

Road accident claims 4 lives
F.P. Report

MUZAFFARGARH: A speeding passenger van collided with a tractor trolley near Sinanwan, Muzaffargarh district, resulting in the deaths of four people and leaving 12 others injured, some critically. The incident occurred while the passenger van was traveling from Kot Addo to Multan. Emergency responders swiftly arrived at the scene, transferring the injured to nearby hospitals.



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GAZA: An injured Palestinian girl sitting on a stretcher at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir el-Balah.

Justice Jamal requests judicial nominations

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court's Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel has responded in writing to a letter written to him by senior apex court judge, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, saying the latter's suggestions regarding the rules and strict mechanism for appointing judges in the judiciary have been considered previously and his letter in this regard will also be studied.

Justice Mandokhel also said that Justice Shah could give his suggestions to the Rules Committee in the future also. Justice Mandokhel further said in his letter that Justice Shah spoke about the 26th Constitutional Amendment also. "I will not respond to it because petitions against it are pending in the Supreme Court," he replied. "I am also of the same opinion that the intention of the Constitution is that the judiciary should be independent and impartial. The members of the judiciary should be competent and honest, and the rules are being specifically made for this purpose. The Judicial Commission was reconstituted after the 26th Amendment."

Justice Mandokhel, the head of the committee responsible for making rules for judicial appointments, said the new commission gave the chief justice of Pakistan the authority to form a committee to make the rules for judges' appointment, which the CJP did under his leadership.

"The committee has held two meetings, and your recommendations have already been included in the draft and I have shared the proposed draft with you before

writing the letter. The mandate of the committee is only to prepare a draft of the rules for the appointment of judges. It has been learnt that you suggested the names of judges for three high courts. My suggestion is to give the names of judges after the approval of the rules by the commission," the letter stated.

On Friday, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah had written a letter to Justice Jamal Mandokhel, saying that after the 26th Amendment, the balance of the role of the judiciary in the appointment of judges had deteriorated. According to Justice Shah, the judiciary once had a prominent role in appointing judges, but the 26th Amendment has shifted the balance of power, increasing the role of the executive. He warned that if any appointment were made contrary to established criteria and strict rules, it could significantly damage public confidence in the judiciary.

Justice Shah emphasized that the creation of transparent rules by the Judicial Commission is critical for the independence of the judiciary. He pointed out that without these rules, any proceedings or decisions made by the Judicial Commission regarding judicial appointments would be unconstitutional. Article 175(4) empowers the Judicial Commission to make rules, the letter stated. The letter further noted that the 26th Amendment has disturbed the equilibrium between the judiciary and the executive, leaving the judiciary in the minority within the Judicial Commission. The executive now holding a majority in the commission increases the risk of political appointments.

PTI urged to delay civil disobedience movement

F.P. Report

CHAMAN: Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkM-AP) Chairman Mahmood Khan Achakzai has urged Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to postpone its planned civil disobedience movement.

In conversation with media on Saturday, Achakzai, who is the president of the opposition alliance Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-e-Pakistan (TTAP), emphasised the importance of dialogue with the government to resolve the country's pressing issues.

Achakzai stressed that discussions should focus on a clear roadmap for when the government will step down. He said: "If problems can be resolved through dialogue, there's nothing better than that. However, if talks fail, the movement will have to proceed." He further proposed that successful negotiations should lead to elections within four months. Achakzai also announced plans to visit Peshawar tomorrow at PTI's invitation to offer prayers for the martyrs of Kurram and PTI.

Court acquits 32 suspects in PTI's protest

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Islamabad acquitted 32 persons, whom the police had produced after picking them up in connection with the PTI's November 24 protest.

Judge Abul Hasnat Zulqarnain, who heard the case, while expressing his strong displeasure over the production of the suspects late at night, warned the policemen against arresting these individuals again, saying he would give their arrest orders in case they did so. Advocate Ansar Kiyani represented the suspects in the court.

The police officials told the judge that the men had been taken into custody on November 25, but they were still to be sent for an identification parade. They prayed to the court to grant their 30-day physical remand.

Advocate Kiyani said that on the one hand, police had yet to send the suspects for identification, while on the other the Force was seeking their physical remand. "The police picked up poor people from their homes only to show its efficiency," he added.

ment agencies to use lethal force against unarmed citizens" through statements made in the media. The petition said that on Naqvi's directives, the other respondents "held consultations and conspired to arrange a coordinated attack on the peaceful protesters".

The petition accused the PM and the cabinet ministers named as respondents of ordering authorities to use lethal force to "teach a lesson" to the demonstrators on November 26. It listed the 12 PTI workers who were allegedly killed in the protest, as well as 38 workers who were wounded and 139 others reportedly missing.

"Their actions constitute not only a gross abuse of power but also criminal offences under the Pakistan Penal Code ... and violations of international human rights standards," the petition read. "This premeditated conspiracy of the accused to kill unarmed citizens represents a grave assault on the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and the sanctity of human life." Gohar pleaded that the respondents be summoned through non-bailable arrest warrants and punished and sentenced as per the law.

Murtaza Turi.

During the hearing, the judge observed that seven other people were also accused in the case, urging the counsels not to indulge him in unnecessary prolonging of the case. On this, the lawyer expressed lack of knowledge about the whereabouts of other accused. "You can file exemption request for Barrister Gohar, I will accept that," the judge replied. Later, the court adjourned the hearing while directing others accused in the case to file acquittal pleas.

However, a day ago Gohar had filed a petition with the Islamabad Judicial Magistrate against Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, the Islamabad police chief and others over the alleged deaths of 12 PTI workers during the November 26 protests.

According to the petition, the respondents "formulated a plan to deal with peaceful protesters in order to sabotage the constitutional and fundamental rights". Gohar accused Naqvi of declaring "his intentions that orders had been issued to law enforce-

PTI has put across its demands for talks: Gohar

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Barrister Gohar said that they didn't have any preconditions for the negotiations, instead they had expressed their demands in front of the government.

Speaking to media outside the Islamabad district and sessions court, the PTI chief said that PTI founder Imran Khan had called for parleys in the past as well, necessitating political dialogue for ending cul-de-sac.

He said negotiations were held earlier but ended without reaching a settlement, adding that politicians would have to sit together for cooling down the political temperature. Earlier, a hearing was held in the district and sessions court Islamabad against the PTI top brass in connection with their alleged involvement in party's protest in Islamabad.

Judicial Magistrate Shehzad Khan conducted hearing of the case registered against the PTI leadership in the Karachi Company Police Station. The PTI chief appeared before the court along with his lawyers including Amna Ali, Sardar Masroof and

Pakistan, ADB sign \$330m loan agreement

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Saturday formally signed a loan agreement for the Integrated Social Protection Development Program (ISPD) Additional Financing, amounting to USD 330 million.

"This program builds on the ongoing ADB-funded program for

strengthening and expanding social protection systems in Pakistan through the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP)," a press statement issued by Economic Affairs Division read. The agreement was signed by Secretary Economic Affairs Dr Kazim Niaz and ADB Country Director Emma Fan.

Speaking on the occasion, Secretary, Ministry of Economic

Affairs highlighted the importance of this additional financing from concessional lending for enhancing institutional capacity and improving access to education and healthcare particularly among women, adolescent girls, and children from low-income families. He expressed gratitude for ADB's continued support in this regard, according to press release.

The Frontier Post

Special lawyer courts setup
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The federal government established special courts across Pakistan to ensure the protection of lawyers. The establishment of these courts has been notified in Islamabad and all four provinces, as per the Lawyers' Welfare and Protection Act 2013. The decision was made in consultation with the chief justices of all high courts in the country.

PM seeks joint session of parliament on 'Madrasa Bill'

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif sent advice to President Asif Ali Zardari, requesting him to convene a joint session of the Parliament.

According to the sources, the Prime Minister has proposed December 17 for the session, during which eight bills, including one on registering religious seminaries, are expected to be approved.

Sources further informed that consultations between the government and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) are ongoing regarding the new bill on madrassah registration. It is pertinent to mention that President Asif Ali Zardari had previously raised objections to the madrassah bill and returned it for reconsideration.

Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC), Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, on the other hand, stated that no compromise is possible on the

issue of madrassah registration. In a statement addressing the ongoing controversy, Ashrafi said the main disagreement revolves around ensuring that seminaries affiliated with the Ministry of Education are not subjected to adverse legislation. He highlighted that seminaries already conduct audits and maintain transparent financial records.

"If anyone wishes to examine the accounts of madrassahs, why would they object?" Ashrafi asked, adding that no international power has the right to interfere in Pakistan's system, particularly its madrassah framework. He also clarified that seminaries have never faced issues in the context of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in the past and do not face any currently. "Blame games and abusive language will not resolve the challenges faced by madrassahs," he concluded.

Reacting to objections to the legislation on Saturday, JUI-F leader

Hafiz Hamdullah alleged that the government's 'prime objective is handing over seminaries to FATF [Financial Action Task Force] at the behest of the global anti-money laundering watchdog'.

"It has also proved that this is not the parliament of Pakistan but FATF's," the JUI-F leader said. He went on to say that the country's "parliament is not independent to legislate [laws]". He said that objections would not have been raised at the seminaries registration bill had the legal experts at the President's House read the legislation.

Speaking to the media in Karachi earlier today, Federal Education Minister Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui said that 10 out of 15 seminaries' boards had raised objections to the bill which led the federal government to review it. He added that the government was working to give a legal shape to the combative Societies Act.

President's objections on seminaries bill legal, constitutional, says Tarar

ISLAMABAD, ISTANBUL (APP): Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar said on Saturday that the objections raised by the President of Pakistan on the seminaries bill were legal and constitutional.

Using his X account, in reaction to JUI-F leader Hafiz Hamdullah's post he said that in the objections there was no mention of Financial Action Task Force (FATF). He remarked that doing politics on legal and constitutional matters was in nobody's interest.

Linking registration of religious seminaries with FATF was only tantamount to the creating baseless stories. He said that procedure of legislation was clearly mentioned in the Constitution. The minister said that the President had raised constitutional objections and the Parliament had to address those objections. Unnecessary statements and criticism on the issue, the President and the Parliament should be avoided, he maintained.

Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar on Saturday said the objections raised by President Asif Ali Zardari on the seminaries' registration bill are completely "constitutional and legal".

"In these objections, there is no mention of Financial Action Task

Force (FATF), nor they have any connection with it," said the minister in a post on X formerly Twitter. He said it is not in the interest of anyone to politicize the constitutional and legal matters. "Linking the registration of seminaries with FATF is nothing but a creation of complete imagination and speculation", he said.

The Constitution elaborated the complete procedure for legislation, he said, adding the President objected in accordance with the Constitution and the Parliament would also rectify it in the same spirit. The purpose of these speculations is to target the powers of the President and Parliament, he said, while urging the people not to criticize the issue just for the sake of criticism.

Meanwhile, Federal Minister of Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar met Turkish Presidency's Head of Communications, Fahrettin Altun and discussed important issues including strengthening cooperation in the media sector, promoting public diplomacy and eliminating Islamophobia.

They also discussed measures to counter disinformation and misinformation, exchanged media delegations, and prepared joint productions. They also agreed to telecast Turkish dramas like Ertugrul Ghazi in Pakistan, including a joint broadcast of PTV and Turkish state TV "TRT." Pakistan's

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the Turkish Directorate of Communications also agreed to form a working group and appoint focal persons from both sides.

The minister said that Pakistan and Turkiye have historical and fraternal relations and that there are vast possibilities for cooperation in the field of media. Tarar said public relations would be more stable with enhanced media cooperation between the two countries. Cooperation and joint ventures in the field of entertainment and tourism were also discussed in the meeting.

By preparing joint productions between Pakistan and Turkiye, the cultural exchanges between both countries will be enhanced, Attaullah Tarar said, adding, "We have to make the young generation aware of the historical relationship between Pakistan and Turkiye". Federal Information Minister invited Professor Fahrettin Altun to visit Pakistan. Professor Altun expressed a keen interest in the development of media in Pakistan. He said Turkish drama Ertugrul Ghazi gained great popularity in Pakistan and Pakistani artists and musicians were very popular in Turkiye. Media cooperation in both countries will help in the fight against Islamophobia and misinformation, he remarked.

Govt decides to terminate packts with 6 more IPPs

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has decided to terminate agreements with six more Independent Power Producers (IPPs), supplying expensive electricity, potentially saving Rs300 billion.

The decision includes ending power purchase agreements totaling 2,396 MW with Gul Ahmed Energy (136 MW), Kapkoo Power (1,638 MW), Liberty Power (200 MW), Attock Power (165 MW), Kohinoor Energy (131 MW), and Tapal Energy (126 MW).


This move is aimed at reducing electricity tariffs and follow the government's earlier termination of 13 IPPs agreements, including eight bagasse-based plants. A task force has been negotiating with IPPs to address annual capacity payment exceeding Rs2 trillion.

ECP fixes hearing against Imran

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Saturday fixed hearing of contempt case against former premier and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan.

According to sources, the ECP fixed December 17 as the hearing date of the contempt case against cricketer-turned-politician by issuing cause list and notices.



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KARACHI A man selling Chicken Yakhni after cold increasing Provincial Capital. —INP Photo

Khalid Maqbool advocates for Karachi's development

KARACHI (INP): Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM-P) Chairman Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui has expressed strong criticism over the current state of governance, particularly highlighting the lack of autonomy in Karachi's local government matters. Speaking at the inauguration of an IT lab at the National Textile University in Korangi, Siddiqui stated that his record in resigning from government positions is "very bad" and emphasized that there is little benefit to democracy in a government where local governance lacks independence.

Siddiqui also referred to the powers granted to Karachi's local government as a "fraud," underscoring his dissatisfaction with the political system. He explained that he has consistently resigned from ministries in the past but remains uncertain about the timing of his future decisions regarding government positions. He further criticized the hastily passed 26th Constitutional Amendment, noting that it failed to consider the role of madrasas, and urged for a fresh vision in Pakistan's development. "The prosperity of Karachi is the key to the prosperity of Pakistan,"

said Siddiqui. He stressed that until Karachi thrives, the country's development would remain hindered. Drawing comparisons to Islamabad, he advocated for the transformation of Karachi into a prosperous city that could drive the nation's economic success. Siddiqui emphasized the importance of thinking in a new way to rebuild Pakistan, asserting that when Karachi thrives, the nation thrives. In his speech, he also highlighted the historical conspiracies against Karachi's institutions, which he claimed had been dismantled and transferred to Bangladesh rather than being allocated

to other provinces. He reiterated that working towards the development of Karachi would, in turn, lead to the progress of the entire country. Meanwhile, MQM-P leader Mustafa Kamal praised Senator Faisal Vawda during a recent meeting at the MQM's Bahadurabad headquarters. Vawda, who had visited the party's leadership, stressed the importance of political unity for Pakistan's stability. He urged all political parties to set aside differences and work together on a national agenda aimed at resolving the current political and economic crises.

Dacoits snatch minced meat from butcher

KARACHI (INP): Two dacoits snatched minced meat from a butcher at gunpoint but didn't ask for his valuable belongings. The incident occurred in the Liaquatabad area where two armed men snatched 10kg of ground meat from a butcher and escaped. Surprisingly, the thieves left behind the victim's mobile phone and cash. The robbery occurred early morning when the butcher was transporting the mince meat and other items to his shop. Two armed men, wearing masks, stopped the butcher and demanded him to hand over the mince. The thieves threatened to shoot the butcher if he informed anyone about the incident. While talking to the media the victim said that he was bringing minced meat and other items on a cart to his shop, but was stopped by two armed boys at gunpoint, asking him to hand over mince. To his wonder, the dacoits didn't touch his mobile phone and cash. He said that the robbers were wearing masks and threatened him to shoot if he informed anyone about the incident.

Improving healthcare top priority: health minister

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique Saturday highlighted the provincial government's commitment to enhancing the health sector, describing it as a top priority for Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. He was addressing a conference of Vice Chancellors and Principals held at the Department of Specialized Healthcare and Medical Education here. In his opening remarks, the minister welcomed participants and outlined the conference's agenda, which included a comprehensive review of government teaching hospitals' performance. He highlighted the ongoing success of the Chief Minister's Children's Heart Surgery Program and the Chief Minister's Free Medicine Project, underscoring their importance in providing accessible healthcare. He announced that all dialysis centers in Punjab are undergoing inspections to ensure quality care. Additionally, major projects, such as the Nawaz Sharif Institute of Cancer Treatment and Research in Lahore and the Nawaz Sharif Institute of

Cardiology in Sargodha, are underway to address the needs of cancer and cardiac patients respectively. "All teaching hospital heads must exhibit leadership qualities," the minister stressed, urging them to take ownership of their institutions. He also revealed plans to automate government hospitals, address gaps in the Universal Health Insurance Program, and enforce a zero-tolerance policy against corruption. The minister called for the publication of a monthly journal documenting the performance of government hospitals and encouraged vice chancellors and principals to actively identify corruption. "Allah Almighty has given us a rare opportunity to serve humanity in government hospitals," he said. He also discussed the government's focus on revamping hospital infrastructure, promoting telemedicine in medical institutions, and introducing private practice opportunities in government hospitals. "Providing the best medical facilities to patients is among our top priorities," he said, promising

better healthcare for the people of Punjab. Punjab Health Secretary Azmat Mahmood echoed these sentiments, emphasizing the need to ensure an uninterrupted supply of medicines in hospitals and urging hospital heads to prioritize patient care. He highlighted efforts to improve nursing colleges and address human resource shortages in government hospitals. Additionally, CEO Punjab Healthcare Commission Dr. Sagib Aziz presented strategies to enhance health indicators and improve service delivery in government hospitals. The conference concluded with a shared resolve to transform Punjab's healthcare system, making it more efficient, transparent, and accessible for the province's citizens. The conference was attended by Special Secretary Syed Wajid Ali Shah, Special Secretary Tariq Mahmood, Additional Secretaries Sajjad Khan, Dr. Muhammad Waseem, Anwar Briar, Chief Planning Officer Abdul Haq Bhatti, Deputy Secretaries and other officials.

Murtaza inaugurates Clean and Safe drinking water facility

KARACHI: Mayor Murtaza Wahab inaugurated Nestlé Pakistan's first clean and safe drinking water facility in Karachi, that aims to cater to more than 10,000 people every day in the district of Bin Qasim Town. Speaking on the occasion, Murtaza Wahab said "Access to clean and safe drinking water is a basic necessity, and I am touched that Nestlé has focused its community efforts for the people of Karachi. It is a remarkable contribution, and I am hopeful that people will truly benefit from this." During the inauguration, Jason Avanceña, Chief Executive Officer, Nestlé Pakistan said, "We are committed to Creating Shared Value throughout our value chain for communities and the inaugura-



tion of this ninth clean safe drinking water facility is a testament to our commitment to making a positive impact for families, communities and the planet, in line with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals." Nestlé Pakistan has already developed and is currently managing nine clean and safe drinking water facilities around its manufacturing sites in

Sheikhupura, Kabirwala, Khanewal, Islamabad and Karachi. With the inauguration of this facility in Karachi in collaboration with Karachi Metropolitan Corporation and Port Qasim Authority, approximately 90,000 people will have access to clean and safe drinking water daily through these facilities. Pakistan is making considerable progress in improving access to clean

drinking water especially in Karachi. This facility will use ultrafiltration water treatment technology with capacity to supply up to 3,000 liters per hour of clean and safe drinking water. It will utilize a multi-stage filtration process, with monitoring systems that guarantee consistent quality and a UV disinfection unit providing an extra layer of protection. The plant is also equipped with energy-efficient pumps and utilizes sustainable practices to minimize its environmental footprint. Nestlé's efforts under its flagship Caring for Water-Pakistan initiative, are focused on three pillars: factories, communities, and agriculture. All its Clean and Safe Drinking Water Facilities across the country are having a positive effect on communities where it operates, in line with UN SDGs 6, 13 and 17.

Sindh introduces new motor vehicle fitness certificates

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Department of Transport and Mass Transit, Government of Sindh, has introduced new Motor Vehicle Fitness Certificates along with the updated SOPs for the MVIS. The new certificates will carry the modern security features like barcodes, and they will be effective from December 1, 2024. Orders have been issued by the Transport Department in this regard. The new measures, according to the senior minister of Sindh and provincial minister for information, transport, and mass transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, are designed to enhance vehicle fitness standards. It aims at road safety improvement, reduction in environmental pollution, prevention of issuance of fake certificates, and revenue for the government.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said in a statement that detailed SOPs have been issued for Motor Vehicle Inspectors across Sindh. He said that these instructions must be strictly followed to ensure uniformity and accountability in the issuance of fitness certificates. He announced that the Transport Department will notify the cut-off date of new certificates, and any old fitness certificates issued will be null and void from that day onwards. Besides, all the old records that are present in MVI wings across Sindh will be confiscated and a central database of fitness certificates will be maintained through an Android application. Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said assistance would be taken from the law enforcement agencies, such as traffic police, district SSPs, and highway and motorway police, to get the people on board

the new system. He added that regular snap checks would be conducted by designated officers and that any inspector issuing a fake certificate would be taken to task. The campaign for creating public awareness would be initiated through print and electronic media, while meetings with transport associations would be organized for the proper implementation of the new measures. Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said that designated locations in Saeedabad, Malir, and Keamari are being established for the comprehensive inspection of vehicles. Similar facilities are also being set up in other districts. For effective management, Karachi will be divided into two zones, East and West. A focal person will oversee operations in Karachi and submit a monthly progress report to the department.

NAB warns public to be cautious of fraud and forgery

LAHORE (APP): The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on Saturday has warned the public to be careful to avoid fraud and forgery. NAB has warned the public to avoid buying and selling files of unregistered housing schemes and not to provide any details on fake messages about ATM card blocking. The National Accountability Bureau local chapter sources told APP that it has advised people to be careful of frauds through online trading of cryptocurrencies, illegal deposits and private loan apps. NAB has further directed the public not to believe in promises of high profits or unrealistic prizes, urging them to be wary of fake messages about multi-level marketing, online lottery and Benazir Income Support Program (BISP). National Accountability Bureau sources further informed that online trading of foreign currency, fake online jobs and offers of visas are tactics of fraudsters, citizens should not provide their personal or bank account information, password or PIN code to anyone. NAB sources advised people that instead of being tempted by high profits, be careful because caution is better than regret.

Smog Clean Tower to be activated on 21st

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab government on Saturday decided to install a smog clean tower in the provincial capital to control air pollution. Its worth mentioning here that the Smog Clean Tower, has been developed by the Department of Environmental Protection to eliminate smog, and it is being installed in Mehmoody Buti. The location has been selected due to the high level of air pollution. The installation and calibration of the tower is underway. It will be fully functional by December 21. The Smog Clean Tower has the ability to clean toxic particles in the air and will play an important role in reducing air pollution in the city. Senior Provincial Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb has already termed this initiative as a revolutionary step towards environmental protection. Marriyum Aurangzeb has said that the use of modern technology is the need of the hour to overcome a serious problem like smog. This tower will prove to be a model not only for Lahore but also for the entire country. The government is taking all possible steps to address environmental challenges, she added.

