling stations, ensuring peace and order on the election day against the backdrop of fears of militant and politi-

cal violence. The report added that whatever the reasons and explanations, the ECP's delay in the preparation and announcement of preliminary election results overshadowed an otherwise orderly election, raising questions about the credibility of the election outcome.

In addition, the caretaker government's suspension of cellular and internet services on election day — regardless of the security reasons — undermined years of parliamentary efforts to reform the election results management process through amendments to the Elections Act, 2017, which were meant to maximise the integrity, efficiency and transparency of electoral outcomes. Fafen said the country had found a closure to a period of unsettling uncertainty that was not only exhausting for the people but also for the economy, with lingering inflation, unemployment and general disenchantment.

"Now it is the responsibility of political parties to bring to end their obstinate disengagement for a smooth transition of power in order to ensure the much-needed political stability in the country," the report stressed. "Many of the concerns raised by the political parties and their candidates need to be addressed on legal merit by the ECP as promptly as possible, while residual matters can be addressed by the election tribunals that will be formed and start working in less than two months," the report observed.

C'wealth observer group unveils preliminary findings on Pak polls

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) on Saturday unveiled its initial findings on Pakistan's General Elections-2024, highlighting the commendable efforts of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and other institutions for conducting general polls.

Chairperson COG, Dr Goodluck Jonathan at a press conference here acknowledged Pakistan's significance as one of the world's largest democracies and emphasized the importance of these elections for its people. The COG chairperson expressed his gratitude for the invitation to observe the elections and commended the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for logistical preparations amid challenges. The group, he said, adhered to principles of impartiality, non-interference, and independence during its deployment, engaging with various stakeholders.

Appreciating the role of Election Commission of Pakistan, he said that the COG observers were depl-

oyed in various areas including Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Multan, Faisalabad, Karachi, Hyderabad and Abbottabad on February 6, 2024 to observe election preparations. Recognizing and appreciating the substantial work by the ECP, the COG chairperson noted delays in proceeding with the elections, attributing them to the significant task of organizing an election involving around 128 million registered voters. The security challenges were acknowledged, with condolences extended for lives lost in terrorist attacks leading up to Election Day. The impact of adverse weather conditions, including snowbound areas and the damages caused by floods in 2022, was also highlighted.

Dr Jonathan mentioned the substantially reformed legal framework leading up to the 2024 General Elections, emphasizing the importance of continued reform in line with the Constitution and Commonwealth Charter values. The areas for refinement in the legal framework will be detailed in the final report.

Lauding the reduction in

the national gender gap in registered voters and the reserved seats for women, he noted concerns regarding the participation of women candidates and some communities discouraging women from campaigning and voting. The youth engagement in campaigns, especially on social media, was commended, but challenges for minority communities were mentioned.

The COG chairperson underscored the importance of a legal and administrative environment conducive to citizens' right to run for office and vote. He noted the implementation of codes of conduct for political parties and the media, with calls for more stakeholder engagement. The complete recommendations to ensure transparency in this regard will be included in the final report. While commending the ECP's efforts to improve election management through the Election Management System (EMS), he acknowledged operational challenges on Election Day, which will be elaborated on in subsequent observations.



KARACHI: Supporters of Jamat-e-Islami holding a protest against rigging in general elections outside Election Commission Office.

Cop martyred, three terrorists killed in D I Khan

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: The Additional Station House Officer (SHO) was martyred and three terrorists were killed in an exchange of fire that took place after a terrorist attack on a mobile van here in Sub-Division Darazinda on Saturday, police said.

The police team was going to the police station when unidentified assailants targeted the police mobile van with hand grenades and fired at Morgah area of Darazinda. The police team also retaliated the firing attack. In exchange for fire, Additional SHO Din Muhammad Sherani embraced martyred while three terrorists were also killed.

The Rescue 1122 team shifted the body of martyred SHO to District Headquarters Hospital (DHQ) Dera Ismail Khan. District Police Officer (DPO) Abdul Rauf Babar Qaisrani along with a heavy contingent of police and security forces reached the site soon after the incident. The police also started a search operation in the area.

