

PTI forms negotiation body
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan stated that a committee, headed by Omar Ayub, has been formed for negotiations. Speaking to journalists, Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said that the government had not made any contact regarding negotiations. He further clarified that no explanation had been sought from Sher Afzal Marwat, as he had not made any statements against party policy.

CJP visits Ghotki
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi on Wednesday visited Ghotki, the remotest district in Sindh province as part of his initiative for judicial reforms. He was accompanied by Mr. Justice Mohammad Shafi Siddiqui, Chief Justice of the High Court of Sindh, along with the Registrars of the Supreme Court and High Court of Sindh.



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Prime Minister arrives in Cairo for D-8 Summit

PM directs solid actions to curb human trafficking

CAIRO, ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif arrived today in Cairo on an official visit to Egypt to lead the Pakistan delegation at the 11th Summit of the Developing Eight (D-8) countries being held in Cairo from 18-19 December.

Minister for Public Business Sector of the Arab Republic of Egypt H.E. Mr. Mohamed Shimi along with senior Egyptian and officials of the Pakistan Embassy in Cairo received the Prime Minister upon arrival at the airport. 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. 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.

On the sidelines of the Summit, the Prime Minister is expected to hold bilateral meetings with the participating leaders. Pakistan delegation includes

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar and Federal Minister for Information & Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar.

Founded in 1997 in Istanbul, the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, also known as Developing-8, is an organisation for development co-operation among Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Türkiye. Its objective is to increase economic cooperation among Member States to boost economic growth, sustain development and promote and improve standards of living by focusing on bringing improvement and enhancing cooperation in agriculture, trade, transportation, industry, energy and tourism.

Earlier, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also directed the authorities concerned to take solid actions against human trafficking bringing defame to Pakistan and sought a report on the incidents of human trafficking during the last year involving Pakistani citizens.

The prime minister, chairing a meeting to discuss the death of Pakistani nationals in a boat capsizing incident in Greece and the measures to curb human trafficking, called for strict action against the people involved in the trafficking of innocent

people to other countries.

He recalled that 262 Pakistani nationals had lost their lives in another incident in the same area last year and expressed his displeasure over inaction against those responsible. The recurrence of such incidents is due to the sluggish actions against the people involved, he added.

The prime minister instructed the immediate implementation of the Integrated Border Management System (IBMS) to monitor international travelers. During the briefing, the prime minister was told that 174 people involved in human trafficking had been produced before courts with four of them convicted.

Prime Minister Shehbaz sought details on the public awareness campaign on human trafficking and asked the FIA and foreign ministry to furnish a report on the incidents involving Pakistani nationals over the last year. He also stressed the need to enhance collaboration with international institutions to prevent the recurrence of such tragic incidents.

Federal ministers Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Syed Mohsin Naqvi, Ahad Cheema, and Attaullah Tarar, Special Assistant to PM Tariq Fatemi, Coordinator to PM Rana Ehsan Afzal and relevant senior officers attended the meeting.

Court reserves verdict against Imran, Bushra Bibi

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: An accountability court on Wednesday reserved the verdict after completing the trial in 190 million pound reference against PTI founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi.

According to media, Judge Nasir Javed Rana conducted the trial of the 190 million pound reference at Adiala Jail, and the decision was reserved after the defense lawyer's arguments were concluded. The final hearing of the trial lasted for approximately 8 hours and 15 minutes, during which PTI founder and Bushra Bibi were present in court.

The accountability court will announce its decision on Monday, December 23. It is worth noting that the NAB lawyer had completed their arguments in the 190 million pound reference the previous day. The court reserved the decision after final arguments in case, the trial concluded in one year.

The £190 million case involves a reference filed by NAB against former prime minister Imran Khan, his wife Bushra Bibi, and others in December 2023. The case centers around an alleged settlement between the PTI government and a property tycoon, which reportedly caused a loss of £190 million to Pakistan's national exchequer.

Khan and the accused are alleged to have misused £190 million sent by the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) as part of the settlement. Bushra Bibi was named as an accused for her role as a trustee of the Al-Qadir Trust. Additionally, the couple is accused of receiving undue benefits, including over 458 kanals of land in Mouza Bakrala, Sohawa, for the establishment of Al-Qadir University.

During Khan's tenure, the NCA seized £190 million worth of assets from the tycoon. The assets were meant to be handed to Pakistan, with the settlement deemed a civil matter by the NCA. However, the details of the confidential agreement were not disclosed when Khan's cabinet approved it in December 2019. Subsequently, the Al-Qadir Trust was established in Islamabad.

National security important than internet: Shaza Fatima

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Information Technology (IT) Shaza Fatima said on the floor of the house on Wednesday that national security was a priority for her.

Speaking in the National Assembly on the suspension of internet service, Shaza justified blocking X, formerly Twitter, saying that less than two percent Pakistanis use the app. "The enemy is always ready for cyber-attacks. We have to stop these cyber-attacks. The PTA (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority) has to stop material on religious and social content as these are sensitive issues and such content causes hatred in our society. We have to keep our citizens safe," she added.

"Nothing is more important than national security," the state minister said and added that the regulatory system comes into play on security concerns. "I don't have a button to shut down the internet. We neither get pleasure nor benefit from it." She said that internet services in specific areas were shut down on the basis of data provided by provincial home offices.

It did not affect the entire country. "We try to

Tax Law Amendment Bill presented in NA

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A tax law amendment bill regarding restrictions on non-filers has been presented in the National Assembly. According to the proposed amendment, non-filers will be prohibited from purchasing vehicles exceeding 800cc, and they will not be allowed to buy property beyond a specific limit. There will also be a ban on purchasing shares beyond a certain threshold.

Non-filers will not be able to open bank accounts or conduct banking transactions beyond a specific limit. However, the amendment allows non-filers to purchase motorcycles, rickshaws, and tractors. The proposed amendment also includes provisions for freezing the bank accounts of unregistered businesses, restricting property transfers by unregistered individuals, and authorizing the government to seize property and businesses of such individuals. Accounts of individuals listed by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) will be frozen.

According to the amendment, bank accounts of those who do not register for sales tax will also be frozen, and they will be prohibited from transferring property. Accounts will be unfrozen two days after sales tax registration, and an appeal can be made to the Chief Commissioner for unfreezing. These restrictions will come into effect after the notification from the federal government.

ensure that users of the technology suffer the least inconvenience. I apologize for the inconvenience caused to users," Shaza continued. The minister of state said that steps would be taken to protect our data from cyber-attacks.

"X was shut down on the instructions of the

Interior Ministry. The closure of X has nothing to do with freedom of expression. If we had to curb the freedom of expression, TikTok and Facebook would not have been working either." Shaza said that "the language used against us is unbearable."

Israeli strikes kill 16 people in Gaza

GAZA (Reuters): The United States, joined by Arab mediators, sought on Wednesday to conclude an agreement between Israel and Hamas to halt the 14-month-old war in the Gaza Strip where medics said Israeli strikes killed at least 16 Palestinians overnight.

On Tuesday, sources close to the talks in Cairo, the Egyptian capital, said an agreement could be signed in coming days on a ceasefire and release of hostages held in Gaza in return for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. Medics said an Israeli airstrike killed at least 10 people in a house in the northern town of Beit Lahiyah, where army forces have operated since October, while six were killed in separate airstrikes in Gaza City, Nuseirat camp in central areas, and Rafah near the border with Egypt.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military spokesman. The US administration, joined by mediators from Egypt

and Qatar, has made intensive efforts in recent days to advance the talks before President Joe Biden leaves office next month.

On Wednesday, a Palestinian official close to the negotiations said mediators had narrowed gaps on most of the agreement's clauses but he said Israel had introduced conditions which Hamas rejected. He would not elaborate. CIA Director William Burns was due in Doha on Wednesday for talks with Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani on bridging remaining gaps between Israel and Hamas, other knowledgeable sources said. The CIA declined to comment.

Israeli negotiators were in Doha on Monday looking to bridge gaps between Israel and Hamas on a deal Biden outlined in May. There have been repeated rounds of talks over the past year, all of which have failed, with Israel insisting

on retaining a military presence in Gaza and Hamas refusing to release hostages until the troops pulled out. The war in Gaza, triggered by a Hamas-led attack on communities in southern Israel that killed some 1,200 people and saw more than 250 abducted as hostages, has sent shockwaves across the Middle East and left Israel isolated internationally. Israel's campaign has killed more than 45,000 Palestinians, displaced most of the 2.3 million population and reduced much of the coastal enclave to ruins.

Meanwhile, tired and sad, Palestinian activist Fakhri Abu Diab stood amid the rubble of his home in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, just a narrow valley away from the famed domes of the Old City. In early November, bulldozers from the Israeli-controlled Jerusalem municipality tore down his house in the Silwan neighborhood for a second time, citing unauthorized construction.



CAIRO: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif being received by Minister for Public Business Sector of Egypt, Mohamed Shimi at airport.

11 terrorists killed in operations

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: At least eleven Khwarij were sent to hell in three separate engagements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. An intelligence based operation was conducted by the Security Forces in Tank District on reported presence of Khwarij. During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location, as the result of which seven Khwarij were sent to hell.

Another intelligence based operation was conducted in general area Datta Khel, North Waziristan District. In ensuing fire exchange, two Khwarij were sent to hell by the security forces.

In third encounter that took place in general area Mamad Gat, Mohmand District, after an intense fire exchange two Khwarij were sent to hell. Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from killed khwarij, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces as well as innocent civilians. Sanitization operations are being carried out to eliminate any other Kharji found in the area, as security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe-out the menace of terrorism from the country.

President, PM pay tribute to Lance Naik

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday paid tribute to Lance Naik Mahfuz Shaheed (Nishan-i-Haider) on the 53rd anniversary of his martyrdom, recognizing his valor and sacrifice to safeguard the country.

The president and prime minister, in their separately issued statements, lauded the exemplary gallantry of Lance Naik Mahfuz Shaheed in the 1971 war when he repelled the enemy at the Wagah Border. They prayed to Allah Almighty for the elevation of the rank of Lance Naik Mahfuz Shaheed in paradise.

"Lance Naik Mahfuz Shaheed fought the enemy with bravery. The entire nation salutes him for his exemplary valor and patriotism. The people of Pakistan recognise the sacrifices of the martyrs which they will never forget," the president remarked. Prime Minister Shehbaz said that Lance Naik Mahfuz Shaheed defeated the enemy despite its overwhelming strength.

"Lance Naik Mahfuz Shaheed proved to be an indomitable symbol of duty and patriotism to protect the country from the evil intentions of the enemies. His commitment to the motherland and the spirit of sacrificing his life for its defense is a model for the new generation to follow," he said.

US urges Pakistan to uphold HRs

Jalil Afridi

WASHINGTON DC: During a press briefing on Monday, a correspondent from The Frontier Post raised concerns about the killing of 12 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers in Islamabad on November 26, allegedly by snipers. The journalist highlighted comments from Congressman John James, who questioned the legitimacy of the government responsible for such actions.

In response, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller reiterated the United States' stance on human rights and the rule of law. "We have always been quite clear — and every time you ask me a question about this, I'm quite clear — that we want to see human rights and the rule of law respected inside Pakistan," Miller said.

The State Department has not issued a specific press release about the incident but emphasized that its concerns are raised both publicly and

State Dept reaffirms support for journalists amid visa concerns

F.P. Report

WASHINGTON: During a State Department briefing on Monday, a correspondent from The Frontier Post raised concerns about visa challenges faced by Pakistani journalists, citing the case of a veteran journalist Arshad Sharif who was denied a US visa and later killed. The correspondent urged stronger support for journalists facing threats in Pakistan.

In response, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller emphasized that the department cannot comment on individual visa cases due to privacy concerns. "I obviously don't know anything about that particular case or why a visa was or wasn't granted," Miller said. "We don't typically talk about those matters in public for obvious privacy reasons." Miller highlighted the United States' commitment to supporting journalists and dissidents worldwide. "We are proud of the work that we have done to provide visas to refugees, dissidents, journalists, and those who expose corruption, fight for freedom, and flee tyranny. We will continue to do so," he added. The issue of press freedom and journalist safety remains a critical concern in Pakistan, where reporters often face violence, censorship, and legal harassment. The US has been vocal about protecting human rights and supporting press freedom globally, though specific visa policies remain a sensitive topic.

in direct engagements with the Pakistani government. The incident has drawn widespread criticism and added to the

growing scrutiny of Pakistan's government amid ongoing political unrest and allegations of human rights abuses.

Pakistani Ministers' salary increase

State Department declines to comment

F.P. Report

WASHINGTON DC: During a State Department press briefing on Monday, a correspondent from The Frontier Post questioned the US stance on a reported 900 percent salary increase for government ministers in Pakistan, despite the country's ongoing economic struggles.

The journalist criticized Pakistan's leadership, highlighting allegations of corruption and excessive spending in a nation grappling with severe poverty.

"These rulers increased their own salaries by 900 percent," the reporter said, adding that Pakistan frequently seeks financial assistance from international partners, including the United States.

State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller responded by steering clear of commenting on the issue. "I think the appropriate pay of government officials inside Pakistan is a question for the people of Pakistan and the Government of Pakistan to answer, not a question

for the United States," Miller said.

Miller further noted that it is not US policy to comment on the salaries of government officials in other nations, emphasizing that such matters are internal to the respective countries. The salary hike has sparked outrage within Pakistan, where many citizens are struggling with soaring inflation and widespread poverty. The US has been a key economic partner for Pakistan, providing aid and assistance during its ongoing financial crisis.

Govt not to tolerate presence of arms in Kurram: Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Adviser to the Chief Minister for Information, Barrister Dr Muhammad Ali Saif here Wednesday said that presence of weapons at Kurram district would not be tolerated and reiterated that the main Parachinar-Peshawar Road will not be reopened till surrender of the heavy weapons.

Flanked by Adviser to CM for health Ahtesham Ali here, Barrister Saif told a press conference that use of rocket launchers and anti aircraft guns were unacceptable.

The outlaws bunkers would be dismantled and he sought cooperation of tribal elders in surrenders of arms and ammunition in Kurram. Barrister Saif said huge consignments of medicines were delivered to Kurram through helicopters service and the

use of edible products including wheat were ensured.

To a question about death of 29 children, Barrister Saif said that a team was investigating the reported incidents from different angles. He claimed that these incidents were not reported due to food or medicines shortage rather caused by natural deaths over a period of times.

Adviser for health, Ahtesham Ali said that vehicles full of medicines were handed over to Commissioner Kohat for delivery to Kurram besides helicopters were used for this purpose. He claimed that medicines worth Rs12.4 million were dispatched to Kurram till today. He said that Rs5lac medicines were dispatched to tehsil headquarters Sadda today. The advisers urged media to avoid speculations and report incidents after its

complete verifications. Barrister Ali Saif said that huge stock of life saving medicines were dispatched to Kurram district.

He said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government would ensure uninterrupted supply of life saving drugs and edible items to Kurram. Talking to delegation of grand peace jirga here, the Chief Minister aide said that opening of Parachinar-Peshawar road was linked with handing over of heavy weapons and dismantling of bunkers. He said peace in Kurram cannot be restored unless bunkers were dismantled. He said that efforts were on to address the concerns regarding returns of heavy weapons, adding the area have to be cleared from anti aircraft weapons, missiles and RPGs for durable peace in Kurram.

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PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif addressing a press conference.

Annual sports event for girls at University Model School Co-curricular activities in edu institutions vital: Fakhar



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jihan has stated that holding of co-curricular sports activities in educational institutions is crucial for the physical and mental health of students. He mentioned that the provincial government is making significant efforts to encourage such healthy activities among the youth.

The provincial minister added that the organizing of annual sports events for girls at the University Model School, a subsidiary of the alma mater, the University of Peshawar, is a unique achievement and this initiative provides

valuable opportunities for girls to engage in sports and physical health activities.

He further announced the establishment of a badminton hall, female open gym and a basketball court at the University Model School for the convenience of the girls. The minister also assured for provision of scholarships for the school's outstanding female athletes. These remarks he made while addressing the 69th Annual Sports Day of the University Model School Girls Section, Peshawar University, as a chief guest on Wednesday.

The event was attended by Vice-Chancellor of Peshawar University, Professor Dr. Naem Qazi, Principal of University Model School Dr. Munir,

Principal of University Model School Girls Section, Syeda Safia Fazal, Director General of Halal Food Safety Authority, Wasif Saeed, as well as students, athletes, faculty members, and parents of the institution.

During the 69th Annual Sports Day, the girls demonstrated excellent performance in physical training (PT) and march fast. The provincial minister was briefed about the athletics, other sports, and physical fitness competitions organized at the institution.

On this occasion, the minister announced individual prizes of PKR 50,000 for each of the four house teams participating in the sports events, and awards were distributed

among the best-performing students.

The provincial minister further emphasized that there is no shortage of talent among the girls. He highlighted that during the recent Quaid-e-Azam Inter-Provincial Games, the majority of the participants were women and girls while they performed well in various sports. He reiterated that efforts would be made to enhance sports facilities at the relevant educational institution.

In his speech, Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Naem Qazi stated that the University Model School was established in 1955, and its teachers have made invaluable contributions to the academic development of students.

He assured that he would make every effort to resolve issues the school might face. The school's Sports Incharge, Sadia Gul and others also spoke during the event.

Meanwhile, Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Naem Qazi presented a souvenir from the university to the provincial minister, and Principal of the Girls Section, Syeda Safia Fazal, gifted a souvenir from the school to the Vice-Chancellor. Earlier, the provincial minister also cut the cake to mark the occasion of the school's sports day.

KP Govt launches youth skills program worth Rs4bn

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government has launched youth skills program worth Rs4 billion to alleviate poverty and combat unemployment.

Besides youth skills program worth Rs. 4 billion, the KP Government has also launched Rural Economic Transformation Project worth Rs. 11.4 billion and upgradation of technical educational institutes, and an on-job training program for TEVTA graduates.

The spokesman of KP Technical and Vocational Education Department told APP on Wednesday that youth skills program would

be implemented through Akhuwat Microfinance, aims to provide interest-free loans of up to Rs. 500,000 to skilled youth for start-ups and entrepreneurs.

The provincial government has allocated Rs. 2 billion for this initiative in the current fiscal year. More than 35,000 skilled youth are expected to benefit from the program.

The Rural Economic Transformation Project was launched in collaboration with IFAD and the European Union. This important project of Rs. 11.4 billion will offer free technical and vocational training to 60,000 youth males and females from

rural areas. Additionally, financial assistance averaging \$300 per person will be provided to 42,000 skilled individuals to promote self-employment. The program will also facilitate internships and employment for 25,000 TEVTA graduates.

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

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

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



PESHAWAR: Principal Government College Peshawar, Nadir Khan presenting shield to Provincial Minister for Higher Education Meena Khan Afridi during the IT Exhibition.

ADB okays disbursement of \$7.5mn to support KP health sector

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved the disbursement of USD 7.5 million under Loan No. 4222-PAK (COL), marking a significant achievement for the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Systems Strengthening Program (KPHSSP) supporting the Mega project Revamping of Non Teaching DHQ hospitals across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Health

department.

This disbursement reflects the progress made in achieving Disbursement Linked Indicators (DLIs) 1, 2, 3, and 5, aligning the program with Secondary Revamp Project to improve secondary healthcare services across the province in DHQ Hospitals.

Under DLI 5, 85% of essential medical equipment across SHC hospitals is available, tagged,

and fully functional and has liquidated 10 million USD paid in advance.

The ADB's disbursement brings the program back "on-track" after being previously marked as "at-risk," ensuring continued support for critical healthcare improvements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Officials from the Planning and Development Department (P&DD) and health sector stakeholders hailed this development as a turning

point for the program.

The success stems from a collaborative approach initiated in November 2023, with decisive actions taken during a meeting co-chaired by senior officials in Finance and Health Department.

This approval underscores ADB's confidence in the GoKP's efforts to strengthen health infrastructure, improve service delivery, and modernize equipment across secondary healthcare facilities



PESHAWAR: Children decorating Christmas Tree at St John Catholic Church as preparation for the upcoming Christmas celebrations.

Issue of enforced disappearances is a reality but exaggerated: Bilal

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An interactive session on the issue of enforced disappearances was organized at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Peshawar, in collaboration with Pakistan Development Foundation (PDF) and think-tank Forum for Inquiry, Knowledge and Review (FIKR), in which Chairman Muhammad Bilal Sethi delivered a keynote speech.

Dr. Sameera Gul of Benazir Women University also spoke on the occasion. Director Women Development Center, Sobia Karamat Khan Chagharmati, Dr. Toheed, Mrs. Farhana and students were present on the occasion.

Addressing the students, Bilal Sethi said that the issue of enforced disappearances is a bitter reality but unfortunately some people exaggerate this issue and create misconceptions in innocent

minds.

The Commission of Inquiry for Enforced Disappearances registered 9294 cases, out of which 7038 cases have been resolved while 2256 cases are pending.

He said that this is a global problem while internal and international elements, for their own political wants, greatly exaggerate the cases of missing persons and incite hatred between the state and the people.

He further said that the

trend of spreading fake news is on the rise in Pakistan. Lies are told so clearly and expertly that innocent people believe them to be true.

He invited the students of Benazir University to become Truth

Ambassadors in this era of mistrust and propaganda and raise public awareness against fake news.

The students expressed interest in becoming Truth Ambassadors and registered their names with the Foundation.

Special Secretary Health visits Provincial Health Services Academy

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: On the directions of the Advisor for Health, Ihtesham Ali, the Special Secretary Health (Budget and Development), Habibullah, visited the Provincial Health Services Academy (PHSA). During the visit, he reviewed the arrangements made for the

training of management cadre doctors and assessed various facilities to ensure the comfort and satisfaction of the trainees.