10.6 mln children to be vaccinated during polio drive

KARACHI (DNA): As many as 10.6 million children would be vaccinated across the province during week long anti-polio drive, starting from December 16 (Monday). In order to achieve vaccination target, 80,000 frontline workers will participate in the campaign, going door to door to ensure that no child is left unattended, a press release issued by Sindh Health department stated. To provide a secure environment for these efforts, 15,000 security personnel will be deployed across Sindh. The campaign will be held from December 16 to 22, 2024. This year, 63 children in Pakistan have been affected

by polio, including 17 from Sindh, highlighting the urgent need for effective vaccination campaigns. The situation remains critical, with most environmental samples testing positive for the virus, indicating ongoing circulation. This campaign is a crucial effort to halt the spread of the virus and protect children from its devastating impact. This is the last campaign of the year, making it imperative that every child is vaccinated to stop the transmission of the virus and protect them from a lifetime of disability. Parents and caregivers are urged to cooperate with vaccination teams and

ensure that their children receive the polio vaccine. Repeated doses are essential to building strong immunity against the virus. For those who miss the vaccination during the campaign, the Emergency Operations Centre's Sehat Tahaffuz Helpline 1166 or WhatsApp Helpline 0346-7776546 is available to provide assistance and information. The Department of Health calls on media, community leaders, and religious scholars to amplify awareness about the importance of vaccination and support this vital campaign to secure a polio-free future for Sindh, Pakistan, and the world.

FBR launches faceless customs assessment system in Karachi

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Under the Transformation Plan, Federal Board of Revenue is going to implement Faceless Customs Assessment (FCA) System from 15th of December, 2024 at Karachi. FCA is one of the key components of the FBR Transformation Plan approved by the Prime Minister of Pakistan. All the import goods declarations filed after 12.00 AM in the Appraisal Collectorates of Karachi shall be allocated to the Central Appraising Unit (CAU) for assessment which has been established at South Asia Pakistan Terminal Karachi in terms of CGO No.6 of 2024 issued by FBR a few days ago. The introduction of FCA is expected to bring a significant change in the overall

culture and working of the Customs department. It would facilitate trade by reducing the clearance time and would also induce efficiency and transparency in assessments. After successful completion of the first phase at Karachi, the system would soon be rolled out at the upcountry ports and border stations and the appraisal function of Customs would be relocated outside the Customs Collectorates. All the arrangements have been finalized for the housing of appraisers and principal appraisers in a sanitized environment and 55 officers have already been posted to the CAU. For enhancing productivity and ensuring accountability of the customs appraising officers posted in CAU, an incentive-based perform-

ance management mechanism has been introduced in the system. This mechanism would reward the appraising officers who perform their duties with diligence and integrity. The eligibility criteria and licensing regime of Customs Clearing Agents have also been revamped and a points scoring system is being introduced to make them responsible for the correct and quality declarations. Under the point scoring system, the Customs Agents who give true and honest declarations of description, value and origin etc. shall score more points and their profile would improve. On the contrary, the Customs agents who fail to show improvements in the declarations, would lose points and eventually their licence may be cancelled.

Committee formed to probe illegal trees cutting: Marriyum

LAHORE (APP): Senior Provincial Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said on Saturday that an inquiry committee had been formed to probe illegal cutting of trees and the sale of rare timber in the Cholisthan Range Management Division. She said that Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz had issued directives for launching crackdown on the timber mafia, as illegal deforestation was a significant contributor to smog. In compliance with the CM orders, the Forest Department conducted a grand operation in the region, especially targeting illegal felling of trees and its sale. The department carried out multiple raids and intercepted a trailer loaded with stolen timber. The confiscated timber and vehicle

were seized under the Forest Act 1927, initiating legal proceedings. The culprits were fined Rs. 5.148 million. Additionally, the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Cholisthan and relevant field staff were suspended over negligence in duty. Departmental disciplinary action was initiated against the suspended officials and the committee formed to probe the matter was directed to submit a report in seven days. Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said, "This committee will conduct a transparent investigation, free from any external pressure, and strict action will be taken against those responsible." She highlighted that the government's recent measures are critical steps toward combating smog. Illegal defor-

estation not only contributes to smog but also causes soil erosion, climate change, and water scarcity. The government is leveraging modern technologies such as drone surveillance and GIS mapping to protect forests alongside afforestation efforts. The minister appealed to the public to support the government's environmental protection initiatives, stating, "We must understand that cutting down one tree puts countless lives at risk." She reiterated the government's commitment to utilizing all available resources to eliminate illegal deforestation, control smog, and create a greener Pakistan. These measures, she added, will not only improve the environment but also ensure a safer future for generations to come.

Govt committed to create opportunities for youths: Rana Mashhood

LAHORE (INP): Prime Minister's Youth Programme Chairman Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan has said that the government is committed to creating opportunities for youths to help them become self sufficient. Talking to media after visiting College of Tourism and Hotel (COTHM) Management here on Saturday, he said, "It has been 22 years that College

of Tourism and Hotel Management is serving youngsters of the country in skill sector, hospitality services and related to technical education. COTHM is doing good work for employment as well. One can see trained and certified students of COTHM working across the globe." He said that there was a need to educate the country's skilled labour ethically. "The skill development

company and fund which had been created in 2010, this initiative aimed at letting youngsters to shape their better future in a respectable manner. With the support of China, the first technical education university has been established in Punjab. Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz is working more aggressively on empowering youngsters and the Punjab skill sector has set a target to

get employment for 7,000 or more youngsters abroad besides giving employment within Pakistan. Under Prime Minister's Youth Skill Programme, a big programme is ongoing under which a target had been set to get employment for more than 1.2 million youngsters abroad besides giving employment to 1.5 million to 1.8 million youngsters within the country," he added.



Cabinet commits to solve dispute

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A crucial meeting was held at the Governor's House in Peshawar to resolve the differences within the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Nowshera district. The meeting was attended by the provincial president, provincial cabinet members, and representatives of the PPP ideological group.

The meeting, which lasted for three hours, aimed to address the ongoing disputes within the PPP Nowshera district. The attendees included PPP provincial president Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha, provincial general secretary Shahzi Khan, provincial cabinet members Gohar Khan Inqilabi, Farzand Wazir, and Peoples Labour Wing provincial president Shah Zulqarnain. Additionally, representatives of the PPP Nazriati group, including Yousuf Shabab, Maulana Muhammad Usman Ali Shah, Saeedullah Khan, and Noor-ul-Bashar Sawal, also participated in the meeting.

During the meeting, the PPP Nazriati group presented a clear stance, emphasizing

ing that the three-member interim organization formed in 2024 should be dissolved in the first phase. They also stressed that the district organization in Nowshera should be formed through mutual consultation. Furthermore, they demanded that the bogus organizations formed on provincial constituencies should be abolished.

The PPP Nazriati group criticized the actions of certain party officials, including Flak Naz Khan and Najeebullah Khattak, who had opposed PPP candidates in the 2024 elections. They argued that these officials had violated party discipline and should not be reinstated to party positions.

The provincial leadership agreed to consider the demands of the PPP ideological group and to hold further talks to resolve the issues. The next round of negotiations will be held with the mutual consent of both parties.

The meeting concluded with an agreement to continue the dialogue and work towards resolving the disputes within the PPP Nowshera district.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur addressing annual prize distribution ceremony at Public School.

Syndicate of Agriculture varsity holds meeting

PESHAWAR (APP): The 122th syndicate meeting of Agriculture University Peshawar was held here Saturday under the chair of Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Jehan Bakht.

The meeting was attended by syndicate members including Justice Retired, Irshad Qaisar, Deputy Secretary Agriculture Department, Deputy Secretary Higher Education Commission (HEC), Deputy Secretary Finance and concerned faculty members.

The meeting discussed proposals forwarded by finance and planning department, administrative and education related matters. The syndicate members also approved establishment of daycare center in the varsity.

Addressing the meeting, Vice Chancellor appreciated efforts of provincial government and HEC to continue education and research activities and urged university faculty to join hands for development of university. He also underlined the significance of quality education and research activities in the varsity.

Students of govt primary schools showcase extra skills in co-curricular activities

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Little students of government primary schools showcased their extra creative skills and talent during an annual competition concluded in Adenzai here on Saturday. The School Leaders of the Adenzai subdivision organized the annual co-curricular competition to build community trust in government primary schools. A total of 300 students of over 50 government primary schools from the Adenzai tehsil, showcased their academic, cultural, and creative talents in science projects, recitation of the Holy Quran, speeches, naat, national anthem and entrepreneurial skills and art exhibition.

Three semi finals were held at government primary school (GPS) Kotigram, GPS Dagai Osakai and GPS Ouch Sharqi to ensure fair judgement among the toppers.

The winners from the semifinals advanced to the

grand finale held at Aghosh Center, an orphanage in Gulabad. The final competition attracted a large gathering of local community representatives, members of Parent-Teacher Committees (PTCs), teachers and students. The additional assistant commissioner Sardar Badshah, sub-divisional education officer Tariq Ahmad, ASDEOs, members from the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) and School Leaders from across the district were also present. Position holder students and schools were awarded with trophies, shields and cash prizes.

The district monitoring officer Tariq Jamal was chief guest for the final round who praised the efforts of the School Leaders to improve the education system. "If School Leaders can organize such events using their own resources, it is a testament to their passion for education. My office will fully support similar initiatives to promote quality education", the DMO said.

Additional Assistant Commissioner Adenzai, Sardar Badshah while addressing the gathering, said that he had never imagined this level of creativity and outstanding projects from students of government primary schools. The official said that he had heard complaints about lack of basic facilities and low quality of education at public sector primary schools. The AAC lauded the efforts of the School Leaders, teachers and students for their devotion to ensure quality education.

A School Leader, Adil Nawaz told local journalists that the event reflected the power of instructional leadership and the collective efforts of School Leaders and teachers in the Adenzai Subdivision.

JUI-F confidence: The Lower Dir chapter of the Jamaat Ulema Islam Fazl on Saturday expressed its full confidence on the leader-

ship of Maulana Fazl ur Rehman regarding his stand on Madaris Bill. A meeting in this regard was held at Timergara with the JUI-F district emir Siraj ud Din in the chair.

The JUI-F district general secretary Maulana Muhammad Huzaifa, former provincial minister Muzafar Said, former district chief Maulana Zahid Khan, Maulana Muhammad Nabi Shah and others spoke on the occasion. They said that obstacles were being created in seminaries' registration.

They said that the Madaris Registration bill despite the passage from the national assembly and senate was not being implemented under a conspiracy. The JUI-F leaders said that returning of the bill by the President of Pakistan with objections, was beyond understanding. They said the party workers were ready to march on Islamabad if they were called by the party chief on the matter.

Thousands of trees worth millions burned in fire

— DFO assures support for restoration



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A terrifying fire broke out in the hilly area of Nagri bala in the tehsil of Timergara, engulfing a large expanse of the mountainous region. Trees worth millions were

burned.

To extinguish the fire, Suleman Muhammad, a social worker and former Vice Nazim of village council Nora Khel Nagri Payaan, along with local residents, worked tirelessly for several hours to bring the blaze under

control. Meanwhile, Suleman Muhammad praised the efforts of the youth of Nagri bala during a conversation with the media and also thanked District Forest Officer (DFO) Shabir for promptly arriving at the scene with his team.

He mentioned that strong winds in the mountainous area posed difficulties in the firefighting process. However, with the collective efforts of the brave social workers of Nagri bala and the DFO's rescue team, success was achieved in extinguishing the fire.

Suleman Muhammad also informed DFO Bashir about the devastation caused by the fire and the loss of thousands of trees during their meeting, to which he promised every possible support and pledged to plant more trees in the mountainous area.

LG officials to perform duties

PESHAWAR (APP): The divisional administration has issued directives for deployment of the local government officials to perform duties along patwaris to persuade refusing parents to administer polio vaccines to their children during the polio vaccination campaign.

He issued the directives while presiding over the divisional task force meeting regarding the last 7-day national anti-polio campaign of the year starting from December 16. The campaign will continue from December 16 to December 22.

Besides, the Deputy Commissioners (DCs) and District Police Officers (DPOs) of all five districts, district health, revenue, local governments' officers and administrative officers of other concerned agencies participated in the meeting.

The Commissioner Peshawar Division, Riaz Khan Mehsud has issued directives for finalization of the administrative and security plans for the national anti-polio campaign.

During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioners of all districts of the division gave detailed briefing regarding previous anti-polio campaigns and the approaching one in their respective districts.

Under the directives of the Commissioner Peshawar the officials of the local government including Secretaries Neighbourhood Councils and Village Councils will perform duties along the officials of the revenue department.



PESHAWAR: People buying jaggery at Gurr Mandi.

FAST-NUCES holds 82nd convocation

— award degrees to 116 graduates

PESHAWAR (APP): FAST-National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences (NUCES), Peshawar Campus here Saturday organized 82nd convocation and awarded degrees to 116 graduates.

The successful students completed their studies in different disciplines including Computer Science, Software Engineering, and Electrical Engineering.

A total of 10 brilliant students from the campus received gold-medals in various fields.

The chief guest of the ceremony was FAST-NUCES Rector, Dr. Aftab Ahmed Maroof, while other distinguished guests included Campus Director Prof. Dr. Umar Usman Khan, board of Governors Member Justice (Rtd) Mian Ajmal Khan, Dr.

Latifullah Kakakhel, and Chairman Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Prof. Nasrullah Khan.

Addressing the convocation, Dr. Aftab Ahmed Maroof congratulated the

graduates and urged them to play a significant role in the socio-economic development of the country.

He highlighted the educational services of Fast-News, especially its leadership in computer science education and its significant impact in the field of IT and engineering.

FAST-NUCES, Peshawar Campus, established in 2001, is a major educational hub in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, providing modern educational facilities and a research environment.



PESHAWAR: A vendor busy in preparing parata for customers.

Peshawar City College hosts traffic awareness seminar

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: City Traffic Police Peshawar organized a traffic awareness seminar at City College Peshawar.

The seminar was attended by Superintendent Police City Riaz Khan Khalil, DSP Suburb Ghulam Hyder, and the Education Team of City Traffic Police Peshawar.

During the seminar, the participants were briefed about road safety, zebra crossings, and the importance of wearing seatbelts.

SP City Riaz Khan Khalil and his team emphasized the need for adherence to traffic laws and rules to prevent accidents and loss of life.



He said that wearing seatbelts during travel can prevent traffic accidents and loss of life.

SP City Riaz Khan Khalil added that City Traffic Police Peshawar regularly organizes aware-

ness seminars at different institutions to educate students about traffic laws and road safety.

Polio vaccination drive kicked off

PESHAWAR (APP): The five days anti-polio vaccination campaign has been kicked off in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with a target of administering drops to 6.5 million children.

The campaign was launched at Emergency Operation Center (EOC) KP by a female journalist who administered drops to a child as Advisor to KP CM on Health, Ehtesham Ali had to rush to his hometown at last moment due to some pressing urgent engagement.

Speaking to media persons, Coordinator EOC KP, Abdul Basit informed that polio vaccination will be carried out in all the districts of the province, except Kurram due to law and order situation there.

In all a total of 42,000 teams of vaccinators will participate in the campaign who will be guarded by

around 54000 policemen, Basit told newsmen. He said in current year, so far 62 cases of polio have been reported in the country out of which 18 are in KP.

Sharing a break-up of 18 polio cases, Abdul Basit said out of these 18 polio infection cases, 16 are reported in Southern districts where access to children is very challenging due to bad law and order situation.

Out of 16 cases in Southern districts, around nine are reported only in Darazanda Tehsil of Dera Ismail Khan because of less coverage of children in the area. He said the cohort of below five years age children in Darazanda Tehsil is

around 17,000 who are at risk because the area has missed coverage in around three campaigns in current year.

Responding to a question about number of non-vaccinated children among the polio infected cases, he said serology from blood samples of 11 infected children in KP discovered that four had not developed anti-bodies which mean they are zero dose children.

Coordinator EOC admitted that around 60 to 70 thousand children are zero dose in the province because of refusals by parents or missing of new born from essential vaccination.

In order to expand vaccination coverage several

steps are being taken including holding of Data Quality Assessment.

Abdul Basit said coverage of data by vaccinator, area incharge and monitoring officers and now tallied to find missing in number of children who should be reached out and covered.

Similarly, the Big Catchup campaign would also be launched by EPI soon after completion of polio vaccination drive to cover the unvaccinated children.

He said despite all these impediments the Health teams are making remarkable contribution by reaching to children in every nook and corner of the province.



PESHAWAR: New branch of 'Am Pm Travel & Tours' inaugurated in Deans.

Addl. DC inspects anti-polio campaign

PESHAWAR (APP): Under the public agenda of the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Additional Deputy Commissioner General, Bashir Khan visited various spots of the area to inspect anti-polio campaign.

Accompanied by concerned officials, he visited different areas of Lal Qila and witnessed vaccination process. He also checked finger marks on vaccination children and urged parents to support efforts of district administration and government to eliminate polio from the society.

He also reviewed performance of polio workers and urged them to perform duties with dedication realizing their responsibilities in fight against polio. He said that safe future on our children is also dependent on eradication of polio that is still a looming threat to our children.



In brief

Free education to remote areas F.P. Report

WANA: The youth of Waziristan are determined to provide free education to underprivileged children. The former FATA region continues to grapple with an array of social and economic challenges, exacerbated by the lack of realistic policies and the government's persistent indifference to crucial issues like education. Despite frequent verbal commitments, successive governments have unfortunately never truly prioritized education in the region since the FATA merger. However, a ray of hope shines through various private organizations operating in the merged districts, striving to provide free education to underprivileged children, even amidst the dire circumstances.

Workers union hold protest F.P. Report

LARKANA: Sindh Rice Workers Union (ASRWU) held protest demonstration in front of Larkana press club against the regional deputy director of the Sindh Workers Welfare Board and arranged a sit-in, on Saturday. The workers had placards and labor flags in their hands. On this occasion, labor leaders Ghulam Murtaza Korai, Abdul Razaq Brohi, Ehsan Ali Jagirani and others protested and said that instead of issuing dowry forms to the daughters of industrial workers and death grant forms for widows, the regional deputy director of the Sindh Welfare Board Larkana is demanding a bribe of Rs 30,000 per form by filling 104 fake forms and robbing the rights of the workers, while the dowry forms filled by the real workers and the forms of money received in various forms have been lost by hand, which is a complete excess, while the receipts of the lost forms are also available. Meanwhile, the Sindh reformist stage play "Jeevan Saathi" was presented by the Arts Council of Pakistan, Larkana, at the OpenAir Theater.

Woman dies, two injured

NAROWAL (INP): A woman died on the spot while her husband and daughter were seriously injured after an explosion caused by gas leakage in Narowal on Saturday. Sources said that the blast occurred as the deceased woman started the stove of her kitchen to prepare breakfast for the family in Mohallah Islampura. Her husband and daughter received severe burn wounds in the incident. After receiving report of the incident, Rescue team reached the spot and shifted the injured persons to a nearby local hospital. Sources further revealed that both injured persons were in critical condition. Further investigation was underway.

Substandard milk discarded

MULTAN (INP): The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) teams conducted a checkpoint operation on Bahawalpur Bypass, testing over 6,000 litres of milk, here on Saturday. According to a spokesperson, during the milk quality test, 2,700 litres of substandard milk was discarded, imposing fine of Rs. 40,000 on two suppliers. Director General Operations Zubair Ijaz said milk was found substandard during checking through lacto-scan machine. Traces of chemicals, water and white powder were witnessed into the mixture being sold in the name of milk was discarded on the spot. He added that Punjab Food Authority's top priority to ensuring the delivery of pure milk to the public.



BAHAWALPUR: Laborers busy fixing tuff tiles on footpath.

Politics a way for serving humanity

Mubarak Zeb turns his way with PTI over Rehan Zeb assassination

Humayun Khan

ACCIDENTLY tribal politician and Member National Assembly (MNA) Mubarak Zeb claimed that he had joined federal coalition government on two fundamental principles to obtain justice for Rehan Zeb assassination and uplifting of erstwhile Fata especially Bajaur district.

This he stated while talking to The Frontier Post and added that neither local nor national leadership of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) conduced with the bereaved family of Shaheed Rehan Zeb after his assassination during election campaign for 8th Feb general election.

Mubarak Zeb claimed that PTI had disgrace the mandate of Bajaur as he had waited six months to ensure justice for Rehan Zeb assassination after electing for both national and provincial assemblies with clear majority by tribesmen. He added that PTI had nominated candidates both to contest election against him and Rehan Zeb.

MNA argued that the tribesmen had support him to obtain justice for Rehan Zeb assassination and development of the area. He added that PTI has used Rehan Zeb as victim card during general despite the fact that party had nominated on both seats.

Mubarak Zeb claimed that PTI leadership had deceived founding chairman

Imran Khan by ignoring Rehan Zeb in nomination for general elections. He claimed that Imran Khan had directed Rehan Zeb to start election campaign because you will be PTI's candidate but it doesn't become reality.

MNA claimed that he believes in serving humanity and that why his team had provided legal assistance to dozens of innocent prisoners held in wake of 24th November PTI's protest at Islamabad. The redressal Pakhtun especially tribesmen is top priority irrespective of political affiliation and discrimination.

The infrastructural development is top priority to uplift living standard in tribal belt especially in Bajaur district as the region severely underprivileged and lacking basic civic facilities, Zeb argued. He stated that a comprehensive developmental has been initiated for development of Bajaur district.

The developmental projects would covered from provision of standard educational and health facilities to provision of non-stop electricity as well as extension of gas pipeline to Bajaur district, MNA claimed. He added that multiple projects are under consideration for construction of rainy dams in newly merged district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The most important projects include establishment of University or at least a campus of well reputed university and pre-disaster manage-



ment projects to maximize calamities of global warming which has severe impacts on Pakistan, Mubarak Zeb stated.

Mubarak Zeb is hopeful for nomination as Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Tribal Affairs in next federal cabinet expansion. He added that federal government had allocated Rs42 billion for under ATP for developmental projects in tribal districts of erstwhile FATA.

MNA claimed that he had upheld Rs27 billion issue with federal government which will be utilize by Pakhtunkhwa's government for the developmental of newly merged districts. He added that national prosperity can be achieved after the establishment of rule of law and supremacy of constitution.

It worthy to mention that Rehan Zeb was PTI worker who was groomed as political activist during his student life due to his affiliation with Insaf Student Federation (ISF). Rehan Zeb was assassinated on 31st January 2024 at Sadiqabad Phatak bazar Main Chowk during election campaign scheduled on 8th February.

Anti-polio vaccination to start on 16th F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Five-day Anti-polio campaign will be launched from 16, December and health and other departments have finalised all necessary arrangements to administer drops of polio vaccine to two 2,38,888 children up to five-year-old in the district Hafizabad.

This was stated by the Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razzaq while addressing the meeting of District Anti-Polio Committee held at district complex to review arrangement to make the Anit-Polio Campaign successful. Chief Executive Officer Health Dr. Zaheer Ahmad, Representative of WHO Dr. Touqeer Ahmad, DHO Dr. Faiq Ali Tarar and other concerned officers attended the meeting.

DC directed the officers of health department to ensure administering anti-polio drops to hundred percent target children to below five-year-old in the district. Strict departmental action will be initiated against those officials who found show lethargic attitude during the campaign, he warned. He appealed the local ulema, journalists, social workers, traders, paraments, teachers and civil society to play their pivotal role to give drops of polio vaccine to avoid children from crimping polio disease.

Livestock dept kicks off vaccination drive: Livestock Department started free vaccination campaign and special teams of livestock are not only vaccinating cattle but also providing awareness to breeders to save their animals from cold weather.

PTI lacked plans for KP's economic development: Muqam

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam here Saturday said that providing relief to masses and bringing comfort in their lives were the top most priority of the present elected government.

