

ECP prepared for elections
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was fully prepared to hold general elections across the country on February 8, 2024 (Thursday). According to details, the Election Commission has established 90675 polling stations in all four provinces and over 120 million registered voters will cast their vote for National Assembly and four Provincial Assemblies.



@thefrontierpost

First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIXI

No. 13

Regd. No. 241

RAJAB 23 1445 -- SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 04 2024

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30

PM: Pak, UAE enjoy deep brotherly ties

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Saturday said that Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates enjoyed strong brotherly ties which were being further strengthened with time.

He said Pakistan highly valued the UAE's firm support to its economic and investment sectors. The prime minister was talking to UAE Minister for Foreign Trade Dr. Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi who called on him, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release

The caretaker prime minister said that during his recent visit to the UAE, both the countries had signed MoUs which would open a new era of economic cooperation between the two countries. "The UAE is a home to 1.8 million Pakistanis who are playing a role in the progress, prosperity and economic development of both brotherly countries," the press release quoted the prime minister as saying.

He also stressed the need for cooperation in the aviation and tourism sectors, besides exploring the prospects in railway connectivity so that the people-to-people contacts could be further strengthened. Prime Minister Kakar assured the government's support for bringing traders and chambers of commerce and industry of the two countries closer.

He also conveyed his good wishes to UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. During the meeting,

Caretaker Minister for Maritime Affairs Shahid Ashraf Tarrar, UAE ambassador in Pakistan and other relevant senior officials were also present. The UAE minister expressed the resolve to further strengthen trade ties with Pakistan.

Caretaker PM satisfied at growing cooperation between Pak, UAE businesses: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Saturday expressed his satisfaction over the growth of exchanges, interaction and cooperation between businesses in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

The prime minister witnessed the signing of an agreement between The Authority of Karachi Port Trust Pakistan and Abu Dhabi Ports Group, UAE. The agreement is a commercial understanding for the Outsourcing of Operations of Bulk and General Cargo Terminal at seven (7) Berths of East Wharf Karachi Port, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

Caretaker Minister for Communication, Railways and Maritime Affairs Shahid Ashraf Tarrar along with other high officials from Pakistani side and UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade Dr. Thani Bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, Ambassador of UAE to Pakistan Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Al-Zaabi along with other high officials from the UAE side were present in the ceremony. The agreement aims to strengthen the bilateral relations in the marine and logistic sectors of Pakistan and UAE.

3 wounded in MQM-PPP clash

F.P. Report

KARACHI: At least three persons including two children were wounded in a clash between the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) workers Friday night in Karachi.

This is the second fierce clash between the two leading parties of Karachi within a week as the general elections, slated for February 8, are just around the corner. Police said the 12-year-old Abdul Rehman, who received an injury to his head, was admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) of the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre and was put on ventilator support.

Whereas, Ashraf, 40, was beaten with a stick and Shumail, 16, received a bullet injury to his leg. Both of them were under treatment and were out of danger, said police. A huge contingent of police including the senior superintendent reached the site of the incident and initiated an investigation into the incident which took place in New Karachi's Sector 11-J near the PPP election office.

Police said the tearing of a political party's poster sparked the encounter. The law enforcers initially took one person into their custody for his embroilment in the incident. Later, in a joint raid by police and rangers, 34 people were arrested, said the senior superintendent of police (SSP) adding that the family of the child admitted to the ICU did not belong to any political party.

A cousin of the critically injured kid, Muhammad Saleem, told that they had a clash with workers of a political party last day. The workers started beating them with batons and opened firing, and in the meanwhile, a bullet hit his cousin's head, he added. Saleem said he was associated with the PPP and the other kid wounded in the incident was also his relative.

The hospital administration said the child was under treatment at the JPMC's neuro ward. His health condition was critical, said the administration. Furthermore, a first information report (FIR) has been lodged in the New Karachi police station by PPP worker Yousaf. At least 15 unidentified persons including three MQM-P workers have been nominated in the FIR, lodged under charges of terrorism and attempted murder.

Imran, Sh Rasheed summoned

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan, former interior minister Sheikh Rasheed and Sheikh Rashid Shafiq have been summoned in May 9 violence case on February 6.

As per details, former Punjab Assembly deputy speaker Wasiq Qayyum Abbasi, Sadaqat Ali Abbasi and Umar Tanvir recorded 154 statement and became witnesses against PTI founder and Sheikh Rasheed in May 9 case. They stated that the May 9 violence was carried out on the directions of Imran Khan and AML chief Sheikh Rasheed.

The PTI-backed candidate from NA-53 Ajmal Sabir also recorded statement in May 9 case, revealing that Sheikh Rasheed called a meeting at his residence Lal Haveli on May 6 and planned the May 9 violence. Earlier, Police arrested former interior minister and Awami Muslim League chief Sheikh Rasheed following the cancellation of bail in May 9 riots case. Rasheed is accused of planning vandalism and attack on a sensitive installation on May 9, following the arrest of the former prime minister. Violent clashes were broken out across Pakistan after former prime minister Imran Khan was arrested on May 9, 2023. The protests were held in remote and major cities as the party workers were agitated due to their chairman's arrest, with Balochistan, Punjab, KP, and Islamabad summoning the armed forces to ensure law and order.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar witnessing signing of a commercial agreement between the Authority of Karachi Port Trust, Pakistan and Abu Dhabi Ports Group, UAE.

Imran, Bushra awarded seven years imprisonment

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The trial court has handed seven-year sentences, each, to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the "nikah" case at the Adiala jail. The verdict was pronounced by Senior Civil Judge Qudratullah on Saturday, a day after the hearing of the case was conducted inside the jail premises for 14 hours a day earlier.

The judge issued the court's verdict in the case pertaining to the plea filed by Bushra Bibi's ex-husband Khawar Maneka against what he refers to as an nikah with the former prime minister. So far, cross-examination of the statements given by the four witnesses in the case has been completed. The statements of Khan and Bushra under section 342 have also been recorded.

Bushra Bibi, who has been placed at the Banigala following its status declared as a sub jail, will be brought to Adiala for the final hearing. The verdict will be announced in the presence of the PTI founder, Bushra Bibi and their lawyers. The complainant's counsel Raja Rizwan Abbasi, Khan's lawyer Salman Akram Raja and Bushra Bibi's lawyer Usman Gul also gave their final arguments a day earlier. Maneka, in his petition, had termed Bushra and Khan's nikkah "fraudulent" contending that the marriage was solemnised during her iddat — following her divorce with him. "That above said nikah and the marriage ceremony was neither legal nor Islamic as it was solemnised without observing iddah period."

He also accused the former prime minister of ruining his entire life with the petition stating that the PTI top leader "stigmatised the complainant

and his family just to achieve his unethical and immoral objects through intrusion in the complainant's peaceful marital life". "In light of the above, it is humbly prayed that respondents No.1 [Imran Khan] and 2 [Bushra Bibi] be summoned and punished strictly in accordance with law in the interest of justice," Maneka prayed to the court.

Soon after the unfavourable ruling, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Saturday announced moving the high court against the trial court's verdict that sentenced its founder Imran Khan and wife Bushra Bibi to seven years in the "un-Islamic nikah" case at the Adiala jail on Saturday.

The verdict, which also provisions an Rs500,000 fine each for both the accused, was announced by senior civil judge Qudratullah today in response to the petition filed by Bushra's ex-husband Khawar Maneka against what he refers to as an un-Islamic and illegal nikah with the former prime minister.

Maneka, in his petition, had termed Bushra and Khan's nikkah "fraudulent" contending that the marriage was solemnised during her iddat — following her divorce with him. "That above said nikah and the marriage ceremony was neither legal nor Islamic as it was solemnised without observing iddah period."

Speaking to the media outside Adiala jail today, Khan's lawyer, Barrister Gohar, said that "shameless, scandalous and unethical allegations" have been made for political motives. "This is a case that has no basis whatsoever, but in fact, was simply filed on the behest of Aun Chaudhry — a former close aid of Khan and one of the key witnesses in the said case."

"The cleric [who solemnised the nikah] has himself admitted that

[Aun] Chaudhry 'picked him up'," Gohar said. In response to a question regarding the legal grounds for today's sentence, Khan's counsel revealed that the judge maintained that the defence's reliance on the Supreme Court verdict regarding the 39-day iddat is a "general precedent" and is not applicable in this case.

He further said that the court relied on the second function, held for family and children to take them into confidence, as the "valid nikah" instead of the actual nikah that was solemnised before that. "The judge considered the second function as the actual nikah and not the first," he noted.

"All of this is being done in violation of the constitution for political motives and character assassination of Khan sahib. "We will move the high court against today's verdict. We are hopeful for justice if these cases are presented before a free and fair tribunal," he added while calling on the judiciary to uphold their oath and protect our fundamental rights by ensuring principles of justice.

Conveying the PTI's founder message for his voters, the lawyer said that the former premier has called on his supporters to remain peaceful and persevere in these tough times. "Even if I have to spend a thousand years here [in jail], I would not make any deal," Gohar said quoting Khan.

Meanwhile, in response to the unfavourable trial court verdict, the PTI issued an official statement via its spokesperson, which mentioned the ruling as "extremely shameful" and "against Shariah". "The verdict is a serious and vile attack on the book of Allah, Constitution and matrimonial and family laws," the spokesperson said, adding that the ruling came as an embarrassment for the entire justice system.

CTD arrests five terrorists in operations

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) on Saturday arrested five terrorists during different intelligence-based operations across the Punjab.

As per details, the CTD carried out 70 operations in Punjab and arrested five terrorists who were identified as Sharafat, Yaseen, Talha, Abdurrehman and Usaid. The CTD spokesperson said that explosives, two IED bombs, 10 detonators, weapons and cash were recovered from the terrorists who were arrested in the operations carried out in Mianwali, Jehlum, Hafizabad and Okara. Earlier, the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) arrested two terrorists in an Intelligence Based Operation (IBO) in Okara. As per details, an intelligence-based operation was conducted on Benazir Road in Okara and arrested two terrorists. The CTD officials stated that weapons, explosives, detonators and batteries from the possession of arrested terrorists.

The terrorists associated with a banned organization were identified as Abdurrehman from Taxila and Talha from Faisalabad. The Counter Terrorism Department officials apprehended a suspect from Hub River Road allegedly involved in supplying arms and ammunition in Karachi.

Nawaz pledges to end unemployment

F.P. Report

GUJRANWALA: PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif on Saturday pledged to eliminate poverty and unemployment in the country if he secures victory in the upcoming Feb 8 general elections.

Addressing a public gathering in Gujranwala, the three-time prime minister noted that if his government had not been ousted, not a single person here would have been unemployed.

Citing Transparency International's report, Nawaz Sharif said Pakistan's ranking on graft index improved under Nawaz Sharif-led government. "Not only corruption, the price of bread, flour and sugar were also at the low-

est", he reiterated. He pointed out that his government also ended loadshedding and terrorism while the prices of petrol and electricity were the lowest. "The IMF [International Monetary Fund] had also acknowledged the country's development pace during my tenure," he added. Nawaz further said that the judge, who was in line to become new Chief Justice and awarded him sentence, resigned and went home. "That judge was involved in my ouster," he added. "Had my government remained, people would have been satisfied; they would have been able to make ends meet, unlike today," the PML-N supremo maintained.

Addressing the youth of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif

assured them that he will once again build motorways, universities and hospitals across Pakistan, in addition to tackling unemployment and poverty in the country. A day earlier, Nawaz Sharif asserted that the country's real youth stand by his party, not mummy-daddy type.

Addressing a public gathering in Faisalabad in connection with general elections 2024, the three-time prime minister said that some people believe the country's youth support another party, but "that's not the case". "The real Pakistani youth stand by PML-N, not the mummy-daddy ones," Nawaz Sharif, said, adding that he has no words to "thank the people of Faisalabad for this love".

Will end politics of hatred and division: Bilawal

F.P. Report

CHHACHHRO/MITHI: Chairman Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, has appealed to the nation to vote for his "Nai Soch" in the February 8 general elections pledging that after winning the elections, he will bury the politics of hatred and division in the country forever, which harms the nation, federation, and economy.

He also criticized the PML-N's limited focus on specific areas within one province, stating that Nawaz Sharif is not campaigning in Sindh because of he didn't make any contributions to the province's development. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari announced that the incoming PPP government would gift a train service by laying a track from Karachi to Tharparkar, aiming at to provide quality and low-cost travel facilities to the people of the desert district.

According to a press release issued by the Media Cell Bilawal House, the PPP chairman visited Chhachhro town in Tharparkar district on Saturday as part of his nationwide election campaign. He addressed a huge public meeting, expressing gratitude for the full participation of the people and stating that the people of Chhachhro and Tharparkar have already given their verdict before February 8. He emphasized that the relationship between the PPP and the people is not just political but filled with love, and vowed to be together for the rest of their lives.



Bilawal Bhutto Zardari pointed out that an individual seeking a fourth term as prime minister, is also making false statements about the Thar-coal project. He asked the people of Chhachhro, "Who made the Thar coal project?" to which the public replied, "Benazir, Benazir...." He explained that the Thar coal project was planned to benefit the people of Tharparkar economically.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari assured the people that he would not allow the Karonjhar Mountain in the district to be damaged by the elite, stating, "I will cut off the hands that move towards Karonjhar. Here, if anyone has the right to do business, it is the locals first."

He emphasized that he is the only politician seeking votes from the people, while others are "looking at left and right". He urged the public to come out in large numbers on February 8, saying that no power in the world can stop him if they do so.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari criticized opponents aiming for a puppet government in Karachi to exploit the rights of people in Sindh. He pointed out that those contesting elections with the Star sym-

bol in Sindh are facilitating those with the Tiger symbol, serving Lahore and Raiwind only.

He identified inflation, poverty, and unemployment as the three biggest problems and presented the PPP's election manifesto, the "People's Economic Agreement." He mentioned that the manifesto has been translated into Sindhi, Saraiki, Balochi, Pashto, English, and Urdu. He pledged to double the income of the people, provide 300 units of free solar power, build three million house units with ownership rights for women, increase the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), and offer interest-free loans to women for business. He also announced the launch of Benazir Kisan Card, Benazir Mazdoor Card, and Benazir Youth Card programs to assist farmers, laborers, and youth. Additionally, he promised to establish at least one university in each district and improve the public health system with free treatment facilities, similar to NICVD, SIUT, and Gambat Medical Institute. He concluded by announcing the "Bhook Mittao Program" to provide at least one meal to primary school children.



Waqari, Shahi discuss election matters

KARACHI (APP): General Secretary of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Sindh Chapter, Senator Waqar Mehdi visited the residence of Awami National Party (ANP) Sindh's President Shahi Syed and discussed the overall political situation of the country and matters related to the general elections here on Saturday.

PPP's Javed Nagori and Khawaja Sohail Mansoor accompanied Senator Waqar Mehdi.

Mehdi sought ANP's support for PPP during the general elections in the Sindh province including Karachi. He said that PPP and ANP were supporters of democracy and they were cooperating with each other for the general public.

On the occasion, ANP's Shahi Syed asked for some time to discuss the matter with party leadership.

Police return lost diamond rings to US woman

LAHORE (INP): Motorway Police recovered and returned lost diamond rings worth one million rupees to US national woman setting an example of honesty and responsibility.

According to spokesman of Motorway Police, while travelling to Dera Ghazi Khan from Lahore, US national Dr. Sumera forgot her two diamond rings at M-3 Jaranwala service areas.

The woman informed Motorway Police about the disappearance of her rings.

Patrolling officers Zahid Iqbal, Sultan Khan and Iqbal Khan recovered the diamond rings from service area. On directives of Sector Commander Atif Chaudhry, DSP Hameedullah Niazi contacted the woman.

The patrolling officers after legal formalities returned the diamond rings valuing one million rupees to the Dr Sumera.

DIG Syed Fareed Ali appreciated the patrolling officers for their responsibility and US national woman also lauded the honesty of Motorway Police.

No one will be allowed to disturb peace

KARACHI (PPI): Karachi Mayor Barrister Murtaza Wahab said on Friday that we will not allow the peace of the city to be destroyed in any way, as we have established peace in the city after a lot of struggle and sacrifices.

He expressed these views while addressing a press conference held at Frere Hall in the city. Mr Wahab said that no one would be allowed to take law into their hands. Wahab said: "I am disappointed that attempts are being made to disturb the law and order situation."

He urged the caretaker chief minister, the home minister, and police authorities to take notice of the deteriorating situation in the city and provide security to the public so that citizens could vote for their favorite candidates.

The mayor said that five days ago, the office of PPP South District General Secretary Karamullah Waqasi was attacked, adding the miscreants could still not be arrested while some people were only doing politics of putting blame on others.

The Karachi mayor said that the political parties using KMC properties to put up their panaflexes and banners should pay their rent to KMC. "Those who call me the Qabza Mayor have themselves occupied the pedestrian bridge of KMC, when we tried to remove the political flags from the city on the orders of the Supreme Court, the KMC staff were beaten up. Our war is a war to serve this city."

He hoped that the Election Commission of Pakistan would conduct free and fair elections through which real representatives would reach the assembly and a real revolution would come.

Testament of Pakistan's unwavering commitment to resolution of Kashmir disputes: Mushaal

ISLAMABAD (APP): Principal Information Officer (PIO), Press Information Department, Dr Tariq Mehmood Khan said that United Nations resolutions were very clear that Kashmiris will be given the right to self-determination through a free and transparent plebiscite to decide about their future.

In his welcome address at a seminar organized by the Press Information department titled "Kashmir Solidarity Day" to be observed on February 5, Dr Tariq Mehmood Khan said that since August 2019 fascist Modi regime of India had increased atrocities on hapless Kashmiris.

He said it was the responsibility of Pakistan and Kashmiris to expose the real face of India at the global level.

He said that today's event was jointly organized by Kashmiri media and the Press Information Department. He thanked Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Human Rights and Women Empowerment Mushaal Malik for sparing time for this event.

Mushaal Mullick has said that Pakistan will continue to extend its unwavering political, moral and diplomatic support for the just struggle of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in determining their destiny through the right of self-determination. Principal Information Officer Dr. Tariq Mehmood Khan and members and representatives of All

Kashmir Newspapers Association (AKNA) also addressed on the occasion. DG Information Service Academy Arshad Munir, DG PID Ambreen Gul, President AKNA Amjad Choudhary and members of civil society and other media associations also attended the seminar.

Addressing the seminar, the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister said that the Kashmir Solidarity Day serves as a testament to Pakistan's unwavering commitment to the resolution of the Kashmir issue as per the UN resolutions and provision of justice and peace to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Highlighting the human rights violations in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), Mushaal said that India had been involved in genocide, extra-judicial killings, torture in custody, the use of chemical weapons, violence against children and women, enforced disappearances, pellet gun usage, collective punishment, black laws, false flag operations, and fake police encounters in its failing effort to suppress the freedom movement of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

SAPM expressed concerns over Modi's move to establish illegal Hindu settlements in IIOJK to alter the demographic landscape and turn Muslim majority into a minority in the region. She said the issuance of Kashmiri domiciles to non-Kashmiri by India had

seen a significant increase after the Indian illegal actions of August 5, 2019.

Mushaal raised alarms over the unjust and illegal persecution of peaceful Kashmiri leadership. She said that Kashmiri leaders are either languishing in jails or kept under house arrest.

She further said that the grave of the late Kashmiri leader Syed Ali Gilani had been turned into a sub-jail by India, making it inaccessible to visitors. She urged the world to be watchful as false and fabricated charges might be used by Modi-led regime to impose a death sentence on Yasin Malik through biased legal proceedings. SAPM said that Pakistan was a target of Indian terror operations and irrefutable evidence of Indian involvement in targeted killings inside Pakistan was available.

She further said that the global reach of the RSS terrorist network was a threat to global peace. Mushaal urged the international community and the UN to stand in solidarity with the people of Jammu and Kashmir, acknowledge their rights and make efforts to ensure the peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue as per the aspirations of the Kashmiri people and the relevant UN resolutions. SAPM extended her heartfelt commendation to the Press Information Department for organizing a seminar in connection with Kashmir Solidarity Day to raise awareness and understanding about the Kashmir issue.



PESHAWAR: Governor KP Haji Ghulam Ali addressing as a chief guest to annual convocation of NCS University.

Ministers highlight importance of positive image of Pakistan



F.P. Report

KARACHI: In a joint press conference held at Haseena Moin Hall, the Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture, Syed Jamal Shah, and the Provincial Minister for Information, Minority Affairs, and Social Protection, President Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi Muhammad Ahmed Shah, highlighted the importance of promoting a positive image of Pakistan worldwide.

Welcoming the federal minister, Muhammad Ahmed Shah expressed his delight at the collaboration and stated, "We are here today, two individuals with a common identity - culture and literature. By a stroke of fate, we both have become ministers. Jamal Shah, being the Federal Minister for Culture and National Heritage, and I, serving as the Provincial Minister for Information, Minority Affairs, and Social Protection."

Acknowledging Jamal Shah's contributions to the film industry and the arts, Ahmed Shah remarked, "Jamal Shah is well-known to all as a filmmaker, actor, and connoisseur of the arts. He recently visited Hyderabad, reinforcing the cultural bond with his

presence." Muhammad Ahmed Shah continued, "We share a close relationship with Jamal Shah."

He has formulated policies for the film industry and worked extensively for the promotion of culture. Our aim is to showcase Pakistan's positive image globally, and Jamal Shah's presence adds value to this mission." Jamal Shah, addressing the briefing, emphasized the need for cultural unity, stating, "Culture is the only weapon to connect everyone. If we carry our culture with us and present it to the world, the dynamics change. The lack of appreciation for culture leads to the losses we witness today."

Highlighting the achievements, Jamal Shah mentioned the establishment of policies and galleries, stating, "We have developed policies for Theater Academy, Music Academy under my supervision. The collaboration between federal and provincial ministers in promoting culture is commendable."

During the press conference, Federal Minister Syed Jamal Shah provided insights into heritage conservation efforts, mentioning ongoing projects related to historical forts, stopovers, and mosque

embellishments. He expressed hope for continued support from the upcoming government for these initiatives. Jamal Shah also stressed the importance of language preservation, saying, "Our children are becoming estranged from their languages."

While English poems are remembered, contact with Urdu and native languages is diminishing. We are bringing together people of all languages in our institutions." In a joint effort to promote cultural diversity, both ministers revealed plans for launching 'Heritage TV', focusing on youth engagement and initiating calligraphy education in schools. They also discussed the review of cultural infrastructure, aiming to transform unused spaces in Islamabad into cultural corners.

Islamabad, a city of beauty, has yet to see any government make efforts to establish a museum. Despite this, we have received approval, and ongoing efforts involve collaboration with countries like the United States and France. We aimed to develop 150 cinemas, accessible to the general public; we are striving to create cinemas that cater to a broader audience. Concluding the briefing, Jamal Shah urged the importance of celebrating culture daily, stating, "We must celebrate our culture daily."

We are in a constant struggle to reclaim our heritage. Every day should be Culture Day." The Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture, Jamal Shah, closed the conference by emphasizing the need for the national agenda to reflect the richness and beauty of Pakistan's diverse languages and cultures.



ISLAMABAD: SAPM Mushaal Mullick addresses the seminar conducted by the Press Information Department in honour of the sacrifices of Kashmiri brethren.

ECP refutes private news channels' claims on EMS

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) strongly dismissed deceptive tickers and reports disseminated by certain private news channels, aiming to mislead the public regarding the capability and utility of Election Management System (EMS).

An ECP spokesperson stated that certain private channels, including Hum News, Bol News, and GTV, are spreading false propaganda regarding the non-functionality and faults in EMS.

He stated that, indeed, the functionality of EMS has undergone multiple tests, leaving no doubt about its efficiency.

Earlier, the spokesman

in another statement, said that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) smoothly conducted another experimental mock test of the Election Management System (EMS) on Saturday, successfully achieving all the required steps and goals.

The evaluation concluded that the system performed satisfactorily in all aspects. Returning Officers from 859 constituencies nationwide engaged in the pilot exercise, comprehensively testing the system in both online and offline modes.

The primary goal of tabulation and compilation is to guarantee accurate and timely delivery of election results, and this

data will be put into use on election day, February 8.

He said demonstrating consistent speed and efficiency in both online and offline modes, Saturday's pilot exercise affirmed the EMS's full operational capability and effectiveness.

The system works with the same speed and efficiency in both online and offline modes. Today's pilot exercise proved the EMS to be fully operational and efficient.

Throughout this exercise, the repetition of the process for generating and transmitting election results via Form 47 revealed the satisfactory performance of the EMS in this regard.



Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre

A JCI Enterprise Accredited Organisation

Career Opportunities in SKMCH&RC Peshawar

Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre (SKMCH&RC) is a specialist tertiary care cancer Centre built and funded by charitable donations with a mission to provide the best possible cancer care to all patients. SKMCH&RC has a team of UK and US-trained physicians who provide state-of-the-art diagnostic, treatment and support services to patients. SKMCH&RC is pleased to invite applications for the following positions:

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- Consultant Clinical & Radiation Oncologist
- Consultant Clinical Haematologist
- Consultant Head and Neck Surgeon
- Consultant Medical Oncologist
- Consultant Nuclear Medicine
- Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon
- Consultant Paediatric Oncologist
- Consultant Pathologist
- Consultant Physician Critical Care & Pulmonary Medicine
- Consultant Physician General Internal
- Medicine & Pulmonology
- Consultant Physician Internal
- Medicine & Gastroenterology
- Consultant Physician Internal
- Medicine & Infectious Diseases
- Consultant Physician Internal
- Medicine & Nephrology
- Consultant Radiologist
- Consultant Upper GI Surgeon

- Consultant Urologist
- Locum Consultant Anaesthetist
- Locum Consultant Breast Surgeon
- Locum Consultant Pathologist
- Locum Consultant Radiologist
- Locum Consultant Urologist
- Part Time Consultant Anaesthetist

Senior Instructors:

- Senior Instructor Anaesthesia
- Senior Instructor Breast Surgery
- Senior Instructor Clinical Haematology
- Senior Instructor Clinical and Radiation Oncology
- Senior Instructor Head and Neck Surgery
- Senior Instructor Medical Oncology
- Senior Instructor Paediatric Oncology
- Senior Instructor Radiology

Hospital Based Fellowships:

- Fellow in Anaesthesia (Hospital Fellowship)

Nursing & Paramedical:

- Associate Director Nursing
- Nursing Team Leaders

Management, Administration & Technical:

- Database Administrator

Note: All Senior Instructor positions for Karachi & Peshawar involve working at Lahore for two years, followed by two years of training overseas. For further details regarding the position and eligibility criteria, please visit our website on www.shaukatkhanum.org.pk

TO APPLY: Only online applications will be entertained. Please share your CV at the email address given below and do mention the position applied for in the subject line. We regret that only shortlisted candidates will be notified.

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Human Resources Department

Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre

5-B, Sector A-2, Phase V,

Hayatabad, Peshawar, Pakistan.

Tel: +92 91 5885000 Ext. 3537, 3538

Email: careers.peshawar@shaukatkhanum.org.pk

Education is path of progress, says Governor

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The youth should enlighten the name of the country and nation in the world with their education and research and always prepare themselves for competition, Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali said while addressing the first annual convocation 2024 of NCS University System Peshawar here on Saturday.

The Governor distributed a total of 160 degrees besides awarded 16 gold medals to those students who got distinction in their respective faculties. Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali said that education is the path of development and the name of the end of ignorance. Educated youth have to play an important role in the development and prosperity of the country. "Don't let it go to waste, difficulties are a part of life, struggle and quest should never end, putting knowledge and skills to use, you have to move forward with hard work and honesty in practical life," the Governor said.

Qazi Amjad CEO, Sajid Inam Secretary Higher Education Regulation Authority, Pro Vice Chancellor KMU Professor Rubina Naz, Dr. Bakht Sarwar Chairman Board of Governors, Registrar, Faculty members, members of the Senate and Syndicate, including students and parents, were present in the ceremony. The Governor distributed degrees to 160 students who completed Doctor of Physical Therapy, Bachelor of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences in the session 2023 and awarded gold medals to 16 students who achieved prominent positions in the field of education.

In the ceremony, Director Campus NCS University Aamir Waleed welcomed the governor and other guests and presented the annual performance report of the institution to the

governor. Addressing the ceremony. Earlier, the Governor congratulated the students and especially the parents and faculty members for their academic success. He said that parents have spent most of their lives and capital on the education and training of their children and today is a day of happiness for parents that their children have succeeded in front of them.

The Governor said that in the convocation of public and private universities, I consider participation as my duty, in a period of 14 months, I participated in the convocation of various universities and gave educational certificates to 13,000 students. "Always be ready to compete because the world has come a long way in the field of research, he urged the students. He said that our universities need a lot of effort in the field of research. The governor said that the people associated with the medical field have an important place in the society.

"If you have the passion and pain to serve the suffering humanity, success will be your destiny," he said. The Governor said that this institution has created a place of its own in a very short period of time and it is hoped that this institution will promote the education of health sciences in line with the requirements of the modern age.

Governor seeks compliance over 2% admission quota for minorities in universities: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Governor Haji Ghulam Ali has issued directives to all public sector varsities for sharing compliance over a two percent quota for minorities in the province.

He issued these directives during a meeting held at Governor House with a delegation of Civil Society Organization (CSO) representatives under the chairmanship of Qamar Naseem, Programme Manager, Blue Veins organization.

Muhammad Rizwan, Provincial Coordinator of the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), was also present on the occasion, along with CSO representatives including Zartasha, Faizan, Aliza Mehfooz, and Uruba. The CSO representatives called on the Governor to express their gratitude for the support extended by Haji Ghulam Ali in the enforcement of Section 144 for the imposition of a ban on the sale of e-cigarettes on youngsters below the age of 21 and within the vicinity of educational institutions.

During the meeting, Qamar Naseem diverted the attention of Governor KP over the non-implementation of a two percent admission quota by public sector universities for the minority community. He informed Governor Haji Ghulam Ali that during a survey conducted by Blue Veins in the province, it was found that the majority of universities are not utilizing the two percent quota for minorities as decided by the government.

Taking notice of the information, the governor forthwith issued directives to all the universities in the province to share the implementation of the decision. He said the rights of minorities would be protected, and the implementation of decisions taken by the government in this regard would be ensured at all costs. He also sought implementation of the job quota granted by the government to the minority community of the country. Earlier, Qamar Naseem apprised Governor Haji Ghulam Ali about the benefits of enforcing a ban on the sale of e-cigarettes and vapes to youngsters in KP. He said, "District governments are conducting raids at different commercial markets and taking action over the open sale of newer tobacco products.



PESHAWAR: KP Caretaker Chief Minister, Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah witnessing an MoU signing between KP Information Technology Board and Grow for Google Program.

Civil society announces support to Tehreek-e-Darveshian



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Large number of people from every walk of life announced their support for Tehreek-e-Darveshian Pakistan candidate for PK72 Dr. Zahir u Din Khalil, on Friday.

The political workers claimed that other parties have been tested by public but can't deliver as per will of the nation. They claimed that Tehreek-e-Darveshian will bring dynamic changes in political landscape of Pakistan.

The newcomers announced their support both ideological and physical to ensure success of Dr Zahir u Din Khalil at every cost.

Weather to remain cold

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Weather will remain cold in most districts of the province, an official of the Meteorological Department said here on Saturday.

It will be very cold and cloudy in the upper districts with gusty winds and thundershowers in Peshawar, Chitral, Dir, Swat, Kohistan, Shangla, Malakand, Abbottabad, Mansehra, Charsadda, Nowshera, Swabi, Buner, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Kurram, Waziristan, Tank, Khyber and Bajaur.

Possibility of snowfall on the mountains with some chances of rain as well in the upper part of the province, the official said. Moderate to heavy rain and snowfall and hailstorm are also likely at some places, he said. There is a fear of flooding in local rivers due to heavy rains and risk of landslides and communication roads due to snowfall.

Rivals poses challenge to Sherpao, Aimal

PESHAWAR (APP): As only five days left in the General Election 2024, the candidates of various political parties and independents geared campaign on NA 24 Charsadda-I where political stalwarts are posing serious challenge to Qumi Watan Party Chairman and former interior minister, Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao in native constituency.

Known as a stronghold of ANP and Qumi Watan Party, Aftab Sherpao is again contesting election from his home constituency where he is being challenged by ANP, JUIF, PTI and Pakistan Peoples Party candidates. Winning the 2002, 2008 and 2013 elections despite defeat in last election, Aftab Sherpao expedited elections campaign to persuade voters besides approaching large tribes to win their support.

In 2013 election, Sherpao won the constituency with 37,044 votes against Munhamir Khan who bagged 33,836 votes.

However, Aftab Sherpao had lost to PTI's Anwar Taj as the former stood with third position. The women of Charsadda, constituting 45% of registered voters and are eying on resolutions of their socioeconomic, education and environmental challenges besides seeking jobs.

The voters are demanding the establishment of a medical and cadet college, improved health and education facilities, and economic empowerment for women. Senior vice-chairman of the "Muttahida" Shopkeepers Federation, Sadiqullah said that inadequate healthcare and education facilities, insufficient transport infrastructure, and unfulfilled promises regarding road coverage are major challenges of the constituency and any candidate with solid program for its resolutions would get an edge over others. He said a medical and cadet college was approved 15 years ago and it was yet to be established in the constituency.

He urged the prospective representatives to

address these problems and alleviate the burden on the common people. Meena Taj, an advocate for women's rights, emphasized the need for economic empowerment, education, and a change in societal attitudes. She said the existing laws empowering women are perceived as ineffective in practice, leading to challenges for widows and their children.

Urging elected representatives to enforce harassment laws effectively and develop plans for women's livelihood improvement at the village level, she said that political discourse often focuses on emotions rather than concrete plans. She highlighted the importance of political parties presenting clear manifestos and plans for future development, emphasizing that a focus on opponents rather than problem-solving contributes to divisive politics.

On NA 24 Charsadda-II, ANP's KP President Aimal Wali is also being challenged by JUIF and PPP candidates in his home constituency. Aimal Wali Khan, who is the son of ANP President Asfandiyar Wali Khan was contesting election for a national assembly seat from his hometown Charsadda after his father was out of election race due to health problems.

History of the past elections revealed that ANP's had won the constituency for record six times while JUIF's three times and PTI's only once. During general elections held between 1970-2018, this constituency was won three times by ANP President Asfandiyar Wali Khan, two times by Khan Abdul Wali Khan and once by Begium Nasim Wali Khan. JUIF's Maulana Hassan Jan Shaheed had clinched victory in 1990 election and Maulana Gohar Shah won it two times while PTI's Fazal Muhammad Khan one time in the last general election.

In the 1970 election, ANP Chief Abdul Wali Khan emerged victorious

after securing 34,359 votes while his wife Begium Nasim Wali Khan secured victory on the ticket of Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) with 48,653 votes during the 1977 election. Abdul Wali Khan had regained the seat in the 1998 election after obtaining 63,185 votes. However, Abdul Wali Khan lost to JUIF's Maulana Hasan Jan Shaheed in the 1990 election after the latter bagged 66,452 votes, respectively the former left practical politics.

ANP President Asfandiyar Wali Khan was elected member of the national assembly from this constituency in 1993 election with 56,164 votes and 1997 election with 55,059 votes respectively. In 2002 general election, JUIF candidate Maulana Gohar Shah secured victory with 55,917 votes while ANP's Asfandiyar Wali again elected in 2008 election after securing 38,835 votes.

In 2013 election, the seat was re-clinched by Maulana Gohar Shah on ticket of JUIF with 53,610 votes and PTI's Fazal Muhammad achieved landslide victory in 2018 election with 83,596 votes. Former Chairman, Political Science Department, Professor Dr AH Hilali said that election 2024 in Charsadda would determine popularity of the party.

He said time will tell that whether ANP's third generation would emerge victorious or political rivals would regain its seat after PTI win it in last election. The literacy rate in the politically fertile constituency was relatively higher than NA 23 Charsadda-I where support of other political parties and large baradaris would matter. Most of its people are associated with government jobs, agriculture, trade and overseas employment. The contesting candidates started attending marriages and funeral prayers and addressing corner meetings to persuade maximum public support. The electioneering campaign accelerated as polling day comes nearer in Charsadda.

SSP visits ECP offices

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations for Peshawar Kashif Aftab Abbasi conducted a surprise visit to designated centers and Election Commission offices on Saturday to oversee the distribution of materials for the upcoming general elections.

The unexpected tour included a thorough inspection of security arrangements and surveillance cameras by the Capital City Police Peshawar. SSP Abbasi met with the administration, examined internal and external routes, scrutinizing various arrangements, including security measures.

During the visit, the SSP Operations received briefings from both the Operations team and Election Commission officials regarding security measures implemented so far, overall conditions at the designated centers, and specific security concerns. The materials distribution centers and Election Commission offices were examined in detail, focusing on internal and external routes, among other arrangements. Peshawar Police emphasized their commitment to ensuring secure elections and providing a conducive environment for the public. Stringent security plans have been finalized for highly sensitive and sensitive polling stations, with a comprehensive security setup in place to guarantee peaceful elections.

AIL Pakistan advances global mission in 2nd cabinet meeting

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a pivotal development for the Association of International Lawyers (AIL) Pakistan chapter, the second central cabinet meeting was recently convened at the AIL Head Office in London. Presided over by Nadeem Ahmed Tass, the coordinator of AIL Worldwide, the meeting saw the active participation of key figures, including Rana Zia Aslam Khan, President AIL and general secretary Saeed Hashmi.

The central cabinet members representing AIL

Pakistan, Muhammad Ayub Advocate and Muhammad Nasir Advocate, engaged in discussions addressing crucial aspects of the organization's agenda. Under the strategic guidance of Rana Zia Aslam Khan, the meeting delved into matters concerning the organizational structure, the establishment of new provincial cabinets, and the induction of new members.

A significant highlight of the session was the distribution of membership certificates, symbolizing a commitment to the principles and objectives of AIL.

Founded in 2022, AIL has swiftly risen to prominence as the preeminent global organization for International Lawyers.

Dedicated to upholding the supremacy of the law and safeguarding human rights on a global scale, AIL transcends the boundaries of religion, color, race, and sect.

The organization's mission revolves around protecting human rights, promoting the rule of law, facilitating professional development, and providing a global platform for the networking of lawyer communities.



PESHAWAR: SSP Operations Kashif Aftab Abbasi giving away souvenir to Superintendent Khalid Pervez, on his services.

Plight of Kashmiri people needs attention

Naeem Shamsi

IMAGINE a Valley that possesses some of the most scenic and beautiful landscapes found on Earth, with green mountains surrounding breathtaking lakes and rivers and an air of tranquility. Then imagine the same Valley littered with army check posts, barbed wires and locked down with the presence of hundreds of thousands of soldiers marching tyrannically and intimidating the local population. This is the reality of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), today.

Today, despite the passage of more than seventy-six years, the Jammu and Kashmir dispute remains one of the oldest unresolved disputes on the agenda of the UN Security Council. In these years, India has waged a ruthless campaign of oppression, committing grave human rights violations with impunity against the innocent Kashmiris in IIOJK. India's sole purpose has been territorial hold at any cost.

Despite repeated commitments and assurances to the United Nations, India continues to deny the Kashmiri people their inalienable right to self-determination. This right was promised to the Kashmiris by numerous UN Security Council resolutions which enunciate that the "final disposition" of Jammu and Kashmir would

be determined through a free and impartial plebiscite held under the United Nations. These resolutions also called for demilitarization of the region and for ensuring that demographic identity of the region would be protected and preserved.

Sadly, India has reneged on its commitments, made to the Kashmiri people, the UN, and Pakistan. In 1950, the Indian Constitution provided a special status to Jammu and Kashmir under its Article 370. This was later supplemented in 1954 through a Presidential Order to include Article 35-A that empowered the State Assembly to define "permanent residents" and confer special rights and privileges to them such as the right to purchase land, to vote and contest elections, seek employment and avail other state benefits. Non-permanent residents of the State were not entitled to these 'privileges'.

While these measures were neither consistent with the United Nations resolutions, nor held any legal standing, nevertheless, they preserved the unique identity and special nature of the land and the residents of IIOJK.

Enter Narendra Modi in 2014. The BJP government of Prime Minister Modi came to power riding the wave of a Hindutva-dominated India and powered by the chauvinistic ideals of the RSS ideologues. The BJP government repeatedly claimed that it would "solve" the Kashmir issue and that it

would revoke Article 370. Thus, it was no surprise when, on 5 August 2019, India carried out a so-called "legal coup" and illegally and unilaterally revoked the special status of the state of IIOJK by abrogating Article 370 and 35 A of the Indian Constitution. The region was converted into two so-called "Union Territories" of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, under direct control of New Delhi. The rationale given by the BJP was that this step would break the back of "militancy" and usher an era of normalcy, peace and development.

Deplorably, in its judgment of 11 December 2023, the Supreme Court of India has endorsed the Indian government's actions of 5 August 2019. Evidently, domestic legislation and judicial verdicts cannot absolve India of its international obligations under the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. In the eyes of international law, any process, subservient to the Indian Constitution, cannot be invoked to determine the final status of Jammu and Kashmir, which is an internationally-recognized disputed territory.

The Indian Supreme Court's verdict failed to cater to the aspirations of the Kashmiri people, who have already rejected India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5 August 2019. The Kashmiri leadership also expressed disappointment over the

judgement. As Jammu and Kashmir is an international dispute, the Indian government or its judiciary have no right to take unilateral measures against the will of the other parties to the dispute i.e. Kashmiri people and Pakistan.

Parallel to these legal and judicial measures, an oppressive campaign to crush dissent is in full swing. The brutality of Indian Occupation Forces has led to the killing of more than 800 innocent Kashmiris since 5 August, 2019. Extensive legal and administrative measures, draconian in nature, give complete immunity to the Indian forces from being answerable to law for any extra judicial action. Media has been silenced by curbs on internet, and coercive measures against journalists, including the shutting down of Kashmir Press Club. A farcical exercise of delimitation was carried out that has arbitrarily assigned a relatively higher number of legislative assembly seats to Hindu-majority Jammu region in a bid to enhance the Hindu minority's political influence at the expense of reducing the Muslims to a minority.

The true political leadership of Kashmiri people is languishing in jail, detained arbitrarily or under house arrest. Many such as Yasin Malik have been falsely implicated in fabricated cases, with the prosecution seeking death penalty for Mr. Malik. The untimely demise of Syed Ali

Geelani was also a major setback to the Kashmir freedom struggle. Mirwaiz Umar Farooq has remained under house arrest for a large part of last four years. Even the office of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference in Srinagar has been sealed by Indian authorities. Six Kashmiri political parties have also been outlawed under a counterterrorism law.

And yet, without any visible leadership, the Kashmir freedom struggle continues. There is no normalcy in the Valley. People are vehemently opposed to the BJP, which is trying to install a pliant Chief Minister to rubberstamp all its illegal measures. Last four years have witnessed continued violence and the local people are now raising their voice against the BJP government's Kashmir policies.

Pakistan has always lent its moral, diplomatic and political support to the Kashmir cause. This support has been even stronger since India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5 August, 2019. A whole-of-government approach has been followed involving all state institutions and segments of the society, media and all political parties in the parliament. Our Missions abroad and the diaspora have also played their part in the widespread dissemination of the realities on ground in IIOJK. The voiceless Kashmiris are being given a chance to speak through their Pakistani brothers and sisters. This

bond between Pakistan and Kashmir is eternal.

The Quaid-e-Azam had famously said that Kashmir is Pakistan's jugular vein. Perhaps, it is even more than that. Each year, on the 5th of February, the entire Pakistani nation comes together to demonstrate its solidarity with the people of IIOJK and to reaffirm this pledge that Pakistan will always stand shoulder to shoulder with the Kashmiri people in their just struggle for freedom from Indian oppression.

This year, just as in previous years, the people of Pakistan will once again demonstrate their unstinting resolve to support the Kashmir freedom struggle. We will keep highlighting the plight of our Kashmiri brothers and sisters and show to the world the real face of India's barbarity. The United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, many world leaders and human rights defenders including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have spoken out against Indian atrocities. Pakistan's diplomatic campaign for the freedom of Kashmir will continue full swing till realization of the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people.

Till then, Pakistan stands in solidarity with Kashmir - on 5th February and every day.

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In brief

Gujjars, Alizai tribes to back JI
F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Alizai, Musakhel and Gujar tribes in Jandol on Saturday announced to support the Jamaat-i-Islami chief Sirajul Haq contesting elections on NA 6. The tribes made the announcements during different functions held at Samarbagh, Munda and Miskini Dara. A tough contest is expected among the JI chief Sirajul Haq, PTI former MNA Muhammad Bashir Khan and ANP former MPA Haji Bahadar Khan in this constituency. The PTI Muhammad Bashir Khan had won this seat in 2018 by obtaining 63,071 votes against the JI chief Sirajul Haq's 46,927 votes. The ANP candidate Nazir Khan had got 19743 votes who later joined the PTI-P of Pervaz Khattak and the party has awarded him ticket now for PK 17. A disgruntled activist of the PTI Ali Shah Mishwani withdrew from the running in favour of Muhammad Bashir Khan in this constituency a few days ago. According to political analysts a neck to neck contest is expected between the JI chief Sirajul Haq and PTI Muhammad Bashir Khan in NA 6 Lower Dir-I.

PML-N to clean sweep Mardan
F.P. Report

TAKHTBHAI: Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) will make Takhtbhai a model tehsil across the country as well as will establish chain of developmental projects in the Mardan for public welfare. This was claimed by PML-N Mardan chapter general secretary and the party nominated candidate Jamsheed Mohmand while addressing public gathering at Takhtbhai city. He claimed that PMLN will redress residents of Mazdoorabad longstanding demand of clean drinking water. PML-N NA 23 candidate Jalal Khan, PK60 Mumtaz Khan, former Nazim Mian Abdur Rehman and Saqib Khan addressed the party workers. They claimed that PMLN will secure majority across Pakistan at national and provincial assemblies.

Aram stolen from police station
F.P. Report

LARKANA: Unknown persons broke the wall of the weapons room of the Police station Badeh and stole the weapons of the government treasury and the belongings of the court property. According to details, the concerned policemen were locked up and a case was registered against them in the official complaint. On receiving the information, SSP Larkana Abdul Raheem Sherazi reached at Badeh police station and inspected various parts and got information from SHO Leemon Khan Lashari and other staff. Wherein Junejo, and officer Arab Junejo who has been suspended, a case has been registered against them in the official complaint, while on the order of SSP Larkana, the investigation is ongoing against the suspects involved with the help of "khoji" dogs and technical system and that time SHO Badeh is allegedly missing from the scene. Meanwhile, Girls Badminton and Girls Table Tennis tournament competitions were held in Larkana in connection with the second Sindh Games Region Larkana under the care of Directorate Region Larkana, hosted by Govt. Begum Nusrat Bhutto Girls Degree College, where Govt. The team of Girls Degree College reached the first semifinal by defeating the team of Govt. Shed Benazir Bhutto College of Education and defeated them by 2-0.

PTI to address miseries of tribesment: Qadri

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Serving masses is the manifesto of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). If elected he will address miseries being faced by the tribesmen because he is aware of the problems of locals.

This was stated by PTI supported independent candidate PK-69 Muhammad Adnan Qadri while addressing to a "Meet the Press" program held here in Landi Kotal press club district Khyber on Saturday. He said that PTI was a lonely party which cared about the interest of the people and the dynamic leadership of their leader Imran Khan, the party would be victorious in the upcoming general election.

He vowed that following electing as Provincial Assembly member; he would resolve the issue of provision of potable water to the locals forever. The PTI workers for one reason

or another restrained from voting their votes by various unfair means, Qadri opined. He expressed displeasure over the imprisonment of Imran Khan and said for the undone crime, he had been jailed.

The authorities concerned started pre-poll rigging by lessening polling stations and PTI votes but they would not succeed in their malpractices. He praised the role of local media persons and said it was the community who acted as eyes and ears of the tribal society.

Admn finalizes arrangements for upcoming election: All arrangements have been finalized in Khyber for free and fair election scheduled on 08 February 2024. Deputy Commissioner, Khyber Sanaullah said that 342 polling stations had been set up for three Provincial Assembly seats (PK-69, PK-70 and PK-71) and one

National Assembly seat among which 91 polling stations had been declared sensitive.

He maintained that with the coordination of all stakeholders physical visits of sensitive polling stations had been completed and CCTV cameras would be fixed in it and extra-ordinary security would be provided to it.

On the direction of the High Court, the home department issued SOPs to the candidates that need to be followed, he said and added many candidates had been fined in violation of the law. He went on that separate polling stations had been set up for the womenfolk so that they could cast their vote with respect. The administrative high-up urged the tribesmen to stay in patience, as election was a democratic process and avoid cursing and humiliating their co-tribal.

QWP to bring reforms in health and education

F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Saturday said that if voted to power, his party would bring reforms in health, education and agriculture sectors. He was addressing separate election related gatherings in Shabqadar tehsil in Charsadda.

He said the voters must not listen to catchy slogans as these were meant to deceive them, advising them to check the track record of the candidates before casting their ballots. "We have a proven record of serving the electorate and will never let down our

people," he maintained.

Aftab Sherpao said the country had lagged behind so there was a dire need to work hard for its uplift and to provide relief to the people in the face of back-breaking inflation. The veteran politician said that inflation coupled with unemployment had made life miserable for the people.

The QWP leader said the purchasing power of the common people had also squeezed due to rising price-hike. He said that after the election, the political parties should set aside their differences and join hands to steer the country out of the prevailing crises. Expressing concern over

the poor law and order in the country, he asked the government to take steps to improve the security situation.

He demanded the government to take measures to beef up the security and provide protection to the election candidates. He feared that the violence could mar the electoral process and affect the voter turnout if security was not beefed up. He reiterated his resolve that if voted to power, the QWP would spare no effort to address the prevailing challenges and provide relief to people, who were bearing the brunt of the wrong decisions of the previous PTI government.

