

Bara team calls on KP CM
F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Caretaker KP Chief Minister Syed Arshad Hussain Shah says government is taking solid steps to remove sense of deprivation of tribal people. He was talking to a delegation of Tehsil Bara of Khyber district on Wednesday. He said special programs have been launched for the youth of tribal districts by empowering special technical training for creating job opportunities.



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ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl, Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman talking to media persons.

Two killed, 13 injured in firing during recount
F.P. Report

HUB: In a shocking incident, two people were killed and thirteen others sustained injuries in an armed clash between two groups during a vote recount on the PB-21 seat of the Balochistan Assembly.

The unconfirmed and unofficial results from PB-21 showed the candidate of Balochistan National Party (BAP) Muhammad Saleh Bhutani victory with 30,910 votes. According to Senior Superintendent (SSP) HUB Manzoor Buledi, an armed clash erupted between two groups during a vote recount on the PB-21 seat of Balochistan Assembly from Hub.

The firing incident was reported last night outside Civic Centre, where the vote recount was going on the provincial assembly seat, said SSP. Getting information about the firing incident, the police party reached the spot and arrested three suspects with Kalashnikov. He confirmed the death of two and injuries to 13 others including one critically wounded. The bodies and injured were rushed to the hospital.

SSP Buledi said that Frontier Corps have been deployed in the area to control the law and order situation. It is to be noted that on February 11, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) put a pause on the electoral results and mandated a recount of the votes in the PB-21 constituency. The decision came in response to the joint request for a recount by the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) and the National Party, highlighting the intensity and importance of the electoral contest in the region.

Six more independents join PML-N
F.P. Report

LAHORE: Six more independents who emerged victorious on Punjab Assembly seats in the General Elections 2024 have announced to join the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

The MPAs-elect announced their decision of joining the PML-N in a meeting with the party's Chief Organiser Maryam Nawaz in Lahore.

Independent candidate who joined the PML-N included Sultan Bajwa from PP-132 Nankana, Shazia Tareen from PP-225 Lodhran, Mahmood Qadir Laghari from PP-289 Dera Ghazi Khan, Hanif Pitafi from PP-288 Dera Ghazi Khan, Taimoor Ali from PP-94 Chiniot and Ali Asghar from PP-283 Layyah. The newly elected members of the Punjab Assembly expressed full confidence in Nawaz Sharif.

Welcoming the victorious independents in the PML-N fold, Maryam Nawaz said that their joining will contribute to achieve the party's goal of prosperity of the people of Punjab. "We will give relief to the people from the destruction of the past and ensure a happy future," Maryam Nawaz.

Alleged polls rigging Sindh, Balochistan, KP witness protests

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Protests are ongoing across three provinces in Pakistan — Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The PTI, JUI-F, PTI, and other political parties are staging protests in different cities against the results of the general elections 2024.

In Quetta, workers of National Party, Hazara Democratic Party and Balochistan National Party demonstrated outside the district returning officer's office, while roads across the provincial capital, Chaman, Killa Saifullah, Loralai and Pishin were blocked due to the ongoing protests.

As a result, land communication of Balochistan with Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was cut off. Meanwhile, PPP continued its sit-in in Naseerabad against the alleged polls rigging for the sixth day.

A wheeljam strike was observed on main highways of northern Balochistan on the call of Pushtunkhwa National Awami Party against alleged rigging in NA-251-Zhob-cum-Sherani constituency election.

According to a report, on the call of Pushtunkhwa National Awami Party, all national highways of northern Balochistan, connecting with Punjab and Khyberpushtunkhwa were closed for all kinds of vehicular traffic in protest

over tempering the election result of Chairman Pushtunkhwa National Awami Party.

Balochistan's people mandated Pakistan Peoples Party: People of Balochistan mandated Pakistan Peoples Party, but some elements could not bear the election victory of Pakistan Peoples Party in Balochistan and that was why false propaganda against the newly elected MNAs and MPAs was being spread.

These views were expressed by central leaders of Pakistan Peoples Party Nawabzada Mir Jamal Khan Raisani, Haji Mir Ali Madad Jattak, Mir Zahoor Ahmed Buledi and Secretary Information PPP Balochistan Sardar Sirbulund Jogezeai while addressing a press conference at Quetta Press Club here on Wednesday.

Speaking on the occasion, Haji Ali Madad Jattak said that representatives of Pakistan Peoples Party had laid the network of record development work in Balochistan after winning election in 2008 from the province He said that some rejected leaders were spreading false propaganda against PPP's newly elected MNAs and MPAs from Balochistan. He said that during election campaign, election offices of PPP were not only ransacked, but handgrenades were also hurled at the election offices

of PPP in different areas of Balochistan province, but despite intimidations, people of the province cast their votes in favour of the candidates of PPP.

Nawabzada Mir Jamal Raisani on the occasion said that his victory from NA-264-Quetta was due to the sacrifices rendered by his father Shaheed Nawabzada Siraj Raisani, adding that people of NA-264 constituency cast their votes in favour of the candidates of PPP owing to the sacrifices of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto. Raisani said, "Whatever Election Tribunal decides, it will be acceptable to the newly elected MNAs and MPAs of PPP from Balochistan." Secretary Information, PPP Balochistan, Sardar Sirbulund Jogezeai said, "New Chief Minister in Balochistan will be a Jeyala", adding that no one would be allowed to use derogatory remarks against the newly elected MNAs and MPAs of Balochistan. On the occasion, Malak Shah Gorgech, Sardarzada Samad Gorgech, Nawabzada Obaid Gorgech and others were also present.

It is pertinent to mention that Chairman Pushtunkhwa National Awami Party, Khushal Khan Kakar, had announced to block main national highways of the province against tempering his election result of NA-251-Zhob-cum-Sherani constituency.

I will work under Nawaz leadership, says Maryam

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz Wednesday rebuffed the impression that party supremo Nawaz Sharif quit active politics after he nominated his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif for the post of prime minister.

In a post shared on X, Maryam said Nawaz will not only participate in active politics for the next five years but also oversee the PML-N-led governments in Punjab and Centre. The politician, who is nominated for the post of the chief minister of Punjab, said that people gave a clear majority to her party in the three previous

governments led by the PML-N supremo.

"... he has made it clear in his election speeches that he will not be a part of any coalition government." She added that those who are aware of Nawaz's nature know his principled stance. "Shehbaz Sharif and I are his soldiers, bound by his orders and will work under his leadership and supervision. May Allah grant us success. Ameen," Maryam said.

The PML-N stalwart's statement comes, as speculations are abuzz regarding the elder Sharif bidding adieu to politics with many on the social media site X, sharing their disappointment over decision to pull out of the race for prime minister and instead

nominating his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif. Nawaz's former spokesperson Mohammad Zubair took to X to express his disappointment saying: "He was the one who inspired me to join politics. Whatever name I made in politics & positions earned were all due to his confidence. Sad to see him go like this. The votes N got were all due to him but the party did not do justice to him. Was this his last political battle?"

PML-N Information Secretary Marriyum Aurangzeb announce on social media platform X that party supremo Nawaz nominated Shehbaz Sharif for the post of prime minister and Maryam Nawaz for the Punjab chief minister.

NA session may be summoned between Feb 22-29: Solangi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Wednesday said that the first session of the new National Assembly might be called on any date between February 22 and February 29.

As per the Constitution, the president could convene the National Assembly's session within 21 days of the polling date, the minister said while explaining the post-elections procedure in a talk show of the Pakistan Television (PTV). To a query, he said a simple majority was

required to form a government and the president did not have any power to invite a person or a party for the formation of government.

After the 18th Constitutional Amendment, he said, the office of the president represented the Federation. He said the ECP was bound to issue official results within 14 days of the holding of the elections and the winning candidates were ought to submit the required documents to the electoral watchdog in attested form.

If the details were not submitted, the winning candidate would not be declared an

official member of the National Assembly, he added. He said that the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs took up the matter of convening the session as soon as the NA Secretariat received the official results from the ECP. Immediately after the election of Speaker and Deputy Speaker, he said the Leader of the House would be elected. To another query, he said secret balloting was followed in election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the NA while for the election of the Leader of the House, the process was otherwise.

Gas prices likely to surge again
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Consumers, both protected and non-protected, are poised to face a significant uptick in gas prices, according to the sources within the industry. The media reports indicate that protected consumers can anticipate a Rs. 10 per mmbtu hike, while their non-protected counterparts will see a steeper increase of Rs. 300 per mmbtu.

Crucially, there will be no adjustment to fixed charges for either group, although heavy gas users can expect a substantial Rs. 900 per mmbtu rise in prices. The impact of this price adjustment extends to various sectors, including the CNG industry, where prices per mmbtu will climb by Rs. 170. Engro Fertilizer, among other entities, will also feel the pinch with increased gas rates, effective from March 1st.

These adjustments come into effect retrospectively, with the increased prices slated to apply from February 1st. Overall, consumers are bracing for a collective burden of Rs. 204 billion due to the escalation in gas prices, a change that will also affect captive power plants.

Govt may keep petrol price unchanged
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In the wake of rise in oil prices in global market, the government on Wednesday is planning to revise up the petroleum prices in Pakistan. The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) is planning another hike in petrol and diesel prices for the second half of February 2024.

Prices of high-speed diesel (HSD) and light diesel are likely to go up by 5 to 8 rupees for the next fortnight, while petrol price is expected to remain same from Feb 16, 2024. Earlier, global oil prices settled higher on Tuesday as geopolitical tensions continued in the Middle East and eastern Europe, but gains were curtailed as investors reined in expectations for the US Federal Reserve interest rate cuts. Brent futures settled 77 cents higher or 0.94% at \$82.77 a barrel while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled 95 cents higher, or 1.24%, at \$77.87 a barrel.

IHC grants bail to Pervaiz Elahi
F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Wednesday granted bail to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) President Pervaiz Elahi in the case of the appointment of Muhammad Khan Bhatti as principal secretary, against a bond of Rs0.1 million.

Amir Saeedran advocate pleaded before the court that the judicial magistrate discharged Muhammad Khan Bhatti and contrary to the fact Pervaiz Elahi became the CM, the notification for the principal secretary was issued by the then chief secretary. He argued that the case was established on political grounds.

Earlier, the Lahore High Court (LHC) rejected Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi's petition seeking the 'Peacock' as his election symbol for the upcoming February 8 elections. Pervaiz Elahi has lost the elections. The high court upheld the Election Commission's decision that had previously allotted the symbol of a 'donkey cart' to Pervaiz Elahi. Former Chief Minister of Punjab and PTI leader, Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, had approached the Lahore High Court, challenging the election symbol assigned to him and requesting a review.

JUI-F rejects nationwide election results

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) Emir Maulana Fazlur Rehman has said that if the establishment deems the February 8 elections to be fair, then the "narrative" of May 9 has been "buried" — as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed candidates secured the most seats in the National Assembly.

Fazl added that "rigging" in 2024 broke records of 2018 elections, alleging that the poll organising authority was held hostage by the establishment. He went on to say that the May 9 narrative was seemingly buried if the establishment deemed the Feb 8 polls fair.

It is pertinent to mention here that the Fazl-led party managed to win four National Assembly (NA) seats and 18 provincial assembly seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, as per unofficial election results. Maulana Fazl termed the top electoral body's role in the 2024 general polls "suspicious". He alleged that the commission was suspending petitions of JUI-F candidates without issuing any notices.

He claimed that the JUI-F was deliberately defeated via "rigging" in the nationwide polls as it was "unacceptable for the United States and the West". He also ruled out the possibility

ty of entering parliament as a coalition partner but with the party's own identity as per the decisions taken by the JUI-F's central executive committee (CEC). He clarified that his party was not under the influence of the PML-N or Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and could make its decisions independently.

Hinting at protests, the noted cleric said: "Decisions would apparently be made in grounds, instead of parliament." Elaborating on the next strategy, Maulana Fazl said: "We will hold a meeting of our provincial general council in Balochistan on February 25 and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) on February 27. Additionally, two more meetings will be summoned in Karachi on March 3 and Lahore on March 5."

"The JUI-F was neither consulted in any decision nor would we listen to anyone else now. We haven't given any date and just tabled a few recommendations before the general council. We have given a clear stance about assemblies and election results today." Regarding the Imran-founded party, the politico admitted that his party has had differences with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), but it was based on ideological matters, not personal ones.

He also invited the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to sit in

opposition alongside JUI-F in the Parliament House. Fazl detailed that he would unveil a schedule for a political movement after consultations. He also urged like-minded and former alliance parties to choose their sides whether to join the JUI-F to raise voices against rigging or enjoy rulership.

A six-party alliance comprising PML-N, PPP, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q), Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) announced to form government in the Centre on the pattern of last government of PDM, however, the one of its key allies, JUI-F chief was absent from the crucial meeting that took place at Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain's residence in the federal capital.

Shehbaz Sharif, while offering the 'Charter of Economy' and 'Charter of Democracy' to political parties, said: "I agree with the 'forgive and forget' policy to move ahead and accept the split mandate and grateful to all parties who supported the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)." Following the meeting, the former premier had been nominated for the prime minister's slot, again, whereas, PML-N's Maryam Nawaz was named as its candidate for Punjab chief ministership.



HARYANA: Protesting farmers offer water to a man who fainted during a protest as authorities stopped the marching farmers and fired tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets to prevent them from entering the capital city.

Modi inaugurates BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated on Wednesday the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi. Developed in the desert on 27 acres, the BAPS Hindu Mandir stands off the main highway linking Abu Dhabi to Dubai. It has been constructed from more than 25,000 pieces of pink sandstone from Rajasthan, and white Italian marble carved by artisans in India and assembled in the UAE.

Modi arrived at the site on Wednesday afternoon to perform consecration rituals with the temple's priests. Bollywood stars, including actor Akshay Kumar and singer Shankar Mahadevan, and members of the Indian diaspora in the UAE gathered at the BAPS Hindu Mandir to witness the ceremony. The temple was built by BAPS, or Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha — a Hindu organization headquartered in Modi's home state of Gujarat.

Navdeep Suri, who served as India's ambassador to the UAE from 2016 to 2019, told Arab News that the inauguration of the temple marked a "key milestone" in India's ties with the UAE under Modi's leadership. "It was in August 2015 that he made his first visit to the Gulf nation — the first by an Indian prime minister since Indira

Gandhi in 1981. The bilateral agenda was wide-ranging and set the foundation for a truly remarkable transformation in India's ties with the UAE," he said.

"Modi also used the opportunity to put in a request for the allocation of land for a Hindu temple that would meet the long-standing religious and spiritual needs of a large section of the 3.5 million-strong Indian community in the UAE." The land was donated by the UAE government and the temple's groundbreaking took place in 2019 — the year which the UAE observed as the Year of Tolerance.

Home to the largest population of Indian citizens outside India, the UAE opened its first Hindu temple in Dubai in the 1950s. Several more were built since then, but this one in Abu Dhabi is the first built using traditional techniques. It is also the largest and can host up to 10,000 people.

The temple's construction reflects a "success of India's cultural diplomacy" and the UAE's "respect for all religions," according to Anil Trigunayath, former diplomat and a distinguished fellow at the Vivekananda International Foundation think tank in New Delhi. "The temple is significant as

it meets the aspirations of 3.5 million Indians working in UAE," he said. "Temples and places of worship also act as anchors of the self and due to that it is very important."

For Muddassir Quamar, associate professor at the Center for West Asian Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, the temple also shows India's growing cultural relations with the Gulf region. "Through cultural diplomacy, India has worked towards gaining greater international recognition and status," he said. "The inauguration of the BAPS temple underlines continuous efforts towards promotion of India's soft power."

The inauguration of the temple marks Modi's seventh official visit to the Gulf state, during which he witnessed the signing of multiple memoranda in the areas of digital infrastructure, investment, electricity interconnection and trade. The prime minister was welcomed in Abu Dhabi by UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan on Tuesday, and on Wednesday was received by UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum as guest of honor at the World Governments Summit 2024 in Dubai. — Arab News



Drug peddler, gutka supplier arrested

KARACHI (APP): In two separate operations conducted by District Keamari's Mochko Police Station on Wednesday, suspects engaged in drug peddling and gutka supply were apprehended.

According to SSP Keamari, Arif Aslam Rao, the first operation led to the arrest of Sajid Hussain, accused of drug peddling, by Mochko police station. A case was filed following the recovery of 65 grams of cocaine from the suspect's possession. In another operation, a motorcyclist gutka supplier was detained at the Mochko check post near Hub Chowki. A case was registered after the recovery of one sack containing 200 packets of hazardous gutka/mawa from the suspect. Further investigations are underway with the arrested individuals.

UET Teaching Staff Association executive committee elected

LAHORE (APP): All executive committee members of the Teaching Staff Association (TSA) were elected unopposed in the annual elections of the University of Engineering and Technology (UET).

According to a notification, the newly elected president is Prof. Dr. Amjad Hussain, vice presidents are Dr. M. Faisal Hayat and Dr. Qasim Shaukat Khan, general secretary is Prof. Dr. Muhammad Asif Rafiq, joint secretary, Dr. Rashid Jalil is social secretary, and Aisha Hameed will be treasurer. Executive members will be Ahsan Mehmood, Dr. Fahim Gohar, Dr. Imran Ali, Mr. Jawad Ahmad, M. Bilal Arshad, M. Moazzam Shahzad and Dr. Shamaila Samreen. A large number of faculty members including newly elected officials participated in the annual meeting of the general body of the association.

Vice Chancellor UET Prof. Dr. Nasir Hayat was the chief guest at the ceremony, while Director Punjab Higher Education Commission (PHEC) Dr. Tanveer Qasim also attended the event with his presence.

SIU nabs two extortionists

KARACHI (APP): The Special Investigation Unit (SIU)/ Crime Investigation Agency (CIA) of Karachi Police successfully apprehended two individuals involved in extortion activities. According to SSP SIU, the suspects, identified as Shoaib Abdul Rauf and Muhammad Umair, were arrested from Jamshed Quarters after demanding a ransom from Muhammad Usama, a local resident.

The extortionists targeted Usama, demanding Rs. 0.5 million via phone calls and messages on December 21st, 2023. Later, on December 30th, 2023, they escalated their threats by delivering a parcel containing an extortion slip of Rs. 1 million, along with a 9mm pistol bullet and two handkerchiefs, to Usama's watchman. The parcel also included a menacing message, threatening Usama's family if the ransom wasn't paid.

Ashrafi commends institutions for ensuring law, order during elections

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Special Representative on Religious Affairs and Pakistani Diaspora in Middle East and Muslim Countries, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi on Wednesday commended the significant role of all institutions, including the Pakistan Army, security agencies, and police for their efforts in ensuring law and order, especially during the recent general elections held on February 8, across the country.

Addressing a joint press conference along with other prominent religious scholars and leaders, he acknowledged that despite attempts by adversaries to disrupt the peaceful conduct of elections, their efforts had been thwarted, leading to the successful completion of the electoral process.

Ashrafi who is also the chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council said in light of the current political and religious landscape, there was a pressing call for unity among Pakistan's political and religious factions to strengthen the nation.

Acknowledging election results, he emphasized on utilizing legal channels such as the Election Commission of Pakistan and courts to address grievances and ensure fairness.

Ashrafi called on major political parties to unite and foster an environment conducive to reconciliation and dialogue.

Emphasising the importance of maintaining peace and stability within the country, he announced that a high-level delegation from the Pakistan Ulema Council would engage with all major political parties to foster understanding and cooperation.

Ashrafi also urged the leadership of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, to prioritize national stability and engage in dialogue for the betterment of the country. He reiterated that negotiations were key to resolving all issues encouraging political parties to engage in constructive dialogue. "A strong government with a robust opposition is deemed essential for Pakistan's progress and prosperity," he added.

He opined that there was a pressing need for political parties to forge a national pact for the betterment and stability of Pakistan. He urged all parties to set aside personal interests and prioritize the nation's well-being. He, raising concerns regarding external commentary on Pakistan's elections, emphasized on the importance of respecting national sovereignty and democratic processes.

US Deputy Chief of Mission calls on Mayor Karachi

KARACHI (APP): US Deputy Chief of Mission Andrew Schofer called on Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab on Wednesday in his office and discussed with him matters of mutual interest including the process of development and progress in Karachi and other issues.

US Consul General in Darul Ibtla, Political Officer Weldon Montgomery and Political Specialist Saleh Shah were also in the delegation. In contrast, Mayor Karachi's spokesperson for Political Affairs Karamullah Waqasi, Deputy Parliamentary Leader in the city council Dil Muhammad, Juman Darwan and Muhammad Hanif Chattani were also present on the occasion.

Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab informed the delegation about the recent general elections in the country.

He said that the Pakistan People's Party has won in six divisions of Sindh, out of the 25 towns of Karachi. The elected chairman of the People's Party in 13 towns are performing their duties whereas Jamaat-e-Islami have their chairmen in nine towns of Karachi, he said.

He said that the biggest challenge of Karachi is water and sewage problems, transport, infrastructure, public space, construction of parks are also big challenges for Karachi.

He said that Karachi is the business center of Pakistan and Karachi needs to be improved to promote the economic and commercial activities of the country.

He said that specific information technology zones can be created in Karachi and for this sufficient space is available, therefore international companies can invest heavily in the I.T sector in Karachi.

The Mayor of Karachi said that in the old city area of Karachi, the drainage system has become very old and cannot be expanded due to the dense population. Due to heavy rains, rainwater starts accumulating on the roads in Karachi, for which the city government has to take emergency measures to remove it as soon as possible, he said.

He said that due to a better and more comprehensive strategy, the situation in Karachi is now under control during monsoon rains and the flow of stormwater drains is normal.

He said the first solar park was constructed at Kidney Hill in the city. 100 kilowatts of electricity will be available from the solar park. The plan to install a chairlift between Kidney Hill and Hill Park is pending, he said.

More than 150,000 trees have been planted in Kidney Hill and it has become the best urban forest for Karachi, he said.

NTDC maintains transmission line to ensure uninterrupted power supply in Ramadan

LAHORE (APP): Following instruction of its Managing Director Engr. Dr. Rana Abdul Jabbar Khan, the National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC) is continuing with its comprehensive maintenance programme for the NTDC transmission lines and grid stations to ensure uninterrupted power supply across the country during the upcoming holy month of Ramadan.

NTDC spokesman told media here Wednesday that under the maintenance programme, washing, cleaning, replacement of Disc Insulators and other neces-

sary activities are being carried out by respective NTDC formations. These activities, he added, would increase reliability of transmission lines and grid stations and help ensure uninterrupted power supply during the Holy month of Ramadan.

Under this program, shutdowns were also available on 500kV and 220kV transmission line circuits in the south region. During these shutdowns, he mentioned, the cleaning, washing of insulators, tightening of nut/bolts of line hardware and replacement of disc insulators with RTV coated disc Insulators

on Red, Yellow and Blue phases were carried out.

The spokesman elaborated that a total of 73,493 disc insulators were washed/cleaned at 459 locations, 9,804 disc insulators were replaced at 55 locations, more than 688 braces and 570 nuts and bolts were installed, two damaged disc insulators strings (132kV C.B ESQ1 and E7Q1 C.B Yellow Phase) along with two healthy EMCO-Make disc insulators strings of 132kV C.B E7Q1 (total four strings) were also replaced at 220kV Grid Station Jhampir-1.



KARACHI: Caretaker Federal Minister for Health Dr Nadeem Jan along with Chief Executive officer Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan Asim Rauf inaugurates Expansion & Revamping ceremony of Chemicals & API Manufacturing Facility Drug Pharma Chemicals (PVT) LTD.

Short-term Hajj facility introduced for intended pilgrims: Aneeq Ahmed

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed has announced that this year's Hajj is set to be optimal for Pakistani pilgrims, offering unprecedented facilities. He introduced a short-term Hajj facility for the first time, marking a notable milestone in the nation's history.

Addressing the start of the training session for pilgrims at Darul Hajj Haji Camp on Wednesday, he announced that during Hajj, all women would receive Abayas, adorned with the Pakistani flag. Selected through a transparent system, the minister said fortunate pilgrims were chosen via a draw, and their training began on February 12. He said that Hajj pilgrims were the guests of Allah and a true

ambassador of Pakistan, which would be facilitated with advance facilities. He said that when he took charge of the ministry, it was made clear that in 2024, Pakistani pilgrims would be provided with the best facilities. This year's Hajj would be exemplary for Pakistani pilgrims, offering facilities that were not available in the past.