Addressing people after inauguration of NADRA Office at Khwazakkela tehsil here, Engr Amir Muqam said that people of Upper Swat would get computerized identity cards and other services of NADRA at their doorsteps. He said that Khwazakkela NADRA office would be converted into mega centre equipped with all facilities to facilitate people of Upper Swat.

Engr Amir Muqam said that politics of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and PMLN President Muhammad Nawaz Sharif revolved around welfare of masses and prosperity of Pakistan. He said that PMLN Govt has completed record uplift projects whether it was electricity, gas, roads, schools and colleges in Swat despite of lack of political mandate since 2013.

He said that state-of-the art Nawaz Sharif Kidney Hospital at Mingora was constructed by the PMLN Govt that provide quality healthcare services to patients of the province. Due to prudent economic and financial policies of the present elected government, he said that rate of price hike was slashed to single digit, and stock exchange received record upward growth.

On the other hand, he said that PTI Govt despite 3rd term in office has failed to deliver on all fronts. Without naming ex Minister Murad Saeed, he said that a for-

mer Federal Minister of Communications had failed to construct a single mega road or culvert in Swat. He said that problems of masses were increased manifolds in KP due to negative politicking of the PTI leaders.

Engr Amir Muqam said that PTI has lacked plans to combat terrorism and improve the province's economy. Instead to focus on Kurram security situation, he said that CM KP concentrated on Nov 26 aimless agitation and left PTI workers alone in harsh weather at Islamabad. He claimed that PTI has badly damaged the national economy and tried to pitch institutions against each others.

Engr Amir Muqam claimed that PTI has started losing people support in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as evident of Nov 26 flopped agitation due to its persistent agitation politics and there would be hardly any political worker to accept PTI ticket in future elections. He said that a strong democratic government was the only solution to take the country out of existing challenges and address people problems.

Engr Amir Muqam said that process of development would continue in the country and relief to be provided to masses. Amir Muqam said that he always stood with people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in all difficult situation whether it was earthquake, floods or war against terrorism and would never left them alone. The Federal Minister said that people of Swat had rendered great sacrifices for the motherland and their sacrifices would not go waste. He held sacrifices of SHO the other day in high esteem. Earlier he heard people problems and directed NADARA to facilitate masses.

VC AWKUM assures turning building to Govt College

F.P. Report

MARDAN: A delegation of Post Graduate College Mardan visited Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, the delegation was led by member provincial assembly Abdul Salam Afridi, the Principal Muhammad Abrar, Dr. Jamal, Ihsanullah were present on behalf of the college, on Saturday.

Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zahir Shah, Registrar Hasan Khan and PS to VC Murad Ali were present on this occasion. Prof. Dr. Zahir Shah assured the delegation that part of the main campus building will be returned in a phased wise soon after approval

from the university bodies.

In this regard, a two-member committee consisting of Dr. Jamal Shah Ehsanullah from Mardan College and Salim Shah and Umair from Abdul Wali Khan University was formed which will decide which building the university can hand over to Mardan College as soon as possible. He expressed hope that in the next three years, the academic block and hostel under construction of Abdul Wali Khan University will be completed and the problem of classes in the university will be solved.

MPA Abdul Salam Afridi said on this occasion that both institutions

belong to our Mardan and decisions should be taken under a positive mindset. He appreciated the steps taken by the Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zahir Shah to immediately resolve the shortage of BS classes in Mardan College. Principal Muhammad Abrar thanked Vice Chancellor Abdul Wali Khan University Prof. Dr. Zahir Shah and appreciated his efforts and said that Prof. Zahir Shah conducted the negotiations with positive thinking, part of the main campus building will soon be handed over to Mardan College, which will help in bridging the shortage of space for BS classes in Mardan College.

Four injured in mishap

MUZAFFARGARH (INP): A speeding van collided with a trolley and overturned near Gushkori chowk, leaving four people injured, here on Saturday. According to rescue

1122, the accident occurred due to the van's over speeding.

The injured have been identified as Javed Iqbal (42), Ghulam Abbas (45), Ghulam Shabbir (58)

and Muhammad Arif (50). Rescue teams rushed on the spot, shifted them to the rural health center in Sinawan for further medical treatment. Further investigation was underway.

The PTI strike and its economic fallout on peace and stability in Pakistan

Amjid Khan

IN recent months, Pakistan has been the epicenter of intense political unrest, characterized by widespread protests and strikes led by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the political party founded by former Prime Minister Imran Khan. These demonstrations have not only captured national attention but have also raised significant concerns regarding their implications for the country economy, peace, and stability. As the situation continues to evolve, it is crucial to analyze the complex consequences of these strikes and explore potential recommendations for mitigating their adverse effects.

The roots of the PTI protests can be traced back to a series of political events that have deeply polarized the nation. Imran Khan was ousted from power in April 2022 through a no-confidence vote, a move he and his supporters claim was planned by foreign powers in collusion with local political rivals. This narrative has resonated with a substantial segment of the population, leading to widespread discontent and mobilization against the current government. The protests boost dramatically in October 2023 when Khan called for a "long march" to Islamabad, demanding early elections. The government response was swift and often heavy-handed, leading to clashes between protesters and law enforcement agencies. This cycle of protest and repression had created a volatile environment that posed serious risks to both economic stability and social cohesion.

The immediate economic consequences of the PTI strikes are stark. According to estimates from various economic analysts, these protests have cost the

Pakistani economy upwards of PKR 2 billion per day. Key sectors such as transportation, retail, and manufacturing have experienced significant disruptions. Roads blocked by protesters have hindered the movement of goods and people, leading to delays in supply chains and increased operational costs for businesses. The strikes have also adversely affected foreign investment, investors typically seek stable environments with predictable political climates, and ongoing unrest creates uncertainty. The Karachi Stock Exchange has seen fluctuations corresponding to protest activity, reflecting investor sentiment that is increasingly cautious in light of political instability.

Likewise, the strikes have worsened existing inflationary pressures within the economy. With disruptions in supply chains and increased transportation costs due to blockades, prices for essential goods have surged. The inflation rate in Pakistan had already been elevated prior to the protests, recent data indicates that inflation has climbed further as a direct consequence of these strikes. This situation disproportionately affects low-income households who spend a larger share of their income on food and basic necessities.

The long term economic outlook for Pakistan is grim if political instability persists. The country is already grappling with significant challenges such as high debt levels, dwindling foreign reserves, and an ongoing energy crisis. Continuous protests could halt necessary reforms aimed at stabilizing the economy and attracting foreign investment. Also, international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) may become hesitant to engage with Pakistan if political turmoil continues uninterrupted.

This could lead to a lack of access to critical financial assistance needed for economic recovery.

The PTI protests have deepened political polarization within Pakistani society. Supporters of Khan view these demonstrations as a legitimate expression of democratic rights and an essential pushback against what they perceive as an illegitimate government. Conversely, opponents see these protests as threats to law and order that must be curtailed. This division extends beyond politics into the social fabric, families and communities are often split along party lines, leading to increased tensions and hostility among citizens. Such polarization undermines social cohesion and lead to violence if not addressed.

The government response to these protests has involved deploying law enforcement agencies in significant numbers to maintain order. This militarization of public spaces has led to clashes between protesters and police forces, resulting in injuries or fatalities. Such incidents not only heighten public fear but also contributed to a sense of insecurity among citizens. Heavy-handed tactics employed by law enforcement eroded trust between communities and state institutions. In a country where public trust in governance is already fragile, this erosion has long-lasting implications for social stability.

The ongoing unrest has also taken a toll on mental health across various segments of society. Constant exposure to violence, uncertainty about the future, and economic hardship have led to increased levels of anxiety and depression among citizens. Mental health services in Pakistan are already under-resourced, thus, this crisis aggravates existing issues without adequate support systems in

place. On November 24, 2024, fresh protests erupted under the leadership of Bushra Bibi "Imran Khan wife" and Ali Ameen Gandapur, a prominent PTI leader and Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa known for his fiery speeches. This rally was marked by fervent calls for justice regarding Khan's ousting and his honorable release from jail. Thousands gathered in major cities across Pakistan, stimulating sentiments of frustration towards the current government while also expressing solidarity with Khan's vision for Pakistan future.

The November 24 protest highlighted several key issues facing Pakistan today economic hardship provoked by inflation, political disenfranchisement felt by many citizens, and an urgent desire for democratic processes that reflect the will of the people rather than elite interests. The atmosphere during this protest was charged with emotion as participants shared personal stories of struggle while lamenting how rising prices had made it increasingly difficult to afford basic necessities.

As clashes broke out between protesters and police forces during this rally, it became evident that tensions were reaching a boiling point once again. Law enforcement agencies responded with tear gas and baton charges in an attempt to disperse crowds that had blocked key thoroughfares in major cities like Islamabad and Lahore actions which only served to inflame passions further among demonstrators who felt their rights were being trampled upon.

This cycle of protest-repression-protest creates a feedback loop that threatens both economic stability and social cohesion within Pakistan, a reality underscored by analysts warning about potential long-term results

if constructive dialogue fails between stakeholders involved in this crisis.

Given these profound implications on both the economy and societal stability stemming from PTI-led strikes against governmental authority, stakeholders including government officials, opposition leaders, civil society organizations must engage constructively toward finding solutions that address grievances while fostering peace throughout communities nationwide.

One pressing need is dialogue between government representatives and PTI leadership aimed at creating an inclusive platform where grievances can be aired constructively without resorting to violence or disruption. This dialogue should foster broader understanding around governance challenges facing Pakistan today while seeking common ground upon which future cooperation might be built.

To stabilize the economy between ongoing unrest requires policymakers implementing targeted recovery plans focusing on job creation initiatives aimed at generating employment opportunities which can help mitigate some effects stemming from inflationary pressures currently plaguing households across all strata within society, supporting small businesses through financial assistance programs or tax relief measures would enable them recover more quickly following disruptions caused by strikes while simultaneously addressing inflation control measures designed specifically tackle supply chain disruptions impacting prices for essential goods.

Developing comprehensive crisis management frameworks becomes essential when handling future protests effectively while respecting citizens rights assemble peacefully, training

law enforcement personnel on crowd management techniques prioritizing de-escalation rather than confrontation would reduce tensions during such events while clear communication strategies from government officials regarding protest policies could manage public expectations more effectively thereby reducing chances violent clashes erupting again.

Engaging community leaders discussions around public safety during protests fosters cooperation between law enforcement agencies local populations ultimately enhancing trust between citizens state institutions crucially important given current climate where mistrust runs high due previous heavy-handed tactics employed against demonstrators throughout recent months.

Strengthening civil society organizations plays an equally vital role mediating conflicts arising between citizens state institutions, providing funding capacity-building initiatives enhances these organizations ability facilitate dialogue promote peaceful resolutions during times unrest ensuring voices marginalized groups heard among chaos surrounding them.

Fostering national unity through inclusive policies transcending partisan divides becomes essential long term stability, civic education programs aimed educating citizens about democratic processes foster greater engagement governance beyond mere party loyalty while cultural exchange initiatives encouraging interactions diverse communities help bridge divides created political polarization threatening societal harmony overall.

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DAMASCUS: A man walking on a poster of Bashar al-Assad as a sanitation worker removes it from a downtown street in capital after the president's ouster.

Trump flays Ukraine’s use of US missiles for attacks deep into Russia

WASHINGTON (Reuters): US President-elect Donald Trump criticized Ukraine's use of US-supplied missiles for attacks deep into Russian territory in a Time magazine interview published, comments that suggest he could alter US policy toward Ukraine.

"It's crazy what's taking place. It's crazy. I disagree very vehemently with sending missiles hundreds of miles into Russia. Why are we doing that? We're just escalating this war and making it worse. That should not have been allowed to be done," Trump said in an interview to mark his being named Time's Person of the Year. President Joe Biden last month lifted the US ban on Ukraine using US-supplied longer-range missiles for strikes deep inside Russia, his latest attempt to boost Kyiv in its battle to repel a Russian invasion force from his country.

The decision came after pleas from Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The White House cited Russia's deployment of 15,000 North Korean troops along the battlefield as the main reason why Biden changed his mind. Trump has said he would like to bring a quick end to the nearly

three-year-old war but has been cagey on the details. He told Time he had a "very good plan" to help but that if he reveals it now "it becomes almost a worthless plan."

Pressed on whether he would abandon Ukraine, Trump said: "I want to reach an agreement, and the only way you're going to reach an agreement is not to abandon." He said the entry of North Korean troops into the picture was a "very complicating factor." Trump, who takes office on Jan. 20, met last weekend with Zelenskyy and French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris. Trump's promise to end the conflict swiftly has raised concerns in Kyiv that it could be largely on Moscow's terms.

Sources told Reuters that Zelenskyy used the meeting to explain Ukraine's need for security guarantees in any negotiated end to the war with Russia. He has long sought NATO membership. Trump told Time that the number of people dying in the conflict, especially in the last month, was "staggering." "I'm talking on both sides. It's really an advantage to both sides to get this thing done," he said.

Asked whether he would cut US military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine if Kyiv did not agree to a peace deal, Trump said, "I think I have a very good plan to help, but when I start exposing that plan, it becomes almost a worthless plan." The war is entering what some Russian and Western officials say could be its final and most dangerous phase as Moscow's forces advance at their fastest pace since the early weeks of the conflict.

Russia fired a hypersonic ballistic missile known as the Oreshnik at the Ukrainian city of Dnipro on Nov. 21. President Vladimir Putin cast the move as a response to Ukraine's first use of US ATACMs ballistic missiles and British Storm Shadows to strike Russian territory with Western permission. Washington says more deliveries of US air defense exports to Ukraine are on the way to the country. The United States unveiled a \$988 million aid package of new arms and equipment to Ukraine. Asked whether he had spoken to Putin since his election, Trump declined to answer, saying, "I can't tell you. I can't tell you. It's just inappropriate."

Russian ships move from Syria base amid doubts over future

DAMASCUS (BBC): Russian naval vessels appear to have temporarily left their main port in Syria, satellite images reviewed by BBC Verify show, amid continuing uncertainty about Moscow's military future in the country after the fall of its ally, Bashar al-Assad.

Images taken by Maxar on 10 December show some ships have left Tartous naval base and are currently sitting offshore in the Mediterranean Sea. Meanwhile, other photos taken on the same day show activity continuing at Russia's main airbase in Syria, Khmeimim, with jets clearly visible on the tarmac.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow would enter talks with incoming authorities about Russia's future military presence. "Everything possible is now being done to get in touch with those involved in ensuring security and, of course, our military is also taking all the necessary precautions," he told reporters in Moscow. He previously warned that it was "premature" to speculate on the bases' future. "You know that, of course, we maintain contacts with those who control the situ-

ation in Syria now. This is necessary because we have our bases there and our diplomatic office [embassy]. And of course, ensuring the safety and security of our facilities are of utmost importance," he told reporters.

The Tartous naval facility houses elements of the Black Sea Fleet and is Russia's only repair and replenishment hub in the Mediterranean. Established by the Soviet Union in the 1970s, it was expanded and modernised by Russia in 2012 as the Kremlin began to increase its support for President Assad's regime. It allows Russian vessels to remain in the Mediterranean without having to return to ports in the Black Sea via the Turkish Straits. It is also a deep-water port, meaning it can host submarines from Moscow's nuclear fleet, according to the US Naval Institute. The new satellite images show Moscow has at least temporarily brought its ships out of the port, with two guided missile frigates moored about 13km (eight miles) off the Syrian coast. It is unclear where the remainder of the fleet - pictured in earlier images - currently is.

It is also unclear

whether their departure is part of a permanent withdrawal from Tartous. In recent weeks, satellite images have repeatedly shown naval vessels coming and going from the port. Mike Plunkett from the Janes open-source intelligence organisation noted that the Russian movements appeared to have been "conducted to ensure that their ships are not vulnerable to attack". "Whether they are worried about attack from the Syrian rebels or collateral damage from any Israeli strike on Syrian assets in Tartus is unknown," he added.

Frederik Van Lokeren, a former Belgian navy captain and analyst, told BBC Verify that it appeared the Russian vessels were now in a holding pattern while Moscow deliberated on its next move. "They're effectively in limbo at the moment, because they don't quite know what's going to happen," Mr Van Lokeren said. "Obviously, since they're lingering there, it seems that Russia is not willing to withdraw all its naval vessels out of the area just yet, which might be an indication that they're negotiating with regional partners to see

Russia blasts US transfer of \$20b to Ukraine

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia's Foreign Ministry said that the US transfer to Ukraine of \$20 billion backed by frozen Russian assets was "simply robbery" and suggested Moscow could seize Western assets on its territory "to enhance industrial potential".

"The provision by the US Treasury Department...of \$20 billion using income from operations of 'frozen' Russian sovereign assets essentially stolen by the G7 countries is simply robbery," a statement on the ministry website said. The statement said US President Joe Biden's administration was trying "in a Russophobic frenzy to introduce as many anti-Russian sanctions as possible before it transfers power to D. Trump's team on January 20th".

"No pseudo-legal machinations, abundantly seasoned with hypocrisy and double standards will go unanswered," the statement said. "Russia possesses sufficient capabilities and levers for a retaliatory seizure of Western assets within its jurisdiction, which in such a case would be used to enhance industrial potential and implement infrastructure projects in Russian regions." The US Treasury Department said it transferred the \$20 billion US portion of a \$50 billion G7 loan for Ukraine to a World Bank intermediary fund for economic and financial aid to Kyiv.

The Treasury Department said the action makes good on its October commitment to match the European Union's commitment to provide \$20 billion in aid backed by frozen Russian sovereign assets alongside smaller loans from Britain, Canada and Japan to help the Eastern European nation fight Russia's 33-month-old invasion.

Macron races to choose new PM

PARIS (AFP): French President Emmanuel Macron raced to meet a self-imposed 48-hour deadline to name a new prime minister after he hosted party bosses in a bid to hammer out a consensus and avoid a protracted political crisis.

Following the ouster of the government of Michel Barnier in a historic no-confidence vote last week, Macron gathered leaders from across the political spectrum in a bid to form a "government of national interest". The bosses of the far-right National Rally (RN) and hard-left France Unbowed (LFI), who joined forces to oust Barnier, were not invited.

Macron is under huge pressure to cobble together a broad alliance and form a government that can survive a no-confidence vote and pass a budget for next year in a bid to limit political and economic turmoil. Macron, who is set to travel to Poland, aimed to name a new prime minister "within 48 hours", said the party chiefs who had met him. Several people close to the president said the announcement could come, Macron has hoped to prise the Socialists, Greens and Communists away from their election pact with the hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) but their bosses insist a new prime minister should be named from their ranks. Macron's centrist ally Francois Bayrou, a former justice minister acquitted in a trial this year.

‘It is now time for unity,’ UN chief

UNITED NATIONS (APP): United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has termed the fall of the Assad regime in Syria a cause for hope in the Middle East, and called for a smooth political transition in which minority rights are respected.

"The UN is totally committed to supporting a smooth transition of power, with an inclusive political process in which the rights of all minorities will be fully respected, and paving the way towards a united sovereign Syria with its territorial integrity fully reestablished," the UN chief told reporters in Pretoria, South Africa, where he met with Government officials in connection with the country's presidency of the G20 group of industrial nations. "I fully trust Syrian people to be able to choose their own destiny," he added.

"As we speak, we are witnessing the reshaping of the Middle East, with the changes in the correlation of forces among the key regional actors," Guterres said, stressing that the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and statehood must be constantly reaffirmed. "But we also see some signs of hope, and signs of hope mainly coming from the end of the Syrian dictatorship," he added.

The Secretary-General said his Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, is engaging with all the key actors on the way forward, and I fully trust the Syrian people, to be able to choose their own destiny. Guterres was asked

if he thought world leaders understood that 'the Middle East question' must be resolved as the entire region will be affected.

He underlined that the international community has a duty to 'do everything to support the different Syrian leaders' to ensure that they come together and guarantee a smooth and inclusive transition. "The alternative doesn't make any sense," he said. "Syrians had enough divisions. It's time for unity, and it's time for the reestablishment of its territory."

The UN chief was also asked about Israel's further advancement into the Golan in southwest Syria, which it has occupied for decades, and a response to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly saying that the region will be part of Israel 'for eternity'.

Guterres said 'the concept of eternity' is difficult to define. He noted that the Golan is occupied by Israel, 'but that occupation is not internationally recognized. And so, I would say that eternity would not solve the problem of the violations of the law'.

Meanwhile, the security situation in Syria remains volatile as Israeli airstrikes and localized hostilities continue to affect many areas, the UN humanitarian affairs office, OCHA, said. OCHA expressed concern over the risks of explosive ordnance to people moving around the country.

Humanitarian partners have identified more than 50 minefields over the past 10 days, which is cur-

tailoring the movement of civilians and impeding the delivery of goods and services. The UN and partners continue to support humanitarian response across the country and are resuming activities as security conditions allow.

Listen to our interview with Samer Abdel Jaber of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) which is seeking \$250 million to kickstart key supply chain corridors and ease food insecurity. Local and national partners in Homs, located in western Syria, are gradually resuming humanitarian activities, while the water stations in Al-Husayn city have been reactivated, benefiting residents in Homs and Hama.

However, humanitarian activities in the northeast have been constrained by insecurity. Despite the challenges, aid partners have managed to distribute dozens of tents and thousands of mattresses, blankets, sleeping bags and solar lamps to centres hosting displaced people in Tabqa and Raqqa. OCHA said they need urgent additional funding, particularly with the onset of winter, as rain and snow could lead to flooding across the country. Separately, UN Humanitarian Coordinator Tom Fletcher said in a social media post that much is in flux in Syria, "but vital aid must continue to flow and critical health and other services must be sustained". He reiterated that 'humanitarians will continue to engage whenever and wherever needed to support Syrian civilians'.

Georgia cracks down on pro-EU protests

TBILISI (Reuters): Seventy-five-year-old Marina Terishvili's teenage son Mamuka was shot dead at a national rally in Georgia in 1992. Now her other son, Giorgi, has been arrested for his role in protests against perceived Russian influence in their homeland. Seven police cars pulled up at her house in the capital Tbilisi and took Giorgi, a 52-year-old taxi driver, into custody, she said.

He was placed in pre-trial detention for two months for "participating in group violence" according to a rights group and local media, and faces up to six years in prison if convicted, part of a broad crackdown on demonstrators who have clashed nightly with police for almost two weeks. The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association rights group said he had not yet entered a plea and Marina Terishvili said she did not know why he had been detained. "I can't deny that he went to the rallies, because he has a brother who died on Feb. 2, 1992, and he went there in honour of his soul," Marina said, adding that Giorgi could not tolerate the idea that his younger brother had died in vain.

Mamuka was 17 when he was killed during the brief civil war that followed Georgia's 1991 exit from the Soviet Union, which ended 200 years of rule by Russia. Giorgi is among

more than 400 people who authorities and rights groups say have been arrested during protests against government moves to delay the South Caucasus country's longstanding bid to join the European Union. Around 30 face criminal charges, mostly relating to allegations of "group violence" aimed at overthrowing the government. Among those jailed are two leaders of the country's pro-EU opposition. Rights groups say the crackdown is without recent precedent in Georgia, a country that had been seen as among the most pro-Western and democratic of the Soviet Union's successor states.

Some protesters have thrown fireworks and other projectiles at police, arguing that they are defending themselves against tear-gas and baton attacks. The interior ministry said that more than 150 police officers have been injured. The Georgian Dream party, which officials say won elections in October the opposition says were tainted by fraud, provoked widespread anger in the country of 3.7 million when it announced last month that it was suspending EU accession talks until 2028.