Nation determines for elimination of terrorism

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri has strongly condemned the terrorist attacks in Mach Bolan, Kolpur and Sibi. In her condemnation statement, she expressed grief and sorrow over the loss of precious lives and loss of government property in the incidents of terrorism in Mach, Kolpur and Sibi yesterday. She said that the enemy wants to sabotage the peace and order situation in the country which will not be allowed to succeed under any circumstances.

Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri expressed deep sorrow and grief over the martyrdom of those martyred in the attacks and said that the security forces personnel who prevented the terrorists from carrying out major operations in the aforementioned incidents are the heroes of the nation. Expressing pain and sadness to the families of SHO Mach and other martyrs, she said that the martyrs demonstrated professional bravery and crushed the nefarious intentions of the terrorists and martyred themselves while performing their duty.

The nation will always remember his sacrifice. She paid tribute to the security forces for thwarting the terrorist attacks in Mach, Kolpur that their timely action saved the country

from great loss and brought the cowardly terrorists to hell.

Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri further said that the new wave of terrorism across the country is part of a well-thought-out plan against which the entire nation is united and is determined to thwart the cowardly acts of terrorists and to kill the last terrorist. The determination of the security forces and the nation will not diminish until the end.

Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri expressed her concern over the recent incidents of terrorism and said that behind the recent deterioration in the peace and order situation in Pakistan and the terrorist attacks, the hands of our arch-enemy India and its facilitators are behind them who do not want economic and economic development in Pakistan. She said that it is an undisputed fact that international elements are not tolerating the construction and development of the beloved country and peace and order, and in order to achieve their nefarious goals, they are carrying out cowardly attacks on innocent citizens and security forces.

She said that our brave army and other security forces have always failed the enemy's moves by showing professionalism and will continue to thwart

the conspiracies against peace with the whole nation. She more said that those who sacrificed their lives for the protection of the country and are the heroes of the nation who sent the terrorists to hell and proved that the anti-national elements through their cowardly actions have destroyed the brave nation and the security forces.

She prayed for those who were martyred and injured in the attacks that Allah Almighty grant the martyrs a high place in Jannat-ul-Firdous and speedy recovery to the injured and give patience to the bereaved.

Two youth killed

SHEIKHUPURA (INP): Two youth were killed when an over speeding trailer knocked down a motorcycle at Gujranwala road of Sheikhupura on Saturday.

Rescue sources said that an over speeding trailer hit a motorcycle carrying two youngsters near Shamke bus stop. As a result of accident, 20-year-old Tayyeb and 23-year-old Muhammad Azam were killed on the spot and trailer driver escaped the scene. The bodies were shifted to hospital and police after registering a case into the incident started investigations.



HYDERABAD: Doctors examining patients before eye operation during free eye camp organized by Hyderabad Host Lions Club at Police Line Ground.

Women voters to change contemporary politics: Lubna
F.P. Report

MARDAN: The female candidate Lubna Fahim for NA-21 and PK-55 said that she has entered to the political arena to give women their rightful rights. She said that she is well aware of all the issues facing women, especially the poor and widows, and that the establishment of handicraft centers and women's police stations is among her first priorities.

The nominated candidate said that she will also deploy separate women police officers in the general police stations so that women can register their problems and complaints in a better way. She said that if the people gave her a chance to go to the national assembly, she would first give the gas facility to Rustam as a gift. She further said during the media talk that there is a shortage of male and female schools and hospitals in NA-21 & PK-55, and she will try her best to fill them and bring more improvement in the fields of education and health. She said that doubling the Shahbaz Garhi to Rustam road is also part of her manifesto so that the people of Rustam can have better facilities for travel.

She further said that she will re-enter the poor and deserving women who have been removed from the income support program into the same program. In the end, she appealed to the people, especially the women, to play their role in changing the fate of the constituency and solving the problems of women by stamping the cricket wicket on the election symbol on February 8th.

Legal fraternity oppose shifting forensic lab
F.P. Report

BARIKOT: The establishment of trial courts at Barikot tehsil is need of the hour for dissemination of justice to local residents at doorsteps and shifting forensic laboratory from Swat will be opposed at every cost.

This was demanded by Barikot Bar Association, Barikot press club and Pakistan Aman Committee for Human Rights in a joint meeting held the press club. The participants claimed that local residents facing hardships as well as obtaining justice with heavy cost of both time and finance.

The participants claimed that a delegation held meetings with Commissioner and Deputy Inspector General Malakand Division to stop shifting forensic laboratory from Swat to Peshawar.

Public support shows PPP majority: Mir Ali

F.P. Report

HUB: A grand gathering proved that Dureji also went by your hands, Bilawal Bhutto Sahib. These views were expressed by the senior leader of Pakistan People's Party and the president of Hub district and spokesperson of Asif Ali Zardari for Balochistan, candidate PB-21 Mir Ali Hassan Zehri, while addressing the rally held at Goth Jameel Bareja in Dureji.

Meanwhile, Jameel Bareja, Fayyaz Bareja and a large number of people welcomed Mir Ali Hassan Zehri. On this occasion, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri and other dignitaries were presented with traditional turbans and gifts. Under the leadership of Mir Ali Hassan Zehri, Jameel Ahmed Bareja and thousands of people from different communities joined the Peoples Party regularly, including Ghulam Haider Bandijo, Abdul Razzaq Chhata, Khamisa Khan Chhata, Muhammad Rafiq Chhata, Ghulam Rasool Chhata, Dr. Muhammad Khan Zehri and thousands of colleagues joined the Pakistan Peoples Party as a rule. On this occasion, Pakistan Peoples Party General Secretary Hub Sharif Palari, Usman Koh Baloch, Syed Iqbal Shah, Hamal Khan Marri, Saeed Mengal and party leaders

and a large number of workers were present. Pakistan Peoples Party Central Leader Iqbal Shah, District General Secretary Hub Sharif Palari and Jameel Bareja also spoke on this occasion.

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said in his address that the era of Waderas, Jams and nawabs is gone and now is the era of youth and new thinkers. He welcomed and congratulated those who joined the Pakistan Peoples Party, who expressed confidence in us and the top leadership of the party and joined by listening to the voice of their conscience. On this occasion, Jameel Bareja in his address said that we and thousands of our colleagues have decided to join Pakistan Peoples Party with full confidence in Mir Ali Hassan Zehri because we know that he is a sincere person who is aware of the problems of the region and Mir Ali. Hassan Zehri has the ability to solve the problems of the area better and provide facilities.

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said in his address that today's grand gathering seems to show that the people stuck in the mire of poverty, backwardness and brutality have revolted and the sun of February 8 will rise with the promise of the victory of Pakistan Peoples Party and the people. Listening to the voice of your conscience,

knowledge has raised a rebellion against you. He said that the decision taken by the youth and elders under the leadership of Jameel Bareja is a guarantee of long-lasting development and prosperity for the people here and their future generations. The coming era will not be of vested interests but of the youth. What has been decided is the promise of revolution. Pakistan Peoples Party has always supported the oppressed.

Addressing a public meeting in Lohi, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that Lohi has been suffering from oppression for a long time. It was the way of utilitarian's to make themselves more prosperous by leaving the people behind, but the clouds of oppression and injustice are about to clear. There are neither health facilities nor anything done for education and School buildings have been destroyed.

There is no facility of clean drinking water and no facilities are available for women too. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri appealed that the area for prosperity and lasting development as well as a bright future for generations to come, stamp the sign of the arrow on February 8 and make Pakistan Peoples Party a success because the success of the arrow is your success.

Journalist held for political affiliation

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Police arrested ex-Nazim and Chairman Press Club Hafizabad Ch. Amjad Pavaiz Chhatta in the meeting.

After releasing from police custody, Ch. Amjad Parvaiz Chhatta alleged that he was arrested on the behest of candidate of PMLN Saira Afzal Tarar while DSP Rana Jamil Qaisar was not only running election campaign of PMLN but also harassing workers of PTI to hinder from holding corner meetings. Such tactus are making transparency of elections doubtful and election commission should take notice of DSP illegal acts and transfer from here to stop him from taking part in election campaign of PMLN, he added.

PMLN to overcome national crises: Former Federal Minister and nominated candidate of PMLN for constituency NA-67, Saira Afzal Tarar has said that leadership of Pakistan Muslim League (N) capable to steer the country from all crisis and Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif will elect as Prime Minister fourth term with the support of people. She was addressing the corner meetings at Sukheki Mandi town and village Haveli Atta Muhammad Bhatti.

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Nominated candidate of

PMLN for PP-39 Mian Auon Jhangir, ex-MPA Mian Intisar Bhatti, ex-Chairman District Zakat Committee Hafizabad Ch. Nasrullah Khan, ex-Member District Council Asaraq Najeebullah Bhatti, ex-Chairman MC Sukheki Mandi Ch. Nasir Qayyum Bhatti, Arfan Hassan Hanjra and a large number of party workers were also attended the meetings. She said that whenever Mian Muhammad Nawaz was come to the power, the country run on the track of progress and prosperity and living standard of the people upgraded.

She said that Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif was committed to provide all basic needs of life to the people at their doorsteps. She said that people joined political parties in view of manifesto and ideology of the party and leadership of a party decided to give ticket to suitable candidate to look different aspect of elections whereas only Mian Auon Jhangir Bhatti was candidate of PMLN for constituency PP-39 and other independent candidates were misusing name of PMLN. She called upon voters of PMLN to remember on symbol of "Sher" while casting their votes.

Power of partnerships: Collaborative efforts to achieve SDGs

Muhammad Haris

In an era marked by global challenges, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) stand as a beacon of hope for a better, more equitable world. However, the scale and complexity of these goals necessitate collaborative efforts on an unprecedented scale. The power of partnerships has emerged as a driving force behind the progress towards achieving the SDGs worldwide.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations

Member States in 2015, comprises 17 interconnected goals addressing issues ranging from poverty and hunger to climate change and gender inequality. Recognizing the intricate nature of these challenges, governments, businesses, civil society, and academia have increasingly embraced the idea that no single entity can address them in isolation.

Partnerships between governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have proven to be instrumental in extending the reach and impact of various initiatives. By combining resources, expertise, and networks, these collaborations

can amplify the effectiveness of programs aimed at eradicating poverty, ensuring quality education, and promoting good health and well-being.

The private sector also plays a pivotal role in advancing the SDGs. Companies have the ability to leverage their innovation, technology, and financial resources to drive sustainable development. Corporate social responsibility initiatives, sustainable business practices, and strategic partnerships with NGOs and governments contribute significantly to addressing environmental and social challenges.

Academic institutions have

become crucial allies in the pursuit of the SDGs. Research and knowledge generation are essential components of sustainable development. Collaborations between universities, research institutions, and policymakers facilitate the exchange of ideas and the development of evidence-based solutions to complex problems.

One exemplary model of international collaboration is the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data. This initiative brings together governments, businesses, and civil society organizations to enhance the quality and availability of data crucial for moni-

toring progress towards the SDGs. By fostering cooperation on data collection and analysis, this partnership contributes to informed decision-making and effective policy implementation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of global cooperation. The Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, a collaborative effort involving the World Health Organization, governments, philanthropies, and the private sector, exemplifies how partnerships can expedite the development and equitable distribution of vaccines, treatments, and diagnostics.

As the world races against time to meet the ambitious targets

set by the SDGs, the power of partnerships remains indispensable. Governments, businesses, and civil society must continue to forge alliances, break down silos, and work collectively towards a sustainable and inclusive future.

In conclusion, the road to achieving the SDGs is paved with collaborative endeavors. By recognizing and harnessing the power of partnerships, we can overcome the intricate challenges facing our world and build a future where no one is left behind. Together, we can transform the vision of the 2030 Agenda into a reality, leaving a lasting legacy for generations to come.



‘Overshadow Gaza crimes’
World reacts
to US attacks on
Iraq and Syria

BAGHDAD: The United States has conducted a wave of air strikes on Iran-aligned targets in Iraq and Syria in retaliation for an attack that killed American soldiers in Jordan. On Saturday, Iraq said 16 people, including civilians, were killed on its soil, and a monitoring group reported 18 people were killed in Syria.

Washington has warned of more strikes to purportedly deter the Iran-backed “axis of resistance” amid Israel’s war on Gaza. In announcing the overnight attacks, US President Joe Biden said: “Our response began today. It will continue at times and places of our choosing.” Here is how the world reacted to the US action:

Iran: “The attacks are a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq and Syria, international law, and a clear violation of the United Nations Charter,” said Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Nasser Kanaani.

“In addition to an all-out support of the US for four months of relentless and barbaric attacks by the Zionist regime against the residents of Gaza and the West Bank, and military attacks on Yemen and violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, last night’s attacks on Syria and Iraq were another adventurous action and another strategic error by the US government which will have no result but to intensify tensions and instability in the region.” “The attacks merely support the goals of the Zionist regime. Such attacks increasingly involve the US government in the region and overshadow the crimes of the Zionist regime in Gaza.”

Iraq: “This aggressive strike will put security in Iraq and the region on the brink of the abyss,” the Iraqi government said in a statement, and denied Washington’s claims of coordinating the air raids with Baghdad as “false” and “aimed at misleading international public opinion”. “Iraq reiterates its refusal to let the country be an arena for settling scores,” said government spokesperson Basim Alwadi. Yahya Rasool, the Iraqi military spokesperson, said the attacks “constitute a violation of Iraqi sovereignty, undermine the efforts of the Iraqi government, and pose a threat that could lead Iraq and the region into dire consequences”. “The outcomes will have severe implications on the security and stability in Iraq and the surrounding region,” Rasool added.

Syria: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the strikes served to “inflamm the conflict in the Middle East in an extremely dangerous way” and added to Washington’s “record of violations against Syria’s sovereignty, territo-

rial integrity, and the safety of its people, proving once again that it is the main source of global instability”.

The military said: “The area targeted by the American attacks in eastern Syria is the same area where the Syrian Arab Army is fighting the remnants of the Daesh [ISIL] terrorist organisation, and this confirms that the United States and its military forces are involved and allied with this organisation, and are working to revive it as a field arm for it both in Syria and Iraq by all dirty means.”

“The aggression of the American occupation forces at dawn today has no justification other than an attempt to weaken the ability of the Syrian Arab Army and its allies in the field of fighting terrorism, but the army.” The coalition of US and Israel-opposed armed groups in Iraq, which had “suspended” its attacks earlier this week, said it launched drones at a US base in Erbil.

Al Jazeera’s Mahmoud Abdelwahed reported from Baghdad that Iraqi groups have also carried out attacks with missiles targeting the al-Tanf military base in Syria which is home to US personnel, as well as the Ain al-Assad base in western Iraq.

Hamas: “We condemn in the strongest terms the American aggression against Iraq and Syria, and consider it a dangerous escalation, an infringement on the sovereignty of the two Arab countries, and a threat to their security and the stability of the region, in service of the occupation’s expansionist agenda and covering up its horrific crimes against our Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip,” read a statement from Hamas.

“The administration of US President Biden bears responsibility for the consequences of this brutal aggression against both Iraq and Syria, which adds fuel to the fire, and we affirm that the region will not witness stability or peace except by stopping the Zionist aggression, crimes of genocide and ethnic cleansing against our people in the Gaza Strip, and ending the Zionist-Nazi occupation.”

Analysts: “I’m not surprised there has been this reprisal and retaliation by the United States,” HA Hellyer, a military analyst at the UK-based think tank Royal United Services Institute, told Al Jazeera, adding that if the US wants to de-escalate and not go to war with Iran, the key to that is Gaza. Washington has “failed to apply any real leverage in order to bring a ceasefire to Gaza, which I think would really diminish the tensions in the region and remove the fuel for this sort of escalation taking place, which is likely to continue over the coming days and weeks and beyond”, he added. — Aljazeera

Armed group
fires on UN
helicopter
in Congo

UNITED NATIONS (AP): Members of an armed group fired on a U.N. helicopter in eastern Congo, injuring two South African peacekeepers, one seriously, the United Nations said.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the U.N. peacekeeping department assumes the attack was carried out by members of the M23 rebel group in the Karuba region of North Kivu province, in Masisi territory. Eastern Congo has struggled with armed violence for decades as more than 120 groups fight for power, land and valuable mineral resources, while others try to defend their communities. The armed groups have long waged campaigns of violence in the mineral-rich region and have been accused of mass killings.

The conflict spiked in late 2021 when M23, which had been largely dormant, resurfaced and initiated attacks to seize territory. The group allegedly has support from neighboring Rwanda, though that country’s government denies it. Dujarric said the helicopter that was hit was able to land safely in Goma, and the peacekeepers were receiving medical attention. Bintou Keita, head of the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Congo, strongly condemned the attack on an aircraft with the U.N. emblem. It took place almost a year after a similar attack killed a South African peacekeeper, she said in a statement. Attacks on U.N. peacekeepers may constitute war crimes, and Keita said the Congo mission would spare no effort, in cooperation with Congolese authorities, to bring those responsible for the attack to justice.

Argentina MPs
push reform
bill over hurdle

BUENOS AIRES (Reuters): Argentina’s lower chamber of deputies gave overall approval to libertarian President Javier Milei’s sweeping “omnibus” reform bill in a vote after days of debate, paving the way for a decisive vote in the Senate. The controversial reform package was approved on a vote of 144 votes in favor, and 109 against.

The reforms that make up the bill include the privatization of state entities, measures to enable reductions in generous state subsidies as well as the extension of some executive powers. Lower-house lawmakers will also vote on the legislation article by article, which is expected to begin on Feb. 6, but the general approval means it will now likely proceed to the upper house in some form.

Over the past few days, flag-waving protesters opposed to Milei’s reforms have clashed repeatedly with riot police deployed outside the green-domed neoclassical congressional building, at times hurling rocks at them. “I came to see how they are selling our country,” said protester Liliana Lopez. The mammoth bill is a key plank of Milei’s reforms plans for Argentina’s embattled economy, which is grappling with inflation above 200%, depleted foreign currency reserves and a time-bomb of debt repayments owed to creditors and investors.

Passing its initial hurdle in the lower house of Congress, the legislation marks the president’s first major test since taking office in December after a shock election win for the economist who made his name as an acid-tongued TV pundit and campaigned with a chainsaw pledging to slash the size of the state. The vote followed a long and heated debate in the lower chamber, with deputies for the main center-left Peronist opposition bloc, Union por la Patria, voicing fierce rejection of Milei’s policies while supporters urged them not to obstruct the bill. Milei’s La Libertad Avanza party only holds a small number of seats in the 257-seat chamber, but was still able to muster enough support from likeminded allies including from the main center-right Juntos por el Cambio coalition of parties to advance the bill. Last week, Milei’s government yanked some divisive spending reforms contained within the fiscal section from the bill in what turned out to be a successful maneuver to boost support for it.



BUENOS AIRES: Police clash with protesters outside the Congress while lawmakers debate the so-called omnibus reform bill.

Myanmar’s rebels see unity as
key to victory over mily rulers

KAREN STATE: A young fighter looks out from the upper floor in a concrete skeleton of a church that villagers have been building for two years in this small pocket of southeast Myanmar. The construction work has been a slow undertaking, said 21-year-old Zayar, a member of Myanmar’s Muslim community who moved from the country’s biggest city, Yangon, to this rebel camp near the Thai border to fight against his country’s military rulers.

Air strikes by military warplanes are a constant threat in this hamlet in Karen State – also known as Kayah – where jobs are scarce and money is tight. But, little by little, the ethnic Karen here were able to build their church. “Before, we thought the Karen people were dacoits [bandits],” said Zayar, who joined the rebellion against Myanmar’s military just last year. “Now people understand the real situation,” he told Al Jazeera.

Zayar’s opinion of the Karen – one of Myanmar’s largest minorities – was shaped by disparaging depictions and stereotypes circulated under the country’s military generals, who primarily hail from the ethnic Bamar majority and have violently suppressed the aspirations of Myanmar’s diverse ethnic groups for decades. The Myanmar military’s attempts to pressure the country’s minorities into submission – stretching as far back as the 1940s – fuelled one of the longest-running conflicts in the world. Now as military leaders mark their third year since seizing power in Myanmar, an uprising that melds the decades-old ethnic struggles for self-determination with the more recent armed fight to restore democracy has enveloped much of the nation.

In October, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), based in the Mandarin-speaking region of Kokang on the border with China, along with two other powerful ethnic armed groups, as well as Bamar fighters, launched their offensive against the military. The collaboration – known as the Three Brotherhood Alliance – has scored unprecedented victories against Myanmar’s military, which toppled Aung San Suu Kyi’s civilian government in February 2021. Resistance to the country’s military rulers is now a broad church and confidence in the movement and its campaign has been massively boosted by the participation of a growing number of armed actors.

However, the alliance’s common cause of removing the military from power remains set against a complex history of rivalries and suspicions between a multitude of ethnic armed groups – divisions which the military has successfully exploited to its benefit in the past. As the alliance’s offensive moves from the countryside to urban areas in the west, north and east of Myanmar, the military is struggling to find a way back, and some fear the collaboration among the rebels will not hold together. Zayar slings his rifle around his shoulder and takes the path past corn and peanut crops to his camp. His role in the revolution embodies much of the dreams and contradictions that have come to define the struggle in Myanmar.

On a friend’s recommendation, Zayar joined the Kawthoolei Army (KTLA), a fringe splinter group formed by General Ner Dah Bo Mya, who stormed out of the established Karen National Union (KNU) armed movement after refusing to participate in an investigation into the killing of a group of men allegedly carried out by his fighters in 2021. Ner Dah Bo Mya has not denied the killings were carried out by his fighters, claiming the 25 unarmed men were military spies. He has also cultivated a firebrand image for his KTLA unit that has attracted young people itching to take up weapons to overthrow the military dictatorship.

Though both are fighting the military, the KTLA has also clashed with the KNU in southern Myanmar. On other occasions, KTLA fighters and soldiers under KNU command have worked together on operations. Unity, says Myanmar political analyst Kim Jolliffe, stands as the overriding factor in the success of the current armed revolt. Being unified is not only necessary for military success, said Jolliffe, but also for laying the foundation of a post-military Myanmar.

Unity, he said, will be key to moving the country away from a “highly coercive centralised state” that “creates perpetual conflict” to one where “all ethnic groups are equal in a genuine power-sharing mechanism”. “The central problem that the revolution must solve is how to create a system that enhances the diversity and create a power balance so that no single group positions themselves as overarching chauvinist controllers,” Jolliffe told Al Jazeera. “We will likely continue to see localised conflicts

and tensions among resistance groups in some areas. But there is little to suggest that it will have a fundamental impact on the overall direction of the revolution,” he added.

While some ethnic forces have aligned with the military or have remained neutral, most of the country’s formidable ethnic armed groups have poured their resources and troops into the current campaign against the generals. Zayar said he has risked everything for the revolution. “Living under the dictatorship is worse than death,” he says. “I will fight back until I die.”

For Zayar, he is fighting for equality. Being of the Muslim faith in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar, some have called him a “kalar” – a term used as a slur against Muslims or anyone of South Asian origin in Myanmar. His official Myanmar national identity card also marks him out as a “Muslim”, not only as his religion but also as an ethnic identity, he says. “When the government put me as that, I felt discriminated,” he told Al Jazeera.

“I was born and raised in Myanmar. Of course, I’m Myanmar.” Zayar joined the revolution relatively late – in April 2023 – more than two years after the military’s chief commander Min Aung Hlaing seized power from Aung San Suu Kyi. On the military’s side, people are unwilling to fight for coup leader Min Aung Hlaing, who has overseen an unceasing chain of atrocities against civilians across the country since seizing power. News outlets such as Frontier Myanmar and Radio Free Asia have reported the military snatching young men off the streets at night and threatening to burn down villages as a way to secure recruits and boost their numbers.

Due to the military’s postcoup violence driving peaceful protesters to seek combat training under the guidance of ethnic rebels, the regime’s once inexperienced opponents have developed into battle-hardened fighters. Troop movements by the military have become rarer. Mostly it relies on air strikes and heavy weaponry from fortified positions. Mass surrenders by regime troops have reinforced notions of sinking morale among the rank and file. Discontent within the military at Min Aung Hlaing’s leadership has also stirred persistent rumours that the coup leader may be overthrown himself by his comrades in arms. — Aljazeera

Gas blast in Kenyan capital
kills three and injures nearly 300

NAIROBI (BBC): A huge gas blast in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, has killed at least three people and injured nearly 300. A lorry carrying gas cylinders exploded in Embakasi district, “igniting a huge ball of fire”, an official said.

Housing, businesses and cars were damaged, with video showing a huge blaze raging close to blocks of flats. An investigation has started and Kenya’s deputy president has said those responsible will be held accountable. A child was among those who died, according Embakasi police chief Wesley Kimeto, who added that the death toll could rise. Some 271 people were taken to hospital, according to the authorities, including at least 25 children.

Nairobi county Governor Sakaja Johnson said many of these people had been treated and sent home, but at least 39 have been sent to other facilities – some with critical injuries. A further 27 people were treated on site for non-life-threatening injuries. The government initially said the blast happened at a gas plant where workers were refilling gas cylinders, but the authorities later clarified that a truck had exploded in a

parking yard. According to government spokesperson Isaac Mwaura, a fireball from the blast “spread widely”. A flying gas cylinder hit a clothing and textiles warehouse, burning it down.

