

Two martyred in D I Khan  
F.P. Report

D I KHAN: A policeman and a customs department worker embraced martyrdom after terrorists launched a surprise attack on the Duraban police checkpoint in Dera Ismail Khan. According to the details, taking advantage of heavy fog and darkness, the attackers opened indiscriminate fire at the police personnel guarding the checkpoint late last night.



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KARACHI: A stunning view of the last sunset of the year2024 at Sea view.

## Restoring peace in KP top priority: CM — distributes motorcycles among field staff of agriculture department

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur on Tuesday stated that restoring peace and security in the province is his responsibility and he will ensure its implementation.

Speaking about the long-standing issue of peace in the Kurram region, Ali Amin Gandapur emphasised that the problem has persisted for over 50 years but assured that it is close to being resolved. "I will personally ensure its resolution," he added.

Ali Amin Gandapur remarked, "Those who lack public support cannot approach the people. We have the public's support, and we will continue to work for their welfare." The Chief Minister also highlighted the importance of economic performance, stating, "The performance of any government is visible in its economy."

Ali Amin Gandapur proudly mentioned that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had increased its revenue by more than 24 percent. "If anyone claims to have improved their economy, they should show the results," he said. He pointed out that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had acknowledged Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for meeting its targets. "We have collected Rs103 billion above our targets," Gandapur added by claiming that the federal government and Punjab were facing significant economic deficits, with Punjab in a 150 billion rupee shortfall.

Ali Amin Gandapur also urged the public to refrain from celebratory firing during the New Year festivities. "I cannot celebrate because my leader Imran Khan and workers are in jail," Gandapur said, referring to the political situation in the country. He concluded with a bold statement: "In 2025, either this government will remain in power or we will take charge."

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, distributed 500 motorcycles among the

field staff of the Agriculture Department under the Food Security Support Project and inaugurated plants for olive oil extraction. The event, held at the Directorate of Agriculture Extension, was attended by the Chief Minister as the chief guest.

Provincial Minister for Agriculture, Major (R) Muhammad Sajjad Barakwal, other provincial cabinet members, MPAs, and officials from the Agriculture Department, were also present. During the event, the Chief Minister inspected various agricultural stalls set up by the department.

In his address, Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur emphasized the abundant natural resources of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in the agriculture sector. He lamented the lack of serious efforts in the past to harness these resources effectively. "By utilizing these resources, we can make the province and the country economically self-reliant," he said. He reiterated the vision of the party's founding chairman, stating, "A nation in debt can never achieve greatness."

The Chief Minister outlined the provincial government's commitment to modernizing the agricultural sector and aligning it with contemporary needs. He noted that the government is investing heavily in sectors with high potential, resulting in a 44% increase in the province's revenue, with plans to double this growth. In the current fiscal year, the agriculture sector budget has been increased by 54%, with ongoing and new projects aimed at enhancing the sector. He stated that key initiatives of his government in agriculture sector include the conservation of water resources and irrigation of barren lands through various projects, such as the CRBC project and the construction of small dams adding that efforts are expected to irrigate millions of acres of barren land, contributing significantly to the country's food security.

## Kurram dispute: Jirga adjourned

F.P. Report

KOHAT: The grand jirga was adjourned without any proceedings on Monday. According to sources, members from both sides were absent from the grand jirga, as participants from the previous session failed to attend today. Due to the incomplete attendance, the jirga was postponed.

Sources among the jirga members stated that the grand jirga will reconvene tomorrow under the chairmanship of the Kohat commissioner and will be held in Kohat.

Earlier, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Adviser on Information Barrister Saif stated that the provincial government was committed to finding a sustainable and long-term solution to the Kurram issue. In his statement, Barrister Saif mentioned that the grand jirga in Kohat would resume on Tuesday after a two-day break granted for consultations with one of the parties. He expressed optimism about the likelihood of an agreement between both sides.

## PHC grants protective bail to Asad Qaiser

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has granted protective bail to Asad Qaiser, a leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and former Speaker of the National Assembly, in multiple cases registered against him. The court has directed Asad Qaiser to appear before the relevant courts by 30th January, on Tuesday.

A single-member bench of PHC comprising Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhel, heard the petition filed by Asad Qaiser while the counsel Suhail Ahmed advocate informed the court that the petitioner is a member of the National Assembly and has been booked in multiple cases registered in Islamabad and Pindi following the November 24 protests.

The counsel argued that Asad Qaiser wants to appear before the relevant courts but fears arrest. He claimed that the petitioner has already obtained protective bail in 11 cases and now wants to appear in the remaining three cases. The court granted protective bail to Qaiser, directing him to appear before the relevant courts by January 30.

MNA and PTI leader Asad Qaiser spoke stated that the judicial system has been paralyzed since the 26th constitutional amendment. He claimed that basic human rights are not being protected, and martial law is in effect in the country while talking to media personnel after his appearance before PHC.

Asad Qaiser also mentioned that he met with PTI Chairman Imran Khan in jail, who said he would not leave jail until all PTI workers are released. He stated that the PTI's negotiating committee has presented two demands to the government committee: the release of all political prisoners, including Imran Khan, and a judicial inquiry into the incidents of May 9 and November 26.

of a judicial commission to probe May 9, 2023 violent incidents and November 26 crackdown on PTI workers in Islamabad, and release all political prisoners, the sources added.

PTI leader and former NA speaker Asad Qaiser, however, said that their demands were clear. He demanded a commission to investigation May 9 and November 26 events and release of the PTI founder, who has been behind bars since August last year after he was sentenced in Toshakhana case-I — one of the dozens cases registered against the former premier since his ouster from power in April 2022.

All members of the PTI's negotiation committee would attend the next round of talks, he added. In the previous meeting, the PTI was represented by former NA Speaker Asad Qaiser, Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) Chairman Sahibzada Hamid Raza, and Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen Allama Raja Nasir Abbas. Questions were raised over the sincerity of the former ruling party in the negotiation process as other members of the Khan-founded party, including Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly Omar Ayub, PTI General Secretary Salman Akram Raja, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, senior PTI leader Hamid Khan skipped the key huddle.

tion cases were being made against politicians.

Earlier, the PHC granted transit bail to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Asad Qaiser till Jan 30, 2025. PHC's Justice Kamran Hayat heard the petition filed by the former speaker of National Assembly and granted bail against surety bonds worth Rs100,000. The high court has barred authorities from arresting the PTI leader in any case till Jan 30.

Meanwhile, in a bid to defuse the political tensions in the country, National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has formally convened an in-camera meeting of committees representing the government and the embattled PTI tomorrow on January 2, 2025.

According to a statement issued by the NA speaker, the crucial meeting between the ruling alliance and Imran Khan-founded party will be held at parliament house on Thursday. The key huddle will begin at 11am, it added. The PTI will present its demands in writing before the government's negotiation committee at the Jan 2 meeting as the first round of parleys ended in a conducive environment.

The PTI's team, following a thorough consultation with the party leadership, has decided to present just two demands before the government in the upcoming meeting, said well-placed sources. The former ruling party's demands include formation

# The Frontier Post

## US strikes Houthi targets

WASHINGTON (AFP): The US military said Tuesday its forces had hit Houthi targets in Yemen's capital that the Iran-backed militia used to attack American warships and commercial vessels. The attacks began Monday and were carried out by US Navy ships and aircraft that also struck Houthi-controlled coastal regions of Yemen, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said.

## PM: Elite class must sacrifice for country — unveils 5-year economic transformation plan, stresses unity, harmony for success

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday launched the five-year National Economic Transformation Plan "Uraan Pakistan," which aims to achieve sustainable export-led economic growth based on 5Es — exports, e-Pakistan, environment, energy, equity, and empowerment.

The prime minister, addressing the launching ceremony of the home-grown national economic plan (2024-29), highlighted that having achieved macroeconomic stability, the all-out focus would be on boosting growth through targeted investment and reforms.

However, the prime minister said the success of the five-year plan which specifically focuses the development in IT, agriculture, exports and mining and mineral sectors was linked with national unity and political harmony and collective efforts by all stakeholders, including political parties, institutions, and the people.

The event was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, federal ministers, Balochistan and KP governors, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, provincial ministers, diplomats, businessmen, and experts. He vowed to make the focused efforts on increasing the annual investment in various sectors to US\$10 billion. Over the next five years, he said the government's key priority will be to stimulate economic growth especially through exports, he added.

"The government has achieved the macro-economic stability due to teamwork of the federal cabinet, the deputy prime minister, provincial chief ministers, and the institutions," he said adding he never experienced this kind of cooperation that he received from the Chief of the Army Staff. He told the gathering that the government would create a conducive environment and incentivise the private sector to promote the export-oriented industry as the "export-led growth will be the pivot of "Uraan Pakistan" for being the ultimate savior for the Pakistan economy."

He regretted that a huge chunk of the country's resources went to waste annually due to corruption, leakages in electricity and gas, and lack of reforms in various sectors. He said the Federal Board of Revenue had the



potential to multiply its revenue collection for which the institution was being reformed.

Similarly, he said the state-owned entities incurred losses of Rs 6 trillion during the last one decade, while the electricity and gas sectors had circular debts of around two to three trillion rupees. Prime Minister Shehbaz, who earlier launched the logo, website, and a book on Uraan Pakistan, said that during the last nine months, the government had to face huge challenges but achieved macroeconomic stability, due to untiring efforts of the federal and provincial governments and cooperation from the international partners. "But this is just the beginning of a long journey and it requires unity."

Highlighting the positive macroeconomic indicators he mentioned inflation eased to 5%, average exports increase by 10%, a surge in remittances by 24%, and IT export boosted by 34% during last five months, besides the policy rate decline to 13%. Calling "solar name of the game" he emphasized the importance of clean and affordable energy sources and a special focus on solar energy.

The prime minister noted that the journey from instability to development and from stability to a strong economy had witnessed several challenges. He said that in 2023, the government struggled hard to conclude the IMF program as Pakistan was on the verge of default owing to continuously depleting foreign exchange reserves. He also expressed the hope

that that it would be the last IMF facility.

"To avoid this default, our party (PML-N), and the coalition partners jointly decided that we will sacrifice our politics for the national interest." He also mentioned the attempts made by a political party to sabotage the negotiations with the IMF. He said Allah Almighty had blessed Pakistan with huge natural resources and talented manpower that could be utilized to achieve the ambitious development targets.

He said Pakistan could regain its lost glory through self-inspection, learning lessons from past mistakes, and marching forward as Team Pakistan with unity of thoughts and actions. Referring to the prudent economic policies of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, he said Indian former prime minister late Manmohan Singh also adopted those policies and took his country's economy to new heights.

He also defended his government's re-negotiation with IPPs saying that it was time the elite class also sacrificed for the country. Prime Minister Shehbaz also reiterated his openness about the Charter of Economy among the political parties, as both the political and economic stability with inter-linked. He congratulated Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, entire federal cabinet, government officials, and provincial chief ministers for their great efforts to carve out this homegrown five-year plan.

## Cabinet okays 15pc Reko Diq shares to S Arabia

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The federal cabinet has approved the sale of 15 percent shares in Reko Diq Mine worth \$540 million to Saudi Arabia (KSA) under the Inter-Governmental Commercial Transactions Act.

Saudi Arabia will pay Pakistan \$540 million (approximately Rs150.27 billion) in two installments. It will pay \$330 million as a first instalment and 10 percent shares will be transferred. In the second phase, \$210 million will be paid for the transfer of remaining five percent shares. The Saudi Fund for Development will also provide \$150 million for the development of minerals in Balochistan.

The Reko Diq Mines hold vast gold and copper reserves. It is believed to have the world's fifth-largest gold deposit. The project is among the world's largest undeveloped copper-gold mines. It

has estimated reserves of 5.9 billion tonnes of ore grading 0.41 percent copper and gold reserves amounting to 41.5 million oz, and a mining life of at least 40 years.

The Barrick Gold owns a 50 percent stake in the mine, whereas federal and Balochistan governments collectively own the remaining 50 percent shares, ensuring substantial benefits for the region. Reko Diq's development will unlock significant economic potential for Pakistan. The project's successful implementation will not only boost the mining sector but also create job opportunities, enhance infrastructure, and provide long-term revenue streams for both federal and provincial governments. Saudi Arabia has also agreed to invest in Chagai for mineral exploration under its "broader strategy to diversify investments and collaborate with strategic partners."

Meanwhile, Minister for Petroleum Musadik Malik has rejected media reports claiming that the federal cabinet has greenlighted the sale of a 15% stake in the Reko Diq project, worth \$540 million, to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) under the Inter-Governmental Commercial Transactions Act.

"No deal has been reached with Saudi Arabia for the Reko Diq project yet [...] such reports are not true," says the minister while speaking to journalists in Islamabad. However, he said, the government is definitely having "positive discussions" with the kingdom in this regard. "So far, no talks with Saudi Arabia have been finalised nor has any approval been given from the cabinet," he added. Furthermore, the minister said, a deal would be reached with Saudi Arabia regarding Reko Diq shares next year.

## UN condemns Taliban ban on Afghan women working at NGOs

KABUL (AFP): UN human rights chief Volker Turk said on Tuesday that Afghanistan's governing Taliban authorities must reverse their ban on Afghan women working for NGOs.

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, women have been progressively erased from public spaces, prompting the United Nations to denounce the "gender apartheid" the administration has established.

"I am deeply alarmed at the recent announcement by the de facto authorities in Afghanistan that non-governmental organisations'

licenses will be revoked if they continue to employ Afghan women. This is absolutely the wrong path being taken," Turk said in a statement. He said that in a letter dated Thursday, the Taliban's economy ministry ordered national and international NGOs to comply with a decree issued two years ago that bars them from employing Afghan women.

"The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains dire, with more than half the population living in poverty. NGOs play a vital role in providing critical life-saving assistance — to Afghan women, men, girls and boys

— and this measure will directly impact the ability of the population to receive humanitarian aid," said Turk.

"I once again urge the de facto authorities in Afghanistan to revoke this deeply discriminatory decree and all other measures which seek to eradicate women and girls' access to education, work and public services, including healthcare, and that restrict their freedom of movement. "No country can progress — politically, economically or socially — while excluding half of its population from public life.

## Bilawal greets nation on new year

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has extended heartiest New Year greetings to the people of Pakistan and the global community, expressing hope and determination for a brighter, united, and prosperous future.

In a statement issued by the Media Cell Bilawal House, Chairman PPP, in his message said: "As we step into 2025, let us take stock of our struggles, celebrate our triumphs, and renew our resolve to build a Pakistan that embodies the dreams of its founding leaders. This is a time to strengthen our bonds, bridge divides, and work collectively for justice, equality, and peace."

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari emphasized the significance of continuing the fight against poverty, inequality, and ignorance, urging the nation to stand united in its pursuit of a progressive and inclusive Pakistan. He expressed his deep faith in the strength and spirit of the Pakistani people to overcome challenges and pave the way for a future that reflects hope and harmony.

Bilawal pledged the unwavering commitment of the Pakistan Peoples Party to uphold the rights of every Pakistani and work tirelessly to ensure their well-being. "Let this New Year ignite in us a renewed dedication to the principles of democracy, freedom, and social justice," he said.

He concluded by wishing all citizens a year filled with peace, health, and prosperity, urging them to support one another and keep striving for a better tomorrow. "Together, we can and will make 2025 a year of progress and promise for Pakistan."





# Turkish Consul General meets Punjab CM

LAHORE (APP): Turkish Consul General Durmesh Bastag called on Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif here on Tuesday.

They discussed measures to promote cooperation in the fields of trade, education, health, agriculture and tourism.

The CM said that people of Turkey always supported Pakistan in difficult times. She called Turkiye a great friend and brother of Pakistan. She also expressed her government's commitment to further strengthen bilateral relations between the two brotherly nations.

Maryam Nawaz said that the Punjab government will provide all possible facilities to Turkish investors. "One-window operation for the Turkish business community will be made more active", she added. Turkish Consul General Durmesh Bastag appreciated the public welfare projects of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. He said that Turkiye attaches great importance to relations with Pakistan.

"We are ready to further expand cooperation with Punjab in various fields", he maintained.

**CM orders foolproof security on New Year's**

**Eve:** Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif ordered strict arrangements to ensure safety of the general public during the New Year celebrations. She directed to ensure foolproof security at public places, parks, shopping malls and other places.

"The police and administration should prevent all kinds of illegal activities with the cooperation of the general public and prompt action should be taken during occurrence of any suspicious activity", she added.

She stated that the public should celebrate the New Year as a

responsible citizen. She urged the public to avoid firing and other untoward activities. A strict crackdown will be launched against such elements who are found violating the law as well as endangering precious human lives", she asserted.

The CM said that action will be taken against those who fail to implement the SOPs with regard to buying and selling alcohol. The New Year should be started in a safe and peaceful environment. Punjab's journey to development and prosperity will be further strengthened, she maintained.



LAHORE: A view of a damaged truck after it overturned on Ferozepur Road. —APP Photo

## All major schools must secure buses by Jan 13

LAHORE (APP): All major schools in the province has been instructed to purchase buses by January 13, otherwise action will be taken against schools that do not purchase buses.

School Education Department spokesperson told APP on Tuesday that in a recent meeting it was decided that all schools must purchase buses to facilitate the pick-up and drop-off of students from private schools. It is worth

mentioning here that the meeting was attended by a large number of private school owners from across the city. Former provincial education minister Mian Imran Masood and deputy District Education Officer (DEO) Mirza Ghulam Hussain were specially invited in the meeting to present their ideas and proposals. M. Shahid Noor, Malik Khalid, Wasim Anwar Chaudhry, Kashif Mirza and others owners of the private schools were

present among the private school owners in decision making meeting.

Meanwhile, Secretary Schools Education Khalid Nazir Wattoo in a recent statement has said that after the winter vacations, children will be given pick and drop in buses. All major school chains will have to purchase buses by January 13. Khalid Nazir Wattoo further said that no concession will be given to private schools in the matter of purchasing buses.

## Minister inaugurates underground water tank project

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Housing Bilal Yaseen inaugurated an underground water tank project at Hussain Park Tikka Chowk, Johar Town, here on Tuesday. The ceremony was attended by Vice Chairman WASA Chaudhry Shahbaz Ahmed, Malik Saif ul Malook Khokhar, Provincial Minister Faisal Khokhar, Member Provincial Assembly Shahbaz Khokhar, and Managing Director WASA Ghufuran Ahmed.

Managing Director WASA Ghufuran Ahmed briefed the minister about the project. According to the briefing, the project will be completed at a cost of Rs560 million and is expected to be completed within three months. The underground tank will have the capacity to store 1.5 million gallons of rainwater.

Before the completion of the project, traffic flow from G Block Market to Tikka Chowk was often disrupted during rainfall. However, once the project is completed, not only will traffic improve, but rainwater will be efficiently stored in the underground tank.

Minister Bilal Yaseen emphasized the importance of completing the project on time and instructed the use of all necessary resources to ensure the highest quality of construction with modern technology.

## UAE envoy calls on governor Punjab

LAHORE (APP): Ambassador of United Arab Emirates (UAE) to Pakistan Hamad Obaid Al Zaabi called on Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan and discussed matters of mutual interest, besides ways to expanding bilateral relations in the economic sector during a meeting at the Governor's House here.

Governor Punjab apprised the UAE ambassador of the difficulties faced by Pakistanis, especially students, in obtaining UAE visa. Speaking on the occasion, Governor Punjab

Sardar Saleem Haider Khan said that Pakistan and the UAE had deep brotherly relations, adding that Pakistan wants to take relations between both countries to greater heights.

He said development of the economy was top priority of the government and, therefore, the government was providing facilities to foreign investors through the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). He maintained UAE companies can invest in various sectors in Pakistan.

Governor Punjab said that Pakistanis consider

UAE their second home due to their common religion and culture. He highlighted that Pakistan values UAE government's cooperation in health, education and other sectors, adding that there should be more exchanges of delegations in the trade sector between the two countries.

UAE envoy Hamad Obaid Al Zaabi said that there were vast possibilities of cooperation with Pakistan in the renewable energy sector. UAE embassy was working on resolving issues regarding visas", he remarked.

## Lahore police implements security plan for New Year's eve

LAHORE (APP): In preparation for New Year's eve, Lahore Police have launched a comprehensive security plan aimed at maintaining law and order, with a firm zero-tolerance policy toward illegal activities such as aerial firing, hooliganism, and one-wheeling.

Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Bilal Siddique Kamyana, in a statement on Tuesday, said that special police squads have been deployed across the city to ensure peace and security. Checkpoints have been established at key locations to prevent unlawful activities.

To address issues like one-wheeling and aerial firing, teams from the Dolphin Squad, PRU, and Elite Force are conducting patrols in various areas, he added. The police have also focused on targeting mechanics who alter motorcycles for one-wheeling as well as those involved in the illegal sale of drugs and alcohol, he said.

The CCPO urged citizens to adhere to the law and refrain from participating in any illegal or immoral activities. He issued a stern warning that strict action would be taken against anyone engaging in one-wheeling, motorcycle modifications or causing disturbances. The CCPO assured the public that law-breakers would face severe consequences. He also encouraged citizens to report any incidents of one-wheeling, weapons display, or aerial firing by dialing the emergency number 15.

## Muhammad Saleem lands in Canada to foster int'l relations

### F.P. Report

OTTAWA: The High Commissioner-designate Mr. Muhammad Saleem has arrived in Ottawa on December 29, 2024. With a distinguished diplomatic career and a passion for fostering international cooperation, Ambassador Saleem brings exceptional leadership and vision to this role. Muhammad Saleem graduated with a Master's degree in Diplomacy and Strategy from the National University of Malaysia.

He joined the Foreign Service of Pakistan in 1995 and since then has served at various positions



in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad, and Pakistan's Diplomatic Missions abroad including the Federal Republic of Germany, the Kingdom of Bahrain, Romania and Canada. He also served as Pakistan's High Commissioner to the

United Republic of Tanzania from 2020-2022.

Ambassador Saleem has consistently worked to build on meaningful partnerships, address global challenges, and promote shared values on the international stage.

He is eager to deepen the strong and historic ties between Pakistan and Canada. Through initiatives focused on political, economic, investment, trade, higher education, cultural exchange and people-to-people contacts, he aims to further strengthen the existing collaboration and explore new avenues of cooperation between the two friendly countries.

# Sindh's Senior Minister Sharjeel Memon sends New Year wishes to the nation

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: Senior Minister of Sindh Sharjeel Inam Memon has extended his heartfelt New Year greetings to the entire nation and said I extend my heartfelt New Year greetings to the entire nation. I hope this year brings happiness to Pakistanis all over the world, foreigners living in Pakistan, our Palestinian brothers, and all those who are victims of conflict and oppression.

I urge everyone to celebrate the New Year responsibly and ensure that they do not do anything that causes suffering to others. Citizens should strictly avoid aerial firing, which is banned by the Sindh government. I encourage everyone to support the "No to Aerial Firing" campaign led by First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari. First Lady and Pakistan Peoples Party leader, Ms. Aseefa Zardari, has also issued a message encouraging people to celebrate the New Year fully but avoid aerial firing.

Addressing a press conference in Karachi, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that statements are being made regarding the Red Line BRT, with the Sindh government working tirelessly on the project. Any organization in the world is welcome to come and conduct an audit. The Sindh government is not delaying this project in any way. There are some issues with the Red Line BRT project that are currently being resolved. No work was done on the project during the 9-month caretaker government, and at that time, there was negligence on the part of some officers.

He stated that the last cabinet meeting was held before the fall of the previous government, and the minutes of that meeting were misinterpreted by some incompetent officers, after which the work increased due to transfers. In the first meeting of the Sindh cabinet after the 2024 elections, SES, P&D stated in the cabinet

meeting that tenders should be issued again for this project. At that time, I made it clear that re-tendering would waste another year. We immediately made all efforts on an emergency basis and restarted the project.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon acknowledged that there are challenges in this project, and if there is any audit or accountability regarding it, we are ready to appear before any commission. There is no delay on the part of the Sindh government or the transport department; all available resources are being utilized. The transfer of utilities is a significant problem. The Sindh government is ready to provide funds to relocate K-Electric poles. The 96-inch K-4 water line passes through the middle of the BRT, and we cannot complete our work first and then dig again to lay the K-4 line. Showroom owners near Nhamshid Chowrangi are concerned that the project will harm the beauty of their showrooms and destroy their business. These businessmen went to the World Bank, which funded the project, but were told it could not be changed, as things cannot be done based on the request of every individual. Due to the unfortunate incident at the airport, Civil Aviation is not allowing work. Whatever TV channel, person, or political party wants to discuss this issue, our doors are open. Come and talk. If there is any negligence on the part of the Transport Department or Trans Karachi, we are ready to address it. We are working day and night on this project.

