

**PM condoles**  
LAHORE (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday expressed heartfelt grief and sorrow over the death of Pakistan People's Party's former member of the National Assembly Makhdoom Syed Ali Hassan Gilani in a traffic accident. The prime minister, in a press statement issued by the PM Office, offered his condolences to the family members of the late Syed Ali Hassan Gilani.

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**PM attends funeral**  
LAHORE (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday attended the funeral prayer of Captain Muhammad Zohaib-ud-Din Shaheed. The funeral prayer was attended by Corps Commander Lahore Lt. General Syed Aamer Raza, senior civil and military officials. The prime minister met with the family of shaheed captain and expressed his condolence.

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LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif offering Fateha after the funeral of Captain Muhammad Zohaib ud Din Shaheed.

## Gandapur visits CTD headquarters



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur visited the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) Headquarters on Sunday, and inaugurated the newly constructed Investigation and Intelligence Block. Equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, the new block features an auditorium, conference room, library, offices, and other modern amenities.

Advisor to the Chief Minister on Information, Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry, Inspector General of Police Akhtar Hayat Gandapur, Additional Chief Secretary for Home Affairs Muhammad Abid Majeed, and other senior officials accompanied the Chief Minister.

During a briefing, police officials highlighted key initiatives taken by the incumbent provincial government for the capacity building of CTD to enable it effectively deal with the prevailing situation; and it was informed that new units including Data Collection, Data Mining, Crime Scene, and Cybercrime Units, have

been established to provide technical support for counter-terrorism efforts adding that a Central Intelligence Agency has also been formed to streamline intelligence operations, and a Counter-Terrorism Financing and Extortion Unit has been set up to curb financial support for terrorism and extortion activities.

The Chief Minister was informed that 18 dedicated public prosecutors have been appointed in CTD to ensure effective prosecution of terrorism cases, and added that to strengthen intelligence operations, 314 detective officer positions have been created, and Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams equipped with advanced weapons and equipment have been deployed in all districts. Forensic lab has been upgraded with modern equipment and trained specialists, while 30 CTD vehicles have been fitted with jamming devices.

Moreover, CTD personnel have been provided with modern laptops, mobile phones, and bullet-proof vehicles in sensitive districts while advanced drones, night vision devices, and thermal guns have also been introduced

to monitor terrorist activities. It was apprised that CTD's workforce has been expanded by 1,263 personnel, raising the total strength from 3,167 to 4,430.

Officials noted that these measures have significantly improved CTD's overall performance, resulting in the prevention of several terror plots through intelligence-based operations. The conviction rate for terrorism cases has increased from 13% in 2022 to 38% in 2024, while the average remand period for suspects has risen from 1.4 days to 25 days. The number of bail rejections for suspects has also increased from 55 in 2022 to 123 in 2024.

Speaking to the media on this occasion, Chief Minister Gandapur praised the progress made over the past year, noting that the CTD's infrastructure in 2023 was almost non-existent, and in just one year, we have significantly strengthened the CTD, and its performance has improved tremendously.

He commended the police for their dedication and announced an additional Rs. 1 billion to further enhance the CTD's capabilities. "We are now self-sufficient in forensic lab operations and no longer require support from other provinces," he said and added that plans are also underway to procure 20 bomb-proof vehicles, high-tech kits, sniper rifles, advanced drones, and thermal devices for the CTD.

## Movement for Imran's release strengthened, says Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, has stated that the movement for Imran Khan's release has gained further strength following the D-Chowk incident.

He said that if the illegitimate government believes that oppression and brutality would weaken the movement, they are gravely mistaken.

Barrister Dr. Saif said that everyone has full confidence in the leadership of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, adding that rumors of internal differences within PTI are merely wishful thinking by opponents and have no basis in reality.

He further said that under the leadership of Ali Amin Gandapur, the movement for Imran Khan's release would gain more momentum, and Imran Khan would soon be among the people. He said that by resorting to violence and brutality, the illegitimate government had only harmed itself. Dr. Saif said that the blood of innocent workers would bring the illegitimate government to its inevitable downfall.

"The love for Imran Khan in the hearts of the people is deep-rooted, and no tactics by the illegitimate government can diminish it and the recent actions have only strengthened the public's bond with Imran Khan, who has now become a symbol of their determination."

## Govt shares details of PTI protest

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on November 21 directed the federal government to take all necessary measures to maintain law and order in the federal capital, says the handout issued by the Ministry of Interior on Sunday, sharing all the details of the protest fiasco orchestrated by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

Throughout the protest march from Peshawar to Red Zone Islamabad, violent protestors of PTI aggressively engaged LEAs repeatedly using fire arms and all sorts of other weaponry including steel sling shots, stun grenades, tear gas shells and nail studded batons to force their way to Red Zone Islamabad. This violent protest was primarily orchestrated and logistically & financially sustained and supported by the resources of the government of KP.

Alarmingly, PTI's protest included violent and trained miscreant elements including many illegal Afghan nationals who spearheaded the riots and violent activities throughout the march. These miscreants, employed as violent vanguard, comprised of approximately 1500 hard core fighters working directly under absconder and proclaimed offender Murad Saeed. This vanguard group, using militant tactics violently attacked the LEAs and breached the blocks with the help of government machinery paving the way for the second wave of vehicles and protestors to cross.

# The Frontier Post

## 8 terrorists killed, captain, soldier embraced martyrdom



RAWALPINDI (APP): Security Forces killed eight Khwarij terrorists and others 9 injured while a captain and a soldier embraced martyrdom in two separate operations conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from November 29 to December 1.

"An intelligence based operation was conducted in general area Baka Khel, Bannu District on the reported presence of khwarij. During the conduct of the operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location and resultantly killed five khwarij, while nine khwarij got injured," said an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release.

However, during the operation, Sepoy Iftikhar Hussain (Age: 29 years, resident of: District Jhang), having fought gallantly, embraced shahadat.

"In another operation conducted in general area Shagai, Khyber District, three Khwarij were sent to hell, while two were apprehended by the security forces," it further said. During an intense fire exchange, Captain



Muhammad Zohaib Ud Din (Age: 25 years, resident of: District Lahore), who was leading his troops from the front, fought bravely, paid the ultimate sacrifice and embraced shahadat. These khwarij were involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces as well as innocent civilians. "Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other kharij found in the area as security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve," the news release said.

**President, PM commend security forces for twin operations against Khawarij in KP**  
President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday praised the security forces for their successful operations in Bannu and Khyber districts. They commended their bravery for eliminating eight Khawarij terrorists and arresting eleven others injured in two separate operations.

The president and prime minister paid tributes to Shaheed Captain Muhammad Zohaibuddin and soldier Iftikhar Hussain, who were martyred during the operations, and acknowledged their sacrifices, President Secretariat Press Wing and PM Office Media Wing, in separate press releases said.

President Zardari emphasized that the sacrifices of the martyrs for the country's security would not be in vain and that the entire nation would remember the sacrifices of those who laid down their lives for the motherland. He reiterated the commitment to continue operations till the eradication of terrorism and assured the nation that they would stand with their brave security forces in the fight against terrorism.

The president also prayed for the elevation of the martyrs' souls and grant of patience for their families. The prime minister prayed for the high ranks of the shaheed personnel of Pakistan Army and grant of patience for the bereaved families.

The fight against terrorism would continue till the complete eradication of this menace from the country, the press release quoted the prime minister as saying.

The officers and personnel of the Pakistan Army were protecting the country from its enemies without caring for their lives, he added. The prime minister said the entire nation, including him, was proud of the brave officers and soldiers of the Pakistan Army, adding the Pakistani nation could never forget the sacrifices of its martyrs. He said the nefarious designs of terrorists and enemies of the country to spread chaos in Pakistan would never succeed. The brave and courageous young men who sacrificed their future for this country and their families, filled with the spirit of sacrifice, were the pride of the entire Pakistani nation, he observed.

The prime minister reiterated that the entire nation stood shoulder to shoulder with their armed forces in this fight against terrorism.

## Governor Kundi chairs 'grand jirga' to restore peace in Kurram

KOHAT (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, expressed his commitment to restoring peace in Kurram district and stressed the need for local efforts in resolving the region's security challenges.

Speaking at a grand jirga of political leaders and tribal elders in Kohat, Kundi said, "I am ready to go to Kurram and sit with the jirga for as many days as they ask. We must resolve our own issues; no other country or province can do this for us."

The grand jirga was attended by various political figures, including Federal Minister Engineer Amir Muqam, Awami National Party's Mian Iftikhar Hussain, PPP Provincial President Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha, Jamaat-e-Islami's Professor Ibrahim, Qaumi Watan Party's Sikandar Hayat Khan Sherpao, National Democratic Movement's Bushra

Gohar, former Federal Minister Sajid Hussain Tori, Kohat Mayor Qari Sher Zaman, Ibn-e-Ali, Ahmed Ibrahim Pracha, Asif Ibrahim, Haji Noor Jat, Maulana Abdullah Wahid, and other tribal elders.

Commissioner Kohat, Motasim Billah Shah, moderated the event.

Governor Kundi emphasized the need to end the use of social media to spread hatred and called for identifying the elements responsible for disturbing peace within the community. He urged public cooperation with security forces to carry out joint operations aimed at disarming the province.

"We cannot bring food and medicine to the area, but I issued instructions to the Red Crescent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to provide all possible aid while I was on my Umrah trip," he added.

Praising the Kurram Peace Jirga members,

Kundi acknowledged the political leadership for coming together despite differing ideologies.

He pointed out that, for the sake of peace and stability in the province, political parties must unite, regardless of differences. "We must work together for the peace of Kurram, Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, and the entire province, including merged districts.

We need to conduct an All-Party Conference on the security and rights of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and I will invite the Chief Minister to participate," he said.

Highlighting the important role of religious leaders in promoting peace, Kundi called on them to advocate for peace and prevent displacement in the Province.

He reminded the jirga that political differences should be put aside for the

greater good of peace. "Negotiation is the solution to our problems. There are good and bad elements in every sphere of life, but we must work to strengthen the rule of law," he said.

The Governor also stressed the need for addressing the grievances of the youth in the province and reiterated that any external forces in the area likely received support from local elements.

"We must protect our youth and remove their doubts. The sacrifice of our security forces, media, and the children of the Army Public School must not be forgotten," he added.

Kundi announced that their demands would be presented for government and assured that the political leadership would meet with the President, Prime Minister, and Chief of Army Staff to address the security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

## Sharjeel greets Sindhis worldwide on Sindhi Culture Day

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon, while extending heartfelt greetings to Sindhis around the world on the auspicious occasion of Sindhi Culture Day, stated that this day celebrates the rich heritage, vibrant traditions, and timeless values of Sindhi culture.

He emphasized that the Sindhi Ajrak, Topi, literature, music, and folk arts are enduring symbols of Sindh's deep-rooted civilization and peaceful coexistence. On the occasion of

International Sindhi Culture Day, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, stated in a message that the Sindh government, under the visionary leadership of Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto and President Asif Ali Zardari, remains committed to preserving and promoting Sindhi culture.

He highlighted that the PPP has consistently worked to organize cultural fairs, restore historical sites, and support Sindhi artists and artisans.

He stated that the Sindh government has consistently promoted the Sindhi language, culture, and traditions of peaceful coexistence through education, media, and cultural events.

He emphasized that cultural diversity is the province's strength. On Sindhi Culture Day, he added, we also renew our commitment to peace, unity, and solidarity across the country.



## 'Straight firing by LEAs on protestors' Tarar dares PTI to show video evidence

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar on Sunday dares the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to share the video evidence with the public which could prove that the Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) had opened straight firing on its protestors who descended on Islamabad a couple of days ago.

"I have shared the video evidence that show how a person from the protest told the protestors to open indiscriminate firing on the police. Now, I challenge the PTI to share one video of straight firing or live ammunition by the LEAs against the protestors," said the minister while addressing a news conference.

The minister was flanked by Federal Secretary for Interior Khurram Ali Agha, IG Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi and Chief Commissioner Islamabad Ali Randhawa. Different videos were played during the press conference that shown how the PTI protestors used guns, shells and marbles against the LEAs.

Tarar categorically rejected the propaganda being peddled by the PTI on the social media regarding the direct firing on protestors, saying it was the PTI which brought professional criminals and Afghan Nationals to the protest to ensure that there would be a bloodshed in the whole city.

He said Murad Saeed, who was hiding in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief



Minister House, was also present in the protest and led an armed group that wielded guns, shells and glass marbles which were recovered from them later on their arrest from the frontline.

No personnel of the LEA is allowed for the live ammunition, he said, adding that the fake videos and pictures were being created to cover up their humiliation and political failure from the so called final call.

He said that the Pakistan Institute of the Medical Sciences (PIMS) and Poly Clinic had already issued their press releases that clearly stated that no death occurred due to the firing of the law enforcement agencies. "Likewise, we are calling them out for their fake propaganda and communicating the fact to the people through different channels," he added.

He said the armed protestors were being identified through video evidence as there were a large number of people who were directly involved in creating chaos and anarchy in the country.

The minister underlined the need for effective prosecution of those involved in

challenging the writ of the state and martyring and injuring the personnel of different LEAs.

"We had received the intelligence reports that an attempt was being made to create chaos, anarchy and killing under the garb of the so called final call so that some political scores could be made over dead bodies."

He said the government had indicated time and again during different press conferences that they wanted the dead bodies to achieve ulterior motives and for that matter, they used tax payer money and resources of the KPK government. The minister said the Government had proposed them to hold the protest at the Sangjani area but they were hell bent on holding the protest at D-chowk which is just near to the red zone where the Belarusian President was staying. He said that the PTI had a track record to stage violent protests in the country and had been giving a call for protest whenever there was a visit of foreign delegation in the country, citing the recent protests by the party at the time SCO summit which was attended by 12 countries' prime ministers.





KARACHI: Renowned singer Taj Mastani performing on the occasion of Sindh Culture Day outside Karachi Press Club. —APP Photo

### PTI leaders at new heights of cowardice: Azma Bokhari

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari has said that the current leadership of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is at the lowest level of cowardice.

In a statement, she said the PTI is hiding its disgrace and infamy behind fake news and rumours. She said, "Those who ran away, leaving the workers behind, now have no shame in talking about their workers?"

She said that attacking the federation with mobs does not lead to an NRO. The real culprits behind PTI's downfall are Gandapur and Bushra Bibi, she added.

The media around the world witnessed how Ali Amin Gandapur and Bushra Bibi's vehicles were attacked with sticks and stones by their own workers. Those who are now making provocative statements should be ashamed of themselves, she maintained.

The Information Minister added that Bushra Bibi alone was enough to harm the PTI founder and his party. This was PTI's last failed rebellion, and now the extremist and disruptive group will not repeat the mistake of marching on Islamabad again, she maintained.

### Boy recovered from Mardan

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore police on Sunday recovered a "kidnapped" boy from Mardan (KP).

A 14-year-old boy working in Shah Alam Market had gone missing some days ago. His family had lodged a case. SSP Investigation Lahore Muhammad Naveed had directed police to recover him as soon as possible.

In-charge Investigation Mochi Gate Muhammad Ramzan along with a team recovered Muhammad Arshad from Mardan. When SSP Muhammad Naveed gave the police team the task of immediate recovery of the boy, the police sprang into action and Muhammad Arshad was found with the help of modern technology including human intelligence, CCTV cameras. According to police, Muhammad Arshad works in Shah Alam Market and had gone to Mardan without informing the family.

## Sindh's cultural day reflects harmony and heritage: Nisar Shah

ISLAMABAD (APP): Sindh Energy Minister Nisar Shah on Sunday said that the Sindh Culture Day signify as a celebration of the province's timeless traditions, values, and harmony.

In a special message on the occasion, he said that this day symbolises shared values of brotherhood, peace, and cultural pride, a private news channel reported. "Sindh Culture

Day is a powerful reflection of Sindh's enduring heritage of tolerance and unity", he said.

He highlighted Sindh's historical role as a beacon of peace and coexistence, stating that the province has been a lighthouse of harmony and love for centuries. Shah reiterated the Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) commitment to safeguarding and promoting Sindh's

cultural heritage.

He said that such celebrations help foster unity and ensure that the rich traditions of Sindh remain a source of inspiration for future generations.

Across the province, Sindh Culture Day is being celebrated with traditional fervour, marked by cultural performances, rallies, and ceremonies showcasing Sindh's vibrant heritage.

## Right to govern belongs to elected representatives

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Assembly (PA) Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan has said the right to govern the country belongs to the elected representatives of the state.

Attending a prize and certificate distribution ceremony at Jamia Salfia Faisalabad as the chief guest on Sunday, he said it was unacceptable to burn anyone's house under the guise of dissent, said a media release issued here.

Malik Ahmad stressed that acts of vandalism and arson in the name of poli-

tics would not be tolerated as politics was not about chaos and unrest but a means to serve the public. He commended the country's institutions and law-enforcement agencies for maintaining law and order, stating that they deserve appreciation for their efforts and sacrifices. He made it clear that acts of vandalism under the guise of politics would not be tolerated.

Highlighting the importance of libraries, he praised the library of Jamia Salfia, acknowledging its vital role in

promoting knowledge and underscoring the significance of libraries in national development.

The ceremony was attended by a large number of notable figures, including Senator Professor Sajid Mir, Ameer of Markazi Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith Pakistan, Maulana Abdul Rasheed Hijazi, Secretary General, Professor Yaseen Zafar, Principal of Jamia Salfia, Dr. Hafiz Abdul Kareem, Hafiz Sohaib Meer Muhammadi, along with local scholars and distinguished personalities.

## Restoration of religious sites discussed

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Minorities Ramesh Singh Arora chaired a significant meeting at the National College of Arts (NCA) on Sunday, where discussions focused on the technical support required for the restoration and upgradation of religious places of worship, including Gurdwaras, churches, and other places of spiritual importance.

The meeting was attended by NCA Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Murtaza Jafferi and faculty members of the institution. During the meeting, Arora emphasized the importance of collaboration with third-party experts to provide technical input and support for the restoration and preservation of these religious

sites, ensuring their historical and cultural significance is maintained for future generations.

The NCA administration presented a comprehensive documentary that highlighted the college's rich heritage and its role in fostering artistic excellence. Additionally, another archival documentary showcased the significant contributions of Sikh students during the era of Mayo School of Arts. These documentaries provided the minister with a deeper understanding of NCA's role in preserving cultural diversity.

The NCA administration also informed Minister Arora about an upcoming project – a documentary on the first-ever Sikh Vice-Chancellor of NCA, a significant figure

in the college's history. The minister lauded the initiative, emphasizing the importance of documenting such milestones that reflect the institution's commitment to inclusivity and cultural unity.

Minister Arora also highlighted the importance of interfaith harmony and cultural unity, underscoring that projects like these would contribute to promoting peace and understanding among different communities. He hoped that the meeting was a step forward in strengthening the relationship between the provincial government, NCA, and various religious communities, focusing on the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of interfaith dialogue.

## All Pakistan Bilingual Declamation Contest organized

### F.P. Report

SANGHAR: 6th All Pakistan Bilingual Declamation Contest was organized, at Cadet College Sanghar (CCS). Senator Qurat-ul-Ain Marri, graced this mega event as the Chief Guest.

In the event, 45 x elite institutions from all over Pakistan participated by sending their 90 x best male & female speakers. The contestants delivered impressive speeches on both serious and humorous topics. The jury comprising of experienced panel of judges belonging to reputable institutions of Pakistan evaluated the performance of the speakers.

While addressing the audience, the Senator Qurat-ul-Ain Marri emphasized the students to always remain diligent, resilient and optimistic to scale the pinnacle of success as mentioned by one of the speakers, "Rough tides refine the sailor's art."

She congratulated the Prize Winning Teams & appreciated CCS efforts for organizing and hosting this mega event in a triumphant manner. Earlier, in his welcome address, Cdre Zeeshan Ali SI(M), Commandant/ Principal



CCS expressed his profound gratitude to the Chief Guest for gracing the event. He highlighted the significance of Oratory Skills and appreciated contestants for their enthusiastic participation.

In English Declamation, Ms Misbah Imran from Isra University, Hyderabad clinched the 1st Position, while Ms Shahnoor Rajpoot from Govt College University, Hyderabad stood 2nd and Ms Areeba Imran from Liaquat University of Medical & Health Sciences, Jamshoro secured the 3rd position. While in Urdu Declamation, Cadet Ghazain from Cadet College Ormara achieved

1st position, the 2nd position was won by Ms Mariyam Ameer from NUML University, Karachi & the 3rd position was secured by Ms Zoya Ahmed from Karachi Medical and Dental College, Karachi.

The consolation prizes in English Category were awarded to Ms Hareem Fatima from Hayat College Fatima Campus & Mr Abbas Mehdi from Govt Degree Boys College, Nawabshah and in Urdu Category to Cadet Abdul Haseeb from Marine Academy, Karachi & Ms Affaf Sikandar from Tabani's College (PECHS Campus).

The Champion Trophy of the 6th All-Pakistan

Bilingual Declamation Contest - 2024 was clinched by the team of Cadet College Ormara, while the Runner-up Trophy was won by the team of University of Karachi. To maintain the interest of audience, CCS cadets performed cultural shows in between the declamation sessions. Horse & Buggy Rides, Shooting at CCS firing range, visit of Faiz Mahal Art Gallery, Swimming Pool & CCS Orchards and serving of Fresh Milk Tea at College Dairy Farm were also arranged for Participants & Guests. The teams thoroughly enjoyed their stay and were thankful for great hospitality showed by CCS management.

