

**Tarar reaches Istanbul**  
ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar on Thursday arrived in Istanbul, Turkiye on a three-day visit. He will represent Pakistan at Stratcom Summit 2024 being held in Istanbul. During his stay in Istanbul, the minister for information will meet the Head of Media and Communications of Turkish Presidency, Prof. Fahrettin Altun.



GAZA: Palestinian families fleeing Maghazi refugee camp following Israel's leave-or-die threats.

## Imran, Bushra indicted in new Toshakhana case

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A special court on Thursday indicted Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the Toshakhana-II case. Former prime minister Imran and Bushra Bibi were both present in court of judge Shahrukh Arjumand who heard the case in Adiala Jail.

The judge read out the charges and adjourned the hearing until Dec 18. It may be noted that the NAB (National Accountability Bureau) investigated the case. But, after amendments to the NAB law, the case was transferred to the FIA. In September 2024, the FIA submitted the case to the court after conducting the necessary investigations.

Earlier on Dec 10, the indictment proceedings against Imran and his wife were deferred till Dec 12 without any proceedings. Before that, the hearing was held on Dec 5 but without any proceedings. The case is based on allegations that Imran and Bushra Bibi retained state gifts without fulfilling legal obligations.

According to NAB reference, Bushra Bibi was gifted a Bulgari jewellery set during a visit to Saudi Arabia from May 7 to 10, 2021. The set included a ring, a bracelet, a necklace, and a pair of earrings. The refer-

ence alleged that the couple illegally retained the jewellery set. On May 18, 2021, the Deputy Military Secretary informed the Section Officer of Toshakhana to assess and declare the value of the jewellery, but it was not deposited.

Later, the necklace was sold to the Saudi Arabian franchise Solugent Trading on May 25, 2018, for 300,000 euros and the earrings for 80,000 euros. However, the prices of the bracelet and ring were not available. On May 28, the total value of the jewellery set was approximately Rs75,661,600.

The necklace was valued at Rs56,496,000 and the earrings at Rs15,065,600. According to Toshakhana rules, the jewellery set's value after paying 50 percent should be Rs35,765,800. However, the NAB claimed that by undervaluing the jewellery, the national treasury suffered a loss of Rs32,851,300. The former prime minister and his wife violated Section 9 and Sub-sections 3, 4, 6, and 12 of the NAB Ordinance 1999, the NAB alleged in the reference.

**IHC disposes of plea seeking Bushra's bail cancellation:** The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday disposed of the petition filed by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), seeking cancellation of the bail granted to Bushra Bibi in

the Toshakhana-II reference, the wife of former prime minister and PTI founder Imran Khan.

During the hearing, judge Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb told Barrister Salman Safdar, counsel for Bushra, that if his client would not appear in the trial court, the latter could cancel her bail. "Safdar sab, you should take cases like these seriously," the judge remarked. Barrister Safdar informed the judge that there had been 15 hearings of the case since October 23. "It appears that the court is in a rush."

The judge asked him about the occasions on which Bushra was granted exemption from appearance in the court. The lawyer replied that the first time his client was granted an exemption was on November 5. "She appeared at the next hearing on November 8. There was no hearing on November 12. And on November 14, she was granted another exemption." He went on to say that there were three hearings of the cases involving Bushra. Justice Aurangzeb ordered Barrister Safdar to provide to the IHC the trial court's order sheet so that it could know on which dates the former first lady was granted an exemption. The judge also ordered him to inform about the number of hearings at which the former PM's wife did not appear in court after she was granted bail.

### PTI ready to hold talks with everyone: Omar

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Leader of the opposition in National Assembly Omar Ayub said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was ready to hold dialogue with everyone. "The PTI founder has constituted a committee to hold talks and we are ready for dialogue," the opposition leader said.

He was talking to media in Islamabad on Thursday. He said that formal talks with NA speaker hasn't started yet as he visited him only to condole over his sister's death. "It would be good for everyone if NA speaker plays any positive role in arranging talks between the government and opposition," said Ayub.

He was of the view that PTI founder has constituted a powerful committee in this regard that is authorized to make any decision. "They have now realized that PTI cannot be suppressed. The country cannot progress without political dialogue," he added. He added that PTI wants release of all the political prisoners and formation of judicial commission to probe the May 9 mayhem.

## SC restores Adil as MNA

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court has annulled the decision to de-seat Adil Bazai, restoring him as a Member of the National Assembly (MNA).

A three-member bench, led by Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, heard the petition filed by Adil Bazai challenging his de-seating from the National Assembly. During the hearing, the Supreme Court raised questions about the Election Commission's procedures.

Justice Ayesha Malik inquired, "What inquiry did the commission conduct to verify the facts in the Adil Bazai case?" Justice Aqeel Abbasi remarked, "Just because a letter from a high-ranking official arrives, they can't just de-seat someone. That's not how it works." Justice Mansoor Ali Shah stated, "The criteria for disenfranchising the voters of an entire constituency should be stringent."

In response, the petitioner's lawyer, Sardar Taimoor, said, "The matter reached the Election Commission, and the next day, proceedings were started. We approached the Balochistan High Court to get the relevant documents. We asked for the affidavit claiming affiliation with the PML-N, which was

### Bench dismisses pleas against practice procedure ordinance

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan's Constitutional Bench on Thursday dismissed a set of petitions challenging the SC Practice Procedure Ordinance, ruling that it has already lapsed after enactment of the law.

The Constitutional Bench headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan ruled that the Parliament has enacted laws regarding practice procedures and the ordinance stood lapsed. Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail remarked that the ordinance would automatically lapse with the enactment of the law. Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar noted that Parliament has enacted laws regarding practice procedures after the ordinance. The petitions were filed by Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Barrister Gohar, Afrasiab Khattak, Ihtisham Haq, and Akmal Bari, among others. Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar added that the committee formed under the ordinance has ceased to exist but its decisions are protected. Regarding the President of Pakistan's authority to issue ordinances, Justice Mandokhail pointed out that the Constitution grants the President this power. Earlier, the PTI chairman challenged the presidential Ordinance, seeking to declare it unconstitutional.

supposedly submitted, but we were not provided with it." Justice Ayesha Malik remarked, "The Election Commission has stated that those documents are confidential."

The court then summoned the Director-General of Law from the Election Commission to the rostrum. Justice Ayesha Malik asked, "You received two affidavits: one from the winning candidate who claimed

it was his, and another from someone who denied it. On what authority did you accept one affidavit as valid without any inquiry? Can the Election Commission simply reject one affidavit and accept another without verification?"

The court's questions highlighted concerns over the fairness and transparency of the process followed by the Election Commission in de-seating Adil Bazai.

Addressing the Gold Star families present, he added, "You're in my thoughts and my prayers."

Blinken's testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee marked a pivotal moment after months of disagreements with the panel, which has been investigating the controversial withdrawal for over two years. Blinken, 62, balanced a conciliatory tone with a staunch defense of President Biden's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, calling it the "right one."

### Asad Qaiser meets NA Speaker

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Former speaker and PTI leader Assad Qaiser called on Speaker National Assembly Ayaz Sadiq to discuss formal beginning of dialogue with the government.

The two leaders exchanged views over creating consensus between sides over the issues of the national interest and cooling down political temperatures and confrontation. "You convince your party's hardliners, I will convince my people," Ayaz Sadiq told Assad Qaiser. The PTI leadership has requested for meeting with the party's founder in jail. "We will further consult with him," Assad Qaiser said.

Meanwhile, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said on Thursday that if this time the party held talks with the government, these would be without pre-conditions. He said the party would not say to the government that first it should meet its specific demand before the talks could begin. "However, there will be points on which both sides will have a discussion," he clarified.

Speaking to reporters in Islamabad, the PTI chairman said that the party leaders and workers would pray for those killed at D-Chowk in Islamabad on the night between November 26 and November 27 on December 15 on the call given by the former prime minister and PTI founder Imran Khan.

When a reporter asked him what he made of contradictory statements issued by Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, Barrister Gohar said that this was a routine in politics. "But we should not allow such statements to distract our attention from the target we have set out to achieve."

Also on Thursday, while talking to reporters at the Islamabad High Court (IHC), PTI stalwart Sher Afzal Marwat said that negotiations between the party and the government were about to begin. "National Assembly (NA) Speaker Ayaz Sadiq is a respectable person. PTI trusts him. It will be a good omen if he plays the role of a bridge between the party and the government," he added.

### Saif lauds legacy of ICP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif here Thursday emphasized the pivotal role of education, ethics and historical preservation in societal progress and national development.

Speaking to an esteemed audience comprising officials, academics, and students at the Inaugural ceremony of Chrysanthemum Exhibition at Islamia College Peshawar, Barrister Dr Saif lauded legacy of Islamia College as a cornerstone of cultural and intellectual identity in the region. "Islamia College is not merely an academic institution; it stands as a symbol of our region's rich history and values. Its contributions have significantly shaped the trajectory of our collective growth," he stated.

Barrister Dr Saif commended the creative efforts of students, particularly female participants in reviving and conserving historical artifacts, describing these endeavors as a testament to their ingenuity and commitment for preserving the cultural heritage.

Chairman @RepMcCaul, @RepMikeLawler, what an amazing hearing you all did today on #Afghanistan, #DohaAgreement and the #13Marines with @SecBlinken. More power to the Democracy in #America.

I am a small time journalist from that region but can you please confirm from... pic.twitter.com/d4iJBb9FB2

— Jalil Afridi (@afrijidjili) December 11, 2024

"Any attempt to understand and learn from the US withdrawal from

## No compromise on health tantamount: PM

— hails OICCI report highlighting significant improvement in investor's trust in Pakistan

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday recognising the provision of accessible healthcare to all citizens regardless of their socio-economic status as a moral imperative of the government said that any compromise on health was tantamount to compromising the security, prosperity, and development of where no risks could be taken.

The prime minister, in his message on Universal Health Coverage Day, annually observed on December 12, reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to the advancement of the global momentum towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

He said that this year's theme, "Health: It's on the government," underscored the pivotal role of governments in ensuring that no one had to choose between essential healthcare and basic necessities such as food, shelter, or education.

He said that in pursuit of this goal, the government had introduced transformative initiatives, such as the Sehat Sahulat Program, spearheaded by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation & Coordination under the banner of "Sehat Sub Kay Liye" (Health for All).

He said that the program, which has garnered international recognition

from esteemed organizations like the WHO, provided free health coverage to millions of families, prioritizing the most vulnerable segments of society. Additionally, the government had made significant investments in healthcare infrastructure and ensured access to essential, life-saving medications, especially in rural and under served areas.

"Moving forward, Pakistan remains steadfast in its commitment to achieving the health-related targets outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. We will continue to collaborate with the United Nations and other global leaders to develop and strengthen frameworks that prioritize health as a fundamental human right," the prime minister resolved.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif expressed satisfaction over the recent report by Overseas Investors Chambers of Commerce and Industry (OICCI), which highlighted a significant improvement in foreign investors' confidence in Pakistan.

According to the report, foreign investors' confidence in Pakistan has increased, the business friendly environment in the country has improved while the international perception in this regard has shifted from this regard had signif-

icantly improved from negative 10% to positive 31% which is highly encouraging, the prime minister said in a press statement issued by the PM Office.

Furthermore, the prime minister pointed out that according to the report, the employment opportunities in Pakistan had increased, the manufacturing sector growth also surged from 2% to 6%, whereas, the services sector growth also witnessed a sharp increase from 7% to 30%, marking a significant success.

The prime minister noted that sales of cement, auto sector, fertilizer and petroleum products had also increased. These outcomes are a positive message for the investors at the international level, he said adding that the report reflected that Pakistan was a hopeful and trusted destination for investment. The prime minister emphasized that during the previous few months, the confidence of foreign investors in Pakistan had significantly improved as the country posted record exports and inflow of foreign remittances.

He expressed the government's resolve to provide all possible relief to the people on priority and said that the benefits of the government's improved economic policies and the hard work of the economic team had begun to materialize.



PESHAWAR: Former federal minister, Muhammad Ali Durrani called on Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur. CM's Adviser on Information, Barrister Saif also present.

## Fazl warns of nationwide protests over Madrasa Bill

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman has warned the government of nationwide protests if the notification for the Madrasa Registration Bill is not issued promptly.

Addressing a press conference, he emphasised that, under the constitution, a bill automatically becomes an act if not signed within 10 days. He criticised the government for delaying the notification despite the bill's unanimous approval in both houses of Parliament.

Fazlur Rehman pointed out that the draft, presented by the Ministry of Law, was agreed upon during discussions on the 26th Constitutional Amendment, with the involvement of major parties, including the PML-N and PPP. He raised concerns about institutional interference in decision-making processes and expressed alarm over the deteriorating law and order situation in the

southern districts, accusing the government of driving the country towards chaos.

The JUI-F chief announced a party meeting on December 16 and hinted at the possibility of pursuing legal action if the issue remains unresolved. Fazl also lambasted the government and the institutions for their "non-serious attitude" towards significant issues, saying that they were "ridiculing" the Constitution, law and his party.

He pointed out that the draft was chalked out by the Ministry of Law — which he said JUI-F accepted despite reservation, asking what "scope of objection" President Zardari has on this legislation. Referring to the recently-held Ulema conference, he told the religious scholars that those who "incited you are the ones responsible for the madrasa bill issue".

He further said that the agreement, reached between the government and the JUI-F, states that bank accounts of all madrasahs should be

opened. "Tell us, has the account of any seminary of the Wifaq Ul Madaris opened?" The much-discussed legislation is an amended version of the Societies Registration Act, 1860, which emphasised the registration of madrasahs (Islamic seminaries) in existence "within six months" from its enactment.

It also stated that a Deeni Madrasa established after the commencement of the Societies Registration (Amendment) Act, 2024, shall get itself registered "within one year of its establishment". A seminary having more than one campus shall need only one registration, it read. Subsequently, each madrasa would be bound to submit its annual report of its educational activities and audit report to a registrar. Under the law, a Deeni Madrasa was defined as a religious institution established or operated primarily to impart religious education, which provides boarding and lodging facilities.

## Blinken takes responsibility for Kabul withdrawal, regrets loss of 13 US troops

F.P. Report

WASHINGTON: Outgoing Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed deep remorse for the Biden administration's failure to do more to protect the 13 US service members killed during the ISIS-K suicide bombing at Abbey Gate amid the chaotic 2021 Afghanistan withdrawal.

CHM @RepMcCaul delivered opening remarks at today's hearing with @SecBlinken on the State Department's failures during the

Biden-Harris admin's deadly withdrawal Afghanistan.https://t.co/WpVuz32kdghttps://t.co/IIU8Jy5j1E

— House Foreign Affairs Committee Majority (@HouseForeignGOP) December 11, 2024

"I think today, especially of the 13 heroes that we lost at Abbey Gate. And I deeply regret we did not do more and could not do more to protect them," Blinken stated during his testimony on Capitol Hill on Wednesday.

the withdrawal, Blinken admitted, "All of us, including myself, wrestled with what we could have done differently during that period and over the preceding two decades."

Committee Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Texas), who will soon be succeeded by Rep. Brian Mast (R-Fla.), secured Blinken's testimony last month after protracted negotiations. McCaul described the withdrawal as a catastrophic failure of US policy, with lingering consequences for national security and the nation's allies.





KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon addressing the Sindh Investment Conference in Karachi.

## CM Murad, WB discuss K-IV Augmentation and Sukkur Barrage projects

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, in a high-level video meeting with a World Bank team led by Country Director Najy Benhassine, reviewed the progress of a \$3.1 billion portfolio comprising 13 ongoing development projects in the province.

According to a statement issued today, the discussion primarily centred on accelerating the K-IV Augmentation Project, investigating the recent gate failure incident at Sukkur Barrage, and exploring further initiatives in solar energy, infrastructure rehabilitation, and urban mobility. The Chief Minister highlighted the importance of the Karachi Water and Sewerage Services Improvement Project (KWSSIP), aimed at enhancing access to safe water and boosting the operational efficiency of the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB).

This ambitious project includes three key components: operational reforms, infrastructure investments, and robust project management. Mr Shah shared that work on the K-IV

Augmentation Project, a critical \$256 million element of KWSSIP, is slated to begin on December 30, 2024. He underlined that land acquisition and the necessary corrective measures should be completed by February 2025, with the goal of completing the project by December 2025. The Chief Minister urged the World Bank to expedite the release of funds to ensure timely completion. The World Bank responded positively, advising the Sindh government to proceed with initial funding from its own resources, with the promise of reimbursement at a later stage.

The Chief Minister also directed the Chief Secretary to ensure the swift release of funds to kickstart the K-IV Augmentation works. The meeting also saw discussions on the rehabilitation of the Sukkur Barrage, where the Root Cause Analysis (RCA) report on the recent gate failure is in progress. In addition, the establishment of a Maintenance, Repair, and Operations (MRO) division was announced, with the objective of improving the Barrage's long-term functionality.

Other key projects

reviewed included the Akram Wah Rehabilitation and the Sindh Water and Agriculture Transformation (SWAT) Project, which aims to enhance agricultural water productivity and support flood-affected farmers. On the transportation front, the Karachi Mobility Project (KMP), a \$382 million initiative, aims to enhance urban mobility by developing the Yellow Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. With 12 percent physical progress and designs already approved, the World Bank expressed satisfaction with the project's ongoing efforts.

The Sindh Solar Energy Project (SSEP), a \$100 million initiative, also featured prominently in the discussions. This project seeks to improve solar power generation and access to electricity. The first shipment of Solar Home Systems (SHS) kits arrived on December 11, with more shipments scheduled for February and March 2025. The Chief Minister emphasized the importance of solarizing public buildings, with 19 sites expected to be completed by December 2024 and the remaining four by January 2025. Progress on solar

power parks is also underway, with land lease agreements and advisory services currently in progress.

The Sindh Flood Emergency Housing Reconstruction Project (SFHERP), funded with \$500 million, was commended for its efficiency and the high quality of work. To date, \$383.3 million has been released, making significant contributions to the province's flood recovery efforts.

The meeting concluded with the Chief Minister directing the Chief Secretary to expedite fund releases and ensure the timely execution of all projects. Shah reaffirmed his government's commitment to completing these transformative initiatives, which are essential for the province's growth and development.



### Kalam Bibi International Women Institute, Bannu

Bannu Township Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.  
Ph # 0928-633433 / 03329723653



### Walk in Interview

Advertisement No. 1(24)

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 Sociology/ Psychology/ Urdu/ English/ Computer Science/ Home Economics/ Education/Botany	As per HEC criteria.

#### 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

## KP WAPDA employees to protest over unresolved demands

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The All Pakistan WAPDA Hydro Electric Workers Union (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chapter) has announced a series of province-wide protests to address multiple longstanding issues, including the proposed privatization of WAPDA, delays in recruitment, and various worker rights violations.

Union spokesperson Gohar Ali Gochar outlined key grievances, including the misinterpretation of the Supreme Court's decision regarding DISCOs, the failure to regularize lump-sum assistant linemen, and the suspension of marriage grants and scholarships. Workers are also concerned about delays in the formation of the promotion and upgradation board, the removal of Saturdays and Sundays as government holidays, and forced labor practices.


Additional issues raised by the union include job insecurity, stagnant wages for part-time employees, and the non-transfer of important benefits such as the GP Fund, Group Life Insurance, and Workers Welfare Fund to company levels. The union has also highlighted concerns about outdated vehicles, fuel supply suspensions, and the delayed promotion of diploma-holder meter readers. Furthermore, the lack of a pension fund for newly recruited staff on fixed salaries has been a point of contention.

Provincial secretary Noorul Amin Haiderzai, in coordination with the union leadership, has finalized the schedule for the first phase of protests. These will take place at various locations, including Bannu Circle (December 16, 2024), Dera Ismail Khan (December 17), Khyber Circle (December

19), Hazara-1 Circle (December 23), Hazara-2 Circle (December 24), Peshawar (December 26), Mardan (December 30), Swabi (December 31), Swat Circle (January 2, 2025), GSC, PD Construction, and GSO Circle in PESCO Peshawar (January 6, 2025), and FATA Circle (January 8, 2025).

The protests will culminate in a major sit-in at the

PESCO Headquarters on Shami Road, Peshawar, on January 14, 2025. The sit-in will continue until the union's demands are met, with thousands of workers expected to participate. The union has formally notified the relevant authorities about the planned protests and has made it clear that they will continue their actions until their issues are addressed.



## OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL, JINNAH COLLEGE FOR WOMEN UNIVERSITY OF PESHAWAR

### INVITATION FOR BID (Single Stage Two Envelopes System)

Dated.12.12.2024, Bid Ref. ITB No.1/UoP/JCW

1. The University of Peshawar invites sealed bids for **Construction of Fatima-tu-Zahra Block at the Jinnah College for Women, University of Peshawar** from eligible bidders as per detail given below:

Estimated Cost (Rs)	E/Money @2%(Rs)	Issuance of Bid Documents	Pre-Bid Meeting	Submission of Bids	Opening of Technical Bids
102,398,872/-	2,047,977/-	From the date of advertisement Upto Tue 31 <sup>st</sup> Dec, 2024 8am to 4pm.	Mon 23 <sup>rd</sup> Dec, 2024 at 10.00am in Committee Room, Admn. Block	Upto Wed 1 <sup>st</sup> Jan, 2025 till 11.00am at Directorate of Works	On Wed 1 <sup>st</sup> Jan, 2025 at 11.30am at Committee Room, Admn. Block

Source/Address For Tender Inquiries, Collection & Submission of the Bidding Documents: Engr. Hassan Iqbal Cell:03343344454 & Engr. Faisal Habib Cell:0300906227 Email: [works@uop.edu.pk](mailto:works@uop.edu.pk) Directorate of Works, Opp: Block-D Hostel, University of Peshawar

2. Interested bidders may obtain the Bidding Documents upon production of the following:

- Application on Bidder's Letter Head addressed to the Director of Works, University of Peshawar
- Non Refundable Fee of Rs.5000/- deposited in A/c No.PK19KHYB 0317 0020 0811 6523 at Bank of Khyber, University of Peshawar.
- Registration with FBR for I. Tax & with KPRA for Sales Tax on Services (Active Taxpayers Only).
- Upto date Registration with Pakistan Engineering Council in C-4 Category or above.
- Upto date Registration with the Registrar of Firms as Association of Persons / with the Security Exchange Commission of Pakistan as Company.

3. Sealed bids complete in all respects, must be accompanied by Bid Security in the form of CDR from bidder's account in f/o the Principal, Jinnah College for Women, University of Peshawar must reach the venue, date & time as above.

4. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Phase, Technical Bids will be opened in the presence of the bidders' representatives who choose to attend, whereas, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase, Financial Bids of the technically qualified bidders only will be opened for which schedule will be shared with the qualified bidders.

5. Additional Security in f/o Principal, Jinnah College For Women, University of Peshawar, if required, shall be deposited in accordance with the mechanism mentioned as per SRO. (14)/Vol: 1-24/2021-22 Peshawar, the May 10, 2022.

6. All Govt Taxes will be deducted as per prescribed rules in vogue.

7. In case bids become tie, the lowest bid will be decided through a free toss, which shall be final.

8. The competent authority reserves the right to accept / reject the bids with solid justification in light of the procurement rules.

Sd/-  
**Prof. Dr. Gul Naz Bano**  
Principal/Convener  
Jinnah College For Women

## Sindh governor visits UAE Embassy Islamabad

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori visited the UAE Embassy Islamabad, where he was warmly welcomed by UAE Ambassador Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Al-Zaabi and other diplomatic staff. Tessori discussed visa issues being faced by Pakistanis, the strengthening of Pakistan-UAE bilateral relations, investment opportunities, and enhancing trade between the two nations. He invited UAE investors to capitalize on Sindh's lucrative investment sectors.

He raised issues of visa challenges faced by Pakistanis, the UAE Ambassador clarified that these issues are not government-level concerns but are caused by travel agents. Both sides resolved to work together to address the matter promptly. The ambassador reiterated the UAE's commitment to Pakistan's stability and expressed keen interest in UAE investors exploring various sectors within Sindh for investment. He remarked that bilateral relations between Pakistan and the UAE are growing stronger with time and expressed Pakistan's desire to increase trade with the UAE.

contributions to the province's flood recovery efforts.

The meeting concluded with the Chief Minister directing the Chief Secretary to expedite fund releases and ensure the timely execution of all projects. Shah reaffirmed his government's commitment to completing these transformative initiatives, which are essential for the province's growth and development.