The Special Secretary inspected accommodations, food services, and cleanliness arrangements to ensure they meet the required standards. He praised the efforts of PHSA Director General

Dr. Abdul Waheed and his team for their dedication and exceptional arrangements for the training program.

Habibullah emphasized that, in line with the instructions of the Advisor for Health, every possible facility must be provided to the trainees, and no compromise should be made on the quality of the training. He further

highlighted the importance of collaboration and effective management in achieving successful outcomes from such initiatives.

The visit underscores the government's commitment to providing top-notch training and support to the healthcare workforce to ensure better service delivery across the province.

5th international conference on CIIoT 2024 concludes at UET

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The two-day 5th International conference on Computational Intelligence and Internet of Things (CIIIoT) 2024, organized by the Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering (FECE) and ORIC UET Peshawar concluded the other day. The conference was aimed to bring together experts, researchers, and professionals in the fields of computational intelligence and IoT (Internet of Things) to discuss the latest advancements, innovations, and challenges in these domains.

Mr. Sajid Hussain Shah, Director General, Directorate of Science and Technology (DoST), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa addressed the audience as Chief Guest. He appreciated UET Peshawar for successfully conducting the conference and assured full support to bridge the gap between Government industry and academia by holding a round-up in near future. Such initiatives, he said, are focused on harnessing the immense potential of the youth studying in universities with the support of government and private sectors.

Director ORIC Dr.

Nasru Minallah said, the two-day conference served as a useful platform for sharing knowledge, fostering collaborations, and addressing the gaps that can be filled through knowing the technological best practices related to IoT systems and computer intelligence. The conference, supported by Springer and Cardiff Metropolitan University, UK featured 40 research papers with SCOPUS indexing. This ensured that the cutting edge research work presented at the conference would have a global visibility in academic and research circles. He also appreciated the efforts of the organizing chairs, Computer Student Society and Media Student Society for their support in making the conference successful.

Dr. Laiq Hassan, Conference Technical and Publicity Chair/ Chairman Department of Computer Systems Engineering mentioned that the last four conferences on Computer Intelligence and the Internet of Things were held in India. This year, however, it was the first time the conference was brought to Pakistan, specifically to Peshawar, and hosted at UET Peshawar. He said, the credit for organizing the conference goes to UET Professor, Prof. Dr. Haseeb Zafar, who is currently serving at Cardiff Metropolitan University, UK, was instrumental in spearheading the efforts to hold the conference at UET Peshawar.

The conference conducted three parallel sessions on

"Graduate Employability and Industry-Academic Synergy Bridging to align academic outputs with industrial expectations. The conference also organized different talks/seminars in which eminent speakers from UK, Canada, India and South Korea and notable panelists from leading Pakistani universities including GIKI, NUST, FAST and IBA Karachi emphasized over different aspects of computational intelligence and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Later, Dean Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Engineering/ Conference Chair Prof. Dr. Waqar Shah presented the souvenir to the chief guest and other members of conference organizing committee.





In brief

Police busts dacoit gang F.P. Report

PABB: A five members an intra-provincial dacoit gang, including their facilitator has been arrested and recovered arms and stolen money from their possession. According to the details, on March 21, 2024, Latifur Rehman, a resident of WAPDA Colony, Peshawar, filed a report with the police stating that armed men had entered his house during Iftar time and looted mobile phones, cash, and gold jewelry at gunpoint. The police registered a case against an unknown dacoit gang and formed an investigation team, led by SDPO Peshawar, Javed Khan, to arrest the culprits and recover the stolen goods. The investigation team arrested Adnan, the facilitator of the dacoit gang, and recovered arms and stolen money from him. During the interrogation, Adnan confessed to the crime and revealed the names of his accomplices, including Wajid, a resident of Bandha Daud Shah, Krak district, and Hassan Afzal, a resident of Okara district, Punjab.

Youth killed over oral dispute Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: A young man was killed in a firing incident over a verbal altercation in the Dhairy Katti Khel area of Nowshera. The accused, Sharif Khan and Muhammad Ullah, fled the scene after committing the crime. According to the report filed by Muhammad Mustafa, the brother of the deceased, Hamza, the incident occurred over a verbal altercation between Hamza and the accused. The accused opened fire on Hamza, killing him on the spot. The police have registered a case against the accused and started an investigation. The accused are still at large. According to the report, a verbal altercation occurred between Hamza and the accused, Sharif Khan and Muhammad Ullah, over a minor issue. The accused opened fire on Hamza, killing him on the spot.

SP Traffic visits MCCI F.P. Report

MARDAN: Superintendent of Police (SP) Traffic Mardan Saeed Khan visited Mardan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and met Group Leader of Mardan Chamber and President Mardan Trade Union Zahir Shah In the meeting, the traffic problems in Mardan and its solutions were discussed in detail. Shah, group leader Mardan Chamber said that Mardan is the second largest city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where business activities are also at high level, but in Mardan traffic has created a number of problems that the business community and the general public are facing which requires proper traffic planning, on which Saeed Khan SP Traffic said that we are taking various measures to control the traffic in Mardan, including setting up of parking, stopping the parking of vehicles on the road side and determining the route permits for rakhshaws and chungechi, which will help a lot in traffic control. Apart from this, a consultative meeting will be held collectively very soon to formulate a plan for the traffic problems taking into account the opinions of the presidents and secretaries of different markets and bazars, on which Zahir Shah gave full assurance and said that we will play our role in controlling traffic in Mardan, for which SP Traffic Mardan Saeed Khan thanked Zahir Shah.

PPP to continue struggle for masses' welfare: Governor

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi has reiterated that PPP would continue its struggle to serve the people and resolve their issues. He was speaking at a dinner ceremony hosted in his honour by former Provincial Assembly candidate from the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Nawabzada Azizullah Khan Ali Zai here.

The event was attended by a large number of party workers, officials, and local dignitaries. Speaking on the occasion, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi highlighted ongoing development projects in Dera Ismail Khan and his efforts to resolve people's issues. The governor shed light on projects such as the Chashma Lift Canal, the gas expansion project, the installation of new TBS, and the provision of modern facilities by NADRA and the Passport offices, assuring their timely completion.

The Governor also criticized the provincial government of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), stating that the province had been left at the mercy of terrorists. He said the government had failed to address the public problems.

Other prominent PPP leaders present at the event included Divisional President Qaizar Khan Miankhel, former District Nazim Nawabzada Azizullah Khan Alizai, PPP District General Secretary Malik Aabid Awan Advocate, District President Malik Farhan Afzal Dhup, former MPA Nawabzada Tahir Bin Yameen Khan, and member of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council Sardar Hashmat Nawaz Sadozai. At the conclusion of the event, Nawabzada Azizullah Khan Alizai thanked Governor Faisal Karim Kundi for his efforts regarding uplift of Dera Ismail Khan.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi has also directed the SNGPL authorities to resolve all issues being faced by inhabitants of Dera Ismail Khan on priority basis. He issued these directions during a meeting held with SNGPL officials here at his residence which was also attended by SNGPL Area In-charge in DI Khan Shehzad Saleem, Distribution Officer Jan Muhammad, Engineer Hafiz Mohibullah, Sales Officer Barkatullah Kundi besides PPP District President Malik Farhan Afzal Dhap and renowned political and social figure Mubashir Khan Kundi.

The SNGPL officials briefed the governor about installation of five new TBS, gas expansion work and other matters. The Governor instructed the officials to address all gas related issues on priority

including low pressure and loadshedding. He said that timely completion of the new TBS installation should be ensured as it would reduce the load on the existing TBS and improve gas distribution.

He emphasized resolving low-pressure issue on priority addressing public grievances related to gas load-shedding. Furthermore, Governor Kundi directed for early initiation of gas expansion work in Kotla Saidan. He mentioned that efforts were being made to lift the ban on new connections which was imposed during the previous PTI regime. He instructed the gas officials to coordinate with the C&W Department in areas where there are issues and to take all possible steps while prioritizing public interest.

Governor Faisal Karim Khan Kundi on visited Basic Health Unit (BHU) Shortkot and monitored the ongoing anti-polio vaccination drive. During his visit, the Governor also administered anti-polio drops to a child at the health facility, emphasizing the importance of the ongoing vaccination campaign in Dera Ismail Khan.

His visit highlighted the government's commitment to eradicating polio and ensuring that every child is protected from the disease. The Governor's involvement underscores the critical role of community awareness and government leadership in the fight against the crippling disease.

On this occasion, the Governor also met with the health Staff and female Frontline Polio Workers at the health unit. He acknowledged their hard work, dedication, and commitment to this vital national cause. He praised their efforts in the fight against polio, recognizing the critical role they play in ensuring that every child receives the vaccine and contributing to the goal of a polio-free Pakistan.

The Governor's visit served as an encouragement to the frontline workers, highlighting the significance of their work in protecting the future of the nation. Furthermore, the governor also visited the Benazir Nutrition Center at the BHU, where he met with the nutrition team.

The team briefed the Governor on the ongoing interventions in the area and shared the challenges being faced by them during the operations. To address these concerns, Governor's Focal Person for Polio Eradication Tariq Habib, was tasked with following up with the District Health Officer and other relevant authorities to ensure the timely resolution of issues and improve the delivery of services in the region.

Journalists meet army local commandant

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A group of local journalists from the Jandol Press Club and social media activists led by Liaqat Seemab Durrani met the Commandant Samarbagh, Lieutenant Colonel Majid Khan, at his office here on Wednesday.

The journalists discussed issues relating to law and order and peace in the area. The commandant appreciated the role of local journalists and asked them to ensure the positive use of social media. He said that all possible steps would be taken to resolve the issues raised by the journalists.

The issue of traffic jams in the area was also discussed in the meeting, in which the Colonel said that immediate steps would be taken to improve the traffic system by contacting the relevant authorities. In addition, the performance of the Complaint Cell was also discussed so that public complaints could be redressed in a timely manner.

The participants termed the meeting as positive and constructive and expressed the hope that such meetings would be held in the future

as well so that communication between the public and the authorities could be strengthened and problems could be resolved quickly.

Power outage flayed: The people of Samarbagh, Lekaure and Kambat on Wednesday complained that they were facing severe problems due to poor power supply and load shedding. According to the residents, due to low voltage of electricity, household electrical appliances such as refrigerators, motors, and other essential items were getting damaged, due to which they were also facing financial losses.

With the decrease in voltage in the area, the duration of load shedding has increased significantly. Sometimes, electricity is missing for 10 to 12 hours a day, which is not only affecting business activities but also adversely affecting the education of students and the daily life of the people.

The people say that complaints have been filed with the concerned authorities many times, but no substantial solution could be found to these problems. Local citizens say that the

demand for electricity is less in winter, yet this situation is a matter of concern.

When contacted on this issue, the local office of WAPDA admitted that the problems are increasing due to weak infrastructure and old lines in the area. However, officials say they are planning to resolve these issues, but it will take time. The public has demanded immediate action from the government. They say that the problems of low voltage and prolonged load shedding should be resolved as soon as possible to reduce their difficulties.

Blood camp: A day-long free blood group camp was set up at the Khyber Medical University Lower Dir campus at Samarbagh here on Wednesday. A large number of students and locals attended the camp during which their blood was screened. Speaking on the occasion the campus director Immad Khan highlighted the importance of blood donation. He said that all citizens should be aware about their blood group, so that they could donate blood during emergencies.

Students demand their college affiliation with UoP F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Students of the Postgraduate College, Landi Kotal demanded of the Higher Education Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to affiliate their institution with University of Peshawar (UoP) in the best interest of them.

Addressing to a press conference in District Press Club, Landi Kotal on Wednesday head of the college students union Muhammad flanked by his cabinet members, Muhammad Shoaib, Shahhan Shinwari, Dawood and others categorically condemned the decision of incumbent government to affiliate colleges of merged districts with Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) University.

It not only violates the rule of the Higher Education Commission, but also the University is still unrecognized and poor performance in universities ranking, they opined. He maintained that the decision could jeopardize the future of the 400 students currently enrolled in the college.

We have conveyed our grievance to the Provincial Minister for Religious Affairs, Auqaf and member of the Provincial Assembly from the constituency but to in avail, they remarked. They threatened suspension of teaching and learning activities not only in the Postgraduate College but also forcibly would lock the girls' college besides announcing their protest sit-in in front of the college main gate.

The students demanded of the Members' Parliament and Provincial Minister for Higher Education to revoke the decision to affiliate Postgraduate College, Landi Kotal with FATA University and save their precious time, wasting in agitation and protest sit-in against it. It is to be mentioned here that December, 31, 2024 is the last date of affiliation fee with University of Peshawar.

Hafizabad press club elects new cabinet F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Election process 2025 of District Press Club/Union of Journalists Hafizabad has been completed. All office bearers were elected unopposed. Election Board Chairman Abdul Jabbar Raza Ansari and members Mehar Habibullah and Malik Javed Akhtar officially announced the officials elected unopposed for the year 2025.

The successful office bearers include President Ch. Javed Asad, Senior Vice President Hafiz Abdul Qadeer Chaudhry, Vice Presidents Syed Zaheer Abbas Shah, Ch. Asmat Rasheed Chatha, General Secretary Kashif Ihsan Tarar, Joint Secretary Haji Shahid Abbas Nagra, Finance Secretary Muhammad Azam Gondal, Additional Finance Secretary Ch. Mazhar Hussain Warraich, Information Secretary Maher Abu Bakar and Office Secretary Rana Muhammad Aamir were elected unopposed. None of the candidates filed nomination papers against these candidates.

Later, Chairman for the year 2024 Ch. Amjad Parvez Chatha administered the oath to the newly-elected office bearers. In this regard, the event was held at the Press Club in which a large number of journalists from across the district participated.

Later, the newly elected office bearers were garlanded with flowers and a huge rally was held. The rally passed through various roads and thoroughfares of the city which was warmly welcomed by the traders and other citizens. On this occasion, the newly elected President Ch. Javed Asad said that through positive journalism, he will play an active role in highlighting the regional problems and for the welfare of the journalist community across the district.

Sinh CM attends Parent's Day at Cadet College Petaro

F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah today attended the 62nd Parent's Day ceremony at Cadet College Petaro as the chief guest.

The event was also attended by various dignitaries, including MNAs, MPAs, and other notable personalities. Upon arrival, the chief minister was warmly welcomed by MNA Malik Asad Sikander, Commodore Faisal Iqbal Qazi, the Principal of Cadet College, and others.

During the ceremony, CM Shah, accompanied by the Principal, inspected the cadet parade and was introduced to the college's teaching staff. The event also saw the participation of Hyderabad Division Commissioner Bilal Ahmed Memon, DIG Hyderabad Tariq Razaq Daharijo, Chief Minister's PS Saleem Bajari, and Jamshoro Deputy Commissioner Ghazanfar Ali Qadri.

Addressing the audi-



ence, the CM expressed his honor in attending the 62nd Parent's Day at Cadet College Petaro and said he was impressed by the gathering of bright cadets, parents, and esteemed guests. He advised the students to make the most of their time at Petaro by using it to develop knowledge, leadership skills, and a strong sense of responsibility.

He further emphasized that success relies on perseverance, leadership, and the

ability to adapt, urging the students to stay true not only to their parents but also to their country, as they are the future of Pakistan. The chief minister also praised the Principal and staff for their dedication to the institution. He reassured the college that the Sindh government would continue to provide support to strengthen the institution. CM Shah announced the provision of a 1.5 MW solar system for Cadet College Petaro.

DC visits Abdullah Shah Institute of Medical Sciences

F.P. Report

SEHWAN: Deputy Commissioner Jamshoro, Mr. Ghazanfar Ali Qadri, visited Syed Abdullah Shah Institute of Medical and Health Sciences, Sehwan, to inspect the facilities available at the hospital.

During the visit, DC Ghazanfar Ali Qadri reviewed the modular operation center, dialysis facilities, CT scan and MRI services, and the molecular laboratory. He was also briefed on the hospital's provision of free and high-quality treatment, particularly for trauma and road accident cases.

Dr. Moinuddin Siddiqui, Director of Syed Abdullah Shah Institute of Medical and Health Sciences, provided a comprehensive briefing



about the hospital's services and infrastructure, to which DC Ghazanfar Ali Qadri expressed his satisfaction.

On this occasion, DC Jamshoro congratulated the hospital on achieving the status of a postgraduate teaching and training hospital and praised the efforts of

the team for their exceptional contributions to public healthcare. The event was attended by Syed Abdullah Shah Institute of Medical Sciences Director Dr. Moinuddin Siddiqui, Admin Officer Mr. Karamullah Babar Ali, and other officials.

Varsity students take lead in Climate Change awareness

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: The University of Swat recently played host to a production seminar and training workshop, where experts shed light on the devastating effects of climate change and the crucial role of green scale in mitigating its impacts.

The event was organized by local organizations in collaboration with the German Government's IZ Cooperation. Addressing the seminar, TV sociology expert Dr. Fayyaz Amin, along with Anwar Ali and other experts, emphasized that climate change is a global phenomenon that requires immediate attention.

"Green scale plays a vital role in reducing the adverse effects of climate change," Dr. Amin stressed. The experts called for a change in lifestyle and adoption of green scale practices to combat the challenges posed by climate change.

The seminar highlighted the pressing issues faced by Pakistan and Swat due to climate change. Untimely rains, severe weather, shortage of commodities, water scarcity, and diseases were identified as some of the main consequences of climate change. Anwar Ali of Lasona Organization emphasized the need for awareness campaigns, stating that his organization is already conducting such initiatives in various universities of Malakand.

The seminar concluded



with a resolution that students of the University of Swat will take the lead in creating awareness about climate change and green scale. The students pledged to organize events and activities that promote environmental sustainability and practical steps to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Tribute paid to journalist: Today marks the first death anniversary of Ghulam Farooq Spin Dada, a renowned journalist known for his fearless pursuit of truth and justice. The nation salutes Spin Dada, who passed away on December 18, 2023, leaving behind a legacy of courage and dedication to journalism.

A condolence reference was held at the Swat Press Club in Mingora, attended by a large number of journalists, political and social figures, lawyers, and business community representatives. The event was a testament to the high esteem in which Spin Dada was held by his peers and the community.

On this occasion, Omar Farooq, son of Ghulam Farooq Spin Dada, was appointed as his successor.

This move is seen as a significant step in ensuring the continuation of Spin Dada's legacy and his commitment to fearless journalism.

Addressing the condolence reference, speakers paid tribute to Spin Dada's journalistic services, highlighting his role in promoting peace and prosperity in Swat and resolving problems faced by journalists. They remembered him as a shining star of journalism who always stood with the oppressed against the oppressor.

Ghulam Farooq Spin Dada was born in 1967 in Mingora to Haji Abdul Khaliq. He started his journalism career in 1993 with the English newspaper daily Frontier Post and went on to work with international and Pakistani broadcasting organizations. He was also the editor-in-chief of the daily Shamal Swat and a recipient of numerous awards for his journalistic services. A conference hall named after Ghulam Farooq Spin Dada was inaugurated at the Press Club, a fitting tribute to his legacy. The ceremony concluded with a Fateha for the departed soul of the late Ghulam Farooq Spin Dada.

Farmers' seminar for high cotton cultivation held

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: The lands of Pakistan are very suitable for the production of canoes and we have achieved self-sufficiency in the production in this sector and are earning thousands of rupees in foreign exchange annually by exports. About 3 million

tons of cotton in Pakistan last year has been exported while the production per acre is about 200 maunds whereas progressive farmers get three times the average yield due to balanced use of fertilizers.

These views were expressed by Assistant Director of Agriculture Toba Tek Singh Asif Aziz

to the participants of the field day organized by FFC at the Canoe exhibition plot. Speaking on the occasion, Hassan Raza, FFC's agricultural expert, said that through the balanced use of fertilizers, it is possible to increase the production of cano in Pakistan by more than 50%.



KARAK: Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak (KKKUK) hosted an awareness session on drug abuse, organized by the Anti-Drug Society of KKKUK. The event aimed to educate students about the dangers of drug use and promote a healthy and drug-free lifestyle.

The session commenced with a warm welcome and thanks to all participants by Dr. Hassan Ahmad Shah, Incharge of the Anti-Drug Society. Dr. Shad Muhammad, Provost of KKKUK, addressed the gathering, emphasizing the university's commitment to student well-being and the importance of creating a drug-free campus environment.

The highlight of the ses-

sion was a detailed presentation by Shabeer Ullah, Lecturer in Communication and Media Studies. He provided comprehensive information on the various types of drugs, their effects on physical and mental health, and the social and legal consequences of drug abuse. He also discussed

strategies for preventing drug use and seeking help for addiction.

The awareness session proved to be highly informative and engaging for the student participants. It provided a valuable platform for open discussion and raised awareness about the serious issue of drug abuse.



Why does Russia want to capture Pokrovsk?

MOSCOW / KYIV (Reuters): Russian forces are around 3 kilometres (1.9 miles) to the south of the strategically important eastern Ukrainian city of Pokrovsk, open source maps published by Russian and Ukrainian war bloggers show. Pokrovsk is a road and rail hub in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, which had a pre-war population of some 60,000 people. Ukraine estimates that around 11,000 of them remain in the city.

It lies on a key road used by the Ukrainian military to supply other embattled eastern outposts including the towns of Chasiv Yar and Kostiantynivka in the Donetsk region. Ukraine's only mine that produces coking coal - used in its steel industry and vital for the country's pre-war economy - is just a 20-minute drive to the west of Pokrovsk. An industry source said last week that Ukrainian steelmaker Metinvest BV had halted some of the mine's operations because of the proximity of advancing Russian troops. Its complete closure could more than halve Ukraine's steel output, the country's steelmakers' union has warned.

Pokrovsk has hosted since 2014 an important technical university, the largest and oldest in the wider region. Damaged by shelling, it has now suspended its operations.