He stated that the work of the Transport Department is also underway on the Jam Sadiq Bridge, which is scheduled to be completed in December 2025. However, we will complete this work in March or April 2025, God willing. We have issued instructions for the work to be done in three shifts. Where there are no utilities, we are completing the work ahead of schedule. We



know that people are suffering, and there are challenges, but we cannot stop the work because of them. These projects are being developed as part of the upcoming hundred-year plan for the citizens of Karachi by the PPP government of Sindh. A systematic BRT project is being built, which will benefit future generations as well. If someone wants to score points, I cannot stop them.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon emphasized that what Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said in his speech at the Khuda Bakhsh Bhutto mausoleum is the most important issue for the entire country. Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari stated that every child in the country knows that Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto made Pakistan a nuclear power and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto strengthened its defense with missile technology. The Chairman further said that Imran Khan is merely an excuse; the real target is our nuclear capability. Imran Khan is not only being used but is also using Pakistan's security for his own benefit. Imran Khan's goal is to compromise Pakistan's integrity and defense for personal gain, while provoking challenges, chaos, polarization, and division.

He stated that Imran Khan has hired lobbyists to exert all kinds of pressure on Pakistan, putting the country's integrity at stake so that he can gain relief. In his pursuit of relief, Imran Khan played with the IMF and tried to get Pakistan's loans canceled, hoping that, God forbid, the country would go bankrupt.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that Imran Khan has not even lost a single hair, while the PPP leadership and the Bhutto family sacrificed their lives but never compromised on the integrity and sovereignty of Pakistan. President Asif Ali Zardari was imprisoned for 12 years, but he never allowed Pakistan to be undermined. The greatest initiative to strengthen Pakistan, by raising the slogan of "Pakistan Khappa" during Shaheed Benazir Bhutto's martyrdom, was led by President Asif Ali Zardari. He never allowed his homeland to come under fire. Imran Khan, however, is doing everything that will harm Pakistan. One team of Imran Khan is negotiating with the government, while at the same time, another team is working to defame Pakistan and increase international pressure on the country.

He said that we do not want any political worker or leader to

be sent to a military court, but if someone attacks military installations, the case will go to their own court. As Prime Minister, Imran Khan supported military courts, but today, military courts are bad for him. Even today, the incompetent government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is responsible for the situation in Parachinar. All the tragic events that have occurred in this country happened under the PTI government. When the APS Peshawar tragedy took place, the PTI government was in power in KP. When the Bannu jail was breached, and terrorists freed their comrades, the PTI government was still in power. Has the PTI Chief Minister gone to Parachinar? He talks about attacking Islamabad but cannot even open a road in his own province. Yesterday, a statement from Imran Khan came from jail. Has he made any statement regarding Parachinar? Has he instructed the PTI leadership to go and solve the issue? If you cannot handle such matters in your own government, then let's admit that for the first three and a half years, you were the most incompetent, and even now, the PTI government in KP is the most incompetent. You lack the ability to fix any sector of the country. You have not done a single thing in your three and a half years that will be written in history. Instead, you have created chaos, misled the youth, stirred up a storm of misbehavior on social media, and tried everything to disgrace and defame Pakistan. Youth, open your eyes and see who is doing what to this country.

In response to a question, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that there were challenges in the Red Line BRT, and there is a significant difference between working in a desert and working in a busy city like Karachi. In response to another question, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said that I invite the opposition leader and the mayor of Karachi

to come and visit. Every citizen has the right to express their concerns. If they come, I am ready to explain everything step by step. Initially, there will be some inconvenience due to the Red Line BRT, but in the long run, the public will benefit from the convenience it brings.

He stated that at the time of the APS tragedy, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government was in power in KP, and it was the incompetence of the PTI that allowed terrorists to enter and carry out terrorism within the city.

In response to another question, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said that for whom Imran Khan used to say "absolutely not" and "we are not slaves," today Imran Khan and the entire PTI are lying at their feet. The Jewish lobby is heading Mission Goldsmith internationally. They are attempting to pressure Pakistan into taking action. This is an unsuccessful attempt to harm Pakistan, but Pakistan remains a strong and sovereign country. No country has the right to interfere in Pakistan's internal affairs.

In response to another question, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said that there are differences with the federal government, and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has given a clear stance on the channels. The PPP can still challenge the federal government today, but we want our problems to be addressed. We want the country to grow stronger and the politics of hatred to end. All stakeholders must work together for the strength of this country.

## Woman held in fake degree case

LAHORE (APP): Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Composite Circle Multan arrested a woman for using counterfeit degree to secure employment in Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV). FIA spokesperson said on Tuesday that Shahida Pirzada aka 'Shigi', presented a fake matriculation certificate along with her application for a make-up artist position in PTV.

After verification by the Multan Board, the certificate was found fake. Upon it, the FIA team immediately arrested Pirzada in Multan. Further investigation was underway.

## PFA seals snacks unit

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Food Authority discarded 500 kg fungus-infested oranges and 400 kg of contaminated, insect-infested eggs during inspections. Food safety teams inspected seven food points, including a juice factory, a snacks unit and a bakery. A snacks unit was sealed for using contaminated eggs, while fines of Rs.100,000 were imposed on a juice factory for poor hygiene and preparing juice pulp from fungus-infested oranges.

DG Asim Javed reaffirmed the authority's zero-tolerance policy, stating that no violator of PFA regulations will be allowed to operate in Punjab.

He emphasized that Punjab Food Authority is committed to ensuring the provision of quality food across Punjab. Public is encouraged to report food adulteration to the PFA helpline 1223.





PESHAWAR: Chief Minister's Advisor on Health Ihtisham Ali meeting with Insaf Doctors and Paramedics Forum.

## KPRA seals restaurant for tax evasion

PESHAWAR (APP): On special directives of Advisor to KP Chief Minister on Finance Muzammil Aslam, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) Peshawar Region sealed a noted restaurant on Ring Road near Hayatabad Toll Plaza for failure in depositing sales tax on services, said a press release issued here on Tuesday.

A team of KPRA Additional Collector Peshawar consisting of Deputy Collector Raheel Iqbal, Deputy Collector Ashraf Uddin, Assistant Collectors Khalid Mansoor, Shah Nawaz Khan, Imran Ahmed, Younas Khan, Inspector Muhammad Afzal Abid, Audit Officer Hadi Hussain, and other officials, conducted the operation to ensure tax compliance and sealed the restaurant for tax evasion.

KPRA had already issued notices to the restaurant's management under KPRA regulations, but it failed to cooperate, leading to this action in accordance with the law.

During the last few days of this monitoring and enforcement campaign, initiated under the special instructions of Director General KPRA Fouzia Iqbal, the KPRA Peshawar Region has recovered millions of rupees in taxes from various restaurants.

## UET Peshawar hosts seminar on Engineers' Role In Sustainable Solutions

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: A one-day seminar on "the role of engineers in providing safe and sustainable solutions", organized by the Department of Civil Engineering UET Peshawar, hosted by the Institute of Civil Engineers (ICE) and the Let's Help Welfare Society (LHWS), UET Peshawar under the supervision of Dr. Shahid Ullah and Prof. Dr. Khan Shahzada.

The guest speaker of the seminar was Engr. Naeem Ahmad Subhani, CEO Safe T Consult (STC) and an alumnus of UET Peshawar. With more than thirty years of experience in sustainable operations across various industries, Engr. Subhani shared his expertise on the critical aspects of sustainability in the construction industry and its impacts on environment and communities.

His presentation emphasized over the critical role of engineers while planning, designing and building sustainable structures and integrating safety measures into construction practices.

Prof. Dr. Amjad Naseer, Chairman Department of Civil Engineering, UET Peshawar said that the seminar is part of weekly seminar series, regularly organized by the department with the aim to educate the students on latest practices in the field, keeping them informed about emerging trends and innovations through participation of experts from industry and academia.

"By hosting such events, the Department seeks to bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world industry active standards, empowering students to become more adept at tackling the challenges they will face in their professional careers", he added.

He further said, through these sessions the students gain valuable insights from industry experts, enhancing their knowledge and skills in areas such as sustainability, safety, and advanced engineering techniques.

A large number of students, professionals and faculty attended the seminar.



## Syndicate of Agriculture University ratifies decisions

PESHAWAR (APP): The syndicate meeting of University of Agriculture Peshawar chaired by Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Jehan Bakht here Wednesday ratified the decision taken in 122th syndicate meeting of the varsity.

The meeting was attended by syndicate members including Deputy Secretary Agriculture Department, Zain Ali Raza, Deputy Secretary Higher Education Department, KP Riaz Muhammad, Deputy Secretary Establishment Department, KP Muhammad Irfan Usman, Deputy Secretary Finance Department, Masood Ahmed Jan and faculty members.

The syndicate ratified decisions taken in previous meeting and discussed matters relating to land of Amir Muhammad Khan Sub Campus Mardan of University of Agriculture Peshawar.


Chairing the meeting, Vice Chancellor appreciated the role of Higher Education Commission and provincial government in educational and research activities.

He also urged university teachers and employees to play enhanced role in development of the university.

## Climate change or life change

**Shahid Afridi**

**L**IFE on earth is completely dependent on the climate. The planet earth is getting hot posing existential threats to life on the planet. Human being has to play its role to stabilize the climatic conditions and lower the average temperature considerably. Additionally transformation of life style from brown development to green development is of paramount importance. We the humans are always waiting for a fortunate day to come, and deal all sort of disasters as heavenly misfortune. Actually, the impact of



disasters can be reduced through mitigation and adaptation. This can only be possible through changing our life style. We have to mobilize the community to change their mind set regarding considering climate change as someone else's problem.

Climate Change cannot be flagged as an environmental issue rather it is directly linked with our social, cultural as well as religious way of life. The human of today will decide whether to face the brunt of the climate change or change its approach to deal with the climate change and its ill impacts on the planet earth as whole. The scientists, sociologists, economists, citizens and policy makers have to re-evaluate their priorities, values and principles focus on how to change the life style to a healthy one.

We have to switch over from fossil fuel energy production to clean and green energy. The fossil fuel energy is detrimental and causing severe threats to our climate. Those countries which are dependent on fossil fuel energy are adding fuel to the deteriorating climate of our planet earth. The leading countries have to revisit their energy production plans and adopt green and clean energy otherwise they will have to pay the price to heal up the manifested ecosystems. The climate science is very clear about the GHGs production from the energy sector. The COP 29 has decided to provide USD 300 billion annually to developing countries till 2035 for adaptation and mitigation. The developed UNFCCC should devise a very effective and efficient mechanism for swift transfer of green funds to the developing countries in general and low carbon producing countries in particular. In order to minimize the effects of climate induced disasters the funds should be channeled towards disaster risk reduction (DRR). However, Pakistan needs a lot of home work to identify the most vulnerable sites and tap the said international resources.

Given paramount importance of plantation in fighting against climate change, the entire world should encourage protection and conservation of biodiversity. Pakistan has effectively executed massive afforestation and conservation projects namely 10-Billion Tree Afforestation and Billion

# Governor extends new year greetings, hopes for peace, development

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Tuesday extended his heartfelt congratulations to the people of the province on the occasion of the new year and emphasized his commitment to a future free from terrorism and violence and new era of development.

In his message, Kundi expressed optimism for 2024, describing it as a year that will bring happiness, peace, and prosperity to the region.

Kundi expressed confidence that the new year would mark the beginning of a new era for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, one characterized by peace and accelerated development.

"We are hopeful that 2024 will be a turning point for the province," said Governor Kundi. "With concerted efforts from the government, security forces, and the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, we are determined to eliminate terrorism and foster an environment of stability and security."

The Governor further highlighted the provincial government's focus on improving infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic growth, which he described as key pillars for the province's future success.

He urged the citizens of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to unite in their efforts to contribute to this shared vision of progress.

As the province faces challenges in the realm of security and development, Governor Kundi's message also called for a collective spirit of resilience, hoping that the new year would bring a renewed sense of hope and determination to overcome past difficulties.

"Together, we will step into a new chapter of prosperity, and I remain confident that 2024 will witness significant strides in the development of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," he added.

Faisal Karim Kundi, emphasized the urgent need for the provincial government to focus on developmental projects to ensure the prosperity and well-being of the people of the province.

He stressed that the government should take serious and concerted steps to address the region's pressing developmental challenges.

Governor Kundi pointed out that the progress of the province is crucial for the overall stability and growth of the country.

He called on the provincial government to prioritize long-term, sustainable projects that would directly improve the quality of life for the people of the region.

"The provincial government must take immediate and serious actions to implement developmental projects that will have a lasting impact on infrastructure, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities," Kundi said.

"Only through focused and strategic development can we create a prosperous future for our citizens."

The Governor said that Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) commitment to serving the people, citing the leadership of President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman Bilawal

Bhutto Zardari as examples of this dedication to public welfare.

He said that the Governor House is open for all kinds of people, adding that it is a place of accessibility and service to the public, regardless of their background or status.

He emphasized that development should not only focus on urban areas but also reach remote and underserved regions of the province.

Kundi also underscored the importance of fostering collaboration between local government authorities, civil society, and private sector partners to drive meaningful change and ensure the success of these initiatives.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi reiterated his confidence that, with strong leadership and commitment, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can enter a new era of development and prosperity, benefiting all its residents.

He expressed hope that the new year would witness significant progress in the province's developmental agenda.

## BRT facilities 86.5million commuters in 2024

PESHAWAR (APP): TransPeshawar on Tuesday released its annual report for 2024, highlighting significant milestones for the city's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, "Zu Peshawar."

According to the report, the system facilitated 86.5 million passenger rides in 2024, with women making up 30 percent of daily commuters. The system now handles over 345,000 passengers daily.

During the year, three new routes were added including DR-14 Islamia College to Regi Model Town, DR-14A Islamia College to Professor Model Town, and DR-13 Sardar Garhi to Pabbi.

Additional University Express services were launched for student convenience on routes ER-09, ER-10, ER-12, ER-16, and SR-08.

Similarly, over 240,000 new Zu cards were sold this year, raising the total number of issued cards to 1.9 million.

The Zu Bicycle Sharing System recorded 2,130 new registrations, including 17 women, bringing the total registrations to 8,900.

The system facilitated 224,000 trips in 2024 and completed integration with NADRA, streamlining registration processes directly at BRT stations.

Meanwhile, TransPeshawar's spokesperson, Sadaf Kamal said that the call center resolved 20,000 complaints of BRT users while providing guidance to over 3,500 passengers via social media.

Three new tuck shops were established at BRT stations, raising the total to 25. Moreover, 115 wheelchairs were supplied in collaboration with Al-Khidmat Foundation to assist persons with disabilities.

Zu Peshawar also contributed to Peshawar's urban aesthetics by refurbishing key landmarks, including underpasses at Hashtnagri, University Town, Islamia College, and PDA.

She said that Zu Peshawar model was showcased at international conferences such as the Sustainable Transport Award Webinar hosted by ITDP, a World Bank and IMF forum in the US, and the "Mobilize Your City" conference organized by the Asian Development Bank in Manila.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the special committee of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government led by Excise Minister Khaliq-ur-Rehman and Commissioner Peshawar Division Riaz Khan

Mehsud was held to address aggravating traffic issues in the provincial capital.

The committee decided to recommend the launch of BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) services on Khyber and Warsak roads, according to a press release issued here after the meeting.

This initiative was in line with the directives of KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, aimed at controlling traffic congestion and improving the flow in Peshawar.

Additionally, the committee proposed extending the BRT service from Ring Road to Kohat Road via GT Road. Once approved by the provincial government, these expansions were expected to significantly ease traffic flow on these routes and reduce the burden on adjacent roads.

## PHC seeks response against appointment of PMS officers

**Humayun Khan**

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhel and Justice Dr. Khurshid Iqbal asked Chief Secretary, Secretary Establishment, Secretary Finance and Director General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) to submit their response regarding the appointment of Provincial Management Service (PMS) officers to the posts of Deputy Directors and Deputy Collectors in the KPRA, on Tuesday.

The writ petition filed by Munir Khan and others while the counsel Ali Gohar Durrani advocate informed the court that the petitioners are serving as Assistant Collectors (BS-17) in the KPRA, which is an autonomous body established under the KPRA Act 2017.

He argued that the KPRA Act 2017 clearly states that the authority is an autonomous body, which shall be headed by a Director General as the Chief Executive Officer.

The lawyer claimed that despite the KPRA's autonomy, the provincial government has been interfering in its affairs, particularly in the appointment of officers to key posts. The provincial government has been appointing PMS officers to the posts of Deputy Directors and Deputy Collectors in the KPRA, which is a violation of the KPRA Act 2017, the counsel argued.

The counsel stated that these posts are not scheduled posts and cannot be filled by PMS officers. He requested the court to declare the appointments of PMS officers to the KPRA as null and void.

He also requested the court to restrain the provincial government from appointing PMS officers to the KPRA and from taking any action against the petitioners.

PHC issued notices to the Chief Secretary, Secretary Establishment, Secretary Finance and Director General of the KPRA seeking their response after initial arguments.

## Plan for solarization of UoP finalized

PESHAWAR (APP): A plan has been finalized to convert the University of Peshawar (UoP) to solar energy. The University of Peshawar's official told APP on Tuesday that the project would be completed with an estimated cost of Rs160 million. The Federal Govt has provided Rs60 million for the project. The consultancy services would be performed by Dr Misbah Khan of the University of Engineering and Technology Peshawar.

## Climate change or life change

buses should be scrapped and replaced with pollution free vehicles. The citizens should use public transport rather driving individually. The education institutions should arrange special seminars and workshops for educating the stakeholders about mitigation and adaptation to avert the ill effects of CC.

The householders have to revisit their way of life. We should minimize the use of plastic goods and gradually eliminate utilization of plastic in due course of time. They should train their kids not to purchase those goods which are wrapped in plastic. They should avoid all sorts of drinks available in non biodegradable materials. The house members should collect the seeds of fruits, vegetables and other plants for dispersing in appropriate ecosystem. The house members should minimize their energy by using energy efficient appliances, switching off lights and electronic appliances when not in use. Further to insulating houses to minimize air conditioning of it.

I must extend my recommendation to the concerned authorities, community members and every citizen to change their life styles to transfers the planet earth free of pollution and improved ecosystem to the upcoming generations.





## In brief

### Annual election of HPC held F.P. Report

HARIPUR: The annual election of district Haripur Press Club was held wherein senior journalist, Hanif Akhtar was elected as President and Malik Muhammad Iqbal as General Secretary for one year. According to election results announced by chairman of election committee Ziaul Islam, senior journalist Ibrar Tanoli clinched the position of senior Vice President, Bakhtzada Khan as Vice President-I and Waheed Ahmed as Senior Vice President-II. Similarly, Malik Muhammad Arshad has been elected as Joint Secretary, Yasir Khan as Finance Secretary, Dr Arhsad Jamal as Information Secretary and Naem Awan as Office Secretary of the body for one year. The General Secretary and Finance Secretary candidates were elected unopposed.

### Old enmity claims man life F.P. Report

SWABI: An old enmity over land dispute claimed man life while another injured in Swabi district. Police said that Owasi Khan, Anas Ali and Umar Shah allegedly started firing at Altaf Khan and Muhammad Qasim when they were coming towards home. As result Muhammad Qasim sustained injuries and Altaf Khan lost battle for life at hospital. The tragic incident occurred at Dobiyan in the limits of Yar Hussain police station over a land dispute. Police have registered a case and started an investigation.

### Three killed in road accident F.P. Report

WANA: Three people were killed and two were reportedly seriously injured in a road accident in South Waziristan on Tuesday. According to private news channel and rescue team, a motor car going from Wana to Makin fell into a deep trench at Ladhra. According to the rescue sources, three people were identified as Riazuddin, Mahmood, and Ruhullah, who died on the spot, while Maulana Zainabullah and Shafiq were seriously injured. The injured were shifted to Ladhra Hospital for treatment. Hospital sources said that one of the injured was in critical condition. Meanwhile, the funeral prayers for prominent Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) activist Rooh Ullah, Mahmood Khan and Riaz who were martyred in a road accident yesterday in Upper South Waziristan, were offered in Tehsil Birmal Azam Warsak. The funeral was attended by MNA South Waziristan Zubair Khan Wazir, senior leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Upper Waziristan and former senator Salah Shah, Saeed Anwar Khan, and PTM leaders Alam Zeb Khan, Zakim Khan, and Hanif Pashtin. MNA South Waziristan Zubair Khan Wazir expressed his condolences over the tragic martyrdom of Ruhullah Comrade, Mahmood Khan, and Riaz Khan in the unfortunate incident.

### Interfaith harmony stressed F.P. Report

BUNER: A two-day's workshop held at University of Buner in collaboration with the support of European Union, United Nations and NACTA on Interfaith Harmony Countering Violent Extremism and promoting peace, on Tuesday. The workshop was attended by various communities including representatives of the Sikh community, students, scholars of Madrassas and members of civil society.



QUETTA: People collecting dry wood for domestic use due to shortage of Sui gas supply.

## Hike in education and health budget sought

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Speakers at a dialogue have asked the federal and provincial governments to increase health and education budget and enhance funding towards the underserved regions of the country. The dialogue was arranged by the community development organization with the support of Citizens Network for Budget Accountability (CNBA) and Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) here in Lakki city.

Noted speakers included CDO programme officer Inayatullah Khan, Zafarullah Khan Advocate, Sultan Salahuddin Advocate, Ikramullah Khan and members of civil society organizations. The speakers underlined the need for enhancing service delivery in the health sector through public private partnership and prioritising improving hospital infrastructure.

In addition, primary and secondary education should be prioritized to provide a strong educational founda-

tion across the country", said Inayatullah Khan. He said that the targeted investments should be promoted to ensure equitable educational access in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and steps should be taken to ensure availability of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in rural schools, increase students' attendance and improve their health.

Analyzing the budget trends of the last four years, they said the gradual increase in the budget has been insufficient to meet the growing needs of the country, and that there are clear disparities between the provinces in both the health and education sectors. They said Pakistan has a shortage of 589,122 hospital beds, which highlights the urgent need to expand healthcare facilities, especially in resource-poor areas like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where per capita health expenditure is alarmingly low.

"The bulk of the federal allocations in the education sector goes to higher educa-

tion, leaving primary and secondary education with less resources", said Zafarullah Khan, saying that Sindh's education budget has emerged as a model of balanced distribution, ensuring equal funding among primary, secondary and higher education. He revealed Punjab's budget appears to be mostly allocated to higher education with only 7 percent allocated to primary education.

Speakers stressed on increasing the health budget and prioritising hospital infrastructure, saying that to reduce healthcare inequalities, funding should be targeted to under-resourced areas and a strategy of greater emphasis on public-private partnerships and preventive healthcare should be adopted. They said that primary and secondary education should be prioritized for a strong educational foundation, besides focusing on achieving sustainable development goals, especially provision of standard healthcare and access to quality education.

## PML-N urged to honour agreements with PPP

F.P. Report

OKARA: Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider has expressed concern over the challenges faced by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) due to its alliance with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

Speaking to the media during his visit to Okara late night, the governor urged PML-N to fulfill its written commitments with PPP to strengthen the coalition government. "We have made significant sacrifices for this alliance, but how long can PPP continue to bear the brunt? It is now time for PML-N to honour the agreements it has made with us," he urged.

The governor, who earlier inaugurated the Al-Kabeer Palace in the city, told media that both parties must work together for the

coalition to move forward. "A partnership requires effort from both sides. PML-N must understand that constant reminders are not productive," he said. Haider lauded the ongoing negotiations between the government and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), scheduled for January 2, calling them a positive step towards resolving issues. "Matters that can be addressed at the table should not escalate to violence, street protests, or destructive confrontations," he stated.

Commenting on the deteriorating situation in Kurram, the governor criticized the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government for its lack of action. "Hundreds of innocent Muslims, including children, are being killed, yet the KP government seems

indifferent. He also endorsed Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah's stance on the issue, urging the KP government to acknowledge its responsibilities. "Instead of political stunts like marches on Islamabad, KP leaders should address their own province's crises," he added.

The governor called on all political parties to prioritize national interests over personal agendas. "Elections will come, and there will be winners and losers. For now, we must work towards the country's stability and development to provide maximum relief to the people," he said. The event was attended by local PPP officials, political leaders, and community members, who welcomed the governor with enthusiasm.

## HEC faculty outreach program concluded

F.P. Report

BANNU: The University of Science and Technology (UST) Bannu hosted the closing ceremony of the month-long National Outreach Program for Higher Education Faculty, organized by the National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE), HEC, on Tuesday.

The comprehensive training program focused on equipping faculty with advanced skills in teaching, communication, assessment and evaluation, academic

planning, technology integration, psychological well-being, and microteaching. It aimed to familiarize educators with modern pedagogical practices for enhancing the quality of education.