## Incharge Federal Ombudsman held Khuli Kacheri

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Regional In-Charge of the Federal Ombudsman Secretariat Karachi, Senior Advisor Syed Anwar Haider along with Advisor Syed Zakir Hussain Zaidi and Advisor Moula Bux Shaikh, held Khuli Kacheri at the office of DC Karachi East on 12 Dec 2024.

The Katcheri was attended by the Additional Deputy Commissioner II (ADC-II) Mr. Bakht Ali Dahio, officials from Police, K-Electric, NADRA, Sui Gas, Water Board, Municipal Corporation as well as a large number of residents of District East.

On this occasion, numerous complaints were lodged against federal institutions such as SSGC, Water Board, K-Electric, NADRA, Municipal Corporation and other agencies. A significant number of people raised issues about unjustified bills by SSGC, K-Electric and lack of availability of Gas, Water and Electricity.

Syed Anwar Haider directed the officials from concerned departments to address public grievances promptly and resolved several issues related to the Federal

Departments on the spot. He assured that legitimate issues raised by the residents of District East Karachi and surrounding areas would be addressed promptly.

Speaking at the occasion, Senior Advisor and Incharge Federal Ombudsman Karachi Syed Anwar Haider thanked District Administration East for hosting the Katcheri and hearing public grievances. He told the attendees that Federal Ombudsman was established in 1983 to resolve public grievances and ensure efficient service delivery.

He assured the public that Federal Ombudsman works efficiently to redress the complaints of public against Federal Institutions in 60 days. In addition to this, Federal Ombudsman office ensures the implementation of the complaint as well.

He encouraged the public to use this platform for their fair and just complaints against Federal Institutions and pledged to arrange more such activities for ensuring smooth public delivery. Addressing the gathering, ADC-II Bakht Ali Dahio thanked Federal Ombudsman office for holding the gathering and lauded their efforts for resolving public grievances.

## Ex-senator remanded to NAB in Pak-Arab Housing scam

LAHORE (APP): An accountability court on Thursday remanded former senator Waqar Ahmad Khan into the custody of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) for one day in connection with a multi-billion-rupee scam of the Pak-Arab Housing Scheme.

Earlier, NAB officials produced the accused before Accountability Court Judge Nadeem Gulzar, requesting his physical remand for further investigation. At this stage, the accused sought time to

hand over his properties to NAB, stating, "I am willing to transfer my assets to NAB."

Subsequently, the court granted NAB a one-day physical remand of the accused and ordered his production upon the completion of the remand term.

It is pertinent to mention that NAB arrested the accused on the premises of the Lahore High Court (LHC) after a division bench denied him protective bail the previous day. NAB is investigating the scam related to the

Pak-Arab Housing Scheme, alleging that the accused denied plots to individuals despite receiving payments from them. The bureau claims that the housing society defrauded the public by selling more files than the number of available plots.

Furthermore, NAB alleged that the former senator collected Rs10 billion from individuals who purchased files for Pak-Arab Society Phase-II, a project that was not approved by the Lahore Development Authority.

## Life of Prophet (PBUH) real guidance for all of us: Saleem

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider Khan said that the Holy Quran and the life of our last beloved Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) is beacon of light and real guidance for all of us to overcome problems facing the country.

He said this while addressing the certificate distribution ceremony among the participants of 121<sup>st</sup> National Management Course held at National School of Public Policy on Thursday. He said, "No doubt all officers are fully capable and reached here following a proper system." He said that different training and courses help officers to polish their abilities and executing their responsibilities more efficiently.

He further said that these courses also provide guidance to the officers which help them in playing positive role for development of the country. Saleem Haider Khan underlined the need of self

accountability, adding that it was very unfortunate that country was far behind in terms of progress.

He said that, "If we want development and prosperity in the country then self accountability is must at all levels." Punjab Governor said that there was a lot of scope for bringing improvement at all levels. He further said, "Pakistan is full of potential and opportunities and only there is a need to work on our weaknesses."

Sardar Saleem Haider said that country was facing different challenges and conspiracies and it was a high time to correct ourselves to steer the country out of existing challenges. National dialogue was required to form a road map which could be followed to overcome all sort of problems, he said and added all focus should be on competing with neighbouring countries in terms of development. He emphasized on giving priority to national interest over self interest.



### Kalam Bibi International Women Institute, Bannu

Bannu Township Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Ph # 0928-633810

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Advertisement No. 3(24)

### OF ENGINEERING/ARCHITECTURAL CONSULTING FIRMS

The Kalam Bibi International Women Institute, Bannu is a public sector institute/organization and intends to hire the services of a Consultancy Firm Registered with Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) and Pakistan Council of Architect and Town Planner (PCATP) of civil work components for the works as mentioned below:

Project Title	Name of Work	Type of Services required
Kalam Bibi International Women Institute, Bannu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Construction of Studio Flats</li><li>Construction of Management Block</li><li>Horticulture, External Developmental Works including boundary wall and Main Gate etc</li><li>Solar System and Generators for Power Backup</li></ul>	Services required are detailed in the Terms of Reference (TOR) and Bidding Documents.

#### Terms & other Conditions:

- Proposals are invited from the consultant firms having valid registration with Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) and/or with Pakistan Council for Architects and Town Planner (PCATP) for the year 2024-25 and registered with FBR and KPRA with active status for the abovementioned works.
- The consultant will be evaluated/selected on Quality and cost based Selection (QCBS) method under the procedure/criteria described in the Request for Proposal (RFP) documents.
- Consultancy firms are required to submit a comprehensive Technical Proposal in English (Original + One Copy) and Financial Proposal (Original + One Copy) in separate sealed envelopes for the services required in the Terms of Reference (TOR's) latest by 11-01-2025 at 11:00 AM. Technical Proposals will be opened in the Tender Opening Committee meeting on the same date at 11:30 AM in the presence of the firms or their representatives who choose to attend at the same address. The original and copy of the proposal shall be sealed in separate envelope and marked original and copy. Both these envelopes shall be put in one sealed envelope must reach the office of the undersigned by 11-01-2025 at 11:00 AM. The financial proposal of the technically qualified consultants/ firms will be opened after evaluation of the proposals by the technical evaluation committee.
- A pre-proposal meeting will be held in the office of the undersigned on 03-01-2025 at 11:00 AM.
- Consultancy firms having maximum experience in each components of civil works in buildings, studio flats, roads, solar system, and generator for power backup, horticulture beautification etc will be preferred during technical evaluation.
- An amount of bid security equal to 5% of Bid Amount must be submitted along with the application for the Request for Proposal (RFP). Applications without the bid security shall not be considered.
- The successful bidder would be required to provide performance security in the form of Bank Guarantee at the 10% of Bid Amount with twenty eight (28) days after the issuance of acceptance letter. If the performance bank guarantee not provide by the bidder in the required periods the offer will be given to the next lowest bidder and so on and the bid security of defaulter bids will be forfeited.
- Interested consultant firms may obtain Terms of Reference (TOR/Bid solicitation documents) from the office of the undersigned on payment of **Rs.5,000/-** non-refundable fee in the form of Bank Draft from any schedule bank of Pakistan in favor of Treasurer KIWI, Bannu before closing date during office hours (From 09:00 am to 4:00 pm).
- All applicable Federal, Provincial & local taxes must be considered while preparing the financial proposal. All these taxes are required to be built in quoted rates not mentioned separately.
- Any other query/information can be obtained from the office of the undersigned on any working day during working hours.
- The procuring entity may reject any or all the proposals as per provisions of PPRA rules, at any time prior to the acceptance of Request for Proposal (RFP).
- This advertisement is also available on PPRA & the entity websites.

**Note:** The firm must visit the site/office of the undersigned before submission of bid to get details regarding scope of work to be fully well conversant of the project.

#### Vice Chancellor

Kalam Bibi International Women Institute, Bannu  
Bannu Township, Bannu Ph 0928-633810



# APCEA-USAID organizes stakeholders' session on Gems' City

PESHAWAR (APP): All Pakistan Commercial Exporters Association (APCEA) in collaboration with USAID's Economic Recovery & Development Activity (ERDA) organized a stakeholders' engagement session for establishment of Gems City to promote gemstone exports from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa here on Thursday.

Besides, the Special Assistant to KP CM on Transport, Haji Rangez Khan, Javed Iqbal Khattak (ex.CEO KP-EZDMC), Chairman APCEA Ifthikhar Ahmad, Dr Shakeel Kakakhel (USAID/ERDA), Dr Ashraf (Director, Gems Geological Survey of Pakistan, KP), Alamgir Khan (CEO NPO/JGM), Sartaj Ahmad Khan (Coordinator APCEA) and others addressed the participants of the session.

Addressing the partici-

pants of the session, Javed Iqbal Khattak, former CEO Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC) stressed need for initiation of concrete steps economic development and promotion of business activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He said that business opportunities in the province are stagnating due to peculiar situation and lack of official focus businesses are being transferred to other parts of the country.

He appreciated the efforts of APCEA for the establishment of the Gems' City, which he said is long-standing demand of the gems sector businessmen and said that since last two decades they are struggling for the achievement of the goal.

However, he said that

the absence of the concerned authorities from the session is raising question mark on the interest of the provincial government in this regard.

Javed Khattak said that despite hardships various items are still being exported from the province, which should be encouraged. He recalled that in past the holding of International Gems & Minerals' Show and Apple Show were regular features of the province. But, the holding of such shows is stopped in the province.

He said that due to the lack of planning, carpet manufacturing which was once considered a profitable business in the province is also ended as the Afghan skilled labour force has been shifted to another neighbouring country.

He said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is gifted with

various natural resources particularly gems and minerals and stressed need for the utilization of the sector to optimum level. He announced full support to the efforts of APCEA for the establishment of Gems' City and called for setting up of a modern and quality gems testing laboratory in the province to increase exports, beside generating economic uplift and employment opportunities.

On this occasion, Sartaj Ahmad Khan, the coordinator of APCEA also spoke of the lack of policy level consistency and unawareness about the importance of the sector.

He said that if state of the art laboratory of the gems' sector could be established in India, Singapore and Dubai then why not such facilities could not be provided in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



**PESHAWAR:** Members of Young Pharmacists Association protesting against government's pharmacy services policy.

## Registration of illegal water connections CEO WSSP directs to expedite process

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Executive Officer Water and Sanitation Services Peshawar (WSSP), Yasir Ali Khan, has directed to expedite registering process of illegal water connections and emphasized for taking measures at the zonal level to bring all illegal connections under the billing system.

He also instructed ensuring water supply to consumers within the stipulated time and making efficient use of vehicles to achieve cleanliness targets.

He was addressing a meeting to review the performance report for

November, which was attended by general managers, zonal managers, and other officials.

The meeting reviewed the monthly targets, progress made, operational, financial, and administrative matters, and ongoing projects. Discussions were held on cleanliness, water supply, drainage and sewage systems, employees' attendance etc.

Yasir Ali Khan emphasized further improving and expediting service delivery and instructed better planning and management to utilize available resources efficiently, reduce expenses, and ensure timely collection of

garbage from collection points.

He also stressed for identifying and registering illegal connections to enhance self-reliance.

Officials informed the meeting that the registration of illegal water connection was in process, during November, water production was recorded at 54.30 million gallons, 100 water quality tests were conducted, 13,850 tons of garbage were collected, 5,426 kilometers of roads were cleaned, 2,348 manholes and 319 kilometers of drains were cleared, and 262 locations were sprayed and complaint resolution rate remained more than 88 percent.

## Ehtisham visits Directorate of Health Services

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister on Health, Ehtisham Ali here Thursday visited Directorate General Health Services and inspected its various sections.

Director General Health Services, Dr. Salim and Additional Director, Dr. Shahid Younas was also present on the occasion.

He visited procurement, nutrition nursing sections of the directorate and met with staff. He also listened to the problems of staff and assured them cooperation.

He witnessed digitization process in the directorate and said that steps would be taken to address issue of staff shortage. He urged employees to work with dedication and professionalism realizing their responsibilities.

## Early intervention for mental illness KMU hosts seminar

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Medical University (KMU) Institute of Public Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences, organized a seminar on the topic of Early Intervention for Severe Mental Illness at Senate Hall. The seminar, led by Associate Professor Dr. Muhammad Firaz and Family Physician Prof. Dr. Abdul Jalil Khan, aimed to raise awareness about mental health issues, particularly psychiatric illnesses, and to highlight the importance of timely intervention. The seminar emphasized the need for collaboration among stakeholders for early diagnosis and immediate treatment.

Keynote speaker Professor Dr. Saeed Farooq shed light on the increasing burden of psychiatric illnesses in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs). He highlighted that 9 out of 10 adolescents live in LMICs, with most psychiatric issues surfacing during adolescence, making this a potential epidemic for these countries. Prof. Dr. Farooq underscored the necessity

of establishing quality-based services to provide comprehensive treatment to young patients, enabling them to lead productive lives. In a significant development, Professor Dr. Saeed Farooq announced the release of the first-ever clinical guidelines for managing the First Psychiatric Episode (FEP) in LMICs, a major milestone achieved under the HOPE Project.

In his address, KMU Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Zia ul Haq emphasized the importance of advancing research and quality initiatives in mental health. He pointed out that psychiatric challenges are among the greatest hurdles of the 21st century, while the number of mental health specialists remains disproportionately low compared to other medical fields. He shared that KMU Hospital is prioritizing mental health care by allocating dedicated staff and space for these services. He also highlighted the link between mental health disorders and the exacerbation of physical diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. This initiative, he said, reflects KMU's commit-

ment to addressing mental health challenges and promoting comprehensive healthcare.

The seminar was attended by experts and students from various fields, including psychiatry, psychology, family medicine, public health, research, and traditional spiritual healers. Traditional healers commended the HOPE Project as a commendable effort and expressed their willingness to collaborate with mental health specialists in the future.

To provide a practical dimension to the seminar, Clinical Psychologists Ms. Fatima Ruby and Ms. Zainab set up a stall under the director IPMH&BS, offering free diagnostic services to participants and students. Awareness materials, including leaflets and pamphlets, were distributed to promote understanding of mental health and psychological well-being. The seminar, jointly organized with Keele University and the Midland Partnership Foundation University, marks a significant milestone in addressing mental health issues in Pakistan.

## PA body for steps to reclaim barren land

PESHAWAR (APP): A meeting of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Standing Committee on Agriculture here Thursday stressed for taking measures to reclaim barren and uncultivable land of the province. The meeting was chaired by Abdus Salam Afridi and attended by MPAs including Ali Shah Advocate, Makhdoom Aftab Haider, Muhammad Nisar, Daud Shah, Sher Ali Afridi and Juhar Muhammad besides concerned officials of agriculture department. On the occasion, meeting was briefed about On Farm Water Management and ongoing projects of agriculture department. Addressing the meeting, Committee Chairman stressed to take measures and devise a plan to reclaim barren land of the province. He also directed agriculture department to play its role to stop mushroom growth of illegal housing societies.

## Projects of over Rs40billion approved in PDWP meeting

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The eighth meeting of the Provincial Development Working Party (PDWP) was held under the chairmanship of Additional Chief Secretary for Planning and Development, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mr. Ikramullah Khan. During the meeting, projects exceeding PKR 40 billion were approved to ensure the balanced development of the province. Key approvals included initiatives to provide low-income individuals with quality housing, such as the "Ehsaas Apna Ghar Scheme," which will offer interest-free loans of up to PKR 1.5 million. A total allocation of PKR 4 billion was approved for this scheme.

The forum also approved 32 projects across various sectors, including agriculture, tourism, health, social welfare, and sports. Notable infrastructure projects approved include the dualization of Sheikh Yousaf Adda to Mandrah Bridge Road in Dera Ismail Khan, the improvement of Shuzai-Hangu Road in District Hangu, and the acquisition of land for the Swat Motorway Phase II under PSDP. The rehabilitation of Tall-Parachinar Road in District Kurram, widening of Haripur-Chhappar Road, and the establishment of an RTA office in Bannu were also sanctioned.

Other significant approvals include the restoration of irrigation

infrastructure in merged districts, the design and construction of interchanges on Peshawar Ring Road, and the pilot installation of 13 solar mini-grids in merged areas. Additionally, 300 places of worship for non-Muslims in merged districts will be provided with solar energy.

In the energy sector, feasibility studies for transmission lines to connect PEDO powerhouses with economic zones and industrial units in KP were approved. The health sector received attention with the establishment of an independent monitoring unit and procurement of equipment for the Orthopedic and Spine Surgery Block at Hayatabad Medical Complex.

The sports sector also saw developments, including the provision of gym equipment for Hayatabad Sports Complex, a framework for sports promotion, the revival of squash, and enhancements to existing sports fields in District Swat. Youth development packages and facilities for merged areas were approved to empower young people.

In tourism, community housing projects to facilitate tourists were approved. Further projects included the establishment of a Resource Center, introduction of e-stamping, integrated development packages for South Waziristan and District Khyber, and initiatives to promote agriculture and horticulture in merged districts.

## Islamia Collegiate School students' education at risk due to festivals

### Sajjad M. Khan

PESHAWAR: Islamia Collegiate School has been shaken by music and dancing, causing a headache for local residents and school students. The ancient educational institution has begun to resemble a dance club, as students from Islamia College have set up tents at Islamia Collegiate School for festivals and organizational activities.

The education of the young students at Islamia

Collegiate School is being affected. The students from Islamia College have been making life difficult for students of ICS with their music and dancing throughout the day.

Parents of students from Islamia Collegiate School expressed these views during an interview with The Frontier Post. They said that their children's exam schedule is already out, and they are busy preparing for papers. However, at this critical time, allowing college

students to hold non-educational and unnecessary activities in the school's premises is completely unjust and tantamount to putting the future of the young generation at risk.

They urged the Vice Chancellor to take action against such activities and if permission is necessary, it should be granted to hold such events at Islamia College, so that school students do not face difficulties in acquiring their education, and their future is not jeopardized.

The parents condemned non-educational activities in strong terms and demanded that the Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Ali Muhammad Yousufzai immediately terminate the activities of college students in ICS premises.

They also requested that the Minister of Education Khyber Pakhtunkhwa take immediate notice of the situation. In the absence of any action, they threatened to block Main University Road along with their children.



# Aman Dialogue 2025 - United by the sea

### Commander Anees Muhammad Khan (Retd)

**M**ARITIME professionals play a crucial role in enhancing awareness of maritime issues by sharing best practices and generating policy recommendations that address emerging challenges. Institutions like the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISS) in the UK and the Brooklyn Institute in the USA exemplify how professional engagement can influence policy and practices. The ISS brings together experts from various fields enabling it to produce pivotal research reports and policy papers that tackle complex issues such as piracy, maritime terrorism, and international shipping laws. ISS report on the geopolitics of the North Atlantic provides valuable insights for military stakeholders, allowing them to make informed strategic

decisions on balancing naval resources and addressing emerging maritime threats. Similarly, the Brooklyn Institute is recognized for its diverse academic programming, which addresses issues related to urban coastal environments, the impact of climate change on maritime activities, and community resilience against maritime threats.

Similarly, bringing together Senior Naval & Coast Guard Officers, Maritime Security Experts, and Representatives from Think Tanks to discuss emerging Maritime Security Threats, Regional Cooperation, and Strategies for enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is a norm in developed countries. Examples of notable gatherings in maritime security include the Maritime Security Challenges Conference & Joint War Fighting Conference (JWC) in the United States, NATO Maritime Command

Meetings, and Assemblies of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), European Maritime Day (EMD) and Australian Maritime Security Conference, among others. Lately, Pakistan has also joined the above League of Nations through its inception of AMAN DIALOGUE on the sidelines of biennially held Ex AMAN. A great feat for Pakistan Navy.

The AMAN (Peace) exercise, initiated by the Pakistan Navy in 2007, is a significant multinational maritime exercise aimed at enhancing regional and global maritime security. It significance can be gauged from the fact that it has evolved exponentially over the last seventeen years to include participation from navies worldwide, including major powers such as the U.S., China, and Russia. The core objectives of the AMAN exercise are to promote maritime security and stability, tackle

piracy and maritime terrorism, and enhance interoperability among naval forces. The increasing global participation in the AMAN exercise over the years highlights the trust and confidence that the international community places in the Pakistan Navy's efforts and contributions to enhancing collaborative maritime security.

In response, the Pakistan Navy for the first time has now launched the 'AMAN DIALOGUE' as an adjunct to the said exercise, with its inaugural session scheduled to take place alongside AMAN-25 from February 6-11. The initiative aims to provide a dedicated platform for senior maritime leadership to share insights on regional security and develop innovative solutions to address evolving maritime challenges. This forum will gather Chiefs of Navies, Coast Guards, and Defense Forces, facilitating both multi-lateral discussions and one-on-

one meetings, along with keynote addresses and seminars on contemporary maritime issues. The planned activities during the AMAN Dialogue include a summit of Chiefs of Navies and Coast Guards, a seminar featuring academic discussions related to the themes of the dialogue, and bilateral meetings between participating delegations, all aimed at fostering collaboration and addressing maritime security challenges.

In the contemporary environment, it is but more imperative to interact and understand views on diversified subjects of all stakeholders. Notwithstanding the global and regional rivalries, however fetching of maritime centric economic interests is a priority to each and every state. Addressal of Maritime Safety & Security through arresting growing trends of Maritime Terrorism, Piracy, Smuggling and Illegal Exploitation of Underwater Minerals is the

key to reaping Maritime dividends by all nations. The said dialogue aims to achieve the same.

Additionally, tactical level discussions on improving Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on Ship Boarding Operations in open sea, Ship Protection Organizations (SPO), Hot Pursuit Operations, Rules of Engagements, Intelligence sharing both HUMINT & ELINT, Innocent Passages, Coordination for undertaking Benign Operations, Interdiction Operations, Interpretation of UNCLOS 1982, Law of Sea & Law of Armed conflict etc need continued revision since the understanding vary from state to state. The dialogue will provide a forum for the understanding & refinement of same through correct understanding of views on these diversified subjects. The forum additionally provide opportunity of state to state signing of

Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) which help in future craft acquisitions & training forums exploitation between states.

Above all, as the name of dialogue imply, the forum will help in shaping a soft & positive opinion about Pakistan as a responsible maritime state who hold no grudge against any state and is interested solely in the defence of country and helping the government in pursuance of its objective of developing maritime economy through ensuring maritime safety and security in its AOR.

In short, it is imperative that Regional and World Powers conceive Pakistan's Economic endeavours i.e. development of Gwadar Port, pursuance of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects etc and its cordiality with Western World from the prism of economic development only, with no other intentions whatsoever. If achieved, the forum would be a success story.





## In brief

### Hospital at the verge of collapse F.P. Report

WANA: The Sholam Hospital in Lower Waziristan is on the verge of collapse. Due to salary suspensions over the past several months and the absence of doctors, the hospital's operations have come to a standstill, causing severe hardships for patients. Political and social activist Taj Muhammad Wazir met with the hospital staff today. The employees present at the hospital complained that the administration had assured them their salaries would be released and doctor posts would be filled by December 15, but no progress has been made to date. Taj Muhammad Wazir stated that TCP Organization officials had promised to fulfill all hospital requirements by December 15. Speaking to the media, he said that they had discussed the issue with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, but the TCP Organization has completely failed to present a progress report or satisfy provincial government departments. He further stated that they had postponed the employees' strike on the condition that the TCP Organization would ensure the appointment of doctors and the release of pending salaries by December 15. However, the current situation at the hospital indicates that resolving these issues by the deadline seems unlikely. He warned that if the employees' issues are not resolved by the given deadline, they will participate in a strike alongside the hospital staff.

### Timely completion of bus stand F.P. Report

D I KHAN: The district administration South Waziristan Lower is taking tangible measures to provide the best facilities to the people of the area. As part of efforts, Assistant Commissioner Wana, South Waziristan Lower Faisal Ismail the TMO Wana, visited the under-construction general bus stand to take stock of progress and facilities for passengers. According to the district administration, the assistant commissioner reviewed various facilities at the bus stand, including separate waiting areas for women and men, a designated prayer area, restrooms, and vehicle parking facilities. Faisal Ismail directed the Tehsil Municipal Officer (TMO) to ensure the timely completion of all facilities so that the public could fully benefit from the facility. He emphasized that this project was crucial for the convenience of the public, and any delay in its completion would not be tolerated. Once completed, the AC added that the city would have improved transportation infrastructure and would provide the public with modern and well-equipped travel facilities.

### Awareness walk organized

HYDERABAD (INP): In preparation for the upcoming polio eradication campaign, a key meeting and awareness walk were organized in Matari district. A meeting, chaired by the Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Yousif Shaikh in this regard, took place at the Deputy Commissioner Secretariat on Thursday. Attended by District Health Officer (DHO) Pir Ghulam Hussain, SSP Faisal Bashir Memon and officials from various departments, including education, social welfare, police, PPHI, NGOs and other relevant organizations, the meeting focused on reviewing strategies and preparations for the upcoming polio campaign.



