

**Pak aid arrives in Egypt**  
**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: A special aircraft carrying hundreds of relief goods donated by Pakistan for the suffering people of Gaza arrived in Egypt on Wednesday. The plane carrying sixth tranche of Pakistan's humanitarian assistance comprising winterized tents, tarpaulins and blankets landed at El-Arish International Airport of Egypt.

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**Bannu police repulse attack**  
**F.P. Report**

BANNU: An attack by the terrorists on Miryan police station was repulsed by the police, making the terrorists run for their lives and flee the area, police said on Wednesday. According to police, the terrorists attacked Miryan police station from two sides resulting only in damage to the thermal cameras installed on the walls of the police station.

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QUETTA: An injured person being shifted to hospital after bomb blast at the election office of an independent candidate in Khanozai Pishin.

## 28 killed as blasts target political offices

Explosion target indepdent candidate office in Pishin, JUI-F's leader in Qilla Saifullah

**F.P. Report**

QUETTA: At least 28 people were killed and 50 others injured Wednesday in two separate explosions targeting election candidates in Balochistan, just a day before general elections in Pakistan.

A three-day mourning period has been announced by CM Balochistan to mourn the loss of lives in both attacks. Caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai said in a presser. The first attack claimed at least 15 people's lives while 25 were injured after an explosion took place outside an independent candidate's office in Balochistan's Pishin, while the second blast took place outside the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) office in the Qilla Saifullah district.

The Pishin blast took place outside the political office of independent candidate Asfand Yar Khan Kakar in Khanozai area. Kakar is contesting elections from NA-265 constituency and Balochistan Assembly constituencies — PB-47 and PB-48 in the February 8 elections.

The injured people have been shifted to the Tehsil Hospital Khanozai, while the bodies have also been transferred, the hospital's MS Dr Habib told media. Dr Habib said most of the injured are in critical condition. Following the blast, an emergency has been imposed across hospitals in Quetta for which additional staff has also been called, the provincial health secretary told media.

He added that operation theatres with the staff are ready to treat injured at the Trauma Centre, Civil Hospital, BMC, Benazir and Sheikh Zayed Hospital. The independent candidate was not present inside his office when the explosion took place in PP-47 in Pishin.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has taken notice of the blast and summoned a report from Balochistan

### Hamdullah survives gun attack in Chaman

**F.P. Report**

CHAMAN: Unknown assailants on Wednesday targeted the senior leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) Hafiz Hamdullah Saboor in Chaman, but he remained safe due to the retaliatory action of his guards.

According to details, unidentified individuals opened fire on the vehicle of Hamdullah, with the firing continuing for five minutes. The attackers fled following the retaliatory firing by Hamdullah's guards. Fortunately, the JUI-F leader remained completely unharmed in the attack.

chief secretary and Inspector General of Police (IGP). A spokesperson for the ECP said directives have been issued to take action against those involved in such incidents. Speaking with media, Kakar said that the blast happened in a motorcycle outside his election office. "Eight of our workers were martyred and more than 18 were injured in the explosion when the names of the polling agents were being finalised in the election office," he said. Kakar himself was in Barshore when the blast happened and is currently reaching Khanozai.

The second blast targeted the JUI-F office in the Qilla Saifullah district. At least 12 people were killed and 25 others injured in the second explosion, Balochistan Information Minister Jan Achakzai said. He said JUI-F leader Maulana Abdul Wassay, who is contesting elections from PB-3, remained unhurt in the attack.

Achakzai said terrorists would not succeed in their objectives and added that the war would continue until the elimination of the last terrorist. Following the explosion in Qilla Saifullah, many vehicles caught fire. Deputy Commissioner Yasar Bazai told media that most of the injured are in critical condition. "The Balochistan government is sending helicopters from Quetta to evacuate the injured."

He added that a high alert has been issued across the district. "To ascertain the

nature of the explosion, the bomb disposal squad team reached the site of the incident." The blast site has been sealed for investigation, he stated. Superintendent of Police (SSP) Akhtar Achakzai, speaking to media, said investigations into the nature of the explosion are underway. He added that the JUI-F candidate was not present at the election office when the blast took place. "Security arrangements have been beefed up in Qilla Saifullah," the SP said.

Meanwhile, Balochistan Caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai said the explosive material was planted in a motorcycle, according to preliminary information. "Further investigation is underway," he added.

The minister assured that peaceful elections will be held in Balochistan today. "Tomorrow, the people of Balochistan will come out, they will destroy the ambitions of terrorists," Achakzai said. Speaking about the injured, the minister said they will be sent to other cities if they are unable to receive treatment in Quetta. Achakzai said that the government will continue its responsibility despite the tragic incident.

The minister added that India, a "terrorist" country, has targeted Balochistan through terrorism. "We will avenge the martyrs, we will end India's terrorist agenda. Our war will continue until the end of the last terrorist," he said.

### Tourism can be further promoted in GB: PM

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday said that development of the proper communication system and other necessary infrastructure in Gilgit-Baltistan was important to ensure sustainable development of the area.

"The construction of a communication system and other necessary infrastructure can further promote the tourism sector of Gilgit-Baltistan and create opportunities for economic development in the region," he said while talking to a 17-member delegation of Royal Foundation of Gilgit-Baltistan, headed by Raja Nazimul Amin. Prime Minister Kakar said Gilgit-Baltistan was rich in natural resources and the people of the area were very hospitable.

He said that a positive trend in tourism had been witnessed in the area after the upgradation of Skardu Airport to the international airport. He said multiple countries were showing keen interest to collaborate with Pakistan in the tourism sector. The prime minister directed the authorities concerned to devise a strategy to work out a sustainable solution to the issue of electricity in Gilgit-Baltistan. He also directed to devise a plan for enhancing the quota of GB students in the higher education and technical education sectors of all provinces of the country.

He said the overall development of Gilgit-Baltistan was linked with the social integration across the area. He also appreciated the services of Royal Foundation of Gilgit-Baltistan in multiple sectors in the area. The delegation presented proposals to the prime minister to improve the working of various sectors of Gilgit-Baltistan. The prime minister was apprised that some 1.6 million tourists visited Gilgit-Baltistan last year. On the occasion, members of the Royal Foundation of Gilgit-Baltistan also presented a cultural robe as a souvenir to Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.

### ECP issues notice to Daniyal Aziz

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Wednesday issued notice to NA-75 Narowal candidate Daniyal Aziz over violation of the code of conduct and fixed February 10 for hearing of the case.

The ECP spokesman said that the commission had decided that if Daniyal Aziz would be declared successful in the general election, the issuance of his final notification would be subject to decision of the ECP. The commission took the decision in the light of the report of the District Monitoring Officer N-arowal, in which it has been stated that the above-mentioned candidate is repeatedly violating the code of conduct and neither respond to the notices issued by the District Monitoring Officer.

# Nation all set to elect representatives for five years term

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistani nation was all set to elect public representatives for five-year democratic term on Thursday. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in coordination with various supporting departments, including law enforcement agencies has made extensive arrangement for peaceful elections.

Around 18,000 candidates from across the country were in the electoral arena to woo the registered voters (128,587,760) for about 855 general seats of National and Provincial Assemblies. In order to provide the voters an opportunity to exercise of right of franchise in a smooth and convenient manner, the ECP has announced a public holiday on February 8.

The Commission has already issued a Code of Conduct for the voters as well for media-persons for the Election Day. The polling agents have been advised to display authorization cards. The ECP said that there would be a complete ban on any campaign within the radius of 400 meters of a polling station and added that no candidate, polling agent or their supporters would interfere or hinder the official functioning.

The ECP has categorized over 17,500 as highly sensitive, 32,508 as sensitive and 42,500 as normal, out of a total of 92,500 polling stations nationwide. About 2,038 polling stations in Balochistan and 4,344 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been categorized as highly sensitive. Likewise, 15,829 polling stations in Punjab, 8,030 in Sindh, 2,068 in Balochistan, and over 6,000 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are classified as sensitive.

The ECP has completed the training of approximately 1.49 million election staff to ensure the smooth execution of the electoral process. The Commission has established an Election City in its premises,

equipped with the latest technology to swiftly disseminate election results of 855 constituencies to the media.

A comprehensive strategy has been worked out to receive election results via WhatsApp, email, and fax. The ECP has also set up an alternative website to ensure uninterrupted dissemination of results in case of any disruptions. The Election Management System (EMS) will operate even if internet connectivity were not available. Satellite communication arrangements have also been made in some areas facing connectivity issues.

Under the EMS, the photo of the Form 45 prepared by the Presiding Officer containing the result of the respective polling station will be swiftly transmitted to the respective Returning Officer for compiling of the results of the constituency on Form-47, which will be forwarded to the ECP and also shared with the media. In case of connectivity issues, the results will be compiled through off-line modules.

The government has deployed over 648,000 security personnel nationwide to ensure the safety of voters, as well as, conduct of fair and transparent polling process. The government has completed all arrangements for holding safe, fair, and transparent elections. Out of 648,000 security personnel deployed, 137,000 are from army and paramilitary force, while 511,000 policemen will perform duties during the election.

An average of seven to eight security personnel will man each of the 90,777 polling stations across the country. In the first tier, the police will perform the duty, along with the civil armed forces in the second tier and the armed forces in the third tier. A special aerial Quick Reaction Force (QRF) has also been established to promptly deal with any untoward incident, especially in the Balochistan province.

CCTV cameras and other modern gadgets have been installed to ensure peace and security on the polling day. The Ministry of Interior has set up a national crisis information management system that will monitor the electoral process round the clock. The Election Monitoring and Complaint Centre (EMCC) has also been established to facilitate and address the voters' grievances pertaining to the elections. Complaints can be submitted through email at complaints@ecp.gov.pk, or the dedicated helpline 111-327-000.

The ECP has accomplished the task of handing over 260 million ballot papers to the DROs. The Commission has advised the people to bring their Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs) to cast their votes. No one will be allowed enter the polling station without producing original CNICs. No other document, including a copy of CNIC, passport and driving licence will be entertained. A group of eminent experts from across the Commonwealth states has arrived in Pakistan to monitor the electoral process across the country.

The ECP has entrusted first class magisterial powers to the DROs and Returning Officers under Section 193 of the Elections Act 2017 "Some 111 political parties have nominated 280 women candidates to contest the elections on general seats, making up 4.6 percent of the total of 6,037 candidates they have fielded," the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) said in a statement. According to Section 206 of the Elections Act, 2017 (Selection for Elective Offices), each political party is required to ensure at least five percent representation of women candidates while selecting candidates for general seats for elective offices, including membership of the Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament) and Provincial Assemblies, through a transparent and democratic procedure.



ISLAMABAD: Polling staff members leaving after collecting polling materials for general election.

## Govt stood by commitment of holding elections: Solangi

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Wednesday that the caretaker government had stood by its commitment of holding general elections on the schedule given by Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of Media Coordination and Facilitation Center established by Press Information Department here, he said tomorrow morning the voting would start and by midday half of the polling would have been done. Referring to speculations, he said there were doubts and concerns in people's minds regarding the elections.

"We stood by the promise of holding polls and elections are being held (tomorrow), putting aside all fears and rumours," Murtaza Solangi maintained. The minister said that the caretaker government had taken all possible steps for ensuring the conduct of free and transparent elections. He said after oath-taking of caretaker government on August 17 last year, in his first press briefing here the very next day, the first question he was asked about the elections and his answer was that elections would be held on the timeframe given by the ECP.

Murtaza Solangi said that this country was established under constitutional democracy and constitutional federal parliamentary system was the foundation of its political system. He said he as spokesperson of the government had reiterated time and again that elections would be held on the time given by ECP. "When the date of February 8 was given, our consistent answer was that the polling stations will open at 8.00 am on Thursday February 8", he added. The minister said that announcement of

unofficial results would start tomorrow evening and, the official results will be released by the ECP within three days time period. He said there were many challenges and problems in holding elections but the government was not discouraged by anything. The minister said that Ministry of Information and Broadcasting facilitated the media and provided authentic and verified news to the public through the relevant institutions.

He said that the Press Information Department had set up Media Facilitation Center to facilitate both local and foreign media in coverage of elections. Federal Information Secretary, Shahera Shahid said that all possible facilities would be provided to the journalists in the Media Coordination and Facilitation Center here and other cities as well. She said that Press Information Department had been establishing such centres during elections in the past as well and it had a experienced officers and staff.

On the elections, anyone could approach the centre set up by PID for getting information and assistance, she maintained. Principal Information Officer (PIO) Dr Tariq Mehmood Khan in his opening remarks at the inauguration ceremony of Media Coordination and Facilitation Center, stated that Media Coordination and Facilitation Centers had also been established in PID offices across the country. He informed the media persons that a total 4,763 accreditation cards had been issued to journalists who wanted to cover the elections. Out of total, PIO said, that around 1219 cards were issued in Islamabad, 776 in Lahore, 878 in Karachi, 363 in Peshawar, 167 in Quetta, 132 in Hyderabad, 482 in Faisalabad and 746 in Multan. Media Coordination and Facilitation Center will also provide transportation facilities to journalists, Dr. Tariq Mehmood added.

### ECP Issues SOPs for vote recount petitions

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has established clear guidelines for submitting petitions requesting a recount of votes in the upcoming elections. These Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) aim to streamline the process and ensure transparency and fairness in addressing recount requests.

ECP Secretariat will be open on February 10th and 11th, 2024, from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM to receive recount petitions from applicants or candidates. Hearings will also be held on these dates. Petitions must be submitted in 9 copies: one original and eight photocopies with complete details and date of filing.

A soft copy of the petition in PDF format along with any supporting documents in a USB drive must be attached to the application. Petitioners must include their identity card copy, valid current address, and contact number in the application.

Complete details and address of the defendants (usually the winning candidate or party) must be provided. If an advocate is representing the petitioner, a letter of attorney, advocate's card, and additional contact numbers are required. Presentation: All applications need to be properly indexed, page-numbered, and flagged for easy reference.

Only applications received during the designated dates and times will be scheduled for hearings. These SOPs provide clear instructions for submitting recount petitions, ensuring a standardized and organized process. This helps prevent confusion and facilitates timely review of applications by the ECP. Transparency in the recount process is crucial for maintaining public trust in the electoral system, and these guidelines contribute to achieving that goal.

## IHC suspends govt's FBR restructuring move

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court has put a temporary halt to the caretaker government's efforts to restructure the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), suspending the notification that formed a committee tasked with implementing the changes. This decision comes after an FBR officer challenged the legality of the move, arguing that it oversteps the caretaker government's mandate as outlined in the Election Act 2017.

The officer's petition highlighted that caretaker governments are typically prohibited from making major policy changes or undertaking significant initiatives that could impact

the incoming elected government. Despite the Election Commission's earlier warnings against such actions, the caretaker government proceeded to form the restructuring committee.

The court's suspension order effectively throws a wrench into the caretaker government's plans, which involved establishing an "Implementation and Asset Distribution Committee" within 72 hours. This committee, led by Caretaker Finance Minister Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, was intended to spearhead the FBR restructuring process.

The news has sparked mixed reactions, with some commending the court for upholding the caretaker

government's limitations and others expressing concerns about potential delays in addressing inefficiencies within the FBR. The caretaker government has yet to respond to the court's decision, but it is expected to explore legal options to challenge the suspension or seek alternative avenues for implementing the desired changes.

This development adds another layer of complexity to the already charged political atmosphere in Pakistan, as the country gears up for general elections later this year. The caretaker government's actions and the court's response are likely to be closely scrutinized by all stakeholders involved in the electoral process.





ABBOTTABAD: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah is talking to a delegation of Cristian Community.

### Sharifullah visits ‘Display Centre’

KARACHI (APP): The Provincial Election Commissioner of Sindh on Wednesday visited the 'Display Centre' in District South of the metropolis. Joint Provincial Election Commissioner Sindh Sardar Nazar Abbas and Commissioner Karachi Muhammed Saleem Rajput accompanied him. The Provincial Election Commissioner Sindh Sharifullah reviewed the delivery of election materials for the general elections in 2024. He also asked questions to the staff present at the display centre.

### 390 personnel to perform duties in quick response force

KARACHI (APP): Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) District Central Zeeshan Shafiq Siddiqui on Wednesday briefed the Quick Response Force (QRF) at the SSP Office regarding General Election 2024. SSP District Central Zeeshan Shafiq Siddiqui regarding the election duties to the QRF established in connection with the General Election 2024, according to spokesman for district Central Police. He informed the personnel that for every 10 buildings, 2 QRF vehicles will be deployed on election day as quick response force. He told the personnel that the QRF in case of any emergency or untoward situation will respond and inform the higher officers along with informing the base. District Central Police has deployed 390 personnel in 39 QRF vehicles. Each QRF is deployed for every 10 buildings in the limits of all police stations to respond in case of any emergency.

## CM grieved over loss of human lives

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has strongly condemned the blasts near the election offices at Pishin and Qila Saifullah in the areas of Balochistan. In his message on Wednesday, the CM expressed his deep sense of sorrow and grief over the loss of precious human lives. Mohsin Naqvi has expressed his heartfelt sympathy and condolence with the heirs of the deceased persons and prayed for an early recovery of the injured. The CM assured that the Punjab government equally shares the sorrow with the

heirs of the deceased persons in this hour of grief. These terrorism incidents are a conspiracy to create instability and unrest in the country. The anti-state elements want to worsen the law and order situation through their nefarious designs. The nation is completely united for the complete eradication of terrorism and is fully determined to eliminate the scourge of terrorism with the power of unity and national harmony, he added. CM inaugurates day-care centre at police lines Qila Gujjar Singh: Punjab Caretaker Chief

Minister Mohsin Naqvi inaugurated the daycare centre, set up in collaboration with the private sector, at police lines Qila Gujjar Singh and expressed satisfaction with the facilities. The CM directed to improve the conditions of police flats adjacent to the office of DIG (Investigations), emphasizing the necessity of adequate parking arrangements. He also instructed to ensure spacious and separate entryways for the residents. CCPO Bilal Siddique Kamyana, DIG (Operations) Ali Rizvi, and others were also present.

### Criminal killed in police encounter

LAHORE (INP): A wanted criminal was killed in an exchange of fire with police in the provincial capital in the wee hours of Wednesday. According to details, the police signaled to stop three suspected motorcycle riders in Chung area of Lahore. The bike riders instead of stopping started of stopping started firing at police. In retaliatory firing of police, on out-law was killed while his two accomplices sped away the scene. The killed criminal was wanted by police in various criminal cases and his body was shifted to hospital.

### Ahmed Shah visits Election Cell

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Caretaker Minister for Information, Minority Affairs and Social Security Muhammad Ahmad Shah, Wednesday, visited the Election Cell established in the Sindh Information Department. The information minister inspected arrangements made at the election cell and issued various instructions for ensuring the timely dissemination of authentic information regarding the electoral process to media persons. The minister, speaking on the occasion said that the Sindh Information Department's election cell will work round the clock from February 7 to 9, so that the election results can be conveyed to the people authentically and timely through the media. Director General Public Relations Muhammad Salim Khan, Director Press Information Akhtar Hussain Surhio, Director Admin and Accounts Muhammad Yusuf Kaburo, Director Publication Mansoor Ahmad Rajput.

## Polling material distribution in progress

KARACHI (APP): The process of distribution of polling material to presiding officers is underway in Karachi on Wednesday amid tight security arrangements. Provincial Election Commission Sindh has established 9 dispatch centers in 7 districts of Karachi for the distribution of ballot boxes, ballot papers and other polling material to presiding officers concerned while arrangements were also made for transportation of polling staff and the material to the polling stations. The dispatch center for district Malir of Karachi is set up at DC office Malir, for district West in the office of DC West, for district Central in Government Comprehensive School North Nazimabad, for district Korangi in Superior College Shah Faisal Colony and Government Girls College Korangi, for district South in Government Commerce College and Church Missionary School Nishtar Road, for district East in Expo Center Karachi, and Keamari district in Government College of Technology SITE Area. Provincial Election Commissioner Sindh Sharifullah visited dispatch centres in East, Keamari and Central Districts of Karachi to inspect the process of distribution and delivery of polling material. Joint Provincial Election Commissioner Sindh Sardar Nazar Abbas and Commissioner Karachi Saleem Rajput were accompanied with him. Caretaker Sindh Home Minister Brigadier (Rtd) Hariz Nawaz visited the center set up for the distribution of election materials at CMS Boys School, Nishtar Road to review the process of distribution and dispatch of the polling material. It is pertinent to mention here that over 9 million registered voters of Karachi will exercise their right to vote for electing their representatives on 22 constituencies of the National Assembly and 47 constituencies of the Sindh Assembly in the general elections scheduled to be held on February 8, 2024.

### Interior Sindh Minister visits polling stations

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Home Minister of Sindh Brigadier (Rtd) Hariz Nawaz on Wednesday visited various highly sensitive polling stations of the metropolis and reviewed the security arrangements. He visited the polling stations set up at DJ Science College (Burns Road) and Ghulam Abbas School (Maripur Road). The minister also visited the centre set up for distribution of election materials at CMS Boys School, Napier Road. He said that ensuring the implementation of the code of conduct and SOPs issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan and conducting peaceful elections is the first priority of the caretaker government. He appealed to the public to cooperate with the police and other law enforcement agencies to maintain peace and report any suspicious activity immediately. He further said that aerial firing and display of weapons will not be tolerated and immediate action will be taken against those who take the law into their hands.

## IGP visits polling station, reviews security arrangements

KARACHI (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP), Sindh Riffat Mukhtar Raja Wednesday paid a visit to the Commerce College polling station located near PIDC. During his visit, the IGP interacted with the police personnel who were on duty at the polling station. He instructed the officers to enhance the security measures to ensure the safety of voters, candidates, polling staff, and materials by maintaining a strong police presence in and around the polling stations. Riffat Mukhtar Raja emphasized the importance of vigilance and readiness

among the police stationed at the polling stations. He stressed the need for extraordinary security measures based on past and anticipated election scenarios, with no room for any shortcomings.

Riffat informed that the deployment of police personnel had been completed, and all necessary polling materials had been delivered.

CORRIGENDUM

With the reference to the advertisement published vide INF(P): 172/2024 Dated 01-02-2024. The following correction may be made.

1- The date of closing / opening of bids may be extended from 20-02-2024 to 27-02-2024.

Other Conditions of the NIT will remain the same. INF(P) 236/2024

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER C&W DIVISION KOHISTAN UPPER

GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA  
COMMUNICATION & WORKS DEPARTMENT  
NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING  
(Single stage two envelope E-Bidding System)

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

S. No.	Name of Work	Required category of PEC	Tender Form Entry Fee	Bid Security + S/Duty	Period of completion	Last date of submission of Bids and time	Date of opening of Technical Bid	Date of opening of Financial Bid
1	Estabtt: of Bannu Medical College Bannu (Balance Work), (Risk & Cost).	C-5	0.03%	2% on E/C+S/D	As per W/Order	26/02/2024 At 12:00 PM	26/02/2024 At 12:30 PM	Date of opening of Financial bid will be announced after the approval of Tech: bids from the competent authority.

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

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

1. Technical bid/ proposal should accompany the following:

a. Certificate that Bid Security in the shape of Call deposit (original) has been enclosed in financial bid.

b. Enlistment Order of C&W Department (photocopy)

c. Renewal of registration for CFY 2023-24 (Photocopy)

d. National Identity Card (CNIC Photocopy)

e. Pakistan Engineering Council registration copy for calendar year 2023-24

f. Form H of the Company/Firm.

g. Documents showing general capabilities, financial soundness, general and relevant experience record, personnel capabilities, equipment capabilities and Income Tax/NTN Certificates.

h. Any other document to support the technical bid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

16. Call Deposit of Scheduled Banks shall be acceptable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Note:-

1. Differential amount, if a contractor quote e.g. 25% below Engineer Estimate bid than he has to deposit alongwith his bid 2% bid security and 25% Additional Security of Engineer Estimate.

2. It is mandatory to all contractors, who are participating in the bidding should sign every page of their brochure with page numbering and mentioning here total No. of Pages i.e. 1 of 200 before submitting in the office of the undersigned, unsigned brochure will not be considered in the bidding process.