Prof. Dr. Safdar Rehman Ghazi, Vice Chancellor of UST Bannu, graced the ceremony as the Chief Guest. In his address, he expressed heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Noor Anna Malik, Managing Director, and Ghulam Murtaza Goraya, Assistant Director NAHE, for their unwavering efforts in organizing this significant

initiative. Prof. Ghazi emphasized the critical need for continuous self-improvement in today's fast-evolving technological era, commending the program's substantial impact on faculty development.

The Vice Chancellor also acknowledged the contributions of Mr. Fahad Nawaz, the Training Coordinator, for his effective execution of the program. The ceremony concluded with Prof. Ghazi presenting completion certificates to the participants, applauding their dedication to educational excellence.

## Traders' leader congratulated Mardan press club cabinet

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Provincial General Secretary of the Central Organization Traders Zahir Shah has said that journalism is the fourth pillar of the state and journalists are playing a fundamental role in identifying social evils through their pen, as well as developing the region

and promoting democracy.

He expressed these views along with his delegation on the occasion of congratulating the newly elected president of Mardan Press Club Riaz Mayar, General Secretary Pervaz Khan Afridi, Vice President Hidayat Rahman Hoti, Joint Secretary Aamir Shoaib

and Finance Secretary Pervaz Shaheen.

The delegation comprised Chairman Ghulam Sarwar Saraf, General Secretary Waqar Ali Bacha, Mardan Chamber of Commerce Senior Vice President Nouman Faqir Saraf, Vice President Waheed Gul, Presidents and General Secretaries of various markets.

## Businessman freed after two days of abduction

F.P. Report

PABBI: A local businessman named Ismail Khan released from his shop in Pabbi City over family dispute. The kidnappers used firearms to intimidate and forcefully took Ismail Khan away in a car. They also fired shots into the air.

Police promptly responded to the incident and cordoned off the entire district. As a result, the kidnappers were forced to release Ismail Khan after two days. Police registered a First Information Report (FIR) on behalf of Ismail Khan's brother.

According to the FIR, the complainant was sitting with Ismail Khan in their shop when unidentified armed men, including Jehangir Khan, Taimur Khan, Ali Khan, and Altaf Khan, attacked them. The assailants beat Jawad Khan severely and took Ismail Khan away in a car after firing shots into the air.

The motive behind the kidnapping was revealed to be a family dispute. Jawad Khan and Ismail Khan's brother, Fahad Khan, are involved in a family dispute with their relatives, including Jehangir Khan and his sons. The dispute is related to a family court case in Pabbi and Peshawar. The abductee brother's Fahad Khan addressed a press conference at the Pabbi Press Club, praising police Inspector Taimur Salim for his prompt response and effective strategy in recovering his brother Ismail Khan.

## Media urged to support March

Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: Amir Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Nowshehra district Haji Inayat ur Rehman has stated that the international community is condemning Israel's genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and its interference in Syria and Lebanon. Protests and demonstrations are ongoing worldwide, but the Pakistani media's indifference to the Palestine Million March organized by Jamaat-e-Islami in Islamabad is regrettable and a clear violation of journalistic principles.

In a press statement issued from the Jamaat-e-Islami district office, Haji Inayat ur Rehman further stated that the Palestinian struggle for freedom is in line with the United Nations Charter, while Israel's aggression is a persistent violation of this charter. Israel continues to commit atrocities against Palestinians, killing them in their homes, UN offices, schools, colleges, universities, and hospitals.

He recalled that Qauid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, had termed Israel as the illegitimate child of Britain. Pakistani media houses have a responsibility to extensively cover any activities in support of Palestine in Pakistan.

**House burnt to ashes:** A house in Nowshehra Cantt's Khushal Colony caught fire due to a short circuit in the electrical system. The fire severely damaged one room of the house, burning millions of rupees worth of household items to ashes.

# Sindh govt prioritizes public welfare: Murad

F.P. Report

THATTA: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah expressed his satisfaction with the progress of the lining work at the Kalri Baghar feeder during his visit to Thatta on Tuesday. CM Sindh announced that he has issued directives to accelerate the lining process and achieve timely results.

The project aims to address Karachi's water scarcity challenge, with the city requiring 260 million gallons of water per day. "The Kalri Baghar feeder project will help meet this demand, and the World Bank has played a crucial role in its completion", said Syed Murad Ali Shah during the media talk. He further said that the World Bank had been working on an augmentation project in Karachi and never wanted any deduction in the water share following which the capacity of KB feeder would be enhanced from 7800 cusecs to 9500 cusecs.

"The lining project would be completed by

January 2026", held CM. and further added that provincial minister Jam Khan Shoro had been supervising the project. Shah revealed that despite receiving less funding from the federal government this year, the provincial government has managed to complete 40% of the Kaleri Baghar Feeder project. Answering a query regarding the controversial six-canal scheme he said that the stance of the provincial government and the top brass leadership of Pakistan People's Party was crystal clear.

Murad Ali Shah quoted the speech of PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on the 17th death anniversary of Benazir Bhutto where he opposed the six-canal project. He further stated that the PPP government would oppose this project the way it opposed Kalabagh dam. "This project would turn Sindh barren", Shah noted. During the media talk Chief Minister discouraged frequent use of the word "Interior Sindh" by media persons and urged to

replace it with rural Sindh. He expressed deep grief on the state of affairs being prevalent in Parachinar and said that on request of Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sindh government had sent relief goods for the victims. He further said that the protest had ended at eight places in Karachi after successful talks with the protesters while negotiations continued to end the protest in the remaining four areas of Karachi. "We have never opposed peaceful protest and the Parachinar issue should be resolved peacefully", CM proposed, adding that it was the responsibility to address the problems of people.

He praised the Sindh government for launching bus services in main cities of Sindh and announced revival of SRTC bus service on Thatta-Hyderabad route. The journey of development would continue in the New Year. Shah hoped and urged people of Sindh to strengthen the government by fulfilling their responsibilities with loyalty.

## SIAL commits for standard aviation services

F.P. Report

SIALKOT: Sialkot International Airport Limited (SIAL) proudly announces a remarkable year of achievements in 2024, reinforcing its commitment to excellence and innovation in aviation services. From passenger milestones to operational advancements, SIAL's dedication to enhancing the travel experience has set new benchmarks in the aviation sector.

In 2024, more than 1 million passengers chose Sialkot International Airport as their gateway to the world, showcasing its growing reputation as a premier travel hub. This milestone underscores the confidence of travelers/Airlines in SIAL's exceptional services and facilities. SIAL achieved a significant feat by operating over 11,000 tons of air cargo during the year, solidifying its position as a vital player in global trade and logistics. The airport's robust cargo handling capabilities continue to facilitate economic growth in the region.

During the year 2024 the SIAL medical team exemplified dedication and professionalism by treating over 550 patients, including passengers and staff, throughout the year. This commitment to health and safety underscores SIAL's holistic approach to passenger care. Safety remained a top priority at SIAL in 2024. The airport successfully maintained a zero-accident rate in handling

international flights, reflecting its stringent adherence to global safety standards and protocols. In a significant move to enhance accessibility, SIAL inaugurated a new and wide-laned airport gate, streamlining traffic flow and improving the overall passenger experience.

Additionally, the airport rehabilitated its runway in record time, ensuring uninterrupted operations and meeting international aviation standards. With number of International Airlines operating from SIAL that includes PIA, Emirates, Air Sial, Qatar Airways, Fly Dubai, Air Arabia, and Salam Air, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) emerged as the leading carrier at SIAL, operating an impressive 697 flights during 2024. This collaboration highlights SIAL's pivotal role in supporting national and international aviation.

As part of its passenger-centric initiatives, SIAL carried out an impressive passenger awareness campaign throughout the year. This initiative aimed to educate and engage travelers on key aspects of air travel, enhancing their overall journey experience. During the year 2024 SIAL successfully facilitated Hajj operations, ensuring a seamless experience for Hajj pilgrims. The airport's meticulous planning and execution during this critical period earned widespread appreciation. In collaboration with its partner airlines, SIAL marked various national and interna-

tional days with zeal and zest.

These celebrations highlighted the airport's commitment to fostering a sense of community and shared pride. As 2024 concludes, Sialkot International Airport remains steadfast in its mission to provide world-class services, prioritize safety, and contribute to the regional and national economy. SIAL looks forward to welcoming even greater achievements in the coming year. Chairman & Vice Chairman SIAL stated that Reflecting on the achievements of 2024, we are filled with immense pride and gratitude for the remarkable journey we have undertaken together. This year has been a witness to our resilience, dedication, and unwavering commitment to excellence. From surpassing passenger milestones to achieving a zero-accident rate, our accomplishments are a collective effort of our exceptional team, partners, and valued passengers.

CEO SIAL Air Vice Marshall Tanweer Ashraf Bhatti (R) stated that as we welcome the dawn of a new year, I extend my heartfelt wishes to all passengers, partners, airlines, and team members of Sialkot International Airport. This year, we aim to elevate our commitment to excellence, fostering connections that inspire progress and unity. Together, let's soar to new horizons and create an experience that reflects the spirit of Sialkot—resilient, ambitious, and ever-reaching for the skies.

## 65 per cent framers facing financial crisis

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: The government is exploiting the farmers tremendously. Due to this, not only 65% of the farming population is suffering from financial crisis, but there is a fear of great damage to the country's agriculture.

These views were expressed by Central President Kisan Board Pakistan Sardar Zafar Hussain while addressing a press conference at the district office. He said that the government is constantly refraining from announcing the support price of wheat and sugarcane, which is causing anxiety and panic due to the deprivation of fair compensation for the labor and expenses of the farmers.

He clarified that despite the announcement of the support price by the Punjab government last year, the farmers had to bear heavy financial loss due to the failure of the food department to purchase the crop. While people of the corrupt mafia under government patronage continued to benefit by

earning millions and billions of rupees overnight. He urged the government to announce the fair support price of wheat and sugarcane. Amanullah Chatha and District President Malik Shoukat Ali Phularwan also addressed the press conference.

**Dry fruits price-hiked:** With the severity of winter in Hafizabad city and its surroundings, the demand for dry fruits has increased, city markets, carts, rickshaws and shops are decorated with dry fruits. Due to the drastic increase in the prices of dry fruits, the citizens were forced to live only by looking at the decorated items in the shops.

According to the details, the inflation has changed the method of hospitality in the winter season, the ritual of offering dry fruits to guests or friends in the winter season has also become a sign of inflation. As the weather gets colder, the prices of dry fruits are beyond the reach of the common man.

According to a survey, almonds are being sold at

Rs. 1200/- to 1500/- per kg at Vanike Chowk, Railway Gate, Alipur Road, Kassoki Road, Jalalpur Road, Madharianwala Road, Vanike Road and other places.

While the price of walnuts is being sold at Rs. 800/- to Rs. 1000/- per kg. The price of cashew is skyrocketing, the price of pinenuts (chalghoza) has also exceeded 8 thousand rupees per kg like cashew. As the demand for dry fruits increases with the onset of winter, their prices start skyrocketing.

The citizens have demanded that the district administration should check the quality of dry fruits and set the prices officially so that the common man can get relief in purchasing dry fruits.

**Abdul Khaliq Qadri passes away:** Sheikh Abdul Khaliq Qadri, Patron General of Anjuman Ghousia and senior journalist, passed away in Pindi Bhattian after a long illness. A large number of people from all walks of life participated in the funeral prayer of the deceased.





GAZA: Forcibly displaced Palestinians taking shelter in tent camps are battling harsh weather as heavy rainfall flooded their tents in Deir el-Balah.

## Israel must face consequences over Gaza campaign: UN experts

NEW YORK (AFP): United Nations rights experts said Israel must face the consequences of "inflicting maximum suffering" on Palestinian civilians in Gaza, alleging Israel was defying international law and being sheltered by its allies.

"International humanitarian law comprises a set of universal and binding rules to protect civilian objects and persons who are not, or are no longer, directly participating in hostilities and limits permissible means and methods of warfare," the 11 experts said in a joint statement. "Rather than abide by these rules, Israel has openly defied international law time and again, inflicting maximum suffering on civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory and beyond."

"Israel continues to face no real consequences, largely due to protection offered by its allies." The Gaza war was triggered by the Hamas-led October 7, 2023, attack on Israel. That resulted in 1,208 deaths, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Israel's retaliatory military campaign has killed more than 45,500 people in Gaza, a majority of them civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry that the UN considers reliable. The experts highlighted alleged crimes against humanity committed by Israel "including murder, torture, sexual violence, and repeated forced displacement amounting to forcible transfer". They also noted alleged war crimes including "indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian objects... the use of starvation as a weapon of war" and "collective punishment". They said civilians were protected persons and did not constitute military objectives under international law. "Acts aimed at their destruction in whole or in part are genocidal," they added. The experts called for urgent, independent and thorough investigations into alleged serious violations of international law. "Israel's continued impunity sends a dangerous message... Israel and its leaders must be held accountable," they said. The experts said they

were particularly alarmed by Israel's operations in the northern Gaza Strip. Since October 6 this year, Israeli operations in Gaza have focused on the north, with officials saying their land and air offensive aims to prevent Hamas from regrouping. "This siege, coupled with expanding evacuation orders, appears intended to permanently displace the local population as a precursor to Gaza's annexation," the experts said.

UN rights experts are independent figures mandated by the Human Rights Council. They do not therefore speak for the United Nations itself. The 11 experts included the special rapporteurs on internally displaced persons; cultural rights; education; physical and mental health; arbitrary executions; the right to food; and protecting rights while countering terrorism. Francesca Albanese, the special rapporteur on the rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, was also among the experts. Israel has demanded her removal, branding her a "political activist" abusing her mandate "to hide her hatred for Israel".

## New French PM vows to restore power, ban shantytowns in storm-hit Mayotte

PARIS (Reuters): New French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou said that power will be restored to all households on the storm-ravaged Mayotte archipelago by the end of January, while the rebuilding of its shantytowns will not be permitted.

The slow pace of aid and delays in the arrival of clean water and electricity have angered residents of France's poorest overseas territory, located between Madagascar and Mozambique about 8,000 km (4,971 miles) from mainland France. Bayrou, whose first days in office were rocked by Cyclone

Chido, the worst storm to hit Mayotte's two main islands in 90 years, travelled to the archipelago to announce a raft of new emergency measures to rebuild, dubbed "Mayotte Standing."

A special emergency bill, which will include measures to ban the kind of makeshift housing that was ubiquitous before the storm, will be presented in a cabinet meeting on Jan. 3 and be sent to parliament in the next fortnight, Bayrou said. "We can't let Mayotte become the capital of shantytowns," he told reporters. "It can't be about rebuilding Mayotte as it was. We must

draw a different future for Mayotte," he said earlier. Bayrou did not say how he would re-house the thousands, many of them undocumented immigrants from nearby Comoros, who lived in hillside shantytowns comprised of flimsy huts before the storm and who have already started rebuilding them.

He was criticised for not visiting the islands earlier. President Emmanuel Macron was also heckled when he travelled to Mayotte earlier this month. Bayrou said water supplies, a flashpoint even before the disaster, will be back at pre-storm levels

before the end of next week. Some 200 Starlink antennas will be deployed to help restore communications. Bayrou also said that early estimates given by the local prefect, who mentioned a death toll of possibly several thousands in the days following the cyclone, may have been overstated. "We must be very cautious when we discuss this, but what's striking with those we meet is that the rumours of thousands of deaths are not founded," he said, mentioning a possible death toll in the hundreds. The official death toll still stands at 39.

## India launches its first space docking mission

BENGALURU (Reuters): India launched its first space docking mission, on an Indian-made rocket, in an attempt to become the fourth country to achieve the advanced technological feat.

The mission, called Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX), lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Andhra Pradesh state at 1630 GMT aboard the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) "workhorse" PSLV rocket. After around 15 minutes, the

mission director called the launch successful after the spacecraft reached an altitude of around 470 km. The mission is seen as pivotal for future space endeavours, including satellite servicing and the operation of the country's planned space station.

In-space docking technology is crucial when multiple rocket launches are required to achieve shared mission objectives. The Indian mission involves deploying two small spacecraft, each

weighing about 220 kilograms, into a 470-km circular orbit. It will also demonstrate the transfer of electric power between the docked spacecraft, a capability vital for applications such as in-space robotics, composite spacecraft control and payload operations following undocking. Each satellite carries advanced payloads, including an imaging system and a radiation-monitoring device designed to measure electron and proton radiation levels in space, providing

critical data for future human spaceflight missions.

ISRO Chairman S. Somanath said the actual testing of the docking technology could take place in about a week's time and indicated a nominal date of around Jan. 7. "The rocket has placed the satellites in the right orbit," he said. A successful demonstration would place India alongside the United States, Russia and China as the only countries to have developed and tested this capability.

## Iran confirms arrest of Italian journalist Cecilia Sala

DUBAI (Reuters): Iran confirmed the arrest of Italian journalist Cecilia Sala for "violating the laws of the Islamic Republic". Iran's official IRNA news agency reported. Sala, 29, who works for the newspaper Il Foglio and the podcast company Chora Media, was detained in Tehran on Dec. 19, according to the Italian foreign ministry.

Italy's Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani declined to say whether the case might be linked to the arrest of an Iranian in Italy this month at the request of the United States. The case of the Italian journalist being held in Iran is "complicated", but Rome hopes to bring Sala home quickly, Tajani said. "Italian national Cecilia Sala traveled to Iran on Dec. 13 with a journalist visa and was detained on Dec. 19... for violating the laws of the Islamic Republic," a statement by Iran's Culture Ministry said, according to IRNA. Chora Media said Sala had left Rome for Iran on Dec. 12 with a valid journalist visa and had conducted several interviews and produced three episodes of her "Stories" podcast. She had been due to fly back to Rome on Dec. 20.

Sala has been in contact by phone with her family and the Italian embassy in Tehran was notified of her detention, the statement said. In recent years, Iran's security forces have arrested dozens of foreigners and dual nationals, mostly on charges related to espionage and security. Rights groups have accused Iran of trying to extract concessions from other countries through such arrests. Iran denies taking prisoners to gain diplomatic leverage.

## Migrants in Mexico anxious to enter US legally

TAPACHULA (Reuters): Hundreds of migrants waited in long lines outside an immigration office in southern Mexico, hoping to secure safe passage north and enter the US legally before President-elect Donald Trump takes office in January. Trump plans to end President Joe Biden's humanitarian programs, including one that allows migrants in parts of Mexico to make an appointment on a US government app, known as CBP One, to approach a port of entry and enter the US legally.

The Mexican government runs a program of busing migrants with confirmed CBP One appointments from southern Mexico to the northern border, seeking to protect them from gangs and organized crime groups that extort and kidnap migrants traveling across the country. Migrants in the southern Mexican city of Tapachula waited to secure seats on these buses and expressed relief that they'd managed to land one of the coveted CBP One appointments for early January, before Trump takes office on the 20th.

## Moldovans fear looming energy shortage

CHISINAU, Moldova (AP): On a frigid morning in Moldova's capital, 39-year-old postal worker Petru Murzin braces for a difficult winter as he fears a looming energy shortage could leave many Moldovans with "no heating, no light." His concerns aren't unfounded.

On Jan. 1, Russia's state-owned energy giant Gazprom is set to halt gas supplies to the European Union candidate country over an alleged \$709 million debt for past supplies, a figure fiercely disputed by Moldova's pro-Western government, that has accused Moscow of weaponizing energy as a political tool to destabilize the country. "I feel that we've entered a crisis that is quite difficult to resolve ... which worries me greatly," Murzin told The Associated Press in Chisinau. "Price increases are one thing, but when there is no gas at all, that's something entirely different."

The cessation will stop gas flowing to the Kuciurgan power plant, the country's largest, which is situated in the separatist pro-Russian Transnistria region. The gas-operated plant generates electricity that powers a significant portion of Moldova proper. "There will be no heating, no light," Murzin added. "We are entering a very difficult year." Transnistria, which broke away after a short war in 1992 and is not recognized by most countries, also declared its own state of emergency earlier this month, fearing the region will not receive gas supplies. A large majority of Transnistria's 470,000 people speak Russian as their first language and some 200,000 are Russian citizens.

On Dec. 13, Moldova's

parliament voted in favor of imposing a state of emergency in the energy sector, as the looming crisis threatened to leave the former Soviet republic without sufficient energy this winter, sparking fears it could trigger a humanitarian crisis in Transnistria, where the impact of the gas cutoff could be immediately felt. Many observers have predicted that the looming energy shortage could force residents in Transnistria to travel to Moldova to seek basic amenities to get through winter, a season in which temperatures throughout the country regularly drop below subzero degrees Celsius.

Cristian Cantir, a Moldovan associate professor of international relations at Oakland University, says that Moscow is likely trying to exploit a "potential humanitarian crisis in Transnistria to overwhelm Moldova's already-strained resources" to amplify tensions between Chisinau and the region's de facto capital, Tiraspol. "It could stoke fears among the Moldovan electorate of a violent conflict, and give fodder to pro-Russian parties who will accuse Chisinau of being responsible for increased prices for gas and electricity, which will be a major campaign issue" ahead of the country's parliamentary elections in 2025, he said. The unprecedented situation prompted Chisinau last week to implement a series of energy-saving measures beginning Jan. 1, which include reducing lighting in public and commercial buildings by at least 30%, and energy-intensive businesses operating during off-peak hours.

"We'll probably have to save power till we have a

solution," said Nicoleta Neagu, who is from Moldova but works in Germany. "I hope we'll look at this seriously and not waste power on not-so-useful things." After Gazprom announced it would halt gas flows, Moldovan Prime Minister Dorin Recean accused Moscow of using energy "as a political weapon" and said his government does not recognize the debt cited by the Russian energy giant, which he said has been "invalidated by an international audit." "This decision confirms once again the intention of the Kremlin to leave the inhabitants of the Transnistrian region without light and heat in the middle of the winter," he said.

For 30-year-old Chisinau resident Iuliana, who did not want to give her surname, power outages would prevent her from doing her online job, which could also be untenable if the heating goes off in the middle of winter in the country of about 2.5 million people. "We're afraid, but we're happy that there's no snow and the temperatures aren't that low and we can turn on the heating maybe only in the evening if we work at an office," she said. "But I work from home and I'll be directly affected." She also noted that Moldova has faced multiple crises in recent years, "But regarding power and gas, it's the first time we face this," she said. Moldovan President Maia Sandu criticized Russia for Gazprom's decision and said that the country has gas supplies "for the heating season" and measures will be taken "to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply," adding that plans are also in place to provide humanitarian aid to residents in Transnistria.

## Syria eyes 'strategic' ties with Ukraine

DAMASCUS (Reuters): Syria hopes for strategic partnerships with Ukraine, its new foreign minister told his Ukrainian counterpart, as Kyiv moves to build ties with the new Islamist rulers in Damascus amid waning Russian influence.

Russia was a staunch ally of ousted President Bashar al-Assad and has given him political asylum. Moscow has said it is in contact with the new administration in Damascus, including over the fate of Russian military facilities in Syria. "There will be strategic partnerships between us and Ukraine on the political, economic and social levels, and scientific partnerships," Syria's newly appointed foreign minister, Asaad Hassan al-Shibani, told Ukrainian counterpart Andrii Sybiha.

"Certainly the Syrian people and the Ukrainian people have the same experience and the same suffering that we endured over 14 years," he added, apparently drawing a parallel between

Syria's brutal 2011-24 civil war and Russia's seizure of Ukrainian territory culminating in its full-scale 2022 invasion. Sybiha, who also met Syria's new de facto ruler Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus, said Ukraine would send more food aid shipments to Syria after the expected arrival of 20 shipments of flour on Tuesday. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he hoped providing help to Syria would be beneficial to restoring stability in Ukraine, locked in a 34-month-old war with Russia. "We can help restore stability in Syria after years of Russian interference and this will undoubtedly help us restore peace for ourselves," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address. "It will be the right step to renew our diplomatic relations with Syria and our economic cooperation. I am very hopeful that post-Assad Syria will respect international law in a way that Assad could not and did not want to."

Zelenskyy announced the dispatch of Ukraine's first batch of food aid to Syria comprising 500 metric tons of wheat flour as part of Kyiv's humanitarian "Grain from Ukraine" initiative in cooperation with the United Nations World Food Programme. Ukraine, a global producer and exporter of grain and oilseeds, traditionally exports wheat and corn to countries in the Middle East, but not to Syria, which in the Assad era imported food from Russia. Russian wheat supplies to Syria have been suspended because of uncertainty about the new government in Damascus and payment delays, Russian and Syrian sources told Reuters in early December.