The minister highlighted the comprehensive efforts made by the ministry regarding Hajj arrangements, collaborating with Saudi Arabia during a visit to assess the facilities, provided to pilgrims. He mentioned that accommodations, meals, and transportation, along with all basic necessities, had been standardised.

While discussing transportation facilities for Pakistani pilgrims in

Saudi Arabia, he said that this year, there would be provision of trains along with buses for pilgrims.

Responding to a question, the minister said that for the first time in the country's history, a short-term Hajj facility is being provided in Pakistan. Every pilgrim would be given a green suit-case containing a QR code to prevent any loss of belongings. The Hajj pilgrims would also be provided with a free SIM containing 180 international calling minutes and 7GB data to facilitate easy communication with their loved-ones.

Additionally, for the first time this year, women in Pakistan would receive free Abayas, adorned with the Pakistani flag, contributing to the country's identity.

E-Kutchehri resolves LESCO customers' complaints swiftly

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) Chief Executive Officer Engineer Shahid Haider held an e-kutchehri [open court] here at LESCO Headquarters on Wednesday by listening/considering the LESCO customers' complaints through a Facebook live session. He also issued on-the-spot orders to the officers' concerned for immediate redress of complaints.

Company's Director (HR) Mohammad Nauman Ghafoor, DG (Implementation) Raja Mehmood, Chief Engineer (Operations) Sarwar Mughal, Chief Engineer (T&G) Zafar Mehmood, Manager (Commercial) Tariq Usman, In charge (Complaint Cell) Rana Rizwan Sibghatullah, Deputy Manager (Admin) Salman Haider and Assistant Manager (Complaint Cell) Farhan Shakeel were also present, while the SEs (Superintending Engineers) of all the LESCO circles participated online.

A large number of customers of all LESCO circles approached the e-kutchehri for timely resolution of their complaints, most were related to delay in installation of new meters and replacement of defective meters, and the LESCO chief issued instructions accordingly to the officers concerned for their early resolution.

He urged all the officers to address grievances of all the customers. He also appealed to the customers to pay their electricity bills on time so that they would be supplied with uninterrupted electricity.

On this occasion, the customers appreciated the LESCO CEO for this effective initiative that ensures their easy access to the LESCO's top management and hoped their complaints would now be treated and resolved in a proper manner. It should be noted that every month, the LESCO chief along with top management receives complaints from the customers through the facebook page LESCO PMDU.

LESCO detects 53,285 power pilferers in 155 days: The Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) detected a total of 53,285 connections from where power consumers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts: Lahore, Sheikhpura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara on the 155th day of grand anti-power theft campaign.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION UNIT GOMAL ZAM DAM COMMAND AREA DEVELOPMENT PROJECT AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT, GOVT. OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA NOTICE INVITING TENDER						
Gomal Zam Dam Command Area Development Project (GZD-CADP) is jointly funded by Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa & USAID. The Project Implementation Unit (PIU), GZD-CADP invites sealed bids on Single Stage Two Envelope basis from eligible firms/contractors in accordance with KPPRA Procurement Rules 2014 (amended from time to time) for the following works on farmers' fields located at different sites in District Di. Khan and Tank.						
#	Detail of Works / Sub Works Construction of Earthen & Lined Watercourses (WCs) along with Allied Structures	Estimated Cost (Million)	Earnest Money / CDR	PEC Relevant Category /Code	Completion Period	
	Package# WCs (Nos) Dists/Min					
1	Package-01A 03 D-6	16.793	336,000	C-05 Or Above	150 Days/ (05 Months)	
2	Package-02A 07 D-6	40.607	813,000			
3	Package-03A 04 D-6	27.858	558,000			
4	Package-07A 08 D-08	34.187	684,000			
5	Package-10A 10 D-1 & D-2	20.952	420,000			
6	Package-10B 10 D-2	35.211	705,000			
7	Package-11A 10 D-3 & R-Min	44.603	893,000	Field of Specialization		
8	Package-11B 09 D-3	27.414	549,000			
9	Package-12A 05 D-5	32.852	658,000			
10	Package-12B 05 D-5	23.375	468,000			
11	Package-15A 09 D-1&1	37.214	745,000			
12	Package-15B 07 SS-Min	40.821	817,000			
13	Package-18A 06 D-4	36.500	730,000	CE-04 & CE-10		
14	Package-18B 06 D-4	31.371	628,000			
15	Package-29A 07 D-5	43.354	868,000			
16	Package-30A 08 D-5 & D-6	44.980	900,000			
17	Package-31A 07 D-10 & D-6	24.491	490,000			
18	Package-53 07 D-3,4 & 6	36.795	736,000			

TERMS AND CONDITIONS:

- Bidding documents (separate for each package) containing all the terms & conditions and other relevant instructions for the works can be obtained upon payment of Rs. 3000/- (Pak Rupees Three Thousand only) per package (non-re-fundable/transferable) against a proper receipt from the office of Project Management Unit (PMU), GZD-CADP located on Qafila Road Street No-17, House # 04 New Defense Colony near KFC Tehkal Peshawar w.e.f. the date of publication of this tender notice in the newspaper till one day prior to opening date of the bids.
- Bidding documents shall only be issued to the original contractors/firms or their authorized representative(s) having authority on judicial stamp, upon production of attested copies of the following documents (A to G).
 - Valid registration/enlistment with any Works Department of public sector and/or On Farm Water Management Department(s).
 - Valid registration with Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) in relevant category (C-05 or above) and field of specialization (CE-04 & CE-10).
 - Valid Registration with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA).
 - Valid Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) of the bidder or his authorized representative.
 - Proof of Income Tax & Sales Tax Registration/Active Tax Payer with concerned Authorities.
 - Tentative Agreement with certified / approved PCPS and Nucra manufacturing yards pertaining to supply/purchase subject to award of Contract.
 - Attested copy of affidavit stating that the original CDR-Call Deposit Receipt @ 2% of the bid cost, sealed and placed in the Financial Proposal. Moreover, the Original Affidavit shall be attached with the Technical proposal, failing which the technical bid will be considered as Non-responsive.
- The eligible bidder(s) can apply for one or more than one package. However, the bidder(s) will be considered for award of single package only. For each package separate bid solicitation documents are to be submitted by the interested bidders.
- The eligible bidders shall send their bids in duplicate along with original call deposit and attested copies of the above-mentioned documents (A to G) through courier / or by hand in separate envelopes clearly marked as Original & Duplicate. Detailed bidding criteria is given in IB-2 of the bidding documents.
- The bidding system shall be based upon Single Stage Two (02) Envelope system namely;
 - Technical Proposal of the bid
 - Financial Proposal of the bid
- The Financial Proposals of only those bidders/firms will be open whose Technical Proposals declared as qualified by the duly constituted procurement committee / sub-committee in accordance with the scrutiny/assessment of the technical credentials/evaluation criteria mentioned in the bidding documents. The financial proposals of the technically accepted bids shall be open publicly at a time, date and venue announced and communicated to the bidders in advance, within the bid validity period.
- Financial Bid(s) must be accompanied with Bid Security @ 02% of the bid cost in the shape of Call Deposit Receipt (CDR), as per prescribed format given in the bidding documents (Form of Bid Security), from any scheduled Bank of Pakistan in the name of Project Director, PIU, GZD-CADP, D.I. Khan.
- Bidders/Contractors who have already been awarded contract(s) under GZD-CADP and they have still not completed their package(s) shall not be eligible for this contract. In case of completion of the awarded civil works; the firm shall provide the satisfactory performance certificate from Project's Design & Supervisory Consultants.
- Bid securities of 1st, 2nd and 3rd lowest bidders for the respective works will be retained by the Client till approval of tenders by the Competent Authority.
- All Government Notifications / Rules / Taxes updated from time to time shall be applicable.
- The undersigned reserves the rights to reject any or all bids as per provision contained in Rules-47 of KPPRA Procurement Rules, 2014 (amended from time to time).
- The award of contract shall be on the basis of above/below engineer estimate on MRS instead of item rate basis. Bidders should quote their rates on percent "Above/Below" of the engineer estimate (both in words & digits) and only two digits after the decimal point shall be considered for evaluation purpose.
- A pre-bid meeting will be held in the office of Project Implementation Unit (PIU), Gomal Zam Dam Command Area Development Project (GZD-CADP), Bannu Road Dera Ismail Khan on **22.02.2024 at 10.00 AM**. Interested bidders are advised to attend this meeting at the schedule time, date and venue.
- Bids complete in all respect shall reach the office of Project Management Unit (PMU), GZD-CADP located on Qafila Road Street No-17, House # 04 New Defense Colony near KFC Tehkal Peshawar by **11:00 AM on 29.02.2024** which shall be opened at **11:30 AM** on the same date & venue in the presences of bidders, who wish to attend.
- Error/omissions (if any) are subject to rectification.

PROJECT DIRECTOR, PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION UNIT (PIU), GOMAL ZAM DAM COMMAND AREA DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (GZD-CADP), BANNU ROAD, NEAR SHIEKH YOUSAF ADDA DERA ISMAIL KHAN (Mobile #: 0333-9724646, Email ID: pd.gzd.cadp@gmail.com)



LAHORE: Federal Minister for IT and Communication Dr. Umar Saif witnesses an MoU of Treatment And Prevention Of Heart Attack between NHATI, PSIC and National Information Technology Board (NITB).

JI refuses PTI's offer for alliance in KP Assembly

PESHAWAR (APP): Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) on Wednesday made a significant move by rejecting to enter into a political coalition and support Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which had sought assistance from the religiopolitical party to accommodate its independents who emerged victorious in the February 8 elections for the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.

Talking to media persons here, Deputy Emir of JI, Liaqat Baloch, announced that after thorough consultations within the party, they have decided not to comply with PTI's request.

Baloch revealed that PTI had approached JI solely for assistance in forming the government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while expressing readiness for cooperation at the national level across Pakistan.

In the repercussion of this refusal, PTI may not secure any of the reserved seats – 26 for women and four for minorities – in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly unless it finds an alternative solution.

PTI faces a challenge after the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) stripped the party of its “bat” symbol, compelling it to field candidates as independents who contested on various symbols.

Consequently, despite securing seats in the provincial legislatures of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the PTI may not obtain reserved seats for women and minorities unless its members align with one of the parties that contested the recent elections.

Youth urged to play role in eradicating polio

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Secretary Health Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Polio Control Abdul Basit has urged the youth to come forward to play a role in eradicating the polio epidemic so that children can be saved from lifelong disability.

He expressed these views while interacting with young squash player Khushal Riaz Khan, who met Abdul Basit at the Emergency Operation Centre for Polio eradication on Wednesday. The Special Secretary Health lauded Khushal Riaz Khan's outstanding performance in the National Squash Championship and National Games 2023 and also appreciated his efforts in the eradication of polio, especially in anti-polio vaccination campaigns to protect children from polio.



Afghanistan, many children are still disabled for life due to polio every year. Abdul Basit hoped that, like Khushal Riaz Khan, other youths, especially sportsmen of national and international level, would fully cooperate with the Emergency Operation Centre in the noble cause of eradicating polio.

AIG summoned regarding promotion cases

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission (KPIC) on Wednesday summoned Additional Inspector General (legal) of Police to proactive disclose promotion cases in Police Department and recommends inquiry against Tehsil Municipal Administrations Jhangira and Abbottabad.

In compliance to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission (KPIC) personal hearing, the Additional Inspector General of Police (AIG Legal) Muhammad Asif attended the hearing.

The AIG was summoned as Public Information Officer (PIO) of the Central Police Office Peshawar in a case where a citizen namely Muhammad Iqbal sought information from the police office regarding promotion from clerk to superintendent case.

The complainant asked for provision of copies of the Departmental Promotion Committee meeting from the rank of Assistant Grade Clerk (BPS16) to Office Superintendent (BPS17), in which the public body failed to provide the requested information with in stipulated time as envisaged in the KP RTI Act 2013.

In hearing, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission (KPIC) directed the public body to provide the relevant data within seven days positively, besides proactively disclosure of the said information on the official website of police department within seven working days with intimation to the Commission.

While in other cases the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission (KPIC) recommends enquiry against the Tehsil Municipal Administrations (TMAs) Abbottabad and Jhangira by the Secretary Local Government, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa over noncompliance to the citizen requests under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa RTI Act, 2013.

It is pertinent to mention that the above mentioned TMAs Abbottabad and Jangira were failed to provide information to the citizens regarding maps and auction record of shops, list of staff of TMAs, detail of income expenditure from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2022 from the said TMAs.

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Muhammad Nawaz defends M.Phil thesis



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A scholar of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) named Muhammad Nawaz in Pakistan Studies defended his thesis titled “Identity

Crisis in Pakistan; the case study of Hazara province movement, on Wednesday. Islamia College University Peshawar Department of Pakistan Studies faculty member Dr. Younas supervised the

scholar during his research.

Moreover, Benazir Women University Peshawar Professor Dr. Zarmina Baloch was external examiner of the dissertation during defense.

PHC disposes of Aimal Wali's plea

PESHAWAR (INP): The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has disposed of the case filed by Awami National Party (ANP) president Aimal Wali Khan against the PTI founder.

The case was heard by a two-member bench comprising Justice Shakil Ahmed and Justice Waqar Ahmed.

The petition filed by the ANP president claimed that the nomination papers filed by the PTI founder to contest by-election on seven constituencies were distorted as they omitted details of Toshakhana gifts.

After hearing the arguments of the lawyers, the court remarkeded that the assembly had been dissolved, and the PTI founder was no longer a member. The Peshawar High Court disposed of the case.

Court extends bails of PTI leaders

PESHAWAR (APP): A Judge of the Anti-Corruption Court Babar Ali on Wednesday extended the bails of PTI leaders and former provincial ministers and MPA in corruption cases till March 05.

On the requests of the former MPAs Fazal Shakoor, Taj Khalid, Arif Ahmed Zai and Fazal Muhammad Khan the judge extended their bails till March 5 while the bail of Khaliq ur Rehman was extended till March 04.

The applicants were facing allegations of illegal appointments in the government departments.

AG office issues report

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Attorney General (AG) Office Khyber Pakhtunkhwa dispose of four thousand 286 cases and forwarded annual performance report to Federal Ministry of Law, on Wednesday.

The report is forwarded by Additional Attorney General Sana Ullah stated that as many as 90% financial cases related to federal government has been disposed of during last year which causes reduction in such pleas are recorded.

According to the report, as many as three thousand 567 cases are dispose of at principal bench of Peshawar High Court while at circuit benches the disposal is recorded as 63 pleas at DI Khan, 230 at Bannu, 201 at Mingora bench and Abbottabad bench disposed-off 226 cases.

PHC has constituted special bench for financial matters relating to federal government as requested by Attorney General Officer as per directions from Ministry of Law, the report stated. Moreover, focal persons of federal departments are directed to prioritize financial pleas.

Crackdown continued

PESHAWAR (APP): The crackdown on drug traffickers continues rapidly in provincial capital, a spokesman of the Excise Police said here Wednesday.

The official said that Provincial In-charge of Excise Intelligence Bureau on an information of an attempt to smuggle a large amount of drugs in a rickshaw took quick action and recovered 14400 grams hashish during search from rickshaw number GB 2650 on Motorway Service Road here.

The accused driver was arrested on the spot, and a case was registered in Excise Police Station Peshawar Region for further investigation, the spokesperson said.

Likewise, it said power supply will remain suspended from Mardan Grid Station on 15th February from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00



PESHAWAR: Governor KP Haji Ghulam Ali and Consul General of Islamic Republic of Iran Ali Banafsheh Khah in a group photo with other officials during 45th National Day of Iran.

KMU, Zalmi Force Project ink MoU

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Medical University (KMU) and Zalmi Force, a distinguished project of Peshawar Zalmi, on Wednesday formalized a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in a step towards enriching extracurricular opportunities for students.

The signing ceremony, held at KMU, saw Nasir Salim Arab, Director of Sports and Youth Affairs, and Omer Farooq Syed, Head of Zalmi Force, cementing the partnership.

The event was graced by the presence of VC KMU, Prof Dr. Zia Ul Haq, who participated as the Chief Guest. Also in attendance

were Registrar KMU, Inam Ullah Khan Wazir, Director IBMS Associate Prof Dr. Inayat Shah and Syed Hasnain, General Secretary of Zalmi Force.

The primary goal of the MoU is to actively involve KMU students in diverse activities, fostering their personal and professional growth through the “Zalmi Force” initiative.

This collaboration aims to introduce a vibrant array of sports and cultural activities within the KMU premises.

VC KMU Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq, Chief Guest, expressed optimism about the partnership, emphasizing the promotion of

healthy extracurricular engagement among university students.

He highlighted the mutual benefits expected to arise from this collaboration, providing talented young individuals with valuable opportunities in their respective fields of interest.

This strategic alliance signifies a commitment to nurturing holistic development and creating a platform for students to explore and showcase their talents.

The Zalmi Force program is anticipated to become a catalyst for unleashing the full potential of KMU students, contributing to their overall educational experience.

FPCCI, KhCCI join hands to enhance trade

PESHAWAR (APP): The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) and Khyber Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KhCCI) Wednesday joined hands to enhance bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

This was agreed during a meeting between the Vice President, Aun Ali Syed and president KhCCI and other office bearers of both organizations here at FPCCI Regional Office.

The meeting was attended by KCCI President Javad Hussain Kazmi, Vice President Zahirullah Shinwari, and Member Syed Ali Hamad Kazmi.

During the meeting, they expressed their commitment to work together to enhance bilateral trade between the two countries.

Speaking on the occasion, Vice President of FPCCI, Aun Ali Syed said that increasing trade activities with neighboring countries was crucial for economic stability and strengthening relations.

The KhCCI representatives congratulated the newly elected Vice President Aun Ali Syed and expressed their hope that his leadership would pave the way for resolving business community issues in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

They also exchanged suggestions for strengthening Pak-Afghan bilateral relations.

Discussing the current economic situation, Aun Ali Syed emphasized the need for practical steps to address business community problems while promoting business activities.

He observed that Pakistan and Afghanistan were brotherly Islamic countries and inherently interdependent on each other, therefore efforts would be made to stabilize their bilateral trade relations by the incoming governments, paving the way for uninterrupted trade between the two nations.

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PESHAWAR: Caretaker Minister Dr. Aamir Abdullah presiding over a meeting.

Power suspension for Peshawar notified

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) on Wednesday notified that due to maintenance work power supply will remain suspended from Shai Bagh Grid Station on 15th and 16th February from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of 132 KV Shabqadar, Tangi, Rajjar and Charassada grid connected feeders will face inconvenience.

The Power Supply will also remain suspended from Mardan Grid Station on 15th and 20th February from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. resultantly consumers of Mohabatabad, Express, SIDB, Shaikh Maltoon, Industrial, SIDB, Janabad, Pakistan Chowk, Canal Road, New Charsadda Road, New Manga, Saleem Khan, Gujar Garhi, Town,

muslim Abad, New Saleem Khan, Bacha Khan, MED, Benazir Children Hospital, Muhabatabad Road, Nissata Road, Sheikh Maltoon, Ahmat Abad, Misri Abad, PRC, Eid Gah, Green Area, New Sheikh Maltoon feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from Warsak Power House grid Station on 15th, 16th and 17th February from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of 132 KV Warsak, Peshawar Cantt, Regi Model Town, Shahi Bhagh, Sakhi Chashma feeders will face inconvenience.

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ECP notifies elections in 6 PSs on 17th

PESHAWAR (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has been notified to hold elections in six polling stations of NA-43 Tank on February 17.

A press release issued here Wednesday said that polling was postponed in the six polling stations due to the law and order situation.

The ECP directed the Chief Secretary and IG KP to ensure necessary security arrangements for polling.

KPRA chaired meeting

PESHAWAR (APP): Director General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA), Fouzia Iqbal chaired a meeting of the KPRA Collectorate on Wednesday to conduct a stock-take review of the revenue and non-revenue targets assigned to headquarters and the regional offices.

Additional collectors from the regional offices and the headquarters gave detailed presentations of their performances and highlighted the challenges they were facing. The Director General appreciated the efforts of the officers in the collectorate and assured them to address the issues on a priority basis.

“As officers of a revenue-collecting authority, we are like bread-winning children, who are usually more responsible and overburdened,” she said, adding that this year’s revenue target of Rs42 billion reflects a significant responsibility, and the government has shown its trust in the department.

“We have to work with more passion and zeal to not only achieve the target but to surpass it”, she said adding that efforts would be made to resolve the issues of her team and higher-ups would be approached if needed.

Cleanliness of Assembly continue

PESHAWAR (APP): After the completion of the general elections, the process of government formation has started with the doors of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly will be opened before the new government comes.

After one year, the cleaning process of the Provincial Assembly has continued to welcome newly elected candidates of various political parties. It should be noted that the last session of KP Assembly was held on January 17, 2023 under the presidency of former Chief Minister Mahmood Khan.

After which the KP Assembly was to be dissolved on January 18 at 9:15 AM under Article 112 of the Constitution. According to the constitution, a meeting of the provincial assembly must be convened within 21 days after the completion of the election process.

Weather in KP to be cold and dry: Met Office

PESHAWAR (APP): The weather in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would be cold, clear and dry, an official of the Meteorological Department said here Wednesday.

The weather is cold and dry, however, in the upper districts of the province, the weather is likely to be very cold and partly cloudy, Meteorological Department officials confirmed.

There is a possibility of

rain in the upper districts of the province in the evening hours and chance of snowfall in the upper districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is also there, the official of the Meteorological Department said.

The minimum temperature was recorded at 8 degrees Celsius and chance of rising to a maximum of 19 degrees Celsius with humidity ratio in the air up

to 50% recorded, the official said, adding, the lowest temperature recorded in the province was minus 2 degree Celsius in Dir, Minus 1 in Malam Jabba, 1 in Saidu Sharif, 0 in Abbottabad while up to 5 degrees Celsius has been recorded in Bannu. There was a reduction in seasonal diseases due to change in weather with rain and snow, he informed.



In brief

Three outlaws arrested

MULTAN (APP): Police have arrested three notorious criminals and recovered drugs and illegal weapons from their possession during separate raids conducted in the city during last 24 hours. According to police sources, police ensuring all possible measures to provide sense of security to masses by launching comprehensive action against criminals under the vision of IG Punjab Dr Usman Anwar of making the province crime free. In this regard, the Gulgasht police arrested Shahzaib s/o Abdul Rasheed and recovered over one kilogram Hashish and weapons from his possession. The arrested criminal was wanted to police in different cases of drug peddling and other offenses, police sources said. Meanwhile, Shah Shams police apprehended Muhammad Ahtesham and Muhammad Rizwan besides recovering 27 litre liquor and weapons during a special raid conducted here on Wednesday. Separate cases have been registered against the criminals with the concerned police stations, police sources added.

Anti-dengue steps reviewed

FAISALABAD (APP): A meeting of the District Emergency Response Committee for Anti-Dengue was held under the chairmanship of Additional Deputy Commissioner Dr. Shahab Aslam, here on Wednesday. During the meeting, implementation of preventive and protective measures, taken by the relevant departments against dengue was reviewed. The ADC ordered conduct of surveys of places repeatedly where dengue larvae could grow including tyre shops, graveyards, nurseries, etc. He said that the anti-dengue activities of all departments should be clearly visible. The relevant departments should ensure their attendance in the Tehsil Emergency Response Committee meetings, he added. He said that prevention of dengue was not possible without cooperation of citizens. Therefore, awareness programs should be continued to make them aware of implementation of preventive measures for safety from dengue mosquitoes. Earlier, Chief Executive Officer Health Dr. Asfand Yur briefed the meeting about the preventive measures.

CTD arrests terrorist

SAHIWAL (INP): The Punjab Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) has arrested a terrorist during an operation in Sahiwal on Wednesday. Sources in CTD said that explosive material IED, primacord, detonator, battery, electric circuit and cash recovered from possession of the terrorist who was nabbed from Sarwar Chowk on Faisalabad Road. Sources revealed that the arrested terrorist belongs to the banned organization Daesh, named Usman Saeed is a resident of Jhang. A case has been registered against the terrorist in police station CTD.

Hesco seizes 341 connections

HYDERABAD (INP): Under the vigilant supervision of Chief Executive Officer Engineer Bashir Ahmed, Hyderabad Electric Supply Company (Hesco) launches a rigorous operation against electricity theft, yielding significant results in the past 24 hours. A total of 341 connections of electricity thieves were apprehended, disconnected, and charged for their illicit activities, as reported by Hesco.