Executive Engineer  
Building Division Bannu

INF(P) 233/24

## Final Election Preparations in Mohmand Tribal District

Murad Khan

GHALANAI: 1st phase of Election 2024(Political campaign by political parties and candidates) ended on 12 AM at midnight on 6th February in all over the country including Mohmand Tribal District. The election materials have been distributed today amongst the Polling officers and Assistant Presiding officers, in the supervision of district administration and election commission officials, all the preparations for the final countdown on 8th February are ready and the historic general elections will be held by tomorrow (on 8th February). Mohmand tribal district has one National Assembly (NA-26) and two provincial assembly seats (PK-67-1 Lower Mohmand & PK-68-2 Upper Mohmand Khewizi & Baizi). The total number of registered voters in the district are 359045, including 206785 male and 152260 female voters. Total 195 polling stations have been made, including 62 most sensitive, 94 sensitive and 39 normal polling stations. For the security of these polling stations 2900 police persons have been deployed, the Army and FC will work as a quick response force. About the preparations of the polling activities the Deputy Commissioner District Mohmand Dr. Ihtisham-ul-Haq said” I will say thanks to all the law enforcement agencies and local community on completing the 1st phase of election campaign, with the help of local community there was no adverse event

recorded and all the arrangements have been, the polling materials are transferring to the polling stations, we have started the transfer of material on 9 am and we are trying to complete the transfer up to 4PM. In first phase, we sent the materials to far-flung areas, following by other nearby areas and after the end of polling on 8th February, the result will be prepared, the police have been already deployed on polling stations and the voting will start by tomorrow.” About the security arrangements for the polling in the district, the DPO (District Police Officer) Ayaz Khan says “in order to control the law and order situation, 2900 police persons have been deployed in the whole district, and additionally, the army and FC teams will work as QRF(quick response force).” “Additional security persons have been deployed on

most sensitive and sensitive polling stations and we are preparing for any kind of security assignments” He added. The District election commissioner Umar Khan said “by the help of district administration and law enforcement agencies, we have started the transfer of polling materials to the polling stations, this process will end by 4PM today and the voting will commence from 8 AM soon by tomorrow.” He appealed the local community to coordinate with the polling staff in order to smoothly complete the election process. Ex-MNA and the candidate for NA-26 Muhammad Sajid khan said that they went to each and every village and met with the people, they hope that the people of the district Mohmand once again will trust him and if he wins, he will accomplish the PTI Ex-chairman mission.

Waheed Mohmand, PPPP General Secretary and the NA-26 candidates said that after the FATA merger the awareness amongst the people has been increased. About his manifesto he said that I will solve the demarcation problem with Charsada, establishment of University in Mohmand, and will promote the marble industry. About the electricity problem, he said that we will make 5MG solar electricity in Khawazi and Baizi area. About construction of roads he said that it will be linked with CPEC. He claimed that majority of roads and colleges have been made by founder of PPPP, similarly the people are benefiting from BISP, so only PPPP is the party, which can solve all the problems of Mohmand District. At the same time he also threatened the Mohmand's people that if they did not give vote to PPPP, they might cancel BISP program.

A young man, Mr. Wasim 25 years old, belonging to Tehsil Pandialai, District Mohmand says “the election is very good for our country, as the interim government has no powers, if the elected governments come in power, it will be good for the whole country.” 40 years old SammiUllah belonging to Tehsil Ekka Ghund says “the elections are very important for our country, as all the activities were blocked from the last one year, as interim govt. has no powers to take decisions and they are not accepting responsibilities like economy and law & order situation, so when an elected government comes in power, they will be responsible of each and every thing and overall the situation of the country will be improved.” Almost all the political parties and candidates for provincial and National assembly have no clear manifesto or future plan for the main issues of Mohmand Tribal Districts, in public gathering and political campaigns, majority of the candidates looked busy in leg-fooling and blaming each other. In spite of presenting his manifesto or future plan, a candidate of the National Assembly from the large party threatened his workers of depriving from BISP stipend. All the arrangements have been made for the final countdown. Anyone who wins will have to face tough challenges in the form server load shedding, water scarcity, main roads and other infrastructure, mine and lease issues.





**PESHAWAR:** Workers of Election Commission Office sorting ballot boxes to be sent to polling stations for upcoming General Elections-2024 at Qayyum Sports Complex

## Women votes are key for success in Bajaur in general election

KHAR (APP): Women votes are key for success in Bajaur District in General Election as a total of 51 candidates are in the run for four provincial assembly seats - PK-19 Bajaur-I, PK-20 Bajaur-II, PK-21 Bajaur-III and PK-22 Bajaur-IV, however, after the postponement of the election on NA-8 and PK-22, the candidature now contesting election only on three provincial constituencies.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has postponed elections in Bajaur's NA-8 and PK-22 after a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) backed independent candidate Rehan Zeb Khan was killed in the Siddiqabad area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's (KP) Bajaur a week earlier. The notification to postpone the polls on the National Assembly's NA-8 and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly's PK-22 has been issued by the ECP.

Rehan Zeb Khan was shot dead during his election campaign in the area. Some unidentified assailants opened fire on his vehicle, leaving him dead on the spot. Four other people were also injured in the attack.

There are seven candidates to run for PK-19 Bajaur-I, 11 for PK-20 Bajaur-II, 18 for PK-21 Bajaur-III and 15 for PK-22 Bajaur-IV constituencies. Malik Hikmatullah Mamond of ANP, Ikram Khan of PMLN, Malik Ayaz of JJ, Said Rahim Shah Sabawoon of Mazloom Ulasi Tehreek while independent candidates Dr Hameedur Rahman, Malik Khalid Khan and Rahimdad Khan are contesting elections on PK-19 Bajaur-I.

On PK-20 Bajaur-II constituency, there are a total of 11 candidates in the election arena – Maulana Waheed Gul of JJ, Shahabuddin Khan of PMLN, Maulana Abdur Rashid of JUIF, Akhunzada Chattan of PPP, Gul Afzal Khan of ANP, Burhanuddin of Muttahida Qaumi Movement, Shahid Azam of Tehreek-e-Darveshan Pakistan, Sher Ahmad of JUI-S while former minister Anwarzeb Khan, Muambar Khan and Muhammad Saeed Khan are contesting elections in independent capacity.

Similarly, there are more independent candidates, including a woman, out of the total 18 to contest elections on PK-21 Bajaur-III. The candidates comprising Rashid Khan of ANP, Shakil Khan of PPP, Haji Sardar Khan of JJ, Muhammad Zahoor Khan of PMLN, Muhammad Tariq of JUIF, Muhammad Asghar Khan Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, Zair Muhammad of MUT. While the lone woman candidate Sultanat Bibi, Malik Umar Wahid, Engr Ajmal Khan, Badshah Rawan, Jumma Said, Hazoor Khan, Samiullah, Shakirullah and Shah Salim are contesting polls as independents in this constituency.

Also, there are a total of 14 candidates to test their luck in the forthcoming elections in PK-20 Bajaur-IV constituency. Abdullah advocate of PPP, Shah Naseer Khan of ANP, Siraj Khan of JJ, Imran Mahir of JUIF, Lalishah Pakhtunyar of MUT, Nawabzada Jalauddin Khan of PTIP, while Aurangzeb Iqilabi, Ijaz Khan, Hayat Khan, Guldad Khan, Gul Munir, Laiqzada, Muambar Khan and Noor Shah are contesting elections in independent capacity.

Likewise, on other provincial assembly constituencies, leading political parties and the election candidates termed the success in the election with women voters are the key, specially Bajaur District that is why election candidates are focusing more on women voters.

The political parties and the contesting independent candidates are making efforts to ensure maximum participation of women voters in the Feb 8 polls as ECP has declared 10 per cent women votes in a constituency must for validity of the polling process. Women constitute more than 48 per cent of the total population of Bajaur tribal district. Local leaders of all political and religious parties as well as independent candidates are giving special attention to active participation of women in the upcoming elections during their campaign.

Leaders of political parties and poll aspirants, who were earlier focusing only on male voters in their ongoing election campaign, have now started giving importance to women voters after realizing that 10 per cent women votes are mandatory in a constituency for the elections to be declared valid as per ECP rules.

Surprisingly, the contesting candidates of various political parties and independent candidates did not bother to give any attention but after the announcement of the Election Commissioner of the women pool percentage, all of them gave full concentration to women voters. Now with the announcement of the mandatory of women voters with a set percentage fixed by the Election Commission, all the candidates have started giving importance to women voters.

Ismail Khan and Irfan Bajauri when asked to comment, said that local leaders of all parties were making efforts to bring maximum women to the polling stations on the polling day so that to ensure validity of the election result. They said that their parties also formed a mobilization team to attract women voters and ensure their active participation in the election process. Vice President of the PML-N Shahabuddin Khan, who is contesting elections for PK-20, has also formed several teams of elders and youth to convince locals to allow their women to cast their votes on the polling day.

Similarly, local leaders of Jamaat-i-Islami are also struggling to convince their supporters to encourage their women to cast votes in the district on the polling day. A senior worker of JJ told APP that his party formed several teams of female workers to inform women about the importance of their votes. A party worker said that political and religious parties and poll candidates were yet to say anything against casting of votes by women in their ongoing campaign and public meetings. It will help local women to use their right to vote in the upcoming elections, Irfan Bajauri added.

There are four constituencies of the National Assembly and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly in Bajaur district. In the past, this constituency was called National Assembly Constituency NA 43 of Bajaur, while in 2018, it was renamed NA 40, but it was merged with the tribal districts. After this, due to new delimitation, the National Assembly constituency of Bajaur has been named as NA-8.

One constituency has now been reduced from Bajaur because before the merger, there used to be two National Assembly constituencies in Bajaur. In the 2002 general elections, Maulana Muhammad Sadiq of Muttahida Majlis Amal won from this constituency, while later Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Former Governor Engineer Shaukatullah won the 2008 general election, his father Haji Bismillah Khan in 2013 while PTI's

and possible measures are being taken for the development of the province and the restoration of infrastructure.

He expressed these views while representing the province while participating in a Zoom meeting regarding (ECNEC) Executive Committee of National Economic Council in his office on Wednesday. Additional Chief Secretary Planning and Development Intiaz Hussain Shah, Finance Secretary Aamir Sultan Tareen and other officials have participated in the meeting.

Gul Dad Khan won from the same constituency in 2018.

Due to the former tribal areas, the influence of political parties is relatively less in this constituency, although after the merger, various parties are trying to increase their vote bank. On January 3, Qari Khairullah, the provincial assembly candidate of Jamiat Ulema Islam-F, was targeted, but he remained safe.

Due to the poor law and order situation in Bajaur, there is fear among the candidates and the people. According to a report, instead of political meetings and rallies, corner meetings are being held in private Hujra's.

Because due to the security situation, ordinary tribal people shy away from going to political programs, like in the past, the votes of personalities are high in Bajaur, but some of the contesting candidates definitely have the support of political parties. In Bajaur, former Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Engineer Shaukatullah, Awami National Party's Maulana Khan Zeib, Jamaat-e-Islami's former assembly member Haroon Rasheed and some other independent candidates are present in the election contest in Bajaur.

It is worth mentioning here that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly has 145 elected members, 115 regular seats, 26 seats reserved for women and 04 seats for Non-Muslims. The Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is elected by the Chief Minister of the Province who forms a Cabinet of Ministers to oversee various Departments.

The Chief Minister is also the Chief Executive of the Province. The Federal Government appoints a Governor as head of the Provincial Government. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is divided into 24 districts. Each district has a Zilla Nazim assisted by a District Coordination Officer. In a District the functions are devolved further to the Tehsil, Town and Union Council Governments. Each District has an elected Zilla Council, elected Tehsil, Town and Union Councils who look after various activities at their respective levels.

At district level a District Police Officer looks after matters of Law and Order and he/she reports to the Zilla Nazim. Each district has a Public Safety Commission which addresses public complaints against the Police. There is a Provincial Police Officer who is in charge of the Police system at the provincial level.

To find your constituency and location of your polling booth, SMS your NIC number (no spaces) to 8300. Once you know your constituency, visit the ECP website here for candidates. Similarly, for the General Election 2024, polling materials are being shifted to polling stations and the elections are being held in three provincial constituencies in the district apart from NA-8 and PK-22 postponement.

The total number of male and female voters in three provincial constituencies is 4,88,873 and the total number of male voters is 2, 66, 169. The total number of women voters is 2, 22, 644. A total of 275 polling stations have been set up for the elections with 257 joint polling stations for men and women have been established. The Election Commission has declared 63 polling stations as the most sensitive, 109 polling stations have been declared sensitive and 65 as normal with 2526 policemen deployed for security. A ban has been imposed on the display of all types of weapons in the district under Section 144.

The meeting, ECNIC approved PC-1 of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Rural Roads Development Project (KP-RRDP) with the cooperation of Asian Development Bank (ADB), in which 1337 km of roads and 62 bridges are planned. The total cost of the project is Rs. 105.45 billion, of which 13.5% is provincially shares and 86.5% is ADB funded. The project will provide access to rural areas, upgradation and rehabilitation of flood-affected roads will be made possible.

### Governor urges masses to exercise voting rights

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali has urged masses to participate in the electoral process abiding by norms of democracy and respect the electoral rights of each other.

In a message issued here in connection with general elections, KP Governor also urged masses to cooperate with administration, police and polling staff for peaceful conduct of electoral process. He said that KP people had always expressed mutual respect in elections and hoped that election would be completed in the province in atmosphere of peace and mutual coexistence.

KP Governor advised masses to remain patient and avoid creating unnecessary rush in polling stations. He said that law enforcers are fully prepared to meet any untoward incident adding that political workers should respect the democratic rights of each other and maintain decorum and discipline during elections keeping in view basic norms of democracy.

### D&SJ terminates 3 officials

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: District and Session Judge (D&SJ) Peshawar Ishaq Taj terminated three officials on corruption and negligence towards their responsibilities, on Wednesday.

According to details, D&SJ had terminated junior clerks Barakat Ali and Zakaria Kabria along with Naib Qasid Hamid-ur-Rehman in two different enquires. The terminated officials were serving at the Office of Judicial Magistrate Peshawar Fahim Ahmad. They were using fabricated documents with fake verification from Tehsil Peshawar for utilizing in bail pleas.

Moreover, Barakat Ali and Zakaria Kabria also using delaying tactics in submission of cases of prosecution and police which had caused interruption in trial apprehended accused. The terminated officials were warned multiple times but to no veil and latterly enquiry was initiated in this regard. During the enquiries, fair defense facility was provided to the officials but they had failed to defend themselves against the charges, the statement stated.

### Winter festival organized

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: A two-day winter festival to encourage tourists was organized under auspices of Pakistan Army at Malam Jabba, a renowned tourist destination of Swat. During the festival, competitions in volleyball, badminton, tennis, and tug of war were held.

A large number of tourists including men, women, and children from all over Pakistan took part in the competitions. Tourists also praised the Pakistan Army for arranging the festivals and predicted that the number of tourists would increase by organizing such kinds of festivals.

## All arrangements for election completed 15, 696 polling stations for 21.928m voters setup in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): All arrangements have been completed by Election Commission of Pakistan for free and transparent election in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where over 21.928 million registered voters would decide fate of 713 candidates contesting for national assembly seats and 1,814 candidates of provincial assembly seats on Thursday (tomorrow).

Provincial Election Commission (PEC) Spokesman told APP on Wednesday that all arrangements for February 8, 2024 general election were completed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including merged tribal districts where over 1,80,000 trained polling staff were deployed for polling duties.

He said that there are over 11.944383 million male and 99.83,737 million female who exercise right of votes in KP including merged tribal districts. Similarly, 4,180 polling stations were set up for male, 4,287 polling stations for female and 6600 collective polling stations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, he said, adding that 4,178 polling stations were declared highly sensitive and 5,925 sensitive where police and security personnel would be deployed for smooth conduct of the election process.

As per ECP's Code of Conduct, there would be complete ban on electioneering and persuading voters within 400 meter distance of the polling stations and only polling camps of the polling parties could be established at 400 meters distance in rural areas and

100 meters in urban areas of the province.

The spokesman said that district returning officers, returning officers, police and administration would ensure implementation of ECP's code of conduct during the polling process and can take strict action against violators. He said that 45,440,000 ballot papers were printed for elections and foolproof security arrangements were made for voters at polling stations.

To ensure foolproof security, he said police, frontier constabulary, frontier corps and Pakistan Army would be deployed and no would be allowed to disrupt polling process on election day, he said. He said strategy was also chalked for snowfall districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and arrangements for election results were made at Qayyum Stadium, Eidgah and Returning Officers offices.

Meanwhile, Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary, IGP Akhtar Hayat Gandapur and Additional Chief Secretary Home, Abid Majeed visited the office of Provincial Election Commissioner and inspected preparations regarding handing over of polling materials. They also inspected the monitoring control room at PEC where they were briefed by the joint secretary provincial election commission.

Meanwhile, Interior Minister Dr Gohar Ejaz visited Chief Secretary Office KP on Tuesday night where

he was briefed about security arrangements made for smooth conduct of the election. The Minister underlined the need of significance of the contingency plans in case the online system of ECP did not function and asked the top officials of KP Bureau to ensure efficiency of back up mechanism through pre-polls drill exercise.

The minister highly praised the efforts put to develop the online application for the conduct of GE-2024 i.e. provincial election workplace that would donut polls through in over 15,000 polling stations in the province. Following the end of the election campaign last night, the supporters of candidates were seen busy preparing their parties' polling booths outside of the polling station for education of young and female voters.

Great enthusiasm is being witnessed among voters in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where young voters were eagerly waiting to poll their first votes. The polling would start 8.a.m and would continue till 5pm without any break. Soon after completion of voting process, counting of ballot papers would start in presence of voters and results on farm 45 of ECP would be shared with ROS and to be fixed on the concerned polling stations for information. The tribal voters of erstwhile Fata were jubilant to participate in the second direct general elections and all were awaiting to poll their votes in large numbers in favour of their candidates on February 8, 2024.

## Contingency arrangements of HMC for elections held

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Hayatabad Medical Complex (HMC) on Wednesday decided to take steps for emergency preparations in the light of General Elections 2024. A meeting was held under the chairmanship of Professor Dr. Shehzad Akbar, Chairman of Clinical Executive Board and Medical Director of Hayatabad Medical Complex Medical Teaching Institute, said the spokesperson.

A declaration has been issued by the hospital

administration and all the departments of the hospital have also been informed that no holiday will be celebrated in Hayatabad Medical Complex before the election and on the day of voting.

As usual, this time also HMC Hospital in Action will provide its service 24 hours on emergency basis. All OPD services will function as usual during normal working hours. However, the admission of patients during elective services will be reduced for this week.

To ensure availability of

beds in case of any emergency and all medicine these days.

All support facilities including diagnostic and operation theatres, clinical, surgical and supporting staff in casualty will continue uninterrupted. Also, the IBP facility will remain closed only on February 8, 2024 due to Election Day. All these measures have been arranged only for the election days. After the election, Inshallah, all the services of the hospital will continue as normal on a daily basis.



**PESHAWAR:** An aged man displaying coconuts to attract the customer at Sadar Road.

## Over 870000 voters to exercise right of franchise in Dir Lower constituencies

PESHAWAR (APP): More than 870000 voters would exercise their right of franchise from two national assembly and five provincial assembly seats in Dir Lower in the general election 2024. A statistical report of voters and polling stations on Wednesday revealed that around half of the population of a total 16.50000 residents of Dir Lower will be eligible for casting their votes in the general election.

According to the 7th digital census of 2023, the total population of the Dir Lower district was 1660528, of which 817545 were male while 842927 consisted of female. The number of transgenders in the district was counted at 26. The total number of voters in the district was 870852 of which 481809 were male voters and 389043 were female voters.

In NA-6, the number of total registered voters was 457075 of which 253972 were male and 203103 were female voters. In the constituency a total of 307 polling stations have been established for the election day,

of which 80 were specified for the male voters while 7 for female voters and the number of combined polling stations was 153. Among these polling stations 143 have been declared as highly sensitive while 119 as sensitive and 45 as normal.

Likewise, in NA-7 Dir Lower, the number of total registered voters was 413777 of which 227837 were male voters while 185940 were female voters. The number of polling stations in NA-7 was 308, among which 96 were for male voters and 93 for female voters and the combined polling stations were 119. Among the polling stations, 45 were declared as highly sensitive, while 170 as sensitive and 93 as normal.

Among five constituencies of the provincial assembly of Dir Lower, the number of registered voters in PK-14 was 182404, of which 100696 were male voters while 8170 8 were female voters. In this PK constituency a total of 31 polling stations have been established for male voters and 29 for female voters. In PK-14 Dir

Lower, 129 polling stations have been established as combined, both for male and female voters. In PK-15 Dir Lower-II, the number of total registered voters was 177459, of which 97082 were male voters while 80377 were female voters. For the polling day a total of 127 polling stations have been established in the constituency, of 47 were for male, 45 for female and 35 were combined polling stations.

Among these polling stations, 40 polling stations have been declared as normal while 65 as sensitive and 22 as highly sensitive. In the constituency PK-16 Dir Lower-III, the number of total registered voters was 172941, of which 94719 were male while 78222 were female voters. A total of 133 polling stations have been established for the election day of which 37 were for male voters and 37 for female voters while 59 polling stations were combined. Of these polling stations, 47 have been declared as normal, while 73 as sensitive and 13 as highly sensitive.





## In brief

### Polling staff deployed F.P. Report

THATTA: Election staff started reaching the office of District returning officer to collect necessary material required at the polling stations on the election day. Out of 450 polling stations 31 polling stations of district Thatta have been declared sensitive. However, situation has turned tense in Thatta district. While spokesperson to district election Commissioner Thatta said that things were well under control and chief monitoring officers have been tasked evaluate security measures on all polling stations of district Thatta. On the other hand, incidents of mismanagement were reported from DRO office Sujawal during the process of distribution of poll-items. Three female teachers appointed as presiding officer withdrew citing different reasons while the staff of DRO office was struggling to do away with challenges. The weather however is expected to remain pleasant on the polling day in both the district. A directory has been issued by the district information department urging media person to avoid fake and unverified news. The reporters were advised to contact concerned focal person to seek actual facts and figures regarding election results.

### Rail traffic suspended

KHANEWAL (INP): A number of bogies of a freight train derailed near Marzipura Railway Station in Jahanian near Khanewal suspending rail traffic on Wednesday. The freight train was going to Karachi from Lahore when five of its goods car went off the track, causing severe damage to the railway line. Rescue services could not be launched on time causing suspension of rail service on the track. Due to suspension of both up and down rail traffic, passengers demanded of the authorities concerned to restore the track as soon as possible. However, there is great possibility that the trains will be delayed.

### Arrangements for polls reviewed F.P. Report

D I KHAN: District Emergency Officer of Rescue service 1122 Awais Babar on Wednesday said the comprehensive arrangements had been made to meet any emergency during general elections in the district. He expressed these views during a visit to Rescue Station 11 and 33 city and inspected arrangements for tackling emergencies. During the visit, he was briefed about matters about ongoing rescue activities, checked the attendance of staff and arrangements made for the polls. He also inspected the cleanliness condition of vehicles and the equipment used by the rescue service for coping with emergencies in the district. He said that rescue service workers had been alerted, they would be available round the clock for meeting any emergency during the polls. He expressed satisfaction with the performance of the station, adding staff of the service was efficiently tackling emergencies. He also awarded a cash prize to LTV Muhammad Ramzan for his best performance.

### Security plan finalized: DPO

KHANEWAL (INP): District Police Officer (DPO) Rana Omer Farooq said that a security plan has been finalized to maintain law and order during the elections.



JAMRUD: President Officers receiving election equipments from district Election Commission. - F.P. photo

## NA-43 Tank anticipates exciting electoral battle

F.P. Report

TANK: In the upcoming 2024 general elections, the Tank district is gearing up for a fierce competition in the National Assembly constituency NA-43 Dera-cum-Tank and PK-108. This constituency comprises one seat in the National Assembly consists of two tehsils of Dera Ismail Khan Kulachi and Paharpur areas and one in the Provincial Assembly.