### Free insulin program for diabetic children launched

LAHORE (APP): For the first time in Pakistan's history, a project has been launched to provide free insulin to children suffering from diabetes. On the directive of Chief Minister of Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, insulin will be delivered directly to the homes of type 1 diabetic children. This initiative aims to ease the daily struggles of parents and children who suffer from this lifelong condition.

Under the Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Insulin Program, registration for diabetic children has officially begun. This program provides a unique facility where parents can register their diabetic children from the comfort of their homes. To support the program, a special helpline (1033) has been set up for guidance and assistance.

Parents who wish to receive free insulin for their children can contact National Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) clinics located at the tehsil or district level. CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif stated, "Little children are like flowers; we will not let them wither." As a mother, she expressed her heartfelt understanding of the challenges posed by such conditions. She added, "As a mother, I can feel the pain and illness of children deeply. We will ensure that insulin is provided at their homes to save them from the hardship of traveling to hospitals."

The CM emphasized that insulin is a lifelong requirement for diabetic children, and through this program, she aims to reduce the burden on parents. She assured that the provincial government would spare no effort in providing all necessary resources to ensure proper treatment and health care for children across Punjab.

### LESCO hunts down transformers thieves gang

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has caught a 20-member gang of transformer thieves in its Kasur Circle.

According to the company's spokesman here Sunday, the accused confessed that they have stolen 15 to 20 transformers from Kasur Circle. The spokesman said that LESCO's Kasur Circle has since long been facing high financial and operational losses due to incidents of transformers theft.

On the direction of Superintending Engineer (SE Kasur Circle) Nadeem Malik, announcements were also made in mosques, appealing the people to inform the LESCO immediately on seeing anyone damaging the public property.

## Khawaja Ghulam Fareed shrine Auqaf dept grants zonal headquarters status

LAHORE (APP): The Auqaf Department has decided to elevate the shrine of Hazrat Khawaja Ghulam Fareed (RA) to the status of zonal headquarters.

The decision was formally approved in a meeting chaired by Secretary Auqaf, Dr. Tahir Raza Bukhari, aimed at restructuring and enhancing the department's efficiency. During the meeting, a detailed review of the administrative affairs of all circles and zones in Punjab was conducted.

Recommendations for redefining boundaries, improving zonal office performance, and reassessing administrative resources and financial targets were also presented.

Dr. Tahir Raza Bukhari

highlighted that the shrine has 19,000 acres of endowed land. He stated, "This decision will significantly enhance the monitoring of endowed properties and result in a substantial increase in departmental revenue."

He further noted that the establishment of the zonal office at the shrine is a major relief for devotees and the public in South Punjab. "This is the fourth zone associated with a specific location after Data Darbar, Baba Fareed Pakpattan, and Badshahi Mosque," Dr. Bukhari remarked.

As part of the restructuring, Lodhran district has been transferred from Khanewal Circle to Bahawalpur Circle. A new administrative unit has also been established to

monitor thousands of acres of land in Liaquatpur and Khanpur tehsils.

Additionally, a boundary realignment for Rawalpindi Zone was finalized, considering the commercial units and income targets within its circles. Dr. Tahir Raza Bukhari reiterated the department's commitment to enhancing its performance and revenue, saying, "Every possible measure is being taken to ensure the efficiency and growth of the Punjab Auqaf Department."

This significant step is expected to streamline operations, improve resource management, and provide better services to the devotees visiting the shrine and other associated sites.

## Govt should apply smart city concept

KARACHI (PPI): Altaf Shakoor, Chairman of Pasban Democratic Party (PDP), today urged the government to adopt the concept of smart cities in Sindh, emphasizing that modern technology enables the swift development of both major and secondary cities and towns.

In a statement, Mr Shakoor highlighted the significant advantages smart cities offer, such as improved transportation, better traffic management, and efficient public services that conserve resources like water and electricity.

Shakoor pointed out that smart cities can enhance

air quality through energy-efficient buildings, use renewable energy sources, and provide affordable high-speed internet access and public Wi-Fi. The technology also allows for predictive maintenance of infrastructure, creating opportunities for business, reducing crime rates, and ensuring equitable access to resources.

He emphasized the importance of focusing not only on major urban centers but also on developing second-tier cities such as Hyderabad, Sukkur, Larkana, Nawabshah, and Mirpurkhas. These cities, with their unique socio-

economic and political cultures, offer investment opportunities and can ease the pressure on larger cities by promoting local development.

Shakoor noted the stark contrast in the infrastructure of Sindh's second-tier cities compared to those in Punjab. He called for special funding from both provincial and federal governments to accelerate the development of these cities. He specifically mentioned the urgent need to complete projects like the Sukkur-Hyderabad motorway and enhance tourism facilities in the Gorakh Hills.

## WCLA organizes guided tour of old havelis

LAHORE (APP): The Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA) organized a guided tour of historic Havelis in Androon Lahore, titled "Havelis of Lahore."

The tour included visits to historic havelis such as Mubarik Haveli, Haveli Wajid Ali Shah, Noori Building, Haveli Nau Nehal Singh, Naqash School of Arts, Fakir Khana Museum, Haveli Awais Mir, and Haveli Barood Khana. Since these havelis are private properties and typically inaccessible to the general public, the Walled City Authority organized this special tour to provide access and deliver an enchanting experience infused with history. Approximately 120 participants joined the tour. Additionally, tourists enjoyed a Rangeela Rickshaw Ride and a performance by the Garvi Group from the hit Coke

Studio Season 15. Refreshments were also provided for all attendees.

Asghar Hussain, Deputy Director Tourism, Walled City of Lahore Authority, said, "The Old Havelis of Androon Lahore are a vital part of the city's architectural heritage. They don't just showcase old designs but offer a glimpse into everyday life in the past. Touring these historic homes is like stepping back in time to experience how people once lived and occupied the social space in Old Lahore. These tours also highlight the architectural roots laid down by ordinary people, not just rulers or officials, shaping the unique structures of the old city. With this vision, the Walled City of Lahore Authority is dedicated to celebrating and presenting every part of this cultural heritage with the public". Kamran Lashari,

Director General, Walled City of Lahore Authority, also expressed his opinions on this guided tour of Old Havelis. He said, "Visitors to Lahore's heritage sites have long been captivated by the historic havelis of Androon Lahore, renowned for their rich architectural intricacies. Constructed during the Mughal, Sikh, and British periods, these havelis offer a vivid representation of traditional lifestyles, street culture, and the social fabric of different historical eras. The Walled City of Lahore Authority has committed significant efforts to safeguard this cultural heritage, ensuring its preservation amid urban development and modernization. To enhance the experience, cultural performances have been integrated into these tours, providing a comprehensive and enriching visit at an accessible cost".

## OPC Punjab & OPF join hands to address grievances

LAHORE (APP): Vice Chairperson of the Overseas Pakistanis Commission (OPC) Punjab, Barrister Amjad Malik, said that OPC Punjab and the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) will work together to address the grievances of overseas Pakistanis.

He said that the initiatives of former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif regarding overseas Pakistanis were exemplary, and efforts will be made to restore these initiatives in their original spirit. The establishment of the Overseas Advisory Council and District Overseas Committees, as well as organizing a convention for overseas Pakistanis, are among his top priorities. He emphasized that the representation of overseas Pakistanis in Parliament is a pressing need. Barrister Malik further stated that the creation of fast-track courts would help restore investor confidence,

allowing them to seek justice in these courts.

A grand event was organized in honor of Barrister Amjad Malik by Haroon Shah, a journalist returning from the UK, and Sardar Kamal Khan. They congratulated him on assuming the position of Vice Chairperson of OPC Punjab. The event was attended by individuals from various walks of life. Senior Vice President of the Supreme Court Bar Association, Advocate Habib Qureshi, presented a welcome speech, declaring Barrister Amjad Malik's appointment a positive sign.

Journalist Haroon Shah, based on his two-decade-long association with Barrister Malik, expressed confidence in his ability to achieve significant results, a sentiment supported by Sardar Kamal Khan. Former diplomat and government additional secretary, Sajid Qazi, welcomed

Barrister Amjad Malik to Islamabad, recalling their 36-year-long relationship dating back to their days at Government College Lahore. He praised Barrister Malik's legal career. Former diplomat Waqas Langah, Director of the National Fund Tariq Mahmood Kiani, Barrister Hassan Mann, and Chaudhary Nisar Ali Khan from Malaysia congratulated the organizers of the event.

Former MD OPF, Habib-ur-Rehman Khan, shared that working with Barrister Malik had been a pleasant experience and praised his hardworking nature.

The event was also attended by Abbasi Sahib, Rafiq Ghori, Aftab, and Wasif Shah. The guests were treated to a lavish feast. Barrister Amjad Malik presented a bouquet to Sajid Qazi and a shield to former MD OPF, Habib-ur-Rehman Khan, as a gesture of appreciation.



# We must hate AIDS not the patient: Ihtesham

8356 AIDS patients registered in KP: Health Advisor

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: On the occasion of World AIDS Day, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Advisor Ihtesham Ali stated in his video message, "The purpose of observing World AIDS Day is to raise awareness among the public about this disease and encourage them to undergo screening. We must hate the disease, not the patient."

He added, "Free AIDS screening and treatment facilities are available at 13 centers across the province, including tribal districts. We plan to expand these centers over time to

increase the screening process."

The Health Advisor appealed to the public, "Never reuse syringes and insist on tested blood for transfusions." Warning of hidden cases, he said, "Currently, there are 8,356 registered AIDS patients in the province, but many people may be living with this disease undiagnosed, which poses a significant threat."

He further stated, "Healthcare staff and the Health Care Commission must ensure the sterilization of surgical instruments, and the public must insist on disposable items at

barbershops and beauty salons."

The Advisor explained, "As of now, 2,080 women, 6,105 men, and 171 transgender individuals are registered as AIDS patients, and with increased screening, these numbers may rise. In 2024, 1,173 new cases were registered compared to 1,147 in 2023."

Dr. Tariq Hayat Taj, Project Director of the Integrated HIV, Hepatitis, and Thalassemia Control Program, said, "Discrimination against AIDS patients on the basis of their disease is a violation of human rights. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the

highest transmission rate is among injectable drug users sharing syringes at 12%, followed by transgender individuals at 1.5%."

He continued, "Last year, the number of AIDS treatment centers was increased from six to 13, where patients receive free medication, diagnosis, and counseling services."

Dr. Tariq further explained, "There are 1,256 registered AIDS patients in tribal districts, while settled districts like Peshawar lead with 1,515 cases, followed by Bannu with 979, Swat with 384, Mardan with 366, and Charsadda with 345 cases."

# Demand of hand-me-downs on the rise as winter approaches

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: As the winter season sets in, the demand for secondhand items such as clothes, woollen goods, blankets, and shoes has surged in popular markets across Peshawar, including Nauthia, Hasthagri, Kohati and other areas.

Shopkeepers revealed that rising inflation has prompted many consumers to turn towards secondhand goods, considering them to be both affordable and of better quality.

"Consumers believe that second-hand items, especially imported ones, are durable and reasonably priced," said a local shopkeeper.

Visitors to the market expressed a clear preference for secondhand jackets, shawls, sweaters, shoes, and even household



items, citing the significant price difference compared to new products.

"Jackets and sweaters are in high demand this season, as they are not only durable but also offer better quality compared to brand-new ones," said a shopper, Ahmed.

Parents shopping at Qissa Khwani Bazaar

shared that secondhand clothing for children is an economical option, especially since kids often outgrow their clothes within a season.

Another buyer, Bilal, mentioned that he came to the market specifically to find large-sized shoes, which are often unavailable in regular shops. "Six

months ago, I bought shoes from here, and they turned out to be of excellent quality," he added.

The winter season continues to draw more customers to these traditional markets, where affordability meets practicality amidst rising inflation.

# Corruption on the rise in KP govt: Khizer

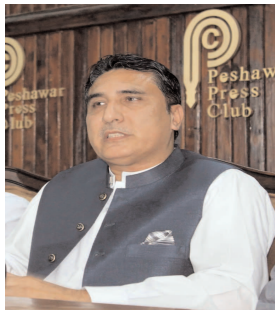
‘Final call proved last nail in coffin of PTI’

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: PML-N's Additional Information Secretary for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Arbab Khizer Hayat, has challenged Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, alleging that daily corruption worth millions of rupees is taking place in the province. Speaking informally to journalists in Peshawar, Arbab Khizer Hayat claimed to have concrete evidence of this corruption and announced plans to release a white paper on corruption amounting to billions of rupees soon. He further declared that if he fails to prove these allegations, he will permanently retire from politics.

Arbab Khizer Hayat accused Ali Amin Gandapur of abandoning PTI workers in Islamabad and fleeing the scene.

He said that while the Chief Minister boasts on the assembly floor in the dead of night to portray himself as a hero, the reality is that the people of



Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the nation as a whole, now see him as a "runaway Chief Minister."

He also criticized the Chief Minister and PTI leadership for being too preoccupied with their confrontations in Islamabad to address pressing issues in the province.

Referring to the tragic loss of hundreds of lives in Kurram Agency, Arbab Khizer Hayat lamented that the Chief Minister and his party's leadership could not find the time to respond appropriately to the crisis.

Arbab Khizer Hayat condemned Ali Amin Gandapur's criticism of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor's call for an all-

parties conference on the law and order situation.

He stated that when the Chief Minister is too focused on his confrontations with the federal government, and lives are being lost in the province, the PML-N welcomes the Governor's initiative to hold such a conference.

He further declared that PTI's "final call" for Imran Khan's release has proven to be the last nail in the party's coffin.

Speaking informally to journalists in Peshawar, he criticized Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and Bushra Bibi for abandoning party workers in difficult times, leaving them helpless while they fled. He added that PTI attempted another "May 9-like event" but failed miserably.

He congratulated the government for its effective strategy in preventing chaos. Arbab Khizer Hayat mocked Ali Amin Gandapur's speech during a late-night assembly session where he challenged the federal government, calling it incomprehensible.

PESHAWAR (APP): Inept, unprofessional and untrained employees are spoiling the heavy cost operated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project as commuters particularly government employees have started looking for alternative vehicular transport.

The staffers particularly those deployed at bus stations of the service are not properly trained to treat the commuters in a professional manner. The security personnel of the Zu Security, a subsidiary of the Urban Mobility Authority are very poorly trained regarding the use of the security equipment including walk-through gates and frisk machines.

The security staff deployed at the entrances of the stations are most found involved in exchange of harsh words and arguments with commuters. The commuters are objecting their manual body search in presence of security equipment worth of millions of rupees that are install at the gates.

Talking to this scribe, Aslam an employee of a public sector organization expressed his displeasure over the treatment accorded to the commuters at BRT stations by the Zu Security personnel.

He said that the security staff often check them manually despite adherence to the standard security standard operating procedures (SOPs) followed by the security personnel at all sensitive installations and facilities like airports, railway stations and hotels not only in Pakistan rather across the world.

When asked about filing a for-



PESHAWAR: Children enjoying a ride on a swing during the Fun Fair organized by Peshawar Press Club and Khyber Union of Journalists for the children and families of the journalists.

# Kundi pays tribute to martyred Captain Zohaib, Soldier Iftikhar

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Sunday expressed grief and sorrow over the martyrdom of two security personnel at Baka Khel area of Bannu district.

Governor Kundi paid heartfelt tribute to the martyrs, Captain Zohaib and Soldier Iftikhar Hussain. He also paid tribute to security forces to kill five terrorists during exchange of fire.

He expressed deep condolences to the families of the deceased soldiers, offering his sincere sympathies and prayers for their strength during this difficult time.

The Governor prayed for the elevation of their ranks and for patience and resilience for their families.

Governor Kundi emphasized that the sacrifices made by the martyrs would never be in vain and that the entire nation takes immense pride in the bravery and dedication of the security forces.

He also highlighted the unwavering courage and commitment of the security personnel in the fight against terrorism.

**Former Asian Squash Champion Danish Atlas Khan meets Governor Kundi**

Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi has said that we are working on a comprehensive strategy for the development of all sports, including squash, to provide opportunities for young people to showcase their talents.

He said this during a meeting with renowned

squash player and former Asian champion, Danish Atlas Khan, recipient of the Sitara-e-Imtiaz, here at Governor House.

During the meeting discussion focused on the promotion of sports and the training of young athletes.

Danish Atlas Khan highlighted the issues facing squash in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and emphasized the need for efforts to nurture the talents of young players.

He pointed out that Peshawar, in particular, has produced several world champions in squash, but there is a need for more facilities and government support to further promote the sport.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi praised Danish Atlas Khan's efforts and said that the provincial

government is taking significant steps to promote sports.

The Governor also acknowledged the significant role played by Danish Atlas Khan's family in squash, noting that the family has dominated the sport for over 40 years.

He assured that modern facilities would be provided for the promotion of squash and that local tournaments would be organized to address the challenges the sport faces.

During the meeting, Danish Atlas Khan shared his international experiences and the victories he has achieved for Pakistan in the field of squash.

The Governor praised his contributions, describing him as a source of pride for Pakistan and a role model for young athletes.

# Inept, unprofessional, untrained manpower spoiling BRT service

PESHAWAR (APP): Inept, unprofessional and untrained personnel with the management of the BRT, he said that he had even talked to the incharge of the Zu Security, he instead of taking action or slamming the arrogant personnel supported them and told him to file a complaint against them on the CM's Complaints' Portal.

He said that now being disgruntled of the constant mistreatment at the hands Zu security staff he has repaired his abandoned motor cycles to use it for commuting to his office. Same is the case with hundreds of regular commuters of the service and they are mulling over abandoning the use of BRT service.

When this scribe asked a Zu Security personnel about their professional training and particularly friendly treatment of the commuters, he on condition of anonymity said that they are being told that no one should pass through without their manual body search, either the passerby is even their father.

This attitude of the BRT top management and security personnel is even the violation of their own adapted and advertised security code of conduct. The service is regularly demonstrating it through playing a video, asking the commuters to take out metal-oriented articles from their pockets and then pass through the walk-through gates. But the security personnel are bent upon the humiliation of the commuters while the management has turned deaf ears to the

public complaints in this regard. Following the operation of the BRT service, the commuters have no alternative vehicular transport as the provincial government has established the monopoly of the public sector transport service and has banned the issuance of route permits to any vehicle on the routes on which BRT is operated.

The provincial government has fixed highest fare for the BRT service than other provinces, particularly against the metro bus services of the Rawalpindi-Islamabad and Lahore wherein the fare per one commuter or rider is Rs.30 while in BRT Peshawar is charging Rs.60.

There are also other complaints of the unprofessional approach of the management and operation on the pattern of the omni buses is resulting in overloading and crowding the buses as time duration of departure of buses is long and due to the monopoly of the BRT service on the public transportation.

The service is defending the overloading saying intra-city bus services are used to overloading all over world. Such kind of ads is regularly played on the monitors installed on the buses.

Since, initiation of work, BRT Peshawar, which the leadership of the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) claims as their flagship project is tainted with alleged corruption and malpractices. The total cost of the project has become a secret for the people as the provincial administration is not ready to reveal its

exact cost while the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has claimed the recovery of Rs168.5 billion in the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Peshawar project.

The bureau also helped the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government avoid a Rs31.5 billion claim lodged by contractors in the International Court of Arbitration (ICA).

NAB launched an inquiry in 2018 into the illegal awarding of contracts, misuse of government funds, and submission of fraudulent performance guarantees by contractors involved in the BRT project. After a period of stagnation, the investigation gained momentum, resulting in significant financial recovery.

The expenses of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in Peshawar are also significantly higher than its revenue, leading to a financial crisis, according to documents from the Transport Department.

The documents revealed that the daily expenditure of the BRT system stands at Rs14.5 million while the daily revenue is over Rs5.4 million, resulting in a daily loss of Rs9 million. Annually, the BRT's expenditure has risen to Rs5.32 billion while the annual deficit has reached Rs3.38 billion.

The Transport Department argued that subsidies are provided for metro systems worldwide and the purpose of the BRT is to provide excellent transportation facilities to the public without burdening them.

# Equitable Development – A pathway to inclusive prosperity

PESHAWAR (APP): Inequitable urban-rural development remains the most pressing challenges for nation's socio-economic progress as this divide perpetuates inequality, undermines merit and stifles national progress.

This dilemma persists since decades as people in most of rural areas of the country remain backward, less educated and less paid for lacking jobs and business opportunities with millions spending their lives in abject poverty.

Like other parts of the country, socio-economic imbalances in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, compounded by corruption and nepotism have also landed rural people in vicious cycle of poverty and unemployment with majority still lacking quality education, healthcare, housing, clean drinking water and sustainable livelihoods. This inequality

not only hampers economic growth by placing extraordinary pressure on urban infrastructure due to massive mass influx.

"The development gap between rural and urban communities has fostered a fragmented society where rural populations feel increasingly alienated from the urban centers," remarked Prof. Zilakat Ali Malik, former Chairman of Economics Department, University of Peshawar.

He said a marginal segment control majority of national wealth with a vast majority still struggling for basic needs. "This unjust distribution of wealth exacerbates poverty and unemployment, especially in rural areas."

As urban growth in the country swelled to 36.4% in 2017 from 32.5% in 1998, majority of country's population (63.6%) still reside in rural areas.

"Migration from rural to urban areas has further strained urban systems while rural communities continued to be overlooked in terms of investment and policy attention," Prof Malik commented.