ABBOTTABAD: KP Governor, Haji Ghulam Ali inaugurating Centre of Excellence for Freelancing IT Lab in Abbottabad University of Science and Technology.

CJ PHC opens control room at Session Courts

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Ibrahim Khan inaugurated control room at session court Mardan, on Wednesday. Keeping in view the recent terror situation and law and order situation, the control room has been set up, the control room will consist of 66 cameras and will make the security of the court and district accounts full-proof.

In a few days, the Peshawar High Court had a heavy load of cases involving political figures and other types of cases, Allah is witness that I made decisions based on justice. Judges should dispose of the pending cases as soon as possible, justice should be ensured to the appellants.

The Chief Justice announced to accept the demands made for the Mardan bar, lawyers should gather at the judicial complex we will cooperate, the Chief Justice has also inaugurated a healthcare unit for lawyers in which basic health facilities will be available to lawyers in the health care unit, Chief Justice Ibrahim Khan also inaugurated a separate bar room for women lawyers. The Chief Justice announced the provision of water dispensers, LEDs and air-conditioners for the women's bar room.

Broadcasters celebrates World Radio Day with enthusiasm: Radio broadcasters across the globe celebrated World Radio Day, recognizing the medium's vital role in communication, information dissemination, and cultural expression. Established by UNESCO in 2011, World Radio Day aims to raise awareness about the importance of radio and promote international cooperation in advocating for access to information through radio broadcasting.

Radio is one of the oldest forms of mass communication has remained a resilient and influential medium despite the rise of digital platforms. Its accessibility, affordability, and ability to reach remote and marginalized communities make it a powerful tool for sharing stories, promoting dialogue, and fostering social cohesion.

Radio played a vital role during wars, terror attacks, disasters, and pandemics. For example, The Radio Dilber FM93 Charsadda became a single source of information during the 2010 floods in Charsadda and other districts. People were glued to their radios, relying on them for crucial information regarding relief and rehabilitation efforts.

In the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), radio has played a significant role in shaping public discourse and connecting communities. From its humble beginnings

as a means of entertainment and news dissemination, radio in KP has evolved into a platform for education, health promotion, and disaster management.

The emergence of radio in KP can be traced back to the establishment of Radio Pakistan stations in major cities like Peshawar and Abbottabad. These stations served as a lifeline for residents, providing them with news, music, and entertainment during times of peace and conflict.

Over the years, radio broadcasting in KP has expanded with the launch of community radio stations catering to the specific needs and interests of local communities. These stations, run by non-profit organizations and community groups, have empowered marginalized voices and provided platforms for grassroots activism and social change. More than 50 FM radio stations are working in KP recently.

Commenting on the significance of World Radio Day, M zeb Khan, a veteran broadcaster from Swabi, emphasized the enduring appeal of radio in the digital age. "Radio continues to be a trusted source of information and entertainment for millions of listeners worldwide," he stated. "Its ability to reach remote areas and provide localized content makes it indispensable in today's media landscape", he said.

Similarly, Hizbullah, a radio manager and presenter based in Charsadda, highlighted the role of radio in promoting cultural diversity and preserving indigenous languages. "Radio celebrates the rich tapestry of cultures and traditions across the globe," he remarked. "It serves as a platform for linguistic diversity, allowing communities to express themselves in their own languages and dialects", said Hizb Ullah.

In addition to its cultural significance, radio has also been instrumental in disaster preparedness and response efforts in KP. Fazal Ullah Amin, a radio producer involved in emergency broadcasting, shared his experiences of using radio to disseminate critical information during natural disasters and humanitarian crises. "Radio's role in saving lives cannot be overstated," he noted. "Its ability to reach affected populations quickly and effectively makes it a vital tool in emergency communication", Fazal Ullah said to the FP.

As World Radio Day celebrations continue, broadcasters and listeners alike reaffirm their commitment to preserving and promoting the unique and enduring legacy of radio broadcasting. In an increasingly digital world, radio remains a beacon of connectivity, community, and creativity, bridging divides and amplifying voices across borders and barriers.

Awareness session for Mushroom growers held

F.P. Report

BARA: On behalf of the Khyber Agriculture Department in collaboration with Tirah Mushroom Agriculture Development Organization (TMADO), an agricultural awareness session was organized in Karigur Gari, tehsil Bara on the last day. Dr. Bakhtiar Khan Special Secretary Agriculture Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was the chief guest of the event.

Besides, other officials including director general of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Jan Muhammad Khan, director general agriculture of merged districts Murad Ali Khan, Shad Muhammad Chief of Economic Recovery Development Authority (ERDA) of USAID, Zia Islam Dawar District Director of Agriculture, Aqeel Shah Deputy Director of Agriculture in merged Areas and others were present on the occasion.

A large number of local farmers associated with the agriculture sector were present in the awareness seminar. Addressing on the occasion, Special Secretary of Agriculture Extension Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Dr. Bakhtiar Khan said that the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and especially



newly merged districts were taking practical steps for the development of agriculture and providing better facilities to the farmers.

"The cultivation of seeds, vegetables, fruit and fast food are noteworthy, while practical steps have been taken to provide modern machinery to the farmers," he said, adding that the agriculture department along with other welfare organizations is also organizing various training sessions for the farmers.

The tribal districts were fertile in terms of agriculture and would provide them with basic facilities so that the farmers here were prosperous, he vowed. The secretary maintained that the Department of Agriculture had succeeded in the cultivation of olive orchards in trib-

al districts and especially in Khyber, grafted fruit orchards in wild olives, mushrooms, tomatoes, while the cultivation of more fast foods had also been successful.

Meanwhile, the local and Tirah farmers and organizers had set up various stalls, including locally produced sunflower oil, honey, country ghee, jaggery, stalls of olives, walnuts, and various locally produced vegetables that attracted the participants.

Prior to it, the organizers highlighted the aims and purposes of the ERDA project that was started in 2022 for the welfare of cultivators and will continue in the merged area until 2027. The chief guest also planted a sibling to kick off monsoon plantation drive in the area.

Anti-polio vaccination drive from 26th

F.P. Report

HAFAZABAD: Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad Madam Sundas Irshad said that five-day anti-polio campaign will commence from February, 26 and health and all other concerned departments is completing all necessary arrangements to make the campaign successful in the district.

While presiding over the meeting of District Anti-Polio Committee Hafizabad, she said that health department has constituted 998 polio teams consisting on health workers to administer drops of polio vaccine to more than two lakh and thirty-eight children below to five-year-old.

She said that polio teams would visit home to home while special teams also deployed at hospital, schools and other all public places to give polio drops to target children.

DC appealed the teachers, parents, traders, media-men, social worker and civil society to cooperate with polio teams for administering drops of polio vaccine. Ulama can play their vital role to convince people through their Jumma sermons to get administer polio drops to their children during anti-polio campaign, she added.

Section 144 imposed in Dara

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: In order to ensure smooth conduct of re-poll process in PK-90 (Tribal Sub Division Dara) on 15th February 2024, the Deputy Commissioner Kohat has under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code imposed ban on use of motor bikes and display of weapons.

According to details, the Law Enforcement Agencies in the Tribal Sub-Division Dara (including Jawaki) will be exempted from ban with immediate effect for a period of 5 days.

The violation of this order is punishable under section 188 of the Pakistan Penal Code. Meanwhile, in view of the General Election 2024 re-poll in PK-90, Deputy Commissioner Kohat has also declared 15th February 2024 as public holiday in Tribal Sub-Division Dara.

40 students donated blood

F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: Hamza Foundation and Thalassemia Welfare Hospital arranged awareness seminar regarding genetic disease thalassemia at Government Higher Secondary School Amba Dheri area of Charsadda, Wednesday.

As many as 40 students donated blood for thalassemia patients and appreciated the organizers for ensuring such an informative session at the school. GHSS Principal Bahadar Ali along with teachers and administrative staff also participated in the awareness seminar. Hamza Foundation and Thalassemia Welfare Hospital representative Atiq-ur-Rehman briefed the participants on operations and services of the organization.

KP Governor opens IT Lab at AUST

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Haji Ghulam Ali on Wednesday inaugurated a free IT lab at Abbottabad University of Science and Technology (AUST) to foster technological education and promote sustainable practices.

Addressing the gathering, Governor KP emphasized the significance of Free IT Labs in Fourth Generation Universities and applauded Abbottabad University's efforts to obtain projects in information technology from global countries. He advocated for educational systems that prioritize skill acquisition over job pursuit and stressed the importance of empowering youth in the present era.

He further outlined plans to beautify the university's vacant land and enhance its atmosphere by planting 10,000 trees. He underlined the importance of student involvement in the university's care and beautification efforts. He urged students to utilize information technology tools responsibly to shape a better future for themselves and society.

Speaking on the occasion, Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Malik Mujaddad ur Rehman underscored the importance of nurturing talent and ability among the province's youth to empower them as valuable assets to the nation and society. During the event, it was revealed that AUST has generated approximately \$47,000 from various international-level projects in information technology.

Furthermore, nearly 400 deserving and underprivileged students have been provided scholarships that reflect the university's commitment to inclusive education.

Dr. Rahman also highlighted the significant advancements including the resolution of the university's land issue and the complete elimination of the electricity bill through a \$9 million investment in solar energy.

Following the inauguration, the Governor engaged with students in the IT lab and emphasized the acquisition of expertise in information technology. Commendation certificates were distributed to students for their projects, while faculty members received shields in recognition of their contributions.

KKKUK starts MPhil program

F.P. Report

KARAK: The Department of Communication and Media Studies (CMS) Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak on Wednesday announced the enrolment of its first batch of scholars into the MPhil program. The orientation session was graced by the presence of the Head of Department, Dr. Muhammad Anwar Marwat.

Addressing the scholars during the orientation, Dr. Anwar Marwat emphasized the importance of academic excellence and urged the scholars to strive for high standards in their research endeavours. He articulated the department's commitment to promote a culture of academic inquiry, with MPhil level students expected to contribute significantly to the advancement of knowledge in the field. Mr. Wajahat Karim, a senior faculty member of the CMS department, shared valuable insights with the scholars regarding the demands of higher-level studies.



He underscored the necessity of dedication and willpower, stressing that the department is dedicated to providing intellectual insights into mass media research. During the orientation session, Dr. Abdur Rauf, highlighted the significance of adhering to the academic calendar, particularly in the dominion of research and development.

Stressing the importance of structured academic activities, Dr. Rauf set the tone for a disciplined and productive academic journey for the MPhil scholars. Muhammad Anwar Khan and Basar Ali, Lecturers at the Department of CMS,

shed light on the department's commitment to inculcating practical skills in the course contents.

They underlined the relevance of real-world application of knowledge acquired during the MPhil program. Expressing their gratitude, the MPhil scholars lauded the efforts of the department in making the MPhil course accessible to them. The scholars eagerly look forward to the academic journey ahead, confident that the Department of CMS at Khushal Khan Khattak University will equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge for success in their respective fields.



FAISALABAD: A large number of people standing in queue outside Police Service Center to get their driving license at D-Ground.

Zehri condemns firing on peaceful protestors

F.P. Report

QUETTA: The incident of firing on unarmed protestors at Civic Center and Goth Sheikh Ibrahim is condemnable and a tool to spread chaos. These views were expressed by Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri in her condemnatory statement. She strongly condemned the incident of firing on the protestors of the ongoing sit-in at the civic center and Goth Sheikh Ibrahim against the alleged rigging by the Bhutani brothers and son shehzad bhutani in PB21 hub, killing three persons and injuring several others, saying that the incidents are human brutality and there is an incident of terrorism in which unsuspecting people were fired upon due to which the lamp of a house went off and many innocent people were injured.

Senator said that on the one hand, you are trying to seize the rights of the people once again through rigging and when your theft was caught, you are firing at the opponents out of your senses. She said that the people should get their mandate if they are seen as being above the party affiliation and stealing the people's mandate wrongly and bragging about it is beyond understanding.

She said that during the election campaign of my husband Mir Ali Hassan Zehri, there was also an attempt to spread fear and panic among the people with the bombings and shootings that were fired on me and Mir Ali Hassan Zehri. The limit was reached in which three innocent lives were lost and many poor were injured. The Bhutani brothers lost their senses on the notification of recount of votes by Election Commission in Constituency PB-21 and the civic center incident caught their stupidity and theft. It is a result of the fear of leaving.

It is a great pity that the Bhutani brothers have not done anything for the region for forty years and turned the hub into ruins and now they are anti-people and unpopular after being caught stealing the people's mandate in the elections. Now they have resorted to killing and looting the peaceful people because they know that this time their rigging has been exposed and their true

nature has been revealed to the public. They have been caught trying to steal the original mandate of the people once again, as they were in power in the past through rigging.

According to police, lady police constable Sumera was beaten up to death by her husband Sanaullah over a domestic issue in Almo Chowk area of Quetta.

Her body was shifted to Sandeman Provincial Hospital Quetta and later handed over to the heirs after fulfilling necessary medico-legal formalities. On the other hand, police arrested husband of the deceased constable. Further investigation was being conducted by the authorities of concerned police station.

Lady police cop tortured to death

QUETTA (PPI): A lady police constable was tortured to death by her husband over a domestic issue in Police Colony, located in Almo Chowk area of the provincial capital on Wednesday.

According to police, lady police constable Sumera was beaten up to death by her husband Sanaullah over a domestic issue in Almo Chowk area of Quetta.



Indonesians vote for a new president as Joko era comes to an end

JAKARTA: Counting is under way in Indonesia after millions of people turned out to choose a successor to Joko Widodo, the hugely popular president known as Jokowi, who is barred from running for a third term under the constitution. The frontrunner is Prabowo Subianto, the only general ever to be given a dishonourable discharge from the country's armed forces.

Widodo's archrival in the last two elections, 72-year-old Prabowo later became his defence minister and has sought to soften his strongman image throughout the two-month campaign. He's been helped by a cartoon portraying him as a "cuddly grandpa" and having Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Jokowi's eldest son, as his running mate after a controversial Constitutional Court ruling on age limits last year. While the president has not formally endorsed the pair, his unofficial support has boosted their bid for office.

"Jokowi is the single most important person not running for office in this campaign," Greg Fealy, an emeritus professor at the Australian National University and an expert in Indonesian politics, told Al Jazeera. "Jokowi is extraordinarily popular, with a more than 80 percent approval rating, and Prabowo is the main beneficiary of that." The other candidates are academic turned education minister and Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan, and Central Java Governor Ganjar Pranowo from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), the biggest party in parliament and Jokowi's party in 2014 and 2019. Heavy overnight rain caused flooding in some places and led to the temporary closure of some polling stations, but voting generally went smoothly. After casting his ballot in Bogor in Western Java, Prabowo was in good spirits. "Rain brings blessings," he said. "Hopefully everything goes smoothly. We await the results." Anies, who voted in South Jakarta, appeared to reference concerns about the continued persistence of vote buying, as well as the risk of unrest. In 2019, Prabowo challenged Jokowi's victory and two days of deadly rioting.

"I want to underline that we want honest and fair elections and that the community also accepts the results," he said. In a country that celebrates election day as a "festival of democracy", some polling stations were decorated with pink and red hearts for Valentine's Day. Queues of voters were enthusiastic. Turnout was more than 80 percent at the last election in 2019. In the beach town of Sanur on the island of Bali, 18-year-old Gunghar was voting for the first time. His heart "pounded," as he placed his



vote, he said. "Young people want major changes in Indonesia," he told Al Jazeera without revealing which candidate he had backed. "We want Indonesia to be the most impactful country in the world." Young people make up just over half the total number of voters and are expected to have a substantial impact on the result. In Jakarta, Marcellina Pujowati was concerned about unemployment which stands at just under 20 percent for those aged 15-24.

"The job situation is most important to us young voters because nowadays it is hard to find a job," she said. Before casting her ballot, Marcellina said she also wanted a president who would "make Indonesia better" by improving the political and economic situation in the country. Over in Beijing, 20-year-old Maria Jessica Fernanda Santoso was voting for the first time. She said she had decided to back Prabowo and Gibran because they offered the best chance of a continuation of Jokowi's policies. "I feel it is important to continue and finalise the milestones that President Jokowi has achieved during his administration," she told Al Jazeera. "I am confident that [Prabowo-Gibran] has the potential to continue these efforts better." The pair have promised to continue with Jokowi's controversial plan to relocate the country's capital to a site on the island of Borneo, as has the PDI-Ps Ganjar. Anies, meanwhile, is seen as a candidate for change and has said he will stop the move. Students and civil society groups have raised concerns about Prabowo's dark past. A former Kopassus special forces commander, the 72-year-old is the only

candidate with links to the headline regime of former leader Soeharto, once his father-in-law. He was dishonourably discharged in 1998 after Kopassus soldiers kidnapped and tortured Soeharto's political opponents. Of 22 activists kidnapped that year, 13 remain missing. And while Prabowo never faced trial, several of his men were tried and convicted. He has also been accused of human rights abuses in East Timor, which won independence from Indonesia amid the collapse of the Soeharto regime, and its troubled eastern region of Papua. For all that, most Indonesian voters seemed unconcerned. Ben Bland, the head of the Asia Pacific programme at Chatham House in London, said that probably reflects Indonesians' growing confidence in their democracy and institutions' ability to constrain an autocratically inclined president. At an online election discussion last week, he also noted the "tendency in Indonesia for grand coalitions" to be formed after elections, further limiting a president's power. "Whoever wins will be looking to build a big tent coalition," he said. As the count progresses, all eyes will be on the 50 percent threshold that is necessary to avoid a runoff in June. Ten years ago, Jokowi and Prabowo were bitter rivals. With Jokowi's son now by his side, Prabowo appears to be facing his best-ever chance to become president. "It's quite a turn of fate," political analyst Tobias Basuki told Al Jazeera. "It could be third time's the charm for Prabowo." Indonesians are also voting for a new parliament and thousands of local representatives. — Agencies

Storms bring destructive winds across Victoria

MELBOURNE (AP): Powerful winds have killed a man and brought widespread destruction across Australia's second-most populous state, leaving 530,000 homes and businesses without power and fanning fires that razed homes and injured five firefighters, officials said on Wednesday.

Winds of up to 157 kph (98 mph) toppled six electricity transmission towers and caused one of the highest number of power outages Victoria state had ever experienced, Emergency Management Commissioner Rick Nugent said. "The storms were the most destructive in years and years and unfortunately from time to time this can occur," Nugent told reporters, referring to the widespread power outages.

A 50-year-old dairy farmer was killed by flying debris while driving a tractor near Mirboo North in southeast Victoria, Nugent said. Storms also brought lightning strikes that sparked several forest fires in the west of the state, damaging homes in the township of Pomonal. Nugent confirmed houses had been lost but declined to provide an estimate of how many. Five firefighters who were protecting Pomonal sustained minor burns from cinders when the fire changed direction and burnt over their truck, officials said. Weather conditions had eased on Wednesday and the fire risk had diminished. Temperatures had exceeded 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) in parts of Victoria. But maximums were forecast to be closer to 20 degrees Celsius (68 degrees Fahrenheit) on Wednesday. The number of homes and businesses without power had fallen to 220,000 by Wednesday morning.

Daniel Westernman, chief executive of Australian Energy Market Operator, which manages the national electricity and gas markets, said the collapse of two transmission towers between the state capital Melbourne and the neighboring city of Geelong had "sent shock waves" through the state's power grid. He expected many more customers would have power restored by late Thursday. Emergency crews were working on Wednesday to clear roads and train lines across the state of fallen trees and power lines. Schools remained closed in the hardest hit parts of the state for a second day on Wednesday.

Ukraine needs \$9b to rebuild its cultural sites

PARIS (AP): Ukraine will need nearly \$9 billion over the next decade to rebuild its cultural sites and tourism industry following Russia's invasion and war, the United Nations' cultural agency said. UNESCO estimated that the country's interlinked culture and tourism sector have lost over \$19 billion in revenue during the war that started two years ago this month. The agency said the fighting has damaged 341 cultural sites across Ukraine, including in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, and the cities of Lviv in the west and Odesa in the south.

The agency estimated that the total cost of destruction to those cultural sites, and thousands of other "cultural assets" around the country, comes to nearly \$3.5 billion. "The cathedral of Odesa is one example of a site that was gravely damaged," Chiara Dezzi Bardeschi, who heads the UNESCO office in Ukraine, said. "It's a symbol of all the community ... with deep spiritual and historical meaning." In July 2023, UNESCO strongly condemned a "brazen attack carried out by the Russian forces" against historic buildings in the center of Odesa, an area the agency designated last year as an endangered world heritage site. The attack claimed at least two lives and damaged several sites, including the Transfiguration Cathedral. The cathedral founded in the late 18th century is the main Orthodox church in Odesa.

Has Israel committed war crimes in Rafah?

GAZA: At least 95 people, including 42 children, have been killed in four attacks by Israeli forces in Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, according to Amnesty International. Victims include a newborn girl who was so young her birth had not even been registered, the human rights organisation said. So far, there have been four assaults on the city beginning in December after a week-long humanitarian pause to allow the passage of aid and release of hostages and prisoners.

Israeli authorities said the attacks are justified because Hamas operatives are hiding in the city. Israel has repeatedly stated that it does all it can to avoid civilian casualties despite the death toll in Gaza having surpassed 28,000 in only four months with many thousands more lost under the rubble and believed to be dead. United States President Joe Biden has warned Israel against carrying out military attacks at the expense of civilian lives. He met with Jordan's King Abdullah at the White House and stated: "A major military operation in Rafah should not proceed without a credible plan for ensuring the safety and support of more than one million people sheltering there." Its investigation into Israel's actions in Gaza is ongoing, but Amnesty International's latest report shows evidence of possible war crimes in Rafah. Its senior director of research, advocacy, policy and campaigns, Erika Guevara Rosas,

said: "Entire families were wiped out in Israeli attacks even after they sought refuge in areas promoted as safe." Photographs, video recordings and satellite imagery have been taken from all four attack sites by Amnesty to verify destruction. The organisation has also interviewed 18 people - 14 survivors and four rescuers. This investigation found no legitimate military targets that would warrant an attack of this scale, it said.

Amnesty said it had sent questions about the attacks to the Israeli authorities on January 19 and January 30 but received no response. Yes. In August 2014, Israel carried out a four-day air and ground attack on the city, in which 135 civilians, including 75 children, were killed. Amnesty International said Israel had violated international law that time as well. That assault was launched in response to the capture and presumed killing of an Israeli soldier, Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, who was declared dead on August 2. In 2015, Amnesty International and the investigative journalism unit, Forensic Architecture, released a report titled Black Friday: Carnage in Gaza during 2014 Israel/Gaza conflict. Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa director, Philip Luther, stated at the time: "There is strong evidence that Israeli forces committed war crimes in their relentless and massive bombardment of residen-

tial areas of Rafah in order to foil the capture of Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, displaying a shocking disregard for civilian lives." In its statement, Amnesty International called on the international community to support the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in examining allegations of war crimes "including those documented in this report". It added: "All states should oppose punitive measures against Palestine for joining the International Criminal Court or for submitting information on Israeli violations to the Court or taking other steps to activate international justice mechanisms." Despite the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on January 22 ordering Israel to comply with the 1948 Genocide Convention, the rate of civilian casualties in Gaza has not abated. The international community continues to put pressure on Israel to limit or avoid civilian casualties. Israel's staunchest ally, the US, has also advised caution.

Matthew Miller, spokesmen for the US Department of State, said: "We do not support any military campaign in Rafah going forward as long as they cannot properly account for the 1.1 million people, by some estimates, who are in Rafah today, some of whom have already been displaced, some of whom have been displaced multiple times." Egyptian officials have also made it clear that civilian casualties should be avoided at all costs. — Aljazeera

US lawmakers impeach Biden's immigration chief

WASHINGTON: Lawmakers in the United States House of Representatives have impeached Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas at a second attempt. Mayorkas was removed in a tight vote of 214-213, as the Republican-led House blamed President Joe Biden's immigration chief for a surge in illegal entries from Mexico. The impeachment helps to set the stage for November's presidential elections, which Republicans hope to centre on the border issue.

Lawmakers passed two articles that accused Mayorkas of "willful and systemic refusal" to enforce immigration law and "breach of public trust". The Democrat is the first cabinet secretary to be impeached in nearly 150 years. The move by Republican leaders followed closely on the heels of a failed attempt last week to remove Mayorkas. Having wrongly anticipated how many lawmakers would be present on each side, they had lost by one vote.

