

Daniyal Aziz arrested
F.P. Report

NAROWAL: Narowal witnessed a dramatic turn of events as independent candidate Daniyal Aziz was apprehended in NA-75, prompting his wife, Mahnaz Akbar Aziz, to speak out, alleging her husband's abduction. Daniyal Aziz cast his vote earlier in the day before being detained by police. Mahnaz Akbar Aziz asserted that her husband was forcibly taken into custody and subjected to torture.

Peaceful polling for election concludes

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A daylong polling process concluded on Thursday for the General Election 2024 overall in a peaceful manner, with active participation from all age group voters who came out in droves to elect candidates of their choice.

The polling started simultaneously across the country at 8 a.m. and continued till 5 p.m. without any break to provide maximum time to citizens to exercise their right to vote enshrined in the constitution. The voters present in the premises of the polling stations at the poll-ending time were allowed to cast their votes, said a spokesperson for the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja had been personally seeing the election proceeding at the Central Election Monitoring Control Center. According to the ECP, over 128 million registered voters were scheduled to exercise their democratic right by casting votes for candidates participating in elections for the national and provincial legislatures. The polling was held for 265 seats of the National Assembly and 590 seats of provincial assemblies.

The voting took place on 51 seats of the Balochistan Assembly, 128 out of 130 seats of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, 296 out of 297 seats of the Punjab Assembly and 130 seats of the Sindh Assembly. The polling was held in 855 Constituencies out of 859 however due to the death of the candidate, voting will not be held in NA 8, PP 266, PK 22 and PK 91.

The government had deployed over 648,000 security personnel nationwide to ensure the safety of voters, as well as, conduct of fair and transparent polling process. Out of 648,000 security personnel deployed, 137,000 were from army and paramilitary force, while 511,000 policemen performed duties during the election. An average of seven to eight security personnel manned each of

CEC felicitates nation

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja on Thursday expressed his gratitude and congratulations to the nation for the successful conduct of the general election.

In a special message, he thanked the people of Pakistan for fulfilling their constitutional and national responsibility, PTV news reported. Sikandar Sultan Raja extended his appreciation to all stakeholders involved in the electoral process, including federal and provincial caretaker governments, political parties, security agencies, police, civil administration, Pakistan Army, media, voters, polling staff and election members and their staff. The CEC expressed confidence in the responsible conduct of the returning officers and urged them to fulfill their duties diligently, ensuring timely ordering and delivery of results.

169 seats hold key to NA control

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In the intricate landscape of the National Assembly, the magic number for political supremacy is a straightforward 169 seats for securing simple majority out of the 336 total seats, which include reserved slots for women and minorities.

This uncomplicated majority is the golden ticket that political parties aim to secure to wield influence in the legislative powerhouse. The National Assembly boasts a total of 266 seats, with 265 dedicated to general representation. However, a hiccup in the electoral process arose when the polling for one seat had to be postponed due to the unfortunate demise of a candidate. This incident brought the effective count down to 265 at present. For those keeping score, a party aspiring to clinch a simple majority needs to secure precisely 169 seats.

PM greets nation on conduct of successful polls

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Thursday congratulating the nation over the successful conduct of general elections 2024, said the high voter turnout was a clear indication of public commitment to shaping the country's future.

"The participation and enthusiasm of the people of Pakistan have been the cornerstone of this democratic exercise. The high voter turnout is a clear indication of public commitment to shaping the future of our country," the prime minister wrote on his X timeline following the polling ended after a smooth and peaceful process across the country.

He appreciated the efforts of the Election Commission of Pakistan, interim provincial governments, armed forces, civil armed forces, police, law enforcement agencies, election staff, media and all those institutions and individuals who contributed to the conduct of the free and fair elections. Prime Minister Kakar said that the momentous occasion was not just a testament to the

resilience and strength of the country's democratic processes but also the indomitable spirit of the Pakistani people.

He said that the voices, expressed through the votes, would contribute to the fortification of the country's democracy, and for that, the people of Pakistan deserved every bit of appreciation. Prime Minister Kakar said that despite few incidents of terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, the efforts of armed forces, civil armed forces, LEAs, civilian administration and Election Commission of Pakistan for conducting free and fair elections across the country were commendable.

"Their unwavering commitment to their duties has been instrumental in the smooth conduct of the elections." He said that in the face of adversity, the people of Pakistan had shown remarkable courage and determination. He said that the institutions' resolve in the aftermath of the recent terrorism incidents, continuing to participate in the electoral process, was a powerful statement against the forces that sought to

ISPR greets nation over successful election

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: We extend heartfelt congratulations to the nation on the generally peaceful and violence free conduct of the general elections. The armed forces alongside other Law Enforcement Agencies are proud to have played a pivotal role in providing security during conduct of the sacred electoral process, in aid of civil power, and in accordance with the constitution of Pakistan. With the deployment of 137,000 army personnel and civil armed forces at approximately 6,000 selected most sensitive polling stations and over 7800 QRFs, a safe and secure environment for the public was

ensured.

Despite 51 cowardly terrorist attacks, mostly in KP and Balochistan, aimed at disrupting the electoral process, the soldiers remained resolute and effectively ensured peace and security across Pakistan. 12 people (including 10 personnel of security forces and law enforcement agencies) embraced Shahadat and 39 others have been injured in these attacks. Through proactive intelligence manoeuvres and swift action, many potential threats were neutralized, underscoring the unwavering commitment of our security agencies to protect the democratic rights of our citizens. During various operations, 5 ter-

destabilize the nation. It underscores our collective desire for peace, stability, and prosperity, he added. "Once again, I congratulate the nation on this historic achievement. May this election be a harbinger of a brighter, more prosperous future for Pakistan," the prime minister remarked.

PM visits various polling stations of twin cities, expresses satisfaction: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Thursday visited various polling stations in Islamabad and Rawalpindi as the voting process for General Elections 2024 is underway across the country.

The prime minister took a round of the polling stations in G-6 sector of Islamabad and Arid University of Rawalpindi and others. He also talked to the polling staff and inspected the voting process as well as the facilities provided to the voters.

The prime minister expressed satisfaction over the security and the facilities for the voters. He interacted with the voters, and shook hand with them, who also had photographs with him.

The Frontier Post

Pakistan shuts borders

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan shut down its border crossings with Afghanistan and Iran as the country votes in general elections on Thursday. Border crossings with Afghanistan and Iran would remain closed both for cargo and pedestrians to ensure full security during the polling for general elections being held today. In a statement, Foreign Spokesperson said that normal border operations would resume today.



KARACHI: President Dr. Arif Alvi casting his vote in general elections.

600,000 security men deployed across country

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Over 600,000 security personnel have been deployed across Pakistan to maintain law and order situation during election 2024. Polling began at 8 am today and will continue uninterrupted till 5 pm as more than 128 million voters are set to elect their representatives for the national and provincial assemblies for the next five years in what appears to be one of the most unpredictable general elections in Pakistan's political history.

To maintain the law and order situation on polling day 600,000 security personnel including Pakistan army, civil armed forces and police have been deployed on polling stations across the country. Whereas 106,342 quick response forces have also been deployed on the ECP's request. Among 600,000 security personnel, 23,940 are from Pakistan army, 30,882 from civil armed forces and 465,736 police forces have been deployed across the country.

The military troops are deployed to assist the civil administration in general elections, ensure transparency in electoral process and maintain law and order. The military troops will provide third tier of security duty outside the polling stations. Police will be the first tier, while the civil armed forces will provide second tier security of the election under a third-tier security plan. It is pertinent to mention here that 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.

ECP printed 40m additional ballot papers

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission has printed 40 million additional ballot papers for 2024 general elections against the 2018 general elections.

According to the ECP, for the current general elections it printed 260 million ballot papers for 859 national and provincial assemblies constituencies while 220 million ballot papers were printed for 2018 general elections.

For 220 million ballot papers printed for 2018 elections, 800 tons of special security paper were used, while for 260 million ballot papers printed for the current elections 2,170 tons of paper were used. The key reason for rise in printing of ballot papers was the increase in the number of candidates in the constituencies, which was 150 times more than the 2018 elections.

Five cops martyred in D I Khan blast

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: At least five cops martyred and two others sustained injuries as explosion occurred near police vehicle in Kulachi DI Khan.

As per details, the explosion occurred in Garah Aslam area of Kulachi which targeted a police vehicle. According to police officials, the dead bodies and injured have been transferred via a helicopter to DI Khan.

Yesterday, a hand grenade blast occurred in Karachi's Gulshan-e-Iqbal area, leaving three persons dead and two injured. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Irfan Bahadur said that a grenade exploded in the hands of 17-year-old Farooq, the son of a police officer. The SSP said that Farooq came out of his residence in Haji Limu Goth of Gulshan-e-Iqbal with a hand grenade that exploded, resulting in his death.

It is pertinent to mention here that the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja ordered the police chiefs and chief secretaries of all provinces to put security on high alert following terror attacks in Balochistan ahead of general elections 2024.

Meanwhile, a security forces' vehicle came under attack during election duty in Dera Ismail Khan, resulting in the martyrdom of one officer on Thursday morning.

The incident occurred in Kot Azam area of DI Khan District. The assailants targeted the security forces' vehicle while it was providing security for the election process. Amid security concerns, the government temporarily suspended mobile and internet services across the country.

Meanwhile, at least two children killed in another blast occurred near a polling station Washbood Panjgur during the voting for election 2024. According to police officials, the polling was stopped at the Government High School Malik Abad polling station after the blast.

The security personnel were summoned

to the scene of the explosion. Earlier on the day, at least five cops martyred and two others sustained injuries as explosion occurred near police vehicle in Kulachi DI Khan. As per details, the explosion occurred in Garah Aslam area of Kulachi which targeted a police vehicle. The dead bodies and injured were transferred via a helicopter to DI Khan.

Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice Retired Syed Arshad Hussain Shah on Thursday condemned IED blast on police mobile in Aslam Gara area of Tehsil Kulachi Dera Ismail Khan.

In a statement, the Chief Minister strongly condemned the attacks. He expressed deep sorrow over the loss of policemen in the line of duty. The Chief Minister extended heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the families of the martyred. He prayed for the elevation of the martyrs' status and patience for their bereaved families.

Expressing regret over the loss of lives, the Chief Minister emphasized that such cowardly acts wouldn't dampen the spirits of the police force. He wished for the swift recovery of the injured. Highlighting the sacrifices made by the police for the peace and security of the province, Justice Syed Arshad Hussain Shah stated that the government and the public stand in solidarity with the police and other security agencies.

"No stone will be left unturned in supporting the families of the martyrs," reassured the Vigilant Chief Minister. He emphasized that the government and the people will not leave the martyrs' families alone during these trying times. The incident underscores the challenges faced by the police in ensuring peace, and the Vigilant Chief Minister urged unity and resilience in the face of such tragic events. It's worth mentioning here that at least five policemen were martyred and two were injured when an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast took place.

Internet, mobile services suspended on polling day

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Interior Ministry on Thursday suspended mobile phone and internet services across Pakistan to maintain law and order situation in election 2024.

"As a result of the recent incidents of terrorism in the country precious lives have been lost, security measures are essential to maintain the law and order situation and deal with possible threats, hence the temporary suspension of mobile services across the country," the interior ministry said in a message on X (formerly Twitter).

Following the suspension of internet and cellular services across Pakistan, the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) 8300 SMS service has been also affected.

Earlier, a hand grenade blast occurred in Karachi's Gulshan-e-Iqbal area, leaving three persons dead and two injured. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Irfan Bahadur said that a grenade exploded in the hands of 17-year-old Farooq, the son of a police officer. The SSP said that Farooq came out of his residence in Haji Limu Goth of Gulshan-e-Iqbal with a hand grenade that exploded, resulting in

his death.

It is pertinent to mention here that the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja ordered the police chiefs and chief secretaries of all provinces to put security on high alert following terror attacks in Balochistan ahead of general elections 2024. Pakistan, world's fifth largest democracy, is going to polls today (Thursday) to elect its representatives for next five years.

A huge number of countymen are expected to vote in the most expensive polling exercise since the country's inception. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F), Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and a huge number of independent candidates, some backed by PTI, are participating in the exercise.

Meanwhile, PTI has strongly criticized the nationwide suspension of mobile phone and internet services on Election Day, denouncing it as an assault on democracy. A spokesperson for the party lambasted the Election Commission of

Pakistan, accusing it of failing to uphold the transparency and integrity of the electoral process. "The termination of mobile phone services on election day is a blatant attempt to disenfranchise voters and suppress turnout," the PTI spokesperson asserted. "It represents a systematic conspiracy to deprive citizens of their constitutional right to vote."

Citing concerns over electoral rigging, the spokesperson contended that the shutdown of communication services was designed to obscure any evidence of malpractice at polling stations. "The Election Commission is turning a blind eye to the erosion of democratic principles occurring right under its nose," they added. In a resolute tone, the PTI spokesperson declared, "The nation will not tolerate such orchestrated efforts to subvert the electoral process." Calling for the immediate restoration of mobile phone and internet services nationwide, the PTI spokesperson urged authorities to ensure that citizens are able to exercise their constitutional rights freely. They called upon the people to defy oppression and fascism through the power of their vote.



KARACHI: Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori casts his vote at a polling station during General Elections 2024. —APP Photo

Journalists visit Election City

LAHORE (APP): The journalists on Thursday visited the Election City established by the Election Commission where they were briefed about the election results, received.

The journalists were briefed by Head of Political Finance Wing Masood Sherwani and DGIT Khizr Aziz. DGIT Khizr Aziz said that the results of ROs would be received here in Election City, adding our system does not depend on internet.

DGIT Khizr Aziz further said that one National Assembly and three Provincial Assembly elections had been postponed due to the death of candidates. A media wall has also been installed in the Election City.

Project Director EMS Colonel (retd) Muhammad Saad Ali said that after the completion of data entry Form-47, it will have to be sent to ECP here, adding Form 47 will be received through e-mail, fax. He said live results could be seen from here. All Returning Officers (Ros) are provided with DSL connections.

Saad Ali further informed that 60 ROs had also been given satellite connections, adding 3600 EMS operators were working across the country, moreover presiding officer had created a photo of Form 45 through the software send to the ROs. He said if the network is not available somewhere, the location and time of the photo will be saved in the software.

EC Sindh directs to use all resources

KARACHI (APP): The Provincial Election Commissioner of Sindh Sharifullah has directed all the relevant departments including the district returning officers, police and administration to ensure the conduct of free, fair, transparent, impartial and peaceful general elections in the province. He said that all resources should be utilized for the peaceful conduct of the general elections. He has also appealed to the voters to cast their vote without fear and fulfil their national responsibility.

CCPO visits polling stations

LAHORE (APP): Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Bilal Siddique Kamyana inspected polling stations in Lahore.

He visited Garhi Shahu, Lawrence Road, Model Town, Defence and Cantonment areas. Kamyana reviewed security arrangements at sensitive polling stations, stressing strict adherence to the Election Commission's code of conduct. He emphasized peaceful conduct and warned against any disruptions to the polling process.

He assured the public of a peaceful environment for voting, highlighting the vigilance of police personnel and the deployment of Dolphin squads and Piru teams for effective patrolling. Special checkpoints were established around polling stations to maintain security, with additional support from the Anti-Riot Force to ensure peace.

Kamran congratulates admin, LEAs for holding peaceful elections

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori, has congratulated the local administration and law enforcement agencies (LEAs) for playing their effective role in holding peaceful elections 2024.

The Governor monitored the election process throughout the day, and was also in touch with the LEAs and administration, said a spokesperson of the Governor's house here on Thursday.

He lauded the role of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), for conducting the elections in a peaceful environment. He said the media had also played vital role for excellent coverage of the polling process.

He said that the overall peaceful conduct of the elections in the province is

the result of joint efforts of all the stakeholders. He said the voters also deserve appreciation who exercised their right to vote for their favourite candidates.

He hoped that next elected government would resolve the problems of the masses of this country.

Governor Sindh casts vote: Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori, Thursday, cast his vote at the polling station of Neelam Colony, district South Karachi for National Assembly Constituency NA 241 and Sindh Assembly Constituency PS 110.

The governor speaking to the media after casting the vote, expressed satisfaction that polling process across the province was being conducted in a peaceful manner and people were

casting their vote in a peaceful environment.

He said that the international media was also monitoring the election process in Pakistan.

The governor emphasized the citizens to exercise their right to vote and said that senior citizens, women and youth should cast their vote in favour of the most suitable candidate as next 5 years would depend on the outcome of these elections.

The governor also lauded the services of the security forces in maintaining peace and law and order on the polling day.

Kamran Khan Tessori said that government would not allow any one to disturb the peace of Karachi and stringent action would be taken against them.



KARACHI: Caretaker Provincial Minister for Information, Muhammad Ahmed Shah talking to media persons after casts his vote at polling station.

Sindh home minister, IGP take maximum measures for security

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Sindh Home Minister Brigadier retired Haris Nawaz, accompanied by Inspector General of Police Riffat Mukhtar Raja, conducted a thorough inspection of the Command and Control Center at Civic Center and the polling station at DJ College and expressed satisfaction over the measures taken for holding polling process in a peaceful environment.

Their visit focused on assessing the security arrangements and monitoring the polling, during which they engaged with

both voters and presiding officers to inquire about the proceedings.

Emphasizing the importance of cooperation between voters, supporters, and law enforcement agencies for ensuring peaceful polling, the Sindh Home Minister reiterated the caretaker government's commitment to prioritize a conducive electoral environment.

Highlighting the need for vigilant surveillance, particularly around the perimeters of polling stations, Haris Nawaz asked the police to promptly respond to any suspicious

activities or movements. Furthermore, he underscored the significance of providing special assistance to senior citizens and women visiting polling stations today (Thursday).

IGP Sindh Riffat Mukhtar Raja, speaking on the occasion, lauded the readiness and alertness of all police officers and personnel, with additional reserves on standby. He said that Sindh Police utilised all available resources and manpower to uphold security during the electoral process.

3 killed in road mishaps, 4 bodies found in Karachi

KARACHI (INP): Three including a child were killed in separate road mishaps while bodies of four people were recovered from different localities of the metropolis on Thursday.

According to details, an over speeding vehicle crushed to death 2-year-old Usman s/o Gul Hassan while playing in street outside his residence near Baldian Mumtaz Goth Hotel.

A 50-year-old passerby was killed after hit by an over speeding near a pri-

vate mill at Baldia Lakki Charhai.

An over speeding vehicle crushed to death a 60-year-old unidentified person near Rexer Bridge on Lyari Expressway.

Body of 51-year-old Muhammad Naeem was found emergency waiting area of Jinnah Hospital.

Body of a 17-year-old youth identified as Haji Khan s/o Muhammad Bilal who allegedly died of heart stroke was found from Super Highway. The

deceased hailed from Umerkot.

A 75-year-old unidentified man was found dead near Quba Masjid, Sohrah Goth Adil Shah bus stop.

Body of another 55-year-old man was found near Aqsa Mosque Impress Market Saddar.

The bodies of all people were shifted to different hospitals of concerned areas and police after registering separate cases at respective police stations started investigations.

All parties should accept election results: Hamza

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Hamza Shehbaz said on

Thursday that acceptance of election results was important for progress of the country.

Talking to the media here, Hamza said that the turnout was less in the morning, but it was better in the evening.

He said that economic stability was the need of the hour for the country, adding all political parties have to stand together against terrorism. He said: "I think it is important to accept the election results."

Amir Ji Karachi Hafiz Naem casts vote

KARACHI (APP): Amir Jamaat-e-Islami of Karachi Ji's candidate for National Assembly (NA) constituency NA-250 Hafiz Naemur Rehman exercised his right to vote in North Nazimabad on Thursday.

Ameer Ji Karachi Hafiz Naem is a Ji-supported candidate for NA-250 Karachi Central-IV (formerly NA 256), against MQM Pakistan's Farhan Chishti and PPP's Khawaja Sohail, among other candidates in the contest.

Hafiz Naemur Rahman is also running for office in 2024 from Karachi West-III seat NA-246 (formerly NA 251) against MQM Pakistan leader and former federal minister Syed Aminul Haq.

PPP has concerns over Karachi's election process: Mandokhail

KARACHI (INP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) candidate for National Assembly constituency NA-242, Qadir Mandokhail has said that his party his party has serious concerns over election process in Karachi.

Talking to a private news channel after casting vote on Thursday, he alleged that the District Returning Officers (DROs) torn off the posters of PPP and replaced them by posters of Mustafa Kamal.

Qadir Mandokhail said that hooligans of Mustafa Kamal were deployed in Karachi Baldia for campaign against PPP.

The PPP leader blamed that voting stations of his party voters from PS-112 were changed on Wednesday night for creating difficulties for PPP voters.

CS casts vote in Lahore

LAHORE (APP): Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman on Thursday cast his vote in Lahore.

He exercised his right to vote for National Assembly Constituency NA-129 and Provincial Assembly Constituency PP-171 at the polling station set up in Government Officers Residences (GOR)-II.

Later, the Chief Secretary visited the control room established in the Home Department to monitor the general elections. He issued instructions to strictly monitor law and order and administrative matters during the polling process.

CM casts vote at Riwaz Garden

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi cast his vote at the Riwaz Garden polling station here on Thursday. The CM cast his ballot in the polling station No. 42 of GPS Junior Model School Riwaz Garden. He stood in the queue and waited for his turn. The CM on his turn took ballot papers from the polling officer and by putting a stamp on the electoral symbol put the ballot papers in the box.

CM monitors election arrangements: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday paid a visit to the Central Control Room established by the home department at the Civil Secretariat to review and monitor arrangements made for holding the general elections across the province. The CM went to the central control room and conducted a detailed review of the

monitoring arrangements.

The home secretary gave a briefing to the CM about arrangements being undertaken to ensure holding of general elections in a peaceful environment besides the monitoring system. Mohsin Naqvi stated that a crucial phase of holding general elections had been completed in a peaceful and nice manner. The police, administration and law enforcement institutions jointly maintained law and order environment during the general elections.

The CM acknowledged that excellent arrangements had been made for holding the general elections in every city of Punjab, including Lahore. IG Police Dr Usman Anwar, CCPO Lahore and officials concerned were also present.

CM lays virtual foundation stone of 40 police stations: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi performed the virtual

groundbreaking for 40 state-of-the-art police stations in Sabzazar, simultaneously commencing construction at the Shirakot police station site with the use of an excavator.

Accompanied by senior police officials, IG Usman Anwar briefed about the project. Expressing his vision, the CM outlined plans for the construction of 22 smart police stations in Lahore and 18 in other cities across the province.

Additionally, he highlighted the establishment of dispute resolution centers within these facilities to expedite the resolution of public grievances.

He mentioned the provision of separate entrances for men and women. Acknowledging the pressing need for these modernized police stations, the CM affirmed plans for their further expansion, recognizing them as imperative solutions for societal challenges.

‘Security beefed up, polling stations functioning smoothly’

KARACHI (APP): The

Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (retd) Maqbool Baqar on Thursday said that the security arrangements were beefed up and the polling stations were functioning smoothly. While talking to media persons after casting his vote at Polling Station Government Boys Secondary School No.2, Block-6, PECHS for NA-237 and PS-104, the CM Baqar said that the current government has provided all the necessary facilities, including transportation of the election staff to polling stations.

He dismissed the notion that polling staff had not reached their polling stations and affirmed that the voter turnout would increase in the day.

The Chief Minister visited the Command & Control Center at Civic Center and witnessed the polling process

through CCTV coverage.

The Home Minister, Brig (retd) Haris Nawaz and IG Police Riffat Mukhtar briefed him about the smooth functioning of the polling process.