QUETTA: People selecting and purchasing warm clothes from a roadside vendor.

## Anti-polio immunization campaign kicks off

### F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Deputy Commissioner Lakki Marwat kicks off the three day anti-polio drive by administering a kid below five with oral polio vaccine at a ceremony on Thursday.

The ceremony held at the deputy commissioner's compound was attended among others by additional DC Sikandar Khan, additional AC Gohar Ali Khan, DHO Dr Abdugul and officials of the line departments and partners' organisations. A health official said on the occasion that the five day polio eradication campaign would commence from Dec 16 for which a total of 1017 teams had been organized to vaccinate 205532 children under five against the crippling disease.

DC said that along with 46 chairpersons of the union council polio eradication committees, 360 area in-charge officers

would be deployed to monitor the performance of vaccinators. The deputy commissioner said that his administration would fully support the health department and its partners' organization to ensure immunisation of the targeted population.

He asked the health officials to ensure polio teams reach every child and get them immunized against the disease. DC said that full support by the community, especially parents, was a key to achieve the goal of elimination of poliovirus completely. He called upon parents to cooperate with vaccinators and get their children administered with anti-polio drives so as to keep them safe from lifelong paralysis.

Meanwhile, divisional commissioner said that immunisation of children under five against polio was a national obligation and there was no room for

any negligence and all stakeholders should play their role to wipe out the disease completely.

While chairing a meeting of the Divisional Task Force at his office, he said that elimination of every obstacle was inevitable to achieve the vaccination of the targeted population of kids against the crippling disease. He asked the relevant authorities to strengthen security and ensure provision of foolproof protection to vaccinators engaged in anti-polio drives.

Among others Regional Police Officer Imran Shahid, Bannu DC Abdul Hameed Khan and DPO Ziauddin Ahmed and other officials were in attendance.

Regional Coordinator Eid Nawaz Shirani and relevant officials of district administrations, health and other departments from Lakki Marwat and North Waziristan districts virtually participated.

### Governor inaugurates solar system at KTM's Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi has formally inaugurated the 3 MW Solar System at Kohat Textile Mills (KTM) on Wednesday evening. He, on this occasion was accompanied by the renowned political figure former Federal Minister Salim Saifullah Khan, Chief Executive Officer KTM Asad Saifullah Khan, President Kohat Chamber of Commerce and Industry Rashid Pracha and other Businessmen.

The 3 MW Solar System has been installed at a cost Rs.400 Million. Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also visited different sections of the KTM where he was briefed in detail by the CEO KTM Asad Saifullah on production cost and other issues.

Talking to the media persons on this occasion, the Governor said that it is commendable that the private sector is benefiting from the modern trends adding that this initiative will bring economic comfort to the industrialists as well as the people.

Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa said that he is in close contact with the district administration and getting complete details of the Jirgas being held on Kurram situation. He further said that the Federal government is also taking steps to restore lasting peace in the Kurram. Faisal Kundi said, solar systems are now being installed in most of the factories and the credit of it goes to the federal government, which waived the tax on solar panels.

Due to Solarization, there has been a substantial reduction in the electricity load shedding in the country. Kundi also planted a sapling in the KTM as part of the plantation campaign.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram Chitrali has along-with the Divisional Forest Officer Kohat and Sub-Divisional Forest Officer inspected the olive orchard in Babri Banda Kohat which is planted under the "Olive Orchards Project". The said Project is successfully launched by the Forest Department with the support of Allied and Habib banks.

### DIG orders inquiry F.P. Report

SHAHDADKOT: The viral post on social MEDIA since last day, in which a police official found in harassment of a lady police official Sanam Parveen Brohi incharge of Women Protection Cell District Qamber Shahdadt, notice of the viral post on various social media, taken by the Deputy Inspector General Range Larkana Nasir Aftab Pathan.

According to notice, SP Investigation Larkana, Haseeb Javed Somar has been appointed as the investigating officer and ordered to submit a detailed report within time. There is a link to sexually and physically harassing lady policemen posted at district Qamber Shahdadt.

## Faiz Hameed's matter a military issue, says Saif

### F.P. Report

MARDAN:Advisor to Information and Public Relations, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, visited the Mardan Press Club. He was welcomed by the Press Club President M. Bashir Adil, along with the cabinet members. Accompanying him were Press Registrar Ansar Khalji, Deputy Directors Sahibzada Hassan Ali, Muhammad Nisar and Regional Information Officer Mardan Shams-ul-Haq Yousafzai.

The advisor inspected various sections of the press club, where President M. Bashir Adil and General Secretary Fazal Haq briefed him on the club's activities. Barrister Saif appreciated the journalistic efforts of the press club's members and officials. During his address at the "Meet the Press" event, Barrister Dr. Muhammad Ali Saif commented on several topics:

He stated that General Faiz Hameed's matter is a military issue, emphasizing that court-martials are for military personnel. However, some individuals are linking the former general with the PTI founder and even suggesting court-martials for civilians. He criticized this notion as baseless.

Barrister Saif clarified that the call for civil disobedience was announced by the PTI founder, and party leadership is formulating a strategy for it. He described Islamabad's recent protest as successful, claiming thousands reached D-Chowk and faced bullets bravely. The protests aim to secure Imran Khan's release and restore the "stolen mandate."

On the Kurram issue, he said both groups have agreed to an indefinite ceasefire after detailed discussions. He noted that the conflict is not purely sectarian but also involves land disputes, group inter-

ests, and the Afghan situation. Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has instructed a lasting resolution and is personally supervising the negotiations. Barrister Saif also mentioned launching an air service for Parachinar and requesting two FC platoons from the federal government to maintain.

The advisor highlighted the universal health card initiative providing free treatment to 100% of the province's population. At the conclusion of the visit, Barrister Saif was presented with a commemorative shield.

**AWKUM moves toward innovation:** A comprehensive presentation on the progress and achievements of the Office of Research, Innovation, and Commercialization (ORIC) was presented to the Worthy Vice Chancellor of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Professor Dr. Zahir Shah, by Director ORIC Dr. Tariq Mehmood. The event, held in the Vice Chancellor's Secretariat, was attended by Dr. Ali Khan (Assistant Director, ORIC) and Muhammad Naseer (Deputy Director, ORIC).

During the presentation, the Vice Chancellor was briefed on the strides made by ORIC in fostering research, innovation, and strengthening academia-industry linkages. Professor Dr. Zahir Shah expressed his satisfaction and commended the entire ORIC team for their dedication and achievements. He emphasized the critical role of ORIC in advancing the university's research goals and its contribution to regional and national development. The ORIC team reaffirmed its commitment to maintaining high standards of excellence and supporting the university's vision of academic and research leadership.

## Tribesmen assures support to admn for development

### F.P. Report

BANNU: Elders of North Waziristan district and government authorities have agreed to launch concerted efforts to bring sustainable development and prosperity to the tribal region. The consensus was shown at a jirga held in Bannu on Thursday.

The government team comprised divisional commissioner Muhammad Abid Khan Wazir, North Waziristan deputy commissioner Yousaf Karim and military officials. Malik Nasrullah, Mufti Baitullah, Malik Abdul Qadir, Malik Samiullah, Malik Misbahullah, Malik Muhammad Noor and other tribal chiefs

also participated.

The Jirga has been convened on the special directives of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister to engage tribal elders in the uplift process", said divisional commissioner at the meeting. He said that the commission set up by the provincial government to resolve tribesmen's issues pertaining to oil and gas reserves would work for uplifting the region in consultation with tribal people.

Wazir asked the members of the district level committee to play a proactive role to eliminate the backwardness of the tribal district. He said that the establishment of the com-

mission would help to usher a new era of development in North Waziristan besides enabling the local population to take advantage of natural resources.

The divisional commissioner said that the tribal elders should promote mutual consensus and adopt a national perspective, adding that the district level committees should start their assigned work with the consultation of elders without wasting time. The elders assured provision of full support to the government authorities and said that they would play an effective role in bringing sustainable development to the district.

## DHO stresses collective efforts for polio eradication

### Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: As Pakistan struggles to eradicate polio, District Health Officer (DHO) Swat, Dr. Muhammad Saleem, emphasized the crucial role of parents in protecting their children from this debilitating disease. With 59 positive polio cases reported nationwide and 16 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the need for collective action has become more pressing than ever.

Polio is a highly infectious disease that can cause lifelong paralysis, warned Dr. Saleem. "It's essential that parents take

responsibility for ensuring their children receive the protective drops." A 5-day anti-polio campaign is set to commence on December 16, with all necessary preparations in place. Dr. Saleem urged parents to ensure their children receive the protective drops, emphasizing that no child should be deprived of this essential protection.

In addition to the anti-polio campaign, a new initiative dubbed the "Big Ketchup" campaign will launch on December 23, running for 12 days. This campaign aims to safeguard

children under the age of 5 from 12 diseases. UNICEF representatives Dr. Allah Rakhi and Dr. Liaquat reiterated the importance of parental cooperation in ensuring the success of these campaigns.

As the anti-polio campaign and "Big Ketchup" initiative approach, parents, healthcare workers, and community members must work together to ensure the success of these critical public health endeavors. By doing so, we can protect our children from the devastating consequences of polio and other preventable diseases.

## Relevant documents handed over to college principal

### F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Following the directives of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa advisor to chief minister on health Ehtisham Ali, the former project director of the Timergara Medical College (TMC) Dr. Shaikat Ali handed over all the relevant documents to the college Principal Prof Dr Samiullah during a function held at the college here on Thursday.

The function was also attended by special assistant to chief minister on prisons MPA Humayun Khan, SACM on population welfare MPA Malik Liaquat Ali, chairman district development advisory committee Lower Dir Ubaid ur Rehman, MPA Azam Khan, MPA Malik Shafiullah Khan, MS Timergara hospital Dr. Ali Asghar, area elders and staff of the college. Dr. Shaikat Ali handed over all the documents of equipment, furniture, machines and land purchased for the college during his tenure to the principal Prof Dr

Samiullah.

The TMC Principal Prof Dr Samiullah informed the participants that out of the total 436 posts of the college, 228 were still vacant. He said the posts were approved in 2021, out of which the employees from Grade 7 to 16 had been recruited while the faculty was yet to be completed. The principal said the government and local lawmakers were committed to making the college functional so that classes at the facility could be launched soon.

Talking to local journalists, former project director Dr. Shaikat Ali said that all equipment had been installed in 2021 and the procurements had been checked by a health committee finding it according to the PC-1 of the project. He said the NAB team had also conducted an inquiry against the allegations of irregularities in procurement for the college.

**International NGO completes work on**

**streets' pavement at Afghan refugees' camp:** The Secours Islamique France (SIF), an international NGO, in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has completed work on 18 street pavement schemes in Refugee Village at Chakdara. The initiative, under the Cash for Work (CFW) Project, engaged 104 Afghan refugees, each receiving Rs 45,000 for 26 days of work.

Implemented in collaboration with the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR) and local Shooras, the project addressed long-standing infrastructure challenges. Comprehensive assessments by field engineers and community consultations prioritized street pavement, a critical need highlighted by refugees and community elders. While SIF-UNHCR provided labor-intensive support, local residents contributed construction materials.





JAKARTA: Rescuers clearing rubble from damaged houses at a neighbourhood affected by a landslide in Sukabumi, West Java, Indonesia.

# Syrians in Germany worried by some politicians’

BERLIN (AP): Nearly a decade after he arrived in Germany from Syria and took a selfie with then-Chancellor Angela Merkel, Anas Modamani has finished his university studies and has a German passport.

He's less positive about some German politicians' reactions to the fall of Bashar Assad, which was followed within hours by the first talk of Syrians returning. "Berlin has become my second home, I will definitely stay here," Modamani said. "I managed it" - a reference to Merkel's famous slogan "We will manage it," coined as Germany faced the challenge of integrating hundreds of thousands of migrants.

As Syrians took to the streets of Berlin, far-right leader Alice Weidel wrote on social platform X that anyone celebrating a "free Syria" in Germany "evidently no longer has a reason to flee. He should return to Syria immediately." With a German election approaching and the government under longstanding pressure to reduce irregular migration, some mainstream opposition politicians also appeared eager to kickstart the return of Syrians. Prominent conservative lawmaker Jens Spahn suggested on n-tv television the government could say that "for everyone who wants to go back to Syria, we will charter planes for them, they will get a starting fund of 1,000 euros (\$1,055)." He stressed, though, that it will take time before it's clear whether ideas have stabilized.

Such ideas strike Syrians as indecently hasty. Modamani, a 27-year-old from Damascus who came to Germany in 2015, said he was "shocked" by reports of the 1,000-euro proposal. "I think that's a terrible idea," he said as he sat over lunch with Syrian friends at a Berlin restaurant. "The situation in Syria is still just as dangerous as before." Modamani, who says he shares an apartment with his girlfriend from Ukraine and finished his studies in business communication, illustrates

what German officials acknowledge is the successful integration of many Syrians. A deputy interior minister, Juliane Seifert, said Syrians are "a group that has significantly above-average educational qualifications," among them many doctors.

The number of Syrians gaining German citizenship has risen from 6,700 in 2020 to 75,500 last year, when they were the biggest single group and accounted for 38% of all naturalizations. Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann, whose conservative party has talked tough on migration, said that many Syrian refugees are now "superbly integrated in our country, have a job and are urgently needed here" and no one is thinking of getting such people to leave Germany. "Those who have already integrated well are still cordially welcome," Herrmann told Deutschlandfunk radio. "But it is clear that there are also people who have been here for 10 years and don't have a job and haven't integrated well, and then it's right to help them return to their homeland" if Syria stabilizes.

It's not surprising that hopes of a more stable Syria raise hopes in Germany of reducing immigration. Official figures show that, at the end of October, there were nearly 975,000 Syrian nationals in Germany, a country of 83 million. The majority had some kind of refugee or other protected status. Germany and a string of other European countries announced that they were suspending decisions on Syrians' asylum applications as they wait for the situation in Syria to become clearer. Over 47,000 cases are pending in Germany, one of the main destinations for Syrians outside the Middle East.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said that is the right thing to do, but it would be "unserious to speculate in such a volatile situation" about the eventual return of Syrians. Among those who will may face a longer

wait is Basil Khalil, a 26-year-old Kurdish Syrian who said he applied for asylum after crossing from Turkey into Bulgaria and traveling to Germany on the back of a truck. Khalil said he spent the last nine years as a refugee in Turkey, but was worried that Turkish authorities may soon start deporting Syrians.

"I applied for asylum in Germany because I'm afraid that back in Syria I may get drafted as a soldier," he told The Associated Press as his cousin translated for him. "But if the German government will deport me, then I guess I will go back," Khalil said. "We Syrians have been through so much suffering, all we want to do is survive." Tarek Alaows, a spokesperson for pro-refugee group Pro Asyl, said that "many from the Syrian community naturally want to return ... Many want to participate in the reconstruction. But they must not be forced to leave the country" for a still-unstable Syria. Alaows, 35, who fled Damascus in 2015 and became a German citizen over three years ago, said many Syrians in Germany were concerned to hear public calls so soon for the quick return of Syrians. "These debates that are going on right now - nobody needs them," he said.

Yamn Molhem, who arrived 10 years ago, sees it the same way. The 39-year-old father of four now manages the Aldimashqi restaurant on Berlin's Sonnenallee boulevard, known for its many Arabic stores and businesses. "All of my family has left Aleppo, and the situation in Syria is generally very unstable," he said. Molhem said he is applying for a German passport, proudly adding that his youngest son already has one. "They can't deport our family," said, "My son is German." In general, Molhem said, Germans should think twice before they even consider sending back Syrians who work, pay taxes and help keep the economy running. "Syrians don't just sleep here," he said.

## Yemen’s Houthis clash with US Navy ships in Gulf of Aden

ADEN: The United States military has said its forces successfully fended off an attack by the Houthis, a Yemen-based armed group, while escorting a group of three commercial vessels through the Gulf of Aden. The US Central Command (CENTCOM), which oversees US military activities in the Middle East, said that two destroyers intercepted a barrage of cruise missiles and drones launched from Yemen.

"The destroyers were escorting three US owned, operated, and flagged merchant vessels. The reckless attacks resulted in no injuries and no damage to any vessels, civilians or US Naval," CENTCOM said in a statement. US forces in the region have exchanged fire with the Houthis for months, as the group seeks to block certain commercial ships from travelling through the Red Sea. The group says those actions are a means of exerting pressure to end Israel's war in Gaza, of which the US is a key supporter.

But the US has depicted the Houthi attacks as a threat to trade and freedom of navigation. "These actions reflect the ongoing commitment of CENTCOM forces to protect US personnel, regional partners, and international shipping against attacks by Iran-backed Houthis," CENTCOM said. The three US-flagged commercial vessels were sailing towards Djibouti when the US said they came under attack by "uncrewed aerial systems" and one antiship cruise missile.

Two US Navy ships, the USS Stockdale and the USS O'Kane, responded to the attack. Citing an unnamed official, The Associated Press (AP) news agency reported that a US Navy helicopter and French Air Force aircraft also helped repel the attack. Together, they shot down four of the drones and a missile, according to the AP. Despite months of US efforts to put an end to the attacks, including numerous strikes on Yemen, the Houthis have continued to target military and shipping vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

At the start of this year, the US military reported that the Houthis had conducted 27 such attacks in less than two months, from November 19, 2023, to January 11. The Yemeni group also claimed responsibility for a drone attack in central Israel. — Aljazeera

# 60 patients at Gaza hospital at risk of starving

GAZA: Dozens of wounded patients at the Indonesian Hospital in the Israeli-besieged northern Gaza are at risk of dying due to lack of food and water, Palestinian health authorities have said. The Ministry of Health in Gaza said that 60 patients were "at risk of death".

"The humanitarian situation inside the hospital has become extremely dangerous, as the wounded lack basic needs, which increases their suffering under the difficult conditions imposed by [Israeli] forces," the ministry said in a statement. The hospital is located in Beit Lahiya in the north of the Gaza Strip, which has been under a tighter Israeli military siege since early October.

In its separate daily update on the death toll from Israel's war on Gaza, the ministry said that at least 28 people had been killed and 54 others wounded in "four massacres against families" over the last 24-hour reporting period. "A number of victims are still under the rubble and on the roads, and ambulance and civil defence crews cannot reach them," the ministry added.

The death toll from more than 14 months of Israeli attacks on Gaza rose to 44,786 people, the ministry said. An estimated 1,139 people were killed in Israel

during attacks led by the Palestinian armed group Hamas on October 7 2023, and more than 200 were taken captive. The Palestinian news agency Wafa later reported that at least seven Palestinians had been killed and others wounded when Israeli fighter jets bombed a multi-storey residential building in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza.

Meanwhile Sigrid Kaag, the United Nations' humanitarian coordinator for Gaza, briefed members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) in a closed meeting in New York. Speaking to reporters after the briefing, Kaag said she told the council the situation in the Gaza Strip is "a very, very bleak picture".

"I've spoken of the inhumane conditions in which our fellow human being civilians are trying to survive, the young and the old," she said. Responding to a question from Al Jazeera on whether the fall of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government could overshadow Israel's war on Gaza, Kaag said she was working to keep the situation in the besieged and bombed territory "on the map". Kaag also said she discussed with members of the UNSC "our hope for a ceasefire and the unconditional release of the hostages that this would

enable, obviously, a further surge of assistance".

Her comments came as Israel's Channel 13 reported that Israeli National Security Council ministers have been briefed that Hamas has expressed an interest in reaching a ceasefire and captive deal. Channel 13 also reported that Qatar has been "playing a significant role in negotiations for the deal" after previously announcing it was suspending its role as mediator. Speaking at the Doha Forum, Qatari Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said "momentum is coming back" to ceasefire talks.

The latest expectations of a truce come as the Israeli military announced it had launched 480 attacks on Syria in the 48-hour period after Syrian opposition fighters toppled the decades-long rule of the al-Assad family. Israeli forces also grabbed Syrian-controlled territory in a buffer zone of the Golan Heights that was established by a 1974 ceasefire agreement with Damascus, drawing condemnation from countries in the region. A separate ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon has largely continued to hold. — Aljazeera

# Biden issues veto threat on bill expanding federal judiciary

WASHINGTON (AP): House Republicans teed up a vote this week on bipartisan legislation to gradually expand by 66 the number of federal judgeships across the country. Democrats, though, are having second thoughts now that President-elect Donald Trump has won a second term.

The White House said that if President Joe Biden were presented with the bill, he would veto it. A Congress closely divided along party lines would be unlikely to overturn a veto, likely dooming the bill's chances this year. It's an abrupt reversal for legislation that the Senate passed unanimously in August. But the GOP-led House waited until after the election to act on the measure, which spreads out the establishment of the new district judgeships over about a

decade to give three presidential administrations the chance to appoint the new judges. Rep. Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., said the bill was negotiated with the understanding that three unknown, future presidents would have the chance to expand and shape the judiciary. No party would be knowingly given an advantage. He said he begged GOP leadership to take up the measure before the presidential election. But they did not do so.

"It was a fair fight and they wanted no part of it," Nadler said. Rep. Jim Jordan, the Republican chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, explained the timing this way: "We just didn't get to the legislation." The change of heart about the bill from some Democrats and the new urgency from House Republicans for con-

sidering it underscores the contentious politics that surrounded federal judicial vacancies.

Senate roll-call votes are required for almost every judicial nominee these days, and most votes for the Supreme Court and appellate courts are now decided largely along party lines. Lawmakers are generally hesitant to hand presidents from the opposing party new opportunities to shape the judiciary. Nadler said that the bill would give Trump 25 judicial nominations on top of the 100-plus spots that are expected to open up over the next four years. "Donald Trump has made clear that he intends to expand the power of the presidency and giving him 25 new judges to appoint gives him one more tool at his disposal to do that," Nadler said.

# Can a US missile defense system shield Guam from Chinese threat?

NEW YORK (Reuters): An SM-3 interceptor erupted into the night sky over Guam, its engine briefly illuminating the northeast corner of the island as it accelerated toward its target: a ballistic missile. US Missile Defense Agency and military personnel monitored the radars and telescopic cameras tracking both projectiles; this was not an attack, but a complex test.

Within minutes, the ballistic missile - air-launched from a US Air Force C-17 - was pulverized by the kinetic energy of the SM-3. The collision more than 600 kilometers (370 miles) up was a violent milestone in the United States' multibillion-dollar plan to turn its Western Pacific territory, closer to potential adversary China than any US state, into one of the most heavily defended places on earth.

"We need the capability to deter the PRC from an attack on sovereign US territory," said a US defense official, referring to China by the initials of its formal name, the People's Republic of China. "The goal of whatever capability we put on Guam is defense of the homeland." Over the next decade, the US government plans to replace missile defenses at 16 sites around the island. They will use the best hardware in the country's arsenal, including the SM-3 Block IIA and SM-6, Patriot PAC-3 MSE, and THAAD missile systems, and a new, advanced radar, the AN/TPY-6, and short-range air-defense system, the Indirect Fire Protection Capability. Linked to sensors on Guam and around the region, the batteries are meant to engage whatever China might throw at the island, home to crucial US Air Force and Navy facilities, which the Pentagon sees as vital to projecting power into East Asia and the South China Sea.

That's the plan. Reuters interviews with more than two dozen people, including analysts, government officials, civic leaders, senior US military officers and technical experts, alongside planning and budget documents, show the project's impact will balance on a knife edge: complicating Chinese planning without simply

turning the island into a missile magnet. The plan - a cornerstone of the US Pacific Deterrence Initiative, which seeks to counter China in the region - faces headwinds as tensions tick upward. Building the island's missile defenses as envisioned will cost about \$10 billion over the next decade. China will soon field the DF-27, which carries a hypersonic glide vehicle to evade interception. On Guam, residents worry that additional personnel will worsen a housing shortage, and strain infrastructure and public services. And a new administration in the White House may change the system's requirements or architecture. At stake in the Dec. 10 test was a simple question of feasibility. A ballistic missile had never been shot down from Guam. Could an interceptor designed for ships be fired from land, guided for the first time by a new type of radar and hit a fast-moving target?