“The inferno further damaged several vehicles and commercial properties, including many small and medium sized businesses,” he said in a statement. “Sadly, residential houses in the neighbourhood also caught fire, with a good number of residents still inside, as it was late at night.” The fire has been contained and a search and rescue operation has been launched to find out if people are missing or have simply taken shelter elsewhere.

“There is still a search going on of whether there are bodies which have been burnt in various houses,” said Embakasi East MP Babu Owino. The Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority (Epra) said in a statement that the gas plant was illegal and that it had rejected three applications for construction permits to build a storage and filling facility at the site. Epra said the designs did not meet its safety standards and there was a high population around the proposed

site. It is not clear how the facility was still able to operate. Mr Mwaura, who visited the site, said the owners of the company involved must “compensate the victims” and take “full responsibility” for the explosion. “It is immoral to risk the lives of fellow Kenyans for profit,” he added. “Sometimes we have weak enforcement institutions and of course the element of corruption, which has now led to the death of three of us Kenyans.”

Kenyan Vice-President Rigathi Gachagua promised a tough government response. “As we call for caution and adherence to the rule of law, those culpable in this unacceptable occurrence will be held accountable,” he said. About 10 trucks were completely burned inside the compound where the explosion occurred. One vehicle landed on top of a block of flats dozens of metres away, partially destroying the building’s front.

Witnesses told the BBC that the explosion sent objects including gas cylinders and a shipping container, flying into the air. Jackline Karimi said she ran out of the house and lay flat on the tarmac.

She suffered burns on her right hand and arm up to the shoulder and to her right leg. “I saw a woman on fire, but we couldn’t help her. Everyone was running,” Ms Karimi said. Another woman who was in a flat near the scene of the blast said she was trying to trace her friend. “She was pregnant and had a child in the house, which is now completely burned.”

At the Mama Lucy Kibaki Hospital, where many of the injured were initially treated, the BBC spoke to a man named Geoffrey. He said he and his family were woken by a big explosion and thought their building was collapsing. “When I saw that the fire was too much, I used my body to shield my child and sustained burns on my back in the process,” said Geoffrey. “My family members got minor injuries but I got the most severe burns”. Isaac Mwaura, the government spokesperson, said a command centre has been set up to help co-ordinate rescue operations and humanitarian assistance is being given to those affected. He also said the government plans to provide two months’ rent for survivors whose houses were razed in the explosion.

‘Are we witnessing its
return off country’s coast?’

MOGADISHU (BBC): Hijackers are once again targeting ships off Somalia’s coast and a recent spike in attacks has brought back memories from more than a decade ago. That was when armed Somali pirates scoured the waters, forcefully boarding vessels and raking in millions of dollars by demanding ransoms.

That died down and all but disappeared once extensive security measures were put in place, but the events from the past few weeks has raised questions about whether a full-scale resurgence of piracy is possible. According to EUNavfor Atalanta, a European Union naval force responsible for maritime security along East Africa’s coast, at least 14 vessels have been hijacked off the Somali coast since late November.

These include two in that month when an Iranian-flagged fishing boat was attacked and then two days later a Liberian-flagged ship, Central Park, was targeted. In both cases the crews were rescued. US forces were involved in the Central Park rescue and later said the attackers were likely Somali and that it was “clearly a piracy-related incident”.

Then in December the MV Ruen, a ship carrying a Maltese flag, was hijacked. The attackers are still in control of the vessel and 17 crew members remain stuck on board. This was the first successful hijacking off Somalia in six years, according to the International Maritime

Bureau (IMB), an influential non-profit organisation that aims to tackle maritime crime. In January, attacks continued with the Indian navy coming to the aid of the sailors in several cases including three this week. It said it freed 19 crew members - 11 Iranians and eight Pakistanis - “who had been held captive by the Somali pirates”.

Attacks on ships off Somalia appear to be opportunistic, with hijackers likely exploiting a security gap, Troels Henningsen, associate professor at the Royal Danish Defence College, told the BBC. International forces began patrolling these waters when piracy surged between 2005 and 2012, but the focus recently moved up into the Red Sea, where Yemen’s Houthi rebel group have been attacking ships, he said. “Militarily speaking, it is such a demanding task to protect against [the Houthis’] missiles and drones. So they’re not able to switch between anti-piracy and countering drones and missiles,” Dr Henningsen explained.

This theory has been echoed by the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), a regional body comprised of countries in nearby East African waters, like the Seychelles and Comoros. In a statement last week, the IOC suggested other reasons for the hijacking spike. In the initial wave of attacks over a decade ago, some coastal fisherman turned to piracy after their livelihoods were destroyed by illegal fishing from for-

eign trawlers.

The IOC said current Somali fishery policy has led to another increase in foreign fishing vessels, which may again be pushing coastal Somalis into piracy. For example, it referenced speculation that the Islamist militant Somalia-based al-Shabab group has been encouraging attacks on ships, via an alleged deal where they get a cut of ransom proceeds in exchange for providing the attackers with protection.

Between 2005 and 2012, pirates off the Horn of Africa raked in between \$339m (£266m) and \$413m (£325) by holding crew members hostage and demanding ransom payments, the World Bank has estimated. Given this history, Samuel Oyewole, a lecturer at Nigeria’s Federal University with an expertise in East African piracy, said that the latest set of hijackers are highly likely to be after ransoms.

But at this stage it is not possible to know for sure. “In most cases... the efforts of the multinational naval forces in the region actually disrupted the operations. “So at the end of the day, we may not fully know the intention,” he explained. The IOC called the situation “worrying” in its statement, going so far as to urge a UN-appointed anti-piracy group to “asap” hold an emergency meeting about the attacks. The IMB called the the MV Ruen - which has been under the control of hijackers since 14 December - a “cause for concern”.

of the worst violence. Earlier this week, the UN’s refugee agency said almost eight million people had been forced from their homes by the conflict. Both sides in the conflict - the army and the Rapid Support Forces - have been accused of war crimes. Attempts to broker peace between the warring factions have so far failed, and in recent weeks fighting has only intensified.

Sudan civil war: UN receiving
reports of starvation deaths

KHARTOUM (BBC): The World Food Programme (WFP) says it is receiving reports of people dying of starvation in Sudan, where a war has displaced millions of people since last April. Violence is escalating between the army and a rival paramilitary force as they fight for control of the country.

Security threats and roadblocks have made the work of humanitarian agencies nearly impossible.

Nearly five million people across Sudan now face emergency levels of hunger. This is twice the number since the start of the conflict, according to the WFP. The humanitarian body says it has only been able to deliver vital aid to 10% of those in need in areas embroiled in the conflict.

These include the capital, Khartoum, and the western Darfur region, which have endured some

The Frontier Post

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

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Middle East's newest crisis

IRANIAN President Ebrahim Raisi has recently announced that his country would not start a war with anyone but it would respond strongly to efforts bullying. According to Raisi, Iran's military power is not and never has been a threat to any country. Rather, it ensures security that neighbors can rely on and trust.

Raisi's comments came after days of speculation about how Washington might retaliate after three US soldiers were killed and 40 others were injured last Saturday in a strike on the US military in Jordan. Previously, US President Joseph R. Biden approved the plan for the US's military strikes against Tehran back militias, Iranian personnel and facilities in Iraq and Syria. Whilst, that plan has been implemented by the US military through air strikes and sea-based missile attacks against the targets stretched across multiple territories in Iraq, Syria, and adjoining territorial waters in the Gulf of Eden and the Red Sea. According to the Pentagon, the strikes carried out by US Central Command forces included more than 85 targets across seven facilities used by groups affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force. Those targets included command and control centres, intelligence facilities and weapons storage facilities used by the Iran-backed militias to attack the US and Western coalition forces. Meanwhile, after the launch of the first offensive against dozens of sites affiliated with multiple armed groups allegedly linked with Tehran, the elderly President Biden vowed that the United States does not seek conflict in the Middle East or anywhere else in the world, however, all those who might seek to harm the US must know that American will surely respond.

Over the past weeks, the tension remained high in the Middle East and the adjoining waters including the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean because dozens of warships, aircraft carriers and submarines from regional and extra-regional countries amassed in the area, turning this volatile region into a most militarized zone in the world. After multiple exchanges of air strikes, missiles and drones between Iran-aligned Houthis and the US-led alliance in the past week, the wave of hostility covered extra mileage when an unidentified drone attacked a US military base in Jordan leading to a widespread response from the United States who considers the Middle East the best testing range for it's arsenal and a lucrative market for the trading of arms and ammunition.

The prevalent situation presents a gruesome scenario wherein Israel and its staunch ally have kicked off an unceasing conflict that has no end in sight. Although, Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps has pulled its senior officers from a violence-hit region yet Iranian advisers assist armed groups in Iraq, where the US has around 2,500 troops, while Syria is home to over 900 US troops. Multiple Iran-back groups in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon vowed to respond to the US and British attacks against them and their partners and allies. The current Gaza conflict has brought all anti-Israel and anti-US forces to one platform. A proxy war has begun that is unlikely to capsize until and unless a peaceful and just resolution is brought to the Gaza crisis.

The details of damage that occurred due to the recent US strikes against Iran-aligned groups are not reported, however, retaliation from the anti-America bloc is yet to come. This competition is likely to worsen and has grave consequences for regional peace and stability. Unfortunately, the current situation is highly inflammatory and Israeli intelligence is likely to undertake deceptive operations to facilitate a direct US attack against Iran. It is important that the global community steps in and plays its due role in the mitigation of crises and the ultimate resolution of the Palestine dispute, which is the sole guarantee for durable and lasting peace in the region.

Road infrastructure and overloading

THE Inspector General of National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) directed the authorities to conduct surprise checking and monitoring to ensure the implementation of the axle load control regime. The IG emphasized the importance of preventing overloaded vehicles from using motorways and highways, adding that overloaded vehicles contribute to road accidents and cause damage to the road infrastructure. It was informed in the meeting that extra goods are being offloaded from overloaded vehicles under the supervision of the National Highways and Motorway Police at all the Weigh Stations established on National Highways and thousands of overloaded vehicles are also being returned with heavy fines.

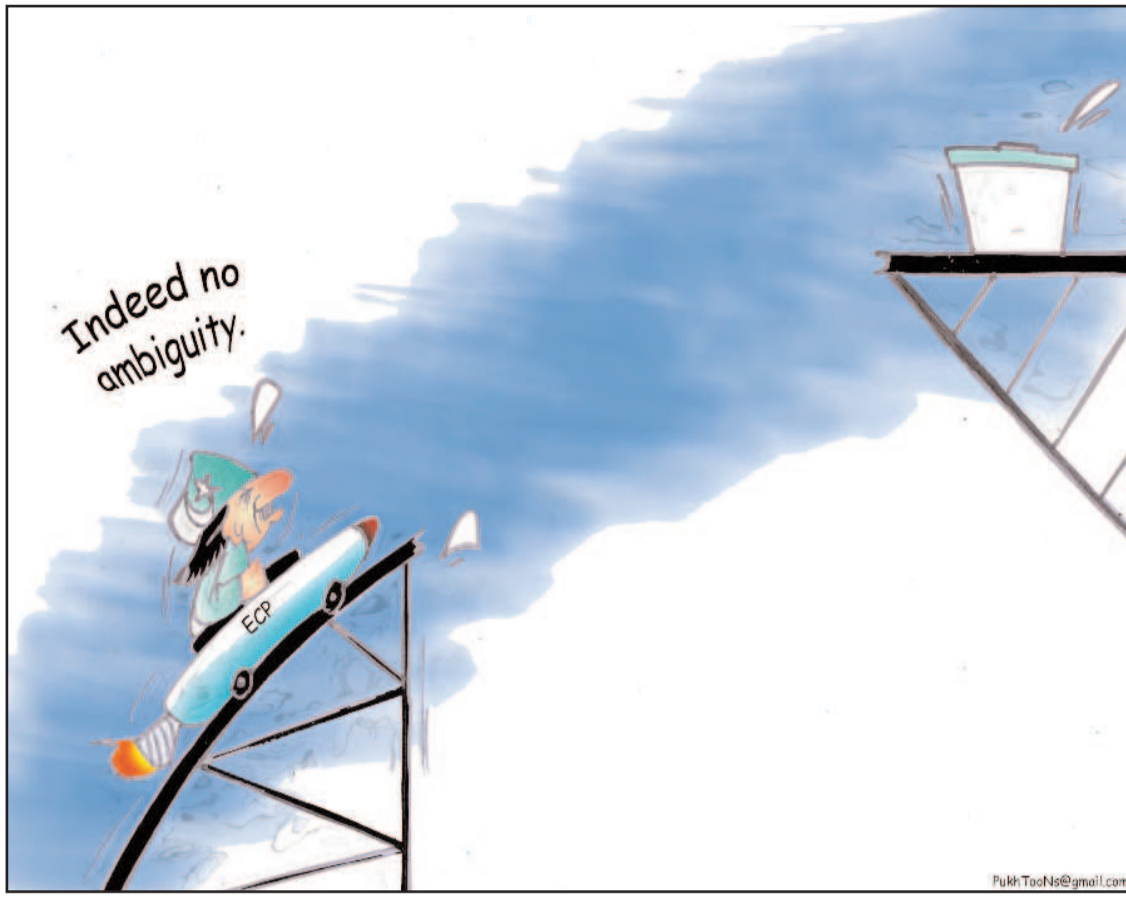
Historically, overloading on highways leads to various negative effects, including increased wear and tear on roads, reduced road safety due to impaired vehicle handling, higher fuel consumption, and more significant environmental impacts that cause significant monetary and economic losses to the country. Additionally, overloading puts stress on infrastructure and contributes to traffic congestion and accidents. Unfortunately, Pakistan's magnificent motorways, highways and intercities roads have been the biggest victims of the curse of overloading goods on trucks, tractor-trailers, and long containers as well. That destroyed our roadways and turned our magnificent highways/motorways into dunes of mud and rubles.

The evil of corruption and lust has badly spoiled our society and affected each aspect of national life. The transportation charges of the goods depend on the weight and quantity of the load so greedy truck drivers load unauthorized quantities of goods in lust for a large amount of money and thus destroy the country's road infrastructure for their trivial benefit. Whereas, the corrupt motorway staff assist them in unloading and loading before and after having checked their weight near weight bridges on the motorways and highways. Meanwhile, tractor-trailers and small trucks are also used for transporting oversize goods/loads through the checking points.

Hence, there is a dire need for strict implementation of the law, while the major goods suppliers, markets, cement manufacturing plants, and goods transport companies should be instructed not to allow overloading of goods to transporters/ truck drivers to avoid damage to the roads. Meanwhile, the vehicle drivers themselves adhere to weight limits for the overall well-being of the transportation system and the larger interest of the country.

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Defunding UNRWA is worse than collective punishment

Moncef Khane

ON January 26, the very day the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an interim ruling on South Africa's case accusing Israel of committing genocide against the Palestinian people, the Israeli government dropped a bomb. It was not the usual 900kg US-made bunker buster, but a much more lethal one: it accused 12 employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) of having ties to Hamas or being involved in its October 7 operation. This immediately resulted in over a dozen countries cutting their financial support for the agency and UNRWA's chief, Philippe Lazzarini, firing nine of the accused (of other three - one is dead and two are unaccounted for).

Given the meagre aid trickling into Gaza and the looming starvation of its people, particularly in northern Gaza, defunding UNRWA now is worse than collective punishment - it could be a death sentence for many destitute and hungry Palestinians. UNRWA was established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1949 to provide relief to all Palestine refugees originally defined as "persons whose place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as the result of the 1948 war". The definition was broadened to include persons displaced by the "1967 and subsequent hostilities".

Today, UNRWA has 30,000 staff, mainly Palestinian physicians, nurses, educators, relief workers, drivers, engineers, logisticians, etc who provide humanitarian relief, healthcare, education and other assistance to millions of Palestine refugees throughout the Middle East. In Gaza, UNRWA's 13,000 staff have supported almost all aspects of Palestinian life, especially after Israel imposed a blockade of the Gaza Strip in 2007 with Egypt's support. Critics have pointed out that the UN has delegated to UNRWA important international legal obligations that would otherwise be incumbent on Israel as the occupying power.

Under the Geneva Conventions, basic services such as shelter, healthcare and education in occupied territories are the responsibility of the occupying state. Thus, in effect, the UN has subsidised, and possibly prolonged, Israel's occupation of Palestinians.

From Israel's perspective, UNRWA is another enemy that has prolonged

of the current conflict, it has been caught lying repeatedly about alleged crimes by Palestinians (eg, the beheading of 40 babies on October 7).

Bolstered by the UN's hasty decisions taken without establishing through an investigation a prima facie case, Israel now claims that 10 percent of Gaza-based staff have links to "militant

The accusations against the 12 UNRWA staff should be seen in this context; it is also important to remember who is making them. Israel is an occupying power facing allegations of genocide deemed plausible by the ICJ. Israeli forces have repeatedly attacked UN-protected facilities including schools and hospitals, killing thousands of civilians, mainly children and women seeking refuge on UNRWA premises, as well as 152 UNRWA staff. Israel also has a long history of unsubstantiated accusations against UNRWA employees and within the context of the current conflict, it has been caught lying repeatedly about alleged crimes by Palestinians (eg, the beheading of 40 babies on October 7).

Palestinian resistance to its occupation. It is a "barrier" to solving the Palestinian refugee question by simply resettling Palestinian refugees in other countries, as it is now openly advocates. For all Israeli governments, implementing UN Security Council resolutions and international law on the inalienable "right of return" of Palestinians forced by Zionist militias and subsequently the Israeli army to leave their homes in 1948 is anathema to Israel's existence. The accusations against the 12 UNRWA staff should be seen in this context; it is also important to remember who is making them. Israel is an occupying power facing allegations of genocide deemed plausible by the ICJ. Israeli forces have repeatedly attacked UN-protected facilities including schools and hospitals, killing thousands of civilians, mainly children and women seeking refuge on UNRWA premises, as well as 152 UNRWA staff. Israel also has a long history of unsubstantiated accusations against UNRWA employees and within the context

groups". Under the UN's internal rules, due process is compulsory when misconduct is alleged. When serious allegations backed by incontrovertible evidence against UN personnel are put forward, the UN's secretary-general has the authority to order the summary dismissal of the accused staff. Such extreme cases are rare.

In all other cases, typically, a board of inquiry is established to investigate the most serious cases, or accusations are picked up by the UN's internal investigatory department that may initiate a formal inquiry based on preliminary evidence. In the interim, the staff member facing allegations of misconduct may be suspended. In the case of the 12 UNRWA employees accused by Israel, summary dismissal is a surprising decision not least as the circumstances of the cases - an all-out war and possibly a genocide - and the credibility of the accusing party should compel a cautionary approach.

Yet the UN leadership was quick to jettison the presumption of innocence of their staff. On January

28, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a statement to advise that of the "12 people implicated, nine were immediately identified and terminated by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Philippe Lazzarini; one is confirmed dead, and the identity of the two others is being clarified. Any UN employee involved in acts of terror will be held accountable". In his statement, Guterres further stated that "the abhorrent alleged acts of these staff members must have consequences". Already, the secretary-general has seemingly adjudicated the case and promised "consequences". He has shown no such outrage or made calls for accountability for the murder by the Israeli military of his own staff - as if such war crimes are not abhorrent acts that call for consequences.

Firing staff at will based solely, as Guterres admits, on "allegations" is troubling and should be of concern to all staff members and staff unions of the United Nations. But more alarming and consequential is the swift decision of the United States, Austria, Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Iceland, Sweden, Switzerland, Romania and the United Kingdom to suspend their funding to UNRWA during an all-out war on the people it was established to protect.

Worse, when Israel is in the dock of the ICJ facing plausible allegations of perpetrating a genocide, such decisions may even be deemed a breach by these states of their obligations under the 1948 Genocide Convention. But this shouldn't come as a surprise since some of the same governments choose to overlook the many war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by Israel and continue their military support for its onslaught on Gaza, now in its fourth month. In the end, even if the 12 accused staff are found guilty of grave crimes, this hardly justifies starving UNRWA of funding when it tries to save from starvation Palestinians in Gaza. Cutting down a septuagenarian olive tree because it might have 12 "bad" olives on it is not only collective punishment - it is furthering a genocide.

Sudanese people's dire plight should not be ignored

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

THE protracted conflict in Sudan, which is now in its 10th month, has caused a dire humanitarian crisis that is inflicting profound suffering upon millions, both within the country and in neighboring nations. The repercussions of this war are particularly acute for women and children, who bear the brunt of the devastating effects.

As the situation unfolds, the pervasive hardships extend beyond national borders, casting a wide-reaching shadow of distress that demands urgent attention and concerted international efforts to alleviate the plight of those affected by the conflict. Sudan currently bears the unfortunate distinction of harboring the highest number of displaced individuals globally, also marking it out as the center of the world's most extensive child displacement crisis. Commenting on the enduring repercussions of the conflict, which began last April, Marie David, the acting country director of CARE Sudan, said: "Loss of life, mass displacement, gender-based violence, hunger, cholera are all on the rise and occurring at an alarming rate. Between 70 and 80 percent of hospitals in conflict-affected areas are no longer functional. This crisis demands more attention, and funding."

New data from the International Organization for Migration reveals a staggering 10.7 million people displaced by conflicts in Sudan, including 9 million who remain within the country. This organization is requesting coordinated international efforts to urgently enhance the humanitarian response and address the colossal displacement crisis. Among the displaced, 1.7 million have sought refuge in neighboring countries, with the majority (62 percent) of these being Sudanese.

Chad hosts the highest percentage of those leaving Sudan at 37 percent, followed by South Sudan at 30 percent and Egypt at 24 percent, while Ethiopia, Libya and the Central African Republic host the remaining refugees. This mass displacement is exacerbating humanitarian needs in an already deeply troubled region.

Amy Pope, director general of the International Organization for Migration, said: "As of today, one in every eight internally displaced persons in the world is in Sudan." She highlighted the overwhelming needs of these displaced individuals, including critical shortages of food, shelter, healthcare and sanitation. This is placing them at heightened risk of disease, malnutrition and violence. Despite the severity of the situation, the current humanitarian response falls short of meeting these critical needs. As Pope emphasized, it is important not to turn away from the millions of people who are in desperate need of support.

The protracted conflict in Sudan continues to exact a severe toll on the lives of ordinary citizens. The widespread devastation extends to critical infrastructure, encompassing healthcare facilities,

educational institutions, transport networks and essential utilities such as power and water. This extensive damage has significantly curtailed access to fundamental necessities and essential, life-saving services, plunging communities into desperate circumstances. The resulting scarcity has not only led to heightened susceptibility to disease outbreaks, hunger and malnutrition, but has also exacerbated the vulnerability of the population to sexual and gender-based violence.

Women and girls find themselves particularly at risk within the prevailing chaos. This underscores the urgent need for comprehensive humanitarian intervention.

Expressing the challenges she faces, Manal Adam Yousif, a woman in her 20s from the town of Nyala in South Darfur state, told UN Women: "Unfortunately, our house and all other houses in the neighborhoods were robbed. So, I am very afraid for the rest of my family. We just fled with the clothes we are wearing ... winter brings many diseases." She went on to share the difficulties she is encountering, mentioning that her son and several other children are unwell. Yousif also highlighted her financial constraints, stating: "I do not have the money to take (my son) to the hospital. I hope the war will stop and there will be safety and stability so that we can return to our homes and families."

Addressing this crisis requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach, including mobilizing international humanitarian organizations and governments to provide immediate and sustained aid to the affected regions. They need to deliver emergency relief supplies, including food, clean water, medical supplies and shelter, to address the pressing needs of displaced individuals, as well as initiate efforts to restore some of the critical infrastructure to enhance people's access to essential services.

Another approach would be to establish mobile healthcare units and clinics to provide medical assistance to those facing health challenges. This would address issues such as disease outbreaks, malnutrition and the general well-being of the population. It would also facilitate access to medical care, especially for vulnerable groups like children, women and the elderly. In addition, the international community must ensure the safety of women and girls in conflict-affected areas. Temporary learning spaces can also be set up in order to ensure that children affected by displacement continue to have access to education. Finally, there is a need for robust diplomatic efforts and negotiations to bring about an end to the conflict. In a nutshell, the dire situation in Sudan underscores the profound and far-reaching impacts of this conflict, particularly on the lives of ordinary individuals. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive and coordinated response from the international community.

Arab News

Von der Leyen seeks era-defining legacy

Andrew Hammond

EU presidents and prime ministers have a huge, diarized agenda in their upcoming meetings, ranging from enhancing Europe's economic competitiveness to the Ukraine war. However, on the sidelines of these sessions lurks another big issue for the bloc's future: the growing momentum behind a second term for European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

Von der Leyen, who took office in 2019, is becoming the most powerful person in Brussels since Jacques Delors in the 1980s and 1990s. A key conundrum in the coming months will be if she can now develop an era-defining agenda like the one that put Delors, who was behind economic projects such as the single market and single currency, in the history books.

