

Iran shuts power plants
TEHRAN (AFP): Iran has suspended operations at several power plants over fuel shortages that have been intensified by rising demand during a spell of freezing weather. The country is an energy giant and holds one of the world's largest reserves of natural gas, but it has been forced to ration electricity in recent weeks and close schools and government buildings.

@thefrontierpost First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

Vol. XXXIXI No. 324 Regd. No. 241 JAMADI US SANNI 13 1446 --TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17 2024 PESHAWAR EDITION 12 PAGES PRICE. 30

Khaqan challenges amend F.P. Report
KARACHI: Former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Monday challenged the 26th amendment in the Sindh High Court (SHC). The veteran politician prayed before the court to give direction to halt the appointment of new judges in the high courts. Abbasi also requested the court to bare the judicial commission to work till the decision of his petition.

Assad denies ‘planned’ exit from Syria

MOSCOW (AFP): DAMASCUS: Bashar Assad on Monday said he fled Syria only after Damascus had fallen and denounced the country's new leaders as "terrorists," in his first remarks since militants seized the capital and unseated him.

An opposition alliance launched a lightning offensive from its northwest Syria bastion on November 27, swiftly capturing major cities from government control and taking the capital on December 8. "My departure from Syria was neither planned nor did it occur during the final hours of the battles, as some have claimed," said a statement from Assad on the ousted presidency's Telegram channel.

"I remained in Damascus, carrying out my duties until the early hours" of Sunday December 8, it added. "As terrorist forces infiltrated Damascus, I moved to Latakia in coordination with our Russian allies to oversee combat operations," the statement said, adding that he arrived at the Hmeimim base that morning.

"As the field situation in the area continued to deteriorate, the Russian military base itself came under intensified attack by drone strikes," it said, and "Moscow requested that the base's command arrange an immediate evacuation to Russia on the evening" of December 8. Five former officials previously told AFP that hours before militant forces seized Damascus and toppled Assad's government, the former Syrian president was already out of the country.

The officials said that the night before, Assad had even asked his close adviser to prepare a speech — which the ousted leader never gave — before flying from Damascus airport to Russia's Hmeimim air base, and from there out of the country. "When the state falls into the hands of terrorism and the ability to make a meaningful contribution is lost, any position becomes void of purpose," the statement from Assad added.

Though Assad has long branded any who oppose his rule "terrorists," Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), the group that led his overthrow, has also been proscribed as a terrorist organization by the United States and other Western governments. With its roots in a former branch of Al-Qaeda in Syria, HTS broke with the extremist group in 2016 and has sought to soften its image.

In recent days, both the US and Britain

have established contact with the group. Meanwhile, Israeli strikes targeted military sites in Syria's coastal Tartus region overnight, a war monitor said Monday, calling them "the heaviest strikes" there in years. "Israeli warplanes launched strikes" targeting a series of sites including air defense units and "surface-to-surface missile depots," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

It said 18 raids "targeted strategic locations on the Syrian coast," added the Britain-based Observatory, which relies on a network of sources inside the country. It called the raids "the heaviest strikes in Syria's coastal region since the start of strikes in 2012." Tartus province also has a naval base belonging to Russia, a close ally of president Bashar Assad whom Islamist-forces ousted just over a week ago after capturing swathes of the country in a lightning offensive.

In the village of Bmalkah in the hills above Tartus, an AFP journalist saw roads filled with shattered glass and shreds of roller doors. The force of blasts had stripped the leaves of olive trees in groves surrounding the village, and smoke still rose from nearby hillsides. Residents told AFP that explosions began shortly after midnight and continued until almost 6:00 am (0300 GMT).

"It was like an earthquake. All the windows in my house were blown out," said 28-year-old Ibrahim Ahmed, an employee in a legal office. Clean-up crews sawed at fallen trees that had blocked the road to the next community. They also swept up missile and shell parts, even as the valley echoed to more blasts as pockets of stockpiled munitions caught fire. "The village did not sleep last night. The kids were crying," said one middle-aged man in a blue sweatshirt who refused to give his name.

"Most of the people had already left their homes toward the city, now they have lost their houses," he added. At a nearby military complex, smoke billowed from arched concrete bunkers cut into the hillside, and secondary explosions threw out shrapnel that fell among the trees. Broken parts of mortars, rockets and missile launch tubes littered the hillsides. According to the Observatory, 473 Israeli strikes have targeted military sites in Syria since the opposition alliance toppled Assad on December 8.

PM to attend D-8 Summit in Egypt

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif will undertake an official visit to Egypt from 18 to 20 December to participate in the 11th Summit of the Developing Eight (D-8) countries being held in Cairo.

Preceding the Summit, Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar will attend the 21st Session of the D-8 Council of Ministers on December 18, the Foreign Office Spokesperson said in a press release. The theme of the 11th D-8 Summit is "Investing in Youth and Supporting SMEs: Shaping Tomorrow's Economy."

"At the Summit, the Prime Minister will underline the importance of investing in youth and SMEs for building a strong and inclusive economy; creating jobs; advancing innovation; and promoting local entrepreneurship. He will express Pakistan's strong commitment to the ideals of D-8; underscore the importance of fostering partnerships for mutual benefit and prosperity; and promoting cooperation in agriculture, food security and tourism. He will also underline Pakistan's incentives for youth empowerment and financial development," it was further added.

The prime minister will also attend the Special Session of D-8 on the humanitarian crisis and reconstruction challenges in Gaza and Lebanon to deliberate on the situation resulting from Israeli aggression in the Middle East. He would underline Pakistan's principled position on the situation in Palestine and call for peace in the Middle East. On the sidelines of the summit, the prime minister is expected to hold bilateral meetings with participating leaders.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif welcomed the reduction in policy rate of State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) by further 2 percent and said that its current 13 percent rate bode well for the country's economy.

He further expressed the confidence that the decrease in the policy rate would further enhance investors' confidence in the national economy and would spur investment, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. The prime minister said that lowering of inflation rate also brought down the policy rate, adding that in the future, the inflation rate would further come down. He also appreciated the federal finance minister and other authorities for making efforts in this regard.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari addressing the 3rd China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Blue Economy held in Kunming, China.

Dialogue, imperative to end misconceptions: Tarar

F.P. Report

towards this cause", he added.

Pakistani nation was most misunderstood nation and there were specific misconceptions about the country, he remarked. He said Pakistan was totally a different country, in contrast with what the western media had been portraying. "We are a peaceful people, we are a peace-loving people," he added.

He said that efforts were being made to revive the soft and positive image of Pakistan in the world by dispelling the wrong perceptions. He said Pakistanis were friendly people and their hospitality was known the world over. He said "when people leave Pakistan, they yearn the hospitality, extended by Pakistanis during their stay in the country. "That's what we have Learned over the generations and over the period of time that hospitality is our hallmark."

The minister said that as far as peaceful coexistence was concerned, even in international relations, Pakistan had been very consistent in this regard. He said Pakistan had been a good ally and it had never parted away with anyone until and unless done by other side. He said as a nation, Pakistanis needed to put across the message of tolerance, peace, and harmony through their culture.

He said there was a need to open up to the world and inform the world about indigenous people in real perspective. He said one of the oldest UNESCO World Heritage Sites known as the Mount of the Dead or Mohenjo-Daro in Sindh dates back to 2500 BC. "In Pakistan, we not only are home to all these historical sites including the Gandhara civilization, we are also home to one of the world's oldest Buddhist sites that you can come across and you can find them in the surroundings of Islamabad."

"If you start exploring Islamabad and go towards the Shah Allah Ditta Caves or you go towards Margalla Hills, you can find Buddhist stupa there which actually highlight the richness of our culture and tradition", he remarked. "Starting from the indigenous people of Gilgit-Baltistan, high up in the north, going to the Thar deserts down south. We have been blessed with a landscape which has all seasons, which has all terrains. The only problem with us is, as I mentioned, the misconception about us", he added.

Nation observes 10th anniversary of APS attack

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The 10th anniversary of the deadly attack on Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar that claimed the lives of more than 140 people, 134 of them schoolchildren, is being observed across the country today (Monday).

On Dec 16, 2014, six terrorists affiliated with the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) had stormed the APS and martyred 147 students and teachers. It was the deadliest attack in the country's history. The carnage prompted the government to declare an all-out war against the terrorist outfits. In the wake of the attack, military courts were set up for trying terrorists under amendments made to the Constitution and the Army Act.

Pakistan army said the six militants, who were involved in the attack, had been executed. The military courts, established soon after the attack, awarded death sentences to 310 militants and 56 of them have been executed so far, said a statement issued by the Pak Army. The mastermind of the APS massacre, Umar Mansour (alias Khalifa Mansour and later known as



Umar Naray), was killed in a drone strike in Afghanistan.

Ten years on - despite the counter-terrorism National Action Plan (NAP) that was chalked out days after the APS massacre and other security strategies - some parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remain a relatively easy target for militants. The massacre changed the perception of Pakistan against terrorism and people in the country raised voices for a uniformed action against all types of militancy.

Following the attack, political parties and security departments formed the National Action Plan to stem extremism and terrorism. Later, Pakistani parliament unanimously approved

the formation of military courts for speedy trials of the hardcore terrorists. The terrorists began their attack in mid-morning when they entered the school compound by scaling a wall. At that time, more than 1,000 students, many of them children of military personnel, and staff were present in the school.

They bombed their own vehicle to divert the attention of school guards. They entered the main assembly hall, where a large group of students was taking a lesson in first aid, and started shooting indiscriminately. The attackers, who were armed with automatic guns and hand grenades, then went to various classrooms, where they targeted teachers and older boys.

KP police faces acute shortage of officers

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Police Department is grappling with a significant shortage of officers across various grades, severely affecting its operational capacity.

According to official sources, the department currently faces a shortfall of 22 officers in Grade 19 (PSP) against the 57 sanctioned posts in this grade. Similarly, 14 positions in Grade 18 (PSP) remain vacant out of the 131 sanctioned posts,

while 7 posts in Grade 17 (PSP) are unfilled against the approved 15.

The acute shortage of officers has led to an unusual administrative arrangement. Despite the fact that the position of Regional Police Officer (RPO) is a Grade 20 post, several officers in Grade 19 have been assigned to serve as RPOs, highlighting the critical gap in senior leadership within the department.

Sources within the KP Police reveal that the department has repeatedly raised

the issue with the federal government. Over the past year, at least four formal requests have been made to address the shortage of officers by ensuring the timely allocation of PSP officers to the province. The persistent shortage of officers is causing operational challenges and placing an undue burden on the existing force. KP Police officials emphasize the importance of filling these vacant positions to ensure effective law enforcement and public safety across the province.

Bilawal pays tribute to APS martyrs

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has paid tribute to the martyrs of the Army Public School (APS) Peshawar tragedy on the 10th anniversary of the horrific attack, emphasizing the nation's resolve to combat terrorism and safeguard future generations.

In a statement issued by the Media Cell Bilawal House, Chairman PPP expressed profound sorrow over the loss of innocent lives in the barbaric attack on December 16, 2014. "The APS carnage remains one of the darkest chapters in Pakistan's history, a tragedy that shook the conscience of the nation and united us against the menace of terrorism," he said. He also lauded the resilience and courage of the families of the martyred children and staff members.

Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari called upon the federal and provincial governments to ensure the effective implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) to prevent such tragedies in the future. He emphasized the importance of addressing the root causes of radicalization through education, economic opportunities, and social harmony.

SBP cuts policy rate by 200bps to 13 per cent

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Monday slashed the policy rates by 200 basis points (bps) to 13pc. SBP Governor Jameel Ahmad announced the policy decision after the MPC meeting.

"Headline inflation declined to 4.9 percent y/y in November 2024, in line with the MPC's expectations. This deceleration was mainly driven by the continued decline in food inflation and the phasing out of the impact of the hike in gas tariffs in November 2023. "However, the Committee noted that core inflation, at 9.7 percent, is proving to be sticky, whereas inflation expectations of consumers and businesses remain volatile. To this effect, the Committee reiterated its previous assessment that inflation may remain volatile in the near term before stabilizing in the target range."

"At the same time, the growth prospects have somewhat improved, as reflected by the recent uptick in high-frequency indicators of economic activity. Overall, the

Committee assessed that its approach of measured policy rate cuts is keeping inflationary and external account pressures in check while supporting economic growth on a sustainable basis," said the committee. The committee noted the following key developments since its last meeting that may have implications for the macroeconomic outlook. First, the current account remained in surplus for the third consecutive month in October 2024, which, amidst weak financial inflows and substantial official debt repayments, helped increase the SBP's FX reserves to around \$12 billion.

Second, global commodity prices remained generally favourable, with positive spillovers on domestic inflation and the import bill. Third, credit to the private sector recorded a noticeable increase, broadly reflecting the impact of ease in financial conditions and banks' efforts to meet the advances-to-deposit ratio (ADR) thresholds. Lastly, the shortfall in tax revenues from the target has widened. Based on these developments, the committee assessed that the impact of the cumulative

reduction in the policy rate from June 2024 is beginning to unfold and will continue to materialise over the next few quarters.

"In this context and taking into account today's decision, the Committee noted that the real policy rate remains appropriately positive to stabilize inflation within the target range of 5 - 7 percent," said the committee. The committee had on Nov 4 reduced the key interest rate by 250 bps, taking it from 17.5pc to 15pc after a fourth successive cut since June.

The MPC noted that the strict regulations by the government played an important role in sustaining the downward trend in inflation. Pragmatic steps by the government, including curb on illegal foreign-exchange trade, has boosted country's foreign exchange reserves to a record high this fiscal. The news website Bloomberg quoted the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) data in its report on Pakistan that remittances from the overseas Pakistanis to their families rose 34pc to \$14.8 billion in the first five months of the current financial year 2024-25 from a year ago.

Cop martyred in attack on polio vaccination team

F.P. Report

KARAK: During an attack on the polio drive in the western areas of the country, a policeman was martyred while protecting the vaccination team in the Karak district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Monday.

According to media reports, some unknown armed persons attacked the polio vaccination team in the Shakarkhel area of the Terai Police Station in Karak, resulting in the death of one police official. As per the channel report, the armed attack also left a polio worker injured, leading to widespread panic in the area. The

channel reported that the slain police official was identified as Irfan.

District Police Officer (DPO) Khan Khail arrived at the crime scene, and a search operation is currently underway in the vicinity. Police have surrounded the area with heavy reinforcement in pursuit of unknown assailants responsible for the attack. Karak is the headquarters of Karak District in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Karak is said to be the single district in Pakistan that is inhabited by only one tribe of Pashtuns — the Khattaks.

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz

Sharif on Monday strongly condemned the terrorist attack on the polio workers in Karak, resulting in the martyrdom of a policeman. The prime minister directed the relevant authorities to provide immediate medical assistance to those injured in the incident.

In separate press statements, the president and the prime minister expressed deep sorrow and grief over the martyrdom of the policeman. President Asif Zardari said that the terrorists, who did not want to see the people healthy and prosperous, were the enemies of the future of the country and the nation.

KP Assembly passes Bricks Kilns 2024 bill

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly with Speaker Babar Salim Swati here Monday passed Bricks Kilns Registration Bill 2024.

The bill was tabled by Minister for Industries and Trade, Abdul Karim Khan that was adopted by the house. The bill was aimed to bring about 1000 illegal operating Bricks Kilns under the law.

The law would help combat air pollution in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially in Peshawar.

PPP Parliamentary Leader Ahmad Kundi withdrew his amendments after the Minister declared it as irrelevant. Under the new law, the brick kilns would be monitored by the industry department and these would be established and shifted outside of the city.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Speaker Babar Salim Swati also referred the call attention notice of appointment under the deceased sons/retirement of employees under medical grounds quota to the select committee of the house for consideration.

Ahmad Kundi, parliamentary leader of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly through a call attention notice claimed that the sons of the deceased employees and of those retired on medical grounds quota were being overlooked in appointments by education department despite their reserved quota in DI Khan.

He further claimed despite their 100pc quota in recruitment, these employees sons were not being appointed, which is clear violation of the recruitment rules. Kundi said it was not a matter of DI Khan district but of the entire province, and demanded referring it to the select committee of the house for addressal. Adviser to the Chief Minister, Abdul Karim objected over the assertions of the Ahmad Kundi and reiterated that all appointment are made strictly under the rules. However, the CM did not object over referring to the call attention notice to the Select Committee of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



CM Murad launches 7-day polio eradication campaign

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah inaugurated a new polio eradication campaign across the province, running from December 16 to December 22, 2024, by immunising children in a classroom at NJV School and encouraged the polio vaccination teams to treat their work as a classroom activity.

The event was attended by Secretary of Health Rehan Baloch, Commissioner of Karachi Hassan Naqvi, Additional IG Karachi Javed Alam Odho, Coordinator of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Irshad Sodhar, and school administrators.

This vaccination cam-

paign aims to protect 10.6 million children under the age of five from the poliovirus and is the final campaign of 2024. CM Shah reported that over 80,000 frontline workers are participating, going door-to-door to ensure that no child is overlooked. "I have deployed 15,000 security personnel across Sindh to create a safe environment for this effort," he stated.

CM Shah highlighted the urgency of the situation, noting that 63 children in Pakistan have contracted polio this year, including 17 from Sindh. "The situation remains critical, with most environmental samples testing positive for the virus, indi-

cating ongoing transmission," he explained.

He pointed out that Pakistan and Afghanistan are the last two countries in the world where the poliovirus is still endemic. "This campaign is essential for halting the virus's spread and protecting children from its devastating effects," he said, emphasising that since this was the last campaign of the year, every child must be vaccinated to prevent the virus's transmission and avoid long-term disability.

Irshad Sodhar, the Provincial Coordinator of the EOC, added that for those who miss vaccination during the campaign, help and information can

be obtained through the Emergency Operations Centre's Sehat Tahaffuz Helpline at 1166 or WhatsApp Helpline 0346-7776546.

The Department of Health urged media, community leaders, and religious scholars to raise awareness about the importance of vaccination and support this vital campaign to ensure a polio-free future for Sindh, Pakistan, and beyond.

During the event, Secretary of Health Rehan Baloch, Commissioner Karachi Hassan Naqvi, Additional IG Karachi Javed Alam Odho, and others administered polio drops to children.

Chief guest Saeed Ghani honored at IHSC 2024 closing ceremony



F.P. Report

SANGHAR: Closing Ceremony of Inter Houses Sports Championship (IHSC) 2024 was held on 16 Dec 2024 at Cadet College Sanghar (CCS). Honourable Saeed Ghani Minister for Local Government & Housing Town Planning Govt of

Sindh, graced the ceremony as the Chief Guest. Upon his arrival, the worthy Chief Guest was presented Guard of Honour by smartly turned out cadets.

He was escorted to the sports venue by the College Riding Team. An energetic contingent of cadets presented impressive display of sports

events i.e. 100 Meter Race, 200 Meter Race, Tug of War, Tent Pegging and Horse Show Jumping. The event was also attended by the MPAs, Area Notables and Dignitaries.

The Chief Guest in his address, appreciated the CCS efforts for successful conduct of IHSC. He said that regular participation in

sports is a vital component of youngsters' life and can have a lasting impact on their physical, mental and emotional development. He congratulated all the prize winners.

Earlier, Commodore Zeeshan Ali SI(M), Commandant CCS in his welcome address thanked the Chief Guest for sparing his valuable time and highlighted importance of healthy sports activities at CCS.

The Chief Guest also gave away medals and trophies to the winning Cadets and Houses. Cadet Abdul Aziz was declared the Best Sportsman and Cadet Bilal as Best Athlete for 2024-25. Allama I.I Kazi House secured Winner Trophy and M. A. Jinnah House clinched Runners-up Trophy. He declared the IHSC "Closed", followed by lowering of Houses Colours. At the end, Chief Guest endorsed his remarks in visitors book and performed tree plantation.

Mohtasib advocates for Human Rights in economic development

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Wafaqi Mohtasib, Mr. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi has said that the primary purpose of economic growth is to promote equal opportunity for all citizens to live their lives in dignity and honor.

He was inaugurating an online meeting on Business and Human Rights organized from the platform of the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA) in cooperation with the Commissioner of Human Rights in Azerbaijan, here today.

Addressing the meeting as President of the 47-member strong Asian Ombudsman Association, Mr. Qureshi underlined the growing

influence of corporate activities on human lives and communities. He said that the United Nations Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on Business and Human Rights provide a comprehensive global standard for addressing maladministration and abuses resulting from the business activities.

He further added that Pakistan remains committed to safeguarding the rights and interests of the stakeholders in business and industry.

"The people are the biggest stakeholders and their legitimate interests must be protected", he maintained. He also called upon the business and industrial circles not to lose sight of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), while carry-

ing out business-related activities and also remain watchful about their impact on the environment.

It may be added that the theme of the meeting is in line with Article 4(2) of the AOA's Bye-Laws, which provide for activities aimed at sharing of information and promoting professionalism in the discharge of Ombudsmen's functions.

The meeting was attended by a large number of member institutions of the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA), the OIC Ombudsman Association (OICOA) and the Forum of Pakistan Ombudsman (FPO) including from China, Thailand, Hong Kong, Morocco, and Azerbaijan.

Sindh Narcotics Control ramps up operations

F.P. Report

KARACHI: On the instructions of the Provincial Minister for Excise, Taxation and Narcotics Control, Sindh Mukesh Kumar Chawla, the Narcotics Control Department has intensified its operations against drug dealers across the province.

The Narcotics Control Department Sindh, has arrested four accused involved in drugs supplying in Larkana, Hyderabad and Karachi in the last two days and recovered five and a half kilograms of hashish (Charas), 14 grams of cocaine, 500 grams of ice, 150 liters of raw liquor, thirty intoxicating pills and a car and two motorcycles used in drug trafficking from the possession of the accused. Cases have been registered against the accused and further investigation has been initiated.

Minister announces provision of uniforms

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Education Minister Rana Sikandar Hayat has launched a free uniform drive for deserving students studying in government schools in the winter season and announced that he would personally provide uniforms and jerseys to 5,000 children.

In his video statement, the minister said that the rights of the people are the most important, adding the weather has become more severe and there are many parents who cannot afford uniforms and jerseys for their children. Rana Sikandar Hayat further said that any citizen who can afford to donate a uniform and jersey should contribute to a government school in their city or village.

Industrialists across the province are appealed to play their role in this cause according to their financial status because all of us have sons and daughters studying in government schools, he added. He said that God willing, children studying in expensive private schools will now study in government schools.

Eliminating terrorism is inevitable: CM

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has said that the APS tragedy taught a lesson that ending terrorism is inevitable.

In her message on the 10th anniversary of the APS tragedy, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz paid tribute to the martyrs of the Army Public School tragedy. Maryam Nawaz said that ten years have passed since the Army Public School Peshawar tragedy, but the wounds

are still fresh.

The dark morning of December 16, 2014, is etched in the hearts of every Pakistani. Terrorists brutally targeted 147 innocent children and their teachers, she added.

She said that young students who wanted to brighten the future of this country with the light of knowledge fell victim to brutality. The December 16 tragedy was not only an attack on the school but also on humanity, educa-

tion and the bright future of Pakistan, she said.

The Punjab Chief Minister further said that the APS martyrs are the heroes of our nation, the courage and patience of the parents and families of the martyrs are commendable. She said that the dream of the 147 martyrs of the APS tragedy was a better Pakistan and it is our responsibility to turn it into reality, adding we will die only after winning the war against terrorism.

Istehkam-e-Pakistan convention held

LAHORE (APP): December 16, 1971, but even today the wounds of the fall of Dhaka are fresh. Hindutva sank in the Arabian Sea with the restoration of Bangladesh relations, they added.

They said India was directly involved behind the fall of Dhaka. India claims to be a secular and the world's largest democratic country, but its reality is like a big name and a small vision.

The convention was chaired by Secretary

General of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, Ameer-ul-Azeem. It was attended by Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami Central Punjab, Muhammad Javed Kasuri, Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami Lahore Ziauddin Ansari, Secretary Jamaat-e-Islami Lahore Azhar Bilal, senior journalists Sajjad Mir, Hafizullah Niazi, Zikrullah Mujahid, Malik Shahid Aslam, Ahmed Bilal, Ali Irza Hasni, Mian Khabib Nazir, Abdul Aziz Abid, Hassan bin Salman and Mirza Abdul Rashid.

General of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, Ameer-ul-Azeem.

It was attended by Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami Central Punjab, Muhammad Javed Kasuri, Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami Lahore Ziauddin Ansari, Secretary Jamaat-e-Islami Lahore Azhar Bilal, senior journalists Sajjad Mir, Hafizullah Niazi, Zikrullah Mujahid, Malik Shahid Aslam, Ahmed Bilal, Ali Irza Hasni, Mian Khabib Nazir, Abdul Aziz Abid, Hassan bin Salman and Mirza Abdul Rashid.

Naulakha Church organizes annual Christmas luncheon

LAHORE (APP): The Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, Naulakha Church, organized its annual Christmas luncheon hosted by Moderator Dr. Majid Abel.