Later, the Chief Minister, along with Home Minister Brig (R) Haris Nawaz and IF Police Riffat Mukhtar, took an aerial view of the polling process by helicopter.

Interim CM casts vote: Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (r) Maqbool Baqar on Thursday went to cast his vote at Polling Station Government Boys Secondary School No.2, Block-6, PECHS for NA-237 and PS-104. While talking to the media, the Chief Minister mentioned that the security arrangements were beefed up and the polling stations were functioning smoothly. He also added that the voter turnout would increase.

PEC Punjab urges voters to exercise right to vote

LAHORE (APP):

Provincial Election Commissioner (PEC) Punjab Ijaz Anwar Chohan has urged voters to exercise their right to vote without any fear.

In a statement issued here on Thursday, he said that foolproof security arrangements had been made for peaceful conduct of elections across

the Province.

He said that polling was going on in 144 national and 297 provincial assembly constituencies in Punjab and the polling process would continue from 8 am to 5 pm without any delay.

He said that 51,000 polling stations had been established for 74.2 million registered voters of province. Chohan said

that the administration, police and related institutions should ensure the conduct of impartial elections, adding that no negligence would be tolerated in this regard.

He said that all resources would be used for transparent elections. All control rooms were operational for immediate redressal of voter complaints, he added.

DG Rangers assesses election security, orders enhanced measures

KARACHI (APP): Director General (DG) of Pakistan Rangers Sindh Major General Azhar Waqas

undertook a comprehensive tour of various locales in Karachi in connection with the general election under-way across the country.

His itinerary included the Civic Center, Karsaz, Drig Road, Mazar-e-Quaid, Dawood Chowrang, Indus Chowrang, Korangi, Qayyumabad, Nursery, Lasbela, Golimar, Board Office, North Nazimabad, Sakhi Hasan, Nagan Chowrang, Sohrah Goth, Gadap, Malir Halt, and

surrounding areas, where he meticulously assessed the security situation.

During his visit, the area sector commanders provided a thorough briefing to the DG Rangers on the security measures implemented by the Rangers.

A particular focus was placed on evaluating the security status around the highly sensitive polling stations, prompting directives to enhance security arrangements.

Emphasizing preparedness, the DG Rangers affirmed the readiness of Sindh Rangers' quick response teams to address

any potential challenges, working in tandem with the Pakistan Army, Police, and other relevant agencies.

He reiterated his commitment to uphold the code of conduct issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), ensuring its full implementation.

According to a Rangers spokesperson, approximately 10,000 Rangers personnel were deployed across the province for security duties during the national general election, with around 6,000 personnel dedicated to Karachi alone.



LAHORE: Police officials standing alert outside the polling station during General Election-2024.

CM KP inspects Election Control Room in Home Dept

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (Retd) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah on Thursday visited the Election Control Room established at Home Department, overseeing the latest developments in the electoral process.

Key officials, including Provincial Minister Aamer Abdullah, Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Choudhry, Inspector General of Police Akhtar Hayat Gandapur, and Additional Chief Secretary Home, were present during the briefing. They were briefed that polling is underway at all 15,607 polling stations throughout the province.

Adequate electoral equipment and staff have been timely deployed to every station, including those in the snow-covered . All routes in these areas are reported to be accessible at present. The election process is smoothly progressing throughout the province, with the Election Commission coordinating with administrative and security authorities.

The provincial government has introduced new software for online monitoring of administrative and security matters related to the electoral process. This

software facilitates real-time information gathering from all polling stations, ensuring efficient communication even in the event of internet service disruptions. It contains comprehensive data on polling stations and election staff.

To ensure continuous communication, alternative arrangements, including telephone and mobile phone access, have been made with all polling stations. The control room will remain operational without any interruptions until the receipt of the last ballot box. Expressing satisfaction with the election arrangements, the Caretaker Chief Minister affirmed confidence in the coordination efforts and instructed relevant authorities to stay alert to handle any unpleasant or disruptive situations effectively.

Meanwhile, on the conclusion of the process of polling for General Elections - 2024, I announce with immense satisfaction that the overall security situation across the country was kept generally stable to ensure the peaceful conduct of free and fair elections.

As Minister of Interior, I acknowledge the unwavering dedication and

professionalism of our security forces, law enforcement agencies, and police personnel. These forces were deployed extensively and in large numbers, ensuring the smooth conduct of the electoral process, which is a testament to their commitment to democracy and the people of Pakistan.

Special congratulations are due to all the security personnel who played a critical role in facilitating a peaceful voting environment. Their deployment covered even the most far-flung areas of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, interior Sindh, and Punjab, underscoring our commitment to ensuring every citizen's right to vote in a secure atmosphere.

Despite a few isolated incidents, the overall situation remained under control, demonstrating the effectiveness of our security measures.

Smooth conclusion of the polling process underscores commitment of our Armed Forces, Civil Armed Forces and law enforcement agencies to providing a peaceful environment for voters, enabling them to exercise their democratic right without fear.

Election Commissioner visits polling stations

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Provincial Election Commissioner Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shamshad Khan on Thursday conducted a comprehensive visit of various polling stations in Peshawar to assess the electoral process.

Accompanied by SSP Operation Kashif Abbasi, Regional Election Commissioner Peshawar Saeed Ahmed Khan, and Deputy Commissioner Peshawar Afaq Wazir. Shamshad Khan engaged in discussions with polling staff in Fagirabad and Gul Bahar, emphasizing their crucial responsibilities.

Shamshad Khan interacted with present polling agents, discussing electoral procedures, and commended them for their courteous involvement in the election process. He directed them to fulfill their duties with utmost responsibility. Election Commissioner also engaged in a positive conversation with media representatives, highlighting the importance of democratic participation at polling stations for the country's stability and progress.

Expressing satisfaction with the election arrangements, he appealed to the public to exercise their voting rights responsibly, contributing to the consolidation of democratic practices and the nation's prosperity. Election Commissioner Shamshad Khan briefed on these electoral duties during the visit, emphasizing the Election Commissioner's commitment to ensuring a smooth and transparent electoral process.

SP visits polling stations

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Superintendent Police (SP) Saddar Division, Abdus Salam Khalid here Thursday visited various polling stations and reviewed security arrangements.

Talking to media, he said that satisfactory security arrangements have been made for 306 polling stations. He said that 252 polling stations are very sensitive while the remaining were declared comparatively less sensitive. He said that seven policemen are deputed on very sensitive polling stations and five policemen are performing duties on less sensitive polling stations. He told that Quick Response Force and Reserve personnel are also deputed to assist police in enhancing security of polling areas.

Ex CM cast vote at Swat

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa former Chief Minister and Vice Chairman, Pakistan Tahrik e Insaaf Chairman Mahmood Khan polled his vote his native polling station Khariir Swat district.

Jumat e Islami Pakistan Central Ameer, Sirajul Haq cast his vote at Dir Lower while Central Ameer of JUIF Maulana Fazlur Rehman at Abdulkhel in DI Khan district. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Awami National Party President Aimal Wali Khan cast vote at Charsadda.

ANP president cast vote

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial ANP and NA-25 candidate Aimal Wali Khan on Thursday exercised his voting right.

Amal Wali Khan cast his vote at Raza Khan Kale Narai union council Charsadda. Aimal Wali Khan also visited polling camps of other parties, including ANP, during his electoral campaign in the ANP-25 constituency.

Fake cop held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Town police here on Thursday arrested an impersonated policeman from a polling station and shifted him to police station for interrogation.

Police said, a man wearing police uniform was arrested on suspicion from a polling station of NA-31, Peshawar.



PESHAWAR: KP Governor, Haji Ghulam Ali casting his vote during general elections.

Pervez Khattak, Mian Iftikhar cast vote at Manki Sharif, Pabbi

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Polling of votes peacefully continued in Nowshera, Charsadda and Mardan amid long queues of voters in polling stations in all urban and rural areas of these districts.

Long queues of voters were seen at polling stations setup at Govt Primary School Dheri Ishaq, Mohib Banda, Amankot and Azakhel Payan in NA 34 Nowshera-II where tough electoral battle is expected among PPP, PTI Parliamentarians, JUIF and ANP candidates. Police and security officials were deployed at sensitive and highly sensitive polling stations in NA 34 Nowshera-I and NA 33 Nowshera II.

Former KP Information Minister and ANP Central General Secretary, Mian Iftikhar Hussain who was contesting election on PK 89 Nowshera casted his vote at his native town Pabbi. Similarly, PTI Parliamentarians Chairman, Pervez Khattak polled his vote at polling station Manki Sharif at NA 33 Nowshera-I.

Pervez Khattak is contesting election on NA 33 Nowshera-I

where he is being challenged by former MPA and PMLN KP leader, Ikhtair Wali Khan and other political heavyweight. The candidates have setup private polling camps outside of polling stations for education of young voters.

"Today, my dreams to poll my first vote at General Election has been fulfilled," Ehtisham Qaiser (22), a young voter at polling station Babi Jadedd Nowshera told media. "My brother Zeeshan Qaiser and father have also polled their votes," he said, adding it was a day of taking right decision and elect those candidates with a will to serve people for next five years with commitment.

In Mardan district, polling of votes also expedited at all polling stations including Katlang, Baghdada, Takht Bhai, Mayar and Hoti where voters were seen in long queues besides women and youth voters in all towns and villages at Nowshera. Female voters were also seen in large numbers at these polling stations. Girls voters including Samina, Sidra and Wajiha polled their votes at Wapda Town Nowshera polling stations and

expressed satisfaction over polling arrangements made by ECP for women voters.

They said that polling of votes was a national obligation and urged female voters to come to polling stations in large numbers and polled their vote. Police and security personnel were deployed for security reasons and ensured smooth polling process. Polling also continued in Charsadda district where voters are coming to their respective polling stations and booths exercising right of votes.

The voters at polling stations setup at Prang, Tangi, Wali Bagh, Nisatta, Rajar and all others are witnessing rush of voters. The voters including senior citizens, women, girls, persons with disabilities, farmers and labourers besides general public. Former Ambassador, Manzoorul Haq who polled his vote at native polling station Mohib Banda Nowshera said that casting of votes was a national obligation and decision process for future government. The Ambassador urged voters not to wait for afternoon and come out of homes by exercising right of franchise in large numbers.

Rickshaws drivers, tailors overjoyed after casting first votes

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The rickshaw drivers, bricklin labourers and tailors were overjoyed after polling their first vote in February 8, 2024 election. Asadullah Khan, a 21-year-old voter was overjoyed after casting his first vote of his life in Election 2024 on Thursday. "Today, my dream came true after polling my first vote in general election 2024 held in Pakistan," said Arifullah after polling his vote at native polling station Dheri Ishaq Nowshera district.

"For the sake of voting, I refused several offers of clients today and visited to native polling station along with my family and cast votes in a peaceful atmosphere," he told media after casting his vote with big smile in face. "When General Election 2024 came nearer, I applied for computerized ID Card to cast my first vote on February 8, 2024 Election," he told media

Tailor Siyar Ali and bricklin labourer, Mosa Jan expressed happiness after polling their first vote in election 2024. "I rushed to my polling station Mohib Banda

Nowshera where I cast my first vote after Zuhar prayer" he told media at the said polling station. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) data has revealed that 17,816 candidates are in the run, including 12,695 for provincial assemblies and 5,121 for National Assembly seats.

They include 16,930 males, 882 females and four transgender persons. The political parties fielded 6,031 candidates, including 5,726 males and 275 females. A record number of 11,785 independents are also in the race, including 11,174 males, 607 females and four transgender persons. The political parties fielded 1,873 male and 93 female candidates for 266 general seats of the National Assembly with 3,248 independents, including 3,027 males, 2,019 females and two transgender persons in the fray.

Similarly, 12,695 candidates are flexing muscles for 593 provincial assembly constituencies, including 12,123 males, 570 women and two transgender persons. In Election 2024, great enthusiasm was witnessed among female voters. Women form 46% (59.3 million) and men

54% (69.2 million) of the total registered voters. However, more than 56 million young voters between the age brackets of 18-25 and 26-35 years are being seen as potential factor in shaping the legislatures.

The electoral contest are featuring 28.74 million voters in the age group of 36 to 45 years. Those on the premises of a polling station would be allowed to exercise their right to vote after the time is over. As many as 648,000 security personnel have been deployed for poll duties, including 137,000 military and 511,000 police personnel. As many as 90,675 polling stations have been established across the country, out of which more than half have been declared as sensitive or most sensitive.

The counting of ballot papers will begin soon after the voting closes, with tentative results expected to emerge within a few hours. Election Commission has introduced an Election Management System (EMS) for speedy tabulation of results and expects the new system will function without any problem besides quick dissemination of results.

DPO visits polling stations for examining security

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: District Police Officer (DPO) Abdul Rauf Qaisrani visits various polling stations to examine the security situation.

Accompanied by Senior Superintendent (SP) Headquarters Dera Muhammad Arshad Khan and DSP City Muhammad Adnan, he checked police personnel deployed at those polling stations and issued necessary directives to ensure peace and security in accordance with the code of conduct issued by the Election Commission.

Later, the DPO also inspected the Election Control Room established in the police lines, where the Incharge Control Room DSP Muhammad Imran Kundi briefed him about various relevant matters. The polling process is successfully underway on

all 821 polling stations including 282 male, 262 female, and 277 combined ones for eight Constituencies in Dera Ismail Khan.

The national assembly constituencies in Dera Ismail Khan included NA 44 and NA-45 while provincial assembly seats are PK- 111, 112, 113, 114 and 115. The foolproof security arrangements had been made at all polling stations as out of a total of 821 polling stations, 158 polling stations have been declared as normal, while 551 are sensitive, and 112 are highly sensitive. About 5473 police personnel besides Pakistan Army and FC personnel have been deployed to perform security duties for the peaceful conduct of the polls across the district.

Meanwhile, Assistant Commissioner Tank Amin Ullah Khan on Thursday visited different polling station to review the voting process.

During the visit, the AC also checked security arrangements and cameras installed at the polling stations to monitor the situation.

Issuing directives to the concerned during his round to the polling stations, he said that implementation of 'code of conduct' issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), must be ensured in letter and spirit at all polling stations of the area. A total of 192 polling stations including 58 male, 55 female, and 79 combined polling stations have been established for one each national and provincial assemblies Constituencies in the Tank. All necessary security arrangements were also made to ensure a peaceful environment near twenty eight (28) polling stations including 12 male, 13 female and three combined which were declared as sensitive in the district.

Security of polling stations inspected

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: District Police Officer (DPO) South Waziristan Upper Malik Habib Khan on Thursday visited various polling stations and reviewed the security arrangements on the polling day.

During the visit, the DPO instructed the on-duty policemen to maintain peace and order at the polling stations. Moreover, he said, the implementation over the code of conduct issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) must be ensured.

He advised the personnel on duty to deal with the citizens politely and maintain discipline. In case of rush, the citizens should be guided to stand in proper queues in an orderly manner. He said no one should be allowed to enter polling stations without checking.

Polling of votes for election ends peacefully

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Like other provinces of Pakistan, polling of votes for the General Election 2024 was ended peacefully in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including merged tribal districts on Thursday.

The polling began at 8 a.m. and would continue till 5 p.m. without any break in all districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In Peshawar, the voters including male and female are coming to polling stations in large numbers and exercising their right of franchise in a free, fair and transparent atmosphere. "I have fulfilled my national obligation after casting my vote at my native polling station," said Manzoorul Haq, former Ambassador while talking to media.

He advised voters not to wait for the afternoon to avoid the rush and come out from their homes in large numbers by polling their votes and play role in the decision process. "Polling starts exactly at 8am and voters are coming in large number at their respective polling booths

since then," said Sundas Amin, Presiding Officer of Govt school Bara Lines Peshawar polling station.

She said water and seating facilities were arranged for voters inside polling stations. She said identity of voters are being checked also through polling agents of candidates. In Nowshera and Mardan, polling of votes was also started where voters including male, female and youth besides persons with disabilities are coming to polling stations.

According to media, polling was also started in Khyber, Mohmand, and other tribal districts where voters were coming to polling stations in large numbers. A great rush of voters are being seen at Parachinar, Kurram, Orakzai, DI Khan, Mardan, Swat, Dir, Malakand, Chitral, Abbottabad, Buner, Shangla, Kohat, Charsadda and other districts of the province.

The Election Commission of Pakistan has set up over 15, 696 polling stations for 21,928 million registered voters set up in KP. These voters are

deciding the fate of 713 candidates contesting for national assembly seats and 1,814 candidates for provincial assembly seats. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there are around 11,944,383 million male and 99,83,737 million female voters who would exercise the right to vote today.

Similarly, 4,180 polling stations were set up for males, 4,287 polling stations for females and 6600 combined polling stations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The voters are being facilitated by over 1,80,000 trained polling staff deployed for polling duties. The supporters of candidates have set up polling camps some 200 meters outside of polling stations for education and guidance of voters, especially youth. Police! Frontier Corps, Frontier Constabulary and other law enforcement agencies were deployed for the security of polling stations and voters. Carrying arms and ammunition inside the polling stations were banned. The election in NA 8 Bajaur was postponed due to the death of a candidate.

Voters defy snow to cast ballots in Hazara Division

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Despite heavy snowfall and severe cold gripping the hilly areas of Hazara division the general elections proceed smoothly in all polling stations operational on Thursday.

Tourist destinations like Kaghan, Shugran, Paras, Mahandri, Bhuniga, Jreed, Thandiani, Nathiagali, Changla Gali, and Donga Gali, Alai, and others were snow hit and weather conditions were severe, yet both women and men are exercising their voting rights at these stations.

Residents of the area, though facing challenges posed by heavy snowfall and long walking distances, are committed in fulfilling their national duty by participating in the electoral process.

Despite the difficulty, voters are determined to have their voices heard. Security measures are firmly in place at the polling stations, ensuring the safety and integrity of the voting process. Despite the isolation and heavy snowfall, roads leading to the polling stations remain clear, facilitating the turnout of voters from snow-covered areas in

the hilly regions.

Despite severe cold temperatures in most parts of Hazara division electoral process on Thursday started on time in all 8 districts of the region amid tight security. In districts Abbottabad, Haripur, and Mansehra, a large number of voters and supporters of various political parties and independent candidates have reached the polling stations.

In the three main cities of the region, long queues of voters could be seen in polling stations while in the rural and hilly areas, voters came out a bit late.



PESHAWAR: A female casting her vote during general elections in NA-31.



In brief

PRC, Rescue staff deployed
F.P. Report

KHAR: Pakistan Red Crescent and Rescue 1122 staff have been deployed as emergency response teams in District Bajaur to deal with any emergency situation. Red Crescent response teams include first aiders, ambulance services and blood donation volunteers are available with all the teams have been instructed to stay near the sensitive polling station during the polling time. When asked to comment on the present situation, the officials said that they have taken all precautionary measures to deal with any emergency situation. He said Chairman Red Crescent Sardar Shahid Ahmad Laghari directed all the staff to be alert and extend all out emergency support to the general public, if any, during the ongoing election process in Bajaur District. Besides law enforcement agencies and FC, 2,526 policemen were deployed for security of these police stations.

Control room inspected
F.P. Report

KOHAT: Commissioner Kohat Division, Abid Khan along with Deputy Commissioner Kohat Dr. Azmatullah Wazir on Thursday visited the District Control Room established in Post Graduate College Kohat in connection with General Election 2024 and reviewed all the arrangements. On this occasion, various polling stations of Kohat district were also visited and security measures, CCTV cameras, provision of needed facilities and ongoing voting process were reviewed at the polling stations. Commissioner Kohat also met with the polling staff and inquired about the voting process and any issue, if needed to be addressed. He issued instructions for strictly implementing the code of conduct issued by the Election Commission.

Clash between political workers

ATTOCK (INP): Tensions escalated in National Assembly Constituency NA-49 in Attock as clashes erupted between supporters of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), leading to the temporary suspension of polling activities at Government Boys High School Bhangi Hazrao and Polling Station UC Office Northopa. Quarrelsome PML-N and PTI activists were forcibly ejected from the polling stations, causing a delay of approximately five hours before voting could resume at both locations. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, law enforcement authorities dismantled a PTI camp in the Civil Lines area of Rawalpindi. PTI swiftly filed a petition with the Regional Police Officer (RoPP-19) in protest against the demolition of their candidate's camp. The clashes and subsequent disruptions underscore the volatility surrounding the electoral process and the need for heightened vigilance to maintain peace and order during elections.

Cop held red handed

NAWABSHAH (INP): A policeman was caught red handed while stamping 'arrow' during general election polling in NA-207 on Thursday. According to details, PTI nominated candidate for NA-207, Sher Muhammad Rind visited a polling station of the constituency. During visit, the PTI candidate found a policeman stamping 'arrow', the election symbol of PPP.

Long queues of voters at Kohat, Hangu witnessed

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Following completion of four hours polling process, the voters in large numbers especially young and female thronged to polling stations at Kohat, Karak and Hangu districts on Thursday afternoon and casting votes.

In Kohat, long queues of voters are seen at polling stations set up at Jarma, Shakardara and others areas and are casting their votes in a peaceful atmosphere. These voters would decide fate of political stalwarts including Pakistan Muslim League (N) former senator Abbas Afridi, ex MNA Sharyar Afridi of Pakistan Tahrik e Insaf and Saifullah Bangash of JUIF besides independent today.

Seth Saifullah Khan Bangash and Abbas Afridi polled their votes at native polling stations at Kohat. In KP-90, PTI district president Aftab Iqbal was facing a three-time election winner as independent candidate, Amjad Afridi, who remained part of the Awami

National Party and the PTI, and was currently associated with the Pakistan Peoples Party.

Amjad Afridi is considered an influential personality in the constituency as he and his brother, PML-N's Abbas Afridi, carried out massive development work in Kohat that may benefit the latter. JUI-F candidate Mohammad Shoaib of Darra Adamkhel, which is now part of KP-90, also has large voter support, especially of religious people and can surprise many.

PTI has fielded Daud Afridi in PK 91 Kohat, who was facing party dissident and former MPA, Imtiaz Qureshi, who is contesting election independently. Iqbal Fana, who won the 2008 election as a nominee of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal can also surprise his rivals on polling day.

He recently quit the Jamaat-i-Islami after a long affiliation to join the JUI-F after being approached by supporters. Former minister Ziaullah Bangash, who

joined the PTI-Parliamentarians, has jumped into the electoral arena of KP-92 where he was being challenged by PTI nominee Shafi Jan whose father laid the party's foundation in Kohat in 1996.

Johar Saifullah Khan Bangash of the JUI-F and Dr Zulfikar of the PPP, who has a sizable support in the "Mini Larkana" of Bangash belt on the Hangu Road are also in the field and their fate would also be decided today. The voters at different polling stations at Takht e Nasrati and other areas at Karak district thronged to polling stations and polled votes.

"Today, I left my labour work and came to cast my vote" said bricklin labour Sher Ali at Takhti Nasrati polling station. Voters queues are also being seen at all polling stations at Hangu district. The polling would continue till 5p.m today. Police and FC were deployed for security of voters outside polling stations in these districts.



LANDI KOTAL: A man casting his vote during general elections in NA-31. — F.P. photo

Vote a sacred national trust: Tareen

LODHRAN (INP): Istehkam Pakistan Party (IPP) President, Jehangir Khan said that vote was a sacred national trust and should not be wasted.

Talking to media after casting his vote in Lodhran on Thursday, he expressed desire to stay victorious from constituencies. Jehangir Tareen hoped that the IPP candidates would win the polls from wherever they were contesting the general elections.