He also mentioned to revenue collection in terms of urban rural divide and claimed that Pakistan's cities generate about 55% of country's GDP and contribute 95% of federal tax revenues with Karachi alone generating 12-15% of GDP and 55% of federal taxes.

"Even then there is need to invest in rural infrastructure especially roads, schools, healthcare and clean water to improve living standards of people and stimulate economic growth in remote areas including merged tribal districts," he argued.

Since majority of our population reside in rural

areas, the governments should focus on modernizing agriculture by introducing latest techniques, access to credit and improve market linkages, Prof. Malik said. "Such initiatives may help create jobs, reduce dependence on subsistence farming and improve productivity."

Dr. Ibrahim Khan, former Director Elementary and Secondary Schools states that major reason for urban-rural gap is poor education infrastructure and roads. In 2024, approximately 22.8 million children across Pakistan and 4.7 million in KP are out of schools with rural areas disproportionately affected.

"Situation is more worrisome in former FATA regions due to poor education infrastructure, rampant poverty and cultural barriers that prevent many children especially girls, from

attending school after primary," he said. "Only 37% of girls in former FATA are enrolled at primary school but at secondary level, this figure drops to five percent." He urged the KP government to focus on early childhood education, rebuilding damaged schools and expand education network to all villages.

Recent studies show that urbanization does not automatically lead to economic growth; rather unplanned urbanization, without proper development strategies leads to slums, environmental degradation and deepen urban-rural inequalities.

"Bridging rural-urban divide is not just an economic issue but also a moral and strategic imperative for country's long-term prosperity," stated Syed Akhtar Ali Shah, former Inspector General of KP Police. "Failure to

address these disparities, especially the security challenges also lead to increased social unrest, deepening divisions and potential loss of qualified professionals through brain drain." Although respective governments off and on launched programs to bridge this divide, particularly the mention worthy Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) yet a holistic approach with improved macroeconomic situation could be better option to addressing this dilemma.

Director General, Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) KP Ms. Zohra Aslam states that one of the primary objectives of BISP is to alleviate poverty and narrow the rural-urban divide through diverse programs.

"Currently, around 9.3 million poor households are benefitted from BISP's

educational stipends and nutritional support to children and mothers, particularly in rural areas," she informed. "BISP aims to open more centers in rural areas to continue this practice."

With the government functionaries often claiming to focus rural development, the desired results remain a far cry owing to different challenges like unchecked population growth, insufficient revenue collection, economic recession and transparent execution of programs and projects.

Provincial Minister for Livestock and Dairy Development, Fazal Hakeem also mentions targeted rural development programs like Calf Fattening, Save the Calf and Azakheli Buffalo Conservation Program in Malakand.

"These initiatives aim to

boost rural economy, create jobs and bridge rural-urban divide in KP," he claims.

"With targeted investments, strategic policy reforms and community-driven initiatives especially in agriculture and livestock, we hope to build a more equitable and prosperous future."

But how long such programs can bridge this divide is a question to be answered as experts believe that a few scattered initiatives were insufficient to unlock untapped potential of multiple resources in the region.

Therefore, for benefiting rural communities and bridging this divide they emphasize a multi-pronged approach for overall development and creating a society where every Pakistani, regardless of geographical location, avails an equal opportunity to achieve the goal of a prosperous life.





## In brief

### JUI-S raise voice against inflation F.P. Report

KARAK: Maulana Hamidul Haq Haqqani, leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (S), has said that Pakistan is currently going through a difficult time, inflation, unemployment, and insecurity are surrounding the country, especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The heads of the scholars are visible on the walls of the mosques, voices against insecurity and reorganizing the Jamiat for the rights of the province, for which activities are taking place in all the districts. While addressing the Maulana Samiul Haq Shaheed Services Conference organized by Karak, he said that Pakistan was created in the name of Islam and that an Islamic system should be established in it. The Islamic system will not be established, the problems will not end. In the conference, the central general secretary of Jamiat Ulema Islam (S) Maulana Syed Yusuf Shah, the provincial deputy amir Maulana Sabz Ali Khan, the district amir Maulana Muhammad Irfan Haqqani, Sheikh Al Hadith Maulana Aseel Badshah, Maulana Hafiz Ibn Amin, Maulana Ghous Azam Maulana Zaeheruddin, Maulana Shafuallah, Qari Eid Muhammad, Maulana Abdul Qadir, Maulana Mushab, Maulana Naseer Rahman, Hafiz Abdul Samad, Hafiz Asim, Abid Gul participated in the conference.

### PPP Foundation Day observed F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: 57th foundation day of Pakistan People's Party observed in district Hafizabad. In this connection, a rally was taken out led by President PPP women wing Hafizabad Khalida Shahid Advocate. Vice president lawyer's forum central Punjab Muhammad Arshad Mehind Advocate and other workers participated the rally. Addressing the participants of the rally, Khalida Shahid Advocate said that PPP was taken unmatched steps for welfare of the masses and progress of the country always. She said founder of PPP Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto laid foundation to make the country invulnerable which would be remembered in the history of the country forever. She said that Shaheed Benazir Bhutto render sacrifices her life for promoting democracy and politics of reconciliation in the country. At the end of rally sweets was distributed among people and special prayer officered for the integrity of the country and PPP.

### 1122 issues report F.P. Report

TIMERGARA: Rescue 1122 has issued its performance report for November 2024, highlighting its services in a total of 536 emergencies last month. Rescue services were provided to 512 injured and patients during various emergencies. During the month, 41 road traffic accidents were reported, where injured individuals were assisted. Additionally, there were 218 medical emergencies, 3 cases of altercations, 10 fire incidents, 1 drowning case, and 24 recovery operations, along with other incidents where assistance was provided. Under the ambulance referral service, 239 patients referred by doctors were transported to different hospitals within and outside the district under the supervision of trained Rescue 1122 staff.



SWABI: Director General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority Tashfeen Haider presenting trophy to Dr. Nadeem as winner of the Indus Water Jeep Race.

## PPP to be most popular party in Dir, claim leaders

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Pakistan Peoples Party Lower Dir president Nawabzada Ahmad Zeb has said the PPP leadership has rendered great sacrifices for democracy in Pakistan.

He was addressing a function at his hujra to mark the 57th foundation day of the party in Timergara here the other day.

A large number of party workers from different parts of the district attended the function which was addressed by the PPP senior leader and former senator Ahmad Hassan Khan, former district president and MNA Malik Azmat Khan, PPP district president Ahmad Zeb Khan, district general secretary Naeemullah, former MPA Muhammad Zamin Khan, president Peoples Lawyers' Forum Muhammad Salim advocate, district secretary information Alam Zeb advocate and others.

The speakers paid tributes to the PPP founder Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (ZAB), former prime minister Benazir Bhutto and other slain leaders for their sacrifices for the people of Pakistan.

They said that the PPP was the largest national political party in the country that had roots in the public.

They said the history of PPP was full of sacrifices as its leaders and workers laid their lives to restore democ-

ocracy in the country.

The speakers said that it was the PPP founder, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who challenged all capitalists and feudal lords in the country and ensured the right to vote for every citizen.

Speaking on the occasion, the PPP district president Nawabzada Ahmad Zeb said that thousands of youths from Dir worked abroad today.

He said that it was the credit of ZAB who issued the Pakistani passport to them.

He said that hidden powers always blocked the way of the PPP to the power corridor and its mandate was always stolen. Criticizing the Pakistan Tahreek Insaf's leadership, he said that innocent and sincere party workers were left on the mercy of Allah and law enforcement agencies at D-Chowk Islamabad on Nov. 26. He said the PPP again would emerge as the most popular political party in Dir in the future.

**IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION:** The Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Malakand chairman Muhammad Nasim Khan has said that no nation can develop and progress without imparting quality education to its children.

He was addressing a function after inaugurating a private educational institution at Shehzadi as chief guest here on Sunday.

The function was also

addressed by additional deputy commissioner Bashir Khan, divisional president of the human rights commission of Pakistan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, prominent religious scholar Maulana Inayatullah Islahi, Sartaj Khan and others.

The speakers said that 20 million children were still out-of-schools across the country which was a major challenge for the government.

They appreciated the role of private educational institutions and said that without their support it was not possible for the state to provide quality education to every citizen. The speakers said that youth should also focus on other fields instead of medical and engineering.

The speakers asked the owners of private schools and colleges to provide free education to poor deserving students at their institutions so that they could also get standard education for their bright future.

**STOLEN VEHICLES:** The Timergara police on Sunday claimed to have recovered 6 stolen motorcycles, 4 Suzuki pick ups and a car during the last few days.

Briefing local journalists, the SHO Salim Shah said that police launched a special drive against car lifting in the area. He said the persons involved in car lifting had been arrested and further investigations were in progress.

## Awareness seminar on World AIDS Day in Nawabshah

NAWABSHAH (INP): District Administration, Health Department of Shaheed Benazirabad and CDC HIV AIDS Center organized an awareness seminar on the occasion of World AIDS Day at the Darbar Hall of the DC Office.

Deputy Commissioner Shehryar Gul Memon participated in the seminar as the chief guest.

Addressing the seminar, Deputy Commissioner Shehryar Gul Memon, District Health Officer Dr Asadullah Dahri, MSPMC Hospital Dr Yar Ali Jamali, District Focal Person for AIDS Dr Riaz Shah, Incharge AIDS Treatment Center Dr Ghulam Qadir Rajput and others said that World AIDS Day is being celebrated today with the aim of making the public aware of the precautionary measures to prevent AIDS.

He added that HIV AIDS is a curable disease which can be prevented from causing further harm by getting regular treatment. They said that there are multiple reasons including repeated use of syringes, blood transfusion without screening, use of non sterilized machinery for operations and dental treatment, while this disease does not spread by shaking hands or sitting together.

Speakers said we have to play a joint role in creating awareness about the harms of HIV/AIDS. Speakers said that in order to cleanse the society from this disease, awareness programs should be conducted in cities and especially in rural areas, to create awareness among the people.

They said that the Sindh government is working on an emergency basis to eradicate HIV/AIDS and other diseases and treat patients by providing better treatment facilities to patients suffering from this disease.

They quoted that saving the life of one human is saving the life of the entire humanity. On this occasion, Deputy Commissioner Shehryar Gul Memon and others distributed certificates of appreciation and medals among the officers and employees who performed best.

F.P. Report

SWABI: Several out of the 80 enthusiast drivers competed and clinched positions in the 12th Indus River Water Cross Jeep Race held on the waters of mighty Indus River at Hund point in Swabi district on Sunday.

Jointly organised by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) and the Frontier 4x4 Club, the race saw the participation of over 80 4x4 jeeps from various cities, including Lahore, Islamabad, Abbottabad, Peshawar and elsewhere in the country.

KPCTA Director General Tashfeen Haider was the chief guest at the event. He was also accompanied by Frontier 4x4 Club president Babar Khan, members from the

PMRC Club, Lahore, Islamabad Jeep Club and other key personalities.

A track of about 2.5 kilometers was set up along the fast-moving waters and rocky paths of the Indus River. The race was held in three categories, Category A for 0 to 2500cc, Category B for 2500cc to open, and Category C was open.

In the A category, Dr Nadeem Naeem secured first place with a time of 4 minutes and 38 seconds, followed by Arshad in second place with 4 minutes and 39 seconds, and Babar in third place with a time of 5 minutes.

In the B category, Mansoor Ali clinched first position with a time of 5 minutes and 29 seconds, Rizwan Meshhadi grabbed second place with 5 minutes and 50 seconds,

and Wali finished third with 6 minutes and 51 seconds. In the C category, Imran Haider stood first in the vintage race with a time of 6 minutes and 30 seconds.

Speaking on the occasion, Tashfeen Haider praised the drivers from various cities for their excellent participation in the race. He added that next year, drivers from the merged districts, who are passionate about 4x4 jeep race, would also be included in the competitions.

The DG said that the KPCTA was organising more activities and various events would soon be held in the merged districts as well. The aim of the event was to promote adventure tourism as well as water sports activities in the province.

## Compensation announced for Parachinar victims

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit-Baltistan, and SAFRON, and President of PML-N Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Engineer Amir Muqam has announced compensation for all victims of recent incidents of violence in Parachinar on behalf of the federal government.

He has directed the Kohat Commissioner to prepare a detailed report on the damages, said a press release issued on Sunday.

Speaking at a grand jirga in Kohat, the minister stressed the importance of restoring peace in Parachinar for the greater good of the country and its people.

He expressed condolences on behalf of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the federal government over the tragic incidents, praying for the departed souls and the swift recovery of the injured.

Muqam emphasized that the issue transcends



politics, urging all stakeholders to unite for a common resolution.

"This is not just a provincial issue; it concerns the entire nation," he said and highlighted his efforts to foster unity, including visits to the Chief Minister's House and collaboration with the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The minister reiterated that lasting solutions can only be achieved through dialogue, not conflict. He promised to personally discuss the compensation package with the prime minister and present the matter to the federal cabinet.

Families of the deceased and those who

lost their homes would be compensated, he assured.

Muqam warned of strict action against elements tempting to destabilize the region, stating, "Enemies of Pakistan cannot tolerate our stability and are sowing discord among us."

He called for collective efforts to restore peace, urging political leaders and religious scholars to play their roles in this mission.

Praising the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for his dedication, Engineer Muqam concluded by emphasizing the importance of everyone contributing to national harmony and stability.

## Sindh Cultural day celebrated in Larkana

LARKANA (APP): Sindh Culture Day was celebrated with enthusiasm in Larkana on Sunday.

In this regard, a cultural event was organized at Jinnah Bagh Chowk in the city with the joint cooperation of Larkana Press Club and representatives of Sindhi media. It continued till late night, the famous artists of Sindh Shiraz Abbasi, Nawaz Siraj Solangi, Sajjan Mairi, Imam Bakhsh Baloch, Niaz Imrani, Nadir Lashari, Raja Samoo and others bowed their heads in the cultural event.

The ceremony was marked by four moons, on which the youth, old and children danced. In the main ceremony MPA Larkana Jameel Ahmed Soomro,



Larkana Deputy Commissioner Dr Sharjeel Noor Channa, SSP Mir Rohal Khan Khoso, District General Secretary of People's Party and Chairman District Council Larkana Ejaz Ahmed Laghari, Bhutto, Mayor Larkana Advocate Anwar Ali Luhar and Including leaders of var-

ious political, social, nationalist, business organizations, intellectuals, poets, writers, professors, doctors and personalities associated with different schools of thought participated in large numbers.

MPA Larkana Jameel Ahmed Soomro addressed the event.

## Harnessing youth potential for nation building

MULTAN (APP): With approximately one third of country's population falling in 15-29 years bracket out of total 64% below 30 years, the coming years will pose serious challenges to governments for harnessing this potential amidst fluctuating economic situation.

As the lesser education and employment opportunities make the youth easily lured by vested interests and extremists to sabotage activities. So, this bulge can only be fruitful if political parties ensure continuity of policies, cordial atmosphere to education and employment and an overall political will for a strong democracy in the country.

Statistics and findings of experts reveal that out of over 60 million young Pakistanis between 15-29 years of age, a vast majority either is illiterate or left schools and colleges prior to reaching 12th standard

with a marginal number out of whom more than half still searching for jobs.

Like many other parts of the world, being young in Pakistan is also both exciting and frustrating. The space for young in Pakistani society is vast and full of possibilities if the potential in different sectors of economy is fully exploited. But there are fears as well in view of a major chunk generally being intolerant as recently seen in protests of political parties.

The youth bulge can have positive impact if economy is strong enough to absorb new entrants in the labor force. Otherwise, the idle and frustrated youth would raise the incidence of crime, violence and embrace radical political and religious views.

"Our educated youth is mostly zealous in pursuit of career building and excelling in practical life," stated Prof. Anwaar Ahmad

Khan, Former head of National Language Authority. "They become mature once in practical life and like to be productive, if groomed properly. Earning livelihood and leading a respectable life is always their foremost priority."

"But, when they have limited resources and opportunities amidst growing poverty, they detract from their mission and engage in different unhealthy activities," Prof. Anwar said. "Therefore, we need comprehensive strategies to harness this potential through access to education and employment."

Before exploring the significance of youth involvement in nation-building, the challenges of formulating better strategies and policies must be addressed. For fostering their participation in fruitful activities, we must heed youth's demand of justice

and merit in all arena of life.

"Youth are often less constrained by established norms and more open to creative solutions that may lead them to innovative ideas in technology, climate change, education, healthcare and social justice," noted Senior Lawyer Chaudhry Waqas Anjum.

"Democracy also thrives when its citizens especially youth actively engage in political process. But, this needs awareness that emanates from literacy otherwise they can be swayed by any extremist political entity or sectarian factions," he pleaded.

"Empowering them through education, entrepreneurship and employment would help them contribute directly to nation's economic development," Waqas said. "By investing in their skills and fostering a congenial environment they can unlock new opportunities of growth

and progress."

After the social media onslaught in recent years, we have seen a bulk of our youth engaging in anti-social, immoral and irresponsible activities. Since, they were not properly educated and trained to use this medium for constructive activities, they not only distracted from their actual goal but also physical and healthy activities.

"Younger generation is always ambitious to exhaust their energies and this craving, previously used to lead them to sports grounds," said Chaudhry Farooq Latif, a sports official. "But, unfortunately internet, social media and lack of opportunities detracted them from healthy activities."

Mentioning to an old narrative that 'Healthy body keeps mind healthy,' Farooq suggested to engaging youth in healthy activities and referred to Punjab government's steps like

training programs, scholarships and leadership initiatives to encourage youth in pursuit of their passion for sports, personal growth, teamwork and excellence.

"Discipline must be our core value in youth upbringing besides their education and employment to properly guide their inclination and thought process," he pleaded. "But when we fail in this, most of young souls fall victim to despair and lured by vested interests."

Youth can be empowered to earn their livelihood and contribute to nation-building if equipped with right skills, opportunities and values. Therefore, skill based education can be a foundation to prepare a job-ready squad who is also adaptable to market demands.

"Promoting global competencies through language skills, digital literacy and cultural exchange programs enables youth to

compete in international markets," stated another educationist, Prof. Rao Babar Khalil. "Programs that instill civic values and leadership qualities encourage them to engage in social causes, volunteerism and community development, strengthening social fabric of a nation."

"Investments in science, technology and innovation also prepare youth to compete globally and elevate their country's reputation," he added. "Training in digital skills would also allow them to engage with day-to-day challenges in contemporary style."

Since, youth is our future, harnessing their potential for nation building requires active engagement with them. All our efforts must be diverted to preparing and empowering them to contribute positively within the country and win accolades internationally.





# Russian, Syrian jets intensify bombing of Syria's rebel-held northwest

AMMAN (Reuters): Russian and Syrian jets struck the rebel-held city of Idlib in northern Syria on Sunday, military sources said, as President Bashar al-Assad vowed to crush insurgents who had swept into the city of Aleppo.

Residents said one attack on the second day of raids hit a crowded residential area in the centre of Idlib, the largest city in a rebel enclave near the Turkish border where around four million people live in makeshift tents and dwellings.

At least seven people were killed and dozens injured, according to rescuers at the scene. The Syrian army and its ally Russia say they target the hideouts of insurgent groups and deny attacking civilians.

On Saturday, Russian and Syrian jets bombed other towns in Idlib province, which had fallen completely under rebel control in the boldest rebel assault for years in a civil war where front

lines had largely been frozen since 2020.

Insurgents swept into the city of Aleppo, east of Idlib province, on Friday night, forcing the army to redeploy in the biggest challenge to Assad in years.

In remarks published on state media, Assad said: "terrorists only know the language of force and it is the language we will crush them with".

The Syrian army said dozens of its soldiers had been killed in the attack on Aleppo.

On Sunday, the army said it had recaptured several towns that had been overrun in recent days by rebels. The insurgents are a coalition of Turkey-backed mainstream secular armed groups along with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an Islamist group that is the opposition's most formidable military force.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham is designated a terrorist group by the U.S., Russia, Turkey and other



states.

The war, which has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced many millions, has ground on since 2011 with no formal end. But most major fighting halted years ago after Iran and Russia helped Assad's government win control of most land and all major cities.

CIVILIANS LEAVE ALEPPO

Inside Aleppo city, streets were mostly empty and many shops were

quickly the army left. "I am shocked at how they fled and abandoned us," Abdullah al Halabi, a pensioner whose neighbourhood was bombed near the central area of Qasr al Baladi, said people were terrified they would see a repeat of the Russian-led bombing that killed thousands of people before driving out rebels a decade ago.

Syrian troops who had withdrawn from the city were now regrouping and reinforcements were also being sent to help in the counter-attack, army sources said.

Aleppo had been firmly held by the government since a 2016 victory there, one of the war's major turning points, when Russian-backed Syrian forces besieged and laid waste to rebel-held eastern areas of what had been the country's largest city.

Rebels said on Sunday they had pushed further south of Aleppo city and captured the town of Khansir in an attempt to cut the army's main supply route to Aleppo city.

Rebel sources said they had also captured Sheikh Najjar estate, one of the country's major industrial zones.

Reuters could not independently confirm the battlefield accounts.

Iran sent thousands of Shi'ite militias to Syria during the Syrian war and, alongside Russia with its air power, enabled Assad to crush the insurgency and regain most of his territory.

A lack of that manpower to help thwart the rebel onslaught in recent days contributed to the speedy retreat of Syrian army forces, according to two army sources. Militias allied to Iran, led by Hezbollah, have a strong presence in the Aleppo area.