Special guests included Chairman of the All-Religious Scholars Board, Maulana Muhammad Asim Makhdoom, Professor Syed Mahmood Ghaznavi, Syed Mufti Ashiq Hussain, Sajid Christopher among others.

In his welcome address, Reverend Dr. Majid Abel stated that, as in previous years, they had continued the tradition of gathering people from different faiths to cele-

brate the joy of the Christian community, promote interfaith dialogue, and share happiness. He emphasized that all minorities in Pakistan have contributed to the creation of Pakistan and that all minorities living here enjoy equal rights. He said "Interfaith harmony is the need of the hour, and while the world seeks peace, we must all work together for peace."

Chairman of the All-Religious Scholars Board, Maulana Asim Makhdoom, said that interfaith events aim to show the world that Pakistan is a peaceful country. He also highlighted the ongoing efforts to promote

the rights of minorities and interfaith tolerance.

He noted that the annual luncheon reflects the unity of all Pakistanis. Other speakers also shared their thoughts, praising Dr. Majid Abel's services and efforts to promote mutual love and harmony.

Dr. Majid Abel, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, concluded the event with a special prayer for the promotion of interfaith relations, harmony, and Pakistan's development and prosperity while a cake also cut in connection with upcoming Christmas.

WAPDA Chairman reviews construction work on Diamer-Basha Dam

LAHORE (APP): Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) Chairman Engr. Lt Gen (Retd.) Sajjad Ghani reviewed construction activities being carried out on project sites of Diamer-Basha Dam during his day-long visit.

The Chairman WAPDA urged upon the project team to gear up the ongoing construction activities in accordance with time scheduled for completion of the project. He was accompanied by the Advisor Projects, GM/PP Diamer Basha Dam project

ect, Consultants Group and representatives of the Contractors i.e Power China and FWO, according to WAPDA spokesman here Monday.

The Chairman WAPDA inspected the progress on construction activities at different sites of the project in details that include Crushing Plant, Upstream and Downstream Cofferdam, Diversion Canal, Dam Pit, Guide Wall and Left Abutment.

In a progress review meeting, GM/PP Diamer Basha Dam Project and the Project Managers of the

Consultants and Contractors briefed the Chairman about the development made on each site. He was briefed that the construction activities on the project are moving ahead with a good pace and at present, construction work is simultaneously in progress on 14 key sites. The project is scheduled for completion in 2028.

During his visit to Diamer Basha, the Chairman also attended a JIRGA with civil administration, notables of district Diamer and Upper Kohistan and the matters

related to land acquisition, resettlement and Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) were brought under discussion.

The Diamer Basha Dam is the highest roller-compacted-concrete (RCC) dam in the world with 272-meter height. The dam has a gross water storage capacity of 8.1 MAF to irrigate 1.23 million acres of land. With an installed power generation capacity of 4500 MW, the project will provide 18 billion units green, clean and the most affordable electricity to the national grid every year.

TPL properties launches its first sales office in Karachi



F.P. Report

KARACHI: In a significant milestone, TPL Properties (TPLP) has unveiled its inaugural Sales Office, underscoring its commitment to customer engagement and innovative urban development.

This office will serve as a central hub for all of TPLP's projects, including 'One Hoshang' and the latest addition, 'The Mangrove.' All projects are developed by TPL Developments and funded by TPL REIT Fund I, ensuring a seamless integration of expertise and investment to drive excellence in real estate innovation.

The launch event took place at the project site in Karachi's Korangi Creek area, attracting a diverse audience of industry leaders and prominent brokers eager to explore the offerings of TPLP's various developments.

Mr. Jameel Yusuf (S.St.), Chairman of TPLP, inaugurated the Sales Office, whose visionary leadership has been instrumental in promoting sustainable urban development. Also present on the occasion was Mr. Ali Jameel, CEO of TPLP.

Speaking at the event, Mr. Syed Jamal Baqar, CEO TPL REIT Management company (RMC) provided an overview of the TPL REIT Fund I. He emphasized that TPLP has earned recognition as a frontrunner in the real estate sector, with landmark projects such as the iconic Centrepoint building and One Hoshang, Pakistan's first LEED Gold-certified residential building.

"As the first Sales Office established by TPLP, this initiative aims to further strengthen the company's presence in Karachi and offer a more direct and convenient way for buyers to engage with the brand across all current and future projects," mentioned Raza Rahman, Head of Sales and Marketing at TPL Developments.

The Mangrove project, with its focus on sustainability and community well-being, will be prominently featured in the Sales Office. This innovative community aims to redefine modern living with diverse options, including residential, commercial, and retail spaces. Its first residential tower is set to launch in the first quarter of 2025.

In his speech, Mr. Rizwan Karim, CEO of TPL Developments, stated, "This launch marks a significant step in our mission to blend modern living with sustainability." He also highlighted that all projects under TPL REIT Fund I are designed to comply with international green building standards and aim for certifications by the US Green Building Council (LEED) and International Finance Corporation (EDGE).

The company warmly invites potential buyers to visit the newly opened Sales Office to connect with the expert team and discover the unique features that distinguish TPLP in the real estate market.

About TPL Properties Limited (TPLP): TPL Properties was established in 2007 and became a PSX-listed company in 2016. Centrepoint,

the first project and flagship office development was completed in 2013 and subsequently acquired in 2021 by a leading bank for their head office. The company is focused on sustainable developments and is using the US Green Building Council's LEED certification to measure this across its portfolio. It has partnered with leading international and Pakistan-based design and engineering firms to deliver developments of the highest quality, setting new benchmarks in Pakistan's real estate sector.

About TPL Developments (Private) Limited (TPLD): TPL Developments is a subsidiary of TPL Properties which specializes in providing comprehensive development and project management services. Focused on high-quality, large-scale urban and historic projects, TPLD aims to create vibrant, enduring communities with a commitment to innovation and environmental responsibility.

About TPL REIT Management Company (Private) Limited (TPL RMC): TPL REIT Management Company Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of TPL Properties, was established in 2019 and is regulated by the SECP. It is the leading provider of REIT management services in Pakistan. TPL RMC has established Pakistan's first and largest REIT Fund, 'TPL REIT Fund I', focused on investments in sustainable development and yielding real estate assets across the residential, commercial, hospitality, and retail sectors.

Commissioner highlights crucial role of trees in climate action

KARACHI (APP): Commissioner Karachi Syed Hassan Naqvi on Monday emphasized the importance of tree plantation to combat climate change challenges in Karachi.

He encouraged institutions and citizens to take responsibility for planting and safeguarding trees. The commissioner further stressed the need for continuous monitoring to ensure the survival of planted trees. He said this at the ceremony of Special children from the Institute of Holistic Rehabilitation and Inclusion participating in NIPA's tree plantation campaign. Director General of NIPA, Dr Saifur Rehman and CEO of IHRI Razzak Pardesi were also present.

The Commissioner emphasized that for tree plantation efforts to succeed, it's

crucial to not only plant trees but also protect them. He stressed the importance of continuous monitoring after planting trees. Over 1.5 lakh trees were planted in Karachi's moonsoon plantation drive initiated by the city administration, with special instructions given for their care. Efforts are underway to ensure maximum tree growth in the city.

The Karachi administration plans to launch a comprehensive tree plantation campaign by March, involving the forest department sindh, government institutions, non-governmental organizations, banks, and other private entities. These institutions have pledged their support during a recent meeting at the Commissioner's office. Commissioner Syed Hassan Naqvi emphasized the importance of protecting planted trees,

stressing the need for continuous monitoring to ensure their growth. He appealed to citizens to support the government's efforts and play their role in tree plantation. The Commissioner said that NIPA is the premier institution for training public servants in the country, providing training to facilitate public service and national development. The Commissioner praised NIPA's role in achieving these objectives and expressed hope that NIPA's efforts would inspire officers to understand and act on their role in serving the public and the country. Dr Saifur Rehman added that he aims to share the lessons he learned from Harvard University about public service, community engagement and collaborative national development with fellow officers.

APS tragedy unite nation against terrorism

PESHAWA (APP): Ten years ago, this dark day brought an immense pain and sorrow for the families of innocent martyres of Army Public School (APS), Peshawar where their loved ones were brutally massacred in a deadly terrorists attack that wounded the hearts of every Pakistani.

Known as a black day in the country's history, 16th December 2014 was a dreadful day for the Sharif Gul's family whose elder son Hassnain Sharif, who was a 10th grade student at APS Peshawar was martyred in a horrific guns attack along with 131 others students, which put the entire nation in deep shock.

"Ten years ago on this fateful day, my elder son Hussain Sharif whose had a great desire to join Pakistan Army as SSG Commando, wake early in the morning, offered Fajr prayer, recited Holy Quran as per his routine daily practice and left for school after a motherly kiss on his forehead by his mother, on main gate of our house," Sharif Gul said.

"Hassnain was very obedient, intelligent and disciplined son. To fulfill his dream wish, I shifted along with family to Peshawar and admitted him at APS where he showed outstand-

ing results in academic, sports and cocurricular, activities" he recalled.

"I was busy in routine office work at Peshawar when my colleagues informed me about terrorists attack at APS. I rushed towards Warsak Road where the school was located amid gunshots, firings, smell of explosives and blasts. Later at night, I was informed that Hassnain has been martyred and his body was laying in the hospital from where it was collected for burial," Sharif Gul with tears rolling down over his face told APP.

He said that although Hassnain was not among with us today but his mission would be completed.

Sharif Gul said that Pakistan is our country and if it need my blood or more sons we a ready to sacrifice for our beloved homeland.

Sharif Gul said that APS tragedy has proved a turning point in the nation resolved against terrorism.

The APS attack remains one of the most painful incidents in Pakistan's history when about six terrorists dressed in military uniforms entered the school premises and opened indiscriminate fire at students, teachers and staff.

Chief Secretary visits Army Public School Peshawar

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary, accompanied by Commissioner Peshawar Division, Riaz Khan Mehsud, and Deputy Commissioner Peshawar, Sarmad Salim Akram, visited the Army Public School (APS) Peshawar on 16th December. The visit was marked by a solemn tribute to the martyrs of the tragic APS attack.

The Chief Secretary laid flowers at the martyrs' memorial and offered a special prayer for the elevation of their ranks. He also met with the families of the martyrs to express solidarity, inquire about their concerns, and assure them of the government's support.

While meeting the families, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary lauded their patience and courage, stating, "The entire nation shares your grief. This tragedy is etched in our hearts and will never be forgotten." He reassured them that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is committed to resolving their issues and will take all possible measures to provide the necessary facilities and assistance.

The Chief Secretary emphasized the government's dedication to ensuring that no stone is left unturned in addressing the needs of the martyrs' families.

During his visit, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary also interacted with the teachers and management of Army Public School, commending their resilience and contributions to the education sector despite the immense challenges they have faced.

Resultantly, 147 people including 132 students and their Principal Tahara Qazi were martyred and many injured.

Principal Army Public School Shaheed Tahira Qazi and other teachers stood in front of terrorists as a rock wall to protect their students, and sacrificed their lives.

The security forces of Pakistan, immediately after the attack, surrounded the school and killed all the terrorists after a successful operation and saved many precious lives of students and their teachers.

"The terrorists attack at APS had proved a defining moment in the country's history. It united entire nation against menace of terrorism and militancy in Pakistan," said Ikhtair Wali Khan, former member Provincial Assembly while talking to APP.

He said the cowardly terrorists wanted to eliminate education, knowledge and learning by attacking the students in the school, who were the future of Pakistan.

However, the enemy of education could not dampen the morale of the nation in Pakistan where people of every school of thought strongly rejected terrorism in all forms and manifestation.

He said a strong message was given to supporters of terrorism by the school administration after reopening of APS in a couple of days after the attack and studies restarted there.

He said Pakistan was a victim of terrorism and the national APS tragedy was testimony of it.

Ikhtair Wali said APS tragedy has led to the formulation of a clear policy and consensus plan in the form of the "National Action Plan" to combat terrorism.

"Hats off to the survivor students of APS whom despite the horrific attack had continued their studies and inspired many due to their indomitable courage,

willpower and professional commitment by earning great name for the country's within and abroad."

Ahmad Nawaz, a brave son of Peshawar, who survived APS massacre on December 16, 2014, has inspired thousands of people last year after becoming the youngest President of the prestigious Oxford University's Union at Lobdon with a history going back to 1825.

Born at the resident of Muhammad Nawaz at Peshawar, Ahmad Nawaz, who received multiple bullets wounds during APS horrific terrorist attack had comfortably won the Oxford University's Union election after defeating his two opponents. Ahmad Nawaz's brother Haris Nawaz was also killed in the deadly attack.

"Ahmad Nawaz is a symbol of indomitable courage, willpower and brave son of Pakistan. His success in the oxford university's union election showed that every goal can be achieved with a strong determination, belief in own abilities and willpower," said Professor Dr A. H. Hilali, former Chairman Political Science Department at University of Peshawar while talking to APP.

Despite brutal killing of his younger brother Haris Nawaz in the APS's horrific incident, he said the 23-years-old Peshawari son had stood up and continued his inspirational journey fueled by great mental strength and character, which led to his great achievement at Oxford union election in a very young age.

Following appeal of his father Muhammad Nawaz, the critically injured Ahmad was shifted to Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham, London by Govt on February 12, 2015.

The Government had also provided Rs 30.6 million to his father for abroad treatment of his son.

Despite passing of 10 years of the tragic incident, the memory of this horrific bloodshed was still fresh in the minds of every Pakistan and their sacrifices would always be remembered in the country with golden words.

The people and relatives came to the residences of the victims and offered fateha.

The well wishers and families of martyres also visited to their graveyards including Hassnain Sharif Shahhed for Fateha.

Climate Smart Agricultural Practices National training course at NIFA concludes

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: National Training Course on "Climate Smart Agricultural Practices for Bridging Yield Gap of Major Crops Using Nuclear Science and Technology" Successfully concluded.

Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission in collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), successfully conducted a week-long December 9 to 13, 2024, National Training Course on "The Role of Nuclear Science and Technology in Enhancing Crop Productivity through Climate-Smart Agricultural Practices" at the Nuclear Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA), Peshawar.

The training aimed to equip participants with the latest agricultural technologies and practical applications of nuclear science to address climate change challenges and boost crop productivity.

Dr. Gul Sanat Shah, Director of NIFA, warmly welcomed distinguished guests, technical experts, and participants. He elaborated on NIFA's contributions to the agriculture and food sectors, emphasizing its pivotal role in leveraging modern techniques to enhance Pakistan's agricultural capacity and promote sustainable farming practices.

Dr. Zahid Mukhtar, Director General (Agriculture and Biotechnology) highlighted PAEC's agricultural centers, including NIAB, NIBGE, NIA, and NIFA, and praised their contributions to introducing climate-resilient and high-yield crop varieties. He commended the relentless efforts of PAEC scientists in driving agricultural advancements and fostering economic growth.

Dr. Amir Raza, the course coordinator, underlined the importance of climate-smart agricultural practices and their role in establishing sustainable farming systems. He stressed that the practical application of nuclear science could effectively tackle climate-induced challenges, marking a significant step towards Pakistan's agricultural progress.

Dr. Mohammad Zaman, a technical expert from IAEA and the course designer, highlighted the technical content and expected outcomes of the program.

He emphasized the significance of integrating nuclear and isotopic techniques with traditional methods to improve soil fertility and crop yields. He also stressed that combining modern science with conventional agriculture could effectively address climate-induced challenges.

Dr. Masood Iqbal, Member Science (PAEC), was the chief guest at the closing ceremony. He congratulated the participants and expressed hope that the course would strengthen collaboration between PAEC scientists and IAEA experts to enhance crop productivity sustainably.

He acknowledged the contributions of PAEC's agricultural centers and reiterated PAEC's commitment to addressing the nation's challenges through innovative science and

technology.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Iqbal lauded the efforts of Dr. Mohammad Zaman and the NIFA team for organizing the event successfully. He noted that the course was a milestone in introducing cutting-edge agricultural techniques to Pakistan and ensuring their practical implementation.

The training program included 20 lectures and virtual sessions delivered by prominent experts from IAEA Austria, New Zealand, Brazil, Bangladesh, and Djibouti. Topics covered ranged from climate change and climate-smart agriculture to advanced technologies such as spectroscopy, atomic absorption, cosmic ray neutron sensors, and near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS).

Twenty-five scientists representing Agriculture Research & Development (R&D), Agriculture Extension and Universities from across the country participated. Participants praised the training program, recognizing its significance in combating the impacts of climate change and improving Pakistan's agricultural productivity.

They emphasized that initiatives like these are vital for the nation's progress, leveraging modern science and nuclear technology to lay the foundation for a brighter future in agriculture.

This training course demonstrated PAEC's commitment to harnessing modern science and technology for agricultural development and effectively addressing climate challenges.

Khizar Hayat takes charge as SHO Dawoodzai

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Inspector Khizar Hayat has been appointed as Station House Officer (SHO) of Dawoodzai Police Station.

Inspector Khizar Hayat has efficiently solved numerous cases including murders robbery and others while serving as a SHO in various police stations of the provincial capital.

The public must support the police to reduce crime, and the police will work to



maintain peace in the community, he said.

Residents of Dawoodzai and neighboring villages expressed satisfaction with

Khizar Hayat's appointment as SHO, hoping his competence will enhance the police force and reduce crime in the area.



PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister for Food chairing the meeting of Provincial Committee for Food.

SP Faqirabad visits BHUs to review security

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: SP Faqirabad Division, Syed Talal Ahmed Shah, conducted visits to various Basic Health Units (BHUs) to review the security arrangements for the ongoing polio eradication campaign.

During the visits, DSP Faqirabad Circle Umar Afridi accompanied SP Talal Ahmed Shah. The SP closely examined the security provided to polio teams and issued necessary directives to police personnel to ensure smooth operations.

In addition to overseeing security, SP Talal Ahmed Shah held discussions with officials from the Health Department present at the BHUs. The meetings focused on enhancing coordination and addressing any security concerns related to the campaign.

Speaking on the occasion, SP Talal Ahmed Shah emphasized the collective responsibility of parents, civil society, and individuals from all walks of life in eradicating the life-threatening disease of polio.

"The Peshawar Police will continue to extend full cooperation with all institutions to achieve the goal of a polio-free society," stated SP Talal Ahmed Shah.

Arbab Usman defends MS thesis

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The MS thesis defence examination of Mr. Arbab Usman was held at the Centre for Disaster Preparedness and Management (CDPM), University of Peshawar. Usman's thesis, titled "Developing A Cost-Effective Early Warning System for Flood Vulnerable Communities", was supervised by Dr. Shah Nawaz Khan, Lecturer at the CDPM.

The external examiner for the thesis was Dr. Mehboob Alam, Associate Professor, Agriculture University Peshawar. Director CDPM Prof. Dr. Zulfiqar Ali convened the defense examination.

Usman's research focused on developing a sensor-based flood early warning system to enhance flood preparedness and response in vulnerable areas.

To test and validate the system, he installed an integrated network of sensors in communities to monitor water flow in real-time. This system can predict the water overflow time automatically and issue alerts to vulnerable communities and line agencies through sirens and signals in case of flood emergencies.



PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan Afridi cutting the ribbon to inaugurate the Chrysanthemum Exhibition at University of Peshawar.

Chrysanthemum Exhibition adds vibrancy to UoP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Like every year, this year too, the Chrysanthemum and Flower Exhibition at the University of Peshawar created a festive atmosphere at the administrative block.

The unique and innovative display added charm to the administrative block, something not seen in four decades.

The exhibition was inaugurated by the Provincial Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan Afridi, who cut the ribbon and then individually appreciated the flower arrangements and decorative stalls.

On the occasion, she commended Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Muhammad Naem Qazi's aesthetic sense and the re-

location of the exhibition to the former parking shed area. She expressed hope that the exhibition would enhance and satisfy the aesthetic sensibilities of the students.

She was particularly impressed by the professional designs and decorations by students from the Departments of Art & Design and Zoology. She expressed confidence that

these students would bring positive change to their surroundings in their professional lives, making them the true assets of the nation.

During a press talk with journalists, she lauded the University of Peshawar's consistent healthy activities and expressed hope that the university would continue its journey of reforms, paving the way for a brighter future.

Chief Secretary urges parents to cooperate during anti-polio drive

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary formally launched the seven-day anti-polio campaign by administering anti-polio drops to children at the Police Services Hospital Peshawar. Secretary Health Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Adil Shah, Commissioner Peshawar Division Riaz Mehsud, Deputy Commissioner Peshawar Sarmad Salim

Akram and other officials were also present on this occasion.

Talking to the media, the Chief Secretary said that unfortunately 18 cases of polio have been reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa so far. Due to various reasons, a large number of children miss out on protective vaccines, resulting in more cases.

Among these reasons, one of the main problems is that some parents do not vaccinate their children against polio.

He further said that along with door to door campaign for the convenience of parents, availability of anti-polio vaccine has been ensured in all hospitals so that parents can benefit from this facility.

The Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa appealed to the parents to fully cooperate with the polio teams during the seven-day campaign and fulfill their national duty in administering polio

vaccine to all children.

He said that eradication of polio virus from the country can be made possible only with joint and vigorous efforts.

Meanwhile, a meeting was held in the office of Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which was presided over by Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary and Federal Secretary Health Nadeem Mehboob. In this meeting, the anti-polio measures in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were reviewed in detail.



PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary administering polio drops to a child to inaugurate anti-polio campaign in the province.



In brief

Girls' education awareness session F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Girls education awareness session was conducted at jirga hall, Landi Kotal. Under the banner of Sarhad Rural Support Program (SRSP) with assistance of Education Department, the gathering was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner, Tehsil Chairman Haji Shah Khalid, Manager of the SRSP Sartaj Ghani Afridi, Assistant District Education Officer Inayatullah Afridi, Principal Post Graduate College, Saeed, large number of tribal elders, teachers and students were among the participants. Speaking on the occasion speakers including Additional DC Ihsanullah, Haji Shah Khalid, the Manager Sartaj Ghani Afridi and others said that the purpose of the Sarhad Rural Program was to enhance literacy rate among the women-folk so as to guarantee a bright future for girls. Female literacy rate was low in the merged districts therefore all necessary initiatives were adopted to encourage girls' education in the tribal belt, they remarked. They urged the participants to decorate their sisters and daughters with ornaments of education and make them useful citizens of the country. At the end school bags were distributed among the female students of the government run schools in Landi Kotal.

Anti-polio drive launched F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Zafar Chishti Toba Tek Singh: Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Naeem Sindhu formally inaugurated the campaign for polio immunization for children up to five years of age. CEO Health Dr. Kashif Mehmood Kamboh, DM Punjab Health Facilities Management Company Muhammad Asif Rasheed and personalities from civil society were also present on this occasion. Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Naeem Sindhu said that the 5 day anti-polio campaign will be held from December 16 to December 20 will continue. In the anti-polio campaign, 4 lakh 33 thousand 838 children will be administered polio drops. Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Naeem Sindhu further said that 1916 mobile, 106 fixed, 49 transit teams will administer drops to children up to 5 years of age. Polio drops are also being administered at all health centers across the district. It is a priority to make the homeland polio-free. All government departments and scholars have to fulfill their responsibilities. Polio virus can be completely eradicated only through joint efforts.

Gifts distributed F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: Deputy Commissioner Cap (Retd) Nadeem Nasir distributed Christmas gifts among Christian staff of his office on Monday. Addressing the ceremony, he said that the Christian community was a part of our society and we equally shared their joy. He said that necessary directions had been issued to all departments of district administration to pay salaries to their Christian staff before Christmas and also give them gifts on their religious festival. Meanwhile, the DC chairing a meeting of the District Coordination Committee for Minorities Affairs said that it has been ensured to pay salaries to Christian employees before December 20.

Struggle for KP's development to continue: Kundi

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi inaugurated modern facilities put in place at the Regional Passport Office to facilitate citizens here on Monday.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony, the Governor said that he would continue his struggle for the development of the province including southern districts and especially the Dera Ismail Khan region which had been neglected by the past rulers. He added that launching state of the art facilities in the passport office was part of such efforts. The Governor said that five one-window operation desks had been opened to help ease passport-related issues for the residents of southern districts.

He also informed that similar passport desks were being set up at NADRA offices in Pahrpur and Prova tehsils to facilitate residents of those areas. The Governor also thanked Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi, Director General of Passports Mustafa Kamal Qazi, the teams from Peshawar and Islamabad, and the local Nazim Yahya Khan Akkakhel for their support.

Earlier, Director Headquarter Asam Fawad Mirza, Operational Officer Headquarter Islamabad, Zafar Rehman and Technical Head KP Zone Hassan Sheraz and Abdul Rehman gave a briefing about new facilities put in place in the Passport office. They said that five one-window operation desks has been established and now the whole procedure of any applicant would be completed within 10-15 minutes.

