

RAWALPINDI: Pak-China Joint Exercise Warrior-VIII between Pakistan Army and Chinese Army of was conducted. Three weeks' long Exercise in Counter Terrorism domain is 8th in the series of bilateral exercises being held annually. Distinguished Visitor's Day (DVD) Ceremony of the Exercise was conducted at Tilla Field Firing Range on 10 December 2024.

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has decided to expand the federal cabinet, planning to add 10 new members. The expansion is expected to be announced this month. The move is seen as an effort to bring in experienced and seasoned politicians, as desired by PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif. The new additions to the cabinet are expected to include PML-N leaders.

Barrister Gohar calls for dialogue

— says May 9 issue must be resolved

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan urged the National Assembly to allow the political dust surrounding the events of May 9 to settle, emphasising the need for dialogue and accountability.

Addressing the lower house, Barrister Gohar said, "Enough is enough! We demand a fair resolution of the injustices we have faced. This parliament must act as the platform for dialogue. We have formed a negotiation committee, which should not be mistaken as a sign of weakness."

He warned that failure to provide a solution through dialogue would leave the party with no choice but to return to the streets for protests. The PTI chief slammed the violence inflicted on his supporters, claiming they were targeted despite being peaceful. "Our people faced oppression, bullets were fired at them. Nowhere in the world are unarmed protesters treated with such brutality. Look at recent protests in Brazil and other countries—did they fire on demonstrators who entered government buildings?"

Referring to an incident outside parliament, Gohar rejected Defence Minister Khawaja Asif's claim that Ali Amin Gandapur's guards were responsible for the firing. "It is absurd that the government refuses to acknowledge that straight bullets were fired on protesters," he remarked. Responding to accusations of exploiting ethnic sentiments, Gohar dismissed allegations of playing the Pashtun card. "Our people who protested were unarmed. If you have evidence of PTI workers using weapons, bring it forward. These baseless charges only serve to accuse us," he asserted.

The National Assembly was informed on Wednesday that Gwadar

port is fully operational, equipped to handle general cargo, containers, and other operations. Responding to a query during the Question Hour in the National, Parliamentary Secretary Planning Development and Special Initiatives Wajih Qamar said the port accommodates vessels of up to 50,000 DWT and possesses the requisite infrastructure to support bulk cargo and container handling efficiently.

She said multiple shipments under the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement have been successfully processed. Replying to another question, Parliamentary Secretary Finance Saad Waseem Sheikh said Personal Income Tax rate for the salaried class has not been increased in the current fiscal year budget.

To a question, Parliamentary Secretary Commerce Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti expressed the hope that rice exports can achieve the mark of five billion dollars during this fiscal year. He said Pakistan's rice exports reached a notable 3.8 billion dollars in last fiscal year, rising from 2.1 billion dollars in 2022-23.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti said from July to October this year, the grand total of rice exports saw an approximate 48.81 percent increase in value and 43.77 percent rise in quantity as compared to the same period in 2023-24. Replying to a Calling Attention Notice, Parliamentary Secretary Cabinet Division Sajid Mehdi said the government is working on various measures, including legislation, to check spread of fake news on social media platforms. He said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has established a Task Force with the aim to curb fake news on social media.

Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan Engineer Amir Muqam, on Wednesday called upon the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to prioritize govern-

nance and address the pressing issues faced by the people of the province.

Speaking on the floor of the National Assembly, the minister expressed concern over the deteriorating situation in Kurram, a district of KP. He said that he, along with the Governor, had visited Kohat to participate in a grand jirga aimed at resolving the matter.

He highlighted that an All-Parties Conference was convened in Peshawar; however, he regretted that the Chief Minister and representatives of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chose to boycott the event. Amir Muqam stressed that efforts to address the challenges in the province were made beyond political affiliations, urging all stakeholders to set aside political biases and work collectively to restore peace in the region.

He reiterated that maintaining law and order is primarily the responsibility of the provincial government while assuring the federal government's readiness to assist upon the province's request. The minister criticized the political exploitation of Pashtuns, pointing out that while the PTI chief's sons reside in London, Pashtuns are being misled into participating in protests. He emphasized the need for legal action against those who incite and mobilize individuals for such activities, only to abandon them while fleeing across multiple districts.

He also condemned the unlawful protests that violated High Court orders, describing them as attempts to release a jailed individual. Amir Muqam affirmed that issues concerning Pashtuns have been raised in the federal cabinet and other relevant forums. He assured that investigations would be conducted based on concrete evidence rather than unsubstantiated allegations, ensuring fairness and transparency throughout the process.



ISLAMABAD: Outgoing High Commissioner of Bangladesh, Muhammad Ruhul Siddique pays a farewell call on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.



Jawan martyred, 7 militants killed

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Seven Khwarij were sent to hell in two separate engagements in North Waziristan.

An intelligence based operation was conducted by the Security Forces in general area Miran Shah, North Waziristan District on reported presence of Khwarij. During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location as a result of which four Khwarij were sent to hell.

In another encounter that took place in general area Spinwam, North Waziristan District, own troops successfully neutralized three more khwarij. However, during the intense fire exchange, one brave son of soil, Lance Naik Muhammad Amin (age: 34 years, resident of District Faisalabad), having fought gallantly, embraced Shahadat.

Sanitization operation is being conducted to eliminate any other Khwarij found in the area as Security Forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe-out the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve.

Russia tells citizens not to travel to US

MOSCOW (AFP): Russia has warned its citizens not to travel to the United States and other Western countries, claiming they could be "hunted" by the authorities in those states.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova issued the warning in a news briefing on Wednesday, saying Russians could be caught in the crosshairs of perilous relations with the US. "Trips to the United States of America privately or out of official necessity are fraught with serious risks," she said, describing US-Russia relations as "on the verge of rupture". Russians should also avoid travelling to Canada and US allies in the European Union, said Zakharova, describing those nations as US "satellites". The US also advises its citizens against travelling to Russia, saying "they may face harassment or detention by Russian security officials" or "arbitrary enforcement of local laws" based on their nationality.

Russian and US diplomats say ties between the two countries are worse than at any time since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis due to the grinding war in Ukraine. The US has been giving it \$62bn in military aid since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Taliban refugee minister 'killed in Kabul blast'

KABUL (Reuters): The Afghan Taliban's acting minister for refugees, Khalil Rahman Haqqani, has been killed in a blast in the country's capital Kabul, his nephew Anas Haqqani said on Wednesday.

Khalil Haqqani became a minister in the Taliban's interim government after foreign forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021. He was a senior leader of the Haqqani network, a group blamed for major attacks during the 20-year war, according to the US State Department. Khalil was the brother of Jalaluddin Haqqani, who founded the feared Haqqani network. The deceased minister was also the uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani, the current interior minister of Afghanistan.

The Haqqanis are said to be engaged in a struggle for influence within the Taliban authorities. According to press reports,

they are pitted as a pragmatic faction up against supporters of the severe interpretation of Islamic law in line with the Taliban's supreme leader based in Kandahar. Several senior Taliban leaders have been killed since their return to power, including provincial governors, commanders and religious clerics, mostly in attacks claimed by Daesh.

Violence has waned in Afghanistan since the Taliban forces took over the country in 2021, ending their war against the United States and Nato-led foreign forces. "We lost a very brave Mujahid," Anas Haqqani told Reuters, using the Taliban's term for its fighters, meaning a holy warrior. "We will never forget him and his sacrifice." It was not immediately clear who was behind the blast.

The Taliban took over Afghanistan in 2021 as



foreign forces withdrew, vowing to restore security, but attacks have continued in urban areas. In 2022, a blast took place near the interior ministry, led by Haqqani network leader Sirajuddin Haqqani, killing four people.

In 2023, Daesh claimed an attack outside the Taliban-run foreign ministry that killed at least five. The US Treasury classified Khalil Haqqani as a "Specially Designated Global Terrorist" in 2011 and the State Department offered a \$5 million reward for information leading to his arrest.

US flays Taliban ban on medical education for women

F.P. Report

WASHINGTON: The United States has strongly condemned the Taliban's recent decision to prohibit women from pursuing medical education, calling it a grave violation of fundamental human rights.

The new directive marks yet another move in the Taliban's systematic efforts to curtail the rights of Afghan women and girls, severely impacting their access to education and healthcare. This decision follows the Taliban's August edicts under the 'Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice' law,

which has been widely criticized for its oppressive measures against women.

Previous restrictions barred women from seeking medical care from male providers and imposed strict travel requirements that necessitate a male guardian. By banning women from medical training, the Taliban further endangers the health and safety of not only Afghan women but the broader population.

"The United States remains steadfast in its support for the rights of Afghan women and girls," the statement declared, urging the Taliban to

revoke this directive and all others undermining women's access to education and essential services.

The US also called on the international community to unite in unequivocally condemning these actions and supporting the Afghan people, particularly women and girls, who face systematic oppression. The Biden administration emphasized its commitment to advocating for the full, equal, and meaningful participation of Afghan women and girls in all aspects of society, reaffirming its support for their rights amidst escalating restrictions under Taliban rule.

Toppling of Assad result of US-Israeli plan: Iran

DUBAI (Reuters): Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday that the toppling of Syrian President Bashar Assad was the result of a plan by the United States and Israel.

One of Syria's neighbors also had a role, he said. He did not name the country but appeared to be referring to Turkey, which has backed anti-Assad militants. Assad's overthrow is widely seen as a major blow to the Iran-led "Axis of Resistance" political and military alliance that opposes Israeli and US influence in the Middle East.

"What happened in Syria was mainly planned in the command rooms of America and Israel. We have evidence of this. A neighboring government of Syria was also involved," Khamenei said in a speech reported by Iranian state media. The neighbor had a "clear role and continues to do so," he said.

Hours after Assad's fall, Iran said it expected relations with Damascus to continue based on the two countries' "far-sighted and wise approach" and called for the establishment of an inclusive government representing all segments of Syrian society.

In his speech, Khamenei also said the Iran-led alliance would gain in strength across the entire region. "The more pressure you exert, the stronger the resistance becomes. The more crimes you commit, the more determined it becomes. The more you fight against it, the more it expands," Khamenei said. "Iran is strong and powerful—and will become even stronger," he said.

Meanwhile, the Kurdish-led force controlling northeast Syria said Wednesday it had reached a US-brokered ceasefire with Turkish-backed fighters in Manbij, after Islamist-led rebels top-

pled Bashar Assad's government. The clashes in Manbij, an Arab-majority city, have killed 218 combatants since Turkish-backed groups launched offensives in the north following the ouster of Assad on Sunday.

"We have reached a ceasefire agreement in Manbij via US mediation," said Syrian Democratic Forces commander Mazloum Abdi. He said fighters of the SDF-affiliated Manbij Military Council "will be withdrawn from the area as soon as possible." "Our goal is to reach a ceasefire across Syria and start a political process for the future of the country," Abdi added.

Abdi had told reporters last week that the United Nations had been in touch with the SDF about helping to "shape a political resolution for Syria" as rebels seized power. The US-backed SDF fighters spearheaded an offensive that defeated the Daesh group's self-declared caliphate in Syria in 2019. On Tuesday, US Central Command said its chief General Michael Kurilla had visited US bases and SDF partners in Syria.

Tarar blasts PTI

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar on Wednesday lambasted Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for propagating a fake narrative regarding what he called "an onslaught on Islamabad" on November 26.

The minister, reacting to the remarks of PTI leader Barrister Gohar, said the "Tehreek-e-Inteshar" was propagating fake narrative regarding firing on the protesters by the Law Enforcement Agencies. He asked the PTI to bring forth the evidence if any incident of direct firing, that took place on the night of 26 November.

He said the PTI was looking for face-saving after their leaders and workers abandoned the protest. The minister called them "miscreants" who had invaded Islamabad on November 26 and were armed with sling shots, shells and firearms. "Who will compensate the lives of the personnel of Ranger and Police who were martyred on that day," the minister questioned while vowing that the action would be taken against the culprits.

The minister lashed out at the PTI for "violent protests and politics", asking the party to respond to the questions people were asking. He said the government had solid proof of the involvement of the entire PTI leadership in May 9 incident. Tarar asked how the perpetrators of May 9 could ask for an end to discussion on the tragedy.

Israeli strike on Gaza kills 26

CAIRO (AP): Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip killed at least 26 people overnight and into Wednesday, including one that hit a home where displaced people were sheltering in the isolated north, killing 19, according to Palestinian medical officials.

That strike occurred in the northern town of Beit Lahiyah near the border with Israel, according to the nearby Kamal Adwan Hospital, which received the bodies.

Outgoing Bangladesh HC calls on Premier

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The outgoing High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Pakistan, Ambassador Muhammad Ruhul Alam Siddique, paid a farewell call on the Prime Minister of Pakistan, today. The High Commissioner is returning to Bangladesh, on completion of his four-year tenure in Pakistan.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif appreciated the remarkable contributions made by the High Commissioner for promotion of Pakistan-Bangladesh relations. He stressed that Pakistan greatly valued its relations with Bangladesh, which were rooted in shared history, common faith and cultural similarities. While conveying his warm wishes to

Chief Advisor Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the Prime Minister remarked that the existing goodwill between Pakistan and Bangladesh needed to be translated into tangible cooperation. He wished the High Commissioner success in his future endeavors.

The High Commissioner thanked the Prime Minister for the facilitation, courtesies and privileges extended to him during his stay in Pakistan. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif extended his "heartfelt wishes" for a swift and full recovery to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil after he underwent brain surgery.

"Sending my heartfelt wishes for a swift and full

recovery to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as he recovers from surgery," the prime minister wrote on his X timeline. He said, "Our thoughts are with you and the people of Brazil during this challenging time. Get well soon."

The medical team of the Brazilian president said in a statement that his MRI test showed intracranial hemorrhage, resulting from the accident at home in October. He was transferred to Hospital Siro Libanês, São Paulo unit, where he underwent craniotomy to drain the hematoma. "The surgery was uneventful. At the moment, the President is well, under monitoring in an ICU bed," the statement added.

SC Constitutional Bench disposes off number of cases

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) conducted hearings of a number of cases relating to constitutional matters and rejected most of the petitions for one reason or another.

The seven-member Constitutional Bench of the SCP has speed up the proceedings by fixing petitions for hearing in chronological order and disposing of them mostly for being outdated or not followed by the petitioners.

The Court disposed of three petitions regarding alleged rigging in general elections 2024 on the basis of non-following. Petitioners Abdul Qayum Khan, Mahmood Akhtar Naqvi and Mian Shabbir were not present in the Court when the proceedings began.

The Court, however, adjourned hearing of a petition filed by Founder PTI to be heard after the winter vacations in the SCP. Counsel for Founder PTI appeared before the Court and requested to adjourn his petition against alleged rigging in general elections held in February

2024 and the Court accepted his plea.

The Constitutional Bench, headed by Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan, also disposed of a petition of former Judge SCP Mazahir Akbar Ali Naqvi against a show cause notice to him by the Pakistan Judicial Commission (PJC). It may be worth mentioning that Mazhar Ali Naqvi was removed by the PJC as Judge SCP on the basis of misconduct.

Counsel for Mazhar Naqvi plead before the Court that contact with his client was not established and he may be granted time to contact and consult him. The Court, however, rejected the petition that no fresh development has been taken in the case and the JC has already announced its judgment.

SC adjourns hearing in phone tapping case: The Supreme Court's constitutional bench adjourned hearing of the phone tapping case after issuing notices to provincial law officers. Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar questioned about any legislation with regard to phone-taping in the hearing by a seven-member constitutional bench of

the apex court.

"A law exists since 2013," Additional Attorney General told the court. "The law gives phone-taping mechanism, while judicial monitoring is also part of the law," AAG said. "According to the law only a judge could allow tapping a phone," Justice Mazhar observed. "If any judge was notified for it," the judge questioned.

"The law has been ambiguous," Justice Jamal Mandokhel remarked. "We are not interested in reports or the law, we want results," Justice Aminuddin Khan said. "I don't know about nomination of a judge for it," AAG replied. "This case would also have impact over several pending cases," Justice Mandokhel said. "This case was started with the chamber of the chief justice will go," Justice Mandokhel questioned. "The law doesn't allow everyone to tape phone of anyone," Justice Mazhar remarked. "The petitioner of the case has not been in contact, the petitioner's lawyer was also expired last year," the advocate on record (AOR) said.



Kaira criticizes PTI's afloat, stresses collective efforts to solve national issues

LAHORE (APP): Senior Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader and former federal minister for information, Qamar Zaman Kaira, criticized a political party PTI, stating that it is in trouble and attempting to engage in dialogue with entities that are unable to negotiate. He emphasized that political parties should always engage with relevant political entities.

Speaking at a press conference on Wednesday at the residence of Aziz Malik, the vice president of PPP Lahore, Kaira highlighted the growing challenges in Pakistan's political landscape. He remarked that politics had become increasingly difficult, but resolving challenges was at the core of political efforts.

He expressed concern over the country's current crises, acknowledging

some progress but warning that the magnitude of issues makes solutions complex.

He pointed out that the PPP has supported the government without joining it, aiming to curb division and hatred in the country. "Bilawal Bhutto rescued the government during tough times," he said, adding that national issues will only be resolved gradually.

Taking aim at the PTI, Kaira criticized its lack of direction, stating, "The party started with revolutionary slogans but now seems aimless, creating turmoil that pushes the country one step forward and two steps back."

Kaira clarified that the PPP was not making any new demands of the government, but whenever the party raises concerns, it was misinterpreted as a withdrawal of support. He noted

that while some points of PPP's agreement with the government were implemented, others remain unaddressed. He called for the full implementation of the agreement to reduce political bitterness.

"No single party can solve the country's problems alone," Kaira stressed, emphasizing the need for collective efforts and mutual understanding. He highlighted the cooperation between the PPP and PML-N as an example of addressing crises with unity. The PPP, he said, was actively pursuing alliances to steer the country out of its challenges.

Regarding the upcoming anniversary of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, Kaira announced that caravans would travel to Larkana on December 27 for events in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh. Party chairman

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was expected to outline the party's future course of action.

Kaira also lauded the PPP's symbolic flag-hoisting campaign, describing it as a representation of political affiliation. He praised the Punjab team for mobilizing the campaign across the province.

PPP leaders Hasan Murtaza, Usman Malik, Faisal Mir, Abid Siddiqui, and Allama Yusuf Awan accompanied Kaira at the event, where the party flag was ceremonially hoisted. Naveed Chaudhry, Asim Mahmood Bhatti, Shaheem Safdar, Tanveer Butt, Rao Khalid, and Chaudhry Sajjad Nazir were also present on the occasion.

The PPP remains steadfast in its commitment to the betterment of Pakistan, Kaira concluded.

Institutions are on same page: Shujaat

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Q President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain said on Wednesday that it was a good omen that institutions in the country were on the same page. He stated this during a meeting with a delegation accompanied by Muslim League Chief Organizer Dr Muhammad Amjad here at his residence.

Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain said that a mischievous group failed in its conspiracy, and for that we pay tribute to the armed forces and other relevant institutions. He further said that although the country was currently facing numerous challenges, and he thought that it was necessary to discuss the issues. He was of the view that national issues should be resolved quickly with coordination and better working relationships between institutions, which would ultimately promote national unity.

Passport office official, five agents held

LAHORE (APP): Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) claimed on Wednesday to have arrested six people including five agents and an employee of passport office for minting money from applicants.

A team of anti-human trafficking circle under the supervision of Deputy Director Mian Muhammad Sabir, raided the Shahdara passport office and arrested six people identified as Liaquat Ali, Munir Nazir, Tanveer Alam and Muhammad Yasir while collecting cash from applicants for speedy process of their passports.

Azma Bokhari flays PTI founder

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari said on Wednesday that PTI founder Imran Khan had the habit to make holes in the plate he eats from.

In a press statement, she said the PTI founder had reached the point of hatred for Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz. She said there was no corruption case against Maryam Nawaz. Azma said that Bushra Bibi was involved in stealing a precious necklace and 190 million pounds corruption scam. Bushra Bibi has to give account of looting and her doings in Punjab. "The person who kept asking Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz to show the money trail of their properties was himself without any receipts", she added

Chinese delegation explores investment opportunities in Sindh

F.P. Report

KARACHI: A high-powered delegation of 12 major Chinese companies, accompanied by Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Sindh on Investment and Public-Private Partnership Syed Qasim Naveed Qamar, visited various sites of the Dhabaji Special Economic Zone this morning.

In a meeting held with the officers of the companies Chinese companies expressed special interest in investing in cargo, electronic vehicles, fertilizers, pharmaceuticals, food and beverages, solar and wind energy, livestock, agriculture and other sectors.

The Chinese delegation expressed deep interest in establishing a medical city worth one billion dollars in

the Dhabaji Special Economic Zone.

The Chinese delegation also expressed keen interest in setting up factories for solar plates, solar inverters and solar batteries along with a factory to make fertilizers using coal instead of gas, in collaboration with local partners.

In the meeting, Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Sindh Syed Qasim Naveed Qamar said that Dhabaji Special Economic Zone is a priority project of CPEC. This project is a prominent symbol of the lasting and proud friendship between China and Pakistan.

He said that Chinese President Xi and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari are striving to further strengthen the relations between the two countries. He said that land has

been allocated for all kinds of industrial, commercial and residential facilities in Dhabaji Special Economic Zone.

Syed Qasim Naveed Qamar said that there are attractive and vast investment opportunities in Sindh. He said that Dhabaji Zone is located in a prime location with respect to port, road and railway network, hence this zone will prove to be the most important economic zone in the province in terms of industrial development, technology transfer and job creation.

A complete introductory video about Dhabaji Special Economic Zone was shown in the meeting and Secretary Investment Sindh Raja Khurram Shahzad gave a briefing about Dhabaji SEZ.

Govt plans to upgrade emergency wards in major hospitals

KARACHI (PPI): In a high-level meeting chaired by Chief Secretary Sindh Asif Hyder Shah today, the provincial government pledged to upgrade emergency wards in public hospitals across Sindh, aiming to address the growing demand for quality healthcare services.

According to a statement issued from the Sindh Information Department, the meeting, held at the Chief Secretary's office, was attended by senior health officials, including Health Secretary Rehan Iqbal Baloch, JPMC Executive Director Prof. Shahid Rasool, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Trauma Centre Executive Director Dr. Muhammad Sabir Memon, Dr. Ruth K.M. Pfau Civil Hospital Medical Superintendent Syed Khalid Bukhari, and Abbasi Shaheed Hospital Director Dr. Faisal Samdani, among others. Shah emphasized the vision of Pakistan Peoples

Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah to introduce people-centric health sector reforms. "The Sindh government is committed to improving the accessibility and efficiency of emergency healthcare services to meet the increasing demand across the province," he stated.

Presenting data from a recent survey, Shah revealed the staggering number of patients handled by emergency wards in major hospitals. Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC) receives around 2,000 emergency cases daily, totalling nearly 60,000 monthly. Similarly, Dr. Ruth K.M. Pfau Civil Hospital treats 1,800 patients daily, with a monthly tally of 54,000. The cumulative figures from Karachi's major hospitals, including Sindh Government Lyari General Hospital and the Shaheed

Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Institute of Trauma, indicate that public hospitals in Sindh handle approximately 10,000 emergency patients daily, amounting to nearly 300,000 cases per month.

Acknowledging the immense pressure on healthcare facilities, Shah underscored the need for upgrading emergency wards in both urban and rural hospitals. He assured hospital administrators of the government's full support in providing financial assistance, hiring skilled human resources, and procuring advanced medical equipment to meet the needs of these facilities.

The Chief Secretary directed administrators to submit detailed proposals outlining the requirements for upgrading their emergency wards. "We will ensure swift approvals to expedite the transformation of emergency healthcare services," he said.

port in providing financial assistance, hiring skilled human resources, and procuring advanced medical equipment to meet the needs of these facilities.

The Chief Secretary directed administrators to submit detailed proposals outlining the requirements for upgrading their emergency wards. "We will ensure swift approvals to expedite the transformation of emergency healthcare services," he said.

NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING SYSTEM

The Executive Engineer Warsak Canals Division Peshawar invites Electronic Bids from the eligible firms / contractors in accordance with KPPRA procurement rules 2014 on single stage one envelop procedure for the following works:

S.No.	Name of Work/Sub Work	Estimated Cost In Million	Earnest Money in name of Executive Engineer Warsak Canals Division Peshawar.	PEC Category / Relevant Code
I Annual Maintenance & Repair to Warsak Canals System during 2024-25.				
01.	Silt Clearance of WGC from RD 25+000 to RD 55+000 in reaches	2.50	50000	C-6 & CE-04
02.	Silt Clearance of WGC from RD 55+000 to RD 65+000 in reaches	2.80	56000	-do-
03.	Silt Clearance of WGC from RD 65+000 to RD 83+000 in reaches except tunnels	2.50	50000	-do-
04.	Silt Clearance of WGC from RD 83+000 to RD 96+000 in reaches	2.00	40000	-do-
05.	Silt Clearance of WGC from RD 96+000 to RD 115+500 in reaches	2.00	40000	-do-
06.	Silt Clearance of WGC from RD 115+500 to RD 135+000 in reaches	2.00	40000	-do-
07.	Silt Clearance of WGC from RD 135+000 to RD 155+000 in reaches	2.00	40000	-do-
08.	Silt Clearance of WGC from RD 155+000 to RD 175+000 in reaches	1.50	30000	-do-
09.	Silt Clearance of WGC from RD 175+000 to RD 190+000 in reaches	1.20	24000	-do-
10.	Clearance of Syphon at RD 21+000, RD 31+500, RD41+500 and RD.55+400 WGC (Head Section)	1.40	28000	-do-
11.	Silt Clearance of WLC from RD.104+000 to RD.130+000 in reaches	1.70	34000	-do-
12.	Silt Clearance of WLC from RD.130+000 to Tail in reaches	1.60	32000	-do-
13.	Silt Clearance of WLCB from RD.0+000 to RD.28+000 in reaches	1.20	24000	-do-
14.	Silt Clearance of WLCB from RD.28+000 to RD 56+000 in reaches.	1.50	30000	-do-
15.	Silt Clearance of forebay and feeder channel of Warsak Pump House	1.30	26000	-do-

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- Bid Solicitation Documents containing all the terms and conditions and other relevant instructions for the work can be downloaded from the Irrigation Department or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Regulatory Authority websites (www.irrigation.gkp.pk) (www.kppra.gov.pk)
- Electronic bidding shall be done on "Above / Below system" on BOQ / Engineer's estimate.
- The bidder shall submit their bids on the following address: "Executive Engineer, Warsak Canals Division Warsak Road Kababian Peshawar" only through reliable courier Service on or before the deadline along with required documents as per details mentioned in Bid Solicitation Documents. The affixed labels of the Courier Service provider shall be authenticated for tracking before opening. Fake courier deliver shall be processed as per the law and would not be considered.
- All bidders are required to have valid registration with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority.
- The bidder shall submit 02% bid security of the estimated cost as mentioned above, in the shape of deposit at call (Original) enclosed along with their bid before closing date and time in the name of Executive Engineer, Warsak Canals Division Peshawar.
- The bidder shall also submit 0.03% Non-refundable bidding entry fee of the estimated cost in shape of Deposit at call (Original) enclosed along with their bid before closing date and time in the name of Executive Engineer, Warsak Canals Division Peshawar.
- Notifications issued by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Regulatory Authority pertaining to procurement process issued from time to time shall be applicable.
- If the evaluated electronic bid costs of two or more bidders are equal, then the successful bidder will be declared through Draw/Toss.
- Pre-Bid meeting will be held on 17-12-2024 at 11:00 A.M in the office of Executive Engineer, Warsak Canals Division Warsak Road Peshawar.
- The last date & time for submission of the Bid alongwith relevant documents is 31-12-2024 upto 12:00 P.M which will be opened on the same day at 12:30 P.M in the office of Executive Engineer, Warsak Canals Division Peshawar in presence of Contractors and their representatives who wishes to attend.
- Bid security of 1st, 2nd and 3rd lowest bidders will be retained till the approval of bids by the competent authority.
- All Govt. Notifications / Rules / Taxes updated from time to time shall be applicable.

INF(P) 3332/24

Executive Engineer | Warsak Canals Division Peshawar



NATIONAL HEALTH SUPPORT PROGRAM
KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA
HEALTH DEPARTMENT



NOTICE FOR INFORMATION

Project : KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA NATIONAL HEALTH SUPPORT PROGRAM (KP-NHSP)
Contract title : PROCUREMENT OF FURNITURE, IT EQUIPMENTS, COMMUNICATION, STATIONARY ITEMS & OTHER OFFICE ACCESSORIES FOR PMU NHSP KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA.
Country : Pakistan
Issued on : 10/12/2024

- The Govt. of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa received financing from the World Bank toward the cost of the project, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa National Health Support Program and intends to apply part of the proceeds toward payments under the contract for Procurement of Furniture, IT Equipment's, Communication, Stationary items & others office Accessories in KP-NHSP.
- The PMU, KP-NHSP, Health Department Govt. of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa invites sealed Bids from eligible Bidders/ Contractor for Bidder for Procurement of Furniture, IT Equipment's, Communication, Stationary items & other office Accessories for PMU NHSP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- Bidding shall be conducted through Open National Competitive Procurement using one envelope process as specified in the World Bank Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers (July 2016 revised November 2017 and August 2018) and is open to all eligible bidders as defined in the procurement regulations. The bidding document in English may be purchased by interested eligible Bidders upon the submission of a written application to the address below and upon payment of a nonrefundable fee of Rs. 2,000/-. The method of payment will be by cash or DD in the favor of Employer. The bidding documents can also be downloaded from <https://www.healthkp.gov.pk>. The PMU shall not be responsible for late or missing delivery.
- Pre-Bid conference is scheduled on (19th December 2024 at 11:00 AM) in office of the KP-HCIP House No. 240 defense colony shami road Peshawar.
- Bids must be delivered to the address below KP-HCIP (Health), House No. 240 defense colony shami road Peshawar, on or before (11:00 AM, 30th December 2024). Electronic Bidding will not be permitted. Late Bids will be rejected. Bids will be publicly opened in the presence of the Bidders' designated representatives and anyone who chooses to attend at the address below on (30th December 2024 at 11:30 AM).
- The bidder is bound to quote full lot as per bidding documents. Non-quoting or non-compliance to bidding documents shall lead to disqualification of bidder/s.
- The address (es) referred to above is (are): Project Director KP-NHSP (Health), House No. 240 Defense colony shami road Peshawar.

INF(P) 3318/24

Procurement Specialist
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
National Health Support Program
Tel: 091-9211605

IRRIGATION DEPARTMENT

NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING (Single Stage - Single Envelope System)

DIKhan Irrigation Circle D.I Khan, Irrigation Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, invites electronic Bids from the eligible firms/contractors in accordance with KPPRA procurement rules 2014 on Single Stage, Single Envelop procedure for the following works:-

S. No.	Name of Work & Sub work	Estimated Cost (Rs)	Earnest Money (02% of the Estimated Cost) + Stamp duty/Tender Fee)	Last date/time of submission of Tenders Forms	Time Limit
AOM&R to Paharpur Canal System & Irrigation/ Augmentation Tube well / Sump Wells & Drains in District DIKhan and Tank during 2024-25. Sub work:-					
1	1/21-AOM&R to Paharpur Canal network in "Chashma Section".	10,00,000/-	22150/-	30/12/2024 time 2:00-P.M & will be opened on same date	As per Work Order
2	2/21-AOM&R to Paharpur Canal network in "Lar Section".	10,00,000/-	22150/-	-do-	-do-
3	3/21-AOM&R to Paharpur Canal network in "Paharpur Section".	10,00,000/-	22150/-	-do-	-do-
4	4/21-AOM&R to Paharpur Canal network in "Girsal Section".	10,00,000/-	22150/-	-do-	-do-
5	5/21-AOM&R to Drainage System of Paharpur Network.	20,00,000/-	46850/-	-do-	-do-
6	6/21-Desiltation / Berm Cutting of Additional Disty RD.00-40000 in reaches	300,000/-	7340/-	-do-	-do-
7	7/21-Desiltation/Berm cutting of Takarwah Disty RD.00-36000 in reaches.	300,000/-	7340/-	-do-	-do-
8	8/21-De-siltation of Kot Hafiz Disty RD.00-50000 in reaches.	300,000/-	7340/-	-do-	-do-
9	9/21-De-siltation of Kot Hafiz Disty RD.50000-Tail in reaches.	400,000/-	9370/-	-do-	-do-
10	10/21-De-siltation of Pura Minor RD.00-Tail in reaches.	300,000/-	7340/-	-do-	-do-
11	11/21-De-siltation of Segra Minor RD.00- Tail in reaches.	300,000/-	7340/-	-do-	-do-
12	12/21-De-siltation of Takarwah Disty RD 36000-86000 in reaches.	300,000/-	7340/-	-do-	-do-
13	13/21-De-siltation of Mala Minor RD.00- Tail in reaches.	300,000/-	7340/-	-do-	-do-
14	14/21-De-siltation of Paharpur Disty RD.00-Tail in reaches	400,000/-	9370/-	-do-	-do-
15	15/21-De-siltation/ Jungle Clearance of Bigwani Minor RD.00-16000 in reaches.	300,000/-	7340/-	-do-	-do-
16	16/21-De-siltation of Disty No.3 RD.00-Tail in reaches.	300,000/-	7340/-	-do-	-do-
17	17/21- Periodical Repair / Replacement of Solar/Electrical/Mechanical/Civil portion of Sump well No 9-II, 14-II, 16- II, 17- II, 18- II, 19- II, 20- II (10HP Motor).	400,000/-	9370/-	-do-	-do-
18	18/21-Periodical Repair / Replacement of Solar/Electrical/Mechanical / Civil portion of Sump well No. 27-II, 28-II, 29-II, 30-II, 31-II, 32-II (10HP Motor).	380,000/-	8964/-	-do-	-do-
19	19/21-Periodical Repair / Replacement of Solar/Electrical/Mechanical/Civil portion of Sump well No. 33-II, 34-II, 37-II, 38-II, 41-II (10HP, 40HP Motor).	380,000/-	8964/-	-do-	-do-
20	20/21-Periodical Repair / Replacement of Solar/Electrical/Mechanical/Civil portion of Sump well No. 47-II, 48-II, 49-II, 53-II, 54-II, 55-II (10HP Motor).	400,000/-	9370/-	-do-	-do-
21	21/21-Periodical Repair / Replacement of Solar/Electrical/Mechanical/Civil portion of Sump well No. 1-III, 2-III, 1-4, 6- I, 8- I, 8-II (10HP, 15 HP Motor).	400,000/-	9370/-	-do-	-do-

Terms & Conditions for E-Bidding:-

- Bid Solicitation Documents containing all the terms and conditions and other relevant instructions for works can be downloaded from the department and or KPPRA websites (www.irrigation.gkp.pk)/(www.kppra.gov.pk).
- Bid Solicitation Documents contains mandatory requirements to be fulfilled in order for bidder to be eligible to participate. The Bidders are required to agree to all terms and conditions of bidding documents.
- The Bidder shall submit their bids through leading courier service on or before the deadline along with required documents as per detail mentioned in the bid solicitation documents.
- Venue of Bid opening is office of the Executive Engineer Paharpur Irrigation Division DIKhan.
- The bidder are required to quote their rates above or below on BOQ both on MRS 2024 (1st Bi Annual) as well as Non MRS components.
- 02% Bid security/Earnest Money + Stamp Duty + Tender Fees of the estimated cost from the account of firm / bidder/contractor who submit the bid must be accompanied with the tender document/quotation through any scheduled bank in favor of Executive Engineer, Paharpur Irrigation Division DIKhan. Failure to submit the 2%CDR will lead to rejection of the bid.
- The bidders who quote their bids / rates more than 10% below on Engineer's Estimate shall submit along with their bids additional security as per KPPRA Notification SRO No. (14)/VOL-1-24/2021-22 dated 10-05-2022.
- If the evaluated electronic bid costs of two or more bidders are equal, then the successful bidder will be declared through draw/toss.
- The employer has the authority to reject any or all the bids assigning cogent reasons.
- Bid security of 1st, 2nd and 3rd lowest bidders will be retained by the employer for at least one week after issuance of letter of acceptance to the successful bidder.
- As per clause 37 (A) KPPRA Rules, All bidder are required to have registration with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority.
- All the prevailing KPPRA Acts/Rules and other Govt Notification will be applicable, issued from time to time.
- Funds release depends upon policy of Provincial Govt, hence payment will be made accordingly. Bidder/ Contractor agreeing with the financial constraints in respect of payment etc are at liberty to participate in the instant E-Bidding as no claim whatsoever will be entertained in this regard.
- Last Date/time of submission of tenders Forms on 30/12/2024 at 2:00 P.M and will be opened on same date in office of the Executive Engineer Paharpur Irrigation Division DIKhan.
- All Govt. Notifications/Rules/Taxes updated from time to time shall be applicable.
- The work quantity may decrease due to financial constraints or as the case may be.

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER PAHARPUR IRRIGATION DIVISION DIKHAN

Paharpur Irrigation Division DIKhan, Opposite Peshawar High Court Circuit Bench DIKhan.
INF (P) 3340/24 Phone/Fax No. 0966-9280127 & Email: Paharpurdivision@gmail.com.

Bibi International Women Institute, Bannu
Bannu Township Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
Ph # 0928-633810 Advertisement No. 1(24)

Walk in Interview

The Kalam Bibi International Women Institute, Bannu requires the services of female's faculty members purely on contract/ fixed pay basis.

Name of Post	Minimum Qualifications & Experience
Professor/ Associate Professor/ Assistant Professor/ Lecturer	As per HEC criteria.
Sociology/ Psychology/ Urdu/ English/ Computer Science/ Home Economics/ Education/Botany	

Terms & other Conditions:

- Applicants working in Government, Semi-Government or Autonomous organizations should apply through Proper Channel. However, the Institute may entertain advance copies.
- Application forms can be obtained from Registrar office of the KIWI, located in UST Bannu Main Campus Bannu Township.
- Applications on prescribed forms neatly filled in giving full particulars regarding bio-data, attested copies of academic degrees/certificates, experience certificates, domicile, national identity card with three passport size recent photographs for the each post.
- Application fee non-refundable bank draft from any Bank or cash deposit bank receipt from BoK, Main Campus UST Bannu Branch in favour of Treasurer, Kalam Bibi International Women Institute, Bannu Account No. 2010354989, Professor Rs. 5000/- for Associate Professor Rs. 4000/-, for Assistant Professor 3000/-, and for Lecturer 2000/- (Money Order not acceptable).
- Original Bank Draft/Receipt must be attached with the application.
- The Candidates having Foreign Degree/Certificate will provide Equivalency Certificate from HEC/IBCC, Islamabad.
- Candidates will be required to produce original documents at the time of interview.
- No TA/DA shall be paid for attending the test/interview.
- Incomplete/late applications will not be entertained.
- Only eligible candidates will be interviewed.
- Errors and omissions (if any) will be liable for rectification by the Institute authorities.
- Interview Date: 15-12-2024 at 9AM, at Kalam Bibi International Women Institute Bannu Township Bannu.

REGISTRAR



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur presenting a shield to DG Protocol Mukhtar Khan Wazir on the eve of International Anti-Corruption Day. Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry is also present on the occasion.

High level meeting discusses healthcare issues in Mansehra

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A high-level meeting co-chaired by Speaker of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Babar Saleem Swati and Health Advisor Ihtesham Ali was held in KP Assembly to address healthcare issues and improve health facilities in district Mansehra. The meeting was attended by Tourism Advisor Zahid Chan Zaib, MPA Ikramullah, Secretary Health Adeel Shah, Director General Health Dr. Muhammad Saleem, and other relevant officials. Discussions revolved around upgrading the his-

toric Government Mental Hospital Dadar, relocating the TB Center to a suitable location, restoring damaged health centers in Mansehra, addressing staff shortages, and resolving other administrative issues. Speaker Babar Saleem Swati directed health officials to resolve issues related to King Abdullah Teaching Hospital, Government Mental Hospital Dadar, and the DHO office to ensure the provision of quality healthcare services to the people of Mansehra. He also instructed immediate resolution of issues concerning medicine supplies, activation

of medical equipment, and staff shortages in health facilities. Health Advisor Ihtesham Ali assured the forum of prompt action to address health-related challenges in Mansehra and instructed relevant authorities to expedite the necessary measures. During the meeting, DHO Mansehra briefed the forum on the available facilities, staffing, and requirements of health centers across the district.

Medical Superintendents of King Abdullah Teaching Hospital and Government Mental Hospital Dadar provided updates on the

services being offered, staff shortages, funding needs, and other issues. Managing Director of Health Foundation Dr. Adnan Taj highlighted concerns regarding King Abdullah Teaching Hospital and Frontier Medical College, while Chief Executive of Sehat Card Dr. Riaz Tanoli briefed the forum on uninterrupted health card services, hospital funding, and related matters. The forum directed relevant authorities to take immediate steps to address the issues and ensure the provision of improved healthcare facilities to the residents of Mansehra.

31st meeting of Academic Council held at KMU



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The 31st meeting of the Academic Council of Khyber Medical University (KMU), Peshawar, was held under the chairmanship of Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq. The council approved the minutes of the 30th Academic Council meeting and made several significant decisions to enhance academic policies and programs. During the meeting, a domicile-based quota system was approved to ensure admissions of local students at KMU's remote campuses. It was also decided to reserve seats for students from Baluchistan and Southern Punjab at the KMU Institute of Health Sciences (IHS) Dera Ismail Khan. A committee comprising the Director of Academics, KMU Registrar, and Prof. Dr. Jawad Ahmed was formed to finalize the details.

The council approved the Open and Distance Learning Policy and the Provision and Regulatory Framework for 2024. Under the anti-plagiarism policy, a two-step thesis review process was adopted. A committee, including Prof. Dr. Akhtar Sherin, Dr. Najma Baseer, Dr. Adnan, Dr. Asiya Bukhari, and Dr. Zeeshan Kibriya, was constituted to share the new policy with affiliated institutions and recommend training measures. It was also resolved to align the Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) program with the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) regulations, transitioning it to a five-year framework. This change aims to enhance the quality of dental education and facilitate opportunities for employment and higher studies abroad. The council approved clinical diploma courses in

DHQ hospitals, a Ph.D. program in Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, and other academic initiatives. Curricula for disciplines like Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Pathology, Prosthetics and Orthotics, and Audiology will be updated to reflect modern advancements. Additionally, rules for the selection of visiting faculty, a revised migration policy for affiliated institutes, and training programs for MCPS and FCPS were approved. The council also sanctioned the new admission and migration policy for KMU Institute of Medical Sciences and KMU Institute of Dental Sciences Kohat for 2024-25. Speaking at the meeting, Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq highlighted the significance of the Academic Council as a vital forum for addressing academic and administrative issues. He praised the council's contributions to launching new programs and maintaining the quality of existing ones. He expressed confidence that council members would continue guiding the university through innovative recommendations and decisions, helping KMU achieve its vision of becoming a premier institution in the region.

UNDP Pakistan marks Int'l Mountain Day

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: UNDP Pakistan's Scaling Up of Glacial Lake Outburst Flood Risk Reduction in Northern Pakistan Project (GLOF-II) celebrated International Mountain Day in Chitral, a climate vulnerable region situated in the Hindu Kush Mountain range of Pakistan. Aligning with this year's theme, "Mountain solutions for a sustainable future - innovation, adaptation, and youth", the event brought together students from seven government and private schools, government officials, academia, and climate change enthusiasts. Students showcased the impact of climate change on mountain communities through artwork, which was later displayed in the hotel's gallery for participants to view. "The event provided us with an opportunity to display our artwork, and we also learned about the various mountain ranges and peaks in Chitral, which I am excited to share with my friends," said Fatima, a student at Government High School for Girls, Chitral. Another key feature of the event was a session on adventure tourism by a Chitral-based youth mountaineering and trekking group. The group displayed mountaineering gear and equipment for the audience outside the hotel's hall, emphasizing the region's potential for adventure tourism. "Chitral is blessed with a beautiful landscape and is home to Terich Mir, the highest mountain of the Hindu Kush Range. However, due to lack of infrastructure development and minimal media coverage, it remains largely unexplored by tourists and mountaineers," said one of the expert panellists at the event. The other panellists at the event urged the youth to become champions for climate action and play an active role in educating their communities about the impacts of climate change on ecosystems and livelihoods. The event concluded with an awareness walk along Chitral Town's main road. UNDP's GLOF-II project operates in 16 valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan and eight valleys of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It empowers communities to identify and manage risks associated with GLOFs and the related impacts of climate change, strengthens public services to reduce disaster risks, and enhances community preparedness and disaster response. Additionally, the project supports the development of sustainable livelihood options, particularly focusing on women's participation to ensure food security and livelihoods.

Two suspects allegedly involved in drugs and other crimes held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Tattara police on Wednesday arrested two suspects and recovered heroin, a pistol, and multiple bullets from their possession. According to details, acting on the directions of SP Cantt Aitzaz Arif and under the supervision of DSP

Hayatabad Amjad Khan, a police team led by SHO Cadet Qamar Shehzad conducted operations in various areas under the jurisdiction of Tattara police station. During the operation, the suspects, identified as Shahid, son of Sardar Wali, a resident of Afghanistan, and Sohail, son of Naik Muhammad, a

resident of Jamroud, were apprehended. The police recovered over one kilogram of heroin, a pistol, and several rounds of ammunition from their possession. Cases have been registered against the suspects, and further investigations are underway.

AJK management delegation visits Peshawar Institute of Cardiology

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar Institute of Cardiology (PIC) on Wednesday hosted a delegation of 31 mid-career civil servants and two faculty members from the Kashmir Institute of Management (KIM) as part of KIM's Civil Service Management Training Program. The delegation, representing various Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) government departments, was warmly welcomed by

PIC-MTI CEO and Medical Director, Professor Dr. Shahkar Ahmad Shah, and Acting Hospital Director, Mr. Qazi Saad. Professor Shah presented an overview of PIC's mission, vision, and achievements, while Mr. Saad detailed the hospital's operational structure and key functions. Professor Shahkar Ahmad Shah expressed his gratitude for the delegation's choice of visiting PIC for their training, he stated that the visit underscored PIC's excellence and com-

mitment to effective governance. Mr. Tariq Mehmood Butt, Acting Director General of KIM, expressed his appreciation for the opportunity. He emphasized that the visit aimed to equip mid-career civil servants with the knowledge and skills necessary for improved service delivery in AJK, focusing on modern governance and service delivery dynamics. While appreciating PIC's efficient management and high-quality healthcare

services, he also praised the initiative taken by the KP govt for introducing the revolutionary Sehat Card Plus Program benefitting the greater masses of the province. The delegation participated in a Q&A session, followed by a brief visit of the different functional areas of the hospital. In the closing remarks they recognized PIC as a leading organization to adapt healthcare reforms and a source of pride for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Pakistan.



UoP hosts PCB-HEC sponsored inter-varsity cricket c'ship

18 universities will hunt for victory at mega gala

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Higher Education Commission's Director for Sports and Co-Curricular Activities Javed Ali Memon has underscored the importance of close cooperation with the University of Peshawar to lead sports initiatives for bulging youth to accommodate their sprinted physical well-being and sportsmanship. He shared his views while meeting with the worthy Vice Chancellor, University of Peshawar Prof. Dr. Muhammad Naeem Qazi in his office ahead of PCB-HEC sponsored inter-varsity cricket tournament final round launching at the University of Peshawar Cricket ground. HEC Director further reiterated his commitment to take the initiative to bring international cricket visiting teams' side matches at the University of Peshawar cricket ground through PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi special inspiration for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa buildup in cricket arena. The Vice Chancellor arrested the attention of the visiting representative for

revamping present cricket ground to a model cricket stadium considering the expansive area of the site. He pointed out that the University of Peshawar has the grassy hockey ground that needs astro turf for mentoring and producing modern hockey players. Later, both inaugurated the intervarsity national cricket championship final round at the KMC ground together with the squash legend Qamar Zaman Khan. The intervarsity cricket championship final round will be played among 18 universities that have qualified from the total of 80 teams from different uni-

versities of the country. The final of the championship will be played on 15 December at the same venue, while all matches will be played on five different cricket grounds of the metropolitan Peshawar city location. The worthy Vice Chancellor during inaugural speech praised the present captain National Cricket Team Captain Muhammad Rizwan and Shaheen Shah Afridi to give youngster's a flare of national spirit and optimism to represent country at the international level. The worthy Vice Chancellor praised Director Sports Mr. Behre Karam

for tireless efforts to make the event happen and expected him to render the traditional hospitality for visiting teams across the country. Mr. Javed Ali Memon on this occasion, called upon on player's to imbibe cross culture and language spirit and learn from one another to represent further at competing levels. Later, Director Sports HEC visited the under-construction arena of the national volleyball academy along the resource centre. He praised the construction standards and pointed out a few alterations to accommodate players' needs on the spot.



PMLN lawyer's forum forms parliamentary board

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) lawyer forum formed a seven members Parliamentary board for Elections of Peshawar High Court Bar Association and Peshawar Bar Association for the year 2025-26, on Wednesday. According to details,

Syed Sardar Husain advocate Supreme Court has been named as Chairman of Parliamentary Board. The members of Parliamentary Board include Musarat Ullah Khan, Attif Nazir, Shahid Raza Malik, Manzoor Khan Khali, Akbar Yousaf Khalil and Farhad Ali Khalil. Application are invited from Lawyers affiliated

with PMLN lawyers Forum aspiring to contest for different posts in Peshawar High Court and Peshawar Bar association to till December 20, 2024. President PML N Lawyers Forum KP Kifayatullah Khan has formed the parliamentary board after consultation with provincial cabinet of forum and senior members.

Malgary Wakeelan elections to be held on Dec 19

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A meeting of Malgary Wakeelan held under the chairmanship of Chairman Election Commission, Arbab Safi Ullah Advocate. The meeting was attended by Election Commission members Tariq Afghan, Sawar Khan, Khalid Khan, Khushnood Amjad and Faiza Javed Advocates, on Wednesday. During the meeting, the participants expressed satisfaction over the success of the recent membership drive, which saw a large

number of lawyers obtaining membership of the Peshawar Lawyers' Community. The participants appreciated the trust reposed by the lawyers in the Malgary Wakeelan and acknowledged the organization's role in promoting the rule of law, democracy, and justice in the country. Chairman Election Commission Peshawar, Arbab Safiullah Khan Advocate, thanked all members and leaders of the Peshawar Lawyers' Community, including Provincial President Mian Iftikhar Hussain, Provincial

General Secretary Hussain Shah Yousafzai, and District President Arbab Tahir Advocate, for their efforts in making the membership drive a success. The meeting also unanimously approved the election schedule for the year 2025-26. According to the schedule, nomination papers can be submitted until December 13, scrutiny and objections will be held on December 14, and the final list of candidates will be published on December 16. The election will be held on December 19 from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm.