Moscow says it has annexed Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region and sees taking control of Pokrovsk as an important stepping stone to incorporating the entire region into Russia. Kyiv and the West reject Russia's territorial claims as illegal and accuse Moscow of prosecuting a war of colonial conquest. Control of the city, which the Russian media call "the gateway to Donetsk", would allow Moscow to severely disrupt Ukrainian supply lines along the eastern front and boost its campaign to capture Chasiv Yar, which sits on higher ground offering potential control of a wider area.

Squeezing the Ukrainian military's access to the road network in the vicinity would make it harder for Kyiv's troops to hold pockets of territory either side of Pokrovsk, which could allow Russia to consolidate and advance the front line. A Ukrainian military official said that Ukraine's military leadership had replaced the commander overseeing defences in the Donetsk region where Pokrovsk is located. General Oleksandr Lutsenko, the outgoing commander, had been criticised by Ukrainian military bloggers and some lawmakers for failing to stop Russian troops' relentless push towards Pokrovsk. He was replaced by General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy.

Oleksandr Syrskyi, Ukraine's top commander, has said his troops in and around Pokrovsk have prepared for the approaching Russians by repeatedly strengthening their defensive positions and he has spoken of sending new reserves, ammunition and equipment to bolster the defenders. Russian forces have taken villages and other settlements south of Pokrovsk in recent months and Ukraine says Moscow has been throwing everything it has at trying to break through while sustaining huge losses. Moscow says Ukrainian forces are taking serious losses. Neither side discloses full casualty figures.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited Pokrovsk in November where he spoke to troops defending the city and handed out military awards. The blue and yellow Ukrainian flag continues to fly over Pokrovsk, but the city is a shadow of its former self, with no electricity, gas, heating or piped water. Reuters footage published on Dec. 13 showed the facades of apartment blocks badly damaged and a few mostly elderly residents trudging through the streets. Shell fire could be heard in the distance, "dragon's teeth" anti-tank obstacles had been placed on some roads, and a small shop selling groceries was operating on a power generator.

25 killed after boat capsizes in Congo

KINSHASA, Congo (AP): An overcrowded boat capsized on a river in central Congo, killing at least 25 people, including children, and leaving dozens missing, officials and local residents said.

The vessel was believed to have more than 100 passengers on board after leaving from the town of Inongo, northeast of the capital of Kinshasa. It capsized a few hundred meters (yards) into the journey along the Fimi River, the latest such tragedy to strike Congo. A search was underway for the missing hours later as concerns rose that the death toll could be far higher.

"There was overloading at roof level and, as far as the lifeless human bodies are concerned, at least 25 have been recovered so far," said David Kalemba, Inongo's river commissioner. The capsized boat was also loaded with goods, according to Alex Mbumba, a resident of the area. "Among the dead are children, but it's difficult to give an exact death toll at the moment as ... the boat had a lot of passengers," said Mbumba. Wreck was the fourth this year in the Mai-Ndombe province, a region surrounded by rivers and where many rely on river transportation.

Congolese officials have often warned against overloading and vowed to punish those violating safety measures for water transportation. However, in remote areas where most passengers come from, many are unable to afford public transport for the few available roads. At least 78 people drowned in October when an overloaded boat sank in the country's east while 80 lost their lives in a similar accident near Kinshasa in June. The latest accident prompted calls for the government to equip the province with flotation devices. "The government must act to improve safety on the waters of our province (because) navigation conditions are dangerous," said Mbumba. The capsizing of overloaded boats is also becoming increasingly frequent in this central African nation as more people are abandoning the few available roads for wooden vessels crumbling under the weight of passengers and their goods because of security reasons.

The roads are often caught up in the deadly clashes between Congolese security forces and rebels that sometimes block major access routes. Hundreds have already been killed or declared missing in such accidents so far this year.

Iran's leader to visit Egypt

DUBAI (Reuters): Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian will take part in a summit of big Muslim countries in Egypt, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said, the first visit by an Iranian president to Egypt in more than a decade.

Egypt is hosting the summit of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, which also includes Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey. Relations between Egypt and Iran have generally been fraught in recent decades but the two countries have stepped up high-level diplomatic contacts since the eruption of the Gaza crisis last year as Egypt tried to play a mediating role.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi travelled to Egypt in October to discuss regional issues with Egyptian officials, while his Egyptian counterpart Badr Abdelatty travelled to Tehran earlier in July to attend Pezeshkian's inauguration.

"We have the important summit... known as D-8 in Egypt, the foreign minister will take part in the ministerial conference and then the summit will be held with the participation of the president," Baghaei said in a weekly televised news conference. Iran will discuss regional and bilateral affairs with the participating countries on the sidelines of the summit, Baghaei added. The D-8 was established in 1997 to improve cooperation between countries stretching from Southeast Asia to Africa.

Vietnam seeks to boost defence industry as it hosts arms fair

HANOI (Reuters): Vietnam will showcase locally made weapons at an international arms fair in Hanoi, as it seeks to boost its domestic industry and possibly export military equipment. Among the nearly 250 exhibitors will be top defence companies, including from the United States, Europe, Turkey and countries at war with each other, such as Israel, Iran, Russia and Ukraine.

The Southeast Asian nation is a major importer of weapons, especially from Russia, having invested for years in its defence capabilities in an unstable region where it has clashed with China over boundaries in the South China Sea. But recently it has also bolstered its domestic defence industry and promoting exports of military products is now a priority, defence ministry officials have repeatedly said.

State-owned defence firm Viettel and other local companies will showcase missile defence systems, drones, air defence radars, armoured vehicles and artillery, according to defence ministry media. Some of these weapons will be displayed for the first time, said Nguyen The Phuong, an expert on Vietnam security at Australia's University of New South Wales. He noted a key strategy to strengthen the local industry had been the signing of deals with foreign arms exporters to have some of their components produced in Vietnam.



Talks with South Korean companies were underway for possible new deals under those conditions, especially for artillery and aviation, he said. Similar talks had also been held with companies from other countries, including the Czech Republic, officials said. At the expo, Iran's defence ministry will have an entire pavilion, not far from the booths of Israel's defence firms Israel Aerospace Industries and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems.

The fair will also host a dozen booths of Russian firms and one for Ukraine's Motor Sich, an aircraft engine manufacturer. A dozen Turkish defence companies, including Aselsan, Turkish Aerospace Industries and Roketsan, are among listed participants, making Turkey's

one of the largest delegations. China's Norinco will be one of two Chinese exhibitors, in a first for a Vietnamese defence fair.

US defence giants Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Textron Aviation Defense will also have their booths at the fair. They have all been involved in talks with Vietnamese authorities for the sale of helicopters. Lockheed is also discussing a possible deal on C-130 Hercules military transport planes, sources had told Reuters. Brazil's Embraer said it will exhibit its C-390 Millennium plane - a rival to the C-130. Top European defence firms will also attend, including aerospace giant Airbus, Britain's BAE Systems, Germany's Rheinmetall, Italy's Leonardo and France's Thales Group.

General's assassination pierces Moscow's air of normality

MOSCOW (BBC): Appearance and reality: there is a constant battle in Moscow between the two. Despite nearly three years of war, life here can seem so normal: from the crowds of commuters on the Metro to the bars and clubs packed with young Muscovites. Then, suddenly, something happens to remind you: there is nothing normal about Russia today.

That "something" can be a Ukrainian drone penetrating Moscow's air defences. Or - even more dramatic - what happened: the targeted assassination of a senior Russian general as he walked out of an apartment block. When Lt Gen Igor Kirillov and his assistant Ilya Polikarpov were killed by a bomb concealed on an electric scooter, the reality of Russia's war on Ukraine hit home. At least to those Russians close to the crime scene. "It's one thing reading about it in the news, it feels far, but when it happens next door to you, that's completely different and frightening," Liza tells me. She lives one building from the site of the blast. "Until now, [the war] felt as if it was happening a long way off - now someone is dead,

here, you can feel the consequences." My anxiety has gone through the roof. Every sound you hear unnerves you - you wonder whether it's a drone or something at a construction site," Liza says. This perception of Russia's war in Ukraine as something distant - I've heard that so often here. I get the sense that, for a considerable portion of the population, this is a war they only experience on their TV screen or on their smart phone. In many ways, a virtual war. Astonishing, really, considering the large number of dead and wounded. But the killing of a Russian general in Moscow: that is a definite wake-up call; proof that this war is very real and very close to home. Will it serve as a wake-up call for the Russian authorities? Probably not. There is little sign of a Kremlin U-turn on Ukraine. Moscow is far more likely to intensify the war. Just look at the signs. Reacting to news of Kirillov's killing, the host of a political talk show on Russian state TV blamed Ukraine and claimed that "with this attack President Zelenskyy has signed his own death sentence".

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said "investigators must find the killers in Russia." He added: "We must do everything to destroy their patrons who are in Kyiv." From President Vladimir Putin there has been no public reaction so far to the killing of the general and his assistant. But the Kremlin leader has said many times before that, faced with security threats, Russia "will always respond". Based on that pledge, retaliation is likely.

The Kremlin leader is due to hold his annual end-of-year press conference and phone-in. It's normally a marathon affair broadcast live by all the main TV channels. I wonder: will he use the event to comment on the dramatic early morning assassination of Kirillov? Will he break his silence on Syria? The Russian president has so far said nothing publicly about the fall of Bashar al-Assad, Moscow's key ally in the Middle East. And what will he tell Russians about where their country is heading, as the war in Ukraine - what Putin still calls his "special military operation" - approaches the three-year mark?

Zelenskyy tells allies Russia's shadow fleet must be stopped

KYIV (Reuters): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appealed to allies to ensure the so-called shadow fleet of vessels used by Russia to circumvent sanctions no longer operated in the European waters. Zelenskyy posted on X that the fleet should be limited "not just with sanctions, but in other ways too".

"This fleet is one of the biggest threats. Putin uses these tankers to finance his war, and most of these vessels are old, poorly maintained, and operate without any oversight," the Ukrainian leader said. The European Union adopted sanctions targeting 52 more vessels from Moscow's shadow fleet that try to circumvent Western restrictions to move oil, arms and grains. It brings the total listed to 79. Britain also sanctioned 20 ships that it said were using illicit practices to avoid sanctions on Russian oil.

Zelenskyy called oil spillage caused by a sinking Russian tanker in the Kerch Strait near the Crimean Peninsula, an "environmental disaster". One tanker split apart during a storm, while another ended up in distress. Together they had 9,200 metric tons of oil products aboard, Russian state news agency TASS said. Ukraine's navy spokesperson said Russia violated navigation safety by using old tankers and keeping two vessels at sea during a heavy storm. "There are much larger and more dangerous Russian tankers operating in your seas. This fleet must be stopped. Doing so will not only cut off Russia's war funding but will also protect nature," Zelenskyy added.

Prosecutor seeks death penalty for 8

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP): Alabama prosecutors are seeking the death penalty for the eight people charged in the kidnapping, assault and killing of a 20-year-old mother. Jefferson County deputy district attorney Charissa Henrich filed notice with the court that she would seek the death penalty if any of the suspects are convicted of capital murder. Henrich characterized the case as "especially heinous, atrocious, or cruel compared to other capital offenses."

Mahogany Jackson sent a text to her family in the early morning of Feb. 25 that shared her location and said that she had been kidnapped, according to Scott Thurmond, the police chief at the time. The location appeared to show that she was at the residence of someone she knew. The next day, law enforcement found her body on a street in southwest Birmingham. She died from a gunshot wound. Birmingham homicide detective Mark Green testified that videos taken by the suspects themselves and submitted by an unnamed witness show that Jackson was kidnapped and physically and sexually assaulted before three of the suspects drove her to where she was shot and left on a street, AL.com reported.

NATO takes over coord of mly aid to Kyiv from US

BERLIN (Reuters): NATO has taken over coordination of Western military aid to Ukraine from the US as planned, a source said, in a move widely seen as aiming to safeguard the support mechanism against NATO sceptic US President-elect Donald Trump.

The step, coming after a delay of several months, gives NATO a more direct role in the war against Russia's invasion while stopping well short of committing its own forces. Diplomats, however, acknowledge that the handover to NATO may have a limited effect given that the US under Trump could still deal a major setback to Ukraine by slashing its support, as it is the alliance's dominant power and provides the majority of arms to Kyiv.

Trump, who will take office in January, has said he wants to end the war in Ukraine swiftly but not how he aims to do so. He has long criticised the scale of

US financial and military aid to Ukraine. The headquarters of NATO's new Ukraine mission, dubbed NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU), is located at Clay Barracks, a US base in the German town of Wiesbaden. A person familiar with the matter told Reuters it was now fully operational. No public reasons have been given for the delays.

NATO's military headquarters SHAPE said its Ukraine mission was beginning to assume responsibilities from the US and international organizations. "The work of NSATU ... is designed to place Ukraine in a position of strength, which puts NATO in a position of strength to keep safe and prosperous its one billion people in both Europe and North America," said US Army General Christopher G. Cavoli, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe. "This is a good day for Ukraine

and a good day for NATO." In the past, the US-led Ramstein group, an ad hoc coalition of some 50 nations named after a US air base in Germany where it first met, has coordinated Western military supplies to Kyiv.

Trump threatened to quit NATO during his first term as president and demanded allies must spend 3% of national GDP on their militaries, compared with NATO's target of 2%. Meanwhile, the outgoing Biden administration in Washington is scrambling to ship as many weapons as possible to Kyiv amid fears that Trump may cut deliveries of military hardware to Ukraine. NSATU is set to have a total strength of about 700 personnel, including troops stationed at NATO's military headquarters SHAPE in Belgium and at logistics hubs in Poland and Romania. Russia has condemned increases in Western military aid to Ukraine as risking a wider war.

Russian lawmakers approve new bill

MOSCOW (AP): Russian lawmakers approved a bill that broadened the definition of high treason, part of authorities' efforts to tighten control as the fighting in Ukraine is nearing the three-year mark. The amendments approved by the lower house, the State Duma, in second and third readings expand the definition of high treason to include affiliation with any organization involved in "activities against security of the Russian Federation."

The current legislation has a more narrow interpretation of "turning to the enemy side," defining it as joining the enemy's armed forces. Those convicted of high treason could be sentenced to life in prison. "In

the situation when our soldiers are risking their lives in the battle for Russia's sovereignty, there are no 'neutral' or 'peaceful' organizations on the enemy side," said Vasily Piskarev, head of the Duma's security affairs committee and one of the bill's authors. "We can't allow anyone to work for the enemy on our territory." Rights advocates have warned that the bill's vague formulation could be used to target anyone who has ties to any Ukrainian organization and potentially could be interpreted more broadly to also punish those who have any contact with Western organizations or companies. The legal definition of treason already has been expanded to include provid-

ing vaguely defined "assistance" to foreign countries or organizations.

The proposed amendments, which also must be approved by the upper house and signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin to become law, also introduce punishment of up to 15 years in prison for foreigners and people without citizenship who are accused of "assisting enemy activities aimed against security of the Russian Federation." Treason and espionage cases have skyrocketed after Putin sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022. The cases have targeted a wide range of suspects, from Kremlin critics and independent journalists to scientists, drawing attention from rights groups.

Khamenei says 'resistance' not over after Assad ouster

TEHRAN (AFP): Iran's supreme leader said that Israel and the United States were "completely wrong" to imagine the Tehran-backed axis of resistance had collapsed with the ouster of Syria's longtime strongman. "With the developments in Syria and the crimes the Zionist regime is committing and the crimes that America is committing, and the help that some others are giving to them, they thought that

the resistance was over," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a televised speech.

"They are completely wrong." On December 8, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad fled the country as rebel forces entered the capital Damascus after a lightning offensive. Fellow axis members Hamas and Hezbollah have also suffered heavy losses since the Palestinian militant group attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, sparking war in

Gaza and later in Lebanon.

Since Assad's fall, Iran has sought to distance itself from the ousted leader, instead emphasising the history of friendship between the two countries. Khamenei has also insisted that Assad's overthrow will not weaken Iran. "The Zionist regime imagines it can encircle and eradicate the Hezbollah forces through Syria, but the one who will be eradicated is Israel," Khamenei said.

EU sanctions Chinese firms, N Korea minister over Ukraine war

BRUSSELS (AFP): The EU for the first time imposed fully-fledged sanctions, including asset freezes and visa bans, on Chinese firms for supplying Russia's military for the war on Ukraine. It has also added North Korea's defence minister to its sanctions blacklist after the secretive state sent troops to Russia to reinforce its military.

The move -- part of the EU's 15th round of sanctions over the conflict -- represented a heightened effort to tackle the crucial role allegedly being played by China in

keeping Russia's war machine going. The EU said it was blacklisting four Chinese companies for "supplying sensitive drone components and microelectronic components" to the Russian military.

Two other firms and one Chinese businesswoman were hit for circumventing EU sanctions aimed at stopping equipment flowing to Moscow. Among the companies was Xiaomi Limbach alleged to have supplied engines for long-range attack drones used by Russia against Ukraine.

The EU has targeted

Chinese firms before for supporting Russia's military. But until now the bloc has imposed bans on European firms doing business with the Chinese companies -- rather than the tougher sanctions now being applied. The EU also took aim at North Korea in the latest package, after Pyongyang dispatched troops to Russia to fight Ukraine. The 27-nation bloc added defence minister No Kwang Chol and deputy chief of the general staff Kim Yong Bok to a number of North Korean officials already blacklisted.

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Trudeau's troubles grow

CANADA'S Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland has preempted Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's decision to replace her by resigning, and placing her resignation letter on the social media platform X.

Trudeau is considering to make Bank of Canada Governor Mark Carney the next finance minister. That Freeland and Trudeau were at loggerheads became evident days ahead of Freeland's resignation because they disagreed vehemently on spending.

She was to present her Budget Report to parliament which showed that the budgetary deficit was higher than stated earlier. Trudeau was increasing the expenditure by giving a GST holiday on toys, alcohol and food, and a \$250 rebate for workers earning less than \$150,000 or less. The budgetary outgo from these two measures would add up to \$6.28 billion. It is something that Canada cannot afford, especially in the face of tariff threat of incoming US President Donald Trump. Trudeau however seems to press ahead with his giveaways in a bid to shore up his sinking political fortunes. That left Freeland no other option but to quit. In her resignation letter she pressed the point that Trump's tariff threat has to be taken seriously. She wrote: "We need to take the threat extremely seriously. That means keeping our fiscal powder dry today, so we have reserves we may need for a coming tariff war."

And to be able to do that, she cautioned, "That means eschewing costly political gimmicks, which we can ill afford and which makes Canadians doubt that we recognise the gravity of the moment."

Trudeau has been following an erratic path in his political moves, both at home and abroad. He handled the killing of the Sikh leader Nijjar quite badly when he blamed Indian High Commission officials for being indirectly involved in it, while at the same time admitting that the Canadian government did not yet have the evidence.

He had recently made further amendments that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah had nothing to do with the incident. And he restricted the students' visas, especially Indians, on the ostensible grounds that there was no sufficient residential accommodation for these overseas students.

Then he was faced with the serious law and order problem of the Hindus of the Indian diaspora feeling unsafe even as the Sikh community turned hostile. His government is dependent on the support of the Sikhs' New Democratic Party (NDP).

Similarly, on the home front, he has been losing ground because of economic pressures. The need of the hour was austerity of some kind, but he seems to believe like any politician that economic austerity would ensure his defeat in the next election, which is due next year.

After Trump announced his tariff war against Mexico and Canada, Trudeau went to the US to meet the American president-elect. It is not known whether he had any assurances from Trump, or he had returned empty-handed.

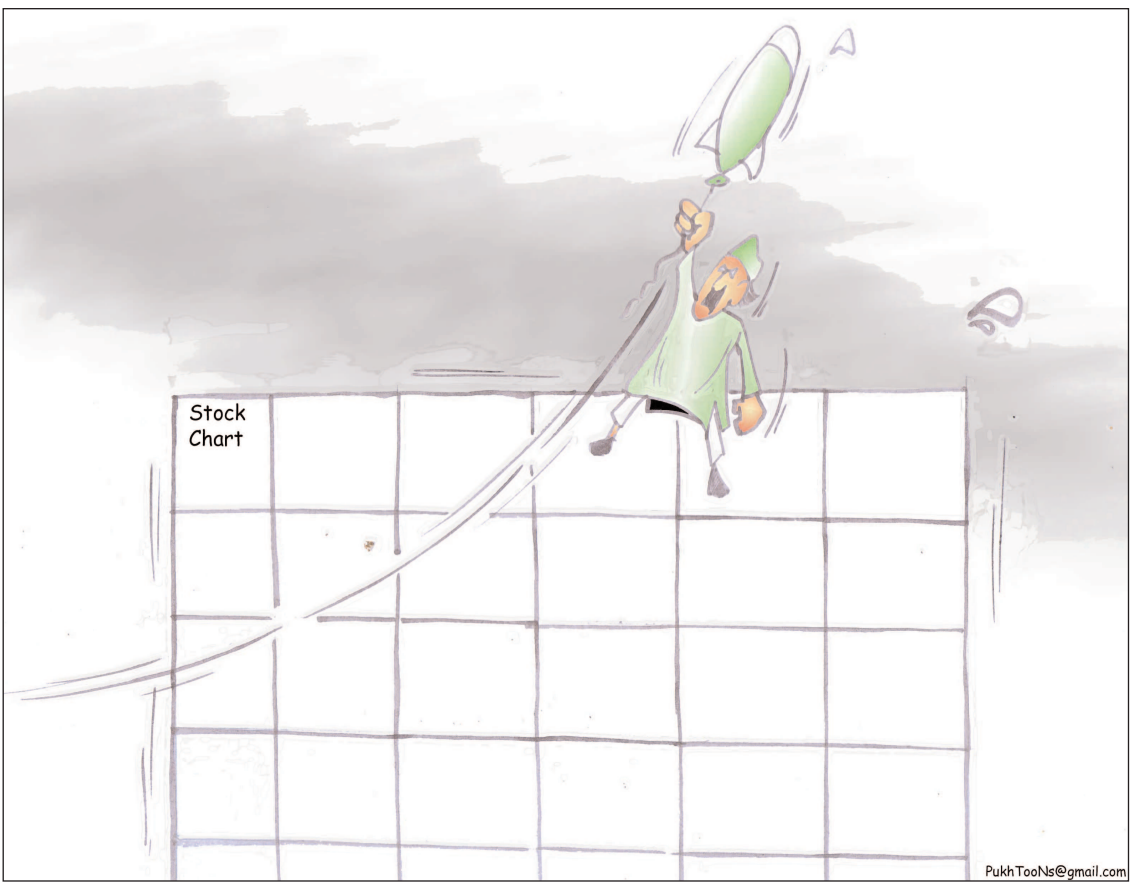
The charges that Trump made against Canada are the serious ones of illegal immigration into the US, and drug trafficking. Trudeau has not refuted the charges. It is to be seen whether Trudeau wants to make a deal with Trump on these tricky issues and avert the tariffs that Trump has threatened.