Among other prominent figures, the ceremony was attended by former Provincial Minister Abdul Haleem Khan Qasuriya, Party's Divisional President Qaizar Khan Miankhel, former District Nazim Azizullah Khan Alizai, PPP District President Malik Farhan Afzal Dhup, General Secretary Malik Abid Awan, and Nazim Yahya Khan Akkakhel.

On this occasion, while talking to media, he asked the provincial government to cooperate with the IDPs of Kurram, and expressed concerns regarding the Kurram road, for which the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Red Crescent is playing an active role. He said that area was going to witness several mega development projects

including Chashma Lift Canal project which would bring green revolution in Dera region besides giving new impetus to agriculture sector of the entire province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In this regard, he added that eleven companies had submitted pre-qualification applications for the project and its completion would turn the dream of the green Khyber Pakhtunkhwa into a reality, the governor added. Moreover, he said that his efforts regarding the international airport at Dera Ismail Khan had started yielding concerted results as directives had been issued to the local administration for imposition of section four in Giloti or Yarik areas.

Referring to local issues of people, the governor said five Transmission Balancing Stations (TBS) had been installed to resolve gas pressure issues for the citizens. About the electricity load-shedding, he said that "the issue would not be politicized but I will take up the matter with authorities concerned."

He vowed to resolve all those issues of Dera Ismail Khan on priority basis, which were related to federation. On this occasion, the governor also paid tribute to martyrs of the Army Public School (APS) attack. He said December 16 was a black day in the history of our province and Pakistan.

He also paid tribute to police martyrs and said that police were fighting against the menace of terrorism and rendering immense sacrifices along with other security forces. The governor also mentioned the recent unpleasant incidents during the ongoing polio campaign in which the policemen were martyred in Karak and Bannu divisions. The Governor also expressed gratitude to all political parties who recently participated in an all-parties conference held at the Governor's House. He said the ruling party in the province Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) showed their true face before the public by refusing to sit with any political party or group for peace efforts. The PTI has consistently promoted division and discord. On one hand, the law and order situation of the province was deteriorating with each passing day while on the other the provincial ruling party was busy in processions and protests towards the federal capital.

Polio eradication drive begins in AJK

F.P. Report

MIRPUR: The 5-day integrated polio eradication drive commenced across Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) on Monday, which will be continued till December 20 without any break, official sources have said.

AJK State Health Department sources told APP on Monday that at least 7,42,500 children under five years of age are targeted to be administered the polio vaccine in all 10 districts of the liberated territory, as announced by the state health authorities. Highlighting the salient features of the drive, the sources said that only in AJK's metropolis, Muzaffarabad, were over 130,000 children up to five years old targeted to be administered the Polio vaccines during the drive.

At least 3995 mobile teams of para-medical staff will be constituted to visit door to door to administer the polio vaccine drops during the campaign across the liberated territory - where a total of 448 fixed centers at local governments' hospitals and subordinate health facilities, will be established by the State Polio Eradication Committee of the AJK State Health Services Department with the coordination of the World Health Organization

(WHO), the sources revealed.

The total staff participating in the AJK-wide national drive included mobile teams comprising over 5000 workers for visiting door to door to immunize the children of age under 5 years of age with the polio vaccine drops during the campaign, the sources underlined. The fixed centers would be set up at the state-run hospitals, basic health units, rural health centers as well as various other spots to vaccinate the children with the anti-polio drops, the sources elaborated.

A total of 169 transit points would be set up for conducting the drive under the supervision of the concerned area in charge, the sources said. The state health department's Polio Eradication Committee had made adequate arrangement to execute the polio-eradication campaign in a befitting manner, the sources said, adding that a total of 844 area in charge would supervise the drive at union council's level across AJK in 35 tehsils and besides a total of 245 Union Council throughout AJK State.

A central polio control room has been set up in the office of the Provincial Program Manager in AJK State's metropolis of Muzaffarabad to monitor

the drive and receive any complaints. In lake-side district of Mirpur, at least 76,656 children under 05 years of age will be administered the polio vaccine.

Deputy Commissioner Mirpur, Yasir Riaz Chaudhry inaugurated the campaign administering anti-polio drops for the children under five years of age at a special camp set up at the District Health Office. District Health Officer, Dr. Fida Hussain informed the ceremony on this occasion that in the district, over 431 mobile teams of paramedics in all 51 zones would visit door to door besides serving at the 41 fixed centers and the 14 transit points to administer the polio vaccine drops to children under five years.

Earlier, chairing a meeting held here to give the final touches to the arrangements for the scheduled national polio eradication drive in this district, the DHO advised the parents to fully cooperate the mobile teams of paramedics by getting their children administered with the polio vaccine by the mobile paramedical staff teams. It may be added that the state health authorities claimed that there had been no any case of polio disease to any child detected in any part of Azad Jammu & Kashmir during over last 24 years.

Prize distribution ceremony held F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Masood Ahmad, the Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, stated that the purpose of education is not merely to secure employment, but to build a respectable and dignified society.

He emphasized that teachers have the responsibility to focus on nurturing values such as honesty, character development, and a strong work ethic in children from the very beginning.

These remarks were made during his speech at the 68th Annual Prize Distribution Ceremony of Abbottabad Public School, held on the second day of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur's two-day visit to Hazara Division.

Secretary Masood Ahmad further emphasized that all professions are respectable, and when teachers instill the importance of moral integrity and excellence in character, the nation will achieve the great goal of transformation and true progress. He added that this will guide the nation towards real development.

During the event, the school children performed national songs, naats, and speeches, which were highly appreciated by the attendees. The school's Principal, Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Khalid Bashir, presented the school's annual performance report.

Anti-polio drive kicks off in Multan F.P. Report

MULTAN: A five-day anti-polio campaign was kicked off across the 393 union councils of Multan Division here on Monday in which about 2.8 million children were administered anti-polio drops.

A total of 10,828 teams were deployed to ensure the campaign's success in the division. Commissioner Multan Maryam Khan said that not a single polio case was reported in the division, and a strong security plan was in place to support the campaign. The anti-polio campaign will continue from December 16 to December 20, the government's zero-tolerance policy on disease prevention, underscoring the national commitment to a disease-free Pakistan.

Anti-polio vaccination camps were set up at key public locations, including the General bus stand, to vaccinate kids against the crippling disease. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Muhammad Ali Bukhari said a target of 1 million children was set for vaccination in Multan district.

Seven booked F.P. Report

SARGODHA: Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (FESCO) caught seven power pilferers during an ongoing crackdown here on Monday.

A task force team raided various areas and caught seven accused involved in electricity theft from main lines and meter tampering. They were identified as Imran Haider, Bilal, Liaquat, Safdar and others.

KKKUK hosts successful quiz competition



F.P. Report

KARAK: The Religious Society of Khushal Khan Khattak University successfully concluded a captivating Quiz Competition followed by a grand Closing Ceremony. The event, held on Monday, showcased the intellectual prowess and competitive spirit of the students.

The Quiz Competition, meticulously organized under the supervision of Mr. Ishfaq Ahmed, Incharge of the Religious Society, saw enthusiastic participation from students across various departments.

The competition tested their knowledge on a diverse range of subjects, including religious studies, general knowledge and current affairs.

The Closing Ceremony was graced by the presence of Dr. Shad Muhammad, Provost of KKKUK, who lauded the efforts of the Religious Society in organizing such an enriching and engaging event. He emphasized the importance of such activities in promoting intellectual growth and critical thinking among students.

Muhammad Shah Din, Assistant Professor, served

as the esteemed Chief Guest for the Closing Ceremony. In his address, He congratulated the winners and participants, highlighting the significance of healthy competition and the pursuit of knowledge.

The event culminated with the prize distribution ceremony, where the winners of the Quiz Competition were awarded with prizes, certificates. This successful event reflects the commitment of the Religious Society and the institution to provide students with a holistic learning experience that extends beyond academics.

Admn provides a week for removal of encroachments

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Deputy Commissioner Mardan has urged the business community to facilitate traffic flow and pedestrian movement in the city. Remove the encroachments in all the markets of the city within a week otherwise the district administration will crack down strictly against the illegal encroachments.

DC was addressing a meeting in his office on Mardan city markets, traffic congestion and sanitation issues in different areas in which Additional Deputy Commissioner, Assistant Commissioners, DSP, TMOs, and Line Department representatives participated. In the meet-

ing, all the market presidents and other leaders should remove the encroachments from the markets within a week otherwise all the encroachments will be removed through a vigorous operation against them in the next week and legal action will also be taken against the responsible persons.

He directed the TMO to restore the splendor of the bazaar by immediately removing transport bases and carriages from the roads so that passers-by and traders do not face problems and trade in the bazaars. DC Mardan also issued instructions to SP Traffic and Assistant Commissioners to improve traffic flow, provide con-

venience to the people, take strict action against illegal parking and ensure rule of law.

Also directed the officers to ensure proper manning, presence and smooth flow of traffic at important places, Market leaders should inform all shopkeepers to remove the carts operating in front of their shops.

Similarly, TMOs and SHOs will take actions against self-standing vehicle stands in the markets and drive the vehicles to the existing general bus stands will move on. The Deputy Commissioner said that these steps are being taken to improve public convenience, cleanliness and traffic system.

Commissioner flay attack on polio team in Karak

F.P. Report

KARAK: Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah and Deputy Commissioner Karak Shakeel Ahmed Jan have strongly condemned the attack on the Polio Team in Shakarkhel area of Tehsil Banda Daud Shah, District Karak and expressed their heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family of Police Constable Shaheed Irfanullah who was martyred in the attack. They while praying for eternal peace of the Shaheed

Constable, saluted the patience and courage of the family members of the Shaheed.

It may be recalled that a Policeman Irfanullah was martyred while on Polio Duty at Banda Daud Shah of Karak District while a Team Member Asad Nawaz Khan was injured as a result of firing by unknown persons in Shakar Khel area on Monday.

The Rescue Team shifted the body of Shaheed Irfanullah and injured Asad Nawaz Khan to Tehsil Headquarter Hospital Banda Daud Shah under the

supervision of Commissioner Kohat Division, Deputy Commissioner Karak and Police officials.

The funeral prayer of Shaheed Irfanullah will be offered in the Police Line. The injured worker Asad Nawaz Khan was transferred to the District Headquarters Hospital Kohat under the supervision of the Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah. Commissioner Kohat directed the hospital administration for the best treatment of the injured worker.

3 abducted for ransom rescued in Katcha operation

RAHIM YAR KHAN (INP): Police claimed to have rescued three persons abducted by Katcha area robbers. The rescued abductees were identified as Musa, Sarwer and Akram. Police conducted an intelligence-based operation in Katcha area of the city and managed to rescue the abductees when their kidnappers were shifting them to other

location. To see the police, the robbers escaped, leaving the three persons in the area. Law enforcers took them in their custody and started a manhunt for the arrest of the fleeing bandits.

Two youngsters were gunned down in as many incidents in Shikarpur and Chaman. In Haji Latif area of Shikarpur, unidentified

assailants shot dead a 20-year-old youth. He was returning home when he was targeted. On information, police reached the crime scene and started investigation after sending the dead body to mortuary. On Rehman Kekwol Road of Chaman, a man was killed in a gun attack. He was identified as Alluddin. Law enforcers were investigating.

Karachi's struggle: Climate shifts and chaos of uncontrolled urban growth

Marya Haleema

In this world, many changes are happening, but in large metropolitan cities like Karachi, the weather is shifting drastically. The usual seasons of heat, unpredictable weather, and rainy seasons are turning into dry spells, making them more of a norm. Global climate change is evident, but Karachi's weather is undergoing a completely different transformation, which has become extremely dangerous.

This rapid change in the city is also causing the spread of uncontrolled expansion. As you observe Karachi's population and its residential areas, the planning and distribution of areas are shockingly skewed. Illegal and environmentally harmful zones are rapidly increasing alongside legal areas. You will be surprised to see that every posh and legal area is being overtaken by an illegal

and unauthorized zone, expanding quickly.

Karachi's weather is undergoing a drastic transformation, as climate change accelerates. Traditionally, Karachi experienced distinct seasons like the hot summer, the unpredictable monsoon rains, and a cooler winter. However, now the city is seeing increasingly irregular weather patterns, with extended periods of heat and dry spells becoming the norm. The once-predictable rainy season has been replaced by unpredictable rainfall or sometimes long droughts, which disrupt the agricultural cycles, water supply, and infrastructure.

This shifting climate is not just an inconvenience; it has serious consequences for health, water resources, agriculture, and the overall ecosystem. The rising heat also exacerbates the urban heat island effect, where concrete and buildings absorb more heat, making the city even hotter.

Karachi is one of the most rapidly growing cities in the world. As the population swells, so does the demand for residential, commercial, and industrial spaces. Unfortunately, this growth is happening without adequate urban planning or consideration for the environment. Unregulated and poorly planned development is widespread, especially in the suburbs and peri-urban areas.

This rapid expansion is leading to the spread of informal and illegal settlements. These areas often lack basic infrastructure like sewage, sanitation, clean water, or access to healthcare. Moreover, illegal constructions are frequently built in environmentally sensitive zones, such as floodplains or along the coastline, which are at risk of being affected by sea-level rise and extreme weather events.

The uncontrolled growth of Karachi, combined with climate change, is significantly harming the environment. Illegal settle-

ments often encroach upon green spaces, natural water bodies, and flood-prone areas, exacerbating the city's vulnerability to both climate change and natural disasters. The lack of environmental regulations and enforcement means that these zones are often built with little regard for ecological balance, resulting in severe environmental degradation.

Additionally, these informal settlements often lack proper waste disposal systems, leading to pollution, clogged drains, and a greater risk of waterborne diseases. Over-extraction of groundwater in these areas, often due to a lack of legal water supply systems, further exacerbates the situation.

The city's urban planning is severely skewed. While posh, legal residential areas with proper infrastructure are limited, they are rapidly being overtaken by sprawling, unauthorized zones. These informal settlements often push into areas meant for public use or

conservation, leading to a distortion in the city's overall planning. The informal growth spreads like a patchwork, creating areas of extreme wealth right next to areas of extreme poverty. This uneven development puts immense pressure on the city's infrastructure, already overstretched due to rapid population growth.

The resulting urban sprawl is not only dangerous for the residents of these illegal zones but also affects the functioning of the city as a whole. Transport systems, public services, waste management, and healthcare are all strained by this uncontrolled growth. The combination of environmental stress and uneven urban development has severe social and economic consequences. Communities living in illegal, poorly planned areas are exposed to a higher risk of climate disasters, such as floods and heat waves. These populations often lack the means to protect themselves from these extreme weather events, making

them more vulnerable to health risks and economic instability.

At the same time, legal areas of the city, though better developed, are not immune to the environmental stress. Rising temperatures and water scarcity affect everyone, with the city's growing population putting even more strain on already limited resources.

In summary, Karachi's transformation due to climate change and urban expansion presents significant challenges. The city's weather is shifting unpredictably, and uncontrolled urban sprawl is further compounding the problems. Without effective planning and environmental protection, Karachi is heading toward more severe climate impacts, social inequalities, and environmental degradation. Addressing these challenges will require a combination of improved urban planning, sustainable development practices, and stronger climate adaptation measures.



Trump threatens mass deportations
Central America
braces for an influx
of vulnerable migrants

SAN PEDRO SULA, Honduras (AP): As dozens of deported migrants pack into a sweltering airport facility in San Pedro Sula, Norma sits under fluorescent lights clutching a foam cup of coffee and a small plate of eggs - all that was waiting for her in Honduras.

The 69-year-old Honduran mother had never imagined leaving her Central American country. But then came the anonymous death threats to her and her children and the armed men who showed up at her doorstep threatening to kill her, just like they had killed one of her relatives days earlier. Norma, who requested anonymity out of concern for her safety, spent her life savings of \$10,000 on a one-way trip north at the end of October with her daughter and granddaughter.

But after her asylum petitions to the US were rejected, they were loaded onto a deportation flight. Now, she's back in Honduras within reach of the same gang, stuck in a cycle of violence and economic precarity that haunts deportees like her. "They can find us in every corner of Honduras," she said in the migrant processing facility. "We're praying for God's protection, because we don't expect anything from the government." Now, as US President-elect Donald Trump is set to take office in January with a promise of carrying out mass deportations, Honduras and other Central American countries people have fled for generations are bracing for a potential influx of vulnerable migrants - a situation they are ill-prepared to handle. "We don't have the capacity"

Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, which have the largest number of people living illegally in the US, after Mexico, could be among the first and most heavily impacted by mass deportations, said Jason Houser, former Immigration & Customs Enforcement chief of staff in the Biden administration. Because countries like Venezuela refuse to accept deportation flights from the US, Houser suggests that the Trump administration may prioritize the deportation of "the most vulnerable" migrants from those countries who have removal orders but no criminal record, in an effort to rapidly increase deportation numbers.

"Hondurans, Guatemalans,

Salvadorans need to be very, very nervous because (Trump officials) are going to press the bounds of the law," said Houser. Migrants and networks aiding deportees in those Northern Triangle countries worry their return could thrust them into even deeper economic and humanitarian crises, fueling migration down the line.

"We don't have the capacity" to take so many people, said Antonio García, Honduras' deputy foreign minister. "There's very little here for deportees." People who return, he said, "are the last to be taken care of." Making their way back to the US Since 2015, Honduras has received around half a million deportees. They climb down from planes and buses to be greeted with coffee, small plates of food and bags of toothpaste and deodorant. While some breathe a sigh of relief, free from harsh conditions in US detention facilities, others cry, gripped with panic.

"We don't know what we'll do, what comes next," said one woman in a cluster of deportees waiting for their names to be called by a man clacking at a keyboard. Approximately 560,000 Hondurans, about 5% of the country's population, live in the US without legal status, according to US government figures. Of those, migration experts estimate about 150,000 can be tracked down and rapidly expelled. While García said the government offers services to help returnees, most are released with little aid into a country gripped by gangs. They have few options for work to pay off crippling debts. Others like Norma have nowhere to go, unable to return home because of the gang members circling her home.

Norma said she's unsure of why they were targeted, but she believes it was because the relative who was killed had problems with a gang. Despite the crackdown, García estimates up to 40% of Honduran deportees make their way back to the US.

Larissa Martínez, 31, is among those who have struggled to reintegrate into Honduran society after being deported from the US in 2021 with her three children. Driven by economic desperation and the absence of her husband, who had migrated and left her for another woman, the single

mother sought a better life in the US. Since her return to Honduras, Martínez has spent the past three years searching for a job, not just to support her kids, but also to pay off the \$5,000 she owes to relatives for the trip north.

Her efforts have been unsuccessful. She built a wobbly wooden home tucked away in the hilly fringes of San Pedro Sula, where she sells meat and cheese to get by, but sales have been slim and tropical rains have eaten away at the flimsy walls where they sleep. So she's begun to repeat a chant in her head: "If I don't find work in December, I'll leave in January." César Muñoz, a leader at Mennonite Social Action Commission, said Honduran authorities have abandoned deportees like Martínez, leaving organizations like his to step in. But with three deportation flights arriving weekly, aid networks are already stretched thin.

A significant uptick could leave aid networks, migrants and their families reeling. Meanwhile, countries like Honduras, heavily reliant on remittances from the US, could face severe economic consequences as this vital lifeline is cut. "We're at the brink of a new humanitarian crisis," Muñoz said.

Trump's return has been met with a range of reactions by Latin American nations connected to the US through migration and trade. Guatemala, a country with more than 750,000 citizens living unauthorized in the US, announced in November it was working on a strategy to take on potential mass deportations. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said Mexico is already beefing up legal services in its US consulates and that she would ask Trump to deport non-Mexicans directly to their countries of origin.

Honduras' Deputy Foreign Minister García expressed skepticism about Trump's threat, citing the economic benefits immigrants provide to the US economy and the logistical challenges of mass deportations. Aid leaders like Muñoz say Honduras isn't sufficiently preparing for a potential surge in deportations. Even with a crackdown by Trump it would be "impossible" to stop people from migrating, García said. Driven by poverty, violence and the hope for a better life, clusters of deportees climb aboard buses on their way back to the US.



DAMASCUS: Syrian residents returned to see what had been done to their neighbourhoods. Some could hardly believe that they were finally able to come back.

Texas man
gets 100 years
in prison

LAS VEGAS (AP): A judge in Las Vegas sentenced a Texas man to 100 years in prison for his role in a two-state shooting rampage on Thanksgiving 2020 that included the killing of a man in Nevada and a shootout with authorities in Arizona. Christopher McDonnell, 32, pleaded guilty in October to more than 20 felonies including murder, attempted murder, murder conspiracy, weapon charges and being a felon illegally in possession of a firearm.

Clark County District Judge Tierra Jones sentenced him to a minimum of 100 years in prison, KLAS-TV reported. If he's still alive, he would be eligible for parole in 2120 with credit for time served. McDonnell of Tyler, Texas, his brother Shawn McDonnell, 34, and Shawn McDonnell's then-wife, Kayleigh Lewis, 29, originally faced dozens of charges. Police and prosecutors say the trio began an 11-hour rampage on Nov. 26, 2020 that included apparently random shootings that killed Kevin Mendiola Jr., 22, at a convenience store in Henderson, near Las Vegas, and drive-by gunfire that wounded several other people.

The group then continued into Arizona, where there were additional shootings, including one involving a police officer. All three were arrested after their car rolled over. Prosecutors said Lewis was the driver as the two brothers fired indiscriminately out of the vehicle's windows. Shawn McDonnell and Lewis are awaiting trial. The shooting rampage ended near the Colorado River town of Parker, Arizona, after a chase involving officers from the Arizona Department of Public Safety, the crash of a car with a Texas license plate and the wounding of Shawn McDonnell by troopers wielding assault-style rifles, police said.

Germany
warns Assad
supporters

BERLIN (AP): Germany's foreign minister is warning anyone involved in atrocities for the ousted Syrian government against seeking refuge in her country, saying they would face "the full force of the law."

Germany has been a major destination for Syrian refugees over the past decade, and several hundred thousand Syrian nationals live there. In rulings since 2021, former Syrian secret police officers already have been convicted in Germany for overseeing or facilitating the abuse of detainees.

"To any of (former President Bashar) Assad's torturers who might be considering fleeing to Germany now, I can only say clearly: We will bring all the regime's henchmen to account for their terrible crimes with the full force of the law," Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock told edition of the Bild am Sonntag newspaper. Baerbock called for international security authorities and intelligence services to work closely together.

North Korean troops
join Russian assaults

KYIV (Reuters): Russia has begun using North Korean troops in significant numbers for the first time to conduct assaults on Ukrainian forces battling to hold an enclave in Russia's Kursk region, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

The Ukrainian leader said the more active use of the troops was a new escalation in the war and called for a global response, as Donald Trump's return to the White House next month fuels speculation of a coming push for peace talks.

"Today, we already have preliminary data that the Russians have begun to use North Korean soldiers in their assaults. A significant number of them," Zelenskyy told Ukrainians in his daily wartime address. The North Koreans were being used in combined Russian units and only on the Kursk front for now, he said, adding: "We have information suggesting their use could extend to other parts of the front line."

Kyiv first said North Korean forces turned up in Russia's Kursk region in October and later reported unspecified clashes and casualties. It estimates there are 11,000 North Koreans in total, adding to

a force of tens of thousands of Russians. Russia has neither confirmed nor denied the presence of North Koreans on its side. Ukraine, nearly a fifth of which is occupied by Moscow's troops, launched an incursion into Russia's western Kursk region in August, carving out an enclave that it said could be used as a bargaining chip in any talks to end the war.

Ukraine has battled to hold the area, although some Western military analysts have questioned the incursion's rationale, arguing it has extended an already-sprawling front line, exposing Ukraine's manpower weakness as it battles a larger foe. Kyiv said the operation sought to divert Russian forces, but it has not stopped Moscow notching up its fastest gains in the east since 2022, although Russian forces have taken heavy casualties, according to Kyiv and the West. Ukraine's General Staff reported a significant increase in the number of Russian assaults on the Kursk front, along with airstrikes, glide bomb raids and more than 200 artillery attacks.

Andrii Kovalenko, an official at Ukraine's National Security and

Defence Council, said the North Koreans had taken losses, but provided no numbers. "The Russians are counting on numbers and are trying to carry out assault operations with the help of the Koreans, when the task of the Koreans is to run under the blows of our forces and occupy certain areas," Kovalenko wrote on Telegram.

As Trump's return has put the focus on a potential endgame in the war, Kyiv has urged the West to put it into a stronger position and bridled at fears of escalation, a line echoed by Zelenskyy as he denounced North Korea's role in the fighting. "In essence, Moscow has dragged another state into this war, and to the fullest extent possible. And if this is not escalation, then what is the escalation that so many have been talking about?" Zelenskyy said. He used his address to issue a fresh appeal to his allies to strengthen their support for Kyiv, something he said he would discuss with European powers next week.

Zelenskyy plans to attend a meeting with the leaders of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, NATO, and the EU in Brussels.