Georgian Dream says it favours a pragmatic policy with Russia, which backs two regions which split from Georgia after it left the Soviet Union. The party says its aim is to safeguard

peace amid the war in Ukraine, which has been shattered by Russian invading forces since early 2022. Western countries have condemned the crackdown, and the EU's ambassador to Georgia said that it merits sanctions.

Georgia's ombudsman Levan Ioseliani, an opposition politician appointed by Georgian Dream, said that his office has visited 327 detainees, of whom 225 said they were mistreated and 157 had visible injuries. Police reported finding fireworks and items for making petrol bombs at two opposition party headquarters. Both parties said the items had been planted.

At a briefing, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze called the parties' premises a "hotbed of violence" and said their attempt to seize power had failed. Gangs of masked men in black have begun attacking opposition politicians, activists and some journalists in recent days. Opposition supporters refer to the gangs as "titushky", a Ukrainian word for thugs who attacked opponents of a pro-Russian government before that country's 2014 Maidan revolution which drove the president to flee to Moscow. Two journalists from a pro-opposition television channel suffered visible head injuries in an attack on Dec. 7 captured in their live broadcast from a protest.

A mother in Gaza hasn't seen her daughter since Israeli troops raided their home

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

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

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

Hamoked says.

Throughout the war, the military has conducted what amounts to a mass sifting of the Palestinian population as it raids homes and shelters and sends people through checkpoints. Troops round up and detain men, from dozens to several hundreds at a time, searching for any they suspect of Hamas ties, while forcing their families away, toward other parts of Gaza. The result is families split apart, often amid the chaos of fighting. But the military has not made clear how it keeps track of everyone it separates, arrests or detains. Even if troops transfer Palestinians to military detention inside Israel, they can hold them incommunicado for more than two months - their whereabouts unknown to families or lawyers, according to rights groups. When people vanish, it's nearly impossible to know what happened, Hamoked says.

"We've never had a situation of mass forced disappearance from Gaza, with no information provided for weeks and weeks to families," said Jessica Montell, the director of

Hamoked. Israel's High Court of Justice has refused to intervene to get answers, despite Hamoked's petitions, she said. Asked by The Associated Press about the cases of Ajour and two other families it interviewed, the Israeli military declined comment. 4-year-old Masaa Ajour was shot, then separated from her mother. The Ajours were sheltering at a home in Gaza City that belonged to Talal's family after being displaced from their own house earlier in the war. Israeli troops raided the home on March 24, opening fire as they burst in, Ajour said.

Ajour, who was three months pregnant, was shot in the stomach. Talal was wounded in his leg, bleeding heavily. Masaa lay passed out, shot in the shoulder - though Ajour said she saw her still breathing. As one soldier bandaged the little girl's wound, another pointed his gun in Ajour's face and told her to head out of Gaza City. She said she pleaded that she couldn't leave Masaa and Talal, but the soldier screamed: "Go south!" With no choice, Ajour collected her younger son and went down to the

street. "It was all in a blink of an eye. It was all so fast," she said. Still bleeding, she walked for two and a half hours, clutching her son.

When they reached a hospital in central Gaza, doctors treated her stomach wound and found her fetus' pulse. Weeks later, doctors found the pulse had gone. She miscarried. Ajour said that several weeks later, a Palestinian released from a prison in southern Israel told her family he had heard her husband's name called out over a loudspeaker among a list of detainees. The rumor has kept her hope alive, but the military told Hamoked it had no record of Masaa or Talal being detained. Another possibility is that they died on the scene, but no one has been able to search the rubble of the family's building to determine if any bodies are there. The storming of their building came as Israeli forces were battling Hamas fighters in surrounding streets while raiding nearby Shifa Hospital, where it claimed the militants were based. Troops cleared families out of nearby homes and often then destroyed or set the buildings ablaze, according to

witnesses at the time.

The military itself may not know what happened to Ajour's husband and daughter, said Montell of Hamoked. "That illustrates a broader problem," she said. Ajour and her son now shelter in a tent camp outside the central Gaza town of Zuweida. Masaa, she said, "was my first joy" - with blond hair and olive-colored eyes, a face "white like the moon." Masaa's fifth birthday was in July, Ajour said, sobbing. "She turned five while she is not with me."

Does the military document what troops do in Gaza? Under a wartime revision to Israeli law, Palestinians from Gaza taken to military detention in Israel can be held for over two months without access to the outside world. Israel says the law is necessary to handle the unprecedented number of detainees as it seeks to destroy Hamas following the Oct. 7 2023, attack on Israel that killed 1,200 and took around 250 people hostage inside Gaza. The military has transferred some 1,770 of its Gaza detainees to civilian prisons, according to rights groups, but it has not

revealed the number still in its detention. Milena Ansari, a researcher at Human Rights Watch, said Israel is obligated under international law to document what happens during every home raid and detention. But the military is not transparent about the information it collects on detainees or on how many it is holding, she said. Hamoked has asked the military for the whereabouts of 900 missing Palestinians. The military confirmed around 500 of them were detained in Israel. It said it had no record of detaining the other 400. The group petitioned Israel's High Court of Justice seeking answers in 52 cases, including that of Masaa and two other children, where witnesses testified that the missing were handled by troops before their disappearances.

"The judges just dismiss the cases, without even inquiring what measures might be necessary to prevent such cases in the future," said Montell. A court spokesperson said it often asks the military to provide additional information but isn't authorized to investigate if the military says it is not detaining them.

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Impending fallout

THE political chaos spawned by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's botched decision to call martial law should not be welcomed or celebrated. One or the other is necessary to return Japan's closest neighbor back to a semblance of political stability. The conundrum for Tokyo, Washington and other allies of Seoul is that the potential replacement for Yoon, opposition leader Lee Jae-myung, is likely to reverse most if not all of his foreign policy initiatives - policies that have been welcomed by friends of South Korea and supporters of an international order based on the rule of law.

To illustrate, Lee has been critical of the Yoon administration's foreign policy toward China and Taiwan, intimating that "China was South Korea's top export market, but now South Korea is importing mostly from China. Chinese people don't buy South Korean products because they don't like South Korea. Why are we bothering China? We should just say 'xie xie' (to China) and 'xie xie' to Taiwan as well. Why do we interfere in cross-strait (China-Taiwan) relations? Why do we care what happens to the Taiwan Strait? Shouldn't we just take care of ourselves?"

This naivety about China and Taiwan is worrisome and could be very costly. Beijing is determined to unify with Taipei. It has not and is unwilling to renounce the use of force to achieve its goals. According to Bloomberg Economics, a conflict across the Taiwan Strait would cost a "staggering \$10 trillion, equivalent to 10% of global gross domestic product - far outpacing the economic toll from Ukraine's war, the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2007-2008 global financial crisis." With South Korea using the same critical sea lines of communication as Japan to connect its economy to the world, it would be negatively impacted by any kinetic conflict across the strait.

Lee's positions on bilateral cooperation with Japan and trilateral cooperation between Seoul, Tokyo and Washington within the Camp David Principles Agreement is also likely to be a casualty of a change in government. Unlike Yoon, who worked to rebuild bridges between Seoul and Tokyo following the tumultuous years of the Moon Jae-in administration, Lee has labeled Japan as an aggressor country in the past and has vowed to go after historical issues and territorial sovereignty. This means returning to litigation over wartime labor issues, seeking compensation for the remaining "comfort women," those women and girls who suffered under Japan's military brothel system before and during World War II, and reneging on previous South Korea-Japan agreements that aimed to resolve these issues. This is self-destructive and will not enable a potential Lee administration the ability to better the prosperity of South Korea. The goodwill and political capital accrued through Yoon's determined diplomacy with Tokyo has enhanced mutual understanding, security and prosperity. They have accrued valuable political capital for South Korea on the global stage, embodying Yoon's aspiration of becoming a global pivotal state.

In the case of relations with Pyongyang, Lee's Democratic Party takes a more dovish position on North Korea, believing that the Yoon administration has provoked its northern neighbor with its focus on strengthening the US-South Korea partnership, enhancing deterrence and with discussions about acquiring preemptive strike capabilities that would eliminate the leadership in Pyongyang in the case of an attack. North Korea's consolidation of its weapons of mass destruction program and a variety of launch systems to deter the US and its allies from attacking the isolated regime will be difficult to remove even with a more dovish president in Seoul. If anything, Pyongyang has hardened its approach to the South by declaring in its revised Constitution that South Korea is a "hostile state." Instead of seeking rapprochement with South Korea's potential progressive leader, Pyongyang is investing in partnerships with other authoritarian states. This is evident in its provision of 5 to 7 million artillery shells and other munitions to Russia, along with the dispatch of up to 12,000 troops to fight in the war with Ukraine.

NATO and the IP4 allies (Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand), along with other friends of South Korea, are concerned that under a president who favors closer engagement with North Korea, South Korea's efforts to support Ukraine - both bilaterally and multilaterally - may lead to less support for that country's existential struggle against Russia's aggression and its illegal war. This has implications for the Indo-Pacific. Yoon has been a determined leader, having issued an Indo-Pacific strategy within months of becoming president. He also was willing to talk about the Taiwan status quo issue as a global public good and find ways to cooperate with the US, Japan and NATO to push back against Russian President Vladimir Putin's might-is-right, Machiavellian approach to international affairs. South Korea even expanded its cooperation in the South China Sea to ensure that Beijing does not realize its regional ambitions of so-called lebensraum with Chinese characteristics.

It is conceivable that a potential Lee administration, with its pro-Beijing positions, may annul Yoon's positive contributions to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. This would be a nightmare for Japan, the US and like-minded states who have worked hard to bring South Korea to the diplomatic table and make it a stakeholder in global decision-making. South Korea's place at last year's Group of Seven Summit in Hiroshima, in "Quad" meetings as an observer, NATO-IP4 cooperation and semiconductor relocation are all examples of the efforts friends of South Korea engaged in to demonstrate its value and importance in contributing to international order based on the rule of law.

Yoon's ill-conceived declaration of martial law has put all this cooperation in jeopardy and is likely to usher in a new South Korean president that will be less committed to the international order that Japan and other like-minded countries depend on for peace and stability. In many ways, South Korea may be returning to its historic alignment with China, as described in Odd Arne Westad's book "Empire and Righteous Nation: 600 Years of China-Korea Relations." Westad explains that Korea has long seamlessly adapted to shifts in Chinese power - from the Ming to Qing dynasties and from the Republic of China to China ruled by the Communist Party - recognizing that its economic prosperity and strategic autonomy were tied to maintaining a mutually beneficial and deferential relationship with the Asian giant.

Whether Lee falls within this world view is yet to be seen. But initial indications are that as president, he would take positions fundamentally misaligned with Japan, the US and like-minded states. The question for a potential Lee presidency is whether the logic of South Korea's past foreign policy choices toward Beijing aligns with the reality of China and the growing concert of authoritarian states in the 21st century. Japan, the US and their allies must exercise patience and demonstrate to Lee that a global order rooted in the rule of law, strong ties with liberal democracies and support for institutions that limit the unchecked power of leaders and states serve South Korea's best interests.

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PM directs further cut in power tariff...



Iran's nuclear phoenix may yet rise from ashes of Gaza, Lebanon, Syria

Mark Toth & Jonathan Sweet

IRAN is down but not out. Since foolishly betting on Oct. 7 in collusion with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Hamas, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's ring of proxies and client states encircling Israel have been decimated. Hamas has been reduced to dead men tunneling. Hezbollah, once the crown jewel in Khamenei's modern day Persian empire, is a spent force with nearly all of its military and political leadership from Hassan Nasrallah on down effectively decapitated.

Yet despite these bloody reversals, Iran still has the capacity to rise again like a Phoenix - indeed, an atomic Phoenix - as Tehran yet again desperately accelerates its rapidly developing nuclear weapons program. Now, inexplicably, courtesy of outgoing President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Khamenei reportedly received another \$10 billion after the November election due to US sanctions relief.

Granted, conceivably the dollars - euros, technically - are escrowed in Oman and only to be used for humanitarian purposes. Yet as evidenced by Hamas' terror tunnels in Gaza, Hezbollah's military arms and munitions depots in Lebanon and ousted Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's gulags and chemical weapons sites in Syria, Tehran's definition of "humanity" differs greatly from that of Washington. Funding Iran never made any sense, regardless of how contorted the White House's excuses became. Freeing up capital for humanitarian purposes only freed up other Iranian funds to supply and equip Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and other IRGC-backed militias - including those in Iraq and Syria attacking US soldiers across the region.

And as misguided as that is, even worse is Biden's belief that somehow his overall Mideast strategy is what caused al-Assad's regime to fall. On Sunday, Biden tried to take a victory lap claiming that "Our approach has shifted the

balance of power in the Middle East." No, Mr. President. It did not. Israel's decision to not cave in to your administration's repeated coercion is why the face of the Mideast has changed since Oct. 7. Despite Biden's best efforts, Israel has shown the US what winning looks

In that vein, Putin could be forced to make one last play to maintain Russia's precarious military position in the region. Absent alternatives, Putin might fully aid and abet Iran in becoming a nuclear power.

like.

In May, John Kirby told Israel not to go "smashing" into Rafah in southern Gaza. Israel did it anyway - and ultimately, Yahya Sinwar, Hamas' military head, was killed 6 months later inside of its city limits. Even as Israel was crushing Hezbollah in Lebanon, Biden was warning Israel in September about causing "an all-out war" in the Middle East. In Blinken's own words at the United Nations General Assembly, he admitted that the White House was "intensely engaged with a number of partners to de-escalate tensions."

Israel, however, had other ideas. Jerusalem was out to win and boldly forged ahead, taking the fight to Lebanon and twice directly to Iran. The Pentagon's response? Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III said, "We believe that this should be the end of this tit-for-tat." Oct. 7 was not the start of a 'tit-for-tat' spat. It was the heinous start of an existential war that Iran and its proxies chose to launch against Israel without warning.

Israel gets this, which is why, even after the fall of al-Assad in Syria, it is conducting a widespread bombing campaign to destroy what is left of the Syrian army and air force - and their considerable chemical weapons stockpiles. Now that Jerusalem's

most immediate threats have been dealt with, Iran's nuclear weapons program is next on the list. Unfortunately, the Biden administration freeing up \$10 billion for Iran through sanctions relief is only making that Herculean task even harder, as the White House has been consistent

ly doing since Oct. 7. Khamenei, above all else, needs time to recover from his losses in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria, and to achieve full nuclear breakout. The Houthis can continue to buy Iran some time by disrupting and interdicting commercial and military shipping in the Red Sea - and, as we warned yesterday, Al-Shabaab in Somalia may join the ranks of Iran's proxies. Israel, however, is not likely to be misled by either Iranian distraction. As Khamenei's nuclear threat grows, the Israeli military will be increasingly focused on eliminating Tehran as an existential threat to the State of Israel - and with the full support of President-elect Donald Trump.

Significantly, despite his own setbacks in Syria that threaten Moscow's ability to project force into the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, Putin also needs time to retrieve Russia's position in the region. Potentially losing his naval seaport at Tartus and military airbase and logistical hub at Khmeimim in Syria are bad enough. Losing the Kremlin's strategic check on the US in the Middle East would be even worse. In that vein, Putin could be forced to make one last play to maintain Russia's precarious military position in the region. Absent alternatives, Putin might fully aid and abet

Iran in becoming a nuclear power. That would mean transferring the nuclear detonation technology that Iran has yet to fully develop - and to provide the needed technical assistance for Tehran to deliver nuclear warheads on missiles to Israel and beyond. Nor is not out of the realm of possibility. Putin has already delivered nuclear weapons to Belarus and technology to North Korea. Regardless of Putin's decision, two things are now certain. Iran is fully intent on achieving nuclear breakout and on amassing a sizable nuclear arsenal. To that end, Iran's nuclear Phoenix is already beginning to arise from the ashes of Gaza, Lebanon and Syria. In late November, the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that "Iran will begin enriching uranium with thousands of advanced centrifuges at its two main nuclear facilities at Fordo and Natanz." This is highly noteworthy because Iran's focus here is on producing mass - not on immediate nuclear breakout. While the IAEA indicates they are only "enriching uranium with [the] new centrifuges to 5 percent," in reality Iran is likely intent on enriching to 60 percent massive amounts of new highly enriched uranium stockpiles, knowing that that it can then quickly enrich to a 90 percent weapons-grade level in as little as one week's time.

Khamenei clearly is betting on this house of mirrors to fool the West - and to deceive a Biden-led Washington into believing a comprehensive nuclear deal can yet be cut. But it cannot. Iran is playing a much deeper long-term game. Biden is leaving the incoming Trump administration an epic radioactive mess. Maximum pressure may no longer be enough. Israel may be forced to use kinetic force to end Iran's nuclear threat and, ideally, to topple Khamenei and his own murderous regime in the process. If not, then Iran's nuclear Phoenix is going to haunt the Mideast potentially for years to come - and Europe and the US as well.

The Hill

Syrian revolution continues

Murat Aslan

SYRIA, where humanitarian tragedies are epitomized by the images of Bashar al-Assad's prisons, has entered a new phase with all opposition elements reaching Damascus in a coordinated manner. The situation is now stable and secure. The opposition, which has taken full control in the west of the Euphrates River, intends to restore order in the cities, initiate the political transition process, and take preliminary steps for the normalization of life. The instruction not to interfere with state institutions is particularly important to ensure a smooth transition.

This step prevented the destruction of the state and denied the disruptions in the provision of services to citizens. In other words, the button was pressed for a stable transition instead of chaos. Although the planned wisdom of taking Damascus has toppled the regime, not all regions of Syria are in control of "Syrians" yet. Israel's "opportunistic" attacks on some targets and its attempts to wrest more territory from the Golan are ill-intentioned. On the other hand, the opposition is concentrating on the consolidation of the state without forgetting the priorities that have been identified. In other words, the Israeli issue is relegated to the future.

Iran has been forced to leave Syria, and Russia is experiencing a recovery phase to foresee the future of the Ukraine war. Due to the unconditional support of these countries to Assad, the Syrian people have been "pariahs in their own homeland". This period is coming to an end as far as Russia and Iran leave Syria. Following the message of the United States (US) President-elect Donald Trump, it seems that the US will make a similar choice. The Pentagon and Central Command (CENTCOM), which are currently focused on the security of US troops and bases, have wasted American interests and tax dollars by "backing the wrong horse" with Brett McGurk's biased projections.

In addition to the developments on the Damascus pivot, the work is far from over either across or at the east of the Euphrates. Manbij is still largely under the control of the opposition. Deir ez-Zor, with its oil resources, has ignited another climate of conflict.

At this point, it is useful to focus on Manbij, which is important for Türkiye. Manbij needs to be under full control of the opposition for the sake of security, safety, and stability. In other words, it is important to end the terrorist group PKK's presence in the city and to ensure the social cohesion of the tribes on the axis of Syriaanness. Otherwise, a divided and incomplete Syria will be passed on to future generations. Therefore, it is important to understand why the presence of terrorist groups in the region is alarming the Syrian opposition groups and to see what has been achieved by the Syrian National Army (SNA) by taking control of Manbij.

Manbij is a self-sufficient city in terms of water supply, agricultural products, and electricity generation. Despite the conflict across Syria, the city's economic potential offers logistical advantages to whoever controls it. The city's predominantly Arab and Turkish demographics were forced to migrate to Türkiye after the emergence of Daesh/ISIS and the PKK in the region. However, this process did not

change the city's tribal demography. The city, which was given to the terrorist group PKK as a favor after Daesh/ISIS, with the coercion of the US, was supposed to be returned to its owners under a protocol signed between Türkiye and the US. However, the US has never fulfilled this promise. The US Army established a military council, and the administration of the city was handed over to the terrorist group PKK. Interestingly, the Russians cooperated with the PKK in Manbij as much as the US soldiers. The two adversaries have preferred quiet harmony when it comes to the terrorist group PKK.

The importance of Manbij for Türkiye should be mentioned from several perspectives. First of all, Manbij is a springboard just south of the Turkish border. Whoever controls it can trigger either a threat against Türkiye or a move that can develop the region, depending on the intention. Thus, a PKK-held Manbij could host the planning, preparation, and execution of attacks against residents or security forces along and behind Türkiye's borders. However, once under opposition control, Manbij will realize its potential to revitalize the regional economy instead of becoming a security problem.

Another feature of Manbij is that it dominates the closest crossing points of the Euphrates River to Türkiye. Having control over Manbij is an advantage in the fight against the terrorist group PKK. For example, in the military context, control of Manbij allows the terrorist group PKK to prevent wide-fronted asymmetric attacks in subsequent operations east of the Euphrates River. In the socioeconomic context, Manbij is a candidate city to become an economic center of attraction along with al-Bab. Militarily, the control of Manbij will allow the SNA and the Turkish Armed Forces to save forces for a military campaign that could be launched from the north. In other words, a probable operation to neutralize the terrorist group PKK could encircle it over a wide area, starting from both the Euphrates River axis and the Turkish borders. With Deir ez-Zor coming under opposition control, the terrorist group PKK can be put under pressure from all directions. Even though the US is known to be in favor of the terrorist group PKK, it seems unlikely that it will be able to prevent the terrorist group PKK from being wiped out of Syria due to the lack of popular support.

Another issue is about the returns of Syrians. SNA's control of Manbij paved the way for the voluntary, dignified, and honorable return of the internally displaced people and Syrians under protection in Türkiye. Considering that approximately 400,000 Manbijis live in northwestern Syria or in Türkiye, hundreds of thousands of Manbijis will be able to return to their lands as the terrorist group PKK is expelled from Manbij.

Ultimately, the capture of Manbij is as important as Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Damascus and is a major security initiative for Türkiye. On the other hand, the goal of eradicating the entire terrorist group PKK's presence east of the Euphrates River and the complete normalization of Syria should be the objective. With Manbij, only the first phase of a long and patiently endured process will be on the agenda to remove the terrorist group PKK from Syria. AA

Putin has just suffered a terrible defeat

Samuel

PRESIDENT-SELECT Donald Trump has stridently condemned Ukraine's use of long-range missiles against Russian targets. In the interview that accompanied his selection as Time magazine Person of the Year, he declared "I disagree very vehemently with sending missiles hundreds of miles into Russia. Why are we doing that?"

Trump's objections to Ukrainian Atacam strikes mirror the views of his allies in Congress and foreign policy advisors. Utah senator Mike Lee warned that President Joe Biden's Atacam greenlight would set the stage for World War III, while former US ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell claimed that Biden was "launching a whole new war". With Trump determined to achieve a negotiated settlement in Ukraine, he appears to want to close the door on pretexts that Russia might use

to avoid partaking in talks.

While Trump's opposition to Atacam use is wholly expected, it also has pitfalls. As Britain and France have approved long-range missile strikes on Russian targets, Trump's stance weakens the cogency of the intra-Nato military cooperation in the Ukraine war. Even more concerning, his statement plays into Russia's strategy of using apocalyptic threats as a tool of deterrence. Last week, Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov told CNN that Russia was prepared to use "even stronger military means" than Oreshnik hypersonic missiles in Ukraine. Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov repeated the same refrain in his interview with Right-wing media personality Tucker Carlson.