Meanwhile, the prime ministers of the Canadian provinces are meeting in an airport hotel in Ottawa to chalk out plans of strengthening policing on the border, and a one billion-dollar investment in putting more security forces to patrol the border. Ontario Prime Minister Doug Ford said that the provinces are willing to pitch in with the needed forces and budgets, but that it was the duty of the federal government to deal with the issue.

The provincial prime ministers want to strengthen the border patrol, and deal with Trump to show that they are serious about dealing with his concerns.

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Whether in Gaza, Sudan or Yemen, health care can't be left out in the cold

“DO you consider us human?” Each time I think of Gaza, I see the face of the woman who asked me this question, not once, not twice, but three times.

It is a question that still haunts me. A question that encapsulates the plight of an entire people – the expression of a last-ditch plea that despite everything that has happened to them, everything that is happening, they have not been abandoned by the world.

I visited Gaza in July 2024. Amid the shattered infrastructure, mass displacement, destruction and growing hunger, I also spoke with a man who shared a single hope. "We long for a ceasefire," he told me. "For a chance to live without fear."

Gazans need food, water and medicine. They need protection and security. They need a solid foundation on which to rebuild their lives. Earlier this month, on December 10, the world marked Human Rights Day, and their plight is a reminder that the fight for human rights is not about abstract ideals. It is about creating the conditions that make it possible for people to live with dignity.

A child's right to safety, to be able to live and grow in dignity, to attend school and access health care must not be reduced to geography. Surely this is something on which we all agree. Yet the reality is that for millions of people around the world access to health care, education and security – necessary conditions to lead a dignified life – is determined by where they were born.

The right to health is enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1948 Constitution of the World Health Organisation. More than 140 countries recognise health as a right in their constitutions. But recognition is one thing, implementation another.

When people's very survival is compromised by violent conflict and deprivation, recognition in the absence of action rings deafeningly hollow. In Gaza, more than 25,000 people have sustained life-changing injuries and 15,600 require urgent medical evacuation. However, only around 5,200 have been evacuated so far. Almost half of these are cancer patients. Forty per cent have sustained war injuries and 200 suffer from kidney disease. Since the closure of the Rafah border crossing in May 2024, only 359 patients have been evacuated.

And what of other populations caught in conflict zones around the world, where political decisions, borders, checkpoints and the vagaries of war determine who receives life-saving care and who does not? Imagine trying to get to a hospital with a loved one, where you know their life can be saved. But there's a fence in the way, or a checkpoint. Or the road has been destroyed. That physical barrier – a political decision made concrete – decides who lives and who dies.

Recognising the right to health involves more than facilitating access to medical care. It also includes the social determinants of health. It includes access to clean water and adequate nutrition, to shelter and safe living conditions, all of which are undermined by conflict – be it political, armed, civil or international. Yemen has become another textbook example of a compounded crisis. Food insecurity, malnutrition and displacement disfigure the lives of 18 million people. Over five million children under five and 2.7 million pregnant and lactating women urgently need nutrition support. Around 2.4 million children suffer from acute malnutrition, putting them at high risk of death and disease. How long must they endure this? How many more

souls should suffer, and how many more lives must be lost before the world acts? Conflict in Sudan has left more than 25.6 million people facing hunger. The violence has caused mass displacement: 11.4 million people are displaced within the country and another 3.2 million in neighbouring states. Gender-based violence has alarmingly increased since the conflict began. The situation of women and children, who face the greatest barriers in accessing food, shelter and health care, continues to worsen. How long can this situation continue? How many more must suffer as the world stands by?

Sanctions, intended as political tools, can restrict access to food, water and essential medical supplies, exacerbating the suffering of civilian populations in those countries. Historical examples demonstrate that sanctions can directly affect fair access to healthcare services. Studies have also shown that sanctions targeting non-health sectors can indirectly hinder healthcare access if the sanctioned country cuts healthcare funding to maintain other activities. The plight of refugees exemplifies how political decisions and conflict strip entire populations of their rights. Forced from their homes, refugees often find themselves in overcrowded camps, living in limbo and unable to work, with little if any access to basic rights like health care and education.

In these situations, women and children are particularly vulnerable. In conflict zones and beyond, gender inequality exacerbates the trampling of human rights. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by violence, sexual exploitation, abuse and lack of access to essential services, and endure suffering that often goes unnoticed. It is pushed to the margins.

Hanan Balkhy

Today, around the world, 4.5 billion people lack access to essential health services, and two billion face financial hardship due to healthcare costs. In the region served by the WHO's Eastern Mediterranean office, spanning 22 countries from Morocco to Pakistan, almost half of the population lack access to such services.

Human Rights Day reminded us that the right to health, safety and dignity is a universal human right, not a privilege reserved for the fortunate few. It reminded us that the pursuit of human rights is the pursuit of freedom, equity and the dignity of all people, everywhere. Without exception.

Seventy-six years have passed since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – more than three quarters of a century during which it has become crystal clear that conflict always erodes the foundations that sustain human rights. Without peace, human rights can never be fully realised.

The theme of this past Human Rights Day 2024 – "Our rights, our future, right now" – served to underline how human rights play a critical role as a preventative, protective and transformative force for good and can empower people and communities to build a healthier and safer future. It reminded us that to promote the protection of these rights we must engage with the most vulnerable populations and understand their needs.

Our future depends on our ability to protect the rights of everyone, everywhere. But to achieve lasting human rights for all, we must prioritise peace. Without peace, the promise of human rights remains just that – a promise, unfulfilled.

The pursuit of human rights is not just a moral imperative; it is a pursuit of our collective humanity. Let us answer the call and respond to the question asked by the vulnerable everywhere: "Do you consider us human?"

Daoud Kuttab

and actual practices on the ground that have resulted in a deformed Palestinian economy.

If Palestinians take control of their resources and the barriers to internal and external trade are removed, the Palestinian economy will grow by at least 35 percent (excluding income from oil and gas) and government revenues would be enough to sustain the Palestinian economy without foreign aid.

At present, Israel militarily controls the Occupied Territories and this must stop. A multinational force must guard the borders.

Palestinians should be able to travel to Jordan and back using their own vehicles. Imports and exports from and to Palestine must be ensured without the control of Israel, except for security checks, which must be restricted only to international standards of security.

The ball is now in the international community's court. The International Court of Justice has called on the UNGA and the UN Security Council to ensure Israeli compliance. Recognizing and support-

ing an independent state at the UNSC can go a long way in helping Palestine decouple from its occupiers and begin the process of implementing its inalienable right of self-determination, leading to an independent and democratic state alongside a safe and secure state of Israel, in fulfillment of the second half of the preamble of UNSC Resolution 242, which calls for "the need to work for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East."

If Europe genuinely wants to drive progress toward peace, it must show courage and conviction. That means recognizing the state of Palestine along the pre-1967 borders, thereby helping to balance the scales in negotiations and clarifying the framework for peace.

The Palestinian president has been resolute and consistent in rejecting all forms of violence against Israelis, but his hands have been tied by successive hawkish right-wing Israeli governments that have literally been stealing money collected on behalf of Palestinians because they dare to care for their prison-

Graduates must embrace AI

Li Ke

EMPLOYMENT is the most basic component of people's wellbeing. So the annual Central Economic Work Conference held from Dec 11 to 12 stressed focusing more on an employment-first strategy and ensuring stable employment for key groups.

The priority here is employment for college graduates, as promoting their high-quality and full employment has a bearing on the country's basic employment situation, the interests of every graduate and the healthy development of the economy and society.

Against the backdrop of the complex and ever-changing global situation, the authorities should pay attention to talent needs and lead the new trend of industrial development to balance the supply and demand of talent and alleviate structural employment contradictions. They should also strive to boost high-quality and full employment of graduates, who will face a more severe employment situation next year. According to the Ministry of Education, the number of university graduates across China is projected to reach 12.22 million in 2025, up 430,000 from the previous year. Predictably, the number of graduates will remain high in the coming few years, and the job market will be overburdened from the oversupply of job-seeking graduates. It is worth noting that a growing number of fresh university graduates will not start working right after graduation. The severe employment pressure has led many graduates to opt for delayed or flexible employment in their quest for stable jobs. While this has eased the tension in the job market to a certain extent, it has also made the overall employment situation more complicated.

From the perspective of employers, new changes have taken place in the labor market. On the one hand, China's employment market is facing prominent overall pressure and structural problems due to rapid demographic changes, economic restructuring, and in-depth adjustments in the global industry chain. As a result, some traditional industries are undergoing transformation and upgrading, resulting in a decrease in job positions and a changing demand for talent. On the other hand, while new industries have generated fresh job prospects, they are unable to accommodate all graduates. Overall, total employment pressure will coexist with prominent structural problems, and the demand has shifted from low-skilled and low-cost workers to high-quality employees.

Currently, there is a mismatch between graduate supply and demand in the job market. An increasing number of youth graduate every year, but some of them can hardly find suitable jobs.

Plus, the development of artificial intelligence has impacted the concepts and models of traditional employment. The widespread application of AI has polarized the job market, with an increase in demand for high-skilled and highly creative jobs and significant reduction in low-skilled and repetitive jobs. But the sup-

ply and demand of such talents is unbalanced. One reason for this is that universities cannot cultivate enough talents to work in industries such as AI, new energy and semiconductors.

It will help if universities adjust the structure of disciplines to adapt to the economic and social development. Some newly emerged and interdisciplinary majors fail to cultivate sufficient talent to meet demand, while some traditional majors are producing an excess of graduates. It is noteworthy that many universities struggle to nurture students' core abilities such as innovation and creativity, resulting in a devaluation of academic qualifications. As such, the governments at different levels, universities, enterprises and society should cooperate to introduce measures to optimize the supportive system of employment and improve the adaptability of talent supply and demand, to promote high-quality and full employment of graduates. First of all, favorable policies should be implemented to boost an employment-first strategy. Efforts should be made to strengthen coordination among fiscal subsidies, tax incentives, financial support and social security to unleash employment dividends. Amid a new wave of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation, it is imperative for the government to institute a predictive mechanism for human resources. This mechanism should promptly release a catalogue of urgently required occupations, elucidating the labor market's demand orientation.

Furthermore, it is essential to promote modern industries to generate more employment opportunities. China should prioritize support for industries and enterprises with robust job creation capabilities to cultivate new drivers of growth. By developing new technologies and tapping into new markets, a modern industrial system can be established to create more fitting employment opportunities for graduates. Encouraging private firms and small to medium-sized enterprises to hire more graduates is also paramount.

Meanwhile, it is necessary to improve a legal guarantee system for entrepreneurship to drive employment, introduce labor standards for new employment groups and encourage graduates to start their own businesses and find flexible employment. Hence, the pressure of economic transformation can be turned into employment potential.

Last but not least, universities should reform by integrating their academic traditions, the expertise of their faculty, and regional advantages to establish emerging disciplines that can educate individuals capable of meeting the demands of new industries and business models. University personnel should engage with employers to understand evolving job requirements and innovate educational approaches. Moreover, graduates should receive guidance to make informed career decisions and adjust their salary expectations. Support should also be extended to assist economically disadvantaged young graduates in securing employment opportunities.

The need to recognize the state of Palestine now

WARS are waged with the goal of attaining a political resolution. Israel's wars are an exception. The war on Gaza following the Oct. 7, 2023, cross-border attack by Hamas has focused on the near-impossible goal of annihilating an idea. Palestinian resistance takes different forms and sometimes fails to apply the laws of war. But international law clearly affirms that occupiers have no right to self-defense, while the occupied people have a right to resist illegal occupations, as repeatedly stated by tireless Italian lawyer and UN Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories Francesca Albanese.

Israel's war on Palestinians, which has also included the West Bank and assassinations of Palestinian leaders in Iran and Lebanon, has exposed the rejection of the leaders of the state of Israel from articulating a political solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Stemming from the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion of July, the UN General

Assembly in September voted overwhelmingly to adopt a resolution that demands Israel "brings to an end without delay its unlawful presence" in the Occupied Territories.

This decades-long occupation of Palestinian lands has made the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza subservient and dependent on the Israeli occupiers. Therefore, the first order of business is to begin decoupling from the occupation to allow Palestinians to live in a truly independent and contiguous state. Consecutive US officials have supported the two-state solution but there has been no effort to ensure the end of this illegal Israeli occupation.

The international community must press Israel, as the International Court of Justice has recommended, to freeze the building of new illegal settlements that have been proven to violate international law, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Israeli occupation's stranglehold over the Palestinian economy is manifested in military orders, restricted economic accords with the Palestine Liberation Organization

and actual practices on the ground that have resulted in a deformed Palestinian economy.

If Palestinians take control of their resources and the barriers to internal and external trade are removed, the Palestinian economy will grow by at least 35 percent (excluding income from oil and gas) and government revenues would be enough to sustain the Palestinian economy without foreign aid.

At present, Israel militarily controls the Occupied Territories and this must stop. A multinational force must guard the borders.

Palestinians should be able to travel to Jordan and back using their own vehicles. Imports and exports from and to Palestine must be ensured without the control of Israel, except for security checks, which must be restricted only to international standards of security.

The ball is now in the international community's court. The International Court of Justice has called on the UNGA and the UN Security Council to ensure Israeli compliance. Recognizing and support-

ers and the families of those who died in fighting for a free Palestine.

Once the end goal of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel is clear, the UN has many mechanisms to help move the peace process along, including the defunct but never dissolved 1947 UN Special Commission on Palestine.

The US can make a major contribution to peace by living up to its own words regarding the two-state solution and agreeing not to stand against the arc of history. Palestinians have a right to self-determination and they have decided, along with the entire world, including the current government in Israel, that such a right come to fruition through two states — Palestine and Israel.

The US was the first country to recognize Israel back in 1948 and it is high time that the US administration listened to the calls of Palestinians yearning to be free and recognized the other half of the two-state solution that is repeated ad nauseam by American officials. There is so much that needs to be done before a truly independent and democratic Palestinian state is

realized. A total revamp of the Palestinian political process and personnel is needed, including the absolute necessity to involve Palestinians in the diaspora, especially those in the Levant and the Gulf.

Such a process of true democratization, which must be independent with impartial international support, is needed for Palestinian unity of purpose and direction. This will also rebuff the unfair Israeli and Zionist excuse for denying Palestinians their inalienable right of self-determination and statehood. The road to statehood will require some hard decisions.

Ever since the Balfour Declaration in 1917, foreign powers have been involved and have taken sides, largely against the Palestinian people. The time for a solution is now. Recognizing Palestine on the June 4, 1967, borders and allowing the genuine representatives of the state of Palestine to negotiate all outstanding issues with the Israelis' representatives is the way out of this century-old war. It all starts with the need for the recognition of the state of Palestine now.

France and Germany’s woes could seriously weaken the EU

ONE government in, another one out — that is becoming a feature pointing to the instability within the EU’s family of nations. One could easily dismiss this and consider it the usual liberal-democratic game of politics within each country of the bloc. But the vote of no-confidence in the center-left government of Olaf Scholz after weeks of turmoil does not bode well for Germany, Europe’s biggest economy. It now seems set to join France in a potential spiral of instability, which could leave the EU without two of its biggest players at a crucial junction of history.

As 2025 dawns, the two superpowers of the EU are likely to welcome the new year without a working government, no agreed budgets and fractured politics, with the narratives of the extremes dominating the public debates, if not yet their political institutions. The two engines of the EU, France and Germany, are in crisis just as adversities gather at the gates of the bloc and multiply.

Embattled Chancellor Scholz of Germany is, after three years in power as part of an unruly three-colors coalition, lagging badly in the polls behind conservative opposition leader Friedrich Merz, of the Christian Democratic

Union party of ex-Chancellor Angela Merkel. And while his government has struggled to revive a stuttering economy that is suffering from high energy prices and tougher competition from China, one wonders what chance any alternative coalition would have. Germany is facing major geopolitical challenges, such as its confrontation with Russia over the Ukraine war and the looming return of Donald Trump to the US presidency, which heightens uncertainty over the future of NATO and trade ties in general.

The same could be said about President Emmanuel Macron’s France. Despite his nomination last week of centrist Francois Bayrou as prime minister, the same old problems are likely to weigh Paris down. The intransigent extreme right and extreme left are bent on sinking the presidency of Macron, unconcerned about headline issues like fixing the budget, the country’s debts or even pension reforms, let alone how Europe can deal with the Ukraine war once Trump returns to the White House next month.

It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the consequences of France and now Germany being in disarray will be catastrophic for the EU, but also for democracy as a whole. That is unless both Berlin and Paris miraculously manage

Mohamed Chebaro

to restore the credibility of their leaderships and systems relatively soon. Otherwise, the demise of the EU and mainstream European democracy might be next.

Despair is written all over the coming weeks. Germany’s path might be simpler if the CDU could win a larger chunk of the seats in parliament in February’s snap federal election. But even then the problems will not go away, as they are rooted in an ever-increasing wealth divide and sinking living standards, which many experts have long blamed on a failure of leadership across the Western world. Too many countries have not dealt with the root causes of the financial crisis of 2007-2008, while globalization has become a bad word for voters across Europe, despite the prosperity it once afforded them.

Germany might find a potential escape route by electing Merz, who has steered his party away from Merkel’s legacy and positioned it closer to its roots in a bid to blunt the impact of the far-right Alternative for Germany and its appeal among conservative voters. His dream of winning an outright ruling majority might be far-fetched in this age of rising populist forces and their anti-traditional politics

narratives, but he could still work with the Social Democrats post-Scholz and with the Greens. However, this could also be problematic.

In France, many blame Macron and his “mercurial arrogance” for ushering in this crisis, which emanated from the battering his party got in June’s European Parliament elections. His decision to hold snap elections over the summer produced a three-way split in parliament between his centrists, the left and Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Rally. A fourth or even a fifth prime ministerial appointment might not aid Macron or the country, as he keeps refusing to nominate one of the many moderate figures from the leftist coalition that earned the highest number of seats in the elections.

France seems to be in a tight corner, with polls indicating that between 35 percent and 38 percent of voters intend to support Le Pen in the next presidential election, which is due in 2027. This could put her far-right movement at the steps of the Elysee Palace.

Commentators across Europe are right to continuously ring the alarm bells, warning that the bloc is in need of a series of ententes cordiales, both within nations and between states, and that voters and leaders ought to wake up because “the enemy is at the gate.”

Rather than external

enemies — as Russia continues to present an existential challenge to European security and society and China’s pursuit of its interests, capitalizing on any holes in the European economic guard rails, continues unabated — it may be the enemy within that ultimately unravels the tenets of the EU project, as the European populists will surely feel the winds of Trump behind them come 2025.

Georgia Meloni of Italy might feel fewer constraints and pursue a more illiberal agenda. Some states in Central and Eastern Europe, formerly part of the Warsaw Pact, are already leaning toward authoritarianism.

There is Hungary and Slovakia and maybe Czechia will soon join them in an orbit of politics that is not far from the Kremlin’s. The exceptions remain the Baltic and Nordic states and Poland, which are just holding on but maybe not for long.

That is why it is imperative for nations like Germany and France to find their withering political balance and leadership in the new year. The alternatives in populist-led European nations could only further sink the EU, its liberal democratic anchors, its peace and security mechanisms and, above all, its prosperity and welfare state.

My mother’s shattered dream of family reunion in Gaza

“OH, high moon, relay my greetings to dear brother Salah!” my beloved mother, Shukria, used to say. For a great many years, she longed passionately to see her only brother, Salah, back at home in Palestine. Like millions of Palestinians, he was forced to live in the diaspora, banned from ever returning to his homeland.

My mother was nine and Uncle Salah was eight in May 1948 when Jewish militias attacked their village Kofakha, located 18km (11 miles) east of Gaza City. Their family was forced to flee for their lives, as the invaders killed people and set homes on fire.

The family managed to make it to Gaza, where they lived in deplorable conditions as refugees. Matters worsened when their mother, Zakia, fell severely ill and passed away shortly afterward,

Hassan El-Nabih

dearest wish was to see Uncle Salah back in Palestine.

My mother had countless ways to express her extreme love for her brother and her overwhelming desire to see him back at home.

She was most delighted with my uncle’s letters and photos; she kept them under lock and key. From time to time, I saw her kissing the photos. She also asked me to read her the letters over and over.

Uncle Salah was always in my mother’s supplications. She fervently prayed for his protection and fast return to Palestine.

It was heartbreaking to hear her chant, “Oh, high moon, relay my greetings to dear brother Salah!” while gazing at the moon in the night sky. Rarely did she do that without tears coming to her eyes.