He said that a strong and stable government was in the larger interest of county which would stabilize the economy and strengthen the country both economically and diplomatically. The IPP chief criticized the closure of mobile and internet service and said that such decisions make the legal procedures also suspicious. He called for wiping out the menace of terrorism from the country and strongly condemned the terrorist attacks on armed forces.

Cases of blasts registered

QUETTA (INP): Cases of blasts in Pashin and Qila Saifullah Balochistan were registered against unknown terrorists. The cases of two explosions were registered by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

As many as 29 people were killed while about four dozen others injured in Pishin and Qilla Saifullah blasts. The first explosion took place on Wednesday morning outside the election office of Isfandiar Kakar, an independent candidate from National Assembly Constituency NA 265 and Balochistan Assembly seat PB 47 in Khanozai area of Pashin district adjacent to Quetta.

Within an hour, the second explosion occurred at the entrance gate of Jamiat Ulema Islam election office near Junction Chowk in the central area of the city in Qila Saifullah district adjacent to Pishin. The two blasts took place when polling agents were holding meeting there and a large number of people were present for election preparations.

Voters throng to polling stations in Swat, Buner

F.P. Report

MINGORA: Despite cold weather conditions, the voters thronged to polling stations in Swat, Shangla and Buner districts on Thursday afternoon and casting votes in a free and peaceful atmosphere.

Polling stations at Mingora City, Amankot, Kalam, Malam Jabba, Bahrain, Madain, Khwazakhiela, Saidu Sharif in Swat, Sorwari, Daggar, Elum in Buner district and Bisham, Chakesar and Puran in Shangla are flooded with voters after Zuhar prayer.

Great enthusiasm was being witnessed among youth and women voters besides people of all walks of life in these mountainous districts. The voters are coming to polling stations

in cars, datsun, rickshaws, pick ups, motorcycles and bicycles and polling their votes. Rickshaw driver, Ahmad Yousafzai after casting vote at Govt High School Saidu Sharif polling station told media that he came here to poll his first vote in any election.

"I have voted in favour of a candidate after seeing his past performance record and party manifesto hoping that his vote may bring positive change," he told media. On NA 4 Swat-III, tough candidates were expected among Awami National Party (ANP) Saleem Khan, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Kamal Khan and Pakistan Tahrik e Insaf Parliamentarians Vice Chairman and former Chief Minister, Mahmood Khan of PTIP.

Sohail Sultan who was

backed by PTI, Rahimullah of the JUI-F, Fazal Subhan of the Jamaat-i-Islami, Mohammad Raza Khan of the Tahrik Labaik Pakistan and Malik Zada of the Pakhtunkhwa National Awami Party can also surprise many. The polling would continue till 5p.m without break. However, voters in premises of polling stations would be allowed to cast votes after expiry of the voting time.

Police and law enforcement agencies were deployed for security of voters outside of polling stations in these districts besides Malakand and Dir districts. Bringing arms and ammunition besides electric devices inside polling stations were not allowed. The computerized Identity Cards were mandatory for casting of votes.

Tribesmen runs for votes despite boycott

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Like elsewhere in the country, voting process has carried out here in district Khyber on Thursday. It is to be mentioned here that 342 polling stations had been set up for one NA-27 and three provincial assembly seats (PK-69, PK-70 and PK-71) among that 91 polling stations had been announced sensitive.

A total of 638743 voters comprising 349121 male and 289623 female voters to exercise their right of franchise in across Khyber. The voting was started at

08:00 am and was continued till 05:00 pm without interruption.

In the morning due to cold weather, thin rush was witnessed while later on voters moved to their respective polling stations and casted their votes.

Contrary to assurance of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), mobile phone service and 3G, 4G net service was suspended in Khyber that multiplied miseries of the media persons. On the other hand, foolproof security arrangements had been at polling stations while forces troops had been

deployed at sensitive polling stations.

The Torkham border was suspended for all kind of vehicle and pedestrian movement for twenty-four hours. Election was in progress and after 05:00 pm counting of the votes started.

Meanwhile supporters of Quami Masail Committee, Landi Kotal, holding black flags and initiated sit-in at Charwazgai square, boycotted the election. The protestors who were carrying Identity Cards of their relatives, refused to cast their votes in protest against lack of basic facilities in the area.

Zainul Abideen memorizes 'Holy Quran' in record eight months

FATEH JANG (INP): In a remarkable feat of dedication, Zainul Abideen Qureshi, a gifted student hailing from Dhok Syedan, a village in the outskirts of Fateh Jang, has accomplished the extraordinary task of memorizing the 'Holy Quran' in a record period of just eight months.

Zainul Abideen Qureshi's exceptional achievement

was celebrated at the local madrasa Dar-ul-uloom Pir Ahmed Shah Sialvi, where he not only completed the memorization but also

secured the first position among his peers. The achievement was marked by a special ceremony where esteemed religious leaders, Pir Qasim Shah and Pir Saadat Ali Shah, conferred upon him the prestigious 'Dastar' as a symbol of honor and recognition for his outstanding accomplishment.

The village of Dhok Syedan, known for its tight-knit community and commitment to education, takes pride in Zainul Abideen's success, which reflects not

only his personal dedication but also the support and conducive learning environment provided by the local madrasa. This extraordinary accomplishment underscores the importance of fostering educational pursuits and spiritual growth within local communities.

Zainul Abideen Qureshi's dedication to memorizing the Holy Quran in such a short time serves as an inspiration for aspiring students and a source of pride for the entire village of Dhok Syedan.

Candidatures in Bajaur District succeeded in mobilizing voters

F.P. Report

KHAR: There were long queues of the general public including women voters with great enthusiasm witnessed among them for exercising their right of vote for their likeminded candidate contesting election on three Provincial Assembly Seats including PK-19, PK-20 and PK-21 respectively without any fear.

President Bajaur Press Club, Hasban Ullah, has also setup a room for the out-stationed journalists, who are here covering the election besides providing them traditional Green Tea (Kawa) and Tea. "We have made arrangements for the lunch as well, Hasban Ullah, the President of Bajaur Press Club told media.

He said that there is great enthusiasm despite a tragic incident of the assassination of one of the candidate as result of which the election on the only NA-8 seat from Bajaur and PK-22 postponed by the Election Commission of Pakistan, other-

wise the people are taking great interest in exercising the right of vote in the General Election-2024.

Surprisingly, there were long queues of the women voters as well right from the morning and those sensing the importance of the women voters, who are 48 percent of the total population of the Bajaur Districts, succeeded in mobilizing them to get a certain edge against their rival candidates.

About the overall position of the candidatures, President Bajaur Press Club Hasban Ullah said that Malik Khalid Khan, independent candidate contesting election on PK-19 along with other strong candidates including Malik Muhammad Ayaz of JI and Dr. Hameed-ur-Rehman with a backup support of PTI contesting as Independent candidate.

Likewise, he said, independent candidate Anwar Zeb Khan, having backup support of PTI, Shahab Uddin Khan of Pakistan Muslim League-N, Maulana Abdur Rashid of JUI-F, former

MNA Syed Akhunzada Chhattan of PPP and Gul Afzal Khan of Awami National Party are among strong candidates over PK-20.

Similarly, Hasban Ullah said that Haji Sardar Khan of JI, Haji Juma Syed, Independent Candidate, Engineer Ajmal Khan, Independent candidate with a back-up support of PTI, Muhammad Anees, Independent candidate, Rasheed Khan of Awami National Party are among strong candidates.

A total of 50 candidates are in the running for the three provincial assembly seats in the Bajaur District. 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. Deputy Commissioner Bajaur also directed the law enforcing officials to take immediate action if anyone involved before or after election in aerial firing. He said section 144 has already been imposed to deal with such incidents.

The polling is in full swing on all three provincial assembly seats across the district. Most of the candidates are giving more priority to the women voters in Bajaur District, which are 48 percent of the total population.

For three provincial assembly seats - PK-19 Bajaur-I, PK-20 Bajaur-II, PK-21 Bajaur-III while election on PK-22 Bajaur-IV, had been postponed along with NA-8. There are seven candidates to run for PK-19 Bajaur-I, 11 for PK-20

Bajaur-II, 18 for PK-21 Bajaur-III. Malik Hikmatullah Mamond of ANP, Ikram Khan of PMLN, Malik Ayaz of JI, Said Rahim Shah Sabawoon of Mazloom Ulasi Tehreek while independent candidates Dr Hameedur Rahman, Malik Khalid Khan and Rahimad 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 JI, Shahabuddin Khan of PMLN, Maulana Abdur Rashid of JUIF, Akhunzada Chhattan of PPP, Gul Afzal Khan of ANP, Burhanuddin of Muttahida Quami 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 JI, 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 JI, 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.



Haitian PM calls for calm as protests continue

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry has called for calm in a public address as violent protests have erupted across the country demanding he step down. Henry's brief speech did little to appease the thousands of Haitians angry and frustrated over growing gang violence and deepening poverty with no general election in sight.

"I think the time has arrived for all to put our heads together to save Haiti, to do things another way in our country," Henry said on Thursday without elaborating. He encouraged Haitians not to view the government or national police as their enemies. Those who choose violence, destruction and killing people to take power are "not working in the interests of the Haitian people", he added.

The legislature is empty after the terms of its last 10 senators expired in January 2023. The country failed to hold planned elections in 2019 and 2023, and Henry assumed power with the

support of the international community after the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moise. According to an agreement in December 2022, Henry was supposed to hold elections and pass power to newly elected officials on February 7 this year. A day after that deadline, Henry pledged to hold general elections as soon as the country's security issues are resolved and congratulated police for their efforts on fighting gangs, promising he would keep pushing for the United Nations-backed deployment of a Kenyan police force.

"I want to reassure everyone the government will do whatever it can for the mission to come as fast as possible," he said. Thousands of people have held daily protests this week calling for Henry to leave and warned they would continue to take to the streets until he steps down. February 7 is an important day in Haitian history. On that date in 1986, former dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier fled to

France, and in 1991, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's first democratically elected president, was sworn in. Henry has held onto power, and an aide said the prime minister intends to form a national unity government.

Five agents from an environment agency, an armed government bureau now in open rebellion, were killed in a shootout with national police in the capital, Port-au-Prince. Lionel Lazarre, the head of the Synapoha police union, told The Associated Press news agency that the environmental agents had opened fire after police asked them to drop their weapons, prompting officers to shoot.

Last week, Henry called on the agency to register with the Ministry of the Environment in an apparent crackdown against the body. In recent weeks, former coup leader Guy Philippe, who was repatriated to Haiti late last year after serving about six years in a United States prison, has also been rallying supporters for a "revolution" against Henry's government. — Aljazeera

Ex-Mountie intelligence official sentenced

OTTAWA (AP): A judge sentenced a former senior intelligence official in Canada's national police force to 14 years in prison for breaching the country's secrets law. Cameron Jay Ortis led the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's Operations Research group, which assembles classified information on cybercriminals, terror cells and transnational criminal networks.

Ontario Superior Court Justice Robert Maranger said that Ortis will be credited with time spent in custody, and he must now serve another seven years and 155 days. A jury last November declared Ortis, 51, guilty of three counts of violating the Security of Information Act and one count of attempting to do so. They also found him guilty of breach of trust and fraudulent use of a computer. Ortis had pleaded not guilty to all charges, including violating the secrets law by revealing classified information to three individuals in 2015 and trying to do so in a fourth instance.

The prosecution argued Ortis lacked authority to disclose classified material and that he was not doing so as part of a sanctioned undercover operation. While there were suggestions that a possible financial incentive was the reason for the crimes, "in truth, there was no tangible evidence of a motive for what Cameron Ortis did," Maranger told the court. "He was never paid anything by anyone. The 'why' here in my mind remains a mystery."

At a January hearing, prosecutor Judy Kliever said a sentence for Ortis in the range of 22 to 25 years would be appropriate. Defense lawyer Jon Doody said his client should be sentenced to a little over seven years. At trial, Ortis testified he did not betray the RCMP. Rather, he said he offered secret material to targets in a bid to get them to use an online encryption service set up by an allied intelligence agency to spy on adversaries.

The prosecution could not pinpoint a motive, but argued Ortis had no authority to disclose classified material and that he was not doing so as part of a legitimate undercover operation. Kliever told the January hearing that Ortis deserved a sentence that would show the public and Canada's international partners that the system intended to protect sensitive information "has teeth."

Marape to address Australia's parliament

SYDNEY (AP): Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape on Thursday became the first Pacific leader to address Australia's parliament, vowing "nothing will come in between our two countries." The nations announced that Australia will spend AU \$100 million (US \$65.3 million) on Papua New Guinea's internal security, including the development of a police recruiting and investigation training facility and a police barracks.

The speech, Marape's meeting with Australian counterpart, Anthony Albanese, and the neighbors' release of details of a security pact signed in December, come as Pacific nations deal with China's growing ambitions. Resource-rich Papua New Guinea has rebuffed overtures from China, which struck a security pact with Solomon Islands in 2022 that caused worry among some in the region.

Papua New Guinea, which is in a strategically important part of the South Pacific, struggles with tribal violence and civil unrest and wants to increase its police numbers from 6,000 officers to 26,000. Anger over high unemployment and cost of living led to rioting and looting last month in its two biggest cities. Papua New Guinea and Australia "reaffirmed their commitment to the region's existing security architecture as a key driver of security cooperation," a joint statement between Marape and Albanese said.



PORT-AU-PRINCE: People stand near a car set ablaze by protesters in Haiti.

Putin and Zelenskyy greet Aliyev for his election win

BAKU (AP): The Ukrainian and Russian presidents congratulated Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev after his expected landslide win as preliminary results released Thursday indicated his resounding victory in the presidential election held the day before.

Aliyev had called an early vote just months after his forces swiftly reclaimed the Karabakh region from ethnic Armenian separatists who had controlled it for three decades. He is now heading into another, seven-year term in office. Russian President Vladimir Putin called Aliyev and the two spoke about continuing their "strategic partnerships," according to the Azeri leader's press service.

Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy posted his congratulations on X, formerly known as Twitter, saying that he appreciated Azerbaijan's humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and valued the "mutual support for our states' sovereignty and territorial integrity." With just over 93% of the ballots counted, Aliyev secured more than 92% of the votes, the head of the Central Election Commission, Mazahir Panahov, said early Thursday. His three main challengers trailed far behind and conceded the race, congratulating Aliyev, the Interfax Azerbaijan news agency reported.

Aliyev, 62, has been in power for more than 20 years, succeeding his father who was Azerbaijan's Communist boss and then president for a decade when the country became independent after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. Other leaders, including Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban and Iran's Ebrahim Raisi, also offered

congratulations.

Analysts suggested that Aliyev moved the election forward to capitalize on his burst in popularity following September's blitz in Karabakh. He will be in the limelight in November when Azerbaijan, a country which relies heavily on revenues from fossil fuels, hosts a U.N. climate change conference. Election officials indicated turnout was strong, saying that over 76% of eligible voters cast ballots during the 11-hour voting. Even before the preliminary results were announced, several hundred people carrying Azerbaijani flags gathered in Baku to dance and sing in celebration.

Aliyev has declared that he wanted the election to "mark the beginning of a new era," in which Azerbaijan has full control over its territory. He and his family cast their ballots in Khankendi, a city that was called Stepanakert by Armenians when it housed the headquarters of the self-declared separatist government. The region, which had been known internationally as Nagorno-Karabakh, and large swathes of surrounding territory came under full control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by Armenia at the end of a separatist war in 1994.

Azerbaijan regained parts of Karabakh and most of the surrounding territory in 2020 in a six-week war, which ended with a Moscow-brokered truce. In December 2022, Azerbaijan started blockading the road linking the region with Armenia, causing food and fuel shortages, and then launched a September blitz that routed separatist forces in just one day and forced them to lay down arms. More than 100,000 ethnic Armenians fled the region after the defeat of separatist forces, leaving it

nearly deserted.

When he visited the city in November, Aliyev said in a speech at a military parade marking the victory that "we showed the whole world the strength, determination and indomitable spirit of the Azerbaijani people." In Fuzuli, the Azerbaijani city near Karabakh that was controlled by Armenian forces until 2020, 73-year-old Raya Feyziyeva, said on election day that she was "feeling great" and was grateful to Aliyev for reclaiming her hometown. She said she was forced to leave Fuzuli after its takeover by Armenian forces and the expulsion of its ethnic Azerbaijani population in 1993.

"I feel calm knowing that I will be buried in my native land," she said. In the village of Agali in the Zangilan region, another area near Karabakh that was reclaimed from Armenian forces, turnout was equally strong. Mubariz Farhadov, who is in charge of the local polling station set up in a newly built school, said he was filled with joy to witness a "historic moment" when "elections are held in our native land for the first time in 30 years." There is no limit on the number of terms Aliyev can serve, and the six other candidates represented no real challenge. Some of them have previously publicly praised Aliyev.

Aliyev's time in power has been marked by the introduction of increasingly strict laws that curb political debate as well as arrests of opposition figures and independent journalists — including in the run-up to the presidential election. Azerbaijan's two main opposition parties — Musavat and the People's Front of Azerbaijan — did not take part in the vote, and some opposition members alleged it may have been rigged.

Malaysia says it recovered \$5m of stolen 1MDB assets

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia has announced the recovery of property and other assets from 1MDB, the state fund at the centre of a multibillion-dollar corruption scandal across multiple countries and jurisdictions. The latest recoveries, which took place from 2023 until this month, are worth more than 23.9 million ringgits (\$5m), the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) said in a statement on Thursday.

They followed the trial and conviction of former Goldman Sachs banker Roger Ng who was jailed by a New York court last

year for his role in the scandal. The scale of the corruption at the fund, which was established to boost economic development, fuelled a backlash against the government of then-Prime Minister Najib Razak that saw his party lose power for the first time in Malaysian history in elections held in 2018.

The MACC said the latest recoveries came from a former 1MDB employee as well as through voluntary surrender by five individuals, including 4.55 million ringgits (\$954,679) from Amhari Effendi, a former special officer to Najib. The authorities also seized three

condominium units worth 7.05 million ringgits (\$1.5m) from Mohammad Kamal Yahya, who was a foreign affairs adviser to Najib, as well as assets in Malaysia and Singapore worth 11.75 million ringgits (\$2.5m) from associates of Jho Low, the Malaysian financier who is now a fugitive. Ng was jailed for 10 years in the United States but was allowed to return to Malaysia to assist authorities in their investigations and to recover more of the money that was lost.

Investigators in the US and Malaysia estimate at least \$4.5bn were stolen

from 1MDB and instead used to finance luxury lifestyles and the production of the Hollywood movie The Wolf of Wall Street. Najib was jailed in August 2022 in the first of multiple cases related to the scandal, becoming the first Malaysian prime minister ever to be put behind bars. Last week, Malaysia's pardons board announced that his 12-year sentence in that case had been halved and his fine slashed from 210.5 million ringgit (\$44.2m) to 50 million ringgit (\$10.5m), in a decision that was greeted with dismay by many Malaysians. — Aljazeera

Amnesty calls for war crimes probe over Myanmar military bombing

LONDON: Myanmar's military should be investigated for war crimes over an air attack last month that killed 17 villagers, including two children, as they attended a Sunday church service, Amnesty International has said.

Amnesty said photo and video analysis, as well as interviews with witnesses, indicated the Myanmar air force had dropped bombs on three locations near the St Peter Baptist Church in Kanan village on the morning of January 7. The village is in the Sagaing region, not far from Myanmar's border with India. At least 20 people were injured.

The damage is "consistent with air strikes", the rights group said in a statement on Thursday. "The combined photo and video evidence indicates at least three impact locations, with craters consistent with aircraft bombs of approximately 250kg each." The Myanmar military has previously denied responsibility for the attack, claiming no aircraft were operating in the area at the time.

But Amnesty said a review of video

taken during the strikes showed the "distinctive swept-wing silhouette of an A-5 fighter jet flying over the village", noting that only the military flies the China-made aircraft. Moreover, satellite imagery from the Tada-U airbase near Mandalay showed active A-5 operations on the airfield while plane spotters had reported the takeoff, flight and landing of an A-5 consistent with that morning's attack on Kanan. "The Myanmar military's deadly attacks on civilians show no signs of stopping," said Matt Wells, the director of Amnesty's crisis response programme. "These attacks must be investigated as war crimes and the UN Security Council should refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The perpetrators of these crimes under international law must be brought to justice."

Myanmar was plunged into crisis three years ago when the generals seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi triggering mass protests that evolved into armed resistance after the military responded

with brutal force. At least 4,485 civilians have been killed since the coup, and violence has become increasingly widespread.

Sagaing has been notorious for brutal assaults by the military, which has launched air attacks and burned villages as part of its long-held strategy known as "four cuts" that aims to separate its opponents from their potential civilian supporters. At the time of the church attack, Kanan village was under the control of a unit of the People's Defence Force (PDF), an anti-coup armed group established by the National Unity Government of lawmakers removed in the coup and pro-democracy activists. There are growing calls for the international community to do more to address the deteriorating situation in Myanmar where the United Nations estimates at least 2.6 million people have been forced from their homes by the fighting and millions are in need of humanitarian assistance. — Aljazeera

‘New electricity tax put on hold after public outcry’

GHANA: Ghana's government has suspended plans to implement a 15% tax on power, following a public uproar that it will worsen the cost-of-living crisis. The value-added tax (VAT) was to be levied on domestic consumers of electricity. But labour unions opposed the new tax and announced nationwide protests against it next week.

Authorities now say the plan has been put on hold until talks are held to resolve the dispute. It comes a few days after the government started to implement a fuel emissions levy, sparking mixed reactions. Ghanaians are now required to pay an annual levy for the carbon emissions produced by their petrol or diesel-powered vehicles. Critics fear that the additional taxes could have a ripple effect on the struggling economy, further intensifying the cost-of-living crisis that has already pushed up the prices of necessities like fuel. In a statement, the finance ministry directed the two main power distributors -

Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) and the Northern Electricity Distribution Company (NEDCO) - to put the new levy on hold.

This is to allow for "extensive dialogue and also to get the buy-in of industry players and labour unions, following the grave concerns raised about its impact on consumers and businesses," the statement said. "On behalf of the government, the ministry would like to inform ECG and NEDCO to suspend the implementation of the VAT directive pending further engagements with key stakeholders including organized labour," it added.

But the Trades Union Congress (TUC) said the government was yet to officially communicate its decision to them. Therefore, plans to hold protests, slated for next Wednesday, remain in place, Joshua Ansah, TUC's deputy secretary general, told the Ghana News Agency. Trade unions say the introduction of additional taxes will burden

families and companies, exacerbating the already high cost of doing business.

"Our message to the government is very simple - we cannot pay VAT on electricity," Mr Ansah was quoted as saying, and demanded that the tax be dropped immediately. Ghana is currently going through its worst economic crisis in a generation, and the government is battling to increase its revenue. It has signed a \$3bn (£2.4bn) bailout programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to ease the crisis. Ghana has for several years been experiencing power shortages, popularly known as "dumsor", which means on and off in the Akan language.

The West African country gets much of its electricity from hydro and thermal sources, but these are often poorly maintained. The country has in the last few years become heavily reliant on gas as a major source of energy for electricity generation and any shortage in gas results in power outages. — Aljazeera

Burkina Faso outcry

BURKINA FASO (BBC): In what was widely seen as punishment for his strident criticism of Burkina Faso's military rulers, anaesthetist Arouna Louré was forced to go to the front lines of the battle against jihadists wreaking havoc in the West African state.

Dr Louré said he was with patients in the operating theatre at the hospital where he worked in the capital, Ouagadougou, when armed soldiers suddenly burst through the door. "They made me understand they could make me leave using the gentle or the violent method," the 38-year-old told the BBC. "Another doctor replaced me [in the theatre] and then we left," Dr Louré added.