US Marines start transfer
from Okinawa in Japan

TOKYO (AP): The partial transfer of US Marines from Okinawa to Guam began, 12 years after Japan and the United States agreed on their realignment to reduce the heavy burden of American troop presence on the southern Japanese island, officials said. The relocation started with 100 members of III Marine Expeditionary Force stationed on Okinawa moving to the Pacific island for the initial logistical work, the US Marine Corps and Japan's Defense Ministry said in a joint statement.

Under the plan agreed between Tokyo and Washington in April 2012, about 9,000 of the 19,000 Marines currently stationed on Okinawa are to be moved out of Okinawa, including about 4,000 of them to be moved to Guam in phases. Details, including the size and timing of the next transfer, were not immediately released. The Marine Corps is committed to the defense of Japan and

meeting operational requirements to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific, and it will maintain presence in the region "through a combination of stationing and rotating Marines in Japan, Guam and Hawaii," the joint statement said. Japan has paid up to \$2.8 billion for the building of infrastructure at the US bases on Guam, and the US government will fund the remaining costs. The two governments will continue to cooperate on the development of Camp Blaz, which will serve as the main installation for Marines stationed in Guam.

The Marines and Japan Self Defense Forces will conduct joint training in Guam, the statement said. Okinawa, which was under US postwar occupation until 1972, is still home to a majority of the more than 50,000 American troops based in Japan under a bilateral security pact, while 70% of US military facilities are on Okinawa,

which accounts for only 0.6% of Japanese land. Many Okinawans have long complained about the heavy US military presence on the island, and say Okinawa faces noise, pollution, aircraft accidents and crime related to American troops. The relocation is likely to be welcomed by local residents, but how much improvement they will feel is uncertain because of the rapid Japanese military buildup on Okinawan islands as a deterrence to threats from China. The start of the Marines relocation comes at a time of growing anti-US military sentiment following a series of sexual assault cases involving American servicemembers. A senior Air Force servicemember belonging to the Kadena Air Base was convicted of the kidnapping and sexual assault of a teenage girl last year, a case that triggered outrage on the island. The Naha District Court sentenced him to five years in prison.

West Africa regional bloc
sets up court for crimes

SERREKUNDA (AP): West Africa's regional bloc ECOWAS approved setting up a special court to try crimes committed in Gambia during its military dictatorship. The landmark decision was announced at the summit of regional heads of state in Nigeria's capital, Abuja.

The court will cover alleged crimes committed under military dictator Yahya Jammeh, whose rule from 1996 to 2017 was marked by arbitrary detention, sexual abuse and extrajudicial killings. Jammeh lost a presidential

election in 2016 and went into exile in Equatorial Guinea a year later after initially refusing to step down. Calls for justice for the victims of the dictatorship had been growing for years in Gambia, a country surrounded by Senegal except for a small Atlantic coastline. In 2021, a truth commission in the country wrapped up its hearings with strong recommendations, urging the government to try perpetrators. In May, Jammeh's former interior minister was sentenced to 20 years in jail by a Swiss court for this

crimes against humanity. In November, a German court convicted a Gambian man, Bai Lowe, of murder and crimes against humanity for involvement in the killing of government critics in Gambia. The man was a driver for a military unit deployed against opponents of Jammeh.

Gambia's Justice Ministry described the move as a "historic development" that "marks a significant step forward for Gambia, the region, and international community" in a statement.

Storms across US bring heavy
snow, dangerous ice in California

OMAHA, Neb. (AP): A tornado near a mall in central California swept up cars, uprooted trees and sent several people to the hospital. In San Francisco, authorities issued the first-ever tornado warning. Elsewhere, inclement weather plagued areas of the US, with dangerous conditions including heavy snow in upstate New York, a major ice storm in Midwest states and severe weather warnings around Lake Tahoe.

The ice storm beginning created treacherous driving conditions across Iowa and eastern Nebraska and prompted temporary closures of Interstate 80 after numerous cars and trucks slid off the road. In upstate New York, more than 33 inches (84 centimeters) was reported near Orchard Park, which is often a landing point for lake-effect snow. A tornado touched down around 1:40 p.m. near a shopping mall in Scotts Valley, California, about 70 miles (110 kilometers)

south of San Francisco. The tornado overturned cars and toppled trees and utility poles, the National Weather Service said. The Scotts Valley Police Department said several people were injured and taken to hospitals.

In San Francisco, some trees toppled onto cars and streets and damaged roofs. The damage was due to 80-mph (130-kph) straight-line winds, not a tornado, weather service meteorologist Dalton Behringer said. Roger Gass, a meteorologist in the weather service's office in Monterey, California, said the warning of a possible tornado in San Francisco was a first for the city, noting an advanced alert did not go out before the last tornado struck nearly 20 years ago. "I would guess there wasn't a clear signature on radar for a warning in 2005," said Gass, who was not there at the time.

The fast-moving storm prompted warnings for res-

idents to take shelter, but few people have basements in the area. Heavy snow fell at some Lake Tahoe ski resorts, and a 112-mph (181-kph) gust of wind was recorded at the Mammoth Mountain resort south of Yosemite National Park, according to the weather service's office in Reno, Nevada. Up to 3 feet (91 centimeters) of snow was forecast for Sierra Nevada mountaintops. The week-end Tahoe Live music festival at Palisades Tahoe ski resort in California went ahead as planned in spite of a snowstorm. Lil Wayne and Diplo were scheduled to perform, the festival's website said. The resort said it has received 3.5 feet (1 meter) of snow. An avalanche warning was in effect at least until Monday morning in the area.

Interstate 80 was closed along an 80-mile (130-kilometer) stretch from Applegate, California, to the Nevada line just west of Reno. The California

Highway Patrol reopened the road in the afternoon for passenger vehicles with chains or four-wheel drive and snow tires. The severe weather in the Midwest resulted in at least one death. The Washington County Sheriff's office in Nebraska said a 57-year-old woman died after she lost control of her pickup on Highway 30 near Arlington and hit an oncoming truck. The other driver sustained minor injuries.

Businesses announced plans to open as temperatures rose high enough in the afternoon to melt the ice in most places.

"Luckily some warmer air is moving in behind this to make it temporary," said Dave Cousins, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's office in Davenport, Iowa. Tens of thousands of people in western Washington state lost electricity as the system delivered rain and gusty winds, local news outlets reported.

South Korean leaders seek
calm after Yoon impeached

SEOUL (AP): South Korea's opposition leader offered to work with the government to ease the political tumult as officials sought to reassure allies and markets, a day after the opposition-controlled parliament voted to impeach conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol over a short-lived attempt to impose martial law.

Liberal Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung, whose party holds a majority in the National Assembly, urged the Constitutional Court to rule swiftly on Yoon's impeachment and proposed a special council for policy cooperation between the government and parliament. Yoon's powers have been suspended until the court decides whether to remove him from office or reinstate him. If Yoon is dismissed, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

Lee, who has led a fierce political offensive against

Yoon's embattled government, is seen as the frontrunner to replace him. He lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon by a razor-thin margin. He told a televised news conference that a swift court ruling would be the only way to "minimize national confusion and the suffering of people."

The court will meet to discuss the case Monday, and has up to 180 days to rule. But observers say that a court ruling could come faster. In the case of parliamentary impeachments of past presidents - Roh Moo-hyun in 2004 and Park Geun-hye in 2016 - the court spent 63 days and 91 days respectively before determining to reinstate Roh and dismiss Park. Lee also proposed a national council where the government and the National Assembly would work together to stabilize state affairs, and said his party won't seek to impeach Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, a Yoon appointee

who's now serving as acting president.

"The Democratic Party will actively cooperate with all parties to stabilize state affairs and restore international trust," Lee said. "The National Assembly and government will work together to quickly resolve the crisis that has swept across the Republic of Korea." It's unclear if Lee's proposed council will be realized. In a meeting with the parliament speaker, who touched upon Lee's idea, Han said he will closely cooperate and communicate with the National Assembly but didn't specifically say whether the government intends to join the council. Kwon Seong-dong, floor leader of the ruling People Power Party, separately criticized Lee's proposal, saying that it's "not right" for the opposition party acting like the ruling party.

Kwon, a Yoon loyalist, said that his party will use existing PPP-government dialogue channels "to con-

tinue to assume responsibility as the governing party until the end of President Yoon's term." The Democratic Party has already used its parliamentary majority to impeach the justice minister and the chief of the national police over the martial law decree, and had previously said it was also considering impeaching the prime minister. Upon assuming his role as acting leader, Han ordered the military to bolster its security posture to prevent North Korea from launching provocations. He also asked the foreign minister to inform other countries that South Korea's major external policies will remain unchanged, and the finance minister to work to minimize potential negative impacts on the economy from the political turmoil. Han had a phone call with US President Joe Biden, discussing the political situation in South Korea and regional security challenges including North Korea's nuclear program.

The Frontier Post

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

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‘Syrian-led’ must not be just lip service

SOON after the fall of the Bashar al-Assad government of Syria on Dec 8, Israel bombed military targets in Syria and quickly occupied the United Nations-recognized buffer zone of the Golan Heights to "protect its own security".

In a bid to avert some of the international pressure, Tel Aviv claimed its occupation of the Golan Heights will be "temporary", and it has "no intention" of intervening in Syria's internal affairs.

However, Israel seems to have changed its stance after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had what he called a "very friendly, very warm and very important" telephone call with the US president-elect on Saturday on the Middle East situation.

The day after their talk, the Israeli government approved a plan put forward by Netanyahu to expand Israeli settlements in the occupied Golan Heights, according to a statement from the prime minister's office, in defiance of regional countries accusing Israel of looting a burning house.

"In light of the war and the new front against Syria, and out of a desire to double the population of the Golan Heights, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu today submitted for government approval the first amendment to the plan to encourage demographic growth in the Golan Heights and Katzrin Heights," the statement said.

Israel captured two-thirds of the strategic plateau from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War, annexing it in 1981. Its occupation is not recognized by the international community. Israel founded the Katzrin settlement for Israeli people there in 1977.

The Israeli government unanimously approved a more than 40-million shekel (\$11 million) plan to encourage demographic growth in the Golan Heights.

"Strengthening the Golan Heights is strengthening the state of Israel, and it is especially important at this time. We will continue to hold on to it, make it flourish, and settle it," Netanyahu said, according to the statement.

Tel Aviv should be reminded that despite its decades-long occupation of the Golan Heights, which has seen about 31,000 Israeli people settling on the Syrian plateau as of this year, the plateau is still home to 24,000 Druze, an Arab minority who practice an offshoot of Islam, and most of whom identify themselves as Syrian.

That US Secretary of State Antony Blinken admitted during a news conference in Aqaba, Jordan, on Saturday, where he met with local leaders discussing the future of Syria, that the United States has been in "direct contact" with the Syrian rebels, who appear not to have the intention of driving Israel out of Syrian territory so far, suggests that the US is working for some deal between relevant parties at the cost of Syrian interests.

Although the top US diplomat of the outgoing Joe Biden administration said the US and its partners agreed that the power transition should be "Syrian-led and Syrian-owned", Washington's acquiescence with Israel's invasion, occupation and bold, if not shameless, attempt to annex the whole of the Golan Heights just serves to expose its hypocrisy.

This begs the question: is its ally taking advantage of the power vacuum in Syria to grab the whole of the Golan Heights part of the US' rebuilding plan for the war-torn country, or a precondition for the role the US had overtly and covertly assumed in the unexpectedly quick fall of the Moscow- and Teheran-friendly Assad government?

China is highly concerned about the volatile situation in Syria, and supports the country finding a rebuilding plan that meets the wishes of the people through inclusive dialogue. In that process, the principle of "Syrian-led and Syrian-owned" should by no means be hijacked by any external force.

The international community should earnestly safeguard Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, respect Syria's ethnic and religious traditions, and allow the Syrian people to make independent decisions.

If the US really cares about the Syrian people as Blinken claims, it should lift the illegal unilateral sanctions it has imposed on the country for years as soon as possible, as these have only served to aggravate the grave humanitarian situation in Syria.

Important Notice

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Genocide Israel is living in the past

Haidar Eid

“THE old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born; now is the time of monsters.” Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci wrote in 1929.

These words come to mind as I observe apartheid Israel disintegrating rapidly, in the historic sense of the word. It is a settler colony that is failing its mission, namely annihilating the native population and replacing them with “civilised” settlers. As the apartheid regime slowly implodes, the Palestinians, especially the Palestinians of Gaza, are paying a horrific price.

The “Jewish state”, as it defines itself, has committed unimaginable war crimes and has violated countless international laws. And it has managed to get away with all these crimes thanks to unlimited support provided by the colonial West.

Nonetheless, the collapse is proceeding at a steady pace. Many have failed to understand that this disintegration is inevitable, including, paradoxically, the leadership of the Palestinian people. It is for this lack of foresight that Palestinian leaders signed onto the Oslo Accords and made the racist “two-state solution” a national slogan camouflaged as “independence”.

Oslo effectively erased the settler-colonial nature of Palestinian oppression and instead presented it as an “ancient war” over the ownership of land. By signing the accords, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat completely disregarded the reality of settler colonialism the Palestinians were suffering in.

Immediately after the handshake between Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1993, Palestinian scholar Edward Said wrote: “Now that the euphoria has faded a little, we can take a closer look at the agreement between Israel and the PLO with the necessary cool head. It turns out that it is way more inadequate and unbalanced for most Palestinians than many initially assumed. The vulgar staging of the ceremony at the White House, the humiliating performance of Arafat as he thanked the world for giving up most of the rights of the Palestinian people, and the laughable role of Bill Clinton as a 20th century Roman emperor accompanying his two vassal kings in the rituals of reconciliation and submission: All this could only temporarily obscure the truly unbelievable extent of the Palestinian surrender.”

Sometimes I wonder whether Arafat and the rest of the leadership of the PLO had read Said, Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Ghassan Kanafani or any of the anticolonial figures of their time. Political Zionism, claiming to represent “the Jewish nation”, emerged in 19th century Europe, and it naturally emulated the European ideologies of the time. It claimed “the right” to establish its own state in any territory in the world, no matter where. It set its eye on Palestine, claimed that it was “a land without a people for a people without a land” and did what Europeans had already done in Africa, the

Americas, Australia, New Zealand and parts of Asia.

Genocide – as so many anticolonial works have documented – is and has always been an intrinsic component of settler colonialism. They are inseparable. And that is the case for settler-colonial Zionism.

One cannot understand the ongoing livestreamed slaughter of the two million people of Gaza and the bragging about it by the majority of Israelis on social media without relating it to that colonial hegemonic ideology.

Since its creation, Israel has systematically pursued the “elimination” of the native. Gaza right now is paying the price for what Israel’s leading fascist historian Benny Morris has argued is the Israeli failure to “transfer” all Palestinians out of Palestine in 1948.

That is because in 1948, Gaza became the largest refugee camp in the world, filled with native Palestinians who refused to be ethnically cleansed and genocided and who have constantly reminded the Israelis of the “unfinished job”. They are now bearing the wrath of genocidal Israel intent on establishing its claim as a fact – that “there is no such thing as Palestinian people”.

But the prosperity of apartheid and settler colonialism is part of history now. A state founded on them cannot survive.

Amid the genocide in Gaza, this may not be as obvious, but let us remember that the downfall of South Africa’s apartheid regime began in the darkest moments of South African history in

the late 1980s when everything looked so bleak. At that time, people did not realise that the racist regime was disintegrating and a new dawn was approaching.

Resistance, in its various forms, mixed with the highest level of “sumud” (steadfastness) has become the norm in Gaza. This resistance and sumud are expected to spread throughout historic Palestine and other places.

Gaza has become the centre of the universe. If it falls, the Global South will follow suit. The world has no option but to dismantle the only remaining apartheid regime committing an unprecedented genocide in the 21st century.

Sometimes I dream of having the ability to visit the future and come back with a message. In the future, I drive my car on the coastal road from Gaza in the south to Haifa in the north, listening to Fairuz’s angelic voice and telling my daughters about the horrific past when a state called Israel forbade us from seeing the rest of our country. I tell them about a time when the world stood idle while Israel butchered tens of thousands of children and women and when ultimately people of conscience decided that enough is enough.

As American writer Mike Davis so eloquently put it: “What keeps us going, ultimately, is our love for each other, and our refusal to bow our heads, to accept the verdict, however all-powerful it seems.”

I come back from the future full of optimism that “the time of monsters” will be over soon.

Israel’s ‘great opportunity’ to annex the West Bank

Dr. Ramzy Baroud

ISRAEL is getting ready to annex the West Bank. The annexation will be a major step backward on the road to Palestinian freedom and will likely serve as a catalyst for a new Palestinian uprising.

Though annexation has been on the Israeli agenda for years, this time around a “great opportunity” — in the words of extremist Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich — is about to present itself and, from an Israeli point of view, it cannot be missed.

“I hope we’ll have a great opportunity with the new US administration to create full normalization (of the Israeli occupation),” the minister reportedly told Civil Administration staff this month.

This is not the first time that Smotrich, among other Israeli extremists, has made the connection between Donald Trump’s advent to the White House and the illegal expansion of Israel’s borders.

Two factors make Israel’s far right optimistic about Trump’s arrival.

One, the Israeli experience during Trump’s first term in office, when he unilaterally changed the American position on the legal status of the settlements, the Syrian Golan Heights and Jerusalem. And, two, Trump’s more recent statement in the run-up to the November US elections.

Israel is “so tiny” on the map, Trump said, while addressing the pro-Israeli group Stop

Antisemitism at an event in August, wondering: “Is there any way of getting more?”

The statement, absurd by any definition, caused joy among Israeli politicians, who understood it to be a green light for further annexations.

Israel’s aims for colonial expansion received another boost in recent days. Following the fall of Bashar Assad’s rule in Syria, it immediately began invading large swaths of the country, reaching as far as the Quneitra governorate, less than 20 km away from the capital, Damascus.

What is taking place in Syria serves as a model of what to expect in the West Bank in the coming months.

Israel occupied nearly 70 percent of the Syrian Golan Heights in 1967. It cemented its illegal occupation of the Arab region by formally annexing it in 1981 through the so-called Golan Heights Law.

That illegal move came shortly after another illegal annexation, that of Palestinian East Jerusalem the previous year.

Although the West Bank was not formally annexed at that time, the boundaries of East Jerusalem have expanded well beyond the city’s historic borders, thus swallowing large parts of the West Bank.

The West Bank, like East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, is recognized as illegally occupied territory under inter-

national law. Israel has no legal basis to maintain its occupation, let alone annex any Palestinian or Arab region.

It is allowed to do so, however, due to US-Western support and international silence.

But why is Israel keen on annexing the West Bank now?

Aside from the “great opportunity” linked to Trump’s return to power, Israel feels that its ability to sustain a genocidal war on Gaza over the past 14 months without any international intervention will make the annexation of the West Bank a far less consequential matter on the global agenda.

Even though the International Court of Justice in July issued a decisive ruling on the illegality of the Israeli occupation, followed by the issuing of arrest warrants against top Israeli leaders by the International Criminal Court in November, no action has been taken to hold Israel accountable. The annexation of the West Bank is unlikely to change that, especially as Israel conducts its wars and illegal actions with direct US support.

With all this in mind, the annexation of the West Bank in the coming weeks or months is a real possibility.

In fact, Smotrich has already informed “workers of the Defense Ministry body in charge of Israeli and Palestinian civil affairs in the West Bank” about his plans to “shut down the department as part of an envi-

sioned Israeli annexation of the area,” The Times of Israel reported on Dec. 6.

While such an annexation would not change the legal status of the West Bank, it would have dire consequences for the millions of Palestinians living there, as annexation would likely be followed by a violent campaign of ethnic cleansing, if not from the whole of the West Bank, then certainly from large parts of it.

Annexation would also render the Palestinian Authority legally irrelevant. It was created following the Oslo Accords to administer parts of the West Bank in anticipation of future sovereignty for the Palestinian people, which never actualized. Would the PA agree to remain functional as part of the Israeli military administration of a newly annexed West Bank?

Palestinians will certainly resist, as they always do. The nature of the resistance will prove critical in the success or failure of the Israeli scheme.

A popular intifada, for example, would overstretch the Israeli military, which would likely use an unprecedented degree of violence to suppress Palestinians.

It is unlikely it would succeed.

Annexing the West Bank at a time when Palestine and, in fact, the whole region is in turmoil is a recipe for perpetual war.

From the viewpoint of Smotrich and his ilk, this is the actual “great opportunity,” as it will secure their political survival for years to come.

AI can be a catalyst for industrial transformation in Middle East

Javier Carinena

ARTIFICIAL Intelligence is transforming the manufacturing industry, ushering in a new era of efficiency, innovation and resilience. Its ability to mimic human cognition, analyze vast datasets and make autonomous decisions positions AI as an essential tool for manufacturing leaders. The benefits it offers are substantial, from improving operational efficiency to delivering high-quality products at scale. However, the journey to AI adoption is not without challenges, requiring strategic foresight and careful navigation to realize its full potential.

AI brings tangible benefits across the manufacturing landscape. Materials discovery, for instance, has been revolutionized by AI’s ability to predict the properties of new materials, significantly reducing the time and cost associated with traditional trial-and-error methods. Microsoft AI’s creation of a lithium-alternative material in under nine months illustrates this capability, providing a sustainable solution for energy storage.

Additionally, AI-driven inventory optimization ensures that stock levels are managed effectively, minimizing shortages and excesses while improving cash flow. Tools for defect detection and process optimization enhance product quality by identifying issues in real time and enabling automated adjustments. These applications, among others, are reshaping the way manufacturers operate and compete.

Yet, the path to AI integration is fraught with challenges. High initial investment costs, outdated legacy systems and the complexity of data integration can deter manufacturers from embracing AI. Many organizations

Ethical considerations are especially critical as manufacturers scale their use of AI. Algorithms must be designed to prioritize fairness, safety and compliance with regulatory standards, ensuring that efficiency gains do not come at the cost of product integrity or worker well-being. Intellectual property issues also emerge in this context, particularly when AI-generated innovations blur the lines of ownership. The lack of transparency in some AI systems — often referred to as “black boxes” — can make it difficult to trace decision-making processes or protect intellectual assets. Addressing these concerns requires a commitment to robust governance and ethical oversight. Countries like Saudi Arabia offer valuable lessons in managing these complexities. Through its National Strategy for Data and Artificial Intelligence, the Kingdom has demonstrated how AI can be integrated into manufacturing in a manner that aligns with national priorities.

struggle to modernize their infrastructure or ensure their data is clean and accessible, both of which are prerequisites for effective AI deployment. Ethical considerations further complicate the picture, raising questions about the transformation of professional skills, data privacy and algorithmic transparency. AI adoption must therefore be approached with a clear strategy that balances innovation with accountability.

Ethical considerations are especially critical as manufacturers scale their use of AI. Algorithms must be designed to prioritize fairness, safety and compliance with regulatory standards, ensuring that efficiency gains do not come at the cost of product integrity or worker well-being. Intellectual property issues also emerge in this context, particularly when AI-generated innovations blur the lines of ownership. The lack of transparency in some AI systems — often referred to as “black boxes” — can make it difficult to trace decision-making processes or protect intellectual assets. Addressing these concerns requires a commitment to robust governance and ethical oversight.

Countries like Saudi Arabia offer valuable lessons in managing these complexities. Through its National Strategy for Data and Artificial Intelligence, the Kingdom has demonstrated how AI can be integrated into manufacturing in a manner that

aligns with national priorities. Investments in workforce development, the establishment of the AI Center of Excellence for Manufacturing and Mining and programs like the Future Factories Program illustrate how governments can create an ecosystem conducive to ethical and effective AI adoption.

Success in AI integration hinges on a combination of factors. Solutions must be aligned with clear business needs, addressing specific challenges where AI can deliver measurable value. Data readiness is equally critical, as high-quality, well-structured data forms the foundation of effective AI systems. Workforce empowerment plays a vital role, requiring reskilling initiatives to help employees leverage AI tools and adapt to new operational models. Additionally, financial investments, supported by government incentives and strategic partnerships, are essential to offset the costs of AI adoption and drive long-term competitiveness.

AI’s versatility in the manufacturing sector is one of its most compelling attributes. In research and development, AI accelerates material discovery and product innovation, as demonstrated by Microsoft AI’s rapid development of an alternative to lithium. In production, AI-powered digital twins simulate and optimize manufacturing operations, offering insights that enhance productivity while reducing waste. Logistics and distribution benefit from AI’s ability to optimize warehouse layouts and delivery routes, ensuring seamless supply chain operations. Even workforce training is being transformed, with companies like Stanley Black & Decker using AI to create personalized training pro-

grams that reduce costs and improve efficiency. The Middle East has embraced these advances with remarkable ambition. Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 exemplifies how strategic planning can integrate AI into industrial frameworks to drive growth and innovation. By fostering start-ups, building infrastructure and investing in skill development, the region is establishing itself as a hub for AI-driven manufacturing. These efforts not only enhance local capabilities but also set a global standard for proactive AI adoption.