2 independent candidates join PML-N

ISLAMABAD (INP): Two independent candidates, who secured victory in general elections 2024, have announced to join Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), strengthening the party's position in National Assembly (NA).

Independent candidates came up from behind and stole the show, with so far securing 102 seats in National Assembly (NA). Besides PTI, the successful candidates also include some who had only been awarded a ticket following the rejection of their party's more preferred nominees.

The results of 257 out of the total 265 National Assembly constituencies where elections were held had been announced, which showed the independents in the lead with 102 seats overall. The PML-N and PPP had won 73 and 54 seats, respectively, and were set to bag most of the 70 reserved seats for women and non-Muslims in the house.

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement had bagged 17 seats, while the PML-Q had three. The JUI-F and Istehkam-i-Pakistan Party (IPP) had secured three and two seats, respectively. MWM and BNP had clinched one seat each.

Firdous Ashiq Awan booked

F.P. Report

SIALKOT: Firdous Ashiq Awan, a prominent leader of the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP), has found herself in legal trouble after a video surfaced on social media, allegedly showing her assaulting a policeman at a polling station in Sialkot. The incident reportedly occurred on Thursday, during the elections.

The Sialkot Sadar police have taken action, registering a case against Firdous Ashiq Awan based on a complaint filed by ASI Amjad. The FIR states that Awan allegedly misbehaved with and slapped a policeman who was on duty at Government High School Gana Kalan in Sialkot NA 70.

Punjab Assembly results Independents secures 138 seats, PML-N gets 137

F.P. Report

LAHORE: In a significant announcement, the results of all 296 seats in the Punjab Assembly elections have been announced shockingly the independent candidates have emerged as the front-runners, securing a total of 138 seats.

The political landscape in the Punjab Assembly reflects the dominance of independent candidates, majority of whom are affiliated with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), who managed to clinch a total of 138 seats out of 296 seats in Punjab.

Following closely behind, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has secured 137 seats, while the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) has claimed victory in 10 constituencies. Other notable performances include the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) with eight seats, the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) with one seat, and the Pakistan Muslim League-Zia (PML-Z) secured one seat.

Additionally, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) has also clinched one seat in the Punjab Assembly. PP-1:

PTI-backed independent candidate Qazi Ahmed Akbar won the seat with 49,257 votes. PML-N's Jahangir Khanzada bagged 36,443 votes. PP-2: PTI-backed independent candidate Sardar Muhammad Ali Khan bagged the seat with 36,093. PML-N's Iftikhar Ahmed secured 35,291 votes. PP-3: PTI-backed Syed Aijazul Hasan secured 36,897 votes to beat PML-N's Hameed Akbar who bagged 31,857 votes.

PP-4: PML-N's Sher Ali Khan defeated PTI-backed candidate, Sardar Shahnawaz Khan on PP-4 Attock, secured 48,593 votes, while Shahnawaz secured 38,790 votes. PP-5: PML-N's Malik Aitebar Khan defeated PTI-backed candidate, Malik Jamsheed Altaf on PP-5 Attock. Khan secured 46,665 votes, while Altaf secured 43,620 votes.

Meanwhile, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), who are potentially set to form coalition governments in the Centre, exchange reservations over the criticism from both sides before the conduct of general elections 2024.

In a speech on Friday

evening, PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif announced that he had tasked his brother, former PM Shehbaz Sharif, to reach out to major parties such as PPP, MQM-P and others, to form an alliance. In this vein, Shehbaz Sharif met with PPP leader Asif Ali Zardari and his son, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, at the residence of Punjab caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

During the meeting, Shehbaz Sharif told Asif Zardari that PPP leadership — prominently Bilawal Bhutto — unnecessarily criticised PML-N in the election campaign. Responding to the reservation, Asif Zardari said it was part of the election campaign and must be ended. "Mian Sahab [Shehbaz Sharif], you too had been criticising PPP", Zardari told the PML-N president.

The PPP co-chairman stressed that now the matters should be resolved for the peaceful formation of the government. "A joint formula must be established to stable the democracy", he added. Meanwhile, the two parties sought time for consultation before a formal agreement, sources added.