The growing momentum behind Von der Leyen comes despite her multiple missteps in the top job. This includes when she was criticized last autumn for her unremittingly

pro-Israel stance during her trip to the country. However, given the slim prospects of European Council President Charles Michel getting a second term this year, the argument is building among the bloc's 27 presidents and prime ministers that some institutional continuity is needed at the top of the Brussels bureaucracy. This is partly why Von der Leyen's star is so high.

On the sidelines of the big meetings, right-of-center politicians in the ruling European People's Party are actively discussing her candidacy for a second term. While Von der Leyen has not yet publicly announced, there is a growing expectation that she will declare her intentions soon, possibly at a key German Christian Democrats event in Berlin in mid-February. Yet, while momentum is clearly behind Von der Leyen, one criticism made of her is that she needs a bolder vision. At last month's World Economic Forum Annual

Meeting in Davos, she remarked that "the next years will require us to think in the same way," citing the big calls she has made over the Green New Deal, support for Ukraine and the bloc's initially stumbling response to the pandemic that nearly forced her resignation due to the bungled early EU rollout of vaccines in 2021.

While some of these achievements will leave a significant political footprint in Brussels, they may not be the era-defining legacy that she appears to want to leave. Delors was the last European Commission president to leave such a landmark, as his major initiatives kickstarted a new age of European integration. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, Delors served a record three terms of office, driving a federalist vision that was often anathema to powerful then-UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. During this time, the

European Community became today's EU, growing from 10 members to 15, with Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Austria and Finland all joining.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the launch of one of the biggest legacies of Delors' time in office: the euro single currency. In January 1999, 11 EU countries fixed their exchange rates, agreed to a single monetary policy driven by the European Central Bank and launched the new common currency. Today, the euro is the official currency of 20 EU countries, which have a combined population of about 350 million, and is one of the most important currencies in the world. This is despite the significant challenges the eurozone has experienced, including the 2010-13 debt crisis, which Delors acknowledged as reflecting the lack of economic underpinning of the

single currency area. One key difference between Von der Leyen's reign so far and that of Delors is that her period as European Commission chief has been shaped by multiple crises of the first order. To be sure, Delors was also in office in a challenging period, when Europe was widely perceived to have lost its way, but these problems were perhaps of a lesser magnitude overall. This, supporters of Von der Leyen assert, makes it harder for her to shape the type of era-defining legacy Delors had.

One example was the key role Von der Leyen played in 2021 in persuading EU leaders to agree to give the bloc debt-raising powers for the first time in its history. This was to finance a 750 billion (\$810 billion) post-coronavirus recovery plan to counteract the EU's worst economic shock for decades. This may be looked back on as a key moment for Brussels. At the time, there was even discussion of a

"Hamiltonian moment," in reference to Alexander Hamilton, the treasury secretary of the newly created US who in 1790 convinced Congress of the benefits of common debt. Von der Leyen appears to share the view that it is critical to be ambitious and seize the initiative with an audacious agenda. The alternative, in her view, is a new era of the kind of political drift that has characterized EU affairs for so long.

As well as potential opportunities on the horizon, such as the green transition, there are also risks. These include a huge number of domestic and external challenges that may be without precedent in the postwar era, including rising euroskepticism. So, a potential Von der Leyen second term would have a huge role in defining the EU's longer-term political and economic character. There may still be a historic window of opportunity for the continent to forge a stronger, more sustainable path into the future, but the key question is whether or not this will be seized.

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

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

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

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

The attacks began soon after the US withdrawal, and overtime settled into a pattern of carefully managed tit-for-tat skirmishes. The superiority of US defence systems, coupled with its state-of-the-art

drone arsenal, meant that the few casualties of the low-intensity conflict have consistently been on the Iraqi side. Most of the projectiles fired by the militias, both missiles and drones, were easily intercepted and destroyed by US forces. It was clear that the point of these attacks was to harass American forces, not cause a high number of fatalities. In fact, these militias most likely did not think their weapons could ever evade the American anti-aircraft defences and cause American casualties.

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

Now, there are not one, but three US casualties, and given the ever-intensifying confrontations between US and Iran-backed militias across the region, once again there are growing fears that the US may respond to the attack on its forces in Jordan in a way that would spiral the longrunning conflict out of control. Sure, Joe Biden is not Trump, and he is expected to be more cautious in his response

Ibrahim Al-Marashi

than his predecessor. But 2024 is an election year, and the Biden administration is facing immense domestic pressures. No matter what Biden decides to do, it will not be enough to satisfy the Republicans who are already calling for Iran to be directly targeted, and even Tehran to be bombed.

Trump, who will likely be running against Biden in November, already blamed Sunday's deadly drone attack in Jordan on Biden's "weakness and surrender". "This attack would NEVER have happened if I was President, not even a chance," he wrote in a social media post on Sunday. "Just like the Iranian-backed Hamas attack on Israel would never have happened, the War in Ukraine would never have happened, and we would right now have Peace throughout the World. Instead, we are on the brink of World War 3." Faced with such provocation, President Biden may feel the need to take drastic action to not appear weak on the eve of a critical election. Iran, for its part, appears more than eager to avoid being pulled into hot conflict against the US at a time when its so-called "Axis of Resistance" is actually on the rise in the region. Indeed, Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, and Israel's consequent assault on Gaza, resurrected and strengthened the Iran-led anti-US alliance between Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and the Harakat and Hezbollah in Iraq. Further, Houthis demonstrated that they can disrupt Red Sea shipping, and thus interna-

tional trade, without much consequence for themselves, adding to Iran's perceived power on the world stage.

The Iraqi militias, just like the Houthis, are likely enjoying the fact that they managed to humiliate Washington by killing US servicemen in Jordan, and hoping that their unexpected success would elevate their status within the Axis. Iran, however, appears to have a much different assessment of the situation. The Islamic republic has long been discouraging its proxies from taking action that could transform its carefully managed low-intensity, low-fatality proxy conflict into a costly all-out direct war against the US. It, for example, has not pushed the Lebanese Hezbollah to enter into a high-intensity conflict with Israel amid its war on Gaza. Thus, there is reason to assume Iran is actually not that pleased with the "success" of the attack on the base in Jordan, and is hoping to avoid any further escalations.

Today, in the Middle East, there is a very real risk of a major escalation in the proxy war between Iran and the US that could prove extremely costly for a region that is already reeling from multiple hot conflicts and crises. This threat of escalation, however, is not coming from Iran, or its proxies that have been hitting US targets with little success for years. The threat of escalation is coming from the US administration, which could throw the entire region into fire by overreacting to a drone attack that got "lucky" due to domestic pressures.

The assassinations at Jenin hospital should not surprise anyone

Yara Hawari

December, a Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF) report noted that there was a "staggering" increase in attacks against healthcare services in Jenin, including the obstruction of ambulances and tear-gassing of medical facilities. Access to hospitals has become so difficult that Palestinians in the Jenin refugee camp have had to establish "trauma stabilisation points" - makeshift clinics where medical volunteers conduct first aid and severe trauma treatment.

Other areas of the West Bank have also seen deliberate disruptions to healthcare services. There has been several incidents in which Palestinian ambulances have been prevented from reaching critically wounded people and medical staff have been detained for long hours. The increase in the number of checkpoints and road closures across the West Bank since October has only made this worse. The MSF report details what Palestinians have long known: Far from isolated incidents, the Israeli regime's attacks on Palestinian healthcare are systematic and are part of a wider policy to disrupt Palestinian access to medical care and life-saving treatment.

Indeed, even before the genocide, Gaza's health system had been in gradual decline as a result of the Israeli blockade on the strip, which, among many things, severely limited imports of medical equipment and medications. As a result, many vital and life-saving treatments, such as chemotherapy, were not available. Palestinians in Gaza were forced to apply for (and were often denied) permits for such life-saving treatment in Jerusalem and elsewhere.

Before the beginning of the genocide, the health sector in Gaza and elsewhere in occupied Palestine was already in a state of

perpetual crisis. Now, the Israeli regime's targeting of Palestinian healthcare is even more blatant.

Taleng Mofokeng, United Nations special rapporteur on the right to health, said that in Gaza, "the practice of medicine is under attack". This is not an exaggeration as there have been well over 600 attacks on medical facilities since October. In November, Gaza's main hospital, al-Shifa, was subjected to a brutal siege, in which sections of the hospital were shelled, staff were abducted and interrogated, and fuel was denied for life-saving machinery.

The Israeli regime claimed that the hospital was sitting on top of a Hamas command centre, a claim that they failed to provide evidence for and was widely disproved even by mainstream media outlets. After the siege, the World Health Organization visited the site and called the hospital a "death zone". Most hospitals in Gaza, including al-Shifa, have also become mass graves with makeshift cemeteries being dug within the grounds of the medical facilities because burying the dead outside is too dangerous. In northern Gaza, there are no functioning hospitals left. In the south, all the remaining hospitals are under intense attack by Israeli ground forces and bombardments.

Under international law, hospitals and medical facilities are considered protected spaces, and attacking them is considered a war crime. But this doesn't matter much to the Israeli regime, which has enjoyed decades of impunity for such crimes. It also doesn't seem to matter much to many mainstream media spaces, which seldom mention that these attacks are war crimes. Indeed their reporting on the Jenin hospital raid fails to mention this and fails to mention the context of systematic Israeli attacks on Palestinian healthcare.

Aljazeera

Climate migration challenge needs to be urgently tackled

Sara Al-Mula

DESPITE global efforts to quell the ravages of climate change, natural disasters have, in recent years, been triggering a serious discourse on the best ways to support those who are forcibly displaced as a result of climate-induced events.

Climate migration occurs when natural disasters and ecological transformations render specific regions uninhabitable, leading to the internal or external displacement of local communities in pursuit of safer and more sustainable living environments. Although the majority of climate displacement occurs within national borders and displaced individuals may have the opportunity to return to their homes following a disaster, the unpredictable and escalating impacts of climate change are rendering certain regions uninhabitable.

Analysis of recent climate-induced disasters demonstrates how the people of the Middle East and North Africa region are grappling with climate migration. For instance, Storm Daniel, which occurred in September 2023, stands as the most fatal Mediterranean tropical-like cyclone in recorded history. It led to the displacement of about 45,000 individuals. Meanwhile, Mediterranean countries such as Morocco and Algeria were harshly impacted during a severe heat wave in July and August 2022, with the ensuing wildfires prompting 9,500 displacements from rural areas in northern Morocco alone.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, an international nongovernmental organization dedicated to monitoring data concerning the world's internally displaced persons, last year released statistics that highlight the calamity of climate migration. Since 2008, a staggering 376 million

people globally have been forcibly displaced due to a number of climate-induced events and disasters, such as floods, windstorms, wildfires, earthquakes, tsunamis or droughts. A worrying upward trend has been observed since 2020, with the data revealing that, between the end of 2021 and the end of 2022, the number of individuals internally displaced by disasters surged by 45 percent, or 32.6 million. In 2022, the MENA region recorded an astonishing 305,000 displacements due to drought, wildfires and floods, which is nearly 25 percent more than in the previous year.

As climate change remains the primary catalyst for natural disasters, the number of climate refugees is expected to keep increasing. The Institute for Economics and Peace estimates that, in the direct circumstances, up to 1.2 billion individuals could face displacement by 2050 due to natural disasters. The challenges climate refugees face play out in different ways as they navigate perilous journeys of migration. Climate refugees encounter various infringements on their basic human rights, including limited access to food, water, sanitation, housing, healthcare and education. Due to the sudden need for relocation, climate refugees also suffer from losses to their livelihoods and an inability to secure sustainable employment options, which consequently has a damaging impact on their mental and physical well-being. The severance of social connections and community ties also leads to isolation, anxiety and depression. Additionally, loopholes mean that legislation often does not provide full protection for climate refugees, making them prone to abuse, discrimina-

tion, exploitation, forced labor or trafficking.

Addressing the challenges of climate migration necessitates a significant course correction to overcome obstacles and achieve objectives. This can be strengthened by the cooperation of international players and local community organizations in safeguarding the rights and dignity of climate migrants. To grasp what lies ahead requires an understanding of the root causes of climate migration within each community. Then there is a need to work diligently to mitigate those triggers. Long-term climate action strategies should envision a sustainable and resilient future, with particular focus on adaptation plans and environmental conservation. Programs should also include investments in agricultural technologies that boost productivity and, in turn, reduce food insecurity risks. Similarly, sustainable water resource management guidance will ensure water conservation in already water-stressed areas and improve access to clean water, while mitigating the impacts of droughts and floods.

In the short run, governments should establish data centers that are responsible for monitoring climate events and issuing early warnings to alert communities about impending climate-related disasters, while also coordinating responses that ensure timely evacuation and preparedness. Social protection programs are the cornerstone for aiding vulnerable populations, while community awareness programs can inform local communities about climate risks and promote sustainable practices. Beyond this, it is vital to roll out skills development programs to equip individuals with

the capacity to adapt and rebuild their livelihoods and local communities following a disaster. Critically, discussions should be held on the national and international levels on the legal frameworks that protect the rights and needs of climate migrants. Currently, the 1951 Refugee Convention pertains solely to individuals who are persecuted due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. It has yet to recognize climate-related risks as grounds for refugee status.

International stakeholders should lay out clear plans for migration management to facilitate safe, orderly and dignified migration. Planned relocation initiatives may be coordinated by governments, humanitarian agencies and communities to transfer populations from areas severely impacted by climate change to more secure and resilient locations. Assisting in the reconstruction of devastated communities affected by the impacts of climate change presents a viable option to reduce the need for external displacement. Enhancing access to sufficient financial resources will ensure the development of improved climate-proof infrastructure in susceptible areas across the MENA region, as well as fund the rebuilding of areas that have been devastated by natural disasters. In all, concerted efforts among government agencies, civil society, academia and the private sector will be fundamental in delivering these important programs. As climate threats continue to grow, the development of effective climate migration policies will be critical in ensuring the protection, rights and sustainable resettlement of individuals and communities displaced due to environmental changes.

Mass migration will permanently alter Britain

Allison Pearson

CALL me old-fashioned, but I rather liked our country when women and children didn't have acid thrown at them in the street, teachers weren't forced into hiding with their family for educating pupils about religious tolerance, Saturdays in the capital didn't feature anti-Semitic hate marches and well-loved Members of Parliament didn't quit their jobs after being subject to death threats because they spoke up for their Jewish constituents.

Yesterday was a perilous and dark moment in the history of this democracy.

Mike Freer, Conservative MP for Finchley and Golders Green, announced he was leaving politics after being hounded with death threats for his pro-Israel views. A decade ago, a group called "Muslims Against Crusades" urged its supporters to target the man who represents the UK's most heavily Jewish area. Alluding to the stabbing of Labour MP Stephen Timms by an Islamist extremist, the group told Mr Freer to "let Stephen Timms be a warning to you." Today, Mr Freer considers himself "lucky to be alive", having learned that Ali Harbi Ali, the terrorist who went on to murder Sir David Amess MP in 2021, had turned up at his constituency office in north London with the intention of killing him. A devastating arson attack there in December followed by an email (calling him "the kind of person who deserved to be set alight") was the final straw.

Since the heinous massacre by Hamas of 1200 men, women, children and babies in their cribs on October 7 and the occupation of

Gaza by Israeli forces, anti-Semites have been horribly emboldened. As one of the founders of British Friends of Israel, and a signatory to the October Declaration asserting the right of Israel to defend herself, I have had the smallest possible glimpse of what Mike Freer and his husband Angelo have had to endure. Graphic pictures of defiled and mutilated Israeli women and children have been sent to me as a "Jew-loving bitch" who "deserves the same". And yet, perfectly understandable though it is, Mike Freer's decision to step down is a victory for the zealots who have no respect for the norms of what feels daily like a less and less civilised society. It's a capitulation to forces against which we need to stand firm if the ballot box is to mean anything.

But don't expect the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition to attack the culprits. After lovely, gentle Sir David was murdered, his fellow Parliamentarians could not wait to change the subject from barbarous slaughter to online safety. In the Commons, there was a cowardly stampede away from the elephant in the room. It is a measure of the success of extremist groups that, too often, fear of being seen as Islamophobic now trumps the solemn duty to defend the British way of life. It's not only supporters of Israel who are at risk. Last November, a mob surrounded the Tower Hamlets office of MP Rushanara Ali after she abstained from a vote on a ceasefire in Gaza

(never mind that it was the official Labour party position). A primary school in east London received bomb threats after its headteacher banned pro-Palestine badges.

Katharine Birbalsingh, the redoubtable head of Michaela Community School, and her staff have faced appalling threats of violence after Muslim pupils were told they were not permitted to pray during the school day. That decision was in keeping with the strict secular ethos which Birbalsingh believes is the best way to bind her multi-faith school together. But the fanatics in the UK demand ever more concessions. What runs through these alarming events is a tantrummy defiance, a determination by headline "community leaders" to get their own way regardless of what custom or the law of the land may say. As long as such people remain an aggrieved minority it is just about possible to keep a lid on it. There are enough of us to speak up for our Jewish citizens and call out medieval attitudes towards women, girls and gay people, and to assist those who want to integrate to do so.

I think that's why I found the Office for National Statistics projection that the UK's population will exceed 70 million by 2026 so devastating. It's not just that our hospitals and transport system can barely cope with the people here already (although they can't). It's not just that we know for a fact that our useless elite are not going to build a town the size of Doncaster every year to provide enough housing (so our young people are going

to feel ever more alienated). No, it's that 92 per cent of the 6.6 million rise - 6.1 million people - will come from immigration, not British people having children. Such a surge would utterly reshape the Britain we love, its culture and even its language. Professor Matthew Goodwin points out that, since the 1990s, the share of school pupils whose first language is not English has almost tripled. I have taught English as a second language in Tower Hamlets, and, let me tell you, it will simply not be possible to integrate such a vast number of human beings within that time frame. And that's if they want to be integrated, which the extremists who have hounded out Mike Freer clearly don't.

Five cities the size of Birmingham within fifteen years. Seriously? There is no democratic consent for such demographic change. No one voted for it. Mindboggling "diversity" is being ushered in against the express will of the people by politicians who think GDP matters more than a contented nation and that anyone who objects is "racist". Parliament has the power to stop this, and stop it they must or they will never be forgiven. And they must do so soon. I could cry thinking of the hundreds of thousands who gave their lives in two world wars to protect this precious island, its values, its green places, its eccentricity, its kindness, its humour. What did they die for? So we could become some teeming Travelodge of Babel? Call me old-fashioned, but no. We have to protest; we must.

The Telegraph

EU must do more to help Europe's farmers

Khaled Abou Zahr

I stand with the farmers of France and the rest of Europe. I stand with these men and women who dedicate their lives, day in and day out, to working the land. I support them during a period when policymakers, detached from reality, are jeopardizing the livelihoods of an entire profession and endangering the rest of the world with the risk of food penury. I stand with them as they uphold tradition and the values of hard work, while fighting for their future and ours.

This situation was expected. Just as weak politicians have been bullied by mobs on energy, cornering Europe when the Ukraine war started, they are now doing the same with agriculture and food supplies, putting not only farmers but the entire population in danger. This is something I warned about in a previous column in October 2022, which was titled "Sustainability needs sensible approach to benefit planet, not just few." Farmers' anger is growing across Europe, from the Netherlands to Romania and through Germany, Italy and France. Their motivations may differ, but they are mainly expressing their discontent, through protests and blockades, against the EU's agricultural policies.

The focal points might be different, such as protests over fuel prices, Ukrainian competition or new environmental measures. But although the factors may seem different and local, the root cause is one that affects all farmers across the EU: Brussels' flawed policies toward globalization and climate change. This unrest emphasizes the vital role of agriculture in providing food and securing the future. Farmers in France are angry due to their government's perceived lack of consideration, rising production costs and increased European regulations. The stakes are high as, according to official census data, between 2010 and 2020, France lost 20 percent of its farms. Their protests, which began with highway blockades and an explosion at an environmental office, highlight issues like the impacts of climate change, delayed agri-

cultural legislation and the decline in farm numbers.

Moreover, farmers cite challenges for young entrants to the industry and noncompliance with the so-called EGAlim law, which aims to strengthen the balance in commercial relationships between suppliers and distributors, and environmental norms. The recent tax increase on non-road diesel - which was scrapped last week - added to their grievances. Farmers also criticize the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, pointing to delayed payments. The government's response, including Prime Minister Gabriel Attal meeting farmers, aims to ease tensions, but the farmers have threatened to escalate their protests, potentially impacting the Paris Agricultural Show, a highly symbolic annual event that is due to take place on Feb. 24.

In Germany, farmers are demanding the reinstatement of tax relief for diesel used in agricultural vehicles and the removal of vehicle tax on tractors. They are also calling for a reevaluation of the "Farm to Fork" strategy, urging the EU to stop penalizing farmers. As European Parliament elections approach, these agricultural concerns may significantly influence the political landscape.

As reminded by a historical article in French newspaper Le Figaro this week, farmers' discontent has deep roots and a legacy of protests. The core of their dissatisfaction lies in issues such as inadequate remuneration, complex environmental regulations and a history of grievances related to competition from imports and fraudulent practices. Historical protests, notably the 1907 Languedoc wine-grower revolt, set a precedent. Their stand against foreign wine imports and fraud set the stage for organized agricultural movements.

Over the years, farmers have engaged in various protests, including the setting up of barricades, sabotage and destroying goods, reflecting their dissatisfaction with agricultural policies and economic challenges. In

more recent history, the 1976 tragedy in Montredon-des-Corbières marked a turning point, as clashes with law enforcement resulted in fatalities, highlighting the severity of farmers' grievances. Despite attempts to avoid violence, subsequent actions - such as Jose Bove's 1999 dismantling of an under-construction McDonald's outlet - showcased farmers' ongoing struggle for visibility and recognition.

These events underscore the enduring nature of farmers' dissatisfaction and the evolution of their grievances over time. France is not the only country with such a history, with the number of protests around Europe growing in the last decade. Indeed, we should remember the 2022 Dutch farmers' protests and road blockades. In an interview at the time, journalist Roger Stryland explained that the main concern was nitrogen pollution affecting natural areas. The government, led by Mark Rutte, proposed radical measures, suggesting that 60 percent of farms either transition or cease operations to combat this phenomenon.

But the Netherlands has a high concentration of livestock, with 11 million pigs, 4 million cows and 100 million chickens for a population of 18 million people. Therefore, this decision understandably provoked frustration, putting about 30,000 farms in jeopardy. With the Netherlands being the world's second-largest agricultural exporter, the move also caused concerns about its impact on food supplies. The main issue is that all proposed transitions to less-polluting technologies require significant investments, which cannot be undertaken by the farmers alone. This highlights the risk of imposing environmental regulations without a logical and smart transition. It also shows the disconnect between EU regulators' noble environmental goals and the bare necessity of feeding the population. The EU has achieved great things and enhanced the lives of people throughout the continent, but it needs to reassess these policies in order to protect and safeguard its future. Without farmers, there is no life.



Pakistan highly values its bilateral ties with Ethiopia: Shamshad Akhtar

ISLAMABAD (PPI): An Ethiopian delegation led by State Minister of Fiscal Policy and Public Finance of Ethiopia Dr Eyob Tekalign Tolina called on Minister for Finance Dr Shamshad Akhtar in Islamabad today.

Finance Minister Dr Shamshad Akhtar wel-

comed Dr Eyob Tekalign Tolina and his delegation on their visit to Pakistan. She said Pakistan highly values her bilateral ties with Ethiopia including trade and economic relations.

The delegation was greatly impressed by Pakistan's effective resolution of economic chal-

lenges and expressed their keen interest in learning from the country's experiences. The admiration stemmed from Pakistan's successful emergence from economic difficulties, making it a source of valuable insights for others seeking to navigate similar issues.

This interest under-

scored a global recognition of Pakistan's experience as a valuable lesson in economic recovery. Dr Shamshad Akhtar briefed the delegates on the latest economic developments, fiscal policy adjustments, and tax reforms undertaken by the Caretaker government.

CDA Chairman assures to address issues of business community

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) Captain (R) Anwar ul Haq said on Saturday that CDA would take all possible measures to address key issues to facilitate the business community for business development.

He said that efforts are underway to develop transparent and financially viable systems in CDA to better serve the citizens and the business community.

He said that CDA is working on an automated parking system to address the parking issue in markets and the Islamabad Citizen Club would soon be made operational.

He said this while talking to a delegation of the Islamabad Chamber of

Commerce and Industry (ICCI) during its visit to the CDA Head Office led by Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President.

Anwar said that the CDA is ready to hand over public toilets and filtration plants to ICCI for their maintenance and operation on mutually agreed terms.

He said that CDA is also ready to hand over its hospital to ICCI for maintenance and operation after its upgrade.

He said that CDA is considering outsourcing the water supply and waste management systems to make them hassle-free services for the citizens.

He said that CDA is digitizing the land record to facilitate the business community and the citizens.

He also updated the

business community about other important initiatives of CDA including the introduction of electric buses and, tree plantation drives to make Islamabad an environmentally friendly city.

Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry briefed the Chairman CDA about the key issues of the business community.

He urged the civic body to take urgent measures to address them. He said that ICCI is constructing water filtration plants in G series, which should be handed over to the Chamber for their maintenance and operations.