US President Joe Biden called the move, the latest in a series of Republican attacks on his administra-

tion, a "political stunt". "History will not look kindly on House Republicans for their blatant act of unconstitutional partisanship that has targeted an honourable public servant," he said.

Biden highlighted Mayorkas's backstory. A Cuban immigrant who came to the US with his family as a political refugee, he spent more than two decades "serving America with integrity in a decorated career" that saw him work as a US attorney in the Justice Department before becoming Secretary of Homeland Security, the president said. House Speaker Mike Johnson doubled down on Republican criticism of the impeached official: "Since this secretary refuses to do the job that the Senate confirmed him to do, the House must act," he said. The vote came amid a showdown between the House and Democrat-controlled Senate over a surge in illegal immigration from Mexico. Apprehensions on the border hit a record 10,000 per day in December. House Republicans have been accused of acting in bad faith in the impeachment, especially after coming out

against a bipartisan deal hammered out in the upper chamber that would have imposed the toughest asylum and border policies in decades. "Republicans with genuine concerns about the border should want Congress to deliver more border resources and stronger border security," said Biden, criticising their rejection of the bipartisan plans. Impeachment is meant to be a sanction for treason, bribery and other "high crimes and misdemeanours," according to the constitution. Seen as the political equivalent of an indictment, the rebuke is largely symbolic, however, as Mayorkas is certain to be acquitted at his trial in the Senate.

The upper house is compelled to open a trial, although it could vote to dismiss the articles, dissolve the trial, or refer the articles to a committee. Twenty-five legal experts called the push "utterly unjustified" in an open letter and were echoed by constitutional scholars who have also spoken in Congress against Donald Trump's impeachments, including Jonathan Turley and Alan Dershowitz. — Aljazeera

Labour suspends second parliamentary candidate after recording emerges

LONDON (BBC): Labour has suspended a second parliamentary candidate over comments he allegedly made about Israel. At the same meeting, Mr Ali is alleged to have blamed "people in the media from certain Jewish quarters" for the suspension of MP Andy McDonald from Labour. The Jewish Labour Movement said Mr Jones' alleged comments were "appalling and unacceptable". The group later said it was "pleased" that Mr Jones had been "swiftly suspended".

Mr Jones has been called in for an interview and the party will need to go through a formal process to remove his candidacy. Earlier, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer insisted he took "decisive action" over comments made by Mr Ali, whose apparent remarks were published by the Daily Mail. The party initially stood by Mr Ali when the MP hopeful apologised for telling a meeting of Labour members and councillors that Israel had "allowed" the Hamas attacks on 7 October as a pretext to invade Gaza. However,

"serve in legitimately recognised armed forces of the country of their other nationalities". At the same meeting, Mr Ali is alleged to have blamed "people in the media from certain Jewish quarters" for the suspension of MP Andy McDonald from Labour. The Jewish Labour Movement said Mr Jones' alleged comments were "appalling and unacceptable". The group later said it was "pleased" that Mr Jones had been "swiftly suspended".

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when the Daily Mail published a fuller recording from the meeting, Labour made the decision to withdraw support. Defending his actions, Sir Keir said: "Further information came to light yesterday calling for decisive action, so I took decisive action. It is a huge thing to withdraw support for a Labour candidate during the course of a by-election."

"But when I say the Labour Party has changed under my leadership I mean it." Former Labour MP Dame Louise Ellman said she had spoken to Mr Ali, who apologised to her for his comments. Dame Louise told BBC North West Tonight Mr Ali "should be upset" because his comments were "truly shocking" and "go against the record of the person I knew and worked with" for over 20 years. When Sir Keir became Labour leader in 2020, he promised to tackle antisemitism saying he would "tear out this poison by its roots". However, in recent days he has received criticism for failing to withdraw support from Mr Ali sooner.

Polar bears struggling to adapt to longer ice-free Arctic periods

TORONTO (AFP): Polar bears in Canada's Hudson Bay risk starvation as climate change lengthens periods without Arctic Sea ice, despite the creatures' willingness to expand their diets. Polar bears use the ice that stretches across the ocean surface in the Arctic during colder months to help them access their main source of prey -- fatty ringed and bearded seals.

In the warmer months when the sea ice recedes, they would be expected to conserve their energy and even enter a hibernation-like state. But human caused climate change is extending this ice-free period in parts of the Arctic -- which is warming between two and four times faster than the rest of the world -- and forcing the polar bears to spend more and more time on land. New research looking at 20 polar bears in Hudson Bay suggests that without sea ice they still try to find food. "Polar bears are creative, they're ingenious, you know, they will

search the landscape for ways to try to survive and find food resources to compensate their energy demands if they're motivated," Anthony Pango, a research wildlife biologist with the US Geological Survey and lead author of the study, told AFP. The research, published in the journal Nature Communications, used video camera GPS collars to track the polar bears for three-week periods over the course of three years in the western Hudson Bay, where the ice-free period has increased by three weeks from 1979-2015, meaning that in the last decade bears were on land for approximately 130 days. The researchers found that of the group, two bears indeed rested and reduced their total energy expenditure to levels similar to hibernation, but the 18 others stayed active. The study said these active bears may have been pushed to continue to look for food, with individual

animals documented eating a variety of foods including grasses, berries, a gull, a rodent and a seal carcass. Three ventured off on long swims -- one travelled a total distance of 175 kilometres (more than a hundred miles) -- while other bears spent time playing together or gnawing on caribou antlers, which researchers said was like the way dogs might chew bones. But ultimately the researchers found that the bears' efforts to find sustenance on land did not provide them with enough calories to match their normal marine mammal prey. Nineteen out of the 20 polar bears studied lost weight during the period consistent with the amount of weight they would lose during a period of fasting, researchers said. That means that the longer polar bears spend on land, the higher their risk for starvation. "These findings really support the existing body of research that's out there, and this is another piece of

evidence that really raises that alarm," Melanie Lancaster, senior Arctic species specialist for the World Wildlife Fund, who is not associated with the study, told AFP.

The world's 25,000 polar bears remaining in the wild are endangered primarily by climate change. Limiting planet-warming greenhouse gases and keeping global warming under the Paris deal target of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels would likely preserve polar bear populations, Pango said. But global temperatures -- already at 1.2C -- continue to rise and sea ice dwindles. John Whiteman, the chief research scientist at Polar Bears International, who was not involved in the study, said the research was valuable because it directly measures the polar bears' energy expenditure during the ice-free periods. "As ice goes, the polar bears go, and there is no other solution other than stopping ice loss. That is the only solution," he told AFP.

Two Thai journalists arrested for reporting on temple vandalism

BANGKOK: Two Thai journalists who were arrested for reporting about the vandalism of a temple in Bangkok with anti-monarchist graffiti have been released on bail, a lawyer's group has said. Nattaphol Meksohbon, a reporter from the independent online news outlet Prachatai, and freelance photographer Nattaphon Phanphongsanon were arrested, nearly a year after the incident in Bangkok.

The Royal Palace police station, which made the arrests, said Meksohbon and Phanphongsanon were charged with collaborating in vandalising an historical site.

Nutthaphol wrote a story and Nathaphon took a video of the incident, which was widely reported. The offence is punishable by up to seven years in prison and a 700,000 baht (\$19,600) fine. The two arrested men have said they were only carrying out their jobs as journalists. The charges involve a March 28, 2023, incident in which a 25-year-old activist spray-painted an anarchist symbol and the number 112 with a line through it on the exterior wall of the revered Temple of the Emerald Buddha, which is in the Grand Palace complex. The number 112 is a reference to the "lese

majeste" law, which protects the royal family from criticism.

The Thai journalists association defended the two journalists and said they were concerned about "damaging media rights and freedom" in the country. "It was necessary for journalists to cover the news," it said. Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin said that the government is "fair" on freedom of the press and said it is up to the police to determine what is appropriate. "Everything depends on the law. There is no harassment," he said. The group Thai Lawyers for Human

Rights said the two journalists were held overnight at separate police stations after their arrests and were taken to Bangkok Criminal Court, where they were released on bail after posting a bond of 35,000 baht (\$980) each. The editor of Prachatai News said the journalists who covered the story went to the temple without knowing in advance that it would be graffitied. "They were covering the news as journalists," Tewarit Maneechai said. He added that his colleagues were unaware of their charges before their arrest despite a warrant issued in May. — Aljazeera

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Human survival and traditional tree planation

THE Caretaker Chief Minister KP Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah has formally launched the provincial Spring Tree Plantation Campaign, 2024 by planting a sapling on the lawn of Chief Minister's House Peshawar. Under this plantation campaign, more than 12 million saplings would be planted across the province. Speaking on the occasion, the caretaker Chief Minister stressed that no one can deny the need and importance of forests for the survival of human life on the earth, wherein, the devastating floods, droughts, and other natural calamities further enhance the importance and urgency of forests and tree plantation in the current era.

The Tree plantation has been recognized as one of the most engaging, environmentally friendly, and highly essential activities that people can participate in to preserve the planet's atmosphere and universal life cycle, if and when done properly. Trees and forestry provide oxygen which is essential for all living organisms including men, animals, and plants. It improves air quality, reduces heat, increases underground water reserves, prevents soil erosion, and promotes natural beauty in respective areas. Similarly, trees and greenery reduce stress and have positive effects on mental health. In fact, tree plantation is not just about planting saplings but it's an investment in our future. Therefore, mass tree plantation is of utmost importance to save our ailing planet and ensure a sustainable environment for human generations to come in this universe.

Ideally, global experts recommend that at least 30% of the land area of any nation must be covered with forest to preserve biodiversity, climate regulation, and ecosystem services. Whereas, Pakistan Forests cover approximately 5.2 million hectares, which is about 5% of the total land-mass. Historically, Pakistan is one of the most vulnerable nations to Global Climate Change whose worst effects regularly appear in the shape of recurrent flash floods, droughts, glacier melt, increased heat, and weather changes. Henceforth, Acute deforestation and land degradation are significant challenges that confront South Asian nation and continuously multiplying to the worst impacts of global warming.

Seasonal tree plantations have always been formally celebrated by the country's political leadership and bureaucracy with traditional media coverage and photo-shoots throughout history. But all those forestation campaigns have been marred by the institutional corruption and slackness of the bureaucracy with the least effect on the ground. Furthermore, the illegal logging and smuggling of precious wood significantly reduced the forests in the country. Previously, the PTI government launched two important tree plantation campaigns commonly known as Billion Tree Tsunami and 10 Billion Tree Tsunami under a nationwide initiative of clean and green Pakistan. Although, massive tree plantation was done through these initiatives but 100 percent effects could not be given due to corruption and no accountability at the lower level.

Undoubtedly, forests are highly essential for the survival of mankind and other living organisms in this universe. Pakistan badly lacks in wood and vegetation which seriously undermines the National economy, the country's environment, and public health. Currently, the KP government has planned to implant around five million saplings in the Peshawar region, whereas, 3.806 million in Abbottabad and 3.784 million trees would be planted in Malakand. Hopefully, the caretaker leaders will ensure full implementation of the ambitious project so such large numbers of saplings are physically planted on the ground instead of fake transitions in files and computers of the bureaucracy. Meanwhile, other provincial governments including the GB and Azad Kashmir administrations must put in their best efforts to make this spring tree plantation successful and decisive. So, Pakistan could effectively respond to grave challenges relating to deforestation and global warming in the future.

Gaza war and ICJ

SOUTH Africa again approached the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and made an urgent request to consider whether Israel's plan to expand its military operations into Rafah requires the court to use its powers to prevent further imminent breaches of the rights of Palestinians. Presently, Rafah, a thickly populated city within Gaza enclave currently home to over 1.2 million displaced Palestinians in the territory, has come under heavy fire from Israeli air strikes and artillery shelling that cost several dozens lives in recent days.

There has been growing criticism from the global community over Israel's plan to expand its military operation in Rafah, a safe refuge for over a million Palestinians who took shelter there since Israel launched its military offensive on October 7 last year. Several western nations including the US, the UK, the European Union, France and Germany urged Israel to avoid military incursion in Rafah on fear of an out break of the worst humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Previously, South African government filed a petition at the ICJ requesting the world's top court to order a ceasefire and stop Israel from weiging a genocide of Palestinians. During the ruling on Peritora's petition, the ICJ ordered six provisional measures be taken, including obligations on Israeli authorities to refrain from actions contrary to the Genocide Convention, to prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to genocide, and to take immediate action to ensure the flow of humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza. However, the Netanyahu regime neither upheld its obligations under the Geneva convention and Global convention on Genocide nor its honored the ruling of the International Court.

In the nevess development, the Netanyahu government ordered a military offensive against bereaved Palestinians mostly living in tent homes in Rafah pushing them into Egypt rendering the enclave uninhabited. Unprecedentedly, the South African authorities again reached the top court to foil Tel Aviv's heinous action against innocent unarmed Palestinians. Although Israel 's military action has no moral or legal basis yet the philosophy and professionalism of the multi-origin adjudicators is uncertain, which seems to be more influenced by their country's interest rather than the global conventions and humanitarian laws.

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Rafah offensive warns to break fragile Biden-Netanyahu ties

Osama Al-Sharif

ISRAEL'S plan to launch a ground offensive into the heavily populated enclave of Rafah, nestled close to the Egyptian border in the Gaza Strip, could bring relations between US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to a tipping point. Netanyahu has angered the White House by ignoring US warnings regarding the planned incursion into Rafah, where more than 1.4 million Palestinians have sought refuge and are living under horrendous conditions.

Already, Biden has changed his tone on Israel's four-month war on Gaza by calling the Israeli response "over the top," in reference to the killing of more than 28,000 Palestinians so far and the vast destruction of at least 60 percent of civilian infrastructure, rendering more than 1.8 million people homeless and displaced. Privately, Biden is reported to have used foul language to describe Netanyahu's rebuff of US attempts to conclude a negotiated, lengthy truce coupled with the release of captives.

Instead, Netanyahu rejected what he called Hamas' "delusional demands," which included a conditional ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, and vowed to push into Rafah to secure a decisive victory. Israel's announcement that it plans to launch a ground operation in Rafah has been rejected by the EU, the UK and the UN, as well as Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt. All have warned that such an incursion will result in a horrific human toll. Rafah has become a tent city, where tens of thousands of Gazans have fled from Gaza City, Jabalia, Bureij and other refugee camps, as well as Khan Younis, where Israel has said it dismantled Hamas' main operational headquarters and killed thousands of its fighters. It now says it needs to enter and clear Rafah of the last four battalions belonging to Hamas. It also believes most of the Israeli captives are being held there.

In response to the fact that Rafah is now home to over a million Gazans, Netanyahu has ordered his army to prepare an evacuation plan, without offering much detail. He suggested

that Rafah residents head to the northern part of the Strip, but the UN and other aid agencies warned that much of the north has become a wasteland with no access to humanitarian aid. The logistics of moving such vast numbers of civilians, already suffering from malnutrition and disease, debunks Netanyahu's suggestion that his army has the safety of civilians as a priority. Hundreds of Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military as they fled to so-called safe areas in the recent past. But it is not only the fear of a bloodbath straining Biden's relationship with

steps to weaken and defund the PA. At the same time, Netanyahu himself has said that he will not repeat the historical mistake of Oslo that created the PA.

Biden faces pressure from America's Arab allies. For Egypt, a Rafah offensive will almost certainly push tens of thousands of fleeing Palestinians across the border and into Sinai. So worried is Cairo that it has deployed tanks and air defense systems close to the border. Egypt has also told Israel that it taking control of the so-called Philadelphi Corridor will not be tolerated. Its most recent warning to Israel

favor of an immediate ceasefire. Polls also show that Biden is at risk of losing the Arab American and Muslim American votes in November because of the war in Gaza.

On another front, the International Court of Justice's initial ruling last month has dealt a heavy blow to Israel's closest allies, especially the US. The court concluded that at least some of the acts Israel is alleged by South Africa to have committed could fall within the provisions of the Genocide Convention. The court asked Israel to take measures to protect civilians in Gaza and adhere to international law. It also called on Israel to present a report by Feb. 23 showing that such measures have been taken. But Israel's conduct in Gaza has not changed since the court's ruling. Thousands of civilians have since been killed due to indiscriminate bombing, snipers targeting civilians and the blowing up of residential buildings, as well as schools, mosques, shelters and hospitals. The delivery of life-saving aid has also been hindered.

In an attempt to put pressure on Netanyahu, the Biden administration has imposed sanctions on radical Jewish settlers in the West Bank. And it last week issued a directive attaching human rights conditions to the use of US military aid. The directive authorizes a swift cutoff of military assistance to countries that violate international protections of civilians. But despite all this, Netanyahu remains defiant and indifferent to Biden's qualms, with his eyes focused solely on the local Israeli scene, where his political survival is now tethered to the outcome of the war on Gaza. A total victory, regardless of the political and economic cost, is his only concern, even if that means a breach with the Biden White House and severe damage to Israel's ties with its Western allies, not to mention a possible indictment by the International Criminal Court. Netanyahu is betting that a vulnerable Biden will blink first and that Israel's allies in Congress will come to his rescue, even if the US president takes off the gloves and challenges the rogue Israeli premier. His gambit appears to be working.

America's Arab allies now believe that the Biden administration has no leverage over Netanyahu, whose defiance has humiliated and frustrated the US administration. They want to see regional de-escalation taking place, especially as Israeli crimes in Gaza have inflamed popular sentiments and heightened tensions in south Lebanon, the Red Sea, Iraq and Syria. But for Biden, Israel's war has also become a domestic issue in a decisive election year. Polls show that young Democratic voters are overwhelmingly opposed to his support of Israel and are in

Netanyahu. To balance his unequivocal support of Israel since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack, Biden has promised to open a clear path toward the fulfillment of a two-state solution, i.e., the creation of a Palestinian state. Netanyahu has flatly rejected Biden's premise and vowed that Israel will have absolute control over all the territories west of the River Jordan.

Added to this, he has also brushed off Biden's suggestion that Gaza is part of the future Palestinian state and that the Palestinian Authority must take over once Hamas is defeated. Netanyahu has affirmed that Israel will have complete and indefinite security control over Gaza. His far-right coalition government has also been carrying out security operations in the West Bank, killing hundreds of Palestinian civilians and destroying infrastructure and allowing Jewish settlers to go on the rampage, terrorizing Arab residents. Extremist ministers in his Cabinet have been taking

Making the case for Palestinians' right to self-defense

Dr. Ramzy Baroud

GERMAN Chancellor Olaf Scholz was last week in Washington on an official visit that was aimed at working jointly with the US to make "sure that Israel has what it needs to defend itself," according to White House spokesperson John Kirby. If this statement had been made soon after the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation of Oct. 7, one might have understood its logic, based on the well-known, inherent bias of both Washington and Berlin toward Israel. The statement and the visit, however, were conducted on the 125th day of one of the bloodiest genocides in modern history.

The purpose of the visit was highlighted in a press conference by Kirby, even though, hours later, US President Joe Biden admitted that Israel had gone "over the top" in its response to the Hamas attack. If killing or wounding more than 100,000 civilians, and counting, is Israel's version of self-defense, then both Scholz and Biden have done a splendid job in ensuring Israel has everything it needs to achieve its bloody mission.

However, in this context, who is entitled to self-defense: Israel or Palestine? On a recent visit to a hospital in a Middle Eastern country, I witnessed one of the most horrific sights one could ever see: scores of limbless Palestinian children, some still fighting for their lives, some badly burned and others in a coma.

Those who were able to use their hands had drawn Palestinian flags, which hung on the walls beside their hospital beds. Some wore SpongeBob T-shirts and others hats bearing Disney characters. They were pure, innocent, and very much Palestinian. A couple of children flashed the victory sign as soon as we said our goodbyes. Little kids wanted to communicate to the world that they remain strong and that they know exactly who they are and where they come from. The children were far too young to realize the legal and political context of their strong feelings toward their homeland.

UN General Assembly Resolution 3236, passed in 1974, reaffirmed "the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in Palestine, including: the right to self-determination ... (and) the right to national independence and sovereignty." The phrase "right to self-determination" is perhaps the most frequently uttered in relation to Palestine and the Palestinian struggle since the establishment of the UN.

The International Court of Justice last month also affirmed what we already know: that Palestinians are a distinct "national, ethnical, racial or religious group." Those injured Palestinian children do not need legal language or political slogans to locate themselves. The right to live without fear of extermination, without bombs and without military occupation is a natural right, requiring no legal arguments, and is unfazed by racism, hate speech or propaganda. Unfortunately, we do not live in a world of common sense, but one of topsy-turvy legal and political systems that only cater to the strong.

In this parallel world, Scholz is more concerned about Israel being able to "defend itself" than a besieged Palestinian population, starving and bleeding, yet unable to achieve any tan-

gible measure of justice. Despite this, Israel still does not have the right to defend itself. Logically, those carrying out acts of aggression should not demand that their victims refrain from fighting back. Palestinians have been victimized by Israeli colonialism, military occupation, racial apartheid, siege and now genocide. Therefore, for Israel to invoke Article 51 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter makes a mockery of international law. Article 51, which is often used by great powers to justify their wars and military interventions, was designed with a completely different legal spirit in mind.

Article 2 (4) of Chapter I in the UN Charter prohibits the "threat or use of force in international relations." It also "calls on all members to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of other states." Since Israel is in violation of Article 2 (4), it simply has no right to invoke Article 51. In November 2012, Palestine was recognized as an observer state at the UN. It is also a member of countless international treaties and is recognized by 139 of the 193 UN member states. Even if we accept the argument that the UN Charter only applies to full UN members, the Palestinian right to self-defense can still be established. In 1960, UNGA Resolution 1514 guaranteed independence to colonized nations and people. Although it did not discuss the right of the colonized to use force, it condemned the use of force against liberation movements.

Five years later, the UNGA voted in favor of Resolution 2105, which recognized the legitimacy of the "struggle" of colonized nations to exercise their right to self-determination. In 1983, the assembly passed Resolution 38/17. The language, this time, was unambiguous: people have the right to struggle against colonial foreign domination by all possible means, including armed struggle. The same dynamics that ruled the UN in its early days continue to this day, with Western countries, which represented the bulk of all colonial powers in the past, continuing to give themselves monopoly over the use of force. Conversely, the Global South, which has suffered under the yoke of those Western regimes, insists that it, too, has the right to defend itself against foreign intervention, colonialism, military occupation and apartheid. While Scholz was in Washington to discuss yet more ways to kill Palestinian civilians, Nicaragua made an official request to join South Africa in its effort to hold Israel accountable for the crime of genocide in Gaza. It is interesting how the colonizers and the colonized continue to build relations and solidarity around the same old principles. The Global South is, again, rising in solidarity with the Palestinians, while the Global North, with a few exceptions, continues to support Israeli oppression. Just before I left the hospital, a wounded child handed me a drawing. It featured several images, stacked one on top of the other, as if the little boy was creating a timeline of events that led to his injury: a tent, with him inside; an Israeli soldier shooting a Palestinian; prison bars, with his father inside; and, finally, a Palestinian fighter holding a flag.

How serious is Trump about pulling out of NATO? Very

Peter Bergen

PRESIDENT Donald Trump's then-defense secretary, James Mattis, said in 2017 that NATO is the "most successful and powerful military alliance in modern history." Yet, at a campaign rally over the weekend, Trump said he wouldn't come to the aid of NATO members if Russia attacked them, which was the whole point of the alliance in the first place. Trump said, "No, I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want."

Trump has long criticized European countries in NATO on the rationale that they purportedly don't pay their fair share. The idea that foreign countries are freeloading off the United States plays well with his base, but Trump either doesn't understand how NATO works or chooses not to. In fact, all the countries in NATO pay into a common fund supporting the

alliance's day-to-day workings, and no country is in arrears on those payments. Meanwhile, in 2014, all NATO countries agreed to spend at least 2% of their GDP on defense by this year. Every US president since Barack Obama has pressed NATO countries to reach that expenditure level, but at the time of the agreement, only three NATO countries - the US, United Kingdom and Greece - were doing so. Since the foreign leader often praised by Trump, Russian President Vladimir Putin, launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, particularly NATO's European members bordering Russia or Ukraine, like Estonia, Lithuania and Romania, have stepped up spending to more than 2%. The war in Ukraine is also forcing Germany to end its long policy of spending a relatively small amount of its GDP on defense. Hours after Trump's NATO comments, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Monday said

his government would meet its commitment to spend 2% of GDP on defense this year. European countries fear that Putin might not stop at Ukraine if he is victorious and that if a second Trump presidency were indeed to happen, it might gravely imperil NATO.