He was bundled into a van by the soldiers and transported to a military training camp hundreds of miles away. He is one of many men who have been forced to join the so-called Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP). Envisaged to be made up of 50,000 recruits, it was set up by Captain Ibrahim Traoré's junta to bolster the army's efforts to regain territory from jihadists who, according to the US Department of Defense's Africa Center for Strategic Studies, have "moved to encircle Ouagadougou leaving a trail of unprecedented violence in their wake". This is despite the fact that when Capt Traoré seized power in September 2022 after overthrowing another military ruler, he pledged to improve the security situation within "two to three months" and restore civilian rule by July 2024.

But Capt Traoré - who is the youngest ruler of an African state - has rowed back on his promise, saying

elections are not "a priority" until territory is recaptured from the jihadists so that everyone can vote. "There won't be an election that is only concentrated in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso and other nearby towns," he said in November, referring to two cities that have largely been spared the violence unleashed by jihadists.

Capt Traoré has defended conscription, saying that "individual freedoms [are] not superior to national freedom" and added that "a nation is not built on discipline and disorder". He has pivoted Burkina Faso towards Russia, ending its close ties with former colonial power France. The junta has expelled French diplomats and has shut France's military base in the country. At the same time, Russia has reopened its embassy in Burkina Faso after it was shut more than 30 years ago, and is also helping its army to strengthen its capabilities. Last week, Capt Traoré said that Russian troops would join the fight against the jihadists, if required, with unconfirmed reports suggesting that about 100 Russian troops had already arrived in the country. Dr Louré's recruitment into the VDP came last September, about five months after the junta passed a decree, giving it sweeping powers to conscript anyone above the age of 18 to fight the jihadists.

The anaesthetist believes he was targeted because he was a vocal critic of the military rulers on social media, describing them as "constitutional deserters" as they left the front lines and were sending civilians instead. "In this country, we are no longer free to say what we think," he told the BBC. Dr

Louré's concerns were echoed by campaign group Human Rights Watch (HRW), which said in a report in November that the junta was using it to "expand its crackdown on dissent".

"The Burkinabé authorities are waging a legitimate war but responding to abuse with abuse is not the solution," senior HRW researcher Ilaria Allegrozzi said. The junta's spokesperson and the minister of justice did not respond to BBC requests for comment. HRW and other rights groups say that Dr Louré's case is not isolated - at least a dozen activists, journalists and opposition leaders have been conscripted. They include pharmacist Daouda Diallo, who formed a rights group in 2019 to document abuses by all sides in the conflict in Burkina Faso.

His family and lawyers believe he was abducted by security agents on 1 December as he left the passport office in Ouagadougou. A few days later, an image shared on social media showed him in the back of an army truck wearing a military uniform. Amnesty International has taken up his plight, calling for his "safe return to civilian life and to end the use of conscription as a tool to silence dissent". Conscription has caused huge trauma for families. One woman said that her husband - an investigative journalist - fled the country, shortly before his call-up papers arrived.

"It's like we're not living any more," said the woman, who asked not to be identified for fear of reprisals. She added that she still feared for the safety of her husband even though the entire family was now living elsewhere in the region.

The Frontier Post

Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

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

Peshawar Office: 091-5700095, 0300- 9009001

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

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

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

What next after elections over

PAKISTAN'S long-awaited and biggest electoral contest finally came to an end as the clock struck 5 PM on February 8. There have been small incidents of clashes among different political parties in several constituencies, while a few incidents of minor violence have also been reported in Karachi, and other parts of the country. The overall electoral process remained smooth and peaceful throughout the day. During the election, over 12 crore registered voters used their right to vote and elected their representatives for the National as well as Provincial assemblies. With the successful mark of 12 general elections, the nation and the country's democracy successfully achieved an important milestone in the political history of the country.

Pakistan is a democratic country whose appearance on the world map was the outcome of a peaceful political and democratic movement that spiralled over almost four decades commencing in December 1906 and yielded the fruit of independence and freedom on August 14 1947. Democracy offers countless benefits and plays a vital role in the promotion and strengthening of individual freedoms, political participation, and peaceful transitions of power. At the same it, the continuous democratic process ensures accountability of the leaders, the governments, and political parties as well.

Historically, Pakistan went through acute political unrest and chaos in recent years, wherein the politics of hatred, confrontation and animosity brought in rigid behaviour and largely polarized Pakistani society. A peculiar security state environment coupled with agencies' involvement in politics badly tarnished social cohesion and distorted national unity in the past. The rumours and propaganda regarding an extension in the tenure of the caretaker governments and no holding of the election have died their deaths as the nationwide election successfully concluded yesterday, the 8th of February.

Historically, every contest ends in the championship of a group and defeat of another but victory or loss is not permanent, as these competitions come at specific intervals. Each party, candidate and their supporters, all must demonstrate resilience, big-heartedness and political wisdom. Pakistan is passing through a crucial transition period that merits utmost caution and sagacity from the state institutions and the political groups to safely pass through this point in time. As a nation, we owe a common agenda of the country's prosperity and public well-being, hence our victories and defeats are also shared and combined. So, the winner should hug the loser and seek his cooperation, while all should play their role in strengthening democracy, and service to the country and the nation.

Need for global multilateralism

THE UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has recently warned that the world is entering into an age of chaos as the UN Security Council (UNSC) remains sharply divided over Israel's war on Gaza. According to the UN Chief, he was especially alarmed after Israel focused its military assault in Gaza on the southern city of Rafah, where more than a million people have sought shelter. The United Nations Security Council, the primary platform for questions of global peace, is deadlocked by geopolitical fissures. The UN Secretary-General called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the unconditional release of all hostages. According to Guterres, the potential chaos will be a more dangerous and unpredictable free-for-all with total impunity. The UN chief urged world leaders to seize the Summit of the Future opportunity, which will be held in September in New York on the sidelines of the annual General Assembly session, to shape multilateralism for years to come.

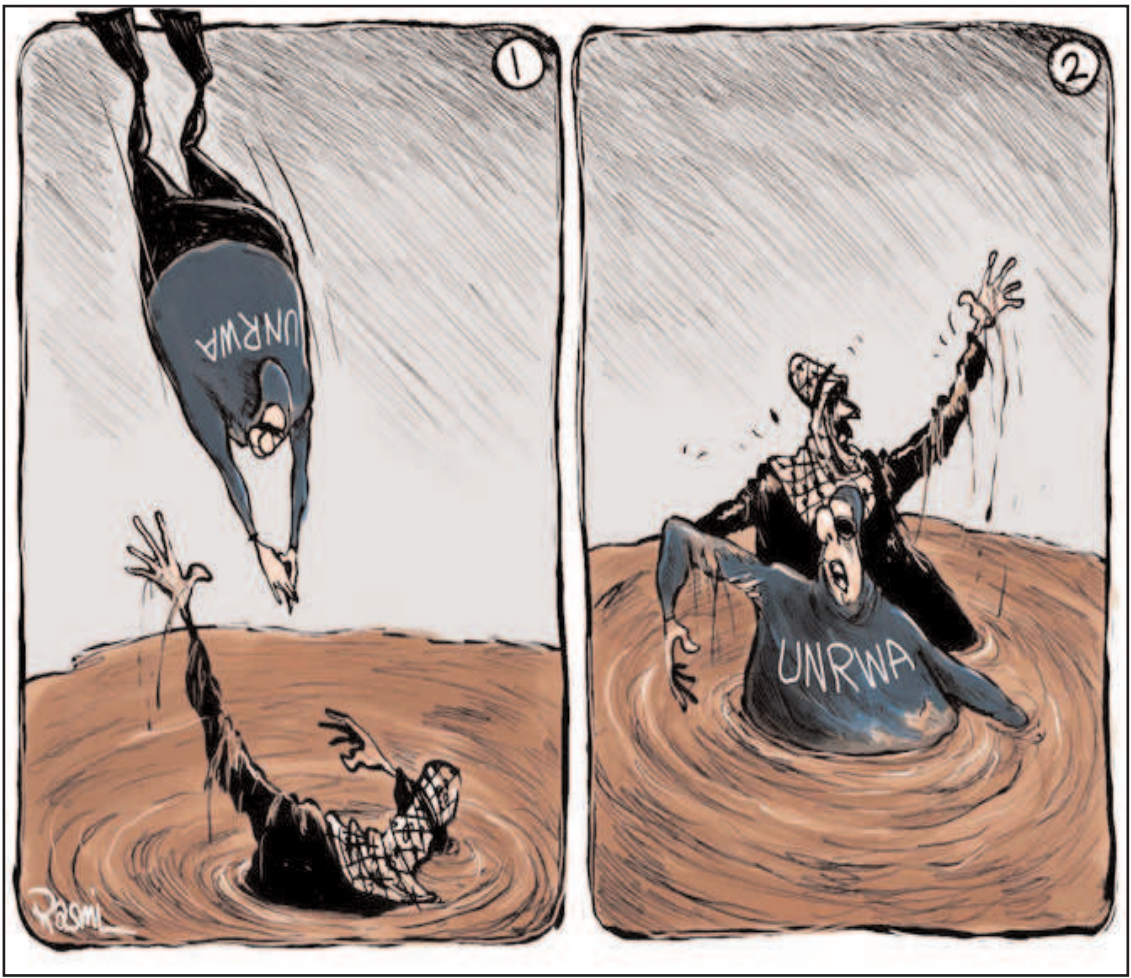
Yesterday, the Gaza conflict entered its fifth month, with no visible end in sight. After a weeklong study of peace proposals, Hamas expressed willingness to a 135-day truce and ceasefire deal but Israel's Netanyahu rejected the plan apparently in pursuit of his ambitious agenda to recover hostages through military operations and eliminate Hamas from Gaza, so no Palestinian Arabs ever dared to attack Jewish state at any point in the future. Hardcore Netanyahu responded to a single Hamas attack that killed about 1,140 Israelis and resulted in 240 hostages on October 7, with Israel's relentless bombardment and ground offensive on Gaza that perished over 28000 lives mostly women and children. Meanwhile, Israel's unceasing bombardment turned the thickly populated enclave into robles, urban battles and violent coercion forced more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million population to leave their homes and take shelter at relatively safe places. Unfortunately, the rogue Israeli regime still opposes the ceasefire and denies the creation of a viable Palestinian state on the principle of a two-state solution, which is vigorously backed by the UN resolutions and the global community at large.

Unfortunately, the United Nations and its vital organ, the UN Security Council failed to achieve a consensus and realise a ceasefire over the past long four months despite continuous debate and numerous sittings largely due to its discriminatory structure and extraordinary rights of veto power with five major countries including the United States, the UK, Russia, China and France. Historically, veto power is fundamentally against the rule of justice and equality, it ever used for a negative purpose against the interest of the majority. The United States used the discriminatory veto power multiple times not to secure peace but to support violence and fuel war of a belligerent power against its weak neighbour and unarmed civilians. Such abuse of power and blackmail of the global community has been a long-held policy of P5 nations in the history of the United Nations since its formation in 1945.

This is not the first time the UN Security Council has been divided but it is the worst in history and the victims have always been the poor nations, particularly Muslims. Today's dysfunction is deeper and more dangerous unlike during the Cold War, when both major powers competed and well-established mechanisms helped manage their relations. Currently powerful Western bloc wholeheartedly backs Israel against unarmed innocent Palestinians instead of pressing Tel Aviv to honour UN resolutions and move toward resolving the Palestine dispute through a two-state solution. The UN Chief has admitted the helplessness and impotence of his institution, whereas, the civilized nations have already demanded the end of discrimination and overhauling of the United Nations. It is a grave universal issue that merits teamwork and cooperation from the Non-aligned movement and third-world nations, so this universal forum could perform its crucial role in true letter and spirit.

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The Rosetta Stone to decipher Japan's new security deals

Michael Macarthur Bosack

THE Japanese government began 2024 by concluding a flurry of security deals with international partners, garnering much attention both because of the pace and scope of the agreements. These include a new acquisition and cross-servicing agreement (ACSA) with Germany, a defense technology transfer pact with the United Arab Emirates and a deal with the United States to purchase up to 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles. These are just the most recent in a line of international agreements that Tokyo has negotiated in the past few years, as the government seeks to advance its bilateral and multilateral security relationships.

But what are these agreements, and what do they really mean for Japanese security, in practice? Are we seeing the birth of new alliances, or are these simply transactional arrangements? To answer these questions, it is useful to have a sort of Rosetta Stone that can help make sense of the security deals Japan is pursuing and why it is doing so.

The type of agreement that is most often misunderstood is a formal alliance treaty. These are ratified international instruments that include some guarantee for the use of military force, be it offensive or defensive. These treaties can be mutual - meaning that all parties sign up to the same obligations - or unilateral, for example, if one party agrees to defend the other in exchange for another tradeoff. They may also be bilateral or multilateral: They could be between just two countries (like the United States and South Korea), or many (like NATO). Because alliance treaties are formal international agreements and include the obligation to use military force, they have become increasingly rare.

Japan only has one treaty ally and that is the United States. The core tradeoff in this alliance is that the US will come to Japan's defense in case of need, while Japan provides facilities for the American military to pursue its commitment to international secu-

urity and stability. Of course, the two countries have built on that foundation through subsequent agreements, and the allies' mutual expectations are codified in the Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation, last updated in April 2015. Although agreements under this umbrella have many different names, whenever governments use the term "security cooperation" in an intergovernmental deal, they are generally referencing foreign military sales. This is where one government sells or trades military equipment, technology or training with another. The recent deal in which Japan agreed to acquire Tomahawk missiles from the US is an example of this.

This differs from security assistance, which is the unilateral delivery of military or defense equipment and technology. In other words, when a government provides security assistance, they are essentially giving a partner the assets or know-how to improve their own defense capabilities. For example, Japan has started providing official security assistance to Southeast Asian partners to bolster their ability to reinforce the rules-based international order within their own areas of operation. Both of these differ from joint cooperative development, which is where governments agree to work together to produce new defense equipment or technology. Notably, Japan recently concluded such a deal with the U.K. and Italy to work on a next-generation fighter aircraft.

One of the agreements between Japan and South Korea that garnered significant media attention was the General Sharing of Military Information Agreement, signed in November 2016. The GSOMIA is a type of information-sharing agreement that allows two or more governments to exchange security-related intelligence or information that would normally be considered classified or proprietary. These agreements ensure that partners understand what information needs to be protected, and they codify

the rights, duties and obligations related to the intended information exchange. They rarely, if ever, specify what kind of information must be shared; they simply provide the legal framework for how information would be exchanged should the parties deem it necessary.

These agreements are important for military partners who intend to operate together because they need to be making decisions and responding to situations based on common understandings - which is difficult if one party has information that the other is not able to employ in its decision making. Japan has recently concluded a series of reciprocal access agreements (RAAs) with security partners including Australia and the U.K., and it is looking to do so with the Philippines this year.

These agreements enable more flexible military operations in each others' territories because they provide the legal framework for the deployment of uniformed personnel. They are akin to visiting forces agreements or status of forces agreements, except the provisions are reciprocal - hence the name. While military forces do not necessarily need RAAs to operate in foreign countries, they make things much easier. Rather than having to negotiate the terms of each visit or deployment through diplomatic arrangements, these agreements ensure there are standing provisions for how foreign forces enter a country, the customs and duties they may have to incur, and how they will be treated under the domestic legal system should incidents occur, among other things. What it means in practice is that, while moving forward with mutual security activities, short-notice deployments are easier and parties are much better prepared to address any incidents that may occur.

An ACSA like the one Japan concluded with Germany last month is a deal that allows for militaries and defense forces to share equipment, supplies and facilities. For example, if a German warship needs fuel from a Japanese supply

vessel while out to sea, the ACSA provides the legal and financial framework for that refueling activity. These agreements are technical and operational in nature, which might not seem to have significant strategic implications - that is, until one starts to look at how important they are for interoperability. ACSAs eliminate barriers to unit-level cooperation, which serves as the building block for a real and viable security partnership, rather than something that exists only on paper. The last type of deal that Tokyo has recently concluded is a consultation pact, which it signed with the US and South Korea during the Camp David summit last summer.

Many scholars consider a consultation pact to be a lesser form of alliance agreement, in which the signatories commit to engage with each other in response to security incidents or conflict scenarios. It is essentially a pledge that they will work to remain aligned when militarized threats become acute. In some ways, consultation pacts can serve as steppingstones to more formal alliance arrangements. However, the key aspect is that they do not necessarily require legislative ratification. This means that such pacts can be achieved without the added hurdle of pushing them through a parliamentary body - a major step to entering a formal alliance treaty. Ultimately, Tokyo is using these agreements as building blocks for new and lasting security ties with a myriad partners. This step-by-step approach, while perhaps more incremental than some would want, is effective when it comes to institutionalizing relationships. This is especially important as many governments have to weather changes in administration or political sentiments over the years.

Observers should expect the Japanese government to continue pursuing these types of agreements both regionally and globally as it seeks to improve conditions for its self-defense and elevate the country's security role in reinforcing the rules-based international order.

The Japan Times

Russia simply can't win a war against Europe

Andrew Lilico

THERE is much talk at present about how we need to prepare for war with Russia. How there might be conscription. There are articles in the press about how in the event of war parts of our industrial base might be converted to military production.

To an observer unfamiliar with atavistic Western concerns going back to the Soviet threat during the Cold War, equipped only with an understanding of the mathematics and economics of military power, this concern would probably seem surprising. Russia's economy is fairly small, only around 85 per cent of the size of Italy's. Its population of about 140 million is less than that of Germany plus France combined. It has been unable to defeat Ukraine - a country that when Russia invaded was the world's 53rd largest economy, below New Zealand and Peru. Even if a future United States lost all interest in protecting Europe, should we really fear Russia could defeat the combined forces of the EU, such that it could reach Britain? The relationship between military power and economic growth is complex and two-way. I have written before on these pages about how having a stronger military can boost long-term economic growth. Here I want to focus on the other direction: the extent to which having a higher GDP does or does not imply being more militarily powerful and what that means for the Russian threat and the Russian economy.

The classical starting point for analysis of the relationship between military and economic power has usually been that military power is, other things being equal, a reflection of the resources available to the military. Obviously other things, such as geography, alliances, technology, military skill and experience, or morale, are typically not equal, and we shall return to that point shortly. But for now let us concentrate on this dimension. The resources available to the military consist of those that have already been mobilised as military forces and those that could be mobilised rapidly, in the timescale required to be relevant, if they were required. Let us for now think of military forces as having two components: personnel numbers and equipment. (Other factors, such as the force balance - air/sea/land - obviously potentially matter as well. But let's keep things simple.)

Consider two opposed countries. One has a larger population; the other has higher GDP. To create matching militaries, in terms of personnel and equipment, the country with the larger population need only devote a smaller percentage of its population to the military, but must devote a higher share of its GDP. Suppose, instead, that the two countries devoted equal shares of personnel and GDP, and thus the more populous country had more personnel but they were less well-equipped, so each soldier is less effective - eg in killing opponents. In that case we can gain insight from an ingenious piece of military mathematics worked out during World War I: the "square law". This tells us that, in pure attrition terms, if one military force is more numerous than another but less effective, then in order to win,

the ratio of the smaller military's effectiveness advantages needs to be greater than the square of the ratio of its numerical disadvantage. So, for example, that means that if you have 10 percent fewer troops, your troops need to be more than 21 percent more effective to win an attrition-based war.

The proportion of the population that different countries can mobilise to fight might differ. An authoritarian state might be able to conscript more of its population to fight. But an authoritarian state might also have what we might term a "morale" disadvantage - its forces might become unable or unwilling to fight at a lower loss rate than would be the case for forces fighting for what they regard as a more noble cause. On the other side there are those that would argue that some democratic liberal countries have become sufficiently self-hating or decadent that they do not regard their own cause as noble enough to fight for. Let's apply some of these insights to a consideration of Russia's medium-term threat to the EU. The Russian economy is about 10 percent of the size of the EU's. The EU spends about 1.3 percent of GDP on its military and the Russians have recently raised their spending to about 6 percent. So EU military spending will be about twice that of Russia. If we assume spending more produces greater troop effectiveness, then by the square law, to compensate for spending half as much, Russia would need to mobilise more than 40 percent more troops than the EU that it was able to devote to battle, if Russian forces continued to be able to fight at the same loss percentages that EU troops were. The EU's combined militaries have about 1.4 million troops. So Russia would need to have around 2 million troops available in an attrition war. If we assume Russia would be attacking, and apply the classical rule of thumb that attacking forces need a 1.5:1 advantage across a theatre, Russia would need about three million. Russia has around 1.2 million troops at present, but notionally around 2 million reservists.

If the above analysis is correct, then, in the medium term, even setting aside any "morale" differences, in order to have a chance against a combined EU (and thus be in any position to threaten Britain) Russia would need either to double or triple its current military forces or roughly double or triple its military spending relative to GDP. A doubling of its expenditure relative to GDP would put it in the 12-15 percent range of the late Soviet Union - the level that caused the Soviet economy to collapse in the 1980s. A tripling would be even more crippling. The Russian economy continues to be subject to Western sanctions. The oil embargo alone is costing it hundreds of billions of dollars. Doubling or tripling its military spending again would bankrupt it within a few years. Russia can posture, and it can threaten or even invade its small, poor, neighbours. But the maths say that when it comes to threatening the EU, let alone Britain, if we in the West continue to believe in our causes enough to fight if it comes to it, Russia simply lacks sufficient economic resources to constitute a serious medium-term threat at all.

The Telegraph

US strikes in Middle East will not change Biden's re-election fortunes

Imad K Harb

ON Friday, the United States conducted a series of strikes on sites in Syria and Iraq that it said belonged to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and affiliated militias. The air raids came in retaliation for the January 28 attack by the armed group Islamic Resistance of Iraq (IRI) on a military base in Jordan that killed three US soldiers and injured more than 40 others.

In a statement issued the same day, US President Joe Biden said the response would not stop at IRGC targets. On Saturday, American and British forces bombeded Houthi bases in Yemen in an apparent continuation of efforts to degrade their ability to disrupt maritime shipping in the Red Sea. There may be more attacks in the coming days as well, but clearly, the US is refraining from directly hitting Iran, which it accuses of supplying

weapons to IRI. A military response was politically unavoidable for the Biden administration. As is normally the case in an election year, any serious domestic development or international incident involving US interests or prestige becomes a defining moment for the sitting administration, whether Republican or Democratic.

The measured retaliation reflects the fact that the US president has a lot to worry about in terms of domestic perceptions and the attitudes of voters he seeks to sway in his favour as well as the dramatic changes in his own party's electorate. Since October 7, the Israeli government has sought to portray Hamas's attack as an Iranian act of aggression. After the January 28 attack in Jordan, some Republican members of Congress echoed this position.

South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham minced no words in agitating for a direct US strike on Iran

itself. His Republican colleagues Tom Cotton of Arkansas and John Cornyn of Texas seconded his call. Former President Donald Trump, who is the likely Republican nominee for the presidential election in November, took a rather isolationist stance and insisted that the Jordan attack would not have taken place had he been in charge.

Establishment Republicans like Graham, Cornyn and Cotton may no longer reflect the general mood among the rank and file who now form Trump's solid base and are trying to change the party's position on foreign policy. Indeed, the Make America Great Again crowd is loathe to expand US entanglements overseas and prefers to see financial resources used domestically, for example, to strengthen the southern border and halt the influx of migrants and asylum seekers. But it is not just the core

of Trump's base that embraces this anti-escalatory stance. Given that the vast majority of Americans worry about their country getting dragged into a war - about 84 percent, according to one recent poll - Trump's isolationist rhetoric has widespread appeal. Democrats in Congress, perhaps feeling the growing pressure, reacted to the Jordan attack by calling for a strong but "proportionate" response, a euphemism for a measured strike on pro-Iran militia targets but without directly hitting Iran. Such positions were articulated by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York and Senators Ben Cardin of Maryland and Jack Reed of Rhode Island.

