

**3 die as roof collapses**  
**F.P. Report**  
PESHAWAR: At least three people including a woman and child were killed when the roof of a house collapsed after a gas cylinder blast in Gulbahar on Friday. The roof of a house collapsed when a gas cylinder exploded in a house in Ejazabad Gulbahar No. 4. Soon after the incident, the rescue workers started rescue and relief activity and recovered the bodies of a man and woman from the rubble.

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**Earthquake jolts Swat**  
**F.P. Report**  
MINGORA: An earthquake of low intensity jolted Swat and surrounding areas on Friday but no casualties or property damages were reported from anywhere. Tremours measuring 4.9 on Richter scale were felt in Swat, Mingora and surrounding areas. People of the areas where quake was felt rushed out of their homes in panic reciting Kalma e Tayyeba and verses from Holy Quran.

Vol. XXXIXI No. 26 Regd. No. 241 SHABAAN 06 1445 -- SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17 2024 PESHAWAR EDITION 12 PAGES PRICE. 30



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq chairing a review meeting regarding Karachi Electric.

## PTI opts for opposition in Center, Punjab: Saif

### Asad Qaiser contacts Achakzai over ‘rigging’ in elections

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: As the political uncertainty about who will form the government in the light of February 8 general election continues, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Friday announced that it would form the opposition in the Centre and Punjab as per party founder Imran Khan's directives.

PTI leader Barrister Saif, while speaking to journalists after a meeting with Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) in Islamabad, said that PTI has decided to sit on the opposition benches in the National Assembly and Punjab Assembly.

"Many politicians face the allegations that they have power lust but we have decided to sit in the opposition in the Centre and Punjab, despite the fact that if we had got the seats according to the votes we received, we would have been forming the government in the Centre," he said.

Saif added that the Form-45s were the evidence that the PTI-backed candidates had won but the results were changed in the Form-47s. He said that party was making contacts with political parties on Khan's orders, and that is why a delegation led by Asad Qaiser visited the QWP secretariat.

Saif said that the 2024 polls, which he said were "rigged", created political unrest in the country and resulted in wide scale complaints from the political parties and those "who had the right" and who had received got the votes of people. "Peoples votes were tempered with," he asserted. Saif said that some people would be cheering that they have got to form the government, but this celebration would be short-lived.

"If we see this in the long term, this is a huge problem for the nation, the country and the parliamentary democracy in Pakistan because the coming

## Marwat to lead Islamabad protest

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: As Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is all set to hold nationwide protests against alleged rigging in elections, party's senior vice president Sher Afzal Marwat said he will lead Saturday's demonstration from Islamabad's F9 park to the National Press Club.

Talking to journalists, Marwat said that PTI founder Imran Khan wants supporters to come out and protest on Saturday at 11:30am in the same numbers as they came out on February 8. Sher Afzal Marwat said that the protest would remain peaceful, warning that if the police clamped down it then the movement would continue until "the results are not changed". "If the rulers want to inflict violence upon us then let me tell them one thing, I take full responsibility that if anyone wants to spread discord in Islamabad then we will ourselves catch them and hand them over to authorities," he vowed. Meanwhile, the Islamabad police – in a statement – said they haven't received any application from PTI for holding protest. The police said they summoned Rangers' personnel for any "untoward incident".

generations have to bear the brunt of such incidents," the lawyer-turned politician said while referring to the alleged rigging in polls. He said that PTI wants "harmony and an environment of reconciliation" in the country.

Sharing the details about the meeting with QWP, Saif said that the PTI requested the party leaders to join it on the agenda to protest the alleged polls rigging. At this, QWP leader Sikandar Sherpao told PTI that they will announce their course of action after sharing PTI's proposal with the party's committee. Pakistan staged the biggest election of its history on February 8, which was extraordinary in various aspects. However, the outcome of the polls did not turn out to be as expected by the political actors as none of them got a simple majority. While the PTI-affiliated independent candidates dominated the election results, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) claimed to have enough numbers to form the government as some independents joined the Nawaz Sharif-led party post-polls.

However, maintaining its stance of having the majority, the PTI also

alleges that the polls were "not free and fair" and plans to stage country-wide peaceful protests against the alleged rigging. Earlier, the PTI-backed independent candidates held a joint press conference, which established that the February 8 general election had set new records of rigging. Despite having the largest number of successful candidates in the general polls, the Khan-founded PTI disapproved of the polls results, saying that the 2024 elections would be remembered in the country's history due to the scale of rigging.

Meanwhile, in continuation of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) efforts to form a multi-party alliance against 'rigging' in the elections, former Speaker of National Assembly Asad Qaiser spoke to Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) chief Mahmood Khan Achakzai. According to details, in a telephonic conversation with the PkMAP Chief, Asad Qaiser requested for a meeting to convey the PTI founder's message. The sources said that a meeting between PkMAP and PTI delegations would be held soon.

## 2 terrorists killed, cop martyred in operation

**F.P. Report**

TANK: Two terrorists were killed and two injured but fled while a cop was martyred in joint operation of Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) and security forces in Tank on Friday. SSP CTD Najamul Hassan said that on an intelligence tip-off regarding presence of wanted terrorists, a joint operation was launched in Tank.

During operation, cross firing took place between the security forces and the terrorists. In exchange of fire, two terrorists were killed while their two accomplices were injured but managed to escape. A cop Zahid was also martyred in the fire exchange.

The killed terrorists belonging to the banned organization TTP Betni Parake group were wanted by police and CTD in 23 cases. The security forces cordoned off the area after the fire exchange and launched search operation for fleeing terrorists. SSP CTD Najamul Hasan said that the killed terrorists were involved in attacking the police and snatching weapons from the officers in District Tank and DI Khan. He further said that we have reached the terrorists involved in the attack on DI Khan Daraban and Chodwan police stations, 6 of them were from Darban and four from other areas.

## PTI, JI in talks to form govt in KP

**F.P. Report**

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) once again came closer to form the government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and centre. PTI's senior leader Sardar Latif Khosa has talked to JI's deputy emir Liaquat Baloch to discuss the ongoing political situation. Earlier, PTI was interested to form government in KP with the support of JI but the later wanted to expand the power-sharing formula to the centre.

Speaking to Liaquat Baloch via telephone, Khosa said that he will again reach to the JI leadership after meeting the PTI founder today. The deputy emir of JI said that the doors of dialogue are always open between the political parties. Meanwhile, a delegation of PTI wanted to visit the JI leadership in order to seek their support for forming government in KP.

PTI leader Amir Dogar has made a contact with JI's spokesperson in this regard. "We'll let them know the time and venue of the meeting after discussing the matter with the top leadership," JI's spokesperson Qaiser Sharif said.

## PHC okays Omer Ayub's transit bail

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court on Friday granted transit bail to Omer Ayub, a Prime Ministerial candidate facing a plethora of legal challenges. The decision comes after a hearing on petitions filed by Ayub, where his lawyer highlighted the staggering 24 cases registered against him across various cities including Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Attock, and Gujranwala.

During the hearing, the court deliberated on the appropriate duration for the bail, considering the extensive legal proceedings ahead. Chief Justice Mohammad Ibrahim Khan emphasized the importance of adhering to the law, acknowledging the considerable time required to address each case individually.

Despite the lawyer's plea for additional safeguards against potential arrests in supplementary cases, the Chief Justice affirmed the High Court's bail grant, ensuring Ayub's protection from detention.

# PM says govt taking steps for economic stability

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Friday said that the caretaker government had resolved major long-standing issues in a short span to steer the country towards economic stability.

He said the caretaker setup also provided all possible facilities on priority to the international investors and business community to attract maximum foreign direct investment in the country. He emphasized that the caretaker government was committed to continue its efforts to resolve the problems facing the country's economy till

its last day of working.

Chairing a meeting to review various issues of Karachi Electric (KE), the prime minister said that the government was striving to solve the remaining problems as soon as possible to remove all obstacles in the way of uninterrupted supply of electricity to the residents of Karachi.

The prime minister directed to find out solutions on priority to issues faced by the Karachi Electric. The Karachi Electric delegation thanked the prime minister and his team for resolving its long-standing issues. The prime minister also hailed the signing of the interconnection agreement between

National Transmission and Distribution Company (NTDC) and Karachi Electric (K.E) held the other day.

The CEO of Karachi Electric paid tribute to the caretaker PM and the government officials for solving the problems faced by the company on the priority basis. The prime minister directed that NEPRA and Karachi Electric should jointly find a solution to these problems and submit a report in this regard as soon as possible. Caretaker Minister for Energy Muhammad Ali, Chief Executive Officer of K.E and concerned high officials participated in the meeting.

## Fazl retracts allegation against Gen Faiz

ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Fazlur Rehman on Friday clarified his remarks regarding the role of former Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) chief Lt Gen (ret'd) Faiz Hameed — the then Peshawar corps commander — in the no-confidence vote against former prime minister Imran Khan and the PTI government, saying that he had mistakenly uttered the ex-spy master's name.

"Gen Faiz had come to me and he asked me to go ahead [with the no-confidence vote], but only within the system, but not out of the system. Though I refused it," he had added. It must be mentioned that Gen (ret'd) Faiz was replaced as the ISI director-general by Lieutenant General Nadeem Ahmed Anjum in October 2021, and posted as the Peshawar corps commander when the PTI government was ousted.

Fazl's remarks had triggered a flurry in political circles, with his former allies in the PDM-led government as well as the PTI both passing comments on the allegations. Questioned about the matter and the alleged responses from the generals in a fresh inter-

view on GTV news programme G for Gharidah, Fazl acknowledged that "it is correct to this extent that I mistakenly uttered Gen Faiz's name and he was not [involved in the no-confidence incident] ... there is no doubt." He further said that he considered the former generals and "their whole regime" responsible for the alleged rigging in the 2018 general elections.

"Instead of further debate, this should be relegated to history." He said when the two generals were alerted about political, economic and defence instability during the PTI government, they began approaching politicians to "stabilise the situation". Fazl said the establishment had always had a role in the country's politics — a practice he said should end. Regarding the challenge — by sources close to Gen (ret'd) Bajwa — to make the allegations under oath, Fazl said it was a waste of time to discuss oaths, especially when "there is no respect for their [own] oaths among the military."

"Is there respect for the oath in their ranks ... in the army ... among generals? Don't they take an oath of not interfering in politics when they are commissioned? Don't they know

they are interfering, have always done so and keep breaking their oath?" questioned the JUI-F chief. "What importance will it (repeating the allegation under oath) have in my eyes if the one who asked me of it has always interfered in politics during their job and keeps violating their oath?"

Asked if he wanted an investigation into the matter, Fazl wondered who would do so, and whether a truth and reconciliation commission could, since he did not have faith in the current situation and institutions. Elaborating on his allegation of the military's meddling in political affairs, Fazl said that on March 26, 2022, the PDM parties were given the option that Imran could tender his resignation if they dropped the no-confidence motion against him. Fazl said before he even joined the meeting, other participants had given their answer that the time for Imran's resignation had passed. Questioned about his first purported meeting with retired Gen Bajwa or other military officials on the no-confidence move, the JUI-F chief said he had "many private meetings". — Monitoring Desk

## PPP hits back at Fazl over no-trust move charges

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: PPP has strongly rejected the allegations levelled by Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman that former army chief General (ret'd) Qamar Javed Bajwa and then ISI DG general Faiz Hameed asked the PPP to initiate no-trust move against PTI founder chairman and then-prime minister Imran Khan.

Addressing a news conference in Islamabad on Friday, PPP leader Faisal Karim Kundi said that Gen Faiz Hameed had nothing to do with the no-confidence move against then PTI government. He said at the time of vote of no-confidence Faiz Hameed was not ISI director general, he was Corps Commander Peshawar.

He further said that Maulana Fazl was the head of the Pakistan Democratic Movement at the time and could have stopped the no-confidence move, adding the JUI-F chief benefitted the most from the move. Kundi claimed maximum benefits of the non-confidence move were cherished by the JUI-F chief but now the Maulana had realized that the PTI chief was punished wrongly.

The PPP leader claimed that Maulana Fazl was a "spent cartridge" in the politics. He said public saw big change in PTI and JUI-F when both parties made compromises on their stances and joined hands to protest together against the alleged irregularities in general elections.

## Alarm over fate of Gaza hospital after Israeli raid

GAZA STRIP (AFP): There was growing concern Friday over a key Gaza hospital a day after a raid by the Israeli army, with the Hamas-run territory's health ministry saying several patients had died there due to a lack of oxygen.

The ministry said the power was cut off and the generators stopped after the raid at the Nasser hospital in the southern city of Khan Yunis, leading to the deaths of five patients. In recent days, intense fighting has raged in the vicinity of the hospital — one of the Palestinian territory's last remaining major medical facilities that are still operational.

The Israeli army said its forces at the hospital had taken into custody more than "20 terrorists" suspected of involvement in Hamas's October 7 attack that sparked the war. It had said the day before that troops entered the hospital acting on "credible intelligence" that hostages seized in the attack had been held at the facility and that bodies of some may still be inside, but it later said it had not yet found such evidence. A witness who declined to be named for their safety told AFP the Israeli forces had shot "at anyone who moved inside the hospital."

Gaza's health ministry also raised fears for four other patients in the intensive care unit and three children, saying it held Israel "responsible for the lives of patients and staff considering that the complex is now under its full control."

Medical charity Doctors Without Borders described a "chaotic situation" at the Nasser hospital, saying medics had been forced to flee and leave patients behind, with one employee unaccounted for and another detained by Israeli forces.

Roughly 130 hostages are still believed to be in Gaza after Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures. Dozens of the estimated 250 hostages seized during the attack were freed in exchange for Palestinian prisoners during a week-long truce in November. Israel says 30 of those still in Gaza are presumed dead.

At least 28,775 people, mostly women and children, have been killed in Israel's assault on Gaza, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run Palestinian territory. Israel has repeatedly accused Hamas militants of using hospitals for military purposes, something Hamas denies. The UN Human Rights Office said Israel's raid on the Nasser hospital appeared to be "part of a pattern of attacks by Israeli forces striking essential life-saving civilian infrastructure in Gaza, especially hospitals."

At a press briefing Friday, World Health Organization spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said the UN agency was trying to get access to the hospital to bring fuel and assess the sit-

uation on the ground. Israel's army on Friday reported the death of another soldier in Gaza, raising the number killed in the ground operation to 234.

It said it had carried out "targeted raids" overnight and killed "12 terrorists" in Khan Yunis. The Gaza health ministry said Friday that another 112 people had been killed in strikes across the territory. Nearly 1.5 million displaced Palestinians are trapped in Rafah — more than half of Gaza's population — seeking shelter in a sprawling makeshift encampment near the Egyptian border with declining supplies.

"They are killing us slowly," said displaced Palestinian Mohammad Yaghi. "We are dying slowly due to the scarcity of resources and the lack of medications and treatments in the city of Rafah." "Everyone is sick, children and the elderly, and there is no medicine," said Jihan Al-Quqa, who was displaced from Khan Yunis to Rafah.

At the Abu Yusef Al-Najjar hospital in Rafah, AFP saw several corpses lined up in body bags while relatives grieved nearby. US President Joe Biden urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu late Thursday not to carry out an offensive on Rafah without a plan to keep civilians safe, the White House said. France, Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand have also urged Israel not to launch a ground offensive in the city.



## Incoming coalition govt won't last 10 months: Pir Pagara

**F.P. Report**

HYDERABAD: Grand Democratic Alliances (GDA) leader Pir Pagara has said the new government will go no longer than eight or ten months and there may be martial law or emergency afterwards.

The Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) on Friday staged a sit-in in Jamshoro against alleged rigging in the general elections held on Feb 8. Addressing the protesters, GDA leader Pir Pagara said, "If Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder is a thief, then everyone is a thief."

"There has been buying and selling in the election 'on large-scale.'" "Where was the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Feb 8? If you do not give justice to the people, they will take their own decision," Pagara said, adding Pak Army is our own military and we cannot leave it alone. GDA leader Liaquat Jatot said Zardari had been given Sindh for the fourth time in the result of rigged elections.

"We are not orphans, we have fought for 15 years against the oppressive system," he stated. GDA leader Saira Bano said after the mega election rigging, the chief election commissioner should go home. She said her leadership had spread the message of love but those who saw Pakistan with evil eye, their eyes would be plucked out.

GDA leader Arbab Ghulam Rahim stated the people joined the sit-in as per their own will and wish due to their love for the Pir Sahib.

"They had come all the way from Thar to there on their own expenses and demanding free and fair elections to form a new government," he concluded.

**Balochistan highway leading to Sindh-Punjab blocked against poll rigging:** Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP) on Thursday blocked Balochistan National Highway leading to Sindh and Punjab by burning tyres near Dera Rehman Jamali Rabi Pull area of Sibi against alleged election rigged election.

The protesters, led by central leader of JWP Nawabzada Guhrum Bughti, blocked the National Highway near Dera Rehman Jamali Rabi Pull area of Sibi, pressing the authorities to issue results of Dera Bughti's National Assembly and Provincial Assembly constituencies on media.

Talking to media, former minister and JWP central leader Nawabzada Guhrum Bughti said that instead of election, selection had taken place in Balochistan, adding that protest would continue till correct results of Dera Bughti's National Assembly and Provincial Assembly

constituencies were released. He alleged that forms 45 of National Assembly and Provincial Assembly constituencies in district Dera Bughti of Balochistan province were tempered, adding that Balochistan was being pushed towards anarchy.

**Four parties alliance hold protest against poll rigging:** Four parties alliance will launch protest movement against rigged election in Balochistan so that people's mandate could not be trampled in the future. This was stated by leaders while addressing a protest demonstration held outside Dalbandin Press Club under the aegis of four parties alliance on Friday.

Addressing the protest demonstration, the leaders said winning candidates were defeated through rigging in election, adding seats won by Chairman, PKMAP, Mehmood Khan Achakzai, leader of BNP-P, Sardar Akhtar Jan Mengal, President, National Party, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch and seats won by the representatives of Hazara community were given to someone others.





LAHORE: Anti encroachment cellbus removing banners and holdings. —APP Photo

## CM unveils upgraded emergency block at Children’s Hospital

LAHORE (APP): In a significant development, Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi inaugurated the newly upgraded emergency block at the Children’s Hospital on Friday.

Notably, the Chief Minister was accompanied by young blood cancer patients, Kaina’at and Abdul Mufti Hanaan, along with donor Sher Baz, to officiate the inauguration of the enhanced OPD block.

During his visit, CM Naqvi toured various floors, engaging with doctors and faculty members who lauded the hospital’s advancements, attributing them to the Chief Minister’s unwavering efforts.

Expressing admiration for the hospital’s transformation, CM Naqvi emphasized the need for all stakeholders to consider the hospital as their own abode, urging them to prioritize its welfare. He stressed the significance of a sense of ownership among healthcare professionals to uphold the hospital’s standards of excellence.

Furthermore, CM Naqvi reviewed the hospital’s information management system at the reception counter, where the OPD pharmacy, patient admissions, discharges, and medical store have been seamlessly integrated for efficient management.

He commended the upgraded OPD block for its state-of-the-art facilities.

Acknowledging the tireless efforts of the health and C&W departments in swiftly completing the challenging task, CM Naqvi directed for the provision of additional benches in the waiting area to ensure comfortable seating for attendants.

The event was also attended by Provincial Minister Dr. Javed Akram, health secretary, secretary of C&W, commissioner of Lahore, and other dignitaries.

**CM sets 10 days deadline for Services Hospital**

lab: Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the Services Hospital to monitor the construction of a new lab and diagnostic center at its front.

The CM set a deadline of 10 days, adding that the project should be completed with accelerated speed. The lab and diagnostic center would help earn revenue for the hospital, the CM said and directed Principal SIMS to get it completed under his supervision.

Provincial Ministers Dr Javed Akram, Mansoor Qadir, Azfar Ali Nasir, health secretary, secretary C&W, commissioner Lahore and others were also present.

## CASS Islamabad, successfully hosted a seminar titled ‘Shifting Battlefields



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD : The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad, successfully hosted a seminar titled ‘Shifting Battlefields: Impact of Emerging Technologies on the Character of Warfare in South Asia’.

This event convened distinguished experts from the defence, technology, and academic sectors to discuss the transformative role of emerging technologies in modern warfare, with a particular focus on South Asia.

Air Marshal Farooq Habib (Retd), Senior Director at CASS, opened the seminar by stressing the complexity and unpredictability of technological evolution in military contexts. He emphasised the necessity for Pakistan’s defence sector to adapt and evolve in response to these advancements to maintain strategic and tactical superiority.

Lieutenant General Aamer Riaz (Retd), former President of the National Defense University, in his Keynote Address, under-

scored the profound influence of technological advancements on the character of warfare. He predicted a technological upheaval, highlighting the need for strategic adaptation to innovations in space, cyber, AI, and more. General Riaz called for a revision of traditional warfare strategies to include emerging technologies that are redefining conflict dynamics.

Mr Fawad Zahir, a Defence and Strategic Studies Expert, focused on the importance of airpower, enhanced by big data analysis, quantum computing, and Machine Learning. He urged for robust civilian-military collaboration to harness technological advancements for defence purposes. Mr Zahir also strongly advocated strategic investment in technologies that align with Pakistan’s core defence needs, given the country’s budgetary constraints.

Prof. Dr Yasar Ayaz, Chairman/CPD of the National Centre of Artificial Intelligence (NCAI), highlighted AI’s

potential to revolutionise warfare, marking it the third major evolution after gunpowder and nuclear power. He stressed the importance of indigenous development of AI technologies to ensure strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty, highlighting the need for a balance between innovation and regulatory oversight.

Mr Khawaja Mohammad Ali, a Cyber Security, Data Privacy, and Digital Forensics Expert, delineated the critical role of cyber operations in modern conflict, advocating for the establishment of a national cybersecurity authority; extensive training and awareness programmes; cyber diplomacy; and indigenous development in cybersecurity solutions.

Senior Journalist and Columnist, Mr Zazar Khurro, focused on the strategic importance of narrative building in the context of advanced technological warfare. He discussed the long-term process of narrative construction facilitated by technology, pointing to the need for authenticity and the significant impact of social media on

public opinion.

President CASS-Islamabad, Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd), in his Concluding Remarks, reiterated the critical importance of first-shot capability in modern warfare, driven by advancements in sensors and detection technologies. He called for an indigenisation strategy that supports the development of home-grown technologies, ensuring that Pakistan’s defence sector remains competitive and innovative.

The seminar underscored the urgent need for Pakistan to embrace indigenisation and support homegrown technologies for enhanced national security and defence autonomy. As emerging technologies continue to reshape the landscape of modern warfare, strategic, policy-oriented approaches are essential for Pakistan to deal with the challenges and opportunities presented by this new era of conflict.

The presentations were followed by active participation from a diverse audience, including retired military officers, scholars, journalists, and students, who engaged in an interactive Question and Answer session, further enriching the discourse on this critical subject.

**Lost Documents**

My MSC Physics Degree, Registration No. F17C09U45024 issued from Riphia University Islamabad has been lost somewhere in Golra, Islamabad.

The concerned board, University, departments are requested to issue proofs/duplicates. Arslan Munir S/O Muhammad Munir, CNIC :- 61101-0179071-5 P h . 0 3 4 3 - 0 2 4 8 5 9 1

**نوٹس برائے بحالی ٹیسٹ بابت اشتہار**  
**INF(P) 3278/2022**

مورخہ 22 جولائی 2023

زیر دستخطی کی جانب سے مذکور بالا اشتہار اور ٹیسٹ کنونشن کرنے کا روزنامہ "آج" مورخہ 16-09-2023 کو شائع کیا گیا نوٹس واپس لیا جاتا ہے اور ٹیسٹ اور اشتہار کو بحال کیا جاتا ہے۔

ڈاکٹر محمد رحمان فریدی ڈسٹرکٹ ہیلتھ آفیسر بنوں

سب ڈویژن وزیر

**INF(P) 290/2024**

### Governor inaugurates Keamari- Boat Basin road

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Governor Muhammad Kamran Tessori on Friday inaugurated the Keamari-Boat Basin road constructed by the Karachi Port Trust (KPT).

The chairman of KPT and other senior officers were also present in the ceremony held here at Karachi Port Trust.

Speaking on the occasion, the Governor said the road project will prove to be a milestone for the commercial activities of the business of the port.

The governor said the road project was proof of the permanent efforts of the KPT chairman. He said this road will make it easy to do port businesses and also resolve traffic jam issues of the port consumers. Tessori said this project is the basic need of the people of Karachi as KPT is one of the major institutions of Pakistan which boosts the country’s economy. The chairman of KPT said the Sindh Governor was working for the uplift of the people of the province.