My mother’s emotion-

the sense of “appearance or coming into view”. It was obvious my mother’s mind was occupied by Uncle Salah and his family in the diaspora, hoping for their return to Palestine. She hoped that the name would be a good omen for the return of the absent loved ones.

In our efforts to fulfil my mother’s deepest wish, we submitted several requests for Uncle Salah and his family to visit Palestine, to the Israeli occupation authority and to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. In 1994, we received an approval.

My uncle and his family arrived in Gaza shortly afterwards. The emotional reunion between my mother and her brother was indescribable. Sadly, the visit was brief. Uncle Salah and his family were able to come back one more time, in 1995. His inability to stay

Just a year later, their father, Sheikh Hassan, passed away in Gaza. Uncle Salah was devastated and started planning his return. Just as he was about to come back in 1967, Israel invaded and occupied the remaining Palestinian territories of historic Palestine — the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. In a gross violation of human rights, the Israeli occupation authority denied the right of return to the Palestinians who were outside the occupied territories at that time. That meant that Uncle Salah could not return to his homeland, Palestine. By contrast, any Jew living anywhere in the world had and still has the right — guaranteed by Israel — to immigrate and settle in historic Palestine. While in the diaspora, Uncle Salah made tremendous efforts to maintain contact with us. With no postal or phone communication available, he occasionally sent letters, photos, money, and gifts with visitors to Gaza. Although these things had their special value for my mother, she yearned for something more. Her dearest wish was to see Uncle Salah back in Palestine. My mother had countless ways to express her extreme love for her brother and her overwhelming desire to see him back at home. She was most delighted with my uncle’s letters and photos; she kept them under lock and key. From time to time, I saw her kissing the photos. She also asked me to read her the letters over and over. Uncle Salah was always in my mother’s supplications. She fervently prayed for his protection and fast return to Palestine.

leaving behind two orphans.

Uncle Salah felt compelled to work abroad to support the family. In 1965, he traveled to Kuwait, where he worked as a teacher.

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Although these things had their special value for my mother, she yearned for something more. Her

al words, yearning looks, and mournful tone reflected the great deal of agony she had endured.

As a child, I memorised some of my mother’s prayers and supplications for Uncle Salah. When seeing the moon in the sky, I sometimes chanted, “Oh, high moon, relay my greetings to dear Uncle Salah!” Overjoyed to hear me chanting her words, my mother used to embrace me tightly.

When my fourth son was born in 1993, my mother was at the hospital. Holding the newborn in her arms, she looked at him tenderly and exclaimed, “What a cute baby! So small and loved by all!” I asked her to choose a name for him; I expected her to say Salah. However, after a moment of deep thought, she responded, “Let’s call him Talal.”

Talal is a beautiful name, but I had never considered it for any of my children. Yet, I hated to disappoint my beloved mother.

Curious about her choice, I said, “Dear mother, no family member has this name to call my new son after him. Why would you prefer it in particular?” She replied, “May the absences appear!” This is a literal translation of her response.

Arabic words are generally based on three-letter roots, which define their underlying meaning. The root T-L-L conveys

in Palestine reignited my mother’s anguish.

With advances in technology, we were eventually able to communicate remotely with Uncle Salah and his family in Kuwait. My mother was thrilled to see and talk to them via the internet.

Tragically, my uncle fell seriously ill in 2017; a massive stroke left him paralysed and unable to speak. His health deteriorated, and he passed away in 2021. It was really heart-rending for my mother that her only brother died in the diaspora.

After his death, my mother’s health declined. Her condition worsened even more during Israel’s brutal war on Gaza. Due to the inhumane blockade and the targeting of hospitals, she could not receive proper medical care. She passed away on December 1, 2023.

May she and her brother rest in peace!

The lives and deaths of my uncle and mother illustrate the grave injustice Israel has inflicted on Palestinians over the past eight decades, blatantly violating human rights laws and United Nations resolutions.

Holding Israel accountable for its atrocities against Palestinians must be a priority for the international community. Standing in solidarity with Palestinians in their quest for freedom and dignity will create stability and peace for all nations in the region.

Outside interference in post-Assad Syria is inevitable

Christopher Phillips

AFTER the sudden collapse of Bashar Assad’s dictatorship, many people have understandably urged foreign powers not to meddle in Syria’s affairs. “Syria’s future must be determined by Syrians, not outside powers,” wrote the Hagop Kevorkian Center’s Mohamad Bazzi for The Guardian, while International Crisis Group declared that outside powers “need to avoid destabilizing interference.” These sentiments are laudable.

Ever since protests erupted against Assad in 2011, outsiders have sought to bend the ensuing civil war in a favorable direction. And Syria would almost certainly benefit from the same forces leaving the country alone as it transitions away from Baathist rule. However, while Syrians should be the ones who determine the shape of their country, it is unrealistic to expect outside powers to suddenly cease their interference. Foreign involvement is a reality Syria’s new government must deal with and manage as best it can.

Syria’s strategic location has long meant it attracted outside meddling. In the 1950s, rivals Egypt and Iraq backed different factions, as did Britain, the US and USSR. This pattern resurfaced after 2011, when

Russia and Iran supported Assad in the civil war while Turkiye, Qatar and others backed the rebels. The US sponsored a selection of rebel groups but mostly the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces to fight Daesh. Meanwhile, Israel, though not backing a faction, took advantage of the chaos to launch airstrikes on Iran-linked targets. Nor was it only state governments involved, nonstate actors like Daesh and the PKK weighed in to further their interests.

As a result, Syrians hoping to rebuild after Assad face a devastated, war-torn state. But they also face a country that has been deeply penetrated by outside interests. Some foreign actors are willing to act with little or no regard for Damascus. Already in the week since Assad’s fall, Turkiye, Israel and the US have launched military operations on Syrian territory. Turkiye has continued its attacks on the SDF, which it regards as a terrorist entity, Israel has occupied more land surrounding the occupied Golan Heights and destroyed Syrian military assets fearing they will fall into hostile hands, while the US has hit Daesh in the east.

But alongside a willingness to use their own forces unilaterally, the years of civil war have

seen multiple outsiders develop new networks across Syrian society. Some are overt, such as the Syrian National Army, which is sponsored by Turkiye, and the SDF, with its links to the US. Others are more covert or not currently active. Iran and Russia, for example, will still have ties with some former Assad loyalists, after years of collaboration. The Gulf states likewise built relationships with various oppositionists early in the war that might be reactivated in the future. Daesh, similarly, retains cells across Syria.

As well as having the military tools to directly infringe on Syrian sovereignty, these networks and relationships give outsiders further opportunities to interfere.

It seems unlikely that the outside actors that have meddled for years will suddenly discover a benevolent side, check their involvement and put Syrians’ long-term interests over their short-term needs. Instead, it will more likely fall on Syria’s new rulers to carefully navigate a perilous geopolitical situation to ensure that foreign interference remains peripheral and does not undermine transition efforts. While there are numerous things Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and the new government can do to mitigate the risks,

two stand out.

The first is to rapidly develop diplomatic skill and capacity. HTS, when it ruled Idlib, showed a surprising talent for managing external actors, whether the UN, Turkiye or aid providers. It has also made positive efforts to reach out to Turkiye, Arab and European governments since taking Damascus. It will hope to swiftly upscale this, perhaps drawing in other talents from the diaspora and former officials to give Syria a stronger voice internationally.

Damascus already faces a chorus of outsiders making demands of the new government, including renouncing terrorism and chemical weapons, protecting minority and women’s rights and calling elections.

It will take considerable diplomatic skill from Ahmad Al-Sharaa, or whomever ultimately leads the government, to appease enough of these to win sufficient foreign acceptance, all the while maximizing Syria’s independence.

The second is to minimize the chances that Syrians become disaffected with the post-Assad government, making them susceptible to outsiders wanting to use their networks to pursue their interests. For now, it seems that most Syrians have welcomed the fall of

Can the International Criminal Court survive the next four years?

THE world’s only permanent international tribunal mandated to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide is facing its greatest challenge to date. With the incoming Trump administration and sanctions looming over the court and its staff, a simple question looms: can the International Criminal Court (ICC) survive the next four years?

I ask this question after attending the Assembly of States Parties of the ICC, the yearly diplomatic conference of the Court’s member states. The gathering took place as dark clouds gathered — both figuratively and literally — over The Hague, where the ICC is headquartered. Sanctions are coming, and maybe sooner than later.

It has emerged that the United States may not wait for Donald Trump to be

inaugurated before sanctions are issued. Instead, Republicans may attach sanctions to the National Defense Authorization Act, the bill that lays out Washington’s yearly defence budget and expenditures.

The hope among proponents of the court is that the sanctions will target senior officials at the court and not the court itself. The ICC can withstand sanctions against a few of its staff. But if the sanctions are issued against the institution, they are likely to have a much larger — and worse — impact. How could ICC investigators and officials travel? How would the court pay its staff if the banks and financial institutions it uses fear being found uncompliant with the sanctions? Could judges even use Microsoft Word to write their judgements?

This is not the first time the court has faced US

sanctions. In the last months of the Trump administration, sanctions were issued against a few staff members, including then-chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda of The Gambia. But now the Court — and its supporters — are staring down the barrel of four years of coercive measures from Washington. And even if the sanctions are targeted against specific ICC staff, they will expose familiar discriminatory and racist thinking within the Trump administration: ICC staff from Western allies are much better positioned to persuade Trump to exclude their citizens from sanctions than those of the Global South.

The challenge the court faces is acute. It must somehow avoid further escalation with the US while maintaining its independence and, all the while, avoid normalising or legitimising Trump.

Mark Kersten

At this juncture, it is difficult to imagine how this is possible. Consider the following trajectory: in the coming weeks, the Trump administration issues sanctions for senior ICC staff.

The court does what it should do and insists that it will remain undeterred. Member-states rally behind the institution. The court’s work continues, and the prosecutor requests an arrest warrant for Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir over war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the West Bank.

The move is celebrated by much of the world as the right — and obvious — thing to do for an independent court. But an upset White House escalates, issues new sanctions against the ICC as an institution, and goes a step far-

ther, demanding that unless its allies also sanction the court, it will impose 30 percent tariffs on trade with them.

The above scenario is entirely plausible. American Senator Lindsey Graham has already claimed that the likes of Canada, France and Germany should be sanctioned for supporting the ICC. Would the court be able to withstand such pressures? Would its member-states?

The ICC has previously withstood interference in its work from Washington, especially during its early years when it faced the hostile administration of President George W Bush. America eventually realised that the ICC posed little or no threat to its interests when it targeted the likes of the Lord’s Resistance Army leader Joseph Kony or Sudan’s

former president Omar al-Bashir; on the contrary, American interests were undermined by its bombastic opposition to prosecuting notorious atrocity perpetrators. Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice even claimed that her administration’s approach to the ICC had been akin to “shooting ourselves in the foot”.

But now the ICC is in direct conflict with US interests, especially over the issuance of arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. Those warrants aren’t going away. Nor is American opposition.

How does the court survive this?

Its survival will ultimately be up to the states that created the ICC in the first place. First and foremost, they must recognise this moment as posing an

existential threat to their institution. They should recognise that the threats emanating from Washington are real and will remain persistent for the foreseeable future, and respond with proactive measures to protect the court. They must do everything possible to insulate the ICC and its staff from sanctions.

States must also remind America that sanctioning the court over the warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant will fundamentally undermine accountability efforts in those situations where US interests are aligned with the ICC: Ukraine, China-backed Myanmar and Venezuela. Every time a new coercive measure is imposed against the ICC, American policymakers should be forced to hear from Ukrainian, Rohingya, and Venezuelan victims and survivors of atrocities. They too will be hurt by

sanctions against the ICC.

As for the court, it must not cow-tow to a state that has for too long sought to determine the institution’s viability and decision-making. But the ICC can remain undeterred and counter American hostility in strategic ways. For example, investigators should explore bringing cases against Iranian leaders over aiding and abetting Hamas and its atrocities. That is the right thing to do but also has the added benefit of making it harder for Trump, Graham and others to lambast the court as a whole.

The ICC will survive the next four years. Whether it emerges as a meagre shadow of itself or as a strategically competent and more effective international tribunal is up to its leadership and the states that claim they support the court, but who must now do everything in their power to prove it.



PSX stays bearish, loses 3,790 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bearish trend on Wednesday, losing 3,790.40 points, a negative change of 3.30 percent, closing at 111,070.29 points as compared to 114,860.69 points on the last trading day.

A total of 1,111,921,053 shares were traded during the day as compared to 1,252,980,316 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs60.242 billion against Rs62.722 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 472 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 89 of

them recorded gains and 349 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 34 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom 139,290,885 shares at Rs1.71 per share, Cnergyco PK with 67,462,895 shares at Rs6.54 per share and Bank of Punjab with 60,162,802 shares at Rs10.17 per share.

Al-Ghazi Tractors Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs51.29 per share price, closing at Rs564.23, whereas the runner-up was Indus Motor Company Limited with Rs43.66 rise in its per share price to Rs2,058.57.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs107.16 per share closing at Rs20,892.86 followed by Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited with Rs98.02 decline to close at Rs8,902.00.

Ruppee gains 05 paise against dollar

Pakistani rupee on Wednesday appreciated by 05 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.22 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.27.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood

at Rs277.75 and Rs279.25 respectively.

The price of Euro decreased by 29 paise to close at Rs291.85 against the last day's closing of Rs292.14, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese yen went up by 01 paise and closed at Rs1.81, whereas a decrease of 56 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs352.88 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs353.44.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decline by 02 paise each to close at Rs75.74 and Rs74.02, respectively.



ISLAMABAD: A vendor displaying oranges to attract customers at Islamabad Fruit and Vegetables Market.

FCCI hails decrease in policy rate

FAISALABAD (APP): President Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) Rehman Naseem Bharara welcomed decrease in policy rate and demanded to bring it into single digit, terming reduction of 200 basic-points as insufficient to further enhance the pace of economic activities.

Talking to a delegation of traders here on Wednesday, he said that it was the fifth consecutive cut in policy rate which had now brought down to 13%. However, further cut in policy rate was imperative to attract maximum local and foreign investment, he added.

He said that foreign exchange reserves had swollen to \$12bn while GDP growth in 2025 was expected to be around 2.5 to 3.5%. A decrease of 2% in policy rate was not enough to achieve the set economic targets in the prevailing circumstances. Therefore, the government should bring it into single digit so that the results of improved macro-economic indicators could be trickled down to the lowest stratum, he added.

He was optimistic that further cut in policy rate would certainly catalyze the economic activities and play a key role in saving the low socioeconomic class from the unbearable burden of price hike and inflation.

Ahsan visits iSoftStone Technology Park — discusses future cooperation possibilities

BEIJING (APP): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal here on Wednesday visited the iSoftStone Information Technology Park and discussed ways and means for future cooperation between the two countries in this sector.

The minister, along with the Pakistani delegation, was received by Vice President of International Business Department Yin Lu and Vice President Intelligent Electronics Li Chuan, a news release said.

Ahsan Iqbal took a round of the headquarters and exhibition area where he witnessed a demonstration of the latest products, services and solutions being provided by the company.

He was given a briefing on the company's business development in Middle East and Central Asia.

Pakistan's side also delivered a presentation on technology integration in the execution of the projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The two sides

exchanged views on future cooperation in the field of IT and implementation possibilities. Both sides expressed hope in collaborating to develop innovative digital technology products and solutions.

The Pakistani delegation included Political Counselor Haseeb Gohar, Science and Technology Counselor Khan Muhammad Wazir and Infrastructure Specialist at Ministry of Planning, Development Special Initiatives Dr Muzammil Zia.

Group head of trade and economy visits SCCI

SIALKOT (APP): Group Head of Trade and Economy and Political Counselor, Mahesh Mishra at the British High Commission on Wednesday visited the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI).

President Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) Ikram-ul-Haq, Senior Vice President (SVP) SCCI Waseem Shahbaz Lodhi and Vice President (VP) Omer Khalid warmly welcomed the distinguished guests.

During the visit, Group Head of Trade and Economy and Political Counselor Mishra introduced a new development program designed by the UK to support Pakistani businesses involved in exports.

The program aims to enhance export capacity, foster innovation and facilitate greater access to international markets, particularly the UK.

Discussions during the meeting focused on poten-

tial collaborations, strategic goals and the pivotal role of Sialkot's export-oriented industries in the initiative.

The visit underscored the importance of strengthening bilateral economic ties and promoting sustainable trade practices for mutual benefit.

The meeting was attended by the President Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Sialkot (WCCIS) Dr. Mariam Nouman and Sialkot Business Community.

SBP launches new eCIB System (V2) F.P. Report

KARACHI: State Bank of Pakistan has launched the new eCIB System (V2), an advanced version of its Electronic Credit Information Bureau (eCIB). The new system will become operational w.e.f January 1, 2025 to replace the existing eCIB system. It has been developed to cope with technological advancement & reporting standards aligned with international practices.

Under the new system, few additions and amendments have also been introduced in Credit Information Report with the objective to make it more comprehensive.

SCCI chief stresses fully capitalizing potentials — to enhance Pak-UAE mutual trade

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fazal Moqem Khan said Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates tied close trade, religious and traditional relations.

He, however, stressed both countries should fully capitalize each other's potentials to enhance current bilateral trade volume.

Fazal Moqem was speaking during a ceremony held in connection with 53rd National Day of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) held in federal capi-

tal Islamabad, said in a press release here on Wednesday.

The SCCI chief highlighted potentials of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, stating that the oil, gas and natural resources rich KP province offers vast opportunities for local as well as foreign investors.

He invited UAE companies to invest in KP potentials to improve the bilateral trade volume between the two brotherly Islamic countries.

Pak-UAE friendship is exemplary, which should be further strengthened by

joint collaboration and initiatives, Moqem asserted.

The chamber president congratulated the leadership and people of UAE on eve of 53rd National Day and stated that UAE gained tremendous progress after unity and it has emerged as an international hub for trade, investment and tourism.

Moqem said Pak-UAE relations are based on religion, trust and mutual respect.

The both countries, he added, are enjoying trust-worthy strategic partnership for a longer period.

POL import bill up by 1.04% to \$6.520 billion

ISLAMABAD (APP): The imports of the overall petroleum group increased by 1.04 percent during the first five months of the current fiscal year (2024-25) as compared to the corresponding months of the last year, the Pakistan

Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

The total imports of the petroleum group during July-November (2024-25) stood at \$ 6,520.898 million against the imports of \$ 6,453.910 million during the same months of last year.

Among petroleum commodities, the import of petroleum products declined by 10.34 percent, from \$ 2,661.231 million last year to \$ 2,386.131 million during the period under review year.

Industries faces challenges due to gas shortage

SARGODHA (APP): President Sargodha Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Khawaja Yasir Qayyum on Wednesday said that industries faced challenges due to the shortage of gas supply.

He emphasized that providing necessary facilities to industrialists would not only boost industrial growth in the region but also create employment opportunities and improve the national treasury.

The president raised these concerns during the

visit of Sui Gas Regional Manager Binyamin Shahid to the Chamber.

Addressing the gathering, Khawaja Yasir Qayyum highlighted that Sargodha had immense potential for industrial development, but the unavailability of basic utilities has driven entrepreneurs to shift their focus to other businesses.

He highlighted that Beco light industry was facing multiple challenges due to shortage of gas supply.

Responding to these

concerns, Regional Manager Binyamin Shahid acknowledged the growing challenges and suggested that relocating the Beco industry to a dedicated zone could facilitate uninterrupted gas supply.

He stated, "It is not feasible to supply gas to scattered industrial units for 24 hours".

During the meeting, members raised various issues, including the unavailability of gas connections, increasing gas prices, disconnection of

meters without prior notice for late bill payments, and low gas pressure.

Addressing these concerns, the Regional Manager explained that fixed taxes were imposed by OGRA, and any relief in this regard would require government intervention.

He assured that measures would be taken to resolve low-pressure issues and urged the Chamber to formally communicate their concerns to the government for potential improvements.

Japan's Honda and Nissan in preliminary merger talks

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Japanese auto giants Honda and Nissan are in preliminary merger talks, media reports said Wednesday.

A tie-up would help them better compete against Tesla and other electric vehicle makers, the Nikkei, the Financial Times and others said.

The two firms agreed in March to explore a strategic partnership on electric vehicles, a move analysts said was aimed at catching up with Chinese competitors.

A Honda spokesman said Wednesday that a potential merger was already among the possibilities being discussed.

"We are discussing possibilities for cooperation between Honda and Nissan in the future, in a wide range of fields and in various areas, and those possibilities include the latest reports, but there is nothing decided," the spokesman told AFP.

Nissan said: "The content of the report is not something that has been

announced by either companies. As announced in March of this year, Honda and Nissan are exploring various possibilities for future collaboration, leveraging each other's strengths.

"If there are any updates, we will inform our stakeholders at the appropriate time."

Nissan in particular has been struggling, announcing 9,000 job cuts last month and slashing its annual sales forecast.

Nissan shares rose more than 20 percent in early trade while Honda was off more than one percent. Mitsubishi Motors -- of which Nissan is the top shareholder -- gained 14 percent.

Honda and Nissan are looking to operate under a single holding company and will soon sign a memorandum of understanding for the new entity, the Nikkei and other outlets said, citing people familiar with the matter.

They said the firms would consider bringing Mitsubishi Motors under

the holding company to create one of the world's largest auto groups.

Honda and Nissan earlier issued almost identical statements in response, saying the details in the report had not been announced by either side.

Their statements said they were "exploring various possibilities for future collaboration, leveraging each other's strengths", as previously announced.

Honda is Japan's number two automaker and Nissan is number three, with their rival Toyota in pole position.

China overtook Japan as the world's biggest vehicle exporter in 2023, helped by its dominance in EVs, a sector where Japanese firms have lost ground by focusing on hybrid vehicles.