In fact, defense spending among NATO countries is growing fast. In 2017, NATO European countries and Canada spent around \$270 billion on their defense, while the United States spent around \$626 billion. As of 2023, European countries and Canada spent \$356 billion on defense, while the US spent \$743 billion, according to NATO. Of the 31 countries in NATO, 11 now meet the 2% or above expenditure target. It's not an accident that during NATO's 75 years, the US became the most powerful and wealthy country in history. But that thought seems not to have occurred to

Trump, who is always looking to attack countries that are supposedly ripping off the US. Indeed, Trump has had similar beliefs about US allies for almost four decades. In 1987, Trump paid for a full-page ad in the New York Times featuring an open letter in which he claimed, "For decades, Japan and other nations have been taking advantage of the United States.... Make Japan, Saudi Arabia, and others pay for the protection we extend as allies." Around the same time, Trump gave a speech in New Hampshire, asserting that Japan and Saudi Arabia were "ripping us off." These attitudes continued when he was president; Trump was annoyed that while the Germans had the second largest economy in NATO, they then spent only around 1% of their GDP on defense, while the US spent around 4%. Trump interpreted the Germans' underspending on

defense as if he were a landlord collecting on overdue rent. But in NATO, each country decides how much it wants to spend on its own defense, so if a government chooses to spend less than the agreed-upon target of 2% of GDP, the United States isn't "owed" anything.

When then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrived in Washington on her first official visit in March 2017, Trump's staff produced a chart showing that Germany was supposedly \$600 billion in arrears. Trump waved the "invoice" at Merkel, who told Trump, "Don't you understand this is not real?" according to an account of the meeting in a book I wrote about Trump's foreign policy, "The Cost of Chaos: The Trump Administration and the World." Trump also seems to not care that the only time that NATO's Article 5 was invoked, triggering the alliance's collective self-defense, was after his home-

town of New York City was attacked on 9/11, nor does he seem to care that the UK lost 455 soldiers in Afghanistan fighting on behalf of the US-led war there, while Canada lost 158 soldiers, France lost 86, and Germany lost 54.

No matter how wrong-headed it might be, according to his close advisers Trump seems quite serious about getting out of NATO. When I spoke to Trump's former national security adviser, John Bolton, last summer for the podcast "In the Room with Peter Bergen," he told me that Trump "would fundamentally reexamine the premise of NATO, which is the predicate for what I think he would do in a second Trump term, which is withdraw the United States from NATO itself." That would be a massive mistake. Why a newly elected Trump would choose to try to undercut such a successful alliance or even break it up is a confounding mystery.

CNN

US minorities grapple with how to see Israeli-Palestinian conflict

THE war in Gaza has highlighted shifting perspectives within the American public toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The brutality of Hamas' Oct. 7 attack and the extreme scale of the devastation and death in Gaza have put new pressure on activists, politicians and community leaders to take a public stand on the war. For some racial and ethnic communities, this has led to complicated discussions and challenged traditional alliances.

Polling shows that there are strong generational and partisan differences. Younger Americans are far more likely than older Americans to sympathize with the Palestinians and oppose sending more economic and military aid to Israel. Democrats are also much more likely than Republicans to sympathize with the Palestinians. The racial and ethnic differences in views toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are less distinct than the generational and partisan differences, but they do exist. In recent polling from The New York Times and Siena College, white Americans were much more likely than Americans of color to sympathize more with Israel than the Palestinians. The survey found that 56 percent of white respondents sympathized more with Israel, compared to 28 percent of Black Americans, 36 percent of Hispanic Americans and 34 percent who identified as "other."

However, responses to other questions about President Joe Biden's policies toward Israel painted a complicated picture. In the poll, the only racial group in which a plurality sympathized

more with Palestinians were Black Americans - 28 percent sympathized more with Israel and 34 percent with the Palestinians. However, a majority (52 percent) of Black Americans supported sending more aid to Israel, while Hispanics and other nonwhite Americans were more likely to oppose it. Black Americans were split on whether they supported Biden's handling of the conflict. These results reflect a deeper debate within the Black American community. Black Americans have a long history of identifying with the plight of Jews. Black slaves identified with the Exodus story in the Bible, which depicts the Israelites fleeing slavery in Egypt. Many Jewish activists and leaders played an important role in supporting the civil rights movement. Churches play an important role in Black communities and many of their leaders built interfaith relationships with Jewish leaders.

There are also historical links between some Black activists and pro-Palestinian activists, though they were often on the fringes of the civil rights movement. In recent years, those links have expanded and became more mainstream. One important driver was the role of Palestinian Americans in supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, which created new connections between activists from different communities who increasingly saw commonalities between their causes. As many younger Americans from all racial and ethnic groups increasingly adopted an interest in social justice, many saw similarities

between the experiences of Palestinians and Black Americans. The availability of smartphones allowed both Black Americans and Palestinians to take videos of abuses and show them to the world, with social media making it easier for both groups to share their experiences, including with each other.

Some Black leaders are struggling to decide how to respond. They want to maintain long-standing relationships with Jewish communities while also recognizing the suffering of Palestinians, but that is an increasingly precarious balance. A growing number of Black activists argue that they must embrace solidarity with all persecuted peoples, including Palestinians. Some of them also see the current Israeli government as expressing and enacting a form of racial superiority that feels similar to how white supremacists have acted against Black people in the US.

On the other hand, some Black leaders reject comparisons between Palestinians' and Black Americans' experiences. Some worry that expressing support for the Palestinians would lead to accusations of antisemitism and would damage relationships with Jewish organizations. Hispanic communities in the US are very diverse and that diversity is reflected in their views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the Times/Siena poll, 36 percent of Hispanics sympathized more with Israel, compared to 27 percent with Palestinians, but respondents were split on whether to support more aid to Israel. Some trends

among Hispanics suggest a tendency to favor Israel, including a strong evangelical Christian movement that embraces Israel, a Jewish Latino diaspora and a history of support from Jewish activists on issues related to Hispanic civil rights and immigration. However, some Hispanics also embrace a social justice approach that tends to be sympathetic to the Palestinians.

The Times/Siena poll found that 34 percent of respondents who identified as "other" (not white, Black or Hispanic) sympathized more with Israel, compared to 22 percent with the Palestinians. However, that same group was the most strongly opposed to sending more aid to Israel (58 percent opposed). A recent AAPI poll found that Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans tend to see US policy as favoring Israel too much. A strong majority of Arab Americans sympathize with the Palestinians. Native Americans often see commonalities with their experience of displacement and dispossession and that of the Palestinians.

Within the US population as a whole and within specific racial and ethnic groups, younger people and Democrats are significantly more likely to sympathize with the Palestinians. Age and party identification are stronger factors than race in shaping views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, as some racial and ethnic communities grapple with how to view the conflict, the war in Gaza is shaking up some old alliances and posing difficult questions to American equality and social justice activists.

US carelessness over Aid Bill costs Ukrainian lives

Elena Davlikanova

Declarations of support for Ukraine for "as long as we can" should be changed to calls for "giving Kyiv as much as it needs as fast as we can." At Davos, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis stressed that to defeat Putin, the West needs to provide Ukraine with not 40 HIMARS systems but 400; not 80 tanks, but 1,000.

And as Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas rightly noted, "Weakness provokes Russia... strength doesn't." However, even if Europe was able to step up in place of the US, it would not be enough. The US is responsible for 45% of all aid sent to Ukraine. Even a historic \$3.2 billion support package from Britain cannot make up for Washington's absence. Congress's failure to deliver vital support quickly will set in motion a nightmare scenario. The current crisis can be traced to Washington's prioritization of short-term domestic victories at the cost of long-term geopolitical losses to the US and Europe. This is worsened by the lack of genuine understanding some American decision-makers have of the courageous sacrifices of Ukraine's determined people. The political mess in the US sends the wrong message to the rest of the world. As the 2024 election looms, some Republicans meticulously document the mistakes and delays in aid to Ukraine by the Biden administration, asserting their role in safeguarding Ukraine's stability and the American taxpayer. Others keep holding up the new aid package for Ukraine in Congress, often supporting their arguments with Russian narratives.

At the same time, the Biden administration has prioritized Ukraine's non-defeat over complete victory, opting for incremental support to strengthen Ukraine's hand at the negotiating table. However, exchanging more territories for dubious Russian promises of peace is a mistake reminiscent of the Minsk agreements. Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has called Ukraine a cancerous growth on historical Russian territories and said "There is a 100% chance of a new conflict, no matter what security papers the West signs with the puppet regime in Kyiv." According

to the Belarusian opposition, Minsk has been preparing for war since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Unfortunately, it appears that history's lessons on the futility of appeasing aggressive dictators have not been fully grasped.

At the same time, the outlook on the ground - despite the resilience and determination of Ukrainian forces - is not improving. Meanwhile, according to Maria Berlinska, the head of the Ukrainian Aerial Reconnaissance Support Center, Russians are on the verge of a technological breakthrough. They are already employing automatic GPS tracking in FPV drones, making traditional means of electronic warfare ineffective.

According to former Ukrainian Defense Minister Andriy Zagorodniuk, the Russians currently hold a threefold advantage in the number of artillery shells fired, which shows how important it is that Ukraine receives new munitions quickly. Russia's 2024 budget allocates 6% of GDP for the military, surpassing the amount spent on social programs for the first time in modern history. This does not look like a decision taken by a country preparing for peace. Yet only one-third of NATO member-states manage to contribute 2% of their GDP to collective security. Voices that support Ukraine, on both sides of the aisle, must find greater leverage and do more to convince themselves and the US public that we must look up.

"Handing Russia victory in Ukraine... will only shred America's credibility, weaken critical alliances, and force us to contend even more directly with two major adversaries at once," Senator Mitch McConnell warned, adding: "I honestly can't think of a more shortsighted strategic gamble." The world is looking at the US right now. If it fails, the post-Cold War age of democratic expansion will come to an end giving way to autocracies with semi-free markets and no free thinkers. The longer we refuse to stare this crisis in its face, the likelier that we will be left standing in the ruins of democracy. We cannot end up like Jennifer Lawrence's character at the end of the movie, telling ourselves that we are just "grateful we tried."

The Moscow Times

Implications of the EU-ASEAN statement on South China Sea issues

RECENTLY, the situation in the South China Sea has attracted a lot of attention from the international community. In a joint statement issued by the EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting last week, the two sides emphasized the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea, reflecting some common understandings between the EU and ASEAN on this issue.

Contrary to the expectations of some states, the statement did not make drastic rhetoric on the South China Sea issue to "provoke China", and the EU and ASEAN still seem to deliberately maintain a certain distance from the US in their policies and actions. This not only shows that the EU wants to make its South China Sea policy more attractive to ASEAN by fully considering ASEAN's comfort, but also reflects ASEAN's desire to maintain strategic autonomy and not want to take sides in the context of Sino-US strategic competition. According to the "dual-track approach" jointly advocated and implemented by China and ASEAN countries, peace and stability in the South China Sea should be jointly maintained by China and ASEAN countries, and relevant disputes in the South China Sea should be resolved through negotiation and consultation by the countries directly concerned. For a long time, China and neighboring countries have been beneficiaries of peace and stability in the South

China Sea. No matter how the regional and international situation changes, the freedom of commercial navigation and navigation safety in the South China Sea have never been affected by relevant disputes.

At a time of ongoing tensions in the Red Sea, the EU wants international sea lanes, including the South China Sea, to remain safe and open, both for practical reasons and influenced by its maritime traditions. As an alliance of the seas with a long maritime tradition and maritime culture, the EU has the largest exclusive economic zone in the world, and the maritime area under the jurisdiction of its member states is far larger than the land area. The EU's official statements and positions on the South China Sea issue have always been based on the policy goals of ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight, promoting the security of trade routes, maintaining rule-based international order and regional peace and stability. The EU-ASEAN statement was generally in a calm tone while using many of the language that ASEAN countries and China have agreed on in the past. For example, the EU and ASEAN jointly highlighted the importance of the full and effective implementation of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in its entirety.

As the first political document on the South China Sea issue signed by China and ASEAN countries, the DOC has played an important role in ensuring that

Ding Duo

there are no serious military conflicts and confrontations in the South China Sea over the past two decades. China and the relevant countries have also made many gains in enhancing political mutual trust, maritime cooperation in low-sensitive areas, and avoiding the escalation of crises. Currently, the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) negotiations are still ongoing, and it is difficult to predict when the agreement would be reached. Under this circumstance, Beijing attaches great importance to the value and role of the DOC in dealing with South China Sea issues. The EU and ASEAN mentioned DOC in their joint statement, certainly not to "please" Beijing, but more to "constrain" China. However, it is worth noting that the DOC requires equal compliance by all signatories to be effective, and the signatories also jointly encourage other countries to respect the principles contained in the DOC. The EU and ASEAN called on relevant parties to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of all activities and avoid actions that could increase tensions and the risk of accidents, misunderstandings, and miscalculation. In fact, since the second half of last year, to avoid the escalation of maritime crises such as the Second Thomas Shoal and the Scarborough Shoal, Beijing has put forward a series of initiatives to Manila to jointly manage differences, cool the situation and promote maritime cooperation. But

there are still quite a few high-level Philippine officials who seem to prefer to resolve issues through cameras, microphones, and social media rather than diplomatic channels. The EU and ASEAN underlined the universal recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The preamble of the UNCLOS certainly reflects the desire of the parties to resolve all issues related to the law of the sea in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation, but it also confirms that matters not provided for in the UNCLOS continue to be regulated by the rules of general international law.

China made an important contribution to the conclusion of the text of the UNCLOS. As a state party, China has always faithfully performed its obligations under the UNCLOS and enjoys the rights conferred. However, China firmly opposes the abuse of the compulsory dispute settlement procedures of the UNCLOS to resolve territorial sovereignty matters that should be regulated by general international law. This means that if a certain country insists on equating the illegal award of the South China Sea arbitration with the UNCLOS, and if a certain country persists in abusing the third-party compulsory settlement mechanism of the law of the sea for provocation, it will not only be far from the true practice of international rule of law in the South China Sea, and the disputes are very likely to eventually reach a "dead end".

The China Daily

Our world and democracy ... What democracy?

THE late British leader Winston Churchill reportedly made one of the most eloquent political claims of the contemporary era when he said: "The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter." If this iconic leader of the so-called free world and Western democracy has such a view of the political principle that democracies have sought to promote - or rather, impose - across the world, can some of us in the "third world," which is accused of being backward, not be excused for being less than naively fascinated with the ideals of democracy as they are manifesting themselves today?

Here, I reference another example of critique, of the Soviet Union, attributed to an American journalist during the Cold War. The journalist asked a Soviet politician about the lack of democracy in the USSR. I am, of course, paraphrasing the conversation. Journalist: Democracy means holding elections and having political parties, and you do not have that in the Soviet Union.

Politician: We do have a party and we have elections at various party levels. We elect officials, from local councils to the presidency. Journalist: But you have only one party. What options do citizens actually have? Politician: It is true, we have one party. But the difference between us is marginal, as you have only two parties in America. You don't have much

broader options than us. This dialogue may seem somewhat absurd. It could indeed be seen as totally illogical under normal circumstances, but if we were to brush over the historical developments of the 20th and 21st centuries, we would find the following. First, absolute choices are available to voters under normal circumstances, during times of peace and a desire for coexistence. However, the electorate is often denied such choices under other circumstances, when the authorities are facing an external threat or they sense a domestic threat. For example, despite being a democracy, the US did not hesitate to detain innocent Japanese nationals after Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Most Republicans saw nothing wrong with Donald Trump refusing to acknowledge the presidential election results in the fall of 2020, although those elections were held during his term. Moreover, the majority of Republicans continued to support him after he incited an attack on the Capitol building (the heart of US democracy) on Jan. 6, 2021. Second, democratic systems (under normal circumstances as well) are broadly tolerant of the "radicalism" of marginal forces, nihilistic factions or anarchic groups. However, what are known as "establishment" parties share ideological assumptions and are usually governed by networks of higher interests that often go

Eyad Abu Shakra

beyond diverse political choices. Thus, when these higher interests impose themselves, effective alternatives essentially disappear.

For instance, in Britain, anti-semitism (as Israel defines it) accusations have become a sword yielded against anyone who objects to the violence in the Gaza Strip, which even US President Joe Biden has called "over the top." The two major British parties, the Conservatives and Labour - the right and the left, respectively - have a shared interest in rejecting the characterization of what is happening in Gaza as a genocide, despite the fact that nearly 30,000 people, most of them civilians, have been killed since the attack on Oct. 7. Remarkably, the BBC is not the only one that insists on using "soft" terms to obscure who is behind the violence. Bombardments become "battles" and victims "die" rather than being killed. In fact, Israeli newspapers like Haaretz appear more objective and bolder in their coverage, characterization and analysis of the events in the Strip than serious British newspapers. Third, the societies that have experimented with electoral democracy are gradually straying further away from the spirit of democracy.

They are veering away from its foundations of coexistence and tolerance, which guarantee the right to choose, hold those in positions of power accountable and protect the independence of the judiciary. Thus, we see that

some electoral democracies are in crisis, either as a result of the spread of ethnic, religious or sectarian populism - as in the case of India, Hungary, Italy and even the US - or because they have made "hysterical" bets on an untested option as they seek an escape from reality, as is the case in Argentina today ... and as had been the case in Brazil under Jair Bolsonaro.

Fourth, the future of coexistence and international compromise seems threatened not only by the distortion of democracy as a principle, practice and conviction, but also by two major emerging threats. One is the so-called demographic bomb, with all its deadly implications for migration, asylum, desertification and scarcity of resources. And the second is the technological bomb of artificial intelligence, which follows the communications revolution and the rise of information technology in diminishing the role of humans in cultural interactions and limited cultural fusion.

Today, humans are gradually transforming, in the best case, into consumers and spectators. In the worst case, we are becoming mute and deaf puppets that are unable to resist - or are even unaware that it is in our interest to do so. We are now prisoners in a world we were told had been subjected to our free will. We now find ourselves incapable of electing a town president or a village mayor or getting news that is not fabricated or information that is not falsified.

The Labour Party sicker than it realises

Vernon Bogdandor

WHEN Sir Keir Starmer became Labour leader in April 2020, he declared that his first task was to remove the "poison" of anti-Semitism, a "stain" on the party. The Azhar Ali episode in Rochdale shows that he still has much to do. Labour's first instincts, when it was revealed that Ali had suggested that Israel had deliberately allowed the murderous assault of October 7, was to brazen it out after he apologised. Two shadow cabinet ministers, Anneliese Dodds and Lisa Nandy, turned up to canvass for him at the weekend. Then, after further unsavoury comments were uncovered, second thoughts prevailed and Labour disowned Ali.

One possible reason for Labour's hesitation was that Ali, in contrast to other Labour MPs suspended for making anti-Semitic comments, such as Andy McDonald and Kate Osamor, is on the Right of the party and therefore an ally of Starmer's. Ali is indeed far from being an unknown figure in Labour circles, having been leader of the party on Lancashire County Council. It beggars belief that members were unaware of his views - his offensive remarks were made in Labour Party meetings. How one is dealt with by Labour does seem to depend not on the degree of the offence but on which faction the offender belongs to.

Until Jeremy Corbyn became leader of the Labour Party in 2015, anti-Semitism was not really an issue in British politics. Who, after all, knew or cared that Grant Shapps and Margaret Hodge are

Jewish? Even before the war, Mosley's Fascists, although frightening many in the Jewish community, were negligible electorally, never contesting seats in a general election.

Corbyn, however, was not a fringe politician, but Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, who nearly won the 2017 general election. He helped to legitimise anti-Semitism. In 2020, the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that Labour had breached its legal obligations in that there had been "unlawful acts of harassment and discrimination" against Jews "for which the Labour Party is responsible". Sir Keir, as shadow Brexit secretary, helped to legitimise Corbyn, who, so Sir Keir assured us in February 2019 "would make a great Prime Minister". On the Andrew Marr Show, it was suggested that Corbyn might be a danger to the Jewish community, but Sir Keir responded, "I don't accept that", even though one poll had shown that 40 per cent of British Jews would have considered leaving the country had Corbyn entered No 10. Did Sir Keir really believe what he was saying? The late Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, once said that anti-Semites are never just anti-Semites. It is not as if those who dislike Jews are overflowing with love for the rest of humanity. Indeed, as the report by the eminent KC, Martin Forde, showed in 2022, Labour's problems with race were not restricted to anti-Semitism. Where race is concerned, Labour has been, as it were, an equal opportunities party. Forde

discovered a culture of widespread racism, including Islamophobia, as well as sexism in the party. In a staff survey in June 2020, 54 per cent of respondents "reported encountering discrimination while working" for Labour. "Recruitment practices", one respondent declared, "were routinely flouted. Women and ethnic minorities were expected to apply and interview for posts yet it was common for white men to arrive without going through a recruitment process." Another respondent told a staff member that "BAME women" tended to get "thrown under the bus". Another claimed that "the Labour Party is not a welcoming place for people of colour". It is astonishing that the Forde report has received so little attention. Had there been such findings about the Conservatives or Reform UK, we would never have heard the end of it. For Labour to be taken seriously as a party of government, Sir Keir must now convince voters that the party treats women and all minorities fairly. That will not be an easy task for someone who seems to bend so easily to pressure. There is little that he appears to believe now that he also believed in 2020 when standing for the Labour leadership, when he promised that he would "build on" Corbyn's "radicalism".

Instead of appearing to be at the mercy of party factions, opinion polls and focus groups, Sir Keir must show that he can give Labour a clear sense of direction. He seems too often a weathervane, when what the Labour Party needs is a signpost.

The Telegraph



PSX continues with bullish trend, gains 926 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Wednesday, gaining 926.92 points, a positive change of 1.51 percent, closing at 62,153.84 points against 61,226.93 points the previous trading day.

A total of 303,886,073 shares valuing Rs.14.687 billion were traded during the day as compared to 435,549,576 shares valuing Rs.15,972 billion the last day.

Some 342 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 267 of them recorded gains and 56 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 19 remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were K-Electric Limited with 33,417,936 shares at Rs 4.47 per share, Oil and Gas Development with 32,231,367 shares at Rs 122.01 per share and

Pak Petroleum with 15,505,464 shares at Rs 107.37 per share.

Philip Morris (Pakistan) Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 38.50 per share price, closing at Rs.728.50, whereas the runner-up was Indus Motor Company Limited with a Rs 38.17 rise in its per share price to Rs 1,518.26.

Ismail Industries Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 93.70 per share closing at Rs1,155.63, followed by Rafhan Maize Company Limited with Rs 26.76 decline to close at Rs.8,276.25.

Rupee remains flat against dollar

The Rupee on Wednesday remained unchanged against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs279.31.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying

and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs280.6 and Rs282.35, respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by Rs1.97 to close at Rs298.90 against the last day's closing of Rs300.87, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen lost 01 paisa to close at Rs1.85, whereas a decrease of Rs2.91 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs350.45 compared to the last closing of Rs353.36.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham remained unchanged to close at Rs76.04 and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 01 paisa to close at Rs74.47.

Gold rates dip by Rs.3,500 to Rs.210,800 per tola

The per tola price of 24

karat gold decreased by Rs.3,500 and was sold at Rs.210,800 in the local market on Wednesday against its sale at Rs.214,300 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat also decreased by Rs.3,001 to Rs.180,727 from Rs 183,728 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat gold went down to Rs.165,666 from Rs. 168,416, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola silver decreased by Rs.20 to Rs2,580 from Rs.2,600 whereas that of ten gram silver declined by Rs.17.15 to Rs.2,211.93 from Rs 2,229.08.

The price of gold in the international market also decreased by \$33 to \$2,010 against its sale at \$2,043 the previous day, the Association reported.



ISLAMABAD: Vendors displaying oranges to attract customers at fruit & vegetable market.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Shipping activity reported at Port Qasim where four ships namely, Bow Endeavor, Epic Sunter, Lokoja and Stockholm Eagle, carrying Palm oil, LPG, LNG and Coal, berthed at Liquid Terminal, Engro Terminal, Gas Terminal and Bulk Terminal respectively during last 24 hours.