The ousting of Assad by al-Sharaa's Islamist group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has thrown the future of Russia's military bases in Syria - the Hmeimim airbase in Latakia and the Tartous naval facility - into question.

## South Korean adoptees and families rocked by fraud allegations

SEOUL (AP): Her greatest fear, dormant for decades, came rushing back in an instant: had she adopted and raised a kidnapped child? Peg Reif's daughter, adopted from South Korea in the 1980s, had sent her a link to a documentary detailing how the system that made their family was rife with fraud: documents falsified, babies switched, children snatched off the street and sent abroad.

Reif wept. She was among more than 120 who contacted The Associated Press this fall, after a series of stories and a documentary made with Frontline exposed how Korea created a baby pipeline, designed to ship children abroad as quickly as possible to meet Western demand. The reporting shook adoption communities around the world with details about how agencies competed for babies - pressuring mothers, bribing hospitals, fabricating documents. Most who wrote were adoptees, but some were adoptive parents like Reif, horrified to learn they had supported this system. "I can't stand the thought that somebody lost their child," Reif said. "I can't stop thinking about it. I don't know how to make it right. I don't know if I can." Forty years ago, she was struggling with infertility. She and her husband pinned their dreams for a family on adopting a baby from Mexico, paid an agency thousands of dollars and waited for months. Then the

agency's directors were arrested, and they learned that those Mexican babies had been taken from their families against their will. Reif was heartbroken, but recalls even now looking at her husband and saying: "thank God we don't have a child who was stolen."

But now she isn't sure of that. Because then they adopted two Korean children, and brought them to their home in rural Wisconsin, first a son and then a daughter. The two were not biological siblings, but both arrived with strangely similar stories in their files: their young unmarried mothers worked in factories with fathers who disappeared after they got pregnant. Back then, Reif still believed the common narrative about foreign adoption: it saved children who might otherwise live the rest of their lives in an orphanage, die or be damned to poverty. "I don't believe that anymore," Reif said. "I don't know what to believe." Cameron Lee Small, a therapist in Minneapolis whose practice caters to adoptees and their families, said many are feeling an intense sense of betrayal. Individual adoptees had long shared stories of falsified identities. But the revelations this year pointed to systemwide practices that routinely changed babies' origin stories to process adoptions quickly, including listing them as "abandoned" even when they had known parents.

Small, who was also adopted from Korea in the 1980s, summarized what he's been hearing from adoptees: "I'm kind of back to nothing. What do I believe now? Who can I believe?" Reif's daughter, Jenn Hamilton, spent her life thinking she was unwanted, often quipping: "that's what happens when you're found in a dumpster as a baby." It has taken a toll on her all her life: She's been happily married for 9 years, she said, but she has this insatiable insecurity: "I constantly find myself asking my husband, 'are you mad at me? Did I do something wrong?' Do you want to leave me?" She has no idea anymore if abandonment was ever really her story, with revelations of abuses so systemic that even the Korean government likened it to "trafficking."

"You can't make that many mistakes. It has to be intentional. It was this huge tree of deception," she said. "I feel disgusted." Holt International, the US-based agency that pioneered adoptions from Korea, did not respond to repeated requests for comment for this story. Reform is sweeping across Europe - countries have launched investigations, halted foreign adoptions and apologized to adoptees for failing to protect them. But the United States, which has taken in the most adopted children by far, has not done a review of its own history or culpability. The US State Department told AP this summer that

it would work with its historian to piece together its history, and detailed initial findings that some documents might have been falsified. But it said there was no evidence that US officials were aware of it. The State Department has since said that it has "been unable to identify any records that could provide insight into the US government role in adoptions from South Korea in the 1970s and 1980s."

Korea's National Police Agency confirmed an increase in adoptees registering their DNA for family searches - both at domestic police stations and diplomatic offices across North America and Europe - in the weeks following the release of the AP stories and documentary in September. More than 120 adoptees registered their DNA in October and November, compared to an average of less than 30 a month from January to August. Korea's government has maintained that adoptions were a necessary tool to care for needy children, including babies of unwed mothers or other children deemed as abandoned. However, Korea's Ministry of Health and Welfare acknowledged to AP that the adoption boom in the 1970s and 80s was possibly fueled by a desire to reduce welfare costs. Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been investigating government accountability over foreign adoption problems since 2022, prompted by

complaints filed by hundreds of adoptees, and is expected to release an interim report in February. The Commission has posted the AP stories on its website. A law passed in 2023 mandates that all adoption records be transferred from private agencies to a government department called the National Center for the Rights of the Child by July, to centralize the handling of family search requests. The center has confirmed that private agencies hold about 170,000 adoption files, but director Chung Ick-Joong doubts it will acquire a space to store and manage all these records in time, due to financial constraints and other challenges. The agency expects family search requests to increase dramatically - "possibly by 10-fold," according to Chung - yet has funding to add only five staff members to its team of six searchers. Chung acknowledged that flaws in adoption laws had persisted for decades, and Korea only required adoptions to go through courts and birth records to be preserved after 2012.

"It's difficult to determine who was responsible for the inaccuracies in records before then," he said. "The adoption agency might have been at fault, the biological parents may have lied, or something might have gone wrong at the orphanage....no one truly knows what the truth is," Korean adoption agencies have most-

ly declined AP's requests for comment in recent months, often citing privacy concerns. Advocates insist that most adoptive families thrive, with both the parents and children happily living their lives without questioning the industry as Reif and Hamilton have. Hamilton grew up in a rural, almost exclusively white community in Wisconsin, and back then all she wanted was to be accepted. But having children of her own changed that. When her first child was born, she looked at him, and it took her breath away.

"It can't explain it, like this is the first person I know in my life that I'm biologically related to," she said. She wanted to learn her own history, so her children could know theirs. She wrote a letter to her adoption agency, which within weeks connected her with a woman they said was her mother. It was emotional, shocking. But soon she felt like she had more questions than answers. The woman's name didn't match the one listed on paperwork, and the name she gave for the father was also different. Birthdates didn't match, the birthplace didn't either. They had not met in a factory, she said, they had been pen pals. Hamilton asked the woman to take a DNA test, but she said she didn't know how to access one. Hamilton came to believe this woman was not her birth mother.



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# European oil majors backtrack on renewables

THE major European oil companies, British Petroleum (BP), Shell, Equinor (of Norway) find enough reasons to cut their investments on green energy sources like wind and solar, and focus on oil and gas, their regular business staple, in 2025. This is seen as a slide from the climate target commitments these companies had made this year and earlier. BP had aimed at reaching 50 gigawatts of green energy by the end of the decade. But it feels unable to do so.

It wants to spin off its wind power projects into a joint venture with the Japanese electric company JERA. Shell has given up its ambitious goal of becoming the largest electric company and has stopped its investments in new offshore wind power projects, which is a blow to curbs on carbon emissions effort.

Equinor has slowed down its investments in renewable sources of energy. Rohan Bowater, energy analyst at Accela Research says, "Geopolitical disruptions like the invasion of Ukraine have weakened CEO incentives to prioritise the low carbon transition amid high oil prices and evolving investor expectations."

He told the news agency Reuters that the three oil companies had reduced low-carbon spending by 8 per cent. Norway's state-owned Equinor said in a statement, "The offshore wind has been through demanding times in the last couple of years due to inflation, cost increase, bottlenecks in the supply chain, and Equinor will continue to be selective and disciplined in our approach."

The picture is clear. The major oil companies cannot invest in low-carbon energy sources unless they are in a financially sound position. They also face the problem that every other player in the \$3 trillion oil sector joins the effort to reduce the dependence on fossil fuels.

The European oil markets are looking over their shoulder to the American oil majors, Exxon and Chevron, who are making profits on the increased oil and gas marketing, leaving their European counterparts behind in the market. With President-elect Donald Trump set to take office on January 20, there is the fear that the US will not do anything to move towards the green transition. Trump is a self-confessed anti-climate change advocate, a climate-change denier in effect.

The European economy is not exactly doing well enough, and China's demand for diesel and petrol which had plateaued is bound to slow down, which would dampen the demand for oil.

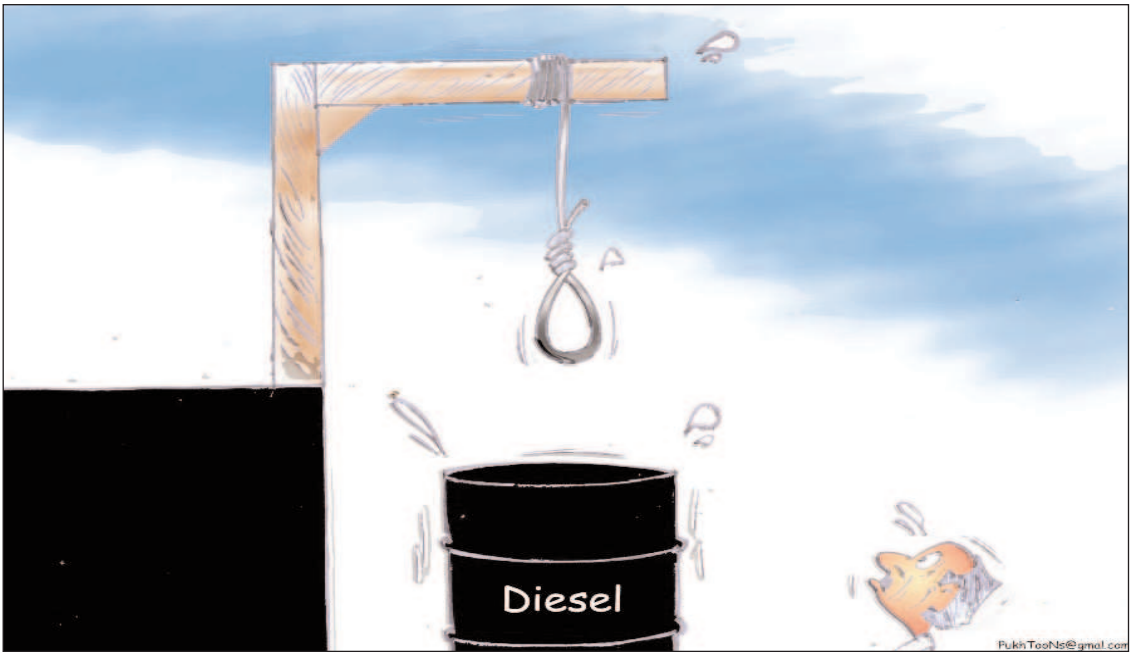
Market observers think that the European oil majors are making a policy mistake if they think there is a need to go back and sell more of oil to keep afloat financially. The argument implies that this is the time that the oil companies should stick to their low-carbon goals because the future demand will rely on green energy sources.

The choice is stark. People and governments are aware that it cannot be business as usual in the matter of carbon emissions, and that to avoid catastrophe the move to renewable energy sources is inevitable. It is in the interest of the major oil companies that they should be treading the alternative path to remain in business in another form. Closing shop of such huge enterprises is a disaster for the economy if thousands of people are thrown out of jobs, and the marketing infrastructure in operation now were to become redundant.

It is not the case that the transition will happen at once. It will take time. But the remedial measures have to be taken to save the oil marketing companies. They have to switch their profiles and their businesses even as the car-makers across the world are doing by moving to the manufacture of electric vehicles (EVs). Giving up the process of moving to alternative sources of energy is not good business strategy.

## Important Notice

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# Building a Prosperous 2025: Priorities for Growth and Stability in Pakistan

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

IN 2024, Pakistan finds itself at a critical juncture, facing challenges that have diminished its standing both domestically and internationally. Restoring its lost stature demands an immediate reevaluation of priorities, accompanied by a pragmatic and well-thought-out strategy. To navigate this path effectively, Pakistan must pursue a dual approach—implementing short-term measures to stabilize the present while developing a long-term vision to ensure sustainable growth and resilience.

The foremost goal for Pakistan is economic revival. A robust economy forms the backbone of any nation's international clout and domestic stability. The country must prioritize addressing its fiscal deficit, controlling inflation, and enhancing revenue generation. Immediate measures, such as cracking down on tax evasion, broadening the tax base, and implementing structural reforms in public sector enterprises, are critical. Economic development thrives when a culture of equitable taxation is established, ensuring every citizen, regardless of their economic standing, contributes their fair share. Taxing only the salaried and middle class not only strains these segments but also perpetuates inequality and resentment. The real catalyst for change lies with the affluent class, who must lead by example. When business magnates, landlords, and policymakers demonstrate transparency and diligence in fulfilling their tax obligations, they set a precedent, encouraging widespread compliance. This will not only increase state revenue but also restore public confidence in the system, reinforcing the notion that everyone is equally accountable.

Moreover, curtailing wasteful government expenditures is crucial for sustainable progress. Resources squandered on unnecessary perks and

extravagant projects drain the national treasury and breed public disillusionment. Streamlining government operations, minimizing redundant expenses, and redirecting funds to critical sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure can create a ripple effect of economic growth and stability.

Simultaneously, fostering a conducive environment for foreign direct investment by ensuring political stability, regulatory transparency, and security will encourage international investors. Pakistan's engagement with global financial institutions should shift from dependency to partnership, emphasizing capacity building and economic independence.

On the domestic front, addressing energy shortages is imperative. Inconsistent power supply has not only hampered industrial productivity but also deterred foreign investors. The adoption of renewable energy solutions, such as solar and wind projects, alongside revamping existing energy infrastructure, can offer immediate relief. Incentivizing private-sector involvement in the energy sector and learning from global best practices will also play a significant role in mitigating this crisis.

Education and human resource development are long-term investments that Pakistan can no longer afford to neglect. The country's youth, which constitutes a significant portion of the population, remains an untapped resource. Expanding access to quality education, aligning curricula with global trends, and promoting technical and vocational training are essential steps. Furthermore, addressing gender disparities in education and employment will unlock the full potential of the nation's workforce. International collaboration in education, research, and technology can provide Pakistan with the tools

needed to keep pace with an increasingly competitive global landscape.

Security concerns, particularly the resurgence of militancy and regional instability, have marred Pakistan's image internationally. Ensuring internal security through comprehensive counterterrorism strategies, intelligence-sharing mechanisms, and community-based policing will restore confidence among both citizens and the international community. Strengthening diplomatic ties with neighboring countries, particularly Afghanistan and India, is crucial for regional peace and economic collaboration. A pragmatic foreign policy rooted in mutual respect and shared interests will help Pakistan reposition itself as a stabilizing force in South Asia.

In the short term, Pakistan must focus on governance reforms to rebuild trust between the state and its citizens. Transparent mechanisms for accountability, reducing bureaucratic red tape, and implementing e-governance initiatives will enhance efficiency and curb corruption. A decentralized approach to governance, empowering local bodies, will ensure that development initiatives reach marginalized and underserved communities.

In the agricultural sector, which remains the backbone of Pakistan's economy, introducing modern farming techniques and addressing water management issues can significantly boost productivity. Short-term measures, such as subsidies for farmers and efficient distribution of resources, will provide immediate relief, while long-term investments in research and development will ensure sustainability. Additionally, diversifying exports by focusing on value-added agricultural products can enhance Pakistan's global trade footprint. On the international stage, Pakistan must work to repair its image as a reliable

partner. Strengthening ties with traditional allies while exploring new partnerships in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America will diversify its diplomatic and economic opportunities. Active participation in global forums and adherence to international commitments, particularly in areas like climate change and human rights, will showcase Pakistan's commitment to being a responsible global player.

A critical element of Pakistan's long-term strategy must be addressing climate change, which poses an existential threat. Developing climate-resilient infrastructure, implementing effective disaster management strategies, and investing in sustainable urban planning will mitigate the impact of environmental challenges. International collaboration and securing green financing for such initiatives will further bolster these efforts.

Cultural diplomacy and the promotion of Pakistan's rich heritage and tourism potential can also play a pivotal role in enhancing its global image. Revitalizing the tourism industry through infrastructure development, safety assurances, and marketing campaigns can create jobs, attract foreign exchange, and foster cultural exchange. Highlighting Pakistan's contributions to global arts, literature, and sports will further strengthen its soft power.

In conclusion, the journey toward reclaiming Pakistan's lost position is arduous but achievable. By addressing immediate economic and security challenges while investing in education, governance, and climate resilience, Pakistan can lay the foundation for a prosperous future. A balanced approach that combines short-term pragmatism with a visionary long-term strategy will enable the nation to navigate the complexities of the modern world and emerge stronger, both at home and on the global stage.

# A prescription for better Sino-US ties

IT is a propitious moment to assess the state and prospects of Sino-US relations, the world's two largest economies as well as large military powers. It might seem clichéd, but nothing is more important for peace and prosperity in the world than cooperation between the US and China.

To many in China, the US is hyping the "China threat" theory and thwarting the country's historic, rightful development by policies of containment: sanctions, tariffs, alliances and arms sales to Taiwan. To many in the US, China has become more "aggressive" abroad and more "repressive" at home. What is especially disquieting to US elites is their perception that China is backing Russia in Ukraine.

With respect to US politics, Trump campaigned, in part, on a tough-on-China platform. One can usually forecast a US president's foreign policy by assessing the background of those whom he picks for top foreign policy positions — and Trump's Secretary of State-designate, Marco Rubio, and National Security Adviser-designate, Mike Waltz, are both historical hawks on China. Yet, going deeper, this truism is less true for Trump, who has a history of flouting expert advice and going with his gut instincts. In fact, Trump himself professes admiration for President Xi Jinping, prizes

himself on avoiding new wars, and loves to make new deals. This provides an opening for improving US-China relations.

With respect to China's economy, the readout of the Central Economic Work Conference is telling — using stimulus-signaling language not seen since the global financial crisis in 2009, implicitly recognizing that China's economy needs to "vigorously boost consumption, improve investment efficiency, and expand domestic demand on all fronts". It stresses "boosting domestic demand, especially consumer demand" and calls for adopting a more proactive fiscal policy, implementing a moderately loose monetary policy with reductions in the reserve requirement ratio and interest rates to ensure ample liquidity, and moves to stabilize real estate and stock markets.

China says that it still welcomes foreign investments and that it still will be the engine of global growth. This provides a motivation, if not a necessity, for improving China-US relations. With respect to the world, events overwhelm expectations. The toppling of the Syrian government, after over five decades of al-Assad family rule, shocked almost everyone.

Assad had been backed strongly for over a decade by a powerful Russia and an

Iran. Then, in less than two weeks, Assad was gone, chased out by barely known, seemingly ragtag rebel groups. But actually, multiple factors were drivers, triggered by Hamas's horrific killing and kidnapping of some 1,500 Israeli civilians in October 2023 and subsequently Israel's furious, devastating and relentless attacks against Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and even against their backer, Iran. It says something about our chaotic world when Israel, in 48 hours, destroys 80 percent of the advanced assets of the massive Syrian army and air force, from missiles, fighter jets and drones to munitions plants, research centers and chemical weapons — and sinks the entire Syrian navy in one night — and the astounding story wasn't even the main headline in the international press. In Europe, there is deep concern over troops from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea having entered the Russia-Ukraine conflict and over China's perceived backing of Russia, despite China's repeated clarifications. There is also concern that low-cost, good-quality Chinese EV vehicles would undermine the European automotive industry.

Meanwhile, US allies in Europe and Asia worry about what Trump may do to them,

from imposing stiff tariffs to demanding they spend more on their own defense. While just about everyone in Washington advocates tough-on-China policies, Trump himself is not beholden to any of them. He is the boss and he is ready and eager to make deals that he perceives are good for the US and burnish his image. What others call Trump's policy flip-flops his ignorance of basic principles, and declare it a weakness, Trump himself calls his personal unpredictability, a strength. This is why when Trump says that he respects President Xi and that Xi is his friend, he is laying the groundwork for potential deals. It takes no PhD in economics to know that every-one loses when global economies are decoupled.

We would best settle in for a period of uncertainty and volatility in China-US relations. My three-imperative prescription for China-US relations remains simple: First, avoid exacerbating areas of conflict or contention. Second, find common ground for joint action: interdicting dangerous drugs, planning for pandemics, mitigating AI risks, and controlling climate change. Third, give time a chance to lower the heat by passing quietly without incident. Just three points to follow — for US citizens, for Chinese citizens, for the people of the world. If only it all worked this way.

# Europe's resilience firmly tested in 2024

Alistair Burt

EUROPE entered 2024 with some trepidation. War was still raging on the continent for the first time since 1945. The echoes of renewed conflict in the Middle East were reaching into its major cities. The continental economy was limping. A series of elections were imminent, with an uneasy public likely to look for alternatives to mainstream parties. No one was sure who would be left standing at the end of the year.

Only the glorious backdrop of the Paris Olympics held out some promise of relief. But despite the many challenges to be faced, there were hopes that Europe would end the year better than it started it. The run of elections, for national and European parliaments, would allow the public to have their say on the direction of the continent and perhaps usher in a period of stability with which to face the future.

That has not necessarily been the outcome. We are learning that elections do not settle a democracy as they once did. The bitter polarization of politics, encouraged by a relentlessly negative social media, suggests that elections have become mere staging posts of anger in unending partisan political wars. Indeed, just four months after an emphatic win at the polls, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer faced a petition of nearly 3 million signatures demanding another general election.

It has been some year. This year has confirmed that a rightward, populist move in Europe is continuing and that there is little stability in its two most powerful and significant nations. Provincial elections in Germany and the European Parliament vote in France debilitated both countries' governments. The year ends with Germany marking time until snap federal elections in February after the collapse of Olaf Scholz's government, while a weakened President Emmanuel Macron is perhaps a prisoner of Marine Le Pen and the far right until the next French presidential election in 2027.

Toward the end of the year, another election further disturbed the European mood. For months, there had been widespread speculation about the result of the US presidential contest. For democracies that uphold the peaceful transfer of power as sacrosanct and the best answer to the creep of authoritarianism now stalking the continent, the idea that a defeated candidate associated with an insurrection could return to office was surely inconceivable.

There was a moment, with the stepping down of an almost-certain-to-be-defeated Joe Biden, when hope sprang for European centrists that the gathering momentum of Donald Trump would be halted. Notwithstanding that the policies of Kamala Harris toward trade and conflict in the wider world were barely known, she could not be worse than the fears accumulating around the prospect of Trump 2.0.

On Nov. 5, we learned the truth. Europe was not to deal with a conflicted or disputed outcome this time, but a newly, and substantially endorsed, President-elect Trump, winner of the popular vote and the undisputed master of his own destiny.

Europe's fears were far from fanciful or based solely on the past. In his first term, President Trump had made no secret of his disdain for NATO — the cornerstone of peace and security for Europe against external threats for some 75 years — claiming it to be an expensive insurance policy costing the US much and the rest of the alliance much less. He had threatened those states not paying their way with abandonment and, while his talk had the political effect of making European states look to their own commitments on defense, its wider impact on states close to an aggressive Russia was deeply unsettling.

On Ukraine, his boast that he could end the war within 24 hours led to not unreasonable speculation that this could only be done by some degree of sacrifice from the victim of the conflict for the benefit of the aggressor — the wrong lesson of history for a continent forever scarred by the mistakes of the 20th century.

Comments of those around him are hardly conducive to overcoming those fears. Donald Trump Jr.

went on social media to mock the leader of a beleaguered country fighting for its existence to say that President Volodymyr Zelensky was "38 days from losing your allowance."

Europe has to work with Trump and his Cabinet. The strangeness of some of his choices for office must be of no consequence to the professional diplomats and politicians who are working toward the transition of power. They are trying to ensure, as far as they are able, that Ukraine is in the best possible situation it can be for an anticipated negotiation in 2025. It will be an early test of the relationship and the future.

Europe's fears are not confined to defense and security. The economic health of the EU is also not strong, as made clear by September's landmark report on competitiveness from former Italian prime minister and president of the European Central Bank Mario Draghi. A tariff war, as threatened by President-elect Trump, is of significant concern.

But the debate about President Trump is moving on. Whatever the views of him may be, there is an awareness that it is no use blaming an incoming US administration for all that needs to change across the European continent. Europe needs to spend more on defense, regardless of who is in the White House. And economic progress, sluggish when compared with the US and China over many years, has to deliver its own prescription for success in 2025. In one telling statistic, Draghi looked at the global investment into artificial intelligence: Of \$35 billion poured into AI startups in the first half of 2024, the EU attracted just 6 percent. A tariff war will not help, but Europe has to take greater charge of its own economic destiny in 2025.

This year unsettled Europe further with two unrelated, though not entirely disconnected, phenomena.

Migration to Europe, whether those seeking to make their way without papers across the Mediterranean from the Middle East or being absorbed into workforces and family reunions, is increasingly cited as a driving force behind the resurgent political right. Mainstream politicians struggle to keep up not just with the rhetoric from the right, amplified by aggressive social media, but with their answers of fences and the turning back of boats.