### Punjab Police demand Rs200 million for PSL security

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Police demanded a grant of Rs200 million for security of Pakistan Super League (PSL) matches. According to report the police have asked for this grant in the form of food, drink and petrol for security. Police have asked for this grant for matches in Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi. However, the Home Department forwarded this summary to the Finance Department.

## Sindh Ombudsman presents Annual Report to CM

KARACHI (PPI): Ajaz Ali Khan, Ombudsman, presented Annual Report for the year 2023 to the Chief Minister Sindh.

The Ombudsman Sindh highlighted that during the year 10,057 complaints received against various Government Agencies which reflect confidence of the general public on the institution whereas during the period under report monetary relief of more than Rs.478.18 million, appointments against deceased quota have been provided in 96 cases.

Besides, 16 own motions and initiatives taken in cases of public importance relating to opening and operationalization and non-availability of basic facilities in public schools, incantatory conditions, backlog of number plates of approximately 0.4 million different vehicles as well as carried out two studies about very important subjects viz. “Issues of Girls’ Education in Sindh” and “Assessment of malnutrition (Stunting) in District Tharparkar”

The report also indicates the performance of Ombudsman Sindh during the last four years, visits of international delegations of Ombudsmen Institutions and opening of three new Regional Offices of Sindh Ombudsman at District Korangi, Keamari / West and Sanghar.

The Chief Minister Sindh appreciated the achievements of the institution of Ombudsman Sindh and assured his full support to the institution for resolving the grievances of masses.

**TEACHERS REQUIRED**

**FRONTIER CORPS PUBLIC SCHOOL HAYATABAD**

**1. Applications are invited from suitable qualified Male/female candidates for the post of Science (Physics) and English Teachers at Frontier Corps Public School Hayatabad Phase - 6, Peshawar.**

a	Qualification	Minimum qualification MA (English) MSc (Physics) 3x years experiences as teacher in a reputed School
b	Age	Below 40 Years
c	Pay Package	As per Qualification & Experience

**2. Applications alongwith CVs and attested photocopies of documents should reach undersigned by 25 Feb 2024.**

**3. Only shortlisted candidates will be called for Demo & interview, No TA/DA admissible.**

**Principal Frontier Corps Public School Hayatabad Phase - 6, Peshawar.**

Address

**GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA COMMUNICATION & WORKS DEPARTMENT**

**NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING (Single stage two envelope E-Bidding System)**

**1. C & W Department (Building Division, Bannu), Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa invites electronic Bids from the eligible firms/bidders in accordance with KPRA procurement rules 2014 on single stage two envelope procedure for the following works:**

S. No.	Name of Work	Required category of PEC	Tender Form Entry Fee	Bid Security + S/Duty	Period of completion	Last date of submission of Bids and time	Date of opening of Technical Bid	Date of opening of Financial Bid
1	Constn/Reh: of Centres in UC Kala Khel, UC Ismail Khel, UC Khujari and other UCs of PK-100 District Bannu. ADP No.1159/220690 District Dev: Plan for Bannu.	C-5	0.03%	2% on E/C + S/D	As per W/Order	12/03/2024 At 12:00 PM	12/03/2024 At 12:30 PM	Date of opening of Financial bid will be announced after the approval of Tech: bids from the competent authority.
2	Constn/Reh: of Community Centres / Verandah in UC Lakki, Mandan, Bharat & other UCs of PK-100 District Bannu. ADP No.1159/220690 District Dev: Plan for Bannu.	C-5	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-
3	Constn/Reh: of Centres/Verandah in UC Mira Khel, Kot Qalandar, Shamsi Khel, UC Nar Jaffar & other UCs of PK-100 District Bannu. ADP No.1159/220690 District Dev: Plan for Bannu.	C-5	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-
4	Constn: of Community Centre at Mira Khel District Bannu. ADP No.1159/220690 District Dev: Plan for Bannu.	C-6	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-
5	Constn/Reh: of Community Centres in UC Kala Khel, UC Ismail Khel, UC Mandan, UC Bharat UC Khujari & UC Mira Khel out of ADP No.1097/210555 District Dev: Plan for Bannu.	C-5	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-
6	Constn/Reh: of Community Centres in UC Khujari, UC Bharat, UC Kakk, UC Nar Jaffar & UC Kot Qalandar out of ADP No.1097/210555 District Dev: Plan for Bannu.	C-5	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-

**2. Bid documents and instruction to bidders can be downloaded from C&W web site ([www.cwd.gkp.pk](http://www.cwd.gkp.pk)) before the submission date/time.**

**INSTRUCTIONS TO BIDDERS**  
(KPRA Single stage two envelop bidding procedure)

**1. Technical bid/ proposal should accompany the following:**  
a. Certificate that Bid Security in the shape of Call deposit (original) has been enclosed in financial bid.  
b. Enlistment Order of C&W Department (photocopy)  
c. Renewal of registration for CFY 2023-24 (Photocopy)  
d. National Identity Card (CNIC Photocopy)  
e. Pakistan Engineering Council registration copy for calendar year 2023-24  
f. Form H of the Company/ Firm.  
g. Documents showing general capabilities, financial soundness, general and relevant experience record, personnel capabilities, equipment capabilities and Income Tax/NTN Certificates.  
h. Any other document to support the technical bid.

**2. Technical evaluation will be carried out on marks threshold in passing all the fields including PEC Registration, Enlistment with C&W Deptt., Tax Payer proof, Relevant experience in past 05 years, Performance, Technical Personnel, required Equipment, Financial status, Auditors report, Managerial capabilities, Litigation status etc.**

**3. Incomplete/ Conditional / Electronic bids and bids received after closing time shall not be entertained. Bids shall be signed by authorized persons.**

**4. Bid security 2% in shape of call deposit (in Original) and 0.03% Tender Firm Entry Fee of the estimated cost in cash (non- refundable) should be enclosed along with bidding documents.**

**5. The contractors quoting their bids upto a limit of 10% below Engineer Estimate shall submit bid security to the extent of 2% of Engineer Estimate only.**

**6. The contractor quoting their bids more than 10% below upto 20% below on Engineer Estimate shall submit alongwith their bids 8% Additional Security of Engineer Estimated Cost in addition to 2% bid security. If the bid is not accompanied with the required amount of Additional Security then it will be considered as non-responsive and the 2% bid security shall be forfeited in favour of Govt. and the 2nd lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly.**

**7. Similarly, a contractor quoting bid more than 20% below shall submit with his bid an additional security on Engineer Estimated Cost equal to the differential amount of submitted bid and Engineer Estimate alongwith detail rate analysis. In case of more than 20% below bids if the bid is not accompanied by the detailed rate analysis and/or required amount of additional security then they said bid shall be considered as non-responsive. All the securities submitted alongwith such non responsive bid shall be forfeited in favour of Govt. and the 2nd lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly.**

**8. In case detailed rate analysis submitted with the bids is, in view of the Procuring Entity, not convincing, the Head of the Procuring Entity may declare such bid as non-responsive without any forfeiture of bid securities and record reasons thereof.**

**9. The procuring entity may offer the contract to next lowest bidder after due diligence in the context of financial difference between such two bids are may advertise procurement opportunity afresh.**

**10. After commencement of work by the successful bidder, the procurement entity may replace the additional security with a bank guarantee of the same amount from the schedule banks, if the already deposited security is not in the form of bank guarantee.**

**11. The additional security shall be released to the contractor in (04) Four installments i.e. 1st installment of 25% to be released upon completion of 25% of the project 2nd Installment of 25% to be released upon completion of 50% of the project 3rd Installment of 25% to be released upon completion of 75% of the project & the 4th Installment of 25% to be released after 100% completion of the project.**

**12. Any bidder who provides incorrect information, fake documents should be disqualified.**

**13. Time allowed for completion of the work is as specified in the NIT which will start from the issuance of work order.**

**14. Bids will be valid for Ninety (90) days.**

**15. Successful Bidder should sign the agreement with the department within stipulated time after acceptance of bid.**

**16. Call Deposit of Scheduled Banks shall be acceptable.**

**17. If the evaluated bid costs of two or more than two bidders are same then the successful bid will be declared through draw.**

**18. A copy of the technical proposals in the required format is mandatory and to be uploaded as a part of E-Bidding before submitting Financial Bids.**

**19. Scanned copy of bid security i/c Tender Entry Fee shall be submitted electronically along with technical bid on E-Bidding System.**

**20. Bid security of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd lowest electronic bidder for the specific work will be retained by the Department till the approval of bids.**

**21. The bidder must be enlisted with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority as per KPRA Rules.**

**22. Pay Order is not acceptable as per Notification No. of KPRA M/E/Estt./1-12/2017-18, dated: 05/04/2018.**

**23. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Act XXVII of 2019 2nd Schedule under S.No.14, in case of projects funded under the Government's ADP Budget, Tax shall be charged at the rate of Two Percent (2%).**

**24. Venue of bids opening is office of the Executive Engineer, Building Division Bannu.**

**Note:-**  
1. Differential amount, if a contractor quote e.g. 25% below Engineer Estimate bid than he has to deposit alongwith his bid 2% bid security and 25% Additional Security of Engineer Estimate.  
2. It is mandatory to all contractors, who are participating in the bidding should sign every page of their brochure with page numbering and mentioning here total No. of Pages i.e. 1 of 200 before submitting in the office of the undersigned, unsigned brochure will not be considered in the bidding process.

**EXECUTIVE ENGINEER - Building Division Bannu**

**INF(P) 281/24**

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, C&W BUILDING DIVISION BANNU**

**CORRIGENDUM / AMENDMENT.**

With reference to Information Department Advertisement No.INF(P)233/24, for Notice Inviting E. Bidding Tender Single Stage Two Envelop System, already Advertised & called on 26/02/2024 in Daily "Aaj" dated 08/02/2024 and others dallies for the schemes "Estabtt: of Bannu Medical College Bannu (Balance Work)" is required to be extended due to non uploading of BOQ because the period is less than 14 days. Therefore the date for last submission of Technical Bid is hereby extended upto 05/03/2024 in interest of public works and doing the needful. This corrigendum is issued for correction of tender documents and general information of contractor.

All other terms & condition of the N.I.T. will remain intact.

**EXECUTIVE ENGINEER**  
C&W BUILDING DIVISION BANNU  
Ph: No. 0928-9270111, [candwdbannu@gmail.com](mailto:candwdbannu@gmail.com)

INF(P) 285/24





**PESHAWAR:** Caretaker KP Minister for Industries, Commerce, Technical Education and Newly Merged Districts Affairs, Dr Syed Aamir Abdullah chairing a meeting of establishment of economic zones.

## Combating climate change, through spring trees plantation

PESHAWAR (APP): Vulnerable to climate change and desertification, Pakistan is losing about 27,000 hectares of forests per year due to poverty, population bulge and erratic weather patterns in recent years.

The National Forest Policy 2015 has revealed that Pakistan's total forest-covered area was about five percent where about 27,000 hectares of forests per year mainly in private and community-owned natural forests are being lost, thus making the province vulnerable to climate change, drought and desertification.

The forest resources in all provinces, especially in KP and Gilgit Baltistan were under tremendous pressure, particularly in the communal lands, shamalats, guzara, and privately owned forests that had negatively impacted on the agriculture sectors, it said. The deforestation in watershed areas has adversely impacted agriculture yield and quantity of water at outlets besides triggering land degradation, and loss of biodiversity, and wildlife in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In riparian and coastal areas, especially in Sindh and Balochistan, deforestation has amplified floods and facilitated sea water intrusion thus inflicting huge economic losses due to the government kitty as evidenced by the devastating 2010 and 2022 floods. Comparing Pakistan's deforestation rate with the world, Dr. Mumtaz Malik, former Chief Conservator of Wildlife KP said that globally around 10 million hectares of forest were deforested every year – equal to the area of Portugal.

He said around half of this deforestation was counterbalanced by re-

growing of forests, which means that an overall around five million hectares of the green gold was lost per year worldwide. Dr Mumtaz said that overpopulation, poverty, and unnecessary trees logging besides erratic weather patterns due to climate change was one of the major causes of high rate of deforestation in the province.

In 1947, he said Pakistan's population was only 37 million that had jumped to a record 223 million in 2022 and if it continued growing with such a high pace it is expected to touch 260.3 million in 2030 and 330.8 million by 2050 resulting in the vanishing of the green gold, wildlife, and bees population. Dr. Mumtaz said that about 68 percent of forests in the country were being used as firewood and 15 percent of trees were being lost due to urbanization and community-driven demands and demanded complete ban on cutting of trees, especially bees flora plants.

He warned, "If we do not change our green sector policies and shift to the adaptation of alternative energy resources including solar, hydroelectric, biomass and wind then there is every possibility of losing the existing forests in the next two decades besides witnessing frequent climate change's disasters. Dr. Mumtaz said that deforestation was a national challenge and there was a need to impose a 'green emergency' to conserve and protect the green gold by looking above party politics.

Taking cognizance of the deforestation and climate change, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government

has chalked out a comprehensive plan of action for afforestation in massive scale under its spring plantation campaign started in all districts of the province. KP Forest Department spokesman told APP that 12 million seedlings would be planted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa under the spring afforestation campaign including merged tribal districts.

He said about five million saplings would be planted in central southern region including Peshawar, Mardan, Swabi, Charsadda and southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He said that 3.806 million saplings would be planted in Malakand Forest Region III Swat including Shangla, Buner, Malakand, Chitral and Dir districts where usher and mass plantation would be carried out. The spokesman said that educational institutions, farmers and the general public would be involved besides national institutions and Govt departments to achieve the set targets.

The barren lands and rugged mountains of merged tribal districts would be utilized to achieve the set targets. He said that farmers and the general public were being encouraged to approach divisional forest officers offices in their respective districts for obtaining plants for afforestation. He said that if every person plants at least two plants in a year and looks after it then 480 million saplings would be planted in one calendar year. The spokesman said that tree plantation was a national obligation and urged the public to take part in the spring afforestation drive to make the province lush green.

## NA can be convened within 21 days of polling date

PESHAWAR (APP): Constitutional experts here Friday said that the first session of the National Assembly (NA) could be convened within 21 days of the polling date for oath-taking of the newly elected members.

Talking to APP, Barrister Syed Noman Bokhari said that the constitution of Pakistan has given powers to the President to convene the new National Assembly session on any date between February 22-28, 2024 for oath-taking. After the oath taking ceremony, he said that the national assembly elects speaker and deputy speaker for a five years term and later the leader of the House i.e. Prime Minister.

Barrister Noman said that a simple majority was required to form a government in centre and four provinces of Pakistan. He said formation of the governments in Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan are easy, however, the lawmakers of national assembly need to look above party politics and sit together for a broad based coalition government.

He made it clear that the President did not have any power to invite a person or a party for the formation of government, adding the President represented the federation after the 18th constitutional amendment. Barrister Noman said Pakistan was confronted with several challenges including a shabby economy and a single political party could not address it.

He said the coalition government was the best solution after the 2024 election to address all the challenges including economy, climate change, poverty and illiteracy and carry the ship of democracy forward. The Election Commission of Pakistan was bound to issue official results within 14 days of the holding of the general elections, he said. He said an agitation in streets or blocking of roads were no solution to the election related problems and asked the losing candidates to approach Election Tribunals for addressing their grievances.

## Financial crisis hit printing of textbook

PESHAWAR (APP): As a result of the financial crisis in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there is a fear that the matter of printing textbooks will go unchecked and it will not be possible to provide books to the students of the government schools of the province in time.

The publishers who printed the textbooks during the last academic year have been demanded to pay the arrears of Rs. 2.5 billion. The publishers have stopped the printing of textbooks for the next academic year 2024-25, an official of the Text Book Board told APP on the condition of not to be named.

He said as a result of stopping the printing, it will not be possible to provide books to the students of the government schools of the province in time. He disclosed that the finance department has been contacted several times for the provision of funds but the Finance Department's insistence to leave the issue of release of funds to the next government.

The caretaker government has decided to give free books to the government schools of the province during the next academic year 2024-25, the official added. He said Punjab and KP Publishers were awarded contract for printing of new books and also signed agreement with them but due to no payment of arrears of more than Rs. Billion they stop working on the printing of Textbooks.

Textbook Board is bound to pay 50% to the respective publishers under CAPRA rules, 50% on completion of work and 50% on printing of complete books, he added. The printing of the books has to be completed by March 20, while April 20 is the deadline for giving the books to the districts for distribution, the official said. He said that free books will be provided to children in the month of April but so far no possibility of distributing the textbooks to government schools in time.

## KP govt decides establishment of EZs in tribal districts

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Caretaker KP Minister for Industries, Commerce, Technical Education and Newly Merged Districts Affairs, Dr Syed Aamir Abdullah has directed the establishment of economic zones at tribal districts Kurram and South Waziristan and initiating of work on all necessary process in this regard.

He issued these directives while presiding over a meeting regarding establishment of economic zones in the newly merged districts of the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) here at Civil Secretary, said an official press release issued

here on Friday.

Besides, Special Secretary Industries and Commerce, Mohammad Anwar Khan, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC), Javed Iqbal Khattak and Manager Business Facilitation Centre (Board of Investment & Trade), Iqbal Sarwar, representatives of HA Consultant and other concerned authorities attended the meeting. The meeting reviewed different aspects of the selected suitable sites for establishment of economic zones.

The participants of the meeting were given a

meticulous briefing on feasibility prepared by the consultants for establishment of new economic zones in the newly merged districts and shared sketches, possibilities and utilities of the establishment of new zones.

Keeping in view various priorities, the meeting agreed on establishment of two zones on two districts and decided that new zones should be established at such areas where is no industrial estate of the Small Industries Development Board (SIDB) or no economic zone of the economic zones development company to provide maximum benefits to the local population of the area.

## MoU between HED, CPEC Cultural Centre inked

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: As a major development in increasing the trained and skilled manpower in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Department of Higher Education Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and CPEC Cultural Communication Center to provide market-based training to young students and increase the skilled workforce of the province through digital skills and training programs for targeted students will be arranged.

Steps will also be taken to ensure the provision of employment opportunities in the relevant fields to the students who complete the training as per the memorandum of understanding. Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister congratulated the concerned authorities of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Department of Caretaker Higher Education and CPEC Culture Communication Center on the said partnership and said that this partnership is not only a milestone for meeting the needs of digital skills in the

The ultimate objective of the MoU is to establish a long-term strategic partnership between the Department of Higher Education Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the CPEC Cultural Communication Center to provide market-based training to young students and increase the skilled workforce of the province through digital skills and training programs for targeted students will be arranged.

Steps will also be taken to ensure the provision of employment opportunities in the relevant fields to the students who complete the training as per the memorandum of understanding. Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister congratulated the concerned authorities of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Department of Caretaker Higher Education and CPEC Culture Communication Center on the said partnership and said that this partnership is not only a milestone for meeting the needs of digital skills in the

province. It will also prove, rather, it will lead to strengthening the long-standing friendship between Pakistan and China.

Caretaker Chief Minister said that the caretaker Provincial Government is working under a comprehensive strategy to provide market-based training and digital skills to the youth of the province and to increase skilled manpower. Apart from this, a human capital export strategy has also been formulated to provide employment to trained and skilled youth in the international market.

The partnership between the Department of Higher Education and the CPEC Culture Communication Center will be an excellent initiative in achieving the goals under the above strategy. He directed the concerned authorities to start implementing the memorandum of understanding without wasting time, the provincial government will provide all possible support for this purpose.



**PEHAWAR:** Adviser to CM on Transport, Zafarullah Khan Umezai distributing certificates among participants at China Window Centre.

## Pesco notifies power shutdown

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pesco authorities have notified power suspension in areas of Peshawar, Jamrud, Haripur and Balakot due to maintenance work.

According to Pesco, power supply will remain suspended from Jamrud grid station on 18th and 25th February from 9AM to 3 PM, resultantly consumers Hayatabad 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, New Hayatabad Heath Care Hospital, Health Excellence, Northwest Hospital, Kidney Center, RMI, Kacha Ghari, Karkhano, Gul Abad, P.I.C, Hayatabad Surgical, Peshawar General, Foundation Hospital, Wood, Nothren Boteling, Industrial Estate, Express 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, PHA, Omrak, Olampia, Industrial Estate, Mohmand Steel, Al Hafiz, Frontier Teck Wood, PPI 1, 2, Mica Steel, Alhaj, BSF, Olampia 2 and Gulabad feeders will face inconvenience.

Power supply will remain suspended from Hayatabad Phase 7 Grid Station on 18th and 25th February from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, resultantly con-

sumers of Shaukat Khanum feeders will face inconvenience.

Similarly, power supply will remain suspended from 500 KV Sheikh Muhammadi-Tarbela Grid Station on 20th and 23rd February from 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM, resultantly consumers of load management will be carried out on 132 KV Peshawar University, Peshawar Cantt, Peshawar Industrial, Kohat, KDA, Shahibagh, Hangu, Warsak, Rajar, Peshawar City, Sakhi Chashma, Shabqadar, Rehman Baba, Rajar, Mattani grid connected feeders.

Power supply will remain suspended from Peshawar University Grid Station on 20th and 22nd February from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, resultantly consumers of University Campus, Canal Town, Malakandher, Engineering, Regi, Taj Abad, Taj Abad 2, Agriculture, Mera Achini, HMC, Ring Road, Danish Abad, Ghrif Abad, Rahatabad 1, CMB and Abdara feeders will face inconvenience.

Power Supply will remain suspended from

Burhan-Haripur Transmission Line on 18th February from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, resultantly consumers of Hattar 1, 2, Hattar Special Economic Zone, Khanpur, Kholian Bala and 66 KV Haripur and Havelian feeders will face inconvenience.

Likewise, power supply will remain suspended from Warsak Power House Grid Station on 19th, 20th and 21st February from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM, resultantly consumers of 132 KV Warsak, Peshawar Cantt, Regi Model Town, Shahi Bhagh, Sakhi Chashma feeders will face inconvenience.

Power supply will remain suspended from Balakot Grid Station on 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th February from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, resultantly consumers of Roi feeders will face inconvenience. Power Supply will remain suspended from Haripur Grid Station on 20th February from 9:00 AM to 7:00 PM, resultantly consumers of Kalabat Town Ship 1, Swabi Mera 1, T & T Colony, Chamba Project and Town 3 feeders will face inconvenience.

## From exclusion to inclusion: Paving way for women's economic uplift

### Noorulain Manzoor Hussain

**I**N Pakistan, the journey towards gender equality in the workforce is like transforming a closed door into an open pathway for women to actively participate in the country's economic revival. However, this transformation is not without its challenges.

In many places, traditional norms and societal expectations limit women's access to education and job opportunities. This results in a gender gap, where fewer women are part of the workforce compared to men. Additionally, workplace discrimination and unequal pay persist, making it harder for women to thrive in their careers. Balancing family responsibilities and work can also be a significant challenge for women in Pakistan. Other issues like harassment and violence, lack of supportive policies, limited access to finance and resources to start their own business, underrepresentation in leadership

role, transportation and safety concern etc.

Some of the possible solutions could be: firstly, by ensuring that all girls have access to quality education is crucial. When women are educated, they are better equipped to contribute to the workforce and break gender barriers. Secondly, there should be equal opportunities for women and men. Companies and industries should provide equal opportunities for both men and women. This means fair hiring practices, promotions based on merit, and creating a workplace culture that values diversity.

Thirdly, by introducing flexible work arrangements, such as part-time options or remote work, can help women manage their professional and family responsibilities more effectively. Fourthly, increasing awareness about the importance of gender equality and advocating for women's rights can help challenge societal norms and eliminate stereotypes that hold women back. Lastly,

by implementing and enforcing policies that promote gender equality in the workplace and provide safety and security to women to be able to travel safely, work safely, not being harassed, won't get domestic violence can be a game-changer. This includes measures to address rights of women, pay gaps, prevent discrimination, and support work-life balance.

The shift from exclusion to inclusion requires collective effort and a commitment to change. When women are given the same opportunities as men, they can contribute significantly to Pakistan's economic renaissance. It's not just about empowering women; it's about unlocking the full potential of the entire nation. As we pave the way for women in Pakistan's economic landscape, we are not just breaking barriers; we are building a stronger and more prosperous future for all.

*The author is Ph. D scholar at IM Sciences Peshawar.*

## FIA arrested 2 accused involved in illegal currency business

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: FIA Commercial Banking Circle Peshawar conducted a grand operation by arresting two alleged accused involved in illegal currency (hundi) business here on Friday morning, FIA spokesman said.

He said, on the directive given by the Director Peshawar Zone Nisar Tanoli, the crackdown continues against the elements involved in the illegal

hundi business. The spokesman said that the FUA team arrested 2 suspects during raid operations.

Karimullah and Shahzad Ahmed Umar are among the arrested accused, he informed. The accused were arrested from Mingora Swat and Deans Chowk Saddar Bazar Peshawar. Domestic and foreign currency recovered from the accused during the raid. Giving complete details, the spokesman said

that a total of 1350,000 Pakistani rupees, 400 Saudi riyals, 150 Qatari riyals and 500 Chinese yen were recovered from the accused.