US Consulate organises self-defence training for women

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: To empower young women and raise awareness against gender-based violence, the U.S. Consulate General in Peshawar, in collaboration with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Police, organized a two-day self-defence training for 40 female students from Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University (SBBWU) and the Institute of Management Sciences (IMS) Peshawar. The training was held at SBBWU and was part of Consulate's 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign. Public Affairs Officer (PAO) Rob Tate addressed the participants at the Eleanor Roosevelt Corner SBBWU Peshawar. PAO Tate remarked, "Self-defence is crucial for everyone regardless of gender or location. This training underscores our commitment to empowering women and ensuring their safety so that they can thrive and contribute positively to the society."



In brief

Protest against gas load shedding
F.P. Report

QUETTA: Citizens of Marriabad and its adjoining areas staged a protest sit-in on Wednesday at Serena Chowk here against load shedding of gas and low gas pressure in Marriabad and its adjoining areas. The protesters, under the auspices of National Party district Quetta staged a protest sit-in at Serena Chowk area of Quetta near the building of Balochistan High Court, demanding the authorities to take notice of protracted gas load shedding in Marriabad and its adjoining areas. Talking to media on the occasion, Ramzan Ali Hazara, leader of National Party district Quetta said that ever since winter season had started, supply of natural gas had been stopped in Marriabad area of Quetta, causing hardships for the citizens of the area. He demanded of the authorities to ensure supplying gas to the residents of Marriabad.

Girls' education vital for uplift
F.P. Report

BANNU: Government Girls Sentinel Model High School Bannu has become the best institution in terms of education. There has been an immense increase in the light of the special instruction of district education officer female, along with the curriculum between schools, attention is also being paid to co-curricular activities. The principal of Government Girls Sentinel Model High School, Bannu Najma, while talking to media representatives, expressed these views. It has become an active and active institution. In this regard, there is a lot of attention being paid to education and training along with various sports competitions within the school, due to which the parents' trust in the school is a proof that the recent admissions. Hundreds of female girls have been admitted in the school, he said that the girls of Bannu city and adjacent areas are receiving education at their doorsteps according to the policy of the provincial government and directorate of education. But by getting the best education, they can make the name of the district and the province shine

Prize distribution ceremony held
F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Deputy District Education Officer (DDEO) has emphasized that a peaceful society and responsible citizens are the foundation of national development. He urged teachers to focus on the proper education and character-building of children by providing opportunities for co-curricular activities alongside the curriculum. He expressed these views during the prize distribution ceremony of the Inter-District Primary Schools Sports Tournament for Circle Dehrai, held at Hira School, Dawlat Kalay. The event was also attended and addressed by Sub-Divisional Education Officer Aurangzeb Khalil, educationist Syed Muhammad Shah Khan, Circle ASDEO Hakeem Ullah, Tournament General Secretary Syed Adil Shah, Principal of Hira School Saleem Khan, and Fazal Hadi, the District President of Grade-IV Employees. Syed-ul-Hussain acknowledged the crucial role of sports in creating a positive and drug-free environment in schools. He expressed satisfaction with the well-organized tournaments held this year from primary to higher secondary levels.

Rs100m to be spent on Dir jail facilities

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Special assistant to chief minister on prisons MPA Humayun Khan has said the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has approved Rs 100 million for repair, renovation work and provision of missing facilities at the district jail Timergara.

He was addressing the jail inmates during his detailed visit to the prison as chief guest here on Wednesday. The Pakistan Tehreek Insaf MPAs Malik Shafiqullah Khan, Malik Liaqat Ali, party activists, jail superintendent Muhammad Ayub Khan and other staff members were also in attendance.

The SACM, Humayun Khan along with Malik Shafiqullah Khan visited different units of the jail, checked quality of food and medicines and directed the jail staff to provide the best quality of food to the inmates. The jail superintendent Muhammad Ayub Khan briefed the visiting lawmakers about the facilities being provided to the prisoners. He pointed out that a total of 364 prisoners belonging to the region had been sent to different central jails in other parts of the country as the convicts for more than five years of imprisonment could not be kept in district jail.

The prisoners gathered in one of the lawns wherein the PTI lawmakers Humayun Khan, Malik Shafiqullah Khan, Malik Liaqat Ali, former president district bar Timergara Jehan Bahadar Rughani and others spoke on the occasion. Some of the prisoners demanded provision of natural gas, hot water in winter and other facilities at the jail. They also demanded the establishment of a central jail in the area.

Addressing the prisoners, Mr Humayun announced that the government had approved Rs 100 million for the Timergara jail and the amount would be spent on repair and renovation work, provision of missing facilities and welfare of the inmates. The lawmaker asked

the prisoners to strictly follow the jail rules and discipline as it was essential for their future life. He said that everyone should hate crime, not criminals.

The SACM said the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government had initiated multiple measures to bring reforms in jails. He said that the behaviour of the jail staff mattered, so the staff should behave with the inmates politely and kindly. He said that the standard of the jail washrooms, barracks and kitchen was being enhanced so that the inmates felt no sense of deprivation.

Tehsil chairman warning: The Jamiat Ulema Islam Fazl elected tehsil chairman Timergara Mufti Irfan ud Din has announced to set up a protest sit-in along with all members of the council outside the Adial Jail on Dec 17 if the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government failed to release funds to the local government bodies in Dir. Flanked by the council convenor Javed Iqbal, village council chairmen Muhammad Ibrahim, Malik Azam, Taimur Shah and Munib Shah, the tehsil chairman while speaking at a news conference at the Timergara press club also threatened the council members would not hesitate to tender collective resignations if their demand was not accepted.

The JUI-F tehsil chairman said the government had released funds only to the 51 PTI affiliated chairmen in the province while those affiliated with the opposition parties had been deprived of their right. "It is the political biases of the chief minister Ali Amin Gandhapur to release funds only to the PTI tehsil chairmen", he said, adding that a total of 80 tehsil chairmen had been ignored by the government. He said the tehsil municipal offices were faced with severe financial problems as the government did not release funds to them for the last three years. He demanded the KP chief minister to take notice of their grievances and release equal funds to all tehsil councils in the province.

Drinking water, facilities demanded

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Deputy Commissioner Kohat along with the Chairman District Development Advisory Committee Shafi Jan held 'Kuli Katcheri' in the remote area of Borakka, which besides the officers of the district administration and Heads of Line Departments was also attended by elders and common people of Borakka, Tin Talab, Suleman Talab, Bammah and adjacent areas, on Wednesday.

The participants openly

presented their collective and individual problems in detail. Most of the minor problems were solved on the spot. Main problems of the area were related to drinking water, health and education. DDAC chairman and Deputy Commissioner while commenting on the issues raised there, announced that one of the 2 under-construction projects of water supply schemes, would be made functional within 10 days while drinking water in Borakka and its adjoining areas would permanently be resolved in a year.

Similarly, they announced the setting-up of a commission for hill and other land disputes in the area. MPA and DC issued necessary directions to the concerned authorities for solving the education and health related problems of Tin Talab, Suleman Talab and Bamma.

They also assured construction of a culvert on the rain drain in Borakka. The authorities concerned of Irrigation Department directed to solve the irrigation related problems in consultation with the local elders.

International Mountain Day celebrated

F.P. Report

CHITRAL: International Mountain Day celebrated at Chitral, a climate vulnerable region situated in the Hindu Kush Mountain range of Pakistan. Aligning with this year's theme, "Mountain solutions for a sustainable future, innovation, adaptation and youth", the event brought together students from seven government and private schools, government officials, academia and climate change enthusiasts, on Wednesday.

The event was organized by UNDP Pakistan's Scaling Up of Glacial Lake Outburst Flood Risk Reduction in Northern Pakistan Project (GLOF-II). The students showcased impact of climate change on mountain communities through artwork, which was later displayed in the hotel's gallery for participants to view.

"The event provided us with an opportunity to

display our artwork, and we also learned about the various mountain ranges and peaks in Chitral, which I am excited to share with my friends," said Fatima, a student at Government High School for Girls, Chitral.

Another key feature of the event was a session on adventure tourism by a Chitral-based youth mountaineering and trekking group. The group displayed mountaineering gear and equipment for the audience outside the hotel's hall, emphasizing the region's potential for adventure tourism.

"Chitral is blessed with a beautiful landscape and is home to Terich Mir, the highest mountain of the Hindu Kush Range. However, due to lack of infrastructure development and minimal media coverage, it remains largely unexplored by tourists and mountaineers," said one of the expert panellists at the event.

The other panellists at the event urged the youth to become champions for climate action and play an active role in educating their communities about the impacts of climate change on ecosystems and livelihoods. The event concluded with an awareness walk along Chitral Town's main road. UNDP's GLOF-II project operates in 16 valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan and eight valleys of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

It empowers communities to identify and manage risks associated with GLOFs and the related impacts of climate change, strengthens public services to reduce disaster risks, and enhances community preparedness and disaster response. Additionally, the project supports the development of sustainable livelihood options, particularly focusing on women's participation to ensure food security and livelihoods.



QUETTA: People holding a sit-in in front of Balochistan High Court as they demand availability of Sui gas.

Punjab govt revolutionizes Agri-Livestock industry
F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) leader Mian Zaid u Rehman Ramde has said that the Chief Minister of Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif is bringing a revolutionary program in Punjab.

In this context, special measures are being taken for the development of agriculture and livestock sector and direct money is being provided to farmers in a transparent manner to improve the quality of life. Livestock Card is a link of this. He expressed these views yesterday in the event organized regarding the distribution of livestock cards.

Assistant Commissioner Kamalia Iqranasir, Deputy Director Livestock Kamalia Dr. Syed Zeeshan Gilani along with Farms participated in the event. Leader PML-N Mian Zaidur Rehman distributed livestock cards in Farmer, Deputy Director Livestock Kamalia Syed Zeeshan Gilani said that farmers who have 5 to 10 male calves can purchase feed supplements like, silage, and mineral mixture at Rs 27,000 per animal through the Livestock Card. The government will pay interest to Punjab Bank and the farmers will return the principal without interest in the fifth month.

Dr. Shahab took charge as MS DHQ. Dr. Shahab Alam took charge as MS of his post in DHQ Hospital Toba Tek Singh. Dr. Shahab Alam is one of the hardworking, capable and honest officers. Dr. Shahab Alam has also served as MS THQ Gojra, MS DHQ Jhang and Toba Tek Singh. MS DHQ Hospital Toba Tek Singh.

Six-year old boy killed by stray bullet

QILLA ABDULLAH (PPI): A six-year-old boy lost his life to a stray bullet in the Killi Kakozai area of Qilla Abdullah on Wednesday, rescue officials said.

The boy, identified as the son of Rehamatullah Kakozai, was hit by the bullet while in the vicinity. He was shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital Maezi Ada, where medico-legal formalities were completed before his body was handed over to the family. Authorities have initiated an investigation to ascertain the circumstances surrounding the tragic incident.

Lodhran Pilot Project observes activism drive

Saqib Mushtaq

LADHRAN: The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an annual international civil society led campaign. Series of events under the 16 Days of Activism organized by The Lodhran Pilot Project (LPP), in collaboration with its consortium partners consisted of Signify Consulting, Pelican Development Organization (PDO), Centre for Public Policy & Governance (CPPG), and Chanan Development Association (CDA) were completed with a commitment to form a just society.

Civil society organizations, communities, and the government must work together to build a peaceful society. Pakistan ranks 145th out of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index 2024. It is time for collective action to make a meaningful impact in closing gender gaps in Pakistan, said Dr. Muhammad Abdul Saboor, Chief Executive Officer of LPP and Chief of Party for



the Subh-e-Nau project, during the closing seminar. He emphasized that the Subh-e-Nau project acts as a catalyst for fostering social cohesion and resilience within local communities, with a focus on preventing and countering violent extremism in South Punjab.

While speaking at the ceremony in Lodhran, Additional Commissioner General (ADCG) Mr. Muhammad Asad Budh commended the initiatives undertaken under the Subh-e-Nau project. He affirmed his commitment to supporting efforts in District Lodhran to advance social cohesion and local development initiatives. Mr. Budh emphasized that the district government will continue to back programs that promote localization, peace-building, and equal opportunities for all, free from discrimination.

On December 9, 2024 Subh-e-Nau hosted a seminar titled 'Voices of Strength & Change: Honoring Our Champions in Lodhran' as part of the global 16 Days of Activism campaign. The event gathered 150 participants (female 70, male 79, Transgender 2), including government officials, students, civil society members, and community leaders, to address gender-based violence (GBV) through education, dialogue, and collaboration. The event concluded with the distribution of souvenirs and shields to gender experts and change agents from South Punjab, recognizing their contributions to the cause.

KP IGP inaugurates upgraded police station

F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inspector General of Police (IGP) Akhtar Hayat Khan, inaugurated the renovated and upgraded City Police Station in Charsadda during his official visit to the district.

The ceremony was attended by Regional Police Officer (RPO) Mardan Najeeb-ur-Rehman Bagvi, Deputy Commissioner Charsadda Qaiser Khan, local political leaders, traders, Dispute Resolution Council (DRC) members, police officers, and senior army officials.

District Police Officer (DPO) Charsadda Masood Ahmed briefed the IG on the newly installed surveillance cameras and advanced facilities introduced in the police station. The IGP commended the developmental work and praised the efforts of DPO Masood Ahmed and his team for modernizing the station and improving public services.

Speaking at the event, IG Akhtar Hayat Khan stated that the renovation and incorporation of modern technology would not only enhance police efficiency but also provide a safer environment for the residents. He highlighted the establishment of a modern Command and Control Center and an Interrogation Room to strengthen security and investigative capabilities in the sensitive region of Charsadda.

The IGP said that under this initiative, 400 new cameras are being installed across the police station, significantly improving surveillance and monitoring capabilities. The Command and Control Center will facilitate centralized oversight of Charsadda City and its surrounding police stations, ensuring better coordination and security.

Meanwhile, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Akhtar Hayat visited presided over a high-level meeting for formulation of strategies to com-

bat terrorism in the region during his visit to Mardan, on Wednesday.

During the meeting detailed discussions were held on counter-terrorism measures and the performance of various police units in tackling terrorism was thoroughly reviewed. He instructed Additional IGP CTD to organize regular coordination meetings with other police units, including the District Police and Special Branch at the regional level to streamline efforts against terrorism.

Additionally, the IGP directed the CTD to hold monthly meetings in all regions, assess counter-terrorism initiatives, and submit progress reports to the IGP. Later, IGP inaugurated the newly renovated DPO Office. He was accompanied by RPO Mardan Najeeb-ur-Rehman, DPO Mardan Zahoob Babar Afridi, and other senior officials. This renovation project aims to enhance police performance and improve the quality of public service.

Employees obtained service structure: Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Zahir Shah gave the good news to All Employees Association President Adnan Saeed, Chairman Muzamil Khan regarding the approval of the service structure which has been stalled for years for promotion.

In which all the employees expressed their serious reservations about the seniority-cum-fitness promotion procedure through an appeal to the senate, the minutes of which were lying in the governor's house for several months. After being ignorant of the minutes of the Chancellor and the Governor, the Vice-Chancellor approved the service structure with reservations after a reminder and a lot of efforts, on which the president of All Employees Association Adnan Saeed and the cabinet members expressed special thanks to the Vice Chancellor on behalf of all the employees.

Great Arab game, another victory, another defeat

Sajid Anwar Wardak

THE 54-year rule of the Assad family in Syria has come to an end. Bashar al-Assad, who ruled for 24 years, has fled Damascus. The army that overthrew him was composed of 50 small and large groups and 30,000 rebels. They launched coordinated attacks from the north and south, leaving Assad's forces unable to defend effectively. Israel also launched an offensive from the Golan Heights, further pressuring the regime.

Alongside Bashar al-Assad, about 100,000 soldiers either abandoned their posts or joined the rebels. This uprising was led by Abu Muhammad al-Julani, and the regime was toppled in less than two weeks. The operation resulted in approximately

820 casualties, while the United Nations reported that 370,000 people were displaced. Historically, since the movement began in 2011, around 500,000 lives have been lost.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an alliance with roots in groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, played a key role in the overthrow. The movement originated in 2011 as Jabhat al-Nusra, an Al-Qaeda affiliate formed under the influence of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In 2016, Abu Muhammad al-Julani reorganized the group, distancing it from Al-Qaeda and renaming it Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. These rebels are highly trained in combat tactics, night operations, and the use of drones. They are equipped with advanced American-made weapons and vehicles, making them a formidable force in the conflict.

The conflict in Syria is deeply rooted in larger geopolitical dynamics, with one of the most significant factors being the "Great Arab Game." Bashar al-Assad relied heavily on three major allies: Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah, all of whom are considered staunch adversaries of the United States and Israel. Russia, in particular, had a significant presence in Syria, establishing up to three military bases along the 193-kilometer-long coastline of Tartus. This included deploying advanced air defense systems in the region. However, with the fall of Bashar al-Assad, the geopolitical balance has shifted dramatically. This development can be seen as a major victory for the United States and Israel and a significant setback for Iran and Russia. For Russia, the loss represents a substantial defeat in the ongoing

"Great Arab Game," undermining its influence in the region and diminishing its strategic foothold in the Middle East.

Another key factor in the Syrian conflict is the deep-rooted sectarian divide, reflecting the historical tensions between the Sunni and Shia communities. This division has played a significant role in shaping the dynamics of the war. The majority of the rebels have the backing of Syria's Sunni population, which constitutes approximately 74% of the country's total population. This sectarian alignment has fueled the rebellion, as many Sunnis view the largely Alawite regime of Bashar al-Assad, a sect linked to Shia Islam, as oppressive and unrepresentative of their interests. The ongoing discord between these two religious groups has further escalated the conflict, making it not

only a political and strategic struggle but also a sectarian one.

A third significant factor contributing to the Syrian conflict is the internal divisions among Arab states. These divisions have repeatedly played into the hands of external powers. For instance, during the Iraq conflict, Iran extended its support to the NATO. In Libya, the Gulf countries provided substantial backing to overthrow its government. In Syria, Turkey has played a pivotal role in toppling Bashar al-Assad's regime. Meanwhile, many other Islamic nations have remained passive, indirectly supporting Israel's strategic interests. These internal rifts have facilitated progress toward the "Greater Israel" project, an expansionist vision conceived during the 1960s and 1970s. The idea gained momentum after the Six-Day War in

1967, during which Israel captured significant territories, including the Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, West Bank, and Golan Heights.

The concept of Greater Israel encompasses a vast region stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates, including parts of Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel has emerged as the dominant power in the Middle East, having neutralized the military capabilities of Iraq, Libya, and now Syria. Organizations such as ISIS and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham operate with support from external actors, including the United States, Israel, and Turkey, further destabilizing the region. The question now is which country might face a similar fate next—Jordan, Egypt, or Kuwait.



Biden rushing aid to Ukraine

WASHINGTON (AP): The grinding war between Ukraine and its Russian invaders has escalated ahead of Donald Trump's inauguration, with President Joe Biden rushing out billions of dollars more in military aid before US support for Kyiv's defenses is thrown into question under the new administration.

Russia, Ukraine and their global allies are scrambling to put their side in the best possible position for any changes that Trump may bring to American policy in the nearly 3-year-old war. The president-elect insisted in recent days that Russia and Ukraine immediately reach a ceasefire and said Ukraine should likely prepare to receive less US military aid.

On the war's front lines, Ukraine's forces are mindful of Trump's fast-approaching presidency and the risk of losing their biggest backer. If that happens, "those people who are with me, my unit, we are not going to retreat," a Ukrainian strike-drone company commander, fighting in Russia's Kursk region with the 47th Brigade, told The Associated Press by phone.

"As long as we have ammunition, as long as we have weapons, as long as we have some means to defeat the enemy, we will fight," said the commander, who goes by his military call sign, Hummer. He spoke on condition he not be identified by name, citing Ukrainian military rules and security concerns. "But, when all means run out, you must understand, we will be destroyed very quickly," he said.

The Biden administration is pushing every available dollar out the door to shore up Ukraine's defenses before leaving office in six weeks, announcing more than \$2 billion in additional

support since Trump won the presidential election last month. The US has sent a total of \$62 billion in military aid since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. And more help is on the way.

The administration is on track to disburse the US portion of a \$50 billion loan to Ukraine, backed by frozen Russian assets, before Biden leaves the White House, US officials said. They said the US and Ukraine are in "advanced stages" of discussing terms of the loan and close to executing the \$20 billion that the US is backing of the larger loan. Biden also has eased limits on Ukraine using American longer-range missiles against military targets deeper inside Russia, following months of refusing those appeals over fears of provoking Russia into nuclear war or attacks on the West. He's also newly allowed Ukraine to employ antipersonnel mines, which are banned by many countries. Biden and his senior advisers, however, are skeptical that allowing freer use of longer-range missiles will change the broader trajectory of the war, according to two senior administration officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

But the administration has at least a measure of confidence that its scramble, combined with continued strong European support, means it will leave office having given Ukraine the tools it needs to sustain its fight for some time, the officials said. Enough to hold on, but not enough to defeat Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces, according to Ukraine and some of its allies. Even now, "the Biden administration has been very careful not to run up against the possibility of a defeated Putin or a defeated Russia"

for fear of the tumult that could bring, said retired Gen. Philip Breedlove, a former supreme allied commander of NATO. He is critical of Biden's cautious pace of military support for Ukraine.

Events far from the front lines this past weekend demonstrated the war's impact on Russia's military. In Syria, rebels seized the capital and toppled Russia-allied President Bashar Assad. Russian forces in Syria had propped up Assad for years, but they moved out of the way of the rebels' assault, unwilling to take losses to defend their ally.

Biden said it was further evidence that US support for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was wearing down Russia's military.

Trump, who has long spoken favorably of Putin and described Zelenskyy as a "showman" wheedling money from the US, used that moment to call for an immediate ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia. And asked in a TV interview - taped before he met with Zelenskyy over the weekend in Paris - if Ukraine should prepare for the possibility of reduced aid, Trump said, "Yeah. Probably. Sure." Trump's supporters call that pre-negotiation maneuvering by an avowed deal-maker. His critics say they fear it shows he is in Putin's sway. Zelenskyy said that Russian forces' retrenchment from outposts worldwide demonstrates that "the entire army of this great pseudo-empire is fighting against the Ukrainian people today."

"Forcing Putin to end the war requires Ukraine to be strong on the battlefield before it can be strong diplomatically," Zelenskyy wrote on social media, repeating near-daily appeals for more longer-range missiles from the US and Europe.

France flies out 2 Mirage fighter jets from Chad

PARIS (AP): France flew out the two Mirage fighter jets it had stationed in Chad, signaling the beginning of its withdrawal of military forces from the former French colony in central Africa that last month broke off its defense cooperation agreement with Paris.

Chad has been a key counterterrorism force in the region and was one of the last countries in which France maintained a large military presence. French forces have been ousted in recent years from Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso following years of fighting Islamic extremists alongside regional troops. Those countries have moved closer to Russia, which has mercenaries deployed across the Sahel, the vast expanse below the Sahara desert.

The Mirage 2000-D fighters took off after midday from a French base in the capital, N'Djamena, after Chadian military forces came to wish them farewell, and were returning to an air force base in Nancy in eastern France, French military spokesman Col. Guillaume Vernet said. He added that negotiations with Chadian authorities continued on how and when France might withdraw other members of its 1,000-strong force in Chad, and whether all will leave. The French ground forces will gradually disengage in the coming weeks, Chad's foreign minister, Koukamallah Abderraman, said in a statement. In announcing the end of the defense cooperation agreement with France last month, the Chadian government described the decision as a turning point for the country that gained independence in 1960, and said it would enable Chad to redefine its strategic partnerships in line with national priorities.

Chadian authorities have said the end of the defense agreement in no way calls into question the countries' historical ties and that it wants to maintain relations in other areas of common interest. Last week, hundreds of people marched in N'Djamena to call for the withdrawal of French troops, chanting "Chad for us, France out!" Some held banners that read, "We do not want to see a single French person in Chad."

Serbia's president says he won't flee his country

BELGRADE (AP): Serbia's president accused foreign intelligence services of trying to unseat him in the wake of spreading protests in the Balkan state and that he wouldn't flee the country like the ousted Syrian leader Bashar Assad.

President Aleksandar Vučić posted a video message on Instagram saying: "I will fight for Serbia and serve only my Serbian people and all other citizens of Serbia, I will never serve foreigners, those who seek to defeat, humiliate, and destroy Serbia," he added. Opponents of the populist leader compared him to Assad who fled to Moscow following a stunning rebel advance, ending his family's half-century of iron rule. Vučić's opponents in Serbia have compared him to Assad and other world dictators, predicting that he may also try to flee the country if he loses his firm grip on power amid the protests triggered by a rail station roof collapse in the northern city of Novi Sad that killed 15 people on Nov. 1. The protesters in Novi Sad, Belgrade and other Serbian cities have blaming the deadly collapse on rampant corruption in the country that led to sloppy renovation work on the station building in Novi Sad - part of a wider deal with Chinese state companies involved in a number of infrastructure projects in the Balkan country.

The canopy collapse has become a flashpoint for broader dissatisfaction with Vučić's growingly autocratic rule, reflecting public demands for democratic changes in the country. In the video, Vučić alleged that the spreading protests, which have recently been joined by university students, are financed from the West with the intention of toppling him and his government from power "with various hybrid tactics being employed to undermine the country."



TBILISI: A coffin containing an image depicting Georgian billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili set on fire during the 12th consecutive day of mass protests.

Palestinians disappeared after encounters with Israeli troops

GAZA STRIP (AP): Reem Ajour says she last saw her husband and then 4-year-old daughter in March, when Israeli soldiers raided a family home in northern Gaza. She is haunted by those chaotic last moments, when the soldiers ordered her to go to leave behind Talal and Masaa, both wounded.