Honda announced plans in May to double investment in electric vehicles to \$65 billion by 2030, part of its ambitious target set three years ago of achieving 100 percent EV sales

by 2040.

Nissan has signalled similar ambitions.

It said in March that 16 of the 30 new models it plans to launch over the next three years would be "electrified".

The world's auto giants are increasingly prioritising electric and hybrid vehicles, with demand growing for less polluting models as concern about climate change grows.

At the same time, however, there has been a slowdown in the EV market on the back of consumer concern about high prices, reliability, range and a lack of charging points.

Hybrids that combine battery power and internal combustion engines have proved enduringly popular in Japan, accounting for 40 percent of sales in 2022.

Just 1.7 percent of cars sold in Japan in 2022 were electric -- compared with 15 percent in western Europe and 5.3 percent in the United States.

WARNING!

Common Frauds and Fake Schemes

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

Avoid Frauds

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

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

BE AWARE, BE SAFE



In brief

Sammy named West Indies head coach

J A M A I C A (Agencies): West Indies have appointed T20 World Cup-winning captain Daren Sammy as head coach across all formats. Sammy, who led the Windies to victory in the 2012 and 2016 T20 World Cups, has been in charge of the white-ball sides since May 2023. From April 2025, he will also take over Test duties, replacing Andre Coley. Under Sammy's leadership, West Indies have risen from ninth to fifth in the T20 rankings with 20 wins from 35 matches, including home series wins against England, India and South Africa. The one-day international side has also won four of their seven bilateral series under the 40-year-old former Windies all-rounder. "Daren Sammy has demonstrated exceptional leadership during his tenure with the white-ball teams," said Cricket West Indies president Dr Kishore Shallow. "His vision, dedication, and ability to inspire players make him the ideal candidate to lead across all formats. This appointment marks a bold and exciting step forward as we strive to elevate West Indies cricket to new heights." Sammy's first Test series in charge will be against Australia in June. Coley, who was at the helm as West Indies claimed a famous win against Australia in Brisbane, will stay on for the two-Test tour of Pakistan in January. The Jamaican will hope to improve his record of two wins, two draws and seven defeats since taking over in May 2023 before he makes way for Sammy.

Santner named NZ white ball captain

HAMILTON (AFP): Spin bowler Mitchell Santner was named New Zealand captain for both white ball formats Wednesday, filling a six-month vacancy since teammate Kane Williamson stood down. Santner, who has played 107 one-day internationals and 106 Twenty20 internationals, will begin his tenure with a three-match home ODI series against Sri Lanka from December 28. The 32-year-old has previously led New Zealand in 28 white ball matches, some on a stand-in basis after Williamson relinquished the role following the T20 World Cup in June. Santner described the full-time appointment as a "huge honour". "When you're a young kid, the dream was always to play for New Zealand, but to have the opportunity to officially lead my country in two formats is special," he said. "It's a new challenge and I'm excited to get stuck into the important period of white ball cricket that we have ahead of us." New Zealand coach Gary Stead said Santner would bring a "calm and collected" approach to leadership, with his appointment allowing Test captain Tom Latham to focus on the longer format. "Tom's doing a great job as full-time Test captain since taking over in October, and we're keen to allow him to focus on that job which requires a considerable amount of time and energy," Stead said. Santner's appointment comes a day after he was named player-of-the-match in New Zealand's 423-run win over England in the third Test in Hamilton. He took seven wickets and hit 76 and 49 with the bat.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa wins Karate and Judo events in Quaid-e-Azam Games



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) dominated the karate and judo events in the ongoing Quaid-e-Azam Inter-Provincial Games in Islamabad. KP players secured four gold, three silver, and two bronze medals in karate claiming the trophy.

In the 50kg category Muhammad Salman won

gold, Ahmed Khan bagged silver in the 60kg category while Saudais Afridi earned bronze in the 75kg category. Waris Habib clinched gold in the 84kg category. Muhammad Babar won gold in the 55kg category and Ehtesham Parvez took bronze in the 67kg category.

Misbahullah claimed silver in the 84kg category. In the team kata event Haris Habib, Waris Habib,

and Misbahullah secured silver while in the team kumite, Muhammad Abrar, Ehtesham Parvez, Waris Habib, Muhammad Salman, Shahid Afridi, Afzal Nabi, and Muhammad Saad Shah brought home the gold medal.

In the women's karate events KP secured fourth position with four silver and three bronze medals. Areeba won bronze in the

45kg category. Hina claimed silver in the 55kg category. Ayesha won silver in the 68kg category. Maliha took bronze in the 50kg category and Fatima secured bronze in the 61kg category. In the team kata Maliha, Muqaddas and Ayesha won silver while in the team kumite Maryam, Maliha, Ayesha and Mehak earned silver medals.

KP also excelled in judo claiming first position with a total of 15 medals including six gold three silver and six bronze. Balochistan secured second place with four gold one silver and two bronze medals while Punjab finished third with three gold four silver and four bronze medals.

In taekwondo KP players won four gold and two silver medals securing the top spot in the event. Overall KP currently holds second position in the games with several events still ongoing. So far KP has won 22 gold 25 silver and 30 bronze medals in various events.

Eyman, Gull Feroza hit unbeaten centuries in Strikers' win

ISLAMABAD (APP): Nashra Sundhu's back-to-back player of the match performances took Conquerors to the top of the table in the ongoing National Women's One-Day Tournament. At the Diamond Cricket Ground on Wednesday, batting first Conquerors managed to score 208 for nine in 45 overs. Hafsa Khalid top-scored with an 83-ball 43, which included three fours and a six. Wicketkeeper-batter Najha Alvi returned undefeated on 39 off 38 balls, smashing three fours.

For Invincibles, Areesha Noor, Fatima Zahra and Ghulam Fatima bagged two wickets apiece. In reply, Invincibles were bowled out for 101 in 29.4 overs with opening batter Ayesha Zafar contributing 31 off 64 balls, hitting four boundaries. Conquerors' left-arm spinner Nashra took three wickets for 21, while Fatima Sana and Mahnoor Aftab snapped two wickets each. Today's win was Conquerors fifth win in seven games, while Invincibles second defeat in the event.

At the Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi, unbeaten centuries by Eyman Fatima and Gull Feroza led Strikers to a seven-wicket win over Challengers. Aliya Riaz-led Challengers ended the tournament with two wins from eight outings.

Chasing 243 to win, Eyman (119 not out, 92b, 17x4s, 3x6s) and Gull Feroza (103 not out, 101b, 13x4s) knitted an unbeaten 205-run partnership for the fourth wicket and helped their side achieve the target in 36.5 overs. This was right-hand batter Eyman's second century in the tournament as the 20-year-old has scored 317 runs from seven matches.

Earlier, batting first, Challengers posted 242 for six in 45 overs with right-hand batter Natalia Parvaiz returning undefeated on 81 off 85 balls, laced with eight fours and two sixes. Gull Rukh (43, 44b, 6x4s, 1x6), Umm-e-Hani (39, 53b, 4x4s) and Momina Riasat (33 not out, 37b, 4x4s) were other contributors with the bat. For Strikers, captain Nida Dar bagged three wickets for 45 in nine overs, while Ayesha Bilal took two wickets for 38 runs.

Scores in brief: Conquerors beat Invincibles by 107 runs at the Diamond Cricket Ground

Conquerors 208-9, 45 overs (Hafsa Khalid 43, Najha Alvi 39 not out, Syeda Aroob Shah 36; Areesha Noor 2-10, Fatima Zahra 2-27, Ghulam Fatima 2-38)

Invincibles 101 all out, 29.4 overs (Ayesha Zafar 31; Nashra Sundhu 3-21, Fatima Sana 2-17, Mahnoor Aftab 2-22)

Player of the match - Nashra Sundhu (Conquerors)

Strikers beat Challengers by seven wickets at the Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium

Challengers 242-6, 45 overs (Natalia Parvaiz 81 not out, Gull Rukh 43, Umm-e-Hani 39, Momina Riasat 33 not out; Nida Dar 3-45, Ayesha Bilal 2-38)

Strikers 243-3, 36.5 overs (Eyman Fatima 119 not out, Gull Feroza 103 not out)

Player of the match - Eyman Fatima (Strikers).

Fawad to participate in Australian Junior Squash C'ship



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa squash player Fawad Ali will participate in the Australian Junior Squash Championship next year.

National ranking number 3 Fawad Ali is practicing under the supervision of coaches Munawar Zaman and Tahir Iqbal and has so far achieved success in many events.

Among them, the National Championship and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Championship in 2022 are prominent.

This year, he has won a bronze medal in the Australian Junior Squash Championship while he has won gold and silver in national competitions.

Bank of Khyber and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sports Board are providing him with all possible cooperation.

Fawad Ali says that last year he participated in the Asian Junior Championship and is working hard to participate in the British Junior and US Junior Squash Championships in the future.

Fakhar, Nafay rout Dolphins in Bahria Town Champions T20 Cup

RAWALPINDI (APP): Openers Khawaja Mohammad Nafay and Fakhar Zaman smashed belligerent half centuries to help UMT Markhors rout a hapless Engro Dolphins by eight wickets, going top of the five-team table in the Bahria Town Champions T20 Cup in Rawalpindi on Wednesday.

Nafay cracked three sixes and seven boundaries in his unbeaten 44-ball 66 while Fakhar knocked his first fifty of the event with a 34-ball 53 with a six and eight boundaries to help UMT Markhors chase down a modest 140-run target in 14.1 overs.

The swashbuckling openers gave a sound 113-run partnership start that gave no chance to Dolphins for whom spinner Shayan Sheikh took 2-16.

The win lifted UMT Markhors to the top of the



table with 10 points from six games. ABL Stallions are second with eight points in six games. Nurpur Lions are third with six points while Lake City Panthers are a rung behind with six points but inferior net run-rate. Engro Dolphins have lost all their six matches and are out of the race for the 25 December final.

Sent into bat, Engro Dolphins were once again

let down by their batting. Opener Mirza Tahir Baig fell for two and Sahibzada Farhan for three, leaving the Dolphins struggling at 14-2. Waqar Ahmed, playing his first match in the tournament, top scored with a 47-ball 55 studded with six boundaries and a six.

Waqar and Salman Khan Jnr (13) took the score to 61. Qasim Akram scored a

24-ball 31 with a six and three boundaries while skipper Faheem Ashraf made 20.

Nisar Ahmad was the best bowler for UMT Markhors with 4-22. He is now second on the bowling chart with 12 scalps, two behind Nurpur Lions's Shahid Aziz. Akif Javed took 2-28.

Scores in brief: Match 15 - UMT Markhors beat Engro Dolphins by eight wickets at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium

Engro Dolphins 139-8, 20 overs (Waqar Ahmed 55, Qasim Akram 31, Faheem Ashraf 20; Nisar Ahmad 4-22, Akif Javed 2-28)

UMT Markhors 140-2 in 14.1 overs (Khawaja Mohammad Nafay 66 not out, Fakhar Zaman 53; Shayan Sheikh 2-16)

Player of the match - Nisar Ahmad (UMT Markhors).

Naqvi meets SA Cricket Federation Chairman, discusses cricket promotion

RIYADH (APP): Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Mohsin Naqvi held a meeting with Saudi Arabian Cricket Federation (SACF) Chairman Prince Saud bin Mishal Al Saud in Riyadh to discuss the promotion of cricket and the development of players in Saudi Arabia.

During the meeting, Chairman PCB extended an invitation to Prince Saud to visit Pakistan and witness the Champions Trophy tournament matches. He also offered comprehensive support to Saudi Arabia in promoting cricket and

constructing cricket stadiums.

Mohsin Naqvi proposed a player exchange programme to enhance cricket development, suggesting that Saudi Arabia could send emerging players to Pakistan for training. "We are committed to fully supporting Saudi Arabia in cricket development and stadium construction. For every Pakistani, Saudi Arabia is like a second home, and we are delighted to collaborate," Naqvi stated.

In response, Prince Saud bin Mishal Al Saud expressed his eager-

ness to strengthen ties with Pakistan in cricket promotion. Saudi Arabia is actively working on player development and boasts approximately 18,000 cricketers, he added. He highlighted Saudi Arabia's victory in the Asian Cricket Council Challenge Cup as a testament to their growing cricketing prowess.

Prince Saud expressed his desire to work closely with Pakistan to foster cricket growth in Saudi Arabia, underscoring the potential for cooperation between the two nations in the sport.

Ashwin retires from int'l cricket

BRISBANE (Agencies): India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has retired from international cricket.

The 38-year-old, the seventh-highest wicket-taker in Test history, made the announcement after the drawn third Test against Australia in Brisbane. Ashwin, who did not play in the game, was widely recognised as one of the greats of the modern game during a 14-year India career.

He took 537 wickets at an average of 24 in 106 Tests - second only to Anil Kumble's 619 among India bowlers.

He also scored six centuries and averaged 25.75 with the bat. "This will be my last day as an Indian cricketer in all formats in the international level," Ashwin said at a news conference at the Gabba.

"I do feel there's a bit of punch left in me as a cricketer, but I would like to showcase that in club level cricket." Ashwin took 156 wickets at 33.20 apiece in 116 one-day internationals and 72 at an average of 23.22 in 65 T20s.

He was part of the squad that won the 2011 World Cup in India,



although he played only two games.

He will be remembered largely for his Test exploits - his tally of 37 five-wicket hauls is second only to Sri Lanka great

Muttiah Muralitharan. Ashwin was the leading wicket-taker in India's past three series against England, including 24 in the 4-1 home triumph this year.

Captain Rohit Sharma said Ashwin considered retiring before the Australia tour but he convinced him to continue. Ashwin was left out of the team for the first Test and took one wicket in the second.

"He was very sure

about what he wanted to do and the team has complete backing of his thought process," Rohit said. "He's had so many big moments with the Indian team and he's been a big match-winner for us. "He's allowed to make these decisions, and if it is now, so be it."

"One of the all-time greats"

Ashwin's former captain and current teammate Virat Kohli said: "I've played with you for 14 years and when you told me today you're retiring, it made me a bit emotional and the flashbacks of all those years playing together came to me. "I've enjoyed every bit of the

journey with you Ash. Your skill and match-winning contributions to Indian cricket are second to none and you will always and always be remembered as a legend of Indian cricket.

"Wish you nothing but the best in your life with your family and everything else that it unfolds for you. "With massive respect and lots of love to you and your close ones. Thanks for everything buddy." Australia captain Pat Cummins said Ashwin will "go down as one of the all-time greats". "He's obviously been a fantastic player all around the world," Cummins said. "There aren't that many finger spinners that have that kind of longevity.

"There's a massive respect from our changing room for the career that he's had." India coach Gautam Gambhir, who played alongside Ashwin, wrote on X: "The privilege of seeing you grow from a young bowler to a legend of modern cricket is something that I wouldn't trade for the world. "I know that generations of bowlers to come will say that I became a bowler because of Ashwin."

Real Madrid outclass Pachuca to win Int'l Cup

DOHA (AFP): Kylian Mbappe and Vinicius Junior both scored as Real Madrid cruised to a 3-0 victory over Mexican side Pachuca in the Intercontinental Cup final in Doha on Wednesday.

Mbappe opened the scoring in the 37th minute before Rodrygo doubled Madrid's lead early in the second half. Vinicius sealed a comfortable win for the Spanish and European champions with a late penalty.

France striker Mbappe returned to the Madrid line-up in Doha after missing Saturday's 3-3 draw with Rayo Vallecano due to a hamstring injury suffered in the Champions League win at Atalanta last week.

Mbappe swept in from close range to break the deadlock after brilliant play from Vinicius Junior, who won the FIFA Best men's player of the year award a day earlier after missing out on the Ballon d'Or.

Rodrygo's fine curling strike from the edge of the area put Madrid in total control, but the goal wasn't without controversy.

It was allowed to stand after the referee consulted the pitchside monitor even though Jude Bellingham was in an off-side position and appeared to be interfering with the goalkeeper's line of vision.

Vinicius added a third from the penalty spot six minutes from time following another VAR review after Lucas Vazquez was chopped down in the



Pachuca box.

This is the first edition of the FIFA-backed Intercontinental Cup, which broadly maintains the previous format of the Club World Cup.

The latter is being expanded to include 32 teams in 2025 and will now be played every four years. A past version of the Intercontinental Cup ran from 1960 to 2004 involving the champions of Europe and South America.

Madrid are due to play Pachuca again at next year's Club World Cup in the United States, as well as an Al Hilal team featuring Neymar, and Red Bull Salzburg.

Carlo Ancelotti's side host Sevilla in La Liga on Sunday in their final game of the year. They will return to the Middle East in early January for the four-team Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia.



In brief

Police reunite missing child with family

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Shahzad Town police team successfully reunited a missing five-year-old child, Rohan, with his family on Wednesday. A public relations officer told APP that the child had gone missing on the evening of December 14. Despite the family's extensive search efforts, they could not locate him. Left with no other options, Rohan's father, Ahmad, reported the matter to the Sumbal police station. He said the family resides in Sector G-12. Upon receiving the report, Sub-Inspector Mansab Dar and his team launched a swift search operation. Employing both technical and human resources, they worked tirelessly to locate the child and ensure his safe return. Sub-Inspector Mansab Dar said, "Our priority was to reunite the boy with his family as quickly as possible. We are committed to serving the community with dedication." The child's parents expressed profound gratitude to the Islamabad Police, especially Sub-Inspector Mansab Dar, for their prompt and effective response. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police Ali Raza commended the Shahzad Town police team for their outstanding efforts. "Protecting and serving the community remains a top priority for the Islamabad Police," he said, lauding the officers for their exemplary service.

Police arrest 3 in murder case

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police's Humak Police Station and Homicide Investigation Unit (HIU) teams have arrested three accused involved in a murder case on Wednesday. Police spokesman said that on December 11, 2024, the Humak police team received information that three accused had murdered Muhammad Anwar with an axe during a fight. He said upon receiving the information, the Humak police team registered FIR No. 896/24. Following the incident, a special investigation team was formed. The police teams used technical and scientific methods to arrest the three suspects, namely Sharafat, Hussain, and Ansar Jamal. DIG Syed Ali Raza directed all senior officials for an effective crackdown against the accused involved in criminal activities and to ensure the safety of lives and property of citizens on a priority basis. The DIG said that police adopts a zero-tolerance policy against violence, including injustices and crimes, and the accused involved in it will be brought to justice. He further directed all officers and officials to intensify the crackdown against the criminal elements. "Safety and security of the citizens is our foremost priority and no laxity will be tolerated in this regard."

Woman's murderer arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Kallar Syedan Police on Wednesday arrested an accused who had murdered a woman over a marriage dispute. According to a Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the accused Adeel had opened fire on the woman last month, who succumbed to her injuries. The accused had gone into hiding after the incident, but was traced and arrested.

Bike lifter held

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Ganj Mandi Police on Wednesday arrested a bike lifter and recovered eight stolen motorcycles from his possession. Raids were underway to arrest the accomplices of arrested accused Adnan alias Lahori, a Rawalpindi Police spokesman said.

ANF recovers 122 kg drugs in 7 operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 7 operations across the country managed to recover over 122 kg drugs worth Rs 10 million and arrested 5 suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday.

He informed that 190 intoxicated tablets were recovered from a parcel sent from Peshawar at a courier office in Hyderabad.

100 kg hashish was recovered from a deserted area of Turbat in Balochistan.

16.8 kg hashish was recovered concealed in a rickshaw near a park on Ring Road Peshawar and a suspect was arrested during the operation.

1.2 kg hashish and 2.2 kg ice were recovered from the possession of a woman arrested near a petrol pump on Okara Road Kasur.

In 5th operation, 980 grams ice was recovered from a suspect held on Sakhi Sarwar Road in Dera Ghazi Khan.

In 6th operation, 610 grams ice was recovered from the possession of a suspect netted near Shah Pul Multan.

150 grams opium was recovered from the possession of a drug peddler nabbed near Burhan Toll Plaza Attock.

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

PHA board approves key housing policies

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 58th Board of Directors meeting of the Pakistan Housing Authority (PHA) Foundation, chaired by Federal Minister for Housing and Works Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, on Wednesday approved key decisions on financial investments, project auctions, installment deferments, and housing policies aimed at facilitating allottees and optimizing resources.

After thorough discussions, the board approved several agenda items, including the confirmation of the 57th BoD meeting minutes, the investment of Rs. 339 million in Government Securities and Treasury Bills at current State Bank yield rates, and the auction of canceled apartments and shops in Lahore and Islamabad projects.

The Board agreed on deferment of installment schedule for one year in Kuchlak Road, Quetta to facilitate allottees keeping in view the unavoidable factors involved in the suspensions of work at site. On an agenda item relating to auction of commercial plots at Kuchlak road, project, auction process was kept on hold for some time to put up a revised layout plan for the commercial area to get maximum profit and optimal use of the specified land.

Furthermore, the successful auction bids received and accepted by the committee with a difference of Rs 8.3 Million on higher side of six shops in I-16/3 project and one cancelled apartment of G-11/3 project, Islamabad was unanimously endorsed along with the approval of allotment of temporary spaces for shops or cabins in I-16/3 project on pre-stated terms and conditions to facilitate the dwellers of this scheme.

In addition to this, board consented to the policy of allotment of housing apartments to the officers of PHA with fixation of permanent seniority under 1% quota besides granting permission for a mandatory management course for the mid-career officers of technical cadre in PHA.



RAWALPINDI: A vendor busy in displaying henna stuffs to be used in weddings at his shop at Old Fort in the city. —APP Photo

Trail 5 in Margalla Hills: A Popular Spot for Nature Lovers, Hikers

ISLAMABAD (APP): Trail 5 in Margalla Hills National Park (MHNP) has become a favourite destination for hikers and nature enthusiasts looking to escape the city's chaos.