Hundi references and records related to foreign currency were also recovered from the accused. The accused could not satisfy the authorities regarding the recovered currency. Cases were registered against the accused with further investigation underway, the Spokesman said.



**PESHAWAR:** Staff of Capital Metropolitan busy in drive against encroachments.

## Weather in KP is likely to be very cold, partly cloudy

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The weather is clear in Peshawar with the upper districts of the province, it is likely to be very cold and partly cloudy, an official of the Meteorological Department said here Friday.

The official also predicted that the forecast of rain in the upper districts of the province and snowfall on the mountains in the evening hours with minimum temperature has been recorded as low as 11 degree Celsius.

He said the chance of rising to a maximum of 22 degrees Celsius the humidity ratio in the air up to 44% recorded while rains, strong winds and snowfall in upper districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are likely to start from February 18.

PDMA has issued a new notification to all district administrations to stay alert and there is a risk of landslides due to snowfall and rains in the upper districts of the province.

Rains and snowfall are likely to continue intermittently till February 20, the official of the Met Office said.





## In brief

### Employees true asset F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Commissioner Dera Ismail Khan Division, Zafarul Islam Zafarul Islam has reiterated his commitment to ensure a work environment that recognizes the efforts of every dedicated employee for achieving socio-economic development of the district. He expressed these views on the occasion of a farewell ceremony held at his office in honor of Assistant to Commissioner Revenue, Sheikh Muhammad Jameel on retirement from service. He said that dedicated employees were the true asset of any organization and their services and contributions should be recognized. The entire staff of the office, gathered to bid farewell to Sheikh Muhammad Jameel, acknowledging his exemplary service over the years. The commissioner appreciated Sheikh Muhammad Jameel for his dedicated efforts and outstanding performance throughout his service. He also extended best wishes to the outgoing employee for a prosperous post-retirement life. The retired employee also expressed thanks to his colleagues for hosting such an impressive ceremony in his honour. Meanwhile, Food Safety and Halal Food Authority's team has conducted operations at several places and imposed fines on several violators. Deputy Director Sajjad Ahmed leading a team visited grocery shops and checked the quality of various edible items. The team also visited the main distributors' shops took samples of ghee and sent them for laboratory tests. During the inspection, the team seized several expired edible items and imposed fines on violators. It also renewed the licenses and the deputy director said that no compromise would be made on the quality of food items.

### Renovation work reviewed

SUKKUR (APP): Mayor Sukkur Barrister Arslan Sheikh on Friday reviewed the ongoing renovation work of Municipal Building and different roads in the city. On the occasion, he said that the process of renovation of Government Offices Building should be completed as soon as possible, in this regard, the relevant authorities should immediately use all resources to complete the development works. He was briefed about the ongoing development works while he issued orders to complete the development works with in the stipulated period by increasing the manpower and machinery. The Mayor Sukkur also directed the Municipal Officials that cleaning and sanitation should be performed on a daily basis in, in this regard no negligence will be tolerated. The process planting new trees in the Municipal Offices is also going on, which will further enhance the beauty of the Sukkur city.

### Temp rising Bahawalpur

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Temperature is rising in Bahawalpur region as highest maximum temperature 27 centigrade was recorded here on Friday. The local Met Office has forecast a dry weather for city for next 24 hours. The highest maximum temperature of 27 centigrade and the lowest minimum 11 centigrade were recorded during last 24 hours. The dry weather has also been forecast for rest of the region.



LARKANA: Girls on a tractor trolley on the way to attend a wedding function at New Gud Village Road.

## Progress review committee meeting held

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Chairman BISE, Mardan Farid Ahmad Khattak Chaired Progress Review Committee meeting at Conference Room Of BISE, Mardan. Agenda of the meeting was preparations for the forthcoming SSC Annual-I 2024 Examination, Computerization of inventory of BISE, Mardan and Developing a Dash Board of BISE, Mardan. Ishrat Ali C.E BISE, Mardan briefed the forum regarding preparations for the forthcoming exam and enlightened that BISE, Mardan has already started its preparations and available stationery is enough to meet the need of the coming exams. Mostly exam centers has been visited and found satisfactory regarding required facilities.

Chairman appreciated the ongoing preparations regarding exam. Farhan WPM briefed the forum on Computerization of stocks/inventory of BISE, Mardan, he told that we have developed and installed a programme with which we will be able to count and record the available inventory, Kamran Taj Incharge Works Section told that all the stock will be digitized very soon.

Farman Ali Khan C.P enlightened the forum that for the first time BISE, Mardan will have it's Dash board consisting of all the information and steps taken so far. Hazrat Ali DRD congratulate the forum for selection of BISE Mardan's Seven Students out of 82 from all over Pakistan in the IOI contest.

Chairman appreciated the hard work of the officer concerned and told that it will be our target to win the IOI contest on national and international level too. Chairman also congratulate the forum and told that due to our day night struggle, today Army Burn Hall College Abbottabad has sent us a request for presentation on SLO Based Examination and E-Marking to their teachers and students.

This is our achievement that we are now able even to facilitate the key educational institution of the province. Meeting was also attended by Inam Toru Secretary, Zahid Hussain Director Accounts, Rashid Gul Dy Secretary and all Section Incharges of BISE, Mardan.

Meanwhile, the President of Mardan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Zahir Shah has completely rejected the excessive increase in the prices of petroleum products and gas by the government.

He said that due to the increase in petrol and gas prices the people and especially the business community are suffering from mental depression. MCCCI President Zahir Shah said that the caretaker government suddenly increased the prices of petroleum products after which the business community oppressed by inflation cried out because the traders and common people are already under the burden of inflation and the increase in the prices of petroleum products from above will bring more storm of inflation and has made it has become difficult for people to earn their livelihood smoothly.

He said that increasing the prices of electricity and gas including petroleum products every fortnight is gradually increasing the problems of the people including the business community. The government should give relief to the business community because if the business community is comfortable and prosperous then the country's economy will be on the path of development and the country will develop so the government should immediately withdraw the increase in the prices of petrol and diesel if not so then the business community will have no option rather to protest.

**Four girls arrested:** The Sheikh Maltoon police station on Friday raided the den of prostitution and arrested 04 girls including 01 eunuch and 03 men in semi-naked condition on

the spot

A large quantity of weapons, hashish and alcohol were recovered from the accused. According to the details, Sheikh Maltoon police station under the leadership of ASP Sheikh Maltoon Circle Resham Jahangir and SHO Bakhtzada Khan raided the base of prostitution and arrested 04 girls and 01 Transgender and 03 male accused in semi-naked condition What did Among the arrested accused are Saad Siddiqui resident of Bickatgunj, Tanveer resident of Rishkai, Bahar resident of Sherin Kothe, Transgender Akram resident of Gulbahar, Hangama resident of Arbab Road, Aiman resident of Dosehra Chowk Mardan, Nida and Nazo residents of Peshawar. A case was registered against the accused in Sheikh Maltoon police station.

## Youth, girl shot dead in Takht bhai

F.P. Report

TAKHT BHAI: Takhtbhai police on Friday morning recovered the bodies of a youth and girl from a car bearing number plate (LX 558) near Labor Colony, Siri Behlol on Malakand Road.

Police said the bodies of a youth, aged 30 and girl aged 22 were recovered from an XLI Toyota car. Police said the youth and girl were shot dead by unknown persons. The bodies of the deceased have been shifted to Tehsil Headquarters Hospital, Takhtbhai for medico-legal procedure.

After receiving information police officers from Takhtbhai and officials from Rescue 1122 reached the site and examined the situation. Police said a thorough investigation has been initiated into the incident adding that all means of inquiry will be applied to arrest the perpetrators involved in these blind murders.

## Illegal mining, logging banned

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: District Administration Swat has imposed a ban on mining and excavation for a period of sixty days hence forth-with.

According to district administration, ban has been imposed to protect aquatic life of River Swat and to bridges and public property. It was said that ban is also imposed to reduce chances of dengue and malaria that are increasing from water accumulation due to illegal mining and excavation.

Moreover, illegal mining and excavation could also damage bridges and public properties and increase probabilities of floods in monsoon season. District administration has also banned logging in protected areas, and use of chainsaw within limits of the district for a period of sixty days citing hazardous climate changes.

It was said that illegal logging would also help control and reduce harmful effects associated with climate change. The violators would be dealt under section 188, said an official statement issued on Friday.

## Police arrests drug smuggler

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Dara Adam Khel Police on Friday arrested a drug smuggler carrying hashish, a Police Official ASI Wali said here.

According to detail, the Police mobile team is on routine patrolling, checking a motorcycle rider and during search near a blockade in Sheni Kalay, Dara Adam Khail area and recovered 3 kg of high quality hashish tied to his stomach. The drug smuggler was identified as Mohammad Niaz, resident of Khyber. A case has been registered against the detained drug smuggler in Dara Adam khail Police Station.

## ‘Sargodha Day’ preparations reviewed

SARGODHA (APP) Commissioner Muhammad Ajmal Bhatti has said the Sargodha Arts Council (SAC) board of Management's decision to celebrate the 'Sargodha Day' on February 22 is appreciable, and the divisional administration would extend all possible cooperation.

He was addressing a meeting of the SAC Board of Management at his office on Friday. Board President Professor Dr. Haroon Rashid Tabbsum, Director Arts Council Asad Ahmad, Director Information Sargodha Division Ahmad Naeem Malik, Senior Artist Inaam Khan, Former Director Arts Council Tariq Mahmood Malik, renowned poetess Najma Mansoor and renowned calligrapher Tariq Mahmood were also present. The commissioner said preparations for Sargodha Day should be finalised soon, and all stakeholders should be invited to its activities. He said prominent figures of Sargodha should also be awarded on the day in recognition of their services. The commissioner said that after the Sargodha Day observance, there should also be a memorable literary event in the city. It was decided in the meeting that Inaam Khan and Tariq Abuzar would present a stage drama for Sargodhians. It was also decided in the meeting that members of the Board of Management, on the commissioner's direction, would visit Bhakkar, where they would inspect the under-construction building of the Arts Council and present their recommendations to the Bhakkar deputy commissioner for purposeful accomplishment of the mega project.

**DC conducts interviews:** Deputy Commissioner Mianwali/ Chairman board of Governors of Danish School Authority

Sajjad Ahmad Khan visited Danish School for Girls in Hamoli on Friday.

Acting Principal Madam Sajida Jabeen welcomed the deputy commissioner and students presented him with a bouquet. The DC sat on an interview panel for recruitment of new teachers in Danish School for Girls in Mianwali. The principal and other school members Professor Dr. Muhammad Ashraf and the relevant subject experts were also present. As head of the panel, the DC conducted interviews of candidates, who had come for recruitment as teachers. The candidates had already passed the written test and gave a demonstration in the class a day earlier. The deputy commissioner also planted a sapling in the lawns of Danish School for Girls, inaugurated the tree plantation campaign and also inspected various departments of the school.

**Awareness seminar on Punjab Ombudsman's services held:** Consultant Ombudsman Punjab Regional Office Mianwali Dr. Khalid Hussain Baloch said the offices of the Provincial Ombudsman Punjab are active in providing immediate solutions to the public issues. He said a series of awareness and guidance was being provided to people to solve their problems so that they could be aware of their rights.

He expressed these views while addressing a special awareness seminar, held at the University of Mianwali on Friday. A large number of professors and students were present in the seminar. Consultant Ombudsman Punjab Regional Office Mianwali Dr. Khalid Hussain Baloch said people should approach the local office of the Ombudsman Punjab for redress of their problems so that their issues could be resolved in time.

## 18th convocation of SZABST Varsity held

F.P. Report

LARKANA: The 18th convocation program was organized by Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (SZABST) University in Larkana yesterday, in which degrees were distributed among 149 students, the convocation was conducted by Vice Chancellor of Sindh Agricultural University, Tondojam, Dr. Fateh Muhammad Marri was presided over in which certificates were distributed among 149 male and female students, including 99 undergraduate and 50 master's degree students. In the convocation held, 5 male and female students

Kajal, Abdul Aziz, Aman Sharma, Sadaf Haider and Sasai were given silver medals, in addition to this, 37 male and female students were kept in the enrollment. Said this student. And female students are the bright and valuable asset of our country.

SZABST has properly prepared them for every challenge whether it is business, economics or computer science technology. These children will make our country bright. The higher administration of the university, vice president, academic vice president, deans, educational experts, respected students and parents of students from various fields participated. On the other hand, against the increasing street crime, looting and murder incidents in Larkana district, a protest demonstration was held by Urban Alliance Larkana from

Daniyal Hotel to Luhar Bypass.

On this occasion, the leaders of Citizens Union Larkana, Niaz Hussain Abro, Roshan Ali Sangi, Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah and others said that peace and order in Larkana city and its suburbs has completely failed. The events of theft, robbery, robbery and murder have become normal, traders and citizens have become insecure, but the administration and police of Larkana district, has completely failed, he demanded from Sindh caretaker Chief Minister Justice (retired) Maqbool Baqir and Inspector General of Police, saying that the people of Larkana district should not be left at the mercy of robbers and to ensure law and order situation. Possible measures should be taken so that the puzzled restlessness in the public can be removed.



SARGODHA: A view of on open manhole at Chungi No 9 needs attention of the concerned authorities.

## Early cultivation practices for cotton

Sajid Mahmood

**COTTON plays a vital role in Pakistan's economy, being the fifth largest cotton-producing country globally, trailing behind India, China, the USA, and Brazil according to the latest ICAC report. It serves as a crucial cash crop and is the primary raw material for the country's textile industry. Cotton contributes 0.6% to Pakistan's GDP and adds 1.4% value to the agriculture sector. Pakistan also ranks as the ninth largest producer of organic cotton worldwide.**

Additionally, it ranks third in yarn production, second in yarn export, and third in cloth export. Pakistan's cotton production accounts for 5% of the global total. Despite aiming for a cotton production target of 127 million bales in 2023, the actual production hardly reached only 85 million bales. Among the provinces, Punjab, Sindh, and Baluchistan contributed 42.38 million, 41.11 million, and 1.87 million bales, respectively. Pakistan's textile industry consumes around 15 million bales of cotton annually. Traditionally, cotton in

Pakistan is typically planted from April to May 31 as summer begins. However, various challenges such as changing weather patterns, water scarcity, cotton leaf curl virus, and insect attacks have reduced the likelihood of successful cotton farming, leading to lower productivity and profitability for farmers. To address these issues and boost cotton production, there has been a growing trend in recent years of early cotton cultivation in Sindh and Punjab, particularly in February-March. Last year, farmers who planted cotton early, specifically in February-March, not only achieved higher yields per acre but also benefited from favorable cotton prices. The performance of cotton cultivated during the April-May season and the later June period was not as favorable as that of early cultivation.

This was primarily due to changes in climate, such as rising temperatures, heat waves, rainfall, and the spread of the leaf curl virus. Consequently, pests like whiteflies and pink bollworms infested the cotton plants, leading to reduced yield per acre and a decline in quality. As a result, farmers did not receive

good prices for their cotton produce. It's important to note that planting cotton during the typical season (April to May) doesn't automatically indicate failure for the crop. In fact, seasonal cultivation can facilitate effective management, adoption of modern farming techniques, and timely utilization of resources. With guidance from agricultural experts, you can achieve successful cotton production through seasonal cultivation.

A report indicates that last year, early cotton cultivation encompassed an area exceeding 638,000 acres across both core and non-core regions of Punjab. Munawar Hussain, a progressive farmer and industrialist from Sindh, highlighted the success of early cotton cultivation in the region last year. Particularly, farmers in lower Sindh achieved high-quality cotton and received favorable prices per acre. The yield was impressive, with early-grown cotton fetching over 10,000 per maund and production reaching up to 40 maund per acre. Munawar anticipates a 25% increase in early cotton cultivation in Sindh this year compared to last year. Similarly, Punjab is also expected to see a rise in cotton

cultivation this year.

Currently, it's crucial to prioritize the cotton crop and textile sector to bolster Pakistan's fragile economy. The federal government must promptly announce the support price for cotton prior to planting and ensure its enforcement. Unfortunately, last year, farmers didn't receive compensation according to the government's announced support price, leading to widespread uncertainty and frustration among cotton farmers.

The moderate temperatures in February-March offer protection to the cotton crop against climatic adversities like extreme heat and monsoon rains, as well as pests such as whiteflies and pink bollworms. This not only boosts production per acre but also reduces production costs and enhances market prices due to improved quality. After the winter season, soil moisture levels tend to replenish, creating optimal conditions for cotton seed germination and early plant growth.

This natural moisture retention saves considerable water. Implementing cotton sowing in February-March in Pakistan seems to offer a viable solution

to the challenges encountered by farmers and stakeholders in the cotton industry. To further enhance its success, supportive policies, extension services, and capacity-building initiatives are essential. This can be achieved through farmer training and awareness programs, the adoption of modern farming practices, and the transfer of technology.

Based on observations from last year, it's clear that single, double, and triple-gene varieties of cotton have proven successful for early cultivation. With proper management, cotton farmers can easily achieve a yield of 40 maunds per acre. To maximize production from early cotton, it's crucial for farmers to cultivate only approved varieties recommended by the Central Cotton Research Institute Multan and Punjab Agriculture Department. Non-approved varieties are more susceptible to attacks by harmful insects and diseases, leading to lower yields. Recommended varieties such as BTCIM 775, BTCIM343, BTCIM663, BTCyto537, BTCyto511, FH333, HATAF3, CKC1, CKC3, CKC5, CK C6, Ghor 2, Badar1 and ICI 386

should be cultivated from February to March 31. According to cotton experts at the Central Cotton Research Institute in Multan, farmers should follow specific guidelines for optimal cotton planting.

These guidelines include planting early on raised beds, maintaining a distance of 9 to 12 inches between plants, keeping row distances at 2.5 feet, and ensuring a density of 17 to 23 thousand plants per acre. The farmers should keep a seed quantity of 8 to 10 kg per acre for cultivation on beds and furrows. Before early planting, it's recommended that farmers treat their seeds with the fungicide mefenoxam fludioxonil+azoxystrobin, which is commonly sold under the name Dynasty.

The application rate should be 2 to 3 ml/kg of seed, diluted with 25 ml of water per unit. This treatment helps protect the cotton crop from insect attacks during the initial 30 days of growth. Overall, planting cotton in February and March in Pakistan presents an opportunity for farmers to capitalize on favorable weather conditions, leading to improved productivity and increased profitability.





BEIRUT: A view of destroyed buildings attacked by an Israeli air strike in Nabatieh, southern Lebanon.

## Earthquake fever grips Istanbul amid fears of ‘the big one’

ISTANBUL: Earthquake fever has gripped Istanbul since last year's disaster in southern Turkey, as residents in Europe's most populous city fear they could face similar devastation. The city lies near the North Anatolia faultline, a geological danger that has seen Istanbul hit by at least 34 strong earthquakes over the last 2,000 years.

Smaller tremors can be felt by people in Istanbul every year - an ominous reminder of the danger that lurks beneath their streets. For many, witnessing the stark devastation caused to swaths of Turkey last February added to their anxiety over the inevitable but unpredictable arrival of "the big one". Istanbul's official population is 16 million, but estimates based on household water consumption by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality put the figure at 20 million. The vast majority of residents live in apartment buildings of five storeys or taller in compact neighbourhoods with few open spaces. Those built before 1999 - the year a powerful earthquake in the eastern Marmara Sea rocked Istanbul, killing 18,000 people - are considered particularly at risk. Officials say such buildings account for two-thirds of the city's construction. But spiralling property prices mean that even those who fear their building is unsafe cannot afford to move out. Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu said economic circumstances - annual inflation currently stands at 65 percent - impeded "saving the city from a tragedy". The municipality has checked 35,000 buildings to measure their earthquake resilience, but many residents are unwilling to submit to the tests. "Sixty-five percent of people who are offered rapid scanning don't let us in," Imamoglu told journalists recently. "Their concern is what they will do if they find out the building isn't safe."

Damage on the scale of the quake that hit last year, as well as a potential tsunami, would have catastrophic

effects not just for the city but also the country. Istanbul is Turkey's finance and trade powerhouse - last year it accounted for more than half of Turkish exports - and such a blow would ravage the country's economy. Okan Tuysuz, a professor at Istanbul Technical University's Eurasian Earth Sciences Institute, said the North Anatolia fault could be expected to generate a quake of magnitude 7.5. "Serious damage may occur in Istanbul, especially on the coasts facing the Marmara Sea," he said. With this in mind, the city's disaster preparedness is set to be a key issue ahead of nationwide local elections in March. Murat Kurum, the mayoral candidate for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AK Party), is aiming to recapture Istanbul from Imamoglu, the Republican People's Party politician who took it in 2019.

"We see that this time the focus of the campaign is earthquake and urban transformation," Ozer Oz, a board member of Istanbul's Chamber of Civil Engineers, said. "However, the earthquake danger for Istanbul has not just emerged. It is a threat that we have felt is approaching every day since the 1999 earthquake and that grows bigger every day." Kurum served as minister for environment, urbanisation and climate change between 2018 and 2023, a role central to preparing Turkey's cities for disaster. But he was accused of mismanagement after last year's earthquakes. Critics highlighted a building amnesty during his period in office when more than three million building registration documents were issued across Turkey to those who paid a fine rather than bringing their buildings up to code. But in a wide-ranging list of campaign pledges delivered on January 25, Kurum promised that "not a single risky building will be left in Istanbul" if he is elected.

He said 650,000 new homes would

be built during his five-year term and another 250,000 renovated through supporting homeowners and the private sector. The former minister accuses Imamoglu of subjecting Istanbul residents to "five lost years" of mismanagement. Imamoglu has also received criticism from opposition circles. Birol Aydin, of the Saadet Party, accused him of "squandering the opportunity that was presented to him on a golden platter" in 2019. "You said that all buildings will be checked for earthquake risk," Aydin said. "However, not a single municipal employee has visited hundreds of thousands of buildings." Imamoglu, meanwhile, says there are 200,000 risky buildings - housing three million people - that are in urgent need of transformation. Since winning office five years ago, he has initiated schemes to improve the quality of Istanbul's housing stock but says his efforts have been obstructed by the "disease of partisanship" as the central government blocks funding for improvements. "Every time we try to contact the minister, we do our best to recommend that earthquake risk needs to be the priority," he said.

"After February 6, we thought these proposals and requests would be taken more seriously, but unfortunately this has been ignored and has been seen as a matter of politics." Speaking at a ceremony to hand over the keys to new housing in Kahramanmaraş on the anniversary of last year's earthquakes, Erdogan refuted claims of bias against opposition-led municipalities. "As the government, we have sent and are sending the budget share they should receive to all municipalities, regardless of which party they belong to." He added: "The opposition municipalities from Istanbul to Izmir, from Ankara to Hatay cannot provide the services to their cities that they deserve ... the only reason for this is incompetence, ignorance and pursuing other calculations." — Aljazeera

## Thailand sees Chinese tourism soar as visa requirement dropped

BANGKOK: Bangkok's Chinatown, lit up by red lanterns and decorative banners to celebrate the Lunar New Year holidays, is bustling. As the region welcomed the Year of the Dragon last weekend, ethnic Chinese Thais thronged temples to light candles and pray for good fortune.

Inside the glowing red interior of Wat Mangkon Kamalawat - the largest Chinese temple in Bangkok - women wore traditional cheongsam dresses and took photos with their loved ones. Outside, in the hustle and bustle of Yaowarat Road, lion dancers performed as visitors - Thais and legions of tourists - crowded the street, sampling the food and shopping from stalls in the market.

Many were from China, with official figures showing hundreds of thousands of Chinese nationals chose to spend the holiday, which began on February 10, in Thailand where they no longer need to get a visa. "Destinations in Southeast Asia traditionally rely on a strong Lunar New Year holiday to kick-start the tourism calendar," Gary Bowerman, a tourism analyst in Kuala Lumpur, told Al Jazeera. "Thailand has positioned itself astutely to capture outbound travel demand from China with its bilateral visa waiver and aggressive marketing into the Chinese market led by the prime minister. This resonates well with Chinese tourists and has encouraged Chinese airlines to add more capacity over [the] Chinese New Year." Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin started his

push to lure more arrivals from China in September when he announced a temporary visa waiver for Chinese tourists. The short-term agreement soon became permanent after Thailand and China signed an indefinite mutual visa exemption for their nationals to visit each other's country starting from March 1. Nithee Seepree, deputy governor for marketing at the Tourism Authority of Thailand, says Chinese arrivals have been encouraging. "It's very exciting and [a] successful Chinese New Year, and it is a positive sign for the new visa waiver between China and Thailand because it brings more confidence for the Chinese tourists," he told Al Jazeera. "Now we got 27-28,000 tourists [arriving each day] since the 1st of February, it is almost back to normal before Covid. Last year, at the same time, it was 7-8,000. Last month 500,000 [China visitors arrived]."