Indeed, the Biden administration's response to the Jordan attack has practically marked the midpoint between hawkish Republicans' calls for striking Iran directly and the

Democrats' calls for a limited reaction. According to the Pentagon, its strikes included the command and control centres of Iran's IRGC and its affiliated militias - in Syria, Iraq and Yemen - as well as their drone and intelligence capabilities. American foreign policy decisions and actions rarely impact the outcome of presidential elections, even less congressional elections. This time around, however, Biden's choices may make or break his chances for re-election. In his administration's response to the Jordan attack, he had to reconcile his declared disinterest in widening the conflict in the Middle East with the need to respond to an act of aggression against US troops in the region. But the response that he ordered was nonetheless an escalation of tensions that may lead to the dreaded widening of the conflict.

Crucially, the president's fortunes may depend on

whether Muslim and Arab Americans decide to vote for him in November. Currently, the support of both communities is in doubt as Biden continues to ignore their calls for a ceasefire in Gaza and is doing nothing to stop the Israeli slaughter, in which more than 27,000 Palestinians have been killed.

While his retaliation for the Jordan attack may be the right geopolitical move that US foreign policy requires, it is unlikely to restore to him any support from young Democrats and Muslim and Arab Americans. What Biden needs to do to gain their support is to dissociate himself and his administration from Israel's genocidal war, its apartheid system and its occupation of Palestinian land. Indeed, his re-election remains uncertain without a new, morally defensible direction in US foreign policy in the Middle East.

Robinson, Pelosi and the sham of Western progressive politics

Andrew Mitrovica

POLITICIANS love to talk. It's a big part of the job. You talk in legislatures. You talk at committees. You talk to voters. You talk to reporters. If you're lucky, you're asked to talk on TV, the radio, or other popular platforms. Politicians crave the attention. It's validating. It means that you're important. You're a somebody with important things to say. You're noticed. People listen.

Politicians know that the bigger their job, the more careful they have to be when they're talking to an audience - however small or large. That's especially true if you're a cabinet minister or a "leader". Too much unscripted talking can be dangerous. So, more often than not, what politicians say while they're talking is forgettable or worse, meaningless. They have to stick to their talking points. They adhere clich  . Still, there are moments when politicians get too comfortable. They get complacent. They slip up and say something candid and revealing about who they are and what they actually think and believe. Fortunately, two politicians opted for refreshing bursts of honesty over the standard rhetorical gruel this past week. One is Canadian. The other is American. You probably don't know the first politician. The second is quite well-known.

Both were talking, in a round-about way, about what is happening in Gaza. The first politician's name is Selina Robinson. She is, as of this writing, the minister of post-secondary education in the "socialist" provincial government of British Columbia, Canada. On January 30, Robinson was talking on Zoom as part of a panel of Jewish politicians organised by a pro-Israeli advocacy group. She was among "friends", talking to and with "friends". In one remarkable swoop, Robinson not only rewrote history, but trafficked in

a familiar racist trope. Before the engineered birth of Israel, she said, Palestine was "a crappy piece of land with nothing on it". "There were several hundred thousand people but other than that, it didn't produce an economy ... it couldn't grow things. It didn't have anything on it, and that it was the folks who were displaced that came and the people who had been living there for generations and together they worked hard," the minister said. Translation: 700,000 idle Muslim and Christian Palestinians had, for generations, squandered the chance to make the desert bloom. Happily, it flowered after the arrival of "displaced", hard-working Israelis who "were offered" the "crappy piece of land". Since she said what she said, Robinson has stopped talking - in public, at least. Instead, the minister has had to watch and listen to a lot of other people talking about how and why she must resign. Even the pro-Israeli outfit that invited Robinson to talk has more or less abandoned her, reportedly telling a CBC reporter that: "The comments made by Minister Robinson ... do not reflect the opinion of our organization." You know you have talked too much when your once-close "friends" cut you adrift.

So, Robinson did what politicians have to do when they give fulsome voice to what they think and believe: she made a groveling apology on X. Robinson wrote that her "flippant" and "disrespectful" comments had "caused pain". "I regret what I said and I apologize without reservation." Few are convinced by Robinson's belated, performative act of contrition, including two of her "socialist" colleagues in Ottawa. One member of parliament (MP) is demanding a "reassessment" of her place in cabinet. Another MP pilloried

Robinson for "an appalling disregard for the horrific violence being inflicted on Palestinians". Robinson's boss, the premier of British Columbia, is also talking. He said that the minister's remarks were "wrong". Rather than fire her, the premier is giving Robinson a good talking to. He told her, in effect, to keep talking. "She's got some work to do to go out to the community to address the harm that her comments have caused," he said. In other curious words, the premier wants Robinson to talk her and the government's way out of a prickly jam. Right. That should do it. The second chatty politician is the former speaker of the US House of Representatives and the grande dame of Congressional Democrats, Nancy Pelosi. She did her troublesome talking in the ever-agreeable studios of CNN's Washington bureau on January 29. The influential "Speaker Emerita" was asked to comment on those pesky, mostly young demonstrators who have been interrupting President Joe Biden with chants of "Genocide Joe" at campaign stops and address whether she was "concerned that they might just stay home" in the fast approaching presidential election.

A condescending Pelosi promptly played the victim card, saying: "I have been the recipient of, shall we say, their exuberance in this regard ... they're in front of my house all the time." Poor, pampered Pelosi. The "Speaker Emerita" compounded her, shall we say, disdain with a lecture, claiming that unlike the "exuberant" rabble, she and other serious types on Capitol Hill were required to "think" about "how to try to stop the suffering in Gaza".

Poor, misunderstood Pelosi. Apparently, she "thinks" that a "ceasefire" would not "stop the suffering in Gaza" since that's

what Russian President Vladimir Putin "would like to see". Pelosi's McCarthyite-smear-laden logic is loathsome and bizarre. What, apart from a ceasefire, is going to "stop the suffering in Gaza" - with or without Putin's blessing? Silly, exuberant me, but I can't "think" of anything other than a "ceasefire" that will "stop the suffering in Gaza". Pelosi ought to have stopped talking. Thankfully, she didn't. She then proved that behind every America-flag-pin-wearing speaker emerita, there lies an Alex Jones-like conspiracy theorist who is convinced that the homeland is awash with fifth columnists disguised as citizens exercising their constitutional rights to challenge a sitting president. "I think some of these protestors are spontaneous and organic and sincere," Pelosi said. "Some, I think, are connected to Russia." Again, Pelosi ought to have stopped talking. Thankfully, she didn't. Not done tarring millions of her fellow, albeit "exuberant", Americans of Arab, Muslim, and Palestinian descent as Putin's useful tools, she confirmed that she is every bit as willing and eager as her nemesis, Donald Trump, to sic the FBI on perceived enemies.

"Some financing should be investigated and I want to ask the FBI to investigate that," Pelosi said. Paging J Edgar Hoover. Paging J Edgar Hoover. I'm glad Pelosi kept talking. I'm glad because she has exposed the Democratic Party for the "progressive" and "inclusive" sham that it is. The Democratic Party never has and never will be the "home" to Arab, Muslim, and Palestinian Americans. They will always be treated with suspicion and contempt by a party establishment that confuses dissent with disloyalty and considers Palestinians disposable fodder. You see, sometimes, when politicians talk, it's clarifying.

Aljazeera

US, France, Russia and now Britain. Everyone has carrier problems

Tom Sharpe

ON Friday night, a pre-sailing inspection on HMS Queen Elizabeth revealed corrosion on a shaft coupling. Pending the fine detail, we know she will now not be sailing to Nato exercise Steadfast Defender. Instead, she will be heading to Rosyth for a docking period to repair the defect.

The first and most obvious point is this is why two carriers were built. If this had happened to the French carrier Charles de Gaulle for example, France would now be without carrier strike options for the duration of the repair. Twice now redundancy has proved its worth. 'Should it have to?' is something I'll look at later.

The general metric for warships is that you need (just over) three to guarantee one on task. Clearly we couldn't afford that and there are many who don't think we could, or should, afford any. Those inside the services or Ministry of Defence who despised the carriers through their design and build phase, and there were many, often lobbied to reduce the class down to one ship. That this was resisted at each stage has proven to be a good example of strategic decision making. Right now, getting HMS Prince of Wales to a position where she can take on QEs programme is not like flicking a switch. She is in a maintenance period that needs to be accelerated. She will then need to be trained, assured, and provided with the equipment, ammunition and people that she didn't need as the lower readiness carrier. This transition has already started but think weeks not days. The Navy will be pushing hard to make this as fast as possible. Why do complex multi-billion pound warships break? The first thing to do is shed the notion that they are in any way like your car or your phone which you expect to work every time (but of course it doesn't). These products are a) vastly less complex, b) not immersed in saltwater and c) have been product tested thousands of times before launch, more after launch. QE and PoW were product-tested twice. Issues are inevitable. And all new ships are thus afflicted, particularly if there is a gap between when they are built and when the relevant shipyard last built a ship of this type.

The first two Bay Class Royal Fleet Auxiliaries are a good example. Swan Hunter took the build on in the noughties having not built anything since the 80s. The programme was so beset with difficulties that completion of the first two and build for the latter two was moved to BAE's shipyard in Govan. Before that, the Upholder class submarines, built at Cammell Laird in the 80s were the first diesel-electric submarines built there since the Oberon class, the last of which was launched in the early 60s. The result was a submarine so plagued with technical difficulties that the torpedo tubes had to be filled with cement because they discovered during trials that the doors at the back and front could be opened at the same time. Even the Type 23 frigate, now the workhorse of the fleet, had early issues. They spent the first five years of their life without a working command system and the Merlin helicopter didn't fit in the hangar in the first of class. Meme generators and bloggers had they existed back then would have had a field day. HMS Queen Elizabeth pushed the boundaries in many respects, both in terms of size and construction techniques - problems are inevitable. Most ships lose their 'character' traits over time as equipment is improved or replaced. The Type 45 destroyer's ongoing propulsion upgrade is a good example. So are the new engines fitted to Hunt class minehunters, changing out the ones that caught fire if you idled them for too long.

Sometimes the ship's company just learn to deal with it as part and parcel of living with a warship. Type 42 destroyers were known for having an interesting aroma that pervaded much of the back end (ironic) of the ship. This was not a design feature. In one of my frigates, the main engines each had names (not uncommon - engineers are like that) but one of

them was most unflattering because it was less than reliable. And this is not just a UK problem. Every navy I ever worked with had ships that had issues. Even Newport News Shipbuilding, the yard that built the Nimitz class carriers - without doubt some of the best ships ever built - had a lot of problems with the first-of-class USS Ford that followed the Nimitzes. The electromagnetic launch system for the aircraft caught most of the headlines which is harsh as that really was novel, but they also had reliability issues with some relatively basic kit such as the weapons lift system. This all combined to delay delivery by nearly two years. The Ford still has a sewage management problem which I won't go into in case you're eating. Elsewhere, the US Navy built an entire class of littoral combat ship which is so overrun with issues that they stopped the build run and are paying them off early. The French carrier Charles de Gaulle has also

crafted schedule of work is unfair, but if I was senior navy just now - and there are many reasons I am not - I would be leaning on both the purse string holder and the maintenance infrastructure to see how fast this can be done. The Secretary of State for Defence recently said we are in a 'pre-war' phase. I would use this issue to test that. The two ships' companies will need to be carefully managed. Rightly or wrongly, the good/bad old days of 'that's life in a blue suit shipmate' and 'if you can't take a joke you shouldn't have joined' are on the wane. Being bounced to the Red Sea to conduct strike operations is one thing. Being bounced to go on an exercise because your sister ship is broken is another. Those who care about these things, and really it should be everyone, will be very busy just now. It was clear last week that the Armed Forces Minister did not want to send one of these ships to the Red Sea yet. For now, at least that conundrum has been resolved, albeit in the

How long it takes to repair QE will be more interesting. A commercial shipping friend of mine suggested that a ship of her size with a shaft issue that needs a dry dock to resolve should be out of the water for no more than two weeks. This will not be the case, but 'complexity' and 'ammunition' can only be blamed for so much. Clearly comparing commercial enterprises to a publicly funded single dockyard with a carefully crafted schedule of work is unfair, but if I was senior navy just now - and there are many reasons I am not - I would be leaning on both the purse string holder and the maintenance infrastructure to see how fast this can be done. The Secretary of State for Defence recently said we are in a 'pre-war' phase. I would use this issue to test that. The two ships' companies will need to be carefully managed. Rightly or wrongly, the good/bad old days of 'that's life in a blue suit shipmate' and 'if you can't take a joke you shouldn't have joined' are on the wane. Being bounced to the Red Sea to conduct strike operations is one thing.

been plagued by problems over the years, including vibration on their propeller shafts. That they only have one carrier, and the ship's company, once trained, are therefore largely unable to move between ships causes them huge issues as well. Their politicians love her (when she is working), their navy find it a (very expensive) fight to keep her running.

The Russian carrier, Kuznetsov, has often had issues too and she is typically accompanied by a powerful ocean-going tug in case of trouble. So teething issues, and this is still early in a 50 year life, are common. What is clear in this case is that whoever in the Aircraft Carrier Alliance (ACA) that had responsibility for the shaft line didn't do a very good job. We've seen shaft seal leaks, the alignment issue leading to PoW nearly losing an entire propeller and now this corrosion. This is galling because whilst the configuration of the QEC shaft line is bespoke, the basic elements within it are not and are run successfully in ships the world over. With the ACA between BAE Systems, Babcock and Thales now dissolved, there will be some 'interesting' conversations going on just now as to where liability for this ongoing issue lies. HMS Prince of Wales will do what's needed to get to sea and take over QE's duties quickly, of that I am sure. How long it takes to repair QE will be more interesting. A commercial shipping friend of mine suggested that a ship of her size with a shaft issue that needs a dry dock to resolve should be out of the water for no more than two weeks. This will not be the case, but 'complexity' and 'ammunition' can only be blamed for so much.

Clearly comparing commercial enterprises to a publicly funded single dockyard with a carefully

wrong way. To those who thought that she should already be heading that way, this is frustrating. Again, searching for positives in all this, at least the defect was identified alongside and not on operations in a high-threat environment. The option to send PoW there has not been removed, it's just had the likelihood reduced. Looking further forward, HMS Prince of Wales will be coming to the end of Steadfast Defender at roughly the same time QE will be fixed. Who goes where at that point will be interesting. QE was due to handover flagship duties later this year anyway and go into a longer period of planned maintenance. Depending on whether the 'pre-war' test works or not, this maintenance period could be bought forward now. PoW was then set to take the lead on next year's global deployment. Lots of unknowns here but I bring it up to show the intertwined and longer term nature of ship planning means that fleet planning is never as simple as 'that one is broken, send the other one'. This is the case even in frigate, destroyer and submarine classes where there are more options.

No matter how sanguine the Admiralty is over 'stuff happens', they will be deeply annoyed by this as once again they are being made to foot the bill, probably in every sense, for a problem not of their making. They will want accountability but are unlikely to get it in the meantime, they have to manage getting QE repaired and PoW online as quickly as possible, both of which will cause pain to the most valuable asset they have, people. Importantly, the decision to build two of these strategic assets means the Navy are still able to offer political options, which is the whole point of the service.

New productive forces need new industrialization

Shi Dan & Deng Zhou

RECENTLY, "new productive forces" has emerged as a prominent term in China, with its essence rooted in technological innovation. This concept serves as a pivotal driver for advancing high-quality economic development. The imperative for China to explore new avenues of development and facilitate high-quality development and new industrialization is pressing. To this end, China is actively integrating resources for technological innovation, leading the development of strategic emerging industries and future sectors, and expediting the establishment of new quality production capacity.

In the current global landscape, the ongoing new industrial revolution, propelled by advancements in digital technology, is disrupting traditional industries, established economic norms and long-accepted patterns of specialization. Simultaneously, countries across the globe have been making greater efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions as a shared global goal, and easing their pursuit of fossil fuel-driven industrialization while taking measures to meet rising green demands.

Unlike some developed countries, China began its digitalization and green transformation at a relatively low development level, as it knows embracing the path of new industrialization is necessary for addressing the challenges and seizing the strategic opportunities. New industrialization refers to industrialization of digital intelligence. The digital domain has seen a multitude of disruptive innovations, which have given rise to new industries and formats, creating novel production factors, and triggering changes in the organizational forms of production.

One manifestation of the changes in production is the substitution of labor by, among other things, automation, posing a serious challenge to labor-intensive industries and weakening the role of developing countries in the global industry chains. This has led to a reduction in China's competitiveness in labor-intensive industries and some segments of the

industry chains. The essence of new industrialization lies in restructuring China's competitiveness, leveraging advanced production factors such as knowledge, technology, human capital and data to boost industrial development. Besides, digital technology has become a crucial means to enhance technological capability and control the global value chains. To become a significant participant and a leader in the new industrial revolution, China must further integrate digital technology with manufacturing through new industrialization. For that, China has to comprehensively develop all aspects of the industry and value chains, product lifecycles, supply chains, and different segments of the business ecosystem.

Low-carbon development is what distinguishes new industrialization from traditional industrialization. And China has vowed to peak its carbon emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060. New industrialization advances on a low-carbon path, creating new constraints and challenges as well as new opportunities. Technologies, products, services and industries capable of overcoming these new constraints will become drivers of growth in the new industrialization process, by utilizing new energy and carbon capture, and preserving the ecology. To promote green and low-carbon development, China needs to reduce carbon emissions from industries and build a world-class green industrial system through new industrialization, thus laying the material foundation for the overall green and low-carbon transformation of the economy, and providing low-carbon technologies, products and services to achieve the "dual-carbon" goals.

China's trajectory of new industrialization neither overly emphasizes an export-driven model nor treads the path of isolationism despite rising anti-globalization sentiments in some economies. In confronting the challenges posed by a fast-changing international landscape, China's new industrialization seeks to expand opening-

up, leveraging both domestic and international markets and resources. The goal is to establish a development pattern centered on a robust domestic cycle while simultaneously promoting mutual reinforcement between domestic and international cycles. The new industrialization policy involves the further opening up of the economy. On the external front, it aims to consolidate export advantages by promoting Chinese investments, products and services worldwide. Its focus is also on strengthening international market channels, enhancing local capability, and ensuring export enterprises meet external demands. This approach will not only further strengthen the resilience and security of the industry and supply chains but also boost China's participation in international industrial division and competition. The policy also advocates self-reliance while fostering political and policy interactions with other economies. Stressing the importance of communication in economic policies, industrial planning and regional industry chain construction, China aims to deepen regional industrial cooperation. However, its focus remains on using its vast market to attract more high-quality foreign investments.

New industrialization endeavors are expected to unleash potential demand and meet domestic consumption needs. In the world's largest potential domestic market, unleashing demand will not only bolster the resilience and security of the industry and supply chains but also ensure the benefits of industrialization reach the broader population. By making industrial production more efficient, taking measures to increase the incomes of workers, improving the social security system, and boosting domestic consumer confidence, the policy will promote the development of new materials, products and business models. Crucially, new industrialization serves as a catalyst for autonomous innovations. As China increases its technological capability, the emphasis is shifting from imitation and

catching up to originality and leadership. This transformation requires a more extensive and intensive focus on innovations at the primary levels. By prioritizing the promotion of independent innovations, the policy aims to bolster the resilience of the industry and supply chains, and safeguard national industrial security.

The policy also facilitates independent but controllable innovations in technology, clearing of the technology development "bottleneck" - which China faces despite being a major player in technological innovations - by taking into consideration the global trends in technological advancements and adjusting the direction of innovations. While continuing to learn from developed countries, particularly in core foundational technologies, key cutting-edge technologies and "futuristic technologies", China seeks to continually improve its independent industrial technology system. New industrialization also boosts innovation capability that leads the new industrial revolution. In the midst of the new technological revolution triggering a new industrial revolution, countries are taking measures to adapt to changes, and implement necessary reforms. Recognizing its shortcomings in basic industrial capability, particularly in critical components and core technologies, China aims to capitalize on the opportunities created by the new technological revolution. The aim is to ensure China actively participates in high-end and emerging industries, giving shape to a new international division of labor in advanced industries.

In essence, China's new industrialization is a dynamic strategy that aligns with the evolving needs of the global economy. And China is positioned to not only continue playing a key role in the global economic landscape but also address the complex challenges through collaboration with other countries and promoting innovations. By continuing on this path, China strives to create a more integrated, sustainable and mutually beneficial global economic environment.

with balance, harmony and the natural order of the universe. Representing auspiciousness, vitality and the power of nature, loong remain a revered and beloved symbol in Chinese society, reflecting the enduring significance of historical traditions in modern China.

The differences in perception of the mythical creatures in China and the West are rooted in their different cultural values. Thus the answer to the question at the beginning is clear: Whether or not to use loong instead of dragon is not important. What is important is that as we enter a new lunar year people globally appreciate the cultural values embodied in such Chinese symbols as loong.

Enduring tales with contrasting characteristics

Zhang Zhouxiang

WE will soon enter the Year of the Dragon. Or should that be the Year of the Loong? That is a question that has been a subject for debate in China, as some say there is a difference between the two in Chinese and Western mythology.

They point to dragons in the West being usually depicted as malevolent, fire-breathing creatures that hoard treasure and terrorize villages. Dragons they say are typically seen as symbols of chaos and evil, portrayed as antagonists in Western mythology and literature, and often depicted as malevolent adversaries to be vanquished by valiant heroes. These depictions

hark back to the archetypal myths of the ancient Mesopotamian and Near Eastern cultures, in which dragon-like creatures, such as Tiamat in Mesopotamian mythology are forces of chaos and destruction that are confronted and ultimately defeated in a great battle.

Such symbolic resonance can be seen in the enduring appeal of dragons in Western popular culture today where they are staples of fantasy literature, films, video games, and TV shows, often embodying a mix of awe-inspiring and fearsome qualities that put them at the heart of struggles between good and evil. In Chinese culture, loong are

revered as symbols of power, excellence, and good luck, and they are often depicted as wise and kind creatures.

The loong has been a central motif in Chinese culture for thousands of years, and its origins can be traced back to early Chinese civilization through mythology, folklore and religious beliefs. Since loong were believed to have control over natural phenomena such as rain, storms and water, and were associated with the life-giving properties of water and the fertility of the land, loong became symbols of strength and good fortune, and they became associated



Economy, democracy vital for a country’s development, stability: Meher

LAHORE (APP): Minister of State and Federal Tax Ombudsman's (FTO) Coordinator Meher Kashif Younis said on Thursday that economy and democracy were vital pillars for development and stability of a country.

Talking to a delegation of women entrepreneurs here, he said a strong economy guarantees growth, job opportunities and improved living standards while democracy ensured a representative government that

upholds the rule of law, protects human rights and encourages people participation in decision-making.

Meher said that the synergy between a stable economy and a functioning democracy was vital for Pakistan's progress and sustainable development. However, it's important to recognise that specific challenges and priorities may evolve over time, and continued efforts are needed to strike a balance between these two pillars.

On the other hand, he said a healthy economy with opportunities for growth and prosperity could strengthen democratic institutions. He said, a robust economy could lead to improved living standards, reduced poverty, and increased access to education and healthcare.