Israel has also in recent months stepped up its strikes on Iranian bases in Syria while also waging an offensive in Lebanon which it says has weakened Hezbollah and its military capabilities.

## Serbia to cooperate in investigation over Kosovo explosion

BELGRADE (Reuters): Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic pledged on Sunday his country would help investigate after an explosion in Kosovo that disrupted water supplies and that the government there blamed on Belgrade.

The explosion on Friday evening hit a canal that sends water to Kosovo's two coal-fired power plants - accounting for most of the country's power production. It also caused water supply cuts in some parts of the country, but there were no power cuts.

The incident inflamed longstanding tensions between Kosovo and Serbia. The Kosovo government called the explosion an act of terrorism by Serbia, which Serbia denied.

"Finding out the truth is

in the best interest of our country," Vucic told reporters on Sunday. "We are ready to share information with everyone even with Pristina."

He reiterated that Serbia had nothing to do with the explosion. He also accused Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti of using the incident to firm up his grip in the north of the country, where a Serb majority refuses to recognise Pristina institution and sees Belgrade as their capital. The Kosovo government has not said why it believes Serbia was responsible for the explosion.

Kosovo police arrested eight people and seized weapons and explosives on Saturday in raids in connection with explosion. Kosovo media reported on Sunday that water supplies were getting back to nor-

mal.

Kosovo declared independence in 2008, almost a decade after NATO bombed Serb forces to halt the killing and expulsion of ethnic Albanians from the region during a 1998-99 war.

But Serbia does not recognise Kosovo as its sovereign state and together with its ally Russia is blocking Kosovo's membership in the United Nations.

Both Kosovo and Serbian governments have set membership in the European Union as their goal, but in order to achieve that the two countries have to normalise relations.

Nearly 17 years after Kosovo's declaration of independence, more than 4,000 NATO troops oversee fragile peace in the country.

## Heavy snow keep parts of the US in a deep freeze

LOWVILLE, N.Y. (AP): Heavy snowfall and numbing temperatures kept parts of the U.S. in a deep freeze Sunday as the Thanksgiving holiday weekend draws to a close. Despite the Arctic-type weather, however, snowmobilers and skiers are reveling in their respective wintry terrains, and weather forecasters gave possible good news ahead of the NFL game in Buffalo.

In the remote Tug Hill region of upstate New York, where lake-effect snow off Lake Ontario can dump several feet of snow at a time, there was up to 46 inches (117 centimeters) in the Barnes Corners area.

"We just keep digging out," Kevin Tyo, a local businessman, said Sunday. "We were out all day yesterday, plowing."

Like many locals, he has a plow attached to the front of his truck for much of the winter, "and I have a tractor with a bucket, and a snowblower."

His advice? "If you're not used to it, stay home. If you're out, slow down." In Buffalo, officials with the NFL's Bills had sought stadium snow shovellers for the season, including ahead of Sunday night's game against the San Francisco 49ers. The team said it would pay \$20 per hour and provide food and hot drinks.

A lake-effect storm began hitting the area Saturday near the Bills' stadium in Orchard Park, New York. Snow was continuing to fall near the stadium just hours ahead of the game, according to the State Weather Risk Communication Center in New York.

## UN plastic talks collapse as countries fail to agree targets

BUSAN, South Korea (Reuters): Countries negotiating a global treaty to curb plastic pollution failed to reach agreement on Monday with over 100 nations wanting to cap production while a handful of oil-producers were prepared only to target plastic waste.

The fifth U.N. Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee meeting to yield a legally binding global treaty in Busan, South Korea, was meant to be the final one.

However, countries remained far apart on the basic scope of a treaty, and could agree only to postpone key decisions to a future meeting.

"While I saw points of convergence in many areas, positions remain divergent in some others," said Luis Vayas Valdivieso, the chair of the meeting.

The most divisive issues included capping plastic production, managing plastic products and chemicals of concern, and financing to help developing countries implement the treaty.

An option proposed by Panama, backed by over 100 countries, would have created a path for a global plastic production reduction target, while another proposal did not include production caps.

The fault lines were apparent in a revised document released on Sunday by Valdivieso, which could have formed the basis of a treaty, but remained riddled with options on the most sensitive issues.

"A treaty that... only relies on voluntary measures would not be acceptable," said Juliet Kabera, Director General of Rwanda's Environment Management Authority.

"It is time we take it seriously and negotiate a treaty that is fit for purpose and not built to fail."

A small number of petrochemical-producing nations, such as Saudi Arabia, have strongly opposed efforts to reduce plastic production and have tried to use procedural tactics to delay negotiations.

"There was never any consensus," said Saudi Arabian delegate Abdulrahman Al Gwaiz. "There are a couple of articles that somehow seem to make it (into the document) despite our continued insistence that they are not within the scope."

China, the United States, India, South Korea and Saudi Arabia were the top five primary polymer producing nations in 2023, according to data provider Eunomia.

Had such divisions been overcome, the treaty would have been one of the most significant deals relating to environmental protection since the 2015 Paris Agreement.

The postponement comes just days after the turbulent conclusion of the COP29 summit in Baku, Azerbaijan.

At Baku, countries set a new global target for mobilizing \$300 billion annually in climate finance, a deal

deemed woefully insufficient by small island states and many developing countries.

The climate talks were also slowed down by procedural manoeuvres by Saudi Arabia - who objected to the inclusion of language that reaffirmed a previous commitment to transition away from fossil fuels.

Some negotiators said a few countries held the proceedings hostage, avoiding compromises needed by using the U.N.'s consensus process.

Senegal's National Delegate Cheikh Ndiaye Sylla called it "a big mistake" to exclude voting during the entire negotiations, an agreement made last year during the second round of talks in Paris.

Plastic production is on track to triple by 2050, and microplastics have been found in air, fresh produce and even human breast milk.

Chemicals of concern in plastics include more than 3,200 found according to a 2023 U.N. Environment Programme report, which said women and children were particularly susceptible to their toxicity. Despite the postponement, several negotiators expressed urgency to get back to talks.

"Every day of delay is a day against humanity. Postponing negotiations does not postpone the crisis," said Panama's delegation head Juan Carlos Monterrey Gomez on Sunday.

"When we reconvene, the stakes will be higher."

## UN officials raise alarm over intensification in fighting in Syria

UNITED NATIONS (APP): A sharp escalation in fighting in Syria's Aleppo Governorate has displaced thousands and caused heavy civilian casualties, prompting urgent warnings from senior UN officials about the growing humanitarian crisis and threat to regional stability.

The alarm comes as the fighting spreads to parts of Idleb and Hama governorates and leaving the situation volatile and unpredictable. Meanwhile, according to the UK-based monitoring group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), claims that 'rebel forces' have taken control of the "majority" of the war-shattered country's second-largest city, Aleppo.

Russia launched air strikes in response across parts of Aleppo overnight for the first time since 2016, the observers added.

SOHR said more than 300 people - including more than 20 civilians - have been killed since the offensive started on Wednesday.

In a statement on Sunday, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen expressed grave concerns over the dramatic shift in frontlines, including advances by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a UN Security Council-designated terrorist group, and intensified government airstrikes.

"In a country torn by nearly 14 years of war and conflict, the latest developments pose severe risks to civilians and have serious implications for regional and international peace and security," he said. He stressed the urgent need to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, calling on all parties to uphold international law.

## Another bleak Christmas in Bethlehem as Christian families quit West Bank

BETHLEHEM, West Bank (Reuters): For a second year running, there is no Christmas cheer in Bethlehem, with tourists shunning the Palestinian city and many residents seeking a way out as the Gaza war grinds on.

Bethlehem's Manger Square in front of the Church of the Nativity is largely deserted and souvenir shops are shuttered.

Once again, there are no plans to put up the traditional light-festooned Christmas Tree in the ancient settlement that is venerated by Christians as the birthplace of Jesus and now sits in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

"During these difficult times that our Palestinian cities are going through, especially in the Gaza Strip, it is difficult to show any signs of joy and happiness," said Issa Thaljieh, an Orthodox priest who ministers at the Nativity Church.

Adding to the gloom, many local Christian families are also looking to

escape, demoralised by both the tourist slump that has ravaged their economy, and the constant threat of violence hovering over the territory northeast of Gaza.

"The emigration out of Bethlehem is increasing daily and monthly, and ... this has a negative impact on the city," Thaljieh said.

Christian communities have been in decline across the Middle East for generations, and the West Bank is no exception.

In the last year of British rule over the region in 1947, some 85% of Bethlehem's population were Christian. As of a 2017 census, the overall population of Bethlehem was 215,514 with only 23,000 Christians among them. That puts the percentage of Christians in Bethlehem in 2017 at around 10%.

Locals say the rate of departure has been gathering steam in recent months in the cradle of Christianity, with the economic lifeblood of the city no

longer flowing and the Israeli occupation preventing freedom of movement around the territory.

Bethlehem resident Alaa Aftem, who runs a falafel restaurant, said one of his cousins had recently moved to Australia.

"Due to the bad living conditions and bad financial conditions, people have started looking for better opportunities for their children, for better education, for a better future," he told Reuters.

Since the 1967 war between Israel and neighbouring Arab countries, Israel has occupied the West Bank, which Palestinians want as the core of a future independent state.

Israel has built Jewish settlements, deemed illegal by most countries, across the territory. Israel disputes this, citing historical and biblical ties to the land. Several of its ministers live in settlements and favour their expansion.

Violence has surged

across the hilly land since the start of the Hamas-Israel war in Gaza in October last year.

Hundreds of Palestinians - including armed fighters, stone-throwing youths and civilian bystanders - have died in clashes with Israeli security forces, while dozens of Israelis have been killed in Palestinian attacks, Israeli authorities say.

Difficult at the best of times, travel between West Bank cities has become increasingly fraught.

"There is no security if you are commuting between districts within the West Bank like between Bethlehem, Ramallah, Jericho, Hebron," Aftem said.

Munther Isaac, a pastor at Bethlehem's Lutheran Church, says local Muslim families have also been emigrating, squeezed by both financial problems and broader worries about the future.

"(There is) the fear that this war might extend to

areas in the West Bank, especially after the arming of the settlers and the announcement of the possible annexation of the West Bank," he said.

The West Bank has been

transformed by the rapid growth of Jewish settlements over the past two years, with strident settlers pushing to impose Israeli sovereignty on the area.

Far-right National

Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir said on X in October that since the start of the Gaza conflict more than 120,000 firearms had been distributed to Israeli settlers to protect them-

selves.

In Isaac's church, the nativity scene has a figure of the baby Jesus lying in a pile of rubble. "We feel that this war will never end," he said.





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## Methods to check age of kids on social media

**S**OFTWARE testers hired by Australia's government to determine how to enforce the world's first national teen social media ban have worked on defence and election contracts but will use another experience to guide their study: wrangling their own children online.

"We're all parents of kids of various ages and we're definitely aware of all the little tricks kids do," said Andrew Hammond, general manager at tech contractor KJR which will conduct the trial on about 1,200 randomly chosen Australians from January to March.

"Kids are quite resourceful so we'll definitely have our eyes and ears open," added Hammond, whose company's previous projects included checking deployment software for Australian troops in Afghanistan.

The study, one of the biggest ever trials of age-checking technology, will likely set the course for lawmakers and tech platforms around the world as they navigate a push to age-restrict social media at a time of growing concern about youth mental health and data collection, according to Reuters.

From late 2025, platforms including Meta's Instagram, Elon Musk's X, TikTok and Snapchat must show Australians they are taking reasonable steps to keep out users under 16 or face fines up to A\$49.5 million (\$32 million). Google's YouTube, a classroom staple, is exempt.

But the legislation does not specify what those reasonable steps must be. That is down to the trial, overseen by the Age Check Certification Scheme, a British consulting firm, which expects about 12 participating tech firms and must give recommendations by mid-2025.

Options include age estimation where a user's video selfie is biometrically analysed then deleted; age verification where a user uploads identifying documents to a third-party provider which sends an anonymous confirmation "token" to the platform; and age inference where a user's email address is cross-checked with other accounts. Some European countries and US states have legislated age minimums for social media, but none has rolled out an enforcement regime due to legal challenges based on preserving privacy and free speech, the Reuters report adds. Even lawmakers in Australia's conservative opposition, whose support was needed to get the centre-left government's ban through parliament, warned the ban could justify collecting personal information – an echo of a November post from X owner Elon Musk that it "seems like a backdoor way to control access to the Internet by all Australians".

Communications Minister Michelle Rowlands told parliament the ban was "not about government mandating any form of technology or demanding any personal information handed over to social media companies".

A last-minute change to the law stipulates that platforms asking for identifying documents must offer an alternative age-gate.

Many people in the age range targeted by bans do not have common identifying documents such as a driver's licence or credit card.

That helps the case for age-checking technology involving analysis of a person's features, such as facial wrinkles or their hand.

Yoti, Meta's age-checking partner, says its accuracy has improved to the point where it can pick more than 99% of people aged 13-17 as under 25. It says its standard deviation of error in guessing the age of an 18-year-old is just over one year. That may not yet be accurate enough for an age restriction in a country of 27 million people, said Konstantin Poptodorov, director of fraud and identity for digital identification company LexisNexis Risk Solutions, while noting the rapid improvements and uptake of technologies such as facial recognition in the past decade. Providers which rely on uploaded identification documents may participate in the trial but "almost the whole ethos behind the way age assurance works is 'we don't want to collect any data'," said age certification scheme CEO Allen.

Software testers would ask some trial participants to try and fool the technology with appearance-adjusting filters but would weed out only the products which failed to stop workarounds deemed cheap and scalable.

### Important Notice

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## Netanyahu has only himself to blame for ICC arrest warrant

Yossi Mekelberg

**F**or a country to have any of its leaders issued with an arrest warrant by the International Court of Justice is a low point in its history, especially when the accusations concern war crimes and crimes against humanity. Last week, the ICC issued such arrest warrants for the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the country's former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. Despite criticisms of this move, some with more merit than others, it is Netanyahu's reckless behavior and folly, both in terms of the manner in which civilians in Gaza have been treated throughout the war and of his political arrogance, that have brought this on him and his country.

It was not only Netanyahu and his political allies who have reacted with shock and anger on hearing about the issuance of the warrants, but also opposition leaders who rallied around the two accused to condemn the ICC judges' decision, in complete denial that across the world those who have witnessed the scenes from Gaza firmly believe that allegations of such crimes should be at least thoroughly investigated. There has never been a suggestion, regardless of how Israel treated the people of Gaza for almost two decades leading up to Oct. 7 last year, that Israel was not justified in pursuing Hamas and other perpetrators of that atrocity. But this was never a green light to destroy Gaza and kill tens of thousands of civilians, including many children, badly injure many more, turn the enclave to rubble, displace most of the population several times over, and deprive them of basic humanitarian aid.

The moral and legal imperatives of ensuring the wellbeing of noncombatants in a war zone are self-explanatory. Nevertheless, had Israel's government, and first and foremost Netanyahu, behaved with less complacency and taken note of advice from their friends in the international community, they could have saved themselves

these indictments. For instance, the ICC judges have found that there are reasonable grounds that starvation as a method of warfare was used during the conflict. This is a serious accusation of an act that was preventable, unless the accused believed, as alleged, that punishing the entire Gaza population was one of the aims of this war, or they showed extreme lack of judgment, despite being warned. As a matter of fact, there was also an opportunity to drive a wedge between Hamas, who have only ever brought calamity to Gaza, and the rest of the population by sparing their lives and treating them

have been let off the hook after being accused of war crimes, despite evidence to the contrary. Here is where Israel's domestic divisions and the government's arrogance have landed it in hot water. The Rome Statute, the treaty that established the ICC, recognizes the principle of "complementarity." This means that if a state linked to the alleged crimes genuinely conducts investigations into such allegations or prosecutes for the same crimes, the court will defer to this state and proceed no further with the case.

The statute is also based on the assumption of an independent judiciary. Back in June, Attorney

**Netanyahu and others claim that other democracies, such as the US, UK, and Venezuela, have been let off the hook after being accused of war crimes, despite evidence to the contrary. Here is where Israel's domestic divisions and the government's arrogance have landed it in hot water. The Rome Statute, the treaty that established the ICC, recognizes the principle of "complementarity."**

humanely. This is a case where morality and expediency could have been complementary, instead of the latter path taken at the expense of the former.

One of the complaints that Israeli politicians level against the ICC is that it has created equivalence between a democratic state and a terror organization by issuing arrest warrants for representatives of both at the same time. This is not necessarily the case. It is the same war, but not the same accusations that apply. There is no suggestion that democracies cannot commit war crimes and crimes against humanity; the opposite has been tragically on display too often in recent decades.

Furthermore, Netanyahu and others claim that other democracies, such as the US, UK, and Venezuela,

General Gali Baharav-Miara sent a letter urging Netanyahu to end the procrastination over the establishment of a state commission of inquiry, first for the obvious reasons of the need for accountability, and to draw lessons from the disaster of Oct. 7 and its aftermath, but also because such an inquiry would have fulfilled the "complementarity" requirement and most likely shelved the request for ICC arrest warrants.

However, Netanyahu is terrified of such an inquiry, for what are the chances of him surviving in power following the findings of an investigation? His fear of facing the Israeli court in his corruption case is much greater than the prospect of one day facing the judges of an international court.

Having said that, it cannot be denied that the ICC's

pursuit of justice might, at least in the short run, have serious adverse consequences. The requirement to go after any leader or country that has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity needs no elaboration, but the main efforts in this case should first have been focused on reaching a ceasefire followed by a permanent cessation of hostilities. This might prevent the creation of even more victims of this war, but the ICC's decision might sadly achieve exactly the opposite. It has already caused a split within the EU, and between several of its member states and the US.

Bringing about a ceasefire requires the EU and the US to work in tandem and with a sense of urgency, not to quarrel over this ICC decision. Moreover, the Israeli opposition felt it had no choice but to defend Netanyahu, as otherwise it could have been accused of being insufficiently patriotic and cynically using this development to unseat the Israeli leader. But counter-intuitively, these arrest warrants have made it more difficult for Netanyahu's political rivals to oppose the war and demand a ceasefire. Nothing strengthens Netanyahu and his bunch of populist ultranationalists more than when they are able to describe any criticism of Israel as an antisemitic act in support of those who are willing to destroy the country. Netanyahu evoked the memory of the 19th-century miscarriage of justice in the case of the Jewish army officer Alfred Dreyfus, who was falsely accused of treason — a misuse of his memory and victimization, as Netanyahu is deplorably perverting the notion of antisemitism and the memory of the Holocaust.

Regrettably, the ICC arrest warrants have provided Netanyahu with more of the toxic fuel that his politics require. With the support of the US, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in his rejection of the warrants, his position has been strengthened and might result in prolonging the war.

## Ominous signs point to Israeli resettlement of Gaza

Dr. Abdellatif El-Menawy

**O**bservers of the unfolding events in Gaza require little effort to discern that Israel is effectively working toward resettlement in the region, even if this objective remains officially unspoken. Discussions on this topic may be confined to the corridors of the Israeli government, or discreetly shared with allies worldwide, but the evidence is clear.

This objective adds to Israel's publicly declared goals for the conflict: eliminating Hamas and recovering the hostages. However, actions on the ground point to a third, more concealed agenda. This is evident in Israel's persistent obstruction of negotiations and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's refusal to outline a "day after" strategy for Gaza.

Amid the systematic Israeli assault, soldiers reportedly aided Daniella Weiss, a 79-year-old settler activist, in entering the enclave to survey potential sites for settlements, allegedly without authorization from their superiors. Known as the "Mother of Settlers," Weiss openly declared at a public conference that Israel's military entered Gaza to resettle it. Her actions, though unofficial, align with longstanding ambitions within certain segments of Israeli society.

Weiss is no stranger to controversy. She played a key role in establishing settlements in the West Bank shortly after Israel's 1967 occupation, and served for over a decade as head of the Kedumim settlement council. Her record includes involvement in violent actions against Palestinians, often with official backing.

Statements from Netanyahu's government partners have also revealed candid views on their long-term plans for Gaza. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said that the Israeli army would control the region for years. His comments echo those of former Israeli military Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot, who acknowledged both public and covert objectives for the war. While these so-called secret goals remain officially unstated, they are increasingly evident in Israel's actions.

Signs suggest Tel Aviv is implementing a strategy to resettle Gaza or, at the very least, establish a prolonged military presence. This strategy brings to mind the 21 settlements Israel dismantled in Gaza under its 2005 disengagement plan, which also included the withdrawal of military forces from the region.

Reports in the Western media have highlighted military actions and political maneuvers indicative of plans to annex northern Gaza.

Statements from senior Israeli military officer Itzik Cohen seemingly admitted to "ethnic cleansing" in the region, revealing intentions to prevent displaced Palestinians

from returning to their homes in Jabalia, Beit Hanoun, and Beit Lahia — areas subjected to relentless bombardment since early October. Although the military has officially distanced itself from Cohen's comments, the realities on the ground appear to align with his claims.

In another revealing moment, former Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant told the families of Israeli hostages: "There's nothing more to be done in Gaza. The primary objectives have been achieved. I fear we remain there simply out of a desire to stay." His admission underscores the potential for a prolonged occupation, even as Israel publicly denies plans to resettle the enclave.

Ethnic cleansing in northern Gaza would clear the way for Israeli settlers to realize long-held aspirations of reestablishing settlements in the area. Analysts suggest further evidence of this agenda lies in the inclusion of far-right ministers Orit Strock and Yitzhak Wasserlauf in Israel's security Cabinet. Both are staunch proponents of settlement expansion and play significant roles in shaping policy.