Eight months later, the 23-year-old mother still has no answers about their fate. The military says it does not have them. Troops leveled the house where they were staying soon after the raid. "I am living and dead at the same time," she said, breaking down in sobs.

Ajour is one of dozens of Palestinians that an Israeli legal group, Hamoked, is helping in their search for family members who went missing after being separated by Israeli soldiers during raids and arrests in the Gaza Strip. Their cases - a fraction of the estimated thousands who have gone missing during the 14-month-long war - highlight a lack of accountability in how the Israeli military deals with Palestinians during ground operations in Gaza, Hamoked says.

Throughout the war, the military has conducted what amounts to a mass sifting of the Palestinian population as it raids homes and shelters and sends people through checkpoints. Troops round up and detain men, from dozens to several hundreds at a time, searching for any they suspect of Hamas ties, while forcing their families away, toward other parts of Gaza. The result is families split apart, often amid the chaos of fighting. But the military

has not made clear how it keeps track of everyone it separates, arrests or detains. Even if troops transfer Palestinians to military detention inside Israel, they can hold them incommunicado for more than two months - their whereabouts unknown to families or lawyers, according to rights groups. When people vanish, it's nearly impossible to know what happened, Hamoked says.

"We've never had a situation of mass forced disappearance from Gaza, with no information provided for weeks and weeks to families," said Jessica Montell, the director of Hamoked. Israel's High Court of Justice has refused to intervene to get answers, despite Hamoked's petitions, she said. Asked by The Associated Press about the cases of Ajour and two other families it interviewed, the Israeli military declined comment.

4-year-old Masaa Ajour was shot, then separated from her mother. The Ajours were sheltering at a home in Gaza City that belonged to Talal's family after being displaced from their own house earlier in the war. Israeli troops raided the home on March 24, opening fire as they burst in, Ajour said. Ajour, who was three months pregnant, was shot in the stomach. Talal was wounded in his leg, bleeding heavily. Masaa lay passed out, shot in the shoulder - though Ajour said she saw her still breathing.

As one soldier bandaged the little girl's wound, another pointed his gun in Ajour's face and told her to head out of Gaza City. She said she plead-

ed that she couldn't leave Masaa and Talal, but the soldier screamed: "Go south!" With no choice, Ajour collected her younger son and went down to the street. "It was all in a blink of an eye. It was all so fast," she said. Still bleeding, she walked for two and a half hours, clutching her son.

When they reached a hospital in central Gaza, doctors treated her stomach wound and found her fetus' pulse. Weeks later, doctors found the pulse had gone. She miscarried. Ajour said that several weeks later, a Palestinian released from a prison in southern Israel told her family he had heard her husband's name called out over a loudspeaker among a list of detainees. The rumor has kept her hope alive, but the military told Hamoked it had no record of Masaa or Talal being detained.

Another possibility is that they died on the scene, but no one has been able to search the rubble of the family's building to determine if any bodies are there. The storming of their building came as Israeli forces were battling Hamas fighters in surrounding streets while raiding nearby Shifa Hospital, where it claimed the militants were based. Troops cleared families out of nearby homes and often then destroyed or set the buildings ablaze, according to witnesses at the time.

The military itself may not know what happened to Ajour's husband and daughter, said Montell of Hamoked. "That illustrates a broader problem," she said. Ajour and her son now shelter in a tent camp outside the central Gaza town of Zuweida.

Former defense chief in South Korea tried to kill himself

SEOUL (AP): South Korea's previous defense minister was stopped from attempting suicide while in detention over last week's martial law, officials said, as police were trying to search President Yoon Suk Yeol's office in their intensifying investigation.

The main liberal opposition Democratic Party also plans to submit a new motion to impeach Yoon for his Dec. 3 declaration that imposed martial law in South Korea for the first time in more than 40 years. Its first impeachment attempt against Yoon failed, with ruling party lawmakers boycotting a floor vote.

Yoon's ill-conceived power grab has paralyzed South Korean politics, frozen its foreign policy and rattled financial markets, greatly reducing his chances of completing his five-year term and casting a turbulent shadow over one of Asia's most robust democracies. Shin Yong Hae, commissioner general of the Korea Correctional Service, told lawmakers that Kim tried to kill himself the previous night at a detention center in Seoul. He said that Kim's suicide attempt failed after center

officials stopped him and that he is in a stable condition now.

At the same parliament committee meeting, Justice Minister Park Sung Jae confirmed Kim's failed suicide attempt. Kim was arrested after a Seoul court approved a warrant for him on allegations of playing a key role in a rebellion and committing abuse of power. Kim became the first person formally arrested over the Dec. 3 martial law decree.

Kim, one of Yoon's close associates, has been accused of recommending martial law to Yoon and sending troops to the National Assembly to block lawmakers from voting on it. Enough lawmakers eventually managed to enter a parliament chamber and they unanimously rejected Yoon's decree, forcing the Cabinet to lift it before daybreak on Dec. 4.

Prosecutors have up to 20 days to determine whether to indict Kim. Later, National Police Agency Commissioner General Cho Ji Ho and Kim Bong-sik, head of the metropolitan police agency of the capital, Seoul, were detained over their actions during martial law, police said. They were

accused of deploying police forces to the National Assembly to block lawmakers' voting together with troops.

The country's main law enforcement institutions are focusing on finding whether Yoon, Kim and others involved in imposing martial law committed the crime of rebellion. A conviction on the charge of rebellion carries a maximum death sentence. South Korean police said they sent officers to search Yoon's office to look for any evidence related to the martial law introduction. Local media reported the search was underway, but police and the presidential office couldn't immediately confirm the reports.

Some observers earlier said the presidential security service won't likely permit searches of Yoon's office, citing a law that prohibits searches of sites with state secrets without approval from those in charge of those areas. Yoon apologized over the martial law decree, saying he won't avoid legal or political responsibility for the declaration. He also said he would leave it to his party to chart a course through the country's political turmoil, "including matters related to my term in office." In his martial law announcement, the conservative Yoon stressed a need to rebuild the country by eliminating "shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces," a reference to his liberal rivals who control parliament. Since taking office in 2022, Yoon has had near-constant friction with the Democratic Party, which introduced motions to impeach some of his top officials and launched a political offensive over scandals involving Yoon and his wife.

Opposition parties and many experts say the martial law decree was unconstitutional. They say a president is by law allowed to declare martial law only during "wartime, war-like situations or other comparable national emergency states" and South Korea wasn't in such a situation. They argue that deploying troops to seal the National Assembly to suspend its political activities amounted to rebellion because the South Korean Constitution doesn't allow a president to use the military to suspend parliament in any situation.

Two bodies recovered amid debris from a fishing boat

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP): Public Safety, said by email. The bodies were being taken to the state medical examiner's office for autopsies and positive identification, the department said. Relatives of the five people who were missing after the boat disappeared were notified that two bodies had been found, McDaniel said. Authorities traveled to a bay east of the community of Hoonah after a beachcomber reported finding the

remains and debris, which included fishing gear and survival suits from the boat, according to the department and McDaniel. Crews with dog teams searched about 5 miles (8 kilometers) of shoreline but no other human remains were found, according to the department. The site is about 12-13 miles (19-21 kilometers) southwest of the Wind Walker's last known location, McDaniel said. Hoonah is about 40 miles

(64 kilometers) west of Juneau.

According to the US Coast Guard, the crew of the Wind Walker sent a mayday call at 12:10 a.m. Dec. 1, indicating the 50-foot (15-meter) boat was overturning off Point Couverden, southwest of Juneau. The Coast Guard tried to get more information as it mobilized a response, but the crew didn't respond. The search was suspended Dec. 2, pending any new information.

Belarus has dozens of Russian nuclear weapons

MOSCOW (AP): Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko said his country is hosting dozens of Russian nuclear weapons and will prepare facilities for the planned deployment of Moscow's newest hypersonic ballistic missile.

His remarks came after he and President Vladimir Putin signed a treaty last week that gave security guarantees to Belarus, Moscow's closest ally, including the possible use of Russian nuclear weapons to help repel any aggression. The pact follows Moscow's revision of its nuclear doctrine, which for the first time placed Belarus under the Russian nuclear umbrella amid the tensions with the West over the conflict in Ukraine.

"I have warned all my enemies, 'friends' and adversaries: If you step on the border, the answer will be momentary," Lukashenko said. Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus with an iron hand for over 30 years and has relied on Kremlin subsidies and support, allowed Russia to use his country's territory to send troops into neighboring Ukraine in 2022 and to host some of its tactical nuclear weapons. Unlike nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles that can destroy entire cities, tactical nuclear weapons for use against troops on the battlefield are less powerful.

Russia hasn't disclosed how many, but Lukashenko said that his country currently has several dozen of them. "I have brought nuclear warheads here, and not just a single dozen of them," Lukashenko said in an

apparent reference to the tactical weapons, adding that the West failed to track their deployment. "They haven't even noticed when we brought them here," he added.

Earlier this year, Russian and Belarusian militaries held joint nuclear drills. They involved Belarus' Russia-supplied Iskander short-range ballistic missiles that can be fitted with nuclear warheads and warplanes equipped to carry nuclear bombs. The deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus, which has a 1,084-kilometer (673-mile) border with Ukraine, would allow Russian aircraft and missiles to reach potential targets there more easily and quickly if Moscow decides to use them. It also extends Russia's capability to target several NATO allies in Eastern and Central Europe. During the signing of the security pact on Dec. 6, Lukashenko asked Putin to deploy more advanced weapons in Belarus, including the Oreshnik intermediate range ballistic missile that Russia used for the first time last month against Ukraine.

Putin responded that Oreshnik missiles could be deployed to Belarus in the second half of 2025, adding that they will remain under Russian control but Moscow will allow Minsk to select the targets. "We will determine targets for them here in Belarus, not the Russians," Lukashenko said. "And we will push the button together if needed, God forbid." He noted that Belarus has about 30 facilities for nuclear-capable ballistic missiles left

over from the Cold War era when it was part of the USSR and hosted Soviet nuclear weapons. He added that a Belarus manufactures the large vehicles that serve as mobile launchers for Russian ballistic missiles, including Oreshnik.

Putin has hailed Oreshnik's capability, saying its multiple warheads that plunge to a target at Mach 10 are immune from interception and are so powerful that the use of several of them in one conventional strike could be as devastating as a nuclear attack. Speaking, Putin charged that "a sufficient number of these advanced weapon systems simply makes the use of nuclear weapons almost unnecessary." Russia's missile forces chief declared that the missile, which can carry conventional or nuclear warheads, has a range allowing it to reach all of Europe.

The revamped nuclear doctrine that Putin signed last month formally lowered the threshold for Russia's use of its nuclear weapons, a move that follows US President Joe Biden's decision to let Ukraine strike targets inside Russian territory with American-supplied longer-range missiles. The doctrine says Moscow could use nuclear weapons "in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction" against Russia or its allies, as well as "in the event of aggression" against Russia and Belarus with conventional weapons that threaten "their sovereignty and/or territorial integrity."

Ukraine war will go on until Putin's goals are met

MOSCOW (Reuters): The Kremlin said that the Ukraine war would continue until the goals set by President Vladimir Putin were achieved by military action or by negotiation.

Putin has demanded that Ukraine abandon its ambition to join NATO and withdraw fully from four regions of the country that Russia has claimed as its own - terms Kyiv has

rejected as tantamount to surrender. "The special military operation will end when all the objectives set by the president and commander-in-chief have been achieved," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, using Moscow's term for the conflict. "These goals can be achieved as a result of the special military operation

or a result of relevant negotiations."

Peskov said no talks between Moscow and Kyiv were currently under way because "the Ukrainian side refuses any negotiations". Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made the case for a diplomatic settlement to the war and raised the idea of foreign troops being deployed in Ukraine until it could join NATO.

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Sabotaging Syria's fresh start is a strategic mistake

AS families were reunited, thousands of exiled Syrians returned home and prisoners were released from hellish captivity this week, Israel launched more than 100 air strikes on military targets inside Syria on Monday.

This was followed by dozens more strikes on Damascus and surrounding areas overnight on Tuesday. Meanwhile, Israel expanded its invasion of southern Syria, moving troops into the buffer zone on the edge of the occupied Golan Heights, just 30km south-west of Damascus.

In a letter sent to the UN Security Council, Israel's UN ambassador Danny Danon said his country had undertaken "limited and temporary measures to counter any further threat to its citizens". Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Gideon Saar both used the same words to describe the latest illegal incursion into Syrian territory.

However, Mr Netanyahu sent a very different signal on Tuesday when he used a media conference in Jerusalem to thank the US for recognising Israeli "sovereignty" in the Golan in 2019, adding that "the Golan Heights will forever be an inseparable part of the state of Israel".

Israel's tactical justifications for its renewed attacks on Syrian territory are not reassuring. For a country with a track record of creating "facts on the ground" to excuse continued occupation and expansion, it is notable that its operation to "temporarily" send troops and armour into yet more foreign territory does not come with a detailed plan for leaving. Given this, observers would be right to question Israel's bone fides.

For Syria to lose control of more territory, have its capital repeatedly struck by air strikes and endure renewed fighting in the north-east does not bode well for the new start many in the country want. The situation is highly combustible and the machinations of neighbouring powers threaten to sabotage the nascent administration taking shape in Damascus.

On Monday, Geir Pedersen, the UN special envoy for Syria, urged the Security Council to press for de-escalation amid increasing tension in the region – sadly, his appeal appears to be going unheeded. For years, Israel said that its interest in Syria was to counter Iranian and Hezbollah forces. These have gone or are in retreat.

On Sunday, Mr Netanyahu said that "if we can establish neighbourly relations and peaceful relations with the new forces emerging in Syria, that's our desire". If this is what Israel's leadership truly wants, then it would be better served by not creating further instability during this precarious transition. "Neighbourly relations" can never be built on invasions, bombings and violations.

French political crisis turns complicated

THE far-right National Rally of Marine Le Pen had brought down the government of Prime Minister Michel Barnier in a no-confidence motion, with the help of the far-left. The party had however lost a by-election which its candidate fought on pulling down the Barnier government, and the independent who had won the election by a narrow margin opposed the idea of destabilising the government.

This is now seen by political observers as a rebuff to Marine Le Pen. Though her party is the largest party in the National Assembly, she does not have the numbers to form the government. And there are many parties, including that of Macron, who would not want to form a coalition with her, something she wanted to gain political legitimacy in the eyes of the voter as she wants to contest in the 2027 presidential election. Macron is ineligible because he has completed the mandated two terms. President Emmanuel Macron is now looking for another leader he could appoint as prime minister.

The Socialists are saying that Macron cannot play his own games and choose a person of his liking to be prime minister. They insist that the new prime minister has to be a Leftist. The Socialists are on the Left end of the political spectrum, and they are willing to do business with centrist Macron and his party. So, there are enough complications.

The grand re-opening of the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, which was attended by several world leaders, was a momentary distraction for Macron from his political troubles. He has a little more than two years in the office, and his hands are tied because neither his party nor his allies are able to form a government that will last.

What keeps Macron and his disenchanted allies together is their determination not to let Marine Le Pen win the presidential election. They will do all that they can to stop her. The question is whether that motive is good enough for them to keep France from teetering on the political edge as it were.

Marine Tondelier of the Green Party observed about Macron's impatience to find a new prime minister that he (Macron) had "understood that he must stop doing things his own way and rushing into appointments that would lead to no-confidence motions." Leader of the Socialists Boris Vallaud made it clear, "If it is not a left-wing Prime Minister we will not participate." The Socialists in the bizarre scenario of the coalition politics voted to bring down the Barnier government.

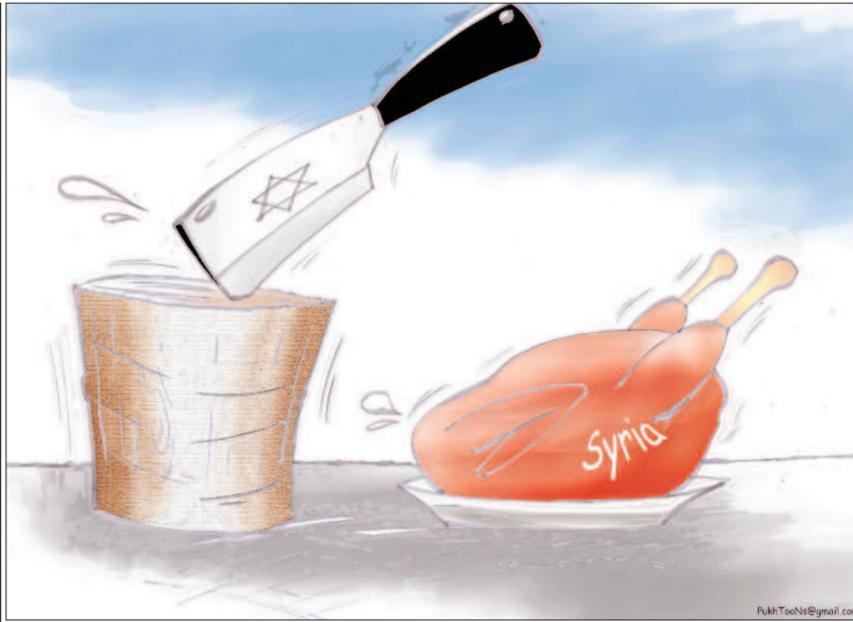
Macron cannot dissolve parliament as he did in June after the European Parliament elections. He did so in a huff because the National Rally had won the majority of seats from France. Macron wanted to defeat the far-right party in the domestic elections, but Le Pen's party emerged strong, though not strong enough to form the government. Macron could have invited her party to form the government but he would not want to do it as a matter of ideology.

Even now, he is talking to the leftists of all hues, the Green Party, the communists, the Socialists. The National Rally wants to be invited by Macron but he is not willing to oblige them.

Responding to the demand from his opponents that he should resign, Macron said he would not step down but continue in office until the end of his term in 2027. Meanwhile, he has to find a way of forging a coalition with enough numbers so that the government would not face another no-confidence motion. The French economy is reeling under low growth and inflation. The situation in France is grim if not desolate.

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The great Arab game: another victory, another defeat

Sajid Anwar Wardak

THE 54-year rule of the Assad family in Syria has come to an end. Bashar al-Assad, who ruled for 24 years, has fled Damascus. The army that overthrew him was composed of 50 small and large groups and 30,000 rebels. They launched coordinated attacks from the north and south, leaving Assad's forces unable to defend effectively. Israel also launched an offensive from the Golan Heights, further pressuring the regime. Alongside Bashar al-Assad, about 100,000 soldiers either abandoned their posts or joined the rebels. This uprising was led by Abu Muhammad al-Julani, and the regime was toppled in less than two weeks. The operation resulted in approximately 820 casualties, while the United Nations reported that 370,000 people were displaced. Historically, since the movement began in 2011, around 500,000 lives have been lost.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an alliance with roots in groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, played a key role in the overthrow. The movement originated in 2011 as Jabhat al-Nusra, an Al-Qaeda affiliate formed under the influence of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In

2016, Abu Muhammad al-Julani reorganized the group, distancing it from Al-Qaeda and renaming it Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. These rebels are highly trained in combat tactics, night operations, and the use of drones. They are equipped with advanced American-made weapons and vehicles, making them a formidable force in the conflict.

The conflict in Syria is deeply rooted in larger geopolitical dynamics, with one of the most significant factors being the "Great Arab Game." Bashar al-Assad relied heavily on three major allies: Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah, all of whom are considered staunch adversaries of the United States and Israel. Russia, in particular, had a significant presence in Syria, establishing up to three military bases along the 193-kilometer-long coastline of Tartus. This included deploying advanced air defense systems in the region.

However, with the fall of Bashar al-Assad, the geopolitical balance has shifted dramatically. This development can be seen as a major victory for the United States and Israel and a significant setback for Iran and Russia. For Russia, the loss represents a substantial defeat in the ongoing "Great

Arab Game," undermining its influence in the region and diminishing its strategic foothold in the Middle East.

Another key factor in the Syrian conflict is the deep-rooted sectarian divide, reflecting the historical tensions between the Sunni and Shia communities. This division has played a significant role in shaping the dynamics of the war. The majority of the rebels have the backing of Syria's Sunni population, which constitutes approximately 74% of the country's total population. This sectarian alignment has fueled the rebellion, as many Sunnis view the largely Alawite regime of Bashar al-Assad, a sect linked to Shia Islam, as oppressive and unrepresentative of their interests. The ongoing discord between these two religious groups has further escalated the conflict, making it not only a political and strategic struggle but also a sectarian one.

A third significant factor contributing to the Syrian conflict is the internal divisions among Arab states. These divisions have repeatedly played into the hands of external powers. For instance, during the Iraq conflict, Iran extended its support to the NATO. In Libya, the Gulf countries

provided substantial backing to overthrow its government. In Syria, Turkey has played a pivotal role in toppling Bashar al-Assad's regime. Meanwhile, many other Islamic nations have remained passive, indirectly supporting Israel's strategic interests. These internal rifts have facilitated progress toward the "Greater Israel" project, an expansionist vision conceived during the 1960s and 1970s. The idea gained momentum after the Six-Day War in 1967, during which Israel captured significant territories, including the Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, West Bank, and Golan Heights. The concept of Greater Israel encompasses a vast region stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates, including parts of Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel has emerged as the dominant power in the Middle East, having neutralized the military capabilities of Iraq, Libya, and now Syria. Organizations such as ISIS and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham operate with support from external actors, including the United States, Israel, and Turkey, further destabilizing the region. The question now is which country might face a similar fate next—Jordan, Egypt, or Kuwait.

One of the most significant reasons is the legacy of colonialism. The arbitrary borders drawn by colonial powers fragmented the Muslim world, creating artificial nation-states that often grouped disparate ethnicities and sects together or divided cohesive communities. This sowed the seeds of conflict, as these nations struggled to forge unified identities amidst deep-seated divisions.

Another factor is the absence of strong and transparent governance in many Islamic countries. Autocratic regimes, corruption, and a lack of political inclusiveness led to widespread disenfranchisement and discontent among the populace. These conditions create fertile ground for uprisings, which external actors can exploit for their own interests. The lack of democratic mechanisms and effective institutions further exacerbates instability, making it difficult for nations to withstand internal and external pressures.

Economic disparities within and among Islamic countries also play a significant role. While some nations boast immense wealth due to natural resources, others struggle with poverty and underdevelopment. This disparity breeds resentment and weakens the collective bargaining power of the Islamic world. Furthermore, the wealth of resource-rich countries often attracts external meddling, as global powers seek to control these resources by propping up regimes or fueling conflicts.

Sectarianism and the misuse of religious differences have been weaponized to divide the

Bilad al-Sham in crisis: A call for unity in the Muslim world

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

THE situation in Syria remains a critical focus for the Middle East and the broader Islamic world, with repercussions that extend beyond its borders to countries like Pakistan. Known historically and spiritually as Bilad al-Sham, Syria is central to Islamic history and tradition. The Quran and Hadith highlight its sanctity, with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) referring to it as a blessed land. Verses in the Quran speak of blessings upon the lands surrounding Masjid al-Aqsa, which include Syria, further underscoring its importance. This historical and spiritual legacy makes the current turmoil in Syria all the more tragic.

From the Assyrians and Romans to the Islamic Caliphates, Syria has been a cradle of civilizations. It flourished as a hub of culture, trade, and governance during the Umayyad Caliphate, with Damascus serving as the capital of an empire that shaped Islamic identity. However, this legacy of glory contrasts sharply with Syria's present condition—a land ravaged by war and division.

The Syrian civil war, triggered by domestic grievances but exacerbated by international interference, has transformed the country into a battleground for competing global and regional interests. External powers have exploited sectarian divides, backing opposing factions to advance their strategic goals. The chaos has benefited arms manufacturers, proxy militias, and nations seeking to redraw the region's political map, ensuring Syria remains fragmented and dependent. Beneath the surface lies a deeper conspiracy—one aimed at diminishing Arab solidarity and weakening resistance against external intervention.

The plight of Syria is not an isolated case but a reflection of broader challenges faced by many Islamic countries. The factors behind such situations are deeply rooted in historical, political, and socio-economic dynamics. Analyzing these factors helps us understand why the Islamic world remains vulnerable to such crises and what steps are needed to avoid similar catastrophes in the future.

One of the most significant reasons is the legacy of colonialism. The arbitrary borders drawn by colonial powers fragmented the Muslim world, creating artificial nation-states that often grouped disparate ethnicities and sects together or divided cohesive communities. This sowed the seeds of conflict, as these nations struggled to forge unified identities amidst deep-seated divisions.

Another factor is the absence of strong and transparent governance in many Islamic countries. Autocratic regimes, corruption, and a lack of political inclusiveness led to widespread disenfranchisement and discontent among the populace. These conditions create fertile ground for uprisings, which external actors can exploit for their own interests. The lack of democratic mechanisms and effective institutions further exacerbates instability, making it difficult for nations to withstand internal and external pressures.

Economic disparities within and among Islamic countries also play a significant role. While some nations boast immense wealth due to natural resources, others struggle with poverty and underdevelopment. This disparity breeds resentment and weakens the collective bargaining power of the Islamic world. Furthermore, the wealth of resource-rich countries often attracts external meddling, as global powers seek to control these resources by propping up regimes or fueling conflicts.

Sectarianism and the misuse of religious differences have been weaponized to divide the

Muslim world. Instead of focusing on unity, certain actors amplify sectarian divides to further their agendas, pitting Shia against Sunni or different ethnic groups against each other. This deliberate strategy weakens Islamic countries from within, diverting attention from common goals and shared challenges.

The lack of unity and cohesion among Islamic countries is another critical issue. While platforms like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) exist, they have often failed to play an effective role in addressing the crises facing member states. Disputes between Islamic nations, competing regional ambitions, and the influence of foreign powers have hindered collective action. Without a unified front, the Muslim world remains susceptible to external manipulation and internal strife.