Thailand's government spokesman Chai Wacharonke said on Saturday that four million tourists had arrived in the country from January 1 to February 8, including more than 730,000 Chinese. Based on Nithee's approximate figures, Chinese arrivals could reach one million by the end of the month. "We have promotions with online travel agents, and [we] coordinate with normal travel agents to create a roadshow in the big cities in China. Also, the flights are back to 90 percent [capacity] like before the pandemic because of the visa waiving. We [are trying] to

coordinate with influencers and key opinion leaders from China to create the content experience in Thailand," he added. Phuket, in southern Thailand, has seen an influx of arrivals in recent weeks. The island hotspot is expected to welcome 49,000 tourists a day through the international airport during the Chinese New Year period until February 16, according to local media. The festival falls in the middle of Thailand's high season, which usually runs from November to March, and is a major holiday for mainland China. Ranjeet Viswanathan, the director of sales and marketing at the luxury Hyatt Regency Phuket Resort, said occupancy was even higher than many had hoped. "This year has started with a bang. Every hotel has seen better-than-expected results in January and this continues in February. Our hotel has been doing over 92 percent in occupancy since January 1," he told Al Jazeera. Chinese tourists make up about 12 percent of the resort's business and the number of travellers in 2024 so far is five percent higher than a year ago. According to the Chinese calendar, 2024 is the Year of the Wood Dragon, which can be a time for new ideas, projects and prosperity.

Chinese visitors have long been crucial to the Thai travel industry, but even with the jump in arrivals, the numbers remain well below 2019, the year before the COVID-19 pandemic. In that year, Chinese visitors made up more than 11 mil-

lion of the record 39 million tourists who visited Thailand. Last year, there were more than 3.5 million Chinese arrivals, but that still fell short of the five million predicted by Thai officials. Experts put the lower-than-expected numbers down to China's own economic issues and domestic travel trends. The mass shooting in a Bangkok shopping mall in September that killed one Chinese national, and the release of the Chinese blockbuster movie No More Bets, a film depicting scams in Southeast Asia, may have also played a part.

But the recent surge of Chinese visitors to Thailand shows China's outbound travel is recovering, according to Bowerman, the tourism analyst. "Strong demand for travel to Thailand from China in the first two months of 2024 suggests that this year will be very different for outbound travel from China compared to 2023," he said. Thai tourism officials have forecast more than eight million arrivals from China by the end of 2024. The tourism authority's Nithee is already working on luring more visitors from China and is in talks to arrange new flight routes from China into Thai cities including Udon Thani in the northeast and Hat Yai in the south. He is optimistic Thailand is on track to meet its arrivals target by the end of the year. "It is really promising. We have to keep an eye on these situations and get more confidence for tourists and do more promotion," he added. — Aljazeera

### South Korea trainee doctors to quit in protest

SEOUL (Reuters): About 20% of South Korea's trainee doctors said they would resign effective to protest a government plan to admit more students to medical schools, saying this would hurt the national health insurance scheme. Representatives of the trainees, who work at the country's five biggest hospitals, all in Seoul, have decided to leave their posts, the head of the Korea Interns and Residents Association (KIRA), Park Dan, said in a statement.

The government has said it will respond firmly to doctor strikes and vows to go ahead with the plan, which got strong public support in opinion polls last year. The trainee doctors, estimated by media reports to number about 2,700, are about a fifth of the country's interns and resident doctors. The system relies on them for emergency and acute healthcare, raising concerns about how the action could affect hospitals. Doctors and medical students say the government's plan would encourage unnecessary medical care by increasing the number of doctors and making care more accessible. This would worsen the finances of the national health insurance plan, they say.

They complain the plan will not address the overburdening of large teaching hospitals and a lack of incentives for doctors to practice in basic fields such as paediatrics and obstetrics. The government plans to raise medical school admissions by 2,000 students for the 2025 academic year to add 10,000 doctors by 2035. Currently about 3,000 students enter medical schools each year. The plan focuses on increasing doctors outside Seoul and in basic fields and expanding protections for the profession against malpractice suits and prosecution. Doctors throughout the country held rallies, calling on the government to scrap the plan.

A proposal by the government in 2020 to increase medical school admissions by 4,000 over 10 years was shelved after intense opposition from the medical community and a strike by trainee doctors.

### Ukraine war: Deadly strike on Russian shopping centre

KYIV (BBC): Seven people - including a one-year-old baby girl - have been killed in a Ukrainian air attack on Russia's city of Belgorod, the region's head says. Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov says another 18 were wounded in strike close to the Ukrainian border.

Videos circulating on social media showed several ambulances parked outside a heavily damaged shopping centre with shattered windows. Russia said air defence systems had shot down 14 Ukrainian missiles. Russian Zvezda TV, which is closely affiliated with the ministry of defence, said one rocket had hit a shopping centre with another landing on the city's sports stadium. Belgorod lies about 30km (19 miles) from the border with Ukraine. It has often been targeted by Ukrainian forces since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine nearly two years ago. A drone and rocket attack in December killed 25 people and wounded another 100 in the deadliest strike on Belgorod so far. Last night, Russia fired 26 missiles at Ukraine, killing a 66-year-old woman in Chuhuyiv, near Kharkiv in the north-east, and wounding several more people.

Meanwhile, the battle for Ukraine's eastern town of Avdiivka rages on. Some Ukrainian soldiers have told the BBC that the town could fall at any moment, describing severe shortages of weapons and ammunition. Nato Secretary General Jen Stoltenberg warned that the US failure to approve continued military assistance to Ukraine is already having an impact on the battlefield. Avdiivka is a key location because it is a gateway to the Russian-occupied city of Donetsk. It has been effectively on the front line since 2014 when the conflict in eastern Ukraine started.

## Nearly 75% of journalists killed in 2023: CPJ

LONDON: Seventy-two of the 99 journalists killed worldwide in 2023 were Palestinians reporting on Israel's war on Gaza, making those 12 months the deadliest for the media in almost a decade, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

Killings of reporters would have dropped globally year-on-year had it not been for the deaths in the ongoing war on Gaza, the CPJ said in its annual report released. "In December 2023, CPJ reported that more journalists were killed in the first three months of the Israel-Gaza war than have ever been killed in a single country over an entire year," the organisation said.

In total, it documented 77 journalists killed in the war on Gaza last year while doing their jobs: 72 Palestinians, three Lebanese and two Israelis. The Palestinian victims account for nearly 75 percent of all journalists killed worldwide. "This war is unprecedented in terms of the threat to journalists," Jodie Ginsberg, president of the CPJ, told Al Jazeera from New York. "What's important to remember about this war is that Gazan journalists are the only journalists able to report on what's happening inside Gaza. International journalists have not been able to get in, have not been allowed in, except on very, very controlled trips that are overseen by the Israeli army. "So we are entirely reliant on those [Palestinian] journalists,

who are risking their lives to bring us this story," she added. On February 7, the New York-based press freedom organisation said the number of journalists killed in the war on Gaza had risen to 85. The CPJ has previously attacked what it calls the "persecution" of journalists by Israeli forces and is investigating whether a dozen journalists killed in the Gaza conflict were deliberately targeted by Israeli soldiers, which would constitute a war crime. Ginsberg said she was "disappointed ... at the lack of public solidarity that we have seen" with Palestinian journalists during the ongoing war. She said Western "hesitancy" to show solidarity with those targeted and killed in Gaza was "sadly unsurprising" given that Israel is "the country, the issue that has divided international media, international politicians more than anything". But she emphasised: "I think it's really important that we let our colleagues inside Gaza as well as in the region know that we stand with them, that we are there to support them, so that we can make sure that press freedom and journalists are protected not just at this crucial moment in Gaza but also globally at a time when journalists are under threat everywhere." Worldwide, the CPJ report said the death toll of 99 reporters killed was the highest since 2015 and an increase of nearly 44 percent on 2022's figures. It said the greatest reductions in journalist fatalities in

2023 were registered in Ukraine and Mexico. Both went from 13 killings to two. Fatalities remained stable in Somalia and the Philippines, the organisation said. However, it warned that Mexico - along with the Philippines and Somalia - was "one of the world's deadliest countries for the press".

"Compounding the situation, government agencies spy on reporters and rights defenders, and a significant number of journalists have had to leave their homes, and abandon their professions, due to violence," the CPJ report warned. In the Palestinian territories, even when journalists are not on the job, they face the risk of Israeli bombardment or arrest. Gaza's Government Media Office said at least 126 Palestinian media workers have been killed since Israel's war began on October 7. Journalists working in conflict areas are protected under international humanitarian law. Palestinian journalists accuse Israel of repeatedly violating that law by targeting the media. "It's very important that these killings are thoroughly investigated and that those responsible are held accountable," Ginsberg told Al Jazeera. She said her organisation was doing the work to document attacks against journalists in Gaza, which could later be used as evidence and presented to bodies such as the International Court of Justice or the International Criminal Court. — Aljazeera

## DR Congo rebel attacks on gold mine kill 14

DR CONGO: Rebel attacks in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have killed at least 14 people, including two South African soldiers, amid an uptick in violence. At least 12 people were killed and 16 others kidnapped by rebels from the CODECO armed group at a gold mine near Djugu district in Ituri province, a civil society organisation said.

Meanwhile, South Africa said that two of its soldiers had been killed by mortar fire in eastern DRC, the first fatalities since it deployed troops there. "As a result of this indirect fire, the SANDF suffered two fatalities and three members sustained injuries. The injured were taken to the nearest hospital in Goma for medical attention," the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) said.

Both of the attacks took place. Violence has been on the rise in the conflict-hit region in recent weeks, with many blaming attacks on the M23 rebel group that has been fighting Congolese soldiers in the

region for years. Kinshasa says M23, one of more than 120 armed groups in the region, is receiving military support from neighbouring Rwanda. Experts from the United Nations and European Union have said there is evidence backing this but Rwanda denies the allegations. But M23 has indicated in recent statements that it is amid an onslaught in eastern Congo, leading to fears the group is again targeting Goma, which it once seized 10 years ago. CODECO, a separate rebel group, is a loose association of militia groups mainly from the ethnic Lendu farming community. It has fought other rebel groups, and is known to target areas rich in gold and minerals in the resource-rich country. Efforts to reduce violence in the DRC have seen the deployment of thousands of South African troops as part of a Southern African Development Community (SADC) mission to fight against armed rebel groups in the east. South Africa announced this week it would be sending a new

contingent of 2,900 soldiers to eastern Congo. It was not immediately clear if those killed and injured in attack were part of that new deployment. The base that was hit was in the North Kivu province, SANDF spokesperson Siphiwe Dlamini said. The injured were taken to a hospital in the regional capital Goma. More than one million people have been displaced by the conflict since November, aid groups say. That adds to the 6.9 million who already fled their homes in one of the world's biggest humanitarian crises.

The Norwegian Refugee Council said the recent advance of armed groups toward the key town of Sake, near Goma, "poses an imminent threat to the entire aid system" in eastern Congo. "The isolation of Goma, home to over 2 million people and hosting hundreds of thousands of displaced individuals who have fled clashes with armed groups, would bring disastrous consequences to the region," the NRC said. — Aljazeera

## NATO warns US aid delay harming Kyiv's battle

BRUSSELS: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has warned that the delay in approving United States military aid to Ukraine is harming Kyiv's forces as they battle against Russia's invading troops. Before a meeting of NATO defence ministers, Stoltenberg said he "expects" the US Congress to agree to "continued support to Ukraine".

The US Senate approved a \$95bn aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, but Speaker Mike Johnson, an ally of former President Donald Trump, has yet to put it to a vote in the lower chamber, the House of Representatives. Stoltenberg said if Russia were to win the war, "it will not only be bad for the Ukrainians, a tragedy for Ukrainians, but also be dangerous for us. It will make the world even more dangerous and us more vulnerable."

Earlier, Russia launched missiles on Ukraine, hitting infrastructure and damaging residential and commercial buildings, injuring at least 11 people in different parts of the country. The Ukrainian military said

seven Ukrainian regions were targeted, including the capital, Kyiv, and the cities of Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia and Lviv. The air force said air defence systems shot down 13 of the 26 Russian-launched missiles. Military spokesman Dmytro Lykhoviy said the army is withdrawing some troops from the eastern town of Avdiivka to "more advantageous positions" to push Russian forces out of the country. "The key announcement with regards to all this is that supplies to Avdiivka and evacuations from there are difficult," he said, adding that they had prepared a "reserve logistics artery" in advance. Since last year, Avdiivka has become a significant battleground after Russian forces nearly encircled it and made attempts to enter it. The commander-in-chief of Ukraine's military, Oleksandr Syrskii, described the situation as "extremely difficult" after a visit to soldiers around the town. Meanwhile, at least six people, including a child, were killed and 18 wounded in a Ukrainian missile attack on the

Russian city of Belgorod, Russian officials said. Roman Starovoit, governor of the neighbouring Kursk region, called the attack "a new crime of the Ukrainian Nazis" and said a shopping mall, an outdoor sports facility and residential areas were hit. Vyacheslav Gladkov, the governor of the Belgorod region, which borders Ukraine, said on social media that five children were among the wounded.

There was no immediate comment from Ukraine regarding the reported attack. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is to meet French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday to sign a security agreement at Elysee Palace, the French presidency said. "As Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine will soon enter its third year, this visit will be an opportunity for the President of the Republic to reaffirm France's determination to continue to provide, in the long term and with all of its partners, unwavering support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people," Macron's office said. — Aljazeera



## The Frontier Post

Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

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

Peshawar Office: 091-5700095, 0300- 9009001

Peshawar Fax: 091-5703687, Post Box No. 573

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

\*USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

## Pakistan economic comeback

**T**HE caretaker Minister for Finance Dr Shamshad Akhtar has recently claimed that the government's steps to stabilize the economy are yielding positive results. According to her, brief measures were taken by the interim government to improve the country's economic conditions. The national economy is performing well now and there are some initial signs of economic recovery. She said that discussions regarding control on government expenses are currently underway with the IMF, however, no deduction has been made to provincial funds so far. According to the Finance Minister, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has witnessed a major decline which illustrates that Pakistan has come out of the difficult position.

The caretaker government in collaboration with the Pakistan military undoubtedly took unprecedented administrative and regulatory steps which not only rescued an almost collapsed economy but put the entire house in order in a short time. The government-military combined platform of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) did miracles in resetting the trajectory of the derailed economy, reviving new life in national institutions, and revitalizing a ray of hope in the nation, that previously diminished due to ever-rising inflation and a flood of rumors about a possible default of the fragile nation.

The SIFC took up the gigantic challenge of revamping the national economy and charted out a nationwide strategy to bring pivotal reforms in each field and clear the yearslong baggage of each institution including removal of the Kunda system and recovery of bills in WAPDA and OGDCL, curbing money laundering and smuggling of currency, along with putting a cap on bad practices and manipulation of forex market which successfully controlled rupee volatility and brought stability in the national economy. Historically, the SIFC played an important role in restoring investors' trust in the local market along with attracting and facilitating local/foreign investment in the country. It successfully streamlined bureaucratic processes, eliminated red tape, and resolved issues faced by investors and traders in the country. The SIFC aims to improve the overall investment climate in Pakistan for businesses to thrive thereby providing a conducive environment for businesses, traders, entrepreneurs, and investors to ensure sustainable economic growth and development in the country.

The Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) is currently engaged with several friendly countries including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, China, Malaysia, Qatar, Kuwait, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran along with engaging overseas Pakistanis to bring investment to the country. The functions being carried out by the most prestigious and powerful platform are the key jobs of certain ministries, and departments in the country who could not deliver to the public due to incapacity, and institutional degradation. Although, the caretaker government with crucial assistance from the SIFC and Pakistan Military has brought the national economy on the track but country's woes are diverse and problems are multifaceted that merit overhauling of all aspects of our national life. Besides economic volatility, current-day Pakistan faces diverse problems relating to food insecurity, a lack of healthcare and quality education, flourishing terrorism, and poor law and order situation, along with the institutional degradation that practically choked the country at this point.

Historically, the SIFC played an important role in restoring investors' trust in the local market along with attracting and facilitating local/foreign investment to the country. It successfully streamlined bureaucratic processes, eliminated red tape, and resolved issues faced by investors and traders in the country. However, there is a dire need to revive and fully operationalize the national institutions, policy-making and implementation mechanisms. So these gains could be preserved sustainably in the long term and the country comes out of this vicious cycle of recurrent economic depletions, debt trap and industrial slowdown, once and for all.

## JUI-PTI alliance

**T**HE PTI and JUI-F on Thursday agreed on a single point that the February 8 general elections were not free and fair. Speaking to the media in a joint press conference, JUI-F senior leader Hafiz Hamdullah stressed that both parties agree that the February 8 polls were not transparent and were marred with rigging and irregularities. The long-held archival displayed utmost consensus and teamwork during their first-ever political interaction over the past several years. Both sides underscored that the case brought by the PTI on what happened in the February 8 elections, was also a case from before the JUI. According to the reports, PTI's delegation offered JUI-F an option to join the party in its protests against alleged rigging in polls and Opposition in the parliament. The two sides discussed matters relating to government formation, while PTI also sought JUI-F's support for its candidate for the slot of the country's Prime Minister.

Historically, the JUI-F and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) struck into unceasing animosity and mostly remained at loggerheads over the past decades. Both major political groups remained at arm's distance not because of their conflicting ideologies, bisecting manifestos and sameness of their target audiences but due to the like, dislike, personal views and adamantism of their leaders throughout the past. Interestingly, both opposing political sections agreed on a single point agenda that is rejection of recent polls which brought results contrary to their expectations. The hardcore religio-political group faced a serious backlash in the election while liberal far right PTI could not grab much public approval as it wanted.

Currently, both parties face similar issues and have equal opportunity to form their governments in the centre as well as provinces or to sit on opposition benches and wait for a suitable time to play the role of treasury. The history has brought the arch-rivals at an important cross road which provided them an opportunity to convert their animosity into teamwork and create new bonds of friendship and alliance. This interaction is amazing and should be viewed as an early dew drop in national politics. Ideally, all political groups must resist unnecessary hatred and war mongering in politics so constructive and healthy civic activities can take place in the country.

### Important Notice

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## Fact or fiction? Israel's evacuation plan for Palestinians in Rafah

**MARC OWEN JONES**  
On Sunday, ahead of a planned Israeli invasion of Rafah, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave an interview to ABC, a TV channel in the United States. He addressed warnings by Western officials, including Americans, that this would result in a high civilian death toll. "We are going to do it while providing safe passage for the civilian population so they can leave," Netanyahu said.

Asked by host Jonathan Karl where 1.4 million Palestinians are supposed to go, he responded: "The areas that we have cleared north of Rafah, there are plenty of areas there, but we are working out a detailed plan to do so." Netanyahu sounded unconvinced by his own words. A day earlier, Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy spoke to London-based LBC radio and also sounded rather unconvincing. When asked by host Matt Frei four times where the Palestinians in Rafah are supposed to go, Levy could not respond. All he could muster was: "Well, there are open areas in the Gaza Strip. And one option is for UN agencies to work together with us on evacuating civilians to open areas." The question where those open areas are remained unanswered. The reason why Netanyahu and Levy cannot respond to a simple question is because they both know the Israeli army does not intend to protect Palestinians, as it hasn't up until now.

They know that nowhere has been safe for Palestinians and nowhere will be safe for them when the invasion of Rafah starts. They also know that ultimately, Israel is aiming to expel the Palestinians from Gaza, not to keep them there. Since the start of this Israeli war on Gaza, the Israeli government has upped the ante on misinformation. Nowhere has this been more evident than in claims that the Israeli army is creating "safe passage" for the people of Gaza or is trying to protect them. The past four deadly months provide plenty of evidence. First, Israel told the people of Gaza that the south would be safe. When they started evacuating, they

were bombed on the way in their civilian convoys. They were also bombed when they arrived. When civilians were not bombed on "safe evacuation routes", they were shot at by snipers or detained and forcibly disappeared.

When the Israeli army invaded the previous "safe zone" of Khan Younis, it told civilians to stay put in hospitals and shelters. Its snipers shot people trying to reach hospitals and shelters and then bombed them. When the Israeli army told Palestinians to leave Khan Younis, it targeted them while they were fleeing. Some Palestinians made it to Rafah, another "safe zone", only to be told that it is no longer safe. Now people are being told to flee Rafah to "open areas". Other "open areas", such as Mawasi, where people were previously told to go have been repeatedly targeted. Throughout this process of telling people to evacuate only to kill them, the Israeli army and govern ent kept making announcements in English and giving interviews to Western media claiming it was taking measures to "protect civilians". Whether it was unsafe "evacuation routes" or confusing "evacuation maps", they did what they could to cover up the truth that there are no safe places in Gaza.

They continued to peddle the lie even after United Nations agencies and international organisations - such as Save the Children, Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF), Amnesty International, etc - all agreed there is no safe place in Gaza. Even Western media - including The New Yorker, Time magazine and Deutsche Welle - started seeing through Israeli disinformation and reported the reality that there is no safe place in Gaza. Should the same army that killed more than 28,000 Palestinians and destroyed or damaged more than 60 percent of homes in Gaza be trusted to offer "safe passage" now?

In the past, as in this war, Israel has repeatedly blamed the killings of civilians on Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups. It has repeatedly claimed that Palestinian fighters and

their commanders use the civilian population as "human shields". But these claims do not quite add up with the data that the Israeli military itself has released. In January, Israel claimed that it had killed 10,000 Palestinian fighters (9,000 in Gaza and 1,000 inside Israel), wounded 8,000, arrested 2,300 and eliminated two-thirds of Hamas's regiments. It has also said it has "struck" 30,000 targets in Gaza. If the Israeli army - the most moral in the world per its own evaluation - "strikes" only military targets, one would have thought that at least 30,000 fighters would have been killed or wounded. And if we go by Netanyahu's claim that for one Palestinian civilian killed, one Palestinian fighter has been eliminated, then we get a death toll that the Israeli intelligence would reject. (The latter apparently has been using internally the Gaza Ministry of Health's numbers, which the Israeli government repeatedly has called to question.) In other words, Israeli army data confirm that it is striking civilian targets and Netanyahu is lying about the civilian-military death ratio in Gaza.

But there is another contradiction in the official Israeli narrative that these data are revealing. Hamas, by Israeli estimates, had at least 30,000 fighters before the war. If we are to believe the Israeli army claims that it has cleared Hamas from the areas it has invaded in the Gaza Strip and that Rafah is the "last Hamas stronghold", that means at least 10,000 were in Rafah in January when Palestinians were still being told this city was a safe zone.

If, as Israel likes to claim, Hamas uses human shields, then Israel is simply admitting that it is pushing the civilian population into areas where they will be targeted because Hamas is there. It turns out, in this war on reality, that Israel can simultaneously say that they are evacuating civilians to safety while saying Hamas uses them as human shields. Somehow, Hamas is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Beneath these lies is the formula for the real truth

that Israel operates by: Where Hamas goes, civilians go, where civilians go, Hamas goes. To defeat Hamas, we must also remove civilians. It is no secret that the Israeli government has been planning and lobbying to have Palestinians expelled to the Sinai Peninsula. As early as late October, a document from Israel's Ministry of Intelligence emerged in which the deportation of the Palestinian population of Gaza to Egyptian territory was clearly outlined.

Netanyahu was quick to dismiss the document as a "concept paper" and downplay its contents. But one has to wonder what he was thinking of when he stumbled on the words "plenty of areas" in the ABC interview. Could it be the real estate plans that are being drawn up for development of new Jewish settlements in viscerated Gaza or the conference his ministers attended calling for Israeli resettlement of the strip? Over the past four months, more than two million Palestinians have been squeezed farther and farther south closer to Egypt. Meanwhile, the "safety" and "evacuation" rhetoric of the Israeli army and government has served as a convenient cover for where this is going. Israel's evacuation orders have been a performance for the international community to try to demonstrate that Israel is complying with its obligations under international law. The same is true of their evacuation maps, their leaflet drops, the "precision" strikes, the "safe zones". These all form part of the "technologies of genocide" designed to make another Nakba easier for Israel and more palatable for Israel's allies and the international community. Indeed, they are part of the window dressing that helps US President Joe Biden trivialise Israel's genocidal campaign as "a bit over the top". In the war on reality, truth falls victim to political ideology, and disinformation conflicts with other disinformation. "War is peace, Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength." Add to this quote from George Orwell's classic 1984, "Nakba is safety", for that is the reality that has been foisted upon Palestinians in Gaza.