Balancing the economy and democracy is an ongoing process that requires careful consideration, public discourse, and a commitment to uphold democratic principles while promoting sustainable economic growth, he added.

On this occasion, the delegation head Ms Maheen said that economy and democracy were closely intertwined concepts. In a democratic system, she said, the economy played a crucial role in shaping people's lives, opportunities, and overall well-being, and the democratic governance influenced economic policies and decisions, she added.

China’s consumer prices suffer biggest fall since 2009

BEIJING (Reuters): China's consumer prices fell at their steepest pace in more than 14 years in January while producer prices also dropped, ramping up pressure on policymakers to do more to revive an economy low on confidence and facing deflationary risks. The world's second-biggest economy has been grappling with slowing prices since early last year, forcing policymakers to cut interest rates to spur growth even as many developed economies were focused on taming stubbornly high inflation.

The consumer price index (CPI) fell 0.8% in January from a year earlier, after a 0.3% drop in December, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on Thursday. The CPI rose 0.3% month-on-month from a 0.1% uptick the pre-

vious month. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast a 0.5% fall year-on-year and a 0.4% gain month-on-month.

The annual CPI decline in January was the biggest since September 2009, mainly led by a sharp drop in food prices, but analysts warn the overall deflationary impulse in the economy risks becoming entrenched in consumer behaviour.

"The CPI data today shows China faces persistent deflationary pressure," said Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management. "China needs to take actions quickly and aggressively to avoid the risk of deflationary expectation to be entrenched among consumers."

The Asian giant has struggled to regain economic momentum since

the end of COVID curbs in late 2022, and nervous investors have dumped Chinese stocks amid a deepening property crisis and local government debt risks.

Global demand has also remained relatively soft, with an official survey showing activity in China's vast manufacturing sector contracting in January.

Chinese stocks retreated shortly after the weak CPI data before rebounding again, helped by the recent rapid-fire support measures.

The economy grew 5.2% in 2023, meeting the official target of around 5%, but the recovery has been much shakier than investors had expected. Policy insiders expect Beijing to maintain a growth target similar to last year of around 5%.

Malaysia’s service sector revenue up 6.6 pct on year in Q4

KUALA LUMPUR (Xinhua/APP): Malaysia's service sector revenue rose 6.6 percent year-on-year in the fourth quarter of 2023 to 591.4 billion ringgit (124.1 billion U.S. dollars), official data showed Thursday.

The Department of Statistics Malaysia said in a statement that the growth

was contributed by favorable performance in all segments of the service sector.

Wholesale and retail trade, food and beverage and accommodation segments grew 5.9 percent, while information and communication and transportation and storage segments increased by 8.1 percent.

Professional, real estate

and administrative and support service segment expanded by 8.8 percent, while the private health, private education, arts, entertainment and recreation and personal services and other activities segment climbed by 12.3 percent.

A quarter-on-quarter comparison showed that the total revenue for the service

sector in Malaysia rose 1.3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2023 as compared to the third quarter of the same year. The total revenue of Malaysia's service sector in 2023 was 2.3 trillion ringgit, which is an increase of 8.4 percent as compared to the previous year. (1 ringgit equals 0.21 U.S. dollar)

MoEI reveals details of Federal Energy Management Regulation in Industrial Facilities

DUBAI (WAM/APP): Sharif Al Olama, Undersecretary for Energy and Petroleum Affairs at the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure (MoEI), revealed the details of the Federal Energy Management Regulation in Industrial Facilities that was recently approved by the UAE Cabinet to improve energy efficiency and sustainability of the industrial sector.

He pointed out that the Federal Energy Management Regulation in Industrial Facilities is the first of its kind to drive industry decisions towards investing in the best available technology and operational excellence in energy management to reduce consumption and emissions from the industrial sector.

As a result, it will reduce energy demand in the industrial sector by 33% by 2050.

Moreover, the regulation will help improve air quality by 32%, as it will reduce CO2 emissions in the industrial sector, which is equivalent to around 63 Mt of CO2 by 2050. In addition, measures taken under the regulation will achieve financial savings of AED14 billion by 2050.

Al Olama said, "The move aligns with the UAE's steadfast commitment to sustainability and climate action. As evidenced by the extension of the Year of Sustainability to 2024, we strongly believe in the optimal use of energy as we shift to a sustainable green economy."

He added that the regula-

tion is at the centre of the ministry's plans to help the industrial sector reach net zero through a proactive approach that relies on three main principles: Reducing energy consumption, enhancing dependency on clean energy solutions, and leveraging advanced technology that supports the growth of sustainable industries.

For his part, Osama Amir Fadhel, Assistant Undersecretary of the Industry Accelerators Sector at the MoEI, said, "In line with the UAE's sustainable economic development plan and to enhance the involvement of all sectors in achieving sustainability and climate neutrality by 2050, government entities, including the Ministry of Industry and

Advanced Technology, are developing strategies and policies to drive the adoption of sustainability standards.

He noted that the Federal Regulation is a step forward for the growth of the national industrial sector and aligns with global best practices, particularly those related to energy efficiency.

Fadhel added that the regulation plays a key role in encouraging the industrial sector to rapidly reduce energy consumption and achieve the National Energy and Water Demand Side Management Programme 2050 objectives. The new regulation will support the ministry's objectives to decarbonise the sector in line with the Industrial Decarbonization Roadmap target of 93% by 2050.

Pakistan exhibitors show substantial presence at Texworld Evolution Paris

ISLAMABAD (APP): With a total of 19 enterprises, the Pakistani exhibitors show a substantial presence and impact at the internationally acclaimed trendsetting innovative 'Texworld Evolution Paris'.

The three-day exhibition that opened on February 5 with over 1300 companies from around the globe catering to future vogue and sourcing requirements remained the central attraction for the global fashion and apparel industry. The exhibition was held at the Porte Des Versailles, Paris, a statement issued by the Pakistan Embassy in Paris said on Thursday.

Out of total Pakistani enterprises, 13 companies participated under the banner of the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) whereas 6 exhibited independently.

Bringing to the forefront an unmatched variety of fabric, accessories and finished products for the apparel and garment industry, the Denim Village remained in the spotlight.

TDAP-led Pakistan Pavilion was coordinated and promoted by the Trade and Investment section of the Pakistan Embassy and their diverse product display included eco-friendly fabrics, cotton & denim blends, drapery, embroidery, silks, sportswear, inclusive of cotton and denim blends, shawls, trims, men's/ladies and children's wear and a woollen range. The participants from Pakistan included Be Be Jan Pakistan, Glamour Garments, Munir Textile Mills, Liberty Mills, Sapphire Finishing Mills, Sarena Textile Industries, Shahtaj Textiles, Shekhani

Industries, A & J Apparel, Fashion Channel, H. Sardar Ali Akhtar Ali, Ijaz Apparel, Karsaz Textiles, MRC Textiles, MS Apparel, MYM Knitwear, Premium Textile Mills, Sami Exports&Sesil.

Pakistan Ambassador to France Asim Iftikhar Ahmad inaugurated the Pakistan Pavilion. He greatly appreciated the efforts that went into setting up the stalls to ensure the promoting of Pakistan as a major sourcing destination in the competitive environs of the TexWorld 2024.

The Ambassador and the Trade and Investment Counselor had detailed interactions with the representatives of the Pakistani companies who were eager and prepared to showcase their products and establish contacts with clients.

Pakistan's Trade & Investment Counsellor Arooj Mehwish Rizvi hosted an evening reception for the Pakistani participants and the ambassadors welcomed the participants and lauded their efforts to enhance Pakistan's exports. Views were exchanged on the need for innovation and value addition for optimal benefit.

The participants appreciated the efforts undertaken by the mission's commercial section in arranging B2B meetings, establishing their stalls at prominent locations, and facilitation throughout their stay. This exhibition not only served as a platform for business networking but also highlighted Pakistan's commitment to innovation and quality in the global textile and apparel industry.

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Most Asian stocks rose Thursday following another record on Wall Street, with strong earnings, a resilient US economy and Chinese moves to boost the country's markets playing up against fading hopes for an early Federal Reserve interest rate cut.

Fresh comments from US monetary policymakers pushing back against reducing borrowing costs too early were unable to overshadow a string of forecast-beating reports from top firms this season including Amazon and Facebook parent Meta.

With traders now resigned to fewer rate cuts this year, they are also now focusing on readings showing that US growth remained on track and jobs were still being created, all as inflation came down.

In the latest moves to temper bets on a dovish Fed pivot, the bank's Richmond president Tom Barkin said he was "very supportive of being patient" on announcing the first reduction, citing the strong metrics.

And governor Adriana Kugler added that she wanted to wait until more data was available before moving. While figures continue to show the inflation

battle is being won, decision-makers are reluctant to cut too early in case prices bounce back.

Still, New York traders were in a good mood, helped by healthy results from Disney, auto giant Ford and Chipotle Mexican Grill. That helped the S&P 500 push to a new all-time high within a whisker of the 5,000-point mark, while the Nasdaq and Dow were also well up. "Higher rates don't appear to burden consumers or corporations significantly, enabling the Fed to wait longer to ensure inflation control without disrupting the stock market's momentum," said Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management.

"It's becoming increasingly evident that equities are unfazed and indifferent to the Federal Reserve's less dovish stance, which suggests that unless there is a substantial deterioration in the labour market, the central bank's baseline expectation for 2024 includes three rate cuts."

Asia was largely positive and Shanghai was again sharply higher, building on the near five percent gains over the previous two days as investors cheered a number of pledges from Beijing to staunch a long-running rout. There was also a posi-

tive reaction to the news that the chairman of China's securities regulator, Yi Huiman, had been replaced after overseeing a sell-off that has wiped trillions off companies' valuations.

He will be replaced by banking veteran Wu Qing. "This is long overdue in my opinion, if one chief cannot do the job, then maybe we should give someone else a chance," Jiang Liangqing, of Zhuhai Greenbamboo Private Fund Management, said.

"At the minimum, a new broom sweeps clean and he could be more bold in taking action instead of just words." The announcement follows a series of measures and pledges aimed at boosting confidence on trading floors, including curbs on short-selling purchases by state-owned enterprises and share-buying by China's "national team". Still, observers warned the moves would not solve the country's deeper economic problems -- particularly in the property sector -- which needed to be addressed to fully restore optimism.

Data showing China's consumer prices fell for a fourth straight month in January -- and at the sharpest pace since 2009 -- highlighted the hard work

leaders face in turning the ship around.

There were also gains in Tokyo, Sydney, Seoul and Manila, though Singapore and Wellington dropped.

Hong Kong was also dragged lower by a more than six percent dive in market heavyweight Alibaba, which was hit by a worse-than-expected earnings report that overshadowed a huge stock buyback.

Tokyo - Nikkei 225: UP 1.7 percent at 36,738.42 (break)

Hong Kong - Hang Seng Index: DOWN 0.6 percent at 15,980.32

Shanghai - Composite: UP 0.7 percent at 2,850.59

Dollar/yen: UP at 148.35 yen from 148.16 yen on Wednesday

Pound/dollar: UP at \$1.2635

Euro/dollar: UP at \$1.0783 from \$1.0777

Euro/pound: UP at 85.34 pence from 85.32 pence

West Texas Intermediate: UP 0.4 percent at \$74.17 per barrel

Brent North Sea Crude: UP 0.4 percent at \$79.53 per barrel

New York - Dow: UP 0.4 percent at 38,677.36 points (close)

London - FTSE 100: DOWN 0.7 percent at 7,628.75 (close)

PFC to take part in 3-day LAS VEGAS-USA expo

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) will take part in a three-day International Las Vegas-United States of America (USA) Expo starting on February 13 to explore business opportunities and find new global markets.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of PFC Mian Kashif Ashfaq, talking to a delegation of furniture manufacturers led by Muhammad Araib, said, "PFC is in touch with the

Trade Development Authority of Pakistan for participating in all international mega events," according to a news release here on Thursday.

He said, "This fair attracts thousands of global manufacturers from all over the world who showcase their products."

He said, "PFC will exhibit its high-quality international products to capture their share in the Intel market."

He said, "It's an excellent opportunity to showcase Pak products and develop business deals with international buyers."

He said, "This fair also offers professional buyers a sourcing platform with a wide variety of products ranging from the basics to the most creative and qualitative." Mian Kashif said, "The main purpose of attending the foreign fairs is to help strengthen the national economy, and

TDAP is facilitating the manufacturers of export products."

He said, "He will also hold a series of marathon meetings with tycoons for investment to avail the government of an unprecedented special package for foreign investors."

He said, "He will also highlight salient features of the package and invite them to a now stable and secure Pakistan, a heaven for investment."

US weekly jobless claims fall more than expected last week

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits fell more than expected last week, pointing to underlying labor market strength despite a recent spike in layoffs.

Initial claims for state unemployment benefits dropped 9,000 to a seasonally adjusted 218,000 for the week ended Feb. 3, the Labor Department said on Thursday. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast 220,000 claims for the latest week.

Claims are little changed compared to the same period last year, in spite of the recent high-profile layoffs, many of them in the technology and media industries.



Employers are generally wary of sending workers home following difficulties finding labor during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Economists also point to rising worker productivity, marked by growth in excess of a 3% annualized pace for three straight quarters, and eas-

ing labor costs as other factors encouraging companies to retain their workforces.

The government reported last week that nonfarm payrolls increased by 353,000 jobs in January. The unemployment rate was unchanged at 3.7%. Sustained labor market

strength has forced financial markets to dial back expectations of the first interest rate cut from the Federal Reserve to May from March.

U.S. central bank officials signaled on Wednesday that they were in no rush to lower borrowing costs until they were confident inflation was headed down to the Fed's 2% target. Since March 2022, the Fed has raised its policy rate by 525 basis points to the current 5.25% to 5.50% range.

The number of people receiving benefits after an initial week of aid, a proxy for hiring, decreased 23,000 to 1.871 million during the week ending Jan. 27, the claims report showed.

ISTANBUL (AA/APP): Türkiye's flour exports last year reached a historic high of 3.66 million tons, the head of the International Association of Operative Millers (IAOM) Eurasia said on Thursday.

Türkiye has been the leading country in flour exports worldwide since 2015, said Eren Gunhan Ulusoy in a press release.

The country is also expected to export over 3.5 million tons of flour in 2024, he noted.

Despite the recent shipping problems in the Red Sea, the Turkish flour sector boosted its exports 22% to 344,000 tons, he stressed.

Türkiye's earnings from flour exports last year totaled \$1.5 billion, he added.

He said Türkiye saw drops in grain production in the last three years due to

weather conditions.

There was a decrease of up to 60% in this period last year, but this season is better, he said.

Türkiye reached 22 million tons in wheat production in 2023, and the sector expects production of 24-25 million tons this year.



In brief

Mitchell misses South Africa Test

H A M I L T O N (Agencies): Black Caps batter Daryl Mitchell will sit out the second Test with South Africa next week to be fit for the looming home series against world champions Australia, New Zealand Cricket said Thursday. Mitchell played in New Zealand's crushing 281-runs win in the first Test against the touring Proteas on Wednesday, but will miss the second match, which starts Tuesday, with a persistent foot problem. The 32-year-old, who has hit five centuries in 31 Tests, will also miss all three Twenty20 games against Australia this month ahead of the home two-Test series with the touring world champions starting February 29. The middle-order batter needs more treatment for a foot injury that sidelined him for the home Twenty20 series win over Pakistan in January, New Zealand Cricket said in a statement. "Daryl is a hugely important member of the squad in all three formats and ensuring he is in the best shape is vital with the period of matches to come," said Black Caps head coach Gary Stead. "Based on the schedule ahead, now is an appropriate time to complete a period of rehabilitation." Seamer Will O'Rourke will join the squad as planned for the second Test against South Africa in Hamilton. New Zealand batter Kane Williamson cemented his place as the world's top-ranked male batter with centuries in each innings against the Proteas. A second win for New Zealand would seal a first-ever Test series win over South Africa after 17 failed attempts against the Proteas since 1931.

Toney not certain to leave Brentford

L O N D O N (Agencies): Brentford manager Thomas Frank has claimed Ivan Toney could stay with the club next season despite interest from Premier League rivals. Frank was quoted by a magazine in his native Denmark this week saying the England striker is likely to be sold in the close-season. Toney, who returned in January from an eight-month ban for breaching FA gambling rules, is out of contract at the end of next term and has been linked with Arsenal and Chelsea. The 27-year-old, who has not hidden his desire to play for a bigger club, has scored twice since his comeback but Brentford remain in relegation trouble with just three points separating them from the bottom three. Frank, who gave his interview to Tipsbladet in Danish, urged caution in relying on translated text when asked about his recent comments on Toney's future. "You always need to be aware of translation. Google Translate is not always the best," Frank told reporters on Thursday. "It's the same message as the whole time, I would love him to stay forever. The reality is he's got one more year left on his contract in the summer. "I think he's been pretty open about playing for a top club in the future. There's a couple of scenarios; he leaves in the summer, he leaves in the winter, or he stays until the end. "If he's leaving - whatever, summer, winter or the summer after - I think it will be fantastic seeing him playing for a top club."

Heartbreak for Pakistan as Australia seal final date with India

BENONI (Agencies): An unbeaten tenth-wicket stand of 17 between Raf MacMillan and Callum Vidler took Australia past Pakistan in a topsy-turvy second semi-final in Benoni to seal a date against India in Sunday's final for the 2024 Men's Under-19 World Cup title. Chasing only 180 after Tom Straker's 6 for 24 wrecked Pakistan in the first innings, Australia nearly threw away their advantage with the bat after a few clumsy top-order dismissals brought some parity into the contest. The 15-year-old Ali Raza (4-34) struck thrice late in the day, but the young pair of MacMillan (19*) and Vidler (3*) staved off the challenge posed by the inspired Pakistan bowling attack in the death overs to just about take Australia over the line. The winning runs in the final over were scored off an inside edge that very nearly crashed into the stumps but instead trickled behind for four. Australia also had opener Harry Dixon and wicketkeeper-batter Oliver Peake to thank for their contributions with the bat that held their fragile innings together. Dixon, who models his game on David Warner, hit his third half-century of the tournament and perhaps

the most important of his youth ODI career with 50 in 75 balls. He held one end up as Sam Konstas (14), Hugh Weibgen (4), Harjas Singh (run out for 5) and Ryan Hicks (0) fell in quick succession to leave Australia reeling at 59 for 4. Along with Peake, he added 43 for the sixth wicket, but a double-wicket burst from left-arm spinner Arafat Minhas brought Pakistan into the game. Pakistan then went ahead in the contest when Raza with his blistering pace picked off Peake - on 49 - and Straker in the 42nd and 46th overs respectively. He then bowled the No. 10 Mahli Beardman for a duck leaving Australia scrambling with only one wicket in hand. But the tenth and most important wicket remained elusive. Earlier in the day, Pakistan were inserted to bat by Australia captain Weibgen. On a surface with ample spin and enough lateral movement, four of Pakistan's top six were out for single digits. Straker, with his height and pace, dismissed Shamyl Hussain (17) and Saad Baig (3) while fellow new-ball bowler Vidler got Shahzaib Khan (4). Offspinners MacMillan and Campbell also found enough purchase to keep the left-hand heavy Pakistan line-up guessing.

Two batters who did look comfortable for Pakistan, though, were the No. 3 Azan Awaais and the No. 7 Minhas. They both struck 52 of different styles, to ensure Pakistan could make 179. Awaais was more reserved, playing according to the struggling situation Pakistan found themselves in, while Minhas was more attacking in the back end, with the team searching for a respectable total. Their 54-run fifth-wicket stand seemed to set Pakistan up for a score closer to 200, but their dismissals in the 41st and 45th overs gave Australia an opening to exploit. And that came in the form of Straker's extreme pace. He picked up a fourth wicket when Ubaid Khan mistimed a shot to cover in the 47th over, and when he returned for the 49th, Straker rattled the stumps of both the No. 10 and No. 11 Pakistan batters. In a game of close margins, the seven balls Pakistan failed to face in the first innings turned out to be mighty expensive. The result now sets up a repeat of the 2018 Under-19 World Cup final and more recently, the 2023 ODI World Cup final contested between the India and Australia senior sides. That contest will be at the same venue in Benoni on Sunday, February 11.

Chelsea set 'standard' with victory over Villa says Gallagher



LONDON (AFP): Chelsea midfielder Conor Gallagher said his side have set a standard they must maintain after ending their dismal run with a vital FA Cup win at Aston Villa. Gallagher scored his first goal of the season to put Chelsea on course for their 3-1 victory against Villa in Wednesday's FA Cup fourth round replay. Nicolas Jackson's header and Enzo Fernandez's superb free kick ensured Chelsea would bounce back from successive heavy defeats against Wolves and Liverpool. Chelsea had travelled to Villa in turmoil after dropping to 11th in the Premier League as the pressure mounted on Mauricio Pochettino in his first sea-

son in charge. England international Gallagher knows Chelsea cannot afford to slip back to the disjointed displays that have marred much of a turbulent campaign. "There was a lot of hunger and that's what we need every game," he said after Chelsea booked a fifth-round tie against Leeds. "I think before the game you could sense that because the last two games have not been good enough by our standards. "Everyone was really up for it and raring to give our fans a good performance and we did." Chelsea must prove they have heeded Gallagher's rallying cry when they return to Premier League action in Monday's trip to

Crystal Palace. The London derby forms part of a hectic month for Chelsea, who can redefine the perception of their season by beating Liverpool in the League Cup final on February 25. "We know how we can play, we showed that. A lot of times this season we haven't been good enough, but also a lot of times we have been really good against the top teams so we know how good we can be," Gallagher said. "We're really buzzing and Villa are a top team so to beat them, and the way we did it, was brilliant so we will take a lot of confidence from that, and hopefully take it into the next game."

UEFA president Ceferin won't seek re-election in 2027

PARIS (AFP): Aleksander Ceferin said Thursday he would not seek a fourth term as UEFA president in 2027 despite the approval of controversial reforms that would allow him to extend his mandate. "I decided around six months ago that I'm not planning to run in 2027 anymore," the 56-year-old Slovenian lawyer said at a press conference following the UEFA Congress in Paris. "The reason is that after some time, every organisation needs fresh blood, but mainly because I was away from my family for seven years now." Ceferin also said he was "tired of Covid, tired of two wars" and of plans for a rival Super League that he called a "nonsense project". His surprise announcement came shortly after UEFA member nations voted overwhelmingly in favour of a series of statute amendments, including a measure that would have let Ceferin potentially stay in his role until 2031.