He urged the CDA to set up flower markets in Marakaz, complete the

slaughter house project, operationalize the Citizens Club, and set up a wholesale poultry market in the federal capital.

He urged the CDA to focus on the better development of all markets and replace all old sewerage lines in Islamabad with new ones to address sewerage issues.

Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI briefed the Chairman CDA about the issues of the industrial sector and stressed their early redressal.

Zafar Bakhtawari former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG, Muhammad Ejaz Abbasi former President ICCI, Ajmal Baloch, Raja Hassan Akhtar, Zahid Qureshi, Khalid Chaudhry, and others were in the delegation.



KARACHI: The Caretaker Federal Minister for Finance, Revenue, and Economic Affairs, Shamshad Akhtar addressing members of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI).

FPCCI supports FBR's restructuring by Finance Minister

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Atif Ikram Sheikh, President FPCCI, has said that the business community supports restructuring plan of Federal Bureau of Revenue (FBR) as visualized by Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Federal Caretaker Minister for Finance & Revenue. The underlining principle of separation of tax policy and collection functions will help resolve contradictions, conflict of interest and maladministration; and, that's why, FPCCI supports the restructuring proposals, he added.

It is pertinent to note that Dr. Shamshad Akhtar paid a detailed, high-profile visit to the apex body's head office in Karachi and briefed prominent trade & industry leaders of Karachi on the measures the caretaker government has taken to stabilize the economy, control exchange rate volatility and restructure FBR.

Mr. Atif Ikram Sheikh stated that the bifurcation of inland revenue and customs will streamline the operations of FBR; and, will not only align it with international best practices, but also remove the con-

cerns of international financial institutions like IMF, World Bank and Asian Development Bank. This is specifically important in Pakistan's peculiar case as the country will continue to depend on external financing for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Atif Ikram Sheikh apprised that it was a longstanding demand of the entire business, industry and trade community of Pakistan to implement complete digitalization and transparency of FBR operations to deal with harassment of the business community at the hands of tax officers and unnecessary issuance of tax notices.

President FPCCI also highlighted the issues of edible oil industry; i.e. section 8-B of the sales tax act should be abolished and 10 percent differential disfavoring and discouraging the industrialists in comparison to commercial importers should be eliminated. Additionally, in order to facilitate industries, higher tariff should be charged to commercial importers than industries.

Mr. Saquib Fayyaz Magoon,

SVP FPCCI, maintained that the input of apex body must be incorporated in budget-making and taxation policies as FPCCI is undertaking a massive exercise to formulate its budget proposals for the federal budget 2024-25 through aggregating feedback from all chambers, associations and trade bodies from across Pakistan.

SVP FPCCI stressed that small & medium enterprises (SMEs) are the real engine of growth as they create employment and generate revenues for the country; therefore, they should be facilitated in the economic, industrial, trade, investment and taxation policies of the country.

Dr. Shamshad Akhtar agreed with FPCCI's demand that its representatives should be included in all important and relevant committees of the finance and revenue ministries as the business community is real stakeholder of the economy. She also appreciated active participation of the business community in government's consultative process with the private sector from the platform of FPCCI.

Green Pakistan project designed to maximize agricultural productivity

BEIJING (APP): The Green Pakistan Million Acre Smart Farm project incorporates advanced equipment, innovative techniques and intelligent water management systems, all designed to maximize agricultural productivity while minimizing environmental impact," said Fu Shuai Vice GM of Dayu Irrigation International Department.

Speaking on the occasion of the delivery ceremony of first shipment of equipment for the project, he said, "Green Pakistan Initiative, launched last year aims to transform the agricultural landscape. We are dedicated to participating in this groundbreaking endeavor and contributing

our expertise."

The delivery ceremony was also attended by Zaeem, President of the exclusive distributor in Pakistan.

The first shipment of equipment for the Green Pakistan Million Acre Smart Farm Project was dispatched from China to Pakistan marking a significant milestone in the country's agricultural development, local media reported.

This collaborative initiative, led by China's Dayu Irrigation Group and local partners, aims to revolutionize farming practices and contribute to the implementation of the Green Pakistan Initiative.

Dayu Irrigation Group aims to integrate intelligent irrigation control systems

into Pakistan's farming as part of the Green Pakistan Million Acre Smart Farm Project.

By monitoring crop growth and optimizing water and fertilizer application, this system seeks to enhance yield, improve crop quality, and reduce labor costs for farmers.

The successful shipment of the initial equipment batch signifies the beginning of a transformative journey for Pakistan's agricultural sector.

Through unwavering Pak-China partnerships, the Green Pakistan Initiative is poised to usher in a new era of sustainable agriculture, benefiting farmers, rural communities and the nation as a whole.

Gold rates decline by Rs.1,700 to Rs.216,000 per tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs.1,700 and was sold at Rs.216,000 on Saturday compared to its sale at Rs.217,700 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs.1,458 to Rs.185,185 from Rs.186,643 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went down to Rs.169,753 from Rs.171,089, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram Silver remained stagnant at Rs.2,600 and 2,229.08 respectively. The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$15 to \$2,059 from \$2,074, the Association reported.

China's internet sector sees steady growth in 2023

ISLAMABAD (APP): China's internet sector registered steady growth in business revenue and profits last year, according to data from the China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Major internet companies and related services companies saw their combined business revenue rise 6.8 percent year on year to total 1.75 trillion yuan (about 246.46 billion U.S. dollars) in 2023, the data showed, China. Org reported. Their cumulative profits came in at 129.5 billion yuan, up 0.5 percent year on year. Major internet companies and related services companies refer to those which have annual business revenues of at least 20 million yuan.

Over 8.3m cotton bales reach ginneries across Pakistan till Jan 31

MULTAN (APP): Seed cotton (Phutti), equivalent to over 8.3 million, or exactly 83,49,553 bales, has reached ginning factories across the country till January 31.

According to a fortnightly report of the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) and released on Saturday, over 8.3 million, or 83,08,790 bales, have undergone the

ginning process, i.e., converted into bales. Cotton arrivals in Punjab were recorded at over 4.2 million, or 42,38,434 bales.

Sindh generated over 4.1 million, or 41,11,119 bales.

The textile sector bought 76,84,117 bales, while exporters purchased 2,92,726 bales, and Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) didn't buy during the cotton season

2023-24.

Sanghar district of Sindh was topped with a cotton arrival figure of 16,94,691 bales, followed by Bahawalnagar district of Punjab with 11,47,870 bales.

A total of 151 ginning factories were operational in the country.

Exactly 3,72,710 cotton bales of unsold stock were available in ginning factories.

Türkiye, Greece look to higher trade volume

ISTANBUL (AA/APP): Türkiye and Greece's bilateral trade volume hit \$5.8 billion in 2023 but the two countries target \$10 billion, officials said Friday.

"We are neighbors, friends and allies with Greece. We need to use the time well, we need to close the trade deficit," Turkish Deputy Trade Minister Mustafa Tuzcu said at the Türkiye-Greece Business Forum in Istanbul, organized by

Türkiye's Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK).

Noting President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Athens seven years ago to prepare the political ground for encouragement and reinforcement, Tuzcu said: "This visit reflected the will of our leaders. After seven years, 15 agreements were signed in various fields. We are confident that we will reach the \$10 billion bilateral trade volume target."

Tuzcu's Greek counterpart, Kostas Fragogiannis, said cooperation can be strengthened with joint projects in investments, trade and the tourism and building sectors.

Both countries are working to achieve that goal. Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Erdogan signed the declaration of friendship and good neighborliness in Athens on Dec. 7, he said.

IMF raises Saudi's economic growth forecast for 2025

RIYADH (APP): The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised its expectations for economic growth in Saudi Arabia, indicating a positive outlook for the Kingdom's economy. The IMF now predicts a growth rate of 5.5% in 2025, an increase from its previous estimate of 4.5% issued in October 2023.

These revisions were made based on the data published in the IMF's report 'Updates on Global Economic Prospects' in January 2024, which highlighted the optimistic outlook for the Saudi economy's performance and strength despite the risks and challenges present in the global economic landscape. This positive outlook confirms the growth and prosperity of the Saudi economy, which is being driven by strong leadership both regionally and internationally.

Lost & Found

I have lost my Passport No. JP 9156461 somewhere. The finder please post to Mr. Wahedur Rehman son of Norul Hadi resident of Nagrai Amazi tehsel Mandnr district Buner.

Court Notice

In the Court of Tazeen Wisal Civil Judge VII / Judicial Magistrate/Alaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar.Suit No 282/1, Institution 2023. Date of hearing. 9/2/2024. Mst. Mahal etc. VS Qamarul Zaman etc. Notice to no. 54/3/1/1. Saeed Khan s/o Mst Shakh resident of Karapa tehsel Daggar district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendant can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendant will /shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 9/2/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Big Tech carries Wall Street to another record and winning week

NEW YORK (AP): Big Tech stocks once again carried Wall Street to a record Friday, even though the majority of stocks fell amid worries about the downside of a hot economy.

Big gains for Meta Platforms and Amazon helped drive the S&P 500 index up by 1.1% to its latest all-time high. It's in a torrid run where it's climbed in 13 of the last 14 weeks. The Big Tech stocks, which are two of Wall Street's most influential, also vaulted the Nasdaq composite up by 1.7%.

But the Dow Jones Industrial Average, which has less of an emphasis on tech, rose by a more modest 0.3%, or 134 points. And the Russell 2000 index of smaller stocks fell 0.6%.

Stocks felt pressure from much higher yields in the bond market after a report showed U.S. employers hired many more workers last month than economists expected.

While the strength is a boon for workers and keeps the risk of a recession at bay, the worry is that it could preserve some upward pressure on inflation. That in turn could mean a longer wait for the Federal Reserve to begin cutting interest rates.

Hopes for such cuts, which can relax the pressure on the economy and goose investment prices, have been a major reason the U.S. stock market has surged to record heights. Fed Chair Jerome Powell said earlier this week that

it's unlikely cuts will begin as soon as traders had been hoping.

"The Fed threw some cold water on the idea of a March rate cut less than 48 hours ago, and today's surprisingly strong jobs report won't dry things off," said Chris Larkin, managing director, trading and investing, at E-Trade from Morgan Stanley. "It's definitely not the type of data the Fed had in mind when they said they wanted to see more evidence that inflationary pressures were under control."

The yield for the 10-year Treasury leaped immediately after the release of the jobs report and climbed to 4.02% from 3.88% late Thursday.

Traders had already pushed out bets for the timing of the first Fed rate cut to May from March following Powell's warning earlier this week. After the jobs report, traders shifted some bets even further off the calendar to June, according to data from CME Group.

Besides the overall hiring number, the jobs report included several signals showing much more strength than expected. Average hourly earnings for workers rose more in January than forecast. The unemployment rate unexpectedly did not get worse. And the government said hiring was actually much stronger in December than it had earlier reported.

The question for the stock market will be whether the upside of such strength outweighs the

downside. That is, will a stronger economy create enough extra in corporate profits to make up for delayed or dashed hopes for quick and significant cuts to interest rates?

"The big payroll gains and wage gains aren't something to be feared," said Brian Jacobsen, chief economist at Annex Wealth Management. "The Fed has stepped back from its insistence that the labor market needs to weaken before inflation sustainably falls."

He pointed to a report earlier this week that showed an increase in productivity for U.S. workers, which could help offset the effect of higher wages.

The jobs report landed on Wall Street amid a maelstrom of profit reports that could have helped move the market on their own.

Meta Platforms, the owner of Facebook and Instagram, soared 20.3% after it reported stronger profit for the latest quarter than expected and said it would start paying a dividend to its investors. Amazon rallied 7.9% after it reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than expected.

They're both members of a small group of Big Tech stocks known as the "Magnificent Seven" responsible for the majority of Wall Street's run to a record. Their huge gains have set expectations very high for their growth, which they need to meet to justify the big runs for their stock prices.



MULTAN: Labourers are busy in unloading sacks of onion from delivery trucks at Vegetable Market. —APP Photo



In brief

Sabonis breaks Sacramento record

NEW YORK (Agencies): Domantas Sabonis posted a 30th double-double in a row to help the Sacramento Kings beat the Indiana Pacers 133-122. The Lithuanian claimed 26 points and 11 rebounds in Indianapolis to break Oscar Robertson's Kings record, external of 29 double-doubles in an NBA season. Robertson still holds the longest overall double-double streak for the franchise with 31. Trae Young scored 32 points and had 15 assists as the Atlanta Hawks beat the Phoenix Suns 129-120 in Atlanta. Young, who has scored at least 30 points in 20 games this season, also recorded his 30th double-double of the campaign. Nikola Jokic recorded 27 points, 22 rebounds and 12 assists to help the Denver Nuggets to a 120-108 home win over the Portland Trail Blazers. Los Angeles Clippers guard Russell Westbrook became only the 25th NBA player to reach 25,000 career points, scoring 23 off the bench in a 136-125 victory at the Detroit Pistons. Zion Williamson scored with four seconds remaining to give the New Orleans Pelicans a dramatic 114-113 win at the San Antonio Spurs. Williamson finished with 33 points and eight rebounds, while Victor Wembanyama scored 16 points and made 14 rebounds for the Spurs.

McIlroy falls out of Pebble Beach contention

CALIFORNIA (Agencies): Rory McIlroy is 12 shots off the lead at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am after shooting a two-over-par 74 in the second round. The Northern Irishman carded three bogeys, a double bogey and three birdies to slip to one over overall. American world number one Scottie Scheffler shares the lead with Sweden's Ludvig Aberg and Belgian Thomas Detry, the first-round leader, on 11 under. Scheffler carded a 64 which included eight birdies in California. Aberg went round in 65 and Detry, who led by one stroke overnight, 70. American Patrick Cantlay is one shot further back on 10 under. England's Matthew Fitzpatrick is seven under after shooting a 68, Justin Rose is five under thanks to a round of 71 and Tommy Fleetwood's 72 kept him on three under.

Fury-Usyk title fight postponed

LONDON (Agencies): Tyson Fury's undisputed heavyweight title fight against Oleksandr Usyk has been postponed after the Briton sustained a "freak" cut in training. Fury, 35, was cut in sparring at his training camp in Saudi Arabia on Friday in preparation for the bout on 17 February in Riyadh. The injury above Fury's right eye needed "urgent medical attention" and "significant stitching". In a statement, external the Briton said he was "absolutely devastated". Fury is the WBC champion with Ukraine's Usyk, 37, holding the WBA, WBO and IBF belts. If the fight does take place at a later date, the winner will be crowned the first undisputed heavyweight champion in the four-belt era. Fury said he had been preparing to face Usyk "for so long" and was in "superb condition". "I feel bad for everyone involved in this huge event and I will work diligently towards the rescheduled date once the eye is healed," he added. In a later Instagram post he wrote: "Can't help getting injured in sparring but what I can say was Usyk was in trouble. I am in fantastic shape. I will reschedule soon as I can. 2024 a massive year for team GK."

Dominant India take 2-0 lead over Pakistan in Davis Cup

ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): India won both Davis Cup singles matches against Pakistan in Islamabad on Saturday, dominating the first matches between the arch-rivals in Pakistan for 60 years.

India were forced to send a squad to Pakistan for the first time since 1964 after the International Tennis Federation rejected their request to shift the tie to a neutral venue on security grounds.

The last Davis Cup tie

between the two countries was played in Kazakhstan in 2019, with India enjoying a 7-0 record against Pakistan in all Davis Cup ties.

Sports matches between Pakistan and India are rare, because of decades of hostility.

In the Group 1 play-off first-round tie, India's singles expert Ramkumar Ramanathan beat Pakistan's veteran Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi 6-7, 7-6, 6-0 in two hours.

Qureshi, 43, injured his hamstring in the second set and could not put up a fight in the third.

India's Sriram Balaji had the better of Aqeel Khan by 7-5, 6-3 in an hour and 15 minutes.

The doubles and reverse singles will be played on Sunday.

Result: Ramkumar Ramanathan (India) beat Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi (Pakistan) 6-7, 7-6, 6-0. Sriram Balaji (India) beat Aqeel Khan 7-5, 6-3.



ISLAMABAD: India's Ramkumar Ramanathan (L) greets Pakistan's Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi (R) after winning the singles tennis match of the Davis Cup World Group-1 play-off between Pakistan and India.

Iran stun Japan 2-1 in Asian Cup to reach semifinals



DOHA (AFP): Alireza Jahanbakhsh scored a 96th-minute penalty to give Iran a dramatic 2-1 win over Japan on Saturday and set up an Asian Cup semi-final against holders Qatar or Uzbekistan.

It capped a stunning comeback from Iran, who were behind at the break but roared back to dump out the pre-tournament favourites and keep alive their dream of a first Asian title since 1976.

Hidemasa Morita gave Japan, who were looking to lift the trophy for a record-extending fifth time, the lead midway through the first half in front of 36,000 at Education City Stadium in Doha. Mohammad Mohebi drew Iran -- themselves

champions three times -- level 10 minutes after half time and they dominated the remainder of the game.

But just when it looked like extra time, Kou Itakura brought Hossein Kanaizadegan down in the box and skipper Jahanbakhsh held his nerve to spark delirium on the pitch and in the stands. Coach Amir Ghalenoei said his players were "fantastic" in the second half.

"They gave everything for the Iranian people," he said. "This can be a turning point for Iranian football."

Ghalenoei, whose side squeezed through on penalties over Syria in the last 16, took a potshot at critics of him and his side back home. "I am not saying criticism is not good, but some

people in the last 11 months tried to ruin the national team," he said.

Under pressure Iran, missing the suspended Porto forward Mehdi Taremi, had the first sight of goal on 13 minutes when Feyenoord winger Jahanbakhsh fizzed the ball over goalkeeper Zion Suzuki's crossbar.

Japan seemed flustered initially by their opponents' physical approach, but they were able to give as good as they got and Itakura picked up a yellow card for cynically stopping an Iran attack.

On 28 minutes Hajime Moriyasu's side went ahead when Morita bustled his way through a weak challenge and with Iran's defence AWOL, the mid-

fielder was all alone with only Alireza Beiranvand to beat.

He did not strike the ball convincingly but the goalkeeper tried to save with his legs instead of his hands and the ball hit an outstretched limb before looping into the net.

Japan, beaten by Qatar in the 2019 final, went to the break in the lead but there was little in it.

In the 55th minute Iran pulled level when Sardar Azmoun slipped in Mohebi and he beat an exposed Suzuki with a smart first-time finish. It was all Iran now. Mohebi headed just wide at the far post and then an Azmoun header flashed narrowly past Suzuki's post with the goalkeeper beaten, before the drama at the death.

"They put us under a lot of pressure and we could not resist their pressure," said Moriyasu, whose side were beaten 2-1 by Iraq in the group phase and conceded eight goals during the tournament.

"Against strong opponents we cannot concede goals like we did today. "We should have scored a second, and if we had, the game would have been different." Asked about the performance of defender Itakura, Moriyasu replied: "I will leave the criticism to the media." Qatar face Uzbekistan later Saturday, with South Korea playing Jordan in the first semi-final, on Tuesday.

Goal-oriented coach needed for promoting football in Pakistan: Asad Ullah

PESHAWAR (APP): Former national team member and Senior AFC C License Coach Muhammad Asad Ullah Khan Saturday said that the role of quality football coach is vital for promoting the game in Pakistan.

He said this during his lecture in the 5-day long Pakistan Sports Board Coaching and Training Course being continued at PSB Coaching Center on Saturday. Pakistan Origin US National Dr. Nabil, DG PSB (Technical) Shahid Hameed, international course conductor Rana Nasrullah, international gold medal athlete Muhammad Asad, and more than 80 male and female coaches from all across the province were also present.

About a good coach, Muhammad Asad Ullah, who represented Pakistan for seven years at the international level besides being coach of the U13, U16 teams that won gold medal in Korea, said that he or she should be positive, enthusiastic, supportive, trusting, focused, goal-oriented, knowledgeable, observant, respectful, patient and a clear communicator.

Muhammad Asad Ullah, who is associated with coaching in Pakistan Sports Board from the last 13-years, said that the coaching philosophy is different in Pakistan. He said coaches could get less support in terms of financial condition rather than hiring international

coaches on huge money. He said having an understanding of coaching philosophy, whether it's inspired by others or part of your own why, by designing good sessions for training.

He should think before any act, provide or generate equal opportunities for the athletes, besides keeping a positive communication by involving all in equal terms. He also questioned the difference between a good coach and a great coach.

A great coach knows how to uncover entrenched behaviors to unblock people's potential. They focus on values, needs, strengths and beliefs with empathy, attention, and patience. A good coach is the ability to see people as part of a system, he added.

He said a skillful coach doesn't enforce changes -- a coach gives their client the confidence to make their own changes and find their own solutions by accessing the qualities that are already inside them.

When one thinks about it, coaches have a lot of responsibilities from organizing training, developing game plans, communicating with players, and much more. When it comes down to it though, successful coaches share some crucial common attributes which set them apart from the rest.

He said mostly coaches tend to focus on the tactical or strategic aspects of what makes coaches great.

But consider this, according to inspirational speaker Tony Robbins, only 20% of an individual's success is due to strategies and tactics.

In fact, he said, 80% of an individual's success is determined by their psychology. As a coach, having the right attitude and mindset is essential for inspiring players, developing the team, and creating a winning culture.

There are more qualities of successful football coaches that you can incorporate immediately to develop a winning psychology within your organization. What's more these qualities are not only applicable to coaching football, they are cornerstones for success in other sports, business, and more, he said.

"When a coach embodies these traits, it has a cumulative effect by rubbing off on those around them as players tend to emulate the characteristics of their leader," he further added. So let's jump in and see how you can get started developing an atmosphere that breeds success.

There are five different qualities of the good football coach

Create a positive team culture

Focus on building strong relationships

The power of a growth mindset

The power of a growth mindset

The importance of teamwork

Remember that enthusiasm is contagious.

Mathews, Chandimal tons put Sri Lanka in control of Afghanistan Test

COLOMBO (AFP): Dinesh Chandimal and Angelo Mathews put on a record 232-run fourth-wicket partnership Saturday to leave Sri Lanka in firm control on day two of their one-off Test against Afghanistan in Colombo.

Sri Lanka were leading by 212 runs with four wickets in hand at stumps, with Mathews sent back on the final ball for 141 and Sadeera Samarawickrama (21) still at the crease.

"We have three more days in the game," veteran opener Dimuth Karunaratne told reporters. "We were planning to bat out the day tomorrow and give everyone an opportunity."

Chandimal (107) also notched up a century in a partnership that broke a record at the Sinhalese Sports Club that had stood for 32 years. In 1992, Arjuna Ranatunga and Asanka Gurusinha put on 230 runs for the fourth wicket there in what is fondly remembered as the Shane Warne Test match, when the spin king helped Australia secure a thrilling 16-run win.

Mathews and Chandimal came together after three wickets had fallen in the morning session and Sri Lanka were still 50 runs behind. The senior batsmen saw off some accurate bowling by the Afghan fast bowlers on a wicket that had flattened out to the detriment of spinners. "They know how to handle situations," Karunaratne said of the duo. "They knew that once the spin comes it will be easy for batting. They did pretty well."

Pakistan edge spirited Bangladesh to reach U19 World Cup semi-final

BENONI (Monitoring Desk): Ubaid Shah-led Pakistan bowling attack defended a low total against Bangladesh in an enthralling ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup clash to book their place in the semi-final.

Put into bat first, Pakistan's strong batting lineup failed in a crucial clash and could only yield 155 runs before bundling out in 40.4 overs. Openers Shamyul Hussain and Shahzaib Khan provided a decent start to the Green Shirts as they added 37 runs for the wicket.

The opening stand was dominated by Shahzaib while Hussain was rotating the strike before falling victim to Doullah Borson in the ninth over. He scored 19 off 31 deliveries.

His dismissal ignited a collapse as Pakistan began

to lose wickets at an alarming rate, consequently slipping to 76/4 in the 24th over when their in-form opener Shahzaib also walked back. He scored a gutsy 26 off 67 deliveries with the help of three boundaries.

Following the slump, Arafat Minhas took the reigns of Pakistan's batting expedition and ticked the scoreboard singlehandedly while losing partners at the other end. Minhas finally perished in the 41st over, top-scoring with a 40-ball 34 as Pakistan failed to breach a commendable total.

For Bangladesh, Doullah Borson and Sheikh Paevez Jibon bagged four wickets each. In pursuit of a modest 156-run total, Bangladesh fell just five runs short as they were booked on 150 in the 36th over, courtesy of Ubaid Shah's five-wicket

haul.

Borson had Bangladesh hoping for a thrilling victory with his courageous knock at the death but Mohammad Zeeshan cleaned up Maruf Mridha to steer his side to a sensational victory.

Borson remained stranded at the other end unbeaten at 21 off 24 deliveries, while Mohammad Shihab James was the top-scorer for Bangladesh with a 43-ball 26 in the middle.

For his match-winning five-fer, Ubaid Shah was adjudged the Player of the Match award in the all-important U19 World Cup clash for Pakistan.

Besides him, Ali Raza bagged three wickets while Zeeshan had one to his name. Pakistan will now take on Australia in the second U19 World Cup semi-final on Thursday.