The events in Gaza and Lebanon have produced civil unrest in Europe's big cities, where the identification of large Muslim populations with those suffering devastating bombardment has heightened awareness of their presence and political influence, contrasted with the seeming indifference of European governments. The agony of the Middle East is now being accompanied by an identifiable increase in anti-semitism and Islamophobia, dismaying populations unconnected with either community, who are being whispered at by often anonymous sources on social media that their countries are not what they were.

And as if politics was not enough, Europe is increasingly aware that global climate change is not only driving refugees toward them, but that it is also having an impact on their domestic populations. The shock of the violence of the floods in Valencia, Spain, which took more than 200 lives in September, was matched only by the intensity of the anger toward the government and officials, who were blamed for their lack of foresight and response. There is little confidence that such scenes will not be repeated.

But Europe is a resilient continent. Investment is flowing in from friends in the Arab world and beyond to new industries and technologies. Europe's universities remain attractive to the world's brightest and best. It will respond to the challenges to its security and defense. Already, a developing European Political Community includes the EU and those beyond, while Brexit has not prevented London, Paris and Berlin working closely together. Its diplomacy will reach into the conflicts of the Middle East, as a new future for the region is formed that cannot afford the catastrophe of continuing conflict.



# Surviving 2024 in Gaza

WHEN I was a child, I dreamed of travelling the world, exploring new cultures and learning new things. I yearned for a journey of discovery. Living in Gaza felt like sitting in the stands, watching the world's achievements – its development, progress and technological marvels – unfold from afar without being able to participate.

It was both a sanctuary and a cage – its regular rhythm comforting yet repetitive, its streets too familiar, its horizons too narrow for the aspirations I carried within me. I cherished its warmth and closeness, but the pull of life beyond its borders was irresistible. I was ready to leave the moment an opportunity came my way.

This year, I did embark on a journey, but not the one that I had dreamed of. Instead of a trip of carefree exploration abroad, I found myself on a journey navigating a genocidal war and a struggle for survival within the narrow strip of Palestinian land I call home. Along the way, I learned a lot – about myself and my inner world.

The “journey” began in January. While most people welcomed the new year under skies filled with fireworks, songs and joy, my sky delivered evacuation orders. Crumpled papers fell on us carrying a message written in Arabic: “Nuseirat camp is too dangerous. Move south for your safety.”

I never thought leaving home would be that difficult. I had always thought of myself as someone who did not have a strong connection to home or homeland. But I was wrong. Leaving felt like abandoning a part of my soul.

My family and I made our way to Rafah to stay with my aunt who gave us a warm welcome. Even though I felt some comfort there, in my mind, all I could think about was my home. So I greeted February, the “month of love”, feeling incredibly homesick and realising just how much I

loved the house I had grown up in.

In mid-February, the Israeli military withdrew from Nuseirat, and we hurried back home. It was one of the best moments of the war – and of my entire life – to find my home still intact. Its front door was broken, our belongings were stolen and rubble from the bombing of our neighbour's home had crashed inside. But it was still standing.

Although destruction surrounded us, the rubble of our neighbourhood still felt warmer than any safe place elsewhere in the world would have. For the first time in my life, I – the grandson of refugees – felt I belonged somewhere. My soul, my identity – they all belonged here.

The joy of being back home was soon overshadowed by the reality of war. March came and brought in the holy month. For Muslims, Ramadan is a time of spiritual peace, prayer and togetherness. But this year, it was filled with loss, separation and deprivation. There were no shared meals or family gatherings, no mosques to pray in – only their rubble.

Instead of tranquility, we experienced relentless bombardment and terror. The bombs fell without warning, each explosion shattering any sense of safety we may have had. We were being punished, treated as “human animals” – as their defence minister had said – for an unknown crime.

In April, Eid al-Fitr came and went, stripped of the joy that defines this cherished Muslim holiday. There was no children's laughter to wake us in the morning, no bustling preparations or decorations to welcome guests. Death was the only visitor in Palestinian homes in Gaza.

Then May rolled in and with it an opportunity I had been waiting for my whole life. My family managed to gather enough money to pay an Egyptian company to help me leave Gaza. The process was riddled with uncertainty. There were

Hassan Abo Qamar

rumours of scams, bribes and rejections.

The thought of escaping the relentless horror around me was intoxicating. I wanted freedom, but it came at a cost. I was to leave my whole family behind and my home with an uncertain prospect of ever coming back.

To outsiders, this might seem like a simple choice: follow your dreams, take the chance and leave! But for me, it was anything but easy.

One late afternoon, I was sitting with my sister Aya on our rooftop under a sky filled with spy planes when I came to realise the true weight of my decision. Aya, just 15 years old, was full of energy and hope, her light brown eyes shining with ambition. “I want to learn programming like you,” she said with excitement. “I want to start my own business like you. I want to improve my English like you.”

How could I leave her and my family in the midst of war? Did I deserve a better life while Aya stayed behind, struggling to eat, to sleep, to dream? How could I live a life elsewhere, knowing my sister faced nightmares alone? How could I abandon the very land that had made me who I am?

In that moment, I realised my soul would never be free if I abandoned Gaza now, if I dismissed it as a place of rubble and ruin. I realised my identity was tied to this place, this struggle.

When I first told my family that I wanted to stay, they refused to accept it. They insisted I leave to survive, fearing for my safety. After a long back and forth, they eventually respected my decision, but their fear never fully went away.

A few days later, the Israeli army occupied the Rafah crossing, cutting off access to the outside world. I did not regret my decision.

As the Israeli army continued to attack civilian areas all over Gaza, displacing hundreds of thousands of people, it was our turn to host rela-

tives. We welcomed them not as displaced people but as our family. It is our duty to share and stand with each other in times of need. By the fall, we were 30 people in our house.

Over the summer, we began to feel the growing impact of restrictions not only on humanitarian aid but on all paid goods. Basic food items disappeared from markets. Aid organisations struggled to distribute food.

It was increasingly clear that those who survive the bombings would face a different, slower death through starvation. Food rationing became so severe that survival turned into a cruel competition. Life felt more like a jungle where only the strongest could survive.

In the fall, hunger was made worse by the rain and wind. We saw people forced to live in tents overcome by misery.

In November, a family tragedy struck. My eight-year-old cousin Ahmad, who was like a little brother to me, fell from the third floor of our building and suffered a brain haemorrhage. The thought of losing him was overwhelming.

We rushed him to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which was overcrowded with the wounded from air strikes and lacked the necessary equipment to perform brain scans. We tried to go to two nearby hospitals, only to be told they too could not do anything for him. By nightfall, we managed to find a medical centre that could help him, but it was far away. Sending him in an ambulance after dark was a huge risk – the vehicle could be targeted by a drone like so many had been. It was a choice between two deaths.

We decided to hang onto hope and sent Ahmad in the ambulance. Even in the darkest of days, miracles happen. Ahmad arrived safely, underwent the necessary surgery and survived. He began to recover although he still needs physical therapy that he cannot receive in Gaza.

As we worried and cared for Ahmad, December came. Soon we heard unexpected

news from Syria: The brutal regime there had collapsed. I felt extremely happy.

In Gaza, we have stood in solidarity with the Syrian people for a long time. We know the suffering of war and oppression, and we were genuinely happy to see the Syrian people finally free. Their liberation was the first time we witnessed justice prevail, which gave us a sense of hope. It reminded us that one day, we too might experience that kind of relief, in a liberated homeland where we are no longer afraid for our lives.

As the year drew to a close, we followed carefully the news about ceasefire talks, but 2024 is now ending without a moment of relief for us Palestinians.

This yearlong journey has left its mark on me: streaks of white in my black hair, a frail body, ill-fitting clothes, dark shadows beneath my eyes and a tired gaze that has lost its shine. But it is not just my physical appearance that has changed. This year has burned through my soul like wildfire.

But even ashes carry seeds. I feel that something new has emerged within me – a determination to stay behind, to persevere, to change, to withstand all attempts to erase my memories, my identity, my people.

The death and destruction have been overwhelming, but they have not managed to bring me down. If anything, I feel a deep desire to live – for many more years – in Gaza, in Palestine. I feel we owe a duty to the martyrs to resist, to stay on this land, to rebuild and to live. The responsibility of restoring our country rests on our shoulders.

I am no longer the man I once was, full of dreams of leaving Gaza and living an easy life far away. I will remain in my homeland, and I will continue to hold onto the belief that peace, no matter how fragile, can someday return to Gaza. I will continue to dream of a Palestine where its people can finally be free.

# Biden's ‘Netanyahu first, US second’ strategy was a total disaster

Hussein Chokr

“WERE there not an Israel, the United States of America would have to invent an Israel to protect her interest in the region.” These were the words of then-Senator Joe Biden as he made his argument for US support for Israel during a congressional debate on arms sales in the Middle East in 1986.

He clearly did not see the possibility of a clash of interests between Israel and the US back then. Ironically, 38 years later, his presidency would bring to the fore just how much US regional interests no longer align with the Israeli government's behaviour.

The Biden administration gave Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a free hand to do as he pleases, not just in Gaza, but across the Middle East. Netanyahu is doing everything he can to stay in power in order, which has meant prolonging Israel's war in Gaza and expanding Israeli aggression into Lebanon, Yemen and even Iran.

This has wreaked havoc in the Middle East and directly undermined US foreign policy interests in the region.

The Middle East holds significant strategic importance for the US. It is home to vast reserves of oil and natural gas which are essential to the US economy and the US-dominated global economy. Any disruption in the supply of oil or gas from the region can have unprecedented consequences for global energy security.

That is why, the US

Since the first Obama administration, the US has been pursuing a national security strategy that aims to reduce liabilities and stabilise the region in order to withdraw and focus resources on China and Russia, perceived as more pressing threats. As part of this policy, Washington has been working to integrate Israel with its Arab neighbours, establishing a Middle Eastern security arrangement similar to NATO, and boosting economic ties through initiatives like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. The Biden administration's National Security Strategy continued this policy, as it announced the end of the combat mission and withdrawal of US troops in Iraq and continued efforts to expand Israeli-Arab normalisation. But the US pivot out of the Middle East was put on pause indefinitely, when Biden pledged unconditional support for Israel in the aftermath of the October 7 attack by Hamas. Washington has been forced to increase its military presence in the region and spend more than \$22bn on military aid to the Israeli army and its own military operations in support of it. This unconditional commitment to Israel is undermining the US's long-term strategy of focusing on Russia and China and allocating more military aid to Taiwan, Ukraine, South Korea and Japan.

has favoured relative political stability in the region, especially after its 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the 2001-2021 occupation of Afghanistan demonstrated just how dangerous and costly military adventurism can be in the region.

Since the first Obama administration, the US has been pursuing a national security strategy that aims to reduce liabilities and stabilise the region in order to withdraw and focus resources on China and Russia, perceived as more pressing threats. As part of this policy, Washington has been working to integrate Israel with its Arab neighbours, establishing a Middle Eastern security arrangement similar to NATO, and boosting economic ties through initiatives like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.

The Biden administration's National Security Strategy continued this policy, as it announced the end of the combat mission and withdrawal of US troops in Iraq and continued efforts to expand Israeli-Arab normalisation.

But the US pivot out of the Middle East was put on pause indefinitely, when Biden pledged unconditional support for Israel in the aftermath of the October 7 attack by Hamas. Washington has been forced to increase its military presence in the region and spend more than \$22bn on military aid to the Israeli army and its own military operations in support of it. This unconditional commitment to Israel is undermining the US's long-term strategy of focusing on Russia and China and allocating more military aid to

Taiwan, Ukraine, South Korea and Japan.

For almost 15 months now, the US has mobilised its political, diplomatic, economic and military capabilities to stand behind Israel. It has deployed navy ships, aircraft carriers and troops in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and engaged in direct military activity in the region to help shield Israel.

On the international stage, it has provided unprecedented support for the Israeli government, attacking and defunding international institutions, undermining the UN and putting pressure on allies not to budge to public outrage about the genocide. US officials have unreservedly defended Israel's massive war on Gaza that has killed at least 45,000 civilians, the majority of them are children and women, displaced 1.9 million within the Gaza Strip and destroyed civilian infrastructure, schools and hospitals.

The US has stood behind Israel as it attacked and devastated Lebanon, killing more than 4,000 people, and as it invaded Syria, occupying even more territory in the southern part of the country. It supported Israeli provocation against Iran: the bombing of the Iranian embassy in Damascus and the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. It approved of Israeli bombardment of Yemen that has caused extensive damage to civilian infrastructure and interrupted crucial

humanitarian aid deliveries. Israel's uncontrollable aggression has been driven by Netanyahu, who believes prolonging and maintaining multiple conflicts, making Israelis feel unsafe and keeping his far-right allies satisfied will help him stay in power. Since he has been charged with fraud, breach of trust, and accepting bribes, maintaining his position as prime minister is the only way for him to enjoy immunity against prosecution. His controversial decision-making has led to deep political division between the different actors within Israel, causing an unprecedented societal split.

Yet, Biden has continued to stand by Netanyahu, basically putting him first – ahead of all US policy priorities in the region. All of this has thrown the Middle East into turmoil that will have long-lasting implications. The Iranian response to Israeli provocations – launching twice a mass missile attack on Israel – was unprecedented. It brought the region to the brink of war. And even though for now it seems Tehran has preferred deescalation, there is no guarantee that another round would not take place between the two archenemies, plunging the Middle East into a regional conflict.

Such a war would drag in multiple state and non-state actors, destroying the economy of Gulf states, and creating a policy quagmire for Washington. Even if such a scenario is avoided, Israel's uncontrollable aggression is motivating regional actors to arm up.

Militarisation of the region may not be limited to conventional arms. Already in May, Kamal Kharrazi, an adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, warned that “should Iran's existence be threatened, there will be no choice but to change [Iran's] military doctrine.” That is, motivation is increasing in Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, and so is public support for it.

Years of international negotiations to ensure the Iranian nuclear programme remains peaceful are being thrown out of the window because of US backing for Netanyahu's aggressive behaviour in the Middle East. This is also harming global efforts to counter nuclear proliferation, as other regional powers – including Saudi Arabia and Türkiye – may also start thinking seriously about nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, the global oil and gas supply remains vulnerable. The Houthis are continuing attacks on ships heading to Israel and its allies in the Red Sea, threatening the smooth flow of energy resources and other goods. Their demand for an end to the war in Gaza has not been met.

Bab al-Mandeb, where the Houthis operate, along with the Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz are key maritime passages through which nearly 40 percent of global oil supply passes. If Netanyahu is allowed to continue to escalate in the Middle East, this could result in major disruptions at these three chokepoints. The consequences for the US and

the rest of the world would be disastrous. Beyond the risks of regional war and a global economic crisis due to a spike in oil prices, Biden's “Netanyahu first” policy is threatening the global order. To defend and shield Israel, his administration has defied decisions by global political platforms like the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, and the UN legal arm – the International Court of Justice – to stop the war in Gaza.

The US's status as a host of the UN headquarters and a supposed guarantor of the international legal order and human rights has been exposed as a fallacy. Its behaviour is eroding the credibility of the post-World War II system it helped create and maintain and it risks causing its collapse.

In short, Biden's insistence on unconditional support for Israel has been a disaster for US foreign policy. In his blind belief in an immutable alliance, the ailing US president may well have dealt the worst blow to US strategic interests in the Middle East in years.

“There is no apology to be made, none, it is the best \$3bn investment we make.” Biden said back in 1986 during his speech. As his term comes to an end, the US president may do well to reflect on his unapologetic stance that has cost his own people billions of dollars of potential investment in social services and that has destroyed a national security strategy years in the making – all while supporting Netanyahu's genocide.

— Aljazeera

# The pope is right about Israel and Gaza. This is cruelty, not war

POPE Francis is a paradoxical figure. Despite leading a church with a long, egregious history of being synonymous with strife, injustice and abuse, the old, ailing Argentinian Jesuit strikes me, at his core, as a modest clergyman who abhors human suffering and misery.

Like you and me, the pope can see what Israel has done with such ruthless ferocity to besieged Palestinians for more than a year in the barren, dystopian remnants of Gaza and the occupied West Bank.

I believe that Francis understands that bearing witness to human suffering and misery on an almost incomprehensible scale requires a response, that silence under the awful, prevailing circumstances means, at the least, blithe acceptance and, at the worst, conscious complicity.

So, to his credit, the pontiff has said what needed to be said.

The pope has, in effect, abandoned neutrality in favour of a raw, refreshing honesty to declare – with candid language – his sympathy for and solidarity with the millions of Palestinian victims of Israel's relentless killing lust. I am convinced that Francis will be remembered for having taken an honourable stand at the right time for the right reasons while so many other “leaders” in Europe and abroad have armed an apartheid regime with the weapons and diplomatic cover to engineer a still unfolding 21st century genocide.

Francis will be remembered, as well, for rebuffing efforts to intimidate or bully him to qualify or retract statements made from “the heart” that Israel is guilty of “cruelty” as it goes methodically about reducing much of Gaza and the West Bank to dust and memory. Instead, bolstered by the truth and an apt

sense of righteousness, the pontiff has refused to step back or “soften” his remarks.

The pope's defiance is not only admirable but also tangible evidence that he does not intend to forsake Palestinians. So many charlatans have deserted them, claiming unconvincingly to be appalled by how many innocents have been killed and the gruesome manner of their deaths.

What have Pope Francis and the Vatican said and done to draw the apoplectic ire of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Francis will be remembered, as well, for rebuffing efforts to intimidate or bully him to qualify or retract statements made from “the heart” that Israel is guilty of “cruelty” as it goes methodically about reducing much of Gaza and the West Bank to dust and memory. Instead, bolstered by the truth and an apt sense of righteousness, the pontiff has refused to step back or “soften” his remarks. The pope's defiance is not only admirable but also tangible evidence that he does not intend to forsake Palestinians. So many charlatans have deserted them, claiming unconvincingly to be appalled by how many innocents have been killed and the gruesome manner of their deaths. What have Pope Francis and the Vatican said and done to draw the apoplectic ire of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the accused war criminal's legion of apologists at home and abroad?

Netanyahu and the accused war criminal's legion of apologists at home and abroad?

Israel's apoplexy began in earnest in February. The Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, denounced Israel's so-called military campaign as disproportionate given the number of Palestinians killed suddenly under constant bombing or slowly due to starvation and disease. “Israel's right to self-defence must be proportional, and with 30,000 dead, it certainly isn't,” Parolin said at the time.

Israel's response was as swift as it was predictable. Agitated diplomats attached to Israel's embassy in the Holy See issued a missive calling Parolin's comments “deplorable”.

Yes, I agree. The truth can at times be “deplorable”.

Andrew Mitrovica

Nevertheless, it remains the truth.

Since then, of course, the “deplorable” number of Palestinian casualties has ballooned with more than 45,000 killed – mostly children and women – with another 108,000 or so wounded, often grievously.

Meanwhile, scores of Palestinians have endured forced marches to and from phantom “safe zones” in Gaza where they are bombed while seeking futile refuge in makeshift “homes” amid the rubble of

freeze to death in flimsy tents engulfed by rain and mud. Then, in book excerpts published by the Italian daily La Stampa in late November, the pontiff argued that a number of international experts found that “what is happening in Gaza has the characteristics of a genocide”.

“We should investigate carefully to assess whether this fits into the technical definition [of genocide] formulated by international jurists and organisations,” the pope said.

Once again, Israeli officials reacted furiously, insisting that the pontiff's remarks were “baseless” and amounted to a “trivialisation” of the term “genocide”. The hyperbolic response was curious since the International Court of Justice at The Hague ruled near unanimously in January that South Africa had made a plausible case

demonstrating that Israel has displayed the intent to execute genocide.

As a result, the court was required, by international law, to proceed with a full hearing and, ultimately, to render a decision on the question posed by the pope: Is Israel culpable for the crime of genocide in Gaza?

Amnesty International delivered its verdict in early December, concluding “that Israel has committed and is continuing to commit genocide against Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip”.

Agnes Callamard, secretary-general of Amnesty International, said Israel's “specific intent” was “to destroy Palestinians in Gaza”.

“Month after month, Israel has treated Palestinians in Gaza as a subhuman group unworthy of human rights and dignity, demonstrating its intent to physically destroy them,” she added.

On reliable cue, Israel and its surrogates dismissed Amnesty International as a nest of anti-Semites in a pedestrian attempt to discredit its damning findings.

It is much harder to tar the spiritual leader of 1.4 billion Catholics with the same tired canard after he accuses you of “cruelty”.

In his Christmas address, Francis condemned the killing of children in an Israeli air strike a day earlier.

“Yesterday, children have been bombed. This is cruelty. This is not war. I wanted to say this because it touches the heart,” the pontiff said.

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Vatican's ambassador for a stiff talking-to to convey, reportedly, its “deep dissatisfaction” with the pope's blunt comments.

According to Israeli media reports, the meeting did not constitute a “formal reprimand”. I'm sure the Vatican was relieved.

What I find instructive is that the Israeli Foreign Ministry expressed its “deep dissatisfaction” with the pontiff's justifiable use of a three-syllable word and not the fact that its marauding forces have killed 45,541 Palestinians and counting in a little more than 14 months.

In any event, I think the pope showed remarkable restraint. He could have described the grief, loss and anguish that Israel has wrought in Gaza and the occupied West Bank – without a moment's regret or remorse – as obscene, abhorrent, or antithetical to decency and humanity, let alone the rules of “war”.

I suspect “cruelty” hit the sensitive mark because it is a stinging reflection of Amnesty International's finding that Israel's overarching intention is to mastermind the wholesale destruction of Gaza and the desperate souls whom it does indeed consider “sub-human”.

Israel's “cruelty” is deliberate. It is not a “mistake” or the regrettable by-product of the unexpected vagaries of war's “madness”. Cruelty is a choice.

The unspoken dividend of that choice is that the perpetrator derives an intoxicating measure of satisfaction, if not pleasure, at exacting its uninhibited revenge on a largely defenceless people.

That is the essence of cruelty. Pope Francis did not say that, but he might as well have.





ISLAMABAD: US Ambassador Donald Blome meeting with Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb at Finance Division.

## CCP imposes Rs275m in penalties

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has levied penalties totalling Rs 275 million in a significant crackdown on anti-competitive practices, in 2024.

These fines were imposed on companies found guilty of cartelization, collusion, and deceptive marketing in various sectors, including paint manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, dairy products, and Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG). This action underscores the CCP's ongoing efforts to ensure fair competition in Pakistan's markets, said a press release issued here on Tuesday.

As part of its policing efforts, the CCP issued 32 showcase notices to companies across sectors such as fertilizer, real estate, education, public procurement in power distribution companies, pharmaceuticals, and FMCG. These notices were in response to potential violations of the Competition Act related to cartel activities and deceptive practices.

Additionally, the Commission initiated seven fresh inquiries into indus-

tries like transportation, telecommunication, construction, and FMCG for suspected cartelization and collusion, which contravene sections 3 and 4 of the CCP Act. Several companies involved in sectors such as the transportation of edible oil, telecommunications, electric fan manufacturing, and construction were found to be in violation of anti-competitive laws. Meanwhile, FMCG, pharmaceutical, and services sectors were investigated for engaging in deceptive marketing practices, breaching section 10 of the Act.

Moreover, the CCP recovered Rs 100 million approximately in penalties from violators by successfully securing judgments in courts, marking the highest-ever penalty recovery since the Commission's inception. The CCP concluded 11 inquiries into cartelization cases in sectors like wheat flour, public procurement, energy, FMCG, civil aviation, and steel. Another four investigations into deceptive marketing were finalized in the FMCG, construction, pharmaceutical, and automobile sectors.

Furthermore, in 2024, the CCP approved 64 merger applications and granted 56 exemptions, predominantly in the FMCG, LNG, power, real estate, telecom, textile, and renewable energy sectors.

The Commission also issued a policy note to the Ministry of Science and Technology, recommending amendments to Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) regulations to mandate the inclusion of manufacturing and expiry dates on cement bags.

In a bid to enhance market surveillance, the CCP operationalized its Market Intelligence Unit (MIU), a cutting-edge initiative aimed at detecting anti-competitive practices. Through advanced data collection and analytical techniques, the MIU has already identified over 125 instances of market manipulation. This initiative promises to strengthen the CCP's ability to investigate and prevent anti-competitive behavior more efficiently, paving the way for a more transparent and competitive marketplace in Pakistan.

## Drugmakers to raise US prices on over 250 medicines

NEW YORK (Reuters): Drugmakers plan to raise US prices on at least 250 branded medications including Pfizer (PFE.N), opens new tab COVID-19 treatment Paxlovid, Bristol Myers Squibb's (BMY.N), opens new tab cancer cell therapies and vaccines from France's Sanofi (SASY.PA), opens new tab at the start of 2025, according to data analyzed by healthcare research firm 3 Axis Advisors.