With a total of 392,214 registered voters, including 214,790 men and 177,424 women, the electoral landscape in NA-43 is marked by its diversity. The constituency boasts 353 polling stations. The influential tribe association of Bettani, Jattar, Kundi, Gandapur, Marwat and Mehsud holds considerable sway in the district.

Three prominent candidates are vying for the NA-43 seat including Maulana Asad Mahmood Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, Dawar Khan Kundi Tehreek-e-Insaf, Abdullah Nangyal Bettani Independent and Muhammad Ramzan Shori Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan.

In the previous 2018 elections in the said constituency which was NA-37, Maulana Asad Mahmood from Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam secured victory with 28,746 votes. In the same constituency, runner-up Habibullah Khan Kundi of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf secured 15,840 votes and Dawar Khan Kundi Independent 13,567.

Looking back at the 2013 elections in NA-25, Dawar Khan Kundi of PTI emerged victorious with a substantial 73,000 votes, while Maulana Asad Mahmood secured 67,000 votes. Now PK-108 Tank, where a total of 224,849 voters are eligible to cast their ballots. The male voter count is 123,303, female voters stand at 101,546, distributed across 192 polling stations.

The three contenders for this constituency are Mahmood Ahmed Bettani Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, Advocate Usman Khan Bettani PTI supporter and Irfan Kundi Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Pakistan. As the election fervor builds, Tank district anticipates an exciting electoral battle, with the outcome of NA-43 shaping the political landscape of the district.

## Polling items handover to Presiding Officers

F.P. Report

JAMRUD: Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has distributed polling equipment among Presiding Officers (POs) here in Jamrud on Wednesday. Equipment needed on polling day included election lists, bags to be used on polling day, screens to offer privacy to voters and stationary items handed over to the presiding officers.

Soon after collecting the election equipment, the POs of remote areas left for their locality where they would execute their official duties. As per the ECP rule, it is obligatory on the POs to arrive at their concerned polling stations till Wednesday night (07 February, 2024) to adopt all necessary initiatives to smoothly conduct the general election next morning (08 February).

It is to be stated here that 342 polling stations had been set up across the district Khyber for NA-27. Similarly, 108 polling stations had been established for PK-69 (Khyber-1) while 117 polling stations had been planned for PK-70 (Khyber-2).

In the same way 117 polling stations had been established for PK-71 (Khyber-3). It's worth mentioning here that a coalition of 50 leading civil society organizations, Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) will deploy around 19,000 observers to monitor 85 per cent of National Assembly polling stations across the country.

## Admn completes preparedness

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Deputy Commissioner Madam Sundas Irshad has said that district administration, police, election commission and other law enforcement agencies have finalised all arrangements to ensure holding of free, fair transparent elections in peaceful atmosphere on February, 8 in the district Hafizabad.

According a handout issued here, DC said that Pak army and rangers will also be performance duty along with police and no one would be allowed to create hurdle in polling process whereas police and other law enforcement agencies would be dealt law breakers and violators of code of conduct of election commission with iron hands.

DC appealed the people being a patriot and responsible citizens of Pakistan to use their votes for promoting democratic process as well as progress, prosperity and integrity of the country. Returning Officer/DC Madam Sundas Irshad said that polling staff have been appointed for election of one constituency of Nation Assembly (NA-67) and three constituencies (PP-37, PP-38, PP-39) of Punjab Assembly.

She said that 619 polling stations were setup in the district and 78 polling stations were declared sensitive where additional security staff was appointed and CCTV cameras were also installed to monitor sensitive polling stations.

## ANP and PTI to run for competition on NA 22, PK 58

F.P. Report

MARDAN: The eyes of the whole country are on the battle of Mardan's strong Assembly Constituency NA-22 and Provincial Constituency PK-58. Political parties have fielded their candidates, but the results in these two constituencies are seen in favor of ANP candidate and former Chief Minister Amir Haider Khan Hoti. Everyone has the right to disagree with my opinion and analysis and can give an opinion on it, but I am putting before you the conclusions that have been drawn by looking at the facts on the ground.

In NA-22, the main contest will be between Amir Haider Khan and PTI's Atif Khan, while in PK-58 Amir Haider Khan and JUI's Maulana Tajul Amin Jabal will be contested. PTI candidate Abdul Salam Afridi is facing difficulties in contesting as a independent without a call due to internal differences in his party and Pervez Khan Khattak as PTI's parliamentary candidate and the votes of his party will be divided. There is no denying the party vote of Maulana Tajul Amin Jabal but he himself knows that it is not easy to overcome the challenge he is facing, now other parties and other candidates will take votes according to their party status, but it is certain that the former chief minister is far ahead of the opposition candidates in both the seats and they will win by a large margin. It can be seen that the services of Amir Haider Khan Hoti as Chief

Minister are not hidden from anyone.

During his five-year tenure, he spent billions of rupees and reduced the depredations of Mardan to a great extent and got the title of founder. Amir Haider Khan may have political differences, but everyone recognizes his nobility. His great quality is that you will always find him among the people. He has public relations with every citizen and worker above politics. They participate in events like plaintiffs and speak politely and logically. Those Pakhtun traditions while giving speeches in political meetings. He always holds the foot of literature and decency. Due to these qualities, he has gone home in the hearts of the people.

In contrast, PTI in the first period beat the drum of freeing the institutions from political interference and kept claiming that buildings and roads do not lead to development. In the second period, PTI had to take a U-turn from its policies, to keep the name alive in Mardan, funds were stopped for ANP projects then flyovers were constructed at such places, which became the cause of daily accidents, Women's University and Girls Cadet College will be established, but until now they are deprived of their buildings. Nepotism on other parties the nine-year tenure of those making allegations of merit violations is in front of everyone.

Despite the heavy mandate, PTI's internal differences were such that during the nine-year tenure of their

government, no mega project was approved for Mardan. On the other hand, no chief minister from the heart has taken care of Mardan. During the leadership of PTI, it was a condition that it was forbidden to socialize with the common people and participate in their joy and sorrow events. In such a situation, in the general elections to be held on February 8 tomorrow, PTI workers including the general public will be forced to think that the real development of Mardan who should be chosen for prosperity and problem solving? The people of Mardan are facing many problems at present, there is no cash lab or burn center in the hospitals and in case of accidents the patients are forced to go to the hospitals of other cities. Cancer Hospital, Sports fields, Sports Academy, IT and Medical University, alternative roads to reduce traffic in the city. Clean drinking water. Sewage system, Street lights and rickshaw bike facility. There are many other issues and challenges faced by the industry for girls' vocational education and youth employment.

These problems will not be solved by claims and mere promises. There is a need for serious and visionary leadership and personality. The people have understood that they have no other choice but to have Amir Haider Khan to solve their problems. Therefore, the bushes of deprivation cannot be cut with a sickle, but the lantern will be lit, then a new prosperity will be created.

## PTI-P to change political status quo today: Asia

F.P. Report

BANNU: Former provincial minister Asia Jahangir said that all those who take account of their 30 years of power must first give an account to the people who turned politics into a business. They are lying to the people today. Khattak and Mahmood Khan did in the previous round of funds of billions of rupees to the boys put the foundation of the development of the boys.

From here, the first ones who have been elected repeatedly tell the people about their performance, on what basis they are asking for votes from the people. In February, the defeat of

the PDM parties revealed that with the participation of dozens of women from the southern districts, the entry of women into the political arena is full of ideas.

Speaking at the ceremony on the occasion of the joining of women's families to the party, Malik Jahangir Khan Faiz Muhammad Khan, Malik Ahmed Khan and other leaders and party officials were also present. We are sad even though we have performed very well as chairpersons of MTI during 16 months and have changed the conditions of the three hospitals here, people still remember us today, but in the presence of

those who have ruled here for the past 30 years. He is also suffering from poverty and problems and in many areas the basic facilities of life are not available, which is a clear proof of the incompetence of the former representatives.

It is the last day and the people's alliance will defeat the politicians of the barrios. Because Shahab Ali Shah as Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister and Additional Chief Secretary during his appointment provided the best opportunities for development for boys. He said that the Additional Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah is a high-ranking person who loves the soil.



QUETTA: A view of large number of vehicles for delivering polling material in polling stations for General Elections 2024.

## Sindh CM visits Larkana in wake of election day

F.P. Report

LARKANA: Sindh caretaker chief minister Justice (retired) Maqbool Baqir presided over the administrative meeting held in Larkana in connection with the general elections to be held today (on Thursday). And it should be done in a peaceful manner and possible measures should be taken to ensure the code of conduct.

Inspector General Police Rafat Mukhtar, Commissioner Larkana Division Waheed Sheikh, DIG Police Larkana Division Nasir Aftab Patahan gave a detailed briefing to the Sindh Provincial Chief Minister regarding the elections,

Larkana Division five districts Larkana, Qamber Shahdadkot, Shikarpur, Jacob. It consists of Abad and Kashmore and Kundahkot while the number of registered votes in the division is 3592271 in which there are 1930896 male voters and 1661375 female voters while in the five districts there are 8 National Assembly seats and 17 Provincial Assembly seats including 4 women for 8 National Assembly seats. 95 candidates are participating, while 236 candidates, including 10 women, are participating in the elections for 17 seats of the provincial assembly. 2738 polling stations have been established at the division level, of

which 1306 are normal, 619 are sensitive, 813 are highly sensitive, while 55 are improvised.

One hundred; In response to the question, caretaker Chief Minister Sindh said that the Election Commission has declared 86 polling stations as flood-affected, which need to be repaired, in addition to this, facilities need to be provided to 1182 additional polling stations. It was informed that political parties have been allowed to make banners, flyers, handbills and pamphlets of their specific size, while they have been prohibited from displaying banner posters on government buildings.



SKARDU: Workers busy removing snow on road to help smooth flow of vehicles at Olding area.





## Former PM Thaksin is being investigated for royal defamation

BANGKOK (AP): State prosecutors in Thailand said they have revived an investigation into whether former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra almost nine years ago violated the law against defaming the monarch, a crime punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Thaksin had been charged in 2016 with violating the law on royal defamation - also known as Article 112 - for remarks he made to journalists the previous year when he was in Seoul, South Korea, said Prayut Phetcharakun, a spokesperson for the Office of the Attorney General, at a news conference. Thaksin, who was ousted by a 2006 military coup, is currently confined to a police hospital in Bangkok where he is serving time for convictions related to corruption and abuse of power. He had been in self-imposed exile since 2008, but voluntarily returned to Thailand in August last year to begin serving an eight-year prison sentence.

He was moved almost immediately to the hospital on grounds of ill health and about a week after that, King Maha Vajiralongkorn reduced his sentence to a single year. The reduction made Thaksin, now 74, eligible to apply for parole after serving at least one-third - four months - of his amended sentence, and could be released later this month. The decision to indict Thaksin was made in 2016, but further legal moves were suspended until he could respond to the charges, which he did when the authorities notified him of them in the hospital on Jan. 17, according to Prayut. Thaksin denied any wrongdoing and submitted a letter rebutting



the charge, which was added to his case file to be used in deciding whether or not to proceed with prosecuting him, Prayut said. The announcement from the attorney-general's office means that if Thaksin gets early release, as is widely expected, he can immediately be taken back into custody on the royal defamation charge. Thaksin's return to Thailand last year came the same day that the Pheu Thai party - the latest incarnation of the party that he originally led to power in 2001, and for which he is considered the de facto leader - won a parliamentary vote to form a new government.

The previous government was heavily influenced by the military, which continued its hostility toward Thaksin and his allies long after ousting him in

2006. Thaksin's critics have questioned whether his shift from prison to more congenial surroundings in the hospital reflected special privilege as part of a political deal between his supporters and opponents.

Thaksin became prime minister in 2001 by promoting populist policies and using his telecommunications fortune to build his own political party, and was easily reelected in 2005. Thailand's traditional royalist ruling class felt threatened by Thaksin's popularity. His ouster set off years of sometimes violent confrontations between his supporters and opponents. Political parties with his backing continued to win elections but were forced from power several times by the courts and the army, both bulwarks of royalism.

## Heavy snow in Tokyo area knocks out power to homes

TOKYO (AP): Heavy snow hit the Tokyo area, disrupting trains and grounding more than 100 flights, with transport officials cautioning drivers to avoid nonessential travel. The Japan Meteorological Agency said the snowfall was expected to peak, with up to 55 centimeters (21 inches) predicted in mountainous areas north of Tokyo.

The snowfall was much less in central Tokyo, where more than 1 centimeter (0.4 inch) was reported for the first time in two years, Kyodo News said. About 40 people received minor injuries from slipping in the snow, NHK public television reported. Some train services were limited in the Tokyo region and highways were partially closed, including the Tomei and Metropolitan Expressways. About 550 passengers on two Yurikamome automated trains that got stuck between stations had to walk to the next stop, NHK reported.

More than 100 domestic and several international flights in and out of Tokyo's Haneda airport were canceled, according to the airport. More than 14,000 homes in Tokyo and five nearby prefectures were out of power, presumably due to the snow, Tokyo Electric Power Co. said. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism urged drivers to avoid nonessential trips and use winter tires or tire chains.

## Chile leader dies in copter crash

SANTIAGO: Chile's former President Sebastian Pinera, a billionaire tycoon who twice held the South American nation's top job, has died in a helicopter crash, his office said in a statement. "It is with deep regret that we announce the death of the former president of the Republic of Chile," said the statement, adding that 74-year-old Pinera had died in the popular vacation spot Lago Ranco, some 920km (570 miles) south of Santiago. Chile Interior Minister Carolina Toha confirmed the death of the former president. No further details were immediately released about the cause of the accident. Chile's national disaster agency SENAPRAD confirmed that one person had been killed and three people injured. The government did not immediately name who was aboard. Pinera, also a successful businessman, oversaw quick economic growth and a steep fall in unemployment during his first 2010 to 2014 presidency, at a time when many of Chile's trade partners and neighbours were facing sharply slower growth.

His second presidency from 2018 to 2022 was marked by violent protests against inequality that led to accusations of human rights violations and ended with the government promising to draft a new constitution. Pinera was the owner of the fifth largest fortune in Chile, estimated at some \$3bn. He worked as an academic in several universities for almost 20 years and as a consultant for the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank. As a businessman in the 1970s through the 1990s, he worked in a variety of industries, including real estate. He held shares in major airlines as well as telecommunications, real estate and electricity companies. He also created one of the largest credit card companies in the country. In 2009, he handed over the management of his businesses to others. He entered politics representing the centre right, which was the civilian support of the military regime. At the same time, he distanced himself from the 1973-1990 rule of General Augusto Pinochet, when more than 3,000 suspected leftists were killed or "disappeared." Pinera ran three times for president of Chile. In 2006, he lost to socialist Michelle Bachelet; then in 2010, he defeated former President Eduardo Frei. — Aljazeera

## Kenyan cult leader charged with 191 murders

NAIROBI (BBC): A cult leader in Kenya has been charged with murder after more than 400 bodies were found buried in shallow graves in a remote forest in the east of the country. Survivors and victims' families have said Paul Mackenzie urged followers to fast in order to "go see Jesus".

He and 29 others pleaded not guilty in a court in the coastal town of Malindi. Mackenzie has already been charged with committing acts of terror, child cruelty and torture, which he denied. Police and prosecutors allege that apart from starvation, some victims may have been strangled, suffocated or beaten to death using blunt objects. The 30 accused have been charged with murdering 191 people. "I'm still scared of him," one survivor told the BBC when asked what she would say to Mackenzie if she ever met him. "I don't want to ever meet him," said the 29-year-old mother of four.

Neema - not her real name - had been a follower of the Good News International Church in Malindi until it was closed down in 2019. When she heard that its leader had moved to Shakahola, the forest about 70km (43 miles) west of the town, together with other members of the church, she followed him there in 2022. Shakahola is sparsely populated and now under 24-hour police guard. The authorities have declared it a crime scene and access is forbidden. Initially, the worshippers would travel there and return home. But from late 2022, the followers claim, they were not allowed to leave. Neema was two months pregnant with her fourth child when

she went to the forest for the last time. She said she was held against her will there and women were repeatedly raped by the guards. "The preaching stopped," she said. "They said we're now done with teachings we only wait to meet Jesus." At first, those in the forest would be given half a cup of tea and a slice of bread in the morning. That was it for the day. But after some time, Neema said they were told there would be no more food or water. "We'd sneak into the bush and pick wild berries to feed on when the guards took breaks to have their meals," she added. They would also scoop water from the ground and drink from their hands.

When it all became unbearable, she plotted with two of her friends to escape. It was not easy to hatch a plan as it was forbidden to chat in groups. They were required to stay silent. They waited for the guards to take their usual meal break, closed the door to their mud-walled hut, made a hole in the rear wall and ran. "We were weak," Neema said. But the desperation to escape pushed them on. Luckily, when they got to the main road, they met a motorist who took them to hospital. Hundreds were not as lucky - including many children. They were the first group identified for fasting until they "went to sleep", according to survivors.

Women were to follow them. Sixty-five-year-old Changawa Mangi is a village elder in Shakahola. He said he had met Mackenzie when he went to buy land there saying he wanted to farm. "We welcomed him." Over time, the residents started noticing that Mackenzie would host many people. It was then that they found out that he

ran a church, but that did not bother them. If anything, their presence boosted local businesses as the church's followers shopped there. But that suddenly ended. Mackenzie's followers stopped going to the village shops. Then the early warning signs started appearing. Mr Mangi said three teenagers went to his house seeking help. They looked emaciated. So, he fed them. "For the first three days, one of them had a running stomach, and what came out looked like soil," Mr Mangi said.

The community leader alerted his superiors in government, but three was a slow reaction. Young men from the village came up with a plan to storm the area on their motorbikes. But they were met with hostility, repulsed by the guards and had two motorbikes set on fire. It became clear they could only gain access under police escort. But word was slowly getting out.

Francis Wanje, a 59-year-old high school teacher from Mombasa, had heard that his daughter and her family may have moved to the forest and went to investigate. He informed the police but said they did not act right away. What he saw at Shakahola shocked him. He was too late to rescue some of his grandchildren, but he found his nine-year-old grandson. "He told me he saw [his siblings] die, he saw them being starved by their parents and that is a story he will never forget. He will never forget! He knew he would be next but he was lucky he was rescued," Mr Wanje told the BBC. The boy's mother - Mr Wanje's daughter - and her husband are still missing. He also rescued another child he found there.

## Country does not wish harm on Somalia: Ethiopia

ADDIS ABBABA (BBC): Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has said that his country "does not wish any harm" on neighbouring Somalia. His comments in parliament came after Somalia accused landlocked Ethiopia of trying to annex part of its territory to gain access to the sea. Last month, Ethiopia struck a controversial deal with the breakaway republic of Somaliland.

Somaliland, which Somalia sees as part of its territory, agreed to lease a stretch of coastline to Ethiopia. Somalia described the agreement as an act of aggression and President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud called on youths "to prepare for the defence of our country". He also said that he would only talk to Ethiopia if the deal was withdrawn. Protests against the deal have also been held in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, with tens of thousands of people turning up to express their opposition.

He went on to blame "some forces [for] trying to incite conflict between the two nations". But he also continued to talk about access to the sea arguing that it would benefit the

whole region. Mr Abiy had previously described sea access as an "existential issue" for his country. On 1 January, he signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi. An MoU is a statement of intent rather than a legally binding agreement. As part of the deal, Somaliland said it was ready to grant Ethiopia access to the sea for commercial traffic through a port. It also said it could lease a section of the coast to Ethiopia's navy. In return, Somaliland said that Ethiopia would recognise its independence, but this has not been confirmed by Addis Ababa. Somaliland, a former British protectorate, declared itself independent from Somalia in 1991 and has all the trappings of a country, including a working political system, regular elections, a police force and its own currency. But its independence has not been recognised by any country.

Meanwhile, diplomats have tried to calm tensions and said that Somalia's sovereignty over all its territory needs to be recognised. In an apparent move to dampen concerns, Mr Abiy painted a picture to MPs of brotherhood among the neighbours, despite a devastating war between the two countries in the 1970s. "The people of Ethiopia and Somalia are bound by blood. Many Ethiopians have died for the peace of Somalia," he said, seemingly referring to the Ethiopian forces that have backed Somalia's government in its fight with armed Islamist group al-Shabab. "Therefore, the friendship between the two countries is profound," Mr Abiy added.

He went on to blame "some forces [for] trying to incite conflict between the two nations". But he also continued to talk about access to the sea arguing that it would benefit the

## UN envoy in Iraq to step down at end of May

BAGHDAD: The head of the United Nations political mission in Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, has told the Security Council she expects to step down at the end of May, adding the country was "on a knife edge". The former Dutch defence minister was appointed by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in late 2018. The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq aims to advance inclusive political dialogue and helps coordinate humanitarian and development aid.

"For Iraq to further continue on its path of stability and progress, an enabling environment will prove essential. And, such an environment requires restraint from all sides," Hennis-Plasschaert told the 15-member Security Council. Iran-aligned groups, known collectively as the "Axis of Resistance", have been waging attacks against Israeli and US targets from Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and Syria, since Israel began its war in Gaza following the Hamas attack

on October 7.

Washington responded with attacks in a cycle of escalating violence that Iraqi officials said threatened to undo progress towards stabilising the country after decades of conflict. "While we are, of course, aware that many authorities and actors seek to limit further escalation, it is clear that the situation remains volatile. Iraq - indeed, the wider region - remain on a knife-edge, with the tiniest miscalculation threatening a major conflagration," Hennis-Plasschaert said. There was an "urgent need to cease attacks, be they originating from within or outside" of Iraq, she said, adding, "And, as stated many times in past years, this must include reining in armed actors operating outside state control."

Security Council permanent members Russia and China have criticised the US for its recent air raids on targets in Iraq and Syria. The two countries accused Washington of raising the risk of regional escalation at

a meeting of the Security Council. Moscow claimed that the US decision to launch the attacks was linked to the upcoming presidential election in November. Russia had requested the council meeting after the US launched dozens of attacks against Iran-aligned targets in Iraq and Syria. The raids followed a drone attack on a US base in Jordan that killed three soldiers. The US air raids, which killed more than a dozen people, including civilians, demonstrate Washington's complete disregard for international law, Moscow's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said. He accused the US of seeking to draw Middle Eastern powers, including Iran, into a regional conflict. The United States invaded Iraq and toppled leader Saddam Hussein in 2003, precipitating years of rebellion and fighting among Iraq's ethnic and religious groups. It withdrew its troops in 2011, but sent thousands back after ISIL's surge into the country three years later. — Aljazeera

## Colombia extends cease fire with National Liberation Army

BOGOTA (AP): Colombia's government and the nation's largest remaining guerrilla group have extended by six months a ceasefire that began last year, with the National Liberation Army rebels also promising to stop kidnapping civilians for ransom. The truce was set to expire. But in a brief statement issued just minutes before midnight, both sides said that they have extended the cease-fire for 180 days.

The statement says the National Liberation Army, known by its Spanish acronym ELN, will "temporarily and unilaterally suspend economic detentions" in order to contribute to the cease-fire. Both sides published a more detailed statement about the cease-fire extension. In it they said they had agreed to create a website about the peace talks and that children under 15 would not be used to conduct intelligence operations or other kinds of military activities.

Government officials said they were pleased with the new terms of the cease-

fire. "Many of the peace deals that have been signed in this country have had little impact on the ground," Otty Patiño, Colombia's peace commissioner, told local radio station Blu. "It is very important to work on territorial peace." Colombia's government and the ELN have been holding peace talks since late 2022 as President Gustavo Petro tries to pacify several armed groups that weren't part of a 2016 peace deal between the government and the nation's main rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. A cease-fire between the government and ELN started in August, and has reduced fighting between both sides. But during the truce, the rebels also have been recruiting teenagers, and financing their operations through extortion and kidnappings, leading to complaints that the cease-fire hasn't done enough to improve security for civilians in rural areas.