BENONI: Pakistan players celebrate the dismissal of Bangladesh's Jishan Alam.

Brilliant Bumrah blows England away in 2nd Test

VISAKHAPATNAM (Agencies): England were blown away by a scintillating spell of reverse-swing bowling by India's Jasprit Bumrah on day two of the second Test in Visakhapatnam.

Bumrah took 6-45 in a devastating burst either side of tea, sensationally knocking Ollie Pope's middle and leg stumps out of the ground with an unplayable in-swinging yorker.

Zak Crawley batted beautifully for 76, but his loose swipe at Axar Patel allowed Bumrah and spinner Kuldeep Yadav to rip the heart out of England's middle order. In all, the tourists lost 6-68.

Ben Stokes fought back with 47 until he was bowled by Bumrah, who took his fifth when Tom Hartley was caught at first slip and then had James Anderson lbw to leave England 253 all out.

That gave India a first-innings lead of 143 after they were bowled out for 396 in the morning session.

Yashvi Jaiswal, 22, became the third-youngest Indian man to make a Test double century before holing out off Anderson, who along with Shoaib Bashir and Rehan Ahmed finished with three wickets.

Jaiswal was batting again before the close, joined by captain Rohit Sharma to take India to 28-0. Their

lead is 171 on a pitch where chasing any target of 300 or above would be utterly remarkable.

England looking for another comeback

England are in a dire position, but fewer runs behind on first innings than the 190 they gave up in the first Test in Hyderabad, when they pulled off an astonishing victory.

The main difference here is that it will be England batting last on a pitch that seems sure to deteriorate.

India are hugely indebted to Jaiswal. No-one else made more than 34 in the hosts' first innings. Their total looked no more than par and England had an opportunity to bat themselves into a position of strength. The wicket of a Crawley was a huge turning point, after which England were overwhelmed by the skill of Bumrah and trickery of Kuldeep.

Stokes has saved England on countless occasions, so hope remained while the captain was at the crease. Ultimately, even he was powerless to resist the brilliant Bumrah. It would take bravery to write off England, but comebacks like Hyderabad came once in a generation. The tourists now need their second in the space of a week.

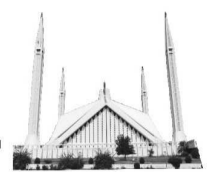
Bumrah blasts through England Crawley, on his 26th

birthday, batted with extreme elegance to add 59 with Ben Duckett and 55 with Pope. He played dreamy straight drives, two slog-sweeps for six and danced to clip Axar for four before trying to repeat it the next ball. Losing his shape, Crawley miscued to point, where Shreyas Iyer took a difficult catch running back over his shoulder.

With the ball reversing, India immediately called for Bumrah, who bowled even better than a similar spell in Hyderabad last week. Joe Root, battling his technique, poked an edge and Jonny Bairstow was drawn into a needless drive. In between was the stunning delivery to Pope, arcing into the toes at almost 90mph to leave the superb visual of one stump standing and two lying on the ground.

At the other end left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep, in for the injured Ravindra Jadeja, was getting the ball to skid and pop. Duckett prodded to silly point, Ben Foakes played all around one to be bowled and Ahmed patted a long-hop to short mid-wicket.

Stokes countered, so Bumrah was summoned again. Two balls into a new spell, Bumrah got one to scoot into off stump, leaving Stokes to drop his bat and throw out his hands in frustration.



In brief

Six gamblers netted during raid

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested six gamblers and recovered bet amount Rs 17,000, 06 mobile phones from their possession during crackdown here on Saturday. According to police spokesman, Ganjmandi police conducted raid and held gamblers who were identified as Khalid, Rahmat Ali, Jahangir, Khalid, Nazir and Arshad. Police have registered separate cases against all of them and started investigation. SP Rawal Faisal Saleem appreciated the performance of police team and said that gambling is root cause of other social evils. The accused involved cannot escape the grip of the law, he added.

Khayyam Sarhadi remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): Today marks the 13th death anniversary of Khayyam Sarhadi, a versatile artist recognized for his contributions to film, radio, TV, and stage. Khayyam Sarhadi was born in 1948 in the family of a renowned film director of his time but he was passionate about becoming a director and actor. His father sent him to Greece to complete acting directing and production courses. After returning to Pakistan, he joined Radio and later producer Yawar Hayat introduced him on PTV. His journey in the entertainment industry, marked by memorable performances, is fondly remembered by millions of fans. He worked in many dramas on PTV including "Waris", "Raiza Raiza", "Mann Chalay Ka Soda", "Dehleez", "Lazawal" and "Sooraj Kay Saath Saath". In addition to his television endeavours, Khayyam Sarhadi ventured into the world of cinema, working in three movies. His versatility as an actor was evident in his performances across different mediums. Today, on the 13th anniversary of his passing, fans and the industry alike remember Khayyam Sarhadi.

RWMC carrying out the cleanliness activities

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) Rana Sajid Safdar on Friday said that the cleanliness drive was in full swing despite severe cold weather while heavy machinery and excavators were being used in the Murree area to remove snow and rubbish from the roads. Talking to media persons, he said that the RWMC was making all-out efforts to keep the hill station clear for tourists. He said that as a large number of tourists visited Murree on the eve of the snowfall that increased the responsibility of RWMC staff. He said that additional staff had been deputed at all choking points to ensure smooth water drainage to provide maximum facilities to the tourists. Rana said that RWMC continued cleaning duties in Murree, and salt was sprinkled on the roads to ensure a smooth traffic flow. The spokesman said that despite the severe cold, the sanitary workers had done cleanliness work in the Rawalpindi areas to keep the city neat and clean. He urged the citizens to cooperate with the RWMC staff in its drive and avoid throwing garbage in the open.

Ali Zafar to sing for PSL 9 anthem

ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): Celebrated singer and music composer Ali Zafar is gearing up to lend his vocals to the official anthem of PSL Season 9. The announcement, made on the PSL account, confirms that Ali Zafar has been working on creating the musical magic for this season.



ISLAMABAD: District Judiciary Judges in a group photo with Hon'ble Mr. Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail at the Federal Judicial Academy. —APP Photo

ECP's training for 1.49 mln election staff concludes

ISLAMABAD (INP): The training organized by Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for approximately 1.49 million election staff to ensure the smooth execution of the upcoming general elections in 2024 concluded on Saturday.

The ECP spokesman in a statement issued here said that the training sessions guaranteed the capability of all election personnel to carry out their responsibilities proficiently and professionally in the upcoming general elections of 2024.

A total of 27,676 sessions were conducted over 87 days in remote areas nationwide, involving 3,821 master trainers to train election staff comprehensively, the spokesman added.

The sequence of training

sessions commenced on November 19, 2023, concluding on the evening of February 3, 2024. Participants in these sessions comprised 144 District Returning Officers (DROs), 859 Returning Officers (ROs), and polling staff.

A total of 7,663 two-day training sessions were held, involving 191,526 trained polling staff, including both Presiding Officers and Senior Assistant Presiding Officers (APOs).

Additionally, 19,630 training sessions were carried out for 785,060 Assistant Presiding Officers (APOs) and Polling Officers. To guarantee transparent, free, and fair elections, 32 Regional Monitoring Coordinators (RMCs) and 1,336 District

Monitoring Officers (DMOs) were appointed at the regional level to oversee election activities according to Section 234 of the Election Act, 2017. Adequate training was also provided for Monitoring Officers (MOs).

The commission conducted 148 training sessions to improve the operation of the Election Management System (EMS), engaging around 5,000 officers and data entry operators (DEOs) linked with returning officers.

Likewise, the Commission imparted training to 1,400 Master Trainers (MTs) to guarantee effective execution of security responsibilities during the elections. These Master Trainers then delivered essential training to 503,495 security personnel.

Firing in Karachi kills, injures three others

ISLAMABAD (APP): A 12-year-old boy was killed while three others sustained injuries on Saturday in a firing incident between two groups in New Karachi's sector 11-J area.

According to a private news channel, a clash between the workers of two political parties in New Karachi, left a 12-year-old boy killed. Three others were sustained injuries in the same incident.

The deceased child was identified as 12-year-old Abdul Rehman. Whereas injured Ashraf, 40, was beaten with a stick, and Shumail, 16, received a bullet injury to his leg. Both of them were under treatment and were out of danger, said the police.

A huge contingent of police, including the senior superintendent, reached the site of the incident and initiated an investigation into the incident, which took place in New Karachi's Sector 11-J.

Police said the tearing of a political party's poster sparked the encounter. The law enforcers initially took one person into their custody for his embroilment in the incident.

Later, in a joint raid by police and rangers, 34 people were arrested, said the senior superintendent of police (SSP). Furthermore, a first information report (FIR) has been lodged at the New Karachi police station.

Sindh's heavy bike rally took off for tourism promotion

ISLAMABAD (APP): Interim Sindh Minister for Tourism, Environment, and Climate Change and Coastal Development Arshad Wali Muhammad emphasized on Saturday the eco-friendly nature of such events, applauding their positive impact on the youth.

In the inauguration ceremony of Sindh's heavy bike rally, he called on the youth to engage in activities that foster a love for adventure while contributing to environmental awareness, according to a private news channel.

Expressing delight, Arshad Wali Muhammad commended the spirit and passion of the rally participants.

"I am delighted to witness the spirit and passion of the participants in this exciting heavy bike rally. These events not only showcase the beauty of our land but also provide an excellent platform for our youth to engage in healthy and environmentally conscious activities," remarked Arshad Wali Muhammad.

The chief guest extended gratitude to participating biker groups and sponsors, including the Sindh Development Tourism Department, DHA City, Vital Tea, Taj Petroleum, and Thar Foundation.

The Heavy Bike Rally commenced from Mazar-e-Quaid, setting the stage for an exciting journey through Sindh's key destinations. The rally includes visits to Bhamhor Fort, Thatta, Badin, Nokot, Mithi, Nagarparkar, and Rampur Dam.

The Heavy Bike Rally was not just an adventure for participants but also a strategic move to boost Sindh's tourism sector.

By showcasing the cultural heritage and natural beauty of the region, the initiative aims to attract visitors and promote tourism.

Ashrafi receives special award for promoting peace, inter-religious harmony

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Special Representative of the Prime Minister for Religious Harmony and Pakistani Diaspora in Middle East and Islamic Countries and Chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi has been given a special award in recognition of his outstanding services for the development of peace and inter-religious harmony.

The Church of Pakistan presented the award to Ashrafi at the Interfaith Religious Harmony Conference, held in Lahore.



The Archbishop Ian Ernest, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Personal Representative to the Holy See and Director of the

Anglican Center in Rome, Italy, bestowed the award to the peace loving prominent religious scholar Tahir Ashrafi.

Students should focus on new scientific inventions: Abdali

RAWALPINDI (APP): Advocate, Principals of Shifa Dental College and Margalla Dental College and Vice Principal of Al Nafis Medical College participated as guests of honour.

Health Minister Nisar Ansari urged the students to actively participate in their academic and research activities as well as co-curricular activities.

Principal Major General (retd) Muhammad Ahmed while addressing said that medical students must uphold their oath of allegiance to this noble profession.

Principal Dental College Brigadier (retd) Gulzar

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Hussain Bukhari said that we aim to prepare the best doctors of the country in this institution who can play an exemplary role for public health.

Addressing the event, Prof. Dr. Abul Rasheed Mian said that Watim Medical and Dental College is determined to promote the latest medical research in the country through collaboration with international medical universities.

At the end of the ceremony, the honorable guests also planted saplings in the premises of the college as part of the Plant for Pakistan drive.

Chairman JKSDMI expresses resolve to support Kashmiris

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Jammu Kashmir Self-Determination Movement International, Raja Najabat Hussain has reiterated the commitment to continue support for Kashmiri people's struggle to get the inalienable right to self-determination.

In an exclusive interview with Radio Pakistan, Raja Najabat Hussain said his organisation will arrange week-long programs across the globe to raise voice against Indian aggression in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

Raja Najabat said being the representative of

British Kashmiris, JKSDMI is holding several meetings, functions, seminars and conferences, especially with the British parliamentarians in connection with the Kashmir Solidarity Day to be observed on February 5.

He said JKSDMI was working closely with all the Pakistani and Kashmiri organisations in the UK, Europe and at the international fora and we are fully committed to working with those organisations and parliamentarians who are supporting us to protect the rights of Kashmiri people.

Najabat Hussain said

they were also in close contact with the Pakistani and Kashmiri diaspora and Pakistan's missions across the globe to raise the voices against Indian atrocities in Kashmir, especially after the 5th of August 2019.

He said even Indian supporters were also condemning this move of the Modi regime. He expressed regret that Indian courts were just listening to the voice of the Indian government as Modi was putting pressure on every institution to suppress the Kashmiri nation's freedom struggle under its Hindutva ideology.



ISLAMABAD: Dr. Tariq Mehmood Khan, addresses the seminar conducted by Press Information Department in honour of the sacrifices of Kashmiri brethren.

Citizens advised to adopt precautionary measures to avoid gas explosions

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rescue-1122 has advised the citizens to adopt all possible precautionary measures, particularly during winter to avoid gas explosions.

According to the District Emergency Officer (DEO), Rescue-1122, Rawalpindi Eng. Sibghatullah, the citizens before going to bed should ensure that the room heaters are properly switched off and the gas valve is closed to avoid leakages.

The DEO urged the citizens to properly switch off gas appliances before going to bed to avoid risks of fire and casualties.

Eng. Sibghatullah said that people use gas heaters in airtight rooms during the winter season which might lead to death due to the absence of adequate fresh

oxygen intake.

He said, "There is a need for launching an awareness campaign among the people about safety protocols as every year in winter, there had been reports of casualties due to incidents of gas explosions caused by gas leakage from appliances, mostly from substandard portable gas heaters."

Several gas explosions were reported in different areas of the Rawalpindi district last winter, he added.

The people know little about how to detect gas leakage, what to do in case of fire and how to provide immediate medical assistance to the burn victims before shifting them to a hospital.

If there is a smell of gas inside your room or shop, then don't smoke or light a

match, don't turn on a light, don't operate any electrical appliance, don't use a flashlight or lighter and leave the place immediately. The people should turn off the main gas valve, if possible, leave the doors open, and call the gas or Rescue personnel."

Rescue 1122, DEO, Eng. Sibghat Ullah said the organization's swift response depends on timely information from people.

He requested the people to inform the emergency service immediately in case of any accident or disaster.

Rescue 1122's Command and Control Room in Rawalpindi claimed its timely response to fire incidents in January helped save property and goods worth millions of rupees from being gutted.

CPO reviews security arrangements for elections

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Police Officer (CPO), Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani on Saturday chaired a meeting at Police Lines Headquarters to review the security arrangements for the upcoming general elections to be held on February 8, 2024.

Among others, SSP Investigation Zunaira Azfar, Divisional SPs, SP Headquarters, Senior Traffic Officer, SDPOs, SHO, and other concerned

officers were present on the occasion. Rawalpindi Police Spokesperson said,

CPO Khalid Mehmood Hamdani briefed everyone on the security measures taken for the election. He emphasized integrated security for the safe transportation of election materials and also assured effective security at RO (Returning Officer) offices and polling stations.

A coordinated strategy for maintaining law and order in

the city was discussed, including police patrols, elite commandos, and Dolphin Force while police teams will make patrolling in areas and highways.

CPO Hamdani stressed the importance of upholding law and order as a national duty, warning that negligence in duties would not be tolerated. The Election Commission's code of conduct will be implemented at all costs, he concluded.

ANF recovers 31 kg drugs in six operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting six operations across the country managed to recover 31 kg drugs and arrested four accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Saturday.

He informed that 51 heroin-filled capsules were recovered from a Sharjah-bound passenger arrested at Peshawar

Airport. 200 grams heroin and 65 grams CBD oil were recovered from a parcel at a courier office in Rawalpindi.

16 grams of weed was recovered from a parcel, sent from England at Shahrah-e-Faisal Karachi Courier Office while 24 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of an accused Netted near M-4

Interchange Faisalabad.

4 kg of hashish was recovered from an accused arrested near Turki Toll Plaza, Suhawa and 4 kg hashish was recovered from an accused near Kamra Road, Attock.

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

Tourists urged to follow traffic rules in Murree

RAWALPINDI (APP): Tourists visiting Murree to enjoy snowfall have been urged to strictly abide by traffic rules to avoid traffic congestion and road mishaps at the hill station.

According to a City Traffic Police (CTP) spokesperson, their department had already finalized all the arrangements to ensure the security of the visitors, particularly during snowfall.

He informed them that Rawalpindi City Traffic Officer Taimoor Khan had requested that the tourists observe traffic rules on the roads of Murree to avoid traffic mess and any untoward incidents during the winter season.

Special teams had been formed to facilitate the tourists and resolve their problems, if any, in Murree, he said, adding that parking vehicles outside parking areas were prohibited.

"There was a complete ban on illegal parking on the roads in Murree, particularly at exit and entry points," he added. The spokesperson informed us that parking was not allowed on roads except at

designated parking places.

He informed me that CTP had issued an advisory for the visitors heading towards the hill station, Murree, to enjoy snowfall.

On the directive of City Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi, Taimoor Khan, the police devised a comprehensive plan to facilitate the tourists heading towards the 'Queen of Hills Murree' for spending recreational time with their families and friends in the chilly weather.

He said the CTP had deployed senior traffic officers to monitor traffic arrangements in the hill station to ensure smooth and safe traffic flow during the snowfall. A special traffic control room with landline number 051-9269200 had also been set up where the citizens could call around the clock for any kind of help, he added.

He further said the control room would organize all possible facilities for the tourists and make arrangements for handling any emergency. The spokesman informed us that they had increased the number of

traffic wardens, junior traffic wardens, under the supervision of inspectors, who were deployed at all key points of the hill station.

Moreover, they have designated several points for car parking. A number of main roads, including Kashmir Point, Mall Road, Guldana Road, and others, had been closed for two-way traffic to ease traffic flow. He said though the snow blanket made the "Queen of Mountains" even more beautiful, which attracted a large number of tourists, motorists could face traffic congestion due to slippery roads and traffic congestion.

The snowfall attracts thousands of tourists to these scenic sites, which results in an extra traffic load on the roads, choking almost every artery linking Rawalpindi-Islamabad to these hilly spots. Due to the huge influx of tourists towards Murree, the administration and CTP have issued an advisory here that appeals to the citizens to use their own line and avoid using the dual line as preventive measures.

Afghanistan: Retirees struggle as pensions go unpaid

KABUL (Amu TV): Afghan retirees are facing severe economic hardships as pension payments remain unpaid for years. Zarghona, a 60-year-old former teacher and sole breadwinner for her family of 13, is among those affected. "Despite dedicating 25 years of service to Herat schools and another 10 years in Badghis, I have not received my retirement pension for three years now," Zarghona said.

Over 250 cybercrime cases registered by MOI

KABUL (Tolo News): The Ministry of Interior (MOI) said that more than 250 cybercrime cases have been registered since the Islamic Emirate came to power. Abdul Matin Qani, the spokesman of the MOI, stated that over 100 cases have been addressed, the majority of which are related to Kabul. "In the past two years, 251 cybercrime cases have been discovered by various governmental.

Britain issues another warning to citizens about traveling to Afghanistan



KABUL (Khaama Press): The British government has once again urged all its citizens not to travel to Afghanistan. On Saturday, February 3rd, the British government issued a statement categorizing travel to Afghanistan as "highly

dangerous" and warned of the risk of its citizens being detained in Afghanistan.

In the statement, the British government expressed concerns about the possibility of "terrorist attacks" around religious sites, during religious cer-

emonies, and on significant religious occasions.

Furthermore, the British government continues to claim that Kabul airport does not meet international safety standards.

It's worth noting that, as of now, the de facto

regime has not responded to the British government's statement. However, in the past, they had dismissed British government claims regarding the possibility of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan as "incorrect."

Previously, the British Foreign Office had issued warnings to its citizens about traveling to Afghanistan due to the risk of detention and potential attacks at religious sites and airports in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, both Australia and Germany's foreign ministries have also advised their citizens not to travel to Afghanistan.

These warnings come despite assurances from Afghan authorities that they have ensured nationwide security in Afghanistan and claimed that security has improved compared to the past.

AI demands release of Afghan education crusaders

KABUL (AT News): A thunderous call for justice echoes as Amnesty International has vehemently demanded the swift and unconditional release of two champions of Afghan girls' education and members of the Afghan Girls' Robotics Team. Locked in the clutches of the Taliban, Ahmad Fahim Azimi and Seddiqullah Afghan face arbitrary charges, igniting a blaze of condemnation from the human rights juggernaut.

The saga began on October 7 when Azimi and Afghan were ruthlessly seized from their Kabul bastion by Taliban intelligence. After enduring a harrowing 72-day detention in the depths of GDI District 40 detention, the duo was abruptly transplanted to Pule-Charkhi Prison, a move that Amnesty International slams as a flagrant violation of their fundamental rights.

In an incendiary statement on Friday, Amnesty raged against the capricious nature of their detention, decrying allegations of activities challenging Taliban authority. The organization's outcry reverberates against the stark backdrop of a denied fair trial, retribution, and heinous physical and mental torture—including the sinister specters of sleep deprivation and solitary confinement.

Amnesty International's thunderous condemnation is not just for show—it boldly underscores the blatant disregard for international human rights laws. Legal representation and medical support were cruelly denied during the activists' interrogation, intensifying the injustice.

UN Experts call for an end to girls' detentions in Afghanistan



KABUL (Khaama Press): A group of United Nations experts has expressed concerns about the detention of women and girls in Afghanistan and called for an immediate halt to this practice.

In a statement released on Friday, the experts urged the Taliban to stop arbitrarily depriving women and girls of their freedom and to release detained individuals promptly.

These UN experts, including Richard Bennett, the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, also called on the Taliban officials to adhere to Afghanistan's international commitments regarding human rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The statement from the UN experts highlights that detained women and girls in Taliban detention centres

receive only one meal a day, and some of them have been subjected to physical violence, threats, and intimidation. The statement also condemns the practice of assigning the responsibility for women's clothing to men, as it violates women's agency, perpetuates gender discrimination, and diminishes their role in society.

Recently, the Taliban detained several girls on the pretext of "immodesty" in Kabul and other Afghan cities, including Daikundi, Bamyan, and Balkh. According to reports, these detained girls were released after their families provided guarantees.

Simultaneously, Amnesty International has called on the Taliban to immediately release two education activists who were detained in October last year. The organization wrote a letter to the Taliban's intelligence agency, stating that the

charges against Ahmad Fahim Ahmadi and Sadeghullah Afghan were fabricated, alleging their involvement in assisting the escape of the Afghan girls' robotics team from Afghanistan and organizing protests.

Amnesty International also noted that both activists and their families have denied these allegations. The organization criticized the unfair trial of Fahim Ahmadi and Sadeghullah Afghan in December and their subsequent imprisonment in Pule-Charkhi prison.

Amnesty International regards the detention of these education activists as an attack on freedom of expression, civil rights, and political rights. They have called on the head of the Taliban's intelligence agency to cease activities such as abduction, arbitrary detention, torture, and other misconduct against the people.

Taliban's Mining illegitimate, revenue spending unclear: Ashraf Ghani

KABUL (Khaama Press): Ashraf Ghani, former President of Afghanistan, says that mining extraction contracts handed over secretly by the Taliban lack international legitimacy.

Mr. Ghani stated that it is unclear for how long the Taliban is granting these mining contracts and where the revenues from them are being used.

On Thursday, the 1st of February, Mr. Ghani spoke in a podcast about Afghanistan's economic situation, stating, "It is unclear on what principles Afghanistan's assets are acquired, and where the proceeds from what is sold go."

The Taliban has claimed that it will award mining extraction through voluntary means. However, there is no mechanism in place to create transparency regarding the process of awarding these mines to companies.

Furthermore, due to limited access to information, there is little data available regarding the income generated from mines and how these revenues are used. Ashraf Ghani stated that Afghanistan's illicit economy has a very close connection to the global criminal network. According to him, the latest United Nations report shows that the exports of two types of drugs, heroin and amphet-



Ashraf Ghani highlighted China's broken promises during his presidency. He explained that China had pledged to support oil extraction contracts in Mes Aynak and northeast Afghanistan by providing electricity, constructing railways to coal mines, and establishing industrial facilities. However, when the time came to deliver on these commitments, China did not follow through on its word.

Ashraf Ghani says that Afghanistan cannot rely solely on customs revenues; its economy needs fundamental development, and a regular financial system must be established to distribute resources equally in all sectors, allowing people to stand on their own feet.

He also added that there are signs of corruption in the Taliban's customs, but this corruption is still in its early stages. In addition, Ashraf Ghani in this podcast compared the government's revenues during the Republic period with those of the Taliban and stated that the Taliban's domestic revenues have not increased compared to the Republic period.

However, he admitted that the Taliban has increased the level of taxation on the general public, worsening the economic situation of the people compared to the Republic era.

mines, from Afghanistan to various countries have increased.

The former President of Afghanistan commented on mining extraction contracts, saying, "It is unclear under what conditions the Taliban auction Afghanistan's mines, and these contracts are conducted unlawfully in broad daylight, lacking international legitimacy."