Although that question was answered, a thornier one remained: If China launched an all-out attack on Guam, home to more than 170,000 people, would a missile-defense system matter? "If the Chinese are serious about taking out Guam - and if there's a war in Asia, I think they have to be - I don't see what the value of an air and missile defense system would be," said Leland Bettis, director at the Pacific Center for Island Security in Guam. "It is not a shield for Guam." Guam is home to Andersen Air Force Base, whose runways can handle America's heaviest military aircraft, including nuclear-capable B-52 and B-2 bombers.

The base also houses the largest US munitions storage area in the Air Force, according to the 36th Munitions Squadron, amounting to nearly 20 million pounds (about 9 million kg) of explosives. Down the coast on the opposite side of the island from Andersen is Naval Base Guam, which serves five Los Angeles-class nuclear-powered attack submarines, and the US Navy's only two specialized ships for tending subs at sea. Other military facilities include radar installations, facilities for communications and mainte-

nance, and housing.

All of that supports forces that can project power into the South China Sea. Other US military units are based closer to China, such as in Japan and South Korea. But Guam is part of the United States. "Anything we are trying to get from the US to INDOPACOM is going to land in Guam," said a senior US defense analyst, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter, referring to Indo-Pacific Command, which controls US forces in the region. "It is the only reliable place that we can operate out of in a Taiwan Strait scenario or a conflict in the South China Sea." The PLA could use a wider variety of weapons to hit American bases in countries closer to China, and may see that as less risky than striking US territory on Day One of a conflict, said Oriana Skylar Mastro of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. She added that Guam, being more-distant, would be ideal for staging operations or regrouping for counterattacks.

Chinese military planners are well aware of Guam's significance, said Tong Zhao of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the People's Liberation Army has an enormous stockpile of weapons with which to attack it. Many, however, require launch platforms: cruise missiles such as the YJ-63 and CJ-20, with ranges that can exceed 1,000 km, must be carried by aircraft or ships that are vulnerable to attack. That leaves ballistic missiles as China's most likely option to strike the island. It has two conventional types that can do so: the DF-26 and DF-27.

The DF-26, nicknamed the "Guam Express," can carry both nuclear and conventional warheads. The PLA Rocket Force has more than 250 launchers and 500 missiles, according to the most recent Pentagon estimates. It is accurate enough to hit a medium-sized building at a maximum range of 4,000 kilometers with more than a ton of high explosives. The DF-27 is not yet in service,

according to the Pentagon. It is designed with a hypersonic glide vehicle warhead that can maneuver to the target, complicating matters for missile defenses. The worst-case scenario, according to a missile defense program director granted anonymity to discuss a sensitive matter, is a simultaneous attack involving all of the Chinese weapons that can strike Guam.

Many experts think that is unlikely. Besides the risk to Chinese ships and aircraft, the United States is working to ensure that its forces can be distributed around the region - investing in upgrades to Australian bases, for instance - so strikes cannot focus on a single location. China's defense ministry did not respond to a request for comment about how the Guam project might affect Beijing's military planning, whether it would make the island more of a target or under what circumstances US territory might be attacked. Last year, a ministry spokesperson said, "If Guam were to be an outpost to wage wars, it would not be secure even if it were armed to the teeth."

Swatting down ballistic missiles is difficult. The targets and interceptors are moving at many times the speed of sound at altitudes ranging from a few thousand meters to above the International Space Station. But missile defense technology has matured in recent years, some analysts say, pointing to successes in Ukraine and the Middle East. The Guam Defense System project will link the most modern US equipment, creating a "layered" network.

"This is the hardest thing Missile Defense Agency has ever done in terms of complexity," said a US official with direct knowledge of the program. At the heart of the system will be a ground-based version of the Aegis fire control used on US Navy ships. Linked to Lockheed Martin AN/TPY-6 radars - as well as other radars and sensors around the region and in space - it can spot inbound missiles early in flight and, working with the Northrop Grumman Integrated Battle Command System, determine the optimal way of defeat-

ing them.

Challenges include limited ammunition, and modern ballistic missiles carry decoys and other countermeasures, which mean they may take several shots to destroy. Stopping every missile in a massive attack is not realistic. But increasing the number China must fire to do meaningful damage - limiting what is available elsewhere and increasing the risk of unwanted escalation - complicates Chinese planning, said Sidharth Kaushal, a senior researcher at the Royal United Services Institute in Britain.

"A credible missile defense system would not be one that intercepted every missile... but stopped enough of the salvo to prevent the destruction the planner was hoping for," he said. US Rear Admiral Gregory Huffman, commander of Joint Task Force Micronesia, said that would "enhance the deterrent effect" and give pause to adversary strike planners.

The 550-square-kilometre island is going to be a target no matter what, said Guam Governor Lou Leon Guerrero. Adding missile defenses only makes it safer, she said. "We realize the importance of a military presence here in the defense of the nation and the defense of our civilian population," Leon Guerrero said. "We are a peaceful island ... But deterrence is also very important in defense."

Others worry that fortifying Guam will make it more of a target. More than half of the 136 public comments on the plan submitted to the MDA last year involved concerns the defenses would invite a strike or be ineffective. Guam's relationship with the US military stretches back to the late 19th century. Since World War II, it has seen repeated military buildups; in 2012, before the missile defense project was proposed, the United States and Japan agreed to transfer 5,000 US Marines to Guam from Okinawa, the first of whom were due to arrive in December. Construction means more work for the island's companies, and a larger population means more spending. But Guam's construction workers are already fully occupied,

said Catherine Castro, president of the Guam Chamber of Commerce, estimating that the number of foreign workers would double to about 10,000 in coming years.

That's in addition to the estimated 1,000 US personnel and 1,300 dependents associated with the missile defense program who would need housing, according to MDA estimates. Such an influx would pile strain on an already severe housing shortage. The mean income on Guam is about \$42,000, according to government data. The median home price is over \$400,000, said Robert Underwood, Guam's congressman from 1993-2003 and former president of the University of Guam. Because of Guam's status as a territory, its residents and government cannot reject any federal government plans for the island. So the question becomes what the island may get out of a military project, including investment in hospitals, education, emergency services or infrastructure, Underwood said.

"Inevitably there is sort of logic here: we are going to leverage the government interest and get something else," Underwood said. But, he added, that would not change "the overall direction of the plan." Although all of the proposed sites for the system are on military property, explosions or debris could affect nearby civilian areas, Bettis said.

The MDA's draft environmental impact statement classifies ordnance risks as "long term, moderate and less than significant." A key aim of the Guam Defense System project, planners say, is to prevent a conflict: if it is never used, it will be a success. "This is trying to enhance deterrence by communicating to potential adversaries... that we would consider an attack (on Guam) an attack on the US homeland," Skylar Mastro said.

The only way to know for sure whether the system works against a major missile attack is a scenario everyone on Guam hopes will never unfold. For now, a regime of regular flight tests will benchmark how well the missiles, radars and control systems work. The project calls for up to two tests a year.



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# Georgia has set a precedent

**A**NTIGOVERNMENT protests in Georgia have continued for over two weeks now, with no end in sight. On November 28, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced he was putting on hold accession negotiations with the European Union for four years, sparking public outrage. Flying the star-studded EU flag, protesters have been pushing against the governing Georgian Dream's (GD) party, defying water cannon, tear gas and police brutality. The rallies have drawn support from Georgia's President Salome Zourabichvili and prompted countries like Lithuania to call for EU sanctions against Kobakhidze, GD's founder Bidzina Ivanishvili and other top figures in Tbilisi. While the demonstrations show no sign of subsiding, it seems unlikely the GD would reverse course. On the contrary, the government has doubled down, with more than 400 people arrested and reports of beatings and harassment piling up.

Georgia's decision to shun the EU is consequential not only for the country's accession prospects, but also for the eastward enlargement process of the union as a whole. The Georgian government has come to the conclusion that the status quo suits it. Georgia already has privileged economic access to the EU, including visa-free travel. Trying harder to actually join the Union could cost it dearly. For one, conducting the reforms required by the EU would make it more difficult – though not impossible – to manipulate elections and pass repressive legislation, such as the foreign agents law inspired by Russian legislation. Accelerating accession talks could also trigger punishment by Russia which has multiple levers in Georgia and surely keeps tabs on billionaire Ivanishvili who made his fortunes in Moscow. That is why GD has been hedging between the EU and Russia.

Now, faced with harsh criticism by the European Parliament, Tbilisi has given Brussels the cold shoulder and has insisted that it will restart accession talks “but only with dignity and justice and without blackmail”, as Kobakhidze put it on December 4. Of course, there is the danger the EU could strike back with economic sanctions. Yet Ivanishvili, Kobakhidze and the rest are probably counting on their allies, such as Hungary's Viktor Orban, to block such moves. And who knows? Incoming US President Donald Trump could become a partner for Tbilisi, too, scrapping the current administration's policy on democracy and human rights.

The problem is that Georgia could well set a precedent for other candidate countries. The semi-detached status it has now established – where it enjoys certain privileges without making the painful reforms the EU requires – is what others desire, as well. The EU's focus on the rule of law does not sit well with elites in a number of candidate countries. Just like GD, there are other political actors that prefer to pay lip service to European integration while entrenching themselves in power and engaging in state capture. Serbia is one example. The Serbian government is negotiating EU membership but not rushing to meet the EU's demands, notably on sanctioning Russia or resolving the dispute with Kosovo. Its governance model also falls well short of fulfilling the democratic requirements of the EU.

North Macedonia is likewise stuck, refusing to honour a commitment to the EU on amending its constitution and thus granting a concession to neighbouring Bulgaria. Moldova could also slow down its accession bid, if the pro-EU forces lose next year's parliamentary elections. But Georgia's precedent is not the only factor that could undermine EU enlargement to the east. The process was already burdened by major obstacles even before the Georgian government made its decision to freeze talks.

One of the main hurdles has been geopolitics. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine gave enlargement a tremendous boost, with EU member states agreeing to open accession talks with Kyiv and Chisinau. In the Western Balkans, Bosnia jumped on the bandwagon, too. However, so long as there is no lasting settlement in Ukraine, the issue of EU membership remains secondary. The conversation about NATO and security guarantees is much more urgent, for obvious reasons. In Moldova, Russia has ample opportunities to play a spoiler in domestic politics using money and disinformation and playing on fears that the war could spill over. Next year's general elections may actually see Moscow-friendly forces coming on top and thwarting the pro-EU agenda. Another obstacle is the EU itself. The tenor of the current conversation within the 27-strong bloc is that it needs to reform its institutions before it opens the door again. But revisiting issues, such as how many commissioners there should be or whether EU Council could take decisions on foreign affairs by qualified majority rather than unanimously, could open a can of worms.

It is questionable whether the Union and its constituent parts have the bandwidth to deal with internal overhaul, on top of all the other headaches they are handling at present. But absent reform, enlargement is held hostage by individual EU members who can veto and block collective decisions. Competition by Ukrainian farmers or concerns about populists at home could well turn even pro-expansion countries like Poland, which will hold the EU Council's presidency in the first half of 2025, into staunch detractors. If there is anything positive that has come out of recent developments in Georgia, it is that there is clear evidence of the EU's lasting appeal among ordinary citizens in Eastern Europe. The prospect of Georgia abandoning its EU bid has produced massive social mobilisation that has dwarfed previous protest waves, including the one in the immediate aftermath of the contested election on October 26. In Moldova, there are positive signs, as well. Earlier in November, Moldovans re-elected their pro-EU President Maia Sandu for a new term. In a referendum held in parallel with the first round of the presidential race, they also narrowly approved an amendment inserting the goal of joining the EU in the country's constitution. Enlargement is, therefore, not dead. It is simply postponed yet again.

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# Ireland hears the call of Palestine, but is it free to answer?

Audrey Kissane

**T**ODAY, Ireland is a country reckoning with the cost and consequences of abandoning its ideals for economic gain. Since freeing 26 of its 32 counties from British rule more than 100 years ago, Ireland has moved away from its socialist roots and embraced neoliberalism. This change in ideology paved the way for it to become one of the richest countries in Europe but also left it unable to uphold some of its core principles moulded by the nation's centuries-long struggle against occupation and oppression.

Over the years, Ireland did everything in its power to make itself attractive to large multinationals. Its low corporate tax, coupled with its status as the only English-speaking nation in the European Union, has made it a haven for foreign direct investment. The American Chamber of Commerce recently named it the “global location of choice for talent and innovation”. Its windfall corporate tax income – including the \$14bn it recently received from Apple – has filled the nation's coffers.

Ireland has made the economy its primary focus and built great wealth as a result. But it also appears to have lost something important in the process: the freedom to fully stand up for its convictions on the global stage.

Ireland owes much of its current economic success to the United States. Today there are more than 960 US corporations doing business in and running their global or regional books through the country. These companies directly employ more than 210,000 Irish citizens and indirectly support a further 168,000 Irish jobs – which together amount to some 15 percent of the Irish workforce. Just 10 multinationals – all of them US-based tech and pharmaceutical companies – accounted for 60 percent of Ireland's corporate tax income in 2022.

There is no question that Ireland is economically dependent on the US, but does this mean it is also politically beholden to it? Does its disproportionate stake in its economy give the US inordinate power over Ireland's geopolitical strategy? The Irish state's jarring refusal to do everything it can to counter

Israel's ongoing US-funded and facilitated war on Gaza, despite acknowledging the unshakeable support an overwhelming majority of Irish people have for Palestinians and their liberation struggle, informs us that the answer to both these questions is a resounding yes.

On the surface, every political faction in Ireland, including Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael – which have governed Ireland since independence, and are expected to form another coalition government after collectively securing some 40 percent of the vote in last month's general election – have strong pro-Palestinian credentials that are in line with the public's convictions.

At a pre-election debate on November 18, all of the country's leading politicians across the political spectrum made it clear that they understand where Irish people stand on the Palestinian issue. They all enthusiastically pledged their commitment to support Palestine and help it resist Israel's efforts to continue and expand its illegal occupation of its territory in every way they can. But the moment of unity broke quickly when those in the opposition pointed to the elephant in the room: Ireland has not actually done all that it can to support Palestine.

Michael Martin, the Fianna Fáil politician who has been serving as Tánaiste (deputy prime minister), minister for foreign affairs, and minister for defence since December 2022, tried to talk up Ireland's track record on the issue, outlining how his government has recognised the state of Palestine, increased funding to UNRWA at a time when other nations were withdrawing funding, and supported South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the ICJ. He also underlined his government's friendly relations with Palestinian leaders to defend his position, saying the Palestinian Authority is satisfied with the support it receives from Ireland.

Opposition leaders were quick to pounce. Richard Boyd Barrett, the leader of left-wing People Before Profit party, delivered the most memorable blows. He pointed out that Ireland allows US weapons bound for Israel to pass through Irish airspace and that

Ireland's Central Bank continues to sell Israel's war bonds while it is engaged in what the ICJ described as a “plausible genocide” in Gaza. He also questioned why the government has still not passed the Occupied Territories Bill 2018, which would see the end of all trade between Ireland and illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian territory.

Representatives of the outgoing government – who are expected to form a new coalition government any day now – did not give any reason as to why they repeatedly blocked the bill since it was first tabled at least six years ago. They, however, said after the ICJ's July ruling that Israel is indeed an illegal occupier guilty of apartheid, they are now ready to act, and if elected back into office, they intend to update and pass the bill. They offered no defence for the central bank's sale of Israel's war bonds or the US using Irish airspace to transfer bombs and other weapons to Israel.

The debate was a moment in which all of Ireland's disparate positions coalesced into a single clarifying view. Ireland is a natural ally of Palestine. Irish people see in Israel's occupation of Palestine and ongoing brutal assault on Gaza their own history of living under British occupation and facing relentless colonial aggression. But, the Irish state is not able, or perhaps more accurately is not willing, to do everything it can to stand with Palestine and support its liberation struggle.

The debate exposed the contradictions between the Irish government's words and actions and put the cost and consequences of Ireland's economic dependence on the US under the spotlight.

The section of the debate on Palestinian solidarity raised some pertinent questions: what is stopping Ireland from doing all it can for Palestine? Could it be that Ireland, getting some 60 percent of its corporate tax from 10 US multinationals, is finding itself unable to take a firm position against Israel because all its actions, including its war on Gaza, are supported wholeheartedly by the US?

Most importantly, what is the true cost of US investment in Ireland? A lot, it

seems. And perhaps more than many people in Ireland realise, are comfortable with, or want to face. Ireland's tacit support for Israel and by extension its current assault on Palestine go even beyond what was mentioned by left-wing opposition parties at the November 18 debate. Research by Uplift, an Ireland-based independent campaigning organisation, revealed that Ireland increased its dual-use exports to Israel by a factor of almost seven and also doubled its military contracts for drone servicing by an Israeli military-owned agency since the latest war on Gaza began following the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023.

To the attentive observer, it is clear that Ireland is playing both sides on an issue that doesn't have two sides. As Amnesty International also confirmed in a detailed report, and the Irish government repeatedly acknowledged, Israel is committing a genocide in Gaza. The law is clear on genocide. All signatories of the Genocide Convention, and Ireland is one, have a responsibility to prevent and punish genocide.

Regrettably, that is not what Ireland appears to be doing. So today, as Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael begin their formal talks to form yet another coalition government, Ireland has a lot of soul-searching to do. It is becoming increasingly difficult to deny that the country is paying a hidden tax, in the form of being forced to dilute its anti-colonial principles, to maintain the economic backing and investment it receives from the United States. As the destruction of Palestine with the full support of Ireland's primary investor continues, the people of Ireland need to decide whether they are truly happy with this state of affairs. If they are not, next time they are at the ballot box, they should vote strategically to take power away from the two parties that put the nation on this neoliberal path, moved it away from its socialist roots, and as a result, hollowed out its expressions of solidarity with the oppressed across the globe. This may be the most important decision Irish people will have to make – because what is at stake is the very soul of Ireland.

# Response to US moves should be calm

Grzegorz W. Kolodko

**I**N the aftermath of the presidential election in the United States, China must continue to play its important and unique role on the global stage, albeit with greater vigor. Widening opening-up, engaging in cooperation with other countries and regions, increasing outward and inward foreign investment, increasing trade following World Trade Organization rules, intensifying technology transfer, and expanding people-to-people exchanges are positive and pragmatic responses to growing global challenges.

As the situation evolves, countries around the world should wisely use every opportunity to improve international relations. One such opportunity arose in Kazan, Russia, during the BRICS Summit in October. Other occasions were the meeting of 21 economies of APEC in Lima, Peru, and the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Committed to sustainable development and win-win globalization, China has used these forums for partnership dialogues and multilateral negotiations in a bid to resolve conflicts of interest.

However, in the context of growing anti-China sentiments and practices – especially by, but not limited to the US – China should shift its economic focus from the West to the Global South. Key in this context will be the further deepening of relations with Brazil, and especially with India, which is already a country with a larger population and developing at a faster pace than China.

Having lost access to parts of the markets of the US and some other developed economies, China must pay more attention to trade with the Global South. To help boost these economies, an increasing share of exports, as well as foreign direct investment and the accompanying technology transfer, should be directed there. This reorientation has been underway for several years, but now that the US is becoming more embroiled in a trade war by stepping up protectionism, China must take additional measures to maintain its high growth rate. Continuing the Belt and Road Initiative alone is not enough; more must be done on the world stage.

The most important aspect of international affairs is US-China relations. Unfortunately, before they will get to improve, they will get worse. With Donald Trump winning the presidential election and the Republicans gaining a majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, tensions, and not only the economic ones, will rise. The new US administration's policies are likely to further disrupt global supply chains, and additional turbulence in the processes of globalization will occur.

The White House will impose punitive tariffs on imports from China. This will slightly fuel inflation in the US, but by acting as a de facto sales tax, it will increase the fiscal revenues for the US budget a little bit, which is in a dire situation with a deficit approaching 7 percent of GDP. The prohibitively high customs barriers in the short term will help US businesses remain competitive, but

eventually they could blunt their competitiveness due to the lack of pressure from foreign manufacturers. On the Chinese side, it will further encourage companies to look for alternative foreign markets to increase exports.

Despite Washington's ill-advised protectionism, Beijing should not hastily impose retaliatory tariffs on US products. Instead, it should take the matter to the World Trade Organization. China, along with the other countries in the Global South, should do even more to ensure that international trade is based on rules collectively established by all WTO member states, rather than unilaterally imposed by wealthy Western states driven by nationalism and populism.

Beijing's response with regards to expanding protectionism should be decentralization and further economic deregulation in favor of strengthening direct cooperation between businesses and research and development institutions in both countries.

Given the remarkably high import tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles and some other products, already imposed by the outgoing Joe Biden administration and now being further increased, the green transformation in the US may slow down. China should expedite the green transition by continuing its anti-warmup climate course, as emphasized at the just-concluded COP29, the UN Climate Change Conference in Baku, Azerbaijan. The ongoing debate should support the process of combating global warming to the greatest extent possible. Unfortunately, in this respect we cannot count on the US under Trump's leadership.

Following the recent BRICS summit, which discussed, among other things, alternative, non-US dollar-based international financial arrangements, China should accelerate the conceptual work and practical implementation of an alternative global monetary system to ensure that part of the international trade is increasingly settled not in the US dollar, but in other currencies, primarily the renminbi. The scale of international currency reserves held in the renminbi will also gradually increase from the current 2 percent at the expense of the decline in the US dollar from the current 54.8 percent.

China may also soon need to reform its foreign exchange rate system. The Chinese currency is still pegged to the US dollar, allowing for daily fluctuations within the band of +/- 2 percent. This sometimes entails odd changes, such as the strengthening of the renminbi's exchange rate against other currencies, as it happened after Trump's election victory, which temporarily strengthened the dollar. China should therefore consider abandoning such currency regime and introduce a controlled floating exchange rate. Given China's structural export surplus in foreign trade, such a change would result in a strengthening of the renminbi and, consequently, a slight reduction in exports to the US due to its lower profitability. This would contain the US trade deficit, which would reduce to some extent the anti-China fever.

# Lebanon must be stable, united in wake of Assad's fall

Khaled Abou Zahr

**T**HE scenes of joy in Lebanon following the end of the Assad regime are understandable and justified. Lebanon lived through decades of Syrian occupation. This occupation was the pure definition of an extractive, violent and oppressive policy. There is no need to go into the details as everyone is well aware of the methods of the regime and the culture of suspicion and fear it pushed.

This occupation was supposed to have ended in 2005, when Syrian troops left the country. Yet, there was merely a transition to the same occupation by Hezbollah and its allies. Syria, although no longer at the forefront, continued to give strategic and logistical depth. Hence, there was never the possibility to celebrate, heal and rebuild after its occupation ended. The so-called Cedar Revolution that brought this withdrawal

shed its needles and ended up with more of the same oppression.

The scenes of horror coming out of Syrian prisons, where Lebanese were also held, are surreal and perhaps answer the questions of Lebanese families. Now, just like the prisoners, Lebanon will have to deal with the scars. It must rebuild its identity to reclaim its cultural heritage. Recreate the institutions and real links with the outside world. Undoubtedly, Lebanon's future will stay linked to Syria. Yet, regardless of the political outcome in Damascus, Beirut should immediately seek to insulate itself from these events and their influence. There is hence a need for stability and unity in the country. We need to build unity among the people destroyed by years of occupation.

There are several steps Beirut needs to take to achieve this and manage the difficult task of rebuilding

stability. As a first step, Hezbollah needs to immediately surrender its arsenal to the Lebanese Armed Forces. Its supply route through Iraq and Syria is now shut. Its access to Rafic Hariri International Airport has also been cut off by the Israelis. Today, its weapons could be labeled as a danger by the new Syrian state due to their role in supporting the Assad regime during the Syrian revolution. Failure to achieve this puts Lebanon at risk of being dragged into a new and horrific ordeal.

Pressure needs to come from the entire population, as well as the army, to achieve this as soon as possible. For the sake of the country's future, this should not and cannot be delayed. Hezbollah is now obsolete and, as I have previously written, it was an artificial power. It needs to be stopped now.

In the same way,

Lebanon cannot and should not harbor former Assad regime members, as has been reported. They need to be escorted out of the country. This is also another possibility for the new Syrian state, which will seek justice to interfere in Lebanese affairs. These figures are a representation of the barbarity that was used to destroy Lebanon and Syria alike. We owe them nothing.

The current situation also demands that the Lebanese military controls the border and prevents any crossings or smuggling that could lead to attacks or an unstable situation. Respect for the country's borders by both Lebanese and Syrians needs to start now. This is a point of unity for the entire country.

The Lebanese Armed Forces have had to accommodate Hezbollah. This is a secret for no one. Whether on the international support

given to it or on the domestic front, the rationale behind this was to cooperate and not be a threat to Hezbollah. This has to stop now. The military needs to be impartial and fulfill its true mission, including protecting the borders. It needs to fill the vacuum and show enough trust on both sides of the border. If it fails to do so, we will be heading for a catastrophic outcome.