Meanwhile two more ship, Visayas and America scheduled to load/offload Rice and Containers are also arrived at outer anchorage of the Port Qasim during the same period.

A total of seven ships were engaged at POA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them an edible oil carrier 'Southern Anoa' left the port on today morning on February 14th 2024.

Cargo volume of 87,293 tonnes, comprising 87,084 tonnes imports cargo and 204 tonnes export cargo carried in 42 containers (30 TEUs imports and 12 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 10 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them two ships, America and Taho Australia and another oil tanker 'Khairpur' carrying containers, Palm oil and Mogas are expected to take berths at QICT, LCT and FOTCO respectively on today, 14th February, while two more container ships, Seaspan Beacon and Maersk Cape Town are due arrive at Port Qasim on Thursday, 15th February 2024.

SMEs report better performance

BEIJING (APP): China's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) reported an improvement in business performance in January, an industry index showed Wednesday.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Index, based on a survey of 3,000 SMEs from eight major industries, came in at 89.2 last month, up from 89 in the previous month and higher than the reading of a year earlier, according to the China Association of Small and Medium Enterprises.

The increase was a result of accelerated production at the beginning of the year and warming consumer demand ahead of the Spring Festival, the association said in a report.

Stepped up pro-growth policies have bolstered companies' confidence in the future, it said. The sub-index measuring SMEs' confidence in the macro-economy stood at 98.8, up from 98.5 in the previous month.

Asymmetric Advisors.

For the three months to December, Sony saw "significant increases" in sales in its financial, gaming, sensor, music and pictures segments. Sales jumped 22 percent to 3.7 trillion yen in October-December for a net profit of 363.9 billion.

The entertainment and electronics behemoth also enjoyed reduced tax expenses related to the dissolution of a subsidiary.

Music industry publication Billboard said last week that Sony had signed a deal worth at least \$600 million to buy half of Michael Jackson's "publishing and recorded masters catalog".

But Sony has declined to

Illegal personal loan apps: SECP continues crack down

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) is constantly monitoring social media and websites for illegal personal loan Apps (illegal apps) in order to safeguard the public from illicit loan sharks.

Eight further illicit apps had been identified by SECP and these apps were being distributed to the public as Android Package Kit (APK) files via various APK websites, emails, and social media, said a press release issued here.

The SECP has already initiated actions against the illegal apps in coordination with the Federal

Investigation Agency (FIA) and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA).

The commission has so far blocked 132 illegal apps in active collaboration with Google, Apple, FIA and PTA. The coordinated efforts made by SECP, Google, FIA and PTA have forced operators of illegal apps to divert their activities to APK websites, social media, etc.

The illegal apps pose significant risks to user's safety including misuse of personal information/sensitive financial data, fraud, blackmailing/harassment etc. The SECP advised general public not to download

illegal apps from any website or links shared through any other source like email or social media.

An updated list of Illegal Apps, as identified by SECP and reported to respective app stores, PTA and FIA, is placed on the SECP website for the information of the public.

The General Public is advised to only download SECP approved personal loan apps that are only available on the official app stores of Google and Apple.

The list of SECP approved personal loan apps is also available on its Website for the convenience of the general public.

High tax on cigarettes results in lower consumption

ISLAMABAD (APP): Owing to the government's decision to increase taxes on cigarettes to address its negative impact on public health and enhance revenue generation tobacco consumption in the country has reduced significantly.

A study conducted by 'Capital Calling', in major cities including Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore and Peshawar revealed that one in every 94 smokers has quit smoking after prices of cigarettes went up, said a press release issued here on Wednesday.

The decision was aimed at increasing the revenue to Rs200 billion from Rs148 billion in the current fiscal

year and the Federal Board of Revenue elevated duty on tier-1 cigarettes from 130 rupees to 330 rupees, resulting in a significant net increase of 154 per cent in cigarette prices.

Smokers told the surveyors that purchasing cigarettes had become financially burdensome, leading them to prioritize spending on essential needs like food and the education of their children instead of smoking.

The survey found a positive relationship between higher taxes on cigarettes and its lower consumption. Needless to say, the cigarette industry was causing a staggering loss of approxi-

mately Rs620 billion annually in terms of diseases including cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, and cardiovascular disease, besides 337,500 deaths each year.

The evidence suggests the sales of cigarettes would further decrease in the coming months across Pakistan if the government maintains the taxes.

Endorsing the think tank's findings, Dr Aman Khan, director of Islamabad-based "Waseela Foundation", said that the government's decision to increase taxes emerged as a strategy to address both public health concerns and revenue deficits.

Tokyo stocks close lower

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo stocks closed lower on Wednesday on profit-taking after recent rallies following sticky inflation data in the United States.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index lost 0.69 percent, or 260.65 points, to 37,703.32 while the broader Topix index ended down 1.05 percent, or 27.44 points, at 2,584.59.

"Profit-taking with a sense of caution" that share prices may have risen too much is weighing on the market, Daiwa Securities said.

The declines came after the Nikkei index jumped 2.89 percent and the Topix advanced 2.12 percent in the previous session.

Wall Street stocks tumbled overnight after US inflation data dampened hopes of quick interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve.

The Dow Jones

Industrial Average finished down 1.4 percent, the broad-based S&P 500 fell 1.4 percent and the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index dropped 1.8 percent.

The dollar fetched 150.52 yen, slightly down from 150.80 yen in New York, as Japan's top currency diplomat warned about recent "rapid" movement in exchange rates.

"In a month-long period since the start of this year, the yen has weakened by nearly 10 yen, and this kind of rapid movement is not good for the economy,"

finance ministry currency diplomat Masato Kanda said before the opening bell. "We are closely watching the currency market

with a sense of urgency, and will take appropriate measures if necessary," he told reporters.

Among major shares in Tokyo, Panasonic lost 3.51 percent to 1,387 yen, Nippon Steel dropped 4.47 percent to 3,418 yen and Toyota slipped 2.05 percent to 3,385 yen.

SoftBank Group closed down 3.36 percent at 8,207 yen, after soaring 6.27 percent in the previous session.

Sony Group slipped 0.51 percent to 14,660 yen. After the market closed, the conglomerate said it had upgraded its annual net profit forecast to 920 billion yen (\$6.1 billion) from 880 billion yen.

Steel woes push Thyssenkrupp into quarterly loss

FRANFURT, Germany (AFP/APP): German industrial conglomerate Thyssenkrupp reported a first-quarter loss on Wednesday, once again weighed down by its troubled steel unit. Between October and December, the steel-to-submarines group swung to a net loss of 314 million euros (\$336 million), compared with a profit of 75 million euros a year earlier.

Thyssenkrupp, which runs its business year from October to September, partly blamed a 200-million-euro impairment related to "the higher cost of capital... especially at Steel Europe".

Group sales fell by nearly nine percent to 8.2 billion euros over the quarter, while order intake also declined year-on-year.

Lower prices and weaker demand weighed especially heavily on the steel unit, which has long been Thyssenkrupp's problem child.

Once a symbol of German industrial might, Thyssenkrupp has suffered in recent years as falling prices, high energy costs and competition from Asian rivals hammered its traditional steel business.

It is trying to shift to climate-neutral production -- without burning fossil fuels -- but this needs huge investments. The group has embarked on a major restructuring to try to turn the tide and is in talks with Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky about a potential joint-venture in the steel business.

"We are conducting constructive negotiations, but we have not yet achieved any results", CEO Miguel Lopez told reporters.

SCCI organises training seminar on SMEs

SIALKOT (APP): A training seminar was organised at Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) to provide guidance and training to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

SMEs Committee of Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry Chairman Faizan Akbar presided over the seminar. He informed

the participants about lead generation and email marketing. He said that in this era of inflation, it had become very expensive for new and small exporters to travel globally for business.

Therefore, they have to pay close attention to their email marketing, he said and added that the seminar was arranged for new entre-

preneurs with the aim of providing them with guidance in the business field so that they move forward and expand their business not only for themselves but also for their homeland including Sialkot and play their role in development of the country by earning foreign exchange.

He said it was his 152nd

seminar and the SCCI had always supported him in his work and that was the reason why I am doing my work in a better way.

He also gave a presentation which was highly appreciated by the participants in the seminar. A large number of young entrepreneurs participated in the event.

Automobile sale rises 29.57% in January 2024

ISLAMABAD (APP): Sale of cars in the country increased by 29.57 per cent in January 2024 compared to same month of the preceding year, a data released by Pakistan Automobile Manufacturing Association (PAMA) said on Wednesday.

Sale of cars rose to 7,802 units in January 2024 compared to 6,021 units during same month of previous year. Sale of cars during first seven months (Jul-Jan)

however decreased by 48.66 per cent when compared to the sale during same period of the year 2022-23. According to the data, as many as 38,464 cars were sold during the period under review as opposed to 74,933 units in the same period of last year.

The breakup figures showed that 5,145 units of Honda Civic and City were sold during July-January 2023-24 as compared to the sale of 10,526 units during

July-January 2022-23.

Toyota Corolla and Yaris car sales also declined by 46.15 per cent as it went down to 7,422 units from 13,784 units in the previous year.

Suzuki Swift's sales also decreased by 63.58 per cent as its sales went down to 2,782 units from 7,640 units last year.

Sale of Suzuki Cultus declined to 2,181 units during the first seven months of the current year, whereas

during the same months last year, the sale was recorded at 5,686 units while the sale of Suzuki WagonR also decreased to 2,149 units from 4,440 units last year.

Suzuki Alto's sales also witnessed a sharp decline of 40.74 per cent from 27,658 units to 16,388 units during the current year, whereas the sales of Suzuki Bolan decreased to 1,314 units as opposed to sales of 2,992 units in the same month of last year.

Most of Asia tracks Wall St down as US data dents rate cut hopes

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Most Asian equities sank Wednesday, tracking a sell-off on Wall Street, as a forecast-topping US inflation report dealt a hefty blow to hopes for an early interest rate cut.

The dimming prospects of a dovish turn by the Federal Reserve also sent the dollar surging against the yen, forcing Japanese officials to warn they would intervene in forex markets to support the country's currency.

Expectations for a rate cut have been doused in recent weeks by a series of strong indicators -- particularly on the economy and jobs -- while several monetary policymakers warned they want to see more data before shifting.

However, stocks continued to push higher in that time, with analysts saying the Fed had indicated it is still on course to cut this year, even if not as much as previously hoped.

A small downward revision last week to inflation figures for the final few months of 2023 added to the upbeat mood.

Tuesday's figures, however, showed the consumer price index and core prices eased less than expected, which came as a severe blow, leading investors to re-evaluate their outlook for rates this year.

Eyes are now on producer price data due at the end of the week.

All three main indexes on Wall Street fell more than one percent, with the Dow and S&P 500 coming down from around record highs.

US Treasury yields jumped and the so-called "fear gauge" VIX rose at its fastest clip since October.

The "CPI report caught a lot of people off guard", Chris Zaccarelli, of Independent Advisor Alliance.

"Many investors were expecting the Fed to begin cutting rates and were spending a lot of time arguing that the Fed was taking too long to get started -- not appreciating that inflation could be sticky and not continue down in a straight line."

Saxo's Redmond Wong added: "The hot CPI report

has priced out a March rate cut, now seen with only 10 percent odds."

The "May rate cut probability has also dropped to less than 40 percent from around 70 percent previously and the first rate cut is only seen in June".

Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management called it "a bitter pill".

"Suppose the other top-tier data released this month shows a hotter trend similar to the CPI report. In that case, it's unlikely that the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates in May."

Asian traders ran for cover, with Tokyo, Sydney, Singapore, Seoul, Wellington, Mumbai and Bangkok well down.

Hong Kong rallied, however, as it reopened after an extended break for the Lunar New Year, boosted by hopes China's leaders will announce further measures to support the country's markets and stuttering economy.

The dollar held on to most of its gains against its peers, with its movements against the yen of particular interest to investors after it

jumped around one percent to sit back above 150 for the first time since November.

Officials in Tokyo said they were keeping a close eye on developments and were ready to step in to support their currency.

"Some of the recent rapid moves are in line with fundamentals, but some are clearly speculative. I think the latter aren't desirable," said vice finance minister for international affairs Masato Kanda on Wednesday.

"Authorities are ready to respond 24 hours a day, 365 days a year."

Those remarks were echoed by Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki.

The yen has lost more than five percent since the start of the year as the Bank of Japan (BoJ) holds off tightening monetary policy, even as the economy improves and inflation picks up.

While BoJ governor Kazuo Ueda has hinted at a move soon, he has refused to give a rigid timeline, piling pressure on the yen.

Sony hikes profit forecast but says PS5 sales to slow

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Japan's Sony upgraded its annual net profit forecast on Wednesday but trimmed its PlayStation 5 unit's sales target, with the flagship console currently in its fourth year on the market.

The conglomerate now predicts a full-year net profit of 920 billion yen (\$6.1 billion) instead of its previous target of 880 billion yen. One reason for the more ambitious outlook is net gains on investments at Sony's life insurance business, the company said, announcing a plan to take its financial services division public in October 2025.

PlayStation 5 sales, meanwhile, are at risk of

losing momentum, some analysts have warned, especially in the battle with US rival Microsoft.

Sony said it now expects to sell around 21 million PS5 units in the current financial year -- trimming an earlier target of 25 million. "PlayStation 5 hardware will enter into its fifth year, which will be the latter half of the console's life cycle," said Naomi Matsuoka, Sony's senior vice president.

She told reporters that Sony would "put renewed focus on its profitability", adding that "we expect its volume sales data to gradually start falling from the next fiscal year".

When the PS5 was

launched in November 2020, supply chain snarl-ups made it difficult to buy.

But those issues have now eased and Sony touted strong software sales and robust user engagement on Wednesday.

Hideki Yasuda, analyst at Toyo Securities, told AFP before the earnings release that Sony's 25 million unit sales target for the PS5 was "a very high hurdle". "Sony had to issue an ambitious target so third-party game-makers would develop and release new games. The company could not set a target lower than for the PS4," he said.

Microsoft has made a strong push to boost its position, including with its

\$69 billion takeover of Activision Blizzard, the maker of the blockbuster "Call of Duty" games.

Sony's video game segment scored a hit with "Marvel's Spider-Man 2", which was released on the PS5 in October last year and became the fastest-selling PlayStation Studios game in the first 24 hours after release.

"Despite the shot in the arm from its Spider-Man 2 title hit, which has come and gone", Sony needs to watch its back when Microsoft "launches Activision games, namely Call Of Duty (COD) franchises on its subscription Game Pass offering", noted Amir Anvarzadeh from



In brief

Ex-Dutch int'l gets six years

THE HAGUE (AFP): A Dutch court sentenced former Ajax and international winger Quincy Promes to six years in prison Wednesday, convicting him of smuggling more than one thousand kilograms of cocaine. The 32-year-old, now playing for Spartak Moscow, was not in court to hear the sentence, a spokesperson told AFP. Previous attempts to extradite him from Moscow have failed. Summing up in court, presiding judge M. Vaandrager said Promes was an example to many, especially young people, due to his footballing talent. "The suspect is regularly in the news, is active on social media, and has fans worldwide," the judge said. "This makes it even worse that he has tried to increase his wealth... by participating in major international drugs trafficking." "All things considered, the court finds a six-year prison sentence appropriate," it said in a statement. The court said Promes had smuggled a total of 1,363 kilograms of cocaine from Brazil in 2020, through the Belgian port of Antwerp into The Netherlands with the help of an accomplice. The ruling was based on wire-tapped conversations and encrypted messages Promes had sent under the pseudonym "Fantasma." Prosecutors had called for a nine-year jail sentence but the court ruled they had based their request on previous cases where the punishment was too harsh. Lawyers for Promes had entered a plea of not guilty.

Hamilton unveils Mercedes 2024 car

LONDON (AFP): Lewis Hamilton admitted it felt "emotional" and "surreal" to take part in the final Formula One car launch of his Mercedes career on Wednesday. Hamilton, a seven-time Formula One world champion, will leave Mercedes at the end of the 2024 season in a stunning switch to Ferrari. The 39-year-old had signed a new two-year deal with Mercedes worth £100 million (\$126 million) in August. But Hamilton recently activated a break clause to seal his move to the Italian team after admitting the prospect of "driving in Ferrari red" was too hard to turn down. Speaking at the Mercedes launch for the first time since his blockbuster move was confirmed, Hamilton said: "The last few weeks have obviously been emotional and it is very surreal to be here. The focus through the whole of winter training is getting the team back to where we once were. We have had these difficult couple of years which have been really grounding for us. It has helped us regroup and really look at things." Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff, standing alongside Hamilton at the launch, added: "It has been a very busy winter. It will be our last season with Lewis so we are keen on bringing a quick car." Hamilton, who joined Mercedes from McLaren in 2013, won six of his record-equalling seven world championships with the Silver Arrows. But the British driver has struggled to match Red Bull rival Max Verstappen since he missed out on what would have been a record eighth world championship in 2021 in controversial fashion. His long goodbye to Mercedes made for an awkward final car launch at the team's Northamptonshire base. Hamilton answered just three questions from the Mercedes moderator during the brief nine-minute event.

CM orders foolproof security for PSL-9

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has ordered to undertaker excellent arrangements to ensure foolproof security for Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9 and for facilitation of cricket lovers. Presided over a special meeting with regard to undertaking security and other arrangements to hold PSL-9 here on Wednesday, Mohsin Naqvi directed to implement the formulated security plan in its true spirit for the cricket matches to be played in Rawalpindi, Multan and Lahore. It was informed during the briefing that more than 16,000 police personnel will perform their security duties during the PSL matches. A security plan for the matches to be played in Lahore, Rawalpindi and Multan has been chalked out. The matches of PSL-9 are going to be launched from Feb 17. The CM directed to carry out effective management to maintain traffic flow during the matches adding that the traffic clo-

sure time should be minimized keeping in view facilitation of the people. He directed to timely impart awareness to the citizens about the alternate routes through the media, saying that the institutions concerned and departments by keeping a close liaison should diligently perform their duties. The arrangements should match with the significance of holding a big tournament like PSL. The cricket lovers should be provided a peaceful and secure environment to watch cricket matches. Chief Secretary, IG Police, Secretary (Home), Secretary Communication & Works, Commissioner Lahore, Capital City Police Officer, Chief Operating Officer Pakistan Cricket board, Deputy Commissioner, DIG Operations, Chief Traffic Officer and officials concerned attended the meeting. Commissioners of Rawalpindi and Multan, Regional Police Officers, Deputy Commissioners participated in the meeting via video link.

Youngsters to watch for in PSL 9

ISLAMABAD (APP): The HBL Pakistan Super League (PSL) has a rich history of providing platform to the finest young talent the country has to offer. PSL 9 was set to feature an exciting new batch of talented players. From lethal fast bowlers and dexterous spinners to skillful batters, all players will look to prove themselves at the big stage. Mohammad Zeeshan of Peshawar Zalmi was a formidable pace prospect, having shown his promise in the Pakistan U19 team. Aided by his towering height of 6 feet 8 inches, the right-arm fast bowler extracts extra bounce, spelling trouble for the opposition. "I will be sharing the dressing room with and playing alongside Babar Azam, the best batter in the world, which I am really excited about. "T20 cricket allows limited room for the bowlers as the batters are always looking to charge. I think that's where variations come into play; you need command over your slower balls, bouncers and yorkers to succeed." Saad Baig of Karachi Kings would be representing his home city in the ninth edition of HBL PSL.

The wicketkeeper-batter led Pakistan U19 to semi-finals of ICC U19 World Cup 2024. The previous year, he led Pakistan U19 to the semi-finals of ACC U19 Asia Cup. Saad, said, "I will be part of a very experienced dressing room and I will try to improve my game as much as I can. I will ask seniors like Shoaib Malik and Keiron Pollard about their work ethic. They have played a lot of T20 cricket across the world so learning from them would be good for my future as well." Right-arm pacer Ubaid Shah of Islamabad United would be joining his brothers, Test cricketer Naseem Shah and first-class player Hunain Shah, at Islamabad United to strengthen the franchise's pace battery. Since his debut for Pakistan U19, the pacer has become an indispensable asset to the side. "It is very exciting that I am in the same team as both my brothers. And it is an honour to play under Shadab [Khan] Bhai's captaincy. I look forward to learning from him. HBL PSL is big tournament with some very experienced names." Shamyil Hussain of Islamabad United was a

top-order batter known for impressive strokeplay. The young left-handed batter, an avid fan of Brian Lara, says he has modelled his technique and shots after the West Indies batting legend. "My style of play aligns with that of Islamabad United; I like to play attacking cricket and put pressure on the bowlers. I will be surrounded by senior players so my goal is to gain as much experience as I can during the tournament." Syed Faridoun of Lahore Qalandars was a left-arm wrist spinner who will be representing Lahore Qalandars in HBL PSL 9. As part of their Player Development Program, the franchise had sent Faridoun to represent Melbourne Stars at the Big Bash League in 2021. Top players from around the world come to play in this league and I aspire to compete against them. Your economy rate matters a lot in T20 cricket, so I always aim to restrict the flow of runs. I have gotten to share the dressing room with Rashid Khan in the past two years so I have learnt a lot from him." Faisal Akram, another left-arm wrist spinner, was set to represent Multan

Sultans in the ninth edition of the HBL PSL. "Multan is my home so it feels great that I have been picked to represent the city. If I get the chance to play, I will give my 100 per cent on the field. I am looking to end the season as the best emerging player of the season. "Multan Sultans have a great team this year. I am especially looking forward to learning from our captain Mohammad Rizwan, and foreign players like Reeza Hendricks and Dawid Malan." Khawaja Mohammad Nafay of Quetta Gladiators was a right-handed batter who was picked by Quetta Gladiators for the upcoming season of HBL PSL. "My coach was with me when I got the news that I had been picked by Quetta. It made the moment really special because he has worked hard with me. It is a big deal for me, because performing in this league paves way for your selection to the national side. "I am really excited to share space with Jason Roy, Mohammad Amir and Sarfaraz Ahmed. I will have much to learn from these seasoned campaigners."

PSL 9 anthem featuring Ali Zafar, Aima Baig released

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The anthem for the upcoming edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL 9) was released on Wednesday, making the fans groove. It features celebrated singers Ali Zafar and Aima Baig, who have showed sizzling moves to leave the cricket lovers excited ahead of the start of the event. The anthem stresses on self-confidence as it urges people to play fearlessly to achieve their goals. The anthem was shared on the official page of the PSL on X. "Overcome your fears, live boldly and #KhulKeKheL," read the caption. A day earlier, PSL 9 trophy was unveiled at the Polo Ground of the Race Course Park in Lahore in the presence of Chairman PCB Mohsin Naqvi, franchise owners, and star cricketers. The trophy is "The Orion Trophy" and will be a source of motivation for all the teams participating in the tournament. The trophy embodies the spirit of the HBL Pakistan Super League where each team shines brightly as they strive for glory. The cricket event will begin from 17 February 2024 at the PCB's headquarters in Lahore, with two-time winners and defending champions Lahore Qalandars taking on winners of the 2016 and 2018 editions Islamabad United. The marquee event will be played in four cities - Karachi, Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi - with the final of the six-team tournament taking place at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi on 18 March.



HAMILTON: Neil Wagner of the New Zealand Black Caps walks off after being stumped by Clyde Fortuin of South Africa during day two of the Men's Second Test in the series between New Zealand and South Africa.

English Premier League approves partial ownership of Man Utd

LONDON (Agencies): The English Premier League on Tuesday approved British billionaire Sir Jim Ratcliffe's acquisition of 25% of Manchester United. "Sir Jim Ratcliffe's acquisition of 25 per cent of Manchester United FC, and further investment of \$300 million in the club, has been approved by the Premier League Board, following the completion of the Owners' and Directors' Test (OADT)," it said in a statement. "The Board agreed to the

change of the club's ownership structure last week, and this has now been officially ratified by an Independent Oversight Panel. "The Premier League's Owners' Charter has also been signed," it added. Ratcliffe, who owns petrochemicals company, INEOS, bought a 25% stake in Manchester United in December. The deal requires approval from the English Football Association (The FA). In addition, the 71-year-old businessman previously

accepted a request by the club's board to take responsibility for managing Manchester United's football operations. Man Utd won a record 13 Premier League titles, the last in 2013, since the top-tier football division was given its current name in 1992. Before the Premier League's inception, the club won seven First Division Championships in England. One of the UK's richest men, Ratcliffe has a \$20.6 billion real-time net worth, according to Forbes.