Aljazeera

## Ethnic cleansing now the most likely outcome in Gaza

Chris Doyle

**W**ILL an Israeli assault on Rafah be the final bloody slaughter to cap the destruction of Gaza? More than 1.3 million Palestinians, including 610,000 children, have been forcibly corralled into the ever-shrinking, unsanitary hellhole of this small city on the Gazan border with Egypt.

They now await their fate. Most have been displaced as many as five or six times in what is now comfortably the largest forced displacement in Palestinian history. Many are eating grass or animal feed and drinking foul water. Rafah is the last place of semi-refugee in Gaza, but also the primary gateway for the lifesaving aid that permits this ghostly Palestinian existence to continue - for now.

This Israeli threat escalated at the tail end of yet another fruitless Antony Blinken mission to the region. The chief American diplomat has made five trips to the Middle East since Oct. 7 but has come away empty-handed every time. If he feels embarrassed at the way Benjamin Netanyahu manhandles him, he has been trying hard not to show it. After yet another bruising encounter with the Israeli prime minister, Blinken was both late and tired when he appeared for his press conference. While Blinken said that Hamas' response to a US-Egyptian-Qatari proposal left possibilities for a deal, Netanyahu crushed all hope once again by stating this was "delusional." Instead of a deal on the release of hostages and a ceasefire, Palestinians were left contemplating the prospect of yet more mass carnage.

The dominant question for all of them is: where to next? Israeli spokespeople just cannot or will not answer that simple and obvious question. Netanyahu has instructed the Israeli military to provide him with options on this.

Where can the Palestinian civilians in Rafah go? Do they get given some corridor to travel north, to the center of Gaza? But where is safe? The roads are bombed and cratered. The Gaza Strip is littered with unexploded ordnance and buildings on the brink of collapse. Humanitarian agencies have no means of preparing safe shelters in these areas. Any major attack on Rafah would be hammering yet another nail into the already well-nailed coffins of the hostages left in Gaza. Most Israelis have come to the conclusion that Netanyahu cares not a jot for their welfare.

When might this happen? This is not clear. No doubt Israel will further torture those in Rafah by keeping them guessing. Based on previous experience, the Israeli army will give them a two-hour warning. Israeli forces are bombing Rafah as it is, so it is not safe even now. Egypt has reportedly warned Hamas that Israel is giving it two weeks to give up the remaining hostages before starting operations in Rafah. If there is to be an evacuation of hundreds of thousands from this area, even two weeks may not be enough time. Remember, thousands more are now injured and sick than when

many were forced to evacuate the north last year.

Egypt has feared this moment, not just since October, but for years. Egyptian leaders know full well that Israel has dreamed of dumping Gaza or the Palestinians of Gaza on Egypt. The desire to wash Israel's bloodied hands of its responsibility for their fate is clear. Egypt has threatened to suspend its peace agreement with Tel Aviv if this goes ahead.

A few mild expressions of concern from American and European leaders have made their way into the public domain. The EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, stated that an Israeli military offensive on Rafah "would lead to an unspeakable humanitarian catastrophe and grave tensions with Egypt." German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said: "The people in Gaza cannot disappear into thin air." British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said he is "deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah." It hardly adds up to serious pressure on Israel.

But what about US President Joe Biden? He has just stated that Israel has gone "over the top." Pressure is growing, including from within his own administration, to go much further and read the riot act. Netanyahu is treating him with contempt and needs to be shown that he cannot get away with it. The US has a myriad of options at its disposal to display serious displeasure if Biden has the courage. Statements will not be enough. They never have been.

International leaders need to rid themselves of the delusion that Netanyahu has ever wanted any form of deal with Hamas. He has always pushed for what he deems to be "total victory." Absent a massive amount of coordinated American and European pressure, which has never looked like materializing, Netanyahu has zero political or personal interest in harnessing himself to an agreement that sees the survival of Hamas, an entity he has sworn to destroy. The general Israeli public would almost certainly breach one, if not two or even three, of those rulings: the first to avoid genocide, the second to facilitate humanitarian aid and the third to preserve and not destroy evidence of genocide. But alongside genocide, what Palestinians also fear is the ethnic cleansing of Gaza. How long will it be before Israel creates a breach in the Egyptian border wall and drives thousands into the Sinai? It would be a dream fulfilled to expel hundreds of thousands. For some, this may have seemed far-fetched when many observers, including myself, pitched this as a plausible scenario back in October. Frankly, it is fast becoming the most likely outcome.

## Will Russia be an artificial intelligence disinformation victim or perpetrator?

**I**N the course of a few weeks between November and December of 2022, the release of ChatGPT-3 and Midjourney v4 put the incredible power of generative AI in the hands of tens of millions of people. Suddenly they could produce human-sounding text or create ultra-realistic scandalous imagery with only a short prompt. With no limits on who could sign up, the AI boom seemed to portend a disinformation boom, especially dire this year as over two billion voters could head to the polls in "The Year of Elections."

But for all this potential, Russian propagandists have little to show for the new tech. Hindered by a prevailing view of generative AI as a threat to be contained, Russia has concentrated on defending against AI rather than leveraging the technology for offensive

purposes. With a presidential election a little more than a month away, the focus is on how to prevent the spread of AI-generated fakes rather than how to turn them on enemies. However, history has shown that Russia's response to perceived information threats often serves as the catalyst for its most aggressive tactics.

Last June, a shocking broadcast appeared on Channel One, NTV, and Russia-1 that appeared to show President Vladimir Putin announcing that the Ukrainians had broken through the lines and invaded Kursk and Belgorod. He was declaring martial law and ordering an immediate general mobilization. Neither the emotion on his face nor the movement of his lips quite matched his words, tipping off to most viewers the video's artificial origin. Russia responded with its own fake of

Valery Zaluzhny, commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, ordering a coup to topple President Volodymyr Zelensky. But the incident made protection against AI-generated fakes a top priority for the Kremlin. A similar AI-clone of Putin appeared at a live press conference in December, which Putin used as an opportunity to warn about "the danger to humanity" AI could pose.

Ahead of this year's presidential election - where the main measure of success will be turnout as Putin faces no serious challenge - Russian experts warn of a flood of AI-generated "disinformation". "The absolute majority, 87 percent of Russians, understand that an information war is being waged," declared the head of political research at the VTSIOM, a polling firm, at a panel on

Ben Dubow

"fakes" last November. "The task of discrediting the authorities through destabilizing civil society is a priority" for Russia's enemies, explained Alexander Asafov of the Civic Chamber at the same event. This week, Vzgl'yad interviewed an expert to prepare voters for fakes emanating from "the US information war against Russia," while Rozkomnadzor will be banning VPNs, a popular method for Russians to reach ChatGPT, starting March 1. Russia's response to this supposed information war has been feeble. In December, the cybersecurity firm Recorded Future detailed the Doppelganger network, which Meta disabled and described as the "largest and the most aggressively persistent Russian-origin operation." The network was huge, with fully-fledged fake

new sites pretending to be reputed sources, likely with the support of generative AI, and promoted by over 2,000 social media accounts. Despite these efforts, only a "negligible" number of people viewed the fraudulent sites, and few of the accounts that amplified the propaganda had any followers.

The weakness of AI-backed Russian information operations reflects the weakness of Russian AI generally, which lags far behind its competitors in the United States or China leading to far lower adoption rates. Whereas 69% of American companies use generative AI, only 20% of Russian companies do, and those that do are more likely to use the nominally banned ChatGPT than home-grown competitors. But Russia lagging behind competitors in transformational information technology follows a familiar pattern. It was the convic-

tion that Western social media had orchestrated mass protests against Putin's election in 2012 that spurred much of Russia's information warfare against Western elections throughout the 2010s.

With Russian analysts and major outlets already laying the groundwork to blame any hitches in March's vote on AI-powered interference, the regime may well invest heavily in potential retaliatory measures. That could spell serious trouble for elections this year in the United States, United Kingdom, the European Parliament and elsewhere around the globe. Or, with Russian tech talent largely living in exile, and a population at home with far less exposure to generative AI, Russia may find that the anticlimactic performance of Doppelganger is now the best it can hope for.

The Moscow Times



# Headline-grabbing climate protests can be good for democracy

**YES, environmental activists can be irritating when they make a nuisance of themselves and overplay their self-righteousness. There is a trend among them - that is growing in both numbers and influence - that has reached the conclusion, whether strategically or out of despair, probably both, that only shock tactics and disruptive antics will shake up a complacent society when it comes to the looming climate change catastrophe.**

In response to such actions, it has been the Conservative administration in the UK that has led the pack of governments enacting anti-democratic legislation to deter people from joining the ranks of these environmental protesters. These activists are now more likely to be stopped and harassed by police and, on occasion, even muzzled by the courts, regardless of whether their protests are peaceful or not. As a result, there is a real danger of conflating the irritating with the illegal.

There are several legitimate questions that can be raised regarding how protests are generally conducted and how they are perceived by the wider public. Their legality is an important consideration and cannot just be dismissed by protesters in the name of saving the planet. On the other hand, trivializing the climate change discourse could lead people, especially the younger generation, to conclude that their concerns on an issue that determines their future are being ignored and, hence, they gradually blur the lines between what is legal and what is not.

For a minority of them, the legitimacy of their cause, combined with a sense of urgency, leads them to believe that it justifies breaking the law, or at least stretching it. But this risks backfiring and driving away the very people they would like to attract to their ranks. For those activists who are highly invested in the issue and believe that the end of planet Earth

is just around the corner, the somewhat relaxed attitude of the wider public is terrifying and the need to change this has become a burning desire. The fact that many of them are young, sometimes very young - take, for instance, Greta Thunberg and her environmental warriors - means that there is plenty of unarticulated energy waiting to explode. The names of some of these organizations are also telling

***Yet, a democracy should be able to tolerate these protests, within reason, and cherish the fact that people care about the future well-being of their societies without imposing draconian legislation or police practices that compromise the very basic rights of freedom of speech and peaceful assembly.***

regarding their cataclysmic implications, such as Extinction Rebellion and Last Generation. Their vision of where the current situation is leading does not greatly differ from what most scientists predict.

Admittedly, many of us feel quite uncomfortable when we see protesters throwing soup at the "Mona Lisa" at the Louvre in Paris, even if we sympathize with their call for "healthy and sustainable food" and are aware that, for many years, this much-targeted classic painting has been protected by bulletproof glass and a sophisticated alarm system. Others are irritated when road traffic is halted by activists, flights are delayed by protesters gluing their hands to the runway or the entrance to the headquarters of an energy industry giant is occupied by a chanting crowd. Yet, a democracy should be able to tolerate these protests, within reason, and cherish the fact that people care about the future well-being of their societies without imposing draconian legislation or police

practices that compromise the very basic rights of freedom of speech and peaceful assembly.

Sometimes, police in the UK and their political masters have been too eager to act. This month, Thunberg and four other environmental activists, who were charged with public order offenses over a protest in London, were cleared after a judge ruled that they had no case to answer. It was an obvious

case of police officers using neither judgment nor common sense when applying Section 14 of the 1986 Public Order Act. This is a very dangerous piece of legislation that can curtail protests almost entirely on the whim of any police officer. It was not surprising, then, that Michel Forst, the UN special rapporteur on environmental defenders, last month warned that, despite our planet's triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, we are seeing "severe crack-downs on environmental defenders in the United Kingdom, including in relation to the exercise of the right to peaceful protest." It is inconceivable and very worrying that peaceful protesters in the UK could be jailed for up to 10 years for the criminal offense of being a "public nuisance."

In December, a climate protester who participated in a slow march along a public road for about half an hour was sentenced to six months in prison under the Public Order Act 2023. Again, this protester was probably a nuisance, but

half a year's incarceration for being a nuisance raises the possibility of a huge spate of imprisonments - and not only of climate change protesters. What also prompted Forst's scathing criticism was a judge who prevented peaceful environmental protesters from explaining the context of their actions and outlining their motivations to the jury in their case, including mentioning the climate crisis, fuel poverty or even the history of civil disobedience as a valid democratic tool against arbitrary decisions by government.

As with all issues that have a significant impact on the nature and future of our societies - let alone, in this case, our very existence - there is a need for an inclusive global dialogue among all those affected by environmental pollution, climate change and biodiversity. This is especially the case as there is a massive difference between how these issues affect people's health, livelihoods, shelter and life expectancy in different parts of the world, along with their resources and ability to respond to these challenges. The UK, as other countries, has a long tradition of nonviolent political activity and protest that has led to positive change, such as universal suffrage, improvements in workers' rights and legislation for race and gender equality. In recent decades, however, there have been general complaints about political apathy, especially among the youth. Perhaps young people once thought that there was no cause worth fighting for, but climate change has changed this.

The test of a democracy is for us to be able to hear things that make us uncomfortable, to see things that upset us and sometimes to have our lives disrupted without these activities being criminalized. Fighting climate change can sometimes divide our societies, but it is also an opportunity to galvanize citizens around a common cause, which in the process could also make our democratic system more robust.

Arab News

# Arrest of Cambodian commentator sparks outcry

**A Cambodian social commentator has been charged with incitement and jailed in a remote prison after criticizing a government minister on Facebook, sparking an outcry from human rights organizations amid other recent arrests of dissidents. Ny Nak, a 46-year-old seller of organic fertilizers and other agricultural products, runs a popular Cambodian Facebook page called IMan-KH. Interspersed with sales deals and tips for growing healthy crops, Nak fires off posts about politics and the Cambodian government to about 425,000 followers.**

The current incident dates back to a December 11 article published by the exiled online media outlet Cambodia Daily that identified Labor Minister Heng Sour as the recipient of a 91-hectare land giveaway. Nak speculated on Facebook the land would be used to build factories for Labor and Vocational Training Ministry officials. Over the next few days, both a Labor Ministry official and Prime Minister Hun Manet publicly denied that the minister had received the land and said it was intended for a different individual with the same name. On December 17, after the denials, Nak posted again, asking: "What achievements has Heng Sour done for the Khmer nation, that the government gave him forest land as his personal property? RIP Khmer forests." Nak was arrested on January 5, after Sour, the labor minister, filed a defamation complaint against him, ministry spokesperson Katta Orn told VOA.

His words "affected the fame and dignity of the minister" and disseminated "untrue information with ill intention to incite and confuse public opinion," Orn said. Nak, who has previous arrests, faces charges of defamation and incitement, punishable with up to three years of jail time, which could be doubled because of a prior conviction clause. On January 28, he was transferred to Correctional Center 3, located more than 150 kilometers from Phnom Penh, near the Vietnamese border. A spokesperson for the Department of Prisons at the Ministry of Interior, Nuth Savna, told VOA that Nak was transferred because of overcrowding. "Over there, freedom is tightly restricted. He has more psychological stress," Nak's wife, Sok Synet, 42, told VOA. "His health is not good."

Human rights groups emphasized that defamation does not, on its own, carry a jail sentence under Cambodian law, and that citizens should be able to question official narratives without fearing imprisonment. "Citizens shouldn't be thrown in jail for criticizing the actions of their government or publicly raising important issues,"

Naly Pilorge, outreach director at Cambodian human rights organization Licadho said. "To throw Ny Nak in prison again over Facebook comments, and then transfer him to a prison far away from his family, is an abuse of the legal system," she said. Phil Robertson, deputy director for Human Rights Watch's Asia division, struck a similar chord. "The persecution

ushered in a wave of new officials, many of whom are family relations of the prior generation. Pilorge told VOA that Nak's arrest "reveals that the new government leaders appear the same as their predecessors in their willingness to misuse institutions to silence active, outspoken citizens." She pointed to at least four other arrests in January of opposition figures from the Candlelight Party before

***Human rights groups emphasized that defamation does not, on its own, carry a jail sentence under Cambodian law, and that citizens should be able to question official narratives without fearing imprisonment.***

of Ny Nak shows that Hun Manet will not tolerate any sort of critical public criticism from anyone, no matter how big or small," he told VOA. "He seems determined to intimidate everyone, ranging from individual activists to civil society groups and organized political opposition parties."

"Manet's message to ordinary Cambodians is sit down and shut up, or else," Robertson added. The family's income has dropped by more than half since Nak's arrest, Synet said, in part because police seized the phones the couple used to sell fertilizer products. She said she is worried about traveling so far to see him, as well as keeping up with payments for their daughter's university education. "It's far, and I need to spend more money when I go to visit him," she said. Nak has faced government backlash before. In 2020, he was arrested and ultimately served 18 months for parodying a speech by former prime minister Hun Sen, replacing words about a COVID-19 state of emergency with references to his chicken coop. Last September, Nak and Synet were assaulted by a group of men wielding metal batons while driving their motorbike in the capital. Nak was heavily beaten in the head and said that he believed the attack was related to his criticism of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, which the ministry denied. The incident bore a resemblance to six other assaults against opposition members that occurred throughout last year, before Cambodia's July national election, during which attackers allegedly beat supporters of the Candlelight Party with extendable metal batons on motorbikes.

Candlelight was considered the only viable opposition to Hun Sen's ruling Cambodian People's Party but was barred from participating in the election. Hun Manet, Hun Sen's son, became prime minister the following month in a

the February 25 Senate election, when local officials are to vote for new senators. Three Cambodian human right activists were arrested in Thailand on February 2 after fleeing political persecution in Cambodia.

The Phnom Penh Appeal Court also recently upheld the conviction of former Candlelight vice president Thach Setha and rejected a request from another prominent former opposition leader, Kem Sokha, to review the conditions of his house arrest after he was convicted of treason last March. The arrests also come as Hun Manet, about six months into his appointment as prime minister, tries to project an image of "certainty and strength" and repair Western relationships, Katrin Travouillon, a senior lecturer and Cambodia expert at the Australian National University, told VOA. "They've invested a lot in lobbying efforts and changing their rhetoric and improving their image, but I don't see that it's accompanied by any substantive changes, especially when it comes to handling domestic critiques," Travouillon said. "You just find repetition of the same patterns."

Robertson said Hun Manet's "global charm offensive" drew a stark contrast with the recent spate of arrests. "Whether he is continuing his father's repressive legacy or acting out of his own conviction doesn't really matter," Robertson told VOA. "The bottom line is virtually all civil and political freedoms are harshly restricted, and those daring to defy Manet get smashed with harsh criminal sentences." Synet, Nak's wife, said her husband had rejected her plea to apologize and join the ruling party, as other government critics have done in the past. In a Facebook update she posted on his behalf, Nak said he would stay firm. "I will not apologize in order to be released," the post said. "I will be in jail until the sentence is finished."

VOA

# EU's migration policies and end of human rights in Europe

**IN January, Greek Prime Minister Kiriakos Mitsotakis featured prominently at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Among the various topics, he was asked to comment on was migration. "Greece has probably managed the migration problem better than most other European countries," he said confidently in an interview with CNN's Richard Quest on the sidelines of the forum. "We won a resounding victory [in the elections] partly because we succeeded in managing the migration through a tough but fair migration policy."**

But this "tough but fair migration policy" resulted in the death of more than 500 people, including 100 children, in a single incident of a migrant boat sinking off the Greek coast near Pylos on June 14. The Greek coastguard has been accused of causing what is considered one of the worst maritime disasters in the Mediterranean by attempting to tow the boat to Italian territorial waters.

The Greek authorities have denied responsibility and instead arrested nine of the survivors, blaming them for causing the shipwreck. As Mitsotakis headed for Davos, the investigation was closed and handed to the prosecution, after requests by the survivors' lawyers to consider important evidence in their defence were rejected. The injustice and shocking disregard for human life in this story are not an aberration, but the culmination of a policy of systematic denial of protection and violation of the rights of refugees. And they are also reflected in the new migration pact the European Union has just concluded.

The tragic stories of death at European borders and the lack of action on them indicate the direction in which Europe is headed, united under a far-right "law and order" flag and racist anti-migrant policies. It is towards a dark future in which human rights will come to an end. The issue of

migration has always been a useful political tool and one of the cornerstones of the far right in Europe. But in the past decade, the rest of the political spectrum has also increasingly instrumentalised and gradually adopted it in a desperate attempt to improve declining electoral fortunes. As a result, European migration policies have taken a sharp turn to the right, reflecting more and more closely the far right's racist agenda and a rhetoric of exclusion of non-Europeans.

The new "Migration Pact" of the EU is a case in point. The European Parliament and the European Council reached a provisional agreement on it five days before Christmas. Roberta Metsola, the president of the European Parliament, called it a "historic day"; human rights organisations called it a "disaster". On February 8, EU member states approved it, and it is now pending final formal endorsement by the EU Parliament and the European Council. The regulations that the pact will introduce will cover all stages of the asylum process: from screening asylum seekers upon arrival and collection of biometric data to rules for determining which member state is responsible for handling their applications. The provisions, which are meant to "fundamentally change how we deal with migration and asylum", however, contain numerous gaps which allow for abuse and further strengthening of violent policies at EU borders.

Rights organisations have pointed out that the pact can usher in the detention of asylum seekers, including families with children, in prison-like facilities; lead to more violence by border authorities; and allow deportation to unsafe third countries. It will not provide a safe and dignified path to the asylum-seeking procedure that could save lives and it will not prevent tragedies like the Pylos shipwreck from repeating. Instead, as

Amnesty International notes, the new pact will result in "a surge in suffering on every step of a person's journey to seek asylum" in Europe.

Additionally, countries like Poland and Hungary have rejected the relocation mechanism, under which they would have to accept refugees. The pact gives them the alternative option to pay 20,000 euros (\$21,550) per refugee; in other words, they can pay their way out of their obligations under European and international law. This means not only that there will be an even heavier burden put on countries at the EU's external borders, but that basic legal norms on the protection of refugees are being eroded.

Overall, the migration pact reflects a tendency within the EU to shrink the scope of international law to the point where it becomes irrelevant to those whom it was created to protect. Failing to put in place a common European asylum system with clear rules and regulations, not lifting the pressure from entrance countries, further militarising border control, and outsourcing the problem of migration to third countries reflect the EU's continuing effort to dodge its obligations under international law towards asylum seekers.

The long-term effect of ignoring and downplaying international legal norms is the potential collapse of the global international system, which would mean the end of the human rights regime as we know it. Another disturbing aspect of Europe's migration pact asylum policy is that it discriminates between people seeking asylum. The EU announced that its provisions will not apply to Ukrainian refugees. In other words, Brussels officially applies international law selectively; it openly declares that people of a certain race are deserving of a pathway to safety and others are not.

This is all the more egregious considering that the migration pact

is meant to keep away people fleeing conflict and other crises in Africa and the Middle East, which European countries are often directly involved in. By clearly and formally discriminating between who is deserving of a safe and legal route of asylum-seeking and migration and who is not, the EU is setting a dangerous precedent. Discrimination over the right to request protection under international law and the allocation of different rights for different groups opens the door to legal apartheid.

It appears the EU has appointed itself as the arbiter of who has the right to life and dignity and who does not. This is apparent in its reaction to the war in Gaza as well. Europe has turned a blind eye to the accusations of genocide in Gaza, as European countries continue selling weapons to Israel and parroting its outrageous argument about "its right to self-defence" from a population it occupies.

It is important to note here that among the most fervent pro-Israeli forces in Europe is the far right which is using the war in Gaza to push its agenda, promote ideas of cultural war, and whitewash its anti-Semitism. Support for the far right is surging in Europe and that is not because of "illegal migration" as some EU officials, like Ylva Johansson, commissioner for home affairs, have claimed. It is because European "centrist conservatives", like Mitsotakis, have embraced the far right's agenda for their own narrow political and economic interests.

This will certainly be reflected in the upcoming European parliamentary elections scheduled for June. If there is no profound overhaul of the antihuman and inhumane direction European politics and policies are taking, the future of the EU looks very dark. As it stands now, we are on a straight path towards a Europe where the Viktor Orbán, Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pens will have a much stronger say about what is on the agenda and what is not.

# What Palestinians in Gaza teaching Muslims worldwide

**THE oppression and atrocities inflicted against Palestinians in Gaza have left us horrified. And indeed, we should be. Everything they have suffered has gone against human dignity, there is no doubt about that. And yet, something else has been on full display in this very horrific time of genocide and exploitation, where people are being brutally tortured and killed: the resilience and faith of a people who refuse to concede.**

Not only has their faith in God and conviction in their values remained unshaken - they have only increased in their dedication and resolve. We have seen this again and again, witness accounts of people in Gaza reaffirming their love of God and for the Prophet Muhammad, and using their beliefs as comfort during the most desperate circumstances. Of course, Palestinians in Gaza should not be put into this position in the first place. They should not need to demonstrate such resolve and strength. What is needed is an urgent end to the war. The global community, and especially the US and the collective West, have much to answer for. Yet, the people of Gaza are teaching Muslims worldwide invaluable lessons. In the face of adversity, the resolve of the people of Gaza can inspire us to not despair nor succumb to pressure to compromise on our beliefs and commitment

to our faith.