Further insights from the Israeli newspaper Haaretz have detailed plans to reoccupy Gaza, sparking a backlash in Palestinian and Arab circles. Sources in Ramallah claim that Israel aims to divide Gaza into four separate zones.

The northern area has already seen extensive demolitions, with only 20,000 residents remaining from an original population of 1 million. The second zone, Netzarim, is slated to become a major corridor up to 6 km wide and 7 km long, cutting across Gaza from east to west. A third corridor, the Salah Al-Din axis, near Rafah along the Egyptian border, will also witness the complete destruction of residential neighborhoods. Additionally, a buffer zone extending 1 km into Gaza's eastern border is planned. These measures are expected to be implemented by 2026, with recent escalations serving as a catalyst for their execution.

Israeli officials continue to deny plans for resettling Gaza, yet actions by government allies and settler leaders suggest otherwise. While the Israeli army claimed that Weiss's entry into Gaza was unauthorized and against protocol, Weiss herself admitted to using the same methods she employs in the West Bank.

Netanyahu, meanwhile, publicly denies any intention to resettle Gaza. However, his coalition members and Likud Party allies openly support the idea.

As events continue to unfold, Gaza's future remains shrouded in uncertainty, with ominous signs pointing toward a protracted occupation and potential settlement expansion.

## Central and Eastern Europe's bid for AI dominance

Sona Muzikarova

**W**hile the world's attention remains focused on Ukraine and Russia, a quieter revolution is reshaping Central and Eastern European economies.

CEE countries have emerged as innovation hubs in recent years, generating a wave of new tech unicorns. Romania's UiPath, for example, has become an automation leader, enhancing workplace efficiency by freeing workers from repetitive tasks. Poland's Docplanner is revolutionizing healthcare access by leveraging artificial intelligence to connect millions of patients with doctors. And while Croatia's Infobip, with its AI-enhanced communication platform, facilitates seamless interactions between businesses, governments, and citizens, Bulgaria's Payhawk is transforming corporate finance by streamlining expense management.

Together, these companies show that AI can be a powerful force for good,

driving rapid advances in healthcare and finance and increasing workplace productivity. The next major tech innovation could well come from a startup incubator in Warsaw, a university lab in Bucharest, or a coworking space in Kyiv — probably developed at a fraction of Western costs.

Some might say that this wave of innovation is building despite the numerous challenges facing the region; others would say it is fueled by them. As they strive to maintain their competitive edge in traditional sectors like auto manufacturing, CEE economies are also grappling with post-pandemic financial pressures, exacerbated by the EU's revised budget rules.

AI has the potential to help CEE countries tackle these complex challenges, generating tremendous value across traditional public sectors such as healthcare and education, while enabling governments to counter foreign interference and safeguard

critical energy networks.

Encouragingly, CEE countries have a strong foundation on which to build a thriving tech sector, with a critical mass of engineers and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) graduates. Company valuations in the region increased more than sevenfold between 2017 and 2022. Moreover, the share of investment from outside the EU rose from 9 percent in 2022 to 21 percent in 2023, highlighting these economies' growing global appeal.

To be sure, significant challenges remain. Notably, recent research shows that CEE economies still lag behind their Western European counterparts in both infrastructure and investment. With a population of more than 150 million and a combined gross domestic product of almost €2.5 trillion (\$2.7 trillion), the region has vast potential. Yet, total private equity investment fell by 40

percent in 2023, to €1.7 billion. Consequently, launching a startup in the region can feel like trying to build a spaceship with spare parts from a bicycle shop.

The rise of populist parties poses another serious challenge, threatening to undermine responsible macroeconomic management and deter partners and investors. Instead of addressing fiscal pressures through spending cuts, many CEE governments have opted to raise corporate and value-added taxes, prioritizing short-term relief over long-term economic stability.

A more forward-looking strategy would embrace AI's transformative potential to drive economic growth and innovation across the region. To unlock this potential, CEE countries should take three key steps.

First, policymakers should focus on expanding STEM education and

retaining top talent. The region's main obstacle to becoming the next Silicon Valley is a shortage of skilled professionals. While hundreds of promising biotech, finance, and robotics startups have emerged in recent years, they cannot grow, let alone become unicorns, without a robust talent pool.

And, although education is a public good, the sluggish pace of reform in CEE countries means that the private sector must also focus on human-capital development.

Second, deeper European integration could fuel innovation by facilitating the cross-border exchange of ideas, talent, and capital. With this in mind, the European Commission recently unveiled its AI Factories initiative, offering developers access to the computing power, data, and other resources needed to train advanced AI models. Several CEE countries have also started exploring structured technological partnerships with other European

governments to promote shared strategic priorities.

Lastly, governments must boost inward foreign investment. Despite the geopolitical turmoil of the past two years and subsequent decline in private equity inflows, the region has demonstrated remarkable resilience. While CEE economies are poised to play a pivotal role in Ukraine's reconstruction, they must first address infrastructure gaps, funding shortfalls, and regulatory uncertainty that could deter potential investors. Enhancing the region's appeal is essential not only for the tech sector, but also for advancing digital infrastructure projects, including 5G networks, data centers, and quantum computing facilities.

As CEE economies confront these challenges, it has become abundantly clear that they must act swiftly to harness AI's potential, or risk watching a generation of talent seek better opportunities elsewhere.



# Africa steps into the global political, economic spotlight

Andrew Hammond

Africa often flies under the global radar, despite its growing economic and political significance. However, that will change in the coming week, with South Africa assuming the G20 presidency on Sunday, and US President Joe Biden visiting Angola from Monday to Wednesday, probably his last overseas trip as president.

Both moments are big firsts. No African nation has ever held the G20 before. Moreover, Biden's trip is not only the first US presidential visit to Angola, but also his first to the continent during his own presidency, as he seeks to highlight to his successor, Donald Trump, and the wider West the strategic importance of Africa in the second half of the decade.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has said that he will use South Africa's G20 year, which will include 130 meetings in the next 12 months, to put the spotlight on the huge political and economic potential of the continent. Indeed, Africa is increasingly seen to have the potential to become the main driver of global growth.

At a time of global demographic aging, the share of Africa's population aged 65 or over has remained at barely 3 percent over recent decades. It has, therefore, earned the nickname of the "young continent," with almost two-thirds of its population under the age of 30, and 40 percent under 14. Overall, Africa's population is forecast to double by 2050, to 2.8 billion, with a huge consumer market that is increasing demand for global goods and services.

Biden, who on Monday will become the first US president to visit sub-Saharan Africa since 2015, will bring attention to this continental growth story in the context of US policy. At present, Africa accounts for

just over 1 percent of US foreign trade, which is dominated by petroleum imports from Nigeria and Angola. So Biden has said that he "is all in on Africa" and, in 2022, he hosted the African Leaders Summit in Washington, the first such meeting for eight years since Barack Obama's presidency.

This contrasts with Trump's first presidency from 2017-21, when US

Infrastructure and Investment at the G7 summit in Germany in 2022. A key goal is to narrow the investment gap for quality infrastructure, providing an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Biden's choice of natural resources-rich Angola, Africa's eighth largest economy, is deliberate. At the G7 summit in Japan in 2023, the US leader announced — in partner-

tions. If the project bears fruit, it may be a partnership blueprint for similar joint initiatives.

Lobito's rival is an existing China route, transporting minerals, such as copper and cobalt, from Zambia and DRC — the so-called Tazara railway, a line from inland mining countries to the Indian Ocean. Earlier this year, China's President Xi Jinping signed off on a \$1 billion plan to

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policy toward Africa had lower priority — and this despite key administration figures, including former national security adviser John Bolton, acknowledging that Russia and China were "interfering with US military operations and posed a significant threat to US national security interests" there.

One of Biden's early presidential initiatives was the launch of the Partnership for Global

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The US first recognized the Angolan government in 1993. However, it was not until 2017 that bilateral relations began to warm significantly with Joao Manuel Goncalves Lourenco's election as president. The nation of 40 million people is Africa's second largest crude oil

exporter, with the oil industry making up about 90 percent of its exports.

Crucially for the US, Angola is diversifying its dependence on China. For decades, Angolan reliance on Chinese loans grew after it emerged from the civil war in 2002. The country still owes China around \$17 billion, mostly in the form of oil-backed loans, which funded infrastructure such as roads and public housing.

The still significant economic dependence of Angola on China is a familiar story in Africa. From 2000-2023, China lent Africa more than \$180 billion, making Beijing the top bilateral lender for multiple nations on the continent. Around a quarter of that has been for 270 loans to Angola for mostly energy and transportation projects, with Ethiopia, Egypt, Nigeria, and Kenya the top five borrowers. This \$180 billion sum is the equivalent of over 60 percent of the World Bank's lending, and around five times the total of African Development Bank's sovereign loans.

The broader context is that, in 2009, China surpassed the US as Africa's biggest trading partner, with trade volumes recording a record high of \$282 billion in 2023, a huge increase from \$12 billion a quarter of a century ago. Around a fifth of Africa's exports now go to China, a quadrupling in US dollar terms since 2001, the bulk of which includes metals, mineral products, and fuel.

Taken together, Biden's trip will focus on the huge potential of Africa, which has global importance for Washington and the wider West. However, with US policy seeking to catch up with China in the continent, regional allies rightly worry that Trump's second presidency could see Africa's perceived importance diminished again in the White House.

# I am starving in Gaza and I don't believe the world can't do anything

Nour Elassy

For over a year now, my family and I have been displaced from northern Gaza to Deir el-Balah in the middle of the Gaza Strip. Throughout this time, we, along with the rest of Gaza's population, have lived every type of torture imaginable and unimaginable. One of them is hunger.

Gaza is now fully dependent on food aid. From a place that could produce its own food and feed its population with fresh vegetables, fruit, eggs, meat and fish, it has now become a place of starvation.

Since last year, the Israeli army has made sure to destroy food stores, markets, warehouses storing foodstuffs, farms and fishing boats. It has eliminated police forces securing aid delivery and distribution, thus ensuring that aid is looted before it reaches those who need it. For a while now, we have been buying "aid" food, not receiving it for free.

We were barely scraping by when the situation took a sharp turn for the worse in October. What began in the so-called "disaster zone" of the north has expanded to the rest of the Strip. Israel's nutritional terrorism has struck the whole of Gaza.

The Israeli army decreased the number of trucks it was allowing to enter to just 30-40 per day and food — which was already expensive and unaffordable for most — started to disappear. Now, even if we are able to buy food, we cannot find any. The international agencies and various charities are of no use; they cannot provide anything.

It is difficult for me to explain and capture the feeling of hunger for someone who does not understand the depths of its pain, and it is even more challenging to explain this experience while being under constant bombardment and shelling from Israel for more than 400 days now.

But I will try. Every day, I wake up in the morning in a home full of family members trying to survive this madness. I drink a bit of barely drinkable water; it has an unpleasant salty taste that does not satisfy thirst. Israel has polluted underground water and prevented fuel from entering, so the last remaining water desalination plant is no longer working.

If I am lucky, I have a bit of coffee, of course without any sugar, and maybe a tiny piece of bread. Then I try to forget about my hunger by focusing on my studies.

I was supposed to graduate last year, but I couldn't complete my last semester because the genocide started. After the Israeli army destroyed all universities, Gaza's education authorities came together and devised a plan to have students continue their education online.

Gaza's destroyed infrastructure has made this endeavour extremely difficult. The internet connection is weak and in most places, non-existent. There is also no electricity, so charging a phone or a laptop is a challenge.

But this is not even half of the struggle. Studying itself, being able to focus amid the sound of screaming, bombardment and drones, and the constant feeling of hunger and weakness is nearly impossible.

I study literature, which requires one to dissect a text, to analyse the language, the characters, their motives and feelings, but I

cannot focus. My brain does not comply; I cannot comprehend what I am reading. The brain fog does not go away, no matter how hard I try to focus. The headache is followed by nausea and my stomach rumbling.

What makes it even more difficult to focus while starving are the children. I have eight nephews and nieces all living with me here in the same house, and all are under the age of six.

Every time they cry for food, their mothers try to change the subject or offer what expired food they have. Yet, how convincing can you be when the food is too difficult to look at even for adults?

My sister and sister-in-

law have babies. Formula is almost impossible to find, so they try to breastfeed them even though they themselves are malnourished. Imagine how you breastfeed a newborn on emptiness.

The Gaza health authorities reported 28 children died from malnutrition in the spring. There has been no update of this number since then. We can only imagine how many babies we have lost to starvation. Hunger has affected everyone I see. People are visibly thinner, they walk around with an empty look in their eyes, dark circles underneath. The streets are filled with children and elderly people begging for food. I see misery and hunger everywhere I turn. The worst is that the food that we have, when we do have it, does not make us feel better. We have been having mostly expired canned food and wheat infested with worms. When I eat it, it makes my stomach problems so much worse. I am always in pain after a meal. Starvation is destroying our bodies and our minds, incapacitating us. And this is the goal. It is, of course, not the first time Israel has starved Gaza to ensure its population is weak and vulnerable. When it imposed its illegal siege on the Strip in 2007, it allowed on average of 2,400 trucks per month to enter in the following three years. This was a sharp decrease from the average of 10,000 trucks, which was meeting the bare minimum of needs before the siege.

The number began to rise after 2010 when an international coalition of human rights activists and groups organised the Gaza Freedom Flotilla — a fleet of six civilian ships loaded with humanitarian aid that sailed for Gaza in an attempt to break the Israeli siege. Israeli soldiers raided the ships and killed nine people, causing international outrage and significant political pressure to lift the blockade.

The number of aid trucks increased again after Israel's brutal assault on Gaza in 2014, which killed

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# Saudi Arabia's sustainable desalination strategy

Sarper Sarp

The Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea are major sources of seafood and vital reservoirs of two of the most precious resources: water and oil.

The rich marine ecosystems within these bodies of water are characterized by a diverse array of unique and indigenous plants and animals that play crucial roles in maintaining ecological balance.

However, these sensitive habitats may experience significant physical and chemical stresses if the natural equilibrium is disturbed.

Saudi Arabia is taking a leadership role on the global stage with its innovative and patented technologies developed by the Saudi Water Authority's Water Technology Innovation and Research Development Institute.

These initiatives are focused not only on efficient desalination, but also on the responsible management of brine as a resource rather than merely as a waste product.

WTIIRA-SWA has created a groundbreaking dual brine concentration design that combines a nanofiltration system upstream of a reverse osmosis system and a membrane brine concentration system downstream.

This technology enables the extraction of two valuable brine streams: one that consists of concentrated

and purified monovalent ions, which can be used to produce high-purity sodium chloride and bromine, and another that is rich in divalent ions usable for manufacturing various calcium carbonate, distinguishing it from other desalination processes.

**Such innovation not only contributes to the sustainability of desalination processes but also opens new avenues for economic viability, connecting the desalination industry to a range of applications in sectors such as chlor-alkali production, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. Another noteworthy achievement in this field is the extraction of vaterite calcium carbonate, distinguished by its unique chemical properties, including high porosity, increased surface area, greater solubility and biodegradability. These attributes make vaterite calcium carbonate especially suitable for controlled release in pharmaceutical formulations, serving as an effective carrier for drug delivery. By harnessing such advanced materials, WTIIRA-SWA underscores its commitment to innovation in resource recovery. Moreover, WTIIRA-SWA has implemented several pioneering strategies to minimize the environmental impact of desalination brine and preserve the precious ecosystems surrounding the Kingdom.**

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# War in Gaza allows Netanyahu to sidestep a two-state solution

Daoud Kuttab

A common thread appears to unite most analysts on the reason the Lebanon-Israeli ceasefire agreement is not necessarily a prelude to a similar deal in Gaza.

The point of consensus is that Israel's prime minister has set a goal of annihilating Hamas in Gaza, while no such aim was set in the conflict with Hezbollah combatants in Lebanon.

While, on the surface, this view holds some truth, the problem is much deeper and wider than the issue of Hamas and Gaza. After all, most Israeli and inter-

national military experts have argued that while you can militarily weaken a resistance movement such as Hamas, you cannot annihilate what in the end is an ideology rather than a set of military adversaries. In fact, the departing Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has said that Hamas cannot be totally defeated, and that this is a goal that is difficult, if not impossible, to militarily accomplish.

However, a longer-term problem that is less talked about might be the real reason behind the absence of any serious effort to end

the Israeli war on Gaza. What might have begun as a campaign to restore a depleted deterrence has become a revenge war — one that has a political goal, but no clear sign of ending.

The political goal can be clearly seen in the refusal of the Israeli government to engage with the Palestinian leadership headed by President Mahmoud Abbas regarding the "day after" in Gaza. The Israeli government, which agreed to the conditions set by the 1993 Oslo Accord, has long forgotten about that agreement, with its military

repeatedly entering areas legally under the security responsibility of the Ramallah-based government.

Ironically, while Israel has refused to engage with Abbas on the future facing Gaza, it continues to benefit from the Palestinian leader's security crackdown on militants in the West Bank. Palestinian leaders say the clampdown is for the higher interest of the Palestinian people, ensuring that the West Bank is not engulfed in violence wreaked by Israeli

military and settlers using Oct. 7 as an excuse.

Nevertheless, and regardless of the security cooperation that Israel enjoys from Abbas, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu understands that any further legitimacy given to the Palestinian leader will force Israel to comply with global demands for negotiations to implement a two-state solution.

This rejection of the right of self-determination for the Palestinian people is not, as some would argue, the result of pressure

from the Israeli leader's far-right coalition partners, but is clearly Netanyahu's personal ideology. So long as there is war and hostages in Gaza, his government can justify its endless military strikes without having to make a single political concession to Palestinians.

However, once the war is over, there is no way that denying Palestinians a political future can be justified. In fact, any junior political or strategic analyst could argue that a ceasefire without a political roadmap is tantamount to a short-lived cessation of violence at best. US

President Joe Biden's comment to Abbas in Bethlehem in July 2022 that the time "is not ripe to restart Palestinian-Israeli talks" is often referred to as the one statement that further discouraged Palestinians regarding their political future, and may have been part of the frustration that brought about the cross-border Hamas attack one year later.

Public and private discussions over the past 14 months have centered on the need to end the war on Gaza with a hostage release and a durable ceasefire coupled with a parallel

process of rebuilding the enclave and working to offer all Palestinians a political horizon, including an independent Palestinian state.

This goal, which the world agrees to as part of the two-state solution, is what encourages the Israeli prime minister to keep the war in Gaza going for as long as politically possible. It might also explain why Netanyahu favored Donald Trump over Kamala Harris, knowing that he can avoid a two-state solution with him, but would have a harder time had Harris become leader.





# Uzbek envoy, PCMEA discuss bilateral trade

LAHORE (APP): The Uzbekistan's Ambassador in Pakistan Alisher Tukhtaev discussed with Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PCMEA) ways to enhance bilateral trade, particularly in the carpet industry, and emphasized increasing mutual trade between the two countries.

During his visit to PCMEA head office here, he also highlighted the importance of strengthening partnerships in all fields, including trade, and expressed his commitment to facilitating visa processes for trade delegations. He was accompanied by Trade Consul Bakhrom Yusupov and other officials. The meeting was also attended by PCMEA Patron-in-Chief Abdul Latif Malik, Chairman Mian Atiqur Rehman, Vice Chairman Riaz Ahmed and Carpet Training Institute (CTI) Chairperson Ejazur Rehman.

Tukhtaev's visit underscores Uzbekistan's efforts

to bolster economic ties with Pakistan, and the carpet industry is a significant sector with vast potential for growth and cooperation.

Alisher Tukhtaev hailed the launch of direct flights from Tashkent to Lahore as a "historic development" in Pak-Uzbek relations. This move is expected to significantly boost trade and cultural ties between the two nations.

With Uzbekistan's population of 40 million and a GDP growth rate of 6-7 percent per annum, the ambassador emphasized the vast potential for cooperation in various sectors, including energy, logistics, agriculture, and culture. He noted that Uzbekistan's special economic zones offer extremely competitive gas and electricity rates, making them an attractive proposition for Pakistani businesses.

The ambassador also highlighted the importance of enhancing bilateral trade, which is expected to reach new heights in the

near future. Discussions are already underway with Pakistan's Ministry of Commerce on various matters, and the direct air service between Tashkent and Lahore is expected to play a key role in promoting trade partnerships.

PCMEA Chairman Mian Atiqur Rehman and Vice Chairman Riaz Ahmed welcomed Uzbekistan's Ambassador and his delegation. They proposed organizing single-country exhibitions in Uzbekistan to promote Pakistani handmade carpets and requested full support for the event. The exhibitions should allow the carpets to be sold in the local market as well.

They suggested reducing import tariffs on handmade carpets from Pakistan to facilitate trade in this sector. They also proposed holding single-country exhibitions every six months to promote bilateral trade and cultural exchange.

Uzbekistan's Trade Consul, Bakhrom Yusupov,

noted that Uzbekistan also has a handmade carpet industry, but Pakistan's experience in this sector is more extensive. He expressed interest in joint ventures and proposed that PCMEA arrange a delegation to meet with Uzbekistan's carpet producers.

He mentioned that Pakistan and Uzbekistan have agreements covering 17 items and two memoranda of understanding on transit trade logistics. However, he emphasized the need to further enhance trade cooperation between the two countries.