Osaka gets walkover as Zheng falls to Fernandez at Qatar Open

DOHA (AFP): Naomi Osaka received a walkover into the Doha quarter-finals on Wednesday, while Leylah Fernandez knocked out Australian Open runner-up Zheng Qinwen 7-5, 6-3. Four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka advanced after Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko, who beat Ons Jabeur in round two, pulled out with an elbow injury. Osaka will meet another former world number one, Karolina Pliskova, or Czech teenager Linda Noskova for a place in the last four, as the Japanese star continues her comeback from maternity leave. Chinese fifth seed Zheng let slip a strong position in the opening set where she led 5-3, as Fernandez broke twice in a row and reeled off the final four games. Fernandez then punished a loose service game from Zheng in the sixth game of the second set before closing out an impressive victory. "I'm extremely pumped up, I'm super happy with my level. There's still a lot of work to do, but so far so good, so we're just going to keep going," said Fernandez. World number 38 Fernandez, a former US Open finalist, goes on to meet third seed Elena Rybakina or 16th-seeded American Emma Navarro for a spot in the semi-finals. A n a s t a s i a Pavlyuchenkova also progressed to the last eight with a 7-5, 6-3 win over Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova. Katerina Siniakova, who took out Coco Gauff in the second round, could not build on Tuesday's success as the Czech lost in straight sets to Danielle Collins. Top seed Iga Swiatek plays Ekaterina Alexandrova in the last 16 later on Wednesday.

Nabi dethrones Shakib to grab top all-rounder spot in ICC ODI rankings

ISLAMABAD (APP): Afghanistan player Mohammad Nabi has ended Shakib Al Hasan's long tenure as the number one all-rounder in the ICC Men's ODI Player Rankings after smashing a fine century in the first ODI against Sri Lanka in Pallekele, the ICC said in a media release on Wednesday. Nabi, who has been the number one T20I all-rounder in the past, moved up to the top position in ODIs after his fighting 136 helped him become the oldest player to top the ICC ODI all-rounders' table at the age of 39 years and one month. Sri Lanka's Tillakaratne Dilshan held the previous record at 38 years and eight months when he was number one in June 2015. Rashid Khan (ODI bowling, ODI all-rounder, T20I bowling) and Mujeeb Ur Rahman (T20I bowling) are the other Afghanistan players to top the ICC rankings. Shakib had been at the top for 1,739 days (since 7 May 2019), which is the longest unbroken stretch anyone has had at the top of the ODI Rankings. His total reign has been for a record 4,276 days, which equates to more than 11 ½ years. Kapil Dev comes next with 3,816 days which includes two stints of 1,376 and 1,375 days. The first two ODIs of the series, both won by Sri Lanka, also saw some other notable performances from either side. Azmatullah Omarzai was another Afghanistan player to move up after his unbeaten 149 in the first ODI lifted him 19 places to 57th position while a

host of Sri Lanka players prospered in the rankings. Sri Lanka's Charith Asalanka has advanced five places to a career-best 15th position after smashing an unbeaten 97 in the second ODI. Pathum Nissanka has progressed 10 places to 18th after upstaging Omarzai and Nabi in the first ODI while Sadeera Samarawickrama has moved up from 47th to 41st after useful knocks of 45 and 52. Spinner Wanindu Hasaranga jumped 14 places to 26th after his haul of four for 27 while left-arm seam bowler Dilshan Madhushanka has gone from 37th to 33th. Nepal players also had some notable improvements in rankings after they beat Canada 3-0 in a home series ahead of the first ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 that commences on Thursday in Kirtipur with a Tri-series featuring Namibia, the Netherlands and hosts Nepal. Captain Rohit Paudel has moved up three places to 77th after scoring 87 in the second match, Kushal Bhurtel is up eight places to 88th with a knock of 62 in the same match and left-arm spinner Lalit Rajbanshi has moved up 14 places to 79th in the bowling rankings after grabbing three wickets in two matches. In the ICC Men's T20I Rankings, Glenn Maxwell's 120 not out off just 55 balls in the second T20I of the three-match series against the West Indies in Adelaide has lifted him 11 places to 24th position while Tim David (up 35 places to 27th) and David Warner (up 19

places to 36th) are other Australia players to move up the batting rankings. Leg-spinner Adam Zampa has moved up from 16th to 11th in the bowling rankings after picking five wickets in the series while Marcus Stoinis has moved from fifth to second in the all-rounders' list. For the West Indies, Johnson Charles progressed from 50th to 38th while Sherfane Rutherford and Andrew Russell too gained after guiding their team to a consolation win in the final match. Rutherford is up 11 places to 61st after an unbeaten 67 and Russell up 54 places to 111th after scoring 71. The Test rankings see South Africa's David Bedingham move up 30 places to 79th in the batting rankings after scores of 32 and 87 in the first Test against New Zealand in Tauranga, that the home side won by 281 runs. Rachin Ravindra is one place behind him in 80th position. In the bowling rankings, New Zealand fast bowler Kyle Jamieson has gained six places to reach eighth position after finishing with six wickets in the match while Matt Henry is up five places to 26th.

Abdur Rahman Farooq, Peshawar's Rising Table Tennis Star, Shines in National Arena

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar's talented player, Abdur Rahman Farooq, has emerged as a prominent figure in the world of table tennis, showcasing his skills and achievements at various competitions spanning district, division, and national levels. Speaking to the media, Abdur Rahman Farooq expressed his deep passion for table tennis, aspiring to make a name for himself alongside renowned players like Arif Khan, Asim Qureshi, Farjad Saif, and SM Sabtain. To realize his ambitions, Farooq has dedicated himself to training under the guidance of table tennis coach Mian Absar Ali, resulting in a significant improvement in his game.



His dedication has been reflected in recent victories, including a silver medal in the table tennis championship on 14th August, gold medals in both the inter-schools and inter-collegiate events, and silver medals in the UAT Expo 2022 Table Tennis and NUST EME Olympiad Tournament. Additionally, Farooq played a crucial role in securing a team event silver

at the 28th Junior National Table Tennis Championship 2022, earning praise from provincial association officials, coaches, and senior players. Encouraged by the positive feedback, Abdur Rahman Farooq remains committed, working tirelessly day and night to further enhance his skills. He acknowledges the abundance of talent in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with young players stepping forward. However, he emphasizes the necessity of proper coaching for these emerging talents. While Chinese coaches played a significant role in the past, Abdur Rahman Farooq notes the current involvement of local coaches like Absar Ali and Amna Mahmood, who are guiding and training young children, including girls.



In brief

Police arrest 17 kite sellers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police on the directives of City Police Officer, Rawalpindi are making efforts to control kite flying and managed to arrest 17 kite sellers on recovery of 4000 kites and 18 kite flying string rolls, said a police spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed, Taxila police arrested five kite sellers namely Nabeel, Ibrar, Inam, Hamza and Numan and recovered 3410 kites while Race Course police rounded up six namely Habib, Rehan, Husnain, Syed Ullah, Hassan and Habib Khan with 405 kites and 12 kite flying string rolls. Westridge police in their ongoing operation against the kite sellers netted Akhtar, Husnain and Kamran and seized 50 kites and three string rolls. Airport police also recovered 50 kites from the possession of an accused namely Umar and Naseerabad police nabbed Muneeb for having 30 kites and kite flying string rolls. R.A.Bazar police also held a kite seller, Ali and recovered five kites and two string rolls. Divisional Superintendents of Police directed the police teams to accelerate operations against kite sellers and flyers. Senior Superintendent of Police, Operations Rawalpindi said that strict action in accordance with the law would be taken against the rules violators and they would be sent behind the bars.

Search operation conducted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi police on special directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Khalid Mehmood Hamdani conducted a search operation in the jurisdiction of Dharmyal police station here on Wednesday. According to police spokesman, the search operation was carried out by the heavy police contingent, Elite Force, Special Branch personnel and ladies police along with officials of Dharmyal police. During the operation, a total of 35 houses were searched and 22 shops while some 80 suspects were questioned, he said. The spokesman further said the search operations to net criminals and proclaimed offenders were regularly being conducted under National Action Plan in different areas of the district to maintain law and order.

SSP hold Khuli Katchery

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



ISLAMABAD: A view of encroachment on road causing problems for traffic and pedestrians at Pirwadhai.

Education Committee acknowledges support of members, officials

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Federal Education and Professional Training, Senator Irfan Siddiqui in a final meeting of the committee before dissolution held Wednesday acknowledged the unwavering support of both committee members and officials from the education ministry and HEC over the past three years.

The chair conveyed to committee members that this marks the final meeting of the standing committee before its dissolution.

Expressing gratitude, the committee members commended the chair for ensuring the smooth functioning of the standing committee proceedings. The committee addressed the agenda item related to a starred question posed by Senator Bahramand Khan Tangi during the Senate Session on 5th January 2024.

The question inquired

about government-established institutes for teacher training. The Caretaker Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training informed the committee about two such institutions in Islamabad.

Senator Tangi urged international training for teachers to expose them to modern educational practices. The chair instructed the education ministry to devise plans for teacher training encompassing dress code, moral values, and teaching acumen.

A point of public importance concerning the absence of a service structure for university teachers was discussed.

The HEC Chairman reported on the special committee's progress, and the chair directed the HEC to submit an interim report by Friday.

The committee also discussed a starred question from Senator Mushtaq

Ahmed regarding the number of students studying "A" and "O" levels under the Cambridge system in Pakistan. Senator Mushtaq Ahmed expressed concerns about the lack of information, citing a message received from the UK embassy in which the sought information was being termed as "Business Secret. The chair emphasized the need for control and directed ministry officials to coordinate with the foreign ministry for obtaining this vital information.

The committee meeting was attended by Senators Prof. Dr. Mehr Taj Roghani, Fawzia Arshad, Engr Rukhsana Zuberi, Mushtaq Ahmed Khan, Falak Naz, Naseebullah Bazai, and Bahramand Khan Tangi, along with the caretaker Ministry for Federal Education and Professional Training, Special Secretary Education, and Chairman HEC.

RDA issues notices to 2 illegal housing schemes

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on the directives of the Director General, Muhammad Saif Anwar Jappa has issued notices to two illegal housing schemes and 11 land subdivisions.

According to RDA spokesman, the Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering (MP&TE) Directorate of RDA had issued notices to Malik Tassarwar, Zakir, Malik Riyasat, Asim Aziz, Sheikh Maisam, Idress Awan, Master Zaheer, Syed Samar Shah, Ch Aslam Bani, Qazi Naveed, Haji Abrar, Ch. Hameed, Malik Aslam, Malik Ibrar, Khurram Qayum, Ch. Abid, Raja Tahir, Ch. Yasir, Kosar, Badar, Anjum Kiyani and Tahir Madni, the owners of two private illegal housing schemes and 11 illegal subdivisions of the land namely Ittehad Town at Mouza Hamal on Mandra Chakwal Road Gujar Khan, Aziz Builders & Developers Pvt.

Ltd at Mouza Jarary on Jorian to Gahi Syedan Road Rawalpindi, Land Subdivision at Mouza Kallar Budhal Tehsil Kallar Syedan, Land Subdivision at Mouza Mankiyala Stupa Road, Land Subdivision Nazimabad at Mouza Louni Kallar Bypass Road Kallar Syedan, Land Subdivision at Mouza Louni Tehsil Kallar Syedan and Land Subdivision at Mouza Kallar Budhal Tehsil Kallar Syedan, Land Subdivision at Mouza Bagga Sheikhan, Land Subdivision at Mouza Chak Bhatta, Dhamial and Bishandot, Land Subdivision at Mouza Khabal and Sukhoo, Land Subdivision at Mouza Mera Sangal and two more Land Subdivisions at Mouza Khabal and Sukhoo.

He said the DG had also directed the Director MP&TE that action should be taken against illegal advertisements and marketing and a First Information Report should also be lodged against the owners of

illegal housing schemes.

Moreover, the sponsors of illegal housing schemes were directed to immediately stop the marketing of their unapproved and illegal housing schemes and contact RDA to get NOC/approval of the scheme as per law, otherwise, strict legal action would be taken against the rules violators, he added.

The citizens had also been requested not to invest in illegal and unauthorized housing schemes, he said adding, they were advised to check the status of the housing projects on the RDA official website www.rda.gov.pk. He said that the owners and sponsors of illegal housing schemes were misleading the public through illegal advertisements. In this regard, the Planning Wing RDA had also requested the Cyber Crime Wing, FIA to take legal action against the illegal and misleading advertisements of illegal housing schemes, he informed.

Excise to facilitate citizens for vehicle registration under ICT doorstep initiative

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a move to streamline services and bring them closer to the community, the Excise department on Wednesday is providing civic facilities to residents of the federal capital to get their vehicle registration as well as access to various essential services at Rose and Jasmine Garden under the ICT doorstep initiative.

On the directives of Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon, the excise staff would be stationed at the park's parking lot from 3.00 to 5.00 pm, ICT Spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabassum said.

This initiative aims to streamline processes and provide ease to the public regarding vehicle registration, transfer, and token tax procedures, he added. In addition to the vehicle registration, transfer, and token tax services, the Facilitation Center Doorstep ICT Vehicle will also be offering the following services: domicile certificate, birth certificate, power of attorney, international driving permit, fuel permit (domestic/commercial), and Motor vehicle registration. The citizens are urged not to miss this opportunity to simplify bureaucratic processes and get everything done at the Rose and Jasmine Garden parking lot today.

Two dead bodies of boys recovered from New Town area

RAWALPINDI (APP): Two dead bodies of boys were recovered from an under-construction plaza in Chandni Chowk, Rawalpindi here on Wednesday. Rescue 1122 teams were immediately rushed to the crime scene.

According to the Media Coordinator, Rescue 1122 Rawalpindi Muhammad Usman Gujjar said that there were no apparent injuries on the dead bodies.

After necessary action, the rescue teams have shifted bodies to the hospital.

The victims were identified as 20-year-old Falak Sher and 17-year-old Saram Ali. However, the motives behind this heinous murder could not be ascertained.

Project for enhancing domestic pharmaceutical ingredients production inaugurated

ISLAMABAD (APP) :The Caretaker Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, Dr. Nadeem Jan, Wednesday, inaugurated a project of expansion and revamping of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API) manufacturing facility at DrugPharma Chemicals. It is the second project under endeavor of revival and invigorating domestic production of API and at completion of the project the production capacity of the Drugpharma would increase in a phased manner from existing 52000 liters to over 105000 liters by end of the year.

The federal minister speaking at the occasion said that APIs are used as basic ingredient in medicines of different disease and their enhanced indigenous production will not only lessen reliance on API imports but it will also help reducing the price of medicines and improving quality and availability of the basic pharmaceutical ingredients in the country.

He said that medicines and other pharmaceutical products manufactured in Pakistan were in a great demand in Central Asia as well as in African countries and we can enhance our exports by ensuring expansion opportunities the local pharmaceutical sector.

Increase in export of pharmaceutical products will also contribute significantly in ensuring the availability of quality medicines on appropriate prices across the country, he added.

"Since formation of caretaker government, I have pursued a three pronged strategy in health sector with core objectives of health sector reforms; decreasing imports, enhancing indigenous production and mobilizing health sector resources for economic stabilization; and increasing the dignity of Pakistan across the globe," the minister stated and expressed satisfaction on substantial progress so far.

The health ministry had set a target of \$ 1 billion for exports of medicines, pharma-

ceutical products and medicinal equipment in the current financial year, he said adding that we are poised to achieve or even surpass the target. In fact Pakistan has potential and it was possible to expand the pharmaceutical exports to \$ 2 billion, he further added.

Governance in health ministry and its allied entities has improved with digitization of the system, accountability is in place and all administrative decisions were being made on merit, Dr. Nadeem Jan said and further informed that control programs on Diabetes and Hepatitis are devised while 500 primary health care centers has mad functional as well.

Government brought structural reforms in PMDC to enhance quality of medical education in the country while measures were also underway for quality enhancement of the Nursing Council, Dr. Jan stated and highlighted the demand of trained nurses across the world.

Elaborating on steps for ensuring availability of quality medicines on appropriate price in the country the minister informed that monitoring system of the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) is fully functional and actions were being taken against illegal profiteering and hoarding of drugs.

DRAP's systems of registration, licensing, review and renewal are made completely online to promote transparency and inclusion of all the stakeholders while measures have also been taken for capacity building and strengthening accountability within the regulatory authority, the minister informed.

The ministry has launched an app to receive and redress public grievances and any citizen could register complaint about prices, availability and other relevant issues on the app and DRAP team will contact the aggrieved person.

The Caretaker Federal Health Minister, at the occasion, unveiled the plank to formally inaugurate the project and also reviewed the progress on the project.

CDA starts cleaning work of Khanpur Dam Canal

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Water Supply Directorate of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) is working rapidly on several projects to meet the shortage of water in the city so that the citizens could not face any kind of difficulties during summer.

In this regard, the annual cleaning work of Khanpur Dam Canal has been started by the Water Supply Department of the CDA which will be completed by the end of this month.

Since water is being supplied from Khanpur to the residents of Sectors G-10, G-11, F-10, F-11 and D-12

of Islamabad, and due to the annual cleaning campaign of Khanpur Canal, the water supply will be reduced by 50% in these sectors.

The shortage of water in these sectors will be fulfilled by Sangjani Water Works including Simli Dam. After which water supply will be restored in the said sectors as per schedule.

It should be noted that due to lack of sufficient rains in monsoon and winter, the water level in the dams has become very low.

Moreover, during the cleaning campaign of Khanpur Canal, the tanker

service was also alerted in the said sectors.

Residents of said sectors can also avail water tanker service by calling 9106580. Similarly, in view of the facilities of the citizens, the Water Supply Wing has also issued a helpline number 03357775444 so that all possible facilities can be provided to the citizens.

The Water Supply Department of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) has also appealed to the citizens to be careful in using water and avoid wastage of water so that maximum water can be used by the citizens.

Int'l conference on 'Recent Trends in Chemistry' begins

ISLAMABAD (APP): A two-day 6th International Conference on "Recent Trends in Chemistry" commenced at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU) on Wednesday. Vice Chancellor, AIU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood was the chief guest at the inaugural session. He highlighted the importance of promoting science as it is crucial for the development of any country and nation.

Dr. Nasir encouraged the students to work hard for the prosperity of the country, and to fulfill their dreams because it cannot be achieved without hard work.

He also mentioned that the

world is open for those who work hard, and the success of students is an honor for the institution. Additionally, the Vice Chancellor emphasized the need for useful and applied research for the betterment of society. This conference is being organized by the Department of Chemistry, AIU. Dr. Nasir mentioned that experts in chemistry from Russia, China, and other parts of the world have participated in the conference to educate students about the latest trends in chemistry. This will help students stay well-informed about the developments in the field of chemistry.

The Chairperson of the Chemistry Department, Dr. Uzma Yunus, explained the aims and objectives of the conference in detail. She emphasized the importance of the conference, as AIU is celebrating its golden jubilee and the chemistry department is celebrating its silver jubilee this year. Dr. Uzma explained that the conference aims to showcase the research-based projects of students, provide a platform for scholars to interact with the national and international research community to enhance the quality of research, and acquaint students with the latest trends in chemistry.



ISLAMABAD: A view of street lights installed at Rawal Dam underpass in the Federal Capital.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) arrested 22 outlaws including six professional beggars from different areas of the city during the last 24 hours and recovered drugs and weapons from their possession.

According to ICP spokesman, following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police has intensified its crackdown against the criminal elements to eliminate the crime from the city.

Following these directions, the Karachi company police team arrested an accused namely Munir Ahmed and recovered 480 grams of hashish from his possession. The Golra police team arrested an accused namely Manan Jameel involved in illegal gas refilling. The Sangjani police team arrested an accused namely Irshad Ahmed involved in illegal gas refilling.

The Industrial Area police team also arrested an accused namely Altaf Hussain and recovered one 30-bore pistol from his possession. The Shams Colony police team arrested two accused namely Dost Muhammad and Nadeem Khan and recovered one iron punch and 1,110 grams of

hashish from their possession.

Similarly, the Khanna police team arrested an accused namely Azhar and recovered one iron punch from his possession, while the police team also arrested two accused namely Nasrullah and Muhammad Sher involved in illegal gas refilling and petrol selling.

Moreover, The Humak police team arrested two accused namely Abid Ali and Nasir Ali and recovered one 30-bore pistol and 307 gram heroin from their possession. The Nilore police team arrested two accused namely Ghulam Hussain and recovered one 12-bore gun from his possession. Furthermore, the Bani Gala police team arrested an accused namely Muhammad Sarfraz and Shakeel and recovered 380 grams of heroin and 25 litres of liquor from their possession, while the police team arrested two accused namely Tasawar Hussain and Shahid Rehman involved in illegally selling petrol and gas refilling. The separate cases have been registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway. During the ongoing crackdown against professional beggars, the Islamabad Capital Police apprehended six professional beggars.

Enmity comes to an end

SAR-I-PUL (Pajhwok): A 40-year-old enmity among three families has ended as a result of efforts by tribal elders in the Syedabad district of northern Sar-i-Pul province. The enmity erupted 40 years ago over environmental problems, leaving two people dead. Maulvi Yar Mohammad Omari, appellant court chief, said at the reconciliation gathering Allah had decreed peace and forgiveness. He added reconciliation among the families had led to the creation of a peaceful atmosphere.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Shabaan 04, 1445 — Thursday, February 15, 2024

Journalist gets two years

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Saint Petersburg city court has given Afghan journalist Kabiri Hassani a two-year prison sentence for crossing the border from Russia to Europe illegally. The Saint Petersburg court announced that Kabiri and his colleagues had been sentenced to two years in prison for illegally crossing the Russian border into Europe. The Afghan journalist enrolled in an English language program at a university in Kyiv after fleeing Afghanistan.

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

IE rejects report of Daesh activity

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate rejected the UN report about the activities of Daesh in Afghanistan. The spokesman of the Islamic Emirate told TOLONews that Daesh has been suppressed in Afghanistan and cannot harm other countries from Afghanistan. "Unfortunately, some NGOs want to campaign for Daesh, they are busy on the magnification of Daesh, which is not the right step. We ask that instead of this Daesh campaign, the facts should be taken into consideration and the public mind should not be filled with anxiety," he said. In the latest report on the threat posed by ISIL (Daesh) to international peace and security, the Secretary-General stated

that Daesh, as the biggest threat in Afghanistan, can also pose a threat to the region and beyond. The report says that ISIL-K has taken a broad strategy for the recruitment of troops in Afghanistan. "Notwithstanding a decrease in the number of attacks perpetrated by ISIL-K and its recent loss of territory, casualties, and high attrition among senior and mid-tier leadership figures, Member States continue to consider the group as the greatest threat within Afghanistan, with the ability to project a threat into the region and beyond," The report reads. The findings of this report indicate that the decrease in the attacks of the Daesh Khorasan in Afghanistan probably reflects the effect of the

Islamic Emirate counter-terrorism efforts and the change in their leadership strategy. "This is an international problem. Security plans should be formed in this regard," said Sayed Muqadam Amin, a political analyst. "Whenever intelligence information is received, the location and number of Daesh are considered. You see that Daesh attacked in Pakistan, Iran and Tajikistan, and the attacks of Daesh have decreased in Afghanistan," said Mohammad Matin Madadkhail, another political analyst. This comes as some more countries have also expressed concerns about the possible threats of Daesh in the country, which have always been rejected by the Islamic Emirate.

Police, local residents reject killing

KABUL (Pajhwok): Police have rejected while local officials said they were unaware of the killing of five people in security forces firing on a corolla type vehicle in the Kasaba locality of capital Kabul. **Claim:** Five people killed in security forces firing in Kabul's Kasaba locality. **Verdict:** The killing of five people in security forces firing in capital Kabul is an unproven claim. Media reported citing local sources that five people were killed in security forces firing on a corolla type vehicle in the Kasaba locality of capital Kabul. The source said that the incident happened on Tuesday when the driver did not pay attention to checkpoint. Security forces had handed over the bodies of deceased individuals to their family members. **Fact check:** Pajhwok Afghan News talked with three people who live in different parts of Kasaba locality but they were unaware of the incident.