Foreign intervention is a recurring theme in the crises faced by Islamic countries. Global powers often intervene in the internal affairs of these nations under the guise of promoting democracy or fighting terrorism. In reality, such interventions frequently exacerbate conflicts, destroy infrastructure, and destabilize the region. Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan are prime examples of how external interference has led to prolonged instability.

Lastly, the lack of investment in education, technological advancement, and economic diversification has left many Islamic countries lagging behind in global competitiveness. This stagnation limits opportunities for growth and progress, leaving these nations vulnerable to exploitation and unable to assert themselves on the global stage.

To address these challenges, the Islamic world must prioritize unity and self-reliance. This involves fostering collaboration among nations, resolving internal disputes through dialogue, and strengthening institutions to ensure transparency and accountability. Economic cooperation, technological innovation, and investment in education are essential to reducing dependency on external powers and building a resilient future.

The situation in Syria and other crises in the Islamic world serve as stark reminders of the consequences of division and disunity. They call for a renewed commitment to the values of justice, compassion, and collective responsibility as prescribed in Islamic teachings. Only by embracing these principles can the Muslim world overcome its challenges and reclaim its rightful place as a beacon of peace and progress.

The crisis in Syria and similar conflicts in the Islamic world serve as painful reminders of the consequences of division and disunity. To overcome these challenges, the Muslim world must prioritize unity, self-reliance, and collective action. This requires fostering collaboration among nations, resolving disputes through dialogue, and strengthening institutions to ensure good governance and accountability. Economic cooperation, technological innovation, and investment in education are critical for reducing dependency on foreign powers and building resilience.

As Syria endures its trials, the lessons of the Quran and Hadith remind the global Muslim community of its duty to alleviate suffering and foster justice.

The Quranic assurance that "after hardship comes ease" offers hope for a better future—not just for Syria but for all nations striving for peace, justice, and harmony. The Syrian crisis is a call to action for the Muslim world to reclaim its strength and uphold the values of justice, compassion, and unity that lie at the heart of Islamic teachings.

Sustainable development goals and Pakistan

Asim Shafique

MEMBER states of the UN, in pursuit of collective sustainable development, agreed to adopt a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. The destination was to protect the planet, end poverty and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. These SDGs are determined by 17 goals, including 169 associated targets and 232 indicators pursued in synchronised international cooperation efforts and national frameworks. The government is independent in taking charge and creating national frameworks to accomplish SDGs, as they are not legally obligatory. Therefore, the interest of international organisations and the effectiveness with which national governments craft programmes to reap the benefits of international support will determine the success of the SDGs. The accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) serves as the foundation for the SDGs.

Since January 1, 2016, the Pakistani government has been actively implementing the SDGs. A dedicated section within the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiative is the national coordinating entity for this effort. The government has prioritised the 17 goals into three categories, demonstrating its commitment to achieving the SDGs.

Priority 1: Zero Hunger

(SDG 2), Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), Quality Education (SDG 4), Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6), Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), and Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16).

Priority 2: No Poverty (SDG 1), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9), Reduce Inequality (SDG 10), Partnership for the Goals (SDG 17), and Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11).

Priority 3: Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12), Climate Action (SDG 13), Life Below Water (SDG 14) and Life on Land (SDG 15).

Pakistan was among the first countries to adopt the 2030 SDGs agenda through a unanimous parliament resolution. Unfortunately, its ranking has fluctuated over the years, showing inconsistent implementation strategies. Initially, Pakistan stood at 122 and moved to 134 in 2020, then came back to 128 in 2023 with an overall score of 58.97, and again moved to 137 recently in 2024. In comparison, we can see that even the smaller neighbouring countries like Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have a better ranking/score than Pakistan.

In a recent sustainable development report 2024,

Pakistan's ranking declined to 137th from 128th in (2023) with an overall score of (57.02). The table below shows the detailed performance of Pakistan in 2024 and its comparison with its performance in 2017 and 2020 in achieving the SDGs.

The Sustainable Development Report 2024 indicates that Pakistan has shown moderate improvement in SDGs 1, 7, 9, 14 and 17. This progress should instil a sense of hope and optimism in the audience. Similarly, Pakistan has stagnated performance in SDGs 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, and 15. Pakistan faces significant challenges in SDGs 4, 11, and 16. However, in SDG 10, the United Nations hasn't received any data from Pakistan.

Pakistan's SDGs ranking has fluctuated since 2015. This is because of inconsistent policies, unstable political situation, economic constraints, etc. Achieving the SDGs requires long-term commitment and cooperation from various segments of society. The financial, sociopolitical, and environmental aspects must converge harmoniously to achieve sustainable development. The following are recommended for Pakistan to achieve the SDGs:

"Pakistan needs political will, clear targets, elaborate timelines, budget allocations, robust regulatory framework, and legal support to ensure accountability to achieve the

SDGs.

Implementing the SDGs in Pakistan requires a robust institutional framework. This involves collaboration between federal and provincial bodies, government agencies, civil society, businesses, and academia. The complexity of this task underscores the need for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to achieving the SDGs.

To ensure evidence-based decisions, the government must enhance its data collection, analysis and reporting mechanisms. "Campaigns to raise awareness about the SDGs should be launched nationwide. Similarly, SDGs content should be incorporated into educational curricula to foster a culture of sustainability.

"Pakistan must implement anti-poverty programmes and promote inclusive economic growth to eradicate poverty.

"Collaboration with other nations, active participation in international forums, and partnerships to share SDG implementation knowledge, resources, and technology are crucial. In summary, Pakistan has made strides in several areas, but social inequality, economic limitations, and political instability prevent the SDGs from being fully achieved. Achieving sustainable development is contingent upon implementing efficient governance, sustained endeavours, and international collaboration.

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Why the US has birthright citizenship and how Trump could challenge it

PRESIDENT-ELECT Donald Trump has for years been railing against the concept of birthright citizenship in the 14th Amendment.

During the 2024 presidential campaign, he promised that, on Day One of his second term, he would issue an executive order ending the current policy, which he said in a video is "based on a historical myth and a willful misinterpretation of the law."

A constitutional amendment beats an executive order every time in the US system of government, but Trump's position represents the persistent belief that something should be done to stop the children of undocumented immigrants from claiming US citizenship.

In that campaign video, Trump said his executive order will make "clear to federal agencies that under the correct interpretation of the law, going forward, the future children of illegal aliens will not receive automatic US citizenship."

CNN's Priscilla Alvarez has reported that Trump's new administration could stop issuing passports to the children of the undocumented, engineering a legal showdown over the issue. In addition, Trump's team might step up "expedited removal" of undocumented immigrants across the country without a court hearing, challenging another sentence of the 14th Amendment, which guarantees equal protection to every person under the law.

Both Trump and his incoming "border czar," Tom Homan, have said they will not shy away from deporting the parents of US citizens who are children.

"If you come in the country and have a child, that's on you. You can either take the child with you, but that's on you," Homan said on Tuesday in Chicago, adding he would target undocu-

mented people living in cities like Chicago that have sanctuary policies.

As president in 2020, Trump tried to restrict visas for pregnant women entering the US for so-called birth tourism.

The US has birthright citizenship to guarantee that the descendants of people brought to the US against their will and sold as slaves are citizens.

In probably the worst moment in the US Supreme Court's history, the Dred Scott decision of 1857, then-Chief Justice Roger B. Taney wrote for a 7-2 majority that no descendant of an enslaved person could be a US citizen. Scott was an enslaved man from Missouri who had lived in free territories with his Army surgeon owner. He sued for freedom after returning to Missouri.

The decision was undone by the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery, and the 14th Amendment, which guaranteed that everyone born in the US was a citizen of the US and protected by its Bill of Rights.

Here's the text of the first portion of the amendment:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

The language is pretty clear. Anyone born in the US is a citizen of the US.

For more on the history of the amendment, read this excellent explainer from CNN's AJ Willingham, written in 2018, when Trump threatened as president to challenge the concept of birthright citizenship.

Zachary B. Wolf

One of the main backers of the idea that the amendment does not apply to children of undocumented immigrants born in the US is John Eastman, the very same lawyer who hatched the six-step game plan by which Trump attempted to subvert the 2020 election results.

While Trump is returning to the White House, Eastman has since been indicted in Georgia and Arizona for election interference and disbarred in California. But before any of that, he was pushing the idea that the country has been misinterpreting the 14th Amendment for the past 150-plus years.

He argued that the phrase in between the commas, "and subject to the jurisdiction thereof," essentially disqualifies the children of people not legally living in the US. All it would take is for Congress to pass a law expressly saying the children of people in the country illegally cannot have citizenship, according to Eastman and some other scholars.

It's a fringe theory in that even conservative lawyers and judges have rejected it.

For more on why Eastman's argument does not apply, look to James Ho, now a Trump-appointed judge on the 5th US Circuit Court of Appeals. Ho wrote in 2006 that the 14th Amendment was enacted expressly to undo the Dred Scott decision and return the US to principles of English common law, by which everyone born in the country was a citizen.

Note: The United Kingdom actually did away with unrestricted birthright citizenship with its British Nationality Act of 1981, but many other countries, including Canada and Mexico on either side of the US, still adhere to the principle.

Ho, a potential contender for a Supreme Court seat if one opens

up during Trump's new term, raised many eyebrows when he was interviewed by the libertarian Reason magazine in November. Without commenting on any specific cases, he added a qualification to his legal support for birthright citizenship. Ho said this:

Birthright citizenship is supported by various Supreme Court opinions, both unanimous and separate opinions involving Justices Scalia, Thomas, Alito, and others. But birthright citizenship obviously doesn't apply in case of war or invasion. No one to my knowledge has ever argued that the children of invading aliens are entitled to birthright citizenship. And I can't imagine what the legal argument for that would be.

Earlier this year, coincidentally, CNN's John Fritze notes that Ho had used that term, "invasion," in a concurring opinion on a different topic.

"In an opinion this summer dealing with Texas' construction of a floating barrier on the Rio Grande, Ho wrote that Texas should have prevailed in the case because the state was repelling an 'invasion' of migrants," according to Fritze.

The Supreme Court did unequivocally find in the case of Wong Kim Ark in 1898 that the children of noncitizens born in the US to "resident aliens" are citizens under the 14th Amendment.

Wong Kim Ark was born in the US to Chinese immigrants but denied entry back into the country after a trip to China due to the Chinese Exclusion Act. Ho described the circumstances of that case in his 2006 defense of birthright citizenship. He included this sweeping language confirming the principle of birthright citizenship from the 1898 court:

The fourteenth amendment affirms the ancient and fundamental rule of citizenship by birth with-

in the territory, in the allegiance and under the protection of the country, including all children here born of resident aliens, with the exceptions or qualifications (as old as the rule itself) of children of foreign sovereigns or their ministers, or born on foreign public ships, or of enemies within and during a hostile occupation of part of our territory, and with the single additional exception of children of members of the Indian tribes owing direct allegiance to their several tribes. ... To hold that the fourteenth amendment of the constitution excludes from citizenship the children born in the United States of citizens or subjects of other countries, would be to deny citizenship to thousands of persons of English, Scotch, Irish, German, or other European parentage, who have always been considered and treated as citizens of the United States.

At the time, Ho argued that the decision extended citizenship to people born in the US regardless of immigration status. There hasn't been a constitutional amendment ratified in more than 30 years. They're notoriously hard to enact. They can either be proposed by a two-thirds majority vote in both chambers of Congress or by a constitutional convention called for by two-thirds of the states. The amendment must then also be ratified by three-quarters of state legislatures or of special conventions called in each state. If talk of Trump and the 14th Amendment sounds familiar, that's because a different section of the amendment bars people who engaged in or aided insurrection against the US from serving in federal office. The Supreme Court earlier this year ruled that the insurrection clause could only be applied to Trump by an act of Congress, clearing the way for his appearance on ballots this fall.

— CNN

Powering growth through policies, reforms

CHINA'S economy has remained stable overall this year, with major macroeconomic indicators meeting expectations and its fundamentals holding steady. But the challenges it faces, particularly low growth of demand, have become increasingly apparent. Supply currently outpaces demand, with external demand stronger than domestic demand, highlighting an imbalance in economic dynamics.

Wang Yiming
nificant reduction in demand.

At its 2021 peak, the real estate market saw 1.8 billion square meters of property being sold for 18.2 trillion yuan (\$2.51 trillion). But in 2023, property sales plummeted to 1.12 billion square meters for 11.6 trillion yuan. And in the first 10 months of this year, property sales declined by 20.9 percent — at this pace of decline, annual sales are projected to shrink further to just 9.2 trillion yuan. This decline has created a wide gap in demand that emerging industries such as electric vehicles and

lations can stimulate household spending. Expanding access to high-end healthcare, tourism and eldercare services can also cater to diverse consumer needs.

To promote the stabilization and recovery of the real estate market, on the supply side, stricter control over new construction, optimizing existing stock and improving housing quality are important.

Also important is boosting loan support for "white-listed" projects with clear guidelines and accountability measures to ease bank financing concerns.

On the demand side, policies should be intro-

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Insufficient demand stems from systemic, cyclical and structural factors. For example, China's economic growth relied heavily on investment and exports for the past few decades. And in times of external shocks or economic downturns, debt-driven investment projects were used to stimulate growth. While effective in addressing infrastructure gaps, this approach has seen diminishing returns as local government debt rises and investment efficiency declines. Investment increases supply capacity, but as global capacity normalizes, the mismatch with relatively low domestic demand becomes more evident. Also, the deep adjustments in the property market have led to a significant reduction in demand.

At its 2021 peak, the real estate market saw 1.8 billion square meters of property being sold for 18.2 trillion yuan (\$2.51 trillion). But in 2023, property sales plummeted to 1.12 billion square meters for 11.6 trillion yuan. And in the first 10 months of this year, property sales declined by 20.9 percent — at this pace of decline, annual sales are projected to shrink further to just 9.2 trillion yuan. This decline has created a wide gap in demand that emerging industries such as electric vehicles and renewable energy, though growing rapidly, cannot immediately fill.

The COVID-19 pandemic and declining real estate prices have eroded household wealth, reducing consumption. Rising corporate leverage has weakened investment capacity, while lower fiscal and land sale revenues have constrained local governments' activities, including investment and purchase activity. Addressing these balance sheet challenges depends on broader economic recovery and asset price stabilization, both of which require time. To ensure sustained recovery, China must combine immediate policy measures with deeper structural reforms. To begin, it needs to strengthen countercyclical measures. In fact, the government has implemented policies to help boost economic recovery, including cutting reserve requirement ratios and interest rates. Additionally, the recent approval of a 6-trillion-yuan local government debt-swap program is aimed at reducing interest burdens and freeing up funds for development. But enhanced coordination across departments is essential to ensure policies are both targeted and effective. Expanding domestic demand should focus on boosting consumption. Currently, commodity consumption is relatively saturated, so efforts should be made to actively expand service consumption. Initiatives such as birth subsidies and extending public services to migrant populations can stimulate household spending. Expanding access to high-end healthcare, tourism and eldercare services can also cater to diverse consumer needs. To promote the stabilization and recovery of the real estate market, on the supply side, stricter control over new construction, optimizing existing stock and improving housing quality are important. Also important is boosting loan support for "white-listed" projects with clear guidelines and accountability measures to ease bank financing concerns. On the demand side, policies should be introduced to support the purchase of unsold inventory for affordable housing by enabling the use of special-purpose bonds, enhancing re-lending mechanisms and establishing clear price evaluation mechanisms to ensure effective implementation.

5.8 percent year-on-year, exceeding GDP growth for the same period. The export growth of 6.7 percent (in yuan terms) during this time was fueled by global trade recovery, inventory replenishment, and enterprises accelerating shipments ahead of expected tariff hikes. However, with slowing global trade and increasing restrictions, the pace of export growth is likely to decelerate, amplifying the pressure on domestic demand.

To address these challenges, boosting effective domestic demand and rebalancing supply and demand are essential. These steps will not only resolve imbalances but also improve market expectations, bolster social confidence and support sustained economic recovery.

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duced to support the purchase of unsold inventory for affordable housing by enabling the use of special-purpose bonds, enhancing re-lending mechanisms and establishing clear price evaluation mechanisms to ensure effective implementation.

Besides, reforms need to be implemented to support private sector development by ensuring fair access to markets, enforcing intellectual property rights and resolving issues such as delayed payments to businesses. And to enhance economic efficiency and regional financial autonomy, a unified national market should be built and the relationship between central and local governments be adjusted, including by shifting the collection of consumption taxes to local governments and allowing them to set flexible tax rates within defined limits.

The difficulties facing China's economy today reflect the pains of transition. However, these challenges also present opportunities to transform growth models and adjust economic structures. By focusing on rebalancing supply and demand, stabilizing key sectors and pursuing comprehensive reforms, China can lay the foundation for a new cycle of sustainable growth.

Economic resilience and adaptability will be critical as China navigates this period of adjustment, turning challenges into a springboard for long-term prosperity. — China Daily

Gulf carving out a place for itself in global cinema

THE Middle East is home to the world's fastest-growing film industry and the Gulf region holds strong potential to advance in this sector. Powered by public and growing private sector investment, the region is producing innovative content, organizing international film festivals and drawing global filmmakers to produce feature films locally. The ongoing Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah highlights how the Gulf is fast emerging as a hub for cinema.

The Saudi model has been particularly successful. Six years since the Kingdom lifted a three-decade ban, the Saudi film industry has generated close to \$1 billion in revenue. The Saudi film market is the fastest-growing in the region, with a 25 percent annual growth rate.

The very idea of entertainment has evolved, as 17 million cinemagoers boost an industry that aims to create 2,000 screens across the Kingdom by 2030. The Kingdom recently launched the \$100 million Saudi Film Fund to promote local content and opened the Al-Hisn Big Time Studios, spread over 10,500 sq. meters in Riyadh.

That the film industry provides a significant boost to the local economy is clear. A single movie has the potential to employ hundreds of people, given the myriad elements of filmmaking — from design and maintaining a set to acting and promotions. The sector has also provided avenues for Saudi collaboration with notable international platforms, such as Vox and Netflix. The entertainment

industry overall can make a 4.2 percent contribution to the Saudi economy by 2030 through the creation of 450,000 jobs, according to the Ministry of Investment.

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At the same time, cinema is a catalyst for societal and cultural change. As the Kingdom moves from watching international feature films to also producing its own, it has found cinema to be a multifaceted avenue for recording history, discussing socio-cultural issues and, perhaps most importantly, forming a strong national identity. For the young Gulf audience, a strong local film industry provides not only an outlet for creativity but also a sense of domestic self-sufficiency in the field of entertainment.

A new nationalism is on the rise in Saudi Arabia and its neighbors, as the Gulf states are promoting socioeconomic transfor-

Zaid M. Belbagi

mation and creating new opportunities for the youth. As the state promotes this field, local creative professionals will find opportunities in their

homeland. Moreover, Gulf society, as any other, will relate the most to popular representations of its own history, culture and humor. Local cinematic productions are key for the Gulf youth to exhibit their own interpretations of modernity and encourage conversations around the same. However, the film industry's potential is not limited to its economic and cultural contributions. Cinema as an influential tool for soft power is unmatched, as the success of the US' Hollywood, India's Bollywood and Nigeria's Nollywood exemplify. As Saudi Arabia and the wider region reshape their foreign policy, local cinema will emerge as a key component of their soft power by projecting a favorable image in the international community. Investing in films allows these countries to increase the international audience's familiarity with the region and

thereby attract tourists.

It is also crucial for the reformation of the traditional image of the region and enhancing cultural diplomacy.

The Saudi Ministry of Investment is yet to be unleashed. Similarly, while the Bahraini, Kuwaiti and Omani film industries are in a nascent stage, there is significant scope for further government investment in this sector to reap its economic and social benefits. For instance, Oman plans to invest more than \$30 million in a Film City in Barka.

As the region sets out on this journey, it can benefit from the successes and challenges seen in established film industries in the Middle East and North Africa. Morocco has a strong culture of cinema, as exemplified by critically acclaimed local productions like "Ali Zaoua" and "Horses of God." It is also a popular filming location for international feature films, such as the classics "Gladiator" and "Lawrence of Arabia."

The Gulf is thus boldly carving out a place for itself in global cinema, offering the world a window into its culture.

The impressive national visions launched by the Gulf states seek to transform not only their economies but their societies as well — and cinema is an important tool that can contribute to this change by encouraging local creative voices. To sustain this growth, governments in the region will need to maximize creative freedom, regulatory support and financing.

As an ever-growing number of tourists and expatriates head to the region, a well-established culture of cinema will provide them with a lifestyle in line with global standards. Crucially, the Gulf voice will expand the depth of global cinema and introduce the international audience to a fresh approach to storytelling.



Foreign investors meet finance minister, explore investment opportunities

ISLAMABAD (APP): A high-level delegation of foreign investors and business professionals, mostly based in the United States, here on Wednesday, called on Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb.

The delegation put together by Ambassador Ali Jehangir Siddiqui of the JS Bank comprised leading entrepreneurs, business practitioners and professionals from diverse sectors, including technology, academia, and finance, with lead members such as Auren Hoffman, Chief Executive Officer of SafeGraph, Kristen Edwards Marqua (Hakluyt & Company), Michael Levi (The D.E. Shaw Group), Dr. Jeff Chang (Rad AI), and others.

Ambassador Ali Jehangir Siddiqui apprised the minister about the composition of the delegation, the purpose of their visit and their interaction with different stakeholders during the visit so far.

Advisor to the Finance Minister Mr. Khurram Shehzad and senior officers of the Finance Division and Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) were also present, according to press release issued by finance ministry.

Aurangzeb briefed the investors about the country's recent macroeconomic progress, highlighting significant achievements in overcoming longstanding challenges.

"Pakistan has historically struggled with twin deficits; however, due to improved export performance, the economy is now operating with a surplus in both fiscal and current accounts. Foreign exchange reserves have crossed the \$12 billion mark, inflation has been brought down to single digits, and the policy rate is moving in the right direction," he noted.

He further elaborated on the government's comprehensive reform agenda, encompassing privatization, SOE restructuring, rightsiz-

ing of the federal government, and pension reforms. Senator Aurangzeb also addressed two existential challenges faced by Pakistan: rapid population growth and climate change.

"With a population growth rate exceeding 2%, we face severe implications for food security, child stunting, and out-of-school children. Climate change exacerbates these vulnerabilities, making it imperative to secure both financial and technical assistance to tackle these issues effectively," he remarked.

He also mentioned that he has emphasized the importance of these priorities in discussions with international partners, including World Bank President Ajay Banga.

Meanwhile, addressing a query on implementing International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions and structural reforms, he remarked: "The willingness and ability to execute reforms are crucial. While

we have significant work ahead, as long as we maintain commitment and momentum, and stay the course, we will achieve the desired outcomes."

Responding to another question, he stressed the role of the private sector in driving economic growth.

"Policy frameworks and continuity are the government's responsibility, but the private sector must lead the economy. The government's focus is on creating an enabling environment to support this transition," he stated.

The delegation appreciated the government's efforts in stabilizing the economy and discussed opportunities for collaboration in areas such as innovation, investment, and financial inclusion.

The meeting concluded with a shared resolve to strengthen US-Pakistan cooperation in achieving mutual economic goals and addressing shared challenges.

Khurram nominated as Chairman

FAISALABAD (APP): Former President Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) Dr Khurram Tariq has been nominated as Chairman of Advisory Council on sustainability and circularity in the textile and apparel sectors.

The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) has notified a 15-member Advisory Council to provide strategic guidance and support on developing policies and action plans for promoting sustainability and circularity in these sectors in addition to ailing it with global regulations and international best practices.

The council may co-opt the representatives of the relevant federal ministries / organizations, provincial departments, business, academia and any other organizations on a case-to-case basis as per its requirement for advice and technical inputs.

The meeting of the Advisory Council will be held on bimonthly basis and the MOC will serve as its secretariat, said Dr Khurram Tariq in a statement here on Wednesday.

Trade sales up 7.2%

ISTANBUL (APP): Türkiye's trade sales volume increased by 7.2% year-on-year in October, according to data released Wednesday by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat).

Retail sales showed a notable boost, rising by 15% compared to the same period last year.

In retail trade, food, drinks, and tobacco sales grew by 10.6%, while non-food sales surged by 20.1%. Automotive fuel sales saw a modest increase of 1%.

In the wholesale sector, wholesale and retail trade, along with the repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, increased by 9.2%, while wholesale trade sales volume rose by 3.8%.

On a monthly basis, overall trade sales volume fell by 1.9%.

However, the retail sales volume index saw a slight increase of 0.2%.

Prudent policies start paying dividends: Advisor

ISLAMABAD (APP): Advisor to the Finance Minister on Economic and Financial Reforms, Khurram Schehzad said on Wednesday that the prudent policies introduced by the current government had started yielding the desired results, as reflected in a recent survey conducted by a world-leading firm.

"Pakistan's Global Consumer Confidence Index has improved, surpassing Türkiye for the first time in two years, while India, China, and Brazil have seen declines," he said in a statement, quoting a survey by global market research firm Ipsos that revealed a significant shift in public perception regarding Pakistan's economic trajectory.

The survey, which includes responses from all four provinces as well as Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), showcased a promising outlook for the country as it navigates economic challenges.

Khurram Schehzad highlighted several key positive takeaways from the fourth-quarter 2024 Ipsos survey, underscoring a wave of optimism among the Pakistani populace.

He said the survey indicated that belief in Pakistan "heading in the right direction" has nearly doubled, rising to 19 per cent – the highest level in 36 months. This surge in confidence reflects the growing public perception that the government's efforts to stabilize the economy are beginning to yield results.