Nearly all of the drug price increases are below 10% - most well below. The median price increase of the drugs being hiked Jan. 1 is 4.5%, which is in line with the median for all price increases last year.

The increases are to list prices, which do not include rebates to pharmacy benefit managers and other discounts.

Larger drug price increases were once far more common in the US but in recent years drugmakers have scaled them back after price hikes drew sharp criticism in the middle of the last decade.

"Drugmakers don't have much real estate any longer to increase prices over time, which means taking greater liberties on launch prices is really the only option they have in the face of expanded penalties for year-over-year price increases," 3 Axis President Antonio Ciacia said.

A Reuters analysis of prices for new drugs found that pharmaceutical companies launched new US drugs in 2023 at prices 35% higher than in 2022.

The over 250 drug hikes represent an increase from Dec. 29 last year when drugmakers unveiled plans to raise prices on more than 140 brands of drugs.

Drug companies are also reducing some prices on Jan. 1. Merck & Co (MRK.N), opens new tab plans to cut the list price of its heavily discounted diabetes drugs Januvia and Janumet "to align the list price more closely to the net price."

The US pays more for prescription medicines than any other country, and incoming President Donald Trump has vowed to lower drug costs by focusing on middlemen in the US healthcare system.

More drug price increases are likely to be announced by other drugmakers over the course of January - historically the biggest month for drugmakers to raise prices.

Pfizer raised prices of the most drugs on the latest list - more than 60 drugs. As well as a 3% hike on Paxlovid, the company raised prices on medicines including migraine treatment Nurtec and cancer drugs Adcetris, Ibrance and Xeljanz between 3% and 5%.

"Pfizer has adjusted the average list prices of our medicines and vaccines for 2025 below the overall rate of inflation - approximately 2.4% - across many products in our diverse product portfolio," Pfizer spokesperson Amy Rose said in an email. She said the increases help support investments in drug development and offset costs.

Bristol Myers raised the price of its expensive cancer cell therapies Abecma and Breyanzi by 6% and 9%, respectively.

## Pak Stock Exchange sheds 132 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) shed 132.09 points on Tuesday, a slight negative change of 0.11 percent, closing at 115,126.90 points as compared to 115,259.00 points on the last trading day.

A total of 1,236,873,705 shares were traded during the day as compared to 1,059,020,119 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs44,218 billion against Rs40,889 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 465 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 235 of them recorded gains and 188 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 42 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Nenergyco

PK with 213,352,120 shares at Rs7.85 per share, Pace (Pak) Limited with 66,219,268 shares at Rs8.09 per share and WorldCall Telecom with 65,770,728 shares at Rs1.78 per share.

Bata Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs104.48 per share price, closing at Rs2,018.85, whereas the runner-up was Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited with Rs91.16 rise in its per share price to Rs21,225.03.

Haleon Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs52.25 per share closing at Rs807.67 followed by Shahmurad Sugar Mills Limited with Rs47.31 decline to close at Rs425.82.

**Rupee sheds 08 paise against dollar**  
Pakistan rupee on Tuesday depreciated by 08

paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.55 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.47.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs278.10 and Rs279.60, respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by 13 paise to close at Rs290.08 against the last day's closing of Rs290.21, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen went up by 02 paise and closed at Rs1.78, whereas a decline of 26 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs349.70 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs349.96.

The exchange rate of the

Emirates Dirham increased by 02 paise and closed at Rs75.83, while the Saudi Riyal came down by 02 paise to close at Rs74.14.

**Gold rates remain unchanged at Rs272,600 per tola**

The price of 24 karat per tola gold remained unchanged at Rs272,600 on Tuesday, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The 10 grams of 24 karat gold and 10 grams of 22 karat also witnessed no change and were traded at Rs233,711 and Rs214,235 respectively.

Per tola and ten gram silver were sold at existing prices of Rs3,350 and Rs2,872.08 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market remained stagnant at \$2,614, the Association reported.

## IBA Karachi, Stanford Life Design Lab join hands with Sindh govt

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: December 2024: In a groundbreaking initiative, IBA leadership and faculty from Stanford University's Life Design Lab met with the Sindh government, led by Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, for a high-stakes strategy meeting. This collaboration, which began in California earlier this year, has now gained extraordinary momentum with the Stanford team stationed in Karachi to tackle the city's most pressing challenges from within.

The recent strategy meeting brought together key members of the Sindh cabinet, senior bureaucrats, and Stanford experts, focusing on how design thinking can address the critical issues faced by Karachi's 20+ million residents. From easing the traffic crisis to improving public safety and creating accessible open spaces for families, the discussions revolved around delivering swift, meaningful, and sustainable solutions.

The partnership's broader vision goes beyond Karachi's immediate challenges. Over the next three years, IBA team led by Dr. S Akbar Zaidi, Executive Director, IBA Karachi; Professor Azam Ali, Assistant Professor; IBA-SBS & Faculty Lead-Stanford & IBA Collaboration; Bill Burnett, Executive Director, Stanford Life Design Lab and Junaid Aziz, the IBA alumnus, Fellow and Faculty Member at Stanford's Life Design Lab, will work closely with the Sindh government to establish a new culture of problem-solving, training ministers, bureaucrats, and students to think differently and act decisively. The Chief Minister has tasked these committees with ensuring that no challenge-be it urban planning, environmental sustainability, or public welfare-is met with outdated approaches.

Syed Murad Ali Shah, CM Sindh, emphasized the significance of this collaboration, stating, "Karachi's challenges are immense, but so is our resolve. By bringing Stanford's world-class expertise and pairing it with local insight, we are charting a new course. Junaid Aziz's leadership



and his understanding of both Stanford's methodologies and Karachi's unique challenges make him an invaluable partner in this journey."

Under Junaid's guidance, Stanford's team and IBA's brightest students will begin working with ministers and provincial action committees formed specifically for this initiative. These teams aim to embed human-centered design practices within government processes, accelerating the pace at which solutions can be identified and implemented. Early prototypes include innovative ideas for traffic flow optimization, enhanced public spaces, and community-driven security measures, all designed to provide immediate relief and long-term benefits to Karachi's hardworking families.

Reflecting on his role, Junaid Aziz said, "Returning to Karachi and IBA, my alma mater, feels like a full-circle moment. This city has given me so much, and it's an honor to bring the tools I've learned at Stanford to create meaningful change here. The Chief Minister's visionary leadership and his deep commitment to Karachi inspire us to think big and act fast."

Speaking about the collaboration, Bill Burnett said, "This partnership is not just about solving problems but about creating a blueprint for innovation that Pakistan can lead with glob-

ally. Karachi is a city of incredible potential, and this collaboration demonstrates how local insights paired with global methodologies can create truly transformative solutions."

The Chief Minister's bold initiative to bring Stanford to Karachi underscores his dedication to not just managing the city's challenges but revolutionizing how they are approached. His ability to leverage his alma mater's resources and bring global expertise to the heart of Karachi speaks volumes about his vision and commitment.

At the heart of this initiative is Professor Azam along with Junaid, hailed as Karachi's prodigal son. Junaid, equipped with cutting-edge methodologies in design thinking and problem-solving, has returned to Pakistan to lead this transformative effort, bridging global innovation with local realities. The Chief Minister, himself an NED and Stanford alumnus, played a pivotal role in securing Junaid's time and Stanford's resources for Karachi, reaffirming his commitment to uplifting the city and its residents. As this collaboration unfolds, all eyes are on Karachi as it becomes a model for how academic-industry-government partnerships can create lasting impact.

## Asian stocks dip as Santa snubs Wall Street

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian stocks ended the year mainly in the red on Tuesday after worries about 2025 and profit-taking turned Wall Street's usual holiday period "Santa Claus rally" into a mini-rout.

The three main US indices all slumped around one percent on Monday, adding to Friday's losses, with Tesla down 3.3 percent and Facebook owner Meta off 1.4 percent.

Volumes were thin but brokers said investors were locking in gains after a bumper 2024, particularly for the "Magnificent Seven" troop of US tech giants.

Concerns about the slow pace of US interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve and uncertainty about incoming

president Donald Trump's tariff plans were also souring the mood.

"In Asia, notably China, tariffs may appear to be a manageable obstacle if they were the only concern," said Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management.

"However, China's economic difficulties go well beyond simple trade conflicts. The nation is also contending with serious domestic consumption challenges and self-induced setbacks in its technology sector," Innes said.

China's Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for manufacturing was 50.1 in December, signalling a third consecutive month of expansion, official data showed on Tuesday.

President Xi Jinping

said China would put in place "more proactive" macroeconomic policies next year, according to state media, with economists warning that more direct fiscal stimulus aimed at shoring up domestic consumption was needed.

Shanghai's Composite Index closed down 1.6 percent on the last day of the year at 3,351.76.

Stocks in Sydney, Taipei and Wellington were all down.

Tokyo was spared the year-end ennui after the Nikkei 225 shut up shop on Monday with its best year-end close since Japan's asset bubble burst in the 1990s.

Hong Kong was a rare bright spot among other

Asian indices on Tuesday, but only just, closing up 0.1 percent at 20,059.95.

Seoul also closed on Monday, before another day of tragedy and turmoil in South Korea.

Rescuers handed over the first bodies from the crash of a Jeju Air Boeing 737-800 to grieving families on Tuesday, South Korea's deadliest air disaster on its own soil in which 179 people were killed.

Boeing shares fell more than five percent on Wall Street on Monday before recovering.

On the political front, a South Korean court issued an arrest warrant for Yoon Suk Yeol, the impeached and suspended president who briefly declared martial law on December 3.

## Christmas celebrations organized

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: This year Hamdard University Attached Ruffayda Hamdard College of Nursing was assigned by the Hamdard University to arrange Christmas Celebrations with the theme, "Unity in Diversity" to foster unity among different segments of Pakistani society.

The Deputy Speaker Sindh Assembly, Honora-

ble Anthony Navid was the Chief Guest while His Grace Cardinal Joseph Coutts blessed this Celebratory-Cum-Thought Provoking event as Key Speaker.

Besides University's Vice Chancellor Prof Dr. Syed Shahib-ul-Hasan & Deans Prof Dr Asadullah Larak and Prof Dr Raza-ur-Rehman of the University, Bridg Dr Roliaz ul Haq, CEO, HUH and a large

number of Christian families of students, employees and guests at Madinat-ul-Hikmah Main Campus in Gadap Town met to commemorate the happiness and joy on the Birth of Lord Jesus Christ.

The hall was twinkling with colorful lights balloons and a beautifully decorated twinkling Christmas tree. The beautiful rhymes and Christmas songs sung by carol further added the

blissfulness of the X-Mas.

The Chief Guest Deputy Speaker Sindh Assembly Anthony Naved while speaking on the theme "Unity in Diversity" referred to the Quid-e-Azam's vision expressed in his historic address on 11th August 1947 of inclusive society. He said that this vision was incorporated in the 1973 Constitution and now it is in the implementing phase.

## Swat Trade Show 2024 organized by TDAP



**F.P. Report**

SWAT: The Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) organized Swat Trade Show 2024, from December -28- 29, 2024, at Nakreezay Event Complex, Mingora, Swat. The trade show was inaugurated by Muhammad Zubair Motiwala, Chief Executive of TDAP and Sheryar Taj, Secretary TDAP along with Muhammad Naseer, Senior Director General and Noman Basheer, Director General Peshawar

While welcoming the guests, Muhammad Zubair Motiwala, Chief Executive TDAP said that these trade shows promote trade and economic development of the country.

Addressing the concluding session of the two days Swat Trade Show 2024, Chief Guest Engr Amir Muqam, Federal Minister for Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs and States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) appreciated the efforts of TDAP.

He said that TDAP's efforts for empowerment and promotion of local businesses besides economic development of the

region are important.

Engr Amir Muqam also said that Swat trade show would help provide opportunities to local traders in expansion of their business and attract investment besides enhancing the country's economy significantly.

Emphasizing on the importance of trade shows, Muhammad Zubair Motiwala said that such shows will empower the business community and will enhance trade and development across diverse sectors and regions of Pakistan.

He also discussed about the rich heritage, culture and craftsmanship of Swat and its potential in economic growth of the country.

He further said that Swat produces high-quality fruits, honey, and furniture to exquisite handicrafts and gemstones. These products are not only a source of pride for our nation but also hold immense potential in international markets.

Noor Mohammad, President Swat Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Prof. Dr. Hassan Sher, Vice Chancellor Swat University, Salahuddin

Khan, President Apples Growers Association and Wajid Ali Khan, former minister for Forest Department, government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also attended the Swat Trade Show 2024.

The event reflected TDAP's dedication to empower local businesses and in promoting economic growth in the region.

The event brought together businesses, entrepreneurs and investors to showcase their products and services in an international mode on more than 80 stalls.

It offered business to business (B2B) meetings and networking opportunities. Trade Development Conference on trade-related topics, cultural performances and traditional food stalls were the allied trade promotional activities on the very occasion of the two days Trade show.

In the end, Sheryar Taj, Secretary Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), thanked all the guests, participants and organizers for successful trade show and assured of organizing these shows on regular basis.





In brief

Noori clinches double titles

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Gun and Country Club (GCC) Open Tennis Championships came to an end on Tuesday with Rohan Noori emerging as the champion in both the Men's Singles and Boys' Singles events. In the Men's Singles final, Rohan Noori defeated Adil Farooq from Islamabad Police in an exciting match, securing the title with a score of 8-5. Noori's double triumph was sealed when he won the Boys' Singles final, beating Mahd Mehmood with a score of 8-4. In the Ladies' Singles event, Shiza Sajjid took the title by defeating her younger sister, Lala Rukh in a thrilling final with a score of 8-6. The three-day tournament featured over sixty players competing in various events. The finals were attended by distinguished guests, including Nadeem Irshad Kiyani, Secretary Inter Provincial Coordination, who distributed prizes and certificates among the winners and runners-up. Other notable attendees included Tariq Mehmood Murtaza, Chairman Islamabad Tennis Association (ITA), Col Tufail Iqbal Din Zia, Secretary Pakistan Tennis Federation, Tufail Cheema, Secretary ITA and Imran Afraz Khan, Secretary Gun Club and Hamid ul Haq, former Davis Cup Captain.

Fresh calls for Rohit, Kohli to step down

NEW DELHI (Reuters): Speculation that India captain Rohit Sharma and batting stalwart Virat Kohli are set to call time on their Test careers has snowballed as the veteran pair continue to struggle in the five-Test series in Australia. India, who won their last two Test tours in Australia, went 2-1 down in the series after their stunning defeat in Melbourne on Monday, with the hosts needing only a draw in Sydney to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy (BGT). Opener Rohit has just one fifty and 10 single-digit scores in his last 15 Test innings, and even a move down the order failed to pay dividends for the 37-year-old. Under his captaincy, India have lost five Tests this season, equalling their unwanted record from 1999-2000 under Sachin Tendulkar. Kohli, one of the greats of the modern game, has not fared much better. The 36-year-old struck a century in the opening Test in Perth but had a wretched season overall with nine single-digit scores in 17 innings this Test season. Both New Zealand and Australia have exploited his vulnerability to left-arm spin and outside the off-stump line, rendering him a walking wicket at times. "Is it time to take a call on seniors Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli?" the Hindustan Times newspaper asked on its front page after the defeat in Melbourne, where India lost seven wickets after tea on day five. That sentiment was echoed among fans in the cricket-mad country where Rohit and Kohli are practically worshipped, with the term "happy retirement" trending on Monday. Both players quit T w e n t y 2 0 Internationals immediately after guiding India to their second 20-overs World Cup title in June. "Is the Rohit-Kohli retirement announcement round the corner?" asked the Indian Express. "The curtain is beginning to slide down from above; will they give themselves one more Test at Sydney with BGT still open.

## Novak Djokovic win season-opener but Kyrgios loses on return

BRISBANE (AFP): Novak Djokovic and Aryna Sabalenka launched their Australian Open preparations with straight-sets wins on Tuesday at the Brisbane International but Nick Kyrgios lost on his return from injury. Former world number one Djokovic, who is chasing a record 25th Grand Slam crown in January in Melbourne, eased to a 6-3, 6-3 victory over wildcard Rinky Hijikata. The 37-year-old Serb broke Hijikata once in the first set and twice in the second for a comfortable 74-minute win. Djokovic, now ranked seven in the world, was all business against the young Australian and always looked in control as he set up a second-round clash against fellow veteran Gael Monfils. "To start the new season with a win is obviously very important," said Djokovic, who is pursuing an unprecedented 11th Australian Open title. "But Hijikata was really good tonight and he made me work for it." Australian firebrand Kyrgios lost in three tight sets in his first singles match since June 2023. Kyrgios went down 7-6 (7/2), 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/3) to Frenchman Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard in almost two and a half hours as serve dominated. The 2022 Wimbledon

finalist Kyrgios, 29, is making his comeback following wrist reconstruction and other injuries over the past couple of years. Ahead of the Australian Open starting on January 12, big-serving Mpetshi Perricard said Kyrgios had shown enough to suggest that his comeback would be a success. Kyrgios played and won in the doubles with Djokovic on Monday. "Playing Nick here wasn't a good match-up for me," the 21-year-old Mpetshi Perricard said, asked about playing Kyrgios in front of his home crowd. "He did some good things, he played with confidence." The Frenchman, who has risen from 205 in the world at the start of 2024 to his current ranking of 31, fired down 36 aces. Women's world number one Sabalenka kickstarted her bid to win the Australian Open for a third consecutive time with a straight-forward win after a sluggish start. The Belarusian appeared bothered by the high humidity on Pat Rafter Arena in Brisbane, particularly during an error-strewn first set against Renata Zarazua. But after breaking Mexico's Zarazua at 5-4, the 26-year-old surged through the second set to wrap up the match 6-4, 6-0 in 65 minutes. "The first match is always a tricky

one," Sabalenka said. "It was a tricky start for me but I'm glad that I closed it out in the first set, and in the second set I felt like whatever I tried to do it would work for me. "So I'm really happy for the first win of the season." Sabalenka is bidding to be the first woman since Martina Hingis in 1997-99 to win three Australian Opens in succession. She will play Yulia Putintseva next after the Kazakh's 6-2, 7-5 win over American McCartney Kessler.

Raducanu pulls out of Australian Open warm-up with back problem

AUCKLAND (AFP): Former US Open champion Emma Raducanu pulled out of the Auckland Classic on Tuesday with a "back niggle" in a blow to her Australian Open preparations. Britain's Raducanu will now fly to Melbourne to begin rehabilitation ahead of the year's first major starting on January 12. The 22-year-old has suffered a series of injuries since bursting onto the scene with her New York triumph in 2021. "I've tried my best to be ready. I love Auckland and the fans here," the 56th-ranked Raducanu said.



BRISBANE: Novak Djokovic of Serbia plays a backhand in his match against Rinky Hijikata of Australia during day three of the 2025 Brisbane International at Pat Rafter Arena.

Pakistani athletes score big victories in 2024

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani athletes across multiple sports competitions have achieved significant international success in 2024, bringing global recognition to the nation. Snooker Champion Mohammad Asif secured his third world championship title by defeating an Iranian opponent further solidifying his status as a global sporting icon. The national volleyball team conquered the Central Asian Volleyball Championship, defeating Turkmenistan in a thrilling final match. Pakistani baseball players also celebrated by winning the United Arab Classic, defeating the host nation UAE and demonstrating their competitive spirit.

Paralympic athlete Haider Ali added to the nation's sporting glory by winning a bronze medal in discus throw, showcasing the incredible talent of Paralympic athletes. In powerlifting, athletes Twinkle, Sabil and Veronica Sohail dominated the Asian Pacific Powerlifting Championship, collectively winning an impressive fifteen gold medals. Martial arts saw another breakthrough with Shahzaib Rand making history by winning the Karate Combat Championship, marking a significant moment for Pakistani combat sports. The taekwondo team delivered an outstanding performance at the sixth Asian Taekwondo Championship in Indonesia, winning an impressive array of medals: three gold, three silver and two bronze. These achievements across diverse sports highlight Pakistan's emerging global sporting prowess and the exceptional talent of its athletes in 2024.

## Day two highlights from Begum Kulsum Saifullah Tennis C'ships

ISLAMABAD (APP): The second day of the 10th Begum Kulsum Saifullah Khan National Ranking Tennis Championships 2024 witnessed some standout encounters at the PTF-SDA Tennis Complex, Islamabad on Tuesday. In the Men's Singles first round, M. Hamza Aasim claimed a commanding win over M. Huzaifa Khan (6-0, 6-4), while Uzair Khan outlasted M. Talha Khan in a grueling three-setter (6-4, 5-7, 6-2). Abdullah Adnan delivered a strong performance against Bilal Asim (6-2, 6-3) and Muhammad Abid displayed impeccable form, defeating Asad Zaman (6-

0, 6-0). Shahzad Khan, Heera Ashiq, and Yousaf Khalil also registered convincing wins to advance to the next round. In the Boys 18 & Under category, Azan Shahid eased past Muhammad Dawood (6-2, 6-2), and Ruhab Faisal triumphed over Ismail Aftab (6-3, 6-3). M. Salar and Bilal Asim also secured victories, with the latter delivering a flawless double bagel performance against Hazrat Ali (6-0, 6-0). In the Boys 14 & Under competition, Rayyan Khan defeated M. Hamza Khan (4-0, 4-0), while Arsh Imran overcame Rajam Taha (4-0, 4-1). Mozam Babar

advanced through a walkover. The event, organized annually by the Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF), commemorates the late Begum Kulsum Saifullah Khan, mother of PTF Patron Senator Salim Saifullah Khan. It has attracted Pakistan's top-ranked players, including Aqeel Khan, Muhammad Shoaib, Muzammil Murtaza, Muhammad Abid, and Heera Ashiq, among others. As one of the most prestigious events in the national tennis calendar, the tournament provides a platform for seasoned athletes and rising stars to compete at the highest level.

## PSL 10 player draft likely to be shifted to Lahore

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The 10th edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) player draft is likely to be shifted from Gwadar to Lahore. Sources divulged on Tuesday that the venue for the domestic premium tournament draft is likely to be changed due to the logistical problems. Meanwhile, the broadcaster stated, "The venue of the PSL 10 draft has been changed." The sources privy to the development said that the franchises had expressed their reservations of travelling to Gwadar, citing logistical problems. PSL 2025 players' retention – date announced Earlier on Tuesday, the PSL administration revealed the date for the players' retention for the

forthcoming season 10 of the domestic marquee tournament. According to details, the players' retention will be announced on January 4. All the franchises will name the retained players from the previous season [PSL 9]. With the exception of the retained players, the drafting of rest of all the prayers will be held. 'Mighty' Australian David Warner registers for PSL 2025 : As the cricket world has geared up to bid farewell to 2024 in a bittersweet way, but the signing up of Australian former cricketer David Warner for the forthcoming season of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) is a big news for the fans, especially from Pakistan. According to details,

Warner, who had registered himself for the PSL for the first time, was having a claim to fame as the aggressive and blazing opening batter, who had not only represented at the international level, but also went onto play for various franchises and teams across the world. The PSL administration was eyeing targeting the bigwigs from different teams. So far, they went on to register household names including Warner, Tim Southee, Daryl Mitchell, and others. Meanwhile, the players' retention will take place on January 4, whereas the draughting for the marquee tournament will be held on January 11 in Gwadar, Balochistan.

## Arteta wants Arsenal to hammer away in title race

LONDON (AFP): Mikel Arteta has challenged Arsenal to hammer away at Liverpool's daunting lead in the Premier League title race. Arteta's side head into their New Year's Day clash with Brentford trailing nine points behind table-toppers Liverpool. The Anfield outfit have won 14 of their 18 league games this season to make them firm favourites to clinch a title that Arsenal expected to be in contention to win themselves. With champions Manchester City in turmoil, the third-placed Gunners hoped to capitalise after finishing as runners-up for the last two years. But Arsenal have paid the price for an inconsistent spell that leaves them well adrift of top spot, prompting Arteta to issue as rallying cry prior to their last game of 2024. "We have to continue to be like a hammer, be there every day, and if someone wins all the matches then we congratulate them and then go to the next season," the Spaniard said. "But if they don't, and in history that hasn't happened, then we will be there." Arsenal are bidding to win their first title since 2004, but will be without Bukayo Saka for an



extended period after the England winger was ruled out until at least March with a hamstring injury. The diagnosis is set to see Saka miss at least nine more Premier League matches as well as Arsenal's FA Cup third round tie against Manchester United, and their two-legged semi-final League Cup clash with Newcastle. Saka's absence, coupled with a knee injury for Raheem Sterling, is likely to see Leandro Trossard handed a run on Arsenal's left-hand side, with Gabriel Martinelli switching wings to fill the void left by the 23-year-old. Trossard, 30, has been in and out of Arteta's team since his move from Brighton two years ago, but the Gunners boss said he

always remained committed. "He's a really good character, but they all want to play. Leo has shown a lot more consistency in the last 12 months. Raise the level, and if he plays at that level then he will play like anyone else," Arteta said. "He has the capacity to do something special in the final third. He's played as a left winger, as an attacking midfielder, he's played as a nine and he's a player that I value a lot. "Leo naturally is a bit of a moaner but I like that because he's very competitive and you have training sessions, he's always busy with the referee's decision, because he wants to win. "He can make an impact because he's got that drive, that anger which says, 'I'm gonna show you', and I love that about him."