As AI continues to reshape manufacturing, its potential to drive progress is matched only by the challenges it presents. The industry must navigate technical, ethical and operational complexities to ensure AI delivers on its promises. Companies and governments alike have a critical role to play in fostering a culture of innovation that values transparency, accountability and collaboration. The path to AI adoption in manufacturing is not merely about leveraging technology; it is about rethinking processes, empowering people and building systems that are resilient, ethical and sustainable. With careful planning and strategic investment, AI can become a cornerstone of manufacturing excellence, paving the way for a future that is not just more efficient but also more equitable and innovative.

— Arab News

Trump dares Republicans to challenge his playbook

AMERICA'S new rulers are putting on a show of intent and unity as Donald Trump turns from his so-far-successful rescue of Pete Hegseth to three more of his provocative Cabinet choices.

The complex dynamics driving the most empowered presidential transition in modern history went public Saturday as the president-elect presided over his political clan at the Army vs. Navy football game beside his pick to lead the Pentagon.

The event — which was the latest show of Republican dominance that will steer America on a vastly different path within a few weeks — brought together the president-elect, Vice President-elect JD Vance, House Speaker Mike Johnson and incoming Senate Majority Leader John Thune.

With Hegseth on hand, Trump made a firm statement about his desire to see his embattled pick confirmed after the former Fox News anchor rode out an initial storm over alleged transgressions in his past that he has denied. Tulsi Gabbard, whom Trump has chosen for director of national intelligence, also stood close to Trump — in a sign he doesn't care about reservations that some Republican senators harbor about her attitude toward Russia and Syria.

It was perhaps the most visible showing of power football hosted in the Washington area since late Redskins owner Jack Kent Cooke corralled the politically connected, rich and famous in his box at RFK stadium in the 1980s and 1990s. When Trump, Vance and the congressional leaders — as well as the ubiquitous Elon Musk — peered over the loudly welcoming crowd and waved, the country's new establishment looked almost like a politburo of the MAGA movement.

There was, however, no sighting of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Trump's pick to run the Health and Human Services Department. His past skepticism of child vaccines that have saved millions of American lives could make him the next Trump Cabinet selection to face a political storm on Capitol Hill, with meetings expected with senators this week.

The attendance of Republican congressional leaders was significant. Johnson, who hitched his wagon to Trump early in his tenure, has been rewarded with the president-elect's patronage but faces a tough job in shepherding the new administration's headline agenda through a tiny House majority. And Thune may have one of the hardest jobs in Washington in piloting controversial nominees through the Senate and preserving the

chamber's, albeit rather eroded, prerogative to check likely power grabs by a new president who knows no limits.

Musk hovered just over Trump's shoulder, personifying the extraordinary entry into the president-elect's inner circle of the world's richest man and one of its most influential sources of non-state power. The SpaceX pioneer's presence is a reminder of the massive conflicts of interests likely to permeate the new administration.

Trump's appearance at the game Saturday was the latest photo-op in a remarkable process in which the former and future president has been assuming power as the current commander in chief, Joe Biden, fades from the scene ahead of his last Christmas in the White House.

So far, Trump has had only one major reversal — the loss of his first attorney general pick, Matt Gaetz, and has been effectively taking control of future US foreign policy by initiating trade showdowns with Mexico and Canada, meeting world leaders and striding back onto the world stage with a trip to Paris.

Trump's controversial Cabinet choices are a show of defiance against a political establishment he believes thwarted his most aggressive instincts during his first term. And his refusal to abandon Hegseth — and support for Gabbard, Kennedy Jr. and FBI critic Kash Patel to lead the bureau — is an uncompromising omen about the administration that will begin next month.

"Donald Trump won. He won overwhelmingly. He said what he was going to do, and that's what he's doing," retiring Sen. Mitt Romney, a longtime Trump critic, told CNN's Jake Tapper in an interview that aired on "State of the Union" on Sunday. "This is a team of people who are very, very different, extraordinarily different backgrounds, different perspectives on issues, in some cases, I think even than the president, so an unusual collection of individuals, not the people I would have chosen," the Utah Republican said.

As Washington gears up for contentious confirmation hearings in January, Romney warned that the Senate has a responsibility to ensure that there is no "skeleton" haunting Cabinet picks that could embarrass the country. But in a sign of the populist transformation of the GOP, Romney — the defeated 2012 presidential nominee — won't be in the Senate to play that role.

Trump's team is increasingly confident after the furor diminished around Hegseth, who faces a sexual assault allegation, which he denies, and concerns over his past drink-

Stephen Collinson

ing, which he insists is not a problem. The Iraq and Afghanistan war veteran is pledging to shake up race and gender diversity programs in the Pentagon if confirmed. His chances look far healthier now than a few weeks ago, after public endorsements by Trump and a conservative media pressure campaign on Republican senators like Iowa's Joni Ernst, who registered early disquiet about his selection.

"I think he made it through the gauntlet, I think he stood in, he fought, he defended himself," senior Trump adviser Jason Miller told Newsmax on Friday, listing the kind of qualities that the president-elect reputedly likes to see in his Cabinet picks.

South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham said Sunday that Hegseth had told him he would release from a confidentiality agreement a woman who accused him of a 2017 sexual assault in which charges were never filed. Graham said on NBC's "Meet the Press" that anyone who had a complaint to make should "come forward." Hegseth's lawyer, Tim Parlatore, told CNN's Kaitlan Collins this month that anyone who did make allegations against his client "would do it at her own peril of a further defamation lawsuit." CNN has reached out to Trump's transition team for comment.

But attention is turning to Trump's other picks, and Kennedy is facing a new flare-up over his past vaccine skepticism. Outgoing Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell warned Friday that anyone seeking Senate confirmation should avoid "appearance of association with" efforts to discredit proven medical cures. The statement, which did not mention Kennedy by name, was especially poignant since the Kentucky senator suffered from polio as a child and still lives with complications — a fact that was widely noted after he suffered a fall last week.

McConnell's warning was not an empty threat. It would take only four Republicans to block Kennedy's nomination, assuming all Democrats oppose, and the long-time leader's stature and personal story might offer other senators cover. Kennedy's past attacks on some vaccines are also coming into focus after The New York Times reported that one of his associates, lawyer Aaron Siri, filed a petition with the US Food and Drug Administration to revoke approval of the polio vaccine used in the United States. Siri made the petition on behalf of the Informed Consent Action Network, or ICAN, a non-profit that challenges the

safety of vaccines and vaccine mandates. He has been working with Kennedy to choose officials to serve in the incoming administration. CNN has reached out to ICAN and the Trump transition.

Trump praised the polio vaccine in a "Meet the Press" interview on NBC last week as "the greatest thing" and said someone would have to work very hard to get him to revoke it. But the president-elect also said in a Time magazine interview conducted in late November and published last week that he'd hold a "big discussion" about the rising rate of autism diagnoses and would consider getting rid of some vaccines for children. Scientists have repeatedly debunked the theory that vaccines cause autism. But despite that evidence, many anti-vaccine advocates have called for greater research into the subject.

In a letter to the Senate on Sunday, a group boosting Kennedy touted his support from hundreds of doctors. "His unwavering commitment to scientific transparency and his determination to address the root causes of illness make him uniquely qualified to lead HHS," read the letter, which was released by Make American Healthy Again Action and was signed by the likes of Dr. Mehmet Oz, Trump's pick to lead the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

The Kennedy selection reflects Trump's fondness for contrarianism, and willingness to mock the consensus of the Washington health and political establishments. It fits into a pattern of elevating well-known skeptics of Covid-19 guidelines during the pandemic to senior administration posts.

But the growing controversy around Kennedy leaves open the question of whether Trump will fight as hard for the former Democrat as he did for Hegseth. The spectacle of a confirmation hearing next year that devolves into a showdown over polio vaccines could have the potential to change the trajectory of the nomination. There are also questions over whether Kennedy's campaign to take on US food giants over unhealthy processed products could weaken his support among some senators whose states depend on the multi-billion-dollar industry. Trump's team has already been strategizing about how to allay GOP fears about Kennedy's past support for abortion rights, which could scramble his support in unpredictable ways. With this in mind, Kennedy's selection could turn into a test case of one of the most important factors that will define Trump's new administration — how willing is the new president to spend his

personal political capital on fights or nominees that may not be popular?

Kennedy will follow in the footsteps of Gabbard and Patel on Capitol Hill, who both got fairly smooth public receptions. Republican senators seem in no hurry to split with their president-elect over Cabinet picks in the knowledge that Trump intends to shake up Washington as never before.

Missouri GOP Sen. Eric Schmitt, for instance, called Gabbard "a patriot" on ABC News' "This Week" on Sunday. "She served our country honorably. She, I think, fits the reform agenda. President Trump ran on disrupting permanent Washington and having people who are going to view things differently," he added.

Graham, meanwhile, signaled support for Patel, despite the former Capitol Hill staffer's past vows to purge the FBI and to go after Trump's political opponents and journalists. "What do I want in an FBI director now? Somebody that can clean it up," Graham said on "Meet the Press." He added: "Get back to the job of fighting crime. Don't have your thumb on the political scale."

Still, Patel's critics fear that in the guise of draining the bureau of political influence, he will further weaponize it to express his loyalty to Trump. California Democratic Sen. Adam Schiff said on ABC that Patel was "someone who demonstrated, sadly, a principle of the first Trump administration, and that is you rise to the level of your sycophancy. And the bigger the sycophant, the higher you rise."

Schiff also criticized Gabbard over her echoing of Russian propaganda over the war in Ukraine, her 2017 visit to deposed Syrian tyrant Bashar al-Assad, and her lack of experience in the intelligence community. "Someone who had shown that kind of poor judgment is not necessarily someone you want advising this president."

Schiff's comment reflected two coming themes in Washington — the first is the extent to which Democrats will try to rebound after a disastrous election by portraying Trump's Cabinet picks as extreme, dangerous and unqualified.

But secondly, it will be up to Republicans to decide who gets to serve and, more broadly, much of what gets done in Washington — for at least the next two years heading into the midterms. That was the message that Trump and his cohorts spelled out high above the field in Landover, Maryland, as Navy surged to a 31-13 victory over Army to lift the commander in chief's trophy.

Erdogan gains political ground in Syria

Michael Jansen

He is blamed for welcoming them early in the Syrian civil conflict and for backing the armed and political opposition battle against Assad which has prolonged the refugees stay in Turkey. Third, Erdogan is determined to contain the US-supported Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia which has established an autonomous region in the northeast that covers 25 per cent of Syrian territory.

He regards the SDF as a "terrorist" partner of Turkey's Kurdish Workers party (PKK) which has been fighting Ankara off-and-on since 1978. Tackling the SDF is tricky because it is protected by 900 US troops and US air power. Washington came to rely on the SDF, the most effective local fighting force, during the 2017-2019 campaign against Daesh in Syria and Iraq.

Turkey's ailing economy could benefit as Ankara's ties to HTS could enable Turkish firms to receive preferential treatment once Syria begins reconstructing war-ravaged cities, towns and villages and infrastructure. Turkish exports of food, fuel, and other supplies could flourish immediately and once stability is restored.

While Turkey has gained political and military influence in Syria as well as a boost in its regional status, Iran has suffered dramatic losses from Assad's fall. Tehran was Damascus' closest ally and Syria was the sole state in the Iran-founded "Axis of Resistance" to Israel and the US which included Palestine's Hamas, Lebanon's Hizbollah, and Yemen's Houthis.

However, before Assad was ousted, the membership of axis had been reduced to Yemen. Israel had crushed Hamas in Gaza and crippled Hizbollah in Lebanon. This dramatically reduced Iran's politico-military regional outreach.

While Damascus had normal diplomatic relations with the pro-Israel US-backed regime in Tehran, Syria and Iran developed close strategic ties after Iran's 1979 clerical revolution toppled the shah.

Due to feuding between rival branches of the Baath party in Iraq and Syria, the latter supported Iran during the 1980-1988 war. Gulf states armed I And funded Iraq.

As Baghdad had widespread Arab political support, by option for Iran Syria endured decades of Arab

ostracism which endured during the Syrian civil/proxy conflict and ended only in 2023.

After Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel deprived the Arab world with military muscle to fight Israel, Iran fostered the "Axis of Resistance" to stand against Israel and the US. Following Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Iran forged Hizbollah from diverse Shia factions.

Iran also trained and armed Hamas fighters and provided the Houthis with weapons.

Before Assad's ouster, Iran's Revolutionary Guards Quds force provided the Syrian army with advice, logistical support, arms and ground forces while Russia supplied weapons and air cover. Armed opposition factions were driven from around Damascus, Homs and Hama, and eastern Aleppo and confined to Syria's north-west Idlib province. As Idlib is Turkey's neighbour, Erdogan was well positioned geographically to carry out his plan. Tehran's role in Syria ended with the victory of HTS and its partners.

Iran's supreme guide Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has blamed Assad's fall on Israel, the US and a neighbour without naming Turkey.

Although Khamenei was primarily responsible for Tehran's Syria policy, officials in Tehran seek to avoid criticism by claiming they had predicted Assad's collapse due to his longstanding refusal to negotiate with the opposition.

The loss of Syria comes at a time of trial and tribulation for Iran's clerical rulers who face a stressed economy, rising internal dissent, and the return to office in the US of Donald Trump in a month's time.

Trump has not so far commented on Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's call for the revival of the 2015 agreement lifting sanctions on Iran in exchange for limiting its nuclear programme.

Trump withdrew from the deal in May 2018 and imposed 1,500 sanctions on Iran, crippling its economy.

Iran responded by breaching limits on uranium enrichment and stockpiles and reducing monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Organisation.

If Trump dismisses Pezeshkian's initiative and sticks to his headline policy of "maximum pressure," Iran could decide to opt for the nuclear weapon option to deter the US and others from attacking Iran in order to effect regime change.

Syria's new rulers must not repeat the past mistakes of Lebanon and Iraq

In these first days of what is being hailed as a "new era" in Syria, the authorities now controlling Damascus are sending mixed signals. On one hand, they are voicing their commitment to preserving Syria's state institutions, and respecting the diversity of its population. On the other hand, however, they are signalling an intention to monopolise the highly delicate process of political transition, and consequently state power.

The path they eventually choose to follow will determine whether the mistakes and miscalculations that devastated not only al-Assad's Syria but also Iraq and Lebanon will be repeated here in this "new era".

Before Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) forces under the command of General Ahmed al-Sharaa, AKA Abu Mohammed al-Julani, entered Damascus on December 8, they pledged to maintain the formal structure of the country's institutions. Former Prime Minister Mohammed al-Jalali formally remained in office until December 10 and played at least a cosmetic role in the handover to Mohammed al-Bashir, the transitional prime minister who is set to serve in this role until March.

Shortly before this, the HTS forces also announced a general amnesty for soldiers of the Syrian army, signalling their intention to preserve the regular military, which is a central pillar of the state.

Preserving the structure and unity of the military institution is key to preventing state collapse during a political transition. We have seen the disastrous consequences of failing to do so in Iraq, in 2003. In fact, Iraq is still suffering the consequences of this grave mistake today, more than 20 years after the destruction of its military organ during the invasion.

The HTS authorities have also demonstrated no interest, at least so far, in initiating an intense de-Baathification process akin to the one that hollowed out all of Iraq's institutions and destabilised the country for decades after the fall of Saddam. For all intents and purposes, it looks like the new authorities are not planning to target the Baath Party, which has been in power in Damascus since 1963, as an institution. The leadership of the former single party announced a suspension of activities, but not their cessation. The party's website is still operational — featuring a photo

of Bashar al-Assad no less — and its central and local offices have not been systematically attacked, as one might have expected in the aftermath of regime change.

In other positive signs, Interim Prime Minister al-Bashir declared that the incoming government intends to dissolve the oppressive security agencies that, since the 1960s, have terrorised millions of Syrians. He announced plans to repeal the so-called "anti-terrorism laws," which came into effect in 2012 as a revamped version of special laws that, for more than 50 years, legitimised military tribunals targeting hundreds of thousands of activists and dissidents.

These are undeniably positive steps, many of which reflect a desire to build a new Syria without dismantling the core elements that make possible its survival as a state. The interactions of the incoming authorities with citizens at the municipality level, which have so far marked by an emphasis on civil — not military — relations also signal a constructive approach to governance.

However, all these promising signs are somewhat overshadowed by

moves and statements by the incoming authorities that carry echoes of Syria's authoritarian past, which may lead the country to repeat the mistakes its neighbours made during their own political transitions.

HTS leader al-Sharaa, for example, announced the appointment of al-Bashir, who previously led the so-called Salvation Government of Idlib, as prime minister without consulting any forces outside of the group. This appointment, made unilaterally and based solely on in-group ties, has made people worry the dysfunctional power mechanisms of al-Assad's Syria may continue into the new era.

Another striking development was the decision to display the HTS flag — featuring the Islamic profession of faith (shahada) in black on a white background — during the first meeting of the new government, held in the prime minister's office. To many, this was reminiscent of how, until a few days ago, the Syrian tricolour was always accompanied by the banner of al-Assad's Baath Party.

Less surprising, but no less significant, has been

the implicit contradiction between the new authorities' media declarations about the inclusivity of their state-building project and their silence regarding the inclusion of Kurdish-Syrian communities. Al-Sharaa and his inner circle appear unwilling to embrace Kurds and invite them to take part in this national project while delicate negotiations over power balances along the Euphrates are under way between Turkiye, which supports HTS, and the United States, which maintains a military presence in Kurdish-controlled areas. Furthermore, opening up to the Kurds could risk antagonising Turkiye, whom the new leaders in Damascus likely see as crucial to maintaining the support of if their fledgling governance project is to succeed.

On the other hand, the new rulers of Damascus could have more forcefully condemned the de facto annexations carried out by Israel to the southwest of Damascus, as well as the unprecedented series of Israeli air strikes on the installations of the Syrian military — the same army that al-Sharaa claims to want to protect from post-Assad collapse. The near

silence from al-Sharaa and his new prime minister on relations with Israel has raised eyebrows among many Syrians. While undoubtedly relieved by the "liberation" after half a century, Syrians remain deeply attached to the principles of national defence, as well as the preservation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The military leaders who have filled the vacuum left by the Assad regime have not yet given a clear indication regarding the trajectory of the transition they are overseeing. Nor have they acknowledged the sole roadmap currently on the table of international negotiations: UN Resolution 2254 of 2015. This document outlines the path towards an orderly transition, with two overarching priorities: safeguarding the state, distinct from the regime, and averting further bloodshed. The urgency of these priorities is underscored by troubling, though perhaps inevitable, episodes of score-settling that have emerged in the streets and squares of various Syrian cities after decades of systemic violence inflicted by the regime.

These principles are explicitly enshrined in UN

Resolution 2254. Although the resolution was crafted in a political and military context vastly different from today's realities, its roadmap for an orderly, Syrian-led transition remains a valuable guide. The resolution calls for the establishment of a transitional government with full executive powers that is inclusive of Syria's political forces, the drafting of a new constitution, and legislative elections under UN supervision within 18 months of the transition's initiation. It also guarantees voting rights for all Syrians, including refugees and members of the diaspora. Notably, the text explicitly excludes "terrorist groups" and HTS was designated as such by the United States, the European Union and the UN less than three years after the resolution's adoption. Al-Sharaa and his allies may thus not feel bound to adhere to a resolution negotiated without their participation by foreign parties that have demonised them.

It is crucial for Western governments, rather than rushing to find a formal workaround to recognise HTS as a legitimate partner despite their "terrorist" designation, to press Damascus's new rulers to

initiate a genuinely inclusive political transition in line with the principles outlined in the 2015 resolution.

To this end, Syrian civil society — both public entities and those long suppressed or clandestine, within the country and among the diaspora — must urgently mobilise to create spaces for political and civil dialogue that transcend communal affiliations.

The risk is clear: Syria under HTS could transform into a larger version of Lebanon, with institutions that appear democratic and republican but are in reality controlled by a narrow elite that wields power vertically through sectarian and clientelist loyalties, bolstered by their respective foreign patrons. Avoiding this fate requires prioritising equal access to basic services and fundamental rights — such as healthcare, education, employment, and housing — in a manner that is inclusive and equitable, rather than exclusive and sectarian.

Only by fostering active citizenship and building horizontal connections across communal divides can Syrians ensure a future free from the corrosive legacies of al-Assad's authoritarianism.



PSX witnesses bullish trend, gains 1,867 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bullish trend on Monday, gaining 1,867.61 points, a positive change of 1.63 percent, closing at 116,169.41 points as compared to 114,301.80 points on the last trading day.

A total of 1,470,661,659 shares were traded during the day as compared to 1,118,570,230 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs66.628 billion against Rs59.511 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 477 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 246 of them recorded gains and 194 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 37 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom 403,228,918

shares at Rs1.92 per share, Energyco PK with 59,584,754 shares at Rs7.12 per share and Pak Refinery with 54,776,226 shares at Rs36.52 per share. Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs163.27 per share price, closing at Rs7,586.36, whereas the runner-up was Raffhan Maize Products Company Limited with Rs108.58 rise in its per share price to Rs8,999.09

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs154.99 per share closing at Rs20,820.00 followed by Khyber Textile Mills Limited with Rs64.63 decline to close at Rs720.32.

Rupee sheds 06 paise against dollar

Pakistani rupee on Monday depreciated by 06 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and

closed at Rs278.17 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.11.

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

The price of Euro increased by Rs1.22 to close at Rs292.28 against the last day's closing of Rs291.06, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs1.81, whereas an increase of 20 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs351.44 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs351.24.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 02 and 01 paise to close

at Rs75.73 and Rs74.02, respectively.

Gold prices decrease by Rs800 per tola

The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs800 and was sold at Rs277,000 on Monday against its sale at Rs277,800 on previous trading day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs687 to Rs237,482 from Rs238,169 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat also went down to Rs217,693 from Rs218,321.

The prices of per tola and ten gram silver remained constant at Rs3,400 and Rs2,914.95 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$8 to \$2,658 from \$2,666, the Association reported.

United Bank Limited unveils Visa Premium Plus Debit Card



F.P. Report

KARACHI: UBL (United Bank Limited) is proud to announce the launch of its Visa Premium Plus Debit Card, a pioneering financial product designed to cater to the evolving needs of eco-conscious customers while supporting the bank's ongoing commitment to sustainability. The UBL Visa Premium Plus Debit Card is the first of its kind in Pakistan, made from recycled PVC, marking a sig-

nificant step in UBL's effort to push for environmental responsibility within the financial sector.

The UBL Visa Premium Plus Debit Card is a gold-tier offering, designed for high-net-worth individuals and those seeking enhanced financial flexibility. It offers higher daily spending and withdrawal limits allowing customers to make larger transactions with ease and security. Furthermore, the Card provides access to exclusive

discounts across various categories through prestigious partnerships with top-tier brands. With this launch, UBL continues its vision to offer innovative and sustainable banking solutions that not only serve the financial needs of customers but also align with global sustainability goals.

UBL is excited to partner with Visa to launch this innovative product, which promotes eco-friendly financial solutions in emerging markets such as

Pakistan, where environmental risks are significant.

The launch event for the UBL Visa Premium Plus Debit Card saw participation from Mr. Ijaz Farooq, Deputy CEO, UBL, Ms. Leila Serhan, Senior Vice President & Group Country Manager for North Africa, Levant & Pakistan at Visa, Umar Khan, Country Manager, Pakistan & Afghanistan, Visa, Mr. Muhammad Anas, Head of Consumer Banking, UBL and other senior executives from respective organizations.

These key leaders spoke about the importance of innovation in financial products and services that align with both customer expectations and sustainability goals.

Their remarks highlighted UBL's position as a forward-thinking institution that integrates environmental concerns into the heart of its business strategy.



PESHAWAR: Patron-in-Chief Sarhad Business Alliance Haji Ghulam Ali chairing a significant consultative meeting of SBA.

SNGPL committed to ensure gas supply F.P. Report

LAHORE: SNGPL shall continue to supply gas to the consumers during the winters with special focus on peak demand hours. All efforts are being undertaken in the matter.

Moreover, gas is being supplied with adequate pressure and currently there is no issue of low pressure except some tail end areas.

The consumers are requested to refrain from using the gas compressors which deprives others from consuming their rightful share. A disconnection campaign against the compressor users is being launched shortly in the matter.

In case of gas pressure complaints faced by our esteemed consumers, please immediately call at 1199 for immediate rectification of the issue.

Every effort is being undertaken to resolve the issues faced by consumers on an immediate basis.

Motorbikes, 3-wheelers sale increased

ISLAMABAD (APP): The sale of motorbikes and three-wheelers in the country has witnessed an increase of 25.87 per cent during the first five months of the current fiscal year (2024-25) as compared to sales of the corresponding months of the last year.

During the months under review, as many as 578,364 motorbikes and three-wheelers were sold against the sale of 459,459 units in July-November (2023-24), according to the Pakistan Automobile Manufacturing Association (PAMA).

The sale of Honda motorcycles surged by 22.20 per cent from 398,303 units to 486,758 units whereas the sale of Suzuki motorcycles also rose by 60.91 per cent from 6,023 units to 9,692 units during the months under review.