"The ceasefire has reduced the number of battles between the ELN and

the government," said Elizabeth Dickinson, a Colombia analyst for the International Crisis Group. "But violence in Colombia has long come from combats between illegal groups, and from the pressure they exert on civilians." In October, the cease-fire almost broke down when an ELN detachment in northern Colombia kidnapped the parents of Luis Diaz, one of the nation's most beloved soccer players. Diaz's mother was quickly rescued by police, while his father was released 12 days later following numerous protests and petitions. The rebel group has been reluctant to disclose how many hostages it is currently holding, though Colombia's defense ministry has said that the ELN could be holding at least 38 civilians. The new ceasefire agreement did not specify whether the ELN's current hostages would be released, sparking complaints from critics of president Petro, who have accused his administration of being too soft on the

rebels. Jose Jaime Uscategui, a congressman for the conservative Democratic Center Party, tied himself to the front gate of Colombia's embassy in Cuba, carrying the photos of civilians who are reportedly being held by the ELN.

"The families of these people demand to know what happened to their loved ones," Uscategui said. The rebels have asked the government to provide them with alternate ways to finance their operations, while talks continue to take place. The government has denied that request, but agreed to create a fund through which activities related to the peace talks will be financed, including the delivery of humanitarian aid to areas affected by the conflict and "educational activities" that will inform communities about the peace talks. The cease-fire statement said that the conditions under which the rebels will cease kidnappings will continue to be discussed in an upcoming round of talks in April.

## NZ calls on Papua rebels to release pilot kidnapped a year ago

WELLINGTON: New Zealand has called for the immediate release of pilot Phillip Mehrtens who was taken captive by fighters in Indonesia's troubled Papua province a year ago. Mehrtens, who was flying a single-propeller plane for Indonesia's Susi Air, was snatched from his aircraft on February 7 last year by a group of fighters from the West Papua National Liberation Army (TPN-PB) who said he would only be released if Papua was given its independence.

The group, led by regional commander Elias Kogoya, later released images and videos showing Mehrtens surrounded by rebels - some armed with guns and others with bows and arrows - in remote forested areas. New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters said the New Zealander had been providing "vital air links and supplies to remote

communities" at the time he was kidnapped.

"We strongly urge those holding Phillip to release him immediately and without harm. His continued detention serves the interests of no one," Peters said in a statement to mark a year since the pilot was taken. The incident in the remote highlands region of Nduga, one of the most restive areas of the province, drew renewed attention to one of the world's least-known and longest-running conflicts. Papua, whose people are ethnically Melanesian, occupies the western half of the island of New Guinea - just 200km (124 miles) north of Australia - and shares a land border with Papua New Guinea (PNG). A low-level battle for independence has been under way since Indonesia took control of the resource-rich former Dutch colony after a controversial referendum in 1969. Peters said New

Zealand had been working with Indonesian authorities and others towards securing Phillip's release. "Let me be absolutely clear," he said. "There can never be any justification for hostage taking." Peters's statement came after the TPN-PB, the armed wing of the Free Papua Movement (OPM), said they had asked Kogoya to release Mehrtens, although they gave no time-frame for when that might happen. "We plan to proceed with the release based on humanity," TPN-PB spokesperson Sebby Sambom was quoted as saying by the Associated Press news agency.

"We believed that most Australians and New Zealanders support Papua's independence," he added. "We don't want to be blamed by international community if the pilot dies while he is being held hostage by our fighters," Peters said. Mehrtens had been able to

contact some friends and family before Christmas and had assured them that he was well. New Zealand was "exploring all avenues" to bring the pilot home, he added. Indonesia deployed police and soldiers into the highland district in an attempt to rescue Mehrtens shortly after he was taken captive and there have been a number of clashes since. Outsiders, including foreign journalists, international organisations and diplomats require special permission from Jakarta to visit the region, which is the location of one of the world's largest gold and copper deposits. There has been a surge in violence in Papua since 2018 when rebels killed 24 Indonesian men who were building a major new road to connect the coast with the highlands. United Nations human rights experts have expressed concern about the deteriorating situation. — Aljazeera

## Spain says over 1,000 migrants reached its Canary Islands in 3 days

MADRID (AP): More than 1,000 migrants from sub-Saharan countries arrived in Spain's Canary Islands in 18 boats over the past three days, Spain's marine rescue service said. A body was found in one of the boats.

The archipelago off northwest Africa has seen a surge in migrant arrivals in recent weeks as more people from West Africa attempt the dangerous journey. Officials say 7,270 migrants arrived

in January, about as many as in the first six months of 2023. Most of the boats depart from Mauritania. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will visit the West African country on Thursday to encourage authorities to try to curtail the departures.

Spain and the European Union have cooperation

agreements with both Mauritania and neighboring Senegal to try to reduce the number of migrants arriving on the islands. But some young people insist on taking their chances and say there are few opportunities and sometimes political turmoil at home. Spain's interior ministry says a record 55,618 migrants arrived by boat - most of them in the Canary Islands - last year, almost double the number of

the previous year. The Spanish non-profit organization Caminando Fronteras (Walking Borders) says more than 6,600 migrants died while trying to reach Spain by boat last year, most of them on the Atlantic route. The figure is more than double the number reported by the organization for 2022. Caminando Fronteras says it compiles its own figures from families of migrants and rescue statistics.



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## PIA, from privatization to restructuring

**T**HE Federal Cabinet on Tuesday approved the restructuring of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) on the recommendation of the Privatization Division. Earlier the cabinet approved the appointment of a financial advisor for financial and administrative restructuring of the airline. According to the details, the financial advisor had formulated a financial restructuring plan for the PIA in line with international precedents under which the airline will be divided into two companies, Top-Co and Hold-Co. As said, PIA's core operations of engineering, ground handling, cargo, flight kitchen and training will be incorporated into Top-Co while other entities such as Precision Engineering Complex, PIA Investment Limited, and others subsidiaries and properties will be incorporated in Hold-Co. The authorities claimed that these measures will help attract capital investors to PIA. The cabinet also directed the cabinet sub-committee on Privatization to deal with the matters related to settlement of state-owned enterprises with PIA on an urgent basis.

The Pakistan International Airline (PIA) succumbed to the heavy burden of its operational losses due to the idle running of its planes on domestic routes, overemployment, unskilled technical staff, unions/ associations pressure groups, and colossal enumeration of the PIA's flying and the ground staff. The PIA fleet consists of foreign leased, poorly maintained Boeing 737 and Airbus A320s, a majority of whom completed their operational lives, and are badly due for replacement. At the moment, the national flag carrier needs bulk money for maintenance and operation, to pay for fuel and to disburse salaries to its employees. However, this was not the first time, that the airline struck such the worst economic and technical challenges but it has been a repeated dilemma met by the institution every year over the past three decades.

There had been a nationwide debate regarding the privatization of the PIA, because the national flag carrier persistently faced operational losses and became dependent on government funding to carry out its routine operations and debt payment. Previously, the caretaker government told the nation that the Privatization Commission was fully prepared to privatize the PIA, and all legal and administrative formalities have been fulfilled. As said, the Commission liaised with several relevant departments including the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), and the ministries of education, law, and finance Division to ensure transparency and fulfill constitutional obligations regarding the PIA privatization. The privatization process was underway that the ECP warned the interim government about its lack of mandate to undertake such a sensitive and huge task of national importance. The caretaker leaders suddenly changed their Qibla and ordered an immediate financial restructuring of the PIA.

There are wide-ranging doubts and ambiguity regarding the government's policy on PIA's privatization which has taken a U-turn and announced a financial restructuring of the PIA instead of privatization. Whether the interim government was taking those important steps without necessary homework and consultations with relevant institutions or the forces of the status quo and corrupt mafia succeeded in their nefarious agenda against the state. During these pages, we categorically stated that numerous pros and cons are attached to the privatization of an important national entity in terms of financial aspects, security issues, foreign investment and efficient public service delivery vis-a-vis potential joblessness, employees' rights, lack of government control and public welfare. Whereas, any misstep can cause further damage to the country.

Apparently, Financial restructuring could not be an alternative to the privatization of a sicked entity and it can not resolve PIA's problems until and unless the government makes it a total sovereign business firm, ends political interference, bans labour unions and other professional pressure groups and launches a ruthless accountability campaign against corrupt and unskilled employees. The Chairman, the CEO and the Board of Governors must be answerable for their performance and actions to the parliamentary committee. So, this important national institution comes out of recurrent ailment, successfully steers through these critical situations and regains its lost glory in the future.

## Pakistan cricket's new chairman

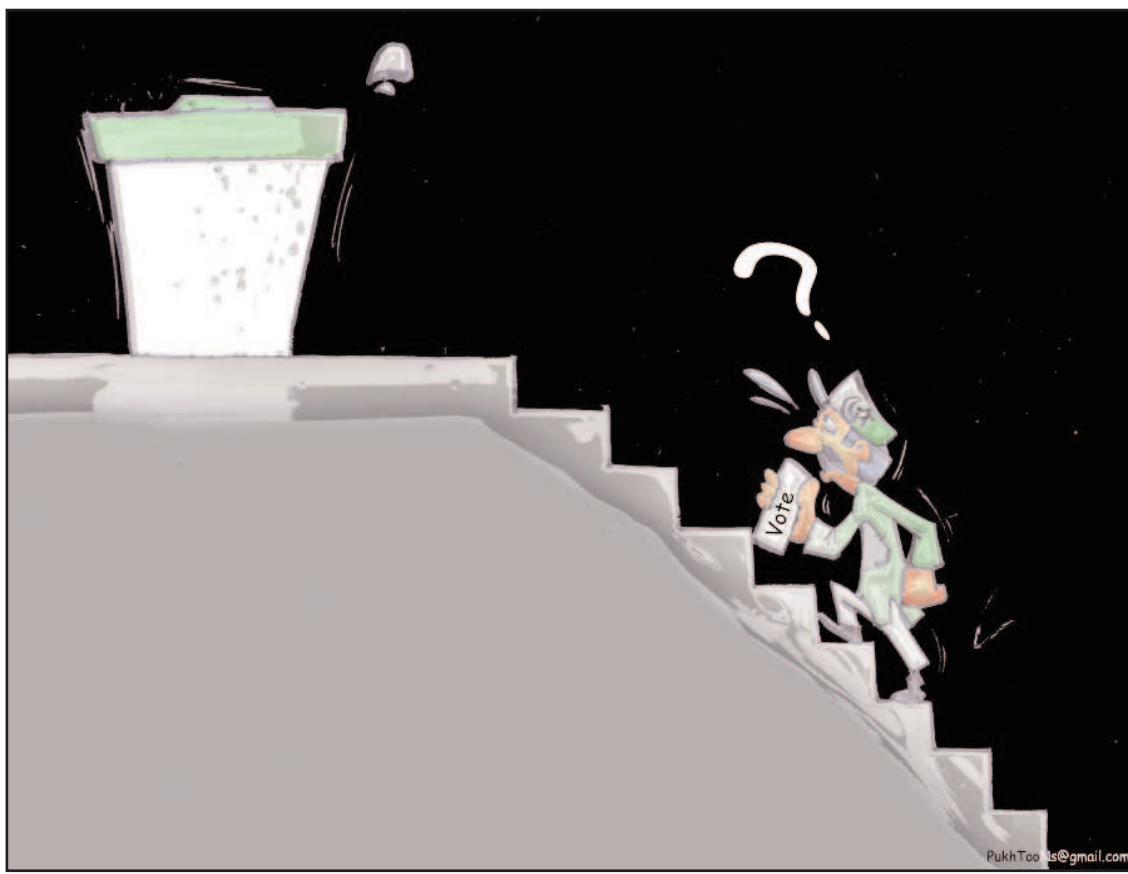
**T**HE Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has recently informed the nation that the Interim Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has been elected unanimously and unopposed as 37th Chairman of the PCB for a three-year term. Meanwhile, Mr. Naqvi demonstrated utmost interest in the new position and assumed charge of the PCB's Chairman on the very first day. The new board chairman held important meetings with the Chief Selector and Chief Operating Officer and discussed future plans to raise the morale of the team and steer Pakistan Cricket from the prevailing crises.

The white dove sat on the head of Mr. Naqvi after the Punjab government was dissolved last year that paved the way for his appointment as caretaker Chief Minister Punjab. Meanwhile, delimitation process and delay in election further prolonged his stay in Chief Minister house Lahore. After assuming responsibility of the Chief administrator, the Media Tycoon invested heavily in public work, renovated religious shrines, constructed roads and cemented streets along with serving family and friends. The political analysts were hoping for a big role for Naqvi in the next political setup because of his talent and links with bureaucracy. However, the man with no experience and least knowledge/expertise in cricket management used his influence and secured the top job in the PCB. The former Chairman PCB Zaka Ashraf stepped down on January 19, whereas Naqvi was not only appointed as member governing body but made its Chairman in a short span of time.

It is the bad luck of Pakistan cricket that Mohsin Naqvi marks the fourth individual to hold the position of Pakistan Cricket Board chairman in the past four years, after Ramiz Raja, Najam Sethi and Zaka Ashraf. Pakistan is the sole nation in the world where no talent, expertise or professional skills are needed to reach top positions, just links with power corridors and relation with rulers is the only criteria in the country. Pakistan cricket faces serious challenges at domestic level in respect of on merit team selection, inter board rivalry and maintenance of code of conduct within the institution. The country faces serious challenges at the ICC, and could not host any major cricket event in the past two decades. Although Naqvi and his supporters have achieved their agenda, it is uncertain whether Pakistan cricket and cricket lovers will gain some vigor from this appointment or the status quo will prevail in the coming years.

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## It's been a year since earthquake and Syrians feel forgotten once again

Rasha Muhrez

**W**HEN the earthquakes hit Turkey and Syria last year, claiming more than 50,000 lives, the question in the minds of many Syrians, myself included, was: "Could things get any worse?" Unfortunately, things did get worse.

The majority of Syrians affected by the earthquake have not been able to move on from the devastation. I see this in my own family. My 16-year-old cousin Naya has been unable to get over losing her sister - my 18-year-old cousin Maya - who was killed along with four other family members when our family home in Jableh collapsed. Her relentless grief is apparent in the steady stream of social media posts of all-black images and broken-heart emojis. On the earthquake anniversary, she wrote: "It's been a year, Mimi, and you are far away from us. We miss your voice. We miss your laugh. We miss you so much. There is nothing in the world to compensate for your absence from us."

We often ask ourselves if our loved ones could have been saved, if only the rescue teams had arrived on time, if only the world had not turned its back on Syrians, if only the war had never happened. My cousins' bodies were still warm when they were taken out of the rubble. The earthquake ravaged an already suffering population. Syrians lost family members, homes, livelihoods, the little sense of stability they may have had amid the continuing war. Over the past year, the number of Syrians requiring humanitarian assistance has surged from 15.3 million to 16.7 million, the highest since the start of hostilities about 13 years ago. And yet, the greater need has not been met with adequate funding; to the contrary, contributions have dwindled.

As humanitarian workers, we are told to prioritise - that is to make impossible choices. If the situation does not change, I fear there will be catastrophic consequences for Syrian children. Since the earthquake, the country has faced a number of challenges that have only exacerbated the situation, including renewed conflict, a severe economic crisis, and climate change-related disasters.

The most significant escalation in conflict in the past five years hit northern Syria in October, killing and injuring dozens and displacing at least 120,000 in opposition-held northwest Syria. Airstrikes in southern and central Syria in January have posed additional threats. The ongoing economic crisis, worsened by sanctions, has made life unbearable for ordinary Syrians. In 2023, the Syrian currency lost nearly 60 percent of its value to the dol-

**Many areas hit by the earthquake had been focal points of conflict in the last five years. The earthquake devastated communities already struggling to cope. It impacted people already at breaking point - mentally, physically and financially.**

lar. This was accompanied by skyrocketing inflation which transformed basic necessities into luxuries. A staggering 90 percent of households struggled to cover essential needs, leaving families to make tough decisions for their children. "We are barely surviving... everything has become expensive," said Zaina\*, a mother of six, living in an informal camp in Raqqa supported by Save the Children.

"I light a fire with wood, turning it into cinders [and bring it inside the tent to keep my children warm]. You know, it smokes a lot and it impacts their health," she told Save the Children staff. "If you go to the doctor, he says it is because of the smoke. Either smoke or cold. We do not know what to do." Too many families, like Zaina's, face the agonising reality - deciding between the health of their children and heating their homes. It's an impossible choice amid a harsh winter.

The freezing cold came after a scorching hot summer marked by erratic rainfall, which triggered devastating wildfires across the country in July, affecting 73 villages and around 50,000 people. Many children, like my cousin Naya, are reeling from the double blow of conflict and earthquakes. Returning to school after the loss of her sister, she has few avenues for support.

There's almost no mental health support available for young people, despite

almost 70 percent of children struggling with sadness, according to a survey by Save the Children. Around one-third of Syrian households have children showing signs of mental distress, the UN reported. Over half of healthcare workers, including qualified mental health professionals, have left the country over the past decade.

"I still feel the ground shaking," one eight-year-old boy in northern Syria told our staff, "It's not just

ting the Syrian people. Following the tragic deaths in my family, I addressed the UN Security Council last year urging the international community to use the earthquakes as a moment to reevaluate its approach to Syria.

As both a Syrian and a humanitarian, I warned that the earthquake could push the country to the brink, leaving the next generation heavily dependent on aid.

I asked whether simply keeping children alive, without addressing the root cause of the humanitarian crisis would be enough. We urgently need to do things differently, but change is yet to come.

The path forward remains clear - we need to restore basic services in Syria. Beyond rehabilitating damaged or dilapidated infrastructure, we need to create safe spaces and schools for children, train teachers and pay them properly. We need investment in sustainable projects focused on helping parents to access jobs that pay a decent wage, supporting farming so people are less reliant on food assistance, and reinforcing health systems so children can grow up healthy. We have to ensure that children and their families can access proper mental health support so they can cope with everything they have been forced to endure.

Right now, there's nowhere near enough funding or support to achieve any of this. Our work as humanitarians has never been harder. We need not only financial assistance, but also the space and security to operate and create change on the ground. We simply cannot keep doing the same things, with fewer resources and expect to see better outcomes for children. The world is of course a more fragile place today than it was a year ago, and Syria is among a growing number of countries grappling with multiple crises.

But the international community has a responsibility to ensure that all children, wherever they are, can grow up in safety, dignity and hope. Only through collective action, sustained support, and a commitment to meaningful change can we hope to build a better future for Syria. As we remember the earthquakes that shook our world, let us not forget the ongoing struggle of the Syrian people.

Yi Xin

stretches across thousands of miles.

As the curtains rise on Act II, we find ourselves in the surreal landscape of immigration detention centers. According to the US Department of Homeland Security, in fiscal year 2023, more than 131,000 non-citizen detainees were housed at 19 "designated facilities" throughout the nation, where the US presents a circus of open-air facilities that resemble summer camps. Undocumented families are treated to a spectacle of barbed wire, chain-link fences and the dulcet tones of immigration officers singing "Welcome to the Land of the Free."

The US brilliantly manages to turn detention into a scenic retreat, complete with caged enclosures for the little ones. It's a circus where the acrobatics of legal processes defy gravi-

ty, leaving detainees in the midst of extreme uncertainty. Recently, those detained in a for-profit detention center in Washington filed hundreds of complaints, yet inspectors have repeatedly been denied entry into it. The US seems to be proclaiming itself as an upholder of human rights while juggling the delicate balance between concerns of all sorts and humanitarian principles.

This act features the guest (or temporary) worker program, a comedic routine where foreign labor is invited to dance a temporary jig on the US stage. The US opens its doors to foreign workers with a wink and a nod, only to ask them to leave when the next round of workers is readily available.

This is a fast-food approach to immigration - order some cheap labor, no questions asked. In most

## Psychology of Israeli genocide in Gaza

Ramzy Baroud

**I**t seemed strange, if not out of context, when Israeli politician Moshe Feiglin said in a TV interview that "Muslims are not afraid of us anymore." Feiglin made this comment on Oct. 25, less than three weeks after the Palestinian Al-Aqsa Flood operation and the start of the genocidal Israeli war that followed.

The former Knesset member, who in 2012 challenged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the leadership of the Likud party, proposed in the same interview that, in order for Muslims' fear to be restored, the Israeli military had to turn "Gaza to ashes immediately."

Feiglin perceives Gaza as something much larger than 365 sq. km of land. He understands, rightly, that the war is not just about firepower but also perceptions - and not only those of Gazans, Palestinians and Arabs, but all Muslims as well.

The events of Oct. 7 exposed Israel as an essentially weak and vulnerable state, thus conveying the idea to Arabs and Muslims - and, in fact, the rest of the world - that the perceived power of Israel's "invincible army" is nothing but an illusion.

Currently, the problem of perception is Israel's greatest challenge. Feiglin expressed this dichotomy in his usual far-right, extremist language, but even the most "liberal" of Israel's leaders shares his anxiety.

When Israeli President Isaac Herzog, for example, declared on Oct. 16 that there are no innocent civilians in Gaza, he was not only preparing his society and Israel's American and Western allies for one of the greatest acts of military revenge known in history. He also wanted to restore fear in the hearts of Israel's perceived enemies.

In a more recent statement, former Shin Bet chief Carmi Gillon last week asserted that Palestinians will not be able to carry out another Oct. 7-like attack. Gillon's comments could easily be mistaken for a rational military assessment. But this cannot be the case, simply because Israel failed miserably to prevent the Al-Aqsa Flood operation in the first place.

Gillon was speaking of psychology. In his mind, the war on Gaza has always been one of revenge; one that aimed at extracting the very idea of standing up to Israel from the collective mind of the Palestinians.

To understand the relationship between Israel's existence and the power - or the perception of power - of its military, one must examine the early political discourse of Zionism, Israel's founding ideology. Netanyahu's Likud Party is the direct heir of the right-wing - in fact, fascistic - ideology that was largely articulated by early Zionist thinker Vladimir Jabotinsky. Though Jabotinsky's political view was deeply nationalistic, his ideas ultimately branched into, or at least inspired, the ideological school of religious Zionism. Unlike more liberal-leaning Zionists of that era, Jabotinsky was straightforward regarding Zionism's intentions and ultimate objectives in Palestine.

"There can be no voluntary agreement between ourselves and the Palestine

Arabs. Not now, nor in the prospective future," he wrote in "The Iron Wall" in 1923, adding: "If you wish to colonize a land in which people are already living, you must provide a garrison on your behalf."

For Jabotinsky, it all came down to this maxim: "Zionism is a colonizing adventure and therefore it stands or falls by the question of armed force." Since then, Israel has continued to invest in building "iron walls," real or imagined. Jabotinsky's iron wall was a symbolic one. His was an impenetrable fortress of military power, cemented through violence and the relentless subjugation of the natives, which is designed for the purpose of their expulsion.

The fact that Israeli ministers and other leading politicians began advancing plans for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza immediately after Oct. 7 indicates that Zionism has never abandoned those early ideas. Indeed, the genocidal language in Israel is older than the state itself.

But if Jabotinsky were still alive, he would be utterly ashamed of his descendants. They have allowed their personal interests to trump their vigilance in keeping the Palestinians caged in, crushed by an ever-expanding iron wall. Instead, the wall was breached, physically, on Oct. 7 and psychologically ever since. While physical damage can be easily repaired, psychological damage is hard to fix.

The ongoing genocide in Gaza is a desperate Israeli attempt to raise the costs for Palestinian resistance, so that it may ultimately reach the conclusion that resistance is, indeed, futile. This is unlikely to work. But can Israel reimplant fear in the collective heart of the Palestinian people? And why is such fear a prerequisite for Israel's survival?

Peace "will only be achieved when the hope of the Arabs to establish an Arab state on the ruins of the Jewish state is dashed," Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich posted on social media last week. Even though the "Arabs" are not calling for the destruction of anyone, Smotrich believes that the very idea of a Palestinian state will automatically lead to the destruction of the Zionist fantasy of racial purity. Note how the Israeli politician did not speak of the Arab political discourse, but rather of Arab "hope." It is a different way of saying that the problem is the collective perception of Palestinians and Arabs that justice in Palestine is possible.