The Kremlin wants us to believe that its willingness to escalate exceeds the West's and hopes that we

will blink first. We must not fall into this time-tested Russian trap. Adhering to the principle of "peace through strength" is the most effective way to call Moscow's bluff and achieve a just peace in Ukraine. The case for a "peace through strength" approach to Russian aggression in Ukraine is bolstered by the repeated folding of Russia's red lines. In July 2022, deputy chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev threatened Ukraine with a "judgment day" if it dared to strike Russian-occupied Crimea. Ukraine exposed Medvedev's bluster with the October 2022 Kerch Bridge explosion and devastating attacks on the Russian Black Sea Fleet. These attacks hindered Russia's ability to sabotage Ukrainian agricultural exports, forced key Russian vessels to dock into

Novorossiysk, and saved countless civilian lives in Odesa and Mykolaiv.

While Ukraine's Atacam strikes against Russian territory have not had such a seismic impact, they still have the potential to inflict serious damage on Russia's capabilities. As uncertainties about future US military assistance compound Russia's ammunition and artillery shell supply chain advantage, Atacam strikes on weapons depots in border regions like Bryansk have strategic value. Ukraine's attacks on the Kursk airfield in late November could slow the recapture of the partially occupied Russian region, allowing Kyiv to use Kursk as a territorial bargaining chip in peace negotiations. The possibility of its forces facing Atacam strikes might also make North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un think twice about further

troop deployments to Kursk. At this critical juncture, Ukraine urgently needs to dilute Russia's manpower and war materiel advantages. This imperative makes Atacams an integral tool at Ukraine's disposal.

Russia's meek capitulation in the face of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's rapid-fire offensive against Bashar al-Assad should also encourage the West to stay strong. After Assad faced opprobrium for his alleged role in the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafic Hariri, Syria became the cornerstone of Russia's Middle East strategy. Russia's naval base in Tartus has been an integral logistical hub for its military operations in Africa and symbol of its great power status in the Mediterranean.

Russia's decisive military intervention on Assad's behalf in 2015 bolstered public pride in Russian mil-

itary power and enhanced its standing as a counterweight to US influence in the developing world. Moreover, it showcased Russia's loyalty to allies in crisis and gave it a triumph in its global struggle against liberal democracy. In less than two weeks, Vladimir Putin surrendered Russia's Middle East foothold, risked key logistical facilities, and sacrificed a key component of his foreign policy legacy. Aside from imprecise air strikes on civilian targets, Russia did not even put up a meaningful fight. This is a clear reminder of the limitations of Russia's material capabilities and exemplifies that the Kremlin does not have the bite to match its bark. Trump's plan to end the wars that have destroyed countless lives in Ukraine and the Middle East is a laudable one. "Peace through strength" is the most effective way to make it a reality.

The Telegraph

From Assad’s backer to sanctuary, Russia has been humiliated

Olga Lautman

THE Syrian people achieved what once seemed impossible. They rid themselves of the brutal dictator who massacred hundreds of thousands in one of the most repressive states. Bashar al-Assad, infamous for his chemical attacks, war crimes, and alliances with Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah in his violent crack-down, fled to Russia as his regime crumbled.

This marked a monumental achievement for Syrians, whose resilience matched their relentless opposition to a brutal regime propped up for over a decade by foreign powers. Chief among them is Russia. Syrian rebels seized Damascus unopposed after a lightning advance through the country, forcing Assad to seek asylum in Russia after a 13-year conflict and six decades of his family's autocratic rule. Assad now joins treasonous former Ukrainian president Yanukovich, another pro-Kremlin leader who fled to Russia.

For Russia, the fall of Assad is humiliating and a severe blow to its global image after Moscow spent over a decade keeping him in power. But despite its promises of unwavering support, Russia ultimately failed to prevent Assad's collapse - a stark reflection of its very limited resources. There is also the question of how Russia's military and intelligence missed signs that rebel forces were preparing an offensive. This failure allowed opposition fighters to overrun key territories, catching Assad's regime and Moscow off guard. Rumors of the dismissal of Lieutenant General Sergey Kisel, who was in charge of Moscow's operations in Syria, highlight growing discontent within Russia's leadership, raising questions about its competence and signaling potential upheaval in the wake of its strategic failures in Syria.

Russia officially entered the Syrian conflict in 2015, launching airstrikes that targeted not only opposition groups but also civil-

ian housing, schools, hospitals, and humanitarian corridors. For over a decade, Russia's brutal tactics, including carpet bombing cities, mirrored the strategy it later used in its 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Yet, despite Moscow projecting 'strength', it was unable to stop the downfall of Assad's regime. Meanwhile, Russia granted Assad and his family asylum to reinforce its image as a loyal ally to authoritarian regimes, even in the face of their collapse. By publicly announcing the asylum, Moscow aimed to signal that it remains a reliable partner while managing the fallout from Assad's downfall. Russia's ambassador to Vienna stated as such on X: "#Assad and his family are in Moscow. Russia does not betray its friends in difficult situations. This is the difference between #Russia and the #US." This decision followed criticism and outright anger from Russian military bloggers, who criticized the collapse of the Syrian army as a failure of leadership and corruption by the regime.

Russia's involvement extended far beyond military backing and collaboration with Hezbollah and Iranian-backed militias. The Kremlin's willingness to work with these groups - often using terrorist tactics - became a hallmark of its foreign policy. Russia set up joint control centers and shared intelligence, further embedding itself in the country. In addition to its military support, Russia supported Assad's regime after it was accused of using poison gas and chemical weapons, systematically targeting civilians, committing war crimes, and leaving mass graves scattered across Syria. Russia also deployed mercenaries, including the infamous Wagner Group, who were responsible for committing horrific atrocities against civilians. To obscure Assad's atrocities, Russia waged an aggressive disinformation campaign, framing the con-

flict as an internal war driven by opposition forces rather than the regime's brutality. This effort aimed to confuse the international community and obscure the true nature of the violence, making it harder to garner foreign support for the opposition. By labeling the opposition as "terrorists," Russia falsely shifted blame for the violence, mass killings, and chemical attacks onto them, providing cover for Assad's war crimes. This campaign not only protected the regime but also endangered opposition and humanitarian groups by seeking to undermine their credibility while millions of Syrians suffered.

Russia's mass propaganda was particularly effective in portraying the civil war as a complex internal dispute, much like the disinformation it spread in Ukraine after its illegal 2014 annexation of Crimea and occupation of Donbas. By framing the conflict as a rebellion, Russian disinformation confused the international community and prevented an appropriate response. Media outlets, often unknowingly, repeated these false narratives, further distorting the reality of the situation. After the sudden fall of Assad's regime, reports emerged of Moscow scrambling to withdraw its military assets from Syria, including moving naval ships out of Tartus. If true, claims that Russia sought Turkey's assistance to ensure the safe evacuation of its forces added an extra layer of embarrassment for the Kremlin. Tartus, once a critical hub for projecting Russian power in the region, now symbolizes Moscow's failure to sustain its foothold, casting doubt on its future influence in the Middle East.

Desperate to salvage some of its investments, Russia reportedly engaged in frantic negotiations with Syria's new authorities to retain access to its remaining bases. However, with the shifting political landscape in Damascus,

any agreements made were precarious at best. The very notion of Russia, a supposed superpower, relying on a NATO member like Turkey to extract its military underscored its weakened position and deepened its humiliation on the global stage. The collapse of Assad's regime and the potential loss of Russia's military bases in Syria present significant challenges to Moscow's ability to carry out operations and maintain influence in both the Middle East and Africa. Khmeimim airbase has been a critical hub for Russia, enabling the supply of mercenaries, supplies, and equipment to African countries, such as the Central African Republic and Mali. The loss of Russia's bases would severely disrupt Russia's mercenary rotations, resupply operations, and broader influence across sub-Saharan Africa.

Moreover, the diminishing of its military presence in Syria undermines Russia's regional authority, weakening its role in Middle Eastern power dynamics and exposing the fragility of its overstretched global ambitions. The loss of Assad, Russia's significant ally in the Middle East, has dealt a severe blow to Moscow. It not only shattered Russia's ambitions for regional dominance but also delivered a psychological setback to Putin, whose reputation for unwavering loyalty to authoritarian partners now appears tarnished. The collapse of Russia's strategy in Syria raises broader questions about its ability to maintain influence in other regions, particularly as its resources are increasingly stretched thin by its ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine.

Russia, a repressive regime, has long supported other authoritarian governments, but this strategy carries inherent risks. As Assad's abrupt downfall this past weekend demonstrated, authoritarian regimes can collapse suddenly and with little warning, making this a fundamentally flawed long-term geopolitical strategy.

The Moscow Times

Xi’s RSVP is a snub to Trump, but inauguration invite is still a big deal

Stephen Collinson

AS Donald Trump swears to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution on the same spot where his supporters rioted four years ago, an extraordinary VIP guest looks on, overshadowing ex-presidents, military brass and members of Congress.

Bundled up to ward off the winter chill is Xi Jinping, the hardline leader of China - the country almost everyone on the inaugural platform sees as an existential threat to US superpower dominance as a 21st century cold war accelerates. It's a fantastical picture, because even before sources on Thursday confirmed Xi wouldn't attend, it was obvious it could not happen, despite Trump's stunning invitation to the leader of the Chinese Communist Party for a second inauguration he hopes to turn into a striking global statement.

Getting Xi to fly across the world would be an enormous coup for the president-elect - a fact that would make it politically unfeasible for the Chinese leader. Such a visit would put the Chinese president in the position of paying homage to Trump and American might - which would conflict with his vision for China's assumption of a rightful role as a preeminent global power. At the inaugural ceremony, Xi would be forced to sit and listen to Trump without having any control over what the new president might say while lacking a right of reply. Xi's presence would also be seen as endorsing a democratic transfer of power - anathema for an autocrat in a one-party state obsessed with crushing individual expression. Still, even without a favorable response, Trump's invitation to Xi marks a significant development that sheds light on the president-elect's confidence and ambition as he wields power ahead of his second term. CNN's team covering Trump reported that he's also been asking other world leaders if they want to come to the inauguration - in a break with convention.

This is a reminder of Trump's fondness for foreign policy by grand gesture and his willingness to trample diplomatic codes with his unpredictable approach. The Xi invitation also shows that Trump believes that the force of his personality alone can be a decisive factor in forging diplomatic breakthroughs. He's far from the only president to pursue this approach - which rarely works since hostile US adversaries make hard-nosed choices on national interest rather than vibes. The president-elect's invitation to Xi is all the more interesting because he's spent the last few weeks shaping a foreign policy team that is deeply hawkish on China, including his pick for secretary of state, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, and for national security adviser, Florida Rep. Mike Waltz, who see China as a multi-front threat to the United States, economically, on the high seas and even in space. "This is a very interesting move by Trump that fits very well with his practice of unpredictability. I don't think anyone expected this," said Lily McElwee, deputy director and fellow in the Freeman Chair in China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). McElwee said the invitation should be seen in the context of sticks and carrots that the president-elect is wielding as he gets ready to take over the world's most critical diplomatic relationship. "This is a very, very cheap carrot. It's a symbolic carrot - it disrupts the tone of the relationship a little bit in a way that certainly doesn't undermine US interests."

Trump's outreach to Xi comes as expectations mount that tense US-China relations will get even worse in the coming administration with officials determined to build on an already tough line adopted by the Biden administration, which built on a stiffening of policy during the first Trump term. The rivals are at odds over Taiwan, an island democracy that China regards as part of its territory and that the United States might or might not defend if Xi orders an invasion. China is increasing its

cooperation with other US foes in an informal anti-Western axis alongside Russia, North Korea and Iran. Air and naval forces of the two main Pacific powers often come dangerously close to clashes in the South and East China seas. And lawmakers in both parties accuse China of stealing US economic and military secrets and of failing to live up to international law and trading rules. Since Trump has already threatened to impose crushing tariffs on China, his attempt to coax Xi to Washington seems like a massive contradiction. And it begs the following question as foreign governments puzzle over how to handle the new US president: How seriously should US allies and adversaries take his bullying tone and volatile policy shifts? Is the true American

Kremlin," McMaster wrote. "Trump, the self-described 'expert dealmaker,' believed he could build a personal rapport with Putin. Trump's tendency to be reflexively contrarian only added to his determination. The fact that most foreign policy experts in Washington advocated for a tough approach to the Kremlin seemed only to drive the president to the opposite approach."

Such contrarianism might be motivating Trump in his early olive branch to Xi. And the president-elect may also force a new trade deal with Beijing even if a first-term bilateral pact was largely a bust. The Phase One trade deal he concluded in late 2019 and hailed as "historic" never came to fruition. While Trump turned sharply against Xi months later because of the Covid-19 pandemic that started in the Chinese city of Wuhan, it was never

clear that Xi ever intended to fully implement what Trump claimed was large-scale economic structural change and massive purchases of US agricultural, energy and manufactured goods. There's no evidence Xi has changed his mind. Trump's tariff strategy is also in question because no one knows whether a president reluctant to hurt his base is ready to pay a political price that such an approach would entail. Despite his insistence that tariffs would end up costing Beijing billions, higher prices for imports would be passed by US retailers onto consumers - including voters who saw Trump as the best hope of easing high prices for groceries. Another question: Does Trump see tariffs as a negotiating tactic or a genuine act of economic warfare? Many analysts think his threats against allies like Canada or the European Union are simply meant to improve his negotiating position. But such is the antipathy to China in Washington that trade wars with Beijing could be more enduring and an end in themselves.

"With China, we still have a question mark about whether tariff threats are aimed as negotiating leverage towards a deal, or they are aimed at some sort of unilateral decoupling of the US and Chinese economies?" McElwee said. Beijing seems to be taking Trump seriously. It's spent the weeks since Trump's election readying retaliatory tools. On Wednesday, it announced an anti-trust investigation against US-based chip maker Nvidia. On another front of the tech war, China banned the export of several rare minerals to the United States. And on Thursday, it pledged to increase the budget deficit, borrow more money and loosen monetary policy to safeguard economic growth as a shield against new tensions with Trump. This shows that a trade war could be disastrous for China as well as America. While tariffs could send prices higher in the US, they could dry up profits and exacerbate some of China's biggest economic vulnerabilities, including industrial overcapacity and low household demand. So, Trump's unorthodox approach may be starting to concentrate minds in Beijing. Seen from this perspective, Trump's inaugural invitation looks like an opening chess move in a pan-Pacific great game that will help define his second term.

CNN

South Korea needs a stronger response from US to help save its democracy

Will Daewook Kwon & Jaemin Park

THE Republic of Korea's ascent as a global beacon of liberal democracy and capitalism has been built on its robust alliance with the United States. Now this exemplary democracy faces its most significant challenge in decades. It is clearer by the day that President Yoon Suk Yeol's recent failed attempt to invoke martial law was just the beginning of a major crisis that risks the collapse of the South Korean government and a politically motivated conflict with North Korea.

The United States must act decisively by unequivocally condemning South Korea's democratic backsliding, supporting its constitutional mechanisms for self-correction and strengthening regional security amid its ally's internal crisis. The situation has grown more unstable by the day.

After swiftly overturning Yoon's declaration of martial law on Dec. 3, the National Assembly moved to impeach the president on Saturday. Yoon responded by announcing that he would essentially hand over the remainder of his term to members of his ruling party, the People Power Party. This prompted party members to abstain, dooming the impeachment vote, which requires a supermajority.

In the aftermath, the leader of the ruling party, Han Dong-hoon, and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo announced their intention to jointly take over governance, a move one

politician deemed a "second coup" and legal experts said wasn't constitutional.

As politicians work to revive the impeachment process, one member of the opposition party has claimed that shortly before martial law was declared, Yoon's defense minister, Kim Yong-hyun, ordered strikes on North Korean balloon-launch sites meant to incite military conflict and justify the imposition of martial law. The National Assembly member cited a tip from a credible military source. However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a statement to the website NK News, denied that Kim had planned a strike. Kim resigned last week as defense minister and was arrested this week on allegations of abuse of power.

Within 24 hours of the martial law order, the United States responded by reaffirming its support for "the people of Korea" and the two nations' alliance "based on shared principles of democracy and the rule of law." Now it should be much clearer: The State Department should issue a clear official statement denouncing Yoon's unjustifiable actions. A unified international voice, led by the US, has often been crucial in countering antidemocratic moves.

During Peru's 2022 political crisis, for example, the US made strong public statements through the embassy, secretary of State, and State Department, rejecting "extra-

constitutional" actions and advocating democratic reforms. This pressure contributed to President Pedro Castillo's removal and encouraged his successor, Dina Boluarte, to engage with opposition forces and prioritize reforms. Similarly, South Korea has seen widespread protests against Yoon's incompetent and irrational leadership. The United States must urge Yoon and all of South Korea's leaders to respect the will of the people and safeguard the country's constitutional framework.

At the same time, South Korea's democratic allies, including the United States, must not cooperate in political asylum requests or escape attempts tied to the crisis. To ensure justice, all those involved in the martial law declaration must face accountability through democratic and constitutional procedures. Historically, South Korea has overcome political crises through self-correction and democratic resilience. From resisting foreign invasions during the monarchy to championing pro-democracy movements and impeaching scandal-ridden President Park Geun-hye in 2017, vigilant citizens have held politicians accountable and strengthened the nation's political system. South Korea's robust civil society must be honored and acknowledged by the United States and other allies.

Beyond diplomatic measures,

the United States should raise its military alert levels in East Asia to ensure regional stability amid the potential security vacuum created by South Korea's political crisis. Key defense institutions, such as the Ministry of Defense and the National Intelligence Service, face operational challenges because of the investigations, resignations and political chaos caused by the martial law crisis. These vulnerabilities could be exploited by North Korea or other adversaries through military provocations or intelligence operations.

South Korea is a crucial frontline defender of liberal democracy globally and a buffer against authoritarian regimes in East Asia. It also plays a vital role in America's supply chains, particularly for semiconductors. Preserving regional stability is essential not only for South Korea but also for US national interests.

This is no ordinary political crisis. Because of Yoon's actions, South Korea now faces a grave threat to its political system, with risks of autocracy and conflict with North Korea. This is not only a test of political resilience but a fight for democracy's survival. The United States, speaking forcefully, can help its ally rise from the brink. This crisis is a defining test of US leadership, signaling whether America still champions democracy globally.

The Los Angeles Times

Ukraine faces a cold, dark winter after Russia’s energy strikes

Oleksandra Matviichuk

IN 2022, when Russia began its invasion of my home country of Ukraine, my husband and I sat in our living room, with no power, heat or internet. While we were being shelled by the Russian Army, we went into survival mode. He took two bricks into the kitchen and put them in the oven, hoping they would retain enough heat for us to get through the night. Thankfully, it worked.

The situation was absurd, yet it was a reality that many Ukrainians have faced every winter since the war began. And the sad truth is, many will continue to face it as we head into the coming winter season. For much of this war, ordinary Ukrainians have survived unthinkable circumstances. Russian forces have killed, tortured and raped thousands of Ukrainian civilians. Putin has kidnapped more than 20,000 Ukrainian children and forcibly sent them into Russia. Putin's troops have persecuted religious leaders and destroyed churches, burning Bibles all in the name of their "holy war."

Despite these horrific war crimes, the spirit of the Ukrainian people is unbroken - and that is why Putin is doing everything he can to break our spirits this winter by destroying our energy infrastructure. Here in Ukraine, winter is cold. Our streets are often full of

unplowed snow and the temperature, persistently remains below freezing.

We depend on our heating infrastructure and electricity to make it through the season - but this year, we may not have those resources. In recent months, Russia has purposely targeted our energy grids, creating a grim situation for civilians. Since the beginning of the war, Russian forces have destroyed eight power plants and more than 800 heat supply facilities in Ukraine. Russian strikes have led to more than \$10 billion in damage to our energy system.

In August alone, Russia fired more than 200 missiles and drones at our power production facilities to cut our energy generation capacity. And on Nov. 17, they continued this campaign with one of the largest attacks against our power grid since the start of the war, consisting of 120 missiles and 90 drones. These Russian attacks have disrupted essential services for Ukrainian civilians, including water distribution, heating, sewage and sanitation systems, and electrical supplies.

As a result, Ukrainian civilians and businesses have already been dealing with sustained blackouts and power outages. Ukrainian families have had to flee homes

destroyed by Russian missiles. As we approach winter, the energy situation will likely become dire. The United Nations has estimated that Russian attacks on our energy infrastructure could uproot as many as 500,000 more Ukrainians this winter who lack access to basic services. Some experts predict that we could experience 20 hours of power cuts per day. Ukrainians cannot survive winter without heat. Without electricity or gas, a mother has no way to warm the milk for her newborn baby. Without an internet connection, a family has no way of making sure elderly family members are okay. Without heat, people will not be able to make it through the night when the temperature falls below freezing. Ukraine is doing its best to prepare for these dire circumstances. We are repairing power stations and energy facilities as quickly as we can. Energy firms are protecting facilities with sandbags and concrete to withstand Russian attacks. Some hospitals have even installed solar panels to ensure continued power if the power plants they depend on are attacked.

But it is already December, and winter is rapidly approaching. Russia's targeted strikes on civilian infrastructure have left us in a per-

ilous situation that cannot be remedied without outside help. In Ukraine, we are grateful for the support our international partners and allies have provided throughout the war. However, we implore those same partners to continue their support and help the Ukrainian people survive winter.

Thankfully - after years of consideration - the US has now permitted Ukraine to strike military targets in Russia with long-range missiles. While granting this permission earlier could have saved thousands and thousands of Ukrainian lives while protecting our energy grid, we are grateful. Now, Ukraine can strike military targets deep in Russia where the missile and drone attacks originate that have been killing innocent Ukrainian civilians and destroying our vital civil infrastructure.

Stopping these drone and missile attacks will be the difference between life and death for many Ukrainians. It will also allow our country and military forces to continue our effort to protect global freedom and democracy from Putin's unyielding authoritarianism. We know that Putin will stop at nothing to rebuild his idea of the Russian empire and rid Ukraine of the freedoms we fought so hard to protect. With the help of our allies, we will survive the winter, and win the war.



KARACHI: Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddique cutting a ribbon to inaugurates Karachi Campus of National Textile University.

Minister stresses on technological advancement for national growth

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The National Textile University (NTU) Karachi Campus held its inaugural ceremony to launch a new campus and advanced tech lab. The event was attended by Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddique, who spoke about the importance of adopting new technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) to help Pakistan stay competitive in the global economy. The inauguration ceremony was attended by key figures including Dr. Khalid Pasha, Director of NTU Karachi Campus, HEC Chairman Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, Federal Secretary of Education Mohyuddin Ahmed Wani, Veqar ul Islam, CEO of Jaffer Business Systems (JBS) and members of the academia and university faculty members.

In his keynote address, Dr. Siddiqui emphasized the urgent need for Pakistan to embrace technological innovation in order to keep pace with global advancements. Drawing examples from neighboring countries, he highlighted how nations like China have leveraged technology, particularly AI, to transform their economies and create vast employment opportunities. He called on Pakistan to invest in technology-driven education and training to prepare its youth for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

"The world is rapidly evolving from the industrial era to an information technology-driven age. In the next 25 to 30 years, nations that fail to adapt to this transformation will find themselves left behind," said Dr. Siddiqui. "Our neighbors have become tech giants, generating vast job opportunities for their

populations. Pakistan must skill itself to meet the demands of this new world."

Moreover, Dr. Siddiqui stressed the role of education and academia in shaping the future of Pakistan, stating that the development of Karachi is directly tied to the development of the nation.

He pledged to create more educational opportunities across Pakistan, with a focus on integrating technology into the curriculum to drive economic growth.

During his visit to the campus, the Federal Minister interacted with faculty members and students, praising the new tech lab as a vital step in preparing students for the future. He also expressed concern over the cotton industry's challenges, noting that technology could play a pivotal role in addressing these issues.