During the meeting, PCMEA officials requested that the Uzbek delegation to provide information on wool and silk prices and import procedures in Pakistan.

The association also presented a handmade carpet and a special shield to the Uzbek ambassador, who reciprocated with a shield for the PCMEA Chairman.



ISLAMABAD: Vendors displaying seasonal fruits to attract customers at Sunday Bazaar.

## Exporters extend Malaysian visit

LAHORE (APP): Encouraged by the enthusiastic response from Malaysian buyers, a delegation of Pakistani food exporters has extended their two-week visit by an additional week to capitalize on the growing interest and finalize trade agreements.

According to a message received on Sunday from Kuala Lumpur, Saif Ur Rehman, the delegation leader, shared that the group has been successfully showcasing Pakistan's diverse and high-quality food products, particularly varieties of Nimko, which have garnered significant attention. "By the grace of Allah, Pakistani products meet international standards and are exceptional in taste," he remarked.

The extended visit aims to strengthen bilateral trade ties, explore new market opportunities, and foster collaborations that could lead to increased export volumes. This initiative reflects Pakistan's commitment to expanding its footprint in Malaysia's food market while boosting economic relations between the two nations.

During the visit, the delegation participated in business-to-business meetings and product demonstrations, highlighting Pakistan's strengths in processed foods. Malaysian stakeholders have shown keen interest in establishing long-term partnerships, marking a promising outlook for future trade relations.

## FDI in corporate farming vital for food security

LAHORE (APP): The Convener of the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Regional Standing Committee on Food, Shahid Imran, emphasised the importance of foreign direct investment (FDI) in corporate farming as a means to counter food insecurity and meet the population's staple food needs.

Talking to a delegation of progressive farmers led by Chaudhry Shaheer Asif Arain from Sahiwal, here on Sunday, he underscored the critical need for FDI to bolster Pakistan's agriculture sector and foreign exchange reserves.

"Pakistan requires substantial foreign investment to bridge its current investment gap, improve agricultural and industrial production, create jobs, increase exports, and generate addi-

tional tax revenues," he stated. He cited examples from countries like India and Indonesia, where public-private partnerships with foreign collaborators have enhanced local production of high-yielding seeds. These partnerships circumvent the lengthy process of developing new cultivars while ensuring affordable access to high-yield seeds, ultimately boosting crop productivity and farm incomes.

Highlighting the scope of corporate farming, he noted the need for capital investment in land acquisition, agricultural machinery, land development, and irrigation systems. "Corporate farming can also expand the cultivated area, increasing oilseed production and saving substantial foreign exchange," he said.

However, he stressed that

beyond corporate farming, establishing an agro-industry through FDI is even more crucial for Pakistan. The country's reliance on imports for critical agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, and machinery—including harvesters and water pumps—continues to rise. Simultaneously, Pakistan's agricultural exports largely consist of raw commodities with minimal value addition.

Shahid Imran stated that Pakistan's vast agriculture sector, coupled with its underdeveloped agro-industrial base, presents a significant opportunity to attract investments in both agricultural input production and agro-processing. "This is essential to address challenges such as high import bills, sluggish export growth, and rural poverty effectively," he added.

## PARC introduced 10 high yielding pulses seed varieties

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) Dr Ghulam Muhammad Ali has said that the Variety Evaluation Committee of the Council during current year has approved 10 high yielding pulses varieties to boost output of pulses in the country.

Talking to APP here on Sunday, he said that pulses play a crucial role in global

food security and nutrition of the country, adding that Pakistan needs 1.56 million tons of pulses annually.

"We have become self-sufficient in mung production during 2021-22 which was 0.263 million tons against the total requirement of 0.180 million tons," he said.

These ten high-yielding pulse varieties are poised to revolutionize the pulse out-

put, adding that now the country is focusing on increasing the production of other pulse crops, such as chickpea, lentil and mash bean.

Out of the recommended 10 pulses varieties included 05 chickpeas and 01 mung bean variety of NIAB, Faisalabad, 01 lentil and 01 mung bean variety of Pulses Research Program, NARC, Islamabad, he said adding that 01 mung bean variety by Pulses Research Institute, AARI, Faisalabad and a mung bean variety of NIFA, Peshawar.

This achievement is due to the consistent backup support by PSDP, Pulses Project "Promoting Research for Productivity Enhancement in Pulses" to its research components throughout the country, he added. The Chairman said that high-yielding, disease and climate-resilient varieties play an important role in improving pulse productivity.

However, he was of the view that as the pulses gene pool has widened, therefore, all pulses scientists across the country are urged to focus on strengthening the pulses foundation seed production including BNS, Pre-basic and basic seed.

Moreover, there was a need for a strong nexus among researchers and extension workers so that more seed can be produced to shrink the gap between pulses production and requirements in the country, he added.

## U Bank wins Best Microfinance Bank for Islamic Retail Banking Offerings



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: U Microfinance Bank (U Bank) has been honored as the Best Microfinance Bank for Islamic Retail Banking Offerings in Pakistan 2024 at the 10th Islamic Retail Banking Awards (IRBA) hosted by Cambridge IFA. The award was received by Mr. Asim Anwar, Chief Business and Digital

Officer at U Bank. The ceremony, held in Dubai, recognized U Bank's trailblazing efforts and significant contributions to promoting Shari'ah-compliant financial services in Pakistan.

U Bank has established itself as a pioneer in the microfinance industry by introducing Islamic banking services at an extensive scale in Pakistan. Since the launch of its Islamic bank-

ing services in 2022, the bank has expanded its network from just five branches to a growing ecosystem of Islamic banking windows and branches, offering a comprehensive suite of Shari'ah-compliant financial products and services. This rapid growth has culminated in the achievement of a PKR 6 billion+ Gross Financing Portfolio (GFP) for Islamic Banking—a remarkable milestone within just two years.

"We are deeply honored to receive this recognition from the Islamic Retail Banking Awards 2024," said Mr. Mohamed Essa Al Taheri, President & CEO - U Bank. "This accolade is a testament to our unwavering commitment to delivering innovative and inclusive Islamic financial solutions that empower individuals and contribute to a riba-free economy in Pakistan."

The Islamic Retail Banking Awards, organized by Cambridge IFA, celebrate excellence and best practices in Islamic retail banking across the world. The strongest Islamic retail

banks are selected based on an Islamic Banking Efficiency Study conducted by Cambridge IFA, which ranks over 150 Islamic retail banks. The awards employ a rigorous assessment process, ensuring that only the most impactful and forward-thinking institutions are acknowledged.

This award reinforces U Bank's strategic focus on the growth of its Islamic banking services as a cornerstone of its long-term vision.

U Microfinance Bank Ltd. (U Bank) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) - e & Group (formerly known as Etisalat Company). The bank has a wide network of branches across multiple cities and rural areas in Pakistan and offers a range of microfinance loans, deposit products, branchless banking solutions, as well as Islamic Banking services. U Bank's branchless banking offers services under the banner of UPaisa in collaboration with Ufone (Pak Telecom Mobile Limited).

## PIAF for withdrawal of anti-industry decisions of constant rise in petrol

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: As the Ministry of Finance has announced an increase in petrol prices by Rs 3.72 per litre for the next 15 days the Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) has asked the government to withdraw the anti-industry decision, warning the oauthorities that inflation above six percent could hurt the economic growth and only a prudent approach could keep it in under the control.

PIAF Chairman Mian Faheemur Rehman Saigol in a joint statement along with senior vice chairman Nsullah Mughal and vice chairman Tahir Manzoor Ch said that a continuous jump in fuel prices have

pushed up the weekly inflation. The oil prices and inflation are closely connected in a cause-and-effect relationship. As fuel rates move up, inflation, which is the measure of general price trends throughout the economy, follows in the same direction upward. On the other hand, if the rates of fuel fall, inflationary pressures start to drop, he said.

Referring the data of PBS Mian Nauman Kabir said the Sensitive Price Indicator based weekly inflation for the week, for the combined consumption group, witnessed an increase of 2.29 percent compared to the previous week, mainly due to the increase in fuel prices in the country.

The SPI inflation for the combined consumption

group was recorded at 32.32 points compared to 29.36 points registered in the previous week. In the same way, as compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI inflation for the combined consumption group in the week witnessed an increase of 4.77 percent, he added.

Faheem Saigol called for putting the economy on a balanced and sustainable growth trajectory, addressing the underlying structural vulnerabilities, as low export growth, limited foreign exchange reserves, documentation of economy and higher food inflation are still major challenges to the economy.

Tahir Manzoor Ch urged the government to take concrete measures for easing

out inflation that has further increased due to rise in oil prices and other essential commodities. He said that inflation is on higher side due to the impact of government's economic policies of soaring fuel rates, enhancing power and gas tariff, depreciating the local currency and imposing exorbitant duties on imported industry raw material.

Nasrullah Mughal asked the Ministry of Finance to devise a strategy to control and ease out the impact of inflation. He said policy measures like zero borrowing by government from the State Bank of Pakistan in current financial year would decrease the local wheat price.

Reduction in fiscal deficit, primary surplus H2

of FY 24; monetary tightening and demand compression by austerity; complete restriction on supplementary grants are positive examples, he added. The downward trajectory in crude oil in the global market should result in downward pattern in domestic prices, he said.

According to a notification issued by the Ministry, the price of petrol has been raised to Rs 252.10 per litre, while high-speed diesel has seen an increase of Rs 3.29 per litre, bringing it to Rs 258.43. Conversely, the price of kerosene oil has been reduced by Rs 0.62 per litre, now priced at Rs 164.98, and light diesel oil has decreased by Rs 0.48 per litre, lowering it to Rs 151.73.

## Diversification vital for growth: Iftikhar Malik

LAHORE (APP): SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry former President Iftikhar Ali Malik has said that diversification of economic activities across various sectors including technology, renewable energy, agriculture, healthcare, and manufacturing can shield Pakistan from the uncertainties of global markets. In a statement issued here on Sunday, he said as Pakistan continues to navigate the complexities of the international economy, diversification can prove to be a pivotal strategy for sustainable growth and resilience. He said in today's interconnected world, economies are increasingly interdependent. "By investing in diverse sectors, we can mitigate risks associated with economic downturns in specific industries," he added.

He said more over, diversification fosters innovation and entrepreneurship. Encouraging a wide range of industries not only creates job opportunities but also nurtures a culture of creativity and adaptability, adding that innovation is a driving force behind economic progress, and diverse industries provide a fertile ground for new ideas and inventions. "We can build a robust and resilient economy that can withstand the challenges of the modern world while fostering sustainable development and prosperity for all citizens of Pakistan," he added.

Iftikhar Malik said additionally, diversification enhances our global competitiveness as a varied economic base allows us to cater to a broader range of international markets. Iftikhar Malik said this adaptability will position Pakistan favorably in international trade and foster economic growth.

## Industry shocked over another hike in oil prices

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has rejected yet another increase in prices of petroleum products in just 15 days, as despite a decline in the international market, the government has increased the prices of petroleum products which is unjust and unfair. The FPCCI former president and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar asked the government to bring down the prices of utilities to the regional competitors besides lowering interest rate which is also very high when compared to the other countries.

He remarked that at a time of unsatisfactory

export volumes and low industrial growth, the hike in oil products alongwith constant raise in electricity and gas tariffs for the industry, especially for the SMEs, was really surprising. If the decision is not withdrawn, it will prove dangerous for the country's SME sector, he stressed.

The average prices of petrol and HSD decreased in the international market by about \$1.5 and \$2.5 per barrel, respectively, after October 15. The average price of petrol had dropped to about \$76 per barrel from about \$77.5. The price of HSD also declined to about \$84 per barrel from \$86.5 in the last fortnight.

He said that the businessmen were hoping that the prices of petroleum products would go down,

but the government increased the rates to offset inventory losses incurred by oil companies after the last price revision on November, saying the massive jump in electricity base rates and petroleum products prices would make local products uncompetitive in the international market.

The BMP Chairman observed the move came as a surprise as experts were hoping for a reduction in the prices of petroleum products.

According to an official announcement, The federal government on Saturday increased the price of petrol by Rs3.72 per litre in line with fluctuation in global oil prices effective Dec 1.

It also hiked the price of high speed diesel (HSD) by

R3.29 per litre. However, the price of kerosene oil has been slashed by Rs0.62 per litre and light diesel oil (LDO) by Rs0.48 per litre.

The finance ministry in a statement said that the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) had worked out the consumer prices of petroleum products as per variation in the oil price in the international market.

The price of petrol has witnessed an increase of Rs3.72 per litre, going up from Rs248.38 to Rs252.10 per litre.

The price of HSD has also been raised by Rs3.29 per litre, from Rs255.14 to Rs258.43 per litre, due to fluctuation in global oil prices.

Petrol is used in motor-bike and cars and its

demand has increased since the government cut indigenous gas supplies to CNG retail outlets in Punjab several years ago.

CNG stations in Punjab now use imported gas, the price of which is double that of indigenous gas. As a result, CNG has become uncompetitive in the province.

HSD is primarily used in the transport and agriculture sectors. Therefore, fluctuations in its price will have a direct inflationary impact on consumers.

Likewise, the price of kerosene oil has come down by Rs0.62 per litre from Rs165.60 to Rs164.98 per litre and LDO by Rs0.48 from Rs152.21 to Rs151.73 per litre.

Kerosene oil is used in remote areas, especially in

the northern parts of the country, where LPG is not available for cooking purposes. The Pakistan Army is its key user in the northern region due to the cold weather. LDO is used in the industrial sector.

The oil prices also include the Inland Freight Equalization Margin (IFEM), set at Rs7.50 per litre for petrol and Rs4.15 per litre for HSD.

The premium on petrol is \$9.80 per barrel. This premium rate applies to the import of petrol and is higher than usual, contributing to the proposed increase in the price of petrol.

In the last review, the government adjusted the increase in oil prices within the IFEM, rather than passing it on to the general pub-

lic, to mitigate the inflationary impact.

The government is currently imposing a petroleum levy of Rs60 per litre on both petrol and HSD, a high rate that consumers are paying to help cover the country's current expenditures.

In announcement, the Ministry of Finance said the petroleum regulator, OGRA, had worked out the prices based on the variations in the international market.

However, the fact is that the government had retained a part of the increase in rates due on October 15, hoping that the following quarter would be cheaper.

However, this resulted in inventory losses to the oil companies, which also

protested against the government.

The international prices subsequently came down, but the backlog was on the higher side, forcing the government to increase the prices for the next 15 days.

During the current fortnight, the import premium on both petrol and HSD remained generally stable at \$8.7 and \$5 per barrel, respectively. The exchange rate also stood its ground.

Anjum Nisar said that the government also charges about Rs16 per litre as customs duty on petrol and HSD, irrespective of their local production or imports.

In addition, about Rs17 per litre distribution and sale margins are going to oil companies and their dealers.





In brief

Ahsan clinches another Gold

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's renowned bodybuilder, Ahsan Aslam, on Sunday has added another international gold medal to his name, making the nation proud once again. According to a private news channel, he won gold medal competing in the Men's Physique category at a championship held in Thailand. Aslam outshone over 800 athletes from around the globe to secure the top position. He had previously won a gold medal in the United States just two months ago, raising the country's flag high on the global stage. The achievement has been celebrated widely, with fans and sports enthusiasts lauding Aslam's dedication and excellence in bodybuilding. His consistent performances are inspiring a new generation of athletes in Pakistan to pursue international success.

Trump leads Hawkins 5-3

YORK (Agencies): Judd Trump is on course to claim a second UK Championship title after establishing a 5-3 lead over Barry Hawkins in the first session of Sunday's final at the Barbican in York. World number one Trump, who is aiming for his 30th success in ranking events, won his only previous UK title in 2011. The 35-year-old left-hander took the opening frame with a break of 73 but was twice hauled back by Hawkins, who made a superb 116 and produced a 70 clearance to level at 2-2 heading into the mid-session interval. Trump then accelerated clear, enjoying a run of 102 as he reeled off the next three frames in a row for a healthy lead. However, qualifier Hawkins, who entered the auditorium to a huge roar barely 12 hours after the conclusion of his gruelling semi-final victory against Mark Allen, displayed great resolve to reduce his arrears with a break of 81. He will, though, have headed back to his dressing room rueing several missed opportunities to make the contest even closer. The 45-year-old failed to convert chances to score heavily in three of the frames he eventually lost. Uncharacteristic misses on the black to the left middle in the fifth frame and a green to top left corner in the sixth frame will particularly rattle as he aims to win his first Triple Crown event, 28 years after turning professional. Play will resume at 19:00 GMT with the winner of the best-of-19 encounter earning a top prize of £250,000.

Kane sidelined with injury

MUNICH (AFP): Bayern Munich striker Harry Kane has been ruled out "for the time being" with a hamstring tear, the club announced Sunday. Kane was subbed off after 33 minutes in Saturday's 1-1 draw at Borussia Dortmund. The 31-year-old will miss Bayern's home German Cup last 16 clash with holders Bayer Leverkusen on Tuesday. Bayern issued a statement on Sunday saying the England captain "suffered a small muscle tear in the back of his right thigh". "Bayern will have to do without Harry Kane for the time being," German tabloid Bild said Kane was likely to miss two weeks of action. Bayern have five more fixtures remaining in 2024. After Leverkusen's visit, Bayern host Heidenheim before playing Shakhtar Donetsk in Gelsenkirchen, facing Mainz in the Bundesliga and hosting RB Leipzig in the final match of the year. The striker has missed just two games with injury since moving to Bayern in the summer of 2023.

# ‘PCB, BCCI agree on hybrid model for Champions Trophy and future ICC tournaments’

LAHORE (INP): The Pakistan Cricket Board and the Board of Control for Cricket in India have retracted from their earlier stance, agreeing to play their future matches in ICC tournaments on a hybrid model and easing the way for next year's Champions Trophy to be held. The two boards held dialogue on Saturday after the International Cricket Council had convened a meeting on Friday and came to a consensus on a hybrid model for the Feb 19-March 9 Champions Trophy after the Indian government refused to allow its team to travel to Pakistan but the PCB has stressed that it will also like the same model to be applied for its team when tournaments are held on the other side of the border in the next three years. The final approval to the plan will have to be given by the ICC Board to ensure it is implemented fully. The PCB had been sticking to its stance of not accepting the hybrid model after the Pakistan team went to India for last year's

ODI World Cup. It expected India to do the same for the Champions Trophy — the first ICC tournament in Pakistan since it co-hosted the 1996 ODI World Cup — but has now sounded the BCCI not to expect any future favours. "Yes the past experience is bitter for Pakistan and the ICC has to give a solid guarantee that the hybrid model will be implemented in letter and spirit in future and no Pakistan team will go to India to play any matches of the ICC events and on the same pattern the Indian team will not come to Pakistan" a source in the PCB told Dawn. The source added that the ICC had asked the two cricket boards to reach at a decision with mutual understanding, before its Board takes any decision. The ICC had convened a meeting online in Dubai on Friday but it was postponed for Saturday. On Saturday it was again not held because the two cricket boards were in the discussion. "As there will be holidays in the

UAE till Tuesday due to the country's national day, the meeting could be held at any time to announce the decision,"the source informed. The PCB had asked the BCCI to show a letter from the Indian government in which it had disallowed its team from touring Pakistan due to security reasons and the source informed that no such letter was shown. "Indirectly, in the backdoor channels, the BCCI had been warned that as it has no letter from its government and had also agreed with the PCB's Master Security Plan for the Champions Trophy, presented in the ICC's meeting on Oct 21, it would have a weak case if the PCB was to approach the Court for Arbitration in Sport." India remains the most influential member of the ICC, earning a lion's share from the income of cricket's governing body, and the source added that Pakistan could ask for a greater share as the bulk of the earning comes from matches involving the two rivals.

## Pak, BD set to clash in Blind Cricket WC final

MULTAN (APP): Pakistan and Bangladesh have booked their spots in the final of the 4th T-20 Blind Cricket World Cup, eliminating Sri Lanka and Nepal from the title race. In a dominant display at the Multan Cricket Stadium, Pakistan cruised past Nepal in the first semifinal. Winning the toss, Pakistan invited Nepal to bat first. Nepal managed to score 94 runs for the loss of seven wickets in their allotted 20 overs. Durga Datta top-scored with 40 runs off 42 balls, while Ramesh contributed an unbeaten 17 off 30 balls. Pakistan's Matiuallah bowled a stunning spell, claiming three wickets for just five runs in his four overs. In response, Pakistan's openers displayed exceptional batting prowess. Kamran Akhtar smashed an

unbeaten 63 runs off just 21 balls, including 12 fours and a six, while Babar Ali added 32 runs. Akhtar's blistering innings included a record-breaking fifty off just 14 balls, setting a new benchmark for the fastest fifty in the T-20 Blind Cricket World Cup. Pakistan chased down the target in just 5.3 overs without losing a wicket. Kamran Akhtar was named Player of the Match and received his award from Raymond Moxley, Secretary General of the World Blind Cricket Council, alongside PBCC Chairman Syed Sultan Shah. In the second semifinal, Bangladesh defeated Sri Lanka in a thrilling encounter, winning by 6 runs. After electing to field first, Sri Lanka conceded 244 runs in 20 overs, with Bangladesh being awarded six penalty runs due to a

slow over rate by Sri Lanka. Bangladesh's Muhammad Salman delivered a stellar performance, scoring 97 runs off 49 balls with 14 boundaries. Arif Hussain supported with 81 runs off 56 balls, including 10 fours. Sri Lanka fought valiantly but fell short, scoring 238 runs in their 20 overs. Chandana played an outstanding knock of 86 runs off 54 balls, while Dinesh contributed 35 runs off 28 balls. Despite their efforts, Sri Lanka couldn't overcome the target. Muhammad Salman was declared Player of the Match for his remarkable batting display. The highly anticipated final between Pakistan and Bangladesh will take place on Tuesday, December 3, at 11:00 AM at the Multan Cricket Stadium.