"I intentionally didn't want to disclose my thoughts before, because firstly, I wanted to see the real face of some people and I saw it," said Ceferin, first elected in 2016 following the downfall of Frenchman Michel Platini. "I didn't want to influence the Congress. I wanted them to decide (on the statutes) not knowing what I'm telling you today." The key amendment passed does not erase the three-term limit but stipulates that terms of office started or served before July 1, 2017, shall not be taken into account. The rule was introduced by Ceferin that year as an anti-corruption move in the wake of the FIFA scandal. He said the need to change the existing legislation stemmed from the fact it had not been properly implemented at the time. Ceferin was re-elected unopposed for a third term last April, just weeks after Gianni Infantino was re-elected as president of the sport's world governing body FIFA. However his suggestion he



could run for a fourth term, which arose during an executive meeting in December, prompted UEFA's chief of football Zvonimir Boban to resign last month. The former Croatia midfielder, who was part of AC Milan's successful sides in the 1990s, called it a "disastrous idea". Ceferin took a parting shot at Boban, formerly a close ally,

criticising his "narcissistic whining" and "pathetic cry about morality". The motion comfortably received the two-thirds majority required during Thursday's vote, with England the lone dissenting voice among the 55 member nations. Ukraine abstained. 'Strength in unity' Ceferin hit back at claims that his organisation, which has

had to fight off the threat of the breakaway Super League, was crumbling under his leadership. "UEFA is divided I've read, UEFA is fragmented beyond repair I've read. I hope that, I'm probably naive, the ones who claim that are a bit embarrassed now after this vote," he said. Among a number of other statute changes voted for as a block of measures, which the English FA also opposed, was a proposal guaranteeing greater female representation on UEFA's ruling executive committee. An age limit of 70 for all members of that committee was repealed as well. Twenty-six European countries signed a joint declaration Thursday voicing their opposition to the Super League, although Spain was a notable absentee from that list. Spanish giants Real Madrid and Barcelona are still publicly attached to the project, which sent shockwaves through the sport when 12 of its biggest clubs announced they had

signed up to the competition in April 2021. However, within 48 hours nine of the 12 rebel clubs -- including six from the English Premier League -- backed down and the project collapsed. Ceferin took another swipe at those behind the Super League as he addressed the Congress, likening it to "Snow White's poisoned apple". "There is strength in unity, and unity is the only thing that can save us," said Ceferin. "Today, a few individuals are trying to divide us in the name of the free market, driven by an insatiable desire to generate ever-increasing profits for the privileged few. "I know some supporters are critical about us, about FIFA, which is normal. Anti-institution and anti-establishment sentiment is rife. "But we take it on the chin. Because we know what we stand for. We stand for an ideal; a fragile balance between opposing interests. And that comes at a price."



BENONI: Callum Vidler and Rafael MacMillan of Australia celebrate following the ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup South Africa 2024 Semi-Final match between Australia and Pakistan at Willowmoore Park.

British Grand Prix to stay at Silverstone for next 10 years

LONDON (AFP): The British Grand Prix will be held at Silverstone for the next 10 years after the announcement of a new long-term deal with the venue on Thursday. Silverstone's five-year contract with Formula One's American owners Liberty Media was up for renewal this year.

The Northamptonshire track, owned by the British Drivers' Racing Club, has battled speculation that it could lose the prestigious Grand Prix in recent years. But Thursday's fresh deal, worth a reported £30 million (\$37 million) per year, keeps the race at Silverstone until at least 2034. "I am delighted to announce that the British Grand Prix will remain on the calendar for 10 more years with this agreement," F1 president Stefano Domenicali said. "Silverstone is an iconic venue at the heart of F1 history and as it approaches its ninth decade hosting Grands Prix, the event continues to attract fans from around the world for fantastic racing on track and the amazing fan experience off it." The British Grand Prix has been an ever-present on the F1 calendar, dating back more than 70 years, with Silverstone staging the sport's first world championship race in 1950.

A record-breaking crowd in excess of 150,000 watched Max Verstappen win last year's British Grand Prix, with nearly half a million spectators passing through the gates over the course of the weekend. Silverstone chief executive Stuart Pringle added: "This long-term commitment reflects the importance of the British Grand Prix to Formula One and their acknowledgement of our ability to deliver a world-class experience. "The cheers of support for the home teams, and particularly for the British drivers on the grid, makes the Silverstone atmosphere unique." Liberty has flirted with the idea of staging a street race in London, but a number of roadblocks have thwarted any serious progress. The American company's commitment to Silverstone comes just weeks after a new race in Madrid was confirmed from 2026.

Sri Lanka readies for challenge in Afghanistan ODI series

KANDY (Agencies): Sri Lanka won their one-off Test match against Afghanistan by 10 wickets, but skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi said he was confident that his side - the world's ninth-ranked team - is capable of pulling off a series win over Sri Lanka, ranked seventh. "We are confident... We have our experienced guys back in the side," Shahidi said. "We are playing good cricket in ODIs, as we showcased in the last World Cup. We have proved that we are one of the best teams in ODI cricket," he added. "Build an attack"

Both teams will play three One Day Internationals at Pallekele in Kandy, with the next two matches on 11 and 14 February, followed by three T20 matches in Dambulla. Afghanistan's opening batsman Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Mohammad Nabi, former captain Gulbadin Naib, left-arm quick Fazalhaq Farooqi and chinaman bowler Noor Ahmad are all back in the team for the ODI leg of the tour. "Quite a few of their

experienced campaigners are returning to the side," Mendis said. "They have a couple of batters who are in form too - but we are confident of doing well in our own backyard." Sri Lanka has dropped former captain Dasun Shanaka due to poor form, but have Wanindu Hasaranga, Chamika Karunaratne and Dunieth Wellalage as all-rounders. "They are all capable players," Mendis said, adding that "hopefully one of them will do the job for us". But while they were determined to win, Mendis said, there is no immediate goal from the ODI series. Sri Lanka were knocked out of the 2025 Champions Trophy - scheduled to be hosted by Pakistan - by finishing ninth in the ODI World Cup. "We have struggled in ODI cricket quite a bit in the last few years," said Mendis, adding that the island nation was "so disappointed" not to qualify for the Champions Trophy. "Our next aim is to build a team for the (ODI) World Cup, which is three years away," he said.

Philadelphia 76ers struggle without Joel Embiid in defeat by Golden State Warriors

NEW YORK (Agencies): The Golden State Warriors won successive NBA road games for the first time since November against a Philadelphia 76ers side struggling without Joel Embiid.

The Warriors' 127-104 victory was the 76ers' seventh defeat in eight matches. Cameroon's Embiid, the NBA's reigning Most Valuable Player, missed his fourth straight game and is out for at least another four weeks after knee surgery. Andrew Wiggins top scored for Golden State with 21 points and 10 rebounds. Klay Thompson and Jonathan Kuminga each added 18 points for the Warriors who secured their fourth win in five games - including a 109-98 victory at the Brooklyn Nets on Tuesday.

Two-time MVP Stephen Curry managed just nine points in 25 minutes of action as Wiggins praised the collective effort of his team-mates. "It's coming together. Tonight was a mindset of being aggressive," Wiggins said. "It's a team effort. We're all a factor



offensively and defensively, getting into it [and] stuck to the gameplan." Elsewhere, the Boston Celtics defeated the Atlanta Hawks 125-117, the Toronto Raptors clinched a 123-117 win over the Charlotte Hornets while the Cleveland Cavaliers triumphed 114-106 against the Washington Wizards. The Miami Heat ran out 116-104 winners over the San Antonio Spurs, the New Orleans Pelicans beat the LA Clippers 117-106 and the Detroit Pistons cruised to a 133-120 success over the Sacramento Kings.



In brief

CTD lady constable martyred in accident

ISLAMABAD (INP): Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) lady constable, Sana Babar was martyred in hit-and-run accident in the federal capital on Thursday. According to details, unidentified vehicle hit the lady constable on Kurri Expressway while she was heading to joint election duty in NA-46. Sana Babar dies on the spot in the accident and driver responsible sped the scene. The body was shifted to hospital where it was handed over to heirs after legal formalities. The police registered a case into the incident and started search for accused.

'Cops to perform duty till return of staff'

ISLAMABAD (INP): Inspector General Islamabad, Dr Akbar Nasir has said that the police will remain on duty till safe return of the election staff and shifting of electoral material to Election Commission of Pakistan. In statement issued on Thursday, the IG Islamabad appreciated the police personnel who performed duty during the general elections. Dr Akbar Nasir said that peaceful and smooth polling in the federal capital was a major success.

PEMRA issues show cause notices

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) on Thursday issues show cause notices to four electronic media news channels for violation of the election code of conduct. Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had complained that Geo News, ARY News, GNN and Dawn News had violated ECP code of conduct and PEMRA law by conducting exclusive interviews of leaders of various political parties. PEMRA has given the management of the news channels seven days to file a reply in personal hearing after which further action would be taken. Moreover, the PERMA issued directives to the satellite news channels to strictly follow the code of conduct issued under Election Act 2017, otherwise, they would face action.

Pakistan's envoy condoles

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's High Commissioner to Ghana Farhat Ayesha expressed condolences on the passing away of President of Namibia, Dr. Hage Geingob. According to her post on X, she signed the condolence book and conveyed the solidarity of Pakistan with High Commissioner Selma A. Musavyi of Namibia during a meeting in Accra city.

'Suspension of internet service'

ISLAMABAD (INP): Independent candidate Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, contesting from National Assembly Constituencies NA 47 and 48, has voiced strong opposition to the decision to suspend mobile phone services across the country, labeling it as the onset of electoral fraud. In his statement regarding the mobile phone service suspension, Khokhar expressed concern over the disconnection of communication channels between candidates, agents, and election machinery, deeming it excessive. He emphasized that such actions undermine the integrity of the electoral process and are incompatible with the principles of fair and transparent elections. Khokhar adamantly stated that intimidation tactics and electoral rigging must not be tolerated, underscoring the importance of upholding democratic values and ensuring a level playing field for all candidates.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior, Dr. Gohar Ejaz visiting the Control Room to review the overall security situation in the Country during General Elections-2024.

Elders, women voters more enthusiastic to cast vote at early time

ISLAMABAD (APP): With the voting time began across the country, mostly elderly and women voters were more enthusiastic about exercising their right to vote at the polling stations and inspiring scenes were witnessed there as differently-abled and elderly citizens participated in the election actively. "I was eagerly awaiting the February 8 general election day to cast my vote and become part of the electoral process for setting up of the future government," a 70-year-old woman while talking to PTV news channel commented.

Most of the voters seen in the morning were middle-aged and elderly; many

of whom had to be carried by their children or grandchildren to the voting centres, said an agent at the polling station of Punjab City. A polling station agent said that he has observed high voter' activity among the elderly public since this morning.

"Despite my age and health-related challenges, I am committed to exercising my voting right in person", said another 50-year-old man. "I want to go to the polling station and vote," said another old woman standing outside the polling station in Sindh.

"Age is not a matter that should stop one from going to the polling center. My mother cast her vote, and

you must cast yours," said a teacher while holding her mother's hands towards Rawalpindi polling station.

An 80-year-old Sakina Bibi also came to cast her vote in Lahore, said a citizen. A man who was carrying his father commented that his father refused to have breakfast and insisted that I should take him to the polling station to exercise his vote first.

In the large queues at polling stations, senior citizens and women were seen waiting for their turn to vote, said a citizen. "Every person should vote as it is our fundamental right. I feel proud of myself by casting a vote," said a women voter in Islamabad.

169 seats hold key to National Assembly control

ISLAMABAD (APP): In the intricate landscape of the National Assembly, the magic number for political supremacy is a straightforward 169 seats for securing simple majority out of the 336 total seats, which include reserved slots for women and minorities.

This uncomplicated majority is the golden ticket that political parties aim to secure to wield influence in the legislative powerhouse. The National Assembly boasts a total of 266 seats, with 265 dedicated to general representation. However, a hiccup in the electoral process arose when the polling for one seat had to be postponed due to the unfortunate demise of a candidate. This incident brought the effective count down to 265 at present. For those keeping score, a party aspiring to clinch a simple majority needs to secure precisely 169 seats.

This means having the backing of more than half of the available seats, allowing them to steer the course of legislative decisions in their favour.

Google joins election day fervour with special doodle

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistanis are heading to the polls today for their general elections, and even Google's homepage doodle is joining in the electoral buzz. The doodle showcases a green ballot box and a ballot paper, symbolizing the ongoing democratic process in the country.

Polling in process nationwide till 5 PM. The Election Commission has made arrangements for 700,000 ballot boxes across Pakistan, with over 276,000 polling booths in place for voters.

Notably, each polling booth is equipped with two ballot boxes, allocated for the National Assembly and the Provincial Assembly respectively. As citizens exercise their voting rights, the nation awaits the outcome of this important electoral event.

GE 2024: Nation reiterates strong resolve to democracy

ISLAMABAD (INP): The nation by exercising their right to vote in general election 2024 on Thursday reiterated its strong resolve to democracy for a smooth power transition to another elected set-up which will eventually contribute to the thriving democratic system in the country.

Since the dawn of the 21st century (2002-2024), it was the 5th consecutive transfer of power by one democratic set-up to another, reflecting the nation's solid commitment to democracy, democratic values and norms.

No major untoward incident was reported throughout the day and the polling process remained overall peaceful with active participation of the citizens who came out in droves to exercise their right to vote for electing candidates of their choice. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) ensured elaborate arrangements in collaboration with security departments and other state institutions to conduct the election in a free, fair, transparent and peaceful manner across the country. Enthusiastic citizens were seen lined up outside their respective polling stations before the start of the polling process to elect their representatives for national and provincial assemblies.

The queues surged gradually throughout the day as passionate voters – males, females, senior citizens and special per-

sons – actively took part in the marathon balloting process in line with their national duty. The nine-hour polling commenced at 8:00 am and continued without any break till 5 pm, amid tight security to elect 265 members of the National Assembly and 590 members of provincial assemblies for the next five-year term (2024-29).

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), over 128 million registered voters were scheduled to exercise their democratic rights by casting votes for candidates participating in elections for the national and provincial legislatures.

The government had deployed over 648,000 security personnel nationwide to ensure the safety of voters, as well as, conduct of fair and transparent polling process. Out of 648,000 security personnel deployed, 137,000 were from army and paramilitary forces, while 511,000 policemen performed duties during the election.

An average of seven to eight security personnel manned each of the 90,777 polling stations across the country.

In the first tier, the police performed 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) had also been established to promptly deal with any untoward incident, especially in the Balochistan province.

Balochistan launches large-scale solar projects

ISLAMABAD (INP): Balochistan Caretaker Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki inaugurated an extensive solarization project of converting various public buildings including educational, healthcare facilities and civic departments over renewables that will provide clean, affordable and uninterrupted power supply to the public facilities of Balochistan.

The Balochistan government, with the support of Chinese government, has completed the solarization of 12 educational institutions, computer labs & hospitals that have been equipped with modern solar power facilities.

The Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Jiang Zaidong participated in the inaugural ceremony and expressed his views through video link held at Chief Minister's secretariat. Gwadar Pro reported on Thursday, Pakistan's total solar installed capacity was 1.24 GW by 2022, representing a 17 percent increase over 2021.

The government has proposed many initiatives to increase the share of solar energy in the country. By now, Pakistan's Solar Energy Market is estimated

to increase at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 49.68 percent from 1.30 gigatonnes in 2023 to 9.77 gigatonnes in 2028.

In the specific case of Balochistan, according to the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program, Pakistan's total technical solar and wind potentials are 2,900 GW and 340 GW, respectively. Additionally, Balochistan has the potential to implement greater than 14 GW of Renewable energy within 5-10 years through least-cost pathways, including PV utility scale plants of 9,500 - 11,500 MWp.

Balochistan's geography, irradiance, and location make it one of Pakistan's most high-potential provinces, with respect to renewable. Decentralized microgrids paired with solar generation could be used to increase reliable electricity access for rural residents. While microgrids generally only provide basic electrification (high quality lighting and charging of a mobile phone), it is able to do so for multiple households at a significantly lower cost over in the long run. An estimated 36 percent of Balochistan is electrified, so this pairing has immense potential for the province. In the future,

the province is poised to become the country's most booming solar power growth hub. In a remarkable turning point, International Energy Agency (IEA) recently reported solar energy is set to attract more capital investment than traditional oil for the first time ever.

In 2023, an average of approximately USD 1 billion per day (USD 380 billion for the year) are being invested in the solar industry, exceeding investment in oil production for the first time (USD370 billion for the year).

"Under such a background, Pakistan stands at a crucial juncture," Ali Majid, Pakistan General Manager of Global leading solar provider LONGi, underlined, "through constantly renovate clean energy technology, not only solar, we can secure a sustainable and clean energy future while reaping the economic benefits that come with the global shift towards renewable energy sources. Obviously, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has also played a crucial role in fostering solar energy cooperation between the two countries, we are going to play a leading role in the industry, making CPEC a greener corridor."

Massive turnout of minorities witnesses in constituency 47

ISLAMABAD (APP): In constituencies 47 and 48 massive turnout of minorities was witnessed on Thursday as many persons with disabilities (PWDs) came out of their houses to cast votes.

According to the presiding officer of the constituency of 47, the turnout of the females

was almost 60 percent and the women cast their votes peacefully. "We have separate corners for the senior citizens and the person with disabilities for the general election".

She said that it was witnessed that PWDs were eager to vote for their leaders.

A senior citizen Bashiran Manzoor mother-in-law of a person with disabilities named Huma Faisal said both the ladies came to cast their vote for the better future of the country.

She said that it is our national obligation to cast a vote for our country's progress.



RAWALPINDI: A large number of voters in queue outside polling station during General Elections-2024.

Long queues of voters outside country polling stations witnesses

ISLAMABAD (APP): Overcrowding was witnessed at various polling stations across the country, including the capital, as long queues of male and female voters turned out to be fully excited to cast their votes for their favourite candidates for the National Assembly.

Talking to the PTV news channel, the voters have expressed satisfaction over the elaborate arrangements made by the Elections Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for conducting the General Elections 2024.

A Presiding officer of Islamabad said that polling started at the right time and process was going smoothly and security officials were fully alert, no mismanagement or mishandling was

observed. Polling started at 8 am and will continue till 5 pm without any break; however, the voters inside the polling station are casting their vote in large, said a official. "I am very excited to cast my first vote in General elections," said 19 years-old boy.

"Casting of vote is our national obligation and I came here to poll my first vote by fulfilling our national responsibility," said another youngster. "My friends also came with me and are casting their votes," he added.

Great enthusiasm was being seen in women voters for whom Election Commission has made elaborate arrangements, said another citizen. An influx of citizens

actively participating in the electoral process has been observed at polling stations, said a police official standing outside polling station.

The enthusiasm of the senior citizens and even special persons is worth mentioning as they gathered at the polling stations to cast votes, said another citizen.

The women are not far behind men and have queued up despite cold weather in morning, said a presiding officer.

The supporters of candidates have arranged free transport for the facilitation of senior citizens, women, and persons with disabilities, said an official.

The candidates have established private booths outside the premises of polling stations to facilitate young voters, he added.

700 rescuers deployed on polling day

RAWALPINDI (APP): Punjab Emergency Service, Rescue-1122 Rawalpindi has been put on 'high-alert' on the polling day following an emergency cover plan devised for the general elections 2024.

According to the District Emergency Officer, 700 Rescue-1122 officials including firefighters were providing emergency cover with 24 ambulances, 16 fire and rescue vehicles, 88 motorbike ambulances, and special vehicles which were deputed to different parts of the district to tackle any kind of untoward inci-

dent. The entire staff and rescue volunteers were performing duties in different areas of the district.

A trained staff had been put on high alert along with rescue vehicles, the District Emergency Officer added.

He said, 46 special rescue posts were set up to give quick response in case of any emergency, particularly near sensitive and important polling stations of the district. The DEO informed that all-out efforts were being made to continue the routine operations of Rescue-1122 round the clock.

Energy price cut, economic stability strong reasons to elect reps, say people of NA-55

RAWALPINDI (APP): General public in NA-55 has expressed miscellaneous reasons for electing representatives of their choice in Feb 8 General Elections. Expressing their views to APP here on Thursday, the majority of voters at different polling stations of the constituency said economic stability in the country was one of the main reasons for their voting choice.

Some believed that energy and fuel prices needed to be reduced,

therefore, they would choose representatives who would address the issue of high energy prices.

Others commented that availability of basic necessities including clean drinking water, more colleges and health facilities in their areas were their basic demands. A few senior citizens termed political stability in the country was the need of the hour, for which they thought that a national level political dialogue should be initiated

among massive political parties.

To miscellaneous questions, political agents belonging to various parties expressed satisfaction over the polling process being managed by polling officials. Overall peaceful polling is underway in NA-55 Rawalpindi IV constituency where 311 polling stations have been established by the district election commission to facilitate 431,832 voters. Security has been beefed up in the district to maintain law and order.

Umari camp construction completed

KABUL (Pajhwok): The construction of premises for the Umari Camp in the Torkham Township of eastern Nangarhar province has been completed, according to a statement on Thursday. The facility was established or the Afghan returnees in Trokham which was inaugurated by Mawlawi Mohammad Khalid Sajastani, Kabul Municipality statement said. This camp had been established on over 11 acres of land, its designing had been done by the Municipality engineering team.

Uzbekistani envoy calls on Muttaqi

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, recently held a meeting with Shadmanov Yadgarkhoja, the Envoy of Uzbekistan in Kabul. Hafez Zia Ahmad Takal, the Deputy Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reported that during the meeting, they discussed a range of topics. These included high-level visits between the two countries, bilateral trade, and the import of electricity from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan.

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

UN contributes to WFP’s fund for returning Afghans from Pakistan



KABUL (Ariana News): The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has welcomed a contribution of \$3.8 million from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to support Afghans forced to leave Pakistan and return to Afghanistan. The funding will allow WFP to provide cash assistance to nearly 33,000 families or more than 230,000 children, women and men, including persons with disabilities returning to Afghanistan at a time when already one third of the people are going hungry.

“With 500,000 Afghans having returned from Pakistan since last September, the importance of this timely allocation from the Central Emergency Response Fund cannot be overstated,” said Isabelle Moussard Carlsen, Head of Office for OCHA Afghanistan. “In the face of the harsh Afghan winter, coinciding with the lean season and peak food insecurity, this CERF funding is a lifeline for thousands of returnees ensuring their immediate and long-term food needs are met. We remain committed to a sustained effort in supporting the most vulnerable and call

for unwavering global solidarity with Afghanistan,” she said. These families are arriving at the worst of times, in winter, when hunger bites hardest in Afghanistan and humanitarian funding is at a low point. Last year, funding shortages forced WFP to reduce the ration size and scale back life-saving food assistance, affecting 10 million people. “With the massive funding shortfalls for humanitarian action in Afghanistan, WFP has been able to respond to new crises only by borrowing from an already underfunded regular programme,” said Mutinta

Chimuka, Deputy Country Director of WFP Afghanistan. “Thanks to the contribution from the Central Emergency Response Fund, WFP will be able to support more than 230,000 Afghans forced to return from Pakistan with cash to cover the families’ food needs for one month. This not only gives them the choice but also stimulates local economies by supporting markets and shops.” The rapid funding made available through the CERF for WFP in Afghanistan has been crucial to reach some of the most vulnerable communities struck by shocks with life-saving assistance.

Nearly 2,000 Afghan migrants expelled from Pakistan and Iran

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Migrants and Repatriation of Afghanistan has announced that close to two thousand Afghan migrants were expelled from Pakistan and Iran in a single day. On Thursday, February 8th, the ministry stated in a statement that approximately 1,563 Afghan migrants were expelled from Iran and returned to the country. According to the ministry’s statement, these migrants re-entered the country through the Islam Qala-Herat border on February 7th. Additionally, the ministry added that around 212 Afghan migrants returned to the country from Pakistan after being expelled on Wednesday through the Spin Boldak border in Kandahar province. The Ministry of Migrants clarified that the returning migrants include both families and individuals. Recently, Iran and particularly Pakistan have intensified the expulsion of undocumented Afghan migrants, but in the latest report from the UN Refugee Agency, it was stated that the Pakistani government has extended the registration cards for Afghan registered migrants until the end of March 2024. Despite the extension of registration cards for Afghan migrants by the



Pakistani government, Pakistani officials have expelled over half a million Afghan migrants amidst a harsh winter and dire humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. As a result, many of the returnees are facing significant challenges, including a lack of shelter, food,

medical treatment, job opportunities, and means of livelihood. This situation exacerbates the already precarious conditions in Afghanistan, highlighting the urgent need for international support and assistance to address the humanitarian crisis affecting Afghan migrants.