The advisor noted that a significant drop in "inflation concerns" has been observed, falling by 16 points. This marks the lowest level of inflationary anxiety in the past 3.5 years, signaling that the government's policies aimed at controlling rising prices are having a positive impact on households.

Khurram said that, according to the report, there has been a significant shift in the way Pakistanis viewed the state of the national economy. The number of people describing the economy as "strong" has quadrupled since September 2023, while the number of those perceiving the economy as "weak" has dropped by 9 points, reflecting a growing sense of economic resilience.

The survey also highlighted an improvement in household financial confi-

dence, with comfort in making purchases rising by 6 points in the last quarter. This suggests that Pakistanis are feeling more secure in their personal financial situations, which may have a ripple effect on consumer spending and overall economic growth.

Sharing further details, the advisor said that, commenting on "Future Optimism," 21 per cent of respondents expected their local economies to strengthen over the next six months. This forward-looking optimism points to a growing belief that Pakistan's economic conditions will improve in the near term, offering hope for sustained growth and recovery.

Additionally, he said that public confidence in the ability to save for the future has shown a significant rebound, indicating a shift toward a more positive outlook on long-term financial planning. This growing confidence in savings is a vital sign of increasing economic stability among households.

He also mentioned another noteworthy trend reflected in the survey: the stable job security perception, which remained at a three-year high.

Policy framework launched

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) on Wednesday unveiled the Women Equality in Finance Policy Framework (WEFF) for Non-Bank Microfinance Companies (NBMFCs), to enhance women's financial inclusion and strengthen their role in the financial ecosystem.

The policy framework mandates that in next five years 70% of all new clients onboarded by the NBMFCs shall be women, said a news release.

To achieve this, NBMFCs will be encouraged to develop tailored financial products for women entrepreneurs.

To foster Inclusive Gov-

ernance the policy requires a minimum of 25% female representation on Boards and also sets incremental workforce inclusivity targets. The policy overall encourages digitization and innovation in the microfinance sector.

With measures such as integrating gender-disaggregated data, training programs for workforce inclusivity, and the modernization of financial services through digital platforms, WEFF aspires to create a resilient and diverse financial sector that uplifts Pakistan's economy.

WEFF comes as a response to alarming disparities in financial inclusion: women account for only 13% of formal finan-

cial institution account holders in Pakistan compared to 34% of men.

Additionally, between 2018 and 2024, the share of female borrowers in the microfinance sector dropped from 54% to 46%, despite women demonstrating superior repayment behaviours.

This data highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to reverse these trends.

SECPs WEFF reaffirms its dedication to advancing gender equity in financial services. By enabling women's financial empowerment, the framework aims to drive sustainable economic growth, innovation, and resilience in Pakistan.

Business confidence increases: Survey

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI) survey indicates an improvement in overall business confidence across Pakistan.

The OICCI's Business Confidence Index (BCI) Survey – Wave 26, conducted in October and November 2024, reveals positive sentiment among businesses. The improvement in business confidence is attributed to positive economic growth, a stable exchange rate, and a significant decline in reported inflation.

The improvement in business sentiment is driven by positive economic growth, a stable exchange rate, and a notable decline in reported inflation.

Commenting on the BCI Wave 26 survey findings, Yousaf Hussain, President of OICCI, added, "The improvement in the Business Confidence Index reflects an overall improvement in the economic outlook and the resilience of Pakistan's business environment amidst ongoing challenges. The government has taken bold confidence-building measures in compliance with IMF EFF translating into improved country risk rating by international rating agencies, and a boost in FX reserves of the country which helped maintain a stable exchange rate, containing inflationary increase to record lows, all of which collectively led to a positive business environment".

The survey highlighted optimism for the next six months, with 43% of respondents expressing positive expectations, up from 34% in the previous wave. Key contributors to this positive outlook include growth in the global market, better government policies, declining inflation, improved law-and-order conditions, and economic growth.

M. Abdul Aleem, Secretary General OICCI, further highlighted that "The BCI Wave 26 feedback reflects cautious optimism among businesses, with significant gains in the services and manufacturing sectors".

The OICCI BCI survey is conducted periodically, incorporating feedback from key business stake-

holders representing nearly 80% of Pakistan's GDP. It covers the environment at regional, national, sectoral, and business entity.

Secretary General OICCI emphasised that while the improvement in business confidence is positive, actionable measures are needed to sustain the momentum. We are positive that all the key stakeholders will thoroughly undertake an analysis of the BCI 26 feedback, and take timely measures to facilitate all segments of the economy through a consistent, transparent policy framework, focused on ease of doing business so as to accelerate economic growth, investment, boost exports and employment in the country.



RAWALPINDI: Vendors busy filling coal into sacks at Bohar Bazaar as demand increased during winter season.

Complaint Management through QR code at IIA

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The management at Islamabad International Airport (IIAP) has introduced a revamped feedback and complaint system using QR codes alongside the existing mechanisms. This initiative allows to promptly addressing passenger complaints and suggestions, ensuring timely communication with our valued customers.

QR codes are prominently displayed at key locations in IIAP to ensure easy access for passengers. The system features a user-friendly interface for hassle-free submission of complaints or suggestions.

Gold prices increase by Rs3,100/tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The price of 24 karat per tola gold witnessed an increase of Rs3,100 and was sold at Rs280,500 on Wednesday against its sale at Rs277,400 on previous trading day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs2,658 to Rs240,484 from Rs237,826 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat also went up to Rs220,443 from Rs218,007.

Per tola silver increased by Rs50 to Rs3,450 whereas that of ten gram silver went up by Rs42.86 to Rs2,957.81.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$31 to \$2,693 from \$2,662, the Association reported.

Shipping activity at PQ

KARACHI (APP): Five ships, Maersk Seleter, Diamond, Solar Omega, SM Navigator and Spar Octans scheduled to load/offload Container, Rice, Palm oil, Gas oil and Coal, berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal, Grain Terminal, Liquid Cargo Terminal, FOTCO oil Terminal and Power Electric Port Terminal respectively on Tuesday.

Meanwhile four more ships, GFS Ruby, Saga, Anikitos and Milah Qatar carrying Container, Palm oil, Soya Been Seed and LNG also arrived at outer anchorage during last 24 hours. Eleven ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them a chemicals carrier 'Jipro Neftis' left the on today morning, while two more ships, Maersk Seleter and SM Navigator are expected to sail on today.

Cargo volume of 121,435 tonnes, comprising 95,555 tonnes imports cargo and 27,880 tonnes export cargo carried in 2,643 Containers (1,590 TEUs Imports & 1,053 TEUs Export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

Nineteen ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them two ships, Gascem Warnow and Milah Qatar & two more ships, Maersk Cairo and CMA CGM La Scala carrying Chemicals, LNG and Container are expected to take berths at ERTL, EETL and QICT respectively on today Wednesday, while two more container ships, One Recommendation and Teno due to arrive at port on Thursday.

PSX turns around, gains 1,913 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bullish trend on Wednesday, gaining 1,913.57 points, a positive change of 1.76 percent, closing at 110,810.22 points as compared to 108,896.65 points on the last trading day.

A total of 1,080,023,483 shares were traded during the day as compared to 1,548,302,320 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs47.139 billion against Rs68.805 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 472 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 288 of them recorded gains and 130 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 54 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were K-Electric Limited 135,915,842

shares at Rs6.40 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 73,534,167 shares at Rs1.65 per share and Fauji Foods Limited with 57,124,498 shares at Rs14.90 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs504.95 per share price, closing at Rs20,835.50, whereas the runner-up was Khyber Textile Mills Limited with Rs53.11 rise in its per share price to Rs684.99

Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs175.54 per share closing at Rs7,155.27 followed by Mehmood Textile Mills Limited with Rs59.14 decline to close at Rs562.53.

Rupee sheds 11 paise against dollar

Pakistani rupee on Wednesday depreciated by 11 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.16

against the previous day's closing of Rs278.05.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs277.70 and Rs279.20 respectively.

The price of Euro decreased by Rs1.09 to close at Rs292.11 against the last day's closing of Rs293.20, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen came down by 01 paise to close at Rs1.82, whereas a decrease of 18 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs354.48 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs354.30.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 03 and 01 paise to close at Rs75.73 and Rs74.01, respectively.

Pakistan to establish 'gem and jewelry city'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Industries and Production, Rana Tanveer Hussain, chaired a crucial meeting of the Prime Minister's Committee on Precious Stones, paving the way for significant developments in Pakistan's gemstone industry.

The committee decided to establish an authority for

the effective use of precious stones, along with a Gemstone Export Processing Center and a Gem and Jewelry City in Islamabad, according to a news release on Wednesday. The meeting was attended by Minister for Privatization Aleem Khan, Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan, and other concerned

secretaries and DGs. During the meeting, various recommendations for the potential use of precious stones were presented.

The committee also considered recommendations to facilitate foreign investment in this sector. It also agreed to set up a Gemstone and Jewelry Center at international airports.

US court blocks Kroger's \$25 billion

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): A US judge suspended supermarket giant Kroger's planned \$24.6 billion acquisition of rival chain Albertsons on Tuesday in a win for the Federal Trade Commission, which had argued the deal would harm consumers.

The order for a temporary block follows a three-week trial in Portland, Oregon, and deals a significant blow to what would have been one of the largest retail grocery deals in US history.

"Plaintiffs are likely to succeed on the merits and the equities weigh in favor of an injunction," US District Judge Adrienne Watson wrote in a court filing confirming the preliminary injunction, which

delays the deal but does not kill it.

The FTC had argued the acquisition would lead to higher prices for groceries and other essential household items for millions of Americans.

The judge rejected the companies' arguments that the merger would generate billions in cost savings and lead to lower prices for consumers, finding these claims were "neither merger-specific nor verifiable."

"Today's win protects competition in the grocery market, which will prevent prices from rising even more," FTC spokesperson Douglas Farrar wrote in a statement shared with AFP after the injunction was granted.

The injunction makes clear, he added, "that strong, reality-based antitrust enforcement delivers real results for consumers, workers, and small businesses."

Neither Kroger nor Albertsons immediately responded to requests for comment.

"The Kroger-Albertsons deal always faced an uphill battle in its bid for approval," GlobalData managing director Neil Saunders wrote in a note to clients. "While some of the FTC's arguments were debatable, it operated from a position of strength"

"For both firms, it is now a case of putting this distraction behind them and going back to the drawing board," he added.

China's auto sector achieves strong growth

BEIJING (APP): China's auto production rose 11.1 percent year on year to 3.44 million units in November 2024, while sales climbed 11.7 percent from a year earlier to 3.32 million units, industrial data showed Wednesday.

In the first 11 months of 2024, auto production exceeded 27.9 million units, up 2.9 percent year on year, while sales expanded 3.7 percent to 27.94 million units, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

The data also revealed that the country's new energy vehicle (NEV) sector

had managed to sustain its sound growth momentum last month.

National NEV output surged 45.8 percent year on year to nearly 1.57 million units in November, and NEV sales climbed by 47.4 percent to 1.51 million units.

NEV sales accounted for 45.6 percent of total sales of new cars in November. The automobile market continued to improve last month -- underpinned by a national auto trade-in policy, said Chen Shihua, deputy secretary-general of the association.

China's auto trade-ins for 2024 exceeded 5 mil-

lion units as of Monday, under a mass renewal program initiated early this year, the Ministry of Commerce said Tuesday.

Currently, consumers trading in an old car for an NEV are entitled to a 20,000 yuan (2,781 US dollars) subsidy, while those opting for a new fuel-powered car will receive 15,000 yuan.

Auto trade-in subsidies form part of a national program unveiled in March 2024 aimed at expanding domestic demand and shoring up the economy through equipment upgrades and consumer goods trade-ins.



In brief

Harry Brook replaces Root

LONDON (Agencies): Harry Brook has moved above England teammate Joe Root to become the number one Test batter in the world rankings. The 25-year-old has overtaken Root after scoring 171 in the first Test of England's current tour of New Zealand and following it up with scores of 123 and 55 in the second Test in Wellington to give him a ranking score of 898. Root, who replaced New Zealand's Kane Williamson at the top of the International Cricket Council rankings in July, is just one point behind Brook on 897 and could take back his crown when the third Test starts in Hamilton on 14 December. Following the victory in Wellington, Root was full of praise for his Yorkshire team-mate. "Brook is by far and away the best player in the world at the minute," said Root. "He can absorb pressure, he can apply it. He can whack you over your head for six. He can smack spin. He can smack seam." Brook, who made his Test debut in 2022, has scored 2,280 runs from 38 innings across 23 Tests with an average of 61.62.

NFL announces Berlin game

BERLIN (AFP): The NFL will play a regular season game in Berlin in the 2025 season, the fifth match to be played in Germany, the league announced on Wednesday. At a joint press conference between the governing body and the Berlin Senate, the NFL also announced it would play games in the capital in 2027 and 2029. All three matches will be played at Berlin's Olympic Stadium but the league did not announce which teams will be playing in 2025 or when the match will be. Berlin will be the third German city to host a regular season NFL game, with two games so far in both Munich and Frankfurt. Alexander Steinforth, the general manager of the NFL in Germany, said Berlin was "made for the NFL". "It's a great day, we've been looking forward to it. Munich and Frankfurt are great, but Berlin is the capital," said Iris Spranger whose portfolio as a Berlin senator includes sport. Berlin applied to host NFL games in November. German media reported the Berlin senate will invest up to 12.5 million euros (\$13.2 million). With space for 74,500 fans, Berlin's Olympic Stadium, opened for the 1936 Olympics, boasts a larger capacity than the other two when converted to all-seated arenas and is regularly used for football matches. Home to second division side Hertha Berlin, the Olympic Stadium has hosted the finals of the 2006 World Cup, the 2015 Champions League and Euro 2024. The NFL first played in Europe in London in 2007 and has since played games in Mexico City and Sao Paulo, with Madrid set to host a match in 2025. The NFL's first regular season game in Germany was in Munich in 2022 between Tom Brady's Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Seattle Seahawks. The NFL boasts high TV viewership in Germany, while demand has far exceeded supply for tickets in each of the regular season games played on German soil.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Junior Squash C'ship Concludes



E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Junior Boys Under-9,13,15 and Girls Under-13 Squash Championship organized by the KP Squash Association concluded successfully. The event's chief guest was Secretary of Public Health Engineering Department and President of KP Squash Association Dawood Khan. He was joined by legendary former world champion Qamar

Zaman, squash legend Mohibullah Khan, senior coach and chief organizer Munawar Zaman, senior coach Tahir Iqbal, Amjad Khan, Finance Secretary Wazir and other notable personalities. In the finals held at Qamar Zaman Squash Complex Atif Ali Naz defeated Abu Bakar 3-1 in the Under-9 category. In the Under-13 category Danish Sikandar triumphed over Ayaan Mahboob with a 3-0 score

while the Under-15 final witnessed a thrilling match where Abdullah Shah overcame Fawad Khan 3-2 to claim the trophy. In the Girls Under-13 category Maliha Shah defeated Hadiya Farman 3-0 in a dominant performance. More than 128 players from across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa participated in the championship. At the conclusion of the event the chief guest distributed prizes among the winning players.

WSF World Team Squash C'ship Pakistan lose to Germany

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan put up a valiant show at the WSF World Team Squash Championship 2024, but fell short in the playoffs against Germany to lose 2-1 in a fiercely contested encounter in Hong Kong, China. According to information made available here by Pakistan Squash Federation on Wednesday, the tie began with an intense five-game battle between Germany's Raphael Kandra and

Pakistan's Muhammad Asim Khan. Kandra ultimately emerged victorious, defeating Asim 3-2 with scores of 11-9, 9-11, 9-11, 11-4, 11-9 in a 58-minute marathon. Pakistan bounced back in the second match, where Nasir Iqbal delivered a stellar performance to sweep past Germany's Yannik Omir in straight games. Nasir dominated the court, winning 3-0 with scores of 11-8, 11-2, 11-6 in just 27 minutes.

In the decisive match, German squash legend Simon Rösner overcame Pakistan's Noor Zaman with a 3-1 victory. Despite Noor's promising start by clinching the first game 11-8, Rösner's experience shone through as he turned the tide, securing the next three games 11-7, 11-5, 11-4 in 38 minutes. Pakistan will now face Canada in the SC6 playoff on Thursday at 1630 PST.

No deal yet for Champions Trophy format

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): The saga of next year's cricket Champions Trophy drags on, with sources saying Thursday that no agreement has been reached on a proposed "hybrid" format allowing India to play their matches outside host nation Pakistan. The eight-team tournament hit a snag last month when the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) told the International Cricket Council (ICC) that their side would not compete in Pakistan over security fears and political tensions. Sources speaking on condition of anonymity told AFP the PCB has agreed to the hybrid model – but only on condition that every ICC tournament taking place in India until 2027 follows the same format, with Pakistan not going to India. Under the hybrid model, Pakistan will host the group matches but its high-profile clash with India will be played in Dubai. The final would be held in Dubai or Lahore depending on whether the Indian side make it through. But the BCCI is objecting to the tit-for-tat condition on its own hosting and to the proposal to play the final in Lahore if India

do not qualify, the sources said. PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi is in Dubai, where the ICC has its headquarters, to finalise the arrangements, sources said. The stand-off means the ICC is still unable to announce the schedule for the February 19 to March 19 event. The arch-rivals only meet in ICC multi-national events, with the last bilateral series held when Pakistan toured India in 2012-13. India last toured Pakistan to feature in the 2008 Asia Cup and have not played a bilateral series across the border for 18 years. Pakistan was also forced to host last year's Asia Cup on a hybrid model, with India's matches and the final hosted in Sri Lanka. India are set to co-host the next Twenty20 World Cup with Sri Lanka in 2026 in addition to the Champions Trophy in 2029 and co-host the 2031 World Cup with Bangladesh. In the last few years, Pakistan has hosted the world's top teams, emerging from cricketing isolation that began after a militant attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in 2009 in Lahore. Pakistan has not hosted an ICC event since the 1996 World Cup with India and Sri Lanka.

Haris Rauf crowned as ICC Player of the Month

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday announced the ICC Players of the Month for November 2024 as Pakistan's Haris Rauf and England's Danni Wyatt-Hodge. Pakistani pacer Haris Rauf wins after his destructive bowling spells in Australia secured Pakistan's first ODI series victory in the country since 2002, while England's evergreen Wyatt-Hodge produced trademark fireworks in her side's convincing short-format victory over South Africa. Both players win their maiden Player of the Month awards, and were crowned following a vote conducted among global fans registered at icc-cricket.com and a specialist panel comprising ICC Hall of Famers, former international players, and media representatives. Haris overcame other wicket-taking quicks Jasprit Bumrah and Marco Jansen to land November's prize and record back-to-back success for Pakistan, after Noman Ali won the award back in October. Wyatt-Hodge wins from fellow nominees Bangladesh batter Sharmin Akhter and South

African all-rounder Nadine de Klerk. A busy month in short-format cricket saw Haris play six ODIs and three T20Is during the calendar month, with 18 wickets across contests in Australia and Zimbabwe. Thirteen ODI wickets fell at the hands of the Pakistan pacer at an impressive average of 16.61, and heralded his jump up the ICC Men's ODI Bowling Rankings to a career-high 13th position. The rankings surge came following the 31-year-old's heroics in Pakistan's landmark series victory over world champions Australia in their own backyard. With almost a full calendar year since his last ODI outing, Haris returned to the format with familiar speed and aggression, taking three for 67 in the first match in Melbourne, before starring in Adelaide with a memorable spell of five for 29, ripping through the middle order to level the series in a Player of the Match display. The series decider in Perth also witnessed more magic from Haris, where, alongside fellow fast bowlers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Naseem Shah he

took two for 24 to skittle the hosts for a modest 140, and set Pakistan on course for a historic victory down under. More wickets followed, this time in the subsequent T20I contests, and Haris' return to form was highlighted by an eye-catching four for 22 in the second match in Sydney. ICC Men's Player of the Month, Haris Rauf, said: "It is an incredible honor to be named ICC Player of the Month, and I am truly humbled by this recognition. This achievement is not just mine but a testament to the collective efforts of my teammates and the unwavering support of our passionate fans. "Wearing the Pakistan jersey is a privilege, and moments like these motivate me to work even harder and push my limits. "I dedicate this award to everyone who has been part of my journey so far, and I look forward to contributing more to the success of Pakistan cricket." ICC Women's Player of the Month, Wyatt-Hodge was at her blistering best at the crease in November's contests, starring atop the order as England swept to victory over South Africa in T20Is.

FIFA confirms Saudi Arabia as 2034 World Cup host

LAUSANNE (AFP): FIFA on Wednesday confirmed that Saudi Arabia will host the 2034 World Cup, underlining the Gulf kingdom's growing influence in world sport despite criticism of the country's human rights record. At the same time, a virtual Congress of world football's governing body confirmed that Morocco, Spain and Portugal will be joint hosts of the 2030 World Cup, in which three games will also be played in South America. The Saudi bid was waved through by acclamation during the meeting of FIFA's 211 national member associations, with no rivals standing in its way. "It is a proud day, a day of celebration, a day that we invite the entire world to Saudi Arabia," said Abdullah bin Turki bin Faisal al Saud, the Saudi Minister of Sports. "We intend to have an extraordinary version of the World Cup in our kingdom."

However, there was immediate condemnation from rights groups who insisted that handing the organization of the tournament to the country puts the lives of construction workers at risk and "marks a moment of great danger". FIFA had invoked its principle of rotating the World Cup between continents, which meant only bids from Asia or Oceania were welcome for 2034. The unprecedented organisation of the 2030 tournament will involve three continental confederations in Europe, Africa and South America, while the next World Cup in 2026 -- the first involving 48 teams -- will take place across North America. Controversially, the body gave potential bidders barely a month last year to submit candidacies, and Australia and Indonesia quickly

abandoned their interest. That left Saudi Arabia as the sole candidate, clearing the way for the World Cup to return to the Gulf region so soon after Qatar hosted in 2022. The kingdom's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has been using sport for some time to amass influence and improve its global image -- critics, though, say he is effectively "sportswashing" by diverting attention from Saudi Arabia's rights record. "Moment of great danger" The awarding of the World Cup to Saudi will make the issue of human rights a major talking point again, just as it was two years ago. "We are inclusive and we are non-discriminatory, and we want to obtain positive social impact," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in closing remarks. "We are of course aware of critics and fears, and I fully trust our hosts to address all open points from this process and deliver a FIFA World Cup which meets expectations."

He added that "social improvements and positive human rights impacts" are "responsibilities of hosting a World Cup." Rights groups highlight mass executions in Saudi Arabia and allegations of torture, as well as restrictions on women under the conservative country's male guardianship system. Free expression is severely restricted too. FIFA's decision to award the tournament to Saudi Arabia "despite the well-known and severe risks to residents, migrant workers and visiting fans alike, marks a moment of great danger," Amnesty International and 20 other organisations said in a joint statement. "Based on clear evidence to date, FIFA knows workers will be exploited and even die without fundamental reforms in Saudi Arabia, and

yet has chosen to press ahead regardless," said Steve Cockburn, Amnesty's Head of Labour Rights and Sport. "Centenary celebration" The 2030 tournament will mark a century since the first World Cup was held in Uruguay, and as a result the unrivalled joint bid by Morocco, Spain and Portugal will also see the South American nation handed one game along with Argentina and Paraguay. FIFA confirmed over a year ago that the joint proposal led by Morocco, Spain and Portugal was the sole contender for 2030, with all other potential candidacies having fallen by the wayside. Four South American countries launched a joint bid in 2019, convinced that the centenary World Cup should entirely take place on the same continent where it all began. Meanwhile, Morocco replaced Ukraine as a partner for Spain and Portugal, while South America agreed to step aside in exchange for hosting three games. Following these "centenary celebrations" in the southern hemisphere winter, the six teams involved will cross the Atlantic to play the rest of the tournament. Spain, which hosted the 1982 World Cup, should be the centrepiece as it boasts 11 of the 20 proposed stadiums. Morocco -- after failing on five previous occasions to be awarded the staging of the tournament -- will become the second African nation to host the competition after South Africa in 2010. Potential venues for the July 21 final include the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid and Barcelona's renovated Camp Nou as well as the planned Hassan II stadium between Casablanca and Rabat, set to boast a capacity of 115,000.

Shahid, Imam guide Nurpur Lions to win over Lake City Panthers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Fast bowler Shahid Aziz took four wickets while skipper Imam-ul-Haq and Hasan Nawaz hit solid forties to lead Nurpur Lions to an eight-wicket win over Lake City Panthers here at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on Wednesday afternoon. Chasing a modest 124-run target, Nurpur Lions crossed the line in 14.3 overs for the loss of two wickets after they were set up by Shahid's potent 4-20 which restricted Lake City Panthers to 123 all out in 19.2 overs. Imam and Hasan set up the win with a confident 79-run opening stand in 9.1 overs. Hasan hit three sixes and four boundaries in his fiery 31-ball 44 while Imam's 38-ball 45 had five hits to the rope. Pakistan U19 batter Shahzaib Khan chipped in with a 17-ball



28 not out, cracking two sixes and a four. With the win, Nurpur Lions opened their account in the five-team competition after losing their first two games. Lake City Panthers have now lost two and won one in their three outings. Sent into bat, Panthers lost opener Sharjeel Khan for five before Umar

Siddiq, who scored a 28-ball 26 with two sixes and as many fours, added 45 for the second wicket with Haider Ali (26, 20b, 2x4s, 1x6). Shahid, Khushdil Shah (2-26) and Musa Khan (2-32) triggered a middle-order collapse which saw Lake City Panthers slumping from 62-1 to 99-6. It was Danish Aziz who res-

cued Panthers to a respectable total with a solid 27-ball 34 which were studded with four boundaries and a six. Scores in brief: Match 6 – Nurpur Lions beat Lake City Panthers by eight wickets at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. Lake City Panthers 123 all out in 19.2 overs (Danish Aziz 34, Haider Ali 26, Umar Siddiq 26; Shahid Aziz 4-20, Khushdil Shah 2-26, Musa Khan 2-32). Nurpur Lions 126-2 in 14.3 overs (Imam-ul-Haq 45, Hasan Nawaz 44, Shahzaib Khan 28 not out). Player of the match: Shahid Aziz (Nurpur Lions). Tomorrow's fixtures: ABL Stallions vs UMT Markhors at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium (11am); Engro Dolphins vs Nurpur Lions at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium (3pm).