## Mohammad Abbas shows Pakistan there's more to pace bowling than pace

Danyal Rasool

Even career arcs that appear predestined require an inordinate amount of good fortune often taken for granted, or forgotten altogether. Had Bach been on another continent where the organ had still not been widely adopted as a musical instrument, or Shakespeare come of age before London became the global centre for theatre, it is difficult to imagine their reputations surviving into this age so embellished. One's environment and circumstance invariably influence the individual, and it's almost certain those who didn't have circumstantial serendipity vastly outnumber the few who have. Which brings us, perhaps not quite neatly, but linearly enough, to Mohammad Abbas. If his skillset were a UCAS form and his birthplace a university of choice, Pakistan would hardly be number one. He is a medium-fast bowler in a land where such characters have at best been ignored, at worst ridiculed. He's not even from "up north", which, as anyone who has ever heard Wasim Akram commentate, might imagine is a nebulous magical land which has learned to specialise in sling-shooting lumps of cork and leather at furious velocity. No, Abbas is a playwright in a land of cave paintings. A kind of

hopeless romantic who, when he worked at a leather factory and welder in his home town of Sialkot, reportedly used to say all he needed was an opportunity. In Pakistani cricket, it can take a lot more than that, but Abbas emerged, making no apologies for his modest pace, and set about outshining anyone and everyone who could hurl the ball quicker than him. But in Pakistani cricket, Abbas knows that lack of pace will always count against him. He may have averaged 23 per wicket in his first four years, a number only bettered by Imran Khan for Pakistan; frankly, just about every cricketing number tends to be bettered by Imran for Pakistan. However, it would not stop Abbas being excluded for nearly four years, partly because that lack of pace was shown up in South Africa in 2019, a tour defined by high pace which only served to magnify Abbas' toothlessness when he lacked it. And that is an inherent disadvantage for any medium-fast bowler, Pakistani or otherwise. A fast bowler might be getting smashed around on a flat wicket, but will invariably produce moments that amplify the excitement, subtly indicating the height of their ceiling. It might be a bouncer that has a batter scrambling to get out of the way of, the one inswinging



yorker that has them hobbling, or that long follow-through which brings them nose-to-nose with a batter. A medium-pacer out of form has... nothing. The same gentle delivery stride, harmless trajectory, a declawed amateur being torn apart by professionals. So when Abbas was given another shot, having spent years impressing domestically, particularly in England where his nagging accuracy and ability to move the ball off the seam can prove particularly lethal, South Africa, the site of his most prominent enervation, seemed a risky place to do it. Not least because his pace had dropped even further from that already low starting point; in 2018, he averaged 127.55 kph across Test cricket - by no means

express, but, with his combination of six-pence accuracy, sideways movement, and use of the crease, remarkably destructive. But he wasn't a young man when he started, and approaching his 35th birthday, those numbers had been on a glidepath towards a level unsustainably slow in the modern international game. And in the first innings in Centurion, that average had dropped to its lowest level; he was down to 123.67 kph, sending down multiple deliveries that didn't crack 120. In a game where three of South Africa's four quicks were repeatedly breaching 140kph, Abbas was negotiated with ease. Even the seam movement was conspicuously lacking, and the one wicket he managed was assisted by the pitch rather than any sort of

plan Abbas deployed. Even on his last, unsuccessful tour of South Africa, his average pace was 126.15 kph. Just like Abbas has taught Pakistan a few things about the misconceptions around the correlation between pace and potency, he had picked up a few things along the way himself. He was not, after all, naive enough to think the one arrow in his quiver would suffice, and has busied himself adding to his arsenal over the years. A glance through his social media accounts shows you scores of videos of Abbas in the gym, doing fitness work, weight training, cardio exercises, anything that helps him get stronger even as age sends his body the other way. In the second innings, with Pakistan defending a low total and consistency more valuable than sporadic explosive brilliance, Abbas would bring all of that to bear. Broken only by stumps on day three and the lunch break on day four, he sent down 19.3 overs, the oldest bowler in the attack never once taken off. His accuracy was almost a given; 86 of his 117 deliveries hit a hard length outside off stump taking three wickets, with a further 17 that targeted off stump producing the other three at a rate of more than one every over. But if you wondered if this

prolonged legwork would have an even more deleterious effect on his pace, think again. Instead, his speed was up to 125.57, and the bouncer Graeme Welch, his coach at Hampshire, had encouraged him to add to his game was every bit as uncomfortable to deal with as an express pacer's. But what also mattered was where he bowled these deliveries from. For the 18 Tests before this Abbas played for Cricviz has data for, his release position has hovered between 2.014m and 2.068m. With the exploitation of bounce more important here than perhaps anywhere else, Abbas' average release point at Centurion was 2.103m, more than half of his entire variance across the other Test matches in his career. It all paints a picture of a bowler in a world entirely outside his comfort zone managing to find ways to bend itself to his will. It may not have been quite enough in the end at SuperSport Park, but he knows how to look for ways to make sure that changes next time. And, above all, Abbas has understood there is more than one way to make batters uncomfortable. He may never be able to fit the Pakistani mould, but he appears on the right track to ensure the Pakistani mould can expand wide enough to include him. —(Cricinfo)





## In brief

### Federal Secretary EAD visits NBF Headquarters

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Secretary for the Economic Affairs Division (EAD) Dr. Kazim Niaz visited the National Book Foundation (NBF) Headquarters here today. He was warmly welcomed by Managing Director (MD) of NBF Murad Ali Mohmand. During the visit, Dr. Kazim Niaz was briefed on NBF's mandate and its significant role in promoting book culture and reading habits across Pakistan. He toured the Book Museum, Wall of Honour, NBF Bookshop, and the Indonesian Corner, appreciating the Foundation's efforts in creating literary spaces that encourage learning and creativity. Murad Ali Mohmand highlighted NBF's achievements in developing single curriculum textbooks and their successful implementation in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), and other regions nationwide. Kazim Niaz praised NBF's initiatives and expressed his admiration for its dedication to advancing education and fostering a culture of reading. He emphasized the importance of books as tools for intellectual growth and national development. The visit concluded with a reaffirmation of the government's commitment to supporting NBF in its mission to make quality books accessible and affordable for all.

### IRSA releases 30,800 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Tuesday released 30,800 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 38,800 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1472.05 feet and was 74.05 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 16,400 cusecs and 10,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1132.80 feet, which was 82.80 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 5,600 cusecs and 4,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 16,900, 15,200, 20,600 and 1,100 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 10,600 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 6,200 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

### Police arrest 25 gamblers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police arrested 25 gamblers and recovered Rs 47,580 stake money, 21 mobile phones and other items from their possession, said a police spokesman here on Tuesday. He informed that Gujjar Khan police conducted a raid and arrested 18 gamblers namely Sakhi Mehmood, Ghulam Abbas, Khalil, Imran, Arshad, Zia ur Rehman and others, who were allegedly involved in betting. Police recovered Rs 31,500, 16 mobile phones, and other items from their possession. In another raid, R.A.Bazar police netted 7 gamblers namely Aftab Ahmed, Shehbaz, Mehran, Adnan and others and recovered Rs 16,580 cash stake money, five mobile phones and other items. Cases have been registered against the accused while further investigations are under process. Divisional Superintendents of Police said that gambling is the root cause of other evils and those involved in such crimes do not deserve any concession.



ISLAMABAD: ICT Police deploys 3,000 security personnel to uphold law and order, ensuring public safety on New Year's Eve in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

## 2025 to bring prosperity in country: Ayaz

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has extended heartfelt greetings to the nation on the advent of the New Year, expressing optimism that 2025 would usher in peace, progress and prosperity for Pakistan. Ayaz Sadiq remarked that the dawn of a new year brings with it renewed hope and aspirations, said a news release issued here Tuesday. He emphasized that this moment provides an opportunity for introspection, reaffirming our collective resolve to steer the country towards progress. Highlighting the pivotal role of the Parliament, he reiterated its commitment to promoting democratic values, ensuring good governance and addressing public concerns. Ayaz Sadiq urged all political parties to shun their differences and resolve issues through dialogue, emphasizing the need to work together for the nation's development. He expressed the hope that the

coming year would be marked by unity, stability and prosperity of the country. The Speaker further expressed the confidence that the year 2025 would open new avenues of development for the country and elevate its stature on the global stage. He appealed to the people to rise above political and social divides and contribute collectively to build a stronger, prosperous and peaceful Pakistan. Ayaz Sadiq appealed to the nation to offer special prayers for the freedom and self-determination of their Palestinian and Kashmiri brothers and sisters, who continue to endure oppression and brutality. He expressed hope that 2025 would bring peace and harmony to Palestine and Kashmir. Ayaz Sadiq urged the international community to take notice of the grave human rights violations occurring in Palestine and Kashmir and to play an active role in ensuring a just resolution to these conflicts.

Deputy Speaker National Assembly Syed Mir Ghulam Mustafa Shah also congratulated the nation on the eve of the New Year. He highlighted that the New Year offers an opportunity to draw inspiration from past achievements and learn from challenges to move forward. Ghulam Mustafa emphasized that a strong and vibrant Parliament is key to Pakistan's development and stability. He urged the public to foster unity and solidarity and work collectively for the country's progress and prosperity. The Deputy Speaker prayed to Allah Almighty that 2025 would be a year of peace, growth, and blessings for Pakistan, bringing joy and prosperity to the lives of its citizens. Reaffirming the commitment of the Parliament, Ghulam Mustafa assured that every effort would be made to enact effective legislation to address public issues and protect their rights.

## Syedaal calls for awareness campaign to promote education in Balochistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Chairman Senate Syedaal Khan on Tuesday emphasized the need for creating an awareness campaign to promote educational programs and creative activities for the youth of Balochistan. He expressed these views during a meeting with Federal Secretary for Information and Broadcasting, Ms. Ambreen Jan, according to a news release issued by the Senate Secretariat. During the meeting, the Federal Secretary briefed the Deputy Chairman on the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting's overall performance, operational procedures, and strategic policies. She also briefed the Deputy Chairman about

new initiatives and detailed road map for enhancing public information and media outreach. Lauding PTV's efforts in covering Senate activities, Syedaal Khan said, "PTV is a national asset, and it is our responsibility to address its challenges." Acknowledging PTV's efforts, the Deputy Chairman praised the broadcaster for its responsible coverage of the upper house proceedings and its long-standing role in delivering reliable news to the public. "Pakistan Television is a national asset, and resolving its issues is our collective responsibility," he said. He urged PTV to collaborate with experts in developing programs that address the challenges

faced by remote communities, thereby raising awareness and facilitating actionable solutions. The Deputy Chairman noted that PTV's extensive network ensures seamless connectivity across the country, including its most distant regions. He commended the channel's consistent efforts in promoting the nation's culture and regional values, stating, "PTV has played a pivotal role in preserving and promoting our heritage. We must connect our younger generation to these values and traditions." He assured the Federal Secretary of full cooperation in resolving any issues and extended his best wishes for her future endeavours.

### 40% work on Rawalpindi Ring Road completed

RAWALPINDI (APP): About 40% of the work on the 38.3 kilometers long Rawalpindi Ring Road project has been completed. This was informed during a briefing to Commissioner Rawalpindi Engineer Aamir Khattak at Bant on Tuesday. The commissioner visited the Rawalpindi Ring Road and Duhucha Dam for review of the pace and quality of work on the mega projects.

It was told that the deadline for the completion of Ring Road project was December 2025. It was further informed that if funds were provided on time the project with the current pace would be completed before the stipulated time. As regards the Duducha Dam, the commissioner was apprised that the overall physical progress was 18 percent.

The land acquisition process had been completed and currently the excavation of spillways was underway. Perennial flow pipes had also been laid, which were now being concreted.

Excavation of the coffer dam was also underway, it was added. The project was scheduled to complete in two years, and would be expected to provide 35 million gallons of water per day to the residents of Rawalpindi.

The commissioner on the occasion directed to complete the projects within the stipulated time.

If needed more workforce should be mobilized to ensure timely completion of the projects, he added. He said the Ring Road was a big gift from Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz to the people of Rawalpindi. After its completion, the city's traffic problems would be resolved, he added.

The commissioner directed the land acquired for the Ring Road should be got vacated. He also directed the process for provision of compensation to the victims of Daducha Dam should be expedited.

## UAE envoy celebrate new year with children at SOS village

ISLAMABAD (APP): The United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ambassador to Pakistan, Hamad Obaid Alzaabi, and his wife, Maitha Majid Al Suwaidi on Tuesday celebrated the arrival of the new year with children at the SOS Children's Village in the federal capital, emphasizing the values of resilience, hope, and humanity.

Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador Alzaabi expressed gratitude and joy at sharing the special moment with the children, highlighting their remarkable spirit and potential. "It is a privilege to share this occasion with those who embody resilience,

hope, and the spirit of our shared humanity," he remarked.

The Ambassador underlined the significance of the festive season as a time to reflect on the bonds that unite people across borders and cultures. "Our visit to the SOS Children's Village serves as a reminder of the importance of nurturing and supporting the young hearts of our future. Together, let us commit to fostering love and compassion in our communities," he added.

Extending new year greetings, Ambassador Alzaabi expressed his aspirations for a brighter

tomorrow, marked by peace and security for all. He reiterated the commitment to building a harmonious world where every child thrives in an environment of love and care.

Concluding his remarks, he conveyed his best wishes for prosperity and progress for both Pakistan and the UAE in the coming year.

The visit by the UAE Ambassador and his spouse to the SOS Children's Village underscores the enduring friendship between the two nations and their shared commitment to supporting vulnerable communities.



## Police to take strict action against one-wheelers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police have finalized foolproof security arrangements to ensure law and order during New Year's eve celebrations and police officers have been directed to take strict action against one-wheelers and aerial firing. According to a police spokesman, Rawalpindi district police on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi, Syed Khalid Hamdani, would utilize all available resources to protect the citizens, prevent aerial firing, fireworks and one-wheeling on the New Year night. More than 6600 officers of Rawalpindi Police have been deployed with all activities monitored via CCTV cameras, he said. He further informed that more than 800 traffic war-

dens would regulate traffic on city roads on Tuesday night. 32 special pickets have been set up across the city to prevent one-wheeling, the spokesman said adding, additional pickets have also been set up in the jurisdiction of all the police stations to prevent aerial firing and fireworks. A ban on aerial firing, fireworks and one-wheeling has been imposed and strict action would be taken against the violators. FIRs would be registered against those involved in aerial firing, he said and informed that Dolphin Force, Mohafaz Squad, and police station mobiles would be on patrolling duty in different city areas to ensure security. On New Year night, effective arrangements have also been

made for the security of the churches and worship of the Christian community, he added. He informed that the police officers have been directed to remain on high alert and monitor anti-state elements closely. The spokesman said that the activities such as one-wheeling, aerial firing, and unruly behavior would not be tolerated, warning that troublemakers harassing women or citizens would face immediate detention. Protection of lives and property of the citizens and enforcement of law would be ensured at all costs, the police spokesman said. The citizens are encouraged to report violations such as one-wheeling, arms display or aerial firing by calling the police helpline at 15, he added.

## Talal urges unified effort for political, economic stability

ISLAMABAD (APP): Talal Chaudhry, a senior leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), on Tuesday emphasized the importance of political stability, the elimination of terrorism, and economic stability as key factors for Pakistan's sustainable economic growth.

Commenting on the Prime Minister's five-year National Economic Transformational Plan 2024-29, titled "Udan Pakistan: Homegrown National Economic Plan," he emphasized that the unified efforts of all stakeholders would lead to positive outcomes for a prosperous Pakistan.

In 2013, he said, the country was on the brink of default, with a weak rupee and rampant price hikes. However, former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and his team immediately after assuming powers revived the economy, controlled inflation, and soon afterwards discussions began about Pakistan's imminent rise to becoming a developed nation. But after 2018, all the achievements were reversed due to political instability, with the return of terrorism, and a divided nation.

He urged all stakeholders to strengthen Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's efforts to achieve the goal of a prosperous Pakistan and a strong economy, working towards the vision of Pakistan envisioned by the nation's founder, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

## ANF recovers over 10.6 kg hashish

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in an operation at Peshawar Airport recovered 10.6 kg hashish, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Tuesday.

He informed that in an operation, a British citizen of Pakistani origin was arrested and ANF recovered 10.6 kg hashish from his trolley bag. Hashish was concealed in boxes. The accused was leaving for London via Doha. Further investigations are underway under the CNS Act.

He said that the smugglers continue to use modern methods to smuggle drugs. ANF is vigilant and determined to combat drug smuggling at the national and international levels, the spokesman added.



RAWALPINDI: Drum performer sitting around fire to warm themselves at Muree road due to cold weather in city. —INP Photo



Shoreline plans implemented

KABUL (BNA): The Head of the Panjshir River Basin Authority reports that four shoreline reinforcement projects implemented over the past year have prevented the destruction of 1,000 residential homes and 300 hectares of agricultural land in the province. According to the Bakhtar News Agency, Mawlawi Fazlullah Adel stated that these projects, which include the construction of retaining walls, were executed in the Shutul, Anaba, Rokha and Dara districts.

Khost begins market project

KHOST (BNA): The Khost Municipality has begun constructing a new market for grain sellers with a budget of 135 million Afghanis. The market will be built in the second district of Khost city, covering an area of 20 jeribs of land. It will include 600 shops, a hotel, a mosque, parking spaces, and other essential facilities. Qari Bismillah Bilal, the mayor of Khost, stated that relocating businesses to new areas will ease traffic, expand the city, and improve its overall appearance.

Shah wa Arus dam inaugurated in Kabul

KABUL (Ariana News): The Ministry of Energy and Water announced on Tuesday that the Shah wa Arus dam project in Kabul's Shakardara district has officially been inaugurated.

The ceremony, attended by senior officials from the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), marks a significant milestone in the country's efforts to improve water management and provide sustainable resources for its citizens.

The dam, valued at approximately \$53 million, was constructed by the Ministry of Energy and Water with the dual objectives of enhancing water management and supplying drinking water to Kabul's residents. The project is seen as a critical step in addressing the capital's water scarcity challenges.

Several high-ranking

IEA officials attended the inauguration ceremony, including Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs; Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs; Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs; and Abdul Latif Mansour, Acting Minister of Energy and Water.

Baradar emphasized the critical importance of water management, highlighting that it is a key priority for the Islamic Emirate. He stressed that the effective management of water resources and the development of energy infrastructure are crucial for the country's future prosperity.

In his speech, Baradar underscored the growing value of water as a key economic asset in global poli-

tics, stating, "Water is increasingly recognized as a vital economic factor in international relations. In some countries, its value exceeds that of oil and precious minerals."

He also acknowledged Afghanistan's challenges due to years of conflict and limited investment in water infrastructure.

"Unfortunately, due to the wars and various internal and external factors, Afghanistan has not made the necessary investments in managing this precious resource," Baradar explained. "As a result, seasonal rains and climate change have led to frequent flooding, causing significant damage and loss of life."

Mawlawi Abdul Kabir described the completion of the Shah wa Arus dam as a clear demonstration of the Islamic Emirate's commit-

ment to the nation's development. He called the project a symbol of the IEA's determination to promote prosperity and improve the lives of Afghan citizens.

Abdul Salam Hanafi also praised the dam's completion, calling it a significant step forward in the country's water management efforts. "This project reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring the sustainable use of water resources for the benefit of the people," he said.

Abdul Latif Mansour, the Acting Minister of Energy and Water, further highlighted the broader vision for Afghanistan's water and energy sectors. He noted that the leadership of the IEA has already approved plans for four additional major dam projects, including the Lalander Shatoot Dam, which is set to begin



construction next year.

The Shah wa Arus dam stands at a height of 77 meters and has the capacity to regulate 30 million cubic meters of water annually.

This will allow for the irrigation of 2,700 to 3,500 hectares of agricultural land and provide 5 million cubic meters of drinking water for Kabul. The dam is also

capable of generating 1.2 megawatts of electricity, further contributing to Afghanistan's energy needs.

This project is expected to have a far-reaching

impact on both the environment and the livelihoods of thousands of Afghan families, particularly in the areas of agriculture and clean water access.

'85% of payments to martyrs' families and disabled completed'

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled has announced that 85% of monthly payments to disabled individuals, orphans, and widows have been completed.

According to the ministry's spokesperson, 650,000 disabled individuals are registered with the ministry. However, some have been removed from the list due to non-compliance with the ministry's guidelines and laws.

Faisal Khamoosh, the ministry's spokesperson, stated: "Some individuals who did not meet the criteria of our guidelines and laws have been removed from the list. For example,

orphans who have become adults, disabled individuals or orphans whose economic conditions have improved, or families that are financially well-off."

Mohammad Anwar, a 38-year-old who visited the Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled to inquire about his payments, said that he has been paralyzed since the age of one.

He told TOLONews: "I came here to ask why, after being biometrically registered and receiving a card in 2023, only six months of payments were made, and then they stopped. I am disabled and face many challenges. I came to follow up on my payments, but they

told me to wait until 2025."

Esmatullah, another disabled individual, said: "We received three payments of 3,000 afghani each month. We are grateful for this. Now we are here to request more assistance, especially in terms of food supplies."

Humaira, another disabled person, added: "We request help, whether it's food supplies, firewood, or coal. We need support and ask for cooperation."

According to statistics from the Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled, 650,000 individuals are registered with the ministry. Among them, 190,000 are disabled, 94,000 are widows, and 370,000 are orphans.

Hanafi meets head of IE Political Office

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, the Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs, met on Tuesday with Alhaj Mohammad Suhail Shaheen, the Head of the Islamic Emirate's Political Office in Qatar.

During the meeting, Suhail Shaheen provided a detailed report on the activities, accomplishments, and future plans of the Political Office in Qatar to the Deputy Prime Minister. He emphasized that the office continues to play a constructive and proactive role in strengthening the Islamic Emirate's relations with regional and global countries while safeguarding its interests.

Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi praised the efforts of the Political Office in Qatar, acknowledging its contributions to defending the Islamic Emirate's interests and fostering ties with both the host nation and other regional and international countries.

He urged the office's officials to focus on expanding these relations based on mutual respect and constructive engagement with regional and global nations.

Development projects completed in Nuristan

NURISTAN (BNA): Local authorities in Nuristan province report the completion of various development projects this year, funded with approximately 680 million Afghanis by the Islamic Emirate and \$10 million by international organizations.

Qari Zainul Abidin Abid, the Governor of Nuristan, told Bakhtar News Agency that these projects, implemented across the province's center and districts, included the reconstruction of major and secondary roads, and initiatives related to electricity, healthcare, agriculture, and education departments.

Meanwhile, residents of Nuristan have expressed satisfaction with these projects, stating that they have brought positive changes to their lives and created employment opportunities for the youth in the region.

Nuristan hosts first gemstone auction, selling over 8 million afn: In the first-ever gemstone auction in Nuristan province, gemstones worth more than 8 million Afghanis were sold.

According to Bakhtar News Agency, the auction of precious stones was held in Barg-e-Matal district of Nuristan province in the presence of local officials and representatives of relevant departments.

Mawlawi Gulam Qadir Haidari, the district governor of Barg-e-Matal, described this initiative as an important step toward transparent and responsible sales of precious stones.

He further called on all miners and traders to henceforth sell precious stones in the presence of officials and through auctions.

355 development projects initiated: Economy Ministry

KABUL (TOLONews): At least 355 development projects have been initiated this solar year (1403) across various sectors in the country, with some already completed and operational, according to the Ministry of Economy.

Abdul Rahman Habib, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Economy, told TOLONews that all these projects have been funded by the country's internal revenue, with 54 percent focused on infrastructure.

According to Abdul Rahman Habib, 19 other projects are currently in the procurement phase.

The spokesperson stat-

ed: "Throughout this year, around 355 development projects funded by internal revenue are included in the development budget. All these projects are designed and implemented to create job opportunities, gradually reduce poverty, and ensure economic stability.