We as Lebanese need to do the exact opposite of what our instincts tell us to do and what every single minority has done. We have invited external power for domestic gains, just riding a merry-go-round. One community after another. This must stop now. Lebanese Sunnis, to which I belong, should not see the change in Syria – if it is maintained – as an opportunity to replace Hezbollah. We cannot as Sunnis and should not use this new power as a way to shapeshift the power-sharing to our advantage

once again. This is inviting instability and war. This consequently means that the weapons in the Palestinian camps also need to be surrendered to the military.

The army needs to be the only armed force in the country and it must represent the entire state, not a single community. It must uphold the creed of “Honor, Sacrifice, Loyalty” – loyalty to the nation. The people across minorities need to stand with the army. Christians, Muslim Shiites and Muslim Sunnis all need to feel pride in our army and stand by it and with it. This is the first and only way to have a shot at stability. It is not certain that we will be able to achieve this, but not doing it will most certainly doom us. If it is achieved, we can prove to ourselves and to our neighbors that we can hold it together. This will be the true celebration of the end of the occupation for all of us, or else it will be a very short-lived one.



# Syria’s gangster couple is on the lam

Andrew Mitrovica

**TRUE** to his cunning nature, the wanted bandit likely fled at night. Bashar al-Assad, reportedly with his wife and three adult children in tow, made a hasty escape to avoid the stiff comeuppance he so richly deserves. It was, of course, the predictable coda of a coward who, having caused so much grief, loss, and suffering for so many decades, sought refuge in a place far away from the scene of his long list of horrific and lethal crimes against decency and humanity.

So, al-Assad now calls Russia, not Syria, home. He is a guest of his welcoming patron, Russian President Vladimir Putin – fittingly, another fugitive from justice accused of war crimes. Syria’s odious man on the run brought along, no doubt, a healthy sum of looted money or gold to finance the comfortable life that he and his complicit partner, Asma, are accustomed to.

The pair of outlaws in designer outfits will, I suspect, remain holed up in a sprawling “safe house” somewhere in Russia’s vast expanse for the remainder of their wretched lives. Meanwhile, exhausted Syrians – who, for the moment, are celebrating a dictator’s sudden demise – will try, as best they can, to recover and rebuild in the wake of a grinding civil war that disfigured their beloved homeland year after debilitating year.

But, I suspect, the al-Assads’ new life in a “foreign” land – beyond just geography – will always be shadowed by fear and the gnawing sense of uncertainty that often accompanies gangsters on the lam. There, Bashar and Asma will rot – if they possess even a speck of what might charitably be described as a conscience – steeped in the knowledge of the appalling scope of misery that they are responsible for.

They will never escape that indecible stain. Despite the revision-

ism now on obscene display in Western capitals and newsrooms, Bashar and Asma had many – turns out fair-weather – friends in those same Western capitals and newsrooms who claim, unconvincingly, that, all the while, they hoped that the “butcher” in Damascus would face the kind of punishment he meted out without hesitation or remorse.

It is the familiar rhetorical pantomime that Western capitals and newsrooms are practiced at performing on reliable cue whenever yet one more of their once-feted stable of “good guy” autocrats conveniently mutates into a “bad guy” pariah. Bashar’s pop, Hafez, was considered a “good guy” autocrat by many Western leaders and establishment media in spite of a sordid history of brutality that his obedient son promptly adopted when he took over as Syria’s despot-in-permanent-residence in 2000.

In 1990, Hafez al-Assad – a sociopath in a well-tailored suit who ordered the military to annihilate 20,000 Syrian “rebels” during a three-week siege in 1982 – was rehabilitated by then US President George Bush senior. At the time, the caked-in-blood tyrant was viewed as a useful regional ally who could blunt Iraq’s influence.

Relations between Washington and Damascus largely remained cozy for the remainder of the 20th century and well into Bashar’s tenure as president in the fresh millennium. From the start, Bashar – with the eager help of Asma, a telegenic, London-educated former banker – camouflaged his ruthlessness behind an agreeable, PR-crafted “narrative” that the couple were symbols of a progressive, secular Syria that Western prime ministers and presidents and a host of easily duped reporters apparently found so beguiling.

Bashar was an authoritarian with an ingratiating smile. All of it, every contrived aspect of their staged act, was a lie meant to convince the gullible that Bashar had broken from his father’s ugly modus operandi and to styxie any Western “intervention” that might infringe on the new president’s ability to exercise absolute power.

Trade and tourism flourished. European parliamentarians made regular visits to al-Assad’s palace under the flimsy guise that, according to one French senator, it was “better to speak with Bashar than with Daesh [ISIS/ISIL.]” and extolled his role as the defender of “Eastern Christians”. In 2001, that paragon of the international rules-based order, pretend “socialist” British Prime Minister Tony Blair, made a pilgrimage to meet Bashar – a fellow charlatan he could clearly, to borrow a phrase, do business with.

A flock of British journalists followed suit to pen pieces brimming with praise and platitudes about Syria’s philanthropic first family bent on “modernising” the country in enlightened ways before – surprise, surprise – Bashar became an unrepentant mass murderer who killed scores of Syrian children, women, and men with chemical weapons and Scud missiles. The nadir of the embarrassing sentimentality appeared in Vogue, a US-based magazine that pays groveling homage to pretty celebrities, including Asma al-Assad. In a notorious bit of hagiography published in 2010, Vogue described Asma as “the freshest and most magnetic of first ladies” – proving that beauty, when combined with a polished, articulate persona, can be leveraged even by the most pedestrian swindlers to hide the truth.

Vogue compounded its injury on journalism and fact by affixing the following headline to a fawning pro-

file of Bashar’s ever-faithful right-hand woman: “A Rose in the Desert”. I, for one, sincerely hope that that “rose” wilts in Russia’s harsh and wintry climes. Only a year later, Syrians, inspired by the possibilities of the Arab Spring, took en masse to the streets in anti-government protests.

Bashar’s fraudulent mask slipped, revealing a killer who would, in due and deliberate course, outdo his repellent dad on the atrocities scale to cling to position, power, and privilege as civil war loomed. The smitten Western leaders and journalists put on a feeble show of supposed solidarity with Bashar’s millions of victims – imprisoned, tortured, raped, condemned, or forced to flee as refugees in neighbouring states.

Earlier this year, the European Union (EU) was happy to forgive and forget the carnage and agony that Bashar al-Assad had wrought. Italy restored diplomatic relations with Assad’s regime in July. And, in November, Michael Ohnmacht, the charge d’affaires of the EU delegation to Syria, posted a short video on Instagram and X to commemorate his return to the sunny capital.

Ohnmacht offered besieged and traumatised Syrians his greetings and explained that his presence amounted to tangible evidence of the EU’s resolve to “support the Syrian people for a better, more prosperous and peaceful future”. The grinning diplomat ended his introduction this way: “I am looking forward to our common endeavours in the coming years.” Impeccable timing.

The EU was poised, it appears, to extend al-Assad an inviting, but qualified, embrace. Alas, he has disappeared to save himself, leaving amnesiac European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen without a dance partner she has belatedly rebuked as “cruel”. Hypocrisy, meet your shameless author.

# Netanyahu never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity for peace

**AFTER more than five decades of brutal and repressive rule, dividing the Syrian people and making their country an international pariah, the Assad regime of Syria has finally met its comeuppance. The lion (“assad” in Arabic) has finally been caged. A truly beautiful country of warm and welcoming people, profound cultural riches and tremendous historical importance is finally going to get a chance to show the world what it is made of. The Syrian people have been held back by an evil regime for so long. Finally, they will be able to construct the country they deserve and show the tremendous potential of the Syrian people at the historical and geographical crossroads of the Middle East.**

A Syrian revolution that had seemed at its end was briskly revived — to the surprise of almost all — after the significant blows dealt to Hezbollah by Israel and with Russian troops having been diverted from Syria and mired in the war in Ukraine. Headed by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which was once affiliated with Al-Qaeda, a diverse assembly of groups, including remnants of the Free Syrian Army, the Turkish-backed coalition of rebel groups, Islamist factions and more rebel groups in the south, took back the country in record time. In his victory speech at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, the head of HTS, Abu Mohammed Al-Golani, called on Syria’s people to “come together to rebuild our nation, free from tyranny and oppression,” while assuring all minorities that their rights would be protected in the new Syria.

This fresh and encouraging start, seeking to include all the Syrian people in a process of reconstruction and reconciliation, has assuaged the fears many countries had concerning the nature of the rebel coalition and its intentions. Saudi Arabia’s response

Hassan Bin Youssef Yassin

Even those countries that lost the most in the fall of the Assad regime, namely Iran and Russia, have sent messages of goodwill and cooperation to the powers that be in Syria. Al-Golani himself emphasized that “a new history has been written, not just for Syria, but for the entire region,” opening new paths for peace and stability across the region.

The almost universal response of goodwill and cautious optimism was renounced only by Israel, which chose instead to occupy more Syrian territory and carry out more than 100 airstrikes around the country on Monday. The prospect of a pragmatic leadership in Damascus emphasizing peace and reconciliation should really be a reassurance to Israel, particularly with the dramatic further blow to Hezbollah’s capacities this represents.

Instead, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the 1974 peace deal with Syria null and void and he bombarded the country. Netanyahu simply cannot bear the thought of peace, of a prosperous and stable Arab world that would force Israel to clearly delineate its borders and allow the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. He has left us no doubt about his continually malicious intentions.

As the Arab world forges ahead, seizing opportunities for peace, growth and stability, the new American administration must make it clear to Israel that its best interests do not lie in seizing more land and crushing the Palestinian people, but rather in becoming a respected partner in making the Middle East a land of peace, progress and stability. Israel cannot be allowed to continue to sabotage every chance for peace and must be held firmly to the establishment of a viable Palestinian state, not only by the international community but specifically by the new US administration.

to the overthrow of the Assad regime in Syria was in stark contrast to that of Israel, as the Kingdom offered “to help (Syria) overcome the devastation endured by the brotherly Syrian people over many years.” It called for “concerted efforts to preserve the unity of Syria and the cohesion of its people.” The Foreign Ministry concluded that “the time has come for the brotherly Syrian people to enjoy the dignified life they deserve, to contribute with all their components to shaping a bright future marked by security, stability and prosperity, and for Syria to reclaim its rightful place in the Arab and Islamic worlds.”

When we look at the history of the Jewish people in the Middle East, we find that, for centuries, they lived as an integral component of Arab societies, in peace and mutual respect. Avi Shlaim, the Israeli historian of Iraqi origin, confirmed that “before Zionism, the Jewish communities of the Middle East and North Africa lived among their neighbors as part of the social fabric, sharing languages, music and culture.” And Iraqi Jewish writer Naim Kattan explained that, “in Baghdad, we all lived together as neighbors, Muslims and Jews. We shared our joys, our griefs and our lives in peace.”

The fall of the Assad regime and the birth of a new Syria represent a critical juncture and a tremendous opportunity for peace, prosperity and stability, not only in Syria but throughout the Middle East. The occasion is too big for Israel to disregard. But to turn Abba Eban’s words around, Israel has recently proven that it never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity for peace. It is time for the world and the new US administration to make it clear to the Israelis that they cannot afford to stand against or aside from this new hope and effort for peace and stability in the region. — Arab News

# Tackling region’s water scarcity amid rising temperatures

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

**THE Middle East and North Africa region is facing an acute and intensifying water crisis. Already the most water-scarce region in the world, MENA is now contending with the escalating impacts of climate change, which have exacerbated water shortages through rising temperatures, reduced rainfall and more frequent and prolonged droughts.**

According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, every single country in the region will experience extremely high water stress by 2050. The urgency of the situation is underscored by the latest climate data, which shows that 2024 is on track to be the hottest year on record.

The consequences of water scarcity in MENA are profound, spanning economic, social and environmental dimensions. Water scarcity threatens agriculture, which is the backbone of many economies in the region, undermining food security and livelihoods. The environmental repercussions also include soil degradation, desertification and the collapse of ecosystems that sustain biodiversity. Socially, the scarcity of water can spark conflicts and internal displacement as communities compete over dwindling resources.

This crisis is not only a regional issue but also a global concern, as its ripple effects could exacerbate migration, destabilize governments and fuel geopolitical tensions. Dr. Mahmoud Fathallah, director of the Arab League’s Environment and Meteorology Department, last month summarized the region’s vulnerability: “The Middle East and North Africa are particularly susceptible to these effects due to their dry and semi-arid climates. The region is witnessing significant challenges,

such as declining annual rainfall, rising temperatures and soil degradation.”

The MENA region’s predicament highlights a grim paradox: despite being among the least responsible for global carbon emissions, it bears some of the harshest consequences of climate change. Delaying action to address water scarcity and climate change in MENA would only compound the problem. The stakes are high: if temperatures in the region rise by 4 degrees Celsius, freshwater availability could drop by 75 percent, with devastating consequences for agriculture, industry and human survival. Projections suggest that many countries in the region could warm by as much as 5 C by the end of the century. Such an increase could render parts of MENA uninhabitable, forcing mass migrations and heightening the potential for resource-based conflicts.

The economic toll of inaction would also be catastrophic. Agriculture, which consumes more than 80 percent of the region’s water, would suffer significant declines in productivity, threatening food security and driving up prices. Industries dependent on water, such as energy production and manufacturing, could face disruptions, stifling economic growth. Furthermore, the cost of managing crises — whether through emergency relief or rebuilding after climate-related disasters — would far exceed the investments needed for proactive measures today.

Socially, the ramifications of inaction are equally dire. Water scarcity has already contributed to instability in the region and worsening conditions could further fuel unrest. To avert these grim out-

comes, MENA governments, regional organizations and the international community must act decisively. Several key measures are essential to mitigate the water crisis.

Raising awareness about the severity of the crisis and encouraging conservation efforts at the community level can have a significant impact. Education campaigns can empower individuals to adopt water-saving practices and advocate for policy changes.

Secondly, adopting sustainable water management practices, such as modernizing irrigation systems, reducing water waste and implementing policies to regulate water use are critical as well. Techniques like drip irrigation and the reuse of treated wastewater can significantly enhance water efficiency in agriculture and other sectors.

Investments in technology can also provide solutions to the region’s water challenges. Gulf states are making significant strides in investing in advanced technologies, such as desalination and renewable energy, to address water scarcity and enhance climate resilience in the region, with Saudi Arabia being a notable leader in this effort. Climate change knows no borders and neither should the efforts to combat its effects. In other words, MENA countries ought to strengthen regional cooperation to share resources, knowledge and technology. Collaborative initiatives, such as transboundary water management agreements, can help ensure equitable and sustainable access to shared water resources.

More importantly, the international community and global powers have a moral and strategic obligation to support MENA in addressing its water crisis. While

the region’s contribution to global emissions is minimal, the major emitters bear a significant responsibility for the climate change that is exacerbating MENA’s water scarcity. Fathallah highlighted this disparity by stating: “While the Arab world is not a major emitter of carbon dioxide, the effects of climate change are disproportionately visible here.”

Financial and technical assistance from developed countries can play a crucial role in helping MENA adapt to climate change. This support can take the form of investments in infrastructure, such as desalination plants and renewable energy projects, as well as funding for the research and development of innovative water technologies.

In conclusion, water scarcity in MENA is not just a regional problem, it is a global challenge with far-reaching implications. If the international community fails to act, the consequences will extend beyond the region’s borders. The displacement of millions of people due to uninhabitable conditions could spark migration crises in neighboring regions and beyond. The economic disruptions caused by resource scarcity could destabilize global markets, while the geopolitical tensions over water resources could escalate into broader conflicts.

Addressing water scarcity in MENA requires a collective effort. By investing in sustainable solutions, fostering regional and international cooperation, and acknowledging the interconnectedness of our world, we can mitigate the impacts of climate change and build a more resilient future for MENA and the global community. The time to act is now because the alternative — a future marked by scarcity, conflict and suffering — is intolerable.

# Big polluters, small island states clash on climate change

Henry Ridgwell

**IN a landmark hearing Wednesday at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the United States argued that human rights law is not relevant to nation states’ legal obligations over climate change. Margaret Taylor, a US State Department legal adviser representing the US, argued Wednesday that the ICJ was the wrong forum for addressing climate justice.**

“An advisory proceeding is not the means to litigate whether individual states or groups of states have violated obligations pertaining to climate change in the past or bear responsibility for reparations, as some participants have suggested,” Taylor told the court. “The UN climate change regime with the Paris Agreement at its core is the only international legal regime specifically designed by states to address climate change,” she said. “International human rights law ... does not obligate states to mitigate anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, nor does it currently provide for a human right to a healthy environment.”

The United Nations General

Assembly asked the ICJ last year to offer its legal opinion on whether major polluting nations can be held accountable for causing climate change and the harm it causes. The 15 ICJ judges will consider not only legally binding climate agreements but also international human rights law and other relevant legislation. Nearly 100 countries and more than a dozen intergovernmental organizations are set to give evidence across two weeks of legal proceedings that began on Monday and ends December 13. The judges are expected to give their legal opinion sometime next year.

Small island nation states have argued that rising sea levels due to climate change place their very existence at stake. Arnold Kiel Loughman, attorney general of the South Pacific island state of Vanuatu, argued that human rights law is applicable. “I have come to ask you to uphold the rule of law,” Loughman told the ICJ judges on Monday. “Under international law, states have obligations ... to act with due diligence to prevent significant harm to the environment,

to reduce the emissions and provide support to countries like mine, to protect the human rights of present and future generations, to protect and preserve marine environment, and to respect the fundamental rights of my people to self-determination in our own land.

“The failure by a small number of large emitting states to fulfill these obligations constitutes an internationally wrongful act, triggering legal consequences under the international law of state responsibility,” he said. The Paris climate agreement, which came into force in 2016, was signed by 195 countries, setting targets to reduce emissions and limit global warming to no more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Many big polluters are reluctant to consider other legislation in relation to climate change, according to Nikki Reisch, director of the climate and energy program at the Center for International Environmental Law.

“We effectively heard them argue that the only relevant law from which any legal obligations can be sourced is the Paris

Agreement. And when you actually look at the text of that agreement, it doesn’t require very much,” Reisch told VOA. “We heard the US really trying to encourage the court and others to ignore history, to sweep the historical conduct of many decades under the rug and saying what happened before the climate agreement was adopted doesn’t really matter from a legal perspective, and that the knowledge for many decades of the causes and consequences of climate change isn’t relevant,” she said. The judges’ opinion is advisory and won’t be legally binding. Nevertheless, it will have implications for all nation states, Reisch said.

“This advisory opinion will be an authoritative interpretation of what binding international law requires. So, it will carry weight as a kind of legal blueprint for accountability, or a guide for courts and advocates around the world to understand what international law requires and what we should be holding states to in terms of their climate action and their measures to remedy climate harm,” she said.

VOA





# SCCI-PAJCCI sign MoU to strengthen Pak-Afghan mutual trade

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) and Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) to strengthen collaboration among both the trade entities and joint work to enhance bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

SCCI president Fazal Moqem Khan and President of PAJCCI, Junaid Ismail Makda signed the agreement during a joint meeting held at the chamber house, said in a press release here on Thursday.

According to detail, PAJCCI president Junaid Ismail Makda along with vice president M. Pervez Lala and his team members' visited the chamber. On the occasion, the chamber president Fazal Moqem Khan chaired the meeting.

During the meeting, SCCI Senior Vice

President, Abdul Jalil Jan, Vice president Shehryar Khan, SVP PAJCCI, Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi, former president Faiz Muhammad Faizi, former senior vice president Shahid Hussain, former vice president Shuja Muhammad, members of the chamber executive committee Aftab Iqbal, Ishaq Ahmad, Mujeebur Rehman and Rashid Iqbal Siddique, Ihsanullah, Khalid Sultan Khawaja, Khalid Shahzad, Mazhar Ul Haq, Secretary General Muqtasid Ahsan, traders attached with Pak-Afghan trade, exporters and importers were present. According to MoU, it was agreed that to build a dependable, pragmatic and advantageous relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan, both the chambers would initiate establishment of friendly cordial relations through an increased cooperation among the industrialists, businessmen and entrepreneurs of the region.

SCCI and PAJCCI will also work to foster a spirit of better cooperation and coordination between busi-

ness communities of both the countries in general and their respective members in particular for the development of trade and commerce, the MoU said.

As per agreement, both trade bodies will play their facilitating role for encouraging bilateral trade activities, exchange of trade delegations, participation in trade fairs and exhibitions.

The agreement said Joint efforts would also be made for establishing effective consultation, cooperation and exchange of information on bilateral trade and relationship.

Both the chambers would also appoint permanent staff to serve as a focal point for execution of this MoU, reads the agreement.

Earlier, President SCCI, Fazal Moqem Khan in his welcome address apprised President PAJCCI about impacts of two percent Infrastructure Development Cess (IDC) levied by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government on import, export and transit trade.

The decision of two per-

cent cess and other impediments have reduced Pak-Afghan trade volume to less than one billion dollar, Moqem claimed.

The trade volume between Pakistan and Afghanistan has the potential of more than three billion US dollars, but unfortunately it is reduced to less than one billion dollars, he continued.

After levy of two percent cess, number of daily clearance of goods laden trucks at Torkham border have been drastically dropped from four to five hundreds on daily basis to mere five to ten, badly impacting commercial activities in the region, President SCCI added.

He said Balochistan government also imposed the same cess, but forthwith withdrew the decision within a couple of days after realizing its impact on trade.

However, in KP, he continued, apart from imposition of cess on import and export, the levy has also been implemented on reverse cargo under Transit Trade Agreement.



PESHAWAR: President of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fazal Muqem Khan presenting shield to Junaid Ismail Makda, President of Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry

## Islamic finance, capital markets road to macroeconomic stability: Finance Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb said on Thursday that Islamic finance and Islamic capital markets could play a pivotal role in helping Pakistan remain steadfast on the road to macroeconomic stability and sustainable growth.

Addressing virtually the inaugural session of the Second International Islamic Capital Markets Conference & Expo that opened in Karachi on Thursday, the minister said, Pakistan had faced significant economic challenges in recent years, however, those issues were now being effectively addressed, and the country was on the right trajectory towards microeconomic

stability and sustainable growth.

He said Islamic finance, specifically Islamic capital markets, could play a pivotal role in this road to market as instruments such as sukuk, equity funds, and Shariah-compliant investment vehicles not only attracted investment but also reduced reliance on interest-based borrowing.

Shaikh Ebrahim Bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa, Chairman, AAOIFI Board of Trustees, Dr. Sami Al-Suwailem, Acting Director General, Islamic Bank Institute, Akif Saeed, SECP, Deputy Governor SBP, and other senior delegates attended the session.

The minister described the conference as reflective

of Pakistan's growing commitment to fostering a robust Islamic capital market, highlighting the country's dedication to transforming its financial ecosystem in line with Shariah principles.

He said the government was firm in its commitment to transforming the financial system in line with Shariah principles, adding that as of June 30, 2024, 56% of market capitalization at the Pakistan Stock Exchange comprises Shariah-compliant securities.

"In the collective investment segment, 48% of assets under management of mutual funds, 66% of assets under management of voluntary pension funds, and 95% of assets under management of REITs are already Shariah-compliant.

These statistics deflect the progress that we have made over year."

The minister underlined the need for "an economic system that is not only in line with our faith but also capable of inclusive and sustainable economic growth". "Only then, we will be able to extend the benefits of all our efforts to the citizens of Pakistan," he added.

He said that Islamic finance and instruments such as sukuk, equity funds, and Shariah-compliant investment vehicles were vital tools for mobilizing resources for critical sectors, including infrastructure development and poverty alleviation through Islamic social finance, while maintaining adherence to ethical and transparent principles.

## Event showcasing cutting-edge data center technologies

# Schneider Electric join hands with Mansha Brothers



## F.P. Report

KARACHI: Schneider

Electric, in collaboration with Mansha Brothers, hosted an exclusive event

in Pakistan, showcasing cutting-edge data center technologies tailored to meet the country's burgeoning demand for digital infrastructure.

With Pakistan's growing middle class driving increased adoption of digital services, and the government's initiatives promoting economic growth, digitalization, and entrepreneurship, the country presents a promising landscape for busi-

nesses and investors.

The event highlighted Schneider Electric's innovative solutions, including modular and prefabricated data centers, hyper-scale architectures, and advanced cooling and power management systems, designed to support Pakistan's accelerating digital transformation and meet the evolving needs of its thriving economy.