Consultative meeting of Sarhad Business Alliance held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A significant consultative meeting of the Sarhad Business Alliance was held under the chairmanship of Patron-in-Chief and Former Governor Haji Ghulam Ali at the office of Co-Chairman Siraj Ud Din. The meeting addressed key issues related to industry, trade, challenges faced by the business community, environmental concerns, and matters pertaining to the industrial sector. Participants emphasized the need for collective efforts and sustainable economic growth to resolve these challenges.

It was decided to prepare a comprehensive working paper on environmental issues, property taxes, and other major concerns to

engage with relevant departments and the provincial government effectively.

Prior to the consultative meeting, Haji Ghulam Ali, accompanied by SBA Co-Chairmen Muhammad Ishaq, Siraj Ud Din, Shahrukh Khan, and Ghulam Bilal Javid, President of Peshawar Traders Chamber, visited Hayatabad Industrial Estate.

The delegation inquired about the health of Dr. Maqbool Khan, CEO of MEDICON Pharma and President of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (KPPMA), who recently underwent successful surgery. They expressed their best wishes for his speedy recovery and appreciated his remarkable

contributions to the pharmaceutical industry. Dr. Maqbool Khan thanked the delegation for their visit and solidarity.

The delegation also offered condolences on the passing of Aminullah Khan, brother of prominent industrialist and CEO of Legacy Pharma, Bashir Khan. They prayed for the departed soul and expressed their sympathies with the bereaved family. On this occasion, Haji Ghulam Ali and others praised Aminullah Khan's contributions to the business community and described his demise as a significant loss.

Sarhad Business Alliance reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the business community and fostering regional development.

OGDCL revives heavy oil well in Chakwal — enhances production at Rajian Oil Field

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), Pakistan's leading exploration and production company, has successfully revived a heavy oil well in the Northern Region field, marking a significant milestone in the nation's energy sector.

The initiative was undertaken at the Rajian Oil Field located in Gujar Khan Exploration License (E.L.), district Chakwal, and is part of OGDCL's strategic moves to enhance production capabilities. Earlier, the field's four heavy oil-producing wells were contributing 1,500 barrels per day (BPD). With the successful completion of the revival process, the cumulative production from the Rajian Oil Field has now

surged to 2,500 BPD.

OGDCL developed a robust optimization plan for the Rajian field, including 11 workover jobs and the deployment of advanced artificial lift systems. Rajian-3A, the first target of this initiative, reaches a depth of 3,652 meters. The well had been temporarily suspended in 2020 due to formation challenges. Employing an innovative approach, OGDCL completed the well using an Electrical Submersible Pump (ESP) in the Chorgali-Sakessar and Tobra formations. This effort successfully revived production at the well, augmenting output to 1,000 BPD.

The optimization program for the remaining 10 wells is underway and OGDCL anticipates a significant boost in production

from the Rajian field. Furthermore, OGDCL-owned Rig N-4, deployed for the implementation of the innovative program, will remain at the Rajian field for the entire duration. The expected outcomes will be shared with shareholders upon completion of these operations, reflecting the company's commitment to maximizing asset potential and ensuring value creation.

This achievement underscores OGDCL's commitment to operational excellence and sustainable energy development. By leveraging innovative technologies and optimizing asset potential, OGDCL continues to play a crucial role in strengthening Pakistan's energy security and solidifying its position as a leader in the hydrocarbon sector.

Haier, UET Lahore partner to advance Green Energy Saving Technology

F.P. Report

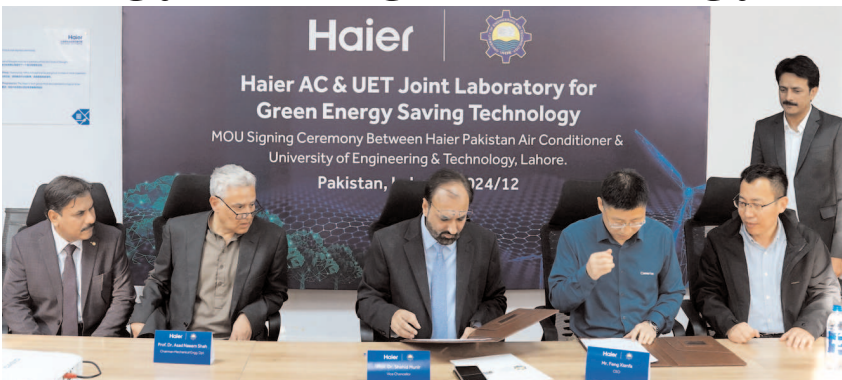
KARACHI: Haier Pakistan Air Conditioner and the University of Engineering & Technology (UET), Lahore, have officially signed a strategic cooperation agreement to establish the "Haier Joint Laboratory for Green Energy Saving Technology." This significant partnership aims to foster innovation, research, and development in energy-efficient technologies, aligning with the objectives of the Belt & Road Initiative.

The memorandum of understanding (MOU) signing ceremony marked the beginning of a groundbreaking collaboration between industry and academia. The agreement reflects a shared commitment to promoting sustainable solutions and advancing the field of green energy-saving technologies. The signing ceremony was attended by Mr. Abrar Anjum Bajwa Director Air Conditioners Haier Pakistan, Mr. Muhammad Humayun - AC Factory GM, Mr. Dilshad Ali - R&D Manager, Mr. Hamayoun Bashir - Director Marketing and Prof. Dr. Shahid Munir Vice Chancellor UET.

A Shared Vision for Innovation and Sustainability

The partnership sets out several ambitious goals that will benefit both the academic and industrial sectors:

1. Promoting Innovation and R&D: The collaborative effort aims to drive



innovation by conducting research and development in energy-efficient technologies. The focus areas include air conditioning systems, refrigeration, and other related fields.

2. Establishing a Joint Laboratory: The laboratory will serve as a hub for interdisciplinary research, bringing together experts from Haier and UET. This joint platform will enable the development of cutting-edge solutions to reduce energy consumption and minimize environmental impact.

3. Leveraging Educational Resources: By combining the advanced resources of UET with Haier's industry expertise, the collaboration seeks to bridge the gap between academic theory and practical applications.

4. Talent Development and Industry-Academia Collaboration: The initiative will provide enhanced learning opportunities for researchers and students, paving way for talent development and strengthening ties between academia and industry.

5. Supporting Local Industry and National Progress: The research conducted in the joint laboratory will not only benefit Haier and UET but also provide valuable insights and solutions for the local industry and contribute to the nation's progress.

Key Objectives Under Belt & Road Initiative

As part of the Belt & Road Initiative, this collaboration aims to address global challenges related to energy consumption and environmental sustainability. By focusing on green energy-saving technologies, the joint laboratory seeks to establish Pakistan as a leader in innovative and sustainable solutions for energy-efficient systems.

A Commitment to Excellence

Speaking at the ceremony, representatives from Haier and UET emphasized the significance of the partnership. They highlighted the mutual benefits of combining University of Engineering & Technology (UET) Lahore's academic

rigor with Haier's technological expertise. The establishment of the joint laboratory underscores a commitment to driving progress through collaborative efforts and shared knowledge.

Future Prospects

The Haier Joint Laboratory for Green Energy Saving Technology will open new doors for interdisciplinary research and development, benefiting not only students and researchers but also the broader community. The initiative is expected to serve as a model for future collaborations between academia and industry, driving innovation and contributing to a greener, more sustainable world.

This partnership represents a milestone in Pakistan's journey toward energy efficiency and environmental stewardship. With a strong focus on innovation and sustainability, Haier and University of Engineering & Technology (UET) Lahore are paving the way for a brighter and greener future.

PIAF for prioritizing low-cost power projects

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) on Monday welcomed the directives of the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to further reduce power tariffs and expedite the implementation process of the action plan of the future power generation projects.

It is a welcome step for the future electricity and power plans of country, stressing the need for prioritising the low-cost power projects based on local resources.

In a joint statement PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol along with senior vice chairman Nasrullah Mughal and vice chairman Tahir Manzoor Ch said that the low-cost power project produce environment friendly and affordable electricity.

Faheemur Rehman Saigol further said that the current electricity generation capacity should also be shifted to solar energy.

He said that globally, electricity is being produced from environmentally friendly, low-cost solar energy, he noted, adding that Pakistan was

fortunate in this regard as the country had vast potential for solar energy. Nasrullah Mughal called for the immediate closure of such outdated power plants adding that closing these plants would not only save valuable foreign exchange, but also reduce electricity costs for consumers. He said that immediate action should be taken against all officials deliberately obstructing reforms in the power sector. He stated that reforms in the electricity transmission system be expedited.

Public Notice

Public at large is informed that Mr. Alamzeb Manan S/O Manan Khan is the owner of House/Plot No. 347/E-4/1-Kanal Phase-VII Hayatabad Peshawar. The Duplicate documents have been issued of the plot Now He Wants To Transfer the Plot on This Duplicate Documents Therefore if Any person

Department, Have any objection it should inform undersigned within 15 days of publication of this advertisement otherwise the Plot Shall be Transfer and later on no claim shall be entertained. Housing Officer (Transfer Hayatabad Phase. 5/PDA Peshawar.

SUIT ADVERTISEMENT

In the court of Syed Zamarrud Shah Judge Banking Court-II Federal Judicial Complex Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar
Case No: 212/1 Next Date: 20-1-2025 Suit for recovery of Rs. 8,39,436/- NBP City Branch Peshawar Vs. Basit Kamal. Notice Versus: Basit Kamal S/o Faqir Muhammad R/o Masjid Abu Bakkar Sadiq Bakto Nala Malakandher Nasar Bagh Road Peshawar. Where is the plaintiff Bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs.8,39,436/- against you under section 10(2) of the Financial Institutions (Recovery of Finance) Ordinance 2001. You are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court to appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/publication of the notice in the newspaper filling which an expert decree shall be passed in favour of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Issue today on 7-12-2024 under my signature and seal of the court.

Judge Banking Court-II Peshawar

SUIT ADVERTISEMENT

In the court of Syed Zamarrud Shah Judge Banking Court-II Federal Judicial Complex Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar
Case No: 213/1 Next Date: 20-1-2025 Suit for recovery of Rs.62,145/- NBP City Branch Peshawar Vs. Fayaz Khan
Notice Versus: Fayaz Khan S/o Khuzur Muhammad R/o House No. 58 Sheikh Abad Mohallah Gharibanan out Side Lahori Gate Peshawar. Where is the plaintiff Bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs.62,145/- against you under section 10(2) of the Financial Institutions (Recovery of Finance) Ordinance 2001. You are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court to appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/publication of the notice in the newspaper filling which an expert decree shall be passed in favour of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Issue today on 7-12-2024 under my signature and seal of the court.

Judge Banking Court-II Peshawar

استثمار نیلام

اعداد تجزیه برآین فید صاحب و مرکز ایند چیج نیلام کورٹ-1 نمبر پختونخوا پتھر فیدرل جود پٹل کیلیس فیئر 7 حیات آباد پشاور۔۔۔ NBP تخت بھائی مرقع ڈگریہ در۔۔۔ نظام۔۔۔ (1) مکانی زمان (مردم) بزرگوار خان (1) و (2) خالد خان (3) اصل خان (3) بچاگیر خان پیران مانی زمان (مردم)، ساکنان پیرمی تحصیل بھائی علی مردان۔ وصول رڈ کورٹ-1-532041 دپے تاریخ چٹی برائے رپورٹ نظام 13-1-2025، شہید آباد پشاور حیات آباد مہمانان۔ اجراء مڈا میں پشاور حیات آباد (K254 - M15) پٹرنٹ۔ پٹرنٹ (813-818-822-828-851-851-870-871) بحوالہ پاس کتبہ نمبر 0280436 واقع مڈا میں پیرمی تحصیل بھائی علی مردان۔ مورث 09-01-2025 کو تمام کٹا گیا ہے۔۔۔ نظام نمبر 8 کے سے شروع ہوکر دپے 2 کے تک جا رہی ہے۔ جس میں ہر خاص و عام حصے مل سکے۔۔۔ سب سے زیادہ بولی دینے والا کامیاب قرار دیا جائیگا۔ بشرطیکہ عدالت اس کی توثیق کرے۔۔۔ عدالت کوئی بولی منظور کرنے یا نہ کرنے کا اختیار حاصل ہے۔ کامیاب بولی دینے والے کو تمام 1/4 حصہ منج پر آٹھویں کے پاس اور بچاڈا نمبر 154 پر عدالت پڑا میں بیج کرنا ہوگی اگر کسی شخص ادارے کے کا تیار ہو کر بولی دینا چاہتا ہے تو تمام سے قبل عدالت سے مشورہ کرنا۔۔۔ تاریخ 24-12-2024 بجرت میرے دستخط و مہر عدالت سے جاری کیا گیا۔۔۔ بیج ٹینک کورٹ نمبر 1 پشاور



In brief

Barcelona stunned by lowly Leganes

BARCELONA (Reuters): LaLiga leaders Barcelona lost 1-0 to Leganes on Sunday with defender Sergio

Gonzalez's early header enough to stun the wasteful hosts who lost their second consecutive league game in front of their own fans. While they have been excellent in the Champions League with five wins in six games, Barcelona have struggled in LaLiga for over a month, with only one victory in their last six league matches. Barca remain top of the LaLiga standings with 38 points, level with Atletico Madrid - who they host on Saturday - and one point ahead Real Madrid in third, with both their title rivals having a game in hand. It was Leganes's first ever win at Barcelona and left them 15th in the table on 18 points. Leganes took the lead from a corner after four minutes when visiting captain

Gonzalez rose unmarked at the near post to fire an unstoppable header past goalkeeper Inaki Pena. Barca immediately went after the equaliser but, despite dominating proceedings throughout the match with over 80% possession, they were clueless as they sought to overcome a disciplined and well organised five-man Leganes defence, spurning a handful of opportunities. They failed to hit the target with 16 of their 20 shots in the game and when they did, they hit a wall in Leganes goalkeeper Marko Dmitrovic who made three spectacular saves in the first half. The 32-year-old Serbian keeper made a brilliant reflex save to deny a first-time effort from Robert Lewandowski in the 10th minute after fine individual play by Raphinha down the left. Then, he worked his magic with a stunning save in the 33rd minute to palm a Raphinha volley against the crossbar and stepped up again a few minutes later to block a Lewandowski effort when the striker was one-on-one. The hosts' frustration grew after the break and they missed several chances with Dani Olmo, Lamine Yamal and Raphinha all wasting good opportunities while Lewandowski and Jules Kounde missed sitters from close range.

UK Sport invests record £330m

LONDON (Agencies): Elite sport funding body UK Sport says it will invest a record £330m in Britain's Olympic and Paralympic sports for the 2028 Games in Los Angeles. More than 50 sports will benefit, though athletics has had its budget reduced for the second cycle running. Five new sports for the 2028 Games - baseball/softball, flag football, lacrosse, Paraclimbing and squash - have all received funding. Breaking, which featured for the first time at the Paris Games this summer, is no longer eligible for support after it was axed from the Olympic programme. The total figure will top £400m with the addition of athlete performance awards (APAs), which are paid directly to individual athletes and contribute to their living and sporting costs so they can focus on competing - about £70m was awarded in APAs in the Paris funding cycle, which totalled £385m. Sally Munday, chief executive officer of UK Sport, told BBC Sport funding should not be looked at as either a "reward" or a "punishment" for performances at the Paris Games. "The decision that we've made against all the sports is we've looked at their potential," said Munday. "UK Athletics will receive in excess of £30m for the Olympic and Paralympic programmes and we believe that's going to put them in a great place to support their athletes in the lead into LA."

Nepal beat Pakistan by six wickets in ACC U19 Women's Asia Cup

KUALA LUMPUR (APP): Nepal beat Pakistan by six wickets at the Bayuemas Oval in Kuala Lumpur to qualify for the Super-Four Stage of the ACC U19 Women's Asia Cup on Monday.

Chasing 105 to win, captain Puja Mahato's undefeated run-a-ball 47, which included three fours helped her side achieve the target with an over to spare.

For Pakistan, Fatima Khan and Quratulain snapped a wicket each.

Earlier, after opting to bat first, Pakistan scored 104 for five in their 20 overs. Opener and wicket-keeper-batter Komal Khan top-scored with a 43-ball 38, which included two fours. Maham Anees coming to bat at number five was other notable contributor, scoring unbeaten 29 off 38 balls, hitting two boundaries.

For Nepal, Mahato bagged two wickets for 27. Pakistan, after losing their opening match

against India by nine wickets on Sunday, will now take part in fifth position match scheduled on Wednesday 18. The match will begin at 2pm PKT.

Scores in brief: Nepal 105-4, 19 overs (Puja Mahato 47 not out)

Pakistan 104-5, 20 overs (Komal Khan 38, Maham Anees 29 not out; Puja Mahato 2-27)

Player of the match - Puja Mahato (Nepal).

From Lodhran to the Int'l Stage
The Inspiring Journey of Shehar Bano

F.P. Report

LADHRAN: Lodhran witnessed a historic moment today as Shehar Bano, the talented daughter of a security guard, made her international cricket debut. Representing Pakistan in the Women's Under-19 T20 Asia Cup, she played her first match against Nepal in Malaysia. This marks a proud milestone for Lodhran and South Punjab.

Shehar Bano, a student at Anma Girls College and a player from Tareen Cricket Academy, is a left-arm fast bowler who has worked her way to the top through sheer determination. Her journey began humbly in the outskirts of Lodhran, in the small village of 48/M, where her father, Liaquat Abbas, works as a security guard for a private company.

"I used to play cricket just for fun," shared Shehar Bano in an emotional interview. "During summer vacations, I attended a summer camp, and that's where everything changed. Slowly, I started practicing at the Tareen Cricket Academy, participated in the Under-19 trials, and eventually got selected for the national team. My family is thrilled, and I owe this success to Ali Tareen and my coach, Mohammad Nadeem, who



supported me throughout this journey."

The Tareen Cricket Academy provided her with vital facilities, including equipment like bats, pads, and kits. "If it weren't for the academy, I wouldn't be here. We all practice together there," she added.

On her debut, head coach Mohsin Kamal presented her with the debut cap, and the team management and players congratulated her on starting her

international career. Ali Tareen, the owner of the Tareen Cricket Academy and the Multan Sultans T20 franchise, also celebrated her achievement, stating, "Shehar Bano is a star, and her debut is a proud moment for Lodhran. Today, we are reminded of why investing in local talent is so important. This is just the beginning—we will continue our efforts to promote women's cricket and natural young talent."

Williamson scores big as NZ set 658 for England to win third Test

HAMILTON (AFP/APP): England face a colossal target of 658 to win the third Test after Kane Williamson's century on Monday rammed home New Zealand's advantage with more than two days remaining.

Williamson posted a 33rd ton to continue a career glut of runs at Seddon Park before departing for 156 as the home side were dismissed for 453 late on day three. Daryl Mitchell scored 60 and Mitchell Santner 49 not out, setting up the prospect of a consolation New Zealand win after they were well beaten in the first two Tests of the three-match series.

England's hopes were dealt a blow by a hamstring injury to captain Ben Stokes while he was bowling midway through the second session.

The 33-year-old limped from the field in pain and he is in doubt to bat in the fourth innings.

The opening session

was lost to rain in Hamilton but Williamson quickly found his methodical groove after resuming on 50.

He put on 105 for the third wicket alongside Rachin Ravindra, who was caught for 44 off a leading edge from seamer Matthew Potts.

Williamson departed soon after powering New Zealand to 274-4 at tea, top-edging a sweep into the deep of Shoaib Bashir (2-170).

New Zealand's greatest run-scorer struck 20 fours and one six as he took his career tally of Test runs at Seddon Park to 1,614, the most by any batter at any New Zealand venue.

He has scored centuries in five successive Tests at what is his domestic home ground for Northern Districts, where he boasts an average of 94.94 from 21 innings.

Williamson survived a tight Brydon Carse lbw appeal review on 73 and

was later dropped by wicketkeeper Ollie Pope, when a difficult leg-side chance spilled from his glove off Stokes.

Mitchell was caught in the deep to hand part-time spinner Jacob Bethell a first Test wicket and, ultimately, England's best bowling figures for the innings of 3-72.

Santner also holed-out off Joe Root to fall just short of back-to-back half-centuries for the match.

Veteran seamer Tim Southee, who is playing his 107th and final Test, only scored two in his last Test innings.

He failed to add to his career tally of 98 Test sixes, leaving him ranked fourth on that list.

Earlier, overnight rain continued into the morning, forcing match officials to abandon the first session.

New Zealand resumed on 136-3, holding a 340-run advantage after the tourists were skittled for 143 on Sunday.



HAMILTON: Kane Williamson and New Zealand celebrate after a review couldn't overturn Zak Crawley's dismissal.

KP shines at Quaid-e-Azam Inter-Provincial Games 2024

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's series of victories continued in the Quaid-e-Azam Inter-Provincial Games 2024.

KP managed to win a total of 5 gold, 8 silver and 6 bronze medals, while it has qualified for the final of squash, athletics, and semi-finals of volleyball and football. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa players are struggling to win medals in various competitions of the Quaid-e-Azam Games being held at Jinnah Sports Complex, Islamabad.

In the karate event they won one gold and 4 silver medals, in the women's judo won one gold, one silver and one bronze



medal, while in the men's competition KP players won one gold, one bronze and one silver medal.

Similarly, in the men's athletics discus throw event, KP players won one gold, one silver and one bronze medal, while

in the high jump got one gold medal. In women's athletics KP won a silver and a bronze medal in discus throw, while qualified for the finals of the 100, 200 and 400-meter races.

Similarly, in squash and table tennis events, the men and women players of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reached into the finals, while in men's volleyball and football competitions, both teams of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa managed to reach to the semi-finals.

Pakistan face South Africa in three-match ODI series in Paarl

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan and South Africa are ready to lock horns in a key three-match ODI series beginning from tomorrow at the Boland Park in Paarl at 5pm PKT. The second and third fixture of the series will be played at Newlands Cricket Ground, Cape Town and The Wanderers Stadium, Johannesburg on 17 and 19 December respectively.

South Africa had won the T20I series 2-0 after the third T20I was washed out on 14 December. The ODI series holds a lot of significance for both the teams as they look to fine tune their preparations for the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy in February and March 2025 in Pakistan.

Pakistan's squad has been bolstered with the return of pacer Naseem Shah, opening batter Abdullah Shafique and top-order batter Kamran Ghulam while wrist-spinner Sufyan Moqim and Usman Khan have received their maiden ODI call-ups. This will be Mohammad Rizwan's third ODI series as skipper of the side as he has started his stint with back to back ODI series wins over Australia and Zimbabwe.

In their last bilateral face-off in the 50-over format, Pakistan won the three-match series 2-1 in South Africa in April 2021.

Mohammad Rizwan, Pakistan's ODI captain:

"This is a vital ODI series in terms of our preparations for the ICC Champions Trophy and with Allah's help we will look to emulate our performances from the ODI series against Australia. We couldn't get the ideal results in the T20I series but I am really happy with some of the performances put in by our players in these conditions especially Saim's batting was brilliant in both games. Our batting, pace and spin stocks are decent enough to challenge South Africa and win the series with the help of almighty."

PESHAWAR: With the cooperation of Pakistan Cricket Board and Higher Education Commission, Peshawar University won the All Pakistan Inter-University Cricket Championship held here. In the final, they defeated Punjab University by 22 runs after a thrilling match. 18 universities from all over Pakistan participated in this championship.

University of Central Punjab get third position by defeated islamia university. Director Sports Peshawar University Bahre Karam distributed prizes among the players. The final of the championship was played at the Medical College Ground, in which Peshawar University batted first and scored 266 runs for the loss of six wickets in 34 overs.

Opening batsman Muhammad Mohsin Khan played a charming innings of 73 runs. In which he faced 54 balls, and hit 15 fours. Apart from mohsin, Jamshed Khan also scored a half-century, he hit two fours and five sixes. Maaz Habib scored 41, Muhammad Zubair scored 29 and Adnan Khan scored 20 runs. Munir Ahmed and Ali Hamza dismissed two players each for Punjab University.

In reply, the Punjab University team was all out for 244 runs in the 33rd over after a thrilling contest. Zahid 42, Hamza 36, Ramiz 38 and Wasim Akram were the prominent scorer with 46 runs. Maaz was the best bowler who dismissed three batters for Peshawar University, while Abdul Wahab, Farhad Khan, Muhammad Ramiz captured two wickets each from Peshawar University.

At the end chief guest thanked Pakistan Cricket Board Chairman Mohsin Naqvi, Higher Education Commission Chairman Mukhtiar Ahmed, and Higher Education Commission DG Sports Javed Memon, whose efforts, the Inter-University Cricket Championship was organized in collaboration with PCB and HEC.

He said that after the successful completion of 14 zonal competitions in Pakistani universities, 18 best teams from universities that showed excellent performance participated in this championship. HEC and PCB are working under an agreement to improve cricket at the grassroots level in the country, which aims to identify cricket talent in universities and work together to improve this talent, which will ultimately strengthen Pakistan's cricket ecosystem.