Salah keeps Liverpool perfect, Real down Atalanta in Champions League



PARIS (AFP): Mohamed Salah helped maintain Liverpool's perfect record in the Champions League on Tuesday while holders Real Madrid bounced back from their defeat at Anfield to topple in-form Italians Atalanta. Elsewhere, struggling Paris Saint-Germain gained a vital win at Salzburg, while Bayer Leverkusen edged Inter Milan to move second. Aston Villa, in their first appearance in the continent's elite club competition for 41 years, maintained their bright progress beating Leipzig 3-2 to sit third. The first eight teams qualify directly for the last 16 with those placed ninth to 24 entering a play-off round. In Spain, Salah's 63rd-minute penalty proved decisive against dogged debutants Girona to extend the Premier League leaders'

record to six from six in the revamped format of Europe's flagship club competition. Under new coach Arne Slot Liverpool are virtually assured a place in the last 16. "If you ask me about all six games, I'm really pleased with all the results... (but) I'm far from pleased about the performance tonight," Slot told reporters in Girona. "(We had) hardly any control at all over the game, maybe the second half was a bit better but then I'm trying to be positive." Salah sent Paulo Gazzaniga the wrong way to net his 50th Champions League goal, pulling the Egyptian level with Filippo Inzaghi as the 10th highest goalscorer of all-time in the competition. The winger is out of contract at the end of the season but his 16 goals across all competitions have been

essential in Liverpool's superb first half of the season. While Liverpool are sitting pretty with two league phase rounds to come early next year, kings of Europe Real Madrid, beaten 2-0 by Liverpool last time out, have work to do to ensure their progress into the knockout phase. Kylian Mbappe gave Real a 10th minute lead before hobbling off injured in Atalanta, his strike was cancelled out by Charles de Ketelaere's penalty in first-half additional time. Settle nerves Real coach Carlo Ancelotti started Vinicius Junior for the first time since a hamstring problem last month. The Brazilian had Real back on top before the hour, with Jude Bellingham also on the scoresheet for a 3-2 win over the Serie A leaders. The hard-fought victory moved Real up to 18th on

nine points and will have helped to settle any nerves at the 15-time European champions ahead of games against Salzburg and Brest in January. PSG put the wheels back on their stuttering campaign with a much needed 3-0 defeat on the road at Salzburg. The French champions went into this encounter in 25th with just four points and three goals scored after five matches. They approach their last two league outings in provisional 24th - the final berth for the play-offs ahead of Wednesday's games. Bayern swept aside Ukraine side Shakhtar Donetsk in Gelsenkirchen 5-1. Fellow Bundesliga giants Leverkusen became the first team to score against Inter in this year's competition in a 1-0 win that lifted them five points adrift of Liverpool at the top of the league. Another noteworthy performance on matchday six came on the Brittany coast where modest French Ligue 1 outfit Brest dished out a 1-0 defeat to former European champions PSV Eindhoven. It left the Atlantic port city club flying high in fifth in their first ever appearance at European football's high table. In other games, Celtic and Dinamo Zagreb remained in contention for the knockout round after an uninspiring 0-0 draw and Club Brugge beat Sporting 2-1. Headline matches on Wednesday include Manchester city at Juventus, and Barcelona at Borussia Dortmund.



In brief

ANF holds 9 accused with drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) on Wednesday continued its crackdown against drug smuggling in educational institutions and various cities of the country and arrested nine accused on the recovery of 43.695 kilograms of drugs worth over Rs 4.2 million. According to an ANF spokesman, 6 kg hashish was recovered from two accused near a university in Peshawar, while an Afghan national was held with 300 grams hashish near a school in Attock. Similarly, 120 narcotic pills hidden in a computer were recovered from a suspect near a park in Quetta. All the accused during investigations confessed to selling drugs to students of educational institutions, the spokesman said. Meanwhile, 1,332 kg ice was recovered from the luggage of a passenger going to Doha at Islamabad International Airport. Likewise, four accused were during an operation on Shabbir Sharif Road, Lahore on the recovery of 32.4 hashish and 3.6 kg opium from their vehicle.

IRSA releases 82,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 82,300 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 39,800 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1480.54 feet and was 82.54 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 18,000 cusecs and 41,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1145.75 feet, which was 95.75 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 5,500 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 48,100, 42,600, 37,700 and 7,300 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 10,200 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 2,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Redressal of public grievances priority: DIG

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Syed Ali Raza on Wednesday reiterated the Islamabad Police commitment to resolving public issues on priority during a Khuli Kachehri held to address complaints from citizens and police officers. He said this while listening to the complaints and issues of the public as well as police officers during the Khuli Kachehri, an official told APP. He said during the Khuli Kachehri, DIG listened to the complaints of the citizens and marked their applications to the concerned officers for timely action on merit. He also directed them to send reports to his office in the given time frame. DIG further said that strict action will be taken against officers involved in bribery or corruption and a zero-tolerance policy will be adopted in this regard. He emphasized that Islamabad Police would not leave any stone unturned to secure the lives and property of the citizens. "Such interaction will be continued in future to provide maximum relief to the citizens," he added. DIG Syed Ali Raza said that interaction during "Khuli Kachehri" would help to promote friendly policing and will also ensure self-accountability, immediate resolution of citizens' problems. The protection of life, property and self-respect of citizens comes first, he maintained.

Pakistan keens to enhance existing friendly ties with Tajikistan, says Awais Leghari



Federal Minister for Power Division, Sardar Awais Leghari and Tajikistan's Minister for Energy and Water Resources, Juma Daler Shofaqir, co-chairing Pakistan-Tajikistan 7th Joint Commission meeting.

Ayaz advocates for enhanced connectivity among legislatures to fortify democratic institutions

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has said that enhancing connectivity and fostering close co-operation among national legislatures is pivotal for strengthening democratic institutions.

He expressed these views during his key note address to the participants of Secretaries' Conference held in Parliament House.

The Speaker said that the realization of dream of an effective parliament hinges on the development of a unified strategy and consensus for proactive and efficient parliamentary functions. Ayaz Sadiq highlighted that the inclusion of provincial representatives in international delegations would allow them to gain valuable insights into best parliamentary practices worldwide.

The Speaker emphasized that the 18th Speakers' Conference, set to be held after a lapse of a decade, would provide an opportunity for legislators from all provincial and legislative Assemblies to collaborate and develop a shared strategy. He stressed the importance of knowledge-sharing and cooperation among national legislatures and encouraged provincial and legislative assemblies to establish liaison mechanisms to enhance connectivity and promote digitalization.

Ayaz Sadiq also urged the need for training and legislative capacity-building to ensure meritocracy. The Speaker also emphasized the establishment of an Association of Whips to foster greater cooperation among legislators. He also called for expanding the role of the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS), urging it to serve as a cornerstone for legislative development and capacity-

building. Ayaz Sadiq also urged the formation of an Association of Secretaries comprising of provincial and legislative assemblies to enhance coordination and facilitate the exchange of knowledge. He also recommended the holding of regular meetings among secretariats and parliamentarians from federal, provincial, and legislative assemblies to benefit from shared experiences and best practices. The Speaker underlined the need for uniformity in legislative processes and the importance of bridging existing gaps between legislatures.

Furthermore, Ayaz Sadiq commended the efforts of provincial and legislative assemblies in institutionalizing and supporting his vision for parliamentary caucuses and forums.

He emphasized the importance of regular interactions between the convenors and presidents of parliamentary caucuses, provincial executives, and governors to enhance unity and curb political polarization. The Secretaries' Conference focused on finalizing the agenda for the 18th Speakers' Conference. During his address, the Chair of the Secretaries' Conference, National Assembly Secretary General Tahir Hussain warmly welcomed the participants. He also praised the efforts of all participants for developing a shared and uniform strategy for proactive parliament. The Secretary General also stressed that there is a need to provide one consensus-based platform.

He further proposed to form Secretaries association to meet after every three months to review the implementation of the decisions taken in the Speaker's Conference. The conference

deliberated upon agenda items of 18th Speakers' Conference to be held from 18th December to 20th December 2024 in Islamabad. The agenda items include: Constitutional issues involving the Legislatures, Institutional Reforms & Revisiting Practice and Procedure of Assemblies, Matters related to Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services (PIPS), Common Wealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and other administrative issues. The participants of the conference put forth suggestions and their proposals for finalizing the agenda of the conference.

The conference was attended by Syed Hasnain Haider Secretary Senate, Kifayat Ullah Khan Afridi Secretary of the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ghulam Muhammad Umar Farooq, Secretary General of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh, Tahir Shah Kakar Secretary of the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan, Abdul Razaq Secretary of the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly, Basharat Hussain Secretary of the Legislative Assembly of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Khalid Mehmood DG Parliamentary Affairs and Research Punjab Assembly, Muhammad Rashid Mafzool Zaka Executive Director PIPS and other distinguished delegates.

The senior officers from the National Assembly Syed Shamoos Hashmi Special Secretary, Muhammad Mushtaq Advisor/Special Secretary Legislation, and Saeed Ahmad Maitla Principal Secretary to Speaker/Additional Secretary Admin and other senior officer of National Assembly were also present in the conference.

80,000 SIMs blocked for spreading fake news

ISLAMABAD (APP): Parliamentary Secretary for Cabinet Division Sajid Mehdi informed the National Assembly on Wednesday that approximately 80,000 SIMs have been blocked for disseminating fake news.

Responding to a calling attention notice regarding the spread of false news on social media platforms, which has caused significant public concern, he said that the government is actively taking steps to address the issue. He said that a joint task force has been established, and it has already submitted its report to the Prime Minister.

He highlighted the need to address shortcomings in the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 and said amendments would be made in the act to expedite the trial of cases related to the dissemination of false news. He said that the registration of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) has commenced as part of these efforts.

He expressed optimism that the measures taken by the government would lead to further improvement in the situation.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Stressing the need to further promote Pak-Tajikistan economic cooperation and expand collaboration in industries, trade, agriculture, energy, Minister for Power Sardar Awais Ahmed Khan Leghari on Wednesday said that Pakistan is keen to enhance its existing friendly relations with Tajikistan.

Speaking at the 7th session of Pakistan-Tajikistan Joint Commission here, he underlined the need for exploring new avenues of cooperation in commercial and economic fields for mutual benefits of both the countries.

He expressed the confidence that the deliberations would result in concrete recommendations to advance relations in the areas of trade, energy, agriculture, education and industrial sectors between the two countries. There was a huge potential for trade between the two countries, he said. He said new avenues of cooperation in trade and economic sectors could be explored for the mutual benefit of both countries.

He said Tajikistan holds a key position in Central Asia and serves as a gateway to the region. "Pakistan is located at the crossroads of

Central and Western Asia," he said.

He said that they would welcome Tajikistan to utilize all trade corridors, including Gwadar and Karachi. "Our 14-kilometer proximity through the Wakhan Corridor provides a unique opportunity for direct connectivity," he added. Highlighting the significance of regional connectivity, Awais Leghari said Pakistan welcomes Tajikistan to avail all trade corridors from Dushanbe to Gwadar and Karachi for enhanced economic relations.

Awais said Pakistan was the second country, after Turkey, to recognize Tajikistan's independence in September 1991. "Our geographical proximity has fostered shared religious, historical, and cultural ties between the two nations," he added.

He said Pakistan-Tajikistan Joint Commission holds significant importance in strengthening bilateral relations and resolving issues of mutual interest. Pakistan is committed to ensuring the implementation of decisions made during the 6th Joint Commission, he said.

The minister said that there were vast opportunities for trade between Pakistan and Tajikistan and making all

out efforts to remove all bottleneck hindering trade.

He said both the sides have agreed to set up a joint liaison committee on transit trade under the Tajikistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement. The committee would play a pivotal role in addressing operational challenges and ensuring the smooth implementation of transit trade provisions, he added.

The minister said the CASA-1000 power project is an important project and would help meet the increasing energy demands of the country. "We are committed to the early completion of the CASA-1000 project," he added. Awais said signing of agreements and memorandums of understanding between Pakistan and Tajikistan would usher in a new era of bilateral relationship.

He said tourism and culture also play key role in strengthening connections between nations. "To promote opportunities in mutual tourism, we can convene an inaugural meeting of the joint working group on tourism," he said. The Tajikistan side was led by Minister of Energy and Water Resources, Daler Juma.

PCHR organizes seminar on 'Role of Parliament in Protection of HR'

ISLAMABAD (APP): To commemorate International Human Rights Day, the Parliamentarians Commission for Human Rights (PCHR) on Wednesday organized a seminar on the "Role of Parliament in the Protection of Human Rights" at the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Studies here.

The seminar was graced by Afrasiab Khattak, former member Senate of Pakistan, as the chief guest. Among the other distinguished speakers were Shaista Pervaiz, Asiya Nasir, Riaz Fatyana, Dr. Shoaib Suddle, Shafique Chaudhry, ED PCHR and Zafar Ullah Khan, said a press release.

Riaz Fatyana, who welcomed the seminar participants, stressed that Human

Rights Day serves as a crucial occasion to reaffirm the nation's commitment for safeguarding the human rights of all citizens. "Human rights are the foundation of any democracy," he asserted.

Zahra Wadood, Member of the National Assembly (MNA), echoed the importance of personal accountability and responsible behaviour, especially when engaging in dissenting opinions.

She noted that both public and parliamentary discourse often lack the necessary respect and decorum, with people failing to uphold the standards of civil discussion. Zahra Wadood underscored that fostering a culture of mutual respect and personal

responsibility in dialogue is crucial in strengthening democratic practices and creating a more constructive and inclusive atmosphere in both public and legislative settings.

Afrasiab Khattak, the chief guest, concluded by emphasizing the necessity of continuity in the democratic process and a grand dialogue among all the segments of society for the democracy and protection of human rights.

To acknowledge the efforts of parliamentarians in addressing the issues of marginalized communities and advancing pro-human rights legislation, the Special Parliamentary Human Rights Award was presented to Asiya Nasir, Shaista Pervaiz, and Afrasiab Khattak.

Romina urges action as mountains face distress from Climate Change

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The Coordinator to the Prime Minister for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam emphasized the urgent need to address the relentless impacts of climate change, which are threatening the planet's precious natural resources.

According to a PID statement issued today, speaking at an event to mark International Mountain Day, she highlighted the critical role of mountains in sustaining life and the growing risks posed by climate disruptions. "Our mountains, crowned with ancient glaciers that house the most vital source of life—water—are now at risk as climate change disrupts their natural course," said Romina Alam. "The glaciers, which have long been a source of life, are receding at an alarming rate. Currently, over 10,000 glaciers in our mountain ranges have already retreated, with 2023 marking the 36th consecutive year of glacial loss rather than gain."

Alam stressed that this disruption is threatening not only ecosystems but also the communities that depend on these natural resources. The Ministry of Climate Change

& Environmental Coordination, she said, stands in full alignment with this year's theme for International Mountain Day, which focuses on strengthening mountain solutions for a sustainable future through innovation, adaptation, and active engagement of youth. "Our mountainous regions, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan, have been severely impacted by rising global temperatures," she continued.

"Climate-induced disasters, such as torrential rains, floods, and Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs), have devastated homes, infrastructure, and ecosystems. However, despite these challenges, we remain committed to accelerating climate adaptation strategies in these vulnerable areas." Romina Alam further highlighted the efforts underway to safeguard these regions, including the installation of advanced early warning systems, support for indigenous practices, and the promotion of ecosystem-based approaches. "Our commitment to protecting these natural treasures and the people who depend on them remains unwavering," she said.

Three new dengue cases reported

RAWALPINDI (APP): Three confirmed dengue cases were reported during the last 24 hours which is the lowest since the endemic's decline started.

According to the details released by the District Health Authority on Wednesday, one patient each from Pirwadhai, Takht Pari and Morgah were reported. After the addition of the new cases, the total number of confirmed cases since January 2024 has reached 6596. However, the current number of patients under treatment in hospitals is reduced to 15.

The total dengue fatalities during the year remained 11. Punitive Actions against Larva Detection and violation of SOPs are still under way but with a slow pace which is in accordance with the situation. Financial penalties of worth Rs 2,34,055.14.0 have been imposed on the violations coupled with 6277 registered FIRs against the violators.

"Together, we strive for a sustainable and climate-resilient future for Pakistan's mountains and their guardians." In her opening remarks, Aisha Humera Moriani, Secretary of the Ministry of Climate Change, underscored the importance of promoting eco-friendly tourism by utilizing local resources and involving local communities.



ISLAMABAD: Coordinator to Prime Minister for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam addressing an event on International Mountain Day. —APP Photo

Japan announces US\$3.1 mln polio program's support grant

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Government of Japan has announced a new US\$ 3.1 million grant to procure essential oral polio vaccines as part of its continued support to polio eradication efforts in Pakistan.

Pakistan Polio Programme will use these funds to procure more than 20.22 million doses of vaccines to support polio campaigns in 2025. Pakistan is one of only two countries globally that has yet to stop polio. So far in 2024, Pakistan has reported a total of 59 cases of polio.

With the current surge in polio cases in the country, the Government of Pakistan, in collaboration with its partners, is set to implement an extensive and strategic action plan in 2025 aimed at eradicating this life-threatening disease among children.

Each national immunization drive targets over 45.4 million children under the age of five, with more than 400,000 frontline workers, predominantly women, playing a crucial role in ensuring the Polio Programme's outreach.

"The challenges faced in 2024 have underscored the critical need to accelerate our efforts to eradicate polio. With Japan's continued support, we are further strengthened to intensify our efforts, aiming to

achieve zero polio cases by mid-2025 under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif," stated Prime Minister Focal Person on Polio Eradication Ms. Ayesha Raza Farooq.

"The unwavering support of the Government of Japan has been instrumental in helping us get closer to reaching zero cases. We are thankful to the Government and people of Japan for their continued support towards polio eradication in Pakistan," Ms. Ayesha Raza Farooq added.

Mr. TAKANO Shuichi, Charge d' Affaires ad interim of Japan to the Pakistan, said "Japan has supported Pakistan to eradicate polio for nearly 30 years despite hindrance such as floods, COVID, and terrorist attacks. "Since this year marks the 70th anniversary of Japan's ODA to Pakistan, we would like to renew our commitment to continue to promote routine immunization including polio vaccination in Pakistan."

The new funding is part of the continuous support from the Government of Japan to the Polio Eradication programme since 1996.

To date, the grant and loan contribution from the Government of Japan has amounted to approximate-

ly US\$ 242.194 million dollars to support the Polio programme in Pakistan through UNICEF.

"We appreciate the government's commitment to making all-out efforts to ensure all children receive the essential vaccine."

"We believe that vaccines, the most effective way to strengthen children's immunity, will be used effectively with the understanding of parents and communities and the efforts of frontline workers."

"We sincerely hope that all the polio campaigns of this year will be conducted successfully toward zero polio cases", said Mr. MIYATA Naoaki, Chief Representative, JICA Pakistan Office.

"The sharp rise in polio cases this year is a reminder of the urgent need to protect every child with vaccines through campaigns and routine immunization."

As long as there is polio anywhere, every child will remain at risk until the virus is eradicated," said Abdullah Fadil, UNICEF Representative in Pakistan. "With steadfast support from partners like Japan, UNICEF remains committed to vaccinating every child to achieve a polio-free Pakistan."

Meeting to be held

UNITED NATIONS (Amu TV): The United Nations Security Council is set to convene on Thursday (today), to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. This marks the Council's fourth meeting on Afghanistan this year, reflecting ongoing international concern about the country's political, humanitarian, and security challenges. The Council previously announced that Roza Otunbayeva, head of UNAMA, will present her quarterly report on the country during the session.

Rashid received medal

KABUL (BNA): The Embassy of Afghanistan in Turkmenistan has announced that the Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy received the Magtymguly honorary medal from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan. Rashid Meredov, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, awarded the mentioned Medal to Fazal Mohammad Sabir, Chargé d'Affaires of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in Ashgabat.

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

IEA rejects Russian claims of security and drug threats

KABUL (TOLOnews): Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, stated that during the more than three years of the Islamic Emirate's governance in Afghanistan, no security threats or smuggling activities have targeted any country. Mujahid rejected claims made by Russia's representative to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) regarding terrorism and drug-related threats from Afghanistan, labeling them as baseless. Emphasizing that Afghanistan poses no harm to any country, the spokesperson said: "We reject these claims as false. Afghanistan is a safe country with a stable government, significant measures have been taken to prevent smuggling, and there are no

security threats to any country. We hope there will be no propaganda, misinformation, or false narratives on this matter." Previously, Russia's permanent representative to the CSTO claimed that Central Asia faces "terrorism and drug-related threats" from Afghanistan. According to a report by TASS news agency, the Russian official emphasized that the CSTO continues to monitor challenges and threats linked to Afghanistan and coordinates efforts to combat them through the working group on Afghanistan under the Council of Foreign Ministers. "The CSTO continues to monitor challenges and threats linked to the Afghan issue, coordinating efforts to counter them through the

capabilities of the CSTO's Working Group on Afghanistan under the Foreign Ministers' Council," said Viktor Vasilev, Russia's permanent representative to the CSTO. "They want to ensure that the terrorist groups they created long ago are not used against them. Moreover, UN data and major countries have reported a 95% reduction in drug production in Afghanistan," said Salim Paighir, a political analyst. These concerns from a Russian official come after the Secretary of Russia's Security Council recently visited Kabul. During meetings with Islamic Emirate officials, he announced that Russia would soon remove the Islamic Emirate from its blacklist.

IEA policies deepen suffering in Afghanistan

KABUL (Amu TV): Rina Amiri, the US special envoy for human rights and Afghan women, marked Human Rights Day by condemning the Taliban's policies, which she said have exacerbated the suffering of Afghanistan's people. In a post on X, Ms. Amiri wrote: "The Taliban's escalating policies of gender persecution against women and girls and abuses against ethnic and religious groups, journalists and human rights defenders continue to deepen the suffering of the Afghan population and quash the prospects of a peaceful and stable Afghanistan." She added that the Taliban's actions have undermined prospects for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, noting that millions of Afghans have endured decades of human rights violations due to more than 40 years of war. Since regaining control of Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban have stripped away most civil rights and freedoms, especially for women. They have imposed sweeping restrictions, including bans on education, employment, and public presence for women and girls. Women are prohibited from entering parks, beauty salons, or traveling without a male guardian, and they are barred from speaking to unrelated men in public. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, with Afghanistan among its original supporters. Despite this legacy, Afghanistan's human rights record has deteriorated significantly under the Taliban. Each year, activists and organizations mark global campaigns like the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, beginning on November 25, to raise awareness of these issues. However, the Taliban's policies have drawn severe criticism, with human rights advocates warning of the long-term consequences for Afghanistan.

EU Envoy applauds anti-corruption and drug control measures



KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs, met with the European Union's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Tomas Niklasson, and his accompanying delegation in Kabul. The meeting was attended by Veronika Boškovic Pohar, Chargé d'Affaires of the EU Delegation in Kabul. According to a statement released by the ARG, Niklasson praised the progress achieved in Afghanistan under the Islamic Emirate's administration. He highlighted the effective measures taken by the Islamic Emirate in establishing peace, combating corruption, and addressing drug-related issues. Niklasson emphasized the need for international cooperation to provide alternatives to drug cultivation and to support the treatment of drug addicts in Afghanistan. Niklasson further announced the EU's plan to allocate 45 million euros in the near future to assist Afghan farmers in adopting alternative crops. He stressed the importance of

unrestricted access for EU staff to all regions of Afghanistan to facilitate humanitarian aid delivery. Moreover, he confirmed the EU's ongoing dialogue with neighboring countries to halt the forced expulsion of Afghan refugees. For his part, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir expressed gratitude for the EU's support, particularly its efforts to assist in alternative crop cultivation. He noted that the Islamic Emirate has established a High Commission dedicated to the sustained fight against

drugs and intoxicants and reaffirmed its commitment to fulfilling its promises. Mawlawi Kabir also emphasized the Islamic Emirate's efforts in treating addicts from the previous administration and equipping them with vocational skills to reintegrate into society. He called for continued cooperation from international organizations, including the European Union, to address the challenges faced by Afghan refugees, urging neighboring countries to cease forced deportations.

Azizi: Afghanistan holds \$1t in lithium reserves

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce said that Afghanistan is considered one of the richest countries in terms of natural and mineral resources, particularly lithium. According to Nooruddin Azizi, the value of Afghanistan's lithium mines is estimated at one trillion dollars. "A study conducted by the Americans themselves shows that we have a reserve worth one trillion dollars of just one mineral, Alhamdulillah. Today, the entire world needs Afghanistan's lithium," said Nooruddin Azizi, the acting Minister of Industry and Commerce. Also in his remarks, Nooruddin Azizi emphasized the growing global importance of clean energy and called domestic investment in mining, especially lithium extraction, a priority.