MULTAN: A view of the semifinal cricket match played between the Bangladesh Blind Cricket team and Sri Lanka Blind Cricket team.

## Bethell leads England win over New Zealand

CHRISTCHURCH (AFP): England blazed to an eight-wicket victory in the first Test against New Zealand Sunday, knocking off their 104-run target in just 12.4 overs of their second innings. After bowling out New Zealand for 254 on day four in Christchurch, debutant Jacob Bethell scored the winning run to reach a maiden Test 50 off 37 deliveries with eight fours and a six. Joe Root was not out 23 off 15 balls at the other end. "Very happy with the way we performed throughout the week," said England captain Ben Stokes after his side took a 1-0 lead in the three-Test series. "Our bowlers were relentless throughout." New Zealand resumed on 155-6 in their second innings, a lead of four runs, and frustrated England for more than two hours to reach 254, a lead of 103. Daryl Mitchell, 31 overnight, scored a defiant 84 and put on a stubborn 13-over partnership for the last wicket worth 45 runs with Will O'Rourke (five not out). England's Brydon Carse took six second-innings wickets to finish with 10 in a Test for the first time. The 104-run target was never going to be enough to stop England, who sealed the Test midway through the afternoon session. They lost Zak Crawley

in the second over, caught and bowled by Matt Henry for one, and Ben Duckett caught by Henry off O'Rourke for a rapid 27 off 18 balls before Bethell and Root took over. The home defeat evaporated New Zealand's euphoria from their recent 3-0 sweep in India and all but ended their hopes of a berth in the World Test Championship final. Through the first two sessions of the Test, the Black Caps had the upper hand, despite losing the toss, as they reached 199-3 on a seamers' wicket. Even when they were all out for 348 and England were 71-4 in reply the momentum was with New Zealand. But from there the game turned England's way with belligerent batting aided by sloppy fielding, which included eight dropped catches. When New Zealand batted again, a masterful seam bowling session by Chris Woakes and player-of-the-match Carse tilted the match firmly back to England. "Catches win matches" "We were happy with the position we had, and we had our opportunities," said New Zealand captain Tom Latham "On a different day, catches go to hand and things might be different, but that's the sport we play." England's first

innings 499 gave them an imposing 151 run-lead, but had New Zealand taken their catches it could have been a different scenario. Harry Brook was dropped on 18, Stokes was put down on 50 and added 30 more, a catch off Duckett was spilt on 25 and he went on to make 46, while Carse finished 33 not out after escaping on six. "Catches win matches," said Brook as he reflected on the five lives he had on his way to 171. Brook then caught opener Latham at the start of the New Zealand second innings to give Woakes his first wicket. In a one-and-a-half sessions on Saturday, New Zealand lost six wickets as Woakes and Carse found movement with the ball. After removing Latham, Woakes bagged New Zealand's premier batsman Kane Williamson for 61 and Tom Blundell in consecutive deliveries. Carse chipped in with the wickets of Devon Conway, Rachin Ravindra and Glenn Phillips. In the first session Sunday, Carse removed Nathan Smith and Henry in the same over. Smith advanced from his overnight one to 21, playing through a barrage of short deliveries before a fuller ball from Carse nipped back and rapped into his pads.



### Jay Shah becomes new ICC chairman

DUBAI (INP): Jay Shah has officially taken charge as the International Cricket Council (ICC) chairman on Sunday. The former BCCI secretary succeeds Greg Barclay, who has held the position since November 2020. Shah was elected un-opposed as the new ICC chairman. In his first statement as ICC Chair, Jay Shah outlined his priorities for his term, including leveraging the sport's inclusion in the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games as a pivotal opportunity as well as further accelerating the growth of the women's game. "I am honoured to take on the role of ICC Chair and grateful for the support and trust of the ICC Directors and Member Boards," Jay Shah said in a statement. "This is an exciting time for the sport as we prepare for the LA28 Olympic Games and work to make cricket more inclusive and engaging for fans worldwide. Jay Shah said we are at a critical juncture with the coexistence of multiple formats and the need to accelerate the growth of the women's game. "Cricket holds immense potential globally, and I look forward to working closely with the ICC team and Member countries to seize these opportunities and take the sport to new heights."

### Lille slip up to late Montpellier equaliser

MONTPELLIER (AFP): Lille passed up the opportunity to move into third in Ligue 1 after bottom-side Montpellier grabbed a late equaliser against Bruno Genesio's side on Sunday. Jonathan David twice gave Lille the lead from the penalty spot in either half but Issiaga Sylla struck in first-half injury time and Arnaud Nordin then found a 93rd-minute leveller for Montpellier as the points were shared in the southern French city. A draw leaves Lille still in fourth but with 23 points, the number amount as third-placed Marseille with Roberto De Zerbi's side in action later on Sunday against second-placed Monaco. Montpellier stay rooted to the foot of the table, five points from safety. Canadian attacker David broke the deadlock in the 44th minute as he sent Benjamin Lecomte the wrong way from 12 yards after Matias Fernandez-Pardo was felled in the box at the end of a rapid Lille counter-attack. The lead only lasted three minutes with Sylla rising highest to glance home a corner on the stroke of half-time. David was back to face Lecomte from the spot nine minutes into the second half as the referee decided following a lengthy VAR intervention to award a penalty for a trip on Remy Cabella.



## Pakistan thump Malaysia to reach Junior Hockey Asia Cup semi-finals

MUSCAT (Monitoring Desk): Sufiyan Khan scored a hat-trick as Pakistan romped to a crushing 4-1 victory over Malaysia here on Sunday and qualified for the semi-finals of the ongoing 2024 Men's Junior Hockey Asia Cup. The victory also guaranteed Pakistan's spot in the Junior Hockey World Cup, scheduled to be played in India next year. In a duel between two unbeaten sides of Group B, the green shirts completely outclassed the young tigers. In-form Sufiyan opened the scoring just three minutes into the game as Pakistan finished the first

quarter with a 1-0 lead. Malaysia forced a comeback in the following quarter as Adam Ashraf Johari scored the equaliser in the 23rd minute. But Sufiyan reinstated Pakistan's lead with a brilliant strike in the 35th minute, while Abdul Qayyum extended their advantage to 3-1 in the final quarter. It appeared that the scoreline would remain in tact at 3-1 but Sufiyan Khan scored another goal just before the final whistle to round up Pakistan's commanding victory over Malaysia. The victory marked the national team's fourth

consecutive in the tournament, having previously defeated China, Bangladesh and Oman in commanding manner. As a result, Pakistan finished the group stage with 12 points in four matches. Pakistan's squad for Junior Asia Cup Goalkeepers: Ali Raza, Faizan Janjua Players: Sufiyan Khan, Aqeel Ahmed, Bilal Aslam, Nadeem Khan, Mohammad Zain, Wasim, Sami, Zakariya Hayat, Mohammad Imad, Hanan Shahid (Captain), Mughira, Rana Waleed, Hamza Fayaz, Basharat, Qayyum Dogar, and Saifullah.



BULAWAYO: Saim Ayub punches the ball away with a high elbow.

## Pakistan comfortably win first T20I in Bulawayo

BULAWAYO (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan's new-look T20I side proved to be too good for Zimbabwe as they won the first match of the three-game series by 57 runs here on Sunday. An unfinished 65-run fifth wicket partnership off 34 balls between Tayyab Tahir (39 not out) and Muhammad Irfan Khan (27 not out) lifted Pakistan to 165 for four. Zimbabwe scored 60 for two in their PowerPlay – eight runs more than Pakistan – but then ran out of steam to be bundled out for 108 in 15.3 overs. Abrar Ahmed took two wickets in his second over, third of Zimbabwe's innings, to finish with figures of three for 28, while Sufyan Moqim mesmerised the middle-order with his left-arm wrist spin bowling to finish with figures of 4-0-20-3. Haris Rauf took two wickets for 17 runs. Pakistan had made an impressive start to reach 52 for one after the PowerPlay overs. They were then suffocated for runs as the next 11 overs yielded 69 runs for the loss of three wickets. However, Tayyab and Irfan put on 44 runs off the last three overs to provide some stability to the total. Tayyab struck four fours and a six in a 25-ball 39 not out, while Irfan's 15-ball 27 included three fours. Usman Khan with a 30-ball 39 with two fours and two sixes and Saim Ayub (24) were the other notable run-scorers, while Omair

Bin Yousuf scored 16 and captain Salman Ali Agha scored a 19-ball 13. Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza was the most impressive bowler, taking one for 14 from his four overs, while fast bowlers Richard Ngarava and Blessing Muzarabani collectively conceded 82 runs from their eight overs. Scores in brief Pakistan beat Zimbabwe by 57 runs, lead series 1-0 Pakistan 165-4, 20 overs (Tayyab Tahir 39 not out, Usman Khan 39, Muhammad Irfan Khan 27 not out, Saim Ayub 24) Zimbabwe 108 all out, 15.3 overs (Sikandar Raza 39, Tadiwanashe Marumani 33; Sufyan Moqim 3-20, Abrar Ahmed 3-28, Haris Rauf 2-17).

## Shiffrin crashes when set for 100th World Cup win



KILLINGTON (Agencies): American star Mikaela Shiffrin suffered a "puncture wound to the right side of her abdomen" and "severe muscle trauma" after crashing out of the giant slalom in Killington, Vermont on Saturday. The two-time Olympic champion had been seeking a record-extending 100th World Cup win and looked well placed to reach the milestone before falling and crashing into safety netting on her second run.

Shiffrin, 29, left the slope on a rescue sledge before being assessed at a medical clinic. She was leading after the first run and had looked set for victory before the accident. "Following her crash in yesterday's giant slalom at the Stifel Killington Cup, Mikaela was taken down by sled and transferred by ambulance to be evaluated at Rutland Regional Medical Center," US Ski & Snowboard said on Sunday. "There was no ligament

damage assessed. Bones and internal organs look OK. There is a puncture wound into the right side of her abdomen and severe muscle trauma." Shiffrin had earlier reassured fans in a social media post on Saturday evening. "Not really too much cause for concern at this point, I just can't move," she said. "I have a pretty good abrasion and something stabbed me." "I am so sorry to scare everybody and it looks like all scans so far are clear, so thank you for the support and concern." She added she would not be taking part in Sunday's slalom event, which she has won six times out of seven at Killington. Sweden's Sara Hector, the reigning Olympic champion, won Saturday's giant slalom. "It's so sad of course for Mikaela, a crash like that after she was skiing so well. It breaks my heart," she said.





## In brief

### 166 absconders arrested

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police arrested 166 absconders, proclaimed offenders and target offenders involved in heinous crimes during the ongoing week. A public relations officer told APP that special tasks were assigned to all senior police officials to ensure the arrest of proclaimed offenders and absconders involved in different criminal activities in the federal capital. During the crackdown, the Islamabad Police teams have arrested 166 absconders, proclaimed offenders and target offenders including 55 from category-A during the ongoing week. DIG Syed Ali Raza said that the Islamabad Police is taking all possible steps to eradicate the crime from the city and those involved in heinous crimes and illegal activities will be dealt with iron hands. Safety of the lives and property of the citizens is the foremost priority of Islamabad Capital Police, he added. Citizens are also requested to cooperate with police during the checking process and inform police about any suspicious activity around them through the emergency helpline Pucar-15.

### 100,900 cusecs water released

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 100,900 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 46,400 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1493.17 feet and was 95.17 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 22,600 cusecs and 55,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1156.10 feet, which was 106.10 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 4,900 cusecs and 27,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 59,300, 45,400, 36,900 and 4,200 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 12,200 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 2,500 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

### ITP's campaign

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) took prompt action against underage motorcyclists and drivers and imposed fines on them under the campaign of Special Traffic Education and enforcement. In this regard, Islamabad Traffic Police launched a special traffic education and enforcement campaign to solve the traffic-related problems faced by the citizens on roads, a public relations officer told APP on Sunday. He said that a campaign is underway against underage bikers, those involved in rash driving and violating traffic rules. Under the supervision of Chief Traffic Officer Islamabad Muhammad Sarfraz Virk, zonal DSPs are ensuring strict action against those violating traffic rules. Moreover, Islamabad Traffic Police already formed special squads to set up special road-blocks in major highways and squares of Islamabad to take strict legal action against underage drivers and other traffic rule violators. Pamphlets and leaflets are being distributed to create awareness among citizens. Various teams of the education wing are spreading awareness about road safety rules among road users.



ISLAMABAD: Women visiting stalls at the Pakistan Foreign Office Women's Association (PFOWA) Annual Charity Bazaar 2024, held in collaboration with the Diplomatic Corps at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## Afnan slams PTI's chaotic politics

ISLAMABAD (APP): PML-N Senator Dr Afnan Ullah Khan Sunday stated that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was damaging the country's reputation with false claims and prioritizing their agenda over the country's well-being. He suggested they should not compromise the country's national interests over their personal gains. Dr. Afnan Ullah Khan, while speaking to a private news channel, accused the PTI of blackmailing the state by politicizing dead bodies, despite having no video evidence to support

their claims.

Afnan Ullah further criticized the PTI leadership for abandoning their supporters during a recent protest in Islamabad, adding that the PTI leadership, including Bushra Bibi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, were accused of retreating from the scene, leaving their supporters to face the consequences alone.

Senator urged the PTI to shun its chaotic approach to politics and refrain from damaging Pakistan's repu-

tation with false narratives and work towards the betterment of the country.

Pakistan's economy is on the path to recovery, but the PTI's nefarious agenda may jeopardize this progress, potentially leading to the country's downfall, he added. Senator accused the PTI of promoting a culture of violence and intolerance in the country. He further added that the PTI's leadership is responsible for inciting violence and hatred among their supporters, which is damaging the country's social fabric and democratic values.

## YPF to conduct consultative session

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation from the Young Parliamentarians Forum (YPF) of the National Assembly will visit the Provincial Assembly of Sindh to conduct a "Consultative Session with Young Legislators on Upholding Human Rights Through Effective Parliamentary Practices" from December 2nd to 4th, 2024.

The official visit to the Sindh Assembly, led by MNA and YPF President Syeda Nosheen Itikhar, follows the successful visit of the YPF delegation to the Legislative Assembly of Azad Jammu & Kashmir in November 2024. This visit led to the establishment of a similar YPF forum in the AJK Assembly.

The visit to Sindh aims to further the dialogue on youth empowerment, parliamentary practices, and human rights. During their visit, the YPF delegation will hold detailed discussions with the Speaker of the Sindh Assembly and the Chief Minister of Sindh to strengthen inter-provincial parliamentary relations.

A key highlight of the visit will be the "Consultative Session on Upholding Human Rights Through Effective Parliamentary Practices", being conducted in collaboration with Shaor Foundation for Education & Awareness (SFEA) and HumAang For Rights.

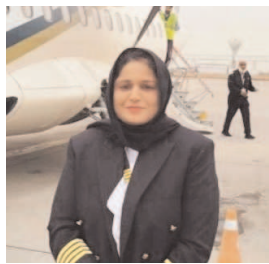
The consultative session will feature interactive group discussions and training led by Syed Shamoon Hashmi, Special Secretary (Special Initiatives of the National Assembly), and Muhammad Mushtaq, Advisor/Special Secretary (Legislation), along with the esteemed representatives and team members of SFEA.

## Mehwish PIA's first female flying spanner engineer

ISLAMABAD (APP): Mehwish Anwar has made history by becoming the first female flying spanner engineer in Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

According to a PIA spokesperson, she completed her inaugural flight coverage, marking a significant milestone in the national carrier's history, private news channel reported.

The groundbreaking flight took place from Islamabad to Sukkur, where



Mehwish ensured seamless engineering operations during the journey. "Mehwish Anwar's unwavering dedication, hard

work, and consistency have set a remarkable example for others", he said and added that her achievement has been hailed as a beacon of progress for women in the aviation industry.

Having started her engineering career in 2013, Mehwish earned her authorization as a flying spanner engineer in 2023.

Her accomplishment serves as an inspiration for aspiring female professionals in the aviation sector.

## Pakistan's youth to get global recognition

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of Prime Minister's Youth Program, Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan Sunday reiterated the government's resolve to empower Pakistan's youth, emphasizing the importance of skill-based education in enabling young girls and boys to gain global recognition.

In an exclusive talk with PTV news channel, the Chairman said Pakistan's youth are poised to gain global recognition through the Prime Minister's Youth Skill Development Program (PMYSDP). This initiative aims to equip young people with market-driven conventional and high-tech skills required for career progression, ultimately bringing their capacity at par with international standards, he added.

This initiative aligns with the Prime Minister's vision to equip the youth with market-driven skills, thereby enhancing their employability and contributing to the country's

economic growth, Rana Mashhood Ahmad said.

The PM skill program promotes inclusivity, striving for gender equality, inclusiveness of differently abled young individuals, marginalized youth and empowering youth workers engaged in the informal sector.

The Prime Minister's Youth Programme is taking a significant step forward by introducing international certifications for various skill programs, he said, adding that these programs include artificial intelligence, digitalization, e-gaming or e-sports, electrician, plumbing, solar system, UPS installation, mechanics, marketing, repairing, beautician courses and digital marketing all designed to boost global recognition and consumption of Pakistani youth.

This initiative aims to empower young Pakistani girls and boys with market-driven conventional and high-tech skills, bringing

their capacity at par with international standards, he added. This move is expected to increase the employability of Pakistani youth, both locally and internationally, he mentioned.

Responding to a query, Rana Mashhood highlighted that Pakistan is becoming a hub for skill-based education, attracting students from over 20 countries. These international students are visiting Pakistan to acquire high-end skills in various fields, including technology, vocational training and entrepreneurship, he added.

This influx of international students is a testament to the quality of education and training being offered in Pakistan, he mentioned. The Chairman emphasized that this initiative not only promotes cultural exchange but also generates revenue for the country, ultimately contributing to the growth and development of Pakistan.

## HSA completes screening for over 150,000 candidates

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Health Services Academy (HSA) has completed its first large-scale recruitment drive for paramedical staff across Islamabad's five major teaching hospitals, marking a significant milestone in the city's healthcare sector.

Over 150,000 candidates participated in skill and written tests during this historic initiative, setting new benchmarks for transparent and effective recruitment.

The recruitment aimed to fill critical positions at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), District Health Office (DHO) Islamabad, Federal Medical College (FMC), Federal Government Polyclinic, and the National Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine (NIRM). The screening process began

with skill tests in early November, followed by written tests, completing all stages within three months of meticulous planning and execution, showcasing HSA's dedication to fairness and precision.

Approximately 48,000 candidates underwent specialized evaluations for typing and shorthand skills, while over 100,000 candidates completed written tests, demonstrating the vast scale of the recruitment initiative. This unprecedented achievement underscores HSA's ability to efficiently handle large-scale recruitment while upholding high standards of accuracy and reliability.

Reflecting on this achievement, Chief Examiner and Director of Quality Assurance at HSA, Nadeem Sajjad Kayani laud-

ed the exceptional teamwork across sections, including secrecy, verification, venue management, and security. He expressed gratitude to Professor Dr. Shahzad Ali Khan, Vice Chancellor of HSA, Professor Dr. Abdullah Khan and the Ministry of National Health Services for their unwavering support throughout the process.

HSA integrated advanced technologies like Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) systems for efficient and precise results grading while maintaining quota-based categorization. Public sector institutions, including the police, Secretariat Training Institutes, National Institute of Health (NIH), and Traffic Police, played pivotal roles in ensuring the seamless and secure conduct of screening tests.

## Women empowerment — A must to sustainable development

ISLAMABAD (APP): In an era of gender diversity where the culture of inclusivity emerges as a trend for sustainable development, women's representation in leadership positions and raising a breed of well-educated and trained women folk has become crucial for nations.

As women participation in policy making and execution, is now a global known fact, creating more and more education and leadership opportunities for female segment in countries like Pakistan where half of population comprises women, is an enormous challenge. Better gender balance in business leadership is also inextricably linked with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under United Nations (SDG 5); attainment of gender equality, is impossible without women's sizable representation at the top.

By ignoring their vibrant participation, the nations' not only lack revered values of justice, harmony and tolerance but also overall development and a sense of security against intolerant behaviors of male dominating societies. "Women representation in different walks of life including economy, policymaking and management is important to ensure gender equality," remarked Fouzia Khan Bhattani, an educationist from Quaid-i-Azam University. "Traditionally in societies like ours, policies about women are formulated by men. The question is; how such policies formulated without representation of women, can be fruitful as women know more about their issues."

She said women can bring different perspectives and viewpoints in decision-making ensuring innovative and better solutions for communities.

"Their integration in decision making and policies for their welfare and economic independence, can address multiple societal problems." In this context she quoted the example of domestic violence where the women are subjected to a coercive living only because of their economic dependence on male family members.

"When they are solely dependent on male members and are not financially self-sufficient, they are obviously on a weaker side," Fouzia Khan said. "Having women in leadership positions can provide them opportunity to contribute in nation building and breaking the shackles of stereotype thinking about their position and abilities in families and society as a whole." She said it is commonly observed that in many cases women executives deliver much better than the male hierarchy. "But, for elevating them to this pinnacle, we need a realistic thinking about women, provide them better education, training and employment facilities."