This time around, Israel is adopting an even more extreme version of Jabotinsky's iron wall strategy because its ruling class truly believes that, in the words of Netanyahu, the country "is in the midst of a fight for (its) existence." By "existence," Netanyahu is referencing Israel's ability to maintain its status of racist, supremacist, settler-colonial expansion and monopoly over violence. Israel calls this deterrence. Many countries and legal experts around the world refer to it as genocide. In truth, even this genocide will hardly change the new perception that Palestinians have the kind of agency that will allow them to not only fight back, but ultimately to win.

## US immigration policy: A masterpiece of tragicomedy

**I**N the grand theater of the United States' foreign policy, where insincerity takes center stage and contradictions perform a ballet of confusion, the US immigration policy stands out as a masterpiece of paradox. A jumble of inconsistency and mixed signals, their immigration policy is a tour de force that leaves observers scratching their heads and would-be immigrants caught in a bewildering dance.

The US prides itself on being a nation of immigrants. Self-styled as "a beacon of opportunity and hope", the nation has a long history of letting in people from Latin American countries, with Mexicans representing the largest group of immigrants for decades. A former US president observed: "The basic idea of welcoming immigrants to our shores is central to our way of life - it is in our DNA."

Yet his successor paved the path to the presidency with the promise of a "big, beautiful wall" along the US border with Mexico. During Iowa's Republican caucuses late last month, immigration remained a top issue. A survey found about 9 in 10 caucus-goers backed building a wall, with about 7 in 10 expressing strong support for the idea.

This would raise the eyebrows of even an imaginative playwright. The US seems to be unfurling a welcome mat and erecting a border wall at the same time. Picture this: sending a grand invitation that beckons those yearning to "breathe free", while building towering walls that shout "Sorry, not everyone is welcome!" Immigrants are invited to a masquerade ball where they are welcome to dance as long as they don't mind a few hurdles, such as traversing a fortress-like structure that

stretches across thousands of miles.

As the curtains rise on Act II, we find ourselves in the surreal landscape of immigration detention centers. According to the US Department of Homeland Security, in fiscal year 2023, more than 131,000 non-citizen detainees were housed at 19 "designated facilities" throughout the nation, where the US presents a circus of open-air facilities that resemble summer camps. Undocumented families are treated to a spectacle of barbed wire, chain-link fences and the dulcet tones of immigration officers singing "Welcome to the Land of the Free."

The US brilliantly manages to turn detention into a scenic retreat, complete with caged enclosures for the little ones. It's a circus where the acrobatics of legal processes defy gravi-

cases, workers will never get the chance to become green card-holders or naturalized citizens. Forget about the tired cliché of the American Dream, just enjoy an American Nap: fill those low-wage jobs with your warm bodies, work hard, pay taxes and then, poof, back to your home country. A classic hedge-podge of contradictions - inviting people to contribute to the economy while making sure they never get too cozy in the American living room.

In addition, there is no shortage of examples of exploitation and abuse under the program. This is because visas bind guest workers to a sole "employer-sponsor" with no flexibility to switch jobs. As such, the worker's ability to acquire and maintain legal status in the US is entirely contingent upon maintaining a "positive" relationship with their employer. This system enables employers

to view workers as commodities that can be conveniently discarded if they fail to comply with demands or for any arbitrary reason whatsoever.

In the grand finale, the audience is left waiting for the punch line that never lands. The irony is thick, the contradictions abundant and the spectacle perplexing. As we exit the theater of immigration absurdity, one cannot help but wonder if the US immigration policy is a tragicomedy intended to amuse, sadden and baffle. Perhaps, in the next act, the US could opt for a more coherent script that aligns with its status as a "beacon", i.e. adopt a policy that reflects the complexity of migration while respecting the dignity of those yearning for a better life. Until then, this masterpiece of paradox will continue its enigmatic performance, leaving the rest of the world in a state of bewilderment.



# Cutting off UNRWA funding is immoral and damaging

Yossi Mekelberg

**I**N times of war, the tactic of deflecting from your own wrongdoings by highlighting others' shortcomings is as old as conflict itself. During the last week, Israel's PR machine has been focused on the organization that has, for the last 75 years, been in charge of providing humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees residing in the Middle East.

Israel's anger in the face of the expose that 12 UN Relief and Works Agency employees were directly involved in the Oct. 7 Hamas massacre is understandable and justified. To say that there has not been a more embarrassing and damaging revelation in this organization's history would be stating the very obvious. But the call to defund UNRWA, and the support for this call voiced by some governments, is a knee-jerk reaction that amounts to a betrayal of the many Palestinian victims of both the current and previous wars in their time of most desperate need.

Had Israel's out-of-control assaults against UNRWA begun with the revelation that some of the latter's employees were among those who carried out Hamas' Oct. 7 terrorist attack, or in its aftermath helped to hide the hostages taken, there might have been some sympathy for Israel's lashing out. However, the current situation comes on the back of years of venomous accusations, many of them baseless.

The organization has been attacked for its very existence, for allegedly being in cahoots with terrorists, for perpetuating the Palestinian refugee tragedy, for being corrupt, for not being good value for its funders and for being generally anti-Israeli. It has been made a scapegoat for the political failure - for which Israel is largely responsible - to bring about an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including a satis-

factory solution to the plight and legal status of the refugees.

Nothing can excuse the participation of any UN employee in an act of terrorism and, in this case, the response from UNRWA's leadership has been entirely correct. Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini immediately announced: "To protect the agency's ability to deliver humanitarian assistance, I have taken the decision to immediately terminate the contracts of these staff members and launch an investigation in order to establish the truth without delay."

This is what should be expected of the organization, although its response was based on information given by the Israelis and before the completion of its own internal investigation. But for both moral and practical reasons, I can only imagine the shock and dismay of both those in charge of UNRWA and across the UN system at the news of the involvement of a number of its people in the Oct. 7 attack.

The immediate calculated hysterics demonstrated by Israeli spokespersons in calling for the defunding of UNRWA, given Israel's long-held hostility to the agency, was only to be expected. But Israel appears confused about who exactly it is fighting in Gaza: Is it Hamas or is it those humanitarian workers who risk their lives in doing their very best to provide shelter, medical help, food, water and, yes, some dignity for those who were already refugees and now have been displaced once more by this horrific war?

Let us also for a moment allow some figures to provide us with a little perspective. UNRWA employs about 13,000 Palestinians in Gaza, out of its 30,000-strong workforce across the region. Most of them are

refugees. According to Israeli intelligence's own dossier, 190 of them are Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad operatives and 1,200 have "links" to these organizations. The latter could mean anything (or absolutely nothing), such as one or more family members or friends possibly being members of these groups, which on its own is no reason not to employ them.

If the Israeli dossier is accurate, they represent a tiny proportion of UNRWA's workforce. This issue needs to be addressed, certainly, but it is hardly a reason for nine countries, including the US, the UK and Canada, to pause their funding to the agency at the worst possible time for the Gazan people.

Neither Israel nor those who have decided to stop funding UNRWA have mentioned that 152 of its humanitarian workers have already been killed during this war or that many of them are among the 1.7 million other Gazan people displaced, which amounts to more than three-quarters of the population. Some of the displaced have been forced to move several times as a result of Israel's relentless bombardments and ground attacks and, despite constantly running out of capacity, UNRWA's facilities and aid remain their only hope.

Behind the severity of Israel's accusations against a few of the agency's people is hidden a much broader agenda, one which is the real source of so much Israeli venom aimed at UNRWA. Israel would like to see the refugee issue just disappear into thin air. The very existence of UNRWA is an inconvenient reminder of the issue of Palestinian refugees and of Israel's role in creating it in the first place - and for leaving it unresolved ever since.

The people of Gaza will remain in Gaza after the war ends, whether Israel recognizes them or not. Many more are now refugees and further displaced. There is an international responsibility to protect them and provide them with humanitarian aid.

Israel's call to defund UNRWA is one of the longest-running bluffs in its policies toward the Palestinians. Because were UNRWA to be dismantled, it is Israel, as the occupying country, that would be responsible for the refugees' well-being, at least in the West Bank and Gaza. And if they are deprived of medical services, education, financial help and shelter, the anger will be first and foremost directed at Israel, and not without justification.

Moreover, the demise of UNRWA would mean the loss of thousands of jobs for refugees, with all the implications attached to such a development, let alone the fact that those are the people likely to become the very backbone of a future independent Palestinian state. And in other host countries, the defunding of UNRWA will only serve as a further destabilizing factor in a region already on the brink of widespread armed conflict.

The need for UNRWA to discipline those among them who have brought the organization into disrepute is indisputable. However, to punish the entire agency - and thus the recipients of its humanitarian services - is immoral and immensely damaging. It will only condemn millions of innocent people to more misery and suffering, which cannot be justified. And for those who want UNRWA to disappear, here is your challenge: please come up with a viable alternative that does not compromise the well-being of millions of refugees and their just aspiration for self-determination living side by side with Israel.

Arab News

# Trump's immunity defeat isn't setback it seems to be

Michael Conway

**T**HE federal appeals court ruling Tuesday that former President Donald Trump is not immune from prosecution for alleged crimes he committed during his presidency is a historic decision that allows for the case being made against him for his role in the January 6 insurrection to move forward.

However, it would be wrong to mistake the decision as a clear-cut victory for efforts to try Trump before Election Day. In fact, the timing of the ruling only increases the likelihood that Trump's strategy of delaying the outcome of this criminal trial beyond November will succeed. The Circuit Court of Appeals in DC took 28 days since hearing oral argument to issue its unanimous decision rejecting Trump's immunity claim, a timeframe that could have been much shorter if the court had acted faster. Now, when combined with the methods Trump can employ to further appeal the case, dragging the proceedings out past the fall is highly likely. (Trump has denied any wrongdoing.)

However, even greater responsibility for allowing Trump's strategy the prospect of success lies at the doorstep of the US Supreme Court rather than at the appellate court. In December, special counsel Jack Smith petitioned the Supreme Court for a direct review of Trump's claim of absolute immunity from prosecution to avoid the delay of an appellate review. The court rejected the request, putting its heavy thumb on the scales of justice: By ducking an immediate ruling on Trump's sketchy immunity claim, as well as his shaky double jeopardy defenses, the high court has provided detours that will make it hard to complete Trump's criminal trial in DC by Election Day and give voters clarity on his actions before they enter the voting booth.

No crystal ball is needed to reach this conclusion. The federal appellate panel rejected Trump's defense that he is immune from prosecution for his actions while president, writing, "We cannot accept former President Trump's claim that a President has unbounded authority to commit crimes that would neutralize the most fundamental check on executive

power - the recognition and implementation of election results."

Yet following Trump's appellate loss, his lawyers can ask the three-judge panel to rehear the appeal or to have their ruling reviewed by all authorized judges in that court - known as a rehearing en banc. While these longshot tactics have scant prospect of overturning the immunity ruling, they will engender additional delay. Yet that delay could be trivial compared to what comes next. The law permits Trump's lawyers to stall up to 90 days before filing a petition asking the Supreme Court to overturn his loss in the court of appeals. If Trump's lawyers take advantage of the full 90 days, that petition would be filed in mid-May or later. To put pressure on Trump's lawyers to act more quickly than that, the appeals court on Tuesday ordered Trump's team to ask the Supreme Court for a stay of the case's proceedings by February 12. Still, if the Supreme Court plans to take up his appeal, it's likely it will grant the stay and give Trump additional time to file his Supreme Court petition, even if the stay is not for the complete 90-day period.

Of course, the Supreme Court could also deny Trump's expected appeal. That would speed up the case considerably and potentially allow for a verdict before November 5. And some justices might wish to avoid adjudicating this issue altogether. But it is risky to the stature of the Supreme Court and its role to pass on reviewing Trump's appeal. If this case about presidential accountability and the rule of law isn't important enough for Supreme Court review, what is? Importantly, the court grants review if only four of the nine justices vote to do so. Given the court's composition, it is easy to see four affirmative votes to hear Trump's appeal.

While it's true that after accepting a case, the Supreme Court can act with dispatch, an appellate process concluding in a Supreme Court ruling would likely last to mid-summer at the earliest - and it could be much later. Meanwhile, all pre-trial activities in the January 6 criminal case pending before District Judge Tanya

Chutkan remain halted. In an order entered last Friday, Chutkan cancelled the original trial date of March 4 and stated a new trial date would be set "if and when" the immunity claims are decided. Chutkan had already concluded in December that, once Trump had appealed her original ruling rejecting his immunity defense, Trump's "appeal automatically stays any further proceedings that would move this case towards trial or impose additional burdens of litigation on Defendant."

The judge reaffirmed that stay on January 18 by adding that, while the appeal is pending, no substantive pretrial motion can be filed without prior court permission. Even if the Supreme Court didn't grant a stay while it considered the case, Chutkan may feel compelled to continue her stay order until the Supreme Court decides whether to hear Trump's appeal. If prosecutors prevail in the Supreme Court, preparations for the criminal trial would resume. But many weeks will likely be needed to allow for essential processing of pretrial motions and jury screening before the actual trial could commence, given the pause on proceedings in December. Chutkan stated in her January 18 order that seven months from indictment to trial allows "sufficient time" for the defense to prepare. Since the case was stayed less than 4.5 months after Trump's indictment, another 11 weeks will be needed to satisfy the judge's criteria.

Then once it starts, the trial will take two to three months. Smith's prosecutors have estimated that they will take four to six weeks to present their January 6 case; Trump's lawyers estimated another four to six weeks for the defense. That would push the jury's deliberations past November 5 if the appeals process is dragged out.

Even if Chutkan were to begin a trial during the final two months of the election campaign, both early voters and Election Day voters would be making their choice without knowing if Trump has been found guilty or not guilty of the January 6 criminal charges. And if Trump is elected president, and with it have the power to stop any proceedings still ongoing, the public could never know.

CNN

# Settler colonialism is not an ‘academic fad’

**P**ALESTINE solidarity activists have claimed their space in mainstream politics and demanded the dismantling of the Israeli settler colonial project. But this has raised a very elementary question: "What is settler colonialism?" Some commentators were quick to dismiss this charge of settler colonialism against Israel as "just another form of anti-Semitism". Others insinuated that "settler colonialism" is nothing but a trendy academic theory conjured up by left-wing academics and activists. But settler colonialism isn't just an academic fad. It's a real political project that has scarred the past and present of Indigenous communities around the world.

A central feature of this project is that it seeks to erase the Indigenous population to make way for the establishment of a settler society. Ideologically, this erasure is seen as justified and inevitable because, for the settler, the Indigenous don't have any distinct peopleness or any historically rooted claim to the land they inhabit. So, when faced with the civilisational, technological and military superiority of the settler state, it is all but expected that the "barbaric" Indigenous society would simply capitulate and "go away". We see this in depictions of clashes between westward settlers and indigenous communities in American folklore. They usually end with the demise of the latter. I saw a similar narrative in the apartheid-era Voortrekker Monument, dedicated to Boer frontierism, outside Pretoria. Exhibits there celebrate the white settler as having brought the "light of civilisation" to the untamed southern African hinterlands.

Somdeep Sen

Israel-Palestine is no different. The ideology of erasure was written into the founding myth of the State of Israel - the myth that Israel was built on "a land without a people for a people without a land". A popular slogan among Zionists, it helped both perpetuate the assumption that the "Holy Land" was virgin territory and characterise Palestinians as not "a people" with a distinct identity, and therefore lacking any legitimate claim to the land. The father of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, outlined his utopian vision for a modern Jewish State in his novel *Altneuland* (The Old-New-Land), where he wrote, "If I wish to substitute a new building for an old one, I must demolish before I construct". Here too, the insinuation was that Palestinians and any sign of their existence on and connection to the land would inevitably be erased by the settler state.

When Israeli geographers drew up their own map of Palestine, they also based their work on the understanding that the Palestinians are "not a people". They were convinced of their incontrovertible right to the "ancestral land" and remapped Palestine in a way that entirely erased all evidence of Indigenous Palestinian presence. Following Hamas' attack on October 7, we have heard Israeli politicians call Palestinians "human animals". They have also demanded that Palestinians "go away" from Gaza and be settled elsewhere. Evidently, the settler-colonial ideology of erasure is alive and well today.

But settler colonialism is not just an ideological force. This ideology of erasure often motivates efforts to materially upend all pil-

lars of Indigenous life and existence. We are witnessing this in Gaza today - and not just in terms of the catastrophic loss of human life. The urge to erase is self-evident in the way all institutions, including universities and hospitals, are being targeted. Israel's war on Gaza seems to be an effort to make it impossible for Palestinians to maintain their existence in the Gaza Strip.

The parallels with the Nakba of 1948 are unmistakable. Oral histories and declassified Israeli government documents have revealed, there was a systematic effort to erase all evidence of Palestinian existence. Israeli military leader and politician Moshe Dayan confirmed as much when he said: "Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages, and I do not blame you because geography books no longer exist-not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either." Of course, such a manner of genocidal violence is commonplace in settler-colonial contexts and accounts for a significant portion of the Indigenous population decline in settler states such as Australia and Canada. Though, the capitulation of Indigenous communities is also a consequence of a process of cultural genocide. This includes the way the church in settler states played an active role in the erasure of Indigenous cultural identity and heritage through the Christianisation of the native population. It also includes the removal of Indigenous children from their families in Canada and Australia. The ostensible purpose was the "protection" of these children. However, in practice, it was a

"civilising" mission meant to annihilate the cultural identity of generations of indigenous children.

Palestinians too face a settler project that aims to annihilate their cultural heritage. This includes the deliberate targeting of archaeological sites in the Gaza Strip. Civil society organisations have argued that this is not an "empty gesture". Rather it is an attempt to strip Palestinians of the "very substance [ie, culture] that forms the backbone of their right to self-determination". The wholesale appropriation of Palestinian cuisine as Israeli, similarly erases key evidence of distinct Palestinian cultural heritage. And when Israeli forces destroy or steal olive trees, they are not just attacking an important source of income. They are also stealing an important symbol of Palestinian resilience. Just like the olive tree that bears fruit despite growing in harsh conditions, the Palestinian national struggle also persists despite the harsh conditions of the occupation and siege. In end, it is important to think about settler colonialism as a tool for better understanding what is happening in Gaza and across Palestine today. In part, it tells that what we are witnessing is structural, in that it is the deeply entrenched structures and institutions of a settler-colonial state that justify and rationalise the assorted forms of erasure we are currently witnessing in Gaza. But equally it helps connect Palestine to a global history of settler colonialism - a history that might explain why Indigenous communities from around the world have stood in solidarity with Palestinians, while settler states like the United States, Canada and Australia seem to perpetually waver in their support for Palestinian rights.

Aljazeera

# System reset

Yang Baorong

**S**INCE the start of this century, the economies of developed countries have registered relatively slow growth, while some developing countries have experienced rapid economic growth. This high-speed economic growth in countries of the Global South has created new opportunities for more extensive complementary cooperation among developing countries and is becoming a new growth engine for the global economy.

Driven by the wave of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the Global South countries are focusing on complementary cooperation and shared development, actively embracing technological innovation and development opportunities, and aiming to create a more equitable and reasonable international cooperation ecosystem. This approach will help steer international relations and global governance in a more just, reasonable and healthy direction.

However, there are still significant disparities in development between the Global North and the Global South. The future development of the Global South faces several challenges.

First, sustainable development is the key to resolving current global issues. Historical issues such as national border disputes and racial discrimination, however, can create conflicts among the Global South countries, distracting attention from sustainable development issues. Therefore, the Global South countries need to further consolidate a consensus on promoting development and avoid being sidetracked by sudden hot-spot issues. Additionally,

in pursuing the attainment of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, there should be increased support for the institutional and cooperative development of the Global South countries.

Second, there is a need to guard against some developed countries to divide the Global South through their so-called value-based tricks and direction misguidance. A current hype focuses on the "North-South differences" or the so-called impact of the rising South on the global order and "new colonialism". The purpose is to deliberately construct barriers against globalization, thereby interrupting supply and industry chains and maintaining the existing technological hegemony and developmental disparities. For instance, in recent years, with the support of the United States, India has been seeking to shape its image as a leader of the Global South in regional or multilateral cooperation mechanisms, bringing new challenges to South-South solidarity.

Third, a common mistake in international relations is the comparison of different countries' social phenomena without considering the differences in the historical starting point and development levels in the modernization processes between developed and developing countries. Although these comparisons lack a common basis and are thus irrational, they are often used by some hegemonic countries as a tool to criticize developing countries. For example, some developed countries, while neglecting the resource and technology needs of the developing countries

in their development process, criticize their governments for inaction and simultaneously prohibit or restrict the export of technology that could aid in green development.

The Global South needs to promote more institutional innovations that facilitate differentiated development. This involves at least three aspects. First, in the past, the Global South countries lacked necessary mechanisms and capabilities. On the one hand, although the Global South countries have built many platforms and mechanisms for cooperative development, their participation in global development and governance is still fragmented, compared to the current international cooperation mechanisms dominated by developed countries. An example is the South-South debt financing support mechanism.

On the other hand, for a long time, the Western countries, particularly the US, have held "double standards" on international affairs and development issues. This not only serves to maintain their vested interests but also reflects the developed countries' lack of proper understanding of the different development needs of the less developed Global South countries. To address this, it is necessary to strengthen international cooperation that objectively reflects the development demands of the Global South and integrates them in the relevant platforms and mechanisms so they can participate in global governance.

Second, there is a need to pay close attention to the misalignment between the existing international cooperation mechanisms and the

development needs of the Global South countries, such as industrial development priorities and aid methods that are ill-suited for the development needs of these countries. It is noteworthy that when the Global South has relatively abundant development elements such as capital accumulation, large-scale industrial clusters, less commercially developed resources and large populations, it is possible to establish new standards and systems for cooperation among the Southern countries based on these elements. In view of this, the Global South should focus on enriching various development resources and enhancing their systematic participation in global affairs.

Third, under the new conditions of technological development, efforts should be made to create cooperative mechanisms conducive to fair and reasonable international political and economic development. Whether it is North-South cooperation or South-South cooperation, traditional cooperation mechanisms can no longer satisfy the development needs of countries under the rapidly changing conditions of technological development. Globalized production and distribution, accelerated circulation of resources and information, and the new technological revolution are bringing profound changes to global development that will impact the development of international relations in unprecedented ways. To address these issues, strengthen South-South cooperation, and shape North-South relations in new direction, more institutional designs and a complete overhaul of concepts are needed.

# Manila violates DOC

Lei Xiaolu

**T**HE Philippines has been creating trouble on Ren'ai Jiao in the South China Sea. On Feb. 2, the China Coast Guard monitored and tracked the Philippine civilian vessel that delivered supplies to a military vessel illegally "grounded" at China's Ren'ai Jiao, or Ren'ai Reef. And on Monday the CCG legally drove away a Philippine Coast Guard vessel which intruded into the waters.

On Dec 29, the spokesperson for the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Medel Aguilar, said the Philippine government is considering building a permanent civilian structure - a lighthouse or a marine science research center - on Ren'ai Jiao in the South China Sea, heightening tensions in the South China Sea. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning responded on the same day, asserting that Ren'ai Jiao "is part of China's Nansha Qundao", and China has "indisputable sovereignty over Nansha Qundao (Nansha Islands), including Ren'ai Jiao, and their adjacent waters". Also, China has consistently held that the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal award is null and void, and never accepted the claim that Ren'ai Jiao is part of the Philippines' exclusive economic zone or continental shelf.

We have to trace the origin of the dispute over Ren'ai Jiao to determine whether the real dispute is about territorial sovereignty. In 1999, when the Philippines intentionally grounded BRP Sierra Madre on Ren'ai Jiao, every state took this as "a unilateral action to assert sovereignty over the Spratlys". This was confirmed on Aug 7, 2023, by then Philippine Foreign Affairs spokesperson Teresita Daza. She said the Philippines "decided to deploy a permanent station on Ayungin Shoal (the Philippines' name for Ren'ai Jiao) in 1999", and maintain it as "a permanent station".