Federal Secretary

Mohyuddin Ahmed Wani spoke about the strategic importance of the new tech lab, stating that it would equip students with the necessary tools to thrive in today's rapidly evolving technological landscape. He also revealed that the federal government is committed to investing in the Higher Education Commission (HEC), with plans to establish 10 state-of-the-art laboratories across the country.

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, Chairman of HEC, applauded the university's collaboration with the textile industry, noting that NTU has made significant strides in both education and industry development.

Dr. Tanveer Hussain, Rector of NTU, welcomed the guests and shared his vision for the future of the university, highlighting its role in shaping the next generation of leaders in the textile and technology sectors.

Saudi e-commerce sales using Mada cards hits \$5 billion milestone

RIYADH (Arab News): Saudi e-commerce sales using Mada cards reached SR18.34 billion (\$4.89 billion) in October – an annual increase of around 37 percent, recent data revealed.

According to the Kingdom's central bank, also known as SAMA, this figure includes online shopping payments, in-app purchases and e-wallets, and excludes transactions by Visa, MasterCard and other credit cards.

Mada cards are Saudi Arabia's national payment cards, offering debit and prepaid services within the network. They use Near Field Communication for contactless payments, allowing secure transactions at retailers and online, and play a key role in supporting the country's cashless economy.

The number of e-commerce transactions also increased by 29.3 percent on a year-on-year basis to reach around 101 million in October.

The prevalence of smartphones, with a 98 percent

penetration rate according to the Kingdom's Fashion Commission, highlights the digital readiness of Saudi consumers compared to advanced markets like the US, which has a 90 percent rate, and the UK with 80 percent.

The Kingdom's youthful and increasingly affluent population is embracing online shopping, spurred by rising disposable incomes and growing awareness of e-commerce benefits like convenience and cost savings.

Saudi Arabia's per capita gross domestic product is on a steady rise, with the IMF forecasting a 15.95 percent increase by 2029, reaching \$38,124.66.

This growing individual income is enhancing purchasing power, spurring demand for fashion, apparel, and other consumer goods. Combined with government initiatives to promote cashless transactions and local brand development, these trends are creating ripe opportunities for e-commerce players.

Fashion's role in e-commerce growth

According to a study by Mordor Intelligence the fashion and apparel sector is a major driver of the Saudi online retail sector.

Saudi Arabia's fashion e-commerce market was valued at nearly \$4 billion in 2023 and is expected to reach \$7 billion by 2028, according to a 2024 report by the Kingdom's Fashion Commission.

This growth is driven by increased digital exposure, evolving consumer sophistication, and strong government initiatives aimed at fostering a robust digital economy.

The Kingdom's Fashion Commission's 100 Saudi Brands initiative exemplifies this effort, spotlighting local designers and promoting Saudi craftsmanship on a global scale.

By addressing consumer pain points and integrating innovative technologies like virtual try-ons, fashion brands can further capitalize on this thriving market.

Global stock index falls

NEW YORK/LONDON (Reuters): MSCI's global equity gauge fell on Friday while bond yields climbed as investors waited for clues about the future path for interest rates from next week's US Federal Reserve meeting.

In US Treasuries, benchmark 10-year yields rose to a three-week high and were on track for their fifth-straight daily gain as investors bet that Fed Chair Jerome Powell will signal a pause in policy easing after a widely expected 25-basis-point rate cut next Wednesday. The US central bank is grappling with inflation staying stubbornly above its 2% annual target. Data released on Thursday showed higher-than-expected US producer prices in November.

Friday's data showed US import prices barely rose in November as increases in food and fuel costs were partially offset by decreases elsewhere, thanks to a strong dollar.

"The market is assuming that Powell cuts next week and then pauses. I think that's the right assumption because we're seeing a tension between the inflationary data and the labor-market data," said Matt Rowe, head of portfolio management and cross-asset strategies at Nomura Capital Management.

While bets on a December rate cut are almost unanimous, CME Group's Fedwatch tool, opens new tab implies just two cuts in 2025.

"They have to take into account that in an economy where inflation is showing itself at this point to be sticky, and you're very highly likely going to get further fiscal stimulus, deregulation, and some aspect of tariffs coming through, there's just no way you can validate why you keep cutting in that instance," said Tom Fitzpatrick, head of global market insights at R.J. O'Brien in New York.

While a rally in chip-maker Broadcom, opens new tab provided a big boost for Wall Street, only the Nasdaq managed a small gain.

Dow Jones Industrial Average, opens new tab fell 86.06 points, or 0.20%, to 43,828.06, the S&P 500 (SPX), opens new tab fell 0.16 point, or 0.00%, to 6,051.09 and the Nasdaq Composite, opens new tab rose 23.88 points, or 0.12%, to 19,926.72.

F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: The largest departmental store in the history of Hyderabad, Chase Up, has inaugurated its 19th branch on Auto Bhan Road in Hyderabad. Now, like residents of other cities in Pakistan, the people of Hyderabad can also shop for household items and other necessities at highly affordable prices.

Right from the opening of Chase Up's 19th branch, a large crowd of Hyderabad residents gathered to take advantage of the discounted offers and purchased daily necessities at reasonable prices. On this occasion, residents expressed their joy, stating that the arrival of Chase Up in Hyderabad allows them to buy everything under one roof at low prices. Now, like people in other cities, Hyderabad residents will also benefit



from this departmental store in their city.

In addition to the general public, the inauguration was attended by DIG Tariq Razaq Dharejo, business personalities, and many other esteemed guests.

Chase Up directors, Jawad Bashir and Mustafa Bashir, shared that Hyderabad is a commercial hub with rapidly growing business opportunities. People from various regions of Pakistan are coming to Hyderabad for business, which will contribute to the development of both Hyderabad and the country.

Chase Up is a trusted name, and today the people of Hyderabad have shown their trust in it, fulfilling a significant need of the city.

9F (Nine Figures) inaugurated in Capital



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The first outlet of 9F (Nine Figures) by Fahad Mustafa has been grandly inaugurated on the third floor of Centaurus Mall in Islamabad.

This outlet offers a wide variety of clothing for men, women, and children. It spans an expansive area of 1000 square yards.

The outlet was officially opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by Fahad Mustafa.

Fahad Mustafa toured the outlet, exploring the various collections of Nine Figures' clothing. A large crowd was present at the event, and Fahad Mustafa also took pictures with the public.

On this occasion, Group

Chairman Anis Moten, Director Sohail Moten, and Director Hassan Moten expressed that this is a great brand, and in the future, it will be the number one brand in Pakistan.

9F by Fahad Mustafa has also launched an online service for its customers, allowing them to shop for their preferred items from the comfort of their homes.

Saudia closes UN conference with bold commitments

RIYADH (Arab News): COP16 witnessed unprecedented financial pledges totaling over \$12 billion for land restoration and drought resilience initiatives, with Saudi Arabia leading from the front.

Held in Riyadh from December 2-13 under the theme "Our Land. Our Future," COP16 brought together over 196 countries and numerous international organizations, marking a crucial milestone in the fight against environmental challenges that threaten billions of people worldwide.

Funding pledges seen at the event included £10 billion from the Arab Coordination Group to finance global projects combating land degradation, desertification, and

drought. Additional contributions included \$1 billion each from the OPEC Fund and the Islamic Development Bank, and \$150 million from Saudi Arabia.

A legacy of action and collaboration

Saudi Minister of Environment and COP16 President Abdulrahman Al-Fadhley opened the conference with a call for intensified international collaboration to combat desertification, particularly in regions most affected by climate change. "The Middle East, among the regions most impacted by these challenges, stands ready to lead through collaboration and innovation," Al-Fadhley stated.

He emphasized Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 as a

cornerstone of the Kingdom's green agenda.

This vision aims to restore 40 million hectares of degraded land, increase national reserves by 30 percent, and achieve a renewable energy mix of 50 percent by 2030.

The Saudi Green Initiative, launched in 2021, has already led to the planting of 95 million trees and the restoration of 111,000 hectares of land.

Outgoing COP15 President Alain-Richard Donwahi of Côte d'Ivoire handed over leadership with a message of urgency, while UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw underscored that nearly 40 percent of the Earth's land is degraded, impacting over 3 billion people.

He warned that failing to address land degradation could lead to intensified food insecurity, conflict, and forced migration.

The Riyadh Policy Declaration

A major outcome of COP16 was the adoption of the Riyadh Policy Declaration, a document drafted by the newly formed Friends of the Chair group.

This declaration provides a comprehensive framework for global land restoration, drought resilience, and sustainable land management. The initiative showcases Saudi Arabia's dedication to fostering international cooperation and achieving tangible results in the fight against desertification.

SAARC regional trade just 5% against 40% of NAFTA, 68% of EU

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry has said the intra-trade among SAARC countries continues to remain in the low range of just 5% of the total trade of the region while this trade in NAFTA region is over 40 percent, 68 percent in EU and 27 percent in ASEAN, laying emphasis on exploring the vast untapped trade potential in SAARC region.

This was stated by the speakers at a reception held in honour of SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry's President Md. Jashim Uddin, organized by the SAARC CCI Vice President Mian Anjum Nisar here at a local hotel on Saturday.

The SAARC CCI delegation, led by its President Md. Jashim Uddin, is presently on visit to Pakistan from Bangladesh with a view to revitalize the apex trade body of the South Asia region. The

meeting underscored the shared goals and mutual interests, paving the way for enhanced regional cooperation. The Bangladeshi delegation reaffirmed their commitment to advancing trade, cultural exchanges, and connectivity among the regional countries.

Md. Jashim Uddin observed that South Asia with its diversified resources and skilled workforce has tremendous potential to be the fastest-growing exporting region to the globe.

He said that other regional associations like EU, ASIAN, NAFTA are doing very well and they are getting regional benefits but it's still unfortunate for us, that we couldn't utilize SAARC till now. We have huge potential in the area of tourism, agriculture, fisheries, industries, human development and many more. It's time we push the government of each country to seize the untapped opportunity in this region, he added.

He added: This forum

gives an immense opportunity for trade and businesses across South Asia to exhibit their products and services to grow beyond their usual parameters. It creates a platform for expanding their international trade at the export markets in South Asia and beyond."

He highlighted the significance of government support for the South Asian business community in achieving the region's goals. He further emphasized the need to explore connectivity possibilities at the government level and find solutions to unify all exhibitors from South Asian countries onto a single platform.

He advocated for investments and trade cooperation, leveraging opportunities for Sino-SAARC cooperation and exploring synergies with external partners like EU.

Addressing the meeting SCCI vice president Mian Anjum Nisar said that it is imperative for all to draw

lessons from the successes achieved by other regional agreements, and channel their experiences of regional identity and solidarity into our efforts to propel SAARC towards new heights. It is our responsibility to find innovative and sustainable solutions to these challenges, and to work together to create a brighter future for the people of our region, he opined. The priority will be given to enhance collaboration on sectors with high growth potential such as information technology, manufacturing, energy, tourism, and agribusiness that derive tangible results, he added. South Asia is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. We have a lot of potential, but unfortunately, we are still lagging behind to seize all the opportunities, he said.

Anjum Nisar emphasized the need to develop a comprehensive strategy aimed at eliminating obstacles that impede trade within the South Asian

Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

He highlighted the significance of South Asia, which is home to over a quarter of the world's population. Despite this, he pointed out that a well-defined strategy to improve trade links between SAARC countries is still in the works. He stressed the need to address various challenges hindering intra-SAARC trade, such as visa restrictions for the general public, particularly businessmen, as well as facilitating seamless transportation of goods, investment, and services across respective countries. He pointed out that SAARC's share in global exports stands at 1.9%, while ASEAN enjoys an 8% share. Over the period from 2019 to 2023, SAARC's total exports rose by 24% to \$462 billion, while ASEAN countries experienced a 52% increase to \$2 trillion.

Mian Anjum Nisar highlighted the lack of banking connectivity among



SAARC member states as a major obstacle preventing the realization of the region's trade potential. He underscored the need for Pakistan to address issues such as rupee devaluation, inflation, and the cost of doing business to secure a significant share in intra-SAARC trade. Nisar noted that the substantial devaluation

of the Pakistani rupee has led to a manifold increase in external debts.

The speakers stressed the importance of enhancing productivity and promoting the use of indigenous raw materials to reduce the cost of doing business. The also called for improved connectivity between SAARC countries,

not only through road and railway networks but also through ports, shipping, and aviation, which would facilitate and enhance mutual connectivity.

They emphasized the importance of financial cooperation among SAARC countries to bridge infrastructure gaps and increase productivity.



In brief

Rain disrupts third test in Brisbane

BRISBANE (Agencies): Rain meant only 13.2 overs were possible on the opening day of the third Test between Australia and India in Brisbane. Openers Usman Khawaja and Nathan McSweeney guided Australia to 28-0, with an lbw appeal by Akash Deep against the latter the only chance of note at the Gabba. The five-match series is level at 1-1 after Australia's 10-wicket win in Adelaide last week. India made two changes to their side from the second Test, with seamer Deep replacing Harshit Rana and Ravindra Jadeja coming in for fellow spinner Ravichandran Ashwin. The only play came in two spells during the morning session, after India won the toss. Play was abandoned just over an hour before the scheduled close. Play will start at the earlier time of 09:50 (23:50 GMT) for the remainder of the match, with 98 overs scheduled each day, although more rain is forecast. India must win at least two of the final three Tests to guarantee a place in June's World Test Championship final at Lord's. Defending champions Australia will reach the final if they win two of the remaining Tests.

Diallo elected head of French football

PARIS (AFP): Philippe Diallo was comfortably reelected president of the French Football Federation on Saturday. Diallo, who took over after the resignation of long-standing former chief Noel Le Graet in 2023, won just over 55 percent of the vote to beat Le Graet's former ally Pierre Samsonoff. For the first time in France's largest sports federation which boasts 2.4 million members, the presidents of amateur clubs could vote electronically along with the heads of professional clubs with 11,500 voters compared to fewer than 250 previously. Diallo, 61, welcomed the "strong legitimacy" the vote gave him and praised the "democratic maturity which does honour to our sport". He said he would begin a nationwide discussion on French football from mid-January "to define together our roadmap for aid to amateur football". During the campaign Diallo highlighted his record within the federation including a 100 million euros (\$105 million) per year contract from 2026 with American sportswear brand Nike. Diallo also courted amateur football by increasing the budget from 100 to 150 million euros annually between now and 2028, and underlined his ambition for women's football where he wants to double membership from 250,000 to 500,000 within five years. Diallo stepped up in January 2023 when Le Graet first moved aside and then was forced to resign following accusations of sexual and psychological harassment, bringing to an end more than a decade in charge.

Boga suffers muscle injury

NICE (AFP): Nice's Ivorian international striker Jeremie Boga has suffered a "serious muscle injury" to his right thigh, coach Franck Haise said Saturday, which the club estimate could take months to heal. "This year he has injured himself in three or four different places in the muscle area, I can't explain," said Haise. France-born Boga picked up the injury ahead of last Thursday's trip to Brussels for a Europa League game against Union Saint-Gilloise which the French club lost 2-1.

Amir, Imad announce retirement from international cricket



LAHORE (APP): Left-arm fast bowler Mohammad Amir and all-rounder Imad Wasim have announced retirement from international cricket. Both players last featured for Pakistan in this year's ICC T20 World Cup held in the USA and West Indies. 35-year-old Imad made his international debut in May 2015 at home against Zimbabwe and went on to represent Pakistan in 55 ODIs and 75 T20Is. He took 117 wickets and scored 1,540 runs across the 130 games in his international career.

Amir, the 32-year-old from Gujjar Khan, featured in 36 Tests, 61 ODIs and 62 T20Is for Pakistan since

making his international debut in June 2009. Amir took 271 international wickets and had scored 1,179 runs across the three formats. Amir and Imad have been key members of the Pakistan men's cricket team over the years and they also represented Pakistan U19 team as part of their development early in their respective careers. Amir was part of the 2009 ICC T20 World Cup winning squad, while along with Imad, both were integral part of the 2017 ICC Champions Trophy winning squad.

Imad Wasim: "It has been a great journey representing my country and the fulfilment of a huge dream. I would like to thank the

fans for supporting me and the team throughout these years.

"I would also like to thank the PCB for all their support at each step and I wish great success to the national team and look forward to supporting Pakistan cricket from the other side of the ground."

Mohammad Amir: "It has been a great honour to play for Pakistan across all three formats. I know this is a difficult decision, but I feel this is the right time for the next generation to take the baton and elevate Pakistan cricket to new heights.

"I would like to thank the PCB for always extending the much-needed support over the years and I look forward to watching the team excel. I would also like to thank Pakistan fans for always supporting me through out my career."

PCB Chief Operating Officer Sumair Ahmad Syed: "On behalf of the PCB, I extend sincere gratitude to Amir and Imad for their services to Pakistan cricket and wish them the very best in their future endeavours."

Nashra stars in Conquerors' 48-run win over Stars



ISLAMABAD (APP): Nashra Sundhu's three-fer led Conquerors to a 48-run win over Stars in the seventh-round fixture of National Women's One-Day Tournament here at the Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium on Saturday. Chasing a modest 167 to win, Stars were bundled out for 118 in 39.4 overs with Sadaf Shamas top-scoring with 28.

For the winning team left-arm spinner Nashra bagged three wickets for 10 runs, while leg-spinner Syeda Aroob Shah also took three wickets for 26 runs. Earlier, batting first, Conquerors were dismissed for 166 in 44.5 overs. Captain Fatima Sana top-scored with 34 off 35 balls, which included three fours and one six. Stars' Waheeda Akhtar clinched four

wickets for 57, while Anosha Nasir and Neelam Mushtaq snapped two wickets apiece.

In the second match, Invincibles, who were without their regular captain Muneeba Ali, due to an eye infection saw their first defeat in the tournament. At the Diamond Ground in Islamabad, batting first, Invincibles were dismissed for 188 in 45 overs with stand-in captain Omaira Sohail top-scoring with 76 off 112 balls, hitting 10 boundaries.

For Challengers, Tasmia Rubab took three wickets, while Samina Aftab and Zaib un Nisa grabbed two wickets each.

In turn, Aliya Riaz' unbeaten knock of 73 off 74, which included eight fours and two sixes helped her side achieve the target with four wickets in hand

and 50 balls to spare. Umm-e-Hani (47, 72b, 5x4s) was other notable contributor with the bat.

For the losing side, spinners Ghulam Fatima (3-48) and Omaira (2-24) picked five wickets.

Scores in brief: Conquerors beat Stars by 48 runs at the Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium.

Conquerors 166 all out, 44.5 overs (Fatima Sana 34, Dua Majid 26, Nashra Sundhu 20 not out; Waheeda Akhtar 4-57, Neelam Mushtaq 2-16, Anosha Nasir 2-23)

Stars 118 all out, 39.4 overs (Sadaf Shamas 28, Rameen Shamim 27 not out; Nashra Sundhu 3-10, Syeda Aroob Shah 3-26)

Player of the match – Nashra Sundhu (Conquerors)

Challengers beat Invincibles by four wickets at the Diamond Ground. Invincibles 188 all out, 45 overs (Omaira Sohail 76, Areesha Noor 37; Tasmia Rubab 3-27, Samina Aftab 2-12, Zaib un Nisa 2-21)

Challengers 190-6, 36.4 overs (Aliya Riaz 73 not out, Umm-e-Hani 47, Shawaal Zulfiqar 29, Gull Rukh 24; Ghulam Fatima 3-48, Omaira Sohail 2-24)

Player of the match – Aliya Riaz (Challengers).

Stokes an inspiration to England, says Potts



LONDON (Agencies): Seamer Matthew Potts said the efforts of captain Ben Stokes were an inspiration to the England team on the first day of the third Test against New Zealand.

All-rounder Stokes bowled 23 overs in Hamilton, his most in an innings since the summer of 2022. The skipper took one wicket as New Zealand were pegged back from 105-0 to 315-9.

"He can be really proud of his efforts," Potts told BBC Sport. "He leads the team by example. "He probably won't want to take the credit, but when we see him doing special things like that, it motivates you to put in that extra 1% for the team."

Stokes, 33, has had his bowling curtailed by injuries in recent years. Last year he had surgery on a long-term left knee problem and, just as he returned

to full fitness, suffered a hamstring injury in August.

In the three-Test series in New Zealand, which England have an unassailable 2-0 lead, Stokes has been able to play a full role as a fourth seamer. His spell in Hamilton equals the 23 overs he bowled in the first innings of the second Test against New Zealand at Trent Bridge more than two years ago.

"Massive plaudits to the skipper," said Durham team-mate Potts. "He bowled three long spells there and one of them was eight overs of bouncers."

Potts returned to the England side for his first appearance of the tour in place of Chris Woakes.

Potts, 26, has been in and out of the side since making his debut in 2022. This is his 10th cap and second of the winter.

He claimed 3-75, including having Kane

Williamson play on to his own stumps for 44. Potts has now dismissed the Kiwi talisman four times in the five innings he has bowled to him. Asked if it is frustrating having to wait for opportunities in the England side, Potts said: "I wouldn't say it's frustrating, no. I enjoy every single moment being part of this squad. There's always jobs I can be doing, helping out."

"The competition for places is really high and that's a great thing from the team stand point. These things happen. You travel around a little bit and don't play, then you get an opportunity." England are looking to become only the third visiting team to earn a 3-0 clean sweep in this country.

Stokes won the toss and chose to field, a decision that looked to be backfiring when Tom Latham and Will Young were sharing New Zealand's highest opening partnership for 18 months.

But England fought back across the afternoon and evening, leaving the game delicately poised. On a pitch that could turn and bounce unevenly later in the match, England are likely to need a healthy first-innings lead.

"It's in the balance," said Potts. "The pitch played better throughout the day and started to look like a decent batting wicket."



LONDON: Alexander Isak scored one of Newcastle's four goals against Leicester City.

PCB BoG meeting to be held on Dec 18 in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) Board of Governors (BoGs) is set to take place on 18th December in Islamabad, sources have confirmed.

According to details, key topics of discussion will include preparations for the upcoming Champions Trophy. In the meeting, stadium upgradation for the Champions Trophy will be reviewed. The board will also deliberate on the challenges faced in hosting the event.

Additionally, the BCCI's refusal to tour Pakistan will also be addressed. Mohsin Naqvi will provide the Governing Board with the reasons behind India's decision.

Furthermore, the board will discuss the Champions Trophy's hybrid model and potential revenue generation, ensuring that all members are kept informed on these crucial matters.

PCB reacts to Amir, Imad Wasim's retirement

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) thanked pace bowler Mohammad Amir and all-rounder Imad Wasim for their contributions on Saturday after they announced their retirement from international cricket.

Amir and Wasim came out of international retirement earlier this year and made themselves available for the ICC T20 World Cup 2024, which was played in the West Indies and the United States of America (USA) in June.

Wasim managed three wickets in three games at an average of 14.66 and scored a meagre 19 runs in two outings. Meanwhile, Amir was Pakistan's best bowler in the tournament, taking seven wickets in four matches at an impressive average of 10.28.

However, their presence did not help as Pakistan crashed out of the tournament from the group stage, mainly due to their gut-wrenching defeats against the United States of America (USA) and arch-rivals India.

Both players were not considered for Pakistan's white-ball assignments after the T20 World Cup, which resulted in them stepping away from international cricket.

The PCB released a statement, thanking both players for their services and wishing them well in their future endeavours.

"All-rounder Imad Wasim and left-arm fast bowler Mohammad Amir have announced their retirements from international cricket. Both players last featured for Pakistan in this year's ICC T20 World Cup held in the USA and West Indies," the PCB said in a statement.