As women comprise half of our population, keeping them away from education, training and better executive opportunities means that we are making half of our population non-productive and irrelevant to national progress. Female doctors, teachers, jurists, executives and even preachers can have better understanding of feminine issue and their redressal and pave way for building a society offering equal and congenial living for our half of population.

"Women have the ability to wear many hats within their role. They often have a more balancing role in their career, household and taking guidance from others to perform better," Fouzia Khan said.

In conservative societies like ours, commonly men at executive positions shy to indulge in sensitive feminine issues. Therefore, when there is a female executive especially at a women dominated institution or department, people of same genre can freely discuss sensitive issues and resolve them. Since, women are also empathetic, this quality may also make them better leaders and help quickly adjust themselves to new situations. In addition, they have better communication skills and can have meaningful conversation with stakeholders making them better understand their viewpoint.

A report issued by International Finance Corporation (IFC) also refers to an increased understanding of the importance of gender-diverse leadership for inclusive and sustainable economic growth. "When more women are empowered to lead, everyone benefits. Decades of studies have shown women leaders helping to increase productivity, enhance collaboration, inspire organizational dedication and improve fairness," opined Chairperson Pakistan Academy of Letters Dr Najiba Arif.

"Different experiences provide us with different strengths, skills and perspectives. The experiences of women are important additions in different traits," she said. "Their unique way of being strategic, leading teams and decision making helps make the workplace more innovative and collaborative." "Women do not hold a standard set of skills and their response varies to different issues. That is why a diverse female role as an executive, becomes a strength for an organization," Najiba said.

## Margalla Hills Trail-5 cleanup kicks off

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 14th Pakistan Mountain Festival, organized annually by Devcom-Pakistan to celebrate International Mountain Day, commenced with a successful cleanup drive at Margalla Hills Trail-5 on Sunday.

Over 100 enthusiastic students from various universities joined hands to raise awareness about the preservation of mountain ecosystems and the significance of natural resource conservation.

International Mountain Day, observed globally on December 11, was established by the United Nations to highlight the critical importance of mountain ecosystems in supporting life on Earth.

Mountains cover 22 percent of the planet's land surface and provide vital resources, including freshwater for half of humanity. The day also serves to draw attention to the challenges facing mountain regions, including climate change, habitat loss, and the struggles of mountain communities.

Addressing the participants, Devcom-Pakistan Executive Director and Founder of Pakistan Mountain Festival, Munir Ahmed emphasized the critical role of mountain ecosystems in sustaining

biodiversity, regulating climate, and providing essential services like clean water and air purification. "Mountains are life-support systems for millions of people globally. Protecting these ecosystems is not just a local responsibility but a global imperative," he said.

Munir Ahmed also highlighted the role of the Pakistan Mountain Festival in raising awareness about these issues over the past 14 years. "Citizens can proactively play their role as the custodians of mountains. Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB) with the support of citizens has played a significant role in keeping the Margalla Hills National Park. It should continue doing so. Devcom-Pakistan's mountain festival has become a platform to engage communities, especially youth, in conservation efforts while celebrating the rich cultural and ecological heritage of Pakistan's mountains. Through diverse activities such as cleanups, exhibitions, cultural performances, conferences and youth forums, we've worked to mainstream mountain challenges and bring them to the forefront of national discourse," he stated.

Chairperson of the Islamabad Wildlife

Management Board (IWMB), Rina Saeed Khan reinforced the importance of the Margalla Hills National Park for Islamabad's rapidly growing population. "These hills are essential not just for their biodiversity but for the ecological services they provide, such as water retention, flood prevention, and temperature regulation. Protecting them is imperative for the city's well-being," she stated.

The cleanup drive also served as a powerful reminder of the urgent need to address threats to the Margalla Hills, including littering, encroachments, and unsustainable development. By actively participating, students and youth showcased their commitment to conserving these vital ecosystems and pledged to inspire others to do the same.

Speaking about the other activities, Devcom-Pakistan Creative Director Riffat Ara Baig said, "The Pakistan Mountain Festival will continue with a series of activities, including cultural performances, live painting, and exhibitions, promoting awareness about mountain ecosystems and the challenges faced by mountain communities."



Hanafi arrives in Uzbekistan

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs, arrived in Uzbekistan this morning, leading a high-ranking government delegation. According to the Office of the Prime Minister's media department, the Afghan delegation was warmly received upon arrival by Jamshid Khodjaev, Uzbekistan's Deputy Prime Minister, alongside Afghanistan's ambassador and other Islamic Emirate representatives.

Afghan migrant killed

TEHRAN (Amu TV): A physical altercation among Afghan migrants in Tehran resulted in one death and several arrests, Iranian media reported. Murad Sarimi, the police commander of Pardis, a district in the capital, said the incident occurred at a futsal club in the city. According to Sarimi, the individual responsible for the fatal attack was severely injured during the altercation and was transported to a hospital by ambulance.

Turkish envoy to Kabul meets with Muttaqi



KABUL (Ariana News): The Turkish Ambassador to Afghanistan Cenk Ünal met with Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi in Kabul on Sunday for discussions on strengthening political and economic relations between the two countries. According to a statement issued by the foreign ministry, other topics were also raised including Türkiye's assistance to Afghanistan and the recent talks focused on the activation of the Lapis Lazuli Corridor.

Muttaqi also mentioned the Halal Expo, which is currently being held in Türkiye. A large delegation of Afghan business people are currently attending the

event. However, Muttaqi underscored the positive trajectory of the current diplomatic relations between the two countries, the statement read. Ünal in turn also noted that Afghanistan had representation at the Halal Expo, which also included the Minister and Industry and Commerce.

According to Ünal, Alhaj Nooruddin Azizi met with Türkiye's minister of industry and commerce and held discussion on enhancing bilateral trade. In conclusion, he said, Türkiye values the relations with Afghanistan and expressed hope for continued progress in diplomatic relations.

‘One in four families face food shortages’

KABUL (Amu TV): One in four families across the country does not have enough to eat, and three-quarters are burdened with debt as they struggle to feed their loved ones, according to the World Food Program (WFP). Years of economic collapse following the Taliban's return to power in 2021, compounded by a funding crisis for humanitarian aid, have left many Afghans relying on small jobs or borrowing to scrape by, WFP said. The organization warns that most families who depend on its assistance will receive little or no support in the coming months due to a massive shortfall in resources.

Lives on the brink

Said Mir, 30, pushes a wheelbarrow through the streets of Wazir Akbar Khan, a Kabul neighborhood once home to embassies now shuttered. For a small fee, he helps customers carry shopping bags, but his wheelbarrow remains empty most mornings. Before Afghanistan's economy collapsed, he worked in construction, earning enough to support his wife and daughter. After losing his job, he went to Iran, where he found work as a security guard and sent money home. But when Iranian authorities cracked down on Afghan migrants, he was forced to return.

Now, he lives with his mother and brother in a rented house, constantly struggling to make the \$45 monthly rent. His wife left, taking their daughter, when he could no longer provide for them. "I miss them so much," he said, wiping away tears.

Across Kabul, other families share similar stories of desperation. In Khwaja Rawash, brothers Emran, 14, and Sulaiman, 12, earn just \$1.50 a day washing cars in the cold, money that supplements their father's income as an unlicensed taxi driver. Both boys have had to leave school to support their family.

"I missed my exams and failed this year," said Emran, who had been in ninth grade. Still, he dreams of returning to school and one day becoming a teacher.

For Mir Akbar, 35, who washes cars in the Shar-e-Naw neighborhood, daily survival is a constant grind. What he earns each day pays for dinner that night and breakfast the next morning. During harsh winters, he struggles to keep his house warm and provide for his wife and five children. "Winter is always difficult for us," he said. "When my children get sick, I try to buy a kilo of gas to heat the house, but it only lasts a few days."

A funding crisis

The WFP, which scaled up food aid in 2021 and 2022 to avert a humanitarian catastrophe, has been forced to cut back. In the first half of 2024, it reached only one million people monthly with life-saving food assistance, leaving 11 million in need.

Afghan families now owe an average of \$560 in debts accrued primarily for food, and rural households face even higher levels of borrowing.

Sulaiman, 23, sells cauliflower from a small truck in Kabul's Arzan Qimat area. He works 12-hour shifts for \$3 a day, but the money is barely enough to care for his ailing mother, who suffers from heart disease.

MCIT and NSIA sign MoU



KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) and the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to implement electronic attendance systems in NSIA's provincial offices.

The agreement was signed by Mawlawi Najibullah Hayat Haqqani, Acting Minister of Communications and Information Technology, and Haji Abdul Qaher Idris, Head of NSIA. Under the agreement, the General Directorate of Digital Governance of MCIT will oversee the implementation of the electronic attendance system.

During the signing ceremony, Minister Haqqani highlighted the importance

of digital governance and advanced systems in the modern era.

He stated that MCIT is actively developing systems for ministries and governmental agencies across Afghanistan to facilitate administrative tasks and ensure prompt service delivery to citizens through digital governance.

Information Authority (NSIA) leadership expressed appreciation for MCIT's efforts to incorporate modern technology, emphasizing its role in improving service delivery for Afghan citizens.

Iranian envoy pledges to strengthen ties



KABUL (TOLONews): Alireza Bigdeli, the newly appointed acting ambassador of Iran to Afghanistan, arrived in Kabul.

Bigdeli stated that his primary mission is to strengthen neighborly relations with Afghanistan and that he will work to expand ties between the two countries.

The acting ambassador of Iran in Kabul said: "I promise to use all my capabilities and experience to achieve our shared high goals of friendship, brotherhood, and deepening neighborly relations, God willing."

He further added that improving the management of Afghan migrants in Iran is also among his key responsibilities.

Bigdeli emphasized that Iran expects Afghan migrants to enter the country legally, saying: "I will strive to organize the presence of Afghan nationals in our country and manage the

movement of people. God willing, we will use this as an opportunity to strengthen relations."

Faizanullah Naseri, the Deputy Chief of Political Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, noted that the new ambassador has significant experience in Afghan affairs and expressed hope for stronger relations during his tenure.

Naseri stated: "We hope that relations will expand significantly during his mission. He is a diplomat well-acquainted with Afghanistan and has worked in Afghan affairs. Certainly, relations will become broader and stronger."

This comes after the Iranian Foreign Minister, earlier this month, dismissed Hassan Kazemi Qomi, the ambassador and special representative of Iran's president for Afghanistan, and appointed Alireza Bigdeli as the new acting ambassador in Kabul.

3 billion afghani saved in national contracts, says Deputy PM's Office

KABUL (TOLONews): The Economic Deputy Office of the Prime Minister's Office has announced that approximately 3 billion afghani have been saved in the contracts of projects approved by the National Procurement Commission.

According to this office, the National Procurement Commission has so far approved 317 large and small projects with a total value of about 85 billion afghani.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Economy emphasized that saving in contracts and implementing infrastructure projects are fundamental priorities of the Islamic Emirate.

Abdul Latif Nazari, the technical deputy minister of economy, said: "Saving in projects and contracts helps offset budget deficits, initiates new projects, reduces corruption, and effectively manages the country's economic growth."

The Chamber of Commerce and Investment views savings in government contracts and projects as beneficial for the country's economic growth.

Khan Jan Alkozaï, a member of the Chamber's Board of Directors, said: "If the government saves and prevents unnecessary expenditures, this action is in the country's best interest. Such savings can be utilized for new projects. Saving is essential and

must be implemented."

According to information from the economic deputy Prime Minister's office, the projects—some completed and others under implementation—not only facilitate the country's development but have also created job opportunities for hundreds of people. These projects play a vital role in infrastructure development and strengthening the national economy.

NEPA chief reports back on Afghanistan attendance at COP29



KABUL (Ariana News): The head of Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency Mati-ul-Haq Khalis says comprehensive discussions were held at the recent COP29 summit on Afghanistan's vulnerabilities to climate change.

He stated that the participation of IEA's delegation at (COP29) marks a significant milestone, presenting a comprehensive and transparent overview of Afghanistan's current environmental and climatic conditions to the global community.

"During COP29, concerted efforts were made to emphasize that climate change and environmental challenges transcend political

considerations," Khalis said in a statement.

He said the delegation urged the international community to treat these issues as critical social and humanitarian concerns.

This was the first time that Afghanistan was able to send a delegation to the annual UN climate summit since the Islamic Emirate's takeover in August 2021.

According to Khalis, the delegation meanwhile used the opportunity to emphasize the need for urgent implementation of effective mechanisms to combat adverse effects of climate change and called for the acceleration of financial assistance in this regard.

The IEA delegation also advocated for enhanced

engagement, coordination, and collaboration among relevant stakeholders in the fight against climate change, and advocated for Afghanistan's active participation in regional and international forums.

Khalis said Afghanistan's representatives also stressed the urgency of resuming suspended environmental and climate-related projects, which are crucial for addressing the country's climate challenges.

"By introducing Afghanistan's national focal point for the Green Climate Fund, the delegation sought to garner international support for the effective governance and management of environmental projects within the country," Khalis stated.

Milestone for Afghanistan

Last year, the COP28 conference was held in the United Arab Emirates, but the Islamic Emirate was excluded. However, this year, Azerbaijan authorities decided to include an official delegation.

Afghanistan remains one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change and also has major environ-

mental challenges.

But some experts believe that the rationale in some quarters for engaging with Afghanistan on environmental policy is its potential for resourcing key minerals for the green transition - key to this being Afghanistan's enormous lithium deposits.

Lithium has certain unique properties which make it very suitable as a metal for batteries needed for the green transition, a Chinese company recently expressed interest in investing \$10 billion in Afghanistan's lithium resources in the south.

The Islamic Emirate stated that the lithium deal would generate up to 120,000 direct and many more indirect jobs in the country.

Afghanistan has long been known for its wealth of mineral resources and the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum estimates it may hold 60 million tons of copper, 2.2 billion tons of iron ore, 1.4 million tons of rare earth elements such as lanthanum, cerium and neodymium, and vast amounts of aluminum, gold, silver, zinc, mercury, and lithium.

Afghanistan's exports decline by \$54m amid trade challenges

KABUL (TOLONews): The National Statistics and Information Authority has announced that Afghanistan exported goods worth over \$667 million in the first six months of the current solar year.

According to the spokesperson of this authority, the value of exports in the first six months of this year decreased by nearly \$54 million compared to the same period last year.

Mohammad Halim Rafe, the spokesperson for the National Statistics and Information Authority, stated: "According to our data,

Afghanistan recorded \$667 million in exports and \$5.250 billion in imports."

The National Statistics Authority report noted that Afghanistan's main export items in the first six months of the current year were:

**Dried and fresh fruits:** \$167.1 million  
**Medicinal plants:** \$119.7 million  
**Mineral materials:** \$85.8 million  
**Vegetables:** \$66.4 million

The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment attributes the primary reason for the decline in exports to trade

and political challenges.

Khan Jan Alkozaï, a member of the Chamber's Board of Directors, said: "The main reason for the decrease in exports was the problems. Borders were closed, regional taxes were imposed, and tariffs increased. These factors impacted our exports because our products are transited to India."

Economic expert Abdul Nasir Reshtia commented on Afghanistan's dependence on neighbor countries: "One of the fundamental problems is our excessive reliance on neighbor countries. This dependence

stems from the similarity of our markets with these two countries, where high standards and strict criteria are not required. However, to export to other international markets, it is necessary to improve domestic production to meet global standards."

According to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, despite Afghanistan's increased exports to neighboring, regional, and global markets over the past three years, 90% of the country's needs are still met through imports, and exports make up only 10% of Afghanistan's total trade.

Najib emphasizes policy compliance in talks with MTN leadership

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Najibullah Hayat Haqqani, Acting Minister of Communications and Information Technology, underscored the importance of adhering to regulations for the growth and development of Afghanistan's telecommunications sector during a meeting with MTN Afghanistan officials.

The ministry's press office reported that Minister Haqqani met with Azmi Meqati, CEO of

Investcom Group, to discuss the company's performance, service quality, and SIM card registration processes in Afghanistan. The minister emphasized resolving issues collaboratively and ensuring telecommunications companies operate in compliance with ministry policies.

Minister Haqqani reiterated that all companies must align their operations with the ministry's standards and committed to the continued support for the

sector.

In response, MTN officials expressed gratitude for the ministry's assistance in legal and operational matters, highlighting progress in aligning services, including SIM card operations, within Afghanistan's legal framework.

Jamal Ramadan, Chief Operating Officer of MTN Afghanistan, acknowledged the ministry's transparent oversight in the company's share transfer

process and pledged to invest in network strengthening and service quality improvement from the start of the next year.

The meeting was also attended by Hisham Ramadan, MTN Afghanistan's President, and Abdul Malik Qazizada, Head of Government and Regulatory Affairs, who echoed commitments to adhere to industry standards and enhance services for customers.





## HISTORY OF UAE NATIONAL DAY

The United Arab Emirates was not always the powerful nation it is today. In fact, the country was distributed into rival tribal groups, occupying different areas. In 1820, Britain entered the picture and offered protection to the tribes in return for some control over the land. Desperate for peace, the numerous tribes accepted this offer and let Britain be in charge of settling their disputes. In 1968, Britain removed itself from the picture after it started experiencing financial losses.

After Britain's exit from the scenario, the rulers of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ajman, Al-Ain, Sharjah, and Umm al-Quwain decided to unite. On December 2, 1971, the emirates announced their independence from Britain and became the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Later on, Ras Al Khaimah – the seventh

emirate – also joined this union. Do you know what the best part is This merger and their freedom from the colonial rule were achieved without any violence!

To mark the unity of the seven emirates and the declaration of the United Arab Emirates, the flag of UAE as we know it today was raised, and the first president of UAE was selected – Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. Sheikh Zayed was the Emir of Abu Dhabi and was the richest amongst the seven emirates. Today, UAE is recognized as a middle power and an influential nation with a flourishing economy, oil reserves, ample tourists, and some of the tallest buildings in the world. However, all the citizens of the UAE acknowledge that the power they possess today exists only because the seven emirates decided to unite in 1971.

## Emirates honours the 53rd UAE Eid Al Etihad with an array of celebrations

UAE Eid Al Etihad is celebrated on 2 December to mark the union of the seven emirates and the collective journey towards the future, as the nation embraces sustainability and collaborative action as cornerstones of progress. Emirates customers can learn more about Dubai's commitments to sustainable practices with multiple episodes on ice, including dedicated food

sustainability programmes on Hatta Strawberry Farm and the renowned oysters of Dibba Bay. In the Dubai & UAE category on ice, there are episodes on art and design from Tashkeel, featuring Emirati architect Reema Al Mheiri, who explores bio-materiality and regenerative design, as well as architectural sustainability, where Emirati architect Ahmed Bukhash harnesses ancient wisdom to combat extreme weather and sun intensity. Customers can embrace the national spirit with Emirates award-winning ice and enjoy more than 80 Arabic and Emirati movies including Thalatha, Al Aasha Al Aaely El Akhir, and Nasseem. In Arabic TV,

customers can be enlightened by My Story, a docudrama series inspired by HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's book or discover Al Sanaa' – a show which explores local culture and traditions. There are more than 40 Arabic TV shows available, including Emirati series such as Al Boom, Khattaf, and Sawalef Yadouh, as well as an informative documentary about the

streaming platform. Customers can also relax with a podcast called Fazza – Qassed Fazza, a series of poems written by HH Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, or a wide selection of 147 Khaleeji albums and playlists featuring Emirati artists like Hussain Al Jassmi, Hazza'ah Al Minhali and Fayeza Al Saeed.

Onboard Lounge, customers can savour the flavours of the region with pistachio and hibiscus namoura, date cake, aseeda cake, pumpkin cake with candied corn flakes and crispy pearls or cardamom cake and date slice with dried rose petals.

In Emirates First Class Lounges in Dubai, customers can feast on traditional Emirati chicken machbous followed by an array of tempting desserts including karak profiteroles, Umm Ali spheres, lommie kabeese cheesecake and Emirati luqaimat served with date syrup and pistachio sauce. In the Business Class Lounges, Emirati style lamb ouzi made with locally sourced lamb, mint raitha and dakkus will be served, while delectable treats will be displayed including Arabic coffee delicie, loomi and rose profiteroles, guerss ugaili cardamom sesame financiers and burnt gahwa chocolate tarts. Customers in both First and Business Class lounges can also treat themselves to a refreshing ice-cream from the Emirates ice-cream cart, homemade in the locally sourced flavours of Halwa and Arabic coffee. Celebrating the sustainability ethos of the 53rd UAE Eid Al Etihad, Emirates Lounges highlights a range of locally sourced products including local luqaimat from Ajman and date syrup from Sharjah.



A celebration of the 53rd UAE Eid Al Etihad at Emirates Group Headquarters

UAE called Al Emarat: Masiret Al Ezza' W Al Enjaz. Emirates also offers a host of premium content on Shahid, the world's leading Arabic

customers will enjoy a duo of loomi cheesecake and chocolate cardamom brownie, while Economy Class customers can relish chocolate and date truffles. In the Emirates A380

## Celebrating 53<sup>rd</sup> National Day of

# UAE

### A Partnership for Progress

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# CELEBRATING UNITY, CONNECTING THE FUTURE

# 53

Celebrating the spirit of togetherness.  
PTCL Group warmly wishes the people of the  
United Arab Emirates a happy 53<sup>rd</sup> National Day.