## US producer prices surge on costly eggs, but trend intact

WASHINGTON (Reuters): U.S. producer prices increased by the most in five months in November, but a moderation in the costs of services such as portfolio management fees and airline fares offered hope that the disinflationary trend remains in place.

A surge in the price of eggs amid an avian flu outbreak accounted for much of the bigger-than-expected rise in producer inflation last month. Other details of the report from the Labor Department on Thursday were, however, mostly favorable, prompting economists to lower their estimates for the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price measures tracked by the Federal Reserve for its 2% inflation target.

The report, together with

other data showing more people were collecting unemployment checks at the end of November relative to the beginning of the year as demand for labor cooled, cemented investor expectations that the U.S. central bank would deliver a third interest rate cut next week.

"We see little evidence of pipeline price pressure in the producer price data," said Samuel Tombs, chief U.S. economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics. "The foundations are in place for core PCE inflation to fall further next year, though the new administration will snatch defeat from the jaws of victory if they press ahead with higher import tariffs and deportations."

The producer price index for final demand jumped 0.4% last month, the largest

gain since June, after an upwardly revised 0.3% increase in October, the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics said.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the PPI gaining 0.2% following a previously reported 0.2% rise in October.

In the 12 months through November, the PPI shot up 3.0% after increasing 2.6% in October. The government reported on Wednesday that consumer prices increased by the most in seven months in November, while a measure of underlying price pressures continued to run warmer over the past four months.

Wholesale goods prices surged 0.7%, accounting for nearly 60% of the broad-based monthly rise in the PPI, after edging up 0.1% in October. Food prices soared

3.1%, making up 80% of the increase in goods prices. Wholesale egg prices vaulted 54.6%, the most since June, after declining 20.6% in October.

Prices for fresh and dry vegetables, fresh fruits and melons also rose. Wholesale energy prices gained 0.2%. Excluding the volatile food and energy components, goods prices rose 0.2%, advancing by the same margin for five straight months.

Services prices rose 0.2% after climbing 0.3% in October. Portfolio management fees fell 0.6% after increasing 3.1% in October. Airline passenger fares decreased 2.1% after increasing 2.6% in the prior month. The cost of hotel and motel rooms dropped 3.1% after rising 2.8% in October.

## F.P. Report

KARACHI: Quaid-e-

Azam embodied discipline and integrity in a truly practical way. Through his leadership, principles, and character, he not only inspired the nation's pursuit of freedom but also imparted vital life lessons.

His life stands as the ultimate example for us as a nation. Ms. Sadia Rashid, President of Hamdard Foundation Pakistan, shared these views during her address at the Hamdard Naunehal Assembly meeting in Karachi.

The event, held at the Bait-ul-Hikmah Auditorium in Madinat-al-Hikmah, was titled "Quaid-e-Azam: A Practical Example of Discipline." The chief guest for the occasion was Prof. Dr. Syed Jafar

Ahmed, General Secretary of the Pakistan Historical Society.

She further said "Quaid-i-Azam's leadership taught us that a divided nation can never achieve progress. For a nation to develop, unity, faith and discipline are essential.

Today, it is crucial to incorporate the principles of Quaid-i-Azam into your life-value time, embrace honesty, and foster discipline."

"If we adhere to these principles, nothing can prevent Pakistan from advancing on the path of development. Shaheed Hakim Mohammed Said was deeply inspired by Quaid-e-Azam's character and philosophy, and he made punctuality a cornerstone of his life," she added.

Prof. Dr Jafar Ahmed

said: "Nations are shaped within schools, where the process of nation-building truly begins. Quaid-e-Azam stands as the greatest figure for the Muslims of the 20th century, having achieved the creation of Pakistan through legal arguments."

He emphasized that the core principles of a disciplined society are humility, self-confidence, and tolerance.

The essential values of discipline-modesty, self-reliance, and tolerance-were embodied in his leadership.

There was a perfect harmony between Quaid-e-Azam's words and actions, marked by unity, which elevated him to the status of a distinguished leader, respected even today.

Shaheed Hakim Mohammed Said established a valuable tradition

through the Hamdard Naunehal Assembly, offering children a chance to participate in an assembly-like experience.

"As you grow and eventually take on leadership roles, you will remember the contributions of Hakim Mohammed Said and Ms. Sadia Rashid in your lives," he added.

Young speakers from various schools paid heartfelt tribute to the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam.

They reaffirmed their commitment to serve the nation with dedication and work towards fulfilling the vision of the founding fathers by strengthening Pakistan. The event concluded with students from Hamdard Public School and Hamdard Village School reciting Dua-i-Said.

## High-level consultation on ‘Protecting Pakistanis Imprisoned Abroad’ held

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A high-level policy dialogue, organised by the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and Justice Project Pakistan (JPP) on Thursday, highlighted the urgent need for robust policy and institutional reforms to protect the fundamental human rights of Pakistanis imprisoned abroad, as per the Pakistan's Constitution and international obligations.

The dialogue brought together key representatives from the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Ministry of Human Rights, Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, members of the Parliament, National Rights Institutions (NHRIs), diplomats, FIA and civil society actors.

The statistics shared at the event show that 23,456 Pakistanis are imprisoned globally as of

February 2024, with 10,432 imprisoned in Saudi Arabia, and 5292 in Iraq, 387 in Turkey, 40 in Iraq, 463 in Malaysia, 89 in Sri Lanka, 338 in Qatar, 578 in Oman, 59 in Kuwait, 100 in Iran, 371 in Bahrain, 313 in UK and 598 in Greece. Out of total number, 74 per cent are in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Organised in commemoration of International Migrants Day, the event, was aimed at addressing the challenges faced by Pakistani migrants and prisoners detained abroad.

The dialogue brought together key representatives from the Ministry of Law and Justice, Ministry of Human Rights, FIA, Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Ministry of Law and Justice, members of the Parliament, diplomats, and civil society actors. The event featured two thematic sessions focusing on prevention and protection, which explored safe migration practices and enhanced

consular protection mechanisms.

Discussions also centred on the systemic gaps, including inadequate legal representation, consular assistance, and language barriers faced by detained Pakistanis and development of a comprehensive plan of action to improve support systems for Pakistanis imprisoned abroad.

Speaking on this occasion, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah said "Consular access intersects with the rights to life and dignity. Article 4 of the Constitution of Pakistan places a duty on the Government of Pakistan to ensure its citizen is treated in accordance with the law, 'wherever he may be'.

These rights extend beyond national borders, and are not just diplomatic functions but a state's legal duty. Consular officers abroad are an extension of the state's sovereignty which is indivisible and stretches beyond borders. It is an essential function of the State."

Justice Shah went on to

say "It is unfortunate that despite the Lahore High Court's 2014 directive to the Federal Government to protect our citizens abroad, we still lack a comprehensive consular protection policy. Pakistan must urgently adopt such a policy, centred on the fundamental rights of its people, not just state diplomacy."

In her opening remarks, Senator Quratulain Marri said that for the person imprisoned abroad and his or her family, it is not only a legal issue but a deep personal tragedy. She acknowledged that the progress that has been made in recent past and stressed the need to build upon those measures. "It requires renewed, coordinated and sustained effort which includes strengthening of diplomatic missions, streamlining and implementing prisoner transfer agreements, focusing on prevention and engaging all stakeholders."

Chairperson NCHR Rabiya Javeri Agha said that most of these

detainees lack access to legal aid, translators or even basic consular support. "Their plight highlights glaring gaps in our international engagement and consular protection systems."

She said that while Pakistan has signed prisoner transfer agreements (PTAs) with 11 countries, including Saudi Arabia and UAE, these agreements remain legally dormant.

"Any human rights issue is multi-faceted, and all stakeholders must come together. My appeal to all consular officers in our Foreign Office is to get in touch with the local human rights commissions, who usually have unparalleled access to prisoners in their countries and are always willing to help, as we found was the case in Malaysia."

Senator Zeeshan Khanzada highlighted the importance of making representations to foreign leaders on behalf of Pakistanis jailed abroad, and regulating the current scheme under which migration takes place.

MNA Saba Sadiq extended her full support as Parliamentary Secretary Human Rights, and called for cross-party collaboration.

Barrister Aqeel Malik, Government Spokesperson on Legal Affairs, stressed the urgency of passing legislation establishing a framework that protects Pakistani nationals imprisoned overseas. He also questioned the current system for repatriating prisoners: "We need to check these Prisoner Transfer Agreements, and see if they are being implemented."

Mr. Allah Dino Khawaja (Secretary, MOHR) outlined the need to publicize any existing Prisoner Transfer Agreements, saying it was impossible for people seeking repatriation to lobby for their own rights if they did not know what those were.

Sarah Belal, Executive Director of JPP, said "The recent surge in the Pakistani prisoner population abroad, which has more than doubled from over 12,000 in 2023 to

over 23,000 in 2024, as presented to Parliament by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, underscores the urgent need to address these critical issues. This alarming increase highlights the pressing necessity for reform, making this dialogue an especially timely and important step toward finding solutions."

The event also featured the sharing of the findings of NCHR research report 'Perilous Journey' and the screening of documentaries by NCHR and JPP. Additionally, the event was attended in person by Malaysia's National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), and virtually by the NHRIs of Bahrain, Bangladesh.

Their participation in this strategic roundtable marks the beginning of future collaborations between human rights institutions on cross-border and transnational issues. SUHAKAM's participation also marked a step forward in protecting the rights of Pakistanis imprisoned in Malaysia and advocating

for a prison transfer agreement between the two countries. Such an agreement would allow Pakistanis imprisoned in Malaysia to be repatriated to Pakistan and serve their sentences in their home country.

This year's International Migrants Day also marked an opportunity to reflect on the contributions of millions of Pakistani migrants who sustain the nation's economy through billions of dollars in remittances, while simultaneously addressing the vulnerabilities they face abroad.

Participants called for reinvigorated inter-ministerial collaboration and sustained momentum to safeguard the rights of overseas Pakistanis, particularly those languishing in foreign prisons.

The NCHR and JPP reiterated their commitment to advocating for the rights of Pakistani migrants and prisoners abroad through strategic policy advocacy and engagement with stakeholders at all levels.





In brief

Meeting reviews arrangements for Cholistan Rally

BAHAWALPUR (APP): A review meeting regarding holding of the 20th Cholistan Desert Rally was held under the chairmanship of Commissioner Bahawalpur Division Nadir Chatha here on Thursday. The commissioner said the Cholistan Desert Rally had become a globally recognised motorsports event. He stressed that timely arrangements should be made for the repair and restoration of the rally track, traffic management and security plans, the establishing of a temporary tent city, and other facilities. He mentioned that participants of the Cholistan Desert Rally would be provided with comprehensive facilities, and seating arrangements for spectators would also be made around the starting point of the race. The Commissioner of Bahawalpur Division stated that in addition to foolproof security and safety for the rally track, adequate facilities would be provided to ensure the participation of international drivers in the rally. He added that the Cholistan Desert Rally prizes would be increased. Additionally, various cultural events and sports activities would be organized during the Cholistan Desert Rally. The commissioner said that all departments ensure coordinated, timely arrangements for the rally. The meeting was attended by MPA Khalid Mahmood Jajja, Deputy Commissioner Bahawalpur Dr. Farhan Farooq, General Manager Tourism Development Corporation Punjab Nauman Khan, Managing Director Cholistan Development Authority Tariq Mahmood Bukhari, and administrative officers from other departments.

Nortje ruled out of white-ball series

JOHANNESBURG (Monitoring Desk): Anrich Nortje, a key South Africa pacer, has been ruled out of the white-ball series against Pakistan due to a toe injury, dealing a major blow to the Proteas. Uncapped all-rounder Dayyaan Galiem has been named as his replacement. The 27-year-old, who boasts an impressive T20 record with 46 wickets in 60 matches, was eager to make his mark on the international stage. Nortje's injury came at a crucial juncture. The pacer had not represented South Africa since the ICC Men's T20 World Cup final in June, where he was the team's standout performer after taking 15 wickets. Recently, he also opted out of a national contract to manage his workload, which added further strain to the Proteas' bowling resources. South Africa's injury woes extended beyond Nortje, with fast bowlers Gerald Coetzee (groin), Nandre Burger (lower back stress fracture), and Lungi Ngidi (hip) all sidelined. Additionally, all-rounder Wiaan Mulder also fractured his finger during the first Test against Sri Lanka. The hosts are scheduled to face Pakistan in the second T20I match at Centurion tomorrow after winning the series opener in Durban by 11 runs. South Africa posted 183/9 in their allotted 20 overs, while Pakistan was restricted to 172/8 in reply. A win for the Proteas will clinch the series, while a victory for Pakistan will level it, with the third and final match set to take place in Johannesburg on December 14. Squad: Heinrich Klaasen (c), Ottneil Baartman, Matthew Breetzke, Donovan Ferreira, Dayyaan Galiem, Reeza Hendricks, Patrick Kruger, George Linde, David Miller, Kwená Maphaka, Ngqaba Peter, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Andile Simelane, and Rassie van der Dussen.

# Aqib Javed named interim red-ball head coach after Gillespie's resignation

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has named Aqib Javed as interim red-ball head coach following the resignation of Jason Gillespie ahead of South Africa Test series, the cricket governing board confirmed in a statement on Thursday. Gillespie's decision came after the PCB decided against renewing red-ball assistant coach Tim Nielsen's contract, prompting the latter to take early retirement. In a statement, the PCB spokesperson said that Aqib's first assignment as red-ball head-coach will be Pakistan men's team two-match Test series against South Africa.

The first Test is scheduled at the SuperSport Park in Centurion from December 26 to 30 and the

second Test will be played at the Newlands Cricket Ground in Cape Town from January 3 to 7 next year.

The Pakistan men's side are currently in South Africa featuring in a three-match T20I series followed by three-match ODI series. Nielsen, who was appointed as the high-performance red-ball coach in August, saw his contract expire after the Green Shirt's recent tour of Australia. The assistant coach revealed that the cricket body informed him his services were no longer required despite him expressing his commitment to the upcoming South Africa and West Indies series. Gillespie told the board that his decision to not go to South Africa was due to personal reasons, said the sources. The head coach

was supposed to arrive in the country tomorrow (Friday) to oversee the pre-Test camp. Further reports suggest that the decision to not renew Nielsen's contract, which caught the former Australian cricketer off guard, left him frustrated.

Sources close to the matter indicate that he was not consulted before the decision was made, further intensifying his dissatisfaction with the board. Gillespie's unease with the PCB stems from recent administrative changes. In October, he was removed from the Test side's selection panel, with his role reduced to that of a "match-day strategist". Since the conclusion of Pakistan's white-ball series in Australia, where he briefly served as interim coach following Gary

Kirsten's resignation, communication between the board and the former Australian legend has reportedly been minimal.

Adding to Gillespie's frustration is his belief in Nielsen's strong rapport with the players. Both Kirsten and the coach of the longer format suspected that Nielsen's absence from Pakistan contributed to the non-renewal of his contract, despite his availability for the full South Africa and West Indies tours. The PCB's reluctance to extend Nielsen's contract aligns with its broader trend of prioritising locally based coaching staff. The board previously expressed dissatisfaction with overseas coaches' limited time spent in Pakistan — a criticism that also preceded Kirsten's resignation in October.

# Ceremony held in Honor of Medal-Winning Athletes of National Wrestling Championship



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Medal-winning athletes of the National Wrestling Championship were honored with cash awards by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sports Department.

The ceremony held at the Directorate of Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was attended by the Provincial Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs Syed Fakhre Jahaan who commended the outstanding performance of Shah Faisal and Suhail in the championship.

He lauded their efforts for bringing pride to the province and expressed hope that they would replicate their success in the upcoming Quaid-e-Azam Games to be held in Islamabad.

Prominent figures at the event included the

President of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Olympic Association Syed Aqil Shah, Director General Sports Abdul Nasir and Secretary of the Provincial Olympic Association Zulfikar Butt among others.

Provincial Minister Syed Fakhre Jahaan stated that the provincial government is committed to nurturing talent and fully supporting athletes representing the province and the country. He termed these athletes as a valuable asset and emphasized the government's dedication to promoting sports in line with the vision of Quaid Imran Khan.

He added that both Imran Khan and the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa who have a background in sports are deeply focused on this sector.

The minister also highlighted ongoing efforts to encourage athletes across all sports disciplines. He assured that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's contingent would participate actively in the Quaid-e-Azam Games with training camps already underway at various venues of the Qayyum Sports Complex. He expressed optimism that the contingent would deliver a remarkable performance at the event.

At the conclusion of the ceremony Syed Fakhre Jahaan presented cash awards of PKR 100,000 for Gold medal winner and 50,000 for silver medal-winning athlete. On behalf of the Provincial Olympic Association President Syed Aqil Shah extended his gratitude to the minister for his support.

# HBL PSL 10: Foreign players registration opens

LAHORE (APP): The registration window for foreign players to register themselves for the 10th edition of HBL Pakistan Super League (PSL) along with the trade window is now open. The category renewals of the players will be announced on December 17 (Tuesday).

The relegation process and retention of players will be carried out during the ongoing month. The HBL PSL Players' Draft is scheduled to take place on 11 January, 2025. The venue and time for the draft will be announced in due course.

HBL PSL Chief Executive Officer Salman Naseer: "We are thrilled to

announce the opening of the registration process for foreign players as well as the trade window. This marks an exciting beginning to preparations for the highly anticipated 10th edition of the HBL Pakistan Super League.

"The HBL PSL is a home-grown brand which we are all proud of. Since its inception in 2016, together with our franchise owners, commercial partners and stakeholders, we have embarked on a long and successful journey.

"The quality and competitiveness of cricket played is second to none and we will strive to meet expectations of our loyal fans. The landmark 10th

season promises to bring more excitement for all and the HBL PSL team is committed to working tirelessly to provide fans unmatched experiences."

Since 2016, Islamabad United have become champions of the HBL PSL thrice, which include the opening (2016), third (2018) and last edition (2024) of the league. Lahore Qalandars have won twice in 2022 and 2023, Peshawar Zalmi remained champions of the 2017 edition, Quetta Gladiators won the 2019 edition, while Karachi Kings clinched their maiden title in 2020. Multan Sultans emerged as the winners in 2021.

# KHA Winter Hockey free coaching camp concluded

KARACHI (APP): The Karachi Hockey Association (KHA) in collaboration with the Sports and Youth Affairs Department, Government of Sindh successfully concluded the first phase of its ten-day Free Winter Hockey Coaching camp at the KHA Sports Complex.

The camp, which ran from December 1st to 10th, provided intensive training to over 250 young boys and girls aged 8 to 25. Renowned hockey legends, including Olympians Hanif Khan, Iftikhar Syed, and Wasim Feroz, actively participated in the camp, sharing

their expertise with the young players.

Their presence inspired the young athletes and ignited their passion for the sport. The KHA's commitment to nurturing young talent and reviving hockey in Pakistan is evident through its well-organized winter camp.

During the ten-day camp, international goalkeeper Abdul Ghafoor, Khalid Junior, former international players Zahid Maqbool, Khalid Paracha and Junaid Khan, including Moin Alam, Irfan Tahir, Minhál Niazí, Arshad Siddiqui, Imtiaz-ul-Hasan, Sagheer

Hussain, Osama assisted the boys while Batool Kazim, Kashmala Batool, Sameera Naseem, Kanwal Ijaz, Momal Sakina, Shazma, Iqra Aziz assisted the girls during the training.

During the training, Chairman KHA Gulfranz Khan, Senior Vice Presidents Dr. S. Majid, Ijazuddin and Joint Secretary Javed Iqbal, Mohsin Ali Khan and Faisal Ismail performed the duties of camp coordinators.

The second phase of the camp is scheduled to commence on December 20th and will continue until the 30th.

# Man City's Walker calls for action after online racist abuse

LONDON (AFP): Manchester City defender Kyle Walker has called for tough action to tackle online abuse after he received a "vile, racist and threatening" message following Wednesday's 2-0 loss at Juventus.

Walker played the whole Champions League match in Turin but could not help Pep Guardiola's team avoid a seventh defeat in 10 matches.

The England international posted a screenshot of a message he received on Instagram from an unnamed user to his social media accounts on Thursday that used obscene racist language.

"No one should ever be subjected to the sort of vile, racist and threatening abuse I have received online since last night's match," Walker wrote on his X and Instagram accounts.

"Instagram and the authorities need to stop this happening for the sake of all who are suffering this abuse. It is never acceptable.

"To our fans, we will continue to work as a team to do better, to improve and to turn the corner together."

City condemned the racist attack. A club statement read: "Manchester City strongly condemns the racist abuse that Kyle

Walker was subject to online following last night's fixture.

"We refuse to tolerate discrimination of any kind, regardless of whether that be in stadiums or online."

A Premier League statement read: "The Premier League condemns all forms of discrimination. Racism has no place in our game or anywhere in society. We encourage anyone who hears or sees discriminatory abuse to report it so action can be taken.

"The Premier League will support Kyle Walker and the club to tackle online hate."

# UMT Markhors and Nurpur Lions record wins in contrasting styles

Rawalpindi (Monitoring Desk): UMT Markhors and Nurpur Lions recorded wins by three and 35 runs respectively, in contrasting styles on the sixth day of the Bahria Town Champions T20 Cup at Rawalpindi cricket stadium on Thursday, perching Markhors on top of the five-team table.

Markhors scored 170-6 on the back of a rapid 32-ball 39 by opener Fakhar Zaman who shared a solid opening stand of 74 with Khawaja Mohammad Nafay who hit a 30-ball 36. While Fakhar smashed a six and five boundaries, Nafay was more aggressive with three sixes and a boundary. No.3 batter Muhammad Shahzad struck 28 off 25 balls with the help of two sixes and experienced Mohammad Nawaz knocked an unbeaten 13-ball 28 with one four and two sixes to lift the total. Usman Tariq with 2-20 and Tahir Hussain, who returned figures of 2-36 were the pick of Stallions bowlers.

ABL Stallions lost Yasir Khan (17, 10b, 2x4s, 1x6) early but Maaz Sadaqat (82, 53b, 10x4s, 2x6s) and Mohammad Haris rescued the innings with a strong

59-run stand off 41 balls for the second wicket.

Haris fell after scoring a fiery 16-ball 22 with a six and a four as it was left to Maaz to help the team cross the target. Team mentor Shoaib Malik chipped in with a 21-ball 16 as Stallions slumped from 127-2 in 15 overs to lose four wickets for 15 runs, including the well set Maaz.

Stallions needed 19 in the last over but fast bowler Mohammad Imran Jnr conceded 15 to steal the match. This became the third consecutive win for UMT Markhors while ABL Stallions suffered their first defeat after two wins.

In the second match, Nurpur Lions scored 194-5 in 20 overs against Engro Dolphins. Their skipper Imam-ul-Haq knocked a brilliant 48-ball 65 and Hasan Nawaz hit 34-ball 50 in a solid 100-run partnership in 11.3 overs. Hasan, smashed three sixes and four boundaries while Imam's knock had seven boundaries and a six.

Khushdil Shah, batting at No.5, blasted an unbeaten 22-ball 57 not out with six maximums and two boundaries as Nurpur Lions added a big 64 in the last five overs.

Dolphins' Qasim Akram picked up three wickets for 21 runs in his four overs.

In reply, Sahibzada Farhan and Mirza Tahir Baig gave Dolphins a robust start of 57 in six overs. Tahir fell for 29 off 16 balls laced with a six and three boundaries. Muhammad Akhlagh fell without scoring. Farhan then added 51 for the third wicket with Umar Amin who made a 19-ball 25 with two fours and a six.

But once Farhan fell for 54 off 42 balls including three sixes and as many boundaries the chase fell apart. Skipper Faheem Ashraf tried valiantly with a cameo of 12-ball 27 with two sixes and as many fours but the asking rate soared beyond 15 an over.

Fast bowler Musa Khan was the pick of bowlers with 4-23 while Khushdil and Shahid Aziz fetched two wickets apiece. Lions have now won two of their four matches while Dolphins are winless in three outings.