"On behalf of the PCB, I extend sincere gratitude to Amir and Imad for their services to Pakistan cricket and wish them the very best in their future endeavours," PCB Chief Operating Officer Sumair Ahmad stated.

Jota rescues 10-man Liverpool in Fulham draw, Arsenal frustrated

LONDON (AFP): Diogo Jota rescued Liverpool as the Premier League leaders recovered from Andy Robertson's early red card to snatch a 2-2 draw with Fulham, while Arsenal's title challenge was dented by a goalless stalemate against Everton on Saturday.

With just four minutes left at Anfield, Arne Slot's side were in danger of losing for just the second time in 15 top-flight games this season. But Jota grabbed a valuable equaliser as Liverpool extended their unbeaten run in all competitions to 19 matches since a loss to Nottingham Forest in September.

With last weekend's Merseyside derby at Everton postponed by severe weather, Liverpool have now gone two league games without a win following their 3-3 draw at Newcastle. The Reds sit five points clear of second-placed Chelsea, who can close the gap with a win against Brentford at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.

Liverpool were rocked in the 11th minute as Fulham midfielder Andreas Pereira met Antonee Robinson's cross with an agile volley that deflected in off Robertson. The Reds suffered another blow when Scotland left-back Robertson was sent off in the 17th minute for a professional foul on Harry Wilson. But Slot's men have made a habit of coming from behind this season and Cody Gakpo equalised in the 47th minute with a stooping header from

Mohamed Salah's cross.

The Dutch forward's ninth goal in all competitions this season was the prelude to a period of sustained Liverpool pressure.

But Fulham forward Rodrigo Muniz delivered a sucker punch as he bundled over the line from Robinson's cross in the 76th minute. That set the stage for a dramatic finale as Jota levelled in the 86th minute with a cool finish past Bernd Leno from the edge of the area.

Arsenal failed to take advantage of Liverpool's rare stumble as the Gunners were kept at bay on a frustrating afternoon at the Emirates Stadium.

Lack of firepower

The north Londoners have become a force from set-pieces, scoring 23 goals from corners since the start of last season. But their lack of firepower outside of that route has been questioned this season and once again they were hampered by a failure to turn pressure and possession into goals.

After a second successive league draw, third-placed Arsenal remain six points behind Liverpool, who have a game in hand on last season's runners-up.

Newcastle handed Ruud van Nistelrooy his first defeat as Leicester boss with a 4-0 rout at St James' Park. Former Manchester United striker Nistelrooy had taken four points from his first two games since replacing the sacked Steve Cooper. But Newcastle ended that encouraging start

as Jacob Murphy drilled a clinical finish into the bottom corner from the edge of the area in the 30th minute.

Bruno Guimaraes nodded in Newcastle's second goal in the 47th minute after Lewis Hall headed Anthony Gordon's free-kick toward the Brazilian.

Alexander Isak bagged the Magpies' third two minutes later with a close-range finish and Murphy struck again on the hour to leave Leicester two points above the relegation zone. Jack Taylor's stoppage-time goal gave Ipswich a priceless 2-1 win over relegation rivals Wolves at Molineux.

Kieran McKenna's team went ahead through Matt Doherty's 15th minute own goal after Wolves made a hash of clearing Liam Delap's cross. Just as Wolves fans were calling for chairman Jeff Shi and owners Fosun to sell the club, Matheus Cunha grabbed a 72nd minute equaliser as his shot beat Arijanet Muric's weak attempted save.

But Taylor headed home from a 94th minute corner to seal Ipswich's second league win since their promotion to the top tier. Third-bottom Ipswich are just one point adrift of safety, while second-bottom Wolves are three points behind them after an 11th loss in 16 league games piled further pressure on boss Gary O'Neil. Nottingham Forest host Aston Villa in a battle of top four contenders in Saturday's late game.

Odermatt wins giant slalom in Val d'Isere as Noel crashes out



VAL-D'ISÈRE (AFP): Swiss skier Marco Odermatt bounced back to form in the giant slalom, his favourite event, to take his first victory in the discipline this season at Val d'Isere on Saturday.

The 27-year-old, who failed to finish in his two previous giant slaloms this season, was quickest in the first run down the Face de Bellevard before clinging on in difficult conditions in the second run to claim his fourth successive win at Val d'Isere.

He beat the Austrian pair of Patrick Feurstein, who finished just 0.08 seconds back, and Stefan Brennsteiner, who was 0.12sec off behind Odermatt.

"I really love this place," said Odermatt who has now won four times at Val d'Isere. "Here you really feel you're in winter."

A master of the discipline - he has Olympic and world championship gold, three small World Cup globe titles and 23 victories to his name including nine out of 10 last season - there was an element of redemption for 'Odi' after his catastrophic start to the winter when he failed to finish in Soelden and Beaver Creek.

"I always knew I was fast so (DNFs) weren't a big problem for me," said Odermatt. "But still, it hurts my confidence a bit so it was important to win today." With this giant victory, Odermatt chalked up his second success of the winter after the Beaver Creek Super-G at the beginning of December, taking him up to second in the overall standings, 10 points

behind the Norwegian Henrik Kristoffersen, who was second on the first run before finishing fifth. Kristoffersen also took the lead in the giant slalom classification. Feurstein was only 24th after the first run but produced a fine second run to take the lead, only being edged out by Odermatt on the final run of the day.

Noel crashes Olympic slalom champion Clement Noel, winner of the first two slalom races of the World Cup season, came down to earth with a bump as he crashed on the opening run. Competing under snowfall and in poor visibility, the French skier took a gate head-on after 45 seconds of racing and finished in the net.

The 27-year-old appeared to take a knock to his right leg but was able to put his skis back on and reach the bottom of the piste relying only on his left leg. Noel, who won the first two slalom races of the season in Levi, Finland and Gurgl, Austria last month, looked in good spirits at the finish line despite appearing to have broken teeth and a painful right ankle.

"I had my teeth done straight away and they're all fine," said Noel. "But my ankle still hurts. I haven't broken anything. We did a little ultrasound and we can see that there's a little sprain which is a bit annoying but it's not very serious, it normally requires a bit of rest." The French Ski Federation said Noel would decide on Sunday whether he would compete in the slalom.



In brief

IRSA releases 78,100 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Saturday released 78,100 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 39,800 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1477.45 feet and was 79.45 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 17,200 cusecs and 36,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1142.60 feet, which was 92.40 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 44,700, 41,500, 34,000 and 5,200 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 12,100 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 1,700 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

ANF seizes 1184 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting four operations seized over 1184 kg drugs worth Rs 80 million and arrested three accused including a woman, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Saturday. He informed that in an operation 1140 kg hashish was recovered from Qilla Abdullah in Balochistan. In second operation, 27.6 kg opium and 13.2 kg hashish were recovered from a vehicle intercepted near Phoolnagar Bypass, Kasur and an accused was arrested. In third operation, 2.4 kg hashish was recovered from a motorcyclist near Tarnol Phatak in Islamabad. In fourth operation, 1 kg heroin was recovered from the possession of a woman rounded up near Sangjani Toll Plaza, Islamabad. The spokesman informed that cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

10 outlaws arrested

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police on Saturday apprehended 10 outlaws involved in different criminal activities including drug peddling and possessing illegal weapons recovered weapons and drugs from their possession. A police spokesperson told APP that the ICT Police Koral, Khanna, Industrial Area, Golra and Ramna police teams took legal action against accused involved in possessing illegal weapons and drug peddling activities. He said police team arrested six accused namely Ajmal Khan, Sajjad Ali, Awaiz, Arslan, Irfan, and Majid and recovered 1,890-gram heroin and four pistols with ammunition from their possession. Moreover, four absconders were also arrested from various areas of the city during the last 24 hours. SSP Operation Muhammad Arslan Shah Zaib 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. He said that protecting the lives, property, and dignity of citizens is the Islamabad Police's top priority.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman SECP, Akif Saeed and Executive Director CUST Prof Sohail Afzal awarding Gold medal to student in convocation of Capital University of Science and Technology.

1269 graduates awarded degrees in CUST Convocation

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Convocation for Graduates of 2024 of Capital University of Science and Technology (CUST) held at Convention Centre Islamabad wherein 1269 graduates including BBA, MBA, BS, MS and PhD in the fields of Management Sciences, Electrical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Computer Engineering, Engineering Management, Project Management, Computer Science, Software Engineering, Bioinformatics, Biosciences, Biotechnology, Microbiology and Doctor in Pharmacy (PharmD) will be awarded degrees.

The chief guest was chairman security and exchange commission Aqif Saeed, whereas Executive Director CUST Prof Sohail afzal presided the ceremony. Prof. Dr.Mansoor Ahmed, Vice Chancellor of University in his inaugural speech, welcomed the graduating students for their presence in this memorable and happy occasion and declared this event as a significant milestone in their lives. He highlighted the contribution made by the University in the field of higher education.

"Education plays a vital role in

economic development of country. It raises the productivity and efficiency of individuals and thus produces skilled manpower that is capable of leading the economy towards the path of sustainable economic development" he added. Akif Saeed, while delivering his keynote address, said education plays a vital role in the economic development of the country. It raises the productivity and efficiency of individuals and thus produces skilled manpower that is capable of leading the economy towards the path of sustainable economic development. Nowadays, modern technology should be adopted by students to meet the challenges of 21st century.

"We should act like an educated nation to solve our problems and demonstrate our abilities to meet the challenges of the high-tech era." In this Convocation 33 graduates awarded PhD degrees; including 16 in the field of Management Sciences, 8 in the field of Engineering, 4 in the field of Computing, 4 and 05 in the field of Biosciences.

PhD graduates who received PhD degrees includes; Maria Mashkoor, Wasim Nasir, Maria Mashkoor, Noshir Wan Khan, Anam Tariq,

Haris Bin Khalid, Muhammad Hassaan, Syeda Nawazish Arooj, Ghazia Khoulia Qureshi, Fizzah Khalid Butt, Aamna Batool, Syed Muhammad Hamza Abid Wasti, Ramsha Zakaria, Waseem Akhter, Mushtaq Ahmed, Rameeza Andleeb, Munibah Munir, and Umer Niaz in the field of Management Sciences; Muhammad Usman Tahir, Azmat Saeed, Ahmad Mahmood, Samana Batool and Samra Kanwal in the field of Electrical Engineering; Saheeb Ahmed Kiani and Shummaila Rasheed in the field of Mechanical Engineering; Muhammad Waqas Zaffar in the field of Water Resource Management; Najam Ul Hassan, Fakeeha Jafari, Humaira Liaqat and Bilal Ahmad in the field of Computer Science; Anam Tariq, Sana Ilahi, Shahid Hussain, Hina Ahsan and Amna Naheed Khan in the field of Biosciences and Bioinformatics.

The 72 position holders students from different departments were awarded 32 Gold, 20 Silver, and 20 Bronze medals. The 'Jinnah Gold Medal' was awarded to best graduate of the Convocation khadeeja Iqbal of BBA program, on her overall distinguished performance in curricular and extracurricular activities.

Speakers deliberate on legislative reforms for gender equality

ISLAMABAD (APP): The participants at a two-day International Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) workshop kicked off here on Saturday gathered to discuss reshaping legislative frameworks for promoting gender equality and gender inclusiveness.

The workshop, titled "Advancing Gender Equality in Legislation: A Workshop on Gender-Sensitive Legislative Drafting" commenced at the Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services (PIPS), under the auspices of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) of the National Assembly of Pakistan.

The workshop was aimed at capacity building of the parliamentarians for ensuring gender-sensitive legislation and to enhance the implementation, monitoring and evaluation frameworks at every tier of the government.

This international workshop of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) was a global acknowledgment and recognition of Pakistan's firm commitment towards promoting gender equality

and is indeed a landmark effort to reshape legislative frameworks to promote gender equality and gender-inclusiveness.

Speaking on the occasion, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Ms. Zainab Gimba, said that whole world has acknowledged the best efforts of the incumbent regime of Pakistan for reshaping the legislative frameworks to promote gender equality and gender inclusiveness.

She underlined that this conference is a testament to the power of collective action as with collective efforts we can move mountains, break barriers, and create a legacy of equality and justice for generations to come. Ms Gimba said that this was a very pleasant moment for me as seeing women representatives from rest of the country here and participating in pursuing the best legislation.

She also appreciated the best efforts of Pakistan for taking various steps by the government for empowering the women segment of the society, especially financial assistance and

offering loans for small businesses at local level.

Addressing the participants, Secretary WPC/MNA Dr. Shahida Rehmani also outlined the significant accomplishments of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) and the women parliamentarians including spearheading critical pro-women legislation, including the Protection Against Harassment at the Workplace Act and anti-acid throwing laws, setting a benchmark for gender-sensitive legal frameworks.

She informed about the advocacy efforts of WPC for increased representation of women in law enforcement, particularly in the police force, and the introduction of electoral reforms with a gender perspective, along with the humanitarian assistance provided to flood victims and survivors of terrorism and violence.

This prestigious event convened experts, policy-makers, and legislators from Commonwealth Parliamentarians to foster dialogue and collaboration on embedding gender equity into legislative processes.

The participants represented diverse nations,

international organizations, and advocacy groups. The workshop explored global best practices in gender-sensitive legislative drafting and addressed pressing issues such as removing systemic biases in existing laws, promoting women's representation, and ensuring that new legislation meets the needs of all genders.

The event featured renowned international speakers and panellists, making it a unique platform for exchanging innovative ideas and fostering cross-border partnerships. This international gathering underscores Pakistan's commitment to championing gender equality on the global stage.

Earlier in his welcoming remarks, Executive Director (PIPS) Muhammad Rashid Mafzool Zaka and Secretary WPC Dr Shahida Rehmani extended a warm welcome to the honourable delegates from Maldives and Sri Lanka, participants from the federal and provincial parliaments of Pakistan and the chief guest, Ms. Zainab Gimba, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP).

Govt committed to hold sports events for youth: Sanaullah

ISLAMABAD (PPI) Adviser to the Prime Minister, Rana Sanaullah Khan, has expressed the government's commitment to organizing regular sports events to provide healthy recreational opportunities to the youth.

He was addressing the inaugural ceremony of Quaid-e-Azam Inter-Provincial Games, which commenced at Pakistan Sports Complex, Islamabad today. The Adviser said that inter provincial games should be held biennially.

Rana Sanaullah Khan announced that athletes, who perform well in the Quaid-e-Azam Inter-Provincial Games, will be granted admission to the High-Performance Sports Academy, which is nearing completion as part of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's vision. He further said that these athletes would receive training to international

standards at the academy.

He informed that the academy being established at a cost of 207 crore rupees will include a state-of-the-art biomechanics lab designed to improve athletes' performance and overall physical efficiency.

Outlining government's major initiatives for promotion of sports, Rana Sanaullah Khan said departmental sports will be revived and all departments and autonomous bodies will be directed to constitute their teams and allocate specialized quota and scholarships for athletes.

He said impartiality and transparency of sports federations' elections will be ensured. The advisor, however, made it clear that this initiative is not meant to interfere in the independent working of these federations and is rather aimed at improving their viability.

Rana Sanaullah Khan

advised the youth to focus on maximizing their potentials and remain wary of the elements that may distract them.

Earlier, the event was formally opened by Olympic champion Arshad Nadeem, who lit the ceremonial torch to mark the beginning of the games.

It is pertinent to mention that Quaid-e-Azam Inter-Provincial Games have been organized by Pakistan Sports Board.

Teams comprising male and female athletes from all the four provinces, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan and Islamabad will participate in the event.

The games will feature competitions in various disciplines, including athletics, badminton, boxing, football, hockey, judo, kabaddi, karate, squash, swimming, taekwondo, table tennis, volleyball, weightlifting and wrestling.



RAWALPINDI: PML-N leaders Barrister Danyal Chaudhry and Muhammad Hanif Abbasi graced the Christmas Celebrations at Muslim League House.

Shezra Mansab denounces PTI for undermining democracy

ISLAMABAD, Dec 14 (APP):Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)

leader Dr. Shezra Mansab Ali Khan Kharal, has strongly denounced the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for spreading false information, emphasizing that the party must prioritize truth and honesty over personal interests.

In an interview with PTV news channel, Mansab exposed PTI's web of lies and emphasized the need for truth and honesty in politics. She stressed that PTI's actions were a threat to the

country's democratic institutions and the rule of law.

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on social media platforms to spread misinformation has become a significant concern globally, she mentioned.

Shezra Mansab claimed that PTI used AI-generated content to deceive people and shape public opinion referring to the recent protests in Islamabad.

Fact-checkers exposed AI-generated images that falsely depicted the after-

math of PTI's workers protests in Islamabad, which were used to misguide the nation, she added.

She stated that the PTI's recent coming to Islamabad was an attempt to recreate chaos like of May 9 incident, adding that instead of promoting peace, the party was exploiting deaths of the innocent people to further move their political agenda.

Furthermore, they are disseminating false information to undermine the credibility of state institutions, which is no longer acceptable, she mentioned.

CDWP clears revised PC-I of Rwp Ring Road Project

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Punjab government has approved the revised PC-I of the Ring Road project, with an estimated cost of Rs 32.9 billion from the previous amount of Rs 26.9 billion.

According to the Director General, Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), Kinza Murtaza, the revised PC-I was presented and formally cleared during a meeting of the Central Development Working Party (CDWP).

This marks a significant step forward in the execution of this important project. The DG also highlighted that sub-

stantial progress is being made on the Ring Road project, including the commencement of girder launch on the flyovers. This development signifies a major milestone in the construction process.

The Ring Road project will cover 38.3 kilometers with five interchanges at Banth, Chak Beli Khan, Adiala Road, Chakri Khan, and Thallian. Once completed, the road will help alleviate the growing traffic congestion in Rawalpindi, significantly improving the city's transportation network.

"This revised plan ensures that the Ring Road project

will meet the growing transportation needs of the region, enhance mobility, and resolve traffic issues," said Kinza Murtaza adding, "The commencement of girder work on the flyovers is an important step toward completing this vital project."

The Ring Road is a key part of the broader efforts to modernize and expand Rawalpindi's infrastructure. It is expected the project to play a crucial role in improving transportation, benefiting both local residents and commuters, and contributing to the region's overall development.



ISLAMABAD: An attractive view of thick clouds hovering over the sky in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

Book documenting the National Art Gallery launched

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), in collaboration with the Asian Study Group, launched the book "Documenting the National Art Gallery" at the PNCA- National Art Gallery on Saturday.

This significant event was attended by a large number of art enthusiasts, architects, cultural experts, and the general public, who gathered to celebrate the story of one of Pakistan's most iconic architectural and cultural landmarks.

The book, written by the esteemed architect Naeem Pasha, is a comprehensive documentation of the National Art Gallery's conception, design, and construction, spanning over 27 years from its initial vision in 1981 to its completion and inauguration in 2007. Naeem Pasha, the architect behind the National Art Gallery and a visionary figure in Pakistan's

art and architecture scene, shared his insights and reflections with the audience, emphasizing the perseverance, creativity, and dedication it took to bring this monumental project to life.

Naeem Pasha is renowned for his contributions to Pakistan's artistic and cultural development.

As the founder of the Rohtas Gallery and with a career spanning over three decades, he has been at the forefront of promoting contemporary art and preserving Pakistan's heritage. His design for the National Art Gallery (PNCA), a blend of modern architectural innovation and homage to the country's artistic traditions, reflects his deep passion for creating spaces that inspire and connect.

During his address, Pasha recalled the challenges faced during the National Art Gallery's (PNCA) journey, including political delays, shifting site plans, and budgetary

constraints. He shared how the project gained momentum under General Pervez Musharraf's leadership, with construction finally resuming in 2005 after years of stagnation.

The audience was also shown engaging documentaries that highlighted the project's evolution and the architectural ingenuity involved in transforming a skeletal structure into a vibrant cultural hub. The National Art Gallery (PNCA) is not only an architectural marvel but also a symbol of Pakistan's rich artistic and cultural heritage.

The book sheds light on how the gallery overcame numerous hurdles to become the heart of the nation's art scene. Pasha described the gallery as a "dream that championed Pakistan's creative spirit," emphasizing its importance in preserving and promoting Pakistan's visual and artistic identity.

Ministry conducts auction

KANDAHAR (BNA): Ministry of Mines and Petroleum successfully concluded the bidding process for over 752 tons of extracted lead and zinc from the Bibi Gohar area of Khakrez district, Kandahar. According to the ministry, Gulbuddin s/o Dawoodzai was declared the winning bidder for this tender, offering a price of 42,140 Afghanis per ton for the extracted minerals. Auction was conducted in the presence of officials from the ministry and representatives of the participating companies.

Iran prevents transfer of body

KABUL (Khaama Press): Residents in Nangarhar report Iranian military forces preventing transfer of executed individual's body to Afghanistan. The individual was executed in Iran 13 days ago. The person was a resident of the Achin district and was executed in Iran on charges of drug trafficking. Reports indicate that the body of the executed individual was transported to the Islam Qala border, but Iranian border guards have demanded payment for transferring the body to Afghanistan.

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

Sulfur springs draw tourists to Badakhshan

B A D A K H S H A N (TOLOnews): Cheshmeh Sanghi, a sulfur spring in Badakhshan, is a popular tourist attraction that draws dozens of visitors daily from various parts of the country. Domestic tourists who have traveled to Ishkashim district of Badakhshan to visit this spring have asked the authorities to pay more attention to developing tourist sites. "During the summer season, many tourists come here, and in the fall and winter, it also has a truly beautiful view," said Abdul Momen, one of the tourists.

"I ask the government to establish parks and suitable accommodation facilities for tourists in tourist sites," said Ahmad Fuad, a tourist. "We came to the sulfur spring, which is one of the scenic spots even in this season. We also invite foreign tourists to visit here. Security is ensured," said Nematullah, a tourist.

The Directorate of Information and Culture of Badakhshan stated that over the past year, more than 100,000 domestic and foreign tourists have visited the historical and tourist sites of this province.

"Many tourists from across Afghanistan and other countries visited Badakhshan. This year, we hosted more than 100,000 tourists in Badakhshan," said Zabihullah Amiri, the Director of Information and Culture of Badakhshan. Located in northeastern Afghanistan, Badakhshan has numerous tourist attractions. According to information from the Directorate of Information and Culture of this province, nearly 500 tourist spots and historical and archaeological sites have been registered in Badakhshan so far.

Olive farming grows in Kandahar province



K A N D A H A R (TOLOnews): Officials from the Department of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock in Kandahar report that olive orchards have been established on 160 acres of land in the province. According to them, approximately 20 to 25 tons of olive products are harvested annually from these orchards. "Overall, we have about 160 acres of land under olive cultivation, producing 20 to 25 tons of crops annually," said Shams-ur-Rahman Moosa, head of the agricultural division of the Kandahar Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock Department. The harvested olives in Kandahar are sent to Nangarhar province for processing. Therefore, olive farmers in Kandahar are calling for the establishment of processing factories within the province. "Olive orchards should be expanded, and a factory should be established so that young people can find jobs, and processing becomes easier. Currently,

we face many challenges in this regard," said Sayed Rasool, one of the farmers. "Olives require less fertilizer and labor compared to other fruits and yield better crops," said Hayatullah, another farmer. Compared to other fruit-bearing trees, olives need less water and care, but they are economically very valuable. "Olives are excellent plants because they produce a high yield and have lower costs. Here, most people use them for medicinal purposes," said Hassan Mubarak, an engineer at the international Afco company in Kandahar. Available information indicates that the olives from Kandahar and Nangarhar provinces are of high quality for oil and pickles. Additionally, olive leaves are used to produce a fine tea that has many fans both domestically and internationally.