Israeli strikes kill 31 Palestinians in Rafah

RAFAH (AP): Israeli airstrikes killed at least 31 Palestinians — a third of them children — in the southern Gaza city of Rafah on Saturday, hours after Israel's prime minister said he asked the military to plan for the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people there ahead of a ground invasion.

Benjamin Netanyahu did not provide details or a timeline, but the announcement set off widespread panic. More than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people are packed into Rafah, many after being uprooted by Israeli evacuation orders that now cover two-thirds of Gaza's territory. It's not clear where they could run next. Israel says that Rafah, which borders Egypt,

is the last remaining stronghold for the Hamas militant group in Gaza after more than four months of war sparked by the Oct. 7 Hamas attack.

In Egypt's first public response to Netanyahu's announcement, Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry warned that any Israeli ground offensive on Rafah would have "disastrous consequences," and asserted that Israel aims to eventually force the Palestinians out of their land. Shoukry also said Egypt was working to bridge the gap between the warring sides to achieve a permanent ceasefire and free the remaining hostages taken on Oct. 7 in return for Palestinian prisoners in Israel. "The negotiations are complex," he said.

There is increasing public

friction between Netanyahu and the Biden administration, whose officials have said an invasion of Rafah without a plan for the civilian population would lead to disaster. Israel has carried out airstrikes in Rafah almost daily, even after telling civilians in recent weeks to seek shelter there from the current ground combat in the city of Khan Younis just to the north.

Overnight into Saturday, three airstrikes on homes in the Rafah area killed 28 people, according to a health official and Associated Press journalists who saw the bodies arriving at hospitals. Each strike killed multiple members of three families, including a total of 10 children, the youngest 3 months old.

PPP's door open

(Continued from Page 1)

With limited campaigning, the PPP has received an astounding response from Lahore and the Party's future as far as Punjab is concerned is very bright. According to the current numbers, the Chief Minister of Punjab will not be successful without the PPP's votes. The PPP made efforts legislatively for the restoration of student unions. It included institutions devising a code of conduct for the student unions however this has not implemented till now.

The PPP's Sindh government was the first to announce its labour policy post devolution. We have begun the Benazir Mazdoor Card in Sindh, and if the EOBI is devolved as per the 18th Amendment, then the provincial government will not only be able to provide facilities to labour unions but also the labourers. We have expanded the parameter of the Mazdoor Card in Sindh to include an array of labourers, including those who are self-employed or working elsewhere.

Responding to a question, Chairman Bilawal said that there has been no

contact with Barrister Gohar so far as the PPP is waiting for the counting to conclude. We are in contact with certain independent candidates. As far as the PTI block is concerned, no contact has been made. Regarding the government formation in Sindh, Chairman PPP said that the Party is focusing on setting up the government in the center, Balochistan and Punjab as it does not have any competition in Sindh. We will all have to make a coalition government in Balochistan. In that government, our first priority will be to replicate the successful projects of Sindh in Balochistan for the people of the province.

My effort will be to establish a health facility like the NICVD in Balochistan so that too feel that they are stakeholders in the state, Chairman Bilawal stated. Our development agenda will be human-centric. We need reconciliation to establish peace in Balochistan. Everyone knows our stance on terrorism and we need to have consensus on that as well. We will be able to deliver to the people by reducing the political temperature.

Responding to a question about irregularities in the counting process and results, he said that some complaints are being received from Karachi which must be addressed. The independents are from different leanings. Some are nominated by the PTI. We are yet to find out how many wish to remain with the PTI.

Chairman Bilawal said that his priority is the people of Pakistan and he would like to form a consensus government to establish political stability. As far as the new "Charter of Democracy" is concerned, even if a new charter is not curated, we should at least devise a code of conduct in politics. This is imperative to create an environment where political differences do not transformed into personnel vendetta. Nawaz Sharif made his speech in haste. He too should have waited for the finalised results as us, but it is ultimately his and his party's prerogative. If politicians start harbouring mutual resentment, then there is no power on earth that could stop Pakistan from progressing. Chairman Bilawal said.