Scores in brief:

Match 7 – UMT Markhors beat ABL Stallions by three runs at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium UMT Markhors 170-6 in 20 overs (Fakhar Zaman

39, Khawaja Mohammad Nafay 36, Mohammad Nawaz 28 not out, Muhammad Shahzad 28; Usman Tariq 2-20, Tahir Hussain 2-36)

ABL Stallions 167-6 in 20 overs (Maaz Sadaqat 82, Mohammad Haris 22; Nisar Ahmed 3-23)

Player of the match – Nisar Ahmed (UMT Markhors)

Match 8 - Nurpur Lions beat Engro Dolphins by 35 runs at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium

Nurpur Lions 194-5 in 20 overs (Imam-ul-Haq 65, Khushdil Shah 57 not out, Hasan Nawaz 50; Qasim Akram 3-21)

Engro Dolphins 159 all out in 19.4 overs (Sahibzada Farhan 54, Mirza Tahir Baig 29, Faheem Ashraf 27, Umar Amin 25; Musa Khan 4-23, Khushdil Shah 2-22, Shahid Aziz 2-35)

Player of the match -- Khushdil Shah (Nurpur Lions)

Tomorrow's fixtures: Allied Bank Stallions vs Engro Dolphins, Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium (11am); Lake City Panthers vs UMT Markhors, Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium (3.30pm).





## In brief

### IRSA releases 83,000 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 83,000 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 40,300 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1479.42 feet and was 81.42 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 17,800 cusecs and 41,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1144.70 feet, which was 94.70 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 60,200, 42,600, 37,300 and 7,200 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 11,700 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 1,800 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

### ANF recovers 101 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force in its ongoing countrywide crackdown against drug smuggling arrested three accused and recovered 101.647 kilograms of drugs worth over Rs 110 million on Thursday. According to an ANF spokesman, a Force team arrested an accused near a hospital in Keamari, Karachi, with 500 grams heroin. The accused during the investigation confessed to selling drugs to students. The ANF personnel, in another operation at the Karachi International Airport, recovered 9.08 kg ice absorbed into the clothes of a Jeddah-bound passenger. Likewise, an accused was held on the recovery of 3 kg heroin from the secret compartments of a vehicle near Chenab Toll Plaza, G T Road in Gujrat. Meanwhile, 45 narcotic pills, 25 LSD stickers and 23 grams of suspicious material were recovered from a parcel coming from the Netherlands at a courier office in Rawalpindi. Similarly, 64 kg heroin was recovered from an uninhabited place in Qila Saifullah district of Balochistan.

### 12 outlaws arrested

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police apprehended 12 outlaws involved in various criminal activities on Thursday, recovering weapons and liquor from their possessions. A public relation officer told APP that the ICT Police Tarnol, Sangjani, Khanna, Korai, Humak, Shahzad Town and Bani Gala police teams took legal action against accused involved in possessing illegal weapons, selling drugs and liquor. In this regard, police teams arrested 10 accused namely Dawood, Kawish, Zaryab, Mahmood, Parvez, Asad, Zeeshan Akbar, Imran Khan, Hamza Ali and Mohib Ali and recovered 10 liters of liquor, 1,260-gram heroin and seven pistols with ammunition from their possession. Moreover, two absconders were also arrested from various areas of the city during the last 24 hours. SSP Operation Muhammad Arslan Shahzaib said that the Islamabad Police is actively working to ensure the safety of citizens' lives and property in the federal capital, emphasizing that no elements will be allowed to disrupt citizens' peace. Protecting the lives, property, and dignity of citizens is the Islamabad Police's top priority.



ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi in a meeting with Pervez Khattak, founder of the PTI Parliamentarians. —APP Photo

## Ministry denounces fake letter permitting opium and cannabis cultivation

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Narcotics Control on Thursday issued an official statement to refute the circulation of a fabricated letter falsely claiming government approval for the cultivation of opium or cannabis in specific districts of Baluchistan.

This clarification comes amid concerns over misinformation being spread on social media platforms, says the press note.

According to the ministry, the fake letter, which has gained traction online, alleges that permission has been granted for the cultivation of these narcotic plants. The ministry categorically denied the claims, stating, "Neither such an approval has been issued nor is there any policy for allowing cultivation of opium or cannabis in Baluchistan or any other region."

Officials emphasized that the news was entirely fictitious and a

product of forgery, designed to mislead the public and potentially undermine the government's ongoing efforts to combat drug trafficking and illegal narcotics production.

In its statement, the Ministry reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to eradicating the illegal production and trafficking of narcotics across the country. "The Ministry of Narcotics Control reiterates its resolve to combat illegal production and trafficking of narcotics in all areas of the country in accordance with the law," the statement read.

The ministry urged the public to remain vigilant against such disinformation and warned that spreading or endorsing such forged content could have legal consequences. Furthermore, it called upon social media users to verify the authenticity of any such claims before sharing them online, in order to prevent panic and confusion.

Experts believe that the circulation of this fake letter highlights the challenges governments face in tackling the spread of misinformation in the digital age. The incident has sparked discussions about the need for stricter regulation of social media platforms and more effective public awareness campaigns to counter the impact of false narratives.

The Ministry of Narcotics Control has assured the public that it was working with relevant authorities to trace the origins of the forged news and hold those responsible accountable. It has also encouraged citizens to report any suspicious activity or information related to drug production and trafficking.

As the Ministry continues its investigation, it reiterates its mission to uphold the law and ensure that no illegal practices undermine the country's efforts to maintain public safety and security.

## OPF set up 24 educational institutions in country

ISLAMABAD (APP): Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) has established a high-quality education system comprising 24 educational institutions throughout the country including Azad Jammu & Kashmir.

These include two state-of-the-art colleges, OPF Girls College, F-8/2 Islamabad, and OPF Boys College, H-8/4, Islamabad and 22 secondary and higher secondary level educational institutions. An official source told APP here on Thursday, that at present more than 17,000 students are studying at OPF institutions out of which more than 2500 students are children of overseas Pakistanis. 1282 teaching and non-teaching staff are employed in these institutions.

He said that OPF works under the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OP&HRD) and had been established under the Emigration Rules made under Emigration Ordinance 1979, Articles of Association, and Memorandum of Overseas Pakistanis Foundation, OPF Education Division is vested with the following responsibilities including giving of scholarships, stipends or grants to the children of the emigrants for studies in the field of science, technology, art and management in Pakistan and abroad.

The education system provides quality education for the children of Overseas Pakistanis from Pre-Nursery to Graduation Level. Educational

institutions in Islamabad also provide education in O & A Level streams. OPF provides the structures, human resources, budget, and administrative & management support to ensure that the quality of service delivery is maintained at a high level, he added. OPF was constantly drawing up strategies, policies, and plans for educational reforms and development at OPF Educational institutions. The Education Division drafts relevant rules and regulations for schools in the OPF Education System and supervises their implementation.

The source revealed that OPF Girls College was established, in 1985, in the heart of the Capital city, Sector F-8/2 Islamabad, on an area of 100 kanals. The college has been providing quality education from Pre-nursery to Graduation level to the children of Overseas Pakistanis and the general public for the last 29 years. Presently 4,800 students are enrolled in the college out of which 702 are children of Overseas Pakistanis. The institution has a hostel facility for the children of OPFs. It can provide boarding/lodging facilities to more than 100 students from the Primary to Graduation Level.

Transport facility for pick and drop of students was also available at the College. 450 highly qualified teaching/non-teaching staff put their hearts and heads for the excellence of the institution. Due to their untiring

efforts and dedication, OPF Girls College has now become a symbol of prestige and its academic and financial performance over the years has remained outstanding.

OPF Boys College was established in 2001 at H-8/4 Islamabad in an area of 56 kanal. The college provides quality education from the Middle to the Intermediate level. Presently more than 1400 students are studying in the College out of which 256 are children of Overseas Pakistanis. 122 teaching and non-teaching staff are making their full efforts to win the confidence of parents and students. A hostel is being constructed for the provision of boarding/lodging for students coming to study at OPF Boys College, Islamabad, from other parts of the country, particularly for the children of overseas Pakistanis.

The college also provides a transport facility for the pick & drop of students. OPF has established 22 other educational institutions in different cities of the country including Azad Jammu & Kashmir. These educational institutions provide quality education from the Pre-Nursery level to the Secondary/Higher Secondary Level. 10,879 students are enrolled in these 22 educational institutions out of which 1,550 are children of Overseas Pakistanis. These institutions are affiliated with boards of intermediate & secondary education in their respective regions.

## Demand for dry fruits soars in capital amid winter season

ISLAMABAD (APP): The demand for dry fruits has surged in the capital as the winter season is at its peak and people are considering taking them as tasty, healthy, and useful items during this season.

Some people use dry fruits in dishes specially prepared in the winter season, like Gajar ka halwa (a sweet dish made of carrots), sohn halwa (a sweet made with maida, milk and dry fruits) etc. Bakeries and sweet shops also incorporate dry fruits in sweets to make them more tasteful and healthy.

Regardless of price, the demand for dry fruits was at its peak as the rush of customers spotted at several dry fruit shops. A dry fruit seller, Pervaiz Khan told APP, "The demand for dry fruit is at its peak" because people love to eat them in winter, and it also reduces the effect of cold air on the body.

He also said that as compared to last year, the prices of most items have increased due to an increase in the prices of services used for the cultivation of dry fruit and also to reach the end users, like transport, labour, etc.

On inquiry of prices, the shopkeeper said that prices of dry fruits vary

depending on quality and origin. As almonds range from Rs 4,800 to Rs 5,600 per kg, while walnuts cost Rs 1400-1,800 per kg, Khan said adding that Cashews, figs, and pine nuts are priced at roundabout Rs 3,600, Rs 4,000, and Rs 14,000 per kg, respectively. He specifically called peanuts the most affordable and best-selling product whose prices depend on the type of area where they were produced; he said that peanuts were produced in mainly three regions of the country: Parachinar, Chakwal, and Gujjar Khan, with prices of 1200, 720, and 640 per kg, respectively.

A customer, Muhammad Ahmed, said that winter was the best season to consume these dry fruits as they gave enough energy and also reduced the effect of the cold air in this weather, he also called dry fruits a healthy diet in this season. A female customer said, "I want to purchase these dry fruits so that I can use them in the Gajar ka halwa for garnishing, taste and health perspective. The sale of sweets in which these dry fruits were used was also enhanced due to the effect of the season."

The online sale of dry fruits has

also seen a boost, with e-commerce platforms offering competitive prices. However, some online sellers face challenges with cancelled orders and increased costs. An online store owner said, "Online selling of dry fruits is very appealing during winter." Adding, "We offer very affordable and competitive prices."

"Most customers order online but when goods reach the addresses people usually cancel the order which raises the cost of the goods," the owner added. The supply of dry fruits involves sourcing from various regions, including Gilgit-Baltistan, Balochistan, and Punjab. Suppliers have reported increased costs due to transportation and farming expenses reason behind the rise in the prices of dry fruit. Supplier of dry fruit from Gilgit Baltistan, Wazir Hashmat told APP that he supplied dry fruit items from all parts of the country and sent them to Lahore, where the main market of dry fruits exists, adding that "We obtain pine nuts from Balochistan province, walnuts from Gilgit Baltistan & Balochistan, and peanuts from most of the parts of Punjab, and so on.

## Mohsin Naqvi, Pervez Khattak discuss national issues

ISLAMABAD (APP): Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the residence of Pervez Khattak, founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Parliamentarians, to discuss pressing national issues, including the country's political climate and the establishment of law and order in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

During the meeting, both leaders deliberated

on measures to ensure peace and security in the region and pledged to resolutely counter forces hindering Pakistan's progress. They emphasized the importance of national unity and collective efforts for the country's development.

Pervez Khattak expressed deep sorrow over the martyrdom of police and Rangers per-

sonnel during recent protests in Islamabad, condemning the attacks by miscreants.

"Pakistan belongs to all of us, and we must work together to move it forward," said Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi. He reassured that the future of nation is bright and no external or internal forces can impede its progress.

## Chairman PMYP calls for cohesive youth policy strategies

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of the Prime Minister Youth Programme (PMYP) Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan Thursday stressed the importance of a cohesive approach to youth policy, emphasizing the need for youth empowerment through inclusive policies that drive employment opportunities and skill development.

Chairing the inaugural meeting of the Taskforce for the National Adolescent and Youth Policy here Thursday, he highlighted that Pakistan's youth, with their potential and creativity, was a significant asset for the country's progress, and their concerns must be at the centre of national planning. Rana Mashhood reiterated that the task force's work was critical to the nation's development and prosperity. He expressed confidence that the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders would lead to a transformative policy that will empower the next generation of leaders and innovators.

The meeting brought key stakeholders together from various ministries, development partners and youth organizations to deliberate on creating an inclusive, employment-driven policy for the youth of Pakistan.

Representatives from the Ministry of Human Rights, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science and Technology, and Ministry of Law and Justice, along with provincial representatives. Development partners, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the British Council, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) were also present.

The meeting discussed the vital need for a youth policy that addresses education, vocational training, mental health, and employment, with a special focus on marginalized groups, including young women and those from rural areas.

Representatives from the Ministry of Education emphasized the need for a curriculum that aligns with industry demands, while the Ministry of Science and

Technology called for greater investment in research and innovation, particularly in technology and digital skills. Development partners such as the UNDP British Council, and UNICEF voiced strong support for the policy's goals and pledged their continued collaboration.

Private sector youth organizations also contributed, offering practical insights on how to bridge the gap between youth aspirations and the opportunities available to them. They suggested partnerships with businesses to provide internships, apprenticeships, and job placements, particularly in emerging sectors such as IT, green energy, and digital services.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to continue consultations and working towards the formulation of a policy that will address the diverse needs of Pakistan's youth. It was agreed that the next meeting would focus on finalizing the policy framework, with an emphasis on actionable steps that can be implemented immediately.

## Romania seeks to further strengthen its ties with Pakistan: Envoy



ISLAMABAD (APP): Romania's Ambassador-designate to Pakistan Dr. Dan Stoenescu said Romania values Pakistan as a key partner in South Asia and seeks to further strengthen this relationship.

Speaking at the cake-cutting ceremony to mark the 106th National Day celebrations here on Wednesday, he said that both Romania and Pakistan are committed to advancing their cooperation within the EU-Pakistan framework and on multilateral platforms like the United Nations.

Dr. Dan Stoenescu said this year Romania and Pakistan are celebrating 60 years of diplomatic relations and both countries are committed to strengthening

their ties in various fields, adding that the two nations have nurtured a strong partnership marked by mutual respect and cooperation.

He said Romania celebrates its Great Union, a historical moment that laid the foundation for its national identity, unity, and vision, adding that the December 1, 1918 event remains a symbol of the country's determination to overcome challenges and build a shared future.

The Ambassador-designate said, on December 1, 2024, Romania marks 106 years since the Great Union of 1918, a milestone that continues to shape its identity and global outlook. This anniversary not only honours the nation's history

but also underscores its commitment to unity, resilience, and international cooperation, he added.

Among the dignitaries, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Tariq Fatemi was also present on the occasion. Dr Dan Stoenescu said Romania's foreign policy is anchored in European and transatlantic democratic values. As an active NATO member, the country contributes to Europe's security, particularly along the Black Sea and NATO's Eastern Flank. Romania also provides steadfast support to Ukraine, assisting its citizens and strengthening regional stability.

He also highlighted Romania's role in the European Union, by promoting democratic values and economic growth. Supporting the EU accession processes for Moldova and Ukraine remains a priority. These efforts aim to enhance societal resilience and secure long-term stability. Romania also backs the European integration of Western Balkan countries, recognizing their strategic importance for Europe's prosperity and security, he added.

## QAU award degrees to 3,188 graduates

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) Islamabad in its convocation 2024 held at Pakistan-China Friendship Center here Thursday, awarded degrees to as many as 3,188 graduates, including 1,246 Bachelor's, 1,734 MPhil, and 208 PhD graduates.

Federal Minister for Education, Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, who also serves as the Pro-Chancellor of QAU, attended the event as the chief guest.

Addressing on the occasion, Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui congratulated the graduates, their parents and teachers. He praised the medal recipients, stating that their achievements

were a source of pride for the nation.

He emphasized that education was key to achieving freedom at all levels and commended the graduates for their association with one of Pakistan's premier educational institutions.

The minister also assured continued governmental support for higher education, particularly for QAU, in advancing research and human resource development.

Vice-Chancellor of Quaid-i-Azam University, Professor Dr. Niaz Ahmad Akhtar, extended his congratulations to the graduates and highlighted the University's significant achievements. He noted

that QAU was ranked as the number one university in Pakistan, 84th in Asia, 9th in South Asia and 315th globally.

Dr. Akhtar emphasized the institution's bright future, focusing on improving education standards, prioritizing practical research, attracting international students, and enhancing its global ranking. A comprehensive review of the curriculum is underway to align it with the latest trends in industry and service sectors, he added.

The ceremony was attended by a large number of faculty members, graduates and their families, making it a memorable event for all.



Turkish Firm explores investment opportunities in Kabul

KABUL (BNA): Turkey's Magma Company has expressed interest in investing in Afghanistan's energy production projects during a meeting with Mullah Abdul Latif Mansour, Acting Minister of Energy and Water. According to the Ministry of Energy and Water, Magma representatives discussed their readiness to invest in the energy sector, underscoring their commitment to advancing Afghanistan's energy infrastructure.

Bulgaria donates 30,000 to Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has announced Bulgaria's donation of 30,000 euros to Afghanistan. In a message on Thursday, December 12, OCHA confirmed that this amount was donated to Afghanistan's Humanitarian Fund for 2024. OCHA emphasized that such donations are critical for responding to emergencies and saving lives in Afghanistan.

ISIS takes responsibility for attack targeting Taliban Minister

KABUL (Amu Tv) : Daesh, also known as ISIS, has claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing that killed Khalil Rahman Haqqani, the Taliban's Minister for Refugees and Repatriation.

In a statement released on Wednesday, ISIS said that Haqqani was the primary target of the attack. The group claimed its operative successfully bypassed security barriers to reach the location of the bombing in the ministry's compound in Kabul.

According to the statement, the attacker waited until Haqqani exited the ministry, accompanied by



aides and bodyguards, before detonating an explosive vest. ISIS claimed the explosion killed Haqqani as well as several members of his entourage.

The Taliban, which has consistently downplayed

ISIS's presence in Afghanistan, has not provided specific details about casualties from the attack. The Taliban has often described ISIS attacks as isolated and unrepresentative of a broader insurgency.

This is not the first time ISIS has launched high-profile attacks against Taliban officials. Since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, ISIS has conducted bombings, targeting government figures, mosques, and civilians.

In its own statement reacting to the attack, the Taliban also attributed responsibility to ISIS.

Afghanistan to Build Hospitals in 318 Districts



KABUL(BNA): The Ministry of Public Health has confirmed the approval of a budget exceeding six billion Afghanis for the construction of hospitals in 318 districts across Afghanistan.

According to the

announcement, based on the decree of the esteemed Amir al-Mu'minin, the construction process has already begun, and procurement activities for the construction of hospitals in provinces such as Logar, Ghazni, and Farah are

completed. Work on these hospitals will start soon.

This initiative aims to enhance the provision of quality healthcare services to citizens, improving access to uniform health facilities throughout the country.

Russia, Uzbekistan jointly study feasibility of Afghan-Trans Railway

KABUL (TOLONews): The Russian Deputy Prime Minister stated that Russia is working jointly with Uzbekistan on a feasibility study for the construction of the Afghan-Trans railway.

Denis Manturov, speaking at the 25th session of the Intergovernmental Commission on Cooperation between Russia and Uzbekistan, highlighted that Russia places special emphasis on developing international transportation corridors.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Railway Minister of Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Works visited Hairatan and met with the head of Sogdiana Trans to discuss maintaining active railway lines, fully utilizing station capacities, and expediting the unloading and loading operations on

the Hairatan-Mazar-i Sharif railway.

Mohammad Ashraf Haqshenas, spokesperson for the Ministry of Public Works, stated: "In this meeting, discussions were held in detail regarding rail wagon congestion, keeping railway lines operational, maximizing station capacity, accelerating loading and unloading processes, and resolving challenges, with necessary decisions made."

The Chamber of Commerce and Investment considers the construction of railway lines beneficial for Afghanistan's trade, noting that the establishment of railways significantly reduces the cost of transporting commercial and transit goods.

Khan Jan Alokozai, a board member of the Chamber of Commerce

and Investment, said: "This is one of the most critical needs. Currently, trade has reached a level where unless transportation and logistics are streamlined, trade cannot become cost-effective. Therefore, railways are essential."

Zabihullah Islami, an economic expert, stated: "No matter how productive a country is, if it lacks transit routes, connections with other countries, and economic and trade relations, it cannot achieve development."

The Hairatan-Balkh, Aqina-Andkhoi, and Herat-Khaf railways are considered among the active rail lines in the country. The Ministry of Public Works has emphasized that it has major plans in place to further develop these lines domestically.

Oak, juniper wood rates down in Kabul City

KABUL CITY (Pajhwok): The prices of oak and juniper firewood have declined in Kabul markets after the government allowed its entry to Kabul, firewood sellers said on Thursday.

Fire wood rates surged in capital Kabul after the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) had banned its entry in Kabul for the past one year.

Local residents have been thrilled that ban on the entry of firewood is lifted and the rates of fire woods declined on the eve of winter.

Hewad Zazai, a resident of capital Kabul, said he came to the city to purchase firewood, adding that he burnt oak and juniper wood for heating up his house.

Shujahuddin, another resident of capital Kabul, said his economic condition was not good and so far he did not purchase firewood and waited for the prices to come down.

"Firewood rates have declined, thanks to Allah, there is difference in its prices and I am very happy if there is more decrease in the prices of firewood."

Gul Mohammad, a resident of Kabul City's 8th Municipality District, said: "I purchased 280 kilograms of firewood, my economic condition is not good and borrowed money from another person, if more firewood are supplied to the city, the prices would further decrease."

Firewood sellers said that for the past one week, the government has allowed those traders who bring firewood — oak and juniper — to Kabul city from Paktia, Khost, Paktika, Nangarhar and Laghman provinces.

Sayed Moqim Kalakani, a firewood and coal seller, said that roads are opened and the prices have declined now compared to the past week.

"Now 560 kilograms of oak firewood are accounted for 10,000 afis, but earlier the same quantity of oak firewood accounted for 13,000 afis to 14,000 afis, 560 kilograms of juniper firewood are now accounted for 12,000 afis but earlier the same quantity of juniper firewood accounted o 16,000 afis," he said.

He added that the Environment Protection Authority and the Ministry of Agriculture had stopped deforestation and the timber trade, which had also increased the price of timber in the market.

Kalakani said that now the government has allowed traders to import timber to Kabul city, adding that the prices have also decreased.

According to him, in Kabul city, mulberry, walnut and other fruit trees are sold for 6,000 to 5,500 afis, but people do not like them for burning.

Taliban bans broadcast of music in Kabul

KABUL (Afintl): The Taliban in Kabul has banned the broadcast of music in the media.

The Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice announced on Thursday that the ministry's ombudsman met with media representatives in Kabul and asked them to refrain from broadcasting music.

Previously, the Taliban had banned media outlets from broadcasting music in other provinces. This action came as the group forced all media outlets to call the assassination of the Taliban's Minister of Refugees a "martyrdom".

"The ombudsman of the Kabul Municipal Department, in corrective meetings with some officials of print and audio media, asked them to refrain from broadcasting music and any content that contradicts Islamic rulings and Afghan culture," the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue said on Thursday, December 12.

The Taliban had previously banned the media from broadcasting music and entertainment programmes in Khost and several other provinces.

The ban on music broadcasting in Kabul media came as Khalil-ur-Rehman Haqqani, the Taliban's Minister of Refugee Affairs, was killed in a suicide attack on Wednesday (December 11) and the Taliban's intelligence agency forced the media outlets to use the word "martyr" when publishing news related to the incident.

Previously, the Taliban's Ministry of Promotion of Virtue had banned Afghan media outlets from publishing images of living creatures in television programmes. Since the Taliban came to power, the group has imposed many restrictions on the media and has severely restricted their freedom by issuing various decrees.

Recently, the Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice announced that it had shut down Arezoo TV in Kabul for "protecting Islamic values".

Ministry of Defense initiates security planning

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Defense has announced security planning for the year 1404 Solar Hijri in collaboration with two other security agencies.

In a statement, the ministry said the purpose of the security planning meeting is to ensure the safety of citizens, protect major projects such as TAPI and CASA-1000, and implement other projects in the country.

Enayatullah Khawarazmi, spokesperson for the Ministry of Defense, stated: "The objective of this meeting was to prepare a security plan for the year 1404 Solar Hijri to ensure the reliable safety of the country's citizens and to secure major projects such as TAPI, CASA-1000, and other significant projects across the country."

At the same time, several military analysts in the country consider systematic planning to be effective in ensuring security and implementing projects.

Ahmad Khan Andar, a military analyst, said: "This is a good process that allows them to identify weaknesses in their performance and, for the coming year, make efforts to ensure the security of the people, our country, and the new projects ahead, including those involving international stakeholders, by taking necessary measures."