This is a huge lesson for many of us in the United States, where Muslims are also being tested, as hate crimes and Islamophobia have increased, especially since the war broke out. If we take a page from their book, we'll be reading something which is nothing short of a miracle. In the face of utter and total destruction, Palestinians are standing up and saying, "Allah is our Lord." They are standing up and performing mass funeral prayers. They are still observing the tenets of Islam, even if it means using rainwater to perform ritual ablutions before prayer. They are standing up and still perform the call to prayer. These are people who have either been killed or have suffered the killings of their loved ones. Many are simply waiting to die. They don't know what's going to happen to them. There is a lot they are showing us as history unfolds before our eyes. At the forefront, we see that Israel's persecution of the people of Gaza is wrong. It is heinous. It is inhumane, and we should say that. We should speak about it and try to stop it as far as we can. We need to protest. At the very least, we should pray for them.

But we also gain a unique perspective. There are Muslims all over the world being persecuted. We could

very well point to Muslims who are hurting everywhere - whether in Kashmir, China, Myanmar, Somalia, Yemen, or Bosnia. Far too often, there is no help in sight. But Palestinians have shown their oppressors, "Hey, give me your best punch. I'll stand in the ring. I won't fall. My faith will become stronger." This is the lesson we need to learn, especially in places like the US. Yes, we experience struggles, we may be looked at with suspicion, people may taunt us and insult us. But perhaps we can adopt a different perspective. While there are legitimate concerns, they pale in comparison to the suffering of Palestinians. Through this humongous tragedy, Muslims throughout the world are on the same page - that this is wrong. We're united on this, which is something to appreciate. In the Quran, we are reminded of the importance of patience and perseverance in the face of adversity. The people of Gaza embody these virtues, refusing to be broken by the trials they face. Their unwavering resolve is a testament to the strength of the human spirit. Despite the unimaginable suffering they endure, they continue to resist, their faith serving as a source of strength and courage. They refuse to be silenced, even in the face of unimaginable hardship. Their unwavering faith serves as a beacon of hope for Muslims worldwide.

# At WGS, Artificial Intelligence dominated more than just discussions

**AS the World Governments Summit concluded in Dubai on Wednesday, after its various forums spent nearly three days delving deep into a comprehensive agenda, there was widespread agreement that - in a sign of the times - one theme dominated most discussions from curtain raiser to closing remarks: artificial intelligence.**

This shouldn't be surprising. As we have learned every day since last year, AI is not - and will not be - a standalone topic: it is going to influence every aspect of our lives. As one leading UAE official put it, AI will impact us in the same way that the invention of the wheel did, with so many applications already in use and much uncharted territory ahead: from curing cancers, to space exploration, to better understanding the human mind - about which, despite all our knowledge,

we still comprehend so little.

One thing we must do is to take AI out of the traditional "capital vs. labor" discussion, as one senior technology company officer explained to me. We must accept that there will be a huge impact on future jobs, and move beyond that to the bigger picture of what AI means for all of humanity, and specifically for our region. As it stands, we Arabs - particularly Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE - are well placed to be at the heart of the AI revolution. We have three competitive edges: a young population with curious, global minds; huge resources to deploy; and governments that are making this a priority. The UAE has the world's first AI minister, and officials in Saudi Arabia have often spoken of the need to be at the forefront of technology. It is a

priority because they understand that whoever masters this will have an edge for the rest of the century.

In fact, at last year's World Governments Summit a senior official said during a private briefing that competition and cooperation between countries would no longer be over geopolitics, but technopolitics. The 5G conflict is an example, information warfare another. In his opening remarks on Monday, the UAE Minister of Cabinet Affairs Mohammed Al-Gergawi gave the audience a glimpse of what AI had already achieved in just one year. Its capacity for learning has multiplied 1,000-fold, for example, and that trajectory will continue exponentially. However, there is a flip side: the number of deep fakes has tripled in a year, with 500,000 on social media last year. This, too,

Faisal J. Abbas





## Prices of essential kitchen items fall by 0.78 pc

ISLAMABAD (APP): The prices of essential kitchen items eased as the weekly inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed a decrease of 0.78 per cent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on February 15, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 315.18 points as compared to 317.65 points during the past week. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 34.25

per cent. The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups.

The SPI for the lowest consumption group up to Rs. 17,732, decreased by 0.78 percent and went down to 307.99 points from last week's 310.42 points.

The SPI for consumption groups from Rs. 17,732-22,888, Rs. 22,889-29,517; Rs. 29,518-44,175 and above Rs. 44,175, decreased by 0.82 percent, 0.72 percent, 0.77 and 0.77 percent respectively. During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 22 (43.14%) items increased, 11 (21.57%) items decreased and 18 (35.29%) items remained stable.

The items, which recorded a decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included eggs (28.82%), chicken (4.23%), onions (3.48%), LPG (2.85%), gur (1.13%), wheat flour (0.32%), tomatoes (0.29%), pulse masoor (0.28%) and mustard oil (0.18%). The items that recorded an increase in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included bananas (4.64%), potatoes (2.80%), match box (1.31%), long cloth (1.29%), cooked daal (0.77%), shirting (0.63%), energy saver (0.62%), pulse moong & rice basmati (0.56%) each, mutton (0.48%), cooked beef (0.39%) and pulse mash (0.35%).

## Gold rates up by Rs.1,300 to Rs.212,400 per tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs.1,300 and was sold at Rs.212,400 in the local market on Friday against its sale at Rs.211,100 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat also increased by Rs.1,115 to Rs.182,099 from Rs.180,984 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs.166,924 from Rs.165,902, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram silver remained unchanged at Rs2,580 and Rs.2,211.93 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$12 to \$2,025 against its sale at \$2,013 the previous day, the Association reported.



LAHORE: A vendor wearing bangles to a girl at Province Capital.

## Ambassador assures cooperation for making ICCI BOC successful

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates Faisal Niaz Tirmizi Friday said that his Embassy would extend all possible cooperation to Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry in making the Business Opportunities Conference (BOC) a landmark event.

Talking to President ICCI Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, who called on him, the ambassador lauded ICCI for organizing the next edition of its BOC in Dubai in the first week of March 2024, said a press release received here today.

The Ambassador said that Pakistan and UAE have great potential to strengthen business relations and set up joint ventures. He stressed that a series of BOC-like events should be organized by the Pakistani Chambers of Commerce in UAE to explore all untapped areas of bilateral cooperation and expand

economic relations.

He said that his Embassy would extend all possible cooperation to ICCI in making the BOC a landmark event. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that ICCI has already held successful BOCs in Turkey, Malaysia, and Azerbaijan and the Chamber has planned to organize the next edition of BOC in Dubai, which is a hub of business and investment activities.

He said that a 160-member delegation of ICCI representing real estate, construction, IT, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, food processing and packaging, light engineering, logistics, franchising, tourism, and other sectors would attend the BOC and Award Ceremony.

He said that both countries have great potential to further enhance bilateral trade and economic relations. He hoped that ICCI BOC would provide a

good platform for the private sectors of both countries to hold B2B meetings, exchange ideas, develop strong business linkages, and explore opportunities for business and investment collaborations in areas of interest.

He said that ICCI would also organize a small exhibition of Pakistani products on the sidelines of BOC to show their export potential. He said that representatives of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and other prominent businessmen and investors of the UAE would be invited to the BOC.

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari also met with Ambassador Javed Malik, President, Dubai Diplomat Business Club, and took him on board to make the ICC BOC in Dubai a successful event for Pakistan. Javed Malik appreciated ICCI for organizing its BOC in Dubai and assured his cooperation to make it successful.

## Shipping Activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Four ships, Maersk Cape town, Sea Span Beacon, MU Dan Song and Al-Jassasiya scheduled to load/off load Containers, Iron ore and LNG, berthed at Container Terminal, Multi-Purpose Terminal and Eleny Terminal respectively on Thursday. Meanwhile two more ships, Han

He and Shimanami scheduled to load/offload Crude and Bentonite also arrived at outer anchorage of the port during last 24 hours.

A total of 09 ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them, an edible oil carrier 'Bow Endeavour' left the port on Friday morning and four more ships, Epic Sunter, Maersk Cape town, Sea Span Beacon and Khaipur are expected to sail on today afternoon.

Through put during last 24 hours stood at 153,077/tonnes, comprising 133,077 tonnes imports cargo and 20,390 tonnes export cargo, including containerized cargo carried in 2,730 Containers (1,740 TEUS Imports and 990 TEUS export) was handled at the port.

There are 11 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them a container vessel APL Minnesota & another ship Marine Aman carrying Containers and Palm oil are expected to take berth sat QICT and LCT on Friday.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

It Is Published Through This Notice That I, Riaz Ullah Khan S/o Malik Nasrullah Khan Resident of Khyber Roar House no 14/1 Street no 4 Mohallah Defence Officers Colony Peshawar Cantt Tehsil & District Peshawar Is The owner of Plot no 166 Size 11.1 Marla Sector VII Phase I.K.D.A Kohat. He Has Requested That The .Original Pepars. Of The said Plot Has Been Lost Some Where and Now Issuance of Duplicate Pepars. is Desired. The Plot Is not Mortgaged There Has Been Appointed no Attorney. And not Sold To Anybody If Any Bank /Institution/Firm or Person Has any objections. He /She Should Contact The. Housing Officer UADA Kohat Within 15 Days of Publication of This Notice. In Writing With Proof otherwise Duplicate Pepars Will Be Issued. and no objection will be Accepted (Director Urban Area KDA Kohat)

### PUBLIC NOTICE

IN The Court of Qaisar Khan Afridi Additional District Judge II/Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Dagar. Appeal. No. 121/13 Institution 4/11/2023. Date of hearing. 20/2/2024. Muslim Shah VS Nor Mohamad etc. Notice to no. 19/2. Fainda Khan s/o Mst K h a n k h e l a . 21. Bakht Zamin Khan s/o Walid Shah. 26. Said Wahab. 29. Bakht Biland .29A. Said Wali Shah sons of Fazal Wahab resident of Matwanay tehsel Gagra district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 20/2/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

## Chairman FBR and Member-IR (Operations) visited Large Taxpayers Office

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: Chairman FBR Mr. Malik Amjed Zubair Tiwana and Member-IR (Operations) Mir Badshah Khan Wazir visited Large Taxpayers Office, Karachi on 16-02-2024 and held meeting with Chief Commissioners-IR of Large Taxpayers Office, Karachi, Medium Taxpayers Office, Karachi, Corporate Tax Office, Karachi.

The meeting was also attended by Chief-IR (Operations) Mr. Arshad Nawaz Chheena and all Commissioners-IR posted at field formations based in Karachi. During the meeting, Chairman FBR evaluated the performance of field formations regarding revenue collection during the ongoing financial year. All Chief Commissioners-IR gave detailed presentation on the assigned budgetary targets and strategies adopted to meet them.

They also highlighted the cases where demanded tax was recovered after due legal proceedings. Mr. Tiwana emphasized upon the need to examine validity and legality of



input tax claimed by taxpayers to unearth cases of Tax fraud and fake/flying invoices and ensure recovery of Sales Tax evaded through fraudulent ways.

Keeping in view the importance of Broadening of Tax Base, Chairman FBR held a separate meeting with Chief Commissioners-IR of Regional Tax Office-I & II, Karachi to evaluate their performance and achieve-

ments of District Tax Officers. He directed them to go all out against those who are required to be registered with FBR but are not registered.

He also underscored the need to enforce returns of non-filers by adopting penal measures enshrined in Income Tax Ordinance, 2001.

Earlier, Chairman FBR also held a meeting with Chief Collectors and Collectors of Customs

Karachi at Customs House Karachi for the similar purpose. While Chairing the meeting, the Chairman commended the anti-smuggling operations of Pakistan Customs and encouraged them to continue their efforts for eliminating the menace. The meetings concluded with appreciation for field formations and Pakistan Customs for their dedicated efforts in meeting revenue targets for the current financial year.

## Engro Fertilizers achieves record urea production in 2023

### F.P Report

LAHORE: Engro Fertilizers, Pakistan's premier seed-to-harvest solutions provider, achieved record urea production of 2.3 million tons in 2023 to support the Government's efforts of ensuring affordable and abundant supplies for the farmers.

The Company was able to achieve this feat and continued to play a pivotal role towards enabling the food security of Pakistan, amidst the headwinds of tough macroeconomic conditions, imposition of a higher super tax and gas price hikes. Engro Fertilizers was additionally affected by steep Rupee devaluation as its 950,000 tons Base Plant is supplied gas under Petroleum Policy 2012

pricing, which is dollar-pegged due to its linkage with crude oil rate.

According to the latest annual results, Engro Fertilizers urea production surged by 18.3 percent compared to the year 2022 (1.95 million tons) due to improved operational performance of both EnVen and Base Plants. Consequently, the Company's urea sales witnessed an uptick by 20.3 percent to reach 2.32 million tons, while its market share also increased to 35 percent.

"The local fertilizer industry has ensured that farmers continue to benefit from lower domestic urea prices. The Maximum Retail Price (MRP) of urea stood at PKR 3,596/bag at year end, at a discount of 40

percent to international prices. This delta constitutes a contribution of approximately PKR 330 billion per annum towards farmer income in Pakistan," said a Company statement. The industry is also engaging dealers to support Government's initiatives to curb urea hoarding for market price manipulation, bolstering crop productivity, and farmer profitability.

In 2023, the robust domestic urea manufacturing industry enabled import substitution to the tune of USD 2.3 billion, including Engro Fertilizers' share of USD 835 million. Further, in 2023, the Company contributed nearly PKR 34.7 billion towards the national exchequer by way of Government taxes, duties,

and levies, compared to PKR 11.6 billion last year.

On a consolidated basis, Engro Fertilizers posted a profit after tax of PKR 26.2 billion with earnings per share (EPS) of PKR 19.61 in 2023, mainly on the back of increased production from long-term reliability projects, cost optimization, efficient working capital management and higher interest income.

To sustain domestic urea production levels and safeguard the food security of Pakistan, Engro Fertilizers and other major fertilizer manufacturers are investing heavily in Gas Pressure Enhancement Facilities (PEF) project. The expected share of Engro Fertilizers' capital expenditure in this project is over USD 100 million.

## Textile exports earn \$9.738 billion for Pakistan in 7 months

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan earned \$ 9,738,551 million from exports of textile products during the first seven months of the current financial year (2023-24), the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported here on Friday.

The exports of the product, however, witnessed a decline of 2.99 percent during July-January (2023-24) when compared to the exports of \$ 10,038,199 million during July-January (2022-23). The textile commodities that witnessed positive trade growth included raw cotton, the exports of which grew by 353.78 percent, from \$12.286 million last year to \$55.752 million this year. Likewise, the exports of cotton yarn increased by

49.04 percent, from \$ 449.418 million last year to \$ 669.824 million this year and towels by 2.29 percent, from \$ 582.833 million to \$ 596.203 million.

The textile commodities that witnessed negative growth include cotton cloth, exports of which declined by 11.34 percent, from \$1,225.348 million to \$1,086.396 million; cotton carded or combed by 37.19 percent, from \$0.947 million to \$0.595 million; yarn other than cotton yarn by 17.19 percent, from \$26.154 million to \$21.658 million, and knitwear by 8.36 percent, from \$ 2,801.777 million to \$ 2,567.577 million.

Likewise, the exports of bedware declined by 0.61 percent from \$ 1,639.104 million to \$ 1,629.184 mil-

lion, tents, canvas and tarpaulin by 5.21 percent, from \$74.122 million to \$70.258 million, ready-made garments by 5.79 percent, from \$ 2,125.680 million to \$ 2,002.663 million.

The exports of art, silk and synthetic textiles also decreased by 12.33 percent declining from \$239.209 million to \$209.723 million, madeup articles by 4.66 percent, from \$435.052 million to \$414.787 million whereas the exports of all other textile materials also went down by 2.89 percent, from \$426.270 million to \$413.931 million.

Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, the textile exports increased by 10.10 percent going up from \$ 1,321.761 million in January 2023 to \$ 1,455.300 million in

January 2024. On a month-on-month basis, the exports grew by 3.98 percent when compared to exports of \$ 1,399.655 million in December 2023.

The Trade deficit from July-December (2023-24) was recorded at \$11.148 billion as against the deficit of \$16.965 billion in July-December (2022-23), showing negative growth of 34.29 percent. During the period under review, the exports increased by 5.17 percent to \$14.981 billion compared to the exports of \$14.244 billion during the corresponding period of last year, according to the latest PBS data. On the other hand, the imports narrowed by 16.28 percent and were recorded at \$26.129 billion compared to \$31.209 billion last year.

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Global stocks rose to fresh records Thursday despite lackluster economic data that included negative growth reports from Britain and Japan that qualified both countries as in recession.

The US Commerce Department reported a bigger than expected 0.8 percent decline in January retail sales, a pullback after the holiday season that suggested possible vulnerability in consumers.

US indices were pressured in the early going, but "people woke up in the afternoon and saw the way things were moving and went with that trend," said Art Hogan of B. Riley Wealth Management. The broad-based S&P 500 finished up 0.6 percent at 5,029.73, an all-time high.

Meanwhile, eurozone stocks advanced despite the European Commission cutting growth forecasts while also trimming their inflation forecasts.

Both Paris and Frankfurt set new intraday and closing highs thanks to strong corporate results.

Carmakers drove the

Paris stock market upwards after Stellantis posted record 2023 profits as demand revved higher for new vehicles, one day after news of bumper annual earnings from rival Renault.

Renault and Stellantis saw their shares rally over five percent and topped the risers board.

Frankfurt stocks advanced strongly after Commerzbank revealed that higher interest rates had helped it achieve its biggest annual net profit in 15 years, sending shares in Germany's second-largest lender also up more than five percent.

London equities also advanced despite official data showing the UK entered recession at the end of last year, as high inflation prolonged a cost-of-living crisis for millions of Britons. UK gross domestic product shrank 0.3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2023 after contracting 0.1 percent in the prior three months. That places the British economy in recession, which is defined as

two quarters in a row of

falling GDP.

The weak data has driven fresh hopes that rate cuts may be forthcoming in the UK, and with Germany also teetering on the brink of a recession, that the eurozone may see rate cuts sooner than anticipated, said Chris Beauchamp, Chief Market Analyst at online trading platform IG.

Tokyo stocks rallied despite the data showing that the Japanese economy had also entered recession - and has been overtaken by Germany as the world's third-biggest economy.

Elsewhere, Taipei's Taix stocks hit a record high, fueled by a surge in chip giant Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) after it reported strong sales that lifted options demand for chips used for artificial intelligence.

New York - Dow: UP 0.9 percent at 38,773.12 (close)  
New York - S&P 500: UP 0.6 percent at 5,029.73 (close)  
New York - Nasdaq Composite: UP 0.3 percent at 15,906.17 (close)





## In brief

## India slapped with five-run penalty

RAJKOT (Agencies): India were penalised five runs after the umpire charged batsman Ravichandran Ashwin for running in the middle of the pitch in the third Test against England on Friday. Ashwin was reprimanded by on-field umpire Joel Wilson on the morning of day two in Rajkot and England will start their innings with five for no loss as a result of the offence. Ashwin attempted to argue his case with Wilson, who then put his arm around the batsman's shoulder and indicated five to signal the penalty. According to the laws of cricket, "deliberate or avoidable damage to the pitch" is an offence. "A batter will be deemed to be causing avoidable damage if either umpire considers that his/her presence on the pitch is without reasonable cause," the laws state. Ravindra Jadeja was warned for running on the pitch on the opening day.

## Triangular Blind Cricket Series

ISLAMABAD (APP): The second edition of the UAE Triangular Cricket Series for the Blind would kick off from February 22 to 25 at the ICC Cricket Academy Ground, Sports City, Dubai. Teams from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka would feature in the series conducted by Cricket Association for the Blind in India Samarthanam, World Blind Cricket Council and Well wishers of Blind Cricket in the UAE, said a press release issued here on Monday. Shabana Abdul Razak was the organizing committee Chairperson while other committee members include Secretary U Nagaraja Rau (Director Bhima UAE), Coordinators Fida Askar (Former Rajni Trophy Player), Suku, EK Radhakrishnan and Treasurer Anoop Ravi. World Blind Cricket Council Vice President and CABK Chairman, Rajanish Henry, expressed that the overwhelming support received from the UAE audience during the first edition of the UAE Triangular Cricket Series has inspired them to organize the second edition. Organizing international events of this nature contributes to creating an inclusive society, particularly through sports like cricket. This fosters increased connection between the visually impaired community and mainstream society. The triangular series offers visually impaired players an opportunity to showcase their talents, inspiring one another.

## Ashwin to take 500 Test wickets

RAJKOT (Agencies): Indian off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has become the second-fastest bowler to take 500 wickets in Test cricket during the first innings of the third Test against England here on Friday. Ashwin began the Rajkot Test on 499 wickets and dismissed Zak Crawley (15) to claim his 500th wicket, becoming the ninth bowler to achieve this feat. He took only 98 Tests to reach the landmark, which is the second-fastest, while Sri Lankan legend Muthiah Muralidaran is the fastest as he took only 87 Test matches. He is only the second Indian bowler to reach the milestone after fellow spinner Anil Kumble (619). Meanwhile, Ashwin also became the fifth spinner across the globe to join the elite 500-wicket club after Kumble, Muralidaran, Shane Warne and Nathan Lyon.



HAMILTON: It was the first Test series win for New Zealand over South Africa.

## Hafeez breaks silence after parting ways with PCB

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Former Pakistan captain Mohammad Hafeez opened up after parting ways with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) as the Director of the Pakistan Men's Team. Taking to X, formerly Twitter, Hafeez revealed that he was given the role for a four-month period which was cut short to months instead. He further asserted that he would "reveal all the cricketing and other amateur non-cricketing facts which ensure bad performances".

"I always prioritised and represented Pakistan with dignity and pride. I accepted the new role as a Director PCB with great passion to make positive

reforms but unfortunately my designated tenure which was offered by [PCB] for 4 years was cut short for 2 months on the account of new chairmanship," wrote Hafeez.

"Best wishes for Pakistan cricket future. As always, I foremost take responsibility and put myself accountable for all my executions in my given time and will accordingly reveal all the cricketing and other amateur non-cricketing facts which ensure bad performances. Stay tuned," he added.

Notably, in an official statement, released Thursday, the cricketing body revealed that it has parted ways with Hafeez.

"The Pakistan Cricket

Board extends heartfelt gratitude to Mohammad Hafeez, Director Pakistan men's cricket team, for his invaluable contributions," the statement read.

For the unversed, Mohammad Hafeez replaced Mickey Arthur as the Director of the Pakistan Men's Team in November, following Pakistan's failure to qualify for the semi-finals of the ICC World Cup 2023, held in India.

In his first assignment, Pakistan toured Australia for a three-match Test series and suffered a clean sweep, extending their losing streak Down Under.

Pakistan also lost to New Zealand 4-1 in the five-match T20I series.

## New Zealand win South Africa Test series for first time

HAMILTON (AFP) : New Zealand won a Test series against South Africa for the first time with Kane Williamson hitting an unbeaten century Friday to steer them to a seven-wicket victory in the second Test.

Williamson's unbeaten 133 was at the heart of their 269-3 in the fourth innings of a tight Test in Hamilton to complete a 2-0 series win over the understrength tourists. The Black Caps hadn't beaten the Proteas in 17 previous Test series dating back to 1931, having lost 13 and drawn four.

The 33-year-old Williamson was methodical throughout a 260-ball stay, putting on an unbroken stand of 152 with Will Young, who scored 60 not out, as New Zealand reached their target of 267 late on day four.

The in-form Williamson

scored his seventh century in his last seven Tests, which included twin tons in the 281-run first Test victory at Mount Maunganui.

His 32 centuries have come from 172 innings, surpassing Australia's Steve Smith (174 innings) as the fastest player in Test history to reach that milestone. Williamson batted through the day after New Zealand resumed at 40-1, adopting a disciplined approach on a tricky pitch, but was always prepared to punish loose deliveries, scoring 12 fours and two sixes.

New Zealand seamer Will O'Rourke finished with nine wickets on his Test debut to earn the man-of-the-match award with Williamson named player of the series. New Zealand briefly wobbled when opener Tom Latham was dismissed in the first session for 30 and Rachin

Ravindra soon after lunch for 20, but Young dug in to reach his seventh half-century.

The inexperienced Proteas struggled to make an impact aside from Dane Piedt, who finished with 3-93 to give him eight scalps in his first Test in more than four years. Offspinner Piedt struck early by removing Latham, the opener caught by Zubayr Hamza driving to short cover after adding nine to his overnight score.

Ravindra was undone by a near-identical shot after New Zealand had resumed the second session at 107-2.

South Africa were fielding a side missing the majority of their first-choice players, who skipped the series to instead contest their lucrative domestic Twenty20 league.