Besides, according to media reports, Philippine Coast Guard spokesman Jay Tarnella said Sierra Madre is "the symbol of Philippine sovereignty in the area".

It is thus clear that the Philippines intended to occupy Ren'ai Jiao and claim it as part of its territory in 1999, for which it intentionally grounded Sierra Madre on the reef. It used the illegal "grounding" to establish its permanent presence on the reef, and back its claim by building either a permanent military station or civilian infrastructure there. When China demanded that the grounded ship be removed, then Philippine "president" (Joseph) Estrada promised to tow it away as soon as it could be safely floated off the reef". When China and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations negotiated on the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) from 1997 and eventually signed it in 2002, Ren'ai Jiao was not inhabited because Sierra Madre was a grounded ship (no matter intentionally or unintentionally) and Manila had promised to tow it away.

Importantly, Paragraph 5 of the DOC uses the term "inhabit"/"uninhabited" instead of "occupy"/"unoccupied". The wording reveals the understanding (and acceptance) of the 11 parties that Ren'ai Jiao was an inhabited feature in the South China Sea, to maintain the uninhabited status of the feature and prohibit any activities that would turn the reef into a permanent maritime base. Para 5 represents the fundamental commitment of the 11 parties to the DOC that vowed to observe and respect the stance. Over the past more than 20 years, China and the ASEAN members have together, and in good faith, implemented Para 5, which has played a key role in maintaining peace and stability in the region. In fact, Para 5 is the cornerstone of the regional

rules for maintaining peace and stability.

But in August last year, the Philippines announced a change of plan and declared that it intends to build a permanent military base or civilian infrastructure on Ren'ai Jiao. Manila's decision is an attempt to turn Ren'ai Jiao into an inhabited feature, which is a clear breach of the commitments it has made in the DOC. This will complicate issues and escalate tensions. For some time now, China and ASEAN members have been holding talks on the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea on the basis of effective and full implementation of the DOC. And by violating the DOC, the Philippines will pollute the good environment of the COC negotiation and thus undermine the joint efforts of ASEAN and China to maintain peace and stability in the region. Manila's decision to build civilian infrastructure is an attempt to turn Ren'ai Jiao into an inhabited reef. This will complicate issues and escalate disputes. Over the past more than 20 years, the ASEAN members and China have managed disputes through self-constraint, consultations and cooperation.

These joint efforts between the two sides stopped after Manila's provocative activities in 2023. Therefore, the only possible way out of this problem is to not play tricks and, instead, resolve the sovereignty and maritime disputes in good faith, and maintain peace and stability in the region. This "dual-track approach" is also what China and the ASEAN members agreed on. As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has said, China remains committed to resolving differences through dialogue and consultation so as to maintain maritime stability, noting that this is an effective way for the neighbors to get along with each other and improve Beijing-Manila relations.

The China Daily





# Exports increase by 7.89 % to \$17.7bln in 7 months

ISLAMABAD (APP): The exports from the country witnessed an increase of 7.89 percent during the first seven months of the current fiscal year (2023-34) compared to the corresponding period of last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

According to the latest PBS data, exports from the country increased up to \$17.782 billion during July-January (2023-24) as against the exports of \$16.481 billion in July-January (2022-23), showing a growth of 7.89 percent. On the other hand, imports into the country

declined by 14.11 percent to \$30.949 billion this year against the imports of \$36.034 billion last year.

Based on the figures, the trade deficit during the first seven months of the current fiscal year was recorded at \$13.167 billion against the deficit of \$19.553 billion last year, showing a sharp decline of 32.66 percent.

Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, the exports from the country increased by 24.72 per cent in January 2024 compared to the exports of the same month of last year. The exports during the month were recorded at \$2.790

billion as against the exports of \$2.237 billion in January 2023.

On the other hand, the imports during January 2024 were recorded at \$4.737 billion compared to the imports of \$4.826 billion in January 2023, showing a decrease of 1.84 per cent, according to the data.

On a month-on-month basis, the exports from the country decreased by 1.13 per cent when compared to the exports of \$2.822 billion during December 2023. The imports into the country went up by 1.87 per cent when compared to the

imports of \$4.650 billion in December 2023, PBS reported.

Meanwhile, the services exports during July-December (2023-24) earned foreign exchange worth \$3,765 million as compared to exports of \$3,870 million during the same period of last year, showing negative growth of 2.70 percent. The services' imports into the country however increased by 25.50 percent going up from \$4,140 million last year to \$5,196 million during the first six months of the current fiscal year.

# PSX stays bullish, gains 344 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Wednesday, gaining 344.85 points, a positive change of 0.54 per cent, closing at 64,143.87 points against 63,799.02 points the previous trading day.

A total of 327,591,633 shares valuing Rs 14.308 billion were traded during

the day as compared to 330,921,598 shares valuing Rs. 15.195 billion the last day. Some 356 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 203 of them recorded gains and 125 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 28 remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were K-

Electric Limited with 44,379,925 shares at Rs.4.86 per share, Oil and Gas Development with 24,951,384 shares at Rs.150.67 per share and Pak Electron with 21,266,442 shares at Rs.23.88 per share.

Hoechst Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.76.34 per share price, closing at

Rs.1,400.00, whereas the runner-up was Pakistan Services Limited with a Rs.41.00 rise in its per share price to Rs.920.00.

Premium Textile Mills Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.19.00 per share closing at Rs.361.00, followed by Ismail Industries Limited with a Rs.13.48 decline to close at Rs.1,261.52.

# Oil industry requires \$14t investment as demand set to soar 23% by 2045

DUBAI (Monitoring Desk): The global oil industry will require \$14 trillion in investments or about \$610 billion annually, until 2045 to meet rising energy demand, Opec secretary-general Haitham Al Ghaith said.

The Opec chief, who spoke at India Energy Week in Goa on Tuesday, said global oil demand "will continue to rise and there is a need to ensure that supply is maintained". He estimated that demand would rise between now and 2045 by 23 per cent.

Global oil demand growth is forecast to far outpace the expected rise in



non-Opec supply over the next two years. The producer group has started charting its course to manage the market ahead. In its closely watched monthly oil market report, Opec estimated

the world's thirst for oil to increase 2.25 million barrels per day in 2024 and another 1.8 million b/d in 2025. In June 2023, the International Energy Agency said it expected

global oil demand growth to slow significantly by 2028 as high prices and supply concerns hastened the shift to cleaner energy. Based on current policies and market trends, crude demand will rise by 6.0 per cent between 2022 and 2028 to reach 105.7 million bpd, supported by strong demand from the petrochemical and aviation sectors, the Paris-based agency said in its medium-term oil market report.

Ghaith said the twin focus of the Indian government to pursue both fossil fuel growth as well as renewables is the right path to adopt.

# Adamjee Life Assurance and Faysal Funds Collaborate to extend life insurance benefit to unit holders

## F.P. Report

KARACHI: Adamjee Life Assurance – Window Takaful Operation, one of the largest Family Takaful providers, is proud to announce their strategic partnership with Faysal Funds, a leading Islamic Mutual funds Institution. This collaboration aims to bring enhanced life insurance benefits to Faysal Funds unit holders, providing them with added financial security and peace of mind.

Under this partnership, Adamjee Life Assurance will offer its exclusive Takaful services through its customer centric Family Takaful products tailored to Faysal Funds unit holders. This initiative aligns with the shared commitment of both organizations to empower individuals with comprehensive financial solutions.

"We are excited about the opportunity to collabo-



rate with Faysal Funds and extend our Family Takaful offerings to their esteemed unit holders. This partnership reflects our dedication to providing accessible and innovative financial protection solutions," said Mr. Manzoor Mushtaq (CEO - Adamjee Life Assurance).

Mr. Nadir Rahman (CEO – Faysal Funds)

commented at the event "As a financial institution, our ongoing goal is to improve the overall prosperity of our valued clients. Partnering with Adamjee Life Assurance allows us to further strengthen our promise by providing life insurance benefits that complement our existing offerings."

The partnership between Faysal Funds and Adamjee Life Assurance signifies a mutual understanding of the evolving needs of today's investors. It underscores the importance of integrating insurance solutions with investment strategies to create a more robust financial portfolio.

# ‘FCCI ready to cooperate with Akhuwat for eradication of poverty, unemployment’

FAISALABAD (APP): Poverty and unemployment can be rooted out through the Islamic philosophy of "Muwakhat" and in this connection, the FCCI is ready to cooperate with "Akhuwat", said Acting President Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) Dr Sajjad Arshad.

In a meeting with Abu Bakar, Chief Coordinator Akhuwat, he appreciated the services rendered by Dr Amjad Saqib and said that interest free loans extended to the have-nots are playing a key role in helping them to start their own respectable small businesses. He said that a family could not survive with Rs.25000 to Rs.30000. However, they could generate additional income with the help of Akhuwat.

He said that FCCI members are financially safe and sound but the current situation has posed multiple challenges to them. "On the other hand, the deteriorating economic situation and inflation has made the life of common man miserable", he said and added that Akhuwat is also investing in the education sector in addition to providing

free food and doling out interest free loans for businesses. He said that this long term investment could equip young deserving students with education and skills. "Its focus is also on the character building of the students," he said and added that these students could start their own businesses while they could also be sent abroad to earn precious foreign exchange for the country. He expressed concern about the population explosion and said that overpopulation has constantly increasing pressure on our limited financial resources and infrastructure.

He further said that the air quality index is yet another threat to the quality of life as all villages have been merged into the Lahore city. He said, "Instead of developing new cities we are constantly expanding existing cities which have become unmanageable."

He said that the same situation is cropping up in Faisalabad and "we must take policy decisions to avoid environmental degradation." Abu Bakar said, "The poorest of the poor are looking towards

the affluent business community and we must keep their hopes alive." He said that Dr Amjad Saqib would visit Faisalabad very soon however the date for his scheduled meeting would be decided in consultation with the FCCI. He said that Akhuwat has earned the confidence of the people who are getting loans and returning the same so that it could be redistributed among the other needy people. He requested Dr Sajjad Arshad to visit Akhuwat School in Abbaspur where deserving students from all over the country are enrolled. Responding to a question, he said that administrative expenditures of Akhuwat are only ten percent as compared to 30-35% billed by other similar organizations.

Vice President Hajji Aslam Bhalli offered a vote of thanks and said that his relationship with Dr Amjad Saqib is his lifelong asset. Later, Dr Sajjad Arshad presented FCCI shield to Abu Bakar. Former President Muzammil Sultan, Hajji Muhammad Abid and Bilal Qadoos Manj were also present during this meeting.

# Rupee gains 08 paise against dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Rupee on Wednesday gained 08 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.34 against the previous day's closing of Rs 279.42.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 279 and Rs 281.5 respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 11 paise to close at Rs300.59 against the last day's closing of Rs300.48, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remained unchanged to close at Rs1.88, whereas an increase of Rs1.63 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs 352.52 compared to the last closing of Rs 350.89. The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 02 paise and 03 paise to close at Rs 76.05 and Rs 74.48 respectively.

# Gold rates up by 400 per tola

ISLAMABAD, Feb 7 (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs.400 and was sold at Rs.215,500 on Wednesday compared to its sale at Rs. 215,100 on the last trading day. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs.343 to Rs.184,756 from Rs184,413 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs.169,360 from Rs. 169,046, 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 increased by \$5 to \$2,053 from \$2,048, the Association reported.

# Cement exports increase 58.77% to \$135.925 mln in six months

ISLAMABAD (APP): The exports of cement witnessed an increase of 58.77 per cent during the first six months of the financial year 2023-24, as against the exports of the corresponding months of last year.

The cement exports from the country were recorded at US \$135.925 million during July-December

(2023-24) against the exports of US \$85.611 million during July- December (2022-23), according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

In terms of quantity, the exports of cement also surged by 104.50 per cent going up from 1,713,289 metric tons to 3,503,650 metric tons, according to

the data.

Meanwhile, year-on-year basis, the exports of cement witnessed an increase of 151.11 per cent during the month of December 2023 as compared to the same month of last year. The exports of cement from the country during December 2023 were recorded at US

\$21.927 million against the exports of US \$8.732 million in December 2022.

On a month-on-month basis, exports of cement witnessed an increase by 4.86 per cent during December 2023 when compared to the exports of US \$20.911 million in November 2023, the PBS data revealed.

# Asian markets track Wall St higher as Shanghai extends rally

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Shanghai stocks extended their rally Wednesday on hopes for more Chinese measures in support of battered markets, while traders in most other parts of Asia tracked Wall Street advances fuelled by strong earnings.

Fresh comments from Federal Reserve officials that poured cold water on hopes for an early interest rate cut appeared to have little impact with investors resigned to the prospect of US monetary policy remaining tight well into 2024. A series of announcements out of Beijing has lit a fire under equities in Hong Kong and Shanghai this week, with Bloomberg reporting that companies have spent more than \$4 billion on buybacks after officials called on them to play their part.

The surge on Tuesday came after a unit that controls government stakes in big financial institutions said it would ramp up investments in funds, while regulators said it would urge more action from long-term funds.

The developments follow a long-running rout in Shanghai and Hong Kong - fuelled largely by worries over China's economy -- that has slashed trillions off valuations.

The crisis is becoming increasingly uncomfortable

for the leadership, with Chinese President Xi Jinping reported to be taking a personal interest.

"Sentiment improved after (Tuesday's) ripping rally in Chinese and Hong Kong stocks," said Kyle Rodda of Capital.Com.

"For now, the measures have had their desired effect," he added, pointing out that the markets were reaching levels that could spell the end of their downward spiral.

Shanghai jumped more than one percent Wednesday -- a day after piling on more than three percent.

However, Hong Kong reversed the morning's surge of more than one percent to fall into the red as investors fretted over a lack of detail on the government's plans.

Observers warned the measures will not be enough on their own to revive confidence among weary investors, adding that much more needs to be done to kickstart the world's second-largest economy and address the property sector debt crisis.

Saxo Capital Markets' Charu Chanana said "the effect may be temporary as all these are band-aid measures that cannot fix the structural issues that China is facing from property sector to lack of productivity".

There were also gains

Wednesday in Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Bangkok, Wellington, Manila and Jakarta, though Tokyo and Mumbai edged down.

The advances came after Wall Street's three main indexes chalked up small gains thanks to more healthy corporate results, including from Spotify and data analytics firm Palantir, which soared more than 30 percent on optimism over its artificial intelligence offerings.

That helped investors look past comments from two top Fed officials pushing back against early rate cuts.

Cleveland Fed president Loretta Mester said it would be a "mistake" to move too soon, even as inflation continues to come down nearer the bank's two-percent target.

She said decision-makers would be happier to "begin moving rates down" later this year if the economy progressed as expected.

And Minneapolis counterpart Neel Kashkari also suggested more progress was needed.

While the mood has improved on trading floors, investors remain on edge over a range of issues that could blow up, including wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, China-US tensions, China's property crisis and the global economy. Commonwealth

Financial Network's Brad McMillan warned: "While conditions are good, volatility is very possible."

"We saw some turbulence in January, and we aren't out of the woods with inflation yet. So, while the trends remain positive, risks could increase over the next couple of months."

However, he added: "This is something to watch out for but not worry about too much, given the strong economic fundamentals."

Tokyo - Nikkei 225: DOWN 0.1 percent at 36,119.92 (close)

Hong Kong - Hang Seng Index: DOWN 0.2 percent at 16,097.89

Shanghai - Composite: UP 1.4 percent at 2,829.70 (close)

Dollar/yen: UP at 148.00 yen from 147.91 yen on Tuesday

Euro/dollar: UP at \$1.0761 from \$1.0758

Pound/dollar: UP at \$1.2604 from \$1.2600

Euro/pound: UP at 85.38 pence from 85.36 pence

West Texas Intermediate: UP 0.1 percent at \$73.39 per barrel

Brent North Sea Crude: UP 0.1 percent at \$78.66 per barrel

New York - Dow: UP 0.4 percent at 38,521.36 (close)

London - FTSE 100: UP 0.9 percent at 7,681.01 (close)

# Singapore's biggest bank cuts executive pay after outages

LONDON (BBC): Singapore's biggest bank DBS has slashed its CEO's bonus by 30% after disruptions to its digital services, despite it posting a record profit. The company said the cut to Piyush Gupta's variable pay amounts to S\$4.14m (\$3.1m; £2.4m) and that his full salary for 2023 will be disclosed in March. In 2022 Mr Gupta was paid S\$15.4m.

After several glitches last year, the country's central

bank banned DBS from buying new businesses or making non-essential IT changes for six months.

The outages saw digital payment services and cash machines go offline across the city-state. At the time, DBS apologised and announced plans to improve the resiliency of its systems.

In its latest statement, the bank said other members of its management team will have their variable pay cut by 21%, while more junior

employees will get a one-off bonus to help them with higher living costs.

DBS' variable pay is made of both a cash bonus and deferred shares. It comes on top of base pay and is usually based on an employee's performance. The cuts to the pay of senior DBS executives comes despite the bank posting annual record earnings, with its 2023 net profit rising by 26% to S\$10.3bn.





In brief

Naqvi inspects facilities

LAHORE (APP): Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Mohsin Naqvi visited Gaddafi Stadium and National Cricket Academy (NCA) and reviewed facilities and development projects at the sites. The incumbent Chairman PCB was briefed on the preparations for the HBL PSL 9 at the Gaddafi stadium while he visited the dressing rooms and other public facilities. Naqvi was also given a detailed briefing on the upgradation of the NCA accommodation. During his visit to both places, he instructed the NESPAK, Infrastructure Development Authority of Punjab (IDAP), and Communications and Works Department (C&W) Punjab to present a roadmap for revamping of NCA and Gaddafi Stadium by the end of week. He was accompanied by Salman Naseer, COO of PCB, Secretary C&W Sohail Ashraf and Wahab Riaz, Chief Selector Pakistan men's team.

Woods to make season debut

LOS ANGELES (AFP): Tiger Woods will make his first PGA Tour appearance of the year at the Genesis Invitational at Riviera Country Club in Los Angeles, the golfer confirmed on Wednesday. "Excited to be host next week," Woods posted on social media. The 48-year-old last competed in an official PGA Tour event at the 2023 Masters tournament in April but played in two events in December. Woods played with his son Charlie at the PNC Championship in Orlando on December 18 after playing in the Hero World Challenge in the Bahamas earlier in the month. The 15-times major champion, has struggled since suffering severe leg injuries in a 2021 car crash and he underwent ankle surgery after the Masters in April. The Genesis Invitational is held from February 15-18 and Woods is the host of the event. Last month Woods said he was ending his long-standing partnership with sportswear company Nike and it will be interesting to see what equipment and clothing he features in at Riviera. After playing at the PNC Championship, Woods said he felt in shape to carry out his plan of monthly competitive action this year. "I'll be able to walk and play," Woods said after the final round of the Orlando event. "We've been working out hard, been able to recover. We've been training every day, which is great. It's been nice to knock off a lot of the rust and some of the doubt that I've had because quite frankly I haven't hit a shot that counted in a long time," he said.

Tamasha to live stream PSL 9

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's largest homegrown OTT video streaming and entertainment platform, Tamasha was once again, bringing HD live streaming of the HBL Pakistan Super League 2024 (PSL 9). Cricket enthusiasts across Pakistan can now enjoy HD live streaming of all HBL PSL 9 matches on the Tamasha mobile app, said a press release. A signing ceremony between Tamasha and Walee Technologies leadership where Tamasha acquired digital broadcasting rights for the tournament, bringing HD live streaming of all HBL-PSL 9 matches straight to the smartphones of millions of Pakistanis, regardless of their network.



DOHA: Players of Qatar celebrate victory following the AFC Asian Cup Semi Final match between Iran and Qatar at Al Thumama Stadium.

# WAPDA, SNGPL set to lock horns for President's Trophy final

LAHORE (PPI): Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) and Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) are set to play the final of the President's Trophy Grade-I at the Pindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi from 9 to 13 February.

According to PCB information on Wednesday, WAPDA and SNGPL qualified for the final after topping the points table after seven rounds of matches, with all seven departmental teams playing six matches each. WAPDA, with five wins out of six, had 62

points, whereas SNGPL had 57 points owing to four wins and a drawn result. Iftikhar Ahmed will be captaining WAPDA while SNGPL will be led by Asad Shafiq.

Umar Akmal is currently leading the run charts for WAPDA, after amassing 489 runs in six games. Left-arm spinner Asif Afridi has been the most successful bowler for the team, grabbing 32 wickets in five games – the second highest of the tournament so far, behind Ghani Glass' Mohammad Rameez Jnr's tally of 42 wickets.

Abid Ali is the top-scor-

er for SNGPL with 532 runs in six games. Leg-spinner Arif Yaqoob and right-arm pacer Mohammad Ali are the joint-highest wicket-takers for SNGPL thus far; Arif bagged 19 scalps in three games while Ali equaled the tally in six games.

WAPDA will be heading into the final on the back of three-wicket win against Pakistan Television (PTV), which came in the last round of President's Trophy. In the same round, SNGPL also claimed a dominant 109-run win over Higher Education Commission (HEC).

## New Zealand hammer South Africa by 281 runs in first Test

MOUNT MAUNGANUI (AFP) : Black Caps seamer Kyle Jamieson claimed four wickets on Wednesday to drive New Zealand to a 281-run win over South Africa with a day to spare in the first Test.

Dogged resistance from the tourists ended with their dismissal for 247 at Mount Maunganui as the Black Caps notched their second-biggest Test victory by runs.

New Zealand are a step closer to a maiden series win over South Africa after 17 previous failed attempts, dating back to 1931. Given their struggles at Bay Oval, the vastly inexperienced Proteas will need a dramatic turnaround to win the second and final Test, starting on Tuesday in Hamilton.

Captain Neil Brand was one of six South African debutants and conceded his team were well off the pace. "It's very deflating," he said. "We were completely outplayed by a very good New Zealand team."

"Our patience was tested on this wicket. Guys got in, then got themselves out, which is disappointing. Hopefully we can compete more in the second Test."

The tourists were forced to name a depleted tour squad with most first-choice players involved in their domestic Twenty20 competition. New Zealand took control with 511 in their first innings and never looked like losing when the tourists were dismissed for 162.

The hosts declared at their overnight 179-4 before play began on Wednesday, leaving South Africa to chase an unrealistic target of 529.

Jamieson ensured they never came close, taking 4-58 and producing key double-strikes at the start of the second and third sessions on Wednesday. The most crucial wicket was that of David Bedingham, who raced to a career-high 87 off 96 balls before he mistimed a pull shot to mid-wicket soon after tea.

It ended a 105-run stand with Keegan Petersen, who also failed to control a Jamieson short ball on 16. The day's response had begun disastrously for the tourists, when both openers departed inside the first four overs.

# Qatar beat Iran 3-2 in thriller to reach Asian Cup final

DOHA (AFP): Hosts and holders Qatar squeezed into an Asian Cup final showdown with Jordan after beating Iran 3-2 with an 82nd-minute winner in a frenetic semi-final on Wednesday.

Almoez Ali struck in Doha to send Qatar into their second straight final, further exorcising the demons of their first-round exit at the 2022 World Cup.

Qatar lost all three of their World Cup games on home soil just over a year ago, the worst record of any host in the competition's history. But that was all a distant memory as they celebrated in front of over 40,000 fans after a breathless encounter at Al Thumama Stadium.

Sardour Azmoun gave Iran the lead in the fourth minute before Qatar equalised soon after when Jassem Gaber's shot went in via a heavy deflection.

Qatar's Akram Afif then notched his fifth goal of the tournament with a wonderful strike minutes before

half-time, only for Iran to equalise through an Alireza Jahanbakhsh penalty early in the second period.

Match-winner Ali scored an Asian Cup-record nine goals to lead Qatar to their first title in 2019 but he had managed only one heading into the semi-finals of this year's tournament.

His late strike was worth the wait for Qatar, and ended Iran's bid for a first Asian title since 1976.

Iran had Shojae Khalilzadeh sent off in second-half injury time, before Jahanbakhsh hit the post in the final minute. The game had barely begun when Azmoun gave Iran the lead with a well-taken finish, hooking the ball over his head and into the net.