Kabul residents complain of only 4-5 hours of power

KABUL (TOLOnews): Several shopkeepers in the capital have complained about the persistent and prolonged power outages. Some of them say that these outages have negatively impacted their businesses. Mohammad Imal, a shopkeeper, said: "This week, we only have electricity for one hour or half an hour in the mornings, and there's no power at all at night. We run generators, and each kilowatt costs us 70 afghani. We can't even cover our rent. Our problems are enormous." Shahab, another shopkeeper, stated: "When we take on customers' orders, we cannot complete their work on time. The truth is that we are really struggling with power outages. Customers also complain because their work isn't completed within the agreed timeframe." Residents have also called on Breshna Breshna Sherkat (Afghanistan's electricity company) to address citizens' electricity challenges. Fayaz, a Kabul resident, said: "Currently, there is almost no electricity in Kabul. Even if it is available, it's only for 4 to 5 hours a day." Firoz, another Kabul resident, said: "At night when we study, there's no electricity. Our laptops and phones don't charge. We're forced to study by candlelight." Meanwhile, Breshna Sherkat (Afghanistan's electricity company) has announced measures to reduce outages, including the activation of a thermal

power plant and fixing technical problems with Turbine 4 of the Naghlu Dam. Hekmatullah Miwandi, spokesperson for Breshna, said: "To ensure a stable power supply, we have activated a thermal power plant, which operates for 4 to 5 hours a day. Additionally, Turbine 4 of the Naghlu Dam, which had technical issues, has been repaired and reactivated." Recently, Breshna also announced an increase in power generation from the Naghlu, Surobi, and Mahipar dams. According to the company, these dams, operating under the Directorate of Power Production, have collectively generated about 1,700 megawatts of electricity over the past 24 hours.

IEA's Embassy head participates in exhibition



KABUL (BNA): The acting head of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's embassy in Qatar, participated in the cultural exhibition upon the official invitation of Qatar's Ministry of Information and Culture. According to a statement issued by the embassy in Doha, Dr. Mohammad Naeem, acting head of the Islamic Emirate's embassy, participated in the "Darb Al-Saai" cultural exhibition at the formal invitation of Qatar's Ministry of Information and Culture. The exhibition, held from December 10 to 16, showed various historical and cultural artifacts of Qatar. The event also saw the participation of Qatari officials, ambassadors from foreign missions in Doha, representatives of international organizations, scholars, civil activists, journalists, and the general public.

One dead, six injured in traffic accident

NANGARHAR (Amu TV): A collision between two vehicles in Nangarhar Province left one person dead and six others injured, according to the Taliban-run provincial police department. The accident, involving a Toyota Corolla and a 2D model car, occurred in the Behsood district, the Taliban-affiliated Bakhtar News Agency reported. Afghanistan has seen a rise in traffic accidents in recent months, with poor road conditions and driver negligence cited as contributing factors. While the Taliban's traffic department attributed the incident to driver error, local residents have increasingly voiced concerns over deteriorating infrastructure, including pothole-filled roads and lack of proper signage. Seasonal changes are also compounding the issue. Increased rainfall and snowfall have made roads more treacherous, particularly in mountainous and rural areas, leading to a spike in accidents during winter months.

Sweden donates \$9m to trust fund for Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Trust Fund for Afghanistan has announced a \$9 million donation from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency to support the people of Afghanistan. The Trust Fund shared this news on its X page, noting that these funds are aimed at providing sustainable solutions to the Afghan community during these difficult times. According to the United Nations Trust Fund for Afghanistan, this vital support empowers Afghan communities with resilience, hope, and long-term solutions during challenging periods. The message from the agency also mentioned that "together, we are making a lasting impact." Earlier, Sweden also announced a \$6.8 million donation to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. According to data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Sweden has contributed over \$85 million to Afghanistan's humanitarian fund since 2014. In addition, Norway also pledged support on Wednesday, December 11, for the reconstruction of life in Afghanistan and the empowerment of women. Meanwhile, as winter sets in, the United Nations and international aid organizations have warned of the growing humanitarian needs in Afghanistan. According to international organizations, approximately 23.7 million people in Afghanistan are in need of humanitarian assistance. The continued support from countries like Sweden and Norway highlights the ongoing commitment of the international community to the well-being of the Afghan people.

Baradar describes Haqqani as 'steadfast mujahid and true servant of people'



KABUL (Ariana News): Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, attended a mourning ceremony on Saturday in honor of the martyred Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, Khalil ur-Rahman Haqqani, held in the Garda Serai district of Paktia province, according to a statement from the Deputy Prime Minister's office. During the ceremony, Baradar offered prayers for the soul of Khalil ur-Rahman Haqqani, lauding him as "a steadfast mujahid and true servant of the people." He further expressed that the loss of Khalil Haqqani is "an irreplaceable blow to the Islamic Emirate."

Khalil Haqqani was martyred in a bombing on Wednesday at the Ministry of Refugees in Kabul.

Concerns grow over poor conditions of Afghan refugees in Abu Dhabi

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Human Rights Watch has reported that Afghan refugees in the humanitarian settlement camp in Abu Dhabi are facing inhumane and inadequate conditions. Afghan refugees in the camp face the risk of forced deportation due to harsh living conditions. The union expressed deep concern over the dire situation of Afghan refugees in the camp. The organization highlighted that the refugee camp is located in a remote industrial area, lacking basic living facilities. Human rights watch have pointed out that the living conditions in the camp are highly vulnerable and alarming. They further emphasized that the refugees are enduring significant hardships, with poor quality food, lack of access to clean drinking water, and polluted, unhealthy air putting the physical and mental health of dozens of refugees at risk. Additionally, the activists noted that security personnel at the camp are blocking any attempts to document protests and grievances, using threats and intimidation. This suppression of their voices adds to the growing frustration among the refugees. The union also expressed concern over the potential forced return of these refugees to Afghanistan, calling on international organizations, particularly the US, to intervene and prioritize expediting their relocation to safe countries. Notably, after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, the US and NATO evacuated thousands of Afghan allies, sending them to the UAE and other countries. Despite over three years passing since their relocation, many of them have still not been resettled in permanent, refugee-friendly countries. The plight of these refugees highlights the urgent need for action from the international community. As they continue to live in limbo, the necessity of providing them with safe, long-term housing and access to better living conditions is critical. Countries that promised to offer asylum must step up their efforts to resettle these refugees and uphold their commitment to protecting human rights.

Female artisans struggle with handicraft sales in winter

BAMYAN (TOLOnews): Several female artisans in Bamyan express concerns about the decline in the market for their handicrafts during the autumn and winter seasons. Nargis Rasouli, one of these women, has been supporting her 10-member family for seven years by selling handicrafts. She said that in the cold season, due to a drop in tourists, it becomes difficult to cover the family's expenses. "Our sales depend on the seasons of the year. In winter, because fewer tourists visit Bamyan's attractions, the sales of handicrafts also decrease," said Nargis Rasouli. Other female artisans in Bamyan are calling on the interim government officials to facilitate proper marketing and organize local and national exhibitions to create suitable sales opportunities for their local products. "Our sales are good in the spring, and many customers come to buy handicrafts, but in the winter, sales decline due to the lack of tourists," said Fatima Rezaei, another artisan. "In the handicrafts sector, many women are the breadwinners of their families. The government and international organizations should create marketing opportunities for women's handicrafts to help them grow their businesses," said Sadia Zaki, a women's rights expert. Zainab Karimi, the head of the Bamyan Women's Handicrafts Association, also emphasized that despite the economic dependence of hundreds of families on handicraft production, the sales of these products are not favorable during the autumn and winter seasons. She said: "The number of women artisans currently active in the Bamyan market reaches 300, but daily, more women are drawn to the handicraft sector based on their interest." Previously, the Bamyan Directorate of Industry and Commerce had stated that they are working to facilitate proper marketing for women's local products in this province by organizing various local and national exhibitions.



Afghanistan produces chicken meat beyond demand

KABUL (Pajhwok): More than 10,000 poultry farms in Afghanistan produce 1,700 tonnes of chicken meat on a daily basis while demand for chicken is only 1,600 tonnes nationwide. Engineer Toryalai Himmat Helmand, head of poultry farms association, told Pajhwok Afghan News only 10,000 poultry farms out of 13,000 were operational. He said 800 million dollars has been invested in these farms across the country, which produce 1,700 tonnes of chicken meat every day while the demand for chicken meat in the country is only 1,600 tonnes. About 120,000 people work in these farms. Since the takeover by Islamic Emirate, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) has completely waived poultry farms tax, banned the import of chicken over two kilograms of weight and increased import tax on chickens weighing less than two kilos to 40 percent, Helmand said. Right now Afghanistan does not import chicken from foreign countries and is self-sufficient in this regard, he added. With a decline in chicken market, chicken is supplied to markets with a cheap price. During the previous government, institutions would buy chicken meat twice a week for their staff while the current government is not using it at all. The demand for chicken will go higher only if government institutions resume using chicken, help with marketing, control market and if the meat is supplied with cheaper price for public consumers, he added. Right now each kilogram of chicken is supplied to sellers from poultry farms for 90 afghanis while they sell it to the public for 180 afghanis a kilo. The main problem for chicken market in the country is lack of special location in domestic markets. If special locations for poultry products are created in the country, it will be very easy get control over its prices as well, he believed. Helmand asked the government to create special poultry-product markets across the country and purchase chicken for its staff twice a week instead of other meats. According to Helmand, right now provinces such as Kabul, Nangarhar, Herat, Balkh and Kandahar have 45 special animal slaughter houses. The poultry production sector witnessed a robust development across the country while packaging and processing sector is also improving. Aman, a poultry farm owner, told Pajhwok he has been in this business since 12 years and has four poultry farms in Kabul's Dehsabz district. He said he had invested six million in his farms. While complaining from lack of a suitable market, he urged the government to create a special market for poultry products. Zahir, another poultry farm owner, told Pajhwok he has five poultry farms in the same district of Kabul and has invested 3.5 million afghanis seven years ago and has employed 15 workers. He also asked the government to have control over chicken markets. Abdul Salam Jawad, spokesman for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC) told Pajhwok the import of frozen chicken had been banned. Jawad said: "Producing 300,000 tonnes of chicken meat annually, Afghanistan has reached self-sufficiency and does not import this product."



MOSCOW: A Russian service member rides in the back of a military buggy during combat training at a firing range in Russia's Krasnodar region.

CM KP performs ground breaking of Haveliya water scheme

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, performed ground breaking ceremony of Haveliya Water Supply Scheme during his visit to Abbottabad on Saturday.

The project, with an estimated cost of Rs. 4.64 billion, is expected to be completed within two years. Upon completion, it will provide 250,000 gallons of clean water deaily to urban and rural areas of Tehsil Haveliya, benefiting approximately 94,000 residents.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, the Chief Minister announced several other developmental projects for Tehsil Haveliya, including Upgradation of Haveliya Hospital, land acquisition for graveyard, construction of Haveliya City Bypass, upgradation of ten primary schools,establishment of playgrounds and parks, construction of a middle school and a bridge, development of Saji Kot Waterfall Road, expansion of Shewa Road, allocation of funds for a degree college building, installation of ten tube wells and 200 pressure pumps, establishment of five Basic Health Units (BHUs), construction of five community centers and others.

The Chief Minister expressed his commitment to transforming Tehsil Haveliya into a developed region. He also paid tribute to those who sacrificed their lives for democracy. Earlier, the Chief Minister attended the annual awards ceremony at Abbottabad Public School as the

chief guest. He distributed medals and shields to students excelling in academic and extracurricular activities. During his speech, he announced a grant for the construction of an auditorium at the school. Additionally, scholarships for orphaned students were increased from 20% to 100%, while provincial government scholarships were raised from 20% to 40%. The Chief Minister also announced an additional month's salary for the school faculty.

He toured various stalls set up by students and praised their creativity and enthusiasm. The school principal, Col. (Retd.) Khalid Bashir, presented the institution's annual performance report. Addressing the students, the Chief Minister said, "It is a pleasure to be part of this event. The passion and determination of students here are inspiring. Our youth are our greatest asset, and we are investing in their future. Students should shape their lives according to Islamic teachings and work with dedication to achieve their goals. Great dreams lead to great achievements."

Emphasizing self-accountability, he added, "We must break the barriers of individualism and adopt collective thinking. Nations that succumb to envy cannot progress. A self-reliant and great nation fosters great individuals in all fields." Provincial Minister Pakhtun Yar, Secretary Education Masood Ahmad, Commissioner Hazara Tahir Islam, Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad, and other

officials were also present at the ceremony.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, chaired a meeting on Saturday at the office of Commissioner Hazara Division to review the progress on a 99-point public agenda. The meeting was attended by Commissioner Hazara Syed Zaheer-ul-Islam, deputy commissioners, district police officers, and heads of line departments from all districts in the division. During the briefing, CM Gandapur was updated on the progress made so far on the public agenda.

He directed officials to further enhance the implementation process. He instructed deputy commissioners to hold public forums (Khuli Kacheris) at district headquarters, while assistant commissioners and other officials should regularly organize such forums in other areas. He also emphasized that deputy commissioners and district police officers must dedicate at least one hour daily for public meetings at their offices.

The Chief Minister ordered an immediate crackdown on illegal mining and crushing plants across the division, instructing that unauthorized crushing units be shut down immediately. He further directed the registration of all unregistered garin godowns by January 1 and mandated the relocation of patwari offices to their respective circles by the same deadline. Officials who fail to comply will face removal from their positions.

Navy chief meets top Bahraini leadership

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf, called on the highest civil and military leadership during an official visit to Bahrain. The Naval Chief held meetings with the King of Bahrain, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, and the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, His Royal Highness Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. During these meetings, discussions focused on strengthening defence cooperation and reinforcing the historic ties between Bahrain and Pakistan. The King appreciated Pakistan Navy's role and commitment to regional maritime security and stability.

Later, Chief of the Naval Staff met Commander-in-Chief of Bahrain Defence Force (BDF), Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, the Commander of the Bahrain National Guard, General Shaikh Mohammed bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, and the Commander of the Royal Bahrain Naval Force (RBNF), Rear Admiral Ahmed Mohammed Ibrahim Al-Binali. During these engagements, professional matters of mutual interest, including regional maritime security and bilateral defence collaboration, were discussed. The Naval Chief emphasized the importance of enhancing interactions between the armed forces of both countries through joint exercises, mutual visits, and training exchange programs.

Admiral Naveed Ashraf also visited RBNF Ship MANAMA and the Royal Command and Staff College. In his address at Royal Command and Staff College, the Naval Chief elaborated on current and emerging environment in the Indian Ocean Region and highlighted the need for a region-centric maritime security construct. The Naval Chief's visit is expected to further strengthen and expand defence ties between the two brotherly nations.

South Korea's Yoon impeached

Embittered survivor buckles under martial law backlash

SEOUL (Reuters): South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol faces the greatest threat to his brief but chequered political career, with his fate in the hands of judges after some of his allies turned from him and voted to impeach him on Saturday for allegedly leading an insurrection.

Regarded as a tough political survivor but increasingly isolated, he has been dogged by personal scandals and strife, an unyielding opposition and rifts within his own party. After he narrowly won election in 2022, his recent battles have left him increasingly bitter and have drawn out a recklessness that a former rival said was his defining trait.

By the time Yoon imposed a short-lived martial law on Dec. 3, he was badly bruised politically. This week, his appeal that he had acted only out of "burning patriotism" to save the country from destruction and defiance to "fight to the end" did little to ensure continued support from those who earlier were not convinced he had committed an impeachable crime.

Instead, the 29-minute address drew alarm that he may have become unhinged, his sense of

judgment so badly damaged that he was now a danger to the global industrial powerhouse and one of the most powerful success stories of democratic resilience. Shin Yul, Myongji University political science professor, said Yoon was likely listening to the wrong people such as right-wing extremists, YouTube personalities, and probably "still thinks he did the right thing."

An opposition Democratic Party member said Yoon's address was a "display of extreme delusion". Even those who were more sympathetic said he had buckled under extreme pressure under endless political attacks, some of which he probably took personally. "I hope we remember how the opposition party has incredibly and viciously pushed the president and his family into the corner with threats of special prosecutors and impeachment," Ihn Yohan, a physician and member of parliament for Yoon's People Power Party (PPP), said. The president, on December 4, had announced imposing martial law following which saw South Korean troops briefly trying to enter the parliament building.

Meanwhile, parliamentary aides were seen trying to push the soldiers back by spraying fire extinguishers as protesters gathered outside the parliament. The president was forced to revoke his decision hours later due to a standoff with the country's parliament which roundly rejected his attempt to ban political activity and censor the media.

Yoon's surprise declaration of martial law, which he cast as aimed at his political foes, was voted down by 190 lawmakers in parliament with his own party urging him to lift the decree. Under the South Korean law, the president must immediately lift martial law if parliament demands it by a majority vote.

President Yoon's move warranted a strong reaction from various segments of society with growing demand for his impeachment. Yoon later apologised to the nation but defended his decision and resisted calls to resign. Furthermore, he is also under criminal investigation for alleged insurrection over the martial law declaration and authorities have banned him from travelling overseas.

President hosting meetings to make Bilawal PM: Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Information Adviser Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif claimed on Saturday that "secret meetings" were being held in the President House to oust Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and bring Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairman

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari as the new PM.

In a statement, the adviser said both father and son (President Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal) were making all the necessary efforts for premiership of the latter, adding that the president was on a secret mission to see his son as the PM.

"Zardari should make his son the PM through

fair means instead of stealing the mandate given by the people to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Both Sharifs and Zardaris are enjoying the power through a stolen mandate," he added. He reiterated that Zardari should keep it in mind that the PTI would continue its struggle to restore its mandate.

Iran confirms increase in IAEA nuclear inspections

TEHRAN (AFP): Iran confirmed on Saturday that it has allowed watchdog the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to increase the number of inspections it carries out into Tehran's nuclear programme, state media reported.

"We have increased capacity — it is natural that the number of inspections should also increase," the official IRNA news agency quoted the country's nuclear chief Mohammad Eslami as saying. "When we carry out nuclear activities, and where we deal with nuclear materials, changing the scale will naturally change the monitoring level," he added.

Eslami's comments came after an IAEA report, seen by AFP on Friday, that Iran had agreed to increased monitoring. "Iran agreed to the agency's request to increase the fre-

quency and intensity of the implementation of safeguards measures at Fordo enrichment plant," south of Tehran, the IAEA report said. Last week the UN nuclear watchdog said Iran had revamped Fordo so it could "significantly increase the rate of production of uranium enriched up to 60%", close to the 90% needed to make a nuclear weapon.

Iran insists on its right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and denies it is seeking an atomic weapons capability. "The IAEA has always had access to monitor within the framework of the safeguard agreement and the NPT, and we have not created any obstacles for it and we will not do so," Eslami said. The Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT requires member states to declare and maintain their nuclear materials under IAEA supervision.

Last month, Iran announced it would launch "new and advanced" centrifuges in response to an IAEA board resolution censuring Tehran for what it called a lack of cooperation with the agency. Britain, France and Germany on Tuesday "condemned" Tehran's latest steps to expand its nuclear programme, "strongly urging" it to reverse them. In a letter to the UN Security Council, the three European powers raised the possibility of restoring all UN sanctions against Iran to keep it from developing its nuclear programme.

Nuclear tensions with the West have soared since Donald Trump withdrew from a landmark 2015 deal with Tehran during his first term as US president. The deal had provided sanctions relief in exchange for limits on Iran's nuclear programme.

Russia pulling back but not out of Syria

TARTOUS, Syria (Reuters): Russia is pulling back its military from the front lines in northern Syria and from posts in the Alawite Mountains but is not leaving its two main bases in the country after the fall of President Bashar al-Assad, four Syrian officials told Reuters.

The ousting of Assad, who along with his late father, former President Hafez al-Assad, had forged a close alliance with Moscow, has thrown the future of Russia's bases - the Hmeimim airbase in Latakia and the Tartous naval facility - into question. Satellite footage from Friday shows what appeared to be at least two Antonov AN-124s, among the world's largest cargo planes, at the Hmeimim base with their nose cones open, apparently preparing to load up.

At least one cargo plane flew out on Saturday for Libya, a Syrian security official stationed outside the facility said. Syrian military and security sources in contact with the Russians told Reuters that Moscow was pulling back its forces from the front lines and withdrawing some heavy equipment and senior Syrian officers. But the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation, said Russia was not pulling out of its two main bases and currently had no intention of doing so.

Some equipment is being shipped back to Moscow as are very senior officers from Assad's military but the aim at this stage is to regroup and redeploy as dictated by developments on the ground, a senior Syrian army officer in touch with the Russian military told Reuters. A senior rebel official close to the new interim administration told Reuters the issue of the Russian military presence in Syria and past agreements between the Assad government and Moscow were not under discussion.

Diplomats flay Israel's incursion into buffer zone

AQABA, Jordan (Reuters): Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan joined top diplomats from the US, Türkiye, the European Union and Arab nations in Jordan on Saturday for talks on Syria following the ousting of President Bashar Assad earlier this week.

Prince Faisal led the Kingdom's delegation at the meeting, held under the auspices of the Arab League, which focused on supporting a Syrian-led transitional political process to address the challenges faced by the Syrian people. Discussions emphasized restoring Syria's national institutions, ensuring the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and supporting the aspirations of its citizens for a secure and dignified life.

The meeting also included prominent officials, such as Prince Musab bin

Mohammed Al-Farhan and Saudi Ambassador to Jordan Nayef Al-Sudairy. Outgoing US President Joe Biden's administration has begun engaging with the victorious militant groups including Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), which led a lightning assault that ended in the capture of Damascus on Sunday. Biden sent Secretary of State Antony Blinken to the region this week to seek support for principles that Washington hopes will guide Syria's political transition, such as respect for minorities.

Meanwhile Syria's northern neighbor Türkiye has for years supported Syrian opposition forces looking to oust Assad and is poised to play an influential role in Damascus. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said on Friday that his country's embassy in the Syrian capital would resume work on Saturday, after Türkiye's

intelligence chief visited this week.

Syria's neighbor Jordan was hosting Saturday's gathering in Aqaba. Russia and Iran, who were Assad's key supporters, were not invited. Blinken, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pederson and EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas, Fidan and foreign ministers from Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar met around a circular table at a Jordanian government guesthouse. There was no Syrian representative at the table.

Blinken, meeting Pederson at his hotel earlier on Saturday, said it was a time of "both opportunity but also real challenge" for Syria. Arab diplomats attending the talks said they were seeking assurances from Türkiye that it supports an inclusive political process that prevents partition of Syria on sectarian lines.

WARNING!

Common Frauds and Fake Schemes

- Sale / Purchase of Files of non-registered Housing Societies
- Fake messages on ATM card blockage
- Promise of unrealistic reward in return on investment
- Online trading Cryptocurrency (Bitcoins etc.)
- Illegal deposits and private loan apps
- Multi-level marketing, Ponzi schemes and online lotteries
- Fake messages on BISP funds
- Online trading of foreign currencies (Forex trading)
- Online Employment / Visa Frauds
- Fake insurance coverage offers

Avoid Frauds

- Don't share your personal or bank account information (password or PIN code).
- Don't fall into the temptation of high and unrealistic profits.
- Don't invest in schemes without verification.
- Don't sign documents without reading the terms and conditions.

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

BE AWARE, BE SAFE