The largest share of the development budget is allocated to the infrastructure sector, with approximately 54% of resources spent on infrastructure programs."

Meanwhile, some experts believe that working on large-scale projects that provide employment opportunities for the peo-

ple benefit Afghanistan's economy and that these projects should be prioritized based on the country's needs.

Ismail Zadran, an economic analyst in Afghanistan, told TOLONews: "These projects can be valuable for Afghanistan's economy because every project implemented in Afghanistan not only advances the economy but also provides job opportunities for impoverished individuals."

Issa Mobarez, another economic analyst, said: "Prioritization is necessary—identifying which projects are essential, how

they should be implemented, and which projects generate the most revenue. The more revenue we earn and the more revenue-generating projects we focus on, the better results we achieve and the more investments we can make."

According to the Ministry of Economy, 157 projects from previous years remain incomplete, with work still ongoing. Various Islamic Emirate institutions have also developed plans for launching new major projects next year to reduce poverty and promote economic growth.

Afghan and Chinese officials hold talks



KABUL (Ariana News): Chinese Ambassador to Kabul Zhao Xing met with acting Afghan Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani and discussed bilateral issues, including the Wakhan Corridor.

According to a statement from the Interior Ministry, the two sides discussed the Wakhan Corridor's strategic importance, improving trade relations, and expanding passenger flight operations.

Both sides underscored

the importance of deepening bilateral cooperation and taking concrete steps to advance common interests.

Meanwhile, Afghan officials in Badakhshan province dismissed reports of Pakistani forces in the Wakhan district.

"There have been no credible reports confirming the presence of the foreign military in the area," state-run Bakhtar News Agency quoted Ehsanullah Kamgar, Badakhshan police spokesman, as saying.

Kamgar added that Afghan forces are fully prepared to tackle any potential threats along the borders.

The Wakhan Corridor is a narrow strip of territory in Afghanistan's Badakhshan province that links to China's Xinjiang region.

It also separates Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region to the north from Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and Gilgit-Baltistan region.

UAE funds construction of 150-bed hospital

PAKTIA (TOLONews): Officials in Paktia province of Afghanistan have announced the commencement of construction of a 150-bed hospital spanning 25 acres of land in the city of Gardez.

According to officials, the hospital is being built at the recommendation of Khalifa Sirajuddin Haqqani, acting minister of interior, and with financial support from the United Arab Emirates.

The project, costing approximately \$5 million, is expected to be completed within the next two years.

Miraj Gul Adel, Paktia's Director of Public Health, said: "This hospital, with a capacity of 150

beds, will be constructed to high standards on 25 acres of land at an estimated cost of \$5 million."

Mohammad Sharif Mangal, Director General of Border Police at the Ministry of Interior, said: "The doors of this hospital will not only be open to this zone but to all Muslim patients in the region. This hospital is being built with financial support from the UAE and under the special directives of Minister Khalifa Sahib."

Several residents of Paktia have urged the interim government and donor agencies to take further steps to strengthen the healthcare sector in the province.

Mohammad Yousuf, a

resident of Paktia, said: "This hospital is being built under the guidance of Khalifa Sahib and with the support of the UAE. We are very happy and grateful for this initiative. We hope more such welfare projects will be undertaken, such as building hospitals, schools, and other useful projects."

Mohibullah, another resident of Paktia province of Afghanistan, said: "We call on the UAE to expand their assistance, as they have done so far, and continue supporting us."

Officials in Paktia province have also announced plans to begin constructing 12 additional health centers in the near future.

Doctors warn of increased pneumonia

HERAT (TOLONews): Officials at Herat Regional Hospital report a rise in respiratory illnesses, particularly pneumonia among children, as the weather gets colder. Around 1,000 children suffering from pneumonia visit the hospital daily for treatment, officials said.

Mirwais Abedi, the head of the pediatric department at Herat Regional Hospital, stated: "Many children do not receive timely treatment. Despite providing all the necessary facilities, we still face fatalities. Families should take their children, even if they are suffering from a common cold, to the nearest health center."

Meanwhile, some patients' families have expressed satisfaction with the improved services at the hospital.

Wahid Shah Haidar, one such family member, said: "The hospital provides the required medicines directly from their own supply."

Another family member, Abdul Wadood, said: "We brought our patient here yesterday, and they are now doing better. The care provided has been excellent."

Doctors identify cold weather, weak immune systems, unhealthy diets, and the spread of colds as the main causes of pneumonia in children.

Mohammad Qasim Rahimi, a physician, explained: "To prevent this disease, hygiene must be maintained. Patients with pneumonia should be under care and follow a proper diet."

Officials at Herat Regional Hospital also said that sick children from neighboring provinces such as Farah, Badghis, and Ghor are brought to the hospital for treatment. However, they emphasized that the hospital's pediatric facilities are insufficient to meet the needs of all patients.

Korea pledges \$5m to help Afghan families

KABUL (Ariana News): The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in Afghanistan has announced the receipt of a \$5 million donation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea.

This contribution will enable WFP to provide urgent food assistance to vulnerable families, support maternal nutrition, supply daily school snacks for children, and bolster livelihoods and resilience activities in rural communities.

The donation arrives at a critical juncture in Afghanistan, where one-third of the population—around 15 million people—are projected to face severe food insecurity during the challenging winter months.

"Winter in Afghanistan is unforgiving. With no work and no food, families face the impossible choice between heating their homes or feeding their children," said H.E. Moon Sung-hwan, Chargé d'affaires of the Republic of Korea to Afghanistan.

"Currently, one-third of

Afghanistan's population—nearly 15 million people—are going hungry and need food assistance to survive. The Republic of Korea stands in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan and remains committed to supporting families most in need."

The US\$5 million contribution will enable WFP to assist nearly 37,000 food-insecure individuals with 2,000 metric tons of fortified wheat flour, vegetable oil, pulses, and salt. Over 46,000 malnourished mothers will receive specialized nutritious food to prevent malnutrition, and nearly 47,000 primary school children will benefit from daily, nutritious snacks as part of WFP's school feeding programme. Additionally, the funding will support over 860 families in activities that aim to improve livelihoods and enhance community resilience against climate-related shocks.

"Afghanistan remains one of the world's most severe hunger hotspots, and the outlook for many fami-

lies is grim," said Hsiao-Wei Lee, WFP Country Director in Afghanistan. "The rising rates of malnutrition present a dire situation, with nearly 3.5 million children and 1.2 million mothers expected to become malnourished in the coming year. It is thanks to the generous investments of partners like the Republic of Korea that we are able to reach women and children with critical assistance."

The Republic of Korea has been a consistent supporter of WFP's efforts in Afghanistan, contributing a total of US\$36 million over the past five years. This places Korea among WFP's top ten donors for Afghanistan, reinforcing its strong commitment to humanitarian assistance in the country.

As Afghanistan grapples with widespread food insecurity, the ongoing support from international partners such as the Republic of Korea plays a crucial role in providing life-saving aid to those in desperate need.





ISLAMABAD: Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Sahir Shamshad Mirza exchanging views with Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf at Naval Headquarters.

## President promulgates Income Tax (Amend) Ord

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has promulgated the Income Tax (Amendment) Ordinance, 2024, introducing significant changes to Pakistan's tax structure.

The ordinance, which amends the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001, aims to increase revenue generation and promote transparency in the tax system. The tax rate for banking companies has been increased to 44 per cent for the tax year 2025, which is expected to generate approximately Rs. 70 billion for the government by December 31, 2024.

The tax rate for banking companies will be reduced to 43 per cent in 2026 and 42 per cent in 2027 and subsequent years. The tax rate for small companies remains unchanged at 20 per cent, while the rate for all other companies is 29 per cent. The ordinance explains the method for calculating the ratio of total advances to deposits for banks. The government has set the "Type of Company-Rate of Tax" for banks in the ordinance.

The tax rate for a banking corporation would be 44per cent for the 2025 tax year, 43per cent for the 2026 tax year, 42per cent for the 2027 tax year and beyond, 20per cent for small businesses, and 29per cent for all other businesses.

## PHC seeks response from HEC

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has postponed the hearing of a case regarding the postponement of the entry test for the Higher Education Commission's scholarship due to the deteriorating law and order situation in Kurram district. The court has asked the administration to respond within 14 days and adjourned the hearing till 16th January.

During the hearing, a two-member bench comprising Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhal and Justice Dr. Khurshid Iqbal heard the case. The lawyer for the petitioner informed the court that hundreds of candidates are taking the test for 55 seats allocated to Kurram district, but the law and order situation is uncertain. He suggested that alternative test centers should be provided, as the current situation is not conducive to holding the test.

The Additional Advocate General informed the court that the law and order situation in Kurram is bad, and people from different areas of the district cannot move freely. He stated that the situation is so dire that people from one area cannot even visit another area.

## UNsays Israel must face consequences over Gaza

GENEVA (AFP): United Nations rights experts on Monday said Israel must face the consequences of "inflicting maximum suffering" on Palestinian civilians in Gaza, alleging Israel was defying international law and being sheltered by its allies. "International humanitarian law comprises a set of universal and binding rules to protect civilian objects and persons who are not, or are no longer, directly participating in hostilities and limits permissible means and methods of warfare," the 11 experts said in a joint statement. "Rather than abide by these rules, Israel has openly defied international law time and again, inflicting maximum suffering on civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory and beyond.

"Israel continues to face no real consequences, largely due to protection offered by its allies." The Gaza war was triggered by the Hamas-led October 7, 2023, attack on Israel. That resulted in 1,208 deaths, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Israel's retaliatory military campaign has killed more than 45,500 people in Gaza, a majority of them civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry that the UN considers reliable. The experts highlighted alleged crimes against humanity committed by Israel "including murder, torture, sexual violence, and repeated forced displacement amounting to forcible transfer." They also noted alleged war crimes including "indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian objects... the use of starvation as a weapon of war" and "collective punishment."

## Gaza hospitals on 'brink of total collapse'

NEW YORK: A UN report says Israel's claims that Gaza hospitals are being used for military purposes by Palestinian armed groups are "vague" amid continuing Israeli attacks on health facilities protected under international law.

The report – released on Tuesday by the UN human rights office – said Israeli strikes targeting hospitals and their surroundings in the Gaza Strip have pushed the territory's healthcare system "to the brink of total collapse with catastrophic effect on Palestinians' access to health and medical care". The 23-page report looked at the period from October 7, 2023, to June 30, 2024. During this time there were at least 136 attacks on 27 hospitals and 12 other medical facilities, inflicting significant casualties among doctors, nurses, medics, and other civilians while causing significant damage to, if not the complete destruction of, civilian infrastructure. The report highlighted that international humanitarian law explicitly protects medical personnel and hospitals as long as they do not engage in or are not used to commit acts harmful to the enemy outside their humanitarian function. — Aljazeera

tion as a weapon of war" and "collective punishment."

They said civilians were protected persons and did not constitute military objectives under international law. "Acts aimed at their destruction in whole or in part are genocidal," they added. The experts called for urgent, independent and thorough investigations into alleged serious violations of international law.

"Israel's continued impunity sends a dangerous message... Israel and its leaders must be held accountable," they said. The experts said they were particularly alarmed by Israel's operations in the northern Gaza Strip. Since October 6 this year, Israeli operations in Gaza have focused on the north, with officials saying their land and air offensive aims to prevent Hamas from regrouping. "This siege, coupled with expanding evacuation orders, appears intended to permanently displace the local population as a precursor to Gaza's annexation," the experts said.

UN rights experts are independent figures mandated by the Human Rights Council. They do not therefore speak for the United Nations itself. The 11 experts included the special rapporteurs on internally displaced persons; cultural rights; education; physical and mental health; arbitrary executions; the right to food; and protecting rights while countering terrorism.

Francesca Albanese, the special rapporteur on the rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, was also among the experts. Israel has demanded her removal, branding her a "political activist" abusing her mandate "to hide her hatred for Israel."

## Russia, Ukraine trade dozens of attacks

MOSCOW, KYIV: Russia launched a heavy aerial attack on Ukraine hitting the capital, Kyiv, and other regions with a volley of missiles and drones. Ukraine's air force said on Tuesday it downed six out of 21 Russia-launched missiles overnight. Russia used 40 drones to attack the country, the air force said on Telegram. Air defence units shot down 16 and 24 more failed to reach targets.

Ukraine's air force reported a ballistic missile threat at 3am (01:00 GMT) with at least two explosions heard in Kyiv minutes later amid a number of attacks throughout the country. Another missile alert in Kyiv was issued at 8am (06:00 GMT), followed by at least one explosion in the city. Missile debris fell in the Darnytskyi district of the capital, with no reports of casualties or damage.

Meanwhile, authorities in the northeastern Sumy region reported attacks near the city of Shostka, where Mayor Mykola Noha said

12 residential buildings were damaged as well as two educational facilities. Noha said some "social infrastructure objects" were destroyed, without providing more details. Ukraine's air force also reported missiles and drones targeted several other regions.

The strikes come as the nearly three-year conflict rages on, but its course is uncertain with United States President-elect Donald Trump to soon take office. Trump has promised to end the war and threw into doubt whether vital US military support for Kyiv would continue. Ukrainian military intelligence also said on Tuesday one of its naval drones – the Magura V5 maritime drone – destroyed a Russian Mi-8 helicopter and damaged another one in the Black Sea. Ukraine's GUR spy agency said it was the first time a Ukrainian naval drone had downed an air target.

While there was no comment from Russia, Mikhail

Razvozhaev, the Russia-appointed governor of Sevastopol in Crimea, said on Telegram two sea drones were destroyed near the coast overnight and Russian defences downed four unmanned aerial vehicles attacking the city. Russia's Ministry of Defence said air systems shot down 68 Ukrainian drones overall in several regions of the country.

On Monday, President Joe Biden announced the US will send an additional \$2.5bn in weapons to Ukraine as his administration works quickly to spend all the money it has available to help Kyiv fight off Russia before Trump takes office.

The war broke out in February 2022 with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. About half of Ukraine's energy infrastructure has been destroyed since, with Kyiv's Western allies providing air defence systems to help it protect critical infrastructure. — Aljazeera

## CJCSC visits Naval HQs

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Sahir Shamshad Mirza visited Naval Headquarters Islamabad and met Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf.

Matters of mutual interest, contemporary geo-political situation and emerging maritime security challenges were discussed during the meeting. General Sahir Shamshad Mirza appreciated the role of Pakistan Navy in ensuring maritime security in the region.

Meanwhile, the Command and Staff Conference of Pakistan Navy concluded at Naval Headquarters, Islamabad. The conference was chaired by Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf. The forum reviewed the maritime situation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and deliberated on measures to ensure safety and security of national sea trade passing through the region.

During the conference, preparations for the upcoming PN multinational Exercise AMAN and the maiden AMAN Dialogue were reviewed to ensure the befitting conduct of these momentous events of international significance. Moreover, the forum also discussed matters related to the geo-strategic environment, national security, operational preparedness, training, and troops welfare. Comprehensive briefings on important ongoing and future developmental projects of Pakistan Navy were also presented to Chief of the Naval Staff.

Chief of the Naval Staff emphasized on the importance of strengthening maritime security and maintaining combat readiness to effectively respond to any aggression against Pakistan. He commended the initiatives undertaken to enhance capabilities through the acquisition of emerging technologies.

The Naval Chief also expressed satisfaction with the operational preparedness of Pakistan Navy in the face of prevailing maritime challenges and praised the morale and motivation of troops at all levels. The Command and Staff Conference is the apex decision-making body of the Pakistan Navy, where Chief of the Naval Staff, along with all Principal Staff Officers and Field Commanders, reviews the Pakistan Navy's policies and plans.

## PM's package to boost growth: Tarar

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar said on Tuesday that the prime minister's homegrown economic reforms package will significantly improve citizens' lives, stimulate growth, and strengthen the economy.

In an exclusive statement regarding the prime minister's five-year National Economic Transformational Plan 2024-29, titled "Udan Pakistan: Homegrown National Economic Plan," Tarar revealed that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will unveil the ambitious agenda today.

Tarar stated that Pakistan has moved from the verge of default to stability and is now on the path to progress. He expressed gratitude, highlighting improvements in all economic indicators.

## Police disperse MWM protesters, several arrested

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Following multiple engagements with the protesters, the Karachi police finally launched a crackdown to clear roads as the Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM) continued its sit-ins at various locations in the country's economic hub for the eighth consecutive day on Tuesday.

Protesters pelted stones at police, torched their six motorcycles and a check post at Numaish Chowrangi, prompting the cops to fire tear gas shells and baton-charge activist of the politico-religious party staging sit-in at the Numaish Chowrangi on M A Jinnah Road. Police also demolished central sit-in camp of the MWM established at Numaish Chowrangi. The law enforcers also took several protesters into custody and shifted them to the police station.

Taking swift notice of the incident, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah said that nobody would be allowed to damage public and private property under any circumstances. Legal action will be taken against those who set vehicles ablaze, vowed the chief minister. He said: "Everyone has the right to protest but damaging civil property is mischief."

The politico-religious party has been staging sit-ins in the metropolis against the Parachinar crisis despite government's warnings. The prolonged protests were not only damaging the country's economy but disrupting daily life in the metropolis as people were unable to travel freely. Besides Numaish Chowrangi, protests were being staged near Safari Park on University Road, Kamran Chowrangi, Lasbela, and Abbas Town.

At Kamran Chowrangi, more police force was summoned as the situation grew tense this morning upon continued blockage of roads. The senior superintendent of police (SSP) East and Sindh Rangers personnel arrived at the site to end the sit-in but to no avail. Additionally, the participants of the sit-in at Karman Chowrangi pegged tents, while police tried to negotiate with the protestors, who refused to end the sit-in and open roads.

Earlier on Tuesday, the protests at Five Star Chowrangi, Shamsuddin Azeemi

Road, Surjani Town, Ancholi, and Golimar Chowrangi were called off to clear pathways for commuters. Whereas, police removed obstructions and dispersed protesters from the Abul Hassan Isphani Road after a brief spell of clashes with protesters.

The Sindh CM, while addressing media in Thatta, said the provincial government had last night asked the demonstrators to hold the protest at one place only without disturbing other citizens. However, he said, they did not fulfil their commitment to end the city-wide protests. The Sindh CM said the ongoing sit-ins at four more places would be removed through administrative action and talks. "We are not against peaceful protests, nevertheless, they have hurt people," he said.

The provincial government sent relief goods for Parachinar as well, he said, adding that the issue of Parachinar would be resolved in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, not here. Murad said the government was taking action against the sit-ins which might make some people angry. "It is the government's responsibility to address it if common men are troubled," he said.

Last night, the MWM and a delegation of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) addressed the media after a meeting on ongoing protests and sit-ins across the city. PPP leader Saeed Ghani expressed solidarity with the bereaved families of the Parachinar tragedy victims, saying: "We are deeply grieved over the incident and extend our condolences to the martyrs' families."

Paying tribute to the resilience of women and children participating in the protests, the PPP leader remarked: "We salute their courage." He added: "It is your right to protest." However, he urged organisers of the protest sit-ins to limit their demonstrations to a single location. On the occasion, AIG Javed Alam also spoke to the media. According to him, additional security personnel have been deployed across the city to ensure security of the sit-ins. MWM leader Allama Hassan Zafar Naqvi said: "We respect your opinion." However, he noted that it is not possible for him to give a definitive answer right now as various sit-ins have different organisers.

## Bugti vows to eradicate terrorism with help of nation

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Chief Minister of Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti paid tribute to martyrs and reiterated the national unity to eliminate terrorism in the country.

Addressing a passing out parade of Counter-Terrorism Force in Quetta, Sarfraz Bugti emphasised that the heroes of the nation have left no stone unturned in protecting the homeland. He remarked, "While everyone serves the nation, it is the forces that shed their blood for the country."

The chief minister highlighted the ongoing attempts to spread terrorism through the manipulation of young minds. He also asserted that the nation and its soldiers will thwart the nefarious designs of terrorists. He assured that the entire nation would unite to thwart the terrorists' ambitions. CM Bugti urged the

newly graduated cadets to perform their duties with integrity, emphasizing the importance of protecting citizens, highways, and national assets.

"You must confront terrorists boldly, day or night, and send a message that the sons of Balochistan are a solid wall against them," he said. Sarfraz Bugti warned that the enemy is cowardly and cunning which funded by RAW and these terrorists manipulate innocent minds.

He said despite the attack on the training school and the loss of 200 lives, the school is still running. Sarfraz Bugti also promised support for the families of martyrs, stating, "We will take care of the families of our martyrs; they reside in our hearts."

Meanwhile, the Balochistan Government's spokesman Shahid Rind

said that the Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti has taken notice of the closure of National Highways. He said this while addressing a press conference here that provincial government has imposed section 144 in the province, various national highways of Balochistan were closed in protest since the previous day causing problems for public in the area. "Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti had said on the first day that peaceful protest is the right of everyone," he said.

Shahid Rind said that the provincial government has always allowed protests saying that no one would be allowed to close national highways in protest. He said that Grand Health Alliance (GHA) would implement the High Court orders regarding the protest.



KARACHI: Police officials firing tear gas shell after clash between police and Shia community members.

## Media safety in Pakistan remained under attack in 2024: Report

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Press Foundation's (PPF) in its annual report said today that the year 2024 drew to an end with media safety under attack in Pakistan and the space for free expression tightly controlled both offline and online.

According to the PPF report, during the year, at least two journalists' murders to be in connection to their work were of Bachal Ghunio and Khalil Jibrani. Both of whom were killed in targeted attacks while two cases of murders of journalists, Nasrullah Gadani and Kamran Dawar, remain under investigation by PPF.

The year was a mix of political protests, internet shutdowns, and policies and legislation, both proposed and passed, that would increase policing of free expression particularly online. In 2024, journalists continued to come under attack with unfortunate patterns of violence against the

media being repeated including targeted killings of journalists for their work, abductions, arrests and detentions, physical violence, threats both online and offline, and legal action.

The report also mentions 72 instances of assault, four instances of abduction, 12 instances of attacks on property, five instances of arrests, 12 instances of detentions, 14 instances of case registration, eight instances of FIA action, including call-up notices, case registration, involving at least 202 persons, two instances of legal action, two instances of placement on the Exit Control List (ECL), 14 instances of online harassment, five instances of threats, 31 instances of censorship and restrictive regulatory directives, 19 instances of internet, mobile connectivity, and social media platform disruptions, including the ban on X.

The year began with a caretaker government at the helm ahead of a delayed general election finally held in February, the results of which were

contested by opposition parties. Multiple waves of protests, predominantly by the opposition party, the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), were held throughout the year, during which journalists became the target of violence both by law enforcement, and political party workers and supporters even when they indicated they were from the media.

Despite this, neither have political parties made any effort to develop policies of engaging with the media during such events, nor have authorities taken practical steps to ensure that journalists are not targeted in the crossfire during protests. Additionally, media professionals have faced threats offline as well as harassment online.

While the media was in some instances directly targeted, the environment for free expression they worked in was also significantly tightened. At the same time, mixed messages and little clarity were provided by authorities taking action,

and a lack of meaningful consultations with stakeholders leaving citizens in the dark.

In an environment of direct attacks against the media and a tightly restricted landscape for free expression as well as disrupted access to information online, media professionals in Pakistan have to not only worry about their physical safety as attacks against them continue but also face challenges in collecting and disseminating news created through regulations and legislations, and repeated disruptions to internet access.

Between January and December 2024, the Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) has documented at least 162 confirmed attacks on journalists and media professionals in connection to the work and attempts of censorship to regulate and restrict free expression either through punitive measures or regulation: The report also recorded four restrictive directives by PEMRA, eight other directives,

orders, or actions that were tantamount to censorship, and remarks by the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa targeting journalists. In addition, there were legislative and policy-level measures that impacted media safety and free expression.

These include measures taken, proposed, and in process, including: The formation and repealing of the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA); passing of the Punjab Defamation Act, 2024; proposed PECA Amendment Bill 2024 that proposes forming the Digital Rights Protection Authority; plans for implementation of a national firewall; and registration and restrictions on Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) Internet Disruptions.

The year has been marred with internet disruptions and issues with connectivity (mobile and internet). This began ahead of elections through documented internet disruptions that continued into election day. At the end of the year, at least

19 instances of disruption to internet access, social media platforms, and mobile services have been documented. While the importance of digital spaces as mediums of expression should be increasing, the state has clamped down and pushed for regulation and control of online spaces.

In a significant move, X, formerly Twitter, was first restricted on election day and then following the election results on February 17. It remains inaccessible in Pakistan without a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to date. While the courts have since been informed that X was blocked due to national security, initially, there was no clarity on why X had been closed with no authority taking responsibility, including the government or the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA). It is ironic that despite a 10-month ban on X, government leaders including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif continue to post on X.