Mehdi Taremi should have made it two when Jahanbakhsh teed him up in front of goal soon after, and Qatar made them pay with the equaliser in the 17th minute. Afif pulled the ball back for Gaber, whose shot on goal deflected off Iran's

Saeed Ezatollahi and looped up over goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand.

Iran were incensed that no foul had been given in the build-up. The equaliser gave Qatar new energy but Afif failed to take advantage in a one-on-one with Beiranvand just after the half-hour mark.

Afif made no mistake in the 43rd minute, curling home a superb strike after jinking his way into the box. Iran regrouped at half-time and drew level just six minutes after the break.

A VAR check ruled that Qatar defender Ahmed Fatehi had blocked a goal-bound shot with his hand, and Jahanbakhsh made no mistake from the penalty spot. The action continued at breakneck speed and Ali restored Qatar's lead when he controlled a shot from Abdulaziz Hatem and turned it past Beiranvand.

There was more than a hint of offside about the goal but it was allowed to stand.

## Heavyweight champion Fury reveals five-fight plan

LONDON (AFP): Tyson Fury has set out an ambitious five-fight plan, including a long-awaited bout against fellow British boxer Anthony Joshua, as the world heavyweight champion dismissed talk of retirement.

WBC champion Fury's unification bout with Oleksandr Usyk, the holder of the WBO, WBA and IBF belts, had been due to take place in Riyadh later this month. But the eagerly anticipated contest was postponed until May 18 in Saudi Arabia after the British fighter suffered a deep cut above his eye in training.

Fury expects to have a rematch with Ukraine's Usyk regardless of the outcome of their first fight,

before facing former world heavyweight champion Joshua in one or two bouts and then Francis Ngannou, whom he beat in October.

"I keep hearing talk of people saying I should retire or I'm going to retire soon or whatever," Fury said on his Instagram feed on Wednesday, showing stitches above his eye. "I ain't retiring -- I've got two fights with Usyk for the undisputed, twice."

Fury, yet to face Joshua, added: "Then I'm going to fight AJ (Joshua) at least once, maybe twice, if there's a rematch -- if he wants one after the first battering I give him."

"Then I'm going to fight Ngannou again. That's just the start. There's five fights

for you to whet your appetite. I ain't going nowhere. I'm 35 years old and in the prime of my life."

Fury has won 34 fights with one draw since turning professional in 2008.

His most recent fight was a controversial victory over former UFC mixed martial arts world champion Ngannou, making his professional boxing debut. Fury was knocked down but won on a split points decision. Two-time former world champion Joshua is set for a non-title fight with Ngannou, also in Saudi Arabia, on March 8.

The last undisputed heavyweight boxing champion was Lennox Lewis, when he beat Evander Holyfield in 1999.

## Hidayatur Rehman won Kashmir Day Techball Championship



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Directorate General of Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in collaboration with Absar Welfare Foundation and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Teqball Association organized Teqball Championship to observe Kashmir Solidarity Day.

About 30 male and female top teqball players from Peshawar participated in the Championship. In

male category Hidayat Ur rehman beat Munim Siddique by 2-1 while in female category Safa Marwa beat Hina Khan by 2-1 to clinch the title, Nadia Khan secure third position. Earlier in the 1st semi final Munim beat Hassaan Siddique by 2-0 and in the second 2nd semi final Hidayat beat Hainsain by 2-0. Honorary Guest Ilyas Shinwari distributed cash prize among position holder and Hayat Nazir

International Karate Coach honoured players with medals. Vice President KP Teqball Association Akhtar Rasool was also present.

At the end Mian Absar Ali, Founder of Absar Welfare Foundation, stated that Pakistan support Kashmiri people and always stand for their rights. Pakistan wants India to leave the Kashmir and let the Kashmiris to live in peace.

# Tug of War, Football tournaments concluded in Chitral

F.P. Report

CHITRAL: The tug-of-war tournament concluded in Dumon area of Chitral. There was a great competition between Domon A and Domon B team. The tug-of-war took place on the play ground of Domon, where the spirit of the players was warm despite the extreme cold weather. In this game, eleven players in each team pull the rope on one side, while eleven players from the other team pull the rope on the other side.

Being motivated, the players by team coaches they pull the rope harder. Often these coaches are aged and experienced people. In the final match of tug-of-war, Senator Muhammad Talha Mehmood, the nominated candidate for the National Assembly from NA-1 Chitral, was chief guest, while Mufti Faiz Muhammad Maqsood, the nominated candidate by JUI for PK-2, Qari Jamal Nasir and other members of the party were also present with him. Team A pulled the

ropes aggressively and defeated Team B and won the final trophy.

On this occasion of closing ceremony, Senator Muhammad Talha Mahmood distributed trophies, cups and one lakh rupees cash prize among the players. A large number of spectators were also present on this occasion. Addressing on this occasion Senator Talha Mehmood encouraged the players while addressing the participants. He said that the hospitals of those nations always remain full of patients that have poor sports activities. He lamented that there is a lot of talent among the players of Chitral but there is still no public stadium for them to improve their skills.

Senator Talha said that if the public trusts upon me and they elected me as MNA from Chitral, then I will not only bring government funds here, but also bring kits and sports equipment from the Muhammad Talha Mahmood Foundation. We will build playgrounds, stadiums in every area so that the youth here can improve their skills by playing in

them. He said that the only way to save the youth from drugs addicting, immorality and other negative activities is to keep them engaged in sports and positive activities. He also announced a cash prize of 100000 rupees for the players, organizing committee of this tournament and distributed trophies among the players. Senator Talha Mehmood highly liked the game of tug-of-war in which people of all ages are participating and it is a great way for physical exercise. Especially the special voice of the team coach who motivates the players and tries to defeat the opponent team.

A football tournament was also organized by Northland Football Academy Sengor in which twenty four teams participated. In the final match, there was an interesting match competition between Jughur Academy Football Club and Northland Football Club Singor. This match was decided by plenty in which the Northland football team won the final trophy. The football

tournament was continue for the last one week in which players from all the regions from Sengor to Jagur participated in it.

On the occasion of the final match, Senator Muhammad Talhama Mehmood was chief guest who distributed trophies and cups among the players. Senator Muhammad Talha Mehmood announced a cash reward of 100000 rupees here as well. A large number of people belonging to Sengar and suburbs were also present on this occasion. Senator Talha Mehmood said, while addressing the spectators and participants, praised the players and encouraged them to play football matches regularly, which improves your talent on the one hand, and on the other hand, it keep them fit physical. It is also a great tool for exercise. He said that I am very happy to know that a daughter of Chitral is part of the national football team and earlier male players have also shown their ability in the national team.

The people of the area demanded that a playground

should be constructed for them because they have taken this ground on rent on self-help basis. Senator Talha Mahmood said that my foundation i.e. Muhammad Talha Mahmood Foundation is ready to cooperate with you in every field, but the people whom you voted and sent to the assemblies in the past have filed a complaint against me to the administration. That hundreds of Talha Mehmood Foundation trucks loaded with relief good heading towards Chitral should be stopped as they are being used as bribes for votes. He said that these trucks usually have edible items for the poor, needy and helpless people who are currently facing financial difficulties and I am not even a part of Talha Mahmood Foundation until the end of election.

But these relief goods are being brought to the poor people of Chitral and this foundation works not only in Chitral but in the whole country and in foreign countries as well, but it is restricted only in Chitral. He said that until February

8, I have been banned by the Election Commission of Pakistan so that I can be free later and will help the people of openly. On this occasion, he explained to the public that I have been separated from the Muhammad Talha Mahmood Foundation by fulfilling the legal requirements until the election, whose chairman, Mustafa Bin Talha, has ordered to bring here two hundred trucks of relief goods.

The candidates have complained the administration that these relief goods are being given to people of Chitral as bribes due to which these trucks are standing on the road across from the Lowari tunnel, but after the end of election , at one minute past twelve at night, I myself will drive these trucks to Chitral and indiscriminately Those relief goods will be distributed among the poor people. On this occasion, the people of the area raised slogans in favor of Senator Talhama Mahmood and prayed for her success. A large number of people were present on this occasion.





## In brief

### DC inspect schools up-gradation

ISLAMABAD (APP): On Wednesday, Special Secretary Education Mohiuddin Wani, along with Deputy Commissioner (DC) Irfan Nawaz Memon, visited various schools in the capital to oversee the ongoing upgradation process for the provision of basic amenities to the students. The focus of their visit was to ensure that government schools are providing top-notch facilities to students. Memon emphasized the importance of modernizing educational infrastructure to create conducive learning environments, ICT spokesman Dr. Abdullah Tabasum said while talking to APP here. He also commended the Ministry of Education for its pivotal role in this initiative, highlighting ongoing efforts to bring government schools up to modern standards. Irfan Memon also praised Mohiuddin Wani's dedicated attention to the education sector. "Across Islamabad, government schools are undergoing a comprehensive overhaul with support from the Ministry of Education. This visit underscores the commitment to enhancing educational facilities for students across the city," he concluded.

### SSP visits district control room

RAWALPINDI (APP): Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Rawalpindi, Hafiz Kamran Asghar here on Wednesday visited the District Control Room set up at Liaquat Bagh for upcoming general elections and reviewed the arrangements. He directed the officers and personnel to remain alert round the clock. The SSP said, all available resources were being utilized for peaceful conduct of the elections. The law and order situation was being monitored continuously from the district and police control rooms. He said that all-out efforts were being made to ensure fair and transparent elections.

### Capital maintains clean air

ISLAMABAD (APP): The air quality of the federal capital remained healthy for the second consecutive day on Wednesday as the atmospheric pollutants remained below the threshold of the national environmental quality standards. The Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA) daily air quality report indicated a reduced ratio of air pollutants, recorded below permissible limits. The agency is responsible to ensure the protection of the environment under the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act 1997. The hazardous air pollutant particulate matter of 2.5 microns (PM2.5), which was a hazardous atmospheric contaminant, remained 28 microgrammes per cubic meter on average which was lower than the national environmental quality standards (NEQS) of 35 microgrammes per cubic meter and denoted the air quality healthy. PM 2.5 is generated through the combustion of an engine, industrial emissions, burning garbage or inflammable material and dust blown up by fast-moving cars plying on non-cemented patches of the roads. The ratio of nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide (NO2&SO2 respectively) also remained below the NEQS that were mostly produced during the industrial emissions from the factories involving complex and extraordinary chemicals' use in production processes. The NO2 remained 11.64 microgrammes per cubic meter and SO2 was 12.14 microgrammes per cubic meter. The EPA officials claimed that the vehicular emissions due to increased automobiles was one of the leading cause of bad air quality.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Ambassador-designate to Turkmenistan, K.K. Ahsan Wagan, calls on President Dr Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

## 26 candidates including 16 independents contesting for NA-57, Rawalpindi-VI

RAWALPINDI (APP): As many as 26 candidates including 16 independents are contesting general elections for National Assembly Constituency No. NA-57, Rawalpindi-VI, while a total of 431,511 registered voters including 222,434 male and 209,077 females will use their right to franchise on Feb 8, Thursday.

Danyal Chaudhary, candidate of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Mukhtar Abbas, Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians, Mirza Khalid Mahmood, Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, Abdul Wajid Hussain, Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam Pakistan, Ch Rizwan Younis, Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan, Sheikh Rashid Shafiq, Awami Muslim League Pakistan and Chaudhary Muhammad Adnan as an independent candidate are in the run. According to details, all the arrangements had been finalized by the administration for the general elections and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had also announced a polling scheme for the constituency, NA-57.

Rawalpindi district administration on the directives of Commissioner, Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali

Chatta had finalized administrative measures including security arrangements to maintain law and order. As many as 326 polling stations including 157 male, 155 female and 14 combined will be set up in the constituency to facilitate the voters.

There will be a total of 780 polling booths including 398 for male and 382 for female voters in Rawalpindi-VI, NA-57 constituency. Under the polling scheme of NA-57, there are 326 presiding officers with 1560 assistant presiding officers while 780 polling officers and 326 assistants will also perform their duties on the election day. The main areas under NA-57, Rawalpindi-VI constituency are Murree Road, Tipu Road, Zafar-ul-Haq Road, Chaklala, Millat Colony, Factory Road, Qasimabad, Dhoke Khaba, Dhoke Elahi Buksh, Dhoke Farman Ali, Shah De Talian, Nia Mohallah, Raja Bazar, Hukamdar Road, Chah Sultan, Waris Khan, Amarpura, Dhoke Ali Akbar, Shakrial, Islam Nagar, Professor Colony, and others.

According to a Commissioner's office spokesman, the Commissioner had directed the

authorities concerned to complete all the arrangements for the general elections as per the code of conduct issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). Liaquat Ali Chatta had also ordered that the code of conduct issued by ECP should be implemented in letter and spirit, he said adding, that all possible facilities should be provided to the voters and all the activities should strictly be monitored. Special security arrangements were also being finalized for the sensitive polling stations, he added.

Chief Secretary Punjab, Zahid Akhtar Zaman during a visit to Rawalpindi division here the other day directed the authorities concerned to finalize the best possible arrangements for the general elections 2024, scheduled to be held on February 8.

The Chief Secretary during the visit reviewed all the preparations including security being finalized for the general elections.

The Chief Secretary also visited the special control rooms established for the elections and the sensitive polling stations of Rawalpindi.

## All set for general elections 2024; tight security arrangements

RAWALPINDI (APP): All arrangements have been finalized in Rawalpindi division including Murree, Rawalpindi, Attock, Jhelum and Chakwal districts for general elections 2024, scheduled to be held on February 8, Thursday while foolproof security have also been put in place for free, fair and transparent election. Rawalpindi Region Police have finalized all the arrangements and more than 16,500 police and other law enforcement agencies personnel would perform security duties on the occasion. 5,490 polling stations have been established in 13 constituencies of the National Assembly and 26 constituencies of the Provincial Assembly across the region.

In terms of sensitivity, there are 694 polling stations of category A, 1371 of category B and 3425 of category C. According to Regional Police Officer, (RPO) Syed Khurram Ali, 2,519 CCTV cameras had been installed across the region to monitor the situation from the central control room. Syed Khurram Ali further said that the control rooms had also been set up in all districts while a central control room had been set up in the regional office. The police in Rawalpindi, Attock, Jhelum and Chakwal along with other law enforcement agencies had also conducted a joint flag march and full dress rehearsal regarding the election, he added. Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chatta along with RPO, Syed Khurram Ali during a visit to the central control room established in Sports Complex Liaquat Bagh for monitoring the elections of National and Provincial Assemblies reviewed all the arrangements. During the

visit, they also reviewed the working of the control room and other administrative matters. The commissioner informed that the focal persons of all the agencies concerned including District Administration, Police, Pakistan Army, Rescue-1122 would be present round the clock in the control room. Timely information regarding any emergency through the control room would help in taking immediate action, he said.

The commissioner said that the officers and personnel of all the institutions would perform their duties 24-hour at each polling station to deal with any emergency situation. Separate desks had been created for all the constituencies of Rawalpindi district, the DC Rawalpindi said adding that a media monitoring cell had also been set up in the control room.

Rawalpindi district police had conducted Flag March across the district regarding the security of General Elections. According to a Rawalpindi district police spokesman, Rawalpindi Police, Pak Army, Rangers and other law enforcement agencies participated in the flag march which was supervised by City Police Officer, SSP Operations, Divisional SPs and other senior officers. Separate flag march was conducted in seven National Assembly constituencies of Rawalpindi district, NA-51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56 and 57 under the supervision of senior officers. More than 9500 officers of the police would perform security duty for general election 2024, CPO, Syed Khalid Hamdani said adding, the security would be deployed at 580-A, 980-B and 1221-C category polling stations.

## IESCO makes arrangements to ensures seamless electricity provision on Election Day

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) has taken proactive measures to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply on Election Day. According to the spokesperson of IESCO, the company has set up a central control room to monitor the demand and supply of electricity in the region.

Leaves for field officers and staff have been cancelled, with instructions to remain on high alert for 24 hours.

Monitoring cells have been established in six operational circles, providing necessary materials to field offices. The scheduled shutdown from 7th to

9th February for system maintenance has been cancelled to ensure uninterrupted power supply during this critical period.

The Chief Executive and Chief Engineer Operations will personally oversee the operations to ensure efficient management.

Field formations are in constant communication with district administrations to swiftly address any potential issues.

The complaint helpline numbers at the office, accessible at 118, have been fully activated to promptly address any electricity-related concerns.

## HEC steps to transform education system with technology, introducing smart teaching project soon: Chairman

ISLAMABAD (APP): Higher Education Commission (HEC) Chairman Dr Mukhtar Ahmed Wednesday said that his department was taking various steps to transform traditional education system with latest technology and introducing projects including 'smart teaching' 'smart campuses' and 'smart university' to promote multi-technology ecosystem.

In an exclusive interview with PTV news channel, he said that the aim is to equip and prepare the younger generation and students with the advanced technology and knowledge in the digital industry.

He said that HEC is working to develop a new system of learning where the ever-expanding technological challenges are met, adding, the Government is working hard to provide internet access, better infrastructure and facilities which can benefit students.

He said online tools and

classrooms will also provide an opportunity for students and teachers to introduce blended learning, adding, HEC is moving towards an affiliation policy, online education policy, artificial intelligence and systems approach. Replying a question, he said that collective efforts are need of hour to bring reforms, adding, HEC with the help of all related departments was reviewing its policies.

He said that a long-term strategies are being implemented to allow universities to excel in providing quality technology-based education to open virtual campuses.

"HEC is committed to materialising the dream of making Pakistan a digital country", he mentioned.

To another question, he said that in a significant step towards enhancing data accessibility and obtaining international recognition, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has also established 2 cutting-edge

Data Centers.

These Data Centres will also facilitate high-speed, secure, and reliable access to data, offering a significant advantage to researchers at Pakistani universities, he added.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) also introducing Smart University project to equip university campuses with blanket Wi-Fi coverage, in order to enable the deployment of other smart instruments as needed, he added.

HEC also offering various international scholarship schemes to make education accessible for students, particularly those from far-flung and less privileged areas, he further mentioned. We have allocated funds for need-based scholarships in the recurring budget for universities so no brilliant student who falls within the merit, has to discontinue studies due to financial constraints," he added.

## Wheat output forecast over 28.86m metric tons during current season

ISLAMABAD (APP): The wheat output in the country during the current season is likely to reach over 28.86 million tons, which would further help in cementing the efforts of the government to achieve sustainable agriculture growth and economic development.

Wheat cultivation relies heavily on irrigation water, so the ample water supply as reported by IRSA along with record planting areas indicated the potential for another strong harvest during the crop season 2024-25, said Imtiaz Ahmad Gopang Food Security Commissioner in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

However, the actual production outcomes will depend on factors such as growing conditions and accessibility of essential inputs particularly fertilizers, he told APP on Wednesday.

Additionally, weather patterns in March and April crucial for the grains' development and maturation will significantly impact the final output, he added.

He said that according to the provincial crop reporting services, wheat production for the Punjab Province was forecast at 23.50 million metric tons, and Sindh at 3.3 million metric tons respectively.

Meanwhile, the output for the provinces including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan was expected to reach at 1.474 million metric tons and 21.274 million metric

tons respectively.

Imtiaz Ahmad said that owing to the incentives introduced by the government, wheat sowing in the country during the current season (Rabi 2023-24) increased by 7.5 per cent as compared to the crop sowing of the corresponding period of the last year.

During the period under review, wheat sowing had been completed over 23.69 million acres as against the set targets of 22.22 million acres, he said adding that the wheat crop has been sown across more than 23.69 million acres of land in various crop-growing regions during the current season to meet local staple food requirements and maintain strategic reserves throughout the year.

The wheat cultivation targets fixed for the period under review were achieved by 107 per cent as crop sowing in two major grain-producing provinces Sindh and Punjab gained momentum as both the provinces surpassed their assigned targets for the current season, he added.

He said that the post-flood phenomenon in Sindh has also contributed to massive wheat sowing as adequate moisture in fields during crop cultivation supplemented the overall area under wheat production, the farmers also switched over from oil seed to wheat crop for its better rate of return.

Meanwhile, Punjab which has 76 per cent shares in total wheat sowing has achieved 109 per cent as against

its sowing targets due to a well-coordinated wheat cultivation campaign during the season, he added.

He said that the crop sowing has gained momentum across the wheat-producing areas in the country as Punjab Province has completed wheat sowing over 103.09 per cent of areas as against the set targets for the current season.

The Punjab, which is the largest wheat-producing province in the country, has completed crop sowing over 16.48 million acres compared to the fixed targets of 15.99 million acres during the current season.

Sindh Province has achieved 106.66 per cent of its targets as wheat cultivation in different divisions of the province was completed over 3.16 million acres as against the set targets of 2.97 million acres, he added that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has also achieved wheat sowing targets by 100 per cent and crop cultivation was completed over 1.93 million acres as compared to the set targets of 1.93 million acres during the current sowing season. He informed that according to the Provincial Crop Reporting Services, the Balochistan Province has achieved 100 per cent of wheat sowing targets set for the current season. In Balochistan the wheat crop was cultivated over 1.93 million acres, he said adding the province was assigned a task to grow wheat over 1.33 million acres during the current season.

## Police conduct flag march in connection with election security

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police here on Wednesday conducted a flag march regarding the security of General Elections 2024.

Rawalpindi Police, Pak Army, Rangers and other law enforcement agencies participated in the flag march.

The flag march was conducted under the supervision of City Police Officer, Rawalpindi, SSP Operations, Divisional SPs and other senior officers.

Separate flag marches were conducted in seven constituencies of the district including NA-51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56 and 57. The purpose of the flag march is to express the determination to conduct the elections 2024 peacefully.

According to CPO, more than 9500 Rawalpindi Police personnel would perform security duty for Election 2024. Security would be deployed at polling stations of 580-A, 980-B and 1221-C category, the CPO added. He informed that the city had been divided into 280 clusters for security patrolling. Elite commandos would patrol on Murree Road, and Mall Road, near important places, he added. Pakistan Army and Rangers Quick

Response Force would also perform patrol duties at important places, he informed.

The CPO said that Police Quick Response Teams would patrol across the city and provide immediate response if required. The process of safe delivery of polling material was being completed under tight security arrangements, he added. The cameras had been installed at sensitive polling stations, Syed Khalid Hamdani said and informed that all the officers were present in the field and continuously monitoring the security arrangements. No one would be allowed to display weapons and strict action would be taken against the violators.

Implementation of the code of conduct issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan was being ensured at all cost, Syed Khalid Hamdani added. The law and order situation was being continuously monitored through a special control room set up in the police headquarters, the CPO said adding, that the peaceful conduct of elections was a top priority and all available resources were being utilized to ensure the peaceful conduct of general elections 2024.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Education Minister Madad Ali Sindhi addressed the discussion forum for his book titled 'Pakistani Adab Kay Ma'maar'.



Head of UNICEF bids farewell

KABUL (Ariana News): The head of UNICEF in Afghanistan, Fran Equiza, held a farewell meeting with the deputy foreign minister Shir Mohammad Abbas Stanakzai this week as his two-year tenure came to an end. Equiza said at the meeting that he takes away good memories. He also thanked all the institutions of the Islamic Emirate and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their cooperation. He said "Dr. Tajuddin will continue the work of UNICEF in Afghanistan."

Japan to collaborate on key projects

KABUL (BNA): In a recent meeting with the Japanese Ambassador to Kabul, Takeyoshi Kuramaya, Sheikh Mawlawi Neda Mohammad Nadim, the Acting Minister of the Ministry of Higher Education, called for collaboration between Japan and Afghanistan's higher education system. According to BNA, Nadim urged for Japanese cooperation in strengthening Afghanistan's educational system, with the aim of presenting an accurate image of Afghanistan to the world.

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

# Sinirlioglu: No one is looking for the collapse of IEA government



KABUL (Ariana News): The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has said according to the UN special coordinator for Afghanistan, Feridun Sinirlioglu, no one is looking for the collapse of the Islamic Emirate government and everyone wants the Islamic Emirate to join the international community. On Tuesday in a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister, Sinirlioglu said that the Islamic Emirate must be committed to international laws, an IEA newsletter read.