Earlier, in the Memorandum of Understanding between HEC and PCB, it was agreed that equal emphasis would be placed on promoting cricket talent in both men and women.

KP, Sindh, Punjab register wins in Kabaddi event

ISLAMABAD (APP): The first day of the kabaddi event of the ongoing Quaid-e-Azam Inter-Provincial Games saw Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh and Punjab registering emphatic victories in their respective matches at Pakistan Sports Complex. In the opening clash, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa dominated Balochistan with a convincing 86-12 win. Sindh followed suit, defeating Islamabad 54-15 in the second match. Punjab showcased their superiority by outclassing Gilgit-Baltistan 50-8 in the third game. The competition will continue on Tuesday with three exciting matches lined up. Balochistan will face Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) in the first match, followed by a contest between Gilgit-Baltistan and Islamabad.

Doncic triple-double leads Mavs over Warriors in record duel

San Francisco (AFP/APP): Luka Doncic reeled off a triple-double with 45 points, 13 assists and 11 rebounds to spark the Dallas Mavericks over Golden State 143-133 in a record-shattering NBA matchup on Sunday.

The Mavericks and Warriors combined for an NBA single-game record of 48 made three-pointers, breaking the old mark by four, with Golden State sinking 27-of-54 shots from beyond the arc and Dallas hitting 21-of-41 three-point attempts.

"No team could miss. They had 18 threes at half-time and we were still up, which is insane," Doncic said. "Felt like nobody could miss. It was a fun game. Lot of makes. But it was a physical game too." Doncic made 16-of-23 shots from the floor, including 6-of-11 three-pointers, and the 25-year-old Slovenian guard added three steals and two blocked shots to his ninth career 40-point triple-double.

"The guy never ceases to amaze me," said teammate Klay Thompson. "He never rushes, plays at his own pace. Had 45 points easy as pie he made it look like." It was the three-point sharpshooting that made the contest historic, crushing the old mark for combined three-pointers in an NBA game of 44 set in February 2023 by Sacramento and the Los Angeles Clippers, and matched two nights ago by Phoenix and Utah.

The Mavericks, who won for the eighth time in nine starts, and Warriors combined for a one-half

NBA record of 30 three-pointers in the first half, which ended with Dallas ahead 81-74. Dallas made 12-of-25 from three-point range in the first half while the Warriors matched another NBA record with 18 three-pointers in a half, coming on 32 shots.

That set the stage for ex-Warrior Thompson to sink the record-breaking 45th combined three-pointer with 4:32 remaining in the fourth quarter off an assist from Doncic. "I've had a great history of shooting the ball well here so I try to tap into that every time I come back," Thompson said.

Thompson had a season-high 29 points, 12 in the last quarter, and sank 9-of-14 shots from the floor and 7-of-11 from three-point range against a club with which he won four NBA titles. "Legendary stuff. Now it's time to do some legendary stuff in Dallas," he said. "I truly believe in this team. We have all the ingredients to do something special." LeBron back, Lakers win -eBron James made a triumphant return after missing two games with a sore left foot as the Los Angeles Lakers beat Memphis 116-110, snapping the Grizzlies' four-game win streak. Anthony Davis led the Lakers with 40 points and 16 rebounds while James, the oldest active NBA player who turns 40 on December 30, added 18 points, eight rebounds and eight assists.

Jayson Tatum scored 28 points and grabbed 12 rebounds to lead the reigning NBA champion Boston

Celtics over league-worst Washington 112-98, but an injury to Kristaps Porzingis dimmed the joy of a road victory. Porzingis, a 29-year-old Latvian center who missed the first month of the season following left ankle surgery, played only 11 minutes before leaving for good with right heel pain in the second quarter.

Porzingis has played in only seven games this season, averaging 20.3 points and 7.8 rebounds. The Wizards fell to 3-21 while Boston improved to 21-5, second-best in the NBA to Cleveland (22-4). At Orlando, the New York Knicks delivered the first home loss of the season to the Magic as Jalen Brunson scored 31 points and Karl-Anthony Towns added 22 points and 22 rebounds in a 100-91 victory.

Reserve Mo Wagner scored 32 to lead Orlando, which fell to 10-1 at home. At San Antonio, Minnesota's Anthony Edwards scored 26 points to lead the Timberwolves over the host Spurs 106-92. French star Victor Wembanyama led the Spurs with 20 points and added 12 rebounds and five assists. Host Phoenix got 28 points from Devin Booker plus 20 from Kevin Durant to power the Suns over Portland 116-109. At Indianapolis, Pascal Siakam scored 22 points to lead the Indiana Pacers over New Orleans 119-104. The Pacers obtained Miami center Thomas Bryant in a trade deal while the Brooklyn Nets sent German guard Dennis Schroder to Golden State for forward De'Anthony Melton.



In brief

IRSA releases 77,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Monday released 77,300 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 39,600 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1475.70 feet and was 77.70 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. The water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 18,700 cusecs and 36,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1140.45 feet, which was 90.45 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 4,600 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 41,200, 33,600, 34,000 and 3,500 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 10,600 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 1,900 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Police bust three robbers' gangs

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police have busted three gangs of robbers and thieves involved in criminal activities in different areas of the district. According to a Rawalpindi Police spokesman on Monday, the Race Course Police arrested the Mamoon gang leader and his accomplice with the stolen money of Rs 60,500, mobile phones and the weapons used in the incidents of robbery. The accused Sohail alias Mamoon and Ghufuran were sent to jail for an identity parade. The Naseerabad Police also nabbed two members of a gang involved in robbery incidents. The accused were identified as Usman and Riaz. The stolen money of Rs 44,000, seven mobile phones and weapons were recovered from the accused. Likewise, the Wah Cantt Police also nabbed a two-member gang involved in thefts. The stolen amount of Rs 21,600 and weapons were also recovered from the accused Wasim and Yasin.

Police hold 17 law breakers

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Monday arrested 17 law breakers involved in different criminal activities from across the district. According to a police spokesman, the Wah Cantt Police held accused Jalal with 1.7 kilograms hashish while the Jatl Police nabbed Amir Jan on the recovery of 540 grams hashish. Similarly, the Kahuta Police arrested accused Ehsan-ul-Haq and recovered 10 liters of liquor from him, the spokesman said. Meanwhile, eight accused were held for possessing illegal weapons and ammunition. The accused identified Aminullah and Dilwar were held by the Ratta Amral and Wars Khan Police respectively. Zeeshan and Basit by the Civil Lines Police, Waseem and Yasin by the Wah Cantt Police, and Waqar by the Kahuta Police with a 30-bore pistol each, while the Jatl Police recovered a carbine from Waqas Mehboob. The Pirwadhai Police arrested an accused, Bilal, involved in several incidents of street crime and theft, with stolen money of Rs 27,000. Meanwhile, the Morgah Police held four gamblers for betting on a cockfight. The arrested accused included Zeeshan, Kamran, Asif and Saqib. The amount at stake and three phones were recovered from them. The Ratta Amral Police arrested accused Noman for making a false call on the emergency helpline 15 that someone had snatched his mobile phone and money.



ISLAMABAD: A welder busy reinforcing the roadside fence on Zero Point Flyover in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

Governor paid tribute to APS victim families

RAWALPINDI (APP): Governor Punjab, Sardar Salim Haider Khan on Monday has paid rich tribute to the victim families of Army Public School (APS), Peshawar attack in 2014, in which a number of innocent students were killed.

"I pay tribute to the armed forces of Pakistan whose personnel are laying down their lives in the line of the country's protection", he said. The governor remarked this during his address at the inaugural of an International Training Workshop on DSSAT" organized by Pir Mehar Ali Shah (PMAS) Arid Agriculture University. Sardar Salim highlighted that Pakistan is a least contributing country in the global climate change but remained among the major affected countries.

"Irregular rains affecting arid areas which result in poor crop yields, and wastage of time money and energy of farmers", he said. He further said that Pakistan is an agricultural country with sufficient resources, but it is importing food items, wheat, sugar etc. The governor said that the government should own the Research and Development sector in the agriculture sector which

needs funding in particular.

"PMAS university is rendering and contributing well in this regard. We need to modify our techniques to counter prevailing climate challenges which are impacting the agri sector", he said urging the relevant quarters from the government to contribute their due positive role at all levels. He underlined the need of collective efforts to eradicate corruption and the corrupt mafia who are creating barriers in the country's development.

However the governor commended the efforts of VC PMAS for his utmost efforts in setting up a campus in Attock. The governor said that Pakistanis are a resilient nation who always stood affirmed for the national cause. Earlier in his welcoming remarks, Dr. Muhammad Naeem, VC PMAS Arid Agriculture University highlighted the key initiatives taken by the university in research and development to provide sustainable solutions and means to overcome the prevailing challenges to the agriculture sector.

"The university is trying to address these issues through research, community engagements, green Pakistan ini-

tiatives and is collaborating with other organizations in adopting the latest technological methods", he said. The Vice Chancellor informed that labs were being equipped with the latest and modern technologies in collaboration with the Chinese government.

"The three day International Workshop on Decision Support System for Agro-technology Transfer (DSSAT), will be deliberate to draw means and ways to assess crops's growth and improve cultivation", he said.

Dr Mukhtar Ahmad Chairman HEC urged the academia and students to put their energies in discovering innovation in agriculture development. Dr. Abid UNESCO Chair, Dr. Muhammad Aslam Gill former Commissioner Minister of National Food Security, Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Crop Modeler, Prof Dr. Saifullah Khan and others also shed light on the computer model for simulation of crop growth and yields, soil and plant water. It is worth mentioning that DSSAT is a software which is being used as a tool globally for the assessment of climate change impacts and mitigation using the crop simulation model.

Broadband connectivity essential for economic growth: Gilani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani on Monday said broadband connectivity is a cornerstone of global transformation, driving economic and business growth, financial empowerment, social development, and innovation.

"This connectivity is important to health, safety, and welfare of the public" he said, while addressing the National Broadband Network (NBN) Forum 2024 Gigabit for all arranged by Huawei and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA).

He further remarked that broadband is the foundation upon which digital economy is built. The Chairman Senate said that Pakistan has made remarkable progress in expanding broadband penetration but there are still millions who lack access to affordable and reliable broadband.

"This digital divide is not just a technology issue; it is a societal challenge that demands urgent attention and action" he added.

He said that Pakistan's population has exceeded 240 million and the demand for connectivity and digital services is on the rise. Gilani said, "It is our responsibility to bridge the digital divide and ensure that all Pakistanis have access to high-quality broadband services."

Yousuf Raza Gilani said that parliament has crucial role to play as an enabler in this transformative journey. "We are committed to providing comprehensive legislative support for the implementation of progressive policies to enhance efficiencies, remove barriers and encourage investment and innovation in the telecom sector" he said.

The Chairman said, by fostering a favorable environment for public-private partnerships, the country can drive the digital agenda and ensure the effective deployment of advanced technologies.

He underlined the need to address challenges like cybersecurity, data privacy and equitable access as the country make stride to adopt

emerging technologies like 5G and 6G, Fiber Optic Advancement, Artificial Intelligence, Renewable Energy Innovations, and Space Technology. He acknowledged the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication, PTA and Huawei for jointly arranging this important event.

He said that the initiative brought together leaders, policymakers, and regulators to discuss key issues, challenges and opportunities concerning telecom sector. "I take great pride in acknowledging the telecom industry as a mainstay of Pakistan's economic development by driving digital transformation and fostering innovation", he observed.

He called upon all the stakeholders to join hands for a connected future where every school has high-speed internet, where businesses can thrive in rural areas, and where every individual can participate in the digital economy. He thanked the organizers for creating a platform that can drive meaningful change.

Romania National Day celebrated at Islamabad



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Sardar Waqar Shahzad was graciously invited and hosted by the Ambassador of Romania Dr. Dan Stoenescu at a splendid event to mark the celebration of the National Day,

highlighting the strong bond between Pakistan and Romania.

Expressing gratitude to Ambassador Stoenescu for the warm hospitality and thoughtful invitation, Shahzad emphasized the importance of continued friendship and cooperation

between the two nations.

The event was a testament to the enduring diplomatic ties and the commitment to strengthen relations.

He paid thanks to Romanian Ambassador and other diplomatic mission for hosting such event.

Ministry introduces installment plan for Hajj 2025 expenses

ISLAMABAD (APP): The spokesperson of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Muhammad Ümer Butt, on Monday said that the government had introduced an installment mechanism for Hajj 2025 to help pilgrims manage their expenses more conveniently.

Talking to a private news channel, he stated that the estimated cost for Hajj this year would range between Rs. 10.75 lakh (1,075,000) and Rs. 11.75 lakh (1,175,000). According to the Hajj Policy 2025, a total of 179,210 Pakistani pilgrims will perform Hajj, he added. He said that the Hajj quota has been equally divided, with 50 percent allocated to the government and 50 percent to private Hajj schemes.

Additionally, he mentioned that individuals with chronic diseases and children under 12 years of age have been barred from performing Hajj under the new policy. The government is vigilant to provide the best possible facilities to pilgrims during Hajj 2025, he added.

were being threatened besides attacking their houses. He urged the government to take appropriate steps in this regard.

ANF recovers over 2805 kg drugs in six operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting six operations managed to recover over 2705 kg drugs worth Rs 150 million and arrested two suspects, said a police spokesman on Monday.

He informed that 750 grams ice was recovered from the possession of an accused arrested near a university in Multan.

The arrested accused confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions.

In another operation, 2 kg ice was recovered from a passenger going to Dubai at Lahore Airport.

In third operation, 2600 kg hashish was recovered from a mountainous area of Pishin in Balochistan.

76 kg heroin hidden for smuggling was recovered in a mountainous area of Chaman in Balochistan.

In fifth operation, 19 kg hashish was recovered from an area near the railway gate in Makrani Para Hyderabad.

In sixth operation, 3 kg heroin and 5 kg hashish was recovered from an abandoned motorcycle near a hotel in Turbat area of Kech in Balochistan.

Cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

Govt takes notice of trolling journalists: Senate told

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarrar on Monday informed the Senate the government has taken notice of trolling some specific journalists by a certain political party and decided to conduct an inquiry into the matter.

Responding to a point raised by senator Jam Saifullah in the House, the minister said the matter was also raised by the Minister of Information and Broadcasting during a meeting with the Prime Minister. "Journalists inform us about the pulse of society," he said.

He said it was also the responsibility of the government to protect the lives and properties of the people. Difference of opinion was essence of democracy but we must create a tolerant society, he added.

He went on to say that the Constitution also guarantees freedom of expression but it has some limitation. The minister said this matter has also been reviewed at a high level today and the law would take its course. "It is wrong to create disruption in society or start trolling when someone speaks against something, he remarked.

He said there were

grave challenges in the region and stressed the need to lead society towards tolerance. "The government is aware of its responsibilities. If anyone's fundamental rights are being violated, the state will play its role," he said.

Earlier, speaking in the House, Parliamentary leader of PML-N Senator Irfan ul Siddiqui condemned the trolling of journalists. Unfortunately such trend was growing in politics which was not fair, he added.

He said that we should also listen the view point of opponents with patience and tolerance. Attacking journalists' houses or abusing them and making propaganda against them were tantamount to strife the voice of others, he added.

He said one could criticize the government but maligning of Pakistan through social media by resorting to propaganda was not totally unfair.

He said as a government, we would look into the matter and such behavior towards journalists was highly condemnable.

Earlier, speaking on a point of order, Jam Saifullah said in last two three days, some senior journalists/anchor-persons

Christmas to bring festive cheer amidst winter in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): As December unfolds, the Christian community in the federal capital, like elsewhere in the world, has begun preparations for celebrating the festival of Christmas with great enthusiasm.

The grand festival of Christmas, celebrated with passion and joy across the city, promises to spread warmth and cheer in the chilly winter air.

The markets and shops across Islamabad are brimming with Christmas-themed accessories like Christmas trees, wreaths, garlands, ornaments, lights and stockings as well as Christmas gifts, drawing crowds eager to make their celebrations special.

The shopkeepers are anticipating a boost in sales as families, despite the rising cost of living, continue to prepare for the festival through buying dresses,

shoes, and other accessories, especially for the children.

The sweet shops sellers and florists are also gearing up to capitalize on the occasion by offering festive treats and floral arrangements to add charm to the festival. Every December, families across the Christian community shop for dresses, shoes, and festive decorations to mark the occasion in a befitting manner however the rising prices have driven many to flea markets, where they search for affordable second-hand items to partake in the festivities.

Julia, a mother of four, shared her challenges in preparing for Christmas amidst economic hardships. "My husband is a cab driver, and we're struggling to manage our children's education and household expenses," she said. "With prices so high, buying new

clothes and shoes is impossible, so I've turned to the flea market for affordable options", she said.

Despite economic pressures, the Christmas spirit remains vibrant as the members of Christian community of Islamabad are seen enthusiastically engaging in holiday traditions such as decorating homes with lights, setting up nativity scenes, and buying gifts for loved ones. This festive season is a time of hope and renewal, where people come together to celebrate faith and family. For shopkeepers, Christmas presents a lucrative opportunity to earn profits by selling the festival related stuff.

Ameen Ali, a shop owner in F-7 Markaz, said, "This season, we expect good sales as people buy gifts, ornaments, chocolates, and flowers to celebrate the grand festival. Christmas always

brings a surge in demand for decorative items and festive essentials." The customers are particularly interested in unique ornaments for decorating Christmas tree and personalized gift items to make the celebrations more meaningful, he said while talking to APP.

The celebrations will include various activities such as community gatherings, cake-cutting ceremonies while the iconic decoration of Christmas trees is always at the heart of the festival. The trees, adorned with baubles, bells, stars, and other ornaments, symbolize the joy and spirit of the season while an angel or star often crowns the tree, representing the heavenly hosts. Local churches in Islamabad are also gearing up for the occasion, preparing for special midnight masses, carol services, and charity drives. "The

church is not only a place of worship but also a center for community bonding during Christmas," said Pastor Peter from one of the city's prominent churches. "This year, we're focusing on supporting underprivileged families and spreading the message of peace and harmony."

Samina, a government employee, expressed her excitement for the festivities. "I love decorating the Christmas tree at my office, organizing cake-cutting ceremonies, and exchanging gifts," she said. "Such moments of joy and togetherness remind us to pray for the safety of all citizens and the progress of our country during church visits", she said.

Stalls have also popped up near the Katchi Abadis, where many members of the Christian community live. These stalls offer affordable decorative items

and clothing, attracting young people and children eager to become a part of the celebrations. Beyond the markets and malls, local schools and institutions are also playing a role in the festivities. Many schools are organizing Christmas programs, including plays, carol singing, and gift exchanges, allowing children to embrace the holiday spirit. "Christmas at school is always special for the kids," said a teacher at a Convent School in capital. "It's a time to instill the values of love, generosity, and community."

Christmas remains a cherished occasion, bringing people together to exchange gifts, sing hymns, and host family gatherings. It is a time to spread love, joy, and hope, uniting communities in festive cheer, the teacher said.

Minister, envoy held meeting

KABUL (BNA): Alhaj Nooruddin Azizi, the Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce, held a meeting with Gaziz Akbasov, the newly appointed Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Afghanistan. Ambassador Akbasov conveyed messages from Kazakhstan's leadership, emphasizing their commitment to strengthening and expanding bilateral relations with Afghanistan. He also expressed Kazakhstan's interest in investing in Afghanistan's mining and transport sectors.

Fire broke near Mosque

KANDAHAR (Amu TV): A fire broke out on Monday near Edigah Mosque in Kandahar, causing an estimated \$25,500 in financial losses, local sources reported. The incident occurred in Police District 4, a commercial area of the city. Witnesses attributed the fire to negligence but did not provide further details about its cause. No casualties were reported, but the fire has raised concerns among local business owners who suffered damage to their shops and inventory.

EU allocates 19.8m for economic empowerment

KABUL (TOLONews): The European Union (EU) in Afghanistan announced that it has allocated 19.8 million to the Aga Khan Foundation and Aga Khan Cultural Services to implement the "Economic Resilience, Women's Economic Empowerment, and Job Creation in Afghanistan" initiative.

According to the EU, this project, with a total value of 22 million, aims to address the immediate needs of Afghan communities while fostering long-term economic stability, inclusion, and resilience.

The EU in Afghanistan said that over a 36-month implementation period, the program will directly benefit 34,200 households and reach an estimated 292,544 people indirectly, with a strong emphasis on youth and women.

"Millions in Afghanistan remain trapped in poverty, with women disproportion-

ately bearing the burden," stated Veronika Boskovic-Pohar, chargé d'affaires of the European Union in Afghanistan.

"This initiative supports inclusive and sustainable economic growth, helping communities build self-reliance. By enhancing employment, income generation, and productivity, it promotes resilient livelihoods, particularly for women and other vulnerable groups, including youth, returnees, internally displaced people, and farmers affected by the poppy ban. The program also considers the severe impact of climate change in Afghanistan by introducing climate-smart technologies and helping communities withstand climate-induced shocks," she said.

"We are excited to announce the signing of a new project with the European Union in

Afghanistan, further strengthening the longstanding partnership between the EU and the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in the country," noted Doctor Najmudin Najm, Chief Executive Officer of AKF and AKDN Coordinator, Afghanistan.

The EU also said that its assistance in Afghanistan "focuses on supporting the most vulnerable populations, including women, girls, minorities, internally displaced persons, and refugees" and "all EU humanitarian and basic needs assistance is delivered through trusted partners, adhering to principles of impartiality and transparency."

However, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock of Afghanistan had previously criticized the implementation of projects funded by the European Union.

Northern Coal Company begins distribution



KABUL (TOLONews): The Northern Coal Company, in collaboration with Kabul Municipality and under the supervision of the General Directorate of governmental companies, has started distributing coal at prices lower than the market rate in Kabul.

The head of the governmental companies has stated that the aim of this initiative is to support those in need and emphasized that the distribution will also extend to neighboring provinces.

"The Directorate of Emirate Companies has decided that this year, through the Northern Coal Company, quality coal will be provided to citizens at an

affordable price. Our goal is to facilitate life for the citizens of the country with the arrival of the cold season," said Ahmad Jan Bilal, the acting head of governmental companies.

"This initiative helps those in need. It is located near the main road, and as you can see, anyone in need of coal can access it transparently and with confidence, whether they are a housewife, a child, or a young person," said Noorulhadi Noori, head of Kabul's 10th district.

Some Kabul residents have expressed satisfaction with this move by the Islamic Emirate.

"Coal has been provided to us at the price of 6,500

Afs, which is very reasonable. We are satisfied because we were unable to purchase it from the open market until now," said Sayed Qasim, a Kabul resident.

"We ask our government to adopt similar serious measures in other areas, such as food supplies, vegetables, and job creation, so that the needy can benefit during the winter," stated Mohammad Kabir, another Kabul resident.

According to information from the Northern Coal Company, 120,000 tons of coal have been allocated for Kabul and 40,000 tons for neighboring provinces. The price of each ton of coal has been set at 6,500 afghani.

Retirees protest unpaid pensions

KABUL (TOLONews): With the arrival of winter, retirees have once again complained about the non-payment of their government pensions, stating that they have faced numerous challenges over the past three years.

They urged the caretaker government to address their issues seriously.

Asadullah, one of these retirees, said that during this time he has lived with great difficulty, and the cold season has added to his problems.

This elderly man calls on the Islamic Emirate to resolve the challenges preventing the payment of his pension.

"We have not benefited from our entitlements at all. We request the leadership of the Islamic Emirate pay us our pensions. This is our right," Asadullah told TOLONews.

Several other retirees, who had gathered at the Pension Treasury, said that they can no longer bear the economic hardships at their age and urged the caretaker government to pay attention to their problems.

"For three years, we have been coming and going. I am struggling financially, and I am physically weak. Winter has arrived, and we have nothing," said Wali Mohammad, one of the retirees.

"Winter has come, and we face many hardships. Our pensions have not been paid yet. We appeal to the Islamic Emirate to release the retirees' pensions," said Habibullah, another retiree.

The Islamic Emirate has recently made no comments regarding the payment of pensions to retirees.

Previously, retirees had frequently gathered in front of UNAMA office in Kabul to protest the non-payment of their pensions and called on the organization to take action to resolve the issue.

UNESCO stresses urgent protection

GHOR (Khaama Press): The Head of UNESCO's Office in Afghanistan emphasized the need for further protection of the Jam Minaret during her visit to Ghor province.

Patricia McPhillips, the head of UNESCO's office in Afghanistan, highlighted the importance of safeguarding the Jam Minaret during her visit to Ghor province.

She stated that efforts to secure funding and implement protective measures for the site continue. McPhillips also mentioned plans to construct a new bridge over the Hari Rud River to improve access for both locals and tourists near the Jam Minaret.

The Jam Minaret was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site approximately 22 years ago. However, the site has faced significant damage due to earthquakes and recent floods, raising concerns among cultural activists.