## Klopp denies quick returns caused Liverpool injuries

LONDON (AFP): Jurgen Klopp has rejected suggestions that Liverpool rushed players back too soon after Trent Alexander-Arnold, Thiago Alcantara and Dominik Szoboszlai all suffered setbacks after returning to action.

Alexander-Arnold will miss the League Cup final against Chelsea later this month because of a knee problem that recurred in last week's win over Burnley for the Premier League leaders. Thiago faces another spell on the sidelines after picking up an injury following an appearance as a late substitute in the defeat against Arsenal, while Szoboszlai has hurt his hamstring again.

"I got the news that there was a discussion we might have forced Trent back," Liverpool manager Klopp said on Friday. "He had two setbacks and it is really unfortunate, no one wants that. But different cases, different scenarios and as long as I'm here we never forced anyone back

and we will never do.

"We work in a high-performance area and if you have the same injury you are fit after three days and another guy after four weeks." Klopp, whose team travel to Brentford on Saturday, said the players had been ready when they were passed fit to play.

"We can never know if it would have happened anyway or whether it was something before," he added. "Very unlucky and unfortunate. It is not great but it says nothing about the quality of anyone. The world we are living in it is always immediately 'Medical department? I'm not sure about that' but it is nothing to do with that."

"We have to bring the boys as back as soon as possible but never sooner than they are ready from our point of view." In brighter news for Klopp, top scorer Mohamed Salah returned to training this week after a month out

with a hamstring problem sustained on Africa Cup of Nations duty with Egypt.

"Mo is back in full training, that brings him automatically in contention of course," said the Liverpool boss. The German also welcomed the "really nice" announcement that former England boss Sven-Goran Eriksson will be part of the management team for a charity legends game against Ajax at Anfield next month.

Eriksson revealed in January he had "best case a year" to live after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. The 76-year-old Swede disclosed at the time his lifelong love for Liverpool and how he had always wished to be manager of the club.

"I was always convinced that it will work out some way, and then this is now really nice," said Klopp. "A legend coaches legends, so it's really cool."

## Hamza moves in ITF Pakistan World Jr final

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's Hamza Roman qualified for the boy's singles final of the ITF Pakistan Khawar Hyat Khan Memorial World Junior Championship Leg-1 here at PTF-SDA Tennis Complex on Friday.

In the Boys' Singles Semi Final, Hamza beat Dong Hyeon of Korea (2nd seed) and qualified for the final, where he would face Kiagaoge Kang of China.

In the Boys' Doubles Semifinals Bilal Asim and Ahmad Nael Qureshi of Pakistan qualified for the final.

In Boys' Singles semifinals, Hamza Roman (PAK) beat Dong Hyeon (KOR) 6-4, 6-2; Kiagaoge Kang (CHN) beat Ahmad Nael Qureshi (PAK) 6-4, 3-6, 6-2.

In Girls' Singles semifinals, Katsiaryna Dubik (BLR) beat Deniz Cakil (TUR) 5-7, 6-4, 6-1; Kira Kalinouskaya (BLR) beat Stefaniya Neporent (BLR) 6-2, 3-0 (ret'd).

Boys' Doubles Semifinals: Bilal Asim, Ahmed Nael Qureshi (PAK) beat Jun Hyeok An (KOR), Ye Chan Choi (KOR) 6-2, 6-3; Dong Hyeon Euom (KOR), Jiwan Park (KOR) bt Howard Chan (HKG), Xiuyuan Guo (CHN) 6-2, 6-3.

The finals of Boys' Singles, Boys' Doubles, Girls' Doubles and Girls' Singles would be played on Saturday.

## Hasan Ali urges fans to Buy PSL tickets

KARACHI (INP): Karachi Kings' pace sensation, Hasan Ali, has taken to social media to urge cricket enthusiasts to purchase tickets for the upcoming season nine of the Pakistan Super League (PSL). In a message posted on the platform X (formerly known as Twitter), Ali emphasized the importance of supporting the league by buying tickets through TCS outlets, rather than relying on complimentary passes.

PSL 9, set to unfold across Karachi, Lahore, Multan, and Rawalpindi, will culminate in the final showdown at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi on March 18. The excitement kicks off with the opening ceremony at Lahore's iconic Gaddafi Stadium, featuring performances by renowned artists including Ali Zafar, Aima Baig, Arif Lohar, and Noori.

The grand event promises a spectacular display of fireworks and laser shows, with gates opening for fans at 3:30 p.m. and festivities commencing at 6:30 p.m. PSL 9 will be divided into two legs, with matches slated at Multan Cricket Stadium and Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium from February 17 to 27, followed by matches from February 28 to March 12.

Key clashes, such as the highly anticipated showdown between Lahore Qalandars and Karachi Kings, are scheduled for February 24 and March 9, with Gaddafi Stadium and National Bank Stadium hosting the respective matches. Notably, each team will enjoy home ground advantage, with Kings, Qalandars, Sultans, and United playing five matches at their respective venues.

Peshawar Zalmi will showcase their prowess in four matches at Pindi Cricket Stadium.

### Pakistan Super League-9

## Lahore Qalandars to face Islamabad United today

LAHORE (APP): In the opening match of Pakistan Super League's Ninth Season, Lahore Qalandars will face Islamabad United at 7:30 pm in Gaddafi Stadium, here on Saturday.

Unveiling the HBL PSL 9 trophy in Lahore, Chairman PCB Mohsin Naqvi said that HBL PSL is entering its ninth season and the league continues to be a success story for Pakistan cricket.

Thanking all the participating teams and sponsors, he said HBL PSL connects to the hearts of people of Pakistan, who

cherish every thrilling moment of the game.

**Quetta Gladiators provide update on Hasaranga's availability for PSL 9:** Quetta Gladiators issued an update regarding the status of their foreign players ahead of the ninth season of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) on Friday.

Gladiators' head of player acquisition, Nabeel Hashmi, confirmed through his social media account that originally slated for the first five matches, Hasaranga may miss more due to scheduling issues with the

Afghanistan vs. Sri Lanka series. Despite efforts, Quetta is still awaiting his No Objection Certificate.

On the coaching front, mentor Sir Vivian Richards and bowling coach Shaun Tait have already arrived in Pakistan ahead of the tournament.

Similar to the previous edition, PSL 9 will be held in two legs. Lahore and Multan will host 14 matches from February 17 to 27, followed by 16 matches in Rawalpindi and Karachi from February 28 to March 12. The playoffs will then be held entirely in Karachi.

## PCB joins hands with TikTok for HBL PSL 9

ISLAMABAD (APP): TikTok and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) have announced a collaboration for HBL PSL 9, providing fans the opportunity to experience the excitement of the country's most loved sporting event like never before.

The collaboration heralds a new era of engaging content for cricket enthusiasts. Throughout HBL PSL 9, TikTok will play a pivotal role in delivering behind-the-scenes moments, player interviews, post-match analysis, and much more directly to fans worldwide, said a news release.

The HBL PSL account on TikTok @thepls has close to 2 million followers while there have been more than 2.47 million published

content, using the popular hashtag #HoJaJazbaati in the last two seasons. The official hashtag for this season is #KulKeKhele.

Saif Mujahid, TikTok's Head of Content Operations and Marketing in Pakistan: "TikTok is excited to collaborate with PCB for HBL PSL Season 9. We are committed to delivering an unparalleled experience for cricket fans, providing them with access to exciting content and immersive storytelling throughout the tournament."

Salman Naseer, Chief Operating Officer PCB: "TikTok's collaboration with PCB reflects our shared commitment to engaging cricket fans through innovative and compelling content.

As we gear up for another thrilling season of HBL PSL, we look forward to leveraging TikTok's platform to bring fans closer to the action and excitement of the tournament."

Throughout HBL PSL Season 9, fans can engage with the excitement using official hashtags such as #HoJaJazbaati, #PSLFanzone, #PSLTopPicks, #CricTok, #NawaayaSonaya, #PSLKiYaadein and #JashaneCricket. Additionally, TikTok will introduce special HBL PSL filters, curated playlists, and a dedicated HBL PSL search hub within the app, enabling fans to immerse themselves fully in the tournament experience.

## 33rd Fajr Open Taekwondo C'ship Hamza Saeed won gold medal for Pakistan



all over the world participated in the Fajr Open, Hamza Saeed said, adding, that our head coach Yusuf Karami gave the best training to all the athletes in preparation for the event.

Silver medalist Shahzeb Khan said that unfortunately he could not win the gold medal, but he will try to win honours for Pakistan by working harder in the future.

In the Fajr Open Taekwondo Championship, Iran won first place, Pakistan got second place and Kazakhstan got third place. Hamza Saeed was declared the best player of the Fajr Open.

The Pakistani team will also participate in the World Taekwondo President's Asia Cup from February 16th to 19th in Tehran and the Asian Club Taekwondo Championship from February 21st to 22nd.

## Leading Dutch hockey club to arrive in Pakistan on Sunday for a friendly series

ISLAMABAD (APP): A leading hockey club from the Netherlands will arrive in Pakistan on Sunday to play a three-match friendly series with the Prime Minister's Youth Talent Hunt team, the event organizer, Olympian Khawaja Muhammad Junaid said on Friday.

"It is a watershed moment as the Dutch club Billy Ozendaal is the first international hockey club to visit Pakistan after 22 years to play hockey matches here. Orange and Black was the last European club that visited Pakistan in 2001," Khawaja told APP.

"The series will kick off with the first two matches hosted by the National Hockey Stadium, Lahore on February 19 and 21. The third match is scheduled to take place at the Naseer Bunda Hockey Stadium Islamabad on February 23," he said.

He said Khawaja Junaid Hockey Academy had teamed up with Billy Ozendaal to strengthen the national sport of hockey in Pakistan in accordance

with the requirements of modern times.

"We aim to enhance the capabilities of our players and for that we are committed to fostering a closer relationship and exchange of expertise between the two countries. "As part of the programme, our team, which is comprised of a highly talented bunch of players will also travel to the Netherlands in August, this year to play matches," added Khawaja, who was part of Pakistan's bronze medal-winning team at the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona.

According to Khawaja, Chairman Higher Education Commission Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, Inspector General Punjab Police Dr. Usman Anwar, the Netherlands Embassy in Islamabad, Director General Pakistan Sports Board Shoaib Khoso, and Punjab Sports Board officials were all playing significant roles to hold the series in a befitting manner.

He said the first match between the two teams would be dedicated to honour the martyrs of Punjab Police. "The arrival of a top-notch European club in Pakistan after over two decades is a breath of fresh air for Pakistan hockey. While cricket matches of PSL are being played on one side, the visit of the club will contribute greatly to establishing a positive image of the country globally," he reckoned.

With its foundation laid in 1935, the Billy Ozendaal club holds a special place among the well-established clubs in the Netherlands. Many of its players have represented the Netherlands at the international level.

"It was the club's tradition to tour Spain, Portugal, Australia, and South America during the cold season. However, this time they have agreed to come to Pakistan as a result of our efforts. We are also grateful to the Dutch Embassy in Islamabad for playing a key role in persuading club members and their families to come to Pakistan," Khawaja added.





## In brief

### Police arrest 12 for illegal weapons

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police on the directives of Senior Superintendent of Police, Operations Rawalpindi conducted raids in different areas and netted 12 accused for possessing weapons, ammunition and other items. According to a police spokesman, Bani, Taxila, Saddar Wah, Gujjar Khan, Saddar Baroni, and Rawat police conducted raids in their respective jurisdiction and rounded up 12 accused namely Arslan, Adnan, Tasawar, Umair, Akhtar and others and recovered 11 pistols 30 bore, ammunition and other items from their possession. The SSP said that strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against the lawbreakers and operations against aerial firing and illegal weapon holders would continue.

### Criminal wanted in murder case arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): City police have arrested a criminal wanted in a murder case. According to a police spokesman, Shabbir killed a citizen Amin Gul by stabbing him with knives in a clash with his other associates. He was declared absconder and police had been in his search. He informed that a case of the incident was already registered in police station Ratta Amaral on the complaint of the deceased's family. He said that Tahir Mehmood, the accomplice of the criminal was already arrested by the police. Faisal Saleem, SP Rawal while appreciating the police team said that arrested criminals would be produced in the court of law.

### Six drug peddlers, bootleggers netted

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi police in an action against suspected drug peddlers and bootleggers here on Friday arrested six accused besides recovering over 1940 grams charras, 30 liters liquor and other items from their possession. A police spokesperson said that Rattaamaral, Rawat, Sadiqabad and Bani police conducted raids in their respective jurisdiction and rounded up Hamza, Muhammad Nami, Shakeel, Munir, Yusuf, and Kashif and recovered 1940 grams charras and 30 liters liquor from their possession. Separate cases have been registered against all accused while further investigations are underway. City Police Officer, Rawalpindi had directed the police officers to accelerate ongoing operations against drug peddlers, bootleggers and other lawbreakers, he added.

### DC leads crackdown against beggary

ISLAMABAD (APP): Under the guidance of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Irfan Nawaz Memon, Assistant Commissioners (ACs) and Magistrates in Islamabad were spearheading a relentless campaign against beggary. In the recent operation, coordinated by Assistant Commissioner Industrial Area Avid Irshad Bhatti, resulted in the apprehension of 11 beggars from the vicinity of Faisal Mosque. These individuals were shifted to Margalla Police Station as part of the ongoing efforts to curb this societal issue. In continuation of this crackdown, professional beggars were also targeted, with several being apprehended and handed over to the local police stations. Moreover, special attention was given to underage children found in the streets, who were also handed over to the Edhi Center for proper care and support.



ISLAMABAD: Heavy Machinery is being used for expansion of Club Road in the Federal Capital.

## Mushaal expresses concerns over deteriorating health condition of Yasin

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Human Rights and women empowerment, Mushaal Hussein Mullick has vociferously condemned Indian authorities' inhumane behavior towards her husband, Chairman JKLF Mohammad Yasin Malik. She said that Yasin Malik's health deteriorated to an alarming level after he stopped taking medicines in protest of inhuman behavior of authorities for their delaying tactics to take him to the hospital for proper medical treatment, despite court orders. Mushaal said that the expired and outdated pacemaker implanted in him had now gone ineffective, endangering his life. She said that In addition to his heart problems, Yasin Malik was also suffering

from kidney ailment. She further said that according to confirmed reports his body weight had also dropped to a great extent, which was a great cause of concern. She said that just two weeks ago, his mother had approached a court in Delhi to draw the court's attention towards the deteriorating health condition of her son and over concerns of the lack of interest of the authorities towards his health.

In her plea to court, his mother also expressed her readiness to bear the expenses of her son's treatment.

Mushaal said that her husband Yasin Malik worsening health condition and court orders demanded that Yasin Malik should have been immediately transferred to the hospital and kept there under the supervision of doctors until his

full recovery. She said that Yasin Malik was taken to a government hospital in Delhi on February 13 only after his condition deteriorated to an alarming level.

She said that despite the court orders to keep him under supervision in hospital, authorities brought him back to the jail after just a routine medical checkup.

She appealed International human rights institutions to intervene so that the precious life of the most popular pro-freedom political leader of the people of the Jammu Kashmir was saved. She further emphasized that the resilient people and leadership of Jammu and Kashmir cannot be intimidated or subdued through false and fabricated cases, nor by employing heavy-handed and inhumane tactics.

### SSP Operations holds 'Khuli Kutcheri' to address grievances of citizens

RAWALPINDI (APP): Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations, Rawalpindi Hafiz Kamran Asghar on the directives of the City Police Officer, Rawalpindi held a 'Khuli Kutcheri' here on Friday in Police Lines Headquarters to address the grievances of the people.

The SSP issued orders to the officers concerned to complete inquiries and send reports within the given time frame.

He said all-out efforts were being made to ensure the dispensation of speedy justice purely on merit to the people and to improve service delivery standards.

According to a Police spokesman, Police Officers under Punjab's open door policy were holding 'Khuli Kutcheries' to provide relief to the citizens.

He informed that the SSP issued directives to the officers concerned to take action and submit a report on the complaint submitted by the citizens in 'Khuli Kutcheri'. He said, the 'Khuli Kutcheries' were being held to provide the citizens immediate relief and address their complaints besides it also helped improve standards of policing.

### RDA issues notice to marketing company

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on the directives of the Director General (DG), Muhammad Saif Anwar Jappa here on Friday issued a notice to a marketing company, M/s Reliable Marketing for advertising campaign of nine illegal housing projects.

According to RDA spokesman, the Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering (MP&TE) Directorate RDA issued a notice to the marketing company namely M/s Reliable Marketing and directed it to stop advertising campaign of nine unapproved and illegal housing schemes namely New Metro City, Al-Muqet City, Mega City, Al-Imran Homes, Al-Imran Garden, Prism City, Sarwar Shaheed Garden, Khan Village Housing Society and Faisal Town Phase-II. He said the DG had directed the authorities concerned to take action in accordance with the law against advertising campaigns of illegal housing societies.

Additionally, the partnership seeks to conduct academic research contributing to a culture that values human rights and create and distribute digital content for widespread awareness. The MoU was signed by the Executive Director

## 'Motorbike ambulance services' rolling out in Sindh remote areas'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Health Minister Dr Saad Khalid Niaz Friday said that first-ever state of art 'motorbike ambulance services' equipped with a first-aid box rolling out in narrow streets of Sindh province to provide immediate medical care before patients can be transported to hospitals. The 1122' emergency motorbike service equipped with portable oxygen cylinders and various kinds of medicines is emerging as a new hope for emergency healthcare department, he said while talking to a Private news channel. The motorcycle ambulances are equipped

with state-of-the-art tools and equipment, adhering to international standards, he mentioned. The bike ambulances were introduced to provide easy availability of health care services to people living in the inaccessible areas of the province, he added. He explained that these ambulance motorbikes could easily pass through small rivers-drains and bumpy roads.

The WHO had handed over 25 ambulance motorbikes to 1122 departments to enhance the effectiveness of already existing facilities, he added.

"Bike ambulances were being deployed in areas that

have large populations living in narrow streets", he mentioned.

Replying a question, he said that the provincial government was striving hard to provide better healthcare facilities to people at their doors. There is a successful pilot project running in the districts of Thatta and Sujawal with 25 life-saving ambulances, he added. To another question, he said that we will further expand of this service shortly, underscoring Rescue 1122's commitment to delivering prompt, immediate, and internationally standardized emergency facilities to the residents.

## Committee set up for adopting Sahiwal recycling model to ensure twin cities cleanliness

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Liaquat Ali Chatta on Friday said that a special committee has been formed to improve the sanitation conditions of the twin cities, comprising Islamabad and Rawalpindi administration, Capital Development Authority and Cantonment Boards.

He said this while presiding over a meeting at his office regarding water supply and sanitation system of the twin cities. President Rawalpindi Board Brigadier (R) Ijaz Qamar Kayani, Chairman Rawalpindi Waste Management Company Saqib Rafiq, MD Rana Sajid Safdar, Hanif Abbasi, CDA members and other concerned officers were present in the meeting. The Commissioner said that it had been observed that even after great efforts, the cleanliness situation in the twin cities was not up to mark and to resolve the issue, a committee had been set up which will present Sahiwal-style recycling model on next Monday. He said that the model would be immediately launched in the twin cities after the forum's approval.

He directed the RWMC to make arrangements for its essential machinery which was completely defunct at present and include it in the upcoming Annual Development Programme to overcome the shortage of resources in cleanliness activi-

ties. Chatta further said that the second important task of the committee was to deal with the rising issue of water deficiency. He said that according to World Health Organization standards, the shortage of clean drinking water in the twin cities was around 47 percent which will increase with the passage of time and population expansion.

The Commissioner informed that Sahiwal Division was self-generating 35 percent of its budget through garbage recycling. He said that around 2,300 tons of garbage was lifted daily in Rawalpindi while as per the Sahiwal model, a major portion of the garbage would be recycled while only 30 percent of the remaining waste would be left for disposal. Liaquat added that after adopting Sahiwal model the cost of disposal would be significantly reduced and at the same time income would be started from recycling. He urged the residents to cooperate with the sanitation staff in making the city neat and clean as no campaign could be successful without the active participation of the people.

Liaquat asked the residents not to set the garbage on fire and throw the waste in the bins placed in every corner of the city.

He said that RWMC had displayed banners across the city to inform citizens about the hazards of smog.

## HEC, NCHR sign MoU to work on various academic, research activities on human rights

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Higher Education Commission (HEC), signed on Friday a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) to jointly work under a collaborative arrangement on various academic and research activities in the Human Rights area in the country.

Under the MoU, HEC and NCHR aim to equip academia, researchers, and students with knowledge of human rights laws and instruments, promote literacy through various media channels, introduce courses focusing on marginalized groups, and establish human rights study centers.

Additionally, the partnership seeks to conduct academic research contributing to a culture that values human rights and create and distribute digital content for widespread awareness.

The MoU was signed by the Executive Director

HEC, Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum and Secretary NCHR, Malik Kamran Azam Khan Rajar. The ceremony was attended by Dr. Bushra Mirza, (Member-Research and Innovation) HEC, Ms. Noor Amna Malik (Managing Director-NAHE), Engr. Muhammad Raza Chohan (Adviser-Academics), and other officials from HEC and NCHR. Speaking at the occasion, Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum emphasized HEC's commitment towards fostering awareness and research at higher education institutions, highlighting the importance of investing in teachers to enhance their capacities in igniting social responsibility among the students.

Recognizing the crucial role of youth in advocating for human rights, Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum stressed the need to sensitize the nation to the compliance of human rights policies. He said that HEC has already implemented numerous programmes engaging the

youth to address prevailing challenges within the country. He also emphasized the creation of courses focusing on marginalized groups and awareness programmes through youth clubs at HEIs. He affirmed HEC's commitment to facilitating communication through established synchronous and asynchronous modes, emphasizing the urgency of nurturing a generation well-versed in human rights principles.

Malik Kamran Azam underscored that it is imperative to elevate the implementation of human rights laws and standards in Pakistan. He said that the collaboration will serve as a vital bridge and will help in developing accelerated modules and methodologies for implementation of the policies. "It will establish a benchmark of engagement programmes, fostering focused discussions and reinforcing statutory institutions' roles in addressing human rights issues."

## Action against illegal commercial use of residential buildings in full swing

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA)'s operation against unauthorized commercial use of residential buildings in Sectors G-13 and G-14 of the federal capital was in full swing. In this regard the authority has already issued notices to the owners of illegal and unauthorized use of residential properties for commercial purposes in the sectors, sources in the FGEHA told APP. As per the Islamabad Capital Territory Building Control Regulation 2020, they said the FGEHA has decided to take legal action against property owners involved in unlawful or unauthorized commercial use of residential buildings in the sectors."

The sources said, the relevant authority has issued formal show-cause notices and warnings to them to immediately cease non-conforming use of residential build-

ings. Moreover, they said, the FGEHA has cautioned the property owners that failure to comply with the orders would result in a fine of Rs. 500,000 in addition to sealing such properties. They informed, "As many as 80 residential buildings in these sectors have been identified as in unauthorized and illegal commercial use, including various offices, schools, guest houses, beauty parlors, hostels, property offices, furniture showrooms, and others."

The authority had initially issued notices in March last year regarding illegal commercial use of residential buildings. However, another warning has now been issued, emphasizing the immediate halt of commercial use in residential areas," they added. The sources said, "The authority is set to initiate definitive actions against violators to ensure compliance with regulations."

## Railways all set to restore Akbar Bugti Express

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways is set to restore one more passenger train 'Akber Bugti Express' from Quetta to Lahore to facilitate the passengers of the routes and generate more revenue for the department. "The decision to restore Akber Bugti Express train has been taken on the directions of the caretaker Minister for Railways Shahid Ashraf Tarar," an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP. He said the train would facilitate the people of Quetta and Punjab provinces to travel to Balochistan and vice versa.

Currently, the Jaffer Express is the only operational passenger train in Balochistan being run between Quetta - Peshawar, besides local Chaman and Hurnai trains.

To a question, he said in a bid to accommodate passengers, Pakistan Railways expanded the network of its express trains to 96 last year, running all over the country to better felicitate the commuters.

"Before completing the network of 96 trains over the entire railway network, the last year the figure of trains is 86 which

will be improved after the concentrated efforts of the department," he added.

They said He said the facilities being provided to the passengers at railway stations include waiting rooms, vending stalls, station restaurants, wheelchairs, an information desk, computer reservation facilities, public address system to inform the public about the arrival/departure of trains, provision of paramedics and 1st aid facility, online reservation facility, passenger insurance service and revival of help desks at stations facilities in trains.

About punctuality, he said the overall punctuality ratio of trains has improved from 76 to 93 percent in five months owing to close monitoring and stern measures taken by Pakistan Railways at the divisional and ministry levels.