This beautiful trail known for its rich biodiversity and lush greenery, offers a perfect retreat for those seeking peace and relaxation in nature.

Hassan Raza Cheema, a fitness trainer and avid hiker, has recently embraced meditation on this scenic trail. He shared that the tranquil environment filled with the sounds of nature, creates an ideal setting for yoga and meditation. "In these challenging times, it's essential for people of all ages to connect with nature to relieve stress and frustration," Hassan said. He believes hiking helps reduce stress and regulates blood sugar levels, allowing individuals to soak in the positive energy of the outdoors.

Sehrish Mughal, a university student also expressed her love for Trail 5. She began visiting the trail when she started her BS studies and now considers it her go-to

leisure activity. "The environment is mesmerizing, with its beautiful green cover," Sehrish noted.

She appreciates how hiking has enhanced her relationship with nature, allowing her to learn about local plants and observe unique birds flitting through the trees. Abdul Samad Tariq, a journalist and nature enthusiast reflected on his experiences hiking the trail. He recalled a time when the paths were littered with plastic waste due to careless visitors.

However, thanks to the efforts of the Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB), this issue has improved significantly. The IWMB has focused on educating the public about responsible behaviour in the national park, promoting a sense of ownership among visitors.

Abdul Samad described his hiking experiences as both memorable and exciting. He emphasized that the trail is excellent for enhancing trekking skills and improving physical health. "While hiking may not lead to significant weight loss, it strengthens

limbs and joints through the physical exertion required to navigate the terrain," he explained. The challenge of walking uphill not only provides a workout but also fosters a deeper connection with the natural surroundings.

Officials from the IWMB have been proactive in monitoring the park. They maintain a vigilant patrolling staff that takes strict action against littering. Their efforts to promote zero plastic use in the national park have been met with positive responses from visitors.

By raising awareness about the importance of keeping the environment clean, the IWMB aims to preserve the beauty of Margalla Hills for current and future generations.

Visitors to Trail 5 are increasingly practising responsible hiking, showing respect for nature while enjoying their time outdoors. The improvement in cleanliness has made the trail more enjoyable for everyone. As the popularity of Trail 5 continues to rise, it serves as a reminder of the essential role that nature plays in our lives.

Deepening Pak-Saudi ties crucial for regional progress: NA speaker

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, reaffirmed the strong and enduring relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which is built upon shared religious beliefs, traditions, and cultural values.

He emphasized that all Pakistanis, irrespective of any differences, stand united in their respect and admiration for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The speaker further underscored that the visit of Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh, Chairman of the Saudi Shura Council, and his accompanying parliamentary delegation is a significant step toward further strengthening bilateral relations and parliamentary cooperation between the two countries.

Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq made these remarks during a meeting with Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh, who is leading the Saudi delegation on an official three-day visit to Pakistan at the special invitation of the Speaker. Former Speakers of the National Assembly, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and Asad Qaiser also participated in the meeting.

Upon arrival at the Parliament House in Islamabad, Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh was warmly received by Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, who highlighted the enduring strategic partnership between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Speaker Sadiq stated, "I extend a warm welcome to the Chairman of the Saudi Shura Council and his delegation to Pakistan. The people of Pakistan, alongside all members of Parliament, hold the people of Saudi Arabia and the Holy Haramayn Sharifain in the



highest regard."

He also stressed that Pakistan takes immense pride in its exceptional friendship with Saudi Arabia, underscoring that both countries have always stood by each other in times of need.

The meeting focused on enhancing bilateral relations and expanding parliamentary cooperation between the two nations.

Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq emphasized that the relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is anchored in mutual respect, trust, and a shared religious, cultural, and historical heritage. He emphasized the importance of increasing parliamentary exchanges as a means to expand cooperation across various sectors, such as trade, education, and technology.

Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh expressed his sincere appreciation for the warm reception and commended Pakistan's Parliament for its efforts in reinforcing the deep bond between the two nations.

He highlighted the need for increased cooperation in the economic, trade, educa-

tion, and technology sectors, emphasizing the potential benefits for both countries. Additionally, the Chairman of the Saudi Shura Council called for increased unity and solidarity within the Muslim Ummah, particularly in addressing the complex challenges facing the Muslim world.

He reiterated the importance of joint efforts to resolve these issues and stressed the value of strengthening parliamentary exchanges between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Reaffirming Saudi Arabia's continued support for Pakistan, Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh highlighted the deep religious and cultural bonds between the two nations. He expressed Saudi Arabia's strong commitment to supporting Pakistan's advancement in technology and the further development of bilateral parliamentary relations.

Later, the Saudi delegation, led by Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh, held a meeting with members of the Pakistan-Saudi Parliamentary Friendship

Group (PFG). Deputy Speaker Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah was also present at the session, which focused on expanding parliamentary and economic cooperation between the two countries.

In his remarks, Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq expressed his gratitude for Saudi Arabia's consistent support and solidarity with Pakistan, especially in the face of the rapidly changing global dynamics. He emphasized that the evolving global landscape necessitates a stronger partnership between the two nations. "The changing dynamics of the world call for enhanced collaboration between our nations," Speaker Sadiq remarked.

Chairman Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh, in turn, expressed his pleasure at visiting Pakistan and praised the country's pivotal role in the Islamic world. He reaffirmed the shared religious and cultural ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, stating, "Pakistan is the only country in the Islamic world founded in the name of Islam, and we in Saudi Arabia take

immense pride in our relationship with Pakistan."

He further reiterated Saudi Arabia's commitment to strengthening ties with Pakistan in parliamentary cooperation, economic development, and technological advancement. Dr. Abdullah also underscored the importance of unity among Islamic countries in addressing challenges faced by the Muslim Ummah and called for collaborative efforts to promote solidarity within the Islamic world.

Deputy Speaker Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah echoed similar sentiments, noting that increased parliamentary exchanges would significantly improve bilateral cooperation. Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Chaudhry Salik Hussain highlighted the contributions of Pakistani workers in Saudi Arabia and the profound affection the people of Pakistan have for the Kingdom, especially for the Haramayn Sharifain.

The Saudi parliamentary delegation includes Sheikh Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh, Yousaf bin Rashid Al Harbi, Advisor and Special Secretary to the Chairman, and Members of the Saudi Shura Council: Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al-Omair, Dr. Adel bin Siraj Murdad, Dr. Hassan bin Hijab Al-Hazmi, Dr. Aisha bint Hassan Zekri, Dr. Abdullah bin Saad Al-Wiqdani, and Dr. Muidha bint Muidh Al-Ghamdi.

Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Chaudhry Salik Hussain, along with Members of the National Assembly, Zeb Jaffar, Shagufa Juman, Syed Hafeezuddin, and Shahbazada Hamid Raza, also participated in the delegation-level talks.

Governor Punjab calls for practical steps to redress people's problems

RAWALPINDI (APP): Punjab Governor, Sardar Salim Haider Khan has called for taking practical steps to redress problems being faced by the people. He stressed the relevant authorities to pay special attention to the problems at the grassroots level.

The governor remarked this during an 'open court' which was arranged in Attock. Sardar Saleem listened to people about their problems and issued orders to the concerned

authorities to resolve their problems on the spot. "People are worried about inflation, taxes and unemployment", he said and added that his party would continue to struggle for the elimination of deprivations of the people from backward areas.

He said that the PPP will continue to raise its voice for the solution of public problems. He observed that due to declining rains, the farmers of Punjab were wor-

ried. "PPP is a party of the poor and downtrodden class, it has always given relief to the farmers and has not imposed any additional taxes on the agricultural sector", he said while highlighting the expected new tax regime in the agriculture sector.

The Governor Punjab emphasized on giving equal importance to all parts of the province in development works so that no area feels deprived.

RDA seals 15 flats, restaurant in Mid-City Apartments

RAWALPINDI (INP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on the directives of the Director General (DG), Kinza Murtaza here on Wednesday sealed 15 flats and a restaurant in the Mid-City Apartments on Old Airport Road. According to RDA spokesman, the RDA Enforcement squad conducted an operation and sealed the residential flats and a restaurant in the Mid-City Apartments in Moza Gangal located on Old Airport Road.

The action was taken as part of the crackdown on the illegal conversion of residential flats into commercial properties, the RDA spokesperson informed. The flats were being used for commercial purposes in violation of RDA regulations, which prohibit such activities in residential zones. The operation was conducted under the supervision of the Director Land RDA, Ghazanfar Ali Awan.

Building Superintendent Fahad Bhatti and Building Surveyor Malik Aamir Mahmood.

This operation is part of RDA's ongoing efforts to enforce zoning laws and maintain the integrity of residential areas within Rawalpindi, he said adding, the RDA is committed to ensuring that the properties within the city adhere to the approved land use and building regulations. He informed that the DG had directed the authorities concerned to continue operation and take strict action against the rules violators.

AIOU's Christian employees celebrate Christmas

ISLAMABAD (APP): A Christmas celebration was held at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) yesterday for Christian staff members. The event was presided over by the University's Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, while the guest of honor was Reverend Father Azam Sadiq of Saint John Paul II Parish, Iqbal Town.

Addressing the gathering, Vice-Chancellor Dr. Nasir Mahmood praised the role of the Christian community in the development of the country, acknowledging their significant contribution to the progress of the university as well. He emphasized that AIOU belongs to everyone and ensures the protection of minority rights, offering Christian staff the same benefits as other employees.

Extending Christmas greetings to the Christian staff, Dr. Nasir Mahmood remarked that AIOU commemorates the birth anniversary of Prophet Jesus (AS) with great enthusiasm every year.

He highlighted that the Holy Quran regards Prophet Jesus (AS) as one of the greatest prophets and mentions him with various honorable titles. He added that the birth of Prophet Jesus (AS) is a joyous occasion not only for Christians but for everyone.

Dr. Mahmood stressed the importance of self-transformation to establish a harmonious society and urged adherence to the teachings of the prophets and aligning

daily lives with the principles of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Reverend Father Azam Sadiq, in his speech, appreciated the Christmas celebration at AIOU and expressed gratitude for the portraits of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Muhammad Iqbal displayed in the university's auditorium. He said these leaders, who were educated in missionary schools, serve as an inspiration for the Christian community to pursue education. He thanked Vice-Chancellor Dr. Nasir Mahmood and the university administration for organizing the Christmas event.

The ceremony was attended by the university's Registrar, Raja Umar Younis;

Director Coordination and Follow-up, Professor Dr. Syed Amir Shah; representatives of the Employees Welfare Association; other staff members and officers; and approximately 80 Christian employees.

A Christmas cake was cut during the event, prayers were offered for the country's development and prosperity, and best wishes were extended to the Christian community. Pastor Shiraz read selected verses from the Bible and spoke about interfaith harmony, national security, and the well-being of the global human society.

The event was jointly organized by the Employees Welfare Association, the Directorate of Works, and the Estate Office.

SC grants bail to woman in phones smuggling case

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Supreme Court of Pakistan on Wednesday granted post-arrest bail to a woman accused of mobile phone smuggling while setting aside the decision of Lahore High Court (LHC).

The SC's Justice Musarrat Hilali wrote the verdict. It said that the LHC should have kept in mind the accused as being woman before canceling her bail. It further said that the high court should also have to view the criminal record and nature of crime in the judgment.

Announcing judgment by giving reference of law is not appropriate in this case, the order said.

The court said that the accused has neither a crime history nor a record of being absconder. It may be mentioned here that 26 iPhones were recovered from the custody of the woman at Lahore Airport.

IRSA releases 78,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 78,300 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 39,100 cusecs.

According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1473.90 feet and was 75.90 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 17,400 cusecs and 36,000 cusecs respectively.

The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1138.00 feet, which was 88.00 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet.

The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 4,400 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively.

The release of water at Galabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 46,100, 32,100, 32,400 and 3,100 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 12,000 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 1,800 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Taliban lash eight in Paktia

PAKTIA (Amu TV): The Taliban publicly lashed eight individuals in the eastern province of Paktia on Wednesday on charges of theft, murder, kidnapping, and "illicit relationships." According to a statement from the Taliban's Supreme Court, each person received 39 lashes and was sentenced to prison terms ranging from two to ten years. Local Taliban judicial officials and other Taliban representatives reportedly attended the punishment.

EU reaffirms help for IDPs

KABUL (Amu TV): On the occasion of International Migrants Day, observed on December 18, the European Union reiterated its commitment to supporting Afghan migrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In a statement on X, the EU emphasized its efforts to integrate migrants and IDPs into their communities through educational programs, job creation initiatives, and economic support. "Everyone deserves a safe and secure home," the EU statement read.

Afghan-Turkish relations expanding, says Consul General



JAWZJAN (TOLOnews): The Turkish consul general, Qasim Kaban, during the graduation ceremony of 86 students from the Afghan Turk Boys' School in Jawzjan, stated that the relationship between Turkey and Afghanistan is not merely political and cultural but a brotherly bond that expands with each passing day. According to Kaban, the Turkish government and people will never forget the people of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, officials from the Maarif Foundation schools in Asia said there would be continued support for Afghanistan from the Turkish government and from the public, adding that they plan to commence educational activities in Helmand province in the near future. Qasim Kaban, the Turkish Consul General in Mazar-e-Sharif, said, "The relationship between Afghanistan and Turkey is

Director of Hajj and Islamic Affairs in Jawzjan, said: "Our dear country, Turkey, strives to advance Islamic, Sharia, and modern sciences in Afghanistan and the world, which are considered both our material and spiritual assets, and such efforts deserve appreciation." Abdul Ahad Rahimi, the deputy director of Jawzjan's education department, stated: "Reading, writing, learning, graduating, acquiring modern and Sharia sciences – these are concepts that the great Prophet of Islam has always emphasized." Some of the graduates from the Afghan Turk School in Sheberghan called on the Islamic Emirate and Turkey to provide scholarships and better educational opportunities at the bachelor's and master's levels. Fardin Hossaini, a graduate, said, "Our request to the Islamic Emirate is to open the path of education and create opportunities for us to continue our studies so that we can serve our society in the future." Another graduate, Shoaib, stated: "We have studied for 12 years and now seek scholarships and access to international universities in various fields." According to the Turkish Maarif Foundation, it currently operates 460 schools and universities in 55 countries, including Afghanistan. Nasrullah Mansoor, the

Over 22m in Afghanistan to need aid by 2025

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for Afghanistan has reported that 22.9 million people in Afghanistan will require humanitarian assistance in 2025. In a report released on Wednesday, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs highlighted that millions of Afghans, particularly women, face severe restrictions imposed by the Taliban. According to the report, these restrictions have jeopardized the safety of Afghan citizens, especially minorities, leaving them vulnerable to discrimination and harm. The report further revealed that out of the 22.9 million people in need, 21 million lack access to adequate healthcare and safe drinking water. Additionally, 14.8 million people are facing severe food insecurity, while 7.8 million women and children urgently require nutritional support. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) also warned of an impending drought crisis that is expected to threaten Afghanistan in early 2025, further exacerbating the humanitarian challenges. The organization stated that humanitarian actors can only provide aid to 16 million of the 22.9 million people in need by 2025 due to funding constraints. This follows a similar trend in 2024, where humanitarian efforts were underfunded, assisting only 15 million out of the 23 million people in need. More than three years after the Taliban's return to power, the economic and social conditions in Afghanistan continue to deteriorate, leaving citizens increasingly impoverished. The international community must urgently address the funding gaps to prevent further suffering and stabilize the situation. Long-term solutions, including investments in infrastructure, healthcare, and women's empowerment, are essential to breaking the cycle of dependency on aid. Without such measures, Afghanistan risks facing an unending humanitarian crisis that could have dire regional and global consequences.

\$698,000 agreement signed for winter aid



KABUL (TOLOnews): The National Disaster Management Authority has signed an agreement worth \$698,547 with the Norwegian Committee. According to the agreement, the allocated funds will be used to provide winter assistance to vulnerable families in the provinces of Parwan and Badakhshan. Mohammad Yousuf Hamad, deputy spokesperson for the National Disaster Management Authority, stated: "Based on this agreement, \$698,547 will be used to provide cash assistance and distribute blankets to 1,630 families in the mentioned provinces." The National Disaster Management Authority told TOLOnews that in the past week alone, it has signed nine cooperation agreements with national and international organizations in the fields of disaster management, risk reduction, and assistance to affected individuals, with a total value of \$6,481,382. Abdul Zahoor Madaber, an economic affairs expert, highlighted the economic significance of such agreements, saying: "Money and liquidity can be considered essential elements for a country's development. Therefore, signing agreements that bring funds and capital into the country can benefit Afghanistan's economy." Qutbuddin Yaqubi, another expert in economic affairs, said: "In emergency situations, there is a need for medicine, food supplies, or hygiene items. These agreements and collaborations play a critically effective and fundamental role in addressing such circumstances." In recent years, floods and earthquakes have caused significant damage to citizens in various provinces of the country.

Minister, UNDP discuss Afghan youth empowerment initiatives

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Mohammad Yunus Rashid, Deputy Minister for Youth Affairs at the Ministry of Information and Culture, met with Stephan Rodrigues, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) representative for Afghanistan, at his office. During the meeting, Deputy Minister Rashid commended UNDP's impactful initiatives in Afghanistan and called for expanding these efforts to include capacity-building programs, job creation, and educational opportunities for Afghan youth. Rodrigues expressed respect for Afghanistan's priorities and reaffirmed UNDP's commitment to supporting initiatives in capacity development, education, and economic empowerment for young people.



It is worth noting that the Ministry's Youth Affairs Directorate has recently provided free training in online business and other skill-development programs to hundreds of youth across the country, with plans to continue these efforts nationwide.

Air pollution very high in Kabul: NEPA head



KABUL (TOLOnews): With the arrival of winter, the air in Kabul becomes increasingly hazardous, particularly during the evening hours. Matul Haq Khalis, the acting head of the National Environmental Protection Agency, revealed in a press conference that the capital's air pollution levels have escalated to a 84% at night. Speaking at a press conference, Matul Haq Khalis said that the main causes of this pollution are insufficient public awareness about the use of fuel materials and economic hardship faced by citizens. According to Khalis, this pollution has short-term and long-term negative impacts on citizens' health, and the media should cooperate in raising awareness in this regard. "Our people's economy has become so weak that when you look at Kabul or other cities with the arrival of winter, air pollution rises significantly. In the evenings, Kabul's air is 84 percent polluted," he said. Matul Haq Khalis further added that women and children are more affected than others by climate change and that the world should not politicize climate change, which is a humanitarian issue. The acting head of the National Environmental Protection Agency emphasized: "Our society has been harmed by climate change, and the world should not link climate change issues to politics." Meanwhile, the deputy head of an organization working in the environmental sector in Afghanistan stated that lack of sufficient infrastructure, poverty, and economic challenges make Afghanistan more vulnerable to climate change, and global stakeholders, the private sector, and government institutions should pay attention

and cooperate in this regard. Izatullah Siddiqi, deputy head of one of Afghanistan's environmental organizations, said: "The lack of sufficient infrastructure, the presence of poverty, and economic challenges all combine, making Afghanistan a vulnerable country." Saifur Rahman Rahmani, a university professor, said: "The world has the responsibility to compensate for the damage caused to developing countries, including Afghanistan. Afghanistan should be supported in adapting to climate change and reducing its impacts." This comes as representatives from environmental organizations and the NEPA traveled to Azerbaijan between November 11th and 22nd to participate in the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Baku, where they shared the challenges caused by climate change in Afghanistan with officials from other countries.

IE appeals to citizens to stay in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLOnews): Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for Islamic Emirate, urged Afghan citizens to refrain from illegal migration, emphasizing the government's ongoing efforts to create job opportunities and improve the domestic economy. Mujahid said: "Afghans should not try to leave the country. Many of our migrants in Iran have returned to their homeland. On the other hand, the Islamic Emirate is making serious efforts to create employment opportunities and improve the country's economy to address the people's economic challenges." Earlier, some Iranian media outlets, quoting officials, reported that Iran has expelled over 1.5 million illegal migrants in the past year. "Over the past year, we have expelled more than 1.5 million undocumented individuals from cities and villages and started biometric and technical processes, such as fingerprinting, to prevent these individuals from returning under different identities," the report reads.

Kandahar's Takhtapul district hit hard by ongoing drought

KANDAHAR (Ariana News): Residents of Takhtapul district of Afghanistan's Kandahar province say they are struggling to survive amid an ongoing drought that has devastated their crops. This rural community mainly relies on agriculture to survive but climate change has virtually ended any hopes of farming. Afghanistan has experienced three consecutive years of drought, including the most devastating drought in 30 years in 2021 and 2022. Climate experts predict that by 2050, 90% of its territory will be affected by drought. Afghanistan is one of the ten countries most vulnerable to climate change. It's also ranked fourth in overall disaster risk. Takhtapul residents have spoken

out about their plight and said they have sustained extensive losses due to the drought. They said in the past they had made a living off farming, but now due to the severe lack of water, their land has become barren. They also said this is forcing their youth and younger generation to find work in other provinces or outside the country. Abdullah, a resident of Takhtapul district of Kandahar, said: "Our youths have gone to Pakistan and other provinces in search of work due to unemployment and drought. There they have wheelbarrows [for day labourer work] or they do other jobs." On the other hand, local officials say that they are trying to reduce unemployment by launch-



ing development projects in this district. Along with droughts and lack of work for young people, the breakdown of roads, lack of health centers and lack of suitable places for education are among the problems that the residents of this district want to solve.