Cultural activists are urging global cultural institutions, particularly UNESCO, to focus on restoring and preserving the ancient Jam Minaret in Ghor to prevent further deterioration of this historical landmark.

Ghor province is home to several historical and tourist sites, with the Jam Minaret being the most significant cultural monument. The Jam Minaret, built in 1194 during the reign of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Ghor, stands in the Jam Valley in the Shahrak district of Ghor province.

At over 830 years old, the Jam Minaret is the second tallest brick minaret in the world, after the Qutb Minar in Delhi, India. It is located 70 kilometers west of Firozkoh, the capital of Ghor province. The preservation of this ancient site is not only crucial for Afghanistan's cultural heritage but also for its role in global history.

Efforts to protect and preserve the Jam Minaret are critical, as it is a symbol of Afghanistan's rich architectural and cultural history.

TAPI Pipeline project in Herat: Taliban, Turkmenistan discuss progress



HERAT (Khaama Press): Local officials in Herat have reported that Amir Khan Muttaqi, the acting foreign minister of Taliban, and Rashid Meredov, the foreign minister of Turkmenistan, visited the construction site of the TAPI project in Herat.

The Taliban Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated on Monday, that during this visit, discussions focused on facilitating visas, extending the railway, fiber

optic transmission, and improving transportation between the two countries.

Both sides emphasized the importance of accelerating these processes and agreed to increase the frequency of working group meetings in Kabul and Ashgabat to expedite progress.

A few months ago, the Taliban and Turkmenistan had launched the practical work of the TAPI project within Afghanistan's borders.

The TAPI pipeline is a major infrastructure project, stretching 1,814 kilometers in total, with 207 kilometers crossing Turkmenistan, 774 kilometers through Afghanistan, and 826 kilometers across Pakistan to the India border.

TAPI is considered one of the region's largest economic projects, as Afghanistan will not only receive substantial amounts of gas but also earn around

\$400 million annually in gas transit fees.

This project is seen as a key driver of regional economic cooperation and energy security, with the potential to boost Afghanistan's economy and its position in regional energy transit networks. As work progresses, it will be crucial to ensure that security, infrastructure, and diplomatic ties continue to align for its successful completion.

Displaced Kunar families return amid hardships

KUNAR (TOLONews): Some families who were displaced due to Pakistani rocket attacks along the Durand Line in Kunar province have now returned to their homes.

Mohammad Amin, a 65-year-old resident of the Nawa Pass Valley in Sarkano district, Kunar province, has returned to his native area after years of displacement.

He recounted that during the previous government, his 12-year-old daughter was killed due to rocket attacks, forcing him to leave his home and village to protect his family.

Mohammad Amin told TOLONews: "We live in poverty, working as farm-

ers here. We only have fifteen goats, which are barely enough. Life is very hard.

These destroyed houses belong to my uncles—all three were destroyed. The house where I live is over there. My family consists of eight or nine members. My 12-year-old daughter was martyred in this very house, and I was also injured. I left my home at night and fled."

Some of these returnees are calling on the interim government to assist in addressing their problems.

Lalurahman, a resident of Kunar, said: "We had intact homes and ready farmland, but due to bombings and shelling, everything was destroyed. Now

that we have returned, our homes are in ruins."

Khan Wali, another resident of Kunar, added: "Previously, hundreds of families lived in this village. There was communal living, joy, and kindness. But due to Pakistan's shelling, our homes were destroyed, and people were forced to leave the village."

Local officials pledged that they are working to address the issues of the returnees with the help of aid organizations.

Mohibullah Hijrat, the district governor of Sarkano, said: "Out of those who had left, around 25 to 30 percent have returned. We are in contact with the rest, and they have also shown

interest in coming back to their homes."

Mohammad Ibrahim MiaKhel, the head of refugees and returnees in Kunar province, said: "People living in border areas with Pakistan had migrated due to shelling and insecurity—around eight thousand people."

During the previous government, families from districts like Sarkano, Khas Kunar, Shultan, Marawara, Dangam, and Asmar were forced to leave their areas due to fighting and Pakistani rocket attacks. With the return of the Islamic Emirate to power, many of these families have gone back to their original homes.

Mayor seeks TIKA's help for urban uplift projects

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Rashid, the Mayor of Kabul, met with Fazil Akin Erdogan, Head of Turkey's TIKA Organization, to discuss implementing urban development programs.

During the meeting, Mayor Abdul Rashid emphasized the longstanding

friendship between Afghans and Turks, highlighting the need to strengthen urban cooperation between Kabul and Turkish cities.

He called for mutual collaboration in scientific and technical sectors to enhance urban management.

In response, Erdogan

expressed support for Kabul Municipality's new urban development plans. He pledged cooperation in areas such as capacity building for municipal staff, maintaining sustainable order, reducing congestion, designing new overhead bridges, and providing urban facilities.

Head of Ghaznfar Group met Minister



KABUL (BNA): Mullah Hidayatullah Badri, the Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, met with Mohammad Ibrahim Ghaznfar, the head of Ghaznfar Group, to discuss potential collaboration and investments.

According to a statement

from the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum of Afghanistan, during the meeting, Ghaznfar provided updates on the progress of the company's gas-to-electricity plant and expressed a keen interest in investing in oil refining projects in Afghanistan.

Mullah Hidayatullah Badri, the Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum assured the Ghaznfar group of the ministry's full cooperation and support in advancing these initiatives, emphasizing the importance of fostering domestic investments in vital sectors.

NGOs enhance coordination to foster agricultural progress

KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock has announced that Mawlawi Sadr Azam Osmani, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, held meeting with representatives from Afghanaid, TLO, Concern Worldwide, and ActionAid organizations.

During the meeting, Deputy Minister Osmani emphasized the importance of effective, transparent, and coordinated implementation of projects with the ministry.

He highlighted the need for these organizations to focus on developmental initiatives, particularly the construction of standard cold storage facilities, which enable farmers to



sell their agricultural products at better prices throughout the year.

Charles David, a representative of Afghanaid, stressed the importance of developmental projects.

The collaborating NGOs assured their commitment to implementing various programs effectively for the benefit of Afghan farmers.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and

Livestock is committed to working with these organizations to execute developmental projects transparently and effectively, aiming to maximize benefits for Afghan farmers.

UNHCR boosts support for Afghan returnees

KABUL (TOLONews): Arafat Jamal, the head of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has announced efforts to create better conditions for Afghan returnees inside the country.

He told TOLONews that the organization is implementing measures such as distributing cash assistance and providing shelters for Afghan returnees from Iran and Pakistan.

Arafat Jamal said: "What we do for the returnees from Iran and Pakistan is, first, we give

them cash. When they arrive at the border, they get \$350, and then the amount goes up. This cash enables people to rent a room, buy some food, get transport to their home. After that, we do shelter, building people homes so that they can establish themselves."

Jamal emphasized the need for cooperation from other countries to assist returning Afghan refugees and expressed hope for increased activities, particularly for women and children. "We are launching

different appeals right now for more assistance to help with basic things like Bukhari, like blankets and other items for the winter," stated Arafat Jamal.

Meanwhile, newly returned refugees to the country are calling for immediate assistance to survive the winter season.

Noor Mohammad, who was recently deported from Pakistan, said: "We have come from Sohrab Karachi. So far, we have received no assistance. Winter is approaching, and we are living in a rented house."

"We have returned from Pakistan, and winter is ahead of us. We have no fuel and are living in a rented house," said Sayed Ahmad, another returnee from Pakistan.

Previously, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation said it was working to provide basic living facilities for returning migrants. The ministry also mentioned that in the first eight months of this solar year, over 900,000 Afghan migrants have returned to the country from Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan.

KPITB finalizes Digital Transformation Policy-Roadmap 2030

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The 16th board meeting of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Technology Board (KPITB) was held here at the Chief Minister's Secretariat with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair. In a significant step towards digital transformation in the province, the meeting has finalized the Digital Transformation Policy and Roadmap 2030, which will be presented for formal approval at the next provincial cabinet meeting.

This comprehensive policy encompasses various key domains, including digital governance, skills development, cyber resilience, emerging technologies, fintech, and digital payments, digital platform infrastructure, climate tech, startup and innovation ecosystem. The meeting was attended by Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry, Additional Chief Secretaries, IT Department officials, and other board members.

The meeting reviewed the implementation of decisions made in previous meetings, actions taken under the digital policy, and future course of action. It was briefed in the meeting that over 60 projects have been launched under the KPITB to improve service delivery in the province. Flagship initiatives include the Public Service Delivery Portal (Dastak), Digital Revenue Collection Platform, Digital FinTech Platform (Pamir), Digital Stamp Duty, Motor Vehicle Registration System, and Carbon Credit Portal.

The meeting also highlighted the key achievements under digital payment platform, which has processed over 1 million transactions for arms licenses, resulting in payments exceeding Rs. 89 crore. Similarly, the Excise Department has collected over Rs. 12 crore through this platform. Additionally, 6,058 new vehicle registrations have been processed, generating over Rs. 6 crore in revenue. Other achievements include the collection of Rs. 5 crore in token tax, Rs. 57 lakh in transfers, and Rs. 28 lakh in other matters. It was informed that a unified digital platform for revenue collection, tax, and fine collection has been established, providing a single platform for all services. Additionally, the Carbon Credit Portal will provide details of all carbon deposits and related services on a single platform.

The KPITB has spent a total of Rs. 206 million on these initiatives, with an estimated return amount of Rs. 1.8 billion. Similarly, the KPITB has made significant progress in digital skills development, with 13,800 youth trained in graphic design, web development, digital marketing, and animation over the past few years, with 37% employment in the respective fields. Furthermore, 2,500 youth have been trained in cloud computing and data engineering, with 49% securing employment.

Under the ongoing initiatives, additional 27,000 youth are being trained in various fields, including e-commerce, IT governance, mobile development, social media marketing, computer networking, and cyber

security, the authorities told and added that over 7,000 youth from merged districts will also be imparted with training in various fields, while the Digital Economy and Skills Center in Mardan will provide training to over 4,000 youth.

They further informed that Digital Internship Program has also provided internships to 23 youth at the China Accelerator, while over 2,000 youth have received internships at IT Park companies, with 67% of them now employed. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has also developed the "Khyber Pass" digital identity platform, which will provide digital and transportable electronic IDs. The platform will offer online facilities for all citizen services, from birth registration to death certificates, making it a complete paperless system.

Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has directed the acceleration of digitization process in the provincial government departments and said that it was the policy and priority of his government to enhance the capacity of government departments and improve transparency, good governance, and service delivery across the sectors. He directed the quarters concerned to immediately complete the remaining work of Digital City Haripur and initiate work the project for establishing IT Park in Peshawar. He termed this development as a testament to the KPITB's commitment to driving digital growth and empowering the youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, adding that the KPITB is playing a pivotal role in shaping the province's digital future.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information, Attaullah Tarar addressing an IRD dialogue titled 'Leveraging Pakistan's cultural diversity to foster peace within and without.'

President vows to promote regional marine cooperation

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to promote regional marine cooperation and ensuring peace, progress and sustainability in the Indian Ocean region.

Addressing the 3rd China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Blue Economy Cooperation held in Chinese city of Kunming, via a video message, the President stressed the need for collective action to harness the ocean's potential while addressing the pressing challenges of climate change, pollution, and ecosystem degradation.

The Forum was organized by the China International Development Cooperation Agency and focused on promoting collaboration among countries in the maritime sector. Asif Ali Zardari said Pakistan stands ready to partner with all stakeholders to promote marine cooperation and ensure that our region remains a bastion of peace, progress, and sustainability.

The President said the future world economic growth is going to be driven by the East due to its large population resources. Highlighting the importance of the ocean as a shared lifeline and a source of immense economic opportunities, he pointed out Pakistan's efforts to enhance its blue economy.

These include the formulation of the National Maritime Policy, initiatives focusing on sustainable fisheries and marine conservation, and the Living Indus Project, which aims to protect ecosystems and combat pollution. The President also underscored the development of Gwadar Port under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is being transformed into a regional connectivity hub to drive trade and maritime economic growth.

Pak-KSA agree to take steps for narcotics control

RIYADH: Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have agreed to take more effective measures for narcotics control under the framework of bilateral cooperation.

The understanding was reached during meeting between Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control Mohsin Naqvi and Saudi Director General of Narcotics Control Major General Mohammed bin Saeed Al-Qarni in Riyadh.

Speaking on the occasion, Mohsin Naqvi said joint efforts should be made at international level against narcotics as no country can fight this menace alone. He said Pakistan will continue cooperation with Saudi Arabia regarding anti-narcotics measures. While visiting the headquarters of Saudi Directorate of Narcotics Control, the Minister took a round of the control room and other departments. He was briefed about drug interdiction strategies and systems. The Saudi Director General Anti-Narcotics Major General Muhammad Al Qarni offered provision of modern narcotics detection tools to Pakistan. — Agencies

Kurram grand jirga not dissolved: Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, has clarified that the Kurram Grand Jirga has not been dissolved, but rather, the parties involved have requested a one-day extension for further consultations. Rumors about the jirga's dissolution are baseless and may be attributed to anti-peace elements.

The one-day hiatus was sought to deliberate on the elimination of bunkers and the collection of arms. The parties involved have requested time to consult with their elders on these matters.

Barrister Dr. Saif emphasized that the provincial government is committed to establish durable peace in the region, which necessitates the elimination of bunkers and the disarmament of the area. The gov-

ernment is also well aware of the public issues arising from the road blockade in the region.

To address these concerns, the Chief Minister has arranged for essential medicines to be delivered to the area via helicopter. The wounded are also being transported to Peshawar via helicopter. Furthermore, the Chief Minister has directed the Food Department to supply 2,000 metric tons of wheat to alleviate food shortages in the region.

The issue of Karam is 120 years old, and its permanent resolution may take time. However, due to the sincere efforts of the Chief Minister, serious steps are being taken to address this longstanding issue. It is hoped that the problem will be resolved within a few days, and durable peace will be established in the region.

Meanwhile, Barrister Dr. Saif, Advisor to the Chief

Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, has strongly condemned the denial of a meeting between the Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and Imran Khan, despite the court order. He termed this act as contempt of court and announced that they will approach the court against this violation.

Barrister Dr. Saif expressed his concerns that the federal government is disregarding court orders, especially after the 26th amendment. He questioned how a Deputy Superintendent of Jail can deny the Chief Executive of a province permission to meet Imran Khan, citing this as an insult to the entire province. He further accused the federal government of promoting provincial discord, highlighting that Ali Amin Gandapur is the legitimate Chief Minister of KP, unlike Maryam Nawaz who holds a fake Form 47.

Enforced disappearance: PHC seeks govt's reply

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) has directed the federal and provincial governments to submit a report on the enforced disappearance of a Ph. D scholar Asad Ali Khan on 1st October from a Masjid at Babo Mohalla area of Mardan, on Monday.

PHC's Justice Ejaz Anwar expressed concern over the enforced disappearance of the scholar and observed that it was an alarming situation where a Ph. D student was picked up and then accused of being involved in militant activities.

The petitioner's lawyer, Zarbad Shah advocate informed the court that Asad Ali Khan, a Ph. D scholar at the Islamic College University was taken away by unidentified persons on 1st October. The student was picked up from a local Masjid in the Babo Mohalla of Mardan city.

The lawyer stated that 12 days after the scholar's disappearance, the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) contacted the family

and asked them to bring a pistol. The family was later told to bring a hand grenade, which they refused to do.

Justice Ijaz Anwar remarked that it was a tragedy that a Ph. D student was picked up and then accused of being involved in militant activities. He stated that the authorities first pick up individuals and then keep them in custody for two to three months. If nothing is found against them, they are then accused of being holding pistol or others illegal weapon. The court directed the federal and provincial governments to submit a report on the enforced disappearance of Asad Ali Khan and adjourned the hearing.

ATC grants interim bail to AAG Arshad Azim: The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Peshawar Judge Muhammad Iqbal Khan granted interim bail to Assistant Advocate General (AAG) Arshad Azim, a suspect in the May 9 protest case against the arrest of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan.

The court has ordered

Azim to cooperate with the investigation and appear before the police. During the hearing, ATC Judge Muhammad Iqbal Khan was informed that Azim was nominated in the May 9 case for protesting against Imran Khan's arrest.

The prosecution alleged that Azim, along with other protesters, had demonstrated in the premises of Khan Raziq Shaheed Police Station and caused damage to public and private properties.

On the other hand, Arshad Azim's lawyer argued that the case against the petitioner was baseless. He stated that Azim is a lawyer and is currently serving as Assistant Advocate General at the Service Tribunal Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The lawyer requested the court to grant bail to Arshad Azim, which was accepted by the court.

After hearing the arguments, the court granted interim bail to AAG till 21st December and directed him to cooperate with the investigation. The court also ordered the parties to submit the record on the next hearing date.

FO confirms death of 4 Pakistanis in boat incident

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch on Monday announced that four Pakistanis were identified among the dead in Saturday's incident of boat capsizing in the south of Crete Island of Greece.

"We announce with deep sorrow that, as per the latest information shared by the Greek authorities, four Pakistani nationals have been identified among the dead in Saturday's incidents of capsized boats in the south of Crete Island of Greece," the FO spokesperson said in a statement. "Our Mission in Athens is in contact with the Greek authorities to facilitate the survivors and repatriate the dead bodies," she added.

In response to speculation regarding the casual-

ties, the MoFA clarified the situation but also indicated the possibility of additional casualties, as the rescue operation was still ongoing. The ministry also confirmed that its Crisis Management Unit (CMU) have been activated to assist Pakistanis in Greece. Pakistani nationals in Greece and their families are urged to contact the CMU via telephone at 051-9207887 or by email at cmul@mofa.gov.pk. Families of the missing Pakistanis can reach the Embassy of Pakistan in Greece to provide details at +30-6943850188.

Earlier, Reuters reported that 39 men — most of them from Pakistan — had been rescued by cargo vessels in the area. These individuals have been transferred to the island of Crete. The number of miss-

ing individuals has yet to be confirmed. Coastguard boats, merchant vessels, an Italian frigate, and naval aircraft have been searching the area since Greek authorities were alerted to the incident on Friday night.

The tragic event has renewed calls for stricter measures to combat human smuggling and protect vulnerable individuals from exploitation by criminal networks. In response to the casualties resulting from illegal migration attempts to Europe, Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi directed the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to launch nationwide operations against human smuggling networks. He stressed that the mafias responsible for destroying countless families must be eradicated.

ATC discharges 78 more suspects in PTI's Islamabad protest cases

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Islamabad has discharged 78 more suspects who were arrested during the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) "do-or-die" protest at D-Chowk last month. Officials of four police stations of the federal capital produced a total of 283 suspects before ATC Judge Tahir Abbas Sipra on Monday, whereas, advocate Ansar Kiana represented detainees in the court.

After the completion of a two-day physical remand, Sihala police produced 31 suspected protesters and sought an extension. However, the ATC rejected the plea and sent the suspects to jail on judicial remand. Aabpara police produced 94 suspects before the court and sought their physical remand. The ATC judge handed custody of the 90 accused to police on a two-day physical remand and discharged 4 others in the case.

Meanwhile, officials of Tarnol police station also produced 63 suspects of which the court approved two-day physical remand of six and discharged 57 others from the case. Subsequently, 95 suspects were produced by Karachi Company police in two separate cases. The court discharged 9 suspects and approved a two-day physical remand of 3 accused in a case related to the PTI's November 24 protest in Islamabad.

In the second case, the ATC discharged 8 suspects while 75 accused were handed over to the police on a three-day physical remand. Sipra also sought details from the relevant police officials regarding underage children among the detainees. At the outset of the hearing, the lawyer representing detainees apprised the ATC

that some suspects had been discharged by the court two days ago but police rearrested them.

Judge Sipra directed the police to remove the handcuffs of the suspects and refrain from rearresting them. However, police did not release the accused despite the court orders which led their lawyer to return to the courtroom. Following the complaint, the ATC judge came out of his courtroom and summoned relevant police officials to the Judicial Complex's gate. Sipra then strictly ordered the cops "not to repeat the action [rearresting the accused after release] carried out the day before yesterday".

Two days ago, more than 40 PTI workers, who were discharged by the Islamabad ATC, were rearrested by police from the court premises. The PTI workers were arrested by police in connection with an arson and vandalism case related to PTI's November 24 protest in Islamabad. Judge Abul Hasnat Zulqarnain had ordered the suspects' handcuffs to be removed in court and discharged them from the cases, rejecting investigating officer's plea seeking a 30-day remand for the suspects.

The suspects were previously linked to cases filed at I-9 and Margalla police stations. Separately, a Rawalpindi ATC had also discharged 29 PTI workers from a case registered at Taxila police station on November 27 over alleged vandalism and arson during the party's "final call" protest. The former ruling party's much-hyped protest last month in Islamabad, aimed at securing the PTI founder's release, had culminated in the party's hasty retreat after the government's midnight crackdown on the protesters.

The party's protesters were dispersed from the Red Zone in Islamabad following a crackdown by law enforcers with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and PTI founder Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi taking to their heels, fleeing the protest site. The law enforcement agencies had arrested more than 1,000 supporters of the party who stormed the federal capital to demand his release, the city's police chief told media on November 27.

Meanwhile, the Rawalpindi Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) heard proceedings related to the May 9 GHQ attack case, indicting Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders Shireen Mazari and Major (ret'd) Tahir Sadiq, along with nine other accused individuals. The charges against them include sedition, terrorism, attempted murder, arson, and conspiracy. During the session, the court also postponed the indictment proceedings for PTI's former Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi.

The hearing, held at Adiala Jail, was presided over by Judge Amjad Ali Shah, who is overseeing 14 cases linked to the GHQ attack. PTI founder Imran Khan and Shah Mehmood Qureshi were both present in the courtroom for their respective hearings. In addition to the aforementioned leaders, nine more individuals were indicted in connection with the attack. However, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Colonel Ajmal Sabir Raja, and Sikandar Zeb refused to sign the charge sheet, claiming that the evidence against them was insufficient. They argued that their 265D applications should be heard first before they would sign the charge sheet.

Pakistan eyes flights resumption to US

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: After the lifting of the ban by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), both national and private airlines in Pakistan have started preparations to resume flights to the UK and the USA.

It reports in media that private airline Airblue has decided to begin flight operations from Pakistan to the UK. The airline has started preparations to launch flights from Lahore and Islamabad to the UK. A British aviation delegation will visit Lahore in the first week of January to assess passenger facilities and security arrangements at Lahore Airport.

Meanwhile, progress is being made in talks with the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to restart flight operations. Pakistan has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the FAA, and financial responsibilities are being finalised.

Director General of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), Nadir Shafiq, mentioned that payments to the FAA will soon be made, and the FAA delegation is expected to visit Pakistan by February or March.

Digital Nation Pakistan Bill tabled in NA

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Monday tabled the Digital Nation Pakistan Bill in the National Assembly as part of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's national digital agenda spanning economy, society, and governance. Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja tabled the bill in the parliament.

The bill aims to transform Pakistan into a digitally empowered nation by fostering a dynamic digital society, a robust digital economy, and efficient digital governance. The bill, recognising the potential of digital technologies to drive innovation, economic growth and societal well-being, seeks to accelerate sustainable development, enhance public service delivery, and modernise governance for improved transparency and effectiveness.

As per the bill, key governance bodies — the National Digital Commission (NDC), Strategic Oversight Committee (SOC) and the Pakistan Digital Authority (PDA) — will be established. The NDC, chaired by the prime minister and comprising federal and provincial leadership, will set the strategic vision and policy

Climate financing fundamental right of everyone: Justice Mansoor

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Senior puisne judge Justice Mansoor Ali Shah said that we didn't do much work to deal with the climate change during last seven years.

He was addressing a seminar on climate change in Lahore on Monday. "The climate financing is the fundamental right of every individual. There is a need to work on this issue to address the environmental pollution," said the senior judge. He added that Pakistan is facing severe challenges of climate change and therefore we should devise a strategy to deal with the situation. "We should work on food security, disaster management, water security and urban planning," said Justice Mansoor Ali Shah.

He said that the courts always gave much importance to the cases related to climate change and environment. Justice Mansoor also emphasized on climate diplomacy on emergency basis. Earlier, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah said that there is a need to establish child courts in the country. The senior judge said that child labour and child trafficking are major issues in Pakistan. "The child justice holds great importance.

framework for the country's digital transformation.

Meanwhile, the PDA will implement these policies by coordinating and harmonising digital initiatives across all levels of government and the SOC monitors the PDA's performance and provides an independent review to the NDC ensuring alignment with the masterplan. A cornerstone of the bill is the National Digital masterplan which provides a comprehensive strategy for aligning and optimising digital initiatives, eliminating redundancies across fed-

eral, provincial and local levels, and driving economic growth through enhanced public service delivery.

The implementation plan under the masterplan will detail specific projects, required resources, timelines and risk management strategies to ensure its effective execution. The bill further emphasises effective data governance to ensure secure and responsible data management and prioritises the development of digital public infrastructure and data exchange layer to foster innovation.