The acting minister also said that the Islamic Emirate, based on its economy-focused policy, is ready to welcome investors in various sectors. "The slogan of the Islamic Emirate is that we are economy centered. Our system is an Islamic Sharia-based system with economic centrality. Why is economic centrality important? Because we have significant resources, and they must be used to assist the

people," Azizi said. Lithium, which is the most important electricity storage material, is widely used in modern technologies, particularly in the production of batteries for mobile phones, electric vehicles, computers, and drones. Previously, the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum stated that Afghanistan's lithium mines have not yet been contracted to any company.

Agriculture Ministry criticizes EU project implementation

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (AIL) has criticized the implementation of certain EU-funded projects in Afghanistan. The ministry's spokesperson stated that Deputy Minister Sadr Azam Osmani, in a meeting with the EU's Special Representative for Afghanistan, highlighted that much of the funds allocated for the Afghan people are spent through their own institutions' projects. Meanwhile, the EU's Special Representative for

spokesperson for the Ministry of (AIL), said: "Thomas Nicholson, the EU Special Representative, discussed the funding and implementation of EU projects and expressed readiness to collaborate for improving the living conditions of the Afghan people." The spokesperson said that Sadr Azam Osmani, referring to the significant reduction in poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, called for support for farmers in cultivating alternative crops. Meanwhile, the EU's Special Representative for

Afghanistan acknowledged the dependence of Afghanistan's economy on agriculture, noting that the EU currently has agreements worth nearly 44 million euros in Afghanistan, benefiting close to one million people. "Eighty percent of Afghanistan's population is engaged in agriculture and livestock. The better our agriculture becomes, the more self-reliant we become in food production and agricultural investments. This will be very beneficial," said Economic expert Esa Mobarez.

"The latest developments in agriculture from various countries, particularly those that have made significant advancements, could serve as valuable experiences for us," said Economic analyst Shakir Yaqubi. According to the Ministry of AIL, the meeting covered topics such as poppy cultivation and its alternatives, increasing agricultural production, marketing Afghan products, easing project implementation, and supporting farmers and livestock owners.

Ministry signs agreement with ZFA Foundation

KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs has signed an agreement with the ZFA Charity Foundation to address the winter needs of orphans, widows, and disabled individuals in specific districts of Kabul Province. The ministry announced that this agreement, valued at \$70,000, will benefit 346 individuals from the Farza, Estalef, and Paghman districts. The beneficiaries will receive

winter fuel supplies and blankets. Each eligible person will be provided with 420 kilograms of firewood, 210 kilograms of coal, and one blanket. The agreement was signed between Mullah Sadokhan Haqshanas, Director of Foreign Relations and Planning at the ministry, and Dr. Hamiduddin Yuldash, Head of ZFA Charity Foundation. The implementation will be coordinated with the Kabul

provincial office of the ministry. During the signing ceremony, Mullah Haqshanas expressed gratitude to the foundation for its support, emphasizing the ministry's commitment to serving vulnerable groups such as orphans, widows, and disabled individuals. He urged the foundation to coordinate its future assistance efforts with the ministry to ensure transparency and efficient delivery to deserving beneficiaries.

Taliban move to dismiss female varsity staff

KABUL (Amu TV): Taliban have ordered female administrative staff at universities to step down and nominate male replacements within three days or face dismissal, according to three sources who spoke to Amu. A copy of the directive, dated December 8, has been shared with university staff, sources said. Sources, who shared another document, said some female employees in one of the country's universities were pressured into signing the document, which effectively forces them out of their positions. At Herat University in the west of Afghanistan, two sources described emotional scenes as female staff members were seen crying after the directive was announced. According to the document, the letter has been sent by the Taliban-run Ministry of Higher Education to universities across the country. Mounting restrictions on women This latest move adds to the Taliban's increasingly strict policies targeting women and girls since their return to power in August 2021. Women have been barred from most jobs, excluded from secondary and higher education, and earlier this month prohibited from studying medicine. Female employees have also been banned from working in non-governmental organizations. Critics say the Taliban have been systematically erasing women from public life. The restrictions have drawn widespread international condemnation, with human rights groups warning of the devastating impact on Afghanistan's society.

Shaheen meets French Charge d'Affaires for Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): Suhail Shaheen, the head of the Taliban's political office, reported his meeting with Jean-Marie Schuh, the Chargé d'Affaires of the French Embassy for Afghanistan. Shaheen wrote on Twitter that they discussed the healthcare sector, non-governmental organizations, and the technical needs of Kabul airport. Shaheen did not provide further details about the discussions. Recently, Shaheen also met with the Chargé d'Affaires of the French Embassy for Afghanistan, where they discussed humanitarian aid, development projects, and alternative crop programs for Afghan farmers. Earlier, reports indicated that the Taliban leader had convened an emergency cabinet meeting in Kandahar, where he labeled foreign institutions in



Afghanistan as "spies" and called for their closure. According to the sources, some cabinet members opposed this decision, arguing that such a decision "cannot be made in a single day." The Taliban cabinet also argued

that shutting down foreign institutions would widen the gap between the international community and their administration. These ongoing debates highlight the internal divisions within the Taliban leadership and the challenges they face in maintaining relations with international entities. The situation remains fluid, with varying opinions on how to navigate Afghanistan's complex diplomatic and humanitarian needs.

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Ishaq reviews Hairatan port operations



KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Mohammad Ishaq Sahibzada, Deputy of Railways at the Ministry of Public Works of Afghanistan, led a delegation to Balkh province to expedite unloading and loading processes. During his visit to the Hairatan port, he held discussions with representatives of Sogdiana Trans, the

Uzbekistan-based company managing railway operations at the port. The meeting focused on addressing wagon congestion, maintaining active railway lines, maximizing station capacities, and enhancing unloading and loading speed. Necessary decisions were made to address these challenges effectively.

As part of the visit, the deputy and his team inspected the railway tracks, stations, and facilities at Hairatan port to assess operational efficiency. Worth mentioning that, Sogdiana Trans has been managing the transportation of commercial goods at Hairatan port under a long-standing agreement.

Salang Highway to temporarily closed

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Public Works has announced that the Salang Highway will remain closed to all large passenger and freight vehicles from the 20th of Qaus to the 4th of Jadi in the solar calendar. The ministry's spokesperson stated that this decision was made due to recent icy conditions and snowfalls that have reduced traffic capacity on alternate routes. Mohammad Ashraf Haqshenas, spokesperson for the Ministry of Public Works, said: "To protect the

lives and property of our dear citizens and to prevent unfortunate incidents, the Salang Highway will remain closed to all large passenger and freight vehicles such as 303, 404, 580, and other large passenger and freight vehicles until 4 Jadi this year." Meanwhile, some drivers and passengers have expressed concerns that the onset of winter and continuous snowfall and rain will make traveling via alternative routes to the Salang Highway particularly challenging. They urged the interim

government to complete ongoing projects at this critical passage before heavy snowfalls begin. Abdullah, one of the drivers, said: "I was on the road for 36 hours, and the route is extremely difficult and in poor condition. This is a major problem for the people. The Salang Highway was also closed last year; if this issue is not resolved, we will face numerous challenges in both spring and winter." Rahmatullah, a passenger, added: "The Salang route is short, but the

Shiber route is very long. Due to the problems on the Salang Highway, we had to use this alternative route." At the same time, the Ministry of Public Works has called on all citizens and government agency employees to cooperate with officials and staff working on the Salang passage. Previously, the Ministry of Public Works announced that work on ten galleries and other sections of the Salang passage is ongoing and would be completed before the onset of winter.

CM directs improvement of KP healthcare services

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A meeting of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Healthcare Commission and Directorate of Drug Control & Pharmacy Services was held here on Wednesday with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair to review the performance, objectives, challenges, and future strategies of the above mentioned subordinate offices of the health department. The meeting was attended by Advisor to CM on Health, Ihtisham Ali, Health Secretary Adeel Shah, Director General Health Services Dr. Muhammad Saleem, Director General Drug Control Dr. Abbas, and CEO Healthcare Commission Dr. Nadeem.

The Chief Minister directed the Healthcare Commission to devise and implement a comprehensive plan to improve the quality of healthcare facilities across the province. He emphasized conducting clinical and surgical audits of healthcare centers, registering unregistered facilities, and working on a timeline-based plan with regular progress reviews.

He also instructed the commission to address staff shortages by hiring necessary personnel and taking strict action against facilities providing substandard medical services. The Directorate of Drug Control was directed to establish at least one mobile drug testing laboratory at each divisional headquarters and fill vacant positions of pharmacists in all government hospitals.

During the meeting, CEO Healthcare Commission briefed participants about the overall performance of authority and informed that over 18,911 healthcare centers have been registered, with an online portal

PSDP projects discussed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chairman of the Prime Minister Inspection Commission, Brigadier (R) Muzaffar Ali Ranjha called on Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur here Wednesday and discussed matters relating to development projects under Federal Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry, Additional Chief Secretaries Ikramullah Khan and Muhammad Abid Majeed, along with other relevant officials were also present on the occasion. It was agreed in the meeting to expedite pace of work on development projects to ensure their timely completion. The importance of improved coordination among relevant departments to resolve obstacles hindering the implementation of these projects was also emphasized. Necessary directives were issued to the concerned federal and provincial departments to take requisite steps in this regard. The projects that came under discussion include Chitral-Shandur Road, Peshawar Northern Bypass, CRBC (Chashma Right Bank Canal) and Hangu Road. Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister said that completion of projects initiated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa under the Federal PSDP is crucial as they are significant for public welfare. He assured that the provincial government would fulfill its responsibilities to ensure their timely completion. He underlined the importance of CRBC Lift Canal project stating that it is not only vital for the province but also essential for country's food security. Brigadier (R) Muzaffar Ranjha assured that all ongoing projects in KP under PSDP would be completed. He emphasized that these are public welfare projects and would be prioritized for completion.

introduced for an easier registration process. Geo-tagging of 38,443 centers has been completed, and assessments of 159 centers for licensing are underway. It was told that in the last 2.5 years, 10,085 inspections were conducted, notices were issued to 2,606 facilities, and 2,062 were sealed due to violations, whereas of 2839 complaints out of 3006 received were resolved during the period.

It was further told that actions were initiated against 1,523 cases of quackery, resulting in fines for 1,189 facilities and the sealing of 763 centers. Similarly, training was provided to the staff of 835 public and private hospitals.

The meeting was briefed that a

total of 13,928 pharmacies were inspected, resulting in the seizure of 1,977 drug stocks. Of 8,493 samples taken for quality testing, 992 were found substandard, and 211 were declared spurious.

The concerned officials told the meeting that 234 pharmacies were sealed, 107 FIRs filed, and the Drug Court imposed penalties amounting to Rs. 8.59 million, alongside imprisonment sentences. The Chief Minister emphasized the importance of strict enforcement of healthcare standards and drug quality to ensure the well-being of the public, and directed the quarters concerned to ensure regular monitoring and follow-ups in this regard.



PESHAWAR: Chairman Prime Minister Inspection Team, Brig. (ret'd) Muzaffar Ranjha called on KP Chief Minister, Ali Amin Gandapur.

Russia vows retaliation after Ukrainian strike

MOSCOW (AFP): Russia on Wednesday vowed retribution against Ukraine, accusing Kyiv of firing Western-supplied missiles on a military airfield in its southern Rostov region. President Vladimir Putin has previously threatened to launch a hypersonic ballistic missile at the center of Kyiv if Ukraine did not halt its attacks on Russian territory using US-supplied ATACMS missiles.

And one US official said Wednesday that Russia might soon target Ukraine with another of its new Oreshnik missiles. Hours after Ukraine's overnight attack, Russia claimed its troops had recaptured territory in its western Kursk region, where Ukraine occupies swathes of territory. And Putin told Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban that Kyiv's "destructive" approach made a peace deal impossible. Kyiv has been on edge since Russia fired its nuclear-capable Oreshnik missile at the city of Dnipro last month in a major escalation of the nearly three-year conflict.

Putin called that retaliation for Kyiv firing US ATACMS and British Storm Shadow long-range missiles against targets on Russian territory. In the latest attack, Russia's defense ministry said Wednesday that Ukraine fired six ATACMS missiles at a military airfield in Taganrog, a port city in the southern Rostov region. "Two of the missiles were shot down by the combat crew of the Pantsir air defense system, while the others were deflected by electronic warfare equipment," the ministry added.

It said no military personnel were hurt but that falling shrapnel "slightly damaged" military vehicles and buildings nearby. "This attack by Western long-range weapons will not go unanswered and appropriate measures will be taken," it added. And one US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Wednesday: "Russia has signalled its intent to launch another experimental Oreshnik missile at Ukraine, potentially in the coming days." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had earlier hailed "tangible blows against Russian targets last night," which he said would help bring peace closer.

No reason for West to fear Syria: HTS

DUBAI: The West has no reason to fear Syria following the ousting of Bashar Assad's regime, Abu Mohammed Al-Golani, leader of the group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), told Sky News on Wednesday.

In his first interview with a Western outlet since Assad fled, Al-Golani insisted that Syria is on a path to stability. "The fear stemmed from the regime's presence. Syria is now on a path toward development, reconstruction, and stability," he said during an interview in Damascus with Sky News' international news editor, Zein Jaafar, and Middle East producer, Celine Al-Khaldi.

Golani, a former member of the Daesh of Iraq who previously led Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria before severing ties in 2016, is now trying to present himself as a more moderate leader. However, HTS remains designated as a terrorist organization by the UN, US, UK, and other nations. Despite his reassurances, HTS's rapid rise to power has fueled fears among Syria's minorities, including Kurds, Alawites, and Christians. "The country isn't ready for another war, nor will it enter one," Golani stated, emphasizing that Syrians are weary from years of conflict. — Arab News

Sindh launches Senior Citizen Card

F.P. Report

KARACHI: In a landmark initiative, Sindh has become the first province in Pakistan to launch the Sindh Senior Citizen Card, aimed at providing elderly citizens with enhanced medical facilities, travel conveniences, and access to basic services.

According to a statement issued from the Sindh Information Department today, the program was unveiled at an official signing ceremony presided over by Mir Tarique Ali Khan Talpur, Minister for Social Welfare Department, in collaboration with NADRA.

The initiative, formerly known as the Azadi Card, has been rebranded to reflect the Sindh government's commitment to the welfare and dignity of its senior citizens. According to NADRA's data, the card is set to benefit 3.7 million individuals aged 60 and above across the province.

Speaking at the event, Minister Talpur emphasized the program's importance, stating, "The Sindh Senior Citizen Card is a testament to our resolve to care for our elders. It offers them the respect and support they deserve, ensuring easier access to essential services. Our senior citizens are the custodians of our culture and history, and it is our duty to ensure they live their later years with



dignity." He further remarked, "This initiative is part of our broader vision to create a more inclusive and compassionate society. By addressing the needs of the elderly, we honor their contributions to building our communities."

The Sindh Senior Citizen Card will serve as an identification tool to streamline access to: Medical facilities at public and private hospitals. Other civic amenities designed to ease daily life for senior citizens. Ehtesham Shahid, Director General NADRA Karachi, expressed NADRA's commitment to the cause, saying, "We are proud to collaborate with the Social Welfare Department on this initiative. The card will simplify access to vital services for senior citizens, honoring their lifelong contributions to society."

The ceremony was attended by prominent officials, including Parwez Ahmed Seehar, Secretary Social Welfare Department; Athar Hussain Mirani, Director General Social Welfare Department; Ehtesham Shahid, Director General NADRA Karachi; and Junaid Shaikat, Program Manager.

The Sindh Senior Citizen Card underscores the Sindh government's dedication to fostering inclusivity and care for vulnerable populations. The Social Welfare Department plans to roll out similar programs to address the needs of other underserved groups, continuing its mission to promote equality and well-being across the province. "This is more than just a card—it is a promise that our senior citizens will always be valued and remembered," said Minister Talpur.

Govt further complicated PTI's Nov 24 protest

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) Chief Justice Amer Farooq remarked that the government further complicated the Nov 24 protest of PTI instead of ensuring law and order in the federal capital.

The IHC chief justice gave these remarks during the hearing of a contempt of court petition filed by Islamabad's traders against the PTI's Nov 24 protest. "The court only gave a simple order of ensuring law and order but you made the matter very complicated," remarked IHC chief justice.

During the hearing, Justice Amer Farooq also asked about the report of interior ministry. The interior ministry sought some time to submit the report. "Why didn't you submit the report yet," asked IHC chief justice. It was very simple matter but you made it complicated, he remarked. Later, the court granted time to interior ministry to submit the report and adjourned the hearing for next week. Earlier, the IHC grilled the government for closing the federal capital during PTI protest.

ADB approves \$200m loan

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a loan of \$200 million for improving Pakistan's electricity transmission system. According to a bank's statement, the money will be used to modernise the distribution system and enhance the capacity of distribution companies (Discos) to provide sustainable electricity.

In the initial phase, three distribution companies, Lesco (Lahore), Mepeco (Multan) and Sepco (Sukkur) will be funded to increase their capacity to provide energy in their respective regions. Under the project, more than 300,000 advanced metering infrastructures will be installed. The installation of data management and communication systems is also part of the project. Monitoring systems will be installed on more than 15,000 online transformers in Lahore, Multan, and Sukkur electricity supply companies.

The statement noted that the voltage of four grid stations of Sepco would be doubled from 66kv to 132kv, which will help reduce transmission losses and assist in meeting electricity demand.

In Lahore, 25 grid stations will be constructed and modernised. These stations will also be equipped with the latest equipment. The 11kv feeders, which have been incurring high losses, will be replaced with the latest cables so that financial losses are minimised.

PHC grant protective bails to four PTI's leaders

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court has granted protective bail to four Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders including the party's Secretary-General Salman Akram Raja and three Members National Assembly (MNAs) Amjad Ali, Shahid Khan and Fateh Ullah Advocate.

Two separate benches, one comprising of Chief Justice Peshawar High Court Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and another divisional bench comprising Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Waqar Ahmed, heard the petitions filed by the PTI leaders. The petitioners' lawyer, Alam Khan Adeenzai, informed the court that Salman Akram Raja was facing eight cases registered against him, and he had already obtained protective bail in eight cases.

The lawyer argued that the PTI leaders were innocent and had been falsely implicated in the cases. He requested the court to grant protective bail to the petitioners, enabling them to appear before the relevant courts and face the charges against them.

The Peshawar High Court, after hearing the arguments, granted protective bail to the petitioners, including Salman Akram

Raja, Amjad Ali, Shahid Khan, and Fateh Ullah Advocate. The court directed the petitioners to appear before the relevant courts within a specified time-frame.

The general secretary Salman Akram Raja stated that the PTI was fighting for the supremacy of the law and the Constitution while talking to media personnel after hearing at PHC. He alleged that the judicial system was being used for political purposes and that the PTI leaders were being implicated in false cases.

Court sought response against ban on wheeling system for cheap electricity: A divisional bench of Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Waqar Ahmad has directed the Pakhtunkhwa Energy Development Organization (PEDO), federal government and the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) to respond to a petition challenging the ban on the wheeling system for the supply of cheap electricity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on Wednesday.

The petition filed by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textile Mills Association. The petitioners' lawyer,

Shumail Butt informed the court that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is currently producing the most electricity, which is extremely cheap, at a cost of two to three rupees per unit. However, textile mills in the province are being charged 60 to 70 rupees per unit.

The lawyer argued that the federal government had previously introduced a wheeling system, which allowed for the transmission of electricity from one place to another. However, the federal government directed all Distribution Companies (DISCOs) to stop implementing the wheeling system, citing potential issues.

The petitioners contended that the wheeling system would enable textile mills in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to receive cheap electricity, resolving many issues and providing employment opportunities.

The lawyer requested the court to direct the relevant authorities to allow the implementation of the wheeling system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, enabling the textile mills to receive cheap electricity. The court has sought a response from the relevant authorities including PEDO, federal's government and NEPRA.

UK court convicts father, stepmother of Sara's murder

LONDON: Three members of British-Pakistani Sara Sharif's family have been found guilty over the 10-year-old's death after years of horrific abuse. Her father Urfan Sharif, 42, and stepmother Beinah Batool, 30, were found guilty of her murder and her uncle Faisal Malik, 29, was convicted of causing or allowing her death following a trial at the Old Bailey.

Justice Cavanagh adjourned sentencing until next Tuesday, telling jurors the case had been "extremely stressful and traumatic". Sara was beaten to death four years after taxi driver Urfan was awarded custody, despite accusations of abuse against him, jurors heard. Prosecutor William Emlyn Jones KC said Urfan had gone on to create a "culture of violent discipline", where assaults on Sara had "become completely routine, completely normalised".

He alleged Urfan had meant to cause her serious harm and the other two defendants took part in the abuse, encouraged or helped him. The defendants had fled to Pakistan after Sara died at the family home in Woking, Surrey, on August 8 2023. Urfan called the police when he arrived in Islamabad and confessed he had beaten her up "too much". Officers went to his former home and found Sara's broken and battered body in a bunk bed, with a

confession note from Urfan on the pillow.

Sara had suffered more than 25 broken bones, from being hit repeatedly with a cricket bat, metal pole and mobile phone. She had a broken hyoid bone in her neck from being throttled, iron burns on her buttocks, boiling water burns on her feet, and human bite marks on her arm and thigh. There was also evidence she had been bound with packaging tape and hooded during the assaults, which would have left her in excruciating pain, jurors heard. Batool had told her sisters that Urfan would regularly "beat the crap" out of Sara over the course of more than two years, but failed to report what was going on. By January 2023, Sara began wearing a hijab to cover up the bruises at school. Teachers noticed marks on her face and referred her to social services in March of that year, but the case was dropped within days. The following month, Sara was taken out of school and the violence against her intensified in the weeks before her death.

On August 8, Sara collapsed and Batool reacted by summoning Urfan home and calling her family 30 times. Urfan's reaction to finding his daughter lying close to death in Batool's lap was to "whack" her in the stomach twice with a pole for "pre-tending", jurors heard. Within hours of Sara's death,

the couple were arranging flights to Pakistan for the next day for themselves and the rest of the family.

The defendants returned to the UK on September 13, 2023, leaving behind other children who had travelled with them, and were detained within minutes of a flight touching down at Gatwick airport. Giving evidence in his trial, Urfan initially blamed Batool for the violence, claiming he was working when his daughter was abused. On the seventh day of his evidence, he dramatically changed his story and took "full responsibility" for Sara's death.

Jurors appeared tearful and shocked and Batool wailed in the dock throughout her husband's confession. He admitted hitting Sara repeatedly with a cricket bat and pole, strangling her with his bare hands, and battering her over the head with a mobile phone. He denied burning her or putting a hood over her head during "punishments" for her so-called "naughty" behaviour.

Later, he backtracked on his confession and claimed he did not mean to seriously harm Sara, despite having earlier indicated he wanted to change his plea. Under cross-examination, it was alleged two other children he was connected with had been burned and bitten and he was the "common denominator". — Agencies

'CASS hosts launch of book on technology governance'

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad, organised the launch of Azhar Zia-ur-Rehman's new book, 'Governance of Technologies in Industrie 4.0 and Society 5.0,' which focuses on addressing challenges and strategies for technology governance in the modern era.

In his opening talk, Air Commodore Raza Haider (Retd), Director at CASS, highlighted the transformative impact of emerging technologies on aerospace, emphasising the critical role of drones, AI, and space economy advancements. He discussed cutting-edge innovations such as swarm drones, stealth capabilities, and generative AI applications in cybersecurity and aerospace. Stressing the significance of digital transformation, he outlined the need for policies fostering STEM education, digital startups, and industry digitisation in



Pakistan to remain competitive in the global arena.

The author of the book, Mr Azhar Zia-ur-Rehman, an international governance consultant, outlined the need for structured governance frameworks to manage the risks and opportunities presented by emerging technologies. He explained his methodology for navigating digital ecosystems, focusing on aligning technology with strategic organisational goals through the DIGI-4MATION, FOURAME-WORK and the PENTRI-UM Model, emphasising the need for synergy among diverse technologies. Furthermore, he stressed

the importance of governance frameworks that ensure ethical practices, particularly in fields such as Artificial Intelligence and biotechnology, to mitigate risks and promote responsible innovation.

President of CASS, Islamabad, Air Marshal Javed

Ahmed (Retd) delivered concluding remarks and congratulated the author on his publication. He underscored the critical need for integrating governance practices with technology, highlighting that organisations must develop systems enabling the effective and ethical use of emerging technologies to stay competitive in today's rapidly evolving landscape. The launch concluded with a discussion where participants explored how industries and governments can use the insights from the book to adapt to technological changes and strengthen governance systems.

Pakistan Navy ship Moawin visit Comoros

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy Ship MOAWIN conducted its maiden visit to Comoros and established a free medical camp for the local populace. Upon arrival at Port Mutsamudu, Anjouan Island, the ship was warmly welcomed by Commander of the Comorian Coast Guard, along with other senior military and government officials.

During its stay at the port, the Commanding Officer of PNS MOAWIN called on the Governor of Anjouan, Dr. Zaidou Youssouf, Deputy Chief of the Army Staff Colonel S.B. Dailami, and other civil and military leaders of Comoros. Various matters of mutual interest and opportunities for bilateral cooperation were discussed



during these meetings. The Commanding Officer also conveyed warm greetings from Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf, to the Comorian authorities for their support extended to the visiting ship. Additionally, shipboard exercises and discussions on various operational matters were held onboard to enhance interoperability.

In Comoros, PNS MOAWIN established a medical camp where Pakistan Navy surgeons

and medical specialists provided free medical consultations, treatments, and medicines to patients.

The medical camp was widely appreciated by the local populace, who benefited from the high-quality medical care provided. The maiden visit of PNS MOAWIN to Comoros stands as a testament to the Pakistan Navy's commitment to fostering friendly relations and delivering essential medical services to communities in need.