Life amid illness: Forced marriage and a daughter’s effort to save her mother

Zahra Rashidi

Mursal, a 27-year-old woman from Mazar-i-Sharif, lives in its alleys. She sacrificed her life to care for her elderly mother’s medical needs by marrying a man 43 years her senior. As someone who has long described current conditions, I find myself incapable of writing Mursal’s narrative. The reality that shapes her life, revolving around compulsion, disability, and perpetual deprivation, is not easy for me. She resides on the outskirts of Mazar-i-Sharif, with her story portraying a blend of coercion, disability, and perpetual deprivation. Struggling to cope with her mother’s illness while her father, a vendor, lacked the funds for her treatment, Mursal heeded the advice of her relatives

to marry a man seeking a fourth wife. Mursal, originally set to marry a 70-year-old man, didn’t expect happiness with a man of her age. Affected by polio as a child due to her family’s neglect, she now faces mobility challenges. According to research following the Taliban’s rise, forced and early marriages, and gender-based violence in Afghanistan have significantly increased. Mursal does not see herself as a victim of any of these types of marriages, but her sacrifice for her mother’s treatment remained futile as her mother succumbed to her illness. Mursal, a young woman, married an “old man,” as she describes it. She feels embarrassed about the marriage and doesn’t tell any of her friends about her intentions to marry, fearing

ridicule. She married without a wedding celebration. She believed she had no other choice as her mother suffered from a debilitating illness. She completed her education and graduated from an institute in Balkh. She now lives with a man who, apart from Mursal, has three other wives and children from previous marriages. Mursal refers to her husband as a “merchant” who spends most of his time in Uzbekistan. She consented to the marriage to ensure her mother’s treatment, but nothing went according to plan, and her mother passed away. She considers herself and her husband from different generations with stark differences. Even in these circumstances, she sees no better option and has decided to continue this life. She says, “Starting over at my

father’s house with this illness is not favourable. So, I have to endure it.” Mursal recounts the violence she endures, stating that she is physically assaulted at her husband’s house, and subjected to verbal and psychological abuse. She describes life in her husband’s home: “Sometimes I feel like he married me for cleanliness, laundry, and cooking.” Forced marriages with significant age differences have long been prevalent in Afghanistan society. Poverty, low literacy rates, and years of war and conflict are primary factors driving young girls to marry older individuals. With the Taliban’s rise, the factors contributing to this crisis, including poverty and illiteracy, have increased, leading to forced marriages and gender-based violence. Khaama Press

Deputy Interior Minister discusses anti-drug efforts with EU Envoy for Afghanistan

KABUL (BNA): Abdul Haq Hamkar, the Deputy Interior Minister, met with Thomas Nicholson, the European Union Envoy for Afghanistan. During the meeting, as per a statement from the Ministry of Interior, Hamkar discussed the accomplishments and activities of the ministry’s counternarcotic department. He highlighted the decree issued by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) that prohibits all forms of drug cultivation and trafficking in Afghanistan, emphasizing the importance of adhering to this decree. Hamkar also addressed the support, treatment, and education provided for drug addicts in the country. He underscored Afghanistan’s



cooperation with the international community in combating drug trafficking and called for global support in Afghanistan’s anti-

drug initiatives. Significantly, a recent United Nations report has noted that Afghanistan is no longer the world’s

largest producer of narcotics, and drug cultivation and trafficking have considerably decreased in the country.

Malaysian tourists explore historical and natural attractions in Herat province

HERAT (BNA): A group of 30 tourists from Malaysia recently visited Herat province to explore its historical and natural attractions. Mawlawi Ahmadullah Muttaqi, the director of the Information and Culture Department of Herat

province, assured the visitors that there are no security concerns for foreign tourists. Muttaqi emphasized that the Islamic Emirate is committed to facilitating everything within its capabilities for the people. He noted that improve-

ments in security and the presence of significant tourist attractions have led to an increase in foreign tourists visiting Herat. During their trip, the Malaysian tourists visited landmarks such as the Qala-e-Ekhtiyaruddin and

various minarets, among other attractions. According to figures, more than 700 foreign tourists have traveled to Herat in the current year, a significant increase from the previous year when only 300 tourists visited.

KABUL (Khaama Press): In the past two years, journalists – especially women journalists – have faced numerous challenges in various media outlets. Reduction and delayed payment of wages and benefits, internal and external censorship, imposition of work restrictions, and lack of personal and job security have been among the most significant challenges faced by journalists and media workers, particularly women. This report attempts to speak with women journalists. The interviewees are women journalists or media workers who narrate the challenges faced by them due to imposed restrictions. Sharifa, a journalist at one of the visual media outlets, speaks about the challenges of women journalists in the media: “The problems of women journalists in the media are more significant. When we go to the media to fulfil our duties, priority is given to men, and there are many restrictions imposed by media authorities in all areas. Our wages are not paid on time, and we cannot choose our report subjects freely.” Following political developments in the country, a considerable number of women journalists have been removed from the media, as described by some as a mass dismissal. Others, despite gender discrimination, continue their activities in the media. Zainab, a journalist at a radio station in Kabul, says: “News directors do not treat women journalists well; our workplaces are

separate, and our movements are restricted.” According to Zainab, some media outlets hire journalists as interns without payment and then neglect to employ them as official employees after completing their internship due to economic challenges. Benazir Baktash, the deputy and program manager of a television channel, says that the closure and cessation of activities by many media outlets and their economic challenges have led to neglect of the gender issue in the media. He says: “Unfortunately, in more than two years, conditions have not only not improved but have become more serious day by day, and the gap between the clouds of crisis has widened.” Mr. Baktash adds about the difference in the salary of women journalists compared to other media workers: “Another challenge in the media is the injustice and lack of balance in the wages and benefits of female and male employees

so that a man’s salary is equivalent to the salary of five ladies.” On the other hand, a female journalist who refrains from being named in this report says: “I am an intern; they don’t pay even my meagre salary on time. Sometimes they pay two months later, sometimes three months later.” Internal and external censorship, lack of access to information, and harassment outside are other challenges for women journalists. Tamana, one of the new journalists, says: “Women are facing problems in all situations because when I had just finished university, wherever I went in the media, I faced insult and humiliation. They said to me, ‘You have no experience, and we can’t give duties to those who have no experience.’ Well, if our media outlets don’t hire us, how can we gain experience?” According to statistics provided by the Office Nai or Supporter of Afghan Free Media, in the past two years, over 90% of

women journalists and media workers have lost their jobs. Zarif Karimi, the official of Nai or Supporter of Afghan Free Media, says: “We had nearly 4,000 women journalists and media workers in Afghanistan, among whom currently less than 1,000 women journalists and media workers are actively working in Afghanistan.” Nevertheless, Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Taliban, claims that the government supports journalists and media in the country. He said: “Media are free in their activities, and we strive to keep the media active and address their problems. In the economic sector, we encourage traders and industrialists to cooperate and give advertisements.” This is while the Universal Media Law, the Access to Information Law, and relevant regulations in the media sector by the Taliban have not been finalized and enforced, leading to increasing challenges for media outlets and journalists.



Israel PM orders troops to prepare for push into Rafah

JERUSALEM (AFP): Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ordered troops to prepare to enter the overcrowded Gaza city of Rafah, even as a new round of talks aimed at securing a truce with Hamas were set to open Thursday in Cairo.

Netanyahu announced the order after rejecting Hamas's response to a ceasefire proposal at the center of intense recent diplomatic efforts, though visiting US Secretary of State Antony Blinken insisted on Wednesday that he still saw "space for agreement to be reached".

Concerns were mounting, meanwhile, for the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who have sought refuge in Rafah along the Egyptian border, with UN chief Antonio Guterres warning a military push into the city "would exponentially increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare". In televised remarks Wednesday, Netanyahu said he had ordered troops to "prepare to operate" in the city and that "total victory" over Hamas was just months away.

Regarding the ceasefire proposal, he added: "Giving in to the bizarre demands of Hamas that we have just heard will... only invite another massacre," Blinken, who is on yet another trip to the region to press for a truce, told reporters in Tel Aviv that Hamas's counter-proposal at least offered an opportunity "to pursue negotiations".

"While there are some clear non-starters in Hamas's response, we do think it creates space for agreement to be reached, and we will work at that relentlessly until we get there," Blinken said, hours after meeting Netanyahu. Since October 7, the Lebanese-Israeli border has seen near-daily exchanges of fire between Israel and the Iran-backed Hamas ally Hezbollah.

International Crisis Group president Comfort Ero warned Wednesday that the hostilities around the region increased the possibility of the situation boiling over. "I think the big three — Iran, Israel and the US — do not want to see escalation," she told AFP in Washington. "But we are also seeing that every day we're one step closer to a major miscalculation."

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan received phone calls from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and

Israel strike wounds Hezbollah official

BEIRUT (AFP): An Israeli air strike on a car in south Lebanon seriously wounded a military official of Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah on Thursday, a Lebanese security source told AFP.

The official was "seriously wounded and a companion was also injured" in the strike in the city of Nabatiyeh, some way from the border region that has seen almost daily exchanges of fire since the Israel-Hamas war broke out last October. Meanwhile, Palestinian human rights organizations have accused UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide Alice Wairimu Nderitu of failing to warn of a possible genocide in Gaza.

Sixteen groups have written to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres after Nderitu issued a statement in October that failed to criticize Israel for its military actions in Gaza, saying only "innocent civilians should never pay the price of a conflict for which they bear no responsibility." The signatories complained there had been a "glaring absence of any action in response to the sustained mass atrocities endured by Palestinians in Gaza," and that the statement by Nderitu raised "significant concerns about the special adviser's capability to execute her mandate with due effectiveness and impartiality."

Nderitu's role includes working on initiatives to safeguard people from crimes against humanity, genocide, war crimes and ethnic cleansing. The groups, including the Palestinian Human Rights Council, said Nderitu had failed to engage with them on the issue of Gaza, canceled meetings with human rights advocates, failed to warn of a potential genocide in Gaza or speak out more broadly against Israel's actions, and made no comment following the January findings by the International Court of Justice that there was a strong risk to Palestinian civilians in the enclave under the Genocide Convention.

France's Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Stephane Sejourne on Thursday. During the call with Blinken, developments in the Gaza Strip and efforts made to deal with the security and humanitarian repercussions of the conflict there were discussed.

Blinken left the Middle East on Thursday after wrapping up a four-nation trip to the region. He returned after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the war would continue until Israel is completely victorious and appeared to reject outright a response from Hamas to a proposed ceasefire plan. During the call with Sejourne, the two officials spoke about regional and international developments including the situation in the Gaza Strip.

US President Joe Biden will host Jordan's King Abdullah II in Washington for talks on resolving the Israel-Hamas conflict, the White House said. The meeting comes as the United States and regional powers try to broker a ceasefire in exchange for the release of hostages from Gaza, amid hopes of a longer-term solution.

The two leaders will "discuss the ongoing situation in Gaza and efforts to produce an enduring end to the crisis," White House

Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Thursday in a statement. They also will talk about the "US effort to support the Palestinian people including through enhanced humanitarian assistance into Gaza and a vision for a durable peace to include a two-state solution with Israel's security guaranteed."

The Jordanian king will be accompanied by Queen Rania for the visit to the White House, which comes as the United States and Jordan mark 75 years of diplomatic relations, Jean-Pierre said. It will be the first time Biden and Abdullah have met since the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel triggered the Gaza conflict.

Biden was meant to travel to Jordan for talks with the king when he visited Israel less than two weeks after the attack, but the meeting was canceled after an explosion at a Gaza hospital caused anger across the Arab world. Biden later backed Israel's account that the strike was caused by a malfunctioning Palestinian rocket. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Abdullah in Amman in January. The Jordanian monarch urged the top diplomat to push for a ceasefire in Gaza and end the humanitarian crisis there.

Nawaz barred party leaders from responding to Bilawal allegations

E.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz leader and former federal minister Marriyum Aurangzeb has said that PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's allegations against party Quaid Nawaz Sharif and PML-N were part of his election strategy.

While talking with media persons on Thursday after casting her vote in NA-51 Rawat polling station Bourbon, Marriyum Aurangzeb said that Nawaz Sharif had instructed party leaders not to respond to Bilawal's allegations. She said people have rejected the politics of hate and "we did not abuse anyone in our election campaign."

She said the main election cell of PML-N is in Lahore at 180-H Model Town from where all constituencies will be monitored and all candidates will be contacted and election results will be compiled. All PML-N leaders are instructed to reach Lahore after casting their votes.

Marriyum Aurangzeb said. She advised people to vote and choose their favorite leaders because voting is mandatory. Marriyum said "Good time has come for Pakistan and good days will come in Pakistan under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif." "I have not decided whether I will be in the province or the federal government," she concluded.

Only PPP gave people-friendly manifesto, says Zardari

E.P. Report

NAWABSHAH: Former president and co-chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Asif Ali Zardari has said that PPP only political party with gave a people-friendly manifesto for 2024 general elections.

This was stated by him while talking to media persons while casting his vote in Nawabshah on Thursday. Asif Zardari said that no other political party other than PPP has given pro-people election manifesto. He said that the future of Pakistan Peoples Party was bright and those affiliated with it will bear the fruit soon. The co-chairman PPP claimed that his party would clean sweep the 2024 general elections.

Mandate can't be given to anyone else: Bilawal

E.P. Report

LARKANA: PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Thursday said his mandate could not be handed over to anyone else and added that the people had every right to cast their votes.

Talking to media at a polling station which visited to poll his vote, Bilawal asked the people to leave their homes and exercise their basic right, as he opined that suspending mobile phone service would result in a low turnout while also making it difficult to contact the returning officers.

Bilawal had previously accused three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif of trying to influence the caretaker governments for favourable results. However, the PPP has been facing the allegations of vote buying in Lahore where his rival candidate Attaullah Tarar told him that the city wasn't a no-go area and he didn't enjoy any public support.

Earlier in the day, the PPP chairman had criticised the move to suspend the mobile phone and internet service across Pakistan, asking his party to move the courts and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). Later, the PPP like theJI and the PTI asked the ECP through a written application to intervene and get the communication services unblocked.

While Bilawal is banking on a divided mandate and get into a future coalition government, a confident Nawaz has completely opposite thoughts, as he on Thursday sought a clear mandate from the people. Asking the voters to reach polling stations, the former prime minister said no coalition government could tackle the challenges currently faced by Pakistan.



RAWALPINDI: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar interacting with polling staff during his visit to polling station.

President casts vote; urges countrymen to exercise their right

Enthusiastic turn out testament to strengthening democracy in Pakistan, says Solangi

E.P. Report

KARACHI: President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday cast his vote and urged the countrymen to exercise their voting right saying that the country needed their opinion as never before. The president, who reached the polling station along with his family members, awaited his turn in the queue and cast his vote.

Later, he wrote on his X timeline, "The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has asked for your personal advice through your vote to elect representatives to the National & Provincial Assemblies." He said it was everyone's Islamic, constitutional and civic responsibility to vote. "We as a family reached our polling station, stood in line and have voted and urge all of you to come out and exercise your right. Pakistan needs your opinion as never before," he remarked. First Lady Begum Samina Alvi also cast her vote at her respective polling station.

Meanwhile, Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Thursday that enthusiastic turn out in the general elections was not only a testament to the strengthening democracy in the country but also marked a significant

milestone in its history.

Congratulating the entire nation on successful completion of polling process of the general elections 2024, he said in a policy statement on elections that today the nation had witnessed another historic event in the democratic journey.

"People across Pakistan participated in the process in large numbers demonstrating their commitment to democracy, their national responsibility and belief in the power of vote", he maintained. The smooth conduct of the elections is attributed to the collective efforts of multiple stakeholders and it is my privilege to extend my gratitude to all those who played a pivotal role in this democratic exercise", he added.

He specially thanked the international media, observers, local media and journalists covering the electoral process. "Your presence and coverage has been instrumental in ensuring transparency and credibility shining a light on integrity of electoral process at global stage", said the minister.

The minister also thanked the armed forces, civil armed forces, law enforcement agencies and civilian administration for their unwavering commitment and diligence in providing safe and secure environment

for the electoral process. "Their dedication ensured that the polling process was conducted peacefully allowing every citizen to exercise their right to vote in peace and safe environment", he said.

Furthermore, he extended appreciation to the Election Commission of Pakistan for its exemplary conduct and management of electoral process. Tireless efforts and dedication of the ECP to uphold democratic values and ensuring free and fair elections was commendable.

"The professionalism and integrity displayed by the commission has been crucial in reinforcing the confidence of public in democratic electoral process", said Solangi. He said that in the moment of achieving a great benchmark, the nation should raise hands to pray for those who became victims in yesterday and today's incidents. May Allah bless their souls in eternal peace and may the nation stands united for benefit from their ultimate sacrifice. "As we move forward, let us all pledge to continue to supporting and strengthening our democratic institutions and process." "Together, we will build a stronger and more prosperous and democratic Pakistan for the future generations", he remarked.

Shehbaz, other leaders exercise right to vote

E.P. Report

LAHORE: Former prime minister and President of the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) Shehbaz Sharif exercised his right to vote today in the National Assembly constituency NA-128. He cast his vote at polling station no. 82 in NA-128.

Addressing media, Shehbaz Sharif advised the public to vote with the vision of fostering development and securing a bright future for Pakistan. He assured voters of comprehensive security measures in place to ensure their safety throughout the electoral process.

Sharif expressed optimism about changing the fate of people, especially

if PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif would emerge victorious and return to power. He underscored the potential transformative impact of the PML-N leadership, particularly citing the Transparency International rating during their previous government.

Younger Sharif fervently prayed for a government that would address pressing issues such as inflation, poverty, unemployment, and societal division while actively promoting harmony and tolerance among the populace.

Marriyum Aurangzeb, also cast his vote in National Assembly constituency NA-51 (Murree). Khawaja Asif

polled his at Sialkot's FG Boys School (Cantt) in NA-71 constituency. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Amer Dogar cast his vote in NA0149 (Multan).

Pakistan Peoples Party leader Aseefa Bhutto Zardari cast her vote in Nawabshah. Murad Ali Shah cast his vote at a polling station of Sehwan. Senior Deputy Convenor Muttahida Qaumi Movement Farooq Sattar exercised his right to vote in Karachi's NA-241 constituency (PIB Colony). Maulana Fazlur Rehman cast his vote in Dera Ismail Khan's constituency NA-44. As the electoral process unfolds, the nation awaits the outcome with anticipation, considering the stakes involved in shaping Pakistan's future trajectory.

Iraq condemns operation after US strike

BAGHDAD: Iraq has denounced a US drone strike in Baghdad that killed a commander of an Iran-aligned group, saying the United States-led military coalition in the country is becoming a "factor for instability". Army spokesperson Yahya Rasool said on Thursday that repeated attacks by the US in Iraq are pushing the government to end the coalition's mission.

The US has conducted frequent attacks, targeting Iran-backed armed groups that it said were behind missile and drone strikes on its troops in Iraq and Syria. On Wednesday night, a senior commander from Kataib Hezbollah, an Iran-backed armed group in Iraq that the Pentagon linked to an attack that killed three US soldiers in Jordan, died in a drone strike on a vehicle in eastern Baghdad, security sources said.

The vehicle targeted was used by Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces, which includes dozens of armed groups, many of them close to Iran. Rasool said the US-led coalition "has

become a factor for instability and threatens to entangle Iraq in the cycle of conflict". US forces are "repeatedly and irresponsibly" carrying out a "clear-cut assassination operation", he said, adding that such strikes fail to "care about the lives of civilians and international law".

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington was "bombing targets around the region not to fuel escalation but to prevent escalation", according to Al Jazeera's Shihab Rattansi, reporting from the US capital. "It's caused clearly a lot of questions because the escalation we've seen around the region is directly correlated and quite openly blamed on the Israeli bombardment of Gaza," Rattansi said. "But the one thing the US won't do is try and stop Israel from bombing Gaza."

Rasool said the US strikes are even more concerning because "the coalition consistently deviates from the reasons and objectives for its presence on our territory". The US maintains

several military bases in Iraq used by it and its allies to fight ISIL (ISIS). Last month, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed al-Sudani said talks would be held to schedule an end to the coalition's tasks in the country. "Administration officials [are] also saying this isn't over, that there will be more attacks to come at a time and place of the US's choosing," Rattansi said.

Iraq's Harakat al-Nujaba movement promised a "targeted retaliation", saying "these crimes will not go unpunished". It said US "violations" will not cease without "a firm official position from the Iraqi government". Palestinian group Hamas said the strikes were a "violation of Iraq's sovereignty and security", according to a statement.

Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group, meanwhile, said "resistance movements in the region have total confidence" in their Iraqi counterparts and the commander's killing will only encourage them to continue acts in support of Palestinians. — Aljazeera

Warrant for 114 govt employees issued

E.P. Report

KARACHI: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has ordered the arrest of 114 government employees of East Zone in Karachi for violating the orders of the ECP and being absent from their election duties, reported Thursday.

The Returning Officer of East Zone, Ghulam Azfar Mahesar, issued the arrest warrant and informed the DIG East and SSP East to form teams and conduct raids throughout the night to arrest the absentee staff. The DIG East said that the polling material has not yet been received by the polling staff, which may disrupt the election process and affect the compliance with national work in the general elections. He said that it is a violation of the effective electoral process of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and that the absentee staff will be arrested in any case.

The accused include polling staff of provincial and national constituencies, lecturer engineers and senior officers of Karachi University, senior school college teachers, auditors, SBCA officers and officers belonging to various departments of Sindh government. The DIG East said that action will be taken as per the orders of the ECP.

CTD lady constable martyred

ISLAMABAD (INP): Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) lady constable, Sana Babar was martyred in hit-and-run accident in the federal capital on Thursday.

According to details, unidentified vehicle hit the lady constable on Kurri Expressway while she was heading to joint election duty in NA-46. Sana Babar dies on the spot in the accident and driver responsible sped the scene. The body was shifted to hospital where it was handed over to heirs after legal formalities.



PESHAWAR: KP Caretaker Chief Minister, Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah being briefed about arrangements of general elections during his visit to Control Room in Home Department.

PPP and JI question blocking communications on polling day

E.P. Report

KARACHI: The PPP and the JI on Thursday blasted the government over suspending the mobile phone and internet service across the country at a time when millions of people are supposed to reach polling stations for casting ballot.

Later in the day, not only the PPP and the JI but also the PTI separately wrote letters to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to demand restoration of the services, saying the move would help make the polls free, fair and transparent.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari led the criticism by demanding immediate restoration of the service, the move is causing great hardships not only to the political parties and candi-

dates but also voters. "I have directed the party to approach the courts and the ECP" to get the decision reversed, Bilawal said in a statement.

Earlier, PPP Election Cell In-charge Raj Haider urged the party workers to exercise their right to vote to make Bilawal Bhutto Zardari the next prime minister. There is no justification for blocking the mobile phone and internet service on the polling day, said Haider who added that other strict measures could have been adopted for ensuring blanket security.

Similarly, Saeed Ghani demanded the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to get the service restored, saying the move would raise many questions about the elections. The security agencies are respon-

sible for keeping an eye on the law and order situation, he said and noted that making the whole electoral process controversial by suspending the communication services wasn't justified.

No one can contact each other if anything happens at a polling station, Ghani said as the JI (Jamaat-i-Islami) joined the PPP in censuring the government. What sort of polls does the ECP wants, Hafiz Naemur Rehman questioned and declared the decision as pre-poll rigging. "We will protect our vote after the polling," he vowed. Describing the JI as the only option, the party's Karachi chapter chief claimed that they were leading the polls in 12 to 13 National Assembly constituencies of the megacity.