He added that the capital from these mines belongs to all the people of Afghanistan, but it is not used in accordance with the law and transparency, with "everything happening behind the scenes."

“I was assaulted in front of my son”: Former Afghan Policewoman



KABUL (Khaama Press): A former Afghan policewoman has revealed that Taliban militants entered her home after the fall of Kabul and sexually assaulted her in front of her son.

This former police officer, who had worked for four years in the women's security sector of the former government's Ministry of Interior, described her harrowing experience on the day of Kabul's fall.

She mentioned that at 10 a.m. on the 15th of August 2021, her commander at the ministry informed her and her colleagues that the Taliban had entered Kabul and that they needed to escape.

In an interview with Afghanistan International, she said, "We removed our military uniforms, left our weapons behind, and rushed out, but gunfire had already begun. The situation was dire, like doomsday. I managed to get my family to safety."

This former Afghan policewoman revealed that she comes from an educated family, where her father and brothers were also in the military. She shared images of her father with NATO soldiers, who had been killed ten years ago. She mentioned that her father had served in the 207th Corps and was a member of the Special Forces (Commandos).

When she learned that NATO was assisting her Afghan colleagues in evacuating Afghanistan, she and her entire family went to Kabul's airport. She described the overcrowded scene at the airport on the 4th of September 2021 when suicide bombings occurred, plunging her into darkness.

After the explosion, she lost contact with her family members, and to this day, aside from her mother, she has not found her two sisters and two

brothers. The Terrifying Taliban Assault

The horrifying situation after the attack at Kabul airport compelled her to return home. She stated, "It was 9 in the morning. We were having breakfast. The Taliban entered our house. They accused me of being a military officer, a prostitute, a sinner, of being involved with generals or soldiers, of having relations with foreigners, and insisted that I should come willingly and marry them."

While tearfully recalling the events, she added, "When I refused and my son said, 'This is my mother,' five of them raped me in front of my son. They covered my son with a blanket, blindfolded him, and took him away. They said I had to marry them."

She mentioned that the Taliban gave her until evening to prepare her-

self. According to this former policewoman, the Taliban assigned two fighters to stay behind the gate of her house to ensure she wouldn't escape.

Escape from the Taliban's Clutches

This former policewoman, who had worked in the Ministry of Interior, had a teenage daughter. Fearing for her daughter's safety, they both escaped by jumping out of a window at the back of their house when the Taliban left. They managed to flee the danger.

Now safe outside of Afghanistan, she expressed her anguish, "It's been about two and a half years since I last heard from my son. I don't know where he is or what he's doing. I cry day and night, and it's taking a toll on my sanity. I was able to save myself and my teenage daughter and escape."

Currently employed as a cleaner at a health centre, she bravely shared images of the physical abuse inflicted by the Taliban on her body and arms with Afghanistan International reporters. She has sought help from the United Nations Refugee Agency, alerting them to the danger faced by her and other Afghans and urging them to find a haven for them. She emphasized the need for assistance from international organizations and countries offering asylum, questioning their response to her past suffering and the current threats she faces.

Japan provides over \$13 million in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): The World Food Program (WFP) has announced that Japan has contributed \$13.5 million in humanitarian aid for Afghanistan.

This agency stated on Friday, the 2nd of February through a newsletter that this fund will be provided for food assistance and emergency nutrition for individuals facing food insecurity. The organization continues to emphasize that by providing this aid, it will

also support the humanitarian aviation services of the United Nations.

Takeyoshi Kuramaya, Japan's envoy to Kabul, mentioned that alongside the people of Afghanistan, nearly one-third of the country's population currently doesn't know where their next meal is coming from and they urgently need food assistance.

Hsiao-Wei Lee the Director of the World Food Program in Afghanistan, has praised

the Japanese government as a strong and reliable partner for this agency, stating that Japan's assistance has been critical for many families across the country.

According to the World Food Program, with the fund provided by Japan, assistance will be provided to nearly 630,000 people, including over 42,000 mothers and malnourished individuals.

Previously, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the

Taliban had announced a \$36 million aid package to various sectors in Afghanistan.

According to the statistics of this agency, Japan has contributed \$73 million in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan over the past three years.

It is worth mentioning that Japan has also provided assistance to Afghanistan in various sectors such as education, health, and development projects in the past two years.

Representatives of Pakistan and China discuss Afghanistan



KABUL (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan said that additional Foreign Secretary (Afghanistan & West Asia) Ambassador Rahim Hayat Qureh met with Chinese special envoy for Afghanistan, Yue Xiaoyong.

The Ministry said on X that they underscored their commitment to a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

"They underscored their commitment to a peaceful & stable Afghanistan and emphasized the need for enhanced coordination for regional stability. They also underlined the crucial role of neighbouring countries of Afghanistan for a peaceful, stable & prosperous

region," the ministry added.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Emirate said the stability in the country provides a good opportunity for neighboring countries and asked the countries to increase their diplomatic and economic relations with Afghanistan.

"The countries of the region should cooperate in this regard, because the security of Afghanistan has a direct impact on the entire region, and the economic situation of Afghans has an impact on the situation of the region. Improving the security is good for all," said Zabihullah Mujahid, the Islamic Emirate spokesman.

According to some political analysts, the role of

neighboring countries, especially China and Pakistan, are important in establishing permanent stability in Afghanistan.

"Regional consensus is not in the top row in terms of legislation since we can arbitrarily pursue our policy. However, given that Afghanistan has gained peace after 45 years, the regional nations may contribute to the national consensus that we think is beneficial for our country," Moeen Gul Samkanai, a political analyst told TOLONews.

"Not only the role of representatives of Pakistan and China regarding affairs of Afghanistan will be important, but the role of

all neighboring countries are important in the peace and stability of Afghanistan if they think honestly," Aziz Marji, another political analyst, told TOLONews.

Sayed Rasoul Mousavi, Iran's assistant to the Foreign Minister, in a meeting with the Chinese special envoy for Afghanistan, Yue Xiaoyong, spoke on Beijing's policy in Afghanistan.

He said on X: "Understanding China's strategy and policy in Afghanistan is not easy and requires knowledge of the components of China's global strategy and the regional implementation of that strategy."

16 people killed in ‘new US aggression’: Iraq

BAGHDAD: At least 16 people have been killed in US strikes in Iraq, the government said, as it condemned the “new aggression against” its sovereignty and warned of dire consequences in the region.

Civilians were among those killed and 25 people were wounded in the bombings that targeted both civilian and security areas, a government spokesperson said on Saturday. The United States warned of more retaliatory attacks after it hit Iran-linked targets in Iraq and Syria overnight in response to an attack that killed American soldiers in Jordan amid Israel’s war on Gaza. “This aggressive strike will put security in Iraq and the region on the brink of the abyss,” the Iraqi government said, and denied Washington’s claims of coordinating the air attacks with Baghdad as “false” and “aimed at misleading international public opinion”.

The presence of the US-led military coalition in the region “has become a reason for threatening security and stability in Iraq and a justification for involving Iraq in regional and international conflicts”, read the statement from Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani’s office. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs subsequently summoned the US charge d’affaires in Baghdad to deliver a formal protest. The Syrian Ministry of Defence slammed the “aggression of the American occupation forces”, which it said was attempting “to weaken the ability of the Syrian Arab Army and its allies in the field of fighting terrorism”, adding that the areas targeted were the same where the military is fighting remnants of the ISIL (ISIS) armed group. Syrian state media reported several casualties after the attacks in the country’s desert region and border areas with Iraq. The United Kingdom-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 23 Iran-aligned fighters were killed in the Syria attacks, but it could not be independently verified.

The strikes did not take place inside Iranian territory. Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Saturday called them “another adventurous action and another strategic error by the US government which

will have no result but to intensify ... instability in the region”. US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told journalists that the goal of the “multitiered” attacks was to stop attacks by Iran-aligned groups, and not to start a war with Iran.

The Iranian ministry said tensions in the region “go back to the occupation by the Israeli regime and [its] military operations in Gaza and the genocide of the Palestinians with the unlimited support of the US”, adding that stability would only return by resolving “the root cause of the crisis”. President Joe Biden said the strikes “will continue at times and places of our choosing” as his chief diplomat Antony Blinken is preparing to embark on his fifth regional tour since October 7 from Sunday, visiting Israel, the occupied West Bank, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Qatar.

The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said it flew bombers from the US and used more than 125 precision munitions to hit more than 85 targets that included command and control operations centres, intelligence centres, weapons storage and supply chain facilities of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the armed groups backed by Tehran. Iraqi security sources told Al Jazeera that six air strikes targeted a number of locations in the country. Even though Washington said all its intended targets were supported by the Quds Force command of the IRGC, no Iranian personnel are believed to have been killed. The US took nearly a week to act after three of its soldiers were killed in a drone attack on the Tower 22 base near the Syria-Jordan border to strike back, and continued to leak information to the media prior to the overnight raids.

The attack on the US base had been claimed by the coalition of forces known as the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which views US troops as “occupying forces” and has demanded an end to Israel’s deadly war on Gaza. Iran, which, Washington suspects of supplying the weapons that hit the American soldiers in Tower 22 but not of ordering the attack, has maintained that members of the “axis of resistance” that it supports across the region act independently. Reporting from Baghdad,

Al Jazeera’s Mahmoud Abdelwahed said on Saturday that the Iraqi resistance, which includes Iran-aligned groups, carried out attacks, with missiles targeting the al-Tanf military base in Syria that is home to US personnel, as well as the Ain al-Assad base in western Iraq. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which had announced the suspension of hostile operations against US troops this week, said it “attacked the American occupation’s Harir base in Erbil” in northern Iraq with an unspecified number of drones on Saturday.

It said in a statement that the attack comes in resisting “American occupation forces” in Iraq and across the region, and in standing up to Israel’s war on Gaza. However, three security sources quoted by the Reuters news agency said there had been no attack detected on the air base hosting US forces. The Biden administration’s actions triggered dissatisfied reactions from US politicians who have demanded stronger and faster attacks, including direct strikes on Iranian soil, despite concerns that such a move would lead to an all-out war. Mike Johnson, the Republican speaker of the US House of Representatives, accused the president of “placating” Tehran after the strikes, and said: “To promote peace, America must project strength.”

But the same US politicians are refusing to mention the Gaza war that has killed more than 27,000 Palestinians, most of them women and children, as being a key link in the chain of more than 150 attacks that have been directed at US bases in Iraq and Syria since last October. “I’m not surprised there has been this reprisal and retaliation by the United States,” HA Hellyer, a military analyst at the UK-based think tank Royal United Services Institute, told Al Jazeera, adding that if the US wants to de-escalate and not go to war with Iran the key to that is Gaza. Washington has “failed to apply any real leverage in order to bring a ceasefire to Gaza, which I think would really diminish the tensions in the region and remove the fuel for this sort of escalation taking place, which is likely to continue over the coming days and weeks and beyond”, he added. — Aljazeera



ISLAMABAD: The Federal Minister of Information, Broadcasting, and Parliamentary Affairs, Murtaza Solangi addressing a press conference along with Special Secretary ECP, DG Political Finance, Spokesperson MoFA, EDG External Publicity Wing and PIO, MOIB.

PPP, JUI-F, JI fail to ensure 5% quota for women

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: With just a few days left for general elections, Aurat Foundation (AF) Saturday filed a complaint with Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja claiming that few mainstream political parties, including the PPP, JUI-F, ANP and JI, failed to ensure 5% mandatory quota for women on the general seats.

Last month, the ECP had directed all the political parties to ensure “mandatory” 5 per cent representation of women candidates on general seats under Section 206 of the Elections Act, 2017. In a letter to the CEC, AF claimed: In the National Assembly, the analysis shows that the PPP, JI, ANP, TLP, JUI-F and BNP have not met the requirement of awarding at least 5% party tickets to women on general seats. The ECP is requested to take cognisance of the matter.

The civil society organisation said that it has undertaken an analysis of 8 political parties contesting election for the National Assembly (NA) and four provincial assemblies. Expressing its disappointment over the findings, the organization said: “We are dismayed to find that some political parties have not observed the legal requirement under section 206 of the said act and section 6 of the code of conduct for political parties, to award a minimum of 5% tickets to women candidates on general seats.”

On the other hand, some political parties complied with Section 206 of the Elections Act 2017, which was a commendable gesture towards women’s political participation, it added. The AF urged the ECP to take strict legal action as per Section 217(1) of the Election Act against those political parties who violated Section 206 and awarded less than the minimum required 5% party tickets to women on the general seats.

The letter also noted that the election regulator has not uploaded separate party lists of the women candidates on general seats on its website till to-date. It further said that AF’s analysis is based on the scrutiny of over 1,000 Forms-33 of each and every constituency of the national and provincial assemblies, with the possibility of a slight margin of error.

KP CS, IGP reviews polls arrangements

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary (CS) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry and Inspector General Police (IGP), Akhtar Hayat Khan Gandapur on Saturday visited Mardan, Charsadda and Nowshera to review arrangements being made for peaceful holding of general elections.

They also attended a meeting in District Police Office that was attended by Commissioner Mardan, Shoukat Yousafzai, Regional Police Officer Mardan, Muhammad Sulaiman, District Police Officer, Njeeb-ur-Rehman and Deputy Commissioner, Fayaz Sherpao.

Meeting discussed election security plan, implementation of election code of conduct besides collective and individual responsibilities. CS and IGP also visited polling stations being set up in engineering university and expressed satisfaction over the arrangements. They also directed providing needed security to polling staff and timely procurement of election material. They also directed security staff to be vigilant to avoid any untoward incident and ensure provision of clean drinking water and basic facilities in polling stations.

Deadly strikes hit Rafah ahead of Gaza truce push

GAZA (AFP): Israel pressed its blistering assault in the Gaza Strip on Saturday as fears grew over a push into Rafah, the southern city teeming with civilians uprooted by the nearly four-month war. A barrage of air strikes and tank fire rocked Khan Yunis overnight and through the day, an AFP journalist said of the main city in southern Gaza that has been the focus of Israel’s offensive.

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said more than 100 people were killed across the Palestinian territory overnight, mostly women and children. The Israeli army said its forces killed “dozens of terrorists” in northern and central Gaza over the past 24 hours. Hundreds of thousands of Gaza’s 2.4 million people displaced by the fierce fighting have fled south to Rafah since the outbreak of the war, with their tents crammed along streets and in parks.

The city that had been home to 200,000 people now hosts more than half of Gaza’s population, the United Nations said. Civilians who fled to Rafah have been pushed up against the border with Egypt, trying to avoid parts of the city exposed to the fighting in nearby Khan Yunis. AFP TV images showed Palestinians gathered around a row of body bags at the Najjar hospital in Rafah after Israeli strikes.

“The children were just sleeping and suddenly the bombardment happened. God took one of my children and three escaped death,” said Ahmad Bassam Al-Jamal, who also lost his father. Hamas remained defiant, with an official from the Palestinian Islamist group that has ruled Gaza since 2007 saying it was “holding its ground” in Khan Yunis.

“The resistance is still steadfast in Khan Yunis... it is inflicting losses on the occupation,” said Mahmud Mardawi. “The enemy will not achieve anything by targeting Khan Yunis.” The United Nations humanitarian agency OCHA said it was deeply concerned about the escalation of hostilities in Khan Yunis, which has pushed more and more people south. “Rafah is a pressure cooker of despair, and we fear for what comes next,” said OCHA spokesman Jens Laerke.

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant had warned on Thursday that the military was set to train its sights on Rafah. “We are achieving our missions in Khan Yunis, and we will also reach Rafah and eliminate terror elements that threaten us,” he said in a video message the defense ministry sent to journalists. The war in Gaza was sparked by Hamas’s unprecedented 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 figures.

Militants also seized around 250 hostages, and Israel says 132 remain in Gaza, including at least 27 believed to have been killed. Vowing to eliminate Hamas, Israel launched a massive military offensive that has killed at least 27,238 people in Gaza, mostly women and chil-

dren, according to the health ministry. Israel has lost 224 soldiers since starting its Gaza ground operations in late October, according to the army.

The fighting has devastated the narrow coastal strip, while an Israeli siege has resulted in dire shortages of food, water, fuel and medicines. Image analysis released Friday by the UN satellite center UNITAR based on footage collected on January 6 and 7 showed “approximately 30 percent” of Gaza’s structures had been affected by the war. The soaring civilian death toll in Gaza, as well as fears among Israelis over the fate of the hostages, have fueled calls for a ceasefire.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to the Middle East yet again in the coming days to press a new proposal involving the release of Israeli hostages in return for a pause in the fighting, the State Department said. Blinken will visit Qatar and Egypt — the mediators of the proposal — as well as Israel, the occupied West Bank and Saudi Arabia starting Sunday, it added. The trip — his fifth since the war broke out — comes after Qatar’s foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al-Ansari said there were hopes of “good news” about a fresh pause to the fighting “in the next couple of weeks.”

Ansari said a truce proposal thrashed out in Paris had “been approved by the Israeli side” and received a “positive” initial response from Hamas as well. But a source close to Hamas told AFP: “There is no agreement on the framework of the agreement yet — the factions have important observations — and the Qatari statement is rushed and not true.” A Hamas source said it had been presented with a plan involving an initial six-week pause in fighting that would see more aid delivered into Gaza and exchanges of certain Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners held in Israel.

The leaders of Hamas and its Gaza ally Islamic Jihad, Qatar-based Ismail Haniyeh and Ziyad Al-Nakhalah, respectively, discussed the latest development and said any future ceasefire must lead to “a full withdrawal” of Israeli troops from Gaza, Haniyeh’s office said. The war has sparked a surge in attacks by Iran-backed groups in the region in support of the Palestinians. The US military launched a wave of air strikes against Iranian forces and Tehran-backed fighters in Iraq and Syria overnight in retaliation for a drone attack in Jordan that killed three US soldiers on Sunday.

US forces in the Middle East and their allies have faced stepped-up attacks since the war in Gaza began, coming under fire more than 165 times since mid-October. Hamas denounced the strikes, saying the United States would bear “responsibility for the consequences of this brutal aggression... which pours oil on the fire.” In Lebanon, meanwhile, the Israeli army said its warplanes struck targets of the Iran-backed Hezbollah group.

Alvi upholds dismissal from service penalty

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Saturday upheld the penalty of “dismissal from service” imposed upon a bank manager after he was found guilty of the charges of sexually harassing a female colleague at workplace.

He rejected the representation filed by Muhammad Munir Akhtar (the accused), a former employee of the Askari Bank Ltd (ABL), against the decision of the Federal Ombudsman for Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace (FOSPAH). Dr Arif Alvi said that the incidents narrated in the complaint against the accused, when juxtaposed with the evidence, established the guilt of the accused for the charges of harassment, the President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release on Saturday.

In his decision, he observed that the accused had duly admitted the allegations about calls, text messages, and denial to hand over her ATM card to the complainant deliberately. President Alvi said that the accused had admitted that he called and sent messages to the complainant and did not give her ATM card due to the reasons best known to him despite the fact that he was required to hand it over to the complainant. “Facts admitted need not be proved”, he added.

As per details, a female

employee of ABL (the complainant) had filed a harassment complaint under section 8 of the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010 against the accused within the departmental hierarchy of ABL stating that she was harassed by the branch staff of the ABL, Hassanabdal. According to her, the accused Muhammad Munir Akhtar, Bank Manager along with his friend had made it difficult for her to work in the branch by creating an offensive workplace environment.

She alleged that the accused had forced her to go with his friend and after she was transferred to another branch, when she went to collect her card from the Hassanabdal branch, she was verbally abused by the accused and he refused to hand over her ATM card. The Departmental Harassment Committee probed into her allegations and, after inquiry, concluded that the accused was involved in harassment and was accordingly dismissed from service.

The accused filed an appeal with FOSPAH, which was dismissed, after which, he filed a representation with the president. President Alvi wrote that workplace harassment could have very serious consequences for the women who experience it as a harassed woman risked losing her job or the chance

for a promotion, if she refused to give in to the unethical demands of someone in authority.

“The unwelcome conduct of co-workers makes the working conditions hostile and unpleasant, putting indirect pressure on her to leave the job”, he added. He remarked that sometimes a woman employee was so traumatized by the harassment that she suffered serious emotional and physical consequences and became unable to perform her job properly. “The workplace harassment has a cumulative and demoralizing effect that discourages women from asserting themselves within the workplace while among men”, he concluded. The president highlighted that the main objective of the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010 was to create a safe working environment for women, free of harassment, abuse and intimidation with a view toward fulfillment of their right to work with dignity.

“Harassment is one of the biggest hurdles faced by working women preventing many who want to work to get themselves and their families out of poverty”, he stated. President Alvi underscored that the Act was built on the principles of equal opportunity for men and women and their right to earn a livelihood without fear of discrimination as stipulated in the Constitution.

Court allows Dr. Asim to travel abroad

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Accountability Court of Karachi has granted permission to Dr. Asim Hussain for traveling abroad amidst the ongoing 17 billion rupees corruption case. The court considered applications related to Dr. Asim’s overseas travel and the possibility of sending the corruption reference back to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

Advocate Owais Jamal, representing Dr. Asim Hussain, argued that his client should be allowed to go abroad for medical treatment. The court, after deliberation, reserved its decision on the request to return the corruption reference to NAB, with a pronouncement scheduled for February 15. Meanwhile, the court has granted Dr. Asim permission to travel abroad.

Dr. Asim had sought permission to go abroad from February 15 to March 30. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) alleges that the accused, including Dr. Asim, were involved in causing a loss of 17 billion rupees to the national exchequer through gas contracts. The corruption reference was initially filed by NAB in 2016.

Sh Rashid to contest polls from jail

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The Chief of Awami Muslim League, Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, faces a setback as the Anti-Terrorism Court in Rawalpindi suspended his bail case, potentially paving the way for him to contest elections from behind bars.

During a hearing before Judge Malik Ijaz Asif, objections were raised by the public prosecutor against Sheikh Rashid’s bail application, deeming them valid. The court instructed the removal of objections and adjourned the bail application hearing until February 6. The suspension of the bail matter and objections may result in Sheikh Rashid Ahmed participating in the elections from jail and casting his vote from Adiala jail.

The objections highlighted the absence of court and High Court orders related to the May 9 tragedy in Sheikh Rashid Ahmed’s petition. Additionally, certified copies of judgments from the High Court were not enclosed with the application.

Corps Commander visits Qisa Khawani Bazaar

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: In a remarkable display of solidarity and commitment to preserving the cultural heritage of Peshawar, Lieutenant General Hassan Azhar Hayat, the Commander of 11 Corps, recently undertook a tour of Qisa Khawani Bazar and its surrounding areas. The visit, occurring amidst the challenges posed by terrorism in the province, has ignited a wave of hope among the people of Peshawar.

Lt Gen Hassan Azhar’s decision to explore the historical Qisa Khawani Bazar and adjacent localities without the usual security protocols sends a powerful message. In these critical times, his unguarded visit emphasizes the unwavering support of the Pakistan Army for the people of Peshawar and the province at large. The absence of formal protocol during the visit underscores the genuine connection between the military leadership and the citizens.

The Corps Commander’s outreach to the general public, engaging in meaningful conversations and sharing moments over street food, has resonated positively. This unprecedented gesture not only demonstrates the commitment of the Pakistan Army to stand alongside the people but also conveys a strong mes-



sage to miscreants that Peshawar remains resilient and secure.

Amidst the challenges faced by the province, the visit serves as a beacon of hope, assuring the citizens that their security is a top priority. Lt Gen Hassan’s personal interaction with the public fosters a sense of unity, reinforcing the notion that Peshawar is a safe and inclusive space for everyone.

The spontaneous and unscripted nature of this visit has garnered widespread appreciation, showcasing the Pakistan Army’s dedication to fostering community bonds and safeguarding the rich cultural heritage of Peshawar. Lt Gen Hassan Azhar Hayat’s tour stands as a testament to the army’s commitment to peace, security, and the well-being of the people it serves.



LAHORE: Members of civil society holding placards during protest against Israel attacks on Gaza.

US advises citizens to ‘remain vigilant’ during polls

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of the United States has issued a travel advisory for its citizens as Pakistan braces for general elections, slated to be held on February 8.

In its advisory, the US embassy asked Americans to remain vigilant and aware of the locations of political rallies occurring in areas they intend to visit. “On February 8, election day, areas around polling stations may be crowded, and US citizens not eligible to participate in Pakistan’s

elections should avoid them.

The embassy warned that disruptions to internet and cellular service could occur leading up to and throughout election day and immediately following. It further said that political parties are, and will be, actively campaigning in advance of election day, including marches, rallies, and speeches, which are normal activities in any democratic process.

Public gatherings have the potential to block traffic, disrupt transportation, and otherwise create obsta-

cles to free movement and safety, the embassy added. “In some instances, political activities in Pakistan have been targeted for violence.”

US citizens were asked to avoid areas of large public gatherings and exercise caution if unexpectedly in the vicinity of a large gathering or demonstration. The US embassy asked its citizens to review their personal security plans and monitor local media for updates. Americans in Pakistan were also asked to keep a low profile and carry identification.