Aziz Stanekzai, another military analyst, remarked: "In the recent meeting of the Ministry of Defense of Afghanistan, it was emphasized how and in what way Afghanistan's security and that of major projects in the country will be ensured."

Previously, the leader of the Islamic Emirate had met with senior security officials in the country in the month of Saratan this year to discuss improving security measures further.

Women urge UNSC to prioritize human rights in meeting on Afghanistan

KABUL (Amu Tv): Ahead of the United Nations Security Council's fourth meeting on Afghanistan today, women and girls are calling for urgent action to address escalating human rights abuses in the country. They express exhaustion and deep concern over the Taliban's increasing restrictions on their freedoms.

The Security Council meeting, set to take place on Thursday, Dec. 12, is expected to feature a report from Roza Otunbayeva, the U.N. Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The session will also include remarks from the chair of the U.N. sanctions committee on Afghanistan, a representative from the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and a member of Afghan civil society.

Among those hoping for meaningful outcomes is Shaqayeq, a university student who was barred from completing her education under the Taliban's

policies. Previously, she worked alongside her brother at an international organization, providing for their nine-member family. However, two years ago, her brother was arrested by the Taliban for working with a foreign organization. After two months in prison, he was released with a warning that neither he nor Shaqayeq could continue their employment.

"We were the only breadwinners for our family," she said. "Now, we are struggling with severe economic hardship. We urge the United Nations to focus on the living conditions of Afghan people and the country's human rights crisis in their meetings." Shaqayeq's story is echoed by other Afghan women who are calling on the international community to prioritize their plight.

Salma, a resident of Farah Province, said, "At the General Assembly, our message to the U.N. and the international community is to pay more attention to the situation of Afghan women and the growing restrictions imposed

on us by the Taliban."

Diwa, another Afghan woman, expressed frustration with the lack of tangible outcomes from previous U.N. meetings. "These meetings aren't delivering results. If they see no impact, they need to adopt better strategies rather than issuing statements about their sympathy for us. That sympathy doesn't change our situation."

Escalating restrictions The Security Council convenes at a time when the Taliban have intensified their restrictions on women and girls. In recent weeks, the Taliban have banned women from attending medical training programs, further closing off access to education and employment.

These developments come amid a broader crackdown that has drawn condemnation from human rights advocates worldwide. Women are now calling on the U.N. to move beyond discussions and deliver concrete actions to address their plight.

EU representative pledges 45 million for Afghan farmers

KABUL (TOLONews): Tomas Niklasson, the European Union's Special Representative for Afghanistan, emphasized the relationship between the Islamic Emirate and the European Union during a meeting with Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the Political Deputy of the Prime Minister's Office.

In the meeting, Tomas Niklasson stated that the EU plans to collaborate with international partner organizations to provide 45 million in aid for alternative crop cultivation for Afghan farmers in the near future.

Hamdullah Fitrat, Deputy Spokesperson of the Islamic Emirate, told TOLONews about the meeting, stating: "Mr. Tomas Niklasson praised Afghanistan's progress and highlighted the importance of ensuring security, eliminating corruption, and the Islamic Emirate's efforts to combat narcotics. He also emphasized the need for international organizations to play a role in promoting alternative crops and treating drug addicts."

According to Fitrat,



Tomas Niklasson deemed the EU's staff access to all parts of Afghanistan a vital step for effective assistance and stressed the necessity of international organizations working alongside the Islamic Emirate to combat narcotics and develop alternative farming options.

Sayed Zia Hosseini, a political analyst, remarked on the importance of such meetings, saying: "These discussions can foster a positive and interactive approach, encouraging other members to adopt a unified and cooperative perspective towards Afghanistan, ultimately promoting engagement between the

Islamic Emirate and Western societies."

Meanwhile, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir highlighted the importance of collaboration and aid from humanitarian organizations, including the European Union, for Afghan refugees. He urged the cessation of forced deportations of Afghan migrants from neighboring and other countries worldwide.

Additionally, the EU Special Representative for Afghanistan noted that discussions with neighboring countries have been held to prevent the forced expulsion of Afghan refugees.

Mohammad Khan Mohammadzai, a migrant rights activist, stated: "Through multilateral committees of host countries and Afghanistan's caretaker government, there is a need to negotiate for extending or renewing the residency permits of Afghan refugees in host countries, or to simplify their living conditions in those countries."

This comes as, last month, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported a 30% increase in opium production in the current year compared to the previous year—a claim the Islamic Emirate dismissed as baseless.

Cold wave triggers surge in respiratory diseases in Jawzjan



SHIBERGHA N (Pajhwok): With the onset of cold weather, health officials and doctors in northern Jawzjan province report an increase in respiratory diseases, saying majority of those affected are elderly and children.

They recommend that, in addition to giving more attention to the elderly and children, those suffering from respiratory diseases should keep themselves away from healthy individuals, gargle with a saline solution several times a day, and avoid going outside during peak air pollution hours.

Dr. Hashmatullah Inayat, a pediatric specialist at Shakaran Hospital in Shibergan, told Pajhwok Afghan News that every winter, the air becomes more polluted, and respiratory diseases such as pneumonia, cold, and shortness of breath increase.

He added, "In recent days, we have been receiving

15 to 20 patients daily, most of whom with severe pneumonia and cold, of which 10 are children. When the weather becomes warmer, the number of patients lowers."

Regarding the increase in respiratory disease cases, he said, "In winter, the gathering of family members in one room and sleeping close together causes the rapid spread of contagious diseases such as cold and pneumonia. Families with more members are more vulnerable to seasonal diseases."

Dr. Inayat advised that in order to prevent respiratory diseases from spreading, hygiene should be strictly observed, more fluids should be consumed, patients should be kept warm, and gargling with a saline solution should be done frequently.

Meanwhile, Dr. Javid, another specialist in the province, said in recent cold weather, the number of people affected by res-

piratory diseases has increased.

He added, "Seasonal diseases in winter mainly affect children and the elderly because their immune systems are weak, and they are more susceptible to viruses."

He advised families to keep children and elderly warm, give them hot liquids, prevent them from being exposed to cold weather, avoid going outside during peak air pollution times, and to wash their mouths with saltwater in the morning and evening. Additionally, when leaving the house, they should wear masks.

At the same time, Qari Zabihullah Hosseini, Director of Public Health in Jawzjan, said that with the arrival of winter, various diseases, particularly cold, pneumonia, and sore throat, have increased, and everyone should take care of themselves and their children, keeping them warm.

He also added that 500 to 700 patients visit the Jawzjan Provincial Hospital daily, most of whom suffer from cold. He informed free medicines were provided to all these patients.

Patients satisfied with services at health centers

Gul Hawa, a resident of Khwaja Dokoh district in Jawzjan, said her two-year-old daughter contracted pneumonia and has been ill for several days without improvement.

She added, "Though we keep our house warm, yet our children fell ill. There is a health center in the district, and doctors work hard, but there are no advanced facilities to hospitalize our children. We've been here for almost seven days, and now the doctor says my daughter's condition is improving."

Meanwhile, Zakia, another resident of the province, said her 14-year-old daughter is hospitalized at the Provincial Hospital and her condition is not improving.

She added, "My daughter has been in the hospital for three days. It started with a cough, and gradually she developed fever and persistent coughing. I tried home remedies, but it didn't help. Eventually, I brought her here, and her pain became severe, so she was hospitalized."

She requested the Jawzjan Provincial Health Directorate to increase availability of health services in the province.





KARACHI: President Asif Ali Zardari in a group photo with Chinese business delegation, who called on him.

Challenges and prospects

# Charting resilient economic future for pakistan post-IMF

E.P. Report

LAHORE: The Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies (CASS), Lahore, organised a seminar titled "Charting the Resilient Economic Future for Pakistan Post-IMF: Challenges and Prospects" on 12 December 2024. The event provided the platform for eminent economists and intellectuals to address the multi-faceted economic challenges that confront Pakistan and discuss how Pakistan can attain future economic resilience. Ms Nida Khattak, a researcher at CASS Lahore, commenced the seminar with her introductory remarks.

The keynote speaker, Dr Rashid Amjad, director at Graduate Institute of Development Studies (GIDS), stated that the fundamental problem of Pakistan's economy is that when growth increases; balance of payments crisis emerges. He highlighted that an educated youth, empowered women, efficient provinces, and Pakistani diaspora will be the drivers of economic growth in Pakistan. Dr Khaqan Najeeb, former advisor at the Ministry of Finance, emphasised human resource and skill development as the missing link in Pakistan's economic revival strategy. He advo-



ated for enhanced agricultural productivity, reduced states' economic footprints, and export-oriented growth as ways to move beyond the IMF. Mr Almas Hyder, Chairman of SPEL, said that the path to resilience requires embracing value addition and export competitiveness. Investing in education, infrastructure, and innovation is a precondition for Pakistan's prosperous, equitable, and sustainable economy.

In his concluding remarks, Air Marshal Asim Suleiman (Retd), President of CASS Lahore, emphasised that IMF support has been crucial; however, it should be viewed as

a temporary and transitional phase. Moving forward, Pakistan must focus on reducing its dependence on external financial assistance through comprehensive structural reforms. He added that diversification is the way forward to set Pakistan's economic trajectory in the right direction, as it aligns with global economic realities.

The interactive session generated insightful discussions. The seminar stressed the complexities facing Pakistan's economic landscape and highlighted opportunities for economic reforms and prosperity, aiming not only for economic resilience but also sustainable economic growth.

## Syrian people have right to decide future

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has said that it is the right of the Syrian people to determine their own future and make decisions about their destiny which any foreign interference or external imposition should not determine.

Foreign Office Spokesperson Murtaz Zahra Baloch made these comments in light of the current situation in Syria after rebels ousted Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in a lightning offensive spearheaded by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group and its allies, which brought a spectacular end to the five-decade-rule. Following Assad's ouster, Sharaa's fighters took power in Syria and appointed Mohammed al-Bashir to lead an interim administration until March.

"We are following developments in Syria and are concerned about the escalation in violence. We express full support for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria," Baloch said during weekly press briefing on Thursday. Baloch said that Islamabad has always supported the efforts aimed at finding a comprehensive solution to the crisis in Syria.

Expressing Pakistan's concerns at the Israeli aggression, illegal seizure and widespread destruction in Syria, Baloch said this assault on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria is a grave breach of international law. "We express support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and reject Israeli acquisition of territory by force. We reaffirm our support for the UN Security Council Resolution 497, which declares Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights null and void and without international legal effect," said the spokesperson.

The spokesperson also talked about the terror attack in Afghanistan's Kabul on Wednesday, saying Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar had expressed "shock" at the incident as "any terror activity with whatsoever motive, shall be condemned and Pakistan has unequivocally condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations."

## PHC grants bails to three PTI's leaders

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court has granted protective bail to Deputy Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Surya Bibi and Provincial Minister for Sports Fakhra Jehan till 24th January. The court has also directed the federal government to provide details of the cases registered against them.

A two-member bench of the Peshawar High Court, comprising Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Waqar Ahmad heard the petition while the petitioners' lawyer, Alam Khan Adeenzai informed the court that the federal government had registered multiple cases against the leaders of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) after the November 24 protests in Islamabad.

The lawyer argued that the federal government was not providing them with the details of the cases, making it difficult for them to appear before the relevant courts. He requested the court to direct the federal government to provide the details of the cases and grant protective bail to the petitioners.

The court accepted the petition and granted protective bail to Surya Bibi and Fakhra Jehan till January 24. The court also directed the federal government to provide the details of the cases registered against them. In a separate case, PHC Chief Justice Ishfaq Ibrahim granted protective bail to former provincial minister and PTI leader, Timur Saleem Jhagra, January 3. The court directed Jhagra to appear before the relevant courts and cooperate with the investigation.

**Court sought written response against curtaining LG members powers:** A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Arshad Ali ordered government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to

submit a written response on a petition challenging the transfer of powers from local government representatives to the provincial government, on Thursday.

The petition was filed by Peshawar Mayor Zubair Ali along with Mardan Mayor Himayat Ullah and others. The petitioners' lawyer, Babar Khan Yousafzai argued that the recent amendments to the Local Government Act are in conflict with court decisions and have stripped the local government representatives of their powers.

The lawyer stated that the powers of the Tehsil Council have been transferred to the provincial government, leaving the Tehsil Chairman with no authority. He argued that the amendments to the Local Government Act are contrary to the court's decisions and have resulted in the erosion of the rights of the local government representatives.

Justice Ijaz Anwar asked whether the amendments had resulted in the elimination of the fundamental rights of the local government representatives. The petitioners' lawyer replied that the powers of the local government representatives had been reduced after the amendments.

Justice Syed Arshad Ali observed that judges take an oath to protect the Constitution, and it is their duty to perform their responsibilities. He asked the petitioners' lawyer to prove how the amendments had resulted in the erosion of the fundamental rights of the local government representatives. The Additional Advocate General present in the court argued that the seven merged districts do not have offices or funds for the local government representatives. PHC directed the provincial government to submit a written response and adjourned further hearing till date to be fix.

## Treasury, Opp MPs assail ministers' absence from NA

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Ministers of the ruling coalition party PML-N again faced criticism on Thursday from its ally PPP as well as the opposition PTI for their absence from the National Assembly proceedings.

Session of the Lower House of the parliament also saw both treasury and opposition members protesting the absence of ministers during the question hour. They had expressed their dissatisfaction over several replies given by parliamentary secretaries on behalf of the ministers. Besides the opposition members, the most vocal and strong protest was lodged by the PPP members who termed it "an insult to the parliament".

Shortly after the session began at 11am, PPP's Syed

Naveed Qamar recalled that his party raised the issue of ministers' absence yesterday. "The cabinet is collectively responsible to the National Assembly. It is the ministers' constitutional duty to be present in the House," Qamar said. "There cannot be any other obligation more important than the responsibility to National Assembly and yet they abdicate that responsibility day after day in defiance.

"How do they expect anybody — the opposition or anybody else — to respect parliament when its major beneficiaries decide not to respect parliament?" he asked, adding: "This is ridiculous. We keep on raising this issue and yet they keep on abstaining themselves." The PPP lawmaker then urged NA Deputy Speaker Ghulam Mustafa Shah to issue a "strict rul-

ing" on the issue that the House should not proceed until the ministers were present.

Responding to Qamar, the deputy speaker recalled that he had issued a ruling yesterday that they would write a letter to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to ask him to ensure the presence of ministers for parliamentary business. He highlighted that earlier today, the NA proceedings were paused for 15 minutes to wait for ministers and parliamentary secretaries to arrive. "The government is non-serious and if the government wants the House to continue in this manner, it will not happen." Speaking next, Opposition Leader in the NA Omar Ayub Khan also criticised the absence of ministers during the question hour.

## President for Chinese investment in Pakistan

E.P. Report

KARACHI: President Asif Ali Zardari has called for greater Chinese investment in diverse sectors of Pakistan's economy to boost economic and commercial cooperation between the two brotherly countries. He also emphasized the need for enhanced interaction between the people of the two countries, especially between the investors and businesses, to increase bilateral trade and economic relations.

The President expressed these views while talking to a Chinese business delegation, led by the Chinese Consul General in Karachi, Mr Yang Yundong, at Bilawal House, Karachi. Chief Minister Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah, Minister for Transport and Information, Mr Sharjeel Inam Memon, Minister for Energy, Planning and Development, Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, and Special Assistant to the Chief Minister for Investment and Public Private Partnerships, Syed Qasim N Qamar, also attended the meeting.

The delegation expressed interest to invest \$1 billion to establish a medical city in Pakistan to advance the country's healthcare sector. The delegation also expressed interest to invest in diverse sectors of Pakistan's economy, especially agriculture, livestock, energy, transport, and manufacturing.

Welcoming the delegation, the President said that Pakistan and China shared commonalities of interest and views on important issues, besides enjoying deep-rooted and historic brotherly ties. "We have been close friends for decades, and it was my vision to develop Gawadar Port into a regional trade and economic hub that would not only improve regional connectivity but would also boost regional trade and economic cooperation," he stated. The President said that Pakistan would welcome Chinese investors and preferred to do business with China. He stated that Pakistan was committed to facilitating and supporting Chinese investors in every possible way.

## Israeli drone attack kills 12 in Gaza

GAZA: An Israeli attack on Palestinian security guards escorting a humanitarian aid shipment in the Gaza Strip has killed at least 12 people and injured dozens, Al Jazeera Arabic's correspondents on the ground and news agencies report.

Medics and local residents told the Reuters news agency that at least 30 people were injured, including several in critical condition, following the Israeli attack on Thursday that targeted civilian guards tasked with securing the aid convoy in the southern part of the war-torn enclave. A video clip shared by local Palestinian media in Gaza showed bodies stacked in a morgue that were reported to be the aid convoy's security personnel who were targeted west of Khan Younis.

The attack is only the latest by Israeli forces on humanitarian aid workers, convoys and those trying to assist the safe entry of food and other supplies into war-torn Gaza, which is gripped by food shortages and fears of famine in the north of the territory, where an Israeli military ground operation and siege have been ongoing for several weeks. At least 10 Palestinian people were killed while lining up to buy flour in an Israeli attack on Rafah, which is also in the south of the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli military has yet to comment on its latest reported attack on security guards protecting an aid shipment. Al Jazeera Arabic also reports that six people, including children, were killed in an Israeli attack on a residential building in western Gaza City in the north of the Gaza Strip in the early hours of Thursday morning, while the death toll rose to 13 following Israel's bombing of a house in the Nuseirat refugee camp, in central Gaza.

Gaza's Ministry of Health said in a statement on Wednesday that at least 44,805 Palestinians have now been killed and 106,257 wounded in Israel's unrelenting war on the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023. — Aljazeera

# KP CM unveils major initiatives to empower youth

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has taken a significant step towards youth empowerment and employment by launching four major programs worth billions of rupees. These programs include the Ehsaas Hunar Program worth Rs. 4 billion, the Rural Economic Transformation Project worth Rs. 11.4 billion, the upgradation of technical educational institutes, and an on-job training program for TEVTA graduates.

The launch ceremony, held at the Chief Minister's House, with the Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur as a chief guest, was attended by provincial cabinet members, the Deputy Speaker of the Provincial Assembly, Members of the Provincial Assembly, government officials, and selected beneficiaries.

The Ehsaas Hunar Program to be implemented through Akhuwat Microfinance, aims to provide interest-free loans of up to Rs. 500,000 to skilled youth for start-ups and entrepreneurs. The provincial government has allocated Rs. 2 billion for this initiative in the current fiscal year. More than 35,000 skilled youth are expected to benefit from the program.

The Rural Economic Transformation Project was launched in collaboration with IFAD and the European Union. This important project of Rs. 11.4 billion will offer free technical and vocational training to 60,000 youth males and females from rural areas. Additionally, financial assistance averaging \$300 per person will be provided to 42,000 skilled individuals to promote self-employment. The program will also facilitate internships and employment for 25,000 TEVTA graduates.

The third important initiative regarding upgradation of the selected Technical and Vocational Educational Institutes would be funded by GIZ-European Union. Under the initiative, two Government Colleges of Technology in Nowshera and Abbottabad would be upgraded to the status of Centers of Excellence. Moreover, 22 technical institutions across the province will be

upgraded into model institutes, and nine other institutes have been selected to offer DAE Level-5 certifications.

On the Job Training Program for TEVTA Graduates has been launched with investment of Rs. 177 million. Under this program over 3,000 graduates would be placed in the selected industries for internships in a phased manner. In the first phase, 168 students will be offered three-month internships, each receiving a monthly stipend of Rs. 15,000. The cost of the first phase is estimated at Rs. 7.56 million.

Addressing the gathering, Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur underlined the importance of empowering the youth, terming them the nation's most valuable asset. He emphasized that creating employment opportunities for the youth is vital for the nation's progress and self-reliance.

"The Ehsaas Hunar Program is a crucial part of our efforts to empower youth of the province," he said and added that in the past, technical education was largely neglected, leaving many of our graduates with degrees that lacked international recognition. Our government is now focused on providing internationally accredited certifications", he remarked.

The Chief Minister underscored the need for youth to take advantage of the opportunities being provided, stating 'the government cannot offer everyone public-sector jobs, it is committed to creating avenues in the private sector'. Highlighting the province's economic growth, he noted, "Due to our efforts, KP's revenue has increased by 44%. This additional income will be reinvested in our youth. We will not pass on the deprivation we endured to the next generation. Hard work is the key to success, and there is no substitute for it."

He urged the youth to create their own employment opportunities while contributing to the nation's development. Special Assistant to the Chief Minister on Technical Education, Tufail Anjum, also addressed the event, reiterating the government's dedication to skill development and youth empowerment.

## Sindh always embraced foreign investors: Sharjeel

E.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said that the Government of Pakistan and the Government of Sindh have always embraced foreign investors. He said the Sindh government is working with active public private partnership mode and full facility will be provided in all respects to the investors on a public private partnership basis.

Addressing the Sindh Investment Conference at a local hotel in Karachi, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon said that Chinese investors are interested in investing in the medical city and transport sector in Karachi. He said that President Asif Ali Zardari on behalf of the Sindh government has

offered full support to Chinese investors.

He said Sindh was the best region for foreign investment as it possesses the potential of providing Thar coal-based inexpensive electricity to the country for two hundred years continuously, besides becoming the hub of many companies, which are practically engaged in providing green energy within Sindh. Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said, "Farmers will gain immense benefits from corporate farming as latest technology will help them achieve maximum yield from limited water availability".

He said that a combination of Chinese technology and the opportunities available in Pakistan is the way forward for further development. He vowed that the Sindh government will extend full security to the Chinese investors and that

he wished such opportunities continued to thrive.

Addressing the ceremony, the Provincial Minister for Energy, Planning, and Development Syed Nasir Hussain Shah accorded a warm welcome to the Chinese investors and Consul General of Turkiye present on this occasion. He appreciated the efforts made by the Investment Department to organize the investment conference and assured full cooperation on behalf of the Sindh government to the international investors.

Syed Nasir Hussain Shah said, "Sindh offers investment opportunities in the energy, industrial, agricultural, and transport sectors." The Sindh government welcomes not only Chinese investors but also all the international investors and offers full cooperation and facilities to all investors.



KARACHI: Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah, Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon and others in a group photo with PPP Chairman, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

## PTI can't get 'Faizyab' anymore: Sherry tells Senate

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The opposition and the treasury benches have traded barbs in the Senate over the late-night crackdown on the PTI supporters during its "do-or-die" protest in Islamabad, with PPP Senator Sherry Rehman saying that the former ruling party took a back seat

"because they know they can no longer be Faizyab" — a tacit reference to the alleged support of detained former spy chief Lt Gen (ret'd) Faiz Hamid to previous Imran Khan-led regime.

"You [PTI] have launched an attack against the state [...] you will get freedom once you accept the responsibility," the senator said during the session of the upper house of parliament on Thursday. Rehman asked the Imran Khan-founded party to tender an apology over the violence took place during the November 26 and May 9, 2023, protests. "The Constitution of Pakistan was flouted during the PTI's

tenure," she said, noting that following their ouster, they even wrote a letter to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to halt its financial assistance to Pakistan.

She asked the opposition party to endure the imprisonment, saying: "What PTI did on May 9 was never done by any political party." "Now they have to sit down because they know they can no longer be Faizyab," she said. Meanwhile, PML-N Senator Iftan Siddiqui also lashed out at the PTI saying everyone has a right to stage a peaceful protest but does "a peaceful protest is being held by chanting slogans of Al-Jihad, kill or die?" Referring to the PTT's protest in Islamabad last month that turned violent, the ruling party senator said the opposition party neither filed any application nor sought permission for the public gathering.

Speaking about the reported icebreaker meeting between the PTI leaders and National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq, Siddiqui said the

PML-N never closed its door on talks. "We want talks, we are ready for negotiations," he said clarifying that no formal negotiations have commenced between the PTI and the government.

He also made a sarcastic remark about the talks: "We are hearing from you that the ice is melting [between the government and the PTI]. By the way, snow is falling all around us." However, Siddiqui also expressed apprehensions about the prospect of the talks with the PTI, stating that the view of jailed PTI founder Imran Khan regarding parleys is not yet known.

He recalled that the rival parties also held fruitful talks in May 2022 "but after talks, he [Imran Khan] left happily and later refused to negotiate". "It seems like the perspective of the PTI founder has changed towards us now." Speaking on the Senate floor, PTI lawmaker Barrister Ali Zafar metaphorically said: "Parliament building told me that the democracy in this country has ended".