Mahtabuddin, one of the local resident, said: "There is a checkpoint in Kasaba closed to my house, I have no information about the killing of five people in security forces firing, I heard about this incident in social media which was surprising for me, I went to a supermarket close to our house nobody talked about the incident there as well." Police Spokesperson Khalid Zadrin on his social media handle wrote: "Some media outlets published report regarding the killing of five people in security forces firing in Kabul's 15th Police District, this report is total untrue and no such incident had happened." **Outcome:** Hasht-i-Subh daily without credible source claimed that five people were killed in security forces firing in the Kasaba locality, three local residents rejected such claim and Kabul police also categorically rejected the claim. **Verdict:** Report regarding the killing of five people in Kabul is an unproven claim.

IE confirms 280 radio stations on-air

KABUL (Ariana News): The Ministry of Information and Culture said the Islamic Emirate is committed to supporting the media and confirmed that 280 radio stations are currently on air across Afghanistan. Deputy minister Mahajer Farahi said: "Currently, there are about 280 radio stations in our country, including Kabul, in all the provinces and districts of the country." After print media, radio was the second media type in Afghanistan. The first radio station in Afghanistan began broadcasting in 1927 in Kabul and over the years, before the arrival of TV, radio was the main source of information in the country. One popular radio service in Afghanistan is Ariana FM, which was launched in 2005. Nabila Mohammadi, an employee of Ariana FM, said: "Regarding the fact that there is no television or electricity in some houses, our radio listeners can listen to the radio even on their telephones and in their cars." Ali Heidari, another Ariana FM employee, said: "After the developments in the country [in 2021], a number of private and government radios started operating again, and the radios found a very good position. The office of the deputy head of the UN in Kabul also acknowledged World Radio Day and said it is difficult to imagine a world without radio. The office said the organization supports freedom of expression in Afghanistan. Last year, 24 new radio stations were established in the country and 19 others, who had suspended broadcasts, restarted.

Ebad discusses healthcare with UN agency

KABUL (Ariana News): Acting health minister Qalandar Ebad, met with the representative of the UN Population Fund in Afghanistan for discussions on bolstering the country's healthcare infrastructure. The meeting underscored collaborative efforts aimed at improving facilities, particularly through the refurbishment of health centers, enhancing mobile healthcare units, fostering greater coordination, providing technical assistance to health departments, and addressing other pertinent issues, a statement from the ministry read. Ebad underscored the need for enhanced healthcare provision and the augmentation of public access to health services as being of paramount importance. Echoing the sentiments,



He expressed a steadfast commitment to elevating the caliber of health services in conjunction with health partners in the country. Assuring ongoing sup-

port to the Ministry of Public Health, the representative pledged continued cooperation while acknowledging the prevailing constraints and opportunities.

Ministry: Efforts being made for Afghanistan-Turkmenistan trade

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Finance in a statement said that it is trying to expand trade with Turkmenistan. According to the ministry's statement, the first negotiations between the ministry and the Turkmenistan ambassador were held in Kabul, and the next meeting between the high-ranking tax delegations of the two countries will take place in the near future. The ministry added that the talks between the officials of the two countries focused on avoiding double taxation, expanding trade relations, increasing investment and preventing tax evasion between the two countries. Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman of the Islamic Emirate, said: "Their delegations came and spoke to

the financial, commercial and transit sectors. It was a very good step, we are in favor of increasing our trade with Turkmenistan." Businesspeople talked about the increase in trade between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan at Aqina port and asked the Islamic Emirate to take steps to facilitate the implementation of the new plan for Aqina. Abdul Majeed Niazi, head of the chamber of commerce and investments of Faryab, said: "Our imports have increased a lot these days, the loaded trucks full of transit goods waited for two days on that side in queue and our unloaded trucks are also waiting at this side in queue and there are a lot of them. We are hopeful that they will adapt the plan for the

new town of Aqina port because the previous governments could not do it." At the same time, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce also said that the amount of trade between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan in the last year was \$481 million. The spokesman of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, said: "Exports and imports between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan in 2023 were worth \$481 million, which is about \$3 million of exports and \$477 million of imports." Meanwhile, the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI), pointed out the challenges caused by Turkmenistan's not issuing visas to Afghan business-

men, and the large difference in the import and export balance. Mirwais Hotak, head of the Executive Board of the Chamber of Commerce and Investment, said: "Trade with Turkmenistan has had its ups and downs, including the challenges and problems faced by Afghan businesspeople and investors in the field of obtaining visas, and on the other hand, the imbalance in the trade balance." Afghanistan and Turkmenistan have two official ports which are Aqina in Faryab and Torgundi in Herat province. According to the information of the MOIC, most of Afghanistan's imports from Turkmenistan are electricity, gas and oil, and marble, dried fruit and non-alcoholic beverages.

Afghan, Iranian border officials meet in Herat to resolve issues

KABUL (Ariana News): Afghanistan's Ministry of Defense says border officials of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) and Iran held a meeting at Islam Qala in Herat province to discuss border issues and ways to strengthen bilateral relations. This meeting was held at the headquarters of Herat Provincial Commissionerate under the chairmanship of Brigadier General Mohammad Rahim Khadim, the commander of the 5th Frontier Brigade of the 207th Al-Farooq Army Corps. A delegation of Iranian border officials also attended. The ministry said that in this meeting, the two sides, in addition to exchanging views on strengthening



cooperation and border issues, also discussed ways to solve existing problems. IEA officials assured the Iranian delegation that they

are prepared to cooperate in any way in order to establish good relations with neighboring countries. Also, the Iranian delega-

tion expressed their satisfaction with the cooperation of the border forces of the Ministry of National Defense.

Minister advocates for economic upliftment of war-affected families

KABUL (BNA): In a meeting with South African scholars, Mullah Abdul Majid Akhund, the Acting Minister of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs, expressed his commitment to effecting a positive change in the economic situation of the families of martyrs and disabled individuals. He underscored the sacrifices made by the Afghan

people against foreign invasions and called for attention to the many families physically and financially impacted by past conflicts. Sheikh Abdul Hakim Haqqani provided information about the number of martyrs in Afghanistan, disabled individuals, heirs, and martyr families. He emphasized that the

Islamic Emirate is consistently working to provide more assistance to deserving communities, aiming for a positive economic transformation. He further noted that the Islamic Emirate has never forgotten or neglected orphans, widows, and the disabled, considering it a moral and conscientious responsibility to ensure

their voices reach charitable institutions and aid agencies, thereby facilitating increased support for those in need. Representing South African scholars, Mufti Abdullah pledged to encourage and motivate aid institutions to provide more assistance to the affected groups in Afghanistan.

Over a dozen security cameras installed in 15th district of Kabul

KABUL (Ariana News): The Ministry of Interior has said 15 security cameras were installed in the 15th district, in the square and other areas, and are all linked to a central control room. According to the Ministry of Interior, security cameras are being installed across Kabul city, and at all the squares and other key places. The ministry added that an important part of the five-year strategic plan of the ministry is the installation of security cameras in Kabul and other cities in the country.



UNAMA concerned about arrests of Afghan women



KABUL (TOLONews): The UN Secretary General's spokesperson expressed concern about the alleged arbitrary arrests and detention of women in Afghanistan. Speaking at a briefing, Stéphane Dujarric said that the UNAMA is concerned that the ongoing restrictions on Afghan women will further isolate them and will lead to an increase in fami-

ly violence. "The UN Mission fears the current crackdown is pushing women into even greater isolation due to fear of arbitrary arrest and creating a permissive environment for men to enforce repressive measures at home," said Stéphane Dujarric the spokesman for the UN Chief. The Islamic Emirate on the other hand denied the

detentions of women and added that the government is committed to fighting against family violence. "If we witness any kind of violence, the relevant bodies will act and sisters are immune to any kind of attack. Families should also be cautious, there exist laws and implementing administrations in country," Zabiullah Mujahid, the spokesperson of the Islamic Emirate, told TOLONews. "Providing physical and mental security is one of the main obligations of the government, both at the society and family level," Zakiullah Muhammadi, a university lecturer, told TOLONews. The acting minister of vice and virtue has denied any women's arrests for alleged improper dress code and called the allegations "propaganda" against the Islamic Emirate.

‘IEA sets conditions for participation at meeting’



KABUL (Ariana News): Hassan Kazemi Qomi, Iran's ambassador and special representative in Kabul, says the Islamic Emirate has announced two "important conditions" for its participation at the upcoming special representatives meeting on Afghanistan in Doha. In a post on X on Wednesday morning, Qomi: "It is a good oppor-

tunity to find out how serious is the proposal of finding a 'fair way' for the interaction that comes under the goals of the meeting." He added: "If the path of the regional contact committee is noticed by others and the path of interaction is followed, we will face a stable Afghanistan." Qomi did not however say what the two conditions were.

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has meanwhile not yet announced their decision on whether they will attend the meeting. Earlier, the Islamic Emirate confirmed they had been invited to the meeting, but said they would decide on whether to attend once provided with certain details. The second meeting of the special representatives of the countries on Afghanistan affairs is scheduled to be held on the 18th and 19th of this month in Doha. This meeting will be hosted by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and will discuss the proposals of the "Afghanistan Independent Assessment" report based on UN Security Council Resolution 2721.

Healthcare services improved, says officials

KABUL (TOLONews): In response to the latest report of Human Rights Watch (HRW) the Islamic Emirate says that serious efforts to provide healthcare services throughout the country over the past two years are ongoing. The spokesman of the Islamic Emirate, Zabiullah Mujahid, told TOLONews that women have also been provided with employment opportunities and healthcare services in the health sector in the Islamic Sharia framework. "Compared to the past, health activities have increased and hospitals have become more standardized. The hospitals in provinces have also been better equipped and the medicine is available on time there," he added. This comes as HRW in its latest report warned that the reduction of assistance

of aid organizations in the health sector after 2021 and the imposition of restrictions by the Taliban on women will challenge the Afghan health system. HRW in a report titled "A Disaster for the Foreseeable Future," said: "The loss of foreign assistance has severely harmed Afghanistan's healthcare system and exacerbated malnutrition and illnesses resulting from inadequate medical care." "The healthcare system in Afghanistan is in crisis. As the Taliban gained power, aid organizations cut their assistance. Restrictions imposed on women and girls have exacerbated the situation. Limitations such as the requirement for women to have a male [Mahram] when seeking medical care or visiting a male doctor, as well as restrictions on

their movement, have created significant challenges. Another serious issue is that the Taliban has banned education beyond the sixth grade for girls and women, effectively cutting off the pipeline for training female healthcare workers," said Heather Barr, associate women's rights director at Human Rights Watch. "The health sector is also like the other sectors: not satisfactory. And we need the international community and neighboring countries' aid in this field," said Hamid Shakib, a doctor. In the report, HRW also called on the US and other governments to pressure Islamic Emirate leaders to lift restrictions hindering people's access to healthcare, including the ban on women's education and employment.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO), Mr Asif Mahmood Jah, presenting FTO's Annual Report 2023 to President Dr Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-i-Sadr.

PHC disposed off plea against PTI founder

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) disposed of Awami National Party (ANP) president Aimal Wali Khan plea against the Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) founder for concealment of facts in nomination forms, on Wednesday.

The case was heard by a two-member bench comprising Justice Shakil Ahmed and Justice Waqar Ahmed. The petition filed by the ANP president claimed that the nomination papers filed by the PTI founder to contest by-election on seven constituencies were distorted as they omitted details of Toshakhana gifts.

After hearing the arguments of the lawyers, the court remarked that the assembly had been dissolved, and the PTI founder was no longer a member. The Peshawar High Court disposed of the case.

Court stops govt from cashing contractors bank guarantees for Othla dam project: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice Ijaz Anwar and SM

Attique Shah stopped provincial government from cashing bank guarantees of Othla Dam's contractors while adjourned further hearing, on Wednesday.

The counsel Alamzeb Khan advocate informed that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government initiated Othla dam project for provision of water facility to 50 different villages in Swabi district. The initial cost estimated Rs1500 million but it was increased to Rs2200 million by Irrigation's department due to hike in prices caused by inflation. He added that Rs200 million has been utilized on developmental project of Othla dam, the counsel argued.

PHC had ordered Deputy Commissioner Swabi to negotiate with stakeholders for ensuring establishment of Othla dam after rejecting writ petitions of different land owners against the proposed project, the lawyer added. However, the government had created several hurdles for the project and a Contempt of Court plea had filed which is fixed on 6th

March for hearing in this regard, the counsel added. He claimed that the government had placed the project before caretaker cabinet for closure which is unconstitutional and illegal.

The contractors are directed for returning mobilization money otherwise their bank guarantees would be cashed by the government, the lawyer argued. The counsel Alamzeb Khan advocate argued that the caretaker government didn't took approval from Provincial Development Working Party (PDWP) but generated recommendations from few engineers for the closure of the project which is also violation of Election's Act.

Advocate General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Amir Javed informed that caretaker cabinet had postponed it and declare that the new government will decide fate of Othla Dam to continue the project or may to close. PHC's divisional bench comprising of Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice SM Attique Shah stopped cashing of bank guarantees of the contractors while adjourned further hearings.

FTO decides Rs 17,742.16m refund claims

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) has addressed the grievances of the taxpayers by processing 8,963 cases with an implementation status of 94.07% during 2023 as compared to 73.29% last year.

Likewise, requests for refund claims were also decided to the tune of Rs. 17,742.16 million in 2023 and the due amount was paid to the aggrieved taxpayers by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). This was highlighted by the Federal Tax Ombudsman Asif Mahmood Jah, who called on President Dr Arif Alvi and presented FTO's Annual Report 2023 at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Wednesday.

The Federal Tax Ombudsman briefed the president about FTO's overall performance and its key initiatives to facilitate taxpayers and expeditiously address their grievances against maladministration of tax officials. He stated that concerted efforts were undertaken to enhance FTO's outreach by launching awareness campaigns and opening up regional offices in the country.

He informed that Honorary Advisors had also been appointed abroad to facilitate overseas Pakistanis in the USA, Canada, Sweden, UAE, Hong Kong and the Philippines. He added that FTO had appointed leading businessmen as Honorary Advisors from various Chambers of Commerce and Industries to facilitate the business community. "To ensure prompt response against the maladministration of tax authorities, a mobile App has been developed enabling aggrieved complainants to lodge complaints and check their status using mobile/smart devices", he stated.

By-polls to be held in 5 constituencies

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Lahore is poised to host by-elections in five constituencies after Feb 8 polls result. President of the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), Shehbaz Sharif has successfully secured victory in the National Assembly's NA-123 Lahore and NA-132 Kasur constituencies, as well as in two Punjab Assembly constituencies, PP-158 and PP-164.

In light of the multiple wins, Shehbaz Sharif is required to retain one seat while vacating all others where by-elections are slated to take place. It is anticipated that he will vacate PP-158 and PP-164, triggering by-elections in those constituencies. Concurrently, by-elections are expected in NA-119 if Maryam Nawaz decides to relinquish the seat she has won.

Shehbaz Sharif has been nominated for the position of Prime Minister, while Maryam Nawaz is in the running for the Chief Minister of Punjab. Sources suggest a potential vacancy in PP-174 by Hamza Shehbaz. Aleem Khan of the IPP is set to retain the NA-117 Lahore seat while deferring the Punjab Assembly constituency PP-149.

Abbas urges Hamas to agree Gaza deal 'quickly'

RAMALLAH (AFP): Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas pressed the militant group Hamas on Wednesday to agree a Gaza deal quickly to avoid "dire consequences," the official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported. "We call on the Hamas movement to quickly complete a prisoner deal, to spare our Palestinian people from the calamity of another catastrophic event with dire consequences, no less dangerous than the Nakba of 1948," Abbas said. The president was referring to the war accompanying the creation of Israel, which saw 760,000 Palestinians flee or forced from their homes.

Abbas's internationally recognized Palestinian Authority has not been involved in this week's talks hosted by Egypt, aimed at securing a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel after more than four months of war. Seated in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, the PA is widely derided by Palestinians who have failed to see their aspirations for statehood realized since 1948.

The United States — Israel's top military backer and a PA funder — has said it supports the creation of a Palestinian state but wants an overhaul of the leadership. Washington's top diplomat, Antony Blinken, said last month Abbas was "committed" to reforming the PA "so that it can effectively take responsibility for Gaza, so that Gaza and the West Bank can be reunited under a Palestinian leadership." Gaza has had its own separate administration run by Hamas since 2007 when Abbas loyalists were ousted from the territory.

Meanwhile, negotiations to pause the Israel-Hamas war and free the remaining hostages headed into a second day in Cairo on Wednesday, as displaced Gazans braced for an expected Israeli assault on their last refuge of Rafah. A Hamas source told AFP that a delegation was headed to the Egyptian capital to meet Egyptian and Qatari mediators, after Israeli negotiators held talks with the mediators on Tuesday. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, an outspoken critic of Israel's conduct of the Gaza war, was also due in Cairo

Wednesday for talks with President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

CIA Director William Burns had joined Tuesday's talks with David Barnea, head of Israel's Mossad intelligence service, which Egyptian media said had been mostly "positive." US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby described the negotiations as "constructive and moving in the right direction."

Mediators are racing to secure a pause to the fighting before Israel proceeds with a full-scale ground incursion into the Gaza Strip's far-southern city of Rafah, where more than 1.4 million Palestinians are trapped. The potential for mass civilian casualties has triggered urgent appeals, even from close allies, for Israel to hold off sending troops into the last major population center they have yet to enter in the four-month war. Key ally the United States has said it will not back any ground operation in Rafah without a "credible plan" for protecting civilians.

Rafah is the main entry point for desperately needed relief supplies and UN agencies have warned of a humanitarian disaster if an assault goes ahead. UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said any military operation "could lead to a slaughter." Terrified civilians have been locked in a desperate search for safety. "My three children were injured, where can I go?" Dana Abu Chaaban asked at the city's border crossing with Egypt, where she was hoping to be allowed across with her bandaged-up sons.

Pressure has grown on Egypt to open its border to Palestinian civilians, hundreds of thousands of whom have sought shelter in makeshift camps by the border where they face outbreaks of hepatitis and diarrhea and a scarcity of food and water. But it remains closed to Gazans. "For 100 days we enter the crossing and beg them to let us cross, or to do anything to help us," Habiba Nakhalah said.

US President Joe Biden has said civilians in Rafah "need to be protected," calling them "exposed and vulnerable." But Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu has said "complete victory" cannot be achieved without the elimination of Hamas's last battalions in Rafah. As the truce talks go on in Cairo, the Israeli military has kept up its bombardment of Gaza. The health ministry in the Hamas-run territory said Wednesday that 104 people had been killed overnight.

The military released a video it said was from a security camera and showed Gaza's Hamas chief Yahya Sinwar and family members escaping through a tunnel days after the October 7 attack that launched the war. "The hunt will not stop until he is captured alive or dead," Israeli army spokesperson Daniel Hagari told reporters. Some Gazans in Rafah were already packing up their belongings in readiness to move but others vowed to stay put, fearing even greater misery in the bombed out hometowns they fled.

Ahlam Abu Assi said she "would rather die" in Rafah than return to the famine-like conditions facing relatives who stayed in Gaza City. "My son and his children have nothing to eat. They cook a handful of rice and save it for the next day," she told AFP. "My grandson cries from hunger." The Hamas attack that launched the war resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures.

At least 28,473 people, mostly women and children, have been killed in Israel's response, according to the health ministry. Around 130 of an estimated 250 people taken hostage by Palestinian militants during the attack are believed to remain in Gaza. Israel says 29 of them are presumed dead. Ahead of the Cairo truce talks, the Israeli campaign group Hostages and Missing Families Forum sent the Mossad chief a plea saying the delegation must "not return without a deal." Asked by reporters whether he believes the Americans among the hostages were still alive, National Security Council spokesperson Kirby said: "We don't have any information to the contrary."

CJP suggests holding plebiscite in GB and Azad Kashmir

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Expressing surprise that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) still had no idea about their constitutional status, Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Qazi Faez Isa on Wednesday suggested holding a referendum or a plebiscite in GB and Kashmir by abolishing its special status. He then asked whether the federal government had been formed after the elections.

"Who has been elected as the prime minister?" Saad Hashmi, counsel for the GB government, told the CJP that the government was yet to be formed. "However, there are reports that the newly elected National Assembly would

about that. "All I am asking you whether this is possible."

The AAG told the apex court that the government wanted to make GB part of the federation, but some international conventions were stumbling blocks in its way. The chief justice said that India had devoured the state of Jammu and Kashmir by abolishing its special status. He then asked whether the federal government had been formed after the elections.

"Who has been elected as the prime minister?" Saad Hashmi, counsel for the GB government, told the CJP that the government was yet to be formed. "However, there are reports that the newly elected National Assembly would

Russian landing ship Caesar Kunikov sunk off Crimea

KYIV (BBC): A big Russian amphibious ship, the Caesar Kunikov, has been sunk off the coast of Russian-occupied Crimea, according to Ukraine's armed forces. Powerful explosions were heard early on Wednesday, according to local social media, which suggested the landing ship was hit south of the town of Yalta.

Ukraine's intelligence directorate released video of what it said were Magura V5 sea drones striking the ship. Ukraine has repeatedly hit Russia's Black Sea fleet in occupied Crimea. Satellite images last year showed much of the fleet had left the peninsula for the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. Ahead of a Nato ministerial meeting in Brussels, the secretary general of the Western defensive alliance, Jens Stoltenberg, said Ukrainian forces had won a "great victory" in recent months, inflicting "heavy losses" on the Black Sea fleet that had opened a corridor for Ukrainian grain exports.

Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine is due to enter its third year next week and Ukraine's armed forces chief has admitted the situation is "extremely complex and tense". Col Gen Oleksandr Syrskyi, who was appointed commander-in-chief last week, visited the front line on Wednesday and promised that units trying to prevent Russian troops from capturing the flashpoint town of Avdiivka would be reinforced. Avdiivka is almost empty and all but surrounded by Russian forces and one of the soldiers defending it said earlier that the situation there was critical. "We are doing everything possible to prevent the enemy from advancing deep into our territory," he wrote on social media.

Overnight, a Russian missile attack claimed three lives including a child in the mining town of Selydove, 40km (25 miles) west of Avdiivka. Officials said four missiles had hit the local hospital and maternity ward, as well as nine blocks of flats. Several other residents were wounded, including a baby.

There was no confirmation from Russia's navy that the Caesar Kunikov had been sunk in the Black Sea, merely that six Ukrainian drones had been destroyed. The Kremlin has also refused to comment on the incident. Video appearing to show the aftermath of the Ukrainian attack was uploaded only recently, BBC Verify confirmed.



KARACHI: Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashrafi laying the Keel of 6th Hangor Class Submarine at Shipyard.

Indigenization a top policy of Naval HQs: Naval Chief

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Achieving another milestone in indigenous submarine development project at Pakistan, the Keel Laying Ceremony of second HANGOR Class Submarine was held at Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works (KS&EW). Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf graced the occasion as Chief Guest.

As per the defence agreement between Pakistan and China for development of 08 x HANGOR Class Submarines, 04 submarines are under construction at Wuchang Shipbuilding Industry in China whereas remaining 04 are being built at KS&EW under Transfer of Technology (ToT) agreement. This is the 2nd Submarine to undergo Keel Laying at KS&EW. Earlier, in Dec

2022, Keel Laying of first Submarine was successfully undertaken and currently it is at advanced stage of construction.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf said that it is a matter of great pride to witness the Keel Laying of HANGOR Class Submarine at Karachi Shipyard in collaboration with China Shipbuilding & Offshore International Co. Ltd (M/s CSOC). He lauded the joint efforts and performance of Ministry of Defence Production, Pakistan Navy, Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works (KS&EW) and M/s CSOC for construction of these Submarines. Chief of the Naval Staff highlighted that indigenization is a top priority of Naval Headquarters policy which is being manifested by construction of these state of the art Submarines at KS&EW.

Earlier during his wel-

come address, the Managing Director KS&EW, Rear Admiral Salman Ilyas highlighted that Karachi Shipyard is fully cognizant and completely aligned with the goals set forth by Government and Pakistan Navy in pursuing self-reliance in submarine construction. These submarines are a testimony of our commitment to this national cause. He also thanked Ministry of Defense Production and Pakistan Navy for their continued support and cooperation in realizing various projects at hand.

The ceremony was attended by representatives of Embassy of China, M/s CSOC (China), M/s WSIG (China) and other high-ranking government officials including distinguished guests from MoDP and armed forces of Pakistan.