According to the Islamic Emirate, Sinirlioglu said in the meeting with Mawlawi Abdul Kabir that good decisions will be made about Afghanistan at the upcoming Doha meeting. According to the newsletter, the UN special coordinator for Afghanistan said that the international community, including the US and European countries, is interested in having relations with the Islamic Emirate. The UN official also said that the World Bank

will hold a meeting on Afghanistan in the near future. According to the newsletter, the development of the banking system in Afghanistan, the end of sanctions and the resumption of the remaining projects of the World Bank in Afghanistan are to be discussed at the World Bank meeting. Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, in his meeting with Sinirlioglu, emphasized that the Doha meeting should take action on the reconstruction of

Afghanistan, humanitarian aid, and the lifting of banking sanctions. Sinirlioglu had previously met with acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi and discussed the Doha meeting. In this meeting Muttaqi said he would decide to participate in the Doha meeting after getting information about the topic and its composition. The Doha meeting about Afghanistan is scheduled to be held on Sunday and Monday, 18th and 19th of February.

# If necessary, Suicide brigade from Afghanistan to support Gaza: Iran's Envoy

KABUL (Khaama Press): Iran's representative for Afghanistan suggests that if necessary, "more than one division of martyrdom forces" will go from Afghanistan to support Gaza. Hassan Kazemi Qumi told the state-owned network Ofoq that Afghanistan is geographically distant from Gaza but is part of the "axis of resistance." The Islamic Republic of Iran refers to groups under its support and other factions fighting against the Western coalition and Israel in the region as the "axis of resistance." Mr. Qumi, speaking on the program "Toward Palestine" on the state-owned Ofoq network, responded to whether he talks about the "people of Afghanistan" or "Afghanistan under Taliban rule" by stating that Afghanistan has fought against "occupiers" for forty years, and "no one can claim that [this war] is specific to one ethnicity or group."



Since the Taliban assumed control of Afghanistan, Iran has maintained positive relations with the group, offering support against foreign forces, according to reports. Despite the change in government, Iran continues to foster strong ties with the

Taliban, indicating ongoing cooperation between the two entities. As of now, the Taliban has not issued any official comments regarding the remarks made by the Iranian representative. The Islamic Republic is a major supporter of Hamas

and other Palestinian groups fighting against Israel, but the Taliban regime has only limited its support for Gaza by issuing statements against "Israeli crimes" and holding relatively small rallies in support of the Gaza people.

# Hanafi calls for collaboration with Turkish charity on housing projects for returnees



KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, the Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs, has called for collaboration with a Turkish charity organization, IHH, to develop housing projects for Afghans returning from abroad who are in need of shelter. According to a statement from the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, Hanafi met with officials from IHH in Kabul. He expressed his appreciation for the organization's efforts and requested their cooperation in creating job opportunities and rebuilding homes for returnees. During the meeting,

Mujahid Khalich, a representative of IHH, briefed Hanafi on the organization's activities, functions, and plans. He highlighted their contributions to mosque reconstruction, agricultural development, well drilling, employment generation, and assistance to the families of martyrs, disabled individuals, and

medical treatment in Afghanistan. The organization expressed its commitment to expanding its activities in the country, aligning with Hanafi's request for increased collaboration. This partnership aims to provide much-needed support to returning Afghans, particularly in the area of housing.

# EU envoy and deputy interior minister discuss counter-narcotics



KABUL (Ariana News): EU Special Representative Thomas Nicholson on Tuesday met with Abdulhaq Akhund,

deputy minister of interior affairs for counter-narcotics, where the two sides discussed this issue of drugs in the country, the ministry said in a

statement. At the meeting, Abdulhaq Akhund said to keep future generations safe, the cultivation, smuggling and sale of drugs must be seriously

prevented not only in Afghanistan but across the world. The ministry quoted Nicholson as saying that the EU has announced cooperation in this sector. "With mutual understanding, we should prevent the cultivation, smuggling and sale of drugs not only in Afghanistan but all over the world for the sake of the new generation. I ask you to cooperate with Afghanistan in supporting and treating drug addicts and farmers," said Abdulhaq Akhund. Earlier, Nicholson met with the acting minister of economy about the improvement of economic cooperation, and the continuation of humanitarian aid, and the need to focus on the implementation of development projects to create job opportunities.

# Economic Commission approves installation of scanners at 12 customs units at border crossings

KABUL (Ariana News): The Economic Commission on Tuesday approved the installation of electronic scanners at 12 customs units at border crossings across the country. During its routine session in Kabul, the commission addressed a range of topics, including the

installation of the scanners by the private sector, as well as the economic strategy outlined by the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing. The meeting was chaired by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs.

The installation of the scanners will be a public-private partnership and private investors will reportedly invest about eight billion afghanis in the initiative. Commission members deliberated the economic blueprint for the project, presented by the Ministry of Urban Development

and Housing. Following an assessment, the commission designated the ministry as the primary policymaker for the initiative. Surveying, designing, and overseeing the project will fall under the ministry's purview, while implementation will be overseen by relevant ministries and agencies.



# How the pandemic accelerated the global used car market

KABUL (Khaama Press): Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the world has witnessed a significant transformation in the automotive sector, with the used car market taking center stage in countries including the U.S., Asia, and Europe. This shift was primarily triggered by production halts in automobile manufacturing and a critical shortage of semiconductor chips, essentials in modern vehicles for a wide range of functionalities. This article delves into the rise of the used car market during the pandemic, the recent adjustments in used car prices, and a unique perspective on Afghanistan's auto market dynamics. The pandemic-induced shutdown of vehicle production units, coupled with a severe scarcity of semiconductor chips, left the automotive industry in uncharted waters. This led to a sharp decline in the production of new cars, steering consumers towards the used car market. The U.S. saw a surge in used car sales, rising over 10% in 2020 compared to the pre-pandemic era. Europe and major Asian markets like China and India similarly reported a spike in demand, with used car transactions climbing by 15% and 20%, respectively. The landscape began to

shift in the past two years, marking a decrease in used car prices. This change came as the production of new cars picked up pace and the advent of electric vehicles (EVs) started reshaping consumer preferences. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics noted a 5% dip in used car prices in early 2023 relative to the peak in 2021, with Europe and Asia observing a 3% and 4% decrease, respectively. The revival of new car production and the growing allure of EVs, supported by environmental policies and incentives, contributed to this trend. Afghanistan presents a unique case within the global auto market landscape, dominated almost

entirely by used vehicles. The country's economic conditions, import limitations, and the average consumer's financial capacity have shaped a market where new car dealerships are virtually non-existent, save for a Toyota dealership with scant sales. A substantial portion of the vehicles in Afghanistan are models from before 2005, with many dating back to 1988. This scenario underscores Afghanistan's reliance on imported used vehicles to fulfill its transportation needs. The global used car market's evolution since the pandemic outbreak reflects the adaptive response to supply chain

disruptions and shifts in consumer behavior towards automotive purchases. While the initial surge in used car prices underscored the market's resilience, the subsequent price adjustment signals a gradual return to normalcy and a shift in focus towards new and electric models. Afghanistan's auto market, with its reliance on used cars, offers a unique lens through which to view the impact of global trends on local economies. As the world progresses post-pandemic, the automotive sector remains a vital indicator of broader economic and technological shifts, particularly resonant within the Afghan context.







ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi in a group photo during his visit to office of the Wafaqi Mohtasib.

## Mohtasib resolves 193,028 complaints

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Wafaqi Mohtasib has resolved 193,028 complaints against the maladministration of government departments and provided relief worth Rs 4.898 billion to citizens. The Mohtasib processed a record 194,099 complaints during 2023, the registration of complaints witnessed a surge of 18% while the disposal of complaints increased by 22% as compared to 2022. Furthermore, on the recommendations of Wafaqi Mohtasib, 18,000 street children were enrolled in government schools in Islamabad.

This was highlighted by Wafaqi Mohtasib (Ombudsman), Mr Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi, during a briefing given to President Dr Arif Alvi, who visited Wafaqi Mohtasib Office, in Islamabad, today. The meeting was attended by advisors to the Ombudsman and senior officials of the Mohtasib.

While briefing the President, the Federal Ombudsman highlighted the role and performance of the institution. He informed that 193,028 complaints

were addressed in 2023 whereas monetary relief of Rs 4.898 billion was provided to the complainants. The meeting was told that 85.4% of Wafaqi Mohtasib's decisions were implemented last year, and efforts were underway to further improve the implementation rate. It was apprised that the greater use of technology in Mohtasib had enhanced people's accessibility as 48,190 complaints in 2023 were registered online, which was an increase of 47% from the year 2022. Similarly, 22,321 complaints were received through Mohtasib's mobile App in 2023 with an increase of 21% as compared to 2022. The meeting was also told that under the Integrated Complaint Resolution System, 18,469 complaints were processed in 2023, whereas Mohtasib's teams had also held Khuli Katcheries, and inspection visits to address people's grievances against government agencies. It was added that 2,113 cases were disposed of through the Informal Resolution of Disputes. The steps taken for the facilitation and resolution of complaints, filed

by Overseas Pakistanis, were also highlighted. The Mohtasib further informed that the awareness campaign, undertaken by the Ombudsman, had greatly increased its outreach as well as helped address people's complaints at their doorsteps.

Highlighting the significance of Mohtasib in the provision of expeditious justice and curbing corrupt practices, the President said that Mohtasib was helping promote good governance and delivering free-of-cost justice to people. He stressed the need to further enhance awareness among the people about the role and services of Mohtasib in the provision of timely justice against maladministration of government departments.

He also urged the need to further expand the outreach of the Mohtasib to far-flung areas of the country, besides improving people's access to Mohtasib by utilizing modern technology. The President lauded the performance of the Wafaqi Mohtasib and said that it was doing a remarkable job by providing prompt relief to the people.

## Pakistan fully committed to inclusive democratic process: FO

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch on Wednesday said that Pakistan was fully committed to foster an inclusive democratic process and uphold the rule of law.

The spokesperson's remarks came in response to the media queries on the statement by UN Human Rights High Commissioner Volker Türk who had urged authorities in Pakistan to ensure that parliamentary elections this week were free and fair. He also appealed to ensure a fully free and fair vote and to recommit to the democratic process and an environment that promotes and protects human rights.

In response, the FO spokesperson remarked "Pakistan is fully committed to fostering an inclusive democratic process, upholding the rule of law and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms guaranteed in its laws and Constitution." Mumtaz Baloch said the security plans have been finalized to hold the elections on February 8, 2024, as per the electoral laws of Pakistan.

The spokesperson said that Pakistan's judicial system provided for fair trial and due process. Domestic legal remedies are available in case of any complaints in the electoral process, she added.

## Arrangements finalized for elections: KP Info Minister

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Caretaker Minister for Information, Barrister Feroze Jamal Kakakhel has said that all the necessary arrangements have been complete the electoral process that was the mandate of caretaker government.

Addressing a press conference here Wednesday the caretaker minister said that control rooms have been established by election commission, home department and police to monitor the election process. He said that Quick Response Force has also been deployed to meet any emergency in an effective way. He said that steps have been taken for security of sensitive polling station adding that about 15000 polling stations have been established among which some are declared sensitive.

## AD&SJ grants bail to 4 policemen

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Additional District and Session Judge (AD&SJ) Peshawar Muhammad Sher Ali Khan granted bail to four policemen allegedly involved in change of case's property, on Wednesday.

According to prosecution, Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Cantt Muhammad Haroon Jadoon, Station House Officer (SHO) Gulberg Abdul Aziz, Moharar Aziz Khan and Additional Moharar Arshad had changed 469 kilograms hashish, 152 kilos opium and one kilo heroin after recovery which wasn't drugs.

Moreover, police high-ups had registered against DSP Cantt Muhammad Haroon, SHO Abdul Aziz, Moharar Aziz Khan and Additional Moharar Arshad Ali as well as arrested them. The lawyers argued that there is insufficient evidences against the culprits which would place liability of imprisonment till conclusion of trial and requested for provision of bails.

## Saudi Arabia says no diplomatic ties with Israel

Blinken meets Israeli PM for talks on Gaza truce plan

### Hamas proposal calls for 135-day ceasefire

DOHA: Hamas has proposed a ceasefire plan that would quiet the guns in Gaza for four-and-a-half months, during which all hostages would go free, Israel would withdraw its troops from the Gaza Strip and an agreement would be reached on an end to the war.

The militant group's proposal — a response to an offer sent last week by Qatari and Egyptian mediators — comes amid the biggest diplomatic push yet for an extended halt to the fighting, and was met with hope and relief in the Gaza Strip. There was no immediate public response from Israel, which has said it will not pull its troops out of Gaza until Hamas is wiped out.

According to a draft document seen by Reuters, the Hamas counterproposal envisages three phases of a truce, lasting 45 days each. Militants would exchange remaining Israeli hostages they captured on Oct. 7 for Palestinian prisoners. The reconstruction of Gaza would begin, Israeli forces would withdraw completely, and bodies and remains would be exchanged.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived overnight in Israel after meeting the leaders of mediators Qatar and Egypt in the most serious diplomatic push of the war so far aimed at reaching an extended truce. A source close to the negotiations said the Hamas counterproposal did not require a guarantee of a permanent ceasefire at the outset, but that an end to the war would have to be agreed during the truce before the final hostages were freed. According to the document, during the first 45-day phase, all Israeli women hostages, males under 19 and the elderly and sick would be released, in exchange for the release of Palestinian women and children from Israeli jails. Israel would also withdraw its troops from populated areas during the first phase. Implementation of the second phase would not begin until the sides conclude "indirect talks over the requirements needed to end the mutual military operations and return to complete calm."

The second phase would include the release of remaining male hostages and "the withdrawal of Israeli forces outside the borders of all areas of the Gaza Strip." Bodies and remains would be exchanged during the third phase. The truce would also increase the flow of food and other aid to Gaza's desperate civilians, who are facing hunger and dire shortages of basic supplies. "People are optimistic, at the same time they pray that this hope turns into a real agreement that will end the war," said Yamen Hamad, a father of four, living in a UN school in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip. "People are awaiting news of a ceasefire, they are a bit hopeful despite the continued bombardment," he said via a messaging app. Israel began its military offensive in Gaza after militants from Hamas-ruled Gaza killed 1,200 people and took 253 hostages in southern Israel on Oct. 7. Gaza's Health Ministry says at least 27,585 Palestinians have been confirmed killed in Israel's military campaign, with thousands more feared buried under rubble. — Arab News

alarm about looming major combat in the densely crowded area.

"Intensified hostilities in Rafah in this situation could lead to large-scale loss of civilian lives, and we must do everything possible within our power to avoid that," said its spokesman Jens Laerke. The bloodiest ever Gaza war started with Hamas's unprecedented attack on Israel on October 7, which resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures. Militants also seized around 250 hostages. Israel says 132 remain in Gaza, of whom 29 are believed to have died.

Israel vowed to eliminate Hamas and launched air strikes and a ground offensive that have killed at least 27,585 people, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry. The campaign has devastated swathes of Gaza and displaced the majority of its 2.4 million people who have also endured dire shortages of food, water, fuel and medicine.

The humanitarian situation in long-blockaded Gaza has become "beyond catastrophic," the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said on Tuesday. To bring relief, the warring parties have discussed a possible new ceasefire deal which would follow a first, week-long truce in November that saw more than 100 hostages freed, the Israelis among them in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Last week, a Hamas source said the proposed new truce calls for a six-week pause to fighting and a hostage-prisoner exchange, as well as more aid for Gaza, but negotiations have continued

since.

Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said on Tuesday that Hamas had responded to a new proposal, adding that "the reply includes some comments, but in general it is positive." Blinken said he would discuss Hamas's reply with Israeli leaders and Netanyahu's office said the "details are being thoroughly evaluated" by the spy agency Mossad. Netanyahu — who had yet to comment directly on the Hamas response — stressed that Israel's overall war aim remained unchanged: "We are on the way to the total victory and we will not stop."

Amid the Gaza war, Iran-backed groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen have launched attacks in support of Hamas, and Israel, the United States and its allies have launched strikes on them. Yemen's Houthi rebels have for weeks targeted what they say are Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, disrupting global trade and prompting reprisals by US and British forces.

Last week, the United States also carried out strikes on Iran-backed groups in Syria and Iraq, killing dozens in retaliation for an attack that killed three US troops in Jordan. Israel has also traded deadly cross-border fire with Lebanon's Hezbollah movement and has repeatedly bombed Iran-linked targets in Syria. Israeli strikes on the Syrian city of Homs on Wednesday killed 10 people, including at least six civilians, according to the Britain-based war monitoring group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. — Arab News

## Tough contest expected on Lahore's 14 NA seats

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Tough contest expected on Lahore's 14 National Assembly (NA) seats tomorrow, according to a analysis report on Wednesday.

Bigwigs are contesting polls on 14 NA seats tomorrow as Pakistan is heading towards general elections tomorrow after months of electioneering. Pakistan People's Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will contest the election with Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's Attaullah Tarar on NA-127, Lahore. The PPP chairman hopes to repeat history by winning the elec-

tions from Lahore like his maternal grandfather and Pakistan's first elected prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

On NA-130, former three-time prime minister and PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif will take on Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-backed candidate Dr Yasmin Rashid, who is currently in jail in May 9 riots cases. On NA-123 tough contest is being expected between PML-N President Shehabz Sharif, Jamaat-e-Islami's Liaquat Baloch, and Afzal Azeem.

Maryam Nawaz will contest the election against independent candidate

Shehzad Farooq in NA-119, while Saad Rafique will contest polls against PTI's backed candidate Sardar Latif Khosa on the NA-122 seat. Istekham-e-Pakistan Party's Abdul Aleem Khan will contest elections against Ali Aijaz on the NA-117 seat, while Hamza Shahbaz will contest polls against PTI's backed candidate Aliya Hamza on the NA-118 seat. On NA-120, PML-N's Sardar Ayaz Sadiq to contest polls against Usman Hamza, while IPP's Awn Chaudhry will contest polls against Salman Akram Raja on the NA-128 seat.

## Zaluzhny touts drones as path to victory

KYIV: Ukraine's commander-in-chief has outlined a plan to massively scale up the use of unmanned systems to overcome Russia's advantages in manpower and materiel and break the deadlock in this war. The effectiveness of such systems was proved again last week as they sank a Russian missile corvette, grounded three planes and set an oil refinery on fire.

Russia, too, continued to attack Ukraine with drones and missiles, but it failed to capture new territory despite its superior resources and constant assaults on the eastern city of Avdiivka and Ukraine's stronghold at Krynyk on the left bank of the Dnipro River in the Kherson region. Meanwhile, Ukraine's Western allies made progress on securing funding for the war.

The European Union finally approved a 50-billion-euro (\$63bn) aid package for Ukraine, and the United States Senate unveiled a \$118bn bill that includes \$60bn for Ukraine. "Unmanned systems ... are almost the only tool for withdrawing from military operations of a positional form," Ukrainian commander-in-chief Valerii Zaluzhny wrote in a doctrinal paper on Thursday, because traditional heavy armour and manpower are "increasingly a dream" for Ukraine's armed forces.

He called for a "completely new state system of technological rearmament" that could "take up to five months". Zaluzhny's new military doctrine dovetailed

with the government's pledge late last year to build 1 million first-person viewer drones and 11,000 medium- and long-range drones this year. Ukraine has used such systems with devastating effect. On January 31, Ukraine struck the Belbek airfield in western Crimea. Russia's Ministry of Defence said it intercepted 20 air-launched missiles, but Russians in Crimea filmed some of the missiles flying undisturbed directly over dormant air defence systems.

The following day, Ukraine struck Belbek again, this time damaging or destroying three Russian fighter planes on the ground, according to southern forces spokesperson Natalia Humenyuk. One Russian military reporter described it as a complex, two-day operation targeting three airfields and involving decoy missiles, HARM radar-seeking missiles, Storm Shadow attack missiles and surface drones. Those surface drones sank a Russian warship near Lake Donuzlav off western Crimea.

Footage released by Ukraine's armed forces showed them repeatedly striking the Ivanovets, a 480-tonne missile corvette, crippling it and then destroying it in a pair of massive explosions. It was reportedly one of only three still operating in Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Ukrainian military intelligence chief Kyrylo Budanov said his service's drone unit Group 13 sank the Ivanovets using Magura V5 surface drones. "There were six direct hits

to the hull. ... The ship overturned on its stern and sank," he said.

Two days later, Ukraine's Security Service struck the Rosneft refinery in Volgograd, one of the largest in Russia, apparently using two aerial drones. Footage showed at least four burning oil tanks destroyed. Budanov said he believes the number of attacks would increase. "Hypothetically, there is a plan by which all this happens. I believe that this plan includes all the main objects of critical infrastructure and objects of military infrastructure of the Russian Federation," Budanov said.

Ukrainian air force spokesman Yuri Ignat suggested attacks on Crimea would continue to target airfields. "Russia uses not only Belbek. About five airfields are actively used for attacks on Ukraine. These are planes of various modifications: MiG-31, ... MiG-29, Su-27 and helicopters," he said. Ukraine has pursued other forms of asymmetric warfare.

Its military intelligence said a Russian Tu-95 bomber, who had reportedly taken part in raids on Ukraine, was shot dead in Russia. Ukrainian hackers from the Prana Network broke into a Russian Defence Ministry server, stealing documents that revealed Russia had agreed to pay Iran \$1.75bn for 6,000 Shahed drones. Russia kept those drones flying into Ukraine throughout the week, accompanied by missiles. — Aljazeera



LAHORE: Pakistan Army soldiers patrolling to ensure security ahead of general election.

## SHC directs to use modern tech in hunt for missing persons

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court has issued a strong directive to law enforcement agencies, demanding they utilize modern technology and devices in their efforts to recover missing individuals. This order came during a hearing on petitions filed by families seeking the return of their loved ones who have vanished.

Justice Naimatullah Phalpot presided over the hearing, questioning the investigating officer about the measures taken to locate missing citizens. While the officer reported conducting 14 Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) and reaching out to various

agencies, the court deemed these efforts insufficient.

Specifically, the families of Hasan Dilawar, missing from Landhi, and Habib Khan, missing from Shah Latif, presented their cases before the court, pleading for their loved ones' safe return. In response, the court not only ordered the reconvening of JITs and the Provincial Task Force but also emphasized the crucial role of modern technology in expediting the search.

This emphasis marks a significant development, highlighting the potential of technological advancements in tackling the critical issue of missing persons. The court expects law enforcement to lever-

age tools like advanced tracking systems, facial recognition software, and data analysis to enhance their investigations and bring missing individuals home.

The hearing concluded with a four-week adjournment, during which time the court expects a comprehensive progress report detailing the actions taken and results achieved in recovering Hasan Dilawar, Habib Khan, and other missing citizens. This renewed focus on utilizing modern technology in missing person cases offers a glimmer of hope for families desperately seeking answers and reunions.

## Polling in 4 constituencies postponed

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has postponed elections in four constituencies due to death of candidates, it emerged on Wednesday. The constituencies where elections have been postponed include three provincial assembly seats. Elections were postponed in PK-91 (Kohat) due to death of candidate Ismatullah Khattak.

In NA-08 and PK-22 (Bajaur) polling was put off due to death of aspirant Rehan Zeb. Similarly, the ECP postponed polling in PP-266 (Rahim Yar Khan) after a candidate, Israr Hussain, died. The ECP says elections in these constituencies will be held after general election. The ECP will issue election schedule for these constituencies later.

## Body of young student found

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Body of a 10-year-old boy was recovered from the washroom of a local seminary in Islamabad's Aabpara's police station area in G-6/3, police said on Wednesday. Abdullah's jugular vein was slit with a sharp-edged weapon. He was a student of a seminary in Jamia Masjid Bilal.

Police registered the first information report and after the postmortem the dead body was handed over to the family. A Polyclinic Hospital doctor told police that Abdullah was killed by using a sharp-edged weapon.