Sweden reflects on 2 decades in Afghanistan, cites few signs of hope

KABUL (Amu TV): In a newly released report, the Swedish government has assessed its two decades of involvement in Afghanistan, highlighting key lessons from its extensive engagement while acknowledging the bleak current state of the country. The report, titled "Experiences and Lessons Learned: Sweden in Afghanistan 2001–2021," emphasizes that after 20 years of international efforts, there are "few hopeful signs" for Afghanistan, particularly for women and girls. From 2001 to 2021, the report says Sweden played a significant role in Afghanistan, contributing through humanitarian aid, civil society support, and

military participation in NATO-led missions. Thousands of Swedes worked in the country, often in dangerous conditions, with six Swedish nationals and two Afghan interpreters losing their lives during the mission, the report says. The report reflects on Sweden's efforts to improve living conditions and support Afghan institutions. It underscores the challenges faced, including shifting global priorities and the eventual collapse of Afghanistan's republican government in August 2021, when the Taliban returned to power. The report says the Taliban's resurgence marked the rollback of many of the gains achieved

during Sweden's 20-year engagement. The report highlights the particularly dire situation for Afghan women and girls, who face severe restrictions on education, work, and basic freedoms. It also notes that Afghanistan has largely fallen off the international agenda as global attention shifts to other crises. Key findings The report says Sweden's efforts, which included humanitarian aid, development projects, and military engagement, were among its most extensive international undertakings. Over 9,500 Swedish Armed Forces members served in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021.

Sweden also contributed SEK 14.7 billion in development assistance, focusing on education, health, gender equality, and infrastructure, the report says. The report highlights a lack of clear, realistic goals throughout Sweden's engagement. Objectives often reflected "wishful thinking" rather than a pragmatic understanding of Afghanistan's complex social and political context. The report says Sweden made notable contributions to healthcare and education, particularly for women and girls. Progress included increased school attendance and healthcare access, often through partnerships with organizations like the Swedish

Committee for Afghanistan (SCA). However, these gains remain vulnerable under Taliban rule. The report says Sweden's military contributions, including participation in NATO-led operations, initially helped maintain regional stability but failed to achieve lasting security. Corruption, weak governance, and a lack of Afghan ownership hindered efforts to build sustainable state institutions. The report says advancing gender equality was a priority, with nearly 90% of Sweden's development programs targeting this goal. While some progress was made, particularly in urban areas, the Taliban's return to power in 2021 has erased

many of these achievements. According to the report, Sweden successfully evacuated nearly 2,000 individuals during the chaotic withdrawal following the Taliban takeover, including Swedish citizens, local staff, and those in need of protection. The report commended the operation's results despite its delayed start and significant logistical challenges. The report outlines six key areas of reflection for future international engagements: Insufficient knowledge of Afghan society and its regional dynamics undermined international strategies. Sweden emphasized the need for deeper cultural

and historical awareness in future missions. While Sweden played an active role in governance and policy discussions, global efforts in Afghanistan were poorly coordinated, limiting their effectiveness. The report says that clear, adaptable, and well-communicated objectives are critical for success. The absence of these hindered Sweden's ability to measure and achieve long-term outcomes. National ownership and realistic timelines are essential for lasting change. Sweden's contributions lacked sufficient local buy-in, reducing their long-term impact. The report says that

greater investment in preparatory training, resources, and continuity for personnel in leadership roles would have improved the execution of Swedish efforts. The report stressed the importance of continuous monitoring and a willingness to adjust strategies based on emerging realities. The report concludes that while Sweden's engagement improved the lives of millions of Afghans—particularly in education and healthcare—the overall mission fell short of its broader objectives. The Taliban's return to power marked a significant setback, erasing much of the progress made over two decades, the report added.

PHC extends PTI's Sher Afzal Marwat protective bail

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has extended protective bail of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and Member National Assembly (MNA) Sher Afzal Marwat till 11th February and directed the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to submit a report on the cases registered against him, on Wednesday.

A two-member bench of the Peshawar High Court, comprising Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Waqar Ahmad heard the petition seeking the quashment of FIRs registered against Sher Afzal Marwat. During the hearing, the petitioner informed the court that he had been acquitted in three cases and that the FIRs had been quashed.

The petitioner had been falsely implicated in several cases and that the FIRs registered against him were baseless. He requested the court to quash the FIRs and direct the authorities to stop harassing him.

The court, after hearing the arguments, extended Marwat's protective bail until February 11 and directed the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to submit a report on the cases registered against him.

Speaking to the media after the hearing, Marwat said that the protest at D-Chowk was not a failure, as the entire world had condemned the firing incident. He emphasized that PTI workers had been fired upon, and demanded inquiry who had ordered the firing and why.

He also stressed the need for negotiations between the government and PTI, stating that the country could not function without dialogue. He expressed hope that the political leadership would agree on a lasting formula for the country's progress.

Marwat criticized the government for its handling of the economy, saying that the country was facing severe economic challenges. He also criticized the government for its failure to provide justice to the families of the victims of the D-Chowk firing incident.

Marwat said that PTI a democratic party and believed in the power of dialogue. He expressed hope that the government would engage in meaningful negotiations with PTI to resolve the country's problems.

Court grants bail to four PTI's leaders including Adil Baizai: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has extended the protective bail of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders, including Member National Assembly (MNA) from Balochistan Adil Baizai, Senator Falak Naz, Ali Zaman advocate and Hamida Shah while adjourned hearing on Alia Hamza petition till 24th Dec, on Wednesday.

A two-member bench of the Peshawar High Court, comprising Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Waqar Ahmad, heard the petitions filed by the PTI leaders seeking extension of their protective bail. The court also extended the protective bail of PTI leader Adil Baizai and Advocate Ali Zaman till January 16, directing the federal government and relevant authorities to submit a report in this regard.

During the hearing, Alam Khan Adenzai advocate representing Adil Baizai informed the court that the petitioner MNA from Balochistan and had been de-seated earlier, but was later reinstated by the Supreme Court.

Justice Sahibzada Asadullah inquired about the reason for Adil Baizai's presence in Peshawar, to which Advocate Alam Khan Adenzai replied that the petitioner's houses in Balochistan had been demolished, and he had come to Peshawar to seek protection. The court directed the federal government and relevant authorities to submit a report regarding the cases registered against Adil Basheer.

In another case, the court refused to extend the protective bail of Alia Hamza, directing her to appear before the relevant court. Advocate Alam Khan Adenzai, representing Alia Hamza, informed the court that the petitioner had filed a petition seeking extension of her protective bail, but the court refused to grant the extension.

Justice Sahibzada Asadullah inquired about the reason for Alia Hamza's failure to appear before the relevant court, to which Advocate Alam Khan Adenzai replied that the petitioner had appeared before the relevant court earlier, but was not granted bail. The court directed Alia Hamza to appear before the relevant court and seek bail. The PTI leaders had filed petitions seeking extension of their protective bail in various cases registered against them.

IHC orders SZABMU to re-conduct MDCAT

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A division bench of Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday instructed the Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Medical University (SZABMU) to conduct medical and dental colleges admission test (MDCAT) again within two weeks.

A two-judge bench comprising Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Saman Raffat Imtiaz heard the intra court appeal (ICA) against the verdict of the single member bench. The petitioners' lawyer said that the single-member bench had declared that 31 questions out of 200 were out of syllabus and course. He said that the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) declared firstly 25 but later 18 questions out of the syllabus.

He said that there were a total of 150 seats allocated for Islamabad of which 50 were for admissions in medical colleges while 100 for dental colleges. Addressing the lawyer, the court said that if you are admitting the opinion of PMDC then you have to accept it in letter and spirit.

On the query of the bench, the registrar of the university said that passing marks in the test are 50 percent to which the court said that if the 18 questions are excluded then the passing marks would be 90. Justice Saman Raffat Imtiaz said that the university has to satisfy the students on their reservations instead of court.

Chief Justice remarked that the court has to ensure that there would be no injustice with anybody. The PMDC lawyer said that the single-member bench didn't terminate the test result. However, he said that it had given another opportunity to the students. He said that the single bench had asked to re-take the test on the previous fee.

The university's lawyer said that they were conducting the exam again on December 22. Petitioners' lawyer prayed the court to further delay the test for one more week as a number of students have to come from abroad. After hearing arguments, the court ordered the university to conduct the exam within two weeks. The court said that it would pass a written order later on.

NA speaker to mediate between govt, Opp

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In a major development, National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq agreed to play his role in political dialogue between the government and opposition.

"My office is always ready to mediate between the government and opposition in order to decrease the political temperature in the country," NA speaker said. He said that negotiations are very important between the government and opposition and yesterday's debate in National Assembly was also very fruitful.

It merits mention here that the government had formally invited the opposition to hold dialogue during the National Assembly session on Tuesday. "The government is ready to talk to PTI on every issue," PM's advisor Rana Sanaullah had said during the NA session. PTI leader Sher Afzal Marwat had also advised the political leaders to sit together to start political dialogue.

13 dead after naval vessel hits passenger boat

MUMBAI (Reuters): At least 13 people died when a boat with more than 100 passengers capsized off the coast of India's financial capital Mumbai after colliding with an Indian Navy boat on Wednesday, officials said. The navy said 99 people were rescued with efforts ongoing for others.

"An Indian Navy craft lost control while undertaking engine trials in Mumbai Harbour due to engine malfunction. As a result, the boat collided with a passenger ferry which subsequently capsized," the Navy said in a statement on X. Local TV channels showed a boat carrying at least five people hitting the passenger vehicle, causing the accident.



RIYADH: Federal Minister for Interior, Mohsin Naqvi visiting Directorate of Passports of Saudi Arabia.

KP CM directs expedition of work on computerization of land record

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, has directed the concerned authorities to expedite Computerization of land record in the province and assured that the financial resources required for completing the computerization process will be provided on a priority basis. The Chief Minister also directed to ensure the provision of necessary resources for the completion of Service Delivery Centers (SDCs). He emphasized that completed SDCs should be made operational without any delay for public convenience, and in areas where land or government buildings are unavailable, SDCs should be set up in rented buildings to avoid delays.

The Chief Minister issued these directives while presiding over a meeting regarding land record computerization held at the Chief Minister's Secretariat on Wednesday. Provincial Minister for Revenue Nazir Abbasi, Senior Member Board of Revenue Syed Imtiaz Hussain Shah, and other relevant officials also attended at the meeting.

The meeting took stock of the progress made on the ongoing land record computerization project in the province. The Chief Minister directed that Patwaris serving outside their designated Mauzas must be relocated to their respective jurisdictions within a final deadline of 15 days. Strict action will be taken against those who fail to comply.

Additionally, the Chief Minister directed for starting land settlement in Nathiagali to prevent possible land disputes in the near future. He also directed for the provision of vehicles needed for land settlement and digitization in the merged districts. The Chief Minister stressed that land record computerization is a dire need of the time and an effective way to curb corruption. He emphasized prioritizing GIS mapping of land records and said that delays or inefficiencies in these projects would not be tolerated. Where staff is needed,

temporary arrangements should be made immediately while simultaneously initiating the process for permanent recruitment.

During the briefing on the progress of land record computerization, it was told that out of the 3,562 Mauzas included in the first two phases of the project, computerization of 3,296 Mauzas has been completed, and 2,945 Mauzas have been made live. The districts of Abbottabad, Mardan, Buner, Kohat, Tank, Shangla, and Hangu are leading with 100% computerization. In Peshawar, the computerization process is 98% complete. Overall, the progress on land record computerization in the province stands at 83%, while land settlement is in process in the merged districts, Upper Dir, and Lower Dir. In various districts of the province, 23 Service Delivery Centers have been completed, while work on 23 additional centers is in progress.

Meanwhile, The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Oil and Gas Company Limited (KPOGCL) has successfully completed the bidding process for the exploration and production of the Miran Block, under which, 49% of the shares of the Miran Block have been sold out while 51% of the shares will remain with KPOGCL without any risk. The project is expected to bring direct investment of Rs 22 billion into the province. Furthermore, 100% cost of the exploration phase will be borne by the relevant consortium.

This was told in a meeting of the KPOGCL, held here the other day with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair. Special Assistant to CM for Energy, Tariq Sadozai, Secretary Energy Nisar Khan, CEO KPOGCL, and other relevant officials attended the meeting.

The Chief Minister commended the performance of KPOGCL's management for successfully completing the bidding process of the Miran Block, adding that this milestone will not only further strengthen the company but also play a significant role in

the region's development.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister was given a detailed briefing on the company's corporate business strategy, oil and gas potential in the province, recent discoveries, investments, and other related matters.

It was highlighted in the meeting that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa plays a significant role in the country's oil and gas production. The province produces 30,000 barrels of oil per day, which constitutes 42% of the country's total production. Similarly, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa produces 410 MMCFD of gas, which accounts for 13% of the national output. The province also produces 800 tons of LPG daily, representing 40% of the national LPG production.

The meeting was also told that KPOGCL is also investing in multiple other oil and gas blocks. Four new high-impact recent discoveries have increased the province's daily gas production by 180 MMCF and oil production by 5,550 barrels. Similarly, it was informed that from 2013 to 2024, the company's equity injection amounted to Rs 4 billion.

While briefing on the KPOGCL's budget estimates, it was informed that the annual budget has been prepared in line with the investment plan approved by the provincial cabinet. For the exploration of new blocks, Rs 3,00 billion has been allocated in the budget of current fiscal year.

On this occasion, the Chief Minister also directed the quarters concerned to expedite work on ongoing hydropower projects in the province and conduct surveys for the construction of small hydropower plants in the merged districts. He also directed the early initiation of the project regarding solarization of masajid and households in the province, emphasizing that the provincial government is taking concrete steps to resolve electricity-related issues faced by the public. The solarization of masajid and households is an important step in this regard and must be completed in time, he concluded.

China, India should put border issue at 'appropriate place': Chinese FM

BEIJING (Reuters): China and India should put their border issue at an "appropriate place" in bilateral relations, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told Ajit Doval, India's national security adviser, in a meeting on Wednesday, according to China's state broadcaster CCTV.

The two officials reaffirmed the two countries' commitment to seek a package of solutions to the border dispute that is fair and acceptable for both, CCTV's readout of the meeting in Beijing showed. They also highlighted strengthening routine controls and management of the border to jointly maintain peace in the area, according to CCTV.

The meeting in Beijing between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and India's National Security Adviser

Ajit Doval followed a milestone pact two months ago on lowering military tensions at a contested part of their border. Wang called on the two sides to engage in candid communication, enhance mutual trust and promote collaboration, a Chinese foreign ministry statement said.

The two officials reaffirmed both sides' commitment to seek a package of solutions to the dispute that was fair and acceptable for both, the ministry said. Wednesday's meeting marked the first formal talks between the two countries' special representatives on Sino-India border issues since late 2019. Paving the way for the talks was an agreement in October allowing for the disengagement of their troops at two face-off points. The world's two most popu-

lous nations are intense geopolitical rivals and have accused each other of trying to seize territory along their unofficial divide, known as the Line of Actual Control. Their shared 3,500-kilometre frontier has been a perennial source of tension between the nuclear-armed neighbours. China and India fought a brief but bloody border war in 1962.

Relations plummeted after a brutal skirmish in 2020 high in their Himalayan borderlands that killed at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers. However, New Delhi said in October it had reached an agreement with Beijing on patrols in disputed areas. Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a rare formal meeting soon after.

Russia detains suspect over murder of chemical weapons chief Igor Kirillov

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia said on Wednesday it had detained an Uzbek man who had confessed to planting and detonating a bomb which killed a top general, Igor Kirillov, in Moscow on the instructions of Ukraine's SBU security service. Kirillov, who was chief of Russia's Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Protection Troops, was killed outside his apartment building on Tuesday along with his assistant when a bomb attached to an electric scooter went off.

He is the most senior Russian military officer to be assassinated in Russia by Ukraine, Ukraine's SBU intelligence service took responsibility for the killing after Ukraine accused Kirillov of being responsible for the use of chemical weapons against Ukrainian troops - something Moscow denies. Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes serious crimes, said in a statement on Wednesday that the unnamed suspect had told them he had come to Moscow to carry out an assignment for Ukraine's intelligence services.

In a video published by the Baza news outlet, which is known to have sources in Russian law-enforcement circles, the suspect is seen sitting in

a van describing his actions. It was not clear under what conditions he was speaking and Reuters could not immediately verify the video's authenticity. Dressed in a winter coat, the suspect is shown saying he had come to Moscow, bought an electric scooter, and received an improvised explosive device.

He describes placing the device on the electric scooter and parking it outside the apartment block where Kirillov lived. Investigators cited him as saying he set up a surveillance camera in a hire car which, they said, was watched in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro by people who organised the killing. The suspect, who is thought to be 29, is shown saying he remotely detonated the device when Kirillov left the building. He says Ukraine had offered him \$100,000 and residency in a European country. Maria Zakharova, a spokeswoman for Russia's Foreign Ministry, said Moscow would raise the assassination at the United Nations Security Council on Dec. 20.

"We see that the Kyiv regime has taken responsibility once again for a new terrorist attack. All these SBU losers and the mad Kiev regime are

all tools managed by the Anglo-Saxons," she said, using a term Russia uses to describe the United States and Britain. "They are the main beneficiaries of Kyiv's terrorism." The US State Department said Washington had no connection to the killing or any prior knowledge of it. A spokesperson for British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Kirillov had "propagated an illegal invasion and imposed suffering and death on the Ukrainian people."

Russian President Vladimir Putin has not commented publicly on the killing. Dmitry Peskov, his spokesperson, praised the work of the Russian intelligence services in investigating the case and accused Ukraine of using "terrorist methods." Former President Dmitry Medvedev criticised an editorial in the London Times newspaper which called the killing "a legitimate act of defence by a threatened nation". He said the same logic would imply Western officials providing Ukraine with military aid would be legitimate targets for Russia and called the management of The Times "lousy jackals" who could also be considered accomplices and military targets.

Israeli settlers set up tents in Lebanese border town

BEIRUT: Israeli settlers crossed into Lebanese territory on Wednesday, entering the border town of Maroun Al-Ras in a significant incident. The group erected tents and took pictures of themselves in the area. The Israeli army, which has been present in Lebanese territory since Oct. 1 and remains in the border area, said that the "serious matter" is being investigated.

Photos taken by the settlers showed two tents and a group of men accompanied by two children. The group raised banners featuring the Star of David, with the Lebanese cedar — symbolic of the Lebanese flag — prominently displayed in the center. It was later discovered that one of the settlers had recently shared a video on social media in which he told his child, who accompanied him, that Lebanon belongs to Israel. The video had previously ignited widespread outrage in Lebanon.

The Israeli violations extended to areas near sites belonging to UNIFIL forces operating south of the Litani River. A UNIFIL statement reported "activities by the Israeli army near one of our sites in Maroun Al-Ras," describing the incident as "both dangerous and unacceptable, as it

jeopardizes the safety of our personnel." The two incidents coincided with a meeting of the committee responsible for overseeing the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. Held at the headquarters of the Italian unit in Ras Al-Naqura, the talks brought together military representatives from the US, France, Lebanon, Israel and UNIFIL.

For the third consecutive day, Israeli forces have continued demolishing and bulldozing homes, particularly in the town of Naqoura. According to the town's mayor, Ali Awada, "the extent of systematic destruction in the town has reached 70 percent since the ceasefire agreement took effect on Nov. 27." Awada added: "The Israeli forces are systematically demolishing the town, located just 3 km from the border. We have been unable to assess the full extent of the damage or losses firsthand, as the Israeli military has prohibited citizens from entering the town to inspect their properties. However, images and videos from the area clearly reveal Israeli machinery bulldozing homes, shops and civilian facilities in what seems to be a calculated act of retaliation against the

town and its people."

He expressed his surprise at "the failure of UNIFIL forces and those responsible for monitoring the ceasefire to prevent Israeli forces from demolishing infrastructure and civilian facilities in several towns, particularly in Naqoura, where the UNIFIL headquarters is located." The destruction extended to areas of Tyre Harfa, Al-Jabeen and Sheheen in the Tyre District, with residents of Tyre reporting the sound of explosions. Israeli military reconnaissance aircraft were operating at low altitudes around the clock over the southern airspace as well as Beirut and its southern suburbs.

The Lebanese army, in coordination with UNIFIL forces, recovered several bodies of Hezbollah members who were killed in confrontations with the Israeli army during the extensive war launched by the Israeli military. In the town of Adaiseh, located in the Marjeyoun district, the estimated number of bodies was about 30, all of which were retrieved by the Lebanese Red Cross. The process of retrieving the bodies from the town of Taybeh is still awaiting approval from Israel, as requested by UNIFIL forces. — Arab News

Pak Navy Commissions offshore patrol vessel PNS Yamama

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy has commissioned its Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV), PNS YAMAMA, at Constanta Port, Romania. Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi, graced the ceremony as Chief Guest and handed over the traditional Command Scroll to Commanding Officer of PNS YAMAMA, Deputy Fleet Commander of Romanian Navy, Rear Admiral (UH) Marian Ciobotaru, and the Ambassador of Pakistan to Romania, Mr. Arshad Jaan Pathan, were also present on the occasion.

While addressing the ceremony, Chief Guest emphasized the significance of this project and highlighted the additional set of capabilities that PNS YAMAMA brings to Pakistan Navy's sphere of operations. He further stated that these platforms are designed to enhance full spectrum of Navy's maritime operations. Earlier this year, Pakistan Navy



inducted first ship of OPV Batch II into its fleet on 6 September 2024. Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi commended the exceptional professionalism and dedication of DAMEN Shipyards and expressed confidence in the prospects of future cooperation in delivering cutting-edge technologies to Pakistan Navy.

PNS YAMAMA is the final vessel of OPV Batch II constructed at DAMEN Shipyards, Galati, Romania, and the Netherlands, including members of Pakistani community.

The ship is equipped with state-of-the-art electronic warfare, anti-ship, and anti-air warfare capabilities. Additionally, it is capable of embarking a multirole helicopter and can operate independently or as part of a task force for extended durations to execute a variety of missions, thereby safeguarding Pakistan's maritime interests. The commissioning ceremony was attended by high-level dignitaries from Pakistan, Romania, and the Netherlands, including members of Pakistani community.