"With the punctuality of trains and concrete measures taken by the department in the last five months, the number of passengers has increased by over 20 million, which is ample proof of the department's achievement," he added.

## ANF recovers 108 kg drugs in five operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting five operations across the country managed to recover 108 kg of drugs and arrested six accused including a woman, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday.

He informed that in an operation, 920 intoxicated tablets were recovered from

the possession of the Muscat-bound passengers including a woman, arrested at Multan Airport.

34 grams of weed was recovered from a parcel sent from UK at courier office in Rawalpindi while 101 kg hashish was recovered near Rughni Road Chaman. In fourth operation, 5 kg weed was recovered from the possession of

an accused rounded up near Karachi Railway Station.

1 kg opium and 590 grams heroin were recovered from the possession of three suspects arrested from Model Town, Bahawalpur.

Separate cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused while further investigations are under process.



ISLAMABAD: Elder vendor selling traditional children jackets at roadside in the Federal Capital.



2 rival families end enmities

JALALABAD (Pajhwok): Two families and as many tribes have reconciled and ended their enmities as a result of mediation by religious scholars, officials and tribal elders in eastern Nangarhar province. The enmity between Malem Abdul Qadir and Najib's families erupted 12 years ago in Kama district, leaving two people dead from Abdul Qadir's family, a statement from the governor's house said.

Fish farms increases in Kunduz

KUNDUZ (Ariana News): The Agriculture and Livestock Directorate officials of Kunduz say interest in investing in the fish farming sector has increased in this province and so far, 450 fish farming farms have been created in Kunduz. The increase of fish farms in Kunduz has caused the export of fish from this province to other provinces to rise. Meanwhile, Kunduz fish has a special reputation in the northeastern provinces and recently, people from different provinces come to Kunduz to eat fish.

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

Russian Security Council Secretary urges extra CSTO, SCO measures at border with Afghanistan



KABUL (Ariana News): The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) need to work out extra border security measures to counter threats from Afghanistan to neighboring countries, Tass news agency quoted Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolay Patrushev said on Friday.

The unstable situation in Afghanistan is related to the activity of international terrorists supported by the West, Patrushev said at a meeting of Security Council secretaries on the Afghan problem in Bishkek. "Considering all the mentioned threats from the Afghan direction, it is necessary to take measures in advance to counter the export of instability to our countries. It is obvious

that this problem can be resolved comprehensively by collective efforts, primarily, within the CSTO and the SCO," Patrushev stressed. The Russian top security official highlighted specific steps that "require special attention." In the first place, this relates "to elaborating extra measures in the sphere of border security, exchanging information on the activity of terrorist

organizations and their supporters and cooperating for the purpose of exposing and shutting down sources and channels of terrorism financing and also drug trafficking," Patrushev pointed out. "I am certain that the development of Afghanistan as a peaceful, united and independent state meets the interests of regional security. By virtue of its geographical position, that country is at the intersection of key trade routes linking European and Asian states. In this context, it is important to pay attention to developing the transit potential of Afghanistan," the Russian top security official said. Meanwhile, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) has repeatedly stated that Afghan soil will not be used against the security of neighboring countries or beyond and that no terrorist group exists in the country. Meanwhile, the sixth annual meeting of Security Council secretaries on Afghanistan kicked off Friday in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan.

MacCaul calls Ghani's escape 'Cowardly' as Government collapses

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the United States House of Representatives called the escape of former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as "cowardly." Michael McCaul agreed with Zalmay Khalilzad's assertions regarding the failure of the former leaders of the Afghan government to maintain order, stating, "I agree, Ashraf Ghani's actions and escape were cowardly." Michael McCaul questioned Zalmay Khalilzad about his and the US Secretary of State's proposals for introducing more conditions into the Doha Agreement. Khalilzad responded by saying they proposed that the withdrawal of US forces should take place after an agreement between the former Afghan government and the Taliban, but after discussions with allies, it was determined that imposing additional conditions beyond the Doha Agreement would delay the withdrawal process, and if there was a need for forces, America's allies were not willing to cooperate. Michael McCaul added that this decision led to the



Taliban's domination over Afghanistan. Zalmay Khalilzad considered senior officials of the former Afghan government, especially Ashraf Ghani, as responsible for the collapse of the state and the current situation, stating, "The entire responsibility lies with the former leaders who claimed to have built the government but failed to prevent its collapse." McCaul also added his agreement with Khalilzad's statements, saying, "I

agree! I think Ashraf Ghani's actions and escape were cowardly." Zalmay Khalilzad was summoned to provide explanations regarding the Doha Agreement to the Foreign Relations Committee of the United States House of Representatives on Thursday, February 15th. In response to McCaul's question about an agreement to prevent the Taliban from entering Kabul, the former US representative

for Afghan peace referred to General McKenzie, who was responsible for the withdrawal of US forces, not for ensuring security. According to Khalilzad, after the withdrawal of foreign forces under McKenzie's leadership, chaos erupted in Kabul, and the Taliban entered the capital. He considered the escape of Ashraf Ghani and Afghan government security commanders as the major factors contributing to these conditions.

New Emergency Healthcare to be established for women in Herat

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) recently announced that it is establishing separate emergency sections for pregnant women in Herat, western Afghanistan. The organization said on Friday, February 16th, on its social media platform X, that it is creating a separate emergency healthcare service section to support pregnant women in Herat. According to the organization, many hospitals in Herat were damaged after the deadly earthquake of October 11 last year, and currently, there is no suitable place for the safety and support of pregnant women in the hospitals of this province. The organization further stated that it will provide the necessary equipment for natural childbirth and cesarean sections. This comes as just a few

days ago, the United Nations Population Fund stated that over 90 percent of the victims of the Herat earthquake are women and children. According to the organization's report, nearly

7,500 pregnant women and 38,000 girls have been affected by the recent earthquake in Herat. Earlier, human rights observers also warned about the severity of the health situation for

women across Afghanistan. On the 11th of October last year, a powerful earthquake shook Herat, resulting in the loss of 2,400 lives and damaging several villages.



Afghan women's grassroots voices absent in UN-led talks, say women's Rights Advocates

KABUL (Khaama Press): Afghan women's rights advocates have voiced their apprehensions regarding the selection process of civil society representatives and activists to participate in the UN-led meeting in Doha concerning Afghanistan. Husna Jalil, Afghan women's rights advocate expressed her concerns on her social media platform X, on Friday, February 16th saying, "It is concerning to note the absence of genuine representation of grassroots Afghan women in UN-led discussions regarding Afghanistan." Husna Jalil added that "despite the necessity of amplifying their voices, the platform primarily features a select group of elite Afghan women." She criticized the top-down approach adopted in these meetings, which undermines their legitimacy. "Over the past two and a half years, the top-bottom approach has inadvertently marginalized the voices of grassroots women, thereby undermining the legitimacy of these crucial discussions," she said. She urged the UN to prioritize the interests of the people by selecting repre-

sentatives who reflect grassroots perspectives. "The UN, as a symbol of justice and human rights, holds the responsibility to prioritize the interests of the Afghan people. This can be achieved by ensuring the inclusion of diverse voices from Afghanistan, particularly those representing grassroots perspectives, she added. She urged the UN, "UN must reevaluate its strategy. They must work towards bringing new voices to the forefront while

excluding individuals who have previously betrayed public trust from participating in the negotiations." Inclusivity and representation are fundamental principles that must guide UN-led discussions on Afghanistan. Ignoring the voices of grassroots women not only perpetuates marginalization but also hampers the prospects for sustainable peace and development in the region. The current approach risks perpetuating the exist-

ing power dynamics and fails to address the diverse needs and aspirations of Afghan women at the grassroots level. It is time for the UN and relevant stakeholders to prioritize inclusivity and genuine representation in their efforts to facilitate peace and stability in Afghanistan. This necessitates amplifying the voices of grassroots women and ensuring their meaningful participation in all stages of the negotiation process.



Soviet Union laid Afghanistan's economic foundations: Maria

KABUL (Khaama Press): The spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a session, compared the presence of NATO and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. She stated that the former Soviet Union had laid the foundations of Afghanistan's economy by constructing over 140 industrial facilities, while NATO brought the "mother of bombs" into the country.

Maria Zakharova, the spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that the Soviet Union had established more than 140 industrial facilities in Afghanistan, which still form the basis of the country's economy. The spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs added in this session that NATO's twenty-year presence in Afghanistan had brought negative impacts to the

country. Maria Zakharova said, "The former Soviet Union laid the foundations of Afghanistan's economy by constructing over 140 industrial facilities, but NATO brought in the 'mother of bombs' to this country, and NATO's operations in Afghanistan ultimately ended in 'complete failure'." According to the spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NATO's operations in Afghanistan

also ended in a "complete failure" in the end. She made these statements on the occasion of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan. Thursday, equivalent to the 15th of February, marked the thirty-fifth anniversary of the former Soviet forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan. While the Taliban had declared this day a public holiday in Afghanistan.



Mujahid: Afghanistan's security, roads, ports facilitate intl transit

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate said that they have provided facilities for transit trucks of neighboring and regional countries. The spokesperson for the caretaker Afghan government told TOLONews that the security and operations at the ports and highways are the main facilitators for transit trucks to drive inside Afghanistan. "All the highways that connect Afghanistan with the region have been secure and transit trucks can easily reach their destinations. Second, at all ports of the country, facilities have been provided for transit trucks. Third, traffic is properly managed by teams if problems occur. Afghanistan is now a good direction for transit," said Zabiullah Mujahid, the spokesman for the Islamic Emirate. In the meantime, officials at the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI) said that being landlocked and lacking extended railways costs the Afghan traders large amounts of money to import goods. A member of

the board of ACCI, Khan Jan Alokcozay, said that existing issues at Karachi port is one of the biggest challenges for Afghan traders in terms of transit. "Our transit imports are too expensive. For example, if we import from Russia and China, we are doing it through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and other countries, which is very

costly. The ports, Chabahar and Bandar Abbas have their own problems. Through Pakistan's Karachi, we cannot call it a transit for being too expensive," said Khan Jan Alokcozay, a boardmember of the ACCI. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance said that transit is a key source of income for Afghanistan which injects direct and indirect

revenue to the country. "Transit is one of the important parts of trade in Afghanistan, which generates direct and indirect revenue to the government's treasury. Transit creates employment because cars operate which need oil. We are trying to provide further facilities for transit," said Ahmad Wali Haqmal, spokesman for the ministry of finance.







**PESHAWAR:** KP Caretaker Chief Minister, Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah launching management and information system developed by Excise and Taxation Department.

## KP govt successfully launches CUIPTMIS

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has successfully launched GIS-based Centralized Urban Immovable Property Tax Management and Information System (CUIPTMIS) to transform the whole property tax regime into an automated, transparent and robust mechanism.

The initiative is an important step towards enhancing tax collection, improving management of public resources and facilitation of tax payers in the province. A ceremony, in this regard, was held here at Chief Minister's House Peshawar on Friday with the caretaker Chief Minister KP Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah as chief guest.

Besides, caretaker provincial ministers Ahmed Rasool Bangash and Engr. Ahmed Jan, Secretary Excise and Taxation Syed Fayyaz Ali Shah, Secretary Local Government Daud

Khan and other relevant officials attended the ceremony. The newly launched Management and Information System (MIS) has been completed at a total cost of Rs 95.898 million. Initially, the project has been launched for two districts of the province; Nowshera and Abbottabad, and would soon be replicated in the rest of the districts of the province.

Under the project, 50938 new property units have been identified in district Abbottabad and Nowshera, and thus, the total number of property units in the two districts has increased to 90,938. Resultantly, the demand of tax revenue in both of the districts has also increased from Rs 69 million to Rs 123 million in Nowshera and from Rs. 83 million to Rs. 143 million in Abbottabad.

Addressing the ceremony, the chief minister has lauded the role Excise and Taxation department for launching this important project, and said that the

newly developed system will not only improve tax collection and management mechanism but also facilitate the tax payers in the province by providing an integrated online system and grievance redress mechanism.

The addition of new property units in the valuation list will also result in revenue growth for the province, he remarked and added that the complicated mechanism of tax payment has always been a serious problem for citizens, due to which they were hesitant to paying taxes; but now through the newly established UIP Tax Management and Information System, they can pay taxes from their home by using online tax paying facility. On this occasion, he expressed the hope that the Excise department will continue to adopt technologically advanced techniques in the future as well, so as to further advance its tax collection and public facilitation system.

## Plea seeking to revoke polls result fixed for hearing

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The petition of a citizen Ali Khan in the Supreme Court seeking to declare Feb 8 elections null and void has been fixed for hearing.

A three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa will hear the case on Feb 19. Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Musarrat Hilali are members of the bench. The petitioner has made the Election Commission of Pakistan and the federal government respondents.

The petitioner also submitted that the formation of a new government be halted and fresh elections be held under the supervision of judiciary within 30 days. The petitioner requested the apex court to order investigation in to allegations of rigging in the elections and strict action against the elements involved. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Jamaat-e-Islami, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam protested across the country against alleged rigging in the Feb 8 elections.

**SC to hear ZAB reference on 20th:** The Supreme Court of Pakistan will take up Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's reference for hearing on February 20. The registrar's office of the top court issued the cause list. A nine-member larger bench would hear the presidential reference on the said date.

It may be mentioned here that, in the last hearing, the top court sought written arguments from the amicus curiae. The reference was moved by former President Asif Ali Zardari during the regime of PPP seeking the court to re-visit the death penalty of ex-prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

## SJC exceeding its powers, says Mazahar

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Mazahar Ali Naqvi, SC judge who resigned after misconduct allegations, on Friday alleged Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) is 'exceeding its powers'. Naqvi, who is facing 'misconduct' allegations in the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) forwarded his resignation to the President of Pakistan, Dr Arif Alvi in January.

In a letter penned to the secretary SJC, the former judge termed the order of January 12 'illegal' as he resigned from the SC judge post on January 10. "Notification of my resignation was also published in the gazette." Alleging SJC of "exceeding its power" the former judge said he is not bound to be part of the proceedings.

# Navalny, Russian Opposition leader, dies in jail

MOSCOW: Imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny has died, state media reported, citing the prison service of the region where he had been serving a 19-year sentence on charges of extremism. There was no immediate confirmation of the 47-year-old's death from his team. Navalny spokesperson Kira Yarmysh said his lawyer was travelling to the remote prison colony north of the Arctic Circle.

In a statement on Friday quoted by state media, the federal prison service said Navalny "felt bad" after a walk and lost consciousness "almost immediately". Navalny was in the IK-3 penal colony in Kharp, in the Yamalo-Nenets region, about 1,900km (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow, where he was transferred in December. The "special regime" or "Polar Wolf" colony is among the harshest in Russia's prison system and is located in a place with severe winters. Most inmates have been convicted of grave crimes. Kharp is about 100km (60 miles) from Vorkuta, whose coal mines were part of the Soviet gulag camp system.

"Medical staff arrived immediately, and an ambulance team was called," the prison service said. "Resuscitation measures were carried out, which did not yield positive results. Paramedics confirmed the death of the convict. The causes of death are being established." The Kremlin said President Vladimir Putin had been informed of Navalny's death. Navalny aide Leonid Volkov posted on X: "Russian authorities publish a confession that they killed Alexei Navalny in prison. We do not have any way to confirm it or to prove this isn't true."

Lyudmila Navalnaya, Navalny's mother, was quoted by Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta as saying that her son had been "alive, healthy and happy" when she last saw him on February 12. "I don't want to hear any condolences. We saw him in prison on the [February] 12, in a meeting. He was alive, healthy and happy," she wrote in a Facebook post on Friday.

Navalny's wife, Yulia, who held a press conference at the Munich Security Summit attended by global leaders and officials, said that Putin and his associated should not go unpunished if the news of her husband's death was confirmed. She called on the international community to come together and fight against the "horrific regime" in Moscow.

Many world leaders put out statements saying Navalny "paid for his courage with his life" and that they hold Russia respon-

sible for his imprisonment and death for standing up to Putin. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reacted to the news and said it was "obvious" that Navalny had been killed by Putin. "Like thousands of others who have been tortured," he said, adding that this demonstrates why the Russian leader must be made to "lose everything and held accountable for his actions".

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also said that Navalny's death "only underscores the weakness and rot at the heart of the system that Putin has built. Russia is responsible for this." However, Maria Zakharova, the spokesperson for the Russian foreign ministry, wrote on her Telegram channel that the West has already arrived at "conclusions" without forensic evidence.

She said the immediate reactions "in the form of direct accusations against Russia are self-revealing". Reporting from Moscow, Al Jazeera's Yulia Shapovalova said that the prison service reported Navalny's death in colony number 3 which is "a very, very harsh prison", adding that "his health has been pretty bad lately". The official cause of death has not been announced and an investigation is under way, Shapovalova reported.

Navalny, a fierce critic of Putin, has been imprisoned since January 2021 when he returned to Moscow after recovering in Germany from nerve agent poisoning that he blamed on the Kremlin. His death less than a month before Russia holds elections that will give Putin another six years in power drew renewed criticism of the leader who has cracked down on all opposition at home.

Before Navalny was arrested, he led campaigns against corruption and organised major anti-Kremlin protests. When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Navalny strongly condemned the war in social media posts from prison and during his court appearances. Less than a month after the start of the war, he was sentenced to an additional nine-year term for embezzlement and contempt of court in a case he and his supporters rejected as fabricated. The investigators immediately launched a new investigation and in August 2023, Navalny was convicted on charges of extremism and sentenced to 19 years in prison. After the verdict, Navalny said he understood that he was "serving a life sentence, which is measured by the length of my life or the length of life of this regime". — Agencies

## Turkish commander visits Naval HQs

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Chief of General Staff Turkish Armed Forces, General Irfan Ozsert visited Naval Headquarters, Islamabad and Called-on Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf.

During the meeting, matters of mutual interest including regional maritime security were discussed. The visiting dignitary appreciated and acknowledged Pakistan Navy's efforts and commitments in support of collaborative maritime security in the region. Both dignitaries appreciated the mutual cooperation in the field of defence production in general and successful projects of ships construction between Pakistan Navy and Turkiye on Transfer of Technology basis in particular.

Turkiye and Pakistan share deep-rooted bonds of friendship and brotherhood that date back in history. The visit of Chief of the General Staff Turkish Armed Forces will further enhance bilateral defence collaboration between the two countries.

## PTI founder challenges his convictions

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: PTI founder chairman and former prime minister Imran Khan has challenged his convictions in cipher, Toshakhana and Iddat cases in Islamabad High Court (IHC) and sessions court on Friday.

Appeals against conviction in cipher and Toshakhana cases was filed in the IHC and against conviction in Iddat case was submitted in the sessions court. PTI senior counsel Sardar Latif Khosa confirmed to journalists outside the IHC that the appeals against convictions have been filed.

Earlier, there were reports that another PTI counsel Salman Safdar had drafted appeals against the convictions awarded in the cipher, Toshakhana and Iddat cases before 2024 general elections. On January 30, Imran Khan and his close aide, former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, had been sentenced to 10 years in jail in cipher case related to the leaking of state secrets.

The special court set up at a prison in Rawalpindi had announced the sentence in the cipher case, which pertained to a diplomatic cable that Imran Khan claimed proved his allegation that his removal from power in 2022 was a US conspiracy. On January 31, an anti-graft court had jailed Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Khan for 14 years each on charges of illegally selling state gifts. The sentence in the Toshakhana case also included a 10-year disqualification from holding public office.

Bushra Khan, commonly known as Bushra Bibi, had, however, been allowed by authorities to serve her sentence at Imran Khan's Islamabad hilltop mansion at Banigala. Later, Bushra Bibi had moved the court to allow her to undergo her sentence in prison and not at Banigala residence, which the authorities turned into a sub-jail. The third conviction in merely one week came in Iddat case. On February 3, a court in Islamabad had sentenced the PTI leader and his spouse Bushra Bibi to seven years in jail, along with a Rs0.5 million fine each, for "contracting marriage during the 'Iddat' (period of waiting)" of the former first lady.

## President directs payment to heirs of two insurants

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has directed to make payments of the death insurance claims of Rs 3 million and Rs 4,60,000 to the legal heirs of the deceased policyholders of two private insurance companies.

The president issued the directives while deciding two separate representations, filed by Adamjee Life Assurance Company Limited and EFU Life Assurance Limited against the decisions of Wafaqi Mohtasib, asking them to pay the death insurance claims to the respective claimants, a President Secretariat press release said. It should be mentioned here that Zahid Nasreen's deceased sister had obtained an insurance policy from Adamjee Life Assurance Company for the sum assured of Rs 3 million

against an annual premium of Rs300,000 in 2021.

After her sister died in 2022, the company refused to pay the death insurance claim on the pretext that the deceased had hidden her pre-insurance ailment of acute kidney injury and chronic liver disease at the time of obtaining the insurance policy. On the other hand, Memoona Naeem's husband obtained an insurance policy from EFU Life Assurance Limited for the sum assured of Rs 460,000 against an annual premium of Rs 23,000 in 2015.

Her husband died the same year and when she filed the death insurance claim, it was repudiated on the ground that the deceased had not disclosed his pre-insurance ailment of hypertension at the time of obtaining the policy. Feeling aggrieved, the complainants separately

approached the Wafaqi Mohtasib to seek relief, which passed the orders in their favour and directed the respective insurance companies to honour their claims.

Later, the companies filed separate representations with the President against the decisions of the Mohtasib. President Dr Arif Alvi after perusing the material facts of the case and hearing the parties, rejected both the representations. He held that the companies had failed to produce any evidence establishing the pre-insurance ailments.

He said the onus to prove the pre-insurance ailments rested upon the companies and the repudiation of death insurance claims required unimpeachable evidence to prove the ailments and their knowledge on the part of the policyholders.

## Qureshi moves IHC against conviction

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) vice chairman and former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi on Friday moved Islamabad High Court (IHC) against the conviction in cipher case.

On Jan 30, a special court established under the Official Secrets Act handed both former prime minister Imran Khan and ex-foreign

minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi 10 years in jail in the cipher case. As per details, Shah Mehmood Qureshi filed the plea against the cipher case conviction and urged IHC to declare the trial court's January 30 verdict null and void.

The plea stated that the trial of cipher case was not proceeded as per the law and the process was violated in the trial which started on August 15. It is important to

mention here that the cipher case pertains to a diplomatic document that the Federal Investigation Agency's charge sheet alleges was never returned by Imran. The PTI claimed the document contained a threat from the United States to oust Imran as prime minister. Imran Khan and Shah Mehmood Qureshi were facing trial in cipher case in Adiala Jail from last year for "distorting" the facts of the diplomatic cipher.

other's viewpoints and political mandates rather than implementing personal agenda through agitation and confrontation. He said that the first session of the National Assembly (NA) may be convened within 21 days of the polling date for oath-taking of the newly elected members.

Talking to APP, Barrister Syed Noman Bokhari said that the constitution of Pakistan has given powers to the President to convene the new National Assembly session on any date between February 22-28, 2024 for oath-taking. After the oath taking ceremony, he said that the national assembly elects speaker and deputy speaker for a five years term and later the leader of the House i.e. Prime Minister. Barrister Noman said that a simple majority was required to form a government in centre and four

provinces of Pakistan.

He said formation of the governments in Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan are easy, however, the lawmakers of national assembly need to look above party politics and sit together. He made it clear that the President did not have any power to invite a person or a party for the formation of government, adding the President represented the federation after the 18th constitutional amendment.

Barrister Noman said Pakistan was confronted with several challenges including a shabby economy and a single political party could not address it. He said the coalition government was the best solution after the 2024 election to address all the challenges including economy, climate change, poverty and illitera-

cy and carry the ship of democracy forward. The Election Commission of Pakistan was bound to issue official results within 14 days of the holding of the general elections, he said. The experts said that unnecessary delay in formation of government was not in the country's interest. He said an agitation in streets or blocking of roads were no solution to the election related problems and asked the losing candidates to approach Election Tribunals for addressing their grievances.

Dr Hilali said that it was a good one that a consenses was being found on leadership of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, PPP and MQM Pakistan for a coalition government. He said that protest was no solution and any candidate have reservation on election results may approach

Election Tribunal for its resolutions.

Manzoorul Haq, former Ambassador said that Pakistan was passing through a critical political and economic phase since of its creation 77 years ago and it was the spirit of age that all political and religious leadership and heads of the state institutions work with harmony and cohesion in order to take the country out of existing economic quagmire. He said the wrangling between political forces for power would serve no objective rather than destabilize the country, which has already been confronted to serious economic challenges. They urged political leadership to sit together for initiation of a result-oriented grand dialogue to take the ship of democracy to the safe shore and make Pakistan economically strong.



**ISLAMABAD:** Deputy Chief of General Staff Turkish Armed Forces, General Irfan Ozsert called on Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf.